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ISSN: 0799-1711

PROFESSIONAL
THEOLOGICAL
JOURNAL FOR
THE CARIBBEAN
COMMUNITY

CJET

VOLUME
13

2014

Caribbean Journal of Evangelical Theology

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THE CHURCH'S
IMPACT ON
WESTERN
CIVILIZATION

By

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Many Christians, including Church leaders, may not be aware of it, but the Church of Jesus Christ is under attack, from many quarters and more and more we hear lectures, speeches or read books that highlight certain negative episodes in the Church's history like the Spanish inquisition and torture of people, the witch hunting saga and as well complicity with the chattel slavery experience. There is also a popular query about the Church's relevance in the modern world and some even sustain and try to promote the view

that the Church's role in societies even in the past has been largely negative.

I get the distinct impression, when talking with Christians, especially those exposed to tertiary level training that they register a tinge of embarrassment about the Church and possibly about being a Christian because of the regularity with which they hear about the spots on the Church's history. Part of this embarrassment, in my view, has to do with ignorance or forgetfulness of what the Church, despite its faults, has done for societies in what is called the Western world and the ongoing debt that Western civilization owes to the Church. It should be known too that the spots on the Church's record happened when the Church moved away from its wellspring, the Bible.

My aim in this paper is to provide a historical sweep of the past two thousand years with special emphasis on the positive role that the Church has played in the transformation of Western civilization.

The hope is that all of us may be encouraged to continue the transforming legacy of the Church.

Odd though it may be, I wish to begin with a definition of the Church. The need for this is something of a puzzle, because we are all in a church (Fellowship Tabernacle), all or most of us are members of, or associated somehow with a local church or a denomination called let's say, the Baptist Church or Anglican Church and we also refer to the members of a church as the church. And yet that is the problem, the fluidity attached to the English word 'church'.

The situation is no easier if we go behind the English word 'church' to probe the 'meaning-in-usage' of the central Greek word, *ekklēsia*, that has given rise to the English word 'church'.¹ This is so for two reasons.

Firstly, *ekklēsia* itself has fluidity in meaning in the New Testament documents, so *ekklēsia* describes, in Acts 19.32, 39 and 41, a gathering of tradesmen², in Rom. 16.4 and 5, a local group or groups of Christians, in 1 Cor. 10. 32, all Christians on earth and in Eph. 2.6 and 3.10, possibly a trans-earthly or cosmic body of Christians. The

¹ *Ekklēsia* appears 114 times in the New Testament.

² This reflects the traditional usage of the term, in Greek cultures, for a group gathered for a purpose, in which case the term *ekklēsia*, had reference to the gathering, not the people themselves. When dispersed the *ekklēsia* ceases to exist. See T.D. Alexander, et al (eds.), *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 408; Walter Elwell (ed.), *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 95; Lawrence O. Richards, *New International Encyclopaedia of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 164-167.

central prevailing idea in the 114 references to *ekklēsia* is that of *people constituting a kind of community*.³

Secondly, the New Testament documents use a multiplicity of terms to describe the same entity called ‘church’, terms such as ‘those who believe’⁴, ‘the brethren’⁵, ‘body’⁶, ‘family’⁷, ‘temple’⁸, ‘flock’⁹, etc. Even that popular expression on the lips of our Lord, ‘kingdom of God/heaven’ is suggestive of a term for the entity called church as Kevin Giles argues. He says,

It has been pointed out that the term, the Kingdom of God, primarily speaks of the dynamic rule of God, but as the thought of God ruling implies a people he rules over, the expression also can involve, in a secondary sense, the idea of ‘realm’. Thus Jesus not only proclaims the Kingdom of God – that is, God’s dynamic reign – but also invites people to

³ Using the King James Version at 1 Corinthians 11.18, 14.19, 28, 34, 35, one may be tempted to think, incorrectly, that the idea of ‘church’ as a structure is evident in the expression ‘in church’. This really means ‘in assembly’ and it must be remembered that the 1st century Christians met in homes until they were able to acquire property for worship structures in later centuries. For an insightful and readable summary of the use of *ekklēsia* in the Old Testament and the Intertestamental literature plus the challenge of translating *ekklēsia* see Kevin Giles, *What on Earth Is the Church?* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1995), 230-243.

⁴ Acts 2.44, 4.32.

⁵ Acts 15.1,32.

⁶ Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4.

