

# 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.<sup>[4]</sup> 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.<sup>{5}</sup> 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 information 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.<sup>{10}</sup> 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."<sup>{11}</sup> Other scholars have argued that secretaries did play a significant role in the formation of the NT.<sup>{12}</sup> 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](http://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).

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## 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.”*

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*“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'être*. 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.

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# 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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.probe.org).

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## 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 led 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](#)," [www.probe.org](http://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](http://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](http://www.probe.org).

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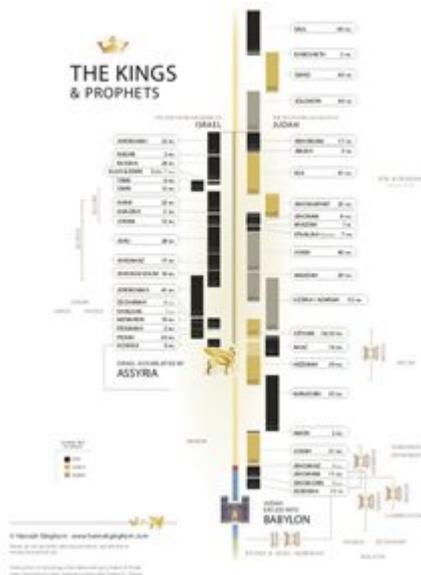
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# The Reliability of Kings and Chronicles

*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.<sup>{4}</sup> 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.<sup>{5}</sup>

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.<sup>{6}</sup> The Bible then says that

Nadab reigned two years and died in year 3 of Asa.<sup>{7}</sup> 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;<sup>{8}</sup> 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.<sup>{9}</sup> 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.<sup>{10}</sup>

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 Benedictine* 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," *Andrews 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](http://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.

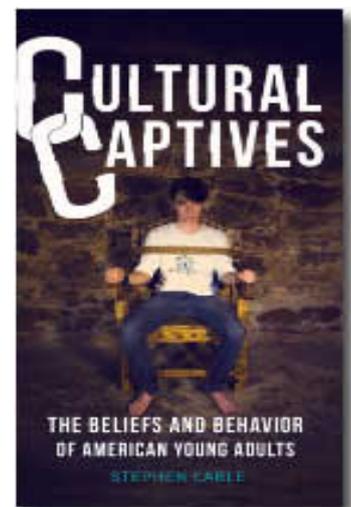
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## Trend Indicates Over Half of Emerging Adults Will Identify as Non-Christian by 2020

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.

Acknowledgments:

The General Social Survey 2014 data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, [www.TheARDA.com](http://www.TheARDA.com), and were collected by Tom W. Smith and the National Opinion Research Center.

The Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Study interactive tool, located at <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/> was the source of our data on the Pew survey

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# 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.



[This article with footnotes](#)

*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/](http://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/](http://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/](http://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

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## I've Got a War Room—Now What Do I Do?



Millions of people have seen the summer blockbuster movie *War Room*, many of them challenged to be more intentional about prayer. Some have even cleaned out a closet or a corner to make their own War Room.

But the movie, for all its motivation to experience the power of prayer, did not provide instructions on what and how to pray. Other than eating potato chips in secret!

Prayer is not about sacred words or flowery religious language. Biblical prayer is about talking to God, heart to heart. Here are some suggestions for what to do in the War Room.

Many people have found it helpful to follow the structure of the acronym ACTS: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication.

Directing our prayers and thoughts in this particular order aligns the heart with God's heart.

**Adoration:** This is simply telling God how great He is, focusing on His character and praising Him with words. The book of Psalms is one of the best place to find truths about God and tell Him about it. Several years ago, I went on a treasure hunt as I read through the Bible, drawing a box around every title and name of God I encountered, and writing them down on the blank pages at the back of my Bible. Simply reading some of the titles of God back to Him constitutes adoration. ("You are the King of Kings and Lord of Lords! You are the Bright and Morning Star! You are the Ancient of Days! You are the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth!")

**Confession:** Quietly consider what unconfessed sin you need to bring out in to the light. Confession means to agree with God. You may not even feel remorseful about it (yet), but it is still important to agree with God that sin is sin and you were wrong. ("Lord, I confess being short-tempered with my family yesterday. I confess yelling at that driver who cut me off in traffic. I confess going all day without once thinking of You. I was wrong. Please forgive me.")

