Monday, January 12: Creation

Required Reading

- Plantinga, Ch. 2, *Creation*
- From the *DCM Reader*:
  - Chapter 3 Introduction
  - Atkins, *The Limitless Power of Science*
  - Gould, *Non-Overlapping Magisteria*
  - Fang Li Zhi, *Note on the Interface Between Science and Religion*
  - MacKay, *A Scientist in God’s World*

Optional Reading

- Dillard, excerpts from *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

Other Preparation

- Prepare reading notes; prepare for quiz.
- Administer *A Little Survey* to two subjects and bring them with you next week. I’ll have you record the results in class. Do this by *Tuesday*.
- Design two versions of a survey question intended to bias the responses in opposite directions. Then try it out on *at least 20* subjects. Use a coin toss or some other random means to decide who gets asked which version of the question, but ask the same number of subjects each version so that the results are easy to compare.
- Prepare a brief summary where you
  - Give both versions of your question.
  - Give the distribution of responses to each version of the question.
  - Compare the two distributions and comment on them. Were they more similar or dissimilar than you expected? Did you learn anything else in the process?

This will be collected on *Wednesday*, but the weekend may be a good time to get your subjects to help you out.

- Take a (sabbath) break. Relax. Enjoy creation.

Class

- 8:30–8:50 Devotions, Quiz
- 9:00–9:50 Plenary Lecture: *An Astronomer’s View of Creation*, Deborah Haarsma
- 10:30–11:50 Discussion
Looking Ahead

• Next week one of the required “readings” will be to watch the movie *The Mission*. There will be on-campus screenings of the movie next Friday, Saturday and the following Monday (times and locations TBA). But you are also free to watch it on your own.

• If you have time to get ahead on reading, you can read the articles by Niebuhr and Clapp in the *DCM Reader*.

• Upcoming plenary talks:
  – Tuesday, January 13: Kurt Schaefer, *The Cultural Mandate and U.S. Poverty Policy*
  – Thursday, January 15: Claudia Beversluis, *Can We Still Speak of Sin in a Therapeutic Culture?*
Getting Ready for Tomorrow’s Readings

1. This discussion item is intended to get you thinking about this issues 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?

2. What kind of music / movies / t.v. / books should Christians buy? 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, t.v., 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, t.v., 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 dreck. 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 above answers, how would you answer the question?)

3. North American society is rich compared to much of the rest of the world. There are lots of things we can buy and enjoy. Which of the following comes closest to what you think about that?

   (a) Christians ought to be stewardly with their money. When you buy homes or cars or televisions or clothes, dont waste money buying the most expensive or stylish. Buy things which are useful and long-lasting. That way, you can save some of your money and give some away to those who have less.

   (b) Its not enough for Christians to be frugal. North American culture is way too materialistic, almost to the point of idolatry. Christians ought to live simpler. We dont need so many big houses and gas-guzzling cars or expensive clothes or rich food. If we live more simply, we can live more spiritually, avoid some of the temptations of wealth, consume fewer natural resources, and have more to give to the poor.

   (c) Many Christians are too uptight about money. God has blessed our society with a lot of good things, and we shouldn’t begrudge those good gifts. Instead, we should work hard, enjoy the good things that God gives us, and be thankful for them.

   (If you don’t like A, B or C, how would you answer the question?)
4. In general, should Christians get involved in politics (join political parties, run for political office, get involved in local government, and so forth)? Which answer comes closest to what you think?

(a) Yes. We have a responsibility to get involved. We can accomplish good things and help make society better if we get involved.

(b) Yes, but unfortunately, the current system (including all the major political parties) doesn’t really reflect Christian ideals. It would be best if we could set up an explicitly Christian political party. In the meantime, well just have to make do with the current system.

(c) No. It’s a good idea to vote, but if you get much more involved in politics than that, you’ll probably wind up compromising your Christian ideals. There are more important things for Christians to do. Besides, involvement in politics gives people the misleading idea that society’s problems can be solved through government, when the real problems are spiritual problems and need to be solved spiritually.

(If you don’t like A, B or C, how would you answer the question?)
Tuesday, January 13: Cultural Mandate

Required Reading

• From the *DCM Reader*:
  
  – Ch 4 Introduction
  – Niebuhr, *Christ Against Culture*
  – Clapp, *Why the Devil Takes VISA*

Other Preparation

• Prepare reading notes, as usual. Here are a couple suggestions based on looking at your first couple reading notes:
  
  – Don’t merely write a sequence of quotations with no additional structure.
  – Try to discern and express the main points of each reading and how they are supported. (And make sure you understand the difference between those two things.)
  – Make use of the fact that the paper is two dimensional: use indentation, draw diagrams, etc. to organize things.
  – Include some response to the reading: agree/disagree, questions, connections to other readings, etc.
  – Make use of white space and/or color to make them more readable and more memorable.

