PROFILES IN FAITH
Malcolm Muggeridge (1903–1990)
“Mr. Valiant-for-Truth”: Reminiscenses of a Friendship
by James M. Houston
Senior Fellow, C.S. Lewis Institute
Founder of Regent College (Vancouver, B.C.) and
Professor of Spiritual Theology (retired)

Thomas Malcolm Muggeridge was born in 1903, named by his father Henry after Thomas Carlyle. A lover of words, Malcolm was to become one of the great literary figures of British public life in the twentieth century. After the death of C.S. Lewis in 1963, many came to regard Muggeridge as Lewis’ successor as a Christian popular apologist. Although he grew up in an atheist environment, Malcolm admitted to me that he had always believed in God, vague though his religious convictions remained for a long time in his life. One can trace this search for God in reading his diary1 and other of his works from the 1930s.

Malcolm’s eldest son, Leonard (born in 1928), had become an evangelical as a member of the Plymouth Brethren while in the British army in Austria, during the early 1960s. I had gotten to know Leonard when he attended an annual summer biblical conference I had helped to organize in Oxford. Through him I was introduced to his father, after he had resigned as rector of Edinburgh University. A friendship then continued with Malcolm and later his wife Kitty, from 1968 until a few years before Malcolm died in 1990.

Malcolm came from a poor home, with an illiterate mother and a father whose career as a socialist member of Parliament was brief. In spite of this background, Malcolm was educated at Cambridge and became a journalist. He had a great love of words, pouring out millions of them.2 Like his father, he had a passion for “truth,” but living among the rich and the famous, he had much greater opportunity to become quixotic, and either hated or idolized. His wife, Kitty, was the niece of Beatrice Webb, whose biography she wrote.3 Beatrice and her husband, Sidney (Lord Passfield), established the London School of Economics, founding Fabians, many of whose ideas

(continued on page 18)
A Note from the President

It is both sadness and joy that we feel this summer at the departure of our dear friend and colleague, Jim Beavers. At the end of July, Jim left the staff of the C.S. Lewis Institute and moved to Ambridge, Pennsylvania, where he will attend Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry.

I first met Jim and his wife, Anne, in 1990, when I was on the search committee that interviewed Jim for the position of Headmaster of Trinity Christian School in Fairfax, Virginia. He and I became fast friends and have been ever since. His commitment to Christ, sterling character, servant heart, and professional excellence have been a great example to me over the years. Jim faithfully led Trinity Christian School from a small, struggling, church-based school of 120 students to a strong institution with 320 students on four campuses. Under his inspired leadership, a capital campaign successfully purchased 25 acres of prime real estate in Fairfax County, where the school has subsequently built a beautiful facility, housing 525 students.

When he joined the staff of the institute in 2000, he brought his considerable gifts to bear in helping us reinvigorate the small and struggling C.S. Lewis Institute, which had been languishing for several years. His good judgment, commitment to excellence, and attention to detail have played a major role in the institute becoming what it is today.

Although we will miss Jim greatly, we are excited about his future. His natural and spiritual gifts clearly point to pastoral ministry. And his study at Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry will prepare him well to enter into the service of Christ in the orthodox Anglican world.

Please join us in praying for Jim and Anne as they make this change and embark on a new stage of life in the service of Jesus and his church.

With great appreciation and affection,

For the Board and Staff
of the C.S. Lewis Institute
Character

by Art Lindsley
C.S. Lewis Senior Fellow

"Consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds" (Heb. 10:24). Love is never safe apart from character.

Character in Crisis
The oft-discussed crisis of character in this nation is due to the widespread disdain for moral absolutes. If there is nothing fixed, then character is based on quicksand. The attitude of many (more than two-thirds of people in the USA) is that morality is based on the situation or that it is solely a matter of personal preference. Despite this relativistic tendency, there is a desperate desire to inculcate character in the educational process. But you cannot have it both ways. Either you give up your relativism or you give up a solid foundation for character. As the Hebrews passage calls us to do, we need to “consider how” to shape or create character in our time.

The word for “let us consider” (kata-noeo) is used fourteen times in the New Testament. It means “notice, consider, pay attention to, look closely at.” George Guthrie says: “Believers are to rivet their attention on the need for conscious activities of encouragement among those in the Christian community.”

Consider how to stimulate. We are to consider one another, considering how to stimulate each other to love (and good deeds). Such consideration has not often been done. Sometimes it is assumed that merely teaching what is right and what is wrong is enough. It is easy to neglect the cultural context in which people live, the social, economic, and community pressures that contradict or undermine faithfulness. We can also underestimate the difficulty of reversing deeply entrenched patterns (bad habits) that bind us. We can also neglect desire. We can teach people duty, but it is much more difficult to teach the desire to do your duty. You can want to do what’s right (desire), but not know what right is (duty). But many know what is right (duty) yet lack sufficient desire to consistently do it. So we must seriously “consider how to stimulate one another” to really love and consistently manifest good deeds.

The Importance of Character
Love is never safe apart from character. How can we risk loving friends, spouses, coworkers, neighbors, and fellow citizens? Sometimes we are called to love without regard for our own safety (as in loving our enemies). Yet it is wise before entering into a long-term relationship to consider the other person’s character. This is especially true in friendship, marriage, business partnership, etc. Love in a relationship is only safe when there is character present. A habitually abusive spouse may do an occasional good deed, but it is not safe to be in a relationship with him or her. In like manner, a church is not safe apart from the character of its members. A business partnership is only as safe as the character of the partners. A nation is only as

(continued on page 4)
Character
(continued from page 3)

safe as the character of its citizens. You can only trust wisely when you discern good character being present. Relationships can only rise as high as the characters of those involved. Plato argued that you cannot be good friends with a bad person because sooner or later that bad character will manifest itself. That relationship will only rise as high as the lowest level of character between the two. Similarly, Aristotle argued that there are three kinds of friendship: (1) utility, (2) pleasure, (3) virtue. Only the friendship of virtue can be trusted to rise to the heights because only it is based on unchanging values. Friendships of utility, based upon a common situation, such as working at a summer camp, playing on a sports team, or working at the same job, can be of great value but it would be unrealistic to expect that all these relationships would continue beyond the common context in which they grew. If the relationship was primarily about playing basketball together, it may be that if you were to meet later, the only thing you would have in common was basketball. If you were together in a summer camp situation, it could be that accomplishing the task of running that camp was what the friendship was about and that outside that context, there would be little else in common to bind the relationship. If the relationship is primarily about utility—accomplishing a task—then the relationship may not continue outside the context of that task.

The second one of Aristotle’s friendships was a friendship of pleasure—based upon common good times you had together. Fun times in high school, college, and beyond often draw people together and create good memories. However, if the friendship was not based on something more than pleasure, if you were to meet years later, you might only be able to talk about the good old times you had together. Now it is good to have friendships of utility and pleasure as long as you do not expect more of those relationships than they can deliver. In Proverbs 17:17 it says, “A friend loves at all times and a brother is born for adversity.” A true friend is with you and for you despite changing situations and circumstances. When good times, times of pleasure, change to times of adversity, the true friend continues to love, so much so that it seems that they were born just to help in that time of adversity. But that is not true of all friendships.

