

Cross Cultural Apologetics in Uganda

For any speaker, cross-cultural teaching is challenging. So when Pat Zukeran and I were asked to participate in two pastors' training conferences in Uganda, Africa, my prayer life took on a new urgency. Although the official language of Uganda is English, most of its citizens use one of twenty-nine other languages. Uganda is mostly an agricultural society and is somewhat isolated from the Western media. A majority of the pastors had received only a limited education, and would be fortunate to own a Bible much less have books for a theological library. Pat and I realized we would have to adjust the way we normally present our lessons to incorporate word pictures and stories to help the Ugandan translators effectively communicate our messages with this specialized audience.

However, a more central question was whether or not these pastors felt a need for the kind of apologetics information that Probe usually provides. Did they care about arguments for the authority of Scripture or the deity of Christ? Was maintaining a Christian worldview something they would understand or even be interested in? Would defenses against religious pluralism, Mormonism, and Islam be wanted or deemed unnecessary? I fervently prayed for wisdom and discernment as we made our preparations. Thankfully when it came time to go, I experienced a peace as I stepped out in faith. The Lord was sending us and I was eager to see how He would accomplish His plan for the Ugandan pastors!

Our time in Uganda was split into two one-week conferences. The first conference was near the town of Jinja, not far from the country's eastern border with Kenya. This town is on the shores of Lake Victoria, near the headwaters of the Nile River. Our actual conference location was a 30 minute van ride

to what we later discovered was the first church in Uganda, built in the 1880s by the Anglicans. Most of the attendees were lay pastors in area churches along with a few priests. We later discovered that the Anglican priests were responsible for as many as twenty churches and spent most of their time marrying, baptizing, and burying members. Much of the work of evangelizing and mentoring new believers fell upon the lay workers. As a result, this group of 125 workers was essential to energizing and equipping the Anglican movement in the region.

Pat opened the conference with a great session on the biblical mandate to be ready to give a reason for the hope that we have in Christ. Some of the pastors admitted that they had never really thought about having to defend what they believe. They would share with their neighbors that they believed about Jesus, but they didn't even think about defending the faith if questions or objections arose. We later discovered that Jinja was the center of Mormon activities in Uganda. The pastors were shocked to hear what Mormons believe concerning the nature of God and specifically the person of Christ. They also responded positively to arguments against religious pluralism acknowledging that they were hearing them for the first time.

For the next leg of the trip, we headed out to Fort Portal to partner with ALARM Ministries on the western border of Uganda next to the Congo. We had received an e-mail from both the Ugandan government and our state department warning us about the ongoing conflict in the Congo. Fortunately, the fighting had not spilled over into Uganda. Other than refugees entering into the country we did not notice any problems.

It turns out that the group of pastors in Fort Portal was especially passionate about the apologetics material Pat and I covered during the six hours each day. They were experiencing a direct challenge



from Islam and had little information with which to respond. Many of them felt the burden to defend their faith from the rising influx of money and mosques from Libya. Libya's ruler Muammar Kaddafi has taken an interest in Uganda. In Fort Portal he has built a large, gold-domed mosque and a mansion for the local fifteen-year-old tribal king. Local Muslims have been targeting pastors and their sons by offering money and even cars to those who would convert to Islam. Sadly, some have done so.

In response, Pat and I decided to change our scheduled topics to make the last day entirely focused on Islam. I did a session on the history of the religion and its basic beliefs while Pat covered apologetic strategies to use when talking with a Muslim. At the end, one pastor jumped to his feet and began shouting in the local dialect. We wondered what we might have said to upset him and looked to the translator. Translated he said,

"For years the Muslims have challenged us and we've never been able to answer their challenges. Today, our teachers have provided answers and addressed the issues they bring up. Now for the first time I feel we are equipped to answer them when they come for their crusades here in Fort Portal!"

Another pastor agreed with him and stood up to say,

“For too long we have given bad answers or just beat around the bush. Now we can provide solid answers!”

Then a third pastor exclaimed,

“After receiving my new Bible (given to them by the mission trip funds) and hearing the teaching today, I love God’s Word more than ever!”



With that, they began celebrating by raising their new Bibles above their heads, dancing and singing a song titled, “Heaven and earth will pass away but God’s Word will endure forever.” It was a very moving for us to see the joy in their hearts

because of our teaching.

Our other material also connected as well. I spoke about temptations all Christians experience when life becomes difficult. We in the U.S. tend to trust in our wealth, technology, and entertainment when we should be turning to God for strength and endurance. In Africa, the tendency is to revert to the traditional African religions that include local witch doctors and ancestor worship. We had a number of good discussions about trusting only in God and the truth revealed in Scripture rather than in other belief systems and unbiblical practices.


Our time in Uganda reconfirmed the need for apologetics regardless of location and culture. Although the challenges may be different, Christians everywhere need to have confidence in the gospel message if they are going to take it into the world. It is our prayer that we left our brothers and sisters in Uganda with tools that will equip them to be more effective ambassadors for Christ.

© 2008 Probe Ministries

Reasonable Faith

Reasonable Faith

One of the finest Christian philosophers of our day is William Lane Craig. Although he's become very well known for his debates with atheists and skeptics, he's also a prolific writer. To date, he has authored or edited over thirty books and more than a hundred scholarly articles.^[1] His published work explores such fascinating topics as the evidence for the existence of God, the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, divine foreknowledge and human freedom, and God's relationship to time. In 2007 he started a web-based apologetics ministry called Reasonable Faith (www.reasonablefaith.org). The site features both scholarly and popular articles written by Craig, audio and video recordings of some of his debates, lectures, and interviews, answers to questions from his readers, and much more.

 But before he launched the Reasonable Faith Web site, Craig had also authored a book by the same title. One of the best apologetics books on the market, a revised and updated third edition was recently released. His friend and colleague, the

philosopher J. P. Moreland, endorsed Craig's ministry with these words:

It is hard to overstate the impact that William Lane Craig has had for the cause of Christ. He is simply the finest Christian apologist of the last half century, and his academic work justifies ranking him among the top one percent of practicing philosophers in the Western world. Besides that, he is a winsome ambassador for Christ, an exceptional debater, and a man with the heart of an evangelist. . . . I do not know of a single thinker who has done more to raise the bar of Christian scholarship in our generation than Craig. He is one of a kind, and I thank God for his life and work.[\[2\]](#)

Although the book has been described as “an admirable defense of basic Christian faith,”[\[3\]](#) many readers will find the content quite advanced. According to Craig, “*Reasonable Faith* is intended primarily to serve as a textbook for seminary level courses on Christian apologetics.”[\[4\]](#) For those without much prior training in philosophy, theology, and apologetics, this book will make for some very demanding reading in places. But for those who want to seriously grapple with an informed and compelling case for the truth of Christianity, this book will richly repay one's careful and patient study.

Although we cannot possibly do it justice, in the remainder of this article we will briefly consider at least some of the reasons why Craig believes that biblical Christianity is an eminently reasonable faith.

The Absurdity of Life Without God

Imagine for a moment that there is no God. What implications would this have for human life? Science tells us that the universe is not eternal, but that it rather had a beginning. But if there is no God, then the universe must have come into

being, uncaused, out of nothing! What's more, the origin of life is nothing more than an unintended by-product of matter, plus time, plus chance.{5} No one planned or purposed for life to arise, for if there is no God, there was no one to plan or purpose it. And human beings? We are just the unpredictable result of a long evolutionary process that never had us in mind. In fact, if one were to rewind the history of life to its beginning, and allow the evolutionary process to start anew, it's virtually certain that none of us would be here to think about it! After all, without an intelligent Agent guiding this long and complicated process, the chances that our species would accidentally emerge a second time is practically zero.{6}

Depressing as it is, this little thought experiment provides the appropriate backdrop for Craig's discussion of the absurdity of life without God. In his view, if God does not exist, then human life is ultimately without meaning, value, or purpose. After all, if human beings are merely the accidental by-products of the unintended forces of nature, then what possible meaning *could* human life have? If there is no God, then we were not created for a *purpose*; we were merely "coughed" into existence by mindless material processes.

