

Restoring the Sacred

The Loss of the Sacred

There are several ways to define modernism. One way is this: modernism was an attempt to remove the sacred from society and to replace it with a mechanistic naturalism. Everything was to be understood and explained in scientific terms.

The late philosopher of religion Mircea Eliade wrote this:

The completely profane world, the wholly desacralized cosmos [that is, the cosmos with the sacred removed] is a recent discovery in the history of the human spirit . . . desacralization pervades the entire experience of the nonreligious man of modern societies.[\[1\]](#)

Profane, here, is another word for *secular*. It is contrasted with *sacred*. My *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *sacred* as “connected with God or a god or dedicated to a religious purpose and so deserving veneration.” It is closely related to *sanctified* which means “holy” which means “dedicated or consecrated to God.”[\[2\]](#)

Ours is obviously a secular society. Everything open for public discussion is to be explained with no reference to the sacred; there is no acknowledged connection to God. It seems the only time the sacred makes it into the news is when there is a tragedy and reporters talk about people praying, or when a famous religious person, such as the Pope, dies.

Once upon a time in the West, our society operated as though God mattered. Now, such views are considered quaint relics of the past which shouldn't be allowed to invade the public square. The late Christopher Reeve in a speech about stem cell research at Yale University said that “our government should not be influenced by any religion when matters of public

policy are being debated.”{3} Religion is to be a private affair only.

The late theologian and missionary Lesslie Newbigin, after spending four decades in India, said this about the West:

The sharp line which modern Western culture has drawn between religious affairs and secular affairs is itself one of the most significant peculiarities of our culture, and would be incomprehensible to the vast majority of people.{4}

Why should this matter to us? Among other reasons is the simple unfairness in a democracy of “religious people” not being able to bring *their* worldviews into public debates while the nonreligious can. I can think of two explanations for this idea. First, it’s thought that religion necessarily creates unreasonable *bias* whereas irreligion doesn’t. Religious belief removes our ability to be objective, it is thought. People who think this way need to catch up with current philosophy! There are no value-free facts, and no perspectives that do not begin with unprovable assumptions.{5}

Second, it’s thought that religious biases are likely to be *destructive* because of their “intolerant” character. This is a popular mantra today; it is trotted out with all the authority of unassailable fact. Didn’t the events of 9/11 prove it? Responding to the observation that people see those horrible events as illustrating what religious monotheism causes, writer Os Guinness noted that “In the last century, more people were killed by secularist intellectuals, in the name of secularist ideologies, than in all the religious persecutions and repressions in Western history combined.”{6} If the twentieth century is a good witness, there is greater danger from secular powers than from religious ones.

Beyond that, though, is a problem Christians have individually and corporately. When so much of our time is spent in a realm in which our Christian beliefs aren’t welcomed, we begin to

forget their importance for all of life. So we start thinking from a secular perspective. In addition, we even find it easier to let our Christian beliefs be shaped by non-Christian thinking.

In her latest book, *Total Truth*,^{7} Nancy Pearcey has reminded us of the importance of destroying the divide between the sacred and the secular in our thinking. But it can't stop with our thinking; the sacred needs to be an integral part of our lives. As part of that process it would be good to be reminded of just what we mean by the sacred.

Sacredness

As noted earlier, *sacred* means to be dedicated or devoted to God. It involves a separation of purpose: something is separated from the use of the world for the use of God.

The idea of sacredness is reflected in a number of ways in the various religions of the world. There are holy books and places and festivals. The sacred is reflected in religious architecture. Islamic mosques, for example, are designed to point people to Allah. Muslim writer Hwaa Irfan speaks of "sacred geometry [which] is the science of creating a space, writing or other artwork, which reminds one of the greatness of Allah."^{8} In the past, Christianity too, of course, was conscious of the sacred in its architecture. Medieval era churches were built for the purpose of "signifying the sacred," of reflecting something about God. The furnishings of churches were designed to aid in this focus.

Old Testament

What does the Bible tell us about sacredness or holiness?^{9} In the Old Testament it refers primarily to God. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts" Isaiah said (6:3). In Old Testament times, God showed Himself to be set apart from His created order through such events as Moses being told to remove his

shoes before the burning bush because he was standing on holy ground (Ex. 3:5). Later, at Sinai, God called Moses up onto a mountain to teach him His laws, far away from the people signifying His separateness from a fallen world (Ex. 19). His separation from unclean things was reflected also through His laws (e.g., Lev. 11:43, 44). Anyone who would approach God, who would “ascend His holy hill,” according to the Psalmist, must have “clean hands and a pure heart” (24:4).

The word *holy* was applied to other things that were separated by God, such as the nation of Israel (Ex. 19:6; Lev. 20:26), the Sabbath (Ex. 16:23), the tabernacle with both the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place (Ex. 26:33), and the various feasts and special observations, such as the Day of Atonement (Ex. 30:10). This even extended to objects used for worship. For example, there was special incense that was too holy to be used by people for themselves (Ex. 30:37). In the Old Testament, then, we find God using things and events to teach His people about His holy nature.

New Testament

What do we find in the New Testament? Again, the primary reference is to God. All three members of the Trinity are said to be holy. Peter repeated God’s admonition recorded in Lev. 11:44—“Be holy because I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:16). He called Jesus “the Holy One of God” (Jn. 6:69). And, of course, the Spirit is called the Holy Spirit (e.g., Lk. 2:26).

Whereas in the Old Testament, God’s separateness from creation and the unclean was the emphasis, in the New Testament the moral dimension comes to the fore (although the moral wasn’t absent from the Old Testament). In the Old Testament the concern is more with external matters; in the New Testament the focus is on the internal. The writer of Hebrews says we were “made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (10:10). This doesn’t mean we’ve fully “arrived” in our personal sanctification. Paul says we’re to

“purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God” (2 Cor. 7:1). The shift in emphasis between Testaments doesn’t indicate a change in the meaning of holiness or its importance. For example, God’s people are called saints—holy ones or sanctified ones—in both Testaments (e.g., Ps. 34:9; Acts 9:13). However, in the Old Testament times, God used external matters, which could be seen, to teach about the inward change He desired.

Does this mean that we no longer think about events and physical things as holy as in the Old Testament? Certainly not in the same way Old Testament saints did. We no longer have the Temple and the sacrificial system and the Aaronic priesthood. All things are God’s, and all things are to be offered up to Him with a pure heart. There should be no sacred/secular split in the sense that some things are under God’s jurisdiction and some aren’t. However, we might find that, just like the Israelites, certain items or observances might help in directing us to God or reminding us of His character.

Secularism—The Loss of the Sacred

Contrasted with *sacred* is the idea of *secular*. The root of the word “secular” is interesting. It comes from a Latin word that means “time.” James Hitchcock says “to call someone secular means that he is completely time-bound, totally a child of his age, a creature of history, with no vision of eternity. Unable to see anything in the perspective of eternity, he cannot believe that God exists or acts in human affairs.”^{10} A secular society, then, is one which is tied to time, to the temporal, with no reference to the eternal, to God.

We shouldn’t think that there was no distinction between the sacred and the secular in the West until modern times. In the Medieval era, there was secular music and poetry. However,

there was an increasing turn to the secular following the religious upheavals of the sixteenth century. By the eighteenth century writers such as Voltaire were openly espousing secularism. If religion was the cause of such terrible things as the wars of the sixteenth century, it should be removed from the public square.

Over time, secularism gradually encroached on almost all areas of human life. In the university in the nineteenth century, a movement began to remove religion from its central place in education and segregate it to its own department. In the workplace, *efficiency* became a watchword; because religion could disrupt the workplace, it was to be left at home. By the twentieth century buildings and art and law and . . . well, you name it; all areas of human life were now to be thought of in secular terms and developed according to the methods of science. Life would be much improved, it was thought, if we were freed from the narrowness of religion to make of ourselves what we would. Humanism was the fundamental worldview, and secular humanism at that. The name given to this era was "modernism."

What has this gotten us as a society? We're free to construct our reality any way we wish now that God is supposedly dead. But what have we done with our freedom? Henry Grunwald, former ambassador to Austria and editor-in-chief of Time, Inc. said this:

Secular humanism . . . stubbornly insisted that morality need not be based on the supernatural. But it gradually became clear that ethics without the sanction of some higher authority simply were not compelling. The ultimate irony, or perhaps tragedy, is that secularism has not led to humanism. We have gradually dissolved—deconstructed—the human being into a bundle of reflexes, impulses, neuroses, nerve endings. The great religious heresy used to be making man the measure of all things; but we have come close to making man the measure of nothing. [\[11\]](#)

What the Loss of the Sacred Means for Us

Life in a secular world

What does it mean to live in a secular society? How does it color our Christian experience? How does it affect the way we make decisions? The way we spend our money and time? The way we relate to people?