⁷ Ephesians 3.14, 17-18; 1 John 3.11-15, 4.7-21; 1 Peter 1.22; 1 Thessalonians 4.9.

⁸ Ephesians 2.21-22, 1 Peter 2.5.

⁹ John 10.1-18.

‘enter’ the Kingdom of God (Matt. 18.3; Mark 9.47; Luke 16.16, etc.), which must mean deciding to recognize God’s rule over one’s life. Those who do this constitute a new community where the rule of God is of utmost importance, and life transforming. Yet the reign of God is not limited to this sphere.¹⁰

It may be instructive too that in one of the only two places where Jesus uses the term *ekklēsia*, Matt. 16.18-19¹¹, it may, arguably, be used as a synonym for ‘kingdom of heaven’ which is also used in the text.

Nonetheless, one has to agree that “...all the early Christian writers use *ekklēsia* only for those fellowships which came into being after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.”¹²

May I suggest then that for purposes of this presentation we regard the Church, minimally, as *a plurality of persons, forming a community, who express faith in and allegiance to Jesus Christ.*¹³

It is to such a community that the multifaceted mission of Jesus Christ is committed.¹⁴ If we seek justification for seeing such a

¹⁰ Giles, op. cit., 30-31.

¹¹ The other is Matthew 18. 17 (twice).

¹² L. Coenen in Colin Brown (ed.), *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol.1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 298.

¹³ I have reworked ideas from Richards, op. cit.,164-167 and Elwell, op. cit., 95.

¹⁴ We would include para-church agencies as part of the Church insofar as their staffs express faith in and allegiance to Jesus Christ and their mission is some aspect of the Church’s mission. See a discussion of para-Church agencies in

community as God's means of transforming society then such emerges from several passages.

I wish now to explore these in brief compass then spend the rest of the time on selected aspects of the legacy of societal transformation and challenge toward transformation left by the church over the past 2000 years.

Perhaps the fundamental text in this regard would be Matt. 28.16-20 especially the central command to 'make disciples *of all nations*' (v. 19). The suggestions are quite strong concerning societal transformation in both the central command 'make disciples' and its stated extent 'of all nations'.¹⁵

A disciple is one who mirrors in her life and ideas the life and ideas of her master. Put differently the disciple mirrors in his *character, concepts* and *conduct* whose he is. The ministry of *genuine* discipling is then transformational of the individual in terms of mind and life and when a nation can be said to be disciplined, meaning the majority of people have experienced this transformation, such a nation can hardly escape being transformed or at least being challenged toward transformation.

The revolutionary metaphors 'salt of *the earth*' and 'light of *the world*' used by Jesus of his disciples (Mt. 5.13-16), are definitely transformational in societal terms.

Bruce J. Nicholls (ed.), *The Church: God's Agent of Change*, The Paternoster Press, 1986, 199-229.

¹⁵ This is so whether we take *ta ethnē* as bespeaking Gentiles (non-Jews) or what we call today nations or countries.

There are also hints of the transformational presence of God's community in parables such as the Sower (Mk. 4.1-20), the Mustard Seed (Mk. 4.30-32), the Seed growing secretly (Mk. 4.26-29).

A Legacy of Societal Transformation and Challenge toward Transformation

Christians in the period from Pentecost to the fall of Rome challenged and at times progressively transformed the societal mores of the Roman Empire with reference to the value of human life and the virtue of sexual purity.

Value on Human Life

That Roman culture placed very little value on human life is well known. Romans were not only accustomed to emperors (like Nero,¹⁶ Domitian,¹⁷ Decius,¹⁸ and Diocletian,¹⁹) and other societal leaders who were murderous of rivals, Christians and even of family members²⁰ but the horrible gladiatorial games were as popular then as football is in many nations today.

¹⁶ Ruled AD 54-68.

¹⁷ Ruled AD 81-96.

¹⁸ Ruled AD 249-251.

¹⁹ Ruled AD 284-305.

²⁰ Nero killed two wives, one of whom he kicked to death while she was pregnant. Domitian, who insisted upon being called 'lord and god' ruled like a despot and lived with a fear of being assassinated. See William Klingaman, *The First Century: Emperors, Gods and Everyman*, Guild Publishing, 1990, 360-362. and Alvin J. Schmidt, *Under The Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization*, Zondervan, 2001, 22-32.

