

# 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 Edwards'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.”[\[10\]](#) 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 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.

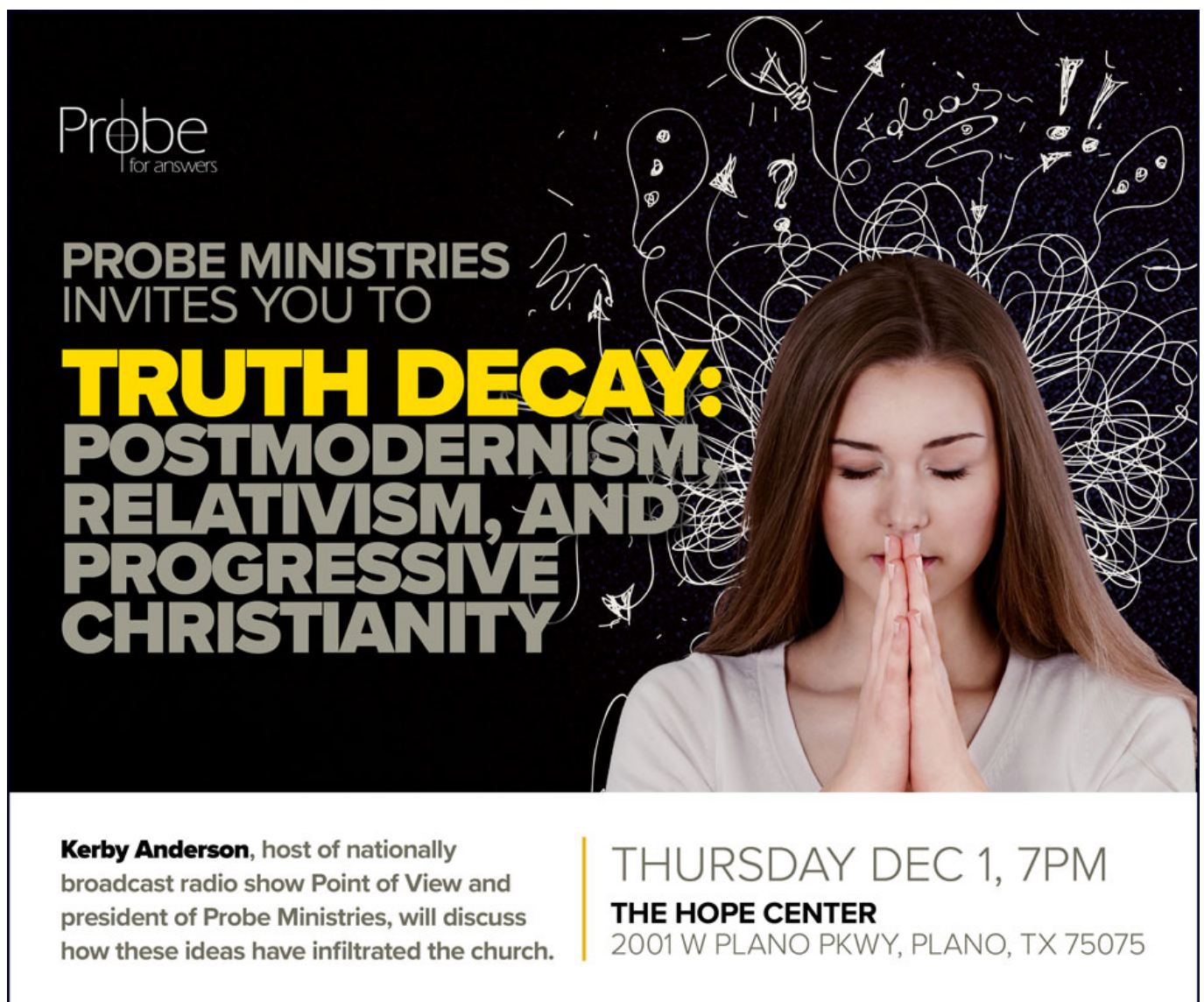


11. Ibid., 59.
12. Ibid., 173.
13. Ibid., 175.
14. Ibid., 173.
15. Ibid., 180.
16. Ibid.

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## Probe Live: Truth Decay

The poster features a woman with long brown hair, eyes closed, and hands clasped in prayer. Behind her head is a dark space filled with white, chaotic scribbles and symbols, including a lightbulb, question marks, and the word 'ideas'. The text is arranged on the left side of the image.

Probe  
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.*

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## **No Reason to Fear: Examining the Logic of a Critic**

*Rick Wade uses the faulty arguments in Sam Harris' book Letter to a Christian Nation to show why Christians don't have to be afraid of the new atheists' assault on our faith.*

### **Getting Started**

Sometimes we Christians shy away from books which attack our beliefs because we're afraid we can't answer the objections. That's understandable. Often the authors of such books carry

impressive credentials. It's easy to feel intimidated.

Another response which is the opposite of fearful avoidance is haughty dismissal. Sometimes we act as if our position is so obviously true that others can be dismissed as downright stupid and hardly worth bothering with. Even if the opponents' arguments *are* bad, that's no reason to adopt an arrogant attitude. It's especially bad when the dismissive Christian hasn't even bothered to read the book!



A better response, I think, is to use such occasions to grow in understanding and to exercise one's apologetic "muscles" by working at answering the challenges posed. So, for example, when a doctrine is challenged, by studying the subject, we grow in our knowledge of Christian beliefs and (here's the uncomfortable part) we are sometimes corrected in our understanding. Another advantage is preparation for real face-to-face encounters with critics. Responding to arguments in a book means there isn't the pressure of a person staring at you, waiting for an answer (and fully expecting one; critics do have such a high view of us!).

In this article I'm going to use Sam Harris's book *Letter to a Christian Nation* to give some suggestions about what to look for in such books.[\[1\]](#) I won't try to address every challenge. Others have given more extensive responses.[\[2\]](#)

I titled this essay "No Reason to Fear" for a good reason. The challenges of critics throughout the ages have not been able to prove Christianity false, and those of modern day critics won't either. Most of their arguments have already been answered. When we brace ourselves and start reading a critic's book, we often find that the arguments don't pack that great a punch after all, much like the neighborhood bully who the other boys are afraid of but really have no reason to be.

Of course, we can't always answer seemingly good objections,

and certainly can't answer them all to the atheist's satisfaction. I'll go further than that. I don't think we *have* to answer every objection. There will always be objections. But it's as intellectually wrong to drop one's convictions because of a few unanswered criticisms as it is to hold to such convictions for no reason at all. Atheists obviously don't abandon their beliefs so easily, and they shouldn't expect us to either.

## Fallacious Arguments

If we're going to engage books like *Letter to a Christian Nation* responsibly, we have to be ready to hear some good criticisms of our beliefs or actions. We have to accept the fact that there are some hard things to deal with in our beliefs, especially the problem of evil. We need to admit our inability to give satisfying answers to all objections if we're going to expect that kind of openness from critics. Also, it is often Christians who come under attack rather than Christianity. Harris spends a lot of time here. Christians have done some bad things, and they need to be acknowledged.

More to the point for this article, Christians can sometimes give bad arguments for what they believe. I'm not suggesting that we have to bow to all the demands of skeptics; there are several theories of the proper use of evidences and logical arguments and personal experience, and some formulations are unreasonable. It *is* to say, however, that we must use good reasoning when we make a case.

The problem with using poor reasoning is that it undermines one's case. That's what we find in Harris's book, and that will be our focus here. When we read a case for a particular belief, we should keep a lookout for such things as questionable assumptions, logical fallacies, and incorrect facts. Harris's book is plagued with fallacious arguments, a surprising turn since he presents his side as being that of

reason. So I'm going to spend most of my time on those and mention the other things when appropriate.

Don't let the term "logical fallacies" put you off, like they're things only specialists can understand. It's just another name for poor reasoning. So, for example, if you make the claim that Christianity is the only true religion, and someone responds that you only believe that because you grew up in a Christian nation, you could cry "Foul!" You're making a universal claim; where you're from is irrelevant. If it's true, it's true in India and China and the US and everywhere else, too. This is a kind of fallacy of false cause. No one is a Christian because he lives in a Christian nation. We are Christians because we have believed Jesus' claims that are universal. It also reflects the current mood according to which religions are human constructs, and Christianity is just one such religion among many.

Although fallacious arguments can have *psychological* force (when we don't spot them and they seem correct), they have no *logical* force. Their conclusions should not be believed.

## Are We Really So Evil?

Harris's favorite target in his attack on religion is its supposed immorality. He tells us that "Christians have abused, oppressed, enslaved, insulted, tormented, tortured, and killed people in the name of God for centuries, on the basis of a theologically defensible reading of the Bible."[\[3\]](#) Well, *that's* a surprise! Not that Christians have done bad things, but that such acts are *theologically defensible*! Such things are sanctioned by God because He, too, does such things. Harris accuses Christians of picking and choosing sections of Scripture that present a more loving God while ignoring the truly telling ones which reveal a God who condones slavery and the beating and killing of rebellious children.

But Harris is guilty of this picking and choosing himself. He commits the fallacy which is called the *neglect of relevant evidence*. To be fair, he does note that “it is undeniable that many people of faith make heroic sacrifices to relieve the suffering of other human beings.”[\[4\]](#) But he doesn’t bother listing them. He gives no space to the great work done by Christians in the fields of medicine, literacy, agriculture, famine relief, etc. He ignores the good work of organizations like Mercy Ships which takes life-changing medical help to people in third world nations in the name of Christ.

Well, he doesn’t completely ignore missionary efforts. One of his favorite rants is against the evils perpetrated by missionaries. They waste time preaching about such things as the virgin birth when there is important work to be done. The most memorable accusation is when he charges missionaries who preach against the use of condoms with “genocidal” piety![\[5\]](#) “Genocidal!” Maybe a little exaggeration there? (And, by the way, while it’s true that Christian medical missionaries do present the gospel to people—which they should, since one’s eternal life is more important than one’s temporal life—I’ve never heard of any who withhold medical help from people in need until they first preach a sermon on the virgin birth.)

In another place Harris commits the fallacy called *causal oversimplification*. As he sees it, religion is the cause of conflicts in Palestine, the Balkans, Sudan, Nigeria, and other countries. Religion is so unnatural and wrong-headed to atheists, that it becomes an easy target for casting blame.

I’m going to give a bit more space to this charge since it’s a very popular one these days.

In 2004, the BBC published what it called a “War Audit” which was conducted to determine how significant religion has been in war, at least in the last century.[\[6\]](#) In the article “God and War: An Audit and an Exploration,” authors Greg Austin, Todd Kranock and Thom Oommen report that

at a philosophical level, the main religious traditions have little truck with war or violence. All advocate peace as the norm and see genuine spirituality as involving a disavowal of violence. It is mainly when organised religious institutions become involved with state institutions or when a political opposition is trying to take power that people begin advocating religious justifications for war.

They continue:

After reviewing historical analyses by a diverse array of specialists, we concluded that there have been few genuinely religious wars in the last 100 years. The Israel/Arab wars from 1948 to now, often painted in the media and other places as wars over religion, or wars arising from religious differences, have in fact been wars of nationalism, liberation of territory or self-defense.

Regarding Islamic terrorism, the authors write:

The Islamist fundamentalist terror war is largely about political order in the Arab countries, and the presence of US forces in Saudi Arabia. It is not about religious conversion or a clash of religions. Nevertheless, bin Laden claims a religious duty in executing the war. . . .

It is mainly when organised religious institutions become involved with state institutions that people begin advocating religious justifications for war.

We need to go back to the wars of Arab expansion, the Crusades and the Reformation Wars for genuine wars over religion.

