
Dialogue

Volume 5 Issue 3

Strength for the church's journey into wholeness in Christ

July 2003

The subject: A Christian "World View"

This is a rather "heady" topic. But some of us talk about this all the time. We are blessed with people who can not only talk about it, they do it professionally! Abraham Lincoln reportedly said that what is taught in the universities in one generation is what the people believe in the next. I would say that this generation bears that out. But it is not just the universities that taught us, it was all the other big institutions, especially the visual media like TV and film.

Although the idea of a "worldview" has not been common throughout history, there is no doubt that the people who wrote the scripture had a way of seeing everything and their ancestors follow in their steps. Around here, we have a sense that our dialogue will help us to keep developing a way of looking at the world and responding to our era as the Holy Spirit continues to lead us through it.

Here is one way the Bible reveals how to see things:

Colossians 2:6-12 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

Here's a way the Bible reveals how to respond:

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

The transformation we have received obviously puts us into some challenging relationships with people. Mary will help us sort them out. Ben and Rod tell us stories about their experiences with the process. And Chris helps us understand how to think it all through.

— Ed.



Ecumenicism(s)

The term "worldview" is full of complexities that make students of religion like myself squirm with delight. How should we go about examining the interplay between differing religions? How should we regard those whose religious lives differ dramatically from ours? Many people who consider these issues often find themselves caught between two inaccurate characterizations of human religious life. The first tendency is towards an oversimplified universalism, or the belief that all religions share essentially the same goals and outcomes beneath apparent cultural differences.

In other words, it is the belief that "all roads lead to Rome," though each road has its different markers and landscapes along the way. Others are inclined towards an irresolvable pluralism; that is, the view that religion is essentially an expression of culture and language, and since there is a vast array of human culture and language, there is also a variety of religions that are relatively equal in value, though separate and different. Extreme pluralism would hold that we are so separate and different from one another that no true commonalities (other than biological) between human beings of different backgrounds can ever be identified.

Even though neither of these common approaches seems to adequately portray the actual situation, we often find ourselves living out one or both of these myths in the practical realm. As evangelically-inclined Christians, we tend to reject total universalism since it obscures the reality of God and Christ. In popular culture, there is often the sentiment that "all religions are basically the same." However, the motive behind such a statement often does not convey a true appreciation for religion as a worthwhile pursuit, but is rather an expression of the apparent irrelevance of the religious life. True, there are those who genuinely believe in a completely "smorgasbord" approach, usually blandly called "spirituality," but even these seemingly open approaches are undergirded by an exclusivity that depends solely on the individual, leaving out community consensus. The result of this type of universalism seems to be the belief that most established religious traditions are motionless museum pieces that sit around and collect dust while the rest of the world moves along with better things to do. We Christians have our own method of combating this particular accusa-

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tion: "It's not a religion, it's a relationship." It seems, however, that we have both, and we lose out by denying one or the other for the sake of apologetics. Our religion finds its roots in our relationship with Christ; indeed, the religious life is worship, which leaves no aspect of our lives uninvolved.

Religion is not an enshrined curio or an attractive performance; it defines us as people. Human beings are fundamentally religious creatures, meaning that we are worshipping creatures; it's what we do, whether or not we are aware of it. This statement has its roots in several centuries of Christian tradition. For many of our most influential church theologians, ranging back at least as far as St. Augustine, the question has not been *whether* we should be religious, but how to be *rightly* religious since our worship shows the orientation of our beings. The specific instructions regarding how to be rightly oriented are not engraved on special plaques in each religion's historical society. All religion changes, all of the time, and "new" ways of being religious are constantly being birthed.

This is not to say that our ways of being religious are fundamentally different from those who have called themselves Christians in times past. Pragmatically, this simply cannot be true. We are all human beings, and as such, we share the common struggles and profundities of human experience. Moreover, as Christians, we believe in an active God who reveals His same nature to peoples of all times and places. What is different, but not incomparably so, are the activities and environs in which Christians have found themselves engaged. If you think about how different the lives of fellow believers in ancient times are from ourselves and from one another (e.g., Ireland, medieval Europe, North Africa, India), it's no wonder that we have such a historical potpourri. (This is not to say, however, that difference precludes any critical look at past behavior and choices.) The environs themselves do not lose their attachment to meaning because they do not match. For example, when was the last time you felt tempted to sacrifice an animal to an idol? We can talk about the principles behind this example and

see the Spirit at work.

