

# STRAIGHTWAY

"And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him" [Mark 1:18].

## CHRISTIAN PURITIES FELLOWSHIP

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## THE ECLIPSE OF HOPE

by Dr. O. Talmadge Spence, Founder & President  
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The Sage of Jerusalem, in his research laboratory of the Book of Ecclesiastes, revealed that all things "under the sun" were indeed "vanity of vanities." That is, his research revealed this, and divine inspiration of God's Revelation sanctioned the accuracy of Solomon's research.

Anything above the sun would have to be revealed by someone who lived in that sphere. All of the content of man's research, in all of his compartments of life, would naturally carry with it a statute of limitation: man would only and always think and speak in his own place of immanence, which will ultimately exalt himself. Some men have proposed themselves to be God; others, seemingly humble,

sided to the effect of merely taking their position as a respectful agnostic. This becomes, however, simply, the most beautiful infidel of all. No creature can afford to live, or hope to live, both "under the sun," and "above the sun."

Under the sun is the only position we may honorably take in this life, even if we think ourselves otherwise. Man only lives in a place of immanence.

All of the philosophies of all of history, therefore, have only four symbolic categories to be placed:

1. The Meridian View
2. The Horizon View
3. The Median View
4. The Eclipse View

The Meridian View or Vertical View represents some

of the best thoughts man has expressed without the divine upper view, "above the sun," in his presupposition. This group of thinkers approached the height of Natural Theology with certain concepts built upon law, order, design, purpose, beauty, in a reasonable view. A certain kind of nobility of thought prevailed based upon fallen man's reason. This was seen in the intellect of the Greeks, which reached an apex in Plato and Aristotle, but led to skepticism anyway. This is man's high noon view.

The Horizon View, or Horizontal View, turned away from their predecessors and sought humanism, the practical and pragmatic, as the Stoics, and the Epicureans did mingle with the moralist and the sophist. These Greek philosophers led their generation into agnosticism, which prevailed during the immediate 150 years before Christ.

The Middle View or Median View proceeded through, and only to, the days of Descartes. This period simply gave pro and con,

before and after, thesis and anti-thesis between the Meridian View and the Horizon View. Neo-Platonism was the catalyst; there was a hope to blend both oriental religion, from Moses and from Christ, into a new Judeo-Christian religion, along with Greek Platonic philosophy, or Neo-Platonism. Roman Catholicism was born; the Dark Ages persisted; and the Reformers came. This led to the many controversies and martyrdoms between Romanists and Protestants. This proceeded on to the birth of Rationalism and the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries.

The Eclipse View marked the end of sane philosophical thought in man.

In a lunar eclipse, the earth impedes light; in a solar eclipse, the moon impedes light. So, man, or some other hindrance, impedes understanding.

God in creation and Newtonian law in science would be eclipsed from natural hope; the lack of Biblical faith would eclipse revealed hope. Thus, the skepticism of natural hope eclipsed reason; the skepticism of supernatural hope would eclipse revelation. Then man would not be able to bring all his thoughts to a resolve. Nothing remained in man's sky, to say nothing of God's heavens above, to be used as his fulcrum point, his polar star, his fixed criteria, or his place of reference to bring moorings for any meaning.

This led to the present twentieth-century Irrationalism, when the constancy ("C") in a human

## **STRAIGHTWAY**

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formula would be marked by the speed of light in Einstein's hope of relativity of  $E=mc^2$ .

In the aftermath, "Rock" music in art would come, chaos in science, pragmatism in religion, and inconsistency in philosophy, to bring man away from God, into an eclipse from hope.

The cry today openly pleads for suicide as a viable alternative that remains. And it is literally rendered in abortion, euthanasia, war, carnage, and despair. German theologians beg off with fear (**angst**).

Is there still an open door of hope? a place where reason and revelation are complementing and complimenting friends? There must be, or else all the past thoughts of all the thinkers were indeed the expressions of depraved insanity.

As a writer, I do not believe that anyone has ever been really brought to saving grace through the Lord Jesus Christ by sheer apologetics. In other words, there is indeed a difference between the Christian being "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world." In the former, the Christian becomes the apologist; in the latter, the Christian is becoming the evangelist. Apologetics is a Christian endeavor that seeks to either silence or make neutral the skeptic of the Gospel. However, it is always the hope of the Christian that the definition of apologetics will also include, along with the defense of the Lord Jesus, Himself, the proclamation of redemption to the skeptic. This is

where the present author extends some hope.