The authors—or as they call themselves, compilers—of this article include tables which give death tolls in different categories of wars. The writers say that the tables

show that the overwhelming majority of wars and the



overwhelming majority of the victims of such wars cannot be classified primarily according to religious causes or religious beliefs. There have been horrific examples though where particular communities have been *targeted because of their religious faith* [italics mine], and these atrocities have been perpetrated by the three most 17 vicious and blood-thirsty regimes ever to hold power: Stalin's Russia, Mao's China and Hitler's Germany.

It's interesting that Harris tries so hard to make religion a source of violence when, as this report indicates, it is often the religious who are targeted by violence.[{7}](#)

## A Few More

Sam Harris's book is titled *Letter to a Christian Nation*, not simply because he's against Christianity. He wants all religion to come to an end. It just happens that Christianity is the most prominent religion in America. Because he lumps all religions together, he can smear Christianity with the evils of Islam by implication.

This is a fallacy. It's called the fallacy of *over-generalization* (or *converse accident*). If evil is done in the name of Islam, and Islam is a religion, then every religion is prone to evil. Thus, what counts against Islam counts against Christianity, too. (If one is reluctant to group Christianity with other religions, then one might see here the fallacy of *faulty comparison*, or what is more commonly called "comparing apples to oranges.")

Another argument Harris presents employs a fallacy we've already discussed, the fallacy of *causal oversimplification*. Harris commits this fallacy when he tells us that "the anti-Semitism that built the Nazi death camps was a direct inheritance from medieval Christianity."[{8}](#)

The reality of Christian anti-Semitism through the ages cannot



be denied. However, Harris's evaluation is simplistic. It is very easy to narrowly focus on the very real anti-Semitism of Christians and ignore other very significant factors. For example, Harris fails to tell us that the Jews were persecuted quite apart from Christianity and even before Christianity came into existence. For example, serious tensions between the Jews and the Greeks of Alexandria in the first century B.C. spilled over into the next century. Things got so bad that Jews were forced to live in one section of the city. Their houses were broken into and looted. Synagogues were burned, and women were dragged to the theater and forced to eat pork. Historian H. I. Bell reports that "men, women, and even children [were] beaten to death, dragged living through the streets, or flung on to improvised bonfires."[\[9\]](#) He also ignores the shift from religious persecution to racial persecution which occurred in the nineteenth century, notably in Russia.

Of course, this doesn't prove that Hitler *didn't* get his anti-Semitism from Christians; but it *does* mean that one should not immediately assume that Christian prejudice is at the root of anti-Semitism. There have been other causes as well. A significant factor in Hitler's hatred of the Jews was the strong influence of *Darwinism* that led him to think that people who were racially or eugenically inferior needed to be eliminated from the evolving human race.[\[10\]](#)

Although some people already believed in the inferiority of some races, and although Darwinism wasn't Hitler's sole inspiration, Historian Richard Weikart writes, "Darwinism was a central, guiding principle of Nazi ideology, especially of Hitler's own world view." Weikart quotes Richard Evans, a historian at Cambridge University: "The real core of Nazi beliefs lay in the faith Hitler proclaimed in his speech of September 1938 in science—a Nazi view of science—as the basis for action. Science demanded the furtherance of the interests not of God but of the human race, and above all the German

race and its future in a world ruled by ineluctable laws of Darwinian competition between races and between individuals.” Weikart continues: “This is not a controversial claim by anti-evolutionists, but it is commonly recognized by scholars who study Nazism.”[{11}](#)

## A Fundamental Commitment to Atheism

One of the questionable assumptions in *Letter to a Christian Nation* is Sam Harris’s assertion that “there is no question that human beings evolved from nonhuman ancestors.”[{12}](#) Of course, there is indeed a question about this, a question raised by highly educated scientists easily as qualified as Mr. Harris.

It’s no wonder, really, that Harris makes such bold statements. He is prevented from allowing the possibility of divine creation by his basic worldview commitments. He admits that he doesn’t know why the universe exists, but he’s confident there’s no God behind it. That sounds like a philosophical presupposition. What evidence or reasons does he give for it? Harris might like to pretend that his beliefs are based solely on the “trinity” of science, reason, and nature, but his naturalism cannot be established by these. Rather, it informs his use of them.

One of the (potentially!) maddening things about the arguments of atheists these days is their frequent silence with respect to any justification of their own basic worldview commitments. Harris goes so far as to claim that atheism isn’t really a belief; that there shouldn’t even *be* the word “atheism.”[{13}](#) Although “atheism” has long been understood to mean the belief that there is no God, many atheists today deny that. It isn’t the belief that there is no God; it’s simply an absence of belief in God.[{14}](#) It’s a kind of “default” position, a “zero” belief, where everyone should be until given sufficient reasons to believe in God. Thus, the atheist has nothing to

defend or prove.

But really, folks. Who's going to believe that atheists are belief-less about God, that they don't actually believe that there is no God? It's astonishing the effort they put forth in arguing against religious belief if indeed they have no belief at all.

However, we can go back and forth with atheists about whether they truly deny the existence of God, or we can let that stand and simply ask what they *do* believe about ultimate reality, for surely they believe *something*. It's simply false to assume that atheism is some kind of zero belief, that it involves no metaphysical commitments. If one denies God, one must have some other view about ultimate reality. Naturalism is a metaphysical position, and it has serious problems of its own.<sup>[15]</sup> If Christians are responsible to give good reasons for their belief in Christian theism, naturalistic atheists must give reasons for their naturalism.

Sam Harris speaks as a voice on high, shouting down to us poor, ignorant people who are stuck in our absurd religious beliefs. It's hard to imagine anyone with thoughtful convictions changing his or her beliefs based on this book. He's preaching to the choir. Now that you have a few tips on what to look for, you might want to take a look at the book, and hear the rest of the "sermon."

## Notes

1. Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).
2. Douglas Wilson addresses many of Harris's arguments in his *Letter from a Christian Citizen* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2007) and Ravi Zacharias does the same in *The End of Reason: A Response to the New Atheists* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).
3. Ibid., 22.

4. Ibid., 22.
5. Ibid., 33-34.
6. Greg Austin, Todd Kranock and Thom Oommen, "God And War: An Audit & An Exploration," <http://tinyurl.com/a2tpb>.
7. For more on this subject, see also Don Closson, "The Causes of War," Probe Ministries, 2008, [www.probe.org/the-causes-of-war/](http://www.probe.org/the-causes-of-war/).
8. Harris, *Letter*, 41.
9. H. I. Bell, "Anti-Semitism in Alexandria," *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 31. (1941), pp. 1-18.
10. Richard Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).
11. Richard Weikart, "Re-examining the Darwin-Hitler Link," The Discovery Institute, [http://www.evolutionnews.org/2008/02/reexamining\\_the\\_darwinhitler\\_1.html](http://www.evolutionnews.org/2008/02/reexamining_the_darwinhitler_1.html).
12. Harris, *Letter*, 71.
13. Ibid., 51.
14. See Michael Martin, *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification*, (Temple University Press, 1990), 463.
15. See Norman Geisler, *Is Man the Measure? An Evaluation of Contemporary Humanism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), chap. 11.

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## How Do We Respond to Calls to Discuss Justice in the Church?

*How do we respond to calls to discuss justice in the church?*

*Not only is this a hot issue right now, but it is a critical issue to discuss. Because it is crucial, we need to address it in the church.*

## **Approaching the Conversation**

Primarily, we need to be intentional about how we approach the conversation (and yes it should be a conversation, not just one person teaching or giving a monologue). First, we need to be extra intrigued as to why others think differently than we do. We need to let them talk and accept their reactions as genuine. We need to stay away from rejecting what is being told by attributing a bad intention.

Second, we need to take note of whether we are processing the information as facts, filters, or identity{1} on our part individually, but as well look to know where others are coming from and why. Our goal should always be understanding, not only of issues but also of other people's perspectives.

Third, we need to be interested and ask questions, *not to beat the other person but to seek reciprocal knowledge* regarding why we differ or where the disagreements and pressure points are.

Fourth, we need to learn reflective listening, to correctly rephrase what we hear others to be saying in the tricky moments in a manner that reassures the other person: "This is what I hear you saying. Did I get it right? Do I understand you correctly?" The importance at this point is that the other person gets to decide whether he/she is being understood. By engaging in these approaches, what is hopefully conveyed to others is that the fundamental purpose of our discussion is to dialogue—to understand each other, not only find out who is correct.{2}

## Defining Terms

As with almost any discussion today, I think it is necessary to define terms. This discussion especially calls for defining the term “justice” before we can even begin. For instance, when having this discussion are we saying merely “justice”, or the now popular term “social justice”, or a seemingly Christian claim to “biblical justice?” This alone takes up a good chunk of the discussion. Read how one popular journalist describes this dilemma: “I put on my prospector’s helmet and mined the literature for an agreed-upon definition of social justice. . . . What I found,” he bemoans, “was one deposit after another of fool’s gold. From labor unions to countless universities to gay rights groups to even the American Nazi Party, everyone insisted they were champions of social justice.”[\[3\]](#)

The word *justice* in Scripture means to prescribe the right way, [\[4\]](#) and the two key metaphors used in Scripture are level scales and an even path (Deuteronomy 16:18-20; Isaiah 1:16-17; Amos 5:21-25; Matthew 23:23). Now any variation of justice could refer to Christian attempts to eradicate human trafficking, help the inner-city needy, creating hospitals and orphanages, overturn racism, and safeguard the unborn. I propose we call this *biblical justice* and use a definition provided by pastor, speaker, and author Dr. Tony Evans: “The equitable and impartial application of the rule of God’s moral law in society.”[\[5\]](#) He arrives at this definition because God’s ways are just (Deuteronomy 32:4) and He is the supreme lawgiver (James 4:12), therefore His laws and judgments are just and righteous (Psalm 19:7-9; 111:7-8). Furthermore, they are to be applied with no partiality (Deuteronomy 1:17; Leviticus 19:15; Numbers 15:16).

What is social justice then? Recently, *social justice* has brought on an exceptionally charged political meaning. It turned into a brandishing poster for groups like Antifa, which

finds physical aggression against persons who believe differently as both morally justified and tactically successful, and praises its underreported verbal beatings. Social justice is the brandishing poster for universities across the country where the “oppressor vs. oppressed” narrative of Antonio Gramsci and the Frankfurt School (Note: *Oppression* is a biblical term. The prophets precede these authors by millennia! The term or its presence in the world is not automatically in this area.), the deconstructionism of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, and the gender and queer theory of Judith Butler have been inserted into the very definition of the term.[\[6\]](#)

As Evans summarizes,

*Social justice* has become a convoluted term meaning different things to different people. It is often used as a catchphrase for illegitimate forms of government that promote the redistribution of wealth as the collectivistic illegitimate expansion of civil government, which wrongly infringes on the jurisdictions of God’s other covenantal institutions (family and church).[\[7\]](#)

However biblical the roots of the term *social justice* are, it has been hijacked (still as some might criticize what is going on for other reasons). There is a concern labels can oversimplify matters and make binary classifications. Pitting “biblical justice” against “social justice” brands is making binary means of seeing ideas and dangers, creating a false dichotomy. Certainly, there are things that the “social justice” group is doing that is other than the biblical response to advocating justice. However, several of the concerns that they are raising are reasonable. One of the troubles is that they are recommending political solutions to problems that are beyond complicated and in the end need God’s divine change of individual hearts. But labels can also clarify distinctions between various models. Therefore, for the sake of clarity, I propose when we are discussing *justice*,

we aim for the meaning of *biblical justice*. After clarifying and defining terms, we would want to check and make sure all interested parties are on the same page.

