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ORIGINAL ARTICLE



## Colloquy with Clifford G. Christians in Urbana-Champaign

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### ABSTRACT

On 14 September 2015, Clifford G. Christians, one of the world's leading communication ethics scholar, was interviewed by Robert Z. Cortes, a PhD candidate of the Pontifical University of Santa Croce (Rome, Italy), in the campus of the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign). This article is an edited version of that interview. The themes covered in this interview span almost the entire range of Christians' scholarship in communication ethics. Responding to straight-from-the-shoulder questions in reciprocally candid fashion, Christians re-affirmed and added nuances to topics he has thoroughly treated in much of his written work: the importance of both theoretical ethics and practical case discussions in a free-standing course in ethics; openness with one's own, and to the other's, worldview and pre-suppositions as the basis of any conversation in ethics; the evolution of communitarianism to *communitas*; the necessity and challenges of including religious ethics in the discussion of ethics; the possibilities of achieving a global normative theory for communication ethics. For the first time, Christians comments more directly on his collaboration with some Catholic scholars and compares his idea of 'faith and reason' with that of an influential Catholic thinker.

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## Introduction

Gregory Hall at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign is a historic and important building for the field of communication. The book 'Four Theories of the Press,' acknowledged to be 'the most influential map of the terrain of normative press theory in the post-World War II era' (Nerone 2009), was written here. As well, two big stars in the constellation of communication scholars, Marshall McLuhan and James Carey, used to work here. These were but two of the very interesting things that a team from the Pontifical University of Santa Croce, which included the author and two other professors, learned directly from Professor Clifford G. Christians<sup>1</sup>, as he received us with palpable warmth and enthusiasm into the historic building on 14 September 2015 for a conversation<sup>2</sup> on various themes involving media and communications ethics.<sup>3</sup>

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However, the interview did not actually begin that day. To fully maximize the very limited time for the face-to-face discussion, I sent Prof. Christians a questionnaire with 18 sets of questions<sup>4</sup> to serve as a jumping board for the conversation. It was sent two weeks prior beforehand to give him the needed time to ruminate on the questions. Preceded by statements that framed them within a particular context, these questions touched on themes such as the intellectuals who have influenced Christians' thinking on communication ethics, how media ethics are best taught, the search for universal proto-norms and a global theory for media ethics, and the tenuous relationship between faith and reason in ethics.

The interview in the University of Illinois lasted for two hours, spread out in three venues: 50 minutes in Gregory Hall, 55 minutes in the Main Quad (following lunch with some faculty of the University), and 15 minutes in a sidewalk café. By coincidence, each venue, respectively, has a slight connection to three of several key aspects of Christians's proposal for communication and media ethics: the importance of grounding ethics on (a global normative) theory rather than on codes and praxes; the search for universal proto-norms; and the emphasis on the common good and of building community (Cooper 2010).

The rest of the article has attempted to capture and transcribe as closely as possible the thoughts and words of Clifford G. Christians during the interview. It is, however, not a chronological transcription, but rather one edited to optimize readability, understanding, and appreciation of the colloquy as a whole.

## **The Colloquy**

### ***The ideal program for the teaching of ethics in a communications course***

CORTES: *As a future professor of communication and media ethics, one of my greater interests in this interview is knowing your thoughts about the best way to teach this subject. Back in 1978, you wrote that 'a basic pedagogical debate emerges over adopting a specific course or absorbing ethics into the curriculum as a whole' (Christians and Bo 2015). You likewise recommended 'further evaluation and research (to) determine the pedagogical efficacy of these two approaches' and to clarify and further articulate this divergence. The goal, nevertheless was to '(outline) the ideal program of ethical instruction.' After almost forty years since you wrote that assessment and recommendations, is this 'basic pedagogical debate' finally over? What has the research of the last nearly four decades yielded in terms of which approach is more pedagogically effective?*

CHRISTIANS: In the U.S. context, it is clear that the debate is over. That is, at one point the question was, do you teach professional stories, the values and morality of editors and reporters, and you concentrate on these issues; or do you teach theoretical ethics? That was one side of the question. The other one was, do we teach ethics everywhere in the curriculum so that the people in editing will have a section: here's the ethical issue in this editing or reporting or environmental reporting, sports reporting. And then that spilled over into marketing and advertising.

In 1983, we initiated a free-standing course in ethics. For ten years we had a series of one week long workshops in which people would be invited who were just starting to teach ethics, and at the beginning (*it was either*) including modules of ethics in the

whole curriculum or free-standing courses. And if you have a free-standing course then it shouldn't just be stories of the great journalists. And I understand what they were doing: 'Now we'll just hold up moral heroes, not red-light ethics but green-light ethics. Right here are the great people and this is how they handled it, and we can best teach it this way.'

As a matter of fact, now – all the studies we've done, the conferences we've held, the kind of teaching that's done – all argue for a free-standing course. It created a few issues. I was a younger professor, and a student would come to me and say, 'But the head of our department had just taught us the opposite of what you said about ethics.' He was a Washington Post reporter and all that.

Ideally what we do...and what you want to see is that both (*happen*) at the same time, that is, you need a free-standing course (*and teach ethics in other courses as well*). I think as people got into the issues more, they realized that you can't just summarize Aristotle in one day. You have to have the students read the 'Nicomachean Ethics.'

And especially in the United States, the problem is our students are utilitarians almost instinctively, and almost across the board. It fits with democracy. They (*read about*) utility or utilitarianism, which basically means that you choose the consequences that benefit the most, and that follows their instinct, correct? The majority rules and sure, you're kind of the minority, but (*the policy is*) 'the majority rules.' To get over that (*way of thinking*) you need to have (*more than*) a superficial reading of utilitarianism.

I am a heavy-handed critic of utilitarianism, and I think that's where the field is, roughly. In any case as people have started to teach it (i.e., *ethics*), they've realized that there is a full agenda there, and they've wanted, in a university setting, to be respected by the philosophy department, for example. And to say, 'Well we just teach ethics, wherever it occurs...' is too limited.

But you still need that, because it's a complicated world... and what I don't have are the (*experiences others have*). (*For example*) you're blessed with experience as a teacher. Others have experience as a journalist, which I don't have. And (*if there's*) somebody in advertising who knows the field, what I've done, when I taught the course, I have professors of journalism, journalists come in.

One of my colleagues in advertising, he would make this grand entry to the class: 'I want to fumigate this place! Christians has made it impossible to breathe in here!' So he has this big act, of getting rid of all the ethical stench, and 'now that the air is clear, now I can teach advertising ethics in a way that favors advertising.' In any case, that's one way of handling it.

You try to take the expertise in journalism and media and cinema studies and in advertising seriously, but you still need theory. A professor at Texas<sup>5</sup> wrote (*an article entitled*) 'Quandary Ethics.' He's worried that if you don't teach ethics seriously, (*what might happen is*) you introduce it into a classroom and if you don't stay with it long enough, pretty soon students conclude: it depends on this belief, it depends on this situation. So you come away – instead of believing in a world that ethics makes a difference or gives you guidance as to what to do – just left with 'well it's a lot of discussion that goes nowhere.'

At the early stage – this is an overgeneralization, but basically true – we just didn’t have enough literature. Now we have tons of books for entire courses or taught in many different formats and people can see for themselves what would work best in their own setting. The problem we’re facing in the U.S. is that we believe in these courses now and want to see editors and reporters who teach professionals to also include ethics in their courses, as a module or a chapter or discussion. But to find people who are really committed to ethics – it’s difficult.

You know a lot of people who are reporters by training, or historians or sociologists of the media, some who are in theory or research who happen to be interested in ethics, but they don’t make it their priority. Their writings, the conventions they go to, the papers they give are in reporting or history or sociology. The question is, where are the professors who have the ability to teach a free-standing course?

Now in a school like yours, in which theology and philosophy are taken seriously, you probably have students who have at least a grounding in ethics. For our program students are supposed to be in the liberal arts for two years, and during those two years they must take two courses in philosophy. But I still have students who come into my classes who don’t know Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Mill... They take courses like ‘Philosophy and War,’ or ‘Philosophy and Film,’ and they’re great courses, but they’re not the history of moral thought. So they (*lack*) a serious course preparation.

I believe that the liberal arts institution is the best way to teach media ethics because along the way you would assume that they (*i.e., the students*) take liberal arts ideas seriously. I know (*the University of*) Missouri faces that question. You get a B.J. degree in your program as a freshman<sup>6</sup>. Here (*in the University of Illinois*) you have to be a junior to get into a program, and that puts a lot of weight on liberal arts training, and that kind of general education, as we call it, has been under duress in the U.S. It has been trivialized because most majors just demand so much of their students... you know in Engineering or Chemistry you start right off as a freshman, because you need four years to be up to speed in the field.

