

# Worldviews Through History – Compared to a Christian View

*Kerby Anderson provides a summary of how mankind has viewed the world from the Romans until today. This summary provides us a perspective against which to compare and contrast a Christian, biblical worldview based on New Testament principles.*

## Roman Worldview

On the Probe Web site we often talk about [worldviews](#). I want to explain how the worldviews we talk about developed through history. We will be using as our foundation an excellent book written by Professor Glenn Sunshine whom I have met and also had the privilege of interviewing. His book is *Why You Think the Way You Do: The Story of Western Worldviews from Rome to Home*. [{1}](#)

Glenn Sunshine is a member of the church that Jonathan Edwards attended when he was at Yale. Professor Sunshine gave a lecture about Jonathan Edward's worldview at a conference they held, and Chuck Colson invited him to teach with the Centurions program. He gave a talk about "How We Got Here" and then later turned it into *Why You Think the Way You Do*.



Since we will be talking about worldview, it would be good to begin with Glenn Sunshine's definition. "A worldview is the framework you use to interpret the world and your place in it." [{2}](#) You do not need to be a philosopher to have a worldview. All of us have a worldview.

Although Glenn Sunshine begins with the worldview of the Roman world, he quickly takes us back to neo-Platonism. It was the religion and philosophy based upon Plato's ideas. Neo-

Platonism was the belief that the fundamental ground of reality is non-physical. Instead it is found in the world of ideas (and is known as *idealism*). These ideas cast shadows that cast other shadows until they arrive at the physical world.

According to this worldview, the whole universe exists as a hierarchy. The spiritual is superior to the physical. This provides a scale of values for the world, but also provides a scale for humanity. In other words, those who are superior should rule over those who are inferior because they have demonstrated their ability to rule or conquer.

This view of hierarchy led to the idea of the father having superiority over all members of the family. It led to the idea that men are superior to women. It led to the idea that the emperor should rule and be worshipped. And it led to the idea that slaves are inferior to free people and nothing more than "living tools."[{3}](#)

This explains not only the success of Rome but also its ugly underside. Essentially there are two pictures of Rome: "the glittering empire and the rotten core."[{4}](#)

In Rome, human life did not have much value. While it is true that Romans abandoned human sacrifice, they engaged in other practices equally abhorrent. "They picked up the Etruscan practice of having people fight to the death in games in honor of the dead."[{5}](#)

Slavery provided the economic foundation for the empire. Abortion and infanticide were regularly practiced. "Roman families would usually keep as many healthy sons as they had and only one daughter; the rest were simply discarded."[{6}](#) And Roman law required that a father kill any visibly deformed child.

# Transformation of the Pagan World

How did Christianity transform the pagan world? In AD 303, the Roman emperor Diocletian began a severe persecution of Christians. But because Christians were faithful and even willing to go to their deaths for their beliefs, their credibility increased. Eventually they were accepted and allowed to exercise their faith. Constantine even legalized the Christian faith by AD 313.

Once that took place, Christian ideas were allowed to percolate through society. One of the most important ideas was that human beings are created in the image of God. This idea has a profound impact. First, it meant that people are fundamentally equal to each other. No longer were there grounds for saying that some people are superior to others. In fact, "Christians were the first people in history to oppose slavery systematically." [\[7\]](#)

Christians (who believed that all are created in the image of God) treated the sick differently. They believed that even those who were deathly ill still deserved care. Dionysius of Alexandria reported that Christians (often at great risk to their own lives) "visited the sick fearlessly and ministered to them continually." [\[8\]](#) They would rescue babies abandoned in an act of infanticide. They would oppose abortion.

In economics, we can also see the influence of Christianity. The idea that God created the universe and then rested showed that God worked. That would mean that human beings (made in the image of God) are expected to work as well. God gave Adam and Eve intellectual work (in naming the animals) and physical work (in tending the Garden). Contrast this with the Roman world where physical work was seen as something that only slaves would do. Christians saw labor as something that was intrinsically valuable.

Labor is good; drudgery is bad. Drudgery is a result of the

Fall (Genesis 3). So Christians were the first to develop technology to remove drudgery from work. Other civilizations had technology, but the West uniquely applied such things as water power to make work more valuable and worthwhile by eliminating the drudgery and repetitive nature of certain tasks.

Property rights were also well-developed during this period. "The medieval world under the influence of Christianity has a much stronger emphasis on property rights than other cultures had." [\[9\]](#)

These ideas come from a biblical worldview and began to be developed during the Middle Ages. This led to a complete transformation of western society and set it on a trajectory to our modern world.

## **Christianity and Politics**

Glenn Sunshine points out that in the West, the dynamic between church and state is unique. Christianity was originally a persecuted minority religion. Even when Christianity was declared a legal religion, the church did not depend upon the state. So the question of the relationship between church and state has been an open question.

During the Middle Ages, two men helped shape political thinking. The first was Augustine, who described two realms: the City of God and the City of Man. He argued that human government is the result of sin. He believed that it is based upon selfishness. Government itself is corruption. In the absence of government, anarchy reigns. So government is a necessary evil.

The City of God is different in that it is not based upon force or coercion. It is based upon love, charity, and repentance. That doesn't mean that the City of Man and the City of God cannot work together. But overall, Augustine had a

more pessimistic view of government.

Aristotle had a different view of government. As people in the Middle Ages began to rediscover Aristotle, they began to develop a different view of government. They saw government as a necessary institution that God has placed in the world. It had positive and legitimate functions.

Aristotle believed that government had a more positive role in society. But the Christian theologians had to also deal with the problem of original sin. They wanted to find a way to prevent original sin from corrupting the government. The tension between these two views is what drives the discussion of western political theory.

Sunshine notes that “another check on civil government involved the idea of rights.”<sup>{10}</sup> We normally associate the idea of rights, especially inalienable rights, with eighteenth century political theorists. However, John Locke’s idea that we have inalienable right to life, liberty, and property is already found in the writings of medieval theologians. The basis for this is a belief that all are created in the image of God. Therefore, all of us have a number of natural rights that the state cannot remove. Natural law was the idea that God wove moral laws into the fabric of the universe.

There also was the belief that there should be limitations on the jurisdiction of civil government and church government. One example is the Magna Carta, that stated that the English church was to be free and its liberties unimpaired by the crown.

## **The Renaissance and Enlightenment**

What about the transformation into the modern world? In the early modern period, starting with the Renaissance in the fifteenth century to the seventeenth century, there are a whole series of events that shook the worldview consensus that

developed in the Middle Ages.

Previously there were certain beliefs about truth: (1) that truth was absolute, (2) that truth is knowable to the human mind, and (3) that truth is necessary for society (a society could not be based upon a lie). The best good guide for truth would be the great civilizations of the past that lasted for so long and thus must have been based upon truth.

The idea was to go to the past to find truth. During the Renaissance scholars were very successful in collecting manuscripts and finding ancient sources. Unfortunately, they found so many sources that they discovered there was not a coherent perspective. The ancient writers disagreed with each other. In a sense, the Renaissance was a victim of its own success. There was too much information. The more ancient sources they found, the less likely they would find agreement in the perspectives. Once it became obvious that this grand synthesis was not possible, the entire purpose of intellectual activity was thrown into question.

Then there were the wars of the Reformation in which various factions fought over who was the true follower of the prince of peace. The devastation of the religious wars left many people wondering if there really was religious certainty. No longer was the question "is Christianity true" but rather "which Christianity is true?" Now you had a multiplicity of options that left people confused. This also generated questions about the role of religion in society.

Then you also had the discovery of the New World and whole people groups that had never heard the gospel. Some began to ask questions like: Is it fair of God to send them all to hell because they had never heard of Christianity? Or, in light of biblical history, where did they come from? How do these people fit with the story of Noah? These discoveries called into question biblical morality and biblical history.

Also, people started using a new way of looking at knowledge. They began to use the scientific method to evaluate everything. This begins a significant shift in how we understand the world. There is a movement away from certainty toward probability. There is also a movement away from studying ancient authors toward scientific experimentation.

In the modern world, therefore, truth is not found in the past but in the present and future. With this is also questioning of biblical authority.

## **The Modern World and Christianity**

Let me conclude by talking about our modern world and how Christians should respond. Sunshine concludes his book with chapters on “Modernity and Its Discontents” and “The Decay of Modernity.” Essentially the modern world has left humans with a loss of truth, certainty, and meaning in life. “Materialism provides a ready answer to the question of the meaning and purpose of life: there is none.”[{11}](#) From a Darwinian perspective, our only purpose is to pass our genes on to the next generation.

This rejection of spirituality and meaning has ushered in various other worldviews as alternatives. These would be such worldviews as postmodernism, neo-paganism, and the New Age Movement. Sunshine argues that in many ways we have been catapulted back to Rome.

Like Rome we value toleration as the supreme virtue. Rome believed that toleration was important because it kept the empire together. If you go beyond the lines of toleration, you are persecuted. This is similar to the mindset today. The highest value in a postmodern world is toleration. Toleration so defined means that we will embrace any and all lifestyles people may choose.

The Romans lived in an oversexed society.[{12}](#) So do we. Rome

practiced abortion. So does our society. Rome was antinatal and made a deliberate attempt to prevent pregnancy. They focused on sexual enjoyment and did not want to bother with kids. In our modern world, birthrates in most of the western democracies are plummeting.

Western civilization is a product of ancient Roman civilization plus Christianity. Sunshine argues that once you removed Christianity, modern society reverted back to Roman society and a recovery of the ancient pagan worldview.

So how should Christians live in this world? Of course, we should live out a biblical worldview. Every generation is called to live faithfully to the gospel, and our generation is no exception.

This is especially important today since we are facing a society that is not willing to accept biblical ideas. In many ways, we face a challenge similar to the early church, though not as daunting. From history we can see that the early church did live faithfully and transformed the Roman world. Christians produced a totally new civilization: western culture. By living faithfully before the watching world, we will increase our credibility and earn the respect from those who are around us by living in accordance with biblical principles.

## **Notes**

1. Glenn Sunshine, *Why You Think the Way You Do: The Story of Western Worldviews from Rome to Home* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).
2. Ibid., 13.
3. Ibid., 31
4. Ibid., 20
5. Ibid., 30
6. Ibid., 33-34
7. Ibid., 43

8. Ibid., 44
9. Ibid., 76
10. Ibid., 91
11. Ibid., 177
12. Ibid., 33

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# The Eclipse Declares the Glory of God, v. 2024

*Sue Bohlin is very excited to be the path of the upcoming total solar eclipse, where God shows off once again.*

“The heavens declare the glory of God,” Psalm 19 tells us. On April 8, 2024, millions of Americans will have an incredible opportunity to see His heavenly glory in a way most of us never have: through a total solar eclipse. On a path running from Texas to South Maine, observers on the ground will see the moon slip in front of the sun, blocking out all its light and dropping the temperature drastically (about 10 to 15 degrees Fahrenheit) and suddenly.

