



THE BEREHA PAGE

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

When I Teach

In a handout for participants in a class for teachers of adults at a Bible Teachers Workshop, I included the following: “A Personal Credo for Teaching.”

I believe . . .

- That good Bible teaching requires work, effort, diligence and long hours.
- That the most effective teachers are those who know their subject well, not those with the gift of gab.
- That a man or woman filled with the Word and “teaching from the overflow” will teach classes that make a significant difference over time.
- That the Bible is relevant to every need we have.

Thus . . .

- That the only way for the Bible to be prominent in our churches—or in our classes—is to teach the Bible, and
- That the only way to teach the Bible is to study the Bible.

The following appears on the same handout page: “You pay the same price for doing something halfway as for doing it completely. So you might as well do it completely.” - A dictum often cited by Richard Nixon, reported in Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, excerpted in *Time*, 3/15/99, 49.

To a World “In Every Way Very Religious”

David Anguish

Did you know there is website devoted to Gnosticism? It is not for historical research, though it does link to the writings known collectively as Nag Hammadi and other materials. It’s an advocacy site, with a bookstore, web lectures, and a link to The Gnostic Society (which has an address in Hollywood).¹

The contemporary existence of Gnosticism illustrates the importance of Christians being purposeful in thinking about the similarities and differences between our culture and the ancient world. But, more importantly, it helps us recall that, in the Scriptures, we have what we need to effectively respond to modern challenges to the faith.

This is important since we do not face the same culture American believers generally encountered during the lifetime of my grandfathers (b. 1896, 1898). The changes challenge us in various ways, not least in the need to adjust to the fact that tried and true Bible passages and methods once so effectively used do not address the increasing number of adherents to ways of thinking not formerly prominent in the West. Oh, the audience addressed by our previous teaching points still exists, but its members comprise a significantly smaller percentage of our society than they once did.

Do we have what we need to respond to everyone else? Yes, but we will need to call on ideas from other Bible texts to do so. Remember, first century disciples also faced Gnosticism, or at least ideas that morphed into its more developed form in subsequent centuries. So 1 John in particular will point us to an approach that will inform us as we seek to respond to today’s Gnostics and their worldview cousins.

Other texts reveal clues for responding to others. For example, Paul answered the worshipers of Zeus and Hermes (Acts 14) and taught adherents of cults associated with Artemis and probably Dionysus (Acts 18; Eph 5).² He also answered Corinthians who had subscribed to a form of

The Bible at Church

“The problem . . . is that it is more and more evident that the preacher stands before a congregation that does not know the content of the Christian faith. Except for a few narratives from the Bible that retain some wider cultural currency . . . the biblical materials have largely faded from the memory of many congregations . . .”

- Thomas G. Long, “When the Preacher Is a Teacher,” *Journal for Preachers* 16/2, Lent 1993, 22.

A friend makes it his practice to read significant sections of the Bible text in every sermon. Long’s comment suggests others should consider doing the same.

When Trials Come

I recently re-read Gerald Sittser’s *A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows Through Loss* (Zondervan, 1996), a reflection in light of the tragic auto accident that claimed the lives of Sittser’s wife, mother, and daughter. I did so in anticipation of posting a review I wrote nineteen years ago, for a course on “Theology and Suffering,” to my website.

Only after re-reading the book did I read and format the review, adding a short reflection in light of my wife’s death in 2017.

My situation now resembles that of Sittser, who wrote, “the issue of God’s sovereignty is no longer a mere abstraction to me either. I chose to become a professor because I *wanted* to think about big questions like this one, which have always fascinated me. But after the accident I *had* to think about them, . . .” (138).

You may read my review and reflection on the **Publications and Papers** page of my website.

naturalism, rejecting the resurrection of the body because they could not fathom “how” it could occur (1 Cor 15.35ff.).

Yes, there are differences. Early Christians were labeled “atheists” because they rejected many gods, not the existence of any deity. “Postmodernism” is intended to correct the modernism that preceded it. But the relativism at its heart is not new and, given all the Bible says about truth, we are confident Scripture points the way to a cogent, effective response. Ideas with a common Eastern origin may not be just like the ancient faiths, but the basic ideas are essentially the same. Islam did not begin until 600 years after Christianity, and the interpretation of some statements and direction of influences is debated, but by the Middle Ages, Islamic philosophers had rediscovered classical Greek thought and incorporated it as they shaped Islamic thinking.³

When in Athens Paul faced a city that was “in every way . . . very religious” (Acts 17.22; ESV), he looked past the obstacles to see the opportunities. His core message of resurrection remained constant (17.18, 31-34), but he developed his Athens sermon differently from the one he preached a few years before in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch (13.16-41).

As a body with different members and strengths (Rom 12; 1 Cor 12; Eph 4; 1 Pet 4), various disciples used their diverse training and skills to address their challengers, not with a one-size-fits-all study course, but by addressing the specific questions people they met were asking. They did so with the conviction that God’s revelation equipped them for the task.

Just as it still does today (2 Tim 3.16-17).

www.davidanguish.com

Notes

¹ The Gnosticism URL not being secure, I will not paste the link. If you have interest, go to gnosis.org.

² For comments and citations regarding the possible influence of the Dionysian cult in Ephesus and elsewhere, see Cleon L. Rogers Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 444. Also Clinton E. Arnold, “Ephesians,” *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, vol. 3, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 331.

³ R. J. Sproul noted that by the time of Aquinas, “Islamic philosophers had already experienced their own renaissance through rediscovering classical Greek thought. Principal thinkers such as Averroës had already synthesized Muslim theology and Aristotle’s philosophy” (*The Consequences of Ideas: Understanding The Concepts that Shaped Our World* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000], 68). For an overview of Islam relative to Christian apologetics, see C. G. Moucarray, “Islam,” *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*, ed. W. C. Campbell-Jack and Gavin McGrath (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 358-364.

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