

Nuclear War

Kerby Anderson provides an overview of nuclear war from Annie Jacobsen's book Nuclear War: A Scenario with a biblical response.

Hell on Earth

Annie Jacobsen begins her book with a scenario: [\[1\]](#) a one-megaton thermonuclear bomb strikes the Pentagon and vaporizes the building and the 27,000 employees within it. A mile away the marble columns of the Lincoln and Jefferson memorials burst apart and disintegrate. Two and a half miles west at National Park, the clothes of a majority of the 35,000 people watching the ballgame catch on fire.

Her book, *Nuclear War: A Scenario*, takes you through, in a minute-by-minute description, what would happen if a “bolt out of the blue” nuclear attack took place on U.S. soil. This 370-page book isn't for the faint-hearted, but it is an in-depth investigation in how we got to this place in world history and what would happen if the unthinkable became reality. And the book provides a sequel to the 2023 biographical film, *Oppenheimer*.



Why are we discussing this difficult topic of nuclear war now? First, there is a need to educate a new generation. Although Americans talked about the danger of nuclear war during the Cold War years, much less has been said in recent years. Second, the threat of nuclear war is even greater today because of countries like North Korea that have nuclear weapons and other countries like Iran that are attempting to develop nuclear weapons. Third, this discussion is relevant because so many documents about nuclear war have been declassified. We know so much more about nuclear war than we knew just a few years ago.

It is impossible for our minds to comprehend what happens in a nuclear blast. The air heats to one hundred and eighty million degrees Fahrenheit. This is nearly five times hotter than the temperature in the center of the sun. The blast levels any structure within miles, but also creates winds travelling at several hundred miles per hour.

The nuclear fireball then rises like a hot-air balloon forming the iconic mushroom cloud with cap and stem. Then the inferno begins. Gas lines explode and look like giant blowtorches. Washington, D.C. has now become a mega-inferno. Asphalt streets turn to liquid from the intense heat. More than a million people are dead or dying within two minutes after the detonation.

Outside of the blast area, the electromagnetic pulse obliterates all radio, television, and the Internet. Cars with electric ignition systems cannot start. Water stations cannot pump water. And deadly radiation spreads to those who survived the initial blast.

Nuclear war may be unthinkable, but that is why we are thinking and talking about it.

Happens Too Fast

Nuclear war could develop unthinkably fast and devastate our world.

An intercontinental ballistic missile is a long-range missile that delivers nuclear weapons to political and military targets on the other side of the world. These ICBMs exist to do one thing: kill millions of people in another country.

Back when the ICBM was invented, Herb York, the Pentagon's chief scientist, wanted to calculate how many minutes it would take for it to reach the Soviet Union. [{2}](#) A group of defense scientists estimated that it would take 26 minutes and 40

seconds. From launch to annihilation takes just 1,600 seconds. Nuclear war happens too fast.

Today that estimate varies because we have nine countries that possess nuclear weapons: Russia, France, China, Pakistan, India, Israel, North Korea, the UK, and the US. Given North Korea's geographical location, the launch-to-target time frame from the Korean peninsula to the East Coast of the US would be about 33 minutes.

But a nuclear blast can come even sooner from nuclear-armed, nuclear-powered submarines. These submarines are called "boomers" or even have been called the "handmaidens of the apocalypse." They are undetectable under the sea and can sneak up very close to a nation's coast and launch a first-strike attack. This is why the president actually has only a six-minute window to decide on a nuclear counterattack.

Launch on Warning

America has a policy known as "launch on warning."^[3] What that means is that America will launch its nuclear weapons once its early-warning electronic sensor system warns of an impending nuclear attack. Put another way, the US won't wait to check if a warning is accurate, it will not wait and physically absorb a nuclear blow before launching its own nuclear weapons at whoever sent a missile to them.

This policy has been in place since the height of the cold war and represented an incredibly high risk. As one advisor explains, launch on warning during at time of intense crisis is a recipe for catastrophe.

Presidential candidates have promised to change this policy, but nothing has happened so far. George W. Bush in 2000 vowed to address this policy: "Keeping so many weapons on high alert may create an unacceptable risk for accidental or unauthorized launch." Barack Obama argued that "keeping nuclear weapons ready to launch on a moment's notice is a dangerous relic of

the Cold War.” President Biden has also encouraged to eliminate this perilous policy. No change has been made.

President’s Football

The decision to launch a nuclear strike comes from the president. How did the government decide to give the president the nuclear football? The story begins with Harold Agnew back in 1959.^{4} He visited a NATO base and noticed there were four F-84F aircraft at the end of the runway; each was carrying two nuclear gravity bombs. This meant that these nuclear bombs were in the custody of one U.S. Army private armed with a M1 rifle with eight rounds of ammunition. The only safeguard against unauthorized use of an atomic bomb was this single GI surrounded by numbers of foreign troops on foreign territory with thousands of Soviet troops just miles away.

When he got back to the U.S., Agnew contacted a project engineer at Sandia Laboratories and asked if they could put an electronic “lock” on the bomb’s firing circuits that would prevent others from arming the nuclear bomb. They produced a lock and coded switch that would be activated with a three-digit code.

They presented the idea and the device to the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy and then to President Kennedy who ordered it to be done. But the military objected. A general asked how a pilot somewhere in the world could get a code from the President of the United States to arm a nuclear weapon before being overrun by a massively superior number of Soviet troops? And why not have other nuclear bombs also coded?

The answer came in the creation of the President’s Football, which is an emergency satchel. This gave the president, not the military, control of America’s nuclear arsenal. The Football must always be near the president.

There is a story of how important it is for the president to have access to the Football.[{5}](#) When President Clinton was visiting Syria, President Hafez al-Assad's handlers tried to prevent Clinton's military aide from riding in an elevator with him. The Secret Service would not let that happen, and they did not let that happen.

Inside is a set of documents known as the Black Book. Robert "Buzz" Patterson served as a military aide to President Clinton, and I was able to interview him one time on [my radio program](#). He likened the Black Book to a "Denny's breakfast menu" because of how it looked. The president must choose retaliatory targets from a predetermined nuclear strike list on the menu.

Let me end with this question: Do you believe the current president has a mental capacity to make a rational decision of about launching nuclear weapons?

War Games

One question that was asked more than forty years ago was whether anyone could win a nuclear war. Spoiler alert: no one can. President Reagan ordered a simulated war game with the name Proud Prophet to explore the outcome and long-term effects of a nuclear war.[{6}](#)

The research used mathematical models to predict outcomes and was conducted at the National War College. Participants were cloistered away inside a secure location to prevent leaks. The results were only declassified in 2012, but much of the material was blacked out. Fortunately, this declassification allowed participants to discuss it without violating the Espionage Act of 1917.

Over the two weeks, every simulated scenario ended the same way. Sometimes they began with a tactical nuclear strike and a so-called limited nuclear war. Other times they simulated

exercises with NATO and then with other exercises without NATO. There were scenarios where the U.S. launched nuclear war preemptively. Sometimes that was when the Pentagon was supposedly in focused calm and other when in a crisis mode.

Sadly, the result was the same. Once a nuclear war starts, there is no way to win it or even end it. No matter how a nuclear war begins, it ends with complete Armageddon-like destruction. As one participant put it, this destruction "made all the wars of the past five hundred years pale in comparison." At least a half billion (and probably more like a billion) people die in the war's opening salvo. Then billions more die of radiation poisoning and starvation.

Nuclear Winter

When the bombs cease striking targets, the world turns cold and dark. Everything is on fire. Smoke produces noxious smog of pyrotoxins. Fires in the cities ignite other fires. Even in the less-populated areas, forest fires rage.

The density of soot reduces global temperatures by 20-40 degrees depending on the location. Earth plunges into the horror known as a "nuclear winter." This might be a familiar term for those of us who lived in the 1980s. Astronomer Carl Sagan wrote about it and warned us of the dangers of nuclear war.

A nuclear war would change the troposphere and thus the amount of sunlight reaching the earth. Once the radioactive fog and haze diminish, the ozone layer disappears, and the sun's warming rays are now killer UV rays.

Earth is no longer as hospitable for humans as it once was. After millennia of planting and harvesting, the few humans to survive return to a hunter-gatherer existence.

Biblical Perspective

We will conclude this discussion of nuclear war with a biblical perspective. Let's begin with the realization that God is sovereign and in control. But that doesn't mean that He would never allow a nuclear war to take place. Throughout history, we have had tyrants and armies destroy people groups and civilizations. God used pagan nations to judge the nation of Israel.

How should we respond? Since the first atomic bombings at the end of World War II, there has been a condition known as "nuclear anxiety." Jesus instructs us not to "be anxious about tomorrow" (Matthew 6:34), and Paul also tells us not to "be anxious about anything" (Philippians 4:6). Jesus even says that "if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved" (Matthew 24:22).

In the book of Daniel, we have another reminder of God's sovereignty that came in the second dream of Nebuchadnezzar. It reminded him of the fact that God "rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men" (Daniel 4:17). Nebuchadnezzar knew more about human sovereignty than anyone and proclaimed God's sovereignty over the earth at the end of his days (4:34).

Some Christians have suggested that the Bible may be describing a nuclear war. In the book of Revelation, there is a description of the poisoning of the waters (8:11), death of the earth's vegetation (8:17), the end of ocean life (16:3), and the inability to block the sun's rays resulting in severe burns (16:8).

There is a description of stars of heaven falling to earth (6:13) that some have suggested might be describing nuclear missiles raining down on earth during a nuclear war. These would be visible as they enter the atmosphere and begin striking the cities on earth.

Even passages in the Old Testament might point to the effects of a nuclear war. For example, in Zechariah 14:12 we read that “the Lord will strike all the peoples that wage war against Jerusalem: their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths.”

One prophecy yet to be fulfilled can be found in Ezekiel 38 that describes nations that will come against Israel. But critics point to the fact that it says they are riding horses, wearing helmets and armor, and wielding swords (38:4-5). That doesn't look like a modern army. But I remember a famous quote from Albert Einstein: “I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones.” The world might look very different after a nuclear war.

In this article we have been discussing the unthinkable: a nuclear war. We should remember the words of Jesus: “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Notes

1. Annie Jacobsen, *Nuclear War: A Scenario*, NY: Dutton, 2024, xvii.
2. Ibid., 53-55.
3. Ibid., 59-60.
4. Ibid., 86-87.
5. Ibid., 84-85.
6. Ibid., 173-178.

Friendship with Jesus

Dr. Michael Gleghorn draws on a work by Dr. Gail R. O'Day, "Jesus as Friend in the Gospel of John,"[{1}](#) to explore the perspective of Jesus Christ as a Friend.