In this climate Christian apologetics stands at a crucial juncture. The current polls indicate that only 28 percent of Americans have a strong belief in "absolute truth" and that a corresponding **relativism** is on the rise. We are urged from many quarters, as a Christian, to set forth a "rational defense of Christianity." However, we must underline again that seldom do we win a soul to Christ through this kind of apologetic witness. The same polls mentioned above say 66 percent of Americans believe "there is no such thing as absolute truth," among 18- to 25-year-old adults, 72 percent. Even more sad is that 53 percent of those who call themselves evangelical Christians believe that there are no absolutes.

It is the firm conviction of this writer that the great doubts and denials being placed against Christianity are more because of the presence of a neo-Christian apostasy in the land rather than an accusation that Christianity, inherently, has passed its day of credibility. Since credibility is found in the balance, wanting, then we must hope for at least some plausibility to be raised for the Christian Faith in this dark time.

If we are only seeking the **relevance** of the church for the survival of Christianity, there is probably a permanence in our eclipse of hope in the public concourse of Christianity. The institutional church is a part of the apostasy,

and **relevance** is her own institutional word, too. We have tried a multiplicity of "relevance" translations of the Bible in our day to think we can assist the survival of Christianity, which has only underlined, to most people, that the Christian does not seem to know the answer to "what is the Text of the Holy Scriptures, so, how could we know the interpretation of the Text?"

Much is being said concerning "Modernity" and "Postmodernity" at this time in our world. In the former, there is the link back to a relationship between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. In the latter, postmodernity repudiates any appeal to reality or truth at all. In the former, Reason (with a capital R) is revered to scrutinize critically every claim to the edification of knowledge. In the latter, however, the very attempt to define and legitimate Reality is denounced as oppressive and untrue. Once modernity's claims to Reality are dissolved, **relativism** emerges in only the autonomous Self and its power of its own language. Self becomes the source of truth and reality. By emphasizing persuasion and plausibility over the former apologetic forces of evidences and credibility, the Christian apologist finds himself hard-pressed to maintain his defense for the Christian Faith.

It follows, therefore, that the Christian apologist must fall back upon the very power of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit in order to gain an audience with the skeptic. In days of apostasy, as we

are witnessing in the ecumenical movement of Romanism and Charismatism, we are also pressed to decry the Neo-Christianity and its false definitions of its own popular and pragmatic methodologies of evangelism.

In other words, the Christian is called upon to not only defend the Christian Faith from the attacks made by the skeptics, but to also redefine the very core truth of Christianity itself against the neo-christian of the time. This task seems impossible, but that which is impossible with man is possible with God.

The burden of this unpretentious article has been to simply hope to gain the audience of one individual at a time, his audience, his reasoning and reasonableness. It was first written in privacy to a friend of mine; it was written with a burning heart rather than with the hand of a technical pen.

It is now presented in this article with the longing of expressing a personal faith in the Holy Scriptures, even to the end of my days.

The trek of modern man's thinking through his eclipse of hope is a long way from his early longings set forth in the millenium before the birth of Christ.

Cosmology, at first, attracted him, and so he sought of a primal substance and a unifying principle from which all else had come. Thales called it water, and much did result from such thoughts in a good direction. Finally, water, air, heaven, and fire were exhausted in vain. Heraclitus, with fire, became the Weeping Philosopher,

as “becoming” overtook his “being” of things. Democritus, became the Laughing Philosopher, while Anaxagoras was praised with “Mind” (**nous**) being considered as the primal substance and unifying principle. However, Socrates is reputed to have observed that Anaxagoras, while naming the most appropriate primal substance of “mind,” yet Socrates observed he fell back into the former trapping without using it.

The “unifying principle,” that should hold all that “primal substance” brought, was also elusive, however, while Parmenides and his “is” versus “being” and “becoming” frustrated the agreement needed for a hopeful ongoing, coherent thought.

### **Cosmology to Humanism**

From cosmology man turned away from the Heavens, because of the Graeco-Persia War, between Sparta and Athens, and entered philosophical thinking through ethics, moralism, and humanism. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle would dominate the philosophical scene with each succeeding one to become the student of the latter one. Many scholars have judged that these three men brought philosophical thought to its highest plateau from which all formal philosophies would recede and receive a formal and dignified burial during the days of Justinian (529 A.D.).

Socrates initiated: “virtue is knowing”; Plato would add: “...and also doing.”

However, there would be a

philosophical decline through Stoicism, and its **denial** of desire, and Epicureanism, and its **satisfaction** of desire.

### **The Measure of All Things**

Philosophy would reach a bottom line declaration: “Man is the measure of all things,” and agnosticism would prevail for 150 years before the birth of Christ.

