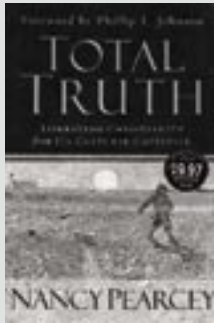


Book Reviews

Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity
Nancy Pearcey,
2004, ISBN:
1-5813445-8-9



—Reviewed by Ralph D. Winter

New Book Complements Purpose Driven Life

Earlier I commented a bit negatively (very reluctantly, I might add) on *The Purpose Driven Life*, the best-seller by Rick Warren, pastor of the famous Saddleback Church (with over 20,000 members). A new book, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*, by Nancy Pearcey (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), now admirably rounds out, I believe, the excellent quality of Warren's best seller.

Warren's book (indeed any book with the truly stupendous acceptance off "88 thousand" churches) deserves very close scrutiny. Pearcey makes no reference to Warren or his book—which must have required a great deal of restraint on her part—but she is almost totally (and ponderously) devoted to what Warren hardly mentions, namely the massive challenge of our Christian faith out in the marketplace, a perspective which defies the gravitation of purely personal salvation.

It is not as though anyone I know disagrees with either book or either perspective. Certainly not I. The books do not themselves contradict each other.

So what is the issue? Well, Warren's book portrays the many ways a believer can minister in and through the local church. He himself is proud that 7,000 of his church members are already employed in their part time or spare time doing things within the church (ranging from ushering to fixing up old cars for needy people).

Neither I nor Pearcey would deny the value of that kind of activity. Both Pearcey and I would like to see more focus on what believers are to do in the world beyond the specific sphere of the church.

In the very first sentence of her introduction she quotes a new friend saying to her,

Your earlier book says Christians are called to redeem entire cultures, not just individuals ... I've always thought of salvation strictly in terms of individual souls. (p.17)

As a loyal disciple of Francis Schaeffer, she then replies,

I sense an eagerness among evangelicals to move beyond a purely privatized faith, applying biblical principles to areas like work, business, and politics. (p. 17)

Later, she tells of a deacon, an attorney for a big corporation, whose daily work focused on finding loopholes in company contracts that would allow them to break the agreements legally whenever they did not suit their needs. Her comment,

He seemed to have no sense that his work involved violating moral principles—ideals of truth, integrity, and keeping one's word. He was just 'doing his job.' (p. 98)

She refers to the chief justice of a state supreme court as saying to a group of lawyers,

If you think law has anything to do with morality, you won't last long in this profession. (p. 98)

But *Total Truth* goes far beyond all this. Nancy Pearcey is herself a true intellectual from a highly educated family, with many years of astute editorial commentary behind her, including major contribution with Chuck Colson on the blockbuster, *How Now Shall We Live*. Her book this time is kind of a splendid, comprehensive, personal magnum opus, distilling her own wide-ranging thinking over many years into one highly readable book, which has 400 pages of text plus fifty pages of valuable, small-print endnotes.

I have not read more than a handful of books in the past forty years *line by line*. This is one of them. Every page is loaded with trenchant insights.

All the way through she employs a two-story metaphor, the downstairs being, roughly, the world of science, the upstairs being religious thought. She shows again and again how our culture has seized control of the lower floor, the world of hard facts, and conceded only the realm of "faith and values" to religion on the upper floor, and, indeed, is already invading that second floor now with pseudo-scientific, materialistic perspectives.

She embraces the Intelligent Design movement. Phillip Johnson writes the foreword. She believes Darwinism has been and is the cause of great deal of harm to our thinking about many things.

Fact is, I find it hard to disagree with anything in the book. Same with Warren's. But, what is not said in either of these two superlative books is what I am concerned about. Pearcey's book extends the playing field dramatically beyond the direct activities organized by local churches.

But, as I see it, neither hers nor Warren's recognizes that the world we need to refine and reform is not just in need of righteous people staying out of trouble (and fueling the many activities churches find them to do in their free time), but righteous people working with God out in the world, during the eight-hour day, fighting against all trouble—not just doing the right thing, but fighting all wrong.