What a Friend We Have in Jesus[{2}](#)

In his book, *The Problem of Pain*, C. S. Lewis offers four analogies of God's love for humanity.[{3}](#) These include the love of an artist for a great work of art, the love of a human being for an animal, the love of a father for his son, and the love of a man for a woman. Interestingly, he does not consider the analogy of friendship, or love between friends. In one sense it's surprising, for Lewis would later write quite perceptively about friendship in his book, *The Four Loves*.

Of course, at this time in his career, Lewis may not have even thought about the love of friendship in the context of discussing analogies of God's love for humanity. After all, on the surface, the Bible appears to say little about friendship between God and human beings. But saying little is not the same as saying nothing, and the Bible does speak about the possibility of enjoying friendship with God. In fact, the Gospel of John offers a great illustration of this in the life and teaching of Jesus, whom Christians regard as God the Son incarnate. John presents Jesus as a true friend, one who is willing to speak the truth to those He loves and to lay down His life for their benefit.

Consider Jesus' words to his disciples in John 15: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I

have made known to you” (vv. 12-15).

In this brief passage, Jesus surfaces several important elements of friendship which would have been readily recognized by people in the ancient world. We’ll carefully consider each of these elements in this article. For now, however, the key point to notice is that Jesus explicitly refers to His disciples as “friends.” Moreover, He also holds out to them the possibility of deepening their friendship with both Him, and one another.

In what follows, we’ll unpack many of these ideas further. First, however, we must get a better understanding of how friendship was viewed in the ancient world.

Friendship in the Ancient World

Of course, John’s discussion of friendship in his gospel does not occur in a cultural or historical vacuum. Indeed, he seems to have been aware of other such discussions and even enters into a dialogue (of sorts) with some of them. So how was friendship understood in the ancient world?

The most important discussion of friendship in antiquity is probably that found in Aristotle’s *Ethics*. As one philosopher observes, “Aristotle’s treatise on friendship is comprehensive and confident, as well as undeniably profound.”^{4} Aristotle views friendship as something like the glue of a community, binding people together in relations of benevolence and love. Such relations are indispensable for the community’s health and well-being.^{5}

Aristotle describes friendship as “*reciprocated goodwill*” and claims that the highest form of friendship occurs between “good people similar in virtue.” The primary virtue of real friends is “loving” one another. And such love is expressed in practical actions, for the virtuous person “labours for his friends” and is even willing to “die for them” if necessary.

Finally, the ancients also viewed “frank speech” and “openness” as essential elements of friendship. According to Plutarch, “Frankness of speech . . . is the language of friendship . . . and . . . lack of frankness is unfriendly and ignoble.”[\[6\]](#) The language of friendship thus involves something like “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). Friendship should allow, and even encourage, frank speech. And yet, such speech should always be characterized by love and a genuine desire for the friend’s best interest.

Putting this all together, we can see how Jesus’ remarks about friendship correlate with the ancient ideals expressed in the writings of men like Aristotle and Plutarch. Just as Aristotle viewed friendship as the glue of a community, so also Jesus seems to envision the formation of a community of friends, who are bound together in love by their shared allegiance to Him. As biblical scholar Dr. Gail O’Day observes, “The language of friendship provided language for talking about the construction of a community of like-minded people informed by a particular set of teachings.”[\[7\]](#)

Below, we’ll consider how Jesus both models and encourages the ancient ideals of friendship in His life and teaching.

The Language of Friendship

One of the ways in which John shows Jesus demonstrating friendship is through his frank and honest speech. We’ve seen that in the ancient world, open and honest speech was regarded as one of the hallmarks of friendship. And there are several occasions in which such speech is attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of John (e.g., 7:26; 10:24-30; 11:14; 16:25-33; 18:19-20).[\[8\]](#)

Of course, this doesn’t mean that everything Jesus had to say was easy to understand. It wasn’t, and even his disciples often misunderstood Him. Nor does it mean that Jesus never

taught truths about God by using parables or figurative language. Indeed, He often did. What it does mean, however, is that throughout his Gospel, John repeatedly portrays Jesus as speaking and teaching the truth about God openly and honestly to all who care to listen.

For example, Jesus is described as “speaking openly” while teaching the people in the temple at the Feast of Booths (John 7:14, 26). Moreover, after His arrest, when Jesus is being questioned by the High Priest, He frankly declares to those present, “I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret” (John 18:20). Dr. Gail O’Day observes that Jesus here claims that His entire public ministry has “been characterized by freedom of speech throughout its duration.” She writes, “Jesus has not held anything back in His self-revelation but has spoken with the freedom that marks a true friend.”[\[9\]](#)

Finally, we must not forget what Jesus says to His disciples in John 15: “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (v. 15). Here Jesus explicitly refers to His disciples as “friends,” claiming that He has “made known” to them everything that He has heard from the Father. Not only does Jesus call His disciples “friends,” He also speaks to them in the language of friendship, openly and honestly revealing to them the heart and mind of the Father.

Judged by the criterion of “frank and honest speech,” Jesus thus reveals Himself to be a true friend to His disciples. And as we’ll see next, He is willing to do much more than this, for Jesus is willing to lay down His life for the benefit of others.

The Ultimate Demonstration of Friendship

In John 15 Jesus declares, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (v. 13). Earlier we saw that Aristotle, in his writings on friendship, maintained that the true friend, actuated by genuine goodness, would even be willing to "die" (if necessary) for the sake of a friend.^{10} Of course, as any reader of the Gospels knows, Jesus soon does this very thing, thus demonstrating the greatest possible love according to the ancient ideals of friendship. As Dr. O'Day observes, "Jesus did what the philosophers only talked about—He lay down his life for His friends."^{11}

This event is foreshadowed by Jesus in His claim to be the Good Shepherd in John 10. "I am the good shepherd," He says. "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (v. 11). This claim is one of the seven "I Am" statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John, and it likely involves an implicit claim to deity, for as Edwin Blum has noted, "In the Old Testament, God is called the Shepherd of His people (Psalm 23:1; 80:1-2; Ecclesiastes 12:11; Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 31:10)."^{12} One thinks of the way in which David begins Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" (v. 1). The Lord Jesus, as the Good Shepherd of His people, is willing to lay down His life for their benefit (John 10:11).

But Jesus goes further than this, for as Paul tells us, Jesus not only gave His life for His "friends," but even for His "enemies." "For while we were still weak," writes Paul, "at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). "While we were still sinners" (Romans 5:8), and even "enemies," "we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (Romans 5:10). If dying for one's friends epitomizes the ancient ideal of friendship, dying for one's enemies far transcends this ideal. It demonstrates the sacrificial love of God for all humanity. While we were spiritually dead, mired in

sin and rebellion (Ephesians 2:1-3), God “sent his Son to be the savior of the world” (1 John 4:14).

Aristotle referred to friendship as “reciprocated goodwill.” Jesus demonstrated the greatest possible love and “goodwill” of God by giving His life for the sins of the world (John 1:29). He commands His disciples to reciprocate His goodwill by loving “one another” as He has loved us (John 15:12, 14). By following His command, a community of friends is formed, bound together in love for one another and a shared commitment to Jesus.

A Community of Friends

Jesus calls His disciples “friends” and commands them to “love one another” as He has loved them (John 15:12). Jesus wants His followers to regard themselves not only as *His* friends, but as friends of one another as well. He intends for them to be a community of friends, bound together in their love for one another because of their shared devotion to Him. The sort of love to which Jesus calls them is a costly love, for He desires that His people’s love for one another be an imitation of the love that He has already demonstrated toward them. And what sort of love is this? It’s the kind of love that is willing to give one’s life for the benefit of others, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends (John 15:13).

Now this, I think we can all agree, is a very high calling. Indeed, if we’re honest, I think that we must all admit that, humanly speaking, it is frankly impossible. If some degree of discomfort does not grip our hearts in considering this commandment, then we probably aren’t considering it in all due seriousness. Very few of us will probably ever reach the level of truly loving other believers just as Jesus has loved us, and if any of us do reach it, we probably won’t be able to consistently maintain such love in our daily practice. But Jesus commands us to do it, and we must at least begin trying

to do so. But how?

Dr. Gail O'Day, I think, strikes the right tone when she comments: "The disciples begin with the explicit appellation, 'friend,' and the challenge for them is to enact and embody friendship as Jesus has done. The disciples know how Jesus has been a friend, and they are called to see what kind of friends they can become. Jesus' friendship is the model of friendship for the disciples, and it makes any subsequent acts of friendship by them possible because the disciples themselves are already the recipients of Jesus' acts of friendship." [\[13\]](#)

We must remember that Jesus is our friend, that He loves us and provides all that we need to live a holy and God-honoring life. Indeed, He has sent the Holy Spirit to indwell and empower His people for just this purpose. As we trust in Jesus, giving ourselves to Him (and one another) in genuine love and friendship, we will find that we are increasingly obeying His commands and bearing fruit that brings Him glory. So let's commit ourselves to friendship with Jesus, and to those who compose His body, the church (1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:24).

Notes

1. Much of the content of this article is indebted to the prior work of Gail R. O'Day, "Jesus as Friend in the Gospel of John," *Interpretation*, 58(2):144-157.

2. The title for this day is indebted to the song, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." The words to this song were originally penned by Joseph Scriven in the 19th century; they were set to music by Charles Converse in 1868. For a brief history of Scriven and the hymn, please see Terry, L. (2004, July-August). Joseph Scriven's: "What a Friend We Have in Jesus": What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer! *Today's Christian*, 42(4), 16.

3. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York, NY: Macmillan,

1962), 42-48.

4. Michael Pakaluk (Ed.), *Other Selves: Philosophers on Friendship* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1991), 28.

5. I am drawing from Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Hackett Publishing, 1985), 1155a23-27.

6. Plutarch, *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*, 61; cited in Gail O'Day, "Jesus as Friend in the Gospel of John," *Interpretation* 58(2):147.

7. O'Day, 147.

8. See the discussion in O'Day, 152-57.

9. O'Day, 156.

10. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Hackett Publishing, 1985).

11. O'Day, 150.

12. Edwin A. Blum, "John," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament Edition*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Victor Books, 1989), 310.

13. O'Day, 152.

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Biblical Worldview: Parents and Pastors Are Not Passing It On

Steve Cable reviews the dismal results of surveying the worldview of American Christians.

Problem: How Parents are Missing the Mark

Following up on our series of articles featuring the results from Probe's recent 2020 survey of American Religious

Beliefs{1}, we want to add to that understanding drawing on data collected and analyzed by George Barna of the Christian Research Center at Arizona Christian University. Since 2020, the Christian Research Center has taken multiple surveys to assess the worldviews and the values of American adults. In 2023, Barna released a book entitled *American Worldview Inventory 2022-23: The Annual Report of the State of Worldview in the United States.*{2}

Looking at the spiritual status and worldviews of America's parents of children living at home, our data and Barna's book both show the vast majority of Americans do not possess a biblical worldview to pass on to their children. Equally disturbing at a parenting level, most of them "do not even have the worldview development of their children on their radar." {3} To make this situation worse for the future of American Christianity, most Evangelical parents fall into the same category as other parents— a fractured, inconsistent worldview with no intentional plan to impart their worldview or any other worldview to their children.