I suppose what I'm advocating in this regard is not total universalism, but a type of Christian universalism that is more like ecumenicism. Ecumenicism not only expresses a willingness to acknowledge our differences, but also the desire to realize and build upon our commonness. For North Americans this is particularly crucial, since we live in a world where the majority of believers now live in the Southern hemisphere, in

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places and conditions much different from our own. It is also important here, in our city and our nation, to be able to unite in Christ, the heart of our faith, who provides an anchor and a glue for a fragmenting society that is obsessed with individualism and blind to any stable connecting point. Christian religion must simultaneously center around the person of Jesus, and also recognize the perpetual insufficiency of one's religious activity and worldview. Given the wealth of connecting points between a creatively endowed humanity and an infinitely creative God, the possibilities can vary immensely, at least on a superficial level. Hence the need for a "body" of Christ, beyond our individual persons, beyond our local communities, beyond denominational loyalties, beyond North American evangelicalism, extending

to all believers past and present.

How we regard ourselves in relation to those who do not consider themselves to be Christians is also extremely important. As an approach this question, I would strongly encourage a spirit of *human* ecumenicism. Once again, it seems prudent to avoid the application of the two aforementioned viewpoints: one that sees Christianity as completely and utterly distinct from other religious expressions, and one that sees no difference at all. It has often been our tendency to overlook the actual human beings who embody any two "worlds" we treat as completely separate. One of the strengths of "postmodern" thinking is that it questions the lines we Westerners have rigidly and unnaturally drawn around such things as "worldviews." In other words, it allows us to think beyond stereotypes of nationality, social class, and yes, religion. It helps us to avoid making incorrect and hurtful assumptions about persons simply based on perceived difference that often seem to stem from textbook definitions of who others are "supposed" to be. It forces us to "go deeper" and see people as human beings like ourselves rather than some exotic set of unfamiliar

Dialogue

WHY? *This quarterly journal is a gift to everyone who wishes to be a part of the ongoing dialogue we share in Christ that forms us and deepens us as a real church. Whether you just arrived or have been with us from the beginning, we want you to be part of the conversation and an informed member of the team. We hope you will work with us to build a safe place to experience and share the love of Jesus Christ. Dialogue is a crucial part of that.*

If you would like to respond to any of the articles printed, that would be great. We have never turned a response away, yet — but we reserve the right to do so.

iar criteria. Postmodern social theorists like to say that this "other" status we put on...well...others, is a natural barrier to peace since we refuse to acknowledge a very real relationship, or reference point, that we all share.

I can think of no better way to illustrate this fact, than to point out elements from non-Christian religious practices that have been absorbed by Christians who live in the midst of non-believers. The late Ni Duosheng (or "Watchman Nee") is a wonderful human example of this type of creativity since much of his writing exhibits an amazingly beautiful fusion of Chinese philosophy and Anabaptist theology. The result is not always comfortable for Westerners (probably due to our own theological dalliances with non-Christian philosophies), but today his followers comprise one of the largest networks of Protestant house churches in China and North America. Nevertheless, lest we assume that we are not affected, consider this example: the very profound "centering prayers," practiced by medieval as well as contemporary Western Christians, probably owe a good part of their origins to Indian meditation techniques developed by various schools of Hinduism and Buddhism. Again, this does not mean, as conventional wisdom would have it, that all religions and religious practices are the same. It does, however, seem to indicate that we might even share something "religious" with non-Christians. If the old Christian writers are correct, we all have in common religious, or worshipping, tendencies, even though these tendencies orient themselves in different and more or less beneficial ways.

As peacemakers, we cannot afford to separate ourselves so much on a mistaken assumption that we do not share anything with those who are unfamiliar to us. This is not a time to isolate ourselves, but to find our common ground in our humanity. We can literally see the very violent and damaging wind of racism and ethnocentrism in the world, and it behooves us to seek understanding rather than wholesale condemnation since the practical pluralism of American life is inescapable. Moreover, it is advantageous, if not vital, for us to cooperate with those who

have similar peacemaking aims, even if they are not Christians. Although the reasons may differ, there are strong currents for social justice among people who are as dissimilar religiously as Buddhists and Muslims. Therefore, in this time and place, the ideal worldview is contained in the word: world-view. To see the whole world, to see each other, as the Lord does, is to understand his love for the world and the common existence of human life. This is true religion, and we must constantly humble ourselves to worship thusly.

