
The Consecrated Christian and Conformity to the World

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An Exposition of Romans 12:1–2

Introduction

We begin with a horror story. Unlike the horror stories in novels, TV, and films, this one is true. Hundreds of years ago in China, for the amusement of the nobility, the art of molding men was developed. The practitioners of this art would take a child two or three years old, place him in a porcelain vase, sometimes a vase grotesque in shape, a vase without bottom or top. Only the child's head and legs would protrude from the vase. The child would be kept in that vase for years, standing in the daytime, reclining at night to sleep. All the while his small and pliable body would be growing and filling the contours of the vase with flesh and bones. After several years in the vase the child's body took on the shape of the vase and the child became a grotesque, misshapen human monster. The child became as twisted as the vase, and the damage to his body was irreparable. When the practitioners of the art of molding men thought that the child's shape was permanent, they would break the vase and remove the child, now perhaps eight or ten years old. Before them was a helpless child shaped like a vase, a source of endless amusement for the noblemen of China.

We are horrified to learn that there could be men as cruel as that: Men who could take little children and keep them imprisoned in a porcelain pot for years, despite the begging and pleading of the children to be released. We are angered by the idea of forcing helpless children to become human vases to be ridiculed by the rich men and rulers of China. We ought to be angry at such cruelty.

In Romans 12:1–2 the Apostle Paul tells us of a danger far worse than the physical deformity caused by cruel men. He tells us of the world that deforms our minds. The world creates monsters of the mind and soul. It twists, malforms, and exerts great and unrelenting pressure on us all, especially on the young, to conform to its shape. The world is a great vase, and we are all in it.

While the Chinese sought to twist the limbs of children, the world seeks to twist their thoughts. While the Chinese sought to keep children imprisoned in a porcelain vase until their deformity was irreparable, the world seeks to keep us in our sins until the last judgment.

Worst of all, the world's work is not always obvious, because it is not visible. Because it does not offend our eyes, almost everyone, including many professing Christians, either is not aware of the savagery of the world, or is not concerned by it. We do not realize that we are being misshapen and deformed. We may, sinners that we are, even come to love our deformity; we may think that it is natural, that men are supposed to live like we do. If we profess to be Christians, we may even think that our twisted thoughts are the thoughts of God. We may think that other Christians who do not conform to the world are fanatics who do not understand the Bible.

Paul the Apostle, like John and the other Apostles, was aware of the dangers of the world. He saw that the world was opposed to the revealed will of God. In the opening verses of Romans 12 he summons his Roman readers—and he summons us today—to consecrate themselves to the Lord and His will for their lives. If they do this, he promises, their minds will be spiritually renewed and they will grow in their appreciation of God’s will.

Romans 12:1–2, then, is a call to consecration, commitment, and dedication of life to the will of God.

I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

The passage may be outlined as follows:

The Basis of Consecration, v. 1a

The Nature of Consecration, v. 1b

The Demands of Consecration, v. 2a

The Purpose of Consecration, v. 2b

The Basis of Consecration, v. 1a

I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God.

The Appeal of the Apostle

Paul’s tone here is significant. He says, “*I urge you therefore, brethren.*” The old commentator Bengel says, “Moses commands; the apostle exhorts.” Paul is able (see Galatians) to take a strong stand in his letters, but he prefers for people to see for themselves. He says, “*I urge*” or “*I beseech,*” not “I command.” The Apostle constantly exemplified his words, “*Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy*” (2 Cor. 1:24).

The Ground of the Appeal

Romans 12:1–2 marks a turning point in this great epistle. In chapters 1–11 the great doctrines of sin, salvation, and the divine purpose of the ages have been expounded. Now, in chapters 12–16, the Apostle turns to practical application, subjects with an ethical stress. This is his pattern in a number of his letters (e.g., Ephesians, Galatians, Colossians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians; but not so apparent in 1 and 2 Corinthians and Philippians): redemptive theology is followed by practical theology. Doctrine leads to duty. Divine accomplishment at the cross leads to human responsibility. Paul’s line of reasoning is this: Because all these things in chapters 1–11 are true, this is the kind of person you should be.

The word “*therefore*” (οὖν, oun) is pivotal. It is an inferential conjunction. It joins together the two halves of the epistle. It emphasizes the unity of doctrine and life.¹⁰ What Paul is now going to say is based on what he has said in chapters 1–11. In chapters 12–16, he will give teaching on practical Christian living: the Christian and the government, the Christian and money, the Christian and morality, the Christian and doubtful things. Such ethical teaching is not given to us in a vacuum. It has as its motive the great work of salvation described in chapters 1–11.

