

# 1 Butterflies in the Belfry . . . Serpents in the Cellar

A Perilous Search for Authentic Christianity

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## Introduction

This book is the culmination of a decade and a half of a deep and personal pondering. But the word, “pondering” has too soft of a meaning for its use here. Maybe a better way of describing this process would be arduous, gut wrenching . . . or anything but a soft process.

Some writers are most productive when they are isolated in romantic cabins on wind-swept beaches. Without distraction, their creative minds assemble extremely imaginative worlds out of thin air—worlds that their readers can escape to, and cavort in, for weeks at a time.

I visualize these writers awaking with the dawn and then pouring delicate china cups of strong, black coffee brewed on a wood-fired stove. They sip their java for hours, being surrounded by a row of double-hung windows that faces out to the sea. It is within this private setting that they type out pages of a mystery novel or self-help books. The mornings must seem to go on perpetually for them as the pages turn into chapters, and chapters are artfully woven together into magical books of gold, as if by Rumpelstiltskin himself.

If these authors’ creative energies do need reviving, all they need to do is to don their yellow raincoats and take long walks on the beach in perfect solitude . . . a solitude that is unblemished except for the squawking of breadcrumb-seeking seagulls, the mesmerizing sound of crashing waves, and sea foam squishing between their toes and clinging softly to their heels like a salty-beige mousse. There they air out their tired minds like an old feathered mattress in the cool, sifting fog of the early afternoon.

*Butterflies in the Belfry* came about not in peaceful solitude and long walks of inspiration on the isolated beaches, but in moments of desperation and long crawls among the trenches in the midst of the cross-fire of the true war of the worlds. Not to say that I didn’t have my own,

pleasant walks of solitude(mine were along the hills above Puget Sound) but those were word-finding walks, where I, like a journalist, attempted to select the right words that best communicate and reflect the actual story that had already been written on the pages of my life.

People do write books from different perspectives. Many write as authorities or teachers. Their academic training, Ph Ds in psychology, or theology permit them such authority and respect. I do have a degree in psychology. I did spend countless nights groping for the truth by studying the Bible from cover to cover. I have also studied hundreds of other books; books on theology, philosophy and history, but I make no claim of being an authority on any of those subjects. This was subsistence research, striving for my own intellectual, emotional and spiritual survival, not the kind of research that makes one a professional and certainly not simple, academic research for a book. I write as a humble journalist, an observer and recorder of life or at least that part of life through which my incredible journey has taken me.

I did not go on this journey willingly, as some type of paid war correspondent if you will. I never studied journalism nor sought out a story to write about. Like many people, I was accidentally swept up in the whirlwind of a troubling experience in the same way as Tolkien's Frodo. I became a participant in a very personal and dangerous adventure of the soul. I had no choice in the matter but I was pulled kicking and screaming by the irresistible undertow of the antic's wake. I wouldn't have believed it before this experience, but there are truly things worse than death. In my storms of life, I almost lost my soul but may have inadvertently found it.

Butterflies in the Belfry, Serpents in the Cellar

Chapter One

The Year of the Rabbit

In the middle of a cheap, imitation bamboo table a dark pit began to appear in front of me. The pit was materializing between assortments of real bamboo chop sticks, each well-used and coated with dark-brown soy-based sauces. The pit was a figurative one of course . . . but in some ways, it was as real as any rabbit hole or portal to another world. I felt the grip of the hole on my arms and shoulders, the darkness reaching out and pulling me in. The draw was as tangible as if I were an iron asteroid slipping inside the event horizon of a black hole somewhere in deep space.

The force that was carrying me forward, headfirst, into the pit must have started decades earlier and there was no mortal power capable of stopping it after such a sustained momentum. I fell in and began to tumble, in slow motion, head over heels.

Around the bamboo table sat two other men, but, as far as I know, I was the only one who was falling. Neither the hole, nor my fall, was the product of some type of mysterious oriental magic conjured up by one my dinner partners. It was the simple words of one of them, Curt, that became the last straw, or more correctly, the downy feather that had pushed me over the edge. He was not even aware of the impact of his words at the time . . . nor was I.

Curt was my boss. He was a stocky man on a six-foot frame with a blondish-gray goatee which pedestaled a reddened, sun-kissed face. His turquoise eyes beneath the thinning hair of a man approaching his middle years, gave him an intimidating look, whether he wanted it or not. The other man, an Arab, was a stranger to me, but a friend of my boss.

I was in these exotic surroundings as a missionary. We were not sitting in some out-of-

the-way restaurant in Shanghai . . . but in Egypt. It was the only Chinese restaurant that I had ever seen in the chaotic streets of central Cairo.

I had been eagerly waiting for Curt's visit for months. My wife, Denise, and our three small children were literally teetering on the edge of some type of emotional meltdown and we had only been in the country for a little over a year. Culture shock made up only a small fraction of our unbearable distress. It had been more of a situational shock if anything . . . a chain of events that no one could have predicted.

We had volunteered to join a close-knit team of missionaries in Nicosia, Cyprus. There we would have been working among Moslem refugees from Lebanon's cruel civil war. I had spent two years studying the cultures of Cyprus and Lebanon as well as the layout of the land and city of Nicosia. I had photos and maps of Cyprus on the stone walls of my basement office back in Ypsilanti, Michigan. For two years, I dreamt about Cyprus almost every night. I was studying Lebanese Arabic and had developed a passion for this people. There is no place on earth I could have been more exciting about moving to.

As we were nearing our departure date, support funds raised and belongings shipped to Cyprus, Curt paid us a surprise visit in Colorado Springs, the headquarters of our mission board. He said to me, almost as if it were tangential trivia, "Mike the team in the Middle East met recently. We've decided that you won't be moving to Cyprus but to Cairo, Egypt. Also, realizing that single men do much better in language acquisition, we want you to come alone, without your family."

At the last minute, and without any input from us, Curt had already reassigned us to live alone in the huge crowded city of Cairo, Egypt, but I resisted his last request, for me to come

alone without Denise and my sons, Bryan and Daniel.

It was written in the culture of my experience with The Navigator mission organization over the previous decade that you obey those whom God had put in authority over you. I told Curt that I could not leave my family behind. Despite the absurdity of his request, I still felt guilty for opposing his directive. In consolation, he did promise to bring all our belongings, including baby diapers, clothes, books, cooking pots, down to Cairo after we arrived. He never did. Actually we never set eyes on his goateed face again until two years later . . . in the Chinese restaurant.

We had arrived in Cairo with the shirts on our backs and the basic belongings that would fit in a few suitcases. To our surprise, Curt had taken a job (while continuing to draw his missionary salary) in Syria and had moved from Cyprus just before our arrival in Egypt. He had sealed up our belongings in his garage just before his departure from the island.

After being in country for twelve months, we had hardly heard a word from him or anyone within our mission organization and certainly not received any of our property. Arriving in Cairo alone, without our effects or a resident visa, was only the start of our difficulties. We were also under strict orders from Curt to avoid contact with other Americans, either in Egypt or even friends and family back home. All letters to us had to come through his hands in Damascus. This rendered us extremely lonely.

Curt had honest motives for our isolation—at least one could assume—though looking back, they were misguided. He theorized that our intense loneliness would drive us to develop relationships with Egyptian Moslems . . . the people who were to be the focus of our ministry. His believed that if we were “baptized by fire” into the Arab culture, alone in an Arab country,



we would be better fit for long-term ministry. Curt knew that it would be very difficult for us to find our way without assistance, but he sincerely believed that the process would harden us in the same way that a steel tool, once hardened, is more useful. Despite Curt's conspiracy of adversity, our major challenges had to do with our health.

When we arrived in Cairo, our two youngest sons, Bryan and Daniel, were ages four and two respectively. Denise was also seven months pregnant with our third son. As soon as we got on our feet we had to start making arrangements for his birth.

Tyler came into that exotic world without any complications but it was his older brother, Daniel (then aged three) that soon became quite ill. His illness lasted throughout our two, long, arduous years in Egypt and during the months leading up to Curt's infamous visit, he had been very near death on one occasion. Based on his symptoms, I think his most serious illness was typhoid. To have a very seriously ill child while being alone in a strange country was deeply draining on our spirits and emotions. In our desperation, after ten months Denise broke Curt's mandate and called her parents for help. They were quickly on their way.

Within weeks of the worst period of Daniel's illness, I succumbed to illness myself. I had been working with sickly children in a slum known as the "Village of Garbage" and was exposed to a lot of infectious diseases. It was meningitis that took over my faculties on the day that Denise went to Cairo International Airport to pick up her parents.

I knew that something was wrong when I got up that god-awful morning and had a terrible headache and fever. By ten o'clock I had become so ill that I couldn't accompany Denise to flag a taxi and fetch her parents. By the time she returned, after three hours, I was on the verge of unconsciousness. It was extremely scary for her to have her three-year-old son and now her

husband so sick with only a broken Third-world health care system for assistance. The good news was that Denise's parents were there to help with Bryan and Daniel while she attended to me.

I spent the next week face down on a foam pad, the place where I originally collapsed, sequestered in the sweltering boys' bedroom as our make-shift hospital room. An Egyptian doctor visited me each morning and brought me cups of colored pills . . . some of them I took—but when I was of my better senses—some I brushed under my pad. As a medical practitioner myself, I knew that there were no pills that would treat viral meningitis except to dampen the senses and bring temporary comfort. I wanted my senses to be as acute as they could be, to make sure the quack didn't inadvertently poison me.

In the process of recovering from meningitis I subsequently came down with a very painful case of shingles across my face. Daniel, simultaneously, started taking another turn for the worse. Denise, fortunately a nurse by training, bounced between Daniel and me, plus attempted to provide her parents with some needed hospitality and orientation to this radically different (from Minnesota farmland) culture.

The grand finale in our bad health saga was Denise's father. On the eve of his departure back to the states, after I was on my way to recovery, he collapsed. I was in bed on the verge of falling asleep when I heard the cry from my mother-in-law, "John! John! (a name she used for me, especially when she was being very serious)." I jumped out of bed and ran out into the dark hallway. Halfway between the bathroom and the guest bedroom was my father-in-law laying face down on the cold tile floor with Denise's mom hovering over us in extreme agony.

I rolled him onto his back. He was not breathing . . . nor did he have a pulse. I was just

getting ready to place my lips on his to give him a breath of air when he took a deep breath of his own. I felt his pulse again . . . it was thready, irregular, but present. He apparently was having a very significant heart arrhythmia, which put us in the middle of another medical nightmare on the heels of mine, and now with Daniel in the other room continuing to decline.

There was no "911" number to call for Denise's father, no emergency rooms to drive to and few friends to call for help. We did get an IV started in his swiveled up vein. I pounded a nail into the wall above his bed and hung the glass bottle there. Eventually we transported to, and admitted to, a hospital with a makeshift cardiology unit. But, after all of that, what were the few words spoken in a Chinese restaurant that became my breaking point?

When I found out that Curt was in Egypt on personal business, I was desperate to talk to him. Denise and I both felt that we were on an unsustainable path and I came that night asking him for mercy. Denise and I had decided that we wanted to finish our difficult assignment in Egypt and join the rest of the team in Cyprus as soon as possible. We wanted to reunite the boys with their clothes and toys and get a hold of the diapers and other baby equipment that we had shipped to Cyprus a year earlier. Most of all we wanted fellowship and peers that we could talk to, and to break the grip of merciless isolation.

I took the hour train ride into the heart of the city that infamous night, repeating over and over in my mind—and even audibly at times—the words that I wanted to say to him. I knew that the words were deeply entangled in emotions, frustrations and confusion. But Curt was a very logical man and if I did not speak in an objective language, he would quickly tune me out. He was also an aggressive speaker, and left few alley-ways between his sentences into which I could insert a word. I was nervous. I always found confrontations difficult, but it was extremely

difficult to go up against your Navigator leader, something I had been taught never, ever to do.

Disobeying your Navigator leader was equivalent to disobeying God himself.

I will never forget Curt's response to my petition. He looked at me and smiled while saying, "Uh Mike, actually I have a new assignment for you and Denise . . . Sana, Yemen. So really, you won't ever be joining us in Cyprus." He paused for another drink of his green tea and sloshed it around in his mouth as I sat speechless. Stirring his noodles with his chopstick he added, "But one thing I've learned over the years, women don't handle these changes very well." Pointing his chopstick at my face he concluded, "Lie to Denise and tell her you are moving her to Cyprus . . . then surprise her when you arrive in Sana." His smile evolved into a loud chuckle and then sipped his tea again.

Before the words had finished passing his parted lips, I began to feel a tightness building in my chest . . . a warm, flushed feeling filled my face. I had known of Curt for ten years and known him personally for three, but I had never said an unpleasant word to him. I believed, as a Christian, that it was wrong to do such . . . to say unkind words to a bother or to even "harbor anger." But, on that night it took every ounce of strength in my body to hold back a flood of vile verbiage, even profanities or possibly a punch in his sun-kissed face. The few words that did slip out still took Curt by surprise.

"I'm fed up with your crap! I'm not taking orders from you anymore!" I said in more of a whisper than a shout as I trembled. My throat was acting as a high pressure valve on fire hose, turning gently to let a few, quiet words slip out while guarding against an uncontrolled explosion pressing against the brass like a torrent. Being a "godly man," my intentions were for my behavior to reflect that idealized character.

He immediately stood up, handing me a bundle of envelopes tied with a string, “Here’s your mail.” Then he said to his Egyptian friend, “Let’s get out of here.”

I stood up too, shaking . . . shaking so hard that I couldn’t say another word. Curt noticed my quiet distress and his parting words to me were, “If you have a problem with my orders, Mike . . . well, write me a letter.” He then vanished into the frenzied streets of downtown Cairo. I didn’t catch sight of him again . . . for another twelve months. He was like a ghost, sweeping in with no warning, dropping a bomb of plans for our lives and sweeping away in the nocturnal Sahara breeze.

The vortex on the imitation bamboo table began to spin and its suction escalated. Trying to escape its tug, I too exited the small restaurant. I left the fumes of wok-burnt noodles and stepped into the dark and dusty air that hovers over the busy night streets of Cairo. It was a thick, desert air, saturated with the unorthodox mix of fumes, motor exhaust, jasmine, campfire smoke, incense and rotting animal flesh.

But even outside, walking over the broken down sidewalks beneath the clusters of dusty date palms, I felt myself continuing to fall and lose control and it was almost literal. The rabbit hole was following me and, like quicksand, there was no escaping the pull of its pit nor anything within reach on which a grip would arrest my fall. I turned the corner and stepped off the side street into Medan Tahreer, the major square at the heart of Cairo. Even at nine o’clock at night, it was a busy place, a perpetual activity of hundreds of walkers and drivers between bus and donkey riders. But in the midst of the chaotic masses, I had never felt so alone . . . and terrified. Not terrified of Curt or even of Egypt, but of the darkness that was beginning to percolate up through the hole, a darkness which had claws, scales and saber-like teeth. What was most scary

now was realizing that the hole wasn't in the imitation bamboo table, or even the restaurant, but in the middle of my own soul . . . and there was no escaping it. I refused to name the dark force, but I knew what it was . . . it was raw hate. A hate that had germinated in Colorado Springs, but was nurtured via Curt's long absences and failed promises of bringing our things and helping us settle in this inhospitable place. I allowed the anger to multiply when Daniel was so ill and I was so scared. Earlier that year we had sent Curt a telex saying that we were taking our very sick boy to the U.S. for emergency medical treatment. A sterile, impersonal telex returned, "Request denied. Use only Egyptian medical services." All my rage at Daniel's suffering and almost death I now allowed to spew at Curt.

A mile away, I fixed my eyes on the metro train station, which was my transit home, my life-line to Denise's comforting arms. I continued walking, but slower, now that I knew that I could not outrun the void. I heard the sound in my ears . . . on the left and on the right . . . before me and behind me . . . a soft thumping sound. It was my house of cards, one by one, starting to fall in slow motion. The thin cards, like facades, had been carefully, but perilously put in place since my conversion a decade and a half earlier. There were the stoic kings, always in control and with a confident, purpose. Below them, were the princes, serving with faithfulness, obedience and order. Finally, at the bottom, were the smiling jokers . . . who were the first to fall. One by one the whole house of cards of my Christian persona was starting to crumble. I kept walking, focusing my eyes on the sparks falling, like fireworks, from the overhead power lines as subsequent electric trains pulled from the station, leaving a trail of ozone in the air.

What was the meaning of those fifteen years of devotion to Christ? When I first came into the fold, my Navigator mentor had shared with me a verse from II Corinthians 5:17 that now

I was a “new creature.” He went on to explain that all my past was erased and I was a blank slate of purity as a new Christian. I had felt his words so reassuring because as a young man I had a lot of anger. My mentor also taught me a simple formula for Christian maturity, like a magic growing potion, “Time in the word = Christian maturity.” I had spent thousands of hours “in the word.” Thirty minutes of devotional time virtually every morning. I had memorized hundreds of Bible verses and spent literally thousands of hours in Bible study, not to mention all the other activities of “discipleship,” such as evangelism and prayer. I had experiences of being “Baptized in the Spirit” when I spent one year associating with a charismatic group. I had also attended hundreds of hours of workshops and classes, thousands of hours of lectures and sermons . . . and for what?

Thump, thump, thump fell the cards before me, and behind me as I—in a zombie state—boarded the faded green train, which listed to one side from the broken springs, a consequence of chronic overloading.

I took a seat on the well-worn, red, vinyl seat. I had rarely sat on this train because when I usually rode it, commuting to and from Arabic classes, it was standing room only. At peak travel times, I was lucky to even get into the interior of the train. Once I hung on the outside with my toes on a 1/4 inch ledge and my fingernails grasping the chrome flange that framed in the window as the train raced through the crazy maze of streets of Cairo. One slip on that day and I would have been crushed beneath the train’s iron wheels, but, on this night a new danger seemed far more vicious. I needed a seat. I could barely stand as the foundation beneath my feet was slowly crumbling away.

I hated Curt that night, with no less hate than I could have had the day before I came into

the Christian fold. It was a hate that was no less than that of the militant Moslem Brotherhood, who I knew wanted me—as an American—dead. I was always looking over my shoulder, trying to avoid them. But, on this night, I too felt murderous. If I were to hear that Curt's Egypt Air flight, from Cairo to Damascus had plunged into the Mediterranean, I would have felt some joy. As Jesus, in his wisdom noted, murder is hate's twin brother. I could pretend sorrow, and even shed a Christian tear in public, but I knew, in my heart of hearts, that there would be at least some delight in his demise. This was the real doubt-inducing dilemma that I faced that night. I could rationalize Curt's cruelty but the conundrum of my own hatred was inevitable.

Thump, thump, thump the cards continued to fall. What was the meaning of all the spiritual training, which I had received, from great men of faith? What was the significance of the six years I spent at a staff training center, probably the most disciplined program in Christendom outside some ascetic Turkish monastery of the tenth century? What had all of that self-denial, discipline and study gained me? How could I, the tabula rasa, still carry that evil nature that I had known so well before I had met Christ? Why was the magic formula for maturity not working? All those serpents, which I thought I had slain, were now raising their atrocious heads. Had I only clothed them in party dress rather than crushed them with my heel?

I also felt that something must be wrong with me that I allowed my own family to suffer so much. In my Christian idealism, I had always wanted to be the most perfect, loving father . . . but instead, I was finally realizing that my wife, and especially my son, had suffered tremendously in Egypt under my watch. How could I have allowed that to happen? Why hadn't I stood up for them earlier?

I looked out the window and studied the continuous flow of humanity that lined the old



tracks. Shiny plate glass windows of the fancy dress shops of Roxy were accented with homeless Boabs (door-men) that huddled in their dusty gallabas over a campfire fueled by street-trash with dinner—a single ear of burnt corn—being stirred in the coals. I saw my own reflection on the inside of the train window, faintly, ghost-like, superimposed over the alien world outside like some type of “heads-up display” in a fighter cockpit. My eyes looked sunken, even distant to myself as I was by that time, only a semitransparent shell.

By the time I was halfway home; all the cards had all fallen. The Christian Mike was gone. The stoic faces of kings, disciplined princes and joyful jokers were in disarray beneath my feet on the dirty floor of the listing metro train. But my fall down the hole didn't stop there. Head over heels, with nothing to grab a hold of to cease it or at least to slow it down, the fall continued to devour me. The muffled thumping had ended but I started to hear the subtle building of a replacing sound . . . a clicking.

The clicking was soft at first, but more comprehensive than the thumping. Was it real? Maybe it was the clicking of the wheels of the train over the fatigued joints of the old rails. But the sound wasn't real. In the eyes of my emotions . . . I didn't see any cards of my persona left to fall, but I did notice that the fabric of the whole Christian world was clicking as it was shifting and changing. Tiny threads of the fabric, like a scene from the movie *The Matrix*, were turning to 1s and 0s and streaming downward like thin rows of white sand through an emptying hour glass. What was this? I was confused and horrified beyond fear as I watch my whole world dissolving before the eyes of my emotions.

My disillusionment had spread, like a pandemic, outside my own persona . . . next to Curt. Three years earlier, when he first invited me to come to Cyprus under his leadership, I was

so honored. I considered him one of the most godly, men-of-faith, within the Church. After all, he was the poster-child of commitment inside one of the most disciplined organizations within Christendom. He alone had worked as a missionary during a very difficult and violent period of Beirut, when other Americans were being killed and kidnapped left and right . . . and all other missionaries had fled Lebanon for their personal safety. Even his own wife and two daughters had fled, not hearing a word from their husband and father for over a year. His legend was well known to me long before I had met the man in person. He had been my hero . . . a true champion of the Christianity I had come to know.

Now my righteous hero was appearing to me as a monster, one of the cruelest men I had ever known. How could I resolve this paradox? The greatest man of God I had ever known . . . and also the most savage. Nothing was making sense anymore. My previous boss, in the U.S. was an agnostic Jew. He was kind and loving to me and my family. He would never have treated us this way. The whole paradigm of my Christian world was crumbling under the weight of its own erroneous presuppositions, like a cardboard house under a stone facade.

After the hour train ride we pulled into our stop. I had to move faster than I felt like moving or the train would leave with me still on board. My feet hit the fine, Sahara sand beside the tracks and I started my last two-hundred yard walk down the narrow street toward our flat. Click, click, click the fabric of my universe was continuing to come apart, digit by virtual digit . . . 1s and 0s falling in lines through the hour glass and into the bottomless hole. I wanted to make it to my apartment and the safety of Denise's arms before I diminished into a mirage.

When I arrived at our flat and our old wooden door squeaked with its opening, Denise jumped out of bed and donned her housecoat. She met me in the living room, trying to muster a

smile on her sleepy face. “How did it go?” She knew that our future was to be determined that night and hopefully the end to our struggles.

“Horribly,” I said softly. I dropped down on the couch and said again . . . even softer, “Just horribly.” Denise and I sat for a couple of hours . . . both of us dazed. As close as the two of us were, I couldn’t find a way to communicate what was happening inside of me. It was the beginning of something terrible and even I had no idea how dreadful it would eventually get. I sat up the entire night. Denise didn’t sleep either, but she returned to our bed to rest.

The hours between two and four in the morning were the only times that our apartment’s interior temperature’s were bearable during the summer. Click, click, click it continued in the coolness of the early morning until the break of the sun over the eastern desert and the rooftops of the apartment buildings that neighbored ours. Even the face of God was starting to blur and change like it was melting—like wax—under the heat of the rising sun. Who was He? Did I really know Him? Was He really there after all?

I had learned of God as a loving father, who had control of everything, even the very hairs of my head. But that He too was the rewarder of those who do good and a punisher of those who do evil. Hadn’t I done good?

For fifteen years, I thought following God’s will had been my highest desire. In my secret places, I knew that I wasn’t perfect, but I was sincere. Out of my zeal, I had sought out the toughest Christian disciplining programs. I, with my family, had given up a good job, lived out of a V.W. Vanagon for almost two years while we raised financial support to go to the mission field. Then we came to one of the most difficult places in the world, just because it was the most difficult mission field . . . to serve Him and follow His will . . . and to please Him. Why did I feel

that we were being punished? Had I not pleased Him after all? Why was God hiding his face like he was ashamed of me? Click, click, click the fabric of all I knew of God was falling apart, turning to 1s and 0s and falling downward to oblivion. I begged the heavens, for someone, anyone, to answer me.

In the early morning light I reached for the bundle of letters, which Curt had brought. The bundle was now covered with Egyptian-train dust. It had been months since we had received a single letter, due the requirement that they be sent to Cyprus, then Damascus first. About the time that Denise broke the rules by calling her family for help, I had followed suit and sent out a desperate newsletter directly to our supporters, mailing them from Egypt. I had felt a lot of guilt about that. In the letter I had simply asked for prayer . . . prayer because we were struggling to “cope with some health issues.”

In the bundle of letters, wrapped in a simple, beige rubber band and bearing the familiar Cypriot postmark, I noticed one with a hand-written return address, “Rich Marriot.” Rich was a man whom had been at the Navigator training center with me . . . an old friend. I opened it looking for some comfort in the midst of my pain. Instead amenity, it was a letter of rebuke. Rich wrote, “When people have struggles it is because they don’t have their eyes on Jesus.” He added, writing from his comfortable middle-class, air conditioned American home, “Real Christians don’t just ‘cope’ . . . they are victorious!” He ended it with the exaltation for me to, “Repent and shape up.” The loneliness that I felt at that moment was like the musty taste of death itself or the passionate French kiss of a four thousand year old mummy.

Click, click, click . . . the collapse of my world spread rapidly, the foundations were the first to give away, then everything above it . . . to the whole Church, and my entire Christian

experience. Had it all been a farce? By the time that the sun was high in the sky, I was no more of a Christian than my Moslem neighbors in the next flat or the agnostic that I once was . . . before I had become a “new creature.”

For any man, standing in the center of a total ruin . . . be it a physical ruin of a bombed-out city, a personal ruin with the loss of a spouse or, in this case, a spiritual ruin . . . there are three main pathways out. The largest and most inviting path is that of emotional numbness. The ones who walk this corridor learn to continue the mechanics of taking steps, eating nourishment, but develop a thick, elephant-type skin to insulate them from the omnipresent reality around them.

This was my father’s response to losing his three sisters and parents from TB in the 30s, and then his horrors on the beaches of Normandy. He never talked about it. He didn’t shed a tear when his close brother died years later . . . except when he was alone, beneath his blankets in the middle of the night. Numb people, like my dad, become the kind of rock that the great American poet, Paul Simon, sang about. Zombie-like, they continue through the remainder of their lives until a natural death brings comfort.

The second path is to simply extinguish your own physical life by your own hands. Those who choose this path, I think, do it merely out of fatigue. I was very, very tired at this juncture. Although the first path seems to be the broadest and most traveled, this second path is, in some ways, the easiest and most alluring.

The last and most difficult, path is the long torturous journey to understand. This path is taken usually out of curiosity alone, and sometimes with the hope that understanding will bring resolution. I was fatigued but, by nature, I’ve always been curious. So I stood in the center of my

ruin almost visibly contemplating which path to take. I would flirt with each of the paths over the next few years. I think that my deep disillusionment was bred with a deep longing to understand. That's why I eventually left on my perilous decade-long journey. I was determined to find the answers and to solve this celestial puzzle as to why my safe Christian world had really been built on un-tempered glass. Why did I still harbor within my "Christian soul" the worst kind of evil imaginable? I would eventually ask where do I go from here? *Where do I find truth?* I also wanted to honestly find out if God was ever there—and if he was—who the hell was he?

Denise and I did not want to be quitters so we stayed in Cairo for another year without any connection to The Navigator mission organization . . . as if there had been any connection to sever. Initially following the wide path, breathing and studying the Arabic language were my only purposes because the rest of me was a lukewarm corpse. I had no thoughts of God or spirituality. I lost fifteen pounds as I could barely remember to eat. It was a great struggle for me to even nurture my wife and children as I knew that they needed. By the second half of our second year in Cairo, I saw the on the horizon our return to the states, and maybe there I hoped to find myself again and my family could find rest and good health. But such hope would quickly vaporize as only an illusion.

Butterflies in the Belfry, Serpents in the Cellar

Chapter Two

The Homecoming

Arriving back in the states, I quickly found a job in Duluth, Minnesota, where we knew no one. I thought it would be better that way. It seemed easier to start over from scratch among strangers than to try to constantly justify my return to the people in the church which had sent us out. I knew that I was too confused on the inside to try and make sense of things to other people. I couldn't even make sense out of what had happened to me. I knew that I could fake it. Take the broad, stoic, numb path and smile saying simply, "God spoke to us and called us home." I knew enough about Christianity, that I could always play the "God card," then no one would question it. But I didn't want to play games of any kind anymore. I was willing to take a gamble, betting everything on honest reality. If God wasn't there in reality, then I would have to live without Him.

Expecting a great relief in a strange town, I was disappointed to find that my fall had not yet run its course. I had passed through the realms of spiritual discordance, intellectual doubts and finally into a pure emotional fall. I was in clinical depression for the second time in my life . . . this time far more seriously than the first. My first taste of depression was when I was a teenager, but this time, I was constantly shadowed by sincere thoughts of suicide. I could really visualize myself as a corpse. The opportunity to end the pain forever was seductive. Now, however, I had more reason not to do it. I had a wife, three boys and now a new baby girl, Amy.

The first year on American soil all my—and unfortunately Denise's—energy was spent on me trying to find my way out of the melancholic colliery. Matters were not helped when

rumors made their way through The Navigator circles that we had been “quitters” at best and failures at worst. This organization had been my Christian family for fifteen years and now I felt like an outcast, save for our friends the Larsons in Indiana. They had always seemed like a breath of fresh air and completely out of the Navigator-military mold. I know that Ken and Tina did love us and were concerned about us . . . but with a distance of a thousand miles there wasn’t much they could do or say to help.

Another old Nav friend, Gary, a missionary himself in China, called because he heard we had “failed.” He suggested that I was demon-possessed. I found no comfort in that call—although his intentions were honorable I’m sure.

But eventually I did get my emotional feet back on stable ground and I was ready to move back to the third path, with one quest . . . finding the real truth. Was God really there? If so, which path leads to Him? If Christianity is genuine, what is the truth about it? The Christianity that I had known for a decade and a half now seemed deeply flawed and nonsensical, like high tea around a mad hatter’s table in Wonderland. If Jesus was real . . . who was he and what did he really teach?

I also eventually discovered a very seductive fourth path that, unfortunately many of us fall into after any kind of painful experience or disillusionment. This later path is becoming obsessed with your pain, the victimization of yourself. In a very selfish and destructive way, it is just like a dog licking his wounds day after day . . . turning a small gash into a huge gapping hole. I know that I must have wandered onto this path many times and like a fly in a thick syrupy mass, once in it, it was very difficult getting unstuck. And, like honey to a fly, it was very inviting.



During an interview with the late (and courageous) Christopher Reeves, Barbara Walters asked him, “Didn’t you ever feel sorry for yourself . . . surely you did?”

Speaking slowly, pausing to catch each breath with the help of his portable ventilator mounted on his wheelchair, “For a while” . . . breath . . . “I allowed myself . . . to feel sorry for myself for the first fifteen minutes” . . . breath . . . “of every day. But I had to stop it then” . . . breath . . . “because I knew” . . . breath . . . “if I let it go on more than fifteen minutes” . . . breath . . . “my self pity would” . . . breath . . . “totally consume me.”

Fortunately, my curiosity seemed to eventually win out over my self pity but not without a formidable scuffle.

As I started to make my first attempts to re-enter American Evangelical culture, everything appeared to have been turned on its head . . . irrational and very ugly. What I had seen before as a Jesus-centered utopian society, filled with loving saints, I now saw as only a veneer. In a raw way, I saw broken people struggling earnestly to hide their brokenness at all cost and promote their own self interests under the guise of spiritual fruits or God’s will. And worse yet, I then realized that for fifteen years I had been the most broken and self-promoting of them all.

The dishonestly around me appeared to be comprehensive, and yet, it too was luring me back into the game because I was so desperately lonely. The draw to play the part was enthralling because I so hungered for Christian friendship . . . which was not often assessable unless I appeared good.

We weren’t allowed to make Christian friends for the two years in Egypt, but now, living in a Christian country I still couldn’t make any because I was so messed up. Being depressed, questioning everything, and being emotionally honest that was very unbecoming for an

Evangelical, which was something of an absurdity.

The fact that we had been missionaries earned us a lot of saintly points at first glance. However, when people asked me about our experience and I did not give a glowing response, of victories and miracles they were stunned. I was violating all mores of the Evangelical value system. Few people are attracted to missionary stories that don't have a happily-ever-after (even after a tragedy) garland wrapped around its ending like a Hudson Taylor and Jim Elliot story. After I moved past my clinical depression and more into my spiritual search, I read countless books on philosophy and listened to literally hundreds of hours of lectures on cassette tapes. I read the complete works of Dr. Francis Schaeffer, some of his books many times over. I read every book on Christian apologetics that I could get my hands on.

I spent the third year studying world history, history of world religions and especially the history of the Church. Then the fourth year, I studied the Bible from cover to cover with more fervor than I had ever known even in my intense discipleship training center, but this time out of a subsistence passion, not as a religious exercise nor to earn brownie points with God. I didn't study to impress my Christian peers nor for penitence . . . but simply to find the truth.

Like trying to find the one, unifying theory of quantum physics, I knew that there must have been a fundamental flaw, a real fly in the sacred ointment, in my previous way of thinking . . . which once uncovered, would make sense of everything. But to find this philosophical culprit, I would have to go back through my entire Christian journey, like a Sherlock Holmes bearing a magnifying glass.

Butterflies in the Belfry, Serpents in the Cellar

Chapter Three

Loosening My Belt

I was fortunate, or maybe misfortunate . . . depending on your perspective . . . to have grown up in the Bible belt. Specifically, it was in a small town called Fall Branch, nestled in the Appalachians of northeast Tennessee. Going back and trying to understand this particular Evangelical culture and my formative years is where I knew the journey had to begin. The process would have to start with knowing myself better. I needed to find out not only why I was a murderous man (at least in my heart), but why my particular brand of Christian thinking failed me so severely.

Northeast Tennessee is a beautiful area, rich in a folk history and antebellum architecture. The sounds of dulcimers playing ancient mountain music could be heard echoing in the valleys with lyrics telling of lost loves and heroes found, as well as hymns about this world not being important and having a cabin in Heaven. Deeper in the valleys, or what we called hollows (pronounced “hallery”), were the ruins of old moonshine stills and even darker family secrets.

Our beds or walls were covered with the trademark brightly colored quilts, “woven” together from pieces of old rags, which told of hardships and struggles that has always been indigenous to the region. The hardships were a fruit of the land, where the hills, valleys and hollows were so rugged that you could barely scrape out a decent living in the poor clay soil.

Despite the poverty, the lay of the land is rich, with rolling green hills, covered by light-clay cattle tracks that corkscrewed up their green-grassy sides. The hills, in stair-step fashion, take you from muddy creek bottoms in the lowlands up to steep, spruce-covered mountains

rising over six thousand feet above sea level.

Accenting the valleys and hills were villages like mine. The highest points, geographically, in each of these settlements were adorned by old, white clapboard churches with steep steeples and silvery-tin roofs. Sometimes the old churches had been replaced by more modern and larger red-bricked ones. Evangelical Christianity, as a culture, had found no better home than here among these hills.

When I was attending college in nearby East Tennessee State University, a goateed sociology professor from Buffalo, New York, fondly referred to our area as not only the Bible belt, but the “buckle of the Bible belt.” In other words, it was the very heart of fundamentalist Christianity.

This professor loved living in the area as a scientist and researcher of culture. His expertise was a group of Churches of God in the Newport, Tennessee, area about sixty miles away . . . deeper in the mountains, where rattle snake handling, drinking poisons and playing with fire were routine parts of Sunday morning worship. He often filmed these services with an old eight millimeter movie camera on Sundays and showed them in our, somewhat spellbound, class later that week. He included his graphic footage of the time when the pastor of the church died from multiple rattle snake bites. The bites and subsequent death were supposedly indicative of the handler’s lack of sincere faith . . . that is if you take the Bible to its literary extreme. If the whole area was the buckle of the Bible belt, then Newport was the little metal flipper thing at the center of the buckle.

Our little Baptist church looked like it had been taken right out of a Thomas Kinkade painting. It was of the white clapboard style, with tall stained glass windows—each pane

monochrome, red, green or yellow. It stood at the top of a steep but rounded hill. Behind it, encircled by a lacy wire fence painted with many layers of silver paint and with limestone posts, was an old cemetery. The oldest gravestones nestled up against the church wall, and the newer ones, of friends and relatives . . . including my dear dad . . . were far up the hill in the “new section.” The grave stones flanking the church walls were smooth and weather-worn dating back until the early 1800s. You could barely read the lichen covered letterings expressing grief and hope from two centuries past.

The church building itself was just as old, from the period of the Second Great Awakening which swept through the area with circuit-riding evangelists, on mule back, during the early nineteenth century.

Inside, running horizontally, were white quarter-sawn boards covering the walls and ceiling. Two rows of about twenty, dark, hard oak pews filled the sanctuary with a wide, aqua-green-carpeted aisle down the middle. The pulpit sat on a riser and was a lighter oak and, along with the carpet, was a newer addition from the forties or fifties. The pulpit was massive, weighing in at least two hundred pounds, and had a wooden cross carved on the front of it. That cross stood just above the communion table, which was long and narrow with a white, linen cloth draped down the middle. Engraved on the front of the table were the words, “In Remembrance of Me.”

Behind, and to the right of the pulpit, were four rows of pews facing toward the congregation. This was where the choir sat during the service and where my uncle Casey, a deacon, taught Adult Sunday school before worship. On the wall above the pews was an old, dark-stained, oak sign with movable black and gold letters and numbers. It listed “Sunday School

Attendance,” “Church Attendance,” “Last Week’s Offering.” and “Saved.” On the wall behind the pulpit was a large painting of Christ, in mild earth-tones of brown and beige. He had long sandy-blond hair flowing past his shoulders, looking like a Swedish Fabio with a full beard.

Across from the choir pews, high on the left wall, was a solitary shelve and on it perched an old clock with a shinny, brass pendulum that swung back and forth . . . tick, tock . . . tick, tock. As a child I spent many Sunday mornings studying that old clock. Two things amazed me about it. For one, I could not figure how anyone was able to reach it to wind it. But, it always kept perfect time. The other thing that I found astonishing was that the pastor always stopped the service exactly at twelve noon—not thirty seconds before—and not thirty seconds after. He also did it without even looking at the clock and that was always a mystery to me. If we had a guest minister, and he went one minute past noon, the church would suddenly become restless. Even the adults would begin fidgeting in their seats, knowing that he had missed this important cue.

Outside, the church roof was made of tin with many layers of plastic-based coatings to try and stop the perpetual leaks. What rainwater that didn’t leak through the rusty spots and nail holes ran down to large, round gutters and down spouts. The down spouts led to a large underground cistern, from where the church drew its potable water. The cistern had a metal door with some kind of lock. I know that there was a lock because I can remember one of the Parker boys trying to pry it open. He thought it would be a funny prank to pee into the cistern. For some odd reason, he thought it would be hilarious to imagine the older, blue-haired women drinking his urine-tinged water from the big porcelain fountain that sat in the vestibule. Fortunately the padlock served its purpose well.

I can still remember a thick, white, cotton rope that hung through a hole in the ceiling in

the vestibule. It led to the old iron bell up in the towering steeple. My uncle Casey, now buried in the new section of the cemetery, along side my dad, would lift me up to pull the rope on Sunday mornings. I didn't have the strength to make it toll on my own, even if I swung on it with my entire weight of 50 lbs, so my uncle would cheat by pulling on the rope with his sly left hand, beneath me, leaving me to think I had done it.

The earliest thing that I remember about church service was nothing as exciting as live snakes, but it was a time of confusion and conflict. I must have been about five years old when an episode of screaming between adults opened the worship service. I was very frightened, squatting in the floor and crawling under our pew as the arguing continued. It wasn't until I was much older that my mother explained what had happened on that scary Sunday morning.

The Pierce family owned our church. I wouldn't be surprised if they hadn't literally owned it as they did contribute a lot of the money for the offerings. But, between the husband, the wife and the adult son, Jack—who still lived at home—they held all major posts. Jack was the music and Sunday school director. I think his dad was the head deacon. I'm not sure what posts his mother held but she seemed more powerful than any of them, as a kind of godmother or matriarch.

On that infamous morning we had new visitors to the church. I can't remember the name of the family but the father had made a lot of news in town. He had been arrested a couple of years earlier for embezzling money from his employer. The man went to prison and had just been released. I assume that once he got out of prison, he wanted to take a different path for his life, and the life of his family, and he decided to bring them to our church on that day . . . maybe the first time they had ever darkened the doors of a church.

This new family came in late (I assume because they weren't sure what time church started) and took a seat. The church went silent. An old hymn was being led by Jack in the usual manner. When the hymn was done, Jack's mother stood up and seemed very upset. She pulled the collar of her flowered-print dress up around her neck, looked at the pastor and announced, "We do NOT go to church with criminals!"

Pastor Long, who was elderly, soft-spoken, but probably one of the most sincere pastors the church ever had, was obviously disconcerted by this outburst and opinion that was expressed. His extreme reaction had the signs of an opinion that was a long-time coming. Stepping out of his quiet, humble character, he shouted (obviously without thinking) at Mrs. Pierce, "If we are going to talk about criminals . . . maybe we should start by looking at your own family!"

A ten megaton nuclear bomb detonation would not have caused more pandemonium in that sanctuary on that morning. Everyone knew what Pastor Long was talking about but, the words had never been spoken louder than whispers between friends over their home kitchen sinks or between husband and wife in the dark, quiet of their bedrooms. Jack had been, habitually, sexually molesting young boys in the church for years. The response had always been to pretend it wasn't happening at least, and at most . . . orchestrate situations where your own sons were out of his reach. My mother was the later . . . although he did get his hand into my bother's briefs once on a camping trip.

By the time the church service was over that morning, the Pierce family had "fired" the pastor and the search was on for a new one . . . one that would never venture into the dark cellars of the souls of the members. Pastor Long had only opened the cellar door briefly, yet that feeble effort caused a fatal outrage, fatal as far as his career went. It was such a shame because, until this day, most people still have a deep respect for the man and his honest devotion to God



became legendary and, unfortunately, an aberration.

A new pastor was eventually summoned and he was the perfect fit. Joe was a good man, hard worker, polite and articulate. He was also well educated and well dressed. He drove a new metallic-green Cadillac and his wife was glamorous, in the image of Marilyn Monroe. She was a bleached-blond, spunky and wore dresses, which revealed most of her large bosom unless it were covered by a mink. She was the closest the people in this out-of-the way church thought they would ever get to Hollywood.

The pastor accomplished a lot during his tenure. He extensively remodeled the church building, paved the parking lot, built the new section of the cemetery and started many new programs including a major theatrical production every Christmas. His wife, the Hollywood-type, directed the plays. I was a sheep herder in a couple of her productions. Their busyness never afforded them the time to meddle in people's personal lives and that's the congregation liked it that way.

The historic old church, ironically, burned down the very day that Pastor Joe retired. It was surreal. For a decade he had slaved to build a better church building and the on the very evening that he declared his job done, it burned completely down. The only thing left standing was the cistern. They say the fire started from the electric heater being set too close to the curtains down in the basement. This tragic event forced him to directly come out of retirement and oversee a new program of rebuilding a bigger, red-bricked, church in the same spot. The new church had fake wood paneling, fake-plastic "stain-glassed" windows and an aluminum steeple with electronic "bells."

Joe was also the perfect man for the pastorate in many ways. He not only didn't make the time to snoop, he never had a desire to. He'd rather keep the cellar doors closed than peer inside .

. . the reason being, he kept and nurtured his own monsters down there. Apparently he had a mistress on the side for most of the years that he was our pastor. So, he allowed Jack to have free-reign of the boys . . . in turn, the Pierce family never questioned his behavior.

It was in this setting that I first learned about God and Christianity. In a rich (but not so pure) Christian culture, I got to know God as an absentee landlord, or maybe absentee Lord. What I mean is that what God was to us, was the same as what Genghis Khan must have been to someone in a remote, twelfth century village on the Black Sea . . . at the very periphery of his empire. We heard a lot about God, but, He wasn't anywhere close by. He seemed at least two thousand years away in travel time. He did have a local embassy, our church, which told us about this mysterious emperor . . . what He liked and what He disliked. We learned too that He was very powerful and would reward us if we did exactly what He wanted but would punish us if we disobeyed Him. Some of the punishments could come in the form of accidents or cancer. We all feared cancer. Additionally we learned that doing nice things for the absentee emperor would make up for any disobedience as a kind of Protestant penitence.

You must understand that I am not speaking of official Baptist theology here. Any decent Baptist theologian would be offended at the way I describe these concepts. But I, as a reporter, am giving a very honest account of the "folk" or "colloquial Christianity" that was experienced by most of us in the Bible belt . . . be they Baptist, Methodist or Presbyterian.

The main thing that God seemed to like, and the greatest act of penitence, was us going to church every Sunday. For some odd reason, he liked for us to get up, hustle to get everyone dressed in our best clothes, drive down to the church and sit on the hard, punishing pews for an hour. We also had to pretend that we were very good people while at church. I could never figure out why the Church ritual pleased him so much, but it was at the top of the list of his favorite

things. It seemed very queer in the eyes of a small child.

The whole congregation would sit, tuned out, while pretending to listen to a monotone lecture about Paul Harvey or a Peanuts cartoon that culminated with a Bible verse and an alter call. The lecture used words that were far out of reach of a preschooler and made no sense until I was in high school, then they were just plain boring.

My dad learned to sleep during the sermons while sitting straight up. I could tell. His eyes were closed and his chest moved slowly up and down inside his neatly ironed, white shirt. I think mom told me that he learned to sleep sitting up in World War II, sitting up in a fox hole with his rifle at his side . . . and his finger on the trigger.

Mom, like many of the ladies, kept her mind preoccupied by studying people, noticing who was sitting with whom, who had alcohol on their breath or was carrying a new brand-name purse. For a while she couldn't keep her eyes off a young couple who were French-kissing in the back pew each Sunday or a young mother who was chewing up peanuts, spitting them out and feeding them to her hungry toddler.

Looking back, I realize that these people, including my own parents, were not bad people. They were the product of their Bible belt culture and I truly think they were doing the best they could with what they had. I'm sure my mom has a sincere desire to know God and to serve him and the same was true with my dad. Even beyond these good, average folks, there were a few like Mrs. Rector, a Sunday-school teacher, who seemed to have been completely spared from the faults of that Evangelical age.

Like Mrs. Rector, these people were a geographic anomaly.

A few years ago, I went on a job interview to a small town in central (and flat)

Wisconsin. Right outside of that little town, surrounded by picturesque dairy farms with dull-red barns and tall white silos, stood an even taller, round tower of limestone. I was puzzled by the feature, looking like it had been imported from someplace in Monument Valley, Arizona or a miniature version of Devil's Tower.

At the base of the giant outcropping was a picnic area and plaque. The plaque described how during the last ice age, the glaciers somehow split and wrapped about that point, eroding and polishing the flat terrain around it, but leaving these rare stone islands standing two hundred feet above the lower and now green farm fields.

In the same way, as the massive Bible-belt culture evolved and migrated, glacier-like, across the southern landscape, there were these rare individuals, like Mrs. Rector who seemed to be left unscathed. But really they weren't that rare. Every little white clapboard church had one or two of these saints. These people loved the Lord with all their heart. They were humbly aware of their own frailty and lived like they were deeply dependent on God's grace. They also had an odd security about them, where they could be real people at all times. They didn't mind coming to church with a dirty shirt, bad hair or even a bad attitude. They made no pretense about their own spirituality. Until this day I am perplexed by them. I don't know if it is an issue of moral choice, family rearing, genetics or divine intervention, but, they were a breath of fresh air and sometimes a point of my envy.

After the sermon at my church we would sing a few songs about this world not being as important as Heaven. The Tick, tock of the clock would continue until both hands pointed straight up and we could go home—penitence done for another week.

As a young boy it was always hard to figure out why this ritual was so very important to

the Creator of the, twelve billion light-year-wide, universe. It was so important, that even if you had done a lot of things He didn't like, you can erase the negatives on the balance sheet by going to church more—such as Sunday evenings or Wednesday nights. There must have been something magic about coming in the door, wearing your best clothes, because, even if God wasn't mentioned there . . . still it made Him very happy that we had shown up.

Once a year, there was a special ritual that also seemed to please God more than the others and that was the “having the pastor for Sunday dinner” ritual. Every good family in the Church practiced it. As a child I dreaded it very much. It meant that we didn't only have to pretend to be perfect for the two hour Church service, but also for the entire afternoon.

It was also a huge production, much like the behind-the-scenes work of a theatrical production. We had scripts to learn. The “set” had to be built to perfection, in other words a perfectly clean home and immaculate yard. We could not say any words that were offensive, what the locals called “swear words.” That wasn't so hard to avoid, but there were many other things that we couldn't say. It wasn't always easy for a kid to figure which words were good and which were bad . . . so we usually just kept quiet. We tried to exhibit perfect behavior, sitting on the couch with our Sunday clothes on and our arms folded politely on our laps like mannequins in a Sears living room display.

We also couldn't mention anything about going to the bathroom, belching or any other bodily function. We even had to leave the bathroom door closed . . . maybe fooling the pastor and his family into believing that we didn't have one or a need for one. Such bodily functions were animalistic and we knew that everything earthly was the total opposite of the heavenly.

We had to make our home appear heavenly . . . soft hymns were playing on the radio, air fresher sprayed everywhere . . . somewhat like a modern Christian bookstore. Things were so

carefully orchestrated that it became a major scandal one year when Mom (with a slip of her mind) served “devil’s food cake” for desert. We were all so embarrassed. Why couldn’t she have served “angel food cake” instead? We hated those once-a-year productions. Pleasing such a finicky God was such a chore.

Our Christian culture also taught us that God didn’t like lying unless we lied for Him. If I said I caught a fifteen inch bass, which was really only twelve inches long, this absentee God would be angry. But, if I said I saw a miracle, which I knew in my heart that I hadn’t, that seemed to make God and everyone in his embassy very happy because it “brought him glory.”

It seemed too that God hated all forms of alcohol, cigarettes, poker cards, music with a beat, dancing, long or facial hair. The exception for the tobacco was that God had a special dispensation for men, like my dad, who had survived either the Great Depression or World War II. They were allowed to smoke because they had “earned it.” The many tobacco growers who attended our church were also exempt. Selling alcoholic beverages, like one of our deacons did, was okay only if you kept the alcohol money in a separate bank than your godly money, which you used for church work. Somehow, any money used to buy alcohol became “dirty” and God, for some reason, didn’t like dirty money mixed with his clean money.

The tobacco exemption was employed by all that qualified. Between Sunday school and worship the steps of our little white church looked like a choir of dragons. Every man over forty was puffing away. The men stood with their backs to the doors, so as not to blow smoke inside. They stood, all facing the same direction, with smoke sifting out from their nostrils. But, because of their suffering during the Great Depression and the war, God looked the other way when they practiced their bad habits . . . as some type of mutual understanding between God and them. However, if one of us kids slipped a smoke, out in the parking lot, God would be really be

pissed!

For men that lived prior to World War II, there was also some kind of dispensation regarding their hair. When the church posted antique photos for the Sunday school centennial celebration many of the men had long beards and hair. Even the pastor looked like Ulysses S. Grant. Our Sunday school teacher explained that God made an exception for those maned-men because in those days “razors weren’t cheap.”

This absentee God hated premarital sex more than any other sin. He, actually, wasn’t very fond of sex in any form, even within marriage. It was nasty and disgusting . . . very earthy and animal-like. Even our own sex organs were felt to be disgusting and if we had a choice, we would never bring them into church with us. Actually, anything that brought physical pleasure would be suspect, like eating too much chocolate.

My mother grew up one generation removed from the Victorian age. When she was a young girl, even the word “pregnant” was a dirty word. After she and my father had been married for a couple of years and she was expecting my sister, she was still very embarrassed. She wanted to cover up her growing belly with a long coat. To be obviously pregnant was to wear a billboard around one’s neck declaring, “I’ve had sexual intercourse.” It seemed to her that even God was ashamed of her. But, at the same time, oddly, it was believed in that culture that God loved children more than anyone else because they were least contaminated by the world.

I wasn’t sure why God had such an odd eccentricity about Him but apparently He did. He also didn’t like any questioning. To believe everything that you were told by parents and especially at Church without expressing any doubt, we thought, was very pleasing to Him. He seemed to really like ignorance. I guess that is where the saying, “ignorance is bliss” has its

roots. In this type of Christian culture, knowledge and thinking were opposites of faith, and faith was considered the greatest of Christian virtues. But this kind of faith would prove to be an unhealthy faith.

If a building is built on a cracked foundation, the whole structure is in jeopardy, especially during an earthquake and this kind of faith would prove to be that kind of fissured foundation. As I went back and studied my early spiritual heritage, I began to see those fissures clearly . . . but they starting to look more like chasms.



Butterflies in the Belfry, Serpents in the Cellar

Chapter Four

The Baptist Bar Mitzvah

When I turned twelve, it was a major event. Southern Baptists considered this as the “age of accountability.” I don’t know who invented the age of twelve as the magic turning point, but it was assumed to have been written in stone . . . somewhere . . . if not on Mount Sinai, then in Nashville. Maybe “accountability” was something that sprouted with pubic hair, but it happened overnight.

Somehow, when you go to bed at age eleven on your birthday’s eve, you are innocent and accepted by God. At the stroke of midnight, you are suddenly condemned to the eternal fires of hell . . . and it happens while you are fast asleep for crying out loud! This moment must be determined by the same magical clock that determines the end of worship service . . . precisely when the two hands line up at the top of the clock. This metaphysical transformation takes place, however, at midnight, not noon.

The next day, you awaken with an overwhelming feeling of guilt like you had never known before. The only thing that can take the sting of guilt away is to walk up the aisle to “receive Christ.” This act of going forward was usually not a deep spiritual awakening but a ritual awakening, like taking the test to get your driver’s permit. It was something that was expected by the Christian culture. There have been equivalent rituals in every Christian culture since the beginning of the organized church. It might be baptism or catechism in other circles.

I remember the Sunday after my birthday like it was this morning. I had already been living under the fear of hell fire for forty-eight hours. That Sunday, the choir sang happy birthday to my uncle and me. We had a birthday the same week, his was on the fourth of July, mine on the

eleventh. I was hoping no one would notice what age I had obtained.

As I was leaving the sanctuary, at the end of the service, I followed the tradition of parading by and shaking the pastor's hand. While my parents were lying and telling him how much they enjoyed his sermon, I tried to sneak on out. I had done it a thousand times if I had done it once. This time, however, Pastor Joe wouldn't release my hand . . . holding on tightly to it with his right hand, while reaching across with his left to shake my mother's.

When my family had passed, he looked at me, "Johnny (my first name) how old are you now?"

I was terrified. I looked up at him, with the thick bell rope hanging just behind his head like a hangman's noose. I wanted to pull a big handle and watch him fall through the floor and the rope tighten around his neck, not killing him, but cutting off enough blood to his brain that he would forget my stinking birthday. More realistically I wanted so much to lie and tell him that I was eleven . . . but I knew he would eventually find out the truth. Plus, being so perilously perched above the all-consuming fires of hell, I was not inclined to lie so easily, unless it was lying for God, like my folks had just done.

"Uh . . . twelve," I mumbled.

His eyes lit up. He loved seeing the numbers of new members of his church going up. "Well, I'm looking forward to seeing you making a decision for Christ." I just smiled.

I was a late bloomer in my trip to the pulpit. The honest reason, looking back, was not any kind of hesitation about becoming a Christian, because the going forward was so irrelevant that it had virtually nothing to do with your own spiritual condition. It offered an instant release of guilt, fire insurance from hell and getting all the adults off your back forever. No, the real reason that it took me almost a year to go forward, which I didn't realize at the time, was that I

suffered from a serious case of social phobia. I didn't know what social phobia was at the time but I knew that people frightened me beyond belief.

As I mulled over the fact that I was afraid of people, I knew that as soon as I was done exploring my spiritual heritage, I would have to go back and take a close look at my early emotional milieu as well. Decades later, when I fell down the rabbit hole, one of the great mysteries which I could not answer at the time, was why had I been too afraid to stand up to Curt until it was too late. Why I hadn't been a better husband and father in the face of such pressure from him?

