On May 21, 1738, the day of his conversion, Charles Wesley opened the Bible for a word from God and put his finger on a text which graphically described the mighty work of God in his life: “He hath put a new song in my mouth…. Many will see and fear and will trust in the Lord” (Ps. 40:3). That was, indeed, a prophetic word, as thousands of “new songs” would come from the pen of this most prolific and enduring of all English hymn writers.

Charles Wesley’s conversion transformed his life, and its impact, through such cherished hymns as “And Can It Be?” and “O for a Thousand Tongues,” still lives today. Out of a new heart came a new song, and by exploring Wesley’s spiritual pilgrimage we can appreciate all the more the experience which we, standing more than 270 years down the road, still share when we make his song our own.

Born the eighteenth of nineteen children, Charles Wesley was given his early training by his mother, but at the age of ten he was sent to the Westminster School, where his brother Samuel was an instructor. Samuel assumed almost full responsibility for the boy and had a great influence on him. Most importantly, Charles was forever shaped by Arminian-Laudian theology and high church sympathies, which would later result in significant differences with his brother John in the development of the Methodist Revival and with Isaac Watts in the character of his hymnody. Further, Charles’s training included an immersion in the biblical texts, which made him a significant biblical scholar in his own right and helped to account for the wealth of biblical allusions in all of his hymns. Charles, perhaps even more than John, was “a man of one book.”

From Westminster School Charles moved on to Christ Church, Oxford, where after a slow start he began in earnest to live a life that he hoped would please his Lord. Joining with a few fellow students in 1728, he began what became known as the Oxford Holy Club, whose members sought to practice the “methods” of spiritual devotion prescribed by the Church of England (hence, the term “Methodists”). Theirs was a rigorous routine that involved daily meetings for prayer and worship as well as a myriad of “good works.” Charles’s finger was constantly on his spiritual pulse, but there appears to have been no life. On his trip with his brother John (continued on page 10)
For the past three issues, we have been looking at those things which make for a healthy church. We have considered the importance of preaching, Scripture, and prayer. We now turn to examine fellowship or community. In attempting to address the question of community, we are at once faced with a problem. As sociologist Robert Bellah has written in his classic work, *The Habits of the Heart*, Americans are increasingly influenced by an excessive and unhealthy degree of individualism, which threatens to undermine our social fabric and even our form of government. In *The Culture of Narcissism*, social critic Christopher Lasch speaks of America having “a culture of competitive individualism, which in its decadence has carried the logic of individualism to the extreme of a war of all against all, the pursuit of happiness to the dead end of a narcissistic preoccupation with the self.” All of this, along with the busyness, distraction, and fragmentation of contemporary life, spills over into the church and shapes its culture to a degree that we may not recognize and that inhibits community.

The fellowship or community which the church needs is not simply a small group program. Such programs can provide a helpful context for community to develop but do not guarantee it. Nor is it having a good experience of fellowship with a group of believing friends, as desirable as that can be. Indeed, our idealistic visions of community and our programs to achieve it are often major barriers to ever experiencing it. Authentic community is created by the Holy Spirit and is about abiding in Christ and sharing that life with others who love him. It involves the vulnerability of opening ourselves to them in friendship and sharing who we are and what we have with them in a spirit of grace and love. It requires serious commitment, because it involves the hard and sometimes painful work of maintaining holy, reconciled relationships in a spirit of humility and mutual confession. And it doesn’t exist for its own sake but for the sake of Christ, and thus it moves its members out in mission to the suffering and need of a fallen world. This is just a taste of the fellowship we see in the New Testament and desperately need in the church today.
Archibald Alexander on The Use and Abuse of Books

by David B. Calhoun
Professor Emeritus, Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri

In 1812 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America elected Archibald Alexander as the first professor in its newly established theological seminary. Alexander was forty years old. He had already served as a preacher, college president, and pastor. His preparation for leading the first Presbyterian seminary had been enriched by his experience of American life in the South, the Middle States, and New England; on the frontier, in the country, and in a major city. Alexander was the primary force that gave direction to Princeton Theological Seminary for at least its first hundred years.

Soon after his installation as professor of didactic and polemic theology, the seminary’s board of directors also appointed Alexander librarian, a position he held until his death in 1851. He began the work, carried on by others, that eventually made the seminary library one of the finest theological libraries in the world.

For a few years the library of Princeton College also served as the seminary library. But students and professors (Alexander was joined by Samuel Miller and later by Charles Hodge) began collecting books for a separate seminary library. At first these were placed in the home of Dr. and Mrs. Alexander, which also served as the seminary chapel and classroom.

When the first seminary building (later named Alexander Hall) was completed in 1817, it provided rooms for a hundred students, a dining hall, the oratory or prayer hall for chapel and lectures, and the library. In 1825 this was named the Green Library in honor of Ashbel Green, a Philadelphia pastor who became president of Princeton College. In 1843 the first seminary library building was completed, given by and named for New York philanthropist James Lenox.

Beginning early in the seminary’s history, an introductory lecture was presented at the beginning of each school year. There are seventeen introductory lectures by Archibald Alexander in his manuscripts. His introductory lecture for 1813 ranged widely over practical and devotional issues related to call to the ministry. In another lecture, Alexander addressed the topic of “defects of character among ministers of the Gospel who are in the main upright.” One lecture dealt with the “means of using to the best advantage the opportunities afforded by a theological seminary.” Alexander’s lecture for 1819 was on the “importance of vital piety and holy living in all who aspire to the ministry of the Word.” In the lecture for 1823 Alexander dealt with the question, “Can anything be done to raise the standard of piety in this seminary?”

In his introductory lectures Alexander often touched on matters related to reading and studying books. In the late 1820s he gave the opening address to the seminary on the topic “The Use and Abuse of Books.”

Alexander’s practical wisdom, his love for learning and books (according to his son, he treated books with “religious tenderness”), and his balanced advice and practical guidance to his students (continued on page 14)
Whereas inspiration concerns the origin of the Bible’s authority, inerrancy describes its nature. By inerrancy we refer not only to the Bible’s being “without error” but also to its inability to err (we might helpfully illustrate this point by comparing it to the distinction between Jesus’ sinlessness or being without sin, on the one hand, and his impeccability or inability to sin on the other). Inerrancy, positively defined, refers to a central and crucial property of the Bible, namely, its utter truthfulness.

The basis for the doctrine of biblical inerrancy is located both in the nature of God and in the Bible’s teaching about itself. First, if God is perfect—all-knowing, all-wise, all-good—it follows that God speaks the truth. God does not tell lies; God is not ignorant. God’s Word is thus free from all error arising either from conscious deceit or unconscious ignorance. Such is the unanimous confession of the psalmist, the prophets, the Lord Jesus and the apostles. Second, the Bible presents itself as the Word of God written. Thus, in addition to its humanity (which is never denied), the Bible also enjoys the privileges and prerogatives of its status as God’s Word. God’s Word is thus wholly reliable, a trustworthy guide to reality, a light unto our path.

If the biblical and theological basis of the doctrine is so obvious, however, why have some in our day suggested that the inerrancy of the Bible is a relatively recent concept? Is it true, as some have argued, that the doctrine of inerrancy was “invented” in the nineteenth century at Princeton by B.B. Warfield and Charles Hodge and is therefore a novelty in the history of theology? In answer to this question, it is important to remember that doctrines arise only when there is need for them. Doctrine develops when something implicit in the faith is denied; false teaching provokes an explicit rebuttal. This is as true of inerrancy as it is of the doctrines of the Trinity, or of justification by faith.

The notion of the Bible’s truthfulness was implicitly assumed throughout the history of the church. Theologians were only reflecting the view of the biblical authors themselves. Jesus himself quotes Scripture and implies that its words are true and trustworthy—wholly reliable. The New Testament authors share and reflect this high estimate of the Old Testament. The question is whether this “high estimate” of Scripture pertained to its reliability in matters of faith and salvation only or whether it involved a trust in all matters on which the Bible speaks, including science and history.

One difficulty with this question is that it is anachronistic: it reflects the concerns of our times (including the dubious dichotomy between fact and value) rather than that of the Fathers and Reformers. With regard to the Fathers, we know that they held to the divine authorship of Scripture. Behind the many voices of the human authors is the voice of the Holy Spirit, the ultimate author of Scripture. While some used this as an excuse to search for hidden truths through allegorical interpretation, if anything the
tendency was to ascribe too much truth to Scripture rather than too little. For the Fathers, to suggest that there were errors in the Bible would have been unthinkable. Augustine, for instance, wrote that biblical authority would be overthrown if the authors had stated things that were not true. Though Augustine warned Christians not to hide their ignorance of scientific fact by easy appeals to Scripture, he also believed that the biblical writers did not make any scientific errors. True scientific discoveries will always be capable of being reconciled with the Scriptures. Augustine is at pains to show that there are no contradictions, either between one part of the Bible and another, or between the Bible and truth gleaned from elsewhere. Whatever we think of such attempts, they are at least compelling evidence of the widespread Patristic presupposition of the Bible’s truthfulness.