Paul’s ground of appeal is the phrase, “*by the mercies of God*” (διὰ τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν τοῦ θεοῦ, dia tōn oiktirmōn tou theou). The term “*mercies*” refers to all the benefits that are ours

through the electing grace of the Father and the work of Christ: justification, identification and union with Christ, the indwelling Spirit of God, the security of the believer. The legalist says, “Do these things and God will show you mercy.” But Paul, an Apostle of grace, says, “Because we are already recipients of the mercies of God, we should therefore do these things.”¹³

The Objects of the Appeal

Paul is writing to people who are already believing Christians (“brethren,” ἀδελφοί, adelphoi) and therefore already justified and secure in their salvation. We are justified by faith, not by consecration, or commitment, or dedication. As Griffith Thomas said, “We work *from*, not *for* salvation.” Legalistic, law-based morality has no motive, no dynamic, and no power. Good conduct requires a power behind it. This is found in the “*mercies of God*.” The comment of John Calvin is apt. Paul teaches us, he says,

that men will never worship God with a sincere heart, or be roused to ... obey Him with sufficient zeal, until they properly understand how much they are indebted to His mercy. [Legalists] ... extort some kind of forced obedience by fear. Paul, however, in order to bind us to God ... by a voluntary and cheerful love of righteousness, attracts us by the sweetness of that grace in which our salvation consists.

Christian obedience is motivated by what God has done for us. It is an expression of gratitude. Thomas Erskine well said, “In the New Testament religion is grace, and ethics is gratitude.”¹⁷ It is significant, as F. F. Bruce points out, that in the New Testament one Greek noun (χάρις, charis) does duty for both “grace” and “gratitude.”

The Swiss preacher Walter Lüthi walked into a pretty little church in the Bernese Oberland. Inside he saw one single Bible text on the front of the pulpit: “*Be doers of the word*” (James 1:22). He said,

I can picture the members of that mountain community, weary from their six days’ toil, visiting their House of God on Sunday only to find that even here they are exhorted to work! The words, “*Be doers*,” must be the last straw for them. The Apostle goes about things more mercifully, for God is merciful... [For] eleven long chapters ... Paul has tirelessly preached what God has done for us, and not until the twelfth chapter do we hear the words: “*I appeal to you*.”

Paul writes in the spirit of Isaac Watts:

Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.”

The Nature of Consecration, v. 1b

To present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

The nature of true Christian consecration is given in the last half of verse 1. It has three prominent characteristics:

It Is Decisive

The English word *consecration* means “dedication to the worship and service of God.” Paul urges his Roman readers (and us) to an act of consecration with his words, “*to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice*.” The verb “*to present*” (παραστήσαι, parastēsai) was a

technical term for the offering of a sacrifice. The tense of the verb (aorist) points to decisive action.²⁴ The believer is called to an act of consecration that is “decisive, crucial, [and] instantaneous.”

We are called, says Bishop Moule, to “once for all” look our “Lord in the face, and to clasp His gifts in [our] hands, and then to put [ourselves] and His gifts together into His hands, for perpetual use and service.” As Christians, we should ask ourselves whether we have made this life-long commitment, or not. If we have not, let us not hold back.

There is some debate among evangelicals today over the doctrine of dedication or consecration. Charles Ryrie has argued that dedication is generally an experience subsequent to conversion. Others argue that a believer is inwardly consecrated at the time of conversion.²⁸ I would suggest a mediating position. There is no doubt that a person is consecrated or set apart to God at conversion. This is confirmed, for example, by the positional use of the verb *to sanctify* (ἁγιάζω, *hagiazō*) in Hebrews 2:11. Yet, from the point of view of his conscious experience, a believer’s consecration, or commitment, or dedication of life often follows conversion.

The decisive nature of this act of consecration does not mean that it will not have to be repeated again and again. Consecration or dedication to Christ is like the “I do” or “I will” of a wedding ceremony. It is an “I do” or “I will” with continuing responsibilities. You will be saying “I do” and “I will” many times thereafter!³¹

Every three years Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship sponsors a missions convention at the University of Illinois at Urbana. At the 1970 convention there was a graffiti board for students to write their thoughts. Someone wrote these words, “The trouble with a living sacrifice is that it is always crawling off the altar (Romans 12:1, 2).” The great Scottish preacher, Alexander Whyte (A.D. 1836-1921), once said, “The perseverance of the saints consists of ever new beginnings.”³³ Perhaps today is a day for a new beginning for someone reading this essay. The Apostle is calling you to a transaction with the Lord that is quite decisive, whether or not it has happened before.

We should note that Paul says “*to present*” (NASB, Darby, ASV, RSV) or “*to offer*” (NEB, NIV). He does not say “to yield,” which suggests resistance. Nor does he say “to surrender,” which suggests reluctance. Let us suppose on my next wedding anniversary, if by some unusual good fortune I remember the date, I should buy some jewelry for my wife Linda. If in giving it to her I should say, “I am yielding this to you,” or “I am surrendering this to you,” she might not think that I was very happy about the gift. The Apostle here speaks of the voluntary and happy presentation of his body to the Lord for His use for time and for eternity.

