“Is It a Sin For a Christian to be a Soldier in the Military?”

Is it a sin for a Christian to be a soldier (i.e. someone training to be on the frontlines to kill) in the military?

I have been reading some arguments on both sides of this coin, and both have some weight to them. The main argument from the peaceful side of this coin is that Jesus said “those who live by the sword, will die by the sword” and that first century christians did not serve in the military, except for a few, but they weren’t in war at that time. The other side of the coin seperates personal responsibility from state responsibility and says that if you are serving in the military and kill, God holds the head of the state responsible. It also uses the Old Testament wars in many of its arguments.

It seems to me that there is power in not fighting, and that the Bible teaches that we should love our enemies, and not kill others just because a government tells you too. However, it would seem in such an evil world that if we didn’t stand up and fight for the protection of others, all Christians would be oppressed. It just keeps flipping back and forth.

Thank you for your question about Christians serving in the military. Probably the three best known books dealing with this subject are:

- *Robert Clouse, ed., War: Four Christian Views (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1981).*
- *Arthur Holmes, ed., War and Christian Ethics (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1975).*
- *Keith Payne and Karl Payne, A Just Defense (Portland: Multnomah, 1987).*

I could go into the details of the various positions, but I think these books (especially the InterVarsity book) provide a good overview of the arguments on each side.

I might also mention that Tommy Nelson (the pastor of Denton Bible Church in Denton, TX) has put together a 90-minute video on the subject of Christians in the military. It is simply called "God and the Military: Is It Right to Bear Arms?" You can contact him at www.dentonbible.org. Thanks for writing.

Kerby Anderson

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"Where Did The Terms 'Right Wing' and 'Left Wing' Come From?"

I was reading Ecclesiastes 10:2 ("The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left") and what struck me right away was this fits our right and left wings.

My question is, how did the political parties get their status of being considered left and right?

It turns out that the historical explanation for the political terms left wing and right wing are based upon the seating arrangement of the first French General Assembly. The proponents of the political ideas inspired by the Enlightenment were seated on the left. Those who supported the old regime were seated at the right hand of the president of the Assembly.

So early on, ideas that were something new and novel were associated with the left, and conservative ideas were associated with the right. Actually, the story is a bit more complicated than that, but to answer your question, the origin of left and right is found in modern politics rather than Ecclesiastes.

Thanks for writing. God bless you.

Kerby Anderson

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"How Could the Wise Men Have Found Baby Jesus in Nazareth?"

I have one question on [the Christmas Quiz] that has me completely perplexed. Question 31 asks where the Wise Men found Jesus and his family when they arrived. Your answer says that it was Nazareth. How can this be? Why would Herod have ordered the slaughter of the children in Bethlehem if they were in Nazareth? Also, why would they have travelled all the way to Egypt if they were that much further north from Bethlehem?

Thank you for writing. Dale Taliaferro wrote the Probe Christmas Quiz, but let me try to give you a brief answer to why he answered the question the way that he did.

Many commentators merely have Jesus staying in Bethlehem, but Dale suggests a better interpretation that fits with both the Matthew account and the Luke account.

Matthew 2:11 says the Magi saw Jesus as a “young child” and found him in ”the house,” where ”they fell down and worshiped him.” At the very least, it eliminates the possibility that this was at his birth at a manger scene in Bethlehem. That would also mean that the typical nativity scene is inaccurate.

Notice that Luke’s account has them leaving Bethlehem for Jerusalem to be presented in the Temple. Then Luke 2:39 says that after Jesus is presented in the Temple, the family returns to Nazareth. That is where Dale believes the Magi found Jesus and his family.

Notice that Matthew 2 gives an impression of a hurried, immediate escape to Egypt. Nothing like that is mentioned in Luke 2:39. Instead we have them returning to Nazareth.

Therefore, it is possible that the family returned to Bethlehem when Jesus was perhaps 1-2 years old. Matthew 2 then appears to be picking up the story where they escape during the night.

I think this interpretation also helps make sense of King Herod’s command to kill all male children “two years old and under.” Remember earlier asked ”the exact time the star had appeared” in Matthew 2:7. That would mean that at the time of the king’s order, Jesus was not a newborn, but a toddler, ”the young child.”

I hope this helps explain Dale Taliaferro’s answer.

Kerby Anderson
Probe Ministries

When Nations Die

One of the more popular Probe radio programs has been "Decline of a Nation." Kerby Anderson returns to this important theme by summarizing the significant work by Jim Nelson Black in his book When Nations Die. When we look at three thousand years of history, we observe that civilizations rise but eventually fall and die. The history of the world is the history of nations that are conquered by other nations or collapse into anarchy.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

Jim Nelson Black sees ominous parallels to our own country. He says,

> As I have looked back across the ruins and landmarks of antiquity, I have been stunned by the parallels between those societies and our own. For most of us the destruction of Carthage, the rise of the Greek city-states, and the Fall of Rome are mere ghosts of the past, history lessons long forgotten. And such things as the capture of Constantinople, the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire, the collapse of the kingdoms of France and Spain, and the slow withering decline of the British Empire are much less clear and less memorable. Most of us do not remember much from our history lessons about the French Enlightenment or, for that matter, the issues that led to the American Revolution. But this is the legitimate background of our own place in history, it is vital that we reconsider the nature of life in those earlier times. For within those eras and movements are the seeds of the troubles we face today.{1}

There are many reasons for the decline and fall of a nation, but an important (and often overlooked) reason is its abandonment of religion. Russell Kirk has said that the roots of "culture" come from the "cult." In other words, culture

(cult-ure) is based upon some form of religious or spiritual worldview. Egypt was a religious society founded on the worship of nature gods and goddesses. Greece and Rome had their pantheon of pagan deities. And the list of nations in India, China, and other parts of the globe all demonstrate the principle that civilization arises from religion.

And the opposite is also true. When the traditional beliefs of a nation erode, the nation dies. Religion provides the set of standards that govern a nation. Historian Will Durant said, "There is no significant example in history, before our time, of a society successfully maintaining moral life without the aid of religion."{2}

Unfortunately, this nation has embarked on a journey to maintain a society without a religious code. The Ten Commandments are pulled from the walls, and religious values are stripped from the public square.

Christian principles are no longer taught in the public schools and often ridiculed in the arenas of education and media. One has to wonder what the fate of this country will be in the future.

Social Decay

In his book *When Nations Die*, Jim Nelson Black lists three aspects of decay: social decay, cultural decay, and moral decay. Three important trends demonstrate social decay. They are "the crisis of lawlessness," the "loss of economic discipline," and "rising bureaucracy."

History provides ample illustrations of the disastrous consequences of the collapse of law and order. "In ancient Greece, the first symptoms of disorder were a general loss of respect for tradition and the degradation of the young. Among the early symptoms was the decline of art and entertainment. The philosophers and pundits distorted the medium of

communication. Rhetoric became combative and intolerant; intellectuals began to deride and attack all the traditional institutions of Hellenic society."{3}

New thinkers in the society argued for "fundamental change" and called for giving the youth a "voice in society." Without traditional guidelines, the young men grew wild and undisciplined destroying the old order. Slowly Greece devolved into a disreputable and lawless nation. The Romans conquered Greece in 146 B.C. By placing everything under military authority, they were able to restore order and bring back the rule of law.

In a study of the French Revolution, José Ortega y Gasset noted that "Order is not pressure which is imposed on society from without, but an equilibrium which is set up from within."{4} The Roman Empire (as well as other great civilizations) understood that discipline and custom were essential to stability.

A similar story can be found in ancient Egypt during the fourth century B.C. Lawlessness and violence crippled the economy, and the nation was in chaos. When Alexander the Great invaded the country in 333 B.C., his first task was to restore order and institute martial law (which he did in a ruthless manner). With the death of Alexander, Egypt returned to its old ways until the Roman Empire brought peace to the region through conquest and martial law.