Of course, some might wonder why we couldn't just create some meaning for our lives, or give the universe a meaning of our own. But as Craig observes, "the universe does not really acquire meaning just because *I* happen to give it one for suppose I give the universe one meaning, and you give it another. Who is right? The answer, of course, is neither one. For the universe without God remains objectively meaningless, no matter how we regard it."{7}

Like it or not, if God does not exist, then the universe—and our very lives—are ultimately meaningless and absurd. The difficulty is, however, that no one can really live consistently and happily with such a view.{8} Although merely recognizing this fact does absolutely nothing to show that God

actually exists, it should at least motivate us to sincerely investigate the matter with an open heart and an open mind. So let's now briefly consider some of the *reasons* for believing that there really is a God.

The Existence of God

In the latest edition of *Reasonable Faith*, Craig offers a number of persuasive arguments for believing that God does, in fact, exist. Unfortunately, we can only skim the surface of these arguments here. But if you want to go deeper, his book is a great place to start.

After a brief historical survey of some of the major kinds of arguments that scholars have offered for believing that God exists, Craig offers his own defense for each of them. He begins with a defense of what is often called the *cosmological* argument. This argument takes its name from the Greek word *kosmos*, which means "world." It essentially argues from the existence of the cosmos, or world, to the existence of a First Cause or Sufficient Reason for the world's existence.[{9}](#) Next he defends a *teleological*, or design, argument. The name for this argument comes from the Greek word *telos*, which means "end." According to Craig, this argument attempts to infer "an intelligent designer of the universe, just as we infer an intelligent designer for any product in which we discern evidence of purposeful adaptation of means to some end (*telos*)."[{10}](#) After the design argument, he offers a defense of the *moral* argument. This argument "implies the existence of a Being that is the embodiment of the ultimate Good," as well as "the source of the objective moral values we experience in the world."[{11}](#) Finally, he defends what is known as the *ontological* argument. Ontology is the study of being, and this much-debated argument "attempts to prove from the very concept of God that God exists."[{12}](#)

Taken together, these arguments provide a powerful case for

the existence of God. As Craig presents them, the cosmological argument implies the existence of an eternal, immaterial, unimaginably powerful, personal Creator of the universe. The design argument reveals an intelligent designer of the cosmos. The moral argument reveals a Being who is the transcendent source and standard of moral goodness. And the ontological argument shows that if God's existence is even possible, then He must exist!

But suppose we grant that all of these arguments are sound. Why think that *Christianity* is true? Many *non-Christian* religions believe in God. Why think that Christianity is the one that got it right? In order to answer this question we must now confront the central figure of Christianity: Jesus of Nazareth.

The Son of Man

When the previous edition of *Reasonable Faith* was published in 1994, most New Testament scholars thought that Jesus had never really claimed to be the Messiah, or Lord, or Son of God. But a lot has happened in the intervening fourteen years, and "the balance of scholarly opinion on Jesus' use of Christological titles may have actually tipped in the opposite direction."[\[13\]](#)

For example, we have excellent grounds for believing that Jesus often referred to himself as "the Son of Man."[\[14\]](#) Although some believe that in using this title Jesus was merely referring to himself as a human being, the evidence suggests that he actually meant much more than that. Note, for example, that "Jesus did not refer to himself as 'a son of man,' but as '*the* Son of Man.'" [\[15\]](#) His use of the definite article is a crucially important observation, especially in light of Daniel 7:13-14.

In this passage Daniel describes a vision in which "one like a

son of man" comes before God with the clouds of heaven. God gives this person an everlasting kingdom and we are told that "all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him" (Dan. 7:14). It's clear that Daniel's "son of man" is much more than a human being, for he's viewed as an appropriate object of worship. Since no one is worthy of worship but God alone (see Luke 4:8), the "son of man" must actually be divine, as well as human.

According to Mark, at Jesus' trial the high priest pointedly asked him if he was the Christ (or Messiah), "the Son of the Blessed One." Jesus' response is astonishing. "I am," he said, "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:61-62). Here Jesus not only affirms that he is the Messiah and Son of God, he also explicitly identifies himself with the coming Son of Man prophesied by Daniel.[\[16\]](#) Since we have excellent reasons for believing that Jesus actually made this radical claim at his trial, we're once again confronted with that old trilemma: if Jesus really claimed to be divine, then he must have been either a lunatic, a liar, or the divine Son of Man!

Now most people would probably agree that Jesus was not a liar or a lunatic, but they might still find it difficult to accept his claim to divinity. They might wonder if we have any good reasons, independent of Jesus' claims, for believing his claims to be true. As a matter of fact we do!

The Resurrection of Jesus

Shortly after Jesus' crucifixion, on the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter stood before a large crowd of people gathered in Jerusalem and made a truly astonishing claim: God had raised Jesus from the dead, thereby vindicating his radical personal claims to be both Lord and Messiah (see Acts 2:32-36). The reason this claim was so incredible was that the "Jews had no

conception of a Messiah who, instead of triumphing over Israel's enemies, would be shamefully executed by them as a criminal." [\[17\]](#) Indeed, according to the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, "anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse" (21:22-23). So how could a man who had been crucified as a criminal possibly be the promised Messiah? If we reject the explanation of the New Testament, that God raised Jesus from the dead, it's very difficult to see how early Christianity could have ever gotten started. So are there good reasons to believe that Jesus really was raised from the dead?

According to Craig, the case for Jesus' resurrection rests "upon the evidence for three great, independently established facts: the empty tomb, the resurrection appearances, and the origin of the Christian faith." [\[18\]](#) He marshals an extensive array of arguments and evidence in support of each fact, as well as critiquing the various naturalistic theories which have been proposed to avoid the resurrection. He concludes by noting that since God exists, miracles are possible. And once one acknowledges this, "it's hard to deny that the resurrection of Jesus is the best explanation of the facts." [\[19\]](#)

This brings us to the significance of this event. According to the German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg:

The resurrection of Jesus acquires such decisive meaning, not merely because someone . . . has been raised from the dead, but because it is Jesus of Nazareth, whose execution was instigated by the Jews because he had blasphemed against God. If this man was raised from the dead, then . . . God . . . has committed himself to him. . . . The resurrection can only be understood as the divine vindication of the man whom the Jews had rejected as a blasphemer. [\[20\]](#)

In other words, by raising Jesus from the dead, God has put

His seal of approval (as it were) on Jesus' radical personal claims to be the Messiah, the Son of God, and the divine Son of Man! This forces each of us to answer the same haunting question Jesus once asked his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" (Matt. 16:15).

Notes

1. See "About William Lane Craig" at www.reasonablefaith.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about_william_lane_craig, accessed 22 August 2008.
2. J. P. Moreland, cited in William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 1.
3. C. Behan McCullagh, cited in Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 1.
4. Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 12.
5. Ibid., 76.
6. In the minds of some people, this is a rather controversial claim. But it's been convincingly defended by naturalist authors like Stephen J. Gould and Michael Shermer. For a brief defense by Shermer, please see the articles on "Glorious Contingency" at www.metanexus.net/Magazine/ArticleDetail/tabid/68/tabid/72/Default.aspx?aid=27, accessed 4 September 2008.
7. Ibid., 79.
8. Ibid., 78.
9. Ibid., 98.
10. Ibid., 99-100.
11. Ibid., 104.
12. Ibid., 95.
13. Ibid., 301.
14. See Craig's discussion on pp. 315-318.
15. Ibid., 315.
16. Ibid., 317.
17. Ibid., 388.
18. Ibid., 360-61.
18. Ibid., 399.

20. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Jesu Geschichte und unsere Geschichte," in *Glaube und Wirklichkeit* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1975), 92-94; cited in Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 399.

© 2008 Probe Ministries

"How Should I Respond to 'It's All Right to Do Anything as Long as It Doesn't Hurt Anybody'?"

I have a question about some of the new age mentality that I have encountered in the more recent months. As apologetics is a bit of a hobby for me, I love learning what other people think and believe. It seems that as I ask around more and more, people are always saying the same thing. In more words they always seem to say "I can do whatever I want as long as it doesn't hurt anybody." I know that this is by no means a new or uncommon answer, but it seems to be growing to me. Usually I address this with a series of questions which will cause them to backtrack and correct themselves, something like this: It is not all right to hurt people? Do you count as a person? Are you allowed to hurt yourself? Is emotional harm all right? How did you determine that it was not all right to hurt people? Who enforces this rule? Are you making a connection between church and state? How did the world come into existence? And so on. My philosophy is that sooner or later they will be forced to acknowledge that their view is full of holes, yet it appears to me that this way doesn't work. I actually should have realized this sooner, because I now realize that those people really do not know what they

believe, and that their choices are based on emotions. Thus, I am asking you how you would suggest responding to the view that “It is all right to do anything as long as it doesn’t hurt anybody”?

