



Saving Leonardo: A Call to Resist the Secular Assault on Mind, Morals, and Meaning

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Is secularism a positive force in the modern world? Or does it lead to fragmentation and disintegration? In *Saving Leonardo*, best-selling award-winning author Nancy Pearcey (*Total Truth*, coauthor *How Now Shall We Live?*) makes a compelling case that secularism is destructive and dehumanizing.

Pearcey depicts the revolutionary thinkers and artists, the ideas and events, leading step by step to the unleashing of secular worldviews that undermine human dignity and liberty. She crafts a fresh approach that exposes the real-world impact of ideas in philosophy, science, art, literature, and film--voices that surround us in the classroom, in the movie theater, and in our living rooms.

A former agnostic, Pearcey offers a persuasive case for historic Christianity as a holistic and humane alternative. She equips readers to counter the life-denying worldviews that are radically restructuring society and pervading our daily lives. Whether you are a devoted Christian, determined secularist, or don't know quite where you stand, reading *Saving Leonardo* will unsettle established views and topple ideological idols. Includes more than 100 art reproductions and illustrations that bring the book's themes to life.

Saving Leonardo: A Call to Resist the Secular Assault on Mind, Morals, and Meaning Details

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From Reader Review Saving Leonardo: A Call to Resist the Secular Assault on Mind, Morals, and Meaning for online ebook

Andy Young says

Nancy Pearcey has done it again! After her first book, Total Truth, I didn't think she would be able to come up with any new material. What a pleasant surprise to find a systematic layout of modern secular thinking. This is a powerful tool in any evangelist's library.

D.C. says

This is an exceptionally well-reasoned and historically backed defense of morality and the enriching depth and meaning that Christianity brings to mankind. Pearcey never attacks or resorts to ad hominem against secularism, but she doesn't sugarcoat, either. Instead, she traces the historical lineage of philosophy, art, music, literature, science, and film to explain how we as a culture have resorted to different shades of secularism that, ultimately, produce nothing but dehumanization and cruelty. I also appreciate how she is not afraid to call out the modern church for its inaction, hypocrisy, and refusing to carry out its real calling: to send bold Christians out into the world to counteract the destructive forces of humanism. If I was teaching an introductory philosophy class, I would assign this for a wonderful explanation of Western culture with a strong Christian viewpoint.

Josh Robinson says

I concur with Douglas Wilson's review on this book. It's hard for me to contain my enthusiasm. Pearcey has done well, and I appreciate that she did it in classic Shaefferian (Francis Shaeffer, that is) style. I wish that every Christian would take up and read this book. One of the best reads of the year. For the epistemologically self conscious Christian.

Greg says

(note: I don't normally like calling people Nazi's, but this book appears to deserve having the four letter N word thrown at it.)

Leafing through this book at work I'm fairly certain that off in the distance I heard the sound of goose-stepping jackboots. The sound was soft but growing subtly louder.

This book is allegedly an unbiased (the author was once agnostic! I wonder who some other 'unbiased' agnostics were? Right, some of the high ranking members of the Nazi party.) look at how secularism (fuck it just say Dirty Jew-ism, as I will show in a minute this isn't so far off of 1930's German) is ruining our society. Lots of examples are given from all different cultural areas, Expressionism in art is very widely

distributed through the book (hmmm, who else hated Expressionism and thought it was a Jew thing? And seriously who really cares much about Expressionism these days? (But all those Jews who painted those pictures, I mean seculars.)), and are all put down as being decadent and amoral against the Masterpieces of Art (i.e., Leonardo, and musically maybe the last great non-decadent composer could be I don't know, maybe ummm Wagner?).

I will read this book in the near future. This is just a little pre-read taste of a new piece of culture war propaganda being spread in your neighborhood big box bookstore in the Christian Inspiration section. If I were the publishers of this book I would be embarrassed to issue it, especially since all the pre-WW2 artists and movements that caught my eye all were called *Entartete Kunst* by the Nazis. But of course we are hating Secularism here, not Jews, same ignorance different name.

