Those Admirable English Puritans

Michael Gleghorn corrects a number of misunderstandings and stereotypes about the Puritans, suggesting there is much about them to admire.

Introducing the Puritans

J. I. Packer begins his book, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*, by comparing the English Puritans to the California Redwoods. He writes, "On . . . the northern California coastline grow the giant Redwoods, the biggest living things on earth. Some are over 360 feet tall, and some trunks are more than 60 feet round."{1} A bit later he draws this comparison: "As Redwoods attract the eye, because they overtop other trees, so the mature holiness and seasoned fortitude of the great Puritans shine before us as a kind of beacon light, overtopping the stature of the majority of Christians in most eras."{2}

Of course, in our day, if people think of the Puritans at all, it's usually only for the purpose of making a joke of one kind or another. As one author notes, "the Puritans are the only collective stock-in-trade that virtually every cartoonist feels free to use to lampoon society's ills."{3}

But who were the Puritans really? When did they live? And, most importantly, why should we care?

Many scholarly studies of English Puritanism begin by noting the variety of ways in which the term "Puritanism" has been used and defined. Christopher Hill begins his book, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England*, with a chapter entitled, "The Definition of a Puritan."{4} And John Spurr, in

his book on English Puritanism, has an introductory section on "Defining Puritans."{5} But we'll leave it to the scholars to haggle over details. For our purposes, it's good enough to say that the Puritans were English Protestants who were influenced by the theology of the Reformation. They were zealous to "purify" not only the Church of England, but also their society, and even themselves, from all doctrinal, ceremonial, and moral impurity—and to do so for the glory of God.{6} The time period of English Puritanism spans roughly the years between 1550 and 1700.{7}

So that's who the Puritans were, but why on earth should we care? Personally, I think it's because the Puritans can offer us a great deal of wisdom, wisdom that could really benefit the church and society of our own day. As Packer reminds us, "The great Puritans, though dead, still speak to us through their writings, and say things . . . that we badly need to hear at the present time."{8}

The Puritans and God

Before going any further, we need to come right out and admit that, at least on the popular level, the Puritans really seem to suffer from an "image problem." According to J. I. Packer, "Pillorying the Puritans . . . has long been a popular pastime."{9} Likewise, Peter Marshall and David Manuel observe that "Nearly everyone today seems to believe that the Puritans were bluenosed killjoys in tall black hats, a somber group of sin-obsessed, witch-hunting bigots."{10} Of course, like Packer, they regard this view as "a monstrous misrepresentation."{11} But when a view is so widely held, we seem to be in for an uphill battle if we want to suggest some ways in which the Puritans were admirable!

So where do we begin? Let's briefly consider the way in which Puritans sought to live their lives before God. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, a teaching device highly esteemed by many Puritans,{12} begins by asking, "What is the

chief end of man?" That's a great question, isn't it? They answered it this way: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever."{13}

Now what follows if this answer is correct? Well first, it would mean that human life is *objectively* full of meaning, value, and purpose, for God exists and (as General Maximus asserted in the hit movie, *Gladiator*) "what we do in life echoes in eternity."{14} But second, in claiming that "man's chief end" consists not only in *glorifying* God in the here and now, but also in *enjoying* Him *forever*, we see the potential for the complete and eternal fulfillment of human existence. For what could be better than enjoying God, the greatest good, forever and ever?

It is doubtless for reasons such as this that the Puritan theologian, William Perkins, defined theology as "the science of living blessedly forever"!{15} He understood that theology is not some dry, academic discipline, with no relationship to the rest of one's life. Rather, theology is all about knowing God personally. And this, according to Jesus, is eternal life, the life of supreme blessedness (John 17:3). So the first reason for seeing the Puritans as admirable is that they sought to live their lives in such a way that they would glorify God and enjoy Him forever—and what could ultimately be wiser, more fulfilling—or more admirable—than that?

The Puritans and Books

Now some may have thought of the Puritans as ignorant, or anti-intellectual—people who either feared or hated learning. But this, claims Leland Ryken, is "absolutely untrue." Indeed, he says, "No Christian movement in history has been more zealous for education than the Puritans."{16} Many leaders of the Puritan movement were university educated and saw great value in the life of the mind. One can list individual Puritans who were interested in things like astronomy, botany, medicine, and still other subjects from the book of

nature.{17}

Above all, however, Puritanism was a movement which prized that greatest of all books, the Bible. Puritans loved their Bibles—and deemed it both their joy and duty to study, teach, believe and live out its promises and commandments. According to Packer, "Intense veneration for Scripture . . . and a devoted concern to know and do all that it prescribes, was Puritanism's hallmark."{18}

Indeed, so great was this Puritan veneration for Scripture that even those without much formal education often knew their English Bible exceedingly well. A great example of this can be seen in John Bunyan, the famed author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Although he did not have much in the way of formal education, one of his later editors declared (doubtless with *some* exaggeration) that "No man ever possessed a more intimate knowledge of the Bible, nor greater aptitude in quoting it than Bunyan."{19}

For Puritans like Bunyan, the Bible was the inspired word of God. It was thus the highest court of appeal in all matters of Christian faith and practice. Indeed, since the Bible came from God, it was viewed as having the same divine authority as God himself. It was therefore worth one's time to know the Bible well, and to be intimately familiar with its contents. As two contemporary scholars of Puritanism remind us, the Bible was both "the mirror before which each person could see the . . . status of one's soul before God, and the guidebook for all human behavior . . ."{20}

The Puritan stress on knowing, believing, and obeying God's inspired word is refreshing. What might the church in America look like if it *really* recaptured this Puritan vision for the importance of Scripture? Here the writings of the Puritans can still be a valuable resource for the church today, which is yet another reason for seeing them as admirable.{21}

The Puritans and the Church

Even in our own day, the Puritans remain fairly well-known for their desire to "purify" the Church of England from anything which, in their estimation, smacked of doctrinal, moral, or ceremonial impurity.{22} The Puritans were passionate about the purity of the church. But how were they to determine if a particular doctrine or practice was suspect?

For the Puritans, it was only natural that God's inspired word, the Bible, should serve as the final authority in all such matters. If a doctrine was taught in Scripture, then it should also be taught in the church. And if not, then it shouldn't. The same standard would apply to all moral and ceremonial issues as well. Scripture was to have the final word about whether any particular doctrine or practice was, or was not, to be taught or permitted in the church of God.{23} Of course, this is right in line with what we said above about the Puritan devotion to Scripture.

But once one is committed to judging everything *within* the church according to the standard of Scripture, it probably won't be long before one's view *of* the church undergoes a similar biblical scrutiny. Such scrutiny soon led Puritans to "the notion that the church is a spiritual reality." The church is not the building in which the redeemed gather to meet, it is rather "the company of the redeemed" themselves.{24} Doubtless this was one of the reasons why the Puritans were eager to purify not only the church, understood in a corporate sense, but themselves as individuals as well.

It also helps explain the Puritans' devotion to both the fellowship of the saints and the discipline of an erring brother or sister in the faith. The Puritan pastor Richard Sibbes urged God's people "to strengthen and encourage one another in the ways of holiness."{25} And Robert Coachman reminded his readers that "it is no small privilege . . . to live in . . . a society" where one's brothers and sisters in

Christ "will not suffer them to go on in sin."{26}

But isn't it all too easy to allow Christian fellowship to lapse into something that is superficial, boring, and sometimes even frankly unspiritual? Yes; and this is why the great English Puritans are quick to remind us (sometimes in the most forceful of ways) that we must continually seek, in our fellowship together, to promote both faith and holiness, along with a deep love and reverent fear of the Lord our God. And isn't that an admirable reminder?

The Puritans on Marriage and the Family

If there's one thing that almost everyone thinks they know about the Puritans it's that they "were sexually inhibited and repressive," right?{27} But just how accurate is our knowledge about the Puritans on this score? Well according to some scholars, it's wide of the mark indeed.{28}

Of course, it's certainly true that the Puritans believed, just as the New Testament teaches, that human sexual behavior should be enjoyed only within the marriage relationship between a husband and wife. And naturally enough, they disapproved of any sexual behavior outside of this relationship. But within the union of heterosexual marriage, the Puritans were actually quite vocal proponents of a rich and vibrant sex life. Indeed, one Puritan author described sex as "one of the most proper and essential acts of marriage" and encouraged married couples to engage in it "with good will and delight, willingly, readily and cheerfully."{29} And need I add that the Puritans thought it important to *practice* what they preached?!

But with Puritan couples so "readily and cheerfully" enjoying their sexual relationships within marriage, they naturally had to give some serious thought to the raising of children and the purpose of the family! So what did they have to say about such matters?

For the Puritans, the family ultimately had the same purpose as the individual; namely, "the glory of God." The reason this is important, notes Ryken, is that "it determines what goes on in a family," by setting "priorities in a spiritual rather than material direction."{30}

The Puritans rightly saw that if one wants a spiritually healthy church and a morally healthy society, one must first have spiritually and morally healthy individuals and families—for the former are inevitably composed of the latter.{31} Hence, if we want healthy churches and societies, we must also prize healthy individuals. And such individuals are best produced within spiritually and morally healthy families.

Now I personally find it difficult to argue with the Puritan logic on this point. And although they lived in a different era, Puritan views on the purpose of the family really seem to offer "some attractive possibilities for our own age."{32}

And now we've reached the end of our discussion of English Puritanism. Of course, the Puritans also had their faults—and I've no desire to pretend otherwise.{33} But I hope you'd agree that there's much to admire about these oft-maligned and misrepresented giants of the past. And I also hope this might encourage you to read (and profit from) these giants for yourself!

Notes

1. J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990), 11. I should probably note that the California Department of Parks and Recreation gives figures slightly different from those in Packer's book, but this is really immaterial for my purposes in this article. See, for example, "How Big are Big Trees," California Department of Parks and Recreation, accessed February 12, 2015, www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=1146.

2. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 11.

3. Bruce C. Daniels, *New England Nation: The Country the Puritans Built* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 230.

4. Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 1-15.

5. John Spurr, *English Puritanism, 1603-1689*, ed. Jeremy Black, Social History in Perspective (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 3-8.

6. Definitional help was gathered from the sources cited above, as well as the article by Mark A Noll, "Puritanism," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 897-900.

7. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 11.

8. Ibid., 16.

9. Ibid., 21.

10. Peter Marshall and David Manuel, *The Light and the Glory: 1492-1793*. Revised and expanded edition (Grand Rapids: Revell, 2009), 211.

11. Ibid.

12. According to Packer, the Puritan Richard Baxter used this catechism to help instruct (and encourage) his parishioners in the truths of the Christian faith. See Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 45.

13. This catechism can be found many places on the internet. See, for example, "The Westminster Shorter Catechism," The Westminster Presbyterian, accessed February 15, 2015, www.westminsterconfession.org/confessional-standards/the-westminster-shorter-catechism.php.

14. For a philosophical defense of this view, please see the chapter entitled, "The Absurdity of Life without God," in William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 65-90.

15. William Perkins, *A Golden Chain*, or *The Description of Theology* (1592). In *The Work of William Perkins*, ed. Ian Breward. Courtenay Library of Reformation Classics 3 (Appleford, England: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1970), 177; cited in *Reformed Reader*, ed. William Stacy Johnson and John H. Leith (Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 7.

16. Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 7.
17. See the brief discussion in Charles Pastoor and Galen Johnson, *The A to Z of the Puritans* (Lanham, MY: Scarecrow Press, 2009), s.v. "Science."

18. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 98.

19. *The Works of John Bunyan: Allegorical, Figurative, and Symbolical*, ed. George Offor, vol. 3 (London: Blackie and Son, 1859), 396.

20. See Pastoor and Johnson, *The A to Z of the Puritans*, s.v. "Scripture."

21. Packer says much the same thing. See *A Quest for Godliness*, 16.

22. For the Puritans, of course, this was typically some vestige of Roman Catholicism. I purposefully chose not to mention this on the radio, however, because I did not want any of our listeners to somehow get the mistaken idea that this was an anti-Catholic program. It's not. My purpose in this program is to extol the virtues of the Puritans—not to vilify some other segment of the Christian community.

23. Leland Ryken has an excellent discussion of this issue in

his chapter on "Church and Worship" in *Worldly Saints*, 111-135. See particularly pp. 112-115.

24. This, and the previous quotation, are both taken from Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 115.

25. Richard Sibbes, "The Church's Visitation" (London, 1634), cited in Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 133.

26. Robert Coachman (or Cushman), *The Cry of a Stone* (London, 1642), cited in Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 133.

27. Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 39.

28. See, for example, Ryken's chapter on "Marriage and Sex" in *Worldly Saints*, 39-55.

29. William Gouge, *Of Domestical Duties* (London, 1622), edited, updated and revised by Greg Fox (Puritan Reprints, 2006), 158.

30. Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 74.

31. Ryken provides numerous examples of this view from the writings of *Puritans in Worldly Saints*, 74-5; 84-7.
32. Ibid., 73.

33. See Ryken's chapter, "Learning from Negative Example: Some Puritan Faults," in *Worldly Saints*, 187-203.

Deism and America's Founders

The views and beliefs of our country's founders were as diverse and complicated as today. Don Closson focuses on the

role of deism.

In his book *Is God on America's Side*, Erwin Lutzer asks the important question, "Is the American dream and the Christian dream one and the same?"{1} If our national dream fails, does it necessarily follow that our Christian dream also dies? Lutzer's book makes the point that it's dangerous to see the goals of the state and the purpose of the church as one and the same. It's dangerous to equate the "city of man" with the "city of God."

However, there are those who argue that because our Founding Fathers were devoted Christians who held to an orthodox Christian faith, the state and the church in America are already linked together, and that if America as a nation loses its uniquely Christian flavor, the church will fail in its task as well. They see America as a unique country that holds a special place in God's plan for reaching the world. Additionally, they argue that we enjoy God's special protection and blessings because of this Christian founding, blessings which will be lost if Christians lose control of the nation.

At the other end of the religious and political spectrum is the group who portray America and its founding as a thoroughly secular project. They argue that by the time the Revolution had occurred in the colonies, Enlightenment rationalism had won the day in the minds and hearts of the young nation's leaders. They often add that the drive towards religious tolerance was the result of a decline in belief in God and an attempt to remove religious influence from America's future.

For all those involved in this debate, the specific beliefs of our Founders are very important. Those who argue that America was founded by godless men who established a godless Constitution are, for the most part, wrong. Belief in God was practically universal among our Founding Founders. On the other hand, those who argue that our Founders were mostly

devoted Christians who sought to establish a Christian nation devoted to the gospel of Jesus Christ are not giving us the full picture either. Because both sides in this debate tend to define America by the religious faith of our Founders, both sides tend to over-simplify the religious beliefs of those early patriots.

It's important, therefore, to consider the specific beliefs of some of our Founding Fathers so that we might get a clearer picture of religion in that era and avoid either of the two extremes usually presented. As we look into the actions and words of specific Revolutionary era leaders we will find that their beliefs represent a mixture of viewpoints that are every bit as complicated as those of America's leaders today.

