

# SERIOUS TIMES

MAKING YOUR LIFE MATTER IN AN URGENT DAY

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## Be Still and Know

In his fourteenth encyclical, *Fides et Ratio* (Faith and Reason), Pope John Paul II expressed dismay that philosophers no longer wrestle with the big questions of life, the questions that most define who we are. What does it all mean? Does life have a purpose? Is death the end? Is there a God? If it is increasingly rare among philosophers, one can only imagine the degree of scarcity among the rest of us.

To reflect means to give thought to something to such a degree that it brings some kind of realization – an “a-ha” moment. It takes an idea and burns it deep within. It takes a question, and like Jacob wrestling with the angel, does not let that question go until some form of answer emerges.

Such reflection demands intentionally setting aside time for its pursuit. As Esther de Waal has recently written, “To take time to be apart...is not a luxury; it is essential.” The Latin word *schola*, from which we get our words scholar and scholarship, means “free time.” If we are to protect the life of the mind, we must protect the time it takes to develop it. Most think this means time devoted to study; in truth, it means the time to study coupled with the time needed to reflect on what we have studied. Else we will be engaging the *worst* of Malcolm Gladwell’s “blink” – thinking without thinking on things that *need* to be thought about. Henri Nouwen insightfully wondered if the fact that so many people ask support, advice and counsel from so many other people is not, in large part, due to their having lost contact with any sense of personal reflection on the matter. Sometimes one feels, writes Nouwen, “as if one half of the world is asking advice of the other half while both sides are sitting in the same darkness.”

Reflection does more, though, than bring insight. It brings sensitivity; awareness. Reflection provides an assessment of the world that could not come any other way. The heart of “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10) is that such stillness allows us to see God, and be aware of God – both in terms of when He is being acknowledged, and when He is being ignored. It is this

awareness that allows us to bring Christ to bear on the world, and engage not only the Great Commission, but the cultural commission as well.

Malcolm Muggeridge tells of taking Mother Teresa into a New York television studio to appear on one of the morning shows. It was the first time that Mother Teresa had been in an American television studio, and as a result, she was completely unprepared for the constant interruptions for commercials.

On that particular morning, Muggeridge observed that all of the commercials dealt with food, and food that was being advertised as non-fattening and low in calories. Mother Teresa took it in with a sense of unbelief. Her own work was in trying to nourish the starving, to put some flesh on human skeletons. Suddenly, without even thinking, she said out loud, "I see that Christ is needed in television studios."

A total silence fell on the studio and everyone there. Muggeridge said that in the midst of the media fantasy, reality had suddenly intruded.

But it took someone having been still enough to "know."

James Emery White

## Sources

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## About Serious Times

Launched in conjunction with the release of the book, *Serious Times* (InterVarsity Press, 2004), the aim of this site is to serve the vision of the book in an ongoing manner. At [serioustimessite.com](http://serioustimessite.com) you

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