Animal House Considers God

How would you like this introduction for your speaking engagement?

The terrazzo floor is glazed with stale, dry beer from the weekend's wild party. As students stream into the dining room, it is obvious no self-respecting cockroach would have wanted to live in the adjoining kitchen. A few composite portraits of members hang – somewhat askew – on the paneled walls. The room buzzes as the 60 men swap stories and engage in friendly banter. Then their leader gavels them to order. Welcome to the fraternity chapter meeting.

First up is a profanity-laced tirade by the president condemning two rival University of Miami fraternities and a UM campus administrator. Next, an officer blasts some members for lagging participation. A sharp crack of the gavel awakens a sleeping brother, who responds with an obscene gesture. The president declares he is stressed out and cannot wait to get away for spring break so he can get drunk and sleep with some chicks he does not know. A few minutes later he announces a speaker who has come to talk about brotherhood.

As you step up to speak, you might think, ***So, I break my back raising support to get to do this?***

Some friends, Christian campus workers at the University of Miami, lined me up to speak at this fraternity. Ken and Robert were eager to reach the campus Greek community. Of course, fraternity and sorority members have no special standing in God's eyes. But Greeks are leaders on many campuses, with significant potential influence for Christ. They often live together which helps facilitate small groups and discipleship. Ken was a member of this fraternity on another campus, as was I, and his relationships in the Miami chapter opened doors. We prayed that God would work through this meeting.

My opening joke bombed. My stories and illustrations about communication skills, conflict resolution, and brotherly love seemed to connect; they laughed and appeared more relaxed. The chapter advisor had told me that internal feuds were affecting his men. As I spoke, I was convinced the Holy Spirit had arranged this presentation on this topic for this audience at this moment. To catch a glimpse of what went on that evening, here is a bit of what the men heard.

Backfired Road Trip And Brotherly Love Quotient

I related this incident: During my freshman year in college, two other pledges and I took my fraternity big brother (an older student mentor) on a road trip. We borrowed his car (he was generous), took him to dinner, and then drove to a remote location with plans to strand him there. All went according to plan until we arrived at the remote location. Somehow, he overpowered us, grabbed the keys, and drove off, leaving **us** to find our way home. Of course, we were red-faced. Eventually, his forgiveness soothed our embarrassment.

In the same way, these men to whom I spoke could forgive when wronged, but care enough to confront when appropriate. Balancing truth and grace can be challenging.

Some questions helped them analyze their attitudes and brotherly love quotient:

1. *How often do I use biting sarcasm?*
2. *How do I act toward members whose participation lags?*
3. *Do I participate in chapter activities as I should? How is my attitude?*
4. *How do I feel about the brother who casts a vote against my favorite rushee (prospective member)?*

5. How do I relate to rushees to whom we did not extend bids to join the fraternity? Later, when I see them on campus, do I give a friendly smile and greeting? Or was all that just for rush?

*6. I am madly in love with the beautiful blond in Chemistry 101. So is another member of my chapter … and **they** are going out tonight. How do I feel toward that brother?*

Number six may be the ultimate test of brotherly love.

How does one get the internal power to love and accept others unconditionally? I related to these men that as I struggled with this question some friends suggested I consider the spiritual dimension. I learned in coming to faith as a freshman that God can provide inner power to enhance life and relationships.

The men seemed fairly attentive and were gracious in their applause. Had the Holy Spirit penetrated hearts? The men's written comments gave some clues:

- *"On target."*
- *"Very good but a bit idealistic to me."*
- *"If I did not know any better, I would have thought that you had lived here for months. You clearly know the ins and outs of fraternity life, and you hit the nail right on the head. I especially like what you said about the situation where two brothers like the same girl [sic]; it happens more than we would like to admit. Thank you."*
- *"Boring."*
- *"Very sincere. I am not the most spiritual person. But you made sense."*
- *"You read my mind."*

- *“I would be interested in receiving your articles and more about brotherhood.”*

Arrogance, wrath, and lasciviousness sometime mask empty hurting hearts.

Ken continued his ministry in that house. Two years later, the chapter gathered at 11 p.m. to hear a Christian perspective on sex. When my host and I departed after midnight, several men followed us out the door with heartfelt questions. Animal house was not a church sanctuary, but God was at work.

Lessons For Communicating In Secular Universities

Consider some lessons from this story that relate to one-on-one, small-group, and public speaking situations.

Pray

Ken, Robert, other friends, and I prayed before the outreach. The warm response was God’s answer. Wisdom and skill help, but ultimately it is God who works in hearts.

Meet on their turf

To present Christ to hardened nonbelievers in their own home might seem scary, but they feel much more comfortable there among their friends than they would in a church or a neutral campus location. Use various outreach venues as appropriate, but also go where people are. Jesus and Paul went to homes, the marketplace, synagogues, and schools.

Transcend differences

In a Greek house or dormitory, you may encounter uncomfortable scenarios: pinups, porn, drunkenness, and foul language. At a campus-wide outreach meeting in my fraternity house, one member welcomed guests while tied to a cross. Other members

heckled the speaker. The speaker responded with poise, engaging them in friendly dialogue about Jesus. We are seeking to rescue lost people who do not always feel lost. Pick your battles and learn to overlook the natural flaws of natural people so you can relate spiritual truth.

Establish personal relationships

Ken's friendships with fraternity leaders helped open doors for our meeting and for continued ministry there. That we were both members of their fraternity did not hurt. Use the opportunities you are given; but warm, personal relationships can open many doors for the gospel.

Use humor and stories

Those men could relate to the story about my backfired road trip, laughing with – and at – me. Humor can involve risk. I have studied, written about, taught, and used humor often. I also have had hilarious stories fall flat. Learn from these situations, develop recovery techniques, but realize that circumstances and specific audiences may generate different reactions. Do not be discouraged when your best zingers or illustrations bomb. Ask others to critique your presentation, but keep telling stories to connect with today's campus culture.

Connect with their situation

Learn your listeners' intellectual and emotional languages. This applies to any people group you seek to reach, whether they reside in remote forested jungles or nearby academic ones. In this case, stories about fraternity life and recognizable social situations – using terms familiar to them – helped gain and hold attention.

Connect their interests with spiritual matters

The brotherly love quotient questions helped listeners consider their need for inner strength to love

unconditionally. From that point, discussing spiritual matters, God's inner power, and my own journey to faith followed naturally. Do not simply tack the gospel onto your secular material. Show a clear connection.

Trust the Holy Spirit for long-term fruit and open doors

After Paul presented Christ to the Greek philosophers on Mars Hill, "some laughed, but others said, 'We want to hear more about this later.' … Some joined him and became believers" (Acts 17:32,34, NLT).{1} Similarly, in our attempts to reach secular students and professors, some will scorn, some will want to know more, and some will believe. As we are faithful to trust the Holy Spirit to open hearts and doors of opportunity, God will work. "The king's heart is likechannels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes" (Proverbs 21:1, NASB).{2}

Notes

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Duke Lacrosse: Ethical Reflections

Written by Rusty Wright

The Duke lacrosse story has multiple ingredients for explosive media coverage: sex, race, politics, criminal charges, sports, class, a prestigious institution the list goes on.

Like many Duke alumni, I have personal convictions about the scandal. My Duke experience was and remains positive. So I'm biased. But I'm also realistic. Houston, we have a problem.

As much of the civilized world knows, a hired African-American stripper alleged some white players raped her at a lacrosse party. The accuser attended nearby North Carolina Central University. The accused maintain their innocence. The lacrosse coach resigned. Duke cancelled the season.

During basketball season, it was often "All Duke, all the time" on America's sports pages. Through much of the Spring, it became "All Duke, all the time" on the front pages.

Nowadays at Duke, quips one professor, historical calendars are not reckoned "BC" and "AD" but "BLC" and "ALC." "Before the Lacrosse Crisis" and "After the Lacrosse Crisis."

I'm glad Duke President Richard Broadhead emphasizes the presumption of innocence in criminal law. Travels in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have exposed me to chilling stories about presuming guilt.

At an April reunion, I found the campus buzzing with controversy. Some students conveyed deep personal pain about race and gender issues. At their national tournament in May, Duke women lacrosse players wore wristbands and headbands supporting the men's team.

Broadhead commissioned an ongoing Campus Culture Initiative emphasizing responsibility and respect. In my view, he's handled a difficult situation with exceptional grace, dignity, and transparency.

What ethical lessons might come from this episode? Of course, if rape occurred, punishment should ensue.

But setting aside the rape allegations, what about the ethics of hiring a stripper? What principles should determine how we act in life?

When I was an undergraduate, a friend from the fraternity next door excitedly told me the dean had just given his fraternity permission to host a topless dancer at their Saturday night party in university housing.

Fast forward to 2006. On one television program, a woman argued that her own stripping had paid her college bills, and besides, it allowed her to exercise power over men.

Suppose you were a Duke student. Should you host or attend such a party? Hiring a stripper broke no laws. Both the players and the young woman could claim benefit. What's the harm?

A pragmatist might maintain, "In retrospect, it was more trouble than it was worth." A libertarian might assert, "Stripping's OK, if no one gets hurt." Some absolutists might say, "No. Never." Feminists could argue either side. Stripping exploits women as sex objects, a negative cultural influence. Yet a woman needs to earn a living.

Duke ethicist Elizabeth Kiss, soon to become Agnes Scott College president, recommends a starting point for answering the classic question, "How should I act?" She notes that the "Golden Rule" appears in various forms in different faith traditions.

Good point. Jesus said, “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you.”

The Jewish Talmud says, “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor.”

Muhammad said, “Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself.”

On Duke’s main quadrangle sits a plaque containing the first article of the university’s bylaws. The statement promotes truth, scholarship, freedom, tolerance, and service. It begins as follows:

“The aims of Duke University are to assert a faith in the eternal union of knowledge and religion set forth in the teachings and character of Jesus Christ, the Son of God….”

Hmmm. An ethical guideline worth considering?

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Redeeming the Da Vinci Code

Dr. Michael Gleghorn critiques The Da Vinci Code’s *theories, demonstrating that most of these theories are simply false.*

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

Introduction to *The Da Vinci Code*

Dan Brown's novel, *The Da Vinci Code*,{1} has generated a huge amount of interest from the reading public. About forty million copies have been sold worldwide.{2} And Ron Howard and Sony Pictures have brought the story to theatres.{3} To help answer some of the challenges which this novel poses to biblical Christianity, Probe has teamed up with EvanTell, an evangelism training ministry, to produce a DVD series called Redeeming *The Da Vinci Code*. The series aims to strengthen the faith of believers and equip them to share their faith with those who see the movie or have read the book.{4} I hope this article will also encourage you to use this event to witness to the truth to friends or family who have read the book or seen the movie.

Why so much fuss about a novel? The story begins with the murder of the Louvre's curator. But this curator isn't just interested in art; he's also the Grand Master of a secret society called the Priory of Sion. The Priory guards a secret that, if revealed, would discredit biblical Christianity. Before dying, the curator attempts to pass on the secret to his granddaughter Sophie, a cryptographer, and Harvard professor Robert Langdon, by leaving a number of clues that he hopes will guide them to the truth.

So what's the secret? The location and identity of the Holy Grail. But in Brown's novel, the Grail is not the cup allegedly used by Christ at the Last Supper. It's rather Mary Magdalene, the wife of Jesus, who carried on the royal bloodline of Christ by giving birth to His child! The Priory guards the secret location of Mary's tomb and serves to protect the bloodline of Jesus that has continued to this day!

Does anyone take these ideas seriously? Yes; they do. This is partly due to the way the story is written. The first word one

encounters in *The Da Vinci Code*, in bold uppercase letters, is the word "FACT." Shortly thereafter Brown writes, "All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate."{5} And the average reader, with no special knowledge in these areas, will assume the statement is true. But it's not, and many have documented some of Brown's inaccuracies in these areas.{6}

Brown also has a way of making the novel's theories about Jesus and the early church seem credible. The theories are espoused by the novel's most educated characters: a British royal historian, Leigh Teabing, and a Harvard professor, Robert Langdon. When put in the mouths of these characters, one comes away with the impression that the theories are actually true. But are they?

In this article, I'll argue that most of what the novel says about Jesus, the Bible, and the history of the early church is simply false. I'll also say a bit about how this material can be used in evangelism.

Did Constantine Embellish Our Four Gospels?

Were the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, which were later to be officially recognized as part of the New Testament canon, intentionally embellished in the fourth century at the command of Emperor Constantine? This is what Leigh Teabing, the fictional historian in *The Da Vinci Code*, suggests. At one point he states, "Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ's human traits and embellished those gospels that made Him godlike" (234). Is this true?

In a letter to the church historian Eusebius, Constantine did indeed order the preparation of "fifty copies of the sacred Scriptures."{7} But nowhere in the letter does he command that

any of the Gospels be embellished in order to make Jesus appear more godlike. And even if he had, it would have been virtually impossible to get faithful Christians to accept such accounts.

Before the reign of Constantine, the church suffered great persecution under Emperor Diocletian. It's hard to believe that the same church that had withstood this persecution would jettison their cherished Gospels and embrace embellished accounts of Jesus' life! It's also virtually certain that had Constantine tried such a thing, we'd have lots of evidence for it in the writings of the church fathers. But we have none. Not one of them mentions an attempt by Constantine to alter any of our Gospels. And finally, to claim that the leaders of the fourth century church, many of whom had suffered persecution for their faith in Christ, would agree to join Constantine in a conspiracy of this kind is completely unrealistic.

One last point. We have copies of the four Gospels that are significantly earlier than Constantine and the Council of Nicaea (or Nicea). Although none of the copies are complete, we do have nearly complete copies of both Luke and John in a codex dated between A.D. 175 and 225—at least a hundred years before Nicaea. Another manuscript, dating from about A.D. 200 or earlier, contains most of John's Gospel.{8} But why is this important?

First, we can compare these pre-Nicene manuscripts with those that followed Nicaea to see if any embellishment occurred. None did. Second, the pre-Nicene versions of John's Gospel include some of the strongest declarations of Jesus' deity on record (e.g. 1:1-3; 8:58; 10:30-33). That is, the most explicit declarations of Jesus' deity in any of our Gospels are already found in manuscripts that pre-date Constantine by more than a hundred years!