Deism

The issue centers on how much influence Deism had on our Founders. So a good place to begin is with a definition of the movement while remembering that Deists "were never organized into a sect, had no [official] creed or form of worship, recognized no leader, and were constantly shifting their ground."{2} That said, Edward Herbert is often given credit for being the father of Deism in the seventeenth century. His five-point system is a good starting point for understanding the religious beliefs that affected many of our nation's leaders nearly one hundred years later.

Herbert's Deism begins with the fact that there is a God. However, Deists did not equate this God with the one who revealed himself to Moses or as having a special relationship with the Jews. Instead of being the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Deists referred to him with terms like "the First Cause," "the Divine Artist," the Grand Architect," "the God of Nature," or "Divine Providence."{3} Many Deists argued that more could be learned about God by studying nature and science than by seeking knowledge about him in the Bible.

Deists also thought that it naturally follows to worship this God, which is Herbert's second point. This belief is arrived at by reason alone and not revelation; it is a common sense response to the fact that "the God of Nature" exists. The nature of this worship is Herbert's third point. Deists worshipped their God by living ethically. Some acknowledged the superior example of an ethical life as lived by Jesus; others felt that Christianity itself was a barrier to an ethical life.

Interestingly, Deists included repentance as part of their system. What is not a surprise is that this repentance consists of agreeing with the Creator God that living an ethical life is better than to not live such a life. Herbert's last point may also be a surprise to many. Deists believed in an afterlife, and that in it there will be rewards and punishments based on our success or failure to live ethically now.

What should be obvious by now is that Deism was derivative of Christianity. As one cleric of the day wrote, "Deism is what is left of Christianity after casting off everything that is peculiar to it. The deist is one who denies the Divinity, the Incarnation, and the Atonement of Christ, and the work of the Holy Ghost; who denies the God of Israel, and believes in the God of Nature."{4}

Anti-Christian Deism

The impact of Deism on Americans in the 1700s is complicated because the word itself represents a spectrum of religious positions held at that time. One extreme represents a group that might be called the non-Christian Deists. This faction was openly hostile to the Christian faith. Thomas Paine, of *Common Sense* fame, and a leading advocate of this position, wrote that Deism "is free from all those invented and torturing articles that shock our reason . . . with which the

Christian religion abounds. Its creed is pure and sublimely simple. It believes in God, and there it rests. It honors Reason as the choicest gift of God to man and the faculty by which he is enabled to contemplate the power, wisdom, and goodness of the Creator displayed in the creation; . . . it avoids all presumptuous beliefs and rejects, as the fabulous inventions of men, all books pretending to be revelation."{5} This quote clearly expresses the complaints and disdain that some Deists held against the Christian faith.

Although often accused of being godless pagans, it was not unusual for Thomas Paine and others in this group to see themselves as God's defenders. Paine says that he wrote *The Age of Reason* in France during the French Revolution to defend belief in God against the growing atheism in that country. But he agreed with the French that the power and influence of the Roman Catholic Church had to be removed. There was little love lost on the monarchy or the priesthood; one French philosopher wrote, "let us strangle the last king with the guts of the last priest."

Deists were very confident in the power of human reason. Reason informed them that miracles were impossible and that the Bible is a man-made book of mythical narratives. This faction of Deists also saw Christianity as a barrier to moral improvement and social justice. And since for them, living an ethical life is itself true worship, Christianity was seen as an impediment to worshipping God as well.

Reason is highlighted by the writings of these influential colonists. The former Presbyterian minister Elihu Palmer wrote a paper titled *Reason, the Glory of Our Nature,* and the well known patriot Ethan Allen published the Deistic piece *Reason: the Only Oracle of Man.*{6} In the preface of his book, Allen wrote, "I have generally been denominated a Deist, the reality of which I never disputed, being conscious I am no Christian, except mere infant baptism make me one."{7}

It is not surprising that this focus on reason led Deists to reject the Trinity. Unitarianism was making great inroads into American colleges by the 1750s, and America's best and brightest were now subject to this view at Yale, Harvard, and other prominent schools.

Church-Going Deists

It can be argued that there was a form of Deism in the late 1700s that was comfortable with parts of Christianity but was not entirely orthodox. Some of our most cherished and famous early American patriots fit into this category.

A good argument can be made that Franklin, Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe were all significantly influenced by Deism and Unitarianism. Let's take a look at the actions and comments of two of these revolutionary era leaders who can justifiably be called church-going Deists.

Hearing that Benjamin Franklin was a Deist will probably not shock too many Americans. By some accounts he embraced Deism at the young age of fifteen.[8] As an adult he was asked by a minister to express his personal creed, and Franklin replied, "I believe in one God, Creator of the Universe: That he governs the World by his Providence. That he ought to be worshiped. That the most acceptable Service we can render to him, is doing good to his other Children. That the soul of man is immortal, and will be treated with Justice in another life, respecting its Conduct in this."[9] Franklin's faith was focused on personal behavior rather than faith in Christ's work on the cross. When asked about Jesus, Franklin said, "I have . . . some Doubts as to his Divinity, tho' it is a Question I do not dogmatize upon."[10] Rather than being openly hostile to Christianity, Franklin contributed to every church building project in Philadelphia, as well as its one synagogue.

The faith of George Washington is a more controversial matter. Washington consistently used Deistic language to describe God in both public and private communications, rarely referring to Jesus Christ in any setting. Comments made by his contemporaries also point to Deistic beliefs. Washington's bishop and pastor while he was in Philadelphia admitted that "Truth requires me to say, that General Washington never received the communion in the churches of which I am parochial minister."{11} Another pastor added, "Sir, he was a Deist," when questions about his faith arose shortly after his death. The fact that Washington was never confirmed in the Episcopal Church and ceased to take communion after the war adds to the case for him being a Deist. The controversy will continue, but much evidence points to his less than orthodox beliefs.

It must be remembered that, while Washington and Deists in general were quite willing to speak about the "God of Providence" or the "Grand Architect," rarely are they found them referring to God as "Father," "Lord," "Redeemer," or "Savior."{12}

Orthodox Christians

Samuel Adams is often called the father of the American Revolution, but he is also known as "the Last of the Puritans," a title that speaks to his commitment to orthodox Christianity.{13} His orthodoxy is confirmed by both his actions and comments. Adams was opposed to Freemasonry, which taught a belief system that was consistent with Deism. Neither ideology focused on Jesus or the Bible, and both accepted Jews, Muslims, Christians, or anyone else who believed in a divine being. In fact, the phrase "the Grand Architect," often used by Deists as a title for God, came from Freemasonry, not the Bible.

Adams maintained a religious household by personally practicing grace before meals, Bible readings, and morning and

evening devotions. More important, Adams' religious language revealed an orthodox belief system. He referred to God as "our Divine Redeemer," and the one "who has given us his Son to purchase for us the reward of eternal life," phrases that a Deist would most likely not employ.{14} Even when thinking of his future passing Adams looked to Christ; his will spoke of his "relying on the merits of Jesus Christ for a pardon of all my sins."{15} Although many leaders of the day left their orthodox upbringing, Adams "was a New England Congregationalist who remained staunchly loyal to the Calvinist orthodoxy in which he had been raised."{16}

John Jay was president of the Continental Congress and the first chief justice of the Supreme Court; he also exhibited leadership in spreading the Word of God among the new country's citizens. As president of the American Bible Society, Jay used his annual address to stress the authority of the Bible. He spoke of the events in its pages as events in history, not as religious mythology. He also employed the language of the church in his speeches and writings including "Saviour," "King of Heaven," and "Captain of our Salvation."{17} Although Jay had many friends among the Deists of the day, he differed greatly with them concerning the relationship of reason and revelation. Jay wrote that the truths of Christianity were "revealed to our faith, to be believed on the credit of Divine testimony" rather than a product of human reason.

Just as today, the religious landscape of early America was varied and complex. Those complexities should neither hinder nor determine our efforts to build God's kingdom in the twenty-first century. America has been blessed by God, but to argue that it is privileged over all other nations is presumptuous. Other nations have believed that their country would be used uniquely by God as well. Perhaps we stand on firmer ground when we look to the church as God's vehicle for accomplishing His purposes, a body of believers that will draw

from every nation, tribe, people and language.

Notes

1. Erwin W. Lutzer, *Is God On America's Side* (Moody Publishers, 2008), 75.

2. David L. Holmes, *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers* (Oxford, 2006), 39.

3. Ibid., 47.

4. Ibid., 39.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. books.google.com/books?id=IHMAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA1#PPA1,M1 accessed on 9/15/2008.

8. Holmes, 54.

9. Ibid., 56.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., 63.

12. Ibid., 65.

13. Ibid., 144.

14. Ibid., 146.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., p. 150.

17. Ibid., p. 158.

Truth: What It Is and Why We Can Know It

Rick Wade explores truth from a biblical and philosophical perspective. Despite what many believe, it IS possible to know truth because of the role of Jesus Christ as creator and revealer of truth.

The Loss of Confidence

Did you see the movie *City of Angels?* Nicholas Cage plays an angel named Seth who has taken a special interest in a surgeon named Maggie, played by Meg Ryan. Maggie's lost a patient on the operating table, and she is very upset about it. Seth meets her in a hallway in the hospital, and gets her to talk about the loss. Here is a snippet of the conversation:

Maggie: I lost a patient.

Seth: You did everything you could.

Maggie: I was holding his heart in my hand when he died.

Seth: He wasn't alone.

Maggie: Yes, he was.

Seth: People die.

Maggie: Not on my table.

Seth: People die when their bodies give out.

Maggie: It's my job to keep their bodies from giving out. Or what am I doing here?

Seth: It wasn't your fault, Maggie.

Maggie: I wanted him to live.

Seth: He *is* living. Just not the way you think.

Maggie: I don't believe in that.

Seth: Some things are true whether you believe in 'em or not.{1}

What did he say?! "Some things are true whether you believe in 'em or not"?? Are you kidding?!? That's crazy talk these days! I have a right to my own opinion, and if I don't believe it, if it's not my opinion, it's not true . . . for me, anyway.

The meaning of *truth* has changed in recent decades. Whereas once it meant statements about reality, today it often means what works or what is meaningful to me. This kind of language is heard primarily in the context of religion and morality. We have lost confidence in our ability to know what reality *is*. So much emphasis has been put on knowledge through sense experience that anything outside the boundaries of the senses is considered unknowable. Moral and religious discussions frequently end with, "Well, that's *your* opinion," or the more colorful, "Opinions are like belly buttons. Everyone has one." It's assumed that opinions can't be universally, objectively true or false. Each person is his or her own authority over what is true. Truth is a personal possession which is why people get so offended when challenged. A challenge is taken personally. "This is *my* truth. Don't touch it!" Strong challenges are even taken as a sign of disrespect.

What does it mean when truth is lost? In philosophy, the result is skepticism or pragmatism. In society in general, one

sees a degeneration from skepticism to hypocrisy to cynicism. First we say no one can know what is true—that's skepticism. Then someone says "I have the truth" but then speaks or acts in a way not in keeping with that "truth" (if truth is uncertain, it can change with my moods)—that's hypocrisy. Then we stop trusting each other—that's cynicism. In politics, power and image are what count. In matters of morality, there is no standard above us; social consensus is the best we can hope for, or "human solidarity," according to Christopher Hitchens. Justice has no sure footing. Might becomes right.

[Elsewhere I have written](#) that we don't have to give in either to the demand for absolute certainty or to the skepticism of our day.[{2}](#) We can be confident in our ability to know truth even though not exhaustively. In this article I want to look at the nature and ground of truth, for these are of utmost importance in regard to the question of reliable knowledge.

Truth: The Significance of Its Loss

Let's look more closely at what it means to lose confidence in knowing truth. One problem is that we become closed up in our individual shells with each of us having his or her own truth. Theologian Roger Nicole notes that the loss of truth means the loss of meaning in language; if we don't know whether a proposition means what it seems to mean or its opposite, then language is impotent to convey reliable knowledge. And we get caught up in contradictions. As Nicole wrote, those who deny objective validity "presuppose such validity at least for their denial!"[{3}](#)

Problems are also created in the realm of morality. Historian Felipe Fernández-Armesto wrote this:

> *The retreat from truth is one of the great dramatic, untold stories of history. . . . For professional academics in the affected disciplines, to have grown indifferent to truth is an extraordinary reversal of traditional obligations; it is*

like physicians renouncing the obligation to sustain life or theologians losing interest in God—developments, formerly unthinkable, which now loom as truth diminishes. The trashing of truth began as an academic vice, but the debris is now scattered all over society. It is spread through classroom programmes, . . . In a society of concessions to rival viewpoints, in which citizens hesitate to demand what is true and denounce what is false, it becomes impossible to defend the traditional moral distinction between right and wrong, which are relativized in turn. Unless it is true, what status is left for a statement like 'X is wrong' where X is, say, adultery, infanticide, euthanasia, drug-dealing, Nazism, paedophilia, sadism or any other wickedness due, in today's climate, for relativization into the ranks of the acceptable? It becomes, like everything else in western society today, a matter of opinion; and we are left with no moral basis for encoding some opinions rather than others, except the tyranny of the majority.[{4}]

One of the worst problems for a well-ordered society is cynicism. First we say there's no truth. But then we hypocritically push our views on others as though *we* have the truth. Then people stop trusting each other. "You say there are no fixed truths, but then you push your claims on me." The result is cynicism.

Some people claim that truth claims are suspect because the words we use are changeable; they can't carry fixed, eternal truths. If we don't think it's possible that words convey truth, then words lose their objective meaning, and we start giving them our *own* meanings.

The loss of confidence in knowing truth is significant for Christians, too, who, without realizing it, adopt similar patterns of thought. When such confidence in knowing truth is weakened, one cannot have confidence that the Bible is the true Word of God. Its authority in the individual's life is

weakened because what it says becomes questionable. Evangelism becomes a matter of sharing one's own religious preferences, rather than delivering God's authoritative Word. Bible study becomes a sharing of opinions with none being normative. Each has his or her own opinion and no one is supposed to say a given opinion is wrong.

Truth in Scripture

What is this "truth" thing we talk so much about? My dictionary has such definitions as genuineness, reality, correctness, and statements which accord with reality.{5} Truth can also be a characteristic of persons and things. Someone or some thing that is true is genuine or in keeping with his or its nature. And truth can refer to quality of conduct. The Bible speaks of people doing the truth rather than doing evil (cf. Nah. 9:33; Jn. 3:20, 21).{6}

To help in considering all these matters, let's look at truth as understood in Scripture, and then at truth considered in philosophical terms.

What does the Bible teach about truth?

In the Old Testament, the word most often translated *true, truth,* or *truly* is *'emet* or a cognate.{7} This word is also translated "faithfulness." Let's consider the matter of faithfulness first.

For the Israelites, Yahweh was "the God in whose word and work one could place complete confidence."{8} For example, God said through Zechariah: "I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God" (8:8). Nehemiah said to God: "You have acted faithfully, while we did wrong" (9:33). "The works of his hand are faithful and just," said the Psalmist; "all his precepts are trustworthy" (111:7).

