

# SAVING TRUTH

Finding Meaning  
& Clarity in a  
Post-Truth World

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ZONDERVAN

*Saving Truth*

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## CHAPTER 1

# The Blossoming of the Culture of Confusion

**Y**ou've been at an intersection before, waiting for the red light to change, and had that uneasy feeling: *Is the bus next to me moving forward or am I in reverse?*

The first thing you do to regain clarity and overcome the quick flash of vertigo is look at something that doesn't move—a mailbox, or the streetlight perhaps. Getting a fixed point of reference clears up your confusion and relieves the vertigo.

But what if there are no fixed points of reference? What then?

Some time ago I rode a car ferry across a river between Michigan and Ontario, Canada. One would think that a boat ferrying cars from one country to another would be large, holding many cars. Being from the Great Lakes state, I've ridden such grand ferries. This wasn't one of them. This ferry could hold two cars at most, and that morning it was just me. Because the ferry was so small and the trip so short, the deckhand asked me to stay in my car, which I happily did, given the young day's heat and my car's air-conditioning. Glancing down at my GPS just when the ferry pulled away from the dock, I didn't see us leave. Due to my car's mass and suspension, I didn't feel the boat gently pull away either. When I looked up and my eyes met the flowing river, my body told me I was stationary, but my eyes told me that we were moving. Looking at the ferry couldn't help me overcome the vertigo because it was moving too. And the ever-moving river didn't provide a fixed point of reference. There were no mailboxes or stoplights; a sure foundation was hard to find. So my dizziness persisted longer than it would have in a typical bus-at-the-intersection incident. Only the unmoving land across the river could abate my nausea and clear up my confusion.

Whenever we find ourselves in such situations, we instinctively try to

end the disorientation by hurriedly locating a fixed point of reference that doesn't depend on our feelings. In fact, we recognize in those moments that our feelings are part of the problem. Imagine if in my situation the land itself was moving. Awash in the river, I wouldn't have been able to find a bearing. My feelings would have been unreliable. My confusion would have persisted and my uneasiness wouldn't have diminished.

Culturally speaking, in the past decade we have found ourselves adrift in a river with no bearings in sight. The cultural river we find ourselves in isn't narrow. We can barely see the land's outline. In fact, we departed from it so long ago that we've forgotten what solid earth feels like and have begun to question whether the land itself is anchored or afloat.

As if to put an exclamation mark on this situation, the Oxford Dictionaries selected "post-truth" as 2016's Word of the Year. The Oxford Dictionaries annually select a word that captures the culture's current mood and preoccupations. And post-truth does exactly that. According to Oxford Dictionaries, post-truth means "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief." Although the word dates back at least to 1992, the usage of post-truth ballooned in 2016 by 2,000 percent. That may seem shockingly high, but pause to reflect on the year. The American presidential election was marked by so many competing and false claims, allegations of fraud, and proven mistruths, it was difficult to know who to believe. Voices across the political spectrum were quick to condemn the other side with little or no facts and quick to defend their champion regardless of facts. Raw emotion dominated the megaphones of 2016's various protests such that the truth behind the controversies was drowned out. "Fake news" allowed agendas to advance regardless of, and often contrary to, the truth. Was it not the case that facts were dismissed as getting in the way of agendas? Was it not true that sensitivities to personal preferences and hair-trigger senses of outrage shaped debates and even determined the words considered acceptable in our supposedly free society? It's hard to think of a word better suited to the spirit of our age than "post-truth."

## When the Soft Soil Is Harder

Post-truth has two modes. The first is a “soft” mode, by which I mean that we may acknowledge that truth exists—or that certain things are true—but we don’t care about the truth if it gets in the way of our personal preferences.<sup>1</sup> In this soft mode of post-truth, the truth exists objectively, but our subjective feelings and opinions matter more. The second mode is “hard,” by which I mean a willingness to propagate blatant falsehoods, knowing they’re false, because doing so serves a higher political or social agenda.

The differences between the soft and hard modes of post-truth may be subtle, but they are significant. Both are troubling and both appear to be growing more pervasive. But I suspect the soft mode of post-truth is more dangerous. Allow me to explain.