The act of going forward during an alter call didn't simply mean me walking up in front of the church full of people, but I would be expected to make a speech and then greet the whole church . . . one by one. It was only when the intense guilt finally out-weighted the intense fear of public speaking that I closed my eyes and made the first step from my pew. It was exactly like the first time I rappelled off the side of a cliff, as I also have phobia about heights. It starts as an intense fear, then a closing of the eyes, and finally taking that first step.

For a few weeks after I went forward and was baptized, I was on an emotional high. I wanted to believe that it was the Holy Spirit or some other tangible proof that God was really there after all . . . but in my heart, I knew it was simply that the load of guilt was finally lifted. No longer would I feel the hundred pairs of eyes staring at me every Sunday morning as the choir sang "Just as I Am." I wouldn't feel the incredible shame bestowed upon me by that distant, absentee Lord. Now I could move on to the next landmarks in my life of getting my driver's permit and losing my virginity.

Another major event that occurred when you turned twelve in the Bible belt—at least in our small church—was moving up from the grade-school Sunday school classes into the high school class. Our congregation was so small that everyone between ages of twelve and eighteen were in the same class. There were no singles over the age of eighteen in our church because in the Bible belt, as soon as you are emancipated from the control of your parents, you don't go to church anymore. After what I've shared so far, why would you? Maybe, when you are twenty seven, have your first child and are married, the pressure of tradition, the desire to be a “good father or mother” might move you to return to church to raise your family. Only a small percentage did return.

I would have to say that the grade-school years in Sunday school really did have some positive impact on all of our lives. One of the greatest redeeming factors about church in the Bible belt was the Sunday school teachers. These men and women (and it was more than a few) I believe, had a very sincere desire to teach us about the real God. Some of them were the “spared ones” or the, geographically speaking, Devil's Towers, which I mentioned previously. How they reached such a level of sincerity, in the midst of the farce, amazes me. It was during those formative years that we become familiar with the important Old and New Testament stories and of course about Christ himself. If there was a short-coming during those years, it was being given the idea that the world you lived in was far removed from the one you were reading about in the Bible. Like the absentee Lord, the teaching of the disciples and Paul were so other-worldly, that it was never anything that you or anyone would aspire to.

High school Sunday school was a completely different world primary due to one thing . . . testosterone. The classrooms were in the basement, and if I remember right, the high school class was in the northwest corner of the building. The walls were old limestone blocks

covered with concrete stucco and then painted white. The blue carpet on the floor had the musty cellar smell from the perpetual dampness. In the winter we had a large electric heater with four coiled springs around ceramic posts that glowed red. A little silver fan in the back of it blew the heat across the damp room. More than one teacher used the glowing hot coils as an illustration for the heat of hell that awaited us if we weren't good people, or if we kept interrupting them while they were trying to speak. It was the same notorious heater that eventually burned down that old church.

Interruptions were commonplace, not to mention a general disrespect. For that reason no adult wanted to teach this group. The boys out-numbered the girls three to one in the high school class. I'm not sure why, but the adults said it was God's way of providing soldiers for war. The superstition was claimed that if a lot of boys are born it would mean American would be at war in eighteen years. My group must have been the exception because the war in Vietnam ended when I was sixteen and we were at peace for two decades.

The boys sat across the back row, in an L shape, along the inside of corner wall. The three or four girls sat in a row in front of us . . . dressed in their white, Sunday dresses and donning a dead silence behind emotionless faces. I am sure they hated coming to the class because the boys kept them in a constant state of embarrassment.

I was mortified myself the first day I came into the class. Rather than a nice teacher-lady coming in and taking control . . . no one was in control. Every Sunday for the following five years, the pastor would spend the entire hour trying to persuade any adult to come and teach our unruly class. None wanted to. So we were often left alone.

Mike was a cocky, sixteen year old athlete. He sat with his folding chair leaning back on the stone wall on two legs. In many ways, he was the teacher, at least for the boys' section. He

had his driver's license and, most importantly, he had a girlfriend named Kathleen, who went by "Candy." She was the sheriff's gorgeous daughter and went to a different church across the county line. Her dad and my dad had been boyhood friends, but went their separate ways. Oddly, they "bumped" into each other on a beach in Normandy in the midst of the chaos of D Day morning. Candy's absence gave Mike the freedom to describe their dates from the previous night . . . in graphic detail.

"Hey, I got my hand on her boob last night!" Mike would announce at the beginning of class. The other high school boys would laugh and snicker in excitement. The girls and the twelve-year-old boys, like me, were frozen like statues, in a state of shock. The girls' faces were crimson and my pupils were fully dilated as I listened enthralled.

Mike would describe how he learned to unbutton a bra with his left hand . . . and Candy . . . wouldn't even suspect it. Then, he would make his move. She would fight him off . . . but he was persistent. His plan was to wear her down, date after date, as if she were a bull and he was a Spanish matador. Each week he gave his play by play account as he was moving in on the "kill."

On those rare occasions, when a teacher did come in and take over the class, he or she would pull out the "quarterly," a Sunday school lesson book put out by the denomination headquarters in Nashville. They would pass around the glossy-faced booklets to the entire class and we would go around in a circle reading a paragraph each. We totally ignored the content of what we were reading but went through the formality, knowing that this was just another one of those rituals that pleased the absentee Lord. Sometimes we would try to out-do each other in reading in the most monotonous voice that we could muster. Even more rarely we would have an adult teacher that did try to create some discussion, but, it was quite a challenge to pull anything

more than a wise crack out of the group.

One Sunday morning, Mike's own father was picked to, reluctantly, lead the class. When we had read the entire quarterly, he quickly exited . . . to work in a smoke on the front steps before worship. As soon as he had closed the door behind him, one of Mike's peers quickly asked, "Well . . . did you bang her last night?"

As soon as Michael started telling the details of his story, one of the girls sitting in silence on the front row reached her breaking point. She quickly turned around and shouted, "Would you just be quiet!" Her face was fire red and the veins were sticking out on the sides of her neck like a cluster of garter snakes. Then she whirled back to face the front.

Mike, and the boys on his end of the row, started giggling as I watched him . . . in disbelief . . . reach out and secretly unsnap the girl's bra through the back of her sweater. She didn't notice at first. Then she heard the boys' laughter increasing in volume . . . looking down, she noticed that she had a problem. She burst into tears and raced from the room. She never came back to Sunday school . . . or church as far as I know.

Only a few Sunday's later, Mike made his last appearance in Sunday school as well. His Candy had suddenly broken up with him for some curious reason and he was devastated. I don't think he had the heart to face his group of admirers with such failure. He continued to come to worship because his parents made him, but told us that "Sunday school is for little kids."

At first I felt uncomfortable with the continuous volley of sexual innuendos in the classroom, accented now and then, with instructions for making "home-brew" booze or pipe bombs, shop lifting tricks, who was selling pot or news of pending fights. As I got older, I, unfortunately, got used to it.

By the time I was fourteen, I was invited to join the older boys, between Sunday school

and worship, out in their supped up Chevy Novas or Mustangs in the cemetery parking lot. This was a gravel lot behind the church, inside the lacy wire fence and well out of sight of the fathers smoking on the front steps. In the cars I was introduced to Pink Floyd and my first exposure to photos of naked women.

The strange thing I was learning about God and the Christian culture, which I thought He had inspired, was that despite all the negative things that I was being exposed to at church, I was still taught that was where He wanted me to be. If I had decided that I didn't want to be exposed to those things and decided to stay home to protect my innocence, my parents, the pastor and the whole Christian community would have been outraged. I would be scolded, "You have turned your back on God!" With my parents help, I earned several Sunday school perfect attendance pins. Pastor Joe pinned them on me with great pride. The whole thing was as perplexing to me, as a tea party with a crazy hatter and a warped March hare.

If it snowed, or we had some other reason to stay home on Sunday, my mom wanted us to watch TV evangelists as a surrogate act of penitence. God would give us credit for that, considering the bad weather. In the late sixty's these evangelists would be preaching loudly with a strange (God given, I guess) lisp. They wore red sports jackets and plaid pants and had hair that was combed straight back and plastered down with pig fat, or at least it looked that way.

They preached against sin and the need to trust Jaeeeeeesus. They would then pound their fist on their big, black, King James Bibles, with gold edged pages, and point at the camera, "These young people today . . . God bless them . . . with their long hair . . . jeans . . . and devil's music . . . they've turned their backs on Jaeeeeesus. I don't see them in church anymore because they love the devil's way . . . the way that leads to death and the fires of hell eternal!" So the message was loud and clear, but at the same time . . . befuddling. God hated long hair and music



with a beat. But, He wanted me to go to church. Just the act of going would suffice. It didn't matter if you went to a class where you were being taught how to get into your girlfriend's pants, then sit for a very boring hour, listening to songs about how this world is not important, followed by a very boring lecture about a comic strip. What kind of crazy absentee Lord was this?

Another loud and clear message was that appearance is far more important than substance. Jack, the choir director, was a good Christian because he dressed nicely, had a crew cut, didn't swear in public, didn't partake of alcohol and was a hard church worker. He was considered the model Christian man that we were to emulate. It didn't matter that he was using his position to lure young boys into fulfilling his sexual pleasures . . . as long as that was kept in the cellar. After a while, I finally figured out that this absentee Lord didn't have the ability to peer into those cellars . . . or at least that's the way it seemed. Maybe the cellar doors were made of kryptonite.

But, I was a bright young man. The nice elementary Sunday school teachers and a few of the drafted high school teachers did expose me to the Bible. When I read about Christ, the real historical Jesus, I was able to read between the cultural lines enough to recognize that He was very different from the absentee Lord that the Bible-belt culture was revealing. I never saw where he was judging people on their appearance or for not following certain rules. As a matter of fact, He was always getting into trouble with the established religion of His day for being a rule breaker. Rather than hating sin, what He really seemed to hate was pretending. He loved the hookers, who wore their sin on their sleeves, but despised the Pharisees, who had secret cellars that were overflowing but followed the external rules to perfection. But even though I had a glimpse of this real, authentic Jesus . . . the Christian cultural mores were extremely powerful, overwhelming and quickly extinguished such insights.

By the time I was sixteen or seventeen years old, with so much confusion about life, I came to a place where I really didn't know if there even was an absentee Lord. This was in the very quietest place of my inward heart . . . far away from the scrutiny of my parents or any adults. For one thing, I had discovered science and reason. I was not allowed to ask any questions in Church, but, in stark contrast, honest questions were welcomed and encouraged in Mr. Humphrey's science class.

In science class I found a humble and honest search for truth, while at church I found a dogma that you must believe without questioning or be socially shunned. I wasn't the only one to drift away from the church at this point . . . and for the same reason.

I, like most of my peers, continued going through the motions of church, but it had no substance. That was fine because that was all the culture demanded. Strangely, years later when I did start to take Christianity seriously, mom and the pastor thought I had gone too far. Mom invited Pastor Joe over to talk to me. He warned, "Be careful and don't get too religious. It must be in moderation or you could go Bible-Crazy." It was an urban legend in the Bible belt that if you read the book too much, you would literally go insane. The local mental institution, called "Green Valley," was full of people who thought they were Biblical prophets or even Jesus himself. They paced back and forth in their makeshift cells clutching their Bibles . . . and cigarettes.

If you were getting perfect attendance Sunday school pins, making good grades and, especially, if you were a good athlete, it didn't matter that in your heart of hearts you were having serious doubts about the Christian narrative . . . as long as you didn't tell anyone.

I was even thinking at the time, that now that I was a member of the Christian religion, I should also secretly join Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam . . . and maybe Judaism . . . just in case

one of the others was right instead of Christianity. If I belonged to them all, I so reasoned, then my eternal destiny would be sealed. I secretly built a small alter in mom's garden where I attempted to do burnt sacrifices (usually jewelry and other things of value were thrown on the fire) thinking that if Jesus wasn't real, I would at least be pleasing the Old Testament Jewish God. The whole religion thing was so external and shallow that simple membership, even multiple memberships, was all that each religion required. After all, that is what my Christian culture had taught me . . . walking down the church aisle and getting my name on the church rolls would give me fire insurance.

I am sure that in the Catholic Northeast, the Lutheran North and other American-Christian regional cultures have mores and folklore that teach a very different Christ than scripture and the Bible-belt Baptist don't have a monopoly on such folly.

My wife grew up Lutheran and they have many parallels to my upbringing. For them, completing confirmation classes was the equivalent of walking up the aisle. Being nice, not using words considered offensive, not drinking alcohol (at least in public), being respectable, singing in the choir fulfilled the absentee Lord's requirements, making him happy. I've thought about this a lot and I've concluded that the main difference between my Bible-belt rearing and my wife's Midwest Lutheran roots is that the Lutherans take the farce far more seriously.

For example, if a deacon in my small church had gotten a good deal on some exotic Russian Vodka, it wouldn't be beyond him to open up his trunk in the Church parking lot and show someone . . . then wink. They both would know that the alcohol abstinence thing was just a game. Inside the church they would give full support to the message that all alcohol is sin. But in Minnesota, this would never happen. The deacon might indeed have a stash of high quality Vodka in his cellar, but absolutely no one else would know about it. He would drive all the way

to Milwaukee or Chicago to buy it if he had to.

Another way of looking at it comes to mind from a recent conversation I had with my son, who is 22. He is teetering on the edge of leaving Christianity and he blames a lot of it on the superficiality of Evangelicalism. I was sharing with him, “Dan, all areas of human culture have a farceness about them. The Evangelicals didn’t invent this type of game playing. Even the scientific community plays their own version of the game, treating the impersonal, cold universe as if it were a person who cared about them. They have their unspoken mores built on sand.”

Dan responded with an interesting insight. “Yeah, that’s true. But the difference is, most people realize that they are pretending but the Evangelicals don’t.”

There may be some truth to that. So in my point about how the Bible belt differs from Lutheranism is that in the Bible belt culture at least, they know it’s just a game. That’s why our pastor didn’t hesitate to let my mom and aunt know that he had a mistress . . . because he knew that it wouldn’t change things, such as their respect for him as a pastor.

In the Midwest Lutheran sub-culture, it really didn’t matter what you really believed in the deep, quiet places of your soul, or what you did in the back seat of a car after the football game . . . as long as you team won the game and you helped with the sacraments on Sunday. Those private things were simply not discussed . . . period. Mike Parkers’ sexual pandering in Sunday school class would not have been tolerated in my wife’s Lutheran church. For them appearance was paramount.

Like I was telling Dan, the same is true in all cultures, not just Christian ones. I believe that Islam has taken the charade to a much higher art form, like rubbing the center of their heads to create a deep, dark “zabiba” (meaning “raisin”). Even the materialists, secularists behave this way. I’ve known many fine atheists who cannot live consistent with their beliefs because in the

hidden places of their hearts they know that their lives have true meaning, not just survival, and that ethics really do matter.

Besides my faulty religious thinking, I knew too that I had also made some serious mistakes in how I thought on an emotional level. To succeed in answering my questions, I knew that I would have to smoke out that part of me as well.

Butterflies in the Belfry, Serpents in the Cellar

Chapter Five

What Are You Worth?

After deciphering my formative, religious rearing, I knew that I would have to do the same with my emotional progression through my younger years. I had to look at myself honestly, for the first time, to really understand what was wrong with me. But this re-passage would be more difficult than the first for many reasons.

It is a part of our natural, psychological defense mechanism to consider the way that we are, emotionally, is the way that we should be. In other words, we believe that we are normal even if the rest of the world is totally nuts. To even open the door to other possibilities than our normalcy is terrifying. It was especially horrifying for me, as a well-studied evangelical, to even consider that my fall down the rabbit hole was part of my own doing. I wanted to think of it as a push from evil Curt, rather than any kind of a personal stumble or tripping up. But I did know that something was wrong with me, somehow I was broken, and my intense curiosity after my fall coerced me onward to find out the reasons.

First, I had to establish some kind of universal landmark, or grid through which I could evaluate all human behavior as well as that of my own. I spent months contemplating this whole idea, trying to reduce the human psyche down to its fundamental building blocks. I really thought about this a lot. Of course, scores of psychologist and philosophers have done this before me, but I needed to do it for myself.

I had recently attending a lecture by an astrophysicist who, to our good fortune, retired and moved to our little island. He made the comment that all energy can be traced to one simple

source . . . gravity. That didn't sound right to me. For the following days I kept meditating on that comment, trying to challenge it by following every form of energy that I could think of to its ultimate source. I thought about nuclear, coal, solar, hydroelectric, photosynthesis, even the Krebs Cycle deep within our own cells. Finally I realized that this guy was, indeed, telling the truth. It all starts with gravity.

In the same way, during my contemplative years subsequent to my rabbit-hole experience, I too wanted to find the very primal principle of human behavior from which all behavior can be traced. I wanted to find that one source, which is so basic that all great views of psychology, and of course scripture, would not contradict.

My searching eventually led me to reach the conclusion that the root of all human behavior is ultimately tied up in issues of one's appraisal of self-worth. It was an "eureka" moment when I realized that I had finally gotten past all the complex theories to the very essence of behavior. This discovery became a key component for my understanding what was wrong with me, in the microcosm as well as the big picture of what went wrong with the Church over the ages.

All cultures, since the beginning of time, have believed that determining your personal worth is the centerpiece to your very existence. I would suggest that all suicides come only after the eventual self-assessment of worthlessness. The economics of determining self-worth, which I will abbreviate "ESW" (for the Economics of Self Worth), I quickly realized is an extremely important concept and not just a side-bar to my search, but a real cornerstone.

I recognized that all human behavior is based on physical, emotional and spiritual desires. Physical desires are simply the hunger for air, water, food, freedom from discomfort and for pleasure. The emotions are a composite of both the physical (brain) and spiritual (soul). You

might even say that the brain is the interface between the physical and soul. The essential emotional hunger is to be loved. I do think that there is a difference between the sexes when it comes to this need. John Eldredge was right when he described, in his book *Wild at Heart*, that men have this intrinsic desire to be loved as a hero (dragon slayer) and women have the desire to be loved for their inward or outward beauty, or the desire to be a princess. I'm speaking in generalities here, but it does seem to fit. There is also another hunger that I would classify as emotional and that is the hunger for knowledge and creativity.

In the spiritual dimension I'm aware of the hunger to be accepted by God and, tied closely to that, the desire for personal value. We don't feel acceptable to God if we feel we have no value and the same is true in reverse. If God created us, like a potter creating his pot, and if we are defective or of no practical use, this would bring nothing but disdain from the artist who had made us. This desire to be of value almost supersedes all other hungers and this is where the concept of ESW comes in. Even the Fall (with a capital "F") of Adam can be explained by this hunger for value as well as knowledge.

In the Bible belt at least, the Christian culture was not the main determining factor for ESW, even within the church. The problem was more of a sin of omission. The church never stood in opposition to some very unhealthy ideas of ESW, but sometimes, actually incorporated them into its own rituals and mores.

ESW can't exist without a form of measurement. As in material things, there can not be an appraisal of worth without a standard of measurement. For used cars, it is Kelly's Blue Book. For gold it is grams and carat. For lobster it's "MP" or "market price."

In determining human value, I believe that there is only one measuring stick and that's comparison. If one person was alone on a deserted island and had never met another human



being . . . his or her feeling of self worth would probably be equivocal. I honestly don't think anyone born alone on a deserted island could have a low self esteem. This concept of deserted island reminds me of such a story about isolation on an island.

While I was in graduate school at the University of Kentucky, I was also attending a very intensive Navigator training center. It was somewhat like a protestant monastery. The purpose of this four-year program was to prepare me to go on staff with the organization.

The director of this training center, Hal, was what we used to call "hard core." He was very concerned about purity, discipleship and obedience. He didn't believe that going to movies or even watching TV, unless it was a ball game, was good for us. There were five guys and five gals in this center but we avoided each other . . . most of the time. I later initiated a few "group dates," with Hal's approval, but it was deeply frowned upon to pair up or even to touch each other. By the time I met my wife, and I was the first in the group to marry, it had been eight years since I had kissed a girl.

I can remember one night Hal heard of a movie that was coming to town called, *The Blue Lagoon*. It really disgusted him because he had read in a Christian newspaper, that it was really pornography that had been "mainstreamed." I think our Christian and Missionary Alliance Church was considering protesting in front of the theater. I never gave the movie a second thought . . . until later that night.

When we arrived home to the two-story ministry house on Lexington's Walnut Street, my roommate, Tom, seemed a little distant. He was a California boy and the oldest of our group, somewhere in his upper twenties. He had been the stereotypical, dark-tanned, body builder from Venice Beach. He had a lot of rough living under his belt (and this wasn't a Bible belt either)

before he came into the Christian fold.

We were standing in the bathroom getting ready for bed, Tom flossing and me brushing my teeth. He pulled the waxed string out of his mouth and stared at me in the mirror. “Do you know who Brooke Shields is?”

“Nope, I’ve never heard of her,” I said after spitting foamy Colgate into the old porcelain sink.

Tom smiled. “She’s like a goddess. She’s considered one of the most beautiful women in the world . . . and she’s only about fourteen, or maybe sixteen now.” He stared at me with a twinkle in his eye.

I looked puzzled at him, holding my toothbrush at a 45 degree angle as if it were a question mark. I spit again, “So what brought all this up?”

Tom smiled for a moment, threw some cold water on his face and dried it off with a towel, “She’s staring in the Blue Lagoon.” Then he walked down the hall and looked back over his shoulder donning a grin and a wink, “Good night.”

As I laid my head on my pillow to fall asleep that night the name, “Blue Lagoon” kept floating through my head.

It must have been three weeks later that I was driving down the main street of Lexington in the middle of a thunderstorm in an otherwise quiet afternoon.

The marquee of the old Kentucky Theater caught my eye . . . or maybe my eye—intentionally— caught it. *The Blue Lagoon*, flashed in red lettering beneath which, in a little smaller letters, “Staring Brooke Shields.”

I drove past that theater every day going back and forth to school. On this day, with a primitive impulse, I parked my jeep on a side street. I looked both ways, not for traffic, but for

anyone that might know me. I darted into the rotating glass doors of the historic movie house with the hood of my sweatshirt over my head and the strings so tight around my chin, to hide my face. I must have looked quite goofy . . . something like the Unabomber. This was the first time I ever did anything like that while at the training center. I knew in the deep parts of my heart that I wanted only one thing, to see the goddess that Tom was talking about . . . naked.

I honestly don't remember if she ever took her clothes off. She must not have or at least close up because I don't remember it. I do, oddly, remember the story line. It was about two babies, a boy and a girl, that somehow got shipped-wrecked on deserted, tropical island. They of course discovered sexuality but I don't remember it being very graphic . . . but to me at the time, a kiss was porn. I think the point of the writers of the screenplay, being influenced by the French philosopher Rousseau, was to show that human behavior, in its raw form, is pure and wonderful. Rousseau believed that we humans, like noble savages, were basically good but were corrupted by socialization . . . or religion.

I'm not proud to tell that story or any of the stories that show me in my vulnerable, broken self. But I'm now being honest about it. My wife Denise also saw the movie. She was attending a Lutheran college and her boyfriend took her with the stated reason of going for the storyline.

The plot of the *Blue Lagoon*, two babies untouched by human culture on a deserted island, makes a good back drop that I will draw from several times in this book. If you were shipped-wrecked alone, as a baby, how would you know if you were tall, slim, fat, smart, fast or good (in a relative sense) unless you had other humans for comparison? As soon as another person steps onto your little island, the comparisons would start, at least in your own mind, in

order to assign yourself value. If you were of the same height, weight, intelligence and goodness then maybe you would still see your value as equivocal. But if person A is slightly taller than person B, and if that gives person A some practical advantage, such as reaching coconuts, then suddenly person A has more value than person B. Each particular subculture arranges the comparisons according to different hierarchal ranking, which is the basis of my concept of ESW.

Ironically, I am writing this chapter of my book at the very epicenter of what the American culture values as the pinnacle of human value. No, I'm not on Wall Street, but sitting by a pool of a five star hotel in Beverly Hills, California. This is indeed an oddity for me . . . actually my first trip to Beverly Hills. I am not here because I'm having some type of PR event as an author (only in my dreams) but to attend a symposium on migraine research.

As my family and I have walked the streets of this glamorous city over the past couple of days, I see confident, tanned, young-looking successful people driving Ferraris or Porsches. Along all the streets, and especially down at the beach in Santa Monica or Venice Beach, are hundreds of people working out and jogging to keep their body fat below 5%. As medical provider, I have to applaud them for taking such good care of themselves. But at the same time, on the underbelly—no pun intended—of this glamorous world, I wonder what really makes these people tick.

I've also see a lot of Botox and cosmetic surgery clinics here. I perceive that if a young man or lady isn't in their top physical form, with abdominal six-packs and a deep tan, that they would see their personal value dropping . . . at least in the eyes of the opposite sex and perhaps in general. Being rich, famous and young seems to be what most people think gives them the highest value in our society.

I have to add one more observation from my walking around over the past couple of days

. . . scores of people my age, in their forties and fifties, walking the streets of Beverly Hills and Hollywood, who look like they are doing everything in their power to appear like they are in their twenties or thirties. Hair transplants for the men, face-lifts for the women, lipo-suction for both. It is not just a coincidence that Hollywood is the Mecca of illusion and special effects for America and the world. Sadly, with the headquarters of MGM, CBS, Paramount Pictures and the likes within blocks of here, this is also the Mecca of the emerging American culture and the exportation of these ideals to the rest of the world.

I can't look up the statistics from the edge of the pool, but I would bet that the rate of alcoholism, suicide, prescription drug use and abuse, depression, and illicit drug use is higher in this area than about any other neighborhood in the country. "Rehab" is as common here as getting a haircut in small town America. This ESW, like all, is simply an illusion, even like having the right haircut. Once the people arrive at their dreams of stardom, they must be deeply disappointed that the insecurity continues to haunt them. This was the real message of Ecclesiastes. ESW, in my humble opinion, is also the fundamental building block for racism and most wars. It is the comparison act taken to the ultimate extreme.

It is truly astounding how heavy of an object that you can lift with a lever. However, the key point to any lever is a fulcrum or pivot point. Comparisons allow you to use another person as that fulcrum to lift yourself up. But to make a comparison, you must differentiate yourself from them. The thinking goes, I'm male, and they're female so by pushing down on them, disrespecting them, I can push myself up. But you can carry this to, I'm white and they are African-American, I'm Anglo and they're Hispanic, I'm Sunni and they're Shiite, I'm Aryan and they're Jewish, I'm northern and they're southern etc..

Friedrich Nietzsche, the nineteenth century German philosopher, believed that the

fundamental motive of all human behavior was to power over other people. This thinking had its roots in social Darwinism, basically stating that the strong end up on top. But I take it back a step to this issue of feeling of worth. The reason you want to power over others, by pulling yourself up . . . or by pushing them down, is leveraging for self worth. I'm not saying this is the way things should be, but the way things are. Actually God has solved this problem once and for all, but we always seem to forget that. Now with my behavioral grid in place I could start to make sense of my personal world and makeup.

What I had considered as a "happy childhood" came to an abrupt end on a warm Tuesday, September the tenth, in 1968. On that day it was announced to my seventh grade class that basketball try-outs would start the following Monday. This would put me on the path of some major-league misery but ironically may have been the path that finally caused me to take the Christian life more seriously.

I didn't grow up in what you would call an athletic family, although my older sister did play softball and basketball. The week before the Monday afternoon try-outs, I quickly learned that the economic paradigm of my whole world and worth was about to abruptly change in a direction that I was ill prepared for.

During my elementary school years, the ESW was based on comparisons of intelligence, looks, economical class of your family, brute strength (for example bullies did well on this item alone) and personality . . . in that order. Being good, in the Bible belt, had some merit but it was superficial. For example, one kid in my elementary school, Luther Hayes, was the son of a pastor. He wore short hair, didn't swear, dressed only in button-up, white shirts and dark polyester pants and prayed before his meals in the cafeteria. In some ways he was respected, but

in more ways he was not. He didn't have many friends, except for maybe one.

One of the biggest thrills for the whole sixth grade class came when Luther got into a fight with one of the bullies. This bully had picked on him, relentlessly, until the point he finally fought back. On that fateful morning, while the teacher was out of the room, Luther's composure broke and he started swinging his fists with such pent-up rage that it brought cheers by all the class. He had murder written in his eyes.

The reason the class cheered as poor Luther was fighting was because of the comparison issue. Everyone was thrilled to see that Mr. Goody-Two-Shoes was human . . . like the rest of us. I'm sure that's why the bully was picking on him to start with. He was jealous of his "goodness" and wanted to bring out his dark side.

During my elementary school years, I fared okay with the ESW. I was intelligent. I didn't have any major facial deformities. Our family was not very rich, but we weren't poor either. I had no brute force to exhibit but my personality wasn't too bad. I was kind to other kids and was well liked by them. I was reasonably comfortable in my self-worth measurements but it was a very fragile contentment. Then, in a matter of a week, the whole hierarchy was turned on its head.

Two human activities are most conducive for ESW because they literally assign numbers to your value. Comparisons between people are always easiest and most objective with numbers. The two human activities that use numbers are athletics and business.

Since I am going to be talking about mostly athletics, I will briefly mention business first. I work in medicine and it has become a business just like any other (and don't be misled, alternative health care, like supplements, is even a bigger business). A slogan that is often used among my peers is "What's your worth?" They are simply asking what kind of skills and talents

have I accrued that can be translated into income. In medicine, it is not unusual for a practitioner to generate over four hundred thousand dollars per year in income for their business. Don't misunderstand me. We Physician Assistants don't take paychecks home in this amount. PA's only take home a very small percentage of the income generated. But when you negotiate your contracts, you are valued on what you can produce for the business. So I can get huffy and say, "I'm worth \$400,000 a year." All businesses use these same measurements of "What are they worth."

I've heard the board of directors of major corporations say, "Our CEO is worth every penny of fifty million dollars per year." Really . . . are they really worth a thousand times as much as a hard-working, intelligent, honest, creative person down in the mail room? Or, are they good bosses who just happen to be lucky enough to at the helm of a huge corporation that is doing really well . . . due to a good economy?

Athletics are even more easily measured with numbers. As a matter of fact, that is what athletics really is all about, a system for comparing human behavior with numbers. The most blatant number is the score of the game. We had 66 points and they had 64 points—therefore, we are better than they are. But it goes far beyond the score. The whole area of sports statistics is about comparisons used to rank human beings according to their worth.

I think gymnastics and figure skating are extremes in this ESW, where even minute human behavior is measured to determine the person's value. There is no question that Michelle Kwan was the best women's figure skater for a number of years. She never won a gold medal, thus proving that she was the best, because possibly a few molecules of ice melted a little faster under her skate on one particular day in one particular place, causing her to slip a few millimeters. With one tiny slip her value in the skating world's mind plummeted by a huge



number. A visitor from another planet, who was watching this whole production, would think that all humans are insane . . . and, later, I will prove that indeed we are!

There are athletes who have said that they would be willing to die to win a gold medal . . . verses a silver one. I hope that Michelle never felt that way. But athletics has become an addiction and a very unhealthy one because of this issue of ESW. Even middle school sports teams practice year round and the sport must come as the center of the players' lives because winning is now everything. It is everything because, honestly, the coach's own ESW is entangled in winning. He conveys to the team that their ESW should also be based on winning. I am not trying to say that sports are evil and should be banned. I personally still like sports a lot. But sports, like everything in the fallen world, have its dysfunctional side. But more than that, the sad thing is "being competitive" is a very favorable attribute in almost every subculture . . . including the Christian ones, but I realized that we Christians cloak it with other names.

In junior high school, and now it starts even much younger, athletics were the number one endeavor for determining your personal value . . . at least for boys. If you don't believe me, ask some high school students. I knew (and still know) guys that were poor, ugly, stupid and jerks but they were great athletes. Their heroism on the football field, or basketball court suddenly catapulted them to the top value of the local society. Even some high school sports stars continue their high status well after graduation and had more opportunities in business and other areas of life.

To be a good athlete you need natural talent, hard work, and the right psychological makeup. I started out with above average natural talent as I was one of the taller guys in my class at the time. When try outs came around, I had not worked hard because I had never played basketball before that day. However, after not making the team on the first try, I have absolutely

no doubt that I worked harder than any other player for the next five years. My mother thought I had become obsessed with basketball to the point that she wanted to take me to see a psychiatrist. I wish she had. I slept with my basketball. I got up in the mornings and dribbled it for three miles. I would shoot hoops for eight hours a day, and then went to team practice. Afterwards, I stayed at the gym long after the others had left. But I was desperate as I watched my personal value dropping like a brick down a well of broken dreams once sports became the most important measure of a young man's worth.

This drop in personal value was in my own mind, but somewhat true in the external—real world—as well. My popularity was slumping and those boys who were doing well in sports came out of nowhere and rose in popularity in the eyes of our peers . . . and what was even worse, as real heroes in the eyes of the girls. They were the real dragon slayers.

Even though I worked very hard and had a reasonable amount of raw talent, I never succeeded in basketball because of the third pillar of success . . . the psychological factor. I didn't know it at the time, but I suffered from a very serious case of a general anxiety disorder and more specifically social anxiety. I didn't know what the heck was wrong with me. I knew that I could hit nineteen, out of twenty, jump shots from the key while I was in practice. But just put me in a game in front of a crowd and I would transform from Dr. J into Mr. Klutz. I remember taking a shot and missing the entire backboard and hearing laughter in the crowd . . . and it was a home game! I was jerked out of the game when I made mistakes like that and my playing time would diminish. People who didn't know me assumed I had no talent. But, I could beat every guy on the team in a pick up one on one contest . . . as long as nobody was watching.

When I was a freshman, I was briefly chosen to start as point guard by a new coach who appreciated my raw talent. But, as soon as scrimmages started, it was a nightmare again . . . I

performed far below my potential and I felt helpless to do anything about it. The coach worked with me because he did have enough insight to know that my problem was mental. But my frustration magnified over the next couple of years by a factor of ten. I didn't personally have the discernment to understand the nature of the mental component. I worked harder on my skills thinking that I wasn't good enough, that it was a talent issue, but sadly, to no avail.

About this time I started developing insomnia. At first it was just the nights before the games, but then it became every night. My social anxiety worsened, being wrapped up in a vicious downward spiral. I sat on the bench, being terrified of the crowd, yet at the same time longing for the opportunity to prove myself. When I was put in, I would faithfully screw up because my trembling was so severe.

An insatiable rage stepped out of one of the darker corners of my deeper places. But it was anger without an obvious reference point. I could try to blame others. "The coach wasn't giving me enough playing time. He's not being fair!" I would complain in the locker room, but, I knew that those arguments were unfounded. I didn't understand who or what was causing my downfall . . . outside my own doings. Eventually I grew to detest myself as my most perilous enemy. I forced myself to practice harder and harder, as if I was an angry father disciplining his unyielding child. All the while I continued to feel the value of my identity sliding.

I've heard the stories about hostages, who believed that they were going to be executed but somehow survived. Some of them watched while others in their party were, for example, beheaded by Islamic extremist or killed by the Nazis during the Holocaust. I can not imagine anything more terrifying. But, when you believe that your entire value, your reason for existing, is measured by your performance . . . points scored in a game, assists, rebounds and games won . . . the terror of failure can also become paralyzing.

When I turned fifteen my acute distress of low self esteem rose to its highest point. I started thinking about killing myself, or at least coming close to it. Looking back, I really don't think I wanted to die but, to get attention for my plight. If I came close, I believed that at least I could find someone to help me navigate out of my self-imposed labyrinth of despair.

One night, I stayed home from a ball game. My mom and dad weren't at home. I am sure they were not at the game because I had placed a moratorium on their attendance because I didn't want to embarrass them. I went down into our basement and found two large hose clamps. I tightened one around one wrist with a screw driver. Then I slid the second one under the first, and then put my hands together behind my back. I fasten the second hose clamp around my other wrist—awkwardly turning the screw driver, blindly, until the clamp was tight. The two, linked together created a type of handcuffs. I was scared . . . but at the same time completely hopeless. I felt so worthless that I no longer had the right to exist. I broke a quart jar over in the area of the basement where mom kept her canning supplies. I took a deep breath, closed my eyes and slammed my wrist down on the broken jar and felt a sharp pain.

I could see red blood dripping between my feet . . . crimson drops on a gray concrete floor. I couldn't visualize my wrists directly because they were locked behind me. I sat down waiting to die . . . okay, maybe just to pass out. I really preferred to just pass out from blood loss because maybe I wasn't completely without hope I still believed that someone out there had the answers to what was wrong with me. I also had some fear of death. My doubts about my Bible-belt upbringing were very serious by this time, but kept to myself. I really thought that there was an appreciable chance that if I died, I would simply cease to exist and that there was no afterlife.

After some time, I had not died nor had I fainted. I was coming to my senses enough to be scared that I might really die . . . so I stood up and made my way back to dad's work bench.

There, I took a screw driver and meticulously started to turn the screw on the clamp, an eighth of a turn by an eighth of a turn until it came loose. I pulled my wrist around in view. The cut was so superficial that I would have had to lay in the basement for a week to bleed to death . . . that's if the cut hadn't healed over by then. I cleaned up the small dribbles of blood, put gauze around my wrist and have never told many people until now.

From talking to hundreds of patients over the years, I am aware that many other people have contemplated suicide at some point in their lives . . . some far more seriously than I have. But the truth is, I've been in the vicinity of taking my own life twice, as a teenager and again about a year after I fell into the abyss in the Chinese restaurant in Cairo, both times for the same reason. But it shouldn't have been. What I mean is that there was a lot of "holy" water under the bridge, changes in my life between the two events . . . or at least I had thought there was. But it was soon after this first low point in my life, that God was able, for the first time, to reach me in a more authentic way.

Butterflies in the Belfry, Serpents in the Cellar

Chapter Six

Repossessed Memories

Everyone has a story to tell and I mean that in the most positive way. Incredible narratives of mystery, wonder . . . and, unfortunately, grief have been engraved on every page of our lives.

Going further back into one's psychological heritage is a little bit like walking into a minefield. The "repressed memories" movement swept into the scene of popular psychology during the late eighties and took it, especially Christian psychology, by storm. The psychologists and counselors who held these views believed that finding and recovering "repressed memories" was the cornerstone of the patient's healing. That may be true for a few, but I think such positive outcomes are rare. The whole concept of repressed memories has remained controversial among the mainstream psychological movement and is considered by most to be no more than a passing fad.

Yes, healing may be found in those bloody mine fields but more often it is ambiguity . . . if not worse. Those hallow, or possibly haunted, grounds can also be a quagmire where you can get caught up in a deeper and deeper spiral of introspection without any fruit of resolution. I've seen countless patients of my own go back to re-live their Vietnam experience, or their abuse as a small child, but are not able to get beyond that. They start to define themselves by those horrible past experiences. The vet starts wearing army fatigues with peace symbols sewn on the pockets and marching in MIA parades, and beginning all their conversations about their post-traumatic stress disorder. For some this could be healing and helpful, but for others their feet get stuck in the muddy spots of that field and they can't ever free themselves again.

I knew that getting stuck in some type of emotional quagmire would certainly not be helpful in my quest. There is a thin membrane of wet tissue paper that separates finding answers that help resolve and finding answers that excuse. But at the same time, to untangle the mystery of why my faith had become unraveled . . . I had to go back even deeper.

It was obvious that basketball was not my simple downfall and did not account for the anger and the hate that I felt in Cairo on that dreadful night. There were some serious issues with my own concept of ESW long before I held my first basketball.

I could have let it go with what I had observed about my early spiritual heritage, but I wanted to venture on . . . into that minefield . . . still being driven by my life-sustaining curiosity. But I tried to heed the warning signs along the field's edge, "Take Care, Tarry Not."

Looking back into your life is like looking down the throat of a large funnel. The big end, filled with well-defined details is close to your eyes, but the furthest end narrows and extends into a shadowy world between real memories and imagination. My life before high school seemed to be an elongated tunnel that extended into a murky infinity. The memories of the really old days are broken up, more like snap-shots than a continuous movie. The further back you go, the fewer the photos and more the haze. Like looking into an old photo album it is filled with old black and white Polaroid snapshot. But the album must have been recovered from a flood or other natural disaster because the pages are stuck together and most of the pictures are ruined or faded beyond recognition, but a few, though, seeming to survive unscathed.

Coming into this world at birth is no different than an astronaut landing on Mars, but with no pre-knowledge of the planet. Every thing you see, feel, smell or hear is reality reshaping who you are and your perceptions of the world. All that you experience is truth to you as you have no concept of illusion, misperception or certainly not evil.

The earliest snapshots are me, circa age two, of being in my crib at night and holding my mother's giant hand through the bars. I can also remember sitting in my highchair at the table, before our family dinners dissolved into a living room and T.V. event. But the most substantive memories were from age four or five. I was the youngest child on my dead-end road, by far. My sister Susan was closest to my age, three years my senior. But the majority of the dozen or so kids were in their early, if not late teens.

When I first started to venture away from the safety of our yard, it was usually being led by the hand of Susan. One of the first of such trips we walked beyond the end of our paved road, down its steep, red clay remains that eventually narrowed into just a footpath. The trail was quickly swallowed by a dark hollow of pines, maples and sassafras trees. Susan had been telling me for weeks about their wonderful clubhouse and I was excited to see it for myself.

Just venturing into the dark woods was a real-world rendering of the Mother Goose stories that I was familiar with. I imagined at any moment a lion, a dragon or a lost wood cutter with a double axe would jump out and grab us, taking us to some witches hut . . . which may have been a blessing in disguise.

When we came into the clearing, my pregnant imagination was not disappointed. I saw this beautiful two-story stone club house with a thatched roof. To my young eyes, it looked no different than the ink drawings in the story books. Looking back, I don't know how the young kids pulled off such an engineering feat. The large stones had been placed neatly into straight walls, with red-clay mortar holding them in place. They had used old lumber to create the base of the second floor. A wooden ladder led up to the loft. The windows were open to the outside, but the girls had made some kind of curtains that they could draw shut.

The roof was made from stalks of simple straw that grew in the nearby field. Through the



middle of the stone house was a functional chimney with real smoke bellowing out. On the fire below, Orië, my fourteen-year-old neighbor girl, was cooking mud pies. The local orange clay gave the pies the appearance of real pumpkin pies, but instead of whip cream, they were piled high with white daisy pedals.

It soon became apparent, of the eight to ten kids at the playhouse, that one, Les, was what you would call the Alpha Male. He was the boss, giving instructions to those on his right and his left. He was a big kid, both in age and in body size. Although he was barely a teenager, he seemed as tall as my parents and much heavier. Initially, he gave the feeling of safety in this remote part of the woods.

I don't know what I did that day that changed things . . . but they did suddenly change for me. When Orië was done "cooking" her mud pie on the small fire, Les announced, to my surprise, that I would now eat it. I didn't want to . . . but I had no choice. He grabbed me by the shirt collar, handed me the pie and demanded that I eat, forcing my face down in the mud.

I slowly ate it bite by nasty bite as he squeezed the back of my neck tighter and tighter. I ate the dried clay, gravel, sow bugs, earth worms and daisy pedals with Les hovering over me, grasping my shirt tightly, cutting off the blood supply to my head . . . while he, and some of the others, continue to belly laugh. I felt nauseous and embarrassed. I was also confused. My reality was changing and I didn't like it but there was a deep, unspoken feeling that I somehow had caused it.

This was the beginning of a long and difficult relationship with Les. For reasons that my small mind could not understand, I became the focus of his cruel attention for the subsequent three or four years. Whenever Les found me outside my house, and he lived right next door to me, he would come over and grab me, drag me through the bushes and force me to do things that

I hated. Eating mud pies was just the beginning. Once he forced me to climb to the roof of our house when dad had left a ladder leaning on the gutter. Once I was on the top, Les took the ladder down and vanished. It seemed like I stayed up on the roof for hours. What started as sobbing became out-right terror until I finally closed my eyes and jumped off, hurting my leg.

Sexual abuse soon became part of his cruel arsenal of weapons. Being five years old, sexual things were not even on my radar but I did know that private parts were supposed to be private. I felt deep shame and hated it, but I was a stranger on a new planet earth and I took reality as it came without any understanding of it. You start this life with the feeling that the way things are, is the way things suppose to be. There was no concept of the Fall or brokenness of nature.

I do remember telling Les' mother about the sexual things. Actually I had told my mother and she immediately took me over to tell Les' mother. I didn't want to talk because I was very scared of him, and deeply embarrassed about the whole thing.

We approached their small, white house and mom knocked on their screen door. When Barbara came to the door, my mother said to me, "Tell her what you told me."

Somehow I was able to spit out a few details, "Les forces me to play dirty." I remember being so surprised at Barbara's strong reaction. She was a British war-bride and her accent was hard from me to understand at times. But it was obvious that she was becoming very upset.

My problems didn't end there, but became much worse. At four in the afternoon was when Les and the older kids came home from school. It was usually the time I would have to go indoors to hide. But that didn't help matters much. My older brother, Gary, who was about sixteen by that time, made my indoor life a living hell as well. He constantly tortured me and I didn't understand why that was true either. Looking back, I know that Gary suffered from

intense jealousy of me, as soon as I was born. But when I was five, I always felt like I was doing something wrong that would make these older people want to hurt me. Gary would wrap duct tape around my face, where I could barely breathe, tie me up, break my toys and tear up the pictures that I colored. He was constantly pinching me, throwing darts into my flesh and tickling me until I peed in my pants. After a glorious early childhood, I quickly came to the point of hating my existence.

By that evening on the day I had tattled, I ventured outside. To my horror, Les was sitting behind a bush in my back yard. His eyes looked red like he had been crying. I knew that his dad did not hold back physical punishment and I suspected that Les had been severely beaten. But he looked at me with evil in his eyes. “You little lying creep! I hate you and you’re going to die!”

He grabbed me and punched me over and over. I was beat up by him so many times that I can’t remember the details of that pounding. But with me weighting in at barely fifty pounds and he weighing a hundred pounds more, I had no chance. The only thing that seemed to save me was my mother’s call to dinner. As Les, in his almost six-foot frame stood up, he pointed his finger at me and said, “I’m not finished with you yet.”

I came in through the back door of our house which led directly our set dinner table. Mom looked at me and shouted, “Look how dirty you are. What’s a matter with you! Go shake the dirt off before you come in the house!”

After dinner was over, Mom looked at me and shook her head, “Barbara called. It looks like you’ve been telling lies!”

My heart sank. My shame was taking a major turn for the worse. Then Mom added, “We don’t tell lies so I’m going to wash your mouth out with soap.” The wonderful taste of roast beef and corn on the cob was replaced by the bitterness of Colgate soap.

By bedtime, I would climb onto the top bunk, over Gary. While waiting to doze off, Gary would kick the underside of my bed hard, throwing me into the air, to make sure I was awake. Then he would tell me how much he hated me and that I was a spoiled brat, stupid, ugly and the list would go on. This continued every night until I was eleven and Gary got drafted to go to Vietnam. It was such a relief for me, while at the same time it was terrifying for the rest of the family. Gary's last cruel act was on my twelfth birthday. My aunt got me a pellet gun, which stirred up Gary's jealousy. He unloaded a whole magazine of bullets into the flesh of my legs and back as he told me how much he hated me.

When you are five, you have no instinct about the Fall of Adam, the world is . . . to you, as the world should be. If you feel shame, then it is because you deserve shame. If people hate you, it is because you deserve to be hated. This is one of the greatest tragedies of the Fall, the naivety of the very young.

My Mom's courtship with the Fall also came at a young age. She was only thirteen when her mother died of breast cancer, forcing Mom to drop out of school and become the mother to her four younger brothers. Her father was cruel to her and I have no clue what made him mean. But his cruelty was mostly emotional, although beatings until my Mom's legs bled were not uncommon.

By the time that she had reach adulthood, Mom had been well taught by her father, and later her new stepmother, that she was totally worthless. That extreme low self-esteem, or low self-appraisal of her ESW, has continued up until the present time. This has made her very vulnerable over the years to abuse and exploitation especially by our most self-righteous relatives . . . her brother the evangelist and her other brother's family who were career Sunday school attendance pin winners.

I think it was Mom's low self-esteem that it made it hard for her to defend me when I was small. It was hard for her to stand up against my brother and picking on me was only a small part of his behavioral problems. But even with the situation with Les, once he had told his mother that I was lying, then Barbara told Mom that I was lying . . . Mom did not have the courage to even consider that the fault might lay with the other family.

Dad seemed to experience the worst of the Fall on his life later. As a teenager, he had to slowly watch his mother and three of his sisters succumb to tuberculosis and die. Then his father suddenly died of a heart attack. Before he could even begin to grieve, he volunteered to fight the Germans. He made the awful landing in Normandy . . . and survived, at least in body. But Dad's hardships made him an impenetrable fortress and he was not involved with child-rearing, especially by the time I came along.

Les' sexual molestation seemed to have a short reprieve after my ratting him out, but he was still bullying me around and threatening me whenever he saw me. But with Gary now in basic training, I could at least find refuge inside my house. I think it was about that time I became an avid reader and practiced escapism via my strong imagination.

But, my days with Les were not over. His next phase came in when a little blond girl, Mary Lou, aged six, moved into the farm that bordered our lot at the far end. Les came over and got me and took me up to Mary Lou's farm. There we played in the barn and was having fun, but Les wanted me to kiss Mary Lou. I hated the thoughts. To five year old boy, girls had cooties. But Les went on to trying to force us to show our private parts to each other while he watched. Of all the humiliation I had experience, that day in that hayloft of Mary Lou's barn was the worst. I don't know why. Sexual things were still off the radar, but here was this little girl I barely knew, and I was being force by Les to show her my penis and he forced her to show me

her genitals. I'm not sure when my rage started, but I clearly remember it being in full bloom on that day.

There's some time that had passed and this is where the pages of the memory album are stuck together. I know that I avoided Mary Lou as much as I could. It was helpful the next year when she started first grade and I was still a preschooler because we did not have kindergarten.

The next thing I remember is stabbing Les. It was a hot summer's day and I was playing in my back yard with my plastic army men around my dad's brick barbeque. I know that I was now seven and in school. Les had been pulling the same things with me, but now with a different girl named Susan. She was in my first grade class and I don't think I had even ever spoken to her.

Susan's parents were friends of Les' parents and would visit them every week or so. It was during those visits that Les would come to our house. Even if I were hiding in my room, Les would knock on the door and ask for me. Mom, in her naivety, would tell me to come out of my room and "go play with Les" or I would be rude. I don't think it dawned on her that it was a little odd that Les, being now fifteen, wanted to play with a seven-year-old.

He would grab my wrist and pull me to either his house or his shed and make me kiss Susan. I hated it and it brought total humiliation on me . . . as well as an accumulative rage. I knew that more would soon be coming, like what had happened with Mary Lou.

But, on that faithful day, I was minding my own business, paying with my army men. I also had a false sense of security because dad had taken down our old, white picket fence and replace it, in the back yard at least, with a hedge row. The hedges were now over my head, which gave me some camouflage.

To my shock, I heard Les' voice at the hedge row, "Hey creep! Guess who's coming

here this afternoon . . . Susan! Ha! Mum . . . kissy-face . . . mum . . . hey little Susan creep!”

I felt my chest tighten with rage. I had just returned from the kitchen with a butcher knife because I was building a miniature swinging bridge for my army men and I needed to cut the cotton twine in strips. That day is seared into my mind as not only a well preserved Polaroid photo, but the only one that is in color . . . red.

I really didn't want to hurt Les . . . but I desperately wanted my personal nightmare to end. It had started the day I had visited the storybook club house at age four and it seemed to me, that it would never go away. Three years to a seven-year-old seemed like an eternity. My only hope was that Les would get drafted like my brother did, but that would be years away.

I looked at him with my most stern frown and I held up the knife. “Leave me alone or I will stab you!”

Immediately he started laughing out loud. “Give me that knife you freaking little queer-faced pervert!” He started to walk towards me with his hand held out. I stood up keeping the knife above my head with its blade pointing at him.

He shouted again, “Give me the knife you little shit!”

The fury of three years of rage erupted in my chest and in an impulse I swung down, striking Les in the top of his head. He screamed as I saw blood flooding down his face. He ran toward his house holding his head. I heard the screen door squeak open then slam shut.

I remember hiding behind the hedge and nervously waiting. It wasn't very long before the screen flew open again and I heard the car start and take off up the hill in a hurry.

The details after that are murky but I do know that I got into a whole lot of trouble. Les had several stitches and his parents were very mad and were concerned that I was some kind of sociopath and needed psychological help. My parents were quite stunned that I would, out of the

blue, stab my faithful friend . . . the friend who took me with him whenever he went to tree or club houses. My mom scolded me, “You should consider yourself lucky to have a fifteen-year-old friend like Les when you are only seven. Then you stab him in the head . . . what’s wrong with you! Les is going to hate you and the Wards are going to hate us!”

I have never told this story to anyone. I’ve hinted at it to my sisters Susan and Sandy because they shared some similar experiences, both with Les and others. These were not some type of repressed memories. Actually, of all the things in the old photo album, these events stood out the clearest.

I also know that the sexual molestation was only a small part my first experiences with the Fall. Sometimes I think being a victim of sexual abuse is overblown at least in comparison to others, sometimes more cruel, things which can be understated. I mean, if I were famous, this admission would get me a place on Oprah’s couch and a book deal, but they paled in comparison to the general emotional frustration and bullying that I endured from age four to seven. They did end at seven, with Gary in Vietnam and after stabbing Les in the head. Yes, I guess you can say that my assault worked. Les left me alone after that. Being consider a sociopath by most of the community may have been the lesser of evils that I faced.

I really think that when hard things come at a vulnerable age, the impact is more imbedded in your psyche. I remember cutting down a twelve-inch diameter maple tree in our yard in Marquette, Michigan. One section had a strange crook in it and when I split it, I discovered why. Incorporated in the very heart of that tree was a piece of rusty barbed wire. I suspect the young sapling had grown up next to the fence decades before, then eventually absorbing the metal right into the center of the tree. There was no trace of the fence then, except of the piece in the tree. The very early “experiences” of that tree affected the way it grew for



decades. When you are young and have difficult experiences, they can be absorbed into your psyche and shape it in profound ways. That too is the Fall in 3-D.

I don't know if the bullying that I was subject to, and the great frustration that came along with it, is what made my esteem of my self-worth so vulnerable. But I do know that, somehow, I developed the tendency to not only to fear rejection but to react in great anger when I perceive that I am rejected. There may have been some kind of genetic vulnerability as well. But I had taken this trail into the past as far as I needed. More retrospection would probably not be helpful. I too, did not want to use any of my early childhood experiences as any kind of peg to hang an excuse hat on. Most people have difficulties in their formative years as no one has ever had a perfect family. A whole lot of people have had much worse experiences than I did. If you look at it on a global scale, I would be in the top 10% of positive experiences. After all, I knew that my parents loved me. I think even Gary loves me, but he got so wrapped up in his own insecurities that he was cruel. I don't think of Les as some kind of monster. He too had his issues, his little part of the big Fall. I know that he wet the bed through high school and I have a sense that there were some un-named serpents in his cellar. Coming into his puberty I don't think he knew what to do with his sexuality either as he seemed obsessed with it.

With this new understanding of my past, I felt better equipped to find truth. Now I could honestly ask, anytime I face a challenge, "Is it the situation that's at fault or just my twisted perceptions?" The unhealthy dependency on basket ball made sense now. I had based my entire self appraisal on my ability to succeed.

Butterflies in the Belfry, Serpents in the Cellar

Chapter Seven

Freaking Jesus Freaks

After that infamous night in the basement, with the hose claps and broken glass, there were some significant improvements in my life. The biggest one came as a result of the county consolidated into two large schools, Daniel Boone and Davy Crocket. Davy Crocket was built within a couple of miles from the birthplace of its namesake. My school, DB was build near a spot where Daniel Boone apparently killed a bear. We know this by the fact that an old tree had the engraving, “D. Boone Cilled a Bar Here 17(something).” Now my school is famous because they’ve found one of the most important late, Miocene-Epoch fossil sites in the world, almost literally under our football field.

The good news for me was that my class size went up ten fold with the consolidation, from 35 to 350 students. Being in a larger class, I didn’t stand out as a non-athlete as much as I had before. I also started to make some new friends, but it was an old friend that seemed to turn the table for me.

I had known Bill since kindergarten. He had weathered the sudden change of ESW much better than I had. We had also attended the same small, white church on the hill. Mr. and Mrs. Pierce (who owned the church) were his uncle and aunt.

