

Lessons from Camp Quest

In August of this year, the North Texas Church of Freethought (NTCOF) hosted Camp Quest Texas on a farm outside of Dallas. This eight-hour event for children of atheists, agnostics and other “free thinkers” included nearly 40 children between the ages of five and 15. According to a published report^{1}, the day began with an exercise in making up creation myths based on the Apache story of fire before leading into activities with exotic animals, fossils and staged UFO sightings. The primary purposes of the event were twofold:

- *Encourage the children to have open minds and embrace scientific skepticism*
- *Provide a fun experience for the children where they could make friends among the community of non-believers. This objective was partially motivated by a desire to counter negative experiences some of the children had experienced with schoolmates who believed in God.*

Let me begin by stating that I applaud the organizers and parents for taking positive steps to encourage their children to ask good questions and look for good answers. Even though I suspect that the event was slanted towards promoting an atheistic worldview, I believe all parents should assume an obligation to steer their children toward the truth as they see it. At the very least, they should equip their children to see through the illogical arguments of some enthusiastic proponent of a cultic religion (even if they think that I am just such a proponent!).

The newspaper account of this event and an accompanying interview with the executive director of NTCOF can teach us several lessons as we evangelicals take on the task of raising younger generations.

Background

Before looking for takeaway lessons, let's investigate a little more background. Zachary Moore, the executive director for NTCOF, described their church this way:

"We're a church of freethinkers, which means that we try to understand the natural world by relying on reason and evidence. Like most people, we enjoy spending time with others who share our values and have similar interests. Forming a church just seemed like the natural thing to do, since many of us thought the only thing wrong with churches were the strange things they told you to believe in."[\[2\]](#)

At one time, Zachary considered himself a believer in Christianity. At some point, he came to the conclusion that the evidence did not support his belief in God. As he said,

"If Christianity were true, then I would want at least what Doubting Thomas got. If another theistic worldview were true, then I'd need something equivalent. I don't think it's too much to ask to be able to talk to a deity personally before I'm asked to worship it."[\[3\]](#)

This question, "If God wants me to believe in Him, why doesn't He present me personally with overwhelming evidence?" is one of the classic hard questions raised against our faith. The purpose of this article is not to answer this question, but if you want more information you can find it at Probe.org (see related articles).

Zachary and the NTCOF represent a point of view that is heavily in the minority among Americans, but is growing more vocal as it grows numerically. Recent Pew Institute surveys indicate that the number of atheists, agnostics and others who claim no faith is less than 10% of the population. However, a 2007 Barna survey provides a revealing look inside that statistic.

The table below shows the number of people with “no faith” in each age demographic based on surveys taken in 1992 and 2007. The data reveals two important trends. First, the number of people claiming no faith in God in 2007 grows markedly higher with each younger generation, more than tripling from the 6% for those over 61 to 19% for those from 18–22. Second, the percentages for each generation have not changed significantly in the last fifteen years. We don’t see more people turning to faith as they grow older. It appears that the skeptics remain skeptics as each generation ages.

Percent of Americans who are atheist or agnostic^[4]:

<u>Generation</u>	<u>Ages in 2007</u>	<u>1992 Survey</u>	<u>2007 Survey</u>
Adult Mosaics	18-22	–	19%
Boomers	23-41	16%	14%
Busters	42-60	8%	9%
Elders	61+	4%	6%

Could it be that our secular schools, culture and public square are creating their expected result—generations that are becoming more and more secular? It also appears that on average, once people reach the age of 18, their belief in God is pretty much set for life.

How should we respond to this trend of succeeding generations turning away from God? I believe the report on Camp Quest reveals some lessons we can take away and apply to this question. I want to consider three possible lessons:

- *Respect those who express doubts*
- *Understand that the Truth is not afraid of skepticism (or scientific inquiry)*
- *Don’t be intimidated by an unfriendly world.*

Respect Those Who Express Doubts

Many of the children attending Camp Quest felt like they are living in a culture where it is taboo to ask the question, "Why should I believe in God?"

One fourteen year old boy "was at camp hoping to meet some nonbelievers his age. All his friends in Allen believe in God, he said, and he tries to keep his atheism a secret from them. 'They'd probably avoid me if they knew,' he said." [\[5\]](#)

"Another boy, 14, whose stepfather requested his anonymity, started home-schooling this year after enduring years of bullying for his open atheism." [\[6\]](#)

In my opinion, looking at the experience of the Quest campers gives startling insight into the issue of teenagers from Christian homes turning away from the church in their college years.

Consider a teenager from a Christian family who has questions about the God they learned about in Sunday school. Where can they get some answers to the tough questions? They look around and see how their peers and parents react to other children who question the party line. They realize they may risk status with their peers if they ask these questions. So, at a time when they are around Christian adults on a regular basis who could help them deal with the tough questions and the evidence for God, they are intimidated into keeping silent. Once they leave the home for college or other vocations, they enter an environment where the primary people that claim to have answers to these questions are belittling Christianity as a crutch for people who believe in myths.

In other words, if the children of atheists are afraid to bring up their doubts in public, how much more do many children from Christian families feel forced to go through the motions while hiding their major doubts and concerns?

If we teach our children to respect those with genuine questions about God, we receive a double benefit:

- *Our children will be more willing to bring up questions that cause them to struggle.*
- *Our children will have opportunities to hear the questions of others who need to know Christ. If we model for our children a gentle and respectful response to peoples' questions/beliefs, their friends are more likely to be willing to share their questions with them.*

Understand That the Truth Is Not Afraid of Skepticism (or Scientific Inquiry)

Most parents at Camp Quest indicated that they did not want to dictate their children's beliefs, but clearly they wanted to impact the thought process. As one mother stated:

"Our job isn't to tell children what to think," she said. "It's about opening up their minds and learning how to ask good questions." [\[7\]](#)

Just as we hope that the children at Camp Quest will ultimately ask the right questions about the purpose of life and their eternal destinies, we should encourage our children to examine the truth claims of Christianity. After all, Jesus told Pilate:

'For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.'" John 18:37-38 (*NASU or New American Standard Updated.*)

Lies and hoaxes are afraid of skeptics. The Truth welcomes skeptics because it shines in the light of examination. If we are willing to examine the truth with our children, it will build their confidence in their faith.

Many teenagers in Sunday School and youth meetings learn the things that Christians do (and don't do) and some things that Christians believe, but never learn about why we believe that the evidence for Christianity is strong and a biblical worldview answers the hard questions better than any other worldview. I suspect that many teenagers get the impression that their pastors and teachers are afraid of hard questions and want to avoid them. Perhaps in too many cases this suspicion is reality.

This reinforces what we have stated in prior articles on the subject of youth retention (see *The Last Christian Generation*, related articles). We need to:

- *Encourage students to ask tough questions and respect them for doing so.*
- *Equip parents and student leaders with solid answers for the tough questions.*
- *Take the initiative and address these topics in Sunday school and youth meetings even before the students ask the questions.*
- *Point them to resources like Probe for those that want to go deeper into these topics.*
- *Expose them to Christian adults who are living out a mature biblical worldview*

Don't Be Intimidated By An Unfriendly World.

How many of us can identify with the following statement:

Just as evangelical adults need social support from their church, our children need it even more. Many of our kids are ostracized at school because their parents are evangelicals,

or because they're sharing their own faith at school. It can also be challenging to be an evangelical parent when most people assume that you're intolerant and ignorant if you teach your children to believe in hell and in Jesus as the only way to heaven. Christian camps provide a valuable resource for parents, plus they are full of fun activities for kids that reinforce our values—faith in Christ, love for God and our neighbors, good morals, and a desire for others to receive eternal life.

It rings true, doesn't it? It is interesting to consider that the statement above is a slight modification of a statement made by Zachary Moore:

Just as freethinking adults need social support from groups like the NTCOF, our children need it even more. Many of our kids are ostracized at school or in their neighborhoods because their parents are freethinkers, or because they're developing their own freethinking perspective. It can also be challenging to be a freethinking parent when most people assume that you're immoral if you don't teach your children to believe in a god. Camp Quest Texas provides a valuable resource for parents, plus it's full of fun activities for kids that reinforce our freethinking values – science, critical thinking, ethics and religious tolerance.[\[8\]](#)

American society as a whole does not have a high regard for atheism. However, in many ways, our public sector and public schools are more supportive of the NTCOF than they are of evangelicals. This is the reality our children will become adults within. We need to encourage them through a community of like-minded believers while at the same time preparing them to stand up in an unsympathetic and sometimes hostile public square.

Youth groups and Christian camps are not refugee camps to protect our children from the world. They need to focus on

equipping them and encouraging them to stand for the Truth in whatever cultural setting they encounter.

You may not be excited about the prospect of a Church of Freethought. However, their experience and reactions may help expose some of our inadequacies in preparing our children to stand firm in their faith in this world. Let's make sure that our children know that we are open to their hard questions and are prepared with real answers.

"For he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" Heb 11:6-7 (NASU).

Notes

1. Avi Selk, "Secular kids' camp in Collin County aims to provide questions, not answers," *Dallas Morning News*, August 31, 2009.

2. Rod Dreher, "A church for skeptics," *Dallas Morning News*, August 31, 2009.

3. Ibid.

4. Barna Group, "Atheists and Agnostics Take Aim at Christians", June 11, 2007, www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/102-atheists-and-agnostics-take-aim-at-christians.

5. Selk.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Dreher.

Related Articles:

- [The Answer is the Resurrection](#)
- [The Last Christian Generation](#)

Procrastination: Conquering the Time Killer – A Christian Cure

Steve Cable considers the causes of procrastination from a biblical perspective. Understanding why we procrastinate is an important step in developing a Christ-centered cure for our ailment. Don't wait until it's too late. Stop procrastinating today!