I am thrilled beyond words that by the grace of God, our home in Dallas, Texas is in the path of totality. All I have to do is go out in our back yard to experience this once-in-a-lifetime event! :::doing the happy dance:::

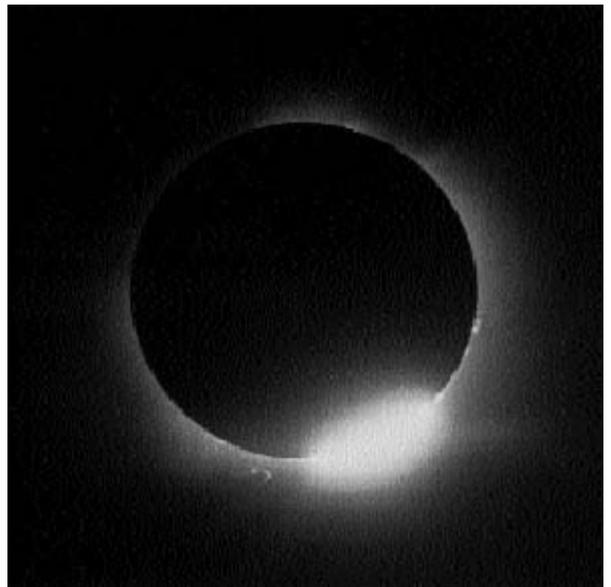
The glory of God isn't just seen, it's *felt* as well. Eclipse-chasers, and even those who have only experienced one total eclipse, report that at the moment of totality (when the moon completely covers the sun, plunging the land into an eerie darkness), people break out with yells and shouts and

applause. Many report the hair on the back of their necks standing up. And both locals and visiting astronomers are equally in awe—and often in tears. Like one’s first in-person look at the Grand Canyon, it is deeply emotional to be thrilled by something much, much bigger than oneself.

Illustra Media’s wonderful DVD *The Privileged Planet*, based on the book by the same name by Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay Richards [{1}](#), exposed me to the magnificence of a total solar eclipse. I will never forget the goosebumps at learning that the sun is 400 times farther away than our moon, but it’s also 400 times larger. This means that both of these heavenly bodies appear to be the same size to us on Earth. This phenomenal “coincidence” also makes a total eclipse possible.

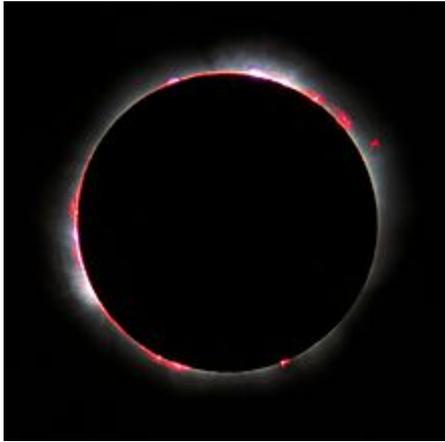
During an eclipse, ***the heavens declare the glory of God*** by

allowing us to see things about the sun we wouldn’t be able to observe any other way, beautiful and gloriously resplendent. Just before totality we can see “Baily’s Beads.” Only seen during an eclipse, bright “beads” appear at the edge of the moon where the sun is shining through lunar valleys, a feature of the moon’s



rugged landscape. This is followed by the “diamond ring” effect, where the brightness of the sun radiates as a thin band around the circumference of the moon, and the last moments of the sun’s visibility explode like a diamond made of pure light. After the minutes of totality, the diamond ring effect appears again on the opposite side of the moon as the first rays of the sun flare brilliantly. These sky-jewelry phenomena are so outside of mankind’s control that witnessing them stirs our spirits (even on YouTube!) with the truth of Romans 1:20—“God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and

divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.”



A total solar eclipse offers so much more, though, than Baily's Beads and the Diamond Ring. At the moment of totality, the pinkish arc of the sun's chromosphere (the part of the sun's atmosphere just above the surface) suddenly "turns on" as if an unseen hand flips a switch. I knew God is very fond of pink because of how He paints glorious sunrises and sunsets in Earth's skies, but those fortunate enough to see a total eclipse can see how He radiates pinkness from the sun itself! ***The heavens declare the glory of God!***

But wait! That's not all! Along with the flare of the sun's pink chromosphere, a rainbow-like band called the "flash spectrum" appears when the sun is viewed through a prism! (You can google this to see pictures. The best ones are copyrighted so I can't show them to you here.) ***The heavens declare the colorful glory of God!***

For the few minutes of totality, the naked eye can see the sun's lovely corona (Latin for crown) streaming out from the sun. We can't see the corona except during an eclipse because looking straight at the sun for even a few seconds causes eye damage, and because the sun's ball



of fire overwhelms the (visually) fragile corona. This is another way that an eclipse allows us to see how **the heavens**

## declare the glory of God.

Astronomer Guillermo Gonzalez noticed details about eclipses that got him excited:

- During a total solar eclipse, the moon is just large enough to block the large photosphere (the big ball of fiery gas), but not so large that it obscures the colorful chromosphere.
- The moon and the sun are two of the roundest measured bodies in the solar system. (Some moons are potato-shaped!) So when the round disk of the moon passes in front of the equally round disk of the sun, the shapes match perfectly.
- He studied all 65 of the moons in our solar system and discovered that ours are the best planet and best moon for studying the sun during an eclipse. Because the moon fits so perfectly over the sun, its blinding light is shielded, providing astronomers with a view of the sun's atmosphere. We can discern finer details in its chromosphere and corona than from any other planet.
- Being able to study the flash spectrum during a total eclipse enables astro-scientists to determine the chemical makeup of other, distant stars without leaving Earth.

These facts of *the heavens declare the glory of God!*

Michael Bakich wrote of the 2017 eclipse in *Astronomy Magazine* blog,

This eclipse will be the most-viewed ever. I base this proclamation on four factors: 1) the attention it will get from the media; 2) the superb coverage of the highway system in our country; 3) the typical weather on that date; and 4) the vast number of people who will have access to it from nearby large cities.[\[2\]](#)

I think this is true of the 2024 eclipse as well. Whether you

are fortunate enough to be in the path of the total eclipse like me, or will only get to see 75% of the sun's surface covered by the moon (with eclipse glasses, of course!), this extremely important sky event will be proclaiming to everyone that ***the heavens declare the glory of God***. May it make a lasting impression on us all that teaches us more about God's glory!

1. Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay W. Richards, *The Privileged Planet* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2004)

2.

<http://cs.astronomy.com/asy/b/astronomy/archive/2014/08/05/25-facts-you-should-know-about-the-august-21-2017-total-solar-eclipse.aspx>

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on Feb. 20, 2024.

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# Apologetics and Spiritual Skirmishing

*Kyle Skaggs urges Christians to use the spiritual armor of Ephesians 6 in engaging in apologetics.*

As I was working towards my degree at Dallas Baptist University I did volunteer work with an online ministry. There, I encountered people from all walks of life; all of them having questions about Christ and Christianity. For a while, I was doing well. I found joy in encouraging and counseling other believers. I also learned to tell the

difference between non-believers who were willing to listen and those who were only there to argue.

Around a week from graduation I logged to the ministry's website feeling confident. I'd spent hours reviewing various arguments and counterarguments, I was certain I would use what I had learned over four years to lead the conversation to the Gospel. This was not what happened. Instead, the people I talked to became either confused or frustrated before leaving. Figuring I was just having one of those bad days, I thought nothing of it. The same thing happened the next day. Now I was conflicted. I wondered why I was ineffective, because everything I said was supported by Scripture, so I logged off and puzzled over what I was doing wrong. While I was lost in my thoughts, a very clear voice in my head said, "You cannot lecture people into the Kingdom of God." I had forgotten 1 Peter 3:15; "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect..." That rebuke from the Holy Spirit sent me on a journey of reflection on the spiritual skirmishes that we so easily lose sight of in our daily routine.

## **Spiritual Warfare**

"Enemy-occupied territory—that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage." [\[1\]](#) Our adversaries are the rulers, authorities, and the powers of this dark world. (Ephesians 6:12) Every ideology, philosophy, and worldview not of the Gospel is controlled by the spiritual forces of darkness.

The devil knows his time is short (Revelation 12:12), so he is intent on dragging as many souls down with him as he can. To his annoyance, if you have already been saved by grace through faith, and are now saved, you are called to make disciples of

all nations (Matthew 28:19). He is resourceful, and if he can't stop you from having a relationship with God, then he will use every trick to make you as ineffective as possible in your walk with Christ, and in evangelism.

The Devil and his forces are relentless. Whenever we attempt to evangelize, every gap in our defenses can and will be exploited. How are we Christians to contend with these forces of darkness? Paul tells us to put on the full armor of God so that we can take our stand against the Devil's schemes. Let's take a look at the parts of the spiritual armor God provides.



## **The Belt of Truth**

First, we must remain grounded in the truth. Ephesians 6:14 refers to the Belt of Truth, which holds our equipment within easy reach. When we face an enemy whose only weapons are lies and deceptions, we have the advantage. We have nothing to hide! All we need to do is tell the truth!

To wear the belt is to be ready. There has been increasing pressure to ignore fundamental Christian teachings for the sake of convenience. Do not do this. Know your scripture and gird yourself in the truth of the Gospel.

# The Helmet of Salvation and the Breastplate of Righteousness

Second, we must wear the helmet of salvation (Ephesians 6:17) and the breastplate of righteousness (6:14) to turn aside any attacks that slip through our defenses. In those days, just as it is now, the helmet and breastplate are essential equipment to protect the head and the heart, and just one of the things separating the true soldier from the levy and the ad hoc militia.

In the same way, the certainty of our salvation and the righteousness of Christ are key pieces of our armor. As I have said before, Satan is ruthless. He will use every sin you have committed to shift your focus away from those who need Christ, and onto yourself. Being assured of our salvation and our righteousness before God is our greatest defense against these attacks.

## The Gospel of Peace

What made the Romans such a formidable force? Discipline and adaptability. Being able to march long distances and maneuver across a variety of terrain. Timing and distance determine the victor of any confrontation. To do this, they needed shoes that were durable and able to grip the ground firmly.



With the readiness that comes from the Gospel of Peace (Ephesians 6:15), we can rapidly move to where the Lord needs us. “[God’s Soldier’s] movements are dictated by the needs of the Gospel witness.”[\[2\]](#)

## The Shield of Faith



We are also told to take up the Shield of Faith (Ephesians 6:16) to extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one. The favored shield in the time Ephesians was written was the Roman *scutum*, a large shield that protected most of the soldier's body,

enabling the Romans to protect both themselves and each other in tight formations without sacrificing their defense when fighting in looser formations. Most deaths in ancient battles occurred after, during, and after a rout. Therefore projectiles were used to disrupt and to instill fear before the two sides met in melee. Standing firm against hails of projectiles was key to surviving the battle.

It is the same with all believers. Our faith is our primary defensive and offensive tool. People who have faith in Christ are willing to risk being made to look foolish. They are confident in the hope they have in Christ, and are therefore enabled to do great things. People who act out of faith inspire others to do the same. Our faith also protects us from the feelings, falsehoods, and ideas the Devil likes to use to discourage us. If we are discouraged from our walk, then we have already lost.

## The Sword of the Spirit

Finally, Ephesians 6:17 refers to the Sword of the Spirit, or the word of God. In conjunction with the *scutum* was the *gladius*, a short sword primarily used for thrusting and short cuts. It was the legionary's primary weapon. After throwing their *pila* (specialized javelins) to disrupt the enemy formation, the Romans drew their swords and closed the distance to engage in hand-to-hand fighting. Their armor and discipline enabled them to weather the brutal melee far better than their opponents. Ideally, this caused the enemy to rout.



