critique

A RANSOM FELLOWSHIP PUBLICATION

ISSUE ONE 2011
Church Centered, not Church Occupied

I don’t want to be misunderstood here. I am not saying that church membership is optional for the Christian, or is of less importance than our own individualized walk with God. I agree with Cyprian (200-210-258) who said that an individual “cannot have God for his Father who has not the Church for his mother.” If we read the New Testament and miss this it means we are reading through lens molded by the individualism of our modern era.

What I mean to say here is that though we must be church centered (seeing it as essential to faith) we must not be church occupied. I am using the second term the way Dick Keyes does when he says that Christian tribalism occurs from “a church having so many weekly meetings that its members have little or no free time. Members are unable to relate to those outside of their fellowship group because they lead a church-occupied life…” What is Christian tribalism? Put simply, it is having little voluntary association with those who are not Christians, whether in recreation, social life, or friendship."

I remember back in the Sixties Paul Little of InterVarsity was fond of saying that Christians should always have at least two people in their life who were not Christians that they were praying for by name and with whom they had a growing, ever-deepening friendship. It was good advice. The point is not guilt, for goodness sake. We’ll all have times when we can’t name two, because life is fluid, people move, and circumstances change. The point is to begin. By faith praying for friendships; by faith rearranging priorities and commitments so it is possible, by faith being someone who listens, asks questions, and gives the grace of hospitality and unhurried time; by faith being willing to learn and say I don’t know; by faith walking in a fallen world like Jesus did, without defensiveness and interested in everything because Christ is Lord of all.

Busy in good things, including church things, is not always good. There is, after all, a tyranny of the urgent that can keep us from what is truly important.

Margie and I find that we have to revisit our priorities every few months or things slide out of kilter. Knowing the difference between being church centered and church-occupied—and living it out—is one part of that process. 

SOURCE
Cyprian from Covenant Seminary class syllabus, “Spirit, Church, & Last Things” by Dr Robert Peterson (Lesson 15, page 3), Keys from Chameleon Christianity (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999) page 41.

---

NOTE from the editor

Text Denis Haack
To the Editor

We are thrilled to be able to help support the work of Ransom. Both of you have impacted our lives in ways we can only try to describe. Thank you for all you do!

We received Notes from Toad Hall today, so Brad will probably get to see it, and Alicia, in about three hours when she emerges from her reading corner, having read it cover to cover! And, we’re excited to say, you have begun to “infect” the next generation of Brummeleds. Jacob, our 13-year-old, is often found with Critique or Notes, reading them on his own.

Thank you so much for your ministry to us and so many others. May God bless you richly during this next stretch.

In the name of our Lord, Alicia and Brad Brummeled
Waco, TX

Denis Haack responds:

Alicia and Brad: Thank you for your kindness. It means a great deal to us. Finding that our publications and speaking is somehow interesting or relevant or attractive to the next generation is something we didn’t plan for but something for which we are deeply grateful. It is simply a reflection of the timelessness and depth of the Christian gospel, and of the fact that all those created in God’s image, regardless of age ask the same questions and yearn to make sense of the same reality. Knowing of Jacob increased my motivation to work on this issue.

To the editor:

I’m not much for blog commenting, but there are more of us “out here” than your comment list reveals! I read both of you regularly—in fact, I prefer no “blog reader” on my computer because it means I can click on you in my “favorites” and have hope daily that there just might be a new post. Thank you, thank you, thank you for living your lives before us, challenging and amusing us, and as always, being a balm for my soul.

Linda Lewis
Rochester, MN

Denis Haack responds:

Linda: Margie and I so appreciate your comments here, even if you never leave comments on our blogs. It has sometimes been difficult to determine how much attention to give to the various opportunities that are available to us. Facebook, Twitter, blogs, publications—all take time and energy, especially to do them well, and that means time and energy that cannot be given to something else. And there are always other things clamoring for attention it seems. So, it’s very reassuring that what we are writing is being read, and that what you read might be touched by grace. A note like yours is a balm in return, and we are grateful.

Listening to Critics:

Mole in a Hole
When Musicians Raise Questions About Faith (III)

Each autumn in Minnesota, as temperatures drop and days shorten, we can see signs that nature is preparing for the winter that is to come. The leaves on trees become brilliant, red, gold, and yellow, and then lose their grip and float to the ground. The goldfinches visiting our thistle feeder molt, setting aside their bright yellow coats for greenish-gray ones that are still lovely but less flamboyant. Rows of jars of dill and bread and butter pickles, and corn relish appear on the shelves of the laundry room in the basement of Toad Hall. Great flocks of Canadian geese trace massive V’s in the sky, and whitetail deer and wild turkeys venture out of the woods into grain fields at dusk to feed. And little voles work at finding ways into our basement.

The voles are not a major problem, all things considered, being small and not at all like the RONS featured in The Princess Bride. (Google it if you don’t remember.) Still, allowing rodents in one’s basement is not recommended so each autumn it is my job to keep the little creatures out.

Toad Hall was built in 1916 so over the years the structure has settled and shifted and tiny cracks have appeared in the limestone walls. Hardly noticeable, except in the unfinished furnace room, where no one spends time unless it’s necessary, but the openings are there and a few enterprising voles always seem to find them. I don’t like using poison (recommended at my hardware store) because I don’t like spreading chemicals around, and because I don’t want voles wandering off to die and not next to some air intake for the furnace. So, traps it is.

Now, I do not want to get into an ethical discussion about trapping voles, so let me just say I’ve thought it through, believe it godly and leave it at that.

In any case, this year for some reason I mentioned the voles in my Facebook status, and was amazed at the comments that followed. Amazed at the number, I mean. People were actually interested, and left thoughtful, witty comments. It was lovely. Who would have thought rodents were so popular?

One commentator was my good friend, Scott Twite, who often seems to have the perfect song for every occasion, and once again he came through. He asked if I had heard “Mole in a Hole” from Richard and Linda Thompson’s album, Hokey Pokey (1975). I had not, but now it is part of the playlist I listen to most frequently.