'Emet also means truth as over against falsehood as when

Joseph tested his brothers to see if they were telling the truth (Gen. 42:16), and when the Israelites were warned to test accusations that people were worshiping other gods to see if they were true (Deut. 13:14). Commenting on Ps. 43:3—"Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me"—theologian Anthony Thiselton says that "Truth enables [the writer] to escape from the dark, and to see things for what they are."{9}

We shouldn't conclude by these two uses of the word that on any given occasion "truth" always means *both* faithfulness *and* the opposite of falsehood. However, there is a connection between the two. Theologian Anthony Thiselton says the connection depends "on the fact that when God or man is said to act faithfully, often this means that his word and his deed are one. He has acted faithfully in accordance with his spoken word. Hence the believer may lean his whole weight confidently on God, and find him faithful."{10}

Thus, in the Old Testament, truth is a matter of both words and deeds. "Men express their respect for truth not in abstract theory, but in their daily witness to their neighbour and their verbal and commercial transactions," Thiselton says.{11}

In the New Testament, there is an increased focus on truth as conformity to reality and as opposed to falsehood. The Greek word *alētheia* means, literally, "not hidden." When Peter was sprung from prison by an angel, he didn't know if it was real (or true) or a dream (Acts 12:9). John the Baptist bore witness to the truth (Jn. 5:33). Jesus used the phrase "I tell you in truth" four times to emphasize the correctness of what he was about to say (Lk. 4:25; 9:27; 12:44; 21:3). When Jesus said "I *am* the truth," (Jn. 14:6), He was identifying Himself with what is ultimately and finally real.

Truth in the New Testament isn't disconnected from how we live, however. We are to walk in the truth (2 Jn. 4; 2 Pet. 2:22), and we are to obey the truth (Gal. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:22).

One mustn't oversimplify scriptural teaching on truth. However, it's safe to say that truth in the Bible means having the correct understanding of the way things really are, and living in accordance with this understanding.

Truth Considered Philosophically

Let's look at truth now from a philosophical perspective, first as what is real, and then as true statements. This is important, because these are the terms according to which non-Christians think about the matter.

First, truth is a characteristic of reality. In short, if something is real, it is true. Or put philosophically, if something "participates in being," it is true. When we say that the God of the Bible is the true God, we mean He really exists and really is God!

By analogy, we might ask if a plant we see in a room is a true or real plant. We want to know if it is organic, and not plastic or fabric. If we say a *person* has exhibited true love, we're saying the person's actions weren't motivated by anything other than concern for the object of the person's love.

Second, truth is a characteristic of accurate statements or propositions. Sentences which express true meanings convey truth. This is what we typically think of when we speak of truth.[{12}](#)

We often divide truth in this sense into the categories of *objective* and *subjective*. When we speak of objective truth, we mean that a statement truly reflects what is real, or really the case, apart from ourselves as knowers. And whether we believe it or not. Such truth is public; others can verify it. When we speak of *subjective* truth, we're speaking of truth that comes from us individually, where we ourselves are the only authority. For example, "My leg hurts" is subjective in

the sense that I am the sole authority. Or if I claim that "French vanilla ice cream is the best tasting kind there is," that is a subjective truth claim."

Both truth as what's real and truth as objectively true statements are in crisis today. First, postmodernists say we can't know what's ultimately real. In academia this means there is no framework for integrating the various areas of study. In everyday life it results in fractured lives as we find ourselves having to conform to different situations without any integrating structure. French sociologist and philosopher Jean Baudrillard had this to say about postmodernism: "[Postmodernism] has deconstructed its entire universe. So all that are left are pieces. All that remains to be done is to play with the pieces. Playing with the pieces—that is postmodern."{13}

We can rearrange the pieces in a number of different ways, but there is, as it were, no picture on the front of the puzzle box to guide us.{14} Such a view of truth leaves one unwilling, or unable really, to say what is true about anything of importance, and, as a result, forces one into the rather mindless tolerance demanded today. Dorothy Sayers had this to say about such "tolerance":

> *In the world it calls itself Tolerance; but in hell it is called Despair. It is the accomplice of the other sins and their worst punishment. It is the sin which believes nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and only remains alive because there is nothing it would die for.{15}*

Second, although truth as true statements is still acknowledged today, some important matters are considered subjective which should be acknowledged as objective, such as statements about God and morality. Christians believe we can

know what is ultimately and objectively real and true because the One who *is* ultimately real and true, God, has revealed Himself to us.

A Foundation for Knowledge of Truth

Now we finally get to the key idea of this article.

Christians claim that they have the truth, a claim that is met with scorn. We are tempted to point to the Bible as our basis for the claim, but critics claim that we're jumping the gun. If no one can have confidence in knowing truth, then what good is the Bible? It isn't the *source* that's the question; not yet anyway. It's the very *possibility* of knowing truth that is questioned. How are truth and the possibility of knowing it even possible?

In a nutshell, we have what philosophical naturalism has given up: we have a metaphysical basis for knowing truth, a basis in what is.

You see, for the naturalist, there is nothing fixed behind the changing world. Three things need to be the case about the world for us to know truth: that it is real; that it is rational; and that there is something fixed behind it. *And* we need to be able to connect with what is around us with our senses and our reason.

Here's the key point: *Knowledge of truth is possible because of the creating and revealing work of the* Logos *of God, Jesus Christ.* I'll return to this below.

It is not enough that Christians to simply throw their hands up in despair over this. We have a message that is true for all people. But it may not do to just point to the Bible as our source for true beliefs if the very possibility of knowing any enduring truth is in doubt. Upon what basis can we believe we can really know truth?

To have true knowledge of the world outside our own minds, there has to be a solid connection between our thoughts and the world. The world has to be rational, and we have to have the proper sensory and mental apparatus necessary to comprehend it. Christianity provides such a connection between our minds and reality outside us in the person of the *Logos* of God.

"In the beginning was the Word," John wrote, the *Logos* (John 1:1; cf. Rev. 19:13). In Greek philosophy, *logos* was the impersonal principle of cosmic reason which was thought to give order and intelligibility to the world. John's *Logos*, however, is not impersonal; a Person, not a principle. The *Logos*—Jesus of Nazareth—is the intelligent expression of God or the Word of God (Jn. 1:1,14; Rev. 19:13). He is not secondary to God, but is God.

The significance of this for the possibility of knowing truth is this: knowledge is possible because of the creating and revealing work of the Logos. Remember that Jesus, the *Logos*, is not only the One who reveals God to us, but is also the creator of the universe (Jn.1:3; Col.1:16,17; Heb.1:2). Because the universe came from a rational Being, the universe is rational. Further, there is no hint in Scripture that the world is an illusion; it is just what it appears to be: real. And because we're made in God's image, we're rational beings who can know the universe.{16} Also, we can perceive the world around us because we were created with the sensory apparatus to perceive it.

But this is just knowledge of our world. What about knowledge of God? Not only has the *Logos* created us with the ability to know the world, He has also revealed Himself in a rational and even observable way. He is, as Carl Henry put it, "the God Who speaks and shows."{17}

Because of all this, it is not arrogance that is behind the Christian claim that truth can be known. We claim it because

we have a basis for it: Jesus of Nazareth, the *Logos* of God, the Creator, has made knowledge of truth possible, knowledge of this world *and* of God. Modern philosophy and theology denied God's ability to reveal Himself to us in any significant way. But such ideas diminish God Himself. He made us to know His world. He gave us sense organs to know the empirical world; He gave us rational minds to engage in logical and mathematical reasoning and to engage in the many, many deductions we make every day of our lives. He also made us to know Him, and He revealed Himself to us through a variety of ways.

It's no wonder that the naturalistic philosophy of our time is incapable of having confidence in knowing truth. It has lost a metaphysical ground for truth. Jesus of Nazareth is not only our source of salvation; He is also the Creator. And because of this, we can have confidence in our ability to know truth in general and truth about God in particular.

Notes

1. *City of Angels*, DVD, directed by Brad Silberling (Warner Home Video, 1998).

2. Rick Wade, "Confident Belief," Probe Ministries, 2001, www.probe.org/confident-belief/.

3. Roger Nicole, "The Biblical Concept of Truth," in D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 287.

4. Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Truth: A History and Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 165-66.

5. *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, 4th ed, s.v., "true."

6. John V. Dahms, "The Nature of Truth," *JETS* 28/4 (December. 1985), 455-465. This is parallel to Carnell's triad of

ontological truth, propositional truth, and truth as personal rectitude. See Edward John Carnell, *Christian Commitment: An Apologetic* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1957), 14-17.

7. Nicole, 288. I am indebted to Nicole's and Thiselton's (cf. note 8 below) studies for much of what follows.

8. Colin Brown, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978); s.v. "Truth" by A. C. Thiselton, III.877, quoting Alfred Jepsen, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, I:313.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. See Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Vol. 5, *God Who Stands and Stays, Part One* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1982), 336.

13. Jean Baudrillard, quoted in Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, Ill.: 2000), 169.

14. See Groothuis, 170.

15. Dorothy Sayers, *Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1969), 4; quoted in Groothuis, 170.

16. As Henry says, "As creative, the Word of God is the ground of all existence; as revelatory, it is the ground of all human knowledge." (GRA, 5:334) Also, "The Logos is the creative Word whereby God fashioned and preserves the universe. He is the light of the understanding, the Reason that enables intelligible creatures to comprehend the truth." (GRA 3:212).

17. The subtitle to Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Vol.

1.

Who Wrote the New Testament?

David Graieg explores Bart Ehrman's contention that we can't trust the Bible's supposed authors. Yes we can.

Bart Ehrman

What if eighteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament were not written by the people who have traditionally been credited with their authorship?{1} Just such a claim is made by Bart Ehrman's book *Forged: Writing in the Name of God* in which he argues that the Bible's authors are not who we think they are.

Dr. Ehrman is a professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. His work has been featured in *Time*, and he has appeared on NBC's *Dateline, The History Channel, National Geographic*, and other top media outlets.{2} Ehrman has authored over twenty books, including three *New York Times* bestsellers: *Jesus Interrupted, God's Problem*, and *Misquoting Jesus*, which argues that the New Testament manuscripts are unreliable and, hence, the text of the Bible is inaccurate. Ehrman's works are having a huge impact on the way that people perceive Christianity both here in the U.S. and abroad. Believers need to be ready to give an answer to Dr. Ehrman's claims.

Ehrman grew up in a liberal Episcopal church, but says that in high school a Youth for Christ leader took advantage of the

loneliness that every teen experiences and led Ehrman to be born again.{3} Ehrman attended Moody Bible Institute and Wheaton College where his studies in New Testament textual criticism began to fuel doubt concerning the importance of variants in the manuscripts. Ehrman went on to pursue doctoral work at Princeton University, and, partly due to an issue concerning who the high priest was in the second chapter of Mark, Ehrman went down the path of agnosticism.

Ehrman's new book, *Forged,* contains eight chapters that include considerable overlap, and much of the space is devoted to forgeries outside the Bible. This makes the book's subtitle, *"Why the Bible's Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are,"* a little misleading. Also, there's not much new here. These concerns are covered in most recent textbooks on the New Testament.{4} Ehrman sees himself as making the public aware of what scholars have known for years.

As for the claim of *Forged,* Ehrman argues that Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy, Titus, James, Jude, and 1–2 Peter are not written by those whose names are traditionally attached to them. It follows that if these books are written by liars and are deceptive in nature, and God Himself does not lie, the Church must have been mistaken in thinking these books were inspired by God. It would also follow that these books should be
removed from the canon of the Bible. However, as we shall see, there's good reason to think that these books are not forgeries.

Determining Authorship

To begin, we will look into the important question of how scholars determine the author of a book written thousands of years ago.

There are two main lines of evidence that scholars use to determine the likely author of a book. The first is internal

evidence, the most obvious being a claim to authorship in the document itself. There might also be hints in the document about when and where it was written, which may or may not match what we know of the life of the author, or might just seem out of place. For instance, if someone wrote that he visited Dallas, Texas in July and adds that it froze overnight, this scenario is not impossible but is very unlikely. Thus, we would have good reason to question other claims in the text.

If we have two letters that are supposed to have been written by the same author, we can compare their styles for confirmation. Do the documents share a similar vocabulary? Do they use the same figures of speech and cultural expressions? Do they both use specific words or ideas in the same way or are they fairly distinct? If one of the documents uses a large number of unique words that are not used in the other, it may put in question mutual authorship.

Another important variable is the intended audience of a document since that can have a significant impact on its style and vocabulary. For instance, a medical doctor might write a work-related letter to a fellow oncologist and on the same day send a personal email to her husband. Ten years later, that same doctor writes a letter to her friend about a personal hobby. In all three cases, it's the same person writing, but there would be three distinct styles and vocabularies in each letter. Determining authorship can be a very complicated matter when considering both objective and subjective elements.

There's also external evidence to consider, information gathered from outside the letter itself. Eyewitness accounts can affirm a document's authorship. For instance, Grandma might have a letter that says, "Happy Valentine's Day, from your secret admirer." Grandma insists that she received this letter from Grandpa fifty years ago when they were still dating. Although there is nothing in the letter that

identifies Grandpa as its author, we have the external testimony of a reliable witness. Such evidence is not certain, as Grandma might be a bit of a romantic who after all these years forgot who it was really from, but it is more probable than not that she is correct.

What Is at Stake?

What if Ehrman's main contention is right, that seven of Paul's books, as well as James, Jude, and 1–2 Peter, are not written by who we traditionally have attributed them to? Not that I think Ehrman is right, but let us grant that he is. Is Christianity now false? Not at all. Ehrman concedes that Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon were written by Paul and that Revelation was written by someone named John. Even with these few books, the heart of the Christian faith is maintained. Ehrman even includes the earliest account of the death and resurrection of Jesus in 1 Corinthians chapter 15. So while I do not think Ehrman is right in even one accusation of New Testament forgery, it is worth keeping all of this in proper perspective: Christ still saves and we still need to trust him.

So what evidence does Dr. Ehrman use to establish his claim of forgery? Let's consider his strongest case, that of 1 and 2 Peter. Ehrman's main argument is that Peter could not have written either of these books because he was a simple fisherman from Galilee and would surely have been illiterate.{5} He points to Acts 4:13 which says that when Peter and John were brought before the Jewish high priest, it was realized that they "were unschooled, ordinary men." From this Ehrman assumes that they were illiterate.

There is one major problem with this line of argument. Ehrman considers the book of Acts to be a forgery. So by Ehrman's own standard, Acts is unlikely to be reliable. That aside, it's more likely that Acts 4:13 is not indicating that Peter and

John are illiterate, but that the Jewish leaders were comparing their training in the best schools of the day to the two men who lacked a rabbinic education.

Luke describes Peter's family's fishing business as having several boats along with the necessary nets and men to operate them. The business was located in Capernaum, only a few miles from the large Greek cities of Tiberias and Sepphoris. As a successful merchant, Peter likely had some knowledge of the Greek language as well as basic literacy. Even if we allow the shaky assumption that Peter might have been illiterate, it doesn't necessarily follow that 1 and 2 Peter are forgeries. It's likely that Peter may have used a secretary to write down his words, a common practice in the first century.