There is a good reason the word of God is described as a sword in other passages. It is absolute truth. Revelations 9:15 and Hebrews 4:12 describe God's word as a double-edged sword. In Hebrews, Paul says "it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Like a sword, learning to use God's word effectively requires constant training. Christians should therefore study and seek to live according to the word so they can stand firm when confronted by the Enemy.

By being willing to close in, to deliver the word of God straight into the heart of the matter, shrewdly providing an answer for our faith with gentleness and respect, we can establish common ground with those who do not know Christ, thus opening the way for them to hear the gospel. We do this knowing full well that friends and even family may hate us for confronting the world. Because we are willing to push through, we are able to form relationships with people and show what it means to walk with Christ! As with Roman equipment in Jesus' day, the armor of God is tailor made to allow us to safely close the distance with the enemy, and with the word of God,

drive them from the field.

All we have to do is put it on.

### Notes

1. Lewis, C.S. *Mere Christianity*, 1952.
2. Ellicott, C. J. (1970). *Ellicott's commentary on the Whole Bible Volumes VII-VIII: Acts to Revelation*. Zondervan Publishing House. 1959.

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# Faith Trends in America: How Is Christianity Faring as We Enter the Third Decade of the 21st Century

*In looking at the state of American Christianity, Steve Cable examines how handling data inaccurately can produce wildly varying conclusions.*

Recent reports on the current state of Christianity in America could create emotional whiplash, making one feel elated one moment and depressed the next. People are quick to comment on survey results and their own experiences. Within the last year, we have run the gamut from Glenn Stanton's book, *The Myth of the Dying Church: How Christianity is Actually Thriving in America and the World*,[{1}](#) to a Pew Research article, *In U.S. Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace*.[{2}](#)



These titles appear to represent two very different

viewpoints. Which is it? Are we thriving or declining at a rapid pace?

Finding the answer requires one to thoughtfully articulate your question in at least two ways:

1. What do you mean by Christianity? Are you referring to all potential Christians both Protestant and Catholic or are you focused on a subset, such as Evangelicals? And,
2. Is anything beyond affiliation with a church necessary to be considered an active Christian? Examples might include a biblical understanding of how one gets to heaven and belief in the Bible.

You also need to thoroughly understand the available survey data that might throw light on your question. You need to understand what questions are asked and how they are worded. Then you analyze the responses to the set of relevant questions to gain insight on your topic of interest. Remember, no survey asks the exact questions you would ideally use. That sounds like more work than most of you want to attempt. Unfortunately, most of the pundits writing today do not attempt to do that work either. Generally, they take fragmented data and attempt to draw intelligent inferences.

In this article, I have done this work for you, drawing primarily on data from the Pew Research Group and the General Social Survey. We will look at which groups are growing as a percent of our population and which groups are not. Both Pew and the GSS have taken surveys over an extended period of time, helping us identify trends in religious affiliation and beliefs.

As you will see, the picture is certainly not rosy, but perhaps better than you expect. Although the growth of non-Christian segments is continuing at a fairly rapid pace, Evangelical Christianity is only declining slightly as a

percentage of the population. However, I will point out how some data has been misunderstood to paint either a rosier picture or a gloomier picture than the actual current state of affairs.

## **Evangelicals: Thriving or Declining**

All surveys we have reviewed covering this century show the same general result: the percent of people claiming an affiliation with a Protestant or Catholic church has been declining.

GSS surveys<sup>{3}</sup> found across all ages the percentage who identify as Protestant or Catholic has dropped from 84% of the population in 1988 down to 69% in 2018. Looking only at Protestants (both Evangelical and Mainline), the drop was from 58% down to 46%. Considering those who are Millennials now, that is ages 18 to 34, we find a decline from 53% down to 36% over this thirty-year period. And the data does not show any leveling off in the rate of decline.

But we may ask, “Are Evangelicals participating in this general decline or are they thriving as some authors claim?”

The bottom-line answer is that Evangelicals are declining as a percent of the overall population but at a much slower rate. Across all ages, the percentage who identify as Evangelical has dropped from 30% to 28% over this twenty-year period. For those aged 18 to 34 the drop was from 29% to 25%. In October 2019, Pew released a report showing that from 2009 to 2018, the percentage of Evangelicals of all ages dropped from 28% to 25%, a significantly faster rate of decline.

Even with a slow rate of decline, if Evangelicals make up around 25% of the population, they can have a significant impact on American culture and life and perhaps begin to grow again.

However, does Evangelical affiliation equate to an active

Evangelical practice? We need to know how many who affiliate with an Evangelical church *are active Christians* as opposed to just being affiliated if we want to truly assess the strength of the American Evangelical movement.

Using the GSS surveys, we can look for people who:

1. Know God really exists
2. Pray multiple times per day
3. Attend church at least twice a month
4. Believe the Bible is the inspired word of God, and
5. Call themselves a strong Christian

I think an active, evangelical Christian would have these basic beliefs and practices.

The percentage of the population who meet these criteria has dropped from about 9% down to just over 7% of the population over the last twenty years. This result is a large enough group to have some impact but not enough to crow about the growing Evangelical presence. We can say that Evangelical Christianity is certainly not thriving but clinging to a position of some relevance.

## **What's Happening with the Nones**

Nones are people who state their religious affiliation is either atheist, agnostic or nothing at all.[{4}](#) The dramatic growth of the Nones has been an ongoing headline story.

Surveys[{5}](#) indicate the Nones were 8% of the population in 1988. By 2018 they had grown to over 23% of the population. For ages 18 through 29, they tripled from 13% to 35% of the population. No one denies this growth, but some question the importance of this trend.

For example, Glenn Stanton states, "(The Nones) are simply reporting their actual faith practices in more candid ways, largely due to new ways in which polling questions have been

asked in the last ten years or so.”{6} Oddly enough, he primarily relies on data from GSS for long term trends and they have asked exactly the same question regarding Nones since 1972.{7}

Some suggest Nones are primarily Christians who will return to the fold as they move into marriage and child rearing. Is there any indication that this is happening?

Well, in 2007, among those aged 18 to 32, 24% of them are classified as Nones. In 2014, for this same group now seven years older, 32% of them are Nones. As this group began rearing children, *a significantly larger percentage of them were Nones than when they were younger*. Also, instead of attending church, only 4% of these Nones attend church more than once a month.

Instead of emerging adult Nones turning into church-attending Christians as they age, more of them are becoming Nones. It appears that the cultural pressures against Christianity are outweighing the tendency of prior generations returning to seek religious training for their children.

The Barna Group has found that there are genuine differences between Millennials and older generations that will not be removed as they age. As Dave Kinnaman, President of the Barna Group, states in his book, *UnChristian*,{8} “I would caution you not to underestimate the widening gap between young people and their predecessors. Those who think that in due time Mosaics . . . will ‘grow up’ and look like everyone else should prepare to have unfulfilled expectations.” Dave’s comment is based on their analysis of multiple surveys covering thousands of individuals and a large number of in-depth interviews with young adults.

## **Are the Nons THE Major Growth Story?**

Is the growth of nondenominational Christians a more important

trend than the Nones? Glenn Stanton states, “Growth of nondenominational churches has been many times larger than the nones. . . it is not the rise of the nones that is the major story . . . It’s the “nons” and not the nones that are mushrooming.”[{9}](#)

This condition would be an amazing finding if true. However, it is not true for three major reasons which we will discuss today:

1. The percentage growth of the “nons” is *not many times larger*. From 2007 to 2014, “nons” grew their percentage of the population by 44%. But, Nones grew by almost the same rate at 42%. Looking at absolute growth, the “nons” grew by four million people versus the Nones’ 19 million—almost five times the number of “nons.” The growth of the “nons” is relegated to a minor factor when compared to the Nones.

2. The “nons” are a subset of the Evangelicals. And Stanton states, “*Evangelicals* have benefited more from these ecclesiastical exoduses than anyone else. They even . . . *outpaced the nones.*”[{10}](#) In fact, most of the “nons” growth came as a result of switching between evangelical denominations. Thus, any growth by the “nons” is offset by declines in other evangelical groups, resulting in an overall *decline of about 1%*. Evangelicals have not even come close to outpacing the Nones.

In fact, *for the first time, we have the total number of nones exceeding the number of Evangelicals in America.*

3. Stanton says, “It’s the evangelical churches identifying as nondenominational that have been growing faster than any others including the nones and the atheists.”[{11}](#) Taking a look at percentage growth, *the atheists and agnostics have shown the most explosive growth by far*, growing their numbers from 9 million in 2007 to 17.4 million in 2014—a growth of 92%—while the “nons” grew from 8 million to 12

million over the same time period, a growth of 56%. So perhaps Stanton meant to say, "It's the non-believers and not the Nones that are mushrooming."

In summary, the growth of the "nons" may be of interest to those who study the relative make-up of Evangelicals in America. But to those interested in how Evangelicals are doing as a whole it is not relevant. The fact that the "nons" are increasing just reflects some churning of affiliations within the Evangelical realm. On the whole, Evangelicals are decreasing at a slow, but steady pace.

## **Confusing Expansion with Same-Store Growth**

A commercial enterprise may report sales growth. But the savvy investor wants to know why. Opening new stores may increase sales. But if it masks lower sales per existing store, it is a red flag. They are actually losing market share.

Similarly, with parachurch ministries, their number of locations gives little indication as to the health of Christianity. However, their growth rate per location can signal increased interest in Christianity.

Unfortunately, this distinction is often overlooked. For example, one pundit points to impressive growth by two respected student ministries in adding new locations as evidence to support an optimistic projection of Evangelical growth. However, they are not reporting an increased impact on a per site basis.

Looking at their annual reports, [{12}{13}](#) we see that one of them reports per location attendance *declining* at a rate of almost 1% per year over the last decade. [{14}](#) The other is declining even faster, reporting a growth rate of *negative* 3% per year. [{15}](#)

These declines could be caused by several different factors such as lower attendance at new locations, competition with other student groups, lower interest in their Christian message, etc. But we can be sure that these two ministries do not indicate an overall growth trend for Evangelicals.

Surveys and statistics can be very helpful in understanding the status of a ministry. However, we can be seriously misled by listening to those who do not know how to interpret the data contained in these sources.

Wrapping up our look at faith trends, in this article we saw:

1. American Evangelicals are declining slightly in the overall population with actively engaged Evangelicals holding about 7% of the population.
2. The Nones continue to grow and now exceed Evangelicals. Their growth clearly reflects the unimportance of religious affiliation among a large percentage of Americans.
3. The growth of Non-denominationals (although interesting) made no impact on the overall size of American Evangelicals and is less than the growth of atheists and agnostics.
4. Looking at growth per location of parachurch ministries is more important than growth in number of locations in assessing the growth of Christianity.

We live in a challenging time but Evangelical churches are strong enough to make a huge difference in America if we will follow the Holy Spirit's lead and present the eternal truth of the gospel in ways that communicate to today's "nothing in particular" culture.

## Notes

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15. For InterVarsity, we looked at 2007 and 2017.

