

Who is the real professional then?

NEWS BRIEFS..... (From the Internet)

- * Asteroid just misses the earth
- * Insects inspire new generation of robots for Mars
- * Life given another 200 million years
- * Bloodsucking flies may have started HIV epidemic
- * When did life start on earth?
- * Nuclear fusion in a bubble
- * South African scientists invent the needleless vaccination
- * Want a healthy brain? Try a little libation
- * Dolly has arthritis
- * Diminutive "duck-croc" discovered
- * God through the Net

Spot the Fallacy

CONTRADICTION OR CALLING A SPADE A NON-SPADE
.....(Mike L Anderson)

Feature article

WHAT CAN LIBERALS AND EVANGELICALS TEACH OTHER
.....(Donald W. Shriver, Jr.)

"On all sides of conversation between people who prefer one or another title for themselves, I hear claims that make sense to me as one Christian among many. I also hear claims that may have gotten neglected in my own sector of the Christian movement. But my sector has claims that it is unwilling to abandon in any debate with those who are most critical of it. In short, I think that so-called liberals and so-called evangelicals have important truths to urge upon each other."

Dr. Donald Shriver was president of Union Theological Seminary in New York City in 1987. This article appeared in The Christian Century, August 12-19, 1987 pp. 687-690. Copyright by The Christian Century Foundation; used by permission.

=====

Wisdom from the Past

[We include Bishop Barnes' article because we believe it contains wisdom, not because we think it wholly wise or agree with everything he says. While it contains truth, we do not agree with his definition of a Christian. - eds.]

SCIENCE & RELIGION

E. W. Barnes

There are times when, after a spell of burdensome ecclesiastical routine or pitiable controversy, I stand aside in thought and try to see the meaning of it all. What is the use of religion? Why has it such vitality? Why can it with such ease be joined to bitterness and superstition? Would not the world be better without it?

And then I begin to reflect what religion has given to me myself. Like other boys and girls, as I grew from childhood I found myself a lonely thing with dreams and fears and joys and, above all, perplexities. I began to see what a tragic business human life often is. For many-perhaps for most men and women - opportunities are painfully few: their powers have no chance of finding expression: a narrow round cramps their growth. For all of us life is absurdly brief. Our Universe seems to be millions of millions of years old; yet man counts himself fortunate with four-score years. To the future duration of our Universe none can place limits: the earth will probably support life for hundreds of millions of years at least. Thus we are, as it were, shut in between unfathomable immensities. Further, though life's joys be many, so are its ills. Pain and disease are the never-silent heralds of death. We are often shocked by Nature's ruthlessness; and the more sensitive we become to beauty and goodness, the more do we recoil from the moral ugliness and brutality which seem to pervade that animal kingdom to which we belong. So the question arises as to whether all that is best in us is a useless and inexplicable by-product of some soulless factory. Are we, Nature's offspring, bound, so far as we are true to our highest emotions, to fight against Nature - and, fighting, to be swept into oblivion? To earthly oblivion, our race is doomed. We shall pass away like the many extinct creatures that in turn have lorded it over the land where it is our fate to live and die. Will the spirit within us likewise perish, or - and here faith raises its head - is there perchance a spiritual realm which is our true and eternal home? Such musings are common to us all when we draw apart from life's hurly-burly and think of its meanings. They leave us hopeless or reckless, with at best a sort of proud despair, unless some form of religious faith transforms our outlook.

Now the faith which constitutes the essence of the finer types of religion has been described as 'a moral trust in Reality'. It is the assurance that whatever is at the heart of things is not hostile to our highest aims and ideals. The Universe, in other words, is friendly. The spiritual aims and achievements of man are not an inexplicable out-growth of some moral barbarism which we must take to be the true character of the Source of existence: on the contrary, man's highest aims and achievements belong to the essentially spiritual nature of That in which all creatures takes its origin. We strive for truth: truth is at the heart of the Universe. We seek beauty, and would make righteousness prevail among men; beauty, also, and goodness are at the heart of the Universe. We long for peace: with the Source of all power there is perfect peace. We thus see why religion has been defined as fellowship with the Unseen. True religious faith is a certainty, deep and strong, that we were not made for nought, that we need not fear the immensities which shut us in, and that all that is best and highest in man shall not perish because it reveals the hidden glory of God.

There are, of course, many who say that such a faith is, no doubt, beautiful and inspiring; it is also useful as an anodyne to anxiety or as an opiate for suffering. But is it

true? Science, they remind us, is the body of knowledge won by patient and orderly investigation of the working of the Universe. Is such knowledge compatible with religious faith?

It is at this point that there arises the possibility of conflict between religion and science.