Anyway, after seeing this book earlier today and then seeing this masterpiece of Christian music (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oOHZv...>) that Esteban posted on another thread I am afraid for this country. What other group extolled a mythical 'pure' past and wallowed in kitschy shit in the present? Oh right, the Nazis.

Abigail says

Excellent, Well-Informed, and Compelling

This book gives a solid, well-informed look at the history of modern philosophy and shows clearly how each of the leading world views expressed themselves in art. Simultaneously, the author equips the reader to critique and respond to these world views with a holistic Biblical worldview, and challenges Christians to think and create well.

Scarlett Sims says

Nancy Pearcey has a noble goal: to provide today's Christian with the tools to analyze worldview in the media they consume. I think she basically fails at this goal, the biggest reason that this book tries to do too many things in too little space.

I commend her for taking a stand against total abstinence from secular culture, but I just found the content of Saving Leonardo to be lacking in.... everything. About 3/4 of the book is an art history crash-course where she analyzes the worldviews that gave rise to some of the western world's more classic works of art (and when I say art I am also including literature and music). I don't always agree with her assessments of the works, and there was something else I found troubling: sometimes when she quoted someone it would be completely out of context. I mean she would be quoting a person as saying something that was completely not his original intent at all if you go to the source and look at it. She uses lots of emotionally charged language, which doesn't accomplish anything. I guess maybe she wants to get the reader riled up, but I don't really like feeling like I'm being manipulated while reading a book.

The one part of the book that I thought was actually really well done, sadly the shortest section, was where she talks about movies. I think for today's Christian this is a more important topic to cover since probably a lot of people won't see Whistler's paintings but everybody watches movies.

Ultimately I think this book is not aimed at me. It's aimed more at a Christian who has zero experience trying to figure out what the artist is saying/where he is coming from. Maybe if this was my first introduction to understanding culture I would have gotten more from it. A small point is that she did say some things to indicate our theology isn't 100% compatible but that's not really why I didn't enjoy the book. It's an interesting topic and maybe if this is the first thing you plan to read on it, it'd be ok. But skip it if you aren't a total n00b.

John Gardner says

"True wisdom consists in seeing every field of knowledge through the lens of God's truth — government, science, economics, business, and the arts."

Though we're not even halfway through 2011 yet, I have a pretty good feeling this will end up being my favorite book of the year. A book on apologetics, culture, and philosophy that spends a lot of time focused on art, music, and literature is right up my alley! I actually finished reading it a couple months ago, but my brain was so full it took me a long time to process everything to be able to write a review. It's still a daunting task, but hopefully I can at least give you enough of a taste of what Pearcey offers in this book to make you want to read it... because you really should!

"Saving Leonardo" is broken down into two Parts, though the second makes up the bulk of the book. Part 1 (**"The Threat of Global Secularism"**) shows the extent to which our culture has been co-opted by secularist thinking. Nearly everyone has a worldview that has been affected to some degree by secularism.

Far from being a conservative "fearmongerer", or attacking an abstract secular "boogeyman", Nancy Pearcey is very deliberate and nuanced in her description of what secularism is, and how and why it is so pervasive in our culture. The primary way in which secular thinking works its way even into the worldviews of most Christians is through the "fact/value dichotomy". Pearcey builds off the work of Francis Schaeffer (under whom she studied at **L'Abri**), who described a "two-story concept of truth". In this conception, *"the lower story consists of scientific facts, which are held to be empirically testable and universally valid. The upper story ('values') includes things like morality, theology, and aesthetics, which are now regarded as subjective and culturally relative"* (p. 26).

As Pearcey points out, *"this dichotomy has grown so pervasive that most people do not even realize they hold it"* (p. 27). This dichotomy is in direct contradiction to the biblical concept of truth, which is that all of creation is ordered by a transcendent, holy God who has given us objective, knowable truth that encompasses both facts AND values. The dominant thinking today, however, is that the realms of science ("facts") and religion ("values") have very little to do with one another. This could not be further from the truth!

Unfortunately, Christianity has bought into this false dichotomy over time, and has therefore largely withdrawn from (or in some cases succumbed to) the culture-at-large. Christians have very little influence or credibility in the sciences, and are no longer creating art, music, and literature (the building blocks of culture that shape our worldviews more than anything else) that impact society outside of Christian circles. This abrogation of the church's responsibility as a culture-making institution has led to rampant secularism in our schools, our media, our politics, and even (to a growing extent) our churches.