• Remember the survey assignments due Tuesday and Wednesday.

Class

• 8:30–8:50 Devotions, Quiz

• 9:00–9:50 Plenary Lecture: *The Cultural Mandate and U.S. Poverty Policy*, Kurt Schaefer

• 10:30–11:50 Discussion
Discussion Questions

These discussion questions are to help you prepare for upcoming readings.

1. When the Apartheid system in South Africa was dismantled, the new, Black-majority government established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This Commission was empowered to grant amnesty to those individuals who, under the old system, committed human rights violations and crimes against humanity, provided the perpetrators gave a full confession to the Commission. What do you think about this idea?

   (a) This was probably a good idea. A lot of crimes were committed, on both sides, during the struggle for power. Investigating and prosecuting all those crimes would take a lot of time and resources, and would just increase what hatred and divisions that still exist. Besides, the ideas behind the commission fit well with the Christian ideals of confession and forgiveness.

   (b) Although the Commission sounds good, it doesn’t do justice for the victims. Confessions of perpetrators should be encouraged, and perhaps result in reduced sentences, but there has to be some punishment for evil acts, or the idea of justice is meaningless.

   (c) (If you don’t like A or B, how would you answer the question?)

2. Imagine this all-too-common situation: an young, unemployed man is encouraged by his friends to try heroin. He becomes addicted, and then sometimes resorts to petty theft to pay for his habit. In your opinion, which of the following is the biggest part of the problem, and which will provide the biggest part of the solution?

   (a) Although the man made some wrong choices, the biggest part of the problem is the addiction. Addiction causes physical changes in the body. It needs to be treated medically. Medical treatment and therapy are the best hope for helping the man out of this situation.

   (b) Addiction is a difficult thing, but the real problem was the wrong choices the man made to get into the situation, and the wrong choices he continues to make. Addictions can be overcome by making the right choices, deciding to change your life, and seeking help. You’ve got to start by convincing this man to make the right choices. Until he decides to do that, not much can be done to help him.

   (c) Addiction is a difficult thing, and the man made some bad choices, but the biggest part of the problem is the situation the man is in. He needs a job, a stable home, and hope for the future. He needs friends that will help keep him off drugs. Without those things, just getting him to stop using heroin in the short term won’t help in the long term.

   (If you don’t like A, B or C, how would you answer the question?)
Wednesday, January 14

Required Reading

Note: Our next plenary lecture is Thursday, but I’m going to split up the reading for that lecture and spread it out over two days.

- Plantinga, Chapter 3, The Fall (through page 53)
- From the DCM Reader:
  - Tutu, *Nuremberg or National Amnesia: a Third Way*
  - Ruden, *Harsh Politics, Extravagant Forgiveness*

Other Preparation

- Prepare your reading notes.
- Don’t forget to gather your data from two versions of a survey question.

Class

- 8:30–9:50 Devotions, Quiz, Discussion
- 10:30–11:50 More Statistics
Thursday, January 15

Required Reading

- Plantinga, Chapter 3, The Fall
- from the DCM Reader:
  - Chapter 5 Introduction
  - Norris, Good Old Sin
  - Schultze, Civil Sin

Other Preparation

- Reading notes and quiz preparation as usual.

Class

- 8:30–8:50 Devotions, Quiz
- 9:00–9:50 Plenary Lecture: Claudia Beversluis, *Can We Still Speak of Sin in a Therapeutic Culture?*
- 10:30–11:50 Discussion

Looking Ahead

- Viewing times for *The Mission*
  - Friday, 1/16 9:00 AM. Commons Annex Lecture Hall (holds about 200 people)
  - Friday, 1/16 7:30 PM. DCC-015 (DeVos Theatre) (holds about 100 people)
  - Saturday, 1/17 2:30 PM. Commons Annex Lecture Hall (holds about 200 people)
  - Monday, 1/19 2:30 PM. FAC Auditorium

- Things to watch for in *The Mission* (suggested by Roy Anker, the plenary speaker for that day):
  - : What does the waterfall symbolize in the movie?
  - There is very little dialog in this film compared to other films. How does this film communicate story with images instead of words?

You might also like read *Redemptive Themes in ‘The Mission’* by Roy Anker (DCM Reader) before or after viewing the movie.

- Find an article in a paper, magazine or online that reports on the results of a study. Analyze that article using the “7 critical components”. This will be collected on Monday to allow sufficient time to locate an article.

- Upcoming readings:
  - *The Truth, But not the Whole Truth* by Peter Carlson
  - *What Are They Thinking?* by Nelson King
  - Plantinga, Chapter 4
Friday, January 16

Required Reading

- None for today.

Class

- 8:30–9:50: Devotions, Basic Probability
- 10:30–11:50: Sample Proportions
  - Don’t Look in the Bag!