How many of us would drop twenty dollar bills out of our car window as we drive down the highway or smash Rolex watches with a hammer as a means of relaxation? Yet, many of us consistently waste the most valuable resource available to us—our time. Benjamin Franklin put it this way: “Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time; for that’s the stuff life is made of.”^{1} From a biblical perspective, Paul admonishes us: “Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15-16).^{2} Looking at this statement in the original language, Paul commands us to *redeem* our time; that is, take time which is part of a fallen, sinful world system and convert it into something good and eternal

through using it wisely for God's purposes.

If we are honest with ourselves, most of us will admit to feeling uncomfortable with our time stewardship. We want to use our time wisely, but when we look back on the last week, month, or year, we feel some remorse over the amount of time we wasted. A big reason that many of us are uncomfortable with how we use our time is the affliction of procrastination. One researcher in this field summarized her conclusions this way: "Procrastination is, hands down, our favorite form of self-sabotage."^[3] In other words, procrastination undermines our attempts to accomplish our plans and goals.

I want to look at the epidemic of procrastination from a biblical perspective. With God's help we will gain a better understanding of why we struggle with procrastination and learn some practical perspectives to help us conquer this time killer.

A Biblical Perspective on Time

You might be asking, Is this really a Christian worldview issue or simply a self-help question? Well, the Bible is very clear on how much God is concerned about how we use our time. Let me summarize a few of the principles the Bible teaches us about time:

1. God created time as a part of His "good creation" (Gen. 1:1).
2. God transcends time, existing in the past, present, and future simultaneously (Is. 43:12, Heb. 13:5, 1 Pet. 1:20, 2 Pet. 3:8).
3. God works in this world within the context of time (Gal. 4:4-5).
4. Our time on earth is precious and fleeting (Jas. 4:14, 1 Pet. 1:24).

5. Time has no meaning or value in eternity (Rev. 4:8-10).

6. God is very concerned with how we use our time on this earth (Eph. 5:16-17).

One way to see how much the Bible has to say about time is to replace references to *life* on this earth with the idea of *time* on this earth. After all, Ben Franklin was right in saying that time is the stuff that earthly life is made of. For example, let's apply this idea to a familiar verse, 2 Corinthians 5:14:

For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who "*have time on this earth*" might no longer "*use their time*" for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.[\[4\]](#)

So, Christ's sacrificial love for us demands that we use our time for Him.

Another example would be 1 Corinthians 10:31:

So whether you eat or you drink or "*however you spend your time, use all of your time for*" the glory of God. (NIV)

Peter highlighted the importance of how we use our time when he wrote:

If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:17-20).

Knowing the heavy price our Father paid to redeem us, we should be very concerned about whether we are making the most of the time God has entrusted to us. It is very clear that

misuse of our time is a great concern to God. As Christians, we have the ability to convert passing time into something good and eternal.

Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire (1 Cor. 3:12-15).[\[5\]](#)

Naturally, Satan and the world system want us to waste that time and pass into eternity having accomplished nothing of eternal value. Thus, anything that causes us to waste our time is a spiritual issue. Thoreau captured this truth when he wrote: "As if you could kill time without injuring eternity."[\[6\]](#)

In other words, procrastination is not a casual laughing matter. It is of great concern to our Lord.

Procrastination: The Consequences

As we continue to consider how to conquer procrastination, it would be helpful to have a working definition. An anonymous pundit quipped, "They said procrastination was the source of all my sorrow. I don't know what that big word means—I'll look it up tomorrow!" Procrastination literally means "to put off until tomorrow." One study defined it as "postponing the completion of a task to the point of feeling uncomfortable about one's delay."[\[7\]](#)

Well, feeling uncomfortable is not fun, but it doesn't sound that bad. Is that the only consequence of procrastination? Whether it is putting off balancing the checkbook, yard work, term papers, filling out expense reports, or reading the

Bible, many of us have learned to live with our favorite areas of procrastination. However, studies have shown that procrastination has many undesirable consequences.

A direct consequence is decreased performance and productivity. Some procrastinators say they put off starting projects because they perform better under pressure. Don't kid yourself! A study of university students showed that students who procrastinated had significantly lower grades than those who did not. Christians are called to "keep our behavior excellent among the Gentiles" and to "work heartily as unto the Lord." When procrastination impacts our performance, we are presenting a negative witness to the world.

The direct consequences of procrastination can be magnified well beyond our expectations. Consider these examples:

- In 1815, Napoleon was prepared to attack Wellington's British army at dawn, but delayed his attack until 11 AM. This delay allowed the Prussians to arrive in time to attack the French flank turning a certain French victory into a bitter defeat. Literally, procrastination caused Napoleon to meet his Waterloo.
- On October 31, 1846, after a tortuous shortcut gone bad cost them several weeks, the Donner Party decided to rest for a few days rather than press on over the Sierra Nevada mountains. Their delay caused them to be trapped by a monster blizzard resulting in thirty-six people dying of starvation and the rest living out their lives with the stain of cannibalism.
- The nation of Israel chose to delay entering the Promised Land, and the result was forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

These are extreme examples, but most of us have experienced times when we put off getting car repairs, working on the house, or starting a project, and found out that the

consequences were much worse than we anticipated.

In addition to the direct consequences, frequent procrastination increases stress, anxiety, and guilt with all their related side effects. A recent study found that “college students who procrastinate have higher levels of drinking, smoking, insomnia, stomach problems, colds and flu.”[\[8\]](#) Many times we delay a task because we feel we need to relax instead, but the ultimate result is greater levels of stress.

Procrastination: Some Causes

Most of us struggle with procrastination in one or more areas of our lives. However, what we share are common symptoms, not necessarily a common root cause. Studies of procrastination have identified some distinctly different causes. If you have a pain in your foot, you need to know whether it is a splinter or bone cancer before selecting a course of treatment. If you are going to conquer procrastination, you need to be aware of your primary root cause.

Two of the most common causes are laziness and avoiding negative feelings. These cause us to delay starting tasks that may be difficult or unpleasant in favor of more pleasurable activities. Research has found that considering a task as boring or adverse is more likely to result in procrastination than a lack of capability to do the task well.[\[9\]](#) The Bible often addresses this issue including Proverbs 24 which says:

*I passed by the field of the sluggard
And by the vineyard of the man lacking sense,
And behold, it was completely overgrown with thistles;
Its surface was covered with nettles,
And its stone wall was broken down.
When I saw, I reflected upon it;
I looked, and received instruction.
“A little sleep, a little slumber,*

*A little folding of the hands to rest,"
Then your poverty will come as a robber
And your want like an armed man (vv. 30-34).*

This cause is modeled by the college student who spends weeks playing video games and hanging out until the night before the term paper is due.

Two other common causes are lack of perspective and poor time management skills. This person is willing to take on an unpleasant task, but has a hard time knowing which tasks need to be tackled right away and which can or should be delayed. This cause is epitomized by the college student who begins working on their term paper at the beginning of the semester by spending hours selecting just the right binder and creating cover graphics rather than researching their topic.

Perfectionism and fear of failure drive some people to procrastinate. Some perfectionists recognize that they don't have enough time to do a perfect job so they are discouraged about undertaking the job at all. Others believe they need uninterrupted time to be able to do a perfect job and they never can seem to clear off enough of their schedule to get started. And some wait until the last moment so they can blame any shortcoming of the finished product on insufficient time. They want to be able to say, "I am really much more talented than this shows, but I had to throw it together at the last moment. So, what can you expect?"

A very different cause is resentment. This person says, "I know I should be starting this task, but my spouse has been bugging me about it and I am going to show them that I am in control of my own time."

Procrastination: the Cure

Many of us feel frustrated by a pattern of procrastination. Like one author, we take the position "I am definitely going

to take a course on time management . . . just as soon as I can work it into my schedule.”[{10}](#)

However, God does not command us to make the most of our time without giving us the ability to do so. We need to tackle procrastination head on if we want to find a cure in our lives. From the rebuilding of Jerusalem under Nehemiah to the race to the moon in the 1960s,[{11}](#) some timeless principles stand out. From my studies of literature and the Bible and my experience in simultaneously raising a family, working as a corporate executive, and pastoring young adults, I suggest five steps to reduce the impact of procrastination in your life. They are:

1. Probing your problem,
2. Praying for perspective,
3. Proper priorities,
4. Perspective-based planning, and
5. Proactive partnering.

Probing Your Problem

When we find ourselves consistently suffering the consequences of procrastination or we find ourselves tempted to procrastinate again, we need to do more than just say, “I am putting off tasks that I shouldn’t.” We need examine why we are tempted to delay. The director of student counseling at Cal Tech University counsels us, “Each time you feel ‘stuck’ or find yourself procrastinating, ask yourself, ‘What is going on here?’ What am I feeling and how might that contribute to my procrastinating?”[{12}](#) Knowing that we are being motivated by resentment or fear or simply a desire to avoid unpleasant activities or feelings should determine how we apply the next four steps.

Prayer

Acknowledge that God has given us all of the time we need to accomplish everything He wants us to accomplish. Since that is

probably far more than we normally accomplish, we need to invite God to lead our time management initiative. We need to pray for a clear understanding of God's priorities and perspective. If we are dealing with laziness, we should ask for self control. If we are dealing with emotions such as resentment or fear, we need to ask God to take our thoughts captive in obedience to Christ. If we are struggling with anxiety, we need His peace that passes understanding. If we are struggling with perfectionism, we need to acknowledge that our total significance is found in Christ, not in our performance. Do not try to bypass this step. Time is a key battleground in the spiritual war. If we run onto the battlefield in our own power and wisdom, we will soon find ourselves hopelessly behind.

Proper Priorities

A simplistic view of our priorities can often get us into time management trouble. God does not want us to have a hierarchy where we do everything possible for the top tier no matter how trivial before we move onto the next level of the hierarchy. Most of us usually have important time commitments for our spouse, our employer, our children, our church, our neighbors, and our personal spiritual and physical health, all on our task list at the same time. The Bible teaches us that Christ is our *life*, not just a priority (Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:1-3). We need to seek His direction each day for what is important for that day. If we are dealing with laziness, we need to acknowledge the importance God places on the tasks we are given.