Now, before I speak of such possibility of conflict, I wish to make it quite clear that many beliefs, associated with religious faith in the past-, must be abandoned. They have had to meet the direct challenge of science: and I believe it is true to say that, in every such direct battle since the Renaissance, science has been the victor.

Let me give definite instances.

First, the earth is not the fixed centre of the Universe; it is merely the moving satellite of a sun which resembles innumerable other suns. Secondly, man was not specially created, but has evolved from an ape-like flock. Thirdly, no priest, by ritual or formula, can attach spiritual properties to inanimate matter. Living men have spiritual value; dead matter in itself is spiritually valueless. Fourthly, if by miracles we mean large-scale breaches in the uniformity of nature, such miracles do not occur in human experience. Here are four typical results of scientific investigation which at least all must accept. The period of indecision is past and gone; nowadays, fundamentalists and magic-mongers alike merely do harm to true religion. Thus, science is gradually stripping myth and magic from religion. But the essence of religious faith as I have described it, need that be abandoned? Can science prove that the Ground of the creative process of which we are products is indifferent to goodness or truth? Does it even make the fact appear probable? I think not.

Now, first of all, science is not directly concerned with origins [the author has ultimate origins in mind - ed.]; it is therefore silent, or should be silent, as regards Divine causation or, in simpler language, as to how God causes events. Science examines the ways in which things happen; and, in so doing, it takes the sequences of Nature for granted; they are given facts of which no ultimate explanation can be discovered. Science, however, rests upon faith, for it assumes that man can reach some measure of truth. Yet ultimate truth is beyond the reach of science; no one can prove that our scientific concepts correspond to the actual nature of things. Further, science has remarkably little to say as to the scale of values by which we order our lives. Yet such values are fundamental to religion. These certain facts suffice to show that the conflict between science and true religion is not direct. What exists is a conflict between such a religious faith as I have set forward and the philosophical conclusions which some men of science derive from their studies.

Now, I, personally, believe that the Creator and Lord of the Universe is God, as Christ revealed Him. In Him are beauty and truth: He is the source of righteousness and peace. His kingdom is the realm where all these qualities exist in perfection. Further, I hold that, as Christ taught, man was

created that, by struggle and service to God, he might enter the Kingdom of Heaven. But there are distinguished men of science who have reached very different conclusions. Though I differ from them, I would speak of them with the respect due to men who seek truth. They believe that the Universe is, in essence, non-moral. Out of the blind forces of Nature evolutionary development has emerged. Man with his moral sensibility is thus at war with the cosmic process of which he is the product. He must fight lest he lose his moral self-respect ; but he can have no fellow-ship with the unseen ; and, moreover, in the battle he will really fight in vain, for extinction, absolute and complete, awaits him.

Now, as I criticise this standpoint, I would ask you first to notice what is implied by the belief, fundamental in scientific method, that man can attain some measure of truth. If this belief is well-grounded, man must be so constituted that there is a harmony between his ways of thought and Nature's laws. Unless we are right in such a belief, no science can be possible. Yet the belief implies that there is a rationality in the Universe akin to the rational thought of man. Reflection upon such a fact, to say the least, makes us doubt whether the cosmic process is not directed by mind.

Such doubts, moreover, increase when one considers the past history and development of the earth as various sciences now unite to describe it. There has obviously, in this vast panorama, been a progress which has culminated in the creation of civilised man. Is that progress the outcome of blind forces? It seems to me fantastic to say 'yes' in answer to this question. Without some directing intelligence, chaos would remain chaos. The process which has led to man from the dead matter of a cooling fragment of the sun is surely evidence both of progress and also of purpose. In fact, the natural conclusion to draw from the modern knowledge won by scientific method is that the Universe is subject to the sway of thought - of thought directed by will towards definite ends. Man's creation was thus not a quite incomprehensible and wholly improbable consequence of the properties of electrons and protons, or, if you prefer so to say, of discontinuities in space-time; it was the result of some Cosmic Purpose. And the ends towards which that Purpose acted must be found in man's distinctive qualities and powers. In fact, man's moral and spiritual capacities, at their highest, show the nature of the Cosmic Purpose which is the source of his being. In this way, by speculation based on purely scientific conclusions, we reach the idea of creation by a God Whose nature is goodness, beauty and truth. By such a mode of argument we are, as I hold, forced to admit that the distinctive excellencies of man at his highest reveal God, so far as knowledge of Him can be attained. Thus it follows that there is some community of nature between the mind of man in general and the Divine Mind. Moreover, if in Christ there was such moral and spiritual excellence as the New Testament asserts, the revelation of God in Him was a true revelation.