Rather than continuing to invest time in sports, Bill saw the writing on the wall sooner than I did, realizing that it was a little hopeless for him to ever be popular via being a sports star. He shifted toward the “drop out” sector of our high school. He transformed his persona into an aficionado of Credence Clearwater Revival and other rock bands, grew his hair out much longer than the Bible-belt would approve of at the time, and wore cutting edge clothes. What you might

call alternative clothes by today's standards—silk, purple shirts with large puffy sleeves.

Bill's long hair and, so called, alternative life style didn't sit well in the mainstream Bible belt. When the two of us first became authentic Christians, we visited a neighboring Baptist church that was having a revival. Immediately a well-meaning deacon at the door said, "I've got something that you boys need to read." Then he handed Bill a small, black and white tract bearing the title, "God Hates Long Hair and Homosexuality." In frustration, Bill sat down near the front of the church and pulled his hair out of his collar and shook it out so it would dangle in plain sight over the back of the pew.

Bill was even a little later than me in taking the walk up our church aisle. I can remember talking to him in the school library when we were thirteen, "It's really easy. Just step out of the pew and take a couple of steps, then the whole thing is over. I really think you can do it." Some would call this evangelism, but I wasn't speaking in spiritual terms, of making some type of commitment to Christ, but simply getting this important milestone out of the way so he could move on and stop feeling so guilty.

Bill walked up the aisle within a couple of weeks of our conversation, but his action seemed to take root, at least much better than mine had. He really did start having some spiritual interests . . . but not a lot right away.

Three years later Bill was dating a girl that he really liked. She was a real cutie, strawberry blond, pale blue eyes (imagine Cate Blanchett when she's has her hair red) . . . and very intelligent. Following the examples that we had from older boys, like Mike in Sunday school, Bill saw that it was his duty to push the intimacy envelope. Even in our Bible-belt culture it was considered a real shame for a boy to turn eighteen and still be a virgin. However it was extremely important that the girl you married would be a virgin. Whoever created this paradigm

must not have done their math.

Bill was facing a real quandary. The girl that he was dating, Martha, was one of the few atheists in our school. She came from a whole family of atheists. Being an atheist in the Bible-belt was about as perilous (and as rare) as trying to be a rabbi in Mecca. Even the wildest guys, who partied all the time, smoked pot, did petty crimes and never visited a church hated atheists. Drug addicted, materialistic, adulterant country singers in Nashville wrote songs of how they hated atheists. Atheists and gays were some of the most despised people in the Bible-belt . . . replacing African-Americans (sadly) by only a generation.

The problem that Bill was facing was that he was trying his best to deflower his girlfriend, but, she had very high moral standards and was putting up a lot of resistance. This threw him into a tizzy . . . the fact that her moral standards were superior to his own, a card-carrying Southern Baptist. Poor Bill was losing a lot of sleep over the situation.

About this time, Bill and I both signed up for a new psychology class that was being offered at the high school. The reason that I wanted to go was to try and find out what the hell was wrong with me. Bill wanted to go to find out how to handle the situation with Martha.

On the first day of class, it was a major disappointment. Mr. Jenkins had been heavily recruited as the head football coach. He was a superb college athlete and even had professional football aspirations . . . only being thwarted by a bad knee. He was quintessential football player. He wasn't that tall, maybe five-foot ten inches at best, but his shoulders were very broad and he literally had no neck. His shoulders seemed to triangulate up to the top of his head. The school board considered him a real catch . . . but of course high schools don't employ full time coaches but only full time teachers who happen to coach.

On the first day of psychology class Mr. Jenkins called roll, fiddled with his pencil for a

few minutes and then had a heart to heart with the twenty-five of us. “Hey, I’m a coach not a teacher. They told me I had to teach this class because psychology was my minor but I really don’t care a lot about psychology.” He got up and walked over to the window and looked outside, up toward the sports fields, looking back at us as he played with the blinds’ draw string. We didn’t know what to think, but just sat in silence. I even considered that it might be some kind of psychological experiment that he was pulling on us. Then he spoke, “You know, psychology is a bunch of crap. If you’ve lived to be seventeen or eighteen and no one has killed you or if you haven’t become a lunatic by now, then you already know all the psychology you will ever need to know.” Pausing to look out the window, then, back at us he continued, “I’ll make a deal with you. I’ll give everyone in the class a well-deserved A if you keep your big, fat mouths shut. I would rather be up on the football field than in here and I’m sure there are other places you would rather be. I have to call roll, but then I’ll crank open this window and you can sneak out while I head out to the field.”

My jaw dropped in disbelief. I, along with Bill, had a true interest in learning something about psychology. But just like Mr. Jenkins said he would do, he took attendance, rolled out the window, pulled the screen out, set it in the floor and then he vanished through the door. One by one we would crawl out the window and creep, serpentine, across the parking lot to our cars like foot soldiers trying to avoid sniper bullets. Bill and I made the best of it and spent third period at McDonalds for the subsequent few weeks.

One morning Mr. Jenkins called roll in his usual fashion. Then he looked at us and announced, “Hey kids . . . I’ve got some really bad news. Well, at least bad news for you.” A soft smile came to his broad jaw and chuckled, “It’s actually good news for me because I won’t even have come down here to call roll anymore. I can spend my entire day on the football field. What

I'm trying to say is that . . . well . . . we will have a student teacher from East Tennessee State University coming on Monday to do his student teaching in this class." A quiet moan echoed across the room.

On Monday morning an unsuspecting man with long, curly, blond, hair and a spotty beard walked into the room carrying a briefcase. The frustrated students in the class greeted Mr. Hall by grabbing him, knocking his briefcase out of his hand and carrying him down the hall and attempting to throw him into the pool. I can't imagine the shock of a nervous student teacher, on his first day in a real classroom and then being met with such hostility. He also didn't know what he was up against with a class that had been going to McDonalds and getting an automatic A before his arrival.

But he did have the courage to come back. In a move to keep control, he arrived in the class well before we did on the following day. As Bill and I came into the room and took a seat, we noticed on the black board Mr. Hall had scribbled three men's names, "B. F. Skinner - Sigmund Freud - Jesus Christ."

Mr. Hall looked at the class sternly and announced, "For the next six weeks we're going to be looking at the nature of human personality from the perspectives of these three psychologists." I had learned some things about Jesus when I was in Sunday school . . . but I had never realized that he was a psychologist. While I was somewhat confused by the interesting teacher, Bill was excited by the Christian faith that he seemed to wear on his sleeves.

After class on the first day, Bill stayed behind to talk to Mr. Hall about his situation with Martha . . . feeling that he would be the perfect counselor for his mixed-up soul. Mr. Hall made the diagnosis quickly, Bill's problem was being a "babe in Christ" and he really needed to "grow." He invited him to come to a discipleship class that he, and several of his college friends,

was teaching at a local Church. Neither Bill nor I had any clue that this small gesture would have such a profound impact on our lives for decades to come, eventually leading me to Egypt and Bill to Australia and then South Africa.

Bill was excited about this development, but me . . . I didn't want to have anything to do with this Jesus freak. Even though Bill was a very close friend, I had not even confided in him that . . . within my hearts of hearts, I wasn't sure that the absentee Lord was ever there. As someone who loved science, a lot of things just weren't making sense to me anymore.

One of those things was that I was told that the Bible insisted that the earth was only six thousand years old, and on top of that, had been created in six, literal days. Geology was a hobby of mine, and I had fossils in my bedroom from ancient forests that my uncle had dug up eight hundred feet below ground in a nearby coal mine. This didn't even touch on the dinosaur skeletons, which I had seen for myself at the Smithsonian. How could these great beasts have lived just six thousand years ago, and the forest be buried that deeply—not to mention having their own prehistoric world transformed into this time capsule locked in frozen carbon? It just wasn't making a lot of sense. Likewise there was no evidence of this Lord that I kept hearing about in the lives of the people who claimed to believe in him. The evangelists were no more credible (even much flakier) than the used car, kitchen gadget or furniture salespeople who came on late night TV right before or after them. I had heard of miracles, but none of them panned out as believable. There had been several people in our community that God had supposedly cured of their cancer, only to succumb to it weeks later.

The whole church thing seemed like a farce. Most of the people were really only pretending and everyone knew it. Why would an absentee Lord be so wacky as to have these strange requirements for his people to please him, and at the same time, look the other way regarding the brutality of things done in his name . . . like Jack molesting church children?

Bill was determined not to go to this Bible study alone. Everyone there would be a college student but him. He hounded me for a week until I agreed to accompany him. I made it



clear, “I’ll come for the first couple of weeks and that’s it. Then you’ll have to fly on your own. I have no desire to be a Jesus freak!” This was not to mention that I also had a girlfriend, Sharon, by that time. I had seen how much Bill had changed during his meetings with Tom after just a couple of counseling sessions. I think he had even ended his relationship with Martha completely. However, for me, approaching 18 and still a virgin, I wanted to leave the “deflowering” verb in my repertoire of possibilities and I was . . . correctly I may add . . . afraid that Tom would put an end to that ambition.

The first thing that I noticed when I arrived at this large, inner-city church was that the college students leading and attending these classes took Christianity very seriously. They didn’t see God as some absentee Lord far off in some distant capital, but very personable. These people were sharing things that “God had shown” them or, even more directly, “things God had told them,” like he was a real person in the next room watching *Magnum PI* sitting in his boxers and smoking Cubans. But the thing that really got my attention was that this group really seemed to be happy. They smiled a lot at least. They were very nice to each other, giving each other hugs and saying things like, “I love you bro!” They were also much cooler than Luther in middle school. Rather than being “clean cut,” dressing in slacks, crew cuts and button-down shirts and carrying a big, black King James Bible with golden page edges, they were . . . well, hippies. They had long hair, beards and wore bellbottom jeans and a few even wore sea-shell beads and carried dark green, padded Living Bibles. A couple of them drove V W mini buses. They looked like a rock band . . . and as a matter of fact . . . two of them were in a rock band, a Christian rock band.

Although I did find their lifestyle far more attractive than any religious people I had ever met before, it was their sincerity that I found most alluring. This caused me to listen to what they

were saying and teaching. Although they were teaching some of the same things I had heard from the nice ladies in elementary Sunday school, these folks were teaching it in new, exciting and relevant ways.

I continued going on the thirty-mile trip with Bill every Sunday night to this Discipleship class . . . pretending to be a Christian. I was even starting to follow their behavioral examples, such as giving them hugs and telling them, “I love you man!” I really liked hugging the college girls . . . but calling them “sis.” But at the same time, deep in my heart of hearts, I was sincerely starting to seriously contemplate the validity of the Christian faith again. I had some major obstacles to overcome; for the most part, my doubts.

I eventually opened up to Bill, who was flying high on his newfound faith. I spoke to Mr. Hall as well. Tom (his first name) was very clear that my doubts were lies being “told to me by Satan.” He diagnosed that what I really needed was to overcome Satan’s lies with a personal (and somewhat blind) faith.

I was having honest questions and they were not only about the creation of the earth, but why was there human suffering, why God seemed silent, plus many other relevant issues. Tom was recommending that I just take a step, more like a leap of faith, and stop depending on logic. He assured me, “Once you are a mature Christian, you will no longer have doubts.” So, to him, questions and immaturity went hand and hand.

Being a very reasonable person, I couldn’t just make a blind leap like he was asking me to. I had to have at least one speck of dust of reason, around which my snowflake of faith could crystallize. I started praying, that God would show me enough answers that I would have some superstructure on which to hang my faith.

I was doing much better, emotionally, in the larger high school, but insomnia had

continued since middle school. At this point, I was lying in bed awake contemplating the possibility of God's existence and the truth of the Bible. Finally I did have a break through. Like spelunking in dark, unexplored caves, at night I would venture deeper and deeper into diverging channels of thought. The one line of questioning that I could not answer, apart from a personal God, was my own existence. I now know that Psychologists would lump this under the concept of "self-consciousness" and would attribute it to a complex array of neurons.

It was after an infamous Saturday night of no sleep and deep pondering that things seemed to jell. It did not happen right away. It was later that following Sunday evening, during the long drive back from the Bible study in Johnson City. Bill was at the wheel of his sister's white, Plymouth Valiant with the cool push-button transmission. It was spitting snow and I was continuing to think. Then, like the proverbial eureka moment, I found the evidence I had been looking for.

Years later, after my plunge into the rabbit hole and when I was trying to find answers for the first time, I read many books by the late theologian, Dr. Francis Schaeffer. He described this very issue, which I was dealing with decades before, as simply the fact that it is impossible for a non-personal universe, one without a personal God, to give rise to personable man. He used the illustration, since he was living in the Swiss Alps at the time, of a high alpine lake. This lake cannot feed a pool of water that is at an even higher elevation. Likewise, a personal universe (with real, personal people rather than carbon-based robots) could not have come from a much lower, impersonal universe.

This watershed moment of my life set me on a totally new path, however the slide that eventually led me to the descent down the rabbit hole twenty years later was also set in motion.

Butterflies in the Belfry, Serpents in the Cellar

Chapter Eight

Foundation Blocks

I've always had a deep appreciation for Swiss engineering. My love for all things Swiss seemed to dovetail with my great appreciation for Francis Schaeffer, who was living out my dream by living in the Swiss Alps.

While we were still living in Egypt, to escape the relentless heat and to see if Daniel's illness would improve, we flew to Switzerland. Arriving in Zurich, we quickly boarded a train and headed as high as we could possibly go into the Alps. Once we arrived at the picturesque, and high, village of Engelberg, the five of us squeezed into a pup tent and camped for almost a month. Having left a dirty, hot, crowded slum . . . the time in the alpine village was nothing less than marvelous.

We quickly noticed that the trains in Switzerland run precisely on time, even to the minute. I'll explain why that is true in a later chapter because I believe that there is a philosophical reason and it fits into my story at a much later point. Just as a hint at this point, I will say that I discovered that it has a lot to do with Aristotle . . . and John Calvin.

I find it ironic that I'm talking about the precision of Swiss trains because I am now writing from a seat on an Amtrak train, somewhere in the mountains near the California-Oregon border. We are running about six hours behind schedule. On the trip down from Seattle to LA, we arrived eight hours late. This would be scandalous in Swiss society and someone would have been fired.

The Swiss also take pride in the fact that anything that is "Swiss-made," is guaranteed to be of high quality. The campground owner remarked to me that the strangest thing that he had

witnessed during his previous visit to America was the half of a new house going down the freeway on the back of a truck. He laughed and remarked (in a strong German accent) “Homes in Switzerland var built weeth very high qual-i-tee and you wood never see halv of one on the back of a lori.”

I was therefore quite astonished when I was watching an episode of PBS’ *This Old House* and the host visited a factory in Switzerland that made prefab homes. Actually this factory was building six-unit townhouses. The buildings were still well engineered including wooden staircases, which were precisely cut-out by computer-guided lasers. The buildings were so well planned and designed that they could be constructed on site in only a week. They didn’t need to pour foundations of concrete and wait weeks for it to cure because even the foundation was part of the “kit.”

The foundation of the building was made of huge, two meter long by one meter high by half meter thick, reinforced concrete blocks that interlocked and were secured with an epoxy adhesive. Once set in place, like giant Legos, you could start putting together the rest of the structure on top of the foundation the following day.

As I began to lay the foundations of my Christian life in the late seventies, there were several large blocks that would become fundamental to my future understanding of everything Christian. Standing in the midst of my burned-out shell of a Christian life in the early 1990s, I looked back through the murk of a decade and a half for answers. By this point I had realized that I had some emotional baggage, which I had just finished exploring, but I also had a sense that there was something seriously wrong with my theology as well and having a blind faith was just the start of it. But I wanted to go beyond just finding any errors, I wanted to know why. Why had I, or maybe all of us, been misled?

I had a feeling that there were some foundational errors established during those formative years, which eventually led to my down fall. I've already mention two general ones, bad faith and the pretend Christianity I was taught in the Bible belt. There were other large blocks of thinking that I didn't recognize at the time that acted as foundation blocks, but they certainly appear that way in retrospect. Most of them were solid, granite-like . . . while others would, eventually, turn out to be "glass blocks" whose fragility would eventually lead to my downfall into the rabbit's abyss.

After Bill and I graduated from high school we enrolled at East Tennessee State University (ETSU). Mr. Hall was the campus leader of The Navigators (Navs) ministry at ETSU. The Navs organization and was mainstream and evangelical. They were started in the 1940s by Dawson Trotman with the initial purpose of ministering to people in the military. Later they became involved in campus ministries and eventually churches. The organization wasn't a far-off cult or even a product of the Bible-belt but was initiated in California (where else?). Even Tom was not from the Bible belt, but from suburban Washington DC. The Navigators are endorsed by most major evangelical churches and Christians leaders such as Billy Graham. The point I am trying to make is that, although the organization took the Christian life far more seriously than other campus ministries such as the Baptist Student Union, it was not atypical of Evangelicalism.

I mulled over in my mind if I wanted to name the organization in this book. There would be a temptation to confine my discussions to this particular organization, rather than to the American evangelical church at large. I'm not trying to do a postmortem dissection of my experience with one group but of my own personal choices and thoughts that had led to my downfall. This one group only takes the things believed in the typical Evangelical church to a

more extreme level, but not to absurdity.

With Tom's encouragement, Bill and I moved into a Nav "training house" with him and another leader of the ministry. The purpose of Nav houses was to have an environment for Nav leaders to disciple (another word for training intensively) young believers more intensely. This concept was created by Dawson Trotman when he invited service men to live with his own family, so he could disciple them on a day to day basis.

The first fundamental building block that I laid during this early phase of my training was of course the *Christ Block*. Christ himself is the cornerstone or chief building block of anyone's Christian life. Connected intimately to this cornerstone was, what you might call, the *Justification Block*. Justification is the concept that our salvation comes by grace alone and not by earning it ourselves . . . it comes by faith. Most Evangelical Christians would agree with these two fundamentals.

We, like many Christians, also learned that faith and reason stood on opposite ends of the spectrum. As I've already mentioned, Tom encouraged me to take the "faith leap." There was a true antithesis between the two concepts of faith and reason and it was believed that Christians should live by faith, not "by sight." To put it simply, we believed that reason and sight came from the brain and faith from the soul as an act of the will. I'll come back to this matter later in much more detail, but at this point I just want to mention that it would turn out to be a very important development in my early Christian life.

Another foundation block, epoxied to the other side of Christ the cornerstone block, was the one for *sanctification*. The way that sanctification was taught to us started with the premise that once saved all of our previous sins were erased and we started over with a totally clean slate

as “new creatures.” I remember Tom and the others emphasizing this concept and having us memorize II Corinthians 5:17 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” It was part of the first Nav discipleship verse memory pack. This verse was interpreted as our old sins, personal or the sins of others, no longer had any influence on us nor would have any influence on our futures. This block, specifically, was very appealing to me because it meant that all my old baggage, my fears, anger and my tendency toward depression and social anxiety, plus all my chronic faults were suddenly and magically gone . . . and without a trace. I, the frog, had been kissed by a prince and now I too was a prince. There was not a trace of webbing between my toes or even a hankering for water. The problem was that we didn’t accept this figuratively (claiming Jesus righteousness as our own) but literally. We saw ourselves as righteous . . . or at least on the road to real righteousness.

Building on this, sanctification block was a life-long process of maturing in Christ, where the rate and tendency of habitual sin would go down—being replaced by the “fruits of the Spirit.” How little a mature Christ would sin was dependent upon your perspective.

Some people, including many in my Nav group, believed that a really mature Christian, someone we would refer to as “godly,” may sin such as a brief “bad attitude” once a week or less. There were a few groups, like some Free Methodist—whom I met in Michigan—believed that you could reach a point of total sanctification. This belief is known by the theological terms of *Entire Sanctification* or *Sinless Perfection*. In other words, when you reached this level, you literally never sin again. But in our group we, at least, had the goal of maturing to the point where we could be considered “Godly” and sinned rarely.

Tied closely to this concept of sanctification we were taught the view of a God intimately involved with the process. The God taught to us by Tom watched our behavior very, very



carefully and interacted with us moment by moment. We believed that God would continually speak to us about such trivial details as which parking spot to park in or which shirt to wear to class.

This is a little different than the people in the small Baptist church, who would never ask God to find them a parking space at the mall. They also had this feeling that He was not that concerned about their trivial behavior, such as “white lies” or even major behavior like having a mistress . . . as long as that behavior was stashed neatly out of sight in the cellar. But this new concept of God assured us that he was concerned about all sin.

As part of His intimacy with us, Tom taught us that God expected total obedience, anything short would disappoint him. If we did sin, our personal relationship with God would be completely broken until we confessed our sins, ask for forgiveness and repented from it. This had to be done on a daily basis to keep our relationship God unhindered. Another verse in the first Nav memory kit was, I John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” This verse was referred to as the Christian’s bar of soap.

The way that we were to grow in maturity (and sin less) was by a simple formula taught to us by Tom and the other Navs. This formula was actually first described by Dawson Trotman. By spending time in four disciplines, Bible study, prayer, witnessing and fellowship, your life would be balanced, like the four spokes of a wheel, and would roll along toward certain maturity. This kind of thinking had its roots in John Wesley’s “methods for godliness” which later became the Methodist Church and was the foundational church for the Second Great Awakening.

The external measure of maturity was by the “fruits of the spirit.” These came from other memory verses like Galatians 5:22-23, “But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience and

kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.” There was also one other measurement of maturity and that was ministry. A mature Christian should have a crowd of people around him or her, which they are actively ministering to. With these parameters we could evaluate our own state of maturity, but more than that—and something we would have strongly denied—we would evaluate the state of others. Keep in mind what I said about ESW (economics of self worth) that you cannot determine your own value unless you can compare yourself with others. A Christian on a deserted island, whom had never met another Christian, would not be able to figure out how mature he or she was, or how valuable they were in God’s sight, without a reference point. I am getting ahead of myself, and my honesty may seem a little crude at this point but being able to evaluate other’s maturity was vital—at least in a deep psychological way.

The Navs had an algorithm for godliness, a type of flow chart, which labeled and described each phase of the maturity process. The flow chart started with *NC* (new Christian) and went to *GC* (growing Christian) to *Disciple 1* (first level of being a disciple) to *Disciple 2* (second level) to *Disciple Maker* (you were “making” other disciples) and finally *Laborer*. It was a flow chart that could have easily been designed by Henry Ford or some other industrialist.

A fourth major foundational block is truly ecumenical; you might even say that evangelical Christianity is defined by it. This is simply the *Bible Inerrancy Block*, which proposes that the Bible is inspired by God and is true. There isn’t much clarification needed here or debate among evangelicals. However it, like all the other foundational blocks is precariously epoxied to the next and final block.

As I went back over my early Christian development and contemplated it, and examined it under a microscope, I discovered this last block was very remarkable and had an amazing

influence on the other blocks. This foundational block sits somewhat like a dead cod fish in a tightly closed refrigerator. The smell of it insidiously slips out and penetrates the delightful bowl of strawberry jell-O, the saucer of butter and even the open milk. But rather than a fish . . . this block smells more like an insect, the infamous fly in the ointment that I had been looking for and it took me almost two years of constant research and reflection to figure it out. Looking back, I do think that this block was the culprit. Like gravity to energy, it was one source that explained it all.



Butterflies in the Belfry, Serpents in the Cellar

Chapter Nine

Linchpin

The last foundational block was the most interesting and difficult to explain. It was also unspoken and not acknowledged, even on a subconscious level. In other words, it wasn't written down on any type of flow sheet, doctrinal statement, memory verse or instructional booklet, however, in some ways, it was written on the entire underbelly of our entire Christian world like a coating of pitch on the hull of an ancient ship, keeping it afloat.

This block was also another universal block and not just unique to our campus group. Everyone in our little Baptist church thought this way as well as most people in the Bible-belt culture. I would even suggest that the tenets of this block are widely held through Christendom, stronger in some places and in certain periods of history than others. American Evangelicalism, since the nineteenth century, I believe, has been one of those periods that it was most prominent.

After the Second Great Awakening this block became stronger, especially in the path of the southern component of this awakening, which of course is what we now refer to as the Bible-belt. The origins of the Second Great Awakening came, Phoenixian-like, out of the smothering ashes of the First Great Awakening in New England. However the Second Great Awakening really took form and energy in the South with the help of Methodist circuit riders, who carried the gospel message from Kentucky, through Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia and back to Kentucky. If you were to pin-point the flashpoint of the southern awakening and the birth of the Bible-belt, you would place it, ironically, at the Creedance Clearwater revival in western Kentucky. This revival took place in 1800. I am sure that neither Bill nor I had historical insight into the fact that this favorite rock-n-roll group had taken its name from an event that had so

much power over how we thought as Christians.

I will name this forth foundational block, which I've been alluding to, as simply "dualism." If you are familiar with philosophical terms you will not be a stranger to this one. In its rough form, dualism simply means where things are divided cleanly and precisely into two realms. It is from the word *dual* which means, of course, two. It is actually from the Latin word *dualis* derived from *duo*, which is Latin for two.

I'm going to devote a significant part of this book to what I learned about this concept, its history, evolution and eminent impact on how Christians think and how I, personally, thought. However, I hope to prove that it was the misapplication of dualism, which was not only the key ingredient to my personal fall, but central to most things that have troubled Christendom throughout history. I'm trying to avoid oversimplifying the matter, as most things in life don't boil down to one simple issue or flaw. But if there is a single, unifying theory of Christian error, I do think it can be defined in dualistic terms.

I must first define the term or at least define it in the way that I am using it. It is crucial that I be very clear that the real problem is not dualism in its literal definition. There is no harm in the act of dividing things into two distinctive sides. The Bible is full of dualistic divides, starting from Genesis 2:9, "In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of GOOD and EVIL." Even Christ did so as recorded in John 3:19, "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved DARKNESS instead of LIGHT because of their evil deeds." No Christian (and certainly not I) would argue against the notion that some things are evil and some are good. I hope that I am explicitly clear on this.

When I was first formulating these thoughts ten years ago, I attempted to have a conversation about the problem of dualism with Jay, a close Christian friend. He immediately

was concerned that I talking about the relativity of truth. Assuming that I was trying to say the difference between good and evil are in shades of gray rather than black and white, he was rightly concerned. You will, of course, find this kind of relativistic thinking in many secular philosophies and some liberal Christian interpretations of Biblical truth and morals. But this is not at all what I am talking about.

The real issue is not the view of dualism, but the how . . . or more precisely . . . the WHERE and, in some ways, the WHEN of it. The problem with my early thinking, that eventually became my “Achilles’ heel” of faith, was what I learned about the dualistic division between the Kingdom of God and that of Satan.

This foundational block, which I’m calling dualism, basically was a metaphysical concept, a line of clear demarcation between what was considered “spiritual” and what was “worldly.” The spiritual realm was God’s kingdom and the worldly domain was Satan’s . . . plain and simple. Some passages that Christians use to support this notion include I Corinthians 3:1, “Brothers I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ.” This idea of dualism may seem philosophical (which it is) and may not appear to relate to practical life . . . but I hope to prove that it is profoundly related to how we think and live our day to day lives. As I continued my studies, I became totally captivated by dualism’s historical development and impact. Dualism’s long saga and its relationship with and on the Church is riveting and has more twists and turns than even the fictional *The Da Vinci Code*.

Starting in the little Baptist church—but much more so in The Navigators of the 1970s—we were taught that all physical things are considered worldly. This term *worldly* was used in the broadest definition. Secular culture was definitely worldly because it was supposedly created by physical beings—humans in other words—and not directly from God. So all TV shows, except

for some Christian programming and most movies, non-Christian music, non-Christian art (if you were able to define which art was “Christian” and which was not) were all worldly. Even history itself was worldly, another product of temporal human endeavors. This was true on all levels of history; both what I would call meta-history, which is the grand scope of things over the centuries, and local history.

Local history is what I call the day to day events of your personal life. Daily events, however, are the bricks and mortar that eventual make-up meta-history. George Washington made a very “local” decision and action, on a cold Christmas night in 1776, to cross the Delaware River. This of course became the turning point of the Revolutionary War. If the Colonies had not won that battle for Trenton (a victory made possible by the crossing) they may not have won the war. If they had not won the war, America wouldn’t exist. Imagine how world history would have been profoundly affected in the two centuries since . . . and all because of local history.

If you considered meta-history as worldly and thus insignificant, or at least no positive significance, you would have no need to study it. Our local, Bible-belt, Appalachian, white, American, western European culture was seen as absolute and pure. To consider it as simply the product of a chain of historical events over centuries seemed like a sacrilege.

Even the study of church history was considered worldly. We didn’t care about early church fathers or the centuries of struggles over theological issues including the major historical church councils. History, in all its forms, was considered insignificant and a complete waste of time and possibly even a harmful distraction.

You would especially see no point in studying secular history . . . the story of secular people doing worldly things. In this dualistic paradigm the stories of ancient peoples, unless they



were Biblical characters, would have absolutely no bearing on your personal spiritual life. So, you couldn't have cared less about them. The only human history that would concern you would be "spiritual meta-history." Specifically God's working in the Old Testament, and world events such as Israel becoming a nation, that you could somehow relate to something spiritual, such as Jesus' second coming. Otherwise history would have no meaning at all.

Mark A. Noll, in his book *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, illustrates this point very well:

The evangelical predilection, when faced with a world crisis, to use the Bible as a crystal ball instead of a guide for sorting out the complex tangles of international morality was nowhere more evident than in the responses to the Gulf War (Gulf War I) in 1991. Neither through the publishing of books nor through focused consideration in periodicals did evangelicals engage in significant discussions on the morality of the war, the use of the United Nations in the wake of the collapse of Communism, the significance of oil for job creation or wealth formation throughout the world, the history of Western efforts at intervention in the Middle East, or other topics fairly crying out for serious Christian analysis. Instead, evangelicals gobbled up more than half a million copies each of several self-assured, populist explanations of how the Gulf crisis was fulfilling the details of obscure biblical prophecies.

Local history would also have no meaning unless it was spiritualized. In other words, there was no simple cause and effect involved with daily events. If a robber came into your uncle's store and shot and killed him, the only significance that event would carry would be to show how God had allowed it to happen to teach your aunt a lesson about something . . . maybe

patience. Sure, you might cry and feel grief . . . especially if you are not very mature, spiritually. The fact that the robber was abused as a child over and over by his mother's boyfriend and then the fact that he got addicted to crack cocaine to help stop some of his emotional pain wouldn't matter. Then the fact that he started robbing people to support his habit has virtually no relevance . . . maybe a sorry excuse at best.

The physical world was considered evil and the spiritual world good within the context of evangelical dualism. In other words, even the tiniest of events of daily life, such a leaf falling from a tree, had to have metaphysical strings attached to the spiritual, specifically God, the puppeteer's, fingers . . . or it would have no meaning down in this physical world. To support this concept, Christians use passages such as Matthew 10:29, 30 "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your father. And even the very hairs on your head are all numbered." Many translations suggest that God looks over the sparrows and doesn't literally control their every move like a celestial puppeteer. If dualism is applied in this way, then events in the physical realm have no meaning or value unless they have direct strings up into the spiritual, more important realm.

To use real examples I must start with Hal, the director of the Nav training center in Kentucky, which I attended during graduate school. He was considered a man truly in tune with God's own heart and an example for all of us to emulate. He was well known throughout the Navs because of his Godly character. His reputation is what drew me to move to Kentucky and participate in his training center. I still consider him a wonderful man.

I will never forget a cold, blustery Sunday night in Lexington when my phone rang quite late. It was Hal and he said that he needed a favor. That was not that unusual except for the late hour. His tone of voice was in no way out of the ordinary. Hal simply said, "Mike . . . Dan (his

sixteen-year-old son) was killed tonight. I just came from the morgue to identify his body. On the way to youth group at church he hit a tree, came out the window of his car and a truck ran over him. But we're okay. We were praying that God would bring him home safely . . . and God was faithful to answer our prayers. He brought Dan home safely to him, in Heaven, just as we had asked. Now if you could call a couple of people for me to cancel my appointments tomorrow I would be grateful. I'm tired and don't want to talk about it anymore and can't make my racket ball time tomorrow morning."

I was speechless. Dan had been a close personal friend of mine. We had played a lot of basketball together. I just couldn't believe it. When words did finally sneak out of my choked up throat . . . they were really dumb words. I whispered, "Are you serious?"

"Yes I'm serious," Hal's replied in a rather calm voice.

With a reputation of being a godly man, a man who had walked with God for over thirty years, he seemed determined to live out what he believed philosophically. He, like all of us, believed that all physical events had no meaning except when they were defined spiritually. God had answered their prayers. He brought Dan home safely. That's really all that mattered.

I never saw Hal or his wife shed a tear during the subsequent weeks. Maybe they did in private or in public but I just don't remember them. Instead, they, as a courageous duo, preached the morning service at our large evangelical church the following Sunday. Looking back, it was one of the most emotionally dysfunctional things I've ever witnessed because they didn't preach out of brokenness but of victory and power . . . and as witnesses to the ability to not grieve because they had a spiritual perspective. The fact that the pastor relinquished his pulpit to a couple under such deep and acute grief, I now find repugnant. The couple, whom I have much compassion for, would not permit themselves to show any signs of sorrow . . . grief itself being

worldly, a function of the physical brain's emotions . . . not a godly perspective. The pastor was an accomplice in my opinion.

Of course Hal and his wife loved their son dearly. I have absolutely no question about that. How they were able to bury the pain so deeply within the cellars of their hearts amazes me until this day. Only once did I sense the slightest hint of the raw emotion and that was a year later.

I and seven other campus student leaders were with Hal on an all night prayer vigil in preparation for an evangelistic thrust in the dorms. We were far out in the woods of eastern Kentucky at a now defunct Bible camp. About an hour into the session of conversational prayer, I heard a thump on the cabin's old, pine floor next to me. I peeked open my eyes to see Hal's fifty-year-old, white-haired, frame laying face down on the floor quivering and sobbing. Then the shocking words came out of his mouth like a high-pitched desperate shrill, "Oh God why did you let my Danny die! Oh God, he was my baby. Oh God why? Oh God his head was cut off and I saw his poor body on the cold stainless steel table." Then in a loud cry, "Oh God I want my baby boy back! Please God! Please!"

Sadly, we were all in such a stage of shock that not one of us said a word. Not one of us reached over and put a hand of compassion on his deserving shoulder . . . let alone an urgently needed hug. We were overwhelmed with a sense of embarrassment . . . as if Hal was cursing God for stubbing his toe on a dresser. But our embarrassment was quickly relieved as Hal "came to his senses." He sat back up in his chair, cleared his throat and continued to pray in a much stronger voice, "God, I am so sorry for giving into Satan's lies. Please forgive me! Please forgive me!" The next morning, the seven of us never mentioned the event from the previous night . . . even though you could read in our faces a deep discomposure.

I had felt so much grief in my own heart for Dan. I came very close to crying as I was a pallbearer at his funeral. The silver casket seemed to weigh far more than what I expected with his fit, sixteen-year-old body. As I carried him, I felt so much grief knowing that my friend's dead body was only inches away. I would miss him so much, and I had only known him for three years. But I couldn't cry if Dan's own father, my mentor, had never cried but knew that every event of that awful, cold, blustery night was entwined with strings running up to the heavens and directly to the hands of God himself. To doubt or to grieve was to question God's spiritual meaning in it, or His control of it. This kind of doubt was considered sin.

It must be beyond measure, the number of funerals within the Bible-belt, including my own father's, where at least one well-intended person did not come up to the bereaved and say something stupid like, "Now don't cry honey, God did this for a reason." But seeing it as a simple tragic event or chain of tragic events would be worldly and not even worth considering by any good Christian.

This evangelical placement of dualism even considered that the physical earth itself was worldly. The example of this in the Bible-belt at that time was the belief that the physical earth, what some would call nature, had very little value.

This is fortunately changing. Don't misunderstand me, a good Christian could admire the beauty of the sun setting in violet hues over the rolling Appalachians, and give thanks to God the creator. But at the same time, the Christian would believe that this physical world was ruined by the Fall of Adam and was destined to be destroyed by fire in the end. In other words, it was pretty much worthless. This may be where the WHEN comes in. In some ways there was a general feeling that the physical world was inferior even before the Fall of Adam, and totally wretched afterwards. I will explore this much more deeply later. With this background, people in

the Bible-belt did not hesitate to dump their trash in the woods or lakes. They also welcomed, with open arms, all sorts of industry which were heavy polluters. As long as the companies provided jobs, there wasn't much concern about what they were doing to the air and the water. God didn't care about the earth, which he had abdicated to Satan's domain, so why should we? Many times I've heard the statement, when talking about damaging the environment, "Don't worry, it's all going to burn," which is usually followed by a chuckle.

I'm now sitting here at a coffee shop in Kingsport, Tennessee. I had to come outside to write because the music was so loud inside. With each breath I take, I feel the nauseating stench of the nearby Eastman Chemical Company and the big paper mill. I grew up with this strong smell. No one, back in the 40s or 50s cared about the air or the water of the Holston River. Here in the Bible belt, at least at that time, no one gave a damn about the physical world. This stink was the smell of money and jobs.

The early Puritans also saw nature along these dualistic lines. William Bradford spoke of the new world as, "but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men." The Puritan preacher and leader, John Cotton, referred to nature as, "A wild field where all manner of unclean and wild beasts live and feed."

While in college, I can remember a Nav sponsored picnic in a beautiful state park called the Laurels. It had a thick undergrowth of laurels and rhododendrons over which towering spruce reached for the sky. Around the edge of the small park was a brook that tumbled over rounded stones with a mesmerizing lure. When we were done eating our KFC dinner, one member, David, took an armload of our trash, threw it into the woods and laughed, "Hey, it's all going to burn anyway." This was consistent with his desire to follow Christ and to only be concerned with

the “spiritual realm” or the important side of the dualistic divide.

This concept of the physical earth being part of the “worldly domain” was obviously tied closely to one’s eschatology as well. Eschatology of course means the study of the end-times. In some ways they were Siamese twins, sharing a common heart. You might even consider that eschatology, especially the post-tribulation, pre-millennium, dispensationalist view as a separate, but closely-related foundational block—the *Eschatological Block*. This was the specific belief that all Christians would be raptured after the coming tribulations (post-tribulation) but before Christ’s thousand-year reign (pre-millennium). But what was most important, was that the end was coming very, very soon. The term used was the “imminent return of Christ.” This strongly held view point came directly out of the Second Great Awakening.

The First Great Awakening started in New England in the 1730s and held a profoundly different view of eschatology. As a matter of fact, this particular eschatology after the Second Great Awakening, which permeates modern evangelicalism, is a relatively new development in Church history. In some ways I think it was the product of the despondency from the Civil War and the wars of the twentieth Century.

Jonathan Edwards, the great preacher and theological thinker is considered by most as the father of the First Great Awakening. He, like most of his peers, was a postmillennialist, which basically believed that, rather than Christians being raptured out of this failing earth, that God would use the Church to overcome the world and to restore it, then Christ would return and reign . . . here. The brutal nineteenth and twentieth century wars took away this optimism. The two antithetical eschatological positions (between the First and Second Great Awakenings) had enormous implications on how one lives their life. So in some ways, the First Great Awakening

did not place the divide of Christian dualism as deeply and precisely between the physical world and heaven as did the second, because they felt this physical world and its associated culture was still worth saving. Throughout its history, the Church has been most dualistic during periods of earthly troubles . . . plagues, wars and political unrest.

The influence of the First Great Awakening was to build the first major institutions of higher learning—now known as the Ivy League Schools—because the brain or human culture was not considered by them as on the worldly side of the line of demarcation, nor did they believe that human history was ending within years if not months. They believed that they would have centuries to improve and restore the earth, so it made sense to invest in universities and culture. Many of the early Puritan fathers (and mothers) brought trunks full of books to the new world, as if they were treasure chests. These were not just Christian books either, but most of the secular classics.

John Harvard was one such man. A few weeks ago I had the opportunity, for the first time, to stand in the middle of the university named after him. I stood in front of his bronze statue reading his life story. There were a line of people taking turns rubbing his left foot for good luck . . . which resulted in it being bright and polished, while the rest of him was tarnished.

John Harvard didn't live long in the new world (only months I believe) but he donated his book collection and half of his estate to start a college for higher learning. John did this because he was a Christian, not in spite of. My daughter Amy and I walked under the large cloth banner with Harvard's motto VERITAS across the top. This of course, is Latin for truth. I felt like I was standing on hallowed ground. This should be the theme of all Christian endeavors . . . truth. This is an honest truth . . . not just a dogma.



The Second Great Awakening, on the other hand, literally believed that Jesus was coming back within a couple of decades and soon afterwards the entire world, including the physical earth, was going to be totally destroyed.

If you were going to build a new civilization on a distant planet, it would make a profound difference if you thought the planet would last thousands of years (as did Jonathan Edwards and John Harvard) or that it was going to collide with a star or explode within a decade. In the later situation, you would not bother to create libraries or institutions of higher learning, governments, art, music or probably nor even a sustainable garden.

I am a Physician Assistant today, rather than a physician, as a direct result of these twin foundational blocks from thirty years ago. I remember, after I became interested in medicine, I had a discussion with Tom about what direction my future should take. He pointed out to me, that it would take seven more years to be a physician but only three to four more years, after college, to be a PA. Therefore I should be a PA. He doubted the world would even still be around in eight years. I actually had the corny bumper sticker on my jeep that read something about at any moment the jeep could become driver-less, as I would be raptured. I agreed with Tom. I don't regret being a PA. I've really enjoyed the profession, but my point is that what you believe deeply impacts the practical choices that you make in your personal life and this discussion is far from being just academic.

These twin building blocks were not just part of our little Nav world, but were also universal. Hal Lindsey's book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, which promoted these three tenets of the end times (post-trib, pre-mil and imminent return) had an enormous impact on both American Christian and secular cultures. The New York Times even called it "The no.1 best

selling non-fiction book of the decade” (referring to the seventies). That book may have had very important implications on Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush’s foreign policy approaches, at least when it came to issues in the Middle East. The indirect sequels to that book, the *Left Behind* series, remain until this day the best sellers among a Christian audience.

To continue looking at the first of these twin foundational blocks, dualism, the human body was also on the worldly side of the line of demarcation. Sure, we thought we should take care of our bodies as a good steward so we didn’t abuse them like we did the planet. Although others in early medieval history, did take this foundation to that level—abusing their bodies for spiritual value. There are remnants of that thinking even today, especially in strongly Catholic areas of the world.

Jose Rivera, the screen writer for the movie, *The Motorcycle Diaries*, was describing his Catholic upbringing on NPR’s Fresh Air with host Terri Gross. He said, one day he came home from pre-school and his mother noticed that he had blood around his soles of both shoes. When she inquired about what was wrong with his feet, he showed her. He slipped off his shoes and between his feet and the insoles were several bottle caps . . . with the jagged, sharp edges pointing up toward his bloody socks. She was shocked and asked, “Jose why are you doing this?” He went on to explain that his grandmother, a devoted Catholic, told him to do it for a “mortification of the flesh.” In other words, by punishing the evil flesh physically, sin would be less likely to take residence there.

But we, like many Christians, believed all products of the body—including its desires—were directly “from the pit” as we use to say. In other words, the human flesh was Satan’s domain. So all elementary pleasures, eating, drinking, enjoying visual art, going to the bathroom, sex, all emotions and even back massages were worldly. Honestly that is why we had to pretend that we didn’t have a bathroom when the pastor came for dinner, although my parents would have never had expressed it in such complicated, philosophical terms. But the bathroom was considered dirty as well as sex in general. This same attitude was expressed two and a half centuries earlier by the Puritan leader Cotton Mather when he said;

I was once emptying the Cistern of Nature, and making Water at the Wall.

At the same time, there came a Dog, who did so too, before me. Thought I: “What mean and vile things are the Children of Men, in this mortal state! How much do our natural necessities abase us and place us in some regard, on the level with the very Dogs!”

When I first became interested in missions, I wanted to go to a very mountainous, rural and cool place. I hated heat. I hated large crowds and I loved mountains. Yet, the Nav group made it clear that all personal desires and taste were from Satan. I should only consider spiritual issues, such as where the greatest need was. This is how we ended up in the Middle East, a place that I personally would never have any natural desire to live in. I had even applied to be a missionary in Iceland, a place I deeply loved, until a Christian friend pointed out how selfish that was . . . to go to a place that I desired to go to for “non-spiritual” reasons.

The biggest problem with the body being worldly concept was that the brain—as a physical organ—was considered worldly as well. The belief that reason was the antithesis of

faith came directly out of this line of thinking. Reason, emotions and even mental health were not taken very seriously as they were considered functions of the physical brain. However, faith, and all mystical experiences were spiritual, functions of the soul, thus respectable. So emotions were bad, spiritual experiences good. But take the same emotions and dress them up in spiritual clothes, for example being “moved by the spirit,” then they suddenly were moved to the top of the spiritual value hierarchy.

My major in college was Psychology. The roots of my interest in the field had its origins in that season of turmoil in my early life. I still wanted to know what made me tick and why I had failed at basketball. There was an expression among psychology majors that eighty percent of people who become psychologists did so because they personally were a little wacky. I really had no insight at the time into the nature of my problem and I believed that by studying psychology I would figure it out.

Before I became interested in medicine, my plan was to become a Christian psychologist. What we would have called “secular psychology,” was in the worldly domain because it dealt with thoughts, emotions and the mental health of the brain. I wanted to work in a similar field but on the other side of the line of demarcation, the psychology of the soul or what you might call Christian psychology.

The reason I was even majoring in secular psychology was to get a degree that the state would acknowledge and license me in, and thus I could earn a living in. I didn't believe anything that I studied, knowing that it was written by non-Christian men. But I was not alone. All my Christian friends considered their majors (at the state school) under the same umbrella, on the worldly side of the line of demarcation. So, I, unfortunately, never took history, English, math or science seriously. We considered studying anything but the Bible as a waste of time because the

other subjects were on the worldly side of the dualistic divide. I would assume that all the students in our organization were underachievers when it came to academics because of this reason.

At the time, there were books being written by Christians on psychology. Christian psychology, and specifically the “Biblical Counseling Movement,” was a new and upcoming field. I read all the Christian psychology books that I could get my hands on for insights and things I would use in my real professional life.

Most popular Christian teachings in psychology looked at man from strictly the spiritual angle. One form, which I ascribed to, was called *Nouthetic Counseling*. The term was coined by the Christian psychologist Jay Adams and means “confrontational counseling.” Nouthetic Counseling was simple. All of man’s, so-called, mental health problems were either demonic possession, or personal sin and the cure was confrontation and repentance. They saw it really that simple and without any shades of gray.

I really believe that sin has two levels, what I call “new sin,” which is sin that you have personally committed, and “old sin,” which is the sins of the Fall of Adam all the way down to the sin of our forefathers and even our own parents. So the sin that Nouthetic Counseling proponents were referring to was all new sin. Therefore since the sin is your personal sin, then confrontation would make sense. However, if it is old sin (not easy to change) then confrontation is at least cruel, if not moronic.

One Christian psychologist claimed that his team was emptying out psych wards in Philadelphia by marching through and confronting each patient. If they perceived that the patient was demon possessed, they would perform an exorcism. The person, according to them, would be instantly healed and discharged to a new productive, mental illness-free life.

If they weren't possessed by demons, then their problem was the direct result of their personal sin. The counselor would point out their failures, get them to confess it and ask for forgiveness and then repent. If they did so, they would be instantly healed from any emotional baggage and released. The catch was, only those who continued to sin would continue to be mentally ill. With this mind set, there was an incredible motivation to bury your problems, deeply out of the sight of the confronter.

The David, who threw his greasy KFC boxes into the woods, was a master at this dual living. He was brilliant, graduating as Valedictorian from high school. He was extremely articulate . . . and manipulative. But David was also gay and I have no doubts about it now. He however, like most of us at the time, believed that not only was homosexuality new, personal sin . . . but probably the most hideous of sins. Therefore his gayness had to go underground . . . or stay in the closet in other words.

But David's gayness became a real problem for me, personally, because during our freshman year (and continuing throughout my four years of college) he became romantically obsessed with me. Combined with his other non-gay but warped, personality traits, it became like a fatal attraction. He, in fact, made my life a living hell until I was able to graduate and move away.

David would constantly pursue me in a dysfunctional way. Soon after meeting me, he drove to my parent's home, thirty miles away, broke into their home, rummage through the drawers in my old bedroom. He was able steal papers that had my social security number on it. Then he posed as me (sort of primal attempt at identity theft) at the university and registered for courses. He did this so that he and I would be in all the same classes. Such acts, and there were hundreds of them, would really piss me off. But David had a way of using words to manipulate

the situation. He would say, “Oh, Mike I did this just to serve you as a brother. I can’t believe that you would turn your back on our dear Lord and reject the gift of a brother . . . a brother that wants nothing more than to serve you and to be close to you.”

But, if I did not quickly “repent from my anger,” and give David a big bear hug and tell him, “I love your bro,” and ask him to forgive me . . . he would take the manipulation to the next level. He would start hanging out with the girls in the Nav ministry. For some reason they loved him, and still do. I think it was due to his witty humor and eye for fashion and style. David would tell the girls stories about how much he had served me, his dear brother, by doing all my class scheduling (or whatever his latest devious acts had been) and I was so mean to him in return. He did not mention that he signed me up for classes that I did not want or need for my major. But even if he had signed me up for the right ones, it was still over the line.

Eventually one of the girls would come to me and confront me for my sinfulness of being rude to David. That was really hard for me because I perpetually had a crush on at least one of the girls and now David was making me look like a jerk to them. I couldn’t defend myself or I would look even worse. I gave up even attempting to explain the details . . . but would eventually cave in, go to David and give him the bear hug and act of forgiveness that he wanted.

So David’s unrelenting hounding did not give up. He would pressure me to come out to his house (he lived with his parents) and spend the night. He would go on for days about, “I’m nineteen years old and I’ve never had a sleepover at my house, even when I was a little boy. Now I’m getting too old and will never have had one. Would you want to come out for a sleepover just so I can experience it once in my life?” I hated the thoughts but I knew if I kept rejecting his request that it wouldn’t be long before one of the gals in the ministry, usually the very one I had a crush on, would come and confront me about my rudeness. So I would cave in

and do what he wanted.

With the few sleepovers that I did participate in, things would get awkward fast. As I would be trying to dose off he would want to talk. But his conversation would always end up on the topics to do with our penises or masturbation. I hated it! I also hated his constant hounding to go skinny dipping with him and his forced prayer times together. In those, he would hold my hand and pray for an hour. But, if I resisted, or even showed up one minute late, I would have hell to pay.

The relationship accumulated my senior year when my dorm-mate, Barry and I decided to go to Myrtle Beach for a few days. David invited himself, turning a potentially pleasurable trip into a nightmare.

Once we arrived at our motel, David stripped off naked, which made Barry and me very uncomfortable. He begged us all day to do the same but we had no desire to go naked. He even tried to make it a theological issue . . . “we can return to the purity of Adam in the Garden.”

Finally, when it was time to go to bed (and there were only two double beds in the room) David made the arrangements to sleep in my bed with me. I refused, especially with him sleeping in the raw. I made my bed on the floor . . . as far as I could from his pale, creepy flesh. Then he started using his spiritual manipulative words . . . “Mike, you are really hurting my feelings and grieving the Lord who died on the cross for you because He said that if you hurt one of the people that you hurt him. Now come to bed!”

After an hour of his un-relenting nagging . . . and in a state of exhaustion . . . I made a deal with him. “Put your clothes on and I will sleep in the bed.”

He did reluctantly put his clothes on and I did reluctantly get in bed with him . . . moving to the farthest point, teetering on the edge. I did quickly fall asleep . . . only to be awakened in



the wee hours of the morning by a cold chill. I discovered that not only were my blankets off, but David was at the bottom of the bed attempting to gently slide my underwear off without awakening me. I could easily guess what his intentions were, which, I had interrupted with my scream, “David, what are you doing!”

Looking back now, the signs were obvious about what was going on with David, but my dualistic eyes were blinded. Like all of us, I had the perspective that we were spiritual and “godly” and sinned rarely. We also believed that homosexuality was a simple choice to sin, and certainly godly David would never choose to intentionally sin. So the obvious became the sublime.

David eventually worked his way up through the ranks of The Navigators to the point of national leadership. He never came out of the closet as far as I know (and if he had he would have been kicked of the Navs). He also has never apologized for his haunting behavior during our college years. I assume he still lives in that dichotomy, anti-gay, godly veneer over a very different gay persona. I do know as recent as ten years ago, he stopped by a friend’s house in New Mexico and attempted the same shenanigans with him as he had with me twenty years ago.

Our dualistic view of human psychology forced many—what we would have considered—unscrupulous emotions underground. If you were seriously depressed, and you agreed with the Nouthetic counselor that your depression was your fault, then you would pray for forgiveness, and “repent.” If your depression continued it would have to become subversive, moving into the cellar in other words. You could no longer speak about it, or show any signs of it. If you did, it would prove that you were still disobeying the loving God who had created you. So you would keep it as a secret as long as you could, until it really did get better or until they found your body and your suicide note.

But the brain is a physical organ. Most Christians do accept that the kidneys function to excrete waste water, and the heart pumps blood through the body but it is impossible for many to believe that the brain, as an organ, can be involved with emotions, our personalities and mental health.

I remember the first time I heard about research supporting the concept of a biological tendency for depression (in 1983) I literally laughed out loud. I considered it as just another “conspiracy of the humanistic, atheistic society.” I had assumed at that point that all depression was the direct results of new sin. This was before my personal fall down the rabbit hole and confronting my own depression . . . from the inside out.

Having spent most of the past twenty-five years in neurology, I’ve seen the overwhelming evidence that the brain has a huge effect on not only thinking and memory, but even mood and personality. The movie *Regarding Henry* portrays the effects that brain damage on personality very dramatically. Henry’s story was fictional, but in my office, I’ve seen hundreds of cases like him. Unfortunately in most of my cases mean people didn’t turn into nice guys after a brain injury but the opposite. But when dualism’s divide is placed squarely between the physical brain and the spiritual soul, then a good Christian would have to disregard the whole field of mental health or even most of neurology.

The dualism block is also closely epoxied to the *Inerrancy of the Bible* block. Dualism greatly affects, not necessarily the concept of the inerrancy of scripture, but the interpretation of it. If you divide the world into the important—spiritual—world and the unimportant—evil—physical world, then reading about Jesus eating breakfast has no value but his transfiguration has great meaning. You would also not engage your physical mind, reason in other words, to figure out scripture’s meaning, but only your spirit.

Some examples of relying only on the spirit to interpret scripture are the fundamental churches whose pastors are not required to have any formal training, only being “called by God.” These are the type of churches that involve snake handling in Newport, Tennessee. I recently saw a TV evangelist, who I gather is growing in popularity, and who is only a kid. I think he is about seven or eight years old. He is preaching on TV, imitating the long tradition of shouting with a lisp and pounding a black King James Bible, but, his Bible has to be a little smaller. However, if you hold fast to the dualistic view, this would make perfect sense. The brain, including learning, has no significance. It is all spiritual and spiritual things can happen instantaneously to anybody at any age.

But within our Navigator group, the super-spiritual exegesis (interpretation of) scripture was the standard. Everyday God was giving us very specific instructions, communicating through precise Bible verses with very spiritual, even mystical interpretations. In other words, with an exegesis that had absolutely no relationship to the original intention of the verse. It didn't matter to us what Matthew, Luke or Paul were trying to say. It only mattered to us what God was saying to us—personally—on that particular morning. We used the words of the verse in the same way that an animist might glean mystical messages from a falling star or an albino buffalo.

One example of this use of scripture in the Nav group was a rash of engagements that sprang up, literally, over night. This was a group that held sexual purity as high as an ascetic monastery. Most of us did not date. There was no romantic connection between any of the men and any of the women. We believed solidly in the concept of the soul-mate, which was one partner created specifically for us by God. Dating wasn't necessary, but only caused problems. The men knew in their hearts that they couldn't even hold a girl's hand without some level of sexual arousal . . . so why bother. So at least we were honest about that part.

The older group, made up of Tom's peers, was just graduating from college and was certainly in the situation where they could start contemplating marriage. But this whole idea of engagement and marriage were unexplored territories. No one had figured out how God was going to work out the process. Maybe a girl would just fall out of the sky.

Tom, as the unofficial Navigator leader, took the lead in this matter as well. The way we believed that God worked was through the super-spiritual exegesis of scripture, at least in a way. Actually the first thing that happened was Tom kissing a girl.