The Reformers similarly affirmed the truthfulness of the Bible. There is some debate among scholars whether Luther and Calvin limited Scripture’s truthfulness to matters of salvation, conveniently overlooking errors about lesser matters. It is true that Luther and Calvin are aware of apparent discrepancies in Scripture and that they often speak of “errors.” However, a closer analysis seems to indicate that the discrepancies and errors are consistently attributed to copyists and translators, not to the human authors of Scripture, much less to the Holy Spirit, its divine author. Calvin was aware that Paul’s quotations of the Old Testament (e.g., Romans 10:6 and Deuteronomy 30:12) were not always exact, nor always exegetically sound, but he did not infer that Paul had thereby made an error. On the contrary, Calvin notes that Paul is not giving the words of Moses different sense so much as applying them to his treatment of the subject at hand. Indeed, Calvin explicitly denies the suggestion that Paul distorts Moses’ words.

Doctrines are formulated in order to refute error and to preserve revealed truth. Just as biblical authority only became part of Protestant confessions in the sixteenth century to counter the idea that tradition is the supreme authority of the church, so the doctrine of biblical inerrancy was only explicitly formulated to counter explicit denials of the Bible’s truthfulness. These denials arose about the same time as did modernity and the distinctively modern way of interpreting the Bible: biblical criticism. Many so-called “enlightened” thinkers of the eighteenth century accepted the Deists’ belief that the source of truth was reason rather than revelation. Increasingly, the Bible came to be studied like any other book, on naturalistic assumptions that ruled out the possibility of divine action in history. Accordingly, biblical critics grew skeptical of Scripture’s own account of its supernatural origin and sought to reconstruct the historical reality. Advances in knowledge and a changed view of the world were thought to necessitate a rethinking of biblical authority. Historical critics argued that the authors of the Bible were children of their age, limited by the worldviews that prevailed when they wrote. It was against this backdrop of widespread suspicion of the supernaturalist appearance of Scripture, and the virtually taken-for-granted denial of divine authorship, that the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, implicit from the first, (continued on page 18)
Prayer Answered by Crosses
by John Newton

I ask’d the Lord, that I might grow
In faith, and love, and ev’ry grace,
Might more of his salvation know,
And seek more earnestly his face.

’Twas he who taught me thus to pray,
And he, I trust has answer’d pray’r;
But it has been in such a way,
As almost drove me to despair.

I hop’d that in some favour’d hour,
At once he’d answer my request:
And by his love’s constraining pow’r,
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

Instead of this, he made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart;
And let the angry pow’rs of hell
Assault my soul in ev’ry part.

Yea more, with his own hand he seem’d
Intent to aggravate my woe;
Cross’d all the fair designs I schem’d,
Blaśted my gourds, and laid me low.

Lord, why is this, I trembling cry’d,
Wilt thou pursue thy worm to death?
“Tis in this way,” the Lord reply’d,
“I answer pray’r for grace and faith.

“These inward trials I employ,
From self and pride to set thee free;
And break thy schemes of earthly joy,
That thou mayšt seek thy all in me.”
Apologetics: Why Your Church Needs It

by J.M. Njoroge

Associate Apologist, Ravi Zacharias International Ministries

The ambiguity of the word *apologetics* provides the apologist with a natural icebreaker in public or private conversations on the topic: the apologist does not exist to “apologize” for being a Christian, or indeed for anything else. The assumption behind the pun is that the listeners would have a fair understanding of what apologetics is even if they cannot attach a formal definition to the concept. Unfortunately, this assumption is not always accurate.

During a conversation at a major apologetics event recently held in a large church, an attendee asked me what “apologetics” meant. I explained to her that apologetics is the branch of Christian theology that seeks to address the intellectual obstacles that keep people from taking the gospel of Jesus Christ seriously. I gave her some examples of questions that are important in the context of apologetics. For example, why does evil exist if the world was created by an all-good, all-powerful God? How do we know Christianity is true in light of the numerous religions that exist in the world?

I finished my answer to her by quoting 1 Peter 3:15, which instructs us to be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks for the reason for the hope that is within us. Her reaction was surprising.

“Are you sure the Bible says that?” she asked.

I assured her that it does. I explained to her that the word translated “answer” in that verse is the Greek word *apologia* that means “defense” and from which we get the English word *apologetics*. She had been a faithful member of a prominent evangelical church for most of her life, and yet she did not understand the meaning or importance of apologetics in the life of the local church. Sadly, I have seen such scenarios repeat themselves so frequently that I have now come to expect them whenever I go to a new place to speak.

Even among those who do understand what apologetics is and why it is important, there are some who suspect that it is reserved for a select minority among the elect—perhaps just for those with a questioning mind, or for an intellectual elite. Tertullian’s famous question, “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” echoes loudly in the hearts and minds of many a follower of Jesus in our time, with the resounding answer being “nothing.” The explosion of knowledge has made it possible for different people legitimately to focus on specific areas at the exclusion of others. This has complicated the process of cooperation among experts in different fields of study, the result being that often the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing. Thus, for example, it is possible for a local church to function without apologetics.

In what follows, I hope to demonstrate why I believe apologetics is absolutely crucial to both the health and the witness of the church and why it is a serious mistake for followers of Jesus to ignore it. My goal is not to cast blame, but to call upon those who are committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ to take seriously the application of its truth to all areas of life. Unless the gospel is understood at the worldview level, its impact upon those who accept it as well as its ability to change the structures of their societies will always fall short of God’s best for his people. (continued on page 22)
On a bitterly cold winter night in early January, we gathered for dinner to welcome back one of our members from the mission field. It was the perfect opportunity to share our thoughts and especially our memories from that first year together. We began together in 2005: twelve mid-career professional women (well, one was slightly older) and two mentors. During the retreat at Wintergreen in September of that year, we met for the first time. There was plenty of opportunity that weekend to share our stories...to laugh and cry together and to bond. We ate, we hiked, we stayed up and talked late into the night. We were a diverse group. Some of us were married and some single. The careers were as varied as the women themselves. But what a joy it was to share openly about our faith walk and to see we shared a genuine desire to grow in our discipleship. As one of us described it, it felt like meeting “friends who also got a green card from Jesus to walk on earth confidently with faith in him and looking forward one day to get a citizenship in heaven.”

Little did any of us know then that the ties that first drew us together would continue to keep us united for five years. At the end of that first year, a few debated about whether to continue on with Year Two, but ultimately we all signed on for the second year, with only one exception, which was due to a move. No one wanted to miss out on the opportunity to learn and grow together.

At the end of the second-year program, it looked like our time as a group was coming to an end. By then we were sisters in Christ, and our group had grown by two, who joined us from previous Fellows’ groups. We knew that we had an exceptional gift in this group and did not want to give up meeting together. We spent a weekend at the Chesapeake Bay to celebrate the completion of Year Two. While we were there, with plenty of time to reflect and talk about how we wanted to continue to grow deeper in our faith, we made the decision to stay together for an “unofficial” Year Three. Using the additional recommended reading list from the C.S. Lewis Institute (that no one has time to read while in the formal Year One and Two Fellows program), we had each brought some book titles that we wanted to read and spent a morning discussing the pros and cons of many options. This seemed to warrant another commitment and the group happily decided to move on together.

We continued some of the Fellows Program practices and modified others. For example, we kicked off our third year together with a wonderful opportunity to have our own retreat at Wintergreen.

At that time we lost two more original members from our group. One, a native of Azerbaijan, moved to Kansas to continue her scientific research at Kansas State University. The other, after much prayer and a leap of faith, went to the mission field in Papua New Guinea for two years with Wycliffe Bible Translators. The rest of us decided to read six books over the next twelve months and to have a social time every other month. Our
missionary friend agreed to read the same books we did and to use email for her input to our discussions. This worked very well and we read a variety of books that the group had agreed on, some light and some quite heavy reading. This group was not all about study however, and we managed to have a lot of fun together at our social gatherings, from a Christmas tour and tea at the White House to a shopping trip and lunch in Culpepper on the way to Wintergreen. We were often regaled with stories about life in a small town in Mississippi, courtesy of one of our members, who frequently kept us laughing. Most of all we continued our commitment to pray for one another. Our friend in Papua New Guinea commented on how wonderful it was to know that the group at home was praying for her, supporting her financially, and even sending regular care packages. Despite some rough times and loneliness, she knows that she is where the Lord wants her and has recently signed on for another two years.