Some people might want to argue that worldviews are personal, and children need to develop a personal worldview without parental intervention. That way they can own and nurture this view as young adults, finding something that works for them. Such an argument might have some substance, if we were talking about forming your views on how one might select sports teams to root for or even choose a career to pursue. But when we talk about worldviews, we are talking about the fundamentals of life including things such as "Where did life originate?", "What does it mean to be a person?", "Why is there evil and suffering in the world?", "How can we escape the destructive forces of sin in our life?", "Can we be restored to a relationship with our creator?" and others.

There are radically different answers to these questions being

promoted in our society today. If you are an Evangelical Christian, you know that true biblical answers to these questions are under constant attack.

You should expect your children to choose to flee from these attacks by adopting another, nonbiblical worldview unless they have been given good reasons to believe the biblical answers are true.

If you believe that a biblical worldview is the only foundation upon which to build a life that will echo through eternity, you need to be actively teaching, testing and encouraging your children with the truth. To do this you will need to repair your worldview along biblical guidelines and develop a plan for building these worldview truths into your children.

But first, we will look at the lies that have crept into many worldviews including those held by Christian parents.

The Victory of Syncretism

George Barna's research as well as our own clearly show a breakdown of biblically based thinking not only among the general population but also among those who identify as Evangelicals. Barna's recent research found that two-thirds of parents of preteens claim to be Christian, but only 4% of them possess a biblical worldview. So, what kind of worldview do they hold?

Barna surveyed adults in America using worldview questions to divide our population into seven different worldviews ranging from Biblical Theism to Moralistic Therapeutic Deism to Postmodernism to Eastern Mysticism. Surprisingly, the most popular worldview was Biblical Theism but held by only 2% of the parents of preteens. All the other worldviews offered were at 1% or less.

Wait, you may be asking! That sum adds up to less than 8% of

the population and you would be right. What happened is that 94% of these parents were classified as being Syncretists. "Syncretism is a blending of multiple worldviews in which no single life philosophy is dominant, producing a worldview that is diverse and **often self-contradictory.**"^{4} Since the rise of postmodernism (and probably before), more and more Americans have no problem holding a set of views which are at best inconsistent. Barna found most of these syncretistic parents gathered their worldview ideas from different parts of three of the candidate worldviews: Eastern Mysticism, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, and Biblical Theism. When considered as a whole, each of these worldviews is distinctly different and in fact counter to the other two.

We see that Americans tend to embrace beliefs in the different areas of worldview that seem attractive in that area, are espoused by many of their friends, and that they see espoused on their media outlets of choice. As one scholar describes it, "Central to syncretism is the belief that all religions offer truth, or that different religions present different paths to God. Syncretism operates on the assumption that combining certain teachings produces a better way of knowing and/or reaching God."

Barna found that less than one third of adults turn to the Bible as their primary source of moral guidance. Of course, even fewer turn to the sacred texts of other religions. American adults, without placing their faith in historical worldviews, feel a freedom to create their own way to view the world. In fact, 58% of adults believe that moral truth is up to the individual to decide. Since all truth is relative, inconsistencies and contradictions are not worth considering. Certainly a careful examination of the so-called truth that all truth is relative would show the falsehood in that statement.

The dominant worldview thinking of Americans assumes that the details of the faith you ascribe to don't matter as long as

you place your faith in something AND you don't presume to question anyone else's object of faith. As you can see, this way of thinking creates a tough wall for any evangelistic message to overcome. People are not programmed to think, "Isn't it nice that this Christian is concerned for my eternal situation and wants to tell me the way I can improve it." Instead, they think, "How can this person be so rude and confrontational as to present their views as the only viable truth? This person needs to be shunned."

At the end of this essay, we will consider some strategies for tearing down this wall.

Values and Beliefs of Young Parents

As noted above, two major barriers exist, preventing the development of biblical leaning worldviews for our pre-teens. First, most parents do not take any concrete actions to pass on or promote a particular worldview. Instead, they leave it to the culture around their children to instill a worldview framework. If these parents have a somewhat Christian perspective themselves, they ignore the teaching of Deuteronomy where God tells us, *"These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up."*^{5} And in the New Testament epistle Ephesians, Paul writes, *"Bring your children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."*^{6}

Secondly, the vast majority of parents, including many Evangelical parents, do not possess a biblical worldview to pass on. In some areas, they depart from the clear biblical teaching and subscribe to the lies of the world. As Barna points out, *"The parents of children under the age of 13 are a stellar example of this Christian nominalism that is widely accepted as spiritually normal and healthy."*^{7} Let's examine some the areas where parents are failing to uphold a biblical

worldview.

As Christians, we know that God created human life as sacred. Even as fallen humans, God considered our lives so important that Jesus came to die, taking on the price of our sin. And yet according to Barna's recent book, over three fourths of American parents do not suppose that human life is sacred.

This gap in a biblical worldview leads to a nation where many worship a woman's ability to choose an abortion over the sacred obligation to protect life. In fact, over 85% of parents do not consider human life as sacred and/or support having an abortion if raising the child would be **too inconvenient** for the parents. To put it bluntly, the right to live a life without inconveniences is more important than another person's right to live at all.

Another example is that less than one in four self-identified Christian parents oppose the notion that having faith matters more than which faith. They are essentially saying if you have faith in Buddha, Mohammed, or your household idol, that is just as good as having faith in Christ. These parents (and remember, these are people who identify themselves as Christians) believe that God would sacrifice His Son, turning His back on Jesus as He took the sins of the world upon Himself, when there were already other ways people could be restored to God that would require no love or sacrifice on the part of God. This inconsistent, self-contradictory thinking is a hallmark of the syncretistic views that dominate our society.

Barna also found that only one in ten parents have a consistently biblical perspective on God, creation, and history. Without this understanding, their children cannot be expected to grasp these key precepts on their own.

With this combination of *laissez-faire* parenting and a lack of a consistent biblical worldview, the natural conclusion is that the upcoming generation of young adults will be even

further removed from clear biblical thinking than the current generation. Unfortunately, this result is almost certain without a concerted effort by concerned Christians to communicate the truth.

Pastors (for the most part) Not Helping Combat the Decline

As we consider the decline in American young adults who profess and live according to a biblical worldview, we might ask what influences are in play to counter this decline. One of the questions Barna addresses is “How well are America’s pastors working to stem this discouraging tide on unbelief?” To get a handle on this question, he surveyed 1,000 pastors across America including Senior Pastors, Youth Pastors and Teaching Pastors. [\[8\]](#)

If these pastors are going to help turn people back to a biblical worldview, they need to possess one themselves. What the survey found was only four out of ten Senior Pastors professed a biblical worldview. This result is disheartening, but perhaps even more startling only 12% of the Youth Pastors claimed a biblical worldview. One third of the pastors surveyed did not even read their Bible at least once a week. So, the vast majority of our children who are attending church regularly have no chance of receiving a clearly articulated biblical worldview from the spiritual leaders their parents are relying on for sound spiritual teaching.

Well, you may be thinking, these results are for all pastors, but I attend an evangelical church so I can be confident in the teaching my children will receive. It is true that while only one out of three Mainline Protestant pastors profess a biblical worldview, we can expect Evangelical pastors to be significantly better. But even Evangelical pastors still only have about one out of two (50%) with a biblical worldview. This result implies that half of the Evangelical churches in

America are not teaching a biblical worldview.

Southern Baptists and non-denominational Evangelicals do score significantly higher. Among Southern Baptists, over three out of four pastors professed a consistent biblical worldview. This significantly higher number may result from Southern Baptist churches requiring candidates for pastoral positions to affirm their belief in the Baptist Faith and Message document. Similarly, almost two out of three non-denominational pastors supported such a worldview.

In Barna's analysis, an Integrated Disciple was defined as someone who *"professed a biblical worldview and successfully integrated their biblical beliefs into their daily behavior."*^{9} One would think the pastors of mid-sized and large churches would be the most educated and very likely to be Integrated Disciples. However, what the survey revealed was that only 15% of pastors at churches with over 250 in average attendance were identified as Integrated Disciples. It is hard to find a disciple who is not following a spiritual leader, but in these churches such a leader will be hard to find.

Some people would like to believe that it doesn't matter which church you go to as long as you are going to church. Probe's and Barna's results show this hopeful view to be unfounded. Among Roman Catholics, less than 6% of the priests profess a biblical worldview. This lack of biblical leadership is clearly evident among those people who regularly attend Catholic mass where less than one out of one hundred profess a clear biblical worldview.

Today it is of utmost importance that Christian parents examine the teaching coming from the pastors and other leaders at their church. If the teaching does not reflect a biblical worldview, you should run, not walk, to the nearest exit and search for another church.

How to Combat the Decline in Biblical Worldview Believers

In this article, we have been highlighting the decline in the portion of our population who profess a biblical review, drawing on the research results presented in the book, *American Worldview Inventory 2022-23*. Although it helps to know the facts about the beliefs of most Americans, just reviewing and lamenting the data does not really accomplish anything. We want to consider and act on the steps we can take as individuals and churches to plant and tend to a new generation of Integrated Disciples in our country.

Barna calls on us to intentionally teach the key doctrines of an evangelical, biblical worldview in our seminaries, our churches, and our homes. As recent history has clearly demonstrated, just assuming that younger generations will catch our biblical worldview is doomed to failure. We need to systematically, intentionally, and repeatedly extol and explain the key truths that make us those who “*proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.*”^{10} Barna suggests the following key truths to focus on:

1. An orthodox, biblical understanding of God which understands that God is the all-powerful, all-knowing, perfect, and just creator of the universe who rule that universe today. Among parents of children under 13, just 40% hold that view.
2. All human beings are sinful by nature; every choice we make has moral contours and consequences. A vast majority of Americans, about three out of four, do not believe that humans are born with a sin nature and are certain to sin “and can only be saved from its consequences by Jesus Christ.”
3. Jesus Christ’s sacrificial death is the only way to be

reconciled with our holy God. We receive this free gift through our repentance and our confession that Jesus Christ is our Lord. Only three out of ten adults believe this is the only way to heaven, while only 2 of 100 believe they will go to hell after they die.

4. The entire Bible is true, reliable and relevant. When we understand how we received the Bible and how it applies to every aspect of our life and earth and in heaven, it changes how we perceive and interact with the world.

5. Absolute moral truth exists—and those truths are defined by God. Absolute truth can only be known by the source of truth, our Creator. Unfortunately, the majority of adults believe that determining moral truth is up to each individual.