Mary Ward-Bucher

Jesus, History or Myth?

This last spring I struggled through a class on Christian origins at the University of Pennsylvania. This class was based on the presumption that faith is not necessarily connected to "real" history. In other words, to truly talk about the historical Jesus, you must not let notions of faith govern your understanding of who Jesus was. According to this school of thought the New Testament accounts of Jesus must be understood as being a type of ancient myth, which may or may not be true. It is my conviction that this approach to Scripture as myth does extreme disservice to its standing as a divinely authored historical document, and eliminates its demands for faith.

Read on its own terms, the Scripture demands an account of history that can be trusted as God's Word. For Christians, and the rest of the world, the ontological significance of the cross rests upon the belief that the Gospel accounts are true. Our salvation and place in the kingdom of God rests in the belief that in real history Jesus did, in fact, usher in the renewed Kingdom of God, He really did eat with sinners, heal the sick,

and ultimately take our punishment upon Himself so that we may be part of His renewed family and work.

There is great importance in approaching Scripture on its own terms, as a faith document. The Scripture demands that you either believe or reject its account of history, and God's working within it. This approach runs counter to the humanistic false hope of establishing a true and objective account of history that is separated from the responsibility to submit in faith to the living God. This living God is still acting within our own time! He listens to our prayers, and speaks to us through His holy Word, the Bible.

The act of study, then, becomes an act of worship. In the preface of his book, "The Challenge of Jesus", N.T. Wright says, "Just as integrity demands that we think clearly and rigorously about Jesus himself, so it also demands that we think clearly and rigorously about the world in which we follow him today, the world we are called to shape with the loving, transforming message of the Gospel." When the Holy Scriptures are believed, the historical quest to understand who Jesus was transforms into something much greater. It teaches us not only who Jesus was, but who He is, and how He affects our lives today.

Ben Volta

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Campfires, Presbyterians, Augustinians, and Worldviews

Sitting around a late night Indiana campfire with some old college friends recently, I had occasion to hear these words escape the mouth of a doggedly Presbyterian friend: “I’m more Augustinian than I am modern or postmodern.” The comment came in the context of a discussion of a book that suggested ways in which Christians might constructively engage contemporary culture. What my friend was saying was basically this: My faith stands beyond culture and worldview. As a follower of Jesus, I’m able to transcend any intellectual and ideological allegiances my time and place throw at me. The particular school of theology to which he aligned himself was irrelevant. He might as well have said, “I’m more Anabaptist than I am . . .” or “I’m more Wesleyan than I am . . .”

What, exactly, is a *worldview*? As Christians, is it possible to transcend the perspectives of our contemporaries? Do Christians of the 21st century think in the same ways, use the same mental and social categories as their cohorts in the 2nd or 1st centuries?

First things first. What, exactly, is a worldview?

In his 1976 book, *The Universe Next Door*, James W. Sire defines a worldview as “a set of ideas composed of a number of basic presuppositions, more or less consistent with each other, more or less consciously held, more or less true.” Worldviews, he says, “are generally unquestioned by those who hold them . . . and only brought to mind when challenged by someone from another ideological universe.”

Sire says that the collective an-

swers to seven key questions make up any worldview:

- What is prime reality—the really real?
- What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?
- What is a human being?
- What happens to a person at death?
- Why is it possible to know anything at all?
- How do we know what is right and wrong?
- What is the meaning of human history?

There is nearly unanimous agreement among social observers that we stand today at a juncture between 2 distinct worldviews. On one hand, there is modernity — a worldview with its roots in the secular Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution — and on the other hand, there is post-modernity — a perspective rooted in non-mechanistic post-Einsteinian theories of relativity and hyper-modern forms of communication technology.

In many respects, the two visions of the world share much in common: both are rooted in a dogged materialism. Neither is optimistic about life after death, viewing such hope as a counter-productive escape from oppressive social and material conditions or as private psychological solace in a publicly cruel world. For both perspectives, “meaning” in human history remains illusory at best. And in their pure forms, both stand against the idea of God, or even of transcendence.