It is only the third type of friendship—one of virtue—that can survive changing contexts and calamities. Because the friendship of virtue is based on that which is eternal and unchanging—the true, the good, and the beautiful—it lasts no matter what. As a believer in Christ, if you meet such a person years later, and you have both been pursuing the unchanging Christ, you pick up right where you left off. Not long ago, I spent a few days at a Young Life camp with a friend I had not seen much in almost thirty years since our days in a Young Life leadership house. Yet, because we both had continued to follow Christ, study His Word, and pursue ministry, there was still a bond present and our conversation flowed easily and naturally to eternal things, permanent things, what we can call first things. Relationships based on first things will withstand the storms of life. Only those relationships that are based on that which is unchanging have a solid basis to withstand the constant changes life brings.
How Can You Discern Character?

You can only trust someone to their degree of character. How can you discern what level of character a person has? Look at the person they have treated or are treating most poorly. That shows the degree to which their character can descend. It is not wise to trust that person beyond that level of their character because what they do to another, given enough time and opportunity, they will likely do to you. Proverbs warns us to distinguish between people who pretend to be friends (but are not) and the real thing. Proverbs 18:24 says, “There are friends that pretend to be friends, but there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother.”

It is one thing to forgive someone, but another to trust them. Because of my background in dealing with cults, I was called to go to another city where a leader had abused a small group of followers. He had abused money, sex, and power for a number of years and was finally found out. When the whole sordid story came out, the little flock was in dismay. How could this trusted leader have been for years so abusive in manipulating people, have many adulterous affairs, and much financial misdealing? He had pleaded with them to forgive him and trust him again. As we talked, we together came to the conclusion: Forgiveness? Yes. Trust? No! Christ calls us to forgive when anyone asks. But he does not call us to trust everyone equally. It would only be wise to trust that leader again when he had demonstrated over time that he had changed his ways.

Often believers assume that just because someone calls themselves a Christian that they should be trusted more than another. It is not necessarily the case. Would that it were always so! Believers are forgiven for their sin but come to Christ with various character deficiencies. These faults do not always automatically disappear. What Christ brings by the Holy Spirit is renewed desires (being born again) and the guidelines for our actions revealed in the Scriptures. But that does not mean that “love and good deeds” automatically abound. Often it takes a battle requiring the whole armor of God to overcome bitterness, lust, envy, pride, and other vices. Love and good deeds need to be stimulated, cultivated, created—applying the principles of Scripture by the Holy Spirit to real deficiencies in our lives. It is wise for leaders to be discerning about those to whom they entrust responsibility. Do they demonstrate the level of character appropriate to the responsibility to be given them?

Love and Character:

Love Is the Best

The way to character is the way of love. In the Scriptures, love is the best or highest virtue because it sums up them all. In 1 Corinthians 13, it says that of the great virtues—faith, hope, and love—“the greatest of these is love” (v. 13). Jesus summarizes the whole law by maintaining that loving God and your neighbor are the foundation of the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 22:40). Jesus’ new commandment is that we love one another as Christ has loved us (John 13:34). The Apostle Paul, following Jesus, indicates that “love is the fulfillment of the Law” (Rom. 13:10). The commandments against adultery, murder, stealing, and covetousness as well as other commandments are summed up by saying, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Rom. 13:9). The Biblical centrality of love is well (continued on page 22)
New Year’s Eve, 1999. The next day would be the year 2000—the new millennium! The world was swept by rumors of what would happen. The Y2K virus would cause global computer networks to crash. Airliners would be stranded in mid-air, with nowhere to land. Religious sects predictably proclaimed the end of the world. The British were told that the hottest party in town was seeing in the new year at the Millennium Dome.

With such colorful prognostications around, less media attention was given to another prediction about the new millennium. For some secular pundits, a new era would dawn, in which religion would evaporate as a significant force in human culture. Globalization would lead to secularization. Humanity would leave behind its religious ideas as children abandon their innocent and naïve belief in Santa Claus. It was time to grow up. As Richard Dawkins put it, “Humanity can leave the crybaby phase, and finally come of age.”

It’s not the first time we’ve heard this. For more than a century, leading sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists have declared that the next generation would live to see the dawn of a new era in which, to borrow a neat phrase from Freud, the “infantile illusions” of religion would be outgrown.

Now that the hype about the year 2000 is behind us, perhaps we can take a more sober look at those predictions. Neither computer networks nor airliners crashed. The world did not end. The Millennium Dome was an embarrassment of monumental proportions. Yet religion shows few signs of diminishing globally, even if its fortunes in western Europe are mixed. (Interestingly, studies indicate that western Europe is the only region to buck the trend of a worldwide surge in interest in spirituality.) The implosion of the Soviet Union, with its atheist (anti)religious establishment, led to the resurgence of Christianity in Russia, and Islam in former Soviet Central Asia. Radical Islam, having been suppressed under the secularist policies of Saddam Hussein, is now emerging as a major political force in western-occupied Iraq. And instead of spreading the secular Gospel of the west to the rest of the world, globalization has brought the religious passions of Asia and Africa to the west.

Past and more recent confident predictions of a secular future now seem curiously ill-judged. In 1965, the Harvard theologian Harvey Cox published *The Secular City*. It became a best-seller. Its message was simple: secularism was here to stay; God was dead. Its basic ideas are now regarded as somewhat unrealistic and utopian by most observers—including Cox himself. In his *Fire
from Heaven, written 30 years later, Cox argues that it is no longer secularism that holds the future for Christianity, but Pentecostalism—“a spiritual hurricane that has already touched half a billion people, and an alternative vision of the human future whose impact may only be at its earliest stages today.” Pentecostalism, a form of Christianity placing emphasis on direct experience of God, now numbers something like 600 million adherents, mostly in the great urban sprawls of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It has long since displaced Marxism as the friend and comforter of the poor in these regions. And it’s on its way here.

Atheism, once seen as western culture’s hot date with the future, has waned both in influence and appeal. In part, this reflects the postmodern cultural mood, which is intensely suspicious of totalizing worldviews (whether Christian or atheist), and has a new fascination with spirituality. Celebrity pre-occupation with the kabbalah or New Age spirituality is easily dismissed as superficial—yet it is a telling sign of our times. It reflects a deep-seated conviction that there has to be more to life than what we see around us—that human nature is not fulfilled until its spiritual side is satisfied. The Harry Potter publishing phenomenon is a sure-fire sign that rationalism—here reflected in the spiritual or magical incomprehension of the “muggles”—is seen as dull and plodding, missing out on something deep and significant.

But the failure of atheism also reflects a much deeper concern about the movement itself. It was easy for atheism to criticize religion in the nineteenth century. Back then, the atheist mantra that religion led to oppression, the abuse of power, and intolerance seemed highly plausible. But that was before atheism itself seized power in the twentieth century. As the baleful history of the former Soviet Union makes clear, when in power atheism was just as oppressive, corrupt, and intolerant as its religious alternatives. Little wonder that those who had been “liberated” from religion in eastern Europe and beyond rushed to regain their faiths as the Soviet empire collapsed around them. Atheism is often portrayed as the “religion of modernity”—that great shift in western cultural mood which took root in the eighteenth century. So what is its fate in our postmodern cultural situation, which has inverted many of modernity’s foundational beliefs? Is it about to enter a twilight zone?

