

JESUS, THE ULTIMATE REALITY
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Novelist Walker Percy has written an essay entitled:
"The Last Donahue Show".

In Percy's fictional account Donahue's guests on one show include
Bill, a homosexual who engages in sex with strangers in parks;
Allen, a heterosexual married business man who is a connoisseur of the lunch-hour
liaison;
Penny, a pregnant fourteen year old and
Dr. Joyce Friday a well known talk-show sex therapist.

In the middle of the discussion about sexual preferences, techniques, choices and
tidbits of wisdom from Dr. Friday, the show is suddenly interrupted by by three odd
looking strangers striding down the aisle to the front.

The first looks like John Calvin the Sixteenth Century Reformer.

The second looks like Colonel John Pelham of Civil war fame.

The third is a man who looks like Harry Truman or Lowell Thomas, a non-
descript 1950s person.

Unbelief and angry reaction erupt from the crowd when John Calvin announces that
God's judgment will fall on such behavior and those who practice and endorse it unless
they cast themselves on God's mercy.

"Wait a minute, Reverend, says Donahue.

You're entitled to your religious beliefs but what if others disagree with you.

What's wrong with two consenting adults expressing their sexual
preference in the privacy of their own bedroom?

Then Civil War era Colonel Pelham expresses his disapproval of the immorality being
discussed as if there was no reason to distinguish one behavior from another.

Last, the 1950s person speaks announcing that the entire civilization is about to be
destroyed by a nuclear device from beyond.

He recognizes that such judgment is not likely to be taken seriously by the
audience who is being lulled by the titillation of the day.

But to anyone who chooses to believe his warning there is a cave to which they
can flee and be saved.

At that Donahue breaks in and announces that the show is out of time for the day and
that tomorrow's show will feature surrogate partners and a Kinsey panel.

A commercial appears and then afterward a simple question for the reader of the essay: "If you were in the studio audience, would you heed the stranger's advice or would you ignore it? (From Colson The Body p181)

Percy's Donahue studio audience is a metaphor for the American Public.

Are we seeking real answers to real questions of life?
Or are we grinding numbly through life anesthetized by the ever more bizarre.

Are we seeking to know what life is really about?
Or are we just seeking temporary personal gratification vicariously through the print and electronic media's portrayal of the lives of the rich and famous, the frontier justice-revenge of Clint Eastwood, and the sexual fantasies of Madonna et.al.

Several characteristics stand out in this American audience.

1. For all too many, life is lived as if it is going nowhere.
There is no rhyme or reason for their actions beyond getting through the day.
No overriding purpose for life.

Pathetic is a good word to describe the uncritical thinking of so many.
I recently read part of the script for the not recommended movie called City Slickers.

In it comedian Billy Crystal plays the role of a bored baby boomer advertising representative who is invited to his son's school to tell the children about his job. Feeling at that moment that his life is rather pointless he lets loose with a monologue that bewilders the children but describes very well life for so many.

"Value this time in your life kids," he began, "because this is the time in your life when you still have your choices. It goes by so fast.

When you're a teenager, you think you can do anything and you do.

Your twenties are a blur.

Thirties you raise your family, you make a little money, and you think to yourself, what happened to my twenties.

Forties, you grow a little pot belly, you grow another chin. The music starts to get too loud, one of your old girlfriends from high school becomes a grandmother.

Fifties, you have minor surgery- you call it a procedure but it's surgery.

Sixties, you'll have a major surgery, the music is still too loud but it doesn't matter because you can't hear it anyway.

Seventies, you and your wife retire to Ft Lauderdale. You start eating dinner at 2:00 in the afternoon, you have lunch around 10:00 and breakfast the night before. You spend most of the time wandering around malls looking for the ultimate soft yogurt and muttering, "I wonder why the kids don't call."

The eighties, you'll have a major stroke and you end up babbling with some Jamaican nurse who your wife can't stand but who you call mama.

Any questions kids? (from Colson The Body p168-9)

Life is pointless for so many.

2. Secondly, the Donahue audience has also been led to believe that choices are made in the vacuum of your own desires at the moment.

Pollsters George Barna and George Gallup both find that 2/3s of the American Public believe there is no such thing as an absolute truth.

Dr. Allen Bloom began his widely read book, "The Closing of the American Mind" with the comment that almost every student entering the university believes or says that he believes that truth is relative."

(Colson, The Body - 170)

Lying, stealing, and even adultery are committed with no felt guilt because the circumstances dictated the actions.

Even the taking of life, whether it is in a planned parenthood clinic or by Michigan's Jack Kevorkian's euphemistic "death with dignity" contraptions, is seen as necessary given certain circumstances.

The rules of life are made up as you go.