### ***How to keep up the conversation in ethics among different persuasions***

CORTES: *It seems that what you just pointed out, i.e., that students in the United States are ‘utilitarians almost instinctively,’ could also be said of so many students in Western or Westernized democratic societies. In these societies another phenomenon you pointed out is likewise true: that ‘epistemological relativism in the Nietzschean tradition (and) cultural relativity is unquestioned and celebrated’ (Cooper, Christians and Babbili 2008), and thus a conversation of what is ethical becomes more challenging. Could there be an approach that we could be clear about what is really ethical without bringing in theology? How can we agree that this or that action is the ethically correct one regardless of whatever is one’s religious persuasion, if one lives by a religion at all? What standard should we use?*

CHRISTIANS: On the one hand, those of us in ethics who take revelation seriously have this kind of problematic on our hands. That is, how do we address the issues to a professional world, to an audience that doesn’t take special revelation seriously? But we have to, that’s what our faith commitment makes central. So it involves the question not just of religion or theology and ethics, but monotheism. We share this problem,



185 this challenge with Judaism and with Islam. In effect, Islam is facing a similar version,  
 186 that is, it is a canonical revelation that makes absolutes exclusive to (*its own*) commu-  
 187 nity, and then divides (*it*) from the universe as a whole.

188 In one of the round tables that we were involved in, we were working on this  
 189 'universals' question in South Africa, and I happened to be the first one to talk of the  
 190 Christian perspective on ethics. At the beginning of the conference everybody is fairly  
 191 congenial. The person representing Judaism was a liberal Jew and mentioned revela-  
 192 tion, but he wasn't hard-nosed about it, and he certainly wasn't proclaiming the Torah  
 193 as the absolute truth.

194 About midway through the conference the representative for Islam, an educator  
 195 from Egypt – he's a great colleague and a beautiful scholar, (*his scholarship is*) just  
 196 quality through and through – but the demeanor was somewhat bombastic and he said  
 197 something (*like*) 'This is the truth and there are no exceptions!' It wasn't like the  
 198 Pharisee-Saducee tradition, let's say in Judaism. But about halfway through his presen-  
 199 tation one of the delegates to the conference stands up. He says, 'Mr. Muhammad!  
 200 Would you please stop?' There were about twelve of us there. He's a Buddhist. He  
 201 said, 'You monotheists – with your one, singular starting point – create binaries. That's  
 202 the logic of having a monotheistic beginning: it is one plus-minus, yes-no, in-out,  
 203 pro-con. I have a hundred thousand gods and if I need more, I'll include them!'

204 And I understand that. You could tell from the conference that that person took  
 205 over, I mean mentally. (*The idea that came off was*) that monotheists create problems  
 206 for themselves, insisting on one dictator God, an authoritarian God who has provided  
 207 the absolute truths in Revelation. (*The thinking continues that*) since I don't believe it,  
 208 I start from a different point, that is, multiple gods, if any god at all, versus one, and  
 209 in various ways, we call it fundamentalism around the world.

210 My colleagues here know me as a Christian, and that's one advantage of being here  
 211 long enough. You sort of earn your credibility through your work and they at least  
 212 understand your perspective. So a colleague of mine will say, 'Christians – here they  
 213 call me an Evangelical Christians – your God does not tell you to condemn me, like  
 214 maybe Sunni or Shiite sects would do (that is, in the name of the holiness of God, you  
 215 can condemn even destroy if necessary anyone who is offensive to that Divine Being  
 216 or his prophet). (*He said*) you don't speak this way, but in the end your God will put  
 217 me in perdition. So, your yes-no, plus-minus, heaven-hell mentality is still offensive to  
 218 me; it's still divisive...and needs a judgment. Why do you believe this?'

219 And one of the trends in ethics right now is called naturalism and is basically an  
 220 argument against received religion. Philippa Foot's (2003) book, 'Natural Goodness',<sup>7</sup>  
 221 for example, makes the claim that the fundamentalists, as she calls them or monothe-  
 222 ists who believe there is Revelation and Truth just create unending difficulties not only  
 223 for themselves but for all of us. So she argues, for example, parents take care of their  
 224 children, animals take care of their babies, the religionist comes along, and says parents  
 225 must take care of their children: must, ought to, and if they don't, condemn them! So  
 226 her point being that they add to the obvious, say to a naturalistic way of how humans  
 227 operate, when keeping their basic needs central, they add this layer of vengeance, of  
 228 condemnation, of even good-spirited divisiveness. Who needs these layers? How do  
 229 you defend it?  
 230

And what concerns me is that in the process of going after certain versions of fundamentalism or monotheism, the whole field of ethics starts getting reduced to values. Her argument would be that this is too narrow, it's broader than this, but basically it is that humans can value certain actions. But value is a sociological category: value is to be understood in terms of what humans consider worthwhile. And it's a meaning category: it is to be understood in psychological terms – why would you value  $x$  instead of  $y$ ? But it is not a moral, theological, metaphysical, or philosophical term.

If we organize, in other words, our metaphysical world as Christians do, as monotheists do, then we need terms like metaphysics, we call that in our field meta-ethics – what's the nature of the good, etc. on a theoretical level – and we need principles to organize the world. And because of the way we've been representing our field, that is, from a Christian perspective, or the way it's understood as fundamentalism, ethics itself becomes problematic. Who needs principles? Because they just create argumentation, and metaphysics in a secular universe is of no consequence or it can be a world of a poet or a theologian. But it's extraneous to ethics.

### ***Fundamental principles as worldview or pre-suppositions***

CORTES: *And to partly address that problem, you suggested that 'our constructive task is formulating a normative position that does not rest on first foundations... unconditional a prioris... or philosophical prescriptions?' (Christians 2008).*

CHRISTIANS: Gee, I'm glad you asked that because the concept of foundations or fundamental principles, I think, ought to be understood in terms of worldview and pre-supposition. One of the arguments I've been trying to make in metaphysics or regarding the question of metaphysics is that deductivist canonical versions of metaphysics on this side of Darwin and Einstein is no longer defensible.

But, there is a domain that we call worldview or pre-suppositional thinking, and often quote Aristotle here – and even though it's classical Greece he's speaking to the world – that there is an unmoved mover. (*This means that*) at some point in regression in our thinking, in deduction, one must stop or begin somewhere. Infinite regression is meaningless. All thought ought to begin somewhere, and the argument being that the so-called neutrality of the social sciences, or the neutrality underlying the naturalism in ethics, that it's simply neutral, it's simply based on experience or our calculations of experience, is simply untrue. Nothing is neutral, it (everything in general) is always conditioned in some form... so pre-suppositional thinking is crucial.

We did write a piece based on some work we did, again in South Africa; this was the Institute for Advanced Study in Stellenbosch<sup>8</sup>. Four of us were there for a week to work on this question of first theories, and if you don't want to abandon foundations or principle or meta-ethics, what is the language that is at least defensible in a secular age. And so we ended up with this tripartite or three-sided view of ethics, that is, your pre-suppositions, your principles, and then your precepts or your applications. And in addition to trying to begin in a different starting point that I call the worldview, and sometimes (*is called*) my faith commitment, for all social science begins with some proposition that they're trying to prove.

Thomas Kuhn's<sup>9</sup> work on paradigm argues that science is not just a pure commitment to the facts, and the facts determine entirely your conclusions; that science is an

edifice that's built fact on fact on fact on fact. He uses the term 'paradigm,' that is, facts get intermixed with politics, with values, people study questions  $x$  instead of  $y$ , and there's a lot of assumptions about the human being that are built into your thinking. You know that humans are biological, they'd say, and can be understood according to their D.N.A. particles. So he claims that 'paradigm' is this more inclusive term that includes reason and facticity but represents our whole being.

CORTES: *Interpreting the concept of 'fundamental principles' this way is indeed more dialogic in approaching any discussion on ethics. Moreover, allowing the concept of foundations to be part of the dialogue through this approach, instead of both parties being expected to be or to pretend to be 'neutral' in their views, seems to be the more honest way of looking at reality.*

CHRISTIANS: Well, that (*honesty*) is what it (*the dialogue*) requires, and I think in certain interpretive research now, that's true. That is, you write your own pre-suppositions into it, you recognize that your observation is worldview-conditioned. That has gone astray in terms of standpoint epistemology now, that is, all I have to do is say 'I'm African-American' or 'I am a Christian' or 'I am a feminist' or 'I represent, let's say, physiological biology'... I think it's required of us to be explicit. Why we choose so, why is it a matter of faith, and in what sense is it your ultimate commitment? We're too glib, I think, about our starting points, but at least that's what's required.

CORTES: *I agree, and it appears that they are easily accepted. However, I am not sure that this 'glibness' you mention is overlooked only when the starting points are non-religious views. On the other hand, there seems to be a longstanding perception that a religious paradigm is not as acceptable a starting point in academia as the other worldviews. As Marsden (1998) points out, 'suggestions that religious perspectives might be relevant to interpretation in other fields are viewed with puzzlement or even consternation.'*

CHRISTIANS: Maybe I should answer that in terms of one of your questions here (*in the questionnaire*). You were saying at various points, 'you've been very articulate about your Christian commitment' and 'what are the occasions in which you've done that?'

