

Teaching at Word of Life in Romania & Hungary

Editor's Note: The vision of Probe Ministries—to free 50 million captives and build them into confident ambassadors for Christ by 2020—promises to involve some 20 million believers overseas. Trips by Probe staff members near the time of this writing include destinations like Burundi, the Philippines, Belarus and—the topic of this report featuring Don and Deanne Closson, two of our staff veterans—Hungary and Romania. We hope you'll feel you have an insider's view of helping people think biblically and prepare to pass on a Christian worldview.

One of the things I enjoy about working at Probe is our tradition of partnering with churches and other ministry organizations. An example is Probe's partnership with Word of Life Fellowship (WOL) both here in the U.S. and overseas. The relationship began when our National Director Kerby Anderson taught at WOL in New York, and later at some of their international campuses. Additional Probe staff members began teaching other courses. In January, 2010, my wife Deanne and I had the privilege of traveling to WOL schools in Romania and Hungary.



Actually, our invitation to Romania came about during our first trip to Hungary in 2008.

Deanne and I became friends with students Alin and Iuliana Muntean and their 4-year-old daughter, Ruthie. Alin and Iuliana were mature beyond their years, serious students, and active evangelists in the various WOL outreaches. When we let them know that we were returning to Hungary this year, they invited us to Romania to teach as well! WOL Bible Training and Discipleship Center is only two years old but already has fourteen students. Needless to say, we were thrilled to accept their invitation.



Our four-day stay in Romania was a busy one. My class was made up of seven second-year students. I taught five hours a day on Apologetics and Worldviews as well as a one hour chapel that challenged our very capable translator, Wanna. She had an amazing ability to translate difficult abstract ideas from English into Romanian. Her skills became evident as the students asked pertinent questions that demonstrated their grasp of the topics. They were eager to receive the apologetics information on the reliability of the Bible, the deity of Christ, answers to the problem of evil and other topics. I also spent one evening helping them to think through a response to the local Jehovah's Witnesses whom most had encountered. It was a lively discussion particularly when they realized they now have biblical answers to those false claims. Deanne sat in on the classes to interact with the students too. She prayed with the girls during a devotion and is continuing friendships with them via email.



Although we only had a few days to spend with Alin and his family, we sensed the considerable burden they were carrying as temporary leaders of the ministry. The director of WOL Romania is in the U.S. until May on a fundraising trip, leaving Alin and Iuliana in charge. Alin was not only overseeing the large building project but was also teaching classes, leading the other staff members, and serving with the various ministry outreaches into the local community.



On top of that, Alin, Iuliana, and Ruthie (now almost seven) live humbly in two of the small student dorm rooms because there isn't enough money yet to finish the construction of their WOL house (shown here). We were touched by Alin's love for the Lord, his family, and a desire to maintain a healthy team atmosphere in light of a demanding work schedule. Please join us in praying for this new outpost for the gospel in Romania and for Alin, Iuliana, and little Ruthie as they depend on God for their needs.

As Iuliana wrote in a recent email:

Thank you so much for praying for us. We need it so much! Thank you for your sensitivity for us and the students as well. God is faithful and will do even more we can ask or think. Thank you for your care!

From Bucharest we were on to Budapest. Fog made it impossible to land in Budapest or at a secondary airport so we circled back to our starting point and the airline put us up in a nice hotel. One benefit to our detour was getting to know Andrassy, a 29-year-old Romanian businessman who lives in Budapest who translated for us. When he found out that I was teaching apologetics at a Bible institute in Budapest, he mentioned that he had grown up going to Bible camps similar to those of WOL. Andrassy told us that he was recently engaged to be married and had yet to find a church to attend in Budapest. We offered to ask our friends in Hungary for recommendations and to send them to him, which we did.



Our time in Hungary was also extremely rewarding. I had thirty students from nine different countries for a course on the cults covering the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientology, Kabala, the Unification Church, and others. Thanks to the expertise of our translator Chris, the students seemed to enjoy the class and always had great questions. In an hour-long chapel I offered a response to the accusations by the so-called "New Atheists" that there is not enough evidence for God's existence and that religion is the major source of wars in the world. I could tell that

this information was new to the students. Afterwards, one student asked if he could meet with me. We ended up discussing for hours a variety of topics over two separate days. Since his list of questions about the Bible and Christianity was long, I agreed to work through the ones we didn't cover and email my replies to him. It was encouraging to me that this young man is serious enough about his faith that he wants answers to important questions.



The WOL ministry in Hungary is having a significant impact both in the Bible Institute and with evangelistic teams. While we were there, a team was invited to present a drama in Czech schools. Eleven boys met with one of the WOL staff members to talk about Christ after seeing the play, "Born to a Living Hope." WOL is very serious about evangelism and has effective tools to share Christ in schools, prisons, and in open-air settings. The ministry also has ambitious plans for the 100-year-old historic structure on their property. They have just rebuilt the roof of the building and hope to build new classroom and office space on the third floor.

Our time in Romania and Hungary was a great blessing. Now that we are home, I am meeting with a young man studying as an intern with Probe. I met John Nienaber, an Indiana native, when he was a student at WOL Hungary in 2008. He caught the "apologetics bug" and has wanted to learn more ever since.





WOL has ministry in sixty countries around the world and certainly could benefit from our prayers and support. Please pray for Alin and Iuliana Muntean in Romania as well as their students and staff. Pray too for Director Alex Konya, the students, and the rest of the staff in Toalmas, Hungary, that they will be able to continue their renovations for improved classrooms and as they witness to those in the surrounding eastern European nations. Pray for John Nienaber as he gains new tools for his apologetics toolbelt. Finally, pray for the Probe staff (Pat Zukeran was in Hungary last November and Michael Gleghorn taught there in March) as we link arms with partners such as Word of Life and other great ministries.

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Facing Facebook: Social Networking and Worldview

Byron Barlowe digs beneath the surface of the various social networking phenomena like Facebook and Twitter.

It seems like everybody is on *Facebook*! At 350 million members worldwide and growing exponentially, this social networking community would be the third largest country in the world! One hundred million Americans,^{1} including 86 percent of American women, now have a profile on at least one social networking site, nearly double from a year earlier.^{2}

“...Twitter has radically changed the face of online communication. This year alone [2009], usage has grown by 900 percent...”^{3} But kids prefer the ever-popular YouTube video-sharing site. Two-thirds of Internet users around the world visit blogs and social networks, making it more popular than email. And older users are flocking to social sites. So this is about you and your friends, too, mom and dad!

So what is *social networking*? At a social site like Facebook.com, when you find another member, you click a button that says “Add as Friend.” Now, you and that person have a connection on the Web site that others can see. They are a member of your network, and you are a member of theirs. Also, you can see who your friends know, and who your friends’ friends know. You’re no longer a stranger, so you can contact them more easily. As the website Common Craft explains, “This solves a real-world problem because your network has hidden opportunities. Social networking sites make these connections between people visible.”^{4}

“These applications have given users an entirely new dimension of interactivity on the Web, as people are able to share videos, photos, links, ideas, and information at a heretofore unseen speed and with uncanny ease that enhances the Web experience of every Internet user.”^{5}

But some push back. “It’s just trivia, a waste of time,” they say. Silly games and self-centered platforms where folks can parade their lives. There is some truth in that charge. But it’s important to understand such a powerful, widespread medium and seek to redeem it.

One commentator said, “Time bends when I open Facebook: it’s as if I’m simultaneously a journalist/wife/mother in Berkeley and the goofy girl I left behind in Minneapolis.”[\[6\]](#) But the accessibility and immediacy is not always good or profound. Be ready to have your life history, long-lost friends and personal ghosts pop up in unexpected ways through social networking. In the same way, the future could be at stake with each post and link you put up: Whatever goes online, stays online. One’s reputation will be marked for years to come by her online life for good or ill.

However, the meteoric rise of social networking has occurred for good reason. In Facebook, Xanga or MySpace, research shows that we *extend* current relationships online. It can all be very trivial or fairly meaningful, depending on how it’s used. In this way, social networking is not unlike meeting up at a coffee shop or at the back fence. Younger generations are known to be more conversational than older ones. In my middle-aged circles, many seem to have written it off prematurely.

We’ll explore some worldview implications of social networking through the insightful book *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith*.[\[7\]](#) Using a grid introduced by media professor and technology prophet Marshall McLuhan that traces media’s culture-shaping influence, we’ll briefly assess how this technology enhances our capabilities, retrieves lost ones, makes obsolete other things, and reverses into unintended consequences. In other words, we’ll ask and partially answer basic questions like: What will this blossoming media change? What am I giving up if I use it? How can I control it for myself and my kids? Will it end up controlling me—or has it already?

“Hanging out” online, for all its similarities to in-person conversation **is** fundamentally different. And those differences are sure to change not only our socializing, but our worldviews—maybe even our faith.

“The Medium is the Message”

McLuhan famously stated that “the medium is the message,” meaning that the content of media is overshadowed in its influence by the influence of the very medium (technology) through which it is communicated. Hipps believes media has been a fundamental change agent of culture, even faith. We’ll explain and explore a bit McLuhan’s grid of change and how it applies to social networking.

In discussing social networking sites like Facebook and their effect on people, it’s helpful to look back at other media to see their culture-shaping influence. Note that I didn’t write “the content of other media,” but rather, “other media.” For example, before Gutenberg’s movable-type printing press, faith was passed down orally and through imagery like stained glass windows and church icons. The concrete stories from the synoptic Gospels ruled the day; the Apostle Paul’s deep, abstract letters were virtually ignored. Then, print technology unleashed a new way to think and even to believe—an emphasis on *individual faith* accessed through *critical reason*. This print phenomenon *retrieved* the abstract, doctrinally rich letters of Paul from the dusty shelves of history. This, in turn, ignited the Reformation, writes Shane Hipps. One result: the church transformed from a highly communal body into a mass of individuals and put religious mystery largely out of touch.

Hipps writes that, *in its extremes*, the influence of print reduced the gospel to incomplete abstract propositions and made many Christians arrogant about what we can know with certainty. [This is what some in the emerging church conversation react against, but we cannot pursue that topic here.]

Perhaps less controversially, Hipps shares the maxim that any media—social networking included—changes its users in a similar way print technology did. Marshall McLuhan famously stated that “the medium is the message.” He meant that the

medium itself does more to affect people than even the content that it carries.

The adage, “We become what we behold”[{8}](#) seems to hold forth in social science and neurology, as well. Brain scientists are finding that exposure to and use of media of any kind changes the brain’s wiring, so there’s more at stake here than just bad content or how we use our time.[{9}](#)

While writing this transcript, I had to fight to get alone and maintain focus. I consciously avoided the distraction and fragmentation my mind easily undergoes while *Twittering* (or “tweeting”) and *Facebooking* (see, social networking even spawns new verbs, like “friending”!). The social networking experience is like walking around at a party filled with friends in various conversations: lots of brief comments, retorts and jokes. My need for individual, abstract thinking was at risk at the “Facebook party.” (Ironically, I was in the abstract writing mode regarding a very different sort of medium: non-abstract, simplistic, disjointed, visually based, online digital “communities.”)

New media may bring us to and keep us more “in the moment” and in touch with real people, all good things. But so-called *virtual communities* may create very unreal relationships. Not to mention a loss of in-depth thinking, conversation and fellowship to build current relationships. Two years ago a commentator wrote regarding American youth on social networks, “The rules of relationship are...being rewritten, and...are being shaped by a distinctly media-centered worldview rather than a Christian one.[{10}](#) However, things may be changing, at least among Australian youth, where “they want more connections with their friends that aren’t digital, that are tangible. They’re starting to question the authenticity of social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. They want technology to assist rather than dominate the way they communicate.”[{11}](#)

David Watson is an entrepreneurial “pastor” exploring the

legitimacy of online shepherding. He believes it's a general relationship issue not confined to online participation: "Any time you are not fully present with whatever community you happen to be with—whether online or offline—you can hurt people.... We just notice the online stuff more because it is new and people tend to spend lots of time with new things before they figure out how everything balances out." [\[12\]](#)

So what's the big deal? Most Facebook, MySpace or Orkut members aren't changing their entire view of reality, truth, God or mankind based on interactions with online friends. No, it's not the obvious pitfall of cults or wild philosophies that people usually deal with day to day anyway. Under-the-radar ways of being and communicating can incrementally change who we are. It's the subtle way that our *view* of life changes that concerns me most. Are moment-by-moment Tweets dumbing us down in various ways? Have we come to expect meaning in 140-character bits? Twitter shows the flow of life in tiny chunks some call a lifestream. But are those snippets, especially when seen intermittently, meaningful?

Media swirls around us and we become immune to the white noise. But McLuhan was a master at stepping back to study what is going on with media to see how to cooperate with and thus handle the vortex. Churches and ministries love to jump on new technologies to share the old, old story—but before diving in headlong, we need to remember McLuhan's warning: we become like the media that we use.

Social Networking Redeems and Resurrects Good Things

What is the technology of social networking enhancing and bringing back from disuse? What are some redeeming characteristics of this new phenomenon? They include renewed friendships and acquaintances, helpful networking made easy, ministry possibilities and relational fun. Mainly, it enhances

real-world relational communities.

McLuhan stated that new media always “enhances and retrieves” good things. For example, we long for the days of chatting with neighbors on the front porch. Social networking restores this dynamic to a surprising degree. One writer reflected, “It could be . . . that Facebook marks a return to the time when people remained embedded in their communities for life, with connections that ran deep. . . .”[\[13\]](#)

Reconnections frequently happen too. One former neighbor messaged me on Facebook, “Are you the Byron that lived beside us 25 years ago?” She was thrilled to know I was still walking with Christ and asked for prayer for her drug-addicted brother. She’d located me out of the blue a quarter century later and seven states away through the wonder of social networking.

Social networks have great potential for ministry. Yet Shane Hipps’ primary message for Christ-followers in *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith* is that simply broadcasting the gospel message in an old style into this new medium will not be effective. The medium itself changes the way people perceive *and* receive the message.

Social media are *not* a kind of broadcast medium, but rather a *conversation medium*. Online social ministry pioneer Paul Watson tells incredible stories of fruit borne online. He shepherds groups who stay current on Twitter and Facebook. One online community of Christ-followers raised funds over the Internet for a non-Christian tarot-card-reader to take her premature son to a hospital half a state away for medical treatment. A blogger, a practicing witch, warned her visitors not to harass Watson after he privately initiated prayer regarding her health issue.

Campus Crusade for Christ uses Facebook for campus ministry. They recently stated that 66 million students are active

Facebook users. That's three times the population of Australia! In an outreach training video produced by Campus Crusade, the camera pans an empty library and the question "*Where are the students?*" flashes across the screen. Then it shows a computer lab chock-full of kids, most logged into Facebook, MySpace, Twitter or YouTube. Another banner reads, "The average college student spends three hours on Facebook each visit." Going where the people hang out is wise! But Campus Crusade knows you can't just post *The Four Spiritual Laws* tract on Facebook and be effective. Long-term engagement with a live person or social community is required to make a positive difference.

If relationships are healthy, they *can* be helped online. "A study published in 2007 in *The Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* suggested that hanging onto old friends via Facebook may alleviate feelings of isolation for students whose transition to campus life had proved rocky."[\[14\]](#)

A Christian apologist wrote regarding social networking and the Internet, "We should note well Thomas Morris's 'Double Power Principle'—'To the extent that something has power for good, it has corresponding power for ill.'"[\[15\]](#)Next, we'll discuss the downsides of social media.

Social Networking Makes Obsolete and Obscures Other Good Things

What is the technology of social networking making obsolete, obscuring or obliterating? Taken to extremes, how might it make its users regress rather than progress? What other troublesome dynamics does it create?

