



Dr. Fred Schwarz

# The Schwarz Report



Dr. David Noebel

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## Our 51st Year!

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#### The Schwarz Report Bookshelf

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And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead expose them. Ephesians 5:11

## Morals in Collision

by David A. Noebel and Chuck Edwards

“It’s taking everything you’ve learned from your parents and school and finding out what works for you and what you have to offer. The important question is, ‘What feels right for you?’”<sup>1</sup>

—Actor Brad Pitt

“...growing up with my sister (older sister Tanya is gay), I learned that whether it be her being with women or men being with other men, there’s never a wrong or a right thing about it. Society has never played a part in my beliefs.”<sup>2</sup>

—Actress Kristanna Loken

“The complete moral gridlock over moral issues such as abortion, euthanasia, and homosexuality, a gridlock that seems to make peaceful coexistence impossible in our culture, is ultimately caused by two rival moral universes colliding.”<sup>3</sup>

—Benjamin Wiker

“In a world of postmodern fad,” sings popular recording artist, Jewel, “What was good now is bad. It’s not hard to understand. Just follow this simple plan: Follow your heart, your intuition. It will lead you in the right direction. Let go of your mind. Your intuition is easy to find. Just follow your heart, baby.”<sup>1</sup> Jewel’s song, “Intuition,” is a lucid expression of popular culture’s view that truth is what *you* believe and morality is what *feels* right to you.

According to researcher George Barna, this “follow your heart” mentality has left its mark on today’s teenagers. As Barna disclosed in his book, *Real Teens*, “Seven out of 10 teens say there is no absolute moral truth, and 8 out of 10 claim that all truth is relative to the individual and his or her circumstances.”<sup>2</sup> But Barna’s investigation into the teenage mind also turns up a puzzling twist. While “three-quarters of teens agree that you can tell if something is morally right by whether it works in your life,” the same majority asserts the opposing idea that “the Bible provides practical, defined standards by which we should live our lives.”<sup>3</sup> This state of confusion reveals the inner struggle the current generation faces when confronted with the question of what is morally right—Is it my way or God’s way?

Jewel’s song begs an answer to the question, “Is that view true?” Which leads to a more fundamental question, “What is truth?” This issue has been around a long time. It was Pontius Pilate’s question as he interrogated Jesus on capital charges (see John 18:38), and as we mentioned earlier, in a more contemporary setting it was Truman’s question to

“Dwell on the past and you’ll lose an eye; forget the past and you’ll lose both eyes.” Old Russian Proverb

Christof when he asked, “Was nothing real?” To respond to this fundamental philosophical query, we need to make a distinction between two different kinds of truth. The first relates to the existence of absolute truth, and the second involves the reality of whether or not there are universally true moral absolutes. As a foundational element of their worldview, Cosmic Humanists have an answer.

### Truth Is Relative

Thirty-year veteran professor of classic literature, Allan Bloom, in his book, *The Closing of the American Mind*, writes “There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative.”<sup>4</sup> The idea that truth is relative is the fruit of both a secular worldview and a Cosmic Humanist mentality. If there is no God, there is no basis for absolute knowledge. All that remains are man’s ideas, and “who’s to say which of man’s conflicting ideas are right?” Even what we think of as scientific “truths” are often revealed to be false when new discoveries are made. The conclusion atheists reach is that “truth” is simply what individuals or society happens to believe at the moment. In other words, truth is relative to the times.

The other side of the relativistic coin is New Age pantheism. With pantheism, the starting point is cosmic evolution—the view that the Universe-that-is-God is changing and growing—so that our concept of truth also changes and grows over time. To the Cosmic Humanist, “truth” is not an objective article “out there” that we must discover, but instead “truth” is understood as something very personal, discerned through one’s feelings—*intuition*, as Jewel says. That’s why *Star Wars* Jedi Master and spiritual advisor Yoda instructs Luke not to use his rational mind, but instead to “*feeeel* the Force.” This internal focus means something may be true for one person and yet not be true for all people. The common slogan reflecting this view is, “That may be true for you, but not for me.”