In the flesh, we have a tendency to forget the unpleasant hard tasks on our list in order to partake of more pleasant interruptions to our plan. One practical tool to help deal with this is keeping an up-to-date task list. Over the last thirty years I have done this in a number of ways. What I have found most practical for me is as follows:

- Keep an ongoing list of all known tasks no matter how far away they are due. I do this on my computer since this is my long-term master list.
- Each week, list all tasks for that week on a sheet of paper. I put my work related tasks on one side of the paper and my personal/family tasks on the other.
- Add a column for each day of the week. Select the first day you may be able to work on each task and place an A or B for that task in the column for that day. An A means the task is critical and really needs to be worked on that day. A B indicates that it would be good to work on that task, but it is not mandatory.
- As tasks are started, mark a dot by the letter. As tasks are completed, put a check mark by the task. If tasks are delegated, put the other person's initial by the task. If tasks are rescheduled, put an arrow by the task.
- Update the sheet of paper every morning to reflect that day's priorities. For example, a task that was a B on Monday and Tuesday may need to be changed to an A on Wednesday.

Note: If I am working on B tasks before addressing all of the A tasks, it is a warning that I may have moved into procrastination mode.

Perspective-based Planning

Committing to keep an updated list of priorities is a big step, but that list may not be very meaningful if we do not set aside time for planning. Many of us have been surprised by unintentional procrastination. We thought we had plenty of time until we started working on the task and discovered that it was harder than expected or we forgot that we needed to order some parts with a long lead time. If your task is to pick up a loaf of bread, then no planning is required. If your

task is a major term project, a major product development, or putting a man on the moon, you need to take some time to think through the subtasks required by this project. Proverbs 1:25 teaches us:

The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage,
But everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty.

Perspective based planning means to look at the priority of the overall project and ask these questions about each subtask:

- What other tasks must I accomplish before I can do this task?
- How long should this task take?
- What are the consequences of delaying this task?
- Are the tasks broken down into small enough increments to take advantage of openings in my schedule to work on them?
- Should this task be delegated to someone else?
- How likely is this task to take longer than expected?

Once I have done this planning, I can do a good job of filling out my weekly priority sheet.

Proactive Partnering

If you are struggling with procrastination issues, don't try to tackle it on your own. Galatians 6:1-5 tells us that we are to help restore those who are struggling and help bear one another's burdens. Yet we are to accept this help without passing our responsibilities onto someone else: "For each one will bear his own load."

Look around for someone who seems to be effective in managing their time. Share your dilemma with them and ask them to help provide guidance and accountability. Ask them to take a look at your weekly priority lists and project plans to see if they are reasonable. Pick out some intermediate deadlines that they will check on and hold you to. It is much easier to recover

from missing one intermediate deadline than to be almost to the final deadline and realize that you are way behind.

An accountability partner can also help us avoid swinging from procrastinator to workaholic. Sometimes the partner needs to reassure us that it is ok to take some time for relaxation. After all, Jesus told his disciples, "Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while" (Mark 6:31). Sometimes the partner needs to challenge our priorities.

You may have noticed that each of these steps will take some time. Productive people have learned that sufficient time spent in planning will save much more time in the long run.

Conclusion

We have been given the high calling of using our time for God's glory. We are called to be wise and make the most of our time. However, many of us know that we let procrastination rob value from the time God has entrusted to us. God understands our temptation in this area and wants to help us conquer procrastination. We can participate in this by acknowledging our underlying motivation, adopting God's perspective and priorities through prayer, practicing a discipline of planning, and allowing others to hold us accountable. When we commit to practicing these things, we will be able to rejoice in the privilege we have of converting fleeting time into eternal value.

Notes

1. Benjamin Franklin, Poor Richard's Almanack, June 1746.
2. All Scriptures are from the NASB except where noted.
3. Alyce P. Cornyn-Selby, manager and author, Procrastinator's Success Kit (Beynch Press Publishing, 1987).
4. Italics indicate the author's substituted words.
- 5 . See also Col 4:5-6.
6. Henry David Thoreau, Walden, chapter 1, "Eternity," accessible online at www.kenkifer.com/Thoreau/economy.htm.

7. Judith L. Johnson and A. Michael Bloom, "An analysis of the contribution of the five factors of personality to variance in academic procrastination," *Personality and Individual Differences*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (January 1995): 127-133.
8. Pychyl, T. A., Morin, R.W., & Salmon, B. R. "Procrastination and planning fallacy: An examination of the study habits of university students," special issue, *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 15, (2000): 135-150.
9. Irene Tham, *Journal of Young Investigators*, Vol. 2, Issue 1 (June 1999), www.jyi.org/volumes/volume2/issue1/features/tham.html.
10. Louis Boone, author of *Contemporary Marketing and Contemporary Business*, www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/l/louis_e_boone.html.
11. For an interesting treatment of how the race to the moon was accomplished ahead of schedule, check out Mike Gray, *Angle of Attack: Harrison Storms and the Race to the Moon* (W. W. Norton and Co., 1992).
12. Dr. Kevin P. Austin, Director of the Student Counseling Services, CalTech University; www.counseling.caltech.edu/articles/procrastination.html

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Darwinist Arguments Against Intelligent Design Illogical and Misleading

I recently attended a debate on "Intelligent Design (ID) and the Existence of God." One of the four debaters was Dr. Lawrence Krauss^{[1](#)} representing an atheistic, anti-ID

position. I was looking forward to hearing what Dr. Krauss would say when speaking in the presence of other knowledgeable members of academia. Would he go beyond the tired, illogical talking points passed on without question by the mainstream media? Or would he present some thoughtful arguments *against* the validity of intelligent design concepts and/or *for* the current state of Darwinist explanations for life as we know it?

Since I believe there are some thoughtful, interesting arguments that could be raised against intelligent design, I was sorely disappointed to discover that Dr. Krauss did not deviate from the shallow arguments which consistently appear in media coverage of this topic. As one of the other debaters, Dr. David Berlinski [{2}](#), commented after Dr. Krauss' opening statement, "Everything you have said is either false or trivial."

However false and trivial they may be, these arguments are blindly accepted as reasonable by many people. As thinking Christians, we have a responsibility to be prepared to tear down these façades raised up against the knowledge of God. One way to do this is to be able to discuss with others the prevailing arguments in ways that reveal their weaknesses and inconsistencies. To help in that process, the remainder of this article will list several of the standard arguments offered up by Dr. Krauss and examine their reasonableness and validity.

Argument: Evolution is a proven fact. Scientific experiments and observation over the last 100 years have conclusively demonstrated that evolution is a fact.

Analysis: Faulty logic resulting in false conclusion. In the context of the debate, "evolution is a proven fact" is implied to mean that random mutation coupled with natural selection is the sole process through which life evolved on this planet. This meaning of evolution is not a proven fact.

What has been demonstrated through observation and experimentation is that the frequency of certain characteristics in a species will vary over time through random mutations and natural selection. These results provide some support to the theory that these undirected natural causes could be responsible for the development of life as we know it, but they do not come close to proving it. In logical terms, we would say that what science has demonstrated is necessary for the premise to be true but not sufficient to prove that it is true. That would be like saying, "Since we can demonstrate that wind and water erosion can produce regular geometric patterns, this proves the Statue of Liberty is the result of undirected natural forces."

Argument: Origins science is the same as observational science. Both the study of origins (or other one-time events) and the study of ongoing natural processes are the same because they both look at data that was observed in the past. Therefore we can apply the same criteria to origins science as to observational science. Since observational science depends on repeatable experiments, we should reject out of hand any hypothesis (e.g. ID) that considers intervention by a designer because we cannot recreate it.

Analysis: False premise resulting in faulty conclusion. *The study of origins is more akin to archaeology and forensic science than to observational science. In these fields, scientists look at the evidence left over by past events to help evaluate hypotheses on what caused the event to determine the ones that are most likely. As an example, consider the question, "Why does the earth have a large moon?" Scientists have a number of different theories on when and how our earth acquired a moon, but they would all agree that we can never be certain what actually happened (apart from the development of a time machine which would allow us to go back and observe the event). It is true that in observational science fields, scientists do look at results*

from experiments done in the past. But, they can choose to repeat those experiments in the future.

Regardless of whether one is considering the role of natural selection or the role of an intelligent designer, when you are developing hypotheses for the origins and development of life on earth the best that can be done is to assess which processes had the highest probability of contributing to the end results. If you eliminate all options other than random variations in natural processes, you tie the hands of scientists in considering how the evidence best fits all hypotheses.

Argument: Some things that have the appearance of being designed are not. Therefore, we cannot detect the presence of design.

Analysis: Faulty logic resulting in false conclusion. Yes, there are things found in nature from the geodesic shapes of carbon structures to the results of erosion that mimic shapes designed by man. Yet, most of us seem to have no problem distinguishing between the remains of ancient civilizations and the results of undirected natural processes. If you search enough beaches and tidal pools, you can probably find every letter of the alphabet produced by the interaction of tides and currents. But, if you come across the words “John loves Mary” in the sand, you will be very confident that these were the result of intelligent intervention.

Argument: The theory of evolution is a foundation of modern science.

Analysis: Switching definitions results in false conclusion. Understanding the processes by which bacteria, viruses, species and societies change in response to changes in their environment are important concepts in modern science.

However, whether one believes these processes are solely responsible for the origin and development of life on earth or not has little or no impact on one's ability to make advances in science. To date, I have not been made aware of a single positive advance in modern science or engineering that required the developer to fully believe in Darwin's view of the origins of the species in order to make that advance. One's beliefs on origins are foundational to answering the metaphysical questions of life, but don't preclude someone from making contributions in science. Advances in science have been made by Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, atheists, etc.

Argument: Scientists understand how the bacterial flagellum evolved, disproving the concept of irreducible complexity.