6. The ultimate purpose of human life is to know, love, and serve God. If we know the true God, we will “*love Him because He first loved us*”[{11}](#) and we will want to serve Him through “*the good works He has prepared for us.*”[{12}](#) Most young Americans say they lack meaning and purpose. They will never be able to find truly meaningful purpose apart from Christ.

7. Success on earth is best understood as consistent obedience to God. If we understand that we are eternal beings who in Christ are the recipients of an eternal inheritance, we can see that our true success cannot be found in the temporal pleasures of this world. Only 20% of adults embrace this definition of success.

In my experience, I have watch numerous young people grow up in a church and then leave to either thrive in a dynamic Christ-honoring life or fall away into a syncretic worldview, serving their own interests. The world system is constantly feeding them with lies and attacking the truths they have been taught. So, how can we do a better job of helping build strong

Christians with a solid biblical worldview?

First, we must teach them the seven truths listed above. Not once, but many times and in many situations. Their parents must talk about these truths and their churches must teach these truths.

Second, we must ask them regularly to explain what they believe. Just because they have sat under teaching does not mean they have learned any lessons. To believe we should test high school students to determine what they have learned and then ignore testing students of the Bible is at best foolhardy.

Third, we must tell these students as they enter into more of the secular world that we are still there for them. Tell them, "If someone or something causes you to question what you have learned, don't just throw out what you have learned and follow something else. Come tell me about it and why it seems like it may be true. I have been in similar halls to the ones you are walking through now. I am convinced that the only source of real truth is found in Jesus Christ and the Word of God. Let's look at it together." Let us "*bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ.*"^{13}

Notes

1. Steve Cable, *Understanding a Post-Christian America in 2020*, probe.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Post-Christian-America.pdf
2. George Barna, *American Worldview Inventory 2022-23: The Annual Report of the State of Worldview in the United States*, Arizona Christian University Press, 2023.
3. Ibid., page 7.
4. Ibid., page 12.
5. Deuteronomy 6:6-7
6. Ephesians 6:4
7. Barna, page 27.
8. Ibid., page 41.

9. Ibid., page 51.

10. 1 Peter 2:9

11. 1 John 4:19

12. Ephesians 2:10

13. Galatians 6:2

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Worldview Deficiency

Kerby Anderson addresses the very sad and dire lack of a biblical worldview in the majority of people claiming to be Christians.

Over the last few months, I have been doing some interviews on books that document (in one way or another) a lack of moral behavior among evangelicals. If you read articles in *Christianity Today*, *Ministry Watch*, or *World* magazine, you see other examples.

As the authors document what is happening in the evangelical world, I always like to bring us back to why. The “why” question is probably more important than the “what” question. Why aren’t Christians acting like Christians? Of course, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Christians are supposed to be different than the world, but there is abundant evidence that they are very much like the world around them.

Each year, George Barna posts [The American Worldview Inventory](#). His most recent report shows that very few Americans (including evangelicals) have a biblical worldview. About four percent have a biblical worldview with four percent more with a variety of different worldviews. The dominant worldview (encompassing 92 percent) is the worldview of

syncretism.

The classic definition of syncretism is that it is an amalgamation of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought. In the Christian context, it is an acceptance and even affirmation of a diverse set of beliefs that aren't biblical. That is best illustrated by the fact that a majority (58%) of American adults don't believe in absolute truth and instead believe that moral truth is up to the individual to decide.

You would hope pastors might be able to correct some of this theological confusion. But George Barna found that less than a majority (41%) of senior pastors have a biblical worldview. And the problem is worse with youth pastors. Only 12 percent of them have a biblical worldview.

We shouldn't be surprised at what is happening in the evangelical world when we understand the why behind it.

“Is Race a Social Construct?”

How do you respond to the assertion that race is a social construct?

Thank you for your question. It may surprise you, but this is one area where I think Christians can agree with some of the statements being made by woke progressives. Although they might want to say that many other issues (class, gender, etc.) are examples of social constructs, we could agree that race is an example.

In [my booklet on “A Biblical Point of View on Racism,”](#) I give many examples of why the term “race” is imprecise. First, the Bible only talks of one race: the human race. Superficial

differences in skin color, hair color, hair texture, or eye shape may provide physiological differences between people groups, but the Bible does not provide any justification for treating people differently simply because of these physical differences.

The Bible teaches that God has made “from one blood every nation of men” (Acts 17:26). Here, Paul taught the Athenians that they came from the same source in the creation as everyone else. If you have ever watched people at an international airport, you can conclude that human beings come in so many shapes, sizes, and colors. Yet all these differences go back to the parents of the human race (Genesis 1-3, 1 Corinthians 15).

Science has also shown us that “race” is not a precise term. Research on the human genome project shows us that such racial characteristics (such as skin color) are insignificant genetically. People of every race can interbreed and produce fertile offspring.

One study of human genetic material of different races concluded that the DNA of any two people in the world would differ by just 2/10ths of one percent. And of this variation, only six percent can be linked to racial categories. These “racial differences” are trivial when you consider there are 3 billion base pairs of human DNA.

Another reason the term “race” also lacks precision is because of interracial marriage, which is blurring distinctions even more. Consider one well-known athlete: Tiger Woods. His heritage is Thai, black, white, Chinese, and Native American.

As you can see, the term “race” is not very precise and thus I think qualifies as a social construct.

Kerby Anderson

Posted June 2024

Ransom and the Martial Spirit in Perelandra

Dr. Michael Gleghorn explores the spiritual dimensions of Dr. Elwin Ransom in C.S. Lewis's space novel Perelandra.

In C. S. Lewis's novel, *Perelandra*, the second book in what some have called the "Cosmic Trilogy," Dr. Elwin Ransom is sent by God to the planet Venus on a mission of great importance.[{1}](#) Although Ransom has learned that dark spiritual powers on earth are plotting "some sort of attack on Perelandra" (or Venus), he doesn't know precisely what he's to do about it once he arrives, nor why he's been chosen for such a venture.[{2}](#) But God knows, and he's specially prepared Ransom for this mission (though this doesn't mean it will be easy).[{3}](#)

[In a prior article](#), I observed how God had providentially orchestrated Ransom's earlier adventures on the planet Mars in order to help him develop some of the "martial" virtues—traits like grit, courage, and perseverance.[{4}](#) As this second story on the planet Venus (or Perelandra) unfolds, the reader gradually comes to see how important this preparation was.[{5}](#) Indeed, before his mission can be completed, Ransom will need all these virtues (along with the grace and help of God) if he's to successfully realize the purpose for which he's been sent.



In the first two chapters of the novel, Lewis foreshadows key themes that will surface later in the story. These include demonic opposition to the plans and purposes of God, the

importance of dying to one's self-will and yielding that will to God, and the possibility of Ransom's physical combat and injury.

The most important of these is probably that of dying to one's self-will by continually surrendering that will to God. As Lewis makes clear elsewhere, such surrender might be harder or easier depending on the spiritual condition of the one who needs to do the surrendering.[{6}](#) For an unfallen creature, such surrender could be experienced as a kind of pleasure. For a fallen and sinful creature, however, it involves a kind of death. This is foreshadowed in the novel by the fact that Ransom is transported to Perelandra in "a large coffin-shaped casket."[{7}](#) The very means by which he's taken to Perelandra symbolizes the fact that God is taking Ransom on a journey that will require him to die to his own will by surrendering to the Divine will.[{8}](#)

In the remainder of this article, we'll consider some of the key issues that Lewis explores in this novel, particularly as these concern the martial spirit in Ransom, who functions as God's representative in Perelandra.

Beauty and the Beast

In C. S. Lewis's "Cosmic Trilogy," each planet in our solar system is governed by a powerful spiritual intelligence that combines aspects of a Christian archangel with the characteristics of a Roman god or goddess.[{9}](#) Hence, in Lewis's first novel of the trilogy, *Out of the Silent Planet*, we learn that the planet Mars is governed by a powerful angelic ruler with qualities like the Roman god Mars (though void of all the negative characteristics attributed to Mars in Greco-Roman mythology). In a similar way, in Lewis's second novel, *Perelandra*, we learn that Perelandra (or Venus) is governed by an angelic ruler with characteristics like those of the Roman goddess Venus, the goddess of love and

beauty.[{10}](#)

After initially being deposited in the ocean of Perelandra, and then making his way to one of the many “floating islands” of that world, Ransom soon discovers that the planet is replete with beauty and pleasure. The colors, the fragrances, the taste of the fruits—everything about the planet exudes beauty, wonder, joy, and pleasure.[{11}](#)

Eventually, Ransom meets Tinidril, the unfallen first mother of Perelandra, also known as “the Green Lady” (due to the color of her skin).[{12}](#) She has been separated from Tor, the first father and king of Perelandra, in part because of the floating islands. At this stage in the history of Perelandra, Tor and Tinidril occupy a position much like that of Adam and Eve before the fall.

One day, while Ransom is conversing with the Green Lady, they see something “like a shooting star” race “across the sky” and fall into the ocean.[{13}](#) They later discover that Weston, the physicist who originally kidnapped Ransom and took him to Mars, has come to Perelandra on a spaceship.

Given his history with Weston, Ransom is naturally worried about why he should have come to Perelandra. Talking with Weston only increases his concerns, for Weston’s previously naturalistic philosophy now has a decidedly religious bent. He claims to have been “guided” to Perelandra by a spiritual force and the more Ransom hears, the more he thinks this force may well be diabolical. When Weston arrogantly calls “that Force” into himself, he is suddenly possessed by a demonic spirit.[{14}](#) He is the “bridge” by which this evil spirit has entered Perelandra.[{15}](#) Ransom now understands that he has been sent to Perelandra to protect the Green Lady from Weston.

Temptation

Perelandra (or Venus) exists in a state much like that of Earth prior to the fall of Adam and Eve. It is an unfallen paradise.

But there's a problem. Weston, a proud and arrogant scientist, has come to Perelandra at the behest of an evil spirit. Shortly after landing on the planet, he is completely possessed by this spirit. Ransom, the hero of the story, now realizes that God has sent him to Perelandra in order to prevent the planet's first couple from falling into the same disobedience as our first parents.

Weston (now referred to as the "Un-man") soon begins tempting Tinidril (the Perelandrian "Eve") to disobey God, trying to get her to sleep on the fixed land. You see, Perelandra consists of both floating islands and fixed land, and God has forbidden the first couple to sleep on the fixed land, just as Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.[{16}](#)

Initially, Ransom tries to counter the Un-man's arguments to disobey God with arguments of his own. After many days, however, he realizes that he cannot allow this to continue. Tinidril has been faithfully resisting the Un-man's temptations, but she seems to be growing weaker and Ransom sees that something more definitive must be done.[{17}](#)

While thinking about this issue, Ransom realizes that God is calling him to confront and physically fight the Un-man.[{18}](#) This is where Ransom's prior experience on Mars and his development of the martial spirit become particularly important. God has prepared Ransom for this and now calls upon him to destroy the corrupt demonic evil that has invaded His good world.