If you have a non-Christian friend who believes these books

were embellished, you might gently refer them to this evidence. Then, encourage them to read the Gospels for themselves and find out who Jesus really is.

But what if they think these sources can't be trusted?

Can We Trust the Gospels?

Although there's no historical basis for the claim that Constantine embellished the New Testament Gospels to make Jesus appear more godlike, we must still ask whether the Gospels are reliable sources of information about Jesus. According to Teabing, the novel's fictional historian, "Almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false" (235). Is this true? The answer largely depends on the reliability of our earliest biographies of Jesus—the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Each of these Gospels was written in the first century A.D. Although they are technically anonymous, we have fairly strong evidence from second century writers such as Papias (c. A.D. 125) and Irenaeus (c. A.D. 180) for ascribing each Gospel to its traditional author. If their testimony is true (and we've little reason to doubt it), then Mark, the companion of Peter, wrote down the substance of Peter's preaching. And Luke, the companion of Paul, carefully researched the biography that bears his name. Finally, Matthew and John, two of Jesus' twelve disciples, wrote the books ascribed to them. If this is correct, then the events recorded in these Gospels "are based on either direct or indirect eyewitness testimony."{9}

But did the Gospel writers intend to reliably record the life and ministry of Jesus? Were they even interested in history, or did their theological agendas overshadow any desire they may have had to tell us what really happened? Craig Blomberg, a New Testament scholar, observes that the prologue to Luke's Gospel "reads very much like prefaces to other generally

trusted historical and biographical works of antiquity." He further notes that since Matthew and Mark are similar to Luke in terms of genre, "it seems reasonable that Luke's historical intent would closely mirror theirs."{10} Finally, John tells us that he wrote his Gospel so that people might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing they might have life in His name (20:31). While this statement admittedly reveals a theological agenda, Blomberg points out that "if you're going to be convinced enough to believe, the theology has to flow from accurate history."{11}

Interestingly, the disciplines of history and archaeology are a great help in corroborating the general reliability of the Gospel writers. Where these authors mention people, places, and events that can be checked against other ancient sources, they are consistently shown to be quite reliable. We need to let our non-Christian friends know that we have good grounds for trusting the New Testament Gospels and believing what they say about Jesus.

But what if they ask about those Gospels that didn't make it into the New Testament? Specifically, what if they ask about the Nag Hammadi documents?

The Nag Hammadi Documents

Since their discovery in 1945, there's been much interest in the Nag Hammadi texts. What are these documents? When were they written, and by whom, and for what purpose? According to Teabing, the historian in *The Da Vinci Code*, the Nag Hammadi texts represent "the earliest Christian records" (245). These "unaltered gospels," he claims, tell the real story about Jesus and early Christianity (248). The New Testament Gospels are allegedly a later, corrupted version of these events.

The only difficulty with Teabing's theory is that it's wrong. The Nag Hammadi documents are not "the earliest Christian

records." Every book in the New Testament is earlier. The New Testament documents were all written in the first century A.D. By contrast, the dates for the Nag Hammadi texts range from the second to the third century A.D. As Darrell Bock observes in *Breaking The Da Vinci Code*, "The bulk of this material is a few generations removed from the foundations of the Christian faith, a vital point to remember when assessing the contents."{12}

What do we know about the contents of these books? It is generally agreed that the Nag Hammadi texts are Gnostic documents. The key tenet of Gnosticism is that salvation comes through secret knowledge. As a result, the Gnostic Gospels, in striking contrast to their New Testament counterparts, place almost no value on the death and resurrection of Jesus. Indeed, Gnostic Christology had a tendency to separate the human Jesus from the divine Christ, seeing them as two distinct beings. It was not the divine Christ who suffered and died; it was merely the human Jesus—or perhaps even Simon of Cyrene.{13} It didn't matter much to the Gnostics because in their view the death of Jesus was irrelevant for attaining salvation. What was truly important was not the death of the man Jesus but the secret knowledge brought by the divine Christ. According to the Gnostics, salvation came through a correct understanding of this secret knowledge.{14}

Clearly these doctrines are incompatible with the New Testament teaching about Christ and salvation (e.g. Rom. 3:21-26; 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 15:3-11; Tit. 2:11-14). Ironically, they're also incompatible with Teabing's view that the Nag Hammadi texts "speak of Christ's ministry in very human terms" (234). The Nag Hammadi texts actually present Christ as a divine being, though quite differently from the New Testament perspective.{15}

Thus, the Nag Hammadi texts are both later than the New Testament writings and characterized by a worldview that is entirely alien to their theology. We must explain to our non-

Christian friends that the church fathers exercised great wisdom in rejecting these books from the New Testament.

But what if they ask us how it was decided what books to include?

The Formation of the New Testament Canon

In the early centuries of Christianity, many books were written about the teachings of Jesus and His apostles. Most of these books never made it into the New Testament. They include such titles as The Gospel of Philip, The Acts of John, and The Apocalypse of Peter. How did the early church decide what books to include in the New Testament and what to reject? When were these decisions made, and by whom? According to the Teabing, "The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by . . . Constantine the Great" (231). Is this true?

The early church had definite criteria that had to be met for a book to be included in the New Testament. As Bart Ehrman observes, a book had to be ancient, written close to the time of Jesus. It had to be written either by an apostle or a companion of an apostle. It had to be consistent with the orthodox understanding of the faith. And it had to be widely recognized and accepted by the church.{16} Books that didn't meet these criteria weren't included in the New Testament.

When were these decisions made? And who made them? There wasn't an ecumenical council in the early church that officially decreed that the twenty-seven books now in our New Testament were the right ones.{17} Rather, the canon gradually took shape as the church recognized and embraced those books that were inspired by God. The earliest collections of books "to circulate among the churches in the first half of the second century" were our four Gospels and the letters of Paul.{18} Not until the heretic Marcion published his expurgated version of the New Testament in about A.D. 144 did

church leaders seek to define the canon more specifically.{19}

Toward the end of the second century there was a growing consensus that the canon should include the four Gospels, Acts, the thirteen Pauline epistles, "epistles by other 'apostolic men' and the Revelation of John."{20} The Muratorian Canon, which dates toward the end of the second century, recognized every New Testament book except Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, and 3 John. Similar though not identical books were recognized by Irenaeus in the late second century and Origen in the early third century. So while the earliest listing of all the books in our New Testament comes from Athanasius in A.D. 367, there was widespread agreement on most of these books (including the four Gospels) by the end of the second century. By sharing this information "with gentleness and respect" (1 Pet. 3:15), we can help our friends see that the New Testament canon did not result from a decision by Constantine.

Who Was Mary Magdalene? (Part 1)

Mary Magdalene, of course, is a major figure in *The Da Vinci Code.* Let's take a look at Mary, beginning by addressing the unfortunate misconception that she was a prostitute. Where did this notion come from? And why do so many people believe it?

According to Leigh Teabing, the popular understanding of Mary Magdalene as a prostitute "is the legacy of a smear campaign . . . by the early Church." In Teabing's view, "The Church needed to defame Mary . . . to cover up her dangerous secret—her role as the Holy Grail" (244). Remember, in this novel the Holy Grail is not the cup used by Jesus at the Last Supper. Instead it's Mary Magdalene, who's alleged to have been both Jesus' wife and the one who carried His royal bloodline in her womb.

How should we respond to this? Did the early church really

seek to slander Mary as a prostitute in order to cover up her intimate relationship with Jesus? The first recorded instance of Mary Magdalene being misidentified as a prostitute occurred in a sermon by Pope Gregory the Great in A.D. 591.{21} Most likely, this wasn't a deliberate attempt to slander Mary's character. Rather, Gregory probably misinterpreted some passages in the Gospels, resulting in his incorrectly identifying Mary as a prostitute.

For instance, he may have identified the unnamed sinful woman in Luke 7, who anointed Jesus' feet, with Mary of Bethany in John 12, who also anointed Jesus' feet shortly before His death. This would have been easy to do because, although there are differences, there are also many similarities between the two separate incidents. If Gregory thought the sinful woman of Luke 7 was the Mary of John 12, he may then have mistakenly linked this woman with Mary Magdalene. Interestingly, Luke mentions Mary Magdalene for the first time at the beginning of chapter 8, right after the story of Jesus' anointing in Luke 7. Since the unnamed woman in Luke 7 was likely guilty of some kind of sexual sin, if Gregory thought this woman was Mary Magdalene, then it wouldn't be too great a leap to infer she was a prostitute.

If you're discussing the novel with someone who is hostile toward the church, don't be afraid to admit that the church has sometimes made mistakes. We can agree that Gregory was mistaken when he misidentified Mary as a prostitute. But we must also observe that it's quite unlikely that this was part of a smear campaign by the early church. We must remind our friends that Christians make mistakes—and even sin—just like everyone else (Rom. 3:23). The difference is that we've recognized our need for a Savior from sin. And in this respect, we're actually following in the footsteps of Mary Magdalene (John 20:1-18)!

Who Was Mary Magdalene? (Part 2)

What do our earliest written sources reveal about the real Mary Magdalene? According to Teabing, Mary was the wife of Jesus, the mother of His child, and the one whom He intended to establish the church after His death (244-48). In support of these theories, Teabing appeals to two of the Gnostic Gospels: The Gospel of Philip and The Gospel of Mary [Magdalene]. Let's look first at The Gospel of Mary.

The section of this Gospel quoted in the novel presents an incredulous apostle Peter who simply can't believe that the risen Christ has secretly revealed information to Mary that He didn't reveal to His male disciples. Levi rebukes Peter: "If the Saviour made her worthy, who are you . . . to reject her? Surely the Saviour knows her very well. That is why he loved her more than us" (247).

What can we say about this passage? First, we must observe that nowhere in this Gospel are we told that Mary was Jesus' wife or the mother of His child. Second, many scholars think this text should probably be read symbolically, with Peter representing early Christian orthodoxy and Mary representing a form of Gnosticism. This Gospel is probably claiming that "Mary" (that is, the Gnostics) has received divine revelation, even if "Peter" (that is, the orthodox) can't believe it.{22} Finally, even if this text should be read literally, we have little reason to think it's historically reliable. It was likely composed sometime in the late second century, about a hundred years after the canonical Gospels.{23} So, contrary to what's implied in the novel, it certainly wasn't written by Mary Magdalene—or any of Jesus' other original followers.{24}

If we want reliable information about Mary, we must turn to our earliest sources—the New Testament Gospels. These sources tell us that Mary was a follower of Jesus from the town of Magdala. After Jesus cast seven demons out of her, she (along with other women) helped support His ministry (Luke 8:1-3).

She witnessed Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, and was the first to see the risen Christ (Matt. 27:55-61; John 20:11-18). Jesus even entrusted her with proclaiming His resurrection to His male disciples (John 20:17-18). In this sense, Mary was an "apostle" to the apostles.{25} This is all the Gospels tell us about Mary.{26} We can agree with our non-Christian friends that she was a very important woman. But we must also remind them that there's nothing to suggest that she was Jesus' wife, or that He intended her to lead the church.

All this aside, someone who's read *The Da Vinci Code* might still have questions about The Gospel of Philip? Doesn't this text indicate that Mary and Jesus were married?

Was Jesus Married? (Part 1)

Undoubtedly, the strongest textual evidence that Jesus was married comes from The Gospel of Philip. So it's not surprising that Leigh Teabing, should appeal to this text. The section of this Gospel quoted in the novel reads as follows:

> *And the companion of the Saviour is Mary Magdalene. Christ loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on her mouth. The rest of the disciples were offended by it and expressed disapproval. They said to him, "Why do you love her more than all of us?" (246).*

Now, notice that the first line refers to Mary as the companion of the Savior. In the novel, Teabing clinches his argument that Jesus and Mary were married by stating, "As any Aramaic scholar will tell you, the word companion, in those days, literally meant spouse" (246). This sounds pretty convincing. Was Jesus married after all?

When discussing this issue with a non-Christian friend, point

out that we must proceed carefully here. The Gospel of Philip was originally written in Greek.{27} Therefore, what the term "companion" meant in Aramaic is entirely irrelevant. Even in the Coptic translation found at Nag Hammadi, a Greek loan word (*koinonos*) lies behind the term translated "companion". Darrell Bock observes that this is "not the typical . . . term for 'wife'" in Greek.{28} Indeed, koinonos is most often used in the New Testament to refer to a "partner." Luke uses the term to describe James and John as Peter's business partners (Luke 5:10). So contrary to the claim of Teabing, the statement that Mary was Jesus' companion does not at all prove that she was His wife.

But what about the following statement: "Christ loved her . . . and used to kiss her often on her mouth"?

First, this portion of the manuscript is damaged. We don't actually know where Christ kissed Mary. There's a hole in the manuscript at that place. Some believe that "she was kissed on her cheek or forehead since either term fits in the break."{29} Second, even if the text said that Christ kissed Mary on her mouth, it wouldn't necessarily mean that something sexual is in view. Most scholars agree that Gnostic texts contain a lot of symbolism. To read such texts literally, therefore, is to misread them. Finally, regardless of the author's intention, this Gospel wasn't written until the second half of the third century, over two hundred years after the time of Jesus.{30} So the reference to Jesus kissing Mary is almost certainly not historically reliable.

We must show our non-Christian friends that The Gospel of Philip offers insufficient evidence that Jesus was married. But what if they've bought into the novel's contention that it would have been odd for Jesus to be single?

Was Jesus Married? (Part 2)

The two most educated characters in *The Da Vinci Code* claim that an unmarried Jesus is quite improbable. Leigh Teabing says, "Jesus as a married man makes infinitely more sense than our standard biblical view of Jesus as a bachelor" (245). Robert Langdon, Harvard professor of Religious Symbology, concurs:

> *Jesus was a Jew, and the social decorum during that time virtually forbid a Jewish man to be unmarried. According to Jewish custom, celibacy was condemned. . . . If Jesus were not married, at least one of the Bible's Gospels would have mentioned it and offered some explanation for His unnatural state of bachelorhood (245).*

Is this true? What if our non-Christian friends want a response to such claims?