For this reason, we find ourselves living in a time and place in which we are "metaphysically lost". The concept of **Total Truth** (the title of Pearcey's first book) is so far removed from our culture's

understanding that we are hardly even able to engage in the discussion. Christians who have unconsciously bought into dualistic thinking are unable to form logical arguments for why things like abortion and euthanasia are morally wrong. As she points out, "*people do not just need rules, they need reasons*" (p. 69). She closes out Part 1 with this challenge (to which I give a hearty "Amen!"):

"It's time for the church to regroup, rethink, and recast its strategy for social and political engagement. Christians must learn to engage the secular worldviews that drive the public debate. They must learn to articulate a worldview rationale for biblical morality. And most importantly, they must back up their message with authentic living before a watching world." (p. 69)

Part 2 ("Two Paths to Secularism") seeks to equip Christians with an understanding of exactly how we got where we are, and with the hope that real change in our society IS possible... though not using the tactics to which conservative Christians have resorted for generations. She does this by tracing the development of secular dualism by exploring the work of several "change agents": philosophers, artists, composers, authors, theologians, scientists, politicians, and others who have shaped the course of history.

Those familiar with Francis Schaeffer's work (especially ***How Should We Then Live?***) will recognize the method of cultural analysis Pearcey uses to determine the significance of a particular cultural artifact, though her work is far more expansive in this regard. After a "crash course on art and worldview", she dives into the meat of the book, tracing the "two paths to secularism". These are two philosophical streams, each of which focused on one side of the facts/values dichotomy. The "Enlightenment Heritage" (Materialism) laid claim to the realm of empirical facts, while the "Romantic Heritage" (Idealism) wanted to protect the realm of values. Each of these streams of thought has had several tributaries — there is much variety within the two traditions — but they have developed roughly in parallel, with thinkers from each side of the divide reacting against the other.

The problem is that, while there are elements of truth within both realms, it is an error to focus on one to the exclusion of the other. Throughout history, Christians have found themselves on both sides of this split. To give you an idea of the scope of Pearcey's investigation, I refer you to the following promotional video, in which the author names several of the genres and individuals presented in the book:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jX2V3f...>

In the end, Pearcey encourages Christians to fully engage in cultural creation and debate. We should approach culture with discernment (which requires first and foremost a solid grounding in the Word of God), holding fast to what is good (**1 Thessalonians 5:21**) wherever we find it. Armed with God-given spiritual discernment and a "*compassion for those who are trapped by destructive ideas*", the church is to become a living work of art, conveying the drama and excitement of the gospel to the world around us in word and deed. After all,

"Ideas are very difficult to accept if they are solely abstract and theoretical. We need to see them lived out practically — made visible and tangible... we need a 'plausibility structure,' which means a social structure that renders an idea more plausible and believable. And what is the plausibility structure for the gospel? The church, the corporate life of the Christian community." (p. 276)

There is so much more that could be said, but your time would be much better spent reading this book! I'll

warn you: This is a very large book (though it's beautiful illustrations and full-color renditions of referenced artwork make it a joy to read, and offset the large amounts of text in a visually appealing way) that will take a long time to read, and even longer to process. Though Pearcey's writing style is quite accessible, you'll have to think a LOT. You'll be challenged to reconsider preconceived notions, even if you don't agree with every one of the author's conclusions. In short, reading this book takes work, but it is absolutely worth it!

Tyler Holley says

This was a truly wonderful book. Nancy's gift for articulation is matched only by her knowledge of the subject. This book will help you understand how we all got into this secular mess. If you are not an art lover then you will love this book, because it will show you why you're not. If you are, then you should love this book, because it will show you how to do that better. As usual, I reserve the 5 star rating for books everyone simply must read, and this is no exception.

John says

Quotes that struck me as I read:

Introduction: WHY AMERICANS HATE POLITICS

"Because the word 'secular' is the opposite of 'religious', many people assume that secularism is a problem for religious groups only. Not so. When politics loses its moral dimension, we all lose." (pg. 2)

Ch. 1: ARE YOU AN EASY MARK?

