JFK and Groupthink: Lessons in Decision Making

JFK's Legacy and Groupthink

Have you ever been part of a group that was making an important decision and you felt uncomfortable with the direction things were headed? Maybe it was a business or academic committee, a social group, a church board, a government agency. Did you speak up? Or did you keep your concerns to yourself? And what was the outcome of the group's decision? Do you ever wish you had voiced your reservations more strongly?

Perhaps you can identify with John F. Kennedy.

Forty years after his tragic death, President Kennedy continues to fascinate the public. A new JFK biography{1} hit the bestseller lists. Analysts dissect his political and oratorical skills, his character and legacy. His relatives — America's royalty in some eyes — are frequent newsmakers.

The youthful president has engendered both inspiration and disappointment. Major initiatives that he sponsored or influenced touch society today: the space program, the Peace Corp, and economic sanctions against Cuba, to name a few.

A fascinating facet of Kennedy's legacy involves the decision-making procedures he used among his closest advisors. Some brought great successes. Others were serious failures. This article looks at two specific examples: the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, an attempt to invade Cuba and overthrow Fidel Castro that became a fiasco, and the 1962 Cuban missile crisis that saw the world come perilously close to nuclear war.

Yale social psychologist Irving Janis studied these episodes

carefully and concluded that too often decision makers are blinded by their own needs for self-esteem they get from being an accepted member of a socially important insiders group. Fears of shattering the warm feelings of perceived unanimity — of rocking the boat — kept some of Kennedy's advisors from objecting to the Bay of Pigs plan before it was too late. After that huge blunder, JFK revamped his decision-making process to encourage dissent and critical evaluation among his team. In the Cuban missile crisis, virtually the same policymakers produced superior results. {2}

"Groupthink" was the term Janis used for the phenomenon of flawed group dynamics that can let bad ideas go unchallenged and can sometimes yield disastrous outcomes. This article will consider how groupthink might have affected JFK and a major television enterprise, and how it can affect you.

The Bay of Pigs Invasion

"How could I have been so stupid?"{3} President John F. Kennedy asked that after the Bay of Pigs fiasco. He called it a "colossal mistake."{4} It left him feeling depressed, guilty, bitter, and in tears.{5} One historian later called the Bay of Pigs, "one of those rare events in history — a perfect failure."{6}

What happened? In 1961, CIA and military leaders wanted to use Cuban exiles to overthrow Fidel Castro. After lengthy consideration among his top advisors, Kennedy approved a covert invasion. Advance press reports alerted Castro to the threat. Over 1,400 invaders at the *Bahía de Cochinos* (Bay of Pigs) were vastly outnumbered. Lacking air support, necessary ammunition and an escape route, nearly 1,200 surrendered. Others died.

Declassified CIA documents help illuminate the invasion's flaws. Top CIA leaders blamed Kennedy for not authorizing vital air strikes. Other CIA analysts fault the wishful

thinking that the invasion would stimulate an uprising among Cuba's populace and military. Planners assumed the invaders could simply fade into the mountains for guerilla operations. Trouble was, eighty miles of swampland separated the bay from the mountains. The list goes on. {7}

Irving Janis felt that Kennedy's top advisors were unwilling to challenge bad ideas because it might disturb perceived or desired group concurrence. Presidential advisor Arthur Schlesinger, for instance, presented serious objections to the invasion in a memorandum to the president, but suppressed his doubts at the team meetings. Attorney General Robert Kennedy privately admonished Schlesinger to support the president's decision to invade. At one crucial meeting, JFK called on each member for his vote for or against the invasion. Each member, that is, except Schlesinger — whom he knew to have serious concerns. Many members assumed other members agreed with the invasion plan. {8}

Schlesinger later lamented, "In the months after the Bay of Pigs I bitterly reproached myself for having kept so silent during those crucial discussions in the cabinet room." He continued, "I can only explain my failure to do more than raise a few timid questions by reporting that one's impulse to blow the whistle on this nonsense was simply undone by the circumstances of the discussion." {9}

Have you ever kept silent when you felt you should speak up? President Kennedy later revised his group decision-making process to encourage dissent and debate. The change helped avert a nuclear catastrophe, as we will see.

The Cuban Missile Crisis

Ever face tough decisions? How would you feel if your wrong decision might mean nuclear war? Consider a time when the world teetered on the brink of disaster. {10}

Stung by the Bay of Pigs debacle, President Kennedy determined to ask hard questions during future crises. {11} A good opportunity came eighteen months later.

In October 1962, aerial photographs showed Soviet missile sites in Cuba. {12} The missile program, if allowed to continue, could reach most of the United States with nuclear warheads. {13} Kennedy's first inclination was an air strike to take out the missiles. {14} His top advisors debated alternatives from bombing and invasion to blockade and negotiation. {15}

On October 22, Kennedy set forth an ultimatum in a televised address: A U.S. naval "quarantine" would block further offensive weapons from reaching Cuba. Russia must promptly dismantle and withdraw all offensive weapons. Use of the missiles would bring attacks against the Soviet Union. {16}

The U.S. Navy blockaded Cuba. Soviets readied their forces. The Pentagon directed the Strategic Air Command to begin a nuclear alert. On October 24, the world held its breath as six Soviet ships approached the blockade. Then, all six ships either stopped or reversed course. {17} Secretary of State Dean Rusk told a colleague, "We're eyeball to eyeball, and I think the other fellow just blinked." {18}

A maze of negotiations ensued. At the United Nations, U.S. ambassador Adlai Stevenson publicly pressed his Soviet counterpart to confirm or deny Soviet missiles' existence in Cuba. Saying he was prepared to wait for an answer "until hell freezes over," Stevenson then displayed reconnaissance photos to the Security Council. {19} Eventually, Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev removed the missiles. {20}

Kennedy's decision-making process — though imperfect — had evolved significantly. He challenged military leaders who pressured him to bomb and invade. He heard the CIA's case for air strikes and Stevenson's counsel for negotiation. Advocates

for different views developed their arguments in committees then met back together. {21} Robert Kennedy later wrote, "The fact that we were able to talk, debate, argue, disagree, and then debate some more was essential in choosing our ultimate course." {22} Many groupthink mistakes of the Bay of Pigs, in which bad ideas went unchallenged, had been avoided. {23}

Groupthink has serious ramifications for government, business, academia, neighborhood, family, and the ministry. One area it has affected is Christian television.

Groupthink and the Seductive Televangelist

Once upon a time, a prominent Christian televangelist, despondent about his rocky marriage, had sexual intercourse with a church secretary.

This televangelist and his wife regularly appeared on international TV, providing physical and spiritual care to hurting people. Television brought in millions of dollars. Their headquarters and conference center displayed a wholesome, positive atmosphere. Yet the operation was quite lavish and included an opulent five-star hotel, white limousine, corporate jet, and bloated salaries.

The distraught secretary contacted ministry headquarters, wanting justice. The ministry paid her hush money, laundered through their builder. Several insiders were aware of the sex scandal and cover up, but turned a blind eye. Many of these top leaders also enjoyed privilege, esteem, comfort, and wealth from the successful ministry.

Eventually, fearing media exposure, the televangelist confessed his sexual episode to the local newspaper and stepped down. The ensuing turmoil became an international soap opera complete with sexual intrigue, power struggles, and legal morass. The televangelist and his VP served prison

terms. The builder's wife divorced him because of his involvement with the televangelist's wife, who divorced the televangelist, married the builder and tried to start another TV ministry.

After prison, the televangelist wrote a book admitting wrong{24}, joined an inner city ministry, and remarried. The church secretary had plastic surgery and posed nude for *Playboy*. The local newspaper won a Pulitzer Prize.

You may recognize this as the story of PTL and Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker. {25} Reporter Charles Shepard's book about PTL, Forgiven {26}, stands as a timely warning to ministry leaders and boards of the temptations of fame and power.

The PTL scandal exhibited several possible symptoms of groupthink{27}, such as belief in the group's inherent morality, rationalizations, stereotyping adversaries, and pressures to conform. Desires for approval, pride, greed, and a false sense of well-being stemming from being an accepted member of a wealthy, influential inner circle apparently stifled dissent. Leaders seemed to overlook problems for "the good of the ministry." Richard Dortch, Bakker's second in command, later admitted, "We were wrong. I should have refused the kind of salary I took. . . . We were so caught up in God's work that we forgot about God. It took the tragedy, the kick in the teeth, to bring us to our senses."{28}

Groupthink can affect leaders of all stripes. What lessons might JFK and PTL have for you?

Groupthink and You

As we have seen, Kennedy's presidency provides some potent examples of this psychological theory about flawed group decision-making. When the group culture overvalues internal agreement, members can become unrealistic. {29}

Symptoms of groupthink include:

- Illusions of invulnerability: "No one can defeat us."
- Belief in the group's inherent morality: "We can do no wrong."
- Rationalizing away serious problems: "Danger signs?"
 What danger signs?"
- Stereotyping the opposition: "Those guys are too dumb or too weak to worry about."
- Illusions of unanimity: "Members who keep silent probably agree with the ones who speak out."
- Pressuring dissenters: "Look, are you a team player or not?"

JFK's Bay of Pigs advisors accepted the CIA's flawed plan almost without criticism. Leaders underestimated Castro's military and political capability and overestimated their own. Jim Bakker and his PTL Christian ministry leaders rationalized away sexual and financial impropriety, to their peril.

Of course, not every group succumbs to groupthink. Nor does groupthink explain every bad group decision (decision makers could be inept, greedy or just plain evil, for example).

What about you? What can you do to avoid the groupthink trap? May I offer some suggestions, from a biblical perspective?

First: Determine to stand for what is right, regardless of the cost. Jesus of Nazareth, one who stood by his convictions of right, admonished followers to "let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father."{30}

Second: Determine to speak up when the situation warrants it. One of Jesus' close friends said of certain people too fearful to speak up amidst opposition that "they loved the approval of...[humans] rather than the approval of God." [31] How sad.

Third: Seek to structure groups to avoid blind conformity and encourage healthy debate. JFK once said, "When at some future

date the high court of history sits in judgment on each of us, it will ask: Were we truly men of courage — with the courage to stand up to one's enemies — and the courage to stand up, when necessary, to one's associates?"{32} Paul, a first-century follower of Jesus, encouraged group members to "admonish one another."{33}

We all have a chance to leave a legacy. John Kennedy left his, which was mixed. PTL left a legacy, also mixed. What legacy will you leave?

Notes

- 1. Robert Dallek, *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy,* 1917-1963 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2003).
- 2. Irving L. Janis, "Groupthink," *Psychology Today* 5:6, November 1971, 43-44, 46, 74-76. See also Irving L. Janis, *Victims of Groupthink* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972).
- 3. Dallek, op. cit., p. 367.
- 4. Ibid., 375.
- 5. Ibid., 366.
- 6. Ibid., 363.
- 7. For a summary of the invasion and various assessments of its many flaws, see Ibid., 356-372; and Michael Warner, "Lessons Unlearned: The CIA's Internal Probe of the Bay of Pigs Affair," Studies in Intelligence: A collection of articles on the theoretical, doctrinal, operational and historical aspects of intelligence, 42:2, Winter 1998-1999, www.cia.gov/csi/studies/winter98-99/art08.html.
- 8. Janis 1971, op. cit., especially 46, 74.
- 9. Ibid., 74.

