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Final Essay:

A Reflection on Being a Disciple of Christ

“Be still, and know that I am God,” declares Psalm 46:10. This verse has become my mantra at Westmont College. As I walk hastily through the campus, with thoughts and unanswered questions swirling around in my head, feeling least of all still or sure, I am reminded of this verse. The stillness that God commands is not to be confused with stagnancy or laziness. Instead, God offers me a sense of calmness and tranquility, and calls me to trust in him for a peace that surpasses all understanding. Further, He provides a solid foundation for acquiring knowledge at Westmont College. Despite all of my questions and uncertainties, I can rest in knowing God.

At the beginning of the semester, this verse wouldn’t have resonated with me in the same way. I didn’t need a call to stillness; I wanted to move and make my place in the world. Just in this verse semester, God has greatly broadened my perspective in both faith and academics. As I learn my place in the global world, my education at Westmont College will help me be a better disciple of Christ through resting my learning in a firm foundation of knowledge and understanding of God.

Disciple can be difficult word to adequately define. In our Silence paper, we defined discipleship as “the act of altering one’s life to be like Jesus Christ,” and pointed
to prayer, worship, fellowship, sacraments, and martyrdom as models. At Westmont, I’ve practiced many of these models for discipleship. My prayer life has been rich; worship at chapel, church, and Vespers has been powerful, and my fellowship with other Westmont students has expanded my faith and provides great accountability.

While this definition and practice of discipleship is decent, I am learning to define discipleship along the lines of Luke 14:27, in which Jesus contends, “Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” Within this context, Jesus describes how His followers must “hate [their] own life” and “give up everything” to be His disciple. According to John Piper in his book, *What Jesus Demands from the World*, “Following Jesus means joining Him in what He was sent to do,” which is a call that affects relationships, possessions, and vocation (69). Thus, discipleship involves learning how to place Jesus Christ absolutely first in life and cast everything else behind as secondary or complementary to faith.

The models of discipleship can be expanded to include not only prayer, worship, and fellowship, but also a pursuit for truth. In John 8:31-32, Jesus promises, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” The phrase, “abide in my word,” is compelling. Abide, though not a commonly used word, means to stay, continue, or dwell. Jesus calls us to live our lives in His word, which encompasses the commands and teachings of the Bible, in order that we can find the truth.

Non-Christian liberal arts colleges sever this tie between knowledge and truth in denying the supremacy of the Bible. The world is easily disillusioned by truth. When Jesus was on trial before Pilate, He testifies, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact,
for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.

Everyone on the side of truth listens to me” (John 18:37). Pilate’s response is very
telling: “What is truth?” (18:38) Without truth, there is no foundation for knowledge.
The motto of Westmont College, on the other hand, is “Holding Christ Preeminent,” and
this entails holding His teachings preeminent as well. At Westmont College, I am
blessed to have the opportunity to integrate the Bible into all that I learn. My Christian
liberal arts education has affected my thinking through teaching me that my foundation
rests in Jesus Christ and His teachings. Even when I am unsure, I can be still in knowing
God. Without this sound foundation, my house flounders in the sand, and I am left
disillusioned and hopeless.

In place of martyrdom, I would add suffering as a model of discipleship. Henri J.
M. Nouwen, Donald P. McNeill, and Douglas A. Morrison, the authors of Compassion,
explain, “Voluntary displacement as a way of life rather than as a unique event is the
mark of discipleship” (62). Following Jesus in what He was sent to do involves
following Him into suffering. We are called to bear the cross as Jesus did. Jesus says, in
John 15:20, “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”

In all honesty, I have not felt the harsh effects of this calling to the extent of many
other followers. As I described in my portrait, I’ve been blessed to have lived a relatively
easy life. Some people have criticized me for my beliefs, but I’ve always been free to
practice my faith. I know I will experience suffering sooner or later, and I believe my
education at Westmont can help cultivate a deeper trust and dependence on God for those
times. However, the call to suffering is bigger than simple endurance; it is also a call to
compassion. Nouwen, McNeill and Morrison describe how suffering leads to
compassion, “By bringing us closer to our brokenness it opens our eyes to our fellow
human beings, who seek our consolation and comfort” (73). My prayer for my time at
Westmont is that my eyes will be opened further to the brokenness of the world, and to
what God has called me in this broken world.