Each contest required men to fight men, commonly with the aim of killing the opponents with a sword (*gladius*). It was the crowd that largely decided the fate of a weakened, gasping gladiator. A turned-thumb signal, usually given by women spectators, instructed the victor to go for the final blow. Often it was the women who praised gladiators...The barbaric cruelty, the agonizing screams of the victims, and the flow of human blood stirred no conscience in the crowds of the gladiatorial events...To see a gladiator stab and slice his opponent to death was top-ranked amusement.²¹

Christians boycotted and denounced the games and attracted criticism. One critic of the Christians said, “You do not go to our shows; you take no part in our processions...you shrink in horror from our sacred [gladiatorial] games.”²² Peter’s call, to live uprightly amidst slander and to suffer with pride for doing good and *for being a Christian* (1 Pet. 2.12, 3.9-17 and 4.12-19) may reflect the emerging trend of verbal attacks on Christians for being counter-cultural in lifestyle.

The gladiatorial games were eventually banned owing to the influence of the Church. As W.E.H. Lecky concludes, “There is scarcely any single reform so important in the moral history of mankind as the suppression of the gladiatorial shows, a feat that must be almost exclusively ascribed to the Christian church.”²³

²¹ Schmidt, op. cit., 62.

²² Cited in *ibid.*, 63.

²³ Cited in *ibid.*

Roman culture too (like several others in the ancient world) was completely at ease with infanticide and child abandonment, which the Church opposed on biblical principles.

Plutarch (ca. AD 46-120) says of the Carthaginians that they “offered up their own children, and those who had no children would buy little ones from poor people and cut their throats as if they were so many lambs or young birds; meanwhile the mother stood by without a tear or moan.”²⁴

Even the philosopher Seneca (ca. 4 BC – AD 65), chief advisor to Nero, said, “We drown children who at birth are weakly and abnormal.”²⁵

Christians did not only denounce the entrenched Greek and Roman cultural practice of child abandonment but they also provided refuge for abandoned children.²⁶

Infanticide and child abandonment were made capital offences in 374 under the Christian emperor Valentinian who was influenced by Bishop Basil of Caesarea.²⁷ Though infanticide was not completely wiped out—recurring in later centuries—the consistent opposition of

²⁴ *Moralia* 2.171D, cited in *ibid.*, 49. See also William Barclay, *Educational Ideals in the Ancient World*, Baker Book House, 1959, 263-266.

²⁵ *De Ira* 1.15, cited in Schmidt, *op. cit.*, 49.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁷ Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, Oxford University Press, 1957, 300; Schmidt, *op. cit.*, 51.

the Church is what has influenced anti-infanticide laws up to the present.

Crucifixion²⁸ in the hands of the Romans approximated an art form, albeit a despicable one²⁹ and was outlawed by Constantine owing to his high regard for the Christian cross.³⁰

Sexual Morality

Christianity's elevation of sexual morality based on the Bible³¹ has exerted a tremendous transforming influence on societies ancient and modern. Whereas the Christian sexual ethic outlawed all sex acts except heterosexual monogamous acts the conventions of the Roman Empire (and not a few modern societies) countenanced a 'no holds barred' approach as people, in general, did sexually, whatever, however, wherever with whomever or whatever. Not only is the evidence in literature but also archaeology has turned up sexual graphics covering a wide spectrum of sexual acts on household items in the Roman Empire.³²

²⁸ "...the *crux* [cross] is put at the head of the three *summa supplicia*. It is followed, in descending order, by *crematio* (burning) and *decollatio* (decapitation)...Of course because of its harshness, crucifixion was almost always inflicted only on the lower class...", Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion*, Fortress Press, 1977, 33, 34.

²⁹ Seneca, "I see crosses there, not just of one kind but made in many different ways: some have their victims with the head down to the ground; some impale their private parts; others stretch out their arms on the gibbet," cited in Hengel, op. cit., 25.

³⁰ Schmidt, op. cit., 65.

³¹ Romans 1.24-27; 1 Corinthians 6.18-20, etc.

³² See, John Clarke, *Looking at Lovemaking: The Constructions of Sexuality in Roman Art, 100 BC – AD 250*, University of California Press, 1998.