## CRT

Now I we need to address Critical Race Theory (CRT) because I believe these ideas are a problem that infiltrate Christian thinking and the church. Legal scholar and law professor Richard Delgado defines CRT:

The critical race theory (CRT) movement is a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power. The movement considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up but places them in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, setting, group and self-interest, and emotions and the unconscious. Unlike traditional civil rights discourse, which stresses incrementalism and step-by-step progress, critical race theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law. [\[8\]](#)

I think we can all agree racism is bad, and because CRT has been pushed to the forefront and claims to deal with the issue of racism, it has been extremely easy for Christians to adopt a terrible framework with good intentions. This needs to be corrected. Otherwise, it remains an elephant in the room especially for Neo-Fundamentalist Evangelicals and Mainstream Evangelicals (as defined by Michael Graham [here](#)).

As pastor and theologian Dr. Voddie Baucham points out, the movement has several qualities of a cult, including keeping near enough to the Bible to prevent instant exposure and concealing the truth that it has a different theology and a novel lexicon that deviates from Christian orthodoxy. In



traditional cult style, they steal from the common and acknowledged, then immerse it with different connotation. [\[9\]](#) The worst part about this theory is there is no final solution to the problem. CRT just offers an endless cycle of division and racism at worst. At best, it draws attention to the sin of racism.

There is much more that can be said on this, and I would suggest anyone who wants to explore this more read the books listed in my bibliography below. Most of them cover CRT in some fashion.

## **Does Focusing on Biblical Justice Get Us Off Mission?**

I want to address the concern of whether focusing on biblical justice gets the church off mission. I think the mission of the church is to equip the saints and make disciples. That is a broad vision. The question is still whether focusing on biblical justice is part of that mission. If it is not already clear in the definition of the term above (even the name *biblical* justice supplies a hint to this answer), I would like to clearly and explicitly answer whether this is part of the mission of the church.

The responsibility of the church is to perform biblical justice for the poor, orphans, widows, foreigners, enemies, oppressed, hungry, homeless, and needy. Scripture concerns biblical justice particularly to these parties as a main matter; for it is these parties that best denote the powerless in the world and take the burden of injustices. The church is not to harm or ostracize the poor (James 2:15-16), or to have status and racial prejudice (Galatians 2:11-14). Instead, the church is appointed to take on the basic needs of the disadvantaged. I would also point out (particularly for the Evangelical Christians) this does not mean promoting reckless handouts, which the Bible rigorously forbids (2 Thessalonians

3:10; Proverbs 6:9-11; 10:4; 13:18; 30-34).

Furthermore, Probe Ministries President Kerby Anderson made a marvelous point (to me over email) regarding Christians in the workforce: "ALL Christians are to be salt and light. But believers who are CALLED to positions related to justice (judges, lawyers, law enforcement, political leaders) are to use their gifts to promote justice. Not only is that not OFF MISSION, but it is exactly their mission in their job."

Ultimately, *doing justice* satisfies the two highest commandments granted to us by Jesus: to love God and love others (Matthew 22:37-40). "Biblical justice is a foundational part of fulfilling the purpose of the church as intimated by the heart of God. It is a result of God's people becoming one through being what God has called us to be and participating in what He has called us to do—*justice*." [{10}](#)

## Asians and Other Minorities

Usually, at least in our environment, the discussion about racial friction is likely a black/white discussion, although lately it has come to be obvious that this is not only a black-and-white discussion. Often, people of Asian background are not being addressed in any way. Now the COVID pandemic ignited some racial prejudice and hatred against Chinese individuals and other Asian individuals. What we are getting more in the news and social media is that for Asians, issues have shifted, and matters appear to be extremely different for them. So, you look at these events and, I believe for certain individuals, they are living with more concern since, whether they have faced that sort of prejudice, they are watching it being discussed in the news and on social media. So, for those that are reading this and even considering this for the first time, I want to point out what is truly a shortage of emotional quotient in the sense we relate with each other. Jesus speaks, "treat people the same way you want them to treat you." [{11}](#) One of the shifts of philosophy demands that

we manage to stop seeing people through a lens of stereotypes that we have, and see the one we are relating with individually. I believe it is extremely useful to think about our longing to develop the proper sort of community in our church. The further we take part and understand the various types of life encounters and experiences that individuals have, the richer we will be as we communicate with individuals.

## Recommendations for the Church

As Tony Evans says, “Theology must never be limited to esoteric biblical conclusions void of practical strategies for bringing God’s truth to life through our obedience and good works.”[{12}](#) The church needs to take the lead in creating unity through clearly showing it in our lives. What I would recommend the church does is follow this three-point plan:  
[{13}](#)

### **1. Assemble: Unified Hallowed Meeting**

Build a community-wide pastors’ group that meets consistently and holds a yearly sacred gathering (Isaiah 58:1-12; Ephesians 2:11-22).

a. Begin or enter a racially and denominationally varied community of kingdom-inclined pastors in our community region. A national group has already been formed at [letstalklive.org/](http://letstalklive.org/).

b. Come together consistently with kingdom-inclined pastors to improve relations, offer reciprocal support and to meet the demands of one another.

### **2. Address: Unified Caring Tone**

Aggressively cultivate disciples who speak out with unified messaging, presenting biblical truths and answers on current social problems (John 17:13-23; Matthew 28:16-20).

a. Pursue common ground and common goals that encourage biblical answers to current problems needing to be tackled, instead of becoming caught on the areas of conflict. Demonstrate grace.

b. Hold conversation groups and prayer meetings to discover biblical responses to social problems.

### **3. Act: Unified Community Affect**

Jointly organize our church to achieve a noticeable spirit of continuing good works enhancing the good of underserved neighborhoods (Jeremiah 29:5-7; Matthew 5:13-16).

a. Create a group for business leaders who would like to help in establishing work prospects and economic growth for underserved areas.

When we work together to *Assemble*, *Address*, and *Act* for God's kingdom in the public, we will create a larger effect as one. The extent of our unity will affect the extent of our influence.

### **Notes**

1. Darrell L. Bock, *Cultural Intelligence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2020), 54-58.

2. These approaches and intentions are adapted from Bock, *Cultural Intelligence*, 59-60.

3. Jonah Goldberg, "The Problem with 'Social Justice,'" *Indy Star*, February 6, 2019, [www.indystar.com/story/opinion/2019/02/10/jonah-goldberg-the-problem-social-justice/2814705002/](http://www.indystar.com/story/opinion/2019/02/10/jonah-goldberg-the-problem-social-justice/2814705002/).

4. Tony Evans, *Oneness Embraced* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2022), 328.

5. Evans, 329.

6. Thaddeus J. Williams, *Confronting Injustice without Compromising Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 4-5.

7. Evans, 328.

8. Richard Delgado, *Critical Race Theory*, Third Edition. NYU Press. Kindle Edition, p. 3.
9. Voddie T. Baucham Jr., *Fault Lines* (Washington, D.C.: Salem Books, 2021), 67.
10. Evans, 335.
11. New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Matthew 7:12.
12. Tony Evans, *Kingdom Race Theology* (Chicago: IL: Moody Publishers, 2022), 89.
13. Adapted from *Kingdom Race Theology*, 100.

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# What a Biblical Worldview Looks Like

*Sue Bohlin explores elements of a way of looking at life that provides a biblical world and life view.*

## What Is a Worldview?

A young Christian couple I know married with high hopes for the future. Within three years they were divorced; the husband handled his hatred for his job by snapping at his wife and retreating to online gaming, and the wife shut down her heart to him and opened it to someone else.

In her book [\*Total Truth\*](#), Nancy Pearcey tells of a Christian lawyer whose job was to find loopholes in the contracts with clients his law firm wanted to get rid of—that is, which enabled his company to break promises.<sup>{1}</sup> She tells another story of a Christian who worked at an abortion facility and never saw any conflict between the Bible she studied and its command not to murder.<sup>{2}</sup>



This disconnect between biblical teaching and the way it's lived out is not just an American problem. Many African Christians go to church on Sundays and pray to Jesus for healing or prosperity, but when He doesn't answer the way they wanted, they go to the village witch doctor.

All these people profess to be Christ-followers and agree that the Bible is the Word of God, yet they don't view reality or live out their lives as if Jesus were Lord and the Bible is true. They don't have a biblical worldview. They don't "think Christianly."

Nancy Pearcey writes, “‘Thinking Christianly’ means understanding that Christianity gives the truth about the whole of reality, a perspective for interpreting every subject matter.”<sup>{3}</sup> It means we learn to interpret everything in light of its relationship to God. The title of Nancy’s book, *Total Truth*, reflects her premise: that Christianity is not just a collection of religious truths, it is *total* truth. Thinking Christianly—which equips us to then live out a biblical worldview—means we understand that natural and supernatural are seamlessly woven into one reality.

Our worldview is like an invisible pair of glasses through which we see reality and life. If we have the wrong prescription, the wrong beliefs and assumptions, what we see will be fuzzy and undependable. If we have the right prescription, we will see things as they are. The prescription of these glasses consists of our beliefs and the things we assume to be true. These beliefs and assumptions comprise the filter through which we experience and interpret life. And we *all* have a filter.

For example, let’s say you walk into a Walmart and discover you are their zillionth customer. Balloons drop, strobe lights go off, and you are handed a \$1000 gift card, a trip to Disneyworld, and the keys to a new car. Your worldview will determine how you interpret that event. If you believe in fate, you will think, “It’s my lucky day! The stars are shining on me!” If you believe in only this physical, material universe, you will think, “Nice, but it’s a totally random and meaningless occurrence.” If you believe that Jesus is Lord over everything, you will think, “I so do not deserve this gift of grace, but I thank You for it, Lord. How do You want me to be a good steward of this amazing blessing?”

Everyone has a worldview, even though most people aren’t aware of it. We believe a biblical worldview is the right prescription for both living and understanding life.

# Creation, Fall, and Redemption

My friend Dr. Jeff Myers of Summit Ministries says, “[A] person’s worldview is his default answers to life’s most pressing questions: Where did I come from? How should I live? What happens when I die?, and How do I know my answers to these questions are true?”[\[4\]](#)

We all buy into an overarching story that explains much of why things are the way they are. For example, people who believe in traditional folk religion (animism) believe there are spirits connected to every physical item and event and place, and this way of looking at life shapes their response to the things that happen in life. People who embrace pantheism—a view of life that sees everything connected as part of a divine but impersonal force with no personal God and no distinctions between good and evil—will respond differently.

If we draw our worldview from the story of God’s dealing with mankind from the Bible, a helpful way to structure it is terms of creation, fall, and redemption. They answer the big three universal questions: Where did we come from? Why are things so messed up? How can it be fixed? Everything that exists and everything that happens falls into one of these categories.

*Creation* answers the question, where did we come from? as well as a basic philosophical question, why is there something rather than nothing at all? God created us in His image for the purpose of having a relationship with us, and He created the universe and our world as well. This explains the exquisite design we see in the human body, right down to the molecular machines inside cells. Creation explains why the earth is so finely tuned for life—just the right distance from just the right kind of star and the right kind of moon, just the right temperature for liquid water, just the right kind of atmosphere for us to breathe.

The relational God, whose very being consists of Father, Son,



and Holy Spirit, created us in His image to draw us into the circle of divine mutual love and fellowship and delight. The reason we are here is so God could lavish love on us by sharing Himself with us and inviting us to participate in the divine life. That explains why we are so relational, and why we need and enjoy other people. It explains why we are hard-wired to be spiritual—because He made us for Himself, and He is spirit. He created the universe and our planet as an expression of His love and glory, and because physical people need a physical place to live. A beautiful God creating us in His image explains why we love beauty in the world, in art, in music, and in every other expression of human culture.