After the coming of Christ into the world a synthesis would prevail between philosophy and the teaching of the Old Testament Moses. Then former Platonism would enter into Neo-Platonism as the oriental ingredient would be added and the former presupposition would be inverted to mysticism, thus getting away from Reason.

Fortunately or unfortunately, the early Church Fathers would perpetuate philosophical theology through their unending allegorical interpretations of the Bible with Gnosticism; therefore, until the days of Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation, philosophy would be queen to theology. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), in his **Summa Theologica**, would bring it all together in the time of the Dark Ages, which lasted 1,000 years (500-1500 A.D.).

Many Protestant denominations would be born as an effect of the cause of their theological systems, while Romanism, as formally initiated by Constantine and Bishop Sylvester (4th century), would reach its ultimate dogmatism in the Council of Trent (16th century).

Although the Reformation, in the main, would rid itself of Philosophy, it endeavored to enrich itself with a Biblical and reasonable state of thought in its theology.

The early Church Fathers gave way to the Scholastics, who gave way to the Papists, who gave way to the Reformers, who gave way to the theologians, who gave way to the English Churchmen. The Divines of Church history were more refreshing with both their theology and piety, which broke forth into orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

### **From Cosmos to Chaos**

Chaos is a word that is rooted near the meaning of "chasm," and bespeaks of a search for that which is without known law, order, design, purpose, and beauty, which were the backbone of the earlier, best days of man's philosophical thought. Chaos is a state of confusion and disorder; cosmos is an adorned system of law, order, design, purpose, and beauty.

The protégé of Robert Oppenheimer, father of the Atomic bomb, pioneered hundreds and possibly thousands of observations of moving clouds over the Salt Flats of New Mexico with the belief that the study of clouds, ocean waves, falling leaves, and other seeming disorderlies, etc. might yield meaning to the scientific community. Of course, something does indeed result to them out of this: the earth, out in space, does look at least like "a blue marble." Man says he is

beginning to see order in disorder, but such a statement lies in a human contradiction. If a Bible-believer said such a thing as that he would be considered a fool. However, we believe if all men could see everything from God's position, in His Transcendent Seat, there would be total and genuine design in it all. All would be cosmos, working together for good.

Modern, modern science in its new quest, is overthrowing Newtonian Law with something of a glee for victory as impersonal force, plus time, plus chance (**chaos**) are being pursued. Sir Isaac Newton was the last of the scientists that included God in his reason and law of a universe. Evolution and chaos are taking over while man's eclipse of hope increases and the sleep of reason continues.

Many scholars have been writing of these realities, and yet man continues his excursions down into devolution, which he declares with all his might an evolution.

This article must include three Biblical beliefs which must be given up if any kind of unreasoning evolution is tolerated, even theistic evolution.

First, the belief of the Biblical depravity of man must be rejected because man is considered to be evolving upward in the evolutionary process.

Second, the belief in the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ must be rejected because He is considered as only a man in the better part of the evolutionary tree of the

human race.

Third, the belief that the Bible is indeed the revealed Word of God must be rejected because it, too, is merely a product of evolution.

### **Historical Research; Historical Sites**

The claim of modern historical research is an invalid presumption because man has only excavated a small token of what must be investigated from the artifacts before a final judgment may be given.

When I was in studies at Oxford University, the very same professors who magnified the **Body** of their own lectures to magnify certain conclusions against the New Testament integrity, would minimize the **Introduction** to archaeology of the very limited resources that they have to reach the conclusions of the magnificent **Body** of their studies. The following appraisal is given from the lectures which I heard daily concerning the resources we have access to at that time.

In Palestine alone, 6,000 archaeological sites have been surveyed and identified. Less than 200 have been actually excavated; and of the 200 only 28 have been excavated to any major intent. For example, Ephesus, a larger excavation, but only 20% of the city.

Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Iran (but not Egypt) are roughly of the same proportions; Damascus, Jerusalem, and others, still occupied, cannot be fully examined.

### **The Interpretation of Facts, Artifacts**

To conclude this section we must acknowledge a very important observation for the interpretation of things.

It is not the content of the facts and artifacts of historical research that hurts the Christian hope; it is the way you interpret these facts and artifacts. Personally, I see nothing distressing in the resource of historical research to hurt New Testament Christianity. It is the way certain scholars read into their quest for their "historical Jesus." There are a large number of archaeologists who see a Biblical affinity with the artifacts.

