

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Who Shall Overcome?

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The generation that now stands at this point in history dare not move blithely onward as if, as the existentialists claim, there has been no instructive yesterday and will be no tomorrow that matters. Rather, perceptive souls of this era have the right, the responsibility, the fascinating opportunity to study the past and make a genuine attempt not to repeat its tragic elements. They must retain the joyous components from yesteryear that remain with us, if only in memory, but soberly ponder the lessons of it all. That examination of the past must not be casual, as if we were but historians filling pages for publications, but must be a serious, thoughtful examination. No one with proper sentience can read the pages of yesteryear without being reminded that the story of the past is the account of flesh and blood, contesting human wills, great purposes realized, and important causes destroyed. The colorful, fitful scenes of the past were the venues of our fathers and mothers and their parents before them. Could they speak to us now—and some do from their graves—they would certainly plead in the strongest language that the lessons they learned at the price of their fortunes and their lives be more carefully learned by us and at a cheaper price. They would surely warn us that to miss or ignore the instructive pages of the past is to be inattentive fools, fools who in our day will be consumed by the tides that might have been stopped in the days of our fathers but which today approach the all but unstoppable.



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There is no question that the tides of history, surging waves of thought and action, were created by the men who now rule from their graves. By what power did they rule? Why did events occur as they did? What explanation can be given for the strange irrationalities that have swept into our time and continue to affect the course of history? What reason can we give for the impact these men made?

Those men who today rule from their graves certainly do not do so because they presented great truths, impeccable arguments, or unfalsifiable syllogisms. Rather, the first explanation for their influence is that they gave people an excuse to be what they truly are. When Lenin organized Communist cadres in the name of the philosophy of Karl Marx, who can believe that his followers fell in behind him because of a sheer love of mankind? No, indeed, for when they rose to power, they demonstrated themselves to be brutal human beings, criminal types, sadists, and murderers. They initiated an orgy of

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slaughter and were themselves drowned in the blood they shed, both their own and that of others.

In our time, the followers of Karl Marx have shown themselves to be selfish, hypocritical liars, amassing fortunes at the expense of the starving populous they rule. Erich Honecker of East Germany was one of those liars, with his thirty-two homes and lavish hunting preserves. Nicolae Ceausescu was another, with his immense palace.

The existentialists have done the same, pandering to the lust of people, preaching to them the doctrine of fornication without tears. These panderers to prurience are well described in the Bible: "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who secretly shall bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you; whose judgment now for a long time lingereth not, and their destruction slumbereth not" (2 Peter 2:1-3).

The church of our time ought to take from those verses a lesson for itself. So long as large masses of people are unaffected by the transforming power of the gospel of Christ, they will be vulnerable to the perverse premises of political and religious charlatans. Should the masses in any era or in any nation fail to be reached and transformed by the message of the love of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross, these masses are tinder for a new fire ignited by the admonitions of the evil one. The Bible warns us that Satan is constantly going about seeking whom he may devour. The vulnerable ones he seeks are certainly the unevangelized, the untutored, the untransformed masses of earth. If, through the preaching of the Word, people are lifted to the place where they are partakers of the divine nature, panderers to the lower nature of man will have no fodder on which to feed. If the church fails to penetrate a society at any given time, the times subsequent to that moment of opportunity may be adverse.

A second reason for the success of the ideologists of the past is that they perceived and responded to the current forces of their history. In the days of Darwin people were looking for new layers of insulation between themselves and God. The spirit of the age was bent toward the Enlightenment, and therefore the sacred was offered on the altar of the secular.

Yes, there may be times in history during which negative forces are but inexorable, times when the night has come in which no man can work.

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But that is not always the case. Sometimes negative forces have seemed so strong because believers have not been sensitive to the ebbing and flowing tides in the culture in which they are supposed to be salt and light.

Speaking about the Day of the Lord, and by implication many other special judgment days, the Scripture says: “But ye, brethren, are not in the darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. You are the sons of light, and the sons of the day; we are not of the night, nor of the darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep, as do others, but let us watch and be sober-minded” (1 Thessalonians 5:4–6).

Despite this admonition, too often cultural change comes upon the Christian elements of society with as great a surprise as it comes upon the people of the world. The lesson is clear: the mind of the Christian must be filled with awareness of the teaching of the Word and be perceptive as to the course of the world in which that Word is to be taught. Only then can he move strategically. The tide of history may well be bringing upon us a great and new strategic opportunity.