Like the flowers, like the bees
Like the woodlands and the trees
(I like the Byrds on their LPs)
And I’m a refugee

I wanna be a mole in a hole, digging low and slow
I wanna be a fly flying high in the sky
I wanna be a mole in a hole, digging low and slow
I wanna be a fly flying high in the sky

(The Thompsons did not write “Mole in a Hole”—it is by Mike Waterson, an English songwriter and singer.)

I was familiar with Richard Thompson from the soundtrack of Grizzly Man (2005). The music Thompson composed and performed for that film is stunning. When I noticed that “Mole in a Hole” was on a CD by him and his wife, I knew I’d be interested.

The melody is light and pleasant, the kind of song you would teach children who would love the imagery in the lyrics. I thought of a walk in the “hundred acre wood,” with dear friends, taking the time to see the flowers that are blooming and the bees that visit the blossoms. Then, like two extremes that form brackets in space, moles and flies, the low and the high, are celebrated for their freedom. Neither are particularly attractive creatures, but in the song we sense they exist to fulfill some greater purpose, their dignity flowing from the fact that they live as they were created to live, whether “digging low and slow… flying high in the sky.”

There is in all of us a deep yearning for freedom, a
Calvin and Culture Across All of Life

When I first stumbled across a book by Francis Schaeffer in 1968 I was not interested in changing my theology. I was interested in saving my faith, because the fundamentalist dispensationalism to which I had been raised had proven to be sadly inadequate. Spirituality applied only to personal morality. God's full pleasure attached only to religious pursuits, and art and culture were dismissed as "worldly." A faith that limited, I concluded, was hardly worth the effort. I almost didn't read The God Who Is There, but as I thumbed through it I saw that Schaeffer neither disdained culture nor was dismissive of asking honest questions—and that caught my interest. It was a Christianity I had not known.

So I read Schaeffer's books, learned that taped lectures were available and devoured them as well. First it made little sense to me, but slowly I began to discover that in Schaeffer's view, the Bible didn't just present a theology, it provided a worldview that applied to all of life and culture. This was not a novel idea, it turned out, but was actually based on what the Reformers had taught in the 16th century, what Augustine had taught in the 4th century, and what the apostles taught in the 1st. Abraham Kuyper had summarized it in his Stone lectures, given in 1898 at Princeton and published under the title, Lectures on Calvinism. In the series he explained how Christ's Lordship extended to all of life, and how the revelation of God in Scripture shed light on every sphere of existence. The six lectures explored Christian orthodoxy as a worldview, and then how it worked itself out in religious life, politics, science, art, and a view of the future. I didn't have to agree with Kuyper at every point (and I don't!) to undergo what can only be called a paradigm shift. I hadn't merely come across a few new ideas to accept but a whole new way of thinking and seeing.

I had begun this pilgrimage in an attempt to save my faith, to try to discover whether the Bible was relevant to all of life or only to a tiny slice of existence. In the process two things transpired: I adopted Kuyper's ringing confession of faith as my own (“No single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’”), and my theology was changed.

To hold a faith that addresses not just “spiritual” (religious or devotional) concerns, but that speaks to all of life provides a motivation to love and serve God. Every legitimate pursuit pointed us toward the fulfillment of the gospel promises. There was a holiness in his, every glimmer of beauty resounds to his glory, and we are not awaiting release from the physical but will serve him body and soul in a new heaven and earth forever.

This holistic vision must be constantly renewed or it will wither away. Our culture pushes us towards fragmented living and thinking. The church is haunted by pseudo-Gnostic beliefs that pull us towards dividing the sacred from the secular, the spiritual from the material. Reminding ourselves of the richness of the Christian worldview and exploring afresh the implications of Christian belief to life and culture is not burdensome but necessary. Besides, new challenges and ideas arise in a broken world and we are commended to "bring every thought captive," which means our thinking is never done (2 Corinthians 10:5).

In Calvin and Culture, David Hall and Marvin Padgett help us in this process by editing a book that essentially works through the same material Kuyper did in his Stone lectures. In the process they provide us a chance to refresh our thinking about the biblical worldview and reflect on how the gospel speaks creatively to every aspect of our lives and thinking. They encourage us to bring every thought captive to life and culture is not burdensome but necessary. Besides, new challenges and ideas arise in a broken world and we are commended to "bring every thought captive," which means our thinking is never done (2 Corinthians 10:5).

They encourage us to bring every thought captive to life and culture is not burdensome but necessary. Besides, new challenges and ideas arise in a broken world and we are commended to "bring every thought captive," which means our thinking is never done (2 Corinthians 10:5). **BOOK RECOMMENDED** Calvin and Culture: Exploring a Worldview edited by David W. Hall and Marvin Padgett (Phillipsburg, PA: P & R Publishing; 2010) 305 pages + indices.

My teeth are yellow and I've got bad breath. My feet are smelly and hair's a mess. Well, my feet are smelly and hair's a mess.
Losing Memory, Losing Oneself

Promise me you’ll never forget me, Because if I thought you would, I’d never leave. [Winnie the Pooh]

As her dementia grows, Fiona is painfully aware of her intractable problem. “I think all we can aspire to in this situation,” she says at one point, “is a little bit of grace.” Unlike many such patients, Fiona decides to enter an assisted living facility, and leads a mourning Grant through the inevitable process. During the initial month in the facility, Fiona develops a close bond with Aubrey (played by Michael Murphy) a man she insists worked for her grandfather in a hardware store as a teenager, though this memory isn’t true. Grant visits faithfully, but Fiona’s affection and attention has shifted away from him to another. It seems a painful punishment for the affairs Grant enjoyed decades earlier as a young university professor with young willing female students.

Over the course of Away From Her (2006) we watch a slow progression—as Grant notes, an unfortunate word choice—as Fiona slips into greater and greater forgetfulness, confusion, disorientation, dependency, and ultimately a deterioration that encompasses more and more of her being, body and mind, unto death. Or, in institutional terms, eventually she has to be moved to the dreaded second floor of the memory care facility, to live among those whose bodies linger on, such as they are, but whose minds have a medical label: Dementia of the Alzheimer’s Type, as the DSM-IV (2004) revealed, such forgetfulness is not always the grace we imagine.