In 1998, Craig Gay published a book titled *The Way of the Modern World: Or, Why It's Tempting to Live As if God Doesn't Exist*.^{12} In the introduction, he addresses the question why there needs to be another book on modernism. He gives a couple of reasons. First, he says, is the possibility of unfruitfulness. He points to the Parable of the Sower in Matthew as a biblical example. Could any ineffectiveness on our part or the part of our churches be traced back to accommodation to the secular mind? Could our many church programs and strategies be found wanting because we are using modern methods which run counter to the ways of God? Our private lives have become divided: Monday through Friday are for money-making endeavors; Saturday is for working around the house or going to the lake; Sunday is for religion. We live bifurcated lives.

Second is "the threat of apostasy and spiritual death." Think of the proverbial frog in the pot of water slowly coming to a boil, and then think about how easy it is to adopt the notion that "you only go around once" and the modernistic solution of getting all the "toys" we can *while* we can . . . and gradually not only *look* like the world but become card-carrying members of it.

The sacred brought down to the secular

The late Francis Schaeffer taught many of us the meaning and significance of "secular humanism," and, as a result of such teaching, evangelicals have taken on the project of integrating the sacred and the secular in more and more areas

of their lives. Much of this has been good. Determining to let one's Christian beliefs inform all aspects of life is hard in itself; in a secular culture that doesn't care for such things, it's a major challenge. As noted earlier, it is an uphill battle living as a Christian in our secular society, so one should be cautious about criticizing the sincere efforts of fellow believers.

In my opinion, however, some or many of us have unconsciously pulled a "switcheroo." In our efforts to tear down the divide between sacred and secular, we have been guilty to a significant extent of bringing the sacred down to the secular rather than lifting all of life up to the secular, as it were. We live so much of our lives in the "lower story" as Nancy Pearcey calls it (following Schaeffer) that we have simply baptized as Christian attitudes and ways of life that are questionable. We've secularized the sacred rather than vice versa.

Ask yourself this: Besides things internal to you—attitudes, beliefs, etc.—what externals in your life clearly reflect the divine? How does the sacred color your life? What habits of life, objects or tools, what signifiers of the sacred, are part of your life?

Restoring the Sacred, *Not* the Sacred-Secular Split

In so far as this describes us, we need to make the conscious decision to bring about change. The first order of business is to re-acknowledge the sacredness of God. Then we must recognize that we are sanctified, set apart. We are to be drawn up to God, and one significant area in which this should be seen is in worship. Think of worship as the sanctified being drawn up to the Sanctifier. In another place I wrote this:

The object of one's worship reflects back on the worshipper. Those who worship things lower than themselves end up demeaning themselves, being brought down to the level of their object of worship. But those who worship things higher are drawn up to reflect their object of worship. To worship God is to be drawn up to our full height, so to speak. We are ennobled by worshipping the most noble One.[{13}](#)

Two thoughts to add which might seem contradictory at first. In response to the secularization of our society, it is our responsibility to bring God back into all the affairs of our lives, even the mundane. In our *private* lives that will be easier to do than in our *public* lives simply because we don't set all the rules for the latter. For example, a person working for a financial institution probably won't be able to insist that the boss leads the office in prayer before work each morning. However, there *are* ways we can bring a Christian view of the world and godly morality into the workplace. We want God to be over the full sweep of our lives such that we don't have a brick wall dividing our lives in two.

Along with that, however, we might find it helpful to bring into our lives some kinds of signifiers of the sacred, some kinds of objects or places or routines or *something* that will provide reminders to us that the world we see isn't all there is. Christians have used symbols for ages to remind them of the "otherness" of God. Art has made a big comeback in recent decades as a means of portraying truths about God and a Christian view of life and the world. Such things aren't prescribed in Scripture. What *is* prescribed, of course, is the rejection of idolatry. Therefore, anything we use as an aid must remain just that—an aid, not the object of our faith.

Thomas Molnar argues that a strong Christian belief in the supernatural needs worship symbols such as prayer, ritual, a sense of the sacred community, sincere piety, and the *élan* (enthusiastic energy) of the clergy."[{14}](#) He believes that the

only way the church can remain strong in a pagan environment is to “remain unquestionably loyal” to both the intellectual component—doctrine—and the sacred component which employs symbolic forms.^{15} The intellectual component gives us an understanding of our faith and our world. By being renewed, it enables us to “test and approve what God’s will is” (Rom. 12:2). The symbolic component can help us focus on and learn about God. Things like visual aids, postures, particular times set aside for a focus on God, along with Bible reading and prayer, can be very beneficial, as long as they don’t lead to idolatry or a diminished or altered view of God.

We don’t have the law with all its stipulations about the Temple and its furnishings, sacrifices, and special feasts. In my opinion, however, to simply set all such things aside *because* they aren’t required by law is short-sighted. Human nature hasn’t changed; if sacred signifiers were helpful to the Israelites, maybe they would be to us, too.

To give people a list of things to do that goes beyond clear scriptural exhortation to such practices as prayer, learning God’s Word, gathering together as a body, and participating in the sacraments or ordinances would be to overstep our boundaries. The most I can do, then, is ask you think about it. Consider how you can restore a clear sense of the sacred in your life. Not just any sacredness *per se*, of course, but a sense of the presence of the One who is truly sacred and of the significance of the sacred for how you live.

Notes

1. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 13.
2. *The Pop-up New Oxford Dictionary of English*, Selectsoft Publishing, 1992.
3. Christopher Reeve, “Stem Cells and Public Policy” Yale University, April 3, 2003. Accessed from

www.yale.edu/opa/v31.n25/story7.html on 4/6/2005. The offending statement was reported in Mitch Horowitz, "Ambassador of the Miraculous" on Horowitz' Web site at www.mitchhorowitz.com/christopher-reeve.html (Accessed 4/6/2005).

4. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 31.

5. Thomas Kuhn got the ball rolling with respect to science, the supposed bastion of objectivity, with his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970; first published in 1962). For philosophical treatments see Arthur F. Holmes, *Fact, Value, and God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986); and Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2002).

6. Mary A. Jacobs, "Q&A With Os Guinness: Standing in Defense of 'One True God'," *Dallas Morning News*, March 26, 2005.

7. Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004).

8. Hwaa Irfan, "Sacred Geometry of Islamic Mosques," Islamonline.net
www.islamonline.net/English/Science/2002/07/article02.shtml, accessed 4/7/2005.

9. I am indebted for much of what follows to Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), s.v., "Holiness."

10. James Hitchcock, *What Is Secular Humanism? Why Humanism Became Secular, and How It Is Changing Our World* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant Books, 1982), 10-11. I highly recommend this book for a history of secular humanism through the 1970s.

11. Henry Grunwald, "The Year 2000," *Time*, March 30, 1992, 75, quoted in Garber, 54.
12. Craig Gay, *The Way of the Modern World: Or, Why It's Tempting to Live As if God Doesn't Exist* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).
13. Rick Wade, "Christianity: The True Humanism" Probe Ministries, 2000. Available on the Web at www.probe.org/christianity-the-true-humanism/.
14. Thomas Molnar, *The Pagan Temptation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 79.
15. Molnar, 81.

© 2005 Probe Ministries

"Scriptures That Prove Trinitarians Wrong"

I dare you to put this on your website!

As I see it, I could write thousands of words to try and prove a Trinitarian wrong. The reason I say this is because the Trinity belief changes depending on which Trinitarian you talk to. There exist hundreds of Trinity-teaching churches, all of which have different interpretations of what the Trinity is or is not. I have heard that Jesus was a Man-God, despite the scriptural reference that no man has ever seen God. I have heard that they (God the Father and Jesus) are the same, but NOT the same..????

In actuality, there is no clear-cut description of the Trinity

Doctrine. It itself is written in such a way that you could come up with literally hundreds of combinations to make it work. And believe me, that has been done. Catholics, Mormons, Protestants, Lutherans and countless other religions have their own interpretations of the Trinity teaching. How can that teaching be right if all these differing opinions exist on its meaning? Is not at least ONE of them absolutely right?