The infamous kiss came after several nights of intensive counseling with a new girl in the ministry named Julie. She was puzzled and had asked Tom for help because she was engaged to a guy that she didn't think was a strong Christian. Tom had convinced her to break it off. Then during her post-engagement counseling sessions with Tom, somehow he kissed her. I will never forget the night when he came home floating on helium.

As his roommates, we were skeptical about this development (which did sound a little flaky). The next morning God "gave" Tom a verse during his morning devotion. I think the verse was Exodus 23:5, "If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help him with it." Tom reasoned that God had given him a "sign" from that verse that if he was not to marry Julie, he would "fall down under his load" that day. Tom was working for a painting company at the time, as he was looking for a teaching job.

I remember the four of us, Tom, Bill, our roommate John and I sitting around the breakfast table. All of us looked confused except for Tom . . . whose feet were ten feet off the ground. Well, guess what? Tom didn't "fall down under his load" that day so he did the obvious thing, raced over to Julie's after work and asked her . . . no, more like told her . . . to marry him! He made it clear that God had spoken to him directly and she needed to either obey God or not.

That was a tremendous pressure for any new believer to deal with, a form of mind control.

Did I mention that Julie was a blond-hair, blue-eyed beauty, and probably out of all of our leagues on a normal planet? However, beauty (a physical thing . . . thus of no value according to dualistic doctrine) had no bearing on Tom, at least that's what he would say. He hadn't even noticed that she was gorgeous. The relationship was all purely spiritual.

I remember weeks later I was riding in Tom's hippie van with his fiancée at the wheel. I can't remember where the two of us were going, but I just had to ask, "Julie . . . how do you feel about marrying Tom in a few weeks?"

She seemed a little more confused than I would have expected from a girl just days from her wedding. She replied, "Well, I'm still in a state of shock. I always thought I would be marrying someone very different than Tom. Like someone better looking . . . and with a real job."

Amazingly, their marriage did last for over twenty years, but did end eventually. However, Tom's engagement was soon followed by the rapid engagements of three more couples, in similar circumstances. One engagement was broken off by the woman who seemed to come to her senses at the last minute. The two other engagements led to marriages which have actually done remarkably well, by God's grace.

So these were the basic foundational blocks of Evangelical Christianity and specifically of the Navigator ministry, which I was involved with. These tenets, as I've said, were not believed by some narrow cult in California or a Christian militia in the mountains of Idaho, but many of them are universal, believed at different levels in different Christian cultures at different times in history.

Butterflies in the Belfry, Serpents in the Cellar

Chapter Ten

Utopia

The original *Back to the Future* movie is one of my favorites. I thought the story line was brilliant. The writers, Robert Zemeckis and Bob Gate, were nominated for the best writing and screenplay for that flick and, in my opinion, should have won. The major theme of the story was a boy who accidentally went back in time to the week his parents first met. Even subtle interferences by him in 1955 would cause major consequences in his life eighteen years later. The whole movie revolved around him contaminating the past . . . and then trying desperately to fix what he had accidentally interfered with. Similarly, when Apollo command modules would be returning from the moon and still a half a million miles away, they would have to make exquisite course adjustments or otherwise they would miss the earth by tens of thousands of miles. Like those two examples, any kind of philosophical trend or delicate change in thinking can have a greatly magnified result over time. Take a subtle liberty in truth and years later, unless corrected, you can end up miles off course.

Despite the fact that some wonderful things were happening in our Nav group in the seventies, looking back, I now realize that we were making some serious mistakes. I sincerely think that the way in which we applied dualism was the universal culprit. This error had only a very little impact in our lives at the time, one friend Owen being the exception. As the years turned into decades, however, the misconceptions were amplified, taking many us far off course and taking me, at least, down a terrifying rabbit hole.

The four years that I spent in college, in many ways, became the greatest Christian experience of my life. The majority of Nav students were very sincere. This was very different

than my Christian upbringing. The Nav people truly wanted to please God and mature in their relationship with him. There was a sincere “cellar-cleansing” as each person came out of the Bible-belt culture and into a more personal relationship with Christ. I’ve already mentioned how Bill wanted to clean up his act. I had many of my own serpents to excise and even more, unfortunately, that would have to eventually go into hiding.

One girl was the daughter of a Baptist minister. Her father’s church was huge and had a TV and radio ministry. When she came into our fold, against her father’s good pleasure, she found some dragons, like impulsive shoplifting, in her cellar. She came clean with that. Others came clean with drug abuse and sexual promiscuity.

In a more general way, there were some wonderful things happening on that campus and in our lives. If one of the students’ cars broke down and they had no money, suddenly and mysteriously, an envelope of cash would appear under their door. This group honestly did care about each other in a way that we had never seen before . . . or sadly, in ways, I have never seen since.

However, the errors that we made on that beautiful campus in the Appalachian foothills, I now believed, ending up shadowing many of us for decades. This haunting was becoming especially evident at our twenty-five year reunion.

We were sitting in the Hampton Inn social room, in Johnson City, swapping stories, filling in the gaps of two and a half decades of water under—and sometimes over—the bridge. One of the old Nav members, whom we called Doc, said, “Life sure turned out much harder than any of us expected.”

The first one to face hardships was Owen. His difficulties emerged even while he was living in our Christian utopia. I still remember him laying awake for hours in his top dorm bunk

pondering how God, the puppeteer, had tiny strings running to every hair of every head . . . indeed . . . to every atom in the universe. Local history, simple cause and effect, was totally irrelevant in his paradigm. There were no real laws of physics, no coefficient of friction or Newton's laws because these were not "spiritual." If you dropped your pencil, it might fall to the ground, but God might decide to pull it up to the sky the next time. God could pull he strings one direction at one time, and a totally different direction at another. All behavior, the behavior of sub-atomic particles or even that of your grocer was precisely controlled by God or at least this was what we were straining to (or perhaps pretending) to believe. If the behavior of your grocer was under God's sovereignty, so reasoned Owen, then the thoughts inside his own head were likewise God mandated and precisely controlled.

Owen became very confused about the Christian life—trying to mesh what he was learning in Bible study with what life itself had revealed. We criticized and labeled his obsession as "hyper-Calvinistic." But the truth was, Owen, like the handful of other men in our group, was simply taking what most people within evangelicalism claim to believe . . . to its logical conclusions, Christian fatalism.

Owen was a good friend. He stood tall, well over six feet-three, with a soft smile underneath Beatles' haircut and a fu-manchu mustache. He spoke with a soft voice and a gentle spirit. His future looked so bright. He was graduating in the spring with honors with a degree in Environmental Health, and he had a wonderful (but tiny) fiancée named Terri waiting for him back home in Nashville.

In desperation, on a cold, rainy, December night, Owen leaped in front of a Norfolk and Western freight train and was crushed to death. The momentum of the massive locomotive could not be halted by the sudden application of its brakes with such short notice. The factors of the



coefficient of friction of its iron wheels on the wet iron track could not save Owen. But he believed that the only definitive answers that he could ever hope to find would be found on the other side of the `dualistic divide, in Heaven itself.

Years later, there were also a few divorces in the group, besides Tom and Julie's. This included the divorce of Joe and Joy. As I was putting together the reunion, the Douglas' were the most difficult to find. When I did find Joe, and he informed me that he and Joy had been divorced for a few years, in some ways I was dumbfounded . . . but in other ways it made a lot of sense.

Joe and Joy were considered as having the "perfect Christian marriage." They were a few years older than Bill and me and had been married for about four years when they first showed up on campus as graduate students. Their marriage was our example of how a godly couple was to relate to one another. They were constantly, like in a verbal tennis match, serving positive superlatives to each other.

I can remember seeing them every Friday night at our fellowship meetings, which were held in the living room of our old Victorian home on Watauga Street, just off campus. Joy, small and thin, would be playing the guitar. Joe, tall and with horn-rimmed, brown-plastic, glasses would be singing and leading us in hymns. He would pause, with his perpetual huge smile strung across his face, pointing at his accompanist he would announce (as if everyone didn't all ready know who she was) "This is Joy . . . the most beautiful creature on this earth."

Joy would blush with her resonant smile, "And this is my husband . . . the greatest man on earth! He's my hero."

Joe was always opening the door for Joy, giving her little hugs . . . not kisses, which could cause us single men to "stumble." He was bringing her flowers and cards, giving them to

her in the front of the group. They were so much in love that it made me, and several other men, hastily sign up for their Bible study, "Preparing for Godly Marriage."

One day I was riding with Joe in his little red V.W. Beetle. It was the old style with the square, cloth, sunroof that would fold back like an accordion bellow. As soon as I sat in the front passenger's seat, Joe turned the chrome handle and opened the sun roof. The fresh fragrance of autumn leaves rushed in. We pulled out of the dorm parking lot as I noticed something quite odd. The windshield in front of me had a new break in it. I asked Joe, pointing at the series of spider-web like cracks, "How did that happen? It wasn't there last week."

He shrugged his shoulders and mumbled, "I don't know."

I didn't mean to be so persistent, but I was honestly puzzled, "Do you think you hit a bird?" He just remained silent. Then I asked, "Did a rock hit your windshield?"

Then Joe, abruptly turned to me and screamed, "I hit it with my fist! Don't you get it? I took a swing at Joy and missed her and hit the damn windshield! Now drop it!"

It was one of those brief moments when you had an unintentional glance into someone else's dark cellar . . . a glance that you knew they didn't want you to have, so I just clammed up. I never brought it up again . . . nor did I mention it to anyone. I hardly thought about it again, not until that day twenty five years later, when Joe was calling me from his Iowa office, "Oh Mike, I got your message. No I don't think I can make a reunion . . . nor can Joy. Actually, Joy and I are divorced and, the last I heard, she is remarried and living in Ohio."

But, after my rabbit hole experience I went back and studied those college days carefully. In the midst of the utopia, I wondered what could have gone so wrong. The answers didn't come easy at first . . . but they did prevail nonetheless.

In my preparation for moving to Egypt I had read several books about cultural dynamics

and understood the phenomena much better than ever before. But it was the actual experience of cross culture living that helped that information to gel. The crowning moment came during the two years after Egypt that I spent studying world and church history. History, of course, is the scaffolding on which culture is perched. This personal study gave me the tools, which I needed to make sense of those early, and sometimes crazy, experiences. It was like giving an archeologist one of those little shovels and paint brushes to painstakingly expose an old, mysterious treasure.

The expression of Christian faith at any one place, at any one time, is indeed a culture. God created us, before the Fall, as creatures of culture. Wherever there are humans, culture will soon sprout up around them like fire around a lighted match in a field of tender.

It is difficult to speak of the Church, including our Navigator ministry in the seventies, in cultural terms because many Christians will not allow it. It becomes a real Catch 22. After all, culture and the study of it (anthropology or sociology) are on the worldly side of the line of demarcation, according to the dualistic doctrine, so dualism will not allow you to use those sciences to disclose the misapplications of dualism. The words of that thought wrap around each other in an illogical way as if they were the part of a convoluted staircase in a Salvador Dali painting.

One of the most important concepts of any culture or society is social mores. These are simple values that a particular society places on certain things including behavior. Wearing gourds over their penises is very cool in a particular society in New Guinea . . . however it would be so out of place in most of American society that the individual doing it would be hauled off to the mental ward. I said, “Most of American society” because, after walking through West Hollywood a few days ago, I’m certain such attire there wouldn’t glean a second look.

But I've already discussed the topic of mores in this book, under my coined term economics of self worth (ESW). We follow the rules of mores because we want to be valued by the society in which we live. A few do the opposite but for the same reason. Like a rebel without a cause, some choose to violate all mores, because they want to be unique. They want to be unique because they want to have value over just being another member of the herd.

I can't speak for all Christians, but I do believe that most live in a culture where they sense that their personal value is determined by their ability to "please God" or meeting His mores. Secondly, their value is determined by meeting the mores of, or pleasing, the Christians around them. But in reality, it is probably in the reverse order that pleasing other Christians is more important to us than pleasing God. Again, I'm speaking brutal honesty here, not how things should be. After all, God knows what's lurking in our dark cellars. We keep the doors to those murky places shut—only to hide things from other Christians, and sometimes ourselves—but never from God.

The Medicis of Florence were a powerful banking family that, almost single handedly, ushered in the Renaissance. I'm going to discuss the remarkable things, which I learned about the Medicis, later because they ended up playing a key role in my story. At this juncture I just want to mention that they were very powerful and ruled the area around Florence (something like a Godfather family) from the mid fourteenth until the sixteenth centuries.

There was a plot once by a rival banking family, the Pazzis, to kill the last two Medici heirs, Lorenzo and Giovanni. The Medici brothers knew that their lives were in danger so they were rarely present in the same place at the same time.

The Pazzi brothers figured that one opportunity to kill both of Medicis would be the Easter mass at the cathedral (Dromo). When this plot was announced to the family insiders, a

hired mercenary military officer shook his head in protest, “We can’t murder them in church . . . God will see us!”

Although this general was expressing a sincere belief that somehow God’s vision was myopic outside the walls of a church, of course God sees even into the dark hidden corners of our deepest cellars.

I know that when I came into the Christian fold that I quickly developed a zeal to please God. I wasn’t alone. Most of the kids in our Nav group or in many churches felt the same. It is my opinion that this sense to please God has authentic, God-given roots, because it is a reflection of an existential reality. God, as our personal creator, is the only one qualified to give us value—or in the situation of condemnation—take it away. It is only reasonable that pleasing him is intimately tied to feeling valuable.

Only the artist can determine the value of their painting . . . if it is worth showing, or painting over it with something new. Sure, others can inflate the value of a painting, but that is more of a psychological nature. Famous artists fetch huge amounts for their work, regardless of its aesthetics. I’m sure if Van Gogh smeared his fingerprint over a piece of canvas it would sell for tens of thousands of dollars but Van Gogh himself would just sneer and shake his head. To exploit this point, the Italian artist Piero Manzoni canned his own feces in 90, 30-gram tins and sold them as “Merda d’Artista” (artist’s shit) for the same price (per weight) as gold in 1960. The last time a can sold, in 2007, it sold for \$80,000. The joke was on the beholder.

This desire to please God is based in a reality, the real desire to have personal value. If we feel that we have failed God, like I know that I often have, then you can start to feel glimpses of the celestial devaluing or self-worthlessness.

Our appearance to our Christian peers also gives us value, in our own perspective. For

example, if someone really didn't embezzle money from his business, but was convicted anyway, and had his name in all the papers . . . it would start to make him or her feel worthless, even though in God's eyes they know they are innocent.

In the Blue Lagoon, where there are no peers, I think it is really hard to feel worthless. Lonely? Definitely. Bored? Absolutely! But worthless? I'm not so sure it is possible without others around to compare ourselves to and to impress. My zeal to become pleasing to God was at the same intensity as my desire to be a basketball star, and oddly for the same reasons but within a different system of self-worth economics or mores.

With those things said, now imagine that the doctrine of sanctification of your Christian subculture was contaminated. What would happen if your group really believed that when you accepted Christ, you immediately started with a clean slate on the same level as everyone else? That there was no consequence from your years of sin, the sin of your parents or the sin of Adam as expressed through your genes (old sin). Then hocus-pocus wham, it's all gone . . . clean to the bone. Now you also had the opportunity to grow at the same rate as everyone else. Everyone else in the group could also measure your growth by the litmus test of the fruits of the spirit, how peaceful, kind, happy and patient you appeared, with *appearance* being the operative word here. And in our group especially, how many people had you helped to become Christians carried a lot of weight in determining your personal value.

I would speculate that eighty percent of our motivation for going out on evangelism each week was to increase our sense of personal value. Just going out released some of the guilt, which was our constant companion. If we won someone to Christ, it would give you the same elevation of self value as hitting the winning basket in the high school ESW. Of course, we were also happy that the person had come into a personal relationship with God . . . but if I continue in

an honest way, I must admit that was only twenty percent of the motivation. I would have strongly denied what I just said at the time. I would have clung to the twenty percent of “pure motives” and claim them as one hundred percent.

Now imagine that the next error in your group’s doctrine of sanctification is greatly under-estimating the tragedy and depth of your own sin. You don’t realize that your evil is not well demarcated or easily corralled into a small space, as dualism would dictate. Our sin actually penetrates not only every cell of our body, but indeed into the cytoplasm, mitochondria and nuclei of every cell. Rather than there being two distinct, dualistic worlds, where the spiritual realm is untouched and pure, but the physical is totally annihilated and rotten to the core, imagine that there is one universe . . . both physical and spiritual. Within this one world, the fall is comprehensive, not leaving one cell untouched, but at the same time, not absolute. Each cell isn’t totally destroyed and despised by the Fall because God, the creative artist’s, original glory still has its presence in every cell.

When I walk along Seattle’s water front I sometimes have to step over unconscious, homeless “bums.” They are physically nasty . . . reeking of urine and feces. Their fingers are dark brown from cigarette tar. They may be mumbling to the demons that have taken permanent residence inside their schizophrenic heads and rocking back and forth. They may be caressing a paper bag with an amber bottleneck protruding from the end. Yes these lives have been touched by the Fall . . . but yet, they have not totally decimated.

I’ve worked in ERs where these clientele are referred to as “worthless dirt balls,” especially if they’ve added horrible crimes, like rape or murder, to their disgusting laundry list of failure. However, in spite of all of that apparent evil . . . God’s glory cannot be hidden. You can see it in their eyes, or in their speech or in their creative art. I’ve seen some write beautiful

poetry. They are indeed God-men and God-women, still reflecting the essence of the artist-creator. Once, a long time ago, they were precious little babies and that relative purity has not been totally lost. They cannot be simply quarantined on the dark side of the dualistic divide, outside God's kingdom as "dirtballs."

The other side of this evangelicalism's compartmentalizing of evil, is the mistaken belief that good is also sequestered to one metaphysical place, precisely within Christendom. It becomes us and them, dark Vs light. Very few Christians, such as those who believe in Entire Sanctification or Sinless Perfection, really believe that the Christian side is actually pure. However, I would guess that most evangelicals believe that sin among Christians is relatively low compared to the other side. They believe that some Christians sin fairly frequently, but mature ones sin infrequently. They also believe that there is a finite process, flow chart, series of exercises that can methodically remove the influence of sin over time and it could be a relatively short time. If you worked hard enough, you could go from being a psycho-drug abuser, to a Christian, to a mature Christian who rarely sins or who carries no psychological damage, within a couple of years—or some believe overnight, literally.

Within this scenario is where the trouble begins and it too is based on the misapplication of dualism. But before I continue on with this story, I think it is time that I explore this whole concept of dualism and the astounding things, which I learned about its roots and development and how I think it became such a powerful movement with the Christian church.



Butterflies in the Belfry, Serpents in the Cellar

Chapter Eleven

The Great Bifurcation

The effects of dualism on my personal life ended in a tunnel. It was more of a bottomless pit, whose opening had appeared in the center of an imitation, bamboo table in an Egyptian Chinese restaurant. But in some ways, this story of dualism also begins with a tunnel, but a real one cut through four thousand feet of solid limestone beneath a mountain called Castro.

It would be very tempting for me to create a fascinating story about how dualism was started by one single individual, in one single place and time, and then passed on through the ages by some secret society. I could make the story as entertaining as the *Di Vinci Code* because dualism's story is equally intriguing. However, to create one lineage or secret society of dualism would be a gross over-simplification and distortion. I will choose one of many possible starting points to tell the story.

Thinking in dualistic terms is one logical way for anyone to think and therefore has been around as long as man. Its origins are therefore quite diverse. In our Blue Lagoon scenario, it wouldn't surprise me if the babies placed on a deserted island would spontaneously start to think in dualistic ways, at least at times. They would simply perceive that some things were good and others as bad. But like I said, dualism itself was never the problem. Clearly the Bible itself is very dualistic in places. Unlike some forms of pantheism, which sees both good and evil coming from the same divine source, true Biblical Christianity divides between evil and good, light and darkness or God and Satan. It is the precise application of dualism that is the problem.

I will now start using the term *Dualism*, with a capital "D" to label this very particular form of Dualism that greatly (and negatively) influenced my personal faith and, I believe, the

faith of many Christians throughout history. In its most simple terms, this Dualism divides reality along metaphysical lines, the physical, visible world being lesser if not evil, and the unseen, spiritual realm being the vastly more important and good.

I'm going to start my story about Dualism on an island, but it was Samos, not the Blue Lagoon. Mount Castro is a very important geological feature that is tied intimately with the development of Western thinking. It is a humble mountain that stands on the eastern edge of the 200 square mile island Samos, in the most eastern part of the Aegean Sea. This island is so far east that even I, and I'm not so good of a swimmer, could swim to across the straits of Mycale to the mainland of Asia Minor. The geographical good fortunes of this island made it a very important place in the ancient Greek world.

The weather of the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas runs northwest to southeast. Moisture picked up by the hot sun isn't deposited very much on the dry mainland of Greece or Turkey in the north, and even less in the arid North Africa in the south. However, the eastern parts of the Mediterranean, such as Lebanon and Israel, especially their highlands, get substantially more. Samos' easterly location increased the highly desired rainfall. The abrupt climb in elevation from sea level to its Kerketeus Mountain range, reaching over four thousand feet in height, quadrupled the needed rain and supplied its lowlands with an abundance of wonderful springs. Even the name *Samos* is from an ancient Phoenician term meaning a place somewhere high. The lush green of Samos made it stand out among the hundreds of dry, brown Greek islands. I've flown over many of them, and from 30,000 feet they always look like tan, chocolate chip cookies floating in deep purple grape juice.

On the eastern side of the island, facing the coast of Asia Minor was a natural and well-sheltered harbor. Around this harbor grew up the fortified city that was also called Samos. The good fortune of having ideal weather, a position close to Athens and Asia Minor, a well-protected port and fresh water gave Samos enormous posterity.

As this city-state grew in the seven centuries prior to Christ, it soon faced a crisis. It did not have enough fresh water locally to support its growing population. A smaller mountain, Castro, separated the flourishing port town from the plentiful springs that lay to the north in the valley between Mt. Castro and the higher Kerketeus range.

In 540 BC Polycrates, a ruthless dictator, came into sole power after murdering one his brothers and sending another into exile. Samos continued to thrive under his power. He fortified the walls and created the greatest navy in the Mediterranean at the time. But his fresh water supply continued to frustrate him and limited what he could do with the city, whose population had risen to twenty thousand souls. With this many people in such a small space, they were becoming vulnerable to outside armies if they did not have an endless source of potable water within the walls.

Samos had already attracted a group of mathematicians from around the Hellenistic world, but these were abstract mathematicians. Polycrates “commissioned” (compelled in other words) a group of them, led by Eupalinus, to apply their newly formulated principle of geometry to the real world by finding a way to get the water to the town. This was like a transition from pure mathematics to civil engineering.

The result was an incredible water tunnel that cut through four thousand feet of solid rock. The tunnel had to be started from each side of Mount Castro and it met exactly in the middle, missing a perfect alignment by a couple of inches. Even though the diggers had to

navigate around weak veins of rock at times, the two tunnels rendezvoused with a precision that would be extremely difficult to duplicate today, even with modern surveying equipment incorporating GPS and laser guides. It is still considered by some as the eighth wonder of the ancient world. This application of mathematical theory in a real world situation was a leap that rivals Armstrong's step onto the moon.

One of Eupalinus' colleagues was Pythagoras (569-475 BC). Pythagoras is most noted as a mathematician after which one of the principle of geometry (Pythagoras' Theorem) gets its name. You might say that Pythagoras was struck by the fingerprint of God on the universe, because he was totally captivated by not only the order that he found in numbers and their application to the real world, but also music. One of his most famous quotes was, "There is geometry in the humming of the strings, there is music in the spacing of the spheres." He saw the same order throughout nature. It was a supernatural kind of order, the kind of order that would allow men, using math and chisels, to dig a tunnel through a real mountain from two sides and meet precisely in the middle. This was the same type of consistency that, two millennium later, allowed Einstein to discover the relationship between mass and energy, and eventually nuclear energy—not by fiddling around with uranium in his garage—but by mathematical equations, using a piece of chalk on a two dimensional blackboard. This process of order screams of a God who creates in an order that reflects His perfect nature.

Pythagoras, as a free thinker, did not like the control of Polycrates. Twelve years before the start of the tunnel, he left the island; taking a ship westward to one of Somos' new colonies in, what is now, Italy. Due to its large navy, Somos had conquered much of the coastal Mediterranean by this time including the Italian peninsula. In Italy, far away from Polycrates, Pythagoras had the freedom to create a school and to continue his thinking, observations and

lectures.

Mathematics is not my strong point, although my son, Daniel is now working on his doctorate in mathematics and can put my head in a spin when he speaks of mathematical theories. I have read about some of the writings of modern mathematical theorists, such as the string theory of the universe. It is not a great leap to move from talking about numbers into talking about metaphysics and philosophy. Pythagoras did so.

Pythagoras' philosophical background was of course immersed in Greek mythology. Don Richardson points out in his book; *Eternity in Their Hearts*, even remote tribal peoples intrinsically know that there is more to life than this material world. Every major culture on earth has developed its own meta-narrative about the spiritual, eternal world.

Of course the ancient Greeks are assumed to be the mother of Western civilization and culture. The Greeks also recognized that there was more to life than what was visible. They developed a complex polytheistic belief system. In that system, a group of god-men ruled the heavens, or spiritual world. I call them god-men because these gods were like men and women but with super powers, much closer to our modern concepts of "super-heroes" than the Christian God. They fought among themselves like men . . . sometimes one would win and another time, he or she would lose. They even had families including fathers, brothers and sisters. They also were imperfect and made mistakes, were deceived by one another . . . along the lines of human behavior, they were just more powerful than us.

To make up for the impotence of their gods, the Greeks had to create more and more of them. They eventually had a system of twelve major gods and many lesser gods. The polytheistic system evolved into such a convoluted story that by the time of Paul, the people of Athens even had alters for the still unknown god (Acts 17:23).

It was obvious to the Greeks that the deities didn't live in the same realm that humans did, because they were never seen. However, the Greeks could visualize the things that they assumed were the consequences of the gods' actions; lighting, thunder, volcanoes, storms, rain, wind, fate and even human behavior. So these mystical gods were interacting within this earthly realm, but living somewhere else.

The home of the better gods was assumed to be literally upward. Older Greek mythology placed their original home on Mount Olympus, which was the highest point in their known world. If the Greeks had known about Mount Everest they would have placed the homes of the gods there. In my neck of the woods, it would have been Mount Rainer. In the skies were stars, the sun and other god-like celestial bodies as well as closer objects such as clouds. Mount Olympus was closest point to these celestial bodies, where heaven and earth was to suppose to have met.

Hades was a god who drew lots with two of his brother gods, Zeus and Poseidon and lost. For that reason, he became the god of the underworld . . . down below the clouds but still out of the human realm. Even early in Greek mythology, it was assumed that upward was better, after all Hades went to the underworld only because he lost.

One hundred years after the birth of Pythagoras in Samos, Socrates (469-399 BC) was born in nearby Athens. He is considered the father of Greek philosophy. His major message or idea is the act of questioning assumed truth and using logic to find real truth. This is over simplified but all that I need say at this point. He got in trouble, and was thus executed, because he taught the youth of Athens to question everything their society had taught them as truth (including the mores or ESW) and to test it with logic.

One of those youths, Plato (427-347) became his star student. Socrates was a stone mason

first, and became a philosopher later in life, after inheriting enough money so that he didn't need to work but could sit around and think. Plato, on the other hand, was a "full-time" philosophy student from the beginning. His teacher, Socrates, turned him on to logic and thinking, but he did not limit his studies to Socrates' school of thought. To broaden his studies, Plato traveled to Egypt and eventually to one of Pythagoras' schools in Italy.

In his later years, Pythagoras had become very interested in the harmony between man and the natural world. However, Pythagoras (like Don Richardson pointed out) realized that the human soul was a different substance from nature . . . that it is eternal. He intuitively reached the conclusion that the body was only a temporary home for the soul. As a mathematician, he also became aware of subtle inconsistencies in mathematics that gave him the impression that math, and thus all of nature, was only a reflection of a more perfect world somewhere else. We Christians would say those imperfections are the relics of the Fall of Adam. The things that may have led Plato to this conclusion were the errors of applied mathematics and the abstract mathematical concepts that could not exist in the real world. One example is the perfect right triangle or the mathematical concept of infinity. As great as his colleague, Eupalinus' tunnel was, the two ends still didn't meet with exact perfection . . . it was a couple of inches off. Pythagoras reasoned that the domain of perfection must be in the heavens where tunnels always met with exactness. This was not the Christian Heaven, but in the high places, where the Greek gods dwelt, or "ether" (as Plato called it). In the ether there would be perfect numbers and perfect math or we might say perfect physics. There objects moved in flawless mathematical forms such as pure circles without wavering as they do this earthly realm.

By the end of his teaching, just a few years before the birth of Socrates, Pythagoras had moved from strictly mathematics to metaphysics and finally to mysticism. He became somewhat

of pantheist because he believed that the soul should attempt to transfigure from its imperfect human body, which was captive in this mirage of this world, to be joined with perfection which was in the ether. Pythagoras clearly taught that this physical world was inferior because it was imperfect.

My brief commentary about Pythagoras's life is that he, like most philosophers, recognized the truth in the universe—the truth which God has created—but without the written word to guide them, their final conclusions are usually in error. Because the mind, like the heart, is fallen you simply cannot find the true God through reason alone.

After studying in Pythagoras's school, Plato spent a lot of his time thinking about his concepts of the eternal human soul and perfection in the ether. He also spent much of his philosophical career writing (as in his paper titled *Phaedo*) trying to prove that the human soul was different than other things in the natural world and was eternal. He also expanded Pythagoras' teaching and formed it into what we now know as Platonic Dualism.

Basically Plato believed that everything that Pythagoras said about mathematics had universal applications. He believed that your bed on earth could only exist if it was a reflection of a perfect, ideal bed in heaven—one with perfect right angles in each corner, forming a perfect rectangle and maybe giving a perfect comfort to the recumbent soul. The same was true for other abstract ideas as well, for example the blankets on that perfect bed would give perfect warmth. Even the color of the blanket, say red, or even the concept of love had its perfect analog in the ether. This concept is where modern society gets its term "Platonic" when referring to a nonsexual relationship between two people. Plato himself of course didn't coin the term. But the principle comes from Plato's ideas that the physical world, including the body, and thus bodily functions such as sexual intercourse, are inferior to the ideals that exist in the ether or other world. The



ideal or perfect relationship in the ether would consist of perfect, pure love with no sexual inferences because it would not be connected to the physical body. So the word “Platonic” is very trendy but has historical roots that go back over two millennium.

The problem here, that would soon have a great influence within the emerging church in the first century, was simply the division between good and bad was defined along altitudinal lines. The earth was only a poorly reflected image of the ideal or heavenly. As this idea leaked into early Christian thinking, it began to divide things, not along God’s divisions, but along a Greek philosophical division between earthly and other-worldly or, now using Christian terms, worldly (earthly) and spiritual (heavenly). The Hellenistic concept of heaven is very, very different than the Biblical concept but the two became totally entwined over time into an unholy marriage.

I could easily write an entire book devoted to the things that I learned about Plato and how he developed a Dualistic view. Plato died three hundred and eighty years prior to the birth of the Church. His influence was felt strongly throughout the learned Hellenistic world at the time of Christ. The apostle Paul surely studied Plato in his Hellenistic school as had many of the Greek converts at Pentecost.

Before I move on to the fascinating things that I learned studying Church history, I must look at one more point of the extra-Biblical origins of Dualism and that was in the experience of an Persian mystic with a funny name. This second, smaller, source was not influenced by, nor did it influence Plato . . . but was a separate watershed leading to the same river.

Zoroaster (meaning “old camel”) was mystical in more ways than one. First, it is very hard to even pin down when or where precisely, in Persia, he lived. One writing suggests that he was alive up to three hundred years prior to the conquest of Persia by Alexander (in 334 BC). So

this would mean that he lived just prior to Pythagoras, but a couple thousand miles to the east. However, his major writings, Zend Avesta (sacred writings) and The Gathas (later hymns) reflected a language that was in use about 1200 BC. A few Greek sources claimed he lived as far back as 6000 BC, but that doesn't make historical sense. Most authorities place his life in the seventh century BC and assumed that he was using an old, traditional language, much like the Catholic Church writing in Latin up until a few decades ago, rather than the Persian language of the time.

Where he lived was also confusing. Certainly it was in the area we now know as Iran but it is not clear whether it was in the north-east, near modern Tehran, or in the southeast, near what is now Baluchistan. Tradition has it, that it was in the arid southeastern desert where Zoroaster had his moment of epiphany. When he was in his thirties and experiencing a mid-life crisis (okay, the thirties were considered "midlife" in 1000 BC) the story goes, he took off into the dry mountains in the proverbial search for the meaning of life. After an overnight vigil on the top of a rugged mountain, the sudden burst of the morning sun gave him the answer he was looking for. All reality was sharply divided between light and dark.

From that supposition he built his entire systematic theology of Dualism, the battle between good and evil, between this world and the next. Unlike Biblical Christianity, he taught that the choice between good and evil was made at an early age. Once you chose your "camp" or kingdom, you would stand counterpoised to the other side for all of eternity.

On a hot predawn morning in August, I boarded a plane in Dubai in route to Rawalpindi, Pakistan. The year was 1981 and I had just finished a summer working at a mission hospital on the Omani boarder.

The plane was soon airborne over the Persian Gulf and within a moment, over Persian

land. I sat in my window seat with my eyes fixed on the black ground beneath me, with great anticipation of the appearance of the morning sun. I have to say, I was not disappointed. I witnessed the most incredible sunrise I have ever seen . . . and I have seen a lot of them.

A thin red line soon formed in the east . . . in front of it stood an infinite lake of black, a nocturnal ink. Within a minute or two at most, a brilliant burst of light came from the center of the red line, catching the pinnacles of the rugged mountains sweeping out in all directions. It was like the brightly glowing peaks were slowly emerging out of the black lake. Once the blood-red disk of the sun was fully above the horizon, the mountains stood like a cluster of crimson islands whose steep edges dropped abruptly off into the tar-black valleys with no visible floors. It was in this very place in southeast Iran, that many believed that Zoroaster caught his vision of a dualistic world divided equally between light and dark . . . with a hope that light would eventually win.

There are certainly critics of Biblical Christianity who promote the scenario that the Jewish, Islamic and Christian faiths actually are evolutions of Zarathustrianism. This of course is not true. However, I learned many things that seemed to reveal how Zoroaster's Dualism, along with that of Plato, did infiltrate the early Church and worked its way all the way up to the Bible belt. As strong as Zarathustrianism's influence was on the Church, I must point out that I believe that it had a far greater impact on the development of Islam. I could even make a reasonable argument that if Zoroaster had never been born, there would be no Islamic terrorism today. The reason is simple, Islamic fundamentalists see the world in black or white glasses. They also see value in Zarathustrian ideas of this physical world not being important at all compared to the heavens. For that reason, blowing up a group of innocent people, or even yourself, is pales in comparison to the eternal realm. Indeed, if you were to take this form of Dualism to its

sociological extreme, you would precisely end up with the quagmire that we saw in Iraq after the U.S. invasion. Real, physical, human life has absolutely no value in that scenario. It is nothing to pour gasoline on a five-year-old boy and light him on fire like a torch . . . if you think it accomplishes something good in Heaven. It is nothing to drive a truck loaded with explosives into a nursery school, destroying your own, physical life as well as that of dozens of innocent children, if you think you are doing it to please God in the far-more-important spiritual realm.

In the same way, I will make the argument that would be no venue or motive, for Islamic terrorism today, if Plato had not had such a strong influence within the Church. These Platonic Christians also see world affairs in terms of light and dark kingdoms and history as only important as it relates to eschatology. Therefore the abuse and injustices to people groups, like the Palestinians is often ignored by the American church because they can only view such issues within some heavenly eschatological meaning.

Butterflies in the Belfry, Serpents in the Cellar

Chapter Twelve

The Celestial Tango

When I speak about how I discovered extra-Biblical concepts having influenced the Church, I often see Evangelical friends start to roll their eyes. I sense that I am coming across to them in the same light as the liberal critics who attempt to explain away everything Christian as a product of natural events and the evolution of secular history.

As soon as I try to explain Dualism's impact on Christian thought, as I said before, the resistance is somewhat of a Catch 22. One of the tenants of Dualism itself is that history has no value unless it is spiritualized. Therefore, when I talk about real, messy, human history, then there is the preexisting assumption that it is of no significance . . . unless it is spiritualized. The

easiest way to spiritualize history, either local or meta-history, is to say that God overrides it with his puppeteer strings. Simply stated, that all things are . . . as God meant them for them to be. Therefore, the Church is the way God wants it to be and if you question the way it is, you are questioning God himself. This was the main rationale behind my own ignorance of world history in my earlier life.

American Christians, I believe, are most vulnerable to the notion that there was this golden pipeline from the time of Christ until the present. This is partially true at least, because they live in America, the “new world.” In Europe, for example, the ancient architecture, all the way back to Roman Aqueducts or even the Neanderthal stone tools, serves as a constant visual reminder of their long cultural history. They realize more clearly that they are living on the last page of a long and interesting set of encyclopedias.

Within this golden pipeline it is assumed that God protected the Church from negative influences. In other words, God’s sovereignty kept the Church perfectly pure. Yet those same Christians usually have denominational favoritism. They believe one Christian denomination—precisely their own—has the real corner on being the pure Church.

If one denomination, out of hundreds, has the pure form or truth, what is the state of the others? Some may have slight errors and others profound heresy . . . even to the point of being cults. Were these churches, according to these Evangelicals, also kept pure from history’s influence or were they somehow outside this golden pipe of God’s sovereign protection?

They can also trace their own church’s roots back for, at most, five hundred years (in the case of Lutherans). Many modern evangelical churches have roots no older than a few decades. How do they explain the long gap between the time of Christ and the rise of their own denominations if God had kept the Church pure throughout the ages? Most evangelicals have no

doubts about the errors and atrocities of the Church during the middle ages, especially just prior to the Reformation. Where was the golden pipe for those hundreds of years?

Still others may assume that their denomination is a return to the real, authentic New Testament Christianity. I have especially heard this among my house church friends. There are certainly a lot of positive things about the house church, but if great Church leaders throughout history have been so deceived, what makes them think that they can now have a corner on the pure truth? I've heard that a few Christians claim that only one branch of the Church, such as the Orthodox Church, remained in a pure form from New Testament times.

Where did God promise to build a hedge around the Church and to protect it from any negative influences? Paul wrote an important letter to the Greek Christians at Colosse and warned them not to be influenced by the traditional philosophies that were endemic to the surrounding the area (Colossians 2:8). At that time, the teachings of Plato and Aristotle were the most dominant of these philosophies, mixed with the polytheistic Greco-Roman religious belief system as well as mystical cults that probably came out of the Zoroastrian watershed. These Dualistic systems were the very ones that Paul was warning the Church about. If the early Christians were not prone to being deceived and incorporating extra-Biblical ideas into their new faith, why would Paul admonish them not to allow it? If they were in this protective pipe, then he didn't even need to bring it up.

Actually much of Paul's writings to the early churches were because they were adopting erroneous doctrines. He says to the Galatians that he was astonished that they so quickly moved into error, within a couple of years of hearing the gospel. He goes on to rebuke them for following non-Biblical thinkers (see Galatians 1). So there is no Biblical evidence that God somehow protects the purity of the Church. The Jews in Berea were praised for examining the

scriptures to see if what Paul and Silas were telling them was true (see Acts 17:11). Somehow good, Christian skepticism has been devalued again along Dualistic lines. Skepticism, after all, is a function of the physical mind and reason and is presented as the opposite of the spiritual concept of faith—a kind of blind faith that accepts all things presented within the walls of a church without critical thinking. Unfortunately now it is looked on as a positive attribute to believe everything that you hear in your church and to doubt anything is a sacrilege.

I am not a meeting kind of person. I've always tried to avoid being on boards and committees that require frequent or prolonged meetings. Sometimes the guilt of not doing my share causes me to cave in and participate in these situations. I'm presently on four boards, the chair of one and the co-chair of another. I don't know how I get myself into these situations.

For a two-year stint I was an elder of an evangelical church in Marquette, Michigan. My five kids were young at the time and there was nothing I loved more than going home after work and playing with my kids. Once a month, during this eldership term, I sat into wee hours of the night or morning as we debated hot topics, such as if we should have coffee in the sanctuary. It almost drove me to the brink of insanity.

I can remember arriving at a special elders' meeting held on a cold and snowy Saturday morning. I can't remember what the issue was that required this rare early morning meeting. We were sitting around a long folding table in the vestibule while we were waiting on the pastor. One of the elders broke the silence and commented, "Did you hear that the state of Florida now requires that all babies born there to have computer chips placed under the skin of their right hand and on their foreheads. The chips have bar codes of three groups of six digits."

It was obvious where he was going with his comment. The group of eight all seemed spellbound . . . all but me. I rolled my eyes and said, "That makes no sense! If they passed a law

like that there would extreme outrage and it would be the news' headlines on every channel.”

The other seven elders turned toward me with hostility written on their faces. One said, “You’ve got your head buried in the sand, Mike! This kind of stuff is happening all around us! There’re rumors that the Clinton administration is secretly building prisons in every region for the coming internment of Christians.” The others all shook their heads in agreement.

Do we not serve a God of truth and honesty? Isn’t lying for Jesus still lying? I doubt if this elder was intentionally lying about the computer chips, but I sincerely think that some Christian somewhere was. This type of sensationalistic lying is the bread and butter of many TV evangelists. This elder’s shame was not questioning it.

I want to save this discussion for a later chapter but to point out here, that it is very difficult to criticize anything Christian without looking like a man without faith. So I believe that the Church is actually far more vulnerable to deception than even secular institutions. We are taught that it is a Christian principle not to judge someone else, even when they are saying things that raise eyebrows. It should therefore not surprise anyone that extra-Biblical ideas were incorporated into Christian thinking even from the beginning. Can an open bowl of Jell-o avoid absorbing the taste of the mackerel laying, unwrapped, just beside it? Could the Church have grown up in a rich culture without absorbing some of it? I don’t think so. When I studied the history of the early Church carefully, such influences were major issues for them. Some cultural absorption is inescapable. The job of the thoughtful Christian is to determine which surrounding cultural particulars are inert, having no harmful effects, and which ones distract from Biblical truth. The Church often gets distracted over the surface cultural features, such as music, language, hair and clothing styles . . . but not understanding the philosophy at all. The philosophy is far more destructive than the tee shirts or tattoos, and it slips into the church



unnoticed.

Studying Church history was the third pillar of my attempts to figure out what had gone wrong in my own Christian experience. The first phase was dealing with clinical depression. The second phase was trying to find God again and this third phase was trying to find out what was really true about Christianity. The first part of that third phase was re-examining my personal Christian history and the last part of that phase was doing the same with general Christian history. The transition from my own history, to broader Church history was seamless.

I had a paper back copy of Stephen Neill's book *A History of Christian Missions* left over from the pre-rabbit-hole days, when I was teaching a class on missionary movements. I pulled it out of my old box of books and started to study it like never before. Before long its pages were crumpled, dog-eared and collected a variety of stains on them. I devoured that book and many more on church history over a period of a couple of years. I read all the writings of early church fathers and even some of the Gnostic Gospels.

The drips of wax on page 101 of Neill's book reminds me of reading the book by candle light while in my blue, down sleeping bag on the beach of Lake Superior. Michigan's Upper Peninsula has many areas that are so remote that you can have an entire white sandy beach to yourself for days. On page 150 of the book is a brown tea stain, when my cup tipped over while studying the book on an airplane. However, my real thirst wasn't for black pekoe but for the real truth.

I joined the Air Force in the early nineties, partially as a means to return to the Middle East. I was a captain at the time in the Primary Care Clinic and I can remember having a stack of church history books as well as my Bible, on my large, drab-green desk. I was reading them,

cross-referencing them and taking notes between every patient that I saw. The things that I learned, and was able to sort out, had a profound effect on my perspective of God and Christianity and with it, my personal history started making a lot of sense.

There are so many fascinating stories woven into the fabric of church history that you could have a hundred spin-off movies, most of them dramatic, but a few would qualify as horror flicks or comedies. Each movie would hold you spellbound for hours. It is sad that someone has to invent a story, such as *The Di Vinci Code*, to steal the imaginations of millions of readers and movie viewers.

But unlike *The Di Vinci Code*, these stories were real and are not controversial. This information is not held by some secret society but is well known by every professor of history at virtually every Christian and secular university. There isn't anything that I learned and will describe that is dubious, although I admit that my practical applications or emphasis may not be readily accepted by all. The only reason that many Christians are unaware of most of the historical facts, or have no interest in church history, is the very nature of Dualism. Dualism demands that history is unimportant . . . unless it is spiritualized.

I recently saw a story about a man who had owned the largest bookstore in Baghdad. Someone bombed the bookstore in the early days after the American invasion. The bookstore recently re-opened, but all books of history or science had to be removed to avoid retribution from Moslem extremists. It is this same type of Dualistic attitude that I'm referring to. Before I started my personal research, I didn't even know that we had records of church history between the New Testament and Martin Luther. So, in most evangelical churches, the only time you speak of history is to illustrate some man or woman of God, or to show how the end times are imminent.

Of course Jesus himself appeared at a place and time in history where there was a clash between two cultures. The Jewish traditions had somewhat of a base in God's revealed word through His prophets but they were so out of touch with God's purpose that they never recognized Christ. But at the same time, there was the Greco-Roman culture. It was within this larger culture that the Church eventually took root and spread its pliable wings.

Butterflies in the Belfry, Serpents in the Cellar

Chapter Thirteen

A Mystery of Cars

There are great differences between a Lamborghini and a Volvo. I happen to own a Volvo, an old one that I bought on E Bay for thirty-five hundred dollars for my teenagers to drive. I would never have bought them a Lamborghini. My entire annual salary could not pay for the insurance premiums for one teenage behind the wheel of a Lamborghini, let alone for three. There is a very interesting reason why I would choose a Volvo and not a Lamborghini beyond the simple cost of the car . . . and they do cost a lot. I've seen some old, wrecked, Lamborghinis on E Bay, and they still cost more than our house. I would have also chosen an old (affordable) Mercedes for my kids, rather than a Ferrari.

As you are reading this chapter, consider this riddle of why one of those cars would be more appropriate than the other for my teenagers to drive. The reason is intimately tied to the fascinating development of philosophical perspectives within Western culture as well as the Church. As a hint will I will only say that if there had never been an Aristotle, there would have never been a Volvo or a Mercedes. If there had never been a Plato there would never have been a Lamborghini or Ferrari . . . it is really that simple.

I learned a lot about Dualism's historical influence on the Church during those lonely and confusing days in Michigan's snowy Upper Peninsula. There have been several books written on the relationship between the two. Francis Schaeffer wrote about this phenomenon extensively. The most brief, but comprehensive, writing is his trilogy *The God who is There, He is There and He is not Silent* and *Escape from Reason*.

I must say two things about Francis Schaeffer as an author. First of all, I am convinced,

barring some other intervention by God, I would not be a Christian today if it were not for his writings and lectures. But at the same time, his books are not the most easy to read and understand. I had to read *Escape from Reason* about three times before I understood what he was talking about. The book is an excellent saga, following Western Civilization's on and off again love affair with Platonic Dualism. But, rather than calling it Dualism, Schaeffer points to a huge divide between Nature (with a capital N) and Grace (with a capital G). Nature represents the physical world, or cosmos, that Plato referred to. Schaeffer calls Grace the heavenly, which corresponds to Plato's "ether."

Plato also divided man between the physical self, "soma," and the spiritual, "psyche." Don't confuse Plato's notion of psyche with the modern concept of psyche. Plato's psyche is much closer to the Christian concept of the soul than modern science's concept of the psyche.

By the fourth century, according to Schaeffer, Grace literally "ate up" Nature and became the predominant arena of life based on Plato's belief that the ether and psyche were superior to the physical realms of cosmos and soma. The Dark Ages were the first great cultural experiment with Platonic Dualism and it was a total disaster. Within the Church, Platonic ideas took the specific form of an illustrious movement called Gnosticism, which I will talk a lot more about later.

I've heard radio Evangelists alluding to the Middle Ages as the zenith of Church history. Surely they don't know what they are talking about. If they had lived during that time, as a normal serf, rather than the very small percentage who were a king or knight, they would have known how horrible of a time it really was. I am convinced that Plato was wise enough, that if he had lived until this time, he would have seriously reconsidered his ideas. But, like I said earlier, small errors of thinking can have major implications later. When the only thing that matters is

the “other world,” what Christians interpreted as “spiritual,” then this present world dwindles into oblivion.

Schaeffer, in a very insightful way, uses the evolution of art and music through the ages as surface markers of the underlying philosophical changes in the same way that I use a buoy to mark the general location or migration of my crab pot on the sea floor.

During the Dark Ages, there were no serious drawings, paintings or sculpture of anything physical such as landscapes or even a flower. Only “spiritual” content, such as Biblical stories, had enough merit for a decent artist to spend his or her talents on. Landscapes are shown, but only as inferior backdrops to a spiritualized foreground of Biblical themes. The depiction of people, at least the good people, was spiritualized by the characteristic halos of the period, represented by a circle of slightly lighter hue of the background color. These important, spiritual people are always portrayed as larger than life—literally. They are disproportional, being larger than other people, animals, buildings or even the landscape.

Several examples of the art of this period are the paintings on canvas or wood titled *Madonna and Child*. In the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, hangs the painting by Berlinghiero from the thirteenth century by that name. If you study it you will see that the Christ child depicted in that beautiful work is no child at all, but actually, a miniature man. He has the body proportions of an adult man, but just smaller in size. This child has no, normal, baby fat.

If the soul or psyche is “other worldly” and the physical body is of this world or inferior cosmos, then even the value of real babies was in question. They didn’t talk. They were totally dependent. They threw up, urinated and defecated on themselves.

Because babies were so . . . well, human, they didn’t have the value of independent

children or young adults that could communicate. During the first millennium, many Greeks, including some Christians, didn't believe that the soul descended into the physical, earthly body until the child was several years old. That's why it wasn't uncommon to toss your baby in the woods if she were a girl and you really wanted a boy.

To some of the Gnostic Christians there was such a Dualistic view that they didn't believe that Christ, the son of God, could have entered human flesh until Jesus was at the temple as an adolescent. I will simply say at this point that Gnosticism was a palatable form of Dualism, at least in the Church's eyes . . . or should I say mouth. If Gnosticism was a cake, then Platonic ideas would be the flour, Zoroastrianism sugar and Jewish mysticism eggs.

Some Gnostics suggested it wasn't until Christ was baptized by John, or the transfiguration, or even not until the cross that He became God. Some went to such extremes to believe that God would never stoop to the point of ever entering a dirty, physical, human body. Jesus, the physical man, to them, was just a mirage.

On the other side of the coin, some Gnostics argued that indeed Christ lived in the flesh of Jesus but because he took on inferior, human flesh, He therefore could not truly be divine. God of course, thinking in Platonic Dualistic terms, dwells in the superior, Heaven, and thus could not descend and appear in this inferior, filthy, earthly world. According to Platonic thinking the Gnostics were also attempting to sharply divide, the evil, seen world from the good, unseen world. Some went so far as to assume (like Zoroaster) that this seen world was created by either a lesser god, or Satan himself.

The church historian Robert M. Grant says of this period, "This kind of gnosis was in the air they (the early Christians) breathed, and some of it entered their lungs." A little later the early (second century) church father Irenaeus said of the growing Gnostic influence, "The Gnostics

were sprouting out of the ground like mushrooms.” At the time of Irenaeus, they really didn’t know about spores and they assumed that mushrooms literally sprouted from nothing.

Gnostic beliefs infiltrating into the Church was what led to the first Church-wide meeting and official statement in Nicaea (in what’s now Turkey) in 325 AD. In some ways, this creed was an attempt to place an iron brace across the crack of Dualism that was raising its ugly head immediately after Acts. The Church came precariously close to adopting these extreme Dualistic views of the Gnostics, as taught by Mani of Persia or Marcion, another Dualistic false prophet. The message of these early Church heretics spread like wildfire and almost consumed the entire church during the first three centuries. If they had succeeded, and they would have if it had not been for some wise early Church leaders, the Church today would look profoundly different and the Dark Ages would have been far worse and, I believed, would have continued for much longer.

Just by reading the English translation of the Nicene Creed, you can see how the early Church fathers were attempting to address this early Gnostic problem—making it clear that Christ was truly a physical (soma) man but of the same substance as the divine God. In the Platonic-Dualistic thinking, the invisible was the same as the spiritual, and therefore more important than the visible.

I believe in one God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds [God of God], Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance [essence] with the Father; by whom all things were made; who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from



heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And [I believe] in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceedeth from the Father [and the Son]; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spake by the Prophets. And [I believe] in one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen. (This last paragraph was added in A.D. 381.)

The meeting in Nicaea did not completely suppress this debate, but did clarify the main doctrine of the Godhead, which Dualism was attempting to erode. Seventy years later, the next generation of the Church leaders had to meet again over this same problem and issue their second statement, known as the Chalcedonian Creed of 451 AD. It too was an attempt to cross the Dualistic crack with reinforcement iron to arrest the chiasm before it tore the Godhead apart, along Dualistic lines.

The Christian Godhead straddles the Platonic Dualistic divide, with the good God dwelling in the ether on one side, and His divine son dwelling in the inferior, dirty, human flesh—soma, which lived in the earthy, dirty cosmos. My point is . . . if it were not for Platonic influences, this tension would never have existed in the first place. In the truly Biblical view, but I'm getting ahead of myself a bit, there is a seamless continuation between the ether and cosmos.

As you read this English translation of the Chalcedonian Creed, notice the tension between the physical and the spiritual.

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [co-essential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.

Before I understood Dualism and its struggle to penetrate the early church, these creeds appeared to me as ancient gobbledygook. Now they make perfect sense. In many ways these intuitive and proactive, early fathers succeeded in squelching the power of Platonic Dualism in the formation of the Church. However, while the lion was terminated at front doors of the Church and put in its crypt, Dualism, like termites, crept in and insidiously ate away at the

church's very foundation.

Throughout the Middle Ages, the spiritual realm was confined to the institutional church and clergy, as well as the King, who was considered a divinely appointed position. But this grouping of power made up only a small percentage of the population of the period.

The first time I hitchhiked through Europe, I was pleasantly impressed by how the quaint French villages were laid out in the cluster of charming houses, surrounded by a defensive stone wall, outside which laid hundreds of acres of farmland. Sitting in the center of each village was the tall bell towers of the cathedral that dominated the skyline of the town. It gave me a warm, utopian feeling of a time when people really did live in an idealized Christian society with the church as its literal centerpiece of life.

However, years later, as I became more familiar with the details of that period of history, I had the sense that nowhere in the Dark Ages was there an utopian, Christian, society. It was not a good time for anyone, especially the Christian. The vast majority of people were oppressed, sick and dirt poor. The life expectancy, not counting for the terrible plague, was thirty one years of age. If you included the deaths from the plague, the life expectancy would drop to about twenty five years old. Science and technological advancement came to a virtual standstill due to the powerful influence of Dualism. And some Christians think that this was the crowning moment of the Church?

The Islamic world began to take shape in the seventh and eight centuries. In the territory that they controlled, the sciences—and culture in general—fared better, much better than in the Christian world, which had been mesmerized by Platonic Dualism. The reason was, although Islam also embraced Zoroastrian (and to a lesser degree Platonic) Dualism, it was far more developed in the Christian world by the time Mohammed conquered Mecca in 630 AD. The

opposite is true today as the secular Western evolved past Dualism and the Islamic world, deeper into it.

The Christian Dualism of the Dark Ages also created the ultimate environment for extreme spiritual manipulation. If this physical world—such as reason, your own bodies and everything you did, including your occupation—was of the inferior or even evil realm, and the church held the keys to the important realm (Heaven) then they had immense control over you. The selling of indulgences was only one symptom of this awful disease. The church, its leadership and institutions, became hideously corrupt. It was Platonic Dualism that made such a nasty church possible.

Imagine that the entire known world was confined to a small island surrounded by a salty sea . . . something like the island of Samos. On this island was only one, small, fresh water spring. Rather than building an amazing tunnel through the mountain to bring the water to everyone, one small group, for example the blacksmith guild, controlled the spring. The blacksmiths built an iron cage around the spring and it was guarded by sentries who were employed by the blacksmiths. Suddenly the blacksmith guild would grow in importance because they literally controlled the lives of everyone on the island. They controlled whether or not you lived or died. In time, they would become very rich and hold every position of power. If you wanted water, you paid for it. You paid in money, obedience, votes, passion and devotion.