New Age promoter Neale Donald Walsch agrees. In his book, *Conversations with God*, Walsch writes:

(God is speaking) “I do not communicate by words alone. In fact, rarely do I do so. My most common form of communication is through *feeling*. *Feeling is the language of the soul*. If you want to know what’s true for you about something, look to how you’re *feeling* about it.... Hidden in your deepest feelings is your highest truth.”<sup>5</sup> (Italics in the original)

How does Walsch know God was communicating these feelings to him? He recounts that in 1992 he was depressed and wrote a letter to God to vent his anger and confusion,

when, “To my surprise, as I scribbled out the last of my bitter, unanswerable questions and prepared to toss my pen aside, my hand remained poised over the paper, as if held there by some invisible force. Abruptly the pen began *moving on its own*. I had no idea what I was about to write, but an idea seemed to be coming, so I decided to flow with it.” Out came a response from God, in first person singular!<sup>6</sup> “Before I knew it,” Walsch continues, “I had begun a conversation... and I was not writing so much as *taking dictation*. That dictation went on for three years...<sup>7</sup> Walsch believes this unique experience is evidence of God communicating with him. This method of communication with the spirit world—called automatic writing—is not new. It is a traditional means used by psychics over the years to receive information from spirit guides and those who have passed on to “the other side.”

What is the content of God’s communication? According to Walsch, God said, “...not all feelings, not all thoughts, not all experience, and not all words are from Me... The challenge is one of discernment... *Mine is always your Highest Thought, your Clearest Word, your Grandest Feeling. Anything less is from another source.*”<sup>8</sup> He goes on to define these highest thoughts, clearest words, and grandest feelings as joy, truth, and love.

How do we know these thoughts or feelings are God’s ideas? Walsch explains, “You should apply it and see what works. Incidentally, put every other writing that claims to be a communication from God to the same test.”<sup>9</sup> The reason Walsch gives for believing what he writes is pragmatism—because it works. The pragmatic approach to truth is summarized in the popular slogan, “It works for me.” As Christians who are concerned about matters of truth, how should we interact with people who have embraced this New Age concept of truth?

### Responding to Relativism

While the “it works for me” mentality may sound compelling—meditating on joy and love and all good things—a thinking person must face a central question: “Does pragmatism offer a reliable way to determine what is true?” We suggest that it does not.

As a way of determining truth, pragmatism has many pitfalls. It fails, first, because it provides no clear guidelines to measure “what works.” For example, having an abortion may “work” for the woman who is pregnant because the procedure eliminates a “problem” pregnancy, yet it does not answer the question of whether it was right for the unborn child. And after having an abortion—sometimes days, sometimes years later—many women feel extreme remorse and depression over the choice they made. In those cases, it may be the

abortion that “worked” for them in the first circumstance now no longer “works.” Or, what if someone is seeking to love others, and the love is not reciprocated, but instead hatred and violence is returned? Does love “work” in that case? What is the loving thing to do when one is being physically assaulted, or an assault is on one’s sibling, or spouse, or parent, or neighbor?

While at first glance Walsch’s pragmatism may seem to confirm God’s voice, upon closer inspection it becomes unworkable, a mumbo jumbo of sweet sounding platitudes that make no contribution to solving the nitty-gritty issues of real life. With no objective criteria to judge between what works and what does not, we are left with only personal feelings. Can it be that personal feelings are not a solid foundation for determining what is actually true? If not, what is?

At this point we need to help our relativistic friends understand the distinction between what philosopher Mortimer Adler calls “matters of truth” and “matters of taste.”<sup>10</sup> Matters of taste are expressions of personal preference, and include statements like the following:

- Papa John’s has the best pizza.
- I like vanilla ice cream.
- *The Lord of the Rings* was an excellent film.

Matters of truth, on the other hand, are statements of fact that correspond to reality. For example:

- Abraham Lincoln was the 16<sup>th</sup> president of the United States.
- That Lexus SC sport convertible is red.
- 2 plus 2 equals 4.

