

Are the Biblical Documents Reliable?

We can trust that the Bible we hold in our hands today is the same as when the various documents were written. Probe founder Jimmy Williams provides evidence for the trustworthiness of the biblical documents.

How do we know that the Bible we have today is even close to the original? Haven't copiers down through the centuries inserted and deleted and embellished the documents so that the original message of the Bible has been obscured? These questions are frequently asked to discredit the sources of information from which the Christian faith has come to us.

Three Errors To Avoid

1. Do not assume inspiration or infallibility of the documents, with the intent of attempting to prove the inspiration or infallibility of the documents. Do not say the bible is inspired or infallible simply because it claims to be. This is circular reasoning.
2. When considering the original documents, forget about the present form of your Bible and regard them as the collection of ancient source documents that they are.
3. Do not start with modern "authorities" and then move to the documents to see if the authorities were right. Begin with the documents themselves.

Procedure for Testing a Document's Validity

In his book, *Introduction in Research in English Literary History*, C. Sanders sets forth three tests of reliability employed in general historiography and literary criticism.[\[1\]](#) These tests are:

- Bibliographical (i.e., the textual tradition from the original document to the copies and manuscripts of that document we possess today)
- Internal evidence (what the document claims for itself)
- External evidence (how the document squares or aligns itself with facts, dates, persons from its own contemporary world).

It might be noteworthy to mention that Sanders is a professor of military history, not a theologian. He uses these three tests of reliability in his own study of historical military events.

We will look now at the bibliographical, or textual evidence for the Bible's reliability.

The Old Testament

For both Old and New Testaments, the crucial question is: "Not having any original copies or scraps of the Bible, can we reconstruct them well enough from the oldest manuscript evidence we *do* have so they give us a true, undistorted view of actual people, places and events?"

The Scribe

The scribe was considered a professional person in antiquity. No printing presses existed, so people were trained to copy documents. The task was usually undertaken by a devout Jew. The Scribes believed they were dealing with the very Word of God and were therefore extremely careful in copying. They did not just hastily write things down. The earliest complete copy of the Hebrew Old Testament dates from c. 900 A.D.

The Masoretic Text

During the early part of the tenth century (916 A.D.), there was a group of Jews called the Masoretes. These Jews were meticulous in their copying. The texts they had were all in

capital letters, and there was no punctuation or paragraphs. The Masoretes would copy Isaiah, for example, and when they were through, they would total up the number of letters. Then they would find the middle letter of the book. If it was not the same, they made a new copy. All of the present copies of the Hebrew text which come from this period are in remarkable agreement. Comparisons of the Masoretic text with earlier Latin and Greek versions have also revealed careful copying and little deviation during the thousand years from 100 B.C. to 900 A.D. But until this century, there was scant material written in Hebrew from antiquity which could be compared to the Masoretic texts of the tenth century A.D.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

In 1947, a young Bedouin goat herdsman found some strange clay jars in caves near the valley of the Dead Sea. Inside the jars were some leather scrolls. The discovery of these "Dead Sea Scrolls" at Qumran has been hailed as the outstanding archeological discovery of the twentieth century. The scrolls have revealed that a commune of monastic farmers flourished in the valley from 150 B.C. to 70 A.D. It is believed that when they saw the Romans invade the land they put their cherished leather scrolls in the jars and hid them in the caves on the cliffs northwest of the Dead Sea.

The Dead Sea Scrolls include a complete copy of the Book of Isaiah, a fragmented copy of Isaiah, containing much of Isaiah 38-6, and fragments of almost every book in the Old Testament. The majority of the fragments are from Isaiah and the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). The books of Samuel, in a tattered copy, were also found and also two complete chapters of the book of Habakkuk. In addition, there were a number of nonbiblical scrolls related to the commune found.

These materials are dated around 100 B.C. The significance of the find, and particularly the copy of Isaiah, was recognized

by Merrill F. Unger when he said, "This complete document of Isaiah quite understandably created a sensation since it was the first major Biblical manuscript of great antiquity ever to be recovered. Interest in it was especially keen since it antedates by more than a thousand years the oldest Hebrew texts preserved in the Masoretic tradition."[\[2\]](#)

The supreme value of these Qumran documents lies in the ability of biblical scholars to compare them with the Masoretic Hebrew texts of the tenth century A.D. If, upon examination, there were little or no textual changes in those Masoretic texts where comparisons were possible, an assumption could then be made that the Masoretic Scribes had probably been just as faithful in their copying of the other biblical texts which could not be compared with the Qumran material.

What was learned? A comparison of the Qumran manuscript of Isaiah with the Masoretic text revealed them to be extremely close in accuracy to each other: "A comparison of Isaiah 53 shows that only 17 letters differ from the Masoretic text. Ten of these are mere differences in spelling (like our "honor" and the British "honour") and produce no change in the meaning at all. Four more are very minor differences, such as the presence of a conjunction (and) which are stylistic rather than substantive. The other three letters are the Hebrew word for "light." This word was added to the text by someone after "they shall see" in verse 11. Out of 166 words in this chapter, only this one word is really in question, and it does not at all change the meaning of the passage. We are told by biblical scholars that this is typical of the whole manuscript of Isaiah."[\[3\]](#)

The Septuagint

The Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint, also confirms the accuracy of the copyists who ultimately gave us the Masoretic text. The Septuagint is often referred to as the LXX because it was reputedly done by

seventy (for which LXX is the Roman numeral) Jewish scholars in Alexandria around 200 B.C. The LXX appears to be a rather literal translation from the Hebrew, and the manuscripts we have are pretty good copies of the original translation.

Conclusion

In his book, *Can I Trust My Bible*, R. Laird Harris concluded, "We can now be sure that copyists worked with great care and accuracy on the Old Testament, even back to 225 B.C. . . . indeed, it would be rash skepticism that would now deny that we have our Old Testament in a form very close to that used by Ezra when he taught the word of the Lord to those who had returned from the Babylonian captivity." [\[4\]](#)

The New Testament

The Greek Manuscript Evidence

There are more than 4,000 different ancient Greek manuscripts containing all or portions of the New Testament that have survived to our time. These are written on different materials.

Papyrus and Parchment

During the early Christian era, the writing material most commonly used was *papyrus*. This highly durable reed from the Nile Valley was glued together much like plywood and then allowed to dry in the sun. In the twentieth century many remains of documents (both biblical and non-biblical) on papyrus have been discovered, especially in the dry, arid lands of North Africa and the Middle East.

Another material used was *parchment*. This was made from the skin of sheep or goats, and was in wide use until the late Middle Ages when paper began to replace it. It was scarce and more expensive; hence, it was used almost exclusively for important documents.

Examples

1. Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus

These are two excellent parchment copies of the entire New Testament which date from the 4th century (325-450 A.D.).[\[5\]](#)

2. Older Papyri

Earlier still, fragments and papyrus copies of portions of the New Testament date from 100 to 200 years (180-225 A.D.) before Vaticanus and Sinaiticus. The outstanding ones are the Chester Beatty Papyrus (P45, P46, P47) and the Bodmer Papyrus II, XIV, XV (P46, P75).

From these five manuscripts alone, we can construct all of Luke, John, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Hebrews, and portions of Matthew, Mark, Acts, and Revelation. Only the Pastoral Epistles (Titus, 1 and 2 Timothy) and the General Epistles (James, 1 and 2 Peter, and 1, 2, and 3 John) and Philemon are excluded.[\[6\]](#)

3. Oldest Fragment

Perhaps the earliest piece of Scripture surviving is a fragment of a papyrus codex containing John 18:31-33 and 37. It is called the Rylands Papyrus (P52) and dates from 130 A.D., having been found in Egypt. The Rylands Papyrus has forced the critics to place the fourth gospel back into the first century, abandoning their earlier assertion that it could not have been written then by the Apostle John.[\[7\]](#)

4. This manuscript evidence creates a bridge of extant papyrus and parchment fragments and copies of the New Testament stretching back to almost the end of the first century.

Versions (Translations)

In addition to the actual Greek manuscripts, there are more

than 1,000 copies and fragments of the New Testament in Syria, Coptic, Armenian, Gothic, and Ethiopic, as well as 8,000 copies of the Latin Vulgate, some of which date back almost to Jerome's original translation in 384-400 A.D.

Church Fathers

A further witness to the New Testament text is sourced in the thousands of quotations found throughout the writings of the Church Fathers (the early Christian clergy [100-450 A.D.] who followed the Apostles and gave leadership to the fledgling church, beginning with Clement of Rome (96 A.D.).

It has been observed that if all of the New Testament manuscripts and Versions mentioned above were to disappear overnight, it would still be possible to reconstruct the entire New Testament with quotes from the Church Fathers, with the exception of fifteen to twenty verses!

A Comparison

The evidence for the early existence of the New Testament writings is clear. The wealth of materials for the New Testament becomes even more significant when we compare it with other ancient documents which have been accepted without question.

Author and Work	Author's Lifespan	Date of Events	Date of Writing*	Earliest Extant MS**	Lapse: Event to Writing	Lapse: Event to MS
Matthew, <i>Gospel</i>	ca. 0-70?	4 BC – AD 30	50 – 65/75	ca. 200	<50 years	<200 years
Mark, <i>Gospel</i>	ca. 15-90?	27 – 30	65/70	ca. 225	<50 years	<200 years
Luke, <i>Gospel</i>	ca. 10-80?	5 BC – AD 30	60/75	ca. 200	<50 years	<200 years

John, <i>Gospel</i>	ca. 10-100	27-30	90-110	ca. 130	<80 years	<100 years
Paul, <i>Letters</i>	ca. 0-65	30	50-65	ca. 200	20-30 years	<200 years
Josephus, <i>War</i>	ca. 37-100	200 BC – AD 70	ca. 80	ca. 950	10-300 years	900-1200 years
Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i>	ca. 37-100	200 BC – AD 65	ca. 95	ca. 1050	30-300 years	1000-1300 years
Tacitus, <i>Annals</i>	ca. 56-120	AD 14-68	100-120	ca. 850	30-100 years	800-850 years
Seutonius, <i>Lives</i>	ca. 69-130	50 BC – AD 95	ca. 120	ca. 850	25-170 years	750-900 years
Pliny, <i>Letters</i>	ca. 60-115	97-112	110-112	ca. 850	0-3 years	725-750 years
Plutarch, <i>Lives</i>	ca. 50-120	500 BC – AD 70	ca. 100	ca. 950	30-600 years	850-1500 years
Herodotus, <i>History</i>	ca. 485-425 BC	546-478 BC	430-425 BC	ca. 900	50-125 years	1400-1450 years
Thucydides, <i>History</i>	ca. 460-400 BC	431-411 BC	410-400 BC	ca. 900	0-30 years	1300-1350 years
Xenophon, <i>Anabasis</i>	ca. 430-355 BC	401-399 BC	385-375 BC	ca. 1350	15-25 years	1750 years
Polybius, <i>History</i>	ca. 200-120 BC	220-168 BC	ca. 150 BC	ca. 950	20-70 years	1100-1150 years

*Where a slash occurs, the first date is conservative, and the second is liberal.

**New Testament manuscripts are fragmentary. Earliest complete

manuscript is from ca. 350; lapse of event to complete manuscript is about 325 years.

Conclusion

In his book, *The Bible and Archaeology*, Sir Frederic G. Kenyon, former director and principal librarian of the British Museum, stated about the New Testament, "The interval, then, between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established."[\[8\]](#)

To be skeptical of the twenty-seven documents in the New Testament, and to say they are unreliable is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity, for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as these in the New Testament.

B. F. Westcott and F.J.A. Hort, the creators of *The New Testament in Original Greek*, also commented: "If comparative trivialities such as changes of order, the insertion or omission of the article with proper names, and the like are set aside, the works in our opinion still subject to doubt can hardly mount to more than a thousandth part of the whole New Testament."[\[9\]](#) In other words, the small changes and variations in manuscripts change no major doctrine: they do not affect Christianity in the least. The message is the same with or without the variations. We have the Word of God.

The Anvil? God's Word.

Last eve I passed beside a blacksmith's door
And heard the anvil ring the vesper chime:
Then looking in, I saw upon the floor

Old hammers, worn with beating years of time.

“How many anvils have you had,” said I,
“To wear and batter all these hammers so?”
“Just one,” said he, and then, with twinkling eye,
“The anvil wears the hammers out, you know.”

And so, thought I, the anvil of God’s word,
For ages skeptic blows have beat upon;
Yet though the noise of falling blows was heard,
The anvil is unharmed . . . the hammer’s gone.

Author unknown

Notes

1. C.Sanders, *Introduction in Research in English Literacy* (New York: MacMillan, 1952), 143.
2. Merrill F. Unger, *Famous Archaeological Discoveries* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 72.
3. R. Laird Harris, *Can I Trust My Bible?* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1963), 124.
4. *Ibid.*, 129-30.
5. Merrill F. Unger, *Unger’s Bible Handbook* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), 892.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. Sir Fredric Kenyon, *The Bible and Archaeology* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1940), 288ff.
9. B.F. Westcott, and F.J.A. Hort, eds., *New Testament in Original Greek*, 1881, vol. II, 2.