It is not surprising that the Scriptures are rich in the themes of memory, remembering, and the danger of forgetting. Memory is explored not just in relation to human beings, but also to the nature of God. The covenant making God who reveals himself in history is the One who remembers (Genesis 9:15-16).

The people of God were to remember their painful past in slavery and God’s gracious rescue, so that they would be eager to act with justice and compassion to the powerless, the alien that live within their community (Deuteronomy 16:12). When the Old Testament people of God forgot God’s grace, the Hebrew poet called it rebellion (Psalm 106:7). The Teacher in the wisdom literature meditates on life and meaning, concluding that at the core of things is the need to remember one’s Creator while still young (Ecclesiastes 12:1). In a wonderful irony express-

8 ISSUE ONE 2011

Photos Courtesy Lions Gate Entertainment Copyright © 2006

9 RANSOMFELLOWSHIP.ORG
ing his mercy the God who always remembers his covenant graciously promises to always forget his people’s misdeeds (Isaiah 43:25). A thief crucified beside Jesus expresses hope by asking to be remembered, and is promised paradise (Luke 23:42-43). The Eucharist is not just a ritual of future hope but of remembering the past (1 Corinthians 11:25-26). The list could be easily expanded. If nothing else, this bibli-cal emphasis throws into stark relief how dementia captures so much of the horror and brokenness of the fall.

Grant’s faithfulness in visiting regularly, and their financial ability to place her in a better-than-average facility for care are both positive things in an otherwise grievous situation. Though his earlier promiscuity may not have made his decision easier, Grant’s willingness to allow Fiona her attachment to Aubrey probably eased Fiona’s transition to assisted care. “Sometimes you have to let go,” the movie tag line says, “of what you can’t live without.” Now that they must be apart, Grant’s heart speaks a deeper truth he expresses with quiet longing, “I never wanted to be away from her.”

It is difficult to think of a more painful effect of the brokenness of our real world. Sliding into dementia, no cure known, often occurring as a person ages, a disease of the brain that can occasionally afflict people in their 50s, a lingering living on while it seems that humanness itself is slipping away. I fear almost anything more than this, a dread of returning to a burden-some infancy for those I love and for whom I desire freedom not burden. I’m far less fearful of death than I am of this.

The Western church needs to speak of euthanasia with greater compassion and thoughtfulness as the population continues to age. Fiona showed courage entering the assisted care facility. “I’d like to make love, and then I’d like you to go,” she says to Grant. “Because I need to stay here and if you make it hard for me, I may cry so hard I’ll never stop.” It seemed impossible to watch that scene and not think of my best friend, my wife, and wondering what I would do. I know I have no desire to enter such a place myself, instituting the need for my family to visit me when I may not even remember who they are. Too much of the discussion about euthanasia in the church has involved easy sound bites and has addressed easy situations—much more substance and compassion will be needed as relatively more people grow old enough to begin the painful slide into dementia.

The church also should take more of a lead in helping families discuss the problems of aging and dementia. Perhaps this would be a better topic for an adult class rather than of the usual children’s repeated fare. Perhaps there is research that shows whether many families thoughtfully discuss and plan for the possibility of dementia in an aging family member, but my limited anecdotal evidence suggests such honest interaction is rare. Though it is a topic no one wants to face, is politely ignoring it until dementia is evident a wise choice? Perhaps this is one way to update the care the 1st century church showed to the widows of its day, when they displayed sensitivity and practical ministry to the unfortunate brokenness of life afflicting those who could no longer care for themselves.

Biblical faith requires assuming some certainties. We remain God’s covenant people regardless of the illness that afflicts us. Though the result of the fall, illness, including dementia is no cause for shame. It is God’s grace not our memory that assures us of his love, presence, and acceptance. Even unlikely, difficult patients are worthy of care because they retain God’s image. Family caregivers are worthy of care for the same reason. Loving, safe, and trusted community should assist caregivers in the difficult task of determining when the patient has outgrown their ability to care for them and needs professional attention. And caregivers need to be helped to see that receiving care themselves is not a sign of weakness or cause for shame.

This past weekend Margie and I visited a beloved maternal aunt of mine suffering from Alzheimer’s. Each visit the disease is more evident, her memory more ravaged, her functioning declining, her emotional swings less rational and more abrupt. When I was a child being with her was a safe place for me, when I felt acceptance rather than the solemn watchfulness on the lookout for my next, inevitable failure that was my constant companion at home. Some of the changes in her are almost amusing, in a perverse way. She’s had listicuffs with some of her fellow patients, men in the facility who were, she said, harassing someone and she wasn’t going to put up with it. She’s even taken to occasionally snarling, my dear Fundamentalist aunt standing next to her bedside table where her old worn King James Bible lies open to her reading for the day. I know it is not her, not really, but the disease. As it is when she rails angrily at me for taking her cane with us when we take her out to lunch. While we eat she asks the same question six times, and we answer each time as if we hadn’t heard it before. Besides the vital addition of prayer, there seems to be little practical difference to our response as Christians to my aunt’s dementia and the care outlined for Fiona in Away From Her. Nor need there be any difference, given the grandeur and extent of God’s common grace expressed so freely in his creation. She claims she stays in her room alone, but the staff tells us otherwise, and when we arrive for lunch she seems happy sitting with the other residents in the main lounge. In the car she tells us she avoids the lounge. I have always been able to make her laugh, and I am happy this grace remains. Over lunch I tell her stories from our past, and it makes her happy to remember through my memories. The fact that I am repeating some of the same stories from the last visit is a secret that breaks my heart.

The church needs to be alert to growing despair as people watch loved one’s lose their memory. To gently remind them that though forgetting us sad beyond words, the final grace is not our remembering God but his remembering us. St Paul himself contrasts the two modes of hope but of remembering the past (1 Corinthians 11:25-26). Biblical faith requires assuming such honest interaction is rare. The 1st century church showed to the non-believer the pain of those I love and for whom I desire freedom not burden. I’m far less fearful of death than I am of this.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What impressed you most about Away from Her? Why?