The *Fall* answers the question, what went wrong? Adam and Eve's rebellion against God brought sin into His marvelous creation, resulting in brokenness, blindness, and nothing working the way it did in the perfect, pre-fall world. The fall explains why death feels so unnatural, why there is suffering and sickness. It explains why there is moral evil like murder, rape and theft, and why there is natural evil like earthquakes and tsunamis and tornadoes. Many people are angry at God at these things. But they are all effects of the fall. He didn't create the world this way; we're the ones who messed it up. This fallen world breaks His heart far more than it breaks ours.

The good news is *Redemption*. God is working to set things right and restore His damaged, distorted creation. This explains why our souls long for justice, for the wicked to face the consequences of their evil choices, and for things to be fair and right. A just God will fulfill our longing for justice. He will make the wrongs right and the shattered whole. Good will triumph over evil once and for all. God's promise of restoration explains why we still long for the perfection of Eden, even while we live immersed in a world and relationships that are far from perfect: He's going to bring it back. The Lord Jesus Christ, who came to earth as fully God

and fully man, living as one of us and then dying in our place, rising again, and ascending back to the Father's right hand, promises He is making all things new (Rev. 21:5). God's got a plan and He's working it!

## **Living in Two Worlds**

One of my favorite things to do is go snorkeling in the crystal clear waters of the Caribbean. When I'm wearing a mask and a snorkel tube, I can float on the water's surface and enjoy the beautiful fish and corals that live in the underwater world. But I can also breathe air from the above-water world. When I'm snorkeling, I get to enjoy two worlds, two spheres of life, at the same time.

This is a picture of what it looks like to live out a biblical worldview. Paul exhorts us to focus "not [on] the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18). We live in a physical world, but looking at life biblically also means living in awareness of the unseen, eternal spiritual reality that also surrounds us. Many believers make the mistake of living as if they were functional naturalists—as if the material, physical world were all there is.

Thinking biblically means staying aware and focused on the spiritual and eternal part of life, letting that guide our interpretation of physical and temporal events. That doesn't mean dismissing or denying the physical, living like some sort of ascetic who refuses to engage with the world; we just keep it in perspective.

I believe this is what the Lord Jesus intended when He said to "seek first the Kingdom of God" (Matt. 6:33). The physical world is so in-your-face about its reality—especially when we get tired, hungry, thirsty every day—that we don't have any

trouble being aware of *this* sphere of life. But focusing on (or even just staying aware of) the unseen, eternal part of life, like donning snorkel gear and going face-down in the water, allows us to function in both worlds at the same time. Next time you're in a group where people share prayer requests, pay attention to how many of them are in the physical realm: health, finances, jobs, etc. These things are important, but according to Jesus' priorities, the Kingdom—the unseen realm where He is Lord—is *more* important. I wonder what would happen if our prayer requests started reflecting this priority?

The seventeenth century monk Brother Lawrence lived out an important spiritual discipline he called “practicing the presence of God.” When we do this, we are able to process the heartbreak of living in a fallen world and the apparent unfairness of what looks like evil winning. When we read what the prophet Habbakuk wrote, and what Asaph recorded in Psalm 73, we see what it looks like to remember that God is sovereign, and He is able to make all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28). It helps us see all people as beloved image bearers for whom Christ died, even the jerks who cut us off in traffic. It helps us remember that what may feel like a bizarre random event may actually be the attack of spiritual warfare. It helps us balance our now-fallen feelings, which were impacted by the Fall like everything else, with the truth of God's word. For example, one Christian woman filed for divorce from her husband with no biblical grounds, claiming that it must be okay since she didn't *feel* “convicted by God.”

Thinking biblically means cultivating an awareness of the spiritual realm: the eternally important things, and the activity of God, angels, and demons. It's like going through life wearing snorkel gear!

# Refusing the Sacred/Secular Split

Have you ever heard someone saying something like, “Well, I personally oppose abortion, but I would never say that it’s wrong for anyone else because that’s a private issue.” Or, do you give ten percent of what you think of as *your* money to the Lord because that’s His portion? Do you think of your spiritual life as time spent reading the Bible and going to church, but the rest of the week is yours? One of the ways Christians fail to live out a biblical worldview is when we buy into the false division of the sacred and the secular.

Thinking biblically means not only believing that Jesus is Lord at the moment of our deaths, but He is also Lord over every aspect of our lives and every aspect of His creation. He created this world, He owns it, He entered it, and He redeemed it. He created us in His image, and then commanded us to take the salt and light of our image-bearing influence into every aspect of life: business, science, law, education, politics, and art, to name a few. The “Creation Mandate” is found in Genesis 1:2:

God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and *subdue it*; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (emphasis mine).

Let’s look at some examples:

- I’ve had a freelance [calligraphy business](#) for thirty years. Beyond showing honesty and integrity in my business dealings, there is also value in the beauty I bring into people’s lives through my hand lettering as a reflection of God’s beauty.
- All of my husband [Ray’s](#) education is in biology. He lives out his biblical worldview by seeking to explore and understand God’s creation through science, then explaining

it to others in a way that gives glory to God.

- Christian educators who express a biblical worldview are teaching about God's world and God's truths whether they mention Him or not. Whether it's the glorious patterns of mathematics or the themes of great literature, the Lordship of Christ ties it all together.
- My son's undergraduate education was in art, and we loved seeing how he wove his biblical worldview into his art pieces. He suggests that a Christian artist has the opportunity to express both the brokenness of life in a fallen world as well as the hope and redemption found in Christ.
- Christians in law can live out their biblical worldview by using their knowledge of the law to create protection for the weak and defenseless, to criminalize criminal behavior, and to codify making restitution, all of which are biblical values.

One element of living out a biblical worldview is refusing to compartmentalize life into our religious activities and then everything else, as if spiritual truth and concepts were unrelated to how we live our lives. One of my dear friends has lived in moral and emotional purity for three years after repenting of her lesbian relationship. The temptation can be strong some days, but she consistently chooses Jesus over her feelings. One day her supervisor, who goes to a large church, asked if she were gay. My friend replied that she used to claim a gay identity, but she's been emotionally and sexually sober for three years. Her supervisor asked why, and my friend said, "Because it's sin! It's not God's design or intention."

"Oh, it's not sin!" her supervisor cheerfully assured her. "God wants you to be happy! You just need to find the right girl and settle down." My friend is living out a biblical worldview; her Christian supervisor, who most definitely does

not, relegates the Bible to religious topics that don't intersect with where the rest of life is lived. (Not only that: the Enemy used the supervisor's lies and wrong beliefs to harass my friend as part of an all-out spiritual warfare attack.)

Jesus is Lord, and He loves and provides for His creation through people, whether we are delivering milk or delivering babies, serving in the military or the government, growing corn or managing hedge funds, raising our family or even serving in ministry. It's *all* God's work and we get to share in it (1 Cor. 3:9). Just as we can't divide colors into sacred and secular, we shouldn't do it with the rest of life either.

## Processing Life Through a Biblical Worldview

I said earlier that a worldview is like a pair of glasses that is comprised of our beliefs and assumptions through which we see and interpret life. My husband, Ray, and I got a chance to put our biblical worldview into practice a few years ago when someone ran a red light and slammed into his car. He sustained a concussion but, miraculously, no cuts or scratches or broken anything. It took almost a year for him to recover from both the impact on his body and the mental fuzziness of his concussion.

As we processed this accident and the difficulties that unfolded from it, we experienced the wisdom that comes from interpreting life according to the truth of God's word. Other [worldviews](#) would have interpreted this experience differently:

- *Naturalism*, the belief that the physical world is all there is, and there is no spiritual or supernatural component to life, would say, "Ray was in a car wreck, but there's no meaning to it. It was just another accident;

*everything* is an accident without purpose. Whether he survived or had been killed, ultimately that wouldn't make any difference anyway since all of life is a random, meaningless existence."

- *Pantheism*, the belief that all of life is a spiritual reality and the physical world is an illusion, would say, "Ray, his car, the other driver, and her car, are all part of 'the one,' the unifying essence of the universe. All of these particulars are an illusion, since there is only one reality where everything and everyone is divine." And since many pantheists also share many of Eastern mysticism's beliefs, we would hear, "Ray must have done something terrible in a previous life to have experienced this trauma in this life. He was working off his bad karma from an earlier existence."

- [Traditional folk religion \(Animism\)](#), the belief that the spirit world is constantly manipulating life in the physical world, because there is a spirit or spiritual force behind every event, might say, "Ray must have made some spirit angry with him. He needs to say some magic words or burn some incense or build an altar or do something to get the angry spirit to not be angry with him anymore."

Since we seek to make the truth of God's word the pair of glasses through which we view life, our filter includes the question, what does God say about this? Together, we practiced responding to this trauma according to our Christian worldview.

The most important truth was that God exists, and He has revealed Himself to be all-powerful and all-knowing. That means that getting "t-boned" was not a random accident that just happened. We reminded ourselves that He was still sovereign; a loving God was in control, even though He allowed Ray to get hit and his car totaled by a driver without insurance. God is all-powerful and could have prevented the

accident, but for some reason He didn't. We determined to trust Him even though He wasn't explaining Himself.

This was a very bad car wreck, and the witnesses couldn't believe he wasn't killed instantly. Instead, he was protected from serious injury. We have thanked God many times for His amazing protection that resulted in 100% recovery.

Ray experienced very real pain and suffering, but we know from the Bible where that comes from: the fall of man is responsible for most pain and all suffering. He was not troubled by the possibility that his suffering might be meaningless because there was no one "up there" or "out there" giving meaning to it, like the view of life that atheists and agnostics have to face.

Ray's car wreck had a special impact on me. At the time, I was dealing with my fear for my son's safety since he was about to enter the Air Force during a war. Because Ray's car wreck happened just three blocks from home, God impressed on me that His protection has nothing to do with geography. The best place to be, the safest place to be, is in God's hand, and He has promised that no one can snatch us from His hand (John 8:28-29). I sensed Him impressing me that I could trust Him with my son the same way He protected my husband from lasting damage.

I hope this article helps you grow in your ability to think biblically so you can see life as it really is—one reality comprised of both the physical and spiritual, God's world, God's life—that He invites you into.

## Notes

1. Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004), 31.
2. Ibid., 97-98.
3. Ibid., 34.



4. Email from Dr. Jeff Myers, April 19, 2011.

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## The Allure of Home

*T.S. Weaver investigates ways by which one can employ cultural methods to make the gospel appealing. He concentrates on one piece of culture and expresses a few ideas on how it can be used in the defense of the faith.*

Is the pandemic over yet? If we can count the fact that the [U.S. has lifted COVID-19 test requirement for international travel as an indicator](#), I think it's safe to say it is. Regardless, I think we have had enough time to reflect on its impact. The pandemic was an extraordinary blow in 2020. I can remember how it all unfolded like it was yesterday. Everything shut down and my fiancé at the time started working from home (at my apartment mostly because she did not have internet at hers) and I followed suit about a week later, and the infamous toilet paper hoarding began around the nation. Around two years later, the pandemic acts as the backdrop to daily living, and my now-wife is still working from home.