Secularism remains an important issue in the west—witness recent controversies over Muslim headscarves in France. Yet a recent conference at Princeton University’s Department of Politics raised hard questions about its future. Far from presenting a positive worldview of its own, secularism seems increasingly reduced to controlling religion in the public arena. Is secularism now just a means of publicly policing other people’s grand visions of reality, where it was once such a vision itself? Some are openly speaking of a “post-secular era,” in which religion fills the vacuum created by the failures of secularism. Others—such as Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury—make the more modest point that the global political agenda is being set by the concerns of religious communities, mostly Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu. Secularism has not managed to confine these “untamed passions” in a
Four Circles of Intimacy with God
by J. Oswald Sanders

It is an incontrovertible fact that some Christians seem to experience a much closer intimacy with God than others. They appear to enjoy a reverent familiarity with Him that is foreign to us. Is it a matter of favoritism or caprice on the part of God? Or do such people qualify in some way for that desirable intimacy?

Frances Havergal envisioned such a life of deepening intimacy:

And closer yet, and closer the gold-en bonds shall be
Enlinking all who love our Lord in pure sincerity;
And wider yet, and wider shall the circling glory glow
As more and more are taught of God, that mighty love to know.

Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the “tent of meeting.” Anyone inquiring of the LORD would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent.

As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the LORD spoke with Moses. Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to his tent. The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.

(Exodus 33:7-11)
Are there secrets we may discover that would admit us to a similar intimacy? Our aim will be to answer that question.

Both Scripture and experience teach that it is we, not God, who determine the degree of intimacy with Him that we enjoy. We are at this moment as close to God as we really choose to be. True, there are times when we would like to know a deeper intimacy, but when it comes to the point, we are not prepared to pay the price involved. The qualifying conditions are more stringent and exacting than we are prepared to meet; so we settle for a less demanding level of Christian living.

Everything in our Christian life and service flows from our relationship with God. If we are not in vital fellowship with Him, everything else will be out of focus. But when our communion with Him is close and real, it is gloriously possible to experience a growing intimacy.

In both Old and New Testaments, there are examples of four degrees of intimacy experienced by God’s people. In the Old Testament, it is Moses’ and the nation of Israel’s experience with their God. In the New Testament, it is that of the disciples and their Lord. In each case, the growing intimacy arose out of a deepening revelation of the divine character.

Dr. J. Elder Cumming contended that “in almost every case the beginning of new blessing is a new revelation of the character of God—more beautiful, more wonderful, more precious.” This was certainly true in the case of Moses.

Moses on the Mountain

On several occasions God summoned Moses to ascend Mount Sinai to have fellowship with Him. Twice, the conference lasted for forty days. On one of those occasions, the people of the nation were associated with him. A study of the circumstances reveals that four circles of intimacy developed.

The Outer Circle (Exod. 19:11-12)

As the Law was about to be given, God told Moses to prepare the nation for His manifestation on Mount Sinai. They would see His visible presence, but there were limits beyond which they must not pass.

Let them be ready for the third day, for on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. And you shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, “Be ware that you do not go up on the mountain.”

The people could approach the mountain, but they could not ascend it, on pain of death. Barriers were erected to keep them at a distance from God. “Moses alone, however, shall come near to the LORD, but they shall not come near, nor shall the people come up with him” was the divine dictum (Exod. 24:2).

Why the exclusiveness? The subsequent reactions of the people clearly demonstrated that they were neither qualified for nor desirous of coming too close to God. There were obviously conditions for a fresh revelation of God. They did have a vision of God, but to them “the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top” (Exod. 24:17).

The Second Circle (Exod. 24:9-11)

Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the
elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel...They beheld God, and they ate and drank.

That group pressed past the barriers that excluded the rest of the nation and had a much more intimate vision of God than the people: “Under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself.” They had a limited vision of God in His transcendence, a glimpse of the Eternal. It was probably a theophany. “They beheld God, and they ate and drank.”

They must have felt a very real and conscious sense of the divine presence. Their experience was far in advance of that of the people, but it effected no permanent transformation. Only a short time later, they were found worshiping the golden calf. They had a vision of God but showed that they were not qualified to ascend to the top of the mountain into deeper fellowship with God.

The Third Circle (Exod. 24:13-14)

So Moses arose with Joshua his servant, and Moses went up to the mountain of God. But to the elders he said, “Wait here for us until we return to you.”

How quickly the numbers dwindled as the mountain path grew steeper! Of all Israel, only two qualified for inclusion in the third circle of intimacy. What was Joshua’s special qualification for that privilege? A clue is given in Exodus 33:10-11: “When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would arise and worship...Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses returned to the camp, his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.”

The tent was the place where the Shekinah glory rested, and where God manifested Himself to His people. “Joshua...would not depart from the tent.” As Moses’ servant, he would have many errands to go on and services to perform, but whenever he was free from those duties, he made his way to the tent. He wanted to be where God manifested Himself. He would have been present on many occasions when the Lord spoke to Moses face to face; thus he enjoyed an intimacy with God excelled only by that of his leader, Moses. Although he fell short of the vision granted to Moses, he ascended higher on the glory-covered mountain than any of his contemporaries. The lesson for us does not need to be spelled out.

The Inner Circle (Exod. 24:15-17)

Then Moses went up to the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. And the glory of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He
called to Moses from the midst of the cloud.

The divine summons must have filled Moses with awe as he climbed alone, for “the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top” (v. 17). The people in the outer circle saw only the consuming fire and feared. Moses saw in it the glory of God and worshiped.

Moses Experienced a Deepening Intimacy of Communion with God

“Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend” (Exod. 33:11). “With him will I speak mouth to mouth” (Num. 12:8, KJV). What could be more intimate—friend to friend, face to face, mouth to mouth! Is there any parallel to that in our experience?

He Shared the Divine Perspective

He was daring enough to make the request, “Let me know Thy ways” (Exod. 33:13). He desired to know his Friend’s principles of action, to share His purposes, and God opened His heart to Moses and revealed something of His own inner nature.

He Experienced a Searching Test in the Area of Ambition

When the nation turned to worship the golden calf in Moses’ absence, God’s anger was kindled, and He said to Moses, “Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation” (Exod. 32:10, NIV, italics added). Moses’ integrity and disinterested love for his people found expression in his audacious response to the divine proposition: “But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book You have written” (Exod. 32:32, NIV). The intensity and selflessness of his intercession grew out of his growing intimacy with God. Not only did he refuse to profit at their expense, but he was willing to sacrifice his privileged position in their favor.

He Had a Surpassing Revelation of God’s Glory

Communion with God kindled in Moses an intense desire to know Him better. “I pray Thee, show me Thy glory” was his request (Exod. 33:18). God’s answer gave him, and us, an insight into the nature of His glory: “I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you…. The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in loving-kindness and truth; who keeps loving-kindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished” (Exod. 33:19; 34:6-7).

God’s goodness and glory are enshrined in His name, in His moral character. Moses did not see the full glory of God in its unveiled effulgence—only the afterglow that He left behind as He passed by.

(continued on page 24)
Most Christians are taught to believe that ambition is sinful and therefore to be avoided. “Blessed are the meek,” the Beatitude instructs, “for they shall inherit the earth.” In the meantime, however, it seems that the ambitious, not the meek, are laying claim to the earth quite successfully, and not only in worldly pursuits. Ministries, churches, and evangelistic crusades are often birthed and built up by people with tremendous energy and ambition. Is that wrong?

Sincere Christians who yearn after some great goal may reasonably conclude that what they have been taught in church about ambition is incompatible with a life of achievement and success. At least some of them decide, whether consciously or not, that the Christian life cannot contain their aspirations, and they quietly break away, plunging headlong into the world of their dreams and desires. They may still go to church and be known as Christians, but in fact they are barely distinguishable from their secular counterparts in the way they advance their goals, the way they treat their underlings, the premium import cars they drive, and their moth-like attraction to celebrity and media.