Does God Exist? A Christian Argument from Non-biblical Sources

Probe founder, Jimmy Williams, looks at evidence for the existence of God from multiple, non-biblical sources. He demonstrates that God's creation speaks to his creator. The important apologetic discussion forms the foundation for a complete biblical understanding of God and His purposes.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

Metaphysical Options

Most will agree that the most basic, fundamental question concerning existence is not that *nothing* is here, but rather that *something* is here. I am a part of some kind of *reality*. I possess a consciousness, an awareness that something is transpiring, unfolding, happening. And you and I are part of it. The reality borne out of our personal observation and experience is that we are participants in a space-time universe which is characterized by a *series of events*. The mind naturally asks the question, "What is it?" Where did it come from?" Did the *cosmos*, what we see, simply come into being from nothing, or has this material universe of which we are a part always been here? Or is something or someone which transcends this material universe responsible for bringing it into existence and us with it?

All of these questions relate to the philosophical concept of *metaphysics*. Webster defines it thusly: "*That division of philosophy which includes ontology, or the science of being and cosmology, or the science of fundamental causes and processes in things.*"[\[1\]](#) When we seek to answer these basic questions, then, we are thinking "*metaphysically*" about the origin and the causes of the present reality. And at this basic, fundamental level of consideration we really are left with few options, or possible answers, to account for or explain the universe. The three potential candidates are:

(1) Something came from nothing. Most reject this view, since the very idea defies rationality. This explanation to account for the universe is not widely held. Kenny remarks: "*According to the big bang theory, the whole matter of the universe began to exist at a particular time in the remote past. A proponent of such a theory, . . . if he is an atheist, must believe that the matter of the universe came from nothing and by nothing.*"[\[2\]](#) Since nothing cannot produce something by rules of logic (observation, causality), something is *eternal* and *necessary*. Since any series of events is not eternal (thus a contradiction), there is, therefore, an eternal, necessary *something not identical* to the space-time universe.

(2) Matter is eternal and capable of producing the present reality through blind chance. Carl Sagan stated this view clearly when he said, "All that ever was, all that is, and all that ever shall be is the Cosmos."[\[3\]](#) This second view has spawned two basic worldviews-*Materialism* (or *Naturalism*) and *Pantheism*. Both hold the premise that nothing exists beyond matter. *Materialism* therefore is atheistic by definition. *Pantheism* is similar but insists that since God does not exist, nature is imbued with "god" in all its parts.

(3) God created the universe. This view, *Theism*, holds forth the assertion that *Someone* both transcends, and did create the material universe of which we are a part. There are *no* other logical alternatives to explain the *cosmos*. Christians, of

course, embrace this third view, along with all other theists, as the most reasonable explanation for what we find to be true of ourselves and of the world. Holding this view is not simply a statement of blind faith. There are sound and rational reasons for preferring this view over the other two. Theism is therefore a reasonable idea. In fact it is more reasonable to believe that God exists than not to believe He exists. Theologians have posed several lines of “proof” to argue for God’s existence. These arguments, while not *proving* the existence of God, do nevertheless provide insights that may be used to show *evidence* of His existence.

The Cosmological Argument

This argument centers around the concept of *causality*. Every event has a *cause*, and that includes the universe. It had a beginning. There was a time when it was not, and a time when it was:

An **infinite** number of real parts of time, passing in succession and exhausted one after another, appears so evident a contradiction that no man, one should think, whose judgment is not corrupted, instead of being improved, by the sciences, would ever be able to admit it.” (emphasis mine) [{4}](#)

Hume is here arguing that time and space are *not* infinite, not eternal. If this is true, the universe, which is an “effect,” had a *cause*. Robert Jastrow comments,

“The most complete study made thus far has been carried out . . . by Allan Sandage. He compiled information on 42 galaxies, ranging out in space as far as six billion light years from us. His measurements indicate that the universe was expanding more rapidly in the past than it is today. This result lends further support to the belief that the universe exploded into being.” [{5}](#)

He goes on to say:

“No explanation other than the big bang has been found for the fireball radiation. The clincher, which has convinced almost the last doubting Thomas, is that the radiation discovered by Penzias and Wilson has exactly the pattern of wavelengths expected for the light and heat produced in a great explosion.”[\[6\]](#)

Jastrow also concludes the universe is dying:

“Once hydrogen has been burned within that star and converted to heavier elements, it can never be restored to its original state. Minute by minute and year by year, as hydrogen is used up in stars, the supply of this element in the universe grows smaller.”[\[7\]](#) “Astronomers now find they have painted themselves into a corner because they have proven, by their own methods, that the world began abruptly in an act of creation to which you can trace the seeds of every star, every planet, every thing in this cosmos and on the earth. And they have found that all this happened as a product of forces they cannot hope to discover.”[\[8\]](#)

Some have argued that an *infinite regress* of causes may not be logically possible. They say the universe is not a “whole” that *needs* a single cause, but rather that it is “mutually dependent” upon itself! Mutual dependence misses the point. The real issue is why there is an *existing* universe rather than a *non-existing* one. Reality and rationality suggest that every event has a cause. Whole series of events must have a cause as well (since the whole is the sum of the parts). If all the parts were taken away, would there be anything left? If we say yes, then God exists (i.e. an eternal necessary being that is *more* than the world. If we say *no*, then the whole is *contingent* too, and needs a cause *beyond* it (God).

We will conclude this section with an examination of perhaps the most often-asked question concerning the cosmological

argument, "*Where did God come from?*" While it is both reasonable and legitimate to ask this question of the universe which we have just examined, it is irrational and nonsensical to ask that same question of God, since it implies to Him characteristics found only in the finite universe: *space* and *time*. By definition, something eternal must exist *outside* this space/time continuum. The very question posed reveals the inquirer's fallacy of reasoning from within his *own* space/time context! By definition, something *eternal* must exist *outside* both time and space. God has no beginning; He **IS!** (Exodus 3:14).

The Teleological Argument

This second argument for the existence of God addresses the order, complexity, and diversity of the cosmos. "Teleological" comes from the Greek word "*telos*," which means "end" or "goal." The idea behind the argument is that the observable *order* in the universe demonstrates that it functions according to an *intelligent design*, something undeniable to an open-minded, intelligent being. The classic expression of this argument is William Paley's analogy of the watchmaker in his book *Evidences*. If we were walking on the beach and found a watch in the sand, we would not assume that it washed up on the shore having been formed through the natural processes and motions of the sea. We would rather naturally assume that it had been lost by its owner and that somewhere there was a watchmaker who originally designed and built it with a specific purpose in mind. Intelligence cannot be produced by non-intelligence any more than nothing can produce something. There is, therefore, an eternal, necessary intelligence present and reflected in the space-time universe.

Until about five hundred years ago, humanity had no difficulty in acknowledging God as the Creator of the natural order. The best explanation saw Him as the divine Designer who created it with a purpose and maintained all things by the word of His

power (Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 1:17). But the rise of modern science initiated a process we could call the "demythologizing of nature," the material world. Superstition and ignorance had ascribed spirit life even to forest, brook, and mountain. Things not understood scientifically were routinely accepted to be unexplained, supernatural forces at work. Slowly, the mysterious, spiritual factor was drained away as scholars and scientists replaced it with natural explanations and theories of how and why things actually worked. After Copernicus, human significance diminished in the vastness of the cosmos, and it was felt only time and research, not God, would be needed to finally explain with accuracy the totality of the natural order. The idea of a transcendent One came to be deemed unnecessary, having been invalidated by the new theory of natural selection.

Ironically, the same science which took God away then, is bringing back the possibility of His existence today. Physics and quantum mechanics have now brought us to the edge of physicality, to a place where sub-atomic particle structures are described by some as spirit, ghost-like in quality. Neuro-physiologists grapple with enigmatic observations suggesting that the mind *transcends* the brain! Psychology has developed an entirely new branch of study (parapsychology) which asserts that psycho-spiritual forces (ESP, biofeedback, etc.) actually function *beyond* the physical realm. Molecular biologists and geneticists, faced with the highly-ordered and complex structures of DNA, ascribe a word implying "intelligence" to the chaining sequences: the genetic "*code*." And we have already concluded that astrophysicists have settled on the "big bang" which seems to contradict the idea that matter is eternal, and, huge as it is, the universe appears to be finite. Whether we look through the microscope or the telescope it becomes more difficult in the light of experimental science to hold to the old premise that such order and complexity are the products of blind chance. The old naturalistic assumptions are being critically reexamined,

challenged, and found to be unconvincing by many of today's scientists. Dr. Walter Bradley, Professor Emeritus of Mechanical Engineering at Texas A & M University states the case:

“Discoveries of the last half of the 20th century have brought the scientific community to the realization that our universe and our planet in the universe are so remarkably unique that it is almost impossible to imagine how this could have happened accidentally, causing many agnostic scientists to concede that indeed some intelligent creative force may be required to account for it.”[\[9\]](#)

Areas of reconsideration include cosmology and the origin of life, essential elements of design and their recognition, the minimal requirements for a universe to support both life of any type and specifically complex human life, why these requirements are met in our universe, and requirements for a place in that universe uniquely met by planet earth. All of these remarkable features of our world are being reevaluated and point toward intelligent design.

The Moral Argument

This argument for God's existence is based on the recognition of humankind's universal and inherent sense of *right* and *wrong*. (cf. Romans 2:14,15). No culture is without standards of behavior. All groups recognize honesty as a virtue along with wisdom, courage, and justice. And even in the most remote jungle tribes, murder, rape, lying, and theft are recognized as being wrong, in all places and at all times. The question arises, “Where does this sense of morality come from?” C. S. Lewis speaks of this early on in his classic work *Mere Christianity*. He calls this moral law “The Rule of Right and Wrong”—“a thing that is *really there*, not made up by ourselves.”[\[10\]](#) For years Lewis struggled against God because the universe to him seemed unjust and cruel. But he began to analyze his outrage. Where did *he* get the very ideas of *just*

and *unjust*? He said, “A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line.”[{11}](#)

He goes on to suggest that there are three parts to morality. Using the analogy of a fleet of ships on a voyage, he points out that three things can go wrong. The *first* is that ships may either drift apart or collide with and do damage to one another (alienation, isolation: people abusing, cheating, bullying one another). The *second* is that individual ships must be seaworthy and avoid internal, mechanical breakdown (moral deterioration within an individual). Lewis goes on to point out that if the ships keep having collisions they will not remain seaworthy very long, and of course, if their steering parts are out of order, they will not be able to avoid collisions! But there is a *third* factor not yet taken into account, and that is, “Where is the fleet of ships headed?” The voyage would be a failure if it were meant to reach New York but actually arrived in Buenos Aires (the general purpose of human life as a whole, what man was made for)![{12}](#)

The human conscience to which Paul refers in Romans 2 is not found in any other animal—only man. The utter uniqueness of this moral compass within humans, along with other exclusively human qualities (rationality, language, worship and aesthetic inclinations) strongly suggest that man not only has a relationship *downward* to animals, plants and earth, but also a relationship *upward* to the God in Whose image he is. As we saw God’s great power and intelligence expressed in the first two arguments, we also see here that this sense of morality, not known in the world of nature, comes from the Great Law Giver Who is Himself in *character* the “straight line” (righteous, just, holy) against which all human actions are measured.

A Word about Atheism and Agnosticism

An *atheist* is a person who makes a bold assertion, “There is no God.” It is bold because it claims in an *absolute* manner

what we have stated above what is not possible: i.e., the existence or non-existence of God cannot be *proven* absolutely. It is also bold because, in order to make such an assertion, an atheist would literally have to be God himself! He would need to possess the qualities and capabilities to travel the entire universe and examine every nook and cranny of it before he would ever qualify to hold such a dogmatic conclusion!

The most brilliant, highly-educated, widely-traveled human on earth today, having maximized his/her brain cells to optimum learning levels for a lifetime could not possibly "*know*" 1/1000th of all that *could* be known. And knowledge is now doubling by the years rather than by the decades or centuries of the past! Is it *possible* that God could *still* exist outside the very limited, personal knowledge/experience of one highly intelligent human being? Furthermore, before an atheist can identify himself as one, he must first acknowledge the very idea, or concept, or possibility of God so he can then deny His existence!

The Bible says that "he who comes to God must believe that He is. . ." (Hebrews 11:6). In other words, there is a "faith" factor relative to a belief in God's existence. But the dogmatic and bold assertion above is itself an expression of faith. It takes faith to believe God *is*, and it takes faith to say God *is not*. In my judgment, it takes even *more* faith for the atheist to believe in his position because he holds to his faith against overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Christians also affirm God's existence on the basis of faith, but it is a *reasonable* faith based on the true nature of the *cosmos*, not a *blind* faith.

Turning to agnosticism, Webster defines it as a position which states that "neither the existence nor the nature of God, nor the ultimate origin of the universe is known or knowable."[\[13\]](#) Here again is a bold statement: When the agnostic says, "*I don't know*," what is really implied is "I can't know, you can't know, and *nobody* can know." Leith Samuel in his little

book *Impossibility of Agnosticism*, mentions three kinds of agnostics: [{14}](#)

Dogmatic: “I don’t know, you don’t know, and no one can know.” Here is a person who already has his mind made up. He has the same problems as the atheist above—he must know *everything* in order to hold this position honestly.

Indifferent: “I don’t know and I don’t care.” It is not likely that God would reveal Himself to someone who does not care to know: “He who has ears, let him hear.” (Luke 14:35).

Dissatisfied: “I don’t know, but I would like to know.” Here is a person who demonstrates an *openness* to truth and a willingness to change his position should he have sufficient reasons. If such were the case, he would also be demonstrating what is true of agnosticism, namely, that it is meant to be a *temporary* path in search of truth which gives way to a more reasonable and less skeptical view of life and all reality.

“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so they are without excuse.” (Saint Paul, Romans 1:20).

“Only the fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ ” (King David, Psalm 14:1).