Analysis: False statement coupled with faulty logic. The bacterial flagellum is a complex device used to propel some types of bacteria. It is comprised of over 30 different proteins. Not only do these proteins perform different complementary functions, but they must be assembled in the bacteria in exactly the right sequence by other proteins. Since the flagellum will not function without all of these elements in place (i.e., it meets the definition of irreducible complexity established by Dr. Behe in his book *Darwin's Black Box*), the premise is that all of these parts would have to appear simultaneously in order for natural selection to favor carrying forward any of these mutations in the gene pool.

Dr. Krauss stated that scientists have shown that the bacterial flagellum is not irreducibly complex. To the best of my knowledge, this is a gross overstatement. The arguments I have seen presented fall far short of developing a plausible explanation for how the flagellum could have evolved^[3]. If a plausible argument coupled with experimental

evidence exists, I am very interested in having my understanding updated. However, even if such evidence did exist, it would not demonstrate that the concept of irreducible complexity was false or that this unknown plausible path was the way the flagellum came onto the scene.

Argument: Intelligent Design can never be science because it is not falsifiable. You must have ways to prove a scientific theory is false in order for it to be a valid theory. Any observation that does not agree with the theory can be attributed to supernatural intervention.

***Analysis: Arbitrary, inconsistent definition.** Academics in the field of philosophy of science do not agree that the ability to falsify establishes a boundary on what is and is not science. Professor of philosophy and atheist Dr. Bradley Monton [{4}](#) pointed this out during the debate. He argued that we should not exclude a potentially valid hypothesis simply on the basis of a narrow definition of science. In addition, origins science cannot meet this standard. Proponents of neo-Darwinism have clearly demonstrated over the last few decades that it is not falsifiable either. Whenever the theory disagrees with the evidence, its proponents claim that natural selection found a way around the problem; we just don't know what it is yet. As Richard Dawkins stated, "Evolution is more clever than we are."*

Hopefully, this summary will help you sort through the smokescreen of "conclusive" arguments offered up by the proponents of naturalistic Darwinism. Perhaps someday they will engage in a genuine discussion where both sides can state: 1) the reasons they believe their theory has merit and, 2) the observations that create problems for their theory. Such a discussion might actually prove helpful to someone trying to sort through the evidence to make an evidence-based faith decision.

Notes

1. Dr. Lawrence Krauss is the Foundation Professor in the School of Earth and Space Exploration and the Physics Department, Co-Director of the Cosmology Initiative, and Inaugural Director of the Origins Initiative at Arizona State University.

2. Dr. David Berlinski is a lecturer, essayist and a Senior Fellow of the Discovery Institute's Center for the Renewal of Science and Culture. Dr. Berlinski received his Ph.D. in philosophy from Princeton University and was a postdoctoral fellow in mathematics and molecular biology at Columbia University.

3. Additional information from the Reference Guide to Redeeming Darwin available at RedeemingDarwin.com.

Example of Darwinist argument: Since design cannot be considered as an explanation, evolutionists maintain that complex structures like flagellum evolved slowly over time from less complex structures performing other functions in the cell. Kenneth Miller states: "At first glance, the existence of the type III secretory system (TTSS), a...device that allows bacteria to inject these toxins through the cell membranes of its unsuspecting hosts, would seem to have little to do with the flagellum. However, molecular studies of proteins in the TTSS have revealed a surprising fact—the proteins of the TTSS are directly homologous to the proteins in the basal portion of the bacterial flagellum.... The existence of the TTSS in a wide variety of bacteria demonstrates that a small portion of the "irreducibly complex" flagellum can indeed carry out an important biological function. Since such a function is clearly favored by natural selection, the contention that the flagellum must be fully assembled before any of its component parts can be useful is obviously incorrect. What this means is that the argument for intelligent design of the flagellum has failed." Response to Darwinist argument: The flagellum is an

excellent example of an irreducibly complex function in one of the simplest life forms. Different proteins and structures work together to create a swimming mechanism. This complex interaction cannot be adequately explained by evolutionary processes. Mutations creating only one piece of the flagellum in a life form without the other pieces would not create any value to be carried on to the subsequent generations. Miller's statement that "the argument for intelligent design has failed" misses the point of irreducible complexity. The fact that one component of an irreducibly complex system may have another useful function does not remove the barrier that the irreducibly complex system requires the simultaneous appearance of multiple cooperating components to perform a function that has not been performed in that way before. In addition, William Dembski points out another problem with Miller's argument:

The best current molecular evidence, however, points to the TTSS as evolving from the flagellum and not vice versa... Miller has nothing more than the TTSS to point to as a possible evolutionary precursor. Behe and the ID community have therefore successfully shown that Darwinists don't have a clue how the bacterial flagellum might have arisen.

4. Dr. Bradley Monton is a philosophy professor at the University of Colorado at Boulder. His areas of specialization include the Philosophy of Science (especially Philosophy of Physics), Probabilistic Epistemology, Philosophy of Time and Philosophy of Religion. Previously he was on the faculty of the University of Kentucky, an Assistant Professor at The American University of Beirut and a Teaching Assistant at Princeton University. He earned his Bachelor of Arts in Physics and Philosophy at Rice University and his Ph.D. in Philosophy from Princeton University.

Oprah's Spirituality: Exploring 'A New Earth' – A Christian Critique

Steve Cable looks at the teaching of Eckhart Tolle and Oprah Winfrey and finds it far removed from a Christian worldview. From a biblical perspective, their teaching is in line with that addressed by Paul in Colossians where he points to false teachers who are "taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind."

Over 2,000,000 people from 139 countries have participated with Oprah Winfrey and Eckhart Tolle in a live Web-based seminar covering each chapter of Tolle's book entitled, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*[\[1\]](#). Why is this book so popular? Will it lead you deeper in your walk with Christ? Or is it counterfeit spirituality promoting a false view of God? In this article, we will address these questions as we embark on an exploration of Tolle's "new earth."

The underlying premise is that all material things (from planets to pebbles to flowers to animals) result from a universal, immaterial life force expressing itself in material form. Humans are a part of that expression. However, we have evolved to the point where we have the potential to become Aware of our oneness with the universal life force. The purpose of all mankind is to become aware that their Being is an expression of the One Life Force.

However, the vast majority of people are unconscious and unaware of the source of their being. Every human being has an illusory self image or ego which is completely conditioned by the past, always wanting and never satisfied. We also have an

individual and collective accumulation of old emotional pain Tolle calls the “pain-body.” Our ego and our pain-body are actively trying to keep us away from true awareness. When we identify ourselves with our ego, our thoughts about the past and future, our wants and our hurts, we cannot experience our true Beingness.

In Tolle’s view, this lack of awareness of our true essence and false identification with our egos has the world and the human race on the brink of extinction. Fortunately, the universal life force is manipulating this crisis to create an opportunity for many people to move from an unconscious state to consciousness. In order to become conscious, we must recognize that we are not our thoughts and/or egos. We must learn to accept and be present in the Now, because the past and the future exist only as thoughts. When most people are operating from their true essence rather than their egos, we will have drastic social and physical upheavals on this earth resulting in a whole new world order—that is, “a new earth.”

If you are thinking this sounds a lot more like Eastern mysticism than a deeper walk with Christ, you are on the right track. So why is this message so popular even among many regular church attendees?

Why Is *A New Earth* a Significant Issue?

Since *A New Earth* is clearly incompatible with Biblical Christianity, why is it being read and recommended by many people who profess to be Christian?

First, the pervasive influence of post-modern tolerance continues to undermine commitment to the truth of the gospel even in evangelical circles. We are constantly assailed with the message that it is hateful and intolerant to believe that Christianity is true and other religions fall short. According to this viewpoint, the loving Christian will accept the validity of all religious traditions encouraging us to partake

from the smorgasbord of spiritual guidance available from other religions. Thus many people forsake Paul's warning in Colossians to not be taken captive by the traditions of men rather than the truth of Christ and thereby open themselves up to false teaching{2}. An immature Christian may say to themselves, "*A New Earth* offers a way to greater personal peace and an escape from unhappiness so why not find a way to glue it onto my Christian tradition." Tolle and Oprah cleverly encourage them by saying, "How 'spiritual' you are has nothing to do with what you believe, but everything to do with your state of consciousness." {3}

Second, *A New Earth* contains nuggets of truth about the nature of the body, soul and spirit and some practical ideas which may often prove helpful in dealing with anxiety, anger and other issues people face. Tolle is correct in pointing out that our individual and collective selfish egos introduce a lot of pain and suffering into this world. In addition, we may be filled with anxiety and discontent with our circumstances because our thoughts are preoccupied with past hurts and future hopes/fears. He encourages us to realize that we are not our thoughts or past pains. If we will affirm our intrinsic spiritual value and observe our ego at work, we can reduce anxiety and be able to accept our present circumstances. In some ways this is analogous to the instruction in Colossians to set our minds on the things of Christ not on the things of this earth because our real life is in Christ not in this earth. {4} It also reminds us of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians where he tells us that through the Holy Spirit we can "take every thought captive in obedience to Christ." {5} So you can see how thinking this way could be helpful. Unfortunately, this is taught as a part of a broader teaching that will leave non-Christians separated from God and misguided Christians not fulfilling their God-given purpose on this earth.

The third reason for its unwitting acceptance among some

Christians is that quotes from Jesus and others in the Bible are sprinkled throughout the book in an attempt to show this philosophy is consistent with “true Christianity.” Like so many false teachers, he attempts to make Jesus support his worldview by removing the teaching of Jesus from the clear message of the gospel.

