THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

March, April 1982

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Art and the Gospel

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In the United States, both within and without the churches, Christianity has many enemies. There are the scientific and not-so-scientific atheists who have tremendous influence in public education. There are the murderous abortionists, and criminals of all types. But none of these is the subject of this article. Within the churches, neo-orthodoxy, more neo than orthodox, reduces the Bible to the level of Aesop's fables. Also within the churches is another group, some of whom have been influenced by Dooyeweerd and Rookmacher, some whose background is too diverse to trace, who wish to substitute art for the Gospel. Perhaps they are not technically existentialists, but they dislike intellect and truth just as much. The exact views of these people vary considerably. Some see further into the implications than others. Since this diversity makes it awkward to speak of the group as a whole, the present article will select one particular member. The selection is defensible because the gentleman, Leland Ryken, has edited and written a preface for an anthology entitled *The Christian Imagination* (Baker Book House, 1981). Consider now this quotation from the Preface:

> The imagination is what enables us to produce and enjoy the arts.... The imagination is one way we know the truth. For truth, including religious truth, is not solely the province of the reason or intellect. For example, one can experience the truth about God and salvation while listening to Handel's *Messiah*. But how? Not primarily through reason, but through the senses (hearing), emotions, and the combination of mind, senses, and emotions that I call the imagination.
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> A pastor friend of mine ... first knew that Jesus rose from the grave ... not during the sermon, but with the sound of the trumpets that concluded the service [one Easter morning]... Not surely with the intellect, but with the senses ... Truth, I repeat, does not come to us solely through the reason and intellect.
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> Consider the way truth comes to us in the Bible. If you asked an adult Sunday School class what topics are covered in the Old Testament *Psalms*, the list would look something like this: God, providence, guilt, ... Such a list leans decidedly toward the abstract.... But consider an equally valid list of topics ... dogs, honey, grass, thunder, ... It touches our emotions far more vividly than the first list does. In the Bible truth does not address only the rational intellect.... Handel's *Messiah* is as important to us as a Christmas sermon.

Because the ideas expressed in these paragraphs attract the adherence of many who profess Christianity, they should be scrutinized with care. One good thing can be said: The author tries to

define his term *imagination*: It is what enables us to enjoy the arts. Later he more explicitly defines it as the combination of mind, senses, and emotions. That no major philosopher had ever used the term in that sense is irrelevant, for every author has the right to define his terms as he pleases. He must, however, adhere to his own definition, and the definition must be suitable to the development of the subject. Yet, though the stated definition includes mind, the general tenor of the passage is inimical to mind. Furthermore, if imagination is the complex of all these factors, including the mind, what can the author mean by saying that the imagination is one way to know the truth. What other way could there be? The definition as given includes one's entire consciousness. It fails to distinguish imagination from any other conscious action. Without using one's mind, senses, or emotions, what truths could possibly be learned, and what would the learning process be? The definition is so all-inclusive that it is utterly useless indistinguishing between any two methods of learning. Because of this vacuity, because the author obviously wants to find at least two ways to truth—one without the intellect, and because of the next-to-last sentence in the quotation, it seems that the author wishes to learn some things through the emotions alone.

One must ask whether or not even the enjoyment of the arts depends more on the mind than on the emotions. Critics of painting examine the brushwork, they evaluate the relation between light and dark areas (*e.g.* Rembrandt's drawing of the beggar, his daughter, her baby son, and the householder), and they analyze the composition. Composition requires careful thought on the part of both artist and critic. Such analyses are intellectual, not emotional; and I can hardly *imagine* that Rembrandt's drawing arouses much emotion in anyone. If the biographer of Leonardo da Vinci had his facts right, it would seem that this prince of painters was completely non-emotional; or if not completely, his emotion was one of continuing anger. Then too, Milton Nahm's book on *The Aesthetic Response* sharply distinguishes it from emotion.