Dr. Ehrman has failed to make his case that 1 and 2 Peter are forgeries. We still have good reason to trust these books as they guide us in defense of the faith and encourage us to endure sufferings for righteousness sake.

Paul's Letters

Ehrman argues that Paul could not be the author of Ephesians because the letter contains some unusually long sentences, and the book "has an inordinate number of words that don't otherwise occur in Paul's writings."{6} Ehrman notes that Ephesians has fifty percent more unique words than found in Philippians which he says is about the same length.

It's true that Ephesians does have long sentences, but this is a bit subjective. There are long sentences in Romans, 1 Corinthians, Colossians and Titus, which Ehrman accepts as Pauline. His comparison with Philippians is also a bit unfair. Ephesians is thirty-three percent longer than Philippians and should be expected to have a greater number of unique words. In fact, Galatians has even more unique words than Ephesians but again is accepted
as Pauline by Ehrman. Further, Ephesians is a circular letter

that was meant for a broader audience. It's reasonable to expect that it would address different topics from Paul's other letters and have more unique words.

Another point made by Dr. Ehrman is that Ephesians uses the words "saved" and "raised" mostly in the present tense while other Pauline letters refer to them as future events.{7} But is this really the case? In Romans, Paul talks of the believer as already saved being dead to sin and alive to Christ, and in Galatians Paul declares that "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." Ehrman's case against Ephesians is less than conclusive.

According to Ehrman, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus should be removed because the letters contain unique expressions not found in Paul's other works. Phrases such as "promise of life" and "with a pure conscience" are unique to these books.{8} Ehrman also argues that these pastoral letters replace an emphasis on the imminent return of Christ with nformation on the organizational structure of the church.

Paul does use unique vocabulary in his books to Timothy and Titus, but these letters are to individual friends and most of Paul's other letters are to community groups. Stylistic variation would be expected because of the different audiences. Other scholars point out that Ehrman exaggerates his case regarding the information about church structure. He seems to ignore the fact that there is information on church leadership and organization in Romans, Galatians, and especially in 1 Corinthians, letters accepted as Pauline by Ehrman.

In summary, it can be said that Dr. Ehrman often overstates his case and is somewhat selective in his examples.

Presuppositions

To wrap up this article, I will look at some general problems

in the way that Dr. Ehrman builds his case that many of the NT books are forgeries.

As with everyone, Dr. Ehrman interprets the world through a set of presuppositions. For instance, he has come to the conclusion that Jesus was merely an apocalyptic prophet.{9} Ehrman's Jesus proclaims that God is going to reveal himself in history and overthrow evil as represented by the Roman Empire. Ehrman discounts the role that the resurrection played in both confirming Jesus' claims to divinity and establishing Christianity itself. The result of constructing Jesus in this untraditional manner causes him to view passages that speak of the resurrection as inauthentic and probably later fabrications.

Another weakness in *Forged* is that Ehrman doesn't seriously consider the role that secretaries (or an *amanuensis*) could have played in the writing of the New Testament.{10} Ehrman himself admits that "Virtually all of the problems with what I've been calling forgeries can be solved if secretaries were heavily involved in the composition of the early Christian writings."{11} Other scholars have argued that secretaries did play a significant role in the formation of the NT.{12} Ehrman assumes either no secretaries were involved, or if they were, they had no impact on the wording of the texts. Such a conclusion is at odds with modern scholarship on the subject. Dr. Ehrman either needs to interact more with this scholarship, or at worst he should take an agnostic position on the authorship of the NT books.

This is important because we know that secretaries were involved in helping Paul write his letters. Tertius inserts a greeting in Romans 16:22 as the one who "wrote down this letter." In 1 Corinthians, Galatians, and Philemon, Paul makes a point of telling his readers that he had written the letters with his own hand, acknowledging that other letters were written down for him. It is also recognized that others may have contributed to Paul's writings or at least had an impact

on the style of some sections of his letters. For instance, Sosthenes, Silas, and Timothy are recognized contributors in the introductions of Paul's letters to the churches at Corinth, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica.

Dr. Ehrman raises important questions regarding the text of the New Testament, but his accusations of forgery seem somewhat subjective. He has not given us good enough reason to abandon the authenticity of the New Testament writings nor their message of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

Notes

1. This article is a slightly adapted version of the program that aired on the Probe radio program.

2. Bart D. Ehrman. www.bartdehrman.com (accessed November 6, 2011).

3. Gary M. Burge, "The Lapsed Evangelical Critic," *Christianity Today*, June 1, 2006, vol. 50, no. 6. (accessed November 6, 2011).

4. D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2005); Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*. 4th ed. (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1990).

5. Bart D. Ehrman, *Forged: Writing in the Name of God—Why the Bible's Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers. 2011), 70-77.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., 97.

9. Ehrman lays out his view on this in: Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophets of the New Millennium* (New York: Oxford

University Press, 1999). For an evaluation of the different views on Jesus see: James K. Beilby, and Paul R. Eddy, *The Historical Jesus: Five Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009).

10. Ehrman, *Forged*, 133-139.

11. Ibid., 134.

12. E. Randolph Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991).

The Tug of War of Reason and Faith in C.S. Lewis's Favorite Novel

*Byron Barlowe examines the timeless battle between reason and faith in C.S. Lewis's novel—his favorite—*Till We Have Faces. *Are they mutually exclusive or can they balance one another? How do we reconcile them? "To rationally look at love and logic and to gaze along, to creatively depict and model its living out, may soon be all that is left to us to reach a new generation."*

"You think the gods have sent you there? All lies of priests and poets, child . . . The god within you is the god you should obey: reason, calmness, self-discipline."

— The Fox, Greek tutor in *Till We Have Faces*[1]

"Heaven forbid we should work [the garden of our human nature] in the spirit of . . . Stoics . . . We know very well that what we are hacking and pruning is big with a splendour and vitality which our rational will could never of itself have supplied. To liberate that splendour, to let it become fully what it is trying to be, to have tall trees instead of scrubby tangles, and sweet apples instead of crabs, is part of our purpose."

— C.S. Lewis, The Four Loves[2]

A strong relationship between C.S. Lewis's conceptions of Contemplation and Enjoyment persists throughout his novel *Till We Have Faces.* It seems most fruitful for today's apologist to examine two primary characters' relationship to the concepts in this way: the Greek slave-tutor known as the Fox, represents cold, hard, factual rationality which grudgingly gives a nod to the divine, but only in a limited, controlling way. He represents Stoicism more than any other school of thought. Meanwhile, the barbarian-pagan Priest of the god Ungit represents a less worldly wise, more mysterious and superstitious faith, rooted in earthy experience (fertility rites, blood sacrifice, etc.). Either worldview can limit human nature, truth and meaning. The Greek-infused contemplative life-view (nowadays seen most strongly in Modernism and its irreligious pupils), largely eschews the heartfelt experience of the latter, while the latter's religiosity often dismisses the thoughtful, discerning caution of the former. This artificially strict dichotomy and lack of balance shows forth at every turn in the Church today, creating a blindly loyal fideism with few answers for contemplative questions; or we see, in an overcorrection, a clinical, spiritless, formulaic religion of pure reason. The former, an unreflective *modus operandi,* chills—and according to testimonies of many apostates and atheists, creates—skeptics, who much like the Fox, seizing on pure reason, ceaselessly explain away the immaterial and numinous.

In doing so they, like the Fox's star student Orual, act as plaintiffs against God or the gods. One apologist recently found that nearly all the young men he surveyed who serve as leaders of college atheist/agnostic groups in the U.S. were raised in church and attended Christian youth groups. Given the ubiquity of broken families, where little love borne of God-given freedom exists—much like the main character Orual's situation—and know-nothing, superstitious Christians, it is no wonder that a mass exodus of youth from the Church continues. One antidote to the current state of imbalance of Contemplation (reasoned examination toward applied wisdom) and Enjoyed faith (in Lewis's sense, experientially realized) may be to use and model the dual approach of Lewis's *The Four Loves* alongside *Till We Have Faces*. To rationally *look at* love and logic and to *gaze along*, to creatively depict and model its living out, may soon be all that is left to us to reach a new generation.

In the mythic *Till We Have Faces*, which we will discuss here, the dual (and often dueling) dynamics of reason (often couched in secularized religion) versus mystical religion (often superstitious) interplay in various characters. It may help to explore these chief characters Lewis creates to embody the story of clashing worlds and worldviews, as well as the Fox's prize student, Orual. Meanwhile, we will briefly attempt to apply the lessons Lewis teaches apologists into the modern milieu.

First, Lewis revealed the predominant worldview, the Fox's philosophy, early in the novel as he tutored Orual. His Platonic views were summarized thus, "'No man can be an exile if he remembers that all the world is one city,' and 'Everything is as good or bad as our opinion makes it.'"[3] As a well-taught classical Greek, he sets out to import real learning into the barbarian kingdom to which he is enslaved. Orual admired her "grandfather's" constant quest for knowledge and carried on his tendency to question, Socratically, all

that went on. Yet, since her dear Fox, always the philosopher, seemed "ashamed of loving poetry ('All folly, my child'), she overachieves in philosophy to "get a poem out of him."[4] Foretelling the dismissiveness and globalizing of the numinous by today's naturalistic thinkers, the Fox scoffs at surpranatural / supernatural explanations with a curt, "these things come about by natural causes."[5] In an ancient instance of positive-mental-attitude-laced freethinking, he lectures, "we must learn, child, not to fear anything that nature brings."[6] When Orual's sister Psyche goes about ostensibly healing the townspeople, and Orual asks about the validity of the claims, Fox the Naturalist characteristically keeps the options limited but somewhat open. "It might be in accordance with nature that some hands can heal. Who knows?"[7] Herein lies a bit of epistemic humility, somewhat disingenuous it seems, something this writer detects quite a lot among materialist-naturalists.

The Fox's framework of Platonic forms emerges in his assessment of Psyche's ethereal beauty, "delight[ing] to say, she was 'according to nature'; what every woman, or even every thing, ought to have been and meant to be, but had missed by some trip of chance."[8] While talk of gods peppered his language ("Ah, Zeus" and "by the gods"—more than curses?), fate seems to drive the universe's cause and effect. He considers suicide and opines about returning to the elements in death, fatefully acquiescing, to which Orual beseeches, "But, Grandfather, do you really *in your heart* believe nothing of what is said about the gods and Those Below? But you do . . . you are trembling." His Gnostic-tinged response: the body fails me. I am a fool, being trapped in it so long.[9] From what little the writer knows of Greek theology, its progeny thrives in and out of the Church today as an admixture of practical atheism, pantheism and pragmatism. Lewis sneaks in the side door of the skeptical fortress by characterizing so strongly the Fox, whose loving humanity belies his deadening philosophy. If Lewis's retelling of ancient myth can be

refashioned again, or better, simply read, truth and meaning may get through.

On the second worldview, Lewis sets forth the theme of a grounding darkness, holy and otherworldly, chiefly through the pagan Priest of the local goddess Ungit. The Priest served as prophet, harbinger of judgment. He repeats the warning of Ungit's all-hearing ears and vengefulness to the irreligious king on two occasions[10] He carries out shadowy, ancient rituals without explanation and in dark places, sticky with blood offerings. Even outside the dank and sacred temple, "every hour the Priest of Ungit walked around [the sacred fire]," narrates Orual, "and threw in the proper things."[11] Throughout, Lewis equates the *holy* with the mysterious, the hidden and darkened. Divine silence, corresponding to the biblical God's hiddenness and holiness, presents as a major theme of *Till We Have Faces.* The Priest offers few and brief explanations.[12] The god judging Orual in the afterlife allows her lifelong complaints to speak for themselves. Her resultant epiphany balances the equation between reason and religion, witty words and wordless (if corrupted) wisdom, and reconciles the silence: "I saw well why the gods do not speak to us openly, nor let us answer. Till that word [of inner secret] can be dug out of us, why should they hear the babble we think we mean?"[13] These characters serve as foils for one another, a creative way to tie Modern rationalism to man's inexorable and entirely unnatural acknowledgment of both the spiritual, or numinous and the moral law.

Sixteen years previous, Lewis had published *The Problem of Pain*, wherein he explores this undeniable yet insanely irrational or rather supernaturally revealed sense of numinous awe and moral law inherent in every man and culture. As if foreshadowing the clash of worldviews in discussion, Lewis writes, "Man . . . can close his spiritual eyes against the Numinous, if he is prepared to part company with half the great poets and prophets of his race, with his own childhood,

with the richness and depth of uninhibited experience [the Fox, to a high degree, or] . . . He can refuse to identify the Numinous with the righteous, and remain a barbarian, worshipping sexuality, or the dead, or the lifeforce, or the future [the old Priest].”[14] The concepts of Contemplation and Enjoyment intertwine through a scholar and a man of the altar, through the gods and humans alike. In life and in myth, “men, and gods, flow in and out and mingle.”[15]

The Fox’s and Priest’s views of one another and each other’s worldview clashed like contemporary apologetic debates. The Fox saw the Priest’s work as “mischief”[16] and nonsense. “A child of six would talk more sense” was the Fox’s response to the apparent contradictions of the Priestly doctrines regarding the Great Offering.[17] Contrarily, the Priest reflexively dismisses the Fox’s Greek wisdom. According to Orual, “like all sacred matters, [a sacred, acted ritual] is and it is not (so that it was easy for the Fox to show its manifold contradictions).”[18] Yet, “even Stoicism finds itself willy-nilly bowing the knee to God.”[19] The Fox at times let down his learned persona, evidencing the axiom that man is inherently religious. Yes, he gave a regular nod to the gods, and at the birth of Orual’s sister Psyche he says wistfully, almost wishfully, “Now by all the gods . . . I could almost believe that there really is divine blood in your family.” Though his comment regards the family bloodline, one picks up here and elsewhere a religious man, who then quickly covers the sentiment with appeals to reason, even rationalization. Such characterization seems both autobiographical on Lewis’s part and testimony to his many dealings with materialist, humanist, secularist, liberal Christian, and unbelieving scholars and laymen.

The Priest’s mythical, experiential religious conviction versus the Fox’s worldly wisdom weaves itself through a climactic showdown. A death sentence falls on Psyche as the Accursed, to be offered to the goddess Ungit. (Here is the

clash of wills between man and the divine in a crisis of state and religion so often seen in history.[20]) "Ungit will be avenged. It's not a bull or ram [sacrifice] that will quiet her now," pronounces the Priest.[21] He mentions "the Brute," who legend says will take away the human sacrifice. In classic rational fashion, the King challenges, "Who has ever seen this Brute . . . What is it like, eh?" In this moment, the Fox presents himself as the King's counsellor, living out his reasonable *raison d'etre*. Prosecution-style, he determines that the Brute only exists as an image, a shadow, six-year-old nonsense. The Priest dismisses this as "the wisdom of the Greeks," and seeks the peoples' fear as a fallback position. (Interestingly, many who either believe in or dismiss the supernatural and mystical seek strength in numbers, popular opinion to make their case, which is no argument at all.) The high stakes exchange illustrates the gravity and consequences of the age-old clash. If religion is to be followed, it must be regulated by reason; if reason is to properly play its part, it must bow to realities beyond its grasp.