In his excellent book *Breaking The Da Vinci Code*, Darrell Bock persuasively argues that an unmarried Jesus is not at all improbable.{31} Of course, it's certainly true that most Jewish men of Jesus' day did marry. It's also true that marriage was often viewed as a fundamental human obligation, especially in light of God's command to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Gen. 1:28). Nevertheless, by the first century there were recognized, and even lauded, exceptions to this general rule.

The first century Jewish writer, Philo of Alexandria, described the Essenes as those who "repudiate marriage . . . for no one of the Essenes ever marries a wife."{32} Interestingly, the Essenes not only escaped condemnation for their celibacy, they were often admired. Philo also wrote, "This now is the enviable system of life of these Essenes, so that not only private individuals but even mighty kings,

admiring the men, venerate their sect, and increase . . . the honors which they confer on them."{33} Such citations clearly reveal that not all Jews of Jesus' day considered marriage obligatory. And those who sought to avoid marriage for religious reasons were often admired rather than condemned.

It may be helpful to remind your friend that the Bible nowhere condemns singleness. Indeed, it praises those who choose to remain single to devote themselves to the work of the Lord (e.g. 1 Cor. 7:25-38). Point your friend to Matthew 19:12, where Jesus explains that some people "have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven" (NIV). Notice His conclusion, "The one who can accept this should accept it." It's virtually certain that Jesus had accepted this. He had renounced marriage to fully devote Himself to the work of His heavenly Father. What's more, since there was precedent in the first century for Jewish men to remain single for religious reasons, Jesus' singleness would not have been condemned. Let your friend know that, contrary to the claims of *The Da Vinci Code*, it would have been completely acceptable for Jesus to be unmarried.

Did Jesus' Earliest Followers Proclaim His Deity?

We've considered *The Da Vinci Code*'s claim that Jesus was married and found it wanting. Mark Roberts observed "that most proponents of the marriage of Jesus thesis have an agenda. They are trying to strip Jesus of his uniqueness, and especially his deity."{34} This is certainly true of *The Da Vinci Code*. Not only does it call into question Jesus' deity by alleging that He was married, it also maintains that His earliest followers never even believed He was divine! According to Teabing, the doctrine of Christ's deity originally resulted from a vote at the Council of Nicaea. He further asserts, "until that moment in history, Jesus was

viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet . . . a great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless" (233). Did Jesus' earliest followers really believe that He was just a man? If our non-Christian friends have questions about this, let's view it as a great opportunity to tell them who Jesus really is!

The Council of Nicaea met in A.D. 325. By then, Jesus' followers had been proclaiming His deity for nearly three centuries. Our earliest written sources about the life of Jesus are found in the New Testament. These first century documents repeatedly affirm the deity of Christ. For instance, in his letter to the Colossians, the apostle Paul declared, "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (2:9; see also Rom. 9:5; Phil. 2:5-11; Tit. 2:13). And John wrote, "In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word was God . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (1:1, 14).

There are also affirmations of Jesus' deity in the writings of the pre-Nicene church fathers. In the early second century, Ignatius of Antioch wrote of "our God, Jesus the Christ."{35} Similar affirmations can be found throughout these writings. There's even non-Christian testimony from the second century that Christians believed in Christ's divinity. Pliny the Younger wrote to Emperor Trajan, around A.D. 112, that the early Christians "were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day . . . when they sang . . . a hymn to Christ, as to a god."{36}

If we humbly share this information with our non-Christian friends, we can help them see that Christians believed in Christ's deity long before the Council of Nicaea. We might even be able to explain why Christians were so convinced of His deity that they were willing to die rather than deny it. If so, we can invite our friends to believe in Jesus for themselves. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish

but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Notes

1. Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).
2. See Dan Brown's official website at www.danbrown.com/meet_dan/ (February 1, 2006).
3. See the Sony Pictures website at www.sonypictures.com/movies/thedavincicode/ (February 1, 2006).
4. More information is available about the series at www.probe.org.
5. Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, 1.
6. For example, see Sandra Miesel, "Dismantling The Da Vinci Code," at www.crisismagazine.com/september2003/feature1.htm and James Patrick Holding, "Not InDavincible: A Review and Critique of The Da Vinci Code," at www.answers.org/issues/davincicode.html.
7. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Reprint. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1952), 1:549, cited in Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible: Revised and Expanded* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 282.
8. For more information see Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible,* 390.
9. Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1998), 25.
10. Ibid., 39-40.
11. Ibid., 40.
12. Darrell Bock, *Breaking The Da Vinci Code* (n.p.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004), 52 (pre-publication manuscript copy).
13. Ibid., 62-63. See also *The Coptic Apocalypse of Peter and The Second Treatise of the Great Seth* in Bart Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It Into The New Testament*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 78-86.
14. For example, *The Coptic Gospel of Thomas* (saying 1), in

Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures,* 20.
15. Bock, *Breaking The Da Vinci Code,* 63.
16. Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: Christian Scriptures and the Battles Over Authentication* (Chantilly, Virginia: The Teaching Company: Course Guidebook, part 2, 2002), 37.
17. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures,* 341.
18. F.F. Bruce, "Canon," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels,* Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall, eds. (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 95.
19. Ibid., 95-96.
20. Ibid., 96.
21. Darrell Bock, *Breaking The Da Vinci Code* (n.p. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004), 25-26 (pre-publication manuscript copy). I have relied heavily on Dr. Bock's analysis in this section.
22. Ibid., 116-17.
23. Bart Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*, 35.
24. Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*. On page 247 we read, "Sophie had not known a gospel existed in Magdalene's words."
25. An "apostle" can simply refer to "one sent" as an envoy or messenger. Mary was an "apostle" in this sense, since she was sent by Jesus to tell the disciples of His resurrection.
26. For more information see Bock, *Breaking The Da Vinci Code,* 16-18.
27. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures,* 19.
28. Bock, *Breaking The Da Vinci Code,* 22.
29. Ibid., 21.
30. Ibid., 20.
31. In this section I have relied heavily on chapter 3 of Bock, *Breaking The Da Vinci Code,* pp. 40-49 (pre-publication copy).
32. Philo, Hypothetica, 11.14-17, cited in Bock, *Breaking The Da Vinci Code,* 43.
33. Ibid., 44.
34. Mark D. Roberts, "Was Jesus Married? A Careful Look at the Real Evidence," at www.markdroberts.com/htmfiles/resources/jesusmarried.htm,

January, 2004.
35. Ignatius of Antioch, “Ephesians,” 18:2, cited in Jack N. Sparks, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. Robert M. Grant (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1978), 83.
36. Pliny, *Letters,* transl. by William Melmoth, rev. by W.M.L. Hutchinson (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1935), vol. II, X:96, cited in Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 199.

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Crime and Punishment – A Christian View of Dostoevsky’s Classic Novel

Michael Gleghorn looks at the famous novel through a Christian worldview lens to see what truths Dostoevsky may have for us. We learn that this great novel records the fall of man into a degraded state but ends with the beginning of his restoration through the ministry of a selfless, Christian woman.

Introduction and Overview

In 1866 the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky published *Crime and Punishment*, one of his greatest novels. It’s a penetrating study of the psychology of sin, guilt, and redemption, and it haunts the reader long after the final page has been read. It tells the story of an intelligent, but impoverished, young Russian intellectual named Raskolnikov. Under the unfortunate influence of a particularly pernicious theory of society and human nature, he exalts himself above the moral law,

grievously transgresses it by committing two murders, “and plunges into a hell of persecution, madness and terror.”{1}

Raskolnikov had conceived of himself as a great and extraordinary man, on the order of a Napoleon. He tried to convince himself that he wasn’t bound by the same tired old moral code that the vast mass of humanity lives in recognition of, if not obedience to—the merely *ordinary* men and women who accomplish little and amount to less. Nevertheless, after committing his horrible crime, he finds that he cannot escape his punishment: he cannot silence his sensitive and overburdened conscience. In the end, when he can stand it no longer, he decides to confess his crime and accept suffering as a means of atonement.

Joseph Frank observes that Dostoevsky, the author of this story, had “long been preoccupied with the question of crime and conscience.”{2} In one of his letters, Dostoevsky describes his story as the “psychological report of a crime.”{3} The crime is committed, he says, by “a young man, expelled from the university . . . and living in the midst of the direst poverty.” Coming under the influence of “the strange, ‘unfinished’ ideas that float in the atmosphere,” he decides to murder an old pawnbroker and steal her money. Dostoevsky describes the old woman as “stupid and ailing,” “greedy” and “evil.” Why, it would hardly be a crime at all to murder such a wretched person! What’s more, with the money from his crime, the young man can “finish his studies, go abroad,” and devote the rest of his life to the benefit of humanity!

Inspired by these thoughts, the young man goes through with the crime and murders the old woman. But, notes Dostoevsky, “here is where the entire psychological process of the crime is unfolded. Insoluble problems confront the murderer, unsuspected and unexpected feelings torment his heart . . . and he finishes by *being forced* to denounce himself.”

This, in brief, is the story of *Crime and Punishment*. In what follows, we'll take a closer look at the theory which led Raskolnikov to commit his crime. Then we'll consider why the theory proved false when Raskolnikov actually attempted to put it into practice.

The Ordinary and Extraordinary

Raskolnikov committed two murders, in part simply to see if he really has the bravado to put his theories into practice. But what are these ideas? Where do they come from? And why do they lead Raskolnikov to such heinous actions?

Essentially, Raskolnikov's theory, which was partially developed in an article on crime that he had written, holds that all men, by a kind of law of nature, are divided into two distinct classes: the *ordinary* and the *extraordinary*. This theory, which finds some of its philosophical roots in the writings of men like Hegel and Nietzsche, claims that ordinary men exist merely for the purpose of reproduction by which, at length, the occasional, extraordinary man might arise. Raskolnikov declares, "The vast mass of mankind is mere material, and only exists in order by some great effort, by some mysterious process, by means of some crossing of races and stocks, to bring into the world at last perhaps one man out of a thousand with a spark of independence." The man of genius is rarer still, "and the great geniuses, the crown of humanity, appear on earth perhaps one in many thousand millions."{4}

The distinctive features of the ordinary man are a conservative temperament and a law-abiding disposition. But extraordinary men "all transgress the law." Indeed, says Raskolnikov, "if such a one is forced for the sake of his idea to step over a corpse or wade through blood, he can . . . find . . . in his own conscience, a sanction for wading through blood."{5} So the extraordinary man has the right—indeed,

depending on the value of his ideas, he may even have the duty—to destroy those who stand in his way. After all, Raskolnikov observes, such ideas may benefit "the whole of humanity."{6} But how can we know if we are merely ordinary men, or whether, perhaps, we are extraordinary? How can we know if we have the *right* to transgress the law to achieve our own ends?

Raskolnikov admits that confusion regarding one's class is indeed possible. But he thinks "the mistake can only arise . . . among the ordinary people" who sometimes like to imagine themselves more advanced than they really are. And we needn't worry much about that, for such people are "very conscientious" and will impose "public acts of penitence upon themselves with a beautiful and edifying effect."{7}

But as we'll see, it's one of the ironies of this novel that Raskolnikov, who committed murder because he thought himself extraordinary, made precisely this tragic mistake.

A Walking Contradiction

James Roberts observes that Raskolnikov "is best seen as two characters. He sometimes acts in one manner and then suddenly in a manner completely contradictory."{8} Evidence for this can be seen throughout the novel. In this way, Dostoevsky makes clear, right from the beginning of his story, that Raskolnikov is *not* an extraordinary man, at least not in the sense in which Raskolnikov himself uses that term in his theory of human nature.

In the opening pages of the novel, we see Raskolnikov at war with himself as he debates his intention to murder an old pawnbroker. "I want to attempt a thing *like that*," he says to himself.{9} Then, after visiting the old woman's flat, ostensibly to pawn a watch, but in reality as a sort of "dress rehearsal" for the murder, he again questions himself: "How

could such an atrocious thing come into my head? What filthy things my heart is capable of. Yes, filthy above all . . . loathsome!”{10}

This inner battle suggests that Raskolnikov has mistaken himself for an *extraordinary* man, a man bound neither by the rules of society, nor the higher moral law. But in fact, he’s actually just a conscientious *ordinary* man. The portrait Dostoevsky paints of him is really quite complex. He often appears to be a sensitive, though confused, young intellectual, who’s been led to entertain his wild ideas more as a result of dire poverty and self-imposed isolation from his fellow man, rather than from sheer malice or selfish ambition.

In fear and trembling he commits two murders, partly out of a confused desire to thereby benefit the rest of humanity, and partly out of a seemingly genuine concern to really live in accordance with his theories. Ironically, while the murders are partly committed with the idea of taking the old pawnbroker’s money to advance Raskolnikov’s plans, he never attempts to use the money, but merely buries it under a stone. What’s more, Raskolnikov is portrayed as one of the more generous characters in the novel. On more than one occasion, he literally gives away all the money he has to help meet the needs of others. Finally, while Raskolnikov is helped toward confessing his crime through the varied efforts of Porfiry Petrovich, the brilliant, yet compassionate, criminal investigator, and Sonia, the humble, selfless prostitute, nevertheless, it’s primarily Raskolnikov’s own tormented conscience that, at length, virtually forces him to confess to the murders.

So while Raskolnikov is guilty, he’s not completely lost. He still retains a conscience, as well as some degree of genuine compassion toward others. Dostoevsky wants us to see that there’s still hope for Raskolnikov!

The Hope of Restoration

After Raskolnikov commits the two murders, he finds himself confronted with the desperate need to be reconciled with God and his fellow man. From the beginning of the story, Raskolnikov is portrayed as somewhat alienated from his fellows. But once he commits the murders, he experiences a decisive break, both spiritually and psychologically, from the rest of humanity. Indeed, when he murders the old pawnbroker and her sister, something within Raskolnikov also dies. The bond that unites him with all other men in a common humanity is destroyed—or "dies"—as a sort of poetic justice for murdering the two women.

This death, which separates Raskolnikov both from God and his fellow man, can only be reversed through a miracle of divine grace and power. In the novel, the biblical paradigm for this great miracle is the story of the raising of Lazarus. Just as Lazarus died, and was then restored to life through the miraculous power of God in Christ, so also, in Dostoevsky's story, Raskolnikov's "death" is neither permanent nor irreversible. He too can be "restored to life." He too can be reconciled with God and man.

