

Breadth of Mind and the Bible - A Personal Narrative

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I have often heard the charge that a Christian is - narrow minded. This has never made any sense to me ... and very little logic is required to refute it. But I suspect this has nothing to do with ... logic. But let's address this logically anyway. And as this is a personal narrative, I will make it ... personal.

A Recounting

For starters, I was not born a Christian. No one is. I attended public schools from 1958-1971 in Wichita, Kansas. At that time, public schools were more academically oriented than today. In sixth grade, I was entered into a state-wide competition in both math and science. This required additional after school hours. I received honorable mention in both (somewhere between 4th and 10th place). I believe I was already into Algebra II. In High School, I did well on the ACT, and also passed aeronautics ground school testing (but, after getting airsick ... I did not pursue licensing). I always had a great interest in science (particularly life science) and loved studying evolution. I was also particularly interested in genetics. My Senior year I was named Outstanding Young Citizen by a civic group, and also received a 4 year Army ROTC scholarship to any college in the country with an ROTC program. It paid for everything and even granted spending money. That's government for you.

In college, I was originally quite heavy in the sciences - Physical Anthropology, Biology, Chemistry ... but later, after two summers of door-to-door sales (and a taste of money) changed to Business Administration - Economics, Accounting, etc. I had taken up the guitar at 19 and soon found I could write songs. This became my own domain to express my questions and frustrations. Part of my search during those years was a longing for some kind of substantive coordinating system for all the information to which I had been exposed. There were too many unaddressed gaps in what I now know were secular world-view systems. When I was 23 years and 5 months old, I began - in private - reading the Bible. Even though I had sold Bibles door-to-door for two summers, and though I had opinions about it, the truth was ... I had never read it. That's not to say I had never had contact with "Christians" before. For example, ...

Once in Junior High, my best buddy, Jeff, and I - spent the week at a Tent Revival Meeting - complete with healings and slayings in the Spirit. Actually, we were outside the tent - peeking in from a split in the canvas - and had been having a grand old time ... mocking them. One afternoon, as we were reenacting "*the show*" - and getting ready for that night's "*showing*" - I remember my Mom mildly warning about our antics. Well, that night, in the midst of our festivities, a couple of rather big brutes collared us from behind, and said that since we were having such a good time watching, they had front row seats ready for us. Well, next thing you know, two young "*sinner*s" were thrust into the midst of the hoopla. People were falling out all around us - in what seemed to us to be seizures - and then one woman fell into Jeff's arms. What were already big eyes, just about popped out of his head. He too was jumping all around, but I can guarantee you - it had nothing to do with the Spirit. Needless to say, after our escape that night ... we left them alone. That incident didn't win me to "*Christianity*."

But there were other contacts with Christians too. A year or so out of High School, a kid I had grown up with "*found Jesus*." He then graced all us hooligans with his presence as "*Mr. Spiritual*" and "*Mr. Deep*." I had known him since I was four, and I knew that within six months he would be back with us ... chasing the girls, among other things. Well, I was wrong. He was back in about three.

And, of course there was the radio and television. You always knew when you hit the Christian program. They were always asking for money. I never could quite figure out ... why God needed money. It seemed like He could just make some if He needed some. But heck, what did I know? I was just a lackey outside the loop. And in order to keep moving here, I won't even bring up my Bible selling days. My point? Well, I had a lot of opinions about Christianity ... but as far as the actual Bible, as previously stated, I had never read it myself - by myself. But, ... then I did. After six months of doing that, something dramatic happened to me. I ... became a Christian. That was April 17, 1977. It just so happens that as I am typing this, it is now April 17, 2009. I did not plan this. I did not even realize this until just before I typed it. Thirty-two years

and two divinity degrees later - and I can tell you - I am just getting a good start in the depths of the material in that Book. But let's go back to 1977 and talk logic.

Logic

On that day in 1977, what happened to all the knowledge in my head from all my educational years? Did it ... *vanish*? Did all the evolutionary materials about adaptations, mutations, geological dating, carbon 14 dating ... *just disappear*? (If so, how did I just write that last sentence ... 32 years later?) And what about all the Humanistic metaphysics of a lifetime? Did all those values and opinions ... *simply evaporate*? And what about the claim in the previous paragraph - that, "*I ... became a Christian*"? Was that declaration the result of an epiphany of some sort, or an instant infusion of mental material from the outside - that at the same time wiped out all the Darwinian materials, and its spinoffs, as well as all the Secular Humanistic philosophies and values? When, "*I ... became a Christian*" does that mean my mind was erased and only "*narrow minded*" Christianity was planted in my gray matter? Or is it possible that six months of private Bible investigation (followed up by 32 more years and counting) weighed Naturalism and Humanism ... and those "*first materials*" collapsed before the Biblical ones? This reminds me of ...