10. Most of the historical material for this section is taken from Dallek, op. cit., 535-574. Another useful summary of the Cuban missile crisis by a former New York Times reporter who covered it from Washington, D.C. — and became a participant, of sorts — is Max Frankel, "Learning from the Missile Crisis," 0ctober Smithsonian Magazine, www.smithsonianmag.si.edu/smithsonian/issues02/oct02/missile c risis full 1.html. For a collection of declassified documents from the crisis, see Laurence Chang and Peter Kornbluh, eds., The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: A National Security Archive Documents Reader, 2nd edition (New York: The New Press, 1998); the Introduction is reproduced at www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba mis cri/declass.htm.

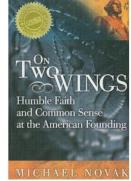
- 11. Dallek, op. cit., 368, 372.
- 12. Ibid., 544.
- 13. Ibid., 559.
- 14. Ibid., 547.
- 15. Ibid., 547-58.
- 16. Ibid., 558-59.
- 17. Ibid., 561-562.
- 18. Ibid., 562.
- 19. Ibid., 564-565.
- 20. Ibid., 562-572.
- 21. Ibid., 550-56.
- 22. Robert Kennedy, *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969), 111; in Chang and Kornbluh, op. cit., Introduction, www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba mis cri/declass.htm.

- 23. Janis 1971, op. cit., 76.
- 24. Jim Bakker, I Was Wrong: The Untold Story of the Shocking Journey from PTL Power to Prison and Beyond (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996).
- 25. See, for instance, Keith A. Roberts, Religion in Sociological Perspective, 3rd ed. (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1995), 376-78. The PTL saga has reached textbook-case status.
- 26. Charles E. Shepard, Forgiven: The Rise and Fall of Jim Bakker and the PTL Ministry (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1991).
- 27. Janis 1971, op. cit., 44, 46, 74-75.
- 28. "Interview: 'I Made Mistakes'," *Christianity Today*, March 18, 1988, 46-47.
- 29. Janis 1971, op. cit.
- 30. Matthew 5:16 NLT.
- 31. John 12:43 NASB.
- 32. Dallek, op. cit., 535.
- 33. Colossians 3:16 NIV.

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On Two Wings

Introduction



Michael Novak has been and continues to be one of the most influential intellectuals of our time. Author of more than thirty books, he has been a professor at Harvard, Stanford, and Notre Dame and was awarded the \$1 million Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion.

So it is significant that his recent book, *On Two Wings*, documents the Judeo-Christian foundations of this country and disputes the teaching that the American Founders were secular Enlightenment rationalists. Instead, he persuasively argues that they were the creators of a unique American blend of biblical faith, practical reason, and human liberty.

In his preface, Michael Novak says, "Although I have wanted to write this book for some forty years, my own ignorance stood in the way. It took me a long time, time spent searching up many byways and neglected paths, and fighting through a great deal of conventional (but mistaken) wisdom, to learn how many erroneous perceptions I had unconsciously drunk in from public discussion."{1}

Novak believes that "most of us grow up these days remarkably ignorant of the hundred men most responsible for leading this country into a War for Independence and writing our nation's Constitution." {2}

The way American history has been told for the last century is incomplete. Secular historians have "cut off one of the two wings by which the American eagle flies." The founding generation established a compact with the God of Israel "and relied upon this belief. Their faith is an *indispensable* part of their story."{3}

Historical research by a number of scholars documents the significant influence of the Bible on the founders. Two decades ago, Constitutional scholars and political historians (including one of my professors at Georgetown University) assembled 15,000 writings from the Founding Era. They counted 3154 citations in these writings. They found that the two political philosophers most often quoted were Montesquieu and Blackstone. But surprisingly, the reference most quoted was the Bible. It was quoted 34 percent of the time. This was nearly four times as often as Montesquieu or Blackstone and 12 times more often than John Locke.

While secular historians point to Locke as the source of the ideas embodied in Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence, they usually fail to note the older influence of other authors and the Bible. "Before Locke was even born, the Pilgrims believed in the consent of the governed, social compacts, the dignity of every child of God, and political equality." {4} By forcing a secular interpretation onto America's founding history, these secular historians ignore the second wing by which the American eagle took flight.

Philosophical Assumptions of the Founders of this Country

First, the Bible was the one book that literate Americans in the 18th century could be expected to know well. Biblical imagery was a central part of American life. For example, Thomas Jefferson suggested as a design for the Seal of the United States a representation of the children of Israel in the wilderness, led by a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night.

Second, the founders believed that time "was created for the unfolding of human liberty, for human emancipation. This purpose requires humans to choose for or against building cities worthy of the ideals God sets before them: liberty, justice, equality, self-government, and brotherhood." {5}

The first paragraph of *The Federalist* describes this important moment with destiny:

It seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force. [6]

The founders believed that they could learn from history and put together piece by piece what they called "an improved science of politics." History, they believed, was a record of progress (or decline) measured against God's standards and learned from personal and historical experience.

Third, the founders also held that everything in creation was intelligible and thus discernible through reason and rational evaluation. They also believed that God was The Creator and thus gave us life and liberty. Thomas Jefferson said, "The God Who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time."

Novak concludes that without this philosophical foundation, "the founding generation of Americans would have had little heart for the War of Independence. They would have had no ground for believing that their seemingly unlawful rebellion actually fulfilled the will of God — and suited the laws of nature and nature's God. Consider the jeopardy in which their rebellion placed them: When they signed the Declaration, they

were committing treason in the King's eyes. If their frail efforts failed, their flagrant betrayal of the solemn oaths of loyalty they had sworn to their King doomed them to a public hanging. Before future generations, their children would be disgraced. To still their trembling, they pled their case before a greater and wholly undeceivable Judge, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the Rectitude of our Intentions."{7}

Seven Events in the Founding of this Country

The first event was the first act of the First Continental Congress in September 1774. When the delegates gathered in Philadelphia, their purpose was to remind King George of the rights due them as Englishmen. But as they gathered, news arrived that Charlestown had been raked by cannon shot while red-coated landing parties surged through its streets.

The first motion of the Congress proposed a public prayer. Some of the delegates spoke against the motion because, they argued, Americans were so divided in religious sentiments (Episcopalians, Quakers, Anabaptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists). Sam Adams arose to say he was no bigot and could hear the prayer from any gentleman of piety and virtue. He proposed that Reverend Duch had earned that character.

The next day, a white-haired Episcopal clergyman dressed in his pontificals pronounced the first official prayer before the Continental Congress. Before this priest knelt men like Washington, Henry, Randolph, Rutledge, Lee, and Jay. The emotion in the room was palpable. John Adams wrote to his wife Abigail that he "had never heard a better prayer, or one so well pronounced." He went on to say that it was "enough to melt a heart of stone. I saw tears gush into the eyes of the old, grave pacific Quakers of Philadelphia." {8}

The second event was the sermon by John Witherspoon of Princeton on May 17, 1776. In this pivotal sermon, Witherspoon who had opposed the rebellion went over to the side of independence. His influence cannot be overstated. He was James Madison's teacher and he is credited with having taught one vice-president, twelve members of the Continental Congress, five delegates to the Constitutional Convention, forty-nine U.S. representatives, twenty-eight U.S. Senators, three Supreme Court justices, and scores of officers in the Continental Army. His sermons were printed in over 500 Presbyterian churches throughout the colonies.

His message centered on the doctrine of divine providence. He argued that even things that seem harmful and destructive may be turned to the advantage of the patriots. Even the enemies of law and morality cannot escape being the instruments of Providence. Witherspoon argued that liberty is God's gift and all of creation has been contrived so that out of darkness and despair, freedom will come to fruition.

Michael Novak concludes that, "During the years 1770-1776, the fires of revolution were lit by Protestant divines aflame with the dignity of human conscience. 'To the Pulpit, the Puritan Pulpit,' wrote John Wingate Thornton, 'We owe the moral force which won our independence.'" {9}

The third event was the writing of the Declaration of Independence. Its very form was that of a traditional American prayer, similar to the Mayflower Compact. In essence, it was only the latest in a long series of local and regional covenants which put all governmental bodies on notice by establishing a national compact.

The fifty-six signers of the Declaration were mostly Christian and represented mostly Christian people. The four names that these signers gave to God were: Lawgiver (as in "Laws of Nature and Nature's God"), Creator ("endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights"), Judge ("appealing to the

Supreme Judge of the World for the Rectitude of our Intentions"), and Providence ("with a firm Reliance on the Protection of divine Providence").

Novak points out that "Three of these names (Creator, Judge, Providence) unambiguously derive from Judaism and came to America via Protestant Christianity. The fourth name for God, 'Lawgiver,' could be considered Greek or Roman as well as Hebraic. But Richard Hooker showed that long tradition had put 'Lawgiver,' too, in a Biblical context." {10}

The fourth event was a national day of prayer. Only five months after the Declaration, "the pinch and suffering of war and a poor harvest seriously imperiled morale." Congress set aside December 11, 1776 as a Day of Fasting and Repentance.

The fifth event occurred when George Washington became commander of the amateurs who became the Continental Army. He knew he had to prepare them for the adversity to come. "To stand with swollen chests in a straight line, beneath snapping flags, to the music of fife and drums is one thing; to hold your place when the British musketballs roar toward you like a wall of blazing lead, and all around you the flesh of screaming friends and brothers is shredded, is another." {11}

Washington knew there would be bitter winters and hot summers with no pay and little food. Often the soldiers would have to frequently retreat rather than face frontal combat from the enemy. He knew his only hope was to fashion a godly corps whose faith was placed in the Creator not battlefield victories. So Washington gave orders that each day begin with formal prayer, to be led by officers of each unit. He also ordered that officers of every unit "to procure Chaplains according to the decree of the Continental Congress." Washington knew that prayer and spiritual discipline were essential to his army's success.

The sixth event occurred toward the end of the fighting season

in late August, 1776. George Washington had assembled 12,000 local militiamen of the Continental Army on Long Island. British Generals Howe, Clinton, Cornwallis, and Percy along with the German Major General von Heister landed a royal detachment twice as large to the rear of the Continental Army. The British took up positions to march swiftly toward the East River to trap Washington's entire army and put an end to the American insurrection.

Seeing that they might lose everything, Washington put out a call for every available vessel so that he might ferry his troops by cover of night back to Manhattan. All night the men scoured for boats, marched in silence, and rowed. But by dawn, only a fraction had made their escape. The Americans prepared for the worst. As if in answer to their prayers, a heavy fog rolled in and lasted until noon.

By the time the fog lifted, the entire Army escaped. Many gave thanks to God. And Washington and many others considered it one of those "signal interventions" by Divine Providence that saved the army and allowed the revolution to continue.

The seventh event was the establishment of Thanksgiving near the end of the third year of the war. Congress had many reasons to express thanksgiving to God and to seek His continued mercy and assistance. John Witherspoon was called upon to draft a Thanksgiving Day recollection of those events. The Congress urged the nation to "humbly approach the throne of Almighty God" to ask "that he would establish the independence of these United States upon the basis of religion and virtue."