Cosmic Humanists muddle the distinction between taste and truth. For instance, if a Christian says, “Jesus is the Son of God,” the response by many in our society is, “Well, that may be true for you, but not for me.” This places the Christian’s claim on par with the comment, “I like vanilla ice cream.” But the Christian is not making a remark about his or her personal preference. Regarding Christ, a statement of preference would be, “I like Jesus.” The factual truth claim about Jesus’ deity is in the same category as “2 plus 2 equals 4.” Either the claim is true, or it is false. It would be silly to say that “2 plus 2 equals 4 may be true for you but not for me.” The confusion about which sort of statement is being made is a category fallacy—placing the statement in the wrong grouping of ideas.

But contrary to personal preferences, there are ways to validate a truth claim. Despite their sometimes creative mental machinations, people cannot sidestep absolute truth. Simply by making a statement such as, “That is true for you but not for me,” they are admitting to one universal truth: That all truth is relative to the person. But here we find a crucial logical

fallacy. Their truth statement self-destructs. The relative truth claim has the same Achilles’ heel as the statement, “Everything I say is false.” If everything I say is false, then if the statement itself is true, it can’t be because it says my statements are false.

To the one who says “That may be true for you but not for me” we can simply ask, “Is that statement true only for you?” We then can elaborate with the following: “If it is not, and you intend for it to apply to everyone, including me, then you are making an absolute statement that contradicts what you just said. If it is true only for you, then why should I pay attention to your personal preference?”

In the Walsch passage cited above, he asserts that a person’s “highest thoughts” and “grandest feelings” are from God and are linked to joy, truth, and love. Walsch’s unspoken premise is that joy and love are morally good standards by which to distinguish from sorrow and hate. So even while claiming subjective feelings are the ultimate guide to what is true, Walsch unwittingly admits to an absolute standard of truth—that we all can agree on what comprises joy, truth, and love—a standard not based on his personal feelings but a shared, objective reality!

There is another problem with the idea that truth is only what we experience. If truth is nothing more than our personal, subjective experience, then we are limited in what we can know. How, for example, does one *feel* 2 plus 2 equals 4? Or if I have never experienced the electrical charge of an electron or the taste of a boysenberry, does that mean electrons and boysenberries do not exist? These examples reveal the absurdity of the idea that truth is only what can be experienced. Truth must be something other than what we feel.

This leads us to consider what the Bible affirms regarding truth. The Christian view holds that truth is that which corresponds to the facts, or the real world. This “correspondence theory” of truth is discussed by philosopher J. P. Moreland when he writes, “If a thought really describes the world accurately, it is true. It stands to the world in a relation of correspondence.”<sup>11</sup> “In fact,” Moreland continues, “something can be true even if no one has ever thought about it at all. For example, if protons really do exist and have positive charge, then this fact was true during the Middle Ages. But no one knew it was true. . . .”<sup>12</sup> Later, Moreland adds, “Truth does not change. Something either is or is not true.”<sup>13</sup> This is what we mean when we claim that truth is absolute—it is true at all times, in all places, for all people.

The reason that Christians hold to a correspondence concept of truth is because our biblical theology informs us that God created a real universe that exhibits certain laws of

cause and effect (see Genesis chapters 1-2; Job chapters 38-42; Psalm 95:3-5; and Psalm 104).

Also, the Bible affirms that Jesus Christ is the Logos of God, or the Word (John 1:1, 14). Logos, or logic (rational thought) is an attribute of the Godhead from all eternity. God chose to communicate to mankind primarily through language (the written Word) and Jesus Christ (the incarnate Word). Look through the Gospel of Matthew at the number of times Jesus used the phrase, “I tell you the truth...”—it averages one every chapter!