While this theme of death and restoration to life is somewhat subtle, nevertheless, Dostoevsky probably intended it as one of the primary themes of the novel. In the first place, it is emphasized by Sonia, Porfiry Petrovich, and Raskolnikov's own sister, that only by confessing his crime and accepting his punishment can Raskolnikov again be *restored* to the rest of humanity. In this way, Dostoevsky repeatedly emphasizes the "death" of Raskolnikov.

In addition, the raising of Lazarus is mentioned at least three times in the novel. One time is when, in the midst of a heated discussion, Porfiry specifically asks Raskolnikov if he believes in the raising of Lazarus, to which Raskolnikov responds that he does.{11} This affirmation foreshadows some

hope for Raskolnikov, for the fact that he believes in this miracle at least makes possible the belief that God can also work a miracle in his own life. Secondly, the only extended portion of Scripture cited in the novel relates the story of Lazarus. In fact, it's Raskolnikov himself, tormented by what he's done, who asks Sonia to read him the story.{12} Finally, at the end of the novel, the raising of Lazarus is mentioned yet again, this time as Raskolnikov recollects Sonia's previous reading of the story to him.{13} Interestingly, this final reference to the raising of Lazarus occurs in the context of Raskolnikov's own "restoration to life."

Restored to Life

Near the end of the novel, Raskolnikov at last goes to the police station and confesses to the murders: "*It was I killed the old pawnbroker woman and her sister Lizaveta with an axe and robbed them.*"{14} He is sentenced to eight years in a Siberian labor prison. Sonia, true to her promise, selflessly follows him there. Early one morning she comes to visit Raskolnikov. Overcome with emotion, he begins weeping and throws himself at her feet. Sonia is terrified. "But at the same moment she understood . . . . She knew . . . that he loved her . . . and that at last the moment had come."{15} God's love, mediated through Sonia, had finally broken through to Raskolnikov: "He had risen again and he . . . felt in it all his being."{16}

Although Raskolnikov had previously been something of an outcast with his fellow inmates, nevertheless, on the day of his "restoration," his relations with them begin to improve. Dostoevsky writes:

> *He . . . fancied that day that all the convicts who had been his enemies looked at him differently; he had even entered into talk with them and they answered him in a friendly way. He remembered that now, and thought it was bound to be so.*

Wasn't everything now bound to be changed?{17}

What's more, Dostoevsky also implies that Raskolnikov is being restored to relationship with God. Picking up the New Testament that Sonia had given him, "one thought passed through his mind: 'Can her convictions not be mine now? Her feelings, her aspirations at least . . .'"{18} And Dostoevsky then concludes his great novel by stating: "But that is the beginning of a new story—the story of the gradual renewal of a man, the story of his gradual regeneration, of his passing from one world into another, of his initiation into a new unknown life."{19}

So by the end of the novel, Raskolnikov, as a type of Lazarus, has experienced his own "restoration to life." He is ready to begin "his initiation into a new unknown life." And interestingly, the grace which brings about Raskolnikov's restoration is primarily mediated to him through the quiet, humble love of Sonia, a prostitute. Just as God was not ashamed to have his own Son, humanly speaking, descended from some who were murderers and some who were prostitutes—for it was just such people He came to save—so also, in Dostoevsky's story, God is not ashamed to extend His forgiveness and grace to a prostitute, and through her to a murderer as well. *Crime and Punishment* thus ends on a note of hope, for the guilty can be forgiven and the dead restored to life!

Notes

1. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Bantam Books, 1987). Citation from cover blurb on back of book.
2. Joseph Frank, "Introduction" to Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, ix.
3. The citations from Dostoevsky's letter come from Joseph Frank's "Introduction" to Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment,* viii-ix.

4. Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 229.
5. Ibid., 227.
6. Ibid., 226.
7. Ibid., 228.
8. James Roberts, *Cliffs Notes on Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment*, ed. Gary Carey (Lincoln, Nebraska: Cliffs Notes, Inc.), 70.
9. Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 2.
10. Ibid., 7.
11. Ibid., 227.
12. Ibid., 283.
13. Ibid., 472.
14. Ibid., 458.
15. Ibid., 471.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., 472.
19. Ibid.

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The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe: Reflections on Its Meaning

Michael Gleghorn provides an overview of C.S. Lewis's classic book for children of all ages that ought to be required reading for anyone who can read.

A Very Brief Overview

With the recent release of the movie *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the public fascination with all things "Narnian" has once again been raised. But what are we to make of this wonderful story? What deeper truths might it contain?

In order to answer these questions, we must begin with a very brief overview of the story. Four children—Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy—are evacuated from London to the house of an old professor during World War II. Once there, they soon discover a magic wardrobe that leads to another world! First Lucy, then Lucy and Edmund, and then all four of the children find their way into the enchanted land of Narnia. The country is ruled by the White Witch, who has placed it under a spell so that it's always winter but never Christmas.

Once in Narnia the children learn of Aslan, the great lion and true king of the country. After a long absence, he's now returned. He will deal with the Witch, they're told, and put everything right again. They also learn of an ancient prophecy, that when two Sons of Adam and two Daughters of Eve sit enthroned at the castle of Cair Paravel, then the Witch's reign (as well as her life) will be over. It's believed that the time for this must be near, since Aslan and the four children are now in Narnia.

But Edmund threatens to ruin everything. Unbeknownst to the others, on a previous visit to Narnia he'd met the Witch, eaten her food, and come under her power. Although he really knows that the Witch is bad, he nonetheless betrays his siblings, hoping the Witch will one day make him king. Knowing about the prophecy, however, she eventually decides to kill Edmund. But before she can do so, he's rescued by forces loyal to Aslan!

Not to be outdone, the Witch then appears before Aslan, demanding the traitor's life. Aslan acknowledges the validity

of the Witch's claim on a now repentant Edmund, but gets her to renounce it by offering to die in his place. The Witch agrees, and that night she slays Aslan on the Stone Table. She believes her rule in Narnia is now assured. But with the rising of the sun, Aslan rises from the dead! He leads his army to victory against the Witch and her forces. After personally dispatching the Witch, he installs the four children as kings and queens of Narnia, thus fulfilling the ancient prophecy.

This, in a nutshell, is the story. But did the author, C. S. Lewis, intend some deeper meaning? And if so, what is it?

The Search for a Deeper Meaning

It seems that Lewis had at least three objectives in writing his famous *Chronicles*. First, he simply wanted to tell a good story. And almost everyone who's read the *Chronicles* will agree that he succeeded admirably here, for they're among the best-loved books of all time. Second, Lewis also aimed at using his stories to communicate moral truth, both by precept and example. In this regard, Paul Ford observes that Lewis is something of a Christian Aesop. Like Aesop, he's more than *just* a storyteller; he's "also a moral educator."{1} As Gilbert Meilaender notes:

> Lewis . . . believes that moral principles are learned indirectly from others around us, who serve as exemplars. . . . . the Chronicles of Narnia . . . are not just good stories . . . they serve to enhance moral education, to build character. . . . To overlook the function of the *Chronicles of Narnia* in communicating images of proper emotional responses is to miss their connection to Lewis's moral thought.{2}

Finally, Lewis also purposed to communicate important truths of the Christian faith by translating them into the imaginary landscape of Narnia. But here we must be careful. Lewis

insisted that the *Chronicles* should not be read as Christian allegories. Paul Ford observes that in an allegory there are "one-to-one correspondences between philosophical or religious concepts and the characters or events or objects in a story."{3} The *Chronicles,* said Lewis, are not allegories. They're rather what he called "supposals." He explained the difference in a letter, with special reference to the great lion Aslan:

> [Aslan] is an invention giving an imaginary answer to the question, 'What might Christ become like, if there really were a world like Narnia and He chose to be incarnate and die and rise again in *that* world as He actually has done in ours?' This is not an allegory at all. . . . The incarnation of Christ in another world is mere supposal.{4}

So while the *Chronicles* should not be read as allegories, it's still quite true that they're informed throughout by Lewis's Christian faith and imagination. They are Christian "supposals"—and Aslan is *supposed* to be what Christ *might* look like if He became incarnate in a land like Narnia.

Having discussed Lewis's purposes in writing the *Chronicles*, and having seen that they do indeed contain a deeper meaning, we're now ready to look more closely at the most famous of these: *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

Temptation and Sin

Two of the major themes developed by Lewis are temptation and sin. By carefully weaving these into his story, Lewis is able to address issues of importance both for basic morality and for the Christian faith.

When Edmund first stumbles into Narnia through the wardrobe, he finds himself alone in a snow-covered wood. Cold, and not much liking the look of the place, he almost decides to go home when he hears the sound of bells in the distance. Shortly

thereafter a sleigh comes into view, and in it sits the White Witch.

The Witch stops the sleigh and questions Edmund. She knows of the ancient prophecy that, when two Sons of Adam and two Daughters of Eve sit enthroned at Cair Paravel, then her reign (and life) will be over. When she learns that Edmund is human, she raises her wand as if she intends to turn him into stone. But she changes her mind and with feigned friendliness invites Edmund to sit in her sleigh. She asks if he would like something to eat and Edmund requests Turkish Delight (which she magically produces).

As he devours the sweets, the Witch continues to question him. She learns that he has a brother and two sisters. Together, the siblings could fulfill the prophecy that would spell her doom! But the Turkish Delight is enchanted; whoever tastes it will want more and more. Knowing this, the Witch tempts Edmund. She says that if he will bring his siblings to her house, then she will give him more Turkish Delight—something Edmund desperately wants. She also says that she would like to make Edmund a prince. And later, when she's gone, he will even be king! So the Witch tempts him by appealing to his desire for power and pleasure.

And it works! Before Edmund returns home, "he [is] already more than half on the side of the Witch."{5} Later, when all four siblings get into Narnia together, Edmund slips away from the others and goes to betray them to the Witch. His desire for Turkish Delight and to be king leads him to yield to temptation—and sin. It reminds one of what James says in the New Testament: "But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death" (1:14-15).

Though we might not like to admit it, there's something of Edmund in all of us. Like Edmund, we've all sinned (Rom.

3:23). And unless Someone intervenes who can change both us and our circumstances, then like Edmund we're also doomed to die (Rom. 6:23; Rev. 20:14-15).

Sacrifice and Redemption

Lewis claimed that the idea for his story, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, "all began with a picture of a Faun carrying an umbrella and parcels in a snowy wood." "At first," he wrote, "I had very little idea how the story would go. But then suddenly Aslan came bounding into it. . . . [and] He pulled the whole story together."{6} It's a good thing He did. For without Aslan the traitorous Edmund would have met a very different fate than that which actually befell him.

You see, Aslan's Father, the great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea, put some Deep Magic into Narnia at its beginning. The Witch, who accuses Edmund before Aslan, is quite knowledgeable about this Deep Magic. "Every traitor," she insists, "belongs to me as my lawful prey. . . . Unless I have blood as the Law says all Narnia will . . . perish in fire and water."{7} Aslan agrees that her claim is valid.

Although it looks like Edmund is as good as dead, Aslan, in a private conversation with the Witch, gets her to renounce her claim on Edmund's blood. It's only later that we learn why. The great lion made the Witch an offer she couldn't refuse. He offered to die in Edmund's place. True to His word, He arrives that night at the Stone Table and there He is slain by the Witch.

But that's not the end of the story. Early the next morning, as the sun peers over the horizon, the Stone Table cracks in two and Aslan is raised from the dead. He's conquered death through an even Deeper Magic, unknown to the Witch. As Aslan explains, "Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of Time. But if she could have looked . . . into . . . the darkness before Time dawned . . . She would have known that when a

willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backwards."{8}

It's a beautiful picture of substitutionary atonement. Aslan willingly lays down His life for the traitorous Edmund, thereby redeeming him from the just demands of the Law. It reminds one of what Christ did for us. Paul told the Galatians, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree'" (Gal. 3:13). Just as Aslan gave up His life for Edmund, so Christ gave up His life for each of us, dying as a substitute in our place so that we might forever share in the life of God!

Reflections on the Movie

As many fans of Lewis's classic story *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* have already observed, the movie is really quite good and well worth seeing. It is a generally faithful rendition of Lewis's beautiful and imaginative original. Indeed the film is really at its best when it adheres most closely to the book. It was reported that at one time another group of filmmakers was planning to produce a very different version of the story. Supposedly their plan was to set Lewis's wonderful children's classic "in present-day Brentwood. Instead of a White Witch wooing young Edmund with Turkish Delight, a cool Californian would win him with cheeseburgers."{9} If this is really true, we can all rejoice that such an absurd retelling of Lewis's famous story never saw the light of day. All those involved with bringing *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* to the big screen are to be commended for adhering so closely to Lewis's original vision.

But of course no movie is perfect, and *The Lion* is no exception. Possibly two of the biggest disappointments for fans of the book are the diminished role given to some of Lewis's most important dialogue and the diminished importance

of the great lion himself. For example, compared to his counterpart in the book, wise old professor Kirke has precious little to say in the movie.

Even more troubling, the extended conversation which the four children have with Mr. and Mrs. Beaver about Aslan lacks many of the Beavers' most important declarations. Unlike the book, the movie never refers to Aslan as "the son of the great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea." And Mr. Beaver is also denied his famous response to Lucy's question about whether Aslan is actually safe. "Safe?" he asks, "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."{10} Not only was such important dialogue cut, but as Jeffrey Overstreet noted, Aslan's appearances are "painfully brief." He doesn't "have the time onscreen to earn our affection and awe the way we might have hoped."{11}

In spite of such shortcomings, however, the movie still possesses much of the book's magic. What's more, it retains the crucially important themes of temptation and sin, sacrifice and redemption. Aslan still dies as a substitute for the traitorous Edmund, thereby redeeming him from the just demands of the Law. Finally, as Overstreet observed, "Those who respond to the movie's roar by running to Lewis's book will find Deeper Magic in its pages. Meeting them there, Lewis himself will lead them 'further up, further in'."{12} If the movie leads a new generation of readers to tackle this classic story, then it will indeed have served as a fitting tribute to its author.

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Video Games – Evaluating Them From a Christian Perspective

Grand Theft Auto

The best-selling video game in America last year was "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas." The recent controversy over this popular video game is just another reminder of the deception of ratings and the need for parental direction and discernment when it comes to buying video games.