Fourth, and probably most importantly, Tolle found a powerful proponent in Oprah Winfrey whose endorsement catapulted his first book, *The Power of Now*, onto the *NY Times* Best Seller list. Now, Oprah is enthusiastically promoting *A New Earth* through her web seminar, calling it the most exciting thing she has ever done. Oprah is an evangelist for smorgasbord spirituality. During the first web seminar for *A New Earth*, she was asked how she could reconcile it with her Christian upbringing. Oprah explained that she began to get out of the box of Biblical doctrine in her late twenties when her pastor was preaching on the characteristics of God. When he said that “The Lord thy God is a jealous God,” she decided that she wanted to believe in a God of love not a jealous God. Apparently, rather than doing a study to understand what that Bible passage meant, she decided to make up her own Jesus. As she stated (see [Appendix A](#)),

“And you know, it’s been a journey to get to the place where I understand, that what I believe is that Jesus came to show us Christ consciousness. That Jesus came to show us the way of the heart and that what Jesus was saying that to show us the higher consciousness that we’re all talking about here. Jesus came to say, ‘Look I’m going to live in the body, in the human body and I’m going to show you how it’s done.’ These are some principles and some laws that you can use to live by to know that way. And when I started to recognize that, that Jesus didn’t come in my belief, even as a Christian, I don’t believe that Jesus came to start Christianity... Well, I am a Christian who believes that there are certainly many more paths to God other than

Christianity.”{6}

Worldview Comparison

Let's continue our exploration of Tolle's new earth by considering some of the fundamental worldview questions. How does the worldview of *A New Earth* line up with a Biblical worldview? (see [Appendix B](#))

God and the Universe

Let's first look at the origin of the universe and the nature of God.

According to Tolle, the material universe is a temporary manifestation of the universal spiritual consciousness. This One Life is impersonal and pervasive, investing itself in all matter not just living things. He states it thus, “Each thing has Beingness, is a temporary form that has its origin within the formless one Life, the source of all things, all bodies, all forms.”{7} And “Like all life-forms, they are, of course, temporary manifestations of the underlying one Life, one Consciousness”{8} Consequently, the being the Bible calls God is really an expression of this impersonal life force. Since everything is of God and is God, all material things must ultimately return to formless, unidentifiable union with the spiritual life force.

This view of God as an impersonal life force living in all things is directly counter to the Biblical revelation of God. According to the Bible, God is the creator of the universe not a part of the universe. God is an identifiable, personal being characterized by holiness, love, grace and compassion. The creator of this universe is a thinking being as God shares through Isaiah, “for as the heavens are higher than the earth...so are my thoughts higher than your thoughts.”{9} Paul reminds us, “For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the

thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.”[{10}](#) God is a communicator, choosing to reveal Himself to us through the attributes of creation, through the Scriptures and through Jesus Christ.

Nature of Man

What about the nature and purpose of mankind? According to Tolle, humans are an evolved material manifestation of the spiritual life force. Humans have evolved to the point where we are capable of being overtly conscious of our Beingness; of our oneness with the One Life force. However, our material manifestation includes the ego (a false sense of identification with our thoughts) and our individual and collective pain bodies which fight our attempts to be conscious of our real identity in the life force. We need to realize that we are not really a unique individual, but rather a material expression on the One Life force. Our purpose for existence is to bring a consciousness of the underlying one Life into this world. He states, “The ultimate purpose of human existence, which is to say, your purpose, is to bring that power into this world.”[{11}](#) However, the ultimate end for each human is to return our life energy back into the impersonal life force.

In contrast, the Bible teaches humans were intentionally created by God in His image. We are created with a body, soul and spirit. Our earthly bodies are temporary, but our soul and spirit are immortal. We are, in fact, individuals responsible for our actions with different eternal destinies determined by our relationship with God.

Sin and Evil

In *A New Earth*, the concepts of sin and evil are severely distorted. According to Tolle, original sin is the collective dysfunction which prevents people from recognizing the point of human existence. He suggests that this barrier to true Awareness is built into our DNA. He states, “The collective

pain-body is probably encoded within every human's DNA, although we haven't discovered it there yet."[{12}](#) In other words, the collective hurts and perceived inadequacies of our parents and previous generations are not only passed on through our interactions with a fallen world, but are actually encoded into our DNA. This, of course, would require our thoughts to be able to modify our DNA so that these experiences are passed on to future generations.

However, since we are not our bodies or our thoughts, we are not responsible for our sins. As he states, "There is only one perpetrator of evil on the planet: human unconsciousness.... People are not responsible for what they do when possessed by the pain-body."[{13}](#) In fact, we cannot really distinguish good from evil since they all arise from the same life force. As Tolle puts it, "The deeper interconnectedness of all things and events implies that the mental labels of 'good' and 'bad' are ultimately illusory. They always imply a limited perspective and so are true only relatively and temporarily."[{14}](#)

In contrast, the Bible teaches that we are all sinners and apart from faith in Christ the result will be eternal separation from God.[{15}](#)

Salvation

In Tolle's worldview, humans are not born spiritually dead, but rather spiritually unconscious. Our real self cannot be separated from God because our real self is a part of God. He states, "You do not become good by trying to be good, but by finding the goodness that is already within you, and allowing the goodness to emerge. But it can only emerge if something fundamental changes in your state of consciousness."[{16}](#) We become a new alive person, not through faith in the atoning death and empowering resurrection of Jesus, but rather through a process of becoming aware of our real self which has been masked by our ego. However, when our body dies, we cease to

exist as an individual merging back into the universal life force. Tolle states, “the recognition of the impermanence of all forms awakens you to the dimension of the formless within yourself, that which is beyond death. Jesus called it ‘eternal life.’”[\[17\]](#) So, regardless of what we do or believe during our earthly existence we all have the same ultimate destiny.

This view devalues the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If Tolle’s view is true, Jesus’ death was unnecessary and His resurrection was an illusion. The Bible clearly states that “the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”[\[18\]](#)

Jesus Christ and Christianity

For Tolle, Jesus was an enlightened human. He joined Buddha and a few others in trying to communicate this concept to people and societies who were not ready to receive it. Jesus was no more God than any other human, but he was aware that he was a part of the One Life Force which He identified as God.

With this view of Jesus, Tolle clearly rejects the central gospel message: faith in Jesus’ atoning death on the cross and victorious resurrection is the only way to move from death into spiritual life.

Truth and Religion

According to Tolle, truth cannot be found in thought, doctrines or narratives which are perceived through our egos. He states, “Every ego confuses opinions and viewpoints with facts. It cannot tell the difference between an event and its reaction to that event. Only through awareness—not through thinking—can you differentiate between fact and opinion.... Only through awareness can you see the totality of the situation or person instead of adopting one limited perspective.”[\[19\]](#) Thus, the only real Truth with a capital T is in my being. “The Truth is inseparable from who you are. Yes, you are the Truth. If you look for it elsewhere, you will be deceived every time.

The very Being that you are is Truth.”{20} He even claims that this is what Jesus was really trying to tell us when He said, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no one comes to the Father except through me.”

Tolle writes:

“All religions are equally false and equally true, depending on how you use them. If you believe only your religion is the Truth, you are using it in the service of the ego.”{21} And, “Many religious people claim to be in sole possession of the truth in an unconscious attempt to protect their identity. Unless you believe exactly as they do, you are wrong in their eyes, and they may feel justified in killing you for that.”{22}

Like many people, Tolle confuses our inability to fully understand the truth with the lack of truth. As R.C. Sproul said, “Real truth is reality as seen from God’s perspective.” Real truth can only be revealed by God and is not about our need for identity or a need to create enemies. Truth is central to the Christian faith. Jesus told Pilate, “For this I was born and for this reason I came into the world, to testify to the *truth*.”{23} As Christians, we are motivated to share the truth God has revealed because of His love for us and His “desire for all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the *truth*.”{24}

The Bible

In addressing the Bible, Tolle attempts to play both sides of the street. Although he does not directly state it, he clearly does not believe that the Bible is an accurate revelation of the character of God and the nature of the universe. His worldview is totally contrary to the Bible in most areas, so he clearly does not consider it an authoritative source. But, knowing that much of his audience has a Christian background, he quotes the Bible over 25 times in this book. In most

instances, he takes the verse out of context and misinterprets it to align with his viewpoint. One example is when he claims that Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" in order to teach us that we are the Truth. Ignoring the fact that Jesus went on to say, "no one comes to the Father but through me." {25} Jesus said that if we lived according to His words we would "know the truth" {26}, not "be the truth."

Conclusion

A New Earth is not so new after all. It is another presentation of Eastern mysticism with a focus on separating your identity from your ego. Although the mind exercises promoted in the book may provide some temporary help with issues such as anxiety and anger, the overall worldview is directly counter to the gospel of Jesus Christ. By denying the existence of a personal transcendent God, by denying individual responsibility for my sin, by denying an eternal soul, and the need for the redeeming death and resurrection of Jesus, Tolle's spiritual teaching will result in eternal separation from God for non-Christians and fruitlessness for Christians taken captive by this unbiblical worldview.

Appendix A: Oprah Winfrey on reconciling *A New Earth* with her Christian background:

"I've reconciled it because I was able to open my mind about the absolute indescribable hugeness of that which we call "God." I took God out of the box because I grew up in the Baptist church and there were, you know, rules and, you know, belief systems indoctrinated. And I happened to be sitting in church in my late 20's...And this great minister was preaching about how great God was and how omniscient and omnipresent, and God is everything. And then he said, and the lord thy god is a jealous god. And I was, you know, caught up in the rapture of that moment until he said "jealous." And something struck me. I was thinking God is all, God is omnipresent, God is—and God's also jealous? God is jealous of me? And something

about that didn't feel right in my spirit because I believe that god is love and that god is in all things. And so that's when the search for something more than doctrine started to stir within me.

"And I love this quote that Eckhart has, this is one of my favorite quotes in chapter one where he says, "Man made god in his own image, the eternal, the infinite, and unnamable was reduced to a mental idol that you had to believe in and worship as my god or our god."

"And you know, it's been a journey to get to the place where I understand, that what I believe is that Jesus came to show us Christ consciousness. That Jesus came to show us the way of the heart and that what Jesus was saying that to show us the higher consciousness that we're all talking about here. Jesus came to say, "Look I'm going to live in the body, in the human body and I'm going to show you how it's done." These are some principles and some laws that you can use to live by to know that way. And when I started to recognize that, that Jesus didn't come in my belief, even as a Christian, I don't believe that Jesus came to start Christianity. So that was also very helpful to me.