### ***Openness with one's faith commitment in academia***

CORTES: Yes, I wrote that as a scholar with your international status and authority, the very straightforward declaration of your 'commitment to the integration of faith and learning' (Christians 2010) is inspiring to aspiring faith-informed scholars who are only beginning their careers...

CHRISTIANS: Yes, you've got a series of questions that revolves around this...you're referring to the lecture at Pepperdine in which I was explicit about my faith commitment.

CORTES: Yes, Cooper (2010) quotes you as affirming during a 2004 lecture at Pepperdine University, 'I am called to live as God's agent here (*in the university* - ed.) and therefore the centerpiece of my vocation is ideas.' Your public acknowledgement that you do what you do for the sake of God was bold and it obviously didn't hurt your career: your reputation as 'arguably the standard bearer of media ethics' (Arnett 2013)



remains, and is acknowledged by scholars all over the globe (Fortner and Fackler 2010). Apparently, some are not as lucky. For example, Yancey (2015) claims from his research that ‘almost half of all academics were less willing to hire a candidate for an academic job if they learned that the person was a conservative Protestant.’ Have you always been as upfront about your faith? Were there ever doubts, fears, or hesitation to be less open about the influence of your faith in your intellectual life? How did you overcome them, if there were?

CHRISTIANS: In your own experiences now in the Philippines, in developing a free-standing course or enriching the curriculum in media ethics, the circumstances you face, given the fact you profess allegiance to the Roman Catholic doctrine, etc. is going to be different and nuanced, but you’re actually facing the same question. We are dealing with problems of apologetics that all fields of the Christian faith would face, not just me as a professor who says that ethics arises out of your fundamental worldview, in my case, Christian, faith-based, (*which*) takes revelation seriously. And to say anyone has a specific answer, that is, how bold should you be, how explicit ought one be (*may not be possible*).

For me to not be explicit about this would violate the very point we were talking about before. We want people in the social sciences to be more up front: this is what I’m trying to defend. And actually the best science is dynamic, like Paulo Freire<sup>10</sup> was talking about so much: his integration of your beginning point and your experience, your theory and your application – praxis, as he calls it – I think (*I’m*) beginning to understand that more. Therefore, in the field it is imperative for me to be explicit.

Then the question is, how do you do that without creating a stumbling block, to see the issues from a Christian point of view, and especially in terms of the question of secularism? I’m working through the book by Charles Taylor (2007) now, ‘The Secular Age’<sup>11</sup> – Taylor is one of my heroes, intellectually. Catholic by commitment, professor at McGill, considered one of the great 21st century philosopher. I mean he earned his philosophical status on Hegel – he was just exceptional on Hegel. So again, here I take it you follow the Holy Spirit’s leading on these matters, and you have to be willing to take some abuse or misunderstanding as a result. This happened to be at Pepperdine which is a Christian college, in which they asked us to do it. But I was in Korea last fall and did a world presentation on worldview, and decided that was the best way to show my starting point.

I gave a lecture at Regent University not long ago on the question of relativism, and you know you get into the faith question toward the end of the intellectual history and that was explicitly biblical, theological an argument for what I consider to be the best Christian thinking, or the best I could produce on these issues of relativism. And so rather than saying there is one specific format or one way of doing this... I’m not answering your question (*exactly, but I say*) you follow God’s leading in this matter.

I mean, if you pray every day, ‘God, support me at my work,’ or ‘I am your servant, show me opportunities...to be a witness!’ Then you have to trust that – I don’t want to be too mystical about it – but there still is another dimension in terms of a holistic being in which our reason and our spirit and our emotions are an integrated whole. So you listen to the voice of the spirit.

### Religious ethics up front

CORTES: *The explicitness of worldview – including one's faith commitment – that you promote seems to partly explain that despite the fact that 'the influential Hastings-Carnegie<sup>12</sup> studies was opposed to religious ethics in higher education' (Christians 2010), you nevertheless called for the inclusion of religious ethics in the discussion of ethics in communication and media (Christians 2008).*

CHRISTIANS: When it comes to that essay I did on media ethics education, the one you were referring to, that monograph... this was in preparation for our review of the field. We had one earlier. This review was twenty years later and I was asked to write this monograph evaluating where the field was. There I felt led to include religious studies..., and that was based on the argument that if we wanted to do international work, for heaven's sake, you have to take seriously the religious ethics that are happening around the world, right?

As a matter of fact it's of no (little) consequence (*to not take it seriously*); it's to write off a huge influx of ethics from around the world. You ask why I would think of listening to Buddhism or Confucianism (though this is not considered a religion)... (*and my answer would be that*) it's not (*just*) a funny kind of ecumenical thinking as much as to say to my colleague, 'This is what a Christian perspective says, now match it, I challenge you.'

I know that the best thinking in Islam, (*for example, that of*) some of my dear colleagues who are professors and teaching Islamic ethics... this is powerful stuff. Philosophically, I tend to be rooted more in the Immanuel Kant tradition, but you see in the best kind of philosophical thinking in Islam, Professor Azzi<sup>13</sup>, for example in the University of Sharjah (UAE), he is an unbelievably good Kantian scholar, but he writes from the Islamic perspective.

I mention this in the ethics and education monograph. There, rather than in theology, I was simply challenging us to take this large world seriously, because we grow up in it. In the Hastings Center report, religious ethics was simply eschewed. We do not wish to pay any attention to the Jesuits or Jewish people or someone else who wants to teach it. They consider that to be preaching, propaganda, and I end up with that sometimes. You know students say to me, 'Mr. Christians you have a master's degree in theology, and you have a bachelor's degree in divinity and you're pretty religious... are you a preacher?' I want to be taken seriously as a scholar, but if I am a preacher they can sort of ignore me more easily, right?

So one way of thinking about this (*would be as*) Paul Ricoeur<sup>14</sup>, in 'Philosophy Today' in 1973: he wrote a piece called 'Ethics and Culture,' and he was making the argument that fundamentally – this is an overgeneralization – on the question of values or ethics, there are two options. One, you believe that values are created and you discover them, or you create them. And in terms of higher education as I know it, in our field specifically, that is kind of the dividing line.

Special revelation then becomes one version of ethics: values, morality is there, and you discover it, just like the electromagnetic spectrum has been there since the beginning of the universe. Ah, you discover it, and then opens up the world of electricity, radio, television, smart phone, broadcasting – but it's (*been*) there. And when I put things in those terms, Ricoeur says, the solution then is what he calls

‘incommensurability,’ that is, why don’t we grant to the world-of-values-as-created credibility as human knowledge? If it’s done well, if it’s consistent with its presuppositions, if it meets validity measures in terms of how the research proceeds, and while we grant you validity, you grant that to me. And therefore my responsibility as a professor, finally, is to make sure that the values-as-discovery (*approach*) is done to the maximum capacity that God has given me.

Then you do not assume that in the process of being faithful to your worldview, to your special revelation, to your understanding of moral philosophy... that this is going to destroy you. I’ve written about this...in the ‘Journal of Communication and Religion.’<sup>15</sup> There are various places which you challenge these assumptions, their epistemology, certainly on their notion of the human, understanding of the human, but my task as a professor committed to the gospel is to (not) destroy my opponents. Rather, it is to be a testimony, the way I look at it, to the truth of this, and under the assumption that you have to grant me at least the possibility of developing a system that’s based on a fundamentally different assumption than yours.

And in many cases – I guess that’s the point I was getting to – that doesn’t answer all the questions, but at least the atmosphere is not as contestatory, right? ‘OK, we’ll grant Christians his thirty minutes, but under the expectation we have it too.’ And somehow I have to show, that I am faith-committed to this, that I’m eager to learn from this and not be phony about it. I mean, it’s (being) a hypocrite to say that everything someone else says is so wonderful and important.

There still are difficulties in knowing how to be a testimony – or testament is probably the better word – to the truth, and to be explicit about that, rather than just say, ‘Well we’re both just filled with belief, faith, that we’re common strugglers or trying to get somewhere.’ I mean, to show the validity of what you want without instilling fighting. I try to that to do that seriously.

I come out of the Reformed tradition of Calvin, who was rooted in Augustine. Calvin argued that, because of God’s providence, among the philosophers there are great ideas that the Christian perspective has to take seriously. In my own work, I do include Plato, Kant, and Heidegger, though I have to work carefully. Among the theologians of the Reformation period, he was creation oriented. I’ve tried to do that in my own work, to see the Scriptures as creation, redemption, the eschaton. When I enter the scriptures it’s not just a life of Jesus, but the New Testament, in which the created order had fallen but now restored in Jesus, like Paul in Romans made explicit, that is the first Adam, who lost the creation through his evil, now is being restored in the second Adam who is Jesus.

