

Introducing Probe's New Survey: Religious Views and Practices 2020

The results are in from Probe's newest assessment of the state of biblical beliefs in America 2020, and the news is not good.

Our 2020 survey reveals a striking decline in evangelical religious beliefs and practices over the last ten years. From a biblical worldview to doctrinal beliefs and pluralism to the application of biblical teaching to sexual mores, the number of Americans applying biblical teaching to their thinking has dropped significantly over this period. Unfortunately, the greatest level of decline is found among Born Again Protestants.

Our previous survey, the 2010 *Probe Culturally Captive Christians* survey^[1], was limited to Born Again Americans' ages 18 through 40. This survey of 817 people was focused on a obtaining a deeper understanding of the beliefs and behaviors of young adult, Born Again Christian Americans.

Our new 2020 survey looks at Americans from 18 through 55 from all religious persuasions. Although still focused on looking at religious beliefs and attitudes toward cultural behaviors, we expanded the scope, surveying 3,106 Americans ages 18 through 55. Among those responses, there are 717 who are Born Again^[2], allowing us to make meaningful comparisons with our 2010 results while also comparing the beliefs of Born Again Christians with those of other religious persuasions.

Two questions were used in both surveys to categorize people as Born Again^[3]. Those questions are:

1. Have you ever made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in your life today? **Answer: YES**

2. What best describes your belief about what will happen to you after you die? **Answer:**
I will go to heaven because I confessed my sins and accepted Jesus Christ as my savior.

In our 2020 survey, we delve into what American's believe regarding biblical worldview, basic biblical doctrine, pluralism and tolerance, religious practices, applications of religious beliefs to cultural issues, and more. In this first release, we lay the groundwork by explaining the trends in religious affiliation over time using a number of different surveys. Then we look deeper, examining how many of those of each religious faith group adhered to a biblical worldview in 2010 and now in 2020.

Laying the Groundwork: American Religious Affiliations Over Time

How have the religious affiliations of American young adults changed over the years? We have examined data over the last fifty years^{4} to answer this question. From 1972 through the early 1990's, the portion of the population affiliated with each major religious group stayed fairly constant. But since then, there have been significant changes. As an example, looking at data from the General Social Survey (GSS)^{5} surveys of 1988, 1998, 2010, and 2018 and our 2020 Religious Views survey, we see dramatic changes as shown in Figure 1. Note that the GSS survey asks, "Have you ever had a "born again" experience?" rather than the two questions used in the Probe surveys (see above). Looking at the chart it appears that the question used in the GSS surveys is answered yes more often than the two questions used by Probe.

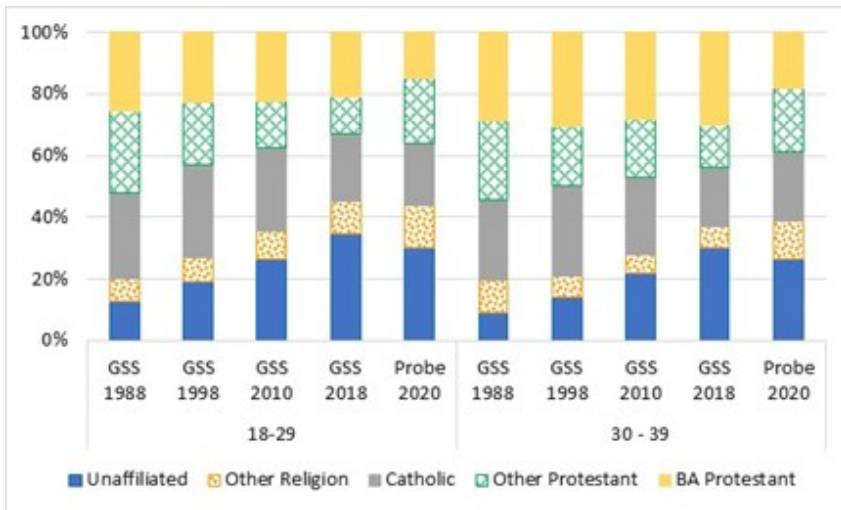


Figure 1 – Religious Affiliations of Young Adults Over Time

As shown, the most dramatic change is the increase in the percentage of those who **do not** select a Christian affiliation (i.e., Other Religion and Unaffiliated). Looking at GSS data for those age 18–29, the percentage has grown from 20% of the population in 1988 to over 45% of the population in 2018. Most of this growth is in the number of Unaffiliated (those who select Atheist, Agnostic or Nothing in Particular). In fact, those from other religious faiths [{6}](#) grew from 7% to 10% over this time period while **the Unaffiliated almost tripled** from 13% to 35% of the population.

The Pew Research data (not shown in the graph) shows an even greater increase, growing from 27% in 1996 to 59% in 2020. The Probe data from 2020 tracks the GSS data, supporting the overall growth trend shown in the figure.

Looking at the Unaffiliated for the 30–39 age group, we see the same growth trend growing from 9% to 30%. Comparing the 18–29 data with the 30–39 data, we can determine that more people are transitioning to Unaffiliated as they mature. For example, we see that 26% of those in their twenties were Unaffiliated in 2010, growing to 30% of those in their thirties in 2018. This result means that more of the people in their twenties became Unaffiliated in their thirties. This result runs directly counter to the supposition of many that

the growth in Unaffiliated will dissipate as young adults age and return to churches to raise their families.[{7}](#)

Considering the other religions shown in Figure 1, we see that the group seeing the greatest decline is Other Protestants, i.e. Protestants who did not profess to being born again. As shown, this group dropped by half (from 26% down to 13%) from 1988 to 2018. Similarly, those professing to be Catholics dropped by one quarter (from 24% to 18%) over the same time period.

In the GSS data, Born Again Protestants are remaining a relatively constant percent of the population. There has been a steady decline in those ages 18–29, but those in their thirties have not declined over this time period. This data appears to indicate that some young adults in their late twenties and early thirties are undergoing a “born again” experience.

However, while Born Again Protestants have remained stable, those who say they are affiliated with an Evangelical church have begun to decline somewhat. Pew Research surveys[{8}](#) of at least 10,000 American adults do show a decline in young adult Evangelicals from 28% in 2007 to 25% in 2014 to 20% in 2019.

Is a Christian Biblical Worldview Common Among Young Americans?

In assessing the worldview of people, we were not able to sit down and talk to them to fully understand their worldview. So, our 2010 and 2020 surveys include specific questions which help us identify someone with a Christian biblical worldview. A set of four questions is used to assess what we call a Basic Biblical Worldview. Two additional questions are added to get to a fuller assessment first used by the Barna Group. We use the six questions together to assess what we call an Expanded Biblical Worldview. The questions are as follows:

Basic Biblical Worldview

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.**{9}
2. The Bible is totally accurate in all of 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**
4. When He lived on earth, Jesus Christ committed sins like other people: **Disagree Strongly**

Additional Beliefs for an Expanded Biblical Worldview

5. The devil or Satan is not a real being, but is a symbol of evil: **Disagree Strongly**
6. Some people believe there are moral truths (such as murder is always wrong) that are true for everyone, everywhere and for all time. Others believe that moral truth always depends upon circumstances. Do you believe there are moral truths that are unchanging, or does moral truth always depend upon circumstances: **There are moral truths that are true for everyone, everywhere and for all time.**

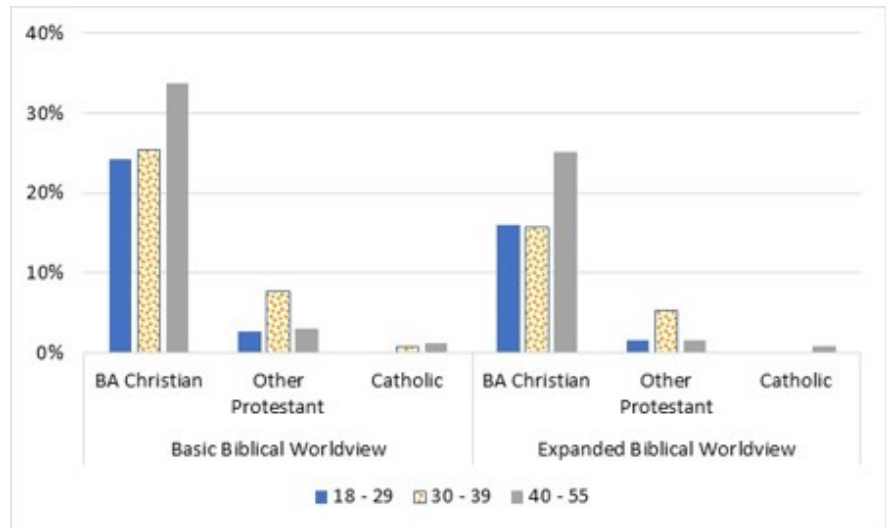
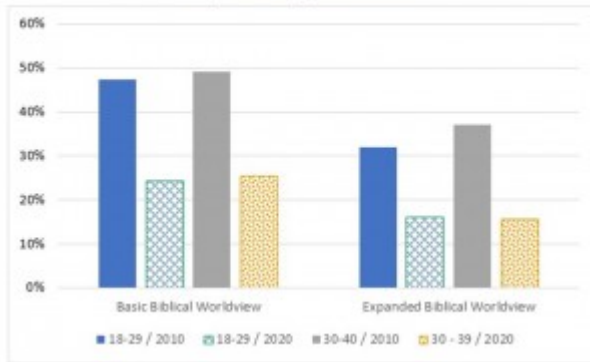


Figure 4 – Worldview Beliefs of 2020 Protestants

First, how do different Christian groups respond to these questions? In Figure 4, we show the percentage of each group in 2020 who have either a Basic Biblical Worldview or an Expanded Biblical Worldview. We use three groups of affiliations: Born Again Christians, Other Protestants, and Catholics.^[10] On the left half of the chart, we indicate the percentage with a Basic Biblical Worldview by affiliation and age group. Those in the Born Again Christian group are at about 25% (about 1 out of 4) for those under the age of 40 and then jump up to 35% (about 1 out of 3) for those between 40 and 55. For those in the Other Protestant group, much less than 10% (1 out of 10) possess a Basic Biblical Worldview. Almost no Catholics possess a Basic Biblical Worldview. For both the Other Protestant group and the Catholics, the concept the vast majority do not agree with is that you cannot earn your way to heaven via good works. The other three questions are also much lower for Other Protestants and Catholics than for Born Again Christians.