Notes

1. *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam Co., Publishers, 1953), s.v. “metaphysics”, 528.
2. Anthony Kenny, *Five Ways* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1969), 66.
3. Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* (New York: Random House, 1980), 4.
4. David Hume, *An Enquiry: Concerning Human Understanding*, Great Books of the Western World, vol. 35 (Chicago: William Benton, 1952), 506.
5. Robert Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers* (New York: W.W.

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8. Robert Jastrow, "A Scientist Caught Between Two Faiths," interviewed by Bill Durbin, *Christianity Today*, 26 (6 August 1982):14-18.

9. Walter L. Bradley, "Is There Scientific Evidence for an Intelligent Creator of the Universe?" (lecture given at High Ground Men's Conference, Beaver Creek, Colo., Lecture given at High Ground Men's Conference, 2 March, 2001).

10. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: MacMillan, 1943), 18.

11. Ibid., 45.

12. Ibid., 70-71.

13. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, s.v. "agnosticism."

14. Leith Samuel, *Impossibility of Agnosticism* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, n.d.).

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"If the Trinity Doctrine is Correct, Then Why Isn't It in the Bible?"

Okay, smart guy. . .if the Trinity doctrine is correct, then why do Catholic encyclopedias themselves admit that it was never taught in the bible? Why does Jesus say that God is greater than he is? Why did Jesus pray to God if God is Jesus? If Jesus died on the stake, how could he bring himself back to life in three days?

Thank you for your recent inquiry. Let me see if I can shed

some light on the things you have questions about. You ask:

If the Trinity doctrine is correct, then why do Catholic encyclopedias themselves admit that it was never taught in the Bible?

You have misinterpreted what they said. What is *not in the Bible* is the use of the term "trinity." It, like many other terms, is a theological designation descriptive of what is *taught* in the Bible. And this concept of a tri-partite Being comes from many places in Scripture, from both Old and New Testaments.

Perhaps the most important is found in Matthew 28:18-20. From the very beginning, the early church baptized in the name of the "Father, the Son, and Holy Ghost" because it was one of the last things Jesus told his disciples to do: "And Jesus said, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.'"

This practice of baptizing converts in the three names of the Godhead was faithfully followed by the Apostles as they spread out to proclaim the Gospel in the first century, and the practice was still in effect at the time of the first major church council at Nicea (A.D. 325). In fact, this was the major topic under consideration. It was here that what we know as the "Doctrine of the Trinity" was hammered out by these church leaders who searched the scriptures and shaped what they believed to be the truth about the Godhead.. I point this out simply to emphasize that the practice of the Church reflected a universal acceptance of the concept of the Trinity for almost 300 years before the Church got around (because of persecution under the various Roman Emperors) to clarifying and resolving this issue at Nicea.

I think it is also important, in light of your question, for

you to know something about this historic Council. Constantine, the first Christian Emperor, called this council, paid the expenses to bring 318 bishops (out of 1,800) from all over the Roman Empire to the little town of Nicea (which is near Constantinople), and served as both host and moderator during the deliberations, which lasted about six weeks.

Most of the bishops present were from the Eastern Mediterranean (Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch, Damascus, Ephesus) and they spoke Greek. In fact, only seven bishops represented the Western church, those who spoke Latin. Each major city throughout the Roman Empire had a bishop, and the bishops from the prominent cities I just named, by sheer representation, dominated the Council. So if anyone was responsible for coming up with the Trinity it was the Eastern church, not the "Catholic" church.

The elderly Bishop of Rome (who at that time was not considered a pope, but one bishop among equals), chose not to come himself due to illness. He did, however, send two of his associates.

All branches of orthodox Christianity—Eastern Orthodox, Protestant, and Roman Catholic, have universally accepted the conclusions of the Council of Nicea concerning the Trinity, namely, that the scriptures clearly teach God is One in Essence, but three in personality: unified, but also distinct. Incidentally, the term "catholic," for the first three or four centuries, was used to describe the *entire* church, the *universal* body of Christians sprinkled throughout the Greco-Roman world. At that time "Catholic" had nothing to do with the city of Rome. (_____, if you want more specific examples from scripture which teach a trinitarian God, let me know).

Why does Jesus say that God is greater than he is? Why did Jesus pray to God if God is Jesus?

Consider John 1:1-4: "In the Beginning was the Word, and the

Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him; and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the light of Men."

This passage also addresses part of your first question as well. Note that there are two terms used in verse one: "the Word," and "God." What does it say about the Word?

"The Word **was**" – the Word existed in the beginning (Eternity Past)

"The Word was **with** God" – (Greek, *pros*, "face-to-face with")

"The Word **was** God." – (Full Deity. . .or God Himself).

Whoever the Word was, the Word possessed (1) eternal existence like God, (2) had face-to-face fellowship with God, and (3) is designated AS God.

Who was the Word? John 1:14 tells us: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." That's Jesus. The second person of the Trinity came and dwelt among us. He became the God-Man. Jesus was just as much man as if He had never been God, and just as much God as if He had never been man. . .two natures distinct, but linked together in one Person.

As a true human, Jesus had feelings, grew to manhood (cf. Luke 2:52), could become weary, thirsty, depressed, and die a human death. When Jesus said, "I thirst" on the cross, He was speaking from His humanity. When He said things like, "Your sins are forgiven you," or "Rise, take up your bed and walk," He was speaking from His deity.

In Christ's humanity, while here on earth, the Father WAS greater, because now Christ was relating to God the Father, not only out of the equality He possessed with His Father in eternal existence, eternal fellowship, and full deity, but now also relating to Him as a man. This also answers your question

about why Jesus prayed to the Father. The answer is simple: Jesus was praying from His humanity. He was a man with normal human emotions. He felt the need to pray as all men do.

_____, your questions have focused entirely on the divine nature of Christ, but His humanity is equally important for us. Consider this passage from Philippians 2:6-11: "Who, although He existed in the form of God, He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped (competed for), but He emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond servant, made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the Name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father..."

The total uniqueness of Christ as the God-Man is absolutely necessary for human salvation. He is the Mediator Who, through His death, provides for us a bridge, or access, to God if we will accept it. And His humanity is necessary to accomplish this, because *Deity doesn't die*: "Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, 'Sacrifice and offering (animals) Thou hast not desired, But a body (His humanity) Thou hast prepared for me. . .Behold, I have come to do thy will, O God.'" (Hebrews 10:5-7)

Further, the scripture makes it clear that the entire plan of redemption to bring about the salvation of human beings involved the entire Trinity. In fact, all the great acts of God throughout the scriptures involved the active participation of the Godhead:

- Creation of the Universe (Ps. 102:25; Col. 1:16; Job 26:31)
- Creation of Man (Gen. 1:1-3, 2:7; Colossian 1:16; Job

33:4)

- The Incarnation (Luke 1:30-37)
- Baptism of Christ (Mark 1:9-11)
- Christ's Death on the Cross (Psalm 22; Romans 8:32; John 3:16, 10:18; Galatians 2:20; Hebrews 9:14)
- Christ's Resurrection (Acts 2:24; John 10:18; I Peter 3:10)
- Inspiration of Scripture (II Timothy 3:16; 1:10,11; II Peter 1:21)

To each of the above events, the scriptures ascribe an active participation by each member of the Trinity.

If Jesus died on the stake, how could he bring himself back to life in three days?

If Jesus is God as well as man, He would have no trouble rising from the dead. The verses cited above (See Resurrection) indicate that Jesus, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit were all actively involved in the process of bringing Him back to life.

I might also add that historically, it is undisputed that during the early centuries there was rapid growth and a dramatic impact by Christianity across the Roman Empire. It is very difficult to explain this, if you just leave a dead Jew hanging on a cross. Nothing short of His actual resurrection can explain the boldness and unfailing commitment of the first disciples to proclaim it so, and, who were, with few exceptions, called upon to seal their affirmation to the truth of this event with their own, violent martyrdoms.

_____, I have taken some time to try to answer your questions. They are all good and important questions. And I hope you can see that there are good answers to these questions. But what is most important is if you really want them and believe them. Your note sounded angry, or hurt. Perhaps you have been "burnt" in the past by some who claim to

be Christians but who have deeply disappointed you. I hope not to do that.

And I hope this information is helpful to you, _____. I am a busy man, but if you sincerely want answers to your questions, I definitely have time for that. The ball is in your court.

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

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Why Did God Allow Animals to be Eaten and Sacrificed?

Why did God allow animals to be sacrificed and to eat other animals if He loves His creation? They are innocent. (I am not an animal rights activist. I am a Christian.)

I think the answer must first be addressed in the reality with which we find ourselves. The cosmos according to Christians was created by God. In the early chapters of Genesis we find that everything God created is expressed over and over as being something GOOD.

The Cosmos is made up of minerals, plants, animals, and humans, the lower to the higher. We are told that only man was created in God's image. That does not mean the rest of creation is of NO value, but there is a hierarchy involved. We are told that all of the created order was intended for man. And that he was to have dominion over it. This does not mean the exploitation of everything for selfish purposes. But God provided a food chain involving plants and animals for man.

We see in the Hindu culture a good example of what happens to a culture when the food chain is distorted. Hindus, with their doctrine of reincarnation, believe that animals are just as valuable as human beings, and some, in a former life, may have actually been human beings. Therefore, all devout Hindus are vegetarians.

What makes this difficult is that now scientists are moving toward the position that even PLANTS have consciousness! Does God love the flora any less than the fauna He created? That leaves us with a diet for our existence totally dependent upon rocks!

Man was never intended to "rape the resources." Having "dominion" meant for man to be good stewards of the plant and animal world. "The Earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof," says the psalmist. (Ps. 24:1) We don't own the earth; we are to be good stewards of it.

The scriptures are filled with indications of God's love for that which He created. Jesus notices the beautiful lilies of the field. Men are not to abuse their animals, but rather care for them with kindness, not with harshness. He takes notice of every sparrow who falls to the ground in death. God explicitly states that one purpose of plants and animals was to provide food for man. He even gave some instructions about *which* animals we were to eat and which we should not.

Consider this verse: Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not *worth much more than they?* (Matt. 6:27). Jesus goes on to say, "Do not be anxious saying, 'What shall we eat? Or what shall we drink?'...for...your heavenly Father *knows* that you have *need* for all these things." (Matt. 6:31-32).

Your question springs out of a matrix of thought which is very popular in the modern world. . .that all life is sacred (I

agree). But the further notion held forth today is that the life of a dolphin or a sea otter or a spotted owl is equal in value to a human being.

The Bible does not teach this equality. Jesus didn't teach it, as we see above. All life is sacred because it came from the hand of God. But it is not all equal in value. Man is set apart as the recipient for which it was intended.

Those who would remove this distinction do not elevate man. If there is nothing special about man (which appears to be true in so many ways), then man is dragged down to the status of beast or animal, and an "open season" on man to cure overpopulation problems would make as much sense as an open season on whitetail deer each fall here in Texas to thin out the one half million which inhabit this state. My point here is that once you remove this line, man is not special in any sense and there is no reason we shouldn't live like the rest of the animals on the planet: "survival of the fittest." Hitler understood this. . .and practiced it!

I don't think you would agree that this is a solution to the problem.

Does this help any?

Sincerely,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

The Christian and the Arts

How should Christians glorify God in the ways we interact with the arts and express our artistic bent?



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

Is there a legitimate place for the appreciation of art and beauty in our lives? What is the relationship of culture to our spiritual life? Are not art and the development of aesthetic tastes really a waste of time in the light of eternity? These are questions Christians often ask about the fine arts.

Unfortunately, the answers we often hear to such questions imply that Christianity can function quite nicely without an aesthetic dimension. At the heart of this mentality is Tertullian's (160-220 A.D.) classic statement, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? The Academy with the Church? We have no need for curiosity since Jesus Christ, nor inquiry since the evangel."

This bold assertion has led many to argue that the spiritual life is essential, but the cultural inconsequential. And today much of the Christian community seems inclined to approach aesthetics in the same hurried and superficial manner with which we live most of our lives. This attitude was vividly expressed recently in a cartoon portraying an American rushing into the Louvre in Paris. The caption read, "Where's the Mona Lisa? I'm double parked!"

Art and Aesthetics

What is aesthetics? Let us begin with a definition. Aesthetics is "The philosophy of beauty and art. It studies the nature of beauty and laws governing its expression, as in the fine arts, as well as principles of art criticism"[\[1\]](#). Formally, aesthetics is thus included in the study of philosophy. Ethical considerations to determine "good" and "bad" include the aesthetic dimension.

Thus, beauty can be contemplated, defined, and understood for itself. This critical process results in explaining why some

artists, authors, and composers are great, some merely good, and others not worthwhile. Aesthetics therefore

“. . . aims to solve the problem of beauty on a universal basis. If successful, it would presently furnish us with an explanation of the quality common to Greek temples, Gothic cathedrals, Renaissance paintings, and all good art from whatever place or time.”[{2}](#)

At the heart of aesthetics, then, is *human creativity* and its diverse cultural expressions. H. Richard Neibuhr has defined it as “the work of men’s minds and hands.” While nature (as God’s gift) provides the raw materials for human expression, culture is that which man produces in his earthly setting. It . . . “includes the totality and the life pattern—language, religion, literature (if any), machines and inventions, arts and crafts, architecture and decor, dress, laws, customs, marriage and family structures, government and institutions, plus the peculiar and characteristic ways of thinking and acting.”[{3}](#)

Aesthetic taste is interwoven all through the cultural fabric of a society and thus cannot be ignored. It is therefore inescapable—for society and for the individual. Human creativity will inevitably express itself and the results (works of art) will tell us something about its creators and the society from which they came. “Through art, we can know another’s view of the universe.”[{4}](#)

“As such, works of art are often more accurate than any other indication about the state of affairs at some remote but crucial juncture in the progress of humanity. . . . By studying the visual arts from any society, we can usually tell what the people lived for and for what they might be willing to die.”[{5}](#)

The term *art* can mean many different things. In the broadest sense, everything created by man is art and everything else is

nature, created by God. However, art usually denotes *good* and *beautiful* things created by mankind (Note: A major point of debate in the field of aesthetics centers around the definition of these two terms). Even crafts and skills, such as carpentry or metal working have been considered by many as *arts*.

