

# Philosophical Taoism: A Christian Appraisal

*The Chinese translation of John 1:1 reads, "In the beginning was the Tao..." Are Taoism and Christianity compatible? Dr. Michael Gleghorn says that even though there are some similarities, Christianity's uniqueness remains separate from all philosophies, including Taoism.*



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

## Taoism and the Tao

The philosophy of Taoism is traditionally held to have originated in China with a man named Lao-tzu. Although most scholars doubt that he was an actual historical figure, tradition dates his life from 604-517 B.C. The story goes that Lao-tzu, "saddened by his people's disinclination to cultivate the natural goodness he advocated,"<sup>{1}</sup> decided to head west and abandon civilization. As he was leaving, the gatekeeper asked if he would write down his teachings for the benefit of society. Lao-tzu consented, retired for a few days, and returned with a brief work called *Tao-Te Ching*, "The Classic of the Way and Its Power."<sup>{2}</sup> It "contains 81 short chapters describing the meaning of Tao and how one should live according to the Tao."<sup>{3}</sup> The term *Tao* is typically translated into English as "way", but it can also be translated as "path," "road" or "course."

The chief object of philosophical Taoism "is to live in a way that conserves life's vitality by not expending it in useless, draining ways, the chief of which are friction and conflict."<sup>{4}</sup> One does this by living in harmony with the Tao, or Way, of all things: the way of nature, of society, and of oneself. Taoist philosophers have a particular concept that characterizes action in harmony with the Tao. They call it *wu-*

*wei*. Literally this means “non-action,” but practically speaking it means taking no action that is contrary to nature. Thus, “action in the mode of *wu-wei* is action in which friction – in interpersonal relationships, in intra-psychic conflict, and in relation to nature – is reduced to the minimum.”[\[5\]](#)

But if we are to live in harmony with the Tao, we must first get some idea of what it is. And this presents something of a difficulty, for *Tao-Te Ching* begins by asserting that words are not adequate for explaining the Tao: “The Tao . . . that can be told of is not the eternal Tao.”[\[6\]](#) But if words cannot fully explain the Tao, they can at least suggest it. In chapter 25 we read:

There was something undifferentiated and yet complete,  
Which existed before heaven and earth.  
Soundless and formless, it depends on nothing and does not  
change. It operates everywhere and is free from danger.  
It may be considered the mother of the universe.  
I do not know its name; I call it Tao.[\[7\]](#)

This passage says a lot about the Tao. For instance, it is prior to the physical universe.[\[8\]](#) It is independent and does not change. It operates everywhere. And it apparently gave birth to the universe. If this is so, you may be thinking that the Tao sounds awfully similar to the Christian God. However, some of these similarities are more apparent than real – and there are also major differences.

## God and the Tao

In philosophical Taoism, “Tao” is the term used to signify ultimate reality. “Tao is that reality . . . that existed prior to and gave rise to all other things, including Heaven and Earth and everything upon or within them.”[\[9\]](#) For this reason one might initially think that what a Taoist means by the Tao is virtually synonymous with what the Christian means

by God. But is this really so?

After Lao-tzu, the most important representative of philosophical Taoism was a man named Chuang-tzu, believed to have lived sometime between 399-295 B.C. He is the author of a text called the *Chuang Tzu*. While the thought of these two men is certainly different, there are also important similarities. One of these concerns the relationship of the Tao to the physical universe. In words reminiscent of *Tao-Te Ching*, the *Chuang Tzu* declares, "Before heaven and earth came into being, Tao existed by itself from all time. . . . It created heaven and earth."[{10}](#)

The most interesting part of this statement is the assertion that the Tao created heaven and earth. How are we to understand this? Does Chuang-tzu view the Tao as Creator in the same sense in which Christians would apply this term to God? Probably not. In addressing such questions one commentator has written: "Any personal God . . . is clearly out of harmony with Chuang Tzu's philosophy."[{11}](#) Properly speaking, Taoists view the Tao more as a *principle* than a *person*. Indeed, some scholars speak of the Tao as "an impersonal force of existence that is beyond differentiation."[{12}](#) So how does the concept of the Tao compare with the Christian view of God in the Bible?

Both the Tao and God are similarly credited with creating heaven and earth. This similarity may offer an initial point of contact between Christians and Taoists, a way to begin a meaningful dialogue about the nature of ultimate reality. As Christians we should always acknowledge any common ground that we might share with those from other religious perspectives. In Acts 17 Paul does this very thing when he speaks at the Areopagus in Athens. In verse 28 he quotes with approval from two pagan poets to help illustrate something of the nature of God.

But Paul also made distinctions between the Christian doctrine

of God and the views of the Athenians. In the same way, we also need to notice how the Tao differs from a biblical view of God. The greatest difference is that the Tao is impersonal whereas God is personal. The Tao is like a force, principle or energy; the Christian God is a personal being. It's crucial to realize that ultimate reality cannot be both personal and impersonal at the same time and in the same sense. Let's look at the reasons to believe that ultimate reality is personal.

## Morality and the Tao

Philosophical Taoism teaches that the Tao, or ultimate reality, is impersonal. If this is so, then what becomes of morality? Can an impersonal force be the source of objective moral values that apply to all men, at all times, in all places? Is an impersonal force capable of distinguishing between good and evil? Or can such distinctions only be made by personal beings? And what of that haunting sense of obligation we all feel to do what is good and avoid what is evil? Can we be morally obligated to obey an impersonal force? Or does our nagging sense of moral obligation seem to presuppose a Moral Lawgiver to whom we are morally accountable?

Such questions are important because each of us, if we're honest, recognizes that there is an objective distinction between moral good and evil. Such distinctions are not ultimately dependent on our preferences or feelings; they are essential to the very nature of reality. But the Tao is neither capable of making such distinctions, nor of serving as the source of such objective moral values. Only a personal agent can fill such roles. "The ultimate form of the *Tao* is beyond moral distinctions."[\[13\]](#)

The doctrine of moral relativism is explicitly taught in the writings of Chuang-tzu. He writes, "In their own way things are all right . . . generosity, strangeness, deceit, and abnormality. The Tao identifies them all as one."[\[14\]](#) This

statement helps clarify why the notion of a personal God is inconsistent with Taoist philosophy. Persons make moral distinctions between right and wrong, good and evil. But according to Chuang-tzu, the impersonal Tao identifies them all as one.

This has serious implications for philosophical Taoists. If the goal of the Taoist sage is to live in harmony with the Tao, then shouldn't moral distinctions be abandoned? If the Tao makes no such distinctions, why should its followers do so? Indeed, Chuang-tzu belittles those who embrace such distinctions declaring that they "must be either stupid or wrong."[\[15\]](#)

Biblical Christianity, however, teaches that there are such things as objective moral values. The source of such values is the eternal, transcendent, holy God of the Bible. Unlike the Tao, the Christian God is not beyond moral distinctions. On the contrary, John tells us, "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5) And Moses describes Him as "A God of faithfulness and without injustice." (Deut. 32:4) And while Taoism proclaims an *impersonal* principle which judges no one, the Apostle Paul describes a *personal* God to whom we are morally accountable and who will one day judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31; Rom. 1:18-2:6). In summary, a personal Moral Lawgiver provides a better explanation of objective moral values than does an impersonal principle.

## Persons and the Tao

We've seen that philosophical Taoism and biblical Christianity differ on the nature of ultimate reality. Taoists view ultimate reality (i.e. the Tao) as an impersonal force that brought the universe into being. Christians view ultimate reality (i.e. God) as the personal Creator of the universe. The law of non-contradiction says it's impossible for ultimate reality to be both personal and impersonal at the same time and in the same sense. Thus, if one of these views is true,

the other certainly must be false.

I argued that if objective moral values are real (and we all live as if they are), then it is more reasonable to believe that the source of such values is personal, rather than impersonal. Now I want to continue this line of thought by arguing that the existence of human persons is best explained by appealing to a personal Creator rather than to an impersonal principle like the Tao. To help us see why this is so, let's briefly consider some of the differences between a personal being and an impersonal principle.

First, personal beings (like men and women) possess such attributes as intellect, emotion, and will. That is, they have the ability to think, feel, and take considered action. An impersonal principle can do none of these things. In addition, a personal being has the ability to form and maintain relationships with other persons. But again, this is something that an impersonal force simply cannot do. If a cause must always be greater than the effect it produces, then does it make more sense to believe that the ultimate cause of human persons is personal or impersonal?

The Bible says that men and women are created in the image of God. (Gen. 1:26-27) God is described as possessing all the attributes of a personal being. He thinks, knows and understands. (Ps.139) He experiences emotions such as sorrow (Gen. 6:6) and joy. (Matt. 25:21; Jn. 15:11) He is described as working "all things after the counsel of His will." (Eph. 1:11) Finally, He is able to form and maintain relationships with other persons. (Jer. 1:5; Gal. 1:15) Indeed, this was true even before God created anything, for from all eternity the three distinct persons of the Godhead – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – have enjoyed intimate communion and fellowship with one another. (Jn. 14-17)

It's crucial to realize that the impersonal Tao possesses none of these personal attributes. But if that which is personal is

superior to that which is impersonal, then it seems more reasonable to believe that the ultimate cause of human persons must likewise be personal. And thus the personal God of the Bible provides a better explanation for the existence of human persons than does the impersonal Tao.

## Evangelism and the Tao

I've emphasized that one of the crucial differences between philosophical Taoism and biblical Christianity is the nature of ultimate reality. Taoists hold that the Tao is impersonal; Christians hold that God is personal. I've argued that it is more reasonable to believe that both objective moral values and human persons come from a source that is ultimately personal rather than impersonal. I wish to conclude by providing one more line of evidence for this position.[{16}](#)

At the end of chapter 67 of the *Tao Te Ching* we read this statement: "When Heaven is to save a person, Heaven will protect him through deep love."[{17}](#) What does such a statement mean? Although it may be argued that it was simply intended as a figure of speech, it's interesting that the author should apparently feel led to ascribe personal attributes to what is supposed to be an impersonal Heaven.

For instance the phrase, "When Heaven is to save a person," seems to imply a considered action on Heaven's part. But only persons can take considered action; an impersonal force cannot do so. In addition, the second half of the sentence speaks of Heaven's protecting a person through "deep love." But an impersonal force is incapable of love. Such love seems once again to require a personal agent.

Another interesting statement from the *Tao Te Ching* occurs at the end of chapter 62:

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Why did the ancients so treasure this DAO? Is it not because

it has been said of it: “Whosoever asks will receive; whosoever has sinned will be forgiven”? Therefore is DAO the most exquisite thing on earth.{18}

This passage also ascribes personal attributes to the impersonal Tao. Specifically, the Tao is said to forgive sinners. This raises two difficulties. First, “forgiveness” means that a moral standard has been broken. But the *Tao* is beyond such moral distinctions!”{19} Second, only persons can exercise forgiveness. An impersonal force is incapable of such a thing.

Such statements may open the door for Christians to tell their Taoist friends about the deep love and forgiveness of God revealed in the Bible. Jesus spoke of God’s deep love when He said, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16) And the Apostle John spoke of God’s continued willingness to forgive His children when he wrote, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9) Since only persons are capable of love and forgiveness, it seems more reasonable to believe that the personal God of the Bible, rather than the impersonal Tao of Taoism, is the ultimate source of such precious gifts.

## Notes

1. Huston Smith, *The World’s Religions* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 197.
2. Ibid.
3. Kenneth Boa, *Cults, World Religions and the Occult* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1990), 57.
4. Smith, 200.
5. Ibid.
6. *Tao-Te Ching*, trans. Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), 139.
7. Ibid., 152.



8. However, in chap. 7 of Chan's translation we read, "Heaven is eternal and earth everlasting." There are some apparent inconsistencies in Tao Te Ching.

9. Robert Henricks, *Confucius, the Tao, the Ancestors, and the Buddha: The Religions of China*, in *Great World Religions: Beliefs, Practices and Histories, Part IV*

(n.p.: The Teaching Company Limited Partnership, 1998), 14.

10. Chuang Tzu, trans. Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 194.

11. Ibid., 181.

12. Dean C. Halverson and Kent Kedl, "Taoism," in *The Compact Guide to World*

*Religions*, ed. Dean C. Halverson (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1996), 224.

13. Ibid.

14. Chuang Tzu, trans. Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 184.

15. Ibid., 206.

16. In this section I have relied heavily on the observations and insights of

Halverson and Kedl in *The Compact Guide to World Religions*, 227-230.

17. Tao-Te Ching, trans. Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 171.

18. Richard Wilhelm (trans. into German). *Tao Te Ching*. H.G. Oswald (trans.

into English) (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 55, cited in Halverson, ed., *The Compact Guide to World Religions*, 229.

19. Halverson, ed., *The Compact Guide to World Religions*, 229.

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# Jonah in the Whale – An Actual Event Pointed to by Jesus Christ

*Probe founder Jimmy Williams considers the question: was Jonah a real man experiencing real events or is it an allegorical story? Upon examining Jesus' use of the book, the testimony of first century commentators, and the characteristics of modern day whales and fish, he concludes that Jonah is a record of actual events.*

The book of Jonah—is it history, allegory, or romance? Was he really swallowed by a great fish as Scripture records? Or was he even a real person? Did he really go to Nineveh and preach so effectively that an entire city repented and escaped divine judgment? These are important questions that not only involve the integrity of Scripture, but that of our Lord Jesus Christ, who referred to Jonah as a real person.

Like the Sadducees of Jesus' day who rejected all things "miraculous" (Remember their question posed to Jesus about the woman who married seven brothers one after the other and their concern about whose wife she would be in the resurrection in Luke 20:33?), modern scholars have had a field day with this book. Here is an example:

*The Book of Jonah is unlike any of the other prophetic books in that it is not primarily a record of the utterances of the prophet. Rather it is a short story, clearly fictional. The hallmarks of fiction rest in its anachronisms and its elements of fantasy. . . . Since the book is fiction, it would be best to consider the "great fish" an element of fantasy, a mythological monster, and let it go at that. . .*

*.Popularly, Jonah's fish is considered to have been a whale. . . . If it was a whale that swallowed Jonah, then we are left with the fact that the only type of whale with a throat large enough to swallow a man is the sperm whale. . . . Sperm whales are not found in the Mediterranean and, in the course of nature, it is completely unlikely that a man should be swallowed by one there, or still further, survive three days and nights of incarceration. . . . All difficulties disappear, however, if it is remembered that the Book of Jonah is a fantasy.{1}*

Always keep in mind that a large proportion of all modern criticism of the Bible comes from one philosophical presupposition: **miracles do not occur**. Locked into this naturalistic view of reality, it is not surprising that skeptical theologians encounter difficulties throughout the Bible. Given their premise, every miracle in Scripture must be explained away by either tacit rejection, in in the previous quotation, or by giving the "miracle" some feasible, naturalistic explanation. Their attempts to accomplish this throughout the Bible are often so ludicrous, varied, and contradictory, that we turn with relief back to the Bible, preferring the miraculous to the ridiculous!

This always reminds me of the illustration Dr. Norman Geisler alludes to in his many debates: A man visited a psychiatrist to share a problem which greatly concerned him.

"Doctor, I have a terrible problem."

"Please tell me about it," said the doctor.

"Well, I believe that I am dead."

"Hmmm, that is a heavy concern. May I ask you a question?"

"Of course," replied the man.

"Do you believe that dead men bleed?"

"Of course not. That's preposterous," said the patient.

The psychiatrist reached over and picked up a long hat pin, took the man's hand, and pricked his finger with it. As the blood began to flow, the man stared at his finger and

exclaimed, "Well, what do you know! Dead men bleed after all!"

The real question is not, "Are miracles possible?" but rather, **"Does God Exist?"**

The Bible declares that "With God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). Those who prefer this presupposition (and there is good reason to prefer it) acknowledge that God has, and can activate, for His Sovereign purposes, the prerogative to intervene, to override the natural laws of the universe created by His Hand.

## **Historical Considerations**

Jonah 1:1 declares, "The word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai."