Adding in the questions on Satan and absolutes for an Expanded Biblical Worldview, we see each group drop significantly. The Born Again Christian group runs about 15% below age 40 and 25% (or 1 in 4) from 40 to 55. The other two groups drop from almost none to barely any.

Figure 5 Born Again Christian Worldview Beliefs Across 10 Years
% of all Born Again Christians



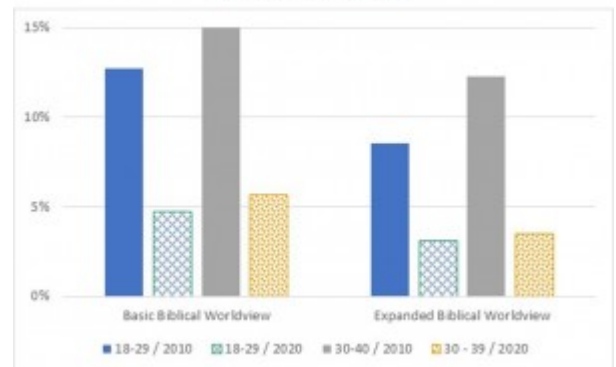
Now let's compare these 2020 results with the results from our 2010 survey. Figure 5 shows the results across this decade for Born Again Christians looking at the percent who agree with the worldview answers above. As shown, there has been a dramatic drop in both the

Basic Biblical Worldview and the Expanded Biblical Worldview.

If we compare the 18–29 result from 2010 with the 30–39 result from 2020 (i.e., the same age cohort 10 years later), we see a drop from 47% to 25% for the Basic Biblical Worldview and from 32% to 16% for the Expanded Biblical Worldview. **So, the percentage of Born Again Christians with a Biblical Worldview (of either type) has been cut in half over the last decade.** This result is a startling degradation in worldview beliefs of Born Again Christians over just 10 years.

However, because the percent of the population who profess to being born again has dropped over the last ten years as well, the situation is even worse. We need to look at the percent of Americans of a particular age range who hold to a Biblical Worldview. Those results are shown in Figure 6. Once again, comparing the 18–29 age group from 2010 with the same age group ten years later now 30–39, we find an even greater drop off. For the Basic Biblical Worldview, we see a drop off from 13% of the population down to 6%. For the Expanded Biblical Worldview, the decline is from 9% down to just over 3% (a drop off of two thirds).

Figure 6 Born Again Christian Worldview Beliefs Across 10 Years
as a % of Total Population



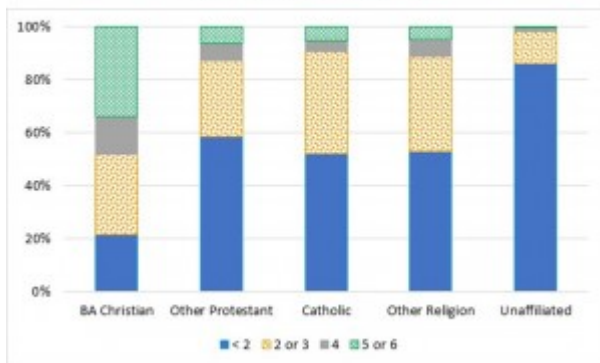
The drop off seen over this ten-year period is more than dramatic and extremely discouraging. In 2010, we had about 10%

of the population modeling an active biblical worldview. Although small, 10% of the population means that most people would know one of these committed Christians. At between 6% and 3%, the odds of impacting a significant number of Americans are certainly reduced.

However, we cannot forget that the percent of biblical worldview Christians in the Roman Empire in AD 60 was much less than 1% of the population. Three hundred years later virtually the entire empire was at least nominally Christian. If we will commit ourselves to “proclaiming the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light,”[{11}](#) God will bring revival to our land.

Second, how do various religious groups stack up against these questions?

Figure 7 Number of Biblical Worldview Topics Affirmed by Americans ages 18 - 39



Rather than look at the two biblical worldview levels discussed above, we will look at how many of the six biblical worldview questions they answered were consistent with a biblical worldview. In the chart, we look at 18- to 39-year-old individuals grouped by

religious affiliation and map what portion answered less than two of the questions biblically, two or three, four, or more than four (i.e., five or six).

You can see that there are three distinct patterns. First, Born Again Christians where almost half of them answered four or more questions from a biblical perspective (the top two sections of each bar). Then, we see Other Protestants, Catholics[{12}](#), and Other Religions[{13}](#) chart about the same, with over half answering zero or one and very few answering more than three.

Finally, we see that the Unaffiliated have over 85% who answer zero or one. This result is one of many we have identified over the years, clearly showing that the Unaffiliated are not active Christians who do not want to affiliate with a particular group. Some have suggested this possibility, but the data does not support that hopeful concept.

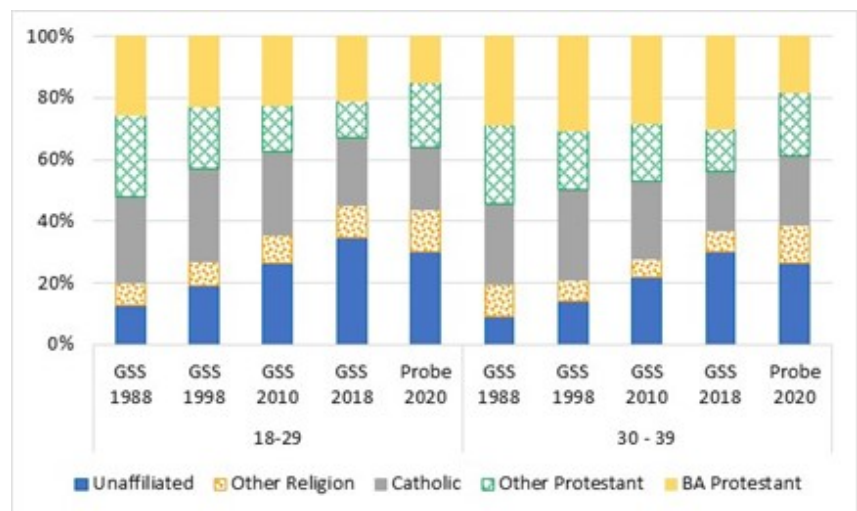


Figure 8 – What Do You Personally Believe to be True About God?

Third, what do they say about God and His relationship to the world?

People have many different views of God or gods in this life. In this chart, we look at how 18-to 39-year old respondents define God across the different religious affiliations used in the prior chart. Our respondents were asked: Which of the following descriptions comes closest to what you personally believe to be true about God? They were given the following answers to choose from (without the titles).

1. **God Rules:** God is the all-powerful, all-knowing, perfect creator of the universe who rules the world today.
2. **Impersonal Force:** God refers to the total realization of personal human potential OR God represents a state of higher consciousness that a person may reach.

3. **Deism**: God created but is no longer involved with the world today.
4. **Many gods**: There are many gods, each with their different power and authority.
5. **No God**: There is no such thing as God.
6. **Don't Know**: Don't know

Once again, the answers fall into three groups. A vast majority of Born Again Christians (~80%) believe in a creator God who is still active in the world today. It is somewhat surprising that over 20% ascribe to a different view of God. The second group consists of Other Protestants who do not claim to be born again, Catholics and Other Religions. These groups are remarkably similar in their responses with around 40% who believe in an active, creator God. So, the remaining 60% have a different view. The third group are the Unaffiliated with less than 10% professing belief in an active, creator God. Over 50% believe in no God or they just don't know. **Overall, only about one third of Americans 55 and under believe in an active, creator God.** We must admit that **America is not a Judeo-Christian nation** as the belief in God is central to Judeo-Christian views. From an evangelistic viewpoint, one needs to be prepared to explain why someone should believe in a creator God. The Probe Ministries website, www.probe.org, is an excellent place to explore the topic.^{14}

Summary

This document begins the process of understanding the status and trends of religious beliefs and behaviors in the America of this third decade of the twenty first century. Several findings addressed above are worth highlighting in summary.

- Unaffiliated Americans continue their growth toward one half of the population which began before the turn of this century. The current number of young adults (under the age

of 40) who are **unaffiliated ranges between one third and one half of our population.**

- The percentage of young adult Americans who claim to be Born Again Protestants has declined slightly among the youngest group (18–29) but has remained fairly constant during this century.

- Other Protestants and Catholics have seen marked declines during this century. The percentage of **young adult Other Protestants has dropped by one half** (from about one quarter of the population to about one eighth) since 1988.

- Born Again Christians are the only group to have a significant number of adherents who profess to having a Basic Biblical Worldview. This worldview is measured by the answers to four very basic questions at the heart of Christian doctrine. Even among this group, **only about one in four (25%) of them hold to a Basic Biblical Worldview.**

- Over the last ten years, the number of young adult (18–39) Born Again Christians with **a Basic Biblical Worldview has dropped by two thirds** from almost 15% of the population down to about 5%. This is a remarkable and devastating drop in one decade.

- Just under one half of Born Again Christians agree with more than three of the six worldview questions. Amongst other Christian groups and the population as a whole less than one in ten do so.

- **Overall, only about one third of Americans 55 and under believe in an active, creator God.**

In our next release, we will look at how American young adults

- react to the doctrine of Jesus Christ,
- believe that Jesus is the only path to heaven, and

- have a classic view of tolerance.

In the meantime, be in prayer about what you can do in your sphere of influence to stem the trends listed above.

Notes

1. For a detailed analysis of the outcomes of our 2010 survey and other surveys from that decade, go to our book [*Cultural Captives: The Beliefs and Behavior of American Young Adults*](#).
2. The 717 respondents equated to 747 equivalent people when weighted to adjust for differences between those surveyed and the distribution of gender, ethnicity, ages, and location as given by the United States Census Bureau.
3. Our 2010 survey was facilitated by the Barna Group and I would presume they commonly use these two questions in other surveys to identify born again Christians.
4. We have looked at religious affiliation from Pew Research, GSS, PALS, Barna Group and others.
5. General Social Survey data was downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by the National Opinion Research Center.
6. Note that the Other Religions category includes Christian cults (e.g. Mormon, Jehovah's Witnesses), Jews, and other world religions.
7. In future releases, we will also see that the Unaffiliated are very unlikely to hold to basic Christian beliefs.
8. U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2007, U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2014, Religious Knowledge Survey 2019 Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (a project of The Pew Research Center). The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by the Pew Research Center.
9. 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.