Jesus placed a priority on his teaching ministry when he told his followers “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24-25). Jesus is not referring to a subjective experience here, but an affirmation of his verbal teaching that leads to an objective reality in the after life. In another place, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32). Again, the focus is on his teaching that sets us free, not an inner light or experience. While there is a subjective aspect to what He is saying, i.e., a person feels a sense of emotional peace and freedom when they accept Jesus’ offer of forgiveness, this feeling comes as a *result* of accepting that His words are true. And Jesus discloses the source of truth—God’s word—when he prayed to the Father, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17-18).

In addition, in the book of Acts, the Bereans are held up as a model for Christians to follow as Luke commends their attitude concerning their search for the truth. We read, “Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11). The Bereans were studying the Scriptures to find out if Paul’s words corresponded with God’s words, a demonstration of the correspondence theory of truth. These factors strongly support the case that God communicates truth primarily with words, not feelings.

Some people object to the idea of absolute truth, saying Christians are narrow-minded to claim Christianity is true and all non-Christian systems are false. Yet, Norman Geisler rebuts that idea by noting, “the same is true of non-Christians who claim that what they view as truth is true, and all opposing beliefs are false.”<sup>14</sup> Narrow-mindedness is not the sole territory of Christians. When the relativist says that truth is relative, he is making an absolute truth claim that itself is narrow-minded, since he is excluding every other claim about truth. Truth by definition is narrow. Yes, to say “2 plus 2 equals

4” is a narrow truth. There are countless ways to make that statement false (2 plus 2 equals 5, for starters), but there is absolutely one and only one way it can be true. What we find then, is that every claim by relativists to discredit logic or absolutes fails because they must use logic and their own absolute standard when trying to refute the biblical view.

### **Morals Are Relative**

When on September 11, 2001 terrorists flew commercial jetliners into the twin towers of New York City and a section of the Pentagon in Washington, killing more than 2,700 unsuspecting men, women, and children, Americans unanimously decried the acts as a textbook example of evil. This suggests people do understand intuitively the reality of right and wrong. Yet, when asked the question directly, only a small minority of Americans claim to believe in the existence of absolute moral truth.

The same year of the grim 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Barna Research Group documented that only 22 per cent of adults and 6 per cent of teens affirm moral absolutes. Among Christian young people, the numbers were only slightly higher, with one out of ten “born-again” teenagers holding to a belief in unchanging moral truth.<sup>15</sup> According to these statistics, even those raised in the church are heeding the call of our popular culture that cries out “Morals are relative.” George Barna also noted “the alarmingly fast decline of moral foundations among our young people has culminated in a one-word worldview: ‘whatever.’ The result is a mentality that esteems pluralism, relativism, tolerance, and diversity without critical reflection of the implications of particular views and actions.”<sup>16</sup>

Barna’s research also found that by far the most common basis for moral decision-making is to do whatever feels right or comfortable in a situation. Nearly four out of ten teens (38 per cent) and three out of ten adults (31 per cent) agreed that is their primary consideration. Among adults, other popular means of moral decision-making were: the principles taught in the Bible (13 per cent) and whatever outcome would produce the most personally beneficial results (10 per cent). Teenagers were slightly different. One out of six (16 per cent) said they make choices on the basis of whatever would produce the most beneficial results for themselves, and just 7 per cent said their moral choices were based on biblical principles.

This view of moral relativism, according to Christian authors Frank Beckwith and Greg Koukl, asserts “there are no universally objective right or wrong answers, no inappropriate or appropriate judgments, and no reasonable or rational ways by which to make moral distinctions that apply in every time, in every place, and to every person... only subjective opinions exist, which are no different from one’s feelings about

a favorite football team, movie star, or ice cream flavor.”<sup>17</sup> This attitude is reflected in fashionable buzzwords, slogans, and pat answers, such as: “Don’t push *your* morality on me!” or “Who are *you* to judge?”

As with relativistic thinking about the nature of truth, moral relativism grows from either an atheistic or pantheistic worldview. If there is no God or if the individual is the ultimate authority, there is no transcendent moral law. One simply creates his or her own moral paradigm and this, of course, can and will change from individual to individual, making morality a subjective experience, dependent solely on the person.