Ransom initially resists this idea, fearing that he may well

be killed in such a violent encounter. But God impresses upon Ransom that he's His *representative* in Perelandra—and if he fails, there will be very real consequences. Perelandra *really can* fall into the hands of the enemy, just as Earth did. Ransom is forced to confront the agonizing reality that his choices are significant and make a real difference. If he chooses to do nothing, then evil will win, and Perelandra will be ruined. He thus decides that he must yield his will to God's will, fight the Un-man, and attempt to rid this beautiful world of its evil invader.[{19}](#)

Holy War

Above we saw how Dr. Ransom, the hero of the story, comes to realize that God is calling him to fight and destroy the Un-man. The Un-man is a demon-possessed physicist whose humanity has been obliterated by the demonic spirit inhabiting his body. He wants to persuade Tinidril (the Perelandrian "Eve") to disobey God, thus introducing sin and evil into this unfallen paradise.

Although some might find it startling that God would call Ransom to fight and destroy the Un-man, we must not forget that at this point the Un-man is mostly just a demon-possessed corpse, an enemy of both God and the innocent persons on Perelandra. Moreover, Lewis carefully contextualizes this battle within the larger mythological world of his story. As Ransom realizes while contemplating this issue, "Whatever happened here would be of such a nature that earth-men would call it mythological."[{20}](#)

The bottom line is that evil has invaded and is attempting to destroy God's good world of Perelandra—and God is utterly serious about eliminating it. As a just and holy being, God cannot allow evil to go unjudged and unpunished, for evil (by its very nature) *deserves* punishment. Moreover, since evil will always seek to corrupt and destroy all that is good, it

must either be set right (through repentance and submission to God's will) or else be completely eliminated from God's good creation. There is no other alternative if God wants to restore His world to perfect goodness, peace, and rest.

The battle begins the next morning and Ransom gets an initial victory. The Un-Man flees, Ransom pursues, and they eventually end up in a large, dark, underground cavern. Although it's too dark to see, Ransom finally believes that he has killed the Un-Man and he sets off to find his way out of the darkness. Unfortunately, however, the demonic spirit reanimates Weston's corpse and pursues him. As the Un-Man comes up out of a tunnel, Ransom confronts him, crushes his head with a large stone, and pushes the corpse over a ledge into a "sea of fire" below.[{21}](#) Here Lewis probably intends an allusion to the biblical "lake of fire," into which the devil and his "offspring" are ultimately cast (Revelation 20:10-15). Ransom, imbued with the martial spirit, has been victorious, and the evil which had invaded Perelandra has been defeated.

Ransom as a Christ-Figure

In the previous section we covered how Dr. Ransom, the hero of the novel, killed the demonically possessed "Un-man" by crushing his head with a large stone. After the battle, Ransom, completely exhausted, falls into a deep sleep (possibly symbolic of death). After waking, he eventually emerges (with the aid of Divine providence), from the deep, dark, tomb-like cavern (in which the final battle had taken place) into the light and air of Perelandra (which is possibly symbolic of resurrection).[{22}](#)

Given the extent of Ransom's injuries, it takes some time for him to recover. During "this long Sabbath," Ransom lay by a stream, eating, drinking, and sleeping.[{23}](#) Only when he is "nearly well" does he discover "his most serious injury." "It was a wound in his heel," inflicted by the Unman in one of

their many violent encounters. The wound is still bleeding when Ransom first notices it, and “nothing he could do would stop it.”[\[24\]](#)

Here we see Ransom emerge from his martial victory over the Un-man as a type of Christ. Those familiar with the Bible will recall Genesis 3:15, in which the Lord tells the serpent, who led Adam and Eve into disobedience, that He will put “enmity” between the serpent and *his* offspring and the woman and *her* offspring. “He shall bruise your head,” God tells the serpent, “and you shall bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15).

Lewis is clearly portraying Ransom as a Christ-figure, who has acted as God’s representative in Perelandra. In a small and limited way, Ransom did something similar to what Jesus had already perfectly accomplished on earth. In the mythological world of the story, he crushed the head of the serpent’s offspring and, in turn, received a wound in his heel. This might remind us of the Apostle Paul’s concluding words to the church in Rome: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Romans 16:20). Insofar as we belong to Christ, we act as His representatives in the world. What is true of Christ is also, in some sense, true of his people.

Having thus secured martial victory in Perelandra, Ransom returns to Earth with the wound in his heel as a continual reminder of his battle against the forces of evil. And it is in this condition that we will meet him for the last time in the concluding novel of this series, *That Hideous Strength*.

Notes

1. C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1965). “Cosmic Trilogy” is the terminology used by Michael Ward in “Voyage to Venus: Lewis’s Imaginative Path to Perelandra,” in *C. S. Lewis’s Perelandra: Reshaping the Image of the Cosmos*. ed. Judith Wolfe and Brendan Wolfe (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2013), 28.
2. Lewis, *Perelandra*, 23.

3. The idea for investigating Ransom and the “martial spirit” in *Perelandra* is indebted to the work of Christiana Hale, *Deeper Heaven: A Reader’s Guide to C. S. Lewis’s Ransom Trilogy* (Moscow, ID: Roman Roads Press, 2020), particularly pp. 70-76.
4. See Michael Gleghorn, “Smuggling Theology into Out of the Silent Planet,” Probe Ministries, 29 October 2023 (probe.org/smuggling-theology-into-out-of-the-silent-planet/).
5. See Hale, *Deeper Heaven*, 76.
6. See C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: NY: Macmillan, 1962), 90-92.
7. Lewis, *Perelandra*, 21.
8. I borrow this insight from Tami Van Optal’s insightful essay, “Perelandran Diction: A Study in Meaning,” in *C. S. Lewis’s Perelandra: Reshaping the Image of the Cosmos*, 112.
9. See Gleghorn, “Smuggling Theology.”
10. See the brief discussion of these planets in *C. S. Lewis, The Discarded Image* (Cambridge University Press, 1964), 106-07.
11. Lewis, *Perelandra*, 37.
12. *Ibid.*, 55.
13. *Ibid.*, 76.
14. *Ibid.*, 96.
15. *Ibid.*, 111-12.
16. *Ibid.*, 74.
17. *Ibid.*, 131-34.
18. *Ibid.*, 143-47.
19. *Ibid.*, 146-50.
20. *Ibid.*, 144.
21. *Ibid.*, 182. Note: the content mentioned in this brief paragraph is covered in the novel on pp. 151-82.
22. *Ibid.*, 182-85. See also the discussion in Bruce R. Johnson’s essay, “Frightful Freedom: *Perelandra* as Imaginative Theodicy,” in *C. S. Lewis’s Perelandra: Reshaping the Image of the Cosmos*, 140.
23. *Ibid.*, 185.

24. Ibid., 187.

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Biblical Reliability

Kerby Anderson provides classic reasons the bible can be believed and trusted as a divine book from God.

Is the Bible historically reliable? That is an important question that deserves an answer since so many people today believe that the Bible is not accurate or reliable. We will look at various tests we can use to evaluate any book and will discover that the Bible is reliable and trustworthy. But before we look at the Bible's reliability, it is worth mentioning its uniqueness.

No doubt you have heard people say they don't read the Bible because it is merely another book. That is not true. Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell spend pages in their book, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, listing all the many ways the Bible is unique.



First, it is unique in character. This includes the fact that it is unique in time span, geographical production, authorship, literary genres, and languages. Professor F.F. Bruce, in *The Books and the Parchments*, summarized it this way: "The Bible, at first sight, appears to be a collection of literature—mainly Jewish. If we enquire into the circumstances under which the various Biblical documents were written, we find that they were written at intervals over a space of nearly 1400 years the writers wrote in various lands, from Italy in the west to Mesopotamia and possible Persia in the east."

He goes on to remind us that "The writers themselves were a heterogeneous number of people, not only separated from each other by hundreds of years and hundreds of miles but belonging to the most diverse walks of life . . . The writings themselves belong to a great variety of literary types. They include history, law, religious poetry, didactic treatises, lyric poetry, parable and allegory, biography, personal correspondence, personal memoirs and diaries, in addition to the distinctively Biblical types of prophecy and apocalyptic."

The Bible is also unique in its theology. There are teachings in the Bible that are not found in any other religious book. And the Bible is certainly unique in its impact (art, literature, history) and circulation (best-selling book of all time).

The Bible is unique, but it is reliable? The Bible makes significant claims about itself, and events recorded in the Bible. These are historical events and can be tested by the same criteria used to evaluate other historical documents.

There are three specific tests scholars, researchers, and archaeologists use to determine the authenticity of historical material. There are three basic principles of historiography: the internal test, the external test, and the bibliographic test. We will apply these three tests to the Bible to determine its reliability as an accurate historical source.

Internal Test

The internal test looks at a document to first see what the document claims for itself, and then to see if there are internal contradictions. What does the Bible claim for itself?

The Bible makes some very significant claims. It claims to be the Word of God. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). Just because the

Bible claims to be inspired is not enough to accept that claim, but it does serve to remind us about the unique nature of the Bible. Jesus made an even more significant claim: "But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail" (Luke 16:17).

The Bible is unique in another significant way: its unity. Consider that the Bible was written over a 1400-year period, by over 40 authors, from many walks of life. It was written in three languages, on different continents, under different circumstances. And it addresses numerous controversial topics, and yet we have unity and consistency throughout the Bible. Imagine if you had three people living at the same time, same place, speaking the same language writing on one controversial topic. Would they agree? They would not. The unity of the Bible suggests its inspiration.

But this raises another question. Skeptics often like to point to contradictions in the Bible. My quick answer often is to merely point to the number of books written over the last few centuries that provide reasonable answers to apparent contradictions. These many books illustrate that these difficult biblical texts can be resolved.

Professor Gleason Archer has written about Bible difficulties and concludes, "As I have dealt with one apparent discrepancy after another and have studied alleged contradictions between the biblical record and evidence of linguistics, archaeology, or science, my confidence in the trustworthiness of Scripture has been repeatedly certified and strengthened."

The reliability of the gospels is also supported by what is called undesigned coincidences. Professor Tim McGrew has been on my radio program to talk about these, and his wife Lydia has written a book on the subject. The writer in one gospel provides part of a testimony, while the writer of another gospel provides another key fact. These are not planned but give a fuller picture of the event. They are like pieces of a

puzzle and provide yet another important piece of evidence for the internal test.