Studies show that people tend to continue and expand their real-life relationships online. But people can be fooled. Nothing replaces face-to-face contact. Hipps writes in *Flickering Pixels* about mutual friends of his who live very

nearby but who had not seen each other in months. They communicate online daily, yet their relationship has deteriorated. Hipps commented on so-called *virtual communities*: “It’s virtual—but it ain’t community. . . . Meaningful, missional Christian community” should consist of several essential things:

*1. **Shared history or experiences** that help establish a sense of identity and belonging*

*2. **Permanence** or relational staying power—“it’s how you get shared history.” Members of a transient community never get shared memories.*

*3. **Proximity**—“you have to be with one another in order to create the kind of meaningful connections to have community.”*

*4. **Shared imagination of the future** —a sense of “We’re all going in the same direction.” Hipps says this is the one thing you get automatically with online social networking—people flock together who already share a future vision. But it’s not community just because of that. If online “friends” are not able to meet together over time and share life experiences as they work toward a common vision, then it’s just an online affinity group.*

“Electronic culture disembodies and separates [yet]. . . . most of us. . . believe our technology is bringing us closer.”[\[16\]](#) The Bible exhorts believers not to forsake group gatherings.[\[17\]](#) Why? Because corporate worship and teaching, personal shepherding, mutual encouragement, even non-verbal signals are irreplaceable. We can take our cues on being physically present from the incarnation: God’s most powerful gospel medium was the Man, Christ Jesus.

Technology always makes something obsolete. It seems probable that too much online use compromises our ability to concentrate and think abstractly and form a coherent argument.

Given a steady diet of fragmented imagery and spontaneous status updates, a new generation is losing the ability to think through issues from a coherent framework. “Through YouTubing, Facebooking, MySpacing . . . people take in vast amounts of visual information. But do they always comprehend the meaning of what they see. . . ? They are easily manipulated as students, consumers and citizens.”[{18}](#)

Another endangered characteristic is deep conversation. Within the space of 140 character status updates and Tweets, all hope of profound, meaningful dialogue seems lost. Instead, images rule. “. . . Image culture is eroding and undermining imaginative creativity” which is “extremely important to our functioning as healthy, creative people.”[{19}](#)

Social networking can steal your time. A friend recently told me that his wife’s use of Facebook is hindering their family time and communications. This is likely a widespread problem. “2.6 billion minutes are used daily by the global population on Facebook.”[{20}](#) If you already struggle with addictive tendencies or wasting time, think twice about launching into this absorbing lifestyle change. Get help for your online habit if it’s destructive as you would for any addiction.

Balancing Social Networking, Keeping a Christian Worldview in Mind

What are some more guiding principles for using social networking (and the Internet)? How do users balance their lives and retain a Christian worldview in a social networking age?

Remember Narcissus, the mythological character who was so enamored by his own image in the pool of water that it eventually became his undoing? Most people focus on his self-absorption. But the point Hipps makes isn’t how stuck on himself Narcissus was, but rather his inability to perceive

and control the low-tech medium of a reflective pool. He seemed oblivious to what was going on, as people tend to be regarding the media maelstrom that surrounds us. “When we fail to perceive that the things we create are extensions of ourselves, the created things take on god-like characteristics and we become their servants.”[\[21\]](#) Media intake stealthily becomes idolatry.

The legendary Perseus, on the other hand, realized the power of a medium that if put under his control, could destroy the deadly effects of staring into the eyes of Medusa. Using a shield as a mirror, he deflected her deadly gaze and turned it into a chance to kill her. Even ancient Greek pagans understood the difference between these two fictional characters: Narcissus became enamored and then ensnared by a medium; Perseus, on the other hand, stepped back, realized the mirror was just an extension of his eyes, and so was able to master that medium. This echoes biblical commands to guard our heart and mind and not be conformed to the world.[\[22\]](#)

Remember, we’re not really talking about what content goes *on* your Facebook page. Rather, it’s the hidden power of the Internet and social networking that concerns us. Count the cost each time you use it.

One good use of the immediacy of Twitter is intercession. I got stuck in Delhi, India on a mission trip and *tweeted* a prayer request through my cell phone that in turn updated my Facebook page. Instant access and 140-character-long brevity can be good.

More advice from this worldview watcher trying to redeem social networking: read widely. Read deeply. Keep those parts of your mind and soul in shape while navigating the quick communications of social networking.

Guard your time like a night watchman. Guard your heart and mind like a jealous lover. Set “no unclean thing” before your

eyes{23} and if others try to, take down that post or don't follow them. Also, guard against not only physical but "psychological nudity." {24}

Mix into everyday wall posts some meaningful thoughts, worthy articles and video clips that cause people to think. Become a fan at the Facebook or MySpace pages of organizations like Probe. Link to articles at Probe.org, Bible.org, or some good cause to help fund.

Balance is key: not everything is worthy of immediate broadcast or attention. "Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him." {25} Trivia can be genuine but tiresome.

Reach out: post a Scripture, share your faith.

As Shane Hipps said, "The most important medium, the most powerful medium is you, you are God's chosen medium to incarnate the hands and feet of God in an aching world. . . . The more we understand [the hidden power of media], the more we can understand how to use our media rather than be used by them." {26}

Notes

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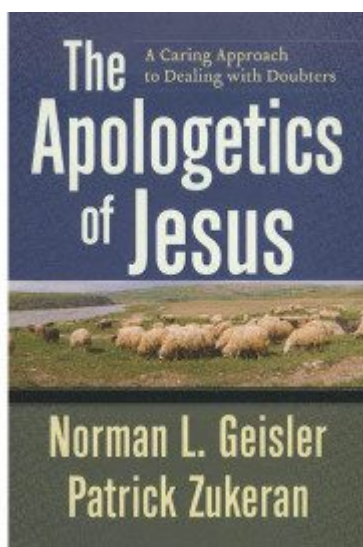
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Apologetics of Jesus: Interview with Author Patrick Zukeran

Written by Probe Ministries Administrator



Question: This is a very interesting topic, *The Apologetics of Jesus*. What inspired this book?

Zukeran: While I was in a doctoral class with Dr. Norman

Geisler, he stated one day in class, "You may be surprised to discover, the greatest apologist is Jesus Himself. Someone needs to write a book on the apologetics of Jesus. In 2000 years of Christian history, no one has written on this subject." The idea of studying the apologetic methods of Jesus and knowing that no one had written on the subject really stirred my interest. It thus became my doctoral project.

Question: You said that after you finished, you realized this would be an extremely important book for the body of Christ. Why do you feel this is a critically significant work?

Zukeran: There is a lot of confusion regarding the role and the need for apologetics in ministry. Many Christians believe our faith in Christ involves a blind leap of faith. In other words, our faith calls for acceptance of Christ without any reason or evidence. Therefore, in evangelism Christians should simply preach the gospel and the Holy Spirit will do the rest. When Christians are challenged by other worldviews or ideas of the culture, we often fail to offer well-reasoned and substantial answers. Often I hear Christians say, "You just need to believe" or "You simply need to have faith." That is not a good answer to an unbelieving world or even to Christians who are questioning their faith because they have been confronted by a challenge to the credibility of Bible or the claims of Christ. Jesus commanded us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Answers like these simply do not exemplify what it means to love God with our minds. Apologetics is the defense of the Christian faith. Apologetics uses reason and presents compelling evidence to communicate the message of Christ, defend the message of Christ and challenge unbelief. Apologetics was an essential component in the ministry of Christ and if it was important in His ministry, it is crucial for Christians as we engage our world for Christ as He commanded and modeled.

Question: Many Christians do not realize Jesus was an apologist. Scores of books have been written on His teaching

methods, leadership skills, prayer life, etc... Few realize apologetics was an important part of His ministry. Why is that?

Zukeran: Apologists defend the message of Christ but when it comes to Jesus, He was the message. Perhaps that is why this aspect of His ministry is overlooked. When you study the life of Christ, He made some astounding claims and He did not expect or want people to take a blind leap of faith. He presented reasons and compelling evidence to support His claims.

Question: People may be asking, since Jesus was God incarnate, why did He need to give a defense of His claims?

Zukeran: As our creator, Jesus understood that we are created in the image of God. God is a rational and morally perfect being and we reflect His nature. Jesus understood that we use reason and evidence to make our daily decisions. For example, when you see two fruit stands how do you decide which one to go to? If one looks clean, has bright looking fruit, and the owner is neatly dressed while the other one looks dirty, the fruit does not look as fresh and you spot a few flies buzzing in the area, which stand will you choose? Here's another example. What if you enter a hotel lobby and see two elevator doors open. One elevator has lights, the music is playing and people flow in and out of it. Next to it the elevator has no lights on, there is no music playing and you do not see people entering it. Which elevator will you choose? We examine the evidence and use our reasoning ability to make daily decisions. We do the same when it comes to deciding what we will believe and who we will entrust our life and eternal destiny to. Jesus understood that when it comes to persuading people to believe in His message, He would need to provide good reasons and compelling evidence and He did.

Question: What are some of the apologetic methods of Jesus?

Zukeran: Jesus used several apologetic methods. He used reason and presented logical arguments to defend His claims and expose error. He used the evidence from the Scriptures, prophecy, His miracles, the resurrection and more. When you study His apologetics, you really appreciate the brilliance of our Lord. He truly was the greatest thinker as well as a powerful communicator.

Question: There are some passages that appear to teach against the use of reason and evidence such as Matthew 12:38-39. When Jesus was asked to perform a sign by the He rebukes them saying, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah” (12:39). Jesus refused to show them evidence. Isn't this a passage that speaks against the use of apologetics?

Zukeran: One of the chapters in the book addresses several alleged anti-apologetic passages. There are no passages that speak against the use of reason and evidence. Jesus and the apostles did not ask people to make a commitment to Christ without good reasons. For example, to understand Jesus' response, you must understand the context. Christ had already performed numerous miracles (Matt. 4:23-25, 8:1-4, 5-13, 28-34, 9:1-7, 9:18-26, 11:20). In fact, this confrontation occurs closely after Jesus' healing of a man's withered hand (12:13), and the deliverance of a demon-possessed individual (12:22-23). Despite these miracles, the Pharisees demanded that Jesus perform another sign. Knowing they were not sincere in their demand, He refused to appease them. Misunderstanding passages like these confuse Christians and their understanding of apologetics.

Question: What was it like writing this work with Dr. Geisler?

Zukeran: I have read many of Dr. Geisler's works and he has had a great influence on my life. I consider him one of the premier defenders of the faith of our generation. It was a

great privilege to work on this book with Him and Dr. Ron Rhodes. They would not let me get away with weak arguments and often pointed out areas and questions I needed to address. It is too bad some of those issues are left out of the book, but they really challenged me to write and think at a higher level. Perhaps you could compare it to football player receiving a chance to play under the great Tom Landry or a basketball player learning under John Wooden, or an investor working with Warren Buffett. I learned a lot but also realized I still have a lot more to learn. It was valuable to see the precision in their arguments, and their foresight in anticipating how opponents may respond. These were valuable examples for me to learn from.

Question: How do you hope this book will impact the body of Christ?

Zukeran: One of the concerns of Christian apologists is that the body of Christ is neglecting the mind. Since the Great Awakening and the preaching of men like Charles Finney, there has been a shift in evangelical Christianity. We have moved to a more emotional faith based on a moving experience. But, an emotional faith can only take you so far. Sooner or later, you will need reasons upon which to base your faith when it is challenged whether through a tragedy or an intellectual challenge. The unbelieving world also needs to see that the Christian worldview offers the best answers to the issues we face in our culture. I hope when Christians read this book and see that Jesus modeled how to love God with our minds, they will be encouraged to engage their minds with their faith in Christ.

Question: Some may see this as an intellectual book. However, you state that there are a lot of practical lessons we can apply from the study of Jesus' apologetics. What are some examples of lessons we can learn and apply?

Zukeran: Since we use our reasoning capacity in daily life,

apologetics is tremendously practical in our evangelism. If we are going to have ministries that will engage a lost world that is in rebellion to God, we will need compelling reasons but we will also need to know how to present our case to various audiences, often a hostile one. Jesus was the master at this. This does not mean He was always successful, but He did show us how to communicate a powerful message. Each chapter ends with practical applications we can apply when engaging our culture for Christ. Hopefully, we will all be more effective witnesses for Christ as a result of studying the model of Christ.

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Charity and Compassion: Christianity Is Good for Culture

Byron Barlowe looks at the impact of Christianity on the world. He concludes that applying a Christian, biblical worldview to the issues that we face in our world has resulted in a great amount of good. Apart from the eternal aspect of Christianity, people applying Christian principles to worldly issues have benefited all mankind.

Christian Religion: Good or Bad for Mankind?

Standing on the jetway boarding a flight out of Cuzco, Peru, I overheard an American college student say to his companion, "See that older guy up there? He's a professor. Came here to give lectures on Christianity. Can you believe that?" In an

apparent reference to abuses perpetrated on local Indians by the *conquistadors* centuries earlier, he added, "Haven't Christians done enough to these people?"

He didn't know that I was the professor's companion. Turning around, I said, "Excuse me, I couldn't help but overhear. I'm with the professor and, yes, we were giving lectures at the university from a Christian worldview. But did you know that all these people in between us were helping with humanitarian aid in the poorest villages around here all week?"

He sheepishly mumbled something about every story having two sides. But his meaning was clear: what good could possibly come from Christians imposing their beliefs on these indigenous people? Their culture was ruined by their kind and should be left alone. Popular sentiments, but are they fair and accurate?

The church—and those acting in its name—has had its moments of injustice, intrigue, even murder. Unbiblical excesses during the Inquisitions, the Crusades, and other episodes are undeniable. Yet these deviations from the teachings of Christ and the Bible are overwhelmingly countered by the church's good works and novel institutions of care, compassion, and justice.

Carlton Hayes wrote, "From the wellspring of Christian compassion, our Western civilization has drawn its inspiration, and its sense of duty, for feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, looking after the homeless, clothing the naked, tending the sick and visiting the prisoner." As one writer put it, missionaries and other Christians lived as if people mattered.[\[1\]](#) Revolutionary!

Christianity exploded onto a brutal, heartless Greco-Roman culture. Believers in this radical new religion set a new standard for caring for the ill, downtrodden, and abused, even at risk of death. Through their transformed Christlike

outlooks, they established countercultural ways that lead to later innovations: orphanages, hospitals, transcendent art and architecture, and systems of law and order based on fairness, to name a few. In the early church, every congregation had a list of needy recipients called a *matriculum*. Enormous amounts of charity were given.^{2} “Pagan society, through its excesses, teetered on the brink of extinction. Christianity, however, represented . . . a new way.”^{3}

Compassion and charity are biblical ideals. “Early Christians set a model for their descendants to follow, a model that today’s modern secular societies try to imitate, but without Christian motivation.”^{4} We take for granted the notion that it’s good to help the needy and oppressed, but wherever it’s found, whether in religious or secular circles, it can be traced right back to Jesus Christ and His followers.

Answering Atheists: Is Religion Evil?

“Religion poisons everything,” carps militant atheist Christopher Hitchens. Fellow atheist Richard Dawkins claims that “there’s not the slightest evidence that religious people . . . are any more moral than non-religious people.” True? Not according to social scientists from Princeton and other top universities.

As citizens, religious people generally shine. According to Logan Paul Gage, “for every 100 altruistic acts—like giving blood—performed by non-religious people, the religious perform 144.” Also, those active in religion in the U.S. volunteer in their communities more.^{5} A Barna study reports that “more than four out of five (83%) gave at least \$1000 to churches and non-profit entities during 2007, far surpassing . . . any other population segment studied....”^{6} This echoes studies from the past few decades.