Is there any other biblical evidence that Jonah was a real person? Yes. In 2 Kings 14:25 we read, "He (king Jeroboam II of Israel) restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of His servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet which was by (from) Gath-hepher."

Here we discover that Jonah gave a prophetic word concerning this king, Jeroboam, the greatest and longest-reigning monarch of the Northern Kingdom, Israel. Substantial archeological data has been recovered concerning Jeroboam (II) from the city of Samaria (the royal Capital of the Northern Kingdom) and Megiddo, including a jasper seal by Schumacher and inscribed, "Shema, servant of Jeroboam." {2}

The reference in 2 Kings also informs us as to the time Jonah lived and ministered. It is thought by some that Jonah may have been numbered among the "schools of the prophets" and was a contemporary of Elisha the Prophet (eighth century B.C.)

With respect to the narrative itself, there is no indication

within it, nor among any of the early Judaic traditions that would suggest that it is not historical. Interestingly enough, during the third century B.C., the time which most modern critics assert the book of Jonah was composed, we discover one of the fourteen books of the Apocrypha, the Book of Tobit, makes mention of Jonah. The Apocryphal books are those included in the Catholic Bible but not in the Protestant Bible. They were early considered “suspect” for one reason or another and were not regarded by the Jews as canonical. However, they do have historical and literary merit for biblical studies. Tobit, addressing death-bed comments to his son, Tobias, says: “Go into Media, my child; for I surely believe all the things which **Jonah the prophet spake of Nineveh**, that it shall be overthrown.”{3}

Two Jewish writers of the first century A.D., Philo, the philosopher, and Josephus, the historian, also consider Jonah to be an historical book. And one of the most prominent biblical scenes found in the Catacombs of Rome is of Jonah and his Fish . . . no doubt for the hope of resurrection symbolized by the book, and confirmed by Christ.

## Jesus

In Matthew 12:39-40 Jesus says, “An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of the prophet Jonas; for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whales’s belly, so shall the son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

Here Jesus refers to Jonah and his experience as historical. Critics have offered the explanation, based on their “no miracles” presupposition, that Jesus (actually aware that it was really a myth) merely *accommodated* Himself to the naïve perspective of His first century, unsophisticated hearers, as someone might refer to King Lear or Don Quixote.

But this is not the *only* mention of Jonah by our Lord. He goes on to say in Matthew 12 about Nineveh: “The men of Nineveh shall stand up with *this* generation at the judgment and shall condemn it because *they* repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here” (v. 41).

Here Jesus is comparing and linking the real people listening to His words (“this generation”) with the generation of Jonah’s day and foresees the Day when both groups will be evaluated and *judged* on the basis of how they responded to the divine light given them in their day! The *context* does not allow an inference that one generation is parabolic and the other historical. It does not allow for the “accommodation” theory of the modern critics. With these words in Matthew 12, Christ clearly confirms the historicity of the book of Jonah.

## Whale or Fish?

The Bible doesn’t say that Jonah was swallowed by a whale. Only the King James Version of 1611 does that. Jonah 1:17 says “God prepared a great fish (*dag gadol*),” not a great whale. And the Matthew passage (12:40) in Greek refers to the animal as a “sea monster” (*ketos*), not a whale. It may or may not have been a whale. Let’s explore the possibilities, beginning with the question of “*Could* it happen?” Are there marine creatures capable of swallowing a human being?

### Whales

There are two basic types of whales if differentiated by their mouth and throat structures: *baleen*, and *non-baleen* (toothed whales).

Baleen whales are by far the most numerous species in the oceans and include the Blue, Gray, Humpback, and Right (Bowhead). All of these whales are distinguished by the presence of a baleen “curtain” or “strainer” in their mouths. They have a very small throat (like a funnel) and feed by

straining krill, plankton, and small crustaceans as they swim through the water with their mouths open. It would be impossible for any of these whales to swallow a human, so they can be ruled out.

The “toothed” whales can be given some consideration. These include the dolphin, porpoise, Beluga, Narwhal, Orca (Killer whale), none of which is large enough to swallow a whole human being, and the Sperm whale, which definitely *is*.

The Sperm whale is the largest of the toothed whales, adult males measuring over sixty feet in length (walk into your garage and multiply the length by four!). They are most prominent in the Pacific Ocean, but not unknown in the Atlantic and a favorite of Norwegian whalers. This whale’s diet consists of giant squid, large sea-bottom and mid-water sharks, skates, and fishes.{4}

The Sperm whale has a *huge* capacity in its gullet to store food. In his book, *Sixty-three Years of Engineering*, Sir Francis Fox tells of a manager of a whaling station who indicates that the whale can “swallow lumps of food eight feet in diameter, and that in one of these whales they actually found ‘the skeleton of a shark sixteen feet in length.’”{5}

In the *Daily Mail* of December 14th, 1928, Mr. G. H. Henn, a resident of Birmingham, England recounted the following story:

*My own experience . . . about twenty-five years ago, when the carcass of a whale was displayed for a week on vacant land in Navigation Street, outside New Street station . . . I was one of twelve men, who went into its mouth, passed through its throat, and moved about in what was equivalent to a fair-sized room. It’s throat was large enough to serve as a door. Obviously it would be quite easy for a whale of this kind to swallow a man.”*{6}

This could only have been a sperm whale. On the coast of

England, Mr. Frank Bullen in his book, *The Cruise of the Cachalot* (another name for the Sperm whale), notes that the *sperm whale always ejects the contents of its stomach when dying*. He himself witnessed such an incident and described the huge masses of regurgitated contents, estimating their size as about “eight feet by six feet into six feet, the total equal to the bodies of six stout men compressed into one!”{7}

It is argued that Sperm whales are not found in the Mediterranean. But who is to say that was the case 2800 years ago? There are a lot of marine creatures not found today due to the intense, world-wide fishing pressure of the past 300 years. If a Sperm whale beached itself on the west coast of England in this century, who's to say a Sperm whale might not have found its way into the Mediterranean? We know all whales migrate toward warm water to bear their young. One would also suspect that if a Sperm whale did find itself east of Gibraltar, it probably would not fare well in the shallower depths and could well be very hungry! [One story has circulated for years about the whale ship *Star of the East*, which lost a sailor named James Bartley. The story is that he was swallowed by a large sperm whale, and found alive inside the whale's stomach when it was killed and brought aboard. Mr. Bartley was found unconscious and with his skin bleached by the whale's gastric acid, but alive nonetheless. We have just discovered that this is, regrettably, an urban legend, and therefore cannot be used to support our argument. Here is a link to the debunking of this urban legend: <http://www.ship-of-fools.com/Myths/04Myth.html>]

## **Other Prospects**

Baxter also notes a more recent incident:

We have come across the following news-item in the Madras (India) *Mail* of November 28th, 1946:

*Bombay, November 26. – A twelve-foot tiger shark, weighing*



*700 lbs., was dragged ashore last evening at the Sasson Docks. When the shark was cut open a skeleton and a man's clothes were found. It is thought that the victim may have been one of those lost at sea during the recent cyclone. The shark was caught by fishermen thirty miles from Bombay.*

The Tiger is a medium-size shark. The Great White is much larger, over thirty feet in length and weighing four tons. This shark has attacked swimmers all along the Atlantic seaboard on both sides of the ocean.

Which bring us to another important point: It *is* possible that Jonah actually *did* die. There are several indications in chapter 2 (vs. 2, 5, 6). There are also several miracles recorded in this book: God preparing the great fish, the hearts of the people of Nineveh, the gourd plant, the east wind. If Jonah did die in chapter 2, another miracle involving his resuscitation after the watery sojourn would not be anymore difficult for God to perform than the other miracles in the book. God chides Abraham when he doubts a child could come forth from the deadness of Sarah's womb and says, "Is anything too difficult for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:14). In Genesis or Jonah the answer is the same: "No."

If Jonah actually did die, this simply records one more person among the several in Scripture who were resuscitated for God's intended purpose, and it makes Jonah a still more remarkable type of Christ and His resurrection . . . which is without a doubt the *main* reason this little book is included in the Sacred Canon!

The main *personal* application of the Book of Jonah is simply this: **Before God can use the prophet, He must first *break* the prophet!**

"And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm strengthen, and establish you. . . .

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time.” (1 Pet. 5:10, 6).

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# **“Why Did the Book of Jacob Get Changed to the Book of James?”**

**By what authority did the translators of the KJV (and other translations) change the name of the book of YAAKOV (Jacob) to JAMES? The original Greek states this author’s name as “IAKOBOY”, or Jacob in English. Thank you.**

You are correct in your awareness of the Old Testament designation “Yaakov” (Hebrew) and the New Testament designation, “Iakboy” (Greek).

Tracing the etymology of a word is a fascinating endeavor. And as it is translated from language to language, or even its development within a language, spelling and pronunciation often change. Beyond the Greek and the Hebrew, this word went through several stages of the Latin language (i.e., Old Latin, New Latin, Late Latin), and there were further influences of the word through the barbarian tribes that overran Western Europe in the fourth and fifth centuries. In England this involved two distinct blending of languages—the first by the Anglo-Saxons (Angles, Saxons, and Jutes), who overlaid their language on top of the (1) Latin & (2) Celtic (two dialects: Brythonic and Goidelic) amalgamation as they conquered much of England between the fifth and seventh centuries, and second, by the Norman/Vikings, who overlaid their language upon all of

that during the eleventh and twelfth centuries!

One of the reasons the English Language is such a rich one is because of the blending of these linguistic strains which created totally different words for identical things: for example: lamb-mutton, brotherly-fraternal, etc.

The words *Jacob* and *James* come out of this matrix. Jacob follows the French/Norman tradition (Jacobin, for example), and James comes out of the Anglo-Saxon tradition.

The use of “James” in the King James Version was not something they had to think about. It was already imbedded into their language as the equivalent of “James” or “Jacob.” Since this translation from Greek and Hebrew involved putting the text into readable and understandable English, they chose the popular word already in circulation.

Actually, three common English names come out of this: James, Jacob, and Jack.

Hope this answers your question.

Thanks for writing.

Jimmy Williams, Founder  
Probe Ministries

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## **Dietrich Bonhoeffer – A Christian Voice and Martyr**

*Todd Kappelman presents a stirring overview of Dietrich Bonhoeffer looking at both his life experience standing against the Nazis and some of his key perspectives on the true*

*Christian life. He was a thought provoking voice for Christianity as well as a famous martyr.*

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

## **Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Man and His Mission**

Since his death in 1945, and especially in the last ten years, Bonhoeffer's writings have been stirring remarkable interest among Christians, old and young alike. Thus, we are going to examine the merits of reading the works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. We will do this by examining the man and his particular place in the canon of Christian writers, his background and historical setting, and finally three of his most important and influential works.

Bonhoeffer's importance begins with his opposition to the Nazi party and its influence in the German church during the rise of Hitler. This interest led him into areas of Christian ecumenical concerns that would later be important to the foundation of our contemporary ecumenical movements. Many denominational factions and various groups claim him as their spokesman, but it's his remarkable personal life, and his authorship of difficult devotional and academic works, which have gained him a place in the history of twentieth century theology.

Bonhoeffer was born on February 4, 1906 in Breslau, Germany (now part of Poland) and had a twin sister named Sabine. In 1933, before Hitler came to power, Bonhoeffer, a minister in the Lutheran church, was already attacking the Nazis in radio broadcasts. Two years later he was the leader of an underground seminary with over twenty young seminarians. That seminary is often seen as a kind of Protestant monastery, and is responsible for many of his considerations about the Christian life as it pertains to community. Later the seminary

was closed by the Secret Police. In 1939, through arrangements made by Reinhold Niebuhr, he fled to the United States, but returned to Germany after a short stay. He believed it was necessary to suffer with his people if he was to be an effective minister after the war. The last two years of his life were spent in a Berlin prison. In 1945 he was executed for complicity in a plot on Hitler's life.

During the time that Bonhoeffer was in prison he wrote a book titled *Letters and Papers from Prison*. The manuscript was smuggled from jail and published. These letters contain Bonhoeffer's consideration of the secularization of the world and the departure from religion in the twentieth century. In Bonhoeffer's estimation, the dependence on organized religion had undermined genuine faith. Bonhoeffer would call for a new religionless Christianity free from individualism and metaphysical supernaturalism. God, argued Bonhoeffer, must be known in this world as he operates and interacts with man in daily life. The abstract God of philosophical and theological speculation is useless to the average man on the street, and they are the majority who needs to hear the gospel.

We will examine three of Bonhoeffer's most influential and important works in the following four sections. The first work to be considered will be *The Cost of Discipleship*, written in 1939. This work is an interpretation of The Sermon on the Mount. It calls for radical living, if the Christian is to be an authentic disciple of Christ. The *Ethics*, written from 1940-1943, is Bonhoeffer's most technical theological exposition. It details the problems in attempting to build an ethical foundation on philosophical or theoretical grounds. Then we will examine more thoroughly *Letters and Papers from Prison*, one of Bonhoeffer's most personal and moving achievements.

# The Cost of Discipleship

Bonhoeffer's most famous work is *The Cost of Discipleship*, first published in 1939. This book is a rigorous exposition and interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount, and Matthew 9:35-10:42. Bonhoeffer's major concern is *cheap grace*. This is grace that has become so watered down that it no longer resembles the grace of the New Testament, the *costly grace* of the Gospels.

By the phrase *cheap grace*, Bonhoeffer means the grace which has brought chaos and destruction; it is the intellectual assent to a doctrine without a real transformation in the sinner's life. It is the justification of the sinner without the works that should accompany the new birth. Bonhoeffer says of cheap grace:

*[It] is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.*[{1}](#)

Real grace, in Bonhoeffer's estimation, is a grace that will cost a man his life. It is the grace made dear by the life of Christ that was sacrificed to purchase man's redemption. Cheap grace arose out of man's desire to be saved, but to do so without becoming a disciple. The doctrinal system of the church with its lists of behavioral codes becomes a substitute for the Living Christ, and this cheapens the meaning of discipleship. The true believer must resist cheap grace and enter the life of active discipleship. Faith can no longer mean sitting still and waiting; the Christian must rise and follow Christ.[{2}](#)

It is here that Bonhoeffer makes one of his most enduring

claims on the life of the true Christian. He writes that “only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes.”{3} Men have become soft and complacent in cheap grace and are thus cut off from the discovery of the more costly grace of self-sacrifice and personal debasement. Bonhoeffer believed that the teaching of cheap grace was the ruin of more Christians than any commandment of works.{4}

Discipleship, for Bonhoeffer, means strict adherence to Christ and His commandments. It is also a strict adherence to Christ as the object of our faith. Bonhoeffer discusses this single-minded obedience in chapter three of *The Cost of Discipleship*. In this chapter, the call of Levi and Peter are used to illustrate the believer’s proper response to the call of Christ and the Gospel.{5} The only requirement these men understood was that in each case the call was to rely on Christ’s word, and cling to it as offering greater security than all the securities in the world.{6}

In the nineteenth chapter of Matthew’s Gospel we have the story of the rich young man who is inquiring about salvation and is told by Christ that he must sell all of his possessions, take up his cross, and follow. Bonhoeffer emphasizes the bewilderment of the disciples who ask the question, “Who then can be saved?”{7} The answer they are given is that it is extremely hard to be saved, but with God all things are possible.

## **Bonhoeffer and the Sermon on the Mount**

The exposition of the Sermon on the Mount is another important element of *The Cost of Discipleship*. In it, Bonhoeffer places special emphasis on the beatitudes for understanding the incarnate and crucified Christ. It is here that the disciples are called “blessed” for an extraordinary list of qualities.

The *poor in spirit* have accepted the loss of all things, most importantly the loss of self, so that they may follow Christ.

Those who *mourn* are the people who do without the peace and prosperity of this world.{8} Mourning is the conscious rejection of rejoicing in what the world rejoices in, and finding one's happiness and fulfillment only in the person of Christ.