External Test

The external test looks at how the document aligns itself with facts, dates, and persons from its world. The facts from archaeology and history validate the historical accuracy of the Bible. In previous articles, we have provided many examples of archaeological verification of the historical accuracy of the Bible.[\[1\]](#)

Dr. William Albright concluded, “There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of the Bible.” Yale professor and expert on the Dead Sea Scrolls, Millar Burrows explained, “Archeological work has unquestionably strengthened confidence in the reliability of the scriptural record. More than one archaeologist has found his respect for the Bible increased by the experience of excavation in Palestine.”

One of the most famous and most significant archeological finds was the [Dead Sea Scrolls](#). Over 800 fragments were found including a complete scroll of the book of Isaiah. It has provided a way to check the accuracy of the transmission of the Old Testament.

Another archaeological find occurred in 1993 when a stone monument fragment was discovered near the border of Israel and Syria. It mentions the “House of David” and implies a victory by Ben-Hadad, king of Damascus (1 Kings 15:20).

More recently, archaeologists uncovered a Curse Tablet found in Joshua’s altar on Mount Ebal (Joshua 8:30). This ancient Hebrew inscription is centuries older than any known Hebrew inscription from ancient Israel. This is the earliest recorded Divine name in Israel and supports the biblical date of the Exodus.

There are also archaeological finds that validate the New Testament. In 1961, archeological work at Caesarea Maritima discovered a stone with the name "Pontius Pilate." He was a prefect of the Roman province of Judea and was responsible for ordering the crucifixion of Jesus. More recently, a ring was found at the Herodium (a desert palace outside of Bethlehem) with the inscription "Pontius Pilate." The ring was not fancy enough to have been worn by Pilate and was likely used for official communications.

Classical scholar and historian Colin Hemer chronicles Luke's accuracy in the book of Acts. With painstaking detail, he identifies 84 facts in the last 16 chapters of the Book of Acts that have been confirmed by historical and archaeological research. This includes nautical details, names of gods, designation of magistrates, and proper names and titles.

Bibliographic Test

Now we will look at the bibliographic test. Since we do not have the original documents of any ancient literature, this test is used to evaluate the transmission from the original document to the manuscripts we possess today. The Bible is far superior to any ancient historical book in its- manuscript evidence with respect to time and the number of manuscripts.

Sir Frederic Kenyon observed, "In no other case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest manuscripts so short as in that of the New Testament."

Many of the books on apologetics or biblical reliability provide a chart of the gap between the original manuscript and the earliest copy that we have: Plato (1200 years), Thucydides, *History* (1300 years), and Tacitus, *Annals* (1000 years). That smallest gap is Homer's *Iliad* (500 years). By contrast, the gap for the New Testament is just a few decades.

Above, we mentioned the importance of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Until their discovery, there was a significant gap between the original and the earliest copy (around AD 900). The discovery allowed us to now see there was an accurate transmission over a 1000-year period.

The number of manuscripts is also important. When we have more manuscripts, we can compare them and have a better understanding of what was written in the original document. We have seven copies of Plato, eight copies of Thucydides, and twenty copies of Tacitus. There are over six hundred copies of Homer's *Illiad*.

By contrast, the number of manuscripts for the Bible is significant. The total number of Greek and non-Greek New Testament manuscripts is nearly 24,000. The number of Old Testament scrolls is more than 42,000. F.F. Bruce concludes, "There is n-o body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament."

The early church fathers also quoted from the New Testament as they wrote to each other. We have more the 36,000 of scripture citations from them as well.

John Warwick Montgomery concluded, "To be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity; for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament."

One Last Test: Prophecy

We have discussed three tests that show the reliability of the Bible, especially when compared to other literature of antiquity. The Bible passed the internal test because of its unity and cohesion. The Bible passed the external test because of the history and archaeology that confirms its accuracy. And

the Bible passes the bibliographic test because of the number of manuscripts and the short time gap between the original and its copies.

But there is an additional test that only the Bible can meet. More than one-fourth of the Bible's content was prophetic at the time that it was originally written. More than half of these 1000+ prophecies have been fulfilled down to the minutest detail. No other book (religious or secular) can make this claim.

Fifty years ago, J. Barton Payne compiled the *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*. It lists 1,239 prophecies in the Old Testament and 578 prophecies in the New Testament, for a total of 1,817. These encompass 8,352 verses.

In previous articles we have discussed the [prophecies of the Messiah](#). Hundreds of prophecies written down in the Old Testament are literally fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. For example, Zechariah records prophecies about the Messiah that were fulfilled by Jesus during the week He entered Jerusalem and was crucified. He predicted that the Messiah would enter Jerusalem riding a donkey (Zechariah 9:9). That was fulfilled during what we often call "Palm Sunday" (Matthew 21:5; Luke 19:32-37).

The price of his betrayal would be thirty pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12-13) and the money would be cast onto the floor of the Temple. That was fulfilled by Judas and the chief priests (Matthew 27:3-10). Also, he predicted that the betrayal money would be used to buy a potter's field- (Zechariah 11:13). We read about its fulfillment in Matthew 27:6-10.

Prophecy is history written before it happens and is another indication of the inspiration of the Bible. It also can give us confidence that prophecies that have not been fulfilled will be fulfilled in the future.

The Bible is historically accurate, and it also shows in many ways that it is also the inspired word of God.

Additional Resources

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Notes

1. probe.org/biblical-archaeology/, probe.org/archaeology-and-the-old-testament/,
probe.org/archaeology-and-the-old-testament/

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Two Genders, Two Spectrums

Sue Bohlin suggests a biblical view of masculinity and femininity that encompasses the variety within two genders as God creates us.

How do you see the variations of gender in people? Many people automatically think of a single spectrum with masculinity on one end and femininity on the other.

I don't think that's the way it works.



Consider the very first thing we encounter about gender in the creation account of Genesis 1:27–

So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

Just two genders. No matter how many choices of made-up genders that Facebook used to offer.

We can look at the issue of gender spiritually by reading about how God created us male and female. We can also see the binary nature of gender by looking at biology. Male bodies produce small reproductive sex cells called gametes—sperm—and female bodies produce large gametes, eggs. There are no other options.

In this article we'll be walking through a way of looking at gender that I believe faithfully reflects what God has revealed in His word about His design for us as human beings. Instead of a single spectrum with male and masculinity on one end and female and femininity on the other, I suggest there are two separate spectrums^[1]: a masculinity spectrum and a

femininity spectrum. God makes delightful variations in girls and women, and equally delightful variations in boys and men, all of us made in His image and created for His glory.

I suggest that God chooses where on each gender spectrum a baby comes into the world. It's our starting point, but as we mature we can embrace and grow in the other characteristics of masculinity or femininity. We can take up more "bandwidth" and become a more fully-rounded man or woman.

One end of the masculinity spectrum, I suggest, are the rough-and-tumble boys who are constantly moving, playing sports, making noise, getting dirty, and can easily be emotionally clueless. On the other end of the spectrum are the sensitive, artistic, creative boys. And there's everything in between.

On the femininity spectrum, we see girly-girls on one end, who love frilly clothes, playing with their doll babies, and in American culture are drawn to pink and purple and sparkly. On the other end are the tomboy jockettes who are often gifted athletes and natural leaders, and hate girly clothes. And, as with their brothers, there is everything in between.

Let's explore these different gender spectrums and hopefully gain a fuller understanding of the goodness of God's creation just the way He makes each one of us.

Masculinity Spectrum 1

I really like the idea that every child, created in his or her own individuality in the image of God, is a gift box that we as parents and care-givers get to open and discover what's inside. Every child is fearfully and wonderfully made, as we read in Psalm 139, and that includes the kind of boy and the kind of girl God chose for them to be. Whoever came up with the philosophy that children are blank slates that we write on, so they become whoever and however the surrounding culture instructs them to be, must have never been around actual

children. Real babies come out of the womb and start revealing how God made them.

God shapes some baby boys as rough-and-tumble. They are often considered classically “all boy.” They’re constantly moving. Ask boys to walk from point A to point B and they may well zig-zag their way across the room. They often have an affinity for fighting and weapons. One mama who said no toy guns in her home because she hated violence, found her young son nibbling his toast into the shape of a pistol, which he pointed at his brother and made shooting sound effects. Her other son would treat the longest French fry from his Happy Meal like a miniature rifle to pretend-shoot his brother.

These rough-and-tumble boys are often emotionally clueless. They don’t *mean* to be insensitive, they just don’t pay much attention to non-verbal cues from other people. They tend to enjoy rough-housing with their daddies and with other boys. They will chest-bump and jostle each other in their male way of expressing friendship and affection. And these boys are drawn to contact sports, especially anything with balls.

God delights to make other boys, though far fewer of them, as sensitive, artistic, and creative. They are often gifted in the performing and visual arts, music, dance, drama, and design. They tend to experience life through a magnifying lens attached to their soul; everything is bigger, louder, and more vibrant. They can experience negative communications as more critical than they actually are. A parent’s frown may feel as devastating as a spanking.

They constantly scan their environment, sensing when others around them are upset. My husband can spot these sensitive boys at age two in the church nursery. He has seen boys drop whatever toy they had and go over to another toddler asking, “You okay? It’s okay.”

Many of them don’t care for sports, especially contact sports.

Often they lack the eye-hand coordination needed for sports that utilize balls, rackets, clubs and other game equipment. They can do better at sports that scratch their competitive itch where they're racing against the clock, like cross-country running.

And of course, there are boys (and men) everywhere in between as well. One of my sons was so sensitive and artistic he graduated with an art degree; the other puts himself square in the middle of the masculinity spectrum.

Masculinity Spectrum 2

We see the two kinds of boys and men in the account of Jacob and Esau in Genesis 25. Esau, the rough-and-tumble man, was a hunter, an outdoorsman. His twin brother Jacob was a mama's boy, more interested in hanging back in the tents with his mother, in all probability the sensitive, artistic, creative type.

Since sensitive boys are in the minority, they often get bullied by the rough-and-tumbles or boys in the middle of the spectrum, and they can easily feel like they don't fit, they don't belong. They feel different from an early age.

These are the ones who are vulnerable to spiritual attacks of being labeled gay and other ugly words. In recent years, as sensitive, artistic and creative boys feel the pain of not fitting in, they are now being encouraged to label themselves as transgender. It used to be they would think, "I don't fit in the world of boys. There's something wrong with me." Now they are being encouraged to think, "I don't fit in the world of boys because I'm really a girl. Or life would be better and easier if I became a girl." (Which, of course, is impossible.) Then if they accept these false labels and they practice seeing themselves that way, they can literally think themselves into a gay or trans identity. But it doesn't have to be that way. Scripture tells us to "take every thought

captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). All of us need to derive our identity from who God says we are.

Thinking of the masculinity spectrum, I like to ask, where would you put Jesus?