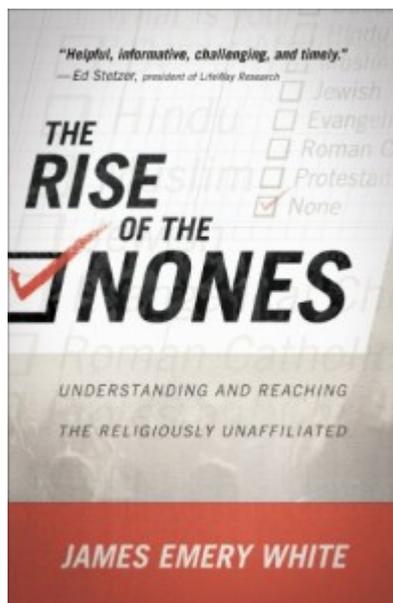
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# The Rise of the Nones –

# Reaching the Lost in Today's America

*Steve Cable addresses James White's book The Rise of the Nones in view of Probe's research about the church.*



Probe Ministries is committed to updating you on the status of Christianity in America. In this article, we consider James White's book, *The Rise of the Nones, Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated*.[\[1\]](#) His book addresses a critical topic since the fastest-growing religious group of our time is those who check "none" or "none of the above" on religious survey questions.

Let's begin by reviewing some observations about Christianity in America.



From the 1930's[\[2\]](#) into the early 1990's the percentage of *nones* in America[\[3\]](#) was less than 8%. But by 2012, the number had grown to 20% of all adults and appears to be increasing. Even more alarming, among those between the ages of 18 and 30 the percentage grew by a factor of three, from 11% in 1990 to nearly 32% in 2012.

Another study reported Protestantism is no longer the majority in the U.S., dropping from 66% in the 1960's down to 48% in 2012.

The *nones* tend to consider themselves to be liberal or moderate politically, in favor of abortion and same-sex

marriage being legal, and seldom if ever attend religious services. For the most part, they are not atheists and are not necessarily hostile toward religious institutions. However, among those who believe in “nothing in particular,” 88% are not even looking for a specific faith or religion.

One report concludes, “The challenge to Christianity . . . does not come from other religions, but from a rejection of all forms of organized religions. They’re not thinking about religion and rejecting it; they are not thinking about it at all.”<sup>{4}</sup> In fact, the 2011 Baylor survey found that 44% of Americans said they spend no time seeking “eternal wisdom,” and a Lifeway survey found that nearly half of Americans said they never wonder whether they will go to heaven.

As White notes, these changes in attitude come in the wake of a second major attack on traditional Christian beliefs. The first set of attacks consisted of:

1. Copernicus attacking the existence of God
2. Darwin attacking God’s involvement in creation, and
3. Freud attacking our very concept of a creator God.

The second storm of attacks focuses on perceptions of how Christians think in three important areas.

1. An over entanglement with politics linked to anti-gay, sexual conservatism, and abrasiveness
2. Hateful aggression that has the church talking in ways that have stolen God’s reputation, and
3. An obsession with greed seen in televangelist transgressions and mega-pastor materialism, causing distrust of the church.

These perceptions, whether true or not, create an environment where there is no benefit in the public mind to self-

identifying with a Christian religious denomination.

## **Living in a Post-Christian America**

A 2013 Barna study<sup>{5}</sup> shows America rapidly moving into a post-Christian status. Their survey-based study came to this conclusion: over 48% of young adults are post-Christian, and “The influence of post-Christian trends is likely to increase and is a significant factor among today’s youngest Americans.”<sup>{6}</sup>

White suggests this trend is the result of “three deep and fast-moving cultural currents: secularization, privatization, and pluralization.”<sup>{7}</sup>

### **Secularization**

Secularization teaches the secular world is reality and our thoughts about the spiritual world are fantasy. White states: “We seem quite content to accept the idea of faith being privately engaging but culturally irrelevant.”<sup>{8}</sup> In a society which is not affirming of public religious faith, it is much more difficult to hold a vibrant, personal faith.

### **Privatization**

Privatization creates a chasm between the public and private spheres of life, trivializing Christian faith to the realm of opinion. Nancy Pearcey saw this, saying, “The most pervasive thought pattern of our times is the two-realm view of truth.”<sup>{9}</sup> In it, the first and public realm is secular truth that states, “Humans are machines.” The second and private realm of spirituality states, “Moral and humane ideals have no basis in truth, as defined by scientific naturalism. But we affirm them anyway.”<sup>{10}</sup>

### **Pluralization**

Pluralization tells us all religions are equal in their lack

of ultimate truth and their ability to deliver eternity. Rather speaking the truth of Christ, our post-modern ethic tells us we can each have our own truth. As reported in our book, *Cultural Captives*[{11}](#), about 70% of evangelical, emerging adults are pluralists. Pluralism results in making your own suit out of patches of different fabrics and patterns and expecting everyone else to act as if it were seamless.

White sums up today's situation this way: "They forgot that their God was . . . radically other than man . . . They committed religion functionally to making the world better in human terms and intellectually to modes of knowing God fitted only for understanding this world."[{12}](#)

This combination of secularization, privatization and pluralization has led to a mishmash of "bad religion" overtaking much of mainstream Christianity. The underlying basis of the belief systems of *nones* is that there is a lot of truth to go around. In this post-modern world, it is considered futile to search for absolute truth. Instead, we create our own truth from the facts at hand and as necessary despite the facts. Of course, this creates the false (yet seemingly desirable) attribute that neither we, nor anyone else, have to recognize we are sinners anymore. With no wrong, we feel no need for the ultimate source of truth, namely God.

## **If You Build It, They Won't Come**

We've been considering the beliefs and thinking of the *nones*. Can we reach them with the gospel, causing them to genuinely consider the case for Christ?

We are not going to reach them by doing more of the same. Statistics indicate that we are not doing a good job of reaching the *nones*.

As James White notes, "The very people who say they want unchurched people to . . . find Jesus resist the most basic .

. . issues related to building a relationship with someone apart from Christ, . . . and inviting them to an open, winsome, and compelling front door so they can come and see.”{13}

Paul had to change his approach when addressing Greeks in Athens. In the same way, we need to understand how to speak to the culture we want to penetrate.

In the 1960’s, a non-believer was likely to have a working knowledge of Christianity. They needed to personally respond to the offer of salvation, not just intellectually agree to its validity. This situation made revivals and door-to-door visitation excellent tools to reach lost people.

Today, we face a different dynamic among the *nones*. “The goal is not simply knowing how to articulate the means of coming to Christ; it is learning how to facilitate and enable the person to progress from [little knowledge of Christ], to where he or she is able to even consider accepting Christ.”{14}

The rise of the *nones* calls for a new strategy for effectiveness. Today, cause should be the leading edge of our connection with many of the *nones*, in terms of both arresting their attention and enlisting their participation.

Up through the 1980s, many unchurched would respond for salvation and then be incorporated into the church and there become drawn to Christian causes. From 1990 through the 2000s, unchurched people most often needed to experience fellowship in the body before they were ready to respond to the gospel. Today, we have *nones* who are first attracted to the causes addressed by Christians. Becoming involved in those causes, they are attracted to the community of believers and gradually they become ready to respond to the gospel.

We need to be aware of how these can be used to offer the good news in a way that can penetrate through the cultural fog. White puts it this way, “Even if it takes a while to get to

talking about Christ, (our church members) get there. And they do it with integrity and . . . credibility. . . Later I've seen those *nones* enfolded into our community and before long . . . the waters of baptism."[{15}](#)

Relating to *nones* may be outside your comfort zone, but God has called us to step out to share His love.

## **Combining Grace and Truth in a Christian Mind**

Every day we are on mission to the unchurched around us. James White suggests ways we can communicate in a way that the *nones* can understand.

We need to take to heart the three primary tasks of any missionary to an unfamiliar culture. First, learn how to communicate with the people we are trying to reach. Second, become sensitized to the new culture to operate effectively within it. Third, "translate the gospel into its own cultural context so that it can be heard, understood, and appropriated."[{16}](#)

The growth of the *nones* comes largely from Mainline Protestants and Catholics, right in the squishy middle where there is little emphasis on the truth of God's word. How can we confront them with truth in a loving way?

The gospel of John tells us, "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."[{17}](#) Jesus brought the free gift of grace grounded in eternal truth. As we translate the gospel in today's cultural context for the *nones*, this combination needs to shine through our message. What does it look like to balance grace and truth?

- If we are communicating no grace and no truth, we are following the example of Hinduism.

- If we are high on grace – but lacking in truth, we give license to virtually any lifestyle and perspective, affirming today’s new definition of tolerance.
- On the other hand, “truth without grace: this is the worst of legalism . . . – what many *nones* believe to be the hallmark of the Christian faith.” The real representative of dogma without grace is Islam.” In a survey among 750 Muslims who had converted to Christianity, they said that as Muslims, they could never be certain of their forgiveness and salvation as Christians can.
- Grace is the distinctive message of Christianity but never remove it from the truth of the high cost Christ paid. Jesus challenged the religious thought of the day with the truth of God’s standard. Recognizing we cannot achieve that standard, we are run to the grace of God by faith.

To communicate the truth, we need to respond to the new questions *nones* are asking of any faith. As White points out, “I do not encounter very many people who ask questions that classical apologetics trained us to answer . . . Instead, the new questions have to do with significance and meaning.” Questions such as, “So, what?” and “Is this God of yours really that good?”

We need to be prepared to “give a defense for the hope that is within us” in ways that the *nones* around us can resonate with, such as described in our article *The Apologetics of Peter* on our website.

## **Opening the Front Door to *Nones***

The *nones* desperately need the truth of Jesus, yet it is a challenge to effectively reach them. “Reaching out to a group of people who have given up on the church, . . . we must renew our own commitment to the very thing they have rejected – the church.”[\[18\]](#) The fact that some in today’s culture have

problems with today's church does not mean that God intends to abandon it.

The church needs to grasp its mandate "to engage in the process of 'counter-secularization'. . . There are often disparaging quips made about organized religion, but there was nothing disorganized about the biblical model."[{19}](#) We all have a role to play in making our church a force for the gospel in our community.

It must be clear to those outside that we approach our task with civility and unity. Our individual actions are not sufficient to bring down the domain of darkness. Jesus told us that if those who encounter the church can sense the unity holding us together they will be drawn to its message.

How will the *nones* come into contact with the unity of Christ? It will most likely be through interaction with a church acting as the church. As White points out, "If the church has a "front door," and it clearly does, why shouldn't it be . . . strategically developed for optimal impact for . . . all *nones* who may venture inside?"[{20}](#) Surveys indicate that 82 percent of unchurched people would come to church this weekend if they were invited by a friend.

One way we have a chance to interact with *nones* is when they expose their children to a church experience. Children's ministry is not something to occupy our children while we have church, but is instead a key part of our outreach to the lost *nones* in our community. "What you do with their children could be a deal breaker."