"Well, I am a Christian who believes that there are certainly many more paths to God other than Christianity."

Appendix B: Comparing A New Earth with Other Worldviews

	Christian Theism	<i>A New Earth</i>	Naturalism (Postmodernism)	Pantheism
God	Personal	Universal life force	Non-existent	Impersonal
World	Creation	Spiritual	Physical	Spiritual
Human Nature	Like God	Is God; corrupted by ego	Like Animals	Is God

Body/Soul	Unity	Spirit is only reality	Body Only	Soul Only
Immortality	Resurrection	Reunite with life force	Annihilation	Reincarnation
Destiny	Glorification	Absorption into grand plan of one life force	Extinction	Absorption
Source of Authority	Divine Revelation	Presence; "I Am Truth"	Culture	Spiritual
Truth	Absolute	Relative and personal	Culturally based	Personal
Jesus Christ	Son of God	Early enlightened being	A product of his/her culture	Enlightened being
Salvation	Redemption	Awareness, consciousness, presence	Whatever is effective	Meditation
Evil	Rebellion	Illusion results from pain-body	Culturally defined	Illusion
Ethics	God-centered	Counter ego	Culturally centered	World-centered
History	Linear	Predestined by the one life force	Culturally defined	Cyclical
Culture	God-ordained / man steward	Unconscious vs. conscious	Language-centered	World-centered

Notes

1. Eckhart Tolle, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*, Penguin Group, New York, 2006
2. Colossians 2:8
3. Ibid., 18
4. Colossians 3:1-3
5. 2 Corinthians 10:5
6. Oprah Winfrey, transcript of the first *A New Earth* web seminar dated March 3, 2008

7. Tolle., 37
8. Ibid., 4
9. Isaiah 55:9
10. 1 Cor 2:11-12 NASV
11. Tolle., 78
12. Ibid., 143
13. Ibid., 163
14. Ibid., 196
15. Romans 3:23, 6:23
16. Tolle., 13
17. Ibid., 81
18. Romans 6:23
19. Tolle., 69
20. Ibid., 71
21. Ibid., 70
22. Ibid., 17
23. John 18:37
24. I Tim 2:3
25. John 14:6
26. John 8:31-32

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“It’s OK to Patronize Pro-Atheism Films to Provoke Christians to Action”

Regarding *The Golden Compass*, I agree, age-appropriate viewing along with informed parental guidance is required for the film, but I personally don’t have a problem spending my money on this film. In fact I would pay double the cost to show my

teenage children simply for the opportunity of “inoculating” them against the false perceptions of God, the church and sexuality that are pushed in these stories. I actually hope that the other movies are made so that Christians are forced to react INTELLIGENTLY regarding defending the Christian worldview. The war is already won! But we do need to pick up our swords and finish the battles.

But thank you for all your work for the sake of the Gospel of Christ, God bless!!

Thank you for your interest in my [Probe Alert article](#). I commend you for your commitment to take advantage of opportunities to equip your children to recognize and respond to contrary worldviews pushed on us in our culture. As you know, I suggested this as one alternative in my article.

However, I don't agree with the idea that we should encourage more of these movies to be made by supporting them financially (especially, when we can read the books and watch the movies in ways that do not directly benefit the author and producers). Let me summarize several reasons I am taking this position:

Most of the children and young adults who would view the movie and/or read the books will not have a parent discuss the worldview implications or issues with them. On the contrary, most of them will strongly identify with the protagonists in their battle against the authority of God. Without critically evaluating their feelings, this emotional experience can influence how they perceive their relationship with God. As we have witnessed over the last forty years, movies and television have helped move the norms of our society further and further away from holiness and purity.

Phillip Pullman openly states his intent is to influence people to view Christianity as misguided and damaging. Providing him with more resources to support this objective

does not seem to be a prudent use of the financial resources entrusted to us.

Early financial success will lead to more advertising and greater distribution of these books to a largely unchaperoned audience. It will probably also encourage New Line Cinema to take a more anti-Christian approach in the production of the sequels.

This trilogy and any associated movies are not going to single-handedly convert our culture to atheism. However, they reflect the greater and more public antagonism to religion being espoused in our society. In general, we should not encourage these attacks through our financial support. At the same time, we should not be on the defensive. When these attacks do occur, we can use them as opportunities to share Christ whose position as the Way, the Truth, and the Life is not threatened by the imaginations of those who oppose Him.

Steve,

Well said; I admit my pro-atheism movies position may be a bit naive; I do see the value of your arguments. Maybe I take this extreme view just to provoke my fellow Christians to take up arms and not be afraid of the fight as I find so many from my (reformed) Christian circles tend to take isolationistic approach rather than see logical and reasonable discourse as a legitimate means to answering a fool according to his folly or casting down every lofty thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God.

Thanks for your reply, I really appreciate the attention to individual concerns, (even though I probably agree with almost everything you said).

I recommend Probe.org, Stand to Reason (str.org) and others to all my friends.

Keep up the good work!!

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The Golden Compass: Pointing in the Wrong Direction

The Golden Compass is the opening gambit in Phillip Pullman's all out-attack on the religious faith of his readers. The film version is scheduled for wide release in theaters on December 7th following a massive marketing campaign. The movie may be more subtle than the book, but it is still opening the door to the full anti-God message of Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy. Since the intended audience for these books is children and young adults, Christian parents need to be prepared to respond to the advertising hype and peer group pressure associated with the upcoming movie release. You want to be able to explain why a PG-13 movie is not appropriate for adolescents.

Just in case you don't have time to read this entire article, I am going to summarize my recommendations:

1. **Don't be put on the defensive.** Pullman is not the first to try to glamorize atheism and, although his fantasy is intriguing and well written, it does not introduce any new arguments into the discussion. If a friend has read it, consider this a great opportunity to make a defense for the hope that is within you. Since his books are allegorical fantasy, you don't need to rebut the books. Simply explain why you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord.

2. Don't reward evangelistic atheists financially for their efforts. Unless you need to answer specific questions for someone who needs help dealing with *The Golden Compass*, you don't need to read the books or see the movie. Let's send the message that freedom of expression is accompanied by the freedom to choose *not* to pay to read or see it. If you do need to read it, check it out of the library or purchase a used copy.

3. Don't allow your children to enter this world without a chaperone (i.e. you as their parent). It is not only anti-Christian; it is also contains elements which should be deeply disturbing to children (e.g. a father murdering his daughter's best friend; a prison camp for torturing children). Even though I think their time would be better spent reading other things, some parents may want to go over Pullman's key themes with their older children to prepare them for their classmates who have seen the movie or read the book. If you have older teenagers, you could check these books out of the library and use them to dissect Pullman's worldview, helping them understand that it does nothing to undermine the historic truths of Christianity.

The Message of *His Dark Materials*

I have read the complete trilogy, *His Dark Materials*, of which *The Golden Compass* is the first volume. In my opinion, this trilogy is both well written and well crafted. Well-written in that the primary characters have some depth and I found myself caring about them. Well-crafted in that the fantasy world (actually an infinite number of parallel worlds) and plot are reasonably self-consistent and continue to be fleshed out as the trilogy unfolds. However, even if this were simply a classic allegory of good vs. evil, some of the events and imagery are too dark for anyone younger than late teens. So the problem is not that it is poorly written pulp, but that it is well written with a clear intention on the part of the

author to promote a worldview that considers Christianity a bane rather than a benefit.

The Chronicles of Narnia by C. S. Lewis and *His Dark Materials* are both allegorical fantasy series written by British authors. However, while *The Chronicles of Narnia* overtly promotes the message of Christianity, *His Dark Materials*, promotes the message that the God of Christianity is a fraud and the organized church is an evil blight preventing mankind from reaching our fullest potential. This contrast is no accident considering Pullman's criticism of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and of monotheism:

Morally loathsome, he called it. One of the most ugly and poisonous things I've ever read. He described his own series as Narnia's moral opposite. That's the Christian one, he told me. And mine is the non-Christian.

Every single religion that has a monotheistic god ends up by persecuting other people and killing them because they don't accept him, he once said.[{1}](#)

Pullman sets out to counter the impact of C. S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien by creating his own fantasy world in which God is ultimately unmasked as a fraud. The trilogy includes an alternate garden of Eden story, ushering in the Republic of Heaven where people are free to reach their full potential without the oppressive effects of God or organized religion. With over 15 million copies of his books in print, Pullman has had some success with his objective to influence others with his atheist worldview. *His Dark Materials* has been the recipient of numerous literary awards, most of them for children's literature.[{2}](#) (This categorization of his work is unfortunate since his books are definitely not suitable for children.) However, prior to the movie release, he had not achieved the notoriety he had hoped for:

Four years ago Pullman wondered why his books hadn't

attracted as much controversy as the Harry Potter series(since) he was saying things that are far more subversive than anything poor old Harry has said. My books are about killing God.[*{3}*](#)

One interesting feature of the trilogy is the progressive unmasking of Pullman's worldview. After reading *The Golden Compass*, one may be equally disturbed with the actions of those representing the Church and those rebelling against it. The intended meaning of the allegorical elements is still fuzzy. However, by the time the reader reaches the climax of the trilogy where the Ancient of Days and his minions are defeated in their battle with the fallen angels, Pullman's objective becomes abundantly clear. He invites the readers to embrace his vision of a Republic of Heaven; a Republic where individual self-awareness and self-fulfillment replace the need for truth and a relationship with our creator.

How Does the Movie Compare to the Books?

Of course, we have not seen the movie yet. However, anyone who has ever gone to see a movie version of one of their favorite books knows that Hollywood does not feel bound to stick to the original plot, much less the message. As the release date for the movie nears, many reports are surfacing that New Line Cinema has chosen to obscure the anti-religion message of the books.