Carthage was once called "the eternal rival of Rome" but its preeminence and impact waned as it "sank into debauchery and dissipation as a result of great wealth and luxury." Law and order were destroyed from within. Moreover, the rich young men of Carthage no longer wanted to serve in the military so they hired mercenaries to do their fighting. But when the army came into fierce conflict with Rome and other adversaries, the mercenaries ran and left the nation defenseless. Carthage fell to Rome in 146 B.C., and the first act of the Roman legions

was to restore law and order.

In these and many other examples, social decay led to the decline and fall of a great civilization. If we are to prevent a repeat of history, then we must learn from these lessons of history.

Cultural Decay

Four important trends demonstrate cultural decay. They are the "decline of education," the "weakening of cultural foundations," the "loss of respect for tradition," and the "increase in materialism."

In his study *The Civilization of Rome*, Donald Dudley says that no single cause, by itself, would have brought the empire to its knees. Instead, the fall came through "a number of weaknesses in Roman society; their effects may be variously estimated, but in combination they must have been largely responsible for the collapse."{5}

The cultural decay of a nation leads inexorably to social and cultural decline. And the patterns are similar from one civilization to another. Samuel Eisenstadt wondered if the similarities were apparent or if they were historical and legitimate. After studying the work of a half dozen historians, he concluded that the similarities were actual. He concluded that "despite the great difference in cultural backgroundmost of these empires have shown similar characteristics, and that these characteristics provide the key to an understanding of the processes of their decline."{6}

The Roman poet Livy wrote that greed and self-indulgence led Romans to dangerous excesses. He said, "For it is true that when men had fewer possessions, they were also modest in their desires. Lately riches have brought avarice and abundant pleasures, and the desire to carry luxury and lust to the point of ruin and universal perdition."{7}

In describing the decadence of the Roman Republic, historian Polybius wrote that this preoccupation with luxury led to carnal indulgences. “For some young men indulged in affairs with boys, others in affairs with courtesans.” They paid a talent (roughly a thousand dollars) for a boy bought for sexual pleasure and three hundred drachmas for a jar of caviar. “Marcus Cato was outraged by this and, in a speech to the people, complained that one might be quite convinced of the decline of the republic, when pretty boys cost more than fields and jars of caviar cost more than plowman.”{8}

As we look at our society today, we too find ourselves in a world where values have been inverted and where citizens pursue hedonistic pleasures without counting the cost. Our nation would be wise to learn the lessons of the past.

Moral Decay

Three important trends demonstrate moral decay. They are the “rise in immorality,” the “decay of religious belief,” and the “devaluing of human life.”

The classic study of Roman civilization, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, written by English historian Edward Gibbon was published in that famous year of 1776. He “observed that the leaders of the empire gave into the vices of strangers, morals collapsed, laws became oppressive, and the abuse of power made the nation vulnerable to the barbarian hordes.”{9}

British historian Catherine Edwards demonstrated that our current examples of immorality are not a modern phenomenon. In her study of the “politics of immorality” in ancient Rome, she says that contraception, abortion, and exposure were common ways to prevent childbirth in Rome. Husbands refused to recognize any child they did not believe to be their own. “Until accepted by its father, a Roman baby did not, legally speaking, exist.”{10}

Life became cheap in the latter days of the Roman Empire. Burdensome regulation and taxes made manufacturing and trade unprofitable. Families were locked into hereditary trades and vocations allowing little if any vocational choice. Eventually, children were seen as a needless burden and abortion and infanticide became commonplace. In some cases, children were sold into slavery.

Manners and social life fell into debauchery. Under Justinian, entertainment grew bawdier and more bizarre. Orgies and love feasts were common. Homosexuality and bestiality were openly practiced. Under Nero, Christians were blamed for the great fire in Rome and horribly persecuted.

Similar patterns can be found in other civilizations. In Greece, the music of the young people became wild and coarse. Popular entertainment was brutal and vulgar. Promiscuity, homosexuality, and drunkenness became a daily part of life. And all moral and social restraints were lost leading to greater decadence.

In Carthage, worship turned from Baal to the earth goddess Tanit. “Sacrifices to the goddess of fertility were supposed to ensure productivity, long life, and even greater profits.”{11} Ornately carved funeral monuments depicting infant sacrifice can be seen today along with thousands of tiny stone coffins to infants sacrificed to the pagan goddess.

The parallels to our own nation are striking. No, we don’t sacrifice infants to a pagan goddess, but we have aborted nearly 40 million babies on the altar of convenience. And various sexual practices are openly accepted as part of an alternative lifestyle. It’s no wonder that many believe our country is a nation in decline.

Are We A Nation in Decline?

Throughout this article we have been describing the patterns

of decline in a nation. Do these patterns apply to our own nation? Many people looking at the patterns of social, cultural, and moral decay in other countries and civilizations have concluded that we are headed down the same path.

Russell Kirk put it this way:

> *It appears to me that our culture labors in an advanced state of decadence; that what many people mistake for the triumph of our civilization actually consists of powers that are disintegrating our culture; that the vaunted 'democratic freedom' of liberal society in reality is servitude to appetites and illusions which attack religious belief; which destroy community through excessive centralization and urbanization; which efface life-giving tradition and custom.{12}*

When we understand the factors that led to the decline of great civilizations, we can easily see that this country can succumb to similar temptations and decadence. What happened in Greece, Rome, Egypt, Carthage, and many other civilizations can happen to us.

Professor Allan Bloom in his book *The Closing of the American Mind*, said, "This is the American moment in world history, the one for which we shall forever be judged. Just as in politics the responsibility for the fate of freedom in the world has devolved upon our regime, so the fate of the philosophy in the world has devolved upon our universities, and the two are related as they have never been before."{13}

We as a nation and a people must rise to the occasion or suffer a fate similar to that which has befallen civilizations in the past. The task is not easy since the patterns of decay found in other nations strike ours as well. Nations were subverted by false and foreign ideologies. We too find hostile ideas in the public arenas of media, politics, and education. Sexual promiscuity led to the downfall of these nations. So

too we find similar patterns of sexual promiscuity and debauchery.

As nations fell into decline, life became cheap. Infants were strangled, exposed to the elements, or sold into slavery. Others were sacrificed to pagan goddesses in order to ensure productivity or a long life. Today life has become cheap. At one end of the spectrum, unborn babies are aborted. At the other end, physician-assisted suicide is becoming acceptable for the aged.

In his study of history, Arnold Toynbee describes the predictable pattern of "challenge and response." We as a nation are challenged in fundamental ways, and our response will either pull us back from the brink or push us over it. Will we follow the path to renewal and reformation or will we follow the path to destruction? The choice is ours.

Notes

1. Jim Nelson Black, *When Nations Die* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1994), 3.

2. Ibid., 9.

3. Ibid., 35-36.

4. Jos Ortega y Gasset, *Mirabeau: An Essay on the Nature of Statesmanship* (Manila: Historical Conservation Society, 1975).

5. Donald Dudley, *The Civilization of Rome* (New York: Meridian, 1993), 238.

6. Samuel Noah Eisenstadt, *The Decline of Empires* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967), 2-3.

7. Livy, preface to bk. I, *The History of Rome from Its Foundation,* trans. Aubrey de Selincourt (Baltimore: Penguin, 1967).

8. Polybius, *The Histories,* trans. W.R. Paton (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930).

9. Black, *When Nations Die,* 187.

10. Catherine Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 50.

11. Black, *When Nations Die*, 165.

12. Russell Kirk, "Can Our Civilization Survive?" address to Heritage Foundation, 24 July 1992.

13. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 382.

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Atheists and Their Fathers

How does one become an atheist? Does a person's relationship with his earthly father affect his relationship with his heavenly Father? These are some of the questions we will explore in this article as we talk about the book Faith of the Fatherless *by Paul Vitz.*

Vitz is a psychologist who was an atheist himself until his late thirties. He began to wonder if psychology played a role in one's belief about God. After all, secular psychologists have been saying that a belief in God is really nothing more than infantile wish fulfillment. Dr. Vitz wondered if the shoe was on the other foot. Could it be that atheists are engaged in unconscious wish fulfillment?