It Is Total

Paul appeals to his readers, “*Present your bodies*” (τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν, *ta sōmata hymōn*). Some have understood the term “*bodies*” in a holistic sense, i.e., the person as a whole: body, soul and spirit. The NEB has “*your very selves.*” However, Paul does not say, “*yourselves*” (ὑμᾶς αὐτούς, *hymas autous*). Furthermore, in the New Testament the term *body* (σῶμα, *sōma*) means the physical body of skin and bones. It is that part of man through which he lives and acts in the world.

Why, then, does Paul appeal to us to present our bodies? Let me suggest three reasons: First, Greek philosophy deprecated the body. The body was a prison from which the soul would one day be freed and made immortal. The Bible (Judaism, and especially Christianity) values the body. The incarnation (Christ taking a human body) and bodily resurrection of Christ undermine

the old dualism that regards the soul highly but the body as material and evil. “No religion,” says Griffith Thomas, “values the body like Christianity.” New Testament scholar, Ralph P. Martin, adds, “The Christian view of the body as sacred and as the servant of the soul is unique among the religions of the world, Judaism excepted.”⁴⁰

Second, the body is the means of concrete activity in the world. It is the instrument by which we act in life. It is the instrument by which we may serve God. Paul calls it an instrument for righteousness (Rom. 6:13) and the “*temple of the Holy Spirit*” (1 Cor. 6:19). By means of our bodies we look, we speak, we hear, we write, we nurse, we travel. We must remember that our physical body is to be used by God in this world.

Third, the world in which Paul lived (and in which we live) was given over to sexual vice of every kind, and indulgence in such sin is closely associated with the body. Just as the body is the base of operations for the Holy Spirit in the believer, so it is the base of operations for sin in the believer. Paul was a realist. He knew that if consecration did not embrace the physical, it would be annulled from the start.⁴³

There is always a tendency in some people to view the spiritual life as a remote, ethereal thing. It is somehow unrelated to real life. This is illustrated in the case of a man who had become involved in sexual sin. A fellow Christian offered this excuse: “But his heart is in the right place!”

Of course, the offering to God of the body implies an inner consecration to God. As someone has said, “It is unreasonable to give the key of the soul to God, and that of the body to the devil.”⁴⁶

Paul calls this (lit.), “*a sacrifice, living, holy, pleasing to God.*” It is “*living*” (ζῶσαν, zōsan). Some understand this in a theological or spiritual sense, i.e., living in “*newness of life*” (6:4). I do not think that this is Paul’s point. Rather, he is drawing a contrast with the Old Testament sacrifices. They were brought to the altar and slain. The sacrifice Paul speaks of demands not the destruction of life, but the full energy of life.⁴⁸

The living sacrifice is “*holy*” (ἁγίαν, hagian). By this Paul means “*consecrated*” (Moffatt) or “*dedicated*” (NEB). The believer is given over entirely to God. He/she is no longer his/her own. The term *consecrate* (ἁγιάζω, hagiazō; cf. “*holy*” [ἁγίαν, hagian] in v. 1) is often linked to priesthood in the Old Testament. The Hebrew word for “consecrate” literally means “to fill the hand.” “*Who then is willing to consecrate himself this day to the Lord?*” (1 Chron. 29:5). That is, who is willing to come to God ready for service, with every part of his/her body (hands, feet, mouth, ears, intellect, money) to be presented to, and used by the Lord? Such a sacrifice is “*acceptable to God*” (εὐάρεστον τῷ Θεῷ, euareston tō theō). It pleases Him. It is a sacrifice God desires us to make and one that He will accept.

Here, then, is a clear call to consecration and commitment. It is not addressed to the clergy. The New Testament knows of no distinction between clergy and laity, the idea that ministers and missionaries are to be 100% committed, but the rest of us are only 75% or 35% committed. It is addressed to all—to the professor, to the preacher, to the doctor, to the hard-working man in the shop, to the busy homemaker, to the student—to everyone. All believers are called to be 100% committed to Christ.

It Is Reasonable

Paul adds, “*which is your spiritual service of worship*” (NASB). The phrase “*service of worship*” is one word (λατρείαν, latreian) in the Greek text. It almost always means service in

the tabernacle or temple, the action of worshipping (cf. 9:4). The translation “*spiritual*” (RSV, NASB, NIV) is probably not good. Paul does not use the Greek word for “*spiritual*” (πνευματικήν, pneumatikēn). Rather he uses a word (λογικήν, logikēn) that means “reasonable” (AV, NKJV) or “rational” (NASB mg).

All in all, the translation “*reasonable worship*” or, even better, “*intelligent worship*” is to be preferred. For Paul true worship is worship with the mind engaged. It is worship that has a proper understanding of the truth of God. The true worshipper is the worshipper with intelligent understanding of the truths of the gospel (viz., the kind of truths Paul has expounded in chs. 1–11).