Let us also suggest that the success of these ideas occurred because of the absence of a timely and forceful rebuttal. On a thousand occasions in history, a foolish idea has prevailed because, figuratively speaking, no one stood up to say that the emperor had no clothes. Lenin himself, speaking of the Communist revolution in Russia, said that it could have been defeated by a hundred purposeful people in St. Petersburg who knew what they were doing. One effective debater, or even an intelligent Christian conversationalist, might have stopped Rousseau and his nonsensical arguments in one evening in the salons of Paris. By so doing, he might have prevented the French Revolution.

History teaches us that a single strong voice for God in a leaderless generation can be effective. Historians agree that the revivals of John and Charles Wesley in England did save England from the terrors of the French Revolution. Surely the single voice of Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms liberated northern Germany, then England, then major portions of the world from incarceration behind the purple curtain of Rome. Liberalism in America was impeded in some places and stopped outright in others by simple fundamentalist preachers who spoke strongly for the truth of God.

Could it be that we have forgotten the strong, amazing power of truth? Forceful speaking that presents the truth of the Word has created and will always create a great result within individuals for the perpetuation of society. For the sake of future humanity, we need to read again the telling words: “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4–5).

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Who shall overcome?

He shall overcome who believes the simple, forceful proposition, namely, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Despite this promise, too many heretical speeches go unchallenged in too many denominational conventions. Too many false propositions are pressed upon young people in college chapels, even Christian college chapels. Refutation should be immediate and forceful. For want of such refutation, questing young hearts may begin to wander, never again to be retrieved for the truth.

It is clear, also, that the ideas of the seven seminal thinkers discussed in this book prevailed because of the nonexistence of overt Christian assertions on the subjects they addressed. This is not an unimportant point. Questing students in the past have often sought in vain for the Christian positions on creation, evolution, dialectical materialism, relativity, and many other subjects. But position papers are hard to come by today whereby emergent minds can be influenced early by the Christian position on the issues of our time. One dares to hope that the Christian alternative to foolish new pseudoscientific positions is being stated in the classrooms. More and more, however, the arena of contest has moved to the television networks, the radio stations, and the newspapers. Every Christian must be more articulate than ever—more thoughtful, more analytical, more ready to give a reason for the faith that is in him. Alas, one cannot help but notice that in this area we have not been well served by the theologians, who should have been responding to the contests of our time with thoughtful, biblically based answers. Keynesian economics, with its assertion that government is God, might have died aborning had there been a Christian position on government and global economics ready to meet it. The churches need once again to ask Christian theologians and intellectual leaders, “Where are you, now that we need you?”

Let us also note that the anti-Christian tides of thought prevailed in no small measure because the church had lost even its own message. Across the world Christians are often remiss, not only in not presenting position papers on global problems but also in not presenting the gospel. When the Reformation message of the gospel of the grace of God slips away from the Christian agenda, initiative, purpose, and motivation are also lost. When we lose the gospel, we will hardly contend for the faith, because there is no remaining faith for which to contend. The church must constantly fight the dreadful slippage that can so easily take us away from the message of the cross. To us who are saved, the cross is the power of God. It must always and ever continue to be so. Dreadful consequences could come upon the eclectic evangelical movement of our time if it so pluralizes its message that no one knows which one of the twenty extant versions of the gospel is the most surely to be believed.

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In thinking further about the seven men at the heart of this book, it is important to note that each was a perceptive and prolific writer. The theories they held about reality, men, nations, and the future were not babbled into the ozone. They recognized that whereas a speech lasted but for a few moments the written word produced a sustained impact. Yes, some of them were rabble-rousers, like the existential screamers at Haight-Ashbury. Still, the rabble does not stay roused apart from the progressive capturing of the mind. And that can be accomplished only by a forceful ideological message, a strong presentation of that message, and the sustained impact of the printed page.

The Communists know this especially well. They were once heard to say, "You Americans teach the people of India how to read and give them the lamps in the light of which to read. We furnish the material for them to read." That lesson ought not to be missed. The media are exciting, the kleig lights are illuminating, and the public address systems are powerful, but it is still words, those little silver bullets of logical thought, that make the sustained impact.

Dare we suggest the course of action that must be followed by the church of our time? We must have Christian thinkers who consider deeply and then write well the truth for others to read. The Christian tract, the booklet, the book, the treatise, the magazine, and the newspaper, written well and distributed wisely, are among the best instruments God has on earth to propagate His truth. The word *spoken* today will put a blip on the screen of the receptive mind, and then it will be gone. The word *written* today will print itself upon the mind behind that screen and never be forgotten.

