CHAPTER TWO

LIVE AND LET LIVE: PLURALISM

Christendom had a monolithic value and belief system that stretched all across Europe until an October day in 1517 when a German monk and theology professor tacked a notice on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg announcing that he wanted to debate ninety-five ideas he thought needed reforming in the church. That sparked the Protestant Reformation, which broke up the monolithic value system of Europe or Christendom as it was then.

A culture is defined in terms of the commonly held beliefs, practices, and attitudes of the people within it. In his monumental study of civilization, Arnold Toynbee concluded that religion was the most important aspect of every culture. The princely rulers of Europe understood this dynamic. In the bridge time between Christendom and modernity, they understood the role that religion played in holding a society together or in tearing it apart.

During the late Middle Ages in southern France, a heretical religious group developed called the Albigensians or the Cathari. They had a mixture of Christian ideas and the ancient Manichaean ideas of dualism between physical and spiritual, the physical being evil and the spiritual being good. This major heresy quickly spread in the southern area of France, and the Pope called for a crusade to suppress this heresy. The princely rulers of Europe gladly joined in to be sure that it did not spread. A great war ensued in which the Albigensians were wiped out. This crusade initiated the idea of an inquisition in Europe to deal with aberrations or differences in religious

thinking or religious practice. The most famous inquisition took place in Spain. It was initiated by Ferdinand and Isabella in the year that Christopher Columbus set sail for China. As a result of that inquisition, the Muslims and the Jews were expelled from Spain.

When Martin Luther began the controversy that resulted in the Protestant Reformation, the Holy Roman Emperor grew quite alarmed. He was concerned with how differences in religion might affect his very fragile empire. It was an empire of different languages and different ethnic groups spread across Europe, and he wanted just one religion in his empire. Of course, he had his own religious piety; but he had his political concerns to think of as well. The German princes, on the other hand, had other considerations, such as the growing concern for their autonomy over their own independent state. Though they wanted to separate from the empire, they too wanted just one religion within their domain. When the religious wars of the Protestant Reformation were over, the peace settlement included the stipulation that the religion of the prince of a domain would be the religion of the people. If the prince was Lutheran, then the state church of that domain would be Lutheran. If the prince was Reformed or Calvinistic, then the state religion of that domain would be the Reformed church. In Bavaria, the state church became Catholic; in Brandenburg, that state church became Protestant. There was diversity, but to a limited extent. The total culture of Western Europe was beginning to fragment.

Henry VIII had the same concern in England. He made himself the head of the church in England, which was a further fragmentation of allegiance to Rome. He wanted no outside interference in his country, which had been a long-standing tradition of monarchs in England. The English kings had actually been striving with the Pope since the time of King John in the late 1100s and early 1200s. Henry's daughter, Elizabeth, who became queen in 1558, made it quite clear that she wanted no further reformation of the church in England. The Church of England would retain many of the old customs of the English church, but they would not move toward a more thorough reformation of the ceremonies and the practices. Elizabeth expected conformity to the established church, and she would allow no diversity. The Puritans at this time were the ones crying for more freedom in worship. They also wanted to dispense with such things as robes and vestments, candles, and the altar against the east wall rather than a table at the crossing of the parish church. They wanted to do away with many of the symbols, but Elizabeth would allow for no diversity because diversity was dangerous to the unity of the state and the solidarity of the culture.

When he came to the throne after the great English Civil War, Charles II

enacted the Clarendon Code, which persecuted the nonconformists. The state enforced conformity to the Church of England, and those who did not conform could not go to universities, could not hold office, and could be jailed for violations of the terms of conformity. John Bunyan spent a number of years in jail for violating the terms of conformity. He preached without a license.

Louis XIII in France, though Catholic and though recognizing the Pope, still wanted authority over the Catholic Church in France. He began a movement known as the Gallican Movement after the ancient name, Gaul, for the area of France. It involved the idea of establishing a truly Gallican church. Through association with the power structure of France and subservience to the monarchy, the French church, in the popular view of the people, was weakened by association with the monarchy. When the French Revolution came, the republic that was set up became an atheistic republic. It was a republic that was tired of the church. The church in France was seen to be dispensable or not necessary for a country.