If the only thing in your world that was important was the spiritual, and the Church held the keys to the spiritual world, you would be at their mercy. To secure their claim to power the church taught that you, personally, had no direct access to the spiritual. This was the same as building an iron cage around the spring with one door and one key . . . the key which they held. The church would then control your wealth, your obedience and loyalty. This is exactly what

happened.

There were a few dissent voices through those dark centuries, but they were quickly toast . . . literally. It wasn't until the overall climate of Europe, the social and cultural climate, had changed that Luther was able to break that stranglehold.

The Renaissance had started a two hundred years before Luther. This movement was simply the swing in the balance of the Dualistic worlds. For the first time in about five hundred years, this physical earth, knowledge, science, art and simple man had significance again.

I wish that I could say that this swing was prompted by Church leaders who had come to their senses, finally realizing that they had been hoodwinked by Plato's ideas and that this earthly realm was, indeed, important. Once they realized that the Greek culture was determining the expression and shape of Christendom, rather than Biblical truth, they repented. But instead of a major remorse and turning by the Church, the Renaissance had its roots outside the church.

Although Luther and the Reformation would benefit from this change in philosophical tone, the extra-Biblical source of the Renaissance would have extreme consequences and come back to haunt us during the second half of the second millennium. The pendulum would not simply pause in a state of Biblical balance at the midpoint, but continue on in the other extreme - leading to the modern and ultimately the post-modern world in which we now live.

If you were to simplify history into a fascinating but an unpretentious story, then the Medici family of Florence, Italy was the epicenter of the Renaissance. But the movement was truly much bigger than one family alone.

The Medici's came onto the scene in 1230 AD. Historically they had been medical doctors, thus the family name "Medici" (which literally meaning "doctors"). Their early ancestors came from the region to the northwest of Florence and they made their first money

trading Italian dyed wool with France and Spain. Eventually they were becoming very powerful, even controlling the regional wool board. They were so influential that the city council of Florence feared them to the point that they banned them from all politics. At that time in history, the city of Florence functioned much more autonomously than modern cities . . . much more like small countries. So being banned from the politics of the most powerful city of the area was a very big deal. An exception was made for one of the brothers, Averardo (Bicci) de' Medici. It was a conditional permission. If he gave up his involvement with the wool industry he would be permitted to participate in politics.

Averardo thought the access to power was worth it, but he would have to find a new means to wealth. He began to dabble in banking but it was his son, Cosimo, who really started to make money in the new business. Cosimo would eventually become the “Godfather” of the entire Medici Empire. Even though his ancestors had been banned from Florentine politics, he eventually became the city “boss” (but having no official title) in 1434. But soon, poor Cosimo was faced with a real moral dilemma.

Personal wealth had been frowned upon by the Medieval Church and the loaning of money for interest was strictly forbidden. Because banking was his livelihood, he began to actively seek a moral and philosophical center that was outside the traditional church.

He was not the first Italian to go to the old Greek philosophers for this new basis for life. The climate was “ripe” for a change in Europe because of how the Medieval culture was failing (the Platonic-Christian pendulum had swung so far in degrading the meaning of this earthly life). Also, the writings of the Greeks were becoming more popular in the same way that Hare Krishna became trendy among the artists and musicians during the 1960s.

The Roman Church had ignored or even destroyed the original writings of the Greek philosophers during its first millennium. However, the eastern branch of the Church (in Constantinople) held on to many of these original Greek manuscripts as did the encroaching Islamists.

The turning point came in 1439, when Cosimo was one of the forces behind moving the great Ecumenical Council (*Ecumenical* meaning that it included both the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox Churches) to Florence. Keep in mind that this meeting would eventually last over a decade. I hope they had lots of coffee.

The important assembly had started in Basel in 1431 but had moved south of the Alps, to Ferrara (Italy) in 1438. With the plague gaining ground in Ferrara, Cosimo agreed to finance the council if it moved to Florence in January of 1439. But bringing such an important meeting to Florence was a real Coup d'état, to a greater magnitude of a modern city being selected to host the Olympic Games.

One hopeful agenda of the meeting was laying the foundations for a possible reunification of the two churches. The split had come over the Nicene Creed as the Eastern Church, being even more favorable to Platonic thinking, did not like the term “filioque” meaning “from the Son.” It pertained to the Holy Spirit coming from the Father “and the Son.” To the Eastern Church, Jesus, being in the flesh (of his inferior material world) still could not be fully equated with God in Heaven. They came close to reaching their reunification goal with only the hold-out of one Orthodox bishop.

One of the scholars who came to represent the Eastern Orthodox was Gemistos. He had recently changed his name to “Gemistos Plethon” in honor of Plato (“Plethon” is spelled almost the same as “Plato” in Greek). Gemistos was an 84 year old scholar, who had devoted his entire

life studying Plato and Islamic/Zoroastrian teachings. He eventually went so far that, just before his death, he left the Church completely and attempted to create a brand new mystic religion combining Platonism, Zoroastrianism and Christianity.

During the Florentine Council, Cosimo didn't sit through all the formal and stuffy theological discussion like he intended. Once he met Gemistos, he became obsessed with the gray-haired and flamboyant old teacher. They spent many long hours over drinks and rich food served in Cosimo's palace and private studies.

By the time the Florentine part of the council was over, three years later, Cosimo seemed to have found the answers he was looking for . . . a philosophical center outside the established Church. But, he wasn't sure if Plato would be his new prophet . . . or possibly Aristotle? He commissioned Gemistos to write a paper on the difference between the two great Greek Philosophers and to explain why Gemistos himself favored the teachings of Plato.

In his paper, Gemistos made a clear argument that Plato's thoughts were far superior to the Aristotelian premise that reason was the highest of human virtues. Platonic thinking seemed more compatible with Christian thought, according to Gemistos. Ironically, Platonic ideas seemed more attractive to the Medieval Christian because the medieval church had already been greatly influence by Platonic thought for several hundred years.

Being morally unhindered, the Medici's began to gain wealth through banking and trade toward the end of the thirteenth century, however, they didn't reach their zenith until the fifteenth centuries. They were able to become so rich in banking, because banking was essentially forbidden by the Church and no one else was doing it, at least not in a big way. The Church forbade loaning money for interest based on such scripture as Exodus 22:25, "If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not be like a moneylender; charge him



no interest.” (NIV) The genius of the Medici family was creating a system for basically loaning money (by exchanging different national currencies for a fee) that circumvented the laws of the Church. But it is intriguing that when the Medici’s coffers began to fill, the jingle of the coins caught the ear of the Church in Rome itself. Ironically the Church eventually became one of the Medici’s principal business partners. The Medicis became not only the richest and most powerful family in Italy, but in Europe as well. In some measure they may have been the richest family that has ever lived. This family eventually produced three popes and two queens of France.

As in many areas of Europe at the time, loyalty was not cleanly divided between political entities, but between families. As the Roman Empire dissolved, the city-states, like Florence, became micro-kingdoms that replaced it. These city-states were dominated by the rich and wealthy clans almost in a Mafia way. If your family was gaining power, you might put out a hit on the controlling family as the Pazzi brothers did on the Medicis. The absolute power of the Medici family ebbed and flowed with enough murders, mistresses, plots and pretense to fill several fascinating HBO miniseries and make a far better movie than *The Di Vinci Code*.

About the time the Medici family was first ascending in power a new development was occurring in the East. Islam was pressing westward across Turkey to the point that the Eastern Orthodox Church leaders in Constantinople could literally smell the campfires of the Moslem Turks closing in on them. It must have been nerve-racking for the churchmen. They eventually started sending precious ancient manuscripts westward away from harm’s way, toward Rome, with Cosimo’s help.

These manuscripts, which had previously been banned on the Italian peninsula, ended up back in Italy including the complete works of both Plato and Aristotle. Some of them came from remote Christian monasteries where they had been spared from the destruction of fires, kindled

by Church candles in a previous generation. Others came directly from the Moslems, taken by force, during the dynamic give and take between the “doms” of Christendom and Mohammedom. But many came from peaceful interaction and the exchange of ideas between Christian and Moslem scholars.

While historical works were being neglected in the Platonic-Christian world, further east, in the Islamic world, they thrived. Many great Greek writings had been translated and preserved in its Arabic form. This of course is the opposite of today’s world where, under the likes of the Taliban regime, all non-Islamic books and works of art are neglected at best, or burned at worst . . . while in the west, there is almost complete freedom of art forms . . . unless they are Christian.

As I mentioned earlier, Aristotle was a student of Plato and the two of them did not represent two diabolically opposing viewpoints. They were good friends. I imagine that if you could bring them together in the same room, and they had spent countless hours in the same room, there would be a deep love and respect between the two of them. Many Athenians, including Plato himself, anticipated that Aristotle would be his successor at the helm of the Academy, which was the major school of philosophy in Athens . . . and of the known western world. By the time that Plato died in 347 BC, however, his views and those of Aristotle had bifurcated to the point that the school elders elected Plato’s nephew, Speusippus, as his successor instead. So their differences were real and serious, but not opposites. But the elders of the Academy knew, like Marty learned in the movie *Back to the Future*, one subtle difference now can lead to a huge variation in decades or centuries ahead.

Like his teacher Socrates, Plato had a great appreciation of knowledge and reason. With that, he and Aristotle were in complete agreement. However, under the mathematician

Pythagoras' influence, Plato began to think "outside the box" of reason. He believed that perfect reason, just like perfect math, could not be achieved in this physical world. He went beyond that in his later writings to make assumptions that nothing in this world had meaning except that it was a reflection of its more real counterpart in the ether, or heavens. For example, a table that you eat dinner on (even an imitation bamboo table in a Chinese restaurant in Cairo) is only a reflection of the real, perfect table, which resides in heaven. The perfect table would have exact right angles at each corner. Each leg would be of the exact same length. Not just each leg being the exact same inches, but exactly the same, beyond the billionth of an inch. The top of the table would be an exact rectangle. You can see that if that was your starting point that in a few hundred years, you could arrive at the extreme mysticism of the Dark Ages.

Aristotle did not make the same leap in reason as Plato, but continued with the more traditional view that reason itself was complete in this physical world. He believed, with the mind, what we would now know as the brain, one can reason perfectly and if you follow reason to its ultimate end, society would be taken into a utopian world. Aristotle envisioned the philosopher-king, or a society where the most brilliant people would control and lead an idealistic society. It is from this Aristotelian concept we get the term "Aristocrats" . . . referring to the elite who are in control. While Aristotle himself thought of these elite as the smartest, the term "Aristocrats," over time began to referring more to the wealthiest. This evolution occurred because at one time it was assumed that the smartest, most educated people were also the wealthiest. It is no coincidence that the term "Aristocrats" was coined to describe the France's ruling-elite, just prior to their revolution. Just as Italy became obsessed with the teachings of Plato, France (and I will explain how later) became obsessed with that of Aristotle.

After his split with Plato, Aristotle did not drift off into anonymity but he eventually

married the niece of a King and moved northeast to, what is now the coast of Turkey. Then, with the threat of a Persian invasion, he moved back west to Macedonia. There he was fortunate enough to meet a local leader named Philip who asked him to tutor his little boy, Alexander. This little boy grew up and conquered the entire known world by the time he died at age thirty three. Alexander, then known as “The Great,” remained faithful to his tutor until the end, spreading Aristotle’s philosophical views along with Greek culture.

The painting by Raphael (Raffaello Santi) titled *The School of Athens* (Scuola di Atene) depicts this difference between Plato and Aristotle graphically. This painting was completed at the height of the Renaissance, in 1510. In the painting Raphael portrays Plato pointing upward and Aristotle pointing downward. Plato believed that absolute truth, or the perfect ideals reigned in the ether or heavens (remember that this is not the same as the Christian heaven). Aristotle believed that they rested within earthly, human reason.

Raphael knew what he was painting. He began to study Greek philosophers as young as age eleven. Thanks to the Medici family, Greek philosophy was then being taught at all the major private schools throughout Italy and to seriously study those subjects was quite fashionable. Raphael eventually moved to Florence and expanded his artistic abilities under the direct support of the Medici family. He was drawn to the fair city after hearing about the wonderful works of Michelangelo and Leonardo of Vinci, a suburb of Florence.

Under the guiding hand and financial support of the Medici family, not only did art flourish, but so did knowledge and philosophical study. For the first time in hundreds of years, learned men could study the actual writings of Aristotle and Plato, which the Medici family had helped to be transferred from the East to Florence and translated from Arabic and Greek into Latin. They eventually set up the major school of philosophy of the western world, called the

Platonic Academy of Florence. This one, meager preparatory school produced the Renaissance.

If I were to be honest to history, I would tell about the influence of Plato and Aristotle on The Renaissance in a very long and convoluted story. It was not simply the abandonment of Platonic Dualism and turning to Aristotelian reason that made the difference, but it was much more complicated than that. In one his films, Francis Schaeffer mentions that the Renaissance was based on Aristotelian humanism. That is incorrect. It really had a lot more to do with a very deliberate turning away from Platonic-Christianity (actually Platonic Dualism re-packaged into Gnostic Christianity) to pure, unadulterated Platonism. This didn't happen by accident but by a deliberate choice by one man, Cosimo Medici.

It took a lot of time and thought but I eventually figured out that the Dark Ages were not the result of pure Platonic Dualism, but Dualistic Christianity . . . which had been heavily influenced by Plato during the Church's early formation through the form of the Gnostics. There were two things that happened at the end of the Middle Ages which laid the ground work for the Renaissance. It was the rediscovery of the original and pure Platonic writings as well as those of Aristotle. In an ironic twist, as Christianity had evolved deeper into Platonic Dualism, during the first couple of centuries they neglected, discarded or even burned the original Platonic writings because those manuscripts (written by a mere man) were on the earthy side of the Dualistic divide. This was another example of the Catch 22 of Dualism. Platonic teachings encourage you to devalue or ignore the earthly . . . until you finally ignore Plato himself. In the first few centuries, the Church, under Platonic Dualism, eventually considered Plato as earthy and on the inferior side of the divide . . . although some church leaders elevated Plato as a de facto Christian. So his general teachings had been internalized into the Church (thus spiritualized) and kept while the actual writings were discarded. In other words, Plato's teachings had been

stripped from the man and Christianized during the period of the early Church. The Renaissance was simply the act of returning to the man himself. I will explain more about what I learned about that early Christianization of Plato in the next chapter.

As the Medici family and their students rediscovered pure Platonic ideology, they began to interpret his writings in a secular light rather than within the Christian framework. They had no choice, because their financial and thus psychological stake was outside the Church. As Cosimo (the godfather of the Medici family) was growing older and approaching death, he bought the entire works of Plato and became infatuated with his thoughts on eternity (much more than the Church's views). While Plato was still a novelty at the time, only a couple of generations later, Lorenzo, Cosimo's grandson, wrote, "Without Platonism man can be neither a good citizen, nor a good Christian."

So, rather than thinking that the better realm was the Christian-spiritual one (as defined by the Church at the time) the higher, more excellent realm began to include secular concepts such as the emotions. Love, beauty, hate, sadness and joy were now important again . . . whereas before, they were only important only if they were related to Christian-spiritual subject matter. Within the city of Florence, it was becoming permissible, and then chic, to enjoy the beauty of a rose growing out of the dirt in your garden, as much as you had enjoyed the rosette, stained-glass window of the Dromo before. You could enjoy a musical piece about romantic love, rather than just about love for God, Jesus or Mary. Even the whole concept of the romantic is from the root word *Roman*, which was analogous to *Italian* at the time. A better term would have been "Florentine" because it was really in Florence where ideas of romance were rediscovered. So this new or neo-Platonic view was still "other-worldly," but no longer of a Christian definition.

A thoughtful Christian at the time of the Renaissance would have had some joy in the

changes because important human experiences, such as the emotions, were important again. God delights in the creative abilities of man, which were, once more, an essential part of life. However, that joy would have been short-lived because the Renaissance did not have its feet planted on a foundation of Biblical Christianity, but on the back of Plato himself.

Mixed into this situation was also the new discovery of Aristotle's writings. While being neglected in the Christian world, Aristotle's writings had been translated from Greek into Arabic and preserved by Moslem scholars throughout the Moslem world. This now included northern Africa and Spain. One Arab philosopher, Averroes was born in Moorish-controlled Spanish territory in 1198. He became a great student of Aristotle. The writings of Averroes, and of thus Aristotle, eventually made their way east to Paris, where Tomas of Aquino (also known as Tommaso d'Aquino in his Latin name) became intrigued with them. Tomas eventually became one of the greatest theologians of the Middle Ages and had a powerful influence on Christian theology from that point forward.

Indirectly, Tomas' interest in Aristotle was influenced by the Medici's as well. He grew up as part of a rich family just south of Rome. Surely he had attended one of the Greek prep schools that the Medici's had ushered in, where he had been exposed to the Greek classics.

Tomas evidently had been greatly influenced by Aristotle's view of logic and reason. Aquinas attempted to inject reason, but an Aristotelian, perfect, unfallen, reason back into Christian thinking. This movement within Catholicism was referred to at times as Scholasticism. It was a powerful movement in the pre and post Reformation Catholic Church. My wife Denise graduated from the nursing program at the Catholic college, *St. Scholastica*, in Duluth, Minnesota, named in the honor of that movement.

This brings us up to the virtual doorsteps of the Reformation. The Western world by this

time was divided between three main watersheds. The first was the old Christian-Platonic Dualism of the Dark Ages followed by the new Aristotelian-Scholasticism of Tomas of Aquino and the third was the new, secular- humanism that was based on the rediscovery of and direct influence of Plato. Another way of describing it was the; 1) Christianized Platonic view of the Dark Ages, 2) Pure Platonic and Aristotelian views of the Renaissance and the 3) Christianized Aristotelian views of the Scholastics. These three belief systems formed the three valleys from which the rivers for the next thousand years would flow.

The simple tenant of the first view says that the universe is divided between the seen and unseen worlds and only things of the unseen world are important. It would go on to say that the unseen world, in this case, is the same as the Christian-spiritual world. Some of these Christians would argue that the cosmos was totally decimated by the Fall of Adam. However, many sensed a totally unbiblical concept that God had created the cosmos inferior even before the Fall of Adam. This view was strongly held by the Gnostics, but even later, some Protestant leaders voice the same concept. Even John Calvin himself made comments like, “Even if man had remained in his integrity (never fallen) still his condition was too base for him to attain to God.” Did God really create man in an inferior condition? How could he be perfect but yet created the imperfect?

The Secular Humanists, coming from the pure Platonic watershed, state that the unseen world is also the most important realm. But, rather than being defined with Christian labels, it is defined by human labels. This unseen world includes human emotions of love, happiness, faithfulness, beauty etc. In this system, which was at the heart of the Renaissance, man’s senses become the measure of all that is. Therefore the term “humanism” is applied.



The last system of belief, following Aristotle's original concepts, simply states that reason is the only absolute and can lead us to all truth. If the second system was the foundation to the Renaissance, then this third system was the foundation to the Enlightenment and the great age of discovery and science known as the Age of Reason. The historical impact of these two philosophers, Aristotle in northern Europe and Plato in southern Europe, is exactly why the Renaissance happened in the south and the Enlightenment in the north. Aristotle's high regard for reason was also the watershed for the French Revolution in 1778-1794.

Ironically the French Revolution deposed the Aristocrats, whose name came from Aristotle, and slaughtered them in the Reign of Terror (also the reign of the guillotine.) Estimates are as high as 40,000 Aristocrats, including clergy and government sympathizers were killed in a matter of days. In the climax, in October of 1794, the rebels marched into Notre Dame and crowned a prostitute (some say she was really just a dancer) as the new Goddess of France, the Goddess of Reason. Reason, that is Aristotelian, perfect reason, was the new religion of France. Atheism and Aristotelian reason were now in vogue, and would quickly spread westward.

These simple rebels did not perceive this great irony. The Aristocrats, whom they despised for their corruption and complete loss of connection with the common poor people, were the fruits of the belief in the infallible reason of Aristotle. They did not grasp the notion that reason was indeed fallible, and unlike Aristotle's hope, would not lead to bliss. It wasn't until the horrible wars of the early twentieth century before this new hope in reason would run its course ending in a terrible despair and the suicides of many philosophers who had hoped in it. Out of those ashes of despair, like the mythical Phoenix, rose the post-modernists, who, like the swinging pendulum, greatly devalued reason. One extreme was exchanged for its opposite.

The American Revolution was different from the French one due the positive influence of the protestant Reformation. There was a deep seated concept of the fallenness of man including man's reason. So when the American Revolution did occur, although Jefferson himself may have been under Aristotle's spell, most of the founding fathers recognized the need for checks and balances. No one could be fully trusted, not the aristocrats, nor the king, nor the people and not even the Church.

If you were to follow the legacy of these earlier European philosophical threads into Protestantism, you could see an almost geographical distribution of the influences. In those days, travel was on foot or horse back and there was no instantaneous information exchange like there is today. Some specific philosophical or Christian thinking could suddenly end on the sandy beaches of a river, or where a mountain range sprouted up . . . both due to the impedance of travel.

The high regard of reason of the Catholic Scholastics ventured northward and eastward from Paris into Scandinavia, Germany and the UK. This would include Gothenburg, Sweden, the birthplace of the Volvo and southern Germany, the birthplace of the Mercedes. Those cultures were deeply influenced by the rational thinking and became the springboard for the Enlightenment. It also became the springboard for the deep-thinking forms of Christianity, such as Calvinism. However, Protestant Christianity did not simply divide into those denominations heavily influenced by Aristotle and those by Plato. The entire church was heavily influenced by Plato from its conception, so there was no part of the Church that did not see things with at least a little Platonic-Dualistic tinting to their spectacles. Yet, on top of this ancient Platonic influence, those denominations, such as Lutheranism and Calvinism were more greatly influence by the Catholic Scholastics and thus Aristotle.

The more Dualistic and mystical thinking of Plato, both in the old Christianized-Platonism and the purer neo-Platonism forms had its greatest influence within the reach of Florence including the little Italian villages of Renazzo di Cento, the birthplace of the Lamborghini and nearby Modena, the birthplace of the Ferrari. This influence would cover the area we know as the Latin cultures of Italy, Spain, France and Slavic areas of central Europe. In a convoluted sort of way, it worked its way into modern Protestant thinking through the likes of the Czech Jan Hus and Moravians and later Jacob Arminius.

The old Platonic-Dualistic Christian thinking eventually evolved into the more super-spiritual forms of modern Evangelicalism, especially the charismatic branches. However the protestant church became so splintered and labyrinthine during the past two hundred years, it would be very difficult to make blanket statements.

Getting back to my car riddle, I will simply say that the motto of the Volvo car company is “Quality and Safety” and similarly for the Mercedes. It doesn’t take much of a stretch to see how such values are based on Aristotelian concepts of logic and reason.

On the other hand, the Ferrari and Lamborghini appeals not to the reason, especially when you consider the cost, but to the emotions . . . the sleek, sexy lines of the cars combined with the adrenalin of speed. Teenagers function from hormones and emotions enough already . . . insurance companies realize that the last thing they need is a car that is based on the same. The concept of the “other,” in this case the emotions, as being higher or better than reason were taken directly from the Platonic-Dualism play-book of the Renaissance. Prior to the Renaissance, the Dualistic divide separated the Christian-spiritual from the physical. Afterwards, with the re-discovery of Plato, the division became between the reason and the emotions with the human-centered emotions taking the higher ground.

Another riddle is which part of Europe is most famous for its cuisine? In New York, or any major city, would you find more Italian and French restaurants or more German, British and Dutch restaurants? The answer is obvious. The Latin, thus Italian, cultures were far more interested in the upper story realm of the senses, including culinary taste, and the northern European became far more influenced by the logical aspect of Aristotelian philosophy. To them food was plain and only the means of providing the greatest nourishment in the most efficient way.

When I started to discover this fascinating course of history, I knew that it would not be a sanitized project of basic facts but that this history would intertwine with my own personal life in intimate ways and indeed it did. Before I moved on to figure out that very personal connection, I was still puzzled how this whole concept of Dualism even got a toe-hold in the early church. After all, much of the New Testament was made up of writings by the Apostles warning about these unscrupulous non-Biblical influences on the infant Church. I had spent a year studying history from the Renaissance forward. But my curiosity was not settled. I went back to Amazon and other book sellers, looking for the ancient texts that I would need to solve this riddle. I knew that I had to first, take a swing back, and spend another year researching the earliest points of Church history. I had to discover how, precisely, the very foundations of the Church were influenced by these extra-Biblical views of reality.

Butterflies in the Belfry, Serpents in the Cellar

Chapter Fourteen

Gnostics

My sophomore year was my first year living in the dorm at East Tennessee State University because I had lived with Tom in the ministry training house during my freshman year. Once I had some Christian training under my belt, I choose to move into the dorm my second year. My roommate, Bill, moved into the dorm with me so that we could start a ministry among our fellow residents. The cornerstone of such a ministry was a Bible study held in our room.

Through that Bible study I got to meet a lot of interesting characters, some with no Christian background, some of them with a mix of church affiliation. My most memorable one was a nerdy-looking guy named Steve.

I found Steve fascinating because I couldn't pigeon-hole him. He said that he was Catholic but he didn't fit any of the Catholic stereotypes that my Baptist upbringing had disposed on me. He did attend mass at the big Catholic cathedral in town, but his major spiritual input came from a small group that he was involved with that went by the unsophisticated name of "The Full Gospel Group at Hank's House." Since Steve had been attending our Bible study faithfully, I felt it was only polite to respond to his many invitations and accompany him to the gathering at Hank's.

Hank was an interesting middle-aged gentleman who wore an obvious toupee that gave him a perfectly-styled John Davidson hair cut. However the perfect hair appeared on a much older face, at least older than John Davidson's 1975 face. He wore un-cool dark green polyester pants and white, button up shirts. It may have even been a leisure suit, I can't remember for sure. His attire—as well as his personality—fit with his daytime job of being some type of traveling

salesman. He spoke in a booming, confident voice always accented with “Praise God-da!” or “Jaeeeeeesus!” in every breath. I could hear Hank well before I ever saw him. He was hard to visualize in that humble wood-framed home, which stood just off campus, because the living room was packed with far more people than at a fraternity party during rush week . . . and Hank was not a tall man.

Hank was obviously more than just the host of the meeting. He was the teacher, song leader, motivational speaker, dictator and of course the incessant center-piece. The man scared me to the point that I kept my distance. When he called the meeting to order most of the crowd immediately took a seat on furniture pieces or on the floor at Hank’s feet. I remained standing in the arched doorway of dining room. I wasn’t too conspicuous because much of the crowd had to spill over into other rooms of the house and others, besides me, had chosen to stand.

Hank began in a chanting prayer of praising God followed by verbal nonsense . . . obviously attempting to give the impression that he was speaking in tongues. Immediately the entire room, except for myself and maybe a few other visitors, burst into chaotic chanting and nonsensical verbal pandemonium like someone had flipped switch. The tongue-speaking session soon evolved into a total dis-inhibition of the expression of emotion. Some people were standing and dancing while some were falling over in a trance—some were laughing hysterically while others were crying uncontrollably. Mixed with the gibberish were occasional outbursts of intelligible words such as “Praise Jaeeeeeesus or “Praise God-da.”

Like turning the switch back off, Hank said, “Amen” and raised his hand to quiet the crowd. He then launch into a sermon. The oration consisted of him reading a passage from II Peter, “For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’” Then

he closed his big, black Bible with shiny, gold-edged pages. Taking off his reading glasses, letting them dangle from his reddened-leathery neck on a gold chain, he looked over the silent crowd and told a story.

“I was making a sales trip to West Virginia this week. While I was in one office, a man looked at me and, out of context of what we were talking about, commented, ‘You must be a Christian . . . because I see the glory of God in your face.’” Hank smiled and continued. “Then I called on another customer across the state line in Virginia. The receptionist in that office looked at me and said, ‘I can tell you have the joy of God in your life.’”

Hank smiled again, and added, “You see . . . I got in trouble a few weeks ago from preaching the Gospel during my sales calls and I promised my boss that I would try to refrain. So this week, I didn’t say a thing about the Lord to see what would happen. But the glory of God is so full in my life that it can’t be hidden . . . no more than trying to hide a flaming torch under a paper bushel. I sensed that God was saying to those customers, regarding me, ‘This is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’”

The mob, which was crammed into the little house, seemed very impressed with this thinly-veiled self adoration. Hank then looked over the group and said it was time for God to heal their affliction. A couple of men, later I was to learn who were deacons, took a dining room chair and placed it directly in front of the leader, but facing the crowd. Hank stood up and looked across the group and asked, “Who’s sick?” One by one people came forward and sat in the chair. Hank made the immediate diagnosis of each person and it was the same . . . one leg being shorter than the other. This was despite the fact that they complained of a wide variety of symptoms. Then he would kneel in front of each one, lift their legs so that one ankle was resting

in each of Hank's palms. Then, in an oblivious slight of hand, pushing up their pant's hem on one side with his thumb, exposing more and more of their sock, Hank made it look like that leg was growing. It was a very simple kindergarten illusion at best . . . but the crowd was completely mesmerized. "Praise Jesus . . . Praise Jaeeeeeeeeesus," was being mumbled across the group. I personally was feeling a little sick myself but for different reasons. After each "healing" the patient would jump up and shout, "Praised God-da I've been heeeel-da . . . I feel great!"

Then Hank looked around the room and asked, "Where's Mildred . . . I've heard she's been in the hospital."

In a few minutes, a middle aged lady appeared from a recliner in one of the overflow rooms. She walked with a limp and an aluminum cane in her right hand, being helped by another lady on her left side. Hank grabbed Mildred by the shoulders and turned her around to face the crowd. "Now tell your brothers and sisters what's wrong with you."

The uncomfortable lady explained that she had a serious back problem and had just had surgery to remove a disc but was still in a lot of pain. Hank sat her on the chair behind her and asked for prayer and the laying on of hands. Then he anointed her forehead with Wesson Oil from a Dixie paper cup. Next he knelt in front of her, took her ankles in his hands, which alone caused a grimace on her face, and began to do his leg lengthening trick. When he was done he told her to stand up. He helped to jerk her up . . . which produced another grimace and a high-pitched squeal. Then he tried to force her to bend over to touch her toes . . . to which she let out a painful bellow. Hank pushed her back down in the chair with his right hand on her head . . . in an aggressive, almost angry manner. He said, "There's sin blocking this healing . . . does anyone have a word of knowledge?"



One of the deacons stood up and raised his hands above his head, rolled his eyes in the back of his head, like he was in some type of trance, and spoke in monotone, “The voice of God says that Mildred has unconfessed adultery in her life.” To this announcement, poor Mildred began to sob. Hank . . . in my opinion looked quite happy, like his failure to heal had been vindicated. He asked for some of the women to take Mildred into a bedroom and to pray with her for repentance.

Before the night was over, Hank also, unfortunately, selected me for an involuntary healing. He announced to the group that God had revealed directly to him that I suffered from severe back pain. I denied it, which seemed to tick him off. He did sit me in the healing chair and tried to do the same leg-lengthening trick on me. As he was pushing up the hem of my jeans on the left side, making it look like my ankle was getting longer, I kept pushing it back down with my hand. He abruptly ceased his healing exercise and gave me a really hateful look. The short man spun around so fast that the inertia of his toupee caused it to twist on his head, moving the part to an oblique line across his scalp. He again called for a word of knowledge. The same deacon repeated his trance-like posture and announced . . . directly from God . . . “This boy does not have faith and has grieved the Holy Spirit.” I didn’t sob . . . but I did feel very sad, sad about every thing I had seen that night.

When I had discovered how the Medieval Church had been influenced by Platonic Dualism, I wanted to go as far back as I could and try to find out how this secular philosophy had entered the Church in the first place. My search eventually led me to the Gnostic Gospels.

The Gnostics were the first expression of Dualism in the early Church. It is at this point

that my true journey intersects with the fictional *The Di Vinci Code*. The book was based on some of the writings of the first and second century Gnostics. One of the Gnostic Gospels—the *Gospel of Mary*—implied that Jesus had a deeper relationship with Mary Magdalene than the rest of his acquaintances. This relationship could have been interpreted, with a little greedy-imagination, as romantic. Around that epicenter, the whole *The Di Vinci Code* story revolved. But some of the other Gnostic writings, such as the *Gospel of Thomas*, implied almost the opposite. There women were presented so far inferior to men that could only enter heaven if they became men first.

But the un-Biblical, Dualistic thinking forced the Gnostics to take one of the two positions. Jesus simply couldn't be both spiritual and physical, of both the ether and the cosmos. So, in the *Gospel of Mary*, he was fleshy and not divine. This was the path that the *The Di Vinci Code* story took. The other choice the Gnostics could make was that Jesus was only divine and never material. But the Dualistic position, which they held firm, forbade them from philosophically considering Jesus as both.

Some Gnostics concluded that there were three levels of humanity. The most basic being the physical or material men and women who were no more than animal in human disguise. They had no hope of redemption. The second were the psychic forms, meaning those with a soul inside a material body. This second group had the possibility of redemption, although most would never seek it because of their material influence. Finally, most Gnostics considered themselves as the pneumatic, which were spiritual people whose bodies weren't even material but more of an illusion or vapor. These people were somewhat born redeemed and above all the others with a secret and very personal understanding, knowledge or gnosis (Greek for

knowledge) of God. The Gnostics and their writings were eventually rejected by the main Church, but not after a couple of hundred years of intense struggle. The Gnostic influence, however, lingered—perpetually.

An incredible book, *Against the Gnostic Protestant Gnostics*, by Philip Lee, traces the Gnostic influence from its early origins through the Protestant church of the twentieth century. While I don't personally agree with everything that he says, Lee's work is brilliant, requiring much research, knowledge and thought and helped me a great deal in my personal quest.

The reason that the Gnostic teachings were rejected by the main Church was not because they did not accept the divinity of Christ, as Dan Brown, the author of *The Di Vinci Code*, suggested. It was far more complicated than that. The wise Church fathers recognized that the Gnostics were centered, not in a true Judo-Christian philosophy but in a Platonic and Zoroastrian Dualism.

It is hard to trace exactly when the Gnostics originated. Some of their thinking preexisted Christ by a few hundred years, in the form of Jewish and other religious sects such as the Essenes. Lee points out that during periods of chaos in the real, material world, then the Gnostic way of thinking is most attractive. This only makes sense because the main tenant of Gnosticism is that this physical world doesn't really matter after all, only the heavenly one. At the time of the Essenes, Israel had been recently conquered by the polytheistic Romans. This physical world wasn't making a lot of sense to them . . . with evil winning out over good. Because of this, their aspirations of an earthly theocracy and Jewish state was vaporizing. In that context, mystical thinking was becoming more and more attractive. They could use their theology to transcend the material world around them.

Many of them first withdrew physically into the wastelands, such as the area where the Essenes lived, on a high rocky outcropping above the Dead Sea . . . a place called Qumran. The pre-Christian, Gnostic sects at Qumran were the transcribers and keepers of the Dead Sea Scrolls for the two centuries prior to Christ. Their famous scrolls not only contained many Biblical texts, but also writings about their personal beliefs, their customs and even their day to day activities. Some of their extra-Biblical writings described their beliefs in absolute Dualistic and mystical terms. Some of this thinking, a couple of centuries later, was mirrored in the beliefs of Christian Gnosticism.

The people of Qumran believed that this world was sharply divided between good and evil. This division was along the lines of Plato's impressions, with the spiritual, and of course God himself, good and the material earth evil or inferior. They did not carry it as far as the Zoroastrians, believing that the spiritual or heavens were likewise divided between the good divine and the evil divine. Later on, some of the Christian Gnostics did adopt these Zoroastrian ideas as well, separating the evil, Old Testament God from the good, New Testament God.

The application of this form of Dualism at Qumran was evident in their civil scrolls. They recorded that they believed in a totally sovereign God. To account for evil in the world, they figured that some people were born evil and some born good. The ones controlled by the "Prince of Light," were good and those controlled by the "Angel of Darkness" were evil. They would not have the free will to choose evil on their own. Somewhat like the Zoroastrians, there was no crossing over between these groups . . . no opportunity for repentance in other words. To account for the fact that good people sometimes did evil and evil people sometimes did good, they believed that this Dualism could be amalgamated. For example, one set of scrolls describes the in

-processing of new members. They were literally judged, as percentages of good or evil, by body type and later, once the community got to know them, by their behavior.

The word *gnosis* is simply the Greek word for *knowledge*. However, it is a far cry from the gnosis that Socrates or Aristotle aspired to. It was more of a Platonic-Dualistic knowledge that dwelt within the ether. This Dualistic knowledge was not obtained by any type of schooling like any other types of knowledge (what some Evangelicals would call head-knowledge) but came directly from God—fully formed and articulated. It was a very convenient and lazy type of knowledge.

My experience at Hank's house is a modern example of this super-spiritual gnosis. The deacon had knowledge, or gnosis that came directly from God . . . about Mildred's adultery and my grieving of the Holy Spirit. He had never met me before and probably didn't know Mildred well enough to have any logical insight into her private life. But that didn't matter; the knowledge came directly from above and didn't need to be processed through the human senses of seeing, hearing or even thinking. The scary thing about it is that no one could oppose this "knowledge" because doing so would be opposing God himself. That is why this type of gnosis is so powerful, so alluring and so treacherous. This ties, regrettably, to the economics of self worth (ESW). Hank's personal value was increased when the reason his bogus healings didn't work was the fault of the one being healed. The deacon scored many ESW points with Hank, the rock star, by creating scapegoats for his failures. Gnosis, as you see, is very handy for those who claim it and are skillful at using it.

This form of super-spiritual knowledge has always been attractive for Christians because it can also be used to manipulate others for your own gain, leaving you looking very spiritual without exposing the raw intentions of your evil nature, which remain hidden neatly in the

trenches of your cellar. A more mainstream use of this kind of gnosis is where pastors and other Christian leaders use the method to manipulate congregations to do about anything they want. All he has to do is to say, “God says” or “God wants you to do such and such.” The more acceptable verbiage in most Evangelical circles is “God spoke to me,” “God convicted me,” or “God showed me.” A few guys in my Navigator group were able to close the deal on engagements to attractive, young women using such tactics.

If anyone even attempted to challenge the gnosis, which is supposedly directly from God, they appear even more at fault for opposing God himself. Selfish intent, emotional or social factors are written completely out of the equation and the claimer of the gnosis is left without true accountability. So this notion of super-spiritual gnosis is a very useful tool in the hands of Christians, who happen to also be broken, fallen, sinful, selfish creatures who are dealing with their own ESW. The original Christian Gnostics also found a boost to their ESW, theologically, because one of the tenants of their beliefs was that they were above all other Christians. After all, they were *pneumatics*. They were chosen to be pneumatics by God because they deserved it. In their thinking, they had the right to look down on everyone else. It also made it extremely tempting to assume that you were a pneumatic, which had a higher value in God’s economy.

The first Church that my wife and I attended together, while living in Ypsilanti, Michigan, was a very loving place and growing in numbers by leaps and bounds. The church came to a juncture when we had to choose to either build a new building or have two Sunday morning services. This wonderful group of people began to polarize along the lines of to build or not to build. The older members, who had built the first building and carried a large debt for a decade, were obviously opposed to building again. The pastors, who envisioned a mega-church on that site some day, lead a large group of the younger members who wanted to build.

The climax of this discussion came at a congregational meeting one Tuesday night. It would turn out to be one of my most disappointing events of my young Christian life. The meeting started out cordial . . . then spiritual. What do I mean by “spiritual?” Representatives from each side gave prepared speeches on how God had “spoken to them” telling them that we should either build or not build. Both sides backed their gnosis with tangential scripture. The pastor, who carried a huge amount of spiritual clout, shared what God had spoken to him (gnosis) that morning during his devotions. He quoted from Isaiah 54:2, “Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes.” Many of us were ready to build at that point . . . that is until Kevin shared.

Kevin was one of our senior and well-respected members and elders. He had been part of the original church congregation who had suffered through a long and draining building program twenty years earlier. He also carried the perspective of a well-respected and successful businessman. God had spoken (gnosis) to him that week with two verses. The first one was from Proverbs 22:7, “The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.” Then he flipped through his Bible until he came to the New Testament verse, I Corinthians 6:12 “ . . . I will not be mastered by anything.”

Things eventually got ugly . . . very ugly . . . leading eventually to a nasty church split and many hurt people. How did God give divine gnosises on both sides that were diametrically apposed? As the very wise Abraham Lincoln said, regarding the Civil War (Christians on both sides were claiming God’s gnosis as supporting their cause):

The will of God prevails. In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both may be, and one must be, wrong. God

cannot be for and against the same thing at the same time. In the present civil war it is quite possible that God's purpose is something different from the purpose of either party - and yet the human instrumentalities, working just as they do, are of the best adaptation to affect His purpose.

Both men in our church were good men, but, who had a personal agenda. Their personal agendas were not all bad. But, in acceptable fashion, they recruited God's gnosis, or "God speaking to them" as the nuke-option in a war of words. That night, this culminated in the proverbial unstoppable force meeting the impermeable wall . . . God's gnosis against God's gnosis. Most the time, unfortunately, it is one sided. A Christian will use this nuke-card to get their way, and their opposition is left standing speechless and feeling undeserved guilt having ever opposed God to start with. It is an enticing and addictive tool of behavior within Christendom.

A couple of years ago there was a trial in my home state of Tennessee where a pastor's wife shot and killed him in their bedroom. Reading some of the transcripts, and watching some of the court room video tape, it appeared that the couple faced some of the same financial troubles that many couples face. However, the wife reports that she felt oppressed by her husband, who always used a spiritual high ground in all their arguments. She had an insatiable, but silent rage that eventually led to the brutal act. Maybe that's true or maybe not . . . after all she was fighting to thwart a conviction of first degree murder. But, it wouldn't surprise me. In my search to try to understand my fall, I eventually realized that I was capable of such psychological masquerades, as is any man . . . or woman.

It is somewhat of a no-win situation for the poor victim of this manipulation technique. It



is the reason that the Medieval Church enjoyed so much power . . . giving them the only keys to the spring of life-giving water. The draw of this from of Christianity took people into its web like psychological cocaine.

If you were to take a time travel machine back to the first couple of centuries and searched for the Gnostics, you might be a little disappointed. They would not be that easy to find nor were they confined together under one flag in the same way that Mormons are today. In an article about the Gnostics, published in 1964 by Arthur Darby Nock, he stated, “You could not have found anyone in Corinth to direct you to a Gnostic church: the overwhelming possibility that there was no such thing.” Yet, at the same time the mainline church had many people who thought in Gnostic ways. Phillip Lee writes, “Very few Gnostics were to be found outside the main body of the Church.” One reason it was hard to pinpoint Gnostics was the fact that they seemed to appear at totally opposite ends of the religious spectrum.

In one area, the Gnostics were extremely ascetic, legalistic and structured. Those groups followed more laws than the Levites could ever fancy. They lived apart from this “evil world” in every way that they could. Some ate only bread and drank only water . . . water from a special spring or well. Some of them sat on tall poles for weeks to separate themselves from the evil world. The concept of self flagellation, or beating their evil, human flesh almost to the point of death, originated with them and was carried into the Middle Ages by the mainstream Church. Even the whole concept of the monastery has its roots in this line of thinking, being separate from the evil world.

In other places, Gnostics indulged in every sin that was conceivable . . . some were beyond conception. They had no shame about sexual orgies and festivals of such gluttony that it put the hedonistic, non-Christian, Romans to shame. It was nothing for them to have open sex

with everyone or thing that moved, women, men, children and even animals. Even the murdering of their enemies was acceptable. Paul may have been referring to these Gnostics in I Corinthians chapter 5 when he said, "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife."

So how could these two polar opposites be of the same philosophical breed? The common denominator or key dogma of Gnostic thinking was extreme forms of Platonic and Zoroastrian Dualism. They considered this physical earth was not only of less value than the spiritual or heavens, but, created evil. So if this world, your own body, your physical desires and even your physical life is of no significance at best and evil at worst, then you have two options. Like the first group, you try your best to separate yourself from this world. Or, like the second group, this world is so insignificant that it just doesn't matter any more. This second group believed that, as long as your spiritual heart is in God's camp, it doesn't matter what you body does. This is exactly the kind of thinking that Paul opposed in his letter to the Romans, in Romans 6:1, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"

Some Gnostics, somewhat like the Zoroastrians, went so far as to believe that the earth was the essence of evil, created by a hateful, evil, Old Testament God. A loving, good, New Testament God was bringing salvation through Jesus. But, this Jesus could not be pure, perfect and divine and also have dwelt in this evil earth. So he either had to be less than God, opening the door for this idea of Jesus marrying Mary and having a family in *The Di Vinci Code*, or not physical. Simple verses, such as John 21:12 -14 are extremely important when confronting such hearsay. In that passage, even after the resurrection, it is implied that Jesus has a real, physical,

human body:

Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

As I've mentioned, the early Church fathers in their wisdom confronted this Platonic Dualism that had found its way into many parts of the Church. Through the council of Nicea (325 AD) a good attempt was made to put it to rest. But, the horse was already out of the barn. Gnostic Christians were a minority within the Church but a significant minority with a majority of influence. When their brand of theology was being confronted by the main Church, rather than disappearing, it simply was absorbed, like a lot of Roman polytheism, into the Church culture. The Gnostic air was already in their lungs.

I could write much more on what I learned about this early Church history and how Platonic Dualism continued to flourish within the walls of the central Church, through the Dark Ages . . . and yes, even to an imitation bamboo table in downtown Cairo. Here, however, I will only take the time to expose only one, but a very important, avenue of influence.

There is virtually little debate that Augustine of Hippo was the greatest Christian theologian of the Church's first 1000 years. Some would argue the greatest ever. There is no way to over-estimate his influence on the thinking and shape that the young church took.

He was born in the small village of Tagaste, in the area of Hippo-Regius (for Royal Horses) in what's now part of Algeria, in 354 AD. The ancient name stood for the place where Numidian kings often resided with their horses. Augustine's Mother, Monnica (spelled with two

“n”s) had a great influence on her son and was a confessing Christian. To further his education, his parents sent the teenager off to Carthage, the Roman capital in north-African, which was only a two-day’s journey away. There he greatly increased his knowledge of philosophy and Christian theology . . . as well sowed a few “wild oats.” One of the seeds he sowed came back as a son whom his mother helped raise.

Augustine also, besides being enticed by the beauty of the women of Carthage, was enticed by different schools of thought . . . especially Manicheanism. Augustine became deeply engrossed by this Christian, Gnostic cult for the next nine years of his life, even converting his father to this faith upon his return to Tagaste. If it had not been for his mother’s contempt for his new-found-religion, he may have never returned to the mainstream Christian fold.

Manicheanism was a Christian sect, although most Christians would not consider it Christian at all. This sect followed the teachings of Mani of Persia. Mani was a wild man, who wore a brightly colored coat and traveled throughout Persia and western Asia with his staff and preached with great charisma. His flamboyant style gave root to the term “maniac,” which literally meant “a crazy person” in Latin.

Mani drew strongly from Zoroastrian, the main religion of Persia at the time, as well as Gnosticism. This Gnosticism included the type of Gnostic-Judaism that existed at Qumran although Mani considered himself a Christian. There is also some reliable evidence that he traveled as far as modern India and China and had an exchange of ideas with some Buddhist thinkers at the time.

Augustine was only able to break the spell of Manicheanism through the prayers and nagging of his beloved mother, and the fact that the cult relied heavily on superstitions and even astrology. It was difficult for Augustine to continue to hold to such irrational beliefs as he

intellectually matured. After his studies advanced, he returned to Carthage to teach rhetoric. To further his studies, and to continue his own, internal journey, he sailed for Rome.

As the emerging capital of Christianity, Rome did not offer Augustine the safe-heaven from Manicheanism as his mother had hoped for because it too was infiltrated heavily with the sect. Later, he moved north to Milano to learn at the feet of one of the Church leaders, Ambrose. Ambrose himself had been a faithful follower for years of another Gnostic cult, Marcionism. This cult was also a Gnostic cult, holding the premise that the Old Testament God was evil and different from the New Testament, good, God.

It was still hard for Augustine to embrace Christianity fully. He considered himself somewhat “tutored” into the Christian faith from Dualistic Manicheanism by Plato’s dualism, being helped along by a semi-ex-Gnostic, Ambrose. As Augustine fully embraced Christianity for the first time . . . he also, in some ways, exchanged his Manichean Dualism for Platonic Dualism . . . which he thought would be more compatible with Biblical Christianity. This was not so strange, because some Christian theologians at the time, and in later centuries, considered Plato as a type of de facto Christian. I don’t think that they realized that Plato seemed so congruous with Christianity because the Christianity of the fourth Century had already been tainted by Platonic teaching during the Greek and Gnostic conversions of the previous three centuries. It’s a little bit like meeting your father for the first time as an adult but not realizing that he was your father. You might say, “I really like that guy for some odd reason.” You like him because he looks like you and thinks like you. He looks and thinks like you because he helped to conceive you.

I’ve walked through our garden and yard and observed birds’ nests in the trees at eye level. It amazes me that they are so skilled at finding that tiny hair-sized blade of grass or twig

and weave it into their work of art with only a rigid beak as a tool. Sometimes they find a man-made object, such as a silver-plastic icicle, which had fallen off our Christmas tree months earlier. They weave the silver thread into the plain, brown nest like a decorative accent. As Augustine wove his deeply thoughtful theology, over the subsequent decades (he died in 430 AD) he included many tenets of Platonic and a little Zoroastrian philosophy. These thoughts were unfortunately far more than decorative and regrettably far less conspicuous than a piece of silver icicle glistening in the bright noon sun.

I really didn't know a lot about Augustine prior to my personal journey except that a charming old city in Florida was named after him. As I traced the influence of Plato and the Gnostics in early Christianity I noticed how the influence seemed to deepen and congeal after the creeds and before leading into the Dark Ages. Through my study of church history, I also began to realize, for the first time, how profound of an influence that the deep thinking of Augustine had on this period of Christian history and for the subsequent thousand years. Of course many of his ideas had a very positive influence on the development of the Church. But, still, I had a great inkling that Augustine had something to do with this further absorption of Platonic ideas within the Church, even though he made a strong stand against the more severe positions of Mani.

When I read Augustine's pivotal writing, *The City of God*, which was written soon after the Visigoths sacked Rome in 411 AD, my suspicion was quickly confirmed. In his writings, Augustine makes it very clear that he had a great respect for Plato. He also acknowledges, as I discovered myself, that it was the dualistic influence of Pythagoras that made Plato stand out from other Greek philosophers. Quoting from *The City of God*, book VIII, first in chapter 4:

Of the pupils of Socrates, Plato was so remarkable for his brilliance that he has deservedly outshone all the rest . . . Socrates excelled in practical wisdom;

Pythagoras favored contemplation, and to this he applied his whole intelligence. It is to Plato's praise that he combined both in a more perfect philosophy . . .

Then, in chapter 5 of *The City of God*, Augustine adds:

If, then, Plato defined a philosopher as one who knows, loves and imitates the God in whom he finds his happiness, there is little need to examine further. For, none of the other philosophers has come so close to us (meaning Christians) as the Platonists have, and, therefore, we may neglect the others (but not the Platonists).

Augustine begins chapter 6 with:

The Platonic philosophers, then, so deservedly considered superior to all the others in reputation and achievement, well understood that no (material) body could be God and, therefore, in order to find him, they rose beyond all material (physical) things.

Later in the chapter he adds this profound summary:

The Platonists . . . argued that whatever exists is either matter (physical) or life (spiritual); that life is superior to matter; that the appearance of a body (soma) is sensible, whereas the form of life is intelligible. Hence, they preferred intelligible form (spiritual) to sensible appearance (physical). We call things sensible which can be perceived by sight and bodily touch.

Augustine ends chapter 9 praising both Plato and Pythagoras again, this time because

they looked to the higher, spiritual realm. Then, in a fascinating twist, he starts chapter 10 of book VIII with the same verse that I used previously (Colossians 2:8) warning Christians about not being taken captive through non-Christian philosophies. So he acknowledges the risk of flirting with Greek philosophy. Yet, he believed that Plato was the exception. He adds later in the same paragraph that the Apostle does not mean to reject all secular philosophies because God had manifested himself to some (implying Plato) even though he lived before Christ. He also never mentioned verse 9 of that chapter, “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (NIV). This verse is really opposed to Platonic Dualism. But, as I later recognized, Augustine saw the similarities of fifth-century Christianity with Platonic thinking because the fifth-century Church had already been greatly influenced by Plato.



I have to say that I agree with Augustine, in a way, that there is sometimes great merit in the observations of secular men and women. God has made many truths in this world self-evident. However, the error of the non-believer, as well as often the believer, is the conclusions that they reach. Without a humble studying of scripture, along with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, our corrupted reason can easily reach wrong conclusions. Because our reason as opposed to what Aristotle believed, is indeed defiled we must take care about becoming dogmatic over issues that are not blatant.

In summary, Augustine had repented from the troughs of Manicheanism and its radical Gnostic-Dualistic thinking, but still, almost ghost-like, some of the influence continued to haunt him for the rest of his life. His view of the universe was forever tainted. He made further statements in his *City of God* that reflect this ghostly remnant. He speaks of the physical life as inferior and can never fulfill. He speaks of how when man reaches heaven, he will no longer be weighted down by his “animal flesh,” which is a very Dualistic way of looking at the world.

I am tempted to return to Dualism’s later historical journey from the post-reformation church, all the way up to my little white Baptist church in Tennessee and to my Navigator experience. I could follow this vein even to the bamboo table and the black hole of confusion that materialized in the center of it. With this historical information, I could also solve the riddle of the rabbit hole and land of wonder. However, it isn’t that simple. The veins of Platonic Dualism of the Gnostics and Augustine, the Neo-Platonic Dualism of the Medicis of the Renaissance and the Aristotelian influence of Averroes are entwined together like long strings of spaghetti tossed randomly on a terra cotta, Roman, kitchen floor. I will try to bundle those things into some general patterns, before I launch into the specific, and negative, effects of these Greek philosophies on modern Evangelicalism and as part of my personal curse.

Butterflies in the Belfry, Serpents in the Cellar

Chapter Fifteen

A Divided Present

In the opening scene of the film adaptation of John Osborne's play *Luther* the reformer is standing in a cathedral-turned-church when a man comes down the aisle with a dead man in a wheel barrel. The man pushing the wheel barrel lashes out at Luther saying something to the effect that "This man's blood is on your hands." In the scene, Luther, stands distraught in anguish over the violence that his thesis had unleashed.

I am sure that the Catholic vs. Lutheran bloodshed, which had begun before Luther died in 1546, was very difficult for him, a peaceful man, to bear. However, the play and movie presents a very non-historical version of Luther, one that is wishy-washy and plagued by constant doubts.

But the bloodshed did come and it was terrible. Before long, the Catholic vs. Lutheran bloodshed became a three-way fight that included the Calvinists. There were many conflicts throughout Europe, but one of the most notorious and bloody was the Thirty Years War. In those three decades it is estimated that casualties, dead and wounded, could be measured in the millions. The violence, using period weapons, was no less that what we saw between the Shiites and Sunnis in Iraq during their civil war.

The Thirty Years War, and the subsequent lesser wars for ten-times that period, certainly had political (non-religious) rationales with power struggles between the major European countries. In some regards you would have to say that it was entirely political because the concept of a Christian, an authentic, Biblical-Christian, war is an oxymoron. However, it did start with a theological disagreement and was, at least on an emotional level, thus sustained.

The three main warring fractions had one thing in common. While, like all of Christendom, they had a Platonic-Dualistic heritage . . . these three in particular had a great deal of Aristotelian influence. The northern Europeans clearly had strong scholastic ties, and Luther and Calvin came out of that same line.

A few years ago I had the great opportunity to have dinner with one of my old college buddies, Ken, in Johnson City, Tennessee. Ken and I share a lot of common experiences. We lived in the same house for a couple of years and went on a couple of memorable, cross-country trips together. Ken was one of the coolest guys I had known in college. He was a professional musician, earning some pocket change playing in local clubs. He was basically a James Taylor impersonator although he would have found that description offensive. But, I mean it as a compliment. After all he looked very much like James Taylor (of the seventies) with his long brown hair parted in the middle inside a scarf rolled into a headband. But more than that, he played and sang so much like James Taylor that if you listened to a recording of Ken you would assume that it really was James Taylor.

