

“Men without Chests”

February 23, 2004

There is always a price to pay for losing our God-ward underpinnings. When we attack, ridicule, or relinquish concepts of absolutes (or its cousin, objective truth), we by necessity abandon any sense of right-ness (except, of course, what’s “right” for me).

Over forty years ago, C. S. Lewis, in an essay entitled “Men without Chests,” unmasked the intolerable notion that there are no transcendent values for us to follow, implying that we only live in a material world. If we are only the sum total of our physical parts, our behavior and actions and thoughts are only responses to glandular juices produced by our inter-action with the world around us. Such a way of viewing human existence is perilously dangerous, for it can produce horrific consequences.

One hot Texas afternoon, a young mother called for her children who were playing in the backyard. One did not respond—the baby, Jessica. After searching for her child, to her horror the mother discovered that Jessica had fallen down a small hole and was trapped twenty-two feet below the surface. In a panic, 911 was called.

With TV images of this tragic situation within hours beamed across the air into every home, a nation-wide concern developed and became focused on this one small little girl. But if the authors of modernity are correct, the 911 operator, the myriad of firemen, the multitude of paramedics, the countless men and women who were called upon to help would have had physical responses or glandular juices which could have just as easily produced feelings of nobility or vulgarity. They could have equally responded by rushing to baby Jessica’s aid or by tragically filling in the hole on top of her. If the apologists of modernity are correct, either would have been possible with little to no moral judgment offered because in a closed universe, there is no basis or foundation for right and wrong (just preference and glandular juices).

Yes, feelings and emotions are part of the human response to this world. However, until recently we generally believed that such emotions and feelings corresponded to objective moral and value assumptions. Any view that places the center of value-making and moral decisions in a closed system of physical matter risks the consequences of creating a society with no soul, no heart. Again, as Lewis said, we become “Men without Chests,” people with no souls.

More recently Herbert Schlossberg, in his book *Idols for Destruction*, exposes the fatal dilemma we face when we abandon absolutes. When we sacrifice supreme, all-encompassing values, we also sacrifice the people who are attached to them: “the wife depending on some absolute value of faithfulness, the partner on honesty, the child love, the comrade on courage.” This issue has very practical implications and can be perilously personal.

Living in a universe where man cannot transcend mere physical and emotional responses to the environment will produce consequences that we will not ultimately be able to live with. In other words, objective truth must invade our emotions, our feelings, and our lives to assist in making right decisions.

It should be no surprise that the Psalmist who praised God “because I am fearfully and wonderfully made” in the same song acknowledged his need for God’s transcendent, moral values to search his soul. Likewise we should reach to the heavens above and cry, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts; see if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:23-24).

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