One of the questions I’ve struggled with most is the place of Christianity in
politics, and how to reconcile Christ and nation. I find it now hard to accept the war in
Iraq, a war I never questioned before because I thought it was a just pursuit to remove a
dictator. Wars involve absurdity, mutilation, and muddled morals, and often fail to end in
peace. How do Christians reconcile war? Western nations, including the United States,
have played a dual role in history. On the one hand, Western nations were the first to
experiment with and develop democracy. On the other hand, Western nations bear
responsibility for the devastating effects of imperialism and globalization. Christians
cannot afford to forget this history that would be easier to leave behind. Instead, history
should elucidate our calling to compassion. As I wrote in my third essay, “Due to the
pervasive presence of sin in the world, one will find that his or her identity as a Christian
can never comfortably merge with his or her American identity. However, this is no call
to give up, but instead a call to serve our nation with compassion.” I am blessed to enjoy
the privileges and freedoms of being an American, but do these blessings extend to all?

As a disciple of Christ and as a political science major, I believe I have a calling
to justice. While considering the place of war in my fourth essay, I was struck by God’s
prophecy in Isaiah 42:1 of Jesus “bring[ing] forth justice to the nations.” The Bible is
very clear that God loves and is “known by” justice (Psalm 9:16, 11:7; Isaiah 61:8). In
Psalm 106:3, the psalmist declares, “Blessed are they who maintain justice, who
constantly do what is right.” In Zechariah 7:9, the Lord commands, “Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another.” In addition to mercy and compassion, justice yields joy, terror, and stability (Proverbs 21:15, 29:4). Therefore, justice can be difficult to define or administer. However, the Bible makes it clear that Christians are called to justice. God and His son, Jesus Christ, love and demonstrate justice, and those who follow in justice are blessed.

At Westmont College, I want to gain a better understanding of how to maintain justice on this earth. I know only God will administer justice in its fullest form, but this is no reason quit in our pursuit of justice. As John Piper maintains, “The greatness of Christian exiles is not success but service.” Service will manifest itself differently for each of Christ’s disciples but it is ultimately rooted in compassion. Nouwen, McNeill, and Morrison describe, “[Disciples] act not to prove their power, but to show God’s power; they act not to redeem people but to reveal God’s redemptive grace; they act not to create a new world, but to open hearts and ears to the one who sits on the throne and says, ‘Now I am making the whole of creation new’ (Revelation 21:5)” (120). Service should point to the greatest servant of all, Jesus Christ.

I could see God using my education in law and justice in many different ways. Perhaps He will use me as a family law attorney, finding safe homes for troubled children. Maybe He will use me as a legal advisor for churches or a non-profit organization like World Vision. Possibly He will use me as a civil rights lawyer, further extending equality and justice to all Americans. He could use me in helping to create a global solution for the problem of violence towards women, or in improving educational opportunities in the inner city. Most of all, at Westmont, I’m learning to be fully content
in Jesus Christ. He brings me a joy that cannot be found anywhere else, and so I am ready to serve wherever He wants to place me.

Fundamentally, my portrait has not changed since the first semester. I am the same person with wider, more alert eyes and deeper questions. One change I have noticed, though, is a greater dependency on God. I think my first portrait reflected a sense of pride and a desire to serve both God and myself in finding success and achievement. Now, I realize that my joy and success comes from resting in my knowledge of God. As His disciple at Westmont College, I will pursue truth, compassion, and justice, all of which are linked, and point to the goodness of my Savior, Jesus Christ.
Conformed to the Cross
Exploring My Identity

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September 5, 2007

According to author David Quammen, “Identity is such a crucial affair that one shouldn’t rush into it.”¹ A person can spend a lifetime trying to answer the seemingly simple question of “Who am I?” People struggle greatly with the concept of being true to oneself. But however difficult defining identity may be, the act of exploring identity is nevertheless important. Identity offers a life compass of sorts. It encompasses not only past experiences, but also future ambitions. Identity yields certain obligations.