The Priest and Fox provide an extremely stark contrast of views during this conflict. The Fox presents a compare-and-contrast list of the Priest's teachings, revealing what he believes defies the Law of Non-Contradiction.[22] The Priest first responds to the abstractions by appeal to concrete realities. Greek wisdom "brings no rain and grows no corn." He portrays such constricting logic as unable to offer "understanding of holy things . . . demand[ing] to see such things clearly, as if the gods were no more than letters written in a book . . .nothing," he continues, "that is said clearly [about the gods] can be said truly about them . . . Holy wisdom is not clear and thin like water, but thick and dark like blood."[23] The apologist cannot help but think of the frustration of trying to communicate the mysterious paradoxes of spiritual truth and meaning to skeptics who demand only linear logic from a naturalist point of view. (The Fox continually appeals to "the Nature of things" and says

"according to Nature.") One must also guard against becoming Fox-like, limiting inquiry and explanation merely to that accessible to the physical senses and human reason. Either philosopher or accommodating priest / poet can make that mistake; via their opposite approaches, whether overly from man's reason or God's assumed reasons, deny the paradoxes of reality.

Ironically, Orual's conversion to real belief in the numinous—halting and years-long—begins during this fight. Though she'd "have hanged the Priest and made the Fox a king" if she could, she realized the power lay in the Priest's position.[24] Her convincing comes in a climactic moment, when pressed at literal knifepoint to stop prophesying the unwelcome judgment, the Priest shows unearthly peace, calm, and indeed a willingness to die. "While I have breath," he intoned, "I am Ungit's voice." Resolute and full of faith at death's door, his was evidence beyond reason, much as the testimony of Christ's Apostles in their martyrdoms. This was not lost on Orual, who narrates, "The Fox had taught me to think—at any rate to speak of—the Priest as of a mere schemer and a politic man" who pretended and said whatever would provide him power or gain, in Ungit's name.[25] The Fox's prize student now saw through personal experience—the kind he taught her to guard against—that the Priest was sincere unto death. "He was sure of Ungit."[26] He may have been mistaken or misled, but he did not pretend. One of the modern apologist's greatest arguments is a convinced life and a faith, well-tested, sometimes right in front of the skeptic. The ultimate witness: a life and death scenario.

After a lifetime, in the afterlife, the Fox repents of his constraints and biases of the supernatural and religious. In this, Lewis communicates a truth applicable today. "I taught [Orual], as men teach a parrot, to say 'Lies of poets,' and 'Ungit's a false image.' . . . I never told her why the old Priest got something from the dark House [of Ungit] that I

never got from my trim sentences . . . I made her think a prattle of maxims would do, all thin and clear as water."[27] How like so many testimonies of those who, in our day, come to Christ after years of dismissing and rationally ruling out the reality of the transcendent. Words are cheap and book knowledge only gets one so far, the Fox admits. What a mirror of teachers who lead people of faith away from that which requires revelation using smart-sounding verbiage. Hence, for those enamored with the Richard Dawkinses of our time, a reading of this novel may be the foxiest way of all to reach them.

Orual is a product of her own Need-Love[28], which is serviced alternately by her Fox-taught Greek rationalism and belief in humanoid gods, whom she thinks she can control. As a young woman being flirted with by a prince on the lam, she characteristically staunches true emotions. "I had a fool's wish to lengthen" the encounter, she says. "But I came to my senses." On her odyssey to save her sister from a supposedly evil god, Orual blocks every sentiment with controlling motherly logic, eschewing all glimpses of and desires for the divine. She chooses to outwit the gods. She ends up the pawn in the hands of the gods, however gracious, that she fancied to be her equals.

The Orual-Queen-Psyche's-twin character spends a lifetime employing Greek wisdom learned under the Fox to seek out life's mysteries of human and divine relations, up to the bittersweet end, constantly denouncing the gods for the woes she experiences. Face to face with divinity, her bitter hiding reveals her glorious humanity. Now, true-faced, she is free. Up until then the helpless, yet defiantly and impressively skillful independence she exhibits as a mothering sister, and later as regent, so well illustrate fallen human defiance of the true God of the Bible, seen most vividly in well-educated apostates and atheists today. Those unbelievers, consumed by angry confusion regarding suffering and life's seeming

futilities, should find both empathy and resolution in this novel.[29] While doing excellently (in human terms) for a lifetime, as Orual did, one can still deny the existence of the divine while cursing the god's or God's supposed effects on mere mortals. Orual's torturous private thought life increasingly revealed her sin nature, which she turned back into ravings against the fate of the gods. Control was her only weapon, until the deaths of all who propped up her life and kingdom, and until visions of her corrupted affections forced humility upon her. Such desperate machinations to live a meaningful life in the face of deadening routine punctuated by tragedy, in turn, raises the biggest questions of life: Why are we here? Are we mere mortals or eternal beings with a destiny? If the latter, what or who determines our fate—is there really meaningful choice or only divine whim or something else? Lewis creates multi-layered characters who live out the quest for ultimate answers.

In another resolution of sorts, the myth comes full circle through the Fox and priesthood back to Greece. Arnom, the new Priest of Ungit, adds a notation on Orual's book (at our novel's end) entreating anyone travelling to Greece to take it there,[30] which may ironically imply that the barbarians had something to teach the world's greatest philosophers. Likelier, Arnom, who put himself under the tutelage of the Fox, meant to dedicate the Queen's life saga to a greater civilization. Is this a symbolic merging and maturing of the two schools of thought and faith? A reference to Arnom as "priest of Aphrodite," likely indicates his fuller "Greekification." Whether this change was for ill, good or neutral is hard to say. Perhaps the former priest of the crude barbarian goddess Ungit was effectively sending a message, as if to preach: "To those in Greece, supreme land of learning and reason, place of the gods of the philosophers, we commend you this account of a Being beyond description who revealed our Queen's aching fallenness, journey into redemption, and glorified revelation as a goddess in her own right." This

writer's weak grasp of Greek mythology and theology notwithstanding, it seems clear Lewis offers much resolution of reason and religion, of the contemplative and the Enjoyed, however incomplete it must naturally be.

[1] C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, (San Diego and New York: A Harvest Book / Harcourt, 1956), 302-303.

[2] C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, (San Diego and New York: A Harvest Book / Harcourt, 1960), 117.

[3] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 7.

[4] Ibid., 8.

[5] Ibid., 10.

[6] Ibid., 14.

[7] Ibid., 31

[8] Ibid., 22.

[9] Ibid., 17-18.

[10] Ibid., 15,54.

[11] Ibid., 14.

[12] Ibid., 15-16, etc.

[13] Ibid., 293-294.

[14] Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperCollins, 1940), 14-15.

[15] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 301.

[16] Ibid., 33.

[17] Ibid., 49.

[18] Ibid., 268.

[19] Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 13.

[20] From the little the writer knows of Plato's *Republic*, there seem to be echoes of it here in the Fox's views. Worth exploring.

[21] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 46.

[22] Ibid., 49-50.

[23] Ibid., 50.

[24] Ibid., 51.

[25] Ibid., 54.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., 295.

[28] Lewis, *The Four Loves*, chapter 2 ("Affection").

[29] The writer plans to use the novel and its contemplative companion, *The Four Loves*, to reach out to a struggling apostate with mother issues on both sides of her adoption.

[30] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 308-309.

Crossing the Worldview Divide: Sharing Christ with Other Faiths

Christians need to introduce the gospel differently to people with different worldviews. Steve Cable provides ways to talk to Muslims, Hindus, Mormons and postmoderns.

Changing Worldview Landscape

Growing up in the sixties and seventies, I had very limited exposure to other worldviews significantly different from my own. Raised in a small town in New Mexico, I was exposed to a number of Hispanic Catholics, and I knew at least two families that were Mormons. Frankly, I never had either of those groups share their worldview with me. But, by and large, most people appeared to have a pretty conventional Christian worldview, answering the basic worldview questions as follows:

- *What about God? God is the creator and sustainer of this universe.*

- *What about man? Mankind is separated from God's provision by our sin nature.*

- *What about salvation? Jesus Christ is God's answer to our desperate need, offering redemption through faith in Him. When people die, those who have put their faith in Jesus will go to heaven while those who refuse will be relegated to hell.*

- *What about history? History is a linear progression culminating in the creation of a new heavens and new earth.*

Since leaving the college campus in 1977, I have lived in suburbs of major metropolitan cities. Over the last thirty-five years, the makeup of those suburbs has changed significantly. I worked as an electrical engineer with several Indian Hindus and Jains. I teach English as a Second Language to a group of Muslims, Hindus, Baha'is, atheists and Latin American Catholics. From 2000 to 2010, the Muslim population of my area grew by 220%. All of these groups have a worldview significantly different from my own. In sharing Christ with them, I cannot appeal to the Bible stories they learned in vacation Bible school as a child. I need to be aware that what

I say is being processed through their worldview filter. So that what they hear may not be what I meant to say.

The apostle Paul was very much aware of the issue of worldview filters. While on his missionary journeys, he preached the gospel

- *in synagogues established by Jews living away from Israel,{1}*

- *in market places containing Gentiles with a common Greek worldview,{2} and*

- *in front of Greek philosophers at the forefront of creating new worldviews.{3}*

In each of these environments, he preached the same truth: Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected from the dead for our sins. But he entered that subject from a verbal starting point that made sense to the audience he was speaking to. For example, in Athens he began by drawing their attention to an idol dedicated to the unknown god and he quoted some of their poets. Was he doing this because the idol was really a Christian idol or because their poets were speaking a Christian message? Of course not. He was bridging the worldview divide between their thought patterns and those of Judaism. Having done that, he finished by saying, "God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."{4}

In the same way, if we want to share effectively with those from different worldviews, we need to make the effort to know how to share in a way that makes sense from their worldview perspective. We want to shake up their worldview, but we have to be able to communicate first. In the remainder of this article, we will consider the differences with and ways to

share the gospel with people from four different worldview perspectives: Islam, Hindu, Mormon, and popular postmodernism.

Bridging Across to a Muslim Worldview

Islam is the second largest religion in the world with about 1.5 billion adherents or over 20% of the world population. In America, there are over 2.6 million Muslims with most of them located in major metropolitan areas accounting for 3-4% of the population in those areas. If you live in a metropolitan area, you are probably aware of several mosques in your area.

How can I share Christ with my Muslim acquaintances in a way they can understand? To answer this question, we need to understand how their worldview differs from our own and what communication issues may come into play. Let's begin by considering the four worldview questions introduced earlier:

• *What about God? Christians believe that a transcendent, loving God created the universe and mankind. Muslims believe that a transcendent, unknowable Allah created the universe and mankind.*

• *What about man? A Christian believes man is created in the image of God, but mankind is now fallen and separated from God by our sin nature. Muslims believe that, although weak and prone to error, man is basically good and is fully capable of obeying Allah.*

• *What about salvation? For a Christian, the answer to our problem is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who provided a way for us to reunite with God through grace. Muslims must focus on good works to earn their way into heaven. They have no instruction as to what level of goodness is required. Certainly, they must pay attention to the five pillars of Islam: reciting the creed (the shahada), daily prayers, giving 2.5% of one's income to the poor or to the spread of Islam, a pilgrimage to Mecca, and fasting during*

Ramadan.

• *What about history? For a Christian, the world is moving through time, not repeating itself, to reach the end God has prepared for it. For a Muslim time is a linear progression as well and it is moving forward exactly as Allah has willed.*

The key difference between our worldviews lies in the way to redemption: by faith through God's grace *or* as a reward for our good works.

How can you share effectively with Muslim friends and acquaintances? First, there are some important issues and confusing terms that will sidetrack your discussion in their minds. These include:

• **The high cost**: *in most Muslim families and societies, converting from Islam is a terrible offense, resulting in expulsion and sometimes death. Most Muslims will not enter into a conversation if they know the intent of it is to convert them to another faith.*

• **The Trinity,** *including Jesus as God's Son: Muslims are told that Christians worship three gods when there is only one. This area is especially problematic in thinking that God could be born to a woman and be crucified.*

• **Belittling Mohammed** *will offend most Muslims, causing them to cease listening to you.*

• **Using corrupt Scripture** *by quoting from the New Testament which they have been taught has been changed and corrupted. An interesting note on this argument for Islam and against Christianity: a study of recently discovered early copies of the Quran show that current Aramaic copies of the Quran are only consistent with the early copies 88% of the time; while similar studies of the New Testament show a 98% reliability between current translations and the earliest documents.*

Let's be clear. We are not saying that you don't need at some time to address the Trinity, the role of Mohammed as a false prophet, and veracity of Scripture. But first, you need to be able to communicate the gospel to them in a way that they will hear it.

To share with a Muslim, you must begin with prayer for your Muslim acquaintances who are captive to powerful social ties and equally powerful demonic lies. Pray that God will work to prepare their hearts. God has been working in powerful ways preparing Muslims to listen to the gospel of Jesus Christ.{5}

Start your conversation with their most important need. Ask them, "How can you be sure that you have done enough to get into heaven?" Listen to their thoughts on this important question. Point out that the gospels say, "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect."{6} Are they that good? God loves us and knows that we cannot do it on our own. For this reason Jesus came to pay our penalty through His death and bring us into God's household through His resurrection.

In some Islamic countries, a good way to begin the discussion is to look at what the Koran says about Jesus to draw their attention to the specialness of Jesus. If they show an interest, you move quickly to the Bible as the true source of information on Jesus and eternal life. For more information on this approach, check out *The Camel Training Manual* by Kevin Greeson.

Bridging Across to a Hindu Worldview

Hinduism is the third largest religion in the world with about 900 million adherents. However, there are only about 1.2 million Hindus in the United States, about 0.4% of the population. Since they are mostly located in high tech, urban and suburban areas, the percentages are much higher in those areas, closer to 2% and growing. If you live in a major

metropolitan area, you have probably seen one or more temples in your area.

How does the Hindu worldview compare with a Christian worldview on the four worldview questions introduced earlier?

- *What about God? The Hindu believes that the universe is eternal and the concept of an impersonal god is contained in the universe.*

- *What about man? Hindus believe that our current state is a temporary illusion and our goal is to merge into the Brahman, the god nature of the universe.*

- *What about salvation? For a Christian the answer to our problem is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who provided a way for us to become reunited with God. This salvation can begin now and will be fully realized in heaven. For a Hindu, the answer to our problem is to live a life in such a way as to merge with Brahman at death. Unfortunately, the vast majority will be reincarnated to suffer again as another living creature.*

- *What about history? For a Hindu, the universe is eternal and history repeats itself cyclically.*

As you can see, the worldview of a Hindu varies significantly from that of a Christian on almost every point. Salvation for a Hindu is to reach a state where they no longer exist. They are integrated into the universal god. Both Hindus and Christians believe that mankind faces the problem of being born into a world full of suffering and hardship. For Hindus, there are three paths that could lead one out of this situation into oneness: 1) performing appropriate good works, 2) reaching a state of knowledge that pierces through the deception of this existence, and 3) devoting oneself to service of one of the many gods.