The game in question already has a bad reputation. The

National Institute on Media and the Family described it this way: “Raunchy, violent and portraying just about every deviant act that a criminal could think of in full, living 3D graphics. Grand Theft Auto takes the cake again as one of the year’s worst games for kids. The premise—restore respect to your neighborhood as you take on equally corrupt San Andreas police.”{1}

Ironically what caused the controversy over the game was not its overt violence and sexuality. What caused a national stir was what was hidden within the game. Those playing the game (known as gamers) could download a modification of “Grand Theft Auto” that would allow them to see graphic sex scenes on screen.

Initially the distributor distanced itself from what hackers could do with their product once it was on the market. But that argument fell flat when it was found that the downloaded modification merely unlocked pornographic material already within the game. It now turns out that skilled players can unlock the pornographic content without downloading the key from the Internet. The game initially had a “Mature” rating. The Entertainment Software Ratings Board now requires that it be labeled “Adults Only.”

“Grand Theft Auto” has already been a lightning rod for controversy because it rewards players for committing crimes and engaging in dangerous and immoral behavior. Gamers can buy and sell drugs, steal cars, run down pedestrians, even feed people into a wood chipper. Nevertheless, the game has sold more than five million copies in the United States.

Who is buying this game? Some are adults buying the game for themselves, but a large percentage of the people buying this game are parents or grandparents buying the game for their kids or grandkids.

Columnist Mona Charen points out that the original concerns

about this game surfaced when a Manhattan grandmother bought the game for her fourteen-year-old grandson. Then she was shocked to find out that he could modify the game by downloading material from the Internet. Charen asks, "So, a kindly eighty-five-year-old lady has no qualms about purchasing a gang-glorifying, violence-soaked, sick entertainment for her teenage grandson, but is shocked when it turns out to contain explicit sex? Wasn't the rest enough?"{2}

In most cases, parents and grandparents are buying these games and need to exercise discernment. Many games are harmless and even can help stimulate the mind. Some are questionable. And others are violent and sexually explicit. We need to use discernment in selecting these games.

Benefits of Video Games

A recent article in *Discover* magazine talked about the perception most people have of video game players. It said this is "the classic stereotype of gamers as attention-deficit-crazed stimulus junkies, easily distracted by flashy graphics and on-screen carnage."{3} Yet new research shows that gaming can be mentally enriching with such cognitive benefits as: pattern recognition, system thinking, and even patience.{4}

One of the best-known studies (done by Shawn Green and Daphne Bavelier) found that playing an action video game markedly improved performance on a range of visual skills related to detecting objects in briefly flashed displays. They found that gamers exhibit superior performance relative to non-gamers on a set of benchmark visual tasks.{5}

What they found was the action video gamers tend to be more attuned to their surroundings. While this occurs while performing within the video game, it also transfers to such things as driving down a residential street where they are

more likely than a non-gamer to pick out a child running into the street after a ball.

They found that gamers can process visual information more quickly and can track 30 percent more objects than non-gamers. These conclusions came from testing both gamers and non-gamers with a series of three tests.

The first test flashed a small object on a screen for 1/160 of a second and the participant would indicate where it flashed. Gamers tended to notice the object far more often than non-gamers.

The second test flashed a number of small objects on a screen at once. The subjects had to type the number of objects they saw. Gamers saw the correct number more often than non-gamers.

The third test flashed black letters and one white letter on a screen in fast succession. The one white letter was sometimes followed by a black “X.” Gamers were able to pick out the white letter more often than non-gamers and could more accurately say whether it was followed by a black “X.”

The researchers also wanted to know whether the superior performance of gamers was acquired or self-selected. In other words, do video games actually improve visual attention skills or is it possible that visually attentive people choose to play video games?

Green and Bavelier trained a selection of non-gamers on one of two video games. One group played the World War II action video game “Medal of Honor.” The other group served as the control group and played the puzzle game “Tetris.” The researchers found that after two weeks, the group trained on the World War II game showed a marked increase in performance over the control group.

The researchers therefore concluded: “By forcing players to simultaneously juggle a number of varied tasks (detect new

enemies, track existing enemies and avoid getting hurt, among others), action-video-game playing pushed the limits of three rather different aspects of visual attention."{6}

Video games can also train our brain to be more efficient. In the early 1990s, Richard Haier (University of California at Irving's Department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior), scanned the brains of "Tetris" players. He found that in first-time users, the brain requires lots of energy. In fact, cerebral glucose metabolic rates actually soar. But after a few weeks, these rates sink to normal as performance increases seven-fold.{7} In essence, "Tetris" trains your brain to stop using inefficient gray matter.

Types of Video Games

Let's now focus on the rating of video games and the major video game categories. As we mentioned earlier, the video game industry is self-regulated, so we need to exercise discernment.

EC – Early Childhood (age 3 and older) – These games are appropriate for anyone who can play a video game and contains no inappropriate material.

E – Everyone (age 6 and older) – These games are designed for younger players and are the equivalent of a PG movie.

T – Teen (age 13 and older) – Generally these games are not appropriate for younger ages and are equivalent of a PG-13 movie.

M – Mature (age 17 and older) – These games are not appropriate for children. They may be rated as such because of overt violence, sexual content, and profanity.

AO – Adults Only (ages 18 and older) – These games involve excessive violence, sexual content, and explicit language.

There are a number of different types of video games.

Puzzles – Puzzle games are usually acceptable for all ages and generally are rated "E." These games involve logic and spatial arrangements. The best known puzzle game is "Tetris."

Strategy – These games may be as straightforward as "Chessmaster" or involve the use of tactical moves of troops or players such as "Advanced Wars."

Simulation games – Some games like "SimCity" require creativity and advanced problem-solving skills. Others involve driving or flying simulations that can be relatively tame or highly offensive such as the "Grand Theft Auto" series of video games.

Arcade games – The classic arcade games include such favorites as "Pacman" or "Frogger." However, the newer arcade games may include games like the violent "Street Fighter."

Role playing games – This is a type of game where players assume the roles of via role-playing. Although these games may be less graphic, they often involve fantasy and even the occult.

Action games – These games most often have an "M" rating. Many of these action games involve point-and-shoot games that are especially dangerous.

Violent Video Games

There is cause for concern about violent video games. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, playing violent video games increases the likelihood of adolescent violent behavior by as much as 13 percent to 22 percent.{8}

A 2005 meta-analysis of over thirty-five research studies (that included 4000 participants) found that "playing violent video games significantly increases physiological arousal and

feelings of anger or hostility, and significantly decreases pro-social helping behavior."{9} Another study has shown a relationship between playing violent video games and being involved in violent acts.{10}

Testimony before the United States Senate documents the following: (1) that violent video games increase violent adolescent behavior, (2) that heavy game players become desensitized to aggression and violence, (3) that nearly 90 percent of all African-American females in these games are victims of violence, and (4) that the most common role for women in violent video games is as prostitutes.{11}

One of the people speaking out against violent video games is Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, whom I have interviewed on a number of occasions. He is a former West Point professor and has written books on the subject of killing.{12} He has also testified that these violent video games are essentially "killing simulators."

Grossman testified on the shooting in Paducah, Kentucky. Michael Carneal, a fourteen-year-old boy who had never fired a handgun before, stole a pistol and fired a few practice shots the night before. The next morning he fired eight shots and had eight hits (four of them head shots, one neck, and three upper torso). This is unprecedented marksmanship for a boy who only fired a .22 caliber rifle once at a summer camp.

The typical response in firing a gun is to fire at the target until it drops. Carneal instead moved from victim to victim just like he had learned in the violent video games he played.

The goal in these games is to rack up the "highest score" by moving quickly. Grossman points out that many of the games (such as "House of the Dead" or "Goldeneye" or "Turok") give bonus points for head shots.{13}

Does that mean that anyone who plays these games will be a killer? Of course not. But Grossman says that the kind of

training we give to soldiers (operant conditioning, desensitization, etc.) is what we are also giving to our kids through many of these violent video games.

Ironically, the U.S. Marine Corps licensed one of these popular video games ("Doom") to train their combat fire teams in tactics and to rehearse combat actions of killing.{14} The video game manufacturers certainly know these are killing simulators. In fact the advertising for one game ("Quake II" that is produced by the same manufacturer as "Doom"), says: "We took what was killer, and made it mass murder."

Biblical Discernment

If we look back at the list of different types of video games, it is pretty easy to see that it is possible to find acceptable games as well as questionable and even dangerous video games in just about any category. That is why parental direction and discernment are so important.

The latest controversy over "Grand Theft Auto" demonstrates that the video game industry has not been effective at self-regulation. And children cannot be expected to exercise good judgment unless parents use discernment and teach it to their kids.

Paul tells us in Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." We should focus on what is positive and helpful to our Christian walk.

As Christians, we should develop discernment in our lives. See my article on "Media and Discernment" (www.probe.org/faith-and-culture/culture/media-and-discernment.html) for suggestions on how to develop discernment in your life and the life of your child.

Parents need to determine the possible benefits to playing videos and whether those benefits outweigh the negatives. Many of the games available today raise little or no concern. As one commentator put it, “The majority of video games on the best-seller list contain no more bloodshed than a game of Risk.”{15}

But even good, constructive games played for long periods of time can be detrimental. Over the last few years I have been compiling statistics for my teen talk on media use. The number of hours young people spend watching TV, listening to music, surfing the Internet, going to movies, etc. is huge and increasing every year. Young people spend entirely too much time in front of a screen (TV screen, computer screen, movie screen).

So even good video games can be bad if young people are staying indoors and not going outdoors for exercise. Obesity is already a problem among many young people. And good video games can be bad if they take priority over responsibilities at home and schoolwork.

Parents should understand the potential dangers of video games and make sure they approve of the video games that come into their home. They may conclude that the drawbacks outweigh the benefits. If their children do play video games, they should also set time limits and monitor attitudes and behaviors that appear. They should also watch for signs of addiction. The dangers of video games are real, and parents need to exercise discernment.

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The Worldview of Star Wars – A Christian Evaluation

Dr. Zukeran takes a critical, balanced view of this popular movie series to help us understand the worldview it presents in light of a biblical worldview. From a Christian perspective, he points out the positive themes of the movies presented from a pantheistic worldview. We can use these movies to generate conversations about the differences between the worldview of Star Wars and a genuinely Christian worldview.

George Lucas

The *Star Wars* series has come to a climatic finale. Many of us can still remember the year 1977 when people stood in long lines at theaters several blocks long. It was not uncommon to hear of individuals who returned to see the movie, some over a dozen times. Few movies have generated the same excitement and following as this series. Through its production, special effects, and cinematography, *Star Wars* had a tremendous impact on the arts, setting a new standard for the movie industry.

Not only did *Star Wars* have an impact on the entertainment industry, it also opened our eyes to the worldview of pantheism. Pantheism comes from the Greek word “pan” meaning all and “theism” meaning God. It is the belief that the impersonal God is one essence with the universe. God inhabits all things. The universe is God and God is the universe. In other words, God is not separate from the universe but is contained within it. This worldview lies at the foundation of most Hindu, Buddhist, and New Age religions. This worldview gained popularity in the sixties, at a time when Eastern ideas

began to enter the West. It drew public attention through celebrities such as The Beatles and Shirley McClain who embraced the teachings of the Eastern religions. *Star Wars*, with its success, continues to stir interest in the ideas of pantheism.

George Lucas borrowed themes from several religions and ancient myths in creating the story line for *Star Wars*. Lucas was not intending to introduce or promote a particular religion in his movie. However, he wanted young people to think about spiritual issues and the big questions about life. He created his movies to ". . . make young people think about the mystery. Not to say, 'Here's the answer.' It's to say, 'Think about this for a second. Is there a God? What does God look like? What does God sound like? What does God feel like? How do we relate to God?' Just getting young people to think at that level is what I've been trying to do in the films. What eventual manifestation that takes place in terms of how they describe their God, what form their faith takes, is not the point of the movie."{1}

George Lucas should be commended in his desire to inspire people to wrestle with such issues. This is a movie rich in theology and deep in philosophical ideas that are sure to generate some profitable discussions. C.S. Lewis, J.R. Tolkien, and Fydor Dostoevsky, in their classical fiction writings, presented answers to life's questions from a theistic worldview. In *Star Wars*, Lucas has accomplished a similar classic work presenting answers to life's questions from a pantheistic worldview. For this reason *Star Wars* is a fun movie that is full of theological ideas.

In the following sections, we will examine how Lucas' pantheistic worldview is illustrated in *Star Wars,* and present a biblical critique of this fine movie series.

The Worldview of Pantheism

What are some of the major tenets of pantheism?

First, there is the concept of monism, the notion that all things are essentially of the same nature or essence. In other words, God is the universe; he is not separate from the universe but is contained within it. The universe is eternal and flows out of the divine. Therefore, creation is *ex deo* (out of God), meaning out of the hands of God. The Greek philosopher Plotinus stated that everything flows from God, be it life or flower from a seed. Good and evil, light and darkness all flow out of God.

Pantheists also believe in the absence of a divine personal being who created the universe. Instead, they attest to a divine essence, an impersonal force, a cosmic energy that flows throughout all things in the universe. This energy is called "the One," "the divine," "Chi," or "Brahma." In *Star Wars*, it is called the Force.

Following their logic, if all is one in essence, all is divine. Hence, God and man are of the same essence, so man is essentially divine. Here is an illustration. God is the large ocean and we are all drops in that ocean. As a drop of water from a rain cloud must make its journey to unite with the ocean, so every individual must make their journey to become one with the divine. Spiritual guru Deepak Chopra writes, "Your body is not separate from the universe, because at quantum mechanical levels there are no well-defined edges. You are like a wiggle, a wave, a fluctuation, a convolution, a whirlpool, a localized disturbance in the larger quantum field. The larger quantum field – the universe – is your extended body."{2} He also states, "In reality we are divinity in disguise, and gods and goddesses in embryo that are contained within us seek to be fully materialized. True success therefore is the experience of the miraculous. It is the unfolding of the divinity within us."{3}

Since we are divine, true knowledge is attained by awakening the god within through an experience known as enlightenment. The One or the divine is not understood through the senses or rational thinking but by mystical union which is beyond the conscious self. This union comes through various means such as meditation, yoga, and channeling, among others. The process includes letting go of our conscious self and reaching out with our emotions.