A person forms his or her identity through the groups with which he or she identifies. People identify with many types of groups, including ethnic, cultural economic, religious, occupational, gender, and age. While a person may be born with certain personality traits, these groups further shape his or her disposition. Essentially, certain qualities are developed through the experiences people have, due to the groups with which they identify.

I am a member of many groups. I am a woman, an American, and a student. I am of the younger generation, and of the upper-middle class. I am a daughter, sister, and friend. But, ultimately, I am not my own person. I am a child of God. I am not defined by the communities to which I belong; Jesus Christ defines who I am, and shapes my identity. Thus, I am not simply a female; I am a woman in Christ. I am not only an

American; I am an American Christian. I am not just a student; I am a student who seeks
the will of God.

Visually, I represent my identity as a combination of words, pictures, and ideas, formed in the shape of a cross. The cross is a symbol of my belief in Jesus Christ, and my commitment to Christianity. Everything that I am converges on the cross. I am conformed to the cross, but I still have individuality. It does not limit me, but instead stretches me to my fullest potential. The cross is my life compass. It transforms my identity, giving it direction and purpose.

Part of my identity is being female. As a carrier of two X chromosomes, I included the word “girl” on my cross to represent this aspect of my identity. I chose the word “speak” because of my aptitude for long-winded conversations (which seems to be associated with the female gender). Additionally, I included the phrase, “Pretty Smile: Priceless” because I love fashion and jewelry, but ultimately, a smile is the best accessory. But because I center my female identity on the cross, I seek to use my words in a deliberate and kind manner. I want my attitude to reflect the joy that Jesus Christ has given me. I believe that women have a special ability for compassion, and I want to utilize that to the fullest.

Another element of my identity is being a member of a family that is prosperous economically. Thus, I included the word “blessed.” Honestly, I haven’t had to experience much hardship in my life. My family has always provided everything that I’ve needed. However, I’ve had to work hard for many of the privileges that I enjoy. I saved up for a long time to buy a flute and laptop, worked three jobs during the summer, and often had to turn down special opportunities because of financial expense. But
because of this, I’ve learned the Christian values of not being greedy and working hard. Because of this, I incorporated the word “give” on my cross. I also included the phrase “rain and shine” because I feel it is important to be grateful in both good and bad situations. I know I’m blessed to have all that I have, but I also know the importance of hard work and generosity.

An additional component of my identity is being an American, and thus, I put an American flag on my cross. As an American, I truly do value democracy and equality. I am fascinated by the Constitution and the history of the American government. I am a political science major because I wish to further explore these areas. As an American Christian, I feel I have a responsibility to help those who are less fortunate. To represent this, I included words and phrases like “Get on Your Feet,” “Impact,” and “World Changer.” I’ve volunteered at nursing homes, helped feed the hungry, and I want to learn about solutions to global issues because of my identity as an American who loves God. The words “Rain? In Oregon?!?” appear because I am an Oregonian who appreciates God’s creativity and sovereignty in nature.

On my cross you will find “scholar,” “challenge,” and “think!” because being a student shapes my identity. As a student, I am called to use the gifts God has given me. God has blessed me with an ability and desire to learn, so I feel an obligation to stretch my mind and grow in His wisdom. I included a picture of a woman in a business suit because of my aspiration to become a lawyer. I want to work in the courtroom or in public policy to make positive changes. Additionally, I chose a picture of a flute, along with the words “worship” and “create” to portray the more creative side of my calling as
a student. Ultimately, I do not want to be a stagnant student, I want to be a student who utilizes every opportunity.

As a Christian, all of these aspects of my identity come together. I do not claim to maintain this identity on my power. 2 Peter 1:3 promises, “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.” I know I am still naive, and I have a lot of learning and growing to do. But I also know that I am a well-off American woman who seeks to serve Christ in all she does. I still have many paths to clear and trek, but I have a life compass pointing in the right direction, and an omnipotent Savior to guide me.
Teaching a Man to Fish
A Reflection on the Christian Liberal Arts Education

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September 10, 2007

You know how if you give a man a fish, he’ll eat for a day, but if you teach a man to fish, he’ll eat for a lifetime? Well, that gift of a fish is like a vocation-specific major, which will only enable a person to be prepared for a particular job. Teaching a person to fish, however, is like a liberal arts education, which allows a person to be ready for anything life presents. A Christian liberal arts education takes that principle one step further – it prepares people for life both mentally and spiritually.