Following the wartime precedent of the Congress, Washington issued his first Thanksgiving Day Proclamation shortly after becoming president in 1789. He reminded the nation of God's protection and provision in the Battle of Long Island all the way to their victory at Yorktown. Years later Abraham Lincoln, after annual presidential proclamations of Thanksgiving waned,

reinstituted a national day of Thanksgiving on November 26, 1863 and the tradition has continued ever since.

Conclusion

Michael Novak has provided Americans with a great service in documenting the Christian influence in the founding of this country. This religious influence is the second wing that tapped into the deepest energies of the human spirit and propelled this nation forward through difficult times and great challenges.

It is also fitting that we remember these important religious concepts and their influence on our nation. If we take seriously the words of George Washington in his Farewell Address to the Nation, then our ignorance of our nation's past may yet be our destruction. That is why we must study our history and teach it correctly to the next generation so we may keep the torch of freedom alive for generations to come.

Notes

- 1. Michael Novak, On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense at the American Founding (San Francisco: Encounter, 2002), 1.
- 2. Ibid.
- 3. Ibid., 5.
- 4. Ibid., 6-7.
- 5. Ibid., 8-9.
- 6. The Federalist Papers, Number 1.
- 7. Novak, 12.
- 8. William Federer, ed. *America's God and Country* (Coppell: TX: FAME, 1994), 137.

- 9. Novak, 17.
- 10. Ibid., 17-18.
- 11. Ibid., 19.
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Thanksgiving Roots

We live in an uncertain moment in history when everyone is looking for "Roots." November, especially, is a time to reflect upon family and traditions. Curiously, we Christians tend to be strangers to what is best in our own tradition. I refer to the Puritans, the historic source of our Thanksgiving heritage and much of what is still good about America.

We can still feel today the impact and the echoes of this robust community upon our own lives—in family, in work, in education, in economics, in worship, and in national destiny. But let them speak for themselves:

On the God-Centered Life: "I was now grown familiar with the Lord Jesus Christ; he would oft tell me he loved me. I did not doubt to believe him; if I went abroad, he went with me, when I returned he came home with me. I talked with him upon my way, he lay down with me, and usually I did awake with him: and so sweet was his love to me, as I desired nothing but him in heaven or earth." —John Winthrop.

On the Sacred and the Secular: "Not only my spiritual life, but even my civil life in this world, all the life I live, is by the faith of the Son of God: he exempts no life from the

agency of faith." -John Cotton.

On God and the Commonplace: "Have you forgot. . .the milkhouse, the stable, the barn and the like, where God did visit your soul?" —John Bunyan.

On Spiritual Vitality: "Therefore the temper of the true professor is. . . to advance his religion. . . In the cause of Christ, in the course of religion, he must be fiery and fervent." —Richard Sibbes.

On the Centrality of the Bible: "The word of God must be our rule and square whereby we are to frame and fashion all our actions; and according to the direction received thence, we must do the things we do, or leave them undone." —William Perkins.

On the Family: "The great care of my godly parents was to bring me up in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord: whence I was kept from many visible outbreakings of sin which else I had been guilty of: and whence it was that I had many good impressions of the Spirit of God upon me, even from my infancy." —Cotton Mather.

The Puritans viewed themselves as pilgrims on a journey to God and heaven. That journey led through this world and was not an escape from it. The Puritans saw themselves as participants in a great spiritual battle between good and evil, God and Satan. As warfaring and wayfaring Christians, they were assured of victory because they were on God's side.

Dartmouth, Harvard, Yale, Princeton and many other colonial universities were originally founded for the express purpose of propagating these principles. Perhaps these universities would still be for us objects of thanksgiving rather than uneasiness if the substance of Christian thought which characterized their historic beginnings was still primary in their philosophies and curricula.

But there are still glimmers here and there. And herein is our great task and challenge for the new century: to rekindle the fires and recapture the spirit of the Puritan lifestyle which was fed by the spiritual springs of new life in Christ. These are roots worth searching for this Thanksgiving. Maya the Lord find each of us diligently seeking to find and emulate them.

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Where Was God on Sept. 11? The Problem of Evil

Dr. Ray Bohlin explores the problem of evil in light of the terrorist attacks on the U.S. on Sept. 11, 2001.

Why Didn't God Prevent the Terrible Attacks?

The events of September 11th are indelibly etched in our hearts and minds. The horrible memories of personal tragedy and suffering will never really go away. As well they shouldn't. As Christians we were all gratified to see so many of our national, state, and local leaders openly participate in prayer services and calling upon people of faith to pray for victims' families and injured survivors.

What was lost underneath the appearance of a religious revival was the clear cry of many that wondered if our prayers were justified. After all, if we pray to God in the aftermath and expect God to answer, where was He as countless individuals cried out to Him from the planes, the World Trade Center and the Pentagon? The skeptical voices were drowned out because of the fervent religious outcry seeking comfort and relief. But

make no mistake; the question was there all the time. Where was God on September 11th? Surely He could have diverted those planes from their appointed destinations. Why couldn't the hijackers have been intercepted at the airports or their plots discovered long before their designed execution?

Why so many innocent people? Why should so many suffer so much? It all seems so senseless. How could a loving God allow it?

It is important to realize also that the suffering of those initial weeks is only the tip of the iceberg. There will be military deaths and casualties. The war on terrorism will be a long one with mounting personal and economic costs. The clean up will also continue to take its ever-mounting toll in dollars, lives, and emotional breakdowns.

Former pastor Gordon MacDonald spent time with the Salvation Army in caring for people and removing debris and bodies from the rubble of the World Trade Center. He relates this encounter from his journal of September 21 in *Christianity Today*: {1}

"Later in the night, I wandered over to the first-line medical tent, which is staffed by military personnel who are schooled in battlefield casualties. The head of the team, a physician, and I got into a conversation.

"He was scared for the men in the pit, he said, because he knew what was coming 'downstream.' He predicted an unusual spike in the suicide rate and a serious outbreak of manic depression. . . . Many of the men will be unable to live with these losses at the WTC. It's going to take an unspeakable toll on them."

So why would God allow so much suffering? This is an ancient question. The problem of reconciling an all-powerful, all-loving God with evil is the number one reason that people reject God. I will try to clarify the question, provide some

understanding, and make some comparisons of other explanations.

Psalm 73 and Asaph's Answer

The Bible answers the question of where God was on September 11 in many passages, but I would like to begin with the answer from Asaph in Psalm 73. My discussion will flow from the excellent discussion of the problem of evil found in Dr Robert Pyne's 1999 book, Humanity and Sin: The Creation, Fall and Redemption of Humanity. {2}

In Psalm 73, Asaph begins by declaring that God is good. Without that assumption, nothing more need be said. He goes on in verses 2-12 to lament the excess and success of the wicked. In verses six and seven he says, "Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits." (Psalm 73:6-7). From this point Asaph lets his feelings be known by crying out that this isn't fair when he says in verse 13, "Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence."

The wicked seem to snub their noses at God with no apparent judgment, while Asaph strives to follow the Lord to no benefit. We have all experienced this in one form or another. Some things in this world simply aren't fair. In the last ten verses of the psalm, Asaph recognizes that the wicked will indeed realize their punishment in the future. God's judgment will come. He also realizes that God is always with him and that is sufficient.

18th century philosopher David Hume stated the classical problem of evil by saying that if God were indeed all powerful He would do something about evil, and that if He were all-loving He would want to do something about evil. Since evil exists, God must either not be able or not want to do anything about it. This makes God either malevolent or impotent or

both. But Hume chooses to leave out the option, as Asaph resolves, that God is patient. Hume, like many before him and after him, grows weary with a God who is patient towards evil.

We long for immediate justice. But before we pray too earnestly for immediate justice, we'd better reflect on what that would be like. What would instant justice look like? Immediate justice would have to be applied across the board. That means that every sin would be proportionately and immediately punished. We soon realize that immediate justice is fine if applied to everybody else. Dr. Pyne quotes D. A. Carson as saying, "The world would become a searing pain; the world would become hell. Do you really want nothing but totally effective, instantaneous justice? Then go to hell." {3} I think we're all quite comfortable with a God that does not apply immediate justice.

Evil and the Sovereignty of God

Next, I want to focus on God's sovereignty. We understand that God knew what He was doing in creating people with the ability to choose to love Him or hate Him. In order for our love for Him to be real, our choice needed to be real and that means creating creatures that could turn from Him as well as love Him. In order to have creatures with moral freedom, God risked evil choices.

Some would go so far as to say that God couldn't intervene in our evil choices. But in Psalm 155:3, Psalm 135:6, and in Nebuchadnezzar's words of praise in Daniel 4:34-37 we're told it is God who does whatever He pleases. However, God does perform acts of deliverance and sometimes He chooses not to. We are still left with the question "Why?" In the book of Job, Job basically proclaims his innocence and essentially asks why? God doesn't really give Job an answer, but simply reminds him who is in charge. (Job 38:2-4) "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" the Lord asks Job.

The parameters are clearly set. God in His power is always capable of intervening in human affairs, but sometimes He doesn't and we aren't always given a reason why. There is tension here that we must learn to accept, because the alternative is to blaspheme by assigning to God evil or malevolent actions. As Asaph declared, God is good!

This brings us to the hidden purposes of God. For although we can't always see God's purpose, we believe He has one in everything that occurs, even seemingly senseless acts of cruelty and evil. Here is where Jesus' sufferings serve as a model. The writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before Him. (Hebrews 12:1-3) So then, we should bear our cross for the eternal joy set before us. (Hebrews 12:11, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18) But knowing this doesn't always make us feel better.

When Jesus was dying on the cross all His disciples but John deserted Him. From their perspective, all that they had learned and prepared for over the last three years was over, finished. How could Jesus let them crucify Him? It didn't make any sense at all. Yet as we well know now, the most important work in history was being accomplished and the disciples thought God was absent. How shortsighted our perspective can be.

The Danger of a Nice Explanation

But with this truth comes the danger of a nice explanation. Even though we know and trust that there is a purpose to God's discipline and His patience towards ultimate judgment, that doesn't mean we should somehow regard evil as an expression of God's goodness. In addition, we can be tempted to think that if God has a purpose to evil and suffering, then my own sin can be assigned not to me but to someone else, namely God Himself because He had a purpose in it.

Dr. Robert Pyne puts it this way.

We may not be able to fully resolve the problem of evil, and we may not be able to explain the origin of sin, but we can see the boundaries that must be maintained when addressing these issues. We share in Adam's guilt, but we cannot blame Him for our sin. God is sovereign, and He exercises His providential control over all things, but we cannot blame Him either. God permits injustice to continue, but He neither causes it nor delights in it.{4}

Another danger lies in becoming too comfortable with evil. When we trust in God's ultimate purpose and patience with evil we shouldn't think that we have somehow solved the problem and therefore grow comfortable in its presence. We should never be at peace with sin, suffering, and evil.

The prophet Habakkuk sparred with God in the first few verses of chapter 1 of the book bearing his name by recounting all the evil in Israel. The Lord responds in verses 6-11 that indeed the Babylonians are coming and sin will be judged. Habakkuk further complains about God's choice of the godless Babylonians, to which God reminds him that they too will receive judgment. Yet the coming judgment still left Habakkuk with fear and dread. "I heard and my inward parts trembled: at the sound my lips quivered. Decay enters my bones, and in my place I tremble. . . . Yet, I will exult in the Lord." (Habakkuk 3:16-19.) Habakkuk believes that God knows what He is doing. That does not bring a smile to his face. But he can face the day.