The last few years of getting together since our first unofficial year seem almost to have been a foregone conclusion. The depth of friendship that has developed and the opportunity for continued growth in our faith made it obvious that the group would stay together. In fact, several members of the group have chosen to become mentors themselves, in large part because of the wonderful mentors we had. We continue with our monthly gatherings of reading one month and socializing and praying the next month. As in most groups there have been many changes. We have had a wedding, an international adoption, several job changes, moves, illnesses, and issues with families. Sounds like a family, doesn’t it? We now think of ourselves as an extended family. Time and distance do not keep us from caring for one another.

Without exception, the group agreed that what drew us together was the quality of the Fellows Program—the well-chosen readings on topics of vital importance to the serious believer, the opportunities for additional growth from the speakers we heard through the Institute, and, of course, the many opportunities to be discipled by our wise mentors. What cemented our group together was witnessing how God used both what we learned and our relationships to support each other through many significant life transitions. Career changes, seeking new direction, facing serious life and health issues were at the forefront of our time together. What we were reading seemed always to have a direct bearing on what was going on with us, and there were many opportunities to make life applications to what we studied. Of course some of the books were more applicable to us than others, but we could take away serious lessons from each one of them.

Inherent in our time together was the commitment to pray for one another, not only during our sessions but regularly throughout the week, month, and then year. As one sister put it, “Without my Fellows’ prayers and love, I cannot imagine how I could have made my transition from being an international city girl with a Ph.D. living on the high-speed-mode East Coast to living in the Midwest farmland with a lot of cows around.” Prayer was the glue that held us all together.

What does the future hold for this group? Only God knows, but he has blessed us mightily in our sisterhood. He lights our path and directs our footsteps. May we bring glory to him in all that we do.

THE C.S. LEWIS FELLOWS PROGRAM is now accepting applications for 2010-11. Please visit www.cslewisinstitute.org/fellows/fellows.htm.

…what drew us together was the quality of the Fellows Program—the well-chosen readings on topics of vital importance to the serious believer, the opportunities for additional growth from the speakers we heard through the Institute, and, of course, the many opportunities to be discipled by our wise mentors.
Profile in Faith: Charles Wesley
(continued from page 1)

to the colony of Georgia to bring the gospel to the Indians he wrote, “Go where I will, I carry my Hell about me” (Feb. 5, 1736). He soon returned to England after a disastrous experience but still could find no peace, as he wrote in 1737:

Evil alas! Thou know'st, and few
My days of pilgrimage have been:
With thankfulness, and pain, I view
My thirty years of grief and sin—
Yet O! forgive this eager sigh,
This gasping of my soul to die.

Later Charles would label this period of his life as “Legal Night,” often using images of darkness, chains, and imprisonment to describe it, as for example, “In darkness, chains, and death I was,” or

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night.

He was, in his words, a legalist, who had yet to discover God's grace:

A goodly formal saint,
I long appeared in sight;
By self and Satan
Taught to paint
My tomb, my nature, white.
The Pharisee within
Still undisturbed remained;
The strong man,
Armed with guilt of sin,
Safe in his palace reigned.

And though devoid of gross outward sin, he still could say later,

For ten long years I lay
A hopeless but reluctant prey
To pride and lust and earth and hell.

Wesley continued to preach, presenting the gospel as a new birth which presumably he and his audience had received in baptism and in accordance with which they were to live. His message was a call to resignation, self-renunciation, and obedience to the discipline of the church. This is illustrated in his sermon, “One Thing Is Needful,” which he frequently gave in this period:

This is our one concern, to shake off this servile yoke and regain our native liberty, to cut away every chain, every passion that does not accord with our evangelical nature. The one work we have to do is to return from the gates of death, to have our diseases cured, our wounds healed and ourselves restored to perfect soundness.

This sermon ends with a vigorous call to “Awake thou that sleepest, to recover the image of God and to keep watch over your soul.” “But,” as F.L. Wiseman explains, “the sermon itself lacks the one thing needful. It gives no proper instruction as to how the needful thing is to be obtained. It bids the sleeper awake to righteousness but gives him no clue as to how he may be made righteous inwardly as well as outwardly.”
In the midst of this “Legal Night” Charles became ill. Peter Boehler, a Moravian Christian whom Charles had known in Georgia, prayed for him and asked him (according to Charles Wesley’s Journal):

“Do you hope to be saved?” “Yes,” I replied.
“For what reason do you hope it?” “Because I have used my best endeavors to serve God.”
He shook his head and said no more. I thought him very uncharitable and said in my heart:
“What, are not my endeavors a sufficient ground of hope? Would he rob me of my endeavors? I have nothing else to trust to.”

He realized then that he lacked faith and confessed to his visitor his unbelief and want of forgiveness.

The matter came to head when Charles was staying with a friend, John Bray, whom he describes as “a poor ignorant mechanic who knows nothing but Christ, yet by knowing Him, knows and discerns all things.” Bray shared with him Luther’s commentary on Galatians, which clearly expounded the evangelical doctrine of justification by faith. Charles was astounded that this doctrine, which he could clearly see was in conformity both to the Scriptures and to the teaching of the English Reformers, had been unknown to him until then. He was especially moved by Luther’s comments on Galatians 2:20, in which he stressed the “for me” aspects of the gospel. “At midnight,” Charles wrote on the 21st of May, 1738, “I gave myself to Christ;… I now found myself at peace with God and rejoiced in hope of loving Christ…I saw that by faith I stood; by the continued support of faith, which kept me from falling, though of myself I am ever sinking into sin.”

Immediately he began work on his first hymn, “Where Shall My Wondering Soul Begin?” In this hymn one can almost feel with Wesley the wonder and joy of those first precious moments. At first, all he could do was ask childlike questions of wonder, but in the second stanza he expressed the fact that he “should know, should feel my sins forgiven.” Interestingly, Charles recorded that as he was writing this hymn, he “was persuaded to break off, for fear of pride. Mr. Bray encouraged me to proceed.” One may assume that it was after writing the second stanza that this occurred, for the third stanza reveals his hesitating efforts to pull himself together, asking,

And shall I slight my Father’s love,
Or basely fear his gifts to own?
Unmindful of his favors prove?
Shall I the hallowed cross to shun,
Refuse his righteousness to impart,
By hiding it within my heart?

He continues in the fourth stanza with triumphant resolution:

No—though the ancient dragon rage
And call forth all his hosts of war;
Though earth’s self-righteous sons engage,
Them and their god alike I dare;
Jesus, the sinner’s friend proclaim,
Jesus to sinners still the same.

The hymn’s closing stanzas offer the invitation that would become (continued on page 12)
Profile in Faith: Charles Wesley
(continued from page 11)

the hallmark of the eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival: “Come, O my guilty brethren, come!”

This, the first hymn of the Revival, demonstrates a number of features that arose directly from Wesley’s conversion experience and that would become characteristic of much of his hymnody. First, one notices the joyful praise pouring from his heart to God:

How shall I equal triumphs raise,
Or sing my great deliverer’s praise?

This certainly is the dominant theme of “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing,” written on the first anniversary of his conversion. God assured him of his love and forgiveness, and a new song of praise was the natural result.

Second, we see the very personal nature of much of his hymnody. The “for me” of Galatians 2:20, so important in his conversion, rings out through the frequent use of the first person pronoun. We notice this clearly in the first stanza of “And Can It Be That I Should Gain?” written only a few weeks after his conversion:

And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Savior’s blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain?
For me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing love how can it be
That thou my God shouldst die for me?
(emphasis mine)

“Jesus, Lover of My Soul” and “Depth of Mercy Can It Be,” both written in 1740, also illustrate the intensely personal nature of Wesley’s spirituality.

Third, we see Charles’s sense of acceptance by God, despite his own sin. He had been justified by faith and could now “know” and “feel” his sins forgiven. The “Legal Night” was now over, and he could now say, “He breaks the power of cancelled sin, he sets the prisoner free”, “The morning breaks, the shadows flee”; and “My chains fell off, my heart was free.” But along with his justification was his new sense of adoption into the family of God, as he reflects with wonder

That I, a child of wrath and hell,
I should be called a child of God.

All of this, of course, combined to produce a compelling urge to proclaim abroad this wonderful news.

Though this note of joy and praise flowed immediately from his conversion experience and greatly influenced his hymnody, there is another aspect of Wesley’s spiritual makeup that showed itself on that night in May 1738. Recall that he wrote, “I now found myself at peace with God and rejoiced in hope of loving Christ.” He had gained emancipation and forgiveness, but he did not gain purity of heart or perfect love. He had been justified but was just beginning the process of sanctification. His preconversion goal of the complete restoration of the divine image remained. His search for Christian perfection became a lifelong struggle, for pardon was not enough; he longed to be like Christ.