I’m afraid you’ve hit the wall of the skeptical postmodern mentality. When a person doesn’t believe anyone can know what is true about anything, and adopts the “true for me” mentality, the results are an amazing batch of contradictory ideas and no reason to try to make them consistent. People toss together beliefs according to what seems right at the moment, changing beliefs like changing outfits; ideas are subject to fashion just as clothes are. After trying to reason with people who think as you have described, you want to bang someone’s head against the wall – theirs or your own (I don’t suggest either!).

Because on the level of ideas contradictory beliefs can be held with such amazing ease, one typically cannot convince a person on that level. I say “typically” because some can be convinced at least that their ideas are inconsistent and that that is a problem. You just have to try drawing the person into a conversation and see what happens. For many it takes real life situations to drive home the point.

I recommend you find a copy of Francis Schaeffer’s *The God Who Is There* and focus especially on the last section: “Speaking Historic Christianity Into the Twentieth-Century Climate.” He deals with this issue there. One of his main points is that any religion or philosophy which isn’t Christian must result in some kind of inconsistency in a person’s life because we were made by God to live in God’s universe. False beliefs put us at odds with the universe and with ourselves. So, for instance, a person who says there is no difference between good and evil will be quite upset if you pour boiling water on him. He might even say you were wrong! Of course, I don’t recommend actually pulling off such stunts to prove a point! What one can do, however, is gently (I Pe. 3:15) question a

person about an inconsistency between what the person says she believes and how she acts. It's like turning a light on and letting the other person see the problem for herself.

One thing we apologists easily forget is tact. One person defined it as "the ability to make a point without sticking someone with it." Work toward encouragement and very subtle enlightenment rather than conquering in your manner. Be committed to truth, but also be committed to people and to showing the attractiveness of truth to them rather than whipping them with it.

If you have any questions after reading Schaeffer's book (or at least the above-mentioned segment of it) write to me directly.

Rick Wade

See Also:

[As Long As It Doesn't Hurt Anyone Else](#) by Rick Wade

"How Do I Talk to My Friend Who's Deceived by Eastern Thought?"

I am hoping you can help me with this huge dilemma: how to talk to a friend who has rejected Christ for Eastern religious thought. I am so ashamed that I have not kept very close to my Lord through His Word, so now I can't think how to answer this friend who is lost deep in Eastern thought. I am hurtfully

speechless when she spews out the “Jesus was a good guy...God is all good and would never create a hell...we are all good...there is no sin” stuff. I am very uneasy around her. I have to keep praying in my mind to keep her awful lies out of my head. Can you help me?!?!?

My friend is visiting her dying mother, and will not be here long. So, I am desperate for quick help. I am so grateful for any help and resources you can point me to.

You sound like you are in such emotional and spiritual pain! Bless you for carrying such a deep burden for your friend.

I think the best response to the “no hell/we are all good” stuff—showing how deceived she is!—is to go for the heart. You said she is tending her dying mother, so apparently she cares for her mother. You might try this approach: “What if someone broke into your house and raped and murdered your mother? You know it could happen; it happens every day. What would you want to happen then? Would you send ‘happy thoughts’ to the raping murderer because he’s a good soul? Or would every shred of your being cry out for justice?”

“I know you; I know you would want justice. And you know why? Because you are made in the image of God, and God is not only good and loving, He is also just. He wants evil punished. He promises He WILL punish evil. Don’t you find that comforting?”

“Eastern philosophy doesn’t fit reality, because we know there IS evil, there IS sin, and the cry of our hearts is that evil and sin be addressed. And when you go back home, I beg you to read and research and think about the death of Christ. If He was only a good man, why did He have to die? If He was only a man, how could He come back to life, just as He promised He would?”

I suggest you leave your friend with questions instead of preaching the answers, and praying up a storm that the Holy Spirit will put hooks on your questions and not give her any peace until she deals with the truth and its implications.

I hope this helps!

In His grip,

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

Bart Ehrman's Complaint and the Reliability of the Bible

The academician and former evangelical Dr. Bart Ehrman now claims we cannot trust the biblical documents. Don Closson responds with reasons why we can.

Introduction

While traditional Christian beliefs never seem to suffer from a shortage of critics, the diversity and intensity of the current group of antagonists is impressive. We have the so called "New Atheists," mostly consisting of individuals from the scientific community, modern day Gnostics both in academia and of *Da Vinci Code* fame, as well as Scientologists, Jehovah's Witnesses and other groups too many to mention. However, one critic stands out, primarily because of his academic pedigree and the impact that his books are having in the popular culture and among Christians.

Bart Ehrman is a product of evangelicalism's center. Educated at Moody Bible Institute and Wheaton College, he knows how

conservative Christians think because he used to be one. His recent book *Misquoting Jesus* has been called “one of the unlikeliest bestsellers” of the year, and with it he has managed to bring to the public’s attention the obscure world of New Testament textual criticism.

Having professed faith in Christ while in high school, Ehrman went off to college with a simple trust in the New Testament text, a trust that included verbal, plenary inspiration. In other words, he believed that God had inspired and preserved every word of the Bible. By the time Ehrman began doing graduate work at Princeton, he was having serious reservations about the text and its source. He now considers himself an agnostic and writes books that question most of what his fellow classmates at Moody and Wheaton believe.

How did a bright, well-educated evangelical become so disillusioned? Even Dr. Ehrman’s detractors acknowledge his credentials and intelligence. One book that attempts to refute his views says that he is “known for his indefatigable scholarship and provocative opinions.”[\[1\]](#) The provocative opinions will be the focus of this article.

Just what is Ehrman’s complaint regarding the New Testament text? His first point is that we do not have the original manuscripts of the New Testament, and the Greek copies that we do have were made too long after the originals. He also says that these Greek manuscripts contain more variants, or places where the manuscripts are different, than there are words in the entire New Testament itself. Finally, he complains that the Gospels were not written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, and that, whoever the real authors of these texts were, they were not eyewitnesses to the life and ministry of Jesus. As Ehrman sees it, these facts create an insurmountable problem for Christians.

Our focus will be on Dr. Ehrman’s assertion that the variants in the New Testament text have corrupted it to the point that

it cannot be trusted to communicate God's truth to us today.

Textual Variants and the Autographa

Ehrman begins his critique with the fact that we do not have the original documents, called autographs, of the New Testament Gospels, letters, and other documents. Nothing new here; this is acknowledged by virtually everyone. But he goes on to add that the copies we do have, even the earliest copies, aren't accurate representations of the originals, and, as a result, what the NT authors wrote has been lost. Ehrman and others note that the approximately 5,700 Greek NT manuscripts we possess differ from one another in as many as 400,000 places even though there are only around 138,000 words in the NT. Ehrman writes, "How does it help us to say that the Bible is the inerrant word of God if we don't have the words that God inerrantly inspired, but only the words copied by the scribes—sometimes correctly but sometimes (many times!) incorrectly?" [\[2\]](#)

The important question is, Do the manuscripts available today accurately convey the truth that God wanted to communicate to those in the first century? I believe that they do, and so do many others.

Conservative Bible scholars argue that although there are many scribal errors and additions in the texts, even in the oldest texts, the vast majority of them do not change its meaning. In his book *Reinventing Jesus*, Daniel Wallace points out that the overwhelming majority of the differences or variants in the texts are insignificant, and he offers four categories of textual errors to help determine if a variant is both meaningful and viable.

The first category of variants, and by far the largest, is the least significant. They are mostly spelling differences, like the difference between the way we spell "color" and the way

the British spell “colour.” This category also includes nonsense errors, scribal mistakes that result in words that either don’t exist, or the misspelling of a word that is similar to another. For example, in one early manuscript the Greek word *kai* was written instead of *kurios* (*kai* is the conjunction *and*; *kurios* means *Lord*). The first word makes no sense while the second is supported by many other manuscripts. None of the variants described here change the meaning of the NT text.