While the works of artisans of earlier eras have come to be viewed like fine art, the term *the arts*, however, has a narrower focus in this outline. We are here particularly concerned with those activities of mankind which are motivated by the creative urge, which go beyond immediate material usefulness in their purpose, and which express the uniqueness of being human. This more limited use of the term *art* includes music, dance, painting, sculpture, architecture, drama and literature. The *fine arts* is the study of those human activities and acts which produce and are considered works of art.

Aesthetics then is the study of human responses to things considered beautiful and meaningful. The arts is the study of human actions which attempt to arouse an aesthetic experience in others. A sunset over the mountains may evoke aesthetic response, but it is not considered a piece of art, because it is nature. A row of telephone poles with connecting power lines may have a beautiful appearance, but they are not art because they were not created with an artistic purpose in mind. It must be noted, however, that even those things originally made for non-artistic purposes can and have later come to be viewed as art objects (i.e., antiques).

While art may have the secondary result of earning a living for the artist, it always has the primary purpose of creative expression for describably and indescribably human experiences and urges. The artist's purpose is to create a special kind of honesty and openness which springs from the soul and is hopefully understood by others in their inner being.

Aesthetics and the Bible

What does the Bible have to say about the arts? Happily, the Bible does not call upon Christians to stultify or look down upon the arts. In fact, the arts are *imperative* when considered from the biblical perspective. At the heart of this is the general mandate that whatever we do should be done to the glory of God. We are to offer Him the best that we have—intellectually, artistically, and spiritually.

Further, at the very center of Christianity stands the Incarnation (“the Word made flesh”), an event which identified God with the physical world and gave dignity to it. A real man died on a real cross and was laid in a real, rock-hard tomb. The Greek ideas of “other-worldly-ness” that fostered a tainted and debased view of nature (and hence aesthetics) find no place in biblical Christianity. The dichotomy between sacred and secular is thus an alien one to biblical faith. Paul’s statement, “Unto the pure, all things are pure,” (Tit. 1:15) includes the arts. While we may recognize that human creativity, like all other gifts bestowed upon us by god, may be misused, there is nothing inherently or more sinful about the arts than other areas of human activity.

The Old Testament

The Old Testament is rich with examples which confirm the aesthetic dimension. In Exodus 20:4-5 and Leviticus 26:1, God makes it clear that He does not forbid the *making* of art, only the *worshipping* of art. Consider the use of these vehicles of artistic expression found throughout:

Architecture. God is concerned with architecture. In fact, Exodus 25 shows that God commanded beautiful architecture, along with other forms of art (metalwork, clothing design, tapestry, etc.) in the building of the Tabernacle. Similar instructions were given for the temple later constructed by King Solomon. Here we find something unique in history—art

works designed and conceived by the infinite God, then transmitted to and executed by His human apprentices!

Apparently He delights in color, texture, and form. (We also see this vividly displayed in nature). The point is that God did not instruct men to build a purely *utilitarian* place where His chosen people could worship Him. As Francis Schaeffer said, "God simply wanted beauty in the Temple. God is interested in beauty."[\[6\]](#) And in Exodus 31, God even names the artists He wants to create this beauty, *commissioning* them to their craft for His glory.

Poetry is another evidence of God's love for beauty. A large portion of the Old Testament is poetry, and since God inspired the very words of Scripture, it logically follows that He inspired the poetical form in such passages. David, the man after God's own heart, composed many poems of praise to God, while under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Among the most prominent poetical books are: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. Poetry is also a significant element in the prophets and Job.

The genre of poetry varies with each author's intent. For example, the Song of Solomon is first and foremost a love poem picturing the beauty and glory of romantic, human love between a man and his mate. It is written in the form of lyric idyll, a popular literary device in the Ancient Near East. The fact that this story is often interpreted symbolically to reflect the love between Christ and His Church, or Jehovah and Israel, does not weaken the celebration of physical love recorded in the poem, nor destroy its literary form.

Drama was also used in Scripture at God's command. The Lord told Ezekiel to get a brick and draw a representation of Jerusalem on it. The Ezekiel "acted out" a siege of the city as a warning to the people. He had to prophesy against the house of Israel while lying on his left side. This went on for 390 days. Then he had to lie on his right side, and he carried

out this drama by the express command of God to teach the people a lesson (Ezek. 4:1-6). The dramatic element is vivid in much of Christ's ministry as well. Cursing the fig tree, writing in the dirt with His finger, washing the feet of the disciples are dramatic actions which enhanced His spoken word.

Music and Dance are often found in the Bible in the context of rejoicing before God. In Exodus 15, the children of Israel celebrated God's Red Sea victory over the Egyptians with singing, dancing, and the playing of instruments. In 1 Chronicles 23:5, we find musicians in the temple, their instruments *specifically made* by King David for praising God. 2 Chronicles 29:25-26 says that David's command to have music in the temple was from God, "for the command was from the Lord through His prophets." And we must not forget that all of the lyrical poetry of the Psalms was first intended to be sung.

The New Testament

The New Testament abounds as well with evidence underscoring artistic imperatives. The most obvious is the example of *Jesus Himself*. First of all, He was by trade a carpenter, a skilled craftsman (Mark 6:3). Secondly, we encounter in Jesus a person who loved to be outdoors and one who was extremely attentive to His surroundings. His teachings are full of examples which reveal His sensitivity to the beauty all around: the fox, the bird nest, the lily, the sparrow and dove, the glowering skies, a bruised reed, a vine, a mustard seed. Jesus was also a master storyteller. He readily made use of his own culture setting to impart his message, and sometimes quite dramatically. Many of the parables were fictional stories about they were nevertheless used as vehicles of communication to teach spiritual truths. And certainly the parable of the talents in Matthew 25 includes the artistic gifts.

The apostle Paul also alludes to aesthetics in Philippians 4:8 when he exhorts believers to meditate and reflect upon pure, honest, lovely, good, virtuous and praiseworthy things. We are

further told in Revelation 15:2-3 that art forms will even be present in heaven. So the arts have a place in both the earthly and heavenly spheres!

We should also remember that the *entire Bible* is not only revelation, it also is itself a work of art. In fact, it is many works of art—a veritable *library of great literature*. We have already mentioned poetry, but the Bible includes other literary forms as well. For example, large portions of it are narrative in style. Most of the Old Testament is either *historical narrative* or *prophetic narrative*. And the Gospels, (which recount the birth, life, teachings, death and resurrection of Christ), are *biographical narrative*. Even the personal letters of Paul and the other New Testament authors can quite properly be considered *epistolary literature*.

Aesthetics and Nature

The Bible makes it very clear that a companion volume, the book of Nature, has a distinct aesthetic dimension. Torrential waterfalls, majestic mountains, and blazing sunsets routinely evoke human aesthetic response as easily as can a vibrant symphony or a dazzling painting. The very fabric of the universe expresses God's presence with majestic beauty and grandeur. Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows forth his handiwork." In fact, nature has been called the "aesthetics of the Infinite."

The brilliant photography of the twentieth century has revealed the limitless depths of beauty in nature. Through telescope or microscope, one can devote a lifetime to the study of some part of the universe—the skin, the eye, the sea, the flora and fauna, the stars, the climate.

And since God's creation is multi-dimensional, an apple, for instance, can be viewed in different ways. It can be considered economically (how much it costs), nutritionally (its food value), chemically (what it's made of), or

physically (its shape). But it may also be examined aesthetically: its taste, color, texture, smell, size, and shape. All of nature can be appreciated for its aesthetic qualities which find their source in God, their Creator.

Human Creativity

Wherever human culture is found, artistic expression of some form is also found. The painting on the wall of an ancient cave, or a medieval cathedral, or a modern dramatic production are all expressions of *human creativity*, given by God, the Creator.

Man in God's Image

In Genesis 1:26-27, for example, we read: "Then God said, Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; and let them rule over . . . all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' And God created man *in His own image, in the image of God He created him* male and female He created them" (Italics mine).

After creating man, God told man to subdue the earth and to rule over it. Adam was to cultivate and keep the garden (Gen. 2:15) which was described by God as "very good" (Gen. 1:31). The implication of this is very important. God, the Creator, a lover of the beauty in His created world, invited Adam, one of His creatures, to share in the process of "creation" with Him. He has permitted humans to take the elements of His cosmos and create new arrangements with them. Perhaps this explains the reason why creating anything is so fulfilling to us. We can express a drive within which allows us to do something all humans uniquely share with their Creator.

God has thus placed before the human race a banquet table rich with aesthetic delicacies. He has supplied the basic ingredients, inviting those made in His image to exercise their creative capacities to the fullest extent possible. We

are privileged as no other creature to make and enjoy art.

It should be further noted that *art of all kinds is restricted to a distinctively human practice*. No animal practices art. It is true that instinctively or accidentally beautiful patterns are formed and observed throughout nature. But the spider's web, the honeycomb, the coral reef are *not conscious* attempts of animals to express their aesthetic inclinations. To the Christian, however, they surely represent God's efforts to express. Unlike the animals, man *consciously* creates. Francis Schaeffer has said of man:

“[A]n art work has value as a creation because man is made in the image of God, and therefore man not only can love and think and feel emotion, but also has the capacity to create. Being in the image of the Creator, we are called upon to have creativity. We never find an animal, non-man, making a work of art. On the other hand, we never find men anywhere in the world or in any culture in the world who do not produce art. Creativity is a part of the distinction between man and non-man. All people are to some degree creative. Creativity is intrinsic to our mannishness.”[\[7\]](#)

The Fall of Man

There is a dark side to this, however, because sin entered and affected all of human life. A bent and twisted nature has emerged, tainting every field of human endeavor or expression and consistently marring all results. The unfortunate truth is that divinely endowed creativity will always be accompanied in earthly life by the *reality and presence of sin expressed through a fallen race*. Man is Jekyll and Hyde: noble image-bearer and morally crippled animal. His works of art are therefore bittersweet. Calvin acknowledged this tension when he said:

“The human mind, however much fallen and perverted from its original integrity, is still adorned and invested with

admirable gifts from its creator. If we reflect that the Spirit of God is the only foundation of truth, we will be careful, as we would avoid offering insult to Him, not to reject or condemn truth wherever it appears. In despising the gifts, we insult the Giver.”{8}

Understanding this dichotomy allows Christians genuinely to appreciate something of the contribution of every artist, composer, or author. God is sovereign and dispenses artistic talents upon whom He will. While Scripture keeps us from emulating certain lifestyles of artists or condoning some of their ideological perspectives, we can nevertheless admire and appreciate their talent, which ultimately finds its source in God. This should and can be done without compromise and without hesitation.

The fact is that if God can speak through a burning bush or Baalam’s ass, He can speak it through a hedonistic artist! The question can never be how worthy is the vessel, but rather, Has truth been expressed? God’s truth is still sounding forth today—from the Bible, from nature, and even from a fallen humanity.

Because of the Fall, absolute beauty in the world is gone. But participation in the aesthetic dimension reminds us of the beauty that once was, and anticipates its future luster. With such beauty present today that can take one’s breath away, even in this unredeemed world, one can by speculate about what lies ahead for those who love Him!

Characteristics of Good Art

We now turn to the question of the important ingredients of various art forms.

First, artistic truth includes not only the tangible, but also the *realm of the imaginative, the intangible*. Art therefore may or may not include the cognitive, the objective. Someone

asked a Russian ballerina who had just finished an interpretive dance, "What did it mean? What were you trying to say?" The ballerina replied, "If I could have said it, I wouldn't have danced it!" There is then a communication of truth in art which is real, but may not be able to be reduced to and put neatly into words.

Great art is also always coupled with *the hard discipline of continual practice*. Great artists are the ones who, when observed in the practice of their art appear to be doing something simple and effortless. What is not visible are the bone weary hours of committed practice that preceding such artistic spontaneity and deftness.

All art has intrinsic value. It doesn't have to *do* anything to have value. Once created, it has already "done" something. It does not have to be a *means* to an end, nor have any utilitarian benefit whatsoever. Even *bad art* has some value because as a creative work, it is still linked to God Himself, the Fountain of all creativity. The creative process, however expressed, is good because it is linked to the *Imago Dei* and shows that man, unique among God's creatures, has this gift. This is true even when the results of the creative gift (specific works of art) may be aesthetically poor or present the observer with unwholesome content and compromising situations.

But we would do well to remind ourselves at this point that God does not censor out all of the things in the Bible which are wrong or immoral. He "tells it like it is," including some pretty detailed and sordid affairs! The discriminating Christian should therefore develop the capacity to distinguish poor aesthetics and immoral artistic statements from true creativity and craftsmanship³ dismissing and repudiating the former while fully appreciating and enjoying the latter. Christians, beyond all others, possess the proper framework to understand and appreciate all art in the right perspective. It is a pity that many have deprived themselves of the arts so

severely from much that they could enjoy under the blessing and grace of God.