Christians grappling with the significance of this shift in ideology and culture have taken one of two approaches. One approach, exemplified by David Wells’ *No Place for Truth (or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology)* and *God in the Wasteland*, has tended to encourage followers of Jesus to retreat to a pre-modern, neo-medieval reaffirmation of a creed-based Christian theology. Others, such as Brian

McLaren (author of *A New Kind of Christian* and *The Story We Find Ourselves In*), have embraced the death of modernity and notions of abstract truth, encouraging Christians to see the rise of post-modernity as an opportunity to assert the narrative-based community of faith, separated from the intellectually arrogant foibles of modernity that too easily seduced the Church.

What to make of such perspectives? Can college-educated, middle-class Westerners claim to be “more Augustinian” than they are modern (or post-modern, for that matter)? Hardly. Our faith is always contextualized by the culture we live in. Our challenge as Christians is not to yearn for some Christian-compatible intellectual glory days of yesteryear. Instead, we are called to live out our faith in our time and place, discerning where our Christian worldview resonates with — and resists—the spirit of the age.

Chris Hickey

I had the pleasure of being asked to Reacting to the Reactive

participate in the Roxbury Holiness Camp meeting on Missions Day this week. As I drove from Philadelphia through Harrisburg to the camp, I truly enjoyed reacquainting myself with the part of PA in which I used to serve. Once at camp, I also reacquainted myself with many of the people with whom I served. It was like a homecoming, in a way. I was tempted to drop the “g” on my gerunds, start saying “y’all” and begin mixing “left” and “leave” again. Once reacquainted and speaking the vernacular, I experienced comments on my haircut and my clothes and my ways that reminded me that I could be identified as an outsider (though fondly). Being seen as an intriguing visitor was something *more* I began to remember as part of my Central PA sojourn. So I had some good feelings of settling into a culture and the world view that goes

with it and some uncomfortable feelings about being on the outside of one.

I was on the docket as a “missionary” in “the city,” which also reminded me that I may as well have been serving in a foreign country as far as many of those attending were concerned. Many in the denomination, which has been in PA since the 1780’s, still see “the city” as a dark, foreign place! Thank God the woman who was interviewing me in front of the crowd of over 500 (Grace Holland, who was a part of the work team that painted the ball room in the Northwest) had the grace to say, “You know, we will all spend eternity in the city. The Bible begins in a garden, but it all ends in a city.”

From my vantage point the whole scene felt rather warm, if a little retro. I felt loved, if odd. But I am still flabbergasted when my whole denomination seems to see “us” as having a “foreign” mission to the city! After all, I have been one of “us” for 20 years and came from a Los Angeles suburb four times the size of Harrisburg! Technically, we are very cosmopolitan, but the old worldview holds sway.

Others in this issue of the *Dialogue* have tried to explain a little about what “worldview” might mean and why it might be important to scrutinize one’s own and the view that runs our church. I want to briefly exemplify how to form one by acting out my own process. And I want to do that by complaining about how others teach Christians to form one.

While I was driving, I also had the time to tune into two variant forms of radio that I hardly ever hear: country and Christian. The country station had a couple of tear-jerking songs that hit me so hard I almost pulled over and had a good cry on the Turnpike. At the same time they had a song about defending the war in Iraq asking, “Have you forgot-en Osama bin Lad-en?”

The Christian radio was more disturbing. I couldn’t listen too long because the bad guilt, anger and fear began to rise in me. The country folk were gentler than the Christian folk. The Christians seemed mad at everyone and “loaded for bear,” as we say back home. Homosexuals, terrorists, people who won’t let you pray in schools, and

people who “don’t agree with the principles of God’s word I am telling you” – they are all out to get “us.” I was sort of surprised at how sarcastic the commentators sounded – too much talk radio?

Excerpts from the following article (that was originally a radio spot, I think) come from one of the com-

I am still shocked that any follower of Jesus could not see the best of both the political “left” and the “right.” I still don’t know how the politicians got “us” to *lean* at all. I don’t think there are many places we could not find the grace of God at work or many places we could not identify the fallen condition of humans and their institutions.

mentary machines I heard on Christian radio. I’m not sure who the “Probe” people are, and they didn’t explain why I should be listening to them. They just put out their stuff in a “Christian” context and assumed they were providing a corrective to any believer tempted to fall in line with the enemy. Since I like movies, this little article, especially, made me think twice. It is about the Academy Award nominees for best picture in 2000. Maybe you have seen most of them by now. I’ll indent the pieces of the article with a bullet and then add my comments bit by bit, below each excerpt:

• **Hollywood’s View of the World** *April 5, 2000,*
by Kerby Anderson

Anyone who doubts that Hollywood leans to the left and views the world through a secular lens, need only look at the recent Academy Award nominees. Nearly every picture presented a liberal, secular, humanistic view of the world that challenged traditional morality and biblical Christianity.