Being aware of these worldview differences can sensitize us to some of the communication problems in sharing with a Hindu. First, when you share with them that Jesus is the Son of God who came to earth in the flesh, they will probably agree with you wholeheartedly. This is exactly the response I received when sharing with a Hindu couple at a Starbucks in an exclusive shopping area. After all, there are many forms of god in the Hindu pantheon. Just because someone is a god, doesn't mean I should leave off worshipping my current gods to worship this new god exclusively.

How can I share with a Hindu in a way that helps be clearly explain the gospel in the context of their worldview? I would suggest two important aspects.

First, you can begin by asking this question: What if there were only one God who transcended His creation? We are not created to be subsumed back into God, but rather we were created in His image to be able to exist with and to worship our Creator. Our Creator does not want us to worship other gods which we have made up to satisfy our desire to understand our world. If you cannot get a Hindu to understand this basic premise, then other things you tell them about the gospel will be misinterpreted because of their existing worldview filter.

Second, you can tell them that you agree that the problems of this world can be seen in the pain and suffering of life on this planet. Man has tried for thousands of years and yet the pain and suffering continue. This state of despair is the direct result of man's rejection of the love of God. We can never do enough in this life through good works, special knowledge, or serving false gods to bridge the gap back to God. God was the only one who could fix this problem and it cost Him great anguish to achieve it through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.{7}

Bridging Across to a Mormon Worldview

There are only about 15 million Mormons worldwide, but almost 45% of them live in the United States. They make up about 2% of the population of the United States. Compared to Muslims and Hindus, their U.S. population has remained fairly constant as a percentage basis over the last few decades. Because of their young adult missionary teams, many Americans have had some exposure to the evangelistic message of Mormonism.

How do Mormons compare with Christians in answering the four worldview questions introduced on day one? First, we need to understand that not all Mormons believe the same things. The president of the Mormons can introduce new doctrine which may contradict prior doctrine. One prominent example is the Mormon doctrine on blacks which was changed in 1978. The statements below represent my understanding as to the current orthodox Mormon position:

- *What about God? Where a Christian believes that God is eternal and transcendent, Mormons believe God was once a man like us and ascended to godhood*

- *What about man? Where a Christian believes that man is born in sin and separated from God, Mormons believe men are born in sin, but have the potential to become gods in their own right*

- *What about salvation? Where Christians believe in salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone, Mormons believe salvation comes from putting our faith in Jesus and performing good works. The good works are intended to pay back Jesus for the price He paid for us. In addition, Jesus is not eternal but was born to God and one of His spirit wives.*

- *What about history? Both Christians and Mormons believe that history is linear, but Mormons believe it is leading to*

a day when they could be gods ruling their own planets.

Even though some would like to consider Mormonism as a branch of Christianity, one can see there are significant differences between the beliefs of Mormons and Christians.

In sharing your faith with a Mormon, there are terms and concepts you need to watch out for as they will be misinterpreted. First, you are relying on the Bible as the complete and only direct revelation from God. When you do that, you need to be aware that they will assume anything you say that they don't agree with is countered in the Book of Mormon or the Pearl of Great Price. Point out to them that the clear meanings of the Bible don't need reinterpretation. Also, you can tell them that the Bible written between 2,000 and 4,000 years ago has been consistently supported by archaeological findings while the Book of Mormon written 175 years ago has no historical or archaeological support.

When talking about God the Father, Jesus, Satan, and man, be sure to make it clear that God and Jesus are one kind of being, the transcendent God of the universe, that Satan is a created angelic being, and that men are created different from the angels. A Mormon will use those terms, but will normally group all four of those beings as made basically the same.

Be leery of expecting to win over Mormon missionaries on mission. If they are sharing with you, of course, you should try to share with them. However, normally they are too focused on fulfilling their mission to really listen to someone else. It is best to share with them when you introduce the topic.

In sharing with a Mormon, you may want to consider how good one would have to be to earn their way to eternal life. After all, Jesus said, "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect." If you can admit you are not perfect, then the only way to redemption is through God's grace.

Some of them may feel that in the matters of the church, they are keeping the faith in a sinless manner. What if a future president changes some criteria of behavior and you find out that you have now been sinning for years? Does it make sense to you that God's criteria for righteousness should change?{8}

Bridging Across to a Postmodern Worldview

Postmoderns may not seem as exotic as some of the world religions we have considered to this point. But they have a distinctly different worldview than do Christians and are the largest segment of non-Christians in today's America. An actual postmodern believes that absolute truth, if it does exist at all, is impossible to find. A Christian believes that Jesus Christ is "the way, the truth and the life" and that "truth comes through Jesus Christ."{9} Jesus is truth applicable to every man in every situation. What do we need to understand about postmodernism to be better equipped to share the truth with them?

Popular postmodernity has a broadly defined identity, but they should resonate with this definition: postmodernity is "incredulity toward metanarratives."{10} In other words, they reject the possibility of anyone knowing truth about the basic questions of life; e.g., our worldview questions.

As before, we will begin with our four worldview questions. Keep in mind that we just said they don't think anyone can know the truth about these types of questions.

• *What about God?* Postmoderns believe that we can't really know where we came from but we probably evolved from nothing over millions of years.

• *What about man?* Postmoderns believe that humans are neither good nor bad and are shaped by the society around them which defines what is good and bad for them.

• *What about salvation?* For a Christian, the answer to our dilemma and hope for eternal life is the death and resurrection of Jesus, God's Son. For a postmodern, each group has their own answer that helps them get through the hard times of life, but none of the answers can be counted on as true. What is important is not their truth, but their helpfulness in coping with life's challenges.

• *What about history?* For a postmodern, history is linear moving forward to whatever happens next. Hopefully, the future will be better than the past, but there is not grand plan or purpose for mankind. In any case, if there is a grand plan, we can't know it with any certainty.

It is hard to present Jesus Christ as the source of all grace and truth to someone who denies the existence of truth or at least our ability to know it. As Dave Kinnaman writes in his book *UnChristian*, "Even if you are able to weave a compelling logical argument, young people will nod, smile, and ignore you."{11} Constructing a rational argument for Christ may not be the place to start. As Drew Dyck reported hearing from one postmodern, "I don't really believe in all that rationality. Reason and logic come from the Western philosophical tradition. I don't think that's the only way to find truth." Dyck concluded, "They're not interested in philosophical proofs for God's existence or in the case for the resurrection."{12}

To begin the process, we need to develop their trust; be their friend. Possibly, invite them to serve alongside you in ministering to the needs of others, exposing them to the ministry of Christ to the world around them.

The postmodern should be interested in your personal story, the things you have found that work for you. But don't fall into the traditional testimony rut (i.e., I was bad, I was saved, now I am wonderful); make it real by sharing real issues you have dealt with. Then convey the gospel story in a

winsome way, emphasizing Jesus concern for the marginalized around Him, realizing the gospel is a metanarrative providing a universal answer to a universal problem.

Share with them why you are compelled to commit to a universal truth. I cannot live my life without making a commitment to what I believe to be the Truth. Saying "it doesn't matter" is basically giving up on eternity. Admit that claiming to know the truth about God, creation, and eternity is crazy from man's perspective. It can only be true if it is truly revealed by God. From my perspective, Jesus is the Truth.{13}

We've taken a very brief look at four distinct worldviews, different from a Christian worldview and different from each other. A simple understanding of those worldviews helps us avoid confusing terminology. We can focus on bridging the gap from their fundamental misunderstanding to faith in Christ. Only God working through the Holy Spirit can bring them to true faith, but we can play an important role in making the gospel understandable when filtered through their worldview.{14}

Notes

1. Acts 17:1-2, 17 for example
2. Acts 17:17, 19:9ff for example.
3. Acts 17:18-32
4. Acts 17:30-31
5. See the web articles "Breaching the Barriers to Islam" by Steve Cable and "Islam in the Modern World" by Kerby Anderson. Both can be found at www.probe.org.
6. Matthew 5:48
7. For more information on Hinduism, you can access the article "Hinduism" by Rick Rood at www.probe.org.
8. For more information on Mormonism, please access "Understanding Our Mormon Neighbors" by Don Closson and "Examining the Book of Mormon" by Patrick Zukeran. Both can be found at www.probe.org.

9. John 1:17

10. Jean-François Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, trans., Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

11. Dave Kinnaman, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity . . . and Why It Matters* (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan), 2007.

12. Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian: Why Young Adults are Leaving the Faith . . . And How to Bring Them Back*, Moody Publishers, Chicago, 2010

13. See the article "[The Answer is the Resurrection](#)" by Steve Cable at www.probe.org

14. For more information on postmodernism, you can access "[Truth Decay](#)" by Kerby Anderson and "[Worldviews Part 2](#)" by Rick Wade at www.probe.org.

Challenging the New Atheists

The new wave of bitterly anti-God, anti-Christian atheists offer arguments against God. Patrick Zukeran provides several good answers.

The New Atheist Agenda

Nearly thirty years ago John Lennon sang the song, "Imagine." The words went like this:

> "Imagine there's no heaven
> It's easy if you try
> No hell below us

Above us only sky
        Imagine all the people
        Living for today
        Imagine there's no countries
        It isn't hard to do
        Nothing to kill or die for
        And no religion too

        Imagine all the people
        Living life in peace
        Imagine there's no heaven. . .
        You may say that I'm a dreamer
        But I'm not the only one
        I hope someday you'll join us
        And the world will be as one

In other words, the source of much evil in the world is religion: belief in God, life after death, and a universal moral code. Would the world be a better place if faith in God was eliminated? Many atheists now think so. Richard Dawkins states, "Imagine with John Lennon, a world with no religion. Imagine, no suicide bombers, no 9/11, no 7/7, no Crusades, no witch-hunts, no Gunpowder Plot, no Indian partition, no Israeli/Palestinian wars, no Serb/Croat/Muslim massacres, no persecution of Jews as 'Christ killers', no Northern Ireland 'troubles', no honour killings', no shiny-suited bouffant-haired televangelists fleecing gullible people of their money ('God wants you to give till it hurts'). Imagine no Taliban to blow up ancient statues, no public beheadings of blasphemers, no flogging of female skin for the crime of showing one inch of it."[1] The goal of the new atheists is to rid the world of belief in God or religion and replace it with reason and science. The new atheists believe that religions that embrace a belief in God, particularly Christianity, are not just irrational but dangerous and therefore must be extinguished.

The new atheists are not presenting new arguments but instead they are promoting their ideas very aggressively with strong,

confrontational, and condemning language. They have gained a following amongst the young academic crowd, and they have been quite influential in public education. Some of the notable names who have written popular work include Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Dan Barker, and Christopher Hitchens.

In this work we will cover four popular arguments presented by the new atheists. The first is that belief in God is irrational. The second argument is that Christianity in particular is dangerous. Third, science has clearly proven God does not exist. Fourth, religion is the result of a natural man-made evolutionary process motivated by man's need for a divine father figure and the need to find meaning in the universe.

In this series, we will examine these arguments and see whether belief in God is irrational or if there are good reasons for belief in a creator.

Belief in God is Irrational

The new atheists allege that faith in God is the result of irrational thinking and that a rational person would not believe in God. Sam Harris writes, "We have names for people who have many beliefs for which there is no rational justification. When their beliefs are extremely common we call them 'religious'; otherwise they are likely to be called 'mad,' psychotic,' or 'delusional.'"{2}

Richard Dawkins, in his book *The God Delusion,* says that belief in God is the result of delusional thinking. He asserts that belief in God is a delusion built on empty assertions and not evidence. He states, "Faith is blind trust, in the absence of evidence, even in the teeth of evidence."{3} His conclusion is that there is no evidence to support the existence of God; in fact, all the evidence goes against God.

The assertion that belief in God is irrational is not a new

argument but a very old one. It is true that many who believe in God are not able to present reasons why they believe. However, Christianity is not founded on "blind faith" but faith built upon evidence, and there are good reasons that make belief in God a reasonable conclusion. One significant individual who has come to believe in the existence of God is Antony Flew. Flew was this generation's greatest atheist philosopher. However, Flew, through philosophical reasoning, came to believe in God.

Flew states that he wrestled with three key, major scientific questions. First, how did the laws of nature come to be? Second, how did life come from non-life? Third, how did the universe come into existence?{4} The naturalists' answers, which are heavily dependent on Darwin's theory, were unsatisfactory. Flew discovered that the classical theistic arguments provided the best answers in light of the evidence. The cosmological argument, or argument from first cause, and the teleological argument, or argument from design, provided a much more reasonable answer.{5}

For centuries, Christian apologists have presented these and several other reasoned arguments for the existence of God and many have come to a belief in God as Flew did. Antony Flew's conversion from atheism to theism deals a devastating blow to the arguments of the new atheists. Not only was he a titan among atheist philosophers, but he is another example that demonstrates belief in God is not irrational. Reasoning individuals who are willing to study the evidence and follow it wherever it leads may find a strong case for a creator.

Is Science at War with God?

The new atheists allege that science and faith are at war. Therefore real scientists must be atheists, for science clearly proves God does not exist.

How do these atheists explain the display of design in the universe? Leading atheist spokesman Richard Dawkins believes Darwin's theory answers the design argument. However, recent discoveries reveal the shortcomings of Darwin's theory. Darwin's theory fails to explain the cause of the universe. It also fails to present evidence that that life came from non-life. There is also the lack of transitional forms in the fossil record, and there is no mechanism for macro-evolutionary change. Mutations and natural selection have failed to conclusively show they can produce macro-evolutionary change. In short, the new atheists have a lot of faith that Darwin's theory will answer these challenges.

Science and the Christian faith are not enemies. In fact, the more scientists study nature and the universe, they continue to discover complexity and design which make it highly improbable such complex systems could have come about by chance or natural forces. For this reason, the number of scientists who are acknowledging an intelligent creator continues to grow. This is a fact the new atheists neglect to acknowledge.

Francis Collins, the leader of the Human Genome project and author of *The Language of God*, tells how the order and precision in the DNA code led him from atheism to belief in God. Collins writes, "Many will be puzzled by these sentiments, assuming that a rigorous scientist could not also be a believer in a transcendent God. This book aims at dispelling that notion, by arguing that belief in God can be an entirely rational choice, and that the principles of faith are in fact complimentary with the principles of science."[{6}](#)

Physicist Stephen Hawking states that his study of the universe reveals that "The overwhelming impression is one of order. The more we discover about the universe, the more we find that it is governed by rational laws. . . . You still have to ask the question why does the universe bother to exist? If you like, you can define God to be the answer to the

question."{7}

Francis Collins and Stephen Hawking are just two examples of numerous award-winning scientists who acknowledge the scientific evidence points to a creator. The more we learn in the various fields of science such as biology, microbiology, astronomy, physics, etc., the evidence continues to point to design. The complexity of life and the order displayed in the universe make it more reasonable to conclude a God created it, and the greater leap of faith would be to conclude it all occurred by chance and natural forces.

Belief in God Is Dangerous

The new atheist movement asserts that religion is dangerous, for it is the source of much of the conflict in the world today. Many assert that religions, especially Christianity, teach intolerance and discrimination. To build their case, however, the new atheists unfortunately attack misrepresentations of religions, especially Christianity.