As a result of the American Revolution and the establishment of the American republic, the Baptists had the opportunity to influence Congress to pass an amendment to the Constitution that guaranteed the separation of church and state. This amendment declared that Congress shall make no laws respecting the establishment of religion or denying the free exercise of religion. Thomas Jefferson was one of the founding fathers most sympathetic to that idea. Jefferson said "I have sworn on the altar of God eternal hostility toward every form of tyranny over the minds of men." This famous declaration did not refer to the tyranny of the British government. Rather, he was talking about the tyranny of the Episcopal Church, the state church of Virginia, which is to say that he declared war on the state church. He did not rest until the establishment of a state church was abolished in Virginia. The Baptists applauded that action because they had spent time in jail for not conforming to the state church of Virginia.

Early in the history of this country Christians accepted pluralism because it provided protection to the religious groups from each other. The colonies that became states were largely ethnic groups unto themselves. New Jersey was a Swedish Lutheran colony. New York was a Dutch Reformed colony. Pennsylvania was an English colony, but a Quaker colony. Maryland was an English colony, but a Catholic colony. Massachusetts was an English colony, but a Congregational colony. Rhode Island was an English colony, but it was an open colony founded on the principle of religious toleration or pluralism. The southern colonies were English colonies, but they were largely economic colonies. They were founded by companies designed to make money. They were a mixed bag to begin with, especially colonies like North Carolina,

South Carolina, and Georgia, which had people from Germany, France, England, Scotland, and Wales, all representing different churches.

Early on there was a commitment in this nation to pluralism based on self-interest. The Baptists no longer had to fear the Episcopalians, and the Lutherans no longer had to fear the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists. But pluralism meant Protestant pluralism. It did not mean general religious toleration, it meant Protestant pluralism. Jews and Catholics still tended to be second-class citizens until World War I. Though Congress could make no laws respecting the establishment of religion, there were ways at the local and state level to ensure the Protestant ascendancy. During most of the republic, Christianity enjoyed most-favored religion status, though unofficially and without government connection. It was a cultural matter. The United States, culturally, was a Christian nation.

This cultural Christianity, this general sense that America was a Christian nation such that at wartime we would sing songs like "God Bless America," and this general acknowledgment that we were "one nation, under God" came to an end in 1963 with the Supreme Court decision concerning prayer and devotions in local schools. The decision was that local school boards could not prescribe set prayers to be said in school. It did not abolish prayer in school, but it said that the local school board could not write a prayer that everyone would say. Though the Supreme Court did not go that far, in practice across the country prayer and devotional readings left the public schools. School boards, principals, and teachers did not want to deal with the issue. The public schools had been the means of making Christianity the cultural religion. It was the way of carrying on the tradition. This situation does not mean that people were Christians as a result of being in public school. It meant they were aware of the Christian tradition. That awareness began to disappear very quickly after 1963. The schools had been the primary agent for transferring the worldview from one generation to the next. It was the idea that if I was an atheist in the United States, the God I did not believe in was the God of the Bible. Even those who did not have faith defined their infidelity in terms of the Christian faith. That was the worldview and if I did not participate in that, it was still my worldview that I was not participating in. Generally, the culture as a whole had one concept of God, whether they believed in God or not. They had one basic concept of right or wrong such that if they chose not to do right, they knew they were choosing not to do right and that what they were doing was considered wrong, but it was their choice.

As a result of the schools no longer being the place for passing on the cultural tradition, the baby buster generation that started in 1963, grew up without the basic exposure to biblical categories and values that previous

generations had been aware of. This religious exposure was not instruction in the Christian faith, but it was a general informing of a tradition, a cultural tradition that was a part of the American mythology. It went along with George Washington and the cherry tree, and the Pilgrims and Thanksgiving. These were aspects of what it meant to be an American.

The postmodern generation grew up without a cultural allegiance to Christian ideas and values. It was not part of their frame of reference. They had not been exposed to it. They do not know the Christian concept of God or salvation. They are uninformed. They do not have a reason for regarding sex outside of marriage as wrong. Where would they be exposed to such an idea? They do not have a reason for questioning abortion as a civil right. There is no place that kind of view would be taught apart from a biblical context. They do not have a basis for examining the issue of euthanasia, which is the next major moral issue that is coming along. In all of these matters, no cultural norm exists for them because religion ceased to be an aspect of the culture in 1963. Therefore, they are thrown back on the only reliable authority they have: "Everyone did what seemed right in his own eyes," as we find in the book of Judges. They have no other basis.