**Thanksgiving:** Consider the things God has given you, the things He has done for you, just in the past 24 hours, and tell Him "thank You." The discipline of keeping a gratitude journal provides lots of things to give thanks for. The great thing about being mindful of what God is doing so we can give thanks for them, is that it makes us more sensitive to the many ways in which He shows His love and concern for us throughout each day, which kicks up our gratitude meter, which overflows in more and more thanksgiving, which leads to a joyful heart.

**Supplication:** NOW we get to the part of asking for the things we need or want, or which we would like to see God do in our lives and in the lives of others. It really helps to keep a list of our requests, just like we see in the movie, so we have a record of how and when God answers them.

This is one of the most misunderstood parts of prayer because often, people mistake having faith in the answers they want, with having faith in the God who answers prayer in His time and in His way. It's fine to ask (not demand, and not presume) for what we want, but it's important not to have unrealistic expectations of getting everything we ask for like a spoiled little kid. (This is one of the reasons people lose heart and can lose their faith—they aren't trusting the God who sees the big picture and knows what is good for us and what isn't, they are looking for the answers to their prayers on a timeline usually faster than the one God is on.)

What should we pray for?

Our daily needs (see also: the Lord's prayer, "give us this day our daily bread," Matthew 6:11), financial provision ("your Father knows what you need before you ask Him," Matthew 6:8), relationships ("it is not good for man to be alone," Genesis 2:18), peace in our relationships ("Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you," John 14:27) . . . whatever comes to mind.

But we get a head start when we pray God's word. This is great War Room material! Consider praying for one's spouse (even a future spouse!) or children or friends the great prayers recorded by the apostle Paul.

"Lord I ask that \_\_\_\_\_ may be filled with the knowledge of Your will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that he will walk in a manner worthy of You, to please You in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of You; strengthened with all power, according to Your glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to You, Father, who have qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light." (Colossians 1:9-12)

"I pray that You would grant \_\_\_\_\_, according to the riches of

Your glory, to be strengthened with power through Your Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in his heart through faith; and that he, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that he may be filled up to all the fullness of You.” (Ephesians 3:16-19)

Consider praying a Psalm, such as Psalm 1:1-3–

“I pray that \_\_\_\_\_ would be blessed, that she would not walk in the counsel of the wicked,

Nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

I pray her delight would be in the law of the Lord,

And in Your law she would meditate day and night.

I pray she would be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,

Which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither;

And in whatever he does, she would prosper.”

Spiritual warfare was one of the elements of the War Room movie, and prayer is how it is battled and won. For the simplest form of it, we can look to how Jesus prayed for His disciples in John 17. He asked His Father:

- To keep His disciples safe from the evil one (v. 15)
- To set them apart in the truth (v. 17)
- For oneness (v. 21). The context was oneness within the Body of Christ, the church, but this is a powerful request to pray for our marriages as well.

I am also intrigued by His prayer in v. 23, “You have loved them just as You have loved Me.” Most people have no idea of just how much and how great the Father’s love is for us–He loves us the exact same way and the exact same amount as He

loves His Son! I love to pray that God will allow my loved one to grasp this truth, which corresponds to the Ephesians 3 prayer above.

Jesus also prayed for Peter before his spectacular, epic failure when he denied his Lord, that his faith would not [completely and utterly] fail, and that after he turned back, that he would strengthen his brothers. Praying for our loved ones' faith not to fail, and for God to redeem and use any lapses and stumbles, is a powerful way to pray for them.

An important part of War Room prayer strategy, just as in physical war, is to remove obstacles to effectiveness. In Mark 11:25, Jesus said, ""Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions." An important thing to do in anyone's War Room is to examine our hearts for any unforgiveness and deal with it.

Well, I think that's a good start on your War Room! Would you like to add any suggestions? Comment below!