For example, in *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins states, "The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser, a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully."{8} What Dawkins displays is his superficial understanding of the Bible. Certainly no Christian believes in a God as described by Dawkins.

Another error is the misuse of labels. New atheists apply the term "fundamentalist" to Evangelical Christians as well as fundamentalist Muslims, creating the illusion the two are equivalent in their teachings. When Dawkins points to the example of the Islamic riots against the Danish cartoons, he

equates this incident not with Islam but with religion, all religions.{9} However a careful study reveals that there is a huge difference between Jesus' teachings and Muhammad's teachings. This huge difference is also revealed in the lives they lived.{10} A careful reading of the New Testament quickly reveals that violence goes against the nature of Christ's teachings who taught His disciples to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them (Mt. 5:38-48). Application of the true teachings of Christ would lead to a peaceful society.

New atheists allege that religions promote division by the creation of in-groups and out-groups. Indeed, there are religions that discriminate, including some Christian groups, but in Christianity that is a perversion of the teachings of Christ. Jesus' sacrifice and gift of salvation is offered to all (Jn. 3:16). Throughout His life Jesus reached out to those despised by the culture, and His disciples die—many in foreign fields—preaching salvation to all. Even in the Old Testament, the mission of Israel was to be a blessing to all the world (Gen. 12). Application of true biblical teachings would lead to non-discrimination.

A significant point that the new atheists do not mention is the destructive consequences of atheist philosophies. Nietzsche predicted that the death of God would lead to a moral relativism which would result in blood in the streets.{11} Communism has lead to the death of millions in the twentieth century. Millions were put to death under the regimes of Marx, Pol Pot, and Mao Tse Tung. Some religions are responsible for conflict, including Christians who have misused biblical teachings. However, atheism has shown to be dangerous as well.

Religion Is the Result of an Evolutionary

Process

New atheists assert that religion was created out of a need for a father figure, or for comfort in a cruel world, or out of fear of the unknown. They rely on the work of James Frazer and his book the *Golden Bough*, written in the nineteenth century. Frazer taught that religion developed through a natural evolutionary process which began first with animism, a belief in spirits in nature. The worship of nature spirits eventually lead to polytheism. Eventually, amongst all the gods, one was viewed as the most dominant. Eventually this dominant god alone was worshipped and monotheism developed. This was known as the evolutionary theory of religion. New atheists believe eventually man's need for God will end and atheism will be the end of this evolutionary development. Unfortunately, the new atheists once again are not presenting a new theory but reiterating an old theory which has been shown to be flawed.

One of the flaws of this theory is that it was influenced by Darwin's theory of evolution and lacked serious empirical evidence and study.{12} One of the most significant and well-researched works was produced by anthropologist Dr. Wilhelm Schmidt in his four-thousand-page treatise, *The Origin and Growth of Religion*. His research of hundreds of cultures revealed that monotheism is the oldest of religions. The development of religion was discovered to have gone in the opposite direction of the evolutionary theory. All cultures began with a belief in a heavenly father, and this monotheistic faith eventually degenerates to polytheism and then animism. This theory is called "original monotheism."{13} The evidence displayed by Schmidt, and later by anthropologist Don Richardson, is consistent with the progression of religion as revealed in Romans 1. Serious research and evidence appears to favor the biblical model.

The new atheists present few new arguments. What are new are

not the arguments but the method and strategy of this group. How should we meet the challenge of the new atheists? 1 Peter 3:15 challenges us to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." We are called to love those who question or even attack the Christian faith. Christians must answer their challenges with humility and grace. As we present a well-reasoned case and the evidence, the Holy Spirit will use our apologetic defense and our unshaken but loving attitude to speak to their mind and heart.

Psalm 14:21 states, "The fool says in his heart there is no God." Might it be the new atheists who are irrational?

Notes

1. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2006), 23-4.

2. Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: Norton, 2004), 72, quoted in Dawkins, The God Delusion, 113.

3. Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 198.

4. Antony Flew, *There is a God* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007), 91.

5. Ibid., 89. For more on this, see Gene Herr, "[Case for a Creator](http://www.probe.org)," www.probe.org.

6. Dr. Francis Collins, *The Language of God* (Free Press, 2006), 3.

7. Gregory Benford, "Leaping the Abyss: Stephen Hawking on Black Holes, Unified Field Theory and Marilyn Monroe," *Reason* 4.02 (April 2002): 29 quoted in Flew, *There is a God*, 97.
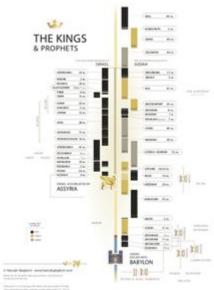
8. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 51.

9. Ibid., 46-50.

10.See Patrick Zukeran, "[The Lives of Muhammad and Jesus](#)," at www.probe.org.

11. Amy Orr-Ewing, *Is Believing in God Irrational?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 208.

12. Alister McGrath and Joanna McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 60.

13. See Patrick Zukeran, "[The Origin of Man's Religions](#)," www.probe.org.

The Reliability of Kings and Chronicles

Dr. Michael Gleghorn shows how the apparent contradictions of two Old Testament historical books can be explained.

Over the past year and a half my wife has been working on what might be called a "visual Bible." By training and profession my wife, Hannah, is a [graphic designer](#). She tends to understand things best when she can visualize them in some way. Hence, when she began team-teaching a women's Bible study that covers the entire Bible in just two years, she felt the need to create visuals of what she was studying in order to help her grasp some of the key points in a single glance. Thus, week-by-week, as she readied herself for class, she also

prepared a wide array of graphically-designed visuals of the written contents of Scripture.

Everything was going fairly well until she came to the Old Testament books of Kings and Chronicles. Since these books give us a great deal of information about the kings of Israel and Judah, including the order in which they reigned, the lengths of their reigns, and so on, she decided to create some charts that would present all of this information visually. She had no idea that she was about to enter one of the most baffling and perplexing issues of biblical chronology!

To put it bluntly, the chronology of Kings and Chronicles initially appears to be a hopelessly muddled, and even downright contradictory, mess! Examining this material as an intelligent layperson, Hannah could make no sense of it at all. It also meant that she could not represent the material in a visually coherent way.

Feeling increasingly frustrated, she asked if I knew of any books that dealt with these problems. Although this is an area I know little about, I remembered a book which (I had heard) handled these issues quite well. That book, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, by Edwin Thiele, offered her some much-needed help in making sense of the apparently confused

and contradictory information in the books of Kings and Chronicles.{2} Although this book did not solve *all* the difficulties she was facing, it did bring a great deal of order to the apparent chaos of this section of Scripture.

In the remainder of this article we'll first consider the problems posed by "the mysterious numbers of the Hebrew kings." Afterward, we'll briefly look at how all these problems have been solved by contemporary scholars, so that what was previously thought of as a hopeless muddle is instead a testimony to the accuracy of the historical parts of the Old Testament.

Some Difficulties with Old Testament Chronology

In the original preface to *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, Edwin Thiele began his discussion with these words:

> *For more than two thousand years Hebrew chronology has been a serious problem for Old Testament scholars. Every effort to weave the chronological data of the kings of Israel and Judah into some sort of harmonious scheme seemed doomed to failure. The numbers for the one kingdom could not, it seemed, be made to agree with the numbers of the other.{3}*

Indeed, the difficulties with Old Testament chronology at this point were so great that many scholars simply assumed that the biblical records were unreliable. But why? What was it about these numbers that made so many scholars think they were in error?

Since we'll later be discussing the two different kingdoms of Israel and Judah, let's begin by considering two *imaginary* kingdoms, both of which celebrate a new king coming to the throne on March 1 of the same year. In other words, both kings

begin their reigns on exactly the same day. Now one would probably think that, as the ensuing years go by, court historians from both kingdoms would agree about how many years each of these kings have ruled their kingdoms. But in fact, this is not necessarily true.

Suppose that one of these kingdoms counts the first year of their new king's reign from his first day on the throne. If he began his reign on March 1 of the year 2000, then this is considered the first year of his reign.{4} On January 1, 2001, he thus begins the *second* year of his reign. But suppose that in the *other* kingdom, the year 2000 is regarded as the *last* year of the *prior* king's reign. In this kingdom, then, even though a new king began to reign in the year 2000, the official first year of his reign is counted from the beginning of the new year, January 1, 2001.{5}

Hence, although both kings began to rule on precisely the same day, the years of their reigns are counted differently. The first king begins his *second* year of rule on January 1, 2001, while the second king only begins his *first* official year at that time. This is just one of *many* issues that complicate the dating of the kings of Israel and Judah as they're recorded for us in the Bible. Once these issues are taken into account, however, a completely harmonious chronology of these kings becomes possible. Let's now consider a biblical example.

A Biblical Case Study

We've been looking at some of the chronological puzzles in the biblical books of Kings and Chronicles. With apologies for the unavoidable names and numbers which follow, let's consider an example.

After the ten tribes split from Judah and Benjamin to form the northern kingdom of Israel, their first ruler was Jeroboam. Jeroboam was followed by his son Nadab. With Nadab we have a

series of synchronisms with the long reign of Asa of the southern kingdom, Judah. The first synchronism is that Nadab began to reign in year 2 of Asa.{6} The Bible then says that Nadab reigned two years and died in year 3 of Asa.{7} But it is only one year from Asa's second year to his third year, so how could Nadab begin in year 2 of Asa, reign two years, and die in Asa's 3rd year? Next, Baasha, who killed Nadab, is said to reign 24 years starting in year 3 of Asa;{8} this should surely put his end, 24 years later, in Asa's year 27. But the Bible says that Baasha died in year 26 of Asa, not year 27.{9} Baasha's son, Elah, reigned two years, and his death was not in year 28 of Asa (that is, 26 plus 2), but in year 27.{10}

At this point we have a decision to make. We could decide that all of this shows that the Bible is not to be trusted in its numerical and historical statements. This is the path taken by critics who say that these parts of the Bible were invented many years later than the happenings they describe. Or, we could give the authors of these texts the benefit of the doubt and consider that these texts show a consistent pattern. The pattern is that the northern kingdom was counting the years of reign for their kings in the fashion mentioned previously, where a king could count the year in which he came to the throne as his first year of reign, so that even if he only reigned exactly one year, he would be given credit for the calendar year in which he became king and also for the calendar year in which he died. This is a method that was used by other Near Eastern kingdoms. With this second approach, success has been achieved in reconstructing the history and exact chronology of the Hebrew kingdom period. We will now consider other factors necessary in understanding these so-called "mysterious numbers" of the Bible.

Co-regencies and Rival Reigns

We've seen a pattern in the chronological numbers that the Bible gives for the first years of the divided kingdom. We saw

that, in these early years at least, the northern kingdom was counting the year that a king died twice; once for him, and once for his successor, so that one year must be subtracted from a reign length when counting elapsed time. By carefully considering the facts as given in the Bible itself, we can determine when the two kingdoms were using this method of counting, and when they were using the other method in which a king's first year was not counted until he reigned a full calendar year.

The Bible also gives us sufficient information to determine when there was a co-regency. The word "co-regency" is not a Biblical word, but the principle is there. A co-regency begins when the reigning king appoints one of his sons as his successor. This was always a smart thing to do. We have an example in our own time. When Kim Jong Il, the dictator of North Korea, became ill he appointed his son, Kim Jong Un, as his successor so there wouldn't be any trouble when he died. In the Bible, after two of David's sons, Absalom and then Adonijah, tried to usurp the kingdom from their father, the prophet Nathan told David to make it known who was to be his successor. David then had Nathan perform a public anointing of Solomon.[11] Another example of a co-regency is when Uzziah was struck with leprosy and had to live in a separate house, so that his son Jotham became the real ruler of the land.[12]

Other co-regencies are not quite so obvious, but the books of Kings and Chronicles always give us enough information so that we can determine when the years of a king's reign are being measured from the start of a sole reign or from the start of a co-regency. For the northern kingdom, Israel, there are also two cases of a rival reign, similar to the rival reigns of Egyptian pharaohs that Egyptologists take into account when reconstructing the chronology of Egypt. As an example, Omri, the father of Ahab, is said to have reigned for twelve years,[13] but this only makes sense if the twelve years includes the five years in which he had a rival, Tibni,

reigning in a different capital.{14} Co-regencies and rival reigns are the second major key to understanding the chronology of the Hebrew kingdom period.

The Accuracy of Kings and Chronicles

In previous sections we considered two factors to take into account when interpreting the rich chronological data of Kings and Chronicles. The first is that there were two ways of counting the first year of a king's reign; whether it was to be counted twice, once for him and once for the king who died in that year, or just once so that the king's first year was his first full year of reign. The second factor was that occasionally a king's reign was measured from the start of a co-regency or rival reign rather than from the start of his sole reign. Both principles were applied, although not consistently, by some earlier interpreters.{15} A third principle, discovered by Edwin Thiele, however, was not used by these interpreters. This principle showed that the southern kingdom, Judah, started counting the years of a king's reign in the fall month of Tishri, while the northern kingdom, Israel, started six months earlier in the spring month of Nisan. Many earlier interpreters thought that both kingdoms started their year in Nisan, but this produced several small errors that they were unable to reconcile. Unknown to Thiele, all three of these principles had been previously found back in the 1920s by a Belgian scholar.{16} But Thiele worked out things in a more satisfactory way, and so his *Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* should be the starting place for understanding the chronology of the kingdom period.

Regrettably, however, Thiele did not recognize that a problem he had with the texts of 2 Kings 18 is explained by a co-regency between Ahaz and Hezekiah.{17} His chronology also needed slight adjustments for the reign of Solomon and for the end of the kingdom period.{18} In our own studies we have followed the corrections to Thiele published in several

articles by Rodger Young.{19} Young responds to the specious claim that the harmony now evident in the chronology of the kingdom period might be the result of a clever manipulation of the data by those who follow the principles outlined by Thiele. Young answers, "The complexities of 124 exact synchronisms, reign lengths, and dates in 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Jeremiah and Ezekiel negate that possibility unless the data were historically authentic."{20} With the proper understanding of the methods used by the ancient authors, the chronological data of Kings and Chronicles offer a remarkable testimony to the strict accuracy of the Bible's 400-year history of the two Hebrew kingdoms.

Notes

1. This article was written by Michael Gleghorn and Rodger Young. Gleghorn's initial inspiration for writing this program resulted from conversations with his wife, who struggled with the "mysterious numbers" in Kings and Chronicles for quite some time before encountering the help provided in the book by Edwin Thiele and, more particularly, the articles of Rodger Young. Mr. Young received a B.A. degree from Reed College, B.A. and M.A. degrees in mathematics from Oxford University, and has done graduate work in theology and biblical languages at the Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City. He retired from IBM in 2003 and began writing about OT chronology.He and his wife attend the West Overland Bible Church in the St. Louis area.
2. Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings,* New rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1994).
3. Ibid., 15.
4. Thiele describes this as "nonaccession-year dating" or "antedating". See Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*, 231.
5. Thiele terms this "accession-year dating" or "postdating." See Ibid.
6. 1 Kings 15:25.
7. 1 Kings 15:25, 28.

8. 1 Kings 15:27, 33.

9. 1 Kings 16:8.