A miracle of grace and sin,
Pardoned, yet still, alas, unclean!
Thy righteousness is counted mine:
When will it in my nature shine?

This aspiration was a dominant theme, especially in later years, of many of Charles’s best-known hymns, including such favorites as “O for a Heart to Praise My God,” “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling,” “I Want a Principle Within,” and “A Charge to Keep I Have.”

It is said that John provided the “head” and Charles provided the “heart” of the

Page 12 • KNOWING & DOING | Spring 2010
Methodist Revival, and as we see the living and vital experience of new life in Jesus Christ expressed in Charles’s hymns, this is easy to believe. Charles Wesley was a man of deep spiritual experience and maturity, which his hymnody vividly reveals. But more particularly, with its ring of praise, its personal nature, its stress on justification by faith, and its expression of aspiration for personal purity and righteousness, Charles Wesley’s hymnody reflects the spiritually transforming impact of his conversion experience. His was a grand encounter with Christ, and on that night in 1738 the Lord did, indeed, put a new song in Charles Wesley’s mouth, and for that all of us can give thanks.

Notes
4. Ibid., p. 38.

RECOMMENDED READING

Two Books from Tim Keller

Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters
In this period in history, the “gods” in whom many have trusted have failed. In the economic downturn, people have lost jobs, money, and power. This book deals with the “idols” people make, giving perceptive cultural analysis of each topic, followed by a clear, well-crafted, biblical position relevant to the theme. You will find this book provides much food for meditation—both for believers and nonbelievers. Keller argues that the heart is an “idol factory.” His book stretches the mind and probes the heart.

The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Deception
A compelling new book on apologetics, The Reason for God explores the issues with depth, but not in an academic fashion. Keller’s book is a “pastoral” apologetic. He gives the impression that his clarity and conciseness have been honed in many encounters with unbelievers. The first part of the book deals with arguments against God’s existence; the second, general arguments for God, culminating in the good news about Jesus. The book is both readable and persuasive.
Archibald Alexander on the Use and Abuse of Books
(continued from page 3)

students on how they best could use books for information and edification comprised this address, in which he proposed to offer “some little assistance” to his students in their “literary pursuits.” A few of Alexander’s comments were corrected by later study, and some ideas seem a little dated, but on the whole his advice given to ministerial students more than 180 years ago is true and helpful today.

Alexander began his introductory lecture on “The Use and Abuse of Books” by describing books as “the scholar’s armor with which he fights” and “the implements with which he performs his work.” He then gave a short history of writing and printing (“the most important after the discovery of the alphabet,” he said). Because of printing, he pointed out, books are now so plentiful and affordable that “a sufficient number are within the reach of every scholar.” In fact, the multiplicity of books may greatly perplex and sometimes discourage the “studious scholar.” He may well feel overwhelmed by “the sight of this vast mass of literature which he beholds in public libraries and in bookstores.” He could be at a loss as to where to begin, or what to select, and may sometimes think “it is vain to begin at all, as he is sure he can never get through so many volumes.”

Alexander emphasized that “the Bible, the first and best of books and heaven’s richest gift to man, contains treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” Alexander believed that there were no more ancient writings than those of Moses. It was reasonable to conclude, he said, that “the making of books originated in divine appointment and was performed by divine assistance.”

Alexander, however, told his students preparing for the ministry that it was important for them to read books other than the Bible. The Bible, he said, “was not given to teach us everything, but only to point out our duty and show us the method of salvation; but other knowledge is useful and even necessary to the enjoyment of those comforts which a beneficent God allows his creatures in this world, and also to the propagation of the gospel through the world.” Books supply us with much useful knowledge, he said, to support and complement what the Bible contains. He noted that “the book of God consists chiefly of facts,” and, therefore, history is important. It holds, he said, “a high place among the objects of human knowledge.” Books furnish us with knowledge of languages, “without which ancient books, divine or human, cannot be read.” Books on science have been perfected “by the labors of successive generations” and provide us with valuable information that helps us in applying the general principles of the Bible “to the various relations and circumstances of human life.”

Our study, however, should support and not lead us away from the study of the Bible, “which contains the substance of all our theology and foundation of all our hopes.” No one “can use too much diligence in digging in this field,” Alexander said. Other books are helpful “just in proportion as they aid us in understanding the Bible.”

It is important that the student be furnished with a guide in his literary pursuits, and “to afford some little assistance on this subject” was the design of Dr. Alexander’s lecture.

The manuscript of Alexander’s address contains thirty-four points! It begins with twelve “principal ends” that can be answered by books, followed by twenty-two
“maxims which should govern us in the use of books.” Fortunately for his hearers, most of Dr. Alexander’s points are quite brief, sometimes consisting of only one sentence, such as “Some books should be read not only with care, but perused over and over again.”

In setting forth the “principal ends” for reading books, Alexander offered sage advice still relevant to our reading today.

Books are helpful in giving us “models of good writing.” They enrich our minds by providing “a variety of figures and illustrations.” They help us to develop “a preciseness of language.” Furthermore, Alexander told the students, “books furnish an innocent pleasure which can be enjoyed in solitude.” They not only provide information but serve “to amuse and relax the mind.” “Much useful knowledge may be acquired in the hours of relaxation,” the Princeton professor said, and he advised his hearers to “follow your own authors.”

In a time when many Christians, and especially ministers, disapproved of the reading of novels, Alexander in his youth had written a religious novel. It was circulated among his friends but never published. His son, J.W. Alexander, described the book as the story of “a young lady of wealth and beauty, who is led through various changes and degrees, from giddy ignorance to piety and peace. The plot was engaging; there was a thread of romantic but pure love running through the whole; it abounded in graphic description and lively dialogue.”

Dr. Alexander’s second main point laid down “some maxims which should govern us in the use of books.”

Alexander warned the students not to substitute reading for thinking. You must not read too much without taking time to think about what you have read. To fail to do so, he said, was “like eating a great deal which the stomach cannot digest.” “To burden the memory with a multitude of undigested and unanalyzed things is of no use,” he said. “It would be better to leave them in books.”

Read the best books available on a subject, the professor advised. Endeavor to find out what the best are by conversations with the “learned” and by reading “judicious reviews.” Look at the table of contents and the index of a book, and, if possible, read a few chapters in the book. Alexander himself made a practice of commenting on books to help others choose what to read. He was a good reviewer, not merely praising a book but fairly and honestly assessing it. One example of Alexander’s approach can be seen in his preface to John Matthews’s The Divine Purpose, Displayed in the Works of Providence and Grace (first published in 1825 and reprinted by Solid Ground Christian Books in 2009). Alexander wrote:

The chief excellency of these Letters [the book is a series of nineteen letters] is, that they present the subject of DIVINE DECREES, without the forbidding aspect, which it is apt to assume in the view of many persons. One thing the reader may be assured of, that whether he should coincide in opinion with the author or not, he will find nothing in the volume calculated to wound the most delicate feelings. A spirit of meekness and kindness, eminently characteristic of the writer, pervades the whole.

This brief review tells me something important about Matthews’s book and makes me want to read it because I am interested in the subject and because I value the comments of Dr. Alexander. He was a convinced Calvinist but also a generous
Archibald Alexander on the Use and Abuse of Books
(continued from page 15)

Christian, with friendship and sympathy for Christians of other persuasions.

Don’t copy long quotations from a book, Alexander said, although it is useful to make notes of main points, facts, and dates. It is often helpful to make a summary of what we have read. Alexander approved of marking in the margin with a pencil passages that one wishes to remember “so that we can go over the book a second time with a glance.” This should be done, however, only with the books we own!

Many books of great value are needed “only for occasional reference,” but don’t settle for encyclopedias and dictionaries for knowledge of a subject on which you want to be truly learned. “Compends are useful to those who have learned a science, but the more a thing is learned in detail at first, the better.”

“In selecting books, we should not blindly attach ourselves to the ancients or moderns, to writers of this or that nation or sect, to the exclusion of all others.” Crossed out in Alexander’s manuscript and presumably eliminated from his address are the following ideas: models of exquisite composition in prose and verse are found in the Greek and Latin classics; in the physical sciences we should turn to modern writers; in theology “the moderns have advanced beyond their predecessors in some branches especially...in biblical criticism; but in didactic and polemical theology the writers....” Here the note ends, but obviously Alexander would say that in these areas the older theologians are the best. He chose the Latin Institutio Theologiae Elenticae of Francis Turretin, the seventeenth-century theologian of Geneva, for the basic text in his theology classes!

