

## Seeking and Finding at the Veritas Forum

During the Veritas Forum at Columbia University, at a world view panel entitled “Three Perspectives on Life,” a religion major named Leah had the following conversation with Professor Philip Kitcher, Columbia University Professor of Philosophy and Chair of Contemporary Civilization, the panelist representing a secular humanist world view:

**Leah:** *What would you tell someone whose intellect agrees with the secular humanist position but whose conscience, emotions, and imagination have a dire craving for a religious world view?*

**Prof. Kitcher:** *What is it that you desire from religion?*

**Leah:** *The ability to pray for a sick friend. The confidence to believe again in the God whose love and providence I have felt so intimately in my life.*

**Prof. Kitcher:** *You don't need these things since you now know them to be based on false beliefs. Offer tangible support to your sick friend, and let your intellect guide you. Everything you need is in secular humanism.*

Leah is a typical student at Columbia University: a young woman who seeks truth. She walked away from that conversation with Prof. Kitcher more determined to find it. By the end of the Veritas Forum, she found Jesus, realizing that He is the Truth. Here is her story:

I immigrated as a child to the US from the former Soviet Union. I was educated in Jewish day schools and in fifth grade became committed to the observance of Rabbinic Jewish law. My favorite subjects were math and Talmud. In high school, the intellectual foundation for my Orthodox beliefs started to fall apart. At the same time, my source of spiritual inspiration came from reading books by C. S. Lewis and from writing poetry. Though I was still very committed to the study and practice of Jewish law, I was equally engaged in constructing my own religious philosophy that would include a place for Gentiles. I was also spiritually experimenting with the morality and faith I had discovered in Lewis' writings. By the end of high school, I was considered by my class to be a budding theologian. In college, I became a religion major. Reading the Book of Matthew for a freshman seminar brought the story of Jesus to my attention for the first time. After initially evaluating Jesus as a Jewish prophet, I read more of Lewis' theology in order to understand the Christian claim about his divinity. After much prayer and reflection, I put my faith in God's incarnation as Jesus Christ. I trusted that God's redemptive work through Christ would cure my moral lapses and perfect me in the ways I couldn't perfect myself. Thanks to this new faith, I experienced a change of heart that quite surprised me. Deep compassion entered my relationships, especially toward the poor and homeless; my prayer life soared, filling me with constant joy; temptations I had long struggled with disappeared. On campus, I remained attached to the Orthodox Jewish commu-

nity while seeking out Christian fellowship and exploring different Christian denominations.

Despite the effects of Christ on my life, a few months later my Christological theology, being insufficiently nuanced, suffered a devastating crisis which forced me to abandon my faith in Christ's divinity. Internally broken, I struggled for a year to redefine my religious identity. I switched from Orthodox to Conservative Judaism, finding the latter more intellectually consistent and philosophically open. Embracing fully the academic study of religious texts, I slowly exchanged all my spiritual convictions for symbolic constructs, while remaining attached to Jewish practice for the sake of community and tradition. The spiritual void within me kept longing for Christ's loving presence, but my Jewish theology as well as my general skepticism made faith in a Christ who wasn't God seem either idolatrous or foolish. On Yom Kippur Eve, I promised the Biblical God whom I accepted only as a symbol not to go to church or pray in Jesus' name for at least a year. A few weeks later, I realized I could no longer endure without an actual God whom I could praise and adore. After sincere prayer, God restored my faith in him and began to guide once more my spiritual quest.

After a month of introspection, I succumbed to my longing for Christ and violated the promises I had made on Yom Kippur Eve. Through studying the New Testament in a college setting, through doing charity knowingly inspired by Christ's love, through befriending intelligent and ethical Christians, I became



Professor Kitcher speaks with students, including Leah.  
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# In View: Veritas

## The Search for Veritas at Columbia

After Richard John Neuhaus spoke about the University as a place where Christ brings together knowledge and turns it into wisdom, a freshmen woman came up to me and said "I'm so happy you guys had Veritas while I'm in school."

Something new and exciting was taking place. A true consideration of Christ had actually become the central topic of the university! Columbia was faced with the question, "Is Truth or *Veritas* found in the person of Jesus Christ?" Over 1,100 students, three renowned professors...a dean and a director of the Journalism School, two people who made the cover of Time Maga-

zine, and two famous scientists all came together with Christ at the center of the search for truth.