"We are not supposed to live at peace with evil and sin, but we are supposed to live at peace with God. We continue to trust in His goodness, His sovereignty, His mercy, and we continue to confess our own responsibility for sin." [5]

He Was There!

Though we have come to a better understanding of the problem of evil, we are still left with our original question. Where

was God on September 11th?

While the Christian answer may not seem a perfect answer, it is the only one which offers truth, hope, and comfort. Naturalism or deism offers no real answers. Things just happen. There is no good and no evil. Make the best of it! Pantheism says the physical world is irrelevant or an illusion. It doesn't really matter. Good and evil are the same.

To answer the question we need to understand that God does, in fact, notice when every sparrow falls and grieve over every evil and every suffering. Jesus is with us in all of our suffering, feeling all of our pain. That's what compassion means, to suffer with another. So the suffering that Christ endured on the cross is literally unimaginable.

"The answer is, how could you not love this being who went the extra mile, who practiced more than He preached, who entered into our world, who suffered our pains, who offers Himself to us in the midst of our sorrows?" [6]

We must remember that Jesus' entire time on earth was a time of sacrifice and suffering, not just His trial and crucifixion. Jesus was tempted in the manner of all men and He bore upon Himself all our sin and suffering. So the answer is quite simple. He was there!

He was on the 110th floor as one called home. He was at the other end of the line as his wife realized her husband was not coming home. He was on the planes, at the Pentagon, in the stairwells answering those who called out to Him and calling to those who didn't.

He saw every face, knew every name, even though some did not know Him. Some met Him for the first time, some ignored Him for the last time. He is there now.

Let me share with you one more story from Gordon MacDonald's

experience with the Salvation Army during the initial clean up at the World Trade Center.

"There is a man whose job it is to record the trucks as they leave the pit with their load of rubble. He is from Jamaica, and he has one of the most radiant smiles I've ever seen. He brings a kind of spiritual sunshine to the entire intersection. "I watch him—with his red, white, and blue hard hat—talking to each truck driver as they wait their turn to go in and get a load. He brightens men up. In the midst of those smells, the dust, the clashing sounds, he brings a civilizing influence to the moment.

"Occasionally I go out to where he stands and bring him some water. At other times, he comes over and chats with us. We always laugh when we engage. "I said to him last night, 'You're a follower of the Lord, aren't you?' He gave me an enthusiastic 'Yes! Jesus is with me all the time!' "Somehow this guy represents to me the quintessential picture of the ideal follower of Christ: out in the middle of the chaos, doing his job, pressing a bit of joy into a wild situation." {7}

Notes

- 1. "Blood Sweat and Prayers," *Christianity Today*, Nov. 12,2001, p. 76.
- 2. Robert Pyne, Humanity and Sin: The Creation, Fall and Redemption of Humanity, pp. 193-209.
- 3. Pyne, p. 197.
- 4. Pyne, p. 204.
- 5. Pyne, p. 206.
- 6. Peter Kreeft, quoted in *The Case for Faith* by Lee Strobel, 2000, p. 45-46.
- 7. "Blood Sweat and Prayers," Christianity Today, p. 76.
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The Enlightenment and Belief in God

The skepticism and relativism seen in our society today didn't just pop up out of nowhere. They received new life during the era of the Enlightenment. Rick Wade provides an overview of this important period.



This article is also available in <u>Spanish</u>.

We are often tempted to think of our own day as truly unique, as presenting challenges that others have not known. Among other challenges, Christians in the West today have to deal with a foundational philosophical matter: namely, the question of the possibility of knowing truth. The mindset in our society today is either one of skepticism or of relativism. Skepticism says there is truth but we can't know it; relativism says there is no fixed truth. These mindsets affect all claims to truth, of course, but they are especially significant for Christians as we seek to proclaim the Gospel to others and hold onto it ourselves in these days of uncertainty.

Is the challenge of the loss of truth new? Not at all. There have been periods of skepticism throughout the history of the West. In this article we'll take a look at the era known as the Enlightenment, that period in the history of the West extending from the late 17th through the 18th centuries. What we'll see is that the very issues we're dealing with today were problems three centuries ago. Of particular concern to us will be the knowledge of God. {1}

Before looking at the Enlightenment itself, let's take a brief look at the mindset preceding this extraordinary era.

Prior to the Enlightenment, believing in God in the West was like believing in the sunrise; the answer to all the big questions of life was God (whether a given individual was inclined to obey God was another matter). The Bible was the source of knowledge about Him, especially the Old Testament, for there one could learn, among other things, the history of humankind and the divine purposes. Even political questions were to be solved by the Old Testament.

Everything was understood to work according to God's plan. The events of history were not chance occurrences, but events that served to carry out God's will. The universe was fairly young, having been created by God about 4000 years before Christ, and it was kept in operation through God's immediate involvement. The earth was at the physical center of the universe; since man was the highest level of creation, clearly God's purposes were centered on him.

For some people this picture of the world made for a comfortable home: nice and neat and orderly. However, the world was a mysterious and sometimes frightening place. This, along with the generally held belief in "that Last Judgment where many would be called but few chosen," {2}

produced in some a pessimistic outlook. "'Certainly there is no happiness within this circle of flesh,' said Sir Thomas Browne, 'nor is it in the optics of these eyes to behold felicity.'"{3}

Although the various major landmasses of the earth were known, other civilizations were not. Europeans knew little about other cultures. It was easy to believe that theirs was the highest civilization.

With the rise of science and the discovery of other civilizations came a new way of thinking about "God, man, and the world." Let's look at these briefly.

A Shift in Thinking

Science

In the Renaissance era, the world started getting bigger for Europeans. Knowledge increased rapidly, and from it followed major changes in life. The various strands of change merged in the Enlightenment, culminating in a new way of looking at the world.

A major shift took place in the world of science with the development of the ideas of such people as Francis Bacon (1561-1627). Bacon, an English philosopher and statesman, abandoned the classical deductive way of understanding nature handed down from Aristotle, championing instead an experimental, inductive approach. He rejected the authority of tradition, and provided "a method of experiment and induction that seemed to offer an infallible means of distinguishing truth and error." {4}

Although science was later to become the source of confidence for people in the West, in the early days scientific discoveries were unsettling. For example, the invention of the telescope resulted in the overturning of Aristotle's theory of the universe in which the earth, and hence man himself, was the center. Aristotle taught that the universe was a series of concentric spheres, one outside the other. "Copernicus and his successors shattered this world," says historian James Turner.{5}Now man was understood to live on a tiny planet flung out into a space that had no center. It was a time of great confusion. In the words of poet John Donne, "'Tis all in pieces, all cohaerence [sic] gone.'"{6}The discovery that we aren't at the center of the universe made people wonder if we are truly significant at all.

More disturbing than this, however, were geological discoveries. {7} It appeared that the earth was older than the current understanding of the Old Testament, which seemed to

some to say the world was created about 4,000 years before Christ. The Bible had long been the authority on such matters. Could it be wrong? To question the Bible was to question Christianity itself. Because Christianity provided Europeans' their basic worldview, such questions were extremely troubling. *Exploration*

Voyages of discovery had a profound impact on Europeans' view of their place in the world and of their Christian beliefs. Discoveries of other civilizations made Europeans wonder if their Christian civilization was truly any better than any others. China was a particular problem. It apparently predated European civilization, and possibly even the Flood! Like the Europeans, the Chinese saw *themselves* as the center of the world. And China wasn't Christian!

Other more primitive societies presented their own difficulties. For example, reports of how gentle and loving American Indians were made people wonder about the doctrine of "original sin." They wondered, too, if it could be that God would destroy such people as these in a Flood.

Furthermore, if other civilizations were able to function without Christian beliefs, maybe Christianity itself wasn't so significant, at least on the cultural level. Maybe it was just one religion among many. {8} Norman Hampson concludes that "The intellectual challenge of non-European societies [were] a much more direct and fundamental challenge to traditional Christian beliefs than any which seemed likely to come from the scientists." {9}

Thus, the discoveries of science and of voyages first disrupted Europeans' orderly world, and then made people doubt the significance of their religion itself.

The New Cast of Mind

Shift in Knowledge Let's look more closely at changes in thinking that developed during the Enlightenment.

In the early 17th century, French philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650) formulated a very rationalistic philosophy. His primary goal was to produce a logically certain argument for the existence of God. To do so, he employed what has come to be known as the method of doubt. Descartes believed we were to doubt any idea that wasn't "clear and distinct." The only idea he could hold in such a manner was that he himself existed. Hence the phrase, "I think, therefore I am." From there Descartes developed his philosophy in a logical, rational manner. He even approached nature from a deductive, rationalistic perspective. Beginning with general principles and known facts of nature, Descartes would deduce what the rest of nature should be like.

Although Descartes' way of looking at the world was overthrown by the experimental approach, his philosophy in general had a profound impact. He is considered by some to be the first modernist philosopher, for he looked for certainty in knowledge within the individual, not from an outside authority. Reason became more important than revelation.

Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) was an immensely significant figure in the developing world of science. His discovery of the law of gravity showed that nature could be understood by man. Man would no longer be at the mercy of an unknown world. Newton's work was so significant for understanding nature that Alexander Pope was prompted to write, "Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night, God said 'Let Newton be!' and all was light."{10}

John Locke (1632-1704) was another major thinker in the Enlightenment era. Historian Norman Hampson says, "the new currents of thought all seemed to flow together in [him]". {11}

Locke believed that knowledge by experience is superior to that which is accepted by belief and trust — "the floating of other men's opinions in our brains," as he called it.{12} He rejected the theory of innate ideas taught by Descartes, believing instead that our minds begin as blank slates to which is added knowledge by experience. Locke carried this approach into the realm of human nature and morality. He believed that "moral values arose from sensations of pleasure and pain, the mind calling 'good' what experience showed to be productive of pleasure."{13} Although Locke was a Christian, he set the stage for a naturalistic understanding of morality.

New Optimism

This new way of looking at the world, of listening first to experience rather than to tradition and the church, was a major characteristic of the Enlightenment. James Turner calls this a "new cast of mind." No longer were people to be dependent upon the Church to tell them about their world. Now they could learn about it in other ways.

In time the unsettling first wrought by scientific discovery was replaced by an "unprecedented optimism" based on the confidence in man's ability to "shape his material and social environment." {14} There was "a gradual and complex shift in the intellectual climate," Norman Hampson says. "As science seemed to establish itself on an impregnable basis of experimentally verified fact, doubt and confusion eventually gave way to self-confidence, the belief that the unknown was merely the undiscovered, and the general assumption—unprecedented in the Christian era—that man was to a great extent the master of his own destiny." {15}

Secularization and the Church

The findings of science had profound effects on people's thinking about God and their religion during the Enlightenment. However, science wasn't alone in this. Other

forces were at work pushing Europe into a new secularism.

The Beginnings of Secularization

As temporal rulers consolidated their power in Europe, the political power of the Church waned. Fragmented feudal kingdoms began to merge together into nation-states and assumed more power over the people. The Reformation sped up the secularization of politics as governments distanced themselves from the warring churches to maintain peace.

