



THE BEREHA PAGE

“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11

God’s Word Matters

To Change the World

In an introduction to Luke’s Gospel, written for *Truth for Today*, I included the following on the importance of *teaching* for effecting real change. The editors set it apart in a text box:

“People in the first century changed because they were taught the Way of Jesus (see Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22). Changed people who had been taught in turn changed the world by their teaching (see 2 Timothy 2:2). If the church today expects to effect lasting change in our world, we must follow the example of the early church. We must teach so that others ‘may know the exact truth about the things’ of Jesus (Luke 1:4 [NASB]).”

~ David Anguish, *Truth for Today*, October 2019: 13

When Persecuted

“. . . In the context of a menaced and harassed Christian minority, . . . daunted by the might of Rome, . . . The Church lived, as it will always live, if the abiding Word is kept intact within her. Lose this, and all is lost.” ~ On 1 Peter 1.22-25, in E. M. Blaiklock, *First Peter: A Translation and Devotional Commentary* (Word Books, Publisher, 1977), 44

Proactive Preparation

David Anguish

Holding advanced degrees in Medical Microbiology from Cornell, William Cairney served as Head of the Biology Department at the Air Force Academy and Head of Aerospace Physiology at the USAF School of Aerospace Medicine. Since 2015, he has been Assistant Dean for Graduate Medical Education at Rocky Vista University (read his profile [here](#)).

I first learned of Dr. Cairney in the early 1990s when I read *Evidence for Deciding the God Question*, a collection of essays by “scholars who know both theology and the secular mindset, and who are concerned to present the lifechanging evidence for Christian truth” (from the Preface, p. 10).

In chapter one, Cairney told how, as an undergraduate science student, he faced challenges from other students and a professor whose skeptical views left him on the verge of breaking with his family heritage. He found himself “tired of trying to live a Christian world view with a large part of my intellect on a shelf marked ‘non-functional.’”¹

While in graduate school at Cornell he learned of a church whose preacher “had a seminary degree and was also a research associate [in astrophysics] at Cornell” (p. 19). His preaching responded to the questions raised by skeptics with evidence for Christianity’s authenticity. Consequently, the “non-functional” part of Cairney’s intellect reengaged.

My main reason for telling Cairney’s story here is not because he emerged with his faith intact and stronger, but to give a context for his conclusion as a conflicted undergrad. Finding that members of the Bible believing church of his youth were unable to answer his questions, he “made an assumption” that “guided [his] mindset for several years.”

I assumed—because these conscientious folks (with a strong commitment to the Bible but with limited scientific training) couldn’t give me answers—that there were no answers (p. 18).

The Church & the Poor

Christianity Today recently reported that the gap in church attendance in America between the highest and lowest income brackets is widening. While all brackets have seen a significant attendance decrease over the last four decades, the poorest are leaving church communities at a higher rate (Kyle Rohane, "Local Church Outreach" email, November 27, 2019. For the analysis article by Ryan Burge, also dated Nov. 27, click [here](#).)

Like many surveys, this one reports a trend, not universal practice; there are exceptions. But its publication may prompt us to evaluate our attitudes and the intentionality of our ministries toward the poor. How are we doing? What can we do better? What might we need to change?

Does it matter? Well, Jesus said "preaching the good news to the poor" was an indicator that he was "the one who is to come" (Luke 7.18-23). And Paul said that the leaders in the Jerusalem church asked that in his Gentile ministry he would "remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do" (Galatians 2.9-10).

Worth Noting

"There is no doubt . . . that religion can be made entertaining. The question is: By doing so, do we destroy it as an 'authentic object of culture'? And does the popularity of a religion that employs the full resources of vaudeville drive more traditional religious conceptions into manic and trivial displays?" ~ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (Penguin Books, 1984), 124

I recently recalled Cairney's statement when some friends told me their college age child is questioning a basic teaching long believed. Like Cairney's, the queries are prompted by association with other students who think differently. Unlike Cairney's, they relate to church doctrine, not the credibility of the faith per se. Another difference is that a case for the teaching in question was intentionally presented during the student's high school years.

Hearing from them also reminded me of two students who years ago contacted me in the summer and fall after they completed the apologetics course I taught in their Christian high school. In their new settings, both had encountered other students who were skeptical about all or part of the Christian faith. Both said essentially the same thing: "The others here are asking questions I can't answer; I know we talked about it in class, but I need help. What do I say?"

I was not surprised they didn't remember the details from my class; they had studied for my tests the same way they did for their other classes. But I was encouraged that a major goal for my class had been achieved in their situations.

We taught apologetics because we knew our students would be challenged. What I hoped was not that, when they were, they would recall all we had talked about, but that they would be impressed that someone thought there are credible responses to the tough questions. And then I hoped that impression would lead them to search for good answers and not be overcome by the skepticism they faced. I aimed to do for my students what Cairney's church had not done for him.

Does doing that guarantee everyone who faces hard questions will emerge with their faith intact or holding to the apostolic traditions (cf. 2 Thess 2.15)? No. Many factors, freedom to think independently not least among them, are at work in what we ultimately believe or reject. But we should at least make the effort to help others not be ambushed by ideas that can swamp their faith like a ship tossed on rough seas. We must be intentional in equipping one another to know, understand, and be able to explain what we believe and why (Eph 4.12, 14; 1 Pet 3.15).

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Notes

¹ William J. Cairney, "The Value of an Evidential Approach," *Evidence for Deciding the God Question*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Dallas, TX: Probe Books, 1991), 19.

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