The use of articles provides another source of variants. Some NT manuscripts use the definite article with a proper name and sometimes they don’t. For instance, for Luke 2:16 some manuscripts have “the Mary” but in others we find just “Mary.” Although Greek may use the definite article with proper names, English does not, so in either case they will be translated just “Mary.”

Another type of variant is called transposition, where two manuscripts have different word orders for the same passage but the meaning isn’t changed. Greek uses different endings on verbs and nouns rather than word order to convey meaning. In English, “Paul loves God” has a different meaning than “God loves Paul.” But in Greek, even if the word order is different, the meaning isn’t if the correct suffixes are used. Differences in word order can be used to change the emphasis of a passage but not the meaning. So two manuscripts might have different word orders but translate into English the same way.

Some variants involve synonyms. In this case, the translation might actually be changed by exchanging one word for another but the meaning of the passage is not. These alterations often occurred because the Scriptures were being read in public. Some long passages didn’t identify the subject; for example the Gospel of Mark goes on for eighty-nine verses using only pronouns for Jesus. Church books called lectionaries would

occasionally change a “he” to “Jesus” or “the Lord” or “teacher,” making a public reading easier. Eventually these changes found their way back into the NT manuscripts. Again, the meaning of the New Testament was not changed.

Another category of manuscript differences are those that might actually change the meaning of a passage, but it’s fairly easy to show that the variant does not go back to the original wording of the text. For example, a late medieval manuscript has for 1 Thessalonians 2:9 “the gospel of Christ” instead of “the gospel of God” that is found in almost all other manuscripts. This is a meaningful difference, but it is not viable. As Daniel Wallace argues, “There is little chance that one late manuscript could contain the original wording when the textual tradition is uniformly on the side of another reading.”^[3]

Textual Variants that Are Meaningful and Viable

The last group of variants or differences in the New Testament Greek texts are those that are both meaningful—in other words, they actually change the meaning of the text—and viable—in the sense that they cannot easily be explained away by looking at other manuscript evidence or external factors. This is by far the smallest group of variants or differences in the manuscripts, making up less than one percent of the total. Let’s look at a couple of examples.

Some manuscripts have Romans 5:1 using a Greek letter called an *omicron* to create the word *echomen*; others use an *omega* resulting in the word *echōmen*. Thus the passage could be saying either “We have peace” or “Let us have peace” with God, depending on this single disputed letter. But how different are the two results? The bottom line is that neither usage contradicts the overall message of the New Testament.

Another example is found in 1 John 1:4. Again, a single contested letter means the difference between the passage saying “Thus we are writing these things so that *our* joy may be complete,” or “Thus we are writing these things so that *your* joy may be complete.” The meaning is certainly affected by the change, but neither translation violates Christian doctrine. In fact, as Wallace argues “Whether the author is speaking of his joy or the readers’ joy, the obvious point of this verse is that the writing of this letter brings joy.”[\[4\]](#)

The largest textual variant in the New Testament is found in the last chapter of Mark’s Gospel. What many consider to be the best and earliest manuscripts end at verse eight. However, the vast majority of manuscripts add twelve more verses to the text. While scholars continue to debate where the actual ending is to the book of Mark, the point is that no doctrinal teaching or truth is affected by the dispute.

Although Dr. Ehrman can point to places in the NT text where scribes either purposely changed the text or allowed errors to creep in, Christian doctrine is not in peril. In his book *Misquoting Truth*, Timothy Jones writes, “In every case in which two or more options remain possible, every possible option simply reinforces truths that are already clearly present in the writings of that particular author and in the New Testament as a whole; there is no point at which any of the possible options would require readers to rethink an essential belief about Jesus or to doubt the historical integrity of the New Testament.”[\[5\]](#)

From One Fundamentalism to Another

What might be driving the current criticism of the New Testament?

There is an old saying that one should not “throw out the baby with the bathwater.” I feel that this is exactly what Bart

Ehrman has done in his book *Misquoting Jesus*. He first assumes that for the New Testament to be reliable it must be perfectly transmitted across the centuries; ninety-nine percent just won't do. He then highlights textual variants that have been known by New Testament scholars for decades and declares that whatever truth was in the Scriptures has been lost forever.

Ehrman seems to have gone from one form of fundamentalism to another. In his earlier state he held to an idealistic view of the New Testament that was unrealistic and unnecessary. Later, when his ideal view was shattered by his study of the Greek text, he went over to an opposite, equally unnecessary view that the text was of little or no value. As Wallace explains, "It seems that Bart's black and white mentality as a fundamentalist has hardly been affected as he slogged through the years and trials of life and learning, even when he came out on the other side of the theological spectrum. He still sees things without sufficient nuancing, he overstates his case, and he is entrenched in the security that his own views are right." [\[6\]](#) He adds that "Bart Ehrman is one of the most brilliant and creative textual critics I've ever known, and yet his biases are so strong that, at times, he cannot even acknowledge them." [\[7\]](#)

It seems that Dr. Ehrman and others have fallen for what has been called the "Myth of Absolute Certainty." [\[8\]](#) This myth argues that as time goes by we are getting further and further from the words recorded in the original New Testament documents. Some use this myth to argue for the supremacy of the King James Version of the Bible. Others, like Ehrman, use it to argue for a position of complete despair, claiming that we can no longer pretend to have anything like an inerrant text.

It's important to realize that we not only have virtually all the documents that were used for the translation of the King James Bible, but we now have one hundred times the number of Greek manuscripts that were available when the King James

Bible was written, and over four hundred of these manuscripts predate the earliest ones available to its King James authors.[{9}](#)

If, in its most basic sense, inerrancy means to tell the truth, we have a New Testament text that is more than capable of accurately conveying the truth that God intended for the church in the first century and today.

Notes

1. J. Ed Komoszewski, M. James Sawyer, and Daniel B. Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus*, (Kregel Publications, 2006), 110.
2. Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, (HarperCollins, 2005), 7.
3. Ibid., 59.
4. Ibid., 62.
5. Timothy Paul Jones, *Misquoting Truth* (IVP, 2007), 55.
6. Daniel Wallace, "The Gospel according to Bart," found at bible.org/article/gospel-according-bart on September 24, 2019.
7. Ibid.
8. *Reinventing Jesus*, 66.
9. Ibid., 67.

© 2007 Probe Ministries, updated 2019

"Can You Suggest Graduation Gifts With Worldview In Mind?"

We are desiring to give each of our graduates an age appropriate gift, i.e., 8th grade, High School, and College, for graduation. We want to give them something to help them

think through the Christian worldview in light of the culture they are being raised in.

Great question! We are in the “business” of providing such resources for kids and adults especially useful for those headed to secular university or college so anything on our site is appropriate, as well as the books & sites below.

The [Reasons to Believe](#) section of Probe.org is a great place for starters.

Resources written for children up to about 8th grade:

Here are Amazon.com listings by journalist turned Christian apologetics author extraordinaire Lee Strobel (note emphasis on titles very similar but not the same):

[*The Case for a **Creator** for Kids*](#)

[*The Case for **Christ** for Kids*](#)

[*The Case for **Faith** for Kids*](#)

[*Off My Case for Kids: 12 Stories to Help You Defend Your Faith*](#)

[*The Case for a Creator: A Journalist Investigates Scientific Evidence That Points Toward God*](#) (more grown-up edition)

[*The Case for Faith—Student Edition*](#)

Also, see:

[*My Heart Christ's Home: Retold for Children*](#) (don't know grade level) by Robert Boyd Munger OR

[*My Heart Christ's Home*](#) (original)

Other suggestions for high school grads, possibly 8th graders:

[Ethix: Being Bold in a Whatever World](#), by Sean McDowell (son of Josh McDowell, good author, speaker, thinker in his own right; this book written somewhat to youth leaders, perhaps—I've only sampled it; great illustrations especially about absolute truth vs. relative truth and morality)

[How to Stay Christian in College](#), by J. Budziszewski—My wife and I give this one to high school grads for obvious reasons, given the title. J. Budziszewski is a one-of-a-kind critical thinker who matches his intellect with caring for kids. See his columns under Ask Theophilus at Boundless.org—excellent narratives of paraphrased professor-student conversations about deep, real life issues from a Christian worldview.

