

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONSISTENCY IS THE HOBGOBLIN OF SMALL MINDS: RATIONALISM

By the time of the split in the Christian church in 1054 between Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, the East and the West thought about God in entirely different ways. Their process or mode of thinking and talking about God differed. They believed in the same God revealed in the Scriptures, but the way they expressed their theology differed. In the Eastern church it was mystical. In the Western church it was scholastic.

In the eleventh century Anselm of Canterbury wrote his major book that set a tone for theology in the West, *Cur Deus Homo?* or *Why the God-Man?* In this book, he explored why God had to come in the flesh. Anselm also constructed a famous argument for the existence of God. He followed a rationalistic approach of one proposition requiring acceptance that builds a case to prove a point. His argument may be restated as:

1. I have in my mind the idea of a most perfect being than which no greater can be conceived
2. But a being that actually exists would be greater than one which only exists in my mind
3. Therefore, God exists.

This rationalistic approach worked well in the Middle Ages because the medieval mind read the argument with the fundamental presupposition, "Of course God exists." The "proof" did not so much prove the existence of God

as it demonstrated how Western theologians thought about the existence of God.

During the Middle Ages, the scholastic movement grew and flourished. The Schoolmen developed the art of argument and reason with such questions as "How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?" and that question would keep them going for months and months. For almost a thousand years the theology of Augustine guided the Western church. Augustine, in turn, had been influenced by the philosophy of Plato. During the high Middle Ages Western theologians rediscovered the philosophy of Aristotle, which encouraged debate between those who thought like Plato and those who thought like Aristotle. The ancient philosophers provided a logical framework for developing systematic theology. Thomas Aquinas would follow Aristotle in developing a new way of thinking about God.

In the Reformation, John Calvin went with Augustine, who was Platonic in his thought and advocated categories of prior knowledge that people are born with. The scientific world, on the other hand, went with Aquinas and Aristotle and the idea that our minds are a blank slate without any universal or archetypal ideas. The division between rational, scholastic, and academic versus the emotional, experiential, and spiritual, came to characterize Western thought by the time of Descartes. This growing separation forced people to choose to think scholastically, rationally, coldly, and methodically or to think more experientially, emotionally, and related to the mystical and spiritual. Descartes, who was in a dilemma about whether or not he existed and questioned the reliability of observation, finally resolved the problem rationally. Sitting in an oven until he could come up with a solution, he popped out of the oven, completely baked, with the statement, "*Cogito ergo sum*," "I think, therefore I am." This episode, as much as anything, helped solidify rationalism as the governing mode of thought for Western white males, because they were the ones who went to school and wrote the books.

You had to be a Western white male to be a monk. Remember that the uniform of the academicians is still the monk's attire: the robe and the hood. Academic professors are still referred to in terms of ecclesiastical degrees. "Bachelor" was a monastic title, and all the academies were monasteries. The master of the academy, the master of the monastery, had charge of all the bachelors. Those who achieved great learning were called "doctors," which is "teacher," or more precisely, teacher of doctrine. Of course, only the boys went to school. The girls made lace in the convents. The embrace of rationalism produced a certain way of thinking. My wife has suggested to me that men and women think differently. Into modern times there has been a male control of the means of communication, learning, politics, and religion. As a result, rationalism has been the official "real way to think."

Christians fell in love with the modern world's love of rationalism. Both conservative and liberal theology developed highly rationalistic systems. Systematic theology, unlike the theology of the Eastern Church, is highly rationalistic. Reformed theology of conservative Calvinists is every bit as rationalistic as the liberal theology of German rationalists. In England, deism considered a personal, involved God who acted in the world as irrational. The deists replaced the personal and involved God with moral laws.