So a lot of my emphasis has gone toward the structure of the Creation as God made it, and a commitment to a created order that’s under God’s providence. And that the creation order, if one begins there is a foundation of history, and it is the opposite of meaninglessness because there’s something that’s been established. Or how do you articulate, then, the fact that values are discovered?

*CORTES: And what would be a more direct response to that colleague of yours mentioned earlier who takes offense in your monotheism and finds it divisive at root despite your openness to feminists and Confucianism? How would one respond when someone is confronted with something as radical as that?*

CHRISTIANS: That my intention in presenting my view is not to destroy (*his*), but (rather) my commitment is to make my perspective as integrated, as systematic, as serious in terms of scholarship. So, therefore, I would welcome any challenges to specifics within the worldview, within this integrated whole, on the grounds that this is my responsibility.

But how do we do this right, to take seriously objections, rather than say, 'You don't understand me'? I mean how does one respond to that? I don't want to react with rejection or with ignorance, and somehow we have to allow that in academia. I guess that's part of the issue, to welcome objections and controversies.

CORTES: *I guess someone who would confront you that way would seem rather closed to begin with.*

CHRISTIANS: (*Laughing*) Well, should I tell him that?

CORTES: (*Laughing*) *Making that person see and understand it is the challenge, I guess.*

CHRISTIANS: It is! One could say that, right? 'I'm sorry, that's to assume that there is only one ideology in the field and we're all contesting for its centrality, and I'm not interested...'

But I find that being overly ecumenical is not very effective either. I mean to say, well as a matter of fact there are a lot of issues on which we agree. And you're objecting to what exactly, in terms of my perspective? I use terms 'we're all made in the image of God. That's my belief and therefore there is a common humanity, underlying issues of ethics. You use terms like the one in the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights and that is, all human beings have sacred status. Sometimes those clarifications will help.

But the one thing that's happened in my own approach as far as communitarianism is concerned, is to move it (*away*) from its political orientation, which has been helpful as its starting point. Its roots are the political struggles that Charles Taylor and Michael Walzer<sup>16</sup> and the others were engaged in (*against*) an individuated, liberal democracy. That is, beliefs in a libertarian democracy, negative freedom, insistence on the autonomous self.

### ***The development of Christians' communitarian ethics: from 'communitarianism' to 'communitas'***

CORTES: Yes, *early on the 'communitarian ethics'*<sup>17</sup> *you advocated in fact had this orientation. A couple of decades ago you wrote, 'The theory of media ethics we advocate – with individual autonomy as its problematic and communitarianism as its ground – makes transformative social change the end'* (Christians, Ferré and Fackler 1993). *What has been the trajectory of this concept in terms of its development to its present articulation? In what direction do you foresee this concept developing?*

CHRISTIANS: So they're (*i.e. Taylor et al.*) saying that you have to start with a community or inter-relational perspective. And if you do, you have feminists as your compatriots, you have African communalism, Confucian philosophy, that all start from a communal perspective. I found that to be somewhat helpful in terms of communicating who I am, and then the question would be why do you choose it? Just for political reasons? To argue against what I call the individuated proceduralism of John Rawls<sup>18</sup>,



for example, an individuated democracy that's done its best, but on the world level still has a legal policy, nation-state orientation? But I've moved from that to the philosophy of languages instead.

The latest piece I wrote is not using the term communitarianism, (*which I find*) a bit too narrow, but *communitas*, in the tradition of Western philosophy. I just edited a special issue of the 'Journal of Media Ethics' on *ubuntu*<sup>19</sup>, and that started with a challenge from South Africa, (*which is*) 'what you're saying in communitarianism, is what *ubuntu* argues in our own philosophy.' So I've been working on that for ten years or so, and there was a conference in South Africa too, and then I wrote the introductory section to it, but I found in that case, (*that*) to use terms like communal, or *communitas*, is better than 'communitarianism' because (*the latter*) still has this American context in which it emerged politically<sup>20</sup>.

(*As well,*) a colleague from China and I have just completed a book called 'The Ethics of Intercultural Communication'<sup>21</sup>. And he wrote a chapter on Confucius and made the legitimate argument – I make the same one – that Confucius and Aristotle are really making the same claim. And out of it arises virtue ethics in the Western tradition, and also in the Eastern. He's a very good classical scholar, he's a philosopher at Wuhan. So I wrote the chapter basically arguing that unless Western Philosophy takes seriously the counter-Enlightenment<sup>22</sup>... In any case, I make the argument that (*among those who took*) the counter-Enlightenment seriously, (*the consequence would be that*) there have been many who made *communitas* the starting point rather than individuated rationality.

That then is the basis. If we want to participate in intercultural communication and go head to head with African communalism, with Confucianism, there's some versions of it in Buddhism as well, we have to start from a different beginning point.

So this is a review of the philosophy of language. It begins with Giambattista Vico<sup>23</sup>, who was a professor of rhetoric at Naples for forty two years, and he wrote 'The New Science' which I consider the best statement on the humanities ever written. And out of it emerges, in the nineteenth and then the twentieth century, the tradition of linguistics. De Saussure<sup>24</sup> (*and*) Ernst Cassirer's<sup>25</sup> 'The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms,' ...that four-volume book (*especially*), is the heart and soul of my argument. We had a professor here, when I was a Ph. D. student, who had a course on Ernst Cassirer, and we had to read all four volumes of the philosophy of symbolic form. He's written that summary book called 'An Essay on Man'<sup>26</sup> and his argument may be one way of getting back to your question about it.

People object to my faith to say the real argument we may have is over the definition of the human. And that's an issue that I don't think our field has taken seriously enough (*because*) we're so committed to epistemology and to ensure that it's done in valid ways. In any case he argues there that if you studied the history of thought – I'm talking about Cassirer's summary now of his four-volumes – the three options are the human as rational being (*animal rationale*), and that was articulated most clearly in Classical Greece; the second option is human as biological being, and here he's dealing primarily with Darwin, but everything that happens out of evolutionary naturalism; and then in contrast to those two he said the real definition of the human that I'm going to argue for is the human as symbol-maker (*animal symbolium*).



A colleague and I are working on a book on meta-ethics right now, Stephen Ward<sup>27</sup>, and we've got a chapter on the nature of the human. We're literally working on it now, but that's one of the fundamental issues that I've learned from the philosophy of technology. Saying again that if you see the human as a symbolic being, then it levels the playing field of the different communication forms. Ernst Cassirer argues that if you create mathematical symbols, or music symbols, or literary symbols, or visual symbols...they're all products of human creativity, and therefore, one is not superior as concepts to another, though we've been taught since the Enlightenment that physics and mathematics are superior in (*terms of*) our forms of knowledge. Cassirer is helping us make headway toward what I call a holistic definition of the human.

What I've tried to do in my career is to argue about the nature of theory also, and to make the claim that theories are really oppositions to the status quo. That is, Einstein's theory is not *ex nihilo*, which means he doesn't create  $E=mc^2$  out of nothing but in contrast to Newton. And feminist theory in its relational commitment is really an argument against John Locke<sup>28</sup>, and much of what you see in Habermas is connected to Immanuel Kant<sup>29</sup>. I mean Habermas<sup>30</sup> doesn't just start from zero but thinking of the public sphere in the light of a Kantian view of the world. In other words you have to identify the problem first, and that takes serious, historical, intellectual history, philosophical work. You get the problems straight, and then you come up with the opposite for a solution to the niche, the problem.

I have argued (*that*) the problem is individual rationality in our field – actually the autonomous individual who's considered rational. And it makes perfect sense: that is, you need free individuals to be accountable for the decisions they make; if they're not understood as free then accountability is meaningless. That's too much of a summary, but (*that is*) to say that individual rationality is the core of ethics, in the classical (that is, Greek), utilitarian, and Kantian traditions.

You summarized my chapter in the communitarian quote, and did it well; that's at least one representation of this. The argument is, if autonomous, individual rationality is (*at*) the heart of communication, and I want to start over, I want a new theory, in (*my*) own way doing what Einstein did to Newton. (*I*) do the opposite, that is, (*to consider*) universal human solidarity instead of my autonomous individuality. I'm bonded to the human race, (*an idea which is*) the opposite of autonomous. So, solidarity with the human race: instead of the individual, the human race.

And that's where it starts getting complicated scientifically. How do you account for the human race? Six thousand, five hundred languages; twenty thousand people groups; two hundred twelve nation states. We only know, what is it, twenty seven hundred languages? So our little study of sixteen countries... Well, what kind of argument is that? Once you take a cup of water out of the ocean, it's still the ocean right? But in any case, the whole question about starting point, pre-supposition, becomes crucial. I just made a commitment to start with universal human solidarity. My commitment is all human beings are created in the image of God, therefore they're special, there has to be something sacred about them.