Note: I suggest the 1999 edition, although there's a newer one (Think books, a NavPress imprint). This older one contains many useful links, many from a site I used to edit:

[LeaderU.com](#). Massively useful for scholarly work like writing papers, essays, debates. Most or all of the links cited in the book should still work.

[Chris Chrisman Goes to College: and Faces the Challenges of Relativism, Individualism and Pluralism](#). From the master of worldview, James Sire, brought down off the proverbial shelf for laypeople, this fictional account of three new collegians creatively tackles the topics in the book's subtitle. Particularly interesting: Sire "identifies no fewer than six types of relativism," according to the cover.

For college or high school grads:

[Welcome To College: A Christ-Followers Guide for the Journey](#), by Jonathan Morrow. This sweeping, but accessible and succinct volume contains 42 chapters that ask: What do

Christians really believe? Can I put that into words for unbelievers? What is the nature of truth and how do we know things? What about sex? Finances? How should a Christian worldview inform my entire life and experience? and much more. Packs a worldview wallop.

[Making Your Faith Your Own, A Guidebook for Believers With Questions](#), by Teresa Vining. See the top review of a pastor's wife.

The second review at Amazon.com of the above book is by my colleague, Sue Bohlin, whose responses on scores of questions from believers and unbelievers, posted here on Probe.org, are worth their weight in gold:

[Probe Answers Your Email](#). Look for Sue Bohlin's responses particularly, especially in the Marriage & Family, Sexuality, Homosexuality and Gender sections, but elsewhere as well. Michael Gleghorn is great on theology & philosophy. This set of 500-600 answers is good for high school, college, adult, sometimes younger, depending on topics.

[My Utmost for His Highest](#) (latest edition), Oswald Chambers

A subscription to our own [Probe-Alert](#) e-letter (always free, every two weeks, relevant new materials and more) might be a good "freebie"—they'll have to approve it via email. Or, to avoid that and make it a one-step operation, send a list of emails to me and I'll mass subscribe them manually.

I hope you find this helpful. God bless you and your graduates and may they thrive in their faith as they move to their next life-step.

Byron Barlowe

© 2007 Probe Ministries

Is This the Last Christian Generation? – The Future of American Christianity

Steve Cable joins Josh McDowell in asking about the future of the American church. Do Christians have the will to turn around the degradation of biblical beliefs and restore the church to a state of vibrant belief in Christ touching the lives of everyone in the country? According to Josh's research, we need to change the trends to have a chance of growing the church.

The Concern

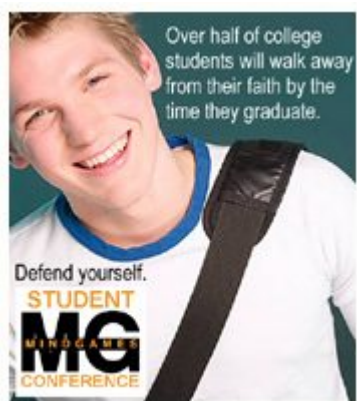
Is this the last Christian generation in America? Mark Oestreicher of Youth Specialties stated recently in *Christianity Today*, "There are a lot of people who've had this nagging sense that we're missing the mark somehow . . . kids seem happy and willing to attend, and engage in our ministries, but five years from now, when they're in college or post-college, they just really aren't connecting with real faith, let alone church."

I know what you are thinking: "This is not new." Of course, I agree. For over thirty years, Probe Ministries has worked to create a strong foundation for Christian teens.

However, some believe it has reached a dangerous new level. This upswing has prompted Josh McDowell to co-write a new book with Dave Bellis. Josh states, "the decision to call this [book] *The Last Christian Generation* was not made lightly nor was it done for sensationalism. I sincerely believe unless something is done now to change the spiritual state of our

young people – you will become the last Christian generation!"[{1}](#)

Is Josh's concern justified? Will this trend correct itself or will we follow in the secular footsteps of Western Europe?



How *are* we doing at converting church involvement by teens into a lifelong relationship with Christ? A 2006 study indicates that over eighty percent of today's teens attend church for a period of at least two months during their teenage years. What an opportunity! The bad news is that only one out of four of those church youth are still spiritually engaged by age twenty-nine;[{2}](#) that is, they are still actively attending church, reading the Bible, or praying. In comparison, roughly twice as many adults in their forties are spiritually engaged.

An earlier study looked at the beliefs of teens involved in evangelical churches. Over two-thirds of these young people believe

- that there is no absolute moral truth,
- that Christianity is about showing bad people how to live better,
- that there is no way to tell which religion is true,
- that Jesus is not the Son of the one true God.

And, over half believe

- that Jesus did not rise from the dead.

Is it any wonder that these young people readily abandon their Christian involvement when confronted with a hostile culture?

The Causes

Let's consider some potential causes three out of four churching teens become disengaged from Christianity during their twenties.

One cause may be the way we define and measure youth ministry. As adults abdicate their training responsibility, our youth are isolated as their own congregation. The measure of success is numerical attendance rather than instilling a life long discipline for spiritual growth. Church becomes a series of fun activities interspersed with encouragement to avoid risky behaviors.

A second factor is primarily teaching topical lessons on Christian rules rather than laying a strong foundation of truth. As our teens move into college, professors, peers, and the popular media all portray authentic Christianity in a negative light. It takes a strong foundation to choose to endure hostility when one can adopt a so-called "private faith" and avoid the confrontation. As you know, soldiers participate in exercises simulating the most effective tactics of their opponents before being sent onto the battlefield. Yet, in training our teens, we often avoid exposing them to the tough questions lest some of them are put off by the experience.

A third factor is allowing teens to be content with a second-hand faith. In Joshua, we learn that "Israel served the LORD . . . all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, and had known all the deeds of the LORD" (24:31). After these elders who had personally experienced the Lord died, most in Israel fell away from serving God. More recently, during the Welsh

revival of 1904, over 100,000 conversions were recorded in less than five months. The impact was so pervasive that police duties were reduced to providing quartets for prayer meetings. A century later, church attendance in Wales is at an all-time low. Only nineteen percent of UK teenagers say they had a religious faith (as compared to over seventy percent for US teens). Luis Palau summed up the Welsh experience by noting, "God has no grandchildren." Teens who attend church to live out their parents' faith find it easy to leave the faith to conform to the expectations of their new authority figures.

These three factors have been around since the inception of Probe. A new factor, somewhat unique to today's culture is a "distorted worldview filter" unwittingly adopted by our youth and adults. This filter tells them:

- Truth is relative, not absolute.
- Science and spirituality are at odds.
- Science confirms that I am nothing but insignificant dirt.
- An irrational, spiritual tradition can help me cope with this harsh reality.
- However, I am in no position to critically evaluate someone else's tradition.

With this distorted filter in place, even solid biblical teaching can leave teens unprepared to stand firm in their faith.

The Last Christian Generation lists some of the concepts distorted by this filter, for example:[{3}](#)

- Truth now means whatever is right for you.
- Tolerance means accepting that each individual's values and lifestyles are equally valid.

- Moral judgments mean bigoted attitudes we have no right to hold.

Many teens are synthesizing Christian teaching and popular culture into a new personal religion. In their 2005 book, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*,^{4} the authors found that religious teens tend to hold a vague group of functionally religious beliefs the authors termed “moralistic therapeutic deism.”^{5} Its key tenets are:

- God is distant and uninvolved in daily life.
- But I can call on God as a “cosmic therapist” when I have a problem.
- My purpose is to be happy and feel good about myself.
- If I avoid being an intolerant jerk, I will go to heaven.

Although these beliefs could be considered theistic, they definitely are not evangelical Christianity.

What happens when these beliefs are put to the test? I’ve known Julie^{6} all her life. Julie consistently attended youth group. She was also tuned into the popular culture. When her circumstances disappointed her, she turned to God as her “cosmic therapist.” When He did not change her circumstances to suit her, she decided that God was not worth her time. Instead, she chose to escape her circumstances through drugs. She had distorted the truth into a perversion that prevented her from having a solid relationship with her Creator.

The Correction

How should we respond to this disturbing trend?

Historically, much of youth ministry has been about getting the crowd in the door and keeping them involved. Recent

studies show we are doing a good job at this function.{7} But we are not doing well if we measure success by how many are still actively involved through their twenties. If the problem is not getting them in the door, it must be in what is happening once they are involved.