Simone Weil gives an argument for the value of liberal arts in her essay, “Reflection on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God.” She asserts that a person should pursue a variety of subjects because the act of attentive contemplation will yield benefits. “Every effort,” she claims, “adds a little gold to a treasure no power on earth can take away” (59). Ultimately, this effort will foster learning and will expand a student’s ability to think. A liberal arts education expects its students not to regurgitate facts, but to explore ideas and concepts. Furthermore, because a liberal arts education teaches the student how to think, its rewards are not stagnant, but instead prepare the student for future growth as life changes.

Cornelius Plantinga, in “Vocation and Education,” shares the importance of a Christian approach to education. He maintains that a secular education is incomplete because it erects a wall between the sacred and secular. Richard J. Foster observes, “Superficiality is the curse of our age,” and further notes the need for “deep people.”
Christian education adds this depth, combining intelligence with virtue, and knowledge with purpose.

Westmont College’s article, “What Do We Want From Our Graduates,” shows how great the result can be when these two concepts (liberal arts and Christian education) are combined. This article includes eighteen ways in which a Christian liberal arts education enriches a person’s life. Westmont College does not stop with educating its students for a vocation; Westmont College seeks to prepare their students to be well-rounded, intelligent, Christian servants. In seeking a rigorous academic education, Westmont students are to “[Hold] Christ Preeminent.”

If a liberal arts education teaches its students how to think and how to define what it means to be human, then a Christian liberal arts education adds purpose, moral direction, and virtue to this endeavor. A Christian liberal arts education yields wholeness and holiness. A study of physics and chemistry is incomplete without recognizing the ingenuity and providence of the Creator. A study of world history and other cultures is incomplete with learning what it means to be compassionate. A study of humanity and human nature is incomplete without an understanding of the God who loving created us in His image.

For me, coming from a public high school, attending Westmont College is a refreshing and stretching change. What a change it’s been to go straight from class to chapel! It’s been so exciting to study subjects with a textbook in one hand and a Bible in the other. I enjoy having conversations with professors who want to glorify God just as I do. I am confident that a Christian liberal arts education at Westmont College will contribute to my personal growth by teaching me how to think for myself and by
strengthening my own Christian worldview. But more importantly, through this pursuit, I will learn to more deeply love and appreciate God.

Westmont College will give me both the tools to be successful in a career in law and the tools to make a difference for Jesus Christ in all aspects of my life. In Mark 1:17, Jesus says to his disciples, “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” At Westmont College, I will learn not only how to fish, but how to be a productive fisher of men.
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October 15, 2007

A Christian American Exile

Reconciling Christ and Nation

In the Pledge of Allegiance, the United States of America defines itself as “one nation, under God.” It’s easy to wonder, however, to what extent that’s actually true. Some have asserted that perhaps “one nation, under Canada, above Mexico” would be a worthy substitution. In many respects God has been removed out of American government and society. This is a troubling issue those who call themselves both Christian and American. Michael J. Baxter reflects on the concept of “we Americans” in his article, “Dispelling the ‘We’ Fallacy from the Body of Christ.” This phrase implies a “collective purpose, a shared project” that is not possible due to the absence of a shared creed. Are we Christian Americans or American Christians? Can the two identities be justifiably integrated?

In his article, “Brokenhearted Joy,” John Piper, an author and theologian, answers these questions remarkably well. “The greatness of Christian exiles,” he reveals, “is not success but service. Whether we win or lose, we witness to the way of truth and beauty and joy. We don’t own culture, and we don’t rule it. We serve it with brokenhearted joy and long suffering mercy, for the good of man and the glory of Jesus Christ.” Due to the pervasive presence of sin the world, one will find that his identity as a Christian can
never comfortably merge with his American identity. However, this is no call to give up, but instead a call to serve our nation with compassion.