Furthermore, studies show that religious youth have more self-

control against cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana. "Religion also correlates with fewer violent crimes, school suspensions and a host of other negative behaviors." {7}

It appears that Dawkins is very wrong. He lamented that "faith is . . . comparable to the smallpox virus but harder to eradicate." People who care about our culture will hope he's right about how hard religion is to eliminate, especially Christianity. {8}

So, what about the evil perpetrated by the church? Early Christians were admirable in their display of compassion and charity. But haven't the centuries since witnessed a parade of continual religious wars (including "Christian wars), persecutions, and mayhem? Among Christianity's sins: forced conversions, expansion by so-called "Christian states" mingled with genocide, execution of accused heretics and witches, and the ever infamous Crusades. Regrettable, inexcusable, but largely overblown.

Dinesh D'Souza writes that this popular refrain also "greatly exaggerates [crimes of] religious fanatics while neglecting or rationalizing the vastly greater crimes committed by secular and atheist fanatics." {9} Historian Jonathan Riley-Smith disputes that the Crusaders were rapists and murderers. He and other historians document that they were pilgrims using their own funds to liberate long-held Christian lands and defend Europe against Muslim invaders. {10}

What about heretics who were burned at the stake? Author Henry Kamen claims that "much of the modern stereotype of the Inquisition is essentially made up. . . . Inquisition trials . . . were fairer and more lenient than their secular counterparts." {11}

Atheism is associated with far more death and destruction than religion is, particularly Christianity. In *Death by Government*, R.J. Rummel writes "Almost 170 million men, women

and children have been shot, beaten, tortured, knifed, burned, starved, frozen, crushed or worked to death; buried alive, drowned, hung, bombed or killed in any other of a myriad of ways governments have inflicted death on unarmed, helpless citizens and foreigners.”[\[12\]](#) Rummel directly attributes eighty-four percent of these to atheistic “megamurderers” like Stalin, Hitler, and Mao.

For perspective, consider that “the Crusades, Inquisition and the witch burnings killed approximately 200,000 people” over five hundred years. These deaths, tragic and unjust as many were, only comprise one percent of the deaths caused by atheist regimes during a few decades. That’s a ninety-nine to one ratio of death tied directly to the atheist worldview.[\[13\]](#)

History shows that atheism, not Christianity, is the view that is bad—even murderous—for society.

Compassion: Christian Innovation in a Cruel World

Christianity is unique. No other religion or philosophy values *and practices wholesale* taking care of the young, sick, orphaned, oppressed, and widowed, hands-on and sacrificially.

To ancient Greeks and Romans, life was cheap. Infanticide—baby killing— was “condoned and practiced for centuries without guilt or remorse [and] extolled by Greco-Roman mythologies.” This ungodly practice was opposed by Christians, whose compassionate example eventually caused Roman emperors to outlaw it.[\[14\]](#) First-century art shows believers rescuing unwanted Roman babies from the Tiber River. They raised them as their own.

Emperors pronounced death sentences on a whim, even beyond gladiatorial games. This was the ultimate extension of *paterfamilias*: a father had the right to kill his own child if

she displeased him. Life was expendable, even among families!{15}

Abortion, human sacrifice, and suicide were also part of societies unaffected by God's love. How different from the scriptural doctrine that all are made in God's image and deserve life and dignity.

Slaves and the poor were on their own. One exhaustive survey of historical documents "found that antiquity has left no trace of organized charitable effort." {16}

The ancient code was: "leave the ill to die." Roman colonists in Alexandria even left their friends and next of kin behind during a plague. {17} Japanese holy men kept the wealthy from relieving the poor because they believed them to be "odious to the gods." {18}

By contrast, Jesus expanded the Jewish obligation of compassion well beyond family and tribe even to enemies. His parable of the Good Samaritan exploded racial and social boundaries. {19} Scripture says that Jesus "had compassion on them and healed their sick." Christ's disciples went around healing and teaching as their master had. Believers were instructed to care for widows, the sick, the disabled and the poor, and also for orphans. "Justin Martyr, an early defender of Christianity, reveals that collections were taken during church services to help the orphans," writes Alvin Schmidt. By the time of Justinian, churches were operating old folks' homes called *gerontocomia*. Before Christianity, homes for the aged didn't exist. Now, such nursing homes are taken for granted. {20}

Schmidt notes that "Christianity filled the pagan void that largely ignored the sick and dying, especially during pestilences." Greeks had diagnostic centers, but no nursing care. Roman hospitals were only for slaves, gladiators, and occasionally for soldiers. Christians provided shelters for

the poor and pilgrims, along with medical care. Christian hospitals were the first voluntary charitable institutions. [{21}](#)

A pagan Roman soldier in Constantine's army was intrigued by Christians who "brought food to his fellow soldiers who were afflicted with famine and disease." He studied this inspiring group who displayed such humanity and was converted to the faith. He represents much of why the early church grew despite bouts of severe persecution. [{22}](#)

Basic beliefs—or worldviews—lead to basic responses. The Christian response to life and suffering changed the world for good.

Early Church Charity vs. Self-Serving Greco-Roman Giving

In ancient Greece and Rome, charity was unknown, except for gaining favors and fame. This stood in stark contrast to Jesus' thinking. He rebuked the Pharisees, whose good deeds were done for public acclaim. Christ's ethic of sharing with any and all and helping the underprivileged brought a revolution that eventually converted the entire Roman Empire.

Caritas, root word of *charity*, "meant giving to relieve economic or physical distress without expecting anything in return," writes Schmidt, "whereas *liberalitas* meant giving to please the recipient, who later would bestow a favor on the giver." [{23}](#) Pagans almost never gave out of what we today would ironically call true *liberality*.

In contrast, for Christ-followers part of worship was hands-on charity. They celebrated God's redemption this way, giving and serving both individually and corporately. Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem in the fifth century, sold church ornaments to feed the poor. (Another contrast: the Hindu worldview assumes that

neediness results from bad deeds in a past life.)

Ancient culture was centered on elitism. The well-off and privileged gave not out of any sense of caring, but out of what Aristotle termed “liberality, in order to demonstrate [their] magnanimity and even superiority.” They funded parks, statues, and public baths with their names emblazoned on them. Even the little philanthropy the ancients did was seldom received by the needy. Those who could pay back in some way received it.[{24}](#)

Historian Kenneth Scott Latourette noted that early Christians *innovated* five ways in their use of their own funds for the general welfare:

First, those who joined were *expected to give* to their ability level, both rich and poor. Christ even called some to give all they had to the poor. St. Francis of Assisi, Pope Gregory the Great, and missionary C.T. Studd all did as well.

Second, they had a *new motivation*: the love for and example of Christ, who being rich became poor for others’ sakes (2 Corinthians 8:9).[{25}](#)

Third, Christianity like Judaism, created *new objects of giving*: widows, orphans, slaves, the persecuted.

The fourth Christian innovation was *personalized giving*, although large groups were served. Also, *individuals* did the giving, not the government. “For the most part, the few Roman acts of relief and assistance were isolated state activities, ‘dictated much more by policy than by benevolence’.”[{26}](#)

Last, Christian generosity was not solely for insiders.[{27}](#) This was truly radical. The emperor known as Julian the Apostate complained that since Jews never had to beg and Christians supported both their own poor and those outside the church, “those who belong to us look in vain for the help we should render to them.”[{28}](#)

Believers sometimes fasted for charity. The vision was big: ten thousand Christians skipping one hundred days' meals could provide a million meals, it was figured. Transformed hearts and minds imitated the God who left the throne of heaven to serve and die for others.[{29}](#)

Even W.E. Lecky, no friend to Christianity, wrote, "The active, habitual, and detailed charity of private persons, which is such a conspicuous feature in all Christian societies, was scarcely known in antiquity."[{30}](#) That is, until Christians showed up.

Medieval and Modern Manifestations

This way of thinking and living continued in Medieval times. Third century deacon St. Laurence was ordered by a Roman official to bring some of the treasures of the church. He showed up with poor and lame church members. For this affront to Roman sensibilities, he was roasted to death on a gridiron. Today, a Florida homeless shelter named after St. Laurence provides job help and basic assistance to the downtrodden.

The Generous Middle Ages

The Middle Ages saw Christian compassion grow. In the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries, Italian clergy "zealously defended widows and orphans."[{31}](#) Ethelwold, bishop of Winchester in the tenth century "sold all of the gold and silver vessels of his cathedral to relieve the poor who were starving during a famine."[{32}](#)

Furthermore, according to Will Durant,

The administration of charity reached new heights in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. . . . The Church shared in relieving the unfortunate. Almsgiving was universal. Men hopeful of paradise left charitable bequests. . . . Doles of food were distributed [three times a week] to all who asked.

. . . In one aspect the Church was a continent-wide organization for charitable aid. [\[33\]](#)

From Hospitals to the Red Cross

Christian hospitals spread to Europe by the eighth century. By the mid-1500s, thirty-seven thousand Benedictine monasteries cared for the ill. Arab Muslims even followed suit. Christianity was changing the world, even beyond the West.

The much-maligned Crusaders founded healthcare orders, helping Muslims *and* Christians. This led to the establishment of insane asylums. By the 1400s, hospitals across Europe were under the direction of Christian bishops who often gave their own money. They cared for the poor and orphans and occasionally fed prisoners—an all-purpose institution of care.

“Christian aid to the poor did not end with the early church or the Middle Ages,” says Schmidt. [\[34\]](#) By the latter years of the nineteenth century, local Christian churches and denominations built many hospitals.

Medical nursing, a Christian innovation in ancient times, took leaps forward through the influence of Christ-follower Florence Nightingale. In 1864, Red Cross founder Jean Henri Dunant confessed on his deathbed, “I am a disciple of Christ as in the first century, and nothing more.” [\[35\]](#)

Child Labor Laws

The Industrial Revolution in England ushered in a shameful exploitation of children, even among those naming the Christian faith. Kids as young as seven worked in horrible conditions in coal mines and chimneys.

Compassionate believers like William Wilberforce and Charles Dickens rallied their callous countrymen to pass Parliamentary laws against the worst child labor. The real superman of this cause was Lord Shaftesbury, whose years of tireless

“pleadings, countless speeches, personal sacrifices and dogged persistence” resulted in “a number of bills that vastly improved child labor conditions.” His firm faith in Christ spurred him and a nation on to true compassion.^{36} This had a ripple effect across Western nations. Child labor has been outlawed in the West but continues strongly in nations less affected by Christian culture.

And Still Today . . .

This attitude of charity and compassion continues today in Christian societies like the Salvation Army and Christian groups who aided Hurricane Katrina victims so much better than the government.^{37} Many more can be named. As someone said, “Christian ideals have permeated society until non-Christians, who claim to live a “decent life” without religion, have forgotten the origin of the very content and context of their “decency”.^{38}

Notes

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3. Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Nashville: Word/Thomas Nelson, 1995) 40.
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19. Christopher Price, "Pagans, Christianity, and Charity," CADRE (Christian Colligation of Apologetics Debate Research & Evangelism), www.christiancadre.org/member_contrib/cp_charity.html.
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23. Schmidt, 126.
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28. Shelley, 36.
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31. Schmidt, 131-134.
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33. Will Durant, *The Age of Faith*, 31, quoted by Christopher Price: www.christiancadre.org/member_contrib/cp_charity.html.
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37. Schmidt, 142-144.
38. Schmidt, 131.

“How Do You Determine Your Spiritual Gift?”

How do people determine their spiritual gift? Is it through prayer? Or does the Lord reveal it to them in some way?

There are several ways. Praying for guidance about your spiritual gift(s) is the first step, certainly. Also important is educating yourself to find out what the gifts are and what they look like in operation. And ask the people around you what they think your gifts are, if the people around you know anything about spiritual gifts! (They are found in 1 Corinthians 12:7, 11; Romans 12:4-8; Ephesians 4:7; and 1 Peter 4:10.)

I have discovered that when you're operating in an area of supernatural gifting, it's like getting on the moving sidewalks at airports—you can get where you're going twice as fast as the people walking next to you who *aren't* on the people mover, and there's energy and power and a spring in your step. It's FUN! When you're using your spiritual gifts, you are aware of operating in God's power and strength instead of your own. . . and the Spirit-led response is humility instead of pride.

After studying spiritual gifts, my husband Ray and I compiled a spiritual gifts inventory that some have found helpful. I hope you do too. (These are limited to the ministry gifts and do not include the foundational gifts of apostleship or prophet, nor the sign gifts of tongues, interpretation of tongues, healings or miracles.)

Spiritual Gifts Evaluation

Teaching – *The supernatural ability to explain clearly and apply effectively the truth of the Word of God.*

- Do you love the Body of Christ and desire that others know more about Scripture and how to apply it?
- Do you love studying the Word of God?
- Do you have a passion for sharing the insights and principles you have learned from the Word?
- Do you find it a challenge to make complicated truths simple and understandable?

Pastor/Teacher – *One who is supernaturally equipped to shepherd and feed the flock of God with the result of their growth and maturity.*

- Do you deeply love the people of God?
- Do you feel a yearning to model the principles of Scripture and mentor others so that they can follow Christ also?
- Do you feel God's calling to shepherd His people, tenderly nurturing and nourishing them?

Evangelism – *The supernatural capacity to present the gospel message with exceptional clarity and an overwhelming burden for those who don't know Christ.*

- Do you find yourself in situations where the topics of Christ and salvation come up?
- Do you gravitate toward relationships with non-Christians?
- When others hear you explain the gospel, do they respond by trusting Christ?
- Do you have a passion for the lost?

Word of Knowledge – *The supernatural ability to receive information and truth directly from God without natural means. To know without knowing how you know.*

- Do you find yourself “knowing” something you did not learn, and unable to explain how you know it?
- If you feel that God has given you a message to give to another Christian, is it confirmed by that person’s response as truly coming from God?

Word of Wisdom – *The supernatural ability to have insight concerning God’s perspective and relay this insight succinctly to others. “Deep insight with handles.”*

- Do you experience flashes of insight on spiritual things, unusual in their clarity?
- Are you able to express this wisdom in ways that minister to people?
- Do you recognize wisdom in others when you hear it?
- Do people consider you unusually wise, and trust your judgment?
- Do you find yourself being quoted, and you recognize the quote as “a God thing”?

Faith – *The supernatural ability to believe God for the impossible.*

- When diverging roads appear before you, are you able to see God’s path based on His word, in a way that others miss?
- Do you depend on God’s resources and guidance to an unusual degree?
- Are you able to firmly claim God’s presence in the midst of chaos?
- When God answers your prayers, is your response one of calm satisfaction rather than wonderment?

Exhortation (Encouragement) – *The supernatural ability to come alongside and help others by comforting, encouraging, challenging, and rebuking.*

- Are you especially sensitive to people?
- When you encourage someone, do they respond with grateful appreciation?

- Is the timing of your encouragements usually “perfect”?
- When you challenge or rebuke another believer, is it well received?

Showing Mercy – *The supernatural ability to minister compassionately and cheerfully to those who are difficult to minister to.*

- Do you have the ability to sense when a person is in need, even before they tell you?
- Are you drawn to people with emotional or physical pain, and to those society considers “unlovely”?
- Do you have an intuitive sense of when to be quiet and when to speak, or what to say and what not to say?
- Do people seek you out when they’re hurting? Do they enjoy having you around?

