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From the Selected Works of Steven Alan Samson

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Summer Reading for Hearty Souls

Steven Alan Samson, *Liberty University*



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TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE ALL THINGS

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Editorial Notes

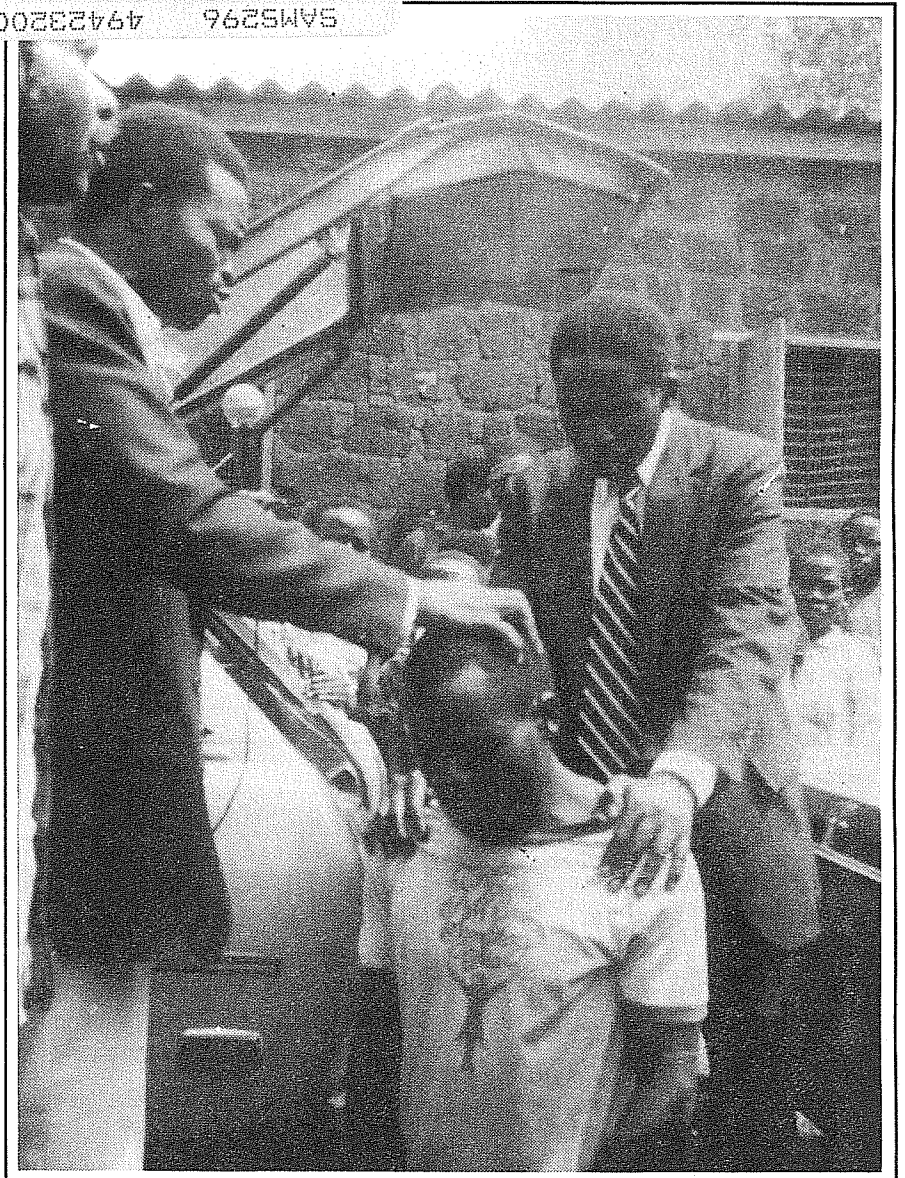
*In thy wife thou shalt have gladness,
She shall fill thy home with good,
Happy in her loving service
And the joys of motherhood.*

From Psalm 128

Marriages with homes and families are normal. Imagine living in an age which considered itself advanced beyond others and didn't understand something so simple! Perhaps the 20th Century is advanced beyond others in mass murder and the enslavement of entire nations, but when it comes to the simple and obvious things necessary in every age, modern man sets new standards for pigheaded blindness.

In the event television, newspapers, and popular culture have left you confused, here are facts you should remember for your spiritual health and your eternal welfare. Undue delay of marriage leads to sin. Having more husbands or wives than one at a time is wicked. Unjust divorce personally provokes God. And desertion of your mate and children is evil even when the state gives you a no-fault pink slip.

No civil court can change these facts and no contemporary value system can excuse gluttony, drunkenness, unchaste company, lascivious songs, or provocative acts of uncleanness. The laws of morality are no more up for popular vote than the laws of physics.



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Excitement on the sawdust trail in Uganda See page 39.