In the end, the religious meaning of the book was obscured so thoroughly as to be essentially indecipherable... The movie's main theme became, in one producer's summary, One small child can save the world. With \$180 million at stake, the studio opted to kidnap the book's body and leave behind its soul.[*{4}*](#)

Even if this is true, I recommend that Christians avoid this movie for several reasons:

1. An adolescent who enjoys the movie may well be interested in reading the books where the message is very clear and compelling.

2. If this movie is a success, the studio will begin production on the next book in the trilogy. It will be much harder to obscure the anti-God message of the second and third volumes of the trilogy. In fact Pullman is attempting to rein in his vitriol against Christians because he wants to make sure that all three books are made into movies.

3. If Christians patronize this film, we are financially rewarding Phillip Pullman for his attack on Christianity and encouraging the studios to produce more anti-Christian propaganda than they already do.

Conclusions

Please go back to the opening of this article for a summary of my conclusions. Join me in praying that while the movie is a financial disaster, many Christians will be motivated to share their faith with people who want to discuss the movie and the underlying books.

Addendum: Post-Viewing Assessment of Film's Departure from the Book

Now that I have viewed the movie, I wanted to add a short update addressing the differences between the book and the movie. There are three primary differences that are worth noting.

Theology-Lite VersionAs reported above, theology and any mention of God are almost completely removed from the movie version. Clearly, the Magesterium represents a powerful church that is condoning horrific experiments on children for the greater good of mankind, but in this parallel universe

the movie does not indicate that the Magesteriums beliefs relate directly to any actual religions. One could argue that the historic Catholic Church is presented in a much more unfavorable light in the film Luther than in The Golden Compass. As a stand-alone movie, The Golden Compass would not be much different than many movies that promote a humanist message of individual dignity and choice versus an authoritarian system. Even with theology-lite, this movie has a strong worldview message that should be discussed with any young people who view the movie.

Chilling Ending Truncated*The movie ends before the corresponding end of the book. The last three chapters of the book are not covered at all. This definitely leaves the door open to use the last three chapters as the opening for a sequel based on the next book in the trilogy. I suspect these chapters were left out because they contain the most disturbing images in the book (e.g., Lyras father murders her best friend in front of her to further his scientific work) and an explanation of the relationship between dust and Adam and Eve. Even without those chapters, this movie earns its PG-13 rating and is not suitable for children.*

Significant Modifications for the Silver Screen*The screenplay plays fast and loose with the order of events in the books and creates new storylines to shorten the build-up to key transitions in the plot. All of the major events of the book (excluding the last three chapters) are retained, but the order in which they occur and the details of how they play out are significantly modified.*

None of the differences noted above cause me to change the recommendations above. I still would encourage you not to reward Phillip Pullman or the movie producers financially. Pullman is very candid that his objective is to influence people to view belief in Christianity as misguided and damaging. Financial success will encourage them to make movies

of the other books in the trilogy which entail much more direct attacks on God and religion. It will also provide Pullman with resources to support his crusade. We should keep in mind that most young people who read these books will identify strongly with the protagonists and their mission to free people from Gods authority *and* will not have parents who will sit down with them and discuss the worldview implications of these books.

Involved Christian parents could certainly review this material with their children as a way to better equip them to deal with contrary worldviews. However, I would encourage you to do it in ways that do not financially reward the cause of atheism.

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Notes

1. Hana Rosin, "How Hollywood Saved God," *The Atlantic*, Volume 300 No. 5, December 2007
2. The awards include but are not limited to: Whitbread Award-Best Children's Book and Best Book 2001, Carnegie Medal (England), American Library Association Top Ten Best Book for Young Adults, A Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books Blue Ribbon book, A Publishers Weekly Best Book of the Year, Children's ABBY Honor
3. Hana Rosin, "How Hollywood Saved God"
4. Ibid

Life on Another Planet-Just Around the Corner?

In late April [2007], a group of European scientists made an announcement that created quite a stir in the mainstream media. For the first time, a planet which could potentially support life has been discovered outside of our solar system. One newspaper headline read “Scientists find potentially habitable planet–Discovery a big step in search for life in universe”[\[1\]](#). Such an announcement raises important questions:

Is this newly discovered planet really a likely host for life?

Does this discovery imply that the earth is not unique in its ability to support complex life as promoted by most proponents of Intelligent Design?

If this planet does (or did) host life, would that detract from or support our belief in a transcendent creator?

By considering these questions, we realize that this discovery provides more support for the theory of Intelligent Design than for Darwinism.

A Potentially Habitable Planet?

This planet orbits the red dwarf star, Gliese 581 and has been designated as 581 c. It cannot be seen from earth. It was detected by examining the effect its gravity had on the light emanating from its star. Based on that data, these scientists projected that this planet may have temperatures between 32 and 104 degrees. With this temperature range and at 1.5 to 2 times the diameter of earth, it might be able to hold liquid water. In addition, its red dwarf star appears to be quite old and stable, suggesting that its planets may have been around

for billions of years. Thus, some of the characteristics necessary for a naturalistic explanation of life may be associated with this planet.

However, a habitable planet requires much more than “just add water”{2} plus time. Further analysis of Gliese 581 c indicates that it probably has many characteristics unfavorable to life. Examples include:

It does not rotate around its axis, meaning one side is always in the sun while the other side remains in constant darkness. Some scientists are now suggesting that its surface temperatures will be much hotter than the original estimates.

Since it orbits a red star with lower levels of electromagnetic radiation than our sun, this greatly limits the effectiveness of photosynthetic reactions.

Uniqueness of Earth

On the [Reasons To Believe](#) Web site{3}, astrophysicist Hugh Ross has posted several articles identifying characteristics of our galaxy and earth that are necessary for life. In one paper{4}, he estimates the probability of the universe having a planet like earth exhibiting all 322 characteristics identified as critical for life. A high level analysis of the list in his paper indicates that Gliese 581 c may satisfy 112 of these characteristics (primarily because it exists in the same universe and galaxy as earth). Gliese 581 c is the first out of 220 planets identified outside our solar system that exists in the habitable temperature zone.{5} That leaves at least 210 questions unanswered such as:

Does it have a large enough moon to create tidal patterns?

Does it have just the right size, protecting planets to reduce the number of asteroid hits?

Does it have the right thickness of crust?

Does it have the right atmosphere?

Does it have the right mixture of minerals?

Using the probability estimates for each remaining characteristic, a conservative estimate for the probability that this planet could support life is 1 in 10^{199} (1 with 199 zeros after it). Please remember that this extremely low probability (essentially zero) is simply to have a planet that is habitable. It does not include the similarly minuscule probability of even the simplest life forms arising from inorganic matter. As renowned astrophysicist Stephen Hawking stated, "I expect there will be planets like Earth, but whether they have life is another question. We haven't been visited by little green men yet."[\[6\]](#) Since we can be virtually certain that this planet does not support any life, we may not want to spend the effort to travel to it—especially, when with current technology, it would take over 400,000 years to reach this planet.

Life on another planet—What would it mean?

Would finding life on another planet be a victory for Darwinism and proponents of naturalistic evolution as the sole force behind life as we know it? Quite the contrary! Given the extremely small probability of finding another habitable planet in our universe, multiplied by the equally small probability of life generating spontaneously on a habitable planet, finding life on another planet would have to be considered a miracle.

In other words, finding even the simplest life forms on another planet would greatly increase the scientific evidence for intelligent design. Only a transcendent intelligent

designer would be able to overcome those long odds to create life in multiple places in the universe. The theological implications of such a discovery would depend upon the nature of the life forms and will be left for future ponderings.

Bottom Line

The discovery of Gliese 581 c is an interesting event in astronomy which, if anything, further supports our view that the earth is very likely unique in its ability to support complex life. If life is ever discovered on another planet, it will further strengthen the position of intelligent design as the best theory to explain the evidence.

Notes

1. *Dallas Morning News*, April 24, 2007.
2. Jay Richards, Acton Institute, formerly with The Discovery Institute, the institutional home of the Intelligent Design movement.
3. www.reasons.org
4. Hugh Ross, "Probability for Life on Earth, 2004 April Update", Reasons to Believe, 2004.
5. It is interesting to note that Ross's paper allocated a probability of 1 in 1,000 to that same factor, which is the same order of magnitude as 1 out of 220. So if we used 1 out of 220 instead, the calculated probability would be less than 1 in 10¹⁹⁸.
6. *Dallas Morning News*, April 24, 2007.

Recommended Responses to The Golden Compass

The Golden Compass: Pointing In the Wrong Direction

Steve Cable

www.probe.org/the-golden-compass-pointing-in-the-wrong-direction

Probe staffer Steve Cable recommends Christian parents steer clear of The Golden Compass film based on Phillip Pullman's trilogy, His Dark Materials. It is openly anti-God from an avowed anti-Christian writer. Kids will not be able to handle it.

The Golden Compass: A Primer on Atheism

Russ Wise

<http://www.christianinformation.org/article.asp?artID=117>

Former Probe staff member Russ Wise examines this anti-Christian book and movie.

Kerby Anderson also recommends:

The Golden Compass Fraud

L. Brent Bozell III

<http://www.cultureandmediainstitute.org/prINTER/2007/20071109161918.aspx>

The upside-down world of Pullman's "Golden Compass"

Berit Kjos

<http://www.crossroad.to/articles2/007/compass-pullman.htm>

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“Why Are You Trying to Redeem Darwin?”

I am curious, why do you call this effort “Redeeming Darwin”? What exactly about Darwin are you attempting to redeem?

Thanks for your question. [*Redeeming Darwin*](#) is a part of our *Redeeming the Culture* series of studies. In this series, we take topics that are counter to and/or hostile to Christianity and educate Christians on how to use these topics defend their faith and to share the gospel. (Our first project was “[*Redeeming The Da Vinci Code*](#).”) By equipping Christians to use a negative topic as a bridge to share the gospel, we are in a sense redeeming that topic. So the title does not imply that we are in some way redeeming the *person* of Darwin, but rather using the *topic* of Darwinism as a tool to accomplish a redemptive purpose.