I am quite sure that we must reject the notion that matter is self-existent, the primary basis of all that is, and that from its properties the Universe has arisen. For humanity matter is a mental construct ; and what actually corresponds

to that construct we do not know, and probably never shall know. The belief that thought is a sort of by-product of material changes that take place in the brain, and that all such changes are part of a vast mechanism, seems to me ludicrous. When the materialist persuasively makes matter produce mind, I admire his skill as I admire that of a conjurer. But the higher is not produced by the lower. We grant that, in the cosmic process, life and mind have emerged through matter. But such emergence is the result of the creative activity of God Who has thus used matter for His own ends. Moreover, the materialist, who regards thought as a sort of phosphorescence corresponding to material change, of necessity believes that we have no freedom. According to his belief, all the working of our minds is but a consequence of changes according to laws which express the properties of matter. My thought and actions could thus be infallibly predicted by the man who could write down and solve the appropriate differential equations. To this I can only reply that constant and invariable experience convinces me that I have freedom of choice. One of my Cambridge friends years ago put the matter briefly and bluntly when he said, ' I may be a fool, but I'm not an automaton '. In brief, the results reached by scientific investigation, when rightly analysed, give no support to materialism. Matter and its interactions do not constitute the source of all that is: mind is not a product of material change.

But, after rejecting materialism, I have still to meet those who urge that some form of pantheism is the natural interpretation of the knowledge of the Universe won by scientific method. Now there are about as many forms of pantheism as there are pantheistic philosophers. These forms range from the Naturalism which identifies God with Nature, to a belief in Divine Immanence such as I myself hold. We have not, as it seems to me, knowledge which will enable us accurately to specify the range and limits of God's activity. But, if we rightly conclude from our knowledge of evolution that there is purpose in the Universe, then we must hold that God is not, like His Universe, in the making. He must act through matter for ends eternally present to His mind. We may even say that He is immanent in material change, though it is probably much more true to say that matter and all its interactions have their ground in God. But it cannot be true that God is, as it were, diffused mind, which only reaches self-consciousness in man, and in whatever similar or higher beings exist elsewhere in the Universe. Further, all forms of pantheism imply that man is, in some sense and to some extent, Divine. All of them, as it seems to me, must be rejected because, if man is actually a part of God, the evil in man is also in God. Either, then, evil is unreal, or it is in God Himself. In either case, as I think, the foundations of morality are destroyed.

Now, I know that there are some who jeer at the moral seriousness of Christian preachers. But they would resent injustice or cruelty as much as any of us. We cannot, in fact, ignore goodness and truth; and I believe that it is only when they are ignored or dangerously minimised that pantheism seems a possible creed. Of course, the moral values to which I assign such outstanding importance are not derived from the scientific investigation of the Universe.

But they arise from aspects of human experience, which are more fundamental and important than those which can be classed as scientific method. No man of science will ask us to deny the claims of truth, and no humane man will desire that we reject those of goodness. But neither, I believe, can frame a coherent theory of the world save by rejecting both materialism and pantheism. For, of course, any theory which involves a state of war between man and the cosmic process of which he is the product is not coherent. Equally, one which implies a struggle between good and evil in God Himself must lead to a Universe divided against itself.

According to Christian belief, God, in making man, desired to create free spirits capable of communion with Himself. He could not give actual moral freedom save in a world which contained both good and evil. Thus we can dimly understand why, though God is perfect goodness, there is evil in this world. But we are puzzled that there should be so much evil, and this bewilderment is the chief argument against Christian theism.

Yet, formidable though the objection be, it is to my mind less damaging than the objections that can be raised to atheism or pantheism. Atheism, if true to itself, must end in a pessimism with no guiding principles; pantheism must logically end in a depreciation of the moral law. Ethical theism, the belief that a God of righteousness and truth has created and rules the world, alone takes full account of the fact that moral and spiritual values are of supreme importance in human life. It is also an incentive to right conduct and, holding the belief, we can rest confident that the Universe is friendly and human life not vain. Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him'. ' All things work together for good to them that love God '. In such sentences the eternal optimism of Jewish and Christian theism rings out ; and no conclusions of science have successfully challenged, or, so far as I can see, are likely so to challenge the faith on which such optimism rests.

There are, doubtless, some of my bearers who at this conclusion will say, But why, then, is religion so often associated with bitterness, fanaticism, and the like ? ' I think that the cause of such perversions is fear. Those who remember the years of the war will not, especially if they were pacifists, be in any doubt as to the almost insane fury that fear can produce. Now, to many religious people their faith is their most precious possession. It gives them confidence that the Universe is friendly, that the love of God is a shield and buckler. Such faith, however, they may associate with a whole collection of beliefs of very varying value, true and untrue, grotesque and reasonable. But let one such belief, however childish, be denied, and the whole structure of the faith of these people seems imperilled. Blank fear assails them. A thief is stealing their greatest treasure and with violent unreason they denounce him.