2. Have you experienced watching someone close to you slide into dementia or Alzheimer’s? What part of the experience seemed hardest to accept? How did they change as the disease advanced?

3. Sometimes the onset of dementia or Alzheimer’s can seem to bring a measure of relief to the person suffering the disease. “People think it’s a terrible tragedy when somebody has Alzheimer’s.” This author Amy Tan says, “But in my mother’s case, it’s different. My mother has been unhappy all her life. For the first time in her life, she’s happy.” How is it that the brokenness of this sad world can produce such abnormal things?

4. To what extent have you considered what it would look like to age gracefully? Whom have you known who achieved that grace?

5. To what extent does the church thoughtfully address the topics raised in Away from Her? If there seems to be reluctance, what might be the reason?

6. Do you know someone who is a caregiver for an elderly member of their family? Does the caregiver receive adequate care for their task?

7. One striking aspect of Away from Her is that it was directed and written by Sarah Polley, who is also the main actress. It’s a small film based on a short story by Alice Munro. Is this your favorite film this year? Why?

8. Read the texts of Scripture mentioned in this article. What does the Bible teach about memory, remembering, and forgetting that seems most important to you at this point in your spiritual pilgrimage? Why?

FOR FURTHER READING


When Christians Offend Christians

Several years ago I was speaking at a large weekend annual conference on the East Coast, leading several breakout sessions and giving one plenary. I had been asked to address popular culture so one breakout was on music and the other on film. Usually the conference consisted of lectures, I had been told, so the organizers were pleased I was going to use film clips in my main talk. The audience was skewed towards an older demographic—there were a handful of people in their 20s and 30s, a few more in their 40s, and the majority were older.

In situations like this I’ve learned that some folk are easily offended, so I used scenes that contained no bad words or nudity or violence or sex—everything I showed could have appeared on television. In fact, far edgier scenes appear on television every day, but that’s beside the point. Actually, the Bible contains far edgier scenes, but that’s beside the point too. I wanted to help my listeners think about living faithfully as Christians in a world saturated by popular culture, not get into a debate about R-rated films.

In situations like this I’ve learned that some folk are easily offended, so I used scenes that contained no bad words or nudity or violence or sex—everything I showed could have appeared on television. In fact, far edgier scenes appear on television every day, but that’s beside the point. Actually, the Bible contains far edgier scenes, but that’s beside the point too. I wanted to help my listeners think about living faithfully as Christians in a world saturated by popular culture, not get into a debate about R-rated films.

Growing up in the church I found that certain phrases from Scripture seemed to carry particular weight. It was important not to “stumble” people or to cause them “offence,” because the apostle Paul had warned against such things in 1 Corinthians 8. If we failed at this point our testimony could “be destroyed” and that was something no Christian wanted to have on their conscience. Even if we were convinced our actions were right and proper, we must “please” the other person for their “good” and be careful “not to please ourselves” (Romans 15). The apostle even gave practical examples of what he was talking about so no misunderstanding could arise. “It is good,” the apostle argued, “not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother [or sister] to stumble” (Romans 14:21).

The Christians at the conference were offended at my use of film clips. Over the years I’ve known Christians who have been stumbled by all sorts of things: bad words in a movie, Rolling Stone on a coffee table, drinking wine, nudies in an art museum, contemporary praise music, traditional worship music, rock music, never attending Sunday school, sipping single malt, smoking a cigar with old friends, having a tattoo... Offense can arise even when the offended party agrees that no wrongdoing was involved. “There is nothing sinful about it,” one woman said, “but it offends me.” The woman had a Baptist background, and when she learned her Presbyterian daughter ordered a glass of wine with dinner at a restaurant. She enjoyed wine herself occasionally, she said, but only at home, never in public where anyone could see who you might be stumbled. “It’s offensive the way you Presbyterians flaunt your freedom,” she said.

All of this raises intriguing questions for the thoughtful Christian. When does giving and taking offense become spiritually problematic? Since the film clips offended some of the Christians in the audience, should I have used them?

Did I need to apologize for offending them? What are the proper biblical limits to embracing the freedom we have in Christ? Should the Presbyterian daughter never order wine in public because it offends her Baptist mother? And what role, if any, should our witness to Christ and his gospel before the world become part of the issue?

What did Calvin say?

There are a number of ways I could approach answering these questions. I could simply go back to the texts of Scripture involved, analyze their meaning and provide some ideas about how we could respond in how we think and live.

And we’ll do that, but I want to also take into account the fact that we are not the first generations who have had to wrestle with this issue. We are not the first to have to reflect on these texts of Scripture and figure out what it means to live faithfully under their direction. As always when I study the Scriptures, I want to find a way to help make certain I am not inadvertently captive to the prejudices of my own culture and period of history. One way to help with that is to consider what orthodox teachers from previous centuries have said about the texts we are studying. In this case we’ll use John Calvin (1509-1564).

I reread Calvin’s Institutes of the Christian Religion last year and was intrigued with what he wrote on this topic. As I think you’ll see, his comments are remarkably applicable for the 21st century. Calvin was a lawyer known for careful scholarship, and unfortunately more than a few theologians have taken his thinking and reworked it into a rather cold, academic, abstract theological system. Calvin, on the other hand, I find to be warm, biblical, and practical. His concern was that the people of God would know God through Christ, love, understand and obey God’s word in Scripture, and in gratitude for grace live faithfully to God’s glory. So, let’s get started.

I know this is a lot to ask in our busy world, but I would urge you to take the time as you read to look up the biblical texts I reference. I’ve written out quotes from Calvin because all readers will not have easy access to his works, but you do have access to a Bible so I don’t always quote the text involved.

In the Institutes, Calvin addressed the issue of giving and taking offense in his chapter on Christian Freedom (chapter 19, sections 10-13). By the way, for those who want to know, I am using the two-volume version of the Institutes translated by Ford Lewis Battles. [That’s where it belongs because the question we are really asking is whether we are free to do something if that act causes someone offense.]