Postmodernism emerged in the 1970s as a rejection of the notion of objective truth. (Postmodernism had other aims, but this was a defining goal.) “What’s true for you may not be true for me,” we would hear. Or someone might say, “There’s no such thing as objective truth.” Both statements are self-defeating and unlivable. Any denial of objective truth must itself be objectively true if it’s to be meaningful. Yet despite its incoherence, postmodernism was quite resilient and remained influential in the West for decades.

Its luster has finally dulled. To be sure, in the past few years postmodernism has continued to pop up in culture. But like a mustard burp, its tang is now momentary and passing.<sup>2</sup> Where postmodernism failed because it was inherently incoherent, the post-truth mindset may succeed because it is not. It faces the problem of truth head-on. Unlike postmodernism, the post-truth mindset acknowledges objective truth, but subordinates it to preferences. That’s dangerous, as logic and evidence don’t have the same influence over the post-truth mindset that they had over a postmodern. In a post-truth age, if the evidence fits our preferences and opinions, then all is well and good. If it doesn’t, then the evidence is deemed inadmissible or offensive, with offense being a kind of solvent against

otherwise sound arguments. To mix metaphors a bit, the post-truth mindset is like bacteria that have mutated to become immune to antibiotics. Where truth and logic could combat postmodern bacteria, they seem powerless to arrest post-truth's infectiousness.

## **There Is No One Immune—No, Not One**

Mixed reactions followed Oxford's announcement of post-truth as its 2016 Word of the Year. Some want to confine the post-truth mindset to politics, arguing that it occurred mainly within the context of the 2016 American presidential race and infected only one side, generally the side opposite one's own. Others instinctively claim post-truth as a positive development, the means to forge one's own destiny free of the shackles of tradition, facts, and even logic.<sup>3</sup>

Still others bemoan the post-truth mindset. Consider Kathleen Higgins' lament in her *Nature* article "Post-Truth: A Guide for the Perplexed." Shaken by the development of the post-truth mindset, she points out it may undermine scientific endeavor. "Science's quest for knowledge about reality presupposes the importance of truth, both as an end in itself and as a means of resolving problems. How could truth become passé?"<sup>4</sup>

Fascinatingly, she seems concerned only about how post-truth has become the traffic cop at the intersection of science and politics, particularly on the climate change issue. Higgins writes:

Scientists and philosophers should be shocked by the idea of post-truth, and they should speak up when scientific findings are ignored by those in power or treated as mere matters of faith. Scientists must keep reminding society of the importance of the social mission of science—to provide the best information possible as the basis for public policy. And they should publicly affirm the intellectual virtues that they so effectively model: critical thinking, sustained inquiry and revision of beliefs on the basis of evidence. Another line from Nietzsche is especially pertinent now: "Three cheers for physics!—and even more for the motive that spurs us toward physics—our honesty!"<sup>5</sup>

Isn't it interesting that Higgins seems to lay the problems of post-truth at the feet of others, while implying that scientists are immune from its influence?

My point is not to denigrate scientists or science. Some of my close friends are scientists of high integrity. Nor am I making a statement about climate change. Clearly, science has benefited all our lives, and I'm convinced science is a gift from God. My point is the post-truth virus is so powerful that it can infect all of us: politicians and voters, pastors and philosophers, soccer moms and baseball dads, and yes, even scientists.

One would think a writer for *Nature* would recognize that scientists—who many seem to think lose their susceptibility to human bias when they don a lab coat—are not immune from post-truth's infection. There is ample evidence that scientists are all too human. In January 2016, just as the post-truth year began, Adam Hoffman reported the surprising results of several studies that concluded the findings of certain sciences are difficult to reproduce.<sup>6</sup> One study asserted the findings in fewer than half of the psychology studies printed in prestigious journals could be reproduced.<sup>7</sup> Stanford University's John Ioannidis went so far as to say that across many scientific disciplines, "It can be proven that most claimed research findings are false."<sup>8</sup> Putting an alarming number to the problem, Ioannidis says, "We are getting millions of papers that go nowhere."<sup>9</sup>

In the face of such conclusions, Hoffman asks, "So why is this crisis in transparency and reproducibility happening in the first place?" His conclusion is telling. In addition to conscious or unconscious biases, scientists are under pressure to obtain "breakthrough results," and those are more likely to get published.<sup>10</sup> In other words, the hard work of honest and forthright research is being undermined by the academic definition of success. No area is immune to post-truth infection.