Artistic expression *always makes a statement*. It may be either *explicitly* or *implicitly* stated. Some artists explicitly admit their intent is to say something, to convey a message. Other artists resist, or even deny they are making a statement. But consciously or not, a statement is always being made, because each artist is subjectively involved and profoundly influenced by his/her cultural experience. Consciously or unconsciously, the cultural setting permeates every artistic contribution and each work tells us something about the artist and his era.

An unfortunate trend in recent years has been the increase in the number of artists who admit their primary desire is to say *something*. Art is not best served by an extreme focus on making a statement. The huge murals prominent in former communist lands were no doubt helpful politically, but they probably did not contribute much aesthetically. Even some Christian art falls into this trap. Long on statement, morality, and piety, it often falls short artistically (though sincerely offered and theologically sound), because it is cheaply and poorly done. Poetry and propaganda are not the same, from communist or Christian zealot.

Another characterization of modern statements is the *obsession of self*. Since the world has little meaning to many moderns, the narcissistic retreat into self is all that remains to be expressed. Thus the public is confronted today with many artists who simply portray their own personal psychological and spiritual wanderings. In art of this type, extreme subjectivism is considered virtue rather than vice. The statement (personal to the extreme) overwhelms the art. Many of these statements seem to imply a desperate cry for help, for significance, for love. In such art feelings overwhelm form; confessional outpourings bring personal relief, but little effort is put forth or the thought necessary for the rigid mastery of technique and form. Perhaps that is why there

is such a glut of mediocre art today! It simply doesn't take as much or as long to produce it.

But consider artists of earlier centuries, those who never even signed their names to their work. This was not because they were embarrassed by it. They simply lived in a culture where the art was more important than the artist. Today we are awed more by the artist or the virtuoso performer than we are by the art expressed. Much of the earlier work was dedicated to God; ours is mostly dedicated to the celebration of the artist. Critic Chad Walsh alludes to a modern exception in the writings of C. S. Lewis when he says that *Mere Christianity* "transcends itself and its author . . . it is as though all the brilliant writing is designed to create clear windows of perception, so that the reader will look *through* the language and not *at* it." [\[9\]](#) Great art possesses this transcendent durability.

Art forms and styles are constantly *changing through cultural influences*. The common mistake of many Christians today is to consider one form "godly" and another "ungodly." Many would dismiss the cubism of Duchamp or the surrealism of Dali as worthless, while holding everything from the brush of Rembrandt to be inspired. This attitude reveals nothing more than the personal aesthetic tastes of the one doing the evaluating.

Form and style must be considered in their historical and cultural contexts. A westerner would be hard pressed, if totally unfamiliar with the music of Japan, to distinguish between a devout Buddhist hymn, a sensual love song, and a patriotic melody, even if he heard them in rapid sequence. But every Japanese could do so immediately because of familiarity with their own culture.

Aesthetic sense is therefore greatly conditioned by personal cultural experience. Just as each child is born with the capacity to learn language, so each of us is born with an

aesthetic sensibility which is influenced by the culture which surrounds us. To judge the art or music of Japan as inferior to American art or music is as senseless as suggesting the Japanese language is inferior to the English language. Difference or remoteness do not imply inferiority!

Truth can be expressed by non-believers, and error may be expressed by believers. When Paul delivered his famous Mars Hill address in Athens, he quoted from a pagan poet (Acts 17:28) to communicate a biblical truth. In this case, Paul used a secular source to communicate biblical truth because the statement affirmed the truth of revelation. On the other hand, error can be communicated in a biblical context. For example, in Exodus 32:2-4 we read of Aaron fashioning a golden calf for the children of Israel to worship. This was a wrong use of art because it directly disobeyed God's command not to worship any image.

Evaluating Art

How should a Christian approach art in order to evaluate it? Is beauty simply "in the eye of the beholder?" Or are there guidelines from Scripture which will provide a framework for the evaluation and enjoyment of art?

Earlier, we mentioned a statement by Paul from Philippians 4. While the biblical context of this passage looks beyond aesthetics, in a categorical way we are given in the passage (by way of application) some criteria necessary for artistic analysis. Each concept Paul mentions in verse 8 can be used as sort of a "key" to unlock the significance of the art we encounter and to genuinely appreciate it.

Truth. It is probably not by accident that Paul begins with *truth*. Obviously not every work of art contains a truth statement. But wherever and to what extent such a statement is being made, the Christian is compelled to ask, "Is this really true?" Does life genuinely operate in this fashion in the

light of God's revelation? And Christians must remember that truth is honestly facing the negatives as well as the positives of reality. Negative content has its place, even in a Christian approach to art. But Christian hope allows us to view these works in a different light. We sorrow, but not like those who have no hope. Ours is a sorrow of expectancy and ultimate triumph; there is one of total pessimism and despair.

Honor. A second aesthetic key has to do with the concept of honor and dignity. This can be tied back to what was said earlier about the nature of man created in God's image. This gives a basis, for example, to reject the statement being made in the total life work of Francis Bacon (d. 1993). In many of his paintings this contemporary British artist presents us with solitary, decaying humans on large, depressing canvasses. Deterioration and hopeless despair are the hallmarks of his artistic expression. But if Christianity is true, these are inaccurate portrayals of man. They are half-truths. They leave out completely a dimension which is really true of him. Created in God's image, he has honor and dignity—even though admittedly he is in the process of dying, aging, wasting away. The Christian is the only one capable of truly comprehending what is missing in Bacon's work. Without a Christian base, we would have to look at the paintings and admit man's "true" destiny, i.e., extinction, along with the rest of the cosmos. But as Christians we can and must resist this message, because it is a lie. The gospel gives real hope—to individuals and to history. These are missing from Bacon's work and are the direct result of his distorted worldview.

Just. The third key to aesthetic comprehension has to do with the moral dimension. Not all art makes a moral statement. A Haydn symphony does not, nor does a portrait by Renoir. But where such a statement *is* being made, Christians must deal with it, not ignore it. We will also do well to remember that moral statements can often be stated powerfully in negative ways, too. Picasso's *Guernica* comes to mind. He was protesting

the bombing by the Germans of a town by that name just prior to World War II. Protesting injustice is a cry for justice. Only the Christian is aware and sure of where it can ultimately be found.

Pure. This fourth key also touches on the moral—by contrasting that which is innocent, chaste, and pure from that which is sordid, impure, and worldly. An accurate application of the principle will help distinguish the one from the other. For instance, one need not be a professional drama critic to identify and appreciate the fresh, innocent love of Romeo and Juliet, nor to distinguish it from the erotic escapades of a Tom Jones. The same dynamic is at work when comparing Greek nudes and *Playboy* centerfolds. One is lofty, the other cheap. The difference is this concept of purity. It allows the Christian to look at two nudes and quite properly designate one “art” and the other “pornography.” Possessing the mind of Christ, we have the equipment for identifying purity and impurity to a high degree.

Lovely. While the first four concepts have dealt with facets of artistic statements, the fifth focuses on sheer aesthetic beauty. “Whatsoever things are lovely,” Paul says. A landscape makes no moral statement, but it can exhibit great beauty. The geometric designs of Mondrian may say nothing about justice, but they can definitely engage us aesthetically. The immensity and grandeur of a Gothic cathedral will inspire artistic awe in any sensitive breast, but they may do little else. Again, the Christian is equipped to appreciate a wide range of artistic mediums and expressions. If there is little to evaluate morally and rationally, we are still free to appreciate what is beautiful in the art.

Good Report. In this concept, we have the opportunity to evaluate the life and character of the artist. What kind of a person is he? If a statement is being made, does the artist, composer, or author believe in that statement? Or was it to please a patron, a colleague, or a critic? Is there a

discontinuity between the statement of the work and the statement being made through the personal life of its creator? For example, Handel's *Messiah* is a musical masterpiece, but he was no saint! Filippo Lippi used his own mistress as a model for Mary in this Madonna paintings. The "less than exemplary" lifestyle of a creative person may somewhat tarnish his artistic contribution, but it does not necessarily or totally obliterate it. Something of God's image always shines through in the creative process. The Christian can always give glory to God for that, even if a work of art has little else going for it. The greatest art is true, skillfully expressed, imaginative, and unencumbered by the personal and emotional hang-ups of its originators.

Excellence. This is a comparative term. It speaks of degrees, assuming that something else is not excellent. The focus is on quality. Quality can mean many things in the realm of art, but one sure sign of it is craftsmanship. *Technical mastery* is one of the essential ingredients which separates the great artist from the rank amateur. Obviously, the more one knows about technique and artistic skill, the better one is able to appreciate whether an individual artist, author, composer, or performer has what is necessary to produce great art. Many Christians have made unfortunate value judgments about art of all kinds. Through ignorance and naivete, superficial understanding of technique has been followed by smug rejection. This has erected barriers instead of bridges built to the artistic community, thus hindering a vital witness. We need to know *what* is great art and *why* it is considered such.

Excellence is also found in the *durability of art*. Great art lasts. If it has been around several hundred years, it probably has something going for it. It has "staying power." Christians should realize that some of the art of this century will not be around in the next. Much of it will pass off the scene. This is a good indication that it does not possess great aesthetic value; it is not excellent.

Praise. Here we are concerned with the impact or the effect of the art. Is *anything* praiseworthy? The crayola scribblings of a toddler are praiseworthy to some extent, but it does not elicit a strong aesthetic response. We are not gripped or overpowered by it. But great art has power and is therefore a forceful tool of communication. Francis Schaeffer has mentioned that the greater the art, the greater the impact. Does it please or displease? Inspire or depress? Does it influence thinking and behavior? Would it change a person? Would it change you. Herein lies the “two-edged-swordness” of art. It can elevate a culture to lofty heights and it can help bring a society to ruin. It is the *result* of culture, but it can also *influence* culture.

Conclusion

Paul undergirds this meaty verse with the final command, *think on these things*. Two very important propositions come forth with which we can conclude this section. First, he reminds us that *Christianity thrives on intelligence*, not ignorance—even in the aesthetic realm. Christians *need* their minds when confronting the artistic expressions of a culture. To the existentialist and the nihilist, the mind is an enemy, but to the Christian, it is a friend. Second, it is noteworthy that Paul has suggested such a *positive approach* to life and, by application, to art. He doesn't tell us that whatsoever things are false, dishonorable, unjust impure, ugly, of bad report, poorly crafted, and mediocre are to have the focus of our attention. Here again the *hope* of the Christian's approach to life in general rings clearly through. Our lives are not to be lived in the minor key. We observe the despair, but we can see something more. God has made us more than conquerors!

Arts, Culture and the Christian

We now turn to two final areas of consideration in the way of suggested applications of what has been discussed.

Christ and Culture

At the beginning, we mentioned that aesthetics is related to culture, because in culture we find the expressions of human creativity. In his very fine book, *A Return to Christian Culture*, Richard Taylor points out that each of us is related to culture in two ways: we find ourselves *within* a cultural setting and we each *possess* a culture personally. That is, society has certain acceptable patterns to which individuals are expected to conform. When one does so, one is considered "cultured."

In the light of Romans 12:2 and other biblical passages, the challenge for the Christian is to resist being "poured into the mold of the world" without also throwing out legitimate aesthetic interests. At the individual level, a Christian should seek to bring his maximum efforts toward the ". . . development of the person, intellectually, aesthetically, socially to the full use of his powers, in compatibility with the recognized standards of excellence of his society."[10](#)

Culturally speaking, the same goal could be stated for Christian and non-Christian alike, but the Christian who wants to reflect the best in culture has his/her different motives. And some Christians can display the fruit of the Spirit, but be largely bereft of cultural and aesthetic sensibilities. D. L. Moody is said to have "butchered the King's English," but he was used mightily by God on two continents. This would suggest that cultural sophistication is not absolutely necessary for God to use a person for spiritual purposes, but one could well ponder how many opportunities to minister have been lost because an individual has made a cultural "*faux pas*." The other side of the coin is that a person may have reached the pinnacle of social and aesthetic acceptability but have no spiritual impact on his surroundings whatsoever.

Three words are important to keep in mind while defining Christian responsibility in any culture. The first is

cooperation with culture. The reason for this cooperation is that we might identify with our culture so it may be influenced for Jesus Christ. Jesus is a model for us here. He was not generally a non-conformist. He attended weddings and funerals, synagogues and feast. He was a practicing Jew. He generally did the culturally acceptable things. When He did not, it was for clear spiritual principles.

A second word is *persuasion*. The Bible portrays Christians as salt and light, the penetrating and purifying elements within a culture. Christianity is intended to have a sanctify influence on a culture, not be swallowed up by it in one compromise after another.

A third concept is *confrontation*. By carefully using Scripture, Christians can challenge and reject those elements and practices within a culture that are incompatible with biblical truth. There are times when Christians must confront society. Things such as polygamy, idolatry, sexual immorality, and racism should be challenged head-on by Christians.

How can accomplish this kind of impact? First by the *development of high personal, cultural, and aesthetic standards*. These include tact, courtesy, dress, and speech. In doing this, Christians need to avoid two extremes. The first is the tendency to try to "keep up with the Joneses." This becomes the "Cult of the Snob." A second extreme is to react against the Joneses and join the "Cult of the Slobs."

Second, Christians must employ all of life to proclaim a Christian worldview. In a century dominated by darkness, despair, and dissonance, Christians can still offer a message and demeanor of hope. If being a Christian is a superior way of living, its benefits should be apparent to all.

Finally, Christians should be encouraged to *become involved in the arts*. This can be done first of all by learning to evaluate and appreciate the arts with greater skill.

