

The Discerner

the voice of... **Religion Analysis Service**

A QUARTERLY EXPOSING
UNBIBLICAL TEACHING & MOVEMENTS

Volume 34, Number 4

October • November • December 2014

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*"Hereby know we the spirit of truth
and the spirit of error" 1 John 4:6*

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Religion Analysis Service

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RAS TEAM NOTES

First: Happy New Year ! May the Lord find us meditating in His Word daily (Joshua 1:8) and "always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1. Corinthians 15:57) in this New Year !

We praise the Lord for the extra funding that has come in through our Christmas letter. May the Lord bless all who gave an extra gift. Just as college tuition costs do not cover college administrative expenditures so it is that subscription prices do not cover printing and mailing costs.

My thanks to Steve Lagoon, our RAS president, for pinch hitting for me while I dealt with a triple bypass surgery and three weeks of rehabilitation in September/October. I praise God that I am now almost completely rehabilitated and able to resume my regimen of activity. My thanks too to all who wrote cards and sent encouragement notes to me.

Please ask for free copies for your church and family friends if you feel that "The Discerner" can help them in situations and problems.

Larry Sutherland

DEAR READER

The litmus test for biblical and theological orthodoxy is the deity of Christ. What do people think of Christ? Who is He? Why do we address Him as God incarnate? What are His credentials? What does that mean to my daily life?

More than ever before I have been occupied with the questions above in this past Christmas season. Diversity and egalitarianism are not only buzzwords in educational and political circles but now even in ordinary communal relations. Many say that when it pertains to religion one religion is as good as the other and must be respected and treated as legitimate and equal.

How should the Christian react to these notions when the Christmas and biblical message exalts Jesus Christ alone as God and Savior of all mankind? Only the God-man Jesus Christ entered history to provide salvation to all men without exception. Only the absolutely perfect God-man could perform supernatural healings and activities, teach things about the kingdom of God, and speak as no one had ever spoken – this qualifies Him as true and exclusive deity.

When we consider His unique qualities we must : “Come, let us adore Him ... Christ the Lord !” He towers over all men and women who ever lived and will live. All other religious, philosophical, military, political pundits, wise men pale in significance to Jesus Christ. We used to sing the tremendous words from “Majestic Sweetness Sits Enthroned” - I remember especially, the second stanza:

No mortal can with Him compare,
Among the sons of men;
Fairer is He than all the fair,
That fill the heavenly train,
That fill the heavenly train.

S. Stennett

Let us consider again and again: “Fairest Lord Jesus”, Ruler of All Nature,

Fairest Lord Jesus, Ruler of All Nature,
O Thou of God and man the Son,
Thee will I cherish,
Thee will I honor,
Thou my soul's glory, joy, and crown.

Anonymous

Larry Sutherland

WITH THIS ISSUE

It is interesting that we start our last Discerner in 2014 with an analysis of the book of Malachi by Pastor Gerald Stigall, pastor of the Grace Evangelical Church in Fridley, Minnesota. Malachi, of course, is the last book of the Old Testament and, at the same time, the last of the Minor Prophets. Stigall's study was made just prior to the Advent Season so it served at a good preparation (though separated by 400 "silent" years) for the New Testament with the references to the "voice crying in the wilderness" (John the Baptist) and the "Sun of Righteousness" Jesus Christ). Dr. Stigall's style is stimulating and popular.

Being labeled possibly as overly critical and caustic we submit another article by Richard Bennett, a converted Roman Catholic priest. His candid thoughts are anchored with biblical texts and solid exegesis. One asks if the Reformation and the ensuing five centuries have hardly changed the practices and traditions of the Roman Church. Our Christian charity must be sieved through good scriptural screening and transparent interpretation.

In our third article Rev. Steve Lagoon offers a personal and insightful testimony as to his belief in God. The reader will sense immediately that Lagoon is not whimsical or frothy as he presents witness after witness to the overwhelming argument for the existence of God. I find that the "either-or" logic of philosophers and godly thinkers is most effective and convincing.

The quiz on genealogies and birthdates will test your general knowledge as well as biblical history.

Larry Sutherland

THE CALL OF MALACHI: ESTEEM THE NAME OF GOD!

by Pastor Gerald L. Stigall

Introduction:

- “What possibly can the Oooooold Testament say to me today?”
- “What relevance can something written to another people, another place, and for another period of time possibly have for me?”
- “As I look forward to a New Year, what benefit is there to look back at something written in the ancient past?”