It is interesting to note how this pluralistic system developed from 1963. Both political conservatives and political liberals advanced the pluralistic or valueless society from the 1960s on. Most people are familiar with the counterculture, which was an experiential approach to values. We think of the counterculture in terms of drugs, sex, and abandonment of norms of behavior. We also think of them in terms of experimentation with Eastern religions.

Not as much, though, do we think of the conservative libertarians. I became acquainted with them in the early 1970s. I had been politically active in the South and had assumed that to be politically conservative meant one was a Christian as well. It was that old Christendom idea. In 1970 I took part in the Institute on Comparative Political and Economic Systems at Georgetown University and held an internship in Congress for the summer. I found that most of the other participants in the program from other parts of the country who were politically conservative did not have faith. They advocated extreme individual freedom such that their behavior in terms of sex and drugs was exactly what I had experienced in college with people who were on the political left. In terms of morality, liberals and conservatives had similar behavior but for different reasons: one more experiential, the other more philosophical and intellectual, concerned with the advancement of laissez-faire, absolute freedom in personal decisions. Whereas the counterculture dominated the popular culture, the libertarian conservatives were active in the political structure that came to power in 1980 in Washington, D.C. Many of those people that had been involved in

the program with me in 1970 were now involved in the Reagan administration and were carrying out a morally valueless political conservatism.

Now there has been a major shift in how cultural values are passed on. The institutions for passing on the cultural values have changed. In the old era, the church, the home, the school, and one's elders had the responsibility for passing on the values of the culture. In the present age, movies, television, music, and one's peers are responsible for the establishment of the cultural values. A media culture responds to the thoughts and desires of the youth generation.

In my first course in seminary in 1975, I read an article by Margaret Mead in an edited collection on anthropological subjects. I have searched in vain for that article many times since. In the article, which she would have written in the early 1960s or late 1950s, she predicted that we were entering a time in which no longer would the elder generation teach the younger generation, but that there would be a major cultural shift and the younger generation would determine the culture and teach it to the older generation. We have now arrived at that point. You can think in terms of how children teach their parents how to program the VCR.

WHAT'S THE MISSION?

One of the greatest difficulties Christians face in dealing with the challenge of pluralism involves understanding the primary Christian mission in the world. People have the dangerous tendency to run to polar extremes and miss the point. Some engage the world in a political battle to ensure the maintenance of a Christian society. Others withdraw from the world completely and abandon it to its own wickedness. The Amish withdrew from the world. The Puritans tried to take over the world. The Great Commission suggests another alternative in which the mission is to make disciples of Christ, and the methodology is through going about one's business in the world.

Both liberal and conservative Christians have attempted to resolve social problems through political activism in the twentieth century. Prohibition came about largely as a result of political pressure that sought a legal solution to the problem of alcohol abuse. In the 1950s and 1960s the cause of civil rights was advanced largely by activist Christians who helped ensure passage of the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act under the Johnson administration. In the late 1970s a burst of activism on the part of Christians sought to overturn the Supreme Court ruling that had the effect of legalizing abortion. Both liberals and conservatives opted for a political solution to problems in society, which conflicted with their understanding of the gospel.

Whatever else pluralism may mean, it certainly means the presence in society of multiple views and behaviors that conflict with the gospel. Throughout the twentieth century, Christians dealt with the emerging pluralism of the United States the way it had been treated traditionally during the long tenure of Christendom. Political power came into play to deal with views or behaviors that stood contrary to the current prevailing Christian consensus. For this approach to work, however, one needs a political majority. Nathan Bedford Forrest's famous strategy for victory also applies to politics: get there first with the most. Committed Christians constitute a minority of the American public today, and this minority includes Catholic, mainline Protestant, Evangelical, Charismatic/Pentecostal, and Orthodox Christians who do not always share a consensus understanding of Christian doctrine or behavior. In Western Europe, committed Christians represent a barely perceptible segment of the population. In terms of numbers, Christians cannot win a political struggle.