The *meek*, says Bonhoeffer, are those who do not speak up for their own rights. They continually subordinate their rights and themselves to the will of Christ first, and in consequence to the service of others. Likewise, those who *hunger and thirst after righteousness* also renounce the expectation that man can eventually make the world into paradise. Their hope is in the righteousness that only the reign of Christ can bring.

The *merciful* have given up their own dignity and become devoted to others, helping the needy, the infirm, and the outcasts. The *pure in heart* are no longer troubled by the call of this world, they have resigned themselves to the call of Christ and His desires for their lives. The *peacemakers* abhor the violence that is so often used to solve problems. This point would be of special significance for Bonhoeffer, who was writing on the eve of World War II. The *peacemakers* maintain fellowship where others would find a reason to break off a relationship. These individuals always see another option.{9}

Those who are *persecuted for righteousness' sake* are willing to suffer for the cause of Christ. Any and every just cause becomes their cause because it is part of the overall work of Christ. Suffering becomes the way to communion with God.{10} To this list is added the final blessing pronounced on those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. These will receive a great reward in heaven and be likened to the prophets who also suffered.

Bonhoeffer's emphasis on suffering is directly connected to the suffering of Christ. The church is called to bear the whole burden of Christ, especially as it pertains to suffering, or it must collapse under the weight of the



burden.{11} Christ has suffered, says Bonhoeffer, but His suffering is efficacious for the remission of sins. We may also suffer, but our suffering is not for redemptive purposes. We suffer, says Bonhoeffer, not only because it is the church's lot, but so that the world may see us suffering and understand that there is a way that men can bear the burdens of life, and that way is through Christ alone.

Discipleship for Bonhoeffer was not limited to what we can comprehend—it must transcend all comprehension. The believer must plunge into the deep waters beyond the comprehension and everyday teaching of the church, and this must be done individually and collectively.

## **Bonhoeffer's *Ethics***

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's work *Ethics* was written from 1940-1943. Intended as lectures, this is his most mature work and is considered to be his major contribution to theology.{12} Christian ethics, he says, must be considered with reference to the regenerated man whose chief desire should be to please God, not with the man who is concerned with an airtight philosophical system. Man is not, and cannot, be the final arbitrator of good and evil. This is reserved for God alone. When man tries to decide what is right and wrong his efforts are doomed to failure. Bonhoeffer wrote that "instead of knowing only the God who is good to him and instead of knowing all things in Him, [man] knows only himself as the origin of good and evil." {13} With this statement, Bonhoeffer entered one of the most difficult philosophical and theological problems in the history of the church: the problem of evil.

Bonhoeffer believed that the problem of evil could only be understood in light of the Fall of mankind. The Fall caused the disunion of man and God with the result that man is incapable of discerning right and wrong.{14} Modern men have a vague uneasiness about their ability to know right and wrong. Bonhoeffer asserted this is in part due to the desire for

philosophical certainty. However, Bonhoeffer urged the Christian to be concerned with living the will of God rather than finding a set of rules one may follow.<sup>{15}</sup> And while Bonhoeffer was not advocating a direct and individual revelation in every ethical dilemma, he did believe that man can have knowledge of the will of God. He said that “if a man asks God humbly God will give him certain knowledge of His will; and then, after all this earnest proving there will be the freedom to make real decisions, and [this] with the confidence that it is not man but God Himself who through this proving gives effect to His will.”<sup>{16}</sup>

Perhaps our first response to Bonhoeffer is that he appears to be some sort of mystic. However, it is imperative to understand the time in which he was writing, and some of the specific problems he was addressing. World War II was raging and the greatest ethical questions of the century were confronting the church. Good men, and even committed Christians, found themselves on opposing sides of the war. It would be ludicrous to suppose that right and wrong on individual or national levels was obvious, and that there was universal agreement among Christians. In the midst of all of this confusion a young pastor-theologian and member of the Resistance could only advise that believers turn to Christ with the expectation that true answers were obtainable. Such confidence is sorely needed among Christians who face a world devoid of answers.

The strength of Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* lies not in its systematic resolution of problems facing the church, but rather the acknowledgment that life is complex and that all systems outside of humble submission to the Word of God are doomed to failure. As unsettling as Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* may be, it is a refreshing call to the contemporary church to repent and return to a life characterized by prayer, the traditional mark of the early church.

# Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Prison Correspondence

Our final consideration of the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was hanged in 1945 for his part in an assassination attempt on Hitler, will center on his *Letters and Papers from Prison* begun in 1942. These letters represent some of Bonhoeffer's most mature work, as well as troubling observations concerning the church in the turbulent middle years of the twentieth century.

The opening essay is titled *After Ten Years*. Here Bonhoeffer identifies with the evil of the times, and especially the war. He speaks of the unreasonable situations which reasonable people must face. He warns against those who are deceived by evil that is disguised as good, and he cries out against misguided moral fanatics and the slaves of tradition and rules.

In viewing the horrors of war, Bonhoeffer reminds us that what we despise in others is never entirely absent from ourselves.<sup>[17]</sup> This warning against contempt for humanity is very important in light of authors such as Ernest Hemingway, Jean Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus, whose contempt for the war turned into disillusion with humanity. This is a striking contrast between several witnesses to the war who came to very different conclusions. Bonhoeffer's conclusions were the direct result of a personal relationship with Christ. The conclusions of Hemingway, Sartre, and Camus were the pessimistic observations of those without a final hope.

Bonhoeffer faced death daily for many years and came to some bold conclusions concerning how believers might posture themselves toward this ultimate event. He argued that one could experience the miracle of life by facing death daily; life could actually be seen as the gift of God that it is. It is we ourselves, and not our outward circumstances, who make

death potentially positive. Death can be something voluntarily accepted.[{18}](#)

The final question posed in this opening essay is whether it is possible for plain and simple men to prosper again after the war.[{19}](#) Bonhoeffer does not offer a clear solution, which may be seen as an insight into the true horrors of the war, as well as an open-ended question designed to illicit individual involvement in the problem.

Long before movies like *Schindler's List*, *Saving Private Ryan*, or *The Thin Red Line*, Bonhoeffer reported on the atrocities of the war. Some of the letters discuss the brutality and horrors of life in the prison camps, and one can certainly ascertain the expectation of execution in many of his letters. The thing that makes these letters so much more important than the popular films is that the letters are undoubtedly the confessions of one who is looking at the war as a Christian. Bonhoeffer was able to empathize with the problems faced by Christians living in such turbulent times.

Bonhoeffer's significance is difficult to assess completely and accurately, but two observations may help as we come to an end of our examination of his work.[{20}](#) We must always bear in mind the time of his writings. This explains much that we might at first not understand. Finally, any Christian would do well to read the works of one who gave his life in direct connection with his Christian convictions. There have been many martyrs in this century, but few who so vividly recorded the circumstances that lead to their martyrdom with both theological astuteness and a vision for future posterity.

## Notes

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R.H. Fuller, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 30.
2. Ibid., 53.
3. Ibid., 54.
4. Ibid., 59.

5. Ibid., 87.
6. Ibid., 87.
7. Ibid., 94.
8. Ibid., 98.
9. Ibid., 102.
10. Ibid., 102.
11. Ibid., 102.
12. William Kuhns, *In Pursuit of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, Image Books, 1969), 130.
13. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. Neville Horton Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 19.
14. Ibid., 20.
15. Ibid., 38.
16. Ibid., 40.
17. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethage, trans. Reinhold Fuller and others, [rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1967)].
18. Ibid., 17.
19. Ibid., 17.
20. An excellent and more thorough consideration of Bonhoeffer's importance can be found in Eberhard Bethage's [ *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Another excellent book for those interested in his life is the biography by Mary [Bosanquet, *The Life and Death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. These books are full of details about the personal life [of Bonhoeffer and offer great insights into his Christian life.

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## The Debate Over the King

# James Version – Which Is the Best Translation for My Personal Use

Written by Rick Wade

*Which version of the Bible is the most reliable and authoritative providing me with understanding of God's revelation? Rick Wade provides a balanced comparison of the King James Bible with other more recent translations to help you answer this question for yourself.*

## **Introduction: What the Debate is About**

Have you ever been in a Bible study where everyone in the group reads a verse . . . and there are two or three Bible versions being used? Following the train of thought can be difficult when a verse in one version clashes with the next verse in another version.

Since the 1940s, many new Bible versions have appeared on the market: the Revised Standard Version, the New English Bible, the New American Standard Bible, the New International Version, the Living Bible, the Contemporary English Version, The Message, and many more. When I was growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, the King James was still the dominant version. Today the New International Version leads sales followed by the KJV.(1)

For some people, the multiplicity of versions is a nuisance, but they accept it, believing that it is all a matter of personal preference. For others, however, this is a serious issue; not because of the inconvenience of multiple versions, but because they believe the King James Version is the only correct version for the church.

These new versions came about because of the publication of a new Greek New Testament about a century ago. Defenders of the primacy of the KJV were very vocal in their opposition to the new Greek text and the new English versions which followed its publication. This issue is not as big today, but it remains problematic for some Christians. Thus, a discussion of the King James/modern version debate is useful with a focus on the New Testament, for that is where the main concerns lie.

This debate is argued on two levels. On one level, the focus is on the King James itself (remember that our English versions are translated from Greek texts). Some simply believe that this particular translation is the best one. They see a certain majesty in its language, and they appreciate its important role in the history of the church. It has served the church well, so there is no need to begin confusing things by bringing in all those other versions, they believe.

There are some Christians, however, who go further than that. They believe that the KJV is not only the *best* version; they insist that it is the only valid English version. Newer translations of Scripture do not reliably convey God's truth. Some arguments for this side are little more than angry diatribes which are often circular. For example, some say that since the new versions differ from the King James, they are bad versions. The supremacy of the KJV is simply assumed.(2)

Although arguments from tradition and style can be powerful, there might be other considerations which outweigh them. A significant problem with the KJV, of course, is the language. People who did not grow up using the KJV have a hard time understanding it. Some of its words are no longer in use, and the antiquated forms of many words impede the understanding of the text. Over time they can learn to understand it, but without any more compelling reasons than tradition and style, it is hard to see why they should bother.

On another level, this debate focuses on the Greek manuscripts

from which the English versions are translated. Some “King James only” proponents believe that the Greek text underlying most of the newer versions is corrupt. As we will see, they present some good arguments for their position.

Because the Greek text is the critical issue in this debate, it will be the focus of our examination of the debate (we will not get too technical!). To set the stage, we will begin with a brief history of the King James Version.

## **A Brief History of the King James Version**

Many of us have heard the joke about the King James Version: “If it was good enough for the apostle Paul, it is good enough for me!” Paul, of course, was fifteen and a half centuries too early for the KJV. The New Testament writers wrote in Koine Greek, the language of the common man in the first century A.D. The first complete English Bible was not produced until John Wycliffe produced his in the fourteenth century. He translated from the Latin Vulgate which was the most widely used version at that time.

The next major step in the development of the English Bible was Tyndale’s translation of the New Testament published in 1526 and portions of the Old Testament published later. Tyndale’s version was significant because it was translated from a newly published Greek New Testament rather than from the Vulgate.

After Tyndale’s, a number of other versions were produced. Among them were the Coverdale Bible, the Matthews Bible, the Great Bible, the Geneva Bible, and the Bishops’ Bible. In 1611 the King James Version was published to provide a Bible which could be used by both Anglicans and Puritans. Marginal notes reflecting any particular theological bias were removed, and the language used was that of the people.

I noted earlier that Tyndale used a Greek text for his



translation. The first published Greek New Testament appeared in the year 1516. It was edited by Erasmus, a Dutch scholar. Erasmus had at his disposal no more than six Greek manuscripts (we have thousands at our disposal today). These manuscripts were part of what is called the *Byzantine* text family.

Although Erasmus' edition provided a great boost to the study of the New Testament, it had a number of problems. For one thing, none of his sources had the last six verses of the book of Revelation, so Erasmus translated from the Latin Vulgate back into Greek! Thus, in his text "several words and phrases may be found that are attested in no Greek manuscript whatsoever." (3) In the first two editions of his New Testament, Erasmus left out I John 5:7 because it did not appear in any of his Greek manuscripts. That verse reads: "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." This omission created a furor, so he promised to include the verse in a later edition if it could be found in any Greek manuscript. One was brought forward, and, although Erasmus did not think the text was genuine, he kept his promise and included the verse. It is now believed to have been a very late and unreliable manuscript, and some think it was forged to include the verse. (4)

Erasmus' Greek text was reworked and reprinted by others including Robert Estienne who divided the text into verses. Theodore Beza then built upon Estienne's work, and his Greek text provided one of the major foundations for the King James Bible. The term *Textus Receptus*, or Received Text, came from a blurb in another Greek text produced in the early seventeenth century by the Elzevir brothers. This title is still used in connection with the King James, and it is one you will see again in this article.

## Westcott and Hort

I noted earlier that the more substantial arguments for the “King James only” position focus on the Greek texts underlying the different versions. There are four significant issues in the debate involving these texts which I will develop: the science of textual criticism, the number of Greek manuscripts available, the history of the Greek texts, and the dates of the manuscripts.

Before getting into the debate itself, it will be helpful to mention the historical event which brought the debate to a head, and to introduce a central element in New Testament textual studies.

Between the thousands of Greek manuscripts available there are differences of one kind or another (although there are not any which effect doctrinal matters). Certain Greek manuscripts share enough similarities that they are believed to have come from the same source. Each of these groups is called a *text family* or a *text-type*. There are four text families which are generally agreed upon by scholars. The manuscripts which were used to produce the Textus Receptus (and later the King James Version) were of the Byzantine family. The other three text families generally agreed upon by scholars are the Alexandrian, the Caesarean, and the Western.(5)

The fundamental debate between scholars in the King James/modern version controversy is over the question of the most accurate Greek text family or families. Which of the four families, if any, most accurately represents what the New Testament authors wrote? The Byzantine text was the dominant Greek text from about the eighth century until the end of the nineteenth century.(6) In 1881, however, two scholars named Westcott and Hort published a new Greek New Testament which relied more on other text families than on the Byzantine family. Their Greek text became the basis of the New Testament portion of modern Bible translations.

Westcott and Hort evaluated the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament according to the principles of *textual criticism*. This is the science of the study of ancient texts, the originals of which are lost. Based upon their studies, they argued that the Byzantine text was *not* the closest to the original writings as the King James advocates claimed. It seemed to have combined readings from other text families, and some readings appeared to have been modified for greater clarity and understanding. Thus, they believed it was at least two steps removed from the original writings. Also, they found no clear evidence of its existence in the writings of the early church fathers, and there are no copies older than the fourth century. Those who agree with Westcott and Hort believe that the Byzantine text was produced in the fourth century probably in an attempt to give the church one New Testament (there were a number of different Greek texts being used at the time). Other text families, on the other hand, appear to have more original readings and *are* quoted by the early church fathers, and are thus closer to the originals. So, the conclusions drawn from the application of textual criticism along with the ages of the manuscripts led them to believe that the most accurate Greek text is to be found by drawing from all the Greek text families, especially the Alexandrian family.(7)

Supporters of the Byzantine or Received Text responded that it was inappropriate to use naturalistic methods of study such as textual criticism on Scripture. They said that this amounts to elevating man over God in determining what the Bible says.(8) They also argued that the vast numbers of Byzantine manuscripts along with the centuries of history behind this text family should not be set aside on the basis of a few manuscripts discovered relatively recently. They insisted that the Spirit of God would not allow His true word to lie dormant so long while the church was being guided by inferior texts.

# Textual Criticism

As I noted above, those who argue for the Byzantine or Received Text say that it is improper to subject the Bible to the scrutiny of textual criticism. The Bible, being the inspired Word of God, is unique. One begins with it as inspired and then accepts what it says.

But those in the Westcott-Hort tradition note that we cannot simply shut our eyes to the fact that there *are* differences between the various Greek manuscripts, even those in the Byzantine family. Even those who believe in the inerrancy of Scripture recognize that the original writings of the New Testament were inerrant, not the copies. It is our responsibility to apply the most sound principles we know of to determine what the original manuscripts said. This is the aim of textual criticism.