I remember once, when we're at Oxford on sabbatical, Michael Traber<sup>31</sup>, the Catholic priest that I talked about<sup>32</sup> who became the colleague on this book, 'Communication Ethics and Universal Values.' He was in London at the time with the World Associate of Christian Communication. One time, when we're talking, he said,

599 'I think this is a proto-norm.' My God! You know, that's it! That's what we were look-  
 600 ing for! A great day at the office, right? I want God to give me good ideas – and there  
 601 it is! It (*may have been as*) plain as ever and not exciting to anybody, but it was a way  
 602 of moving, then, this universal from the deductive and canonical model that we were  
 603 talking about earlier.

604 I mean '*proto*' in Greek (*not as*) prototype, that is the first model you make, like  
 605 Ford Motor Company makes a model and then a hundred thousand – maybe it's only  
 606 ten thousand cars now – I didn't mean that. I mean *proto* in the Greek meaning of  
 607 underneath, it's the pre-supposition, the belief underneath that holds it together.

608 And not long before that I had given a lecture in Slovenia on my view of ethics,  
 609 and it was around these issues, basically regarding the question of *animal rationale*,  
 610 and that our ethics needs a rational component, but it can't be individuated rationality.  
 611 And it was Robert White<sup>33</sup>, whom you know, a colleague that came up to me and he  
 612 said, 'This is an ethics of being!' It's an ethics that's situated in our being, in our spirit,  
 613 mind, and our will. Aristotle – as Gadamer<sup>34</sup> made clear – actually in the  
 614 Nicomachean Ethics has the same emphasis, that is, there is theoretical (*theoria*) and  
 615 there's also *techne*, skill, but in between it is the interpretative capacity and the  
 616 interpretative dimension. He called it – based on the god of language, Hermes –  
 617 'hermeneutics,' the interpretation.

618 So ethics is not just theory, which it is, theoretical, cognitive; it's not just applica-  
 619 tion; but for Aristotle, it's *phronesis*, it's the wisdom that makes connections, that (first)  
 620 sees things, that interprets them. Some (*may say as regards*) the thinking about the  
 621 universal and its connection, 'Now I thought you were a communitarian, now you're a  
 622 universalist!' My argument is that when you start theorizing, you start with the indi-  
 623 vidual (*i.e., individual rationality*), you find its opposite, and then you need the pre-  
 624 cept, you need application, and that's then where the communitarian (*idea*) comes in.

625 But you don't start your professional ethics from the individual to their profession.  
 626 Some in our field have gone from individuated ethics to organizational communica-  
 627 tion, have gone from individual to community, and then started dealing with the pro-  
 628 fessional, but that still leaves you with the same quandaries as individualism, still the  
 629 same self-centered thinking.

### 631 ***The possibilities of a scholarship embodying faith and reason***

632 CORTES: Quite a number of the concepts you mentioned earlier such as 'the integration  
 633 of faith and learning' and 'universal proto-norms' evoked a 1998 encyclical written by  
 634 St. John Paul II (Karol Wojtyla), *Fides et Ratio*, in which he pointed out that 'Faith and  
 635 reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of  
 636 truth...' (John Paul II 1998). Your efforts in the articulation of proto-norms and univer-  
 637 sals within the context of communitarian ethics that includes, among other things, 'tak-  
 638 ing account of the great religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity,  
 639 Islam, and indigenous spiritism' (Christians 2008) seem to me a movement towards  
 640 John Paul II's idea of 'contemplation of truth.' Coming as you are, in your own words  
 641 earlier 'out of the Reformed tradition of Calvin' I am curious to understand how your  
 642 concept of 'integration of faith and learning' might be similar to or different from John  
 643  
 644

Paul II's 'relationship between faith and reason', which he also expressed as 'harmony between the knowledge of faith and the knowledge of philosophy' (John Paul II 1998)?

CHRISTIANS: (*Your question is*) based on my thinking about the faith-learning integration as compared to Pope John Paul II,... that is, how does my thinking on faith and learning compare with a very sophisticated Roman Catholic view?

To answer that question is important to me and I do it in terms of H. Richard Niebuhr's<sup>35</sup> 'Christ and Culture,' so I may be off on the wrong track here, and I'd love your own response to it. His argument is, summarized too briefly in terms of the Christ and culture question, (*that there are*) those who take Christ and culture seriously rather than antagonize them, rather than Babel and Jerusalem, or Christ against culture. (It) is a reform perspective that he summarizes as Christ the transformer of culture.

The Catholic perspective – and this is where my thinking maybe stilted by his characterization – is that it's Christ or culture. (*For Catholics*) it's Christ and culture, but culture as a basis on which you add the revelational material. It's Christianity, then, based on a substratum of mythology, of religious commitments, of customs, etc. Whereas the Reformation, that I claim to represent, (*it*) is Christ the transformer of culture, the one who changes the cultural life.<sup>36</sup>

You know when I look at somebody like Pope John Paul II, who worked on his book 'Love and Responsibility,' then he seems like a transformationalist to me. That is, you understand and respect a culture, and then build your theological and institutional apparatus beyond it, above it. The Reformation view is somehow that has to be total – because of total depravity and original sin – it has to be completely revolutionized from the beginning: so it's Christ the Transformer versus Christ the addition to culture.

Now in the larger scheme of things... when I work with Robert White, when I'm at the Gregorian, when I'm in Latin America, when I'm in the Cavalletti meetings<sup>37</sup>, then the way they talk about faith and learning and the way I do seems... identical, or we may use slightly different language, but in terms of the distinctiveness of the Christian faith, and that is, on the matter of the Christian faith engaging the world of learning (*we are similar*). I know that's multiple in your tradition, but the Jesuits – at least the people that I know, Michael Traber<sup>38</sup>, Robert White – I mean the way they think about higher education is almost identical to mine.

I'm at a secular university because this is where God has called me. I had to make that decision at one point. Several of my graduates are at Calvin College, for example, there are four of them there; and at other Christian colleges and universities. I learn from Regent University, Trinity College, Dordt College... I felt I should stay with ethics, do the larger context – but let them concentrate mostly on questions like this (i.e. faith and learning). That's out of our team collaboration. So they've worked on his question a bit further than I have.

Your question, behind it, though – are you challenging me or you're saying (*said humorously*), 'For all your million words are you saying something more significant on this matter than Pope John Paul II?'

CORTES (*laughing*): Not at all! The similarity is in fact rather striking, while the difference in points of view might have been expected considering the differences between your faith traditions. I also wanted to know, however, still in the context of the

691 'integration of faith and learning (or reason),' what your thoughts are in taking account  
 692 of religions – not necessarily those which you mentioned – in which the focus is on  
 693 'faith' rather than on 'learning/reason.' How, would you say, can they could contribute  
 694 to such an integration between the two?

695 CHRISTIAN: You're raising a really difficult question, and I would love to hear  
 696 your experiences and those of the others here. A good colleague of mine teaches at the  
 697 University of Qatar in Doha. He's a specialist in Islamic ethics and he represents the  
 698 Brotherhood Republic tradition of Islam. He says to me when I see him, 'Be thankful  
 699 for priests and ministers!' 'What do you mean?' I say. 'What I'm trying to do in Islam  
 700 is to teach our leadership that the chapters in the Q'uran that are Mecca-centric...and  
 701 if you read those, it says God is merciful, peace to all. It's mercy, mercy, mercy.' When  
 702 the prophet is in Medina, and is in trouble, the language is different: 'My prophet shall  
 703 be protected forever.' He compares that section to our Old Testament, in which God is  
 704 saying to the 'Philistines, Hittites... my people Israel are my property.'

705 So what my colleague is saying is, 'What I want to do is to teach 'peace' Islam, and  
 706 then I have to deal with them in the Medina chapters just like the Christians and the  
 707 Jewish people had to deal with the Old Testament in which God is therefore seen as  
 708 the authority to punish anybody... you punish my people, you punish my prophets,  
 709 then you have offended Me.' He adds, 'In any case, I get nowhere... In the Catholic  
 710 Church, there's an educated priesthood. In the Protestant Churches, there's an edu-  
 711 cated ministry. Tell me about your pastors.' (*In reply, I say,*) 'Well, they've got their  
 712 master's degrees...' (*At this point, Christians humorously imitates the Muslim's scholar's*  
 713 *good-humored reaction to his response: 'Aaargh!')*

714 See, that's not quite the faith and reason business. But his summary is that the trad-  
 715 ition of Islam has a strong science and liberal arts, but a lot of the imams tend to be  
 716 highly politicized. They represent a certain sect, they're not necessarily educated in a  
 717 systematic way. And there's no seminary that he can go to and talk to the professors...  
 718 (*although*) he may be overvaluing our priesthood and *ministerium*, right? (*Laughter*)  
 719 So I don't know if one can say that (*all of Islam is an*) ideology that's kind of reason  
 720 consumed under emotion, as much as (*it is a faith where one can allow*) the sects to  
 721 determine their position as an imam (*could and would do*), and on his own represent  
 722 it (*Islam*).