I agreed to meet Ken at a strange, but very popular, Mexican restaurant that was literally . . . although tastefully . . . constructed out of trash. I know it is hard to image but you would have to be there to appreciate the aesthetics. The interior walls were old jars cemented like bricks and the tables were old wooden cable spools. Old tires created an exterior wall.

As Ken and I laughed over our rich memories, the conversation naturally led to what I call the “where are they now” segment. There’s a few old college friends that I still have contact with. However, since Ken still lives in the same town as where we went to school, he has contact with many more.

The church that Tom invited Bill and me to, when we were still in high school, was a Calvinistic church. Maybe, because our spiritual roots were within that church, more so than the Baptist church that we grew up in, most of us continued down Calvinistic lines. I still consider myself a Calvinist.

Ken gave me the hard news that the old (and wonderful) church that we had attended throughout college went through an ugly split. Eventually one of the churches that came out of that split was excommunicated by the whole denomination.

I first asked Ken what was meant by “excommunication?” I had not been in that denomination since college and could not remember church rules. Ken shared that their application of excommunication was according to Romans 16:17, 18:

I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.

In other words, the people in church A, and their entire denomination, were to avoid the people of church B at all cost. This was hard because many of the people had been close friends before the split.

Next I asked Ken, since he was an elder of church A, what church B had done that was so horrible that it justified such church discipline?

Ken had always had a sad, Saint Bernard look in his repertoire of expressions, and he flashed that particular gaze . . . then took a bite of his burrito. After swallowing he glanced back up, “Well . . . it is very hard to explain. It has to do with some very complex theological issues about the division between the soul and reason and the penetration of total depravity. I have a

seminary degree and it's hard for me to grasp.”

It may seem odd to some people that it wasn't something like the pastor having sex with the women of the church, elders stealing money or the worshipping of idols in the church basement that caused the horrible split. It was where two pastors precisely came down on a very particular theological (one might say metaphysical) concept. But the issue was so important to that denomination that it warranted, in their eyes at least, a church division and excommunication.

By telling this story I am attempting to give a glimpse of the climate at the time of the Thirty Years War. The French and German Catholics, some of the Lutherans and the Calvinists were very devoted to splitting theological hairs and the division between these hairs became the grounds for excommunication, anger, hatred and eventually murder. I don't mean to overlook the fact that some of these divisions were not trivial. Some of them were enormous, such as Luther's original 95 Thesis against the Catholic Church in Rome.

In a gross, oversimplification of the problem, Aristotelian philosophy through the vein of Averroes and Thomas Aquinas had significant repercussions at the time. Aristotle's main tenet was that reason was the highest human virtue and was infallible. He had coined the term “Philosopher-King,” based on the concept that the smartest men, considered the philosophers at his time, should be king because they would always do the right thing . . . because they were smart and had a great command of logic. Aristotle believed that reason was capable of leading anyone to absolute and total truth but not giving full credit to man's moral dilemma.

What I call the pendulum-effect played a role here. The pendulum-effect is where one

extreme gives way, after a period of time, to a swing in the opposite direction. For five hundred years of Church history . . . due to the Platonic Dualism's influence on the Church . . . reason had been placed on the inferior side of the Dualistic divide, as a function of the inferior—or evil—physical mind. This is why almost all science, math and other developments came to a virtual standstill during the Dark Ages.

There was such a hunger for reason, by the thirteenth century that once it was re-introduced by Averroes and Thomas Aquinas, the pendulum started to swing in its favor. Reason is a God-given ability and should never be considered inferior or contra-spiritual as Dualistic Christianity had (and still often does) considered it. Reason was created by and is a gift from God. It is as godly, in its unadulterated—unfallen form, as faith. The great tragedy of the Dark Ages was a Church without reason.

Once the pendulum started swinging in reason's favor, it had a momentum which carried it beyond a Biblical understanding of reason, as good but tainted by the fall like everything else, to the more Aristotelian position of it being the most perfect and highest virtue. Ironically it was this very issue, or at least a spinoff from it, that caused the church split in Johnson City.

When you elevate reason to an unsustainable level, unsustainable by fallen sinful men, it too can lead to great troubles . . . and it did. When you, as a Christian, believe that you can reach all theological and perfect truth by learning and reason, then, those who disagree with you must be either stupid or evil, but most likely both. It becomes easier over time to demonize them, separate from them, dislike them . . . and eventually kill them.

It became clear to me that this issue of doctrinal disagreements is, like everything else, intimately tied to the fundamental principle of human behavior . . . the economics of self worth (ESW). Theological distinctions, like all distinctions and comparisons, are closely tied to that

psychological principle. As I said in an earlier chapter, the most basic tool for, wrongly, determining self worth is comparing yourself to someone else and proving that you're superior. But that does not mean that we have to give up the quest for correct theology.

This same principle is responsible for all religious wars. True, honest theological disagreements are really important . . . but wouldn't ever lead to bloodshed or even hateful words unless they were tied deeply to this personal, insecurity-based, psychological issue of proving one's self worth. Therefore, like the Sunni versus Shiite, the Calvinists grew to hate the Lutherans as inferior and worthy of death.

Hate does lead to murder. On my way to the train in Cairo, I began to hate my boss, Curt. As Jesus pointed out, hate is a Siamese twin to murder. The only thing that separates hate from murder is the fear of getting caught. I honestly wrote in an earlier chapter that I would have felt pleasure in the crash of his plane, but I would never have considered, personally, causing the crash . . . because I would be afraid I would be caught and I would have to live with the guilt.

I could have, and in fact did, demonize Curt as the most evil man I had ever known. My feelings seemed profoundly clear to me, to be based on reason. I could support my mind-set from a theological stand point. There were many Christian principles that were clear—in my eyes at least—that had been violated by Curt. I could draw lines of demarcation . . . Curt the demon . . . us the victim. That was the only way that I could have, erroneously, given myself any personal value . . . at a time when I felt like a total failure.

However, I was still—at that precise moment—living in the Evangelical land above the rabbit hole where there was a veneer of self-righteousness. I didn't believe in the effects of sin, both new and old, on my own perceptions about Curt. I didn't recognize that my perception and reason had been tainted by Adam's Fall (though my genetic tendencies), my parents' sin (who

did not raise me perfectly), the sin of those around me (who had abused me as a kid), and my own personal sin of wrong thinking and behavior. I didn't recognize that the emotional damage by others and my own choices could taint the rational perceptions of my senses, leaving me just as guilty as Curt himself . . . if not more so.

With so much death and destruction in the aftermath of the Thirty Years War, the pendulum moved in the other direction. There were many small house churches and other Christian groups that began to spring up. In those churches were Christians who were sick and tired of the intellectual debates about theology. They rightly recognized that the highest Biblical virtue was love, not reason. Thus, before long, the pendulum began to fall to the opposite direction again, back toward a Platonic-Christian Dualism, where reason was antagonistic to faith. Reason was thrown back into the inferior side of the Dualistic divide and faith elevated as its righteous opposite. This new way of Christian thinking was called the Piety movement. Philipp Jakob Spener, considered the father of Pietism, proposed a "heart religion" to take the place of "head religion." You can understand their frustration with the decades of religious wars.

Spener's godson Nikolaus Ludwig, Graf von Zinzendorf (I can't imagine the width of his name tag) was one of the main apostles of the movement helping it to spread from Moravia to other parts of Europe and directly influencing John and Charles Wesley and eventually the founding of the Methodist church. The Methodists strongly influenced the Second Great Awakening which created the Bible belt and many para-church organizations like the Navigators.

I wish that I had the time, or the knowledge, to talk about the continuing evolution of both Christian and secular Western thinking for the remaining three centuries . . . up until the imitation bamboo table. The story becomes more and more complex through the remaining years



and it would take hundreds of pages to do it justice. Philip Lee does a much more scholarly job of it. But I will speak here in only gross generalities.

I had mentioned previously that if you look at a flow chart of the roots to modern Christian and secular thinking, it would look like strands of spaghetti thrown wildly on the floor. But even that is an understatement. Spaghetti noodles are well-defined strands that keep their shape unless they are over-cooked, like I've been known to do.

A better word-picture would be like rivers running into a confluent sea. But these wouldn't be ordinary rivers. These rivers would be found on some strange Star Trek planet. There the rivers are bright colors, like streams of paint . . . red, yellow, green and pink. Once they flow into the giant sea of modern western culture, they mix and interact. In places they blend uniformly into a dull gray while in other areas small streams of pure colors venture far out into the sea, or combine with only one or two other colors.

Starting from the Thirty Years War, there are four main Christian headwaters to this sea. These would be the Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinistic and Pietistic movements. From these factions came several lines of secular thinking as well. However, since I am mainly interested in the roots of the American Evangelicalism I will focus on the later two. I will also, almost completely ignore voices of enormous impact on both Christian and secular thinking. This includes men such as Renee Descartes (1596-1650) John Locke (1632-1704) Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) Charles Darwin (1809-1882) Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939).

The First Great Awakening in American (1730s) was the fruit of the Calvinists. With their high regard for reasoning, this movement created the Ivy League Schools and some of the best Christian expressions of theology, art and music in America. However, when a movement

has too high of a regard on reason, at the expense of the emotions, the movement often “goes to seed” as dead orthodoxy. This is exactly what happened with many of the churches that were the heart and soul of the First Great Awakening. Many of these huge, stone structures stand like pigeon-dunged monuments to a forgotten time, in the heart of every major American City. Some of them still have services . . . giving lip-service to an absentee landlord God that no one knows. Others have been converted to private homes or office buildings. Others have become community centers where New-Age spiritual groups, Transcendental Meditation or Yoga classes can meet.

When reason is held as too high of a virtue, godliness is then considered a product of logic and order. This order is taken to such a precision that it becomes almost a mathematical formula of obedience and behavior. John Calvin himself developed such a system of obedience in Geneva, with precise rules of social order and behavior with severe consequences, even execution, if defied.

Switzerland is known as a land of precision. Their trains run to the minute. Their clocks are the world’s standard and their unequivocal workmanship in engineering. John Calvin himself is the one most responsible for that standard. This high standard of order and precision in both engineering and behavior is also exhibited in other areas of Europe which John Calvin had a great influence, such as parts of Germany, Scotland and the Netherlands.

The height of the Calvinists going to seed corresponded closely to the reign of Queen Victoria of England (1837-1901). The culture at the time, so-named “Victorian,” was not a reflection of the queen herself but of the post-Calvinistic age. She was a product of the culture just like everyone else in England and America were at the time. The Victorian age was a time where the precision of behavior was at a pinnacle. Some historians referred to this age as the

“cult of respectability.” The standards for Christian gentlemen and ladies were impossible for anyone to aspire to. It was in this crazy time that Lewis Carroll wrote his story about Alice, falling down a hole and finding a world of total chaos and irrationality. The Land of Wonder was the antithesis of the Victorian world above . . . and in some ways far more real.

It is no accident that the best-selling book was written by Rev. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (pen name Lewis Carroll) who was a clergyman of the English high church. The adventures that he wrote about were based on a real girl, Alice Liddell. It is also intriguing that Alice’s father was the dean of Christ Church at Oxford, which some would consider the “bull’s eye” of Victorian England. Alice, as an adult woman, even became a romantic interest of Queen Victoria’s youngest son.

To add a troubling dimension to the story and a real irony of ironies, there were rumors that Rev. Dodgson’s relationship with the young eleven-year-old Alice, or maybe her thirteen-year-old sister Lorina, may have been more than “Platonic.” Something happened soon after the time of the writing of Alice in Wonderland that caused an abrupt and ugly breakup between the houses of Dodgson and Liddell. Skulking gingerly, around the edge of gossip, you can only imagine that if Rev. Dodgson had molested one or both of the girls, at that time it would have been played out exactly that way. No words would have been spoken outside the families and no involvement of the police that would implicate anything but a perfect Christian Veneer. So the irony is, if these speculations were true, the Rev. Dodgson had lured Alice Liddell’s interest by creating a story where she, as the fictional character, escapes the world of pretend-Victorian perfection, into a world of chaos and confusion. If indeed he did molest her or her sister, his luring would have been from their perfect Christian world into a real, ugly and confusing world . . . and a reality that everyone had to pretend didn’t exist.

As another commentary on the Victorian period, the creators of the clothing label “Victoria’s Secret” was profoundly insightful and effective. The concept of the company is that sexual enticement, through risqué clothing, is normal (and it is the way God designed men . . . to be sexually aroused for their mate via visual experiences). But, during the Victorian age, sex, being a manifestation of the evil physical body, was hidden or pushed down into the cellars as something dirty and “worldly.” I’ve already shared about my mom and her embarrassment over being pregnant with my sister. Even sex within marriage was considered foul. A great parody, of both the Catholic and Calvinistic views of sex during the Victorian, age are hilariously expressed in Monty Python’s movie, *The Meaning of Life*. Thus sex was the shameful “secret.”

Within Victorian Christianity, many new rules of decent behavior were laid on the backs of “good Christians.” Most of these were social mores but some, such as Sabbath laws, blue laws and banning of alcoholic drinks also became civil laws, attempting, as Calvin had done in Geneva, to mandate the ideal Christian behavior on all subjects . . . be they Christian or not. Besides the obvious Christian laws mentioned above, there were many others that were as diverse as forbidding the baiting of bear and the wearing of bathing suits. It was during this time that the northern European and American cultures became “square heads” as a good Spaniard friend calls them. According to Antonio, square heads are the people who live in these areas that are very bright but have no emotions. They don’t laugh and they don’t cry.

A high regard for reason doesn’t have to dismiss the emotions. The problem was that Platonic-Dualism had not been eradicated during the Reformation. The Calvinist, via their Aristotelian influence, did bring the value of reason up to the good realm but left the Platonic-Dualism of the old church in place.

When I read *The City of God*, I noticed that Augustine, many centuries earlier than the

Victorian age, spent a lot of his literary energy criticizing the theatrical productions in Rome because of their ability to corrupt the virtues of their society. I had assumed that the theaters were showing nudity and depravity of all types, maybe even the literal killing of actors as part of the play. But what I finally realized was that Augustine considered the arousing of any emotions, even laughter, sadness or fear, as corrupting. He commented that Plato opposed theatrical productions for the same reason. This is a perversion of how God has made us.

In practical implications, the Calvinist churches had wonderful Biblical and theological teachings but the emotions were minimized. In the 1800s you could sing about the glory of the sanctifying works of Christ with beautiful, thoughtful words and music, but if you ended up sobbing each time you sang it—being overcome by the pure emotions of it—you would be frowned upon. If you were a man, sitting upright on the hard pews with a white, starched collar, you would probably be pulled aside and told, “Hey Chap, good heavens, get a hold of your faculties, you’re acting like a woman!”

In response to the Calvinists and Lutherans, the Pietists moved in the opposite direction, pulling the emotions up to the upper story in an exchange for reason, which they allocated back down. But, in pure Platonic form, raw emotions were considered, even by the Pietists, as being on the dark side of the divide along with all other functions of the brain. So, to enjoy the emotions, like God had intended for them to be enjoyed or experienced, the Pietists had to be re-labeled with spiritual names such as “joy” or “being moved by the Holy Spirit.” This is really a profound and truly pivotal development within the Evangelical Church.

The emotions would never have had to be re-labeled them if the Church had not, falsely, considered them as opposing faith . . . on the wrong side of Dualism. So rather than being angry . . . they were “grieved” (a spiritual experience). Rather than feeling euphoric, manic or giddy,

they were “joyous” (a spiritual fruit). Or to have total inhibition of emotions (such as Hank’s house) they are “slain in the spirit” etc. This gave them the permission, but a dishonest permission, to show real emotion . . . even in extreme forms. But within mainstream Evangelicalism, if a church worship service can stir up a lot of emotions, then it is interpreted as a work of the Holy Spirit. If you were to refer to the service as “very emotional” rather than “very spiritual,” that would not go over so well with many Christians. If there was good teaching, but no stirring of the emotions then it leaves them feeling that it hadn’t been worship at all because emotions eventually became the equivalent of the working of the Holy Spirit. But if you look at the real workings of the Holy Spirit in scripture it is far more concrete than what we experience as emotions. It was speaking in a language that they had never studied, not some strange gibberish. It was real, supernatural works, such as healing people instantaneously from dreadful diseases.

Pietism’s powerful influence did make its way into the thinking of the Wesley brothers (John and Charles) who were “richly warmed” by the spirit. Methodism became the backbone of the Second Great Awakening that began during the revival at Creedance Clearwater in Kentucky and spread like wildfire . . . but on horse back, through the area we now know as the Bible belt. My little Missionary Baptist church was planted by some of the circuit riding revivalists of the eighteen hundreds. The Piety movement also became the well-spring from which the charismatic movement was drawn as well as many of the para-church organizations . . . including the Navigators.

I began the previous chapter with a story about Hank and I will end this one with its sequel. One day Steve came down to my dorm room. It was a few months after the experience at Hank’s house. Steve asked me, “Mike . . . do you have any clothes to wash? I’m out of quarters

and I'm thinking about running up to my house (which was only about five miles away) and doing a load of laundry. Wanna come?"

"Sure," I said, always wanting an opportunity to save a little money. I grabbed my white draw-stringed musty-smelling duffle bag stuffed with dirty jeans, shirts and underwear and followed him down to his car. We loaded them up in the trunk of his faded red Karman Gia. In a few minutes we pulled up in front of a typical middle-class ranch-styled home. "Hmm," he muttered, "Mom's car's here."

I had met Steve's mother only once, the night of the full gospel meeting. I would have to admit that it was the first time in my life that I found myself attracted to one of my friends' mothers. It was creepy. But honestly, she was a beautiful woman. She was thin with deep blue, cobalt, eyes and long, dark hair. I knew that she was "old" . . . pushing 40, but her tan, fit body could have passed for that of a thirty-year-old.

We journeyed through the house and Steve shouted a couple of times, "Mom? Mom?" Secretly I was hoping that she would be home, because, like a work of art, her face was striking. When Steve had no response, he opened the door down to the unfinished basement and their laundry.

Once we had the washing machine loaded up we sat down to talk. I sat on a five-gallon paint can and Steve on top of the dryer. Steve was, oddly, looking into a Catholic monastery that was "full gospel" located near Ann Arbor, Michigan. I was questioning Steve if he really was ready to commit to life-long celibacy.

About that time, we heard a creak in the upstairs hardwood floor. Then we heard another one in the same area. Steve jump off the dryer and said, "Oh, mom must be home. I bet she's in bed with a migraine."

We jogged up the basement steps and to our shock, saw . . . or caught . . . Hank and Steve's mom tiptoeing out of her bedroom in their sock feet. Hank was in his usual white dress shirt but it was un-tucked at the waist and his brown oxfords under his arm. Steve's mom had two empty wine glasses in her right hand.

It seemed like two deer caught in the headlights. While Steve's mom seemed embarrassed, Hank, in his confident—guiltless—style, immediately spoke like nothing was wrong. “Hi boys,” he announced. “Nancy and I were just spending some time on our knees praying for the lost in Johnson City. I always start my prayer time with a little wine and bread . . . communion with Jaeeeeesus before I get down to business. Isn't God great?!” He gleamed with an ear to ear smile. His personality was so compelling I wanted to smile back and say, “He sure is . . . thank you Jaeeeeesus!”

Steve seemed even more embarrassed than his mom and we quickly returned to the basement to finish our clothes. I didn't say a word and Steve was equally quiet. It wasn't until we were pulling up in the gravel parking lot behind our dorm that Steve spoke, “I know that looked funny . . . you know, with Hank and mom alone in her bedroom during the day when dad's at work. But you've got to understand . . . Hank is the godliest man I've ever known. He is full of the Holy Spirit. Mom considers him her best friend . . . but it's a Jesus-centered relationship . . . strictly Platonic.”



Butterflies in the Belfry, Serpents in the Cellar

Chapter Sixteen

The Railroad Grade

I've done a lot of hiking in my life, from the Appalachians to the Rockies, to the Alps, the Himalaya and even on some, unnamed, dry and rugged mountains in Oman and Sinai that looked like they had been imported from the surface of the moon. Now I do most of my hiking in the North Cascades. If you haven't been in them, their ruggedness is truly amazing. Like their name reflects, they are covered with vertical spikes that give them the appearance of mythical castles or cathedrals of such grandeur that it would be even beyond J.R.R. Tolkien's wildest imagination. These ice-accented crags rest on almost plumb valleys of avocado-green velvet, which plunge deeply into their abysmal floors.

One of the most incredible hikes that I've done is on the southeast slopes of the twelve thousand foot volcano, Mount Baker. The trailhead is less than two hours from our driveway, but to get there you must drive up a lonely paved road behind the mountain, then transverse a twenty-mile dirt jeep trail of switchbacks that take you from two thousand feet above sea level to about four. From that point you hike upward in an old-growth forest for another fifteen hundred feet of elevation (five miles of walking). Then you emerge in a gorgeous alpine meadow. This is the only the starting point of this amazing trail, called "the railroad grade."

The railroad grade got its name from the fact that the incline, and I can't remember the exact degrees, is the maximum allowed for a railroad track. The modest incline isn't the problem. Compared to the switchbacks that you have to traverse just to get to this point, it is a piece of cake. The trail is also as straight as an arrow.

The trial's spectacular character comes from its width . . . not its broadness, but its narrowness. It is a knife-edge path that emerges above timberline and takes you on a heaven-bound, three-mile journey up the shoulder of the volcano itself. You end up in the snow fields that merge with the huge glaciers that drape the mountain on all sides like vanilla icing.

Three inches to the right of the trail, during the ascent, is a thousand-foot plummet down the walls of tightly packed glacial moraine. A stumble off that side would probably not kill you, since it isn't completely vertical, but I doubt if you would have much skin left on your body by the time you got down to the valley floor. But again, it could kill you. On the left side, another three inches away, is a gentler, but, still very steep grassy drop. If you fell off that side, you would probably roll end over end, somewhat like Wesley and princess Buttercup in the movie, *The Princess Bride*. As you continue your climb, you are very exposed with enormous geographical features surrounding you . . . so immense that you feel like a flea on the spine of a Seismosaurus. The terror of climbing that trail, especially with a heavy backpack on, is what makes that trip so marvelous.

In order to describe how Platonic Dualism and its little brother, speaking philosophically here, Aristotelian–infallible–logic, infiltrated modern American Evangelicalism I must look again at some of the fundamentals of human behavior.

At this point in my writing, I had to take many long walks along the more local, snarly trails that run like a roller coaster along the edges of Puget Sound. In the solitude—save the crashing of the waves of an early winter storm—I searched for the words to express the solid truth of this Evangelical dilemma which I had encountered. As I walked carefully, I looked for sure footing above the 50 foot drops into the surf. I hope that you can do the same as you read. This chapter would not be a good place for distractions such as reading with one eye on the book

and the other on the TV. I will try my best to weave together, what appears to be unrelated concepts—philosophical history and human personality—into a finale and my profoundly new perspective of how we can think, Christianly, and thus behave.

As I said before, the only one who has the right to appraise our real value is God himself. He made us. We are His stuff. In an earlier chapter I introduced you to what I think is the most basic principle of human behavior and that is the economics of self worth. If you want to explore this concept deeper, and from a Biblical perspective, I highly recommend Robert S. McGee's book and study guide *The Search for Significance: Seeing Your True Worth Through God's Eyes*. If you do the study, especially if you do it with a group, the experience will be like an enema of the soul . . . a purifying and healing enema. Philip Yancey's book, *What's So Amazing About Grace*, is another great complimentary resource.

When we look at this issue of self worth there are three choices, only one of which is healthy. On one side of the knife-edge path is the act of believing that it is our responsibility to earn God's pleasure and that of others . . . but getting enough of a glimpse of the contents of our cellar that we live in a chronic state of shame.

The dangerous cliff on the other side of the path is the concept that it's our responsibility to earn God's pleasure and we have a sense that we've done pretty well at it. For this group, the cellar door to the basement of ugliness is closed and there's a heavy, braided rug thrown over it.

The third, and only healthy choice, is the narrow path along the edge of the blade. That path is the knowledge that in Christ alone God finds us acceptable and his acceptance is total, comprehensive, and planted entirely in grace. It is a Jesus plus nothing situation. I'm not sure why this path is most narrow and difficult to maintain. I'm sure it has to do with the Fall of Adam.

Another name for this process of finding God's acceptance might be *sanctification*. I say "might be" because I really don't believe they are exactly the same, but yet, tightly woven together. True sanctification has nothing to do with our worth nor is it about trying to please God more. Luther's epiphany was understanding righteousness as the *righteousness of God*. If we are granted God's righteousness, what can we do to be more righteous? In what ways is God's righteousness lacking and in need of our tinkering? How can we be more pleasing or not pleasing to God, if He only sees Christ's perfection when He looks at us?

True sanctification is the process of becoming more like God designed us to be so we can live life more to the fullest. If you buy a car, and you want to get the peak performance out of it, it is always best to follow the manufacturer's recommendation for maintenance and service. God was our Manufacturer.

There is a falsehood that contradicts this within Christianity, which is so widespread that I would call it a pandemic. This is the act of mixing sanctification with self worth and it's been happening throughout the history of the Church. The true process of sanctification is almost always, unfortunately, replaced by a Christian system of the ESW. Christians are often comparing themselves to other Christians or to some ideal of "good Christian" or "godliness" with the unpretentious goal of having a better sense of self worth. Again, I am not speaking of how things should be, but how things honestly are.

Our personality type determines which side of the cliff we are most prone to fall off of. I know when I hike up the railroad grade I have this odd torsion of my body, leaning in the direction the steep, but seemingly safer, grassy abyss. My wife, who may have a less fear of heights, carries her backpack straight up.

Unlike some populist psychologists I don't think human personality traits can be easily

pigeon-holed into a few specific groups because the huge number of variables can create an almost infinite number of possible personality traits. The *Spirit Controlled Temperament* was Tim Lahaye's first block-buster book, which was published in the seventies. That book took the Evangelical church by storm and quickly became a best seller and made Lahaye a wealthy man. It seemed like every evangelical church in Johnson City was using it as part of their Sunday school curriculum. It was very in vogue in The Navigators to talk about having a "Choleric" or "Sanguine" personality type. However, Lahaye's entire concept of human personality did not come from scripture, but, in an unadulterated form, from Greek mythology. The Church bought it hook, line and sinker. Until this day it is held as a "Christian" standard for understanding personality and Lahaye has never apologized for it, but smiled, I presume, all the way to the bank.

The book was based on the Greek concept that human personality is the product of four body fluids, blood, phlegm, bile and urine. Thus Lahaye claimed that all people could be classified into these four corresponding basic personality types.

I see human personality as unique as a snowflake with many influencing factors. Christian-Platonic Dualism suggests that our personalities are dictated by heavenly forces alone. What I mean is, we are who we are because of; 1) how God created us, 2) our personal sin or lack of, or 3) spiritual possession—be it demonic or by the Holy Spirit. This is the model that Nouthetic Counseling (mentioned in Chapter Seven) is based on. Tim Lahaye says that we were created according to the four major groups, but he does allow for some mixing. In their raw form, he believes the raw temperaments are destructive. When controlled or possessed by the Holy Spirit, they become very positive.

But if you were to remove Plato's bias in our Christian perspective, and give this physical

world the credit that its Manufacturer intended, then the influences on human personality are far more complicated than that. I would include the three items from the previous paragraph but, as someone who has spent the last twenty-five years working in neurology, I must add quite a few more.

First, there's the genetic influence. This is very different from simply "how God made you." In genetics, God's wonderful creative talents are manifest, but also the effects of the Fall of Adam. In other words there are negative genetic mutations that influence us in many ways. We now realize that most diseases have genetic connections . . . genetics that are not based on God's original intent.

Again I will propose that the brain is not just a bowl of Jell-O to keep our skulls from caving in as the ancient Egyptians thought (okay, maybe they didn't say "Jell-O"). This was also the conclusions of Pythagoras as well as Plato. Plato was emphatic about the separation of the superior psyche (soul or spirit) from the inferior soma (physical body). I deeply believe that this was an artificial and most unfortunate separation.

Genetics can also affect this complex organ, called the brain, in the same way it can the heart or the kidneys. Most Christians would not hesitate to mention that a heart defect "runs in the family." However, these same Christians may reject the fact that people can be born with a tendency toward depression, mania, anger, schizophrenia, violence and, yes, even homosexuality. This view shouldn't shock any Christian because it is totally consistent with the Biblical concept of the Fall. It only shocks Christians when they have been so heavily influenced by Platonic Dualism, de-emphasizing the role of the visible world including the body and the brain.

When I even suggest that the tendency toward homosexuality has some genetic

component, it upsets some of my conservative Christian friends. Why? They say that I'm excusing such behavior. I'm not excusing anything! I have some anger problems. I've already done too much introspection about it and I am still not completely sure why . . . although I have some good ideas. However, even if genetics had a little to do with my anger tendencies, that fact doesn't give me the license to kill people . . . or even permission to be nasty to my wife. But it does help me in knowing how to deal with it . . . and the sense to be leery of it.

I think the reason that some Christians are attracted to this Platonic model of personality, is that everything is so spiritualized that the faults in others can be considered as nothing but pure moral failures. If your flaws are because of your bad moral choices, then—by comparison—my good choices have kept me from the same faults. I realized that this was the same reason that ancient Gnosticism was so attractive. The spiritual people, or pneumonitcs as Gnostics thought of themselves, were created by God to be spiritual because they deserved it. This modern comparison strategy boosts our sense of self worth.

In some ways, this is the same strategy that Hindus used to create the concept of reincarnation . . . to justify their extreme bigotry and racism. They would say, "I am better than you because my skin is of a lighter color than yours. My skin is of a lighter color because in a previous life I made better moral choices than you did." It is really a lame excuse for racism.

Besides genetics, a brain injury can influence personality. If you don't think structural changes can influence the brain then what about all those frontal lobotomies that were done before the nineteen sixties? Personality and higher cognitive processes occur in the frontal lobes of the brain, so when you chop this lobe off, the person becomes zombie-like, and without a personality . . . or if they still have one, it is a docile one.

Besides the obvious traumatic brain injuries affecting personality, there are also subtle

injuries. Hypoxemia (the lack of oxygen going to the brain) can cause injury, especially during birth. One example of a traumatic injury causing hypoxemia later in life is in the movie, *Regarding Henry*. Henry, played by Harrison Ford, went from being an aggressive and ruthless businessman to a kind-hearted family man after the oxygen supply was cut off from his brain from a gun shot wound. I have many patients who have shared similar stories; unfortunately, most of them became obnoxious and hateful after such an event, but for the same reason, a brain injury.

I'm presently following a patient with a form of dementia called Frontotemporal Dementia. This name describes which part of the brain that is affected the most by the disease. The frontal and temporal lobes of the brain happens to be the area of personality and higher reasoning as well as memory.

I was suspicious of the diagnoses because my patient had lived his long life as a very conservative, and what society would consider, a good man. But one day, in broad daylight, a young girl was sitting with her friends at a bus stop in front of his house. He walked up to her and grabbed her crotch. He had never done anything like that before. He and his sweet wife were devastated by his behavior especially after he was arrested and his name appeared in the local paper. If he had been devious, he would have at least tried to hide his actions. He faced prison time and the judge sent him to me for an evaluation.

I ordered a Positron Emission Tomography (PET) scan, which showed a serious defect in the way that the frontal and temporal lobes of his brain was working. The defect was exactly consistent with Frontotemporal Dementia and I was able to convince the judge that it was a brain illness which caused his behavior and he was able to avoid jail time. This is the exception to molestation. Most people, who molest children, do it as a moral act, not from a brain defect.



One of the most common symptoms of Frontotemporal Dementia is what we call dys-inhibition. With dys-inhibition you lose the ability to control impulses. So, the physical, soma has no effect on our “soul?” Platonic Dualism promotes this idea and the Church, unfortunately, has bought it . . . just like it bought Tim LaHaye’s concept of personality types unabashedly based on Greek mythology.

Personality tendencies are also the product of life’s experiences . . . be they good or horrendous. As I went back and explored my own emotional roots, I observed, for the first time, how some events a long time ago have helped to shape my personality tendencies. Again, this is not groping for some kind of excuse to hang my guilt hat on. It helps me to know myself in such a way, that I am suspicious of my own thoughts. It takes me back to Jeremiah, seventeenth chapter (my paraphrase) the heart is more deceitful than all else, and who can really know their own heart? This type of introspection can be a healthy exercise.

During my days in The Navigators, if a girl came into the ministry who had been physically and sexually abused by her father for fifteen years, then hooked on drugs, became a prostitute, and then met Christ . . . we would expect her to be starting with a clean slate. Following our interpretation of II Corinthians 5:17, she would be considered a new, that’s a brand-spanking-new, creature. Not only is she forgiven by God, but, we believed that the past had no consequences on her emotional health or her future. Psychological or emotional factors were worldly and insignificant. To do anything based on feelings was considered worldly. We would expect this girl to go through the same Christian growth flow chart, and at the same rate, as the girl who was raised by wonderful and loving Christian parents. All she had to do was follow the magic formula and she would become a mature Christian within two or three years. Once she was a mature Christian, she would have all the fruits of the spirit and sin rarely. If there

was any delay in her maturity rate, then she obviously wasn't following the magic formula, and it was all her fault. In a duplicitous kind of way, we secretly took joy in seeing someone else fail because, in comparison, it made us feel better about ourselves.

This was Dualism's effect on our thinking. According to us, the damage to the body, mind and emotions had no sequela. Only the spirit mattered. After all, the spirit is fluid and subject to rapid change with just an act of the will, while the physical body is concrete and changes insidiously even with our greatest efforts.

Which side of the railroad grade, which we are most prone to fall off of, is determined by our personality types. Jenkins, Ayzanski and Rosenman were psychologists who, in 1971, coined the very general personality types of "A" and "B." I don't know if these psychologists were Christians or not and it doesn't really matter. They were not creating some new personality category like Lahaye, but simply making observations from large surveys of human behavior. Most people are very familiar with this classification. These general personality types, in my opinion, loosely correspond to which side of the cliff you choose to lean towards . . . and eventually tumble down. But, as I said earlier, I don't want to pigeon-hole people. Some people, who have a type A personality, may behave with type-B traits at times and vice-versa. Some people who start out with one type can evolve over time to the other type. So I don't think it is set in stone. Simply Personality type A is more out going, confident, driven and self-assured. Type B, is quieter, more methodical, sometimes has self-doubt and is less driven.

I tend to be more of a type B personality, but much less than I use to . . . at least than when I sat across the imitation bamboo table from Curt, a true-blue type A. Type Bs tend to live their lives with chronic shame, because they do have a few glimpses into their cellars. These are not comprehensive views, but only glimpses. We have a hard time staying on the trail. It's hard

for us to keep our focus on the fact that God has declared our value as immeasurable, in Christ. We tend to be underachievers and followers because the notion of our inadequacies constantly haunts us.

The type A Christians, lean toward the other abyss. They tend to be out of touch with their cellars but very aware of their successes. Hank was a type A Christian. People from this personality group tend to migrate into leadership positions, such as head of companies, churches or Christian organizations because they are over-achievers. Their self-confidence propels them into such roles and gives others confidence to follow them. They, too, easily lose sight of the narrow trail. It is hard for them to place their value completely on God's appraisal through Christ. The problem with this group is that they tend to lose touch with their sin and they think that they are valuable because they feel that they have "earned it," when it comes to God's acceptance. In practice, they are hard on others, who haven't "earned it." They also have a tendency to use spiritual manipulation to get what they want. For example, they may say; "If you don't do it my way, then you are disappointing God . . . and surely you don't want to do that."

A couple of years ago the national news headlines were, again, full of stories about Christian leaders who turned out to have a very dark side. One of them was Ted Haggard, the pastor of one of the largest Evangelical churches in America and the president of American Association of Evangelicals. It turns out that for years he had been having sex with male prostitutes and using methamphetamines in private. It amazes people, especially people who tend to be type Bs, how someone could stand up in front of thousands of people each week and preach against homosexuality and at the same time be having gay sex himself. The reason is, while the type Bs are too in touch with their sin, or at least not visualizing God's grace enough, the other side loses all touch with their sin. As I said before, the door to their cellar is slammed closed,

nailed tight and a braided rug thrown over it. In their way of thinking, the rules really don't apply to them. This is also why, Jim Bakker could have an adulterous encounter with a young co-worker, and two hours later go on national TV preaching against sin in America.

A few years ago I was watching the evening news show Dateline. That night they had a story about an FBI sting to catch people who were trying to hire hit-men to kill people. The whole encounter was videotaped. One lady, whom I will never forget, was a very successful gospel singer. She sang in a group with her husband and two other men. She was sitting in a white pickup truck in a strip mall parking lot in Las Vegas talking to the undercover FBI agent . . . whom she thought was a hit man. The agent was trying to get her to make herself explicitly clear; because he knew that the video would have to incriminate her in a court of law. She had already communicated through a middleman that she wanted her husband killed. The agent asked her (I have to paraphrase) "Mam, what do you want me to do?"

Gospel singer: "I want you to kill my husband dead . . . but make him suffer first. Can you run over his legs and break them, then drag him down the street and let him lay and suffer for a while before you finish him off?"

Agent: Shaking his head, "Why do you want him dead so badly?"

Gospel singer: "I'm in love with Bill, he's another singer in our group . . . we're having an affair now, but we want to get married."

Agent: "Why don't you just divorce your husband and marry Bill?"

Gospel singer, with a sweet, angelic smile on her face, said, "You don't understand. We are strong Christians and we don't believe in divorce."

When these Christians are caught, you usually see them in what appears to be a great

distress, crying and appearing repentant. The truth is, most the time, their great emotional anguish doesn't come from acknowledging sin . . . but from being caught and exposed. God has known all along about their sin . . . they knew that He knew . . . and it didn't bother them then. The lady couldn't divorce her husband without others finding out about it but she could have him killed in secret. It is horrifying for all of us, but especially type A Christian to have their braided rugs ripped up and their cellar doors and thrown open for the whole world to see inside. Their whole empire of self-worth is decimated in a nanosecond.

At this point in American culture, the type-A personality is considered the ideal. American culture, be it movies, TV, music, in the sports world and in the business world it is considered great to be very self-confident in your own abilities . . . and to never talk about your failures. When I was with The Navigators the type A personality was held up as the ideal Christian personality. We were all told to read a book about being the Leader that God intended all of us to be, which was basically interpreted as being a type A.

I don't believe that the type A personality has always been the Christian standard. During the time of Alice Liddell, I think society considered the quiet, humble personality (the type B) as the ideal. Christian shame, which came along with that ideal, also ran rampant. In that environment, guilt manipulation was the prevailing way for Christians to get their way because most people were very vulnerable to guilt feelings.

I am not condemning these people who were caught in their sin from a higher moral ground. I am simply trying to explain some tendencies of human behavior. I have committed immeasurable amount of terrible sins in my own life. One of the worst, I'm not stating that in God's eyes one sin is greater than the other—but they are of different as far as their human consequences—was about ten years ago. I never lost sight of my sin but felt a huge amount of

deserved guilt. But even with God's forgiveness, I continued, and in some ways continue—present tense—to struggle with extreme guilt and shame. While type As tend to use guilt manipulation, type Bs are very vulnerable to it. One side of the personality coin is not better than the other. Falling off either side of the cliff can be deadly.

When I was in the Chinese restaurant, Curt and I were equally at fault . . . Curt for using guilt manipulation and me for falling for it. We each had our own demons in our cellars that made us the way we were . . . demons that we both denied. I had jumped through every “sanctification” hoop there was to jump through . . . hundreds, if not thousands of hours in prayer, Bible study, training, fasting . . . on and on and so had Curt. Like Luther scrubbing the filthy monastery toilets, day after day, hoping to win God's good pleasure, I too gave all my human effort to exceed the troughs of sin. I thought I had succeeded. I thought I was godly. It wasn't until the dragon of rage, anger, and murder raised his ugly head did I get a tiny glimpse of my inward man.

The Evangelical church holds as one of its foundational beliefs that a new believer enters the Kingdom with a clean slate and has the opportunity to clean themselves up by following simple disciplines, steps or methods. What would it mean if that type of thinking was hogwash? If Evangelicals fail to understand the consequences of the true nature of the Fall of Adam, how every part of us has been tainted . . . but not completely decimated . . . it creates a huge quagmire.

Imagine now, that when you come into the Christian subculture, the ESW is based on your spirituality, both as perceived by other Christians and by yourself, especially your feelings of value in the eyes of God. Instead of having your value based on being a great athlete, America's Idol, or being rich . . . it's having the fruits of the spirit, love, joy, peace and kindness.

Having a spiritual vocabulary helps too. What I mean by spiritual vocabulary is not just avoiding using “dirty” words, but that your speech is sprinkled with spiritual jargon and talk of God’s constant supernatural interventions.

Christians look up to other Christians who talk about miracles, answered prayers and words that reflect the fruits of the spirit, just as we really looked up to Joe and Joy as a godly couple. We would not have looked up to them if we knew in their private life that Joe was taking swings at Joy so hard that he broke the windshield of his VW bug with his fist.

But in reality, the Fall’s effects on the physical side of the Dualistic divide is of immense importance. If the Fall has roots in the concrete, then true repentance is still possible, but it may come at a pace more consistent with a glacier than a waterfall. Human behavior can change and attitudes can transform, but following the laws of brain biochemistry and physics—which God beautifully created—it occurs at a snail’s pace.

When you have a sharp contrast between what you believe about sanctification and reality, there are only two options; change what you believe or construct a veneer superimposed over reality. This is what the Pharisees did. In Matthew 23:27, Jesus called them “Whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean.” This “venerization” is what I believe the Church has done for ages. This was gut-wrenching, but at the same time, liberating revelation . . . that I too had been constructing this veneer. This is the same guise of the orderly world which sits above the rabbit hole and over Alice’s land of wonder. This masquerade was the Christian world I had been living in prior to my fall down the abyss. When I started to figure this part out, it was all starting to make real sense.

Robert Boyd Munger and Andrea Jorgenson wrote a book called, *My Hear-Christ’s*

*Home*. In this book, they describe a simile between Christ coming into your life and Him coming into your house. The point they make is that sanctification is a process of surrendering your house room by room. This is a simile that I would like to borrow from.

Imagine then that we are all houses, but not just ordinary houses. I think it was C. S. Lewis who described humans as “glorified ruins.” We were created by God, for his good pleasure . . . and he was pleased in his creation. We were created as marvelous palaces not shabby huts (as the Gnostics would declare). Look how many times the phrase “it was good,” was used in first two chapters of Genesis. Then sin entered into the equation. The Christian version of Platonic Dualism would have you believe that sin decimated everything of this world, leaving only a wretched, repugnant crater where the palace once stood.

I think a more Biblical image of the Fall of Adam is that the palace is not totally destroyed, but holding all of its original grandeur . . . yet, infested with roaches. While the infestation is comprehensive, including every wall of every room, it does not reduce the entire house to rubble. It is still clearly a wonderful palace.

The homeless people on Seattle’s waterfront are still palaces. But the roaches have penetrated every part of our being . . . our emotions, our intellect, our physical bodies (including our brains), our culture, our history and our spirit. However, none of these areas are worthless or completely wretched even though they are affected.

Evangelicals are often taught, or at least we were, that at the moment the palace is under new ownership (with Christ himself being the buyer) the palace is totally new and instantly restored to its original form. It’s like an episode of *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*. But in reality, even under new ownership, the roaches still thrive, but are hopefully fed less. But these roaches are deeply embedded in their habitat in the real, physical walls of the palace and are very



difficult to eradicate. It is not that God doesn't have the power to vaporize them in a millisecond, but He chooses not to. He, in most situations, seems to leave it up to the system of cause and effect that He authored. This world was created real, with laws that govern consequences of actions and experiences. God usually chooses not to interfere with the incredible way he has made things. Cause and effect is not a result of the Fall, or the character of an inferior cosmos.

But the evangelical community expects that the palace now to be restored from its worthless condition to near perfection . . . overnight! In this false, Dualistic understanding of Evangelicalism, you believe too that the new owner expects the palace to be nearly perfect or he will be very displeased in it. However, in the real, non-Dualistic world, the palace was created glorious but became infested. The instantaneous act at the purchase by the new owner does not mean that the bugs are magically gone. The new ownership is not about restoring the palace to its original glory, but about restoring its valuation. The new owner now appraises the palace with an infinite value. You may ask how does a buyer have the right to reappraise the palace? Don't the market forces do that? As far as you know, roach infested homes, even palaces, have less value.

But in this situation the new owner has the right to set the appraisal because he is not only the buyer, but the builder and, as a matter of fact, the architect. So, like the artist, the architect has the full right to determine the right value of a work. This architect has determined the value of the palace as infinite and, as far as value goes, the roaches don't matter anymore. No more than a clump of dry ice on Mar's southern pole effects my shoe size. This new owner has validated this value by paying an infinite price for His purchase . . . His own blood. The problem of ESW has once . . . and for all . . . been laid to rest. Truly understanding this is the narrow path down the knife edge path and walking it faithfully, I finally realized, would revolutionize my life.

So when you have a palace that is full of roaches, and they cannot be exterminated easily, yet the world around you believes that only low value palaces have roaches, you are left with one choice . . . hide them! Nail up veneer trim over all the corners and baseboards where the roaches habitually enter and exit the walls. Sweep up their excrement and old corpses. Stomp on the few that are still scurrying around the room. Then you get out your caulk gun and run a bead of caulk around every corner, along the floor and filling every hole that a bug could pass. I've done extensive remodeling on three old homes and I've learned that caulk covers a multitude of sins. The Palace then looks pristine—but the roaches continue to thrive and propagate inside the walls, but now more than ever.

What really happened around the bamboo table in Cairo? Now it was finally coming clear. On that infamous night, the baseboards, the caulk, the whitewash was deteriorating before me and cockroaches were pouring out of every orifice of my and Curt's life like a scene in an Indiana Jones movie. But I had been thinking that the bugs, every one of them, were long gone so my entire world came apart at its seams.

Butterflies in the Belfry, Serpents in the Cellar

Chapter Seventeen

So? The Metaphysical Question

Along the shore of the Black Sea, three thousand years before Christ, some ingenious artisan took a block of bee's wax and carved a beautiful sculpture . . . with relatively little effort. Then he packed clay around the wax figure. Next, the clever guy heated the clay form in a very hot oven, until the clay baked and the wax melted and ran out through a drain hole. Next he took a mixture of tin and copper, melted it on the hot coals and poured it into the baked-clay mold. Once it was cooled and solidified, the clay was broken away. Presto, the world's first bronze sculpture appeared!

When I first entered the Egyptian culture, we were cut off from most American influences. Soon, I started to see the American–Western culture slowly melting and running out through my pores leaving only the universal, human culture form. Many things that I had taken for granted as rational, good and natural . . . and maybe even Christian . . . began to melt under the constantly questioning of my Egyptian neighbors and friends, who saw things very differently. The things that were soft wax were really American after all and not Christian. As we try to establish a new way of thinking we have to allow many cultural things to melt away. It is a challenge, but it's not impossible to do. Phillip Lee points out in his concluding chapter of *Against the Protestant Gnostics* that if Ambrose could escape the years that Marcionism held him in its grips and Augustine could escape the troughs of Manicheanism then surely we can escape the Dualism's influence in the twenty-first century Church. I want to give a framework for that change.

Francis Schaeffer produced an important film series titled, *How Should We Then Live*.

Charles Colson wrote a book, similar both in title and intent, titled, *How Now Shall We Live*. These men attempted to summarize their years of thoughtful writings into a “so what” conclusion. In the same tone, I must end my personal journey with a “so what” summary of the things I learned through that grueling progression. It is truly amazing.

If I fail to make these important applications clear, my rantings and ravings may have been in vain. My intentions were not to simply walk through the Christian world causing chaos, like a John Deere tractor pulling a plow through untilled ground . . . without the hopes of planting something new and giving hope.

What would a non-Platonic Dualistic Christianity look like? We have to start with fundamental, metaphysical considerations—specifically creation itself. Plato places a Dualistic curtain, separating the created, seen world, from the created, unseen world and he puts them on a tiered system. This is an artificial division. In a true Biblical perspective, the physical world is not the antithesis of the spiritual but rather each are parts of creation as a whole. Both the seen and the unseen, have the fingerprint of God all over them. The real antithesis of creation is actually nothingness. This is where the great divide really occurs . . . with the metaphysical curtain dropping precisely at this point. Without God, there was nothing. No matter, no space, no time, no quarks, no dark matter . . . absolutely nothing. With God there is all that is, seen and unseen. Before God spoke, there was only empty space with a capital “E.” Everything this side of the point of creation is a miracle or “super-natural.” Did you get that? This is a profoundly new way to think. Miracles include all the things that happen within the laws of physics, cause and effect, biological systems . . . they all are completely covered with God’s fingerprints. I really think this is the point that Albert Einstein was trying to make when he said, “There are two ways to live your life - one is as though nothing is a miracle, the other is as though everything is

a miracle.”

I mentioned earlier that the problem was not in dualism as a concept, but the *where* and *when* of Dualism. So, as I just stated, the where was precisely between nothing and all that is. The *when* is at creation. With most Dualistic views, the where is between the seen and unseen and the when is also at creation. But in that paradigm, then the seen was created inferior or evil. But some who subscribe to Dualism put the *when* as after the Fall of Adam. In that context a good God created a good world both seen and unseen, but the Fall itself totally destroyed the value of the seen cosmos. Both cases end up at the same point of the seen world being inferior but with different sources. In the former, God was to blame for creating an inferior cosmos. In the latter, we are to blame for corrupting the cosmos. I'll put these philosophical considerations in more practical terms.

While I was still living in Cairo I had a desperate call from an American-missionary mother, Andrea, who lived a few miles from us. Her son, who had epilepsy, was having a seizure and was not waking up. I ran the whole way to their apartment. As I passed a pharmacy, I ran inside and demanded a bottle of diazepam (Valium) and a syringe. The pharmacist handed it to me without question. I ran up to Andrea's apartment at full speed. When I arrived her son, Andrew, was in bed and still going in and out of a seizure. His long-thin body would stiffen and shake, before relaxing. There was another American man, Joe, in the room, whom I had never met before. Later I learned that he was a missionary with the same organization as Andrea.

As I was administering the diazepam into the boy's small vein, Joe was simultaneously announcing that the boy was being attacked by demons and that he needed to perform an exorcism. He began to pray loudly that the demon would leave him. In about a minute, the typical time for diazepam to take effect—quieting the rapid firing brain neurons—the boy

stopped shaking and started to wake up. Joe suddenly started praising God for delivering the boy from Satan's influence. In the conversation that followed that event, Joe, in a very confident style, took credit for casting out the demon that was terrorizing the boy's soul.

Having spent my medical career in neurology, I had a different explanation . . . but I made my argument with less coercion than Joe. I explained that, the boy suffered from generalized tonic-clonic seizures. In his case, there's a long complex history that I don't want to go into at this point, I was sure that it was caused by hypoxemia of his brain during birth. When the brain sustains an injury, especially if that injury is in seizure-prone areas of the brain, such as the temporal lobes, there is a tendency for the neurons there to misfire, causing seizures.

Because this seizure was so prolonged, it did put him in some danger. This was especially true living in a place like Cairo, Egypt where the concept of ambulances and Emergency Rooms were outside their paradigm of thinking. I strongly suggested to his mother that I put him on a medication to prevent future seizures from coming.

Joe seemed irritated at my comments, somewhat rolling his Dualistic eyes. He came back with even more confidence that I was not, "looking at it from a spiritual side." He told the mom that she must choose to follow either "God's way or man's way." He added that there is no way he would put his son on "worldly drugs," but he as a godly man, would use prayer to protect him from Satan. Andrea and her husband, with sincere desired to follow and obey God, choose Joe's way.

Joe, like most of us American-Evangelicals, lived in a Christian-Platonic world, where the curtain of Dualism came down sharply dividing the seen versus the unseen worlds. To even consider neuro-physiology, even the wonderful, miraculous brain that God had created, was on the inferior, worldly side of the equation. To put the situation in the upper story, unseen world

was much more consistent with godliness than taking drugs. This included drugs created by smart men and women who were created by a wonderful God with wonderful minds and using the principles of chemistry that God originated.

Our Evangelical culture has deceived us into the mindset that God stands opposed to the laws of nature, rather than as the author of them. Aunt Betty's pneumonia got better through the normal working of her incredible immune system, plus the addition of antibiotics . . . originating in a god-created fungus but perfected in the laboratory under the guidance of men and women using the brains that God has given them. A Christian does not have to embellish the story by adding how Aunt Betty's pneumonia was healed directly by God, outside the natural laws, to give the story more merit. I would assume that God finds rejecting the natural system of healing, which he had created, highly offensive. Also, I believe He, as a God of truth, dislikes lying, especially lying for Him.

As a medical provider, I've often been in situations where I'm either following a patient myself, or know of their medical condition first hand and their name shows up on our prayer chain. It has happened more times than I can count where the prayer chain version had been seriously inflated. A benign brain cyst, that is very common and not serious, can become, on the prayer chain, "A huge, malignant tumor." When the patient is sent to the neurosurgeon, he agrees that the cyst has always been insignificant and should not be operated on. However the prayer chain version becomes, "They went to a brain surgeon and it was a miracle! The tumor was completely gone, praise God!"

I remember such a more unfortunate situation with a lady named Karen in Michigan. I worked in the practice where she was a patient. Karen was diagnosed with lung cancer, and it was very grave. She had started chemotherapy and word quickly spread through the local prayer

chain about her. We did a routine, follow-up CT of her chest and I had the honors of calling and informing her that her tumor was stable. This was the expected outcome of the chemotherapy. Karen's response on the phone was, "Praise God, I knew that He would heal me! This had nothing to do with chemotherapy! God did this, He healed me!"

I tried my best to explain things in more precise terms, that the cancer was still there . . . but she would not hear it. I made it clear that the oncologist certainly wanted her to continue chemotherapy.

Soon the word came down the prayer chain that God had done a miracle, Karen had been completely healed and the tumor was entirely gone. The buzz around the local Christian community continued to spread about the lady with terminal cancer who had a miraculous healing. Due to federal laws about patient confidentiality, I could not correct anyone. Karen never returned to continue her chemotherapy . . . and she, sadly, died three months later.

Philip Yancy's book, "Disappointment With God," starts out telling the story of a promising young, theology student who found out that a man, whom had been supposedly miraculously healed from cancer, later died from it. This caused this theology student's faith to crumble and, eventually, he considered himself as an atheist.

God is not glorified by untruth of any kind. Only Dualism's negative influence would have created the strange environment where Christians feel that they have to constantly make up scenarios where God worked in opposition to the wonderful world that He has made. Hang around Christian groups long enough and you will sense that conversations about God acting outside of His laws of nature are highly esteemed. The term "God thing" is often used to contrast something as not occurring through natural laws, as if natural laws were somehow bad. In these situations, there is tremendous pressure, for Christians, to lie. Your sense of self worth among



Christians is greatly enhanced if you speak in those terms and it has a mesmerizing lure, opium of the soul.

With the Dualistic Christian mind set, all of local history appears only to have meaning if it is tied to the unseen. I found a parking spot near the entrance of the Mall, because God stepped into the natural world and created a supernatural situation . . . maybe some kind of force field . . . that prevented any other car from parking there. According to statistics and traffic behavior, every eight minutes a parking spot opens up in the first row. If you drove around for four minutes then the odds are fifty-fifty that you would get a spot near the entrance. But that explanation would be considered unspiritual.

This is where the circular reasoning of the Evangelical becomes so absurd that it would be fitting for the conversation around the table at a tea party with a mad hatter and March hare. Some Evangelicals would say that every event, from running into Marge at the bakery, to a huge disaster where thousands were violently killed . . . were all divine appointments and this is somehow mixed up with the sovereignty of God. You often hear the clichés “Everything happens for a purpose.” The feeling is that events only have meaning if they are anchored in the unseen world via God’s puppeteer strings. This type of determinism can become suffocating to a culture.

But ironically, these same Christians would faithfully wear seat belts, avoid letting their children walk outside the railings at the Grand Canyon and not look down the barrel of a loaded gun. In the Mad Hatter tea party-type of argument, they would simply say . . . “If you don’t follow safety rules, then you are testing God and this makes Him mad. To punish you, if you test God, he will allow bad things happen.” They still cannot accept that natural laws, created wonderfully by God, have value. The kid didn’t fall and die at the Grand Canyon because they were outside the rail walking on loose gravel, with a low-coefficient of friction, and the laws of gravity pulled them down, accelerating them to a lethal speed. No, it would have to be outside the natural laws, because Plato says the natural laws are inferior. It would have to be God’s direct action to kill the child in order to punish the parents for not watching them more carefully or to “teach the parents patience.”

