



# THE BEREIA PAGE

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

## Truth Matters

“In the Gospel it says, ‘You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.’ It is fascinating, astounding. What does this mean: It means that the path to freedom lies not in the fact that the parliament makes a law of greater freedom today, but [rather] that you have to go through the truth. And if you go through truth just a little, then you will no longer say things such as, ‘Well, if the people are good, truth doesn’t matter.’”

— Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, in David Aikman, “One Word of Truth: A Portrait of Aleksander Solzhenitsyn,” *Unriddling Our Times*, ed. Os Guinness (Baker Books, 1999), 110

## Look Deeper

Writing the article at right, I was reminded of the years I assigned my junior high Bible students to turn in the lyrics of three favorite popular songs. I assured them I wouldn’t penalize them for *any* choice, but did require them to leave blanks for any curse words. Most didn’t need blanks, but *not one* who did ever included a word they should have omitted. They *knew* what the bad words were. What they did not see as readily—and what I hoped they would learn to look for as we talked about their choices—were the songs’ worldview messages (an issue across *all* genres). That was the bigger concern.

## Strangers and Exiles (2)

David Anguish

In 1989, Stanley Hauerwas and Willimon Willimon wrote a book that aimed “to empower people in the church . . . to see what wonderful opportunities lie at the heart of Christian ministry—once the integrity of the church is reclaimed.”<sup>1</sup> That reclamation will depend on the church’s willingness to recommit to its original countercultural mission that neither assumes nor relies upon the prop of culture and/or State.

The authors began with the story of a movie theater in one of their hometowns which, in 1963, “in defiance of the state’s time-honored blue laws,” opened on Sunday nights at the same time the church gathered. They chose that event as a useful marker of the end of the culture’s “Constantinian” era when “church, home, and state formed a national consortium that worked together to instill ‘Christian values’” (15-17).<sup>2</sup>

Their contention—and they note this may not have been true everywhere—is that the American church had generally relied upon “some sort of surrounding ‘Christian’ culture to prop it up and mold its young,” a world where a person could “become a Christian by simply breathing the air and drinking the water in the generous, hospitable environment of Christendom America.” But, though some “still believe . . . electing” right people and “passing new laws” will ensure “a ‘Christian’ culture,” more people across Christendom “are waking up and realizing that it is no longer ‘our world’—if it ever was.” (16-18).

In 2014, the 25th Anniversary Edition of *Resident Aliens* was released, suggesting that someone thought the book’s message is still needed. That idea finds support in Willimon’s comment in the Foreword to the new edition that, “most Americans assume [present tense, DA] that we live in a society that is at least vestigially Christian” (4). Whatever most Americans think, my observation is that his statement aptly describes the current view of some believers.



## A Website Addition

I recently added a [CarChlex Bookshelf](#) page to my [web site](#). The addition showcases published materials and allows site visitors to purchase them directly from me. The initial page features my book, *Getting Acquainted with the Bible: Its Makeup, Purpose, and Story*. It includes a link to preview pages, endorsements, and an order form. Discounts for orders of 10 or more copies are available for any who want to use the book for class or group studies.

## Teaching Matters

According to Hosea, Yahweh prosecuted Israel, the unfaithful northern kingdom, because there was “no truth, no faithful love, and no knowledge of God in the land!” They had been replaced by “cursing, lying, murder, stealing, and adultery” (5 of the 10 Commands). The nation would be “destroyed” because they “lack[ed] knowledge.” Their priests had “forgotten the law of ... God” (Hos 4.1-2, 6). Israel’s teachers had failed them (Jer 2 describes a comparable situation in Judah; cf. 2 Chron 15.3).

Post-exilic Israel also lacked knowledge of the law. But Ezra “determined ... to study the law ... obey it ... and teach [it];” even Artaxerxes endorsed his teaching. Repentance and reforms—including things not done since Joshua—were the result (Ez 7.10, 25; Neh 8.1-18).

Maybe our culture—in some places anyway—is still “at least vestigially Christian,” but it’s hard to watch current events and not think the vestige is getting smaller all the time. Yes, I’m thinking of things like “unrestrained behavior, evil desires, drunkenness, orgies, [and] carousing” (1 Pet 4.3)—as well as other deeds Peter did not mention (but which Paul sometimes did; cf. Rom 1.24-32; 1 Cor 6.9-11; 1 Tim 1.8-10).

But I’m also thinking about the “lawless idolatry” at the end of Peter’s list (cf. Rom 1.18-23). Behaviors do not occur in a vacuum; they are outcomes of the way people think, a point we see repeated in the New Testament (cf. Mark 7.21-23; Eph 4.17-24). That’s why Paul said we are engaged in a “war” of “arguments” and “thought” (2 Cor 10.3-5).

What, then, are we to do? Generally, in view of ideas suggested in *Resident Aliens*, I propose, first, that we help each other get past being “surprised” that the world acts and thinks like the world (1 Pet 4.4, 12). In particular, don’t be “surprised when [our] witness evokes hostility from the world” (46-47).

Second, let’s evaluate the utility of our efforts to teach all Jesus commanded, the third phase of disciple-making in Matthew 28.18-20. Whatever the value of our approach to the culture that was, the methods (and topics) we chose in a world we assumed was “basically Christian,” where “conversion, detoxification, and transformation [were] not needed” and where we could aim for “a slight change of mind, an inner change of heart, a few new insights” (29), will likely have trouble equipping us for the culture we are in now. Let’s think creatively in our effort to complete the teaching that has the breadth and depth believers need to engage today’s world.

Third, let’s reorient our thinking to see that “the demise of the Constantinian world view . . . is not a death to lament,” but “an opportunity to celebrate” (18). We can be like the “holy nation” that lived as “strangers and exiles” (1 Pet 2.9, 11) in the three hundred years before Constantine, involved in “proclaim[ing] the virtues of the one who called [them] out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2.9 NET).

*www.davidanguish.com*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Stanley Hauerwas & William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*, Expanded 25th Anniversary Edition (Abingdon Press, 2014), 144. Page numbers for subsequent quotations are included in the text above.

<sup>2</sup> To mark the era’s inception they used Constantine’s Edict of Milan (313).

*All Scripture quotations not otherwise designated are from the CSB. Permission is granted to reprint original materials with the credit line, “Reprinted from David Anguish, ‘The Berea Page,’ August 3, 2020.*