Generally, Christians can become involved in the arts in one of three ways.

Involvement in the Arts

One of the deep hopes for this paper is that it might instill in the reader a healthy desire to plunge more deeply into the arts and enjoy what is there with the freedom Christ has given. It might encourage us to remind ourselves that Paul lived in a X-rated culture similar to our own. Yet he and most of the other believers kept their spiritual equilibrium in such a setting and were used mightily by God in their culture.

Too often today Christians, like the Pharisees of old, are seeking to eliminate the leprous elements which touch their lives. With increasing isolation, they are focused more on what the diseases of society can do to them than how they might affect the diseased! Nowhere is this more critically experienced than in the arts. We mostly shy away from those contexts which disturb us. And there is today much in the arts to disturb us—be we creator, spectator (a form of participation) or performer.

Ugliness and decadence abound in every culture and generation. From this we cannot escape. But Jesus touched the leper. He made contact with the diseased one in need. As Christians, our focus should be not on what art brings to us, but rather what we can bring to the art! Therefore the development of imagination and a wholesome, expanded analysis of even the many negative contemporary works is possible when viewed in the broad themes of humanity, life, and experience of a truly Christian worldview. Great art is more than a smiling landscape. Beauty and truth include terrible and ominous aspects as well, like a storm on the ocean, or the torn life of a prostitute.

Christians can also experience the arts as *participators and performers*. If each person is created in the image of God,

some creativity is there to be personally expressed in every one of us. Learn what artistic talents you have. Discover how you can best express your creativity and then do so. Learn an instrument, write some poetry. Take part in a stage production. Your Christianity will not mean less, but more to you if you do.

A third area often overlooked must also be mentioned. I refer to those greatly gifted and talented Christians among us who should be encouraged to *consider the arts as a career*. A Christian influence in the arts is sorely needed today, and things will not improve as long as Christians are happy to allow the bulk of contemporary artistry to flow forth from those who have no personal relationship with the One who gave them their talents. The artistic environment is a tough place to live out your Christian faith, and the dangers are great, but to do so successfully will bring rich rewards and lasting fruit.

Gini Andrews, an acclaimed concert pianist and author, writes of the great need for Christians to excel in all the artistic fields and sounds a challenge for them to develop their gifts:

“All the disciplines, music, painting, sculpture, theater, and writing, are in need of pioneers who seek a way to perform in a twentieth century manner; to show with quality work that there is an answer to the absurdity of life, to the threat of annihilation, to the mechanization of man, the message being sounded loud and clear by the non-Christian artist. . . . “If we are to present God’s message to disillusioned, frenetic twentieth century people, it’s going to take His creativity expressed in special ways. I hope that some of you in the creative fields will be challenged by the Almightyness of our Creator-God and will spend long hours before Him, saying, like Jacob, ‘I will not go unless you bless me, until you show me how to speak out your wonder to the contemporary mind.’”[\[11\]](#)“

Here is expressed the unprecedented challenge and opportunity before the body of Christ today. May God enable us to seize it.

Notes

1. William Bridgewater, ed. *The Columbia-Viking Desk Encyclopedia, Vol. I* (New York: Viking Press, 1953), p. 16.

2. John I. Sewall, *A History of Western Art*. (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1953), p. 1.

3. Richard S. Taylor, *A Return to Christian Culture*. (Minneapolis: Dimension Books, 1975), p. 12.

4. Marcel Proust. *Maximus*.

5. Sewall, *Ibid*.

6. Francis Schaeffer, *Art & the Bible*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p. 15.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

8. John Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion, Vol. 1*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), p. 236.

9. Chad Walsh. "The Literary Stature of C. S. Lewis," *Christianity Today*, June 8, 1979) p.22.

10. Taylor, p. 33.

11. Gini Andrews, *Your Half of the Apple* (Grand Rapids, MI:, Zondervan, 1972) pp. 64-65.

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“How Do We Know Christ Rose from the Dead? And Who Wrote the Bible?”

I have been struggling within myself for nearly all my life as to whether to believe that Christ actually rose from the dead. For without that fact, Christianity is an empty promise. So I ask myself, “What evidence is there?” The Bible is the only source of documentation we have to examine. I have often asked and never received an answer, as to exactly who wrote the Bible. The New Testament appears to have been written (opinions differ) from 75 to 400 years after Jesus was to have been around. Who put the pen to the paper on the originals? Who wrote the Old Testament? And when? Jesus was using a copy. Who compiled all the books of the O. T.? Why were they compiled before the coming of Christ? Did they come from a common geographical area, or were different continents involved? What language was used?

I hear statements like “They found hundreds of complete copies of the Bible in jars in the Dead Sea caves.” I try to envision how many thousands of papyri must have been preserved for that to be true. Do you have some light on this subject?

Thank you for your recent e-mail requesting answers regarding the Resurrection, and how the Old and New Testaments came to be developed.

I will try to give you an answer on each of your questions.

I have been struggling within myself for nearly all my life as to whether to believe that Christ actually rose from the dead. For without that fact, Christianity is an empty promise. So I ask myself, “What evidence is there?”

There are a number of components that would suggest Christ

actually rose from the dead. I believe this to be an historical event.

I liken the Resurrection to a space probe to Mars or Venus. Once it is launched, it is on the way to its destination upon the basis of the powerful impetus from its origination.

There is no doubt that something monumental must have occurred around 32 A.D.!

I would suggest you go back to the Probe Web site and you will find essays speaking to this issue. We suggest these:

[The Resurrection: Fact or Fiction?](#)

[Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Fiction?](#)

[Who's Got the Body?](#)

[Jesus Must Have Risen: Disciples' Lives Changed](#)

[Cruci-fiction and Resuscitation](#)

[A \(Not So\) Brief Defense of Christianity](#)

There are many good reasons to believe this event actually occurred.

You cannot explain the origination of Christianity if you leave a dead Jew hanging on a Cross. The cowardice of the disciples was immediately replaced with a boldness and an affirmation, declaring that Christ arose from the Dead, and eleven of "the Twelve" sealed their belief in this event with the spilling of their own blood, becoming the first Christian martyrs.

The idea that they all got together and conjured this up among themselves is preposterous! They would not have died for what they knew was a lie. In effect, the rapid and dramatic spread of Christianity through out the Greco-Roman World is a second "booster" which changed the world that was. And we are still feeling the impact!

The Bible is the only source of documentation we have to

examine. I have often asked and never received an answer, as to exactly who wrote the Bible. It appears to have been written (opinions differ) from 75 to 400 years after Jesus was to have been around.

I'm not sure where you got the idea that the New Testament was developed in a time frame from "75-400 years." This is definitely not accurate, and needs clarification.

What we do have over those four centuries is a great deal of manuscript evidence of the New Testament. We need to start with the first century A.D., the century when all of the New Testament documents were written.

To do this, we need to establish and delineate the time frames of events, from the birth of Christ to the end of the first century A.D.

JESUS: Let's start with His life. The span of his life begins around 6 B.C. We have a very firm date for Herod the Great. He died in 4 B.C. So, given the two years allowed for his order to slaughter the first born male infants up to two years old in Bethlehem, Jesus' birth could have occurred as early as 6 B.C. Doing the math suggests that Jesus may have been 38 years old when He was crucified. (The date for the crucifixion by most scholars is fixed at 32 A.D.)

Our first consideration is the time span from Christ's resurrection to the end of the book of Acts. As you probably know, Acts is "Volume 2" (Luke's Second Treatise) which follows his first Treatise, The Gospel of Luke.

You may remember that at the end of the Book of Acts, Luke is still Paul's traveling companion, and they are both still alive and ministering. The dates for the writing of these are 58 A.D. for Luke and 66-67 A.D. for Acts.

We have a pretty firm date for the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul in Rome at the hands of Nero in 68 A.D. He served as

Emperor from 50 to 68 A.D. If so, his suicide occurred in the same year he executed Peter and Paul.

Now you must recognize that the Four Gospels, Acts, and all the Epistles (letters) were written by the late Sixties, with John's Gospel and his three Epistles of John and his Book of Revelation coming a little later, around 90-95 A.D.

And even before any of the New Testament documents were written down, we know that there was an oral tradition already circulating: that is, a verbal collection of the sayings, stories, and actions of Christ.

CHURCH FATHERS: We also know that about 100 A. D. we have two epistles written by Clement, one of the early bishops of Rome. He wrote both of them to the Church at Corinth at just about the time John was writing the Book of Revelation. He speaks with some authority to them and perhaps other bishops and churches. And in these letters, there are indications that he was familiar with some of the writings and teachings of the Apostle Paul. You will remember that Paul gave instructions in some of his epistles, asking that the churches he wrote to should copy his epistles and send them to the other churches for instruction and encouragement.

All of this is to say, that the books which make up our New Testament were all written and being passed around and being copied within the first century A.D.!

Now it is true that we do not have one original scrap (we call the original the "autograph") of any of the New Testament documents. But we do have, through the combined writings and citations of the Church Fathers from 100 to 400 A.D., an enormous amount of material. With the exception of a few verses, we are able to reconstruct the entire New Testament from the Scripture quotations of the Church Fathers!

Let me give you an example. Let's say you were a teacher and you wrote the Prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1-18) on the

chalk board. Then you had all of your students copy those 18 verses in their notebooks. After they had done so, let's say you went back to the chalk board and erased the Prologue you wrote. Now, have we lost the Autograph? Yes. We have lost the original, but we have 25 copies of it that we can compare with each other and see where there might be a misspelled word, or a missing phrase or sentence, etc.

And this is what we call the science of "Textual Criticism." Obviously, the earliest extant manuscripts are the most valuable to us. For example, I was recently in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, Ireland and saw some of the most ancient manuscripts, portions of the New Testament (papyrus) which date back to the beginning of the second century (the 100s). You would be amazed at how much of the New Testament is in that library, from the second to the fourth Centuries! You could probably get the whole layout on the Web. (Please see my essay ["Are the Biblical Documents Reliable?"](#)). I was able to see with my own eyes, what I had always wanted to see, a little fragment from the Gospel of John (18:31-33) which is dated at 120 A.D. We have an actual fragment that is only about 24 years old from the time John wrote his gospel in 96 A.D.

So, you ask: "Who put the pen to the paper on the originals?" We have supplied the answer above. The authors begin with Matthew and end with John (the book of Revelation). And as stated above, the autographs, the original documents, were all written in the first century A.D. And again may I say that one little scrap of Scripture from the second century is more valuable than 10,000 paperback copies of *Good News for Modern Man*?!

OLD TESTAMENT: Now let's turn to the Old Testament. You ask,

Who wrote the Old Testament? And when? Jesus was using a copy. Who compiled all the books of the O. T.? Why were they compiled before the coming of Christ? Did they come from a

common geographical area, or were different continents involved? What language was used?

First of all, we need to realize that while the Old and New Testaments are linked, they developed from two different time contexts: Judaism, and the Greco/Roman world. They spoke different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic/Greek and Latin). They lived in different places. They developed different cultures. And while they overlap in time to a small extent, the Jewish heritage is much older than the Greco/Roman world of Jesus' time.

The Hebrews (Jews) begin to appear in the Middle East at around 2000 B.C. (or 4,000 years from our time). Abraham, the Father and Founder, was living in Ur near where the mouths of the Tigris & Euphrates rivers flow into the Persian Gulf. The broader "Holy Land" would include Modern Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Gaza, and Arabia: these constitute what we now know as Palestine, or Israel.

We begin to see archaeological indications of a definite the presence of Hebrews in the 1500 & 1400 B.C.

As language and phonetics developed, there came to be several distinct, Semitic dialects, out of which came the Hebrew alphabet and other cognate strains (Phoenician, Arabic, Ethiopic, Hebrew and Aramaic) throughout the Middle East.

At the time of the Exodus, we learn that Moses, educated by the Pharaoh in Egypt, was a man of letters. You may remember that Jesus alluded to this in John 5:46: "If you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for He wrote of me."

As the Jews began to settle in Israel, they became powerful. All along they recorded their history, either in writing or by oral tradition. The Old Testament books are a diverse collection of different kinds of Hebrew literature. All of this literature was preserved by creating scrolls from sheep or goat skins (synagogues all over the world still use them)

upon which the precious documents were copied and preserved.

The creation of the official Old Testament canon we know today all came together around the sixth century B.C. (the historical time of the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah).

THE SEPTUAGINT: Because of the spread of the Greek language (thanks to Alexander the Great), in 250 B.C. Jewish scholars felt the need to translate the Old Testament into Greek so the common people could read it. Jesus knew and read the Biblical Hebrew of the Scrolls when he read in the synagogues. And He no doubt spoke Aramaic (same Hebrew alphabet) to His disciples and to the crowds that gathered.

The value of the Septuagint is that we can examine the Greek translation of the O.T. by these scholars to see how the Hebrew text was rendered into Greek by these translators at that time.

DEAD SEA SCROLLS: Now a word about the Dead Sea Scrolls. You say,

I hear statements like 'They found hundreds of complete copies of the Bible in jars in the Dead Sea Caves'. I try to envision how many thousands of papyrus must have been preserved for that to be true. Do you have some light on this subject

Yes, I do. Let me explain. When the Qumran Scrolls were first discovered, there was a great deal of excitement that we would find significant links to the four Gospels and clear connections to Jesus and the New Testament. But after study over six decades, there does not seem to be much overlap. I have been to Qumran, seen the caves, and I have read the entire translation of all the material that has been gathered and translated. (See Ceza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*).