We are rethinking the way we do a lot of things. As one commentator said, "A global health crisis has exposed outdated economic, political and social systems. For the first time since the Industrial Revolution, we have the facility to reimagine our world."<sup>[1]</sup> While I am not sure what all he means by that, and how much of it is an exaggeration, I can agree the crisis changed things. This same commentator, Kian Bakhtiari, has predicted seven cultural trends "that will shape the next decade."<sup>[2]</sup> I would call them "cultural texts." According to Kevin Vanhoozer, each cultural text "has meaning

to the extent that it communicates something about our values, our concerns, and our self-understanding.”[\[3\]](#) Bakhtiari lists his observed cultural texts as:

- a return to traditions
- metaverse jurisdiction
- creator inequality
- divisions in diversity
- ethical investment
- employee activism
- consumerism in crisis

Bakhtiari says,

Uncertainty has created a strong nostalgia for the good old days and a newfound desire to be rooted in tradition. We, humans, tell ourselves stories to make sense of the world. Stories make us feel like we have control. They allow people to find meaning where there is chaos. In moments of crisis, we often choose to escape the present by seeking refuge in the past.[\[4\]](#)

Has he been reading Joshua Chatraw (author of *Telling a Better Story*) or Paul Gould (author of *Cultural Apologetics*)? Chatraw explains the problem with the current cultural narratives that makes even more sense of Bakhtiari:

Something’s missing. There is a shallowness that gnaws away at the fleeting happiness these narratives offer. The realities of life have a way of applying such pressure at times even the cynic can’t help but peer into the secular crevasses beneath his feet. People can’t help but feel the existential angst when the script they’ve assumed begins to break down.[\[5\]](#)

Like Ursula Le Guin says, “There have been great societies that did not use the wheel, but there have been no societies that did not tell stories.”[\[6\]](#) Chatraw again says, “Despite the cries of those who claim that we as modern enlightened

people should come of age and simply logic-chop our way to truth, story still remains our *lingua franca*.”[\[7\]](#)

Bakhtiari takes this story/narrative idea in the direction of connecting with the past via tradition. The first example he gives is something I was completely unaware of and do not understand, but I am not surprised. His example is Gen-Z’s fascination with Y2K fashion, 90s sitcoms and even wired headphones. First, let us all just acknowledge Gen-Zs are weird. During my internship at Probe Ministries, one of the things I learned is that Gen-Zs drive mentors nuts because they are so hard to understand and connect with. Second, I did not even know there was such a thing as Y2K fashion. Strangely, even though I do not understand the appeal with these things other than just they are “old,” I have noticed a similar fascination with Mason jars.

All this said, I still do not understand what Bakhtiari means by tradition in this context. He somewhat clarifies by pointing out how globalization attributes to the feeling of losing “local traditions and identity.” His proposed solution for global brands is that

They need to find ways to remain culturally relevant in different markets—with divergent needs and values—while maintaining global consistency. This can only be achieved by working with local markets to produce consumer segments, including different communities and sub-cultures.[\[8\]](#)

Admittedly, I wish he would have gotten more specific, but I often find that when people talk about culture, it is usually in broad strokes and abstract thoughts. I have deciphered what I think he meant by tradition, how it affects culture, and how it is charmed.

## **Disillusionment**

But how did we get to the point that traditions or old stuff

have become so attractive to people? For C.S. Lewis there is a “narrative embedded within the deeper structures of the created order, which enables, shapes and moulds the construction and narration of human stories.”[{9}](#) I believe there is also a narrative embedded within cultural structures. Again, Bakhtiari believes globalization is the problem. So what story is globalization telling us? Bakhtiari thinks the story goes something like,

Many countries and communities feel like they have lost their local traditions and identity. The move towards localization is further compounded by nations prioritizing self-reliance. As demonstrated with the rise of populism in advanced economies.[{10}](#)

Should we quit telling stories altogether? We are too enlightened for stories, right? As Chatraw says, “Human potentiality is reached not by giving up on stories, which we can’t really do, but by embracing the true story of the world—the story that elucidates all other stories.”[{11}](#) More on that true story later.

Back to globalism and the desire to return to traditions. What is really happening in culture, and what Bakhtiari does not fully grasp, is that we are in a trance from materialism. There is a collective yearning to connect with the transcendent, a reminiscence for an enchanted universe, something past the usual, that will not leave us. This is what the return to tradition is about. Therefore, Gen Zs are fascinated by Y2k fashion and things of the past.

Therefore, there is an obsession with Mason jars. Moderns assert all is matter, while they show a profound desire to relate to something outside the physical earth. The outcome is a silly and eventually inadequate effort to discover meaning, purpose, and identity in dull obsessions.

What this reveals about how our culture thinks is that we are

“sensate,” as philosopher Paul Gould has articulated.<sup>{12}</sup> We are obsessed with the material and the physical to the exclusion of the immaterial and spiritual. As C.S Lewis has portrayed, we are concentrating on the “stream of experience.”<sup>{13}</sup> Gould has said, “Our whole education system trains us to fix our minds upon the material world.”<sup>{14}</sup> We turn out to be obsessed with the now, with lack of thinking of the past (hence the attempted solution to connect with the past via Y2K fashion). The thinking of our culture is superficial and absent of skill to think truly around issues that really matter . . . just look at social media. Most people are driven to a greater extent by emotion and want than by good sense.

It is one thing to think thoughts, but another to live out actions. I just heard on the news the other night an attorney shared her favorite quote that went something like, “It is one thing to think about your values, it is entirely different to live them. That shows what you believe.” So how does our culture live? What do people believe? Looking to Gould’s analysis again, he argues we are hedonistic.<sup>{15}</sup> We go from one craving to the next, stuffing ourselves with delights that supply an instant carnal gratification, which turn out either to be a passing flame or new addiction. We have a robust wish to improve fairness, defend the weak and persecuted, and fulfill the wants of all persons. This appeal eventually drops short though, as we hold a disillusioned picture of life and have adopted the parallel principles of greed, decadence, and utilitarianism.

## Allure

I hypothesize there is something deeper going on with the desire to return to traditions. The reason Gen Zs and others are becoming obsessed with the past is because it awakens a desire for transcendence. 90s sitcoms take us back and ask us to travel in the direction of the target of our yearning. In

the mystical autobiography *Surprised by Joy*, C.S. Lewis recalls three initial events where he roused a yearning for the divine.{16} His earliest event of deep yearning was “the memory of a memory.” While he paused near a currant bush on a summer day there unexpectedly began in him “the memory of that earlier morning at the Old House—when my brother had brought his toy garden into the nursery.”{18} Before in his biography, Lewis had depicted the toy garden as “the first beauty I ever knew.”{19} While Lewis remained gazing away at the scenery, a feeling similar to “enormous bliss” swirled in him.{20} His recollection of that previous recollection stirred inside him a natural yearning for beauty.

Lewis’s next installment of passionate longing happened after he read Beatrix Potter’s *Squirrel Nutkin*. While he read the tale, Lewis was unsettled “with what I can only describe as the Idea of Autumn.”{21} Once more, his feelings and his yearnings were taken to something lost from his life. A third peek of inspiration arrived out of poetry. While he casually flipped through Longfellow’s *Saga of King Olaf*, he fell upon this:

I heard a voice that cried,  
Balder the beautiful  
Is dead, is dead{22}

Lewis writes, “I knew nothing about Balder; but I instantly was uplifted into huge regions of northern sky, I desired with almost sickening intensity something never to be described (except that it is cold, spacious, severe, pale, and remote).”{23} Every one of these events had a little in common: “an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction. I call it Joy.”{24} Note Lewis’s yearning for the sublime (what he refers to as Joy) was roused out of a recollection of a toy garden, a tale, and a poem.

These are all images of some sort, whether recalled from the past or evoked from reading. James K.A. Smith says, “Our

orientation to the world begins from, and lives off of, the fuel of our bodies, including the 'images' of the world that are absorbed by our bodies." [{25}](#) Frequently it is the "aesthetic currency of the imagination—story, poetry, music, symbols, and images" [{26}](#) that awaken our desire for the transcendent. In a strange way, I think the "return to traditions" examples Bakhtiari uses such as fashion, wired headphones, and sitcoms represent different memories, symbols, and images that evoke "traditional" feelings for Gen Zs, that are a call to return home—that is the transcendent source.

## **We Cannot Get Home on Our Own**

I think Gen Zs, by returning to traditions, are trying to find their path home by chasing (old) possessions. This method is a stalemate. This self-redemption proposal fails since it does not properly identify the underlying trouble. Our trouble is not a shortage of junk. Our trouble is transgression: humankind is justly guilty to God and merits conviction and accusation. The result of human transgression is death—separation from God. There is no self-redemption, no path home on our own. This is awful news.

Only God, who is wealthy in compassion, has worked out something for man. This is great news: God's answer to mortal disaster—His salvage strategy. This strategy climaxed in the coming of Jesus, His death on the cross that paid the price of transgression for man, and His resurrection proving He is God. Jesus offers us a path home. Jesus declares, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." [{27}](#) C.S. Lewis says, "The thing you long for summons you away from self. . . . Out of our selves, into Christ, we must go." [{28}](#) Gould said, "Paradoxically, if we aim for home and happiness, we won't find it. We must instead aim at something else—or better, *someone* else—and along the way, we will find shalom." [{29}](#) As Jesus spoke,

If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and

take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?[\[30\]](#)

You will either receive the joy and home God gives, or perpetually go hungry. The choice is yours.

## Notes

1.

[www.forbes.com/sites/kianbakhtiari/2022/02/20/7-cultural-trends-that-will-shape-2022-and-beyond/?sh=52aeb883768f](http://www.forbes.com/sites/kianbakhtiari/2022/02/20/7-cultural-trends-that-will-shape-2022-and-beyond/?sh=52aeb883768f)

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3. Kevin Vanhoozer, "What Is Everyday Theology? How and Why Christians Should Read Culture," *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, Michael J. Sleasman (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2007), 26.

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6. Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction* (London: Women's Press, 1989), 25.

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16. C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York: Harcourt, 1955).
17. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 16.
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21. Ibid.
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23. Ibid.
24. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 17-18.
25. James K.A. Smith, *Imaging the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 17.

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27. *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update* (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), John 14:6.
28. C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 154.
29. Paul Gould, *Cultural Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 205.
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# **The Apologetics of Peter – A Logical Argument for the Deity of Christ**

*Steve Cable explains how the apostle Peter showed himself to be a master apologist, not the bumbling, brash fisherman he used to be.*

## **Peter – A Leader in Apologetics**

How many times have you heard the Apostle Peter portrayed as the brash fisherman whose mouth was always several steps ahead of his brain? According to many sermons, Peter's life motto may have been "Open mouth, insert foot!" Certainly Peter did not hesitate to speak his mind which sometimes landed him in trouble and sometimes resulted in commendation (Matthew 16:23;

Matthew 16:17). I suspect we often focus on Peter's foibles because we feel that if Jesus could love and use Peter then perhaps there is hope for us as well. Others have been known to say, "I guess I take after Peter" as an excuse for thoughtless words or actions which dishonor Christ.



However, if we look at Peter's entire life journey as recorded in Scripture, we see a life that set an incredible example of love, zeal, compassion, courage and *effective apologetics*. Wait a minute! Peter, a leader in apologetics? That field is only for egghead theologians, not an uneducated fisherman like Peter, right?

Yes, absolutely Peter was a leader in this area. Here are several reasons why we can be sure that Peter was a leading apologist for Christianity.

1. Peter recognized the evidence pointing to Jesus as the Christ early on. When others doubted Jesus' teaching, Peter declared, "To whom shall we go, you (Jesus) have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). As an eyewitness of Jesus' teaching, signs and miracles, Peter, through the Father's revelation of His Son, went on to declare, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Matthew 16:16).
2. Beginning at Pentecost, Peter took on the role as the primary spokesperson presenting a reasoned argument for the gospel before the Jewish masses, the Jewish authorities and the first Gentile converts.
3. It appears that Peter was the one Paul approached to discuss his theology and arguments for the gospel before Paul began sharing them with the entire Roman world (Galatians 1:18). In his second epistle, Peter equates the letters of Paul with the "rest of Scripture," giving them

his approval as “God breathed” (2 Peter 3:15-16; 1:20-21).

4. Peter is the one that commanded us to be prepared to give an effective, reasoned argument for our faith, introducing the term “apologetics” to our vocabulary as important for every believer as he told the believers in Asia, “always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3:15-16).

Peter was never shy about taking the lead. If we are to obey this command to be prepared with a reasoned defense, it behooves us to look at the example and teaching of Peter.