In today's culture, we cannot overemphasize the deep need for visual communication. Almost everyone is attuned to visually receiving information and meaning. By incorporating visual arts in our church mainstream, "it has a way of sneaking past the defenses of the heart. And *nones* need a lot snuck past them."[{21}](#)

We need to keep evangelism at the forefront. “This is no time to wave the flag of social ministry and justice issues so single-mindedly in the name of cultural acceptance and the hip factor that it becomes our collective substitute for the clear articulation of the gospel.”[\[22\]](#)

White clearly states our goal, “Our only hope and the heart of the Great Commission, is to stem the tide by turning the nones into wons.”[\[23\]](#)

## Notes

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## Smuggling Theology Into “Out of the Silent Planet”

*Dr. Michael Gleghorn provides an overview of how C.S. Lewis wove theology into his ‘Out of the Silent Planet,’ the first book of his space trilogy,*

*Out of the Silent Planet, C.S. Lewis’ first foray into the science-fiction genre, was originally published in 1938.<sup>{1}</sup> Lewis, who appreciated the science-fiction stories of authors like H. G. Wells, was nonetheless troubled by elements in these stories that were morally and intellectually objectionable. According to Alister McGrath, Lewis realized “that the forms of science fiction . . . used to promote various forms of atheism and materialism could . . . be used to critique these viewpoints and advocate an alternative.”<sup>{2}</sup> This is what Lewis did in *Out of the Silent Planet*—and what he continued to do in two follow-up books: *Perelandra* and *That Hideous Strength*. Together, these books are commonly known as “the Space Trilogy.”*

*Out of the Silent Planet* tells the story of Dr. Elwin Ransom, who is drugged, kidnapped, and taken aboard a spaceship traveling to Mars. Weston and Devine, the two men who kidnap Ransom, have been to Mars before and believe that the planet's inhabitants want them to bring back another human being (wrongly assuming that the person *may* be wanted as a sacrificial offering). Weston is a physicist, interested in finding potential planets for humanity to colonize once our own planet becomes uninhabitable. Devine is an investor, hoping to make some money from the enterprise.



On their way to Mars (known as Malacandra to its own inhabitants), Ransom learns that his life may be in danger once they reach the planet. Hence, shortly after their arrival, Ransom escapes his kidnappers and ends up meeting a creature called a Hross, one of the planet's native inhabitants. He soon discovers that, much like himself, these are intelligent and moral beings. Indeed, in some ways they, along with the other intelligent species on the planet, are superior to human beings, for they have not been infected with the same moral illness that plagues our own species. Eventually, Ransom even meets the designated ruler of the planet, a spiritual intelligence referred to as an Oyarsa. He then learns why earth is known as "the silent planet."[\[3\]](#)

After publishing the book, Lewis confided to one interested correspondent that most of the early reviews had completely missed of Christian theology that he had woven into his narrative. He humorously noted that, apparently, "any amount of theology can now be smuggled into" such a book without anyone's even noticing.[\[4\]](#) So how much theology did Lewis "smuggle into" *Out of the Silent Planet*? That's what we'll discuss in the remainder of this article.

## The Heavens Declare the Glory

As Weston, Devine, and Ransom travel through space on their way to Mars, Ransom is surprised by just how *good* he is feeling: courageous, joyful, alert, and full of life. He reflects upon the fact that he had been educated to regard space as “the black, cold vacuity” separating the worlds. He comes to realize, however, that this was all wrong. The term “space,” he muses, was utterly inadequate “for this . . . ocean of radiance in which they swam.” He thus *rejects* the term, observing that “Older thinkers had been wiser when they named it simply the heavens—the heavens which declared the glory.”[\[5\]](#)

Ransom is here reflecting upon the words of King David in Psalm 19:1, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.” As one commentator remarks, “David was moved by observing that the heavens, under the dominating influence of the sun, declare the splendor of God’s handiwork.”[\[6\]](#) The reference to the sun here is apt, for it is largely through the influence of the solar rays that Ransom feels “his body and mind daily rubbed and scoured and filled with new vitality.”[\[7\]](#)

Of course, we must remember that Lewis is here writing science *fiction*—and not science fact. While “the substitution of heaven for space” was Lewis’s “favorite idea in the book,” he also acknowledged “that the rays in interplanetary space, so far from being beneficial,” would actually be harmful to us.[\[8\]](#) But Lewis was attempting to reintroduce a conception of wonder and beauty into the world. He wanted to move his readers’ understanding of “space” from something merely cold, dark, and dead, to a conception of the “heavens” as something radiant and alive with the goodness and bounty of their Creator. And this, in the fictional (and even mythological) world of the story, he has arguably achieved.

Indeed, it’s one of the reasons that many dislike referring to

these books as “the *space* trilogy.” Such language misses the fact that Lewis was attempting to shift our attention from the darkness and deadness of “space” to the glory and splendor of the “heavens.” It’s just one of the ways in which Lewis was attempting to reclaim for God a genre of literature that was so often dominated by atheistic and materialistic forms of thinking.[\[9\]](#)

## War in Heaven

Before we go any further, we must address the meaning of Lewis’s title, “*Out of the Silent Planet*.” The novel concerns a voyage from Earth to Mars, and details the adventures of the main character, Dr. Elwin Ransom, after his arrival. In the novel, Earth is known as “the *silent* planet.” But why?

The answer has partly to do with “smuggled theology” and partly with the mythological world of the story created by Lewis. In this mythological world, we are introduced to the idea that each planet in our solar system is ruled by a very great, though still created, spiritual being. These beings were created by God and are something like a cross between a Christian archangel and a Roman god or goddess. Hence, the spirit that governs Mars is something like a cross between the archangel Michael and the Roman god Mars (devoid, of course, of all the negative characteristics traditionally ascribed to Mars in Greco-Roman mythology). In fact, this being is a loyal servant of God and was created (at least in part) for the purpose of ruling the planet assigned to it. In the novel, such a ruling spiritual power is referred to as an *Oyarsa*.

Eventually, Ransom meets this ruling power and learns why Earth is known as “the silent planet.” He is told that the *Oyarsa* of *our* world was once very great, even greater than that of Mars.[\[1\]](#)<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, however, he became “bent” (or evil). This happened in the distant past, before there was any life on Earth. Because this “Bent One” desired to destroy

“other worlds besides his own,” there was “great war” in the heavens. Eventually, he was “bound . . . in the air of his own world.” “There,” Ransom learns, “doubtless he lies to this hour.”[{11}](#) The other planets have no communication with Earth. It is “silent.”

Do you see what Lewis is doing? In the fictional world of the novel, he is telling us a story very similar to that of the fall of the devil. In the Bible, the Apostle Paul refers to Satan as the “prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:1-2) and the “god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4). Lewis is doing something similar in his description of the “Bent One” who rules the Earth as a rebel against God. But Lewis goes much further than this.

## War on Earth

Above, we left Ransom, the hero of C. S. Lewis’s novel, *Out of the Silent Planet*, deep in conversation with the divinely appointed spiritual ruler of Mars. After telling Ransom that Earth, alone among the planets in our solar system, is “silent,” being ruled by a “bent” (or evil) power, the Martian ruler then says something quite intriguing.

He tells Ransom that they do not think that “Maleldil” (more on this in a moment) would completely surrender Earth to the “Bent One.” Indeed, he says, “there are stories among us” that Maleldil has done some “strange” and wonderful things, even personally appearing on Earth and “wrestling with the Bent One” for the right to rule. “But of this,” he says, “we know less than you; it is a thing we desire to look into.”[{12}](#)

So who is Maleldil, and what exactly has he done? In the world of the novel, Maleldil is the name for God in the Old Solar language, which Ransom has gradually learned during his time on Mars.[{13}](#) Hence, the Martian ruler is essentially telling Ransom that they do not believe that God would completely

surrender Earth to the devil. Indeed, they have even heard stories that God (or Maleldil) has visited “the silent planet” and done battle with the evil one. He admits that there is much they do not know about all this but says that he (and other loyal servants of God) long to look into these things.

Those familiar with the Bible will doubtless see what Lewis is doing here, for he concludes this passage with what is basically a biblical quotation. The Apostle Peter wrote of “the prophets who prophesied about the grace” that was to be ours in Christ. So great was the content of this revelation, notes Peter, that even “angels long to look” into such things (1 Peter 1:10-12). Thus, as Christiana Hale rightly notes, the “strange counsel” that Maleldil has taken, and the wonderful things he has done, “the things that all the angels desire to look into, is the Gospel of Jesus Christ: the Incarnation, birth, death, and resurrection of the Son of God.”[{14}](#)

Once again, therefore, we see Lewis “smuggling theology” into his interplanetary space adventure. In this case, though not stating it explicitly, he clearly alludes to the whole gospel message about Jesus. Next, we’ll consider one final example of “smuggled theology” in C. S. Lewis’s *Out of the Silent Planet*.

## **Divine Providence and the Martial Spirit**

Although God, who is known as Maleldil in the novel, is mentioned repeatedly, He is always mentioned in the third person. We hear about things that Maleldil *has done, is doing,* or may one day *do*, but we do not hear directly from God (or Maleldil) himself. Nevertheless, it is clear that He is ultimately in charge, and He is providentially at work in and through His creatures.[{15}](#)

For example, the spiritual power that Maleldil created to govern Mars, tells Ransom (the hero of the novel) that it was only by Maleldil that he had been able to save his own planet

from the destructive rage of the “Bent One” (or devil). Indeed, it was only by Maleldil that the heavenly host were able to stop the “Bent One’s” ambitious cruelty and confine him to the Earth.[{16}](#) Moreover, we learn that Maleldil has done marvelous things and even personally visited Earth to do battle with the devil.[{17}](#)

Lewis thus portrays God (or Maleldil) not only as a king, but also as a warrior. He is characterized (in an appropriate way) by what might be called the “warrior” or “martial spirit.” Moreover, the spiritual power that Maleldil created to govern Mars is also (like the god of Roman mythology) imbued with the martial spirit. He, too, is a warrior, loyally engaged in fighting in the service of God. In light of this, once we learn that Ransom has been called to Mars by its planetary ruler, we can rightly surmise that it was, in fact, *God’s will* for Ransom to make this journey. We might even guess that one of the purposes of this journey was to develop the “martial spirit” in Ransom himself.

As Christiana Hale observes, “Lewis does not randomly pick Mars as the location, as if any alien planet would do. No, he chooses Mars for a reason, and an enormous part of that reason is to mold Ransom into a Martial character.”[{18}](#) In other words, God (or Maleldil) wants to develop certain martial virtues in Ransom, things like courage, strength, determination, perseverance, and grit. Indeed, this is providentially necessary, for He is preparing Ransom for something far greater in the future. Hence, through the providence of God and the influence of Mars, we witness Ransom’s growth in the martial spirit, thus preparing him for [his next great adventure](#) on a different alien world, that of Perelandra.

## Notes

1. C. S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1965).
2. Alister McGrath, *C. S. Lewis: A Life: Eccentric Genius*,

- Reluctant Prophet* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013), 234-35.
3. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 120-21.
  4. C. S. Lewis to Sister Penelope CSMV, August 9, 1939, in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. Walter Hooper, vol. 2, Books, Broadcasts and War 1931-1949 (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2004), 262.
  5. All quotations in this paragraph are taken from Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 32.
  6. Allen P. Ross, "Psalms," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament Edition*. ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Victor Books, 1985), 807.
  7. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 31-32.
  8. C. S. Lewis to Mrs. Stuart Moore (Evelyn Underhill), October 29, 1938, in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. Walter Hooper, vol. 2, Books, Broadcasts and War 1931-1949 (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2004), 233-34.
  9. See Alister McGrath, *C. S. Lewis: A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013), 234-35.
  10. See Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 120-21.
  11. All quotations in the paragraph are taken from Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 121.
  12. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 121.
  13. Christiana Hale, *Deeper Heaven: A Reader's Guide to C. S. Lewis's Ransom Trilogy* (Moscow, ID: Roman Roads Press, 2020), 155.
  14. Hale, *Deeper Heaven*, 88.
  15. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 67-8.
  16. *Ibid.*, 121.
  17. *Ibid.*
  18. Hale, *Deeper Heaven*, 70.