The irony ought to leap out at us. Higgins is perplexed by the rise of post-truth in politics, fearing it may undermine society's trust in scientists who "so effectively model" the intellectual virtues of "critical thinking, sustained inquiry and revision of beliefs on the basis of evidence." Yet she



herself seems to succumb to post-truth, as she vaunts the virtues of scientists while ignoring the questionable conclusions of many scientific studies. In making a case that scientists are above being post-truth, she inadvertently demonstrates the opposite by letting her feelings about scientists overpower the facts.

The creep of post-truth is seen in how we gather information about the world to conform to what we *want* to be true, not to what *actually is* true. Stephen Marche makes this point in a biased, yet incisive, op-ed piece in the *Los Angeles Times*.<sup>11</sup> He notes that many of us get our news not from time-tested news sources, but from comedy and satire shows like *The Daily Show*, *Last Week Tonight*, and *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*. These shows use comedians as faux journalists who mix facts with satire and mockery. The jokes have an obvious slant and are meant to make a point about a particular situation, rather than just report facts. All of that is fine in itself. I'm personally a fan of well-done satire. But what can happen is viewers lose perspective, with the encouragement of these shows' producers. Viewers watch, satisfied by the parody of "the other side" of an issue, while fooling themselves into thinking they are being informed. According to Marche, these shows are why "the Left has a post-truth problem, too." With so much satire masquerading as journalism, Marche bemoans that "post-fact life is funny but not ha-ha funny. Everything has become a joke and so nothing is anymore."<sup>12</sup>

Such shows are emblematic of post-truth's effect on culture. We don't look to facts to find out the truth. We look at editorialized facts to support our preferences. Post-truth isn't just a political issue either. It also infects our spiritual lives and influences how we seek answers to life's biggest questions.

A conversation I had with a young man a few years ago during a multiday speaking trip comes to mind. His parents approached me after one of my talks to tell me that their son was increasingly hardened to the gospel and would become combative during spiritual conversations. But he was interested in meeting with me nonetheless. So the following night after speaking, I sat down with him in the now-empty auditorium. I asked him

about his biggest objections to Christianity, and he told me that the Bible was full of scientifically impossible fables and morally questionable stories. As I began to address his objections, I was fascinated by his willingness to listen. This was surprising, given his parents' description of him. Our interchange was going so well, I thought I'd simply ask where he'd gotten his arguments against Christianity.

"I watch a lot of YouTube videos by atheists," he responded. "I hear these things on *The Daily Show* on Comedy Central. And I read a lot of posts on the Internet." As it turned out, he hadn't read a single book or scholarly article nor taken the time to ask a pastor or theologian a single question.

"Those are really your sources for your worldview?" I asked. "Have you ever read a book by a real scholar or watched videos by credible Christians responding to the things you've watched?" His answer was simply "No." It had never occurred to him to do so. He bypassed sincere inquiry so he could marshal the "facts" he was interested in and hear arguments he was predisposed to agree with. He wanted to disbelieve, so he turned to sources that would reinforce his preferences. This is a quite human tendency, innate in all of us. It's called "confirmation bias." Truth didn't matter. His preferences mattered. But—and I do believe this is God's grace—by the time we were finished talking, truth had started to matter to him, and he was asking me for additional sources to read.

## **The Post-Truth Seed in the Garden's Soft Soil**

As startling as recent developments have been, we should remember that the practice of subordinating truth to feelings is ancient. Biblically speaking, the post-truth mindset flowering today originally germinated in a lush garden long ago. God gave Adam and Eve freedom in Eden so that they could enjoy relationship with Him—the very reason for which they were created. They had but one restriction: they could not eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. If they did so, they would become aware of evil, which would lead to a desire not just to *know* good and evil, but to *determine* good and evil. Satan used our innate human preference to exert our own sovereignty to tempt Adam and Eve away from the communion with God we

were created for and toward autonomy apart from God. Satan preyed upon their desire for autonomy. He told them they would not die when they ate the fruit, but would become *like God*. That's when the fruit became desirable. What God had said didn't matter anymore. Their desires and feelings usurped the truth. This seed of the post-truth mindset has bloomed in our day.