10. Born Again Christians include Catholics who answered the born again questions to allow comparison with the 2010 survey but in the Catholic category we include all Catholics including those who are born again.

11. 1 Peter 2:9

12. Catholics here include about 20% who profess to be born again. That subset is included in both the BA Christian column and the Catholic column in Figure 7 and Figure 8.

13. One of the reasons that Other Religions include some that answer more than three worldview questions is that Mormons and other Christian cults are included in that category.

14. Articles on our website addressing this topic include [Evidence for God's Existence](#), [There is a God](#), [Does God Exist: A Christian Argument from Non-biblical Sources](#), [The Impotence of Darwinism](#), [Darwinism: A Teetering House of Cards](#), and many others.

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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 relatively 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.

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Marianne Williamson

Marianne Williamson, contender for the 2020 Democratic presidential candidate, has been on Probe's radar for over ten years. As Oprah's spiritual advisor and proponent of the New Age "A Course in Miracles," she is a false teacher according to biblical standards.

Here are links to articles that mention her, as well as related articles you may find interesting:

[A Course in Miracles – A Christian Worldview Evaluation](#)

["Is A Course in Miracles Heretical? How Do I Talk to My Friend Who Believes It?"](#)

["Your Article on A Course in Miracles Is Very Disturbing"](#)

[Oprah: America's Beloved False Teacher](#)

[Oprah's Spirituality: Exploring 'A New Earth' – A Christian Critique](#)

[The False Teaching of "The Secret" – A Christian Evaluation](#)

Islam and Terrorism

Kerby Anderson provides various perspectives on the link between Islam and terrorism, including how Americans and Christians can think about its encroachment on our culture.

Clash of Civilizations

In this article we will be looking at Islam and terrorism. Before we look at the rise of Muslim terrorism in our world, we need to understand the worldview conflict between Islam and western values. The Muslim religion is a seventh-century religion. Think about that statement for a moment. Most people would not consider Christianity a first century religion. While it began in the first century, it has taken the timeless message of the Bible and communicated it in contemporary ways.



In many ways, Islam is still stuck in the century in which it developed. One of the great questions is whether it will adapt to the modern world. The rise of Muslim terrorism and the desire to implement sharia law illustrate this clash of civilizations.

In the summer of 1993, Samuel Huntington published an article entitled "The Clash of Civilizations?" in the journal *Foreign Affairs*.[\[1\]](#) Three years later Samuel Huntington published a book using a similar title: *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. It became a bestseller, once again stirring controversy. It seems worthy to revisit his comments and predictions because they have turned out to be remarkably accurate.

His thesis was fairly simple. World history will be marked by conflicts between three principal groups: western

universalism, Muslim militancy, and Chinese assertion.

Huntington says that in the post-Cold War world, “Global politics has become multipolar and multicivilizational.”^{2} During most of human history, major civilizations were separated from one another and contact was intermittent or nonexistent. Then for over 400 years, the nation states of the West (Britain, France, Spain, Austria, Prussia, Germany, and the United States) constituted a multipolar international system that interacted, competed, and fought wars with each other. During that same period of time, these nations also expanded, conquered, and colonized nearly every other civilization.

During the Cold War, global politics became bipolar, and the world was divided into three parts. Western democracies led by the United States engaged in ideological, political, economic, and even military competition with communist countries led by the Soviet Union. Much of this conflict occurred in the Third World outside these two camps and was composed mostly of nonaligned nations.

Huntington argued that in the post-Cold War world, the principal actors are still the nation states, but they are influenced by more than just power and wealth. Other factors like cultural preferences, commonalities, and differences are also influential. The most important groupings are not the three blocs of the Cold War, but rather the major world civilizations. Most significant in discussion in this article is the conflict between the Western world and Muslim militancy.

Other Perspectives on Radical Islam

In the previous section, we talked about the thesis by Samuel Huntington that this is a clash of civilizations.

Bernard Lewis sees this conflict as a phase that Islam is

currently experiencing in which many Muslim leaders are attempting to resist the influences of the modern world (and in particular the Western world) on their communities and countries. This is what he had to say about Islam and the modern world:

Islam has brought comfort and peace of mind to countless millions of men and women. It has given dignity and meaning to drab and impoverished lives. It has taught people of different races to live in brotherhood and people of different creeds to live side by side in reasonable tolerance. It inspired a great civilization in which others besides Muslims lived creative and useful lives and which, by its achievement, enriched the whole world. But Islam, like other religions, has also known periods when it inspired in some of its followers a mood of hatred and violence. It is our misfortune that part, though by no means all or even most, of the Muslim world is now going through such a period, and that much, though again not all, of that hatred is directed against us.[\[3\]](#)

This does not mean that all Muslims want to engage in jihad warfare against America and the West. But it does mean that there is a growing clash of civilizations.

William Tucker believes that the actual conflict results from what he calls the Muslim intelligensia. He says "that we are not facing a clash of civilizations so much as a conflict with an educated segment of a civilization that produces some very weird, sexually disoriented men. Poverty has nothing to do with it. It is stunning to meet the al Qaeda roster—one highly accomplished scholar after another with advanced degrees in chemistry, biology, medicine, engineering, a large percentage of them educated in the United States."[\[4\]](#)

His analysis is contrary to the many statements that have been made in the past that poverty breeds terrorism. While it is certainly true that many recruits for jihad come from

impoverished situations, it is also true that the leadership comes from those who are well-educated and highly accomplished.

Tucker therefore concludes that we are effectively at war with a Muslim intelligentsia. These are essentially “the same people who brought us the horrors of the French Revolution and 20th century Communism. With their obsession for moral purity and their rational hatred that goes beyond all irrationality, these warrior-intellectuals are wreaking the same havoc in the Middle East as they did in Jacobin France and Mao Tse-tung’s China.”[\[5\]](#)

Threat from Radical Islam

It is hard to estimate the extent of the threat of radical Islam, but there are some commentators who have tried to provide a reasonable estimate. Dennis Prager provides an overview of the extent of the threat:

Anyone else sees the contemporary reality—the genocidal Islamic regime in Sudan; the widespread Muslim theological and emotional support for the killing of a Muslim who converts to another religion; the absence of freedom in Muslim-majority countries; the widespread support for Palestinians who randomly murder Israelis; the primitive state in which women are kept in many Muslim countries; the celebration of death; the honor killings of daughters, and so much else that is terrible in significant parts of the Muslim world—knows that civilized humanity has a new evil to fight.[\[6\]](#)

He argues that just as previous generations had to fight the Nazis and the communists, so this generation has to confront militant Islam. But he also notes something is dramatically different about the present Muslim threat. He says:

Far fewer people believed in Nazism or in communism than

believe in Islam generally or in authoritarian Islam specifically. There are one billion Muslims in the world. If just 10 percent believe in the Islam of Hamas, the Taliban, the Sudanese regime, Saudi Arabia, Wahhabism, bin Laden, Islamic Jihad, the Finley Park Mosque in London or Hizbollah—and it is inconceivable that only one of 10 Muslims supports any of these groups' ideologies—that means a true believing enemy of at least 100 million people.[\[7\]](#)

This very large number of people who wish to destroy civilization poses a threat that is unprecedented. Never has civilization had to confront such large numbers of those would wish to destroy civilization.

So, what is the threat in the United States? Let's take one number and one percentage for an estimate. There are about 4 million Muslim-Americans in the U.S., and we are often told that nearly all are law-abiding citizens. So let's assume that percentage is even as high as 99 percent. That still leaves one percent who believe in jihad and could pose a threat to America. Multiply one percent by 4 million and you get a number of 40,000 individuals that Homeland Security needs to try to monitor. Even if you use a percentage of one-tenth of one percent, you still get about 4,000 potential terrorists in America.

That is why it is important to understand the potential threat we face from radical Islam.

Islamic Tipping Point

When the Muslim population increases in a country, there are certain social changes that have been documented. Peter Hammond deals with this in his book, *Slavery, Terrorism, & Islam*. Most people have never read the book, but many have seen an email on one of the most quoted parts of the book.[\[8\]](#)

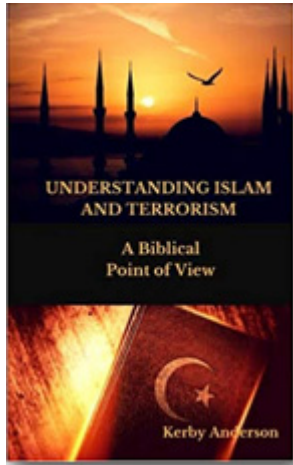
He argued that when the Muslim population is under five percent, the primary activity is proselytizing, usually from ethnic minorities and the disaffected. By the time the Muslim population reaches five percent or more, it begins to exert its influence and start pushing for Sharia law.

Peter Hammond sees a significant change when a Muslim population reaches ten percent (found in many European countries). At that point, he says you begin to see increased levels of violence and lawlessness. You also begin to hear statements of identity and the filing of various grievances.

At twenty to thirty percent, there are examples of hair-trigger rioting and jihad militias. In some countries, you even have church bombings. By forty percent to fifty percent, nations like Bosnia and Lebanon experience widespread massacres and ongoing militia warfare. When at least half the population is Muslim, you begin to see the country persecute infidels and apostates and Sharia law is implemented over all of its citizens.

After eighty percent, you see countries like Iran, Syria, and Nigeria engage in persecution and intimidation as a daily part of life. Sometimes state-run genocide develops in an attempt to purge the country of all infidels. The final goal is "Dar-es-Salaam" (the Islamic House of Peace).

Peter Hammond would probably be the first to say that these are generalizations and there are certainly exceptions to the rule. But the general trends have been validated through history. When the Muslim population is small, its leaders focus on winning converts and working to gain sympathy for Sharia law. But then their numbers increase, the radical Muslims take over and the Islamic domination begins.



In this article we have been looking at the challenge of Islam when it comes to jihad and terrorist activity. I document all of this in my new book, *Understanding Islam and Terrorism*. The book not only deals with the threat of terrorism but also takes time to explain the theology behind Islam with helpful suggestions on how to witness to your Muslim friends. You can find [more information](#) about my book on the Probe Ministries website.