To build their case for moral relativism, many secularists argue that the human moral impulse can be explained through atheistic, Darwinian evolution. That is, an ethical standard has evolved over time that gives *Homo sapiens* a selective advantage, leading to increased survivability. Groups of hominids that did not develop the “moral” gene have been largely eliminated from the gene pool. As zoologist Richard Dawkins puts it, “We are survival machines, robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes.”<sup>18</sup>

A similar line of reasoning comes from a pantheistic position, except here cosmic evolution posits a changing, growing universe-which-is-god and in which man participates as a drop in the cosmic consciousness. In this scenario Walsch reminds us, “true morality as an unchanging, objective criteria does not exist. It *cannot* in any evolving society, for the nature of evolution itself is change.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the conclusion of both atheists and pantheists is that morals are relative.

The issue of what is moral can be boiled down to two basic choices. To quote Beckwith and Koukl, “Morality is either objective, and therefore absolute in some sense, and universal, or not objective, and therefore personal and subjective, mere opinion. These are the only choices.”<sup>20</sup> How then, do we defend a biblical view of moral absolutes against the growing tide of relativism?

### Responding to Moral Relativism

The first step in defending a Christian view of ethics requires showing how other views are not valid. When someone says all morals are relative, the simplest way to deflate that idea is to ask, “Relative to what?” As soon as anyone attempts to answer that question by giving a fixed reference point, he or she has just provided an “absolute” standard and thus ceases to be a relativist!

Another way to help people realize they actually do believe in moral absolutes is to take from them something they value, like a wallet or CD player. When they object to this action, turn the tables and ask, “Why are you upset? You’re not trying to force *your* morality on *me*, are you?” When it

comes to things people hold dear, all become moral absolutists! Isn’t it interesting, while some claim not to know what is always just, right, or fair, they seem to know innately what isn’t just, right and fair when it affects them personally.

To critique the “ethics have evolved” argument, the biblical thinker can point out three major flaws. First, the argument itself assumes at least one moral absolute—it is good to do that which will aid in the survival of one’s species. But if there is one absolute, it is possible there could be others, which, in either case, means moral relativism is false.

Second, the “ethics have evolved” story can give only *descriptive* accounts of what is right and wrong, but cannot be *prescriptive*. In other words, it can loosely explain why people have behaved a certain way in the past—description—but it cannot explain why we should behave in a particular way in the future—prescription. It begs the question, “Why should I not steal or murder tomorrow if it aids my survival?” Yet, what our *intuition* (to borrow Jewel’s term) actually tells us is there are some things people *ought* to do or not do. We ought not steal, murder, rape, or pillage.

And third, “ethics as evolution” cannot account for moral laws that seem to stand contrary to the notion of “survival of the fittest.” For example, rape could be considered a productive way to ensure the survival of the human race, yet civil societies universally restrain its citizens from this act and severely punish rapists, citing ethical concerns as a justification for passing judgment.

Even an atheist such as Princeton’s Peter Singer (who believes we have evolved into rational beings<sup>21</sup>), acknowledges the fact that “we cannot do without all our ethical principles” and if we base ethics on the free use of biological and cultural explanations this “would leave us in a state of deep moral subjectivism.”<sup>22</sup> Therefore, Professor Singer tries to find a basis for morality in the principle of utilitarianism (a moral action is one that brings about the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people).

One of Singer’s books, *Practical Ethics*, is widely used as a college text for ethics courses. In it, he teaches that all “persons” should be treated equally, but he defines a “person” as a being that is rational and self-aware. Of course, on this definition, cows and chickens are persons and unborn humans and infants less than 3 or 4 months old are not. Given his ethical absolute of utilitarianism, Singer argues it is morally right to kill a severely disabled new-born since that action will bring about more happiness for the parents by relieving them of the emotional stress and financial strain of caring for a handicapped child.