Here are a few points of view that should inspire any honest-hearted, truth-seeking person to carefully examine in an effort to shed light upon this teaching. Please keep in mind that the earliest DOCUMENTED proof of the Trinity teaching dates back to the Nicene Creed, a government-sanctioned document the purpose of which was to unify a splitting house of worship...notably, the Roman Catholic Church. All other reports are speculation as to the meaning of certain author's beliefs. All pre-Nicene opinions that I am aware of (not saying that I am familiar with them all) are from "fathers" of the Roman Catholic Church. It was the Nicene Creed that for the first time put it into an official, church stand.

All scripture quoted is from the New International Version of the Holy Scriptures. I invite you to read your own version of the Bible to compare to these quotes.

JESUS IS AN EQUAL PART OF THE GODHEAD

2 Peter 1:17 : "For he received honor and glory from the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." This scripture not only tells where Jesus' glory came from, but also when...and it is critical. Jesus did not possess any glory on his own, it was given by the Father to him when he was 30 years old in front of witnesses at Jesus' baptism. If he was deity in his own right, he would not have needed the Father to give glory to him, nor would he have had to wait until his baptism to receive it. Here, it is stressed in the scriptures that Jesus is God's SON, not God himself.

This points to Jesus' subordinate place along the side of his Father. It is therefore reasonable to deduce that they are NOT equal.

John 14:28: "You heard me say 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I." Jesus here points out in no uncertain terms that he and the Father are not equal. In contrast to other scriptures that only insinuate a point, this scripture is direct in nature and states very clearly that the Father is greater than Jesus. They are NOT equal!

Philippians 2:9-11 "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father."

God did the exalting and did so to his OWN glory. This entire passage speaks to God's sole authority to do what He wants, in this case exalting His own Son. Jesus is NOT the exalt-ER, but the exalt-EE. One cannot exalt another unless there is superior position, rank or authority. Jesus is clearly the lesser of the two.

1 Corinthians 15:25-28: (speaking of Jesus) "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he 'has put everything under his feet'. Now when it says that 'everything' has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God Himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him that put everything under him, so that God may be all in all." Can a logical person even conceive that these two, God the Father and his Son, Jesus are equal from this scripture? This is one of the most direct passages describing their relationship in terms of rank, or position. Any part of the Godhead described

by most Trinitarians is equal to the power of the other. This directly rejects that teaching. Here, in these verses, it is crystal clear who has the authority and who has been given authority. They CANNOT be equal.

JESUS IS ALL-KNOWING, AND THEREFORE IS GOD

Matthew 24:36, Jesus speaking: "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." While Jesus was certainly blessed by God with extraordinary powers, the claim that Jesus is all knowing is completely and utterly denied by Jesus' own words here. Jesus does not know the hour in which the actual end will take place. If he were God, he most certainly would know for it is his (God's) master plan. There exists no scripture, let alone Jesus' own words, that says he is all-knowing. Some apostles asked Jesus that, since he knew all things, would he please explain this or that...but to claim that these scriptures say Jesus knows all would be in direct conflict with Jesus' words here. We know it has to be one way or the other, so which is it? For me personally, I will trust in Jesus' words that he does NOT know the hour of the coming of the end and therefore does not know all things.

[Note: . . .And six pages of verses and commentary from Revelation edited]

Thank you for your response and I will enjoy putting this on our web site. I can tell you are zealous in what you believe and I sense a strong disdain towards those who differ from you. I am sorry that with my heavy schedule I cannot address all your points but let me address just a few. Your response is typical of JW's who have misunderstood the doctrine of the Trinity and have used Bible verses out of context.

Let's take a look at a few.

The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that there is one God who has revealed Himself in three distinct persons all are equal

in nature. They are distinct in person. The Father is not the Son. The Son is not the Holy Spirit. One God revealed in three distinct persons. JW's mislead people when they say the trinity teaches Jesus and the Father are one in the same person. They are distinct in person, but equal in nature.

In regard to the passage from John 6:46 states, "No man has seen God..." you interpret this to mean no man has ever seen God at all. Let's take a look at some passages and see if this is the case. Isaiah 6 states, "In the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on the throne, high and exalted..." Isaiah appears to have seen the Lord. In Exodus 3, Moses speaks with God at the burning bush. Deuteronomy 34:10 states, "Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face." There are other passages where men have seen and spoken with God. So what John 6:46 is saying is, no one has seen God in His full glory. That no one could withstand. However, God has revealed Himself in veiled form, which we could see and withstand. Jesus is God the Son veiled in flesh. Philippians 2 if you read the entire passage states, that Jesus emptied himself or made himself nothing. He temporarily clothed himself in flesh and revealed himself to us. Later in Revelation 1, we see Jesus in glory.

The allegation that the Trinity was not taught until the Nicene council is incorrect. The Watchtower printed this in their magazine 'Should You Believe in the Trinity.' There they quote pre-Nicene fathers as rejecting the Trinity. One interesting note, the Watchtower does not footnote any of it's references. They use endless dots ... why are there no footnotes or references pointing to the exact location of these quotes. Typical Watchtower deception. In my article on the Probe web site called "Why You should Believe in the Trinity," I quote several pre Nicene church fathers and give the exact reference. Here are a few the Watchtower misquoted.

Justin Martyr (165 A.D.): "...the Father of the universe has a Son; who being the logos and First-begotten is also God"

(First Apology 63:15).

Irenaeus (200 A.D.) : (referencing Jesus) "...in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Savior, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father, . . ." (Against Heresies I, x, 1).

Clement of Alexandria (215 A.D.): "Both as God and as man, the Lord renders us every kind of help and service. As God He forgives sin, as man He educates us to avoid sin completely" (Christ the Educator, chapter 3.1). In addition, "Our educator, O children, resembles His Father, God, whose son He is. He is without sin, without blame, without passion of soul, God immaculate in form of man accomplishing His Father's will" (Christ the Educator Chapter 2:4).

Tertullian (230 A.D.): "...the only God has also a Son, his Word who has proceeded from himself, by whom all things were made and without whom nothing has been made: that this was sent by the Father into the virgin and was born of her both man and God. Son of Man, Son of God, ..." (Against Praxeas, 2).

Hippolytus (235 A.D.): "And the blessed John in the testimony of his gospel, gives us an account of this economy and acknowledges this word as God, when he says, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.' If then the Word was with God and was also God, what follows? Would one say that he speaks of two Gods? I shall not indeed speak of two Gods, but of one; of two persons however, and of a third economy, the grace of the Holy Ghost" (Against the Heresy of One Noetus. 14).

Origen (250 A.D.): (with regard to John 1:1) "...the arrangement of the sentences might be thought to indicate an order; we have first, 'in the beginning was the Word,' then 'And the Word was with God,' and thirdly, 'and the Word was God,' so that it might be seen that the Word being with God makes Him God" (Commentary on John, Book 2, Chapter 1).

Not only in these instances, but also throughout their writings the ante-Nicene fathers strongly defend the deity of Christ.

I would challenge you to ask the leaders at your kingdom hall, Why doesn't the watchtower magazine, on Page 7 footnote their references? Also, where exactly are these quotes located in the writings of the church fathers? If you know a little about church history, you will know that the early church suffered persecution under the Roman Empire. It was not until Emperor Constantine converted that they could have a church council. At Nicea then, they simply articulated what they already believed and taught.

2 Peter 1:17, states, "For he received honor and glory from God the Father..." Take a look 17:5 where Jesus prays, "And now Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began." Now take a look at Isaiah 42:8. God says, "I am the Lord, that is my name. I will not give my glory to another..." God will not give his glory to another. Yet Jesus shared in God's glory before the world began. He shares God's glory because He is in nature God.

Let's look at John 14:28 where Jesus says the Father is greater than I. Greater refers to position not to nature. For example, you would agree with the statement, "George Bush is greater than you or I." As the chief executive officer of our country, that is indeed true. But is George Bush a superior being to you or I? No. Greater refers to position, not nature. In the Trinity, there is an economy, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They are equal in nature, greater refers to position. In Hebrews 1:4 it states, "So he (Jesus) became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs." Here Jesus is not an angel because He is superior in nature to them. Or as the New World Translation states, "So he has become better than the angels," Jesus is better, meaning superior in nature to the angels. If Jesus was an inferior being to the Father, He would have said, "the

Father is better or superior than I.”