Sharia Law and Radical Islam

A foundational practice of Islam is the implementation of Sharia into the legal structure. Sharia is a system of divine law, belief, or practice that is based upon Muslim legal interpretation. It applies to economics, politics, and society.

Sometimes the world has been able to see how extreme the interpretation of Sharia can be. Muslims have been put to death when they have been accused of adultery or homosexuality. They have been put to death for leaving the religion of Islam. And these are not isolated examples.

Sharia law is very different in many respects from the laws established through the U.S. Constitution and the laws established through English Common law. In an attempt to prevent Sharia law from being implemented in America, a number of state legislatures have such bans on Sharia law. Voters in other states have approved a ban that has been struck down by a federal appeals court.

Although opponents argue that these Sharia law bans are unnecessary, various studies have found significant cases of Sharia law being allowed in U.S. courts. One report with the title, "Sharia Law and the American State Courts"[{9}](#) found 50

significant cases of Sharia law in U.S. courts just from their small sample of appellate published cases. When they looked at state courts, they found an additional 15 cases in the trial courts and 12 more in the appellate courts. Judges are making decisions deferring to Sharia law even when those decisions conflict with the U.S. Constitution and the various state constitutions.

How should we respond to the increased use of Sharia law in America? One simple way to explain your concern to legislators, family, friends, and neighbors is to remember the numbers 1-8-14. These three numbers stand for the three amendments to the U.S. Constitution that prevent the use of Sharia law.

The First Amendment says that there should be no establishment of religion. Sharia law is based on one religion's interpretation of rights. The First Amendment prohibits the establishment of any national religion (including Islam).

The Eighth Amendment prohibits "cruel and unusual punishment." Most Americans would consider the penalties handed down under Sharia law to be cruel and unusual.

The Fourteenth Amendment guarantees each citizen equal protection under the Constitution. Sharia law does not treat men and women equally, nor does it treat Muslims and non-Muslims equally. This also violates the Constitution.

These are just a few ways to argue against Sharia law. As Christians, we need discernment to understand the religion of Islam, and boldness to address the topic of radical Islam with biblical convictions.

Notes

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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 H₂O. . . . 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 is 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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26. 1 Timothy 2:3.

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Mormon Beliefs about Prophecy, Heaven, and Celestial Marriage

Russ Wise demonstrates some ways in which Mormonism cannot be true because of false prophecies. He also examines their beliefs about three levels of heaven, and the concept of being married for eternity, even though scripture contradicts these doctrines.

The Book of Mormon: A Superior Revelation or a Hoax?

Missionaries for the Mormon Church have converted millions of people to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by

convincing them that the Book of Mormon is true and superior to the Bible.

The Book of Mormon claims to be history of “the period from 600 BC to 421 AD during which the Nephite, Lamanite, and Mulekite civilizations flourished.”[\[1\]](#) It is also believed by the Mormon Church that these civilizations were descendants of Lehi, a Jew who led a colony of people from Jerusalem to the Americas in 600 BC.

The Nephite prophet Mormon and his son Moroni played major roles in bringing the lost story of these civilizations to light. War broke out among the descendants of Lehi, and as they were about to annihilate one another, Mormon wrote their history on golden plates and hid them in the hill Cumorah in New York state.

According to Bruce R. McConkie, a Mormon scholar, the Book of Mormon has three purposes:

- *To bear record of Christ and clarify his Divine Sonship and mission, proving that he is the Redeemer and Savior;*
- *To teach the doctrines of the gospel in such a perfect way that the plan of salvation will be clearly revealed;*
- *To stand as a witness that Joseph Smith was the Lord’s anointed through whom the latter-day work of restoration would be accomplished.*[\[2\]](#) (According to the Mormon Church, Christianity was corrupted after the death of the last apostle and Joseph Smith was anointed by God to restore the true church.)

Referring to the Book of Mormon, the Mormon apostle Orson Pratt, said: “This book must be either true or false. If true, it is one of the most important messages ever sent from God... If false, it is one of the most cunning, wicked...impositions ever palmed upon the world, calculated to deceive and ruin

millions.”[{3}](#)

It is imperative that we recognize the Book of Mormon for what it is and challenge those who continue to perpetuate the false idea that it is true. In order for the Book of Mormon to be accepted as divine truth, the Bible must be discredited.

The book of 2 Nephi in the Book of Mormon says: “Because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words.”[{4}](#) Joseph Smith said, “I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.”[{5}](#)

The underlying problem with the Book of Mormon is that there is absolutely no objective, external evidence for much of the information found in the book. And the information that is trustworthy was plagiarized right out of the King James Bible. Beyond the fact that the Book of Mormon cannot be verified externally, the potential convert is told that the Smithsonian Institution uses the Book of Mormon to aid its archaeological work. However, in a letter referring to this Mormon claim, the Smithsonian Institution Department of Anthropology states: “The Smithsonian Institution has never used the Book of Mormon in any way as a scientific guide. Smithsonian archaeologists see no connection between the archeology of the New World and the subject matter of the Book.”[{6}](#)

Joseph Fielding Smith, the tenth President of the Church, has unintentionally summarized my thoughts about the Book of Mormon exactly as he stated, “If Joseph Smith was a deceiver, who willfully attempted to mislead the people, then he should be exposed; his claims should be refuted, and his doctrines shown to be false, for the doctrines of an impostor cannot be made to harmonize in all particulars with divine truth. If his claims and declarations were built upon fraud and deceit, there would appear many errors and contradictions which would be easy to detect.”[{7}](#)

It is interesting to note that there have been close to four thousand corrections made in the Book of Mormon to date. What an epitaph for a “perfect” book of divine teaching.

Prophecies That Didn't Come True

Mormon writers have influenced millions of people over the years and have been instrumental in developing less than truthful statements concerning the church. These statements, or prophecies, must be looked at carefully, then refuted when they miss the mark of legitimacy.

It is imperative that we understand the biblical teaching regarding a prophet. Deuteronomy 18:20-22 says:

But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?’ When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken, the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. . .”{8}

If the prophecy does not come to pass, the scripture is plain in stating that the individual is not a prophet of God and that he should be put to death. There is no acceptable average of correctness other than 100% correct, 100% of the time. Anything less had grave consequences.

The president of the Mormon Church is known as the “Prophet, Seer, and Revelator” of the church. It is their duty to divine the word of God, to be His mouthpiece.

Perhaps the most embarrassing prophecy that did not come to pass is the prophecy regarding the temple in Zion. The Doctrine and Covenants, a later book of revelations given by Joseph Smith, says this about the temple:

“Verily this is the word of the Lord, that the city New Jerusalem shall be built by the gathering of the saints, beginning at this place... For verily this generation shall not all pass away until an house shall be built unto the Lord. . .”[{9}](#)

This prophecy was in reference to Jackson County, Missouri. It is interesting to note that this prophecy was given in September of 1832 and that there has not been a temple built as of this date nor within the generation of those living in 1832.

Another prophecy related to the temple in Zion is found in Doctrine and Covenants 97:19. It states: “And the nations of the earth shall honor her, and shall say: Surely Zion is the city of our God, and surely Zion cannot fall, neither be moved out of her place, for God is there. . .”

Once again it is noteworthy that a temple was not built in Missouri, but that a temple WAS built in Salt Lake City. If the prophecy is true, Salt Lake City cannot be Zion. However, if Salt Lake City is indeed Zion, the prophecy is utterly false.

On another occasion, February 14, 1835, Joseph Smith said that “it was the will of God that those who went to Zion, with a determination to lay down their lives, if necessary, should be ordained to the ministry, and go forth to prune the vineyard for the last time, or the coming of the Lord, which was nigh even fifty-six years should wind up the scene.”[{10}](#) The truth regarding this prophecy that Jesus would return in 56 years is obvious to any living today. His bride is yet waiting His return after one hundred and fifty-five years.

The fact that these and other prophecies of Joseph Smith were not fulfilled leads us to only one conclusion in light of Deuteronomy 18:20-22. Joseph Smith was indeed a false prophet.

The Great Restoration or the Great Fabrication?

The Book of Mormon tells us that many of the truths of the early church were lost when the church fell into apostasy. Joseph Smith taught that after the death of Jesus Christ and the apostles, there was a total apostasy. They further teach that the churches of our day do not represent Christ and have, in fact, done away with many of the original truths of the early church. The Book of Mormon states, “they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away.”[{11}](#)

One major aspect of the restoration which Joseph Smith was called to establish was that of the priesthoods—both the Aaronic and the Melchizedek.

The Mormon Missionary Handbook indicates that the only ones who have the authority to baptize new believers are those who hold the Priesthood in the Mormon Church. However, when one takes a critical look, it is obvious that the concept of reintroducing the priesthoods into the church is an unbiblical endeavor.

This is of primary importance when one realizes that the structure of the Mormon Church is based on the revelation of Joseph Smith.[{12}](#) According to the past president of the Mormon Church, Spencer W. Kimball, “The priesthood is the power and authority of God delegated to man on earth to act in all things pertaining to the salvation of men. It is the means whereby the Lord acts through men to save souls. Without this priesthood power, men are lost.”[{13}](#) Bishop H. Burke Peterson declared that the effectiveness of the priest’s authority, or “the power that comes through that authority—depends on the patterns of our lives; it depends on our righteousness.”[{14}](#) It is interesting to note that the priest’s power to do the

will of God is not given by the Holy Spirit but comes from one's personal righteousness.

David Witmer, one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, had this to say about the Priesthoods: "This matter of 'Priesthood,' since the days of Sidney Rigdon, has been the great hobby and stumbling-block of the Latter- Day Saints. Priesthood means authority; and authority is the word we should use. I do not think the word priesthood is mentioned in the New Covenant of the Book of Mormon." [\[15\]](#) Witmer goes on to say that it was in fact Sydney Rigdon who gave Joseph Smith the idea of reintroducing the Priesthoods. The Mormon Church had been operating for two full years before the establishing of this new line of authority. About two thousand followers were baptized into the church and confirmed without the advantage of a recognized priest.

David Witmer addresses his remarks to Joseph Smith as he continues his address to all believers in Christ by saying, "You have changed the revelations from the way they were first given and as they are today in the Book of Commandments.... You have changed the revelations to support the error of a President of the high priesthood.... You have altered the revelations to support you in going beyond the plain teachings of Christ in the new covenant part of the Book of Mormon." [\[16\]](#)

Not only does Joseph Smith have problems with his revelation concerning the priesthoods with the authority of the Book of Mormon and David Witmer, but the Bible does not help him either.