For Calvin, the biblical doctrine of Christian freedom—or liberty in Christ—was of real significance. He referred to it as “an appendage of justification” (an essential aspect of being right with God), and therefore “a thing of prime necessity.” If it is neglected, he said, believers will be plagued with doubt and made fearful and hesitant—all needlessly. He was keenly aware that the topic of freedom often roils up heated debate in the church, where differences of opinion can be difficult to resolve.
For, as soon as Christian freedom is mentioned, either passions boil or wild tumults rise unless these wanton spirits are opposed in time, who otherwise most wickedly corrupt the best things. Some, on the pretext of this freedom, shake off all obedience toward God and break out into unbridled license. Others disdain it, thinking that it takes away all moderation, order, and choice of things. What should we do here, haggled about with such perplexities? Shall we say good-by to Christian freedom, thus cutting off occasion for such dangers? But, as we have said, unless this freedom be comprehended, neither Christ nor gospel truth, nor inner peace of soul, can be rightly known. Rather, we must take care that so necessary a part of doctrine be not suppressed, yet at the same time that those absurd objections which are wont to arise be met.

[III.19.1, p. 834]

Apparently some things in the 16th century are very similar to those in the 21st.

This is classic Calvin. His interest here is not simply doctrinal. Instead his interest flows out of a practical concern as a pastor for the people of God. In his view, the doctrine of Christian freedom must be taught, with care taken to correct misunderstandings, so that extreme views on either side—either license on the one hand or legalism on the other—may be adequately addressed. Far too much is at stake—“neither Christ nor gospel truth, nor inner peace of soul, can be rightly known”—for us to sidestep this potentially difficult, even divisive area, of biblical instruction. I think it would be wise for church elders and parents to reflect on Calvin’s insistence on this point so that neither a tendency to avoid conflict nor an assumption that the doctrine of Christian liberty is of secondary importance leads inadvertently to a lack of clear teaching on the topic.

Calvin on Christian Freedom

For Calvin there are three essential parts to the doctrine of Christian freedom. The first is that because of the cross we are free to embrace God’s grace and receive his good gifts in life without endless rules—Calvin called them “superstitions”—that appear spiritual but do nothing to promote true maturity.

The Christian should understand and believe that we are free from the burden of proving ourselves by works. Our being a child of God is not determined by what we do or don’t do, and nothing we do or don’t do earns God’s favor. This, Calvin believed, is something essential to the gospel of grace. It is also, I think, something that many evangelicals do not grasp, and so feel the weight of having to perform in order to feel accepted by God and by his people.

The second element in the doctrine of Christian freedom, Calvin taught, is related to what is called the “third use of the law.” This refers to the notion that God’s law given in Scripture has three uses. The first use of God’s law is to convict people of sin in their life, of what is present in their acts or thoughts or imagination that is contrary to the standard of God’s holiness and glory. The second use of God’s law is to help restrain evil in a fallen world. Even secularists recognize that civil society is impossible without a proper legal and ethical structure to keep things from descending into anarchy. Finally, the third use of God’s law involves the fact that in revealing his law to us God reveals what is pleasing to him. Since his people are redeemed by grace, accepted in Christ, we are then free to serve and obey God through gratitude and not necessity. We keep his law because he loves us, not to earn his love. Calvin’s concern is that believers, “freed from the law’s yoke they willingly obey God’s will” [III.19.4, p. 836]. Calvin believed that unless our true freedom is understood and embraced, a Christian’s good works will be a matter of meritng approval—from God and man—instead of flowing out of a heart simply overwhelmed with gratitude for the amazing grace and love bestowed on us in Christ. Sadly, many evangelicals never experience this profound freedom to serve in love rather than duty. They do or don’t do things primarily through guilt, or because they fear missing God’s approval, or because they know friends or church leaders will disapprove. They need to hear the good news of the gospel.

So, Calvin believed that the doctrine of Christian freedom was important because first, we need to be free from any sense of works righteousness (the need to earn approval by what we do or don’t do) and second, so that we could be free to serve God and our fellow creatures out of love and gratitude. Calvin identified a third essential element in the biblical teaching of Christian freedom. This is that the believer is free to embrace God’s good creation and receive his good gifts in life without endless rules—Calvin called them “superstitions”—that appear spiritual but do nothing to promote true maturity.
in Christ. Thus, he said, “regarding outward things that are of themselves ‘indifferent’, we are not bound before God by any religious obligation preventing us from sometimes using them and other times not using them, indifferently’” [III.19.7, p. 838]. He has in mind St Paul’s teaching that “everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer” (1 Timothy 4:4-5). Calvin says we can identify a simple principle to guide our understanding and application of this aspect of Christian freedom. “To sum up, we see whether this freedom tends: namely, that we should use God’s gifts for the purpose for which he gave them to us, with no scruple of conscience, no trouble of mind. With such confidence our minds will be at peace with him, and will recognize his liberality toward us.” [III.19.8, p. 840]. In other words, we are free to embrace and enjoy the grace of God in his good creation, without fearing that his gifts come bundled with all sorts of regulations and rules. Culture and the arts, good food and drink, rest and work, hospitality and silence, education and skill—we are free in Christ to enjoy all that God has provided in his creation.

Calvin on Weak and Strong

Calvin was a pastor, however, and knew that there is a practical problem involved in the proper understanding and embrace of this grand freedom we have in Christ. The problem is that some people are very weak in faith. Perhaps they are new believers, or have gone through a period of enormous disappointment, or have become overwhelmed by doubts and questions and uncertainty. So, while Calvin recognizes and celebrates the freedom we have in Christ, he also cautions against using that freedom in ways that will cause injury to those who are weak in faith. Some, he says, have turned liberty into something that wounds others unnecessarily and makes their faith more tenuous. “They use their freedom indiscriminately and unwise,” he says, “as though it were not sound and safe if men did not witness it. By this heedless use, they very oftentimes do so much to alienate brothers and sisters [III.19.10, p. 842].

