

A Dialogue

A Response by Richard C. Chewning to Steve Vander Veen's

“Let's Quit *Thinking* About Integration for a Change”

Steve Vander Veen is hungering for that which is laudable. He wants students to live out (experience) their faith in a holistic manner. He desires what is called “biblical belief” where one's intellectual assent is inextricably coupled with one's actions. Biblically, “to believe” has always incorporated this full understanding. Those who divide intellectual assent from actions are called hypocrites in the Scripture. He also has serious doubts about whether merely talking, discussing, and thinking about the biblical perspectives on specific issues will bring about real godly results when the time arrives for specific actions to be taken in the marketplace. I too share these concerns.

Steve, in his search for a solution to these concerns, calls us to accept the *experiential* worldview of Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), the “father” of both philosophical and theological *existentialism* (in the West). Steve has limited his discussion here to a basic review of Kierkegaard's description of “theological existentialism.”¹ The community of “orthodox Christians” has not embraced the existential epistemology as it circumvents

two core biblical presuppositions and easily leads to the separation of “faith” from “reason.”

The two core biblical presuppositions Steve has overlooked in his article are the facts that God has communicated with us in verbal, propositional form and that it is only the Holy Spirit who can make the Word a governing reality in our lives. Truth can be communicated “verbally” and is knowable intellectually, however. To forget, minimize, or ignore this absolutely essential truth is to operationally reduce the Bible to a meaningless aggregation of “mere words.” What Steve is longing for is for God's truth to govern the hearts of his students. That work is reserved for the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does make God's Word “alive” for His children in and through their providential experiences, but God has ordained that His Word is to be used as the standard by which we, His children, are to evaluate our experiences so that every experience—existential or otherwise—is not accepted as reflecting God's purpose and intent for us.

The Bible is God's record of His involvement with His people

and His record of His manifestation of Himself to His people. In ignoring this essential reality, Steve has invited us to “leap” into the quagmire of “subjective Truth,” “indirect communications,” and things “believed real” that are “beyond our ability to communicate.” In doing this we are reduced to a meaning and purpose that are inextricably identified with our “existential feelings.” In the existentialist’s framework of reality we have as our most important personality attribute the ability to feel our experiences with God.

We know, because the Bible tells us so (not existentially), that we are made in the image of God, and we know what this means: We can truly know God (Colossians 3:10); we can be righteous (Ephesians 4:23-24); and we can be holy—a directional understanding of holiness (Ephesians 4:23-24). And we know, because the Bible tells us so, that we have a “heart”—the seat of our intellect, the seat of our affections (desires), and the seat of our will. The word heart is used over 800 times in the Scripture, and two-thirds of the time it is referring to the human intellect. We can truly know, through the human intellect, all that we experience—think about, encounter, act upon, and yes, even “feel” emotionally (for which we have a vocabulary to describe it).

All of this is not to say, or even imply, that feelings are unimportant or in some sense unbiblical. They are an important part of our experiential reality. They are, however, a byproduct of our relationships and acts. God calls us to righteousness, not happiness. God calls us to Christ, the giver of peace and joy (a fruit of the Spirit), but He does not call us to peace and joy. To glorify “feelings” that are a result of life’s thoughts, encounters, and actions is to confuse an important quality of our existential capacity with God’s end purposes for us.

God is a clear communicator, and for us to accept the perception that we, as we relate to Him, are encapsulated in some kind of reality that cannot be communicated to one another because significant truth is only “experienced” in some kind of subjective, noncommunicative phenomenon, is to pervert an important part of God’s created reality. This “worldview” will eventually end in the swamp of existential relativism where God’s having entered into our human state to flesh out His commitment and communicate His reality to us, is made subordinate to our existential feelings.

Is it necessary to continue on and address the expressed perception that Christ taught from a perspective of “irony?” (I do not agree.) Or should we develop afresh the consequences of

adopting a worldview based on “relativistic synthesis” (a perspective refuted in verbal, propositional form by Steve, but nevertheless a sure, ultimate consequence of his exposition)? No, but it is my belief that Steve’s failure to put first the critical fact that God communicates with us first and foremost in a verbal, propositional form is sufficiently damaging to his case to cripple it, except in the context of “theological existentialism” where faith and reason can become substantially disconnected from one another.

Only the Holy Spirit can bring to pass what Steve and I both long to see happen—our students learning and applying the truth of God’s holy Word to their daily activities in every area of life, including the marketplace. We should all ask and be able to answer, however, “How do I really know that I truly know God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit and not just know about God?” The Bible teaches that we come to truly know God first through verbal, propositional teaching (Romans 10:8-15) that is anointed by the Spirit of God (Titus 3:5; Ephesians 5:26).

ENDNOTE

¹Existentialism is the newest epistemology—theory of knowledge—to be added to the West’s historic array of methods of knowing, and is understood to be a form of knowledge that is gleaned in a moment of time through an externally stimulated feeling that is experienced while being in relationship with something or someone—if it were intuitive, rather than a feeling-based “knowledge,” it would be called “philosophical existentialism.”