THE MAGAZINE FOR SERIOUS CHRISTIAN FAMILIES—SINCE 1813

Summer Reading for Hearty Souls

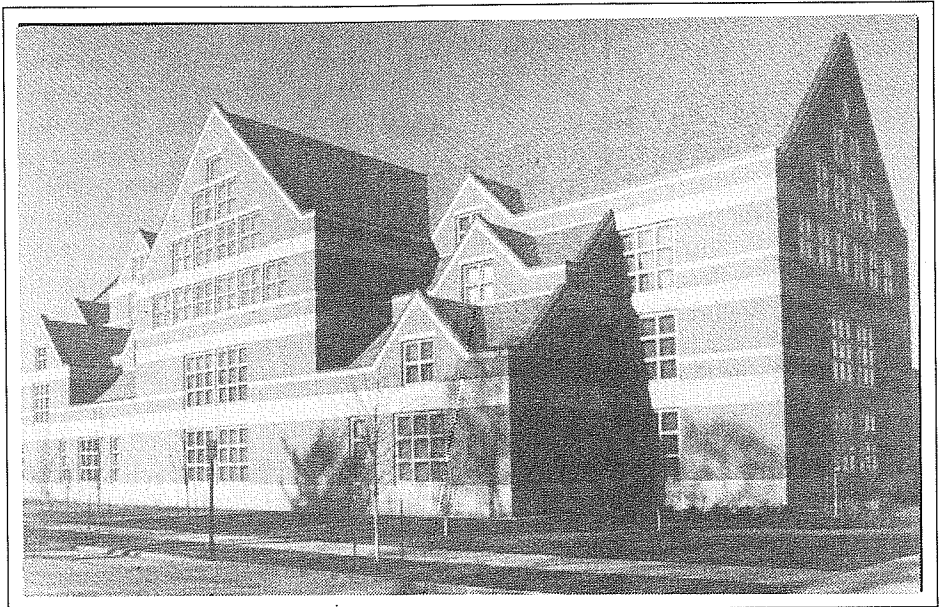
By Steven Alan Samson

Fed up with light summer fare? Tired of politically-correct, low-calorie intellectual fluff? If you crave some real food, let me recommend *A Shattered Visage: The Real Face of Atheism* (Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991) by Ravi Zacharias, a popular campus evangelist based in Atlanta and a visiting scholar at Cambridge University. Here is a worthy successor to the popular apologetic work of Francis Schaeffer, combining vivid writing with intellectual rigor.

Like Allan Bloom, Zacharias begins by noting the skeptical "open-mindedness" that "has become synonymous with intellectual sophistication" in our day. Yet this open-mindedness is really only a symptom of a general closing of the modern mind that in recent centuries has turned away from God and made man the measure of all things.

Like Bloom also, Zacharias knows where the bodies are buried. He probes the genealogy of our modern sophistry first by raiding its graveyard, then exposing its phantoms. At times the book reads like a good murder mystery, but with a difference. There is no secret about the identity of the culprits. Their name is legion. The list culminates with Friedrich Nietzsche—cast in the role of undertaker—for whom "truth is fiction." Yet this "mortician of the Absolute," who proclaimed the death of God, thought himself the medium of some "superior power." Warning that a century of violence and universal madness would follow, Nietzsche went insane himself.

The first part of the book confronts the dilemmas and contradictions of the atheistic hypothesis. Atheism begins with a "leap of faith" of its own and finally rests on what Bertrand Russell called "the firm foundation of unyielding despair." Near the end of this section Zacharias comments: "Having killed God, the atheist is left with no reason for being, no morality to espouse, no meaning to life, and no



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Van Wylen Library contains more than 260,000 volumes and 1,400 current periodical subscriptions for students at Hope College in Holland, MI, where Steven Samson has been a member of the political science department.

hope beyond the grave." We end with the nihilism—the sense of nothingness—of existentialism.

Unlike Bloom, however, Zacharias beckons the reader beyond the strife of competing philosophies. In the balance of the book, he carefully outlines a Christian basis for addressing the issues of life. The final chapter begins with man on the witness stand, accused of self-indulgently repressing the truth and trying to fit God into a Procrustean bed of his own making. Zacharias then confronts the implications of design, accountability, purpose, and destiny. He challenges the reader to see "with larger eyes than his own" and provides suggestions in this regard in two appendices.

As this book should make clear, the word *atheism* is really a misnomer. In place of God, as Malcolm Muggeridge has noted, people substitute either "the drive for power" (Hitler) or "the drive for pleasure" (Hugh Hefner).

Another book, recently revised,

shows that a combination of these two drives—power and pleasure—lies at the wellhead of modern leftism, personified by "the Divine Marquis," the Comte de Sade, who is known as "the grandfather of modern democracy." *Leftism Revisited: From De Sade and Marx to Hitler and Pol Pot* (Regnery, 1991) by Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn is an historical indictment, unsparing in its voluminous detail, of the "ideology of democracy"—specifically its utopian egalitarianism, social conformity, hatred of diversity, and capacity for violence. But be warned! This book is not for the faint of heart. The author strips the facade from our sanitized public history in order to expose the hideous face of Medusa.