Rationalism produced an approach to theology that is logical and orderly, and if things do not fit within the system, you leave them out. Rationalism attacked and undermined Christianity in the modern world because it could not tolerate Christian ideas that seemed to contradict rational logic, such as the Incarnation and the Trinity. How can something be fully God and fully man at the same time? How can God be three persons in one? It doesn't work. How do you deal with human freedom and Divine sovereignty? In certain kinds of logical systems, you cannot deal with such issues satisfactorily. Arminianism opted for human freedom while Calvinism opted for Divine sovereignty. Such issues cannot be dealt with by the kind of rationalistic system that has prevailed during the modern era. So philosophy rejected metaphysical or spiritual ideas as "nonsense." Something is nonsense if you cannot know it through the senses. Religious words were viewed as having some meaning, of course, but only meaning to those who are involved in the group. They had no "real" meaning, as referring to an external object. When Christians say "God," it represents a comforting concept; but the word does not refer to an objective reality. The linguistic philosophers would allow religious people to use religious language, just as long as they understood that it did not mean anything except to religious people. This development presented a very paternalistic, patronizing view.

THE POSTMODERN REJECTION OF RATIONALISM

With this prevailing approach to logic and rationalism in the Western world, the postmodern generation rejected the modern world's devotion to rationalism. They rejected the idea of "right thinking" with the "right" kind of logic. In terms of their international exposure, they have learned that there are many ways to think around the world. There are other systems of logic, other processes for making sense of the world, not just one. Logic operates like a language. In fact, at many universities students can receive credit toward their foreign language requirement by taking a logic course instead of taking a French or a Spanish course. Computers have different kinds of languages. At Union University the computer that operates our library sys-

tem uses a UNIX language system. The computer that sits on my desk uses an MS DOS language system or logic system. All people in the world have a language, but they do not all speak English. All people in the world have some kind of logical system they use to make sense of the world in which they live, but they do not necessarily have a Western white male rationalistic system. The postmodern generation has said, "Well, that may be logic to you; but that doesn't mean it's necessarily the only way to think about it."

The tradition of Western rationalism is a linear way of thinking—like a recipe or like a math equation. The postmodern generation has a preference for other kinds of logic, for instance, narrative thinking, like a story. This approach is not just postmodern, it is premodern. Preliterate societies have a preference for a narrative way of thinking. This preference is both premodern and postmodern, it is preliterate and postliterate. One might think of an emerging postliterate society. A postmodern preference for thinking includes patterns and relationships. Such thinking would be more like a collage as an art form than an architect's plan. The experimental education TV program for preschoolers *Sesame Street* uses quick cuts and unrelated sequences to teach an approach to processing information quite unlike anything that has gone on before in Western civilization.

MTV uses this same way of processing information. It uses these flash points, but a look in the New Testament at the Sermon on the Mount reveals the same approach. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus takes an idea here, an idea here, and an idea there, all woven together to make a point. New Testament scholars of the twentieth century have tended to reject the idea that the Sermon on the Mount represents a single presentation by Jesus Christ. Why? The reason given is that it does not reflect Western linear scholastic thinking. It does, however, reflect the kind of thought processes and logical systems of first-century Palestine. Whereas higher critical Christian scholarship embraced rationalism, the postmodern world has rejected it, with the scathing critique that the modern person does not admit or recognize the prejudices or presuppositions that determine what the outcome is going to be before you even start the process.

All thought systems are based on prior presuppositions and values. Something is built into the system. We think this way. Thought processes are not purely objective. This is the postmodern view, though Paul, Augustine, and Calvin might agree. There is something flawed about all of them, but logic is how we interpret and give meaning to data.

So where does that leave us? Is it scary? A little bit, because I admit I have been trained as a modern thinker; it is my habit, though I am also aware of the fact that I've been showing signs of this postmodern organizational system lately. Preachers have a strong ability to move in that direction if a ser-

mon is not ready by Saturday night. You grab things here and you grab things there and you just hope. Maybe it will make sense. On the positive side, however, in communicating faith to the postmodern person, religious language is no longer regarded as nonsense. In fact, postmodern people view religious language as quite important. Postmodern people are interested in religion, but they have no background. They are true first century pagans, and religion is all like a cafeteria. Take what you want. But the good thing is, they are open and approachable. Religion represents another way of understanding the world, so let me hear about it. The postmoderns are like the Athenians who said to Paul, "Well, tell us more." After the materialism of modernity, religion poses not just interest, but fascination. "Tell us a new thing." They will give religion a hearing; but in rejecting the old rationalism and the old scholasticism, they are also saying, "Don't give me a lecture. I will talk with you, but don't give me a lecture."