Tragically, for too many centuries Christians have sought political ways to enforce Christian discipleship upon people who do not follow Christ. We have sought to enforce godly behavior from ungodly people; thus, denying the very doctrines of salvation needed to make people godly. By the confusion of the Christian mission, we have tended to seek political solutions to spiritual problems while often ignoring social problems for which political solutions might have been found. The confusion of church and state has blurred the distinction between moral issues and religious issues. Moral issues transcend specific religious groups and even apply to nonreligious groups.

Most moral issues are endorsed by religious groups, but that endorsement does not make the issue a religious matter. For instance, most religious groups teach that it is wrong to steal. Similarly, a common teaching of religious groups relates to murder. The presence of common themes like these related to human behavior leads some people to conclude that all religions are basically the same. This view fails to appreciate that religion deals with a great deal more than morality. Despite many basic universal themes of morality, different religions inform and provide a foundation for those themes in different ways.

Many committed Christians in the United States feel the obligation that this country should operate according to the laws of God. In support of this view, many Old Testament texts about God's expectations for Israel may be found. This view tends to confuse the distinction between the old covenant between God and the particular nation of Israel, and the new covenant between God and his church. The first covenant established a nation, but the second transcends all cultures. As part of a democracy, Christians in the United States have a responsibility to influence the political processes as

engaged citizens. On the other hand, we dare not suppose that the engines of politics and government can ever make society godly.

Conservative Christians who opposed the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s criticized their liberal brothers and sisters in the movement by declaring, "You can't legislate morality." By the late 1970s, however, conservative Christians had formed the Moral Majority to legislate morality. Because of the tendency to confuse religion and morality by both believers and nonbelievers alike, however, it appeared that Christians wanted to legislate religion.

Abortion is a moral issue related to life and death. In the cultural ferment of the 1970s it took on a different look. For the counterculture, abortion represented a civil right belonging to a woman. In the American tradition of the rugged individual and the conservative tradition of restricting governmental intrusion into the private lives of citizens, abortion became a privacy issue. Instead of dealing with abortion as a morality issue, however, conservative Christians tended to deal with it as a religious issue. While the Bible provides the basis for a Christian not to practice or endorse abortion, the rhetorical campaign that conservatives used had the effect of making it sound as though abortion was just a peculiar belief of a radical sect of religious people.

At this point, I am aware of several concerns. First, I want people to believe the Bible, place their faith in Christ through it, and rely upon it for guidance in the difficult issues of life. Second, I want the practice of random abortion on demand to die out. In a pluralistic culture I can endanger both of my concerns by an over-zealous attempt to force either to happen.

Fredericka Matthews-Greene and others like her have actually changed their strategy in the face of the dominance of pluralism in society today. From the old confrontational style of the 1960s, she has now embraced a style that lowers the temperature on the rhetoric and seeks to change people rather than defeat them.[1] One might call this approach "Christlike."

Abortion is not a religious issue, in the strict sense, but a moral issue. As such, it is not a church/state issue or even a matter of privacy, but a public policy issue over the civil rights of the unborn. In the famous Dred Scott case before the Civil War, the Supreme Court refused to decide in favor of the position of the slave Dred Scott because he was the legal property of another person. He was a slave, and therefore he had no rights. At the present moment, the Supreme Court has created the same situation for unborn children. Christians will have strong feelings about this matter, but it is not a religious issue and should not be confused as such.

Prayer in public schools, on the other hand, is a religious issue. Prayer is not a matter of morality but an exercise of religion. As such, it is a church/state issue and a matter of private choice. The right to pray is a civil

right, but the governmental establishment of prayer is a public policy that violates the U.S. Constitution.

During the last half of the twentieth century, Christians in the United States have fallen into three camps related to the culture. Some have chosen to fight to maintain the culture as a vestige of Christian thought, value, and practice. These have sought to accomplish this aim through the use of politics. Some have ignored the rapidly changing culture and have even become a part of the valueless value system. Finally, a small group has sought to engage this culture like any other pagan culture that is hostile to Jesus Christ.

Christians who think their mission is to maintain control of society will suffer many bitter defeats in the days ahead. On the other hand, those who recognize that the United States now represents a great mission field and that we are aliens in it will find the next century filled with all the adventure of the first three centuries of the church.

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

As early as 1975 the process theologian John Cobb expressed the logical implications of a long simmering trend in mainline Protestant circles. Pluralism had a modest beginning within the American church. It started small, but grew over the issue Christ raised at Caesarea Philippi: "Who do you say I am?" (Matt. 16:15).