Giving – *The supernatural ability to give of one’s material goods to the work of the Lord consistently, generously, sacrificially, with wisdom and cheerfulness.*

- Are you enthusiastic when presented with an opportunity to give money to meet a need?
- Are you constantly looking for ways to give?
- Do you enjoy giving privately or anonymously?
- Do you REALLY think of money as God’s, not yours?

Leadership/Administration – *The supernatural ability to organize and lead projects while handling people tactfully and providing the vision to keep them at the task.*

- Do you enjoy taking a disorganized situation and straightening it out?
- Are you able to motivate others to complete the project? Do people respond when you step in to give leadership?
- Do you enjoy planning and completing projects?
- Do you enjoy sorting out details, or do they frustrate you?

Service – *The supernatural ability to serve faithfully and joyfully behind the scenes, in practical ways, in long-term commitments to service.*

- Do you willingly volunteer to help with details?
- Do you prefer to work behind the scenes?
- Do you gain a sense of satisfaction when others succeed as a result of your behind-the-scenes work?
- Is faithfulness over the long term important to you?

Helps – *The supernatural ability to minister joyfully to God's people in short-term service with flexibility and sensitivity to what needs to be done.*

- Are you sensitive to specific and immediate needs?
- Are you flexible?
- Would you rather meet a one-time need than commit yourself to long-term service?

Discernment of Spirits – *A supernatural ability to distinguish between the spirit of truth and spirit of error, between holiness and evil. Can instantly sniff out when someone's a phony or lying.*

- Do you have an internal alarm that goes off when you encounter something phony or evil?
- Even when you're the only one who senses something wrong, is your "intuition" eventually validated?
- Do you (and others) consider yourself a good judge of character?

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

MySpace: Parents and Kids Wisely Navigating Online Social Networking

MySpace and other social networking sites can be a great boon or a great danger. Byron Barlowe cautions Christian parents of teens to exercise discernment in educating themselves about this important part of life, and look for a redemptive view of this social technology.

Very Big and Very Hip

MySpace.com: It's big, it's growing, it's controversial for good reasons, and it's probably touched your family—and you may not even know it. In this section, we answer the questions, “What is it and why do you as a parent need to learn more about protecting your kids without cutting them off?”

Is *MySpace* a harmless teen hangout or a treacherous trap? Should parents forbid your kids from using *MySpace* or similar social networking Web sites? Kids, do your parents, like, even have a *clue*? And could Christians legitimately use *MySpace* as a mission field?

Controversy about *MySpace* still abounds, even in the fast-moving online world.

Imagine this: Your straight-A, straight-laced teenaged daughter Lori met Aaron online when he visited her *MySpace* profile, a Web page about her. Now she wants to go to the concert with Aaron and his online buddy, “PartyCrasher.” “But mom, we’ve been ‘friends’ for weeks!” she whines. Mom and Dad, what do you do now?

This may not happen to your family, but something similar

happened to a Michigan family whose previously trouble-free sixteen-year-old daughter sneaked a flight to the Middle East to rendezvous with a *MySpace* “friend”![\[1\]](#)

So, what is *MySpace*? According to one top ranking site, in August 2007 it became the sixth-most-visited Web site on the Internet,[\[2\]](#) with over 100 million accounts.

A “perfect storm”: millions of people—many of them in their teens and twenties—are connecting with friends, meeting new ones, producing Web pages and video and music, chatting, inviting back and forth to events—even doing business and art—all within virtual communities.

Think of it as a microcosm of the World Wide Web, only much more easily connected and organized, even by kids. If the Internet was the Wild West, social networking sites—sites like *MySpace*—are becoming its boomtowns.

Wired magazine explains, “*MySpace.Com*, the Internet’s most popular social networking site...has helped redefine the way a generation communicates.”[\[3\]](#)

One digital culture watcher wrote, “Community-based websites are the fastest growing sites on the Internet. The teen social ecosystem *MySpace*” is the biggest.[\[4\]](#)

“According to some,” writes Connie Neal, author of *MySpace for Moms & Dads*, “*MySpace* marks a societal revolution as monumental as the industrial revolution.”[\[5\]](#)

MySpace owner Rupert Murdoch said, “The average person who is computer proficient is self-empowered in a way they never have [been] before.”[\[6\]](#)

It’s this newfound “empowerment” that rightly concerns parents.

Let’s keep perspective. It’s only natural that real life is

replicated online. A Roper study found that “online communities represent a real and growing phenomenon, but one that is dwarfed by interest in *real-world* social networks . . . [like] extended family (94% interest), neighborhood or town (80%), religious or spiritual organization (77%), hobby/interest (69%)” and so forth.

The directors of *BlogSafety.com* have written a handy book entitled *MySpace Unraveled: A Parent’s Guide to Teen Social Networking*. (“Blog” is short for Weblog, an online diary or commentary page.) They write regarding the rapidly evolving topic of teens redefining blogging into more of a social interaction: “As we adults struggle to find the language that describes this phenomenon, teens are speeding ahead, making it up as they go. . . . To them, these sites are just another tool for socializing.”^{7} Online and offline distinctions blur into oblivion.

What does this mean for Christian youth and parents?

Dangers and Solutions

MySpace and similar social networking sites can be intimidating, even dangerous places. Threats like malicious software, cyberbullying, and sexual predators render it risky for the unprepared and unsupervised. MySpace is being called to account and is responding, but it’s primarily up to parents to protect their children.

One thoughtful parent and Christian school educator responded to the topic as I first did: “Isn’t *MySpace* a waste of time or worse, a place where kids think they’re experiencing real relationships but are *only* getting a risky situation?” His observation was that the kind of kids who were drawn to *MySpace* already had deep needs that weren’t being fulfilled, primarily by parents.

As a parent of three pre-teens, I shared his skepticism. Yet,

there's a bigger picture, I found. There's hope, too. Nonetheless, it can be scary, especially in light of greater autonomy for kids who naturally lack discretion.

Let's pretend you find your thirteen-year-old son pacing after something hits the wall with a crash. He blurts out, "They put up a site about me with nasty pictures and said I'm fat! Now everybody is messaging about it. I'm not going to school." He's been cyberslammed and feels his young world crashing in.

The sense of public humiliation caused by cyberbullying is coupled with the danger that online threats can spill into real life. *MySpace* and similar sites can be intimidating, even dangerous places. As a parent, you may choose to forbid or restrict use of *MySpace* in your home. But I suggest you choose in an informed, careful way.

Sexual dangers are the best known. Chatrooms and posted messages easily enable such temptations and threats. One recent trip to *MySpace* rendered solicitations to chat online with a sultry woman seeking American servicemen and a gang-type fellow with the screen name "King Pimpin'."

In 2002, fifteen-year-old Katie Canton met John in a live online chat room. Since he lived far away, Katie felt free to send photos and flirt. Soon John was sending Katie gifts and e-mailing.

This story ended well: Katie testified at John's trial where he got twenty years in prison. But it had taken Katie participating in a role-playing video game to realize that her behavior and that of her would-be abuser was becoming a classic case of online predation.^{8} This is why parental education and supervision are crucial.

Again, some perspective is in order. It's tempting to view sites like *MySpace.com* as a monolithic online ghetto. A more accurate word picture may be a high school campus. Enter on one side, see the "dopeheads"; enter another, see the "jocks"

and cheerleaders. You can't paint with too broad a brush in assessing it accurately. And students can privately stay in the "nice part of town."

Concern is warranted, of course. The required minimum age for *MySpace* is fourteen. However, age verification is still technically impossible, largely due to lack of a public track record for minors—ironic, as many of them create public records openly on such sites.

Parents have sued on behalf of their abused daughters, and thirty-four state attorneys general are now demanding more age-verification controls.[{9}](#) Meanwhile, *MySpace* has reportedly discovered thousands of members who are convicted sex offenders. "The attorneys general of Georgia, Idaho, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Mississippi and New Hampshire joined Connecticut in signing a letter to the company asking it to turn over information."[{10}](#)

MySpace has responded. The company deleted two hundred thousand "objectionable" accounts.[{11}](#) (A similar move by networking site *Friendster* caused a mass exodus, a sad commentary on many of its users.) *MySpace* also began developing parental tracking software, seen by many as just a start.

After hiring a former prosecutor with experience working on sex crimes against children as chief security officer, in January, 2007, *MySpace* donated a breakthrough national database to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). It features the first-ever method to match faces and body features like tattoos to often-elusive sex offenders. Providing "a way to filter convicted offenders from younger *MySpace* members, the database combines the records of individual state registries, plus allows searches based on images, which the NCMEC said is important."[{12}](#)

A new senate bill would require—for the first time ever—sex

offenders to register their email addresses. Donna Rice Hughes, president of the watchdog/activist group Enough Is Enough, says, "While there is no 'silver bullet' for protecting children from Internet dangers, this legislation will help to provide another protective barrier for millions of children. . . . Parents must remain proactive and educated about the safety rules and software tools available." [\[13\]](#)

Child safety experts agree: parental guidance should be the first and strongest line of defense. Technology continues to outrun ethical reflection in a culture marked by the philosophy, "If it can be done, go for it!" Pragmatism, the myth of progress as always good, lack of a biblical understanding of sin's pervasiveness and seriousness and sheer greed, drive many of the developments like the *MySpace* revolution.

But so do innately human needs and God-given desires to connect in a disjointed, wired world. Moral panic regarding teens and technology are nothing new. Doomsday prophecies—partially deserved—ensued with the advent motion pictures, television, and the Internet itself, as Internet researcher Danah Boyd points out. [\[14\]](#) Wise adaptation is always essential to being "in the world but not of it." [\[15\]](#)

Hanging Out and Friending

Kids hang out on MySpace because virtually everyone they know does, even if they would prefer not to. Another big draw: shared interests. But teens need to appreciate the distinction between acquaintances and true friends, as well as appropriate vs. illegitimate public intimacy while being truly "real."

What can make young men cry? Take away their online "space."

At a conference panel discussion on social networking, four ministry leaders shared nearly identical experiences. Their teens had naturally migrated to *MySpace* with their peers and

created profiles there, unknown to these conservative Christian dads. After perusing the site, three of the four outright forbade use of *MySpace*. One by one, they told tales of begging and weeping. One boy sobbed, "Dad, it's the only time I've ever felt cool."

This is tricky. Parents' gut reaction may be to minimize or dismiss such a notion. Yet, socialization at this age happens naturally, inevitably, even critically. But online? Here?

But part of the vital process of adolescent socializing is decoding cues about where you fit into the youth culture and *who* you are perceived to be. If kids are deeply grounded in the love of their God and family, it's just another "place." It's when this grounding is missing that *MySpace* can easily become a platform to present a false self.

Danah Boyd talks about the psychology of publicly viewable social networking: it's performed. "Showing face" becomes key, being "real" has its limits while "friending" online. Note the use of "friend" as a verb there.[{16}](#)

Author Connie Neal lists ways *MySpace* meets the needs of teens in uncanny ways, needs to:

- *Communicate with peers*
- *Try on different styles*
- *See what others are like*
- *Explore their generation's music, art, photography*
- *Hear, view, read stories through media*
- *Flirt*
- *Make friends*
- *Feel included in a group*[{17}](#)

For a time, *MySpace* also seemed unavoidable (it may be “like, so last year” at this point; *Facebook* is reportedly the social site of choice today among youth). Danah Boyd says, “For most teens, it is simply a part of everyday life—they are [at *MySpace*] because their friends are there and they are there to hang out with those friends. Of course, its ubiquitousness does not mean that everyone thinks that it’s cool. Many teens complain that the site is lame, noting that they have better things to do.

Yet, even those teens have an account which they check regularly because it’s the only way to keep up with the Joneses.”[{18}](#)

Social networking relies on clicking to “make” or invite “friends.” In contrast, an ancient Hebrew proverb states, “A man of too many friends comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”[{19}](#)

This leads to a deeper question: “What does the term ‘friend’ really mean?” Certainly more than a popularity contest, which many accuse *MySpace* of becoming. Stephanie Bennett, writing for *Breakpoint*, warns, “In many ways these technologies reduce relationship to a commodity—something one possesses rather than a jointly developed friendship.”

Bennett continues:

Just as the practice of [slow-paced] courtship . . . gave way to dating and the now common practice of objectifying “the other” [or “hooking up” and casual sex], the rules of relationship are . . . being rewritten, and . . . are being shaped by a distinctly media-centered worldview rather than a Christian one.[{20}](#)

Author C. S. Lewis wrote:

Friendship arises out of mere companionship when two or more of the companions discover that they have in common some

insight or interest or even taste which the others do not share and which, till that moment, each believed to be his own unique treasure (or burden). The typical expression of opening Friendship would be something like, "What? You too? I thought I was the only one."{21}

Perhaps herein lies the greatest appeal of *MySpace*—shared interests. This is not lost on teenagers.

In balance, as one participant in a CNN.com forum wrote, "True friends . . . need to learn when to stop blogging and go across campus to help a friend." {22}

C. S. Lewis also wrote, "Eros will have naked bodies; friendship naked personalities." {23} The scantily clad girls parading on certain pages at *MySpace* reflect our culture. Sex is confused with intimacy nowadays; psychological nudity on the Internet is not so different.

Billed as a place to make friends and connect in community, *MySpace*, *Facebook*, *Xanga* and the like may be having the opposite effect, according to one study at San Diego State. It uncovered "an attitude of 'It's all about me'" prevailing among college students, the *Chicago Tribune* reported, and "blogging and social networking are 'playing a big role' in this." {24}

Nonsense, says tech educator Andy Carvin. Social networking largely entails "communities where people reinforce interpersonal relationships through sharing and creating content. . . . [They] want to be a part of something bigger than themselves." {25}

Social sites should reflect and enhance relationships, not define them. Challenge the presumption of *instant-friendship-by-mouseclick* with your kids as necessary. Guard against not only physical but "psychological nudity."

This presents one more important conversational topic for parents training their kids in a biblical worldview marked by serving others, not by parading themselves or sending false signals.

Parents and Teens Cooperating

Picture yourself or your child in a situation like this: "We're sorry, Caitlyn, but we just cannot hire you. Your online history isn't in keeping with our company's standards." A growing host of those among the Internet generation with online regrets have walled off their online socializing from prying parents and ended up miring their futures in controversy.

Another problem with MySpace and social sites is what Boyd calls *persistence in digital publics*. Unable to envision the future, kids don't grasp the lasting ramifications of their youthful foolishness, often captured publicly and permanently in cyberspace. "Without impetus," Boyd says, "teens rarely choose to go private on MySpace and certainly not for fear of predators or future employers. They want to be visible to other teens, not just the people they've "friended." They would just prefer [that] adults go away. All adults. Parents, teachers, creepy men."[\[26\]](#)
Natural teenage feelings indeed.

Boyd continues:

While the potential predator or future employer doesn't concern most teens, parents and teachers do. Reacting to increasing adult surveillance, many teens are turning their profiles private or creating separate accounts under fake names. In response, many parents are demanding complete control over teens' digital behaviors. This dynamic often destroys the most important value in the child/parent relationship: trust.[\[27\]](#)

While hers may sound like a throwback to the 1960s “Question authority!” mantra, Boyd raises a good point. She points out that nowadays adults control youth environments as never before due to fear of abduction and safety issues. “Teens have increasingly less access to public space. Classic 1950s hang outs like the roller rink and burger joint are disappearing while malls and 7-11s are banning teens unaccompanied by parents.”[{28}](#) Balancing the imperative to protect against the need to let go is tough.