It is probably true to say that the religious fanatic is, as a rule, secretly doubtful of the truth of his creed. When a man has reached inward certainty, he is not upset by criticism. Such certainty may, of course, maintain itself because the mind is closed; and this form is sometimes a not

very admirable product of the seminary or of mental inertia. But, at its best, inward certainty results from quiet meditation upon a few fundamental facts: man's origin and nature, his powers, and especially his occasional contact with spiritual reality made, as the Christian would say, sacramentally. I hold that a man can rightly call himself a member of the Christian Church when, as he surveys the pathway to the religious confidence in which he rests, he can say, ' Christ passed along this road ', and add, ' The Master went further than I have gone, yet I will follow Him '. The Christian religion is not an affair of believing this particular creed, or accepting that particular organisation. It can be summed up in a sentence, 'I have found God, and I will try to follow Christ.'

The Rt Rev E W Barnes was Bishop of Birmingham. This is taken from "Science & Religion," (no date) Gerald Howe Ltd., London, Chapter 4, pp. 55-65.

HUMOUR FROM THE WEB

WHO IS THE REAL PROFESSIONAL THEN?

On a flight to Johannesburg, I was preparing my notes for one of the parent-education seminars I conduct as an educational psychologist. The elderly woman sitting next to me explained that she was returning to Gauteng after having spent two weeks visiting her six children, 18 grandchildren and ten great-grandchildren in Cape Town. Then she inquired what I did for a living.

I told her, fully expecting her to question me for free professional advice. Instead she sat back, picked up a magazine and said, "If there's anything you want to know, just ask me."

A boy was watching his father, a pastor, write a sermon. "How do you know what to say?" he asked. "Why, God tells me." "Oh, then why do you keep crossing things out?"

Jack was removing some engine valves from a car on the lift when he spotted the famous heart surgeon Dr. Michael DeBakey, who was standing off to the side, waiting for the service manager.

Jack, somewhat of a loud mouth, shouted across the garage, "Hey DeBakey! Is dat you? Come over here a minute."

The famous surgeon, a bit surprised, walked over to where Jack was working on a car. Jack in a loud voice, all could hear, said argumentatively, "So Mr. Fancy Doctor, look at this work. I also take valves out, grind 'em, put in new parts, and when I finish this baby will purr like a kitten. So how come you get the big bucks, when you and me are doing basically the same work?"

DeBakey was very embarrassed and as he walked away, said softly to Jack, "Try doing your work with the engine running."

NEWS BRIEFS (From the Internet)

* Asteroid just misses the earth

In astronomical terms it was a near hit. An asteroid that could have caused huge destruction narrowly missed the earth earlier this year. By near hit astronomers mean 600 000 km! - this was the closest the asteroid came to earth. It would have made a direct hit if it had arrived just four hours earlier.

* Insects inspire new generation of robots for Mars

Insect-sized helicopter robots are being planned for future Mars probes. Called Entomopters from entomology (the study of insects) and helicopter, the intention is to have the robots swarming over the Martian surface and mapping its terrain.

* Life given another 200 million years

The sun is destined to expand into a red giant and die in about 7.5 billion years. The expansion will gobble up Mercury and Venus. Original calculations suggested the earth would share this fate, but it is now believed that the Sun's weakened gravitational pull will allow the earth to remain in its orbit. The bad news is that the sun's proximity will cause all water on earth to evaporate. The good news is that this will take a further 200 million years.

* Bloodsucking flies may have started HIV epidemic

Most insects, including mosquitoes, cannot pass on HIV. An exception could be bloodsucking flies such as the stable fly. It bites people and regurgitates a little blood when feeding. Transmission of viruses such as HIV is thus theoretically possible. Bloodsucking flies may, then, have started the HIV epidemic. The older theory is that game hunters became infected when open wounds came into contact with HIV-laded chimpanzee blood.

* When did life start on earth?

Researchers agree that life must have started at least 3 billion years ago. Now, a new laser technology indicates that this date may need to be pushed back to 3.9 billion years. Laser analysis of 3.5 billion years old filament patterns in Western Australia suggests that bacteria were already greatly diversified - the filaments represent 11 species including cyanobacteria. To allow sufficient time for evolution, life must have started soon after the end of asteroid bombardment 3.9 billion years ago. Others dispute the finding.

* Nuclear fusion in a bubble

Nuclear fusion is a much more attractive alternative to the usual fission because the raw materials needed are readily available and it produces less radioactive waste. Now researchers are beginning to find ways of generating the high temperatures needed for fusion by rapid, accoustic implosion of bubbles in acetone containing deuterium atoms. Temperatures achieved range from 5000-7000 degrees Kelvin (the surface temperature of the sun) to close to 10 million degrees Kelvin (the core temperature of the sun).