Fast-forward some millennia and we see another instance of post-truth. Two thousand years ago, during the most important trial of all time, Pontius Pilate, the governor of the Roman province of Judea, stood before Jesus and claimed the authority of the world's most powerful empire. Jesus stood before Pilate and claimed to be Truth incarnate. He declared that his authority and message weren't based on the vicissitudes of political power or cultural feelings, but on unchanging truth. "You say that I am a king," Jesus answered Pilate. "For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice" (John 18:37). Jesus handed Pilate the opportunity of the ages to ask a perfect follow-up question. The form of Pilate's next question was indeed perfect, but his motivation was anything but. "What is truth?" Pilate asked, walking away before Jesus could answer. It made for a dramatic exit, but a pitiful display. Pilate exchanged the opportunity of a lifetime for a rhetorical punch line. His attitude mirrors today's post-truth culture.

The 2004 motion picture *The Passion of the Christ* portrays a fictional yet scripturally consistent subsequent conversation between Pilate and his wife. Sitting in a now-empty court, Pilate sullenly asks his wife the same question he asked Jesus. "What is truth, Claudia? Do you hear it, recognize it when it is spoken?"

"Yes, I do. Don't you?"

"How? Can you tell me?"

She answers with a longtime spouse's candor. "If you will not hear the truth, no one can tell you." Steadfast in his cowardice, Pilate does not heed his wife's words, just as he failed to heed Jesus.

"Truth?" he snaps back. "Do you want to know what my truth is,

Claudia? I've been putting down rebellions in this rotten outpost for eleven years. If I don't condemn this man, I know Caiaphas will start a rebellion. If I do condemn him, then his followers may. Either way, there will be bloodshed. Caesar has warned me, Claudia—warned me twice. He swore that the next time the blood would be mine. That is my truth!"<sup>13</sup>

Though Pilate uttered the word *truth* four times, he subordinated it to his personal situation and desires. He personalized the truth—calling it “my truth.” Pilate wasn't a true skeptic. He was a cynic. A skeptic won't believe a truth claim until there is sufficient evidence. A cynic won't believe even if there is.

Pilate was a post-truth man, living with a post-truth mindset. He had the privilege of standing before the One who claimed to be Truth incarnate and would later prove it by rising from the dead. Yet Pilate wouldn't submit himself to the truth. He subordinated it to his personal preferences. How ironic that Pilate's personal preferences trumped his recognition of a person who embodied Truth.

Jesus made the audacious claim that through him—and what he would accomplish on the cross—all of us could know the truth, and the truth would set us free (John 8:32). Some of us fervently hope Jesus was right about who he claimed to be. Others may prefer that Jesus was wrong in claiming to be the source of truth and true freedom. The most difficult step is realizing that our preferences aren't the governor here.

I understand the struggle between preference and truth acutely and so share something of a kinship with those who embrace a post-truth mindset. I was not born into a Christian background, yet today I follow Christ. In many ways, like the famous atheist convert C. S. Lewis, I desperately didn't want to meet the Jesus of the Bible. For most of my life I was a proud Muslim. I thought Islam was the truest path to paradise and every other worldview, especially Christianity, was wrong. But as I engaged with Christians about claims of Christ, I had the discomfort of uncovering what former Vice President Al Gore might call “an inconvenient truth.” History, logic, and science pointed to the credibility of the Bible in general and to the claims of Christ in particular. My identity as a Muslim was at stake.

Despite mounting evidence in favor of the Christian faith, I held onto the faith of my heritage because I preferred it, because I didn't want to change, because I preferred my side over the truth. Coming to embrace the truth about Jesus took me nine long years. It did not take me nine years to find the truth. It took me nine years to accept it. The truth wasn't hard to find, but it was hard to embrace. When I see today's post-truth snare, I know I was once caught in something similar.