So, how does textual criticism work? Differences between Greek manuscripts are called variants. There are several causes of variants. Some are accidental, such as misspelled words or repeated or reversed words. Some resulted from a scribe not hearing a dictation correctly. Also, deliberate changes seem to have been made to bring passages in different Gospels into harmony or to make a doctrinal point clearer.

What are some examples of differences between the Greek texts which show up in our English Bibles? One example is the Lord's Prayer as it is recorded in Matthew and in Luke. In the KJV the two versions are almost identical, while in the NIV the prayer in Luke 11 is significantly shorter than that in Matthew 6. Most scholars believe that, at some point in history, a scribe added to the text in Luke to make it agree more with Matthew.

The last half of Mark 16 is a lengthy section which is disputed. The KJV retains verses 9 through 20 while the NIV includes the passage with a note saying it is not found in the

most reliable early manuscripts. Scholars who believe it should be excluded also note that the style and vocabulary are very different from the rest of Mark.(9)

To add one more, in the KJV, three verses in Mark 9 (44 ,46, and 48) are identical: "Where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched." The NIV puts verses 44 and 46 in footnotes and notes that *some* manuscripts include the phrase. Since each verse follows a reference to hell, it is very possible that a scribe simply repeated the warning to strengthen the message.

If all this makes you nervous about the accuracy of your Bible, it is important to note that textual criticism is used on all documents for which the originals no longer exist. New Testament scholar J. Harold Greenlee noted that, with respect to the Bible, "No Christian doctrine . . . hangs upon a debatable text."(10) This conflict provides no fodder for critics of Christianity who might ask how we can know what the Bible really says. We can be confident that we have a highly accurate text, especially given the number of New Testament manuscripts available and the antiquity of some of them.(11) As one writer has said, "It is well to remember that the main body of the text and its general sense are left untouched . . . textual criticism engages in turning a magnifying glass upon some of the details."(12)

## **Other Issues in the Debate**

In addition to the question of textual criticism, questions regarding the number of manuscripts, the historical dominance of the Byzantine text, and the dates of the manuscripts still need to be considered.

First is the matter of the *number* of manuscripts. Between eighty and ninety percent of existing manuscripts are of the Byzantine family and are in remarkable agreement. This fact is not in dispute. King James supporters say that the few

manuscripts to which Westcott and Hort gave preference cannot override the witness of the vast majority of manuscripts in existence which are of the Byzantine tradition. It is normal to expect that the oldest manuscript will have the most copies.(13) In response, those who follow Westcott and Hort point out that hundreds of copies could have been made from one defective text while a better text was not copied as often. The copying of New Testament texts was not as carefully monitored as the copying of the Old Testament text by Jewish scholars. As we have seen, errors were made and changes were deliberately introduced. Simply finding a lot of manuscripts which are in agreement is not enough. To illustrate their point, they ask whether one would rather have one real \$100 bill or five counterfeits.

A second issue is the *preservation* of the text through history. Supporters of the Received Text ask why God's Spirit would allow the church to be under the authority of a defective text for almost 1500 years. Textual critics respond that this argument exaggerates the issue. They do not consider the Byzantine text to be a "'bad' or heretical text; it presents the same Christian message as the critical [or Westcott-Hort] text."(14) Again, there are no doctrinal differences between the Greek texts. Members of the Byzantine family are used along with members of other text families to determine what the true reading of a passage should be. The major text families are neither absolutely corrupt nor absolutely perfect. Text critics must use all the available resources to determine what the original documents said.

Finally, the *dates* of the manuscripts are important in this debate. Textual critics point out that church fathers before the fourth century "unambiguously cited every text-type except the Byzantine."(15) If the Byzantine text-type comes directly from the original writings, one would expect unambiguous quotations of it from the beginning. They also point out that there are no Byzantine manuscripts older than the fourth

century, whereas there *are* copies of other text families older than that.

In response to this, King James supporters note that the New Testament manuscripts began to be altered very soon after they were written. Eusebius, the ancient church historian, reported that heresies sprang up early after the turn of the second century, and proponents of these heresies sometimes altered Scripture to accord with their beliefs.(16) Thus, antiquity is not the crucial test. That there are no copies older than the fourth century can be explained by the fact that the material manuscripts were written on was fragile; it's reasonable to conclude that the early copies probably wore out through frequent handling.

## **Summary and Concluding Thoughts**

To summarize, those who support the King James/Received Text tradition emphasize the number of manuscripts, the church's history with the Byzantine text, and God's interest in preserving His Word, whereas those following Westcott and Hort say that the variants in the manuscripts – even between those in the Byzantine family – prove the need for the textual criticism of the New Testament. The results of their analysis along with the ages of the manuscripts leads them to believe that the Byzantine family is just one text family that can lead us back to the originals – or close to it – but it is not the one best text family.

So, which way should you go on this debate? If you are concerned about the issue, I suggest that you study it more. The texts cited in the notes will give you a place to start. If not, I would recommend using a version that is as close to the Greek text as possible while being understandable to you. But whichever version you choose, be very sure of your arguments before insisting that others use it, too. It seems to me that, with all the difficulties we face in our often hostile culture, we should not erect walls between Christians

on the basis of Bible versions. We are not taking God's Word lightly here. We are simply calling for a more well-reasoned discussion and for the rule of love to govern the debate.

#### Notes

1. *Marketplace*, Christian Booksellers Association, May, 1998.
2. An example is the pamphlet by J. J. Ray, *The Eye Opener* (Junction City, Oregon, 1953).
3. D.A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 34.
4. *Ibid.*, 35.
5. F.F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments* 3d ed., (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1963), 185.
6. J. Harold Greenlee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 61-62.
7. To be more precise, while Westcott and Hort gave the greater weight to the Alexandrian text over the Byzantine, they gave even greater weight to the manuscripts Vaticanus and Sinaiticus which they considered to be "neutral texts." Later, sympathetic scholars grouped these two with the Alexandrian family. See Carson, 41.
8. Edward F. Hills, "The Magnificent Burgon," in *Which Bible?*, 5th ed., David Otis Fuller, ed. (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1975), 101-105.
9. Greenlee, 133.
10. *Ibid.*, 68.
11. In addition to the Greek manuscripts, also available for study are ancient lectionaries, various translations into other languages, and the writings of the early church fathers. See Greenlee, pp. 44-58.
12. *Ibid.*, 17.
13. Zane C. Hodges, "The Greek Text of the King James Version," in *Which Bible?*, 37.
14. Greenlee, 81.
15. Carson, 47.



16. Eusebius Pamphilus, *Ecclesiastical History* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971), 215-216. See also Benjamin G. Wilkinson, "Our Authorized Bible Vindicated," in *Which Bible?*, 190-193.

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# Ten Lies of Feminism: A Christian Perspective

*Sue Bohlin examines how this prevalent view of women measures up from a biblical perspective.*

This essay examines the ten lies of feminism that Dr. Toni Grant suggests in her book *Being a Woman*.[{1}](#)

*At its inception, the feminist movement, accompanied by the sexual revolution, made a series of enticing, exciting promises to women. These promises sounded good, so good that many women deserted their men and their children or rejected the entire notion of marriage and family, in pursuit of "themselves" and a career. These pursuits, which emphasized self-sufficiency and individualism, were supposed to enhance a woman's quality of life and improve her options, as well as her relations with men. Now, a decade or so later, women have had to face the fact that, in many ways, feminism and liberation made promises that could not be delivered.*[{2}](#)

## Lie #1: Women Can Have It All

The first lie is that women can have it all. We were fed an illusion that women, being the superior sex, have an inexhaustible supply of physical and emotional energy that enable us to juggle a career, family, friendships and volunteer service. Proponents of feminism declared that not

only *can* women do what men do, but we *ought* to do what men do. Since men can't do what women can do—have babies—this put a double burden on women. It wasn't enough that women were already exhausted from the never-ending tasks of child-rearing and homemaking; we were told that women needed to be in the work force as well, contributing to the family financially.

Scripture presents a different picture for men and women. The Bible appears to make a distinction between each gender's primary energies. The commands to women are generally in the realm of our relationships, which is consistent with the way God made women to be primarily relational, being naturally sensitive to others and usually valuing people above things. Scripture never forbids women to be gainfully employed; in fact, the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 is engaged in several part-time business ventures, in real estate and manufacturing. Nonetheless, it is the excellent care of her husband, her children, her home and her community that inspires the praise she is due. Titus 2 instructs older women to mentor younger women, and teach them to care for their husbands and children and homemaking responsibilities. The God-given strengths of a woman were given to bring glory to God through her womanly differences

## **Lie #2: Men and Women are Fundamentally the Same**

Apart from some minor biological differences, feminism strongly suggested that males and females are fundamentally the same. Culture, it announced, was responsible for turning human blank slates into truck-wielding boys and doll-toting girls. This lie has been very effective at changing the culture. My husband Ray and I offer a seminar at Probe's *Mind Games* conferences called "Guys Are From Mars, Girls Are From Venus," where we go over the major differences between the sexes. Men, for instance, tend to be more goal-oriented and competitive, where women are more relational and cooperative.

Men are active; women are verbal. This is intuitively obvious to the adults in our audience, but it is often new news to high school and college students. We find adults nodding with smiles of recognition, some of them nudging each other in the ribs. In the younger members of the audience, though, we see “the lights come on” in their eyes as they are exposed to something that is obvious and they probably already knew was true, but feminism’s worldview had been feeding them a lie. They have been so immersed in this cultural myth that they had accepted it without question. One young man came up to me after a session and said he totally disagreed with me, that there are no real differences between males and females. I asked him if he treated his guy friends the same way he treated his girl friends, and he said, “Of course!” I asked, “And this doesn’t cause you any problems?” He said no. With a smile, I suggested he come talk to me in ten years after he’d had a chance to experience real life!

The truth is that God created significant differences between males and females. We can see evidence of this in the fact that Scripture gives different commands for husbands and wives, which are rooted in the differing needs and divinely-appointed roles of men and women.

## **Lie #3: Desirability is Enhanced by Achievement**

The third lie of feminism is that the more a woman achieves, the more attractive and desirable she becomes to men. The importance of achievement to a man’s sense of self—an element of masculinity that is, we believe, God-given—was projected onto women. Feminism declared that achieving something, making a mark in the world, was the only measure of success that merited the respect of others. Women who believed this myth found themselves competing with men. Now, competition is appropriate in the business and professional world, but it’s disastrous in relationships.

Men do respect and admire accomplished women, just as they do men, but personal relationships operate under a different set of standards. Men most appreciate a woman's unique feminine attributes: love, sensitivity, her abilities to relate. Women have been shocked to discover that their hard-won accomplishments haven't resulted in great relationships with men. Sometimes, being overeducated hampers a woman's ability to relate to men. Men's egos are notoriously fragile, and they are by nature competitive. It's threatening to many men when a woman achieves more, or accomplishes more, or knows more than they do. Feminism didn't warn women of the double standard in relationships: that achievement can and does reap benefits in our careers, but be a stumbling block in our relationships.

The question naturally arises, then, Is it bad for a woman to have a higher degree of education than the man in a relationship? Is it troublesome when a woman is smarter than the man? Should a woman "dumb down" in order to get or keep her man? In the words of the apostle Paul, "May it never be!" A woman living up to the potential of her God-given gifts brings glory to God; it would be an insult to our gracious God to pretend those gifts aren't there. The answer is for women to understand that many men feel threatened and insecure about this area of potential competition, and maintain an attitude of humility and sensitivity about one's strengths; as Romans exhorts us, "Honor[ing] one another above yourselves" (12:10).

Not surprisingly, God already knew about the disparity between the sexes on the issue of achievement. Throughout the Bible, men are called to trust God as they achieve whatever God has called them to do. It's important for men to experience personal significance by making a mark on the world. But God calls women to trust Him in a different area: in our relationships. A woman's value is usually not in providing history-changing leadership and making great, bold moves, but in loving and supporting those around us, changing the world by touching hearts. Once in a while, a woman does make her

mark on a national or global scale: consider the biblical judge Deborah, Golda Meir, Margaret Thatcher, and Indira Ghandi. But women like these are the exception, not the rule. And we don't have to feel guilty for not being "exceptional."

## **Lie #4: The Myth of One's "Unrealized Potential"**

Lie number four says that all of us—but especially women—have tremendous potential that simply *must* be realized. To feminism's way of thinking, just being average isn't acceptable: you must be *great*.

This causes two problems. First, women are deceived into thinking they are one of the elite, the few, the special. Reality, though, is that most women are ordinary, one of the many. All of us are uniquely gifted by God, but few women are given visible, high-profile leadership roles, which tend to be the only ones that feminism deems valuable. We run into trouble when we're operating under a set of beliefs that don't coincide with reality!

Consequently, many women are operating under unrealistically high expectations of themselves. When life doesn't deliver on their hopes, whether they be making class valedictorian, beauty pageant winner, company president, or neurosurgeon, women are set up for major disappointment. Just being a cog in the wheel of your own small world isn't enough.

This brings us to the second problem. A lot of women beat themselves up for not accomplishing greatness. Instead of investing their life's energies in doing well those things they *can* do, they grieve what and who they are *not*. Just being good, or being good at what they do, isn't enough if they're not the *best*.

Romans 12:3 tells us, "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought." Rather than worrying about our unrealized

potential for some sort of nebulous greatness, we ought to be concerned about being faithful and obedient in the things God has given us to do, trusting Him for the ultimate results. And we ought to not worry about being ordinary as if there were some stigma to it. Scripture says that God is pleased to use ordinary people, because that's how He gets the most glory. (See 1 Corinthians 1:26-31.) There is honor in being an ordinary person in the hand of an extraordinary God.

## **Lie #5: Sexual Sameness**

The fifth lie of feminism is that men and women are the same sexually. This lie comes to us courtesy of the same evil source that brought us the lies of the sexual revolution.

The truth is that women can't separate sex from love as easily as men can. For women, sex needs to be an expression of love and commitment. Without these qualities, sex is demeaning, nothing more than hormones going crazy.

The cost of sex is far greater for women than for men. Sex outside of a committed, loving relationship—I'm talking about marriage here—often results in unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and profound heartbreak. Every time a woman gives her body away to a man, she gives a part of her heart as well. Sexual "freedom" has brought new degrees of heartache to millions of women. The lie of sexual equality has produced widespread promiscuity and epidemic disease. No wonder so many women are struggling with self-esteem!

God's commands concerning sex take into account the fact that men and women are not the same sexually or any other way. He tells us to exercise self-control before marriage, saving all sexual expression for the constraints of a marriage relationship, and then to keep the marriage bed pure once we are married. When we follow these guidelines, we discover that God's laws provide protection for women: the security of a committed relationship, freedom from sexual health worries,

and a stable environment for any children produced in the union. This high standard also protects men by providing a safe channel for their sexual energies. Both chaste single men, and faithful husbands, are kept safe from sexual diseases, unwanted pregnancies with women other than their wives, and the guilt of sexual sin.

## **Lie #6: The Denial of Maternity**

Many women postponed marriage and childbearing to pursue their own personal development and career goals. This perspective denies the reality of a woman's reproductive system and the limitations of time. Childbearing is easier in a woman's 20s and 30s than in her 40s. Plus, there is a physical cost; science has borne out the liabilities that older women incur for themselves and their babies. Midlife women are more prone to have problems getting pregnant, staying pregnant, and then experiencing difficult deliveries. The risk of conceiving a child with Down's Syndrome is considerably higher in older mothers.[\[3\]](#) Fertility treatment doesn't work as well for women over 40.[\[4\]](#)

There is also a spiritual dimension to denying maternity. When women refuse their God-ordained roles and responsibilities, they open themselves to spiritual deception and temptations. 1 Timothy 2:15 is an intriguing verse: "But women will be saved through childbearing." One compelling translation for this verse is, "Women will be *kept safe* through childbearing," where Paul uses the word for *childbearing* as a sort of shorthand for the woman's involvement in the domestic sphere—having her "focus on the family," so to speak.<sup>(5)</sup> When a married woman's priorities are marriage, family and the home, she is kept safe—protected—from the consequences of delaying motherhood and the temptations that beleaguer a woman trying to fill a man's role. For example, I know one married woman who chose to pursue a full-time career in commercial real estate, to the detriment of her family. She confessed

that she found herself constantly battling the temptation to lust on two fronts: sexual lust for the men in her office and her clients, and lust for the recognition and material things that marked success in that field. Another friend chose her career over having any children at all, and discovered that like the men in her field, she could not separate her sense of self from her job, and it ultimately cost her her marriage and her life as she knew it. The problem isn't having a career: the problem is when a woman gets her priorities out of balance.