It is far beyond the scope of this book to look at Islamic history, but as I mentioned before, while the Church was deeply in Platonic Dualism during the Middle Ages, Islam was just entering it. Islam was still engaged in science and knowledge at the end of the first millennium. However, in the last couple of centuries, as Western culture moved into a more Aristotelian-rational, and post-Christian, direction, Islam moved further into Dualism. This type of Dualism, when taken to its logical conclusion, always ends with determinism. If nothing in this world has meaning unless it is attached to puppeteer strings from the unseen world, then the unseen world controls everything and we have no free will. This is why almost the entire Islamic world lives under the thumbs of dictators or monarchs. If they are in power, even if they are cruel and disgusting as Saddam Hussein was, then God must have put them there. Who then, are they to challenge what God has done? The same was true in the West prior to the great revolutions of the eighteen and nineteen centuries. It was only when the climate had changed in the Western culture

that the reign of the Kings could be challenged. Then revolution followed by revolution swept across the European worlds and king after king fell like dominos.

So while most evangelicals would not call the death of a church member in a car wreck an “accident,” yet at the same time, most would wear seatbelts and slow down on icy roads. This is the great paradox. They seem to be saying that wearing a seat belt is the same as prayer . . . it can persuade God to change His mind and choose not to kill you.

One of the most blatant examples of this quirky circular reasoning happened when I was working in the emergency room in Marquette, Michigan. The most hideous things I had ever witnessed was when a four-year-old boy, Sam, pushed the screen door of his house open, ran across the back yard to be with his dad . . . who was on a riding lawnmower. His dad didn’t know he was there and backed over him. Sam’s precious little head was sliced into pieces like a piece of meat . . . and he sadly died in our emergency room soon after. It was horrible.

Sam’s parents, Bob and Clare were also members of our church. In the midst of our grief, the next Sunday one of my fellow elders announce to the congregation from the pulpit that, “God doesn’t make mistakes.” Loud amens followed. Then he added, “This event had an ecclesiastical purpose . . . to teach Bob and Clare to depend on Him!” Does that really make sense to anybody? If so, then we must all be a bunch of freakin’ lunatics. What kind of God do we serve if he slices the brains of four-year-old boys to bits and murders them . . . just to teach his parents something like patience? This God sounds worse than Hitler, or Saddam. It doesn’t surprise me that our churched young people abandon Christianity as soon as they have the freedom to do so. It also doesn’t surprise me that non-Christians don’t want to have any part with a God like that. But as Christians, we have now painted ourselves into a metaphysical corner.

But somehow this great ecclesiastical lesson for Bob and Clare must have eventually

failed anyway. They never recovered from Sam's tragic death but eventually blamed each other to the point of divorce. So, if God murdered Sam to teach them something, but then they remained untaught and if God knows the future, He would have known that they would remain untaught . . . thus His cruel act was all in vain. What's worse, God knew it would be in vain. Mad Hatter, pass the fruit fly jelly!

Every time there is a plane crash where many died but 10% survived, you see elated family members of the survivors talking about how, "God had answered their prayers and spared their loved ones." You can understand their uncontrollable joy but how does this make the other 90% feel? Did God take the lives of their loved ones because they had not prayed hard enough for their safe return? Maybe it was because they weren't holding a rabbit's foot or holding it correctly. Had God allowed them to be crushed then burned to death in horrific pain to teach their spouses patience or because they had some hidden sin? What kind of crazy God do we serve? Can we understand why so many people, like the theology student in Philip Yancy's book, become disillusioned with God when they think this way? I did. It is truly the world above the rabbit hole, which is irrational and peculiar. The land of wonder beneath the rabbit hole only exposes the above world's underbelly.

But, a non-Dualistic perspective would bring the axe down exactly between nothingness and all that is. There is no Biblical division between the natural seen-world and the supernatural unseen-world. Even those terms "natural" and "supernatural" are rooted in Dualism. All that is . . . breathed into existence by the very breath of God . . . is really miraculous. Newton's description of the three laws of motion and gravitation are descriptions of miraculous forces. Einstein's description of the law of general relativity is describing miraculous forces . . . these are not divorced from God! I'm not saying this in a trifling way like a Hallmark card . . . "A flower is a

miracle,” but in a much more profound and metaphysical way.

Hank’s trickery of stretching legs and hearing God’s direct, but inaudible; voice bought about a sense of awe in the eyes of many well meaning Christians. Hank’s sense of self worth was elevated by the attention and the sense of being really spiritual. However, I would think that such behavior was disgusting to God. As I’ve said, God hates lying. Secondly, I would assume that God does not appreciate it when Christians disrespects the way He created the cause and effect of nature.

When our kids were young, we were great fans of super-playgrounds. I think the same company went from city to city to promote their marvelous products. The community would raise a hundred thousand dollars for the equipment and then the parents themselves would assemble the playground. We lived in three different cities where this happened. Our five little kids spent many hours at these sites. They had slides, forts, rope ladders, firemen’s poles, zip lines and gymnastic rings. Oddly I participated in such a build event (I’m sure by the same playground company) about two weeks ago, but not for the benefits of my own kids, which are too old for it now.

Can you imagine that you alone designed, manufactured and assembled the greatest such playground on earth. It had ladders, elevators, long tunnels to slide down, zip lines, climbing walls and you name it. Then you turn the hundreds of kids loose on it as you stood by with great pride, as the designer and builder, to watch.

How would you feel if the rumor got around that the playground is a bit creepy or nasty? After all, there were a few cockroaches sighted around it. The kids methodically stroll around the playground site with less than enthusiasm written on their faces, trying not to touch anything,

thus, be tainted. They walk around between the wooden castle, the swinging bridges and climbing walls, the pirate ships without attempting to use them. But then they walk over, in a huddle, and look at you through the fence. “Can you please give us a piggyback ride?”

Would this make you feel good or not? It’s nice that they want direct contact with you, outside of what you’ve made for them. You wouldn’t mind stepping into the playground and giving a piggy back ride now and then, but it must be very disappointing that they don’t enjoy the wonderful world that you’ve made for them, or even worse, they think it’s creepy or inferior. It would not make you feel so good if they rode down on the wonderful zip line that you created for them, but when they got to the bottom, they announced that they really didn’t ride the zip line but the playground designer stepped in and gave them a personal piggy back ride.

Plato and others started rumors that this wonderful, physical world is inferior to the unseen world. That is a lie! So, speaking metaphysically, how would things be different if you were to purge Dualism from the way that you think . . . when you think Christianly? I believe that it would make a profound difference in every minute of your life. It would literally rock your world.

Christian determinism believes that the way things are is the way that God intended them to be. In that scenario, to try and change the world is working against God’s will. But, without Dualism, you could see the world honestly with real cause and effect and yet uphold God’s great sovereignty and power. You would not have to choose between a God who is in control and the obvious. You would also be spared from the quagmire of reasoning that Christians often find themselves in when they try to make sense of life’s messy experiences.

I believe that Christians should be the greatest of tree huggers as well as animal huggers, stream huggers, Newton’s laws huggers and huggers of the cosmos. This is all God’s stuff . . .

made for His and our good pleasure, not abuse. It is rather bizarre that we, the followers of the creator, have relegated this wonderful cosmos over to the atheistic naturalists who deny that the creator is even there. They instead believe, with just as much superstition and irrationality, in a natural determinism . . . where the accident of the universe has made all that is.

We are earth-people. We were made from earth-stuff. This is our home now, and God is going to restore it, not destroy it. This earth will be our home to enjoy forever. Wim Rietkerk, Dutch theologian, has a wonderful lecture series through LA'bri Fellowship about this positive relationship between people and the created Cosmos titled, *The Coming Great Planet Earth*. He points out that we have a special relationship with the earth, being fashioned from its dirt, and we have a future with it. He looks at scripture that talks about the new heaven and new earth (cosmos) and the word *new* does not mean totally new but renewed.

A long time ago, the Church gave up the natural world as inferior thus the ownership of it was abrogated and was assumed by the nonbelievers. It is like the Church removed God from the natural world and then threw it beside the path. Then the secularist came along and picked up the natural-world and made it a godless-natural-world, and ran with it. It was the Church who took God out, but the secularist sealed it up so God could never be put back in. This is why the natural sciences consider the universe a “closed system” . . . forbidding even the rational discussion of God, or at least the Christian God.

After the secularist took ownership of this seen world, then you could never again talk about natural science and God in the same breath. But no man can live without God forever. So in place of Him, the secularist had to find something inside the closed and godless “nature” box to substitute for Him. They eventually made nature itself god with a Platonic unseen, mystical component to give it meaning, such as The Force, in Star Wars or other “New Age” spirituality.

They also personalized nature, making it seem like a living soul. You hear statements like “Nature intended” (and this is nature with a capital N).

Nature, in its raw form, is now considered the highest standard that we should aspire to. Man, created in God’s wonderful image, is also relegated as inferior to nature in the secular paradigm. The national park system forbids man from cutting a single tree by human hands but at the same time allows a natural forest fire to burn freely, destroying millions of them. They may claim that this has environmental advantages. I’m not an expert on the environment so maybe it does. However, I’m suspicious that this policy is the fruit of post-modern thinking by the secularist that man and God are bad, raw nature is good. You can trace this elevated view of nature all the way back to the French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau who was the first to state that nature is pure and good without man. I would guess that half of my patients demand “natural” treatments for their diseases, rather than “man-made chemicals.” Madison Avenue has cashed in big time on this new view that “natural” is better.

So getting back to little Sam, how would you explain his awful death in non-Dualistic terms that would make sense in a world created by a loving AND sovereign God? These kinds of questions have plagued Christians since the days of Christ.

In the wonderful world that God made, when you push on a door with a certain force, that door moves in the direction of the motion. When a child uses the wonderful brain that God has given him, to visualize daddy and to want him, that child’s wonderful brain can allow them to walk in an upright position. I could go on and describe each stage of the accident in terms of physics and human physiology, but my point is clear. An honest mistake, for example leaving the door unlatched, has real consequences in the real world which God has made. Does God still reign sovereign over these events? Absolutely! The final destiny is in his loving hands. No one



can be sent to hell by someone else or by accident.

I can't completely grasp this harmony between real cause and effect and a loving and sovereign God. I think it must be like a decorative quilt, with shinny bells, stars and beads, that tinkle, spin and rattle but are sewed to the backing of flat, stable felt. The real, dynamic, cause and effect is somehow sewn to the backdrop of God's endless love and overwhelming sovereignty and that is the great mystery.

It is a wonderful world . . . but it is not completely safe. The same gravity that permits life on this earth to exist will take that life away if you step off the top of the Empire State Building, or possibly the Railroad Grade trail. Somehow I do believe that the world was safer before the Fall of Adam but I'm not sure how. I will have to ask God someday.

Does prayer have no value then? What does the Bible say about prayer? It certainly sounds to me like it has value and not just to relax us like Transcendental Meditation. God did not wind up the universe like a clock then go on vacation to Belize where He is laying in a hammock with a Corona and dozing. He walks through the playground, not as an absentee landlord, but a hands-on landlord and does step in and gives a piggy back ride now and then. But God apparently only rarely works outside His natural laws. This is not a theological position but a simple and honest observation of the real world.

Butterflies in the Belfry, Serpents in the Cellar

Chapter Eighteen

So? The Psychological Question

The core course to my psychology degree was the eight semester hour class simply called, “Abnormal Psychology.” I can remember my first day in that class, just like it was yesterday.

Dr. Carpenter, who happened to be the chairman of the department of Psychology, was our teacher . . . to our good fortune. He was a thin man who always had a pipe in his mouth . . . occasionally it was even lit. He certainly looked like a stereotypical psychologist but not from the Freudian mold. With his pipe, and his thin, New England frame . . . he was the spitting image of Norman Rockwell as pictured in one of his self-portraits, where he is leaning out from behind his canvas. That morning, he came in and set his briefcase on his chair, actually lit up his pipe and took a seat on the front of his desk.

He had taken our three-inch-thick, lime-green textbook out of his suitcase before he set it in his chair. He placed his finger in it to mark a place, but then laid the book closed on his lap. With his other hand, he took his pipe out of his mouth and began to talk.

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. We will be spending three hours together in this class every Tuesday and Thursday for the next nine months.

Before we begin this little adventure, I must first give you some personal advice . . . well . . . you might say words of warning. There is a danger that during this course you will start to see within yourselves . . . (then he chuckles) . . . or worse, within your friends and family, every disorder that we explore. But, you must remember that abnormal psychology is only a matter of degree. Yes, there

are days when each of us are a little neurotic . . . having irrational fears, were we are afraid to drive across a high bridge, or even get in a bathtub. There are mornings that you feel paranoid . . . to the point that when you see strangers whispering amongst themselves on the bus, you are confident they are talking about you. But this is normal-abnormal behavior. So don't feel threatened when you see yourselves, or your friends and family, in the descriptions of neuroses, depression, psychoses or personality disorders.

It may seem odd that I have devoted so much of this book to psychology. Psychology may appear as tangential, but it is central. Psychology is simply the study of the psyche. Throughout Greek and subsequently Church history, the psyche and the soul were one and the same. The Greek translation of the word soul is *psyche*. It, ironically, was only through Platonic Dualism's influence, that the modern concept of psychology and spirituality became separated . . . psychology delegated to the inferior, seen mind and spirituality to the superior, unseen soul. So, just as metaphysics (the study of creation) is core, so is the study of the human soul.

Removing Dualism's influence from our understanding of the soul, we must first start with how we were created . . . in God's full image. We are, of course, nowhere equivalent to God . . . but . . . we are like Him. We think like Him. We are creative like Him and we feel emotions in His image. God created us, in perfection, with the mind (logic), will (moral choice) and emotions complete. I realized early on in my personal journey that the psyche was not decimated by the Fall of Adam but cockroaches were set free within all elements of it. Aristotle was only partially right; our reason is very good . . . but with roaches. Reason is not the highest nor is it a perfect virtue, always leading to truth. You can trust your senses as we study the Bible and reach truth with the Holy Spirit's help, but we cannot reach precise, perfect, theological truth every

time with such confidence that we can excommunicate the rest of Christendom that does not adhere to our precise dogma. Our will, the master of our behavior, is good, but with roaches. Our emotions are God breathed, but, also with roaches. This applies as well to meeting with other Christians. We cannot approach church hunting with an all or none attitude . . . either it is perfect or worthless. There is no perfect church . . . there never was nor will never be. There are good churches . . . and some better than others.

Under the shadow of the Adam's Fall, we are born with genetic defects of the brain. As I described before, these defects influence the way in which we see and respond to the world. We may acquire more defects through physical injuries of the brain and through life's negative experiences. There is scientific evidence that prolonged exposure to stress can change the actual physical make up of the brain and the same is true with long exposure to physical pain. Our own moral choices, including how we choose to think inside our own heads, can further damage the emotions and our perceptions and reason. These things are very real and are not to be forgotten or minimized by Platonic neglect. So how does this play out in our non-Dualistic view of life?

I heard about a woman, Kim, in our church that had some incredibly difficult experiences in her past. I didn't know much about them but that she came across as a very spiritual person and had been able to overcome her history. About a year after we met her she was going through some difficulties again. The women of the church were meeting with her as well as one of our senior couples. I was out of the loop, frankly because it wasn't really any of my business and it seemed that there were plenty of people involved already. As an elder though, I did have the sense that someone from her past was stalking her. Some of those who had met with her also had the feeling that she was not being honest about some things.

I happened to be home alone one Sunday evening. Kim called to talk to Denise. When I

told her that Denise was at the store, she asked me, “Has she told you about my situation?”

“No,” I honestly told her.

She eventually asked me to come to her place because she needed some advice. I waited until Denise got home and we both went. Kim is single mom and certainly has her work cut out for her. Despite those struggles she never fails to carry a bright smile and she was that night as well.

Denise and I took a seat on her couch as she sat in rocker across from us. Then she started to unravel a story of such intrigue that it surpasses any dramatic or even horror, movie of my recent memory. Hers and her children’s lives were in grave danger, because her father wanted them dead. That part was not that unbelievable . . . I had heard similar stories, sadly, from many of my patients. But then she went on to describe that her father controls President George Bush and the CIA. She added that her father had penetrated our church by wearing, very convincing latex masks of different members. Lastly, the CIA had been stalking her and indeed came in one night, with the help of the local police department, tied her and her children up and put shotguns to their heads.

There was much more to the story that made it obvious to me that none of it was real. I felt that the best thing I could do, was to expose it. “Kim,” I said, in love, “none of this is real. None of this happened. The CIA is not stalking you.”

This made her very, very angry, “You’re calling me a liar!” She screamed.

“No I am not. Kim, you are sick and you need help. You perceive these things as real, but they are not.”

Kim never came back to our church for more than a brief visit after that night of our conversation. I attempted to arrange for her see a psychiatrist, but to no avail.

I think she would have favored me calling her a liar, as some had, rather than mentally ill. Mental illness, including paranoia, has a huge stigma especially within the Christian community. It is worse than being a sinner, such as habitual liar, because mental illness involves the very unspiritual seen world of the brain. It is a disease of the brain. Like all other diseases, it can be a mixture of genetics, experiences and choices. Often the victim is totally innocent, their mental illness being the results of old sin rather than new sin. Lung cancer, a disease of another bodily organ, can be directed associated with a personal choice of smoking, but can also be directly related to other peoples' choices, second-hand smoke, or even genetic tendencies in a total nonsmoker.

There is a huge amount of needless guilt associated with mental illness, especially within the Christian community. To them, because the brain is of the seen world, it is on the polar opposite to godliness. Christians therefore scramble to hide their mental illness deeper in the cellar than any other fault. But it should not be this way. Unabashed, new, sin is far more under one's control than mental illness, yet the latter is more shameful and less likely to be accepted by the Church.

Before my fall down the rabbit hole I was of the same mind set. I can remember attempting to call the pastor of a large church in St. Louis where I was going to be speaking about our upcoming mission to the Middle East. His wife explained that he could not come to the phone because he had just suffered a mental breakdown and was severely depressed. I was befuddled. How could a man, who obviously didn't have his eyes on Christ, be a pastor of such a huge church? Fortunately, his church must have been far more gracious than I was at the time.

During my first year back in the United States, after our failed mission experience, I experienced clinical depression. Why? I do think it runs in my family but it wasn't that simple. I

had just watched my life's dream go up in smoke. As we left Cairo, the Navigator organization that I was deeply involved with for over ten years . . . under which I, wrongfully, established much my sense of Christian self worth . . . now considered me a complete failure. Their mission's department wouldn't even return my calls. It was very painful. Finally I was able to reach the director of missions by phone. I asked him if he understood why we had resigned. He responded, "I think we made a mistake . . . (I was starting to feel hopeful at this point but then he added) . . . in choosing you . . . you are obviously not missionary material." That's all he could say and then he hung up. His conclusion was based on the report that Curt had given him and it was personally devastating. I wanted to end my life then and there.

I was experiencing serious doubts about my whole Christian faith and even flirting with my old agnosticism. On top of this, we had given up our life-savings to pay for some of our mission expenses and we were broke. We had just received a bill from the Navigators for \$16,000 because Curt listed our income (and we lived below the poverty line) as “ministry expenses” so that taxes wouldn’t be taken out. Now that we were leaving staff the Navigator had to have all “ministry money,” which had no receipts to prove it was spent on ministry supplies, back. We had raised the money from friends and relatives, spent it on food and rent for two years in Egypt, but now were being asked to pay it all back. It was a nightmare. We were also physically exhausted. We had lived out of VW van for a year while we literally crossed North America raising support, then we arrived alone in Cairo with two small children and a third one born soon after. We had lived in that hot, dirty slum and I had faced a series of serious illnesses with family members and myself.

Once we had been back in the states for a couple of months, I had that well-meaning call from an old roommate, Gary, who was then serving The Navigators in China. He was the one that suggested, “Mike, Christians don’t get depressed. You were living in the Moslem world, with a lot of exposure to evil; I think you are a victim of demonic oppression.” He did have good intentions.

Why did all the surrounding circumstances suddenly become extraneous to my depression, at least in Gary’s eyes? Why did my tendency towards depression plus being in the midst of a personal life crisis not mean anything to him? To Gary, like to myself before my experience, the seen-world was insignificant. All of life had to be interpreted as it related to the unseen, world—either God was directly doing it . . . or it was from Satan. Since that time, I’ve learned that Gary himself has gone through a major mental breakdown and had to return from the



mission field. He has never returned my e-mails, calls or messages so I don't know the details. However, I wonder, if Gary had approached his problems as simple mental illness, rather than demonic, maybe he could have fared better.

But the Fall of Adam had enormous consequences not only in the unseen world, but in this seen world . . . the seen world that God accounts as having great significance. There're not only roaches in our soul, but in our psyche or brain. We all arrive in this world damaged only to be damaged (emotionally) more by the sinful behaviors of those around us. Few . . . actually none . . . of us have grown up in perfect families so none have been spared. Then we damage ourselves more through our own sinful behavior and thinking. To put it more bluntly, we are all mentally ill, at least to a degree, some of us more than others. This shouldn't astonish anyone because it dove-tails precisely into the Biblical concept of the Fall of Adam. So why do we try so hard to hide it?

Even in the un-fallen state, in God's created perfection, we still had emotions. The emotions are God-given and that includes joy, sorrow, depression and fear. God exhibits all of these emotions Himself in the Old Testament and we are in His image. But the cockroaches of Adam's Fall have infested all of these emotions just as they have everything else. Now, we are not only sad at times, but we can become clinically depressed, even suicidal. Our healthy fears can become an anxiety disorder or neurosis. Along that continuum, as Dr. Carpenter pointed out, we can reach the extremes of clinical paranoia, as in the case of Kim, or even psychosis where we lose all touch with reality. There are also many personality disorders that can make us into really nasty people . . . while maintaining a facade of being a sweet Christian, exhibiting (on the surface) all the fruits of the spirit.

In conclusion, fallen people come into the Kingdom of Christ damaged. This damage is

concrete—effecting brain structure—and does not go away overnight. There is no promise in the Bible that the work of Christ erased all the damage. In the next chapter I will make it clearer that his work on the cross was a justification work, not an instantaneous, sanctifying work. But, with that said, I don't want to distract from Christ's role as redeemer. He redeems us, from a justification standpoint, immediately. He is also a redeemer of our lives from the broken-ness, but my point is that it doesn't happen overnight. He is also the redeemer of families, societies, cultures and even the cosmos itself.

Neither can the damage to our psyche be erased by jumping through hoops of legalisms. I had been the master of spiritual exercises and it hadn't worked. Because I sincerely believed that these exercises would eradicate any effects of sin, but when in reality it hadn't, pretending had to substitute, otherwise I would give the impression that I had never jumped through the hoops. To continue the illusion, I had to add more and more caulk along the roach exit cracks and seal up my godliness facade.

When we were preparing to go to the mission field, The Navigators had a one day seminar that all new missionaries had to attend. It was titled, "Ministering to Your Donors." The instructor had four main points for writing our monthly newsletters to those donors.

The first point was, write one page only because Americans have a short attention span. The second was to start the newsletter with a Bible verse and to finish with a verse to keep it "spiritual." Next, each time we speak of a family member, we must tell of some victory that they had. And lastly, we were to never, ever express anything short of total success because, as the instructor said, "Donors don't like giving to losers." I'm afraid he may be right about that last point.

We were in the midst of an extreme hardship when our son had almost died, my father-

in-law had come to visit us and almost died from a heart attack and I had meningitis and was very ill. In our lonely desperation, I broke the newsletter rule and added one sentence, "Please pray for us, we are struggling."

In response to that newsletter, we had a telex from Curt (this was before his visit to Cairo and my fall down the rabbit hole) . . . whom we had not heard from in at least six months. It wasn't to ask us how we were doing but to scold me for producing such a negative newsletter and to inform me that from that point on, only he could write the letters to our donors. "Such negative comments make you look immature" was his verdict. It was also the response to that letter, the night after the Chinese restaurant meeting, by one of our donors that was my final push over the edge. "Christians don't struggle, they are victorious!" was his final cry.

But don't we all struggle in this fallen world? I'm not saying this in a defeatist way. In the end, the victory is assured, but our struggling is completely consistent with scripture. Look at what God said about the Fall of Adam in the third chapter of Genesis:

17 To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.

19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

That certainly sounds like a struggle to me. Regarding mental illness, I believe that no one hates their mental illnesses more than those who suffer severely from it. I, as a man, yearn to

be a courageous hero. But I had to come to the point of admitting that I suffer from an anxiety disorder. It is shameful at best and I have a tremendous desire to cover it up. There are no hoops I would not jump through to rid myself of it. Most people with depression or other clinical mental illnesses would agree. Luther scrubbed the stinky monastery outhouses trying to rid himself of his haunting sense of guilt and inadequacy.

Indeed I had spent hundreds of hours in prayer over my desire for godliness. I walked and prayed, literally for hundreds of miles while I was in college, begging God to deliver me from sin and its consequences. I studied the Bible relentlessly hoping for change. I memorized every Bible verse that I could that dealt with the issues that troubled me. I went to countless conferences and workshops. So I assumed, by the time I was a missionary in Egypt, that I was a mature Christian and had been delivered from the effects of the Fall of Adam on my emotional health. So I lived in denial. When Curt made hard choices for us, without any input from us, I did not stand up to him the way I should have. It was my social anxiety that stood in the way of a confrontation. Then things just worsened.

I also believe that Curt was out of touch with his own sin and did not understand that it was his own damaged emotions that caused him to treat people the way that he did. He had grown up in a family where both of his parents were alcoholics from the time he was very young. This had to have an effect on his emotions, such an effect that no jumping through hoops could have easily erased. Even though he was a Navigator superstar, he still carried his emotional baggage.

So if the Fall of Adam and other influences can so damage our emotions, and if the blood of Christ does not take away that damage immediately, is there any hope? There is. But damaged brains heal very, very slowly. This is not a theological statement but simply the

observation of bright men and women for a very long time. Even secular psychiatry is recognizing this. The Freudian school of thought believed that you could unearth subconscious feelings, deal with them and be healed.

In Pat Conroy's book, *The Prince of Tides*, the main character, Tom Wingo leaves his sleepy South Carolinian fishing village and goes to New York to meet with his sister Savannah's psychiatrist. Savannah had just made another attempt to commit suicide. In their attempts to unravel his sister's dysfunctional life, it becomes apparent that not only did his sister (and mother) have demons, but also skeletons in their closet. Tom tells the psychiatrist a childhood story of when three inmates escaped from the local prison, raped his mother and sister and then his mother killed them. The family secretly buried them in the garden and even their father never knew what had happened that terrible night. Oddly, when the father returned from the fields he noticed that his daughter's dress was on inside-out and inquired about that, but his inquisitiveness ended there.

This partially unraveled the mystery . . . but it didn't explain Tom's dysfunctional life . . . at least not completely. It wasn't until a repressed memory came to light, that Tom too had been raped by one of the men, did his life finally come together. The story seems to have a happy ending when Tom returns home to his wife (after having an affair with the psychiatrist) and puts the pieces back together. It was the simple act of remembering the horrible night and presto, he was a new man.

There was somewhat of a faddish movement in secular psychology of discovering "repressed childhood memories." This also, unfortunately, caught on in Christian counseling circles. Their belief that when the memories come to light of day, like for Tom Wingo, that the mental illness magically goes away . . . or is at least much better.

I know when I was in the midst of my depression, I finally sought professional help. I heard of a Christian psychologist in the area and looked him up. He was really into this repressed memory movement. He put intense pressure on me, trying to get me to remember that I had been sexually molested by one of my parents. It simply never happened. I can see how some people, with such pressure, do start to imagine such “memories” of things that never occurred.

He, however, was never able to dig up the fact that I had been, but by Les. But that wasn't a “repressed” memory, but one I voluntarily, and consciously suppressed. There was no need to bring it up. It would not have made my residual low-self esteem, shame and anger, magically go away. I was also afraid that he, the psychologist, would focus on those events, magnifying their real consequences and giving them more credit than they deserve. There seems to be a parade of celebrities (guessing from the commercials) who appear on Oprah to reveal that they had been molested as children. I'm sure they have. It is a very common and tragic part of our broken society.

But now I realize that God created us in far more complex ways than that. Sometimes digging up the old sin can shed light and be helpful in understanding current emotional problems. But just like it is not true that when you become a Christian that your psyche has been purged and purified, just remembering old sins, those done by you or against you, doesn't render you suddenly healed.

This should not cause anyone to be discouraged, but should be a point of great comfort. The reason is, if we had previously believed that you change instantaneously, but in reality you don't, there is a tendency to give up. Like with the fad diets. They often don't work because the claims are exaggerated, or out-right lies. When the companies that sell the diet plans, use digitally altered “before and after” photos and you believe them, you will quickly give up when

you don't see the same results. You be left feeling quite hopeless. But when you realize that God really can change your damaged emotions, but that it just takes time, a lot of time, then your hope becomes perpetual.

It seems though, that some damage is never reversed. Does God sometimes step in and give a piggy back ride? In other words, does He work outside the natural laws of brain physiology and psychology? Certainly He could, but, it is my personal observation that if He does, He does it rarely. Far more often, these are unproven claims. If a convicted child molester-turned Christian says that God completely and instantaneously delivered him from such heinous desires . . . do you leave him alone with your children to baby sit? I would hope not.

I've heard ex-alcoholics claim that Jesus took away their desire to drink the moment that they became a Christian. I'm a little skeptical. I've also heard of many non-Christian ex-alcoholics abruptly stop drinking, especially after they have their first seizure, or are in a car wreck. So the immediate stopping of drinking can happen in the Christian context but also in the secular context as well. The Christian ex-alcoholic would be wise to treat his illness with respect. Keeping alcoholic drinks in their house, or occasionally taking a sip would probably not be a good idea for them.

So how does a Christian, who has eradicated Dualism's low esteem of the seen world, the brain and the emotions, think? He or she recognizes that we are all insane . . . at least a little bit . . . some days more than others. This is the legacy of old sin and the Fall of Adam. This is the consequences of none of us having parents who loved and nurtured us the way that they should have. This is also the fruit of the injustices and abuse that we experience in this world that was created wonderful but now infested with roaches. This is also the result of our own choices and unhealthy ways of thinking inside our own heads.

This non-Dualistic Christian would also avoid hiding their own personal weaknesses beneath the facade of the cellar door but bring them out into the light of the God. Only when we view the problem, unashamedly—in three dimensions—beneath the bright rays of light, can we really start to heal and change then. As I began to recover from my rabbit hole experience and to try and figure out why I still had anger, social anxiety, it was a healing process. I know much better what makes me tick now. I know that if my wife, Curt or anyone, does something that I mistakenly take as disrespect, it makes me very angry. Some of that I am sure comes from being disrespected at a very young age by both Les and my brother Gary. But knowing that doesn't immediately fix it. But the insight helps me to stay safe. Like the alcoholic, when he knows that the drinking tendency was not magically taken away, he knows places he must to avoid, to stay safe. When I feel the anger now, I can think . . . was that disrespect real, or my broken perception? Often it is only my misperceptions.

The first step in treating any disease is the diagnosis. I see many patients with diseases that live in denial. I usually can't help these people. I also see many patients who are mentally ill and who live in denial. I can't usually help them either. I did, however, recently have one refreshing psuedoseizure patient named Bobbi.

Pseudoseizures is a common situation when someone fakes having seizures but really doesn't have them. Faking physical illnesses is actually very common and may make up a third of all cases of seizures, and other diseases. People usually do it because they yearn for nurturing and being sick is the only socially-accepted way to get it, at least as an adult. Many of these people suffered tremendous abuse from the very parents who should have fulfilled their nurturing needs as a child. The problem is that most people suffering from psuedoseizures don't recognize it . . . at least on a conscious level.



Bobbi was sitting on the exam table when I met with her to review the results of her tests. They were all normal, plus I had a way of telling, through her history, that her seizures were not real. However, after my experience with the patient who assaulted me, I always hedged about the diagnoses from that point forward. But Bobbi, seemed more inquisitive than most . . . and more honest. She already recognized that she had a major anxiety disorder. Finally she asked, “Am I faking these spells?”

“Well . . . yes, I think you are.”

This began a very healthy dialog and I am very optimistic that Bobbi has a chance to get better. She had to have tremendous courage to open her cellar door, reaching down and pulling up some painful things and changing the way she thinks about them. Still, it will a long process.

Non-Dualistic thinking about our emotions would also allow us to recognize mental illnesses in others and not simply deny it or assume that it is very simple sin. There is simple, new sin . . . such as telling a lie or stealing money, but mental illness is often old sin, sin that has gone to seed in our brains. This is true with the pastor’s daughter in our Nav group who had been a habitual shoplifter. That was beyond new sin. Some of it stemmed from emotional damage . . . which itself was the fruit of old sin. She was still guilty of sin, but it is not helpful to assume that such a mental disorder is a simple matter of choice.

I remember trying to explain to two of my sons, who were around ten and twelve at the time, the disease of anorexia. I think someone famous, or maybe one of my patients was dying from it. To my sons this made no sense . . . laughing they said, “Just give her food and tell her to eat!” The way that the subconscious thinks has a profound effect on us and it is naive to think we can just “snap out of it.”

I just listened to a National Public Radio program about two Baptist pastors in Missouri

who ran somewhat of a religious commune. It has been revealed that they were having sex with many of the young girls. They interviewed one of the girls, who broke the case. She is now a woman and in her twenties.

This lady now describes how both pastors seemed so “spiritual” at the time, that when they started inappropriately touching the young girls, then having sex with them, that somehow, they assumed it must be from God. Finally this girl came to her senses and went to the authorities.

As non-Dualistic Christians, we should recognize the Fall of Adam in everyone. Yes we can trust people, but we can't fully trust anybody. Yes we can usually trust Christians more than non-Christians, but we can't totally trust them either. We can trust our own senses, emotions and reason but we can't fully trust them. The Message's translation of Jeremiah 17:9 & 10 is the following;

The heart is hopelessly dark and deceitful, a puzzle that no one can figure out. But I, God, search the heart and examine the mind. I get to the heart of the human. I get to the root of things. I treat them as they really are, not as they pretend to be.

The word *heart*, in this verse, could easily be translated as *mind*, *brain* or probably more closer to the modern meaning of the *subconscious*. We cannot fully trust our mind because it does have cockroaches roaming within it and we don't fully understand it.

The most extreme example is in the movie, *A Beautiful Mind*. It portrays, very well in my opinion, the effects of paranoid schizophrenia on a brilliant Princeton mathematician named John Nash. Dr. Nash eventually won a Nobel Prize for his extremely complicated work called the Nash Equilibrium for Strategic Non-cooperative Games. This thesis was written when he was

only twenty-one years old. Later, he succumbed to his mental illness, which is believed to be related to a genetic defect that effects brain development. In other words, cockroaches from Adam's Fall.

The movie shows how convincing the misperceptions about the world are in a paranoid schizophrenic's mind. The Greek term *schiz* means split and *phrenia* means mind. Unlike the common misconception, schizophrenia does not imply "split-personalities" but a split between the mind and the real world.

In the end of the movie, after John Nash was recovering, there is a classic scene I will never forget. An academy award for directing this work and the quality of his workmanship is exhibited in this footage. Russell Crowe did a fantastic job portraying the main character. A gentleman approached Dr. Nash in his classroom to announce to him that he had won the Nobel Prize for economics. Dr. Nash's first, and honest question was, "Are you real?" He knew not to trust his perception or his emotions any more. Unless we suffer from a similar disorder, we have the privilege of trusting our emotions much more . . . but not completely.

There are days when my anger or deep insecurities will distort innocent actions of people that I encounter. If I believed that I was a godly man and above reproach, I would assume that my senses were right and it was the other person's fault. But if I thought in a non-Dualistic way, I would humbly recognize that I cannot always trust my own perceptions. My brain is damaged as is its corresponding emotions, perception and reason. Kim could not accept that her paranoia was distorting reality around her. When I was visiting with Curt in the Chinese restaurant, I perceived him as purely evil and initially assumed that my intentions and actions were mostly pure.

Why doesn't God take away all this damage at the moment that we accept Christ? I honestly don't know. It is something that I want to ask Him some day. But observing reality, it is clear that if there is damage, most of the time it must heal through the God-given natural processes. I think that it is due to our, Dualistic, low view of these natural processes that makes us demand and expect instantaneous "supernatural" healing. Again, it follows the sad view that only supernatural stuff is God's stuff.

The natural healing processes are not just a passive change over time, but occur through pro-active steps. These steps are not just jumping through legalistic-religious hoops. Some of the best steps are forcing ourselves to think differently. In the world of psychology it is called *cognitive restructuring*. In the Bible it is called "Being transformed by the renewing of your Minds" (Romans 12:2). This process is never complete on this earth, barring God stepping in and working outside of His natural laws. However, if Christians pretend that the supernatural is the norm, they end up creating a Cellar where the serpents continue to reign in the dark.

Butterflies in the Belfry, Serpents in the Cellar

Chapter Nineteen

So? The Question of Godliness

It was a formidable task choosing the best title for this chapter. I thought about words like *sanctification*, *spirituality*, *obedience* or *maturity* . . . but all of those were enshrouded with so many connotations, that it would take the entire chapter just to untangle them and define what I really meant. Even the word *godliness* leaves readers with such a wide spectrum of impressions that it will be a struggle for me to communicate deeply what I really intend and to keep my use of the word distinct from assumed definitions. I will say, in a very simple way, that what I purpose by godliness is us living according to the way that God intended . . . period. It has nothing to do with justification or acceptance and certainly nothing to do with our sense of self-worth.

Most Christians, I assume, think the way that I thought about godliness—that it was tied directly to justification. I am again speaking very honestly here and even when I believed it, I would have been the first to rejection this association. But now I must establish that justification and godliness are totally unrelated concepts. Justification, as Luther would tell you, is really very, very simple. In Christ we are one hundred percent justified and totally accepted by God as righteous. Luther's recognition that it was God's righteous bestowed on him was the turning point of his life. Can we do anything to improve perfection? Neither can we do anything to detract from what God has done.

Another confusing and irrational conversation around the Mad Hatter's tea party table is about justification and sanctification. Alice would ask, "How do we please the great King?"

The Mad Hatter would say, "Oh . . . just trust that He is the King and then you will be

made an honorary daughter. Indeed His son is perfect and whenever the King looks at you He can only see the absolute splendor and perfection of the prince. It's a kind of magic.”

Alice feels really good about this and sips her tea, slides down in her chair in a comfortable-reclining position with a warm smile on her face as her shame dissipates. But then the Mad Hatter, dipping his pocket-watch into his tea cup and carrying a contorted grimace on his face, adds in a whisper, covering his mouth so no one can read his lips, “But be very, very careful. If you do anything to displease the King—and He is very hard to please—then he will be exceedingly angry at you and chop off your head.” Alice then has a look of horror on her face. This is the paradox that Christians have always lived in and it too, which I hope to demonstrate, is deeply rooted in a Dualistic view of the world.

If in the Dualistic view, the unseen world is of ultimate value and the seen world of virtual little value then our behavior must have only unseen consequences. Taking it to the extremes, if you murdered someone, sure there would be consequences in the seen world . . . someone would die and his/her family would suffer that loss and you would spend the rest of your life in prison . . . but even that would be pale in comparison to God's great judgment and anger at you. I would suggest that most people, whom have killed another person, even in war, and even if they become Christians, often still live a life filled with guilt, shame and works of penitence. I know that's how it would affect me.

I remember one patient, a gentleman in his seventies, was admitted to our inpatient headache treatment unit in Michigan. He, like most of our patients suffered from daily migraine. During the psychological work up, which is only a small facet of headache treatment, it became clear that he suffered from night terrors and had very poor sleep. As the psychology and nursing staff dug deeper, this stoic man finally had a break down and began to weep uncontrollably. He,

for the first time, told the story of having to kill a German soldier in hand to hand combat during World War II. Every night, for forty years, he had seen the man's dying face and the imagined faces of the German soldier's children begging for mercy—in English. This stoic patient was a Christian, Dutch Reformed I think. He knew of God's forgiveness, yet his actions haunted him for decades.

But if you think in non-Dualistic ways, you would truly realize that the unseen consequences of sin have been settled . . . in Christ, once and for all. There should be, if you are in Christ, absolutely no guilt, shame or need for acts of penitence. However, in this very important, seen world, the consequence can be great. In the case of murder, a person's life has been extinguished. This person, even if they were a terrorist or drug dealer, was still created by God, in His image, as a palace . . . even though it is a palace with a roach infestation. The consequences on the family of the victim are immense. There will be countless loved ones, parents, children, brothers, sisters, spouses and friends who will never be the same. Their grief may be diluted through time and life's experiences, but never laid to rest. The history of the world, which God created, will never be the same. The potential contribution of the person killed will never be realized. The family may choose to forgive you or may choose not to. But even if they are wonderful Christian people, they too have roaches in their hearts, like all of us, and on this earth, their forgiveness can never be complete. In the real, seen world, there is penitence and restitution to the family, even if that restitution is feeble at best, when compared to the crime. But there cannot be continuing guilt, or acts of penitence to God.

Extreme examples are good for staking out boundaries of an argument, but the more practical examples are essential for the reader to identify with and in which to see themselves. When I was working with The Navigators there is no question that we believed that the complete

justification of our souls was accomplished through Christ and not attributed to our good works. This was a foundational building block to our theology. Yet, at the same time, we were taught that we were under the constant watching eye of God, the blood hound of heaven. He was like Santa, perpetually evaluating our motives and our every action to see if we were naughty or nice. But, God's standards are much higher than Santa's.

Maybe I am thinking too much about Santa right now as I am sitting in Starbucks, typing on my laptop . . . and it's Christmas Eve. There's a constant flow of people, in good Christmas cheer, entering the store and seasonal music in the background.

Because of this situation (not sitting in Starbucks, but seeing God as super Santa) we were constantly in a state of guilt. We believe that God was displeased with us immediately when we awoken in the morning. The founder of The Navigators, Dawson Trotman (who was a real Type-A personality) was our human example of godly behavior. He had whittled down his sleep time to about three and an half hours per night. Some staff in the organization would say, "How can you be sleeping when the whole world is going to hell." We were constantly disappointing God from the point that our alarms went off in the morning. Shame was our constant haunting and closest friend.

I can count the days on one hand, during my twelve years with The Navigators, that I felt God's pleasure. These were days when I got up very early, such as five, ran three miles, spent an hour in quiet time, fasted, memorized two Bible verses, lead someone to Christ and did not have a single sexual thought. Maybe the eclipse of these things came together three times in twelve years.

Because in our heart of hearts we knew that we were constantly failing, acts of penitence were constantly sought to erase some of the guilt. We arrived at Bible study precisely on time.



We went to church every Sunday morning. We raked leaves off The Navigator's staff man's yard. We volunteered to help at the Salvation Army. We spent more and more hours in Bible study. We fasted weekly. But, like with Luther and the stinky toilets, we still did not feel acceptable to God.

But this mind set was the fruit of the thinking that our human behavior only has consequences in the unseen world . . . because the seen world doesn't matter. This is the same mind set, taken in its extreme form that can allow immensely Dualistic Moslem extremists to blow up women and babies with bombs filled with nails and glass. Spiritual purification, in their eyes, greatly exceeds any consequences in this seen world. I honestly think that neither Plato nor Pythagoras ever imagined the extreme sequela in the real world that their playful metaphysical and mathematical speculations would bring.

But God's Biblical, non-Dualistic, economy is very different. If you were to divide things between the seen and unseen, which is not healthy to do, the justification issue has been settled, on the cross, once and for all. There is no more guilt, no more shame, and no more a need for penitence and there is no additional consequences of our behavior in the unseen world, at least not the way that we have imagine. There were consequences in the past. Adam's Fall separated all people from God. Our personal sin has separated us personally from God. But in Christ, this has been, once and for all, resolved. I cannot say it any more emphatically. It's over!

If this is true, why has Christianity been so affected by this concept of sanctification . . . where a watchful God is perpetually judging our every mood, motive and action? I think the answers are clear, but not always easy. Of course, I do believe that they are tied intimately with Dualism's influence within the Church.

There are three main reasons that this system of good works has been so attractive. For

one, there is the Dualistic concept that actions in the seen world only have value if they influence circumstances (in this case, God's pleasure) in the unseen world. The second one is the fear of debauchery and the third one, connects us back to the economics of self-worth.

Regarding the fear of debauchery, like with the early Gnostics, there are two extreme positions when speaking of Christian behavior. One is a radical legalism, somewhat worse than the Levitical law; however, the other is unhindered narcissism. There is a fear, that if we take Grace too far, we will fall victims of the latter.

I remember a wise Navigator leader telling me in private, "If people really understood the Biblical concept of grace, there would a great temptation to sin freely . . . which of course would be a disaster." To balance that threat is legalism. We create more and more rules to keep us further and further away from the debauchery cliff. Then we arrive at another statement straight from the Mad Hatter's tea party. The Mad Hatter says to Alice, "Now it is true that the great King sees only the perfect prince when he looks at you, but he is also very easy offended. To avoid offending him, we will follow a long list of rules, none of which have anything to do with Him or what he wants, but we just made them up." Alice's head starts to spin.

When I climb the railroad grade trail and lean toward the grassy slope to avoid the abyss on the other side, in the same way we tend to lean so far to one direction because we fear of falling off the other side. Grace can never be abused or overstated, but it can be falsely used as an excuse for sin. Some readers may think that my story has gone too far. In conversations that I have with individuals, they often think I have become "soft on sin." I think it is a profound misunderstanding. If you really understand what I am saying, I am raising the obedience bar much higher than it has ever been because I am calling for us to account for the secret sin (in the cellars) that we are all guilty of. Most Christian circles are very happy with the fake, white-

washed godliness of the surface. Not saying “swear words,” smiling a lot and etc. I’m also calling for a higher sense of honesty than we have ever experienced before. I’m really more of a fundamentalist than the strictest of fundamentalists because I am appalled how we American Christians have contaminated Biblical teaching with cultural mores, many of which were based on extra-Biblical concepts.

To put this into proper perspective, we have to have a radically new, actually old–pre-Dualistic, paradigm. What is the real purpose of the law? Is it really a tool for winning God’s pleasure day after day? By making up hundreds of new rules, can we please God even more? It’s not that difficult to sort out from scripture. The real law has two prongs to its purpose.

The law is God’s gift to us, His created beings. Since we were created above all other living things (like animals, which work on autopilot using instincts) we have choice and freewill. The law is simply God’s code to direct those choices to quality living. We all desire quality living, so if we break that law, then it goes beyond affecting our quality of life to indicating our lack of trust in the creator. He says do or don’t do these things and you will live better. If we don’t do, or do those things, then obviously we don’t believe Him. This is how following His code is linked to walking in faith. But the word “faith” also has many unbiblical connotations. It eventually began to mean an irrational or mystical leap to take us to the unseen dark. But, originally it was about trust, which is extremely different. So I will use the word “trust” instead of faith. When we don’t follow the few rules, ten to be precise, we really don’t trust the designer and rule maker. It is really that simple.

I’m not that good with auto-mechanics, but I had plenty of friends in high school that at least thought they were. Often, in their false confidence, they would throw away the owner’s

manual to their cars and do things very differently than the manufacturer's recommendations. Back in the seventies the cars were more "flexible" in the way you ran them. Some of my friends would change the plug gap and carburetor settings and timing, thinking that they could better mileage or more power from their cars. I wonder how this would make the designing engineers feel. Some of them, I'm sure, were extremely bright and had spent years developing and perfecting that particular motor and here's a sixteen-year-old punk who thinks he can do it better.

This is how sin, failure to follow the code, becomes personal between God and us. The dynamics of this situation is written all through the Adam and Eve story. Of course we want a quality life, but starting with Eve and Adam, we humans have not fully trusted Him. When we sin, we are thinking that we could improve our lives by doing things differently. This may be only the tip of the iceberg regarding the God-man relationship, but it is an important tip. So when we live by trust, we do follow His instructions. When we really believe God, honestly, then we believe that by not getting drunk, not committing adultery, and by loving other people that our quality of lives will be much better in this seen world. This applies to our personal lives, and the collective lives of us as a society. God's real law was not just an arbitrary list of dos and don'ts for us to do . . . jumping through hoops like trained dogs, just to please Him. The concept of rule following, to please God, is the foundation block of religion. True Christianity is contra-religious.

The other prong of the law, as we read in the book of Hebrews, is the fact that it was given to drive us to Christ. The complete Levitical law was not obtainable by mortal man, at least since the Fall of Adam. In our desperation, we are forced to humbly turn to Christ and our dependence on him justifies us in God's sight. In this case, the point of the law was to prove that we could never please God by keeping it. It is like a celestial entrapment. God knew that we

would be prone to use to the law, legalistically. The Levitical law became the bait to prove that we could not.

But I really believe that a big part of our true, but wrong, motives for trying to be a good Christian goes back to the principle of economics of self-worth. In that case we believe that by following God's rules, plus hundreds of others, which we've made up, we will increase our value . . . in the eyes of our Christian friends and in God's eyes and in that order.

The old Mike would be the first to claim that everything I did was of one pure motive . . . only to please God. To suggest that I was trying to impress my Christian friends would have made me very, very angry, an anger that I would have quickly denied. But looking back I know that my highest subconscious motive was to please other Christians. Pleasing God was secondary, like it is for most people. Like I said earlier, when people get caught in sin, their deep distress is because they were caught. It couldn't be remorse because God suddenly discovered their sin. God has known all along about the most secret places of the cellar and that never bother the perpetrator before.

I think we delude ourselves when it comes to having pure motives because we don't understand the depth of the Fall . . . the cockroaches (or Serpents ) are everywhere. There is a mix of motives at best. There may be a sincere desire to obey God's rules at times and we focus on that motive . . . all the while we shovel the many other, not-so-good, motives down into the cellar, quickly closing the door. I believe that fallen men and women are incapable of doing anything out of completely pure motives and to think that you do anything out of pure motives is a self-deception.

So God has given us these few rules to allow us to live more quality lives in this very important, seen world. But we Christians have flipped it on its head, using those rules as tools,

like keeping score in a basketball game, to try and fulfill the desire for self-value. Then we've added to those rules, which were written in stone, hundreds or thousands of unspoken ones. These extra-Biblical rules come under the guise of statements like, "Don't do anything that offends a weaker brother . . . that would be sin." Or another popular one, "I don't do such (like walking into a bar) to prove that I'm different from the non-Christian." But God's rules have nothing to do self-worth and this is the great tragedy.

In Dualism, everything in the seen world, including the consequences of sin, is devalued. This too is a great tragedy. If we truly understood that the loving God, who designed us in the first place, has a small list of rules that allow us to live life to its fullest, then we are motivated to obey them. If, for the first time, we realized that the failure to follow those rules has an immense consequence in this wonderful seen world, consequences that don't simply go away with forgiveness, we are motivated to obey. After all, pretending that we are only interested in the unseen world is an illusion. Of course we are all more interested in the seen world because we live in the real, seen world every day. This should put our fears of "cheap grace" to rest. If we truly believed what I just said, then why would acknowledging the fact that we are totally acceptable to God regardless of our behavior, then make us want to do behavior that we know is destructive? This is the crux of the matter. Luther recognized that we live a good Christian life by walking in faith, in other words trust. We were all created with a very strong will to live and strong will to live well. The only reason that we participate in destructive behavior is because we really don't believe that it's destructive. So, behavior is really an issue of faith—trusting the designer that He knows what He is doing.

We may be tempted to slide back into focusing on the unseen connection to our behavior and feel that the bad consequences in this seen world are acts of judgment by a disappointed God

in the unseen world. However, the bad consequences of our sin are simply cause and effect in the system that God has created. Only a Dualist would see natural cause and effect as inferior to God's divine judgment.

When we were living in Egypt, one day our neighbors, the Fakrys, who lived in the flat beneath us, seemed to vanish. The couple had two daughters, one, Mary, was eighteen and the other, Joyce, was twelve. We knew that they were planning a car trip to visit relatives in Alexander but that was suppose to be a simple, overnight trip.

We were quickly aware of their absence because flats in Cairo are so close together that you can actually hear your neighbors breathing . . . or snoring . . . at night. Also, Mary and Joyce were in our flat virtually every day. By the fourth day of their absence, our concern started to grow. Then, late on the fifth night, a friend of ours sighted Joyce in a local store buying fruit. It was obvious that Joyce didn't want to be seen, slipping through the shadows with a scarf over her head. She had instructions from her parents to be as clandestine as possible. Our friend was persistent though. She followed Joyce and interrogated her, in a loving way, all the way back to her flat. Finally the young girl cracked. "You see, we were in bad car accident on the way to Alex (short for Alexander) mom and dad are both hurt. Mom was in the hospital for three days with a broken nose and cut face."

This seemed strange to us as I didn't understand the philosophical context of Egyptian culture. Islamic Egypt, like most of the Arab world, is extremely Dualistic . . . even to the point that not only is the seen world greatly inferior to the unseen world, but you foot is your most unholy spot on your body because, along Platonic, altitudinal lines, it is the most distant from heaven. The Fakrys though were not Moslems, but part of the minority Coptic Christian community. But the Coptic Christians, as well as the Eastern Church culture, are also more

deeply influenced by Plato than us in the west. The Eastern Church has, after all, direct roots into Greek culture. The concept of using icons in worship is based on the Platonic concept that concrete things in the seen world having a direct link to what they represent in the unseen world. So if you have an icon of a saint, then that saint is on the other end of that iconic portal, in the unseen world.

But in the Fakry's culture, there is absolutely no natural cause and effect in this seen world and really no natural laws of physics. Just like the icons, every event in the, inconsequential, seen world is directly connected to some far more important cause in the unseen world. Therefore, if they turned their car sharply on a busy and dusty highway and their balding tires skidded into the lane of an oncoming truck . . . then it has nothing to do with the laws of mass and momentum over the coefficient of friction etc., but the punishing hand of God almighty. A perfectly righteous God does not punish without a reason. The Fakrys believed that it was their sin which cause their accident. This made their hiding in great shame more understandable.

American evangelicals are likewise very hesitant to talk about any kind of failure, from a car accident to money lost in the stock market, because failure has the connotation of God's disfavor. Believing that God's disfavor of course is in response to our personal sin . . . or stupidity.

But when you change your Platonic paradigm into a more Biblical concept, you see that the natural world, with all God's wonder, really is a dangerous place. When you look at sin in this light, I think there is even a much greater motivation not to sin than when you work under the dis-incentives of guilt manipulation or economics of self-worth. The reason is simple. We are selfish by nature and we all, if we speak honestly, want a better quality of life here in the seen



world. But I must illustrate this in more concrete terms.

Premarital sex is a sin that is easily defined and there is very little controversy (from a Biblical perspective) that it is sin. Although fornication is not mentioned in the Ten Commandments by name, I believe it clearly falls under the Adultery clause. It is clearly mentioned in the list of sins in the New Testament.

God says that part of living well is one man married to one woman for life and the two of them loving each other with agape love until the end. So, having sex with someone else before you are married is really no different, and no less or more tragic, than having sex with someone else while married.

What we have been teaching children and teens for years is that the big problem with premarital sex is making God mad or deeply disappointing Him. The tool that we use to try and persuade young people not to engage in premarital sex is guilt manipulation. In my Bible-belt culture it was stated that “good girls” are virgins when they get married. The unspoken belief was that boys, especially if they were real men, would have sex before marriage. If other reasons, from the seen world, were given for not having sex, they were usually harebrained reasons of catching sexually transmitted diseases or pregnancy. I say harebrained (and think of the March Hare here) because although the reasons are legitimate, they are so pale in comparison to the real reason that they should be a footnote at best. It would be a little like saying, “Don’t set off a nuclear bomb in midtown Manhattan because the radiation might interfere with your TV reception.”

Do you think that for Mike and Kathleen, in the back of his Nova on a dark night in her driveway, that the fear of her not being a good girl or his fear of catching VD is really going to prevent them from experiencing extreme physical and emotional pleasure? It might work for her

for a while, but eventually they will realize that the reasons that they are given, including displeasing the absentee landlord, not being a good person, catching diseases or becoming pregnant are really only petty reasons.