The late Dr. Rufus M. Jones was a preacher who preached messages that challenged the mind. He once received a letter from someone who found his messages too demanding. The critic wrote, “Whenever I go to church, I feel like unscrewing my head and placing it under the seat because in a religious meeting I have never had any use for anything above my collar button.” Dr. Jones’ correspondent had little understanding of the kind of worship which is acceptable to God.

Paul’s joining together the phrases “*your bodies*” with “*intelligent worship*” implies that true worship embraces the whole of the Christian’s life from day to day. It implies that any worship in the meetings of the church that is not accompanied by obedience in the ordinary affairs of life must be regarded as false worship, unacceptable to God (cf. Isa. 1:10–17; 58:1–11; Amos 5:21–24).

The Demands of Consecration, v. 2a

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

What use is the believer to make of his/her body in this life? In v. 2 there are two commands: The first is negative, and the second is positive.

The Negative Command: “Do Not Be Conformed To This World”

The verb translated “*do not be conformed*” (συσχηματίζεσθε, suschēmatizesthe, pres. imperative of συσχηματίζομαι) is a Greek word that has to do with the outward side of things.⁵⁹ Its root is a Greek noun (σχῆμα, schēma) meaning “bearing, manner, deportment, attitude, pose, fashion.” Sanday and Headlam paraphrase, “Do not adopt the external and fleeting fashion of this world.”⁶¹

The word translated “*world*” (αἰών, aiōn) actually means “*age*.” It is not the same word as in 1 John 2:15 (κόσμος, kosmos): “*Do not love the world*.” How are we to understand this term “*age*?” Well, we speak today, for example, of “the times.” The Germans have a term, *der Zeitgeist*, which means “the spirit of the age.” The “*age*,” someone has said, is a mighty flood of thoughts, opinions, feelings, speculations, hopes, impulses, principles of action, conventional prejudices, dislikes, attachments, aspirations which are at any time current in the world. These things that make up the “*age*” are the moral or immoral atmosphere in which we live our lives.

In short, the “*age*” is the value system of the “*world*.” This value system or “world view” impregnates the world, impels it, molds it and degrades it. It affects our culture and our institutions. It is the mold that threatens, twists, malforms the thinking of all who belong to it. It exerts great and unrelenting pressure upon us all. “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold,” Paul says.

In the New Testament the “age” is always contrasted with and opposed to “*the age to come*” (Matt. 12:32). It is described as “*evil*” (Gal. 1:4), and Satan is its god (2 Cor. 4:4). The result of being conformed to this age is a “*depraved mind*,” Paul says in Romans 1:28, i.e., “a mind so debilitated and corrupted as to be a quite untrustworthy guide in moral decisions.”

What is the “age” like? It is like a mold that seeks to deform all who are in it. Actually, it is several molds or world views [world view = interpretive framework, the standard by which we interpret reality], or one mold with several facets. Here are some of them:

Mold # 1: Secularism.

The word secular is from a Latin word (*saeculum*) meaning “world,” i.e., the world in terms of time. It is a synonym for αἰών (aiōn) or age. Latin has another term (*mundus*) for the world as sphere or space. It is a synonym for κόσμος (kosmos).

Athanasius (A.D. 296-373) was a leading defender of the Christian faith. His tombstone reads, *Athanasius contra mundum* (“Athanasius against the world”). We all live in the secular world, the world of time and space. But we must not adopt the secular world view or secularism. Secularism thinks within the frame of reference of this present time. Secularism says there is only this time, this secular moment. Christianity, on the other hand, thinks of life in terms of eternity.

Where will you be 500 years from now? The secularist says, “I’ll be in a boneyard somewhere; I’ll be fertilizer in a cemetery.” The Christian says, “We shall all be in heaven or hell. By God’s grace I’ll be in heaven.” Does our world have a supernatural or secular orientation? Think for a moment of our popular magazines, movies, and TV. What kind of world is pictured there? Is it a world in which angel and demon are locked in conflict? Is it a world packed with sinners desperately dependent upon the mercy of God? Is it a world run amok with powerless creatures, making an appalling mess of everything, a world in which all men will one day be called to account for every wrong committed? Is it a world fashioned by God, sustained by God, and loved by God?

Is that the world represented in the press, TV, movies, and by journalists and politicians? No! The world pictured by secular modernism is a self-sufficient world. It is a world in which that is all there is. All is over when you die. It is a world run by men, dominated by men, and its course determined by men. It is a world consumed with acquiring more and more possessions and comforts. It is a world of advertising in which no man is older than 35 and no woman is older than 25.

Mold # 2: Humanism.

The beginnings of humanism may be traced to ancient Greece, to the pre-Socratic philosopher Protagoras (480–10 BC). His motto was, “man is the measure of all things.” Man, in himself, is the ultimate norm by which values are to be determined. He is the ultimate being and the ultimate authority; all reality and life center upon man.