## **Lie #7: To Be Feminine Is To Be Weak**

In the attempt to blur gender distinctions, feminists declared war on the concept of gender-related characteristics. The qualities that marked feminine women—softness, sweetness, kindness, the ability to relate well—were judged as silly, stupid and weak. Only what characterized men—characteristics like firmness, aggressiveness, competitiveness—were deemed valuable.

But when women try to take on male qualities, the end result is a distortion that is neither feminine nor masculine. A woman is perceived as shrill, not spirited. What is expected and acceptable aggression in a man is perceived as unwelcome brashness in a woman. When women try to be tough, it is often taken as unpleasantness. Unfortunately, there really is a strong stereotype about “what women should be like” that merits being torn down. A lot of men are threatened by strong women with opinions and agendas of their own, and treat them with undeserved disrespect. But it is not true that traditionally masculine characteristics are the only ones that count.

There really is a double standard operating, because the characteristics that constitute masculinity and femininity are separate and different, and they are not interchangeable. To be feminine is a special kind of strength. It's a different,



appealing kind of power that allows a woman to influence her world in a way quite distinct from the way a man influences the world. It pleased the Lord to create woman to complement man, not to compete with him or be a more rounded copy of him. 1 Corinthians 11:7 says that man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. Femininity isn't weakness; it's the glorious, splendid crown on humanity.

## **Lie #8: Doing is Better Than Being**

In his book *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*[\[6\]](#), John Gray pointed out that men get their sense of self from achievement, and women get their sense of self from relationships. Feminism declared that the male orientation of *what you do* was the only one that mattered; *who you are*, and how important you are to the people in your world, didn't count for as much.

This lie said that active is good, passive is bad. Traditional feminine behaviors of being passive and receptive were denounced as demeaning to women and ineffective in the world. Only being the initiator counted, not being the responder. "To listen, to be there, to receive the other with an open heart and mind—this has always been one of the most vital roles of woman. Most women do this quite naturally, but many have come to feel uneasy in this role. Instead, they work frantically on assertiveness, aggression, personal expression, and power, madly suppressing their feminine instincts of love and relatedness."[\[7\]](#)

Women's roles in the family, the church, and the world are a combination of being a responder and an initiator. As a responder, a wife honors her husband through loving submission, and a woman serves the church through the exercise of her spiritual gifts. As an initiator and leader, a woman teaches her children and uses her abilities in the world, such as the woman of Proverbs 31. God's plan is for us to live a balanced life—sometimes active, sometimes passive; sometimes

the initiator, sometimes the responder; at all times, submitting both who we are and what we do to the Lordship of Christ.

## **Lie #9: The Myth of Self-Sufficiency**

The ninth lie is the myth of self-sufficiency. Remember the famous feminist slogan that appeared on everything from bumper stickers to t-shirts to notepads? “A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle.” The message was clear: women don’t need men, who are inferior anyway. The world would be a better place if women ran it: no wars, no greed, no power plays, just glorious cooperation and peace.

The next step after “women don’t need men” was logical: women don’t need anybody. We can take care of ourselves. Helen Reddy’s hit song “I Am Woman” became feminism’s theme song, with the memorable chorus, “If I have to, I can do anything / I am strong / I am invincible / I am woman!”

Of course, if women don’t need anybody except themselves, they certainly don’t need God. Particularly a masculine, patriarchal God who makes rules they don’t like and insists that He alone is God. But the need to worship is deeply ingrained in us, so feminist thought gave rise to goddess worship. The goddess was just a female image to focus on; in actuality, goddess worship is worship of oneself.[\[8\]](#)

The lie of self-sufficiency is the same lie that Satan has been deceiving us with since the Garden of Eden: What do you need God for? We grieve the Lord’s heart when we believe this lie. Jeremiah 2:13 says, “My people have committed two sins: they have forsaken Me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.” God made us for Himself; believing the lie of self-sufficiency isn’t only futile, it’s a slap in God’s face.

## Lie #10: Women Would Enjoy the Feminization of Men

The tenth lie of feminism is that women would enjoy the feminization of men. Feminists believed that the only way to achieve equality of the sexes was to do away with *role* distinctions. Then they decided that that wasn't enough: society had to do away with *gender* distinctions, or at the very least blur the lines. Women embraced more masculine values, and men were encouraged to embrace more feminine characteristics. That was supposed to fix the problem. It didn't.

As men tried to be “good guys” and accommodate feminists' demands, the culture saw a new type of man emerge: sensitive, nurturing, warmly compassionate, yielding. The only problem was that this “soft man” wasn't what women wanted. Women pushed men to be like women, and when they complied, nobody respected them. Women, it turns out, want to be the soft ones—and we want men to be strong and firm and courageous; we want a manly man. When men start taking on feminine characteristics, they're just wimpy and unmasculine, not pleasing themselves or the women who demanded the change. There is a good reason that books and movies with strong, masculine heroes continue to appeal to such a large audience. Both men and women respond to men who fulfill God's design for male leadership, protection, and strength.

Underlying the women's liberation movement is an angry, unsubmitive attitude that is fueled by the lies of deception. It's good to know what the lies are, but it's also important to know what God's word says, so we can combat the lies with the power of His truth.

### Notes

1. Toni Grant, *Being a Woman: Fulfilling Your Femininity and Finding Love*. New York: Random House, 1988.

2. Ibid, 3.

3. March of Dimes, "Pregnancy After 35," [www.marchofdimes.com/professionals/14332\\_1155.asp](http://www.marchofdimes.com/professionals/14332_1155.asp).

4. Jodi Panayotov, "IVF & Older Women – How Successful is IVF After 40?" [ezinearticles.com/?IVF-and-Older-Women-How-Successful-is-IVF-After-40?&id=636335](http://ezinearticles.com/?IVF-and-Older-Women-How-Successful-is-IVF-After-40?&id=636335).

5. Andreas Kostenberger, "Saved Through Childbearing?" (*CBMW [The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood] News*, Sept. 1997), p. 3.

6. John Gray, *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992.

7. Grant, 9.

8. Mary Kassian, *The Feminist Gospel* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1992), p. 159.

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## Euthanasia: A Christian Perspective

*Kerby Anderson looks at euthanasia from a distinctly Christian perspective. Applying a biblical view gives us clear understanding that we are not lord of our own life or anyone elses.*



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

Debate over euthanasia is not a modern phenomenon. The Greeks

carried on a robust debate on the subject. The Pythagoreans opposed euthanasia, while the Stoics favored it in the case of incurable disease. Plato approved of it in cases of terminal illness.<sup>(1)</sup> But these influences lost out to Christian principles as well as the spread of acceptance of the Hippocratic Oath: "I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody if asked for it, nor will I make a suggestion to that effect."

In 1935 the Euthanasia Society of England was formed to promote the notion of a painless death for patients with incurable diseases. A few years later the Euthanasia Society of America was formed with essentially the same goals. In the last few years debate about euthanasia has been advanced by two individuals: Derek Humphry and Dr. Jack Kevorkian.

Derek Humphry has used his prominence as head of the Hemlock Society to promote euthanasia in this country. His book *Final Exit: The Practicalities of Self-Deliverance and Assisted Suicide for the Dying* became a bestseller and further influenced public opinion.

Another influential figure is Jack Kevorkian, who has been instrumental in helping people commit suicide. His book *Prescription Medicide: The Goodness of Planned Death* promotes his views of euthanasia and describes his patented suicide machine which he calls "the Mercitron." He first gained national attention by enabling Janet Adkins of Portland, Oregon, to kill herself in 1990. They met for dinner and then drove to a Volkswagen van where the machine waited. He placed an intravenous tube into her arm and dripped a saline solution until she pushed a button which delivered first a drug causing unconsciousness, and then a lethal drug that killed her. Since then he has helped dozens of other people do the same.

Over the years, public opinion has also been influenced by the tragic cases of a number of women described as being in a "persistent vegetative state." The first was Karen Ann

Quinlan. Her parents, wanting to turn the respirator off, won approval in court. However, when it was turned off in 1976, Karen continued breathing and lived for another ten years. Another case was Nancy Cruzan, who was hurt in an automobile accident in 1983. Her parents went to court in 1987 to receive approval to remove her feeding tube. Various court cases ensued in Missouri, including her parents' appeal that was heard by the Supreme Court in 1990. Eventually they won the right to pull the feeding tube, and Nancy Cruzan died shortly thereafter.

Seven years after the Cruzan case, the Supreme Court had occasion to rule again on the issue of euthanasia. On June 26, 1997 the Supreme Court rejected euthanasia by stating that state laws banning physician-assisted suicide were constitutional. Some feared that these cases (*Glucksburg v. Washington* and *Vacco v. Quill*) would become for euthanasia what *Roe v. Wade* became for abortion. Instead, the justices rejected the concept of finding a constitutional "right to die" and chose not to interrupt the political debate (as *Roe v. Wade* did), and instead urged that the debate on euthanasia continue "as it should in a democratic society."

## **Voluntary, Active Euthanasia**

It is helpful to distinguish between mercy-killing and what could be called mercy-dying. Taking a human life is not the same as allowing nature to take its course by allowing a terminal patient to die. The former is immoral (and perhaps even criminal), while the latter is not.

However, drawing a sharp line between these two categories is not as easy as it used to be. Modern medical technology has significantly blurred the line between hastening death and allowing nature to take its course.

Certain analgesics, for example, ease pain, but they can also shorten a patient's life by affecting respiration. An

artificial heart will continue to beat even after the patient has died and therefore must be turned off by the doctor. So the distinction between actively promoting death and passively allowing nature to take its course is sometimes difficult to determine in practice. But this fundamental distinction between life-taking and death-permitting is still an important philosophical distinction.

Another concern with active euthanasia is that it eliminates the possibility for recovery. While this should be obvious, somehow this problem is frequently ignored in the euthanasia debate. Terminating a human life eliminates all possibility of recovery, while passively ceasing extraordinary means may not. Miraculous recovery from a bleak prognosis sometimes occurs. A doctor who prescribes active euthanasia for a patient may unwittingly prevent a possible recovery he did not anticipate.

A further concern with this so-called voluntary, active euthanasia is that these decisions might not always be freely made. The possibility for coercion is always present. Richard D. Lamm, former governor of Colorado, said that elderly, terminally ill patients have "a duty to die and get out of the way." Though those words were reported somewhat out of context, they nonetheless illustrate the pressure many elderly feel from hospital personnel.

The Dutch experience is instructive. A survey of Dutch physicians was done in 1990 by the Rummelink Committee. They found that 1,030 patients were killed without their consent. Of these, 140 were fully mentally competent and 110 were only slightly mentally impaired. The report also found that another 14,175 patients (1,701 of whom were mentally competent) were denied medical treatment without their consent and died.(2)

A more recent survey of the Dutch experience is even less encouraging. Doctors in the United States and the Netherlands have found that though euthanasia was originally intended for exceptional cases, it has become an accepted way of dealing

with serious or terminal illness. The original guidelines (that patients with a terminal illness make a voluntary, persistent request that their lives be ended) have been expanded to include chronic ailments and psychological distress. They also found that 60 percent of Dutch physicians do not report their cases of assisted suicide (even though reporting is required by law) and about 25 percent of the physicians admit to ending patients' lives without their consent.(3)

## **Involuntary, Active Euthanasia**

Involuntary euthanasia requires a second party who makes decisions about whether active measures should be taken to end a life. Foundational to this discussion is an erosion of the doctrine of the sanctity of life. But ever since the Supreme Court ruled in *Roe v. Wade* that the life of unborn babies could be terminated for reasons of convenience, the slide down society's slippery slope has continued even though the Supreme Court has been reluctant to legalize euthanasia.

The progression was inevitable. Once society begins to devalue the life of an unborn child, it is but a small step to begin to do the same with a child who has been born. Abortion slides naturally into infanticide and eventually into euthanasia. In the past few years doctors have allowed a number of so-called "Baby Does" to die—either by failing to perform lifesaving operations or else by not feeding the infants.

The progression toward euthanasia is inevitable. Once society becomes conformed to a "quality of life" standard for infants, it will more willingly accept the same standard for the elderly. As former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop has said, "Nothing surprises me anymore. My great concern is that there will be 10,000 Grandma Does for every Baby Doe."(4)

Again the Dutch experience is instructive. In the Netherlands, physicians have performed involuntary euthanasia because they



thought the family had suffered too much or were tired of taking care of patients. American surgeon Robin Bernhoft relates an incident in which a Dutch doctor euthanized a twenty-six-year-old ballerina with arthritis in her toes. Since she could no longer pursue her career as a dancer, she was depressed and requested to be put to death. The doctor complied with her request and merely noted that "one doesn't enjoy such things, but it was her choice." (5)

## **Physician-Assisted Suicide**

In recent years media and political attention has been given to the idea of physician-assisted suicide. Some states have even attempted to pass legislation that would allow physicians in this country the legal right to put terminally ill patients to death. While the Dutch experience should be enough to demonstrate the danger of granting such rights, there are other good reasons to reject this idea.

First, physician-assisted suicide would change the nature of the medical profession itself. Physicians would be cast in the role of killers rather than healers. The Hippocratic Oath was written to place the medical profession on the foundation of healing, not killing. For 2,400 years patients have had the assurance that doctors follow an oath to heal them, not kill them. This would change with legalized euthanasia.

Second, medical care would be affected. Physicians would begin to ration health care so that elderly and severely disabled patients would not be receiving the same quality of care as everyone else. Legalizing euthanasia would result in less care, rather than better care, for the dying.

Third, legalizing euthanasia through physician-assisted suicide would effectively establish a right to die. The Constitution affirms that fundamental rights cannot be limited to one group (e.g., the terminally ill). They must apply to all. Legalizing physician-assisted suicide would open the door

to anyone wanting the “right” to kill themselves. Soon this would apply not only to voluntary euthanasia but also to involuntary euthanasia as various court precedents begin to broaden the application of the right to die to other groups in society like the disabled or the clinically depressed.

## **Biblical Analysis**

Foundational to a biblical perspective on euthanasia is a proper understanding of the sanctity of human life. For centuries Western culture in general and Christians in particular have believed in the sanctity of human life. Unfortunately, this view is beginning to erode into a “quality of life” standard. The disabled, retarded, and infirm were seen as having a special place in God’s world, but today medical personnel judge a person’s fitness for life on the basis of a perceived quality of life or lack of such quality.

No longer is life seen as sacred and worthy of being saved. Now patients are evaluated and life-saving treatment is frequently denied, based on a subjective and arbitrary standard for the supposed quality of life. If a life is judged not worthy to be lived any longer, people feel obliged to end that life.

The Bible teaches that human beings are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26) and therefore have dignity and value. Human life is sacred and should not be terminated merely because life is difficult or inconvenient. Psalm 139 teaches that humans are fearfully and wonderfully made. Society must not place an arbitrary standard of quality above God’s absolute standard of human value and worth. This does not mean that people will no longer need to make difficult decisions about treatment and care, but it does mean that these decisions will be guided by an objective, absolute standard of human worth.

The Bible also teaches that God is sovereign over life and death. Christians can agree with Job when he said, “The Lord

gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). The Lord said, "See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand" (Deut. 32:39). God has ordained our days (Ps. 139:16) and is in control of our lives.