However, aesthetics is neither the main difficulty with the quoted passage nor of much importance to Christianity. A more, a much more serious difficulty is the author's view of truth. Maybe he has no view of truth, at least no clear view; but he certainly seems to be talking about two kinds of truth. He says, "Religious truth is not solely the province of reason." Presumably the truths of physics and zoology are truths of reason. Even this is doubtful, for he says that truth—presumably all truth, and therefore religious truths as well, but also the laws of physics—is not solely intellectual. I doubt that many physicists would agree, and it would be interesting to see how Ryken would answer their disclaimer. Our trouble here is to discover what he means by truth. Statements, propositions, predicates attached to subjects are true (or false). But how could a nocturne or one of Rodin's sculptures be true? The sculpture might resemble its model, and the proposition "the sculpture resembles its model" would be a truth; but how could a bronze or marble statute be a *truth*? Only propositions can be true. If I merely pronounce a word—*cat, college, collage*—it is neither true nor false: it does not say anything. But if I say "the cat is black" or "the collage is abominable," I speak the truth (or falsehood as the case may be). But *cat*, all by itself and without previous context, is neither true nor false. Note that the *Psalms*, which the author tries to use as a support, do not simply say dogs, honey, grass, and thunder: they say that the grass withers, the honey is sweet, and so on, all of which are propositions. And if the words *grass* and *thunder* touch one's emotions "far more vividly" than the words *God* and *guilt* there is something radically wrong with that person's emotions. Better to have no emotions at all. Emotions are hard to control; they are not only distressing to the one who has them, they are also disconcerting to his friends.

If the author's peculiar aesthetics is relatively unimportant, and if his undefined view of truth is a more serious flaw, the implications of such a defective view of truth are disastrous for the preaching of the Gospel.

It is undoubtedly true that "one can experience the truth about God and salvation *while* listening to

Handel's *Messiah*." The reason is that *The Messiah* gives the words of Scripture. Of course, one can have the experience of boredom, or a bright idea on investment policy, or a decision as to which restaurant one will take his girl friend afterward *while* listening to *The Messiah*. But if one has thoughts of God and salvation *while* and *because* of the oratorio, they come by reason of the Scriptural words. The music adds little or nothing. In fact, the reason why many people do not have thoughts about God while listening, is that the music distracts them.

The use of the word *while* is a propaganda device: Literally the sentence is true, but the writer means something else. Fortunately, after inducing a favorable response on the part of the reader by the word *while,* he actually says what he means, twice. First, a pastor first believed Jesus rose from the dead, not during a sermon which told him so, but with (of course *with* is ambiguous too) the sound of the concluding fanfare. At any rate, the pastor did not believe in the resurrection with his mind or intellect: He *sensed* it. One might grant that he sensed the noise of the trumpets; but how can anyone today sense Christ's resurrection? This is utter nonsense, and the final line of the quotation show anti-Christian the whole viewpoint is.

He says, "Handel's *Messiah* is as important to us as a Christmas sermon." Naturally, if the Christmas sermon in a liberal church centers on Santa Claus, and not on the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity, Handel's music might be as important, the equal importance being about zero. But of course the writer means that the music is as important as the words. If this were so, there would be no necessity to preach the Gospel and ask people to believe the good news.

But art is no substitute for Gospel information. In Clowes Hall at Butler University in Indianapolis there hangs a gigantic tapestry which depicts the miraculous draft of fishes. It is supposed to be a great work of art. Now, on one occasion, I accompanied a group of Japanese professors through the place, and one of them asked me, "What is the story?" No amount of art appreciation could give him the information the Bible gives. That Christ was God and that he worked miracles during his incarnation is understood only through the intellectual understanding of words. Nor would a blast of trumpets help.

If the writer's views were true, the work of missionaries would be enormously easier. They would not have to learn a difficult language. They could just put on a recording of Handel and conversions would follow. Why didn't Paul think of that? Don't preach the Gospel, don't give information, just play some music! Poor Paul; he said, Faith cometh by hearing the word of God. No tapestry, no sculpture, no fanfare. But it is Paul who defines what Christianity is. Anything else is something else.

Movie Review

Chariots of Fire

Now when the attendant of the man of God had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city. And the servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?"

So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

Then Elisha prayed and said, "O Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see."