Capitalism and technology furthered the separation as they weakened the hold the Church had on the populace. Before the printing press was invented, for instance, the Church heavily influenced the flow of information in society. But now "the printing press effectively ended church regulation of learning." [16] Other secular institutions arose taking up more of people's lives in areas not governed by the Church. Trade, for example and all it involved— travel, the establishment of businesses, banks and stock exchanges— -added more institutions that were outside the control of the Church. As James Turner says, "The church's words, though still formidable, competed with a widening range of alluring voices that . . . did not have the church's vested commitment to defend Christianity." [17]

Secularization didn't necessarily undermine Christianity, however. People might actually have developed a firmer faith as a result of being able to read about and discuss the faith. It could be that "with worldly ambitions curtailed and legal powers short, the churches exercised deeper spiritual influence." {18} Nonetheless, in society the voice of the Church grew weaker.

The Church

The new experimental cast of mind had profound effects on religion and the Church. Religion now came under the same scrutiny as other areas of thought. Doctrine drew greater attention since it suited the new concern with rational and orderly thought. Mystery was downplayed, and tradition lost significance. The new intellectual mood called for individuals to think matters through for themselves, and as a result, people began to divide over doctrinal differences. If "clear and distinct" ideas were what should be believed, as Descartes taught, then the individual person took on an authority previously held by tradition or the Church.

The Protestant Reformation played a major role in the fracturing of the Church and its loss of power. According to Norman Hampson, rival claims to leadership in the Church contributed most to the decline of its intellectual authority in society. If church leaders couldn't agree on what was true, who could? Although cutting edge thinkers were satisfied that traditional attitudes and assumptions should no longer prevail, they were not able to come up with clear alternatives. "The picture," says Hampson, "was one of a confused mêlée."{19}

Church leaders began "revising belief to fit the new intellectual style. . . . The very meanings of 'religion' and 'belief' began subtly to change . . . during the Middle Ages religion involved not so much assent to doctrines . . . as participation in devotion, particularly communal ritual. Religion was more a collective than an individual affair and collectively it came closer to a system of practice than a parcel of tenets, while individually it meant more a person's devoutness than his adherence to a creed."{20} In the Enlightenment, however, doctrines became more important than practice for some, and the result of doctrinal debates was the breakup of the Protestant Church into multiple denominations.

The Bible itself was subjected to the new way of thinking. First, since all texts of antiquity were now open to question, the Bible too became subject to rational scrutiny. Which parts were to be accepted as historically accurate and which rejected? Second, since scriptural teachings were no longer to

be accepted simply on the basis of authority, specific matters were brought up for debate — for example, the matter of the reality of hell.

Frenchman Richard Simon (1638-1712) subjected the Old Testament to such scrutiny. His book, *Critical History of the Old Testament*, was the first to examine the Bible as a literary product. He treated "the Old Testament as a document with a history, put together over time by a variety of authors with a variety of motives and interests, rather than a divinely-revealed unity." {21} Although his work was condemned across many Christian denominations, the die was cast, and others continued the same kind of analysis.

Political separation from the Church, new means of learning, the loss of tradition, dissension in the churches, doubts about Scripture—these things and more served to turn attention more to the secular than to the sacred.

Belief in God

Nature and God

All of this — the findings of science and exploration and the new experimental way of thinking, along with doubts about the validity and significance of Church teaching — took its toll on belief in God.

One concern was the relationship of God to nature. Newton believed God had to be actively involved in nature because the laws he discovered didn't seem to work uniformly throughout the universe. God had to keep things working properly. {22} For those like Newton, the findings of science were exhilarating; they saw them as God's means of ordering His world. "Even those few minds who had entirely given the universe over to orderly natural law," says Turner, "still needed to assume God's existence. For natural laws themselves presupposed a divine Lawgiver."{23}

Nonetheless, a distance developed between God and nature since nature was now understood in terms of natural laws that were comprehensible to men. René Descartes had believed that nature was to be understood in terms of ultimate realities. Thus, he kept science, theology, and metaphysics together. The new experimentalism of Bacon and Newton, however, separated them. "The modern conception of the natural world, understood as clearly distinguished from and even opposed to an impalpable spiritual world, was being invented," says Turner. {24} God was withdrawn more and more "as nature came to be understood . . . as governed by God through secondary causes." {25} He didn't disappear; He just adopted a new mode of operation. A mechanistic strain in science suggested a more impersonal Deity. God began to be thought of as a "divine Engineer." {26} Thus, scientists stopped concerning themselves metaphysical answers. They looked to nature to explain itself. {27}

Now that God didn't seem to be necessary to the operation of the world, some began to doubt His reality altogether. Prior to the Enlightenment, atheism was a "bizarre aberration" for well over a thousand years in the West. One writer said that, "As late as the sixteenth century, disbelief in God was literally a cultural impossibility." {28} One couldn't explain the world without God. Growing vegetation, intellectual coherence, the orbits of the planets, the existence of life itself, morality—these and other issues all found their roots in God. With science now able to explain how the world worked, however, doubts about God began to rise. Belief in His existence now rested more on the idea of Providence, the beneficial acts of God on our behalf. It was believed that the earth was made for man's happiness, that there was a morally meaningful order to things, and there had to be a God to explain this.

However, with time there developed a more pessimistic view of nature, which lessened the force of Providence. Nature

produced poisonous plants and dangerous animals as well as good things. In the words of the poet William Blake:

Tiger! Tiger! Burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?{29}

While there was obviously no wholesale abandonment of belief in God, the foundations for belief seemed to be eroding. And when God's existence became debatable, says Turner, "the center fell out of Western intellectual life. If divine purpose did not undergird the cosmos, then whole structures of meaning collapsed and new ones had to be built up, brick by precarious brick." {30}

Natural Religion—Deism

Norman Hampson notes that, with the splintering of the Church in the Reformation, and with the pressure of looking at everything in terms of the new cast of mind, churches began making concessions in their teachings. "When the churches were prepared for so many concessions, and seemed encumbered rather than sustained by such dogma as they retained, there was a tendency for the educated to drift by easy stages from Christianity to natural religion." [31] Natural religion, or Deism, was religion divorced from the supposed "superstition" of revealed religion such as Christianity. Human reason unaided by revelation, it was thought, could lead thinking men to the truth of God. Deism was a very basic, not highly elaborated theistic belief. God was "a kind of highest common denominator of the revealed religions." In fact, some thought all the major religions worship the same God! {32} Natural religion was the religion of all mankind. It was centered on man, and it bound all men to a common moral law. Living right counted more than right doctrine. As Pope said,

For Modes of Faith let graceless zealots fight;

Apologetics

The need to prove the truth of Christianity would scarcely have crossed the mind of a medieval preacher. {34} "The known unbelievers of Europe and America before the French Revolution," says Turner, "numbered fewer than a dozen or two." {35} Now the possibility of an intellectually grounded atheism was very real. Fear of unbelief prodded Christian apologists into action.

There were four possible responses to problems created for belief by the many new ideas: to be ignorant of them, to firmly reject new ideas, to accept the new thinking but keep religion autonomous, and to recast Christian beliefs in terms of the new ideas. The latter was the route Deists and others took. "Reason and observation gave always the most certain knowledge of any reality that lay outside our minds," says Turner. "Belief for its own good must therefore be fitted to the new cast of mind." {36}

Some, like the Quakers, believed that belief in God eluded rationality. "On the contrary, the rationalizers insisted, belief in God was entirely reasonable and plausible," says Turner. "And they trimmed it accordingly where its reasonableness seemed shaky. They played down creeds in general and mysterious doctrines in particular. Truth could not be obscure. They repudiated the metaphysical flights of scholasticism, both Catholic and Protestant, in favor of common-sense arguments grounded in palpable reality. Truth must be plain to see. . . . The use of science soon became a phenomenally popular apologetic tool." {37}

Morality assumed greater importance as a test of the truth of the faith. As secularization pushed religion more to the private sphere, "emphasis fell increasingly on inner religiousness rather than externalities of ritual. Cultivation of a clean conscience, then, seems to have become a more common test of inward sanctity, a measure of how close one stood to God." {38} Religion grew more preoccupied with everyday behavior.

This was important in apologetics, because it allowed an escape from concerns about divisive doctrinal concerns and the uncertainties of new philosophy. It had universal appeal. Human nature and conscience worked like natural law: they revealed the moral law in us as natural laws showed God's rational wisdom in nature. Turner comments:

Ethics and physics confuted the atheist and confirmed the reasonableness of Christianity. The rational man demonstrated God and everything essential to religion . . . through the marks that Deity had left in this world, ready for reason and observation to discover. Only the fool stumbled into the pit of atheism or the mumbo-jumbo of mystery. . . . Good morals and a small clutch of plain, rational beliefs kept the Christian safe from unbelief and guided him to eternal reward. {39}

This attitude shaped the thinking of subsequent generations of apologists. Perhaps they did stave off atheism for a while. Turner tells us, "These believers . . . had come to terms with modernity and had refitted belief to sail in its waters. With much of the incomprehensibility and mysterious taken out of it, belief in God was now based more solidly in morality and rationality; that is, in tangible human experience and demonstrable human knowledge. Confusion and uncertainty, apologists might rationally hope, would now give way to a new confidence in reasonable and moral religion." {40}

Conclusion

In the Enlightenment, people were shaken by a new way of thinking that challenged the simple acceptance of tradition and religious authority, but their confidence was restored through science and technology. Today, people are shaken by the loss of *this* confidence. We are seeing now that putting our confidence in our own ability to understand our world and fix it provides a shaky foundation. The need today is for both a reminder that truth *can* be known—ultimately through God's revelation in Christ- -and modesty in our knowledge, which recognizes that we do not now, and never will, know everything.

Notes

- 1. For an overview of the shift in thought from the premodern to the postmodern, see Todd Kappelman, "The Breakdown of Religious Knowledge," Probe Ministries, 1998, available on Probe's Web site at
- www.probe.org/the-breakdown-of-religious-knowledge/.
- 2. Norman Hampson, *The Enlightenment* (New York; Penguin, 1968), 21.
- 3. Quoted in Hampson, 21.
- 4. Hampson, 36.
- 5. James Turner, Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 14.
- 6. John Donne in Turner, 15.
- 7. Hampson, 25.
- 8. Cf. James M. Byrne, *Religion and the Enlightenment: From Descartes to Kant* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 15-16.
- 9. Hampson, 27.
- 10. Pope, quoted in Hampson, 38.
- 11. Hampson, 38.
- 12. Locke, quoted in Hampson, 40.
- 13. Ibid., 39.
- 14. Ibid., 23.
- 15. Ibid., 35.
- 16. Turner, 11.
- 17. Ibid., 13.

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18. Ibid., 12.
19. Hampson, 31.
20. Turner, 23.
21. Byrne, 11.
22. Hampson, 77.
23. Turner, 27.
24. Ibid., 38.
25. Ibid., 37.
26. Ibid., 36.
27. Hampson, 76.
28. Turner, 2.
29. William Blake, quoted in Hampson, 94.
30. Turner, xii.
31. Hampson, 103.
32. Ibid., 104.
33. Alexander Pope, quoted in Hampson, 105.
34. Turner, 8.
35. Ibid., 44.
36. Ibid., 29.
37. Ibid., 29-30.
38. Ibid., 31.
39. Ibid., 32,33.
40. Ibid., 34.
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When Nations Die

One of the more popular Probe radio programs has been "<u>Decline of a Nation</u>." Kerby Anderson returns to this important theme by summarizing the significant work by Jim Nelson Black in his book When Nations Die. When we look at three thousand years of history, we observe that civilizations rise but eventually

fall and die. The history of the world is the history of nations that are conquered by other nations or collapse into anarchy.