Josh McDowell suggests that we need to readjust both what is being taught and how it is being taught.{8} We need to train our youth in a “relational apologetic,” meaning knowing and defending a belief in God as absolute reality revealed through the Bible *and* experiencing this truth lived out in their lives and through the example of others.

What should we teach? Although we should not ignore behavioral issues such as sex, drugs, etc., McDowell calls us to help our teens see the reality of God. If there is a God, it is of paramount importance that we seek to know absolute Truth with a capital T. Consistent with everything the tools of modern science can observe about our universe, they have rational reasons to believe that God has revealed Himself to us through His Word.

McDowell and Bellis suggest teens must learn to know Him as the God of redemption, relationships, and restoration.{9} A clear understanding of each of these aspects serves an important role in countering the tenets of today’s teen religion which we defined above as “moralistic therapeutic deism”:

- Knowing the God of redemption tells them that good people don’t go to heaven; redeemed people go to heaven. Our definition of good is so shallow compared to a transcendent, holy God. We must rely on Him for redemption.
- Knowing the God of relationships tells them God is not a cosmic therapist, but a personal heavenly Father, intimately involved in all aspects of life.

- Knowing the God of restoration highlights that our earthly life is a brief precursor to eternity. This truth changes our central goal to creating eternal value in Christ.

Youth who can articulate these truths have taken a big step to repairing their distorted worldview filter.

Laying a Firm Foundation

McDowell points out that it is not only what we teach but how we teach it that is important.^{10} In America, we have adopted a Hellenistic [Greek] teaching model focused on communicating information and testing whether the student can regurgitate it. In addition, Christianity is often communicated as a set of behavior rules covering one topic at a time, rather than as a deep relationship emulating the character of our heavenly Father. Bits of knowledge and rules for behavior are not a comprehensive worldview.

In contrast to the Hellenistic model, the Hebrew model of Deuteronomy and Proverbs uses a set of ongoing object lessons, applying the character of God to each life situation. The entire inter-generational community is modeling their faith and articulating their biblical worldview. For this model to work, parents and youth leaders must continually express their reasons for believing that Jesus is the truth in a world that says there is no truth. Teens must experience a community of faith willing to trade in a life purpose of being happy and avoiding pain for a life purpose of building eternal value through serving Jesus.

This may sound like a daunting task, but there are ministries that want to come alongside and help in this process. Josh McDowell's ministry is developing study materials and training events specifically designed to fill this need. More information is available at truefoundations.com. Probe Ministries offers the Student *Mind Games* Conference, a week-

long camp designed to equip students to stand firm in their faith through college and beyond.^{11} In addition, Probe offers speakers, curricula and other materials to help parents, youth leaders and students to articulate and live a relational apologetic. You can visit our website at Probe.org.

We know the church will survive and ultimately triumph at the return of Jesus, but there is no promise that America will continue to have a high percentage of evangelical Christians. Four out of five youth in America are giving us a chance to influence the future. I believe God has called all of us to be a part of responding to that challenge.

Notes

1. Josh McDowell & David Bellis, *The Last Christian Generation* (Holiday, Fla.: Green Key Books, 2006).
2. "Most Twentysomethings Put Christianity on the Shelf Following Spiritually Active Teen Years," The Barna Update, Sept. 11, 2006, www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=245.
3. Ibid., 1.
4. Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2005).
5. Bruce Murray, "Understanding the Religious and Spiritual Lives of Teenagers," FACSNET, www.facsnet.org/issues/faith/youth.php.
6. Not her real name.
7. Ibid., 2.
8. Ibid., 1.
9. Ibid., 1.
10. Ibid., 1.
11. More information is available on the Probe Web site at probe.org/mindgames.

Probe Articles Answering The Da Vinci Code

Premier article:

[Redeeming The Da Vinci Code](#)

Michael Gleghorn

Secret Gospels?

[Gospel of Judas](#)

Dr. Patrick Zukeran

[The Gnostic Matrix](#)

Don Closson

[The Dead Sea Scrolls](#)

Dr. Patrick Zukeran

Was Jesus Truly, or Merely *Declared*, God?

[The Case for Christ](#)

Dr. Ray Bohlin

[Jesus' Claims to be God](#)

Sue Bohlin

[The Deity of Christ](#)

Don Closson

[The Council of Nicea](#)

Don Closson

[Ancient Evidence for Jesus from Non-Christian Sources](#)

Michael Gleghorn

[The Self-Understanding of Jesus](#)

Michael Gleghorn

[Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Fiction?](#)

Rusty Wright

[The Resurrection: Fact or Fiction?](#)

Dr. Patrick Zukeran

[The Uniqueness of Jesus](#)

Dr. Patrick Zukeran

[The Da Vinci Code: Who Is Jesus, Really?](#)

Rusty Wright

Can We Trust the Bible?

[Are the Biblical Documents Reliable?](#)

Jimmy Williams

[The New Testament: Can I Trust It?](#)

Rusty Wright and Linda Raney Wright

[The Historical Reliability of the Gospels](#)

Dr. Patrick Zukeran

[Authority of the Bible](#)

Dr. Patrick Zukeran

[The Christian Canon](#)

Don Closson

[The Historical Christ](#)

Rick Wade

[Archaeology and the New Testament](#)

Dr. Patrick Zukeran

[Archeology and the Old Testament](#)

Dr. Patrick Zukeran

Goddess Worship, Ancient Israel and the Church

[Christianity: The Best Thing That Ever Happened to Women](#)

Sue Bohlin

[Feminism](#)

Sue Bohlin

[Wicca: A Biblical Critique](#)

Michael Gleghorn

[Israel's History Written in Advance](#)

Rich Milne

[Scripture and Tradition in the Early Church](#)

Rick Wade

[Goddess Worship](#)

Russ Wise

[The Goddess and the Church](#)

Russ Wise

[The World of Animism](#)

Dr. Patrick Zukeran

The Dead Sea Scrolls Shed Light on the Accuracy of our

Bible

Dr. Patrick Zukeran reviews the discovery of and important historical findings from the Dead Sea Scrolls. The texts discovered provide clear evidence as to the accuracy of our version of the Old Testament and the care with which it was preserved.

The Story of the Scrolls

Worship at the sacred Jerusalem Temple had become corrupt, with seemingly little hope for reform. A group of devoted Jews removed themselves from the mainstream and began a monastic life in the Judean desert. Their studies of the Old Testament Scriptures led them to believe that God's judgment upon Jerusalem was imminent and that the anointed one would return to restore the nation of Israel and purify their worship. Anticipating this moment, the Essenes retreated into the Qumran desert to await the return of their Messiah. This community, which began in the third century B.C., devoted their days to the study and copying of sacred Scripture as well as theological and sectarian works.

As tensions between the Jews and Romans increased, the community hid their valuable scrolls in caves along the Dead Sea to protect them from the invading armies. Their hope was that one day the scrolls would be retrieved and restored to the nation of Israel. In A.D. 70, the Roman general Titus invaded Israel and destroyed the city of Jerusalem along with its treasured Temple. It is at this time that the Qumran community was overrun and occupied by the Roman army. The scrolls remained hidden for the next two thousand years.

In 1947, a Bedouin shepherd named Muhammad (Ahmed el-Dhib) was searching for his lost goat and came upon a small opening of a cave. Thinking that his goat may have fallen into the cave, he threw rocks into the opening. Instead of hearing a startled

goat, he heard the shattering of clay pottery. Lowering himself into the cave, he discovered several sealed jars. He opened them hoping to find treasure. To his disappointment, he found them to contain leather scrolls. He collected seven of the best scrolls and left the other fragments scattered on the ground.

Muhammad eventually brought some of the scrolls to a cobbler and antiquities dealer in Bethlehem named Khando. Khando, thinking the scrolls were written in Syriac, brought them to a Syrian Orthodox Archbishop named Mar (Athanasius) Samuel. Mar Samuel recognized that the scrolls were written in Hebrew and suspected they may be very ancient and valuable. He eventually had the scrolls examined by John Trevor at the American School of Oriental Research (ASOR). Trevor contacted the world's foremost Middle East archaeologist, Dr. William Albright, and together these men confirmed the antiquity of the scrolls and dated them to sometime between the first and second century B.C.