Discussion Questions

Here are some discussion questions to start the day:

1. Driving down the highway.
   
   (a) You are driving on the highway. The speed limit is 65 mph. How fast do you usually drive? (Perhaps imagine you have cruise control, what speed do you set it for?)
   
   (b) Now imagine you are driving down the highway (at the speed indicated above) and you see a police car half hidden to the side of the roadway up ahead. What is your initial reaction? Why?
   
   (c) You continue driving. In the last half hour you have seen several cars pulled over by police officers. Does this effect your driving?

2. Just a minute.

   (a) You need to get a couple items from a local store, but you can’t find a legal parking space. It will only take you a few minutes to get in and out. Would you park illegally and take your chances?

   (b) In the previous scenario, would it make a difference if the illegal spot is a handicapped spot, a “no parking any time” zone, “reserved for customers of Tony’s Tea House” (not the store you need to go to), or “reserved for Mr. Big Shot”?

   (c) What if it will take you 15 minutes to purchase your item? An hour?

3. The Lottery.

   (a) Have you ever bought a lottery ticket? Why or why not?

   (b) Whether or not you have every bought a lottery ticket, do you think there is anything wrong with buying a lottery ticket?

   (c) How about insurance? In what ways are the lottery and insurance similar? dissimilar?


   When you eat at the dining hall, how do you decide what time to eat? What line to get in?
List of Readings So Far

- Plantinga, Chapter 1, *Longing and Hope* [Graham and Jeff]
- Plantinga, Chapter 2: *Creation* [LeAnne and Laura]
- Plantinga, Chapter 3: *The Fall* [Michelle and Lang]
- Colson, *What Are We Doing Here?*
- Garber, *To See What You See*
- Fee & Stuart, *The Need to Interpret* [Lindsey and Elyse]
- Salsbury, *The Lady Tasting Tea*, Preface and Chapter 1
- Sire, *What is a Worldview?* [Mike and Hope]
- Atkins, *The Limitless Power of Science* [Grant and Greg]
- Gould, *Non-Overlapping Magisteria* [Hellen, Kelly]
- Fang Li Zhi, *Note on the Interface Between Science and Religion* [Jordan, Elliot, Jeremy]
- MacKay, *A Scientist in God’s World* [Dana, Katherine]
- Niebuhr, *Christ Against Culture* [Prof Pruim]
- Clapp, *Why the Devil Takes VISA* [Dave and Eric]
- Tutu, *Nuremberg or National Amnesia: a Third Way* [Mark and Laura]
- Ruden, *Harsh Politics, Extravagant Forgiveness* [Brad and Abby]
- *Pollster says churches put too much value on numbers*
Monday, January 19

Required Reading

- *The Truth, But not the Whole Truth* by Peter Carlson
- *What Are They Thinking?* by Nelson King

Other Preparation

- Prepare for quiz as usual.
- A few probability problems (from class).
- Type a summary/study sheet for your assigned reading. (These will be copied and distributed to the class.)

Looking Ahead

- Instead of collecting reading notes, I would like you to write a short (maximum one page) response to one of the following items (as assigned to your group).
  - What purpose did Mendoza’s penance serve? Refer to Plantinga’s description of penance in your answer.
  - In terms of community of Guarani at the mission above the falls, trace the themes of Creation, Fall, and Redemption.
  - Why does Mendoza become a Jesuit? How is this act tied to his conversion?
Midterm Information

- The Midterm exam will be on Wednesday, January 21. It will include an in-class portion and a take-home essay.

- The in-class portion may include multiple choice, true/false, fill-in the blank, short answer, or similar sorts of question formats covering the readings, class discussions and plenary lectures through Thursday, January 15.

- The in-class portion will also include some questions on probability and statistics, covering material through Monday, January 19.

- Mid-term Essay (due Wednesday, at time of mid-term).
  Write an essay on one of the following topics.

  - Does Plantinga offer us any theological insights that might help us to adjudicate between Bishop Tutu and Ms. Ruden? How would you resolve that dilemma and why? In your answer, be sure to give an indication that you understand the relevant ideas from all three writers. You may bring in ideas from other readings and discussions as necessary.

  - Plantinga argues that despite the Fall and evil in the world, Creation is ultimately good. (See the beginning of Chapter 3, for example.)
    * What is his evidence for his claim? Is there support for his position in other things we have read or heard?
    * What are the most important consequences (for a Calvinist) to this claim?
    * The ultimate goodness of creation is part of the Calvinist world view. Do you think a Christian worldview requires you to agree with his argument? Why or why not?

  - Give a well-supported response to consumerism, as defined by Rodney Clapp. Your essay should draw not only on Clapp’s article, but on other things we have read and discussed and should demonstrate how your position corresponds to a worldview position, but it need not be a Calvinist world view.

Essays should be typed and approximately 3–4 pages long. In organizing your essays, do not forget to consider and address possible objections that might be raised to your position (or the position you are describing).