In this article, we will examine the apologetics of Peter to help us grow in our ability to give a reasoned defense. Peter was following the example and instruction of his Teacher, Jesus.<sup>{1}</sup> (For a detailed discussion on Jesus’ example, check out “The Apologetics of Jesus” [probe.org/apologetics-of-jesus](http://probe.org/apologetics-of-jesus) and other resources at [probe.org](http://probe.org).)

## **Peter’s Defense – Credible Witnesses for the Gospel**

Peter commands each of us to be prepared to give an effective reasoned argument for our hope in Christ. Is it possible that this uneducated fisherman was a master at this craft? Let’s begin our examination of how Peter went about making an argument for the gospel.

I have been greatly blessed by studying Peter’s sermons and testimony in Acts and his letters to the churches in Asia. From that study, we find that Peter focused on five aspects in his comprehensive defense of the gospel:

1. Credible witnesses
2. Compelling evidence
3. Confronting objections with consistent reasoning

4. Changed lives
5. Clear conclusion

Let's look at each of these aspects in turn to see what we can learn to make us better at giving a reasonable explanation for our faith in Christ.

First, Peter based his argument on the basis of credible witnesses. He pointed his audience to four primary witnesses:

1. The eyewitnesses to Jesus' life
2. The audience's own personal knowledge of Jesus
3. The testimony of Scripture
4. The Holy Spirit

Peter and the other apostles were eyewitnesses of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension. Speaking to a crowd in the temple shortly after Pentecost, he said, "[Jesus' resurrection is] a fact to which we are witnesses" (Acts 3:15). In Caesarea, he told the Gentile Cornelius, "We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem" (Acts 10:34-48). Much later, writing to the believers in Asia, Peter explains, "For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Peter 1:16-17). Multiple eyewitness accounts of an event provide credibility, so Peter points to "we," not just "me," in each occasion.

Peter also called upon the experience of his listeners. In his sermon at Pentecost, he points to the signs Jesus did stating, "just as you yourselves know" (Acts 2:22). In other words, your own experience supports what I am telling you about Jesus.

Peter uses the Scriptures as an important expert witness. In Acts, Peter refers to the witness of the Scriptures nine different times, explaining how the scriptural prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus. He told his listeners, "But the things

which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled" (Acts 3:18).

Addressing a Jewish audience, Peter did not have to defend the credibility or accuracy of the Scriptures as you may be compelled to do today. But when he addressed the church in Asia, he wrote, "So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place" (2 Peter 1:19). He pointed out that his eyewitness experience with Jesus gives him even greater confidence in the Scriptures.

Finally Peter highlighted the critical testimony of the Holy Spirit in explaining the miracle of Pentecost and in front of the Jewish leaders. As he told those leaders, "And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him" (Acts 5:32).

At this point, you may be thinking, "I don't have the advantages Peter had. I am not an eyewitness, the person I am sharing was not around when Jesus was performing signs and miracles, and they also think the Bible is full of myths. I am zero for three when it comes to pointing to credible witnesses." You may be right, but the principles still apply to us today. Even though you are not an eyewitness, you possess written testimony from eyewitnesses who would not change their testimony even under the threat of death. The Gospels and the letters of Peter and John are eyewitness accounts. And, you are an eyewitness of what faith in Jesus has meant in your own life.

I have a friend who is a retired teacher and volunteer hospital chaplain. A number of years ago, his late wife was in the hospital recovering from a severe internal infection which nearly took her life. When the attending physician came by her room to arrange for her release, she thanked him for her recovery. The physician replied, "Don't thank me. Thank God."

She responded, "How am I supposed to thank God? I don't even believe in God." The physician said, "To find the answer to that question, I would like to give you a prescription. When you get home, read the first three chapters of the Gospel of John."

When she got home, she was surprised to discover that John was located in the middle of the Bible. She told her husband, "This is strange; shouldn't I start with Genesis?" But you see, this physician had been asked to give a defense for the hope that was in him and he began by pointing her to an eyewitness. Shortly, after reading these chapters in John, she placed her faith in Christ. Her husband told me that he personally knows of at least thirty people who are now Christians because this physician said, "Don't thank me. Thank God," and introduced her to the eyewitness John.

We can also point out that no one refuted Peter when he told this large crowd that they were well aware that God had performed many miraculous signs through Jesus, and the Jewish authorities did not refute it either. We can also call upon the listeners' own experience with life. They were not around to see Jesus perform miracles, but they did have experience with the futility of sin and the struggle with hopelessness.

In our defense of the gospel, we can point out that there is universal agreement that all of these prophecies fulfilled by Jesus were written hundreds of years before Jesus' life. The fact that Jesus fulfilled those prophecies lends credence to both the Scriptures and to Jesus' claim to be the Messiah.[\[2\]](#)

## **Peter's Defense – Compelling Evidence for the Gospel**

Of course, credible witnesses are not sufficient to make a convincing argument. If the evidence they report is circumstantial or inconclusive the argument is undermined. The testimony of Honest Abe Lincoln would not be very helpful if



all he had to say was, "It was dark and I couldn't really see what happened." Peter made his argument by honing in on the following compelling evidence for the gospel:

1. Jesus did not live an ordinary life. God attested to Jesus' special position "with miracles and wonders and signs."
2. Jesus suffered a highly public death by crucifixion.
3. God raised Him up again.

First, the signs Jesus performed lend credence to the possibility of the resurrection. As Peter wrote to the Christians in Asia, "For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased' – and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain" (2 Peter 1:17-18).

I have the opportunity to share the gospel with international students who have little prior knowledge about Jesus and Christianity. As we look together at the accounts of Jesus' miracles, I ask them, "What would your response be if you witnessed these events? What would you think about Jesus?" Usually the response is, "I would want to find out more about him. How is he able to do these things? He is not a normal person."

The second piece of evidence is essential to the argument. If Jesus did not actually die on the cross, His resurrection is a farce. In every defense, Peter states that we know that Jesus was put to death on a cross (Acts 2:23; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:39; 1 Peter 1:3; 3:18). Jesus' crucifixion resulted in real physical death. Jesus did not escape death; he experienced death to pay for our sins. The Jewish leaders did not try to refute Peter's assertion that Jesus had died on that cross.

The crowning piece of evidence is that “God raised Jesus from the dead” (Acts 3:15). Peter wants his audience to know that this is an indisputable fact. Peter told Cornelius and his household, “[we] ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead” (Acts 10:41).

Jesus’ resurrection is the heart of the gospel and of any defense of the gospel. Consequently, it is the central theme of Peter’s message.[\[3\]](#)

## **Peter’s Defense – Confronting Objections with Consistent Reasoning**

Some Christian speakers suggest that being “fools for Christ” (1 Corinthians 4:10) means that we do not need to address objections with logical arguments. This is odd since the person they are quoting, Paul, based his ministry and his letters on giving a rational argument for the Christian faith. Perhaps even more compelling is that the uneducated fisherman, Peter, also confronted objections using logical reasoning. He knew that a good argument addresses both the evidence clearly supporting the conclusion and also any evidence which appears to counter the conclusion.

Let’s look at three specific objections on the minds of his listeners that Peter addressed in Acts and his letters.

The first objection he addressed is the popular notion that the Messiah would come in triumph and in power; certainly not in suffering and death. In his arguments, Peter reminds the listeners that the prophets clearly state that the one who will bring healing and restoration will suffer (Acts 2:23; 3:18; 4:11; 1 Pet. 1:10-11; 2:21-24). He told the crowd in the temple, “God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer” (Acts 3:18). He pointed the rulers and the elders to Psalm 118 when he declared, “[Jesus is] the stone which was rejected by you the builders, but which became the chief corner stone” (Acts

4:11).

The second objection is that the Scriptures do not teach the resurrection of the dead. The Jews were looking for a descendant of David who would reign forever as the Messiah. Peter used Psalms written by David to show that the God had revealed that the Messiah would die but not be abandoned to Hades or suffer decay and be raised to sit at the right hand of God (Psalm 16:8-11; 132:11; 110:1).

Later in his life, Peter took on a new objection which was not an issue in his early defense. This third objection was that Jesus had not returned to the earth as He promised. Peter knew that some scoffers were saying, "Why should we believe that Jesus is going to return? It has been years since His death and the world just keeps going along just as it always has." Peter responds by

1. identifying the false assumption in the scoffers' argument,
2. providing an important perspective on the question, and
3. explaining the rationale for delaying Jesus' return.

The false assumption is that God has not dramatically intervened in the past. Peter reminds them that God destroyed human civilization through the flood and the scoffers of that time did not believe God would act against them either.

The important perspective is that God does not view time in the way humans do. "But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day" (2 Peter 3:8-9).

The rationale is God's mercy as Peter wrote: "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Although you may need to address one of these three specific

topics at sometime, the important point is that Peter did not gloss over the objections. He did not just say, “I am an eyewitness. Jesus is the resurrected Messiah. Repent and believe.” He addressed the concerns he knew were on the minds of his audience with consistent rational arguments.

## **Peter’s Defense – The Testimony of Changed Lives**

Peter knew that an effective argument for the gospel, for our hope, needs to include visible as well as oral arguments. Peter emphasized current evidence that his audience could experience or observe at that time.

For example, at Pentecost his sermon is in response to the crowd drawn to the spectacle of the disciples praising God in many different languages. He points out that this event is the fulfillment of the prophecy in Joel. Then the body of his message leads to the point that “[Jesus] has poured forth this which you both see and hear” (Acts 2:33).

Similarly, in the temple he points to the healing of the lame man as evidence that Jesus is the resurrected Prince of Life (Acts 3:15-16).

In his first letter to the churches in Asia, Peter explains that our purpose as God’s special people is to “proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). One way we fulfill our purpose is by always being ready to give a reasoned argument for our faith. However, Peter teaches us that it is much more than a verbal or written argument. According to the body his letter, we proclaim Jesus’ excellencies by

1. our excellent behavior,
2. our loving relationships,
3. our response to suffering,
4. our servant’s heart, and

## 5. our devotion to prayer.

These living arguments are essential elements supporting any effective argument explaining our living hope in Jesus. Peter put it this way: “always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame (1 Peter 3:15-16). A good conscience and good behavior are directly tied to the effectiveness of our defense. Peter also highlights the importance of presenting our argument with gentleness and a genuine concern and respect for the other person as someone created in the image of God and loved by Jesus.

## **Peter’s Defense – A Clear Conclusion**

Sometimes we get so enthused about the argument that we forget the purpose. We always want to point people to the fact that they can receive a living hope through faith in the resurrection of Jesus. Peter always kept his conclusion in mind. Let’s look at how he presented the conclusion.

To the crowd at Pentecost, he said, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ – this Jesus whom you crucified. . . Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:36-39).

To the crowd in the temple, he said, “Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away” (Acts 3:19).

To the Jewish leaders, he proclaimed, “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

To Cornelius and his household, he concluded, “through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins” (Acts 10:43).

To the church in Asia, he reminded, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3).

Peter wanted them to understand the importance of Jesus life, death, and resurrection to their eternal future. His clear conclusions invited a response from each individual.

Our examination of the preaching and teaching of Peter has shown him to be a master apologist for the gospel. If we want to follow in his footsteps, we study his example preparing ourselves to give an effective argument consisting of

1. credible witnesses
2. compelling evidence
3. confronting objections with consistent reasoning
4. changed lives, and a
5. clear conclusion.

