

Truth Matters, Stand Up for Truth

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Editor's Note: This Cape Town 2010 Advance Paper has been written by Carver T. Yu as an overview of the topic to be discussed at the Morning Plenary session on 'Making the Case for the Truth of Christ in a Pluralistic, Globalized World.' Responses to this paper through the Lausanne Global Conversation will be fed back to the author and others to help shape their final presentations at the Congress.

Those of us who live in Asia have for centuries lived with the reality of cultural plurality in general and religious plurality in particular. Yes, we have lived with plurality, but not pluralism. Pluralism has never been an option. Whether you are a Confucianist, or Taoist, Buddhist, Muslim or Hindu, you have an unwavering conviction that what you believe and live by is truth leading to authentic humanity or eternal salvation, and that all other paths would lead at best to an unfulfilled life and at worst to perversion and suffering. Truth matters, for it has life consequences. While respecting others, you nevertheless see it as your responsibility to point them to the right path.

The pluralism in vogue today is entirely different. It is an ideology that proclaims that truth is a cultural construction valid only for the culture that constructs it. It has therefore no bearing on another culture or system of meaning. There is no truth that can claim to be truth for all. All truths are relative to one another. The pluralist pushes the point further from cultures to individuals. The individual is now presumed to be the ultimate ground of reality, the foundation on which meaning and values are created. The postmodern pluralist believes that each and every individual creates her own logic and makes her own rules in constructing her own world of reality and value. The individual is 'autonomous' in the sense that she is the law to herself. As each individual constructs her own world, there can be, therefore, as many worlds as there are individuals, and each is merely a web of beliefs true only to the individual who weaves it. As these individually constructed worlds are each unique to themselves, they are therefore incommensurable to one another. So, despite all the rhetoric about dialogue, pluralism has rendered all dialogues to be unnecessary and futile.

At the same time, as truth is fabricated, it can be re-fabricated at will. It is therefore tentative and fluid, and has no lasting bearing on anything. In condemning all truths to be radically relative and tentative, pluralism has in effect silenced any proclamation of transcendent truth true for all human persons and cultures. In the name of condemning dogmatism, pluralism is nevertheless the most dogmatic of all ideologies as it will frame without hesitation any anti-pluralist concept of truth as dogmatism and exclusivism, and reject it out-right. Pluralism as such is the most virulent kind of monism; it is monism of indifference.

However, it does not take too much critical analysis to see that the pluralist is self-contradicting. In proclaiming pluralism, the pluralist tacitly claims that he stands on a vantage point towering above all cultures or all individuals so as to see their relativity. Yet, miraculously, the vantage point on which he stands is nevertheless absolute. How does he manage to do that? Purely by animal faith and dogmatic claim.

While trivializing truth and framing religious truth as oppressive, the pluralist unashamedly promotes the secularist version of truth, pushing the secular worldview to be true for all. Atheism is allowed to become the new religion and promoted as the embodiment of scientific rationality, objectivity, common sense and inclusiveness. It is now waging a war against religion in general and Christianity in particular with an unprecedented evangelistic zeal and hostility. The 'Atheist Bus Campaign' in London is a good example. In June 2008, comedy writer Ariane Sherine proposed to advertise against the belief in God on London buses saying, 'There is probably no God. Stop worrying. Enjoy your life.' Immediately money poured in, and within four days more than £140,000 was raised. The campaign has now spread to Canada. In a similar advertisement two kids are posted, each pleading

not to be labeled as a Catholic kid or an Atheist kid?;they want to be brought up neutral. In a very subtle way the campaign condemns parents for raising their kids with any conviction of truth. The monism of indifference is tightening its grip on our lives. Yet at the same time, books proclaiming atheism flood the market, with Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* making the biggest splash. It has been translated into 31 languages with more than 1.5 million copies sold. Joan Bakewell, a columnist for the Guardian, sounded forth the battle cry against religion in her praise of the book: "Religions have the secular world running scared. This book is a clarion call to cower no longer" (The Guardian, 23 September 2006). What is the battle all about? It is about taking back the right to define moral values for oneself over against any transcendent boundary. The real issue is how one's life is to be conducted.

