Probe Survey 2020 Report 6: Nothing in Particulars and Biblical Views

Steve Cable analyzes Probe's 2020 Survey, examining beliefs of 'Nothing in Particulars' on salvation, biblical worldview, and sexual issues.

We want to examine the Unaffiliated and particularly those who selected Nothing in Particular (NIP) as their religious preference. As noted in the first article of this series{1}, some researchers earlier in this century posited that many of the Nothing in Particulars were actually part of the Christian majority in America and would return to the fold as they aged. However, as shown in that article, this idea has not materialized as the young adults aged. Rather, the percentage of NIPs in each age group has grown as the age group has aged.

In this report, we will see how very different the beliefs of the NIPs are from those taught in the New Testament. We will look at this in three separate areas:

1. Salvation through Christ Alone.
2. A Biblical Worldview
3. Attitudes Concerning Sexual Issues

In these three areas, we will discover that most NIPs disagree with biblical teaching on these topics.

Reasons for Not Believing in Salvation Through Christ Alone

One question asked was "What keeps you from believing that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ alone?" Particularly for the Unaffiliated, we want to know whether it is a lack of knowledge or some other reason. When asked this question, the

respondents could select from the following answers:

1. Never gave the question any thought.
2. Don't believe that God would take upon Himself the penalty for my sin.
3. Salvation is not a gift, it must be earned.
4. I am clearly as good as Christians I know so I should be accepted by God if they are.
5. There is no personal, creator God.
6. Another answer not listed here.
7. Not applicable, I do believe.

Figure 1 What keeps you from believing in salvation through Jesus alone: Ages 18 - 39

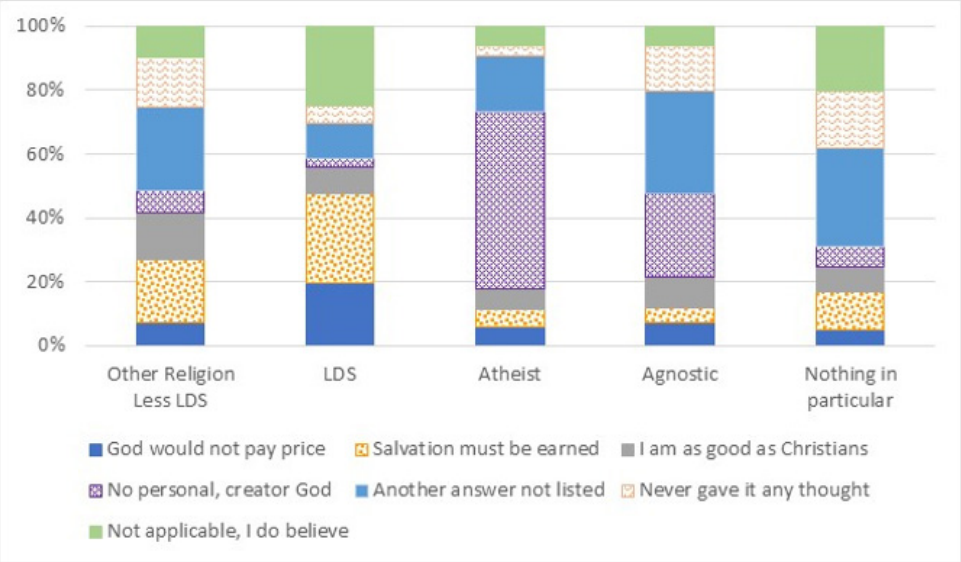


First let's consider how the various religious groups answered this question as shown in Figure 1. This data has already been discussed in Report #4. But in the current discussion, we want to focus on Other Religion and Unaffiliated. Respondents from Other Religions were most likely to select either "salvation must be earned" or "another answer not listed." A smaller percentage, just over 10%, selected "I am clearly as good as Christians I know. That answer appeared to be irrelevant to them.

On the other hand, the two largest segments selected by the Unaffiliated were "no personal, creator God" and "another answer not listed." Both groups had about 15% of their number select "Not applicable, I do believe."

To get a better understanding of what drives these results, we dove further into the makeup of each of these two groups. The results are shown in Figure 2.{2} We divided Other Religions into the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) and all other non-Christian religions. We divided the Unaffiliated into Atheist, Agnostic and Nothing in Particular. As shown, the LDS respondents are much more likely than other religions to select "salvation must be earned," "I do believe," and "God would not pay the price." Almost one quarter of the LDS selected "I do believe" which explains how the Other Religion category showed about 15% with that answer. So we see that a strong majority of LDS people believe that they must do something more than believing in Christ to achieve salvation. At the same time, a significant minority believe in salvation through faith in Christ alone.

Figure 2 What keeps you from believing in salvation through Jesus alone: Ages 18 - 39



The Atheist subgroup follows our expectations. A majority (> 55%) don't believe in Jesus as savior because they do not believe in any God at all. When we add in "another answer not given," about three quarters of the Atheists are covered.

Moving to Agnostics, we see that a strong majority selected either "no God" or "another answer not given." Adding in "I never gave it any thought," we cover about three quarters of the Agnostics.

The Nothing in Particular group (NIPs) has a significantly

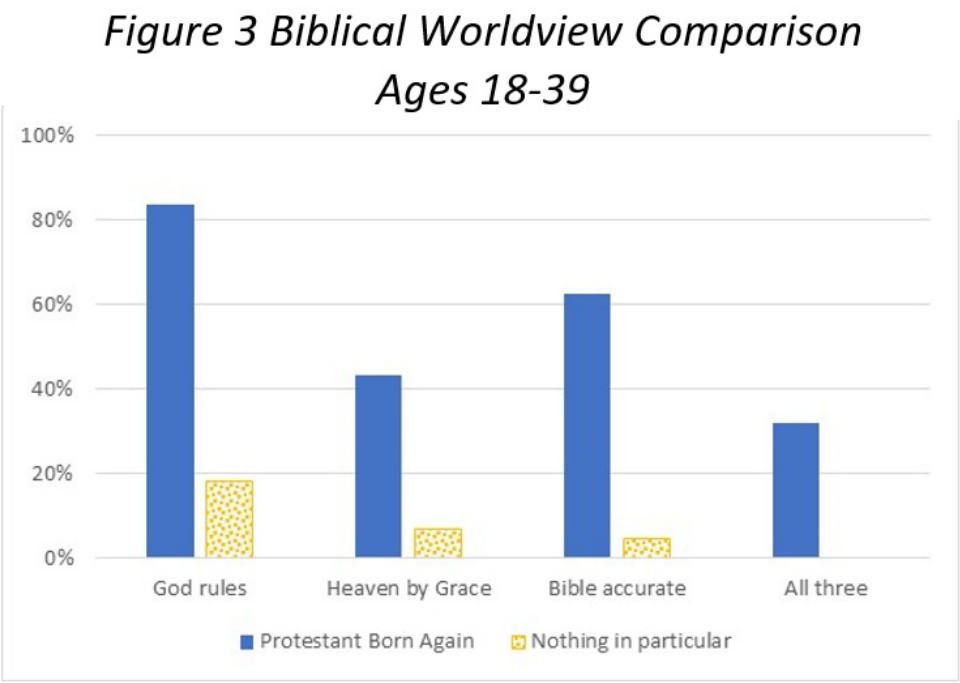
different range of answers. About one in five say they do believe in salvation through faith in Christ. This number is significantly higher than Atheist and Agnostics, but it still leaves four out of five who say they do not believe. Almost one half of them selected “another answer not given” or “I never gave it any thought.”

So, there are about one fifth of the NIPs who might have a somewhat Christian view of salvation. However, less than 3% of this group claim to be born-again. And of course, four fifths of this group say they do not belih3eve in salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. So, an overwhelming majority of the NIPs clearly are not born-again or evangelical Christians.

NIPS and a Subset of a Biblical Worldview

How do those who claim their religion is “Nothing in particular” stand in accepting a subset of the Basic Biblical Worldview discussed in earlier articles? The subset consists of the following three questions:

1. Which of the following descriptions comes closest to what you personally believe to be true about God: **God is the all-powerful, all knowing, perfect creator of the universe who rules the world today**{3}
2. The Bible is totally accurate in all its teachings: **Strongly Agree**
3. If a person is generally good enough or does enough good things for others during their life, they will earn a place in heaven: **Disagree Strongly**



Let's compare the results for Born-again Protestants and those who claimed to be Nothing in Particular. As shown in Figure 3, for each of the questions those agreeing with a biblical worldview among the Nothing in Particulars is a small fraction of those among Born-again Protestants. When we combine the three questions together, we see one out of three Born-again Protestants vs. no NIPs. Certainly, some of these NIPs came from an evangelical background, but none of them interviewed in our survey ascribe to a basic evangelical worldview as adults. As noted in our first report, one in three orn-again Protestants is a disappointing percentage ascribing to these biblical worldview questions, but it is certainly dramatically better than the Nothing in Particular group.

NIPs and Biblical Sexual Morality

On another front, we compare views on biblical sexual morality held by Born-again Protestants and Nothing in Particulars. To do this, we will consider three of the questions from our survey as listed below.

1. Sex among unmarried people is always a mistake: from **Agree Strongly** to Disagree Strongly
2. Viewing explicit sexual material in a movie, on the internet, or some other source is:

- **a. To be avoided**
- b. Acceptable if no one is physically or emotionally harmed in them.
- c. A matter of personal choice
- d. Not a problem if you enjoy it
- e. Don't know

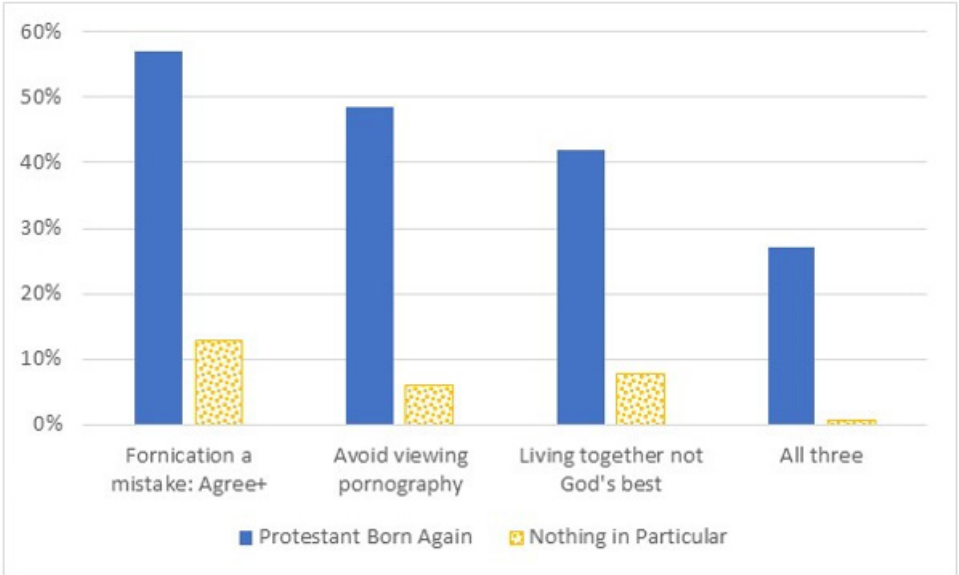
3. Living with someone in a sexual relationship before marriage:
    - a. Might be helpful but should be entered into with caution.
    - b. Just makes sense in today's cultural environment.
    - c. Will have a negative effect on the relationship.
    - **d. Should be avoided as not our best choice as instructed by God.**

For this comparison, we are looking for the following answers:

1. Either Agree Strongly or Agree Somewhat
2. To be avoided
3. Should be avoided as not our best choice as instructed by God

The results from our survey are shown in Figure 4. Once again, we see a large difference between these two groups. Clearly, the NIPs do not ascribe to a biblical view

Figure 4 Comparison of Sexual Morality
Ages 18 - 39



on sexual morality. The majority of Born-again Protestants do not ascribe to those beliefs either, but a significant minority of them do.

Summary

As discussed above, we find that the Nothing in Particular group have

- less than one in five who say they are trusting in Christ for their salvation,
- none who accept a simple three question take on a biblical worldview and
- almost none who accept a biblical view on sexuality.

In each of the age groups considered in our surveys, the percentage of respondents selecting a NIP affiliation has grown as the age groups have grown older. There is no indication that any significant number of them are returning to or turning to an Evangelical Christian perspective.

Clearly for the upcoming decade a critical question for the Evangelical church is, How do we reach the Unaffiliated and especially the Nones with the good news of the gospel? Since the vast majority of NIPs do not accept the authority of the Bible, we need to b e prepared to share with them why we can believe the Bible is an accurate communication from the Creator of this universe. In particular, that the biblical account of the death resurrection of Jesus is an accurate historical account. One source to use in this task is our article "The Answer is the Resurrection"{4} which can be found on the Probe website.

Notes

1. Introducing Probe's New Survey: Religious Views and Practices 2020
2. As we dive down into these subgroups remember that the smaller number of respondents of each type reduce the accuracy

as we apply our limited sample to the entire group across the United States. In this case, we surveyed 68 LDS, 178 Other Religions not LDS, 124 Atheist, 167 Agnostic, and 245 Nothing in particular (between 18 and 39 years old).
3. Other answers to select from: God created but is no longer involved with the world today; God refers to the total realization of personal human potential; there are many gods, each with their different power and authority; God represents a state of higher consciousness that a person may reach; there is no such thing as God; and don't know.
4. The Answer Is the Resurrection: Sharing Your Faith in Christ (probe.org)

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Atheist Myths and Scientism

Steve Cable exposes some atheist myths and the false ideology of scientism, all designed to destroy people's faith.

A Two-Pronged Attack Against Christianity



Atheist attacks against American Christianity are gaining more traction in our society. Their success can be readily seen in the growth of the number of American young adults who do not profess to be Christians. Tracking recent trends, around 50% of American Millennials fall in this category, with most of those identifying as atheist, agnostic or nothing in particular. More identify as nothing in particular than as

atheist, but the atheist attacks certainly have a role to play in their ambivalent feelings about Christianity.