The ultimate destiny of man is to become absorbed into the divine. All individuals are involved in an endless cycle of reincarnation until they attain enlightenment and eventually break the cycle of reincarnation to be absorbed into the divine. These are some of the basic teachings of pantheism that are depicted in *Star Wars*.

God and The Force

George Lucas stated that he wanted *Star Wars* to inspire young people to ask spiritual questions about God. In *Star Wars*, the idea of God is found in the Force. Lucas states, "I put the Force into the movie in order to try to awaken a certain kind of spirituality in young people – more a belief in God than a belief in any particular religious system."{4} Master Jedi Obi Won Kenobi first introduces us to the Force in 1977. Sitting in his desert hut, Obi Won explains to Luke Skywalker the nature of the Force. He states, "The Force is what gives the Jedi his power. It is an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us, penetrates us, it binds the galaxy together." The Jedi Knights and their adversaries the Siths use this cosmic energy to perform supernatural feats.

The Force reflects one of the main tenets of the pantheistic worldview, the concept of monism, that all is in essence one. The Force is not a personal being. It is an impersonal energy that is made up of and resides in all living things. Therefore, all of life has the spark of divinity because all

is essentially one unified entity.

George Lucas borrows a lot of his ideas from Eastern pantheistic religions. Chinese religions such as Taoism teach that this cosmic energy is called the Chi Force. Chi flows through all living things, and therefore the powers of the universe reside in each individual. Through meditation, yoga, and other techniques of altering one's consciousness, one can master this energy within and perform supernatural feats.

Some Christians have mistakenly equated the Force with the Holy Spirit; however, there are several major differences. First, the Force is an impersonal energy field while the Holy Spirit is a personal being, the third member of the Trinity. He has a personality, intelligence, and will. Second, the Force is made up of all living things in the universe while the Holy Spirit is not contained in the universe. The Holy Spirit is an eternal being who was involved in creating the universe out of nothing (Genesis 1). Being God, the Holy Spirit is involved in the universe but He is not contained in the universe and exists independent of living things. Third, the Force can be manipulated by the Jedi who use it to accomplish their will, but the Holy Spirit cannot be manipulated by those He indwells. Instead He guides, teaches, and empowers them to do the will of God the Father. Christians do not master the Holy Spirit to accomplish their will, but rather the Holy Spirit guides them to do His will. Finally, the Force has a good side and a dark side which exist in a state of balance while the Holy Spirit has no dark or evil side but only the attributes consistent with a holy and good God.

Salvation

The story of *Star Wars* centers on one figure, Anakin Skywalker, who is identified by the master Jedi Qui Gon Gin as the "chosen one." Anakin's birth was miraculous in that he was

born of a virgin and his body has a high level of metachlorines. Qui Gon states that as the chosen one, Anakin will restore the "balance of the Force," a hope anticipated throughout the entire series. What does Lucas mean by this statement?

As stated previously, Lucas illustrates the teachings of the pantheistic worldview throughout the movie series. He borrows several concepts from Taoism, one of them being the idea of restoring the balance of the force.

Taoism teaches that there are equal and opposing forces throughout the universe that balance one another. This is known as the yin/yang duality. Opposing forces such as positive and negative energy, light and darkness, life and death, have always been in a state of opposition. Neither side has dominance over the other, but there is a balance of these opposing forces. These forces are mutually dependent, and one cannot be known apart from the other. When these forces are not in balance, there is disharmony. When they exist in a balance, there is harmony.

Every individual must accept and live in harmony with this balance of opposing forces. When there is an imbalance of one over the other in a person, there is disharmony in one's life. When disturbed, this balance must be restored in the individual and in the world. Once balance is restored, harmony and peace returns. Darkness, death, and evil, are never defeated; they are only to be brought into balance with the opposing forces of light, life, and goodness. In *Star Wars*, the Force has two sides, a good side and a dark side. Imbalance has occurred because one side, the dark side, has become too pervasive and must be brought into balance by the opposing force of good. The dark side is not to be defeated permanently by the good but balance is to be restored to the Force. This is the concept George Lucas presents throughout the series.

In the Bible, the universe is not eternal but was created by God from nothing. The original creation was good. Evil, death, and suffering came as the result of the fall, which marred creation. The conflict between light and darkness, life and death, good and evil has not been an eternal struggle. The two forces are also not equal and in a balance. The Bible teaches that God is light, holy, good, and the life. He is not locked in an eternal struggle with opposing forces. One day at His appointed time, He will not bring balance but restoration to the universe. This will occur when God judges the world, defeats evil permanently, and establishes a new heaven and earth where sin and its effects are no longer present.

The Jedi Masters

The heroes in the *Star Wars* are the Jedi Knights. These select few individuals have mastered the Force and are powerful warriors. They function as the guardians of peace in the galactic empire and use their powers only in times of danger. Where did Lucas get his idea for the Jedi?

In a Discovery Channel documentary entitled "The Science of *Star Wars*," Lucas reveals the source of his idea. Once again, he borrows concepts from the pantheistic religions. Lucas reveals that his idea came from studying the Shao-Lin monks of China. The Shao-Lin monks are priests known for originating and becoming the masters of the martial arts. Their fighting skills were legendary throughout the land of China.

Not only are the Shao-Lin monks skillful fighters, they were also men who mastered the use of the Chi force. As previously mentioned, Chi is believed to be the cosmic energy that flows through all things including individuals. The Shao-Lin monks teach that through altering one's consciousness in meditation and other exercises, one can tap into the power of the Chi resident in each individual and use it to perform superhuman feats.

Using the Chi force, Shao-Lin monks believe they can deliver punches and kicks with devastating force. They are also able to withstand punishing blows from opponents and objects. Some even believe a master can strike down an opponent without physical contact by simply utilizing Chi energy.

In Star Wars, we see this parallel. The Jedi are dressed in garments similar to the Shao-Lin monks, are headquartered at the Temple, and are masters of the Force. Using the Force, they are able to move objects, foresee future events, manipulate people's thoughts, and strike down opponents without any physical contact. For the Jedi, truth is ultimately found in their feelings. When questions arise, the phrase among the Jedi is, "Search your feelings. What do they tell you?" True knowledge for the Jedi is beyond the rational and instead found in feelings and intuitions beyond the rational mind. The Jedi are another example of Lucas' pantheistic worldview.

There is much to like regarding the Jedi. They are noble heroes who are self-sacrificing, disciplined, and courageous. However, Christians should reject the idea of the Force that is the power behind the Jedi. The Bible does not teach that there is a cosmic energy or Chi that flows through objects and individuals. Throughout their training, Jedi are taught to let go of the conscious mind and reach out with their feelings. Christians are taught to love God "with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). Christians do not abandon their mind but develop it to understand truth and God's will (Romans 12:1-2). The mind and heart work together through prayer, study of the Word, and guidance of the Holy Spirit to discern truth and God's will in situations.

What Happens After Death?

What happens after death? This is another question George

Lucas hoped young people would ask as they viewed this series. *Star Wars* presents an answer that once again reflects the teaching of pantheism. Pantheism teaches that we are all in an endless cycle of reincarnation until we attain enlightenment. It is then that we escape this cycle and become one with the divine meaning and become absorbed into the cosmic energy of the universe.

In *The Revenge of the Sith*, Anakin Skywalker is haunted with nightmares of his wife Padme dying at the birth of their child. Tormented by this dream he seeks the counsel of Yoda, the master of the Jedi. Yoda imparts to Anakin that death is a natural part of the universe. In other words, we should accept it without emotion. He adds that one should not grieve for those who have died and become part of the Force. Anakin must not become attached to things, including people, for attachment to objects leads to jealousy and the dark side of the Force. One must release all feelings from things, for it is only then that one's thinking will be clear.

Thus, in *Star Wars* those who die become absorbed into the Force. We also learn that the Jedi are able to delay this absorption and appear as spirit guides to aid those in the physical world. Those with special insight may learn how to communicate with these ascended masters.

This teaching is another fundamental tenet of pantheistic religions. Pantheism teaches that the material world is an illusion. Therefore, one should not grow attached to earthly things for they are merely an illusion and are not permanent. Several schools of Hinduism and Buddhism teach that this world is an illusion and, as such, we must rid ourselves of all desires. The most holy of followers will therefore live lives of celibacy and poverty, releasing themselves from any desire and spending their days in meditation and study. At death, some holy men will delay their union with the divine and remain as spirit guides to aid those on the journey to enlightenment.

The Bible teaches that at death, we will not be absorbed into an impersonal energy field but we will retain our personhood and stand before God in judgment. There is no reincarnation or second chance. Hebrews 9:7 states that "It is appointed for each person to die once and then comes the judgment." Those who know Jesus will spend eternity with the Lord and fellow believers for all eternity. Those who have rejected Christ will spend eternity separated from God in Hell. The Bible presents a destiny that is just, but also filled with hope for those who know Jesus.

The answer presented in *Star Wars*, the annihilation of one's consciousness and absorption into a cosmic energy field, is a false one that even if true, would provide insufficient hope.

How to Watch *Star Wars*

When it comes to movies, there are three basic responses among Christians. Some choose to avoid any movie that may teach contrary beliefs for fear that they or their children may be negatively influenced. Others are consumers and watch any movie believing it is harmless fun and entertainment. A third option is to select appropriate movies and then view them with discernment. I take the third position. The arts are meant to be enjoyed and to glorify God. Creation itself reflects the creative mind of God who designed man with the capacity to produce art. Man, however, many times uses the arts for less than noble reasons. However, Christians can learn valuable lessons about other belief systems and use movies as great teaching tools to help younger believers become more discerning and understand other worldviews.

In *Star Wars* we have a great teaching and discussion topic. There is much we should commend George Lucas for in this series. *Star Wars* is creative, entertaining, and family-friendly. It also promotes several good themes such as friendship, courage, and the dangerous corrupting power of selfish ambition. We should furthermore commend Lucas on his

desire to make a movie that would inspire young people to think about deeper issues in life.

In the *Time Magazine* interview, Lucas states that he wanted young people to think about spiritual issues and the big questions about life. I certainly agree with Lucas, and wish more movies were designed for such purposes.

Star Wars is a great discussion piece because it creatively reflects the tenets of pantheism. Christians can use this film to discuss spiritual lessons revealed in the series. I have had profitable discussions with teens and adults on the spiritual principles illustrated in *Star Wars*. Questions such as "What do you think about the whole idea of the Force?", "Is there such a thing as a cosmic energy field?", "Can we master the power of this energy?", "What did *Star Wars* teach regarding what happens after death?", or "What do you think really happens after death?" have arisen in conversations.

Answers to these questions often lead to great discussions regarding worldviews, the nature of truth, and eternal life. *Star Wars* offers answers from a pantheistic worldview, which Christians can point out and explain why these answers are false. Movies like *Star Wars* can be a great teaching tool when Christians are equipped and informed to discern truth from error.

Notes

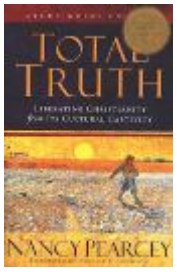
1. Bill Moyer, "Of Myth and Men," *Time* Magazine, (26 April, 1999), 93.
2. Deepak Chopra, *Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*, p.68, quoted in Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods*, (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 2000), 68.
3. Ibid., 96.
4. Ibid., 92.

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Total Truth – The Importance of a Christian Worldview

Total Truth *is a book about worldview, its place in every Christian's life, and its prominent role in determining our impact on a culture that has hooked itself to the runaway locomotive of materialism and is headed for the inevitable cliff of despair and destruction.*

Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity



"This is a book of unusual importance by an author of unusual ability."{1} This is a strong recommendation from any reviewer, but when the reviewer is best-selling author and Darwinian critic, Phillip Johnson, people pay attention. As well they should. Nancy Pearcey's *Total Truth* is probably the most significant book of 2004. I pray its influence and impact will be felt for decades.

This is a book about worldview, its place in every Christian's life, and its prominent role in determining our impact on a culture that has hooked itself to the runaway locomotive of materialism and is headed for the inevitable cliff of despair and destruction.

While the concept of worldview has wiggled its way into the consciousness of some in the Christian community, it remains largely a buzzword used in the context of political

discussions and fundraising for Christian parachurch organizations. But politics only reflects the culture, so working to change the political landscape without changing the way we think is not as productive as some thought it would be.

One of the extreme threats to Christianity in this country is the effect of the culture on our youth and, consequently, on the future of the church in America. Pearcey says, "As Christian parents, pastors, teachers, and youth group leaders, we constantly see young people pulled down by the undertow of powerful cultural trends. If all we give them is a 'heart' religion, it will not be strong enough to counter the lure of attractive but dangerous ideas…. Training young people to develop a Christian mind is no longer an option; it is part of their necessary survival equipment."{2}

Here at Probe Ministries we have recognized this threat for all of our thirty-two years of ministry. We continue the fight with our Mind Games conferences, Web site, and radio ministries. We address young people particularly in our week-long summer Mind Games Camp. Students are exposed to the competing worldviews and challenged to think critically about their own faith, to be able to give a reason for the hope that they have with gentleness and respect.

In the rest of this article we will look at the four parts of Pearcey's *Total Truth*. In Part 1, she documents the attempts to restrict the influence of Christianity by instituting the current prisons of the split between sacred and secular, private and public, and fact and value. In Part 2 she deftly shows the importance of Creation to any worldview and summarizes the new findings of science which strongly support Intelligent Design. In Part 3, she peels back the shroud of history to discover how evangelicalism got itself into this mess. And in Part 4, she revisits Francis Schaeffer's admonition that the heart of worldview thinking lies in its personal application, putting all of life under the Lordship of Christ.

The Sacred/Secular Split

In the first part of the book, Pearcey explores what has become known as the sacred/secular split. That is to say that things of religion, or the sacred, have no intersection with the secular. Another way of putting it is to refer to the split as a private/public split. We all make personal choices in our lives, but these should remain private, such as our religious or moral choices. One should never allow personal or private choices to intersect with your public life. That would be shoving your religion down someone else's throat, as the popular saying goes.