Alexander warned against scattering “our labors over too wide a field.” By “aiming at too much, we become superficial in everything,” he said. Although he added that “general knowledge is very necessary to an accomplished minister of the gospel.” Alexander was himself a good example of this, as is the Princeton journal—The Biblical Repertory—begun in 1825 by Charles Hodge, a graduate of the seminary and its third professor, having joined Archibald Alexander and Samuel Miller in 1822. The journal dealt with a broad range of biblical and theological topics but also included contributions, some by Dr. Alexander, on matters of science, philosophy, geography, literature, and history.

Because so many books were now being published and readily available, Alexander warned the students to be on guard against unnecessarily increasing the number of books by an immature attempt themselves to write books. Better wait until they were well qualified than publish too soon, Alexander warned, so that “the old man” will not wish that he could recall “what the young man has said.” Alexander’s manuscript includes the names Augustine and Baxter here, as examples of prolific authors who found it necessary to retract some of their early ideas. Alexander added a few exceptions to his advice: when a man’s “people or his acquaintances

Alexander urged the students to “converse together on the subjects of your reading.” This produces many benefits, he said; “it is like holding up several lights around an obscure object: the part which is not illuminated by the rays of one may catch those of another.”
are furnished with few books and would be more disposed to read his”; when truth is being opposed by means of popular books or pamphlets; when a person “can write sermons or tracts adapted to the capacities of common people” that contain “the savor of true piety” (“such books are greatly needed”); and when a person has made himself master of some field of knowledge on which there is little of value in print. In 1843 Alexander wrote to Walter Lowrie, Princeton graduate and missionary in China, urging him to write a book about China, “because we greatly want information respecting that wonderful country.”

Alexander’s first book, *A Brief Outline of the Evidences of the Christian Religion*, was published in 1825 when he was fifty-three. Thereafter he wrote substantial books on theology, Bible history, Christian life, church history, and a history of African colonization, in addition to several volumes of sermons and many articles for the Biblical Repertory.

Buy books carefully, preferring those you have not read, those that are valuable but scarce, the best editions of valuable works, and books needed for reference. Sometimes it is better to borrow a book, “not for the sake of economy…but because you will use more diligence in reading it than if it were your own.” Alexander deplored the practice of neglecting to return borrowed books. “It should be one of our fixed rules when we borrow a book to read it speedily, use it carefully, and return it certainly.”

Alexander urged the students to “converse together on the subjects of your reading.” This produces many benefits, he said; “it is like holding up several lights around an obscure object: the part which is not illuminated by the rays of one may catch those of another.”

Such discussions, however, must be conducted “with candor and good humor. If ambition to conquer takes the place of the love of truth instead of friendly discussion, there will be disgraceful contention.”

Alexander concluded his lecture:

> But finally, in all your reading and studies, bear it in mind that all true wisdom cometh down from above. Ask of God, therefore, to bestow upon you the knowledge of the truth…. When you take a book in your hand, lift up your heart to God for a blessing; and often as you read let your desires ascend to the source of light, that your minds may be irradiated with beams from the sun of righteousness.

Amen and amen!

“When one has read a book, I think there is nothing so nice as discussing it with someone else—even though it sometimes produces rather fierce arguments.”

C.S. Lewis
The Inerrancy of Scripture
(continued from page 5)

was explicitly formulated (e.g., by Warfield and Hodge). What is explicitly expressed in the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, however, is not a theological novelty so much as an articulation of what was implicitly, and virtually always, presupposed through most of church history.

What then does the doctrine of biblical inerrancy explicitly articulate? We can refine our provisional definition of inerrancy in terms of truthfulness as follows: The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture, in the original manuscripts and when interpreted according to the intended sense, speaks truly in all that it affirms. These specifications, by identifying the conditions under which Scripture speaks truly, do not hasten the death of inerrancy by qualification; they rather acknowledge two crucial limitations that enable believers to keep the doctrine in its proper perspective. Let us examine these two qualifications in more detail.

First: the Bible speaks truly “in the original manuscripts.” We have already seen that the Reformers were able to affirm the truthfulness of the Bible and to acknowledge errors due to faulty translation or transmission. To the objection that we do not now possess the original manuscripts, it must be pointed out that textual critical studies have brought us extremely close to the original text. The relatively small number of textual variations do not for the most part affect our ability to recognize the original text. At the same time, it is important not to ascribe inerrancy to the copies of the originals, since these are the products of an all-too human process of transmission.

The second qualification is just as important: “when interpreted according to the intended sense.” It is often tempting to claim the same authority for one’s interpretations as for the biblical text itself. The thrust of the doctrine of inerrancy, however, like that of sola Scriptura, is to stress the distinction between the Word of God and the words of men. Interpretations of the Bible fall under the category “words of men.” It is thus important not to ascribe inerrancy to our interpretations. To the objection that we do not possess the correct interpretation, we must appeal not to inerrancy but to the perspicuity of Scripture. What conflicts there are about biblical interpretation ultimately must be ascribed to the fallible interpreter, not to the infallible text.

Does inerrancy do justice to the humanity of the Scriptures? Some critics of inerrancy have suggested that God had to “accommodate” his message to the language and thought-forms of the day in order effectively to communicate. In taking on forms of human language and thought, does God’s communication simultaneously take on outmoded views of the world or of human nature? For example, could God speak truthfully of the sun “rising” when he knows full well that the sun does not move? In speaking of the sun rising, does not the Bible make a scientific mistake? To this objection it may be replied that using the common language of the day is not the same as committing oneself to its literal truth. One must not confuse a social
convention with a scientific affirmation. To say that the sun rises is to employ a metaphor—one, moreover, that is true to human experience. The objection proves too much: if the inspired authors have used ancient thought forms that led to scientific errors, would not these same thought forms have led to errors in matters of faith and practice too? After all, “To err is human”—or is it? Though proverbial wisdom equates humanity with fallibility, the paradigm of Christ’s sinless life shows that the one concept need not follow from the other. God’s Word, we may conclude, can take on human form—in theate, inscripturate—without surrendering its claim to sinlessness and truth.

Does inerrancy therefore mean that every word in Scripture is literally true? There has been a great deal of confusion on this point, both in the media and in academia. It should first be noted that mere words are neither true nor false; truth is a property of statements. Second, those who oppose biblical inerrancy have all too often contributed to the confusion by caricaturing the notion of literal truth. Critics of inerrancy typically speak of “literal truth” when what they really mean is “literalistic truth.” Defenders of inerrancy must take great care to distinguish the notion of literal truth from the kind of literalistic interpretation that runs roughshod over the intent of the author and the literary form of the text.

Perhaps the best way to resolve this confusion is to begin at the other end. What counts as an error? If I say that my lecture lasts an hour, when in fact it lasts only fifty-nine minutes, have I made an error? That depends on your expectation and on the context of my remark. In everyday conversation round figures are perfectly acceptable; no one would accuse me of getting my figures wrong. In other contexts, however, a different level of precision is required. A BBC television producer, for instance, would need to know the exact number of minutes. The point is that what counts as an error depends upon the kind of precision or exactness that the reader has a right to expect. “Error” is thus a context-dependent notion. If I do not claim scientific exactitude or technical precision, it would be unjust to accuse me of having erred. Indeed, too much precision (“my lecture is fifty-nine minutes and eight seconds long”) can be distracting and actually hinder clear communication.

Let us define error, then, as a failure to make good on or to redeem one’s claims. The Bible speaks truly because it makes good its claims. It thus follows that we should first determine just what kind of claims are being made before too quickly ruling “true” or “false.” If error is indeed a context-dependent notion, those who see errors in Scripture would do well first to establish the context of Scripture’s claims. To interpret the Bible according to a wooden literalism fails precisely to attend to the kinds of claims Scripture makes. To read every sentence of the Bible as if it were referring to something in the world, or to a timeless truth, may be to misread much of Scripture. Just as readers need to be sensitive to metaphor (few would react to Jesus’ claim in John 10:9, “I am the door,” by searching for a handle) so readers must be sensitive to literary genre (e.g., to the literary context of biblical statements).

Is every word in Scripture literally true? The problem with this question is its incorrect (and typically unstated) assumption that “literal truth” is always literalistic—a matter of referring to history or to the “facts” of nature. It is just such a faulty assumption—that the Bible always states facts—that leads certain
The Inerrancy of Scripture
(continued from page 19)

well-meaning defenders of inerrancy desperately to harmonize what appear to be factual or chronological discrepancies in the Gospels. In the final analysis, what was new about the Princetonians’ view of Scripture was not their understanding of the Bible’s truthfulness but rather their particular view of language and interpretation, in which the meaning of the biblical text was the fact—historical or doctrinal—to which it referred. Their proof-texting was more a product of their view of language and interpretation than of their doctrine of Scripture.

What if the intent of the Evangelists was not to narrate history with chronological precision? What if the Evangelists sometimes intended to communicate only the content of Jesus’ teaching rather than his very words?

The Bible’s own understanding of truth stresses reliability. God’s Word is true because it can be relied upon—relied upon to make good its claim and to accomplish its purpose.