723 He's worried about the fact that the kind of ritual expression through the five prac-  
 724 tices<sup>39</sup> that does not necessarily demand constant learning. But I'm still reluctant to  
 725 say, 'Well this is a collapse of religion into ideology or religion into faith,' because their  
 726 tradition still has some outstanding scholarship and not just in theology.

727 But maybe just a comment: that goes back to the fundamentalism. Those of us who  
 728 represent the Christian worldview have to make sure that we're not guilty of this,  
 729 because it's often interpreted that way, (that is), your preaching, your homily, your Jn  
 730 3:16 is more important to you, actually, than Kant and Aristotle, and it is. But it's not  
 731 the last word.

732 I think that's one reason I love seeing the faith and learning business as I see it in  
 733 the Catholic and Protestant traditions, because they're saying here's a world of learn-  
 734 ing, here's a university, and we need the Newman foundation, we need chaplains:  
 735 I love them, I support them. But universities are ideas, they operate on ideas, and if we  
 736



can't grapple as a Christian with their ideas, their nature of the human, of epistemology, of metaphysics, if we can't operate on that level then we don't belong here.

Another way to put it, I believe that the Christian faith can operate on that level. And I have a feeling that the best of Islamic ethics will be able to do that too. We've got Confucian institutes now starting all over the U.S., maybe in Europe – that's considered a philosophy more than a religion. But they're trying to say, 'This is intellectually respectable,' that is, scientifically credible.

So again, it's an important question because it rises out of the one of this morning<sup>40</sup> about how we deal with the unbelievable amount of work done in ethics out of other traditions. And as a scholar, I have to be serious about it. I remember being in France with twelve of us who were dealing with the concept of responsibility, and it was based on the idea that freedom has gotten out of hand, that responsibility needed some intellectual resuscitation.

A colleague from Germany, a secular colleague, says, 'I stand before you today with one hand behind my back, and it's getting close to two. What I mean is, as a professor in the German tradition, since Heidegger, they're taking away what we've taught. Heidegger in terms of his own thinking about the Holocaust was an absolute disaster. (But) he's considered, at least by most summaries, as one of the three great philosophers in the West of the 20th century, but our philosophical tradition is in trouble. And now they're taking away my Christian tradition, all the way to Bonhoeffer<sup>41</sup>. So I'm supposed to speak about responsibility, and I can't rely on this one tradition in front of my colleagues because they're discrediting the philosophical one and the theological one, which is hugely important in ethics. You see, I can't use that terminology. So I'm sort of stuck here, helpless.'

That's how we should see the religious ethics of the world, that there's got to be something hugely important here, by the grace of God, to take seriously. So I must have an attitude of learning, of appreciation...it's been difficult. Whenever I work with Hindus, Buddhists... Confucianism is becoming a little clearer in my mind.

### ***The challenge of crafting a universal normative theory for media ethics***

CORTES: *As we bring this interview to a close, I think it is only appropriate to talk about the difficult challenges that confront those who of us who believe that the field of communication ethics needs a sensible and universally acceptable normative theory. You yourself acknowledged this difficulty when you said that in today's technological society 'developing an appropriate form of universal theory for media ethics is nearly impossible... It seems more like chasing fool's gold than anything else, to construct human-centered global proto-norms, from within and on behalf of, today's global media...' (Christians 2011). Part of this challenge comes from among your fellow 'communitarians' who question the necessity and/or effectiveness of the universal proto-norms which you advocate for a global media ethics, and some suggest that there may actually be disadvantages in having them (Steiner 2010). Your optimistic attitude is thus truly commendable. What chances are there for this endeavor to succeed? Do you believe it will?*

CHRISTIANS: One option is fatalism or technological determinism or historical determinism, that is, nothing that one can accomplish could possibly change the tide



of history, of technological superiority... Fatalism therefore, or some version of nihilism, seems like the only logical alternative. So then your question is, recognizing that universal values and theory based in the universal are so far impossible to even theorize or conceptualize, much less put into practice, then what is your motivation for continuing to work on *(it)*?

In a sense that way of structuring the question is a partial answer. That is, if one is not a fatalist, if one is not a nihilist, if one is not a historical determinist, that is, that history follows its own criteria without human intervention, then the alternative is to continue to search for the possibilities that enable universal ethics to take place. If one were to answer the question why do you persist, one could say, it's because my world view is not fatalism.

If one does believe that special revelation determines or sets the framework for our thinking, it's very clear that the structure of biblical theology is from creation to redemption to the eschaton. One thing you learn from Scriptures, and if you believe *(it)*, is that fatalism or meaninglessness is not an option, that history does have a trajectory, and that there's some movement in history toward a final conclusion. History is not circular, but is aimed in a particular direction. If one believes that the world is meaningful rather than meaningless, or that human existence has a purpose rather than being purposeless, then the question is to try and think it through, as your question implies.

*(One might say,)* how is it possible to just believe this as an alternative to fatalism, nihilism, and meaninglessness – but you have to have some evidence! And then, what I do, and I trust you would agree, is *(to say)* that even though *(the other person's)* generalization is true, that believing in universal principles and acting on principles of self, is difficult, impossible, contrary, negative, that's just a generalization which doesn't hold true for everybody.

I believe it's imperative for us to look for examples of journalists, editors, reporters, teachers, students who are doing it right, and there are. Patrick Plaisance<sup>42</sup>, a colleague of mine, has just published a book on moral heroes, and his research is rather than all the negative conclusions or all the negative experiences that one sees in the press, why are there more moral heroes still? Why do people receive Pulitzer Prizes? Why are there those who are considered great journalists? And the reasons vary but the fact is that they exist.

And part of my *(stand)* is not simply to be critical or judgmental – you have to be as an educator, you have to say this is wrong or this is weak, this needs to be changed. But in the process of doing what we call green light ethics *(we say)*: here's somebody who's doing it right, here's a moral hero.

I believe this is a biblical way of looking at life. Even though there's fallenness, evil, sin, everywhere, even, one can say it's total so that it includes my mind, my will and my emotions, it is not absolute depravity, because absolute depravity would mean God is no longer in control. So one believes in doing this for theoretical or theological reasons, that is, history is not meaningless, but the clear biblical progression is from Genesis to Revelation, from the foundation of the world to its redemption to the final conclusion. And that God has left examples of teachers and parents, of students, and journalists, who are doing it right, and doing it from conscience.

You mention Edith Wyschogrod, and one book of hers that I like a great deal is called 'Saints and postmodernism.'<sup>43</sup> The summary is too short, but basically her argument is that even if the world of postmodernism takes away the rational component and says that rationality since the Enlightenment has become oppressive and is imperialistic or imposing that way of thinking on the world, even though human behavior – we've had some of that since Hume<sup>44</sup> – is not driven by reason, but by ideology – all of that (*may be*) true. But her point being, that in ethics, even if our epistemological world is in chaos or under duress, we still have to reckon with the saint, and she doesn't mean it in the Roman Catholic sense. She means good people.

So we study the Holocaust, and she thinks it's unacceptable teaching if all we do is concentrate on Hitler and on the evils and depravations – you must do that, clearly. But there are the benefactors of Anne Frank, there are the people who resist it. There are those who say this is wrong, we have to live in justice. The Jewish people: I'm going to hide (them), protect (them) because they're human beings, and we're not writing the complete history until we take out examples of the of those who are saints, that is holy compared to a weak and evil world.

Another example would be the physician, a surgeon in a leper colony in Cairo, Egypt. Here's a fully trained physician, London School of Medicine, the Royal College of Medicine, could be a success anywhere in the world. He goes to the leper colony. Now you explain that to me. Regardless of your epistemology, here is a saint.

This is summarizing too much, but basically the idea is that when we do ethics, rather than saying it's hopeless – because the principle needs some kind of rational systematic defense; and reason, at least in his Western form is under duress, rather than saying his whole principal system called ethics is therefore unacceptable in a post Enlightenment age, the question (*ought to be the following*). What about moral heroes? How do we reorient our ethics in order to take account for them?

What do we say to a question like yours? It is that the assessment is accurate; that is, in terms of cultural norms, historical practice in this current, contested, chaotic, and divided world is impossible to stipulate.

Then you say, 'Well that doesn't destroy ethics as a whole, it just calls into question a certain kind of ethics.' For those of us who want to do intellectually interesting ethics, it creates a real issue. Both in theological and philosophical terms, we've been principle-oriented, we search for rational principles. We believe that universals, like Kant did, for all reasonable people, would become transparent. Now when that world collapses, rather than saying, 'Ethics as a whole doesn't exist, or has no credibility,' the challenge is to say that the kind of ethics we do is based on human beings – not their rationality only, but their action, their emotion, their spirit, their mind that together help them live out a certain worldview.