This blog post originally appeared at

[blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/ive\\_got\\_a\\_war\\_room-now\\_what\\_do\\_i\\_do](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/ive_got_a_war_room-now_what_do_i_do)

on Sept. 22, 2015

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## **Machinehead: From 1984 to the Brave New World Order and Beyond**

*Wherever the survival of humanity is threatened we find the*

*work of Satan. In the previous century that was Fascism, then Mutually Assured Destruction during the Cold War. Today, Satan hides behind the ascendancy of the global Empire of Technology: assimilation of humanity into the machine, creating a new planetary being: the Cyborg. I believe people best understand large conglomerates when personalized, such as, referring to the Federal Government as "Uncle Sam," so I have chosen to name the Brave New World Order: Machinehead!*

## **Post-Orwellian World**

Say good bye to Orwell's nightmare world of 1984! [\[1\]](#) And welcome to Machinehead: the Brave New World Order and beyond!

Machinehead is what I call the technological idol or the planetary being taking shape in the convergence of human and computer intelligence, a global cyborg. "Machine" is defined as *one global system with many subsystems*.

Experts already recognize the global system as a superorganism, one life-form made of billions and billions of individual parts or cells like an anthill or beehive, with one mind and one will. Thus, the global machine consists of millions of subsystems interfacing one over-system. Mankind acts as agent for the global machine's ascendancy, creating a technological god in its own image.

The suffix "head" refers to the *divine essence* as in "Godhead" (Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. Acts 17: 29). Machinehead is the replacement of all traditional views of God with the new Living God of the Machine, best illustrated by the recent movie *Transcendence* (2014), which depicts the computer's awaking to consciousness in one mind and will, the Singularity!

Two prophets of modernity plead in dire warning for us to

reconsider modern faith in expansive government and escalating technological acceleration. The first and most notable was master political satirist and critic George Orwell (1903-1950), famous for *Animal Farm* and *1984*, and the second, English literatus Aldous Huxley (1894-1963), author of *Brave New World (BNW)*.

Orwell envisioned the end of history in the all-powerful political dictatorship of *Oceania* marked by perpetual war, omnipresent government surveillance, thought control, and the ubiquitous media projection of Big Brother.

Orwell gave us the foundation of the current age in Cold War politics, but does not serve as guide to the future, which belongs, if humanity allows it, to the apparent benign technophilia of *Brave New World* that follows upon Orwell's cruel political combat boot in the face!

## **The Cold War Era and *1984***

Orwell divided his fictional geopolitical borders into three grids: *Oceania*, *Eurasia* and *Eastasia*, shadowing accurately Cold War divisions between Western and Eastern Bloc countries allied behind NATO (*Oceania*) and Warsaw pact nations (*Eurasia*), leaving the Third World (*Eastasia*) as pawns (proxy wars) for interminable power battles between the two Super Powers (Super States). Perpetual war characterized normative relations between the super states in *1984* with the objective to further consolidate the State's power over its own citizens. The threat of war inspires fear in the population and offers government the opportunity and justification for further largesse and control. War insures a permanent state of crisis, leaving the population in desperation for strong leadership and centralized command and control.

The wars of *1984* were a side note to the main thrust of the novel, omnipotent government control. The novel introduced the world to the ominous character Big Brother. The central drama

takes place in *Airstrip One*, the capital of *Oceania*, formerly London, England, where Winston Smith the protagonist struggles to maintain his dignity as an individual, under the crushing gears of Fascist government.

Popular criticism asserts that Orwell had Stalinism in the cross hairs in his novel. However, that interpretative ruse acts as an escape clause for the West to disavow any participation in totalitarianism. Most Americans falsely assume that *1984* applied to the Soviet Union and not NATO. Eurasia (the Eastern bloc) was a mere literary foil. Orwell's social criticism applies to all forms of totalitarianism, especially the subtle power structure of the West hidden behind democratic rhetoric, media bias, and an acute lack of national self-criticism. *Oceania* was Orwell's analogy and commentary on the future of the West after World War II. The NATO alliance, founded in 1949 the same year Orwell published *1984*, was the target of Orwell's criticism—not the Soviet Union.

## ***Brave New World Order in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Imperial Machine***

Huxley's novel *Brave New World* foresaw a techno heaven on earth that knows nothing of wars, political parties, religion or democracy, but caters to creature comforts, maximization of pleasure and minimization of pain; total eradication of all emotional and spiritual suffering through the removal of free choice by radical conditioning from conception in the test tube to blissful euthanasia.