After the initial discovery, archaeologists searched other nearby caves between 1952 and 1956. They found ten other caves that contained thousands of ancient documents as well. One of the greatest treasures of ancient manuscripts had been discovered: the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Date and Contents of the Scrolls

Scholars were anxious to confirm that these Dead Sea Scrolls were the most ancient of all Old Testament manuscripts in the Hebrew language. Three types of dating tools were used: tools from archaeology, from the study of ancient languages, called paleography and orthography, and the carbon-14 dating method. Each can derive accurate results. When all the methods arrive at the same conclusion, there is an increased reliability in the dating.

Archaeologists studied the pottery, coins, graves, and

garments at Khirbet Qumran, where the Essenes lived. They arrived at a date ranging from the second century B.C. to the first century A.D. Paleographers studied the style of writing and arrived at dates ranging from the third century B.C. to the first century A.D. Scientists, using the radiocarbon dating method, dated the scrolls to range from the fourth century B.C. to the first century A.D. Since all the methods came to a similar conclusion, scholars are very confident in their assigned date for the texts. The scrolls date as early as the third century B.C. to the first century A.D.{1}

Eleven caves were discovered containing nearly 1,100 ancient documents which included several scrolls and more than 100,000 fragments.{2} Fragments from every Old Testament book except for the book of Esther were discovered. Other works included apocryphal books, commentaries, manuals of discipline for the Qumran community, and theological texts. The majority of the texts were written in the Hebrew language, but there were also manuscripts written in Aramaic and Greek.{3}

Among the eleven caves, Cave 1, which was excavated in 1949, and Cave 4, excavated in 1952, proved to be the most productive caves. One of the most significant discoveries was a well-preserved scroll of the entire book of Isaiah.

The famous Copper Scrolls were discovered in Cave 3 in 1952. Unlike most of the scrolls that were written on leather or parchment, these were written on copper and provided directions to sixty-four sites around Jerusalem that were said to contain hidden treasure. So far, no treasure has been found at the sites that have been investigated.

The oldest known piece of biblical Hebrew is a fragment from the book of Samuel discovered in Cave 4, and is dated from the third century B.C.{4} The War Scroll found in Caves 1 and 4 is an eschatological text describing a forty-year war between the Sons of Light and the evil Sons of Darkness. The Temple Scroll discovered in Cave 11 is the largest and describes a future

Temple in Jerusalem that will be built at the end of the age.

Indeed, these were the most ancient Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament ever found, and their contents would yield valuable insights to our understanding of Judaism and early Christianity.

The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Masoretic Text

The Dead Sea Scrolls play a crucial role in assessing the accurate preservation of the Old Testament. With its hundreds of manuscripts from every book except Esther, detailed comparisons can be made with more recent texts.

The Old Testament that we use today is translated from what is called the Masoretic Text. The Masoretes were Jewish scholars who between A.D. 500 and 950 gave the Old Testament the form that we use today. Until the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in 1947, the oldest Hebrew text of the Old Testament was the Masoretic Aleppo Codex which dates to A.D. 935.[\[5\]](#)

With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, we now had manuscripts that predated the Masoretic Text by about one thousand years. Scholars were anxious to see how the Dead Sea documents would match up with the Masoretic Text. If a significant amount of differences were found, we could conclude that our Old Testament Text had not been well preserved. Critics, along with religious groups such as Muslims and Mormons, often make the claim that the present day Old Testament has been corrupted and is not well preserved. According to these religious groups, this would explain the contradictions between the Old Testament and their religious teachings.

After years of careful study, it has been concluded that the Dead Sea Scrolls give substantial confirmation that our Old Testament has been accurately preserved. The scrolls were

found to be almost identical with the Masoretic text. Hebrew Scholar Millar Burrows writes, "It is a matter of wonder that through something like one thousand years the text underwent so little alteration. As I said in my first article on the scroll, 'Herein lies its chief importance, supporting the fidelity of the Masoretic tradition.'" [\[6\]](#)

A significant comparison study was conducted with the Isaiah Scroll written around 100 B.C. that was found among the Dead Sea documents and the book of Isaiah found in the Masoretic text. After much research, scholars found that the two texts were practically identical. Most variants were minor spelling differences, and none affected the meaning of the text.

One of the most respected Old Testament scholars, the late Gleason Archer, examined the two Isaiah scrolls found in Cave 1 and wrote, "Even though the two copies of Isaiah discovered in Qumran Cave 1 near the Dead Sea in 1947 were a thousand years earlier than the oldest dated manuscript previously known (A.D. 980), they proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The five percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling." [\[7\]](#)

Despite the thousand year gap, scholars found the Masoretic Text and Dead Sea Scrolls to be nearly identical. The Dead Sea Scrolls provide valuable evidence that the Old Testament had been accurately and carefully preserved.

The Messianic Prophecies and the Scrolls

One of the evidences used in defending the deity of the Christ is the testimony of prophecy. There are over one hundred prophecies regarding Christ in the Old Testament. [\[8\]](#) These prophecies were made centuries before the birth of Christ and were quite specific in their detail. Skeptics questioned the date of the prophecies and some even charged that they were not recorded until after or at the time of Jesus, and

therefore discounted their prophetic nature.

There is strong evidence that the Old Testament canon was completed by 450 B.C. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, is dated about two hundred fifty years before Christ. The translation process occurred during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus who ruled from 285 to 246 B.C.[\[9\]](#) It can be argued that a complete Hebrew text from which this Greek translation would be derived must have existed prior to the third century B.C.

The Dead Sea Scrolls provided further proof that the Old Testament canon existed prior to the third century B.C. Thousands of manuscript fragments from all the Old Testament books except Esther were found predating Christ's birth, and some date as early as the third century B.C. For example, portions from the book of Samuel date that early, and fragments from Daniel date to the second century B.C.[\[10\]](#) Portions from the twelve Minor Prophets date from 150 B.C to 25 B.C.[\[11\]](#) Since the documents were found to be identical with our Masoretic Text, we can be reasonably sure that our Old Testament is the same one that the Essenes were studying and working from.

One of the most important Dead Sea documents is the Isaiah Scroll. This twenty-four foot long scroll is well preserved and contains the complete book of Isaiah. The scroll is dated 100 B.C. and contains one of the clearest and most detailed prophecies of the Messiah in chapter fifty-three, called the "Suffering Servant." Although some Jewish scholars teach that this refers to Israel, a careful reading shows that this prophecy can only refer to Christ.

Here are just a few reasons. The suffering servant is called sinless (53:9), he dies and rises from the dead (53:8-10), and he suffers and dies for the sins of the people (53:4-6). These characteristics are not true of the nation of Israel. The Isaiah Scroll gives us a manuscript that predates the birth of

Christ by a century and contains many of the most important messianic prophecies about Jesus. Skeptics could no longer contend that portions of the book were written after Christ or that first century insertions were added to the text.

Thus, the Dead Sea Scrolls provide further proof that the Old Testament canon was completed by the third century B.C., and that the prophecies foretold of Christ in the Old Testament predated the birth of Christ.

The Messiah and the Scrolls

What kind of Messiah was expected by first century Jews? Critical scholars allege that the idea of a personal Messiah was a later interpretation made by Christians. Instead, they believe that the Messiah was to be the nation of Israel and represented Jewish nationalism.

The Dead Sea Scrolls, written by Old Testament Jews, reveal the messianic expectations of Jews during the time of Christ. Studies have uncovered several parallels to the messianic hope revealed in the New Testament as well as some significant differences. First, they were expecting a personal Messiah rather than a nation or a sense of nationalism. Second, the Messiah would be a descendant of King David. Third, the Messiah would confirm His claims by performing miracles including the resurrection of the dead. Finally, He would be human and yet possess divine attributes.

A manuscript found in Cave 4 entitled the *Messianic Apocalypse*, copied in the first century B.C., describes the anticipated ministry of the Messiah:

For He will honor the pious upon the throne of His eternal kingdom, release the captives, open the eyes of the blind, lifting up those who are oppressed... For He shall heal the critically wounded, He shall raise the dead, He shall bring good news to the poor.

This passage sounds very similar to the ministry of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. In Luke chapter 7:21-22, John the Baptist's disciples come to Jesus and ask him if He is the Messiah. Jesus responds, "Go tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news brought to them."