At the same time, parents, teachers, and youth leaders need to inculcate and model a biblical respect for God-given authority. When kids disrespect this, their Internet privileges should be at stake. Some practical safety tips for parents:

- *Make sure your kids profile themselves online privately, only to well-chosen friends.*
- *Ask your kids to invite you online as a “friend”—but don’t embarrass them!*
- *Openly discuss your concerns about social networking with your child.*
- *Tour their online space and those of their friends.*
- *Be alert to kids who are very secretive about their Internet use.*
- *Use the computer in a common area of the house.*
- *Monitor mobile online use and set up accountability with meaningful consequences. Yet, too many rules could exasperate older kids.*[{29}](#)

Remember the story of the crying kids who had MySpace privileges revoked? One dad took a different approach. He entered into his daughter’s online world and began exploring

how to safely navigate and do ministry outreach together. Connie Neal describes *MySpace for Moms and Dads* how she participates with her daughter's willing friends as spiritual and relational advisor. [\[30\]](#)

The eventual goal of child-rearing is increasing autonomy and decreasing dependency. Social networking allows kids some autonomy, but they need to be careful in such a public arena. We as parents do well to act knowledgeably, not react out of sheer emotion.

Redeeming MySpace

MySpace has effectively tapped into youth culture *and* human nature. Teens are riding a culture-wide wave of self-expression.

But adult audiences there—and especially at other networking sites—are even bigger. Companies are now glomming onto the model for business purposes. *AnimalAttraction.com*, a social networking site for people who love pets, started as a dating service. Now, you can create a tailor-made social network through services like *Ning*.

Up to ten thousand Virginia Tech students conversed on social sites the day thirty-two were murdered in a shooting rampage. [\[31\]](#) Presidential candidates are leveraging networking sites today.

Why is this idea so powerful? Could it be that self-expression is a sign of *imago dei*, the image of God imprinted into the soul of everyone? God spoke the world into existence, and we, his highest creatures, create ideas in much the same way. We seem to have an insatiable need to be heard, especially as we emerge into young manhood or womanhood.

What if we're really after much more—eternally satisfying relating that nothing on earth can compare to? For many folks,

online “friends” or a bigger-than-life Web identity are just new ways to reach out for what’s unreachable in this life. As C. S. Lewis wrote, “If we discover a desire within us that nothing in this world can satisfy . . . we should begin to wonder if perhaps we were created for another world.”[{32}](#)

MySpace can be surprisingly redemptive. It served as a clearinghouse of mourning for Anna, murdered in cold blood while working at a McDonald’s. A youth-led movement to help Ugandan orphans is building to huge proportions.

The head of Internet outreach for one of the world’s largest ministries encourages viewing *MySpace* as a mission field. He tells kids, “It’s where your friends and *their* friends are already. Jesus called us to be smart, not safe.” As Paul wrote to the Roman church, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”[{33}](#)

If you decide that *MySpace* is not for your family, there are Christian alternatives created for fellowship, evangelism, and discipleship; [Meetfish.com](#) and [MyPraise.com](#) are two.

Rather than “circle the countercultural wagons,” why not explore the frontier of online social networking with your child? In a few years, the choice will be theirs, and they will likely default to socializing online as well as offline. They need to learn how to:

- **Be discerning online**, asking things like, “Do I know and trust this person? Will this help me or hurt me?”
- **Reflect Christ online**: “How am I coming across? Does it honor my family and God? Am I teasing with moral compromise?”
- Ask themselves “Who seems lost, alone, afraid? Who needs the gospel?” **That is, see their online life as a calling of Christ.**

Dr. Kathy Koch of *Celebrate Kids* offers a real-life prescription for healthy self-esteem: "Parents and teachers who pay attention to children and teens for who they are and not just what they do, believe in kids' present value and not just their future potential, and encourage kids by celebrating them on more than their birthdays."^{34}

Do this while teaching discernment and a thoroughly biblical worldview, and social networking may not be a problem. It could be a blessing in disguise.

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Why Worldview?

Don Closson writes that developing a Christian worldview impacts both how we think and how we act. It can provide a foundation for great confidence for the Christ-follower.

Probe has called itself a worldview ministry since its birth in 1973. When my wife and I joined Probe in 1986, the term “worldview” meant little to our friends and family; they supported our work with Probe mainly because they knew that we were passionate about our faith and that the ministry involved defending Christianity on college campuses. Since then, the concept of a Christian worldview has become popular among evangelicals, resulting in numerous publications and worldview ministries.



My introduction to the idea of a Christian worldview was through the works of Francis Schaeffer. Although the specific term “worldview” was not used much by Schaeffer himself, he presented Christianity as an all-encompassing system. What attracted me to the Christian faith was Schaeffer’s worldview approach. Christianity was not just a series of propositions or church program, or even just a gospel message; it was about all of life. This idea had a great impact on many baby-boomers who lived through the

turbulent 1960s and were searching for meaning and purpose.

The concept itself is simple. Think back to what it was like as you woke up this morning. As you opened your eyes you began to experience sights and sounds that your brain needed to interpret. This process of interpretation begins with a framework of beliefs that act as a lens to the world around you. This set of beliefs is your worldview. James Sire says in his book *The Universe Next Door* that “A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions which we hold about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.” A worldview is made up of answers to the basic questions all humans face. Is there a God? What does it mean to be human? How do I know right from wrong? The way we answer these questions shapes our reality and provides context for our thoughts and actions.

For a Christian, a worldview involves more than just theological answers to these questions. Nancy Pearcey writes that “Genuine worldview thinking is far more than a mental strategy or a new spin on current events. At the core, it is a deepening of our spiritual character and the character of our lives. It begins with the submission of our minds to the Lord of the universe—a willingness to be taught by Him.”^{1} Pearcey rightly notes that the foundation of any worldview is its assumptions about God. How we answer the God question affects how we answer all the other questions of life.

The History of the Concept

In his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Samuel Huntington writes “In the post Cold-War world, the most important distinctions among peoples are not ideological, political, or economic. They are cultural. Peoples and nations are attempting to answer the most basic question humans can face: Who are we?”^{2} In other words, what

is our worldview?

The idea of worldview in Western culture begins with Immanuel Kant's introduction of the German word *weltanschauung* in a published work in 1790.^{3} Kant only used the word once, referring to humanity's intuitive understanding of the surrounding world. But others, especially German philosophers, took the idea and ran with it.

In his *Philosophical Letters*, Friedrich von Schelling wrote that "the chief business of all philosophy consists in solving the problem of the existence of the world."^{4} Heidegger later added that the basic question all of us face is, "Why is there anything at all? Why not nothing?"^{5} A long list of philosophers, theologians, and poets eventually joined the discussion which peaked in the early 1900s.

At about the same time, the idea of worldview or *weltanschauung* entered the evangelical mind through the writings of James Orr. He used the term as a tool against dramatic changes that had occurred in Europe and America during the late 1800's. Philosopher David Naugle writes that "During Orr's life the West was undergoing its most catastrophic cultural transition, passing through what C. S. Lewis has referred to aptly as 'the un-christening of Europe,' leading to the loss of the 'Old European' or 'Old Western Culture' and to the advent of a 'post Christian' age."^{6} Orr understood that it had become necessary to present Christianity as a complete worldview over and against the worldview being developed by an increasingly naturalistic modern society. He presented his ideas at a lecture series at the United Presbyterian Theological College in Edinburgh in 1891, and later published them in *The Christian View of God and the World*.

Building upon the theological foundations of John Calvin, James Orr, along with the Dutch theologian and statesman Abraham Kuyper, set in place a firm foundation upon which

other well-known Christian thinkers added to. Gordon Clark, Carl Henry, Herman Dooyeweerd, and Francis Schaeffer all contributed to the argument that Christianity is best understood as complete vision of life. Their goal was the same as the apostle Paul's when he wrote to the church at Corinth, to encourage believers that "whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." [{7}](#)

Benefits of Worldview Thinking

What are some of the benefits of worldview thinking?

In his book *Worldview: The History of a Concept*, David Naugle argues that "Christianity is uniquely capable of satisfying the standard tests for truth that philosophers have devised and applied to any network of beliefs." [{8}](#) Christianity is coherent and comprehensive, its parts fit together well, and it takes into account all of our experiences as human beings. It also performs well in what is called the correspondence test for truth. Christianity rings true when its claims about human nature and morality and its other worldview components are compared to the world around us; it corresponds well with our daily experiences in the world.

Naugle also argues that the "God-centered conception of a Christian worldview spares believers from a naïve fideism, a scandalous anti-intellectualism, and a cultural obscurantism." [{9}](#) In other words, a comprehensive Christian worldview does not reject reason or science. Within this worldview all truth becomes God's truth and Christians have nothing to fear in participating in the investigation of our world and universe with non-Christians. It also helps us to avoid an unnecessary separation from the culture that God places us into; in fact, the Bible sends us into the world and encourages us to be salt and light. A correct understanding of the Christian worldview should give believers a cognitive confidence, an apologetic strategy, a cultural relevance, and a sound, spiritual basis for life in the coherent picture of

God's larger story.

A healthy Christian worldview helps believers to avoid dividing the world into the sacred and secular; instead one learns to see all of life as part of God's creation and possessing a sacred aspect. Our culture has a tendency to separate facts and values; it claims that only science creates facts that are to be universally acknowledged while moral values are personal and limited in scope. A Christian worldview recognizes that biblical values are meant for all people everywhere and are not limited by culture or time.

As Naugle writes, "the notion of worldview has a mysterious way of opening up the parameters of the Bible so that believers might be delivered from a fishbowl-sized Christianity into an oceanic perspective on the faith."[\[10\]](#) The concepts of creation, sin, and redemption take on a broader and more comprehensive meaning. Understanding the Christian worldview helps Christians to break free from their cultural constraints and to see their faith as world-sized rather than being bound by their church's four walls.

Cautions and Temptations

In the last fifty years the concept of worldview impacted evangelical thinkers Carl Henry and Francis Schaeffer, among others, and has become the focus for numerous ministries. Now that we've seen some of the benefits of this apologetic tool, we should turn to consider some cautions regarding its use.

The first danger is a philosophical one. The worldview concept sprang from a distinctly modern view of the world, a view that sees "nature itself as something to be known, represented, used, and discarded as needed."[\[11\]](#) Thinking "worldview-ishly" is an attempt to analyze a particular way of seeing reality and, in the process of doing so, one is required to objectify the world to some degree. This is contrary to the historic Christian ideal of seeing the universe in relation to its

creator. The church has always described the world in sacred rather than materialistic language. The danger in using this term is that Christians might be tempted to see the world more in a secular philosophical setting than within the proper model of biblical stewardship.

A number of theologians have voiced cautions about using any language that is not “biblical” in helping to better understand our Christian faith. Martin Luther warned that “There is a danger in speaking of things of God in a different manner and in different terms than God himself employs.”[{12}](#) Karl Barth adds that “The true God and His activity can never be perceived within the framework of a general philosophy.”[{13}](#) He goes on to say that a worldview can never “substitute for genuine faith in the pure Word of God as the divine self-disclosure and exclusive source of an encounter with the living Lord.”[{14}](#) These cautions must be taken seriously. We need to be careful that we are not living by a foreign frame of reference and squeezing the Scriptures into a man-made mold.

Finally, there is a spiritual danger. Even with good intentions, we can end up mistaking the means for the end. C. S. Lewis once remarked, “There have been men before now who got so interested in proving the existence of God that they came to care nothing for God Himself.”[{15}](#)

We can become so enamored with our worldview system and the potential it has to change culture and point others to God that we become forgetful of the God we are called to worship. Just as systematic theologies should never replace the Bible itself, the worldview concept cannot be used as a replacement for the gospel. We are called to worship God and to have a relationship with Him, and not merely to believe in a list of propositions or ideas about God.

Even with these cautions, the worldview concept can be an effective instrument for broadening the faith of Christians

and help them to share that faith with their neighbors.

Summary

What role can worldview play in building the confidence of believers and in communicating the gospel to unbelievers?

The idea of worldviews helps to inoculate Christians against the popular concept of religious pluralism in our culture. When one can see for oneself that the religions of the world have mutually exclusive answers to the basic worldview questions regarding ultimate reality, the world, human nature, and the question of good and evil, it is less tempting to think that somehow all religions are the same or that choosing a belief doesn't matter. Understanding other worldviews can help us to realize that every human perspective is built upon faith in a set of presuppositions, even scientific naturalism. This knowledge can help Christians to be more confident when they profess the uniqueness of Christ and the exclusive nature of the gospel.

Possessing a mature Christian worldview also provides a grid for analyzing the culture we live in. Everything from the education we receive to the entertainment we consume comes with a worldview perspective and often contains a not very subtle attempt to change the way we see the world. Knowing this should help Christians to filter out ideas that are not biblical and to be more resilient against emotionally manipulative works of art.

One of the most important aspects of worldview thinking is that it provides a language for cross cultural dialogue and evangelism. A Christian can inquire about another person's worldview in a way that doesn't cause defenses to rise in the same way that asking about someone's religion can. And although we know that the Bible is the Word of God by the testimony of the Holy Spirit, worldview language can help us to show that Christianity is true to others without having to

first prove the authority of the Bible.

Finally, once the worldview framework is understood and adopted it can provide a structure for a lifetime of learning. Even though grade-schoolers can be taught the basics of the Christian worldview, graduate level material can be assembled to help fill in and give texture to the framework. The question of what the Bible teaches regarding human nature alone can raise enough issues for many years of study, covering everything from free will to gender roles.

Christianity, conceived in terms of a worldview, can help give confidence to the believer and provide a language for entering into deep conversations with unbelievers that can lay the groundwork for sharing the gospel. The worldview concept is a tool that we can use to become a more effective ambassador for Christ.

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3. David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Eerdmans, 2002), 59.
4. *Ibid.*, 60.
5. *Ibid.*, 61.
6. *Ibid.*, 6.
7. 1 Corinthians 10:31b
8. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept*, 340.
9. *Ibid.*, 341.

10. Ibid., 342.

11. Ibid., 332.

12. Ibid., 336.

13. Ibid., 335.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid., 337.

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Redeeming the Da Vinci Code

Dr. Michael Gleghorn critiques The Da Vinci Code's theories, demonstrating that most of these theories are simply false.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

Introduction to *The Da Vinci Code*

Dan Brown's novel, *The Da Vinci Code*,^{1} has generated a huge amount of interest from the reading public. About forty million copies have been sold worldwide.^{2} And Ron Howard and Sony Pictures have brought the story to theatres.^{3} To help answer some of the challenges which this novel poses to biblical Christianity, Probe has teamed up with EvanTell, an evangelism training ministry, to produce a DVD series called *Redeeming The Da Vinci Code*. The series aims to strengthen the faith of believers and equip them to share their faith with those who see the movie or have read the book.^{4} I hope this article will also encourage you to use this event to witness to the truth to friends or family who have read the book or

seen the movie.

Why so much fuss about a novel? The story begins with the murder of the Louvre's curator. But this curator isn't just interested in art; he's also the Grand Master of a secret society called the Priory of Sion. The Priory guards a secret that, if revealed, would discredit biblical Christianity. Before dying, the curator attempts to pass on the secret to his granddaughter Sophie, a cryptographer, and Harvard professor Robert Langdon, by leaving a number of clues that he hopes will guide them to the truth.

So what's the secret? The location and identity of the Holy Grail. But in Brown's novel, the Grail is not the cup allegedly used by Christ at the Last Supper. It's rather Mary Magdalene, the wife of Jesus, who carried on the royal bloodline of Christ by giving birth to His child! The Priory guards the secret location of Mary's tomb and serves to protect the bloodline of Jesus that has continued to this day!

