



THE BEREHA PAGE

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

The Church in Culture

“The tangled crisis of the Western church in the modern world bristles with ironies. For a start, the church that has conformed uncritically to the very world that it helped to create is strenuously working to dig its own grave. Which means that even in countries such as the United States, where the church still represents a large majority of the people, it has less influence on society than tiny minorities that are a fraction of its size. And as the church staggers around dazed and hurt over its rejection, many Christians add insult to their own injury through their fatuous attempts to remain relevant to the modern world in ways that only accelerate their irrelevance.”
~ Os Guinness, *Carpe Diem Redeemed: Seizing the Day, Discerning the Times* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 89.

“What’s True for Me...”

A university “debate professor declared space was not real because he had not been to space.” When a student asked him “if a city he has never visited, such as Paris, exists” he said he “thinks Paris doesn’t exist either.”
~ Auguste Meyrat, “Professor: Space Doesn’t Exist Because I Haven’t Been There,” *The Federalist*, <https://the.federalist.com>, 11/12/19; accessed 1/9/20.

Nurturing for Growth and Response

David Anguish

“If you had been born in India or Iran, what religion would you be?”

I remember where I was sitting in the room the day our teacher asked us that question. It was four decades ago, give or take a year or two, twenty years before 911 and the tensions, fears, and rhetoric that have become common since.

Those realities make my teacher’s question both easier and harder to ask now. It’s easier because, when he asked it, around the time or shortly after the resolution of the Iranian hostage crisis, the religions of India and Iran were not as prominent in the awareness of people in our churches. It’s harder because the events of the last two decades make it more difficult for people to step away from inflamed passions to really consider the question.

Even with that difficulty, I’m convinced my teacher’s question, or one like it, is still a good way to lead people to think about the issue he was addressing, namely, *Are you a Christian because of informed conviction or cultural affiliation?*

Several years ago in a chapel address at Abilene Christian University, John Clayton approached the subject this way:

A little boy was asked by a minister why he believed in God. He replied, “I guess it’s been in our family for a long time.” Unfortunately, that answer is the reason many of us hold to the religious convictions that we have. We really do not know why we believe what we believe; we have simply accepted the traditions of our childhood and are following that acceptance through life. I, too, accepted the traditions of my childhood; but, unlike many people, my belief system was one of atheism. . . .¹

Those who have researched faith development have used multiple terms to delineate the various stages they observe,² but I’ll mention only the difference between *inherited/indoctrinated* faith and that which is *owned*. Each stage is

“Hear My Cry, O God”

Last year, I was asked if I had interest in occasional writing for the *Abundant Living* magazine, the quarterly publication of “an outreach of University Advancement at Harding University, designed to encourage, inspire and equip older Christians to make the Kingdom of God their #1 priority after they retire from their professions” (from their website; for information about their resources, use the link, [here](#)).

Having been aware and supportive of *Abundant Living* for sometime, as well as a recipient of the magazine, I quickly accepted the invitation. My initial contribution appears in the Winter 2020 issue. In “Hear My Cry, Oh God,” I relate the story of the illness and death of my wife, Carlynn, and particularly focus on the circumstance of our prayers and those of many others on her behalf that received the answer, “No.” Against the backdrop of that experience and its emotional impact on myself and others, I review four teachings of Scripture that I have found to be especially helpful. To summarize:

- Our world is fallen (cf. Rom 8.18-23) and Carlynn’s cancer was one of creation’s corruptions.
- I’m consoled by reading the lament psalms where the authors asked God bold questions and voiced complaints about their lot in life (cf. Pss 44; 55).
- I must let revelation rule over emotions; the authors of the laments countered their despair by recalling God’s deeds and promises.
- Scripture defines God’s ultimate purpose for us in terms of the ultimate good and goal he has for us to be justified and then glorified (Rom 8.28-30).

I find myself returning to these ideas often. Perhaps you also will find them of value. ~ *Abundant Living*, 14:2 (Winter 2020): 26-28

important for growing a mature faith³ (in other words, parents should teach their children the tenets of the faith; cf. Deut. 6.1-25). The goal, however, should not be merely espousing “what we believe,” but developing a faith capable of navigating the range of viewpoints in the current marketplace of ideas (cf. Eph 4.13-14; Col 1.28; Heb 5.11-14).⁴

In light of this need—and as a preface to two introduction to Christian Evidences classes I was asked to present in 2017—I raised a series of questions, including:

- Are our teaching programs and youth ministries providing adequate preparation for current challenges to faith?
- Are we nurturing a faith that is *owned* or *inherited*?
- Do we know how our world is like and different from the world of the first Christians and what that means for preparing to defend our beliefs?
- Do we understand how the Scriptures can prepare us to respond to current challenges, including some our grandparents would not have imagined?
- Are we engaged with our world or ensconced in a “Christian cocoon”?

A century ago, T. R. Glover pondered the implausible conquest of Christianity over the gods and philosophies of antiquity, concluding that Christians succeeded because they “‘out-lived’ the pagan, ‘out-died’ him, and ‘out-thought’ him.” Regarding the latter, he noted that they engaged the world intellectually and put “clear, definite Christian teaching” at the center of their efforts. “Who did the thinking in that ancient world?” he asked. “Again and again it was the Christian.”⁵

Because they did, they stood firm and passed on their faith. Are we following suit?

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Notes

¹ John N. Clayton, “Appendix,” in J. D. Thomas, ed., *Evolution and Faith* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1988), 201.

² A useful and readable source is John H. Westerhoff, III, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* 3rd rev. ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2012).

³ Westerhoff likens the growth to a tree adding rings; the earlier rings (stages) are necessary, but the growth process must not stop there.

⁴ The challenges often come from sources some have not been prepared to expect. For example, in the mid-1990s when two students I had taught in a high school Evidences course returned for a visit, they told me that in the state university they were attending the challenges they faced were not so much in their science courses—which they had been schooled to expect—but in history and literature classes. Late in the first decade of the new millennium, a student attending a different university told me her experience was the same.

⁵ T. R. Glover, *The Jesus of History* (New York, NY: Association Press, 1917; New York Public Library repr.), 203-205.

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