Calvin points out, in commenting on 1 Corinthians 8:9, that the apostle “expressly desires that regard be had to the weak, that is, to those who are not yet thoroughly confirmed in the doctrine of piety.” It is clear that Calvin sees the intentional limitation to freedom as not an issue of trying to please everyone’s whims that might feel offended, but an honest concern to show grace to those whose faith might totter under their pressure. The weak Christian’s lack of knowledge and growth requires sacrificial love on the part of those who are stronger. What they do not need is a deaitn insistence on freedom that could breed doubt, confusion, or even unbelief in them. It is a matter of love, in other words, of a willingness to sacrifice for the sake of another person’s growth in Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 8:7-13, St Paul warns Christians not to offend those who are weak in faith. In this he is discussing if it is acceptable for Christians to eat meat purchased in a pagan marketplace where the seller might have offered it to an idol. He points out that idols are not truly divine, and in fact have no ontological (or real) existence as a rival to the true God. Therefore, eating the meat offered to them need not trouble us as a spiritual problem. But then the apostle issues a warning that all Christians must take seriously.

However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. Food will not commend us to God. Calvin writes, “when we induce weak brethren, by our example, to venture upon anything against their conscience. We must never encourage people to violate their conscience. Their conscience may be deeply skewed, of course, and so may need to be shaped and molded by the standard of God’s word. They will have no opportunity to mature in this way, however, if we, by what we say or do encourage them to violate their conscience and collapse their faith. Calvin defines Paul’s phrase, “become a stumbling block” as “they emboldened the ignorant to hurry on, contrary to conscience, to attempt what they did not think it lawful for them to do.” Paul says that when a strong Christian inappropriately insists on exercising their freedom, “the weak person is destroyed.” Calvin translates the phrase a bit differently, “And thy brother perish.” And then he comments, “Mark how serious an evil it is, that mankind commonly and the like to venture upon anything with a doubtful or opposing conscience.” Since Christ died for the weaker person, being disdainful of them is to be disdainful of Christ. Or, as Calvin puts it, “contempt of this kind is an open insult to Christ.”

In reality, both those who are strong and those who are weak are in danger of mistreating their brother or sister in Christ. As he discusses the controversy over eating meat or sticking to vegetables, for example, Paul warns, “Let not the
one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats” (Romans 14:3). In his commentary on this text Calvin expands and explains the apostle’s meaning this way:

They who were strong had this fault, that they despised those as superstitious who were scrupulous about insignificant things, and also derided them; these, on the other hand, were hardly able to refrain from rash judgments, so as not to condemn what they did not follow; for whatever they perceived to be contrary to their own sentiments, they thought was evil. Hence he exhorts the former to refrain from contempt, and the latter from excessive moroseness.

So far Calvin has stressed three important biblical teachings: first, he has rightly insisted on the importance of Christian freedom, second, he has noted that not all believers will necessarily appreciate the biblically appropriate liberties taken by their brothers and sisters, and third, he has argued that Christians must be eager to forgo their freedom in loving sacrifice for those who are weaker in faith, those who are in danger of slipping into doubt and unbelief.

If the person involved is weak in faith, then we should be ended another person without needing to be forgoing one’s liberty to please others (who are strong in faith but offended), but instead requires that we serve the other person (who is weak) so that their faith is not undermined.

To illustrate this biblical teaching, Calvin reflects on the controversy between Jesus and some Pharisees in Matthew 15.

We learn from the Lord’s words how much we ought to regard the offense of the Pharisees. He bids us let them alone because they are blind leaders of the blind (Matt. 15:14). His disciples had warned him that the Pharisees had been offended by him (Matt. 15:12). He answered that they were to be ignored and their offense disregarded.

Can you see how freeing this is? Instead of being held captive to the emotional reactions of Christians who want everyone to conform to their personal standards, we are free in Christ to ignore and disregard what is little more than a power play on their part. Another biblical example arises in Calvin’s commentary on Luke 11:37-41. Jesus is at table with a group of Pharisees, but did not wash according to tradition before the meal. This did not escape the Pharisees’ notice, yet Christ neither apologizes nor washes to make up for the offense, but instead rebukes them. “Christ is fully aware that his neglect of this ceremony will give offense,” Calvin says, “but he declines to observe it.” Christ has made us free, and this freedom, according to Scripture allows us—actually if we want to be like Christ it requires us—to disregard what Calvin terms “Pharisaical offense,” when strong Christians claim they are offended and want us to conform to their preferences. What they are doing via their offense is merely propagating legalism.

In the New Testament there is an interesting series of events involving whether a Christian should be circumcised. The apostles taught that since Christ fulfilled the law on our behalf and since baptism takes the place of circumcision this requirement in the law is no longer in force. We are free in Christ from the need to be circumcised as a sign of being part of God’s covenant people. That part was clear. Out of concern for weaker Jewish believers, however, Paul had Timothy circumcised, but in opposition to strong (and legalistic) Christians who insisted on the observance of the law for salvation Paul refused to have Titus undergo the same ceremony. Calvin argues that this is a clear biblical example of how to distinguish between weak and Pharisaical offense. In the one case Timothy freely sacrificed his freedom (and much more!) for the sake of weaker Christians, while on the other Titus refused to be controlled by believers who claimed they were offended by his life. “We must at all times seek after love,” Calvin concludes, “and look toward the edification of our neighbor.” We are free in Christ from the need to be circumcised as a sign of being part of God’s covenant people. That part was clear. Out of concern for weaker Jewish believers, however, Paul had Timothy circumcised, but in opposition to strong (and legalistic) Christians who insisted on the observance of the law for salvation Paul refused to have Titus undergo the same ceremony. Calvin argues that this is a clear biblical example of how to distinguish between weak and Pharisaical offense. In the one case Timothy freely sacrificed his freedom (and much more!) for the sake of weaker Christians, while on the other Titus refused to be controlled by believers who claimed they were offended by his life. “We must at all times seek after love,” Calvin concludes, “and look toward the edification of our neighbor.”
are not in danger of losing their faith but whose desire is to make others conform to their own extra-biblical standards. In such cases we must be careful to be faithful regardless of the resulting “offense” being claimed. “For,” Calvin says, “as our freedom must be subordinated to love, so in turn ought love itself to abide under purity of faith.” [III.19.13, p. 845].