The message of the gospel may be unveiled in a conversation; but traditionally, in the twentieth century, evangelism and personal witnessing have been a lecture on how the vicarious substitutionary atonement works. It is not a conversation like Jesus had with the woman at the well. It is not a conversation like Jesus had with Nicodemus. It is not the kind of thing we see going on between Jesus and people. Recent witnessing presentations are a linear presentation; and when we get to the end, you'll be saved. This approach is like going into a classroom and hearing a lecture. Postmodern people do not want that, but they will talk.

As uncomfortable as the rejection of rationalism may be for most Christians who value the intellectual dimension of faith, this rejection removes a significant barrier to faith. It is no longer necessary to "prove" the existence of God. With their suspicion of rationalistic logic and philosophical argumentation, postmodern people have a preference for intuition and ways of knowing that lie outside the boundaries of official modern knowledge.

Postmodern people recognize the relationship between rationalism and rationalization. They have grown up cynically recognizing the word games of TV commercials. Rationalism and other forms of argumentation have all the appearance of a trick. It sounds like a sales pitch. When people of faith use the language of rationalism, they sound like "peddlers of the gospel," which Paul warned against (2 Cor. 2:17). People will talk freely about spiritual matters, but they will cut off a lecture or a sales pitch.

Modern Christian philosophers frequently appeal to the "Law of Non-contradiction" to prove that postmodern people do not think correctly and to persuade them to change the way they think. Unfortunately, this argument tends to be self-defeating because it appeals to an assumption they do not

accept. Noncontradiction is not a law of nature handed down by God. Rather, it is a rule of the game of logic practiced in the West. It is not a rule of logic practiced in the East.

Oddly, the "Law of Noncontradiction" has been a cudgel with which modernity has flailed away at Christianity for centuries. The question of *Why the God-Man?* was not settled by Anselm nine hundred years ago. He merely acknowledged the logical contradiction of the central article of the Christian faith. The philosophical speculations on the relationship between the Father and the Son spawned one heresy after another until the final settlement of the issue with the Nicene Creed. Only, the creed did not stop the philosophical attempts to resolve the contradiction of God and Man being one but separate. The doctrine of the Trinity only adds to the problem.

Postmodern people have a high tolerance for contradiction. The Incarnation does not by itself repel them. They may not believe it, yet at the same time they do not deny that it may be true. In other words, they do not have a built-in resistance to the gospel because it offends their sense of logic. This suspension of judgment creates a climate that permits conversation about something rare and extraordinary that does not correspond to any other experience of life.

Though postmodern people reject rationalism, they have not rejected rationality. People must have some basis for rationality in order to function. The rationality of postmodern people looks different from the rationality of modern people. Rationalism operates like a chain. It is strong, and each link fits in a determined sequence. The links all follow the same, predictable connection. With the postmodern person, however, the connections are less predictable. Instead of a strong, sequential chain, the rationality of a postmodern person more closely resembles the relational database of a computer. While thinking about one thing, bits of data spring together into a pattern that makes sense. When thinking about something else, other bits of data are brought together. Nothing is neat. The problem for the postmodern person is having a "program" that works to help them organize the data. The gospel offers such a program to help people arrange the data of their lives into patterns that make sense. In this way, noncontradiction may come to the postmodern person, but it will come as a conclusion to faith in Christ rather than as a prerequisite for faith in Christ.