I am still shocked that any follower of Jesus could not see the best of both the political “left” and the

“right.” I still don’t know how the politicians got “us” to *lean* at all. I don’t think there are many places we could not find the grace of God at work or many places we could not identify the fallen condition of humans and their institutions. Spending much time defending against those who challenge my “tradition” or my “-ity” seems like a waste of time. I’m no artifact. Challenge me for who I am and what I create, not who we *were* and what we *created*.

1 Timothy 4:9-10 This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe.

- *American Beauty* presented a dysfunctional suburban family and in the process challenged traditional notions about family and sexuality.

BUT it could also find beauty within a dancing piece of trash. Which may often be necessary.

1 Corinthians 1:26 Think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.

- *The Cider House Rules* told an engaging story of an orphanage in Maine in the 1940s. But the story was really about abortion and the philosophical pilgrimage of a young protégé who eventually embraced his mentor’s view about abortion and choice.

Mostly true. BUT I loved the love of Michael Caine getting Tobey Maguire to devote himself to saying good night to the orphans that way (“Goodnight, you Princes of Maine, you Kings of New England”). It was also about abused and immoral people doing good things. I don’t advocate being a sinner. But it is still true that Circle of Hope depends on

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sinner miraculously receiving and doing good things.

1 Corinthians 1:28-9 God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

- *The Green Mile* challenged the biblical perspective on capital punishment and questioned the wisdom and justice of the death penalty.

BUT you'd have to admit that our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world question it, too — as might any idealist who thinks we actually have a democracy and doesn't want to have murder on their hands. Plus, Jesus was the recipient of a fallen government's death penalty, right? What's more, didn't Christians in Philly help create a penitentiary (as in repentance) devoted to redemption?

Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

- *The Sixth Sense* questioned conventional biblical concepts about death and the afterlife.

Well, it did do that. BUT Haley Joel Osment, who saw dead people, had such great compassion for them and such an understanding of the unfinished business that keeps many of us walking around like the living dead.

2 Corinthians 5:1-5 Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling...so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

- And *The Insider* accused U.S. corporations of crimes against humanity.

This line sounds like I should have put a BUT in front of it! The crimes were not just against humanity, I might add, they were against God. Making a movie that

takes the reality of the powers that be and their fallen nature seriously is a great thing. May we all see our chains and trust Christ to break them.

Ephesians 6:12-13 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground.

I suppose I may sound a little disingenuous, complaining about people who make all their points by complaining. I admit to reacting to their reacting. Sometimes the dialogue is like that. I think dialogue with God and with the fellow believers is how our worldview stays fresh. A movie, a radio piece about movies, even this quarterly journal in which you may recognize most of the writers and be able to test their integrity may not be the best place of dialogue. But face to face in a cell or on a team, pulling towards Spirit-led mission objectives — that's a good place.

I can't find much rest in debating world views. I need to live one revealed by Jesus. I have been transferred to the kingdom of God and I live there. Locally, that's you and me as Circle of Hope. Daily, that's having people bump into Rod and meeting a child of God.

Rod White

In 1999 we had an issue of the *Dialogue*

Readers Respond

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"The Arts." (Isn't it great that we have survived and grown since 1999?!) In that issue, Ty Furman gave some of his thoughts on how he is a Christian and an artist. They give you some idea of his worldview. Also, in some ways, perhaps, Steve Hoke's journey through that territory reflects Ty's. So here is a

little flashback before Steve shares... — Ed.

From: **"My Struggle with Faith and Art"**

I take both my artistry and my faith very seriously. I rely on both to carry me through this world and to process what it has to offer me. It is a struggle, but I have found that I have no choice, so I have a few foundational issues that I constantly remind myself of in order to remain faithful to both my God and my art.