Humanism is anthropocentric (ἄνθρωπος [anthrōpos, man] + centric), i.e., man-centered. Christians are theocentric (θεός [theos, God] + centric), i.e., God-centered. Humanists claim to be humanitarian, i.e., caring about people. Yet as a world view humanism is atheistic and secular. This world is all there is. There is no divine revelation. Mankind is the only source of morals. The humanist will stand one night outside a prison protesting capital punishment, yet the next morning he will stand outside an abortion clinic defending the right of a doctor to kill an

unborn baby. He loves humanity, yet he will fight for legislation to protect 40 or 50 spotted owls—legislation that will cost 50,000 people their jobs.

Humanism is irrational. It has taken all its ethics and values from Christianity. It wants to have morals without the foundation of Scripture. It wants Christian ethics without Christ. As Francis Schaeffer said somewhere in one of his books, “The humanist has both feet planted in midair.” As a world view humanism has come into the church in the form of theological liberalism. Humanism is anti-supernatural. As a result, all the supernatural elements of Christianity were done away with: miracles, the resurrection of Christ, the atonement of Jesus, the Virgin birth. Think of how the “spirit of the age” invades even the evangelical church. The important thing in this man-centered age is my happiness and my needs. “Why did you leave the church?” someone is asked. “Because my needs were not being met,” is the answer. Unlike the rich young ruler who asked, “What must I do?” today’s church attender asks, “What do I get out of this?”⁶⁹

Mold # 3: Existentialism.

The father of existentialism was Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), who penned the slogan, “God is dead!” He took secularism to its logical conclusion. If this world is all there is, then there is no God, no ultimate essence beyond this present existence. If there is no God, then life is meaningless. All human life is shut up to the here and now. There is no exit to the eternal. Values and truth are what we make them.

This world view has been embraced by the arts, whether in painting, popular music, or the theater, including TV and the movies. Human passion has changed from meaningful and lovely romance to a meaningless and coarse animal drive. All of life is meaningless. We must face this fact with courage. Yet even our courage is meaningless.

The message of Jesus Christ is different. There is a God. Man is God’s creature, even though sinful. When redeemed he lives to obey and glorify God. “*Be of good cheer,*” said Jesus, “*for I have overcome the world*” (John 16:33).

Mold # 4: Relativism.

Out of secularism and existentialism comes relativism. There is no ultimate reference point. Nothing is absolute. There are no absolutes in religion or morals. Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein said, “If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put.” In relativism there are no hinges.⁷³

If “everything is relative,” as many moderns say, then we cannot condemn Hitler. He believed he was right to exterminate Jews. Why should we condemn him? Relativism ultimately leads to statism, totalitarianism, and Antichrist because eventually it becomes intolerable. It leads to emptiness and division. Someone has to bring unity.

A contemporary issue will serve to illustrate the relativistic world view. Our society has been at war over the issue of abortion. Some vehemently oppose abortion. Others favor abortion on demand. In the middle are people who say, “I would not choose to have an abortion, but I believe every woman has the right to make that choice for herself.” This middle position is the stance of the relativist.

In the month of August, 1994 thousands of aging rock ‘n rollers celebrated the 25th anniversary of Woodstock, the mammoth rock ‘n roll show held in upstate New York. The press

was filled with news of the big event. Yet the counterculture that produced Woodstock was immersed in relativism and a hatred of rules and regulations.

J. Robertson McQuilkin, former President of Columbia Bible College, tells of a first year student named Debbie who came to the college out of the counterculture of the late 1960s. She came to protest the college's rules and regulations. "Which rules?" asked Dr. McQuilkin. "No particular rule. Just the idea of having rules. It isn't right for you to put your thing on someone else. Dr. McQuilkin repeated her line, "It isn't right for anyone to put his thing on anyone else?" Debbie responded quickly with conviction and feeling. "No, it isn't right." "In other words," the perceptive teacher said, "I should be free to do anything, whatever it is?" "Of course," she responded. "What if my thing is to kill you?" "Well, I wouldn't like it and I would resist it. But if it's your thing ..." Debbie left after one semester, but she did not leave her personal crisis of authority. Absolute relativism was her commitment, but it did not set her free. She continued her tortured way until six years later, she took her own life.⁷⁶

Relativism has greatly affected thinking about Christian missions. The Bible teaches that Christianity is true. All other religions are false. People must trust Christ for forgiveness or be lost. Relativism says that there are many paths to God, one no better than the other.

Let me give an illustration of relativism in the church. Let us suppose we have a Bible study. A hundred years ago we would ask, "What does this passage mean?" Today, a group of people gather and ask, "What does this passage mean to me?" The impression left by such an approach is that there is no certain meaning to the passage. There are as many meanings as there are members of the class. Such an attitude is relativistic. While all would agree that various Christians may apply a passage in a variety of ways, the meaning of the text is absolute. There may be several applications, but there can be only one meaning.