Before extending the Bible’s truth to include history or astronomy, or restricting to matters of salvation for that matter, we must first ask, “What kind of literature is this?” The question of meaning should precede the question of truth. We must first determine what kind of claim is being made before we can rule on its truthfulness. The point of biblical apocalyptic is quite distinct from the point of Jesus’ parables, from that of the Gospels themselves, or of Old Testament wisdom. We must, therefore, say that the literal sense of Scripture is its literary sense: the sense the author intended to convey in and through a particular literary form. Inerrancy means that every sentence, when interpreted correctly (i.e., in accordance with its literary genre and its literary sense), is wholly reliable.

The older term to express biblical authority—infalibility—remains useful. Infallibility means that Scripture never fails in its purpose. The Bible makes good on all its claims, including its truth claims. God’s Word never leads astray. It is important to recall that language may be used for many different purposes, and not to state facts only. Inerrancy, then, is a subset of infallibility: when the Bible’s purpose is to make true statements, it does this too without fail. Yet the Bible’s other speech acts—warnings, promises, questions—are infallible too.

The Bible’s own understanding of truth stresses reliability. God’s Word is true because it can be relied upon—relied upon to make good its claim and to accomplish its purpose. We may therefore speak of the Bible’s promises, commands, warnings, etc., as being “true,” inasmuch as they too can be relied upon. Together, the terms inerrancy and infallibility remind us that the Word of God is wholly reliable not only when it speaks, but also when it does the truth. ■
Questions & Answers on C.S. Lewis

Q: Atheist Phillip Pullman accuses C.S. Lewis and the Chronicles of Narnia of racism because of his portrayal of the dark-skinned Calormenes in Narnia. Some think this contributes to the “demonization of Islam.” Are the Narnian Chronicles racist or anti-Islam?

A: These charges are mistaken. Islam is monotheistic, whereas the Calormenes have “gods” such as Tash, Azaroth, and Zardeenah. Tash is similar to an evil spirit appearing in the Thousand and One Nights, not to Allah. Lewis is demonizing demons, not Islam. A couple of Lewis’s most noble characters Aravis (in The Horse and His Boy) and Emeth (in The Last Battle) are Calormenes. When Nikabrik (in Prince Caspian) calls Cornelius a “half-and-halfer,” Trumpkin tells him to keep quiet as a “creature can’t help its ancestry.” Note that the witch in The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe is “white.”

Q: What is the central point and purpose of Prince Caspian?

A: C.S. Lewis said in one of his letters that Prince Caspian is about “the restoration of the true religion after corruption.” Although a victory had been won in Book One (The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe), a spiritual entropy went into effect, leading to a decline and loss of faith. The subtitle of Prince Caspian is The Return to Narnia. Douglas Gresham, C.S. Lewis’s stepson, says:

A theme of return became a key part of the story. Jack didn’t look at return in the obvious physical sense, but went deeper to consider a restoration, a restoration of those things that are true—true life, true leadership, and mostly, true faith. Prince Caspian tackles that idea, and the broader themes of the battle between good and evil, spiritual obedience and discernment, and ultimately joy—a festive joy when what was wrong has been put right again.
Orders to Prepare

The first reason why believers cannot ignore the life of the mind is that the Bible itself is opposed to anti-intellectualism. As already mentioned, the Scriptures instruct us to be prepared to give answers to those who raise questions about our faith (1 Peter 3:15). When asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus declared that it is to love God with the entirety of our being, including our minds (see Matthew 22:36-38)—an injunction beautifully modeled for us by biblical characters themselves.

For example, within the context of apologetics, Paul’s practice of reasoning from the Scriptures when in discussion with Jews about the identity of Jesus is well known. But as we see in Acts 17, Paul was willing to depart from this practice when he debated the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in Athens: he started from where they were in order to introduce the gospel to them. He could not reason from the Scriptures with them since they, unlike the Jews, did not accept the authority of the Scriptures.

Similarly, Matthew 22 contains a fascinating account of Jesus’ interaction with a group of Pharisees and Sadducees, the Ivy League scholars of the day. Jesus navigates masterfully through their traps regarding the requirement to pay taxes to Caesar, the status of marriage in the afterlife, and the prioritization of the commandments given to us by God. In each case, he exposes the misconceptions that had led to erroneous interpretations of God’s Word. Jesus caps the chapter with his own question to the experts. How could King David, under the inspiration of the Spirit, refer to the Messiah as his (David’s) Lord if the Messiah was just David’s son (or descendant)? “No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions” (Matt. 22:46).

Although apologetics is mostly associated with such penetrating thinkers as C.S. Lewis, the practice of serving God with the mind has been an integral part of the life of the church throughout its history. This is evident in the formulation of complex biblical doctrines, such as the Trinity. The precision of the words used in the creeds and the determination to avoid contradictions are impressive examples of the priority the church has always given to the life of the mind.

Indeed, biblical thinking played a foundational role in all that went into the formation of what is known as Western culture. Without the Bible, Western culture would not have the shape it has today. Notwithstanding loud protests to the contrary, it was biblical thinking that gave rise to modern science and technology. As C.S. Lewis put it, “Men became scientific because they expected law in nature and they expected law in nature because they believed in a lawgiver.” They believed the universe was crafted by a purposeful God who created humanity in his image, creatures who could (to borrow Johannes Kepler’s famous phrase) “think God’s thoughts after Him.” To Kepler, “The chief aim of all investigations of the external world should be to discover the rational order which has been imposed on it by God, and which he revealed to us in the language of mathematics.”

It was also the Bible that gave the world a foundation for human rights. The Bible makes the astonishing claim that what separates human beings from other creatures is the fact that they were created in God’s
image. Although others may claim that all human beings should be considered to be of equal worth, only the Christian worldview provides a philosophically solid and consistent basis for such a claim.

After all, we don’t all come into the world “equal” in any objective sense. My boys were born in Los Angeles, California, around the same time that the children of a famous celebrity were born. Though there was a barrage of reporters and paparazzi hoping to catch a glimpse of the celebrity’s children, no one showed up with a camera at the hospital where my boys were born (though I can assure you, as objectively as a dad can, that my boys were much better looking!).

We don’t all start life in this world on an equal footing, given the huge range of gifts and attributes people have—musical or athletic ability, good looks, and intelligence. The only basis we have for attaching any meaning to the claim that all human beings are “equal” is the biblical teaching that we are all made in God’s image. So pervasive was such thinking in Western culture that such phrases as “all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights” were taken to be self-evident truths at the founding of the United States.

One can only wonder what the Declaration of Independence would look like if it were drafted today, when some of our leading intellectuals are telling us that we have pulled ourselves up by our own bootstraps and we therefore have no need for God. It is difficult to see how “inalienable rights,” rights that exist independently of any human authority, can be justified without a transcendent anchor.

With all its warts, the church has, in the past, acknowledged a duty to think through issues so that it can anticipate and then answer the questions people have. In other words, it has taken its role as the light of the world much more seriously than is evident today. C.S. Lewis did not invent apologetics any more than Michael Jordan invented basketball.

**Spiritual Warfare**

A second reason why the church cannot afford to ignore the life of the mind is that apologetics is a form of spiritual warfare. The more I study the Word of God and the nature of the spiritual problems that plague human beings, the more convinced I become that ideas are the most effective of all of our enemy’s tools. Slavery is a grievous evil, but never more so than when it is the mind rather than merely the body that is enslaved. At that point, the slave will do the enemy’s bidding without any physical restraints, for whatever controls your mind owns you.

In 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 (NIV), Paul says,

> For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

There is a strong emphasis on the cognitive aspect of our being (continued on page 24)
Apologetics: Why Your Church Needs It

(continued from page 23)

in this passage. The “strongholds” that we are to demolish as divinely inspired warriors are arguments and pretensions that set themselves up against our claim to know God. We are to take thoughts captive to make them obedient to Christ. The word Paul uses for arguments is the Greek word logismous, which refers to “the product of a cognitive process.” If that is true, it is hard to imagine Paul ignoring the claims of those who would today argue that we cannot really “know” God in any meaningful sense. He did not shy away from engaging the Athenian philosophers in discussions on such matters.

But the power of ideas is most clearly demonstrated in the absolute effectiveness of the Tempter’s strategy in the Garden of Eden. How did Satan succeed in driving Adam and Eve away from God? Not through demon-possession or illness, and not by overpowering their will: he succeeded by planting an idea in their minds. Ever since the human race bought the lie that we can actually become gods ourselves in place of God, we have been willing—even resolved—to do our enemy’s bidding. The key arena for this spiritual battle has been our minds.