One more phrase of expressing the same dichotomy is the fact/value split. We all have values that we are entitled to, but our values are personal and unverifiable choices among many options. These values should not try to intersect with the facts, that is, things everyone knows to be true. The creation/evolution discussion is a case in point. We are told repeatedly that evolution is science or fact and creation is based on a religious preference or value. The two cannot intersect.

The late Christopher Reeve made this split quite evident in a speech to a group of students at Yale University on the topic of embryonic stem cell research. He said, "When matters of public policy are debated, no religions should have a place at the table."{3} In other words keep your sacred, private values to yourself. In the public square, we can only discuss the facts in a secular context.

Far too many Christians have bought into this line of thinking or have been cowered into it. Pearcey tells of a man who was a deacon in his church, taught Sunday School, tithed generously and was looked upon as a model Christian. Yet his job at the law firm was to investigate the contracts with clients no longer wanted by the firm to see what loopholes were available to get them out of the contract. He saw no link between his

Christian faith and his work.{4}

We fall into these thinking traps because we don't understand worldviews in general and the Christian worldview in particular. Pearcey outlines a threefold test of any worldview to help get a grasp on what they mean for thought and life: Creation, Fall, and Redemption. Every worldview has some story of where everything came from – Creation. Then each worldview proceeds to tells us that something is wrong with human society – the Fall – and then each worldview offers a solution – Redemption. Using this tool you will be better able to diagnose a worldview and whether it speaks the truth.

The Importance of Beginnings

The second part of Pearcey's book discusses the vitally important controversy over evolution and how it is taught in our schools. There is a clear philosophical filibuster masquerading as science in classrooms around the country.

In the opening chapter of this section, she tells the all too familiar story of a religious young man who is confronted with evolution in the seventh grade. Seeing the immediate contradiction between this theory and the Bible, the young man receives no help from teachers or clergy. He is left thinking that his "faith" has no answers to his questions. By the time he finishes school in Harvard, he is a committed atheist.{5}

The same story is repeated thousands of times every year. The faith of many young people has been wrecked on the shoals of Darwinism. Whoever has the power to define the story of creation in a culture is the *de facto* priesthood and largely determines what the dominant worldview will be.

On *Probe* we have discussed the problems of evolution and the evidence for Intelligent Design numerous times. Now Pearcey makes the case that this is far more than a scientific discussion. It is at the heart of the culture war we are

immersed in. Darwinism has had a far reaching impact on American thought, and we need a better grasp of the issue to better fight the battle we are in.

To show the prevalence of naturalistic Darwinian thinking Pearcey quotes from a Berenstain Bears book on nature titled *The Bears Nature Guide*. "As the book opens, the Bear family invites us to go on a nature walk; after turning a few pages, we come to a two-page spread with a dazzling sunrise and the words spelled out in capital letters: Nature… is all that IS, or WAS, or EVER WILL BE."{6} Clearly this is presented as scientific fact and should not be doubted.

Pearcey guides the reader through a well presented description of the major problems with the evidence concerning Darwinism. But more importantly, she clearly shows that the problem is not just the evidence. Most Darwinists accept the meager evidence because their worldview demands it. Naturalism requires a naturalistic story of creation, and since they are convinced of naturalism, some form of evolution must be true. She quotes a Kansas State University professor as saying, "Even if all the data point to an intelligent designer, such an hypothesis is excluded from science because it is not naturalistic."{7}

Pearcey goes on to show that Darwinism has continued to progressively influence nearly all realms of intellectual endeavor. From biology to anthropology to ethics to law to philosophy to even theology, Darwinism shows its muscle. Darwinism is indeed a universal acid that systematically cuts through all branches of human thought. We ignore it at our peril.

How Did We Get in This Mess?

Nancy Pearcey titles the third section of her book, "How We Lost Our Minds." She begins with a typical story of conversion

from sin of a young man named Denzel. As Denzel seeks to grow and understand his newfound faith, he is stymied by leaders who can't answer his questions and is told to just have faith in the simple things.

When Denzel gets a job, he is confused by those from other religions and cults who all seem to have answers for people's questions. Only the Christians are unable to defend themselves from skeptics and believers of other stripes. Eventually he finds work at a Christian bookstore and finds the nectar he has been hungry for. But he had to look and look hard. Denzel has learned that many in the evangelical movement have a largely anti-intellectual bias.

Where did that come from? Today one can still hear preachers of various stripes make fun of those of higher learning whether philosophers, scientists, or even theologians. The root of this anti-intellectualism is found in the early days of our country. America was founded by idealists and individualists. Many had suffered religious persecution and were looking for someplace to practice their faith apart from ecclesiastical authority. The democratic ideals of the original colonies and the newly independent United States of America seemed like just the right place.

When the early American seminaries became infected with the theological liberalism spawned by the Enlightenment, many rebelled against any form of church hierarchy, believing it couldn't be trusted. With the opening of the great frontiers, great opportunities for evangelism sprouted at the same time. Out of this came the First Great Awakening. The early revivalists directed their message to individuals, exhorting them to make independent decisions, Jonathan Edwards being a notable exception. Emotional and experiential conversions brought bigger crowds. Some began to even see a formula that brought about large numbers of conversions.

There arose a suspicion that Christianity had become

hopelessly corrupted sometime after the apostolic age. The task at hand was to leapfrog back 1,800 years to restore the original purity of the church. Suddenly, the great works of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and others were seen as unnecessary.{8} Evangelicals were cut off from their historical and theological roots. The evangelical movement as a whole became focused on rugged American self-interest and self-assertion, a strong principle of Darwinian naturalism.

This is still evident today in the prevalence of church-hoppers. Many view their church through an individualistic grid which says if the church leadership doesn't do things the way I would prefer and doesn't listen to me, I will take my family and go elsewhere.

The roots of anti-intellectualism run deep and find surprisingly fresh support from Darwinian naturalism. So how do we recover?

Living It Out

In the final chapter of *Total Truth*, Pearcey rings out a call to authenticity, not just with respect to the intellectual underpinnings of the Christian worldview, but also to how we live it out.

On the final page she cites a Zogby/Forbes poll that asked respondents what they would most like to be known for. Intelligence? Good looks? Sense of humor? Unexpectedly, fully one half of all respondents said they would most like to be known for being authentic.

Pearcey concludes: "In a world of spin and hype, the postmodern generation is searching desperately for something real and authentic. They will not take Christians seriously unless our churches and parachurch organizations demonstrate an authentic way of life – unless they are communities that exhibit the character of God in their relationships and mode

of living."{9}

For most of the chapter Pearcey highlights examples of both sides of this call, people and ministries who claim Christ but use the world's naturalistic methods, particularly in fund-raising, marketing, and focusing on a personality rather than the message. She also points to people such as Richard Wurmbrand and Francis Schaeffer who lived out their Christian worldview without flashy results and hyped conferences and campaigns.

Most of us at Probe Ministries were heavily influenced by Francis Schaeffer, his ministry at L'Abri Switzerland, and his books. Many Christians whose youth spanned the turbulent '60s and '70s found Schaeffer a glowing beacon of truth and relevance in a world turned upside down by protests, drugs, war, crime, racism, and skepticism. Essentially, Schaeffer believed the gospel to be total truth. If that was the case, then living by a Christian worldview ought to be able to give real answers to real questions from real people.

We believe that what the postmodern world is searching for, what will most satisfy its craving for authenticity, is the person of Jesus Christ. They can only see Him in our lives and our answers to real questions. Our Web site at Probe.org is filled with the total truth of the Christian worldview. In our "Answers to E-Mail" section you can see authenticity lived out as we answer real questions and attacks with truth, respect, and gentleness.

We're certainly not perfect. We have much to learn and correct as we search out the answers to today's questions. We struggle with the funding and marketing of our ministry using methods that work but do not manipulate, coerce, or misrepresent who we are and what we do. Nancy Pearcey has challenged all of us in ministry, no less those of us at Probe Ministries, to always put Jesus first, people second, and ministry third.

Notes

1. Phillip Johnson, in the Foreword to Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004), 11.
2. Pearcey, 19.
3. Christopher Reeve quoted by Pearcey, 22.
4. Pearcey, 97-98.
5. Ibid., 153-154.
6. Ibid., 157.
7. Ibid, 168.
8. Ibid., 280-281.
9. Ibid., 378.

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The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands: A Christian View

Sue Bohlin looks at this important book from a distinctly Christian perspective. Filtering the advice through a biblical worldview increases the purity and strength of the message on how to minister effectively to your husband.

Why We Need This Book

Talk show host Dr. Laura Schlessinger has written a book that is improving thousands of marriages: *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands.*{1} We need this book because millions of wives either don't know how to love their husbands wisely and well, or they're too self-centered to see it as important. Dr. Laura credits this dismal condition to forty years of feminist philosophy, "with its condemnation of just about everything

male as evil, stupid, and oppressive, and the denigration of female and male roles in families."{2} While the women's movement certainly had a hand to play in the disintegration of relationships and the family, I believe the core cause is our sinful self-centeredness, just as the Bible says.{3}

Which is why we need help, and God instructs older women to train younger women to love their husband and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.{4} *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands* is a great resource for learning these important values and skills.

God gives us great power as women. Dr. Laura says, "Men are borne of women and spend the rest of their lives yearning for a woman's acceptance and approval. . . . Men admittedly are putty in the hands of a woman they love. Give him direct communication, respect, appreciation, food and good lovin', and he'll do just about anything you wish—foolish or not."{5}

We'll be looking at these aspects of the proper care and feeding of husbands in this article, starting with a man's need for *direct communication.*

• We can improve on communication by doing it less. God made us verbal creatures, which can frustrate men with the overwhelming amount of our words. Instead of expecting her husband to be a girlfriend (and men make wonderful husbands, but not girlfriends), the wise wife selects for true connecting value, gives the bottom line first, and chooses her timing well.

• Men make terrible mind readers, so be direct. Dropping subtle hints doesn't work with most men, and it doesn't mean a man is insensitive, uncaring, or oblivious.

• Spell out whether you want help and advice, or if you're just venting. God made men to want to be our heroes, so

understand you can frustrate him if he can't fix what's hurting you because all you want is someone to listen.

• And finally, take whatever he says at face value. Women tend to overanalyze men when they are just not that complicated.

Respect

A listener to Dr. Laura's radio show named Edgar wrote, "There are a few things that men want so bad they would do anything for it. I think a good number of men want respect more than love. They like to feel they have some power. I nearly cry when you tell a woman caller to respect her husband. There is so much selfishness in the world—in marriages. Prosperity has allowed women to be so independent, and thus so selfish. I always feel as though I come last—my feelings come last, my needs come last."{6}

"A good number of men want respect more than love." God knew this when He made us. His commands to husbands and wives in Ephesians 5:33 reflects each one's deepest needs: "Each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband." Dr. Emerson Eggerichs of LoveandRespect.com points out that this verse commands a husband to love his wife. Why? She needs love like she needs air to breathe. This same verse commands a wife to respect her husband. Why? He needs respect like he needs air to breathe.{7}

• Respect means treating someone in a way that builds him up and doesn't tear him down, never denigrating or attacking.{8}

• Respect means always treating the other person with the dignity they deserve as a person made in the image of God.

• Respect means grasping that a man's needs and wants are every bit as valid and important as a woman's needs and wants.

• Respect means not venting to others, *especially* the children. One woman wrote to Dr. Laura, “No emotional outlet is worth damaging my husband’s reputation.”{9}

There are three A’s that men long for from their wives: attention, affection, and affirmation. Respect involves paying attention to what they do simply because they’re the ones doing it.

Respect means allowing the other person to be different and do things differently than you. One repentant wife told Dr. Laura, “And in the end, it doesn’t much matter that they eat PBJ sandwiches for breakfast, lunch and dinner for a day or that one tooth brushing gets overlooked or whatever little thing that used to set me off!”{10}

One way to give respect is to give grace instead of resenting the things he does that complicate your life (like leaving drinking glasses in the living room or clothing on a chair). Ask yourself, “Is he *intentionally* doing this to bug me? To make my life difficult? If he were to die tomorrow, what wouldn’t I give to have him back leaving these things out?”

Appreciation

Ask any woman what she wants, and near the top of her list she’ll tell you, “I want to be acknowledged and appreciated for the things I do.” Well, men want the same thing!

A man named Evan wrote to Dr. Laura: “My wife feels that if she doesn’t remind me again and again, something won’t get done. But the fact is, it makes me feel like her child and that Mommy needs to check up on me. It’s degrading. I want to be admired. I want to be acknowledged for being the breadwinner and making sure that we are all well taken care of. My greatest pleasure is when I feel like her hero. Like her ‘man.’ Not her boy.”{11}

It doesn’t matter what a husband’s primary love language is, every man wants to be shown appreciation for who he is and what he does.

I love to suggest to young wives and mothers, “Keep a gratitude journal to help you be on the lookout for the things your husband does that you appreciate. Every night, write down three things you noticed. And then *tell him* the kinds of things that are in your book!”

• Thank him for going to work every morning even when he doesn’t feel like it.

• Thank him for being faithful to you.

• Thank him for loving you.

• Thank him for giving you children—or even desiring to.

• Thank him for taking out the garbage, and changing the oil in your car, and mowing the yard.

• Thank him for bringing home his paycheck and not spending it on gambling or booze or drugs or women.

And then there’s the opposite of appreciation. The universal complaint of men who e-mailed Dr. Laura about her book “was that their wives criticize, complain, nag, rarely compliment or express appreciation, are difficult to satisfy, and basically are not as nice to them as they’d be to a stranger ringing their doorbell at three A.M.!”{12} So allow me to make some suggestions:

• Request, don’t demand. Demanding is rude and disrespectful.

• Don’t nag. If you have to ask more than once, ask as if it were the first time you were making the request.

• Keep your mouth shut about things that don’t matter. Ask

yourself, is this the hill you want to die on?

• Don’t be controlling—which is micromanaging. Dr. Laura wrote, “When women micromanage, their husbands give up trying to please them, and then the wives complain that their men don’t do anything for them.”{13}

Proverbs says, “Kind words are like honey—sweet to the soul and healthy for the body.”{14} (This is truer no place more than in marriage.) Let your words be kind and full of appreciation.