Charity & Compassion

From the 1st century of this era to the present the impact of the Church's commitment to voluntary charity and compassion has been transforming in many societies. The rise of orphanages, homes for the aged, the Salvation Army, the various Catholic groups like Sisters of Charity and Missionaries of the Poor, United Way, YMCA, YWCA, Teen Challenge, hospitals, mental institutions, the Red Cross/Crescent and, numerous other agencies for the care of needy human beings can be traced back to the Church of Jesus Christ.³³

“The whole approach to [governmental] social welfare that has developed in the West, and more recently in the East as well, is debtor to the Christian contribution and has been profoundly influenced by it.”³⁴

Education

Living in post-slavery societies in the Caribbean we all know of the Church's novel contribution of education for the slaves³⁵ matching an earlier novel Christian practice of education for both sexes.³⁶ The idea of tax-supported public schools and compulsory education seem to go back to Martin Luther (1483-1546) while graded

³³ Schmidt, op. cit., 125-169.

³⁴ Cited in *ibid*, 144.

³⁵ Shirley Gordon, *A Century of West Indian Education*, Longman Group Ltd., 1963.

³⁶ Schmidt, op. cit., 172.

education owes a debt to the Lutheran layman Johann Sturm (1507-1589).³⁷

Education for the deaf began in the late 18th century with three French Christians and education for the blind got its most significant forward fillip, though not its origin, from another French Christian Louis Braille in the 19th century.

The origin of the university is debatable³⁸ but it is beyond controversy that the oldest and most prestigious universities, recognized as such, had Christian roots; the University of Bologna (1158, regarded by some as the first), the University of Paris, Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Heidelberg and Columbia, etc.³⁹

Modern Science

Despite misconceptions that plague the public in general as well as some in the scientific community, modern science not only had its experimental tap roots in the Judaeo-Christian worldview of a purposive, orderly, created world⁴⁰ but “...virtually all scientists from the Middle Ages to the mid-eighteenth century—many of whom were seminal thinkers—not only were sincere Christians but were often inspired by biblical postulates and premises in their theories that sought to explain and predict natural phenomena.”⁴¹

³⁷ Ibid, 177-180.

³⁸ See Charles Habib Malik, *A Christian Critique of the University*, IVP, 1982, 15-16, for a Greek origin; George G.M. James, *Stolen Legacy: Greek Philosophy is Stolen Egyptian Philosophy*, Africa World Press, 1954, 49, for an Egyptian origin; Schmidt, op. cit., 186-187, for monasteries as embryonic universities.

³⁹ Schmidt, op. cit., 186-193 and Malik, op. cit., 30.

⁴⁰ Pearcey and Thaxton, op. cit., 21-26.

⁴¹ Schmidt, op. cit., 244.

The names include Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) in human physiology; Gregor Mendel (1822-1884) in genetics; Nicolaus Copernicus (1475-1543), Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) and Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) in astronomy. In physics: Isaac Newton (1642-1727), Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716), Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), Georg Simon Ohm (1787-1854), André Ampere (1775-1836) and Michael Faraday (1791-1867). In chemistry, Robert Boyle (1627-1691), Antoine Lavoisier (1743-1794), George Washington Carver (c.1864-1943) and in medicine, Louis Pasteur (1822-1895) and Joseph Lister (1827-1912).⁴²

It should be noted as well that the 19th to 21st century anti-God arrogance of some scientists continues to be deflated by certain God-pointing discoveries in the fields of biology/microbiology and astronomy.

In the field of biology/microbiology the most significant mouth-stopper and God-pointer is the intricate design and information-rich nature of all life forms, even so-called 'primitive' life-forms and at the basic level of a cell. There is no more rational explanation for the origin of such intricate design and information than, at least, an Intelligent Designer.

The alternative is to argue that both the design and the information evolved over time and by chance via mutations. There is a fatal flaw here though. Mutations may lead to benefits for an organism but always or almost always involve a loss or a diffusion of information, never a gain of information.

⁴² Ibid., 218-247.

Watch this clip which includes Richard Dawkins, Oxford's vitriolic atheistic scientist and author of *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design*.⁴³

For those of you in the scientific world, get a copy of Lee Spetner's 1997 book *Not By Chance: Shattering the Modern Theory of Evolution* which thoroughly demolishes the central arguments in Dawkins' book.

But that's only the God-pointing evidence from biology. Astronomy's God-pointing evidence is also fascinating. The most abiding alternative to the biblical doctrine of a universe created in time by God has been the scientific notion that the universe is eternal, has no beginning and therefore needs no beginner.