Television was the controlling technology in *1984*, so in *BNW* control is asserted through media, education and a steady flow of *soma*—the perfect drug and chemical replacement for Jesus. “Christianity without tears” was how Mustapha Mond the World Controller described *soma*. “Anybody can be virtuous now. You can carry at least half your morality around in a [pill]

bottle.”{2}

Spiritual perfection commanded by Jesus, “Be ye perfect, even as your heavenly father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48), will be given to all through genetic programming, sustained through chemical infusion and mental conditioning (propaganda). If 1984 was about power for the sake of power, *BNW* emphasizes the kinder, gentler technological dictatorship that does not promise happiness, but delivers it to all whether they want it or not!

Brave New World Order amounts to technological totalitarianism, analogous to Huxley’s “World State” motto: “Community, Identity, Stability.”{3}

The “imperial machine” as it has been called by political scientists acts outside the traditional political process and in tandem with it when needed with no central geographical location or person or groups with any discernable hierarchical structure that directs it; the United States, Great Britain, United Nations, The People’s Republic of China or The European Union are not the power brokers of 21<sup>st</sup> century Empire, but its pawns.

Technological Empire rules as an all-encompassing, all-pervasive power, shaping human destiny in its own image.

## **Transvaluation of Man and Machine**

A titanic transvaluation (reversal in the meaning of values) between superstructure (intangible ideological system: beliefs, convictions, morality, myth, etc.) and infrastructure (tangible urban development: roads, buildings, houses, cars, machines, etc.) begun with the Industrial Revolution will finally be complete some time during the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Infrastructure replaces superstructure. Technology has become our belief, religion and hope, what was once a means

(technology) to an end (human progress) has replaced the end with the means. Technology replaces humanity as the goal of progress; technology for technology's sake not for the good of mankind or God's glory.

The reversal of meaning is found everywhere in postmodern society beginning with the death of God and unfolding in lock step to the death of man, progress, democracy and Western Civilization; concomitantly paired with an equal ascendancy of all things technological, until the machine ultimately replaces humanity.

Marxist regimes were fond of calling their systems "democratic" or "republic" such as *the People's Republic of China* despite the fact that the *Dictatorship of the Proletariat* bears the opposite meaning. The majestic word *Liberal*, once meant freedom from government interference and rule by inner light of reason in the seventeenth century, had come to be synonymous with government regulation and planning by the twentieth century.

The cruelest irony in the transvaluation process is that the triumph of mankind over nature and tradition in the modern world has resulted in his replacement by the machine. Humanism of the modern period promoted the Rational as ideal type of Man. This ideal was already adapted to the machine as *1984* and *Brave New World* illustrated through the removal of faith and the attenuation of human nature to mechanical existence. French Intellectual Jacques Ellul argued further that "This type [of man] exists to support technique [technological acceleration] and serve the machine, but eventually he will be eliminated because he has become superfluous . . . the great hope that began with the notion of human dominance over the machine ends with human replacement by the machine."[\[4\]](#)

## **The Devil's Logic**

What we fear will happen is already here because we fear it;

it will overtake us according to our fears; it will recede according to our love. (1 John 2)

Human Replacement does not necessarily mean total human extinction, a cyborg race that fundamentally alters human nature will cause a pseudo-extinction—meaning part of humanity, the Machine Class, those most fit for technological evolution will ascend to the next stage, leaving the great majority behind. The movie *Elysium* (2011) offers an excellent illustration: the technological elite, who reap all the benefits from technological advance control the earth from an orbiting space station. H. G. Wells in his famous novel *The Time Machine* painted a similar picture of human evolution that branched into two different species: the hideous cannibalistic Morlocks, “the Under-grounders,” their only principle was necessity, feeding off the beautiful, yet docile Eloi, “the Upper-worlders,” whose only emotion was fear.[\[5\]](#)

When fear dominates our thinking, love is absent from our motives. To say, “It is necessary” in defense of technological practice, abdicates choice, giving unlimited reign to technological acceleration, i.e. abortion, government surveillance, or digital conversion. “Fear” and “necessity” are the devil’s logic. Necessity imposes itself through fear of being left behind by “technological progress.”

Necessity is not the Mother of Invention, but the Father of Lies! New technology becomes necessity only after it is invented. There is no conscious need for what does not yet exist. Technological need establishes itself through habitual use creating dependence and finally normalcy in the next generation who cannot relate to a past devoid of modern technological essentials.