And whether the rule is good or not is determined by you - is it right for you.

3. Thirdly and surprisingly the Donahue audience believes in God.

Better than 90% of Americans say they believe in God but like the 18th C. French philosopher La Mettrie, "its a theoretic truth with little practical value."

Who is this God they believe in?

It must be what you want it to be.

I say "it" because "it" can't be a person.

A person has a will.

But the "god" of the Donahue mindset has no will but the will of the person making the statement.

This a god of people's own making - one they can control.

Yes, they believe in "God" but their god is no God at all - just a pawn of their imagination.

4. Fourthly, this audience apparently believes that death is the end.

R.C. Sproul wrote, People today, are "betting their lives that this is it, and that there is no judgment and that there is no eternity." (Colson THE Body p 165)

The Humanist Manifesto declares, "As far as we know, the total personality is a function of the biological organism transacting in a social and cultural context. There is no credible evidence that life survives the death of the body."

English philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote, "No intensity of thought and feeling can preserve an individual life beyond the grave." (Sire The Universe Next Door p 65)

Robin Williams in the motion picture "Dead Poets Society" shouts the cry of modern man and woman - Carpe Diem "Seize the Day" -
They have nothing else to seize since they believe this life is all there is.

Into Percy's Donahue show comes a 16th Century preacher, a 19th Century hero, and a 20th century plain-thinking, plain-talking prophet and they're treated like aliens.

Worse than that they are treated as enemies.

They are suggesting that not all actions are equally acceptable.

They dare to declare that there is a standard of truth outside of ourselves.

They have the audacity to say our actions must change or we will be judged by God.

They come saying we need mercy and need to be saved.

Such thinking is very different.

Such thinking is the enemy of the prevailing relativism of our age.

It is a whole other way of seeing life.

It comes even to daily life with a whole different set of assumptions.

Hear how God through the Apostle Paul says it in I Corinthians 15:

"Now, People, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve, and after that he appeared to more than five hundred at the same time."

The people of this world have tried to make sense of life while rejecting a God who is truly there.

These attempts originate in self-centeredness, are filled with self-indulgence, and end with emptiness.

But God comes in Christ breaking through our human-centered blindness and showing us a whole different view of life - a whole different set of assumptions.

What is this radically different view of reality?

First, there is a God but not one of our making. He is holy, powerful, and merciful. We can be saved from our empty powerless self-made gods.

Secondly, life operates by an objective standard of right and wrong - It is God's standard and it does and will matter. We can be saved from a rudderless life based on ethics that change with every circumstance.

Thirdly, we were created by a purposeful God who gives meaning to our existence. We can be saved from our emptiness.

Last, there is life after the death of our physical bodies. We can be saved from the haunting lie that life ends in nothingness.

And why should these assumptions be believed? What gives them any more credibility than the former assumptions?

Anchoring these truths is the person of Jesus Christ.

Everything this alternate view of life teaches is anchored in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

If that man, Jesus literally rose from the grave after dying dead on the cross and lying in a grave for three days, then he has authority that no other man or woman has ever had.

I do not have the time to go through the proofs of the resurrection of Jesus as I have done in the past but you can read them in the Scriptures.

He claimed he was God who had come in human flesh. And he proved it by his resurrection from the dead.

He claimed that his death was planned before creation - a death in our place, taking our sin against God on himself and paying the penalty for it. And His resurrection proved it.

He claimed that if we would turn from our sins, confess them as sin, and ask His forgiveness, He would forgive us and give us his life - eternal life. And he proved it by his resurrection.

The resurrection of Jesus is the fundamental fact that is the basis for a whole different way of looking at life.

There are two options:

One is the relativism of our culture:

Like Donahue's audience it starts with a man-made god, lives by changing man-made rules, and ends without hope.

The other is the absolute truth of a God who is there as proven by the resurrection.

I want you to think of another group of people, not the Donahue studio audience but this time it's 12 adults meeting in a home on a Thursday evening.

In many ways they are the same as the Donahue audience -
some married some single, most with jobs and families,
mortgages to pay and hassles at work.
One who recently went through a divorce and one whose father died.

But in a larger way this group is radically different.

Without exception, these people have believed the evidence for the resurrection and they now anchor their lives in the absolute truth of Christ's presence and work.

They have a framework for life:

They know they were created by God giving their lives significance.

They know Jesus died and then rose from the dead providing for their forgiveness and a new relationship to God.

This new relationship gives their lives purpose.

They know Jesus is coming again giving their lives true hope.

There may be much they don't understand, life may still get muddled in the middle, but they know they belong to God, have been saved by his grace and they await his return.

Their certain relationship to God is the unifying, stabilizing factor in their lives even if particular circumstances are hard or don't make sense.