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# Money Management in a Crisis

*The COVID pandemic caused a worldwide financial crisis, making stewarding God's money more important than ever. Kerby Anderson provides a biblical view of money, giving, debt, and savings.*

A number of years ago, I wrote a book with the appropriate title, *Making the Most of Your Money in Tough Times*.[\[1\]](#) Although there have been tough times in the past, we certainly need some biblical wisdom about our money and how to manage it in our current circumstances. Here are some key principles that I discuss in that book and in a more recent book on the subject of *Christians and Economics*.[\[2\]](#)

## Biblical View on Money

Let's start by correcting a common cliché that money is the root of all evil. Actually, the biblical passage says: "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness" (1 Timothy 6:10).



Money is not evil, but the love of money can be a concern. Money can be used to promote good or evil. Money can provide for your family, feed the poor, and promote the gospel. It can also be used to buy drugs, engage in prostitution, and destroy individuals and society.

The real question is: What is your attitude towards money? What do you plan to do with the financial resources God has placed into your hands? Jesus warned us that we should not love money because we cannot serve God and Mammon (Matthew 6:24). In order to have a proper biblical perspective on

money, we need to understand what the Bible teaches about wealth and poverty.

While we are talking about money, let's focus some attention on wealth. Within the Christian community, we are often bombarded with unbiblical views of wealth. At one extreme are those who preach a prosperity gospel of "health and wealth" for all believers. At the other extreme are radical Christians who condemn all wealth and imply that a rich Christian is a contradiction in terms.

What is a biblical view of wealth? First, wealth itself is not condemned. The Bible teaches that God gave material wealth to Abraham (Genesis 13), Isaac (Genesis 26), Jacob (Genesis 30), and Joseph (Genesis 39). Other characters in the Old Testament were also wealthy, such as Job (Job 42) and Solomon (1 Kings 3). In fact, we see in Job 42 that God once again blessed Job with material possessions after his trials. In Deuteronomy, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, wealth is seen as evidence of God's blessing (Deuteronomy 8; 28; Proverbs 22:2; Ecclesiastes. 5:19).

Even though wealth might be an evidence of God's blessing, believers are not to trust in it. Passages in the Old Testament and the New Testament teach that the believer should not trust in wealth but in God (Proverbs 11:4; 11:28; Jeremiah 9:23; 1 Timothy 6:17; James 1:11; 5:2).

Second, when wealthy people in the Bible were condemned, they were condemned for the means by which their riches were obtained, not for the riches themselves. The Old Testament prophet Amos railed against the injustice of obtaining wealth through oppression or fraud (4:11; 5:11). Micah spoke out against the unjust scales and light weights with which Israel defrauded the poor (6:1). Neither Amos nor Micah condemned wealth per se; they only denounced the unjust means by which it is sometimes achieved.

Third, Christians should be concerned about the effect wealth can have on our lives. We read in many passages that wealth often tempts us to forget about God. Proverbs 30:8-9 says: "Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food that is my portion, That I not be full and deny You and say, 'Who is the Lord?'" Hosea 13:6 says of those who were satisfied that "their heart became proud" and ultimately forget about the Lord.

## **Biblical View on Giving**

In order to develop a biblical point of view on money, we should first focus on the subject of giving. The concept of the tithe is introduced in the Old Testament. The word tithe means "a tenth part." Once you understand that someone who, say, makes \$3000 a month and gives only \$100 a month is not tithing. A number of studies have found that only 2-3 percent of households tithe their income to their church.

There is no explicit command in the New Testament to tithe. The primary reason is that the tithe was for the Levites and the priests. The substitutionary death of Christ for our sins did away with the need for a temple and priests.

In the New Testament, we do see numerous verses calling for believers to give. For example, we are to give to those who minister (1 Corinthians 16:1; Galatians 2:10). We are to give to those who trust God to supply their needs (Philippians 4:19). We are to give as God has prospered them (1 Corinthians 16:2) and are to give cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7). And the Bible teaches that we will ultimately give account of our stewardship (Romans 14:12).

The first century believers set a high standard for giving. They sold their goods and gave money to any believer in need (Acts 2:45). They sold their property and gave the entire amount to the work of the apostles (Acts 4:36-5:2). And they

also gave generously to the ministry of Paul (2 Corinthians 8:1-5) on a continual basis (Philippians 4:16-18).

Even though the tithe was no longer required, it appears that the early believers used the tithe as a base line for their giving. After all, a large majority of the first century believers were Jewish, and so they gave not only the tithe but above and beyond the requisite ten percent.

Paul makes it clear that Christians are not to give “grudgingly or under compulsion” but as each believer has “purposed in his heart” (2 Corinthians 9:7). Although the tithe was no longer the mandatory requirement, it seems to have provided a basis for voluntary giving by believers.

There is also a correlation between sowing and reaping. 2 Corinthians 9:6 says: “Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” Elsewhere in Scripture, we read that the size of a harvest corresponds to what we scatter. Proverbs 11:24-25 says: “There is one who scatters, and yet increases all the more, And there is one who withholds what is justly due, and yet it results only in want. The generous man will be prosperous, And he who waters will himself be watered.” Notice that a spiritual harvest may be different from the kind of seed that is sown. For example, a material seed (giving to ministry) may reap a spiritual harvest (1 Corinthians 9:9).

Finally, we are to give according to what we have purposed in our hearts. 2 Corinthians 9:7 says: “Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

## **Biblical View on Debt – Part 1**

The Bible has a number of warnings concerning debt. Proverbs 22:7 says: “The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is a servant to the lender.” When you borrow money and put yourself

in debt, you put yourself in a situation where the lender has significant influence over you.

Many other verses in the Proverbs also warn about the potential danger of taking on debt, especially another person's debt (Proverbs 17:18; 22:26-27; 27:13). While this does not mean that we can never be in debt, it does warn us about its dangers.

If you are debt free you are free to follow the Lord's leading in your life. If you are in debt, you are constrained and become a servant to the lender. People who are in financial bondage are not emotionally or spiritually free. Their financial obligations wear heavy upon their mind and spirit.

The Bible also teaches that it is wrong to borrow and not repay. Psalm 37:21 says: "The wicked borrows and does not pay back, but the righteous is gracious and gives."

Some have taught that Christians should never go into debt. The basis for that teaching is usually the passage in Romans 13:8 because it says: "Owe nothing to anyone."

Although some have argued that this verse prohibits debt, the passage needs to be seen in context. This passage is not a specific teaching about debt but rather a summary of our duty as Christians to governmental authority. Paul is teaching that we should not owe anything to anyone (honor, taxes, etc.). But he is not teaching that we should never incur debt. While it is better that we are debt-free, this passage is not commanding us to never go into debt.

The Bible is filled with biblical passages that provide guidelines to lending and borrowing. If debt was always wrong, then these passages would not exist. After all, why have passages providing guidelines for debt if debt is not permitted? Certainly there would be a clear prohibition against debt. We should point out that the clear implication of Romans 13:8 is that we should pay our debts and it would be

wise if we would pay our debts off as quickly as possible.

## **Biblical View on Debt – Part 2**

One of the consequences of debt is that we can often deny reality. In order to realistically deal with the debt in our lives we need to get rid of some of the silly ideas running around in our heads.

For example, you are NOT going to win the lottery. Your debt problem is NOT going to go away if you just ignore it. And a computer glitch in your lender's computer is NOT going to accidentally wipe out your financial records so that you don't have to repay your debt.

Another consequence of debt is a loss of integrity. When we cannot pay, we start saying "the check's in the mail" when it isn't. We not only kid ourselves but we try to mislead others about the extent of our problem with debt.

Sometimes debt even leads to dishonesty. Psalm 37:21 says: "The wicked borrows and does not pay back." We should repay our debts.

A third consequence of debt is addiction. Debt is addictive. Once in debt we begin to get comfortable with cars, consumer goods, furniture, etc. all funded through debt. Once we reach that comfort level, we go into further debt.

A final consequence of debt is stress. Stress experts have calculated the impact of various stress factors on our lives. Some of the greatest are death of a spouse and divorce. But it is amazing how many other stress factors are financially related (change in financial state, mortgage over \$100,000). When we owe more than we can pay, we worry and feel a heavy load of stress that wouldn't exist if we lived debt free.

# Biblical View on Savings



It is always important for us to get out of debt. I have written another booklet on the subject of debt. If you are in debt or want to learn more about government debt and personal debt, I encourage you to obtain that booklet. Email me your name and address at [kerby@probe.org](mailto:kerby@probe.org) and I will send it to you.

We should not merely work to get out of debt and eventually break even. Savings and investing should be part of your budget and part of your life plan. Saving and investing are ultimately a means to an end. You may be saving for your kids' college or saving for your retirement.

America used to be a nation of savers. In fact, thrift was a foundational element of American society. The architect Louis Sullivan even carved the word THRIFT over the door of his bank. Thrift was seen as a private moral virtue that made public prosperity possible. Americans supported institutions that encouraged savings.

The Bible encourages us to save. In Proverbs it encourages those who do not save to consider how a lowly creature like the ant prepares for the future. "Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest" (Proverbs 6:6-8).

The writer of Proverbs also talks about how wise people save in contrast to foolish people who do not. "In the house of the wise are stores of choice food and oil, but a foolish man

devours all he has" (Proverbs 21:20).

We should always have a budget. Author and speaker, John Maxwell, has a great definition of a budget: "A budget is people telling their money what to do instead of wondering where it went." A budget is a plan for saving and spending.

The book of Proverbs admonishes us to plan. Proverbs 16:3 says, "Commit your works to the LORD And your plans will be established." But as we develop these plans for the future, we also need to be sensitive to the Lord's leading. "The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps" (Proverbs 16:9).

The Bible promises that good things will happen when we plan. "Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity" (Proverbs 21:5, NLT). By contrast, the Bible also teaches that your plans will fail if these plans are not within the will of God. Isaiah 30:1 says, "'Destruction is certain for my rebellious children,' says the Lord. 'You make plans that are contrary to my will. You weave a web of plans that are not from my Spirit, thus piling up your sins.'"

If you do not have anything in savings, you need to begin by putting aside a cash reserve for emergencies. Proverbs 22:5 says, "The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it." Everyone needs a cash reserve for major emergencies (fire, tornado, earthquake) and even for small emergencies and inconveniences (broken appliance, car repair, flat tire).

Most financial advisors suggest that you have six months' worth of income set aside for an emergency or unexpected expense. You may not have that set aside right now, but today is a good time to start setting aside some money. Make your first goal to set aside one month's worth of income.

This has been a brief overview of money management. I encourage you to read books [\[3\]](#) and visit websites that will

give you even more direction on how to use your money. The Bible provides insight in giving, savings, and debt. Apply these principles and allow God to bless you.

## Notes

1. Kerby Anderson, *Making the Most of Your Money in Tough Times* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House), 2009.