That is just one kind of tragedy that results from the apparent conflict between human ambition and godly living. Another kind is when a Christian, usually a recent convert, gives up on some goal or gifting because he or she believes it is not “Christian” enough. That is what nearly happened to the great British social reformer William Wilberforce, who was fortunately convinced by a wise, older believer that his calling to the world of power and politics was just as noble, and could be just as fruitful, as a life spent as a parish priest.

Is ambition inherently sinful? Or can it be a force for good? Are there principles we may discern and apply for exercising ambition in an honorable, godly way?

Here in Washington, D.C., where there are more high school class presidents per square foot than any other place on earth, the answers would appear to be yes, no, and doubtful. It’s a city where people read the distinguished weekly National Journal from back to front: first checking the index for any mentions of them, and then scanning the “People” section to see whether any of their colleagues are moving ahead of them. Some say the most dangerous place in Washington is the space between a television news camera and an aspiring congressman.

But for all those sad caricatures of misplaced ambition, we may still find hope that human ambition can be reconciled with godly character, in the life of the Apostle Paul.

When Paul was still Saul, prior to his conversion, he made himself a central figure in the persecution of the early church. He even solicited special letters of introduction to pave his way to Damascus, so that he could personally lead...
the anti-Christian campaign in that crucial city. Like many ambitious people, Saul had vision: he saw the early church as a blasphemous, dangerous cult, and grasped that an outpost church on a major trade route could become a germinating spore.

It is worth reflecting on these terrible events, and Paul’s later sorrow over them, because they reveal a crucial error that many Christians fall into concerning ambition. They may be tempted to say, “Of course, ambition is wrong because it is tainted with self-interest. Zeal, on the other hand, is admirable because it is focused on something higher than our selves, especially if it is religious zeal.” Regardless of whether zeal and ambition can in fact be distinguished from one another, we need only look at the example of Paul prior to his conversion to see how zeal—even if it seems completely free of self-interest—can turn into something brutal, self-justifying and rapacious. Over the centuries, millions of people have died at the hands of zealots who were selfless in their devotion to a virulent religious sect or ideology. Disinterested zeal is no guarantee of godliness—or even human kindness.

We can see that in Saul as he rides toward Damascus, full of grim purpose and armed with the appropriate credentials. Ambitious people are often obsessed with amassing the right credentials: titles, diplomas, photographs with famous people, and that all-important assurance of significance in our media-drenched age, press clippings. Later in life, Paul would review his resume with acid irony: “If anyone thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.” But as he rode out to launch his Damascus campaign, Saul was a rising star in Pharisee circles. Today he would be called a “young man in a hurry,” one of the highest compliments that Washington can bestow. And then he heard a voice—the voice of Jesus—and his whole view of the world, and of himself, was forever changed.

If we had stage-managed Jesus’ confrontation of Saul on that Damascus road, no doubt we would have struck a very different chord. There would be lightning, and God’s voice thundering from heaven in righteous indignation: “Saul, in thy abominable pride, thou hast persecuted My people, and unless Ye repent, I shall annihilate thee in My dreadful wrath!” Instead Saul, and Saul alone, hears Jesus ask him a question. It is an intensely personal, searching question, full of plaintive concern: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

Saul falls to the ground and asks the Voice, whom he instinctively calls, “Lord,” to identify himself. The Voice answers with pastoral tenderness: “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”

Jesus confronts Saul’s bristling ambitions—and ours—with a question aimed straight at our hearts: “Why are you doing this?” Set aside for a moment what the substance of the goal is; Jesus’ question probes at the underlying reasons. Why? What’s motivating you? What are you really after in all of this? Do you even know what you are doing? Saul thought he was doing something

(continued on page 14)
What is striking about Saul after his conversion is how his earlier natural traits of ambition, vision and drive stay with him—though they are utterly transformed by the Holy Spirit.

good and important: eradicating a cult that was a threat to his religious culture, a stain on God’s sacred honor. He had no idea how off-base he was.

Saul is stopped dead in his tracks not only because he hears a voice from heaven, but because he hears his own name—repeated, caressed. The Voice knows who he is, knows where he came from, and has tracked him down to this remote, dusty road. The word from God that shatters us, that brings us back to our senses, is not always a rebuke or a warning but our own name. The revelation that begins to change us and change the course we are on is the simple fact that God knows us, deeply and personally. He sees our hearts, our hopes, our fears. He sees who we are behind the public façade. “[H]e knows how we are formed, He remembers that we are dust.”

If we care to admit it, God actually knows us far better than we do. The voice that Saul hears on the Damascus road, the voice of the Good Shepherd, sees all of Saul’s ambitious fulminations as nothing more than a misguided sheep, kicking obstinately against the goads. In his own mind, Saul is making things happen, leading an important campaign. But in the clearer reality that Jesus sees, Saul is merely injuring himself, fighting against the mysterious purposes of God. How often that is true of ambitious, driven people: they see a vision, they launch a campaign, they push and push—and all they are doing is pushing against God, pushing against His standards and ways, and injuring themselves in the process.

Fortunately, it doesn’t stop there for Saul, or for us. It turns out that God has ambitions of His own, a vision for what we have the potential to be, in His strength and under His guidance. God informs Ananias, a believer living in Damascus who has heard of this murderous Saul: “This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.” After Ananias goes to Saul and lays hands on him, “something like scales” fall from his blinded eyes, a sign that Saul’s way of looking at life is being dramatically transformed. And so Saul begins to fulfill the mission that God had revealed to Ananias, God’s ambition for Saul—first in Damascus, then in Jerusalem, and throughout much of the known world.

What is striking about Saul after his conversion is how his earlier natural traits of ambition, vision, and drive stay with him—though they are utterly transformed by the Holy Spirit. Throughout the Book of Acts, Saul is portrayed—as relentlessly obstinate, confrontational, insistent, resolute, and absolutely driven by the desire to preach the Gospel, build up the churches, and bring glory to his beloved Savior.

What is equally striking, however, is how Saul’s ambition differs from most of the natural ambition we encounter in the world, even among religious leaders.

The first critical difference was that Saul’s ambition was pursued in the rich soil of community. Thirteen chapters into the Book of Acts, Luke mentions almost as an afterthought, “Then Saul, who was also called Paul….” Somewhere along the way, Saul had acquired a new name: Paul. Many commentators postulate that Paul dropped his Hebrew name in favor of a Roman one, in order to relate more easily to the Gentiles. Some traditions also hold that Saul was short in stature, and the new name (meaning “little”) reflected that fact. Regardless
of the origin, Saul had acquired something that is the ultimate sacrament of friendship: a new name. New names, including nicknames, reflect a deeper relationship, a closer bond. If he really was short, “Paul” would have been a good-natured dig. Or perhaps the new Roman nickname was a wry observation—that this Hebrew of Hebrews had “gone Gentile.”