Mold # 5: Materialism.

Materialism is the philosophy that says that matter is all that there is. It is a variation on secularism. It works itself out in a life that centers on money and possessions. The materialist looks to wealth to give him purpose and meaning.

When I lived in Denver a number of years ago I was befriended by a man who was a customer representative for Cadillac. He would visit dealerships and listen to complaints of customers. One man was totally depressed. His beautiful new Caddy had a malfunction. He said to my friend, "I am so disappointed. All my professional career I looked ahead to buying a Cadillac as the ultimate symbol of success." Here was a materialist, a person who found meaning in his possessions. Yet his possessions did not satisfy.

Walter Wilson of Kansas City told a story of Caleb Baker, a Christian businessman. His warehouse burned down. Young Dr. Wilson said, "I'm sorry Caleb." Mr. Baker replied, "Young man, I gave this business to the Lord 20 years ago. If He wants to burn His own warehouse it's all right with me. Let's have a cup of coffee."

Mold # 6: Pragmatism.

The term pragmatism can have an innocent meaning, i.e., the spirit of practicality and problem solving. Christians desire to be practical and problem solvers. In World War II Hitler never dreamed that one nation could build 35,000 planes in one year. America did it. Pragmatism is the American approach.

As a philosophy or world view, however, pragmatism is dangerous because it is unconcerned with principles like goodness, truth, and justice. The pragmatist says that questions about ultimate truth and goodness are not practical. “What works?” is the question of the pragmatist.

Pragmatism is a politician who won't do the right thing because it is an election year. Pragmatism thrives on short term solutions. Pragmatism is government economists driving down inflation with short term tax cuts and inflated money supplies with no concern for the present crippling deficit. Pragmatism is Hitler solving the Jewish “problem” by the Holocaust. Pragmatism is Satan saying to Jesus, “*Worship before me ... [and] all this domain and its glory ... shall be yours*” (Luke 4:6–7). Pragmatism is the attitude that says, “Christianity is good for you Christians because it makes a difference in your life, but I don't feel the need for God. For me, there is no God. I don't need God.”

Pragmatism is using modern techniques (advertising, entertainment) instead of biblical preaching and teaching to build the size of your church. It is saying, “Let's put everything that offends (the teaching of the Word, the ordinances of the church, prayer) the lost person on Wednesday night where he won't see it.”

Mold # 7: Scientism.

Science and its discoveries are cause for all mankind to be thankful. Scientism, however, is making science into an idol. It is Dr. Carl Sagan arguing that the scientific method alone enables us, in principle, to find the answer to every meaningful question. Science alone is a rational guide to truth. Everything else is opinion.

It is Professor Sagan dogmatically asserting that “the Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be,” that the laws of nature are the same throughout the cosmos, that evolution has taken place on billions of other planets, and numerous other assertions for which he has no empirical evidence. It is modern man embracing this god as the solution of all our problems: cancer, heart disease, arms control, and a sound economy. It is man rejecting the biblical teaching that at the heart of all our problems is our sin and rebellion against God.

Mold # 8: Hedonism.

“Go for the gusto!” said a popular advertisement for beer a number of years ago. The sentiment is an old one. The Cyrenaics in 4th century BC Greece had a philosophy of hedonism. They believed that man's ultimate purpose is to be found in enjoying pleasure and avoiding pain. This philosophy was elevated to a religion. The worshippers of Dionysius would get release from the normal restraints of life by drunkenness and sexual involvement with temple prostitutes. The Epicureans of antiquity were a more sophisticated variety of hedonist. They valued exquisite taste in the choice of the finest wines and foods. They valued pleasure without excess.

Our modern culture is very hedonistic. It is very oriented to its feelings. Even in discourse where one used to hear, “I think,” one now hears, “I feel.” Our modern corporations are selling their wares, especially to the young, with a hedonistic world view.

Today we live in a culture where people find happiness in chemicals. The so-called sexual revolution is rooted in hedonism. “If it feels good, it is good!” Helen Gurley Brown, editor of *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, has offered a new definition of promiscuity. Years ago (the 1950s) the word *promiscuity* meant having sexual relationships with more than one person. “Today,” she says, “it is having sexual relationships with more than one person in the same day.”

A young couple visits with one of the elders of the church for pre-marital counseling. They are a wonderful couple, two of the bright lights of the young people's work. During the session they casually admit that they have been having sexual relations for months. "Well, of course, we are sleeping together. We love each other!" Their behavior is based on feeling and intuition, not the forthright, objective teaching of God's Word that forbids all sexual relations outside of marriage.

St. Augustine (A.D. 354-430) was a hedonist before he was converted. He penned this famous prayer, "O Lord ... Thou hast created us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee." He saw the root of man's restlessness. We were created for God. "What is the chief end of man?" asks the Westminster Catechism (Question 1). The answer is: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever."⁸² The goal of man is God. We were created for joy, happiness, and peace. It is found in Him, not hedonism.