A Few Final Reflections

I may be mistaken but it seems that questions about Christian freedom and causing offence arise fairly frequently in evangelical circles today. Some feel under pressure to never do anything that might offend others in their fellowship. For some the pressure has been sufficient to drive them from the church. Others simply operate below the church’s radar screen, unwilling to be bullied into conformity in nonessential areas. When strong believers use their own offense to set standards it doesn’t take long before these standards take on a sort of biblical significance. Soon they are so accepted that questioning them is interpreted as a sign of spiritual insensitivity or coldness. Disappointing Christian leaders can produce a rolling series of negative reactions.

It needs to be noted that in a world like ours that is increasingly post-Christian, this doctrine of freedom and causing offence is important as we live out our faith before a watching world. Many non-Christians, Tim Keller says, “are not in danger of losing their faith but whose desire is to make others conform to their own extra-biblical standards.”

Pharisaic religion doesn’t just damage the inner soul, it also creates social strife. Pharisees need to shore up their sense of righteousness, so they despise and attack all who don’t share their doctrinal beliefs and religious practices. Racism and cultural imperialism result. Churches that are exclusive, angry, moralistic people who can’t stand to see below the surface of events. Dylan’s poetry is deeply rooted in reality but always in a way that transcends the details of the here and now to touch on the deeper questions of life and meaning and spirituality and death. “Dylan’s is an art,” Christopher Ricks says, “in which sins are laid bare and reflected on the 600 titles Dylan penned over those 49 years. Not everyone will necessarily be interested in reading Heylin’s two volumes, but those interested in Dylan, popular culture, and the significant signs of our times will want access to them.

**RECOMMENDED**


**SOURCE**


---

**600 Songs in 2 Volumes, **

**And Counting**

Please understand what I am claiming here. It is not just that I like his music, though I do. It is not just that I think his unceasing musical output has been creatively stunning, though I believe it is. It is not that I disdain people who don’t like his voice or albums, because liking his art really has nothing to do with it. I am claiming he is a poet—perhaps the poet—for my generation, and that in his lyrics is a record of our time, for blessing and for curse. We may listen to the news to know some of what’s happening and read history books for some of the context, but for unpacking a deeper level of understanding we need to listen to poets. It is the poets who have always provided a way to sort the significant from the meaningless, a way to see the glimmers of light hidden in the shadows of our dark world. And from that perspective, Bob Dylan is the voice that time and again has swept aside the distracting details covered with such mind-numbing repetition in media and gossip to expose the heart and soul of what truly matters.

In two volumes Clinton Heylin, a prolific writer on popular culture, has produced a chronological (according to when the songs were written) commentary on all the songs written by Bob Dylan. Revolution in the Air: The songs of Bob Dylan, 1957-1973 (Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2009) 450 pages + bibliography, and indices. Still On the Road: The Songs of Bob Dylan, 1974-2006 (Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2010) 497 pages + notes, bibliography, and indices.

**SOURCE**


---

If Keller is correct, and I believe he is, he has provided one more reason both to teach the doctrine of Christian freedom with biblical care and to refuse to give in to the pressure of Pharisaical offense. We live not in isolation but before a watching world and are responsible to our Lord that what is seen in us is a clear demonstration of the gospel. And our care for those who are weak in faith is also of importance before a watching world as a sacrificial demonstration of the love that proves our relationship with the risen Christ [John 13:35].

I am not here suggesting that we delight in offending strong members of our community and simply set out to do it vigorously—a silly, childish option. “If possible,” St Paul writes, “as far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (Romans 12:18). We must pick our battles carefully and draw lines in the sand prayerfully. Many things are simply not worth fighting for. The only option not open to us is always giving in to Pharisaical offense.

Calvin’s understanding of Christian freedom—as a necessary aspect of biblical doctrine; of the need to distinguish between the offense of the weak and the Pharisee; of the mandate that the strong in faith care tenderly for the weak while ignoring the prideful pretentions of the legalist—is practical, pastoral and most important of all, biblically orthodox. It is not a matter of flaunting our liberty—though our deceitful hearts are capable of even this perversion—but of embracing the grace of true freedom that Christ died to give us.
As Christians, we believe that God has not left us without knowing that he has revealed himself both in the world he has made and in Christ and the biblical witness to Christ. Science is the fallible human interpretation of nature, while theology (or "tradition," which is theological reflection) is the fallible human interpretation of Scripture. You and I believe (I think) that in nature and Scripture there are certain given things, data (although they relate to largely different spheres), which, if they truly come from God, do not contradict one another. The contradictions have not been between nature and Scripture, but between science and theology, that is, between different human interpretations of God's double revelation. If, therefore, we are to learn lessons from the past, it is neither for conservatives to deny the evidence of nature, nor for liberals to deny the evidence of Scripture, but for all of us to re-examine our interpretations of both.

It is necessary, Stott says, for Christians to "re-examine our interpretations of both." I believe that to be true, but it is a proposal fraught with difficulty. Some evangelicals resist the notion altogether and see any re-examination as the first step towards liberalism or in allowing the latest theories of unbelieving scientists to overturn the instruction of God's word. It is one thing to be aware of the dangers of thinking wrongly, but it is another thing to allow those dangers to keep us from thinking rightly. We must not do that—the refusal to seek the truth is a repudiation of following Christ.

Stott makes an important point about God's word in creation and Scripture:

Nature and Scripture are both divine revelation ("general and special," "natural and supernatural," to use the traditional terms), since God has revealed himself both in the world he has made and in Christ and the biblical witness to Christ. Science is the fallible human interpretation of nature, while theology (or "tradition," which is theological reflection) is the fallible human interpretation of Scripture. You and I believe (I think) that in nature and Scripture there are certain given things, data (although they relate to largely different spheres), which, if they truly come from God, do not contradict one another. The contradictions have not been between nature and Scripture, but between science and theology, that is, between different human interpretations of God's double revelation. If, therefore, we are to learn lessons from the past, it is neither for conservatives to deny the evidence of nature, nor for liberals to deny the evidence of Scripture, but for all of us to re-examine our interpretations of both.