The vast majority of ambitious people climb their ladders alone, but Paul pursued his God-given goals in the company of friends. They ate together, worked together, prayed together, wept together, and ministered together. Most of the decisions that were crucial to Paul’s life and ministry were not made by him alone, but in a group, usually after fasting and prayer. His friends included peers like Barnabas as well as younger disciples like Timothy and Titus, whom he nurtured as if they were his own sons. These were vital, emotional relationships, which means they were subject to all the pain and disappointment that true friendship risks. Paul confronts Peter “to his face” in Antioch; Mark deserts Paul and Barnabas in Pamphylia; Barnabas and Paul have “such a sharp disagreement” over Mark that they part company altogether. Yet late in life, Paul sends for Mark again, and Peter refers to Paul as “our dear brother” in his second letter, when both of them are probably nearing martyrdom.

In Paul, we see how the fire of ambition can serve God’s purposes, but we also see how friendship sanctifies ambition and checks its soul-destroying potential. We desperately need the encouragement of friends that is described in Hebrews 3:13: “But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” Without real friends—provoking us, querying us, chastising us, standing with us, praying for us—we turn into hard, driven people, deceived and distorted by our moral blind spots.

The second crucial difference between Paul’s ambition and much of what we find in the world was that Paul’s greatest ambition was for Christ Himself. We are confronted again with the question Jesus posed to Saul on the Damascus road: “Why are you doing this?” Not what, but why? Many ambitious people, including Christians, focus so obsessively on the what that they lose track of the why. The corner office, the next election, the professional recognition, becoming partner, building the church roster, making your first million or your fifteenth—all reasonable goals, but why?

Paul was passionate about spreading the Gospel, he was in love with the church, and he was devoted to the vulnerable flocks under his care. Yet for Paul, the why was even more desirable than all these immensely important, God-honoring activities. When he describes his deepest longings in the letter to the Philippians, there is white-hot intensity in his words, a consuming ambition that makes all worldly striving seem lukewarm by comparison:

I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him.... I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and

(continued on page 26)
It was Woody Allen who quipped: “What if everything is an illusion and nothing exists? In that case I definitely overpaid for my carpet.”

Although written for comic effect, the idea captured by this simple witticism reflects a school of thought whose existence can be traced down through the centuries. Recently I heard a story, told by an easterner, concerning a guru who expounded the “illusion theory” in relation to pain and suffering. Shortly after spouting forth on the subject for several hours, one of the guru’s disciples saw him running for safety while being chased by a wild elephant. After the guru had climbed down from a tree in which he had taken refuge, his disciple asked him why, if pain and suffering were illusionary, did he run away? Pausing for thought, the guru replied “The elephant is illusion, my running away is illusion, everything is illusion.”

The attraction of claiming that all is illusion must be that it partly relieves us of the anguish we sometimes feel in trying to make sense of life. If everything is indeed an illusion, then there is no real need to worry, since there is nothing real to worry about. But here lies the problem. An appeal to illusion assumes that there is such a thing as reality, hence allowing us to distinguish between the two. And if there is such a thing as reality, then everything can’t be illusion. It would appear, therefore, that to make such an appeal is to try (ineffectually) to escape from the problem rather than address it. However you approach it, it is difficult to fly from reality.

A consequence of making an appeal to illusion, and perhaps explaining its increasing popularity, is that it also addresses a far greater dilemma—that of meaning. If everything is illusion, then it follows that meaning is also illusory. And since for many the search for meaning has been fruitless, the idea that there is no meaning to be found can be strangely comforting. At least we are not missing out on something!

Of course, once life in general is held to be devoid of meaning, it follows that subjects such as history, the record of life’s events, become themselves a meaningless record. In a book entitled The Search for Meaningful Existence, the author raises a very good question when he writes:

But we must ask the question, why for this generation of young adults has even history lost its meaning? I doubt that most would be able to provide the reason. As a matter of fact, they would probably suggest that the question itself is wrong-headed, and that the burden of proof lies with those who would claim that history itself is meaningful. It is a rejection in terms of negation.
History is eventless and meaningless because it was never eventful and meaningful. You can never lose that which you never possessed.

But can we say with confidence that history never had any meaning to be lost? As soon as we make the claim, the claim itself becomes an historical statement. Even as the sentiment is given expression, it moves from the present to the past. Even the time taken reading this article now belongs to the past. Do we conclude therefore that nothing meaningful took place?

Of course, this makes the problem look a little too crude. Some claim that although historical facts may be ascertained, their interpretation cannot be. Again, this is a startling claim. More than that, as soon as it is expressed, it becomes a startling historical claim! How should we interpret it? No matter how the problem is addressed, anyone who wishes to advocate this position will find it very difficult to defend.

Maybe what we could say is that ascertaining the correct interpretation of any historical fact is very difficult. But this is not the same as saying that the interpretation is inaccessible to us. It simply means that there is a wide margin for error.

This, of course, raises several immediate questions for the Christian. Christianity does not simply claim to bring some special revelation about God in an abstract way. It claims that a revelation was brought in a very concrete way, in history and ultimately in the person of Christ. How then can the problems involved in understanding history be overcome? How could we gain a meaningful interpretation of it?

Someone once described a historian as a prophet in reverse, and it is the coming together of both of these records, of the prophetic and the historical, that makes up the series of books known collectively as the Bible. This is precisely the claim that the authors of the Gospels make. Descriptions of past happenings, predictions of future events, and the recording of these events “coming to pass” make up the written record of God’s own authoritative interpretation of both the world in which we live and the understanding of our place in it. It is a fantastic claim, and one that I think can be supported by good evidence. Have you taken time to look into it?

And it is this prophetic element that limits the degree of interpretation available to us concerning key events chronicled in the Bible. As a matter of fact, you could even go so far as to say that it prescribes the appropriate interpretation. Interpretation becomes secondary to recognition. We are not only told what events will come to pass, but how and why. Little is then left to interpretation, all that is left is to recognise a course of events when they happen, as the interpretation has already been provided by the God who made the events come about.

Not only does God provide a meaningful framework within which to interpret history, He also provides a framework within which meaning for our own being becomes possible. Which is why one of the early Christians, Paul, said “In Him we live and move and have our being.” Meaning is not illusionary because we were created for a purpose, and purpose is a prerequisite for meaning, and all of this is grounded in the Reality of an ever-present God.
Profiles in Faith: Malcolm Muggeridge
(continued from page 1)

were later popularized in the socialist society blueprint of Lord Beveridge.

Kitty told me that, as a child, her Aunt Beatrice became emotionally attached to the “father figure” of Herbert Spencer, a frequent visitor to their home. His social Darwinism, she said, seduced Beatrice’s childhood Christian faith. When Malcolm and Kitty got married in 1927, in a registry office, Kitty’s father pleaded with his daughter not to sign the document with “Red Malcolm,” while his own parents knew nothing of the event until later. Marrying into the “monarchy of Socialism,” while despising his own parental working class socialism, was just the beginning of the many paradoxes of Malcolm’s life. A previous short time in India and a meeting with Gandhi set Malcolm’s path towards a more mystical-religious way of life. In contrast, the socialism of the Webbs was bureaucratic, rationalistic, and theoretical, which he detested ever after. For as he told me, it saw all of life under neon-lighting: the sun and the heavens never penetrated whatever inner world the Webbs might have had.

After a short assignment in Egypt—then in political turmoil—Malcolm came back to Manchester in England to work for the newspaper, the Manchester Guardian, then one of Britain’s most influential media. He found its editor, C.P. Scott, “a little mad, high-minded, who fed on moral problems, fattened on moral problems, jumped out of bed in the morning to struggle with them, reluctantly extricated himself from their clasp when he went to bed at night. His whole life had been one moral problem after another.” This also was repeated in Muggeridge’s own family life; until the late 1960s, it was a catalogue of marital unfaithfulness, sailing near the wind for libel actions, despairing to the point of a timid attempt at suicide, and living in the half mad world of the eccentrically famous.