Support

A man named Roy wrote to Dr. Laura with some good advice for wives: “If you can’t accentuate the positive, at least acknowledge it. The world is full of messages to men that there are standards we don’t meet. There is always another man who is more handsome, more virile, or more athletic than we are. None of that matters if the most important person in our life looks up to us, accepts us as we are, and loves us even though we aren’t perfect. . . . All I know is that the husband who has a wife who supports him and praises him for the positive things he does is the envy of all the other men who have to live with criticism, sarcasm, and constant reminders of their failures.”{15}

Men desperately want and need the support of their wives. This is reflected in what God reveals in His Word when He says, “It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”{16} And through the apostle Paul, God instructs wives to relate to their husbands in a way that meets this need when He says, “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.”{17}

Submission is basically giving support with a willing, cooperative heart.

A wife's submission includes knowing her gifts and strengths, and using them to serve her husband and family.

Service has a bad name, but both husbands and wives are called to serve God first and then each other; husbands are called to sacrificially love and serve their wives with Jesus as their pattern.{18}

So what does support look like?

• Believing in him. Telling him, "You have what it takes." Being his #1 fan.

• Cultivating a cooperative heart.

• Being generous and openhearted—willing to use your gifts and strengths to help him succeed.

• Understanding the importance of making him look good: never saying anything negative in public.

• Creating a home that's a safe haven from the world.

• Having a warm heart with a positive, cheerful demeanor. Women set the temperature of the home; we are thermostats, not thermometers, of the family. (On the other hand, Proverbs says "A quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping on a rainy day; restraining her is like restraining the wind or grasping oil with the hand."{19})

• Being interested in him and his life.

• Showing thoughtfulness. What does he like? Do it.

• And though by no means exhaustive, it also means being a person of faithfulness and integrity. That means keeping your promises and being dependable. As Proverbs 31 puts it, "Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value."{20}

Good Lovin’

Dr. Laura writes that men need to feel the approval, acceptance and attachment from their women that comes from physical intimacy.{21} For women, emotional intimacy leads to physical intimacy. For men, it’s the other way around; physical intimacy is the key to opening their hearts.

A man named Chris writes: “I don’t understand why women don’t understand that sex is a man’s number one need for his wife. It’s not just the act and sensation of pleasure, but it’s the acceptance by a woman of her man. There’s a communion that happens during intercourse that will bond a man to his woman, and he in turn will then begin to give of himself emotionally to her.”{22}

Wives can discover that giving themselves sexually to their husbands with a warm, open-hearted, loving spirit, can be the most effective encouragement to getting their husbands to open up emotionally.

“What attracts men to women is their femininity, and femininity isn’t only about appearance, it’s also about behaviors. Looking womanly and behaving sweetly and flirtatiously are gifts wives give to their husbands.” We see this modeled in the Song of Solomon, where the King’s bride displays her feminine charms in a holy seduction of her husband, and the way she tells him what she loves about his body.{23}

Instead, our culture has things backward; many unmarried girls and women flaunt their bodies with a total lack of modesty or propriety. Once they marry, it’s flannel nightgowns, wool socks, and no makeup.

Dr. Laura calls wives to give themselves sexually to their husbands, even when they don’t feel like it, as an act of love. It’s really no different, she points out, than the fact

that they expect their husbands to go to work and earn money to support the family even on days they don't feel like it.

She's echoing what God said in 1 Corinthians 7 about husband and wife both fulfilling their marital duty to each other because each one's body belongs not just to themselves but to each other. He also said not to deprive each other for extended periods of time lest we be tempted.

Consider the wisdom of radio listener Herb: "Sex is to a husband what conversation is to a wife. When a wife deprives her husband of sex for days, even weeks on end, it is tantamount to his refusing to talk to her for days, even weeks. Think of it that way, wives, and realize what a deleterious impact enforced sexual abstinence has on a good man who is determined to remain faithful."{24}

I can't recommend *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands* highly enough. In fact, I gave a copy to my new daughter-in-law! Let me close with one more piece of wisdom from Dr. Laura: "[M]en are simple creatures who come from a woman, are nurtured and brought up by a woman, and yearn for the continued love, admiration and approval of a woman. . . Women need to better appreciate the magnitude of their power and influence over men, and not misuse or abuse it."{25} Amen!

Notes

1. Laura Schlessinger, *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands*, New York: HarperCollins, 2004.
2. Schlessinger, 3.
3. Jeremiah 17:9
4. Titus 2:4
5. Schlessinger, xvii.
6. Schlessinger, 1.
7. http://www.loveandrespect.com/Articles/article.asp?aid=43&cat=1

8. Schlessinger, 157.
9. Schlessinger, 159.
10. Schlessinger, 158.
11. Schlessinger, 31.
12. Schlessinger, 37-38.
13. Schlessinger, 57.
14. Prov. 16:24
15. Schlessinger, 47-48.
16. Gen. 2:18.
17. Eph. 5:22, 24.
18. Eph. 2:25, 28.
19. Prov. 27:15.
20. Prov. 31:11.
21. Schlessinger, 25.
22. Schlessings, 129.
23. Song of Solomon 5:10-16
24. Schlessinger, 119.
25. Schlessinger. 10.

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The Five People You Meet in Heaven – A Biblical Worldview Critique

Written by Patrick Zukeran

Dr. Zukeran presents a biblical worldview critique of the story by Mitch Albom, The Five People You Meet in Heaven. Albom's story presents some interesting ideas about the afterlife, but falls far short of expressing a complete understanding of God's description of heaven. It misses the

importance of being created in God's image, being redeemed to be able to spend eternity with our Creator, and the fellowship with God and all the saints for eternity.

Brief Synopsis

Eddie lives an insignificant life as a maintenance man for the rides at the Ruby Pier amusement park. One day a mechanical failure causes a fatal accident. Eddie rescues a young girl from her death but in the effort, he is killed. This is when the adventure begins.

Eddie enters heaven and discovers it is not a garden but a place where he will meet five people whose lives intersected with his in some significant way on earth, some readily known to Eddie and some unknown to him. These five explain the meaning of Eddie's life and the purpose of heaven. Through this best-seller fictional story, *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, author Mitch Albom teaches us his understanding of the meaning of life.

In heaven, Eddie learns five key lessons from the five individuals. First, every life is interconnected so each person impacts others throughout his or her lifetime in ways that may not be recognized. Second, we should live sacrificing for others, for such acts inevitably lead to good outcomes. Third, forgiveness is necessary to find inner peace. Fourth, love is a powerful virtue that lasts eternally. And finally, our life, as insignificant as it may seem, has a purpose.

Heaven is a place where we find inner peace with ourselves when we learn these lessons. Through this process, we are cleansed of negative thoughts and scars we carried in our lifetime and find true inner peace. After this, we will choose our heavenly dwelling. There we will wait for newcomers whose lives intersected ours on earth. We will be one of the five people they will meet as they learn the meaning of their life on earth.

What accounts for the popularity of Albom's work? He addresses two life questions that every individual wrestles with and desperately seeks answers to: What is the meaning of my existence? and What happens after death? In a creative way, here is a story that offers significance to each person's life and hope beyond the grave.

Albom is an excellent writer and is sincere in his effort. This story causes each one of us to wrestle with these key questions of our existence and eternal destiny, issues many choose to ignore but must inevitably face. He also teaches some valuable life lessons. For these reasons, the story is enjoyable and thought provoking.

But after reading the story, I found that Albom's answers fall short of providing satisfactory solutions to every person's dilemma. In some ways he gets us closer to the answer, but never really gets there. Christians will find that he gives us some appetizers, but fails to deliver the main dish. In what follows, I will present a biblical critique of this story and explain how Albom scratches the surface but never finishes the quest for meaning, significance, and eternal hope.

The Quest for Meaning

What is the meaning of my existence? Does my ordinary life make a difference? Will I look back on my life with regret, feeling that I contributed nothing significant in my lifetime? These are issues most people ask throughout their lifetime and seek answers for.

In *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, Mitch Albom teaches that one does not have to be famous or powerful to impact the lives of others. Every person who has understanding can know his or her life was worthwhile.

In Albom's story, the meaning of life comes from understanding that everyone's life is interconnected. Therefore, even small

decisions and actions we take can significantly affect the lives of others. In a CBS interview, Albom stated, “I think the meaning of life is that we’re all kind of connected to one another. I’m living proof of the influence that one person can have on other people. Look at what Morrie did for me talking to me. And I wrote a book to try to pay his medical bills and went from one person to another person and people come up and say your book changed my life. How did that happen? I’m convinced that everybody has an effect on everyone.”{1}

It is true that our life does affect others, some in very significant ways. However, we are still left empty at the end of the novel because Albom’s proposed solution falls short of providing ultimate meaning for our existence.

In the story, the main character Eddie learns in heaven that he impacted the lives of others both positively and negatively, often unintentionally. Knowing our life led to another’s tragedy or greater enjoyment still begs the question, “So what?” It may feel good temporarily to know I made a difference, but that will not bring everlasting satisfaction. Why should we care if our lives affected others? Before we can answer the question, “What is the meaning of life?” we must first answer the question, “Why were we created?”

If we are a cosmic accident as Darwinian evolutionary theory teaches, there is no intended purpose for our existence. Therefore, our lives have no ultimate meaning, and impacting the lives of others is meaningless, for our final destiny is extinction.

If God created us for a purpose, then we need to find out why He created us. The answer to the meaning of life is directly tied to the origins question. Since Albom does not answer the origin question, he cannot provide an adequate answer for the meaning of life question. The Bible teaches that we were created by God to love Him, love others, and fulfill His

calling upon our lives. Any answer that does not include God as a centerpiece of the answer will fall short, and Albom basically leaves God out of his version of heaven.

Albom's Heaven

Could the traditional Christian view of heaven be wrong? Albom gives us a very different picture. Albom developed his idea from a story his uncle, Edward Beitchman, told him when he was a child. One night his uncle was lying near death and woke up to see his deceased relatives standing at the foot of the bed. When asked, "What did you do?" his uncle responded, "I told them to get lost. I wasn't ready for them yet."{2} Albom remembered this story and began to develop his concept of heaven for the story.

Albom states, "Somewhere, swimming in my head, was the image my uncle had given me around that table, a handful of people waiting for you when you die. And I began to explore this simple concept: what if heaven was not some lush Garden of Eden, but a place where you had your life explained to you by people who were in it—five people—maybe you knew them, maybe you didn't, but in some way you were touched by them and changed forever, just as you inevitably touched people while on earth and changed them, too."

His idea that heaven is a reunion with five people who explain the meaning of your life is masterfully pictured in this work. With each encounter the main character Eddie is taught a new lesson that puts the pieces of his earthly life together so that it begins to make sense. Some lessons bring joy, others bring remorse, but the pain is a cleansing process that results in inner peace. After this, individuals will choose their happiest moment on earth and that will be their eternal abode where they await the opportunity to teach a recently deceased newcomer the meaning of that person's life.

If heaven was a place similar to Albom's story, we would be very disappointed, for it is too small and shallow. Our souls are much bigger than this. How quickly we would get bored once we discovered the impact our life made and then spent eternity in a heaven we dream up for our pleasure. Earthly pleasure becomes painful when we get too much of it. The heaven described in the Bible is very different from this earth. Our joy is not wrapped in repeating earthly pleasures but is found in a person, Jesus Christ, who is the center of all creation. Our present earth is fallen and suffers the effects of sin. In heaven, sin and its consequences are not present.

God is the main focus in heaven, but unfortunately, in Albom's story, God plays a very small role. Psalm 16:11 states, "You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." Only a heaven created by and centered on God will be big enough for our soul.

Do All People Go to Heaven?

Albom's bestseller presents a new and creative vision of heaven. I agree with Albom that there is a heaven and an existence beyond the grave. However, it appears that Albom implies that everyone will go to heaven, and with this I disagree.

Albom portrays realistic characters in his story, none of whom lived a perfect life. All are guilty of some sin and negative behaviors that have consequences, some greater than others. There is some remorse when individuals in heaven learn how their actions caused negative results, but there is not a just payment for their sin.

Albom appears to assume that everyone will eventually find peace when they learn their lessons from the five people they meet. Although this is a comforting note, it is not what the

Bible teaches. Albom's story doesn't reveal the dilemma facing all human beings: sin, failing to perfectly live up to God's perfect standard. It is because of sin that the Bible teaches that not everyone can enter heaven. Jesus states in Matthew 7:13, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

The reason is found in the biblical understanding of human nature and God's nature. Man is sinful while God is holy, perfect, and without sin. The Bible teaches that all are guilty of sin and cannot enter into the eternal presence of a holy and just God. Romans 6:23 states, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." What is required is a perfect savior who will pay the price for sin. Albom does not deal with the true nature of God, man, heaven's purpose, man's dilemma of sin, and the solution that God freely offers.

The Bible also teaches that there is a price for rejecting God's gift of grace, Jesus Christ. Jesus states, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:17-18). All who reject Christ cannot stand before a holy God, and will be separated from Him eternally in Hell.

Fiction can often teach principles that are true. However in this work, Albom's foundational idea of heaven misses the mark because he does not present a proper understanding of human nature and God's holiness.

The People You Will We Meet In Heaven

Who will we really meet in heaven? Our answer is revealed in the Bible, the Word of God. The Bible is proven to be God's inspired word through miraculous confirmation and the testimony of Jesus Christ the Son of God. Jesus confirmed His claim to be God through His miraculous life and resurrection, and He affirms the authority of the Bible. The truth about heaven then is revealed not in a novel but in this divine revelation.

The next people we will meet in heaven are the saints of all the ages past (Rev. 7:9 and 19:1). There will be more than five; there will be a multitude! Along with them will be the angelic host.

Will we understand the meaning and see the impact of our life on earth? We will know everything about our life and much more. **We will come to a full understanding of God's plan for all of creation.** Only then will we see how our lives played a role in God's overall plan. We will see things from a renewed perspective because our minds will be transformed and freed from the limitations that resulted from sin. 1 Cor. 13:12 states, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." If we knew the glory of the real heaven, we would say Albom's, and any human attempt to describe heaven, is too small.

Notes

1. CBSNews.com, The Early Show, "Five People You Meet In Heaven," Sept. 25, 2003, http://www.cbsnews.com.
2. The Five People You Meet in Heaven Web site, http://www.albomfivepeople.com/abouteddie.htm, 5/25/2005

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