Then when people say that you are acting like Peter, it should be a testimony to your effective witness for our Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Notes**

1. For a detailed discussion on Jesus’ example, check out Pat Zukeran’s “The Apologetics of Jesus,” [probe.org/apologetics-of-jesus](http://probe.org/apologetics-of-jesus)) and other resources at [probe.org](http://probe.org).
2. For more resources explaining our confidence in the Bible as a reliable witness, check out Pat Zukeran’s “Authority of the Bible” ([probe.org/authority-of-the-bible](http://probe.org/authority-of-the-bible)) and other resources by going to [probe.org/radio](http://probe.org/radio).
3. To find out more information on the compelling evidence for the Resurrection and its importance in making a reasoned

argument for the gospel, see Steve Cable's, "The Answer is the Resurrection" ([probe.org/answer-is-the-resurrection](http://probe.org/answer-is-the-resurrection)) and other resources available at [probe.org/radio](http://probe.org/radio).

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## Influential Intellectuals

*Kerby Anderson examines four famous intellectuals—Rousseau, Marx, Russell and Sartre, looking for reasons they are worth following and not finding much.*

Over the last two centuries, a few intellectuals have had a profound impact on Western Culture. British historian Paul Johnson writes about many of these influential intellectuals in his book, *Intellectuals: From Marx and Tolstoy to Sartre and Chomsky*. In this article, we will look at four of the better-known intellectuals whose influence continues to this day.



Paul Johnson reminds us that over the past two centuries, the influence of these secular intellectuals has grown steadily. He believes it is the key factor in shaping the modern world. In fact, this is really a new phenomenon. It was only the decline of clerical power in the eighteenth century that allowed these men to have a more significant influence in society.

Each secular intellectual "brought to this self-appointed task a far more radical approach than his clerical predecessors. He felt himself bound by no corpus of revealed religion."<sup>[1]</sup> For the first time, these intellectuals felt they alone could diagnose the ills of society and cure them without a need to refer to religion or past tradition.

One important characteristic of these new secular intellectuals was their desire to subject “religion and its protagonists to critical scrutiny.” And they pronounced harsh verdicts on priests and pastors about whether they could live up to their precepts.

After two centuries in which the influence of religion has declined and secular institutions have had a greater influence, Paul Johnson believes it is time to examine the record and influence of these secular intellectuals. In particular, he focuses on their moral and judgmental credentials. Do they have the right to tell the rest of us how to run our lives? How moral and just were they in their financial dealings and their sexual relationships? And how have their proposed systems stood up to the test of time?

I will give you a preview. These secular intellectuals lived decadent lives and mistreated so many people in their lives. Their proposed systems of politics, economics, and culture have been a failure and devastated millions of lives.

What a contrast to the Christian message. Jesus lived a sinless life (1 John 3:5) even though He was tempted as we are (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus called on His disciples to follow Him (Matthew 4:19). Even the Apostle Paul encouraged Christians to follow his example as he followed the example of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Paul Johnson concludes his book with a number of examples of how some of these secular intellectuals addressed current political and social issues. He also points out that these intellectuals saw no incongruity in moving from their own discipline (where they are masters) to public affairs (where they have no expertise). In the end, we discover that they “are no wiser as mentors, or worthier as exemplars, than the witch doctors or priests of old.”[\[2\]](#)



# Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Jean-Jacques Rousseau is a very influential intellectual. Many of our modern ideas of education were influenced to some degree by his treatise *Émile*. And even to this day many indirectly refer to some of his ideas found in the *Social Contract* that encapsulated his political philosophy.

Rousseau rejected the biblical narrative and instead believed that society was the reason we humans are defective. He argued, “When society evolves from its primitive state of nature to urban sophistication, man is corrupted.”[\[3\]](#)

Rousseau believed that you could improve human behavior (and even completely transform it) by changing the culture and the forces that produced it. In essence, he believed you can change human beings through social engineering.

He was, no doubt, a difficult person to be around and very egotistical. Paul Johnson explains that “part of Rousseau’s vanity was that he believed himself incapable of base emotions.”[\[4\]](#) He also had a great deal of self-pity for his circumstances and had “a feeling that he was quite unlike other men, both in his sufferings and his qualities.”[\[5\]](#)

Paul Johnson also reminds us that Rousseau “quarreled, ferociously and usually permanently, with virtually everyone with whom he had close dealings, and especially those who befriended him; and it is impossible to study the painful and repetitive tale of these rows without reaching the conclusion that he was a mentally sick man.”[\[6\]](#)

Apparently, he cared little for those around him. For example, his foster-mother rescued him from destitution at least four times. But later when he did much better financially, and she became indigent, he did little for her.[\[7\]](#) His five children born to his mistress were abandoned to the orphanage hospital.

He did not even know the dates of their births and took no interest in them.

Rousseau even acknowledged “that brooding on his conduct towards his children led him eventually to formulate theory of education he put forward in *Émile*. It also clearly helped to shape his *Social Contract*, published the same year.”[\[8\]](#)

The only woman who ever loved Rousseau summed him up this way: “He was a pathetic figure, and I treated him with gentleness and kindness. He was an interesting madman.”[\[9\]](#)

In this article we are studying some of these secular intellectuals because they have had such a profound impact on our world even today. But as we can already see from the life of Rousseau and will see from some of the other men we will discuss below, they lived decadent lives. They really had no business telling the rest of us how to live our lives.

## Karl Marx

Paul Johnson concludes that Marx “has had more impact on actual events, as well as on the minds of men and women, than any other intellectual in modern times.”[\[10\]](#)

Marx claimed that his philosophy was scientific. Paul Johnson disagrees and says it was not scientific. “He felt he had found a scientific explanation of human behavior in history akin to Darwin’s theology of evolution.”[\[11\]](#) Although Marx obtained a doctorate in philosophy he really wasn’t a scholar, at least in the traditional sense. He actually spent more time organizing the Communist League and collecting material.

Paul Johnson says there were three strands in Marx: the poet, the journalist, and the moralist. He used poetic imagery which actually became part of his political vision. He was also a journalist and fairly good one at that. He also made use of

aphorisms. Many of the most famous were borrowed from others. Two of the best known are: "The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains," and "Religion is the opium of the people."

The moral impulse of Marx began with "his hatred of usury and moneylenders."<sup>{12}</sup> He believed that Jews had corrupted Christianity. His solution, therefore, was to abolish the Jewish attitude toward money. Ultimately, the Jews and the corrupted version of Christianity would disappear. Later Marx broadened his critique to blame the bourgeois class as a whole.

How did Marx treat others? "Marx quarreled with everyone with whom he associated" unless "he succeeded in dominating them completely."<sup>{13}</sup> He also collected elaborate dossiers about his political rivals and enemies."<sup>{14}</sup> Also, Marx "did not reject violence or even terrorism when it suited his tactics."<sup>{15}</sup> Later Lenin, Stalin, and Mao would practice such violence on an enormous scale.

Central to his hatred of capitalism was probably his incompetence in handling money. He never seriously attempted to get and hold down a job. Instead, Engels became the primary source of income for Marx and his family. In fact, Engels nearly ended the relationship when he once received a letter from Marx that virtually ignored the death of a woman Engels loved and focused the rest of the letter asking for money.

Life for his wife Jenny and their children was a nightmare. In time her jewelry ended up at the pawnshop. "Their beds were sold to pay the butcher, milkman, chemist and baker."<sup>{16}</sup> He even denied his daughters a satisfactory education. After his wife's death, the family nursery-maid became his mistress and conceived a child whom Marx would never acknowledge. Once again, we see the decadent lives of these secular intellectuals.

# Bertrand Russell

Paul Johnson says that “No intellectual in history offered advice to humanity over so long a period as Bertrand Russell.”[\[17\]](#) His first book was published when Queen Victoria was still alive, and his last book came out the year Richard Nixon resigned because of Watergate. He also wrote countless newspaper and magazine articles. He wrote so much because he found writing to be so easy, and he was well paid for it.

Russell was an orphan, but his parents (who were atheists) left instructions for him to be brought up on the teaching of John Stuart Mill. His grandmother, however, would have none of it and raised him in an atmosphere of Bibles and Blue Books, taught by governesses and tutors. Nevertheless, he rejected religion as a teenager and remained an unbeliever the rest of his life.

“No man ever had a stronger confidence in the power of intellect, though he tended to see it almost as an abstract, disembodied force.”[\[18\]](#) For much “of his life he spent in telling the public what they ought to think and do, and this intellectual evangelism completely dominated the second half of his long life.”[\[19\]](#) On a number of occasions, he found himself in trouble with the law, being sued and fined for articles he wrote.

Paul Johnson remarked that “No one was more detached from physical reality than Russell. He could not work the simplest mechanical device or perform any of the routine tasks which even the most pampered man does without thinking.”[\[20\]](#)

He said that the First World War caused him to revise the views he held about human behavior, in part because he could not understand how people’s emotions function in wartime. Reading him produced “a sense of wonder in the normal reader that so clever a man could be so blind to human nature.”[\[21\]](#)

Bertrand Russell believed “that the ills of the world could be largely solved by logic, reason, and moderation.” But here was his inconsistency. “When preaching his humanist idealism, Russell set truth above any other consideration. But in a corner, he was liable—indeed likely—to try to lie his way out of it.”[\[22\]](#)

As we have documented with other secular intellectuals, Russell also exploited women (especially his wives) as well as others who worked with him. This does seem to be a pattern. When students are required to read the works of many these men, they are never told about their lives. Although we are supposed to respect their intellect, once we study their lives we find that there was very little to respect.

## Jean-Paul Sartre

Paul Johnson concludes that “no philosopher this century has had so direct an impact on the minds and attitudes of so many human beings, especially young people, all over the world.”[\[23\]](#) Existentialism was a popular philosophy for decades. His plays were hits. His books sold in the millions.

He grew up as a spoiled child (his father dying when he was fifteen months), with his grandfather giving him the run of his library and his mother providing for him a childhood “paradise.” He enjoyed one of the best educations and had a habit of reading three hundred books a year.

In some ways, World War II made Sartre, though the people around him found little use for him. He “was notorious for never taking a bath and being disgustingly dirty. What he did was write.”[\[24\]](#) He didn’t do anything to save the Jews. Instead, he “concentrated relentlessly on promoting his own career. He wrote furiously, plays, philosophy and novels, mainly in cafés.”[\[25\]](#)

Sartre is known for the philosophy of existentialism, though

the word was not his. The press invented it, and he came to embrace it. He proposed his philosophy of human freedom at a time when people were hungry for it. But he also meant that the existentialist individual must live without excuses. That is the why he wrote that "Man is condemned to be free."

Sartre's companion through life was Simone de Beauvoir, who was a brilliant writer and philosopher. But he treated her "as a mistress, surrogate wife, cook and manager, female bodyguard, and nurse."[\[26\]](#) He was "the archetype of what in the 1960s became known as a male chauvinist."[\[27\]](#) He had numerous sexual liaisons that came and went with some regularity.

Paul Johnson concludes that "Sartre, like Russell, failed to achieve any kind of coherence and consistency in his views on public policy. No body of doctrine survived him."[\[28\]](#) Apparently he stood for very little other than to be linked to the liberal Left.

In this article we have taken a brief look at the lives of some of the secular intellectuals who have had an influence in the world. They still have some influence, and so it is worth asking if we should accept their prescriptions.

These men all lived decadent lives. Most of them mistreated people in their lives. But even more disturbing is the fact that they proposed systems of politics, economics, and culture that have been a failure and devastated millions of lives. They do not deserve the prominence they are often given in our universities today. We are expected to revere them, but there is little in their lives to respect.

## Notes

1. Paul Johnson, *Intellectuals: From Marx and Tolstoy to Sartre and Chomsky* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1988), 1.
2. Ibid., 34.
3. Ibid., 3.