2. Kerby Anderson, *Christians and Economics* (Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House), 2016).

3. Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possession and Eternity* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House), 2003.

Kerby Anderson, *Christians and Economics* (Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House), 2016.

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# Did Adam Really Exist?

*Were Adam and Eve really the first pair of humans? Rick Wade responds to theistic evolution and OT scholar Peter Enns' belief the human race did not begin with Adam.*

## Paul and Adam

In 2011, *Christianity Today* reported on the growing acceptance of theistic evolution in the evangelical community and one possible implication of it. If humans did evolve along with other species, was there a real historical first couple? Did

Adam and Eve really exist?

✘ In this article I'll address a couple of theological problems this claim raises and a question of interpretation. I'll look at the views of evangelical Old Testament scholar Peter Enns who denies a historical Adam; not, however, to single him out as a target, but rather because he raises the important issues in his writings.

Enns denies a historical Adam for two main reasons. One is that, as far as he is concerned, the matter of evolution is settled. There was no first human couple.[{1}](#) The other is his belief that Genesis 1 describes the origins of the world in the mythological framework of the ancient Near East, and thus isn't historical, and that Genesis 2 describes the origins of *Israel*, not *human* origins.[{2}](#) So Genesis doesn't intend to teach a historical Adam and Eve, and evolutionary science has proved that they couldn't have existed.

Let's begin with the question of how sin entered the world if there were no Adam.

In Romans chapter 5, the apostle Paul says sin, condemnation, and death came through the act of a man, Adam. This is contrasted with the act of another man, Jesus, which brought grace and righteousness.

However, if there were no historical Adam, where did sin come from? Enns says the Bible doesn't tell us.[{3}](#) The Old Testament gives no indication, he says, "that Adam's disobedience is the cause of universal sin, death, and condemnation, as Paul seems to argue."[{4}](#) Paul was a man of his time who drew from a common understanding of human beginnings to explain the universality of sin. Enns acknowledges universal sin and the need for a Savior.[{5}](#) He just doesn't know how this situation came about. The fact that Adam didn't exist, Enns believes, does nothing to take away from Paul's main point, namely, that salvation comes only

through Christ for all people, both Jews and Gentiles. Is this true?

## Paul and Adam: A Response

There are a few problems with this interpretation. First, there is a logical problem. Theologian Richard Gaffin points out that, in Rom. 5:12, 17, and 18, a connection is made between the “one man” through whom sin came and the “all” to whom it was spread. If sin really didn’t come in through the “one”—Adam—and spread to the “all”—you and me—how do we take seriously Paul’s further declaration that “one man’s act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all”?

Second, there is a piling on of error in Paul’s claim. One of Enns’ foundational beliefs is that God used human understanding to convey His truths in Scripture. God spoke through the myths of the ancient world when He inspired the writing of Genesis.[{6}](#) If Enns is correct, one would expect that God was using the Genesis myth to reveal something true in Paul’s claim about Adam. In other words, the Old Testament story would be opened up so a truth would be revealed. However, Paul’s first point, that sin came through Adam to the race (Rom. 5:12), is in fact false, according to Enns. The following truth, about righteousness coming through Christ, is beside the point here. Paul’s assertion about Adam isn’t simply a *historical* one; it is a *doctrinal* one, too. The traditional teaching of the church regarding the source of sin, death, and condemnation is therefore false. Paul delivered a false teaching based upon a non-historical myth. He should have left Adam out of his discussion. It does nothing to buttress his claim about Christ.

Enns says that this matter of the origin of sin is “a vital issue to work through, . . . one of the more pressing and inevitable philosophical and theological issues before us.”[{7}](#) One has to wonder, though: if Paul didn’t have the answer, and

he was taught by Christ directly, and if the rest of Scripture is silent about such an important matter, can we really think we can ferret out the solution ourselves?

## Paul's Use of the Old Testament

The use of the Old Testament in the New Testament is of great significance in this matter. How does Paul get the point he made out of Genesis if it isn't true?

Peter Enns believes the problem is related to the way Paul interpreted and used the Old Testament. Paul lived in an era which is now called Second Temple Judaism. Writers in this era, Enns says, "were not motivated to reproduce the intention of the original human author" in the text under consideration.<sup>{8}</sup> Thus, we see Old Testament texts used in seemingly strange ways in the New Testament, strange if what we expect is a direct reproduction or a further development or deeper explanation of the Old Testament writer's original intent. Texts could be taken completely out of context or words could be changed to make the text say something the New Testament writer wanted to say. In this way, Enns believes, Paul used the Old Testament creatively to explain the universality of sin and of the cross work of Christ.

Some scholars speak of "christocentric" interpretation of the Old Testament. Enns prefers the term "christotelic" which refers to the idea that Christ is the *completion* of the Old Testament or the *end* toward which the Old Testament story was headed. Regarding Adam, Enns writes, "Paul's Adam is a vehicle by which he articulates the gospel message, but his Adam is still the product of a creative handling of the story."<sup>{9}</sup> Paul presents Adam as a historical person, and then makes the further creative claim that Adam's sin is the reason we all sin. Neither of these are true, but this does no harm to the most important part of the text where Paul claims that salvation for all people came through Christ.

None of this should be problematic for us, in Enns' opinion, for he believes this view of the Bible is similar to our view of the Incarnation of Christ. In Jesus there are both humanity and divinity. Likewise, the Bible is a coming together of the divine and the human. God used the methods of Paul's day to convey the gospel message.

## **Paul's Use of Old Testament: A Response**

How can we respond to this view of Paul's use of the Adam story?

Enns believes "that the NT authors [subsumed] the OT under the authority of the crucified and risen Christ."[{10}](#) However, Jesus never referred to the Old Testament in a way that showed the Old Testament incorrect as it stood. Even His "but I say to you" in the Sermon on the Mount appears to be more a matter of teaching the depths of the laws than a correction of the Old Testament text. He upheld the authority of the Old Testament such as when he said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Mt. 5:17)."[{11}](#)

Bruce Waltke is an evangelical Old Testament scholar who accepts theistic evolution but who disagrees with Enns on this matter. He wonders why Jesus rebuked the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:25-27) for not understanding the plain language of Scripture if the plain historical sense isn't sufficient.[{12}](#) He argues that Enns' method of interpretation can't be supported by Scripture.

Paul said the gospel he preached was "in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4) by which he meant the Old Testament.[{13}](#) Elsewhere he said that the Old Testament Scriptures are "profitable for teaching" in 2 Tim. 3:16-17.[{14}](#)

New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham disagrees with the

belief that Paul followed the interpretive methods of his day. The apostles weren't guilty of reading into the Old Testament ideas held independently of it. He says, "They brought the Old Testament text into relationship with the history of Jesus in a process of mutual interpretation from which some of their profoundest theological insights sprang."[{15}](#)

In fact, it was the apostles' high esteem for the Old Testament that forced them to come to grips with the Trinitarian nature of God given the claims of Jesus.[{16}](#)

This doesn't mean, however, that it's always easy to understand how the apostles used the Old Testament. However, what the apostles taught was understood to be in continuity with what they had received before, not as a correction of it.

## **The Matter of Inspiration**

It is inevitable that a discussion of the denial of the historical Adam will turn to the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture. Old Testament scholar Peter Enns believes that Paul's incorrect use of Adam "has no bearing whatsoever on the truth of the gospel."[{17}](#) That's true, but it has a lot to do with how we understand inspiration and its bearing on Paul's writings.

The apostle Paul said that "all Scripture is inspired" or "breathed out" by God (2 Tim. 3:16). Peter explains further that "no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. . . . but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

Paul, who claimed in 1 Thess. 2 that his teachings were the word of God (v. 13), intended to explain how sin and condemnation came into the world in Romans 5. Elsewhere, Peter spoke of Paul's writings as Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15-16). If Paul's explanation of this "vital issue," in Enns' words, was wrong, was it, then, of Paul's own interpretation? Either it

came from the Holy Spirit and was inspired Scripture, or it was merely Paul's interpretation and was not. Which is it?

Old Testament scholar Bruce Waltke writes this: "A theory that entails notions that holy Scripture contains flat out contradictions, ludicrous harmonization, earlier revelations that are misleading and/or less than truthful, and doctrines that are represented as based on historical fact, but in fact are based on fabricated history, in my judgment, is inconsistent with the doctrine that God inspired every word of holy Scripture."[\[18\]](#)

It might be objected here that I am confusing inspiration with interpretation. These are different things. However, if it is understood that all of Scripture comes from God who cannot lie, then we have to let that set limits on how we interpret Scripture. Interpretations that include false doctrines cannot be correct.

It seems to me that Enns has put himself into a difficult position. His conviction of the truth of human evolution isn't his only reason for denying the historical Adam, but it puts the traditional understanding of Adam and his place in Paul's theology out of bounds for him. It would be better to hold to what the church has taught for centuries rather than to the tentative conclusions of modern scientists.

## Notes

1. Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say about Human Origins* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2012), ix, xiv, 122-23.
2. *Ibid.*, 52.
3. *Ibid.*, 124-26.
4. Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapid: Baker, 2005), 82.
5. Enns, *Evolution of Adam*, 91. See also 124-25.

6. See for example Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 55-56.
7. Enns, *Evolution of Adam*, 126.
8. Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 131.
9. Enns, *The Evolution of Adam*, 102.
10. Peter Enns, "Fuller Meaning, Single Goal: A Christotelic Approach to the New Testament Use of the Old in Its First-Century Interpretive Environment," in *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008) 208; quoted in Don Collett, "Trinitarian Hermeneutics and the Unity of Scripture," p. 10, n.26; accessed on the web site of Trinity School for Ministry, [bit.ly/liBGLYT](http://bit.ly/liBGLYT).
11. See Collett, "Trinitarian Hermeneutics and the Unity of Scripture," 10-11.
12. Bruce K. Waltke, "Revisiting Inspiration and Incarnation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 71 (2009), 90.
13. See Collett, "Trinitarian Hermeneutics and the Unity of Scripture," 11; referencing Christopher Seitz, "Creed, Scripture, and 'Historical Jesus': 'in accordance with the Scriptures,'" in *The Rule of Faith: Scripture, Canon, and Creed in a Critical Age*, ed. Ephraim Radner & George Sumner (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1998), 126-35.
14. Christopher Seitz, "Canon, Narrative, and the Old Testament's Literal Sense," *Tyndale Bulletin* 59.1 (2008), 31-32.
15. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 33.
16. See Collett, "Trinitarian Hermeneutics," 11-12. Cf. Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 54.
17. Enns, *The Evolution of Adam*, 102.
18. Waltke, "Revisiting Inspiration and Incarnation," 95.

# The Causes of War

*Meic Pearse's book The Gods of War gives great insight into the charge that religion is the cause of most war. History shows this is not true: the cause of most war is the sinful human heart, even when religion is invoked as a reason.*

## The Accusation

Sam Harris, the popular author and atheist, says that “for everyone with eyes to see, there can be no doubt that religious faith remains a perpetual source of human conflict.”[{1}](#) Writing for the Freedom from Religion Foundation, fellow atheist Richard Dawkins adds, “Only the willfully blind could fail to implicate the divisive force of religion in most, if not all, of the violent enmities in the world today.”[{2}](#) Speaking more bluntly, one British government official has said, “theocrats, religious leaders or fanatics citing holy texts . . . constitutes the greatest threat to world peace today.”[{3}](#)

War is the ultimate act of intolerance, and since intolerance is seen as the only unforgivable sin in our postmodern times, it's not surprising that those hostile to religion would charge people holding religious convictions with the guilt for causing war.