As I once tried to avoid the Jesus of history, so our culture tries to avoid him. We may prefer a particular view about Jesus because it provides us with comfort, but what we need is the truth. "If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end," C. S. Lewis wrote. "But if you look for comfort, you will not get either comfort or truth—only soft soap and wishful thinking to begin with and, in the end, despair."<sup>14</sup> Is the truth about Jesus more important than our preferences? Did Jesus give us proof that he alone can reliably guide us out of post-truth and into truth? The more post-truth spreads, the more desperately we need to know who can provide us with clarity. Having listened to many voices and examined many worldviews, I'm convinced that Jesus' voice is the truest.

## **Post-Truth's Full Bloom into the Culture of Confusion**

Post-truth has now blossomed into a Culture of Confusion. Confusion is embraced as a virtue and clarity shunned as a sin. The answers to life's questions no longer need to correspond to reality. They need only cater to our desires.

But as our culture has embraced confusion and shunned clarity, have we found ourselves to be better off? The divisiveness of our rhetoric is corrosive. Those who disagree with us are "them." Facts often seem to be a problem to get around instead of the useful tools they once were. And if someone takes a stand we disagree with on a particular issue, we label them in the most uncharitable way possible, never mind whether they may have a point.

I remember the pervasive anxiety of the Cold War in the 1980s. The

world worried that something would ignite tensions between the USA and USSR, initiating a nuclear war. The Cold War could suddenly become hotter than a thousand suns, quite literally. During that time, people in power claimed to know the way forward. Conservatives, liberals, moderates. Capitalists, socialists, communists, and anarchists. So many voices claimed to be able to lift us above it all. They did little to ease the anxiety. Popular musicians wrote a song about the “Land of Confusion.”<sup>15</sup>

Thirty years later, do we not find ourselves neck-deep in the Land of Confusion? Men and women of power claim to be able to guarantee our unfettered freedoms, even if it may mean trampling on the freedoms of others. These same men and women of steel seem preoccupied with rights but often say very little about responsibilities. Yes, there are voices demanding truth and accuracy from our leaders, and rightfully so. But our demands for truth are so often selective—we want truth when it’s convenient or when it supports our point of view. When we look at our world today and see all the questions being asked amid a culture not truly committed to sound answers, it’s hard to imagine a land more confusing.

The confusion tends to swirl around certain questions: What does it mean to be human? What is human freedom and is it the same as autonomy? Do our rights have limits? Is there a transcendent meaning and purpose to human existence, or are we the measure of all things? We need clarity in our day to rightly answer these questions, to be informed individuals, honest scientists, and fair politicians. We need answers, not just questions. Yet as we ask questions, the Culture of Confusion’s answers are inadequate and don’t provide satisfaction. They don’t bring us to dry land. The Culture of Confusion’s answers only give birth to more questions. G. K. Chesterton presciently observed this phenomenon in his masterpiece *Orthodoxy*: “Free thought has exhausted its own freedom. It is weary of its own success.” Thus, “we have found all of the questions that can be found. It is time we gave up looking for questions and began looking for answers.”<sup>16</sup>

We need the unmovable to guide us if we are to find answers we can all live with. Blaise Pascal put it well: “When everything is moving at once, nothing appears to be moving, as on board ship. When everyone is moving

## CHAPTER 2

# Confusion and the Church: Seductions of a Post-Truth Mindset

**T**here's an Arabic saying that often makes me smile: "*Kulna fil hawa sawa.*" It literally means "We're all in the same air," roughly conveying the same idea as the English saying, "We're all in the same boat." But Arabic sayings tend to have zestier connotations than their Western counterparts. "*Kulna fil hawa sawa*" really conveys the message, "We're all in the same stink," particularly the stink of the human condition. It's a pungent reminder that all of us—yes, all of us including Christians—have contributed to the Culture of Confusion's stench.

That's why, while this book is written to a wide audience, in this particular chapter I've fixed my gaze inwardly at my own community, specifically toward Christians. No book that addresses the trajectory of culture, especially the Culture of Confusion, would be fair without serious self-reflection about how every part of culture—including the one I'm in—contributes to both the stench and the aroma, the problem and the solution. And for that narrower audience, this chapter may sting the nostrils a bit.