Yet, as it turns out, Peter Singer cannot practice what he

teaches. During an interview with *The New Yorker*, Singer admits to spending considerable amounts of money on nursing care for his elderly mother who is suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Peter Berkowitz explains,

After all, Singer's mother has lost her ability to reason, and to remember, and to recognize others. She has ceased to be a person in her son's technical sense of the term. In these circumstances, Singer's principles surely require him to take the substantial sums of money that he uses to maintain her in comfort and in dignity and spend them instead to feed the poor and save the lives of innocent children.<sup>23</sup>

This brings us to the foremost problem with moral relativism: It is incongruent with how we actually live and think. People everywhere (even ethical relativists) cannot get away from the idea that *they* ought to be treated with compassion, justice, and truthfulness—values that presuppose a transcendent and objective moral law. Yet, according to their worldview, there is no source from which this moral code originates. Starting from the atheist's position, where nature is all there is, we find no "moral law" written into the universe of molecules in motion. As for the pantheist's view of reality, if God is everything, evil is as much a part of God as is good. Thus, there is no standard of goodness by which to evaluate what is considered evil. Moral judgments become impossible in the Cosmic Humanist universe.

Whether they recognize it or not, it is impossible for ethical relativists to live consistently with their own moral position. This chink in the relativist's armor can be used to pry open their minds and let in a glimmer of the reality of a transcendent moral law given by a moral Lawgiver. A biblical worldview informs us about this knowledge of right and wrong that is built deep into the structure of our minds. Paul says as much in Romans 2:15, "[Non-believers] show that the work of the law is written on their hearts. Their consciences testify in support of this, and their competing thoughts either accuse or excuse them." Or, as Professor J. Budziszewski puts it, there are things "we can't not know."<sup>24</sup>

As image-bearers of God, all people have an innate sense of right and wrong, an "oughtness" associated with behavior. This accounts for the goodness we observe in others, the acts of kindness and generosity. But on the other hand, we find people ignoring these absolute standards of goodness, result-

ing in acts of hatred and violence. Only the biblical worldview explains what we actually see lived out in the world around us, the moral lapses as well as the moral heroism. We know instinctively it is always wrong to murder your fellow human being, to steal his wife, to covet his home and car! Isn't it always wrong to steal from a blind man's cup and torture children? On the other hand, we know it is always morally right to love your neighbor as yourself, to be the Good Samaritan instead of the thief or Pharisee. And it is always right to love your Creator who created you with a rational mind and moral conscious.

The Christian understands that everyone's view of truth and morality ultimately rests on a theological foundation. Secular Humanists and postmodernists begin with atheism, and Cosmic Humanists begin with pantheism, but they both lead to various forms of moral relativism. Christianity, on the other hand, begins with theism, a moral order based on the nature of God and moral imperatives—love God and your neighbor as yourself (Luke 10:27).

### Conclusion

In a May 2003 Gallup survey, Americans are nearly three times as likely to say moral values in the United States are getting worse (67 per cent) than better (24 per cent). In another survey, Gallup asked respondents if they felt that various institutions in society are currently doing a good job in raising the moral and ethical standards of the nation. Although "the church or religious leaders" topped the list, this response received only a 29 per cent "good job" rating. The even sadder news is that this number is *down* from 36 per cent in 1994. At the same time, 60 per cent of Americans believe that the church and religious leaders *could* have a significant influence on raising the moral standards in America.<sup>25</sup> This means that the majority of Americans are looking to the church to set the pace in bringing about a moral revival in our nation.

George Barna comments on the importance of teaching morals within a biblical worldview when he writes, "Christian families, educators and churches must prioritize this matter if the Christian community hopes to have any distinctiveness in our culture. The virtual disappearance of this cornerstone of the Christian faith. . . is probably the best indicator of the waning strength of the Christian Church in America today."<sup>26</sup>

The waning strength of the church's moral influence on society should be a wake-up call to all Christians who take

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God's cultural commission seriously. Are you prepared to defend a biblical Christian view of absolute truth and morality in your schools, your place of employment, and the political arena? To do so is part of your Christian call to be salt and light in our increasingly immoral and dark culture. Make plans to prepare yourself for this important task. As Paul reminds us, "let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary" (Galatians 6:9).