10. 1 Kings 16:8, 15.

11. 1 Kings 1; 1 Chronicles 23:1.

12. 1 Kings 15:5.

13. 1 Kings 16:23.

14. 1 Kings 16:21-23.

15. For example, James Ussher.

16. Valerius Coucke, "Chronologie des rois de Juda et d'Israël," *Revue Bénédictine* 37 (1925): 325-64; idem, "Chronologie biblique" in *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible*, ed. Louis Pirot, vol. 1 (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1928), cols. 1245-79.

17. According to Rodger Young, "Several authors put forth this rather obvious solution, among whom were Kenneth Kitchen and T. C. Mitchell, Siegfried Horn, Harold Stigers, R. K. Harrison, Leslie McFall, and Eugene Merrill." Of course, we could also add Rodger Young's name to this list as well. For details see Young, "When Was Samaria Captured? The Need for Precision in Biblical Chronologies," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 4 (2004): 580.

18. For a one-year correction to Thiele's dates for Solomon through Athaliah, see Rodger C. Young, "When Did Solomon Die?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46, no. 4 (2003): 589-603. By showing that the dates of Solomon through Athaliah must be moved one year earlier than in Thiele's chronology, Young has resolved a problem that Thiele addressed by revisions in the third and final edition of *Mysterious Numbers*, but Thiele's revisions merely moved his problem with the reign of Jehoshaphat to the reign of Athaliah. Among those accepting Young's solution of the problem are Leslie McFall, "The Chronology of Saul and David," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53, no. 4 (2010): 533 (chart), and Andrew E. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2011), 133-34, 138. Young has also written extensively on why 587 BC, not Thiele's 586 BC, is the correct date for the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. See "When

Did Jerusalem Fall?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 1 (2004): 21-38; "Ezekiel 40:1 as a Corrective for Seven Wrong Ideas in Biblical Interpretation," A*ndrews University Seminary Studies* 44, no. 2 (2006):267-70.

19. For those who are interested in pursuing these matters further, please see "Rodger Young's Papers on Chronology" here: www.rcyoung.org/papers.html
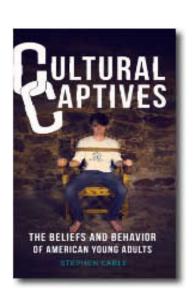
20. Rodger C. Young, "Inductive and Deductive Methods as Applied to OT Chronology," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 18, no. 2 (2007): 116.

Trend Indicates Over Half of Emerging Adults Will Identify as Non-Christian by 2020

More Cultural Research from Steve Cable

One of the dismaying trends I reported on in my book, *Cultural Captives*, was the significant increase in the percentage of people who indicated that their religion was atheist, agnostic, or nothing at all. I referred to this group collectively as the **"nones"** (those with "no religious affiliation"). The percentage of emerging adults (i.e., 18- to 29-year-olds) who self-identified as **"nones"** in 2008 was 25% of the population. This level is a tremendous increase from the 1990 level of 11%.

Now, we have later results from both the General Social Survey (GSS) and the Pew Research Center. Both surveys show another significant increase in the percentage of **"nones"** among this young adult group. In 2014, the GSS survey showed the **percentage of emerging adult "nones" was now up to 33% of the population**, an increase of eight percentage points. The Pew survey of over 35,000 Americans (an astounding number) came up with a similar result, tallying **35% of emerging adults identifying as "nones"** (an increase of nine percentage points over their 2007 survey).

When we consider the number who do not identify as either Protestant or Catholic (i.e., adding in other religions such as Islam and Hinduism), the percentage of emerging adults who do not identify as Christians increases to 43% of the population in both surveys.

If this trend continues at the same rate of growth it has been on since 1990, we will see **over half** of American emerging adults who do not self-identify as Christians by 2020. We will become, at least numerically, a post-Christian culture if things do not turn around.

The Technological Simulacra [no footnotes]

What Saccharine is to Sugar, or The Technological Simulacra: On the Edge of Reality and Illusion

"Anyone wishing to save humanity today must first of all save the word." — Jacques Ellul

Simulacra

Aerosmith sings a familiar tune:

"There's something wrong with the world today,
I don't know what it is,
there's something wrong with our eyes,
we're seeing things in a different way
and God knows it ain't [isn't] his;
there's melt down in the sky. We're living on the edge."

What saccharine is to sugar, so the technological simulacra is to nature or reality—a technological replacement, purporting itself to be better than the original, more real than reality, sweeter than sugar: hypersugar.

Simulacra, (Simulacrum, Latin, pl*., likeness, image, to simulate*): or simulation, the term, was adapted by French social philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) to express his critical interpretation of the technological transformation of reality into hyperreality. Baudrillard's social critique

provided the premise for the movie *The Matrix* (1999). However, he was made famous for declaring that the Gulf War never happened; TV wars are not a reflection of reality but projections (recreations) of the TV medium.

Simulacra reduces reality to its lowest point or one-dimension and then recreates reality through attributing the highest qualities to it, like snapshots from family vacation. When primitive people refuse to have their picture taken because they are afraid that the camera
steals their souls, they are resisting simulacra. The camera snaps a picture and recreates the image on paper or a digital medium; it then goes to a photo album or a profile page. Video highlights amount to the same thing in moving images; from three dimensions, the camera reduces its object to soulless one-dimensional fabrication.

Simulacra does not end with the apparent benign pleasures of family vacation and media, although media represents its most recent stage. Simulacra includes the entire technological environment or complex, its infrastructure, which acts as a false "second nature" superimposed over the natural world, replacing it with a hyperreal one, marvelously illustrated in the movie *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991). As liquid metal conforms itself to everything it touches, it destroys the original.

Humanity gradually replaces itself through recreation of human nature by technological enhancements, making the human race more adaptable to machine existence, ultimately for the purpose of space exploration. Transhumanists believe that through the advancements in genetic engineering, neuropharmaceuticals (experimental drugs), bionics, and artificial intelligence it will redesign the human condition in order to achieve immortality. "Humanity+," as Transhumanists say, will usher humanity into a higher state of being, a technological stairway to heaven, "glorification," "divinization" or "ascendency"in theological terms.

God made man in his own image and now mankind remakes himself in the image of his greatest creation (image), the computer. If God's
perfection is represented by the number seven and man's imperfection by the number six, then the Cyborg will be a five according to the descending order of being; the creature is never equal or greater than the creator but always a little lower.{9}

Glorious Reduction!

www.probe.org/machinehead-from-1984-to-the-brave-new-world-order-and-beyond/

Hyperreality

An old tape recording commercial used to say, "Is it real or is it Memorex?" By championing the superiority of recording to live
performance the commercial creates hyperreality, a reproduction of an original that appears more real than reality, a replacement for reality with a reconstructed one, purported to be better than the original.

Disneyland serves as an excellent example by creating a copy of reality remade in order to substitute for reality; it confuses reality
with an illusion that appears real, "more real than real." Disney anesthetizes the imagination, numbing it against reality, leaving spectators with a false or fake impression. Main Street plays off an idealized past. The technological reconstruction leads us to believe that the illusion "can give us more reality than nature can."

Hyperreality reflects a media dominated society where "signs and symbols" no longer reflect reality but are manipulated by their

users to mean *whatever*. Signs recreate reality to achieve the opposite effect (metastasis); for example, in Dallas I must travel west on Mockingbird Lane in order to go to East Mockingbird Lane. Or, Facebook invites social participation when no actual face to face conversation takes place.

Hyperreality creates a false perception of reality, the glorification of reduction that confuses fantasy for reality, a proxy reality
that imitates the lives of movie and TV characters for real life. When reel life in media becomes real life outside media we have entered the high definition, misty region—the Netherlands of concrete imagination—hyperreality!

Hyperreality goes beyond escapism or simply "just entertainment." If that was all there was to it, there would be no deception or
confusion, at best a trivial waste of time and money. Hyperreality is getting lost in the pleasures of escapism and confusing the fantasy world for the real one, believing that fantasy is real or even better than reality. Hyperreality results in the total inversion of society through technological sleight of hand, a cunning trick, a sorcerer's illusion transforming the world into a negative of itself, into its opposite, then calling it progress.

Hyperreality plays a trick on the mind, a self-induced hypnotism on a mass scale, duping us by our technological recreation into
accepting a false reality as truth. Like Cypher from the movie *The Matrix* who chose the easy and pleasant simulated reality over the harsh conditions of the "desert of the real" in humanity's fictional war against the computer, he chose to believe a lie instead of the truth.

The Devil is a Liar

A lie plays a trick on the mind, skillfully crafted to deceive through partial omission or concealment of the truth. The lie is the
devil's (devil means liar) only weapon, always made from a position of inferiority and weakness (Revelation 20:3, 8). A lie never stands on its own terms as equal to truth; it does not exist apart from twisting (recreating) truth. A lie never contradicts the truth by standing in opposition to it.

A lie is not a negative (no) or a positive (yes), but obscures one or the other. It adds by revealing what is not there—it subtracts by concealing what is there. A lie appears to be what is not and hides what it really is. "Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14).

A lie does not negate (contradict) or affirm truth. Negation (No) establishes affirmation (Yes). Biblically speaking, the no comes
before the yes—the cross then the resurrection; law first, grace second. The Law is no to sin (disobedience); the Gospel is yes to faith (obedience). Truth is always a synthesis or combination between God's no in judgment on sin and His yes in grace through faith in Jesus Christ. "For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). Law without grace is legalism; grace without law is license.

www.probe.org/law-and-grace-combating-the-american-heresy-of-pelagianism/

The devil's lie adds doubt to the promise of God; "Indeed, has God said, 'you shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?"(Genesis 3:1
NASB) It hides the promise of certain death; "You surely will not die" (Genesis 3:4). The serpent twists knowledge into

doubt by turning God's imperative, "Don't eat!" into a satanic question "Don't eat?"

But it is Eve who recreates the lie in her own imagination. "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate" (Genesis 3:6).

Sight incites desire. We want what we see (temptation). Eve was tempted by "the lust of the eyes" (1 John 2:16) after seeing the fruit, then believed the false promise that it would make her wise. "She sees; she no longer hears a word to know what is good, bad or true." Eve fell victim to her own idolatrous faith in hyperreality that departed from the simple trust in God's word.

The Void Machine

Media (television, cell phone, internet, telecommunications) is a void machine. In the presence of a traditional social milieu, such as family, church or school, it will destroy its host, and then reconstruct it in its own hyperreal image (Simulacra). Telecommunication technology is a Trojan Horse for all traditional institutions that accept it as pivotal to their "progress," except prison or jail. The purpose of all institutions is the promotion of values or social norms, impossible through the online medium.

Media at first appears beneficial, but this technology transforms the institution and user into a glorified version of itself. The personal computer, for example, imparts values not consistent with the mission of church or school, which is to bring people together in mutual support around a common goal or belief for learning and spiritual growth (community). This is done primarily through making friends and forming meaningful relationships, quite simply by people talking to

each other. Values and social norms are only as good as the people we learn them from. Values must be embodied in order to be transmitted to the next generation.

Talking as the major form of personal communication is disappearing. Professor of Communications John L. Locke noted that "Intimate
talking, the social call of humans, is on the endangered species list." People prefer to text, or phone. Regrettably, educational institutions such as high schools and universities are rapidly losing their relevance as traditional socializing agents where young people would find a potential partner through like interests or learn a worldview from a mentor. What may be gained in convenience, accessibility or data acquisition for the online student is lost in terms of the social bonds necessary for personal ownership of knowledge, discipline and character development.

An electronic community is not a traditional community of persons who meet face to face, in person, in the flesh where they establish
personal presence. Modern communication technologies positively destroy human presence. What philosopher Martin Heidegger called *Dasein*, "being there," (embodiment or incarnation) is absent. As Woody Allen put it, "90 percent of life is showing up." The presence of absence marks the use of all electronic communication technology. Ellul argued, "The simple fact that I carry a camera [cell phone] prevents me from grasping everything in an overall perception." The camera like the cell phone preoccupies its users, creating distance between himself and friends. The cellphone robs the soul from its users, who must exchange personal presence for absence; the body is there tapping away, but not the soul! The cell phone user has become a void!

The Power of Negative Thinking

According to popular American motivational speakers, the key to unlimited worldly wealth, success and happiness is in the power of
positive thinking that unleashes our full potential; however, according to obscure French social critics the key to a meaningful life, lived in freedom, hope and individual dignity is in the power of negative thinking that brings limits, boundaries, direction and purpose.

Negativity gives birth to freedom, expanding our spiritual horizons with possibilities and wise choices, which grounds faith, hope and
love in absolute truth, giving us self-definition greater than our circumstances, greater than reality of the senses. To freely choose in love one's own path, identity and destiny is the essence of individual dignity.

According to French social critics Jacques Ellul and Herbert Marcuse, freedom is only established in negation that provides limits
and boundaries, which tells us who we are. Technological hyperreality removes all natural and traditional limits in the recreation of humanity in the image of the cyborg. The transhuman transformation promises limitless potential at the expense of individual freedom, personal identity and ultimately human dignity and survival.

www.probe.org/into-the-void-the-coming-transhuman-transformation/

All limitless behavior ends in self-destruction. Human extinction looms over the technological future, like the Sword of Damocles,
threatening humanity's attempt to refit itself for immortality in a grand explosion (nuclear war), a slow poisoning (ecocide) or suicidal regressive technological replacement. Stephen

Hawking noted recently that technological progress threatens humanity's survival with nuclear war, global warming, artificial intelligence and genetic engineering over the course of the next 100 years. Hawking stated, "We are not going to stop making progress, or reverse it, so we must [recognize] the dangers and control them."

In asserting "NO!" to unlimited technological advance and establishing personal and communal limits to our use of all technology,
especially the cell phone, computer and TV, we free ourselves from the technological necessity darkening our future through paralyzing the will to resist.

After we "JUST SAY NO!" to our technological addictions, for instance, after a sabbatical fast on Sunday when the whole family turns off their electronic devices, and get reacquainted, a new birth of freedom will open before us teeming with possibilities. We will face unmediated reality in ourselves and family with a renewed hope that by changing our personal worlds for one day simply by pushing the off button on media technology we can change the future. Through a weekly media fast (negation) we will grow faith in the power of self-control by proving that we can live more abundant lives without what we once feared absolute necessity, inevitable and irresistible. "All things are possible with God" (Mark 10: 27). When we exchange our fear of idols for faith in the Living God the impossible becomes possible and our unlimited potential is released that will change the world forever!

I see trees of green, red roses, too,
I see them bloom, for me and you
And I think to myself
What a wonderful world.

I see skies of blue, and clouds of white,
The bright blessed day, the dark sacred night
And I think to myself

What a wonderful world.

The colors of the rainbow, so pretty in the sky,
Are also on the faces of people going by.
I see friends shaking hands, sayin', "How do you do?"
They're really sayin', "I love you."

I hear babies cryin'. I watch them grow.
They'll learn much more than I'll ever know
And I think to myself
What a wonderful world.

"[I]f man does not pull himself together and assert himself .
. . then things will go the way I describe [cyborg
condition]." – Jacques Ellul