



THE BEREA PAGE

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

Reflections

“A modern praise song’s sheer repetition of ‘Praise God! Praise God! Praise God!’ without any articulation of the content and thus the reason for this praise is vacuous, but the same repetitive words do not become less vacuous when sung in a traditional hymn in Latin or Hebrew instead of English. Nonetheless, the conflict between the traditionalists and the proponents of contemporary music should not be dismissed as simply a generational dispute. There are theological issues at stake that need to be examined in the light of the witness of Scripture, and the words of the prophet Isaiah have something to contribute to such reflection.” ~ J. M. Roberts, “Contemporary Worship in the Light of Isaiah’s Ancient Critique,” *Worship and the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honour of John T. Willis*, ed. M. Patrick Graham, et. al. (Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 266-267

“The resurrection was not so much a doctrine taught by the early church as it was an experience to which the church witnessed in word and deed because the risen Christ had appeared to chosen witnesses in a compelling way.” ~ Frank J. Matera, *Resurrection: The Origin and Goal of the Christian Life* (Liturgical Press, 2015), 83

Let’s Keep Preparing

David Anguish

She approached me during the refreshment break. “Can I ask you a question, off the subject?” When I told her yes, she said, “I’ve been reading 1 Enoch; three different versions of it. I found it fascinating, and learned things about angels and other things that I had never heard before. But I’ve heard it was rejected from inclusion in the Bible. Do you know why?” (An abbreviated paraphrase of our conversation.)

I’m familiar with the writing, and have read parts of it in research on the Gospels, but it was quickly evident that she was more well versed in 1 Enoch than I am. But I’ve also done some study of the events and literature from the time between the testaments, engaged in research into the issues that were considered when determining the books to be accepted into the canon (beginning [here](#)), and am aware of the difference between the books of the Apocrypha (formally affirmed for inclusion in Catholic translations at the Council of Trent in the mid-1500s) and the Pseudepigrapha, the collection in which 1 Enoch is found. So I was able to at least point her to some things that she said gave her better insight into the writing and what to make of it.

The next evening, after a presentation that included lessons learned from a personal crisis in which I mentioned my lifelong penchant for asking why, followed by a short Q & A session, a man asked if we could talk privately. My comment about asking why had resonated with him. He had some why questions, too, but said his experience had taught him that when he raised them in church group settings, they were usually met with discomfort or dismissal. Based partly on that concern, but also out of consideration for others, he said he hesitated to raise his questions publicly lest they create a problem for someone else.

His questions were more relevant to the subject than the woman’s question had been—tangentially at least. The subject for the class series was trouble, suffering, and evil; although I had not spent time on them, that subject often leads to the questions

“Culturally, then, we are no longer careful, close readers of texts, sacred or secular. We scan for information, but we do not appreciate literary craftsmanship. Exposition is therefore virtually a lost art. We don’t really read texts to enter the world of the author and perceive reality through his vantage point; we read texts to see how they confirm what we already believe about reality. Texts are mirrors that reflect *ourselves*; they are not pictures that are appreciated in *themselves*. This explains, in part, the phenomenon that many Christians will read their Bibles daily for fifty years, and not have one opinion that changes in the entire fifty years.” - T. David Gordon, *Why Johnny Can’t Preach: The Media Have Shaped the Messengers* (P & R Publishers, 2009), 49

“In contemporary society our Adversary majors in three things: noise, hurry, and crowds. If he can keep us engaged in ‘muchness’ and ‘manyness,’ he will rest satisfied.... Hurry is not of the Devil; it is the Devil” ~ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (Harper, 1988), 13

“But to refuse to speak of sin, suffering, and the ambiguities of life in our Sunday worship is to evict from our midst the very cross of Christ. To evict the tragic from our corporate life together is to evict the ultimate question upon which hearing the Ultimate Answer finally depends. Without conviction of sin, failure, and finitude, there can be no meaningful sense of grace.” ~ C. Leonard Allen, Richard T. Hughes, Michael R. Weed, *The Worldly Church*, 2nd ed. (ACU Press, 1991), 47

the man asked: How do we balance our freedom of choice with God’s omniscience? Since he knows all and wants a relationship with us, why didn’t he create a world where we could choose fellowship with him without the deleterious effects we often experience in this vale of soul-making? We talked some 10 or 15 minutes in a cordial point-counterpoint conversation before he went to pick up his son and go home.

The two conversations occurred in a small-town church (Sunday attendance ca. 110-125) who had invited me to teach their adult VBS class. The town is also home to a small university—its website reports the undergraduate enrollment as just over 1,500—but, according to the church’s preacher, the congregation is not comprised of “academics.” From what I was able to learn, neither of my conversation partners was a member or regular attender of that church. The woman identified herself as “a hardshell Baptist” and the man told me only that he had always wrestled with challenging why questions. Also, as indicated above, while the man’s questions were tangentially related to the topic I had addressed, neither of them asked something directly on point. But both had clearly spent time wondering about questions that puzzled and/or concerned them.

In my preparations for the class, I did not anticipate that I would need to consider either question, although, as indicated, the second often arises in the subject area we were studying. I had a sense ahead of time that I was not going to a locale or church where matters of philosophy or ancient history were much discussed, and so felt no need to bone up on those specific issues in my immediate preparation. But we live in an information age where people from all walks of life and places encounter a variety of ideas on an array of subjects. Furthermore, as has been pointed out before, it’s a world with an increasingly secular outlook that, if not actively resistant to the traditions of faith, is not satisfied with pat answers about them.

It is unlikely that any of us can prepare to be conversant on every single question our world might ask. But more of us can be more aware that such questions are being asked, explore as many of them as we can, and have at our disposal a list of resources we can utilize for help. Such diligence will see us be better “prepared to make a defense to *anyone* who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3.15).

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