“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” serves as our mandate, if we wish to create a future of universal love and empathy instead of universal speed and memory.

Knowledge without wisdom leads to disaster. “Where is the wisdom lost in knowledge?”<sup>{6}</sup> Wisdom is the loving use of knowledge. Love counsels limits to knowledge for the liberation of all. Fear dictates limitless necessity, enslaving all.

A choice faces us. Say “yes!” to God and “no!” to *limitless* advance. Otherwise mankind faces replacement by the new digital god: Machinehead!

## Notes

1. George Orwell, 1984 [{New York: HBJ, Inc., 1949}](#), 17)
2. Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (New York: The Modern Library, 1932), 285.
3. Ibid, 1.
4. Lawrence J. Terlizze, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 104-105).
5. H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (New York: Bantam, 1982 [1895]).
6. T.S. Eliot quoted in Huston Smith, *The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991, 5).

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# Paul and the Mystery Religions – Christianity Defended

*Was early Christian teaching influenced by the mystery religions of the day? Don Closson presents a solid look at this question; concluding that Christian doctrine as taught by*

*Paul and others was grounded in truth and was not influenced by these other religious concepts.*

## **Introduction**

A common criticism of Christianity found on college campuses today is that its core ideas or teachings were dependent upon Greek philosophy and religious ideas. It is not unusual for a student to hear from a professor that Christianity is nothing more than a strange combination of the Hebrew cult of Yahweh, notions adopted from the popular Greek mystery religions of the day, and a sprinkling of ideas from Greek philosophic thought. This criticism of traditional Christianity is not new. In fact, its heyday was in the late 1800s to the 1940s and coincides with what is now called the History of Religions movement. This group of theologians and historians accused Paul of adding Greek ideas to his Hebrew upbringing, and in the process, creating a new religion: one that neither Jesus nor His first disciples would recognize.



Was the origin of Christianity dependent on existing Greek philosophical and religious ideas? That question hinges upon how one is using the word “dependent.” Philosopher Ron Nash argues that dependency can be weak or strong and that the difference is a vital one. A strong dependency would mean that the idea of Jesus as a dying and rising savior-god would never have occurred to early believers if they had not become aware of them first in pagan thought. It would be admitting that Paul and the other new Christians came to believe that Christ was a resurrected God-man who made an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world because of pagan ideas. Proving a strong dependency of Christianity on Greek thought would be very damaging to those who hold a high view of Scripture.

A weak dependency means that the followers of Jesus used common religious terminology of the day in order to be understood by the Hebrew and Greek culture surrounding them.

This poses no problem for a high view of Scripture. As Nash states, ". . . the mere presence of parallels in thought and language does not prove any dependence in the strong sense."<sup>[1]</sup> Nash and others argue that only a weak dependency can be shown to have existed between Greek religious thought and the Gospel of Christ.

In this article we will consider arguments against the strong dependency claims of the History of Religions movement and modern critics. Specifically, we will compare the theology of the apostle Paul with ideas found in the popular Greek mystery religions present during the early church period.

Although these ideas rarely surface in everyday discussions, Christians entering the academic world of our college campuses would benefit from time spent understanding this issue. In the hands of a professor hostile to Christianity, partial truths and exaggerated similarities between Christianity and the mystery religions can overwhelm an unaware teen. Being conscious of these arguments against Christian thought prepares us to give an answer to everyone who questions the hope that we have in Christ.

## **Arguments Against a Strong Dependency on Mystery Religions Viewpoint**

Previously we noted that the History of Religions movement claimed that Christian thought had a direct and strong dependency on the mystery religions. Although some scholars agreed with this view, many did not. A good example is the famous German historian Adolf von Harnack, who wrote:

*We must reject the comparative mythology which finds a causal connection between everything and everything else. . . . By such methods one can turn Christ into a sun god in the twinkling of an eye, or one can bring up the legends attending the birth of every conceivable god, or one can*

*catch all sorts of mythological doves to keep company with the baptismal dove . . . the wand of 'comparative religion' triumphantly eliminate(s) every spontaneous trait in any religion.* {2}

What were the basic traits of the mystery religions? The annual vegetation cycle was often at the center of these cults. Deep significance was given to the concepts of growth, death, decay and rebirth. The cult of Eleusis and its central deity, Demeter, goddess of the soil and farming, is one example. The mystery religions also had secret ceremonies and rites of initiation that separated its members from the outside world. Every mystery religion claimed to impart secret knowledge of the deity. This knowledge would be communicated in clandestine ceremonies often connected to an initiation rite. The focus of this knowledge was not on a set of revealed truths to be shared with the world, but on hidden higher knowledge to be kept within the circle of believers.