Mold # 9: Neo-Paganism.

Paganism is a pre-Christian condition that exists where the Gospel has never been preached. It is belief in false polytheistic religions. America is not a pagan nation. Yet it is a post-Christian nation, and it is becoming what might be called a neo-pagan nation. The morality and ethics of Christianity were once commonly held in the West. Today, as the West rejects Christianity the old gods are coming back. Over 100 years ago a German Jew, Heinrich Heine, saw the sickness of neo-paganism coming. He wrote, "Should that subduing talisman, the cross, ever break, then the old stone gods will rise from the long-forgotten ruins and rub the dust of a thousand years from their eyes, and Thor, leaping to life with his giant hammer, will crush the Gothic cathedrals."

A candidate for elder in a Midwestern church was startled to be told that he was chosen because his astrological sign was in harmony with those of the board members. They urged him to pray for a spirit guide. He now knew why a friend had earlier rejected the position.

Harold Hughes, once an alcoholic truck driver, was converted to Christ and became a remarkable success, being elected Governor of Iowa (1963-69) and a U. S. Senator (1969-1975). His manly, outspoken Christian testimony was an encouragement to many. Yet in the late 1980s he divorced his wife of 44 years and married his secretary. To help him decide whether or not he should get a divorce he spent time with an Indian tribe in Utah. He was accepted into their traditional religious circles. This "did not affect my traditional commitment to Jesus Christ," he said, but it apparently enabled him to get around the biblical prohibition of divorce. I have great respect for Mr. Hughes and his work in rehabilitating alcoholics, but I feel he has been seriously misled in his attempts to mix biblical Christianity and pagan religion.

In ever increasing numbers people today are embracing Celtic and Norse paganism, witchcraft, Voodooism, American Indian shamanism, and nature goddess religions. Neopagans are deeply committed to environmental causes (their gods embody nature) and animal rights. Professing Christians attend seminars on New Age thought. We hear of animal and human sacrifices.

When I first started my work as a Bible teacher, I worked with young people at a local church in Colorado. A friend of mine was a musician and helped arrange for various young men and women to sing in our meetings. One young lady volunteered, and he wanted to hear her audition. She invited him to her home, and he brought me along in order to avoid any appearance of impropriety. We weren't there very long before she gave us a tour of her house, including a

brief look into her room. On her wall was a poem to “Buddha-Christ.” Here was the member of an evangelical youth group who had no idea that she had embraced corrupt, paganized views of Christ.

Neopagan and New Age thought is unified in its rejection of the Christ of the Bible. His true deity and atoning sacrifice are denied. He is reduced to being an enlightened master; he is a god just as we are all gods in human form. The Bible asserts that Christ is the unique Son of God (John 1:14, 18). There is no other name under heaven whereby men can be saved (Acts 4:12). Jesus claimed to be the only way to God (John 14:6).

Mold # 10: Antichristianity.

In 1 John the Apostle no sooner warns his readers not to love the world than he warns them of the Antichrist and Antichristianity (cf. 1 John 2:18). G. K. Chesterton has observed how Christianity is today attacked “on all sides and for all contradictory reasons.” Some condemn Christianity for being too pessimistic, others for being too optimistic. Christianity is attacked by some for stressing sin, judgment, and austerity, and for being inhuman and bleak; others reject it for its pie-in-the-sky comforts. Belief in a caring God hides the bleakness and meaninglessness of life. The Christian church is ridiculed for being antifemale; yet it is also ridiculed in Europe because there only women go to church. It is attacked because it lacks unity (“None of the churches agree with each other”) and for being unified (“They don’t allow differences of opinion”). The followers of Karl Marx charge Christianity with suppressing the poor; the followers of Ayn Rand condemn Christianity for helping them. In a history class a professor blames Christianity that Edward the Confessor was mild and ineffective; yet he blames Richard the Lion Hearted for being warlike. A science teacher will snipe at Christianity for suppressing modern knowledge in the name of outdated superstition; down the hall an anthropology professor will attack missionaries for introducing modern technology and health care to primitive cultures.

This “age” is passing away (2 Cor. 2:6; cf. 7:31). We belong to the “age to come.” What a tragedy to conform to this perishing world. As someone has written, “What madness it is to join in this puppet show which is displayed on a tottering stage.”⁹¹

The Positive Command: “Be Transformed by the Renewing of Your Mind”

The believer is not to think like the unbeliever. The verb “*be transformed*” (μεταμορφουῖσθε, metamorphousthe) speaks of an internal, deep-seated, permanent, revolutionary change in our innermost nature. The verb (μεταμορφουῖσθε, metamorphousthe) is present tense, which suggests a continuing process of renewal. It is in the passive voice (“*let yourselves be transformed*”), which suggests that transformation is basically a work of the Holy Spirit. It is in the imperative mood, which suggests human responsibility, i.e., we are to allow the Spirit to do His work within our hearts and lives.