4. Ibid., 10.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 14.
7. Ibid., 19.
8. Ibid., 23.
9. Ibid., 27.
10. Ibid., 52.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., 57.
13. Ibid., 70.
14. Ibid., 71.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 77.
17. Ibid., 197.
18. Ibid., 199.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., 202.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 203.
23. Ibid., 225.
24. Ibid., 229.
25. Ibid., 230.
26. Ibid., 235.
27. Ibid., 236.
28. Ibid., 253.

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## The Purpose of Life

*Paul Rutherford looks at the purpose of life from his Christian perspective as well as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Hollywood.*

On a warm day recently I visited my alma mater. And between the hallowed halls of old, a chance encounter reconnected me with an old friend. Eager for news, she asked me what I'd done since graduating, and my easy reply included mission work and how much I enjoy it. She smiled and said, "That's great, as long as you're happy." Have you had this type of conversation before?



If you have, then perhaps you also understand my consternation at my friend's response. I don't do mission work to be happy. I do it to honor and please the Lord Jesus Christ. On some level I felt misunderstood. Yet, her response indicates, I think, a prominent view held in our culture that happiness is what really matters. As far as her response is concerned, I could just as well have taken a job at a coffee shop, so long as I was happy.

Her response, while not uncommon, demonstrates a prevailing value in our culture today—pluralism. Mankind's ultimate purpose can be attained through multiple acceptable means, be they religion, economics, or otherwise.

You might be saying to yourself, "How did you get from your friend's comment about your happiness to mankind's ultimate purpose?" Good question. I skipped a few steps. When my friend bases her approval of what others do on their happiness, that means that what they *do* to be happy matters less than the fact that they *are* happy. Being happy then becomes the primary purpose or aim in life. You see? Happiness becomes a sort of general unit of measure for life's success. Since I am happy in life, I received my friend's stamp of approval.

But what is our ultimate purpose? Isn't that the million dollar question! And it's precisely the question I want to



explore in this article. The answer you give will depend on your perspective. So I'll consider several different perspectives, or worldviews, including my own, Christianity. Contrary to current thinking, the fact that there are different perspectives which result in differing meanings to life does not mean that all perspectives are equally true or even valid. Truth is found in Scripture so that's where we look to discover the true meaning of life.

As a Christian, I believe the ultimate purpose in life is salvation; that is, after I die I want to be with God for eternity.

"Being with God for eternity is great," you might say. "But how does one do that?" That's a great question. Certainly not all Christians will state it the same way, but the answer is believing in Jesus Christ of Nazareth as God who died for your sins and rose again to new life (cf. 1 Cor. 15:3-4). A Christian living out this principle patterns his life and relationships after Jesus Christ—serving, loving, and teaching.

Christianity is unmistakably present in America, but obviously this isn't the case in every culture. Next we'll consider mankind's purpose according to a very different worldview closer to home than you might think: Buddhism.

## **Buddhism**

I was at a diner last week grabbing a late night burger with my friend from Bible study, and I mentioned a desire to start a new workout regimen. He handed me a business card for a place doing some new form of [yoga](#), apparently really good for you.

Is it me, or does yoga seem to be increasing in currency among Christians as just one more way to work out?

It's totally fine for Christians to practice yoga as physical exercise, isn't it? The answer is too complex to say here, but the sheer fact that we pose the question underscores the unmistakable impression yoga has made on American culture.

What if I did practice yoga? What if I were a practicing Buddhist? Would that make a difference anyway? I think so.

To ask a larger question, what is our ultimate purpose? Once again, the answer depends upon your perspective. For the yoga-practicing Buddhist, the answer is nothing. Literally. The ultimate purpose for life is to cease to exist, or what is called *nirvana*.

Traditionally understood to be from India, yoga is a discipline of the mind and the body, and is actively practiced today by both Buddhists and Hindus.<sup>{1}</sup> But increasingly, Americans have jettisoned the spiritual disciplines of yoga, ignoring its spiritual aspects, in favor of the sheerly physical, often in lieu of the morning jog.

Now, ceasing to exist, or *nirvana*, may seem more like an anti-purpose for life because it is defined by not living rather than that for which one lives. Nevertheless, much thought and action is involved in this monumental goal of *nirvana*.

One such step in attaining *nirvana* is realizing the second of the Four Noble Truths: all frustration in life arises from desire. Did that make your head spin? It makes mine spin. Simply put, frustration is an unmet expectation or desire, so frustration's origin then, is desire.

Life is filled with desires—food, shelter, or clothing may be the first to come to mind—but there are a myriad of others from cars, to jewelry, technology, even relationships.

Follow me here. Since desire leads to frustration, the best way to eliminate frustration is to eliminate desire. This is precisely the path to *nirvana*, the elimination of desire.

Therefore, we must cease to exist in order to free ourselves from this frustration or suffering.

Do you see the difference in life's purpose? The ultimate purpose in life for the Christian is to be with God for eternity, but for a Buddhist it's to cease to exist. Very different indeed.

## Hinduism

Fifty singers gather on a Sunday morning in Queens. The director groups them together and gives them one final word of instruction before they begin. Listeners don't entirely fall silent. Priests in the background continue to laugh among themselves, as the choir begins, "Om! Ganesha Sharanam!"

Notice something different about this picture? It may not fit your expectations. That's because this choir isn't singing praise to Jesus Christ; they aren't even in a church. Rather they're Hindus worshipping in their New York temple.

Surprised? So were many of the devotees gathered that Sunday morning in late August 2009, the New York Times reported.[\[2\]](#) Most of the faithful Hindus worshipping there for years had never before heard a Hindu choir. It is a mix of both Hindu and Christian traditions.

This story testifies to the strange and wonderful effects of very different religions meeting in a single culture, and undoubtedly demonstrates the pervasiveness of Hinduism in American culture today.

Choirs seem so commonplace in America. How can a Hindu, like those mentioned earlier, have never heard one in his own religion before? The answer lies in the difference between Hindu and Christian worship.

Hindu worship tends to be much more individualistic. And while predominantly occurring at a temple rather than at one's home,

Hindu worship is more focused on prayers and rituals rather than on an assembly or gathering as a Christian understands a church service.

Take a step back. Ask a larger question. Why does the Hindu go to temple? What's his motivation? The answer? To appease a myriad of gods in hopes of being reincarnated in the next life as a higher life form. If you're a human being listening to this right now, then you've already had thousands of good lifetimes prior, combined to bring you to your current form.

To be fair, Hinduism is a huge religion with over one billion practitioners, spanning thousands of years, and existing in multiple different cultures. Some scholars believe it is the oldest recorded religion. So to ascribe the Hindu's motivation as wanting to please the gods is a drastic oversimplification, but is nonetheless true for many if not most Hindus.

You see, for the Hindu the world exists eternally. People die and are reborn all the time in a never-ending cycle. The ultimate purpose for life, then, is to be freed from the never-ending cycle of rebirth and become one with Brahma, or the ultimate singularity of the universe. This release is called *moksha*. It's achieved by offering sacrifices to the gods, including prayers, and right living.

Does this sound like your life? If not, you're probably not Hindu. This further underscores the fact that all religions at their core may not all be the same.

## Islam

"Boycott Facebook" reads the placard of an Islamist protestor in Karachi.

Late spring 2010 in Pakistan, a Facebook page declares, "Everybody Draw Mohammed Day!" A Pakistani high court deems the material highly offensive, and the entire Facebook website

was shut down within its borders as a result, the *Wall Street Journal* reports.[\[3\]](#)

Ban Facebook! You may find yourself asking, why would anyone ever do that? What about rights to free speech, or exercise of religion? Doesn't a Facebook ban deny people just such rights? Well, under a government far less liberal in doling out these liberties, claiming rights quickly makes a sticky situation.

But the short answer to the motivation for banning Facebook is because they're Muslim, and as such they regard as sacred Mohammed, their most famed prophet. He's so sacred, in fact, that to depict him in a portrait is a kind of blasphemy. Hence art from Muslim cultures is either calligraphy or geometric (think mosaics).

There is more going on here beneath the surface, leading an entire country to ban Facebook. It's not just reverence for a significant religio-cultural phenomenon, or even devotion to their faith. No, it goes deeper than that. Muslims have a different perspective from most Westerners on how this world operates at its most fundamental level.

For the Muslim there is one God, Allah. He is the supreme unquestioned creator and Lord of the universe who revealed his intentions for mankind through his prophet Mohammed. Reverence for Allah is paramount, even above the value of the individual. This leads Muslims to value obedience to Allah over freedoms of the individual. In this case obedience is not portraying Mohammed.

You may respond by posing once again the previous question: what about a man's right to speech or religion? But for the Muslim, you're simply asking the wrong question. A better question the Muslim would ask is, what about putting Mohammed in his proper place, and by extension obeying Allah?

The ultimate purpose in life for a Muslim is to obey Allah and to be rewarded after life by entering paradise. Unlike

Christians, Muslims do not believe mankind is sinful and in need of a savior, but only needs to perform the right actions, of which we are certainly capable. While Muslims hope for the mercy of Allah, the right to enter paradise is a result of obedience, not his grace. So central is this unmitigated obedience to Muslims, that many give their lives to defend Allah and their way of life.

Rights to free speech aside, when given the choice between a Facebook ban and martyrdom, suddenly Facebook deprivation doesn't seem so bad.

## Hollywood

An honest working man returns home from a rough day at the office. He's a struggling ad specialist for a sports magazine. He's in his mid-thirties, single, and completely eligible. But the right woman just hasn't come along. He's a handsome, brown-haired man with kind blue eyes and a knack for making you want to trust him when he flashes you his easy smile. We long for him to find satisfaction in someone as we trace the story of his search.

One night he meets a dashing young lady. Our hearts jump for him. A relationship ensues and they grow closer. One night in desperation to express his deepest and truest feelings for the gal, he confesses, "You complete me." Perhaps now you realize I'm describing the story from Hollywood's hit 1996 film, *Jerry Maguire*.

We've been considering the ultimate purpose of man from different perspectives, and, with an ever-increasing number of Americans considering themselves not religious, I've gone to a secular source for consideration: Hollywood.

Jerry Maguire's famous confession, "You complete me," is a wonderful illustration of mankind's ultimate purpose being himself, or what is called humanism. Maguire realizes

something is missing in his life. He longs for satisfaction, for joy, for love, but his seeming inability to find it causes him pain. We realize that the world in which we live is broken and imperfect, and who would disagree?

Maguire finds in this woman, in this relationship, the completion of himself. He looks to her to be what he cannot be himself. In so doing, he creates out of her a savior. He looks to her to save him from his misery of singleness and heartache. He needs her in order to be whole himself.

This story is a clear demonstration of mankind looking to himself to be his ultimate purpose. I am generalizing a bit to choose words from a single film, but many messages from Hollywood films don't contradict this theme. We want to be able to save ourselves. Isn't that the American ideal: pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps?

Beware what Hollywood would have us believe, that our ultimate purpose is ourselves, and only we can save ourselves. Hollywood would have us believe that life can be found in relationships, people, or even ourselves. It's a lie. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Only Jesus can save mankind. Serving Him is the only purpose that will bring satisfaction and joy in life, only in Him alone.

"What is my ultimate purpose?" That's the question. The answers we've considered from different perspectives range from happiness to appeasing the gods. Why does it matter? Because your ultimate purpose determines how you live, and while we may all be alike, since we are all human, when it comes to what really matters in life, we are very different indeed.

## Notes

1. "Yoga," Wikipedia, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoga](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoga) (accessed May 6, 2010).

2. Jonathan Allen, The New York Times online, [nyti.ms/hJUJ8b](http://nyti.ms/hJUJ8b) (accessed May 20, 2010).
3. Tom Wright, "Pakistan Maintains Facebook Ban," The Wall Street Journal online, [on.wsj.com/dJiwI6](http://on.wsj.com/dJiwI6) (accessed May 20, 2010).

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