It seems to me the challenge for those of us who teach ethics is that students still have to learn classical theory such as Aristotle, Kant, and Mill. We can't just have case studies of all the failures: lying, deception, invasion of privacy, conflict of interest though we need them to sharpen our thinking. But in addition to ethical theory and case studies, we still have to be interested in virtuous leaders such as Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and Vaclav Havel... people who think differently and live with integrity. If you shift to an ethics of being from an ethics of reason, then

looking for being-ness that's distinctive, that's moral, is fundamental to the way we teach and the research we do.

CORTES: *Thank you so much.*

## Notes

1. Clifford Glenn Christians was born on Dec. 22, 1939 in Hull, Iowa. He is presently Research Professor Emeritus, Institute of Communications Research, Professor Emeritus of Media and Cinema Studies, Professor Emeritus of Journalism in the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He is a prolific author, having written or co-written some 14 books, 4 monographs, 63 book chapters, 94 journal articles, 19 encyclopedia or reference entries, and academic addresses and papers too many to count. He is considered as one of the world's foremost authorities in the field of communications/media ethics (Peck 2001), a fact acknowledged by the variety of nationalities represented by the writers whose essays, written in his honor, were published in a book (Fortner and Fackler 2010).
2. While slightly building on a previous interview with Clifford G. Christians (Christians 2007), that appears in a book of interviews with influential scholars in the field of communications ethics made by Pat Arneson, this interview takes a different tone, treatment, and approach. As a result, Christians's responses to some questions give the impression of being intimately personal, especially evident in the part where he discusses religious ethics and religion in ethics. As well, footnotes on intellectuals that Christians mentions in the interview are provided to give the reader more insight into their connection to Christians' thinking.
3. In this article 'communication ethics' and 'media ethics' are used interchangeably.
4. In this article the phrase 'set of questions' means either (a) a principal question with one or two follow-up questions, or (b) two or three questions of similar importance hovering around the same theme.
5. He is referring to Prof. Edmund Pincoffs of The University of Texas at Austin. For the complete bibliographical information of the mentioned article, see reference Pincoffs (1971).
6. He means that students enter the university as a freshman already being incorporated into a specific program.
7. Philippa Foot (1920–2010) after being educated at home, she was admitted to Somerville College, Oxford and studied Politics, Philosophy, and Economics. She held several teaching positions in England and the United States. In her book, 'Natural Goodness' (see References for complete bibliographical reference) Foot proposes an answer the question of 'the rationality of acting as morality requires...arguing that recognizing and acting on certain reasons, among which are moral reasons, is simply part of practical rationality' (Voorhoeve 2009).
8. STIAS (The Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study), first conceived in 2000, aims to nurture and encourage 'top researchers and intellectual leaders to find innovative and sustainable solutions to issues facing the world and in particular the country and the continent of Africa.' Located in the heart of Stellenbosch, South Africa it 'is attracting some of the world's leading scholars and researchers' including Clifford Christians who formed part of the team which he mentioned in a project called 'Global Media Ethics: Fundamental Values Amid Plurality' (Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study 2016).
9. Thomas Kuhn (1922–1996), physicist and philosopher of science. In 1962, he wrote the book, '*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*...one of the most cited academic books of all time' (Bird 2013). Here, among others things, he introduced the concept of 'paradigm' referred to by Christians.
10. Paulo Freire (1921 – 1997) was a Brazilian educator, civil servant, author, and philosopher who wrote and co-wrote some 20 books, of which 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' is the most well-known. As the main proponent of what is now called 'critical pedagogy' Freire is

placed by some scholars 'alongside other critical educators such as Jonathan Kozol, John Dewey, Michael Apple, and Henry Giroux' (Gadotti 1994). Freire's influence on Christians is such that the Brazilian philosopher has been cited in at least 17 of Christians' written work. Moreover, when I asked Christians for a short list of the works he considers to be representative of his thinking, a book chapter he wrote on Paulo Freire's 'philosophy of culture' (Christians 1996) was one of them.

11. Charles Taylor (1931–) is a Canadian philosopher and professor at McGill University 'known for his examination of the modern self.' Though raised by a Protestant father and Roman Catholic mother, he is nevertheless a practicing Catholic, and 'in his later work...became more overt about the ways in which being a practicing Roman Catholic shaped his intellectual agenda and approach.' In 'A Secular Age' (see References for the complete bibliographical information) Taylor traces how Christianity in the West has changed in the last 500 years and explains 'how it has come to be that modern individuals can understand themselves, their society, and the natural world in a purely secular way, devoid of any reference to the divine or to a transcendent realm of any sort' (Abbey 2015).
12. In the summer of 1980, The Hastings Center, a nonprofit research institute based in New York, released the results of major study on 'The Teaching of Ethics in Higher Education,' co-directed by Daniel Callahan of the Hastings Center and Sissela Bok of the Harvard Medical School and supported by the Carnegie Corporation. Aside from the main report, the Center likewise released studies on ethics in various professional fields such as engineering and bioethics. For journalism education the proponents were Clifford G. Christians and Catherine G. Covert (Science, Technology, & Human Values 1980).
13. Abderrahmane Azzi (1954 – ) is an Algerian-born scholar of moral communication in the University of Sharjah (United Arab Emirates). He did his doctorate at North Texas State University. An experienced professor and a prolific scholar who has taught in several Islamic universities, he has likewise published several works in Arabic and English, including a chapter in the book 'Exploration in Global Media Ethics' in which Clifford Christians also contributed (Rao and Ayish 2013).
14. Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) is a French philosopher who is arguably one of the most influential and distinguished 20<sup>th</sup> century thinkers. His influence in Europe and North America is shown by his numerous teaching positions and honorary doctorates in these continents. With philosophical anthropology as the main underpinning of all his writing, Ricoeur's influence on Christians' thinking is patent even in this interview (Dauenhauer and Pellauer 2014).
15. He refers to his article entitled 'Christian Scholarship and Academic Pluralism' in which he affirms that for Biblical theism to have 'long-term impact on higher education, (it) must engage the ideas making up the prevailing worldview,' which, in this case of the social sciences in general and communication in particular is 'scientific naturalism' (Christians 2004).
16. Michael Walzer (1935–) is an American professor (emeritus) of social science in the Institute for Advanced Study, School of Social Sciences in Princeton, New Jersey. He specializes in political theory and moral philosophy and has written several books on these topics. He is co-editor of *Dissent Magazine* which is entering its 61st year (Institute for Advanced Study School of Social Science 2014).
17. 'Communitarian ethics' is a moral theory presented as a more comprehensive alternative ethical framework to what Christians refers to as 'mainstream ethics' – virtue ethics, utilitarian ethics, and duty ethics – which 'make individual choice and accountability their centerpiece' and are all 'Eurocentric.' Styled as a 'neoclassical' (in the sense that it is 'fundamentally different than, but enriched by, the intellectual struggles of an earlier time and place'), and transnational ('it meets the most stringent tests of non-parochialism'), the basis of communitarian ethics is human relationships which its proponents see 'rings true both North and South, and in Western and Eastern cultures' (Christians, Fackler and Ferre 2011). Considering the global scope of the field of communications and media,



Christians' proposal is that this approach to its ethics is the best alternative to the mainstream ones.