The Bible itself has no apparent rationalistic organizational scheme. It does not fit into the neat categories of a book on systematic theology in which topics are pursued in a logical and sequential manner. Yet, the Bible reflects a rational understanding of reality. The connection between individual books written over a period of a thousand years in different cultural settings does not rely upon a rationalistic system to make sense. Instead of delivering ulti-

mate truth in philosophical syllogisms, the prophets of Israel spoke in poetry. Whereas the modern church labored to translate the Bible into rationalistic theology to make it more acceptable to the modern person, the Bible represents the kind of information montage to which postmodern people respond.

The difference between modern thinking and postmodern thinking can be seen in how one deals with repentance and faith. The modern person desires to know the proper sequence of repentance and faith in the order of salvation. The postmodern person, on the other hand, desires to know the relationship between repentance and faith in the experience of salvation. During the development of rationalistic faith during the late-Middle Ages, theology came to be called "The Queen of the Sciences." Oddly, the Bible says nothing of theology. Instead, it speaks of meditation. Theology is not a science. Rather, it involves meditation on one's own experience with God in light of the revelation of Scripture. While the modern person prefers the objective detachment of theology as a scholarly pursuit, the postmodern person prefers the experience of God as the necessary basis for theology.

Anyone who has followed the voyages of the star ship *Enterprise* has witnessed the shift in attitude concerning rationalism as a new generation has come of age. In the original *Star Trek* episodes, Mr. Spock embodied pure logic. Captain James Kirk embodied emotion. The characters represent the polarities and dichotomies that rationalism presented to the modern mind. One had the choice of being logical or emotional. In *Star Trek: The Next Generation* the dichotomy disappears. The captain tempers judgment with compassion. The counselor who advises the captain on critical decisions relies on empathy, rather than logic for guidance.

Postmodern people have no intention of going back to rationalism. Christian scholastics who want them to return to the old philosophical framework have committed the error of confusing rationalism for the Christian worldview. Western Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant, so embraced rationalism for so long that it came to be identified with the faith. But it was only the wineskin. It provided a package for the faith.

THE POWER OF STORY

People love stories.¹ No matter where they live in the world, no matter if they are rich or poor, people love stories. Americans sit in front of the television set to drink in the story on the tube. Tribal people sit around the fire at night as the old people tell the stories. Many times my daughters have climbed up in my lap when they were little and asked, "Daddy, will you tell me a story?"

With all of the technological advance of the modern period, perhaps the most dramatic inventions have been used to perpetuate the ancient need for stories. While the modern person developed an analytical culture that glorified objective fact and emotional detachment, the thirst for stories increased. The political and economic treatises of the English Renaissance continue to be read by a handful of scholars; but every school child knows the stories of Shakespeare, which continue to be produced and read. The great analytical works of the nineteenth century have achieved "classic" status and are required reading for Ph.D. candidates, but people in everyday life still read Dickens.

Moreover, the great stories continue to be produced in media accessible in every home. Leaders of government and education saw the development of the radio as a means of stimulating and educating the population, but the people wanted to be entertained. Radio delivered laughs, music, and sports; but most of all it became a focus of storytelling. Television brought entertainment to the visual level. People could see the games and the singers; but most important, they could see the story taking place. The variety show has all but disappeared from television, but prime time still focuses on telling stories. Sitcoms, soap operas, detective stories, and westerns represent a few of the major types of stories told on TV. They represent different approaches to stories.

In the last twenty years a new kind of storytelling has grown to dominate a major segment of the air waves. Americans watch talk shows in huge numbers. This new form of storytelling is the oldest form of storytelling. It simply involves people telling their own story. Americans crave stories, especially real stories. Thus, Americans watch programs devoted to showing amateur home videos in the same numbers as watch professionally produced programs that cost millions of dollars to make. People listen to Oprah Winfrey and her imitators by the millions. They listen to accounts of real life. Do they listen for answers or rationalizations of their own situation? Do they listen out of boredom or loneliness because they do not have a significant personal connection in their own life? Listening to stories of the lives of other people helps us survive. From ancient times, the biography has remained a standard and popular form of literature.