When the four days of programs were finished, I gathered with the student leaders to evaluate the forum and the next steps. The Inter-Varsity student president who led the charge of putting this forum together shared with the team "This was the most fulfilling leadership experience I've had in college."

While we were opening our hot bagels, we saw the elevator open in the student center and the prayer team walked out. Students



Over 700 Columbia students leave standing-room-only to hear popular professors.

from different fellowships had been praying together everyday since the beginning of the semester for the Veritas Forum and the morning after was no exception. We knew that God hadn't just concluded something great, but He started something new that's shown us we've only just begun to see

His glory on this campus.

Students continue to pray. Our God continues to heed the cry of His children. We haven't seen anything yet!

**Ashley Byrd is on staff at Columbia.**

*"It showed me that academia/intellectual thinking can coexist with Christianity."*

February 7-10 at Columbia University

**Buddha, Man & Jesus: Three Perspectives on Life** - Panel  
**Does Science Point to Intelligent Design?** - William Dembski  
**Faith in the Daily News Chase** - Panel

**The Nature of the University: Who Are We Becoming?** - Richard John Neuhaus  
**The Gospel of Luke** - dramatic presentation by Bruce Kuhn

*"it helped me understand that my faith is a thinking faith, one that requires working out the implications of what I believe in every facet of my life."*

## Leah's Story Continued

convinced that my religious identity, both as a Jew and as a human being must include Jesus in someway. Yet while my heart increasingly rejoiced in Christ's growing nearness, my recurrent skepticism prevented me from intellectual acquiescence to the truth of the Christian story. I thought I could accept Jesus merely as a moral hero, religious symbol, and perhaps vague spiritual force, and yet gain the benefits of his transforming love. The night after the second Veritas Forum, God's offer of the covenant in Christ's blood became overwhelmingly clear to me, and I finally embraced it both in heart and mind.

Two things stood out about Dr. William Dembski during his debate with an evolutionary chemist:

- 1) The intellectual rigor with which he approached his scientific theory, including his honest admission that "there is a leap of faith from the Designer of the Intelligent Design Theory to the God of a theistic faith like Christianity."
- 2) The humility and sincerity of his Christian faith, which illuminated his whole demeanor.

Together, these two facts suggested to me the possibility of being an intellectually honest scientist while at the same time

having true confidence in the transforming and regenerating faith of Christ.

Not only does faith in my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ renew and refine my relationship with God, strengthen my ethical commitments, and fill me with daily gratitude and joy, but this faith also has given me a truly fulfilled Jewish identity.

As part of Messianic Israel, I now can accept Christian Gentiles, both theologically and practically, as heirs of God's kingdom and members of my spiritual family.

# NYC: The Area

## State of the Area: Craving something deeper

I am convinced that college students are craving something deep in the midst of the information age. Today's students have access to an overwhelming amount of information, but often without a sense of cohesion and value. Statesman Vaclav Havel describes it like this: "[w]ith the loss of God, man has lost a kind of absolute and universal system of coordinates, to which he could always relate everything, chiefly himself. His world and his personality gradually began to break up into separate, incoherent fragments."

Christian evangelist Billy Graham once asked former Harvard President Derek Bok "What is the biggest problem among today's students?" Bok answered, "Emptiness."

We launched the Veritas Forum at

both Columbia University and New York University this February ([www.veritas.org/columbia](http://www.veritas.org/columbia); [www.veritas.org/nyu](http://www.veritas.org/nyu)). Our purpose was to provide a public forum where scholars and students would raise and respond to the hardest questions of the university, society, and the human heart, asking those questions in light of the truth claims of Jesus Christ. The results exceeded what we had imagined.

Each night at both universities, the stirred hearts and imaginations of students, faculty and staff of these universities packed out the venues with as many as 700 students gathered one evening.

"Inspirational! There are thinking Christians!" said one student at Columbia. "It showed me that academia/intellectual thinking can coexist with Christianity," said

another student. At NYU, the entire student leadership of the Atheist, Agnostic, and Freethinkers Club signed up for a Christian discussion group on faith, truth, and life.

From world view panels, to scientific debates, to Christian professor panels, to a Broadway actor performing the gospel of Luke, the Kingdom continues to advance. I invite you to join us in this ministry of reconciliation!