How is this transformation brought about? It is “*by the renewing of your mind*” (τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοῦς, tē anakainōsei tou noos). This is the Spirit’s work. Christianity is not a mindless emotionalism. The Holy Spirit renews the mind, which is, in Scripture, the seat of intellectual and moral life. The believer’s mind is gradually being renewed, and this newness is a newness in quality. It speaks of freshness. More and more we are able to think Christianly about life. Harry Blamires says the Christian mind is characterized by at least five things: (1) Its supernatural orientation. It sees all human life and human history held in the hands of God. (2) Its awareness of evil. It believes in absolutes. The Christian believes in the doctrine of Original

Sin, the fact that men and women are drawn towards evil by their fallen natures. (3) Its conception of truth. Christians find their minds renewed as they read and are shaped by the great doctrines of the faith as found in Scripture: the creation, the incarnation of the Son of God, His redeeming work, His gift of the Holy Spirit to His people. (4) Its acceptance of authority. Christians discover that the truth gives shape and purpose and direction to their lives as they submit in obedience to the teachings of Christ. (5) Its concern for the person. In the fellowship of the church believers learn of God's love for them as people, and they learn to love others. We are humanized in the middle of a mechanized, impersonal, cruel age.

The Purpose of Consecration, v. 2b

That you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

The Discernment of God's Will

The purpose or goal of consecration is that the believer might be able to discern the will of God. The verb translated "*prove*" (NASB, δοκιμάζω, dokimazō) is best rendered "*discern*" (NEB). Only a renewed mind can discern, appreciate and determine to obey God's will.⁹⁶ The passage is an important one on the will of God, which we may think of in as many as five ways: (1) His predetermined will [Eph. 1:5, 11], i.e., the will of God by which He purposes and determines to carry out His plans. (2) His providential will [1 Chron. 13:2; Acts 18:21; James 4:15], i.e., God's acts of providence [how events unfold] of which we do not know. (3) His preferential will [Deut. 10:10; 1 Tim. 2:4; 1 Thess. 5:18], i.e., those things that God desires and give Him pleasure. (4) His particular will [Rom. 8:27], God's specific plan for each Christian's life. (5) His preceptive will [Rom. 2:18], i.e., the commandments of the Lord that indicate the duties He demands of us.

It is this fifth category of God's will that is in view here. The renewed mind discerns the appropriate ethical judgment at each given movement and in each concrete situation.¹⁰⁰ As he/she grows in maturity and skill in using the Word of God (cf. Heb. 5:14) the believer is able in various circumstances to recognize his/her Christian duty. It is not always easy for the Christian who lives in this world to discern clearly what is the will of God. This demands a continual renewing of the most mature believer's mind.

The Appreciation of God's Will

The more we live in accordance with the will of God the more we will appreciate it. We shall see that it is "*good*" (ἀγαθόν, agathon), i.e., morally good and beneficial. It is "*well pleasing*" (εὐάρεστον, euareston) to Him. It is "*perfect*" (τέλειον, teleion), i.e., absolute and complete. It is not something manageable and achievable. Only Christ fulfilled the absolute demands of the will of God. We embrace it although in this life we can never perfectly fulfill it. Nevertheless we determine to obey His will, depending on His enabling grace to help us.

Conclusion

In summary, then, God's plan for us in this life is that we think and live Christianly. This plan is opposed by the moral atmosphere of this age, which seeks to win us to its passing fashions and philosophies; to mold us and deform us into the mold of its thoughts and goals. The divine method of victory over the world is the consecration of our lives to the Lord. The basis of consecration is "*the mercies of God.*" The nature of consecration is to offer our bodies as living

sacrifices. The demands of consecration are: (1) negatively, not to be conformed to this age, and (2) positively, to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. The purpose of consecration is that we might know and enjoy the will of God.

What about you, fellow Christian? What are you going to do with your life? Are you going to wrap it in a napkin of affluence and bury it in forty years of self-indulgence? That would be the dullest experience you could have. For a truly meaningful life, present your life to God as a living sacrifice.

In a memorable sermon on Romans 12:1, James M. Gray (1851–1935), president of Moody Bible Institute, asked his listeners,

Have you noticed that this verse does not tell us to whom we shall give our bodies? It is not the Lord Jesus who asks for it. He has His own body. It is not the Father, for He remains on His throne. Another has come to earth without a body. God could have made a body for Him as He did for Jesus, but He did not do so. God gives us the indescribable privilege of presenting our bodies to be His dwelling place and to be used by Him. Cleansed by the blood of Christ, they are acceptable to the Holy Spirit. May we present them as an offering of gratitude to be used as He sees fit (cf. 1 Cor. 6:19–20).¹

¹ . *Vol. 4: Emmaus Journal Volume 4*. 1995 (1–2) (95–124). Dubuque, IA: Emmaus Bible College.