"Writers and artists do not go home at night and study systematic philosophy. Yet they are whole persons who bring their basic assumptions about life into the study or the studio." (pg. 9)

"Worldviews do not come neatly labeled. They do not ask permission before invading our mental space. Do you have the tools to detect the ideas competing for your allegiance in movies, school textbooks, news broadcasts, and even Saturday morning cartoons? Are you equipped to teach your children, students, and colleagues to recognize the most powerful worldviews of our age?" (pg. 9)

"What is taught in the science department, the philosophy department, and the art department shapes a society's 'official definition of reality'." (pg. 10)

"Today's most influential worldviews are born in the universities, but they touch all of us through the books we read, the music we listen to, and the movies we watch." (pg. 11)

"To use a biblical metaphor, all Christians are called to be missionaries, responsible for learning the language of the society they are addressing. Within the boundaries of their native land, they may not face a literal language barrier. But they do face a worldview barrier as they seek to communicate with people whose thinking differs from their own." (pg. 14)

"Many people operate as though the definition of faith were, Don't ask questions, just believe. They quote Jesus himself, who taught his followers to have the faith of a child (Mark 10:15). But I once heard Francis Schaeffer respond by saying, 'Don't you realize how many questions children ask?'" (pg.16)

"The study of worldview and apologetics can descend into little more than a game of GOTCHA! where winning the argument is all important." (pg. 18)

"[Christianity] is 'translatable' into any cultural idiom. As a result, it does not destroy indigenous cultures but actually affirms what is best in each one." (pg. 19)

"The secularization thesis [as societies modernize, they secularize] relied on a second faulty assumption - that when people's convictions are challenged, they grow weaker. In reality, they grow stronger." (pg. 21)

Rachel says

I have taken almost 2 years to read this book, and part of me just wants to start it all over again right now. This is not a book to read quickly, and I found myself re-reading portions frequently.

I discovered many truths that resonated with me deeply, and ignited new passion in me to continue to question and seek how I can be a light in this world and encourage/prepare my children as well.

An inspirational and thought-provoking read. Worth all the time I spent reading it.

Douglas Wilson says

It is difficult for me to contain my enthusiasm for this book. When it comes to a consistent embrace of the true, the good and the beautiful, Christians consistently have a bad case of the Wobblies. They want to pick one and manufacture their own Christianized sect or ideological ism out of that one element. But this is like choosing height over depth, or depth over breadth. You can't have one without having them all, and you can't take away one without removing them all. Pearcey is primarily addressing the arts, but with giving an inch on the other two. Finally, a love of beauty that does not summon us to strike the hipster pose for Jesus.

Get this book

Katharine says

If you are a Christian and you are a thinker (shame on you if you are a lazy Christian!) you should read this book! I'm so glad I did! I'm especially glad my copy was a gift -- so it will be a treasure for my family. Saving Leonardo reminds me of how important it is to be grounded in Biblical worldview so I can make a difference in a broken world especially with my art.

Wendy says

This book had so much potential but just did not deliver. I learned a lot from the clear tracing of the philosophical ideas that historically led us to our current post-modern, western worldview. Ms Pearcey showed clearly the two separate currents of secularism that make up today's American worldview. However,

there were two main problems I had with her book. The first was that it did not take long in the historical whirlwind tour for her to lose me. So many of the explanations sounded similar. And she lost me though I enjoy philosophy and am already familiar with much of it. In other words, the history was a refresher for me. Pearcey did present and evaluate old material in a way that was fresh and helpful to me, but I cannot recommend her book to any of my friends who have no prior knowledge of the history of philosophy. The book would only confuse them.

My biggest disappointment in this book though came near the end, after all the history, after she has fully traced the development of post-modern, romantic and modern thought. One of the unique things about this book is the analysis of worldview expressed through art. It more or less accomplishes that goal until the end when it turns to evaluating current art media. It purports to evaluate recent movies, looking for their hidden and obvious worldviews. This is the reason I bought the book, and it is supposedly the goal of all the historical background.