All trouble? Yes, anything and everything that dishonors the Creator, whether subtle sins of thought in the lives of the saints, crimes committed by non-believers, wars, poverty, or even evils not originated by humans at all (such as the incredibly destructive disease pathogens that drag down nine out of ten Americans into premature death, killing more like 99 out of 100 in many countries).

Note that what neither book acknowledges (although Pearcey's comes closer) is that this world is not just riddled with human failings; it is haunted by an evil intelligence that is just as obvious as the evidence for design, heralded by the Intelligent Design movement.

The problem with the otherwise excellent Intelligent Design movement is that it neither acknowledges nor explains the pervasive evidence of a fallen creation, a distorted creation, an *intelligently damaged* creation. It merely seeks to provide evidence of intelligence. It's like providing evidence of the intelligence of the Osama ben Ladens and the Charles Colsons of our time. Sure, both are highly intelligent. The question to be addressed is "Are they each just as God designed them to be?" Is, for example, nature, which is pervasively demonstrative of life-destroying violence and suffering, just the way an intelligent, loving God would *have created it*?

This is the "frontier" in thinking which I feel could be further recognized in both books.

The Drama of Scripture
Barthomew and Goheen, 2004,
ISBN:
0-8010274-6-2



—Reviewed by Ralph D. Winter

What is our Mission?

The Drama of Scripture, by Barthomew and Goheen, is a new book from Britain, via Baker Academic. A front page endorsement says,

It promises to be an indispensable tool for the many Christians who have been awakened to God's call for serious cultural engagement. (ii)

Actually, the entire book seeks simply to tell the story the Bible is presenting. At points it inevitably jars with contemporary Evangelical thinking, and is thus a provocative book.

It declines to take sides in the age of the earth controversy,

We wonder whether God created over a long period of time or caused all that he made to spring into existence instantly. (p. 32)

It does, however, claim that Genesis 12:1-3

...declares that through Abraham, God is at work to reverse the effect of judgment on his creation.... What is being offered in these few verses is a theological blueprint for the redemptive history of the world. (p. 55)

Further on, N. T. Wright is quoted as saying,

Very often people have come to the New Testament with the presumption that "going to heaven when you die" is the implicit point of it all. ... They acquire that viewpoint from somewhere, but not from the New Testament. (p. 211)

The authors seek to augment this statement,

Wright says "from somewhere" and knows well where that somewhere is! This view of the end is the result of the combination of biblical teaching with pagan Greek philosophy in the early centuries of the church. It is especially

in Augustine's early work, harmonizing Scripture with Neoplatonic philosophy.

It is this same Neoplatonic pollution coming to us so strongly from Augustine that has functionally consigned Satan to unemployment by insisting that God is directly responsible for all things. This defines the distortion of nature out of Satan's responsibility and unnerves millions of thinking believers and non-believers as they try to square the horrendous evils seen in an otherwise marvelous nature with an omnipotent and loving God.

What does this mean for our missionary calling? It means that we may be failing to tap the most profound evangelistic resources if we cannot see the necessity of restoring God's glory by joining with Him to the full limit of our ability in the work of "destroying the works of the Devil," in restoring the distortion of all creation by an evil intelligent being and his followers.

The "full limit of our ability" has radically expanded as more and more of the microbiological details of God's creation have become clear. What additional ideas about fighting disease would Jesus have revealed to people in His day, had they had the knowledge we have about diabolical evil at the microbiological level? Was His healing activity intended to teach people how to treat disease? Or was it intended to teach the people that God is concerned with human suffering and that He wants us to combat disease in His Name, and to the fullest extent of our knowledge—in the process, revealing the full attributes of a loving heavenly Father's love? Is it any wonder that medical missions since 1880 have been the most effective entrance into the hearts and minds of people around the world?

In that case, should we go around the world simply being helpful to people who are already sick and being clawed down to a premature death, or is it a basic part of our mission to pray for and promote in every way possible efforts at the roots of disease, disease origins (not just disease *treatments*)?