But the real reasons for not sinning are far more profound, and even I don't know them all. But as I said, God gave us a hand full of rules that, when followed, will greatly enhance our quality of life. Regarding the fornication or adultery issue, the damage, in this seen world, is immeasurable. God designed us to become life partners, two people unifying as one person, for life. Much of our quality of life is the fruit of that union. If Mike and Kathleen succumbed to their physical desires in the back seat of the Nova, then the consequences in this seen world are enormous, even beyond comprehension. The damage penetrates so deeply into one's psyche and to heart of the future marriage bond (to other people) that it cannot be expressed adequately in words. While in the unseen world, forgiveness is certain (in Christ) and perfect, in the seen world, the damage can never be totally erased. It can be watered down over time. Indeed, such acts do far more damage than ripping a hole in the universe. The most essential part of our living well is damaged beyond repair.

Can a honeymoon between two virgins, in love and totally devoted to each other compare to that of those with past sexual experiences? When Kathleen goes to her husband on their wedding night can she not be reminded of Mike? When Mike goes to his wedding bed with his new wife, can he not but compare her to Kathleen? Can Kathleen's new husband not feel a deep insecurity by the haunting presence of Mike and the same with Mike's new bride? It is a horrible haunting, that can get better over time, but can never be cured in this world. I've seen old men with dementia in the nursing home start to talk about their anger toward their wife's high school sweethearts, sixty years earlier. There should not be guilt or shame, yet there is a place for

weeping over the catastrophe. Fornication and adultery share much of the same kind of damage, but also differ in places. Fornication damages the initial union bed. Adultery damages the marriage trust. That marriage trust, just like Humpty Dumpty, can never, ever be restored to its original state. Of course there is penitence in this seen world. In both situations, the perpetrators can do positive acts to make up for the disaster. They, as much as they have control, can purge their brains of old memories and never do anything to refresh them. They can be more devoted than ever to being a good husband or wife and trying to make the other person feel special. Overall their marriage can be even better in other areas than it would have been if they had not sinned. But they can't erase history and in those specific areas damaged by the sin can never be fully restored in this life. It is a Christian myth that forgiveness erases the harm done. It does not. The cost for a few seconds of pleasure is truly monumental.

Yes, Christians do have hope and there is no place for shame or guilt. In the unseen world, it is solved once and for all. In the seen world, however, there can be partial forgiveness by other humans but the damage is perpetual.

In conclusion, the motivation not to sin—if fully understood—is far more powerful in this non-Dualistic model. Are a few moments of physical pleasure really worth giving up the potential for better living for the rest of your life? Is a crisp twenty dollar bill worth the destruction of your entire house and estate? Fornication is epidemic even among Christian singles and adultery is not uncommon among Christian couples. But if they truly realized the consequences, they would never do it. We have done a horrible job in preparing our youth in this area. Even devoted, Christian student leaders often start having premarital sex in college if they didn't start in high school.

Guilt manipulation has been the Church's tool for controlling behavior for centuries . . .

and it simply is not effective. When all your eggs are in one metaphysical basket, where your sin only affects the unseen world and God's grace does erase all the consequences of sin in that realm, the result is having very little incentive not to sin. Without considering the seen world, then grace is easily abused. So, the Church, historically, was forced into creating a different system for controlling people's behavior. This system was a type of sanctification where God's eye is always watching . . . judging and watching. Guilt manipulation was the mode of control. This generated the bizarre world where we speak grace out of one side of our mouths but guilt, shame and a displeased God out of the other.

I will briefly add a couple more examples but I think my point has already been made. If all stealing in the world were to stop today, the economic boom would be inestimable. The Third World poverty and suffering is rarely the result of natural effects, but from chronic thievery, war and corruption. The only reason that the West had experienced a much better quality of life, from an economic viewpoint, is that thievery has been reduced where Christianity has prevailed. But if thievery, war and corruption were suddenly gone all over the world, there would be no poverty, no hunger and other economic-related suffering. We would all, except for the crooks, be living a much higher standard of living. All goods would be much cheaper because a big cost is accounting for "missing" inventory and security measures. All the huge costs of security and law enforcement would be gone.

All the other sins have enormous consequences in this seen world, but unfortunately, under the philosophical umbrella of Dualism, this consequence has been ignored. Christians usually think only in the unseen-world economy of pleasing or displeasing God, guilt and shame. Thinking non-Dualistically would totally change the way you look at the world and deepen your commitment to follow God's rules for a quality life.

So, thinking in non-Dualistic but more Biblical ways is extremely liberating. We approach the throne of God in extreme confidence and never shame because we wear the perfect righteousness of Christ. But we also understand the consequences of not following God's rules in this seen and important realm of life.

Butterflies in the Belfry, Serpents in the Cellar

Chapter Twenty

So? The Question of Christian Society

I am not a Church service person. I'm not saying that for any theological or philosophical reason but as a personal preference. Many Christians truly enjoy the Sunday morning tradition. I'm probably the aberration. My attitude possibly dates back to my early upbringing when church service was a farce and only stood as an act of penitence.

I also don't care for most church service music. I don't like country and western twang, I don't care too much for operatic falsetto. I also don't care too much for music which has the purpose of working people up into a total emotionally frenzy, without much content, as some of the more contemporary Christian rock music does—with its eardrum-piercing, electric guitar squeals, hands raised in the air and eyes rolled back in the head. But this is simply my own personal taste. But give me a John Mayer, Sarah McLachlan, Jewel, Cheryl Crow, hey . . . even a folksy John Denver-sounding concert with good lyrics of honest seen-world experiences and true unseen world theology and I would be spell-bound for hours.

I don't care much for Sunday morning preaching. After fifty years of church attendance, it is very difficult for even the greatest preacher on earth to preach something that is new and thought-provoking. The same would be true if I weren't a Christian and I had sat for one hour for every Sunday for the past fifty years, listening to a motivational speaker. It doesn't matter how good that motivational speaker was, it would simply get old after a while. However, I do love thought-provoking lectures from Biblical scholars and thinkers and I could sit in on a good lecture for at least two hours without the constant effort to keep my attention focused or checking my e-mails on my smart phone. I must have listened to hundreds of hours of such lectures on

cassette tapes in my Walkman during my first couple of years after my rabbit-hole experience. I did pick our present church because the pastor teaches closer to this type of teaching than any other church on our island.

I do like interacting with people, even though on Sunday mornings that interaction is very superficial. But I deeply crave honest, Christian friendship and fellowship in the same way as a man crossing the Sahara on his knees, craves water . . . where there is virtually none. Such true fellowship is indeed very rare and hard to find. Certainly it is not possible during a typical Sunday morning church service where a smile and a handshake is as far as the interaction can go. Maybe in a well-led Sunday school class there can be a little true fellowship.

But I am sure that many people honestly enjoy Sunday morning church service. However, I wonder how many go, and imagine that they enjoy it because they believe that this is what God wants them to do . . . going out of guilt or penitence. I've talked to many teenagers and this is a common feeling that they are willing to share when they are being very candid.

I can remember a children's Christian music cassette tape that my wife use to play in our old VW Vanagon when we were traveling the country raising support for our mission. Denise bought the tape from the performers at a mission conference that we attended. One song on the tape really bugged me. The title and lyrics were "Everybody ought to go to Sunday school." Over and over the chorus rang out, with the same words as the title. The only reason given for going to Sunday school was "ought." Maybe the lyricist meant something different than guilt manipulation but I'm sure many kids took it that way. Are we not surprised when eighty percent leave the church when they are old enough to do so?

At this juncture I must bring up the issue of semantics when I talk about the Church. What I hope to discuss in this chapter is the vision I have of what the non-Dualistic Church

would look like. But I want to avoid the word “church” because, again, it is a word loaded with a lot of connotations and many of them have nothing to do with the original Biblical intent.

The Greek word in the new testament, which is translated “church,” is spelled (in English) ecclesia or ekklesia. It is a description of a people group and not any kind of institution. It simply means “those called out for a purpose.” A modern example would be something like Congress or even the Army. It is where people from all walks of life come together for a common goal. It is really very simple. Over time the word “church” has come to mean a place, a service or an institution, anything but a people group. You can not “go to church” in the Biblical sense, any more than you can “go to family” because ecclesia was never a location or an event. So the real church is about the collection of Christian people not a service, institution and certainly not a building. So I will be referring to this group, most of the time, from a more neutral wording of “Christian society.” I will just use CS for short. But I don’t mean to downplay the immense importance of the CS in God’s plan. It is the CS that is the bride of Christ.

One influence of the Gnostics, which has had a continuing influence on American Christianity, is the personalization of the Christian faith. The Gnostics considered Christianity as a personal matter between you and your God. True Biblical Christianity is anything but that. In my attempts to point out the Dualistic influence of churches (with a small “c”) I am not attempting to devalue the CS.

If you go back and read the New Testament without wearing Dualistic glasses, you would see that the mandates for the CS form are very few if at all. There are historical examples of how they functioned in different areas. If you go back and study the CS in the Ante Pacem period (before the peace of Constantine in 312) like I spent a year doing, you will see that it took many shapes during that period. Some Christians met daily, some hardly met at all. Some had elders,



some deacons or both. But with Dualistic glasses those descriptions have no earthly-historical meaning anymore, but must be spiritualized as absolute laws or mandates, and if they are not followed precisely, like Levitical law, then God will be very displeased. In the same way the snake handlers in Newport, Tennessee took the example of handling snakes and not getting bitten as a Biblical mandate.

One of the few mandates that I do find is in Hebrews chapter ten, “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” So the opposite of “not meeting” isn’t simply meeting for the sake of meeting, but encouraging one another as the CS was meant to do. It is hard to encourage one another if we don’t know one another. It is hard to know one another when we live in a Christian society where we all pretend that we are much better than we really are and we don’t dare show a sign of weakness.

Good friends from every sort of Church denomination would argue with me until they turn blue in their faces about my oversimplification of the CS and about the great freedom of church form. Each friend promotes their own church form as the true Biblical structure.

We attempted to start a house church once. It was when I first had the sense that a truly non-Dualistic expression of the CS could happen. However I had a naive idealism that didn't, yet, recognize the depth of the Fall of Adam. This was about half way through my personal journey and my thinking was not well developed yet. I thought I should find, or create the perfect church. While good Christian societies are possible, maybe even great ones, fallen people can't produce perfect churches . . . but at the time I thought I could.

Although the fellowship was great in our group, and the teaching was better than I had seen in years, a few, well-meaning Christian friends were deeply troubled because we had taken our children "out of church." The parents of one of my son's friends said that he could not come to our house to play anymore because of this. They just couldn't bring themselves to think outside the traditional church box. We weren't doing it to avoid CS, but to have more of it.

We did eventually disband because we couldn't sustain the group. The cockroaches of old and new sin within each family made it a group that could not reach critical mass. One family believed that we must following orthodox Jewish customs and laws in order to really please God. Another family thought that we should be hoarding food, guns and survival gear for the coming war with Bill Clinton, Janet Reno and the UN. So we obviously had to dissolve for irreconcilable differences. But these families were the only Christians in Marquette, Michigan at the time, who even dared to try a house church concept . . . but apparently, each for different reasons.

I do believe, if it had succeeded, that our children, in some ways, would be far better off today. Through their youth group experiences over the years, they have been

exposed to unhealthy Christian-Dualistic thinking including a disrespect of their intellectual questions and a lot of emotional dishonesty. Young people are very good about recognizing emotional and intellectual dishonesty. It is intuitive to them. This is why the eighty percent of children, who grow up in Evangelical churches, do not stay in them. The American Evangelical response to this hemorrhaging of young people is to make youth groups more entertaining. More trips to the water parks. More trips to the ski hill and Christian concert venues. While at the same time, in my experience, they create a thicker and thicker wall between their pretend Christian utopia and reality. Kids are naturally drawn to reality like moths to a porch light. If they can stand up in youth group and say, "I'm not sure I believe in God anymore," and feel not only accepted, but having a very honest (not a chain of superficial evangelical clichés) discussion, they might consider staying in that particular CS.

When I was sitting in the Mexican restaurant with my good friend Ken, he was sharing that in his opinion, how paramount it was that Christians went to the right church, which taught the perfect doctrine. After all, his church had just excommunicated another church over an issue that was too abstract to even discuss outside their own heads in spoken words. Strangely, when I returned home from that trip to Tennessee, I had an E-mail waiting from a good friend, Rob, in Michigan. He was sending me the name of a church of his particular Lutheran synod that was fifty miles from our house. He strongly suggested, "For the sake of your children" that we move our membership to that church. He was very worried about the proper use of the sacraments and, in his opinion; his church was the only one that did.

I now think, what starts out as good intentions of finding the right CS becomes

entangled with the economics of self-worth. The thinking goes, “My church is the better than yours just like my basketball team is better.” Therefore, we feel better when we go to the “better church.” We get that warm, fuzzy feeling deep inside that we are going to the church God wants everyone to, but we happen to be good enough or smart of enough, unlike the millions of other Christians, to have found the only correct one.

I certainly don't want to diminish the eminent importance of sound doctrine, the historical precedent of church form and structure. Doctrine is very important and form has its place. One of the best functioning church meetings I ever visited, when looking at the mandate to encourage one another, was a house church in Denver. I flew out and spent a week with them when I was contemplating organizing our own house-based church meeting. In many ways this Denver CS met my concept of the ideal. However, I started to notice some problems. At the end of the week, when I sat in on their elder's meeting, it became obvious that they really didn't care a lot about doctrine or form. After I kept asking doctrinal questions, one elder finally turned to me and said, “You just don't get it do you. We couldn't care less about what you believe, just as long as you love Jesus.” While functional wonderfully at the time, this CS was sitting on very dangerous ground. The tendency, unless you have a good doctrinal foundation, is that in time you will wander from Biblical truth.

I eventually gave up on my hope of finding the ideal CS and returned to the more traditional church. I've been somewhat of a misfit since. When the pieces started coming back together for me, post-rabbit hole experience, I vowed in my heart that I would never live in the veneer Christian world again. But it has been very tough going . . . and quite lonely.

For one thing, I vowed to refrain from constantly speaking in terms of the supernatural. For example saying, “My car wouldn’t start, I prayed and pumped the gas and twice and it was a miracle . . . it started! God did it!” Of course if it was clear that God decided to do things differently from working through His wonderful natural system, if He did step into the playground and give a piggy-back ride, I wouldn’t hesitate to boast about that. I mean if my car didn’t have an engine, but I prayed and it started and ran continuously (without gas) for years, I would call that a supernatural work of God.

I also decided that I would try my best to keep my cellar door, at least, ajar. I knew, because of the roaches in my own soul and the tempting lure of the economics of self-worth, that I would not have the courage to keep my cellar aired-out all the time. Unfortunately, you just can not live consistently that way.

But, within the walls of the traditional church, I didn’t give up on the hope of finding honest fellowship and good teaching. The closest thing I have been able to find to Biblical fellowship within the traditional church is the small group. But even small groups have been so influenced by Dualism; it is hard for people to be honest and open.

Speaking honestly within the traditional church is sometimes extremely difficult. When we first got back from Egypt, I wasn’t even sure I was still a Christian. I was suffering from clinical depression to the point that I was seriously considering suicide. I had a plan of hanging myself in our barn. In desperation I took my long walks at night, which had always been a special time of prayer for me. But on those lonely nights, the sky, the billions of brilliant stars seemed cold and empty. I remember begging the cold, dead universe . . . “God, if you are out there somewhere, please find me!” Was He hiding somewhere within the Large Magellanic Cloud, or playing hide and seek behind the Cat’s

Eye Nebula or was He never there in the first place? I really didn't know at that point.

I was also still very confused as I had barely started my journey to understand what ailed my faith. It was tempting to push those unattractive attributes deep into the cellar and slam the door closed and play the church game again . . . just so I could have friends. It is very hard to have good Christian friends when you are honest about where you are in life, angry, confused, depressed and doubtful.

After resigning our post in Egypt, I secured a job in Duluth, Minnesota. This position was in a large clinic with seven other medical providers. One of them, Norm, was on an extended leave at the time with the National Guard. Angela, a nurse practitioner told me, "Mike, you'll really like Norm. He is a strong Christian man and father like yourself (making inferences based on our missionary service and the fact we were expecting our fourth child). In fact, he won Father of the Year. He and his wife have two natural children and they adopted six special needs children. They are like the perfect family!"

I was looking forward to meeting Norm. He did return after a few weeks. He was a very confident, type A Christian who knew all the answers . . . at least the Evangelical cliché version of them. But he did not like questions, not any of them. He seemed repulsed by me every time I approached him honestly. When I said, "I've having some serious doubts right now," he literally became angry but with a sarcastic dimpled smile, "Yeah, good for you . . . so you think you have the right to doubt God, but God never doubts you!" All his answers were bumper sticker material.

During this most difficult time of re-entry, as I was attempting to take my family back to church, I finally reached a point that I couldn't stomach it any longer. We tried

many churches, but it was the same facades and the same clichés in each one . . . something like a KFC franchise serving the same three-piece-original recipe box in Biloxi as Singapore. If anyone spoke to us, and it was usually with very good intentions, the conversation would go like this:

“Hi, are you folks new to town or just visiting?”

“We are new.”

“Where did you come from?”

“Uh . . . Egypt.”

“Egypt! Were you in the military?”

“Uh . . . no. . . we were, uh, missionaries.”

“Missionaries! Praise God that must have been a blessing.”

“No, it was hell.”

At this point, the person would either, quickly make distance between me and them or give a cliché response, “You must not have trusted God, because God never fails.”

I was always amazed with such comments because I hadn't said anything about “God failing.” I wasn't trying to make any theological statement about God's sovereignty. I was just being honest about how I felt in my emotions. However, the person, consistent with the Dualistic view, felt obligated to hastily make a connection of my state of mental health to some significance in the unseen realm. “You didn't trust God,” was like a spear into my chest. It was frustrating and painful to spend years working so hard for something, giving up so much, and then being diagnoses on a whim by a complete stranger. I had not trusted God? Is this what this was all about? Hmm.

When I had given up my high-paying job, lived for a year in a van with my two kids and pregnant wife, then we went alone to the huge city of Cairo . . . all because I thought that was what God had wanted me to do. But I hadn't trusted Him correctly?

I think the lowest point came when we were visiting a very large evangelical church, whose ranks had been growing by leaps and bounds under the guidance of a charismatic pastor, named Paul. One Sunday morning I was sitting on a pew in the vestibule and Paul came in the door and had a seat next to me. He looked at me, in the eye, and smiled, "Hey Michael. How's life treating you?"

Not recognizing that it was only a shallow greeting, I answered sincerely, "I'm very depressed right now."

I felt like this was a fair statement because it was during the period that I was seriously being besieged by the choice to commit suicide or not—feeling so hopeless that suicide might be the only road out of the perpetual swamp, which I found myself in. I was, indeed, begging for help. So, I think I was being honest when I said I was depressed. The thin, tall pastor with the dark Hungarian hair just smiled . . . and did not speak another word to me.

In a few moments we were seated in the huge auditorium along with five hundred fellow churchmen and women. After a lively choir performance, Paul took the podium, looked out over his congregation and almost the first loud words that, literally, came from his mouth were, "I'm sick and tired of Christians telling me that they are (then using a very prissy voice) depressed. It makes me sick to my stomach! Do we serve a depressing God?"

"No!" came the cry from a few deacons in the front row.



I have never felt so alone and desperate as I did at that very moment. I knew that Paul, or maybe no one, cared a damn about me. Maybe they only cared about their ability to score religious points with other Christians. The inaudible answer screaming in my ear was, “Do it . . . hang yourself. It really is hopeless!” I think the most distressing thing at that time was realizing that this was the world I had been living in for fifteen years.

Before my fall down the rabbit hole, I would have reacted toward someone like me, the same way that Norm did or Paul. For a Christian to suffer or fail had to be their own, new sin. History in the seen world must have a spiritual meaning . . . or no meaning at all.

About that time I lost contact with Norm as he abruptly ran off, leaving his wife and eight children, with a nurse who was twenty years his younger. He had apparently been having an affair with her for some time. Maybe that was why he was so offended if I tried to open my own cellar door. He had some real monsters lurking down in his own. But he had thrown a nice braided rug over his trap door that led downward. But in the midst of my despair, eventually there came a glimmer of hope that went by the simple name of “Dave.”

Denise was doing every thing that she could to help me and she insisted that I not give up on the Church. We went to a new one, a Christian Missionary and Alliance church on Arrowhead Road in Duluth, but it could have been any church. It was the same thing all over again. Strangers were standing in the vestibule greeting us and asking who we were. When a newspaper man, Dave Peterson, asked me how it was being a missionary in Egypt . . . and I responded, “It was hell,” he didn’t bat an eye, but smiled softly. Putting his hand on my back, like a semi-man hug, he added, “Hey, I want to hear

all the details. Can I bring the pastor and we meet at Burger King this afternoon?"

That afternoon, I sat with Dave and the pastor for three hours over a Whooper and fries as huge soft snowflakes tumbled out of the grey sky and onto windshields of the cars in the parking lot. Through the birch trees, which lined the highway, you could see the whitecaps of a tremulous Lake Superior, a few hundred yards away.

I had been back in the states for six months and Dave was the first person to ask about our experience . . . I mean sincerely asked. I didn't hesitate to begin telling our story. I thought the saga had been pushed down, inside a can, so long and so hard, that if I took the lid off, it may not come out very easily, as if it had solidified. But it did come out, slowly at first, but then it began to flow out like hot honey, then hot oil. Hot oil gave away to a bust of boiling water, like an Old Faithful eruption.

Dave was a stocky man . . . about forty years old and the pastor, ironically also named David, was about twenty-eight, thin and five-foot seven at best. I will never forget stocky Dave's face. He sat like a statue, in a good-listening way, with his chin set firmly on his two fists, resting on his elbows. After about forty-five minutes into the story, I saw the most amazing thing I had ever witnessed. It was like I just had ten years of therapy rolled into a nanosecond. What was it? It was simply a huge, sincere tear . . . tumbling down Dave's silent face, dripping off his cheek onto his fist.

Until that point, I assumed that Dave, like everyone else, wasn't even listening to me. I guessed he was daydreaming . . . off fishing somewhere out beyond the whitecaps. With the sight of the tear, I froze in confusion, followed by a strange kind of delight or at least a relief. I became so choked up that couldn't speak anymore, but I could cry. The dams burst in my own eyes and for the first time I began to sob uncontrollably until my

French fries became a blur and soggy. It may have been the first time I had cried in fifteen years. Real men, especially Christian men don't cry. I hadn't cried at my friend Daniel's funeral and how could I? After all, even his parents were so godly that they didn't cry.

But that day, I finally had an ear and that's all I had wanted. I didn't want the "answer," or a cliché or a Bible verse. I knew all the Bible verses. I didn't want someone just listening to the first sentence out of my mouth then interrupting, trying to make meaning out of it by connecting it to something in the unseen world . . . God teaching me a lesson, or being my fault because I had not been obedient. I didn't want someone glancing at their watches within five seconds of the story.

I honestly can't remember what happened after Dave's tear and the tears that followed. It really didn't matter. I don't know what he or David said that day and maybe they said nothing at all. But I do know that the moment prior to that dinner at Burger King on Skyline drive in Duluth, Minnesota I was hopeless, so hopeless that I was certain that I would commit suicide before a few more weeks would pass. Afterwards, sitting in the fast-food parking lot under a windshield covered in new, soft, fluffy snow, I knew that some day I would find God again, and I would be well. On that day, I also found the real Church once more.

Years later, when I was over the depression, my faith was restored and I had moved past the finding the perfect CS phase, we were back with the traditional church. However, I was still determined to make the traditional church a better CS. I became the director of small groups. My own small group, six or seven families meeting together in

our home for five years, became one of the best expressions of CS I had seen since my early days of college.

But even within that context it was still very hard to remain transparent and honest. As our group had jelled, I came up with the idea of moving to the next level. The women had taken two weekend retreats together and it was a great success so I thought that I could reproduce the experience with the men. Women are naturally more open to sharing their hearts because, frankly, men are far more insecure when it comes to the economics of self-worth.

I rented a remote national forest cabin in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. It was so far out in the woods that you had to drive on snow-covered gravel roads for an hour then ski in carrying all your supplies in back packs or on sleds behind you. When the seven of us men assembled, we had a blast. We went snow shoeing, ice fishing and skiing. That night, we settled down by the wood stove.

The cabin was very rustic, simple logs on a concrete slab. It had one large bunk room and a kitchen with a wood stove area. There was no running water but a pit toilet out back whose seat hovered around zero degrees all winter. There was a real danger of your buttocks sticking to it if they were damp so you had to tuck pieces of Styrofoam under you before sitting down. With the outside temperatures dipping below zero, it was a struggle, even with a roaring fire, to keep the interior of the cabin above forty degrees.

But it seemed like the perfect ending to the perfect day. With just a candle or two burning, most of our light came from the flicker of the open wood stove. We pulled up chairs in a semi-circle around the warm fire with our mugs of coffee or hot chocolate.

Looking around the semi-circle, the glow of the fire reflected off the faces of each

of my buddies, with their torsos blending into the shadowy background. We started off telling a few funny stories, and then I decided to take a chance and to move the fellowship to a deeper level.

I looked around and asked, “So . . . what’s really happening in your lives?”

I knew from Denise’s report that during the women’s retreat, some opened up about personal struggles such as significant issues within their marriages. This is what I wanted to accomplish, a gentle opening of the cellar doors . . . not to be nosey, but to give us a chance to live more honestly and help one other slay our dragons.

Time passed and no one shared. Then I noticed that the bold, fire-reflecting, faces seemed to be pulling backwards . . . like the heads of tortoises into their shells. I was hoping that I wouldn’t have to be the one to share . . . so was everyone else. The longer I gave it, the deeper the heads retreated. Soon there were only slits in their shells through which you could only make out the reflection of yellow, beady eyes.

I took a deep breath, opened my own cellar door and went spelunking. I took my flash light to the darkest corner that I could find . . . and there stood a Basilisk. I put a collar round his neck and led him to the door and into the light of the flickering fire for heart-wrenching show-n-tell.

“Here’s something that I’m struggling with.” I took another deep breath. “Once a year I have to go to continuing medical education meetings for a week. Now days, it seems like every hotel has” . . . another sigh . . . “adult movies on their TV. As soon as you turn on the set, the beginning menu starts enticing you to buy a movie. Being alone in the room for a week, the struggle is immense. I figured out that I could go down to the lobby and tell them to turn off the adult channels . . . but . . . like an alluring ghost, the

next morning they would reappear. I hated those weeks of struggle to avoid them . . . and having watched one.”

I looked around and the shells were close so tight, that no eyes were still visible.

“Guys, I need your help. I need someone to hold me accountable.”

Still no response, so I had to ask, “Doesn’t anyone else struggle with this?”

Some of the tortoises had their shells clamped tight, but I could make out the eyes of my friend Brad, directly across from me. His shell slowly opened so I gave him more time.

“Well,” Brad finally said, “I have the same problem.” Then he sipped his coffee and looked down at his feet as many other shells started to pop open. Brad opened his mouth to continue . . . but then came a loud sigh from beside me. I hadn’t notice but Charles, had his head out all along and now his neck was really sticking out.

“This is disgusting!” He exclaimed. “How could a godly man even be tempted with this filth? This conversation is becoming unedifying.”

I then noticed that as soon as I had started sharing, Charles had started thumbing through his Bible. Now he held several places with his fingers and he started to read. “Job said in Job 31:1 that he had made a covenant with his heart to not look lustfully at a girl. Those movies are all about lust . . .”

Charles continued on for fifteen minutes with a mini sermon with multiple verses about the evils of sexual sin, as I watched the tortoises pull in their heads and close their shells. Brad not only retracted his head but his legs . . . and his tail.

Maybe the concept of lusting never crossed Charles’ mind anymore now that he was a “godly man” . . . but again, Norm would have reacted the same way. Norm could

have given the same mini sermon . . . while the night before he had slept with his little nurse girlfriend. But how would the CS be better served? Having the cellar doors open or nailed closed with stacks of Bibles on top holding it down? The closed-cellar churches certainly look a lot better, nice and clean and organized. The open-cellar churches can get pretty messy.

I'm not talking about a situation where we speak boldly and constantly about our most intimate sins. I have seen that happen before, though rarely. Sometimes we, in order to get attention, can be a constant public confessor. In that case, trying to look like the humble sincere Christian, we seek to improve our Christian self-esteem. That is not what I'm talking about.

But, the true CS must be a very safe place. We are not called out from the world because we are better or live better or have more value, but because our miserable sin, in God's eyes, has been erased once and for all. If we really believed that, then walking into any church setting would give us the incredible safe feeling of re-entering our mother's womb. We would sense God's total acceptance as exhibited by other Christians.

Instead, the church setting can be one of the scariest places on earth. I deal with a lot of patients with pseudo-seizures, anxiety disorders and panic attacks. One of the most common places for panic attacks to occur is in the middle of church services. Most people feel the least accepted in the middle of church service. I know that growing up it was a tremendous act each Sunday morning putting on our best church clothes and faces.

But the church should be a real sanctuary from critical judgment. It should be the first place that people think of to run to when they are in a crisis, even if that crisis is a mental health problem or a direct result of their new, personal sin. After coming to this

place, I went back and read the Gospels again. I noticed how Jesus made sinners, with open cellar doors, feel compared to the sinners who had their cellar doors nailed shut (white-washed walls in other words).

A great CS is a place that when, even a mature Christian walks up to you and says “I’m depressed,” or “I’m in the midst of an affair,” or “I’m molesting my children” or “I hate my spouse,” that we don’t look at them with horror on our faces and run away, throwing verses over our shoulders at them as we are on our way out the door . . . but we reach out with a smile and a hug and say, “I want to hear all about it. Let’s meet at Burger King today.” This would be a genuine smile, not happy about the sin or the pain of course, but happy that they have opened their cellars and have given you the honor of entering their cellars with them, two friends side by side, swords in each hand, to fight the terrible dragons, like in Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings.

When we, as Christians, don’t recognize how many cockroaches still inhabit our own souls, we are very vulnerable to allowing our psychological economics of self-worth be expressed as godliness. In 1976, while I was an undergraduate student and while I was still new to the faith, I became a self-proclaimed ambassador of the Holy Spirit. I actually thought that I would spend that year stamping out sin wherever I found it. This included in my own life.

To address my own sin, I had a large chart on my dorm room wall where I tracked my days without sin. The behaviorist psychologist B.F. Skinner had a daughter, Susan, who became an expert in tracking human behavior. I used one of her charts to track my sin. Yeah, it was pathetic. But worse than that, I was on the constant lookout for sin in others. If I heard someone say an angry word, I would immediately call them on it. If



someone said “darn” I would point out that it was a substitute for “damn” and therefore equally sinful. If someone told a story, I would go over the facts to make sure they were not lying. Of course, stories about supernatural works of God were the exception and were even points in the positive column. I would never question such miracles because doing so was equated with questioning God. I didn’t make a lot of new friends that year.

After my rabbit hole experience, I sometimes noticed the same attitude in other Christians and I find it most unappealing. I’m perplexed why no one killed me back in my undergraduate days.

When we use leverage, critically evaluating others in order to boost our own feelings of self-worth, we must add measurements. God only gave us a few guidelines for living well. It is hard to keep score with only a handful of basic rules, so we create more and more, in order to create a graded system for establishing our own self-worth and for comparing ourselves favorably to others. This is the psychological basis for legalism.

During our wonderful five year small group in Michigan I pressed hard against legalism, because I don’t think it’s healthy. One night we had a visitor to our small group. Aaron was an Air Force pilot, somewhat from the same cocky mold as the Tom Cruise character in Top Gun. During a time of preparation for prayer, Aaron shared how upset he was that a Christian neighbor on the Air Force base had “ruined his testimony.” He explained that this neighbor decided to clean up his cul-de-sac. He spent a Saturday afternoon picking up trash and then bundled it and put it on the curb in front of his house. Apparently he had several beer boxes on his trash. Aaron was driving by and saw the beer cases and went in to confront his fellow Christian. That’s when he explained why they were there . . . but it still left Aaron very upset.

Being polite toward our new visitor, I didn't say anything. In a moment, Barb began to share. She had been a long time member of our small group . . . and like me, tended to fall off the shame side of the narrow path. She was always very hard on herself, especially when it came to her weight. She may have been forty-five pounds above her ideal weight, according to Hollywood, so she certainly wasn't morbidly obese. She shared that night, almost in tears, "I failed God this week. I had a sign on my refrigerator door not to eat a piece of Jason's (her son's) birthday cake, but in a moment of weakness I did."

I honestly couldn't take it anymore . . . first with Aaron's rules about beer boxes and now Barb's self-imposed condemnation for eating a piece of birthday cake. I spoke up with some emotion, "For Heaven's sake . . . where does God tell us not to eat birthday cake?"

Aaron, with his two percent body fat frame chimed in, "God hates gluttony!"

"Gluttony . . . is eating one piece of birthday cake, your own son's birthday cake, gluttony? Is having a beer box, even if they were your own, on your curb the same as being drunk? You know Christ hated legalism as much as any sin."

Aaron seemed puzzled by my comment then added, "You talk like you think legalism is something bad. We need to code to prove our obedience and love for Jesus and to prove that we are different from the world!"

But are non-Christians more attracted to the CS if the CS has more and more mores for separating themselves from non CS members? I think not. Lastly I want to look at this final area of how thinking non-Dualistically would have an effect on the way in which we relate to the non-Christian world, and our efforts to bringing them into the

Kingdom of God.

After my rabbit hole experience and recovery, I re-entered the Church as a changed man, often feeling like I had been transported from a distant planet, or at least a different culture on our own planet. I call it a deformed to reformed experience. My old system of thinking was shattered or deformed and a new or reformed thinking took its place. It has been a constant struggle for me to fit in with American Evangelicals while holding tightly to my ideals, my self-imposed moratorium on spiritual dishonesty. I occasionally do run into others, who—like me—have had some type of rabbit hole experience that has changed their whole world. I've met women whose “godly” husbands ran off with the church secretary. I've met people whose children were violently killed and the Evangelical clichés didn't resolve anything for them. Sometimes they take the wide path of becoming silent zombies, not expressing what they think or the confusion that still reigns in their inward kingdom. It is only in brief moments of very private conversation do I sense this harmony between us.

But more unique than my story, or the stories of the other deformed—then—reformed people, are these unique Church creatures whom have never lived in the fantasy land above the rabbit hole. I'm not sure how they did it, but they never bought into the American Evangelical subculture. They, like the lone trailer still standing after a tornado, never seemed to be influenced by the Dualism that has saturated the Church for two thousand years. I call these people the “Spared Ones.” You find Spared Ones in almost every church. Even in my little Bible belt church, there were some women and a couple of men who were like this.

The Spared Ones have no hesitation about speaking truth, even when it goes

totally contrary to the mainstream Christian thinking, or makes them look very unspiritual. Throughout Church history, there must have been these refreshing saints. By their nature, being against the flow of Church history, they were usually ignored at best.

One of them, in my humble opinion, is the nineteenth century Scottish novelist George MacDonald. I wish I could say that I've read all his works. I've only read a few but Denise has read them all. C.S. Lewis has said that he never wrote a book without quoting MacDonald. He seems to have this rawness about him. Knowing that he did endure personal suffering, he could have been the deformed-reformed person rather than the natural Raw Christian. Maybe there was a time in his early life when he too conformed to Evangelical Dualism and its cultural mores. I honestly don't know. However, the true Raw Christian will tell you if they are having a bad day. They will not pretend that all events were orchestrated by God to teach someone, somewhere patience. They do not despise the cosmos or their own flesh, but deeply appreciate God's creativity and glory in every thing He's made . . . including the "nasty people" who are not Christians. These Raw Christians, something like Christ himself, are not offensive to non-Christians, but are attractive to them. Both of these groups give me great hope.

Butterflies in the Belfry, Serpents in the Cellar

Chapter Twenty-one

So, How do We Relate to the World?

I'm Standing on a bridge

I'm waitin' in the dark

I thought that you'd be here by now

There's nothing but the rain

No footsteps on the ground

I'm listening but there's no sound

Isn't anyone tryin' to find me?

Won't somebody come take me home

It's a damn cold night

Trying to figure out this life

Won't you take me by the hand

take me somewhere new

I don't know who you are

but I ... I'm with you

I'm looking for a place searching for a face

is anybody here I know

cause nothings going right

and everything's a mess

and no one likes to be alone

Isn't anyone tryin' to find me?

Won't somebody come take me home

It's a damn cold night

Trying to figure out this life

Won't you take me by the hand

take me somewhere new

I don't know who you are

but I ... I'm with you.

These are the lyrics to Avril Lavigne's song, *I'm With You* and could be the heart-cry for this generation. I believe that the non-Christian society has a natural, intense desire to know Christ . . . the true Christ . . . or at least what he is offering, but they don't realize it. This is a truly natural inclination—to be re-united with the one who made them and the only one who loves them deeply and accepts them like no one else can even imagine. They are begging for this help and reunification. So with a world that is hungry for God, why is it that it seems like they desire anything else but Him?

Satan is the father of lies and since the Eden has been the great deceiver. Like a cloaking device, he has worked to obscure the true, wonderful Gospel from those who desperately seek it. I really believe now that Platonic Dualism has been one of the biggest tools of that deception.

As Dualism's destiny has been to separate the physical seen-world from the un-seen world, the tendency has to been to carry that separation into the realm of the lives of men and women by defining them as worldly-men and women versus heavenly-men and women. We want to separate the good guys from the bad guys with sharp lines of demarcation. This is basically what Augustine was trying to do in *City of God*. He was

trying to compare the heavenly city with the earthly one as well as the inhabitants of the heavenly city with those of the earthly city. When we see the world Dualistically, the worldly people, whose king is Satan, stand in total opposition to the people of God. The non-Christians, then become our foes in some great war. Like Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane, we want to draw our swords and go to battle with these nasty people, who Evangelical Christianity often sees as the enemy. You know who I mean; the gays, the whores, the drug dealers, the Islamists, the evolutionists and the democrats.

But Jesus made it clear that His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). We cannot divide the world that we live in so easily into the good guys and bad guys. Jesus goes on, in the parable of the wheat and tares, to make the point how we shouldn't even try to separate the two groups. Carefully read the follow passage from Matthew 13:24-30 with this in mind.

Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?'

'An enemy did this,' he replied. The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'

'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them

in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’

It seems to me that we try way too hard to separate the Christians from the non-Christians as well as Christian things opposed to the non-Christian things. I often hear statements like, “We only listen to Christian music, watch Christian movies, go to Christian stores etc.”

We were home schooling our children while we were in Egypt because we had no choice. Once we were back in the states, we decided to continue home schooling. Denise did a fantastic job with them. This experience brought us in contact with many other home-schoolers.

These home-schooling parents were typically terrific people, who deeply loved and were committed to their children. They were also, typically, very driven to please God. Some of the women went as far as having their heads covered. The families often had special rooms in their homes for school, complete with a large American flag in the corner. Some of them made uniforms for their kids to wear while at school and disciplined their children firmly by spanking them with wooden spoons. If there is an epicenter of American Evangelicalism, it seemed like this group was it.

I remember while attending a Christian conference that I sat down at a table for lunch and I was surrounded by other home schooling parents. As I ate, I attempted to make friendly conversation. I mentioned something that I had seen on the news the previous evening and the group looked like the proverbial deer in the headlights. “TV?” came the question. One guy spoke up, “Uh . . . we wouldn’t allow a TV in our house for any amount of money. It’s just full of humanistic crap. Even the news is part of their liberal conspiracy.”



I asked, “So what do you do for entertainment?”

“We read books to our kids, the classics, and occasionally go to G rated movies, when we can find one. We listen to the radio . . . but only Christian stations.”

The next person down the table, shaking her head commented, “There’s not even a G rated that I would allow my kids to see. Even they have some liberal agenda . . . like evolution. We have given up on the radio too. We have taught our kids to play music . . . old traditional hymns.”

The next person, a man, confidently said, “We haven’t been to a movie in a decade. We’ve never owned a TV. We only allow our kids to read Christian books . . . such as the *Left Behind Series*.”

I sat in silent amazement as the gauntlet of verbal competition continued on down the table as if I had started The Wave in a football stadium. Finally the conversation seemed to reach a pinnacle when a bearded, neo-Amish-looking man on the end declared, “The only book we allow in our house is the word of God, the King James Bible, to be precise. Everything you need to know is in it. We teach math from it, science from it and English from it.” Hmm, English learned from the King James Bible . . . now that must be interesting, I thought.

But, like a veil being lifted from my eyes, I began to realize that what I was seeing wasn’t a group of strangers who desperately wanted to please God, but one who desperately wanted to feel God’s good pleasure . . . but couldn’t. There was some kind of Dualistic disconnect with the perfect justification and peace that God had given all Christians. In order to seek this divine pleasure, they had added more and more rules to their lives.

For Evangelicals, concepts like WWJD (what would Jesus do) or “not offending the weaker brother,” or “not giving the appearance of evil,” become the innumerable “other rules,” which became like mortar to fill in the gaps between the spoken ones. But quickly the situation deteriorates to where there is far more mortar than bricks! When we do this, I now believe we are using leverage of comparison to grasp that sense of feeling God’s pleasure, thus our own sense of self-worth. We do X, Y, Z plus a thousand other godly things . . . so God must really be impressed with us. But God never asked us to do those things in the first place. Micah chapter six, verse eight says, “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” It is really, really that simple!

These conversations around the table with the home-schoolers took me back to graduate school when I was part of the Navigator group. In many ways those were wonderful days . . . although very dishonest. We played a constant game of presenting ourselves as much better than we really were. Also, we, like bloodhounds, were always sniffing out sin in the lives of others or chinks in their spiritual armor. The imperfections in others gave us handholds on which to pull ourselves up on or opportunities for our offensive spears. If a brother seemed better than us, it brought our secret hearts some joy to see him fall. But covering all this is a veneer that non-Christians are very good in seeing through.

The movie *Saved* was considered very offensive by most in the Evangelical world, and even a sacrilege. But I believe some things are so offensive to us because they are like mortar shells that land way too close to our cellar doors. The movie exploits the superficiality of a fundamentalist high school. The co-writer and director of *Saved*, Brian

Donnelly, actually attended a Baptist high school in Baltimore, so, although the movie was a great exaggeration, he did know what he was talking about.

When Christian society behaves this way, why would any self-respecting non-Christian be attracted to it? Why would any non-Christian even want to be around Christians? I've heard non-Christians say that they are too honest to become a Christian, and I think they are telling the truth. They realized that to become a Christian, their sins don't just magically vanish, but must actually go underground. They have to start playing the game of smiling when they hurt, enjoying music that they hate and going far beyond God's few simple rules for better living to the hundreds, if not thousands of non-Biblical mores of the American, Evangelical Christian society. No more alcohol, not even beer boxes in their trash, no more music with a beat and no more TV. It is a terrible burden that we put on them that eventually pushes the Gospel beyond their reach. This was why Paul was furious with Peter for trying to impose circumcision on the new, Greek converts.

So how do we relate to the non-Christian world if Dualism has been eradicated from our cognitive framework? I looked to Christ for my answers. Studying the Gospels and observing the way He related to the world left a new impression on me. Sinners felt attracted to Him, like thirsty men and women to a well of cold water. But His well had no iron cage around it and no armed guards running interference around it.

I noticed too, who and what it was that irritated Jesus the most. It was the struggle of religious men who played the games, who had their cellar doors nailed tight and who used the comparisons for leverage for their own ESW. These are the very folks whom Jesus threw out of the temple.

I remember when we were living in Ann Arbor, Michigan that a well-meaning group in the metro-Detroit area wanted to create a virtual Christian sub-culture. They believe that Christians should only do business in Christian stores. The point that they tried to make is, if you go to a gas station run by a non-Christian and pay for your gas . . . the owner might turn around and use that money, God's money, to buy pornography or even alcohol . . . God forbid. They published a book listing Christian carpenters, dentists, doctors, shoe stores, plumbers and accountants and were emphatic that no good Christian would go to anyone else. Hmm . . . I wonder what would happen if the Christian dentist takes your payment to support his secret (in his closed cellar) addiction to Internet porn?

Combined with these efforts of demarcation are the harshly critical views of the behavior of the dark half. Evangelicals hate homosexuality and often the homosexuals themselves. We can't stand to be around them. We don't allow them to rent our rooms, work on our houses and don't even like it when two men, holding hands, want to visit our churches. We are often very critical of co-workers who live together (unmarried) and use a long list of nasty words. I've heard some well meaning Evangelicals say that have cleaned up their offices because they got all the people to stop swearing.

The Air Force pilot who visited our Bible Study was well-known around the base gym as the clean-up guy. When he entered the large facility full of about two hundred people, most of whom I would assume were not Christians, he would march into the office and demand that the rock music, coming over the intercom, be turned off. After all, he had been convinced by a popular Christian speaker, Bill Gothard, that all music with a beat was sexual and therefore, obviously sin.

But, trying to force idealized Christian behavior onto non-Christians makes no

sense. You can scrub the dirt off a pig, but it is still a pig. But this wasn't always real dirt, but perceived dirt. What the non-Christian world really needs, and the only thing they need, is redemption. They need forgiveness just like we do. They do have some benefit from following the few rules that do have Biblical roots. Like I've said before, God gave us the rules in the first place so that we can live better. When non-Christians follow those rules, such as having sexual relations only inside the commitment of marriage, they do live better . . . but they are no less lost.

We would like to think that our real motive for criticizing non-Christian behavior is that we . . . like my one year of being the Holy Spirit's "ambassador" . . . think that we are defending God, which surely must please Him. Then we find ourselves back into the psychological trap of the ESW.

I believe that if we were really honest with ourselves, we would realize that our usual motives for being critical at anyone, Christian or non-Christian alike, is ESW. There's three parts to this. First, as I mentioned, we feel that God is pleased with us when we tell our co-workers to stop swearing, even though the words that they are saying usually has nothing to do with the true definition of the word "swear."

Secondly, we are critical of others in a defensive posture. When they live contrary to what I believe is true, then they are disrespecting me. It becomes personal and it's really not a God thing after all. Their actions communicate a devaluing of my personal beliefs and that makes me mad. Back in the Bible belt, I've seen pastors screaming from the pulpit from the top of their lungs . . . in unadulterated rage, when girls appear wearing makeup. Why does it make them so mad? It is because for years they had been preaching that it is sin to wear makeup and then when the girls do it, it is a personal offense to the

preacher and his ego. One Baptist pastor in our small town was well known for his stance against short dresses, makeup and rock music . . . until he abruptly ran off with the Methodist minister's wife.

Thirdly, the issue is leverage. When I push down on you, I am pushing myself up. I can still remember how holy I felt when I worked with four blatant homosexual men in the department of surgery at the University of Kentucky. I felt holy when I described my ordeal and "persecution" with my Christian friends. I would say, "They started talking openly about their sexual experiences with other men and I walked out. I told my boss that I would not come back into the OR until they had stopped."

We love to criticize those who are living with their girlfriends, who get drunk and have other vices because, frankly, it boosts our own sense of self-worth. I'm a pretty good guy when I'm compared to the bleeding-heart liberal, fornicator, drunkard, swearing sluggards. But did Jesus simply come to earth and die for us so that we would live better? He came and died to take away the punishment of our sins. Sometimes these non-Christians' behavior make us so mad . . . frankly because we are jealous of them. We think, very privately, it would be nice to sleep with a different gal every couple of weeks.

So the first Dualistic obstacle of the lost seeing all they are longing for, in Jesus, is our critical attitude towards them. The CS should be the safest place in the whole world because it is only in that place that you can find true ablation of guilt. But unfortunately, the Evangelical church is often the most dangerous place on earth for non-Christians as well as Christians.

How can non-Christians see past our criticism to that well of redemption, which they are longing for? I think it would be a great help if we stopped using them for

leverage for our own sense of spiritual self-worth. We don't need to worry about it. Once they encounter the real Christ and start to trust Him, they will start to walk more in harmony with His directions for living.

I really enjoy listening to Tony Campolo. As you may know, he is somewhat of an offbeat, but very funny, Christian speaker. I remember one interesting story that he tells, although I may have some of the details wrong. I believe the events happened when he was on a speaking engagement in Hawaii. He would go sit in a coffee shop late at night to work on his talks. I think he mentioned that his sleep cycle was screwed up having crossed six time zones to get there. Anyway, he noticed that each night, about three in the morning that a group of young hookers would come into the shop. He could overhear them well enough to know what they did for a living. He also overheard that it was one of the girls birthday. They were joking about having a birthday party for her and she laughed about never having one.

The next night Tony arrived at the coffee shop early and began to decorate for a surprise birthday party for the young stranger. When she arrived with her friends and she caught a glimpse of the banners and balloons, she was overcome by emotions. She asked Tony, "Who are you?" He responded, something to the effect, "I'm just a pastor."

The troubled prostitute had an amazing comeback and I wish I could remember the exact words but it was something like, "You can't be a pastor. Because if there was a pastor that threw surprise birthday parties for whores in the middle of the night . . . hey, I would go to that kind of church." This was a profoundly non-Dualistic way at looking at the non-Christian world, seeing them as real people, not simply from the "dark side" or the enemy or as a target for evangelism . . . an evangelism that puffs up our own ESW.

As I went back and studied how Jesus related to the sinners, it was profoundly different than how I was raised, within Evangelicalism, to relate to them.

In Philip Yancey's book, "What's so Amazing About Grace" he speaks about the fact that as rugged as the earth looks to us here (and I think of the extreme ruggedness of the North Cascades) that from the perspective of space the earth is actually smoother than a cue ball and this is a good comparison to godliness.

When we think about righteousness, we sometimes assume that there is a huge difference among Christians along the maturity continuum with some people being quite godly and others very "carnal." But how much of that is really just socialization? How much of that is the appearance of godliness based on learning how to talk and behave in a socially acceptable way, at least acceptable within the Christian sub-culture.

While living on the shores of Lake Superior I became involved with a sea kayaking club. I notice that as a subculture, it had its own mores of behavior. Within this group, it was cool to say some things but other things would make you like a moron or at least a "dork." They too relied on criticism to boost their own ESW. I had complete stranger walk up to me and tell me that I was holding my paddle wrong. There is a way for kayakers to dress that had little to do with real kayaking safety.

One day, as I was having a marvelous time crossing from Munsing, Michigan to Grand Island, I was crashing over huge waves and dropping completely underwater in their trough. It was a ball! About that time a woman, whom I had never met, started yelling at me in a panicked tone of voice . . . you might even say angry. She said, "Don't do that! Stop! Stop! That's called porpoising and it wastes kinetic energy!" It was such a shame that I had to stop because I was having such a good time. I had briefly forgotten



that kayaking was about group conformity. In a brief moment of insanity I was thinking it was about having fun. All subcultures experience the same phenomena of developing mores that you must learn to fit in and much of what we call godliness is really learning the ropes to fit into the Christian, actually the American Evangelical subculture.

In preparation for writing this book I studied the lives of about fifteen individuals who were strong Christian leaders, but at the same time, had many huge, wild serpents living in their cellars. But even the term “serpent” or even “dragon” here seems too trifling because some of them had murdered people in their secret lives. Others, thinking now of David Berg . . . later known as Moses David, the founder of The Children of God . . . had sex orgies that even included little children. He started his career as a respectable Baptist minister.

It is hard to understand these people except that they must have been so caught up in their own self-righteousness and had tightly sealed cellar doors. But the thing that is even harder for me to understand is how easily other—good—people followed them so faithfully.

I saw an interview with one of David Berg’s victims, who had now come to her senses. She had allowed men in the church to have sex with her little children. Looking back it is hard for this mother, who loved her children dearly, to even understand how it happened. She said that she got involved with David, because she loved Jesus with her whole heart and David seemed like the godliest man she had ever known. So our concept of godliness must be deeply flawed. We must be mistaking surface conformity, type-A confidence, and crafty talk for godliness. Non-Christians usually see through the veil much better than we do and that becomes a great hindrance to their seeing the real Christ.

They laugh at our bigger than life, and superficial, televangelists with the big hair and goofy pouring out of emotions. I believe that these screaming fakers drive many people away from Christ. It was about these con-artists, which you see on networks like Daystar, that Jesus made reference to when He said it would be better if a millstone was tied around their (red) necks and they be thrown into the sea. Yet, the mainstream Church is often afraid to oppose them, under the belief that they should “judge not lest they be judged.” But I believe that verse was about not judging non-Christians. It is our responsibility to judge those within the Church.

When we include non-Christians in the righteousness hierarchy, we would expect a wide chasm to exist between them and us. I do believe that if you had a sin meter, a device that measures precisely when you disobey God’s rules of healthy living, that there really is a difference between the non-Christian and Christian groups . . . but maybe not nearly as wide as we think.

I mean after all, there should be a difference. We, as Christians, are confessing to believing that God is really there and he knows what’s best for us. We also really believe that what is written in the Bible is truth, including what it says about the way we should live our lives. But, if you take a non-Christian, who was raised by Christian parents and lives well according to God’s rules and a Christian, who was brought up in dysfunctional family that was abusive, there is a chance that the sin meter would show less over all sin in the non-Christian, but the Christian is better at hiding it.

Non-Christians often feel condemned by Christians. I do feel that is an unfair appraisal because I know many Christians who, like Tony Compolo, exhibit extreme grace and acceptance of the non-Christian, warts and all. But the stereotype of the

Christian, who uses the non-Christian's sinful behavior for leverage for their own ESW, has some basis in reality.

The area I grew up in was only about seventy five miles from the tourist town of Gatlinburg. As a kid, Gatlinburg was somewhat of a small stop for gas and a sandwich on the way into the beautiful Smokey Mountain National Park. Over the years, Gatlinburg was discovered by the rest of the world. It began to grow in leaps and bounds. That growth moved further west into the towns of Pigeon Forge and Sevierville. Hotels went up to offer the guest an overnight stay. Then shopping centers and outlet malls opened to giving these overnight guest a place to shop. Then people starting coming just for the shopping so more hotels opened to accommodate the out of town shoppers. Then Vegas-type shows began to appear to catch the eye of the rising flow of traffic. Next more hotels were built to give the show goers a place to stay.

What use to be a quiet two-lane highway in the little mountain hamlet of Gatlinburg has now become a bumper to bumper four or six-lane traffic jam. On both sides of the boulevard are the add-ons of tall hotels, bright lights and billboards that are so dense that the beautiful Smokey Mountains have become obscured in the background. I'm sure many visitors now come for the shopping, the shows and not even realizing that the mountains are there.

This is the path that non-Christians must travel into God's kingdom. The pure beauty of His total acceptance and love is now obscured by many add-ons to Christianity, such as the rules, condemnation and doctrines that have much more to do with the American Evangelical subculture's mores than anything divine. It is human nature to highly esteem one's own culture. I now realize that we as a Church often place a higher

value on our American Evangelical sub-culture than we do Biblical truth. But, we mix our sub-culture with Biblical truth and while we feel or think we are defending Biblical truth at all cost, we are actually defending our own culture at all cost. It is at this juncture that equivocal issues, meaning here neither good or bad, moves in the direction of become a hindrance to the spreading the good, of God's word.

The last obstacles are the dogma hoops that we require non-Christians to jump through before they even get to Christ. These are extra-Biblical dogmas, also with roots in human culture with a Dualistic influence.

I had honest questions when I was considering Christ. I didn't understand why there was suffering in this world. I didn't understand how the world could be only 6,000 years old and I couldn't understand how I could be confident, philosophically, that God was really there. When I asked my Christian leaders these questions, they made it clear that Christianity was "about faith not reason." But this separation of the two was based on Dualism view of the mind being inferior to the spirit. It was going to be a huge pill for me to swallow, to bury all my questions and accept Christ, not on a Biblical concept of trust, but on a Dualistic—mystical anti-rational faith.

We likewise tell our high school students that they must do the same. No honest doubts about God allowed . . . if expressed, then it is an oblivious sign of immaturity and they are shunned for it. I know this first hand as I have taught some high school Sunday school classes over the past few years. I try to welcome these questions. The few kids, who are honest enough to express them, are often disrespected by and embarrass their Christian peers. If we don't answer their questions adequately in the safety of our Churches, the non-Christian professors will be happy to answer them "adequately" in the

hostile environment of the college classroom. This is another reason that the vast majority of the children of Evangelicals eventually leave the faith. Guilt manipulation about their dress code, church attendance, music and tattoos can only work for so long to keep them in the fold.

Our job is to tear down these obstacles and to make the path clear and unhindered. We are to reflect God's acceptance and love not obscure it. This is true evangelism. This is how Christ did it. Once the path is clear, those in desperation, like in Avril Lavigne's lyrics, can see the way home.