This view is held by many others, not just despisers of religion. A 2006 opinion poll taken in Great Britain found that 82% of adults “see religion as a cause of division and tension between people. Only 16% disagree.”[{4}](#)

To be honest, religion has been, and remains, a source of conflict in the world; but to what degree? Is it the only source of war, as its critics argue? Is it even the primary source? And if we agree that religion is a source of war, how

do we define what qualifies as a religion? This leads to another question. Are all religions equally responsible for war or are some more prone to instigate conflict than others? Once these issues are decided, we are still left with one of the most difficult questions: How does a religious person, especially a Christian, respond to the question of war?

When confronted with the accusation that religion, and more importantly, Christianity, has been the central cause of war down through history, most Christians respond by ceding the point. We will argue that the issue is far too complex to merely blame war on religious strife. A more nuanced response is needed. Religion is sometimes the direct cause of war, but other times it plays a more ambiguous role. It can also be argued, as Karl Marx did, that religion can actually restrain the warring instinct.

In his provocative new book, *The Gods of War*, Meic Pearse argues that modern atheists greatly overstate their case regarding religion as a cause for war, and that all religions are not equal when it comes to the tendency to resort to violence. He believes that the greatest source for conflict in the world today is the universalizing tendencies of modern secular nations that are pressing their materialism and moral relativism on more traditional cultures.

## **The Connection Between Religion and War**

When someone suggests a simple answer to something as complex as war, it probably is *too* simple. History is usually more complicated than we would like it to be.

How then should Christians respond when someone claims religion is the cause of all wars? First, we must admit that religion can be and sometimes is the cause of war. Although it can be difficult to separate political, cultural, and religious motivations, there have been instances when men went

off to war specifically because they believed that God wanted them to. That being said, in the last one hundred years the modern era with its secular ideologies has generated death and destruction on a scale never seen before in history. Not during the Crusades, the Inquisition, nor even during the Thirty Years War in Europe.

The total warfare of the twentieth century combined powerful advances in war-making technologies with highly structured societies to devastating effect. WWI cost close to eight and a half million lives. The more geographically limited Russian Civil War that followed the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 resulted in nine million deaths. WWII cost sixty million deaths, as well as the destruction of whole cities by fire bombing and nuclear devices.

Both Nazi fascism and communism rejected the Christian belief that humanity holds a unique role in creation and replaced it with the necessity of conflict and strife. By the end of the nineteenth century, Darwin's ideas regarding natural selection and survival of the fittest had begun to affect philosophy, the social sciences, and even theology. Darwin had left us with a brutal universe devoid of meaning. The communist and fascist worldviews were both firmly grounded in Darwin's universe.

Hitler's obsession with violence is well known, but the communists were just as vocal about their attachment to it. Russian revolution leader Leon Trotsky wrote, "We must put an end once and for all to the papist-Quaker babble about the sanctity of human life." Lenin argued that the socialist state was to be "a system of organized violence against the bourgeoisie" or middle class. While critics of the Russian Tsar and his ties with the Orthodox Russian Church could point to examples of oppression and cruelty, one historian has noted that when the communists had come to power "more prisoners were shot at just one soviet camp in a single year than had been executed by the tsars during the entire nineteenth

century.”{5}

So, religion is not the primary cause of warfare and cruelty, at least not during the last one hundred years. But what about wars fought in the more distant past; surely most of them were religiously motivated. Not really.

Meic Pearce argues that “most wars, even before the rise of twentieth century’s secularist creeds, owed little or nothing to religious causation.”{6} Considering the great empires of antiquity, Pearce writes that “neither the Persians nor the Greeks nor the Romans fought either to protect or to advance the worship of their gods.”{7} Far more ordinary motives were involved like the desire for booty, the extension of the empire, glory in battle, and the desire to create buffer zones with their enemies. Each of these empires had their gods which would be called upon for aid in battle, but the primary cause of these military endeavors was not the advancement of religious beliefs.

Invasions by the Goths, Huns, Franks, and others against the Roman Empire, attacks by the Vikings in the North and the Mongols in Asia were motivated by material gain as well and not religious belief. The fourteenth century conquests of Timur Leng (or Tamerlane) in the Middle East and India resulted in the deaths of millions. He was a Muslim, but he conquered Muslim and pagan alike. At one point he had seventy thousand Muslims beheaded in Baghdad so that towers could be built with their skulls.{8}

More recently, the Hundred Years War between the French and English, the American Revolution, and the Napoleonic Wars were secular conflicts. Religious beliefs might have been used to wrap the conflicts with a Christian veneer, but promoting the cause of Christ was not at the heart of the conflicts.

Pearce argues that down through the millennia, humanity has gone to war for two main reasons: greed expressed by the

competition for limited resources, and the need for security from other predatory cultures. The use of religion as a legitimating device for conflict has become a recent trend as it became less likely that a single individual could take a country to war without the broad support of the population.

It can be argued that religion was, without ambiguity, at the center of armed conflict during two periods in history. The first was during the birth and expansion of Islam which resulted in an ongoing struggle with Christianity, including the Crusades during the Middle Ages. The second was the result of the Reformation in Europe and was fought between Protestant and Catholic states. Even here, political motivations were part of the blend of causes that resulted in armed conflict.

## **Islam and Christianity**

Do all religions have the same propensity to cause war? The two world religions with the largest followings are Christianity and Islam. While it is true that people have used both belief systems to justify armed conflict, are they equally likely to cause war? Do their founder's teachings, their holy books, and examples from the earliest believers encourage their followers to do violence against others?

Although Christianity has been used to justify forced conversions and violence against unbelievers, the connection between what Christianity actually teaches and these acts of violence has been ambiguous at best and often contradictory. Nowhere in the New Testament are Christians told to use violence to further the Kingdom of God. Our model is Christ who is the perfect picture of humility and servant leadership, the one who came to lay down his life for others. Meic Pearce writes, "For the first three centuries of its history, Christianity was spread exclusively by persuasion and was persecuted for its pains, initially by the Jews but later, from 63, by the Romans." [\[9\]](#) It wasn't until Christianity

became the de facto state religion of the Roman Empire around AD 400 that others were persecuted in the name of Christ.

The history of Islam is quite different. Warfare and conflict are found at its very beginning and is embodied in Muhammad's actions and words. Islam was initially spread through military conquest and maintained by threat of violence. As one pair of scholars puts it, there can be no doubt that "Islam was cradled in violence, and that Muhammad himself, through the twenty-six or twenty-seven raids in which he personally participated, came to serve for some Muslims as a role model for violence."[{10}](#)

Much evidence can be corralled to make this point. Muhammad himself spoke of the necessity of warfare on behalf of Allah. He said to his followers, "I was ordered to fight all men until they say, 'There is no God but Allah.'"[{11}](#) Prior to conquering Mecca, he supported his small band of believers by raiding caravans and sharing the booty. Soon after Muhammad's death, a war broke out over the future of the religion. Three civil wars were fought between Muslims during the first fifty years of the religion's history, and three of the four leaders of Islam after Muhammad were assassinated by other Muslims. The Quran and Hadith, the two most important writings in Islam, make explicit the expectation that all Muslim men will fight to defend the faith. Perhaps the most telling aspect of Islamic belief is that there is no separation between religious and political authority in the Islamic world. A threat to one is considered a threat to the other and almost guarantees religiously motivated warfare.

## **Pacifism or Just Wars?**

Although most Christians advocate either pacifism or a "just war" view when it comes to warfare and violence, Pearse argues that there are difficulties with both. Pacifism works at a personal level, but "there cannot be a pacifist state, merely

a state that depends on others possessed of more force or of the willingness to use it.”[{12}](#) Some pacifists argue that humans are basically good and that violence stems from misunderstandings or social injustice. This is hardly a traditional Christian teaching. Pearse argues that “a repudiation of force in all circumstances . . . is an abandonment of victims—real people—to their fate.”[{13}](#)

Just war theory as advocated by Augustine in the early fifth century teaches that war is moral if it is fought for a just cause and carried out in a just fashion. A just cause bars wars of aggression or revenge, and is fought only as a last resort. It also must have a reasonable chance of success and be fought under the direction of a ruler in an attitude of love for the enemy. It seeks to reestablish peace, not total destruction of the vanquished, and to insure that noncombatants are not targeted.

However, even WWII, what many believe to be our most justified use of force, failed to measure up to this standard. Massive air raids against civilian populations by the Allies were just one of many violations that disallow its qualification as a just war. As Pearse argues, “war has an appalling dynamic of its own: it drags down the participants . . . into ever more savage actions.”[{14}](#)

How then are Christians to think about war and violence? Let’s consider two examples. In the face of much violent opposition in his battle for social justice, Martin Luther King said, “be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. . . . We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win *you* in the process.”[{15}](#) Reform was achieved, although at the cost of his life, and many hearts and minds have been changed.

However, another martyr, German minister Dietrich Bonhoeffer, rejected pacifism and chose to participate in an attempt on the life of Adolf Hitler, mainly because he despaired that an

appeal to the hearts and minds of the Nazis would be effective.

Neither King nor Bonhoeffer were killed specifically for their faith. They were killed for defending the weak from slaughter, as Pearse puts it. Perhaps Pearse is correct when he argues, "If Christians can . . . legitimately fight . . . , then that fighting clearly cannot be for the faith. It can only be for secular causes . . . faith in Christ is something for which we can only die—not kill. . . . To fight under the delusion that one is thereby promoting Christianity is to lose sight of what Christianity is." [\[16\]](#)

## Notes

1. Meic Pearse, *The Gods of War* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 16.
2. *Ibid.*, 15.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, 14.
5. *Ibid.*, 31.
6. *Ibid.*, 53.
7. *Ibid.*, 54.
8. *Ibid.*, 55.
9. *Ibid.*, 134.
10. *Ibid.*, 58.
11. *Ibid.*, 59.
12. *Ibid.*, 173.
13. *Ibid.*, 175.
14. *Ibid.*, 173.
15. *Ibid.*, 180.
16. *Ibid.*

# Probe Live: Truth Decay



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for answers

PROBE MINISTRIES  
INVITES YOU TO

**TRUTH DECAY:**  
POSTMODERNISM,  
RELATIVISM, AND  
PROGRESSIVE  
CHRISTIANITY

**Kerby Anderson**, host of nationally broadcast radio show Point of View and president of Probe Ministries, will discuss how these ideas have infiltrated the church.

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*Join us for the next Probe Live event*

**Thursday, December 1, 2022**

**7:00 p.m.**

**The Hope Center, Plano TX**

We encounter postmodern thinking when we share the gospel and then hear, "That's your truth, but it's not my truth." Moral relativism surfaces when someone says, "That may be your morality, but it's not my morality," or "Who are you to say

abortion or homosexuality is wrong?" And progressive Christians deny absolute moral truth and therefore question the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith.

Probe Ministries President Kerby Anderson will provide an overview of these faulty ways of thinking and answer questions from the audience.

*We will record this message but not live stream it.*