If the biblical account is right, then it is not surprising that some of those who finally succeed in defying God would experience a certain degree of liberation. God has given us the ability to make real decisions with eternal consequences. When we exercise our freedom to choose, we affirm our true humanity. But if we were created by God in order to have a personal relationship with him, then to choose against him is to dethrone the essence of our humanity. We function at our best when we are properly related to God. From cults to distorted biblical teaching, false ideas continue to exert their power on humanity with many casualties along the way. As ambassadors of Christ in a hurting world, we play a dangerous game when we ignore the life of the mind.

The fact that the mind is an intensely active spiritual battlefield is seen in the large number of young people whose faith is shaken when they encounter ideas that challenge the truth of God’s Word. This is a familiar story on many university campuses. Biblical thinking can only regain the respectability it once had by making its case in the marketplace of ideas. When reasoned discourse takes a backseat in any culture (and reasoned discourse in turn is only possible in the context of a shared assumption that truth exists and can be discerned), the only alternative is the exercise of raw power. This is clearly seen in the priority given to court cases in the so-called culture wars without an equal emphasis on shaping public opinion through a reasoned defense of biblically sound positions.

While court cases have their legitimate role, real victory will only come when Christianity is once again recognized to be a legitimate option in public discourse. Fighting culture wars through the courts alone is at best a temporary solution; it is just a matter of time before the weight of
cultural opinion lends an unstoppable momentum to false and destructive ideas. It is not accidental that Paul refers to the church as the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). When biblical Christianity is understood at the worldview level, it has the power not only to change the hearts and minds of individual adherents but also to influence the ideas that shape the opinions of a culture.

Implicit in what has already been said is the third and final reason why I believe it is a serious mistake for the church to ignore apologetics: apologetics is indispensable in the proper application of the gospel to all of life. To flesh out this point, we will examine briefly the role the gospel played in transforming British culture in the nineteenth century in contrast to the limited impact it has had in Africa in recent decades despite its obvious popularity on the continent.

**Borrowing a Page in English**

Church historian Ian C. Bradley credits the evangelicals of the nineteenth century with the revival of a high view of morality in Victorian-era Britain. He argues that it was the evangelicals who led the campaign to abolish the slave trade and who tempered the excesses of imperialism in places such as Africa and India. On October 28, 1787, William Wilberforce wrote in his diary, “God almighty has set before me two great objects; the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners.”

It was not surprising that the “reformation of manners” would be ranked together with the abolition of the slave trade in Wilberforce’s mind. As Bradley writes,

*It did not take a Saint to feel that English society stood in need of reform at the end of the eighteenth century…. There can be little doubt that there was something depraved about a society whose favourite country pastimes included hurling stakes at chained cocks and setting dogs on cats thrown into ponds,*

where townspeople regularly complained of being kept awake by the screams of victims of assault and rape and the cries of prostitutes, and in which an eighth of the deaths in the capital were attributed to excessive drinking. The eighteenth century was probably no more vice-ridden than any other but no other age has ever paraded its weaknesses quite so openly or excessively.

Despite the enormity of the task, Wilberforce and others like him succeeded in impacting their nation. So profound was the transformation of British society that Bertrand Russell, one of the most prominent and influential atheists of the last century, could later write, “It is doubtful that the method of Mahatma Gandhi would have succeeded except that he was appealing to the conscience of a Christianized people.” The process of Christianization did not occur by accident but as the result of a careful understanding of the Scriptures and the application of God’s Word to all of life. The Christian leaders who had laid the foundation for the moral rebuilding of their nation understood what a community of committed believers should produce: people of deep-seated character and integrity who can discern the times in which they live and who can influence others, including their leaders, not only to become believers but also to live their lives and conduct their Christian witness with biblical wisdom in spite of cultural pressure to the contrary.

That is what Wilberforce hoped would be passed along to the **(continued on page 26)**
Apologetics: Why Your Church Needs It
(continued from page 25)

In an age in which infidelity abounds, do we observe them [parents] carefully instructing their children in the principles of faith which they profess? Or do they furnish their children with arguments for the defense of that faith? …When religion is handed down among us by heredity succession, it is not surprising to find youth of sense and spirit beginning to question the truth of the system in which they were brought up. And it is not surprising to see them abandon a position which they are unable to defend.

Unfortunately, his warning increasingly went unheeded as the English Evangelicals began to abandon the life of the mind and to retreat instead into an agenda which prioritized personal piety over a scholarly engagement with ideas that opposed a biblical view of the world. As author Jonathan Rice observes, they claimed “God had called them to a purely practical faith: to send forth missionaries, to help the poor and downtrodden, to better peoples’ manners. These were the things pleasing to God; not intellectual debate or true apologetics.”

Sadly, the result was that many of their children and grandchildren abandoned the faith once they were confronted with arguments to which they had no answers. Rice continues,

They tried to salvage the strong sense of morality, duty, hard work and self-control, but without the God who had given it to them in the first place. One of them summed it up this way in 1873: “Let us dream no dreams and tell no lies, but go our way, wherever it may lead, with our eyes open and our heads raised”…There is bravery and integrity in this statement, together with a horrible sense of the tragic.

It is the practical creed of a man who had once known and loved God, but had lost Him, and was facing his short life alone and abandoned in a now empty universe.

A few years ago, Lee Strobel interviewed Charles Templeton in the course of research for one of his books. Templeton, a one-time preaching partner of Billy Graham, lost his faith while still a young man. In a discussion about Jesus, Templeton’s eyes welled up with tears, and to Strobel’s astonishment, Templeton said, “I really miss him.” After years of writing books defending his agnosticism, he was still unable to shake off the allure of Jesus. He had learned to love Jesus with his heart but not with his mind. What your mind rejects, your life will eventually reject also, however close it may be to your heart.

It is often said that ideas have consequences. Such a maxim can only benefit us as we determine not to allow it to degenerate into a meaningless cliché. If we lose the next generation to secularism, other religions, and paganism, it is not going to be because we fought and lost the battle, but because we never entered the battlefield in the first place. God has given us all we need in order to serve him effectively in this world, and our minds are an integral part of the process.

Out of Africa

Perhaps the best way to appreciate the painful effects of anti-intellectualism in the church is to look at places where the rich legacy of Judeo-Christian scholarship has not taken root. A clear example of this problem is the continent of Africa, my homeland. The continent is known for its exotic wildlife, sprawling jungles, beaches, deserts, and its many cultures. But it is difficult to
think of Africa without also thinking of all its pervasive problems. Drought, famine, poverty, and disease continue to claim lives throughout large parts of Africa. As a result, physical needs receive the greatest attention from those who feel moved enough to act on behalf of the people of Africa.

But despite the seriousness of the physical needs, I am convinced that the biggest problem Africa faces is ideological. In Matthew 4, Satan tries to get Jesus to turn stones into bread in order to meet his physical need. In response, Jesus says, “It is written, man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (v. 4). The need in Africa remains the same: bread (an allegory for humanity’s physical needs) and the Word (ideological needs). This two-pronged diagnosis of humanity’s deepest needs is the key to solving Africa’s seemingly insurmountable problems.

With respect to the bread (or physical needs), trillions of dollars and untold hours of human labor have been poured into the continent of Africa in recent decades. For the record, I am grateful for those who have devoted so much of their efforts and resources to assisting the people of Africa. RZIM’s Wellspring International has played a critical role in the process and we hope to do more in the future. It is impossible to see the need and not feel compelled to do something about it as followers of Jesus Christ. But we also know that offering assistance for physical needs in Africa, though necessary, is only a temporary solution. We are also determined to address the root cause of the problem, which is ideological. God’s Word properly applied is the only hope for the world.

Reflecting on the impact of the gospel in Africa over the last few decades, missiologist Ralph Winter laments the fact that it does not seem to have the impact one would expect it to have in places where a majority of the people claim to be followers of Jesus Christ. Says Winter, “We always used to think, ‘Even if things are not going too well in the USA, at least those millions of newly won believers overseas are flourishing in the faith.’”

But Winter points out that the news is not as good as we have thought. He gives some unsettling examples: Kenya, which is 80 percent Christian, with more than 400 denominations and “almost as many Evangelicals as in all of Europe,” could not contain the outbreak of the postelection violence that claimed more than 1,200 lives and left over 350,000 homeless in January 2008. The Central African Republic is 70 percent Christian, and yet it also ranks among the most dangerous and corrupt nations of the world. Even Rwanda was considered to be one of the most Christianized nations in the world just before the genocide. Winter refers to this as “the nightmare of a thought that our vast global, hard-won expansion of Christianity is falling to pieces before our eyes.” His conclusion is worth pondering:

A Christianity that does not teach the Bible points the way nowhere but to New Age groping, ambiguity, and relativism. However, a Christianity that only teaches the Bible is blind to all the other knowledge God wants us to discover and value.