At the core of each religion was a myth in which the deity returned to life after death, or else triumphed over his enemies. As one scholar explains, the myth "appealed primarily to the emotions and aimed at producing psychic and mystic effects by which the neophyte might experience the exaltation of a new life." {3} On the other hand, the mysteries were not concerned as much with correct doctrine or belief, but with the emotional state of the followers. The goal of the believers was a mystical experience that led them to believe that they had achieved union with their god.

The various religious movements found throughout the Roman Empire were not united in doctrine or practice, and they changed dramatically over time. Any impact that they may have had on Christianity must be evaluated by the time frame in which the religions encountered one another. When comparing religious systems, Philosopher Ronald Nash warns that caution is advised against using careless language. He states, "One

frequently encounters scholars who first use Christian terminology to describe pagan beliefs and practices and then marvel at the awesome parallels they think they have discovered.”{4}

What if someone told you that the root of Paul’s New Testament theology was in obscure Greek mystery religions, rather than his Jewish training and his encounter with Jesus Christ? That’s exactly what the History of Religions movement argued at the end of the 19th century. Many scholars still teach that Paul’s portrayal of Jesus as a dying and rising savior would never have occurred without the presence of the mystery religions. Next, we will continue to consider arguments against what might be called “the strong dependency view.”

## **Weaknesses in the Strong Dependency View**

The first argument against this view is the logical fallacy of *false cause*. This fallacy occurs when someone argues that just because two things exist side by side, that one must be the cause of the other. As one theologian has written, the History of Religions School had the tendency “to convert parallels into influences and influences into sources.”{5} Causal connection is much harder to prove than proximity. The mere fact that other religions may have had a god who died and then came back to life in some manner does not mean that this was the source of Christian ideas, even if it can be shown that the apostles knew of this other set of beliefs.

Some scholars, hostile to Christianity, tend to exaggerate, or invent, similarities between Christianity and the mystery religions. British scholar Edwyn Bevan writes:

*Of course if one writes an imaginary description of the Orphic mysteries . . . filling in the large gaps in the picture left by our data from the Christian Eucharist, one produces something very impressive. On this plan, you first*

*put in the Christian elements, and then are staggered to find them there.*[{6}](#)

An example might be the practice of the taurobolium in the cult of Cybele or Great Mother. This initiation rite, in which the blood of a sacrificed bull is allowed to pour over a neophyte, is claimed by some to be the source of baptism in Christianity. Arguments have been made that the language “blood of the lamb” (Rev. 7:14), and “blood of Jesus” (1 Peter 1:2) was borrowed from the language of the taurobolium and criobolium in which a ram was slaughtered. In fact, a better argument can be made that the cult borrowed its language from the Christian tradition.

The cult of Cybele did not use the taurobolium until the second century A.D.; the best available evidence for dating the practice places its origin about one hundred years after Paul wrote his epistles.[{7}](#) German scholar Gunter Wagner points out that there was no notion of death and resurrection in the cultic practice.

After noting the change in meaning that the taurobolium experienced over time, scholar Robert Duthoy writes:

*It is obvious that this alteration in the taurobolium must have been due to Christianity, when we consider that by A.D. 300 it had become the great competitor of the heathen religions and was known to everyone.*[{8}](#)

## **More Weaknesses in the Strong Dependency View**

A simple but powerful argument against the likelihood that Paul would have turned to pagan thought for his theology was his strict Jewish training. In Philippians 3:5 Paul boasts of being a Hebrew of Hebrews. He had studied under Gamaliel, the

most celebrated teacher of the most orthodox of the Jewish parties, the Pharisees. And in Colossians he warns against the very syncretism he is being accused of proposing. According to Bruce Metzger:

*[W]ith regard to Paul himself, scholars are coming once again to acknowledge that the Apostle's prevailing set of mind was rabbinically oriented, and that his newly found Christian faith ran in molds previously formed at the feet of Gamaliel.* {9}

We find no accusations in the New Testament of Paul incorporating pagan thought into his theology, nor does he defend himself against such claims.