Shortly after the New Hampshire primary of 2000 in which Senator John McCain upset Governor George W. Bush in their race for the Republican nomination, columnist and political commentator Robert Novak spoke at my university. Novak is a rationalist in the grand old tradition who believes in a critically thoughtful political philosophy. In explaining why the people voted for McCain, however, Novak insisted that it was because McCain had a story. The power of the story of a prisoner of war who refused the oppor-

tunity to go home without his comrades overshadowed considerations of political issues.

By adopting rationalism so completely, Western Christianity virtually abandoned half of what it means to be human. The creative, artistic, emotional, experiential, personal, relational, interior dimension of life easily becomes lost in a highly rationalistic world. The Christian faith gave birth to the cultural art forms of the West. Music, drama, literature, and art all flowed from the Christian understanding of life, creation, order, beauty, and truth. As the modern age dawned, however, Christianity and artistic expression became seemingly opposites. The Protestant Reformation identified wholeheartedly with the new rationalism while Catholicism clung to the preservation of old forms and traditions. Both streams of Christianity in the West ceased to use the arts as contemporary expressions of faith.

Christians have not had a significant impact on art in the West since the eighteenth century. The Catholic tradition has accepted the dichotomy of sacred art and secular art, while the Protestant tradition has ignored art as irrelevant or counterproductive to the gospel. During this period, the proclamation of the gospel has become identified with rationalism. The Puritans in England in the early seventeenth century referred to their preaching missions as "lectureships." It has become fashionable in recent years to blame everything bad in American Christianity on Charles Finney while yearning for a return to the days of Jonathan Edwards. Many Christian writers blame Finney for all the subjectivism in religion today as well as all the concern for pragmatic methods. At the same time they look to Edwards for intellectual credibility. This caricature of the situation ignores Edwards's concern for experience and Finney's extreme rationalism, seen in his cataloging of the "laws of revival."

Attempts in recent years to establish a beachhead in the world of art seem wooden. Christian production companies produce Christian movies, which depend upon a cognitive explanation of how the substitutionary atonement works in order to give the movie validity. By straining to insert a lecture in the Puritan tradition, the movie abandons what it most powerfully does. The art forms of a culture set the tone for a culture. They establish, define, defend, and promote the values of the culture. When Christianity abandoned the art forms, it abandoned the culture.

In the face of the general rejection of the art forms, some Christians have continued to express themselves in the arts in spite of the lack of support, and often in the face of criticism. G. K. Chesterton succeeded in troubling the young atheist C. S. Lewis. Lewis, in turn, would discover that his fiction had the power to reach into the hearts of people. Lewis would live his life as that thing he grew to despise most: a modern man, in the sense that he

always retained a bit of the rationalist that had been drummed into him by his education. Yet, he also recovered that ancient spiritual power of the story known to all cultures. His apologetics could operate on the rationalistic level with his masterpiece, *Mere Christianity*. He could communicate just as powerfully, however, in two other nonrationalistic forms. At the artistic level he wrote *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and his space trilogy. At the personal, testimonial level, he wrote *Surprised by Joy* and *A Grief Observed*.

For most of the twentieth century, Christians have imposed a rationalistic understanding on 1 Corinthians 1:21: "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (KJV). Preaching has meant the delivery of a sermon to the modern church from the time of the Puritans who taught that preaching was "the ordinary mean and instrument of the salvation of mankind."² While the preaching ministry remains essential to the worshiping, gathered body of believers, this form of communication is not necessarily the most effective in reaching and influencing the shape of contemporary culture. The sermon and the speech were the spiritual and political means available for influencing public opinion two thousand years ago. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Teddy Roosevelt made much over the "bully pulpit" as a way to sway the masses. By the time his cousin Franklin became president thirty years later, however, the world had dramatically changed. While FDR could deliver a good speech, he influenced the public with "chats" over the radio. He was a media personality like Jack Benny or Bing Crosby.