Does anyone take these ideas seriously? Yes; they do. This is partly due to the way the story is written. The first word one encounters in *The Da Vinci Code*, in bold uppercase letters, is the word "FACT." Shortly thereafter Brown writes, "All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate."[{5}](#) And the average reader, with no special knowledge in these areas, will assume the statement is true. But it's not, and many have documented some of Brown's inaccuracies in these areas.[{6}](#)

Brown also has a way of making the novel's theories about Jesus and the early church seem credible. The theories are espoused by the novel's most educated characters: a British royal historian, Leigh Teabing, and a Harvard professor, Robert Langdon. When put in the mouths of these characters, one comes away with the impression that the theories are actually true. But are they?

In this article, I'll argue that most of what the novel says about Jesus, the Bible, and the history of the early church is simply false. I'll also say a bit about how this material can be used in evangelism.

Did Constantine Embellish Our Four Gospels?

Were the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, which were later to be officially recognized as part of the New Testament canon, intentionally embellished in the fourth century at the command of Emperor Constantine? This is what Leigh Teabing, the fictional historian in *The Da Vinci Code*, suggests. At one point he states, "Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ's human traits and embellished those gospels that made Him godlike" (234). Is this true?

In a letter to the church historian Eusebius, Constantine did indeed order the preparation of "fifty copies of the sacred Scriptures."[\[7\]](#) But nowhere in the letter does he command that any of the Gospels be embellished in order to make Jesus appear more godlike. And even if he had, it would have been virtually impossible to get faithful Christians to accept such accounts.

Before the reign of Constantine, the church suffered great persecution under Emperor Diocletian. It's hard to believe that the same church that had withstood this persecution would jettison their cherished Gospels and embrace embellished accounts of Jesus' life! It's also virtually certain that had Constantine tried such a thing, we'd have lots of evidence for it in the writings of the church fathers. But we have none. Not one of them mentions an attempt by Constantine to alter any of our Gospels. And finally, to claim that the leaders of the fourth century church, many of whom had suffered persecution for their faith in Christ, would agree to join

Constantine in a conspiracy of this kind is completely unrealistic.

One last point. We have copies of the four Gospels that are significantly earlier than Constantine and the Council of Nicaea (or Nicea). Although none of the copies are complete, we do have nearly complete copies of both Luke and John in a codex dated between A.D. 175 and 225—at least a hundred years before Nicaea. Another manuscript, dating from about A.D. 200 or earlier, contains most of John's Gospel.[\[8\]](#) But why is this important?

First, we can compare these pre-Nicene manuscripts with those that followed Nicaea to see if any embellishment occurred. None did. Second, the pre-Nicene versions of John's Gospel include some of the strongest declarations of Jesus' deity on record (e.g. 1:1-3; 8:58; 10:30-33). That is, the most explicit declarations of Jesus' deity in any of our Gospels are already found in manuscripts that pre-date Constantine by more than a hundred years!

If you have a non-Christian friend who believes these books were embellished, you might gently refer them to this evidence. Then, encourage them to read the Gospels for themselves and find out who Jesus really is.

But what if they think these sources can't be trusted?

Can We Trust the Gospels?

Although there's no historical basis for the claim that Constantine embellished the New Testament Gospels to make Jesus appear more godlike, we must still ask whether the Gospels are reliable sources of information about Jesus. According to Teabing, the novel's fictional historian, "Almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false" (235). Is this true? The answer largely depends on the reliability of our earliest biographies of Jesus—the Gospels of Matthew,

Mark, Luke and John.

Each of these Gospels was written in the first century A.D. Although they are technically anonymous, we have fairly strong evidence from second century writers such as Papias (c. A.D. 125) and Irenaeus (c. A.D. 180) for ascribing each Gospel to its traditional author. If their testimony is true (and we've little reason to doubt it), then Mark, the companion of Peter, wrote down the substance of Peter's preaching. And Luke, the companion of Paul, carefully researched the biography that bears his name. Finally, Matthew and John, two of Jesus' twelve disciples, wrote the books ascribed to them. If this is correct, then the events recorded in these Gospels "are based on either direct or indirect eyewitness testimony." [{9}](#)

But did the Gospel writers intend to reliably record the life and ministry of Jesus? Were they even interested in history, or did their theological agendas overshadow any desire they may have had to tell us what really happened? Craig Blomberg, a New Testament scholar, observes that the prologue to Luke's Gospel "reads very much like prefaces to other generally trusted historical and biographical works of antiquity." He further notes that since Matthew and Mark are similar to Luke in terms of genre, "it seems reasonable that Luke's historical intent would closely mirror theirs." [{10}](#) Finally, John tells us that he wrote his Gospel so that people might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing they might have life in His name (20:31). While this statement admittedly reveals a theological agenda, Blomberg points out that "if you're going to be convinced enough to believe, the theology has to flow from accurate history." [{11}](#)

Interestingly, the disciplines of history and archaeology are a great help in corroborating the general reliability of the Gospel writers. Where these authors mention people, places, and events that can be checked against other ancient sources, they are consistently shown to be quite reliable. We need to let our non-Christian friends know that we have good grounds

for trusting the New Testament Gospels and believing what they say about Jesus.

But what if they ask about those Gospels that didn't make it into the New Testament? Specifically, what if they ask about the Nag Hammadi documents?

The Nag Hammadi Documents

Since their discovery in 1945, there's been much interest in the Nag Hammadi texts. What are these documents? When were they written, and by whom, and for what purpose? According to Teabing, the historian in *The Da Vinci Code*, the Nag Hammadi texts represent "the earliest Christian records" (245). These "unaltered gospels," he claims, tell the real story about Jesus and early Christianity (248). The New Testament Gospels are allegedly a later, corrupted version of these events.

The only difficulty with Teabing's theory is that it's wrong. The Nag Hammadi documents are not "the earliest Christian records." Every book in the New Testament is earlier. The New Testament documents were all written in the first century A.D. By contrast, the dates for the Nag Hammadi texts range from the second to the third century A.D. As Darrell Bock observes in *Breaking The Da Vinci Code*, "The bulk of this material is a few generations removed from the foundations of the Christian faith, a vital point to remember when assessing the contents." [\[12\]](#)

What do we know about the contents of these books? It is generally agreed that the Nag Hammadi texts are Gnostic documents. The key tenet of Gnosticism is that salvation comes through secret knowledge. As a result, the Gnostic Gospels, in striking contrast to their New Testament counterparts, place almost no value on the death and resurrection of Jesus. Indeed, Gnostic Christology had a tendency to separate the human Jesus from the divine Christ, seeing them as two

distinct beings. It was not the divine Christ who suffered and died; it was merely the human Jesus—or perhaps even Simon of Cyrene.[{13}](#) It didn't matter much to the Gnostics because in their view the death of Jesus was irrelevant for attaining salvation. What was truly important was not the death of the man Jesus but the secret knowledge brought by the divine Christ. According to the Gnostics, salvation came through a correct understanding of this secret knowledge.[{14}](#)

Clearly these doctrines are incompatible with the New Testament teaching about Christ and salvation (e.g. Rom. 3:21-26; 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 15:3-11; Tit. 2:11-14). Ironically, they're also incompatible with Teabing's view that the Nag Hammadi texts "speak of Christ's ministry in very human terms" (234). The Nag Hammadi texts actually present Christ as a divine being, though quite differently from the New Testament perspective.[{15}](#)

Thus, the Nag Hammadi texts are both later than the New Testament writings and characterized by a worldview that is entirely alien to their theology. We must explain to our non-Christian friends that the church fathers exercised great wisdom in rejecting these books from the New Testament.

But what if they ask us how it was decided what books to include?

The Formation of the New Testament Canon

In the early centuries of Christianity, many books were written about the teachings of Jesus and His apostles. Most of these books never made it into the New Testament. They include such titles as The Gospel of Philip, The Acts of John, and The Apocalypse of Peter. How did the early church decide what books to include in the New Testament and what to reject? When were these decisions made, and by whom? According to the Teabing, "The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by . .

. Constantine the Great" (231). Is this true?

The early church had definite criteria that had to be met for a book to be included in the New Testament. As Bart Ehrman observes, a book had to be ancient, written close to the time of Jesus. It had to be written either by an apostle or a companion of an apostle. It had to be consistent with the orthodox understanding of the faith. And it had to be widely recognized and accepted by the church.[{16}](#) Books that didn't meet these criteria weren't included in the New Testament.

When were these decisions made? And who made them? There wasn't an ecumenical council in the early church that officially decreed that the twenty-seven books now in our New Testament were the right ones.[{17}](#) Rather, the canon gradually took shape as the church recognized and embraced those books that were inspired by God. The earliest collections of books "to circulate among the churches in the first half of the second century" were our four Gospels and the letters of Paul.[{18}](#) Not until the heretic Marcion published his expurgated version of the New Testament in about A.D. 144 did church leaders seek to define the canon more specifically.[{19}](#)

Toward the end of the second century there was a growing consensus that the canon should include the four Gospels, Acts, the thirteen Pauline epistles, "epistles by other 'apostolic men' and the Revelation of John."[{20}](#) The Muratorian Canon, which dates toward the end of the second century, recognized every New Testament book except Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, and 3 John. Similar though not identical books were recognized by Irenaeus in the late second century and Origen in the early third century. So while the earliest listing of all the books in our New Testament comes from Athanasius in A.D. 367, there was widespread agreement on most of these books (including the four Gospels) by the end of the second century. By sharing this information "with gentleness and respect" (1 Pet. 3:15), we can help our friends see that the New Testament canon did not result from a decision by

Constantine.

Who Was Mary Magdalene? (Part 1)

Mary Magdalene, of course, is a major figure in *The Da Vinci Code*. Let's take a look at Mary, beginning by addressing the unfortunate misconception that she was a prostitute. Where did this notion come from? And why do so many people believe it?

According to Leigh Teabing, the popular understanding of Mary Magdalene as a prostitute "is the legacy of a smear campaign . . . by the early Church." In Teabing's view, "The Church needed to defame Mary . . . to cover up her dangerous secret—her role as the Holy Grail" (244). Remember, in this novel the Holy Grail is not the cup used by Jesus at the Last Supper. Instead it's Mary Magdalene, who's alleged to have been both Jesus' wife and the one who carried His royal bloodline in her womb.

How should we respond to this? Did the early church really seek to slander Mary as a prostitute in order to cover up her intimate relationship with Jesus? The first recorded instance of Mary Magdalene being misidentified as a prostitute occurred in a sermon by Pope Gregory the Great in A.D. 591.[\[21\]](#) Most likely, this wasn't a deliberate attempt to slander Mary's character. Rather, Gregory probably misinterpreted some passages in the Gospels, resulting in his incorrectly identifying Mary as a prostitute.

For instance, he may have identified the unnamed sinful woman in Luke 7, who anointed Jesus' feet, with Mary of Bethany in John 12, who also anointed Jesus' feet shortly before His death. This would have been easy to do because, although there are differences, there are also many similarities between the two separate incidents. If Gregory thought the sinful woman of Luke 7 was the Mary of John 12, he may then have mistakenly linked this woman with Mary Magdalene. Interestingly, Luke

mentions Mary Magdalene for the first time at the beginning of chapter 8, right after the story of Jesus' anointing in Luke 7. Since the unnamed woman in Luke 7 was likely guilty of some kind of sexual sin, if Gregory thought this woman was Mary Magdalene, then it wouldn't be too great a leap to infer she was a prostitute.

If you're discussing the novel with someone who is hostile toward the church, don't be afraid to admit that the church has sometimes made mistakes. We can agree that Gregory was mistaken when he misidentified Mary as a prostitute. But we must also observe that it's quite unlikely that this was part of a smear campaign by the early church. We must remind our friends that Christians make mistakes—and even sin—just like everyone else (Rom. 3:23). The difference is that we've recognized our need for a Savior from sin. And in this respect, we're actually following in the footsteps of Mary Magdalene (John 20:1-18)!

Who Was Mary Magdalene? (Part 2)

What do our earliest written sources reveal about the real Mary Magdalene? According to Teabing, Mary was the wife of Jesus, the mother of His child, and the one whom He intended to establish the church after His death (244-48). In support of these theories, Teabing appeals to two of the Gnostic Gospels: The Gospel of Philip and The Gospel of Mary [Magdalene]. Let's look first at The Gospel of Mary.

The section of this Gospel quoted in the novel presents an incredulous apostle Peter who simply can't believe that the risen Christ has secretly revealed information to Mary that He didn't reveal to His male disciples. Levi rebukes Peter: "If the Saviour made her worthy, who are you . . . to reject her? Surely the Saviour knows her very well. That is why he loved her more than us" (247).

What can we say about this passage? First, we must observe that nowhere in this Gospel are we told that Mary was Jesus' wife or the mother of His child. Second, many scholars think this text should probably be read symbolically, with Peter representing early Christian orthodoxy and Mary representing a form of Gnosticism. This Gospel is probably claiming that "Mary" (that is, the Gnostics) has received divine revelation, even if "Peter" (that is, the orthodox) can't believe it.[{22}](#) Finally, even if this text should be read literally, we have little reason to think it's historically reliable. It was likely composed sometime in the late second century, about a hundred years after the canonical Gospels.[{23}](#) So, contrary to what's implied in the novel, it certainly wasn't written by Mary Magdalene—or any of Jesus' other original followers.[{24}](#)

If we want reliable information about Mary, we must turn to our earliest sources—the New Testament Gospels. These sources tell us that Mary was a follower of Jesus from the town of Magdala. After Jesus cast seven demons out of her, she (along with other women) helped support His ministry (Luke 8:1-3). She witnessed Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, and was the first to see the risen Christ (Matt. 27:55-61; John 20:11-18). Jesus even entrusted her with proclaiming His resurrection to His male disciples (John 20:17-18). In this sense, Mary was an "apostle" to the apostles.[{25}](#) This is all the Gospels tell us about Mary.[{26}](#) We can agree with our non-Christian friends that she was a very important woman. But we must also remind them that there's nothing to suggest that she was Jesus' wife, or that He intended her to lead the church.

All this aside, someone who's read *The Da Vinci Code* might still have questions about The Gospel of Philip? Doesn't this text indicate that Mary and Jesus were married?

Was Jesus Married? (Part 1)

Undoubtedly, the strongest textual evidence that Jesus was

married comes from The Gospel of Philip. So it's not surprising that Leigh Teabing, should appeal to this text. The section of this Gospel quoted in the novel reads as follows:

And the companion of the Saviour is Mary Magdalene. Christ loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on her mouth. The rest of the disciples were offended by it and expressed disapproval. They said to him, "Why do you love her more than all of us?" (246).

Now, notice that the first line refers to Mary as the companion of the Savior. In the novel, Teabing clinches his argument that Jesus and Mary were married by stating, "As any Aramaic scholar will tell you, the word companion, in those days, literally meant spouse" (246). This sounds pretty convincing. Was Jesus married after all?

When discussing this issue with a non-Christian friend, point out that we must proceed carefully here. The Gospel of Philip was originally written in Greek.[{27}](#) Therefore, what the term "companion" meant in Aramaic is entirely irrelevant. Even in the Coptic translation found at Nag Hammadi, a Greek loan word (*koinonos*) lies behind the term translated "companion". Darrell Bock observes that this is "not the typical . . . term for 'wife'" in Greek.[{28}](#) Indeed, *koinonos* is most often used in the New Testament to refer to a "partner." Luke uses the term to describe James and John as Peter's business partners (Luke 5:10). So contrary to the claim of Teabing, the statement that Mary was Jesus' companion does not at all prove that she was His wife.

But what about the following statement: "Christ loved her . . . and used to kiss her often on her mouth"?