And the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. 2 Kings 6:15

Chariots of Fire, which recently won the Academy Award as the best picture of the year, is a British film of extraordinary beauty and artistic excellence. The acting, the cinematography, the score, and the costuming are all of the highest standards—far superior to most films being produced today. But the film's greatness does not lie in its artistic and technical merits. Over and over again the story line reaffirms the fact that those who are with the Christian are more than those who are with the unbeliever. The film must be seen by every believer, especially if one is ever tempted to

compromise God's law in an attempt to gain the favor of men.

Chariots' story line centers around two British runners and their divergent paths to the 1924 Olympic games in Paris. One, Harold Abrahams (played by Ben Cross), is a Cambridge man. The son of a Lithuanian Jew, he describes himself as "semi-deprived. It means they'll lead me to water, but they won't let me drink." He feels that although he has technically "arrived" in elite English circles, any real power is denied him because he is a Jew. Bitterly resentful throughout the film, Abrahams is compelled to run, feeling that this is his most effective weapon in combating anti-Semitism. There are some anti-Semitic slurs that lead one to believe Abrahams may be somewhat justified in his outlook. However, he is so driven that he never pauses long enough to realize that those closest to him don't really care that he's Jewish.

The other leading character is Eric Liddell (portrayed by Ian Charleston). Born in China of Scottish missionaries, Liddell had come to Scotland to complete his pastoral training. His purpose is to return to China to continue the Lord's work there; he has no thought of being a runner when the film begins. Liddell is goaded into running in a local track meet, which he handily wins. That same evening Liddell is in essence commissioned to go out and run in God's name. He is told that what the movement needs is a "muscular Christian." Exhorted by his father, Liddell is told, "Do not compromise. Compromise is the language of the devil. Run in God's name, and let the whole world stand back in awe."

Throughout the film, each man's actions reveal his God. Liddell can say with confidence, "I believe that God made me for a purpose—for China. But He also made me fast—and when I run, I can feel His pleasure.... To win is to honor Him." Liddell uses the track meets as an opportunity to spread the Gospel. Abrahams, on the other hand, uses the meets as a vehicle to glorify himself. He even goes so far as to write newspaper articles about himself using the pseudonym "A Special Correspondent."

In 1923 the two men actually compete against each other, and the contrast in their lives is quite evident. Liddell's contentment of spirit allows him to go up to Abrahams and say, "I'd like to wish you the best of success." Abrahams' dour reply is, "May the best man win."

Abrahams loses, and he's totally devastated. His false god of "always winning" lies shattered. His attitude is simply, "I don't run to take beatings. I run to win. If I can't win I won't run."

Both men are selected to represent Great Britain at the1924 Olympics in Paris. It is not until they are boarding to cross the Channel that Liddell learns that the first heat of his event is to be held on a Sunday.

Liddell's humanity is touchingly revealed at this point. He agonizes over his present situation—knowing that he cannot run on the Sabbath, yet wondering why God has brought him to this point.

Intense pressure is applied to Liddell in an effort to "persuade" him to run on Sunday. The Prince of Wales and the entire British Olympic Committee try to convince him that he must run as a matter of national pride: they place country before God. Liddell, for his part, remains steadfast in his position that the proper order is God before country. At one point, he says to the Prince, "God makes countries, and God makes kings, and the rules by which they govern.... To run would be against God's law." Finally, a solution is found, one that satisfies everyone. Liddell uses the Sabbath to honor God, delivering a powerful message on the sovereignty of God based on Isaiah 40. While listening to Liddell read passages teaching that the nations are as nothing before God, one is shown athletes stumbling and floundering their way through the Games.

Even Abrahams' actions at the Olympics testify to the fact that "those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Shortly before his race Abrahams confides, "I'm scared.... [Now I have] ten lonely seconds to justify my existence." For Abrahams, it's as if the rest of his life will be but a postscript to that moment—a mere existence devoid of any purpose, vision, or goal.

Chariots of Fire should serve as a strong reminder to every Christian that compromise with the world is never in accordance with his Law. It also testifies to the truth that those who are with us are greater than those who are with them. Let us pray that God will use the film as an instrument to open unbelievers' eyes, and draw them unto himself. May they—and we—see the chariots of fire around us. –Valerie Stackhouse