- I cannot fear the world. My God is sovereign and reigns over the good and the bad, and even the good is broken. The war is over, we still battle, but the victory is ours.
- I am not merely an individual. I live in community - the most important of which is my Christian community, my church and friends of faith. I share with them. I expect them to support and challenge me, and I them.
- I work it out for each individual project in which I am involved. Sometimes that takes a great deal of work, sometimes not much. Life is huge and has a great deal to teach us. I am always learning, about art, faith and life.
- I know that I live in a state of grace. I am free to fail. I do fail. And I will continue to fail. Christ is still Lord and I am still God's child. And when I fail I am forgiven.

Just for clarification - I do not try or expect to fail. I work toward and expect to win, to figure it out, to faithfully be a Christian and a theatre artist at the same time, without compromising either. I find that difficult. But for me, both are worth the struggle.

A Balancing Act **By Steve Hoke**

The last of the crawfish in black bean sauce had just slipped from my chopsticks when the question came: "You're an artist right?" I knew there was more, and I knew my crawfish would get cold, but I dove in with a solid "Yep." As I had expected the chopsticks were laid down and a conversation far thicker than the black bean sauce began. My friend

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wanted to know how I could balance my Christian beliefs with the assumed beliefs of the artistic community.

The first part of the conversation that needed attention was two basic assumptions: first, that my Christian beliefs were the same as hers, and second, that the artistic community was devoid of them. Interestingly enough, she had excluded me from the second community but lumped me with the first.

I think it's fair to lump me with the first group. I am a Christian, have been for a while. Youth group, worship teams, Messiah College, trips overseas, and several other touchstones are on my Christian resume to solidify the commitment. As for the second community, theater productions, performance installations, and even music shows in...brace yourself... bars have created a solid professional resume. With all of this involvement I have been prompted several times to consider the balancing question. That question normally starts with the issue of time management. Then the issues become more obscure, such as: is this environment good for me to be a part of daily? will I drink heavily if I go to bars? will I succumb to an unhealthy lifestyle? Each new decision brings more information to add to the discussion and still no strong answers.

But there has been one strong change over the past three years. I have been shown a community that not only encourages the question of balance, but also expects to find a solution. Circle of Hope, the Brethren in Christ contingent in Philadelphia, has welcomed me and then asked me to be an artist. They have invited me to be artistic not only in the music, readings, or visual art that happen during our worship meetings, but they have expected that I be an artist in the rest of my time as well. Professors at Messiah introduced the idea of holistic education, and some modeled the attitude that all of life can be intertwined and still be honestly following Christ's guidance. But few of my professors expected as much of me as my friends at Circle.

The body at Circle lets me know what they expect from their questions and use of time. They want to know where I am playing, where my art is happening, and how they can support me. All of this seems very natural. There is nothing new or strange about having my friends from church interested in my life and how I use my time.

All through my growing up years I was surrounded by people from church supporting and encouraging my new ideas and activities. During the high school band years there were always plenty of church friends that kept informed and came to support us. Then when I began playing at coffee shops and through college people continued to ask how things were going. All this is to say that being supported by the church in my art is not something that has begun only in the past three years. However, compared to my time in the Carlisle congregation, my time at Circle has introduced me to some new ideas.

Words like integrity and accountability might be used to describe what Circle has done for me, but those words are too thick. Circle has simply created one community. We have quietly, but distinctly, mixed the assumptions of Christian beliefs and artistic pursuit. The two seemingly different communities that I have participated in for years now no longer have walls between them. Actually the Christian artists meet together several times a week. Two or three of us will gather together and participate in the life of artists and Christians.

The other strong point that Circle has helped me realize is that these ideas are in no way new. I have been introduced to more from Francis Schaeffer, T. S. Eliot, and C. S. Lewis. Certainly my time in college showed me these thinkers, but I did not have much to apply to them. During that time there were other writers and thinkers that took my attention. Now I come to learn that people in Carlisle and Grantham knew these thinkers as well; I simply did not know to ask.

But back to the crawfish growing cold on my plate and the question of balance sitting precariously beside my chopsticks. After reflecting upon the question, I have made an assumption of my own. I think my friend's real question was, "Am I allowed to question all of these things that feel so basic to my beliefs?" I noticed a nervousness in her words that makes me think she wants to know more but does not feel ready. From what I know of her background, art has been dealt with like cards and movies on Sundays, an unclear and dangerous place to be, so why should we put ourselves in harm's way.