In 1913, astronomer Vesto Slipher discovered that a dozen galaxies in the vicinity of earth were moving away from the earth at very high speeds, ranging up to 2 million miles per hour. This discovery led to the realization that the Universe was expanding which also meant that ***the universe had a beginning***.

The reaction to Slipher's discovery and the implications of that discovery for the origin of the universe provoked some odd reactions from scientists.

Albert Einstein in a letter to one of his colleagues said, "This circumstance [of an expanding Universe] irritates me."⁴⁴

⁴³ Video clip from *Biological Evidence of Creation* (American Portrait Films, 1998), shows Dawkins stumped by a question asking for one example of a mutation that has added information to the gene pool.

⁴⁴ Cited in Robert Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers*, W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 2nd edition, 1992, 21.

Arthur Eddington, in 1931 said, "...the notion of a beginning is repugnant to me...the expanding Universe is preposterous...incredible...it leaves me cold."⁴⁵

Allan Sandage, another astronomer, said concerning the evidence that the Universe had a beginning, "It is such a strange conclusion...it cannot really be true."⁴⁶

The Cosmic Background Explorer satellite, in 1992, provided additional confirming information on the nature of the origin of the Universe. The findings of the satellite attracted the attention of major newspapers and TV programmes across the world.

George Smoot, project leader for the Cosmic Background Explorer satellite declared, "What we have found is evidence for the birth of the Universe...It's like looking at God."⁴⁷

Why don't we listen to the Bible? "In the beginning God created the heavens..." "Thou, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands." "The heavens declare the glory of God."

Astronomer George Greenstein in his book *The Symbiotic Universe* made this insightful comment, "As we survey all the evidence, the thought insistently arises that some supernatural agency—or, rather, Agency—must be involved. Is it possible that suddenly, without intending to, we have stumbled upon scientific proof of the

⁴⁵ Cited in *ibid.*, 104.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Cited in Hugh Ross, *The Creator and the Cosmos* (Colorado Springs: NavPress), 1993,19.

existence of a Supreme Being? Was it God who stepped in and so providentially crafted the cosmos for our benefit?”⁴⁸

The cutest comment from an astronomer though is from the book *God and the Astronomers* written by the agnostic Robert Jastrow. He says,

A sound explanation may exist for the explosive birth of our Universe; but if it does, science cannot find out what the explanation is. The scientist’s pursuit of the past ends in the moment of creation...For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.⁴⁹

Law

In the realm of law it is hardly known that “[i]ndividual freedom and rights are most prevalent where Christianity has had the greatest impact”,⁵⁰ nor are human rights advocates often aware of the philosophical dilemma of defining and justifying *inalienable* human rights minus a transcendent and reliable/credible revelational source such as the Bible with its foundational doctrine of human beings *uniquely* created by *and in the image of God*.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Cited in Ross, op. cit., 114-115.

⁴⁹ W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 2nd edition, 1992, 106-107.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 259.

⁵¹ See the arguments for this view by John Warwick Montgomery, *Human Rights & Human Dignity*, Zondervan, 1986. 105-188.

On what other basis, but the concept of creation by and in the image of God could we, non-arbitrarily, elevate the interests of humans over the interests of other animals or plants or even inanimate objects?⁵²

If one operates with an evolutionary philosophical and scientific framework it will be difficult to assign essential or superior dignity to the evolutionary accident called ‘human being’—the result of chance, natural selection, mutations and time—and it would be impossible to escape the racism inherent in, and argued from, the evolutionary view that the earlier species of ‘humans’ were inferior to later species. Note carefully that the full title of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* is *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*.

Elaine Pagels summarizes the issues.

Where, then, do we get the idea on which contemporary human rights theory rests: that ultimate value resides in the individual, independent from and even prior to participation in any social or political collective? The earliest suggestion of this idea occurs in the Hebrew account which describes Adam, whose name means “humanity,” as being created in the “image of God.”...This account implies the essential equality of all human beings, and supports the idea of rights that all enjoy by virtue of their common humanity.⁵³

The legally entrenched idea that no one is above the law had its genesis in an encounter between an emperor and a bishop in the 4th

⁵² Ibid, 208.

⁵³ Cited in *ibid*, 206.

century and got two other shots in the arm by the British Magna Carta in the 13th century and a bombshell of a book written by a clergyman in the 17th century.