But, with the similarities there are also differences. Christians have always taught that there is one Messiah while the Essene community believed in two, one an Aaronic or priestly Messiah and the other a Davidic or royal Messiah who leads a war to end the evil age.[\[12\]](#)

The Essenes were also strict on matters of ceremonial purity while Jesus criticized these laws. He socialized with tax collectors and lepers which was considered defiling by the Jews. Jesus taught us to love one's enemies while the Essenes taught hatred towards theirs. They were strict Sabbatarians, and Jesus often violated this important aspect of the law. The Qumran community rejected the inclusion of women, Gentiles, and sinners, while Christ reached out to these very groups.

The many differences show that the Essenes were not the source of early Christianity as some scholars propose. Rather, Christianity derived its teachings from the Old Testament and the ministry of Jesus.

The Dead Sea Scrolls have proven to be a significant discovery, confirming the accurate preservation of our Old Testament text, the messianic prophecies of Christ, and valuable insight into first century Judaism.

Two Major Prophets and the Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls have been an asset in the debate regarding two major and well disputed books of the Old

Testament, Daniel and Isaiah. Conservative scholars maintained that Daniel was written in the sixth century B.C. as the author declares in the first chapter. The New Testament writers treated Daniel as a prophetic book with predictive prophecies. Liberal scholars began teaching in the eighteenth century that it was written in the Maccabean Period or the second century B.C. If they are correct, Daniel would not be a prophetic book that predicted the rise of Persia, Greece, and Rome.

Before the discovery of the scrolls, critical scholars argued that the Aramaic language used in Daniel was from a time no earlier than 167 B.C. during the Maccabean period. Other scholars, such as well-respected archaeologist Kenneth Kitchen, studied Daniel and found that ninety percent of Daniel's Aramaic vocabulary was used in documents from the fifth century B.C. or earlier.[\[13\]](#) The Dead Sea Scrolls revealed that Kitchen's conclusion was well founded. The Aramaic language used in the Dead Sea Scrolls proved to be very different from that found in the book of Daniel. Old Testament scholars have concluded that the Aramaic in Daniel is closer to the form used in the fourth and fifth century B.C. than to the second century B.C.

Critical scholars challenged the view that Isaiah was written by a single author. Many contended that the first thirty-nine chapters were written by one author in the eighth century B.C., and the final twenty-six chapters were written in the post-Exilic period. The reason for this is that there are some significant differences in the style and content between the two sections. If this were true, Isaiah's prophecies of Babylon in the later chapters would not have been predictive prophecies but written after the events occurred.

With the discovery of the Isaiah Scroll at Qumran, scholars on both sides were eager to see if the evidence would favor their position. The Isaiah Scroll revealed no break or demarcation between the two major sections of Isaiah. The scribe was not

aware of any change in authorship or division of the book.[{14}](#) Ben Sira (second century B.C.), Josephus, and the New Testament writers regarded Isaiah as written by a single author and containing predictive prophecy.[{15}](#) The Dead Sea Scrolls added to the case for the unity and prophetic character of Isaiah.

Inventory of the Scrolls

The following is a brief inventory provided by Dr. Gleason Archer of the discoveries made in each of the Dead Sea caves.[{16}](#)

Cave 1 was the first cave discovered and excavated in 1949. Among the discoveries was found the Isaiah Scroll containing a well-preserved scroll of the entire book of Isaiah. Fragments were found from the other Old Testament books which included Genesis, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Judges, Samuel, Ezekiel, and Psalms. Non-biblical books included the Book of Enoch, Sayings of Moses, Book of Jubilee, Book of Noah, Testament of Levi and the Wisdom of Solomon. Fragments from commentaries on Psalms, Micah, and Zephaniah were also discovered.

Cave 2 was excavated in 1952. Hundreds of fragments were discovered, including remains from the Old Testament books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, Job, Psalms and Ruth.

Cave 3 was excavated in 1952. Here archaeologists found the famous Copper Scrolls. These scrolls contained directions to sixty-four sites containing hidden treasures located around Jerusalem. So far, no treasure has been found at the sites investigated.

Cave 4, excavated in 1952, proved to be one of the most productive. Thousands of fragments were recovered from nearly four hundred manuscripts. Hundreds of fragments from every Old Testament book were discovered with the exception of the Book

of Esther. The fragment from Samuel labeled 4Qsam{17} is believed to be the oldest known piece of biblical Hebrew, dating from the third century B.C. Also found were fragments of commentaries on the Psalms, Isaiah, and Nahum. The entire collection of Cave 4 is believed to represent the scope of the Essene library.

Cave 5 was excavated in 1952 and fragments from some Old Testament books along with the book of Tobit were found.

Cave 6 excavated in 1952 uncovered papyrus fragments of Daniel, 1 and 2 Kings and some other Essene literature.

Caves 7-10 yielded finds of interest for archaeologists but had little relevance for biblical studies.

Cave 11 was excavated in 1956. It exposed well-preserved copies from some of the Psalms, including the apocryphal Psalm 151. In addition, a well-preserved scroll of part of Leviticus was found, and fragments of an Apocalypse of the New Jerusalem, an Aramaic Targum or paraphrase of Job, was also discovered.

Indeed these were the most ancient Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament ever found, and their contents would soon reveal insights that would impact Judaism and Christianity.

Notes

1. James Vanderkam and Peter Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (San Francisco, CA.: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002), 20-32.
2. Randall Price, *The Stones Cry Out* (Eugene, OR.: Harvest House Publishers, 1997), 278.
3. Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago, IL.: Moody Press, 1985), 513-517.
4. Vanderkam and Flint, 115.
5. Price, 280.
6. Millar Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Viking

Press, 1955), 304, quoted in Norman Geisler and William Nix, *General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 367.

7. Archer, 25.

8. J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 1984), 665-670.

9. Geisler and Nix, 503-504.

10. Ibid., 137.

11. Ibid., 138-139.

12. Vanderkam and Flint, 265-266.

13. Randall Price, *Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Eugene, OR.: Harvest House, 1996), 162.

14. Ibid., 154-155.

15. Ibid., 156-157.

16. Archer, 513-517.

17. Price, 162.

Bibliography

Archer, Gleason. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1985.

Geisler, Norman and William Nix. *General Introduction to the Bible*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1986.

Payne, J. Barton. *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 1984.

Price, Randall Price, *Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Eugene, OR.: Harvest House, 1996.

Scanlin, Harold. *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Modern Translations of the Old Testament*. Wheaton, IL.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1993.

Vanderkam, James and Peter Flint. *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. San Francisco, CA.: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002.

“You Shouldn’t Talk About Evidence When the Subject Is Faith”

In your article [“Evidence for the Existence of God,”](#) the link between the remarkable things about earth and God is called “faith.” I believe in God. The author misuses the word “evidence.”

The author takes away from issues of religion and faith by throwing in a reference to “Saving the Whales” because there are all sorts of flawed and fraudulent environmental agendas floating around by various groups and the true conservationists are not represented by these groups. “Saving the Whales” is fraught with political ramifications and does not belong in a commentary supposedly “proving” the existence of God. The title of this article is inaccurate and is a disservice to your organization.

Thanks for your comments about my article.

If I indicated that I was trying to “prove” the existence of God, then please help me see where, so I can change it. I don’t think anyone can prove the existence of God, but we can point to evidence for Him. I am very aware that our sinfulness makes it easy for people to dismiss perfectly good evidence of our Creator NOT because the evidence isn’t good enough, but because they are disturbed by the implications of the existence of a God to whom we are all accountable.

My reference to “Saving the Whales” was simply to make the point that people resort to the moral argument regardless of their relationship to God, because our morality is ingrained

in us as people made in the image of God. The politics of that movement really don't have anything to do with the point I was making; I was only concerned with the motivation behind it.

I do think that evidence and faith are not diametrically opposed. We have faith not just because we choose to believe, but because there is good reason to believe; and that constitutes evidence. I think Christianity is an evidential faith; that's why Jesus appeared to over 500 people after His resurrection, so there would be eyewitness testimony (evidence) of the foundation of our faith. For some, the faith comes first, and for others, the evidence comes first and THEN they put their trust in God. Either way, the important thing is the object of our faith and not how we got to Him.

Thanks for writing.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries