Humanistic rationalism has produced the Spirit-quenching pragmatism found in much of the 21st-century Evangelical church.

In answering this question from a reader, I must first qualify what I am about to say. I am going to address the fallacy and dangers of humanistic rationalism. We must never forget that authentic Biblical Christianity is nothing if not rational -- but it is based on Divine reason, not human reason.

Humanistic rationalism is the effective opposite of Christian presuppositionalism. It is the philosophy, developed beginning in the 1700s, which says that man can make sense of the universe using his reason alone, without any recourse to God or to His revelation in Scripture. Christians must not only reject humanistic rationalism; we must also understand where it has led much of the present-day church.

Kierkegaard's "Leap Into the Dark"

Danish philosopher-theologian Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), the father of postmodernism, rejected rationalism. Ironically, his rejection of it led to even worse thinking among many Christians. Kierkegaard correctly understood that humanistic rationalism leads to the loss of all meaning. But he did not fully accept the supernatural nature of the Bible as the Divine revelation of understandable, objective, propositional truth.

Even so, since he had a nominally Lutheran upbringing, Kierkegaard wanted to have the comfort of "faith" as a source of some sense of meaning in an otherwise meaningless world. "Faith" for Kierkegaard then became irrational -- a "leap into the dark" as he called it. By elevating the subjectivity of this counterfeit of Christian
"faith," Kierkegaard effectively rejected the objectivity of propositional truth in Scripture -- one of the great truths reclaimed by the Protestant Reformers. Thus, Kierkegaard actually rejected the authority of Scripture, and helped set the stage for the postmodernist deconstruction of Scripture by succeeding generations.

**Nietzsche's "Test of Wills" and the 21st-Century Church**

Kierkegaard was, ironically, the forerunner of existentialists such as Friedrich Nietzsche, who came full circle into a worse form of humanistic rationalism coupled with evolutionary philosophy. Nietzsche believed that human reason is rationalization, merely the expression of what each man wants, and therefore a contest of weak versus strong wills. What man calls truth, according to Nietzsche, is simply a matter of what the strongest man or group of men wills. Whatever man can make work in order to achieve his purposes -- that is truth.

How did all of this affect the history of the world? It has poisoned the government of nations, and it has spiritually enfeebled much of today's Evangelical church.

In the political realm, humanistic rationalism became the basis of National Socialism and the horrors of Nazi Germany. It also became the basis of the philosophy that says that the constitutions of nations are "living documents" -- wax noses to be pragmatically twisted to suit the aims of those in power.

But the worst effects are in the church. The Spirit-quenching pragmatism of the nominally Evangelical church of the 21st century is also the product of the influences of humanistic rationalism and its existentialist philosophy. Today many Evangelical leaders, whether they admit it or not, really agree with Nietzsche. They believe that what is most important is not what Scripture says, but what "works" -- what attracts the most people, what builds the biggest "ministry", what produces the most "vibrant" worship, what most "affirms" people and makes them feel good.
Viewed in terms of Nietzsche's test of wills, the strong-willed pragmatists in the Evangelical church have largely triumphed over weak-willed Christians who have remained silent or lodged only ineffectual protests. By force of will, the pragmatists have established a new Nietzschian "truth" — the philosophy of the Purpose-Driven Church.

**True Christians Must Also Reject Irrationalism**

True Christians must reject this. But Christians must also reject irrationalism. Today, much of what is passed off as Evangelical preaching is couched in this kind of language: "Don't think too much about Christianity and the Bible, just 'believe' and feel good about it, and let church leaders take you in any direction they please, without protest." This is not Christian faith rooted in Divine reason. It is existentialist pragmatism couched in Christian jargon.

Genuine Christian faith is not a blind, irrational "faith" in the nebulous, the uncertain, the changeable. It is not the practical rejection of the authority of Christ and His Word, no matter how much church leaders may say they are not rejecting Him. Genuine Christian faith is submission to the authority of God who is consummately rational.

It begins with submission to the divine record of creation, attested to by God Himself:

> Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said: "Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38:1-7)
It requires belief in the Divine record of the person and work of Jesus Christ, attested to by human eyewitnesses whose testimony is recorded in Scripture:

For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:16-21)

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life -- the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us -- that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. (1 John 1:1-4)

**God's Remedy for Humanist Rationalism: "Quench Not the Spirit"**

The danger of humanistic rationalism is that it denies the reality of God's revelation, and the pragmatism it produces denies the power of it -- even in the church.

The early Corinthian church, though it began well, soon fell prey to such deception.
The Apostle Paul wrote his first epistle to them to correct their deadly error:

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God -- and righteousness and sanctification and redemption -- that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord." And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in
much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive
words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that
your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1
Corinthians 1:18-2:5)

Paul also warned the Thessalonians, "Quench not the Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

How does the church do that? Paul immediately goes on to say, "Do not despise
prophesying" -- literally, do not diminish or debase Divine revelation in your thinking
(5:20). And next, "Prove [test] all things; hold fast that which is good" in light of
God's infallible and uniquely authoritative Word (5:21). And finally, "Abstain from
every form of evil" (5:22).

As we have said so often in the statement that summarizes the focus of this ministry:
The church of Jesus Christ must be the Scripture-driven church. God's inspired,
inerrant Word must be our sole authority, and our infallible critic, in every area of life
and ministry.

Copyright 1998-2015

TeachingtheWord Ministries       www.teachingtheword.org

All rights reserved. This article may be reproduced in its entirety only,
for non-commercial purposes, provided that this copyright notice is included.

We also suggest that you include a direct hyperlink to this article
for the convenience of your readers.