It is necessary, Stott says, for Christians to "re-examine our interpretations of both." I believe that to be true, but it is a proposal fraught with difficulty. Some evangelicals resist the notion altogether and see any re-examination as the first step towards liberalism or in allowing the latest theories of unbelieving scientists to overturn the instruction of God's word. It is one thing to be aware of the dangers of thinking wrongly, but it is another thing to allow those dangers to keep us from thinking rightly. We must not do that—the refusal to seek the truth is a repudiation of following Christ.

Stott made an important point about God's word in creation and Scripture:

Nature and Scripture are both divine revelation ("general and special," "natural and supernatural," to use the traditional terms), since God has revealed himself both in the world he has made and in Christ and the biblical witness to Christ. Science is the fallible human interpretation of nature, while theology (or "tradition," which is theological reflection) is the fallible human interpretation of Scripture. You and I believe (I think) that in nature and Scripture there are certain given things, data (although they relate to largely different spheres), which, if they truly come from God, do not contradict one another. The contradictions have not been between nature and Scripture, but between science and theology, that is, between different human interpretations of God's double revelation. If, therefore, we are to learn lessons from the past, it is neither for conservatives to deny the evidence of nature, nor for liberals to deny the evidence of Scripture, but for all of us to re-examine our interpretations of both.

It is necessary, Stott says, for Christians to "re-examine our interpretations of both." I believe that to be true, but it is a proposal fraught with difficulty. Some evangelicals resist the notion altogether and see any re-examination as the first step towards liberalism or in allowing the latest theories of unbelieving scientists to overturn the instruction of God's word. It is one thing to be aware of the dangers of thinking wrongly, but it is another thing to allow those dangers to keep us from thinking rightly. We must not do that—the refusal to seek the truth is a repudiation of following Christ.
Some works of art survive the test of time, touching hearts, minds and imaginations across both generations and cultures. One such work is Handel’s Messiah, which was performed for the first time in April 1742 when the composer was 57 years old. It has been performed countless times since, texts of Scripture set to music both stirring and adoring. Within ten years of composing the piece, health problems and deteriorating eyesight would effectively end Handel’s work as a composer. He died in 1759.

In *Handel’s Messiah*, Calvin College music professor (emeritus) Calvin Stapert introduces us to Handel, his times, his music and then walks us carefully through the famous oratorio. And when I say he does this for us, I mean non-musicians who love music and want to know more. “I simply wish,” Stapert says, “to supply some information, explanation, and interpretation that might enhance appreciation of Messiah.” He defines musical terms when he uses them—besides providing a glossary—and helps us know what to listen for in order to hear Handel’s work more fully.

Stapert suggests, and it is a good suggestion, that readers listen to Messiah as they read through the book. I suspect too few of us will do that (I doubt I will), and our lives will be poorer as a result. Good music should not just be on in the background as we drive or exercise or read or work. At times it needs to be the center of attention. To be too busy for good music is to be too busy.

I’m not scolding you. I’m making a note to myself.

---

**Book Recommended**


---

The Bible makes it clear that God’s covenant people are to be characterized by love. He loves us and is our God, and in gratitude for that unimaginable grace we love him and others. In *The Mark of the Christian*, Francis Schaeffer insisted that love was to be the essential, primary characteristic of Christians, actually setting us apart from the rest of humanity. He had good biblical reasons for making that argument, as these texts (out of many more I could have chosen) reveal:

**Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.**

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another, do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; never be conceited. Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all.

**Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God.** He who does not love does not know God; for God is love.

**Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God.**

**And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.** All who keep his commandments abide in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us.

**Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.**

---

**Loving People...**

**On Relationships, And All That**

---

**Loving People...**

---

**On Relationships, And All That**

---

The end of all things is at hand; therefore keep sane and sober for your prayers. Above all hold unflinching your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another. As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies; in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. [1 Peter 4:7-11]

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But if any one has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth. [1 John 3:16-18]

And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who keep his commandments abide in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us. [1 John 3:23-24]

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. [1 John 4:7-12]
What would Jesus wear? Or...

This is only my impression, but I tend to believe that Christians tend to fall into two major categories: people who wear “Christian Tees” and people who would not be caught dead in one. I promise to try to remain completely objective in this article and not let slip that I fall into the second category.

It’s not that I don’t wear Tees with slogans on them. I have one from despair.com that I love. It’s message is simple and to the point:

But wear Tees with “Christian” slogans? No.

A friend of mine—minister and artisan Mark Weathers of Providence Presbyterian (Concord, NC)—mentioned the topic in a sermon and then later, in a letter to his congregation. From which I extract a couple of quotes:

> It is so easy in our freedom-of-speech country to flippantly speak out against authority and those in positions of leadership. This nonchalant attitude has so influenced the church to a point that we don’t think twice about what we say (or wear) when it comes to Christ. He is the King of Kings, and at the sight of him both Isaiah and John were driven to the ground in absolute humility. They didn’t bow because it was the proper thing to do. No, they bowed because they couldn’t do anything else—not even look at him. And it wasn’t until they experienced the touch of grace that gave them the ability to stand in God’s presence. On the point of Christian t-shirts, there are so many today that flaunt the obnoxious flippancy we have before God. Our allegiance to

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Which category of Christian do you fall in concerning “Christian” Tees? Why? What is your impression of the people in the other category?

2. How can these two categories co-exist in the sort of loving fellowship Christ requires of his followers?

3. Weathers claims some of the slogans on “Christian Tees” involve “stealing.” Do you agree? Why or why not?

4. What slogans, or types of slogans, do you wear—or would you wear—on a tee? Why?

5. Weathers says that “Christian” slogans based on company logos is a form of stealing. Do you agree? Why or why not?

6. If you were required to design a “Christian” Tee that you would be willing to wear, what would the slogan (and/or image) be?

7. What are the dangers when Christian witness is based on a slogan? What are the advantages? How should we sort out the pros and cons?
Should Christians Wear This Sh**t?

Discerning Christians should probably reflect on the wisdom of wearing “Christian Tees.” On the one hand, it’s just a shirt; on the other we are intentionally saying something to the watching world about our faith. Do such slogans and images cheapen the gospel? Or do they alert our friends and neighbors that we take our faith seriously and commend it to them?

Note: See full article [on page 27].