* South African scientists invent the needleless vaccination

Measles is an extremely contagious disease that can lead to serious secondary infections. Now scientists have found a way of delivering a vaccine against measles without the dreaded needle. The child breathes in a mist sprayed into a plastic mask. As a bonus, the new technique stimulates the immune system in the nose and throat.

* Want a healthy brain? Try a little libation

It has been known that alcohol, in moderation, helps to ward off heart disease and strokes. Now, a new study of 5000 people suggests that the brain can benefit too. Those who had one to three drinks per day had a 42% lower risk of dementia. More than that and the hazards rapidly exceed the benefits. Excessive drinking can actually cause the brain to shrink. Note: One large libation is equivalent to many little ones.

* Dolly has arthritis

Dolly, the cloned sheep, has arthritis. The first mammal ever cloned is showing signs of premature ageing. If the condition is the result of a genetic defect, it may provide researchers with hope for solving such challenges as the genetic basis of arthritis, understanding ageing and the complexities of gene interaction.

* Diminutive "duck-croc" discovered

Super-croc was 12 metres long and probably feasted on dinosaurs in Saharan Africa 110 million years ago. Palaeontologists have unearthed its tiny cousin. Dubbed 'Duck-croc' because of its overhanging jaw, it was just 60cm long. It probably started out eating insects and tadpoles moving onto crabs, frogs and fish as an adult.

* God through the Net

A recent survey has found that more adult Americans use the Internet for spiritual purposes than for gambling, banking or trading stocks. The Pew Internet and American Life Project found that these surfers are more likely than their peers to attend church services regularly and 86% said that they prayed or meditated every day.

Spot the Fallacy

CONTRADICTION OR CALLING A SPADE A NON-SPADE

Mike L Anderson

The law of non-contradiction is one of the most basic laws of logic. Violating this law quickly leads to nonsense and a breakdown in meaningful communication. The law of non-contradiction asserts that no statement can be both true and false at the same time. Another way of putting it is that a statement and its negation cannot both be true.

The law is so basic that one may wonder whether it even needs to be expressed. Yet, there are a few notables that have effectively downplayed it. Ralph Waldo Emerson, for instance, wrote: "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by statement, philosophers, and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do" (1). To be consistent in his inconsistency Emerson would have to say that the opposite is also true. So, great souls would have something to do with consistency, after all. Without the principle of consistency Emerson cannot actually affirm or deny anything.

The few who do not obey the law are generally found in insane asylums. For the rest of us, it is deeply assumed. The sane do not typically contradict themselves by affirming and negating something in the same breath. However, otherwise rational, intelligent and educated people do contradict themselves; they just tend to do it in more circuitous and subtle ways.

American philosopher, Moreland, has written a book deploring the loss of the Christian mind in Western Christianity and calling for a recapture of the importance of the Christian mind. It is a welcome call. He gives one consequence of anti-intellectualism on evangelicalism as a misunderstanding of faith. He is surely right. The faith of some is indistinguishable from superstition.

What is the biblical understanding of faith? Ephesians says, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- 9 not by works, so that no one can boast." Let us call this the spade. What is Moreland's view? In a bid to recover the life of the Christian mind but without providing scriptural support, he says, "...biblically, faith is a power or skill to act in accordance with the nature of the kingdom of God..." (Emphasis his) (2). In context he means to include reasoning skills. If he were right it would put those trained like him in the spiritual pound seats. He would have the spiritual advantage. But, are these views the same? Is Moreland calling a spade a spade?

We can tell by taking the term 'faith' in Ephesians 2:8 & 9 and substituting his definition for it. We get, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through a power or skill to act in accordance with the nature of the kingdom of God--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- 9 not by works, so that no one can boast."

We have a contradiction. Moreland is calling a spade a non-spade. Either we are saved by some prowess we have - then we can boast. Or, we are saved by grace - then we cannot boast.

We cannot have it both ways without violating the law of contradiction. Moreland is welcome to whatever views he likes, of course. He just cannot call them biblical. It is ironic that when it comes to palaeontology and neontology, Moreland is decidedly anti-intellectual (3) whereas when it comes to the gospel he revives the intellect in just the wrong place. Similarly, I heard a Christian worker who had no time for academia, question whether a particular individual had sufficient intelligence to understand the gospel and be saved. But if salvation is a gift, God can grant it to the retarded or the insane, or indeed to anyone He wishes.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Hoover, A.J. (1982) Don't you believe it. Moody Press, Chicago.

2. Moreland, J.P. (1997) Love your God with all your Mind. Navpress Publishing Group, Colorado, p. 25.

3. It would take too long to document here. But, suffice to say he rejects the established biological accounts of the history of life.

Feature article

WHAT CAN LIBERALS AND EVANGELICALS TEACH EACH OTHER

by Donald W. Shriver, Jr.

The challenge of writing poetry, T. S. Eliot once said, is dealing with "undisciplined squads of emotion." The problem of writing about evangelicals, liberals and fundamentalists in today's world of religion is one of undisciplined squads of definitions. I live and work at a seminary whose former president, Henry Sloane Coffin, gave to its theological tradition the name "liberal evangelical." Such a description is sure to raise storms of protest in many sectors of American Christianity today. What evangelical wants to be called a liberal? What liberal, an evangelical'?

Rather than devote a great deal of space to getting the definitions straight, I will leave them for implicit explication in what follows. I believe myself to be both evangelical and liberal in my disposition as a Christian; but I know what my friends mean when they call me "liberal" and what my enemies mean when they say that a liberal is really a "radical," just as I know what they all mean when they voice either admiration or suspicion of "the evangelicals." On all sides of conversation between people who prefer one or another title for themselves, I hear claims that make sense to me as one Christian among many. I also hear claims that may have gotten neglected in my own sector of the Christian movement. But my sector has claims that it is unwilling to abandon in any debate with those who are most critical of it. In short, I think that so-called liberals and so-called evangelicals have important truths to urge upon each other.

What can liberal Christians learn from evangelicals?

1. Humans hunger for elevated significance in their lives. To the skeptical eye of anthropologists, religious story, religious ritual and religious theory all make astonishing claims about the ultimate importance of a human life. Liberal secularist critics of "creationism" sometimes seem oblivious to the assault which they are making not upon a theological theory, but upon the sense of worth that evangelicals derive from profound meanings associated with the biblical story of creation. The great God of so vast a universe, focusing divine attention upon the human creatures of earth? It is possible to make it seem an absurd claim. But the very essence of biblical religion (and some other world religions as well) has to do with just this apparent absurdity. People need to think that their lives amount to something. There are enough forces in history, especially in the 20th century, to convince any observant individual that we do not amount to much.

The eminent and eloquent paleontologist Loren Eiseley wrestled throughout his life with the apparent clash between the human cry for meaning and the new time and space-scales of the post-Darwinian account of the universe. Wrote Eiseley in *The Immense Journey*:

"In a universe whose size is beyond human imagining, where our world floats like a dust mote in the void of night, men have grown inconceivably lonely. We scan the time scale and the mechanism- of life itself for portents and signs of the invisible.... We watch the stars, but the signs are uncertain. We uncover the bones of the past and seek for our origins. There is a path there, but it appears to wander. The vagaries of the road may have a meaning, however; it is thus we torture ourselves " [(Vintage, 1957), pp. 161-1621.

Armed with science, sociology and pluralistic awareness, liberals sometimes seem to offer rational reasons why evangelicals should take less seriously their talk about God's self-revelation on behalf of a lost human world. People want to be saved from the undertow of sin, death and insignificance that so regularly undermines us. Evangelicals know this. Liberals, if they mean to be Christians, should know it too.

2. What one does believe, not what one does not, best defines a faith. H. Richard Niebuhr used to quote F. D. Maurice to the effect that "thinkers are more likely to be right in what they affirm than in what they deny." This is a rule that applies both to liberals and to evangelicals, and especially to the debate between them. The classic liberal tradition (represented in such thinkers as Hume, Jefferson and Kant) prided itself on its critical" spirit. It criticized the importance of one set of facts by calling attention to other facts. Learned Hand was expressing classic liberalism in his great dictum, "The spirit of liberty is the spirit that is not too sure it is right. " But vital religion has never been chiefly a way of grounding our uncertainty in yet more uncertainty. The very logic of not being too sure about one's own rightness may require a positive measure for detecting the right itself. In a word, evangelicals are at their best

when they are preaching a positive message of Good News to people mired in bad news.

Is liberalism grounded in rational philosophic skepticism? Its critics often suspect that it is. Another kind of grounding is to be found in the famous plea of Oliver Cromwell to a cantankerous Scottish regiment: "I beseech you by the mercies of Christ, think that you may be wrong!" The Christ who is the way, truth and life for Christians will always stand as judge and critic of all our truths and works. But for Christians there is a great difference between the judgment of God and bare rational criticism, just as there is a great difference between meeting God in an idea and meeting God in Jesus of Nazareth. Among many liberals and evangelicals whom I know, the latter seem to grasp this simple principle better than do the former. In this they are the theologically wiser of the two.

3. Concrete love is the most powerful human truth. I suspect that the growth of many evangelical congregations has more to do with how members of those congregations relate to each other than with what sort of theology gets preached from their pulpits. The word "warm" often creeps into descriptions of evangelical piety, and at its most vigorous this warmth is likely to be present interpersonally. Not long ago I worshiped in a midwestern congregation which had its share of charismatics and other types of evangelicals. After the service a man approached me to say, "Six months ago I was in prison. When I got out, I visited around to various churches, but only here did they make me feel at home." Recent research on the electronic church strongly suggests that faithful viewers of the TV evangelists are overwhelmingly faithful church members. They find no substitute for churchgoing in tube-delivered inspiration. The truth here is not that preaching must appeal to "the heart," but rather that religion is a communal fact. Its vitality springs from concrete human relations between people who visibly care about each other. In their individualism, liberals may have missed this fact. In their congregations, evangelicals may have embodied it. It is hard to believe that one is important to God if one is unimportant to any group of neighbors.

4. There is a witness. Whatever else the word itself means, "evangelical" has to mean a testimony to Good News. In their preoccupation with critical thinking, intellectual clarity and tolerance, some liberal Christians forget that their only access to this historic faith is someone else's testimony. Nobody invents the Jewish or the Christian faith from the depths of his or her own mind. We are Jews or Christians because of something that happened, something worth reporting to generation after generation. Liberals have a right and an obligation to quarrel with many of the terms and techniques of witness employed by some evangelicals, but evangelicals are correct when they remind us that there is a faith "delivered to the saints," who in turn are responsible for delivering it to others.

There may be other elements of the evangelical perspective which its proponents wish liberals would take more seriously, but the above-mentioned are the ones that seem to me

eminently worth commending.

What contributions do liberal Christians have to make in their dialogue with evangelicals?

A less self-serving and probably more ecumenical approach would be for liberals to wait for evangelicals themselves to answer this question. But we all have a right to think that we know our strengths as well as our weaknesses. Among the strengths of theological liberals in today's church, I would focus on the following.

1. Truth is as humanly important as meaning. There is no ultimate comfort in false meanings, or meanings whose base in reality is questionable. Ultimately the famous definition attributed to a bright Sunday school student -- "Faith is believing what you know ain't so" -- means that as an adult he will not show up in church. One inescapable point of debate here between liberals and evangelicals is their respective ways of understanding the Bible. Evangelical sermons abound in statements that begin, "The Bible says . . ." The "liberal evangelicals" to whom Coffin referred were ardent biblical scholars. They were determined to find out, as precisely as possible, what the Bible does and does not say. They made it difficult for anyone to ally the Bible unambiguously with any one theology -- e.g., millennialism or Thomism or Calvinism. Modern religious liberalism, with its roots in the scientific spirit of the 18th century Enlightenment, took science seriously because it took the Creator of the real world seriously. No Marcionite or spiritualistic religion for them: the God of Israel and the God of Jesus, having made this world, inhabits it for our salvation. At stake is the issue over which the Nicene Council struggled mightily: Does God meet us in the real humanity of a historically real Jesus, "of one substance" with the real us, or not? Faith that ignores questions of reality will not long remain faith in the One to whom the gospel testifies.

2. The worshiping congregation is indispensable to the life of faith, but faithful life in the world is equally indispensable. Now that evangelicals have entered the political arena around issues such as school prayer, abortion law, and even the election of candidates, the old distinction that "liberals preach the social gospel and evangelicals a personal gospel" no longer holds. History, of course, is full of evangelical incursions into the issues of American society -- abolitionism and prohibition are two illustrations -- so the old saying never was very accurate. But many evangelicals still seem a bit uneasy in the push and shove of secular democratic politics. It is well that they do, for faithful discipleship in the midst of the world never was easy for Christians. The liberal readiness to see the world (with Calvin) as "the theater of God's glory" has its own tortuous history, and modern evangelicals have something to learn from that history for example, how "success" in secular society often demands compromise with that society.

One reason I respect Billy Graham's ministry is that he seems to have learned from the Watergate crisis not to hostage religion to power. Yet the liberal lesson here is not to send

religion back into its gathered congregations. The lesson is that the withdrawal-and-return rhythm of the church's relation to the world is a rhythm of obedience, repentance and renewal. A decade ago research in Raleigh, North Carolina, demonstrated to some of us that the highest morale among citizens was likely to be found in those who had a sturdy religious faith, a community of friends who stood by them in thick and thin, and a track record, for persistent participation in the push and pull of politics. Liberals were apt to discover this truth as they went into the streets at the time of the civil rights movement and the Vietnam-era antiwar demonstrations. They did not think themselves into it. I hope that the newly political evangelicals discover the same truth.