If you're not a Christian, I offer two reasons for you to resist any temptation to skip this chapter. First, you'll learn how Christians have succumbed to the post-truth mindset similar to the way the rest of culture has. Second, it's always helpful to read an assessment of an influential part of the culture with which you don't identify. If you are a Christian, it's important to take a deep, sobering look at just how we may have contributed to the culture's confused state. To switch metaphors and to paraphrase Jesus, none of us—Christians or non-Christians—will have the credibility to remove the speck of confusion from our neighbor's eye until we've removed the post-truth log from our own.

Culture of Confusion. We have been pursuing autonomy since the beginning of our race. Adam and Eve sought autonomy from God. They sought to transcend the purpose for which they were made so that they could be the definers of their own purpose. We continue that pursuit today.

What is the natural result of the unfettered autonomy we seek? Everything becomes subject to our personal preferences, even our pursuit of truth. Jens Zimmermann points out that “we approach knowledge the way teenagers approach parental authority: ‘no one tell me what to think.’ . . . Consequently, we lump together tradition, Authority and indoctrination, equate them with coercion and reject any intrusion on the pure slate of our autonomous minds.”<sup>1</sup> If each of our personal preferences is celebrated without truth as our guide, if we are all “laws unto ourselves,” confusion is inevitable. When my law unto myself conflicts with another’s law unto himself, what can arbitrate between us if not truth? When truth is sacrificed as the burnt offering on the altar of autonomy, the resultant smoke chokes the breath out of freedom. Only chaos remains, which ultimately leads to bondage.

## **The First Sacrifice: Our Ability to Reason**

The initial detritus that falls next to the altar of autonomy is our ability to think and act clearly and wisely. An incident at the University of Missouri comes to mind. In 2015, football players protested the handling of racist incidents on campus by Timothy Wolfe, the university’s president. Naturally, this attracted media attention, especially from sports media outlets. ESPN commissioned a photojournalist who was also a student to take pictures. But the journalist made the mistake of taking photos of athletes while in a so-called “safe space”—safe from media attention. The entire incident was recorded on a bystander’s phone and put on YouTube. The video shows an angry professor who was taking part in the protest confronting that photojournalist and calling for “muscle” to forcibly remove him. More surprising is that the professor who wanted to forcibly remove the student journalist was a communications professor associated with the school of journalism. What a stark illustration of our post-truth



Culture of Confusion. A professor whose area of study depends on the freedom of the press sought to suppress a journalist's right to cover a protest of public interest. Only feeling-driven irrationality can lead a communications professor to try to forcibly remove a photojournalist from a media-hungry protest, all in the name of safeguarding student preferences for a safe space.

That kind of irrationality seems to be cropping up elsewhere. In late 2015, Yale University administrators issued guidelines cautioning students against wearing Halloween costumes that might be culturally offensive to some students. If a white student dressed as a samurai, for example, that could be deemed an offensive cultural appropriation. One Yale educator, Erika Christakis, pushed back. She penned a graciously worded email expressing her understanding for cultural sensitivity but also her unease that the university guidelines might suppress student expression. She did not get the reaction she expected.

Students, the very people whose freedom of expression Christakis sought to protect, were incensed that she dared to champion a path that might lead to offensive conduct. Her husband, Professor Nicholas Christakis, tried to defend her position. Seeking to calm the clamor for his wife's job, he listened to the angered students' concerns. He was not met with a commensurately listening ear. They shouted him down, telling other students to "walk away. He doesn't deserve to be listened to." The students demanded that Erika and Nicholas Christakis resign their respective positions.

That outrage displays the decay of reasoning, even among our intellectual elite, brought on by a post-truth culture. Nicholas Christakis was the Master of Yale's Silliman Residential College. As such, he was charged with living in the dorms to help shape the residents' cultural, emotional, and intellectual lives. But when the same students' preferences to avoid anything offensive clashed with the right to free expression, reason and truth no longer guided the discussions. One student shouted at Christakis, "It's your job to create a place of comfort and home for the students who live in Silliman. You have not done that. By sending out that

email, that goes against your position as master. Do you understand that!?” When he dared to calmly disagree, Nicholas Christakis was pummeled with invective. After exploding with expletives, a student shouted, “You should step down! If that is what you think about being a master, you should step down! It is *not* about creating an intellectual space! It is *not*! Do you understand that? It’s about creating a home here. You are not doing that!”<sup>2</sup>