Another foundational principle involves a biblical view of life-taking. The Bible specifically condemns murder (Exod. 20:13), and this would include active forms of euthanasia in which another person (doctor, nurse, or friend) hastens death in a patient. While there are situations described in Scripture in which life-taking may be permitted (e.g., self-defense or a just war), euthanasia should not be included with any of these established biblical categories. Active euthanasia, like murder, involves premeditated intent and therefore should be condemned as immoral and even criminal.

Although the Bible does not specifically speak to the issue of euthanasia, the story of the death of King Saul (2 Sam. 1:9-16) is instructive. Saul asked that a soldier put him to death as he lay dying on the battlefield. When David heard of this act, he ordered the soldier put to death for "destroying the Lord's anointed." Though the context is not euthanasia per se, it does show the respect we must show for a human life even in such tragic circumstances.

Christians should also reject the attempt by the modern euthanasia movement to promote a so-called "right to die." Secular society's attempt to establish this "right" is wrong for two reasons. First, giving a person a right to die is tantamount to promoting suicide, and suicide is condemned in the Bible. Man is forbidden to murder and that includes murder of oneself. Moreover, Christians are commanded to love others as they love themselves (Matt. 22:39; Eph. 5:29). Implicit in the command is an assumption of self-love as well as love for others.

Suicide, however, is hardly an example of self-love. It is perhaps the clearest example of self-hate. Suicide is also usually a selfish act. People kill themselves to get away from pain and problems, often leaving those problems to friends and family members who must pick up the pieces when the one who committed suicide is gone.

Second, this so-called "right to die" denies God the opportunity to work sovereignly within a shattered life and bring glory to Himself. When Joni Eareckson Tada realized that she would be spending the rest of her life as a quadriplegic, she asked in despair, "Why can't they just let me die?" When her friend Diana, trying to provide comfort, said to her, "The past is dead, Joni; you're alive," Joni responded, "Am I? This isn't living." (6) But through God's grace Joni's despair gave way to her firm conviction that even her accident was within God's plan for her life. Now she shares with the world her firm conviction that "suffering gets us ready for heaven." (7)

The Bible teaches that God's purposes are beyond our understanding. Job's reply to the Lord shows his acknowledgment of God's purposes: "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know" (Job 42:2-3). Isaiah 55:8-9 teaches, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Another foundational principle is a biblical view of death. Death is both unnatural and inevitable. It is an unnatural intrusion into our lives as a consequence of the fall (Gen. 2:17). It is the last enemy to be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26, 56). Therefore Christians can reject humanistic ideas that assume death as nothing more than a natural transition. But the Bible also teaches that death (under the present

conditions) is inevitable. There is “a time to be born and a time to die” (Eccles. 3:2). Death is a part of life and the doorway to another, better life.

When does death occur? Modern medicine defines death primarily as a biological event; yet Scripture defines death as a spiritual event that has biological consequences. Death, according to the Bible, occurs when the spirit leaves the body (Eccles. 12:7; James 2:26).

Unfortunately this does not offer much by way of clinical diagnosis for medical personnel. But it does suggest that a rigorous medical definition for death be used. A comatose patient may not be conscious, but from both a medical and biblical perspective he is very much alive, and treatment should be continued unless crucial vital signs and brain activity have ceased.

On the other hand, Christians must also reject the notion that everything must be done to save life at all costs. Believers, knowing that to be at home in the body is to be away from the Lord (2 Cor. 5:6), long for the time when they will be absent from the body and at home with the Lord (5:8). Death is gain for Christians (Phil. 1:21). Therefore they need not be so tied to this earth that they perform futile operations just to extend life a few more hours or days.

In a patient's last days, everything possible should be done to alleviate physical and emotional pain. Giving drugs to a patient to relieve pain is morally justifiable. Proverbs 31:6 says, “Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to him whose life is bitter.” As previously mentioned, some analgesics have the secondary effect of shortening life. But these should be permitted since the primary purpose is to relieve pain, even though they may secondarily shorten life.

Moreover, believers should provide counsel and spiritual care to dying patients (Gal. 6:2). Frequently emotional needs can

be met both in the patient and in the family. Such times of grief also provide opportunities for witnessing. Those suffering loss are often more open to the gospel than at any other time.

Difficult philosophical and biblical questions are certain to continue swirling around the issue of euthanasia. But in the midst of these confusing issues should be the objective, absolute standards of Scripture, which provide guidance for the

## Notes

1. Plato, *Republic* 3. 405.
2. R. Finigsen, "The Report of the Dutch Committee on Euthanasia," *Issues in Law and Medicine*, July 1991, 339-44.
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5. Robin Bernhoft, quoted in *Euthanasia: False Light*, produced by IAETF, P.O. Box 760, Steubenville, OH 43952.
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# Homosexual Theology: A Biblically Sound View

*Kerby Anderson helps understand the complete biblical perspective on homosexuality. As Christians, Kerby helps us understand the biblical truth and how to apply it with compassion in our dealings with those around us.*

## The Sin of Sodom—Genesis 19

Does the Bible condemn homosexuality? For centuries the answer to that question seemed obvious, but in the last few decades pro-homosexual commentators have tried to reinterpret the relevant biblical passages. In this discussion we will take a look at their exegesis.

The first reference to homosexuality in the Bible is found in Genesis 19. In this passage, Lot entertains two angels who come to the city to investigate its sins. Before they go to bed, all the men (from every part of the city of Sodom) surround the house and order him to bring out the men so that “we may know them.” Historically commentators have always assumed that the Hebrew word for “know” meant that the men of the city wanted to have sex with the visitors.

More recently, proponents of homosexuality argue that biblical commentators misunderstand the story of Sodom. They argue that the men of the city merely wanted to meet these visitors. Either they were anxious to extend Middle-eastern hospitality or they wanted to interrogate the men and make sure they weren’t spies. In either case, they argue, the passage has nothing to do with homosexuality. The sin of Sodom is not homosexuality, they say, but inhospitality.

One of the keys to understanding this passage is the proper translation of the Hebrew word for “know.” Pro-homosexuality

commentators point out that this word can also mean “to get acquainted with” as well as mean “to have intercourse with.” In fact, the word appears over 943 times in the Old Testament, and only 12 times does it mean “to have intercourse with.” Therefore, they conclude that the sin of Sodom had nothing to do with homosexuality.

The problem with the argument is context. Statistics is not the same as exegesis. Word count alone should not be the sole criterion for the meaning of a word. And even if a statistical count should be used, the argument backfires. Of the 12 times the word “to know” is used in the book of Genesis, in 10 of those 12 it means “to have intercourse with.”

Second, the context does not warrant the interpretation that the men only wanted to get acquainted with the strangers. Notice that Lot decides to offer his two daughters instead. In reading the passage, one can sense Lot’s panic as he foolishly offers his virgin daughters to the crowd instead of the foreigners. This is not the action of a man responding to the crowd’s request “to become acquainted with” the men.

Notice that Lot describes his daughters as women who “have not known” a man. Obviously this implies sexual intercourse and does not mean “to be acquainted with.” It is unlikely that the first use of the word “to know” differs from the second use of the word. Both times the word “to know” should be translated “to have intercourse with.” This is the only consistent translation for the passage.

Finally, Jude 7 provides a commentary on Genesis 19. The New Testament reference states that the sin of Sodom involved gross immorality and going after strange flesh. The phrase “strange flesh” could imply homosexuality or bestiality and provides further evidence that the sin of Sodom was not inhospitality but homosexuality.

Contrary to what pro-homosexual commentators say, Genesis 19



is a clear condemnation of homosexuality. Next we will look at another set of Old Testament passages dealing with the issue of homosexuality.

## **Mosaic Law—Leviticus 18, 20**

Now we will look at the Mosaic Law. Two passages in Leviticus call homosexuality an abomination. Leviticus 18:22 says, “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.” Leviticus 20:13 says, “If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable.” The word for “abomination” is used five times in Leviticus 18 and is a strong term of disapproval, implying that something is abhorrent to God. Biblical commentators see these verses as an expansion of the seventh commandment. Though not an exhaustive list of sexual sins, they are representative of the common sinful practices of nations surrounding Israel.

Pro-homosexual commentators have more difficulty dealing with these relatively simple passages of Scripture, but usually offer one of two responses. Some argue that these verses appear in the Holiness code of the Leviticus and only applies to the priests and ritual purity. Therefore, according to this perspective, these are religious prohibitions, not moral prohibitions. Others argue that these prohibitions were merely for the Old Testament theocracy and are not relevant today. They suggest that if Christians wanted to be consistent with the Old Testament law code in Leviticus, they should avoid eating rare steak, wearing mixed fabrics, and having marital intercourse during the menstrual period.

First, do these passages merely apply to ritual purity rather than moral purity? Part of the problem comes from making the two issues distinct. The priests were to model moral behavior within their ceremonial rituals. Moral purity and ritual purity cannot be separated, especially when discussing the issue of human sexuality. To hold to this rigid distinction

would imply that such sins as adultery were not immoral (consider Lev. 18:20) or that bestiality was morally acceptable (notice Lev. 18:23). The second argument concerns the relevance of the law today. Few Christians today keep kosher kitchens or balk at wearing clothes interwoven with more than one fabric. They believe that those Old Testament laws do not pertain to them. In a similar way pro-homosexual commentators argue that the Old Testament admonitions against homosexuality are no longer relevant today. A practical problem with this argument is that more than just homosexuality would have to be deemed morally acceptable. The logical extension of this argument would also have to make bestiality and incest morally acceptable since prohibitions to these two sins surround the prohibition against homosexuality. If the Mosaic law is irrelevant to homosexuality, then it is also irrelevant to having sex with animals or having sex with children.

More to the point, to say that the Mosaic law has ended is not to say that God has no laws or moral codes for mankind. Even though the ceremonial law has passed, the moral law remains. The New Testament speaks of the "law of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:2) and the "law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). One cannot say that something that was sin under the Law is not sin under grace. Ceremonial laws concerning diet or wearing mixed fabrics no longer apply, but moral laws (especially those rooted in God's creation order for human sexuality) continue. Moreover, these prohibitions against homosexuality can also be found in the New Testament as we will see next as we consider other passages reinterpreted by pro-homosexual commentators.

## **New Testament Passages**

In our examination of the Old Testament teachings regarding homosexuality, we found that Genesis 19 teaches that the men of Sodom were seeking the strangers in order to have sex with them, not merely asking to meet these men or to extend Middle

Eastern hospitality to them. We also discovered that certain passages in Leviticus clearly condemn homosexuality and are relevant today. These prohibitions were not just for the Old Testament theocracy, but were moral principles binding on human behavior and conduct today.

At this point we will consider some of the New Testament passages dealing with homosexuality. Three key New Testament passages concerning homosexuality are: Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9, and 1 Timothy 1:10. Of the three, the most significant is Romans 1 because it deals with homosexuality within the larger cultural context.

*Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.*

Here the Apostle Paul sets the Gentile world's guilt before a holy God and focuses on the arrogance and lust of the Hellenistic world. He says they have turned away from a true worship of God so that "God gave them over to shameful lusts." Rather than follow God's instruction in their lives, they "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18) and follow passions that dishonor God.

Another New Testament passage dealing with homosexuality is 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." Pro-homosexual commentators make use of the "abuse" argument and point out that Paul is only singling out homosexual offenders. In other words, they argue that the

Apostle Paul is condemning homosexual abuse rather than responsible homosexual behavior. In essence, these commentators are suggesting that Paul is calling for temperance rather than abstinence. While this could be a reasonable interpretation for drinking wine (don't be a drunkard), it hardly applies to other sins listed in 1 Corinthians 6 or 1 Timothy 1. Is Paul calling for responsible adultery or responsible prostitution? Is there such a thing as moral theft and swindling? Obviously the argument breaks down. Scripture never condones sex outside of marriage (premarital sex, extramarital sex, homosexual sex). God created man and woman for the institution of marriage (Gen. 2:24). Homosexuality is a violation of the creation order, and God clearly condemns it as unnatural and specifically against His ordained order. As we have seen in the discussion thus far, there are passages in both the Old Testament and the New Testament which condemn homosexuality.

## **“God Made Me Gay,” Part 1**

At this point in our discussion, we need to consider the claim made by some homosexuals that, “God made me gay.” Is this true? Is there a biological basis to homosexuality? For the remainder of this essay, we will consider the evidence usually cited. Simon LeVay (a neuroscientist at the Salk Institute) has argued that homosexuals and heterosexuals have notable differences in the structure of their brains. In 1991, he studied 41 cadavers and found that a specific portion of the hypothalamus (the area that governs sexual activity) was consistently smaller in homosexuals than in heterosexuals. He therefore argued that there is a distinct physiological component to sexual orientation. There are numerous problems with the study. First, there was considerable range in the size of the hypothalamic region. In a few homosexual men, this region was the same size as that of the heterosexuals, and in a few heterosexuals this region was as small as that of a homosexual.

Second is the chicken and egg problem. When there is a difference in brain structure, is the difference the *result* of sexual orientation or is it the *cause* of sexual orientation? Researchers, for example, have found that when people who become blind begin to learn Braille, the area of the brain controlling the reading finger actual grows larger. Third, Simon LeVay later had to admit that he didn't know the sexual orientation of some of the cadavers in the study. He acknowledged that he wasn't sure if the heterosexual males in the study were actually heterosexual. Since some of those he identified as "heterosexual" died of AIDS, critics raised doubts about the accuracy of his study.

In December 1991, Michael Bailey and Richard Pillard published a study of homosexuality in twins. They surveyed homosexual men about their brothers and found statistics they believed proved that sexual orientation is biological. Of the homosexuals who had identical twin brothers, 52 percent of those twins were also homosexual, 22 percent of those who had fraternal twins said that their twin was gay, and only 11 percent of those who had an adopted sibling said their adopted brothers were also homosexual. They attributed the differences in those percentages to the differences in genetic material shared.

Though this study has also been touted as proving a genetic basis to homosexuality, there are significant problems. First, the theory is not new. It was first proposed in 1952. Since that time, three other separate research studies come to very different conclusions. Therefore, the conclusions of the Bailey-Pillard study should be considered in the light of other contrary studies. Second, most published reports did not mention that only 9 percent of the non- twin brothers of homosexuals were homosexuals. Fraternal twins share no more genetic material than non-twin brothers, yet homosexuals are more than twice as likely to share their sexual orientation with a fraternal twin than with a non-twin brother. Whatever

the reason, the answer cannot be genetic.

Third, why aren't nearly all identical twin brothers of homosexuals also homosexual? In other words, if biology is determinative, why are nearly half the identical twins not homosexual? Dr. Bailey admitted that there "must be something in the environment to yield the discordant twins." And that is precisely the point; there is something (perhaps everything) in the environment to explain sexual orientation. These are two studies usually cited as evidence of a biological basis for homosexuality. Next we will consider a third study often cited to prove the claim that "God made me gay."

## **"God Made Me Gay," Part 2**

Now let's look at another study often cited as proof of this claim. This study is often called the "gay gene" study. In 1993, a team of researchers led by Dr. Dean Hamer announced "preliminary" findings from research into the connection between homosexuality and genetic inheritance. In a sample of 76 homosexual males, the researchers found a statistically higher incidence of homosexuality in their male relatives (brothers, uncles) on their mother's side of the family. This suggested a possible inherited link through the X chromosome. A follow-up study of 40 pairs of homosexual brothers found that 33 shared a variation in a small section of the X chromosome. Although this study was promoted by the press as evidence of the discovery of a gay gene, some of the same concerns raised with the previous two studies apply here. First, the findings involve a limited sample size and are therefore sketchy. Even the researchers acknowledged that these were "preliminary" findings. In addition to the sample size being small, there was no control testing done for heterosexual brothers. Another major issue raised by critics of the study concerned the lack of sufficient research done on the social histories of the families involved.

Second, similarity does not prove cause. Just because 33 pairs

of homosexual brothers share a genetic variation doesn't mean that variation causes homosexuality. And what about the other 7 pairs that did not show the variation but were homosexuals?

Finally, research bias may again be an issue. Dr. Hamer and at least one of his other team members are homosexual. It appears that this was deliberately kept from the press and was only revealed later. Dr. Hamer it turns out is not merely an objective observer. He has presented himself as an expert witness on homosexuality, and he has stated that he hopes his research would give comfort to men feeling guilty about their homosexuality.