It is apparent that when young Joseph was plagiarizing the Bible that he did not look very closely at the book of Hebrews. If he had, he might have realized that God had sent His Son to be the eternal High Priest.

Three Chances at Heaven

Joseph Smith was a man of revelation. Perhaps the most welcome revelations from young Joseph were his new teachings about salvation. The idea that all people would receive a measure of salvation was widely received by the Mormon Church.

As well, his teaching regarding the celestial kingdom found wide acceptance. According to Bruce R. McConkie, author of *Mormon Doctrine*, "Heaven is the celestial Kingdom of God."[{17}](#) LeGrand Richards, a presiding bishop of the Mormon Church, says that we have "at least five places to which we may go after death."[{18}](#) He says we "have three heavens, paradise, and the hell so often spoken of in the scriptures. . . ."[{19}](#) Joseph Smith taught that "in the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees."[{20}](#) However, according to the Holy Bible, Joseph's teaching about man's disposition after death is anything but scriptural.

The revelation or "The Vision," as it came to be known, is found in the Doctrine and Covenants and was given to Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon on February 16, 1832.[{21}](#) This revelation was given by Jesus [{vs. 14}](#) to those individuals who will be in the first resurrection of the Firstborn. The Firstborn are those who held the priesthood.

The Celestial Kingdom is made up of three levels or degrees of heaven. The first, or the lower level of heaven, is known as the telestial glory. This degree of heaven is held for those "who received not the gospel of Christ, neither the testimony of Jesus,"[{22}](#) but who, nevertheless, did not deny the Holy Spirit. The Telestial Kingdom is for those who chose wickedness over godliness.

The second degree of heaven is the terrestrial glory. This level is held for those "who, though honorable, failed to comply with the requirements for exaltation, were blinded by the craftiness of men and unable to receive and obey the

higher laws of God.”{23} Likewise, it is for those who rejected Christ in mortal life but accepted Him afterwards.{24}

The third, or the highest level, of heaven is that of the celestial. This degree is held for those who have received the Temple ordinances. They have been married in the Temple for all time and eternity and they are gods.{25} According to James E. Talmage, they “have striven to obey all the divine commandments,. . .have accepted the testimony of Christ, obeyed ‘the laws and ordinances of the Gospel,’ and received the Holy Spirit.”{26} Therefore, they are entitled to the highest glory.

The remaining options for the individual who does not qualify for the celestial glories are paradise and perdition, for the Latter-day Saints do not believe in a hell. Joseph Smith put it this way: “There is no hell. All will find a measure of salvation.”{27}

At death the individual’s spirit goes either to paradise to later be judged and offered one of the three degrees of heaven, or his spirit is sent to perdition where it is given a chance to repent and thus gain a higher heavenly option.

Perdition, commonly known as Spirit-Prison Hell, is a temporary state even though it lasts more than a thousand years. It is interesting to note that the Book of Mormon does not seem to agree with the Doctrine and Covenants where it clearly states there is no second chance for repentance after death. Alma 34:32 states,

“For behold this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God...Do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end...if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his; therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no place

in you, and the devil hath all power over you; and this is the final state of the wicked.”{28}

Once again it becomes evident that Joseph Smith changed his mind regarding another key revelation, since the teaching of the Bible does not correspond to the changeableness of the Mormon prophet. We must conclude that Mormonism completely lacks of any biblical basis and is truly another gospel.

Celestial Marriage: Fact or Fiction?

Eternal Marriage is essential for exaltation. A key element of Mormon doctrine and the foundation for exaltation in the highest heaven is celestial marriage. Exaltation is the primary goal for each Mormon to achieve. To understand the Latter-Day Saints’ desire to enter into an eternal marriage it is important to understand the term “exaltation.”

Exaltation, according to an official Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints publication, “is eternal life, the kind of life that God lives. He lives in great glory. He is perfect. He possesses all knowledge and all wisdom. He is the father of spirit children. He is a creator. We can become gods like our Heavenly Father. This is exaltation.”{29}

We find in the Book of Moses in Mormon scriptures God saying, “This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”{30}—in other words, to help man and woman become gods and goddesses in the celestial kingdom.

“An eternal marriage must be performed by one who holds the sealing powers and authority”{31}—one who holds the priesthood authority. The marriage “must also be done in the proper place. The proper place is in one of the holy temples of our Lord. The temple is the only place this holy ordinance can be performed.”{32} Mormons believe that if they are married by any other authority the marriage is for this life only and therefore negates their opportunity for celestial exaltation.

William Clayton, Hyrum Smith's clerk, was present when Joseph Smith first announced the revelation regarding plural and celestial marriage. Clayton wrote that from Joseph he "learned that the doctrine of plural and celestial marriage is the most holy and important doctrine ever revealed to man on earth, and that without obedience to that principle no man can ever attain to the fullness of exaltation in celestial glory." {33}

This revelation was first given publicly at Nauvoo, Illinois, July 12, 1843. In May of that year Joseph revealed that "In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; and in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage]; and if he does not, he cannot obtain it." {34} Joseph goes on to reveal that "if ye abide not that covenant, then are ye damned." {35}

It has already been pointed out that the individual will receive a measure of salvation regardless of his disposition. The recurring question that remains is, Why should I subject myself to the regimen of the church (ie. the hassles) if I will receive salvation anyway? We find the answer further in the revelation. "We must be obedient to every covenant that we make in the temple of the Lord. He (God) has said that if we are true and faithful we shall pass by the angels to our exaltation. We will become gods." {36} The Mormon hopes to become a god himself but only if he is in complete compliance with the church.

It is noteworthy that the teaching that reveals the foundation for celestial marriage {exaltation} is not to be found in the Book of Mormon, the "most correct" of any book on earth. {37} Therefore, it seems that the motivation for entering into celestial marriage is not based on fact but on the possibility of being a god or a goddess.

The teachings of the Mormon church often go unchallenged and many in the church, along with a growing number outside its

doors believe it to be a Christian institution. Those in the church have in many cases been “fellowshipped”; that is, they have been catered to for the specific reason of gaining their membership in the church. Often these members have not clearly discerned the doctrine of the church.

Those outside the Mormon Church see the good works of its members and because of their lack of understanding of Christian teaching and their acute lack of knowledge regarding Mormon sources, they tend to think that the Mormon church is as Christian as the Baptists, Methodists and the Presbyterians.

Brigham Young, second President of the Mormon Church, challenged the world to test the teachings of the Latter-Day Saints. This essay is an answer to his challenge.

Notes

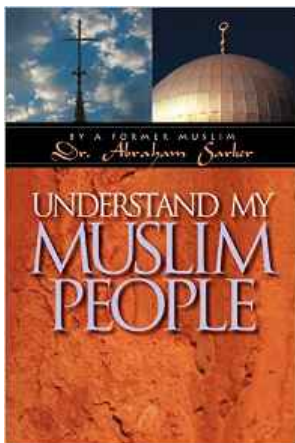
1. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1979), 98.
2. Ibid., 98-99.
3. Orson Pratt, *Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon* (Liverpool, 1851), 1-2.
4. Joseph Smith, Jr., *The Book of Mormon*, 2 Nephi 29:10 (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982).
5. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 194. See also, *The History of the Church* (Vol. 4, November 28, 1841), 461.
6. Letter from the Smithsonian Institution (SIL-76, Summer 1979).
7. *Doctrines of Salvation*, Vol. 1, p. 188.
8. *The Holy Bible*, New King James Version, Deuteronomy 18:20-22) Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1982).
9. *Doctrine and Covenants* 84:1-5 (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1968). See also verse 31.
10. *The History of the Church*, Vol. 2 (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Co., 2nd ed. revised, 1976), 182.

11. The Book of Mormon, 1 Nephi 13:26.
12. Joseph Smith, *Pearl of Great Price* 2:68-73 (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1968).
13. "The Example of Abraham," *Ensign* (June 1975):3. See also *Gospel Principles, First Quorum of the Seventy*, (1986), 103.
14. "Priesthood Authority and Power," *Ensign* (May 1976), 33.
15. David Witmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, 64.
16. *Ibid.*, 49.
17. McConkie, 348.
18. LeGrand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Co., 1950), 263.
19. *Ibid.*
20. McConkie, 348.
21. Doctrine and Covenants, 76:11-119.
22. *Ibid.*, 76:82.
23. Talmage, *Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1976), 92.
24. Doctrine and Covenants, 76:73-74.
25. Doctrine and Covenants, 76:58.
26. Talmage, 91.
27. John A. Widtsoe, *Joseph Smith: Seeker After Truth, Prophet of God* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News Press, 1951) 177-78.
28. Book of Mormon, Alma 34:32.
29. *Gospel Principles* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1978, revised 1986), 289.
30. *Ibid.*, 290. The Doctrine and Covenants, Moses 1:39.
31. *Gospel Principles*, 233.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1977), 345.
34. Doctrine and Covenants 131:1-3.
35. *Ibid.*, 132:4.
36. *Gospel Principles*, 234. See also Doctrine and Covenants 132:19-20 and the Mormon publication by Oscar W. McConkie, Jr., *God and Man* (The Corporation of the Presiding Bishop of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1963), 5.

Basic Religious Practices of Worldwide Muslims

More Cultural Research from Steve Cable

Between October 2011 and November 2012, Pew Research Center conducted a major survey of Muslims involving more than 30,000 face-to-face interviews in 26 countries across North Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Since Probe has been evaluating similar surveys about the beliefs and practices of Christians and other faiths in America, we wanted to analyze the data in this large survey to see how the beliefs and practices of Muslims in the eastern hemisphere relate to Christians in America. We also wanted to see how Muslim beliefs and practices varied across different regions. To do this, we divided the data into five geographic regions: North Africa, Middle East, Europe, the 'Stans (e.g. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan), and South Asia.