Let’s take a look at the verse you quoted in Philippians 2. You begin at verse nine, but you need to look at the verse in its context. Begin at verse 1. Paul is exhorting the Philippians to exemplify humility as Christ did. How did Christ demonstrate humility? Verse 6 states, “Who (Christ) being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped.” The Greek word there is “morphe” which means essential attributes. In other words, Jesus essential attributes was the nature of God. He humbled himself unto death and was exalted by God at the resurrection and sits at the Father’s right hand. Another interesting note, verse 11 states, “and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord...” In Isaiah 45:18 God states, “I am the Lord and there is no other.” Yet here when every tongue confesses Jesus is Lord, it brings glory to the Father. We can’t have two Lords and if God states, He is the only Lord and Jesus has that title as well, what must we conclude?

In regard to the Revelation passages, it would be helpful to outline the book of Revelation. State the theme and how it plays out through the book. The Watchtower has interpreted it incorrectly in many areas. In Chapter 1:7 Jesus is coming to the earth. In verse 8 it states, “I am the alpha and the Omega, says Jehovah God, the One who is and who was and who is coming, the Almighty.” God the Father is never referred to as coming soon. the one who is coming is Jesus. Verse 8 refers to the one coming soon in verse 7 who is Jesus. Jesus is called God in verse 8. The whole theme of chapter one is the Son of God. Even if you want to say verse 8 refers to Jehovah and not Jesus, look at 22:12-16. Who is the alpha and Omega there? Jesus. Jehovah is the Alpha and Omega in chapter one. You cannot have two Alphas and Two Omegas. You can only have one. It is Jehovah in chapter 1, Jesus in chapter 22. So we conclude Jesus is God the Son. In 1:17-18 it states, “I am the First and the Last. I am the living one; I was dead and behold

I am alive forever and ever.” The First and the Last here is Jesus who died and rose again.

In Isaiah 44:6, Jehovah says, “I am the First and the Last; apart from me there is no God.” You cannot have two firsts and two lasts. You can only have one. Once again, Jesus is God the Son for He shares the same title. Just a study of Chapter one of Revelation reveals the deity of Christ. I would study Revelation without the Watchtower articles to see what it says for itself. It is the Watchtower interpretations that led to the numerous false prophecies of Jesus second coming in 1914, 1918, 1925, and 1975. Their record of false prophecies alone should have one question the credibility of this organization.

Sorry I do not have time for a detailed study of the rest of your passages. Perhaps at a later time. Thanks for your reply.

Patrick Zukeran
Probe Ministries

“Why Do You Believe the Bible is Inspired and the Qur’an is Not?”

I have read several of your articles on Islam, and have noted you state several times your belief that the Qur’an is not an inspired text, and the Bible is. Whilst I agree with you on this, I would be interested in the reasons and evidence you have for this belief.

Although I don’t know how others might respond to your question, my own view is this. First, the Bible claims to be

an inspired text: "All Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Tim. 3:16). Of course, this does NOT prove that it really is inspired. However, if the Bible nowhere claimed to be inspired, then we would hardly have good reason to believe that it was. Thus, what the text claims for itself is important.

Second, I think there is strong evidence to embrace biblical inspiration for a number of reasons. For sake of time, let me mention only one: the accurate fulfillment (in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus) of very specific Messianic prophecies (made centuries before Jesus was even born). The specificity of these prophecies, and their accurate fulfillment in the life of Jesus, constitutes strong evidence for divine inspiration. After all, who else knows the future with that kind of accuracy other than an omniscient God?

Finally, if the Bible is inspired by God, then it would seem logically impossible for the Qur'an to also be divinely inspired. Why? Because both texts teach very different doctrines, doctrines that are not logically consistent with one another. For example, the Qur'an denies the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the Incarnation, etc. But the Bible teaches both doctrines. Clearly, both texts cannot be correct, for this would violate the law of non-contradiction. Thus, if the Bible is inspired by God, then it logically follows that the Qur'an is not (because it contradicts clear biblical teaching on a number of important doctrines).

Hope this helps.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

Probe Ministries

“You Anti-Mormons Haven’t Come Up with Anything New Since 1830”

I was briefly looking over your site. I find it amusing when I have nothing else to do to see if you anti-Mormons have come up with anything new since 1830. It appears you have not. For members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints like myself, we indulge in the challenge of finding answers to such shortsighted claims as are found on your site. To help in these boring times I would ask for something different. To start out if you would quit using phrases like “orthodox christians”, and “historic christianity”, it would first eliminate a great deal of confusion for those whom you would blind by your craftiness. After all what does it matter if people believed something for thousands of years. If it is wrong it will always be so. Thus, just because “orthodox christians” believed in the trinity for hundreds of years that doesn’t make it any more true than when it was spawned by uninspired men. This will force your mind to think of new lies to tell people as you divert them from the Spirit of Truth. However I’m sure you will misconstrue and misrepresent my words. But at least you will know that you had to shade the truth to advance your own cause.

Thanks for reading the article on [Mormon Doctrine of God](#). It is difficult to take your response seriously since you are simply making personal attacks, which involve name-calling and cynical remarks. This hardly represents the attitude the Bible teaches believers to have. 1 Peter 3:15 states, “But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always be prepared to give an

answer to everyone who asks you the hope you have, but do this with gentleness and reverence.” I see none of that displayed in your remarks here. Your conduct and attitude says a great deal about your religious faith. I hope this is not typical of the attitude of the Mormon Church. A biblical critique of my article on a more scholarly level would be more profitable. Not only a biblical critique of my work but also a biblical defense of your position leaving out the sarcasm and personal insults would be very profitable for all parties. Until then, I cannot take your comments seriously.

Patrick Zukeran
Probe Ministries

“Seven Spirits of Revelation?”

I recently encountered a group that believes the seven spirits of Revelation are seven aspects of the Holy Spirit ... and the Trinity is actually a “nine-ity” (for lack of a better word). I obviously do NOT believe this hogwash, but I was wondering if this belief has ever been promulgated in history. I personally believe it’s a new heresy, but I wanted to check.

The interpretation of the “seven Spirits” in the book of Revelation as a reference to the Holy Spirit is actually not new. A number of interpreters throughout church history have adopted this position as their preferred view. However, it is by no means the ONLY view that has been advanced throughout church history.

John refers to the “seven Spirits” in Revelation 1:4; 3:1; 4:5 and 5:6. William Barclay points out that the Jews “talked of

the seven angels of the presence,” citing 1 Enoch 90:21. Of course John does refer to seven angels of the seven churches (1:20). What he means by “angels” is not entirely clear. He could be referring to the pastors of the churches, or he might be referring to guardian angels of the churches. Thus, some commentators believe the reference to the “seven Spirits” is a reference to seven holy angels before the throne of God.

Barclay mentions that another “explanation connects the idea of the seven Spirits with the fact of the seven churches.” Since seven is often used as a number of completion, or perfection, in the Bible (and in the book of Revelation in particular) it is thought that the “seven” churches are representative of all churches, each of which has a share in God’s Holy Spirit in order to carry out its ministry to the world.

A third view ties the reference to the “seven Spirits” to Isaiah 11:2. The Greek translation of this verse in the Septuagint reads: “The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and piety; by this spirit He shall be filled with the fear of God.” In this view, the “seven Spirits” of Revelation refer to this sevenfold ministry of the Holy Spirit, particularly evidenced in the life of Jesus, the Messiah.

Which of these views is correct? I honestly don’t know. Maybe the correct view is none of the above! It’s important to point out, however, that those who see the “seven Spirits” as a reference to the Holy Spirit would not typically endorse any but a Trinitarian view of God. Barclay cites Beatus as having said, “The Spirit is one in name but sevenfold in virtues.”

Thus, while I personally do not know what John intends by his reference to the “seven Spirits”, those who interpret this as referring to the Holy Spirit are usually not heretics. They could be, of course; but one need not reach that conclusion

from this particular interpretation. It is actually an old and well-accepted view.

Hope this helps. God bless you!

Michael Gleghorn

Probe Ministries

The Council of Nicea

Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims point to the influence of the Emperor Constantine on the Council of Nicea in AD 325 and argue that the secular government of Rome imposed the doctrine of the Trinity on the Christian church. In reality, church leaders were too resilient for such a simple conclusion, and Constantine's role more complex than is often presented.

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

The doctrine of the Trinity is central to the uniqueness of Christianity. It holds that the Bible teaches that "God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God."^{1} So central is this belief that it is woven into the words Jesus gave the church in His Great Commission, telling believers to ". . . go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . ." (Matthew 28:19).