By the way, this was a problem in every one of the studies we have mentioned in our discussion. For example, Dr. Simon LeVay said that he was driven to study the potential physiological roots of homosexuality after his homosexual lover died of AIDS. He even admitted that if he failed to find a genetic cause for homosexuality that he might walk away from science altogether. Later he did just that by moving to West Hollywood to open up a small, unaccredited "study center" focusing on homosexuality.

Each of these three studies looking for a biological cause for homosexuality has its flaws. Does that mean that there is no physiological component to homosexuality? Not at all. Actually, it is probably too early to say conclusively. Scientists may indeed discover a clear biological predisposition to sexual orientation. But a predisposition is not the same as a determination. Some people may inherit a predisposition for anger, depression, or alcoholism, yet we do not condone these behaviors. And even if violence, depression, or alcoholism were proven to be inborn (determined by genetic material), would we accept them as normal and refuse to treat them? Of course not. The Bible has clear statements about such things as anger and alcoholism. Likewise, the Bible has clear statements about homosexuality.

In our discussion in this transcript, we have examined the various claims of pro-homosexual commentators and found them wanting. Contrary to their claims, the Bible does not condone homosexual behavior.

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# The Bible Code

Written by Richard Milne

*How should thinking Christians respond to purported information embedded in the Bible's original language? There is more to "The Bible Code" than meets the eye.*

## What Is a Bible Code?

There is no way to ignore the clear fact that a computerized code in the Bible . . . accurately predicted the Gulf War, the collision of a comet with Jupiter, and the assassination of [Israeli Prime Minister] Rabin, also seems to state that the Apocalypse starts now, that within a decade, we may face the real Armageddon, a nuclear World War.[\(1\)](#)

So ends Michael Drosnin's best-seller *The Bible Code*. On the *New York Times* bestseller list for months, the book has created a small industry of people selling books about secret codes, and a huge audience of people reading about and discussing codes. And what are these "codes" that are so fascinating and how does the Bible fit into all of this? Those are just a few of the questions we will address in this essay as we try to reach some balanced conclusions about a very controversial topic.

People have written codes since at least 400 B.C., and Jewish



scholars have looked for codes in the text of the Old Testament for approximately a thousand years. *Gematria*, the discipline of changing portions of text into numbers to look for a deeper meaning, has been part of Jewish Cabalistic tradition since at least the 13th century. But it is only in the last twenty years that computers have extended the range of text searches to almost unimaginable lengths.

At the heart of the current controversy is a scientific paper by three Israeli mathematicians with the helpful title of: "Equidistant Letter Sequences in the Book of Genesis." A quite technical paper, it was published in *Statistical Science* in 1994.[\(2\)](#) As is typical in scientific publications, it was peer reviewed. In fact, three other qualified statisticians read the paper, and while confounded by the results, each agreed that the mathematics and data used seemed legitimate. So what did Doron Witztum, Eliyahu Rips, and Yoav Rosenberg write that has caused so much excitement?

In the 1980s Eliyahu Rips, an Orthodox Jew and well-known Israeli mathematician, came across the writings of Rabbi Michael Weismandel. The book is so rare that Rips found only one copy, at the National Library in Israel. Rabbi Weismandel discovered that by starting with the first Hebrew letter "T" in the book of Genesis and counting forward 49 letters to find an "O" as the 50th letter, and then another 49 letters to an "R," another 49 letters to an "A," and finally another 49 letters to an "H," the word TORAH was spelled out. "Torah" is the Hebrew name for the books Moses wrote. This same pattern happens in the book of Exodus. But in Numbers and Deuteronomy one must count backwards beginning at either the first or fifth verse. But why 50?[\(3\)](#)

In Jewish rabbinic tradition, most numbers are symbolic. For example, 50 is the year of Jubilee, the year that all land goes back to its original owner, when all debts are canceled, when the land rests for the whole year. It is also said that there are fifty gates of wisdom in the Torah.

Rabbi Weismandel is reputed to have found many patterns like this in the Torah as he laboriously counted by hand again and again in the most holy of all Jewish books. Rips was fascinated by these patterns and wondered what a computer could do to find more patterns.

Now, let's see what Eli Rips discovered as he looked at the text with a computer.

## **Bible Codes Are Demonstrated by Mathematics and Computers**

Michael Drosnin's book, *The Bible Code*, describes the discovery by Eli Rips and others, of messages they claim are coded into the text of the Hebrew Old Testament, and only discoverable in our own time by using computers. These codes warn of dire events in the near future that could affect the whole world. But how are these messages hidden in a book that has been read for more than 2,000 years?

What Rips uncovered was that if he used Rabbi Weismandel's idea of counting off equal intervals between letters, he could find many words in the Hebrew text. The technical name for this method is quite a mouthful: Equidistant Letter Sequences, or ELS. A computer program finds the first letter of a word, and then begins counting until it finds the next letter of the word. This becomes the "skip code." Then, using that skip code, it counts to see if the third letter of the word is found at that same interval. So it would start by skipping every other letter, then every two letters, then every three letters until it finds a "skip" that spells out the word. Thus, as mentioned earlier, the Hebrew word for the first five books of the Bible, "Torah," is spelled out with an ELS of 50 in the book of Genesis.

This might be the answer to an interesting trivia question, but why is *The Bible Code* selling thousands of copies? That's because Michael Drosnin has made some astounding claims about

the ELS codes: that one code anticipated, weeks in advance, the exact day the Gulf War would start; that another code predicted Yitzhak Rabin's assassination by a man named Amir; that a code anticipated, within two years of the actual events, earthquakes in Japan; and that in the year 2000 or 2006 an atomic holocaust, beginning in Israel, is likely. This is great millennial material!

Droshin's book is based on a paper published in *Statistical Science* in 1994 by Witztum, Rips, and Rosenberg. With great statistical rigor, the authors show that the 78,064 Hebrew letters of the Book of Genesis, when set out with no spaces or punctuation, can be searched by a computer for specific words spelled out by ELS codes. Specifically, they set out to see if they could find the names of 32 famous rabbis in Genesis. Not only did they find ELS codes that spelled out all 32 rabbis, but near their names were coded their birth dates or death dates, or sometimes both. How could any author have known these details 2000 years before these men lived?

This is amazing enough. The odds are said to be one in ten million! But in his book, Droshin claims the same kind of codes revealed that Prime Minister Rabin would be assassinated a year before it happened. Droshin even got a letter delivered through a friend to Rabin, but it was ignored. He also shows dozens of other historic events and how details about them are encoded all around where an ELS code finds the main name or event.

As you might guess, the response to the book has been mixed—to say the least. Most people say, "How could a three-thousand-year-old book possibly say anything about the future?" Others see this as proof that the Bible is the divinely inspired word of God. And some are just interested but very skeptical.

Next, we'll look at the reaction to *The Bible Code* and why some are so critical.

# Critical Reactions to the Bible Codes

A book making claims to “foretell” the future is almost certain to become a target for both eager followers and cynical scholars. In particular, a rift has developed between the original writers of the mathematical paper, and how Drosnin has used their work.

Witztum, Rips, and Rosenberg, while maintaining the accuracy of their original paper, say that Drosnin’s attempts to state what may happen in the future are “futile,” and that Drosnin’s book “employs no scientific methodology.”[\(4\)](#) Witztum categorically states “predicting the future is impossible.” Seems like a strange statement from a man who claims in his own paper that the ELS codes found the names, birth dates, death dates, and cities of residence of 32 rabbis thousands of years before any of them had been born. What the original authors of the *Statistical Science* paper claim is that the ELS codes they have discovered can only give information about what one has a place or name for already. In this view, codes can tell us about death camps in Germany because we know what to look for. Witztum uses this to demonstrate ELS codes at work.

What can we find out about Auschwitz? First, we must have mathematical tools to measure whether a specific ELS and the words found near it are statistically significant. This is provided by the calculations laid out in the 1994 paper, *Statistical Science*. Then one must have a prepared list of words one is looking for.

So, Witztum begins with the words “of Auschwitz” and a list of all of the subcamps of this World War II death camp. Once an ELS for Auschwitz is found, Witztum claims, “We find something very unexpected that [the names of all the subcamps] consistently appear in the area of the words ‘of Auschwitz.’” This, he says, is all that Bible codes can do. Codes cannot predict the future.[\(5\)](#)

But when Genesis was written, all 32 rabbis found in Genesis were still far in the future. The earliest rabbi found lived in the eighth century A.D. This is nearly 2,000 years after Moses. Isn't that predicting the future, at least from the author's point of view?

Michael Drosnin himself has been ambivalent about what the codes tell us. His book says, "I found the Bible code's *prediction* of [Rabin's] assassination myself. . . . When he was killed, as *predicted*, where *predicted*, my first thought was, 'Oh my God, it's real'" [\(6\)](#) (emphasis mine). But in a CNN interview he said, "I don't think the code makes predictions. I think it might tell us about possible futures." [\(7\)](#) Either Drosnin has changed his mind, or he is disingenuous in his book.

Harold Gans, a retired senior mathematician for the U.S. Department of Defense, and an expert at making and breaking codes, was one of the first mathematicians to look at the Bible codes. Highly skeptical at first, he duplicated their experiment, finding the same information. Still suspicious, Gans made up his own test: find the rabbis' cities of birth and death. Again the information appeared in close connection with their ELS codes. His conclusion: "The information was deliberately placed in the Bible by its author. . . . Logic would dictate that the author could not be human, could not be bound by the limits of time. It would be natural to conclude that the author is a divine being." [\(8\)](#)

Is there finally "proof" that the Bible was written by a divine being? That is our next subject.

## **Do the Bible Codes Prove Divine Inspiration?**

Have codes hidden in the Bible finally proved it to be written by God? As we stated earlier, mathematician and code expert Harold Gans thinks so. What about *The Bible Code's*, Michael

Drosnin? His own response is quite remarkable: "Everyone I met with seemed to assume that if the code was real, it must be from God. I did not. I could easily believe that it was from someone good, who wanted to save us, but was not our Creator. Clearly it was not someone omnipotent, or he would simply prevent the danger, instead of encoding a warning." [\(9\)](#)

On the other hand, a Jewish group called Aish HeTorah has developed a Discovery Seminar that has been given to nearly 70,000 people in the last ten years. To help attendees develop an "appreciation of the relevance and value of Torah and Judaism in their lives," roughly 20% of the Discovery Seminar features the work of Witztum, Rips, and Rosenberg. Harold Gans, the Defense Department code specialist mentioned earlier, is an advisor for this group, so compelling has this evidence become for him. [\(10\)](#)

Christians, too, have started looking for ELS codes, claiming to find the Hebrew for Jesus in all sorts of interesting passages about the coming Messiah. Two books by Christians are already out, and surely more will follow. So is this finally "the most important evidence that proves to this generation that the Bible is truly inspired by God" [\(11\)](#) as one Christian writer says?

Brendan McKay is a man with a sense of humor. He also has a mission: to show that even the mathematical uses of ELS codes prove nothing. McKay is an Australian mathematician who has published the first statistical critique of the WRR paper. But at his Web site he has accumulated a most interesting series of what he calls "pictures," much like the diagrams Drosnin published in *The Bible Code*. In these "pictures" he does exactly what Drosnin does: he looks for a word by ELS codes, and then sees what other words occur nearby. He has also taken up Drosnin's challenge in *Newsweek* magazine: "When my critics find a message about the assassination of a prime minister encrypted in *Moby Dick*, I'll believe them." [\(12\)](#)

Undoubtedly Drosnin felt he had nothing to fear: hadn't Rips and his colleagues tried to find information in the Hebrew version of *War and Peace* and found nothing? But published on McKay's web page are the diagrams from *Moby Dick* of predictions of the death of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India, Lebanese President Moawad, Marxist Leon Trotsky, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, John Kennedy, and even Princess Diana. For Lady Diana, not only is her boyfriend Dodi spelled out across her name, but even the name of their chauffeur, Henri Paul is there! And more are added regularly. But by far the most ironic "discovery" concerns the death of Drosnin himself. The place, method, and motive for his death are all spelled out.[\(13\)](#)

McKay's technical paper claims to duplicate the WRR paper but finds the 32 rabbis encoded in the Hebrew of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.[\(14\)](#) McKay and his co-author use the same statistical methods, and have Jewish authorities to back their spellings for the rabbis names, just as WRR had. So what does this tell us? At this point, no one knows for certain.

Finally, let's consider how Christians might want to think about this whole controversy.

## **How Should Christians Respond to the Bible Codes?**

How should thinking Christians respond to these seemingly incredible findings of future events foretold in the Bible, but hidden in codes only a computer can find? Undoubtedly, it is too early to say very much, as even the specific methods and mathematical checks have yet to be agreed upon. But certain things appear to be clear.

We know very little about how sequences of letters behave when not written by an author, but rather put together by a program within a computer. Witztum, Rips, and Rosenberg make certain assumptions about what would and would not be a significantly

close connection between two sets of words to rule out random placement. But these are, in the end, arbitrary. What McKay and Dror Bar-Natan have done in their own paper, "Equidistant Letter Sequences in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*," is demonstrate to their satisfaction that whatever phenomena occurs in the Hebrew text of Genesis can also be found in the Hebrew text of *War and Peace*.[\(15\)](#)

The scholarly arguing about method and mathematics is still going on, but what seems to be emerging is the fact that almost any "message" can be found if a sufficiently long text is used. If this is true, then we have learned something new about how humans who can program computers can find non-random messages in random texts, but we have not shown that a divine intelligence wrote the Bible.

An important question to ask ourselves is, "Why are we so fascinated by codes and mysterious messages in a book as clear as the Bible?" Do we not trust that God has given us all we need to know, both for ourselves and to evangelize the world, in the text that all of us can read? Perhaps for His own pleasure, God has indeed hidden certain things in the text of the Bible, but surely they are not the main message. God has given us the Bible so that we might know Him and make Him known. ELS codes in the Bible do not seem to do much more than pique curiosity.

Our responsibility is to read the text for what it says, not for what may be hidden under the surface. We know from the Book of Revelation that some great cataclysm is coming, and as it draws nearer, we are warned not to be misled. Jesus vividly portrayed how obvious His return would be: "Just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be."[\(16\)](#) So as you watch the news and the millennium approaches, keep your "[baloney detectors](#)" alert!

Will Bible codes become an important tool in the apologetic



toolkit of evangelical Christians? We should be very cautious when we do not use God's Word as He wrote it. Merely studying the Bible codes will not necessarily result in Christian faith. For example, Michael Drosnin, after years of research for his book, *The Bible Code*, was still an atheist: "I had proof there was a code, but not proof there was a God. . . . I don't believe in God. . . . The message of the Bible code is that we can save ourselves." (17) If that is all that Drosnin came to believe after working with these codes for five years, we are probably better off having people read the Bible and encountering the real God through His own words. One needs no codes to read and understand John 3:16.