The very nature of the mystery cults, with the conflicting pantheon of deities and mythical beings, makes it highly unlikely that the strict monotheism and the body of doctrines found in the New Testament would be their source. Although the mystery religions did move towards advancing a solar god above all the others, this change began after 100 A.D., too late to impact the theology of the New Testament.

It should also be noted that early Christianity was an exclusivistic religion while the mystery cults were not. One could be initiated into the cult of Isis or Mithras without giving up his or her former beliefs. However, to be baptized into the church one had to forsake all other gods and saviors. This was a new development in the ancient world. Machen writes, "Amid the prevailing syncretism of the Greco-Roman world, the religion of Paul, with the religion of Israel, stands absolutely alone." {10}

Paul's religion was grounded in real events. The mystery religions were not. They were based upon dramas written to capture men's hearts and passions. Reformed scholar Herman Ridderbos writes:

*Whereas Paul speaks of the death and resurrection of Christ and places it in the middle of history, as an event which took place before many witnesses . . . the myths of the cults in contrast cannot be dated; they appear in all sorts of variations, and do not give any clear conceptions. In short they display the timeless vagueness characteristic of real myths. Thus the myths of the cults . . . are nothing but depictions of annual events of nature in which nothing is to be found of the moral voluntary, redemptive substitutionary meaning, which for Paul is the content of Christ's death and resurrection.*[{11}](#)

Next we will conclude with further arguments against Paul's use of the mystery religions.

## **Conclusion**

Muslim author Yousuf Saleem Chishti writes that the doctrines of the deity of Christ and the atonement are pagan teachings that come from the apostle Paul, not from Christ Himself.[{12}](#) He states that, "The Christian doctrine of atonement was greatly coloured by the influence of the mystery religions, especially Mithraism, which had its own son of God and virgin Mother, and crucifixion and resurrection after expiating for the sins of mankind and finally his ascension to the seventh heaven."[{13}](#) Were these doctrines something Paul made up or borrowed? What did Jesus teach regarding the atonement?

First, both Jesus and Paul taught that Christianity was the fulfillment of Judaism. In Matthew 5:17 Jesus said that He came to fulfill the law and the teaching of the Prophets, not to abolish them. In Colossians (2:16-17), Paul writes that the religious codes of the Old Testament were merely a foreshadowing of the things that were to come, and that the new reality is found in Christ. Both Christ and Paul taught the necessity of the blood atonement for sin. Jesus stated

that, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). At the Last Supper He added, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28). Paul affirmed Christ's teachings when he wrote, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace" (Ephesians 1:7). Tying the doctrine back to the Old Testament, Paul wrote, "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Corinthians 5:7).

The idea that Jesus was the Son of God, born of a virgin, dying on the cross, and being resurrected are hardly Paul's ideas alone. They are found in the earliest Christian writings and held consistently wherever the faith spread. The parallels between Christianity and Mithraism claimed by Chishti are hard to evaluate or confirm. He gives us no references as evidence for the similarities.[{14}](#) Other scholars who have looked at the issue find that most of the similarities disappear on close inspection. Where they do occur, it can be argued that Mithraism borrowed ideas from Christianity rather than vice versa. Bruce Metzger writes, "It must not be uncritically assumed that the Mysteries always influenced Christianity, for it is not only possible but probable that in certain cases, the influence moved in the opposite direction."[{15}](#)

Those who find Christianity hard to accept have offered many reasons for not doing so. The claim that the doctrines of Christianity had a strong dependency on the mystery religions stands on shaky ground and should be investigated thoroughly before one rejects the good news of the New Testament writers.

## Notes

1. Ronald Nash, *The Gospel And The Greeks*, (Probe Books: Dallas, TX, 1992), 18.
2. Ibid, 118.

3. Ibid, 124.
4. Ibid, 126.
5. Ibid, 193.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid, 154.
8. Ibid, 155.
9. Ibid, 196.
10. Ibid, 197.
11. Ibid. 198.
12. Normal Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, (Baker Books, 1999), 490.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid. 492.
15. Nash, 198.

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