First, this portion of the manuscript is damaged. We don't actually know where Christ kissed Mary. There's a hole in the

manuscript at that place. Some believe that “she was kissed on her cheek or forehead since either term fits in the break.”[\[29\]](#) Second, even if the text said that Christ kissed Mary on her mouth, it wouldn’t necessarily mean that something sexual is in view. Most scholars agree that Gnostic texts contain a lot of symbolism. To read such texts literally, therefore, is to misread them. Finally, regardless of the author’s intention, this Gospel wasn’t written until the second half of the third century, over two hundred years after the time of Jesus.[\[30\]](#) So the reference to Jesus kissing Mary is almost certainly not historically reliable.

We must show our non-Christian friends that The Gospel of Philip offers insufficient evidence that Jesus was married. But what if they’ve bought into the novel’s contention that it would have been odd for Jesus to be single?

Was Jesus Married? (Part 2)

The two most educated characters in *The Da Vinci Code* claim that an unmarried Jesus is quite improbable. Leigh Teabing says, “Jesus as a married man makes infinitely more sense than our standard biblical view of Jesus as a bachelor” (245). Robert Langdon, Harvard professor of Religious Symbolology, concurs:

Jesus was a Jew, and the social decorum during that time virtually forbid a Jewish man to be unmarried. According to Jewish custom, celibacy was condemned. . . . If Jesus were not married, at least one of the Bible’s Gospels would have mentioned it and offered some explanation for His unnatural state of bachelorhood (245).

Is this true? What if our non-Christian friends want a response to such claims?

In his excellent book *Breaking The Da Vinci Code*, Darrell Bock persuasively argues that an unmarried Jesus is not at all improbable. [\[31\]](#) Of course, it's certainly true that most Jewish men of Jesus' day did marry. It's also true that marriage was often viewed as a fundamental human obligation, especially in light of God's command to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Gen. 1:28). Nevertheless, by the first century there were recognized, and even lauded, exceptions to this general rule.

The first century Jewish writer, Philo of Alexandria, described the Essenes as those who "repudiate marriage . . . for no one of the Essenes ever marries a wife." [\[32\]](#) Interestingly, the Essenes not only escaped condemnation for their celibacy, they were often admired. Philo also wrote, "This now is the enviable system of life of these Essenes, so that not only private individuals but even mighty kings, admiring the men, venerate their sect, and increase . . . the honors which they confer on them." [\[33\]](#) Such citations clearly reveal that not all Jews of Jesus' day considered marriage obligatory. And those who sought to avoid marriage for religious reasons were often admired rather than condemned.

It may be helpful to remind your friend that the Bible nowhere condemns singleness. Indeed, it praises those who choose to remain single to devote themselves to the work of the Lord (e.g. 1 Cor. 7:25-38). Point your friend to Matthew 19:12, where Jesus explains that some people "have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven" (NIV). Notice His conclusion, "The one who can accept this should accept it." It's virtually certain that Jesus had accepted this. He had renounced marriage to fully devote Himself to the work of His heavenly Father. What's more, since there was precedent in the first century for Jewish men to remain single for religious reasons, Jesus' singleness would not have been condemned. Let your friend know that, contrary to the claims of *The Da Vinci Code*, it would have been completely acceptable for Jesus to be

unmarried.

Did Jesus' Earliest Followers Proclaim His Deity?

We've considered *The Da Vinci Code's* claim that Jesus was married and found it wanting. Mark Roberts observed "that most proponents of the marriage of Jesus thesis have an agenda. They are trying to strip Jesus of his uniqueness, and especially his deity."[\[34\]](#) This is certainly true of *The Da Vinci Code*. Not only does it call into question Jesus' deity by alleging that He was married, it also maintains that His earliest followers never even believed He was divine! According to Teabing, the doctrine of Christ's deity originally resulted from a vote at the Council of Nicaea. He further asserts, "until that moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet . . . a great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless" (233). Did Jesus' earliest followers really believe that He was just a man? If our non-Christian friends have questions about this, let's view it as a great opportunity to tell them who Jesus really is!

The Council of Nicaea met in A.D. 325. By then, Jesus' followers had been proclaiming His deity for nearly three centuries. Our earliest written sources about the life of Jesus are found in the New Testament. These first century documents repeatedly affirm the deity of Christ. For instance, in his letter to the Colossians, the apostle Paul declared, "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (2:9; see also Rom. 9:5; Phil. 2:5-11; Tit. 2:13). And John wrote, "In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word was God . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (1:1, 14).

There are also affirmations of Jesus' deity in the writings of the pre-Nicene church fathers. In the early second century,

Ignatius of Antioch wrote of “our God, Jesus the Christ.”^{35} Similar affirmations can be found throughout these writings. There’s even non-Christian testimony from the second century that Christians believed in Christ’s divinity. Pliny the Younger wrote to Emperor Trajan, around A.D. 112, that the early Christians “were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day . . . when they sang . . . a hymn to Christ, as to a god.”^{36}

If we humbly share this information with our non-Christian friends, we can help them see that Christians believed in Christ’s deity long before the Council of Nicaea. We might even be able to explain why Christians were so convinced of His deity that they were willing to die rather than deny it. If so, we can invite our friends to believe in Jesus for themselves. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Notes

1. Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).
2. See Dan Brown’s official website at www.danbrown.com/meet_dan/ (February 1, 2006).
3. See the Sony Pictures website at www.sonypictures.com/movies/thedavincicode/ (February 1, 2006).
4. More information is available about the series at www.probe.org.
5. Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, 1.
6. For example, see Sandra Miesel, “Dismantling The Da Vinci Code,” at www.crisismagazine.com/september2003/feature1.htm and James Patrick Holding, “Not InDavincible: A Review and Critique of The Da Vinci Code,” at www.answers.org/issues/davincicode.html.
7. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Reprint. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1952), 1:549, cited in Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to*

- the Bible: Revised and Expanded* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 282.
8. For more information see Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, 390.
 9. Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1998), 25.
 10. *Ibid.*, 39-40.
 11. *Ibid.*, 40.
 12. Darrell Bock, *Breaking The Da Vinci Code* (n.p.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004), 52 (pre-publication manuscript copy).
 13. *Ibid.*, 62-63. See also *The Coptic Apocalypse of Peter and The Second Treatise of the Great Seth* in Bart Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It Into The New Testament*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 78-86.
 14. For example, *The Coptic Gospel of Thomas* (saying 1), in Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*, 20.
 15. Bock, *Breaking The Da Vinci Code*, 63.
 16. Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: Christian Scriptures and the Battles Over Authentication* (Chantilly, Virginia: The Teaching Company: Course Guidebook, part 2, 2002), 37.
 17. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*, 341.
 18. F.F. Bruce, "Canon," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall, eds. (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 95.
 19. *Ibid.*, 95-96.
 20. *Ibid.*, 96.
 21. Darrell Bock, *Breaking The Da Vinci Code* (n.p. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004), 25-26 (pre-publication manuscript copy). I have relied heavily on Dr. Bock's analysis in this section.
 22. *Ibid.*, 116-17.
 23. Bart Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*, 35.
 24. Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*. On page 247 we read, "Sophie had not known a gospel existed in Magdalene's words."
 25. An "apostle" can simply refer to "one sent" as an envoy or messenger. Mary was an "apostle" in this sense, since she was

sent by Jesus to tell the disciples of His resurrection.

26. For more information see Bock, *Breaking The Da Vinci Code*, 16-18.

27. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*, 19.

28. Bock, *Breaking The Da Vinci Code*, 22.

29. Ibid., 21.

30. Ibid., 20.

31. In this section I have relied heavily on chapter 3 of Bock, *Breaking The Da Vinci Code*, pp. 40-49 (pre-publication copy).

32. Philo, *Hypothetica*, 11.14-17, cited in Bock, *Breaking The Da Vinci Code*, 43.

33. Ibid., 44.

34. Mark D. Roberts, "Was Jesus Married? A Careful Look at the Real Evidence," at www.markdroberts.com/htmlfiles/resources/jesusmarried.htm, January, 2004.

35. Ignatius of Antioch, "Ephesians," 18:2, cited in Jack N. Sparks, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. Robert M. Grant (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1978), 83.

36. Pliny, *Letters*, transl. by William Melmoth, rev. by W.M.L. Hutchinson (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1935), vol. II, X:96, cited in Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 199.

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Breaching the Barriers of Islam: Sharing Christ with

Muslims

Steve Cable writes that Christ-followers can use some intriguing verses in the Koran as a way to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to Muslims.

Barriers to Islamic Evangelism

Even in these tense times, we can be confident that God loves the followers of Islam and desires for them to receive redemption through Jesus Christ. Paul writes in First Timothy, “[God] desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:3). However, many Christians feel like the gulf is too wide and the walls are too high to share the truth with Muslims. Yet, our God is a “rewarder of those who seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6), working in providential ways to make truth known.

In this article, we will discuss one way God is breaching the barriers of Islam. Let’s begin by looking at the very real barriers to Islamic evangelism.

The first decade of the twenty-first century is becoming known for the greatest clash between the Western world and Islam since the Crusades. The recent furor over cartoons showing caricatures of Mohammed is a violent example of the chasm. This radical fanaticism is an extreme expression of the barriers that have existed for centuries as Christians have tried to share their faith with followers of Islam. Around the globe, missionaries have typically seen fewer converts from Islam than from other religions. Let’s consider a few of the bricks from which this barrier is constructed:

- *The higher way syndrome—According to Islam, earlier prophets such as Moses and Jesus brought truth from God, but over time their followers corrupted God’s true intent. Mohammed came to correct those perversions. Therefore, the*

Bible has been corrupted and is no longer reliable

- *The final word—Mohammed is the last of the prophets; there can be no further revelation. Questioning the meaning of the Koran as held by the local Imam is strictly prohibited*
- *The greater reward—Zeal and strict adherence to the tenets of Islam will result in great rewards in paradise. A zealous Muslim will be proselytizing others, not allowing someone to try to convert him.*

These first three bricks share much in common with reasons why it should be hard to convert a devout Christian to another world religion. But Islam adds a fourth brick that is distinctly different:

- *The ultimate penalty—As reported by Ibn Warraq, “It is quite clear that under Islamic law, an apostate must be put to death. . . . If [even] a pubescent boy apostatizes, he is imprisoned until he comes of age, when if he persists in rejecting Islam, he must be put to death.”[\[1\]](#) The death penalty for conversion certainly puts a damper on openness to considering the claims of other religions.*

These bricks and others build a solid fortress making it difficult for evangelism among Muslims.

Once More into the Breach

Even though certain aspects of Islam create a formidable wall for those desiring to share Christ, God has equipped us for “the destruction of fortresses . . . and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God” (2 Cor. 10:4). As David Garrison reports, “More Muslims have come to Christ in the past two decades than at any other time in history.[\[2\]](#)”

Before modern artillery, a high, thick wall was an effective fortress. If the fortress was well supplied or time was a critical factor for the attacking army, a breach had to be created in the wall through artillery or siege works. The first group of troops to enter the breach would take on the brunt of the fortress's defenses and suffer extremely heavy casualties. During the Napoleonic wars, the British army called the first attackers the Forlorn Hope, offering promotions to any survivors. Shakespeare honored the Forlorn Hope in "King Henry V" as Henry rallied his troops shouting *"once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more, or close the wall up with our English dead!"* [\[3\]](#)

Is it possible that a Forlorn Hope entering a God-given breach in the barriers of Islam could spread the light of the gospel in an Islamic country?

In a South Asian country, Abdul, a teenager, was expelled from his Islamic school for asking too many questions about the Koran. Because of Islamic law, he was held as a captive by his family and condemned to death upon coming of age. Secretly freed by his mother, he fled from his home. A chance encounter with a Christian missionary as he walked a country road dramatically changed his life. The missionary showed such love and concern that Abdul had to touch him to assure himself that this was a man and not an angel. Abdul gave his life to Christ and was baptized. Abdul was one of a handful of converts from Islam witnessed by this missionary over a period of thirty years.

Banished from his home, Abdul spent several years studying and growing in his faith in another part of the country. Led by God to return to his village, Abdul took up residence in the home of a childhood friend as he was still banished by his family. After a few months of studying the Koran and the Bible, his friend was ready to be baptized. When his family learned about it, they rounded up the villagers, took Abdul to the local soccer field and proceeded to beat him. Left for

dead, his friend came to his aid and Abdul survived. When Abdul baptized his friend, he prayed "Thank you, God for my friend. Yesterday, I was the only believer in this village. Today there are two. Tomorrow, there can be two hundred if it is your will."

Within a few years, all 1,800 people in Abdul's village became Christians including those who left him for dead. These new believers were discipled and more villages were touched. Since that time, over 500,000 Muslim background believers have joined in following Jesus Christ. This unprecedented response also resulted in the murder of Abdul's friend by Islamic radicals. Their willingness to act as the Forlorn Hope, entering the breach with no regard for their own lives, was a central part of this wonderful awakening.

The Breach in the Barrier

What was the breach in the fortress of Islam allowing the message of Christ to be heard? Remember Abdul used the Koran and the Bible to bring his friend to faith. The breach in the barrier is the Koran itself. According to others working in Abdul's country, "Good Muslims have been taught from childhood that the Koran is the only true word of God. They may not know the meaning of the Koran's text, but nonetheless, they believe it is true. When approached with the Bible, Muslims immediately become defensive, but they cannot and will not deny the Koran. Relating to a Muslim from the Koran guarantees a listening ear." [{4}](#)

Many Muslims do not know that the following assertions appear in the Koran:

- If you are in doubt about the truth, ask those who read the Scripture that came before you. [{5}](#)
- To be a proper Muslim, one must read the Before Books (the Old and New Testaments). [{6}](#)

- Christians are humble and compassionate and know the truth when they hear it.[{7}](#)
- Those who observe the teaching of the Torah and the Gospels will go to heaven.[{8}](#)
- Mohammed states he is not the greatest prophet, he does not know what will happen to his followers (after death) and he is only a Warner.[{9}](#)
- Jesus knows the way to Allah.[{10}](#)

The strongest passage to foster a discussion about Jesus is Surah Al-Imran 3:42-55. This passage states:

- Mary was chosen by God,
- Jesus was born of a virgin,
- Jesus is the Messiah,
- Jesus has power over death, and
- Jesus knows the way to heaven.

An honest, open reading raises “Jesus from ‘Prophet’ status closer to ‘Savior’ status.”[{11}](#) For example verse 3:45 reads, “O Maryam! Allah gives you the good news . . . that you will be given a son; his name will be Messiah, Isa the son of Maryam.”[{12}](#) And 3:49 reads, “[Jesus] will heal the blind and the lepers, and raise the dead to life, by Allah’s leave.”[{13}](#) This passage clearly ascribes to Jesus a position and power that Mohammed does not ascribe to himself.

Don’t Misuse the Koran

We rightfully accuse some cults of using proof texts from the Bible to promote distorted religions. Do the verses introduced above relate the overwhelming message of the Koran? Absolutely not. There are other passages which are critical of Christianity and particularly the idea that Jesus is “another God” apart from Allah. Lest we be guilty of “proof-texting,” someone approaching a Muslim with passages from the Koran must be clear on their objective. We should keep in mind four points:

- *Be humble. Freely admit that you are not an expert in the Koran. You want to understand how they view these passages.*
- *Be simple. Do not expound on the doctrine of the Koran or attribute inspiration to its teaching. Simply point out that the Koran seems to encourage Muslims to study our Bible and understand more about Jesus.*
- *Be sensitive. Don't think that you are going to use the Koran to lead someone to Christ. You are discussing the Koran to see if they are open to further exploration of Jesus' teaching.*
- *Be positive. People who have grown up studying the Koran have used this approach to bring hundreds of thousands of Muslims to faith in Christ over the last decade.*

In his book *Camel Training Manual*, Kevin Greeson points out that Paul's custom when entering a new area was to begin teaching Christ in the synagogue from their Scripture, the Old Testament. In a similar fashion, we can approach a Muslim with the question, "I have discovered an amazing truth in the Koran that gives hope of eternal life in heaven. Would you read this passage with me so that we can talk about it?" [\[14\]](#)

The purpose of this discussion is not to show how much you know about the Koran or how little they may know. In humility, the purpose is to ask them to consider the implications of this passage stating Jesus had authority over death and Jesus knows the way to heaven. They know these statements are true because they are in the Koran. If they are concerned about death and want to know the way to heaven, they may want to learn more about Jesus to follow the Koran's injunction to obey Jesus.