This article is also available in <u>Spanish</u>.

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

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

There are many reasons for the decline and fall of a nation, but an important (and often overlooked) reason is its abandonment of religion. Russell Kirk has said that the roots of "culture" come from the "cult." In other words, culture (cult-ure) is based upon some form of religious or spiritual worldview. Egypt was a religious society founded on the worship of nature gods and goddesses. Greece and Rome had their pantheon of pagan deities. And the list of nations in India, China, and other parts of the globe all demonstrate the principle that civilization arises from religion.

And the opposite is also true. When the traditional beliefs of

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

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

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

Social Decay

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

History provides ample illustrations of the disastrous consequences of the collapse of law and order. "In ancient Greece, the first symptoms of disorder were a general loss of respect for tradition and the degradation of the young. Among the early symptoms was the decline of art and entertainment. The philosophers and pundits distorted the medium of communication. Rhetoric became combative and intolerant; intellectuals began to deride and attack all the traditional institutions of Hellenic society." {3}

New thinkers in the society argued for "fundamental change" and called for giving the youth a "voice in society." Without traditional guidelines, the young men grew wild and undisciplined destroying the old order. Slowly Greece devolved

into a disreputable and lawless nation. The Romans conquered Greece in 146 B.C. By placing everything under military authority, they were able to restore order and bring back the rule of law.

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

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

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

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

Cultural Decay

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

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

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

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

In describing the decadence of the Roman Republic, historian Polybius wrote that this preoccupation with luxury led to carnal indulgences. "For some young men indulged in affairs with boys, others in affairs with courtesans." They paid a talent (roughly a thousand dollars) for a boy bought for sexual pleasure and three hundred drachmas for a jar of

caviar. "Marcus Cato was outraged by this and, in a speech to the people, complained that one might be quite convinced of the decline of the republic, when pretty boys cost more than fields and jars of caviar cost more than plowman." {8}

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

Moral Decay

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

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

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

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

abortion and infanticide became commonplace. In some cases, children were sold into slavery.

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

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

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

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

Are We A Nation in Decline?

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

Russell Kirk put it this way:

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

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

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

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

As nations fell into decline, life became cheap. Infants were strangled, exposed to the elements, or sold into slavery. Others were sacrificed to pagan goddesses in order to ensure

productivity or a long life. Today life has become cheap. At one end of the spectrum, unborn babies are aborted. At the other end, physician-assisted suicide is becoming acceptable for the aged.

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

Notes

- 1. Jim Nelson Black, When Nations Die (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1994), 3.
- 2. Ibid., 9.
- 3. Ibid., 35-36.
- 4. Jos Ortega y Gasset, *Mirabeau: An Essay on the Nature of Statesmanship* (Manila: Historical Conservation Society, 1975).
- 5. Donald Dudley, *The Civilization of Rome* (New York: Meridian, 1993), 238.
- 6. Samuel Noah Eisenstadt, *The Decline of Empires* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967), 2-3.
- 7. Livy, preface to bk. I, *The History of Rome from Its Foundation*, trans. Aubrey de Selincourt (Baltimore: Penguin, 1967).
- 8. Polybius, *The Histories,* trans. W.R. Paton (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930).
- 9. Black, When Nations Die, 187.
- 10. Catherine Edwards, The Politics of Immorality in Ancient

Rome (London: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 50.

- 11. Black, When Nations Die, 165.
- 12. Russell Kirk, "Can Our Civilization Survive?" address to Heritage Foundation, 24 July 1992.
- 13. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 382.

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The Crusades

The Crusades were more complex than the simple and unfair invasion of Muslim lands by Christians often portrayed in history books. There is cruelty and conquering on both sides.

This article is also available in <u>Spanish</u>.

At the Council of Clermont in 1095 Pope Urban II called upon Christians in Europe to respond to an urgent plea for help from Byzantine Christians in the East. Muslims were threatening to conquer this remnant of the Roman Empire for Allah. The threat was real; most of the Middle East, including the Holy Land where Christ had walked, had already been vanquished. Thus began the era of the Crusades, taken from the Latin word crux or cross. Committed to saving Christianity, the Crusaders left family and jobs to take up the cause. Depending on how one counts (either by the number of actual crusading armies or by the duration of the conflict), there were six Crusades between 1095 and 1270. But the crusading spirit would continue on for centuries, until Islam was no longer a menace to Europe.

There is a genuine difficulty for us to view the Crusades through anything but the eyes of a 21st century American. The notion of defending Christianity or the birthplace of Christ via military action is difficult to imagine or to support from Scripture, but perhaps a bit easier since the events of September 11th.

So when Christians today think about the Crusades, it may be with remorse or embarrassment. Church leaders, including the Pope, have recently made the news by apologizing to Muslims, and everyone else, for the events surrounding the Crusades. In the minds of many, the Crusades were an ill-advised fiasco that didn't accomplish the goals of permanently reclaiming Jerusalem and the Holy Lands.

Are history books correct when they portray the Crusades as an invasion of Muslim territories by marauding Europeans whose primary motive was to plunder new lands? What is often left out of the text is that most of the Islamic Empire had been Christian and had been militarily conquered by the followers of the Prophet Muhammad in the 7th and 8th centuries.

Islam had suddenly risen out of nowhere to become a threat to all of Christian Europe, and although it had shown some restraint in its treatment of conquered Christians, it had exhibited remarkable cruelty as well. At minimum, Islam enforced economic and religious discrimination against those it controlled, making Jews and Christians second-class citizens. In some cases, Muslim leaders went further. An event that may have sparked the initial Crusade in 1095 was the destruction of the Holy Sepulchre by the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim.{1} In fact, many Christians at the time considered al-Hakim to be the Antichrist.

We want black and white answers to troubling questions, but the Crusades present us with a complex collection of events, motivations, and results that make simple answers difficult to find. In this article we'll consider the origins and impact of this centuries-long struggle between the followers of Muhammad and the followers of Christ.

The Causes

Historian Paul Johnson writes that the terrorist attacks of September 11th can be seen as an extension of the centurieslong struggle between the Islamic East and the Christian West. Johnson writes,

The Crusades, far from being an outrageous prototype of Western imperialism, as is taught in most of our schools, were a mere episode in a struggle that has lasted 1,400 years, and were one of the few occasions when Christians took the offensive to regain the "occupied territories" of the Holy Land. {2}

Islam had exploded on the map by conquering territories that had been primarily Christian. The cities of Antioch, Alexandria, and Carthage had been the centers of Christian thought and theological inquiry for centuries before being taken by Muslim armies in their jihad to spread Islam worldwide. Starting in 1095 and continuing for over four hundred years, the crusading spirit that pervaded much of Europe can be seen as an act of cultural self-preservation, much as Americans now see the war against the Taliban in Afghanistan.

One motivation for the Crusade in 1095 was the request for help made by the Byzantine Emperor Alexius I. Much of the Byzantine Empire had been conquered by the Seljuk Turks and Constantinople, the greatest Christian city in the world, was also being threatened. Pope Urban knew that the sacrifices involved with the call to fight the Turks needed more than just coming to the rescue of Eastern Christendom. To motivate his followers he added a new goal to free Jerusalem and the birthplace of Christ.

At the personal level, the Pope added the possibility of remission of sins. Since the idea of a pilgrim's vow was widespread in medieval Europe, crusaders, noblemen and peasant alike, vowed to reach the Holy Sepulcher in return for the church's pardon for sins they had committed. The church also promised to protect properties left behind by noblemen during travels east.

The Pope might launch a Crusade, but he had little control over it once it began. The Crusaders promised God, not the Pope to complete the task. Once on its way, the Crusading army was held together by "feudal obligations, family ties, friendship, or fear." {3}

Unlike Islam, Christianity had not yet developed the notion of a holy war. In the fifth century Augustine described what constituted a *just war* but excluded the practice of battle for the purpose of religious conversion or to destroy heretical religious ideas. Leaders of nations might decide to go to war for just reasons, but war was not to be a tool of the church. {4} Unfortunately, using Augustine's *just war* language, Popes and Crusaders saw themselves as warriors for Christ rather than as a people seeking justice in the face of an encroaching enemy threat.

The Events

The history books our children read typically emphasize the atrocities committed by Crusaders and the tolerance of the Muslims. It is true that the Crusaders slaughtered Jews and Muslims in the sacking of Jerusalem and later laid siege to the Christian city of Constantinople. Records indicate that Crusaders were even fighting among themselves as they fought Muslims. But a closer examination of the Crusades shows the real story is more complex than the public's perception or what is found in history books. The fact is that both Muslims and Christians committed considerable carnage and internal warfare and political struggles often divided both sides.

Muslims could be, and frequently were, barbaric in their treatment of Christians and Jews. One example is how the Turks dealt with German and French prisoners captured early in the First Crusade prior to the sacking of Jerusalem. Those who renounced Christ and converted to Islam were sent to the East; the rest were slaughtered. Even Saladin, the re-conqueror of Jerusalem was not always merciful. After defeating a large Latin army on July 3, 1187, he ordered the mass execution of all Hospitallers and Templars left alive, and he personally beheaded the nobleman Reynald of Chatillon. Saladin's secretary noted that:

He ordered that they should be beheaded, choosing to have them dead rather than in prison. With him was a whole band of scholars and Sufis . . . [and] each begged to be allowed to kill one of them, and drew his sword and rolled back his sleeve. Saladin, his face joyful, was sitting on his dais; the unbelievers showed black despair. {5}

In fact, Saladin had planned to massacre all of the Christians in Jerusalem after taking it back from the Crusaders, but when the commander of the Jerusalem garrison threatened to destroy the city and kill all of the Muslims inside the walls, Saladin allowed them to buy their freedom or be sold into slavery instead. {6}

The treachery shown by the Crusaders against other Christians is a reflection of the times. At the height of the crusading spirit in Europe, Frederick Barbarossa assembled a large force of Germans for what is now known as the third Crusade. To ease his way, he negotiated treaties for safe passage through Europe and Anatolia, even getting permission from Muslim Turks to pass unhampered. On the other hand, the Christian Emperor of Byzantium, Isaac II, secretly agreed with Saladin to harass Frederick's crusaders through his territory. When it was deemed helpful, both Muslim and Christian made pacts with anyone who might further their own cause. At one point the

sultan of Egypt offered to help the Crusaders in their struggle with the Muslim Turks, and the Turks failed to come to the rescue of the Shi'ite Fatimid Muslims who controlled Palestine.

Human treachery and sinfulness was evident on both sides of the conflict.

The Results

On May 29, 1453 the city of Constantinople fell to the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II. With it the 2,206-year-old Roman Empire came to an end and the greatest Christian church in the world, the Hagia Sophia, was turned into a mosque. Some argue that this disaster was a direct result of the Crusaders' misguided efforts, and that anything positive they might have accomplished was fleeting.