And I can tell you that no such “hundreds of complete copies of the Bible have been found in jars in the Dead Sea caves.” There are many thousands of fragments, some as small as postage stamps with a few Hebrew words on them. Today, Qumran scholars continue to study the fragments, designated from each cave/location, and it is just one big puzzle-like task of trying to link one to another. It is a long and tedious process that will not be completed for a long, long time. And many fragments desired are either lost, overlooked, or stolen to sell.

The benefits of Qumran lie in the Old Testament fragments which can be compared with the Septuagint and the Hebrew Texts of the Synagogues. The outstanding example is the comparison of the Book of Isaiah. What is striking is the fact that there is very little variance between the two texts. The famous Qumran scroll and the official, Massoretic text used in synagogues today have a 95% agreement.

So, let’s summarize the sequence of the development of the O.T.:

2000 B.C.	Authors begin writing, preserving literary heritage
465-424 B.C.	O.T. writings are gathered and the Canon formed (Ezra)
280-250 B.C.	Septuagint translation (Greek)
150 B.C.	Qumran Community (Essenes) Originated in the north (Damascus). Persecution drove them south to Qumran. (Dead Sea Scrolls)
45-96 A.D.	N.T. We have still another confirmation of the Old Testament text: all the O.T. verses which are quoted by the N.T. authors.

You can, and should have a certainty about this. _____, I hope this helps answer your questions.

Sincerely and warm regards,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

P.S. At one time in my life (college years), I was where you seem to be right now. I considered myself a Christian because I lived in America and hadn't killed anybody! But I came to understand that I was not a real Christian, and I didn't know how to become one. I finally understood what God was requiring of me, and I acted upon it. I find that most people don't know how to become a Christian. There are many in the pews who assume they are, but that can't explain why. That is a dangerous perspective.

If you want to explore this, I would suggest that you read two of my essays in this order:

["A Moral Life Won't Get Us to Heaven"](#)

["The Most Important Decision of your Life."](#)

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"If Jehovah Isn't the Real Name of God, What Is?"

When the Bible was translated, the interpreter translated the name of God as "Jehovah." My main question is, What was the original name of God? Because I read that his name was translated wrong, and that his real name is YAOHU. Is this true?

Thank you for writing. I will try to explain this to you with the following information:

God is referred to in the Bible by many names, but the primary three are:

Elohim

Translation: "God," as in Genesis 1:1: "in the beginning God created..."

Yahweh

Translation: "Lord," as in Psalm 23:1: "The Lord is my Shepherd..."

Adonai

Translation: "Ruler, Master, Lord," as in Psalm 35:23: "my God (Elohim) and my Lord (Adonai)."

We need to understand the rendering of these three names of God as we find them in our Bibles today, whether in English, Spanish, and all other modern translations. But we must first understand some things about the development of the Hebrew language.

First of all, ancient Hebrew was distinctive, in that there were two traditions which were involved in the handing down of the Hebrew text as we know it today. One was written (Kethiv), and the other was oral, spoken (Qere).

Up until the Tenth Century A.D., all Hebrew written texts in existence and available (for study, worship) had one distinguishing feature: the text consisted of consonants only. In other words, there were no vowels! But since there was also an oral tradition, the Jews who spoke Hebrew knew what the vowels were and just supplied them as they read the text.

Examples in English: McDnlds=McDonalds; prkwy=parkway; frwy=freeway.

Around 906 A.D., a group of Hebrew scholars at Tiberias (on

the Sea of Galilee) known as the Massoretes developed a system of little "dots" and "dashes" representing all of the vowel sounds. These were superimposed upon the written Hebrew text at that time. The Massoretes were concerned that the Hebrew language would be lost, as fewer and fewer people knew and spoke it. So these scholars took steps to make sure that all future generations of Jews would be able to speak the language accurately since they would now have a written record of the ancient vowel sounds. All of our modern Hebrew translations are based upon the work of the Massoretes.

Now let's look back at our three names of God.

The term *Elohim* has always meant "God," but is not germane to our discussion of your question.

The issue of *Jehovah* is derived from the other two primary names of God.

The term *Yahweh* is always translated by the word "Lord." But we must understand that every time a Rabbi or any Jew was reading any portion of the Old Testament and came upon this written word "YHWH", he orally said "Adonai," not "Yahweh." The reason for this is that the Jews considered the written term YHWH so sacred that it should never be spoken or expressed with the lips.

That is the reason why, when they were reading (speaking) and came to "YHWH," they always substituted "Adonai" and spoke it instead. This has been practiced by the Jews back to Jesus' time, and long before.

Now, where does "Jehovah" come from? Well, what were the Massoretes to do when they were adding their vowel-system to the written Hebrew text and they came upon the word, "YHWH?" Since no Jew had ever heard or known the true pronunciation of this most sacred of names for the Hebrew God, they put there the identical vowel-pointings which are rendered for Adonai!

In reality, the Jews were just doing what they had always done: they spoke "Adonai" every time they read "YHWH" in the text.

The vowel sounds in Adonai are "OH" and "AH." Thus, "Yahweh" becomes "YHO VAH" (rendered in English as "Jehovah").

Most scholars have concluded that the term "YHWH" is actually based upon the "to be" verb in Hebrew, "HYH" (HAYAH). The future tense of this verb is YHWH (Yahweh). They refer back to the passage in Exodus where God is actually asked His name. Moses says, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I shall say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now, they may say to me, 'What is His Name?' What shall I say to them?" And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM;" and He said, "Thus you shall say to the Sons of Israel, I AM has sent me to you.'"

I hope this answers your question. You can see from this explanation that the issue was not that someone translated it wrong. It was done with reverent intention. I hope this answers your question adequately.

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

This e-mail also came in with a similar question:

This message is in reference to using the word "Jehovah" to mean the God of the Bible. I assume you know that it is YHWH with the vowel points for "Adonai" added. This was to remind the Torah reader to say "Adonai" instead of YHWH, which was (and is) considered sacred to the Jews. I do not see how one can use a hybrid of two names for God and still be correct. If someone were to call me "Jasen" with different vowels inserted, I probably would not respond. I understand God is an omniscient, compassionate God that knows our shortcomings and misunderstandings, but if we can do it right, shouldn't we?

Your questions about the relationship of YHWH, Adonai, and Jehovah have to do with the tradition of the Jews and their reverence for the name of Yahweh, which comes from Exodus 3:13 when Moses asked God to tell him what he should say when Pharaoh and the Egyptians inquired as to who had sent him (Moses) on his mission of deliverance. Remember, the Lord told Moses to take his shoes off because he was on "holy ground."

God's answer was, "I AM THAT I AM." Actually, the word YHWH is a form of the "to be" verb in Hebrew, "eyeheyeh." It ties into the idea in the New Testament where Jesus said to the Pharisees, "Before Abraham was (existed), **I AM** (that is, I continually exist)" (John 8:58-59). The Hebrew translation is "underived existence."

Unger's Bible Dictionary says that "this custom which had its origin in reverence, and has almost degenerated into a superstition, was founded upon an erroneous rendering of Lev. 24:16, from which it was inferred that the mere utterance of the name constituted a capital offense. According to Jewish tradition, it was pronounced but once a year by the high priest on the Day of Atonement when he entered the Holy of Holies; but on this point there is some doubt." (p. 565).

This reverence carried over into the Jewish thinking about the awe, fear, and reverence to which God was entitled. The Jews scrupulously avoided every mention of it. The true pronunciation of it was known to the Hebrews, but has been entirely lost. They continued to write YHWH in the text, but when pronouncing the text always substituted another name for God, usually Adonai.

You are right in your explanation that the Jews used the vowel pointing of Adonai to YHWH, from which we get the English word, "Jehovah," hence the form Yehowah and name Yehvh. There is a strong possibility that the name Jehovah was anciently pronounced as Yahweh, like Iabe of the Samaritans. But I must remind you that the entire vowel pointing system did not come

into use until the 10th century A.D. This was designed by the Massoretes located at Tiberius on the Sea of Galilee, and their desire was to weld together two traditions of the Old Testament text at that time: the KETHIV (written text) and the QERE (spoken, oral tradition).

Let me explain it this way. Until the tenth century A.D., the written Hebrew text contained only consonants. The reason for this is that those who spoke Hebrew knew what the vowels were. The Pharisees of Jesus' day knew the Old Testament by heart, from Genesis to Malachi. This had nothing to do with literacy or education. This is the oral tradition. Even today many Muslims can quote the entire Koran by memory. Since the Jews had this oral tradition, they knew the Scriptures and they knew what the vowel sounds were.

Let me give you an example: Read these modified English words: blvd=boulevard; pkwy=parkway; McDnlds=McDonalds, and so on.

What the Massoretes did was to devise a vowel pointing system which was superimposed over the written, consonantal text. The reason for doing this was to bring these two traditions together and stabilize the text for perpetuity so that the language would not be lost. Amazingly, this same Hebrew is now in operation in Israel. And when you see modern Hebrew written, the vowels are again omitted as in ancient times, because Jews who read and speak Hebrew know what vowels are to be supplied.

My point with all this is that long before the vowel pointings (which seem to be hanging you up) were created, the Jews were *already* referring to YHWH as "Adonai." This goes way back in the Jewish tradition, even before the time of Christ. The Qumran community (Dead Sea Scrolls) also had this practice.

In summary, the action of substituting Adonai for YHWH had little to do with the vowel pointing you mention, and everything to do with an ancient practice of the Jews (in

respect or perhaps superstition) not to utter the sound of the “ineffable Tetragrammaton” (YHWH cf. *Websters Dictionary*). The practice is not, in reality, a “hybrid” of the two names, as you suggest, but rather a substitution of the one for the other. Your analysis of the vowel pointing is accurate as a means of reminding/warning the reader not to utter “YHWH” after the 10th century A.D. , but we have no knowledge or of any such indicator provided in the written Hebrew text giving such a warning prior to the Massoretic tradition.

I hope this answers your question.

Sincerely in Christ,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

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See Also Probe Answers Our Email:

- [“Is It Wrong to Speak of God as Jehovah?”](#)
- [“Jehovah Is the Only Name of God!”](#)
- [“Why Did the Jews Not Say God’s Name Aloud When He Never Said Not To?”](#)

Violence in the Schoolyard: Why?

America is becoming an increasingly dangerous place to live. Random violence. Drive-by shootings. Columbine. A twelve-year old boy kills his schoolmate with a pistol he has brought to

school. Why? "Well, he ticked me off!" was the reply.

No remorse. . . No conscience.

Do you know what a "feral" hog is? We have some here in Texas – domesticated pigs which have escaped into the brushy Hill Country and live there as wild as their smaller, wild cousins, the Javelinas.

There have been feral children, too. Perhaps the most famous was a teenage boy spotted one day naked and loping up a hill on all fours in Aveyron, France. He was captured on July 25, 1799 and extensive attempts were made to "rehabilitate" and "domesticate" him. These ended largely in failure, including Herculean efforts to teach him to speak (he was mute when first found).

Anyone who has ever observed children suddenly transplanted into another culture are amazed at the way they take to the local language like "ducks to water!" Why? Because children from age one to seven or eight have an enormous capacity to learn – to absorb sights and sounds and smells and everything!

Children have a conscience, too. It is not yet fully formed by way of specifics, but like the capacity to learn language, they possess the ideas of right and wrong. As they grow, through experience, parental guidance and discipline, school, church, etc., they come to embrace moral concepts as easily and automatically as they do linguistic ones.

Today we tend to be "politically correct" and to not push our personal, moral, and religious agendas off on others. We are hesitant to speak of right and wrong in public for fear of offending.

You see, it is assumed that we already know what is right and what is wrong. It is assumed that you know that. And that the children know. . .

But they don't know. Their conscience must be educated, and this is the problem. Children are growing up in America as crippled morally as that wild boy in Aveyon was, linguistically and socially. We have raised an entire generation of "morally feral" children!

I have a good friend of thirty-five years who sold his business and began to use his time in ministering to students at the large, state university in his city. He began to meet with students daily in the student center on campus. Jay was seminary trained and is one of the most effective personal workers I have ever known.

He told me recently that he asks the same question of almost every student: "If you knew God does exist, and it were possible for you to have a personal interview or conversation with Him, what would you ask Him?"

Jay said that SIXTY PERCENT of those have replied with something like, "Gee. . . Gosh! I've never thought about that. . . I don't know what I'd ask Him. . . I guess nothing!"

What they have lots to say about, however, is that no one should be excluded, and everyone's opinion is true because it is "true to them." This is practicing "tolerance." And anyone who doesn't hold this view is a bigot. They think it a crime of the highest order to exclude anyone on the basis of personal belief or lifestyle.

Actually, tolerance is a Christian virtue and should be practiced. But what does it really mean? It doesn't mean that all lifestyles must be accepted. That is not tolerance, but rather, surrender – tacit acceptance of all behavior with no regard to standards of any kind.

What kind of "tolerance" did Jesus practice? We are told that He was *full* of grace and truth. And these two were always in perfect balance. We, however, tend toward the extremes of these – so full of grace that we compromise the Gospel, or so

full of truth that no one can stand us!

Over and over again, we see Jesus “nudging” people toward truth: Nicodemus. The rich young ruler. The parables. The woman at the well. Pilate. Will Rogers is probably known best for his famous quote: “I never met a man I didn’t like.” It could be said of Jesus that He never met a person He didn’t love. He loved and accepted every person He met, including those whose behavior He could not condone. That’s tolerance. To the woman caught in the act of adultery He said, “Neither do I condemn you (grace); go and sin no more (truth)!”

Jesus pressed. He wanted people to understand truth so much that He was not afraid to offend them if it would help to accomplish that purpose.