But Pearcey never fully delivers on this promise to apply all that she has, in a sense, been lecturing on for 3/4 of the book. She does take a brief look at a movie or two, but it feels superficial and all too little. Worldview analysis of popular media is a hobby of mine. I did not need a tutoring session myself, but very much hoped for a book that I could recommend to others. Pearcey makes a great start and, admittedly, a knowledge of the philosophical underpinnings of worldview is essential to analysis. But this book needs to pare down that info and to make it more easily consumed. It fails, moreover, in its goal of giving readers a template of sorts to follow in intentional media consumption. I had so hoped for more explicit analysis of popular movies, with clear explanations that would empower the reader to "go thou and do likewise".

I am tempted to even give 2 stars because it is exactly this that the book's publicity promises to her intended evangelical audience. Such a book is greatly needed, but it needs to be easily assimilated and applied by a non-collegiate audience which has limited reading time and even less study time. I am not asking for spoon-feeding, but Pearcey's book feels much closer to a fire hose than a drinking fountain in information, leaving her with too little space to model the analysis that is the ultimate goal.

I think the people who will most enjoy her book are the ones who will least benefit from it.

Suzannah says

So: this is the book you're looking for.

If you've ever wondered what cubism or impressionism is about.

If you've ever wondered how a urinal or a canvas painted in just one depressingly dark colour could possibly be considered art.

If you've ever had even a fleeting interest in making or consuming music, storytelling, film, or philosophy. If you're a Christian serious about understanding the culture around us.

Or, goodness, even if you just want an engaging and readable history of philosophy illustrated in terms of great Western art in one easy volume, then this is the book you're looking for.

While I bought this book purely for the sake of the art history aspects, *Saving Leonardo* functions equally well as a history of two strands of thought which first diverged at the Enlightenment: that which places ultimate importance in subjective values, versus that which places ultimate importance in objective, demonstrable facts (both strands of which survive to this day as continental philosophy--existentialism/postmodernism--and analytic philosophy--rationalism/empiricism). Pearcey focuses primarily on post-Enlightenment and twentieth-century art in this book, from Flaubert to Huxley, from Stravinsky to Cage, from Picasso to Lichtenstein; but you will also find her comments on ancient and medieval art very insightful and useful.

There was much to enjoy about the book. Pearcey writes ably and well and I had no problem devouring the book in four or five days. She quotes the artists and philosophers themselves pretty extensively, allowing them to explain their art in their own words. Perhaps best of all, she doesn't simply dismiss the artworks based on philosophies she doesn't agree with. Though she is a Christian with a high view of God's sovereignty, she takes pains to point out the grains of truth in each worldview and provides thought-provoking examples of Christian works in the various genres: Christian expressionism, for example, or Christian romanticism (via Lewis and Tolkien, of course).

The book is printed on glossy paper, doing justice to the dozens of colour plates scattered throughout. I haven't read an enormous amount of art history, but I was thoroughly impressed with this book and encouraged, now that I know something about what the painters were trying to say, to study art in more depth.

Amanda says

Excellent book. Pearcey does an exceptional job of exposing the various philosophies that have affected our modern culture. She traces the thought development, primarily through art as well as some literature, to expose worldviews such as Nihilism, Empiricism, Romanticism (etc), and how they have infiltrated mostly culture, but even the church. Pearcey exposes why, as Christians, we need to be aware of these worldviews and how to strengthen our Biblical worldview, renewing our minds in the truths God revealed to us in Scripture.

I read a library copy, however, I believe this book is so valuable I am planning to buy my own copy and reread it after I've had time to ponder it. Throughout the book, I began to understand why I was never exposed to many of the "classics" throughout my education. The worldview in which I was educated was very much nihilism, and that was reflected in both what I was exposed to and what was shunned.

While this book is a great read for any Christian, it is my opinion that this book is a must read for any Christian raising children in our secular society. It is especially important for those who are heavily exposed to main stream culture or the public education system. However, the author also exposed how thoughts such as Romanticism and Relativism have been allowed into the church, weakening our doctrine and leaving us unable to be a salt and light to the greater world. Excellent book. I can only echo what Douglas Wilson said "It is difficult for me to contain my enthusiasm for this book."