Kuehnelt-Leddihn, who writes for *National Review*, is an Austrian Catholic scholar of encyclopedic range and depth. He traces the sinister impulse of this secular religion, Leftism, from its roots in the French Revolution to the present historical juncture, when

the lurches and spasms of a sick Red Dinosaur blind us to an even greater peril: The "inner crisis of the West." It is evident in the deadly evolution of democracy toward "the totalitarian provider state" with its "increasing drug consumption, the mass butchering of the unborn, the shrinking birth rates, the decline of family life, the evanescence of authority." The author concludes with a warning that the "swaddling clothes of nationalism and democracy, two forms of collectivist horizontalism . . . , threaten to become shrouds, soon to suffocate us."

Elsewhere, Kuehnelt-Leddihn argues that the script of modern history has been written by the two Johns of Geneva, Calvin and Rousseau: The one standing for the glory of God, the other for the worship of humanity. Their intellectual heirs remain locked in battle. But the real choice, as Kuehnelt-Leddihn remarked in a chapel message a few years ago, lies between God and nothing. Our problem, as Solzhenitsyn noted just a few years ago, is that "we have forgotten God."

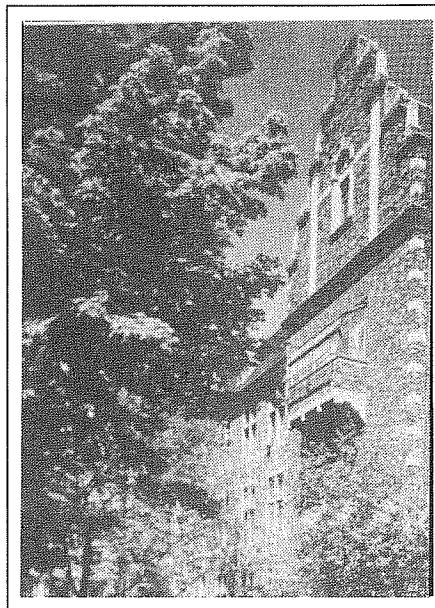
A final word of caution is in order. If you entertain a high opinion of Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, or American foreign policy generally, be prepared for some bad news. The author keeps his powder dry. Much of it, by the way, he stores in his footnotes. Read them and weep.

From the sadism of the Left, we turn to the designing hand of God. James Nickel's *Mathematics: Is God Silent?* (Ross House Books, Box 67, Vallecito, CA 95251), published last year, is also written in the tradition of Francis Schaeffer. Like Zacharias, Nickel begins with an historical overview. He traces the development of mathematics from ancient Egypt to the present century, including the impact of the secularization of modern thought. Along the way he cites dozens of mathematicians and scientists who have commented on the mysterious correspondence of mathematical structure to physical reality. Albert Einstein, among others, noted that there could be no science without a belief in the inner harmony of the world.

Do not be dismayed by the subject. Mathematics, like history, is not boring when taught in the context of God's created order. In fact, it can be downright exciting. The beauty of this book lies in the way it provides concrete illustrations of the wonders of creation from the frequency ratios in music to the Fibonacci numbers in biology. It is written to inform, astonish, and delight. Did you ever notice the spiral arrangements of flower petals, pine cones, pineapples, snail shells, spider webs, ocean waves, comet tails, and the DNA molecule? Why do pine cones and some pineapples have five spirals one way and eight another? What do wild geraniums, starfish, sand dollars, and apple cores have in common? Read the book and see—literally. Nickel concludes this all-too-brief introduction with an annotated list of resources for students and teachers.

Each of these books stands as a reproach to our secularized educational system which fails to challenge either our minds or our hearts. All the talk about reversing low standardized test scores and geographical illiteracy simply disguises the nature of the problem. As Zacharias, Kuehnelt-Leddihn, and Nickel have shown, it is necessary to strip away the pretenses of our flight from God and begin a major facelift. *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning: An Approach to Distinctively Christian Education* (Crossways Books, 1991) by Douglas Wilson takes some steps toward restoring a sensible balance. The author is pastor of a community church in Moscow, ID, and co-founder of the Logos School. His premise is very simple: Teaching a Biblical worldview should lie at the heart of Christian education.

Like Dorothy L. Sayers, whose famous essay, "The Lost Tools of Learning," is reprinted in an appendix, Wilson turns to the medieval Trivium as a model for reforming the curriculum. He recommends the study of classical languages, particularly Latin and Greek, for several reasons, including the intellectual discipline it requires. But more importantly, they are the seedbed of our English language and artifacts of the infancy of our civilization. Even



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today, the ability to recognize and understand Biblical and classical literary references largely defines "cultural literacy." Our growing ignorance of history and literature is severing the cultural lifeline of our civilization and orphaning our young people. Has any generation shown more genuine hatred toward its children? Perhaps, as Zacharias might note, it is because today's children mirror back the shattered visage of their elders.

Wilson criticizes our reactionary reliance on the socialized education of our public schools. He finds much to recommend in the home school alternative, especially in comparison with existing choices, but believes its "built-in limits" will make it less attractive where "good" Christian schools are available. Rather than leave this conclusion unsupported, Wilson devotes an appendix to defining the curricular basis for a "classical and Christ-centered education" and providing practical examples. Like last year's *Closing of the American Heart: What's Really Wrong with America's Schools* (Probe Books) by Ronald Nash, Wilson's book challenges the conventional wisdom in secular and Christian education and recommends a Great Books approach.

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