18. John Rawls (1921–2002) was an American political philosopher who wrote 'A Theory of Justice.' In this book, he sets out 'his theory of 'justice as fairness' in which he envisions a society of free citizens holding equal basic rights cooperating within an egalitarian economic system.' He promoted a 'reasonable pluralism' in the political domain and, rejecting universal principles within this domain, he 'holds that the correct principles for each sub-domain depend on its agents and constraints'. Thus, for Rawls, it is perfectly logical for 'meta-ethics (to) derive from progress in substantive moral and political theorizing, instead of...vice versa' (Wenar 2013).
19. In February 2015, Clifford Christians was guest editor of the Journal of Media Ethics' special issue on 'Ubuntu for Journalism Theory and Practice.' In the Introduction to the issue, which he wrote, Christians affirms 'the future of media ethics depends primarily on theory' and considers the African concept of humanness, *ubuntu*, as 'a moral theory (that) contributes to the theory project' (C. G. Christians, Introduction: Ubuntu for Journalism Theory and Practice 2015).
20. Christians here echoes Paul Ricoeur's words, '...communitarianism is, however, mainly used in the Anglo-Saxon context' (Tóth 1999).
21. This is a book he co-edits with Chinese professor, Bo Shan, where he also wrote two chapters. One of these is cited in this article. For complete bibliographical information of this book, see References.
22. While expounding on this idea, Christians – in intellectually-serious yet light-humored fashion – interrupts himself by making reference to Augustine of Hippo as a way of acknowledging the saint's influence on this aspect of his thinking. In his words, 'Augustine's unbelievable, in my mind. He's important to our field, in rhetoric itself.' He explicitly praises the latter's most famous books, the *Confessions* and *De Doctrina Christiana*. Christians did not continue this particular sentence during the interview itself. However, in the text which he mentioned, one does the following words which articulate the point he was obviously trying to make: '...the tradition of Counter-Enlightenment philosophy is needed for the West to contribute substantially to the intercultural era' (C. G. Christians, The problem of communitas in western moral philosophy 2015).
23. Giambattista Vico (1668–1744) is a key 'figure in the rise of the philosophy of history...one of the greatest of Italian philosophers.' A few remarkable points of his philosophy of history is his 'great emphasis on poetry and mythology' and 'his insistence of the complex unity of each cultural period' (Copleston, A History of Philosophy: From the French Enlightenment to Kant 1994).
24. Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) is a Swiss linguist acknowledged by scholars as one of 'the leading figures of the first two decades of the 20th century...linguistic theory and methodology.' Saussure's 'structural approach to language underlies virtually the whole of modern linguistics' (Robins 2013).
25. Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945) 'more than any other twentieth-century philosopher, plays a fundamental mediating role' between the cultures of literature and natural science, having written philosophical works that spanned these otherwise rather disparate fields. In this regard, the philosopher of German-Jewish descent 'occupies a unique place in twentieth-century philosophy' (Friedman 2011). Cassirer and Saussure both 'view language not as an instrument through which the objective world can be represented, but as a formative event which actively organizes otherwise indistinct streams of human experience' (Ding 2010). However, in contrast to de Saussure who claimed that 'language was the only way of structuring the world' Cassirer affirmed that it is only one of many (Lofts 2000).
26. When Ernst Cassirer 'taught at Yale from 1941 to 1944 and at Columbia in 1944–45... he produced two books in English...where the first, *An Essay on Man* (1944), serves as a concise introduction to the philosophy of symbolic forms (and thus Cassirer's distinctive philosophical perspective) as a whole.' (Friedman 2011).



27. Stephen J. A. Ward 'is an internationally recognized media ethicist... educator, consultant, keynote speaker and award-winning author.' He is presently Distinguished Lecturer of Ethics and Former Director of the Graduate School of Journalism of the University of British Columbia in Canada (UBC Graduate School of Journalism 2014). He co-wrote a book with Clifford G. Christians in 2008 (please refer to the Reference section).
28. John Locke (1632–1704), British philosopher and Oxford polymath whose interests lay not only in philosophy but chemistry, physics, and medicine as well. Although generally known as an empiricist, he was only so 'in the sense that he believed that all the material of our knowledge is supplied by sense perception and introspection,' but not 'in the sense that he thought that we can know only sense-presentations.' He is known for his being anti-authoritarian (Copleston, History of Philosophy: Modern Philosophy: The British Philosophers from Hobbes to Hume 1994).
29. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), a major influence on Christians, is a German philosopher and professor whose first famous work, 'Critique of Pure Reason' became a preparatory study to his own 'system of transcendental philosophy or metaphysics.' In Kant's view, 'the human mind does not...constitute or create the object in its totality.' The following concepts form part of what are most basic in and most known about the Kantian system: that humans perceive and know things 'through the *a priori* forms embedded in the structure of the human subject,' and that 'there are things-in-themselves, even if we cannot know them as they are in themselves' (Copleston, A History of Philosophy: From the French Enlightenment to Kant 1994).
30. Jürgen Habermas (1929–), one of the most influential German philosophers in the world and public intellectual, 'his extensive written work addresses topics stretching from social-political theory to aesthetics, epistemology and language to philosophy of religion' (Bohman and Rehg 2014). With regard to the last subject, it is of interest to note that in contrast to his 'distinctively Marxist framework' in the treatment of religion in the 60s and 70s, Habermas has been offering a 'considerably more sympathetic engagement with the arguments of theologians' on more recent occasions such as during his speech in 2001 before the German Peace Prize Commission and the 2004 debate with Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger who later became Pope Benedict XVI (Harrington 2007).
31. Michael Traber was a priest belonging to the *Mission Bethléem Immensee* (SMB), a missionary institute based in Immensee, Switzerland, and who did extensive work in Africa. (Agenzia Fides 2006).
32. Christians did this when he was showing us around the building where he works.
33. Rev. Robert A White, S.J. is a professor of social sciences and communications at St. Augustine University of Tanzania and formerly Director of the Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture, London. In 2009, he co-authored a book with Clifford Christians, 'Normative Theories of the Media: Journalism in Democratic Societies' published by the University of Illinois Press.
34. Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) was a German philosopher and a 'decisive figure in the development of twentieth century hermeneutics.' His thinking was grounded on other intellectual influences of Christians' such as Plato, Aristotle, and Heidegger (Malpas 2015).
35. H. Richard Niebuhr (1894–1962) was a Protestant Christian ethics professor at the Yale Divinity School. Though less famous than his older brother, Reinhold, he had a significant impact on him. Through his books, among which is 'Christ and Culture' published in 1951, he also made a significant impact on the theological community at large (Fox 1990).
36. For a view of the Catholic Church's 'Christ-culture' connection alternative to Clifford Christians' perception cf. '*Gaudium et Spes*' (Vatican Council II 1965), 'In Love with the Church' (Escrivá 1989), and a text in 'Prophetic Liturgy: Toward a Transforming Christian Praxis' in which Junker (2014) talks about out the Catholic nun Mother Teresa's '*ubuntu*...love for human beings...and her prophetic voice claiming justice for the poor (as)...sources of inspiration for prophetic praxis seeking transformation in the Church and society today.' (The full bibliographical information is in the Reference list.)

37. A conference to explore communication and theology begun and sponsored by the Jesuits of the Gregorian University. It was named after 'the Jesuit retreat and conference center at Villa Cavalletti, outside of Rome. The plan for these conferences followed a simple method: about 25 invited participants—half theologians and half communication scholars—met for five or six days of conversation. From those conversations would emerge a book of essays produced by the participants after they had returned to their home institutions' (Soukup 2007). Clifford Christians was part of the North American delegation in 1985 and 1987.
38. As mentioned earlier, Michael Traber was a priest belonging to the SMB missionary institute and, in fact, was not a Jesuit. He was, however, trained in Fordham University, a Jesuit university (Agenzia Fides 2006).
39. He is referring to the 'five pillars of Islam': testimony of faith, prayer, giving *zakat* (support of the needy), fasting during the month of Ramadan, and the pilgrimage of Makkah once in a lifetime for those who are able.
40. This part of the interview, already near the end, was more than an hour after lunch.
41. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran pastor and theology professor born in 1906 and martyred in 1945 for his opposition of the Nazi-controlled state church. Bonhoeffer's stand against the Nazis was reflected in his book 'Ethics' in which he affirmed that 'the foundation of ethical behaviour lay in how the reality of the world and the reality of God were reconciled in the reality of Christ' (Huff 2005).
42. Patrick Plaisance is a former journalist and now a media ethics and communication theory professor presently connected with Colorado State University (Colorado State University 2014). He wrote a book of 'life interviews of Pulitzer Prize-winning writers and editors, executives of trendsetting PR firms, veterans and young stars known for their ethical leadership' that basically 'argues that we have much to gain by looking closely at some of the most successful and ethically admirable (*media*) practitioners to better understand what makes them tick' (Plaisance 2014). The complete biographical information is found in the References.
43. Edith Wyschogrod (1930–2009) is an American-Jewish philosopher of religion whose book quoted above 'effectively refutes critics who insist postmodernism is blind to ethical questions and is irredeemably nihilistic' (M. C. Taylor 2009). In the book that Christians mentions, even as Wyschogrod (1990) affirms that 'the world's religious traditions have in the past addressed the problems of the wretched of the earth in the persons of saints,' she is not promoting a sort of throwback into the 'historical contexts in which saintliness has arisen,' but rather 'the saint's recognition of the primacy of the other person and the dissolution of self-interest.'
44. David Hume (1711–1776) was a Scottish-born philosopher whose extensive work spans topics that include human nature and understanding, morals, politics, and religion. In the canon of philosophy, he is grouped with the British empiricists (e.g., John Locke, Anthony Ashley [Shaftesbury], George Berkeley, etc.). In this tradition, knowledge is derived solely from sense-perception rather than the apprehension of an object's essence. Indeed, for Hume, 'we cannot distinguish perceptions and objects and make statements about the one which will not apply to the other.' As regards religion, though brought up a Calvinist, he later shed it and 'came to the conclusion that... religion impairs morality by encouraging people to act for motives other than love of virtue for its own sake' (Copleston, History of Philosophy: Modern Philosophy: The British Philosophers from Hobbes to Hume 1994).

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The author reports no conflicts of interest. The author alone is responsible for the content and writing of this article.

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