As our founders understood so well, when it comes to the connection between morality and a free and civil society, the future of our nation is at stake. George Washington gave a "Farewell Address" to the nation after his second term in office. The principles he invoked ring as true today as when he first spoke them 200 years ago. Washington emphasized the importance of morality based on religion, and he was clearly referring to Christianity, not some vague New Age spirituality of self. We quote him at length so you can appreciate the context and reflect on the significance of his words for educating today's young people and the generations yet to come: "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness—these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. The mere poli-

tician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked, 'Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice?' And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

It is substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government. The rule indeed extends with more or less force to every species of free government. Who that is a sincere friend to it can look with indifference upon attempts to shake the foundation of the fabric?"<sup>27</sup>

—This article by your editor and Chuck Edwards is a chapter in *Countering Culture: Arming Yourself to Confront Non-Biblical Worldviews*. *Countering Culture* is a 13-week curriculum study available through Broadman and Holman Publishers or Summit Ministries, PO Box 207, Manitou Springs, CO 80829, 719-685-9103, or [www.summit.org](http://www.summit.org). A complete list of **Endnotes** can be found at [www.schwarzreport.org](http://www.schwarzreport.org).

## 80 Million Christians Underground

by Jason Lee Steorts

I meet Qiu Yue and her friend Yang Jie at an average-looking restaurant [in Beijing]. Qiu has chosen the place precisely because it is unremarkable. Our meeting must have a low profile: Qiu and Yang's safety would be jeopardized if the authorities knew they were having lunch with a Western journalist. In fact, Qiu fears that her security has already been compromised. She suspects that her phone has been tapped, and knows that her e-mails, like those of everyone else in China, are screened by software that searches for terms deemed politically sensitive. We have therefore taken precautions: Our phone conversations have been short and vague, and in our e-mails we have made a habit of writing "C" instead of Christian, "B" instead of Bible. Probably we have avoided detection. But one cannot be sure.

Qiu and Yang (which are pseudonyms) belong to "house churches" here in the capital. A house church is a Protestant Christian assembly that is illegal, having refused to register with the Chinese government and join the Three Self Patriotic

Movement, the Communists party's umbrella Protestant organization. A similar division exists within Chinese Catholicism: The Patriotic Catholic Association, which is controlled by the party, does not recognize the authority of the Pope, while an illegal Catholic church remains loyal to the Vatican and operates underground.

Those unacquainted with contemporary China are often surprised to learn that the Communist party sanctions a kind of Christianity. But this is not surprising when one realizes that many of the Party's propaganda efforts involve the presentation of a simulacrum of genuine freedom. Religion is a case in point. Although the Party remains dogmatically atheist, it permits worship in state-approved churches such as the Three Self Patriotic Movement. But because China's Communists remain hostile to anything that posits a source of authority higher than the political, they carefully control what is taught in these official churches to ensure that the realm of the divine is firmly subjugated to the authority of the Party.

This subjugation manifests itself as a tendency to strip from Christianity its claims to transcendence. "The Three Self Church has never preached Christ's Second Coming," says Qiu. "They don't think that Mary was a virgin. They think Christ had an earthly father." The only kind of Christianity to receive official blessing is thus sundered from many of Christianity's essential

doctrines and reduced to a collection of moral precepts.

The Three Self Church also uses religious instruction as an opportunity for political indoctrination. As an example of this, Qiu adduces the Three Self Church's teachings about Lei Feng, a Chinese peasant-turned-national-hero who was lionized by Mao for his supposed acts of selflessness and political service (acts which, incidentally, many Western historians now believe never happened). The Three Self Church teaches that Lei Feng, in virtue of his service to the country, will go to heaven. The political message of such a teaching cannot be overlooked: Lei Feng is one of the Party's best-known symbols.