It is not surprising, then, that the doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most denigrated and attacked beliefs by those outside the Christian faith. Both Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses reject this central tenet and expend considerable

energy teaching against it. Much of the instruction of the Jehovah's Witness movement tries to convince others that Jesus Christ is a created being, not having existed in eternity past with the Father, and not fully God. Mormons have no problem with Jesus being God; in fact, they make godhood available to all who follow the teachings of the Church of Latter-day Saints. One Mormon scholar argues that there are *three* separate Gods—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who are one in purpose and in some way still one God.[{2}](#) Another writes, “The concept that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are one God is totally incomprehensible.”[{3}](#)

Among the world religions, Islam specifically teaches against the Trinity. Chapter four of the Koran argues, “Say not ‘Trinity’: desist: it will be better for you: for Allah is One God: glory be to Him: (far Exalted is He) above having a son” (4:171). Although Muhammad seems to have wrongly believed that Christians taught that the Trinity consisted of God the Father, Mary the Mother, and Jesus the Son, they reject as sinful anything being made equivalent with Allah, especially Jesus.

A common criticism by those who reject the doctrine of the Trinity is that the doctrine was not part of the early church, nor a conscious teaching of Jesus Himself, but was imposed on the church by the Emperor Constantine in the early fourth century at the Council of Nicea. Mormons argue that components of Constantine's pagan thought and Greek philosophy were forced on the bishops who assembled in Nicea (located in present day Turkey). Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the Emperor weighed in against their view, which was the position argued by Arius at the council, and, again, forced the church to follow.

In the remaining portions of this article, we will discuss the impact the three key individuals—Arius, Constantine, and Athanasius—had on the Council of Nicea. We will also respond to the charge that the doctrine of the Trinity was the result

of political pressure rather than of thoughtful deliberation on Scripture by a group of committed Christian leaders.

Arius

Let's look first at the instigator of the conflict that resulted in the council, a man named Arius.

Arius was a popular preacher and presbyter from Libya who was given pastoral duties at Baucalis, in Alexandria, Egypt. The controversy began as a disagreement between Arius and his bishop, Alexander, in 318 A.D. Their differences centered on how to express the Christian understanding of God using current philosophical language. This issue had become important because of various heretical views of Jesus that had crept into the church in the late second and early third centuries. The use of philosophical language to describe theological realities has been common throughout the church age in an attempt to precisely describe what had been revealed in Scripture.

Alexander argued that Scripture presented God the Father and Jesus as having an equally eternal nature. Arius felt that Alexander's comments supported a heretical view of God called Sabellianism which taught that the Son was merely a different mode of the Father rather than a different person. Jehovah's Witnesses argue today that the position held by Arius was superior to that of Alexander's.

Although some historians believe that the true nature of the original argument has been clouded by time and bias, the dispute became so divisive that it caught the attention of Emperor Constantine. Constantine brought the leaders of the church together for the first ecumenical council in an attempt to end the controversy.

It should be said that both sides of this debate held to a high view of Jesus and both used the Bible as their authority

on the issue. Some have even argued that the controversy would never have caused such dissension were it not inflamed by political infighting within the church and different understandings of terms used in the debate.

Arius was charged with holding the view that Jesus was not just subordinate to the Father in function, but that He was of an inferior substance in a metaphysical sense as well. This went too far for Athanasius and others who were fearful that any language that degraded the full deity of Christ might place in question His role as savior and Lord.

Some believe that the position of Arius was less radical than is often perceived today. Stuart Hall writes, "Arius felt that the only way to secure the deity of Christ was to set him on the step immediately below the Father, who remained beyond all comprehension."[\[4\]](#) He adds that whatever the differences were between the two sides, "Both parties understood the face of God as graciously revealed in Jesus Christ."[\[5\]](#)

Emperor Constantine

Many who oppose the doctrine of the Trinity insist that the emperor, Constantine, imposed it on the early church in 325 A.D. Because of his important role in assembling church leaders at Nicea, it might be helpful to take a closer look at Constantine and his relationship with the church.

Constantine rose to supreme power in the Roman Empire in 306 A.D. through alliance-making and assassination when necessary. It was under Constantine's Edict of Milan in 313 A.D. that persecution of the church ended and confiscated church properties were returned.

However, the nature of Constantine's relationship to the Christian faith is a complex one. He believed that God should be appeased with correct worship, and he encouraged the idea among Christians that he "served their God."[\[6\]](#) It seems that

Constantine's involvement with the church centered on his hope that it could become a source of unity for the troubled empire. He was not so much interested in the finer details of doctrine as in ending the strife that was caused by religious disagreements. He wrote in a letter, "My design then was, first, to bring the diverse judgments found by all nations respecting the Deity to a condition, as it were, of settled uniformity; and, second to restore a healthy tone to the system of the world . . ." [\[7\]](#) This resulted in him supporting various sides of theological issues depending on which side might help peace to prevail. Constantine was eventually baptized shortly before his death, but his commitment to the Christian faith is a matter of debate.

Constantine participated in and enhanced a recently established tradition of Roman emperors meddling in church affairs. In the early church, persecution was the general policy. In 272, Aurelian removed Paul of Samosata from his church in Antioch because of a theological controversy. Before the conflict over Arius, Constantine had called a small church synod to resolve the conflict caused by the Donatists who argued for the removal of priests who gave up sacred writings during times of persecution. The Donatists were rebuked by the church synod. Constantine spent five years trying to suppress their movement by force, but eventually gave up in frustration.

Then, the Arian controversy over the nature of Jesus was brought to his attention. It would be a complex debate because both sides held Jesus in high regard and both sides appealed to Scripture to defend their position. To settle the issue, Constantine called the council at Nicea in 325 A.D. with church leaders mainly from the East participating. Consistent with his desire for unity, in years to come Constantine would vacillate from supporting one theological side to the other if he thought it might end the debate.

What is clear is that Constantine's active role in attempting

to resolve church disputes would be the beginning of a new relationship between the empire and the church.

Athanasius

The Council of Nicea convened on May 20, 325 A.D. The 230 church leaders were there to consider a question vital to the church: Was Jesus Christ equal to God the Father or was he something else? Athanasius, only in his twenties, came to the council to fight for the idea that, "If Christ were not truly God, then he could not bestow life upon the repentant and free them from sin and death." {8} He led those who opposed the teachings of Arius who argued that Jesus was not of the same substance as the Father.

The Nicene Creed, in its entirety, affirmed belief ". . . in one God, the Father almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; he suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost." {9}

The council acknowledged that Christ was God of very God. Although the Father and Son differed in role, they, and the Holy Spirit are truly God. More specifically, Christ is of one substance with the Father. The Greek word *homoousios* was used to describe this sameness. The term was controversial because it is not used in the Bible. Some preferred a different word that conveyed *similarity* rather than *sameness*. But Athanasius and the near unanimous majority of bishops felt that this might eventually result in a lowering of Christ's oneness with the Father. They also argued that Christ was begotten, not made. He is not a created thing in the same class as the rest

of the cosmos. They concluded by positing that Christ became human for mankind and its salvation. The council was unanimous in its condemnation of Arius and his teachings. It also removed two Libyan bishops who refused to accept the creed formulated by the Council.

The growing entanglement of the Roman emperors with the church during the fourth century was often less than beneficial. But rather than Athanasius and his supporters seeking the backing of imperial power, it was the Arians who actually were in favor of the Emperor having the last word.

Summary

Did Constantine impose the doctrine of the Trinity on the church? Let's respond to a few of the arguments used in support of that belief.

First, the doctrine of the Trinity was a widely held belief prior to the Council of Nicea. Since baptism is a universal act of obedience for new believers, it is significant that Jesus uses Trinitarian language in Matthew 28:19 when He gives the Great Commission to make disciples and baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The *Didache*, an early manual of church life, also included the Trinitarian language for baptism. It was written in either the late first or early second century after Christ. We find Trinitarian language again being used by Hippolytus around 200 A.D. in a formula used to question those about to be baptized. New believers were to be asked to affirm belief in God the Father, Christ Jesus the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit.

Second, the Roman government didn't consistently support Trinitarian theology or its ardent apologist, Athanasius. Constantine flip-flopped in his support for Athanasius because he was more concerned about keeping the peace than in theology itself. He exiled Athanasius in 335 and was about to reinstate

Arius just prior to his death. During the forty-five years that Athanasius was Bishop of Alexandria in Egypt, he was banished into exile five times by various Roman Emperors.

In fact, later emperors forced an Arian view on the church in a much more direct way than Constantine supported the Trinitarian view. Emperors Constantius II and Julian banished Athanasius and imposed Arianism on the empire. The emperor Constantius is reported to have said, "Let whatsoever I will, be that esteemed a canon," equating his words with the authority of the church councils.[\[10\]](#) Arians in general "tended to favor direct imperial control of the church."[\[11\]](#)

Finally, the bishops who attended the Council of Nicea were far too independent and toughened by persecution and martyrdom to give in so easily to a doctrine they didn't agree with. As we have already mentioned, many of these bishops were banished by emperors supporting the Arian view and yet held on to their convictions. Also, the Council at Constantinople in 381 reaffirmed the Trinitarian position after Constantine died. If the church had temporarily succumbed to Constantine's influence, it could have rejected the doctrine at this later council.

Possessing the freedom to call an ecumenical council after the Edict of Milan in 313, significant numbers of bishops and church leaders met to consider the different views about the person of Christ and the nature of God. The result was the doctrine of the Trinity that Christians have held and taught for over sixteen centuries.

Notes

1. Grudem, Wayne, *Bible Doctrine* (Zondervan, 1999), p. 104.
2. Blomberg, Craig L., & Robinson, Stephen E., *How Wide the Divide*, (InterVarsity Press, 1997), p. 128.
3. Bruce McConkie in *Mormonism 101* by Bill McKeever & Eric

Johnson (Baker Books, 2000), p. 52.

4. Hall, Stuart G., *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*, (Eerdmans, 1991), p. 135.

5. Ibid.

6. Hall, Stuart G., *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*, p. 118.

7. Noll, Mark, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of*

Christianity, (InterVarsity Press, 1997), p. 51.

8. Ibid., 55.

9. Ibid., 57.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., 60.

© 2003 Probe Ministries.

“Which Is It: Man’s Free Will or God’s Omniscience?”

A friend of mine posed this question to me. I would like to pass it along for your reflection:

When we say that God “knows the future”, are we saying that He possesses knowledge of all future events? My premise is that in order for free will for Man to exist, then it is impossible for God to know all future events. In other words, these concepts are mutually exclusive. If that is true, then which one exists – free will in humans, or knowledge by God of all future events? (Or is my premise wrong?) My opinion is that free will exists, and therefore God cannot know all future events. Furthermore, Christians should not be troubled

by the concept of a God that does not possess knowledge of all future events. They should rest assured that – one way or another – He will execute His plan and carry out His promises.

Thanks for any insights that I could pass along to him.

This is a big issue in theological circles today—sort of the “God version” of the “what did he know and when did he know it?” question. The debate over the extent of God’s foreknowledge is called “open theism.” (Check out Rick Wade’s article called [“God and the Future”](#)).

But I can tell you what we believe. God does, indeed, know every single detail of the future, which is why the Bible contains accurate prophecy of future events—because not only did God know they would (and will) happen, but because He is sovereign, He superintends them.

I think many people misunderstand the concept of “free will,” which is not a biblical term. The reality is that while we have the ability to make truly significant choices, we don’t have truly “free” will. You cannot, for example, choose to wake up tomorrow morning in China when you go to bed in Chicago. Or wake up speaking Chinese when all you know is English. You cannot choose to be a different gender than what God made you. (Yes, I’m aware of sex-change operations and know people who’ve had them—we’re not even going there! <smile>) But we can make choices that make a difference: for example, in our attitudes, in who we marry and most importantly, which God we serve. We have limited freedom in our choices, and God does not force us to choose things His way; He respects our choices. But we do not have totally free will.

I think your friend misunderstands the concept of God’s sovereignty (“one way or another – He will execute His plan

and carry out His promises”) if he thinks that God can have a plan and execute it if He doesn’t know everything that’s going to happen. You can’t have it both ways. A God who is not omniscient cannot be sovereign. A sovereign God MUST be omniscient.

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

Meet the Probe Speakers and Writers

This is a listing of the individuals who speak and write for Probe Ministries. Not all speakers are available for every conference.

Kerby Anderson is president of Probe Ministries International. He holds masters degrees from Yale University (science) and from Georgetown University (government). He is the author of several books, including *Christian Ethics in Plain Language*, *Genetic Engineering*, *Origin Science*, and *Signs of Warning, Signs of Hope*. His series with Harvest House Publishers includes: *A Biblical Point of View on Islam*, *A Biblical Point of View on Homosexuality*, *A Biblical Point of View on Intelligent Design*, and *A Biblical Point of View on Spiritual Warfare*. Kerby hosts “Point of View” (USA Radio Network) heard on 360 radio outlets nationwide as well as on the Internet (www.pointofview.net) and shortwave. He is also a regular guest on “Prime Time America” (Moody Broadcasting Network) and “Fire Away” (American Family Radio). He produces a daily syndicated radio commentary and writes editorials that have appeared in papers such as the *Dallas Morning News*, the *Miami Herald*, the *San Jose Mercury*, and the *Houston Post*. He can be reached at kerby@probe.org. (Click [here](#) for a full bio.)

Byron Barlowe is a research associate and Web coordinator with Probe Ministries. He earned a B.S. in Communications at Appalachian State University in gorgeous Boone, N.C. Byron served 20 years with Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC), eight years as editor and Webmaster of a major scholarly publishing site, Leadership University (LeaderU.com). In that role, he oversaw several sub-sites, including the Online Faculty Offices of Drs. William Lane Craig and William Dembski. His wife, Dianne, served 25 years with CCC and now homeschools their active teen triplets. He can be reached at bbarlowe@probe.org.

Dr. Ray Bohlin is Vice President of Vision Outreach at Probe Ministries. He is a graduate of the University of Illinois (B.S., zoology), North Texas State University (M.S., population genetics), and the University of Texas at Dallas (M.S., Ph.D., molecular biology). He is the co-author of the book *The Natural Limits to Biological Change* and has published numerous journal articles. He was named a 1997-98 and 2000 Research Fellow of the Discovery Institutes Center for the Renewal of Science and Culture. He can be reached at rbohlin@probe.org.
(Click [here](#) for a full bio.)

Sue Bohlin is an associate speaker and the Website Administrator for Probe Ministries. She attended the University of Illinois, and has been a Bible teacher and conference speaker for over 30 years. She is a frequent speaker for MOPS (Mothers of Pre-Schoolers) and Stonecroft Ministries (Christian Women' Clubs), and she serves on the board of Living Hope Ministries, a Christ-centered outreach to those dealing with unwanted homosexuality. She is also a [professional calligrapher](#); but most importantly, she is the wife of Dr. Ray Bohlin and the mother of their two grown sons. She can be reached at sue@probe.org.

Steve Cable is senior vice president of Probe Ministries. He is a magna cum laude graduate of Rice University with a Bachelor of Science and Masters Degree in Electrical Engineering. Prior to joining Probe, Steve spent over 25 years in the telecommunications industry. Steve and his wife Patti have served as Bible teachers for over 30 years helping people apply God's Word to every aspect of their lives. Steve has extensive, practical experience applying a Christian worldview to the dynamic, competitive high-tech world that is rapidly becoming a dominant aspect of our society. He can be reached at scable@probe.org.



Michael Gleghorn is a research associate with Probe Ministries. He earned a B.A. in psychology from Baylor University and a Th.M. in systematic theology from Dallas Theological Seminary, and is currently working on his Ph.D. in theology from DTS. Before coming on staff with Probe he taught history and theology at Christway Academy in Duncanville, Texas. Michael and his beautiful wife Hannah have two children. He can be reached via e-mail at mgleghorn@probe.org.




Todd Kappelman is a field associate with Probe Ministries. He is a graduate of Dallas Baptist University (B.A. and M.A.B.S., and Greek), and the University of Dallas (M.A., philosophy/humanities). Currently he is pursuing a Ph.D. in philosophy at the University of Dallas. He has served as assistant director of the Trinity Institute, a study center devoted to Christian thought and inquiry. He has been the managing editor of *The Antithesis*, a bi-monthly publication devoted to the critique of foreign and independent film. His central area of expertise is Continental philosophy (especially nineteenth and twentieth century) and postmodern thought.



✘	<p>Paul Rutherford is a researcher, writer, and speaker for Probe. He joined staff in 2008 after earning a bachelor's degree in philosophy and religious studies from Rice University. His areas of interest include philosophy of religion, world religions, and faith and culture. Paul's ministry experience includes campus ministry, cross-cultural ministry, and he has spoken in churches and schools throughout Texas. He and his wife Kelly have two young children. Paul's hobbies include playing saxophone, singing, acting, swing dancing, and sometimes Texas two-step. He can be reached at prutherford@probe.org.</p>
---	---

<p>Dr. Lawrence Terlizzese is currently joining the Probe team while teaching rhetoric at the University of Texas at Dallas (UTD). Meanwhile, he is a doctoral candidate with an emphasis in Philosophy of Technology at UTD. He holds both a Th.M. and Ph.D. in Theological Studies from Dallas Theological Seminary, and a B.A. in Biblical Studies from Columbia International University in Columbia, South Carolina. He is the author of two books, <i>Trajectory of the Twenty First Century: Essays in Theology and Technology</i> and <i>Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul</i>. He can be reached at lawrence@probe.org. (Click here for a full bio.)</p>	✘
---	---

Todd A. Kappelman

	<p style="text-align: center;">TODD A. KAPPELMAN Field Associate 5010 Victor #B Dallas, TX 75214 (214) 824-2820 Probe Web Site: www.probe.org</p>
---	--

Todd Kappelman is a field associate with Probe Ministries. He received a B.A. and M.A.B.S. in Religion and Greek from Dallas Baptist University and an M.A. in humanities/philosophy from the University of Dallas. Currently he is pursuing a Ph.D. in philosophy at the University of Dallas. He has served as assistant director of the Trinity Institute, a study center devoted to Christian thought and inquiry. He has been the managing editor of the *Antithesis*, a bimonthly publication devoted to the critique of foreign and independent film. His central area of expertise is Continental philosophy, especially nineteenth/twentieth century and postmodern thought.

Todd serves as a residential tutor of **The Veritas House**, a private study center for undergraduate and graduate students in the greater Dallas area. He and his wife, Deanna, are owners and directors of the study center. They coordinate weekly film groups, books groups, art groups, and Bible studies.

PROBE PUBLICATIONS

A Return to Modesty
Christmas Film Favorites
C.S. Lewis: His Enduring Legacy
Dietrich Bonhoeffer
Film and the Christian
Five Films of 2002
Marshall McLuhan: The Medium is the Message
The Need to Read: G.K. Chesterton
The Need to Read: Francis Schaeffer

The Breakdown of Religious Knowledge
Titanic: A Critical Appraisal
Twelve Films of 2003
We Are Television

LECTURES

Friedrich Nietzsche and Existentialism
The Church in a Postmodern Society
Political Correctness and “Gender Truth”
Friedrich Nietzsche and Postmodernism
Existentialism
Postmodernism
Ecology
Capital Punishment
Literature as Truth
Meta-narrative Truth
War
Film
Postmodern Art

The Urantia Book – A Biblical Worldview Perspective

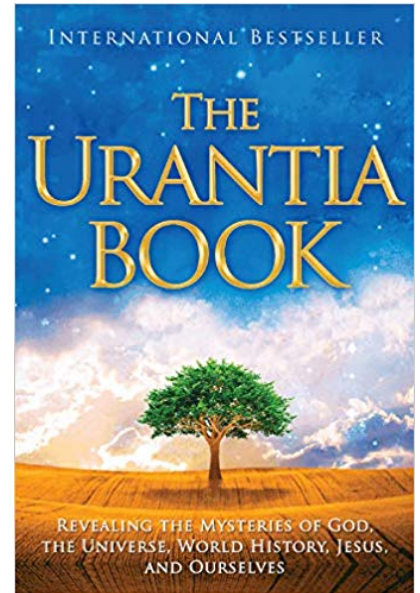
Dr. Michael Gleghorn takes a hard look at the claims of The Urantia Book and finds it lacking in substance and evidence.



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

Introduction to *The Urantia Book*

Not long ago a woman wrote to me about a very painful episode in her life. About fifteen years ago her husband embarked on a spiritual quest that ultimately destroyed their marriage and family. He began reading *The Urantia Book*, a massive tome of 2,097 pages that was allegedly revealed by celestial beings from higher universes. He also became involved in various occult practices such as channeling and astral projection. Eventually, she and her husband divorced, leaving both her and her children hurt and confused.



Of course, it would probably not be fair to blame all of this family's difficulties on *The Urantia Book*. Although my correspondent's experience was quite negative, others describe their own encounter with *The Urantia Book* in very positive terms. If you visit the official Urantia Foundation Web site you can read many of these testimonials for yourself.[\[1\]](#) One woman wrote, "I have found *The Urantia Book* to be the most enlightened source of wisdom I have ever come across." And another person declares *The Urantia Book* to be "the most conclusive and inspiring book on our existence."

So what is *The Urantia Book*? Where did it come from and what does it teach? And how do its doctrines compare with those of biblical Christianity? These are just a few of the questions that we want to consider in this article.

The Urantia Book claims to have been revealed by superhuman personalities from higher universes. The word "Urantia" is simply the book's name for Earth. The book consists of 196 papers and is divided into four major parts entitled: 1. "The Central and Superuniverses," 2. "The Local Universe," 3. "The History of Urantia," and 4. "The Life and Teachings of Jesus." The alleged "authors" of these papers refer to themselves by their order of being with such glorious titles as Divine

Counselor, Perfectioner of Wisdom, Brilliant Evening Star and Chief of Seraphim. Although originally written in English, the book has since been translated into Dutch, Finnish, French, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. In addition, translations into a number of other languages are currently underway. These include Arabic, Chinese, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Polish, Romanian, and Swedish--just to name a few.

Although devoted Urantians are absolutely convinced that every part of *The Urantia Book* was revealed by celestial intelligences, there are a number of problematic issues that need to be addressed. We'll consider a few of these later in this article. Before we do so, however, it is first necessary to give some account of the origin of *The Urantia Book*.

The Origin of the Urantia Papers

The Urantia Book was first published in 1955. But the alleged "revelations" from extra-planetary personalities apparently began early in the twentieth century.^{2} Who received these "revelations"? And who wrote them down in the massive volume that has come to be known as *The Urantia Book*?

While there is not space to specifically mention everyone who played a role in this process, two individuals were key in the reception and recording of this "revelation." The first, Dr. William Sadler, lived from 1875 to 1969. He was a psychiatrist, teacher, and prolific writer. The other individual's identity cannot be known with certainty. Dr. Sadler referred to this person as the "contact personality" and the "sleeping subject."^{3} In a manner similar to that of Edgar Cayce, the so-called "sleeping prophet," the "sleeping subject" of our story was the vehicle through whom the celestial visitors supposedly communicated their revelations to Dr. Sadler and others. This small group of people, known as the Contact Commission, "was the focal point for the

production of . . . the final text of The Urantia Book.”{4}

Although members of the Contact Commission were sworn to secrecy regarding the identity of the “contact personality,” Martin Gardner has made a strong case that the evidence points to Wilfred Custer Kellogg, Sadler’s brother-in-law and a relative of the famous Kellogg family.{5} Of course, not everyone agrees with Gardner’s conclusions. Ernest Moyer, a Urantian researcher, while acknowledging his inability to determine the identity of the “sleeping subject,” is nonetheless convinced that it was not Wilfred.{6}

Although the identity of the “sleeping subject” may never be known with certainty, we have a fairly good record of how the Urantia papers came into being. Although there is some debate about the precise date in which Dr. Sadler first became aware of the “sleeping subject,” it was probably in the summer of 1912.{7} “In 1923 the Sadlers began to invite twenty or thirty friends over for Sunday afternoon teas to discuss religious topics. At about the fourth meeting Sadler began telling the group, which came to be called the Forum, about the sleeping subject and his startling revelations.”{8} He invited Forum members to help prepare questions for the celestials. The following Sunday members returned with hundreds of questions. “Shortly thereafter,” Sadler wrote, “the first Urantia paper appeared in answer to these questions . . . This was the procedure followed throughout the many years of the reception of the Urantia papers.”{9} By the time this process was over there were 196 papers, consisting of 2,097 pages of material, that had allegedly been channeled through the “sleeping subject.”

Problems with *The Urantia Book*

In his article, “A History of the Urantia Movement,” Dr. Sadler stated, “The [Urantia] Papers were published just as we received them. The Contact Commissioners had no editorial

authority. Our job was limited to 'spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.'" {10} But is this really so? There is actually ample evidence for questioning this statement.