I think He embodies the entire spectrum. He was the best of rough-and-tumble men, strong and physically active; He started out as a carpenter or handyman, and men were drawn to Him. Was He artistic? Have you ever seen a sunrise or a sunset? Jesus paints the sky with glorious colors! Was He creative? Scripture tells us He was the Creator of the universe!

I have observed over years that as boys and men grow spiritually, they start taking up more bandwidth on the masculinity spectrum as they become more well-rounded. Rough-and-tumbles learn to listen and show compassion, and sensitives stretch out their comfort zone to take more initiative and reject passivity.

Rough-and-tumbles can become great leaders and servants as they use their strength to love and serve others. Sensitives can become great husbands, dads, pastors, counselors, and teachers as *they* use their gifts to love and serve others.

Femininity Spectrum 1

On the one end of the femininity spectrum are the girly-girls who come into the world wanting a pink receiving blanket and one of those headbands with a big puffy flower on their little bald head. They can't wait till their fingernails and toenails are big enough for Mommy to paint. In American culture they often gravitate toward pink and purple and silver glitter. They cuddle baby dolls and stuffed animals.

One progressive-minded mother didn't want to support gender stereotypes for her daughter, so instead of buying her stuffed animals and dolls, she gave her cars and trucks. One afternoon she saw her little girl lining up the cars and trucks,

covering them with a blanket, and tenderly kissing them “night-night” as she put them down for a nap. Just as she would have with dolls and stuffed toys, if she’d been allowed to have them.

It’s easy to define feminine as girly-girls, but God loves and creates another kind of femininity.

He delights to make some girls tomboy jockettes. They have no interest in frilly clothes or makeup. They don’t care for skirts or dresses and in fact will often push back when required to wear “girl clothes.” For them, comfort is everything. You can find them outside climbing trees, shooting hoops, and perfecting their spirals. Some mechanically-inclined girls want to help their dads work on cars and lawnmowers. They tend to have no patience for girly-girl activities; girl drama drives them crazy. Barbie is stupid, and who wants to play house—nobody wins!

Many times they are gifted athletes, and often natural leaders.

Like sensitive boys, tomboys are outnumbered by girly-girls and those in the middle of the femininity spectrum. Being the minority, they are often bullied. They are judged and ostracized for not being like the other girls.

Sensitive boys and tomboy girls can get the message loud and clear that they don’t have what it takes to be a good boy or girl. They can conclude, wrongly, that they don’t belong in the world of boys, of girls. They burn with the shame of being “other than.” Different.

But God makes every person male or female on purpose, for His glory. They DO belong in the world of boys or girls, of men and women!

Femininity Spectrum 2

As girls grow spiritually, becoming more like Jesus, they can take up more bandwidth on the spectrum and become a more well-rounded expression of femininity.

Girly girls can put down their mirrors and selfies, and become prayer warriors and first responders. They can walk into emotional crises and hard conversations to point people to Jesus. They can become shepherds, more concerned about other people than themselves.

Tomboys can embrace the softer, more nurturing side of femininity. These girls often want to fight and defend those needing protection. They need to be introduced to spiritual warfare! Whether as a princess warrior or a warrior princess, the kingdom needs all girls and women to be fully engaged in fighting evil!

Many of the gender issues today are about stereotypes. People want to stick everybody in either a blue box or a pink box. They make sweeping generalizations like

- “Boys wear blue and brown and play with trucks and guns.”
- “Girls wear pink and purple and play with Barbies and jewelry making kits.”

But what if a boy thinks blue and brown are boring, and he loves pink and purple? Does it mean he's gay? No! Jesus loves pink and purple! Have you ever seen a sunrise?

What if he doesn't want to play tackle football? What if he'd rather sit and try to draw out another kid's thoughts and feelings? Does it mean he's gay? No! It may be a junior counselor in the making, who's also going to be a fantastic daddy!

What if a girl thinks it's just WRONG that she has to stay inside and learn to make gravy because Grandma says that's

what girls do, when there's a broken carburetor outside she's itching to get her hands on? What if she's an amazing softball player? Does it mean she's a lesbian? No! It means she's a gifted mechanic or athlete!

Let's forget the blue and pink boxes and just open the gift box that is each child and find out how God packed the gifts and interests inside. Let's celebrate God's good design of each child IN HIS IMAGE and affirm them as the child they are, even if they don't conform to stereotypes.

Can you imagine how freeing it would be to celebrate the full spectrum of masculinity and femininity, and teach kids to appreciate and celebrate it in each other?

Notes

1. I do realize that the plural of spectrum is *spectra*, but most people don't take five years of Latin like I did. For those who wince at my coining a word, my apologies.

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Spiritual Abuse

Kerby Anderson provides an overview of what makes churches and organizations spiritually and emotionally unhealthy and hurtful.

In some ways, this article on spiritual abuse is an update on [a previous article on Abusive Churches](#). However, this article also provides a biblical perspective on the broader issue of spiritual abuse occurring in our country today.



Many church leaders became aware of the prevalence of abusive churches more than four decades ago when Professor Ronald Enroth wrote his best-selling book, *Churches That Abuse*. A few years later he followed up with a book on *Recovering from Churches that Abuse*.

More than three decades ago, Dr. Pat Zukeran wrote a week of Probe radio programs based on the first book by Ronald Enroth. The transcript of that program is still one of the top ten most popular articles based on the number of Internet searches that land on them each year.

That response to this important subject isn't unique. For example, thousands have also purchased the book by Stephen Arterburn *Toxic Faith*. The same is true of Ken Blue's book *Spiritual Abuse* and Philip Keller's book *Predators in Our Pulpits*. June Hunt with Hope for the Heart has also written a helpful booklet on *Spiritual Abuse*.

Jesus addressed the issue of spiritual abuse many times when he confronted the Pharisees. In Matthew 23, he proclaims seven woes to the Scribes and Pharisees. He concludes with: "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?" He describes them this way in John 8:44, "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires."

Paul also addresses various aspects of spiritual abuse and legalism within the church. He warns us about legalism by teaching that no works of the law can justify us (Romans 3:20). Instead, the "law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2).

Spiritual abuse can occur when someone is in a position of spiritual authority misuses that authority to control or

manipulate another Christian. It may take the form of using religious works to control. It may involve misusing Scripture or twisting biblical concepts. Churches or Christian organizations may be guilty of teaching false doctrine. Even churches that teach sound doctrine may be guilty allowing worship leaders to bring music into the church with bad theology.

Spiritual abuse can also occur when someone in a position of spiritual authority fails to act. Many of the recent church scandals took place because church leaders or denominational leaders failed to act on or report incidents of sexual harassment or sexual abuse.

Characteristics of Abusive Churches

The book, *Churches That Abuse*, lists eight characteristics of abusive churches. You might compare that list to your own church and to other churches you know.

1. Abusive churches have a control-oriented style of leadership. The leader may be arrogant and dogmatic. The leader often is portrayed as more in tune spiritually with God. Thus, these leaders often are not accountable to anyone.

2. Second, the leader of an abusive church often uses manipulation to gain complete submission from their members. These tactics may involve guilt, peer pressure, and intimidation. The leader may even suggest that divine judgment from God will result if you question them.

3. There is a rigid, legalistic lifestyle involving numerous requirements and minute details for daily life. Members are pressured to give a certain amount of time and money to the church. Often members drop out of school, quit working, or neglect their families to meet a church-designated quota.

4. Abusive churches tend to change their names, especially

once they are exposed by the media. Often this is done because the church received bad publicity or was involved in a significant scandal.

5. Abusive churches are often denouncing other churches because they see themselves as superior to all other churches. The church leadership sees itself as the spiritual elite and the “faithful remnant.” They are the only ones “faithful to the true gospel.”

6. Abusive churches have a persecution complex and view themselves as being persecuted by the world, the media, and other Christian churches. Because they see themselves as a spiritual elite, they also expect persecution from the world and even feed on it.

7. Abusive churches specifically target young adults between eighteen and twenty-five years of age. Often, they target youth who are less experienced but looking for a cause. Sometimes an abusive church becomes surrogate parents to these young adults.

8. Members of abusive churches have a great difficulty leaving and often involves social, psychological, or emotional pain. Church members are often afraid to leave because of intimidation and social pressure. If they leave, they may be stalked and harassed by members of the abusive church.

Leaving an Abusive Church

For many of the reasons previously discussed, it is difficult for members to [leave an abusive church](#). There is significant emotional and spiritual damage that results. Often, former members of an abusive church not only leave the church, but they leave God.

The emotional damage is significant. One author suggested that victims of church abuse or other forms of spiritual abuse

suffer PTSD(post-traumatic stress disorder). They find it difficult to trust others, whether leaders in a church or other leaders in their life.

Victims of abusive churches also find it difficult to find the right church. That is why Ronald Enroth in his second book and Ken Blue in his book talk about discerning good from abusive. Here are a few questions worth considering.

1. Does the church leadership invite dialogue and solicit advice from others in the church who are not part of the elite group of leaders? Dogmatic and authoritarian pastors are threatened by diverse opinions whether from members or from people outside the church.

2. Is there a system of accountability or is all the power located in one person? Dogmatic and authoritarian pastors are not accountable to anyone. They may have a board of elders who merely “rubber stamp” any decisions.

3. Does the church encourage independent thinking and encourage members to develop discernment? Abusive church leaders attempt to get all its members to conform. There is a very low tolerance (sometimes no tolerance) for alternative perspectives even about insignificant programs and minor policies about how to run the church.

4. Is family commitment strengthened? Many churches (not just abusive churches) often demand so much of members that they begin to neglect their families. If parents are made to feel guilty for going to their children’s school events when it might conflict with a routine church meeting or activity, something is wrong.

5. Is the individual church member growing spiritually or on the edge of burnout? If you have to constantly attend a myriad of church meetings and meet a quota (time, talent, treasure) in order to be given church approval, something is wrong.

When someone leaves an abusive situation, it becomes difficult to trust others. That is also true when leaving an abusive church. Going to a different church or study group can be difficult and even frightening. But these questions help in choosing a church or organization that will help you grow spiritually.

Enabling Behavior and a Biblical Response – Part 1

There are no perfect churches because there are no perfect people. Sometimes I will hear someone say they are looking for the perfect church. A good response I have heard is: “If you find the perfect church, don’t join it because you will ruin it. You aren’t perfect.”

Every church has its problems, and pastors have a sin nature. But it does seem that we are also guilty of enabling behavior inside the church that isn’t healthy. Here are just a few statements I have gleaned from various sources.

Christians today often enable spiritual abuse from leaders because we value charisma over character. A pastor or leader is often given a platform not because of character but because he is a dynamic preacher.