What have atheists done to create a cultural milieu that is drawing more and more young Americans away from Christianity? In this article, we will focus on two prominent prongs of the attack against Christianity. Those prongs are:

1. Fabricating myths around the premise that Christianity and modern science are enemies of one another and have been so since the advent of modern science, and

2. Promoting the philosophy of scientism as the only way to view science.

First, the myths are an attempt to cause people to believe that the Christian church and a Christian worldview were and are anti-science. They want us to believe that the findings of science are counter to the make-believe teachings of Christianity and the Bible. They want us to look back at history and believe that the church was actively opposing and trying to suppress scientific knowledge. As Michael Keas tells us in his 2019 book *Unbelievable*, "These stories are nothing but myths. And yet some leading scientists . . . offer these stories as unassailable truth. These myths make their way into science textbooks . . . (and) enter into popular culture, whereby the myths pass as accepted wisdom."{1}

However, many historians and philosophers have correctly pointed out that the Christian worldview of an orderly universe created by an involved God produced the mindset that gave birth to the scientific revolution. In his book *How the West Won*, sociologist Rodney Stark states, "Christianity was essential to the rise of science, which is why science was a purely Western phenomenon . . . science only arose in Christian Europe because only medieval Europeans believed that science was possible and desirable. And the basis of their belief was their image of God and his creation."{2} In this

article, we consider the key figures who propagated this myth and some of the falsified stories they have foisted upon us.

Second, they want us to accept scientism as the only valid way to view the role of science in our understanding of the universe. What is scientism? In his 2018 book *Scientism and Secularism*, professor of philosophy J. P Moreland defines it this way: "Scientism is the view that the hard sciences provide the only genuine knowledge of reality. . . . What is crucial to scientism is . . . the thought that the scientific is much more valuable than the non-scientific. . . . When you have competing knowledge claims from different sources, the scientific will always trump the non-scientific."{3}

But scientism "is not a doctrine of science; rather it is a doctrine of philosophy . . . (In fact,) scientism distorts science."{4} This philosophical doctrine came into favor among the public not because of scientific results, but rather as the result of proponents presenting it in popular ways as if it were the undisputable truth. As Moreland points out, "It is not even a friend of science but rather its enemy."{5}

Myths about Christianity and Science

Atheists want to create stories to demonstrate that Christians are and have been the enemies of scientific exploration and discovery. Why this drive to recreate the past? They want to encourage people to turn away from Christianity as an enemy of science and weaken the faith of believers.

As Michael Keas makes evident in *Unbelievable*, this thinking is not based on reality. Instead, historical myths have been created to bolster their position either as a result of ignorance of the actual history or intentional deceit. After creating these myths, they use the educational system and mass media to ingrain these myths into the thinking of the masses.

Keas specifically looks at seven myths used for this purpose

which we find embedded in our textbooks and proclaimed by popular television programs. To understand the nature of these myths, let's consider two of the ones discussed by Keas.

Many of you learned of the Dark Ages, a period of time between A.D. 500 and 1500 where textbooks have claimed that science and the arts were stifled by the control of the church which opposed scientific understanding. In truth, this view is not supported by historical evaluations of that time. As reported in Stark's revealing book, *How the West Won*, "Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the Dark Ages myth is that it was imposed on what was actually "one of the great innovative eras of mankind." During this period technology was developed and put into use on a scale no civilization had previously known.{6} Keas found that this myth first appeared in textbooks in the 1800s but did not surface with an anti-Christian slant until the 1960s. Carl Sagan, and later Neal deGrasse Tyson, would help promulgate this myth on television through their *Cosmos* series.

Another myth exploded by Keas is that "Copernicus demoted humans from the privileged 'center of the universe' and thereby challenged religious doctrines about human importance."{7} In fact, Copernicus as a Christian did not consider his discovery that the earth orbited the sun a demotion for earth or humans. What Copernicus saw as unveiling the mysteries of God's creation over time began to be pictured as a great humiliation for Christians. In the 1950s some scientific writers began using the term "the Copernican principle" to refer to the idea "that the Earth is not in a central, specially favored position"{8} in the cosmos. As one Harvard professor has noted, "This is the principle of mediocrity, and Copernicus would have been shocked to find his name associated with it."{9}

Keas also documents how this atheist strategy also pretends that many early scientists were not Christians. Johannes Kepler, known for his discovery of the three laws of planetary

motion, is cited by Sagan in *Cosmos* as someone who "despaired of ever attaining salvation,"{10} implying that Kepler always felt this way. Sagan leads one to believe that in his astronomical discoveries Kepler was somehow freed from this concern. Yet from Kepler's own writing it is very clear that he was a Christian, telling people shortly before his death that he was saved "solely by the merit of our savior Jesus Christ." And speaking of his scientific endeavors he wrote, "God wanted us to recognize them [i.e. mathematical natural laws] by creating us after his own image so that we could share in his own thoughts."{11}

Much of the reported relationship between science and Christianity is a myth made up to strengthen the atheist position that science repudiates Christianity and makes it superfluous and dangerous in today's enlightened world. Nothing could be further from the truth, as a Christian worldview was foundational for the development and application of the scientific method.

Methodological Naturalism: A Farce

What about the prevalence of scientism, a belief system claiming that the hard sciences provide the only genuine knowledge of reality?

When considered carefully, the whole concept of scientism is a farce. Why? Because as philosopher J. P. Moreland points out, "Strong scientism is a philosophical assertion that claims that philosophical assertions are neither true nor can be known; only scientific assertions can be true and known."{12} So the premise is self-refuting. They are saying that only scientific facts can be objectively true. Thus, the statement that only scientific facts can be true must be false because it is a philosophical assertion, not a scientific fact.

Another example of the faulty philosophy behind scientism

comes in their insistence on adopting methodological naturalism as a criterion for science. Methodological naturalism is "the idea that, while doing science, one must seek only natural causes or explanations for scientific data."{13} This idea immediately demotes science from being the search for the truth about observable items in this universe to being the search for the most plausible natural cause no matter how implausible it may be.

Although they appear to be unsure as to whether to apply the concept uniformly to all forms of science, its proponents are sure that it definitely should be applied to the field of evolutionary science. They make the *a priori* assumption that life as we know it originated and developed by strictly impersonal, unintelligent forces. No intelligence can be allowed to enter the process in any way. This approach to trying to understand the current state of life on earth is certainly an interesting exercise leading to a multitude of theories and untestable speculations. It is a challenging mental exercise and is valuable as such. However, scientism does not stop there. They declare that their unsupported (and I would say unsupportable) theories **must be the truth** about our origins, at least until replaced by another strictly naturalistic theory.

This approach seems to be an odd (and unfruitful) way to go after the truth due to at least three reasons. First, many other areas of science which include intelligent agents in their hypotheses are respected and their results generally accepted, common examples being archaeology and forensic science. Second, the current state of evolutionary science primarily appears to be tearing holes in prior theories, e.g. Darwinian evolution, rather than closing in on a plausible explanation. And, third, scientists are continuing to find evidence supporting a hypothesis that intelligent actions were involved in the formulation of life on earth.

If the sum of the available evidence is more directly

explained by the involvement of some intelligent agent, then it would be reasonable to accept that potential explanation as the leading contender for the truth until some other answer is developed that is more closely supported by the available evidence. This is the attitude embraced by the intelligent design community. They embrace it because so much of the evidence supports it, including

1. the inability of other hypothesis to account for the first appearance of life,
2. the complexity of the simplest life forms with no chain of less complex forms leading up to them,
3. the relativity sudden appearance of all types of life forms in the fossil record,
4. the fine tuning of the parameters of the universe to support life on earth, and
5. the emergence of consciousness within humans.

In contrast, those supporting theistic evolution appear to do so in order to conform to the methodological naturalism of their peers. They claim to believe that God does intervene in nature through acts such as the miracles of Jesus and His resurrection. But they claim that God did not intervene in the processes leading up to the appearance of mankind on this planet. In my opinion, they take this stance not because the evidence demands it, but because methodological naturalism does not allow it. As Moreland opines, "Methodological naturalism is *one bad way* to put science and Christianity together."{14}

Things Science Cannot Explain / God of the Gaps

As we have seen, scientism is a philosophy that says the only real knowledge to be found is through application of the hard sciences and that no intelligence can be involved in any of our hypotheses. So, they believe hard science must be capable

of explaining everything (even if it currently doesn't).

In this section we will consider some very important things that science cannot now nor ever be able to explain. In his book, *Scientism and Secularism*, J. P. Moreland lists five such things for us.

First, the origin of the universe cannot be explained by science. Why? Science has been able to identify that the universe most likely had a beginning point. But as Moreland points out, "Science can provide evidence that the universe had a beginning; it cannot, even in principle, explain that beginning; that is, it cannot say what caused it. . . No real thing can pop into existence from nothing."{15} He points out three specific logical reasons science cannot address this issue:

1. A scientific explanation cannot be used to explain the universe because scientific explanations presuppose the universe.

2. Science cannot explain the origin of time and without time no explanation can be considered.

3. Coming-into-existence is not a process which can be reviewed and explained because it is an instantaneous event. Something either does or does not exist.

Second, the origin of the fundamental laws of nature. All scientific explanations presuppose these laws. We can conceive of a universe where these laws might be different resulting in a different reality, but we cannot explain how our universe came into being with the laws we see active around us.

Third, the fine-tuning of the universe to support life. As far as science is concerned the parameters of the forces within this universe can be observed but we cannot know what caused them to assume the values they do. However, in recent years it has been discovered that our universe "is a razor's edge of

precisely balanced life permitting conditions."{16} Over one hundred parameters of this universe, such as the force of gravity, the charge of an electron, the rate of expansion of the universe, etc., must be precisely balanced or there could be no life in the universe. Science cannot answer the question of why our universe can support life.

Fourth, the origin of consciousness. In this context consciousness is the ability to be aware of oneself and entertain thoughts about things which are outside of oneself and possibly outside of one's experience. From a naturalist point of view, "the appearance of mind is utterly unpredictable and inexplicable."{17} However, God may choose to create conscious beings; beings that are capable of asking about and discovering the works of their creator.

Fifth, the existence of moral laws. As the late atheist philosopher Mackie admitted, the emergence of moral properties would constitute a refutation of naturalism and evidence for theism: "Moral properties constitute so odd a cluster of properties and relations that they are most unlikely to have arisen in the ordinary course of events without an all-powerful god to create them."{18}

These five important questions can never be answered if scientism's flawed premise were true. However, Christian theism answers each of these questions and those answers are true if God is the real creator of the universe.

Integrating Christianity and Science

Scientism claims that you cannot integrate Christianity and science. Instead, they claim all theology is nonsense and only science exists to give us the truth. As Moreland points out, "One of the effects of scientism, then, is making the ridicule of Christianity's truth claims more common and acceptable (which is one of scientism's goals)."{19}

If this view is clearly wrong, how should we as Christians view science and its relationship with Christianity and the Bible? First, we need to understand that the topics addressed by science are in most cases peripheral to the topics covered in the Bible. The Bible is primarily concerned with God's efforts to restore people from their state as enemies of God back into eternal fellowship with Him.

One area of significant interaction is the question of how this universe came to exist in its current state. How one views that interaction (i.e. as adversarial or as complementary) depends on whether they are clinging to the unsupported myth of unguided evolution or to the new science of intelligent design. As Moreland states, "Science has done more to confirm the Christian God's existence than to undermine it, and science has provided little or no evidence against belief of theism. Science has, however, raised challenges to various biblical texts, and Christians need to take those challenges seriously."{20}

Moreland suggests there are five ways to relate issues in science and Christian philosophy. Let's consider two of those methods. One is the complementarity model. In this model, two disciplines are addressing the same object or feature but from different, essentially non-overlapping perspectives. "Neither one purports to tell the whole story, but both make true claims about reality."{21} This is the model used by advocates of theistic evolution who take as gospel the latest claims of evolutionary science while saying of course God kicked off the whole process including us in His plan for the universe.

Another way to interact is called the direct interaction model. In this model, theories from theology and from science may directly interact with one another on some topic, either positively or negatively. One area might raise rational difficulties for the other. This approach has the most potential for bringing information from different fields together into a fuller picture of truth. Intelligent design is

an area where this model is applied as it questions the validity of eliminating intelligence from the options considered in understanding the development of life on earth.

Since scientism swears that science is the only source of truth, even when scientists cannot agree as to what that scientific truth is, they want to discount inputs from any other source no matter how helpful. So the direct interaction model is a difficult road to take. What are the rational criteria for going against the experts? Moreland suggests there are four criteria for Christian theologians to decide to take this road.

1. Make sure there is not a reasonable interpretation of the Bible that resolves the tension.

2. There is a band of academically qualified scholars who are unified in rejecting the view held by a majority of the relevant experts. In this way, we know that there are people who are familiar with the details of the majority view, who do not believe that it is true.

3. There are good non-rational explanations for why the expert majority holds the problematic view. For historical, sociological, or theological reasons, the majority is not ready to abandon their position rather than because their evidence is overwhelming. "For example, the shift from creationism to Darwinism was primarily, though not exclusively, a shift in philosophy of science."{22}

Given the large amount of evidential support for a Christian worldview, any view that is counter to central components of a Christian worldview should be rejected precisely for that reason. Any view meeting the first three criteria that also attempts to undermine key parts of a Christian worldview will be overwhelmed by the significant rational support for a Christian worldview.

As followers of the God of real truth, Christians need to

realize that the so-called truths being taught to justify science over theology are in fact myths and/or self-refuting statements. Every Christian needs to be able to address these fallacies in today's popular science culture. Equip your young adults with this understanding and more by attending our summer event called Mind Games Camp. More information can be found at probe.org/mindgames.

Notes

1. Michael Keas, *Unbelievable: 7 Myths About the History and Future of Science and Religion*, ISI Books, 2019, 2.
2. Rodney Stark, *How the West Won: The Neglected Story of the Triumph of Modernity*, ISI Books, 2014 p. 304, 315.
3. J. P. Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism: Learning to Respond to a Dangerous Ideology*, Crossway, 2018, 26 and 29.
4. Ibid., p. 23.
5. Ibid., p. 55.
6. Stark, p. 76.
7. Keas, p. 4 and Chapter 6.
8. Herman Bondi, *Cosmology*, Cambridge University Press, 1952.
9. Owen Gingerich, *God's Universe*, Belknap Press, 2006.
10. Sagan, 1980 *Cosmos* TV series, episode 3.
11. Kepler, letter to Herwart von Hohenburg, April 9/10, 1599.
12. Moreland, p. 52.
13. Ibid., p. 131.
14. Ibid., p. 159.
15. Ibid., p. 138.
16. Ibid., p. 146.
17. Ibid., p. 151.
18. J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism*, Oxford, 1982, p. 115.
19. Moreland, p. 31.
20. Ibid., p.174.
21. Ibid., p. 184.
22. Ibid., p. 192.

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Lifting the Spell

Steve Cable critically considers atheist Daniel Dennett's book Breaking the Spell *to gain a better understanding of the contrast between the "bright" perspective and a biblical perspective.*

Blinded by the "Bright"

Is your belief in God purely the result of natural evolutionary forces? Has Christianity evolved over the centuries to dupe you into belief for its own survival? This proposition may insult your faith, your intelligence, and your self worth. However, it is the central theme of a recent book by Daniel Dennett entitled *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon.*{1}



Philosopher Daniel Dennett is best known for his 1995 book, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, and his July 2003 op-ed entitled "The Bright Stuff." Dennett is a self proclaimed "bright." According to him,

> A bright is a person with a naturalist as opposed to a supernaturalist worldview. We brights don't believe in ghosts or elves or the Easter Bunny—or God. . . . Don't confuse the noun with the adjective: "I'm a bright" is not a boast but a proud avowal of an inquisitive worldview.{2}

I am relieved he is not boasting, but my English teacher would say that "a proud avowal" is a good definition of a boast. In any case, Dennett is a proud proponent of a naturalist worldview.

The book's premise is that religion is a powerful, dangerous force in need of rigorous study, using the tools of modern

evolutionary science. By understanding the natural forces that imbue religion with so much power, perhaps an enlightened world can neutralize religion while retaining the positive benefits, if any. Our hero, Dennett, has ventured into the sorcerer's den of theologians, ministers, and philosophers to break the spell holding us prisoner. He states, "The spell that I say must be broken is the taboo against a forthright, scientific, no-holds-barred investigation of religion as one natural phenomenon among many."{3}

Dennett lobbies for a truly scientific (meaning atheistic) study of the origins and mechanisms of religion. According to Dennett, we had better understand religion before it destroys us. In today's dangerous world, that may not seem to be such a bad sentiment. Romans chapter 1 tells us that religions not based on God's revealed truth are natural phenomenon because they "worship the creature rather than the creator."{4} However, we should examine the implications of his so-called scientific study before biting into the apple with him.

Critically considering some themes from Dennett's book may help us gain a better understanding of the contrast between the "bright" perspective and a biblical perspective. By examining an atheist's misconceptions, we may discover areas where we have unintentionally adopted a "bright" perspective rather than a biblical worldview. Thoughtfully considering the relationship between Christianity and other religions can better prepare us to defend the hope that is in us.

A Bright's View of Religion

What is religion? Dennett begins by defining religion as "social systems whose participants avow belief in a supernatural agent or agents whose approval is to be sought."{5} Later he adds that "religion . . . invokes gods who are effective agents in real time and who play a central role in the way participants think about what they ought to

do."{6}

Defined in this way, religion is all about groups of people seeking approval of supernatural agents to obtain real time benefits. He also detects an appearance of design, calling religion "a finely tuned amalgam of brilliant plays and strategies capable of holding people enthralled and loyal for their entire lives."{7}

You and I are probably not yearning for a social system or an "amalgam of brilliant strategies." We want an eternal relationship with a real, living God. These definitions are why we sometimes say, "Christianity is not a religion, it is a relationship."

Dennett wants to completely knock the wind out of your sails by stating "that religion is natural as opposed to supernatural, that it is a human phenomenon composed of events, organisms, objects, . . . and the like that all obey the laws of physics or biology, and hence do not involve miracles."{8} Elsewhere he says that "I feel a moral imperative to spread . . . evolution, but evolution is not my religion. I don't have a religion."{9}

For a bright, science does not follow the evidence wherever it leads, but assumes natural explanations exist for every experience. Thus, he proposes that we should study religion by assuming that its foundation is false. That is like playing tennis with your feet tied together—you can never get to where you need to be to return the ball.

Let's consider a different definition that better captures the role of religion:

> My religion is what I believe about the origin, nature, and future of man and our relationship to the supernatural. My beliefs about eternity form the foundation for how I view my life on earth.

Using this definition, Dennett's naturalism is his religion. And, your relationship with Jesus Christ resulted from your religion, your belief that Jesus is God.

To be fair, *organized religion* is a social system for practicing and propagating a common set of religious beliefs. Organized religion may result in some of my beliefs being ingrained rather than chosen, but they are still my belief system. Determining which, if any, of these organized religions is teaching the truth about eternity should be of utmost importance to every person.

The Purpose of Religion

What is the purpose of religion? Throughout his book, Dennett suggests that religions are evolutionary artifacts. Thus, any benefits of religion must be realized here and now to be favored by natural selection. From Dennett's perspective, what religious people say they want from religion is "a world at peace, with as little suffering as we can manage, with freedom and justice and well-being and meaning for all."{10}

He also surmises that

> The three favorite purposes . . . for religion are:
> • To comfort us in our suffering and allay our fear of death.
> • To explain things we can't otherwise explain.
> • To encourage group cooperation in the face of trials and enemies.{11}

At first blush, these sound like good purposes, things we all desire (except perhaps the last one for those of us who have been burned by group projects). Some churches even promote these goals as the primary message of Christianity. But how can these purposes explain Jesus saying, "In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world"?{12} Or, Paul saying, "For momentary, light affliction

is producing for us an eternal weight of glory"?{13} Dennett's purposes cannot explain these statements because they are based on a naturalistic worldview where death is the end.

Ultimately, religion is not about this life. It is about the next life. One of my wife's favorite sayings to help in dieting is, "A moment on the lips means a lifetime on the hips." It is this perspective of lasting consequences for our actions that gives religion such power. Whether it is a Buddhist seeking karma, a Muslim seeking paradise, or a Christian seeking crowns in glory, an eternal perspective is a common trait of the devoted.

The essential contrast between religions is not over which can offer the best temporal benefits or produce moral behavior. It is about which one offers the truth about the nature of God, life, and eternity. Salvation occurs when you believe that Jesus is *the* way, *the* truth and *the* life,{14} and you confess Him as Lord.{15} In contrast, eternal separation is the result of rejecting the truth. As Paul tells us, "[they] perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved."{16}

The purpose of religion is to propagate the truth about the important questions that determine our eternal destiny. The most important topic to study is not "How can we get the temporal benefits from religion, while really assuming that there is no eternity?" but instead "How can I determine which religion has the truth about eternity?"

Defending the Bright Religion

In *Breaking the Spell*, Dennett proposes evolutionary science can explain religious beliefs as natural phenomenon. He believes his religion, Darwinism, can make the world better by neutralizing the power of theistic religion. One problem; his religion is not accepted by most Americans. Dennett laments:

> [O]nly about a quarter [of America] understands that evolution is about as well established as the fact that water is H_2O. . . . how, in the face of. . . massive scientific evidence, could so many Americans disbelieve in evolution? It is simple: they have been . . . told that the theory of evolution is false (or at least unproven) by people they trust more than . . . scientists.{17}

Naturally, Dennett argues for his point of view. His argument exhibits three flaws common in many arguments for Darwinism:

1. *Bait and switch definitions*. The Darwinist says, "Fact: Evolution defined as change over time through natural selection occurs. Fact: Darwinism is based on evolution. Conclusion: Darwinism is proven as the explanation for life in this universe." Claiming that Darwinism is proven because evolution occurs is like the over eager detective stating, "Fact: You were in the city on the day of the murder. Fact: The murderer had to be in the city on that day. Conclusion: You are proven to be the murderer." The two facts are correct, but the reasoning is flawed.

2. *Attack the skeptics, not the evidence*. Dennett states that "there are no reputable scientists who claim (that Darwinism is unproven). Not a one. There are plenty of frauds and charlatans, though."{18} So, anyone who doubts is a fraud regardless of their credentials. His assertion is laughable when one realizes over seven hundred scientists with impressive credentials have signed a statement expressing their skepticism of Darwinism.{19} When you don't have an answer for the evidence, your only recourse it to attack the witness.

3. *Declare yourself the winner*. Assume Darwinism is true and use that assumption to refute other theories. Dennett states, "Intelligent Design proponents . . . have all been carefully and patiently rebutted by conscientious scientists who have taken the trouble to penetrate their smoke screens of

propaganda and expose both their shoddy arguments and their apparently deliberate misrepresentations."{20}

Since defenders of Darwinism attempt to create smoke screens of propaganda, shoddy arguments, and apparently deliberate misrepresentations, it is not surprising that most Americans have not signed up for his religion. However, they control the media and educational systems, so the battle is far from over. Equip yourself to use this conflict to share the truth by checking out Probe's material, *on evolution and Darwinism*, at Probe.org.

Toxic Tolerance

In *Breaking the Spell*, Dennett assures us that atheism is the best course, but he may be willing to tolerate other religions if it can be shown they produce some benefits. He lists three main options among those who call themselves religious but vigorously advocate tolerance:

1. *False humility*. "The time is not ripe for candid declarations of religious superiority, . . . let sleeping dogs lie in hopes that those of other faiths can gently be brought around over the centuries."{21}

2. *Religious equality*. "It really doesn't matter which religion you swear allegiance to, as long as you have some religion."{22}

3. *Benign neglect*. "Religion . . . really doesn't do any good and is simply an empty historical legacy we can afford to maintain until it quietly extinguishes itself (in) the future."{23}

How does your faith fit into his list of viable options? If you believe your religion is true, none of these options makes sense. How can you "let sleeping dogs lie" or say "it doesn't really matter" when you have good news of eternal

significance? Moreover, if your religion is "simply an empty historical legacy," don't put up with it any longer. Join with Paul in saying, "If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied."{24}

Dennett's tolerance options assume that religions claiming revealed truth cannot coexist without leading to conflict and suffering. To the contrary, religious wars are the result of the selfish ambition of men rather than the conflict between competing truth claims. Jesus gave us the model of authentic religious tolerance when he said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would be fighting."{25} Christianity is not about physical or political conquest. It is about redeeming people from slavery to freedom, from death to eternal life.

Truth is not threatened when competing worldviews are able to enthusiastically promote their beliefs. When each person is free to seek the truth and make truth choices without fear of reprisals or coercion, the gospel can flourish. Eternity, not religious wars or religious leaders, will eventually be the judge of what is truth. In the end, truth is not determined by the majority, but by reality.

One thing we know to be true is that "God does not desire any to perish."{26} Consequently, we should not accept any version of tolerance which mutes proclaiming the good news.

Dennett wants to "break the spell" against studying religion as a natural phenomenon. Instead, let's join together in lifting the spell of naturalism by proclaiming the truth that Jesus Christ is indeed our Creator and Lord.

Notes

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4. Romans 1:25. (All Scripture references are taken from the New American Standard Bible, update version.)
5. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 9.
6. Ibid., 11.
7. Ibid., 154.
8. Ibid., 25.
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10. Ibid., 17.
11. Ibid., 103.
12. John 16:33.
13. 2 Cor. 4:17.
14. John 14:6.
15. Romans 10:9-10.
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17. Ibid., 59.
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20. Ibid., 61.
21. Ibid., 290.
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24. 1 Corinthians 15:19.
25. John 18:36.
26. 1 Timothy 2:3.

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The World of the Occult : A

Christian Worldview Perspective

Dr. Pat Zukeran explains why Christians need to be wise and discerning concerning the occult, both recognizing its power and danger, and not going overboard either.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

Occult Overview

In a popular TV show, the heroine calls upon spirits, spells, and magic to defeat demonic beings. In another show, teen-age witches use their white magic to defeat evil warlocks and spirits. Such popular shows deal with the world of the occult. The occult has thrived since the beginning of civilization. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the prophets of God confronted the problem of the occult.

The term *occult* is derived from the Latin word "occultus," which means to cover up, hide, or those things which are hidden or secret. A brief definition of the occult is the practice of attaining supernatural knowledge or powers apart from the God of the Bible. Through these practices occultists seek to influence the present or future circumstances, of their lives or the lives of others.

Why is there such an interest in the occult? Experts point to several factors. The first is disillusionment with the church and organized religion. The second factor is curiosity. There is an attraction to the occult that appeals to our interest in the unseen. Many begin with "harmless" dabbling, but this can often lead to more. Third, there is the quest for power. People want control over the future, spirits, or over other individuals.

There are three primary categories of the occult world: divination, magick, and spiritism. Divination is the attempt to foretell the future and thereby shape our lives accordingly. The divination arts include astrology, zodiac charts, crystal balls, tarot cards, palm reading, psychics, numerology, and horoscopes.

The second category is magick or paganism. Those in magick attempt to control the present by ceremonies, charms, and spells. The magick arts include witchcraft, white magic, black magic, sorcery, Satanism, black mass, and witch doctors.

Then there is spiritism. Those involved in spiritism attempt to communicate with the dead and receive information or help from them. Spiritism involves ouija boards, sances, necromancy, and ghosts.

The world of the occult not only brings a false message, but a dangerous one as well. Experiences with the occult drive us away from God and bring us into contact with the demonic realm. Jesus said the Devil is “a liar and the father of lies.” (John 8:44) In dealing with the demonic, you cannot expect them to deal in truth. The Devil and his legion only seek to “steal, kill, and destroy.” (John 10:10) For this reason, Deuteronomy 18 labels the practices of witchcraft, sorcery, divination, and necromancy as detestable to the Lord. It was these practices that brought judgment on the Canaanites and expelled them from the land. God did not want such teachings to infiltrate any culture. The church must not only present the danger of the occult, but the message of life and victory found in Jesus Christ over the principalities of darkness.

Dangers of the Occult

“What’s wrong with joining the Vampire Club or attending a sance?” your child may ask. For some, exposure to the occult via fantasy games, the media, or music may lead to greater

involvement in a dangerous world.

The primary danger of the occult is that it is a path away from God that can bring us into contact with the demonic realm. The demonic forces seek to deceive and destroy individuals. Therefore, contact with the demonic breeds numerous problems.

First, cult experts and psychologists have documented the connection between occult involvement and psychological and emotional disorders. Participants spend numerous hours studying, practicing, and playing games that involve conjuring demons, sacrificing creatures in cruel rituals, controlling sinister forces, and casting spells to disable and kill their enemies. This can affect a person's spiritual, mental, and emotional state.

Second, there is the danger of spirit possession. The occult arts often require one to empty one's mind and invite foreign spirits to control his or her intellect and body. For example, in operating a ouija board, participants are asked to empty their minds to allow other forces to guide them as they attempt to attain messages. In other games, participants are encouraged to call upon a spirit being to help guide them. These techniques open the door for spirit possession.

Third, there is the danger of violence to oneself and others. Many cases of violence and suicides are connected to the occult. Dr. Thomas Redecki, a psychiatrist and chairman of the National Coalition on Television Violence, has given expert testimony at a number of murder trials that were connected to fantasy role-playing games. He states, "I've found multiple instances of attitudes, values and perceptions of reality that were strongly influenced by an immersion in these games. When someone spends 15 to 30 hours a week dreaming of how to go out and kill your opponents and steal treasure, it's not surprising that the desire to act it out in real life occurs."{1}

Real cases include the famous black occultist Aleister Crowley. He ended up in an insane asylum for six months after attempting to conjure up the Devil. Not only that, his children died and his wives went insane or drank themselves to death.{2} In Florida, a group of three teenagers were charged with bludgeoning to death the parents of a fourth girl in their group. These teenagers were involved in the fantasy role-playing game *Vampire*.{3}

There is no benefit that comes from dabbling in the occult. God's Word tells us to avoid the occult because it can be addicting and harmful. Instead, Philippians 4 says to spend our time dwelling on what is true, noble, right, pure, admirable, and praiseworthy. What we focus on affects our actions and outlook on life. Therefore, we should dwell on what builds the mind, body, and spirit.

Investigating Occult Phenomena

Can seers foretell future events? Can mediums really talk to the dead? How do you explain psychic phenomenon? Dealing with the occult calls for a balanced approach. The biblical worldview acknowledges both the physical and spiritual realms. There are physical beings but also spiritual beings of good and evil. We cannot ignore the supernatural, but we should not be obsessed with it either. C.S. Lewis commented, "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight."{4} Lewis' call, as well as ours, is for a balanced approach.

There are numerous claims of supernatural occurrences in the occult world. However, not all occult phenomena should be attributed to the supernatural. There have been cases where people have quickly attributed unexplained events to the demonic, only to later discover other natural explanations.

This often causes embarrassment and hurts the individual or group's credibility. We must be careful to investigate all possible explanations.

Most occult phenomena are mere trickery. Techniques such as sleight of hand, physical or mechanical deception, luck or mathematical probability, and body reading can explain many accounts. For example, Jewish psychic Uri Geller was believed to have supernatural powers such as the ability to move or bend objects from a distance with his mind. He even managed to fool scientists with his feats. However, his alleged powers were eventually shown to be false when magician James Randi performed the same feats, exposing the charlatan's tricks.

Other phenomena can be attributed to psychological factors. For example, someone demonstrating many personalities and speaking in different voices may have a multiple personality disorder that should be treated with medication. Unusual changes in personality or the fear of objects or names may be due to some kind of chemical imbalance. One should be careful and investigate these possibilities before concluding occult powers at work or demon possession.

The fourth explanation can be attributed to our sin nature. James 1:14 states, "but each one is tempted when, by his own desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." Too often Christians are quick to attribute bad habits and conflicts to the demonic and fail to take responsibility for their actions. For example, addiction to pornography is the result of yielding to our sin nature, not necessarily satanic activity.

Before ascribing events and difficulties to the demonic realm, we must first determine if it is consistent with demonic activity as described in the Bible and cannot be explained naturally. Then we can consider the possibility that it is demonic.

Witnessing to Those in the Occult

What should you do if you discover a friend or child involved in the occult? In witnessing to occultists, we must understand that they view Christians as intolerant and mean-spirited. They feel misunderstood, and quick condemnation often causes the person to retreat and delve further into the occult. Many people enter occult organizations because the church and their peers have rejected them. So, in witnessing, we must remember to be firm, but loving and sensitive as well.

I remember one situation at a Six Flags amusement park. While waiting in line, two Christian men noticed a student wearing a shirt promoting a band with clear connections to the occult. In a very condescending manner they questioned the young boy as to why he would wear such a shirt. “I like their music,” was the response. To which the men rebuked him harshly. Soon a short and heated argument ensued. The boy was left feeling angry and condemned while the two Christian men congratulated one another on a fine job of “witnessing.” Such incidents unfortunately are too common. The first step in witnessing is demonstrating gentleness and respect.

Second, do some research in the area so that you know what you are talking about. People in the occult do not view their activity as dangerous and consider others’ warnings as nave and misinformed. Therefore, being able to point to specific examples of concern goes a lot further than generalized accusations. If you are not able to find information, sit down and patiently listen to the person explain why and how he got involved. As you listen, ask questions that would cause the person to examine his beliefs. Listening always goes a long way in any kind of witnessing.

Third, point out the danger of addiction that can be the result of spending numerous amounts of time and money on occult activities. 1 Corinthians 6:12 warns us not to “be mastered by anything.” Addiction to the occult leads to

bondage, but God’s truth sets us free.

Fourth, know what the Bible says about the occult. Point out that the nature of the Adversary is to deceive and destroy. God’s nature is truth and love. Dwelling on the false teachings of the occult can distort one’s view of reality. This message ultimately leads to ruin, while God’s truth leads to life. Share God’s message of love and demonstrate it in your actions.

Finally, present the message of life, truth, and hope found in Christ. The occult only offers a false message that brings destruction because the force behind it is the father of lies. The deception of the occult leads to bondage, but truth sets you free. In engaging the world of the occult, Christians need not be afraid for we have authority over the demonic through Christ who triumphed over all powers and authorities by the cross. (Colossians 1:15)

Deliverance from the Occult

If you have been dabbling in the occult or know someone who wants to come out of it, what should you do? First, permanent deliverance and restoration begins with a relationship with Jesus Christ. If you have not trusted Christ, receiving Him as your Lord and Savior is the first step. When this happens, you are set free from the Kingdom of Darkness and are now under the authority of the Kingdom of Light. 1 Peter 2:9 states that it is Christ who “called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

Second, recognize and confess your sin of involvement in the occult. Then accept God’s forgiveness by faith. 1 John 1:9 states, ‘If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Third, remove all occult objects. This example was set for us in Acts 19:19-20. Those who had come to Christ burned their

objects publicly. Having occult items around such as game boards, cards, and statues may provide a source of temptation to return. Removing all such objects helps avoid facing that temptation and dealing with memories.

Fourth, break off all medium contacts and occult associations. Spirit guides and friends in the occult will encourage you to abandon your trust in Christ and return to participating in the occult. One must courageously trust that Christ will protect you from demonic retaliation and provide new friends who will encourage you in the Lord.

Fifth, if you are finding the transition difficult, seek a Christian counselor with knowledge in this area. Only a Christian counselor understands that healing comes when we deal with not only the physical, mental, and emotional aspect, but the spiritual as well.

Sixth, join a fellowship of Christians who will pray and care for you. Also, strive to grow in your new walk with Jesus Christ. You have been filling your mind with the teachings of the occult and now you must, as Paul says in Romans 12, “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” This comes by filling your mind with God’s truth and fellowshipping with Him.

In seeking deliverance from the occult, we cannot stop halfway. We must be committed to turning from our sin and following Christ with all our heart. Believers must heed Paul’s exhortation to put on the spiritual armor of God. In Ephesians 6, Paul reminds us that, “Our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” Only Christians who come in the authority of Christ can engage the world of the occult and those protected by His armor can resist the Adversary and be delivered from the occult.

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Communicating with the Dead – A Christian Perspective on Its Reality

Can John Edward and James Van Praagh really communicate with the dead? Michael Gleghorn takes a skeptical and biblical look at the phenomenon of after-death communication.

https://www.ministeriosprobe.org/docs/comunicacion-muertos.html

This article is also available in Spanish.

Mediums and the Media

Both John Edward and James Van Praagh are highly sought-after mediums who claim to possess the ability to communicate with the dead. Each has his own Web site and hit television show. They have both authored best-selling books, been interviewed by television personalities and news journalists, and each has

about a three-year waiting list for personal readings.

"According to a recent Gallup Poll, 38 percent of Americans believe ghosts or spirits can come back in certain situations. In 1990, it was 25 percent. Today, 28 percent think some people can hear from or 'mentally' talk to the dead, compared with 18 percent 11 years ago."{1} Some believe that the increased interest in after-death communication is a "spillover from the growing interest in alternative medicine and Eastern spirituality."{2} But whatever the cause, the popularity of self-proclaimed mediums like Edward and Van Praagh has soared in recent years.



John Edward was 15 when he first learned of his life's work.{3} He received a reading from a psychic who told him that he would help bring comfort to the living by reuniting them with those who had crossed over to the other side. Since then, John has gone from doing private readings in his home to making appearances on popular radio and television shows. He has been a guest on *Entertainment Tonight, The Crier Report,* and *The Maury Povich Show*, just to name a few. He's also been interviewed by *The New York Times, Entertainment Weekly,* and others. He's authored three books, produced a series of audio tapes that explain how to communicate with the other side, and, since June 2000, he's had his own television show, *Crossing Over with John Edward*.



The story of James Van Praagh is similar. On his Web site we learn that James was 24 when a medium told him that he would be in the same line of work within just two years.{4} Although James was initially skeptical, he soon realized that he indeed had the ability to communicate with the dead. Since that time, James has gone from doing psychic readings for friends, to making television appearances on such shows as NBC's *The Other Side*, *Oprah,* and *20/20.* In addition to writing four books, he's produced two meditation tapes and a video about psychic development. The popular CBS mini-series, *Living with the Dead*, was based on his life and work. And since September 2002, he's been the star of his own television show, *Beyond with James Van Praagh*.

What are Christians to make of all this? Is there good evidence that Edward and Van Praagh can really communicate with the dead? And what, if anything, does the Bible say about such matters? These are just a few of the questions that we will wrestle with in this article.

The Tricks of the Trade

Both John Edward and James Van Praagh claim the mediumistic ability to communicate with the dead. And thousands of adoring fans believe these claims are true. One reporter tells the story of Sally Morrison, who visited Edward after the death of her husband.{5} During the reading, Edward reportedly asked her, "I'm getting a screwdriver; what does that mean to you?" Ms. Morrison remembered that the day before she had spent an hour looking for a screwdriver in her late husband's tool box. Afterward she told the reporter, "It was such an everyday thing to bring up. But to me, it was incredibly comforting, a sign that Paul had been there." Apparently, Ms. Morrison was persuaded that Edward had really made contact with her late

husband. Similar stories could also be told of James Van Praagh's apparent successes.

But if this is so, why haven't Edward and Van Praagh managed to convince the skeptics? Michael Shermer, who I must point out is also skeptical of Christianity, observes that there are three techniques commonly used by mediums to convince people of their alleged paranormal powers: cold reading, warm reading, and hot reading.{6} These techniques might be thought of as the tricks of the trade, so to speak.

In cold reading, mediums make use of methods that help them "read" a person who was unknown to them in advance. Such methods may include observing body language, asking questions, and inviting the subject to interpret vague statements.{7} For instance, by carefully observing body language and facial expressions, the medium can often get a good idea of whether or not he's on the right track. Also, by asking questions and inviting the subject to interpret vague statements, the medium can gain valuable information. This information can then be used later in the reading to make what appear to be stunningly precise revelations from the spirit world. Indeed, Shermer contends that by effectively applying these techniques, the medium actually gets the subject to do the reading for him!{8} Skeptics hold that both Edward and Van Praagh make use of such methods.

Warm reading involves making statements that tend to apply to most anyone. For example, many people carry a piece of jewelry that belonged to their dead loved one. By asking if the subject is carrying such jewelry, the medium has a good chance of making a "hit." This can give the impression that the information was divined from a paranormal source. In reality, of course, it may have been nothing more than a highly probable guess.

The last technique, hot reading, actually involves getting information about a subject *before* the reading begins! But

surely Edward and Van Praagh have not availed themselves of such methods. Not according to the skeptics! It appears that both mediums have apparently been caught red-handed using “hot reading” techniques.

Caught in the Act

Skeptics contend that self-proclaimed mediums John Edward and James Van Praagh have both been caught red-handed using “hot reading” techniques. “Hot reading” involves gathering information about a subject *prior* to doing the reading. Although most skeptics agree that such techniques are probably not used as much now as they were by spiritists in the past, there seem to be strong indications that both Edward and Van Praagh have, on occasion, attempted to obtain information about their subjects in advance.

In an article written for the *Skeptical Inquirer*, Joe Nickell describes one such episode involving John Edward.{9} The incident occurred on a *Dateline* special. During a group reading, Edward indicated that the spirits were telling him to acknowledge someone named Anthony. The cameraman signaled Edward that that was his name. Edward appeared surprised and asked, “Had you not seen Dad before he passed?” John Hockenberry, the *Dateline* reporter, was initially quite impressed with this revelation. The cameraman’s name was Anthony and his father was dead. Hockenberry later learned what really happened.

Earlier in the day, Anthony “had been the cameraman on another Edward shoot.”{10} The two men had talked and Edward had learned of the death of Anthony’s father. When confronted by Hockenberry in a later interview, Edward reluctantly admitted as much. Of course, Edward still maintained that he got this information from the spirits as well. But can anyone blame the skeptic for being suspicious?

Michael Shermer relates a similar incident, this one involving James Van Praagh, which occurred on *20/20*.{11} While relaxing during a break, Van Praagh asked a young woman, "Did your mother pass on?" The woman shook her head, but said that her grandmother had died. Unfortunately for Van Praagh, the cameras had accidentally been left rolling during the break. The entire episode was caught on tape! Unaware of this, Van Praagh later turned to the woman during his reading and said, "I want to tell you, there is a lady sitting behind you. She feels like a grandmother to me." Afterward, when confronted by *20/20's* Bill Ritter with the video evidence captured during the break, Van Praagh insisted, "I don't cheat. I don't have to prove . . . I don't cheat. I don't cheat. I mean, come on. . . . " Shermer concludes, "Interesting. No one said anything about cheating. The gentleman doth protest too much."{12}

The fact that both Edward and Van Praagh have been caught using information in their readings that they gained beforehand ought to alert us to the possibility that these men may not really be what they claim. Still, to be fair, we must at least admit the possibility that these men not only had advanced information about their subjects, but that they also received such information later through a spiritistic revelation. But is this really possible? Let's see what the Bible says about after-death communication.

Saul and the Spirit Medium

In 1 Samuel 28, we read that Israel and the Philistines were preparing to make war with one another. When Saul, the king of Israel, saw the Philistine army, he was filled with fear. Desperate for a word from God, he inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him. Hoping for guidance by another means, Saul told his servants to find him a medium. At this point in Israel's history this may not have been an easy task, for "Saul had put the mediums and the spiritists out of the land" (1 Sam. 28:3). But why had he done this?

It was actually an act of obedience to the Word of God. In Deuteronomy 18 the Lord had said, “There shall not be found among youa medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord” (vv. 10-12). The Lord had also told His people that they were not to seek out mediums (Lev. 19:31), that the person who did so was to be cut off from his people (Lev. 20:6), and that mediums were also to be put to death (Lev. 20:27). In spite of all these prohibitions against turning to mediums, Saul was apparently so desperate for guidance that he ordered his servants to find him one. They did, and he disguised himself and went to her by night.

Although initially hesitant to practice her art, the medium, not recognizing her client as Saul, eventually agreed to call up the prophet Samuel who had died some time before. “When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice,” suddenly realizing that her client was Saul! (1 Sam. 28:12)

Samuel’s message to Saul was both tragic and prophetic: “The Lord will . . . deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines. And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me” (1 Sam. 28:19). Reflecting on these events, the author of Chronicles wrote, “So Saul died for his unfaithfulness . . . against the Lord, because he did not keep the word of the Lord, and also because he consulted a medium for guidance” (1 Chron. 10:13). Whatever truths we may glean from the story of Saul and the medium, it clearly does not sanction man’s attempt to communicate with the dead.{13}

But does it confirm that after-death communication is really possible? Although some have speculated that the spirit of Samuel was actually a demonic spirit, the text repeatedly identifies the spirit as Samuel (vv. 12, 14, 15-16) and nowhere even hints that it might be a demon. Thus, we are forced to conclude that after-death communication is not intrinsically impossible. But here we must be careful. Possibility does not suggest probability. The text seems to

imply that God allowed Samuel's special return in order to pronounce judgment against Saul (vv. 16-19). And as we'll see, there are good reasons to believe that this was, in fact, an exceptional event.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) clearly suggests the immense improbability of the dead communicating with the living. Both the rich man and Lazarus died. Lazarus went to "Abraham's bosom," a place of paradise for the righteous dead (Luke 16:22). The rich man went to Hades, a place of conscious torment for the unrighteous. Though separated by a great chasm, the rich man could still see and speak with those dwelling in paradise. He called out to Abraham, asking that Lazarus be sent to warn his brothers, lest they share his torment in the afterlife. But Abraham refused, saying that if they would not listen to the Word of God, they also would not listen if someone rose from the dead.

But why didn't the rich man just go and warn his brothers himself? After all, if it were a simple matter for the dead to communicate with the living, then why did the rich man ask that Lazarus be sent to warn his brothers? Apparently, the rich man was not *able* to warn his brothers. He could not escape his place of punishment to do so.

But wouldn't it also, then, be impossible for Lazarus to warn them? Not necessarily. Although it seems to be a rare occurrence, it appears that the righteous dead are, on occasion, permitted by God to communicate with those still alive on earth. The Old Testament records the appearance of Samuel to Saul (1 Samuel 28), and the New Testament records the appearance of Elijah and Moses to Jesus and some of his disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17). Nevertheless, the biblical evidence indicates that after-death communication is extremely rare.

Does this mean that mediums like John Edward and James Van Praagh are charlatans? Skeptics certainly think so, and the skeptics may be right. But the Bible allows for another possibility; namely, that the spirits with whom Edward and Van Praagh claim to communicate are not human at all, but demonic. Consider the following.

The Bible indicates that messages from the human dead are extremely rare. It's therefore unlikely that Edward and Van Praagh should receive such messages all the time. In addition, listen to what the spirits are alleged to say. Do any of them, like the rich man, strive to warn their relatives about a place of conscious torment? Do they urge repentance for sin or the need for personal faith in Christ? On the contrary, such important Christian doctrines are typically either ignored or denied. But if the Bible is truly God's Word, and the spirits deny its teachings, then who are these spirits likely to be?

Of course, maybe Edward and Van Praagh aren't really communicating with spirits at all. But if at times they are, I fear it's probably with demonic spirits – not spirits of the human dead.

Notes

1. Bill Hendrick, "Higher Communication," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution,* 31 October 2001, sect. C; Greg Barrett, "Can the Living Talk to the Dead?" *USA Today,* 20 June 2001, sect. D; cited in Marcia Montenegro, "The Resurging Interest in After-Death Communication," *Christian Research Journal,* Vol. 25, No. 01, 2002, 12.
2. Ruth La Ferla, "A Voice from the Other Side," *New York Times on the Web,* 29 October 2000 (http://www.nytimes.com/2000/10/29/living/29/DEAD.html).
3. See the information about John at http://www.scifi.com/johnedward/aboutjohn/ and his official Web site at http://www.johnedward.net/about_John_Edward.htm.
4. See the information about James on his Web site at

http://www.vanpraagh.com/bio.cfm.
5. La Ferla.
6. See Michael Shermer, "Deconstructing the Dead: Cross Over One Last Time to Expose Medium John Edward," http://www.skeptic.com/newsworthy13.html. I have relied heavily on Shermer's article in the following discussion.
7. See Joe Nickell, "John Edward: Hustling the Bereaved," *Skeptical Inquirer,* November/December 2001, Vol. 25, No. 6, p. 20. I have relied on some of Nickell's observations in what follows.
8. Shermer.
9. Nickell.
10. Ibid.
11. See Michael Shermer, "How Psychics and Mediums Work: A Case Study of James Van Praagh," http://www.skeptic.com/. See also Michael Shermer, "Does James Van Praagh Talk To The Dead? Nope! Fraud! – Parts 1" at http://www.holysmoke.org/praagh1.htm and "Does James Van Praagh Talk To The Dead? Nope! Fraud! – Part 2" at http://www.holysmoke.org/praagh2.htm.
12. Shermer, "How Psychics and Mediums Work: A Case Study of James Van Praagh."
13. Montenegro, p. 16.

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Wicca: A Biblical Critique

Dr. Michael Gleghorn examines some of the fundamental doctrines of Wicca, offers a biblical critique of those doctrines, and highlights the differences between Wicca and Christianity.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

The Goddess and the God

By some estimates, Wicca "appears to be the fastest growing religion in America."{1} But what exactly is "Wicca" anyway? One scholar writes, "The modern religion of Wicca, otherwise known as Old Religion, Magick, Witchcraft, the Craft, and the Mysteries, is part of the neo-pagan movement."{2} In this article I hope to accomplish two things. First, I want to outline some of the fundamental doctrines of Wicca; second, I want to offer a biblical critique of those doctrines.

Let's begin with Wiccan theology. Although some Wiccans are devoted exclusively to the Goddess, most worship both the Goddess and the God. Raven Grimassi, a Wiccan scholar, has written, "The Source of All Things, also known as the Great Spirit, is generally personified in Wiccan belief as a Goddess and a God."{3}

It's important to point out that the Goddess and God are merely *personifications* of this ultimate source of all things. The Source itself is both "unknowable" and "incomprehensible."{4} It is perhaps for this reason that some "Neo-Wiccans" have simply abandoned such personifications altogether, choosing rather to view the gods as simply "detached metaphysical concepts."{5} But for those who embrace such personifications, the Goddess has often been associated with the moon (and has thus sometimes been called the *Queen of Heaven*).{6} She is also known in three aspects, corresponding to the three stages of a woman's life: Maiden, Mother, and Crone.{7} She was alleged to have reigned "with a male consort called *The Horned One* who was a nature god and was also associated with the sun."{8} Interestingly, this god was not only viewed as the consort of the Goddess, he was also her son as well. Each year he was born of the Goddess, became her lover, and died-only to be reborn once more the following year

from his own seed! This was known as the Year God cycle and was associated with the fertility of the land and the annual cycles of seedtime and harvest.{9}

Interestingly, modern Wicca shares many similarities with the ancient fertility religions of Canaan, religions specifically condemned by God in the Bible.{10} For instance, the Wiccan Goddess is revered by some as the *Queen of Heaven,* by others as *Astarte*.{11} But in the Bible, the worship of Ishtar, the queen of heaven, and Astarte, or Ashtoreth, is repeatedly condemned, as is the worship of her consort, known sometimes as Baal, sometimes as Tammuz.{12} Thus in Judges 2:11-13 we read: "Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord . . . they provoked the Lord to anger . . . they forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtoreth." But if the only true God rejected the ancient Canaanite religions and their practices, would His reaction to modern Wicca likely be any different?

The Watchers

"The Watchers is a concept common to most Wiccan Traditions, although they are viewed differently by the various systems within Wicca."{13} Raven Grimassi describes these "Watchers" as "an ancient race who have evolved beyond the need for physical form."{14} However, he is quick to add that, historically, the "Watchers" have been conceived in a diversity of ways. For instance, in the early Stellar myths the Watchers were "gods who guarded the Heavens and the Earth."{15} Later, he says, "the Greeks reduced them to the Gods of the four winds, and the Christians to principalities of the air."{16}

The connection, observed by Grimassi, between the Wiccan concept of the Watchers and the Christian concept of angels may find some validation in the Bible. In Daniel 4:13-17, the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar relates a dream to Daniel. He tells him that during the dream a "watcher, a holy one, descended

from heaven" and pronounced a judgment that is said to be "by the decree of the watchers . . . a command of the holy ones . . . that the living may know that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind." Most conservative commentators understand the "watchers" in this passage to be angels. One commentator writes, "The king is probably referring to the angels which were known to him through the Babylonian religion."{17} But that these beings are indeed the biblical angels seems evident from the fact that they are acting as *messengers* of the Most High God.{18}

In light of this connection between the "watchers" and angels, it is interesting to note that "Rabbinic and Cabalistic lore" made a distinction between good and evil Watchers.{19} This distinction parallels the biblical distinction between good and evil angels, or angels and demons. Indeed, Grimassi notes, "In the *Secret Book of Enoch*, the Watchers . . . are listed as rebellious angels who followed Sataniel in a heavenly war."{20} We find a similar incident recounted in Revelation 12:7-9, where we read of a heavenly war in which Michael and his angels cast Satan and his angels from heaven to earth.

With this in mind it is interesting to note that Richard Cavendish, in his book *The Powers of Evil*, "lists the Watchers as the Fallen Angels that magicians call forth in ceremonial magick."{21} This remark is especially noteworthy when one considers Grimassi's comments concerning "the relationship that exists between a Wiccan and the Watchers."{22} Grimassi points out that "every act of magick that a Wiccan performs is observed and noted by the Watchers."{23} Furthermore, he says, "There is a definite link between the 'powers' of a Wiccan and their rapport with the Watchers."{24} But since the God of the Bible clearly prohibits magic, is it likely that these "Watchers" should be thought of as good spirits (inasmuch as they oppose the ordinance of God)?{25}

The Art of Magick

Wiccans view magick as a genuine possibility because of humanity's intrinsic connection both to Deity and a supernatural order. Raven Grimassi states: "The art of magick is one of creation. . . . The power to create from *thoughts* is linked to the divine spark within us. We create in accordance with the divine formula that created all things."{26}

But how is this possible? Grimassi explains, "The astral plane is the link between the divine world and the physical. . . . Whatever manifests on the astral plane will eventually manifest on the physical plane."{27} And human thought can manifest on the astral plane.{28} Thus, for one accomplished in the art of Wiccan magick, the power to secure a desired effect in the physical world is alleged to begin with the careful creation of a thought-form on the astral plane.{29} Grimassi continues: "Thought-forms begin to appear in the astral material, which then become vehicles for the spirits or deities that have been invoked (through which they will respond to the desire of the magickal intent)."{30} If done properly, "the magickal seeds planted in the astral plane" will eventually bear fruit on the physical plane.{31} This is the basic theory behind Wiccan magick. And one practitioner has boasted, "No matter what type of coven magic is used, it is usually effective."{32}

Might there actually be some truth to this? Indeed, there might. The book of Exodus tells us that the Egyptian magicians were able to duplicate, by means of "their secret arts," the initial plagues God brought upon Egypt!{33} Furthermore, the text never hints that this was done by any means other than some genuine secret power. In light of this we might ask why God is so opposed to the practice of magic. After all, couldn't such power be used for good, as well as evil? But God specifically warned the Israelites: "There shall not be found among you anyone" who practices divination, witchcraft,

sorcery, or spiritism.{34} Why is this?

Could it be that the "secret power" of magick is due, not to its various rituals, symbols and gestures, but rather to the supernatural intervention of spirit beings? In Acts 16 we read of a demon-possessed slave-girl described as "having a spirit of divination . . . who was bringing her masters much profit by fortunetelling."{35} This passage clearly ties the power of divination to demons. With this in mind, it's interesting to remember Grimassi's admission: "There is a definite link between the 'powers' of a Wiccan and their rapport with the Watchers."{36} Wiccans view the Watchers as a race of highly evolved spiritual beings.{37} But these beings are linked with angels and demons in other religious literature (including the Bible).{38} Is it possible that God prohibits magic because He wants to protect people from involvement with demons?

The Summerland and Reincarnation

Like Christians, Wiccans do not believe that physical death is the end of personal existence. Nevertheless, in its details the Wiccan doctrine of the "afterlife" differs substantially from the biblical view. How so?

To begin, Wiccans do not accept the biblical doctrines of heaven and hell. Rather, they believe that after physical death, "Wiccans pass into a spirit world known as the Summerland . . . a metaphysical astral realm of meadows, lakes, and forests where it is always summer. It is a Pagan paradise filled with all the lovely creatures of ancient lore, and the gods themselves dwell there."{39} The Summerland is viewed as a place of rest and renewal for the soul before its rebirth into the physical world.{40}

The belief in the soul's rebirth into the physical world, also known as reincarnation, is another way in which Wiccan doctrines differ from those of biblical Christianity. Though the doctrine of reincarnation is completely unbiblical, many

Wiccans actually believe it is taught in the Bible. Raven Grimassi cites John 9:1-3 as evidence that even Jesus and His disciples believed in reincarnation![41] In this passage Jesus' disciples ask Him about a man born blind: "'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?' Jesus answered, 'It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was in order that the works of God might be displayed in him.'" Grimassi comments: "Jesus does not denounce the question of this man's existence prior to this birth, but explains that [his blindness] had nothing to do with his sins prior to his present life."[42] But is this interpretation correct? Is Jesus really affirming that this man existed *prior* to his present life?

It's important to understand both the disciples' question, and Jesus' response, from within the historical context of first century Judaism. "The Jewish theologians of that time gave two reasons for birth defects: *prenatal sin* (before birth, *but not* before conception) and *parental sin*."[43] In other words, first century Jewish rabbis did not believe that birth defects resulted from bad karma in a previous incarnation! Rather, they thought such defects arose either from the sins of the parents being visited upon their children, or from the sin of the child while still in the mother's womb.[44] Although Jesus denies that either of these causes was responsible for this man's blindness, we must still bear in mind that His *disciples* were asking this question from within a first century Jewish context. We must also remember that elsewhere the New Testament explicitly affirms, "[I]t is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment."[45] Thus, far from affirming the Wiccan doctrine of reincarnation, the New Testament clearly denies it.

Is Wicca Another Way to God?

Scott Cunningham claimed, "All religions have one ideal at their core: to unite their followers with Deity. Wicca is no

different."{46} He also wrote, "Perhaps it's not too strong to say that the highest form of human vanity is to assume that your religion is the only way to Deity."{47} But is it really true that there are many ways to God, or is there only one?

Although it's quite common in today's pluralistic society to assume that all the enduring religious traditions of mankind are equally valid ways to God or Ultimate Reality, there are tremendous philosophical difficulties with this belief. Since we are here concerned with both Wicca and Christianity, let's briefly compare some of the fundamental tenets of these two religions and see what we come up with.

Wiccans appear to believe in the essential divinity of human nature. Raven Grimassi writes, "[E]verything bears the 'divine spark' of its creator."{48} He also claims, "Souls are like brain cells in the mind of the Divine Creator, individual entities and yet part of the whole."{49} Thus, there doesn't seem to be any clear distinction in Wicca between humanity and Deity. This explains why the Witch Starhawk could confidently declare, "there is nothing to be saved *from . . .* no God outside the world to be feared and obeyed."{50}

Christianity, however, maintains a firm distinction between God and man. Man is created in God's image, but he is neither God nor a part of God. Furthermore, although man bears God's image, his nature has been corrupted by sin, which separates him from God. Man's need, therefore, is to be saved from his sins and reconciled to God. This explains the significance of Christ for Christianity. As Peter put it, "Christ . . . died for sins once for all . . . that He might bring us to God."{51} Christians believe that God dealt fully and finally with man's sin through the death and resurrection of His Son.{52} Thus, contrary to Wicca, Christianity teaches that there *is* something to be saved from and that there *is* a God outside the world to be both feared and obeyed.

Because of their differences, the law of non-contradiction

makes it impossible for both of these religions to be true. It's therefore interesting to note Charlotte Allen's observation: "In all probability, not a single element of the Wiccan story is true. The evidence is overwhelming that Wicca is . . . a 1950s concoction . . . of an English civil servant and amateur anthropologist" named Gerald Gardner.{53} But surely such questionable historical origins cast doubt on the truth of Wiccan religious beliefs as well. Christianity, however, is firmly rooted in the historical reality of Jesus of Nazareth, whose claim to be the *only* way to God was clearly vindicated when God "furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."{54}

Notes

1. Charlotte Allen, "The Scholars and the Goddess" *The Atlantic Monthly* (January 2001): 18.

2. Fritz Ridenour, *So What's the Difference?* (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 2001), 209.

3. Raven Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries: Ancient Origins and Teachings* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2000), 33.

4. Scott Cunningham, *The Truth About Witchcraft Today* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1999), 76.

5. Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries,* 33.

6. Ibid., 25.

7. Cunningham, *The Truth About Witchcraft Today,* 73.

8. Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries,* 26.

9. Ibid., 88-89.

10. Ridenour, *So What's the Difference?,* 210. This is not to imply, of course, that Wicca itself is ancient. The antiquity

of Wicca has been seriously challenged by modern scholarship.

11. Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries*, 25; Cunningham, *The Truth About Witchcraft Today,* 72.

12. For instance, see Judges 2:11-17; 2 Kings 23:4-14; Jeremiah 44:15-23; Ezekiel 8:14-15. For documentation concerning the consort of Ashtoreth being Baal and/or Tammuz see J.D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney, eds. *The New International Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1987), s.v. "Ashtoreth," 100-01; "Tammuz," 986. For documentation that Ishtar, the queen of heaven, was associated with Tammuz see Trent C. Butler, gen. ed. *Holman Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991), s.v. "Ishtar," 721; "Tammuz," 1321.

13. Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries,* 99.

14. Ibid., 100.

15. Ibid., 101.

16. Ibid.

17. Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), 103.

18. Compare Daniel 4:17 with 4:24.

19. Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries,* 102.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., 103.

22. Ibid., 106.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid. This is not to imply that Wiccans explicitly worship Satan or demons (understood in the Christian sense). They are

very careful to say they do not, and we should take them at their word. At the same time, is it legitimate to ask if one can be deceived by the devil without actually worshipping the devil? For while Wiccans may not worship the devil, the Bible seems to indicate that they have nonetheless been deceived by him. Wicca, for example, rejects the biblical doctrines of God, man, Christ, sin, salvation, etc. As a religion, therefore, Wicca helps prevent men and women from coming to a saving knowledge of God through faith in Jesus Christ. The Bible, however, declares that this is also one of the activities of Satan! It reveals that the devil "has blinded the minds of the unbelieving" to keep them from saving faith in Christ (see 2 Cor. 4:3-4). It is for this reason that Christians, while acknowledging that Wiccans do not worship the devil, nonetheless view the religion of Wicca as a means of Satanic deception since it keeps its followers from saving faith in Christ.

25. See Deuteronomy 18:9-13.

26. Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries*, 140.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., 150.

29. Ibid., 140-41.

30. Ibid., 140.

31. Ibid., 159.

32. Cunningham, *The Truth About Witchcraft Today,* 125.

33. See Exodus 7:11-12, 22; 8:6-7.

34. See Deuteronomy 18:9-13.

35. See Acts 16:16-18.

36. Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries*, 106.

37. Ibid., 100.

38. Ibid., 101-03.

39. Ibid., 30.

40. Ibid., 32.

41. Ibid., 113.

42. Ibid.

43. Norman L. Geisler and Ron Rhodes, *When Cultists Ask: A Popular Handbook on Cultic Misinterpretations* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 175.

44. Ibid.

45. Hebrews 9:27.

46. Cunningham, *The Truth About Witchcraft Today,* 77.

47. Ibid., 66.

48. Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries*, 26.

49. Ibid., 27.

50. Starhawk (Miriam Simos), *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 9, cited in Ridenour, *So What's the Difference*, 213.

51. 1 Peter 3:18.

52. See Romans 4:25.

53. Allen, "The Scholars and the Goddess," 19.

54. See John 14:6 and Acts 17:31.

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The Little Lamb That Made a Monkey of Us All

Like many others, I was caught totally flat-footed, astonished by the announcement of the successful cloning of an adult sheep, Dolly. Caught so unaware, in fact, that Probe is re-airing my three-year-old program on human cloning the week of March 17-21, 1997, because so little had changed. When the announcement of a successful sheep cloning was made, it was too late to pull the program from the schedule; tapes had already been sent to all the radio stations and there just wasn't time to replace it in only three weeks. Consequently (and spurred by a number of phone calls and e-mails from around the country), I have compiled a few thoughts and comments regarding scientific and moral considerations about this historic breakthrough to temporarily plug the gap.

Scientific Considerations

Normal mammary cells were intentionally starved of critical growth nutrients in order to allow the cells to reach a dormant stage of the normal cell cycle. This process of bringing the cells into dormancy apparently allows the cell's DNA to be reprogrammed by the proteins already in the egg cell for renewed cell division and new cell functions. The cells were fused with an enucleated egg cell (a cell that had its nucleus removed) and stimulated to begin cell division by an electric pulse.

The process was inefficient. Out of 277 cell fusions, 29 began growing *in vitro.* All 29 were implanted in receptive ewes, 13 became pregnant, and only one lamb was born as a result. This is a success rate of only 3.4%. In nature, somewhere between

33 and 50% of all fertilized eggs develop fully into newborns.

The procedure was very non-technical, and no one is really sure why it worked. It needs to be repeated. All attempts to clone mouse cells from adults have failed. Some suggest that sheep embryos do not employ the DNA in the nucleus until after 3-4 cell divisions. This may give the egg cell sufficient time to reprogram the DNA from mammary cell functions to egg cell functions. Human and mouse cells employ the nuclear DNA after the second cell division. Human and mouse cells may not be capable of being cloned because of this difference.

The purpose of these experiments was to find a more effective way to reproduce genetically engineered sheep for the production of pharmaceuticals. A sheep embryo can be engineered to produce a certain human protein or hormone in its milk. The human protein can then be harvested from the milk and sold on the market. Instead of trusting the somewhat unpredictable and time-consuming methods of normal animal husbandry to reproduce this genetic hybrid, cloning it assures that the engineered gene product will not be lost.

Genetic material is the same in all cells of an organism (except the reproductive cells, sperm and egg, which have only half the full complement), but differentiated cells are biochemically programmed to perform limited functions, and all other functions are turned off. Based on attempts in frogs and mice, most scientists felt that the reprogramming was impossible.

A critical question is the lifespan of Dolly. All cells have a built-in senescence or death after so many cell divisions. Dolly began from a cell that was already six years old. A normal lifespan for a ewe is around 11 years. Will Dolly live to see her seventh birthday?

It is also uncertain as to whether Dolly will be reproductively fertile. Frog clones are usually sterile.

Reprogramming the nucleus could lead to procedures to stimulate degenerating nerve cells to be replaced by newly growing nerve cells. Adults do not generate nerve cells normally.

Moral Considerations

Will humans be cloned for spare parts? While this is certainly possible, I consider it very unlikely that this would be sanctioned by any government. That doesn't mean, however, that someone won't try.

Will humans be cloned to replace a dying infant or child? This is certainly a possibility, but we need to ask if this is an appropriate way to deal with loss. Might unrealistic expectations be placed on a clone that would not be placed on a normally-produced child?

Will humans be cloned to produce children for otherwise childless couples? This is the most often-given reason for human cloning. This argument is unpersuasive when there are currently so many children that need adoption. Also, this further devalues children to the level of a commodity. If *in vitro* fertilization is expensive, cloning will be worse.

Will humans be cloned for vanity? Someone will certainly try.

Will human clones have a soul? In my mind, they will be no different from an identical twin or a baby that results from *in vitro* fertilization. How a single fertilized egg splits in two to become two individuals is a similar mystery.

Does cloning threaten genetic diversity? Excessive cloning may indeed deplete the genetic diversity of an animal population, leaving the population susceptible to disease and other disasters. But most biologists are aware of these problems, and I would not expect this to be a major concern unless cloning were the only means available to continue a species.

If the technique is perfected in animals first, will this save the tragic loss of fetal life that resulted from the early human experimentation with *in vitro* fertilization? *In vitro* fertilization was perfected in humans before it was known how effective a procedure it would be. This resulted in many wasted human beings in the embryonic stages. The success rate is still only 1 in 5 to 1 in 10; normal fertilization and implantation success rates are 2-3 times that. While animal models will help, there will be unique aspects to human development that can only be known and overcome by direct human experimentation which disrespects the sanctity of human life.

This provides a means for lesbians to have a child. One supplies the nucleus and the other provides the egg. The egg does contain some unique genetic material in the mitochondria that are not contributed by sperm or nucleus. One cell from each donor would be fused together to create a new individual, though all the nuclear genetic material comes from one cell. Sue Bohlin has an upcoming program on homosexual myths including gay marriage. This is no longer marriage as it is currently understood, and the technological hoops that must be jumped through for any gay couple to have children should be a clear warning that something is wrong with the whole arrangement.

Are human clones unique individuals? Even identical twins manage to forge their own identity. The same would be true of clones. In fact, this may argue strongly against the usefulness of cloning since you can never reproduce all the life experiences that have molded a particular personality. The genes will be the same, but the environment and the spirit will not.

All together, I find the prospect of animal cloning potentially useful. But I wonder if the procedure is as perfectible as some hope, and may end up being an inefficient process to achieve the desired result. Human cloning is

fraught with too many possible difficulties, from the waste of human fetal life during research and development to the commercializing of human babies (see my previous cloning article) with far too little potential advantage to individuals and society. What there is to learn about embryonic development through cloning experiments can be learned through animal experimentation. The cloning of adult human beings is an unnecessary and unethical practice that should be strongly discouraged if not banned altogether.

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Satanism: The World of the Occult – A Christian View of Demonic Worship

Russ Wise provides a good understanding of why people are attracted to a negative sounding practice: the worship of Satan. Looking at this issue from a biblical worldview, he presents information on how God can free people who have bought into this lie. From a Christian perspective, we don't need to fear them but instead stand ready to offer them the deliverance found only in Jesus Christ.

[*Webservant's Note: Since this article was written in 1994, a "new face" of Satanism has emerged, consisting of pagans and atheists who claim to not believe in Satan yet who have appropriated the name "Satanist" for themselves. Many of these young "neo-Satanists" (to coin a phrase) deny the concepts of good and evil, worship themselves, and take great offense at*

articles like this that describe a Satanic-oriented description of their chosen set of beliefs.

Nonetheless, we believe Russ Wise's original article is still worth offering because of the high numbers of people drawn into the openly occult practices described herein.]

The Growing Problem

The occult is on the rise; many young people are seeking their spiritual identity through Satanism.

Satanism has become an issue of great concern in our society. It is a phenomena that crosses the city limits into the rural areas of our nation. Satanism is not just a big city problem. The news wires carry story after story about young children being kidnapped, only to be found later as victims of some bizarre ritualistic crime. To help us gain a balanced perspective of the subject, C. S. Lewis in his book *Screwtape Letters*, says this about Satan:

> There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe and to feel an unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.

As satanic involvement among our youth increases, we begin to see the primary goal of such activity. It has become clear, according to the data thus far analyzed by those who investigate satanic involvement, that the primary goal is to alter people's values and turn them against themselves, their beliefs, family, God, and society.

When we begin to take a close look at the occult, it becomes necessary to define terms. There is a great difference between cults and the occult. The term *cult* refers to a group of people polarized around one individual who is often a magnetic

personality. This individual has his or her own understanding of truth, who God is, man's relationship to God, the existence of heaven and hell, as well as a number of other issues of faith. In most cases such individuals incorporate some degree of biblical truth into their teachings in order to gain a certain amount of credibility and in order to deceive the unwary.

The term *occult* means "hidden" or those things or teachings that are "unknown" or secret. So, the occult is the seeking after knowledge of unknown information, knowledge that is gained beyond the five senses. Therefore, knowledge is received by some supernatural involvement or connection.

Anton LaVey of the First Church of Satan in San Francisco, California, says that

> Satanism is a blatantly selfish, brutal religion. It is based on the belief that man is inherently a selfish, violent creature… that the earth will be ruled by those who fight to win.

Satanism challenges the biblical teaching regarding man's relationship to others. We are to esteem others better than ourselves, and we are to be team players. In 1 Corinthians we read about being a part of the body of Christ, whereas, Satanism esteems the "self" over others.

Young satanists believe that the strong will rule with Satan. Once they are sufficiently involved, they often make a pact with Satan. They commit themselves to a future date when they will take their own lives by suicide. They believe that if they submit themselves to Satan in death, they will come back in another life as a stronger being and rule with him forever. According to recent statistics, fourteen young people a day take their own lives. A major concern for those who uphold a Judeo-Christian worldview is that this generation is becoming detached and is losing all sense of morality. Many have lost

their mooring. It is imperative for the church, as a corporate body, and we as individuals, to share the message that Jesus Christ is the only possible solution to our emotional and spiritual needs.

The Power that Entices

Power has become an obsession with young satanists. It is sought after on the physical, mental, and spiritual levels. According to one former occultist, the greatest lure into the occult is “power” and “knowledge.” Not just corporate power but personal power. Gaining knowledge that others do not possess is another aspect of the occult. When an individuals have more knowledge it affords them a degree of power over those who do not have access to that knowledge.

Likewise, Satanism offers its lure to the youth in our society. Drugs and sex have become the bait that so often ensnare the unsuspecting.

With the increase of satanic activity, a profile of those involved in Satanism has emerged. They are generally from a white, middle to upper-middle class family. In most cases they are bright and do well in school; however, they are often bored and are not challenged to meet their full potential. They tend to have a low self-worth and are unable to distinguish between right and wrong because of their relative ethical system. They often have problems in the home and in relating to other people around them. They use drugs and are sexually promiscuous. It is a rare occasion when these last two elements are not present in the mix.

Abuse, both physically and emotionally, is another aspect of this mix. Young satanists are often abused children who know no other way to relate to people. Some are a part of a multi-generational family involved in worshiping Satan as savior.

Anton LaVey, Satanist High Priest of the First Church of Satan

in San Francisco gives us a glimpse of how Satan is seen in his book *The Satanic Bible*:

> We hold Satan as a symbolic personal savior, who takes care of mundane, fleshly, carnal things.

Satan has attempted to usurp the place of Christ in redeeming mankind. He has endeavored to establish himself as a god who is equal to or greater than Jehovah and in a sense render God ineffective. LaVey goes on to say that "God exists as a universal force, a balancing factor in nature, too impersonal to care one whit whether we live or die."

Therefore, the Judeo-Christian God is inaccessible and has no compassion. Thus, Satan becomes the solution to man's deepest needs.

Satanism leads one into bondage through mind control and fear, whereas Christianity allows the individual the freedom of choice. We have the opportunity to either accept God's free gift of life or reject Him and simply exist separate from God's love.

An Agent of Change

Music has always been at the center of the youth culture. The problem arises when the lyrics promote aberrant behavior. The Night Stalker, Richard Ramirez of Los Angeles, believed that Satan made him invincible. Police say the style of the brutal rapes and 16 murders Ramirez committed resembled the lyrics of the song "Night Prowler" on AC/DC's LP "Highway to Hell."

Along with Ramirez' fascination with AC/DC, he used cocaine and PCP in conjunction with a deep interest in Satan worship. He believed that Satan would protect him and not allow harm to come to him. According to a *People* magazine article as long ago as September 1985,

> Rock 'n roll is turning too often to sex, Satanism, drugs

> and violence for its major themes and corrupting the values and views of unwary young people.

The lyrics of the last few years of the 1980s have continued on a downward slope. Rachel Matthews, an artist and repertoire representative for Capitol Records, recruits new groups for her company. Her comments regarding a newly signed band reveal what she, as one individual representing the music industry, is looking for in a band:

> I was just going, 'Oh (expletive)! I've never heard anything like this!' I've heard plenty of metal and speed metal, but it was just so intense and out of control, just like this caged psychosis going on. I loved it, because you could actually understand the lyrics. And even if they're morbid and gruesome, it's really cool that you could understand what they're saying. It just makes it twice as evil. I like that." (*Dallas Life Magazine*, 1 July 1988)

The demo that interested Ms. Matthews in the group contained songs like "Die in Pain" and "Foaming at the Mouth."

The music that causes the greatest concern is the various types of "metal" music. Metal has been classified into three types. First, is party metal, and it represents the most popular style of music. Groups like Bon Jovi, Motley Crue, and Def Leppard are representative of party metal. They tend to glorify sexuality and the party spirit.

The second type is "thrash metal" represented by groups like Metallica, Anthrax, and Megadeth. The primary focus of "thrash metal" is violence and death.

The third type is known as "black metal" and is overtly satanic. The lyrics encourage such activities as incest, necrophilia, rape, torture, and human sacrifice. Black metal is represented by groups like Venom and Slayer.

King Diamond is perhaps the most satanic of all "black metal"

groups. He openly professes Satan and incorporates a large amount of satanic activity into his performances.

Music has always been an agent of change in our society. It tends to shape the moral attitudes of each generation. As Christians we should be especially concerned about the lyrics in the music of the youth culture. We cannot afford to allow another generation to become polluted with the immoral themes found in today's music. As parents it is imperative that we maintain open communication lines with our young people. Without open communication it becomes improbable that we can affect the listening habits of our children. Second, we cannot be hypocritical in our personal listening habits. Third, we need to become familiar with the type of music our children listen to and be willing to acknowledge the good and be prepared to positively criticize that which is not appropriate within our household.

Last, we as parents need to recognize that if our child is involved in rebellious music, we must attempt to understand what unmet need in his life is being met by his musical diet.

Galatians 5:19-21 says that

> The deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery . . . those who practice such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God.

Therefore, it is imperative for us as adults and youth to only listen to and think upon those lyrics that would honor God and His principles.

The Games of Destruction

Satan has used a number of tools over the centuries to ensnare the naive. The Ouija Board has proven to be particularly useful. According to the Dictionary of Mysticism the Ouija Board is "an instrument for communication with the spirits of the dead." The Ouija Board is an open door into the world of

the occult and demonic activity. Disembodied spirits speak to the living through the medium of the Ouija Board. This information is believed to be truth from the other side and is not recognized for what it is: Lucifer's delusion to gain our allegiance.

Jane Roberts, the author of *The Seth Material*, relates her story regarding the Ouija Board. She was about to write a book on ESP, and to stimulate her thoughts, she and her husband used a Ouija Board to gain perspective. After a few sessions they were able to receive messages from someone who later identified himself as Seth. The use of the Ouija Board and the gradual, but ever-growing, influence of Seth in Jane's life brought her to the point of possession. Her mind would enter a trance state and a deep male voice would begin to speak, indicating he had a message to get across to our world the wisdom that it was only now ready for. Over a period of ten years Seth produced through Jane over 5000 typewritten records of alleged higher esoteric truth. Then Seth tried to kill her. Though she had not previously believed in demons, this experience changed her mind.

Internationally-known observer of the occult, Kurt Koch, says that by the use of the Ouija Board revelations from the past and predictions about the future are made.

Edmond Gruss tells us in his book *Cults and the Occult in the Age of Aquarius* that there have been "many cases of 'possession' after a period of Ouija Board use." Supernatural contact is commonly made through use of the board and has become a primary tool of Satan in reaching young people.

The Rev. Donald Page of the Christian Spiritualist Church reports that most possession cases he has dealt with are people who have used the Ouija Board. Francoise Strachan's book, *A Company of Devils*, states that the Ouija Board is "one of the easiest and quickest ways to become possessed."

The greatest danger of the Ouija Board is that an individual begins to place his trust and future hope in the message the board brings. As a Christian our only source of revelation regarding future things is to be God's Word. We are to look to Jesus Christ and His teachings to properly understand our problems and seek a solution. Deuteronomy 18 tells us to beware of mediums and those who practice divination.

1 Chronicles 10 tells the story of Saul who was unfaithful to the Lord and consulted a medium, seeking guidance and did not seek guidance from the Lord. Therefore, the Lord slew him and turned the Kingdom over to David.

Christians can offer several reasons as to why one should not be involved in the use of the Ouija Board. One is simply that the Bible condemns it as being involvement in the occult (Leviticus 19:31, 20:6). Another relates to the tragic experiences of those who have been involved with this medium. And then there's the fact that the messages received are often false and misleading. They are often obscene and contrary to biblical teaching.

The following passages in Scripture give us, and those who would seek God's perspective, where to go for truth.

"And when they shall say unto you, seek unto them that have familiar spirits and into wizards . . . should not a people seek unto their God?" (Isaiah 8:19)

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, . . . and it shall be given him." (James 1:5)

The Great Delivery

God is able to deliver those who seek Him. Victory is ours. But first, we must receive God's power.

We have been discussing the problems of satanic involvement.

Whether we become deceived by use of the Ouija Board, music, divination or by Dungeons and Dragons, the end result is the same occult bondage.

Mark Bubeck's Moody Press book, *The Adversary*, gives us a sound basis for applying sound biblical doctrine in resisting the devil as he attempts to infiltrate our lives. Basic to all victory of the believer over Satan is the absolute truth of biblical doctrine. There is no substitute. The greatest key in warfare against Satan is when we recognize that God's truth is our only offense.

Bubeck refers to "doctrinal prayer" as an effective tool to use in spiritual warfare. The sixth chapter of Ephesians tells us that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces. We cannot effectively engage Satan in warfare on the natural plane; we must enter the spiritual dimension to adequately challenge Satan and defeat him and his host. According to Bubeck, doctrinal prayer

> …is the practice of praying or applying the objective, absolute truths of the Word of God as the hope and basis of resolving our prayer burden.

Doctrinal prayer presupposes that we have a deep understanding of the Scriptures. Bible memorization is a must for this type of prayer.

Another aspect of our spiritual warfare is that of resistance. We are called to resist the devil. The term "resist" basically means to stand, to stand invincibly or successfully. We can stand firm and remain invincible because of the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross. Jesus was victorious over Satan at the cross. As God's people, we are victorious over Satan because of Jesus. We can successfully resist Satan as we stand in right relationship with Christ. Since we are in Christ, and He has all authority in heaven and earth, we are in the only place of victory.

Ephesians 6 speaks of our spiritual armor. With the exception of the sword, this armor is defensive in nature. We have the victory; it has been won we simply need to stand our ground. Satan has been defeated at the cross (Colossians 2:8-15) and made powerless (Hebrews 2:14-15). The believer needs to stand in his rightful position in Christ as victor; Jesus has already won the battle.

The Holy Spirit of God shows us the way to righteousness and restoration. Satan attempts to convince us that we are so bad that God wouldn't want anything to do with us. He seeks to convince us that there is no forgiveness for what we have done or that we have committed the unpardonable sin.

The Holy Spirit uses God's Word to give us hope and assurance of God's love and forgiveness, whereas Satan creates despair, doubt, resentment, and anger toward God, His Word, and His people. Satan intends for us to feel as though no one as bad as we are could ever really be saved.

Doctrine and right understanding is important to our spiritual welfare. It is the foundation upon which everything stands. Without it we are subject to every wind that blows, every false teaching that Satan would use to lure us.

As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who have trusted in His blood atonement, we have a vast number of tools to render the enemy ineffective. Power, position, authority, total victory over Satan's world belong to us. All that remains is for us to appropriate God's promises and recognize our position in Christ, focus our attention against the devil's work, and to rest in what our Lord has done for us.

Satanism is a growing concern in our culture. With this growth comes a great deal of confusion and a lack of understanding. The following information is designed to help you understand the problem by clearly defining the different aspects of the occult and giving you concise information that you can use.

Defining the Occult

Cult

A cult is a group of people polarized around an individual with a magnetic personality, who deviates from orthodox Christianity by distorting the central message of the Bible by additional revelation or by introducing their personal understanding of primary biblical doctrines such as the person of Jesus Christ, heaven, hell, salvation, atonement, the virgin birth, etc.

Occult

Secret or hidden knowledge. This knowledge is not discerned by the five senses and is therefore, supernaturally received through the practice of divination.

Witchcraft

The use of scripturally forbidden supernatural powers to manipulate people and events. Commonly known as the “craft of the wise” or “wicca,” the worship of nature and feminine energies mother nature. Witchcraft is manifested in two opposing views: white magic, and black magic or witchcraft (see Deuteronomy 18:10)

White Magic

The use of supernatural power to manipulate a person or an event to bring about good. The practice of divination is used to bring about “positive” results such as knowledge, healing, etc.

Black Magic

The use of supernatural power to manipulate a person or an event to bring about evil or destruction. Manipulation is achieved by use of rituals and the casting of spells.

Satanism

Unlike Witchcraft, Satanism is the worship of Satan, formerly known as Lucifer, and the practice of Black Magic. Satanism is a reaction against the Christian church and the Word of God in particular. Satanism promotes a do-what-you-want attitude and is ultimately the worship of oneself.

Categories of Involvement

Individuals involved in satanic activity fall into one of four categories:

- Multi-generational international organization
- National organizations
- Independent self-styled groups
- Individual dabblers

The greatest increase in involvement is among the latter group the dabbler. The dabbler is, in most cases, from a middle to upper- middle class, caucasian home and is a user of drugs and other controlled substances.

The larger concern is not in the number of young people involved in satanic activity but what they are capable of doing when they become absorbed in the worship of Satan.

Satanism centers around involvement in animal sacrifice, blood ritual, sex, the use of drugs and sometimes murder. According to “The Addiction Letter” (1/89),

> Most Satanism revolves around a drug and alcohol dependent lifestyle which glorifies violence, hate, lying, stealing, and vandalism. The involved youngster craves a higher power to validate . . . chemical dependence and Satan fills the spiritual void.

The Mental Profile of the Dabbler

- Rebellion

- Boredom
- Low self-worth

Warning Signs of the Dabbler

The dabbler is likely to have difficulty relating to peers and in most cases, they have withdrawn from their family and religious heritage. They tend to become involved in a variety of the following:

- A drop in grades
- Burglary
- Drug use
- Physical and sexual abuse
- Mind control
- Animal mutilation
- Increased hatred
- Murder
- Suicide

Drug abuse is the common denominator in all levels of Satanism. Drugs have become the primary source of mind-altering experiences for the Satanist, thereby, giving him a false sense of power and spiritual potency.

Characteristics that may indicate satanic involvement

- Avoiding family members
- A change in friends
- Becoming secretive about activities
- Loss of interest in extra-curricular activities
- Personality changes
- An unusual interest in books, movies, videos, etc. with an occult theme
- Use of drugs and alcohol
- Lack of attendance of worship with family

Individuals are recruited into satanic groups by any number or combination of the following:

- Free drugs or sex
- Companionship
- Power
- Money
- Pornography
- Personal choice

Satan’s Goal

According to scripture (Matthew 4:9, 2 Corinthians 4:4, Revelation 12:9), Satan’s goal is to deceive man by blinding him to the truth of the gospel and to receive worship for himself (Isaiah 14:12-14). On a more practical level Satan desires to alter an individual’s values and turn them against themselves, their beliefs, family, God and society.

The Church of Satan

Anton Szandor LaVey formed the Church of Satan in 1966. LaVey, the author of *The Satanic Bible,* is perhaps the most common source of satanic ritual and understanding available to young people today. It can be found in most large secular bookstores. The Satanic Bible has sold more than 600,000 copies since it was first published by Avon Books in 1969.

Secret things

Another common denominator in satanic groups is secrecy. Individuals keep a journal of activity, rituals, charms, or messages in a notebook, blank book and sometimes even a floppy disc. This information is often written in an alphabet that is not widely known. Alphabets commonly used by occultists are: the witches alphabet, the celtic alphabet used by the Druids, the Enochian alphabet, the Egyptian and others.

Personal Initiation

Initiation plays a major role in group activity. Through initiation an individual is given a chance to declare total

allegiance to Satan by participation. Often one will sever a portion of a finger or a toe to indicate their commitment to the unholy one.

Other acts include being a participant in a ritual where mutilation of an animal or human is a part of the activity. These acts are usually video-taped to be used at a later time to keep the individual in line if need be. In some cases a criminal act is perpetrated where the initiate is involved in a key role. An unholy communion of sorts is taken during initiatory rituals where a cup or chalice (usually stolen from a church) is used containing a mixture of wine, blood (human or animal) and urine. Satanism is not for the faint-hearted.

Other methods of initiation include body markings. An inverted cross may be burned into one's forearm or chest, etc.

Body Markings

Commonly used markings include the following (it is important to note that body markings can be used for the preparation of a sacrifice, as well as initiation into a group):

- Goathead
- Inverted cross
- Skull
- Pentagram
- Baphomet
- MENA (amen)
- Black rose
- Swastika

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The Occult Connection – A Christian View

Occult philosophy has permeated nearly every area of our society. I believe that Christians need to think clearly about these issues and apply a biblical worldview to them.

Consider the pervasive influence of the occult. Students are involved with role-playing fantasy games that introduce them to occult concepts. Universities offer courses in paranormal and occult science. Occultic themes provide popular material for television shows and movies. Police departments are beginning to realize that many of the crimes they investigate have occult origins. Everywhere we go, it seems that the occult is present.

The word *occult* comes from the Latin *occultus*, which means "concealed." In its ordinary usage, it means "beyond the bounds of ordinary knowledge—the mysterious, the concealed, or that which is hidden from view." The occult involved such practices as magic, divination, incantations, paranormal experiences, and the New Age concept of the expansion of consciousness.

Students of the occult frequently divide occult phenomena into three areas: (1) forms of divination, (2) types of mystical experience, and (3) magical manipulation.

The most common form of divination is astrology. Other examples of divination would include palmistry, ouija boards, tarot cards, biorhythm, crystal balls, and interpretation of dreams. Divination is evil and is strictly forbidden in Deuteronomy 18.

Types of mystical experience would include any paranormal attempt to transcend the bounds of our physical world. The out-of-body experiences reported by psychics fit into this category. Other examples would be telekinesis, clairvoyance, and psychic trances. This would also include seances, necromancy, and psychic healing.

The final category would be magical manipulation. This is not to be confused with the art of illusions used by professional magicians. By contrast, occultists say they can use hidden forces in the spiritual realm to manipulate people and circumstances.

Practitioners would include sorcerers, witches, and witch doctors. Many of these practitioners are mentioned in the Bible. In the Old Testament we find Jezebel as well as the magicians in Egypt. In the New Testament are Simon (Acts 8) and Bar-Jesus (Acts 13).

Finally, let me address how Christians should respond to the occult. We should be equipped to counteract its influence in society. First, Christians should know God’s word. The best way to discover a counterfeit is to know the real thing. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Know God’s word and put on the whole armor of God.

Second, resist Satan and all of his influence in your life. If we resist the devil, the Bible teaches that he will flee from us. Third, destroy occult books and paraphernalia in your possession. Confess and repent any involvement you have had with the occult.

Fourth, submit your life totally to Jesus Christ. As we yield to Him and allow the Holy Spirit to dwell within us, we are fortified for spiritual warfare. The Bible teaches that greater is He who is in you, then he who is in the world. Lean not on your own strength but on the strength of the Lord. You can have victory over the forces of darkness if you know the

enemy and marshall God’s spiritual resources for the battle.

Halloween

Next I would like to focus on Halloween. Most people see Halloween as nothing more than a harmless festival that allows kids to collect candy. Yet Halloween is much more than a harvest festival. Its origins are deeply rooted in the occult, and the various practitioners of the black arts identify Halloween as a significant event in the pagan calendar. The following questions and answers should help you be more aware of the occultic nature of Halloween.

The date, October 31st, has long been known as “The Festival of the Dead.” The Celtic tribes and their priests, the Druids, celebrated this day as a marker for the change from life to death. Today, the modern celebration of Halloween is usually performed by adherents of witchcraft who use the day (and especially the night) for their rituals.

Witches celebrate Halloween as the “Feast of Samhain”—the first feast of the witchcraft year. Being a festival of the dead, Halloween is a time when witches attempt to communicate with the dead through various forms of divination.

Witches believe that this day marks the time when the Mother Goddess (also known as Mother Nature, Goddess of the Earth) returns to the underworld to sleep under a blanket of snow. In her place comes another god—the Horned God—who emerges to begin his reign of death. Witches believe this is a time when the life of summer is replaced by the death of winter. Halloween is a high feast day to celebrate the end of summer and the coming of winter.

In later centuries, the Catholic Church attempted to redeem this pagan holiday by designating it as “All Saints Day.” Protestant churches during the Reformation chose not to celebrate this day, seeing it as an attempt to Christianize a

pagan holiday.

For example, let’s look at the practice of dressing up on Halloween. During most of the 20th century, children in America have been dressing up on Halloween so they can go out and “trick- or-treat.” This tradition has been self-perpetuating for decades, but if we go back to the origins of Halloween, we can again see the occult connection.

Occultists who revered Halloween as a pagan holy day saw this day as a time of transition between life and death. They believed that during this transition from life to death, the two worlds were momentarily in contact with one another. The veil between these two worlds (the land of the living and the land of the dead) was very thin, and so many believed they would come in contact with the spirit world.

Some occult practitioners practiced divination and believed one could learn the secrets of life and wisdom by lying on a grave and listening to the messages from the long-departed. Others taught that spirits and ghosts left the grave during this night and would seek out warmth in their previous homes. Villagers, fearful of the possibility of being visited by the ghosts of past occupants, would dress up in costumes to scare the spirits on their way. They would also leave food and other treats at their doors to appease the spirits so they would not destroy their homes or crops but instead move on down the road.

Another technique used to scare away the spirits was to carve a scary face into a pumpkin. People hoped this horrible visage would move the spirit on to another home or village and spare their home from destruction. Sometimes the villagers would light a candle and place it within the pumpkin and use it as a lantern (hence the name “Jack-o-Lantern”). Then they would walk from the local grave yard to their homes in an effort to scare off evil spirits that might be walking down the road after leaving the grave.

Within witchcraft there are four pagan festivals celebrated throughout the year. The first festival in the witchcraft calendar is Halloween (October 31). This is the celebration of life and death. It is also known as Hallowmas. Second is Candlemas (February 2) which honors the “God of Death.” This festival gives thanks to him for keeping them from sickness and wishes him well as he journeys back to the underworld. The third festival is Beltane on May eve (April 30). This celebration welcomes new life and involves fertility rituals. A final festival is Lammas (August 1), which is a festival of the harvest. Witches give thanks to the Goddess of the Earth for making the crops grow.

The pagan origins of Halloween should be sufficient to cause Christian parents to question the wisdom of allowing their children to participate in a witchcraft festival. Given this information, parents really have only two choices: fight the celebration of Halloween and provide alternatives.

At a time when schools are removing any religious significance from Christmas (now often merely called winter break) and Easter (spring break), it is ironic that most public schools still celebrate Halloween. Responsible parents should ask school administrators to restrict Halloween celebrations. Pictures of witches, haunted houses, and other occultic practices in the public schools are a promotion of pagan, religious practices.

Many churches have begun to develop creative alternatives. Church youth groups hold bowling or skating parties. Some groups spend the night going out and witnessing to those in the streets. Other churches hold a Fall Fun Festival and have children come to the church facilities in biblical costumes. Such programs keep children safe and focus their attention on the Bible rather than on a pagan, occultic ritual.

Astrology

Less conspicuous and more insidious than Halloween is the practice of astrology. Even occupants of the White House have failed to see its occultic connection.

Former White House chief of staff Don Regan said in his book that “virtually every major move and decision the Reagans made during my time as White House chief of staff was cleared in advanced with a woman in San Francisco who drew up horoscopes.” The friend was later identified as Joan Quigley, a San Francisco astrology author.

When Ronald Reagan scheduled the signing of the INF treaty for the afternoon of December 8th instead of during prime-time television hours, many were puzzled. Former chief of staff Don Regan said it was performed in the afternoon because Nancy Reagan said that was when “the stars were right.”

The Reagans were hardly the first national leaders to be interested in astrology. Teddy Roosevelt mounted his natal horoscope on a chessboard so he could study it each day. During World War II, Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Adolf Hitler shared at least one thing in common: they were all interested in horoscopes. And even Charles DeGaulle quoted a pre-war horoscope predicting he would rule France.

Even though astrology is unscientific and illogical, it is still very popular. Over 1200 daily newspapers carry horoscopes, and there are 12,000 full-time and about 175,000 part-time astrologers. Many people make it a daily ritual to consult their horoscopes, and some hire professional astrologers to help them make business and personal decisions.

Astrology had its beginnings in the fertile crescent in Mesopotamia. During the period from the Sumarians through the Chaldeans, astrology gained prominence and developed into the formalized occultic structure found today.

Astrology is based upon the questionable assumption that the fixed stars, sun, moon, and planets have an influence upon people and historical events. This influence can be determined once one knows the exact hour of one's birth. In fact, the word *horoscope* means "a consideration of the hour." Once the time and place of birth are known, the stars can be consulted and a forecast can be made.

There are good scientific reasons to question the basis of astrology. First, it is based upon a geocentric solar system rather than a heliocentric one. The basic premise of astrology is that the sun and planets rotate around the earth. Yet science tells us that the earth and planets rotate around the sun. Thus, the science of astronomy undermines the quackery of astrology.

Second, astrology is based upon the assumption that there are seven planets. Moreover it identifies the sun and moon as planets. Lacking telescopes and other astronomical instruments, the founders of astrology incorrectly identified some heavenly bodies as planets and were unaware of other planets. Thus, a second assumption of astrology fails to square with scientific data.

Third, astrology mixes and matches stars that should not be grouped together. The 12 signs of the zodiac are quite arbitrary. They mix together stars in one constellation that are actually quite far from each other—often in entirely different parts of our Milky Way galaxy. Moreover, since the stars are in motion, some of the constellations change shape over time. In essence, the zodiac of astrology is arbitrary and subject to change and hardly reliable as a guide for one's future.

But in addition to the scientific problems with astrology, there are also logical problems. First is the well-documented fact that different astrologers sometimes cast different horoscopes for the same person. If astrology were an objective

science, we would expect different astrologers to cast the same horoscope for the same person. Instead, they make vastly different predictions about the same person. If we can determine our destiny from the stars, we should not find such vastly different predictions. Since we do, we must conclude that astrology does not lead to logical conclusions.

A second logical problem related to the previous one is that if astrology were true, then twins would have the same destiny. Being born in the same place and at approximately the same time should ensure that twins would have the same destiny. Yet the history of twins shows that although there are similarities, there are also significant differences not readily predicted by astrology.

A third problem is the inability to predict accurately the future of people with known destinies. In order to test this idea, one researcher put together what he called a “test of destinies.” He gave astrologers 40 birthdates. Twenty belonged to known criminals and 20 belonged to peace-loving citizens. He asked them to separate the birthdates into the two categories.

None of the astrologers separated them correctly. The researcher said, “The result is always great confusion: the astrologers invariably select a mixed bag of criminals and peaceful citizens in about the same proportion that a machine would pick randomly.”

Finally, in addition to scientific and logical problems with astrology, there are also scriptural problems with astrology. In Deuteronomy 18:9-12, God lists five categories of detestable practices. These range from witchcraft to child sacrifice. They also include divination, which is the attempt to predict the future through such methods as reading the stars. All of these are listed as detestable practices.

Unfortunately we live in a society that sets up a dichotomy

between hard-core occult activity like witchcraft and satanism and so- called soft-core occult such as reading horoscopes and playing with ouija boards. All are considered detestable practices and should be avoided. Don’t be tempted to dabble in these activities. Instead, resist Satan and he will flee from you.

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