3. To worship God in spirit and in truth is-to confess the inadequacy of our worship, spirit and truth. Liberal piety at its best has always stood firm on this insight. Karl Barth was always difficult to classify as either liberal or evangelical because he insisted that the divine Word was never coterminous with the words of Scripture, nor was the whole panoply of religion a sure instrument of that Word. Religions right, left and middle become captive to human pride when their adherents forget that "the sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit" (Ps. 51:17). Ironically enough, the liberal democratic tradition feared the incursion of religion into politics because its proponents did not particularly experience religion as a contributor of "the spirit that is not too sure it is right." Insofar as they mean to be Christian, why should the assorted political advocates of today's churches ride so high a theological horse when they enter the public political arena? Those who ride in on a high horse usually return as pedestrians: that is the ordinary democratic experience. One might even hope that this truth was discovered by the social-action-oriented evangelicals who came to the fore in the early '80s. On the basis of what Paul Tillich called the Protestant Principle, we can predict that in politics we will always be somewhat wrong even when we are somewhat right. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Liberal pride and evangelical pride are neither liberal nor evangelical.

4. The freedom of God transcends every human freedom, and this truth is the hope of the world. Contemporary liberation theology has shown us what exploitative purposes the doctrine of God's transcendence can serve in hierarchical churches and societies. Its principal doctrine has been that the God of Israel and Jesus exercises divine freedom in taking up the causes of the world's poor and exploited. Most liberation theologians have more work to do if they are to make clear that this exercise of the divine freedom, too, can never be theologically identical with any particular political claim. But liberationists have no monopoly on this temptation. "Freedom" is one of the words that binds them rhetorically to both the evangelicals and the liberals. Ecumenical dialogue among these theological parties would be more likely if all three more consistently distinguished between the freedom of God and the creaturely freedoms of humanity. On the basis of that distinction, one might write confessions of this sort: God was free to protect Israel of old from the freedoms

of Pharaoh; and the continued existence of the Jewish people in the 20th century exhibits that same divine freedom over against all the human freedom-including that of Christians-which has been exercised in history to obliterate the Jews.

God was free to preserve the word, the witness and the power of Jesus from the powers of Pilate; as a people created by the resurrecting Spirit of God, the church owes its continuing existence, too, to just that divine freedom. God is still free to reform the religion of those who swear by the name of God in history, through persons and powers that do not swear by that name. God is free to be kinder to humans than ever they were or will be to each other, even in the nuclear age.

Perhaps no major theological issue divides liberals and evangelicals so momentously as that concerning the relation of divine judgment to divine love. In the modern era, liberals have emphasized the love and de-emphasized the judgment of God. They have sought with some consistency to keep divine judgment and grace equally accessible to all. They shy away from those heaven-and hell divisions of humanity which lead to we-they splits in religious people's views of other people. In this, many liberals seem more authentically biblical than many evangelicals. The latter seem as preoccupied with the bad news as with the good, though such a preoccupation betrays the Bible's central message. To say that there is something central and something peripheral in the Bible is, of course, to state a liberal view of Scripture which elicits contempt from some evangelicals. But this is where 2,500 years of living with the Scriptures, in the synagogue and in the church, seems to require some choices of emphasis in Bible interpretation -- choices which we may call the principles of theology. With Jonah and against Nahum, must we not side with the God who yearns for the salvation of the Assyrians'? With Paul and against the millennialists, must we not look forward to a great human reconciliation at the end of time more fervently than to a great divine vengeance upon all the sinners who have ever lived? In the inbetween times, must we not worship the Creator of all things, who forbids us to trample in the vineyards where the grapes of wrath are stored? Do we not know that whatever vengeance for destruction belongs to God, it does not belong to us? Are we ever authorized as Christians to threaten all the earth with a vengeance that God may be too kind ever to unleash? In the nuclear age, who are we to think that we hear the rumble of divine anger unless inside that anger we, like Hosea, hear the sound of tears?

Frankly, I am not sure that the word liberal or the word evangelical is the right tag for what I would covet for both liberals and evangelicals to learn in any future dialogue on this last issue. We live in a world whose creatures, though called to community, have practiced the arts of hostility and enmity -- to the vast neglect of the arts of love. The Scriptures, and especially the gospel, call us to be forgivers of each other's sins, not judges of all the earth; call us to be respectful of each other's strange ways, because we are all strangers enough to the transcending ways of God; call us to be faith-full enough to ascribe to our

living Redeemer the right to love our enemies though we, in our finitude, have not yet learned to love them. "God is not the enemy of my enemies," said Martin Niemöller, recounting the spiritual lessons of his eight-year imprisonment under Hitler. "God is not even the enemy of God's own enemies." Even when they see each other as enemies, liberals and evangelicals must find their fundamental hope in that kind of assertion.

Dr. Donald W. Shriver was president of Union Theological Seminary in New York City in 1987. This article appeared in The Christian Century, August 12-19, 1987 pp. 687-690. Copyright by The Christian Century Foundation; used by permission.