In A.D. 390 some people in Thessalonica rioted, arousing the anger of the Christian emperor, Theodosius the Great. He overreacted, slaughtering some seven thousand people, most of whom were innocent. Bishop Ambrose, who was located in Milan—which was also where the emperor lived—did not turn a blind eye to the emperor’s vindictive and unjust behavior. He asked him to repent of his massacre. When the emperor refused, the bishop excommunicated him. After a month of stubborn hesitation, Theodosius prostrated himself and repented in Ambrose’s cathedral, bringing tears of joy to fellow believers.⁵⁴

The emperor too was under the law and Ambrose would not allow the emperor or others to forget that.

Nor can we forget the significant influence of the Church, through the Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton and his Christian colleagues, on the British Magna Carta (the Large Charter) of 1215, which gave new rights to barons and the people in general and which also challenged the notion of the king being above the law.

The Rev’d Samuel Rutherford, a Presbyterian, wrote his *Lex, Rex: Or the Law and the Prince* in 1644. The main thesis, as implied in the title, is that the law is king, and so the king is *under* the law and

⁵⁴ Schmidt, op. cit., 250, and Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity*, Atheneum, 1980, 105.

not above it, a notion that was regarded as treasonously contrary to the tradition of the 'divine right of kings'.⁵⁵

The Arts

Another area of the Church's transforming influence on societies is in the realm of the Arts, especially with reference to music and art. Though a somewhat subjective issue, if the average knowledgeable person is quizzed about 'the international greats' in music and art, in all likelihood the names of Christians would emerge: such as artists, Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519)⁵⁶, Michelangelo (1475-1564)⁵⁷, Rembrandt (1606-1669)⁵⁸, and musicians, J.S. Bach (1685-1750), Friedrich Handel (1685-1759), Franz Schubert (1797-1828) and Wolfgang Mozart (1756-1791).⁵⁹

There are other areas of societal life that have been transformed or challenged by the Church. In some of the areas we have explored, the Church now stands guilty of deliberate abandonment and must now reclaim or re-engage turf while in others she needs to redouble her efforts against a growing tide of secularism.

⁵⁵ See Francis Schaeffer's comments in his *A Christian Manifesto*, in *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer*, Volume 5, Crossway Books, 1982, 473-476.

⁵⁶ Multimedia projection shows his 'Mona Lisa'.

⁵⁷ Multimedia projection shows his 'Madonna and Child'.

⁵⁸ Multimedia projection shows his 'The Prodigal Son Returns' and 'The Storm on the Sea of Galilee'.

⁵⁹ See Leland Ryken, 'Literature in Christian Perspective' and Edmund P. Clowney, 'Living Art: Christian Experience and the Arts', in D.A. Carson et al (eds.), *God and Culture*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993, 215-253; Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *State of the Arts: From Bezalel to Mapplethorpe*, Crossway Books, 1991; William D. Spencer et al (eds.), *God Through the Looking Glass: Glimpses From the Arts*, Baker Books, 1998; H. R. Rookmaaker, *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture*, InterVarsity Press, 1973.

The Church in the 21st century will need vision—the ability to detect and discern *what is* beneath *what appears*—as it intentionally engages modern societies in order to effect transformation within them.

The Church, in this information age, will need as well a much healthier appreciation of the cruciality of apologetics for our witness to the nations. What is apologetics? Let philosopher J.P. Moreland answer.

Apologetics is a New Testament ministry of helping people overcome intellectual obstacles that block them from coming to or growing in the faith by giving reasons for why one should believe Christianity is true and by responding to objections raised against it.⁶⁰

J. Gresham Machen makes a point worth pondering time and again, when he says,

False ideas are the greatest obstacles to the reception of the gospel. We may preach with all the fervour of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here or there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation or of the world to be controlled by ideas, which, by the resistless force of logic, prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion.⁶¹

Transforming society will involve, among other things, obedience to the call to spiritual warfare in 2 Cor. 10.4-5, a call which is essentially one of using God-surrendered minds to effect the goal of tearing down strongholds or entrenched systems of thought that control minds and lives. How do we do that in a society according

⁶⁰ In *Love Your God With All Your Mind*, NavPress, 1997, 26.

⁶¹ Cited in *ibid.*, 76.

to the text? By demolishing arguments and anti-God arrogance and capturing every thought, every mind for Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church.