In 1932-33, Malcolm and Kitty spent seven months in Russia, leaving behind in boarding school their four-year-old son, Leonard. Contrary to popular opinion, Malcolm was never infatuated with socialism, so he went to Russia prepared to be skeptical of the communist utopia being depicted in the leftist press. What he suspected was that it was power-hungry journalists who envied Stalin’s use of power, not romantic idealists. Knowing his candid reports about Russia would be unpopular in the leftist press in Britain, he wrote a novel in 1934, Winter in Moscow, which was a brilliant exposé of the willful credulity of Western journalists and of “mystified scientism” about Russia. Thinly veiled autobiography, the character “Wraithby” depicts Muggeridge’s own state of mind at the time: “He was a dim, fitful person. Floating loose on society; making little darts, like a bee in search of honey, at newspaper offices and literature and politics and love affairs, and then hastily withdrawing into himself; interested in the world and in human affairs, but having contact with neither; carried this way and that by changing emotions and convictions, he had observed from afar the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and had felt it to be substantial. He knew that it was brutal, intolerant, and ruthless. He had no illusions about its consequences to individuals and to classes. Only, he thought, it offered a way of escape from himself. It was Brahma; an infinite; and by becoming one with it he would cease to be finite.”

Almost religiously, Malcolm hoped it would be a baptism and a rebirth for
him, like “a sea that would cradle him.” It was the quest for clear, authoritative “truth” in a liberal world which had lost its moral moorings. Returning via Germany, he realized the Nazi show of force was the same, “brown terror” no worse than “red terror.” Already he predicted in 1933 there would be war in the West, and his critique of communism was years ahead of George Orwell’s Animal Farm.

The years 1935-38 were bleak years for Muggeridge, feeling demeaned as a reporter working for a London tabloid, The Londoner’s Diary: it was all about gossip and the satirical portraiture of public figures. Then in 1936 he went into work as a freelance writer, meeting many of the upcoming writers of the time. He also became more articulate on his religious quest, recognizing that it alone could sustain true individuality, in avoiding both the isolation of materialism and the false brotherhood of totalitarianism. But it was the institutional container of the religious life that always bothered him, with its inevitable deprivations of personal life and faith. Among the works he wrote in this period was an autobiographical pilgrimage, In the Valley of the Restless Mind (1938). Its bleak vignettes depicted a civilization in decline, only sustainable by satirical detachment. With the outbreak of the war in 1939, Muggeridge immediately joined the army, was commissioned as an officer, and was then recruited into the Special Intelligence Services, or MI6. Sent out to Mozambique, he entered into a tumultuous period of his life, with sex, booze, intrigue, and guilt. It was then he made his suicide attempt in July 1943, was sent home, and after a brief assignment in Paris, once the war was over, joined the Daily Telegraph. After an assignment in Washington, D.C., he returned to London, adding to his literary activities, and becoming the editor of Punch in 1952. Then two years later he was appointed as an interviewer with the BBC, and his television career was launched.6

It was typical of the man that he got bored with every job he took on, so that he lasted scarcely five years at Punch. His political satire against the icons of his day also frequently embarrassed those who hired his services. As a result he also lost old friends, especially after his resignation as rector of Edinburgh University and his public embrace of the Christian faith. Yet Muggeridge had long recognized that the greatest divide in society was not between those politically “right” or “left,” but of those who believed in God and those who did not. He saw, too, that the idolization of political leaders, whether of Churchill or of Kennedy, filled a secular vacuum for those who did not believe in God. As an outstanding lampoonist of society, Muggeridge observed in 1964 that “the only fun of journalism was that it puts you in contact with the eminent without being under the necessity to admire them or take them seriously.”7

After his BBC film on Mother Teresa in Calcutta in 1969, Michael Chantry, the chaplain at Hertford College (where I was a Fellow), invited him to preach one Sunday evening in Michaelmas term. His visit aroused unusual interest, as well as considerable hostility, in the public debate that followed the chapel service. Escorting him to his room, I put my arm around him, and reminded him that, like the apostle Paul, he would doubtless receive a lot of ridicule for now becoming “St. Mugg,” after all the mockery of the established church and

(continued on page 20)
the loose moral life he had previously exhibited. He began to invite me down to Robertsbridge, his home near Brighton. Sitting on the couch in the living room after lunch one day with Leonard, as Malcolm had his afternoon nap by the fireside, Leonard asked me, “Do you think Dad has become a Christian yet?” I noticed a suppressed smile on what should have been a sleeping face while I was assuring his son, “Yes, I think he’s there now.” Malcolm never interpreted his conversion as a single event, but as a life-long journey, helped along by many writers—William Blake, George Herbert, Blaise Pascal, and Simone Weil, among others. For he saw Christian faith more as a living drama than as a series of doctrines. Often I asked him when he was going to write his third volume, Chronicles of Wasted Time, about his conversion. He never did, and instead wrote a separate work, in a differing genre.

It was the great cultural sweep of Muggeridge’s literary life that made him more a prophet than an apologist. I suggested he should be invited to address the Lausanne Evangelical Congress instead of Henry Kissinger, who had originally been proposed. But Malcolm found it all rather uncomfortable. Put up at the luxurious Beau-Sejour Hotel, a well-known religious television personality strolled up the first morning to his breakfast table, coming straight to his offer: $50,000 for a television program. When Malcolm declined, and a double fee was suggested, Muggeridge retorted, as if facing the devil in the wilderness, “Go away you nasty man!” Ruffled by the encounter, he was met in the foyer by Billy Graham, who asked solicitously how he had slept. “Very well, thank you, but I doubt whether Jesus would have done so.” His first meeting with Francis Schaeffer at L’Abri likewise did not go too well, since he knew he was to be quizzed as to how soundly he had been converted. But Schaeffer’s ardent desire to express his own views left no space for any response from Muggeridge.

So as we walked around the shore of Lake Geneva, his first impression of evangelicals was that they were like modern skyscrapers, designed monolithically, to have no gargoyles. Whereas medieval cathedrals had gargoyles everywhere: at the drainage points of the roof, and carved at the end of the pews. His point was that religiously we need much humor and should never take ourselves too seriously in claiming to do the work of God.

Early in 1975, Malcolm was resident on Salt Spring Island, near Vancouver, writing his book, Jesus: The Man Who Lives. I kept him stocked with reference books, and my wife and I would visit him each weekend to hear him read the script as he progressed. In contrast to his previous book of essays, Jesus Rediscovered (1966), when he was still searching, his mood was then penitential about “those empty years, those empty words, that empty passion!” Now in Jesus: The Man Who Lives, he was ready to embrace the God-Man, in joyous assurance, after having already witnessed in the saintly life of Mother Teresa, Something Beautiful for God (1971).

Much has been speculated about Malcolm and Kitty’s entry into the Roman Catholic church. After their admittance in 1982, I suggested to John Stott that the two of us should visit them. On the railway platform at Charing Cross station, we met Lord Longford, their old-time friend and neighbor, who had knelt with them in his chapel, where they had become members. “Well now,” he said,
“you chaps can tell me, why did Malcolm become a Catholic?” We laughed at the irony of his question, when he was largely responsible for making it so easy for them to join. But as we journeyed towards Robertsbridge, we all agreed the factors were not really theological at all.

First, they were aware of their mortality, and needed a priest soon, to officiate at their burial. But Malcolm had told me more than once that the local Anglican church had no appeal. Then the Catholic priest Fr. Bidone, on Lord Longford’s estate, had a community of mentally retarded people whom the Muggeridges loved, and who comprised a large part of the local church. There was Mother Teresa’s influence, which had been so significant in their pilgrimage to faith. He also respected the Catholic church’s stand against abortion, and its staunch orthodoxy of doctrine, unlike the weak compromises apparent within modern Anglicanism.

Muggeridge’s Death of Christendom seemed an exaggerated attack against institutional religion, but now we can see how prophetic it was. Likewise, his broad sweep of the decadence of Western civilization in Chronicles of Wasted Time may prove more profound than any other survey of the twentieth century. Malcolm has had a profound effect upon our family, demonstrating that to be truthful, one needs to be courageous, humble, simple, and decidedly free from ambition. Egotism was for him, “the hiss of the cobra.” Towards the end of our friendship, I asked him what further book would he have desired to write before he died. Unhesitatingly his reply was, Against Consensus. But he added, “Perhaps you will write it!” Since his favorite text as a modern Qoheleth was, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,” all his life Malcolm was “against consensus.” But once he learned to abide in Christ, he confessed: “All I can claim to have learnt from the years I have spent in this world is that the only happiness is love, which is attained by giving, not receiving.” We most appreciate the world as a beautiful place when we become aware that we have another, heavenly destiny. We are here, then, to acclimatize ourselves to another, an eternal reality. Consensus with this fallen world has no future.

References
2. Muggeridge once estimated: “Over the last forty years I must have written, at a modest estimate, some 5,000 weeks a word, or, say, a quarter of a million words a year. In all, ten million written words, of which so very, very few, if any, may be considered as having more than a momentary value.” Muggeridge Through the Microphone, 1969, quoted in Ian Hunter, edit. The Very Best of Malcolm Muggeridge, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998, p. 260.
Character (continued from page 5)

known and uncontroversial, even taken for granted.

But this is strikingly not the case in the culture. There have been numerous attempts to teach character in the culture without mentioning God, Jesus, or the Bible. Moreover, the lists of virtues being taught almost always exclude an explicit mention of love. For instance, the Character Counts! Coalition lists “six pillars of character”—respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, fairness, caring, and citizenship. The Community of Caring affirms “five core values—caring, respect, trust, responsibility, and family.” The Character Education Institute focuses on “universal values” such as courage, honesty, truthfulness, justice, tolerance, honor, generosity, kindness, helpfulness, freedom of choice, equal opportunity, and economic security. The Heartwood Institute based in Pittsburgh stands out as an exception including “love” as one of the “seven universal attributes along with courage, loyalty, justice, respect, hope, and honesty.”

The problem is that once you strip these values of their theological foundation, there is no solid answer as to why you ought to be the kind of person prescribed. James Davison Hunter in his insightful book, The Death of Character, points out that the “demise of character begins with the destruction of creeds, the convictions, and the ‘god terms’ that made those creeds sacred to us and inviolable within us.” Once values are stripped of their “commanding character,” then the word “value” is reduced to utility, personal preference, or community consensus. Hunter argues that contemporary moral education, as well intended as it may be, actually “undermines the capacity to form the convictions upon which character must be based if it is to exist at all.” We are desperately seeking a renewal of character but are not willing in the culture to give it sufficient foundations or justification. Hunter says:

We say we want a renewal of character in our day but don’t really know what we ask for. To have a renewal of character is to have a renewal of a creedoal order that constrains, limits, binds, obligates, and compels. This price is too high for us to pay. We want character but without unyielding conviction; we want strong morality but without the emotional burden of guilt or shame; we want virtue but without particular moral justifications that invariably offend; we want good without having to name evil; we want decency without the authority to insist upon it; we want more community without any limitations to personal freedom. In short we want what we cannot possibly have on the terms that we want it.

Leaving out love not only deprives character traits of coherence (love as the sum) but it deprives character of motive—rooted in the love of God as demonstrated in Christ and commanded by Him.

The Broader the Better
Christ calls us to a love that extends into increasingly wider circles—family, friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, neighbors—eventually even to enemies. No other religious perspective emphasizes “love” to the same degree or extent. More than mere passive “tolerance,” Christ calls us to love very diverse people—of every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (Rev. 5:9). Only a great Lord could give us the capacity to love people so different from us.
The British mainline churches have neither caused nor yet significantly benefited from the failure of atheism. A step away from atheism is not necessarily a step in the direction of the churches. Although the Alpha Course is proving hugely successful in introducing a new generation to basic Christian ideas, the growing interest in spirituality in the United Kingdom is partly due to cultural shifts. Atheism, thoroughly wedded to a modernist worldview, has found itself beached through the rise of postmodernism. This movement regards the traditional atheist dismissal of the transcendent as arrogant and premature, and gives cultural and intellectual legitimacy to the wistful quest for something meaningful in life.

So what can we do? There are many answers that can be given. We need to take this shift in cultural mood seriously, and get away from the “modernism good, postmodernism bad” mentality that has emerged in some quarters. Neither is good, neither is bad; they are simply cultural moods that Christian apologetics must take with the utmost seriousness. Some older evangelists seem to think we have to convert postmodern people to modernism before we can convert them to the Gospel. So let’s get real about this. The greatest challenge that we face is building on a new interest in spirituality within our culture, and seeing if we can develop pathways by which that culture can be enabled to encounter the living Christ.

Who said it was going to be easy? But there is so much that we can do. The new millennium has only just begun. Maybe it will surprise us all by the directions it takes.
Four Circles of Intimacy with God

(continued from page 11)

the afterglow that He left behind as He passed by (Exod. 33:20-23).

Some of God’s Glory Rubbed Off on Moses

“When Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai...Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him” (Exod. 34:29, italics added). That is still the divine prescription for radiance. Had we lived in those Old Testament times, in which group would we be found? With the crowd? The seventy-four? The two? The one?

Jesus and His Disciples

From among those early followers who had evidenced their faith in Him, Jesus chose seventy and sent them out two by two to preach for Him. Later, after a night of prayer, He chose twelve to be with Him for training—to learn His ways and imbibe His spirit. Within the twelve, there emerged a circle of three with whom Jesus became especially intimate. They were closer to Him than any of the others. Within the circle of three, there was one who appropriated the special place on Jesus’ breast, and through whom the disciples channeled questions to the Master (John 13:25). “He, leaning back thus on Jesus’ breast” is the way John described his privileged position. Seventy, twelve, three, one! In which group would we be found? Each of the disciples was as close to Jesus as he chose to be, for the Son of God had no favorites. We are similarly self-classifying.

G. Campbell Morgan wrote concerning the special three:

There can be no doubt that these men, Peter, James and John, were the most remarkable in the apostolate. Peter loved Him; John He loved; James was the first to seal his testimony with his blood. Even their blunders proved their strength. They were the men of enterprise; men who wanted thrones and places of power.... Mistaken ideas, all of them, and yet proving capacity for holding the keys and occupying the throne. What men from among that first group reign today as these men?

On four special occasions, Jesus admitted them to experiences from which they learned precious lessons. On the occasion of the raising of Jairus’ daughter (Luke 8:51), they were granted a preview of their Lord’s mastery over death and saw His gentleness with the little lass.