Looking back at the Crusades, we are inclined to think of them as a burst of short-lived, failed efforts by misguided Europeans. Actually, the crusading spirit lasted for hundreds of years and the Latin kingdom that was established in 1098, during the first Crusade, endured for almost 200 years. Jerusalem remained in European hands for eighty-eight years, a period greater than the survival of many modern nations.

Given the fact that the Latin kingdom and Jerusalem eventually fell back into Muslim hands, did the Crusaders accomplish anything significant? It can be argued that the movement of large European armies into Muslim held territories slowed down the advance of Islam westward. The presence of a Latin kingdom in Palestine acted as a buffer zone between the Byzantine Empire and Muslim powers and also motivated Muslim leaders to focus their attention on defense rather than offense at least for a period of time.

Psychologically, the Crusades resulted in a culture of chivalry based on both legendary and factual exploits of

European rulers. The crusading kings Richard the Lionheart and Louis IX were admired even by their enemies as men of integrity and valor. Both saw themselves as acting on God's behalf in their quest to free Jerusalem from Muslim oppression. For centuries, European rulers looked to the Crusader kings as models of how to integrate Christianity and the obligations of knighthood.

Unfortunately, valor and the ability to conduct warfare took precedent over all other qualities, perhaps because it was a holdover from Frankish pagan roots and the worship of Odin the warrior god. These Germanic people may have converted to Christianity, but they still had a place in their hearts for the gallant warrior's paradise, Valhalla. {7} As one scholar writes:

But the descendants of those worshippers of Odin still had the love of a warrior god in their blood, a god of warriors whose ultimate symbol was war. [8]

The Crusades temporarily protected some Christians from having to live under Muslim rule as second-class citizens. Called the *dhimmi*, this legal code enforced the superiority of Muslims and humiliated all who refused to give up other religious beliefs.

It is also argued that the crusading spirit is what eventually sent the Europeans off to the New World. The voyage of Columbus just happens to coincide with the removal of Muslim rule from Spain. The exploration of the New World eventually encouraged an economic explosion that the Muslim world could not match.

Summary

Muslims still point to the Crusades as an example of injustice perpetrated by the West on Islam. An interesting question might be, "Had the situation been reversed, would Muslims have felt justified in going to war against Christians?" In other words, would the rules in the Qur'an and the Hadith (the holy books of Islam) warrant a conflict similar to what the Crusaders conducted?

You have probably heard the term *jihad*, or struggle, discussed in the news. The word denotes different kinds of striving within the Muslim faith. At one level, it speaks of personal striving for righteousness. However, there are numerous uses of the term within Islam where it explicitly refers to warfare.

First, the Qur'an permits fighting to defend individual Muslims and the religion of Islam from attack. {9} In fact, all able bodied Muslims are commanded to assist in defending the community of believers. Muslims are also given permission to remove treacherous people from power, even if they have previously agreed to a treaty with them. {10}

Muslims are encouraged to use armed struggle for the general purpose of spreading the message of Islam. {11} The Qur'an specifically says, "Fighting is a grave offense, but graver is it in the sight of Allah to prevent access to the path of Allah, to deny Him, to prevent access to the Sacred Mosque. . ."{12} Warfare is also justified for the purpose of purging a people from the bondage of idolatry or the association of anything with God. This gives the Muslim a theological reason to go to war against Christians, since the Qur'an teaches that the doctrine of the Trinity is a form of idolatry. Had the situation been reversed, the religion of Islam provides multiple rationalizations for the actions of the Crusaders.

But is there a Christian justification for the Crusades? The only example of a Christian fighting in the New Testament is the apostle Peter when he drew his sword to protect Jesus from the Roman soldiers. Jesus told him to put the sword away. Then He said, "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and He will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of

angels?" The kingdom that Jesus had established would not be built on the blood of the unbeliever, but on the shed blood of the Lamb of God.

The Crusader's actions should be defended using Augustine's "just war" language rather than a holy war vocabulary. Although they did not always live up to the dictates of "just war" ideals, such as the immunity of noncombatants, the Crusades were a last resort defensive war that sought peace for its people who had been under constant assault for many years.

If one of the functions of a God-ordained government is to restrain evil and promote justice, then it follows that rulers of nations where Christians dwell may need to conduct a *just* war in order to protect their people from invasion.

Notes

- 1. John Esposito, ed. *The Oxford History of Islam,* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 335.
- 2. Paul Johnson, National Review,

http://www.nationalreview.com/15oct01/johnson101501.shtml.

3. Thomas F. Madden, *A Concise History of the Crusades*, (Rowman &

Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 1999), 10.

- 4. Ibid., 2.
- 5. Ibid., 78.
- 6. Ibid., 80.
- 7. Zoe Oldenbourg, *The Crusades*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966), 33.
- 8. Ibid, 32.
- 9. Qur'an 2:190, 193.
- 10. Ibid, 8:58.
- 11. Ibid, 2:217 (also see www.irshad.org/islam/iiie/iiie_18.htm published by The Institute of Islamic Information & Education, P.O. Box 41129, Chicago, IL 60641-0129).

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Atheists and Their Fathers

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

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

After studying the lives of more than a dozen of the world's most influential atheists, Dr. Vitz discovered that they all had one thing in common: defective relationships with their fathers. The relationship was defective because the father was either dead, abusive, weak, or had abandoned the children. When he studied the lives of influential theists during those same historical time periods, he found they enjoyed a strong, loving relationship with a father (or a father substitute if the father was dead).

For example, Friedrich Nietzche lost his father (who was a pastor) before his fifth birthday. One biographer wrote that Nietzche was "passionately attached to his father, and the shock of losing him was profound." Dr. Vitz writes that

Nietzche had a "strong, intellectually macho reaction against a dead, very Christian father." Friedrich Nietzche is best known as the philosopher who said, "God is dead." It certainly seems possible that his rejection of God and Christianity was a "rejection of the weakness of his father."

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

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

Nietzche and Freud

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

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

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

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

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

Russell and Hume

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sartre, Voltaire, and Feuerbach

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

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

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

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

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

Burke and Wilberforce

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

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

William Wilberforce was an English statesman and abolitionist. His father died when he was nine years old, and he was sent to live with his aunt and uncle. He was extremely close to his uncle and to John Newton who was a frequent visitor to their

home. Newton was a former slave trader who converted to Christ and wrote the famous hymn "Amazing Grace." Wilberforce first heard of the evils of slavery from Newton's stories and sermons, "even reverencing him as a parent when [he] was a child." Wilberforce was an evangelical Christian who went on to serve in parliament and was instrumental in abolishing the British slave trade.

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

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

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The Bill of Rights

Introduction

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

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

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

First Amendment

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

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

In the last century, the Supreme Court has extended the First Amendment to any religious activity by any governmental body. The establishment clause originally prohibited the establishment of a national church by Congress, but now has been broadened to prohibit anything that appears like a

government endorsement of religious practice. The free exercise clause supposedly prohibits government from placing any burden on religious practice.

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

Second Amendment

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

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

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

Third Amendment

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

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

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

Many legal scholars question whether the Constitution has an implicit right to privacy. Obviously the Third Amendment provides homeowners with protection against unreasonable military intrusion. But it is quite a stretch to manipulate this amendment into a justification for a right to privacy with regard to contraception or abortion.

Fourth Amendment

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

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

In the last century, the Supreme Court has refined the

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

Fifth Amendment

No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.

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

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

Sixth Amendment

In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the

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

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

The right to an attorney implies the right to "competent" counsel. Appeal courts have had to decide what constitutes competent or incompetent counsel. Usually a guilty verdict is allowed to stand if it seems that an attorney's actions did not significantly affect the judicial outcome.

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

Seventh Amendment

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

The Seventh Amendment addresses civil cases. It provides for a jury trial (in cases involving more than \$20) that involves

suits at common law. Although this seems like a logical right that would already be assumed, it reflects the concerns of the framers that a federal judiciary would set aside jury verdicts and perhaps even eliminate juries altogether.

Eighth Amendment

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

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

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

Ninth Amendment

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

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

Judicial activists have used this amendment to justify their expansion of additional rights. The Supreme Court reasoned in

this way concerning the so-called right to privacy. The Court argued that the First, Third, Fourth, and Fifth Amendments all protect privacy in some way. Therefore, they argued that the right to privacy does exist and should be protected by the Constitution.

Tenth Amendment

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

The Tenth Amendment protects the structure of federalism. Those powers not specifically delegated to the federal government are reserved to the States or the people. The framers intended that the people and the states would decide how power was to be delegated to the other levels of government (cities, towns, counties, etc.).

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

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

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Probing the Shroud of Turin

The Gospels and the Shroud

Few historical artifacts generate as much heated controversy as the Shroud of Turin. Some claim it is merely a clever painting; a forger's work of art.{1} Others think it might be the actual burial shroud of Jesus.{2}

The Shroud is a linen cloth 14.25 feet long by 3.5 feet wide. On its surface is the image of a man who appears to be a Jewish crucifixion victim. Could this be Jesus of Nazareth? While some researchers reject this idea as fanciful, others believe the weight of available evidence points to just such a remarkable conclusion.

In this article we will examine evidence both *for* and *against* the claim that the Shroud of Turin is the actual burial garment of Jesus. My goal is simply to present the evidence. I will leave the verdict to the reader. But where should we begin our inquiry?

If we want to find out if the Shroud may have been the actual burial garment of Jesus, a good place to begin is with an examination of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' death. After all, if the evidence on the Shroud is *not* consistent with the Gospels, we can safely conclude that *whatever* the source of the image, it could not be that of Jesus. So how well do the Gospel accounts line up with the image on the Shroud? Are there any obvious inconsistencies or contradictions?

Actually there is remarkable agreement between the two. The Gospels say that Jesus was scourged, {3} crowned with thorns, {4} and crucified. {5} The man's image on the Shroud likewise gives evidence of one who suffered such things. In addition, John's Gospel says that the legs of those crucified with Jesus were broken. However, when the soldiers saw that

Jesus was already dead, rather than break His legs they "pierced His side with a spear." [6] Careful examination of the Shroud again reveals consistency with the Gospels on this point. Like Jesus, the man's legs were not broken, but his side appears to have been pierced with a spear.

Of course different researchers interpret such parallels differently. Kenneth Stevenson, a Christian researcher, views such consistency as an important link in determining whether the image might be that of Jesus. But Walter McCrone, a humanistic scientist who rejects miracles, contends that the Shroud is simply a medieval artist's painting. {7}

While the different philosophical commitments of Stevenson and McCrone may have influenced their interpretations of the data, we must still ask which interpretation is correct. Does the Shroud image depict an actual crucifixion victim or is it rather an ingenuous painting? We will address this question next.

The Shroud under a Microscope

One of the most qualified researchers to contend that the Shroud of Turin is merely a painting is Walter McCrone. An expert microscopist and member of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, McCrone has "examined several hundred paintings, by artists from Giotto to Pollock" in order to determine their authenticity. {8} He sums up his own examination of the Shroud this way, "From my experience as a painting authenticator, the shroud is authentic—a beautiful and inspired authentic painting."{9}

McCrone reached this conclusion after examining thirty-two sticky tape samples taken from both image and non-image areas on the Shroud. He later wrote, "I identified the substance of the body-and-blood images as the paint pigment red ochre. . . . The blood image areas consist of another pigment, vermilion, in addition to red ochre. . . . These paints were in common

use during the Middle Ages". {10}

These statements give the impression that a careful analysis of the Shroud conclusively demonstrates the image to be merely a painting. However, it's only fair to note that virtually all of McCrone's statements are hotly disputed by other, equally competent, pro-Shroud researchers!