## Notes

1. Michael Drosnin, *The Bible Code* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 179.
2. Doron Witztum, Eliyahu Rips, and Yoav Rosenberg, "Equidistant Letter Sequences in the Book of Genesis," *Statistical Science*, 1994, vol. 9, no. 3, 429-438.
3. Drosnin, 20-21.
4. <http://www.discoveryseminar.org/cgibin/var/aishdisc/witztum.html>
5. Ibid.
6. Drosnin, 14.
7. Interview on CNN web page, "Meet Michael Drosnin the Author, *The Bible Code*."
8. Harold Gans, "Bible Codes," <http://www.discoveryseminar.org/bc.html>
9. Drosnin, 79.
10. Aish HaToreh, "Discovery" web page.
11. Yocov Rembsel, *Yeshua* (Toronto, Ontario: Frontier Research Publications, 1996), vi.
12. *Newsweek*, 9 June 1997.
13. [Http://cs.anu.edu.au/~bdm/dilugim/moby.html](http://cs.anu.edu.au/~bdm/dilugim/moby.html)
14. "Equidistant Letter Sequences in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*," [bdm@cs.anu.edu.au](mailto:bdm@cs.anu.edu.au)

15. Ibid.
16. Matthew 24:27.
17. Drosnin, 103, 179.

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# The Goddess and the Church – A New Age Deity

*Feminism has invaded the realm of theology, elevating the concept of The Goddess, or Great Mother, as a pantheistic and occultic paradigm for religion acceptable to feminists, who find traditional religions unacceptable because of their “male Gods.”*



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

The goddess, or Great Mother, has existed since the beginning of time...it is out of the primordial depths of her womb that the Universe and all life is born. *Morwyn, Secrets Of A Witch's Coven*

Reverence for the goddess is becoming more prevalent in our day. The goddess is embraced by witchcraft, feminism, the occult, and the liberal church. The New Age that is about to dawn upon us will be, according to the occult world, a feminine age. Likewise, those who hold this view believe that this current, masculine age has been an age of destruction and broken relationships among humanity. The New Age with its feminine energies will bring balance to the destructive aspects of the Piscean Age.

Rosemary Radford Ruether in her book, *Womanguides: Readings*

*Toward A Feminist Theology*, states "It is to the women that we look for salvation in the healing and restorative waters of Aquarius. It is to such a New Age that we look now with hope as the present age of masculism succeeds in destroying itself." According to Starhawk, a feminist and practicing witch, "the symbolism of the Goddess is not a parallel structure to the symbolism of God the Father. The Goddess does not rule the world; She is the world."(1)

In order for this feminine age to come into full fruition a shift in consciousness must take place in the world. This shift in thinking and perception of reality will bring forth the goddess.(2)

As interest in the occult continues to rise and gain popularity in our culture, the goddess becomes more popular as a deity. The modern woman is at a crossroads in her spiritual quest. It is imperative that she realize her inherent deity, her god nature, for she is to be the salvation of humanity.

According to those who hold a belief in the Great Goddess, Europe was once ruled by a matriarchal egalitarian religion. Their belief dictates that Old Europe was a culture that worshiped a matrifocal (mother-focused), sedentary, peaceful, art-loving, goddess between 5,000 and 25,000 years before the rise of the first male-oriented religion. They maintain that this egalitarian culture was overrun and destroyed by a semi-nomadic, horse-riding, Indo-European group of invaders who were patrifocal (father-focused), mobile, warlike, and indifferent to art.(3) The ease with which the peaceful goddess worshipers were subdued confirmed to the war-like Indo-European invaders their feelings of natural superiority. The matriarchal religion of these early settlers was eventually assimilated into the more dominant patriarchal religion of the invaders. As these invaders imposed their patriarchal culture on the conquered peoples, rapes(4) and myths about male warriors killing serpents appeared for the first time in their history. The serpent was a symbol of the

goddess worshipers. As the assimilation of cultures continued, the Great Mother Goddess became fragmented into many lesser goddesses.

According to Merlin Stone, author of *When God Was a Woman*, the disenthronement of the Great Goddess, begun by the Indo-European invaders, was finally accomplished by the Hebrew, Christian, and Moslem religions that arose later.(5) The male deity took the prominent place. The female goddesses faded into the background, and women in society followed suit.(6)

## **The Goddess and Witchcraft**

In the world of witchcraft the goddess is the giver of life. Jean Shinoda Bolen, M.D., in her book, *Goddesses In Everywoman*, has this to say about the goddess:

The Great Goddess was worshiped as the feminine life force deeply connected to nature and fertility, responsible both for creating life and for destroying life.(7)

She also proclaims, "The Great Goddess was regarded as immortal, changeless, and omnipotent" prior to the coming of Christianity. For witchcraft, the goddess is the earth itself. Mother Earth or Gaia, as the goddess is known in occult circles, is an evolving being as is all of nature. In the New Age worldview, environmentalism and the ecological movement play an important part in restoring the goddess. In her best-selling book, *The Spiral Dance*, Starhawk says

The model of the Goddess, who is immanent in nature, fosters respect for the sacredness of all living things. Witchcraft can be seen as a religion of ecology. Its goal is harmony with nature, so that life may not just survive, but thrive.(8)

Witches think of Gaia, or Mother Earth, as a biosystem. They attribute consciousness to earth and believe it to be spiritual as well. In other words, Gaia is a living and

evolving being that has a spiritual destiny. Those who practice witchcraft take responsibility for Mother Earth's evolutionary development.

The environmental movement of our day is greatly influenced by those who practice witchcraft or hold neopagan beliefs. Witchcraft is an attempt to reintroduce the sacred aspect of the earth that was, according to their belief, destroyed by the Christian world. The goddess is, therefore, a direct affront against the male-dominated religion of the Hebrew God.

Christianity taught that God was transcendent, apart from nature, and was a masculine deity. Witchcraft holds a pantheistic view of God. God is nature. Therefore, God is in all things and all things are a part of God. However, this God is in actuality a goddess and predates the male God. The goddess is the giver of all life and is found in all of creation.

The importance of the Goddess symbol for women cannot be over stressed. The image of the Goddess inspires women to see ourselves as divine, our bodies as sacred, the changing phases of our lives as holy, our aggression as healthy, and our anger as purifying. Through the Goddess, we can discover our strength, enlighten our minds, own our bodies, and celebrate our emotions.(9)

For Betty Sue Flowers, a University of Texas English professor, the women's spirituality movement is the answer to the male-oriented religion of Christianity. She was a keynote speaker for the International Conference on Women's Spirituality in Austin, Texas, and addressed the conference on the return of the goddess. According to Flowers,

The goddess is a metaphor that reminds us of the female side of spirituality. Metaphors are important. You can't know God directly. You can only know images of God, and each image or

metaphor is a door. Some doors are open and others are closed. A door that is only male is only half open.(10)

## The Goddess and Feminism

For many in the feminist world, the goddess is an expression of worship. A growing number within the feminist movement have bought into witchcraft as the central focus of their allegiance. Those who have become a part of the women's spirituality movement reject what they call the patriarchal Judeo-Christian tradition, deploring sexist language, predominantly masculine imagery and largely male leadership.(11)

In a Wall Street Journal article, Sonia L. Nazario stated, "Women first wanted to apply feminism to political and economic realms, then to their families. Now, they want it in their spiritual lives."(12)

To fully understand the implications of the women's spirituality movement one only needs to read the current literature on the subject. The editors of the book *Radical Feminism* state that "Political institutions such as religion, because they are based on philosophies of hierarchical orders and reinforce male oppression of females, must be destroyed."

Radical feminists believe that the traditional church must be dismantled. For example, in her book *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions*, Naomi Goldenburg announced,

The feminist movement in Western culture is engaged in the slow execution of Christ and Yahweh....It is likely that as we watch Christ and Yahweh tumble to the ground, we will completely outgrow the need for an external God.(13)

Many feminists are obviously moving away from an understanding of deity as an external "male" God who stands apart from Creation to a conception of deity as a goddess that is

realized within one's inner self and is one with nature.

Some extreme feminists in the goddess movement "pray for the time when science will make men unnecessary for procreation." (14) The radical feminist see the goddess movement as a spiritual outlet for their long-held beliefs. According to Mark Muesse, an assistant professor of religious studies at Rhodes College,

some feminist Christians push for changes ranging from the ordination of women and the generic, non-sexual terms for God and humanity to overhauling the very theology. (15)

Perhaps the most descriptive word for the feminist movement is "transformation." Catherine Keller, Associate Professor of Theology at Xavier University, in her essay "Feminism and the New Paradigm," proclaims that the world-wide feminist movement is bringing about the end of patriarchy, the eclipse of the politics of separation, and the beginning of a new era modeled on the dynamic, holistic paradigm. Radical feminism envisions that era, and the long process leading toward it, as a comprehensive transformation.

Another aspect of this transformation is the blending of the sexes. The feminist movement seeks a common mold for all of humanity. Jungian Psychotherapist John Weir Perry believes that we must find our individuality by discovering androgyny. He states,

To reach a new consensus, we have to avoid falling back into stereotypes, and that requires truly developing our individuality. It is an ongoing work of self-realization and self-actualization. For men it means growing into their native maleness and balancing it with their femaleness. For women, it's the same growing into their full womanhood, and that includes their masculine side. (16)

This process sounds more like androgyny (or sameness) than individuality and it reflects a paradigm-shift involving

nothing less than the reordering of man's understanding of God. A shift from thinking of God as male to seeing and experiencing God as a goddess: the Mother of Life.

## **The Goddess and the Occult**

In the world of the occult, popularly known as the New Age, the goddess is believed to be resident within the individual and simply needs to be awakened. In other words, the individual is inherently divine. Starhawk, a witch who works with the Catholic priest Matthew Fox at his Institute of Creation Spirituality, says that an individual can awaken the goddess by invoking, or inviting, her presence. Starhawk tells us,

To invoke the Goddess is to awaken the Goddess within, to become ...that aspect we invoke. An invocation channels power through a visualized image of Divinity...We are already one with the Goddess—she has been with us from the beginning, so fulfillment becomes...a matter of self-awareness. For women, the Goddess is the symbol of the inmost self. She awakens the mind and spirit and emotions.(17)

Jean Shinoda Bolen, a Jungian analyst and Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the University of California, when asked the question, What ails our society?, put it this way: "We suffer from the absence of one half of our spiritual potential—the Goddess."(18) Individuals who follow New Age teaching believe that the male-dominated religion of this present age has been an injustice to humanity and the ecosystem. Therefore, there must be a balancing of energies. The male energies must diminish and the feminine energies must increase in order for the goddess to empower the individual.

The New Age of occultism promises to be an age of peace, harmony, and tranquility. Whereas the present dark age of brokenness and separation continues to bring war, conflict, and disharmony, so it is the goddess with her feminine aspects



of unity, love, and peace that will offer a solution for mankind and circumvent his destruction. For many in our society this appears to be the answer to man's dilemma. However, an occult solution that denies Christ's atonement for sin cannot fully meet a holy God's requirement for wholeness.

For the pagan, the goddess represents life and all it has to offer. "The Goddess religion is a conscious attempt to reshape culture." (19) This reshaping is nothing less than viewing man and his understanding of reality from a female-centered perspective which focuses on the Divine as being female. Therefore, considerable emphasis is placed initially on feminine attributes, but ultimately the focus is on eroticism and sexuality.

Women are clearly the catalyst for the formation of the new spirituality. It is women above all who are in the process of reversing Genesis...by validating and freeing their sexuality. (20)

A major part of this transformative process is the empowerment of women. The rise of the goddess is a direct assault on the patriarchal foundation of Christianity. This new feminist spirituality affirms bisexuality, lesbianism, homosexuality, and androgyny (through the expression of transvestitism).

As this revival of the goddess continues, a growing lack of distinction between male and female will become the norm. Jungian Psychotherapist John Weir Perry maintains,

Both current psychology and ancient history point to an emerging transformation in our sense of both society and self, a transformation that includes redefining the notion of what it means to be men and women. (21)

The Bible clearly indicates that men and women were created as distinctive beings, male and female. This rising occult influence in our society seeks to undermine the Biblical absolute that gives our culture stability. Once again the

Bible rings true as it states,

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables (2 Tim. 4:3).

## **The Goddess and the Liberal Church**

The message of the goddess has gained a hearing in the church as well. The philosophy of the goddess is currently being taught in the classrooms of some of our seminaries. In a growing number of seminaries the student population is becoming increasingly female, and many of these women have a feminist outlook on life. Mary Daly, who considers herself to be a Christian feminist, says this about traditional Christianity: "To put it bluntly, I propose that Christianity itself should be castrated." (22) The primary focus of the "Christian" feminist is to bring an end to what they perceive as male-dominated religion by "castrating" the male influence from religion. Daly continued by saying,

I am suggesting that the idea of salvation uniquely by a male savior perpetuates the problem of patriarchal oppression. (23)

Reverend Susan Cady, co-author of *Sophia: The Future of Feminist Spirituality* and pastor of Emmanuel United Methodist Church in Philadelphia, is one example of the direction that Daly and others are taking the church. The authors of *Sophia* state that, "Sophia is a female, goddess-like figure appearing clearly in the Scriptures of the Hebrew tradition."

*Wisdom Feast*, the authors' latest book, clearly identifies Jesus with Sophia. Sophialogy presents Sophia as a separate goddess and Jesus as her prophet. The book takes liberty with Jesus by replacing the masculine deity with the feminine deity

Sophia. Another example of how goddess "thealogy" (note feminist spelling for theology) is making its way into the liberal church is through seminars held on seminary campuses.

One such seminar was held at the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University. "Wisdomweaving: Woman Embodied in Faiths" was held at the school in February of 1990. If one looks at the schedule of the seminar, it is obvious that the emphasis was not on orthodoxy. Linda Finnell, a follower of Wicca and one of the speakers, spoke on the subject of "Returning to the Goddess Through Dianic Witchcraft." Two of the keynote speakers were of a New Age persuasion. In fact, one, Sr. Jose Hobday, works with Matthew Fox and Starhawk at the Institute for Creation Spirituality.

A growing number of churches in the United States and around the world are embracing the New Age lie. Many churches have introduced *A Course in Miracles*, Yoga, Silva Mind Control, Unity teachings, and metaphysics into their teaching material. Some churches have taken a further step into the New Age by hiring onto their staffs individuals who hold to a metaphysical worldview.

Along with the deception that is subtly gaining influence in the liberal church, there are a growing number of churches affiliated with the New Age. These churches, without apology, teach the Luciferian gospel. They are the seed-bed of the occult.

It is amazing that while the liberal church will not accept or believe in Satan, they are willing to embrace Lucifer as an angel of light. It is interesting to note that the New Age Church represents itself as the Church of Light.

Whether the individual seeks the goddess through witchcraft, the feminist movement, the New Age, or the liberal church, he or she is beginning a quest to understand and discover the "higher self." The higher self, often referred to as the "god

self," is believed to be pure truth, deep wisdom. In actuality, this so-called "truth" or "wisdom" embodies the oldest lie in the Book, the lie of self- deification: "Ye shall become as Gods." As Christians we must learn to discern every spirit lest we too become deceived.

## Notes

1. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance* (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1989), 23.
2. Elinor W. Gadon, *The Once & Future Goddess* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1989), xiv.
3. Ibid., xii-xiii. See also Linnie Levy, *Of A Like Mind* (Madison, Wis.: OALM, 1991), vol. VIII, no. 3, pp. 2-3.
4. See also Zsuzsanna Emese Budapest, *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries* (Oakland, Calif.: Susan B. Anthony Coven No. 1, 1986), 12.
5. See also Gadon, *The Once & Future Goddess*, xiii.
6. Jean Shinoda Bolen, *Goddesses in Everywoman* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 21.
7. Ibid., 20.
8. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 25.
9. Ibid., 24.
10. Carlos Vidal Greth, "The Spirit of Women," *The Austin-American Statesman*, 5 March 1991, Sec D.
11. Ibid.
12. Sonia L. Nazario, "Is Goddess Worship Finally Going to Put Men in Their Place?," *The Wall Street Journal*, 7 June 1990, sec. A.
13. Naomi Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the*

*End of Traditional Religions* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1979), 4, 25.

14. Nazario, "Goddess Worship."

15. Deirdre Donahue, "Dawn of The Goddesses," *USA Today*, 26 September 1990, sec. D.

16. John Weir Perry, "Myth, Ritual, and the Decline of Patriarchy," *Magical Blend* 33 (January 1992): 103.

17. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 99.

18. Jean Shinoda Bolen, "The Women's Movement in Transition: The Goddess & the Grail," *Magical Blend* 33 (January 1992), 8.

19. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 11.

20. Donna Steichen, "The Goddess Goes to Washington," *Fidelity Magazine* (December 1986), 42.

21. Perry, "Decline of Patriarchy," *Magical Blend*, 62.

22. Alice Hageman, *Theology After the Demise of God the Father: A Call for the Castration of Sexist Religion* (New York: Association Press, 1974), 132.

23. Ibid., 138.

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