

Why Is It So Hard to Believe in 2019?

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CCEN Adult Education (Winter 2019)

WEEK ONE:

We Are Enchanted By Materialism

Introduction

- A. The abundant goodness of God's world
- B. The stifling disenchantment of the immanent frame

The immanent frame is a constructed social space that frames our lives entirely within a natural (rather than supernatural) context. It is the sensed context where our beliefs are developed.

Within the immanent frame, the dominant conviction is that we live in "an entirely natural, material, explicable, measurable, and comprehensible world" (Alan Noble, *Disruptive Witness*, 55). In other words, we live in a **disenchanted universe**.

- C. The glittering enchantment of more stuff

I. The primacy of love

Love is the guiding force of every person's life. Our love is the fuel of our action, drawing us like a magnet toward what we most desire.

For when we ask whether someone is a good man, we are not asking what he believes, or hopes, but what he loves.
Augustine, Enchiridion, 31.117

A body gravitates to its proper proper place by its own weight. The weight does not necessarily drag it downward, but pulls it to the place proper to it: thus fire tends upward, a stone downward. Drawn by their weight, things seek their rightful places. If oil is poured into water, it will rise to the surface, but if water is poured onto oil it will sink below the oil: drawn by their weight, things seek their rightful places. They are not at rest as long as they are disordered, but once brought to order they find their rest. Now, my weight is my love, and wherever I am carried, it is this weight that carries me.

Augustine, Confessions, 13.9.10

II. Practicing love

- A. *Uti or frui?* Augustine's classic treatment

Two modes of love:

- The love of *enjoyment*: clinging to something lovingly for its own sake, remaining fixed in it, and placing in it the end of all your joys

- The love of *use*: referring what has come your way to what your love aims at obtaining, whisking it toward that point to which the whole impetus of your love is hastening

Our relationships with products tend to be short-lived: rather than hoarding treasured objects, consumers are characterized by a constant dissatisfaction with material goods. This dissatisfaction is what produces the restless pursuit of satisfaction in the form of something new. Consumerism is not so much about having more as it is about having something else; that's why it is not simply buying but shopping that is at the heart of consumerism. Buying brings a temporary halt to the restlessness that typifies consumerism. This restlessness — the moving on to shopping for something else, no matter what one has just purchased — sets the spiritual tone for consumerism.

William T. Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire*, 35

This, indeed, is the difference between temporal and eternal things: that something temporal is loved more before it is possessed, but loses its appeal when it comes along. This is because it cannot satisfy the soul, whose true and certain abode is eternity. But anything eternal is loved more fervently when acquired than when just desired. This is because while you are desiring it, you cannot possibly think better of it than it really is, so that it disappoints you when you find it does not come up to your expectations. On the contrary, however great your estimate of it while you are on the way to it, you will find it exceeded when you eventually attain it.

Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, 1.42

B. The ordering of love

[Love must be ordered so that] you do not love what is not to be loved, or fail to love what is to be loved, or have a greater love for what should be loved less, or an equal love for things that should be loved less or more, or a lesser or greater love for things that should be loved equally.'

Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, 1.28

Don't love anything less; instead learn to love God more, and you will love other things with far more satisfaction. You won't overprotect them, you won't overexpect things from them. You won't be constantly furious with them for not being what you hoped. Don't stifle passionate love for anything; rather, redirect your greatest love toward God by loving him with your whole heart and love him for himself, not just for what he can give you. Then, and only then, does the contentment start to come.

Tim Keller, *Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical*, 94

C. On loving people

III. A posture for love

Pleasures are gifts to be enjoyed, not goals to be pursued. No pleasure, however delightful, provides a reason for living or a goal for growing. The pursuit of pleasure leads into a swamp of boredom. The foundational human appetite is for God. God has filled the world with all manner of delight. To enjoy it we need the light touch of one who accepts a gift. We need protection from the sweaty, enslaving compulsions of taking a God-gift and immediately de-godding it into an idol. It is possible to accept all the gifts of life and enjoy them completely only if we refuse to make gods out of them.

Eugene Peterson, *As Kingfishers Catch Fire: A Conversation on the Ways of God Formed by the Word of God*

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

- **You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit** by James K.A. Smith, a layperson's distillation of his larger "Cultural Liturgies" project which includes *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*; *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*; and *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology*.
- **Making Sense of God** by Tim Keller, particularly the fourth chapter, "A Satisfaction That is Not Based on Circumstances" (77-96).
- **The Confessions** of Augustine, particularly contemporary translations by Maria Boulding or Sarah Ruden. Drop everything else and read it multiple times.
- **On Augustine** by Rowan Williams, particularly the final chapter "Augustinian Love", a dense but lucid treatment of *uti* and *frui* with regard to human relationships. The chapter on Augustine called "The Clamour of the Heart" in Williams' *The Wound of Knowledge* is also quite strong.
- For more on Charles Taylor and the immanent frame, see the very readable **Disruptive Witness: Speaking Truth in a Distracted Age** by Alan Noble or the less readable but more comprehensive **How [Not] to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor** by James K.A. Smith.
- The winter 2018 issue of *Comment* magazine has multiple worthwhile pieces themed around "the new minimalism". Many are available online at <https://www.cardus.ca/comment/browse/print-issue/minimalism/>.