A full examination of how we got where we are goes well beyond the scope of this short article. Suffice it to say that the church, for the most part, did not respond well to the assaults on the faith that gained prominence in the intellectual centers of the world in the nineteenth century. Philosopher J.P. Moreland identifies three
principal areas in which the gospel was poorly defended against intellectual attacks: philosophy, science, and German “higher criticism.” Philosophers like David Hume and Immanuel Kant insisted that God cannot be known to exist. Charles Darwin’s formulation of the theory of evolution seemed to render the role of a Creator of life superfluous, and the Bible itself came under severe attack with the rise of higher criticism in Germany that questioned its historicity.

Moreland argues that the church frequently responded by withdrawing from the centers of intellectual debate. Bible institutes were built to train lay believers to reach the lost for Christ, rather than to equip a generation of believers to defend their faith. As Evangelicals retreated from the broader society, an unhealthy escapism with an emphasis on end-times teaching became popular. The result was a severe marginalization of Christian ideas from the public arena. Needless to say, reaching souls for Christ is the central objective of our calling, and as Spirit-filled believers, we “groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons” (Rom. 8:23). But in the meantime, we are to endure the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in the believers (Gal. 4:19).

If Moreland’s analysis is largely correct, then the real problem that plagues believers in places like Africa is not hard to identify. Simply stated, the version of Christianity that was planted in Africa was largely divorced from the intellectual legacy of Christendom that had produced first-rate Christian scientists, moral philosophers, political thinkers, artists, business entrepreneurs, etc. It was instead the product of a pietistic strain of evangelicalism which was already in intellectual retreat in the West by the time it was coming to maturity in Africa. In short, since the advent of the missionary movement in the latter eighteenth century, the Judeo-Christian tradition has never been rooted in Africa as it had once been in the West. The West may presently be busy hacking away at the root of its moral foundations, but Africa in one sense has yet even to break ground in order to lay down a strong biblical foundation within its many cultures.

If we do not learn to value the life of the mind, then we will be doing a great disservice to all the missionaries who have sacrificed their resources, time, health, and even lives to take the gospel to places like Africa. In spite of the anti-intellectual flavor of the version of the faith that made it to Africa, the missionaries proved faithful with what was at their disposal. The result, according to the Pew Forum, is that there are now more than 400 million Christians in Africa, and that number is projected to rise to more than 633 million by the year 2025. Far from destroying African cultures, missionaries contributed to their survival by providing them with written expressions of their languages. There is much for which missionaries deserve our gratitude, and the best way to reward their efforts is for African believers to learn to serve God with their minds.

In a different context, Richard Mouw uses the metaphor of the hospital emergency room to make a similar point. The emergency room is a place of much activity and haste. The moment the ambulance pulls in, life decisions have to be made, with no time to waste. But the only reason why the medical experts succeed in saving lives in the midst of the haste and urgency is because medical researchers have already spent countless hours in the labs, conferences, lecture halls, and the library.

Unfortunately, Africa is like an emergency room with a real need for hasty action and urgent care. But there is very
little research at the ideological level to back up the ambulance drivers. Physical and medical needs cannot be denied, but until we recognize that the application of God’s Word to all areas of life is still the final answer to the human predicament this side of the grave, the solution to Africa’s problems will continue to elude us. The Word of God is still the answer, but it must be understood at the worldview level if we are to break down the structures of mental slavery that have oppressed so many for so long.

In December 2008, Matthew Parris wrote an article entitled, “As an Atheist I Truly Believe Africa Needs God.” In that article Parris argued that redemption, not just physical assistance, has to be a part of the process that will give rise to the kind of transformation Africa needs. He concluded his article with a powerful statement:

Those who want Africa to walk tall amid 21st-century global competition must not kid themselves that providing the material means or even the knowhow that accompanies what we call development will make the change. A whole belief system must first be supplanted. And I’m afraid it has to be supplanted by another. Removing Christian evangelism from the African equation may leave the continent at the mercy of a malign fusion of Nike, the witch doctor, the mobile phone and the machete.

To this sobering statement from an atheist, I would add that apologetics must be a part of the equation, for millions of Africans have already responded positively to Christian evangelism. What remains now is for the believers in Africa to demonstrate what the gospel can do to societal structures when it is properly applied. Learning to love God with their minds is the surest way to supplant oppressive belief systems with the life-changing Word of God. I should also note that I am not offering apologetics in place of the gospel: the gospel is what is needed. But in the process of applying it to all of life, apologetics is indispensable.

What It Will Take

The first thing it will take in order for the followers of Jesus to turn this ship around is a sacrificial commitment to the course of truth. The church must produce gifted men and women who are not ashamed of the gospel and who will serve God with their minds as historians, artists, moral philosophers, scientists, politicians, business entrepreneurs, university professors, media personalities, etc. In other words, we must strive to raise a generation of believers who are not just professionals who happen to be Christians but diligent Christians who understand that their professions are a means to glorify God.

Fortunately, this is already happening, especially in the U.S., as followers of Christ respond to the marginalization of biblical ideas in the culture by making the case for the truth and centrality of (continued on page 30)
Apologetics: Why Your Church Needs It
(continued from page 29)

the Bible. The message of the gospel is simple but it is by no means simplistic. Proper understanding and application of its truth requires careful study and contemplation. An impassioned “What-do-I-say-when-he-or-she-says-such-and-such” approach to apologetics alone will not do: we must be willing to roll up our sleeves for the sake of truth, for no one has a greater stake in it than those of us who claim to follow him who is the Truth.

Secondly, it will take the entire community of faith working together. No one person can do this alone. Given the multiplicity of tasks that many pastors bear, pointing out the value of apologetics to them can at times sound insensitive, if not insulting. Pastors tend to be very easy targets of criticism, but over the years I have worked closely enough with a number of them to appreciate the demands their calling places upon their lives on a daily basis. There are not many pastors who are in search of extra-curricular activities to fill up gaps in their schedules.

Consequently, believers must be more intentional about sharing the available resources as we all function together as one body. The biblical mandate for individuals and churches to use their gifts for the benefit of the entire body is clear. It is up to church leaders to create the opportunities for cooperation among believers. This means that no one person should feel left out; the gifts God has given each one of his followers are equally valuable in his eyes and we must embrace them with gratitude and use them to benefit others. Not all of us are called to be apologists, and not even the most gifted pastor can play all the roles God has assigned to any local congregation. Church leaders must be willing to open the door for the members of their congregations to exercise their God-given gifts, including serving God with their minds.

And finally, it will take dependence upon the power of the Spirit of God for authentic, transformed Christian lives. This is not only the ultimate goal of everything we do, it is also the only safeguard against letting our service to God with our minds degenerate into a mere academic exercise. Just as we can use other gifts of God, like material wealth, to oppose God, we can do the same with reason. In his book Beyond Opinion, Ravi Zacharias declares, “I have little doubt that the single greatest obstacle to the impact of the gospel has not been its inability to provide answers, but the failure on our part to live it out.” That is a warning worth heeding. The one Bible verse that comes close to giving us a definition of eternal life is John 17:3. It says, “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” Eternal life is not just something that will happen some day after we die; it is knowing God through Christ, and it begins the moment we believe.

Thus apologetics is necessary for the health of the church because it helps the believer to overcome intellectual obstacles in the course of the believer’s spiritual growth. It is necessary for the witness of the church because it helps clear away the obstacles that can keep the nonbeliever from taking an honest look at his or her true spiritual condition. The life of the mind is an integral part of Christian discipleship, and it is indispensable in the process of applying God’s Word in our individual lives as well as in our role as the bearers of God’s light in a dark world.
THOUGHTS TO PONDER

A.W. Tozer on
Obedience: The Final Test of Love for Christ

“He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me … and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.” (John 14:21)

The final test of love is obedience, not sweet emotions, not willingness to sacrifice, not zeal, but obedience to the commandments of Christ!

Our Lord drew a line plain and tight for everyone to see. On one side he placed those who keep his commandments and said, “These love Me.” On the other side he put those who keep not his sayings, and said, “These love Me not.”

The commandments of Christ occupy in the New Testament a place of importance that they do not have in current evangelical thought. The idea that our relation to Christ is revealed by our attitude to his commandments is now considered legalistic by many influential Bible teachers, and the plain words of our Lord are rejected outright or interpreted in a manner to make them conform to religious theories ostensibly based upon the epistles of Paul.

The Christian cannot be certain of the reality and depth of his love until he comes face to face with the commandments of Christ and is forced to decide what to do about them. Then he will know! I think we should turn for a while from finespun theological speculations about grace and faith and humbly read the New Testament with a mind to obey what we see there. Love for Christ is a love of willing, as well as a love of feeling, and it is psychologically impossible to love him adequately unless we will to obey his words!

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