

BOOK REVIEW

of

Nancy R. Pearcey,

Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity,
Crossway Books, 2004.

This book is in the Evangel Library,
and this review is by Larry D. Paarmann.

You may have noticed the full page advertisement for *Total Truth* on page 3 of the January/February issue of *byFaith* magazine. In that same issue of *byFaith*, beginning on page 14, Eileen O’Gorman of *Covenant Magazine* and Dick Doster of *byFaith* interviewed Nancy Pearcey in an article titled “Closing the Great Divide: Nancy Pearcey Helps Christians See Error in Sacred/Secular Split.” In the lead-in to the interview, the article reports that *Total Truth* “soared to number nine on the Religion and Spirituality bestseller list within two days of its release on Amazon.com.” I certainly hope that this is some indication of a powerful impact that this book may have on American Christendom. It appears that through the work of Nancy Pearcey for one, and others at the Discovery Institute, that Christians are becoming more bold in their attempts to regain much of the ground that has been lost in science, law, education, and the humanities to a secular and metaphysical naturalistic mindset. Pearcey has an M.A. degree from Covenant Theological Seminary, and studied Christian worldview issues under Francis Schaeffer at L’Abri Fellowship in Switzerland.

Total Truth is committed to the idea that religious faith and personal morality, while certainly important, are only part of what it means to be a Christian. And the Christian Church is concerned with much more than personal piety. Modern society has increasingly relegated religious faith of any kind to the realm of the irrelevant. In academia, law, education, etc., personal faith is tolerated so long as it is just that, personal. You are entitled to your personal beliefs for traditional or ethnic reasons, and such things are judged as cultural and quaint, but you are not allowed to bring them into the public arena. They have no place in the classroom, no matter what the subject, and certainly no place in the science laboratory nor in the court room. Christians have been marginalized, and as long as nothing is said to suggest that Christianity might have something important to say about anything they are tolerated, but open one’s mouth about anything important in society and all tolerance is removed. As long we remain in our self-imposed ghetto, the rest of the world seems to let us be. But raise a voice of protest about the absence of credible evidence for the materialistic origin of life, ask the wrong questions about one species evolving into another, suggest that the sanctity of human life might preclude abortion or euthanasia, or imply that at least some principles of morality are universal, etc., and you are off the reservation and met not with reasoned discourse but with ridicule and labeled as a religious extremist. Well, Nancy Pearcey will have none of this! And she suggests, to put it mildly, that neither should you nor I. She is not suggesting that making the appropriate changes in our lives would be easy. To the contrary, on page 24 she writes “As with every aspect of sanctification, the renewal of the mind may be painful and difficult. It requires hard work and discipline, inspired by a sacrificial love for Christ and a burning desire to build up His Body, the Church.”

Total Truth has four parts and a total of thirteen chapters. **Part 1 is titled What’s in a Worldview?** It contains the first four chapters. Chapter 1 is titled Breaking Out of the Grid. Chapter 2 is Rediscovering Joy. Chapter 3 is Keeping Religion in its Place. Chapter 4 is Surviving the Spiritual Wasteland. **Part 2 is titled Starting at the Beginning.** It contains chapters 5 through 8. Chapter 5 is Darwin Meets the Berenstain Bears. Chapter 6 is The Science of Common Sense. Chapter 7 is Today Biology, Tomorrow the World. Chapter 8 is Darwins on the Mind. **Part 3 is How We Lost Our Minds.** It contains chapters 9 through 12. Chapter 9 is What’s So Good About Evangelicalism? Chapter 10 is When America Met Christianity – Guess Who Won? Chapter 11 is Evangelical’s Two-Story Truth. Chapter 12 is How Women Started the Culture War. **Part 4 is What Next? Living It Out.** Part 4 has but one chapter. Chapter 13 is True Spirituality and Christian Worldview. The book also includes four appendices. Appendix 1 is titled How American Politics Became Secularized. Appendix 2 is Modern Islam and the New Age Movement. Appendix 3 is The Long War Between Materialism and Christianity. Appendix 4 is Isms on the Run: Practical Apologetics at L’Abri.

In Part 1 Pearcey gives a history of how things got to be the way they are and the importance of having a well thought-out worldview. On page 94 she writes “Christians assume they can attend church and Bible study on the weekends and then, during the week, simply accept whatever concepts and theories are current in their professional field.

“In practice, the notion that reason is religiously neutral means that secularism and naturalism are often promoted under the guise of ‘neutrality.’ They are presented as objective, rational, and binding on everyone, while biblical views are dismissed as biased private opinions. This equivocation has created enormous pressure on Christians to abandon any distinctively biblical perspective in their professional work. . . .

“The effect of such a stance, however, is that Christians will abandon the world of ideas to the secularists. They will fail to see that secularism is itself a philosophical commitment – and that if they don’t bring *biblical* principles to bear on various issues, then they will end up promoting *nonbiblical* principles.”

Much of Part 2 has to do with Darwinism and its impact upon our world. On page 173 Pearcey writes “‘The so-called warfare between science and religion,’ wrote historian Jacques Barzun, should really ‘be seen as the warfare between two philosophies and perhaps two faiths.’ The battle over evolution is merely one incident ‘in the dispute between the believers in consciousness and the believers in mechanical action; the believers in purpose and the believers in pure chance.’ To promote one faith in the public school system at public expense, while banning the other, is an example of viewpoint discrimination, which the Supreme Court has declared unconstitutional in a wide variety of cases.” On pages 220 & 221 she writes “if our world view doesn’t fit the larger reality we are trying to explain, then at some point we will find that we cannot follow it – that it is not a workable guide for navigating the world. C.S. Lewis once wrote, ‘The Christian and the Materialist hold different beliefs about the universe. They can’t both be right. The one who is wrong will act in a way which simply doesn’t fit the real universe.’ That’s why it is a potent criticism of evolutionary psychology to point out that proponents cannot live consistently on the basis of their own theory. Because they act in ways that don’t ‘fit the real universe,’ at some point, they bump up against reality.”

This book, *Total Truth*, is a call to think deeply about how our Christian Faith should be impacting all that we do and think, and that includes all that we do and think professionally, politically, etc. By concentrating on personal piety, Christians have, for the most part, left the world of ideas to the secularists and materialists. We have been marginalized by the larger society, and we have been complacent in that marginalization. In order to be salt and light, and to honor our Lord, Pearcey’s call should not go unheeded.