After studying the lives of more than a dozen of the world's most influential atheists, Dr. Vitz discovered that they all

had one thing in common: defective relationships with their fathers. The relationship was defective because the father was either dead, abusive, weak, or had abandoned the children. When he studied the lives of influential theists during those same historical time periods, he found they enjoyed a strong, loving relationship with a father (or a father substitute if the father was dead).

For example, Friedrich Nietzche lost his father (who was a pastor) before his fifth birthday. One biographer wrote that Nietzche was "passionately attached to his father, and the shock of losing him was profound." Dr. Vitz writes that Nietzche had a "strong, intellectually macho reaction against a dead, very Christian father." Friedrich Nietzche is best known as the philosopher who said, "God is dead." It certainly seems possible that his rejection of God and Christianity was a "rejection of the weakness of his father."

Contrast Nietzche with the life of Blaise Pascal. This famous mathematician and religious writer lived at a time in Paris when there was considerable skepticism about religion. He nevertheless wrote *Les pensées* (Thoughts), a powerful and imaginative defense of Christianity, which also attacked skepticism. Pascal's father, Etienne, was a wealthy judge and also an able mathematician. He was known as a good man with religious convictions. Pascal's mother died when he was three, so his father gave up his law practice and home-schooled Blaise and his sisters.

Here we are going to look at the correlation between our relationship with our earthly father and our heavenly Father. No matter what our family background, we are still responsible for the choices we make. Growing up in an unloving home does not excuse us from rejecting God, but it does explain why some people reject God. There may be a psychological component to their commitment to atheism.

Nietzche and Freud

Friedrich Nietzche is a philosopher who has influenced everyone from Adolph Hitler to the Columbine killers. His father was a Lutheran pastor who died of a brain disease before Nietzche's fifth birthday. He often spoke positively of his father and said his death was a great loss, which he never forgot. One biographer wrote that Nietzche was "passionately attached to his father, and the shock of losing him was profound."

It seems he associated the general weakness and sickness of his father with his father's Christianity. Nietzche's major criticism of Christianity was that it suffers from an absence, even a rejection, of "life force." The God Nietzche chose was Dionysius, a strong pagan expression of life force. It certainly seems possible that his rejection of God and Christianity was a "rejection of the weakness of his father."

Nietzche's own philosophy placed an emphasis on the "superman" along with a denigration of women. Yet his own search for masculinity was undermined by the domination of his childhood by his mother and female relatives in a Christian household. Dr. Vitz says, "It is not surprising, then, that for Nietzche Christian morality was something for women." He concludes that Nietzche had a "strong, intellectually macho reaction against a dead, very Christian father who was loved and admired but perceived as sickly and weak."

Sigmund Freud despised his Jewish father, who was a weak man unable to support his family. Freud later wrote in two letters that his father was a sexual pervert, and that the children suffered as a result. Dr. Vitz believes that Freud's Oedipus Complex (which placed hatred of the father at the center of his psychology) was an expression of "his strong unconscious hostility to and rejection of his own father." His father was involved in a form of reformed Judaism but was also a weak, passive man with sexual perversions. Freud's rejection of God

and Judaism seems connected to his rejection of his father.

Both Nietzche and Freud demonstrate the relationship between our attitudes toward our earthly father and our heavenly Father. In both cases, there seems to be a psychological component to their commitment to atheism.

Russell and Hume

Bertrand Russell was one of the most famous atheists of the last century. Both of Russell's parents lived on the margin of radical politics. His father died when Bertrand Russell was four years old, and his mother died two years earlier. He was subsequently cared for by his rigidly puritanical grandmother, who was known as "Deadly Nightshade." She was by birth a Scottish Presbyterian, and by temperament a puritan.

Russell's daughter Katherine noted that his grandmother's joyless faith was "the only form of Christianity my father knew well." This ascetic faith taught that "the life of this world was no more than a gloomy testing ground for future bliss." She concluded, "My father threw this morbid belief out the window."

Dr. Vitz points out that Russell's only other parent figures were a string of nannies to whom he often grew quite attached. When one of the nannies left, the eleven-year-old Bertrand was "inconsolable." He soon discovered that the way out of his sadness was to retreat into the world of books.

After his early years of lost loves and later years of solitary living at home with tutors, Russell described himself in this way: "My most profound feelings have remained always solitary and have found in human things no companionship . . . The sea, the stars, the night wind in waste places, mean more to me than even the human beings I love best, and I am conscious that human affection is to me at bottom an attempt to escape from the vain search for God."

Another famous atheist was David Hume. He was born into a prominent and affluent family. He seems to have been on good terms with his mother as well as his brother and sister. He was raised as a Scottish Presbyterian but gave up his faith and devoted most of his writing to the topic of religion.

Like the other atheists we have discussed, David Hume fits the pattern. His father died when he was two years old. Biographies of his life mention no relatives or family friends who could serve as father-figures. And David Hume is known as a man who had no religious beliefs and spent his life raising skeptical arguments against religion in any form.

Both Russell and Hume demonstrate the relationship between our attitudes toward our earthly father and our heavenly Father. In each case, there is a psychological component to their commitment to atheism.

Sartre, Voltaire, and Feuerbach

Jean-Paul Sartre was one of the most famous atheists of the last century. His father died when he was fifteen months old. He and his mother lived with his maternal grandparents as his mother cultivated a very intimate relationship with him. She concentrated her emotional energy on her son until she remarried when Sartre was twelve. This idyllic and Oedipal involvement came to an end, and Sartre strongly rejected his stepfather.

In those formative years, Sartre's real father died, his grandfather was cool and distant, and his stepfather took his beloved mother away from him. The adolescent Sartre concluded to himself, "You know what? God doesn't exist." Commentators note that Sartre obsessed with fatherhood all his life and never got over his fatherlessness. Dr. Vitz concludes that "his father's absence was such a painful reality that Jean-Paul spent a lifetime trying to deny the loss and build a philosophy in which the absence of a father and of God is the

very starting place for the good or authentic life."

Another philosopher during the French Enlightenment disliked his father so much that he changed his name from Arouet to Voltaire. The two fought constantly. At one point Voltaire's father was so angry with his son for his interest in the world of letters rather than taking up a career in law that he "authorized having his son sent to prison or into exile in the West Indies." Voltaire was not a true atheist, but rather a deist who believed in an impersonal God. He was a strident critic of religion, especially Christianity with its understanding of a personal God.

Ludwig Feuerbach was a prominent German atheist who was born into a distinguished and gifted German family. His father was a prominent jurist who was difficult and undiplomatic with colleagues and family. The dramatic event in young Ludwig's life must have been his father's affair with the wife of one his father's friends. They lived together openly in another town, and she bore him a son. The affair began when Feuerbach was nine and lasted for nine years. His father publicly rejected his family, and years later Feuerbach rejected Christianity. One famous critic of religion said that Feuerbach was so hostile to Christianity that he would have been called the Antichrist if the world had ended then.

Each of these men once again illustrates the relationship between atheism and their fathers.

Burke and Wilberforce

British statesman Edmund Burke is considered by many as the founder of modern conservative political thought. He was partly raised by his grandfather and three affectionate uncles. He later wrote of his Uncle Garret, that he was "one of the very best men, I believe that ever lived, of the clearest integrity, the most genuine principles of religion and virtue."

His writings are in direct opposition to the radical principles of the French Revolution. One of his major criticisms of the French Revolution was its hostility to religion: “We are not converts of Rousseau; we are not the disciples of Voltaire; Helevetius has made no progress amongst us. Atheists are not our preachers.” For Burke, God and religion were important pillars of a just and civil society.

William Wilberforce was an English statesman and abolitionist. His father died when he was nine years old, and he was sent to live with his aunt and uncle. He was extremely close to his uncle and to John Newton who was a frequent visitor to their home. Newton was a former slave trader who converted to Christ and wrote the famous hymn “Amazing Grace.” Wilberforce first heard of the evils of slavery from Newton’s stories and sermons, “even reverencing him as a parent when [he] was a child.” Wilberforce was an evangelical Christian who went on to serve in parliament and was instrumental in abolishing the British slave trade.

As mentioned earlier, Blaise Pascal was a famous mathematician and religious writer. Pascal’s father was a wealthy judge and also an able mathematician, known as a good man with religious convictions. Pascal’s mother died when he was three, so his father gave up his law practice and home-schooled Blaise and his sisters. Pascal went on to powerfully present a Christian perspective at a time when there was considerable skepticism about religion in France.

I believe Paul Vitz provides an important look at atheists and theists in his book *Faith of the Fatherless*. The prominent atheists of the last few centuries all had defective relationships with their fathers while the theists enjoyed a strong, loving relationship with a father or a father substitute. This might be something to compassionately consider the next time you witness to an atheist.

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The Second Half of Marriage

When children begin leaving the nest, marriages change and often couples are unprepared for those changes. Kerby Anderson looks at the book The Second Half of Marriage *by David and Claudia Arp and describes the eight challenges of second-half marriages.*

When children begin leaving the nest, marriages change and often couples are unprepared for those changes. In this article we are going to be looking at the book *The Second Half of Marriage* (Zondervan, 1998) by David and Claudia Arp. Suddenly marriages that were child-centered once again become couple-centered. Many marriages do not survive the transition. According to the National Center of Health Statistics, while divorce generally declined, divorces among couples married thirty years or more increased significantly.

In their book, the Arps describe eight themes within a second-half marriage. One is the need to transition from a child-focused marriage to a more partner-centered marriage. Without children as buffers, couples face the challenge of redefining their marriage. Either it becomes more intimate or it slowly disintegrates. A husband married for nineteen years said, “I’m fearful that when our children leave home, we will go our separate ways, because our priorities and interests are so different.”

Couples must learn how to communicate and effectively deal with conflict and anger. Couples often lose the ability to communicate in marriage because there is such an urgent focus on the kids and their needs and problems. One wife said, “The

greatest stress in my marriage is lack of communication—just being able to converse at the end of the day. I always feel as if I'm competing with the computer, the newspaper, or CNN news."

Couples in the second half of marriage must also learn to adjust to changing roles with aging parents and adult children. Your parents may have placed certain expectations on you and your marriage that you are still feeling in midlife. A wife married thirty-one years said, "Whatever I do for my parents, I can never meet all of their expectations. Yet I keep trying. I'd have to say unmet expectations are the hardest to deal with. I need to add that my expectations are the hardest to deal with."

Reconnecting with your adult children is also a challenge. As children leave the nest, they leave behind certain requirements and expectations. Our relationship with them changes, and couples in the second half of marriage must reconnect with children who are now adults on a different level. Often we must learn to resist giving advice unless it is requested. And even when we give advice, we should mentally prepare ourselves for the possibility that our grown children may not act on it.

Here we will be looking at these eight themes of second half marriages and discuss the challenges of each of them. We will view them from the kaleidoscope of over five hundred survey responses used by the Arps in writing their book. We pray that this look at second half marriages will help strengthen your marriage no matter how long you have been married.

Expectations and Companionship

The first challenge is to learn to let go of past marital disappointment, forgive each other, and commit to making the rest of your marriage the best. All of us go into marriage with certain dreams and expectations. Some of these will never

be realized. Are you willing to let go of unmet expectations and unrealistic dreams? You may never build your dream house or go on that exotic vacation. Are you willing to let it go? Can you accept those extra pounds or that gray hair or even no hair at all? Giving up lost dreams and dealing with each other's imperfections is a positive step toward forgiving past hurts and moving on in your marriage.

A wife married for twenty-five years said, "After twenty years of marriage, I finally realized my husband will never be home at 5 p.m. While this is disappointing to me, I simply had to let that expectation go." Another wife said, "During times of testing and disappointment, we kept working on our relationship. We learned how to forgive each other and how to work things out. We are committed to our marriage and we never give up. That's our secret."

The second challenge is to create a marriage that is partner-focused rather than child-focused. When children leave the nest, couples often move from a child-focused marriage to an activity-focused marriage. Community or church activities may now take up the time and energy formerly devoted to children. As valuable as these activities might be, they still serve as buffers to a mutual, partnership marriage. In the second half of marriage, couples need to redefine their roles and functions. What previously worked may no longer be relevant. Marriage can be more personal and more fulfilling as you focus on the couple's relationship rather than the children.

A wife married for thirty-three years said, "It's important to build a good relationship with your spouse so that when the children leave, you have the underlying joy of focusing on each other and not on your adult children."

Key to this is to develop what is called a "companionship marriage." This has been defined as a socially registered commitment between a man and a woman where they seek to know themselves and each other as far as they are capable of being

known. It also involves mutual affection and affirmation where they help each other grow and change in order to become the loving and creative persons they are capable of becoming.

These then are the first two of eight challenges in the second half of marriage. Next we will look at two more challenges.

Communication and Conflict

The third challenge is to maintain an effective communication system that allows you to express your deepest feelings, joys, and concerns. Communication is the lifeblood of a good marriage. But what do you do when the communication patterns that seemed to work in the first half of marriage seem inadequate for the second half? When children are gone, there are more spaces of silence, and there is often less to say to each other. Couples may wonder how they made it this far only to end up as quiet strangers in front of each other. Couples in the second half of marriage need to develop intimate and honest communication that focuses on their needs, wants, and dreams at midlife.

A wife married for eighteen years said, “My greatest fear is that when the kids are gone, we won’t communicate or have anything in common. I’m afraid of being left alone with someone who never speaks, pays attention, or ever touches me.” Another wife said, “The greatest frustration for me in my marriage is simply not being understood.”

The fourth challenge is to use anger and conflict in a creative way to build your relationship. Anger and conflict are part of any marriage. Mature couples need to learn how to process anger. Marriage must become a safe place to express your concerns in the context of a loving relationship. This challenge is critical because often the real problem isn’t the facts but the strong negative feelings we harbor. Once those feelings are dealt with, it’s easier to move on and resolve the conflict.

A wife of eighteen years said, “We had the divorce papers ready to sign a couple of times a number of years ago, but both times we looked at each other and said, ‘But I haven’t stopped loving you.’ Even when we couldn’t agree on virtually anything else, we have always agreed on that. Nothing we’ve been through was bad enough to kill the love we have for each other.”

Often the key to dealing with anger is to objectively state the problem and then begin to set forward the solutions. In the process, the couple can also identify what is at stake and what each partner has invested. Finding a solution to the problem is easier when both partners are committed to each other and committed to a mutually satisfying solution. Sometimes this will involve compromise and in other cases, it will involve showing love to your partner by accepting his or her perspective.

These then are the first four of eight challenges in the second half of marriage. In the next section we will look at two more challenges.

Friendship and Romance

The fifth challenge is to build a deeper friendship and enjoy your spouse. In the second half of marriage, we can deepen our friendship and become close companions. When we are in a long-term marriage, we become more familiar and comfortable with each other. When we acknowledge that we aren’t perfect, we can relax and enjoy each other. What are you doing to build your friendship with your spouse? Are you working to expand your boundaries and prevent boredom? Are you trying to put more fun back into your marriage? Fun and friendship are two key ingredients in the second half of marriage.

One wife married for twenty years said, “This year has been a time of growth for us as a couple. It started with lots of stress—overcommitment and relationship problems—but God helped

us through it. We just celebrated our twentieth anniversary with a romantic getaway. We've become best friends again. Hope can be restored!"

In their book, the Arps provide some concrete tips for making the second half more enjoyable. First, take care of yourself. Sometimes our back muscles can give us a midlife wake-up call, so exercise and physical therapy should become a way of life. Second, pace yourself. Third, build relationships and maintain them. This is the time of life to beef up your friendships and develop a support system. Fourth, stretch your boundaries. Fifth, stay involved with life. Sixth, hang in there. When you are discouraged, don't throw your life away.