To evaluate the religious practices of Muslims, a reasonable place to start would be the Five Pillars of Islam. “Muslims hope that by completing these duties of Islam, Allah will favor them and grant them entrance into heaven.”[\[1\]](#) In other words, performing these duties are necessary but not sufficient to gain the reward of eternal life in heaven. These five pillars are:

1. Declaring "There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His prophet."
2. Praying five times each day in Arabic quoting from the Qur'an
3. Fasting during daylight hours of the month of Ramadan
4. Giving 2.5% of their income for the poor and for the cause of Islam
5. Completing the hajj, a ritual pilgrimage to Mecca

Because the hajj is a once in a lifetime event and according to the survey data is most likely to occur after the age of 60 (if at all), only the first four pillars are considered in our analysis. The results divided into age groups and regions of the world are as follows:

% Practicing Four of the Pillars of Islam					
Age	North Africa	Middle East	Eastern Europe	The 'Stans	South Asia
18 – 29	49%	41%	10%	11%	49%
30 plus	58%	57%	16%	17%	60%

As shown, the geographical groups vary significantly. The composite of all those surveyed is 40% of the respondents claim to practice these four pillars. While not miniscule, this does indicate that the vast majority of those who claim to be Muslim are not seriously attempting to gain favor with Allah by adhering to these four key pillars of the faith.

One startling thing we note from this table is that the Eastern European (e.g. Russia, Bosnia, Turkey) Muslims and those from the 'Stans do not practice the four pillars to the same degree as other areas surveyed. In those areas, less than 1 in 7 practice the four pillars, while in the other areas it is more than half of the people. In general, Eastern European Muslims and those in the 'Stans do not practice the four pillars, much less the five pillars, of Islam. Given this, one

may argue that the Islam practiced in these parts of the world is not Islam at all, but rather another religion with a historical name, Islam, which may at some point in the past been the dominant religion.

The second fact that stands out in the table is the difference in practice versus age. From our earlier blog post on religious beliefs, the results showed very little difference between those ages 18 – 29 and the rest of the respondents, but this is not the case for religious practice. In Eastern Europe and the 'Stans those over the age of 30 are more than 50% more likely to practice the four pillars than are those aged 18 to 29. In the other areas of North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, the older adults are 18% to 37% more likely to practice the key pillars of Islam. In fact, if we compare those ages 18 to 29 with those 60 and older these ratios grow to more than 150% and 31% to 50% respectively.

It appears that the younger adults are not as committed to carrying out these practices as their elders. We can only speculate on whether this difference will diminish as they get older. This difference may in fact shrink over time because, as noted earlier, there is virtually no difference in the percent of young adults and the percent of older adults who profess a Muslim worldview.

The results found for this aspect of religious practice are generally consistent with those reported for [religious beliefs](#) (i.e., a Muslim worldview). We find the majority of those who claim to be Muslim to NOT hold a Muslim worldview and do not practice the five pillars of Islam. In our next post, we will compare Muslim religious practice with Christian religious practice in the United States.

Note

1. Dr. Abraham Sarkar, *Understand My Muslim People*, page 169, Barclay Press, 2004.

Acknowledgement: The World's Muslims Data Set, 2012, Pew Research Center – Religion & Public Life. The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by James Bell, Director of International Survey Research, Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life.

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The Pagan Connection: Did Christianity Borrow from the Mystery Religions?

Dr. Pat Zukeran examines the myths from mystery religions which are sometimes argued to be the source of our Gospel accounts of Jesus. He finds that any such connection is extremely weak and does not detract from the reliability of the gospel message.

One of the popular ideas being promoted today especially on the internet is the idea that the miracle stories of Jesus were borrowed from ancient pagan myths. Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy write in their book *The Laughing Jesus*, "Each mystery religion taught its own version of the myth of the dying and resurrecting Godman, who was known by different names in different places. In Egypt, where the mysteries began, he was Osiris. In Greece he became Dionysus, in Asia Minor he is known as Attis, in Syria he is Adonis, in Persia he is Mithras, in Alexandria he is Serapis, to name a few." [\[1\]](#)

Proponents of this idea point out that there are several parallels between these pagan myths and the story of Jesus Christ. Parallels including a virgin birth, a divine Son of God, the god dying for mankind, resurrection from the dead, and others are cited. Skeptics allege that Christianity did not present any unique teaching, but borrowed the majority of its tenets from the mystery religions.



Indeed, some of the alleged parallels appear to be quite striking. One example is the god Mithras. This myth teaches that Mithras was born of a virgin in a cave, that he was a traveling teacher with twelve disciples, promised his disciples eternal life, and sacrificed himself for the world. The god Dionysius miraculously turns water into wine. The Egyptian god Osiris is killed and then resurrects from the dead.

This position was taught in the nineteenth century by the History of Religions School, but by the mid-twentieth century this view was shown to be false and it was abandoned even by those who believed Christianity was purely a natural religion.^{2} Ron Nash wrote, “During a period of time running roughly from about 1890 to 1940, scholars often alleged that primitive Christianity had been heavily influenced by Platonism, Stoicism, the pagan religions, or other movements in the Hellenistic world. Largely as a result of a series of scholarly books and articles written in rebuttal, allegations of early Christianity’s dependence on its Hellenistic environment began to appear much less frequently in the publications of Bible scholars and classical scholars. Today most Bible scholars regard the question as a dead issue.”^{3}

Despite the fact that many of the arguments were rejected, this theory has once again emerged through the popular writings of skeptics.

What makes Christianity unique among the world religions is

that it is a historical faith based on the historical person of Christ who lived a miraculous life. In what follows, we will examine Christianity to see if it teaches a unique Savior or if it is simply a copy of these pagan myths.

Fallacies of the Theory

There are several flaws with the theory that Christianity isn't unique. New Testament scholars Ed Komoszewski, James Sawyer, and Dan Wallace point out several fallacies. The first is the *composite* fallacy. Proponents of this view lump together pagan religions as if they are one religion when making comparisons to Christianity. An attempt is made to show strong parallels by combining features from various religions.[{4}](#) However, when the individual myths themselves are studied, the reader soon finds major differences and very little commonality.

A second fallacy is a fallacy of *terminology*. Christian terms are used to describe pagan beliefs, and then it is concluded that there are parallel origins and meanings. Although the terms used are the same, however, there are big differences between Christian and pagan practices and definitions.[{5}](#)

A third fallacy is the *chronological* fallacy. Supporters of the theory incorrectly assume that Christianity borrowed many of its ideas from the mystery religions, but the evidence reveals it was actually the other way around. There is no archaeological evidence that mystery religions were in Palestine in the first century A.D. Jews and early Christians loathed syncretism with other religions. They were uncompromisingly monotheistic while Greeks were polytheistic. Christians also strongly defended the uniqueness of Christ (Acts 4:12). Although Christians encountered pagan religions, they opposed any adopting of foreign beliefs.[{6}](#) Ron Nash stated, "The uncompromising monotheism and the exclusiveness that the early church preached and practiced make the

possibility of any pagan inroads . . . unlikely if not impossible.”{7}

Fourth is the *intentional* fallacy. Christianity has a linear view of history. History is moving in a purposeful direction. There is a purpose for mankind’s existence; history is moving in a direction to fulfill God’s plan for the ages. The mystery religions have a cyclical view of history. History continues in a never ending cycle or repetition often linked with the vegetation cycle.{8}

Christianity gains its source from Judaism, not Greek mythology. Jesus, Paul, and the apostles appeal to the Old Testament, and you find direct teachings and fulfillments in the New Testament. Teachings such as one God, blood atonement for sin, salvation by grace, sinfulness of mankind, bodily resurrection, are sourced in Judaism and foreign to Greek mythology. The idea of resurrection was not taught in any Greek mythological work prior to the late second century A.D.{9}

Legends of the Mystery Religions

As noted above, critics of Christianity point to several parallels between Christianity and the myths of the mystery religions. However, a brief study of the legends reveals that there are few if any parallels to the life of Jesus Christ. Historians acknowledge that there are several variations to many of these myths and that they also evolved and changed under the influence of Roman culture and, later, Christianity. Historical research indicates that it was not until the third century A.D. that Christianity and the mystery religions came into real contact with one another.{10} A brief overview of some of the most popular myths reveals the lack of resemblance with Christianity.

In the matter of death and resurrection, major differences are

seen between Christianity and pagan myths. First, none of the resurrections in these myths involve the God of the universe dying a voluntary death for His creation. Only Jesus died for sins; the death of other gods was due to hunting accidents, emasculation, and other calamities. The gods in these stories die by compulsion, not by choice, sometimes in bitterness and despair, never in self-giving love.[{11}](#)

Second, Jesus died once for all (Heb. 7:27, 9:25-28), while pagan gods repeat the death and rebirth cycle yearly with the seasons.

Third, Jesus' death was not a defeat but a triumph. The New Testament's mood of victory and joy (1 Cor. 15:50-57 and Col. 2:13-15) stands in contrast to the mood of pagan myths which is dark and sorrowful over the fate of their gods.

Finally, Jesus' death was an actual event in history. Christianity insists on and defends the historical credibility of the Gospel accounts while the pagan cults make no such attempt.[{12}](#)

A popular myth that some believe parallels the resurrection of Christ is the story of Osiris. The cult of the gods Osiris and his wife Isis originated in Egypt. According to the legend, Osiris' wicked brother Set murdered him and sank his coffin to the bottom of the Nile. Isis recovered the coffin and returned it to Egypt. However, Set discovered the body, cut it into fourteen pieces, and threw the pieces into the Nile. Isis collected thirteen of the body parts and bandaged the body, making the first mummy. Osiris was transformed and became the ruler of the underworld, and exists in a state of semi-consciousness.

This legend hardly parallels the resurrection of Christ. Osiris is not resurrected from death to life. Instead he is changed into another form and lives in the underworld in a zombie state. Christ rose physically from the grave,

conquering sin and death. The body that was on the cross was raised in glory.

Resurrection Parallels

Two other popular myths compared to Christianity are those of Mithras and Attis.