In this I am always reminded of an acronym that I have too often used when teaching students. It concerns TSRA, representing the four areas of Theology, Science, Religion, and Art. Let us assume there are six intellectual young students, equally gifted, who have been given the exact informational data on these four areas of study. After the teaching is all in, then the students proceed to formulate all of the information into a school of thought. Using the acronym we might illustrate the following: TSRA (a word not found in the dictionary); RATS, TARS, ARTS, STAR, and TSAR. If any one of the students had an original piece of information or imaginative thought, he might even invent the word BARTS. But it is clear: it was not the information dispensed by the teacher; it was the way the student interpreted or spelled the information into a school of

thought or added an ingredient of his own. Each individual finally has his own presup-position in life.

To what degree does character, honesty, ethics, and objectivity have in knowledge? Certainly it takes more than brains, I.Q., intellect, and creativity to think, to know, to understand.

What is the difference between "I think," "I know," and "I believe," "I see"? Thinking and knowing do not have the power of belief. Many think and know but do not believe.

Did Descartes have his own trilogy? in **cogito ergo sum**? A flaw appears in the trilogy. Did he mean "I am a thinking being?" (**cogito**); "all thinking beings are existing beings?" (**ergo**); "therefore I am an existing being?" (**sum**)? Is this not an Aristotelian syllogism? Yet, Descartes denies this to be a syllogism. He has been accused of "smuggling in a proposition that had not yet been demonstrated." He commenced his own reasonings in doubts and errors, and he was convinced he had learned nothing but the depth of his own ignorance before his reasoning with his own trilogy. There is evidence of an eclipse of hope here, too.

### **The First American Secular University**

Reaching across the years from the Reformation to the American scene, we can see a model with the presupposition

of Cornell University, founded and endowed by the philanthropist and humanitarian, Ezra Cornell, who desired a university **without** any religious affiliation. He desired a university laboratory of study with the objective teaching and studying of non-religious art, non-religious science, non-religious history, non-religious philosophy, non-religious origin and destiny, etc. This was one of the very first universities brought to the American scene to be conceived and born with that express presupposition. The first president, Andrew D. White, gives that presupposition, history, and defense in his voluminous work, **A History of Warfare of Science With Theology**. Other universities, like Harvard, were brought into existence for an opposite purpose: for divinity students, of scholarly proportions, from Puritan Writers of scholarly piety. But the "Harvard Elite" decided to abort its birthright into the presupposition of the Godless secular humanism.

### **The Eclipse**

The eclipse, because of the prevailing semi-darkness of approaching night, has brought man to a study of chaos, and he says that from the study of the irregular formation of clouds, ocean waves, falling leaves, shapes of geography, etc., there is beginning to appear a world like "a blue marble," a universe of disorder. Man has become so proud of his intellect and his intellectual studies that he believes that even



the chaos and the eclipse must be interpreted as an evolutionary success. Even "the big bang" extravagant beginning will exceed itself by the development of chaos and the irrationalism which exceeded Descartes' "Rationalism." That will seem pale to the contemporary frontiers of human hope. While Harvard professors, feeding on Nietzsche's despair, advocate to freshmen in their university that we now live in a world where suicide is a viable consideration, if not a hope, we see ourselves once again in a world lost in despair and fear (**angst**).

Newtonian Law has been replaced with a Godless heaven, and yet men, thinking men, wonder **why** the violence, the drugs, the "Rock" music, the abortions, euthanasia, the loss of morals, prayer, sanity, public schools, and the powerful presence of fear (**angst**)? Is this what human "reason" brings?

### **The Christian Theistic World View**

The Christian Faith still retains a reasonable faith, but freed from fallen, human "Rationalism." John Locke (1632-1704) declared faith serves reason, but we must also underline Reason is a lower form of knowledge. We have watched the changes: Faith with reason; changing to Faith and reason; changing to man's Age of Reason; changing to Reason dominates faith; changing finally to historical research and a belief that modern, modern science is Faith, although it is a time of the sleep of reason.

Every belief must begin with some postulate, and it is that postulate, without God, that also rises up out of man's ignorance to be applauded as man's final conclusion. If the postulate of ignorance becomes the root of his fruitful belief, we find ourselves chasing the rabbit because the rabbit is chasing the dog.

### **Reason vs. Reason?**

The skeptic may persist to this author, "Why do you use reason to refute human reason to achieve your conclusions if reason is inferior to revelation? Why? Because Reason is a valid, but limited, form of knowledge.