The sixth challenge is to renew romance and restore a pleasurable, sexual relationship. Contrary to popular belief, interest in sex does not have to diminish as we grow older. Actually the research done by the Arps tends to indicate that sexual satisfaction increases rather than decreases with the number of years married. Couples in the second half of marriage need to do three things: protect privacy, cherish the love relationship, and renew romance. These are important priorities.

The Arps list six secrets to rekindle romance. These are: be affectionate, be a listener, be adventuresome, be playful, be in shape, and be a little wacky. As we grow older, the pace of life changes and there is a greater need to stay in shape by eating well, working out, and watching our weight. This is not only good for your marriage. It is good for your health.

These then are the first six of eight challenges in the second half of marriage. Let's look at the last two challenges.

Adapted Relationships and Spiritual Growth

The seventh challenge is to adjust to changing roles with

aging parents and adult children. As children leave the nest, we release them into adulthood. But it is also important to reconnect with them on an adult level. At the same time, you need to balance relationships with your own parents. This will be difficult, especially if your parents did not successfully meet this challenge in their marriage. Whatever your situation, your relationship with your adult children and your elderly parents will affect your marriage. Accepting the circumstances can be key in building a strong second half of marriage. You can't go back and change your family history, but you can make wise choices for the future based upon past circumstances.

The drain of family commitments can take its toll on a second half marriage. One wife of twenty-eight years said, "For me, the emotional drain of trying to be everything to everybody is affecting my relationship with my husband. There is no energy left at the end of the day for me to invest in our marriage."

The challenge of rearing children and sending them into a world also affects one of the other challenges we have discussed: the challenge of communication. One husband of thirty years said, "We don't have an empty nest yet, although two out of three are gone. We've tried to push our children out of the nest but leave the lines of communication open to advise and assist when needed."

The final challenge is to evaluate where you are on your spiritual pilgrimage, grow closer to each other and to God, and together serve others. Our faith in God should make a difference in our marriage. The relationship of a husband and wife to God provides the foundation for a good marriage that will be tested by the changing circumstances of the second half of marriage. Couples should evaluate their spiritual pilgrimage and seek to grow closer spiritually to each other and to God.

A husband married for thirty-two years said, "The best aspects

of our marriage are companionship, our faith in God, and our love for each other. We try to add to the other's happiness by surprising each other with little gifts, a hug, a kiss, or giving a compliment—or just being thoughtful."

We trust that this has been helpful to you as you seek to strengthen your marriage and grow closer to God. We believe you will grow closer to each other as you grow closer to God. May God bless you.

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The Bill of Rights

Introduction

The Bill of Rights is the first ten amendments to the Constitution. It establishes the basic civil liberties that the federal government cannot violate.

When the Constitution was drafted some were fearful that a federal government would usurp the rights and powers of the states and the people. Critics were fearful that the federal government would exceed its enumerated powers—a fear that in hindsight seems most reasonable. The Bill of Rights was designed to address those apprehensions. The states ratified the Bill of Rights in 1791, three years after the Constitution was ratified.

In this article we are going to provide a brief look at the ten amendments that comprise the Bill of Rights.

First Amendment

> *Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.*

The First Amendment begins by preventing Congress from establishing religion or prohibiting the free exercise of religion. Originally the religion clause of the First Amendment was intended to prevent the federal government from establishing a national church. Some New England states maintained established state-churches until the 1830s.

In the last century, the Supreme Court has extended the First Amendment to any religious activity by any governmental body. The establishment clause originally prohibited the establishment of a national church by Congress, but now has been broadened to prohibit anything that appears like a government endorsement of religious practice. The free exercise clause supposedly prohibits government from placing any burden on religious practice.

The second part of the First Amendment provides freedom of political participation. This includes freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly with the right to petition the government for a redress of grievances. This quartet of freedoms allows citizens to be actively involved in electing representatives and influencing legislation.

Second Amendment

> *A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.*

The Second Amendment gives Americans the right to keep and bear arms. Although the amendment clearly provides such rights, proponents of limiting a citizen's right to arms attempt to argue that the amendment only applies to a militia like the National Guard.

Before the drafting of the Constitution, citizen-militias existed to guarantee order and domestic security. The framers envisioned an armed citizenry that was separate from a federal military that could be controlled by government authorities. They were well aware of the abuses that came when a King or Prime Minister could control a standing army. Armed citizens provided an important check and balance of power. The framers well understood the threat to freedom when gun ownership was a government monopoly.

Third Amendment

> *No Soldier shall, in time of peace, be quartered in any house, without the consent of the Owner, nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law.*

The Third Amendment guarantees that no soldier may be quartered in any house without the consent of the owner. At its face, this would seem to be an obsolete amendment since the federal government has never placed soldiers in private homes.

Unfortunately this amendment has been used to make the case for a right to privacy in the U.S. Constitution. The Supreme Court cited this amendment in 1965 in the case of *Griswold v. Connecticut* involving the issue of contraceptives. This case provided the foundation for the infamous abortion case of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973.

Many legal scholars question whether the Constitution has an implicit right to privacy. Obviously the Third Amendment provides homeowners with protection against unreasonable

military intrusion. But it is quite a stretch to manipulate this amendment into a justification for a right to privacy with regard to contraception or abortion.

Fourth Amendment

> *The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.*

The Fourth Amendment requires that a specific warrant be obtained before a search is made of a person, their house, their papers, or personal effects. The framers wanted to ban the British practice of obtaining a general warrant which allowed the seizure of anything in the suspect's home. A search requires a specific warrant issued by a neutral magistrate.

In the last century, the Supreme Court has refined the amendment through what is called "the exclusionary rule." Evidence obtained outside the specific requirements of the warrant is inadmissible in a court of law. Cases in court often swing on whether evidence was obtained legally and whether the law enforcement officer acted in "good faith" in the securing of that evidence.

Fifth Amendment

> *No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor*

> *shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.*

The Fifth Amendment is best known for guaranteeing a citizen's right to refrain from answering a question that might be incriminating. Actually there is more to this amendment than "taking the fifth." The amendment also provides for due process, a grand jury, and freedom from double jeopardy.

Many citizens believe that the amendment guarantees your right to remain silent. Actually the amendment states that no person should be compelled to be a witness against himself. The right to remain silent comes from the so-called Miranda warnings read by a police officer before questioning. The Supreme Court mandated these phrases in an attempt to further protect the rights of the accused.

Sixth Amendment

> *In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defense.*

The Sixth Amendment provides additional rights in a criminal trial. These include the right to an attorney, the right to a trial by jury, and the right to confront one's accusers.

The right to an attorney implies the right to "competent" counsel. Appeal courts have had to decide what constitutes

competent or incompetent counsel. Usually a guilty verdict is allowed to stand if it seems that an attorney's actions did not significantly affect the judicial outcome.

The right to confront your accusers was a deliberate attempt to prevent the possibility of the U.S. some day having a Star Chamber as occurred previously in England. Witnesses must testify in open court and thus are available for cross-examination. The only cases where this is not done are in child abuse cases where child-victim testimony is allowed by videotape.

Seventh Amendment

> *In Suits at common law, where the value in controversy shall exceed twenty dollars, the right of trial by jury shall be preserved, and no fact tried by a jury, shall be otherwise re-examined in any Court of the United States, than according to the rules of the common law.*

The Seventh Amendment addresses civil cases. It provides for a jury trial (in cases involving more than $20) that involves suits at common law. Although this seems like a logical right that would already be assumed, it reflects the concerns of the framers that a federal judiciary would set aside jury verdicts and perhaps even eliminate juries altogether.

Eighth Amendment

> *Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.*

The Eighth Amendment protects citizens against excessive actions. These include excessive bail, excessive fines, and cruel and unusual punishment. These were all provisions found in English law used to restrict the excesses of the English kings.