John Cobb described several alternative approaches to pluralism within the church in *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*.[2] The approaches vary from a rejection of the claims of other religions to a rejection of the claims of Christianity. First, other religious ways have been seen as evil or false. Second, other religious ways have been described as anticipating Christ. Third, as Christians have come increasingly into contact with people of other religions, many have identified Christianity and other religions as the same reality. For instance, they may assert that Christ and Buddha are two names for the same reality. Fourth, when faced with the reality that Buddha and Christ actually stand for entirely different ideas of what is supremely important, many Christians opt for total relativism. This view would hold that all beliefs are culturally captive. This kind of relativism, however, results in a situation in which each religion has equal standing, but in which they are also closed, exclusive of each other, and limited. Fifth, Christians who want to be open to other religions may drop the terminology and image of Christ, resorting to vague terms such as "the ultimate" or "the divine spirit."

By 1987 Cobb's pluralism would seem tame compared with that of John

Hick, Paul Knitter, and a group of like-minded theologians who contributed to *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*.[3] The pluralism of this volume expresses the pluralism of postmodernity and involves "a move away from insistence on the superiority or finality of Christ and Christianity toward a recognition of the independent validity of other ways." The new pluralism sees nothing unique about Christianity that sets it apart or above any other religion. In order to arrive at this final expression of the new pluralism, however, it was first necessary for Hick to settle the question Jesus asked at Caesarea Philippi. John Hick answered it in his volume *The Myth of God Incarnate*. Once he had dispensed with the incarnation, what was left of Christianity did not matter.[4]

If Christians are ambivalent, embarrassed, or hostile to the identity of Jesus as Christ, then one should not be surprised if society in general pays no attention to him. If Christians lose sight of Christ, then Christianity has nothing to offer. Apart from the incarnation of God in Jesus, Christianity has nothing unique to offer.

Pluralism did not arise as an attack from other religions. It did not come about as the result of Supreme Court decisions or hostile politicians. Pluralism within society poses nothing but opportunity for the gospel, but pluralism within the Christian community arises because Christians have abandoned their Lord in exchange for religion.

The apostles found the pluralism of the Roman Empire fertile soil in which to plant the gospel. In a sense, the apostles had an easier job of dealing with the pluralism of the empire because they knew they had to win a hearing. Christians who have a strong sense of the traditional place of Christianity within Western society may feel a degree of resentment when the public does not give Christianity its traditional role.

Freed from its traditional role, however, Christianity returns to its primitive vitality. Losing all advantage and privilege in society, Christianity no longer has anything about it to hold the allegiance of people, unless they can answer the question of Jesus the way Peter did. The danger for committed Christians during this time of dramatic and far-reaching cultural change is that they will be more concerned about the standing of the Christian religion in society than about the standing of Jesus Christ within his church.

INTOLERANCE?

In one sense, Jesus Christ represents the kind of pluralism that accepts all people and makes of them one family. A certain kind of pluralism existed in the days of the Roman Empire, which allowed for great diversity of religious expression, as long as ultimate loyalty was paid to Rome. This pluralism,

however, had no intention of making one great Roman family of all the peoples of the empire. All the peoples shared the privilege of subjugation by Rome. Very few people held citizenship with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities appertaining thereto. The pluralism of Rome represented a carefully defined toleration of differences. The toleration worked when no one had rights.

A similar kind of toleration occurred within the police states of totalitarian Communism. The Communist bloc included wildly diverse groups that could be divided ethnically, linguistically, racially, and religiously. Marshall Tito governed a unified Yugoslavia that appeared to be a model of tolerance between groups within a pluralistic society. With Tito's death and the collapse of the Communist system, Yugoslavia split apart into warring factions. Ancient differences and hatreds that go back to the days of the Byzantine Empire surfaced as soon as the restraints disappeared.