Jesus warned His disciples (Matthew 20:25-28) that leaders should not exercise authority over people. Instead, whoever wants to become great must lower himself to be a servant. Paul even warns (2 Timothy 4:3) there will be a time when followers “will not endure sound doctrine.” Instead, they will want “to have their ears tickled” by eloquent speakers, who may not even have sound doctrine.

Paul reminds Timothy (1 Timothy 3:2-3) that a leader in the church should be “must be above reproach . . . sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a

drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.”

Peter (1 Peter 5:2-3) instructs the church that leadership should “shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”

Christians today also enable spiritual abuse when they value the institution over individuals. We have seen this in our numerous radio programs involving church sexual abuse. Churches and denominations have been too quick to cover up sexual abuse scandals and intimidate victims. Time and again we hear them worrying about their reputations or the reputation of the church or denomination.

Christians today enable spiritual abuse when they value division over unity. Pastors and Christian leaders who are denouncing other churches or denominations can make us feel good about our church and denomination. But it doesn't bring unity. Paul teaches in Ephesians 4:3-6 to “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

Enabling Behavior and a Biblical Response – Part 2

Christians today enable spiritual abuse when they value performance over character. Churches are often quicker to remove a pastor teaching heresy than to remove a pastor with character deficits. We should address heresy. Peter warns (2

Peter 2:1) that there will be “false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them, bringing swift destruction on themselves.”

But some churches or denominations may have pastors or church leaders who have good theology but poor character. One example in the New Testament can be found in a man named Diotrephes (3 John 9-12). John plans to confront him because he is self-willed (likes to put himself first) and rebellious (does not acknowledge authority) and a slanderer (talking wicked gossip). Some commentators have called him the first “church boss” because he uses power for ungodly ends within the church.

But notice that John says nothing about him having bad theology. In his previous letters (1 John and 2 John), he does call out the unbiblical teaching of the false teachers. The problem with Diotrephes was not theology but psychology. For all we know, he might have been a good Bible teacher, but his behavior is the problem. How many churches have turned a blind eye to character problems with a pastor because he was a good preacher and brought people into the church?

Christians today enable spiritual abuse when they value anger and outrage over grace and meekness. Too often we reward candidates who raise their voice and point their fingers by electing them to office. We may enjoy a pastor who pounds the pulpit and condemns society, but is that what is required of a church leader?

Christians should not be enabling this behavior, they should be confronting this behavior and even condemning this behavior. This first step should be to follow the instructions of Jesus (Matthew 18:15-17) to go directly to a person engaging in spiritual abuse (after prayer and reflection). If he listens to you, “you have won your brother over. But if he

will not listen, take one or two others along.” If this is happening in society, we should speak out against spiritual abuse and abusive churches.

An important response to spiritual abuse is biblical truth. As believers we should proclaim the truth. Truth means freedom, not bondage. Jesus said, “You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

Additional Resources

Stephen Arterburn, *Toxic Faith*, Nashville, Tenn.: Oliver Nelson Publishing, 1991.

Ken Blue, *Healing Spiritual Abuse*, Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Ronald Enroth, *Churches that Abuse*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing, 1992.

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A Philosophical Critique of Theistic Evolution

Dr. Ray Bohlin provides an overview of some philosophical problems with theistic evolution, particularly methodological naturalism.

Methodological Naturalism as a Ground Rule of Science

In this article I review the philosophical critique of theistic evolution from the book *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique*.^{1} I'm starting with the chapter in this section by Steve Meyer and Paul Nelson titled, "Should Theistic Evolution Depend on Methodological Naturalism?" Now I admit that's quite a mouthful. What is methodological naturalism?

Well, if you simply break the word down, you can see that it is first about a method, therefore "methodological." The second word is "naturalism." The philosophy of naturalism maintains that only nature exists. There is no supernatural, no spirit or spirits, only matter and energy.

Therefore, methodological naturalism is a method that only considers matter and energy. This refers for many to science. So methodological naturalism is a method of science that only considers natural explanations. As Meyer and Nelson put it, "Methodological naturalism asserts that, to qualify as science, a theory must explain by strictly physical or material—that is, non-intelligent or non-purposive—causes."

Theistic evolutionists collectively assert that this is how science must be done. No purpose or intelligence allowed. Strangely though, Meyer and Nelson quote atheist Sean Carroll saying, "Science should be about determining truth, whatever truth that may be—natural, supernatural, or otherwise." In addition, they quote theistic evolutionist Darrell Falk admitting that natural selection and mutation do not explain the origin of animal form. Yet he also affirms there is a natural explanation waiting out there. Why?

Meyer and Nelson explain, "Because of his commitment to methodological naturalism, Darrell Falk will not consider any theory (such as intelligent design) that invokes 'creative

intelligence.'” Instead, he waits for an adequate and fully naturalistic theory of evolution. But is this reasonable?

This is my third article critiquing Theistic Evolution. You can find the first two [here](#) and [here](#). I simply ask that our brothers and sisters who accept Theistic Evolution, look again with unbiased eyes.

Why Methodological Naturalism?

Above, I said that science should be about determining truth, wherever the evidence leads. Methodological naturalism limits that search for truth in science to only natural explanations. So why this restriction?

Some theistic evolutionists like Nancy Murphy are quoted as saying that, “For better or worse, we have inherited a view of science as methodologically atheistic.” This limit by history over the last 150 years hardly seems adequate. Others, however, insist that methodological naturalism is supported by independent and objective criteria. These are often referred to as Demarcation criteria, such as:

1. Must be based on observable data and/or
2. Must be testable or falsifiable and/or
3. Must offer explanations based on natural law.

These criteria will be able to distinguish genuine science from pseudoscience, metaphysics, or religion.

I’m going to need to examine these criteria to see if they provide what is needed—basically a principled philosophical or methodological reason for supporting methodological naturalism. Can these criteria enable scientists or philosophers to do science in a normative way? Do the criteria justifiably exclude, *a priori*, some theories as unscientific or pseudoscientific, despite what the evidence may show? If so, then it may be perfectly justifiable to exclude from

scientific consideration theories of the origin and development of life that invoke creative intelligence, and it may also be justifiable to require that theories refer only to materialistic causes or natural processes just as many theistic evolutionists assume.

BUT—and this is a big BUT—what if these demarcation criteria are neither independent nor objective? Is there already an inherent bias in these criteria and are they applicable in all situations? The answer is a resounding NO!

Demarcation Criteria Work, Except When They Don't

Earlier, I discussed if methodological naturalism is necessary for science, and most evolutionists and theistic evolutionists think that it is. There are what are called demarcation criteria that are supposed to distinguish science from pseudoscience and religious theories.

There was a significant and famous federal court case challenging a new law passed in Arkansas back in 1980, that required creationism to be taught alongside evolution in public schools. Federal Judge William Overton struck down the Arkansas law and used many of these demarcation criteria as his reasoning. His reasoning was that creationism was not science based on these criteria.

First, he said, virtually verbatim from the brief submitted from the ACLU, creationism was not guided by natural law. Second, it was not explained by reference to natural law. Third, creationism was not testable against the empirical world. And fourth, Creationism was not falsifiable. On the surface judge Overton's decision was reasonable.

Therefore, despite whatever scientific evidence creationists were able to offer for their claims, it simply wasn't science.

No matter what the evidence!

But within months of the ruling being issued, it was blistered by philosophers of science. They explained that many theories throughout science in the past and present would not qualify as science according to Overton's decision.

But as Meyer and Nelson point out, Newton and Galileo posed no natural law to govern gravitational phenomena. Yet, Newton's universal law of gravitation described and predicted gravity precisely, but according to the criteria, it's not science. Even Darwin's theory of natural selection knew nothing of the genetics it would eventually refer to. Were both Newton and Darwin unscientific? No one would claim that today. So, judge Overton greatly overreached.

Demarcation Criteria Could Exclude Both ID and Evolution

In the previous section I began discussing what are called demarcation criteria that are supposed to distinguish between science and non-science. I showed that Newton's gravitational ideas were not based on scientific law. He had no idea what caused gravity. Another criterion is that science must be testable. But as philosopher of science Larry Laudan showed after the trial, creationists routinely offered geological tests for their catastrophic flood geology.

Another major criterion was that a scientific hypothesis must be observable. When discussing intelligent design, of course, the designer is not observable. So, ID is not science. Meyer and Nelson point out however, that this is applying the criterion far too rigidly. After all, we still cannot see gravitational waves, we have never observed an electron, we have never observed a mammalian carnivore evolving into a wolf or a lion, or anything even remotely this close in

relationship.

But evolutionists can suggest evolutionary events that could give rise to the wolf and the lion, and we can very precisely predict and describe gravitational fields even though we can't observe gravity itself, only the results.

Appropriately, while we may not observe the designing mind behind the information rich content of living things, we are very acquainted with the results of intelligence. Our only model today for the origin of complex specified information (or language) is the mind. Our minds interpret and produce language every hour of our waking day; even in our sleep, we dream—again information.

So, if we use the criterion of observability too rigidly, then both evolution and ID are not science, but if we apply the criterion more realistically, then both materialistic and non-materialistic theories can qualify as science.

Why Methodological Naturalism Sinks Theistic Evolution

I will now close my discussion of the philosophical objections to theistic evolution by discussing an intriguingly-titled chapter, *How to Lose a Battleship: Why Methodological Naturalism Sinks Theistic Evolution*.

Remember that Methodological Naturalism is defined by asserting that science, properly understood, can only suggest natural causes. Author Stephen Dillely reminds us of what has been known for decades; that Darwin's *Origin of Species* was written as a scientific answer to its main competitor, special creation. However, in the fourth edition, Darwin also claimed that special creation is not science.

But if you use scientific evidence to discredit a theory as false, it must be science, otherwise, scientific evidence is

useless. But when Darwin also claimed that special creation was not science, then his scientific arguments against special creation should have been taken out of what he called “the long argument.”

But even modern-day theistic evolutionists do much the same thing. On the one hand, they use methodological naturalism to contend that ID is not science, but then they offer scientific evidence that ID is false using scientific arguments. If ID is not science, then scientific evidence is useless; if it is science, then use scientific evidence to demonstrate that it is incorrect science.

Francis Collins is perhaps the most recognizable proponent of theistic evolution. In his book, *The Language of God*, he uses theological language to show evolution as being true and ID as false. Basically, he reasons that the design of the mammalian eye is less than ideal. That is what you would expect, he says, from evolution, but not design. Evolution will cobble something together that works, whereas you would expect the Designer to design it perfectly. This argument has been around for some time and simply is not true, but you can see that Collins uses theological language to exclude design.

If evolution is science, then why resort to what we think God would do, to argue in favor of evolution? Either way, Dilley shows, theistic evolutionists would be wise to discard methodological naturalism. I agree.

Notes

1. *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique* by J. P. Moreland, Stephen C. Meyer et al. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017).