Such a secular ideology has consequences. The eclipse of transcendent truth has life implications.

Twenty-one years ago, just months before what happened in Tienanmen Square in Beijing on June 4, Liu Xiao Bo wrote an article about the tragedy of the Chinese people, in which he said, "The tragedy of the Chinese people is a tragedy of a people without God. When the light from the transcendent Other Side has become dimmed, the darkness of this side will easily come to be taken as infinite light." 1. A society without the transcendent light would almost certainly absolutize itself and turn even its darkness into infinite light, as it has no recourse to resources beyond itself for self-critique. A society without the illumination of transcendent truth will sink into the darkness of its own corruption.

Truth has consequences in the personal dimension as well. At Amsterdam 2000, Dr. Ravi Zacharias shared his experience of defending the objectivity of moral truth to a group of Oxford students. When he finished, a student stood up and challenged him. He said, "Dr. Ravi, morality is purely emotive. 'Right' or 'wrong' expresses nothing more than personal preference in an emotional way." Ravi responded, "If that were true, let us put it to a test. Let me put an innocent and helpless baby on this table and chop him up into three pieces with a big knife. Now would you not say that what I have done is wrong?" Calmly the student answered, "No, I would not say that. All I can say is I do not like it." Ravi confessed that he was quite shocked. Alas, if I were there, I would have asked the student, "What if I put you on this table, ready to chop you up into three pieces, would you not say that what I am going to do is wrong and ought to be stopped immediately?" And if he said, "All I can say is, I do not like it," then I would say, "I like it, I like it very much, and I happen to have the power to do it." You know full well the consequences.

Without moral truth, might will become right. Tribal war is inevitable. Without the divine decree that the human person is made in the image of God, affirmed by the Creator to have absolute value and to be absolutely inviolable, why should anyone take the assertion that "all are born equal" seriously? What is the ground for such a belief, which is supposed to be the foundation of democracy? Do we believe this because emotionally we like it? Or do we simply will to believe it out of rational calculation because of self-interest or fear? What if Nietzsche is right, that we invent such hollow statements because we are weak?;we are afraid to let the will to power take over, for we are afraid to face the fact that only the strong and mighty will survive? What ground do we have to refute Nietzsche? The statement is hollow if it is all human invention. Why should I believe that I was born equal to you, as obviously I am genetically endowed to be much smarter and stronger than you? The selfish gene metaphor should then take over, picturing the human person as an autonomous self, liberated from any obligation to any one other than oneself, being driven only by the logic of self-interest for self-perpetuation. Since human persons are not "born equal," the smarter, the stronger and the richer should therefore have more votes in the political process.

If moral values are severed from their transcendent source, then the highest virtue will be nothing but pragmatic function. The value of a person lies entirely in his function in a process, the value of which is measured by his function in a bigger process. In our context, the reality is the global market controlled by global corporations. The value of the human person lies in her marketability or functionality in the market. The person is basically a tool or a commodity to others. Then people like Richard Posner would be absolutely right in telling us in his book, *Sex and Reason*, that there is no

fundamental difference between prostitution and marriage. Marriage is basically long term prostitution. In marriage you have a long term arrangement for the exchange of services between couples, whereas in the case of prostitution, it is a spot-market relationship, where exchange is made by payment the prostitute can use to purchase services from others.

Right before our eyes we see the moral fabric of our social life being torn to pieces, and the human person being depersonalized into a commodity or a set of functions. The exile of transcendent truth will exact a heavy price on us leading to socio-cultural chaos and therefore immense suffering. We cannot but stand up to turn back the tide. We have to preach the truth of the Christian gospel at all costs.

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