For instance, McCrone tested for blood on the Shroud and claimed to find none. {11} But Professor Alan Adler, a highly skilled chemist, states that the stains on the shroud were from blood. {12} Also, as previously mentioned, McCrone thinks the Shroud image was produced with various paint pigments. But Kenneth Stevenson notes that the primary statement to which the Shroud of Turin Research Project publicly agreed was that "the image is the result of some cellulose oxidationdehydration reaction rather than an applied pigment." {13} Finally, although Alan Whanger admits that threads were obtained from the Shroud which did have the red ochre pigment observed by McCrone, he claims that these are merely "translocated fibers" from the many copies of the Shroud "that were painted during the Middle Ages." {14} According to professor Whanger, such copies "were laid face down . . . on the shroud" and therefore "have nothing to do with the formation of the shroud images." {15}

Finally, Dr. Max Frei claimed to have "identified key pollens that definitely placed the Shroud in both Palestine and Turkey at some time in the past." {16} Of course, this observation is quite difficult to square with the theory that the Shroud has never been outside of Europe! But McCrone accuses Frei of deception and states, "There were very few pollen grains on his tapes (I examined them very carefully)." {17}

So which expert should one believe? As we'll see, the complexity of this question is increased when one considers rival views of the Shroud's history.

Rival Histories of the Shroud

Both Gary Vikan and Walter McCrone maintain that there is no reliable evidence for the Shroud of Turin prior to the year 1356.{18} Kenneth Stevenson, relying on the work of Ian Wilson, believes the Shroud's history might be reconstructed all the way back to the 1st century!{19} So who's right?

Most scholars agree that the Shroud only became widely known in 1357 when it was exhibited in Lirey, France. Those who think the Shroud is merely a 14th century painting cite Bishop Henri of Poitiers' claim that he actually knew the artist!{20} But those who think the Shroud is older suggest that he may have only been referring to one of the medieval *copies* of the Shroud. These researchers attempt to reconstruct the Shroud's history via the Mandylion, an ancient cloth supposedly imprinted with the facial image of Christ. They observe that historical descriptions of the Mandylion bear similarity to the image on the Shroud. But what do we know of the Mandylion's history?

It is alleged that Abgar V, a 1st century ruler of Edessa, sent a letter to Jesus requesting healing from leprosy. After Jesus' death and resurrection, a disciple came to Edessa with a cloth "imprinted with the Savior's image." {21} Seeing the cloth, Abgar was cured and Christianity took root in the city.

Although there may be legendary elements in this story, certain historical facts do underlie it. For instance, Abgar V was ruler of Edessa and tradition links the early evangelization of the city to "a holy image of the Lord." {22}

In 525 the Mandylion was discovered in the walls of Edessa. It was probably hidden there at a time when Christians were being persecuted. In 944 it was taken to Constantinople, but was lost again when the city was sacked in 1204. Later, in 1357, the Shroud was publicly displayed in France. Ian Wilson speculates that the Mandylion and the Shroud are the same

object. He suggests that between 1204 and 1357 the cloth was secretly kept by the Knights Templars. If Wilson is correct, a case can be made for dating this cloth to the 1st century.

But there's a problem. The Shroud is a full-body image; the Mandylion was only a facial image. Wilson, however, thinks the Mandylion was probably folded so that only the face was visible. He may be right. Careful photographic analysis reveals that the Shroud may once have been folded as Wilson describes. But this is uncertain.

While other difficulties could be mentioned, the primary problem with a 1st century date for the Shroud is the conflict with its radiocarbon date of about 1325. We will examine this next.

Carbon 14 An Insurmountable Objection?

In 1988 three laboratories received samples of the Shroud of Turin to be tested with the carbon 14 dating method. The results indicated that the Shroud was a medieval artifact and its date was set at 1325 +/- 65 years. This date is generally considered to be about 95 percent reliable. Thus for many researchers the issue is settled: the Shroud is a medieval relic.

But why isn't everyone convinced? Why do a number of researchers contend that this date may be in error? The chief reason for skepticism concerns the nature and quality of the samples tested. John McRay, a respected scholar and archaeologist, notes that "there is a high probability of sample contamination" which can undermine the carbon 14 dating method. {23} Other scholars have offered a number of reasons why such sample contamination may have affected the dating of the Shroud.

For instance, Kenneth Stevenson notes that the samples were taken from an area of the Shroud just "two to three

centimeters from a repair site due to the 1532 fire."{24} Two potential problems result from this. First, what if the sample was actually part of a repair site? If this happened a medieval date would be expected, for that was when the repair was made. Second, carbon molecules from the Shroud's silver casing may have altered the cloth's carbon content by becoming mixed with the cloth during the fire. "By not checking out these factors and including them as part of the dating equation, the labs left themselves open for a faulty date".{25}

Another researcher, Dr. Leoncio Garza-Valdes, has discovered a bacterium which produces a clear "bioplastic" coating on many ancient objects. When he studied samples of the Shroud, he found them to be "covered by the bioplastic coating . . . and by many colonies of fungi." [26] Additionally, Dr. Garza-Valdes claims that hydrochloric acid and sodium hydroxide, the standard cleansing agents used on ancient artifacts, do not remove this bioplastic coating. If he's right, and the Shroud sample included additional carbon 14 atoms from contamination material, a medieval date for the Shroud might be misleadingly young.

Of course, none of this *proves* that a medieval date for the Shroud is incorrect. Still, it is worth remembering a statement by Dr. Willy Wolfi, a researcher at one of the labs that dated the Shroud: "The C-14 method is not immune to grossly inaccurate dating when non-apparent problems exist in samples from the field. The existence of significant indeterminate errors occurs frequently." {27} Given such a possibility in the case of the Shroud, the need for further testing seems essential.

How Was the Image Formed?

What process led to the formation of the image on the Shroud of Turin? While this remains something of a mystery, there are only three possibilities: human artistry, natural processes,

or supernatural processes.

Walter McCrone maintains the image was painted with red ochre and vermilion. {28} John Heller and Alan Adler disagree. They say the Shroud had too little of either of these pigments for even "one painted drop of blood." {29} Furthermore, Don Lynn and Jean Lorre "discovered that the Shroud's image is nondirectional." {30} That is, it does not appear to have been caused by any hand movement across the cloth. Such observations make the artistic hypothesis at least questionable.

But others think the image was formed naturally. Sam Pellicori and John German believe it resulted from bodily contact with the cloth over a period of time. But this view also has difficulties. First, it postulates that the darker areas formed by more direct contact with the body over time. As Dr. German explains, the hypothesis was that "the oils in the skin (which Pellicori experimentally demonstrated produced the same fiber degradation we saw on the Shroud) would have longer to migrate into the linen and cover more individual fibrils." {31} This would result in the image being darker at those places where the cloth had longer contact with the skin. But some have argued that, if this were so, the back of the image should be darker than the front—which it's not. In addition, if it did form naturally, then it's at least a bit surprising that no other burial cloth images have yet been found."

If the image resulted from neither art nor nature, could supernatural processes have formed it? Adherents of this view typically believe the image was created by something like a burst of radiant energy, possibly at the moment of Jesus' resurrection. Unfortunately, this hypothesis cannot account for all the Shroud image features. Still, supporters observe that the image reveals a dead man in a state of rigor mortis. Yet there is no trace of bodily decomposition on the Shroud. This may indicate that the man was removed during rigor mortis, which generally lasts less than forty-eight hours

after death. But there are difficulties in supposing the body was removed by human agency. "Since the cloth was loosely attached to the body from the dried blood, any attempt to remove it probably would have damaged the stains. Yet these . . . stains are anatomically correct." {32} Nevertheless, while proponents admittedly have some good arguments, they cannot prove that the Shroud offers us an image of the risen Christ.

So we may be left with something of a mystery. We simply don't have enough information to reach absolute certainty about the Shroud. It's important to remember, however, that the truth of Christianity does not depend on whether or not the Shroud is Jesus' burial cloth. A solid case for the bodily resurrection of Christ can be made with or without the Shroud. Thus, having tried to fairly present some of the evidence, I must now leave you to reach your own verdict on the Shroud.

Notes

- 1. See Gary Vikan, "Debunking the Shroud: Made by Human Hands," and Walter C. McCrone, "The Shroud Painting Explained," *Biblical Archaeology Review* Vol. 24 No. 6 (November/December 1998), 27-29.
- 2. Dr. Kenneth E. Stevenson, *Image of the Risen Christ* (Toronto, Ontario: Frontier Research Publications, Inc., 1999). In this section I have relied heavily on Stevenson's research in Image of the Risen Christ, pp. 93-105.
- 3. John 19:1.
- 4. Matt. 27:29.
- 5. Luke 23:33.
- 6. John 19:32-34.
- 7. Walter C. McCrone, personal e-mail, October 5, 2000.

- 8. Walter C. McCrone, "Walter C. McCrone Responds," *Biblical Archaeology Review* Vol. 25 No. 2 (March/April 1999), 66.
- 9. Ibid.
- 10. McCrone, "The Shroud Painting Explained," 29.
- 11. Ibid.
- 12. Giles F. Carter, "The Chinks in Their Armor," Biblical Archaeology Review Vol. 25 No.2 (March/April 1999), 17.
- 13. Steven Schaferamen, "Comment," Current Anthropology 24 (June 1983):301, cited in Stevenson, 73.
- 14. Alan D. Whanger, "Bolstering the Case for the Shroud," Biblical Archaeology Review Vol. 26 No.3 (May/June 2000), 65.
- 15. Ibid.
- 16. Stevenson, 127.
- 17. McCrone, "Walter C. McCrone Responds," 66.
- 18. Vikan, "Debunking the Shroud: Made by Human Hands", and McCrone, "The Shroud Painting Explained," 29. Vikan gives the date 1357, McCrone 1356. At any rate, both would agree that there is no reliable documentation for the Shroud prior to 1356.
- 19. Stevenson, 29-42. I have relied heavily on the historical reconstruction of the Shroud presented by Stevenson in this section.
- 20. Vikan, "Debunking the Shroud: Made by Human Hands," and McCrone, "The Shroud Painting Explained," 29.
- 21. Stevenson, 34.
- 22. Ibid.
- 23. John McRay, Archaeology and the New Testament (Grand

- Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1991), 34. However, McRay himself appears to accept a medieval date for the Shroud (see p. 221).
- 24. Stevenson, 118. I have again relied heavily on Stevenson in this section, pp. 107-124.
- 25. Ibid.
- 26. Leoncio A. Garza-Valdes, *The DNA of God* (New York: Doubleday Books, 1999), 34, cited in Stevenson, 121.
- 27. Willy Wolfi, *Nuclear Instruments and Methods in Physics Research*, B29 (1987): 1-13, cited in Stevenson, 120.
- 28. Walter C. McCrone, "The Shroud Painting Explained," 29.
- 29. John H. Heller, *Report on the Shroud of Turin* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983), 194, cited in Stevenson, 187.
- 30. Stevenson, 188.
- 31. John D. German, personal e-mail to the author, December 29, 2005.
- 32. Ibid., 205.
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