Notice what happened. Christakis’s job as a master at Yale was to ensure the social, cultural, and intellectual life of the students at Silliman College. Specifically, a master at Yale “is responsible for . . . fostering and shaping the social, cultural, and *educational* life and character of the college. During the year, he or she hosts *lectures*, study breaks (especially during finals), and College Teas—intimate gatherings during which students have the opportunity to engage with renowned guests from the *academy, government, or popular culture*” (emphases mine).<sup>3</sup> By trying to discuss the interplay of free expression and cultural sensitivity, he attempted to serve all of those goals. Yet the student shouted that Christakis’s job was *not* about creating an intellectual space, even though it is part of the description of a master’s job.

The truth was that the Christakis *did* have an obligation to create an intellectual space for the students to challenge each other. The truth is that universities should foster free expression, even if disagreeable or crass. But those students preferred to be safe from such truths. The unfortunate irony is that Erika Christakis wrote her email to safeguard the students’ *freedom*. But the competing autonomous desire—to be safe from anything remotely offensive—clashed with freedom. And in a culture where autonomous preferences and feelings prevail over facts, two professors who had the students’ best interests at heart eventually had to resign as masters at Silliman College, though both remain professors at Yale.<sup>4</sup>

How can reason survive in such a climate? When we vaunt feelings over facts in our quest for autonomy, reason dies. One is reminded of the words of Thomas Sowell: “The problem isn’t that Johnny can’t read or even that Johnny can’t think. It’s that Johnny doesn’t know what thinking is. He’s confused it with feeling.”<sup>5</sup>

46. The well-known atheist philosopher A. J. Ayer experienced a near death experience that he could not explain in natural terms. A. J. Ayer, "What I Saw When I Was Dead: Intimations of Immortality," *National Review*, October 14, 1988, 39–40. See also Karl R. Popper and John C. Eccles, *The Self and Its Brain* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1977), 558, where they note that Nobel Prize-winning physiologist Sir Charles Sherrington declared five days before his death: "For me now, the only reality is the human soul."
21. Tallis, *Aping Mankind*, 83.
22. *Ibid.*, 108–109.
23. *Ibid.*, 10.
24. "Phil 103—Liz Harmon on Abortion," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r55QnQjryzl&feature=youtu.be>.
25. Tallis, *Aping Mankind*, 348.
26. John Gray, "Stephen Pinker's Delusions of Peace," ABC Network, [www.ABC.net.au/articles/2013/01/20/3672846.htm](http://www.ABC.net.au/articles/2013/01/20/3672846.htm).
27. C. E. M. Joad, *The Recovery of Belief* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), 81–82.
28. C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock* in *The Timeless Writings of C. S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 311.
29. Singer, "Sanctity of Life or Quality of Life?"
30. C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York: HarperOne, 2001).

## Chapter 6: Clarity about Sexuality, Gender, and Identity

1. Thomas Bracken, *Not Understood and Other Poems* (Wellington, NZ: Richard Brown, 1905), 7–8 (public domain).
2. International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission [IGLHRC], Institutional Memoir of the 2005 Institute for Trans and Intersex Activist Training (2005): 7–8, <https://iglhrc.org/sites/default/files/367-1.pdf>.
3. See Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), for a discussion of how biblical passages have been interpreted to justify same-sex behavior and how to properly interpret those same passages.
4. Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay? And Other Questions About Homosexuality, the Bible, and Same-Sex Attraction* (Epsom: Surrey, UK: Good Book, 2013), 25.
5. Michael W. Hannon, "Against Heterosexuality," *First Things*, March 2014, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2014/03/against-heterosexuality>.
6. Jenell Williams Paris, *The End of Sexual Identity: Why Sex Is Too Important to Define Who We Are* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 40.
7. *Ibid.*, 128.
8. *Ibid.*, 9.
9. Richard Dawkins, "Growing Up in the Universe" (Royal Institution Christmas lectures, London, 1991), cited by John Lennox, "Challenges from Science," in *Beyond Opinion*, ed. Ravi Zacharias (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 116.