I think my parents protected me from harm while still letting me see it passing. My art, and the process in discover-

ing myself as an artist, has brought many of these unanswerable questions. Instead of their becoming issues that might invite harm, they have become questions that I thrived on through school and still enjoy wrestling with till dawn. I think it's important to note that I am in my mid-20s and have just begun to learn that I do not know everything. Hard to understand, I know!

However, I have come to some comforting balance points. The realization that I am in a community that is willing to support me through my search and failure is more than just reassuring. That simple support is almost on par with the knowledge that all things are possible with God. I am pretty sure that those two points work together. But a different side of the balancing agent is the background that has grown me. I come from Christian roots; my grandfather has been praying for years that I find a career. Keep praying, Grandpa! Attending a Christian college that appropriately sheltered me while I first explored these new ideas and artistic identity was certainly helpful. Now with the body at Circle to encompass me, I am able to walk out into new places and search for deeper answers. I am comfortable to be challenged, to challenge my community, and to seek out new members for the community.

So, have I balanced my Christian beliefs with those of the art community? Maybe not, but I have been part of creating a community that is equipped to walk up and get in the discussion. I am also now able to recognize and be comfortable in the tension that a search for balance poses. The question of balance is ongoing and best left to several more dinners and conversations. Even if I mix conversations with plenty of prayer, reading other thinkers, and living in a community that will let me know if I am being honest, I think the tension of balance will still be real. However, the instability will no longer be a source of fear, but instead a daily reminder to maintain focus. For now I will keep time open for dinner and hope to finish the present conversation before the food is cold.

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Goal Check *April to June 2003*

This is a regular feature of this publication. We want everyone to have some facts so we can have authentic dialogue! We adopted these goals in January of 2003. Every quarter we evaluate our progress toward meeting them.

Network

1. Through an ongoing dialogue, make a secure connection between Northwest and Center City.

We feel like more of a unit these days. We have made a new lease on our building, hired Bryan Robinson to be our PM facilitator for the Northwest, and have held a growing series of PMs.

2. Enhance network-wide ways of sharing that augment the cell network

We have begun to collect a resource list. Rod has been more present at both PM sites. The Financial Stewardship Team has begun to provide resources. We held a Parents Forum that held future promise.

3. Increase the activities and awareness of Circle Venture

Megan Scott has become acclimated to her new role. CV Leadership Team members have visited cells. New Teams have formed.

Center City

1. Prepare to multiply the Congregation in 2003-4 – call out an Apprentice Pastor from among us

The Apprentice Pastors group have continued to meet.

2. Prepare to multiply the Congre-

gation in 2003-4-- Find a creative solution to our space needs.

One solution may be to use the space procured by the Thrift Store Team to also house a new congregation.

3. Prepare to multiply the Congregation in 2003-4 -- Grow to a comfortable living size

Our PMs and Cells both grew in number of participants (PMs by 11%, Cells by about 30% over last year!). We continued to experiment with Week 3 and other PMs.

4. Augment the ministry in our cells by offering opportunities for training and enrichment that stoke the fire of our passion for life in God's kingdom.

We held a Council meeting. Our PMs addressed frequently asked questions. We held a parents forum. We did call out a team to help us with debt. We engaged a third counselor for Circle Counseling.

5. Educate people about systemic racism

No further significant action this quarter.

6. Raise \$132,000 in gifts from the congregation(s). (See budget proposal)

From January through June we received about \$66,000. Right on target.

7. Grow the Effectiveness of the Public Meeting

The Tech Team was organized. We began regularly taping the meetings.

8. Devote Ourselves to Peace in a time of war

The Shalom House Team advertised for participants.

Northwest

1. Hire a part-time PM Facilitator using savings we have saved for a future pastor's salary.

Bryan Robinson began this work on July 15.

2. Expand and multiply each cell one time by fall.

We have two new cells trying to form.

3. Organize a Coordinating group for our NW cells in the fall.

No action.

4. Grow the PM to congregation-size (40-50 attending, 80-100 regular attenders) by January 2004.

After five months we have about 30 attending and 29 regular attenders.

5. Deliberately follow the steps on inclusion from BLUYS to Covenant Member and see five people make it all the way by the end of the year.

We have had many significant connections made.

6. Sign a 2-year lease by July 31.

This has been accomplished.

7. Plant the seeds of further mission teams devoted to reaching unreached groups.

We have made significant connections with various groups in the neighborhood: rap artists, fashion designers, event planners, Covenant House residents, high school students.