Urantian researcher Ernest Moyer has carefully documented that Dr. Sadler made changes to the text of *The Urantia Book*. {11} The unsettling thing about these changes, at least for loyal Urantians, is that they were made after 1935, the date that Dr. Sadler claimed *The Urantia Book* was "completed and certified" in its entirety. {12} The evidence for such changes is compelling. Matthew Block, another Urantian researcher, discovered that human sources published after 1935 were later incorporated into *The Urantia Book*. For example, a book by Charles Hartshorne, published in 1941, lists seven possible meanings of "absolute perfection." Block discovered that these same seven meanings were reprinted in *The Urantia Book* almost word for word. This is merely one of several examples that could be offered of human sources published after 1935 that were later plagiarized in *The Urantia Book*. {13}

But not only were changes made after the book had been "completed and certified," they were also made after *The Urantia Book* was first published in 1955. Many examples could be offered, but let me simply mention two. First, both Martin Gardner and Ernest Moyer point out that in the first printing of *The Urantia Book*, toward the end of the account of the Last Supper, Jesus is said to have addressed the twelve apostles. However, as the context makes clear, only eleven of the apostles were currently present. Judas had already left the group. According to Gardner, "in later printings 'the twelve' was replaced by 'the apostles,'" thus eliminating the error. {14} Second, both Gardner and Moyer also note that in the first printing of *The Urantia Book* the wise men are said to have visited the newborn Jesus "in the manger." However, according to a later passage in *The Urantia Book*, this visit must have occurred when Jesus and his parents were in a room at the inn. Gardner notes, "When this contradiction was

noticed, the words ‘in the manger’ were removed from the next printing.”[\[15\]](#)

What are we to conclude from such known and acknowledged errors, contradictions and plagiarisms in *The Urantia Book*? Such problems clearly raise doubts about the integrity of this “revelation.” Wherever the information in *The Urantia Book* has come from—whether extra-planetary personalities, human beings, demonic spirits, or some combination of these—the source of this information is not entirely trustworthy. Moreover, it is not entirely biblical either.

The Bible and *The Urantia Book*

In his appendix to *The Mind at Mischief*, Dr. Sadler stated that the information imparted through the “sleeping subject” was “essentially Christian.”[\[16\]](#) Since this information is allegedly contained in *The Urantia Book*, we would expect the contents of this book to likewise be “essentially Christian.” But are they?

If we compare the teachings of *The Urantia Book* with those of the Bible, we quickly discover that *The Urantia Book*, far from being consistent with biblical Christianity, actually denies or distorts almost every fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith. For example, contrary to the testimony of Jesus in the New Testament—that the Scriptures are the word of God (Matt. 15:3-6), inspired by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 22:43), and completely true and accurate in all details (Matt. 5:17-18; Luke 24:44; John 17:17)—*The Urantia Book* has Jesus declaring to Nathaniel, “the Scriptures are faulty and altogether human in origin” (*UB*, 1767).

The rejection of the Bible as a fallible human document sets the stage for the rejection of many other biblical doctrines as well. For example, *The Urantia Book* rejects the Bible’s views about God, Christ, man, sin, and salvation. Contrary to

the biblical position that there is only one God (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 45:21), *The Urantia Book* espouses polytheism, the belief in many "Gods." Martin Gardner points out that the term "Gods" (a capitalized plural) "appears more than a hundred times" in *The Urantia Book*.[{17}](#) For instance, on page 364 we read, "We are all a part of an eternal project which the Gods are supervising and outworking." Although *The Urantia Book* does acknowledge the existence of one supreme God, it rejects biblical Trinitarianism in favor of its own view that there is actually a "Trinity of Trinities" (*UB*, 1170-73). But this is only the beginning. According to Gardner, there are so many "gods" in *The Urantia Book* that its polytheism "puts Greek and Hindu mythology to shame."[{18}](#)

The view of Jesus presented in *The Urantia Book* is equally disturbing and unbiblical. To begin, the virgin birth is rejected. Jesus was simply born of Joseph and Mary (*UB*, 1344-45). Nevertheless, although he had human parents, he is also presented as the incarnation of Michael of Nebadon, the creator of our universe and one of "more than 700,000 Creator Sons of the Eternal Son."[{19}](#) This clearly conflicts with the New Testament's view of Jesus, which reveals that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary (Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38). Furthermore, John tells us that Jesus is the one and only eternal Son of God in an absolutely unique sense (John 1:1-2, 14; 3:16). He is *not* merely one of more than 700,000 other Creator Sons; He is truly unique.

These doctrinal differences are only the tip of the iceberg. There are many other differences between *The Urantia Book* and the Bible. However, due to space considerations, I can only mention the following.

The Urantia Book declares, "There has been no 'fall of man.'" (*UB*, 846). This explains, at least in part, why there is also no need for any blood atonement for sin (*UB*, 60). *The Urantia Book* tells us, "The whole idea of ransom and atonement is incompatible with the concept of God as it was taught and

exemplified by Jesus of Nazareth" (UB, 2017). The notion of "substituting an innocent sufferer for a guilty offender" is dismissed as a "childish scheme" (UB, 2017). What, then, was the meaning of Jesus' death on the cross? According to *The Urantia Book*, "We know that the death on the cross was not to effect man's reconciliation to God but to stimulate man's *realization* of the Father's eternal love and his Son's unending mercy" (UB, 2019). Obviously, these teachings strike at the very heart of the Christian message.

Genesis 3-5 and Romans 5 make it quite clear that there has indeed been a "fall of man" into sin and rebellion against his Creator. The entire race was ruined and condemned because of Adam's disobedience. Paul tells us plainly that "the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men" (Rom. 5:18). The ideas of ransom and substitutionary atonement are not incompatible with Jesus' view of God. Indeed, Jesus Himself stated that He came "to give His life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). The Bible tells us that "all have sinned" (Rom. 3:23), but it also tells us that "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3). Contrary to *The Urantia Book*, Jesus did not die merely to stimulate man's *realization* of the Father's love; He died to reconcile us to God (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:22). It is because Christ died for our sins that God can now offer us salvation as a free gift (Rom. 6:23). We cannot earn this gift; we can only gratefully receive it through faith in Christ (Rom. 3:22-28; Eph. 2:8-9).

The Urantia Book proclaims a different God, a different Jesus, and a different Gospel than the Bible. Its message, allegedly revealed by higher spiritual beings, is fundamentally at odds with biblical Christianity. In light of this, it's sobering to think of all the biblical warnings about lying and deceptive spirits (e.g. 1 Kings 22:22-23; John 8:44; 1 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 20:7-10). Dr. Sadler once wrote that if there was anything supernatural about mediumistic phenomena, it was probably demonic. [\[20\]](#) But when he actually encountered someone whose

channeling he thought genuine, he did not resort to this hypothesis. He embraced the revelations and eventually helped publish *The Urantia Book*. It's a pity he didn't stick with his original hypothesis. Who knows? It may have even been true. {21}

Notes

- See "What People Are Saying About *The Urantia Book* . . ." at <http://www.urantia.org/about.html#What> (Dec. 2, 2003).
- Martin Gardner, *Urantia: The Great Cult Mystery* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1995), 114.
- William S. Sadler, "A History of the Urantia Movement," at <http://www.urantia.org/pub/ahotum.html>.
- "Where Did *The Urantia Book* Come From?" at <http://www.urantia.org/about.html#Where> (Dec. 2, 2003).
- Gardner, *Urantia*, 97-134.
- See Ernest Moyer, *The Birth of a Divine Revelation*, chapters 16-17, at <http://www.world-destiny.org/tocp.htm>.
- Gardner, *Urantia*, 114-122.
- Ibid, 116.
- Sadler, "A History of the Urantia Movement," at <http://www.urantia.org/pub/ahotum.html>.
- Ibid.
- See Moyer, *The Birth of a Divine Revelation*, chapters 34, 37, and 43 at <http://www.world-destiny.org/tocp.htm>.
- Sadler, "A History of the Urantia Movement," at <http://www.urantia.org/pub/ahotum.html>.
- For more information, see Gardner, *Urantia*, 321-57.
- Gardner, *Urantia*, 126. See also Moyer, *The Birth of a Divine Revelation*, chapter 43, at <http://www.world-destiny.org/tocp.htm>.
- Ibid.
- Gardner, *Urantia*, 125.
- Ibid., 25.

- For example, see Sadler, *The Truth About Spiritualism* (Chicago: McClurg, 1923), 207-08 and *The Physiology of Faith and Fear* (Chicago: McClurg, 1912), 467.
- Sadler made a distinction between mediums and seers. He viewed the former as those who claim to communicate with the dead; the latter, as those who might genuinely be in touch with some sort of divine reality (see Gardner, *Urantia*, 109). Although Sadler thought it possible that demonic spirits might be behind some mediumistic phenomena, he believed the “sleeping subject” was a seer—not a medium. Nevertheless, if demonic spirits actually exist, and if they can impersonate the spirits of the dead, then why couldn’t such spirits also impersonate celestial beings from higher universes?