

How Much of Our Lives Is “Truth” Vs. “Relativism”?

Objective: When we examine our lives, how much of what we want is based on what we see others have? Philosopher Rene Girard called this phenomenon mimetic desire. This idea is the foundation of advertising (i.e., celebrity endorsements and Nike’s “be like Mike”). Culturally we must remember that popularity does not equal right. How can we guard against being too swayed by popular opinion but rather be authentic to our higher calling?

Song Suggestion: Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory (Blue 308, Red 759, Music Issue 615)

Bible and Catechism Readings: –

Romans 12: 2-3

Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect. For by the grace given to me I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than one ought to think, but to think soberly, each according to the measure of faith that God has apportioned.

Col 3: 1-2

If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth.

Catechism 2558

Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one’s own responsibility. By free will one shapes one’s own life. Human freedom is a force for growth and maturity in truth and goodness; it attains its perfection when directed toward God, our beatitude.

Saint: St. Thomas More exemplifies what it means to look inwardly for motivation and not to let external ideals guide your speech and actions. More served as an important counselor to King Henry VIII of England, serving as his key counselor in the early 1500s, but after he refused to accept the king as head of the Church of England, he was tried for treason and beheaded (he died in London, England, in 1535). On his execution, he was reported to have said: "I die the King's good servant, and God's first". Pope Pius XI canonised More in 1935 as a martyr. Pope John Paul II in 2000 declared him the patron saint of statesmen and politicians.

Vignette: – William Wilberforce (1759-1833), abolitionist and philanthropist, was born in England to a family of merchants. Wilberforce had political ambitions and, with his connections, managed to win election to Parliament in 1780, where he formed a lasting friendship with William Pitt, the future prime minister. But he later admitted, "The first years in Parliament I did nothing—nothing to any purpose. My own distinction was my darling object."

A trip to Europe led him to reflect deeply on his life, which led to a spiritual rebirth. In 1789, Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson managed to have 12 resolutions against the slave trade introduced—only to be outmaneuvered on fine legal points. Wilberforce's resolve to end slavery never abated. He was joined in his efforts by like-minded Christian friends known as the “Clapham Sect.” For twenty years, they labored to turn public opinion and political leaders against the evils of slavery, and the tide began to turn. The pathway to

abolition was blocked by vested interests, parliamentary filibustering, entrenched bigotry, international politics, slave unrest, personal sickness, and political fear. Other bills introduced by Wilberforce were defeated in 1791, 1792, 1793, 1797, 1798, 1799, 1804, and 1805. His antislavery efforts finally bore fruit in 1807: Parliament abolished the slave trade in the British Empire.

Wilberforce's faith in Jesus Christ changed him from a careless, wealthy young politician to a tireless, compassionate public servant. He was a moral leader who voted against his party when his principles required it. His partnership with his Christian brothers and sisters in the Clapham Sect is a model for Christians working together to bring about meaningful societal reform. Despite illness, physical threats, and enormous opposition, he persisted for decades in the tasks God had called him to.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:

How much of what you value do you believe comes from others?

Who are the people in your life who influence you?

What is an example of something you purchased because you saw someone else with it and wanted it?

Name someone you think is an example of a Christian life well-lived. What is it that you admire about this person? What value, belief, or skill could you take from them?

Resources:

Bishop Barron discussion of Rene Girard: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSzF2OG2ejI&t=1s>

Bishop Barron Presents | Luke Burgis - Wanting: The Power of Mimetic Desire in Everyday Life:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZOdPLrq5ViM&t=2929s>

Action Plan:

1. This week would be an excellent time to start looking for where in your family or society you see relativism at work.
2. What will you do to change your own relativistic thinking or address the relativistic thinking in your family or society?
3. Contemplate the example you are setting that others might be mimicking.

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