Having considered some but perhaps not all of the reasons for the success of the ideologists of the past, we cannot avoid thinking about the future and wondering what shall unfold in the number of tomorrows available to us. In answer, let us first of all remember that the seven men we talk about in this book continue to rule from their graves. The effect of the ideas spawned and propagated by these now departed minds is an ongoing reality in our time. Boards of education continue to cast votes on questions of science, thereby pretending to prove that the majority vote establishes the truth of evolution. They have done so in the state of California, and others elsewhere will make the same infantile decisions. The existentialists continue to teach moral relativism and situation ethics. Marx continues to stride across history, even though he is limping from recent successful votes taken against him in Eastern Europe.

Could it be that the recent unexplained attitude of the Soviet Union is to be considered in another way than is suggested in the popular press? Is it possible that in releasing the Eastern European nations they are like a jet fighter dropping exhausted auxiliary tanks before it turns to do final battle with an enemy? Bear in mind that the attitude toward a totalitarian nation should be formed not by its stated intentions, which have always been

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deceitful, but by its real capability. In the real world, capabilities count. In the world of delusion, promises prevail. The world of delusion is neither a good nor a safe place to live.

In thinking about the future the realistic Christian will remember that alien ideologies are strong, even prevalent, throughout the world. The call, therefore, is to sobriety and vigilance. The call is also to intrepid Christian action.

In considering where we should go, we must also recognize soberly that the cause of Christ has taken severe hits in our time. Moral, financial, and sensual scandals have come upon the church like torpedoes from an alien submarine. Upon examination, it has become evident that the torpedoes have been fired and have exploded from within Christendom, their destructive force unleashed by unacceptable conduct and bad theology. Although the church must not indulge in neurotic and overly persistent self-examination, occasions come when we must examine ourselves anew. One of those occasions must be now. We may discover that the serious problem we face is not merely that some simple ones have succumbed to the lust of the flesh. We may find that we ourselves have invented too many forms of pop theology, Christian mottos, overly simple slogans, and three-word answers to everything. We may discover, for instance, that the way we have used television has trivialized the gospel, reducing our acceptance by the larger community, rather than enhancing our opportunities. We may learn that our costly, thoughtless expansions of nearly everything will bring the inevitable but impossible day in which the bill must be paid. Should we think that some of our problems are relatively minor, we may learn also from an examination of the past that some great ministries of yesterday are no more because minor problems, uncorrected, became major monsters.

But still "*Quo Vadis?*" is the question.

Great opportunities—greater than ever—are before us. Christ made the church no empty promise when He said, "Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it; for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my Word, and hast not denied my name" (Revelation 3:8). That promise means that great opportunity is ours. It reminds us that opportunity does not come from cooperating circumstances, personal capability, or even the permission of some human group. Opportunity comes from Christ Himself, and it can never fail us so long as our hearts are right with Him. The church is well advised to heed the words of Daniel Burnham: "Make no little plans, they have no magic to stir man's blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans, aim high and hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram, once recorded, will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with growing intensity."

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We must also remember that it is spiritually incorrect to think too much about the future without taking into account the prophetic Word. God has told us, despite the detractors of our time, that we have a more sure Word of prophecy unto which we do well to take heed as to a light that shines in a dark place. Living as we do in today's diffused scene and moving as we are into a murky future, the prophetic Word demands attention. No one can know the events of tomorrow, but the data about the future that we have in the Word of God become a light that shines through the afternoon's fading sunlight into the evening when shadows fall. We are forbidden to make concrete predictions, but we are wise to allow for the possibility that upon us have come the ends of the world.

In considering the future, we must remember that Jesus Christ the Lord presides above history and will return one day in power and great glory. That triumphant return will demonstrate for every eye to see that Christ is the Lord of history and functions precisely, perfectly, and lovingly all of the time as that efficient Lord. Then we will realize by sight, as we must now by faith, that never once in the history of mankind has an event taken place in the halls of the greatest of governments or in the remotest jungle on earth that is apart from His precise and loving permission. Remembering this—that Christ the Lord presides above history—we can think with clarity and labor with alacrity to accomplish the purpose for which we are privileged to live in this dangerous but exciting time.

We remind ourselves that the final rulership of this world and all other worlds to come is not in the hands of those who sleep under a headstone in Germany, England, France, or the United States. In the last analysis the world is ruled from the throne of the eternal God under the scepter in the right hand of Jesus Christ. Whatever may be the continuing influence of the thinkers and doers of another day, that influence will be pitiful and not to be compared with that of the sovereign God of the universe. The final chapter, which tells the account of the results of the interactions between men and nations in the narrow constrictions of time, will be as nothing when compared to the progressive and daily fulfillment of the will of the sovereign God whose universe it is.¹

¹ Breese, D. (1990). [*Seven men who rule the world from the grave*](#) (pp. 227–235). Moody Publishers.