The Supreme Court on many occasions has been called upon to consider whether a particular punishment was proportional to the crime. This has also included a number of controversial rulings over the last few decades about whether long prison terms or capital punishment constitutes cruel and unusual punishment.

Ninth Amendment

> *The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.*

The Ninth Amendment prevents the courts from thinking that the rights listed in the first eight amendments are exclusive and exhaustive. In other words, just because the Constitution does not specifically list a right does not mean that right is not retained by the people.

Judicial activists have used this amendment to justify their expansion of additional rights. The Supreme Court reasoned in this way concerning the so-called right to privacy. The Court argued that the First, Third, Fourth, and Fifth Amendments all protect privacy in some way. Therefore, they argued that the right to privacy does exist and should be protected by the Constitution.

Tenth Amendment

> *The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.*

The Tenth Amendment protects the structure of federalism. Those powers not specifically delegated to the federal government are reserved to the States or the people. The framers intended that the people and the states would decide

how power was to be delegated to the other levels of government (cities, towns, counties, etc.).

The Tenth Amendment was written to provide additional protection for federalism since many citizens were concerned with giving a national government too much power. Although the Tenth Amendment did provide some protection, its impact was undercut by the Fourteenth Amendment that effectively made the federal government the ultimate protector of states rights and has lessened its importance. **For Further Reading**

David M. Wagner, *Freedom Forum: A Commentary on the Bill of Rights*, Washington, DC: Family Research Council, 2000.

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Marriage Test

Is your marriage in the danger zone? How would you know? This article provides a marriage test to help you evaluate your marriage and see if you might need to obtain information or counsel about improving your marriage.

A few years ago I addressed the issue in an article titled, "Why Marriages Fail." The material came from PREP, which stands for the "Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program" developed at the University of Denver. The material was originally published in a book entitled *Fighting for Your Marriage*, and has been featured on numerous TV newsmagazine programs like *20/20.* There is also a Christian version of this material found in a book written by Scott Stanley entitled *A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage*.

Marriage Test

I want to extend that discussion by providing a test you can apply to your marriage. It is loosely based on a questionnaire developed by Howard Markman at the Center for Marital and Family Studies. There are fifteen questions you answer by giving your marriage points. At the end you total the points to see how your marriage is doing. If your total is positive, you are doing well. If it is negative, then you may need to do some work and perhaps seek counseling.

The first three questions have to do with your background. Many of us come into a marriage without considering our previous family and marital backgrounds. The truth is that we are not blank slates when we get married. Our background does have an influence on our marriage.

The first question is about cohabitation. Living together before marriage could signal a lack of commitment. In fact, numerous studies show that living together can have a detrimental effect on a marriage. Often poor communication patterns are developed in such a living arrangement that carry over into marriage. Here's how you score the first question. If you moved in before the wedding give your marriage a 1. If you waited until after marriage, give your marriage a +1.

The second question involves your parents' marriage. Poor communication and conflict-management skills can be inherited from parents. If your parents had a poor marriage, give your marriage a 1. If they had a strong marriage, give your marriage a +1.

The third question involves a previous marriage that ended in divorce. It turns out that one of the best predictors for divorce is a previous divorce. Divorcing once could mean a willingness to divorce again. If you had a previous marriage, give your marriage a 1. If this is your first marriage, give it a +1.

Religion and Finances

The fourth question involves religion which can be the source of strength or strain in a marriage. Religion provides support for marriage and usually discourages divorce. But practicing separate ones can add strain. If you don’t practice religion, give yourself a 2. If you practice different religions, give yourself a 1. If you both attend church regularly, give yourselves a +2.

Question five concerns finances. Money is the number one cause of fights in a marriage. Frequently these differences can lead to marital disharmony or disruption. If you and your spouse fight about money, give your marriage a 1. If you generally agree about spending, give your marriage a +1.

The sixth question also involves finances. In particular it deals with income. Some men aren’t comfortable when the wife is the family breadwinner. If the wife earns more in your marriage, give yourself a 1. If the husband earns more, give yourself a +1.

The seventh question is about your current age. Simply put, older couples are less likely to divorce. If your current age is under 30, give yourself a 1. If you are over 40, then give yourself a +1. If you are over 60, give yourself a +2.

The eighth question is about the length of your marriage. The longer you are married, the less likely you are to split. If you are married less than five years, give yourself a 1. If you have been married five to ten years, give yourself a +1. If have been married more than ten years, give yourself a +2.

Well, that’s the first eight questions. As you can see these questions focus on all sorts of issues that engaged couples rarely consider, but can be significant indicators of marital success. Keep track of your score and see how your marriage is doing. Although this is not an exhaustive questionnaire, the

answers to these questions give you a quick look at how your marriage is doing.

Support and Family

The ninth question concerns support for your marriage. A lack of support from family or friends for your marriage creates tension and can cause a couple to question their relationship. Was your family supportive of this marriage? Did your friends support your choice in a marriage partner or were they concerned about your choice? If family and friends disapproved, give your marriage a 1. If family and friends approved, give your marriage a +1.

The tenth question revolves around changes in the family. Family additions or changes can impact a marriage. Having a baby, adjusting to an empty nest, or moving Grandma in adds stress. If you have had a recent family change, give your marriage 1. If there have been no big changes, then give your marriage a +1.

The eleventh question deals with conflicting attitudes. Opposing views on key issues in a marriage can cause division. Differences about commitment, beliefs, or expectations are just a few issues that can affect a marriage. If you mostly disagree with each other, give yourself a 2. If you are split about half-and-half, give yourself a 0. If you mostly agree, give yourself a +2.

The twelfth question concerns confidence. Feeling assured that relationships will survive anything can help couples through. If you are doubtful the marriage will last, give your marriage a 2. If you are pretty confident, give your marriage a 0. If you think your marriage will never fail, give yourself a +2.

Marital Communication

The thirteenth question involves marital communication. It’s

best if a couple can talk openly about problems without fighting or withdrawing. If you always fight rather than talk about problems, then give yourself a 2. If you sometimes fight, give yourself a 0. If you mostly talk rather than fight, give yourself a +2.

The fourteenth question deals with happiness. Feeling fulfilled in marriage is critical. If you are unhappy in the relationship, give yourself a 3. If you are not consistently happy, give yourself a 0. If you are happy in a relationship, give yourself a +3.

The fifteenth question deals with sex. Being unsatisfied with frequency or quality can create tension in a marriage. If you are unsatisfied with your sex life, give your marriage a 1. If you are satisfied, give yourself a +1.

Well, that's the test. If you have kept track of your answers to these questions, you should have a score. If your score is positive, especially if it is +5 or higher then your marriage is doing well. If your score is negative, then you may want to work on your marriage. That might mean reading a book on marriage, attending a marriage conference, or seek out counseling. That might be helpful even if you had a positive score, but it would be essential if you did not have a positive score.

As I mentioned previously in the article on "Why Marriages Fail," you should not be discouraged by a negative score. The research does show which marriages might have trouble, but that does not suggest that there is nothing we can do about it. As the book of James reminds us, it is not enough to just believe something, we must act upon it (James 1:25, 2:15-18, 3:13). So let's talk about what we can do.

Steps to Change

We have been talking about marriage and helped you to evaluate

your marriage by taking a marriage test. The first few questions dealt with our marital background. Specifically the questions focused on cohabitation, your parents' marriage, and previous divorce. We do not come into a marriage as a blank slate. Our previous experiences do influence the way we interact with our spouse. Obviously, we can change our behavior but we have to make a concerted effort to do so or else we will fall back into patterns that may adversely affect our marriage.

Many of our other questions dealt with the current status of your marriage. This included such issues as religious background, finances, age, the length of your marriage, support for your marriage, changes in your family, conflicting attitudes, confidence, marital communication, happiness, and sexual satisfaction. Again, many of these factors can be changed with a desire and plan to do so. But if we do not change our behavior then we will fall back into patterns that could be detrimental to our marriage.

I hope you will take the time to act on the results of this test. Most of us go through life and go through our marriages on auto- pilot. We set the controls and then fall back into a pattern that is the result of our background and current circumstances. Perhaps this marriage test will encourage you to work on your marriage. Perhaps this test will show your spouse that there are some issues you need to address.

The sad social statistics about divorce show that many marriages fall apart for lack of adequate attention. Every year a million couples end up in divorce court. Yet if you asked them if that would be how their marriage would end, very few would have predicted it on their wedding day.

Most people get married because they want their marriage to work. Unfortunately, many of those marriages fail. Some fail because of poor marital communication. If you identify that as a problem, then I encourage you to read my article on "Why

Marriages Fail.” If you want to identify other potential problems, I encourage you to take this test with your spouse and then talk about the results. I pray that you will use this test to alert you and your spouse to any danger signs and then begin to change your habits and actions so that your marriage will be successful.

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Christian Rumors

Madalyn Murray O’Hair

No doubt you’ve heard them and wondered if they were true. Stories about Madalyn Murray O’Hair’s campaign against Christian radio, Janet Reno’s definition of a cult or Charles Darwin’s supposed deathbed conversion. Are they true or not?

Believe me—I see more than my share of these myths and rumors. Because of my public visibility and presence on various web pages, I probably get a lot more e-mail messages than most people do. So I probably see a higher percentage of myths and rumors than most. Yet, I am amazed at the number of rumors flying around the Internet.

And we get lots of phone calls at Probe from people wondering if various stories they have heard are true. Others forward e-mail messages they receive and ask if they are true, before they forward them to others.

Many of these messages are relatively harmless ones like the promise that you will get free M&Ms if you forward an e-mail message to someone. This apparently has mutated into the belief that IBM will send you a free computer if you forward a

particular e-mail. Supposedly IBM is doing this because of a recent merger between Hewlett-Packard and Gateway. As my teenage daughter likes to say, “Yeah right!” Oh, and don’t forget about the GAP offering free clothing because of a supposed merger with Abercrombie and Fitch.

Some other rumors are harmful to companies. One example would be the false rumor that an executive with Proctor and Gamble announced he was a Satanist on the *Sally Jesse Raphael Show*. The original rumor had this happening on *The Donahue Show*. And then there’s the rumor that the designer Liz Claiborne told the *Oprah* audience that she donates profits to the Church of Satan. None of these rumors are true, yet these e-mails still show up in Probe’s inbox on a fairly regular basis.

In this article I want to address what I consider to be the major myths and rumors that are spread by the Christian community. With so many, I had to be selective; so I tried to focus on those persistent myths spread by Christians and some of the rumors which seem to nearly have a life of their own.

The most persistent rumor in the Christian community over the last few decades is the mistaken belief that atheist Madalyn Murray O’Hair has been trying to ban religious broadcasting through petition RM 2493. Back in December 1974, there was a petition by Jeremy Lanaman and Lorenzo Milam to investigate radio stations with non-commercial educational licenses. The FCC unanimously rejected the petition in August 1975. But somehow the original information mutated into the current rumor that Madalyn Murray O’Hair was trying to remove Christian radio stations from the airwaves. The rumor wasn’t true when she was alive, and certainly isn’t true now. Nevertheless, the FCC has received millions and millions of bogus petitions. Let me state once again, the rumor isn’t true and all of us should do what we can to stop the rumor.

Janet Reno, Enemy of Christians

I am trying to address what I consider to be the major myths and rumors that are spread by the Christian community. Many of these show up in e-mails, while others are repeated by Christian speakers and believed to be true, even though they are false.

One persistent rumor has been attributed to former Attorney General Janet Reno, who supposedly defines Christians as belonging to a cult. Let me quote from one variation of the e-mail.

> *Are you a cultist, ACCORDING TO JANET RENO?? . . . I certainly HOPE SO!! Attorney General Janet Reno, "A cultist is one who has a strong belief in the Bible and the Second Coming of Christ; who frequently attends Bible studies; who has a high level of financial giving to a Christian cause; who home schools their children; who has accumulated survival foods and has a strong belief in the Second Amendment; and who distrusts big government. Any of these may qualify a person as a cultist but certainly more than one of these would cause us to look at this person as a threat, and his family as being in a risk situation that qualified for government interference." Janet Reno, Attorney General, USA Interview on 60 Minutes, June 26, 1994 Do you qualify? Are you (as defined by the U.S. Attorney General) a threat? If any of these apply to you then you are!! This worries me. Does it worry you? Let's impeach her too!!! Everyone in this country "The land of the free" with computer access should copy this and send to every man, woman and child who can read.*

The quote is a hoax, but that didn't stop many Christians from trying to send this e-mail to nearly everyone they knew that had access to the Internet. Even now that Janet Reno is no longer Attorney General, this e-mail still circulates on a

fairly regular basis.

Here are the facts. According to CBS, Janet Reno did not appear on *60 Minutes* in 1994. And it is doubtful that she would ever say something so inflammatory on this program or any other program. If she had, certainly it would have made front-page news to define millions of Christians as “cultists” and a “threat” to society.

The Office of Legislative Affairs in the Justice Department says they believe the quote first appeared in the August 1993 edition of the “Paul Revere Newsletter” published by the Christian Defense League in Flora, Illinois. The group has been described by some as a “far right hate group” holding to racist and anti-Semitic views. The newsletter subsequently ran a retraction.

This is the unfortunate origin of this persistent e-mail message. Unknowingly, Christians circulated a rumor started by a group bent on attacking the Attorney General. They did so because Christians were attacked as being cultists, thus they spread a rumor that was not true.

Joshua’s Long Day

One story that has been around for quite a long time is the myth of NASA discovering Joshua’s long day. As the story goes, computers at the space agency discovered that as they went back in time the calculations did not work. Scientists doing orbital mechanics calculations to determine the positions of the planets in the future realized that they were off by a day. A biblical scholar in the group supposedly solved the question when he remembered the passage in Joshua 10:13 which says that “the sun stood still, and the moon stopped” for about a whole day.

Attempts to verify the story through the NASA Spaceflight Center in Maryland never materialized. But that didn’t stop

the spreading of the story that NASA found computer evidence of a missing day, which thereby verified the story of Joshua's long day.

As it turns out, the apparent origin of this story precedes NASA by many years. Harry Rimmer wrote about astronomical calculations recorded by Professor C.A. Totten of Yale University in his 1936 book *The Harmony of Science and Scripture*.{1} He quotes professor Totten, who said, "[A] fellow professor, an accomplished astronomer, made the strange discovery that the earth was twenty- four hours out of schedule!" He says that Professor Totten challenged this man to investigate the question of the inspiration of the Bible. Some time later, his colleague replied: "In the tenth chapter of Joshua, I found the missing twenty-four hours accounted for. Then I went back and checked up on my figures, and found that at the time of Joshua there were only 23 hours and 20 minutes lost."

Researchers have gone back to Professor Totten's book *Joshua's Long Day and the Dial of Ahaz* (published in 1890) and have not been able to find the story of the astronomer. Instead they find his argument for the lost day based upon the chronology of Jesus Christ. He believed that Christ must have been born at the fall equinox and that the world was created four thousand years before Christ was born. He therefore calculates that the world was created on September 22, 4000 b.c. This day must be a Sunday, but using a calendar we find that this date was a Monday. Therefore, argues Professor Totten, Joshua's long day accounts for this "missing day."

As you can see, there is no story about NASA scientists, nor are there even skeptical astronomers. He makes a number of very questionable assumptions in order to supposedly "prove" Joshua's long day.

The story of NASA verifying Joshua's long day is a myth that has been passed down for decades and apparently has its

origins from stories recorded even before NASA existed. The story is false.

Darwin's Deathbed Conversion

One of the most persistent stories is the *supposed* conversion of Charles Darwin and his *supposed* rejection of evolution on his deathbed. Christian speakers and writers retell this story with great regularity even though there is good evidence that Darwin remained an agnostic and an evolutionist to the day of his death. And even if the story was true (and it is not), its retelling is irrelevant to whether the theory of evolution is true. Darwin did not recant, and scientists would continue to teach the theory even if he had changed his mind.