Best regards,
Steve Cable

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Is This the Last Christian Generation? – The Future of

American Christianity

Steve Cable joins Josh McDowell in asking about the future of the American church. Do Christians have the will to turn around the degradation of biblical beliefs and restore the church to a state of vibrant belief in Christ touching the lives of everyone in the country? According to Josh's research, we need to change the trends to have a chance of growing the church.

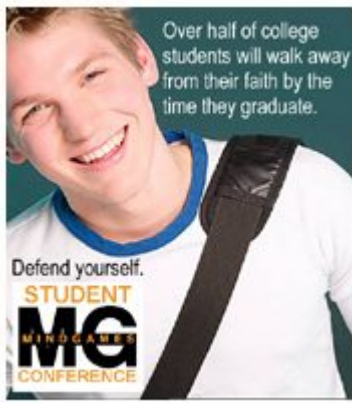
The Concern

Is this the last Christian generation in America? Mark Oestreicher of Youth Specialties stated recently in *Christianity Today*, "There are a lot of people who've had this nagging sense that we're missing the mark somehow . . . kids seem happy and willing to attend, and engage in our ministries, but five years from now, when they're in college or post-college, they just really aren't connecting with real faith, let alone church."

I know what you are thinking: "This is not new." Of course, I agree. For over thirty years, Probe Ministries has worked to create a strong foundation for Christian teens.

However, some believe it has reached a dangerous new level. This upswing has prompted Josh McDowell to co-write a new book with Dave Bellis. Josh states, "the decision to call this [book] *The Last Christian Generation* was not made lightly nor was it done for sensationalism. I sincerely believe unless something is done now to change the spiritual state of our young people – you will become the last Christian generation!"[^{1}](#)

Is Josh's concern justified? Will this trend correct itself or will we follow in the secular footsteps of Western Europe?



How *are* we doing at converting church involvement by teens into a lifelong relationship with Christ? A 2006 study indicates that over eighty percent of today's teens attend church for a period of at least two months during their teenage years. What an opportunity! The bad news is that only one out of four of those church youth are still spiritually engaged by age twenty-nine; [{2}](#) that is, they are still actively attending church, reading the Bible, or praying. In comparison, roughly twice as many adults in their forties are spiritually engaged.

An earlier study looked at the beliefs of teens involved in evangelical churches. Over two-thirds of these young people believe

- that there is no absolute moral truth,
- that Christianity is about showing bad people how to live better,
- that there is no way to tell which religion is true,
- that Jesus is not the Son of the one true God.

And, over half believe

- that Jesus did not rise from the dead.

Is it any wonder that these young people readily abandon their Christian involvement when confronted with a hostile culture?

The Causes

Let's consider some potential causes three out of four churched teens become disengaged from Christianity during their twenties.

One cause may be the way we define and measure youth ministry. As adults abdicate their training responsibility, our youth are isolated as their own congregation. The measure of success is numerical attendance rather than instilling a life long discipline for spiritual growth. Church becomes a series of fun activities interspersed with encouragement to avoid risky behaviors.

A second factor is primarily teaching topical lessons on Christian rules rather than laying a strong foundation of truth. As our teens move into college, professors, peers, and the popular media all portray authentic Christianity in a negative light. It takes a strong foundation to choose to endure hostility when one can adopt a so-called "private faith" and avoid the confrontation. As you know, soldiers participate in exercises simulating the most effective tactics of their opponents before being sent onto the battlefield. Yet, in training our teens, we often avoid exposing them to the tough questions lest some of them are put off by the experience.

A third factor is allowing teens to be content with a second-hand faith. In Joshua, we learn that "Israel served the LORD . . . all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, and had known all the deeds of the LORD" (24:31). After these elders who had personally experienced the Lord died, most in Israel fell away from serving God. More recently, during the Welsh revival of 1904, over 100,000 conversions were recorded in less than five months. The impact was so pervasive that police duties were reduced to providing quartets for prayer meetings. A century later, church attendance in Wales is at an all-time low. Only nineteen percent of UK teenagers say they had a

religious faith (as compared to over seventy percent for US teens). Luis Palau summed up the Welsh experience by noting, “God has no grandchildren.” Teens who attend church to live out their parents’ faith find it easy to leave the faith to conform to the expectations of their new authority figures.

These three factors have been around since the inception of Probe. A new factor, somewhat unique to today’s culture is a “distorted worldview filter” unwittingly adopted by our youth and adults. This filter tells them:

- Truth is relative, not absolute.
- Science and spirituality are at odds.
- Science confirms that I am nothing but insignificant dirt.
- An irrational, spiritual tradition can help me cope with this harsh reality.
- However, I am in no position to critically evaluate someone else’s tradition.

With this distorted filter in place, even solid biblical teaching can leave teens unprepared to stand firm in their faith.

The Last Christian Generation lists some of the concepts distorted by this filter, for example:[{3}](#)

- Truth now means whatever is right for you.
- Tolerance means accepting that each individual’s values and lifestyles are equally valid.
- Moral judgments mean bigoted attitudes we have no right to hold.

Many teens are synthesizing Christian teaching and popular culture into a new personal religion. In their 2005 book, *Soul*

Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers,^{4} the authors found that religious teens tend to hold a vague group of functionally religious beliefs the authors termed “moralistic therapeutic deism.”^{5} Its key tenets are:

- God is distant and uninvolved in daily life.
- But I can call on God as a “cosmic therapist” when I have a problem.
- My purpose is to be happy and feel good about myself.
- If I avoid being an intolerant jerk, I will go to heaven.

Although these beliefs could be considered theistic, they definitely are not evangelical Christianity.

What happens when these beliefs are put to the test? I’ve known Julie^{6} all her life. Julie consistently attended youth group. She was also tuned into the popular culture. When her circumstances disappointed her, she turned to God as her “cosmic therapist.” When He did not change her circumstances to suit her, she decided that God was not worth her time. Instead, she chose to escape her circumstances through drugs. She had distorted the truth into a perversion that prevented her from having a solid relationship with her Creator.

The Correction

How should we respond to this disturbing trend?

Historically, much of youth ministry has been about getting the crowd in the door and keeping them involved. Recent studies show we are doing a good job at this function.^{7} But we are not doing well if we measure success by how many are still actively involved through their twenties. If the problem is not getting them in the door, it must be in what is happening once they are involved.

Josh McDowell suggests that we need to readjust both what is being taught and how it is being taught.{8} We need to train our youth in a “relational apologetic,” meaning knowing and defending a belief in God as absolute reality revealed through the Bible *and* experiencing this truth lived out in their lives and through the example of others.

What should we teach? Although we should not ignore behavioral issues such as sex, drugs, etc., McDowell calls us to help our teens see the reality of God. If there is a God, it is of paramount importance that we seek to know absolute Truth with a capital T. Consistent with everything the tools of modern science can observe about our universe, they have rational reasons to believe that God has revealed Himself to us through His Word.

McDowell and Bellis suggest teens must learn to know Him as the God of redemption, relationships, and restoration.{9} A clear understanding of each of these aspects serves an important role in countering the tenets of today’s teen religion which we defined above as “moralistic therapeutic deism”:

- Knowing the God of redemption tells them that good people don’t go to heaven; redeemed people go to heaven. Our definition of good is so shallow compared to a transcendent, holy God. We must rely on Him for redemption.
- Knowing the God of relationships tells them God is not a cosmic therapist, but a personal heavenly Father, intimately involved in all aspects of life.
- Knowing the God of restoration highlights that our earthly life is a brief precursor to eternity. This truth changes our central goal to creating eternal value in Christ.

Youth who can articulate these truths have taken a big step to repairing their distorted worldview filter.

Laying a Firm Foundation

McDowell points out that it is not only what we teach but how we teach it that is important.^{10} In America, we have adopted a Hellenistic [Greek] teaching model focused on communicating information and testing whether the student can regurgitate it. In addition, Christianity is often communicated as a set of behavior rules covering one topic at a time, rather than as a deep relationship emulating the character of our heavenly Father. Bits of knowledge and rules for behavior are not a comprehensive worldview.

In contrast to the Hellenistic model, the Hebrew model of Deuteronomy and Proverbs uses a set of ongoing object lessons, applying the character of God to each life situation. The entire inter-generational community is modeling their faith and articulating their biblical worldview. For this model to work, parents and youth leaders must continually express their reasons for believing that Jesus is the truth in a world that says there is no truth. Teens must experience a community of faith willing to trade in a life purpose of being happy and avoiding pain for a life purpose of building eternal value through serving Jesus.

This may sound like a daunting task, but there are ministries that want to come alongside and help in this process. Josh McDowell's ministry is developing study materials and training events specifically designed to fill this need. More information is available at truefoundations.com. Probe Ministries offers the Student *Mind Games* Conference, a week-long camp designed to equip students to stand firm in their faith through college and beyond.^{11} In addition, Probe offers speakers, curricula and other materials to help parents, youth leaders and students to articulate and live a relational apologetic. You can visit our website at Probe.org.

We know the church will survive and ultimately triumph at the return of Jesus, but there is no promise that America will

continue to have a high percentage of evangelical Christians. Four out of five youth in America are giving us a chance to influence the future. I believe God has called all of us to be a part of responding to that challenge.

Notes

1. Josh McDowell & David Bellis, *The Last Christian Generation* (Holiday, Fla.: Green Key Books, 2006).
2. "Most Twentysomethings Put Christianity on the Shelf Following Spiritually Active Teen Years," The Barna Update, Sept. 11, 2006, www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=245.
3. Ibid., 1.
4. Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2005).
5. Bruce Murray, "Understanding the Religious and Spiritual Lives of Teenagers," FACSNET, www.facsnet.org/issues/faith/youth.php.
6. Not her real name.
7. Ibid., 2.
8. Ibid., 1.
9. Ibid., 1.
10. Ibid., 1.
11. More information is available on the Probe Web site at probe.org/mindgames.