There is a belief that the story of Mithras contains a death and resurrection. However, there is no teaching in early Mithraism of neither his death nor his resurrection. Ron Nash stated, "Mithraism had no concept of the death and resurrection of its god and no place for any concept of rebirth – at least during its early stages. . . . Moreover, Mithraism was basically a military cult. Therefore, one must be skeptical about suggestions that it appealed to nonmilitary people like the early Christians."[\[13\]](#)

Moreover, Mithraism flowered after Christianity, not before, so Christianity could not have copied from it. The timing is incorrect to have influenced the development of first-century Christianity. It is most likely the reverse: Christianity influenced Mithraism. Edwin Yamauchi, one of the foremost scholars on ancient Persia and Mithraism states, "The earnest mithraea are dated to the early second century. There are a handful of inscriptions that date to the early second century, but the vast majority of texts are dated after A.D. 140. Most of what we have as evidence of Mithraism comes in the second, third, and fourth centuries AD. That's basically what's wrong with the theories about Mithraism influencing the beginnings of Christianity."[\[14\]](#)

The legend of Attis was popular in the Hellenistic world. According to this legend, Cybele, also known as the mother goddess, fell in love with a young Phrygian shepherd named Attis. However, he was unfaithful to her so she caused him to go mad. In his insanity, he castrated himself and died. Cybele

mourned greatly (which caused death to enter into the world). She preserved Attis' dead body, allowing his hair to grow and little finger to move. In some versions, Attis returns to life in the form of an evergreen tree. However, there is no bodily resurrection to life. All versions teach that Attis remained dead. Any account of a resurrection of Attis does not appear till a hundred and fifty years after Christ.[\[15\]](#)

To sum up, the claim that Christianity adopted its resurrection account from the pagan mystery religions is false. There are very few parallels to the resurrection of Christ. The idea of a physical resurrection to glory is foreign to these religions, and the stories of dying a rising gods do not appear till well after Christianity.

Myths of a Virgin Birth

Let us now look-at the alleged parallels between virgin births in the mystery religions and the virgin birth of Christ. Parallels quickly break down when the facts are analyzed. In the pagan myths, the gods lust after women, take on human form, and enter into physical relationships. Also, the offspring that are produced are half human and half divine beings in contrast to Christ who is fully human and fully divine, the creator of the universe who existed from eternity past.

The alleged parallels to the virgin birth are found in the legends of Dionysus and Mithras. Dionysus is the god of wine. In this story, Zeus disguised as a man had relations with Semele and she became pregnant. In a jealous rage, Hera, Zeus' wife, attempted to burn Semele. Zeus rescued the fetus and sewed it into his thigh until the offspring, Dionysus, was born. The birth of Dionysus was the result of a sexual union of Zeus, in the form of a man, and Semele. This cannot be considered a virgin birth.

One of the popular cults of the later Roman Empire was the cult of Mithra which originated in Persia. Mithra was supposedly born when he emerged from a rock; he was carrying a knife and torch and wearing a Phrygian cap. He battled first with the sun and then with a primeval bull, thought to be the first act of creation. Mithra slew the bull, which then became the ground of life for the human race.[\[16\]](#) The birth of Mithra from a rock, born fully grown, hardly parallels the virgin birth of Christ.

New Testament scholar. Raymond Brown states that alleged virgin parallels “consistently involve a type of *hieros gamos* where a divine male, in human or other form, impregnates a woman, either through normal sexual intercourse or through some substitute form of penetration. They are not really similar to non-sexual virginal conception that is at the core of the infancy narratives, a conception where there is no male deity or element to impregnate Mary.”[\[17\]](#)

The Gospel of Luke teaches that the Holy Spirit came upon Mary, and through the power of the Most High she became pregnant. Mary had no physical relationship with a man or a deity who became a man.

Our study of the mystery religions reveals very few parallels with Christianity. For this reason, the theory that Christianity copied its major tenets from the mystery religions should be rejected.

Notes

1. Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy, *The Laughing Jesus* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2005), 55-56.
2. Ed Komoszewski, James Sawyer, and Daniel Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications: 2006), 221.
3. Lee Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2007), 167.

4. Komoszewski, Sawyer, and Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus*, 223-4.
5. Ibid., 224-6.
6. Ibid., 231-234.
7. Ronald Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks* (Dallas: Word Books, 1992), 168.
8. Komoszewski, Sawyer, and Wallace, 221.
9. Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus* (Joplin, MO.: College Press Publishing, 1997), 34.
10. Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks*, 129.
11. Norman Anderson, *Christianity and World Religions* (Downers Grove, IL :InterVarsity Press, 1984),53.
12. Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks*, 171-172.
13. Ibid., 144.
14. Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus*, 169.
15. Ibid., 177.
16. Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks*, 144.
17. Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus*, 182.

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Mormon Beliefs About the Bible and Salvation – Attacking Salvation through Christ’s Grace

Russ Wise helps us understand Mormon beliefs from a Christian worldview perspective. He looks at their core teachings on the Bible and salvation and demonstrates their inconsistency with the truths of Christianity. He concludes that Joseph Smith attempted to strip Jesus Christ of His fundamental gift to

humanity—salvation through grace.

The Foundational Vision of Joseph Smith

Mormonism has become America's most successful home-grown religion. An Examines Mormon doctrine about the Bible, Mormon scriptures, and salvation. April 1987 news brief in the *Dallas Morning News* reveals a nine percent rise in the conversion rate to Mormonism. The Mormon church boasts a four million membership in the United States and 6.2 million members worldwide. In fact, the Mormon church is doubling in size every ten years. It took 117 years for the Mormon church to reach one million members and a short five years to add a fourth million to its membership.

Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon church in 1830, declared that he was chosen by God to restore true Christianity to human kind. Think about it, Christianity was lost after the death of the last disciple; and Joseph Smith, a young man fourteen years of age would be used by God to restore the lost truths of Christianity. The young prophet was not greeted by enthusiasm but received ridicule instead.

Brigham Young, the successor to Joseph Smith said this about Mormonism: "I say to the whole world, receive the truth, no matter who presents it to you. Take up the Bible, compare the religion of the Latter-day Saints with it, and see if it will stand the test."[{1}](#)

According to Spencer W. Kimball, the past president of the church, the goal of the Mormon church is to bring light into the world and the charge to convert the people of the world to accept the truth. He stated: "This is what we want—the total membership of all the world as indicated by the Lord."[{2}](#) The Latter-day Saints are not only interested in converting the living to their truth but the dead as well.

In the mid 1820's a great revival broke out in the Methodist

Church in upstate New York and quickly spread to the Baptist and Presbyterian churches. As a new convert, young Joseph was confused as to which church he should join. Because of his unrest he went into the woods to pray for God's guidance in the matter. It was there that he saw a vision that set a new course for his life and millions of others. However, this foundation block has been re-hewn over the years.

There are no less than nine versions of this one vision. There are three versions given by Joseph Smith himself. The first version was dictated by Joseph Smith in 1838 and published in 1842. It stated that he was fourteen years of age, that God and Jesus had appeared to him and told him that all churches were wrong.^{3} Another version was dictated with portions in Joseph Smith's handwriting in 1831 or 1832. It stated that he was sixteen years of age, that Jesus had appeared and that by searching the Bible, he had found that all religions were wrong.

It's amazing to me, and I suppose you, too, that these accounts—as divergent as they are—could lend credibility to young Joseph's vision. If you were a witness of a crime and gave views as different as these, one would question your presence at the event.

Prophet David O. McKay says that: "The appearing of the Father and the Son to Joseph Smith is the foundation of this church."^{4} I find it ludicrous that so many would place their faith on such a shaky foundation. Jesus called Peter the rock and that on that rock he would build his church.

Sources of Mormon Doctrine

The Book of Mormon is believed by Mormons to be the "fullness of the everlasting gospel."^{5} If this is true, then why so many additions to it?

Mormon doctrine is primarily received by the Prophet of the

church. The Prophet Ezra Taft Benson, spoke at Brigham Young University on February 26, 1980. During his remarks he gave the current teaching regarding the absolute authority of this high office. He stated: "Keep your eye on the President of the church. If he ever tells you to do anything, and it is wrong, and you do it, the Lord will bless you for it."

The Living Prophet is the first line of authority for the Mormons. The present Prophet can overturn any prior teaching of a past Prophet, including that of Joseph Smith. Brigham Young said that (paraphrased) when compared with the living Prophet, the Bible, the Book of Mormon and other standard works of the church are nothing to him. They do not convey the word of God as does the Prophet.

President Joseph Fielding Smith declared that at every General Conference of the church the speakers are giving forth scripture that is equal to anything in the Bible or the Book of Mormon.

To contrast the teaching of this evolutionary prophet, the Bible tells us that God is an unchanging God. Malachi 3:6 says: "For I the Lord do not change..." God's character does not change; He is the same yesterday, today and forever; nor does he change his mind."

The second source of authority for the Mormon is the Doctrine and Covenants and was written after the Book of Mormon. The Doctrine and Covenants contains revelations received by Joseph Smith after the publication of the Book of Mormon. For the Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants has authority over the Book of Mormon since it reveals "latter-day" truth. It's interesting to note that there are a large number of contradictions between the two.

The History of Joseph Smith, another source of authority, states this regarding the Book of Mormon: "He said there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates. . . , he also said

that the fullness of the everlasting gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the saviour to the ancient inhabitants.”[\[6\]](#)

Let me underscore the phrase “the fullness of the everlasting gospel was contained in it.” If we can allow the English language to speak for itself, I think one would have to agree that what Joseph Smith is saying here is that the Book of Mormon is the full presentation of the everlasting gospel—that God has “said it all”—right here. If this is true, then the prophet has shot himself in the foot. Where, then, lies the authority for the Doctrine and Covenants and the other standard works of the Mormon church?

The Pearl of Great Price is made up of three books: The Book of Moses, the Book of Abraham and the writings of Joseph Smith.

The Book of Abraham is unique in that it was translated much the same way as the Book of Mormon. The Book of Abraham was translated from some ancient records from the catacombs of Egypt. Joseph Smith believed these records to be written by Abraham’s own hand and called it “The Book of Abraham.”

To shed light on the veracity of Joseph Smith’s translation, three well-known Egyptologists were allowed to give independent translations of the papyri. Each one, independent of the other, came to the same astonishing conclusion. The Book of Abraham, as translated by Joseph Smith, was a farce. He had taken one proper name and translated it into some 85 words with eleven proper names. Joseph Smith did not get even one word correct in the whole translation. However, the manuscript was plagiarized from the Egyptian “Book of Breathings.”

It is hard to reach any other conclusion than that Joseph Smith’s explanations were products of his creative imagination. If, in fact, Joseph Smith’s credibility

concerning these sources is faulty, then can we dare assume that the balance of his teaching represents the truth?

Why Mormons Reject the Bible

Mormonism has become America's most successful home-grown religion; but are they the only true church, as they believe?