The origin of this story can be traced to one "Lady Hope" who started the story after the death of Charles Darwin. On one occasion, Lady Hope spoke to a group of young men and women at the school founded by the evangelist D. L. Moody at Northfield, Massachusetts. According to her, Darwin had been reading the book of Hebrews on his deathbed. She said he asked for the local Sunday school to sing in a summerhouse on the grounds, and had confessed: "How I wish I had not expressed my theory of evolution as I have done." She even said he would like her to gather a congregation since he "would like to speak to them of Christ Jesus and His salvation, being in a state where he was eagerly savouring the heavenly anticipation of bliss."{2}

D. L. Moody encouraged Lady Hope to publish her story, and it was printed in the Boston *Watchman Examiner*. The story spread, and the claims have been republished and restated ever since.

The claims were refuted at the time and were subsequently addressed by Darwin's son and daughter when they were revived years later. In 1918, Francis Darwin made this public statement:

> *Lady Hope's account of my father's views on religion is quite untrue. I have publicly accused her of falsehood, but have not seen any reply. My father's agnostic point of view is given in my Life and Letters of Charles Darwin, Vol. I., pp. 304-317. You are at liberty to publish the above statement. Indeed, I shall be glad if you will do so.*

Darwin's daughter, Henrietta, writing in the *Christian* for February 23, 1922, said she was present at her father's deathbed. "Lady Hope was not present during his last illness, or any illness. I believe he never even saw her, but in any case she had no influence over him in any department of thought or belief. He never recanted any of his scientific views, either then or earlier. We think the story of his conversion was fabricated in the U.S.A." She concluded by saying, "The whole story has no foundation whatever."

So that is the history of the story of Charles Darwin's deathbed conversion. It simply is not true.

Satanic Affiliations

Now I would like to conclude by looking at rumors linking various individuals and groups to Satan.

One individual linked to Satan is J. K. Rowling, the author of the best-selling *Harry Potter* series. Although we at Probe have expressed some concern over the books, we believe some of the criticism concerning her has been unfair. One purported quotation making the rounds comes from a satirical publication known as *The Onion*. Supposedly she says, "I think it's absolute rubbish to protest children's books on the grounds that they are luring children to Satan. People should be praising them for that! These books guide children to an understanding that the weak, idiotic Son of God is a living hoax who will be humiliated when the rain of fire comes." The quote goes on to use pornographic language.

Editors at *The Onion* made up the quote along with just about everything else in the article. The fictitious article includes mock quotes from blaspheming children planning satanic rituals. It claimed that fourteen million American children have joined the Church of Satan because of the *Harry Potter* series. Unfortunately, many Christians did not understand that the magazine is a blatantly satirical tabloid attempting to lampoon Christians concerned about the *Harry Potter* series.

A similar rumor surfaced in the 1980s when chain letters and petitions supposedly documented that the Procter & Gamble symbol was really a satanic symbol. According to the story, the company's historic "man in the moon" symbol was the devil. And Procter & Gamble executives supposedly appeared on a TV talk show (Phil Donahue or Sally Jesse Raphael) to boast that their company gave some of their profits to the Church of Satan.

I think the lesson this week is that Christians should be more discerning. If you receive a letter or e-mail full of sensational information, you should ask yourself why this is the first you have heard about it. If Janet Reno or J.K. Rowling or an executive with Procter & Gamble said the things they allegedly said, wouldn't you have heard about it long before you received this letter or e- mail? If it sounds incredible, maybe that's because it isn't credible. If you have questions, feel free to write us or call us at Probe or check out the numerous Web sites dedicated to debunking myths, rumors, and urban legends. In the meantime, we should all learn to be more discerning.

Notes

1. Harry Rimmer, *The Harmony of Science and Scripture* (1936), 281-282.
2. Ronald W. Clark, *The Survival of Charles Darwin: a Biography of a Man and an Idea* (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1985),

199.

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Terrorism in America

Many are calling it one of the bloodiest days in American history. And now we face the prospect that terrorism has become a part of modern life. Crashing planes into buildings, hijackings, bombings, and assassinations on different continents of the world may seem like isolated attacks, but they reflect an easy reliance on violence as a way to promote social, political, and religious change. They are elements of a pervasive "end justifies the means" philosophy being followed to its most perverse conclusions.

Terrorism has become the scourge of democratic governments. According to Rand Corporation expert Brian Jenkins, nearly a third of all terrorists attacks involve Americans. Democratic governments, accustomed to dealing within a legal structure, often find it difficult to deal with criminals and terrorists who routinely operate outside of the law. Yet deterrence is just as much a part of justice as proper enforcement of the laws.

Democratic governments which do not deter criminals inevitably spawn vigilantism as normally law-abiding citizens, who have lost confidence in the criminal justice system, take the law into their own hands. A similar backlash is beginning to emerge as a result of the inability of Western democracies to defend themselves against terrorists.

But lack of governmental resolve is only part of the problem. Terrorists thrive on media exposure, and news organizations

around the world have been all too willing to give terrorists what they crave: publicity. If the news media gave terrorists the minuscule coverage their numbers and influence demanded, terrorism would decline. But when hijackings and bombings are given prominent media attention, governments start feeling pressure from their citizens to resolve the crisis and eventually capitulate to terrorists' demands. Encouraged by their latest success, terrorists usually try again. Appeasement, Churchill wisely noted, always whets the appetite, and recent successes have made terrorists hungry for more attacks.

Some news commentators have been unwilling to call terrorism what it is: wanton, criminal violence. They blunt the barbarism by arguing that "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter." But this simply is not true. Terrorists are not concerned about human rights and human dignity. In fact, they end up destroying human rights in their alleged fight for human rights.

Terrorism has been called the "new warfare." But terrorists turn the notion of war on its head. Innocent non-combatants become the target of terrorist attacks. Terrorist warfare holds innocent people hostage and makes soldier and civilian alike potential targets for their aggression.

Terrorist groups are not living in fear of their host governments. Instead, law-abiding citizens live in fear of terrorist groups. In one TV interview a Middle Eastern terrorist was quoted as saying, "We want the people of the United States to feel the terror."

The ability of these groups to carry out their agenda is not the issue. The fundamental issue is how U.S. government leaders should deal with this new type of military strategy. Terrorists have held American diplomats hostage for years, blown up military compounds, and hijacked airplanes and cruise ships. Although some hostages have been released, many others

have been killed and the U.S. has been unsuccessful at punishing more than a small number of terrorists.

Although international diplomacy has been the primary means used by the United States against terrorism, we should consider what other means may also be appropriate. In the past, American leaders have responded to military aggression in a variety of ways short of declaring war.

Military strategy must be deployed which can hunt down small groups of well-armed and well-funded men who hide within the territory of a host country. We must also develop a political strategy that will allow us to work within a host country. We must make it clear how serious the United States takes a terrorist threat. American citizens are tired of being military targets in an undeclared war.

Through diplomatic channels we must make two things very clear to the host country. First, they should catch and punish the terrorist groups themselves as civilian criminals. Or, second, they should extradite the enemy soldiers and give them up to an international court for trial.

If the host country fails to act on these two requests, we should make it clear that we see them in complicity with the terrorist groups. But failing to exercise their civil responsibility, they leave themselves open to the consequences of allowing hostile military forces within their borders.

In some cases, an American strike force of counterterrorists might be necessary when the threat is both real and imminent. This should be the option of last resort, but in certain instances it may be necessary. In 1989, for example, Israeli special forces captured Sheik Obeid and no doubt crippled the terrorist network by bringing one of their leaders to justice. Such acts should be done rarely and carefully, but they may be appropriate means to bring about justice.

In conclusion, I believe we must recognize terrorism as a new

type of military aggression which requires governmental action. We are involved in an undeclared war and Congress and the President must take the same sorts of actions they would if threatened by a hostile country. We must work to deter further terrorist aggression.

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