The *Pax Romana* was just the sort of peace as that enforced by totalitarian government. People got along at the point of a sword. By and large, people do not get along. The pluralism of postmodernity confines itself largely to English-speaking North America and a few countries of Western Europe. For the most part, the pluralism of the postmodern age is a phenomenon of the affluent West. If anything, ethnicity and tribalism are on the rise. The hatred and killing in Northern Ireland struggles with an uneasy and fragile truce. The Bosnians, Serbs, and Croats of former Yugoslavia have fought a series of wars with each other over the last ten years with no reason to believe that another war might not break out. More than fifty years after the bloody division of the old British colony of India, predominantly Muslim Pakistan and predominantly Hindu India continue to threaten war with each other. Inside India strife continues between Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims. In the former Soviet Union war broke out between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In Sudan the Arabic government of the north has fought for years against black African insurgents in the south. The Middle East has witnessed fifty years of strife between Jews and Arabs. Each of these episodes involves a religious dimension.

The religions of the world are mutually exclusive. The intensity of feeling generated by religious conflict bears testimony to this fact. Even those religions that claim to make room for all the other religions do so only on their terms. In this sense, Christianity is no different from any other religion in making truth claims. Each religion, in making its own claims, declares the other religions to be false. Christianity is no different from any other religion in this regard. The difference for Christianity lies in the fact that the current experiment with pluralism is taking place in territory once regarded as a Christian land. Several areas of confusion have clouded the issues involved for people.

Pluralism cannot exist in human society without the force of law. Pluralism does not require totalitarian dictatorship, but it does require the consistent administration of the law. In ancient Rome and the modern communist state, everyone shared equal oppression. In American and British democracy, people share equal rights and protection under the law. It is one theory to say that Christians may not legislate their religious beliefs and impose them on a nonbelieving citizenry. It is quite another to say that Christians may not exercise their right to practice their religion.

Unfortunately, Christianity relied upon its position within the prevailing culture rather than on the proclamation of the gospel to ensure its survival. Survival and maintenance of the status quo are not very lofty goals. The primary function of the Christian faith is to proclaim the gospel to those who do not have faith in Jesus Christ. Proclamation from a position of power can confuse the one proclaiming and the one hearing. A certain satisfaction comes in declaring the truth as we know it, as Jonah did. We can forget that we do not proclaim the gospel for our satisfaction, but so that someone else can come to know Christ in such a way that they have faith in him.

In the postmodern age, Christianity has lost its position of cultural power. It has not disappeared by any means, and it continues to have many great institutions at its disposal as well as millions of adherents. Yet, it has lost its position of power within the culture. Christians must now ask, "How do we proclaim the gospel from a position of weakness?" Fortunately, we have centuries of experience doing just that.

The gospel always calls for confrontation. Yet, we sometimes forget who is doing the confronting. The confrontation comes between Jesus Christ and the people we tell about him. The confrontation should never be between us and the ones we tell. The proclamation from a position of privilege and power tends to foster personal conflict rather than divine confrontation. The gospel always carries a threat because it claims our very lives; therefore, the threat of the gospel needs to come from Christ, not from Christians.

Deprived of the position of power, however, Christians may once again begin to experience the only power that matters. In a state of cultural powerlessness, people become free to experience the power Christ promised. When Patrick journeyed to Ireland fifteen hundred years ago, he left the security of Christendom to enter the land of Celtic paganism. He entered a land of egregarious pagan worship practices. As often as not, they sacrificed their own babies to the Druid gods. Within a generation, however, the Emerald Isle had become a Christian land. Patrick spoke from a position of weakness, but he did so with the power of God. In the face of pluralism, it helps to recall that the power of God is stronger than the power of cultural convention.

The attitude of Christians will determine their effectiveness in the new pluralistic culture. In the last years of cultural dominance, Christians were strangely silent within the broad culture as they seemed content to let Billy Graham fulfill the Great Commission vicariously for all believers. Christians with a willingness to let their faith out of the box will have opportunities in a pluralistic age to talk about the significance of Jesus Christ. The greatest opportunities will come in the marketplace of day-to-day life. In the twentieth century, personal witnessing tended to mean the delivery of a lecture prescribed by a tract or a model presentation. In a pluralistic age, the Christian who can speak specifically of Christ to an individual will demonstrate why Christ stands out from the many alternatives. Conversation replaces the lecture for the Christian who demonstrates the personal concern of Christ. The willingness to speak goes along with a willingness to listen to the concerns of people living in a hollow world.