"Lei Feng's works focus more on serving the government than on serving Christ," says Qiu. That is an understatement, and Qiu—perhaps because she is accustomed to having to be careful—tends toward moderation in her criticisms of the Chinese government. She even makes a point of telling me that her church prays for Hu Jintao and the Party leadership. But she leaves no doubt that official Chinese Christendom "combines religion and politics," and that she finds this unacceptable: "We want our faith just to be our faith." Some 80 million Chinese Christians feel likewise—and, like Qiu and Yang, have gone underground.

Some of them have been treated with a kind of benign neglect. "The government knows where [our] church meets," says Qiu. "They leave us alone." This is partly a matter of necessity: "If they put everyone in prison there won't be enough room in the jails." Consequently, the government ignores those who keep a low profile. "If we go to Tiananmen Square and preach that Jesus Christ is coming, they'll give us trouble. But we don't do that."

Yang Jie's church, however, has not been so fortunate.

Last September, the pastor of Yang's church, Cai Zhuohua (his real name), was arrested. Police from China's Security Bureau searched his home and a neighboring building that housed a printing press. The owners of the press had cooperated with Cai to print some 230,000 Bibles and religious tracts. The police confiscated all these materials and arrested two young women who were working at the press. They were later released, but remain under watch.

Cai's wife, who was not with her husband at the time of his arrest, fled to a coastal province, but was caught shortly thereafter. Her older brother and his wife were also arrested. They, along with Cai, are still being held incommunicado. The only members of the pastor's immediate family to avoid arrest were his four-year-old son and his 70-year-old mother, who are currently being cared for with donations from church members.

The day after Cai was arrested, an underground seminary associated with his church was also raided. More than 20 policeman surrounded the seminary and arrested its stu-

dents. (Yang, who was enrolled at the seminary, happened to be away at the time, and thus escaped.) Beijing's Public Security Bureau held the students for three days, fined them a hefty amount, and sent them to their home provinces for punishment by local authorities. Yang suspects their punishments have been severe, although he has no way of contacting them.

I ask Yang what will happen to Cai, and he says that no one knows. Cai stands accused of being a "counter-revolutionary." Once tried for this offense—of which he will almost surely be found guilty—he will receive a prison sentence of anywhere between three years and life. While hoping for the best, Yang fears that "he will be punished very heavily."

If the pathos of Cai Zhuohua's story lies in the details of his persecution, the pathos of Christianity in China lies in the fact that these details are altogether ordinary. Over the summer, Western media reported that the task force originally set up to crush Falun Gong was carrying out a crackdown on rural Christians. Stories of arrests were widespread, and included news of the imprisonment of more than a hundred Christians attending a retreat in Chinese Turkestan (Xinjiang). Chinese Christians often meet fates worse than imprisonment. Some are sent to labor camps; others fall victim to the arbitrary brutality of rural officials, as Jiang Zongxiu did. Last June, she was arrested in Guizhou Province for handing out Bibles, and was later beaten to death by police.

But such persecution does not defeat the spirits of China's Christians. Remarkably, Cai Zhuohua's church continues to meet under the direction of Yang Jie, who says that he is not intimidated, and that Cai's example is a motivation for his service. If anything, the crackdown appears to have strengthened Yang's faith: "That we are able to continue under these circumstances shows that God is with us."

Qiu Yue, for her part, hopes to return to her native province of Jilin as her church's first missionary. She now teaches English to middle-school students, and they sometimes ask her about her religion. She answers them. "At my work, they told me, 'Don't speak about Christian ideas to the students; it will be dangerous' . . . But God has given me courage to speak."

Qiu says her church baptizes three or four new members every week. On this very day, her parents have been baptized. Yang's church grows at a similar rate. These facts, along with the remarkable courage of Yang and Qiu, leads one to believe that Christianity will thrive in China despite the Party's oppression. Indeed, Christianity's history demonstrates that it is able to flourish even under the most extreme forms of persecution.

Even as we hope, however, we should remember Cai Zhuohua in his jail cell and take the opportunity to say that there are things that must never be excused.

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