The answer lies in the fact that if we do not use reason at all, the skeptics will condemn our faith; and if we use reason, the skeptics condemn reasonable faith. Why do they do that? What do they want us to do? We believe it is because they use "Reason" with the perversion of an unreasonable heart towards God in a denial of Biblical Faith. Man talks about, and rightly so, the precision of the laws of physics in the heavens but falls back into his evil behavior that demands his social studies to think they can cure a rebellious sinner without God. The warning remains: The Holy Scriptures are not against Reason, per se, but against a human faith in man's ability to reason. The contradiction of social studies and studies of physics not only proves man is in an eclipse of hope, but that he has a sick and/or dead mind for reasoning and/or reasonableness;

yet he speaks with an assumed conclusion of greatness in his thoughts.

Man, without God, has core-thoughts producing peripheral beliefs, while the core is fallen in character and behavior to the bottom of fear (**angst**).

### Reasonable Faith

Contrary to Descartes' questionable **cogito ergo sum**, which led him to conclude there was little left for man to be sure of, there remains through the revelation from God, by faith, four steps of understanding:

1. "I Think"
2. "I Know"
3. "I Believe"
4. "I See"

"I think" and "I know" represent that initial part of understanding which is sensible, rational, reasonable, that could lead to mental assent, restraining contradictions and falsehood, while accepting the factual and evidential conclusions, and yet man prefers to say "so what?" So, because of man's indifference to things he does not prefer and desire, personally, we are able to realize that man is not always what he knows.

"I Believe" is certainly a step forward giving evidence of some emotional response, some convictional, partial action he cannot fully prove, which touches his will. It reaches some depth, and he concludes he must not be indifferent in believing it or doing something with what he "thinks," he "knows" and he "believes."

"I See," however, proceeds further with wisdom, insight, discernment balances, effectively sensing in the total parts of man, awakened by God, and then says, "I See!"

In John, chapter 20, we see something of these entities in Mary Magdalene, Peter, and the beloved John. Three different words are used: Mary "seeth" (20:1); Peter "seeth" (20:6); and John, "the other disciple, whom Jesus loved," "he saw and believed" (20:8). The three Greek words are: **blepei**; **theorei**; and **eiden**. The first, Mary, "saw at a glance"; the second, Peter, a deeper sight, supported by evidence, he "theorized, reasoned"; and John, the deepest sight, means "to see with insight." First, is sight; second, foresight to hindsight; third, insight. Thus, in John, faith believes the revealed resurrection and "sees" it.

So, by reason, by faith, by wisdom, by learning, by heart-assent, by conviction, through God's divine revelation and Spirit, man is illuminated and enabled to say, "I See." But as man, he may "know" and "believe" but not "see." In faith and reason, it is not that one is true and the other false; it is because of the effect it has upon the will that is different. Rational knowledge marks that which is conceivable; but, the Christian has faith for the inconceivable, too. Without faith, man must fall back into subjective Reason, and yet even hypotheses, propositions, postulations, and theorems, mark the fact that he is leaning in the

direction of a kind of faith, but that kind must continue to be experimented with; it is not the "sight" of Biblical faith. All of the words of this author at this point are hopeful but not absolutely perfect in human expression.

The Christian believes and understands because he believes and sees it.

The Christian does not contribute additional facts but, he brings a different interpretation to the facts.

The non-christian can only use the logical arguments based upon humanly acceptable assumptions, speculations, opinions of many, many things which are unprovable if not refutable.

The belief and Biblical sight of the Christian's Faith, in, origin and destiny, brings much light and sight the non-christian does not have. Biblical Faith brings Biblical reality.

When the Light of Scripture and Christ come into the knowledge and sight of a Christian believer, then the eclipse passes and hope replaces fear (**angst**).

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (II Timothy 1:7).

The Grand Postulate remains: "God has spoken unto us in his son" (Hebrews 1:1-4).

There is a word now being expressed and studied by some writers identified as "antilogocentricity." That very word strikes hopelessness for all books, all communications, and all other expressions of man. Is this the

place we desire to be, against the centrality of words themselves? against the very words? Where will then future history be resolved? Will man end his own existence giving a final encomium for despair? As one individual, I do not want to live without the lifting of the eclipse of hope from life. And, to me, only God's Word promises such a lifting power of hope. Man's encomium, through his own thoughts and practices, should be to the glory of God and not to despair. He speaks from both Transcendence and Immanence.

Is the final frontier of doubts, words themselves? Are there any words from any of the books and minds of men, from all history, believable? If not believable, credible? If not credible, plausible? If not plausible, erroneous?

Is there a book of words, in its entirety, anywhere, believable? If believable, are the words refutable or irrefutable? If irrefutable, are they infallible? And inerrant? Were they written by men? or by God?

Yes, they were written by God, and the Book is called the Holy Bible.

### ***The Fall Semester***

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*to*

*December 19, 1998*

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### ***The Spring Semester***

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*to*

*May 16, 1999*