While many preachers have taken to the air waves, very few have learned to adapt the style of communication to the medium. For most, radio and television serve to broadcast the sermon. The 700 Club and the PTL Club represent two highly successful and notable exceptions to the normal use of broadcasting by Christians. Unfortunately, the PTL experiment ended in scandalous disaster. The 700 Club has managed to attract a loyal following of Christians, but its primary focus has been on galvanizing a loyal corps of Christian followers who will do battle against the culture rather than trying to shape or influence that culture.

While Christians ignored the artistic dimension of mass communication to concentrate on the rationalistic, the entertainment side of television and radio shaped American values. The shape of family values and social norms came from *All in the Family*. Archie Bunker represented everything a right-thinking, feeling person did not want to be. He made every position he espoused seem ridiculous. He opposed premarital sex, abortion, and homosexuality. These positions were linked with racism, bigotry, and exceptional ignorance. Of course, Archie was a Christian and a hypocrite.

The movie industry promoted the sexual revolution of the 1960s with such trend-setting movies as *The Graduate* and *Goodbye, Columbus*. On television *MASH* and *Maude* made fun of every traditional value that undergirded the culture. Ministers were portrayed as clowns or crooks. Devout Christians were portrayed as mean, meddling hypocrites. No counter voice was heard because Christians had withdrawn from the primary stage that forms public opinion. They had retreated to the rationalistic media of sermon and speech.

While the road back to serious cultural engagement is a long one, Christians can take clues from the leading cultural icons as they seek to help individuals encounter Jesus Christ. The television programs that survive for more than one season scratch an itch that the viewers feel. Several programs that have little artistic merit have lasted for years. *Cheers* had the same plot on every episode. The characters continually repeated their character flaws: sexual addiction, alienation, low self-esteem, loneliness, inability for intimacy and commitment. *Cheers* could just as easily have been called *Church* because of the tremendous needs of the people involved, and the theme song could easily be sung as a contemporary Christian chorus:

Sometimes you want to go. . . .
You want to be where everybody knows your name.³

Critics complained that *Seinfeld* was not about anything. It had the same plot each episode as well. It involved an even smaller group of friends who were preoccupied with sex, but who wanted meaningful personal relationships. Now the popular show simply says it: *Friends*. The Neilson ratings will tell us the most pressing spiritual issues in America today. Average Christians may not have access to a TV production company, but they can talk with their friends about what bothers them.

When Jesus taught, he did not deliver long, boring lectures. He told stories that we call parables. He knew that something about a story makes people stop and listen. Cultural critics complain about the phenomenon of Americans who appear to be "glued" to their television sets. The critics seem to forget that the need to hear stories did not arise in America. Samuel Taylor Coleridge based one of the greatest poems ever written in the English language on the power of story. In "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798) he tells of an old sailor who stops a wedding guest just outside the church. The guest is next of kin to the bridegroom and must hurry in, so he asks why the old sailor has stopped him. The old sailor simply replied, "There was a ship." With those words, the old man had the guest in his power. Once the story had begun, the guest had to hear it out. The guest can

hear the music in the church. He later hears the gaiety of the reception. Finally, all have left except the guest and the old sailor who finishes his long story.

The power of a testimony lies in the fact that it tells a story. When Christians give their testimony, they tell their own story. The testimony has many advantages as a way of communicating the message of the gospel in a way people are willing to hear:

Unique—No two people have the same testimony. That makes everyone's testimony special. The uniqueness of a testimony keeps it from boring people.

Identifiable—Despite the uniqueness of a testimony, people can identify with another person's experience. All people share the same basic needs and emotions. A testimony helps people see the similarities of their own life with which they can identify. If Christ could help the one sharing the testimony, perhaps he will help the one who identifies with it. A testimony helps people see themselves clearly. What we could never admit about ourselves suddenly becomes clear when someone else says it about themselves.

