



STATEMENT DA235

The Lost Beauty of Truth by Ken Myers

One of the effects of Christianity on what was called “Christendom” was to create a setting in which the fundamental assumptions of a Christian world view were taken for granted. Virtually everyone, even the apostate or unregenerate, lived under the canopy of Christian truth. Both general beliefs and the specific application of principles were informed by Christian ideas. Christian truth thus lived *intuitively* in the culture, directing the reasoning of individuals and, perhaps more significantly, informing their imaginations and affections.

Christendom, however, no longer exists. More than a hundred years ago, Friedrich Nietzsche insisted that God was dead. Christianity no longer had the cultural power it once had. God no longer lived in the consciousness of a critical mass of people. It is much easier to ignore Christian truth claims if Christianity is no longer the shared context of social life.

When Nietzsche said it, it was old news. Yet Christian apologetics still has not gotten the point because much of it is still concerned only with defending Christian *truth*, principally by the making of logical arguments. But for years, the issue of truth itself has been irrelevant.

There have always been those who prefer to ignore the conclusions of rigorous argument. But for the most part, the culture was sympathetic to logical discourse as a means to discovering truth and to the idea that truth was an ordering principle for life. Why? Because truth was a vital part of the canopy of Christian assumptions.

But too many social forces have conspired to transform the Christian sense of the inherent nature of reality into a marginal and obscure curiosity, *even within the church, and even among those who are technically orthodox.*

Apologetics must learn to take seriously the obstacles to the hearing of its arguments. Our culture regards with less and less plausibility the notion that one should order one’s life around the conclusions of arguments.

I once spoke with a non-Christian colleague about a controversial scholar whose work I admired. After rehearsing a number of this scholar’s lucid arguments on various matters, my friend rather wearily conceded: “Look, I can’t disagree with his arguments. I just don’t like his conclusions, so I can’t accept them.” This person clearly lacked a “feeling for truth,” the weight on one’s conscience that one must adjust one’s views and behavior if persuaded of new truths.

Such a loss could be described as a change in cultural *sensibility*. One cause of this change has been the rising dominance of image-based communication and the receding influence of print-based communication. In print, with words, one makes propositions. With propositions, one makes arguments and draws conclusions. These conclusions then become the starting propositions for further arguments. Thought, in a cultural atmosphere dominated by words, takes linear, logical forms, and naturally recognizes the difference between contradiction and noncontradiction.

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One of television's effects is the subtle inculcation of the assumption that it's not very important to be able to work with words. Working with words requires working with logic. It requires habits of reason. It nurtures an appreciation for the profound and existentially compelling difference between truth and error. Thus, in a print-based culture, part of becoming educated is to develop a "feeling" for truth.

Image-based communication is not so much irrational as a-rational. It is more concerned with internal subjective resonance, "good vibes," than with seeking synchronization with some objective reality. Image-dominated forms of communication are nonlinear, nonpropositional, and hence inconclusive; they do not move from propositions to conclusion.

Christians need to pay more attention to understanding how the sensibilities of our culture shape its assumptions and convictions. The discipline of pursuing that goal might be called *cultural apologetics*: the aspect of apologetics concerned with understanding the *cultural context* in which the arguments are being made.

Christian apologetics cannot simply be concerned with refining the arguments for the Resurrection or for the existence of God. Those things *must* continue to be done. But unless there is simultaneously urgent, intense attention to the obstacles modern *sensibilities* put in the way of accepting the truth of the Gospel, one of two things will happen. The church may become a completely marginal fringe group within society whose message is literally *meaningless* to the culture at large. The second option is that the church will ignorantly and carelessly accommodate itself to modern sensibilities. It will accept the assumption that truth is irrelevant, and thereby evacuate its message of any power, translating it into what Paul called "another gospel."

— Ken Myers

Ken Myers is editor of the *Mars Hills Tapes*, a bimonthly audio magazine on cultural issues. (800) 598-7557. Taken from *Tabletalk*, March 1993. Used by permission of Ligonier Ministries, Orlando, FL.