The Mormons insist that they do not reject the Bible—in fact, you might have seen their missionaries use the Bible. However, they consider it only partially complete.

The *Church News*, a Mormon newspaper, carried this statement concerning the Bible: "It is the Word of God. It is not perfect. The prophet Joseph made many corrections in it." [\[7\]](#)

The Book of Mormon echoes this idea in First Nephi 13:26: "... a great and abominable church which is most abominable above all other churches; for behold, they have taken away from the gospel of the lamb many parts which are plain and most precious..."

To better understand the Mormon disregard for the Bible, we need to be aware of how they view the Christian church. The apostle Orson Pratt, in his book *The Seer* says this about the Christian community: "Both Catholics and Protestants are nothing less than the 'whore of Babylon' whom the Lord denounces by the mouth of John the Revelator as having corrupted all the earth by their fornications and wickedness." [\[8\]](#)

The Mormon church views the Christian pastor or priest as a hireling of Satan. But where did Joseph Smith get this idea?

Shortly after the religious awakening in upstate New York, Joseph Smith had a vision. In the vision he asked God which Christian church he should join. Joseph Smith writes in *The Pearl of Great Price*: "I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; the Personage who addressed me

said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight.”[{9}](#)

I believe that one could safely say that Joseph Smith considered the Christian church to be a false church. Because of this basic premise, the logical conclusion would be, if the church is false, then the source of its doctrine—the Bible—must be false as well. Therefore, one can better understand the motivation behind the eighth article of faith of the Mormon church: “We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly.”

Joseph Smith has, in effect, set the stage whereby he can rewrite the Bible,[{10}](#) or add to it, to establish his personal theology. The Mormon church believes that Joseph Smith is God’s instrument to bring about His truth, in its entire fullness.

Whenever this attitude toward Christianity and the Bible prevails, the individual is drawn away from the Bible and to the writings of Joseph Smith and the Mormon church. Orson Pratt said: “No one can tell whether even one verse of either the Old or New Testament conveys the ideas of the original author.”

An attempt at credibility is given the Book of Mormon by Joseph Smith in Volume Four of the History of the Church where he says; “I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.”[{11}](#)

In essence, Joseph Smith has attempted to strip the Bible of its authority and place that authority upon the Book of Mormon and the standard works of the Mormon church.

The Bible speaks for itself. We find in scripture that God’s word will stand forever (Isaiah 40:8), that it will never pass away even though heaven and earth will someday pass away

(Matthew 24:35).

According to 2 Timothy 3:16, the Bible is inspired by God; and 2 Peter 1:20 indicates that all scripture was written by men moved by the Holy Spirit.

God's word has withstood critics, skeptics, and others who have sought to destroy it.

Mormon Doctrine

"As man is, God once was. As God is, man can become." Is it possible that we, too, can become like God, that we can *become* God?

A chief source of doctrine for the Mormon church has been the book titled *Mormon Doctrine*[{12}](#) by the late Bruce R. McConkie. However, there are those who strongly disagree with him. The problem is simply this: McConkie contended that the true source of authority for the church is the standard works which include The Holy Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price.

The presidents of the church, however, have attempted to establish *themselves* as the final authority of the church on doctrinal matters. McConkie gives us a glimpse of the primary teachings of the church. First is the belief that, "As man is, God once was. As God is, man can become."[{13}](#) The Mormon church teaches that God was once a man and that he progressed to godhood.[{14}](#) So for the Mormon, the good news is that you too can become as God. In contrast, the Bible clearly teaches that God has been God from everlasting to everlasting (Ps. 90:2).

Another belief is that individuals have to learn how to become gods themselves.[{15}](#) The road to godhood is paved with good works, and the responsibility is squarely on the shoulders of the individual.

Another belief that has received much attention is that godhood is not for men only, but for men and women together. This doctrine has spawned the teaching that God originally intended for man and woman to be joined together throughout all eternity—that the marriage covenant was to extend beyond death. The Mormon church further teaches that the practice of marrying “until death do you part” did not originate with the Lord or his servants, but is a man made doctrine.[{16}](#) This system of holy matrimony, involving covenants as to time and eternity, is known distinctively as “celestial marriage”—the order of marriage that exists in the celestial worlds.

The apostle James E. Talmage, in his book *The Articles of Faith*, says this about those who may aspire to such a marriage: “The ordinance of celestial marriage is permitted to those members of the church only who are adjudged worthy of participation in the special blessings of the House of the Lord...”[{17}](#) The use of the word “worthy” is another indication of the works orientation of the Mormon Church.

The Bible plainly teaches in Matthew 22:30 that in the resurrection men and women are no longer given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

The fourth doctrine we will look at is: God is a resurrected man. This doctrine puts forth the idea once again that God was once a man who discovered his personal godhood and elevated himself to become a god.

Joseph Smith says: “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s.”[{18}](#) But he contradicts himself in the Book of Mormon; in Alma 31:15 he writes: “Holy, holy God; we believe that thou art God, we believe...that thou wast a spirit, and that thou art a spirit, and that thou wilt be a spirit forever.” At this point Joseph is agreeing with the Bible, for we find in John 4 that “God is a spirit.”

The problem of inconsistency arises for the Mormon church,

when Joseph Smith contradicts himself between the Book of Mormon and the other standard works of the church—inconsistencies which point to the man-made nature of the religion. On the other hand, the Holy Bible is unique in that it has incredible unity in its message, even though it was written over a span of sixteen hundred years.

Josh McDowell, a defender of the Bible, writes: “Biblical authors wrote on hundreds of controversial subjects with harmony and continuity from Genesis to Revelation. There is one unfolding story: ‘God’s redemption of man.’”[{19}](#)

The Mormon Plan of Salvation

The Mormon church teaches that it is the only hope for salvation. If this is true, then why did Jesus suffer on the cross?

For many in this world, salvation is truly a slippery slope. Oftentimes the problem is that one does not really know if he possesses it or not. One of the greatest barriers to realizing our position in Christ is that we do not have a clear understanding of the gospel. To understand the Mormon church’s teaching regarding salvation we must first realize what it believes the gospel to be.

By definition the Mormon church teaches that the gospel is the Mormon church system and its doctrine.[{20}](#) The church and its doctrine becomes the good news—their gospel.

For the Christian it’s not an organization but a Person who represents the gospel, and that Person is God’s only begotten son, Jesus Christ. It is the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ that embodies the gospel for the true Christian. Jesus is man’s savior. The Bible tells us that *JESUS* is the only way to God the Father.[{21}](#)

By contrast, Brigham Young says: “No man or woman in this dispensation will ever enter into the celestial Kingdom of God

without the consent of Joseph. . . .” “He reigns there as supreme a being in his sphere, capacity, and calling as God does in heaven.”{22} So for the Mormon, Joseph Smith has become the savior.

Volume One of Doctrines of Salvation says this about Joseph Smith: “No salvation without accepting Joseph Smith. If Joseph Smith was verily a prophet, and if he told the truth...then this knowledge is of the most vital importance to the entire world. No man can reject that testimony without incurring the most dreadful consequences, for he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.”{23}

The Mormon church teaches that all men will receive a degree of salvation and that there is no place known as hell.{24} By incorporating this doctrine into the church, they have attempted to undercut the explicit teachings of the Bible. Furthermore, the church teaches that it ALONE is the only hope for salvation. Bruce McConkie, the Mormon scholar, says this regarding salvation: “If it had not been for Joseph Smith and the restoration, there would be no salvation. There is no salvation outside of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”{25}

Many Mormons who may no longer fully believe the church’s teachings find themselves in a dilemma. They have been so persuaded that only the Mormon church offers a hope for salvation that they lose all hope for ever obtaining it. To better understand this instruction, we need to recognize the twofold approach to salvation taught in the Mormon church.

First, is general salvation. Grace comes to the Mormon by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, and there is no need for obedience to the Mormon church and its doctrine or gospel law. However, to obtain individual salvation one must meet the conditions set by the church.{26} For the Mormon, this salvation, called “eternal life,” means godhood.

For the most part, the Mormon has never clearly understood the gospel of Jesus Christ because his church has so distorted Christian teaching. The outcome of this distortion is that Joseph Smith has stripped Jesus of His gift to mankind and he, Joseph, has taken the rightful place of our Lord and Savior. The Bible simply teaches that man must humble himself and receive the work Jesus did for him at the cross. Romans 10:9 put it this way: "...if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

Notes

1. *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 16, 46.
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4. David O. McKay, *Gospel Ideals* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News Press, An Improvement Era Publication, 1953), 85.
5. Pearl of Great Price, The Writings of Joseph Smith 2:34 (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1968). See also, Doctrine and Covenants.
6. Writings of Joseph Smith 2:34.
7. *Church News* (March 6, 1983, editorial page).
8. Orson Pratt, *The Seer*.
9. Joseph Smith, The Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith 2:19.
10. James E. Talmadge, *Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1976), 2.
11. *History of the Church*. See also, William E. Berrett, *Doctrines of the Restored Church*, 325.
12. Bruce R. McConkie is perhaps the foremost Mormon scholar of this century. His book, *Mormon Doctrine*, is a pivotal book in understanding what Mormons believe.
13. Talmadge, 430. See also Oscar W. McConkie, Jr., *God and Man* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Corporation of the Presiding Bishop, 1963), 5.

14. Joseph Smith, *Times and Seasons*, Vol. 5, 613-14. See also, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 7, 333.
15. Oscar W. McConkie, Jr., 5.
16. LeGrand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Co., 1950), 193.
17. Talmage, 445.
18. Talmage, 48. See also Doctrine and Covenants 130:22.
19. Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers), 19.
20. Interview with Hyrum Dalinga, fourth generation Mormon, 1985.
21. John 14:6.
22. Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 7, 289. See also, *Doctrines of Salvation*, Vol. 1, 198-90.
23. *Doctrines of Salvation*, Vol. 1
24. Richards, 271. See also, John A. Widtsoe, *Joseph Smith, Seeker After Truth*, 177-78.
25. John Taylor, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 6.
25. *Gospel Principles* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1978, revised 1986), 291.

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Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam and Terrorism

Although the war on terror has become a household subject since September 11, 2001, we still hear many politically correct phrases. Do Muslims and Christians worship the same God? Is Islam a religion of peace? What is the true meaning of *jihad*? Kerby Anderson offers an honest, biblically-based discussion of Islam and terrorism.

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