Interesting—A testimony creates interest in the same way that gossip draws attention. A testimony contains the drama of life. It might not be dramatic in the sense of Paul's experience on the Damascus road, but any story that comes from the heart has true drama.

Relevant—A testimony demonstrates that the gospel of Jesus Christ still has meaning two thousand years after the Resurrection. In a personal testimony the contemporary truth of the gospel shows itself. A testimony reveals what Jesus Christ means to someone on a day-to-day basis.

Personal—Unlike some methods of evangelism that rely on a canned approach, a testimony has a personal edge. The testimony comes from the heart of the person who shares it. They did not learn it from someone else.

Authoritative—The very nature of a testimony gives it authority. Because a testimony tells what we know of our own experience, no one can deny it. They may not believe it, but they cannot deny it. We are the final authority about what Christ has done for us.

TELLING YOUR STORY

Every Christian has a testimony. The testimony does not have to tell of a life of crime dramatically transformed. A testimony tells of how Christ has saved someone and how he has continued to make life worthwhile. Glittering testimonies may have excitement, but most people will not identify with them. Most people do not lead glittering, exciting lives. The testi-

mony of an ordinary person has particular power because most people are ordinary.

C. S. Lewis had one of the most powerful testimonies of any Christian in the twentieth century. He wrote his testimony in an autobiography called *Surprised by Joy*. Literally thousands of people came to Christ as a result of this testimony and the other writings of Lewis. Lewis had a dramatic testimony, but not a glittering, exciting testimony. Lewis lived an ordinary, some would say dull, life. He taught medieval English literature at Oxford. He never learned to drive. He lived most of his life as a bachelor. But he had a powerful testimony about how Jesus Christ saved him.

Ordinary people pose a greater challenge in witnessing than very bad people. Very bad people know how bad they are, and in their heart they know how far from God they stand. Ordinary people, on the other hand, consider themselves pretty good. They tend to believe that if there is a heaven, they deserve to go there. For these ordinary people, an ordinary testimony has particular power. If someone like them discovered their need for Christ, then maybe they need him too.

A testimony tells how Christ saved us, but it also tells what Christ has meant to us since salvation. We only have one testimony of how Christ saved us. We have hundreds of testimonies of what he has meant to us. Part of the testimony involves remembering what he has done. In a sense, a testimony is a thanksgiving time when we acknowledge what he has done for us. In another sense, a testimony is a bragging time when we want someone else to know how great our Lord is and why we love him so.

THE RATIONALITY OF STORIES

When we tell our testimony, several points need to come out. Like any good novel or movie, the testimony needs development. It also has to have enough detail that it does not sound like a general experience that could have happened to anyone. Yet it should not have so much detail that it sounds tedious and boring. A good testimony will usually, but not always, have four points:

1. **Introduction**—Set the stage in the introduction. Give some background to your experience with Christ. In a conversion testimony, describe your life before you became a Christian. In a testimony about how Christ has helped you in life, describe your situation before the crisis developed in which you needed help.

2. **Crisis**—The drama builds as you describe how a crisis grew in your life. In a conversion testimony, describe how you realized that you needed

to be saved. In a testimony about how Christ has helped you, describe the crisis that led you to lean on the Lord.

3. **Climax**—The critical moment of the testimony comes with the climax. God does something. In a testimony, the Lord is always the hero who rescues us. In a conversion testimony, describe how the Lord saved you. Did someone lead you to him? Did it happen during a revival? How did you feel? How did you turn to him? In a testimony about how he has helped you, describe what he did about the problem that you faced. How did you know the Lord had helped you? Did you ask him for help?

4. **Resolution**—The resolution tells what life has been like as a result of what the Lord did. In a conversion testimony, tell what difference the Lord has made in your life. In a testimony about what the Lord has done for you, tell how salvation means something every day. Describe what it means to know the Lord loves you and cares for you, even when you do not ask.