Monday, January 15

Today's Readings

- Plantinga, Ch. 4, *Redemption*
- *DCM Reader* Chapter 3 Introduction
- Garber, *To See What You See*
- Clapp, *Why the Devil Takes VISA*
- Niebuhr, *Christ Against Culture*
- Film: *Darwin's Nightmare*
- Film: *The Mission*
  - Anker, *The Jesuits and the Guarani*
  - Anker, *Redemptive Themes in the Mission* (optional)

For Tuesday

- Fee & Stuart, *The Need to Interpret* (in *DCM Reader*; optional, but good)
- MacKay, Chapters II and III.4–6

And Beyond

For Wednesday

Some statistics related stuff related to tomorrow’s class.

For Thursday

- Polkinghorne, *Introduction* and *Providence*
- Haarsema, *Chance from a Theistic Perspective*
- Haarsema and Haarsema, *Is the Creator Infinitely Lazy?*

For Friday

- Plantinga, Chapter 5, Epilogue, Appendix II and Appendix III (pp.191–197)
**Darwin’s Nightmare**

1. On page 63 of Plantinga’s book, he writes

   At some point in our reflection on sin, we come to understand that sin is not only personal but also interpersonal and even suprapersonal. That is, sin is more than the sum of what sinners do. Sin acquires the form of a spirit – the spirit of darkness, the spirit of an age, the spirit of a company or nation. Sin burrows into the bowels of institutions and makes a home there.

   How does the situation depicted in *Darwin’s Nightmare* illustrate these words?

2. Bernard Sauper, director of *Darwin’s Nightmare*, has said

   It seems that the individual participants within a deadly system don’t have ugly faces, and for the most part, no bad intentions. These people include you and me. Some of us are “only doing their job” (like flying a jumbo from A to B carrying napalm), some don’t want to know, others simply fight for survival. I tried to film the personalities in this documentary as intimately as possible. Sergey, Dimond, Raphael, Eliza: real people who wonderfully represent the complexity of this system, and for me, the real enigma.”

   One of the Russian pilots said in the film: “The African children receive guns for Christmas; the European children receive grapes. I want all the children of the world to be happy; but I don’t know how to do it.” This pilot was flying tanks into Angola, and bringing food back to Europe.

   The Russian pilots fly shipments of arms and fish as a job in order to support their families; many Tanzanian AIDS widows turn to prostitution to support their families; some African men join the local army simply because it pays well.

   Do any of these people have evil intentions? Do you blame these people for doing what they can to “make the best of a bad situation?”

   Or is the problem with a system that forces people to make these choices? How should the responsibility for this broken situation be sorted out?

3. *Darwin’s Nightmare* does not include a narrative written by the filmmaker. All the speaking is done by those interviewed. Yet it seems clear that the film stands as an indictment of global capitalism. But is capitalism the real source of the problem? Another diagnosis can be found in a review of the film in the New York Post: “The documentary tries to pin Africa’s suffering on capitalism, but dances around the real problem. Africa starves because corrupt governments own the natural resources and export them to buy weapons to keep their people at bay.”

   Generally speaking, a documentary editorializes by way of selection—what it shows, and what it doesn’t show (and how it shows what it shows). What if the documentary filmmaker was convinced that the problem was not so much global capitalism as corrupt government? What would we see that we didn’t see in Darwin’s Nightmare? Where would the camera go?

4. In an interview, Bernard Sauper (director of *Darwin’s Nightmare*) said:

   You don’t need me to tell you that kids are starving in Africa. But I can give you a different awareness in the language of art. There isn’t anything new in my movie. It’s all known. I just give it a face. Somehow that transforms our knowing into understanding.

   At least that’s what I hope.

   How does seeing a film like this affect you? Does a film like this make a bigger impact on you or statistics reporting the number of people in Africa with AIDS, or who are starving. Why do you think this is?
5. What impressions do we get of Christianity in Africa from the film *Darwin’s Nightmare*? We have scenes of street evangelism, a Christian burial, and an interview with a pastor. What do students think about showing a film of Jesus (as a European) and the fishermen on the Sea of Galilee taking in a miraculous haul of fish? What about the pastor who recognized the problem of AIDS, but does not recommend the general use of condoms because of the church’s teaching that sex outside of marriage is a sin? What about Christian relief and development efforts in Africa?—we didn’t see any evidence of them. What would relief and development work look like on the shores of Lake Victoria? Would that kind of work be the appropriate response on the part of the Christian community, or only part of the response?

6. Some churches (congregations as a whole) seem especially earnest about social activism. Is this a necessary feature in the life of any church? Are there spiritual pitfalls associated with such fervor for social causes? What are they?

**The Mission**

1. Why does Father Gabriel disobey the order to leave the Guarani? Why does Father Gabriel refuse to fight for the Guarani? Why does he refuse to bless Rodrigo?

2. Whose actions do you admire more, Father Gabriel’s or Rodrigo Mendoza’s? Why?

3. What actions and characters do you find most disturbing in the film? Why?

4. Why do you think the Cardinal does what he does in the film? Why do you think the director chooses to begin and end the film with the Cardinal?


6. What purpose did Mendoza’s penance serve? Refer to Plantinga’s description of penance in your answer.

7. Why does Mendoza become a Jesuit? How is this act tied to his conversion?

8. In terms of community of Guarani at the mission above the falls, trace the themes of Creation, Fall, and Redemption.
Culture

6. This discussion item is intended to get you thinking about this issue of culture in the specific context of television.

(a) Do you think television is inherently bad/evil? Can you imagine someone disagreeing with you? What would they say to you about this if you discussed it with them?

(b) How would you characterize the influence of television as it actually exists?
   • on balance it is a negative influence
   • on balance it is a neutral influence
   • on balance it is a positive influence

(c) What sorts of responses could Christians have toward television? How do you those responses relate to the assessment of television’s influence? other aspects of one’s world view?

7. What kind of music/movies/television shows/books should Christians buy/read/watch? Which answer comes closest to what you think?

(a) You should fill your mind with the gospel. It’s OK to listen to any style of music so long as the message is Christian. But you should usually avoid purchasing and listening to music with a non-Christian message. The same goes for movies, TV, books, etc.

(b) Christians are often too legalistic. They shouldn’t worry so much about what they can and can’t listen to. Some music is obviously bad, but a mature Christian can listen to most things and filter out what’s bad from what’s good. So listen to what you enjoy so long as it’s not too extreme. The same goes for movies, TV, books, etc.

(c) You should listen to the best stuff: classical music and jazz, great novels, classic films, high-quality television. Popular culture has a little bit of good stuff, but most of its drek. Avoid it. As a Christian, you should concentrate on the art and music that you know is good quality.

(If you don’t like the answers above, how would you answer the question?)

8. Discuss the quotation below.

“The church, at best, fell asleep. It might be fair to say that we lost the power to transform culture. We accommodated to a culture that was, for us, user-friendly... The church was no longer the shaper of modern culture, but, in fact, modern culture had become the shaper of the church. This should be our great awakening. The world changed, and we didn’t. The world changed for the worse because we didn’t change at all... the world waits for the church to once again become God’s agent of change.”

   Erwin McManus

(a) Which influence do you think is greater: The influence of North American churches on North American culture or the influence of North American culture on North American churches?

(b) What do you think McManus means when he says that “the world changed, and we didn’t”?

(c) Do you believe that a/the role of the church is to be “God’s agent of change?” If so, what change should North American Christians strive for? How should they go about it? If not, why not?