On the mount of transfiguration (Matt. 17:1), they gained clearer insight into the importance of His impending death, although they grasped its significance very inadequately (Luke 18:34). There, too, they had a preview of His glory and majesty. “We beheld His glory,” recalled John (1:14). “We...were eyewitnesses of His majesty,” said Peter (1:16).
On the Mount of Olives (Mark 13:3), they marveled at His prophetic discernment, as He shared with them the sweep of the divine purposes and the inner secrets of God.

In the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:37), they glimpsed in the sufferings of the Savior something of the cost of their salvation, although they were at a loss to interpret His agony. Those were some of the privileges of the inner circle. Could any of the twelve have been among that favored group? Were the three specially selected by the Lord? With Him there is no caprice or favoritism. Their relationship with Him was the result of their own choice, conscious or unconscious. It is a sobering thought that we too are as close to Christ as we really choose to be. The deepening intimacy of the three with Jesus was the result of the depth of their response to His love and training.

They recognized that intimacy with Him involved responsibility as well as conferred privilege. The Master had told them that “whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:35). There are some ties that are closer even than those of kinship.

What excluded some disciples from the inner circle? If perfection were the criterion, then Peter the denier and James and John the place-seekers would have been excluded. But they were included. If it were temperament, then surely the volatile Peter, and James and John the fire-eaters would not have found entrance.

Why then did John have the primacy in the group? Because he alone appropriated the place of privilege that was available to all. It was love that drew John into a deeper intimacy with Jesus than the other apostles. Jesus loved them all, but John alone appropriated the title “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” If Jesus loved John more, it was because John loved Him more. Mutual love and confidence are the keys to intimacy.

It would seem that admission to the inner circle of deepening intimacy with God is the outcome of deep desire. Only those who count such intimacy a prize worth sacrificing anything else for, are likely to attain it. If other intimacies are more desirable to us, we will not gain entry to that circle.

The place on Jesus’ breast is still vacant, and open to any who are willing to pay the price of deepening intimacy. We are now, and we will be in the future, only as intimate with God as we really choose to be.

Note
Cultivating Godly Ambition
(continued from page 15)

so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me…. Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Emphasis added.)

Every other ambition that Paul had was secondary to knowing Christ, gaining Christ, being found in Christ, sharing in His sufferings, and becoming like Him in His death. The fuel for Paul’s ambition was not his job—as noble as it might have been—but Jesus Himself.

The proof of this is evident at the conclusion of Paul’s life. By all appearances, his ministry had been a failure. Many of the churches he had helped found were falling away, embracing either Gnosticism or pagan immorality. Other “apostles” had surpassed him in perceived ability and influence. Some of his closest associates had abandoned him. All that remained for Paul was a martyr’s death, not in the mold of a valiant hero but, as Paul saw himself, “on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena…the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.”

Passed over. Forgotten. Abandoned. Alone. Countless once-great people die in ignominy, their greatest achievements undermined, their monuments toppled, even their very names erased by the selective memory of history. Few “go gently into that good night.” Facing the twilight of their lives and their significance, they become debilitated by bitterness and regret. And after a life of compulsive achievement, amassing power and wealth and importance, they melt away, like the Wicked Witch of the West in The Wizard of Oz. “As for man...he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.”

That’s not how we find Paul at the end of his life. Despite all the rejection, the disappointments, and the humiliations of imprisonment, Paul writes a final letter to Timothy that is full of hope. One moment he is dispensing advice, another he is asking for scrolls to be sent to him. He is surrounded by close friends, and reaching out to old colleagues.

While many grow faint in the face of death, Paul seems positively inspired by it. He warns Timothy fervently about the coming “last days,” which he probably has realized he will not live long enough to see. And he compares his impending death to the pouring out of a drink offering, an act of pure, extravagant worship to God.

How could a man so mistreated, so marginalized, so apparently unsuccessful, finish out his days with such confident joy?
ful, finish out his days with such confident joy? Again, the answer is that Paul’s sights were set even higher than the great work that God had entrusted to him; they were set on heaven itself and the God who was calling him there. Churches may fall, and friends may betray, but Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Paul’s deepest ambition was to know this Christ, above all else, so that when the time came for his “departure,” his external circumstances scarcely mattered.

It is significant that Paul uses his favorite imagery—athletic competition and military contests—to describe his impending death: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” For those who are ambitious after worldly aims, death is the bitter, nullifying conclusion. For Paul, death is a triumphant culmination, where a life of fruitfulness and devotion releases its fragrance to heaven, and the Voice that called us at the beginning declares it well-done indeed.

As we see in Paul’s life, God can make good use of people with passion, energy and vision—whether they serve in ministry, government, business, the non-profit world, the military, or at home raising children. It is no slight to God’s sovereignty to observe that ambitious, dedicated people often accomplish more than those who are reticent and phlegmatic.

So how do we pursue goals in a God-honoring way? How can we be ambitious without it corroding our souls? The secret is summed up in a word that Paul uses to describe ambition gone awry. “Do nothing out of selfish ambition,” Paul exhorts the Philippians. The word he uses is Greek, possibly coined by Aristotle in his treatise on Politics. It refers, in a derogatory way, to merely eking out an existence. For Greeks like Aristotle, one’s highest calling was to be a citizen, immersed in the civic affairs of the polis. To them, self-promoting climbers were like the poor castes outside of Athens’ elite society, preoccupied with nothing more than earning a day’s bread.

We (and Paul) emphatically reject such disdain for the strivings of the poor. But the transformation of this word into a generic description of perverted ambition suggests that the true danger of ambition is not aiming too high, but aiming too low. “Spending and getting, we lay waste our powers,” the poet William Wordsworth lamented. It is a sin to squander our energy and God-given talents on the ephemeral indulgences of recognition, status, fame and respectability. Paul’s life tells us to aim higher.

It is a sin to squander our energy and God-given talents on the ephemeral indulgences of recognition, status, fame and respectability. Paul’s life tells us to aim higher....
Sponsored by the C.S. Lewis Institute
in conjunction with Biola University, the Evangelical Philosophical Society, and McLean Bible Church

Discipleship of Heart and Mind

The C.S. Lewis Institute is supported through the gifts of those who recognize the vital need for authentic discipleship in current culture. Gifts are very much appreciated and can be mailed or made via a secure online donation.

The C.S. Lewis Institute is established 1976

22 of the world’s finest Christian scholars including N.T. Wright, Craig Hazen, William Lane Craig, J.P. Moreland, and Gary Habermas

Seminar tracks addressing today’s most common intellectual challenges to Christianity

Creation and Intelligent Design
The Reliability of the New Testament
World Religions and New Movements
Contemporary Barriers to Faith
Plus a special student track

Early Registration (before September 30) $85 (Friday–Saturday only: $65)
Regular Registration (September 30-November 15) $95 (Friday–Saturday only: $75)
Walk-in Registration (after November 15) $110 (Friday–Saturday only: $90)
Students (age 18 and under) $40

To register or for more information, go to www.cslewisinstitute.org

Visit the C.S. Lewis Institute web site for resources from previous conferences and information on upcoming events.

www.cslewisinstitute.org

C.S. LEWIS INSTITUTE
8001 Braddock Road, Suite 300 • Springfield, VA 22151
703/914-5602 • 800/813-9209 • 703/894-1072 fax
www.cslewisinstitute.org