This teaching about Jesus is especially important in the light

of Surah The Chambers 46:9 which reads, "I [Mohammed] am no prodigy among the prophets; nor do I know what will be done with me or with you. I follow only what is revealed to me, and I am no more than a plain Warner." So, the Koran teaches Mohammed is a warner (calling people to fully obey God) while Jesus is the Messiah (knowing the way to God). A serious Muslim should have a desire to learn about Jesus.

A Person of Peace

Please note that the purpose of discussing the Koran is not to teach someone how to receive God's free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. The purpose is to identify people who are open to learning more about Jesus. People whose hearts are prepared through diligently seeking to know God. In his book *Church Planting Movements*, Kevin Greeson refers to this as "finding a Person of Peace."

This term refers to Jesus sending seventy of the disciples ahead of Him to witness in every city and place where He was going. Jesus commanded the seventy, "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house.' If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you" (Luke 10:5-7). Jesus was telling them to use a non-threatening, culturally appropriate way to determine whether a person is open to learning more about Jesus. An open, interested person is a "person of peace" and you should invest your time in them. If they are not interested, then shake the dust from your feet and move on. It will only antagonize them and their community if you insist on forcing yourself upon them. Once an interest in knowing more about Jesus is confirmed, you set the Koran aside and turn to the Bible (the "Before Book" in Koran terminology) to teach them about Jesus and redemption.

One concern about sharing in this manner is the danger of producing a group of pseudo-believers who add a distorted view

of Christ to their religious practice without truly putting their faith in Christ. This danger is why the Koran must be viewed only as the breach getting you into the fortress. The Bible in the power of the Holy Spirit supplies the words that lead to salvation. Discipleship must be strictly based on the Bible.

In addition to the large numbers of conversions in Abdul's country, the level of commitment by these new believers is encouraging. In 2002, a team from a U.S. mission organization conducted an investigation of the churches resulting from this movement. They found that

- over 2/3 of the new converts had been active followers of Islam,
- less than 25% were mingling old Islamic beliefs with their new Christian ones, and
- less than 10% of the people know of any Christian returning to Islam.[{15}](#)

When Jesus told his followers to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19-20), He did not add a caveat excluding those hostile cultures with strong barriers to the truth. Instead, He promised to be with us and equip us with divinely powerful weapons to breach those fortresses. Hopefully, you are encouraged to reach out in love to Muslims as God brings them into your life. To learn more, take a look at the *Camel Training Manual* from WIGTake Resources.[{16}](#)

Notes

1. Ibn Warraq, "Apostasy and Human Rights", *Free Inquiry*, February/March 2006, vol 26 No. 2.
2. *Church Planting Movements, How God Is Redeeming a Lost World*, David Garrison, WIFTake Resources, 2004.
3. *King Henry V*, William Shakespeare.
4. Kevin Greeson, *Camel Training Manual* (Midlothian: WIGTake Resources, 2004).

5. Koran Surah Jonah 10:94.
6. Koran Surah The Woman 4:136.
7. Koran Surah The Table Spread 5:82-83.
8. Koran Surah The Table Spread 5:65-66.
9. Koran Surah The Sandhills 46:9.
10. Koran Surah Al-Imran 3:42-55.
11. Greeson.
12. English translation of Muhammad Farooq-i-Azam Malik, *Al-Qur'an, The Guidance for Mankind* (Institute of Islamic Knowledge, 1997).
13. Ibid.
14. Greeson.
15. Garrison.
16. Available online at the Church Planting Movement's Web site at www.churchplantingmovements.com/camel_training_manual.htm.

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Why We Shouldn't Hate Philosophy: A Biblical Perspective

Michael Gleghorn examines the role of philosophy in a Christian worldview. Does philosophy help us flesh out our biblical perspective or does it just confuse our understanding?

A Walk on the Slippery Rocks

For many people in our culture today, Edie Brickell and the New Bohemians got it right: "Philosophy is a walk on the slippery rocks." But for some in the Christian community, they didn't go far enough. Philosophy, they say, is far more dangerous than a walk on slippery rocks. It's an enemy of orthodoxy and a friend of heresy. It's typically a product of wild, rash, and uncontrolled human speculation. Its doctrines are empty and deceptive. Worse still, they may even come from demons!

Such attitudes are hardly new. The early church father Tertullian famously wrote:

What has Jerusalem to do with Athens, the Church with the Academy, the Christian with the heretic? . . . I have no use for a Stoic or a Platonic . . . Christianity. After Jesus Christ we have no need of speculation, after the Gospel no need of research. [\[1\]](#)

Should Christians, then, hate and reject all philosophy? Should we shun it, despise it, and trample it underfoot? Doesn't the Bible warn us about the dangers of philosophy and urge us to avoid it? In thinking through such questions, it's important that we be careful. Before we possibly injure ourselves with any violent, knee-jerk reactions, we may first want to settle down a bit and ask ourselves a few questions. First, what exactly is philosophy anyway? What, if anything, does the Bible have to say about it? Might it have any value for the Christian faith? Could it possibly help strengthen or support the ministry of the church? Are there any potential benefits that Christians might gain from studying philosophy? And if so, what are they? These are just a few of the questions that we want to consider.

But let's begin with that first question: Just what *is*

philosophy anyway? Defining this term can be difficult. It gets tossed around by different people in a variety of ways. But we can get a rough idea of its meaning by observing that it comes from two Greek words: *philein*, which means “to love,” and *sophia*, which means “wisdom.” So at one level, *philosophy* is just the love of wisdom. There’s nothing wrong with that!

But let’s go further. Socrates claimed that the unexamined life was not worth living. And throughout its history, philosophy has gained a reputation for the careful, rational, and critical examination of life’s biggest questions. “Accordingly,” write Christian philosophers J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, “philosophy may be defined as the attempt to think rationally and critically about life’s most important questions in order to obtain knowledge and wisdom about them.”^{2} So while philosophy may *sometimes* be a walk on slippery rocks, it may also be a potentially powerful resource for thinking through some of life’s most important issues.

Beware of Hollow and Deceptive Philosophy

In their recent philosophy textbook, Moreland and Craig make the following statement:

For many years we have each been involved, not just in scholarly work, but in speaking evangelistically on university campuses with groups like . . . Campus Crusade for Christ . . . Again and again, we have seen the practical value of philosophical studies in reaching students for Christ. . . The fact is that there is tremendous interest among unbelieving students in hearing a rational presentation and defense of the gospel, and some will be ready to respond with trust in Christ. To speak frankly, we do not know how one could minister effectively in a public way on our university campuses without training in philosophy.^{3}

This is a strong endorsement of the value of philosophy in

doing university evangelism on today's campuses. But some might be thinking, "What a minute! Doesn't the Bible warn us about the dangers of philosophy? And aren't we urged to avoid such dangers?"

In Colossians 2:8 (NIV), the apostle Paul wrote, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ." What does this verse mean? Is Paul saying that Christians shouldn't study philosophy? Let's take a closer look.

First, "the Greek grammar indicates that 'hollow and deceptive' go together with 'philosophy.'" {4} So Paul is not condemning *all* philosophy here. Instead, he's warning the Colossians about being taken captive by a particular "hollow and deceptive" philosophy that was making inroads into their church. Many scholars believe that the philosophy Paul had in mind was a Gnostic-like philosophy that promoted legalism, mysticism, and asceticism. {5}

Second, Paul doesn't forbid the *study* of philosophy in this verse. Rather, he warns the Colossian believers not to be *taken captive* by empty and deceptive human speculation. This distinction is important. One can *study* philosophy, even "empty and deceptive" philosophy, without being *taken captive* by it.

What does it mean to be "taken captive"? When men are taken captive in war, they are forced to go where their captors lead them. They may only be permitted to see and hear certain things, or to eat and sleep at certain times. In short, captives are under the *control* of their captors. This is what Paul is warning the Colossians about. He's urging them to not let their beliefs and attitudes be *controlled* by an alien, non-Christian philosophy. He's not saying that philosophy in general is bad or that it's wrong to study philosophy as an academic discipline.

But doesn't Paul also say that God has made foolish the wisdom of the world? And doesn't *this* count against the study of philosophy?

Is Worldly Wisdom Worthless?

In 1 Corinthians 1:20 (NIV) the apostle Paul wrote, "Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" Some Christians think this passage teaches that the study of philosophy and human wisdom is both foolish and a waste of time. But is this correct? Is that really what Paul was saying in this passage? I personally don't think so.

We must remember that Paul himself had at least some knowledge of both pagan philosophy and literature – and he made much use of reasoning in personal evangelism. In Acts 17 we learn that while Paul was in Athens "he *reasoned* in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there" (v. 17; NIV). On one occasion he spent time conversing and disputing with some of the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers (v. 18). Further, when it suited his purposes, Paul could quote freely (and accurately) from the writings of pagan poets. In Acts 17:28 he cites with approval both the Cretan poet Epimenides and the Cilician poet Aratus, using them to make a *valid theological point about the nature of God and man* to the educated members of the Athenian Areopagus. Thus, we should at least be cautious before asserting that Paul was opposed to *all* philosophy and human wisdom. He obviously wasn't.

But if this is so, then in what sense has God made foolish the wisdom of the world? What did Paul mean when he wrote this? The answer, I think, can be found (at least in part) in the very next verse: "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to know* God, God was well-

pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:21; NASB). In other words, as Craig and Moreland observe, "the gospel of salvation could never have been discovered by philosophy, but had to be revealed by the biblical God who acts in history."[\[6\]](#) This clearly indicates the *limitations* of philosophy and human wisdom. But the fact that these disciplines have very real *limitations* in no way implies that they are utterly *worthless*. We need to appreciate something for what it is, recognizing its limitations, but appreciating its value all the same. Philosophy by itself could never have discovered the gospel. But this doesn't mean that it's not still a valuable ally in the search for truth and a valuable resource for carefully thinking through some of life's greatest mysteries.

In the remainder of this article, we'll explore some of the ways in which philosophy *is* valuable, both for the individual Christian and for the ministry of the church.

The Value of Philosophy (Part 1)

Moreland and Craig observe that "throughout the history of Christianity, philosophy has played an important role in the life of the church and the spread and defense of the gospel of Christ."[\[7\]](#)

John Wesley, the famous revivalist and theologian, seemed well-aware of this fact. In 1756 he delivered "An Address to the Clergy". Among the various qualifications that Wesley thought a good minister should have, one was a basic knowledge of philosophy. He challenged his fellow clergymen with these questions: "Am I a tolerable master of the sciences? Have I gone through the very gate of them, logic? . . . Do I understand metaphysics; if not the . . . subtleties of . . . Aquinas, yet the first rudiments, the general principles, of that useful science?"[\[8\]](#) It's interesting to note that Wesley's passion for preaching and evangelism didn't cause him

to denigrate the importance of basic philosophical knowledge. Indeed, he rather insists on its importance for anyone involved in the teaching and preaching ministries of the church.

But *why* is philosophy valuable? What practical benefits does it offer those involved in regular Christian service? And how has it contributed to the health and well-being of the church throughout history? Drs. Moreland and Craig list many reasons why philosophy is (and has been) such an important part of a thriving Christian community.[{9}](#)

In the first place, philosophy is of tremendous value in the tasks of Christian apologetics and polemics. Whereas the goal of apologetics is to provide a reasoned defense of the truth of Christianity, “polemics is the task of criticizing and refuting alternative views of the world.”[{10}](#) Both tasks are important, and both are biblical. The apostle Peter tells us to always be ready “to make a defense” for the hope that we have in Christ (1 Pet. 3:15; NASB). Jude exhorts us to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (v. 3; NASB). And Paul says that elders in the church should “be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict” (Tit. 1:9; NASB). The proper use of philosophy can be a great help in fulfilling each of these biblical injunctions.

Additionally, philosophy serves as the handmaid of theology by bringing clarity and precision to the formulation of Christian doctrine. “For example, philosophers help to clarify the different attributes of God; they can show that the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation are not contradictory; they can shed light on the nature of human freedom, and so on.”[{11}](#) In other words, the task of the theologian is made easier with the help of his friends in the philosophy department!

The Value of Philosophy (Part 2)

Let's consider a few more ways in which philosophy can help strengthen and support both the individual believer and the universal church.

First, careful philosophical reflection is one of the ways in which human beings uniquely express that they are made in the image and likeness of God. As Drs. Craig and Moreland observe, "God . . . is a rational being, and humans are made like him in this respect."[{12}](#) One of the ways in which we can honor God's commandment to love him with our minds (Matt. 22:37) is to give serious philosophical consideration to what God has revealed about himself in creation, conscience, history, and the Bible. As we reverently reflect on the attributes of God, or His work in creation and redemption, we aren't merely engaged in a useless academic exercise. On the contrary, we are loving God with our minds—and our hearts are often led to worship and adore the One "who alone is immortal and . . . lives in unapproachable light" (1 Tim. 6:16; NIV).

But philosophy isn't only of value for the individual believer; it's also of value for the universal church. Commenting on John Gager's book, *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity*, Drs. Moreland and Craig write:

The early church faced intellectual and cultural ridicule from Romans and Greeks. This ridicule threatened internal cohesion within the church and its evangelistic boldness toward unbelievers. Gager argues that it was primarily the presence of philosophers and apologists within the church that enhanced the self-image of the Christian community because these early scholars showed that the Christian community was just as rich intellectually and culturally as was the pagan culture surrounding it.[{13}](#)

Christian philosophers and apologists in our own day continue to serve a similar function. By carefully explaining and defending the Christian faith, they help enhance the self-image of the church, increase the confidence and boldness of believers in evangelism, and help keep Christianity a viable option among sincere seekers in the intellectual marketplace of ideas.

Of course, not all philosophy is friendly to Christianity. Indeed, some of it is downright hostile. But this shouldn't cause Christians to abandon the task and (for some) even calling of philosophy. The church has always needed, and still needs today, talented men and women who can use philosophy to rationally declare and defend the Christian faith to everyone who asks for a reason for the hope that we have in Christ (1 Pet. 3:15). As C.S. Lewis once said, "Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered." [\[14\]](#) These are just a few of the reasons why we shouldn't hate philosophy.

Notes

1. Tertullian, "The Prescriptions Against the Heretics," trans. S.L. Greenslade, in *Early Latin Theology* (Vol. V in "The Library of Christian Classics"; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 31-32; cited in Hugh T. Kerr, ed., *Readings in Christian Thought* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 39.
2. William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 13.
3. Ibid., 4-5.
4. Ibid., 18.
5. Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000), 487.
6. Craig and Moreland, 19.
7. Ibid., 12.
8. John Wesley, "An Address to the Clergy," delivered February

6, 1756. Reprinted in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3d ed., 7 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1996), 6:217-31; cited in Craig and Moreland, 4.

9. See Craig and Moreland, 14-17. I have relied heavily on their observations in this, and the following, section of this article.

10. Ibid., 15.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., 16.

14. C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1949), 50; cited in Craig and Moreland, 17.

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