And so must we upon occasion. Remember: Even God is not universally admired!

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Berkeley in the Sixties

In 1973, after serving with Campus Crusade for some twelve years, the Lord burdened my heart with a vision for a new kind of ministry.

At that time I had the responsibility for the oversight of several hundred campus staff in the southwestern U.S. As you know, these were turbulent times on campus. . .and especially so along the west coast.

I often found myself in some strange and scary places in those days:

- *Like speaking to 3,000 radicals from the free speech platform on the steps of Sproul Hall at Berkeley...*
- *Or dialoguing with Mario Savio and Bettina Aptheker (her father, Herbert, was the head of the Communist Party-U.S.A. at the time) about the claims of Jesus Christ...*
- *Or being present to observe Angela Davis and Stokeley Carmichael whip student audiences into a literal frenzy at U.C.L.A. and San Jose State...*
- *Or [debating Madalyn Murray O'Hair](#) at SMU on the existence of God...*
- *Or sharing the gospel with hippies and "druggies" on Telegraph Avenue, in the People's Park, and across the bay in Haight-Ashbury...*
- *Or trying to sleep while Timothy Leary and his entourage had a rousing, all-night LSD "Love-in" in the motel room next door to mine!*

Someone has said, "The best thing about the 'good old days' is that they're gone!" Most of us feel that way about the sixties. We are glad that the Black Panthers, the SDS, the Weathermen, Woodstock, "Hair," the Age of Aquarius, the student riots, the communes, the protest songs, the Vietnam War crisis, the long hair and buttons proclaiming "Make love, not war," are with us no longer.

But after personally visiting (for ministry of some sort) over 170 campuses during the past 30 years, I am here to tell you that we are still losing the battle on the college campus in these days. There is actually more hostility toward Christianity and traditional values in 2003 than we faced in the late sixties!

Part of the reason is that the "new morality" of the counter-culture which startled so many of us in the sixties has become the "morality of personal preference" for most in the new millenium!

And many of those bright young radicals just got a haircut, slipped back into corporate America and academia to continue their revolution in more quiet, subtle, and dangerous ways.

WE DID NOT RE-ABSORB THEM; THEY ABSORBED US!

The truth is that today on many campuses, under the guise of “academic freedom,” there is a doctrinal/political creed demanding such conformity that its opponents—be they faculty, university administrators, visiting lecturers, or students—are publicly ostracized, hooted down, and even attacked!

In reality, an inquisition of sorts is taking place right now across academia, and its high priests are dogmatic, unbending students and their mentors who insist upon having the curriculum and the world only as they desire it.

And they are committed to a policy of silencing, pushing aside, and even crushing any and all who would dare to oppose them.

In 1973 as I sought to minister to college students amidst the foment described above, I came to a deep conviction that the battle on the campus, rather than being nearly over, had really just begun. And that is the primary reason we first began Probe Ministries. . . to make sure the Christian viewpoint would continue to have an honest hearing in the university arena, and to be sure it was available for serious consideration by searching students.

Many tens of thousands have had that opportunity on their campus, in their classrooms, and at their church since Probe’s inception in 1973. And we have been able since to take the research and interaction gained from that crucible of ministry experience and share it with millions of others through

conferences, literature, the media, and now, perhaps the most potent tool for world-wide impact, the Internet!

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

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“Why Does Mark’s Gospel Omit the Resurrection and the Virgin Birth?”

If Jesus really did rise from the dead, why didn’t Mark say he saw him after the fact? Is Mark not the first gospel written? If I had hung around with a guy for three years and then seen him after he had died I would certainly write about it. Also, why does Mark not mention the virgin birth? If it were so important why didn’t Paul mention it?

Your first question alludes to a textual problem in the manuscript evidence for the end of the book—namely verses 9-20 of the last chapter (Mark 16:8-20). These twelve verses *do* give an account of the resurrection of Christ. The controversy comes about in that two of the earliest (almost complete) manuscripts we have—(Sinaiticus and Vaticanus [dated mid-300’s A.D.]—*omit* the verses. What is also true is that the scribes who wrote these two codices *left some blank space* after verse 8, indicating that they *knew* of a longer ending to the Gospel of Mark, but they did not have it available from the manuscripts they were copying.

Most all other manuscripts and early versions (translations

into other languages) include vs. 9-20. Even earlier evidence is found among the Early Patristic Fathers (the church leaders which followed immediately after the Apostles' deaths), substantiating that these twelve verses were not only known two hundred years *before* Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, but that there was support for their inclusion (since they each quoted authoritatively from the "disputed" passage (cf. Justin Martyr, *Apology* 1.45, ca. A.D.145; Tatian, *Diatessaron*, ca. A.D. 170; and Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.10.6 ca. A.D. 180).

Your second question alludes to the fact that Mark was the first gospel written. This is generally accepted, although there is still a persistent argument among textual critics that Matthew may have written his gospel in Aramaic *first* (which was later translated into Greek).

Your third comment about Mark is based on a wrong assumption. Mark was *not* one of the Twelve Disciples, and therefore he didn't "hang around with Jesus for three years." What do we know about Mark, or John Mark, as he is also called? There is some scriptural evidence that the home in Jerusalem where Jesus and His disciples celebrated the Passover in the Upper Room the night before the crucifixion, and the place where they gathered for prayer (Acts 1:13) after Jesus was laid in the tomb, was the home of John Mark and his parents (Acts 12:12).

Also, there is an unusual event, unique to Mark's Gospel, found in Mark 14:51-52. The preceding verses describe the arrest of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, and the fact that "Everyone deserted Him and fled, as Jesus had predicted," (cf. Mk. 14:27 and 14:50), including Peter. Immediately following this, Mark records the incident of a young man following Jesus, "wearing nothing but a linen sheet (a sleeping garment) over his naked body; and they seized him. But he left the linen sheet behind, and escaped naked" (Mk. 14: 51,52).

The Greek word used to describe him, *neoniskos*, indicates a

young man in the prime of his life, from late teens to late thirties. Most interpreters believe that this young man was John Mark. After Jesus and the disciples had celebrated the Passover and left for Gethsemane, John Mark removed his outer cloak and went to bed wrapped in a linen sleeping garment. Apparently a servant awakened him and made him aware of Judas' betrayal scheme, and he made his way to Gethsemane, not bothering to dress, which is where the incident occurred. He would hardly have mentioned such an incident unless it had a special significance for him as a turning point in his life.

This is the same John Mark that accompanied Paul and Barnabas later on their first missionary journey (Acts 12:25). This is also the same John Mark that brought about a strong contention between Paul and Barnabas as they discussed whom they would take on their **second** missionary journey (Acts 15:37-40). Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them again, but Paul resisted this, because apparently John Mark, still a young man, had found the first missionary journey too "tough" and he "deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work" (Acts 15:38). So Barnabas took Mark, and Paul took Silas, resulting in two missionary teams. As he had formerly disciplined Paul (the new convert), Barnabas, a builder of men, now turned his attention to disciplining John Mark.

Later on, we find that Mark became the travelling companion of the Apostle Peter (1 Peter 5:13) and Peter speaks affectionately of him as "my (spiritual) son, Mark" (1 Peter 5:13). This indicates that Mark was probably converted by Peter. Even Paul later had a change of heart toward Mark, saying of him to Timothy, "Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is *useful to me* for ministry (2 Timothy 4:11)"

Let me at this point discuss the four gospels a little, as their authorship and *purpose* bear directly upon your next questions.

With regard to authorship, the crucial factor of credibility was *eyewitness* testimony: that is, the writers of the gospels either had to have personally witnessed these events or they had to have an intimate association of and verification from those who had witnessed these events (from the baptism of John to the Resurrection).

Both *Matthew* and *John* qualify because they were both among the twelve disciples. Though not an apostle, *Mark* had the best opportunity in his mother's house in Jerusalem and his personal connection with Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and other prominent disciples for gathering the most authentic information concerning the gospel history. And we also know that Mark was the travelling companion of Peter, who is the real eyewitness reflected throughout Mark's gospel. The document has been called by some the "Gospel of Peter"!

Papias, a Church Father, mentions Mark in the early 100's as the "interpreter" of Peter, "writing down" the personal reminiscences of Peter's discourses/sermons delivered over the course of their journeys together. Clement of Alexandria, a little later in the second century, informs us that "the people of Rome were so pleased with Peter's preaching that they requested Mark, his attendant, to put it down in writing, which Peter neither encouraged nor hindered."

We learn that *Luke*, though not an eyewitness, was the travelling companion of the apostle Paul on some of his later missionary journeys. Of the four gospels, his gospel reaches the highest level of scholastic and literary quality, and his Prologue (Luke 1:1-4) gives clear indication that he gave careful consideration to the compiling of eyewitness sources available to him: "—just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the Word have handed them down to us" (1:2). His treatment of contemporary places, people and events in the secular Roman world have a high degree of accuracy when compared with non-biblical, historical material.

There is good evidence that both Luke and Matthew may have used Mark's gospel as a source (or a common corpus of material which preceded Mark), as well as other oral or written sources. Since the genealogy of Jesus in Luke's gospel appears to be that of Mary, there is a strong possibility that the source for Luke's beginning chapters which record events concerning Christ's birth came directly from His mother.

Luke visited all the principal apostolic churches from Jerusalem to Rome. He met Peter, Mark, and Barnabas at Antioch, James and his elders at Jerusalem, Philip and his daughters at Caesarea, and he had first hand access and benefit to all the information which Paul himself had received by revelation or collected from personal contact with all his fellow apostles and other first generation disciples.

The four gospels are eyewitness portraits of the life and events of Jesus Christ. They do, however, reveal somewhat different purposes with respect to emphasis. The Gospel of *Matthew* without doubt was intended for the Jewish community and a primary focus on Jesus as the *Messiah* who historically fulfilled the prophetic predictions and promises mentioned throughout the Old Testament Scriptures.

The Gospel of *Luke* portrays Christ as the "Son of Man," that is, with an emphasis on the *humanity* of Christ, and it was written primarily to the Gentile world.

The Gospel of *John* has yet a different focus. John clearly identified that his primary purpose was to prove that Jesus was *God Himself*. When John wrote his gospel near the end of the first century, Gnostics and other sects were beginning to question the divine nature of Christ, and John's major intent in his Gospel was to answer these critics.

The Gospel of *Mark* was written to demonstrate Christ as the *Servant*: "For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). The

Nativity accounts in Matthew and Luke make sense, because they would be important to establish both Messianic and human lineage. It does not, however, suit Mark's purpose, as the lineage of a "slave" or a "servant" is unimportant. This answers your question about why one would not expect Mark to mention the virgin birth in his gospel. It did not suit his purpose.

Your final question was why Paul did not mention the Virgin Birth. I believe he does. In Galatians 4:4 we have these words: "But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, **made, born of** (*ginomai*—originating, coming from) **a woman**, born under the Law." Now obviously every person born is "born" of a woman. So what is Paul referring to? He is referring specifically to two promises from the Old Testament, specifically, Isaiah 7:14 and Genesis 3:15. The Isaiah passage says: "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a (miraculous) *sign*: Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel (God With Us)." Matthew 1:23 cites the fulfillment of this messianic promise. The sign is the virgin birth.

Genesis 3:15 contains the first messianic prophecy in the Old Testament. After Adam and Eve's disobedience God pronounces three judgments: upon Adam, Eve, and Satan. Addressing Satan in the verse God says: "I will put enmity (a barrier) between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; And *he* shall bruise (crush) your head, and you shall bruise *his* heel."

Following quickly after the entrance of sin comes the promise of a solution. God promises that a way will be found to undo and to rectify the consequences of their disobedience. It will involve the promise of a "seed" which is referred to by the personal pronoun "He." A conflict or battle is described which will occur at some future time and will result in a mortal blow to Satan's *head* and a non-mortal wound to the "seed's" *heel*.

Speaking to the disciples of His coming death, Jesus said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. . . Now my soul has become troubled: and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour?' But for *this purpose* I came to this hour. . . Now judgment is upon this world; *now* the ruler (Satan) of this world shall be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.' But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die" (John 12:23-33). This passage describes the mortal blow Christ inflicted upon Satan by His death and resurrection: "He shall crush your head."

The passage also alludes to the bruising, suffering and death Christ endured on the Cross—something that our Lord dreaded here, and earlier in His prayer to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Save Me from this hour; let this cup pass from Me." But in order for "the Seed of the woman" to triumph over sin, it was necessary for Him to suffer at the hands of Satan: "You shall bruise his heel."

The "enmity" or "barrier" between Satan's seed (those now contaminated by sin) and the woman's seed **is** the *virgin birth*.

Mary was that elect woman, a virgin, from whom the One Seed came. He was to be the seed of the woman, not of Adam, the man: "And Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I know no man?" And the Angel said to her, "the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason that holy thing born of you shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:34-35).

The Virgin Birth, therefore, is *very* important, because without it, Jesus would be just another human being like you and me, and He would in no way qualify to be a Redeemer for even *one* sinful human being, much less for *all* humans. Shepard has observed:

"No convincing evidence against the Virgin birth of Jesus . . . can be found in the New Testament. The difficulty of accounting for His life on any other ground is greater than the difficulty of accepting the Virgin birth as a fact." (J.W. Shepard, The Christ of the Gospels. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946, p. 1).

Apart from this explanation, the context of Paul's words in Galatians 4:4 are meaningless. He is simply referring to the broader, messianic context understood by all the Jewish community when they referred to "the woman."

_____, I hope this material will help answer the questions you raised.

Sincerely yours,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

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