"The Handwriting on the Wall"

In 539 B.C., Belshazzar, King of Babylon, decided to party with the gold and silver vessels his father had plundered from the Temple in Jerusalem. At the height of the fun, a hand appeared and wrote this on the wall: "*Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin.*" "*Then the king's face grew pale, and his thoughts alarmed him; and his hip joints went slack, and his knees began knocking together.*" Daniel was called in to translate the writing. For my eisogeted purposes here, the first three words of this message I will use: "*Mene, Mene,*" ... *God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it* (stated twice - so, once for the kingdom of Naturalism and once for the kingdom of Humanism), "*Tekel,*" ... *you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient*" (Dan 5:25-27). When Naturalism and Humanism became pitted against the Bible ... both kingdoms were weighed, found deficient - and put to an end. And ever since then, to use a football phrase, the Bible has just kept "*piling on.*" God does not hesitate in running up the score. And He makes no apologies for His merciless assault.

One time my mother charged, "*You never listen!*" I replied, "*Mom, I have listened. I heard and understood your every word. What you mean is, 'You never obey!'*" You see, I have listened very carefully to the contentions of the atheistic Naturalist and the Humanist. I still do. If you have read much of my material, you know I have listened more carefully than many who adhere to those systems. But, both fell (and continue falling) before "*the handwriting on the wall.*"

Breadth of Mind

One of the beauties of Christianity is that no one is to accept the convictions of another. God calls each person to come directly to Him and develop his/her own. In fact, that is genuine Christianity. Do you have a problem with a hand appearing out of nowhere ... and writing on a wall? (Dan 5). What about the sun standing still "*for about a whole day*"? (Josh 10:13). What about God creating the universe and earth in six calendar days? (Gen 1:1-31). What about Jesus Christ walking out of the tomb three days after having been slaughtered on a Roman cross? (Mt 28, Mk 16, Lk 24, and Jn 20, 21). Believing these things - and all the other miracles in the Bible (and the ones on the way) - are not to be blindly embraced. And you are not to be talked into believing any Bible claims by some persuasive speaker (1Cor 2:1-5) ... or writer. You see, God knows that if you are talked into this by someone (other than Himself), you can also be talked out of it. In fact, with the realities of life being what they are, some event, or voice, will come along and do just that. He admonishes each to "*work out your salvation with fear and trembling*" (Phil 2:12). Christianity is a one-on-One transaction. So, how is this embrace to be achieved? How about ... information.

Biblical Faith

The word for "*faith*" (pistis, n.) or "*believe*" (pisteuo, v.) is from a family of words denoting "*persuasion.*" Here is the Biblical definition. "*Now faith (pistis) is the assurance*

(*hupostasis*) of things hoped for, the conviction (*elenchos*) of things (*pragma*) not seen” (Heb 11:1). “*Hupostasis*” means, “to stand under, an assured impression, a mental realizing.” It is to vouch for something that one has become convinced - is substantive. “*Elenchos*” means, “a trial in order to proof, a proof.” This does not mean one needs to try **to prove** His word is true. It is that one tests it **for proof** that it is true. There is a great difference between these two approaches and interaction with the Bible and its Author. “*Pragma*” means, “a thing done, fact, deed, work, matter, affair, transaction, business.” We get the word, “*pragmatic*” which is “concerned with actual practice, not with theory.” So Biblical faith is to vouch for the Bible’s assertions on the most practical of matters after having been persuaded, through personal testing, of its accuracy and trustworthiness. The persuaded proclaimer has been “*sold*” - by One who sells without manipulation, deceit, or a perverted self- interest.