We are quite excited about a significant challenge gift of \$25,000 from an anonymous donor to further this ministry. This will be set up as a one to one match; details about how to participate will be forthcoming. We are quite thankful that God is building a new thing in InterVarsity NYC.

**Kevin Oro-Hahn is the Area Director for NYC.**



**Clockwise from Top Left:** NYU students with alumnus who founded the chapter at NYU in the 1940's, Tom Dunkerton, with wife Barbara; Father Neuhaus; over 350 fill the chapel for "Coffee with Jesus, Darwin & Nietzsche"; Staffworker Anna Lee during follow-up.

"Dembski was amazing!! I found his demeanor and frankness even more inspiring than the content of his lecture, which was very well structured and defended. He made the relevant point that it is a leap of faith from Intelligent Design theory to any form of religion. That was very intellectually honest! But talking to him afterwards, I could still feel how strong his Christian faith is despite his scientific integrity. That was the last link in the series of events which brought me to renew my faith in Christ."

~ Columbia Student

"I was inspired because I never expected a forum like this to take place at a secular school like NYU."

~ Agnostic Sophomore

"I was encouraged that there were faculty at NYU who were not only believers, but believers who lived out their faith."

~ Christian Sophomore

"[Kuhn] definitely inspired me and provided a 'jump start' to my spiritual life, which had been flagging for the past few years. The discussions & performances really brought the Christian faith to life for me in a big way."

~ Agnostic Senior

"I was challenged to continue to explore these intellectual questions and to not be afraid to have these type of questions with my friends. I'm surprised at how many of them actually think of these life questions and with an open heart. I want to be able to open them up to the gospel and a new meaning to life."

~ Christian Senior

**February 8-11 at New York University**

**Jesus for President: Should the Church and State Be Separate? - Richard John Neuhaus**

**Coffee with Jesus, Darwin & Nietzsche - William Dembski & NYU professors**

**Why Do You Believe What You Believe? - Panel of professors**

**One Man, One Gospel, One Act - dramatic presentation by Bruce Kuhn**

# Real Impact

## Alumni Events



### Alumni Weekend 2005: May 27-30 @ Young Life's Saranac Village

Join us for an alumni reunion; see the ministry in action with today's students at Basileia; and relax in the beautiful setting of the Adirondacks all at once!! This event is designed for singles, couples and families.

Go online to [www.ivcfnyj.org/alumni\\_retreat.asp](http://www.ivcfnyj.org/alumni_retreat.asp) . Space is limited, so register early, and before May 7. Still have questions? Call the IVCF NY/NJ office at 212-248-6621, or e-mail us at [ivcfnyj@verizon.net](mailto:ivcfnyj@verizon.net).

### Annual IV in NYC Alumni Dinner: April 28

74 Trinity Place, NYC

This fundraising event is also an opportunity for IV alumni to get an update on the ministry in NYC. Check out [www.ivcfnyc.org/alumni/events/](http://www.ivcfnyc.org/alumni/events/) .

## InterVarsity InView: New York City

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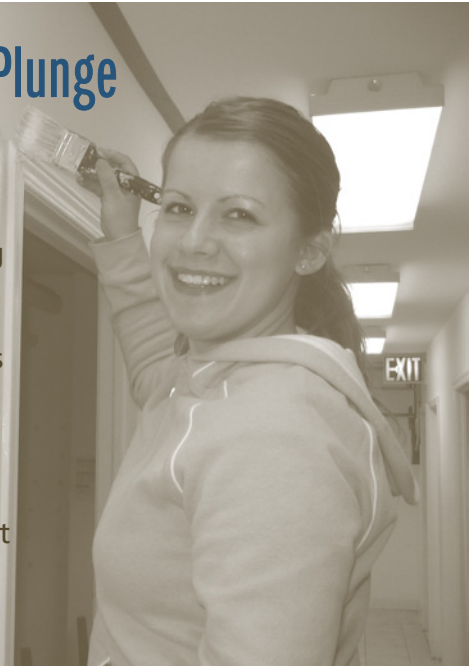
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## NYCUP Spring Break Plunge

For three weeks in a row, over 100 university students from 19 campuses across the nation spent one week of their spring break on a mission: to preach the Gospel by living it. From tutoring young gang members to community advocacy, from loving the homeless caring for them in the streets to sleeping in and running shelters, not only was the city impacted, but their young lives are forever marked by the Kingdom.



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