The Bible calls Christians to respect the authorities in government. In Romans 13:1, Paul says, “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for this is no authority except that which God has established.” As long as one does what is right, obeying the government should be no issue, Paul reasons. As Christians, we need to respect and follow our president, our Congress, our governor, our mayor. This is not a blind respect, but a discerning respect. Baxter warns against the “herd-intellect,” and argues that Christians have a duty to use discernment in where they put their allegiance and how they use it. In Matthew 22:15-21, the Pharisees confront Jesus with questions regarding Christians and government. Jesus responds by saying, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” Though we follow our government, we also follow God. What we give to our government cannot be in conflict with what we owe to God.

Being Christian does not limit people from being patriotic. It’s not wrong to feel blessed to be an American because God has blessed the United States of America richly. Not everyone in the world can practice his religion freely; the United States offers this sweet freedom. The photo collection, “Democracy 2004,” by photographer Richard Avedon displays this sense of freedom that Americans exhibit. Though the views differ greatly, each American portrayed looked into the camera, active and not passive, with a sense of dignity. The causes that these Americans embraced ranged from feminism, to hip-hop, to the crisis of Islam, thus proving the plurality of American culture that Martha Nussbaum points out in her article, “How Do We Approach Cultures? Developing a Complex View of Cultures.” Nevertheless, every American had a campaign, whether
political, economic, religious, or something else, for which they stood and could (theoretically) freely express. Christians are blessed to be able to practice Christianity without legal penalty in the United States.

To understand how Christian and American identities merge together is something I’ve struggled with for a long time. While it seems like Christians should be involved in politics, the world of politics is one marred by deceit, arrogance and hostility. Can a truly Christian politician ever succeed? In the very least, Christians have a responsibility to be informed about how the government is operating and what kinds of laws the government is legislating. With our votes, we must “test everything [and] hold fast to what is good.” (1 Thessalonians 5:21) Discernment is of utmost importance. It is through discernment that we can determine what we should give to America, and what we owe to God.

Christians will never fully rule the United States of America. Christianity in its most genuine form will never dominate American society. However, Christians cannot be passive on American soil. God can do great things in American government if Christians are willing to serve. This service will be difficult, but with “brokenhearted joy” Christians can bring glory to God in the United States of America.
Broken Faces: Examining World War I and the Iraq War

**World War I**

Peace found at gunpoint leaves us fractured beyond recognition

With hope muddled and fragmented

Yet marvelous are Thy works

For the image of God breaks through the brokenness

Yes, one day we will be whole

**The Iraq War**

Perhaps the deepest tragedy

Is the well-intentioned plan

For so far it aims

Yet further it falls

Leaving scars lined with confusion
I must admit that war is something I have shoved in the back of my mind. Despite my country’s current status, I’ve felt, somehow, that thinking of war is not relevant to me. Yet war is a weighty subject, and the fact that it is far beyond me should not cause me to file it away for another day. War seems to be a paradox. It is both the vilest manifestation of human nature, and the most genuine act of courage and sacrifice. It is both honorable and despicable. As humans, war appears to be necessary, but as Christians, the call to passivism is compelling.

The “broken faces” photos disturbed me, and forced me to think about war in a whole new way. It is easy to distance oneself when the casualties are in numbers, but a broken face leaves an impression. I was struck by the fact that these people were loved deeply by God, gloriously made in His image. As brutal and ruthless as war is, it cannot destroy God’s image in mankind. Though we are trapped in a world of brokenness and brutish behavior, God’s hope cannot be squelched. Though war will surely continue, the act of following in the example of Christ can slowly piece together the fragmented hope.

I have pondered the situation in Iraq several times, but each time coming to the conclusion that I don’t know what to think. The reasons why the United States invaded Iraq were respectable – disarmament, removing a dictator, and establishing democracy. Yet four years later, peace is nowhere in sight and the fighting continues. This is grave tragedy, for it is not a clear-cut battle between good and evil. The war is not black and white, but an unsettling shade of grey. Can or should war be used to establish better, more humane governments? Who is in the position to judge? How can we, as Christians, “bring forth justice to the nations?” (Isaiah 42:1) It is a question I need to continue to wrestle with and ponder.
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November 12, 2007

Memory and Commemoration: The Presentation of Life

We have a tendency to try to fit history into a pretty package—into a neat, little box. Though history is multi-dimensional and complex, it is much easier to swallow in its tenable, simplified form. In this way, we make history malleable, so that it reveals, exhorts, and justifies whatever we want. But this one-dimensional presentation squelches truth and flattens out the ways God works in the world. The study of history is an invaluable academic discipline because it involves the deep study of human nature and reveals how God works through humanity. Though this study, we can learn how to better have compassion for the world. Henri M. Nouwen, Donald P. McNeill, and Douglas A. Morrison, the authors of Compassion, explain, “Every time we pay attention [to the experiences of others] we become emptier, and the more empty we are the more healing space we can offer” (80). Understanding history fosters unity, and “togetherness is the place of compassion” (81).