Blind Faith ... Versus an Extrapolated Faith

“*But, you were not there when that hand wrote on the wall, or the sun stood still, or the earth was made in six calendar days, or Jesus rose from the dead - and yet you believe all that? It sure sounds like a blind faith to me.*” Well, if these things were believed in a vacuum, I would agree. But, that is not how God works with a person. Those who seek Him are dealt with so convincingly in their present tense world that, without even realizing it, they find themselves being able to embrace His claimed deeds - for which they were not present. Such embraces are *an extrapolation* of faith based upon tested proofs of His word in one’s personal experience. This is one way a person’s “*faith is greatly enlarged*” (2Thes 1:3), or how one’s “*faith grows*” (2Cor 10:15). This amazing development is the opposite of a blind faith. It is the opening of one’s eyes to be able to embrace God’s abilities - and His fantastic accounts. But it goes even further than this. One becomes persuaded that things He says *He plans on doing* - are rock solid claims. One even begins ordering one’s life upon these proclaimed *future* actions. This is really quite astonishing. For example, believing in Judgment Day changes everything here and now. It not only acts as a restraint toward errant deeds - it also motivates one to do things He says He will eternally reward! Extrapolated faith has power. Blind faith is a weak and fearful grasp at some wished-for hope. The Living Creator has no need, or desire, to place Himself at the end of such a grasp. He deals with His creatures by a faith of substance. This is not ... an oxymoron.

And For the Record ...

This does not rule out the occurrence of dramatic, subjective “*events*” in one’s faith journey. I have experienced incidents that I am certain God was behind. I am happy to share those things (and often do), but as they are subjective in nature, I know that many view them as wishful interpretations - that I credit to “*God.*” This even happened to Paul (Acts 22 and Acts 26). But while dramatic, personal incidents from God are effective and do transform - they are primarily catalysts for objective Bible ingestion and interaction. One is “*nourished on the words of the faith*” (1Tim 4:6) and the gaining of accurate, objective, Bible knowledge and understandings is the primary source for faith accrue-ment.

A Personal Narrative?

Actually, this Article is about ... you. Your personal narrative. God does not want you to forget the Naturalism you have been taught ... or the secular Humanism values you hold - and have been sold. He wants **to confront them** with His positions **and defeat them** inside of you. He wants to broaden your mind as you investigate His claims into other possibilities on the given subject areas. But His goal is not appeasement or peaceful coexistence with contrarian positions. His purpose is annihilation of them and His domination in you. In fact, His goal is to eventually **use you** in “*destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God*” (1Cor 10:5). What do you think about that?

But, how can that be done ... if **you** do not have the additional knowledge of His positions? And how can that be done ... if **you** have not been persuaded to aggressively adopt those positions? And how can **you** destroy the validity of contrary knowledge ... unless **you** know that contrarian material, too? You must be mentally equipped to see its weak spots - to bring it down. God does not attack “*Straw Men.*” He wants accurate understandings of the other side’s positions so as to attack and demolish the “*Real Man.*” This requires a greater breadth of mind ... than you may currently possess.

So, ... do not come to your Creator unless you are willing to subject yourself to such a process. And it is a process. His intention is to grow you into being an apologist for Him. This will necessitate that He open your mind “*in order to understand the Scriptures*” (Lk 24:45). But don’t worry, “*the onions and the garlic*” of Naturalism and Humanism will still be there (Nu 11:5) ... if you want to go back to them. But, you won’t.

Interestingly, one qualification for becoming an overseer in the church is one must be able “*to refute those who contradict*” (Tit 1:9). Some seek to restrict this to internal Bible squabbles so that the approved “*overseer*” only needs to be a denominational loyalist - and the refutation is toward other professing Christians who do not adhere to their sect’s particular distinctives. But such an understanding truly is narrow minded. Naturalism and Humanism (in all its varied shades) both contradict the Bible on just about every subject imaginable - physical and metaphysical. The overseer of God must be able to refute “*those who contradict*” ... including the secularisms (plural) outside the church walls. If they can’t - or won’t - those contrary views **will not** stay outside their church walls. They will come right through the front door, populate the pews, migrate into the decision making positions and then infect, and defect, what is to be an oasis of God in this desert. Overseers must be able to accurately represent contrary positions and then refute them by “*handling accurately the word of truth*” (2Tim 2:15).

To gain the breadth of mind necessary to become a Christian - and *especially* to progress to church leadership roles - is a tall order. If you decide to seek this out, God will challenge you. He will challenge you mentally. He will challenge you emotionally. He will challenge you volitionally. You will be exercised as far as you are willing to go. And even if you apply yourself a thousand times more diligently than say, a person like me, I know you will be the first to declare you are only beginning to scratch the surface of “*the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God*” (Ro 11:33). So, I guess there is only one thing left to do. It is time for you to begin, or continue, your personal narrative with the God of the Bible. That gives me great satisfaction ... and I look forward to reading your account - here or hereafter.

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