

## A Dialogue

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

### “Relativistic Synthesis: Thwarting the Mind of Christ”

First of all, I wish to thank Richard Chewning (author) and Sharon Johnson (editor) for allowing me to respond to Richard's article. Second, let it be known that I agree with much of what Richard says. For instance, I do believe that we tend to “‘Christianize’ the world's thinking” and that our “ontological presuppositions are rarely encountered on a conscious level” to our “shame.” In fact, I agree with all of Richard's propositions. However, the purpose of my article “Let's Quit *Thinking About Integration for a Change*,” was motivated less by the “what” of the mind of Christ, and more by the “how” (Fendt, 1997, p. 255 [abstract]). The challenge for Christian business faculty is to help students develop presuppositions *with meaning* so that they will be motivated to put on the mind of Christ which, philosophically speaking, will shield them from Hegelian and Socratic views of thinking, views which hinder the Word of God from bearing fruit because of their emphasis on *Truth in humans*.

When Richard speaks of “The Christian's Guiding

Presuppositions,” he reminds me of the catechism teacher I had as a very young adult. I had no doubt that what my teacher was saying was true, it is just that the words I heard had no meaning because I had never *experienced* them. Because of this, these words never left the room. The problem was that I was learning the objective truth before I had experienced subjective Truth. What my catechism teacher was telling me about and making me memorize were things that thousands of other, much older, Christians had experienced over time as subjective Truth, now codified as objective truth. So I was being asked to learn Truth backwards, as well as to learn a “watered-down” version before being asked to learn the real thing! It is no wonder, then, that I did not start sincerely, and without hypocrisy, to integrate my faith with my life until I was much, much older.

In fact, I probably did not truly begin to integrate my faith and my life until the day I understood, with meaning, God's Providence. This was on the day I learned that (1) my wife and I were going to have a third child

and (2) our second child was autistic. This, of course, was laid on top of the fact that our first child had a congenital heart defect. The point is that we could do nothing about what “defects” our children were born with, since the source of congenital heart defects and autism were not known. I had no choice but to rely on God’s Providence, which truly was comforting; and, ironically, I do not find my children to be defective at all. Most of the time I think *I* am, with all of my knowledge. Because I understand the meaning of God’s Providence, I have more courage to live as I believe God wants me to live.

This is why I think we, as faculty at Christian colleges, must experience our presuppositions and somehow help our students experience them as well. I also think we would do well to experience Kierkegaard.

Many Christians have told us that Kierkegaard is off-limits, because he disassociated God from truth. But I can honestly say that this was not Kierkegaard’s intent. First, Kierkegaard was concerned that Christians could have an understanding of Christianity, yet not know what it really meant. He was concerned, in other words, that we would know the words of our catechisms but not really understand their meaning. He was concerned that our Christianity would be hollow,

a face that we put on which could hide our dying selves.

Second, Kierkegaard did not think that Truth was a matter of one’s personal opinion. Ironically, Kierkegaard debated Hegel and the idea of Socratic Truth on related grounds; in other words, he debated against the idea that the meaning of Truth was within humans or that humans could find the meaning of Truth on their own (Evans, 1992, p. 41). If they could, God would not be needed. But because God is needed and because of sin and its consequences, Christians, like the hero Abraham, are called to do that which the world may find incomprehensible, not because it is not logical or true, but incomprehensible because of the world’s fallible conceptual equipment (ibid., p. 104).

In fact, Kierkegaard believed that one had to be reborn, *a recipient of special grace and not just a user of common grace*, in order to experience subjective Truth (ibid., p. 40) and that therefore the unbeliever would reject such a proposition (ibid., p. 42)! In the context of this discussion, one can know about Christianity without being a Christian because one can learn the catechism, but one cannot know about the meaning of Christianity unless one is born again. If one is born again, then such an understanding of Truth can hardly be considered

relativistic *since it starts with God and is nurtured by Him.*

But even if one is a born-again Christian, integration of faith and life is not automatic unless one experiences one's faith. Assuming most of our students are born-again Christians, how can we get them to take ownership in the *what* of Christianity so that they integrate? How, in other words, do we give the Word of God a chance to grow within them so that it bears much fruit? I think we do it by allowing the presuppositions of the Christian worldview to have meaning. In order for these presuppositions to have meaning, I believe they have to be experienced.

The point is not that by taking a "leap of faith" we customize God to our own liking. The point is that by taking a leap of faith, we experience God because we have already been born again, and by leaping we develop a closer, more personal, more meaningful, understanding of God. God does not change in this process. We do. God's attributes do not change, but what they mean surely does.

Therefore, I believe Kierkegaard can aid us by helping us form presuppositions with meaning in others. If these presuppositions have meaning, then knowledge will be better governed, and a Christian way of thinking will be better developed

which is distinguishable from the world's way.

Richard is right when he says faith precedes knowledge. But one must experience faith in order for faith to grow. And if faith does not grow, neither will True Knowledge.

## REFERENCES

Evans, C. Stephen (1992). *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Fendt, Gene (1997). "The Idea of Christian Tragedy," *Christian Scholar's Review* 26:3 (Spring), 255-269.

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