Frank Lentricchia and Joy McAuliffe, authors of “Groundzeroland,” argue that it is easy to twist the presentation of history into a tourist attraction, something that people find “horrifically compelling” (352). “Pose for a picture: mix disaster and death with stardom and beauty,” Lentricchia and McAuliffe sardonically suggest (359). However,
the preservation of history can be put to great use when the preserver can manage to use it for compassion.

In order to reach this goal, of instilling compassion, one must consider what the standards should be for presenting history. According to Mark Noll’s article, “Some Recent Battles,” about the Enola Gay controversy, there are two ways to consider. “Should it be history as celebratory commemoration,” he asks, “or history as a thought-provoking moral education?” There has been significant debate as to how to combine these elements, or if it is even possible to do so. The best way to honor history is to pursue the truth, including both celebration and education. It is necessary to approach history from different angles and perspectives (as the title of this world history course would suggest). Noll’s article describes the conflict how to present the end of World War II and the atomic bombing of Japan. Some felt the exhibit’s message was too political, while others felt the moral issues of bombing needed to be addressed within the display. What if both of these exhibits were presented? It could be quite beneficial to have a museum of perspectives, where the viewer could experience both sides of the issue.

The challenges of respectfully presenting history parallel the challenge of commemorating and honoring someone’s life. Created in the image of God, human life is of great significance. Human life is full of both beauty and ugliness – worship and sin, success and failure, joy and suffering. Isaiah 61:3 points to how God uses both sides of human life for “the display of His splendor,” by creating beauty from ashes, gladness from mourning, and praise from despair. In John 9:3, the disciples note the suffering and “sin” of a blind man, and ask Jesus why this happened. His response is powerful, explaining, “This happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.”
Humanity is an exhibit of God’s glory, and the commemoration of a person’s life should reflect how God has graciously moved in his or her life.

The life of my grandma, Geraldine Cochran, is a rich example of God’s providence and grace. She spends most of her week volunteering at church, and chose to celebrate her seventy-fifth and eightieth birthdays by skydiving off a plane. She immigrated to the United States from Yugoslavia as a young child. She had both a spirited and troubled childhood and journey to maturity. My grandpa says he married my grandma because she was “a real piece of work,” and she was. Though she has faced great adversity, she has a beautiful and unwavering inner strength that she has kindled through her relationship with Jesus Christ. Though my grandma is almost blind, she sees the world with clear and genuine vision. Though she is imperfect, my grandma has lived a life transformed by grace.

I envision an exhibit that shows the full spectrum and progression of my grandma’s life. My grandma’s lowest points must be revealed to adequately show the extent of God’s work in her life. Exhibits are most effective when they incorporate several mediums, including art, words, and music. At the beginning of the exhibit, the lighting would be dim, and would have photos and quotes about the challenges of her childhood and first marriage. The lighting would gradually become lighter as the exhibit shows how my grandma has grown. Light is a wonderful motif running through her life. Although her physical vision has dimmed, her eternal vision is stronger than ever. To demonstrate this, Bible verses and my grandma’s pearls of wisdom would be integrated throughout the display. At the end of the exhibit, there would be stories from her friends and family sharing how God has used my grandma to touch their lives.
Commemorating a person’s life isn’t really about honoring that person; it’s about honoring God’s work in his or her life, for the “display of His splendor,” so that “the work of God might be displayed in his life” (Isaiah 61:3, John 9:3). The exhibit isn’t about the created – it’s about the Creator. God uses both history and humanity to reveal himself, and from this, we can better have compassion for the world.

Very nice picture!