Several models exist that show Christians how to make the most of the opportunities that arise as a result of the new pluralism. Pluralism had become the rule in the academic world long before it became the norm of Western culture. Long before the term *postmodernity* came into usage, C. S. Lewis had critiqued the drift he observed in academic culture. In *The Abolition of Man* and other writings, Lewis laid out the subtlety of the introduction of relativism into English school texts in Britain. Without going into Lewis's astute analysis of the relativizing trend in culture, we may learn a great deal about how he addressed the problem.

Lewis lived in a country that is a Christian nation by law. The Church of England is the official religion, and the monarch is head of the church. Furthermore, official prayers are said in all public schools, and religious instruction is required as part of the educational system. Despite this significant official support of Christianity, only 2 percent of the population attend church on any regular basis. Lewis did not seek more legislation to protect the position of Christianity, nor did he seek to elect politicians who could turn the country around spiritually. Politicians and courts respond to the culture. They do not change the culture.

Lewis went to work in his little corner of the culture. Lewis became, perhaps, the most significant witness to Christ in the English-speaking world in the twentieth century. Unlike professionally religious people like Billy Graham, Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Teresa, and Albert Schweitzer, Lewis earned his living as an English teacher and had no official role in the church. He merely lived out his faith in the place where he happened to work, Oxford University. Lewis serves as a model for how a Christian can have an impact in a pluralistic culture. Literally thousands of people have become Christians because of him, and hundreds of thousands have probably changed

the way they think about the world because of him. Most of Oxford did not agree with Lewis at the time, but they had to take him seriously. By its very nature, a pluralistic culture is one in which all ideas stand shoulder to shoulder, but someone must be willing to express the ideas. Lewis gained a hearing for several reasons.

First, Lewis worked hard and did good work. He had the professional respect of those who knew him. He made his mark as a first-rate scholar of Medieval and Renaissance English literature, contributing several important volumes to the field. More than this, however, he understood his first priority belonged to his students. He worked hard as a teacher, and his students proved it.

Second, Lewis claimed no special privilege as the one who brought the gospel. For those who believe the gospel, it is the power of God unto salvation; but for those who do not yet know the gospel, it is folly (Rom. 1:16, 1 Cor. 1:18). Not until a person believes in Christ can he or she realize the privileged position of everyone who knows Christ. That privileged position, however, relates to our standing with God. As such, Lewis presented the gospel as new information to many people. He presented it to educated people as Paul presented it to the Athenians. He recognized their ignorance of spiritual matters and explained Christianity one step at a time. He made no assumptions about what his audience ought to know, how they ought to think, how they ought to behave. A person who does not know Christ does not yet have the option of living in a way Christ approves.

Third, Lewis was willing to do the appropriate thing in the circumstances. He never bullied his students into becoming Christians. One passionate atheist avoided tutorials with "the mad dog Christian" because he had the impression that Lewis would be a "pale and cadaverous moralist" who would try to draw some "trite Christian moralization from every text." He eventually changed his mind because he so resented not being able to study medieval English literature because of Lewis. In three years of meeting together for weekly tutorials, Lewis never once raised the issue of faith. Instead of a preachy clergyman, Lewis turned out to be a robust man full of life. The tutorial always focused on the opinions of the young student whom Lewis treated with courtesy as a "junior colleague." When the young man finished his time at Oxford, he now resented being deprived of the person who meant the most to him.[5] Lewis always respected people. On the other hand, he was not shy about expressing himself. He could go from the private tutorial with a student to the public lecture hall where he would hammer away at the criticism of faith. He understood this difference between stating an opinion and giving the reason for an opinion. Peter enjoins us to always

be prepared to give a *reason* for the hope we have (1 Pet. 3:15). He loved a good, public debate, but he also understood when to listen. He knew the difference between winning an argument and winning a convert.

Fourth, Lewis was good company. He cultivated the art of conversation, which involves the obligation not to bore. Being good company requires that a person genuinely be interested in others. In a pluralistic society, the legitimacy of any idea, religion, or belief will often depend upon the character and personal qualities of the person expressing them. For Lewis, this quality expressed itself in many forms of consideration, but perhaps none more important than his constant willingness to take time for family, friends, colleagues, students, and total strangers.

The C. S. Lewis Foundation has taken Lewis as its model to encourage Christian professors in secular institutions to be Christians like Lewis. In the marketplace of ideas, the Christian perspective has as much place as any other idea. In the marketplace of ideas, the gospel can hold its own. The only question concerns whether anyone will be willing to express it.