What pastor hasn't heard these types of questions? And yet, the Minor Prophet Malachi demonstrates how living, active and exceedingly profitable the Word of God is for believers especially as the New Year unfolds. See if you don't agree. Before we turn to the text, let's review the context.

Historical Context of Malachi

Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament. A span of 400 “silent years” separates it from Matthew, the first book in the New Testament. Historically, there was a long time when no voice spoke for God; no prophet came to Israel. There were no Scriptures being written. The heavens seemingly were silent. It's been said that last words are lasting words. And that's so true as the Lord, through Malachi, speaks the last and lasting words of the Old Testament.

The last three books of the Old Testament—Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi—were all written after the return of the Israelites from their captivity in Babylon. We call them the post-exilic prophets. You'll remember that the people did not come back from Babylon in one great big happy throng. There were two or three major migrations back to Judah, the first one beginning about 538 B.C. At that time, in response to Cyrus' decree recorded in Ezra 1:2-4 approximately 50,000 Jews fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah that the captivity would last for 70 years. They came to the desolated, stricken city of Jerusalem.

The people who returned had changed their entire way of life by that time. Ray Stedman observes that before, while they were in Israel before the captivity, they had been sheep keepers, for the most part.

But in Babylon they learned to be shopkeepers, merchants. So Ezra led these immigrants who had difficulties adjusting not only to a new land, but to a new lifestyle that required hard physical work. Much of this struggle is recorded in the historical book of Ezra.

Upon their return they began to lay the foundations of the Temple, but they ran out of steam. Instead of focusing on the Temple of God, they focused on their own agendas. Eighteen long years passed and the Lord purposed to challenge their misplaced priorities. The Lord raised up Haggai around 520 B.C. to stir them up to continue that work of rebuilding the Temple. And what the people started under Haggai's ministry, they finished under Zechariah's ministry around 515 B.C. (Ezra 6:19).

The last return to the Land was accomplished under Nehemiah who in 445 B.C. led a group back to begin the laying of the walls of Jerusalem. The fascinating book of Nehemiah records the exciting experience of building the walls once again.

Shortly after Nehemiah finished this task, Malachi appears. It's interesting to compare the book of Nehemiah with the book of Malachi. Nehemiah is the conclusion of the historical section of the Old Testament which begins with Genesis. And Malachi is the conclusion of the prophetic portion of the Old Testament covering the same time frame as Nehemiah.

Overarching Question of Malachi:

Having looked at the context, let's look at the text. From examining the setting, let's admire the jewel. As we turn to Malachi, the Lord through the prophet confronts us with penetrating questions. To each of us he asks:

- How's your heart? Is it tender, open, receptive?
- Or, is your heart hard, callous, cold?
- Do you worship out of duty or delight?
- Do you give your offerings out of habit or as an expression of love and thanksgiving?
- When you sing, do you do so with gusto, with enthusiasm, or is there a "ho hum" complacency about it?
- In other words, would someone describe you as a spectator of worship or an active participant?

The ultimate question is this: Are you loving God with “all of your heart” or only a portion of it?

Malachi confronts a people whose hearts were hard like stone. He accuses them of forgetting their first love. By the way, Jesus lodges the same accusation against the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2, doesn't he? That church, you'll remember, was doing everything right. It was orthodox. Solid. Strong. It's just that their hearts here hard, callous, cold. Jesus said about the Ephesians:

I know your works, your toil, and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first (Revelation 2:2-4).

Did you hear that: “*You have abandoned the love you had at first.*”

In many ways, the Lord's letter to the church at Ephesus and his word now to the people through Malachi are the same. Malachi quotes the Lord in Malachi 1:2 saying essentially the same thing: “I have loved you,” says the LORD. But the people respond with dripping sarcasm, “How have you loved us?”

They had replaced a vibrant relationship with the Lord with empty ritualism. They offered the Lord the leftovers of their time, their talents, their treasures. They offered not the first fruits but the last crumbs. And now the Lord accuses them of not esteeming his NAME. Note Malachi 1:6: “You priests despise my name!” Basically the Lord declared, “If anyone should honor my name surely you priests should - but for you have reduced a relationship with me into empty ritualism!”

- There was no devotion.
- There was no emotion.
- The priests were merely going through the motions.

And like priests, like people. Someone observed that “none is so unholy as he who is cauterized by holy things.” That's it. That's the essence of Malachi. The Lord addresses a people who despise the Name of God. When we refer to God's Name understand that the Name of God represents all that God is - what he has done, what he will do, and who he is. His Name stands for His nature, his character.

In what we call the Lord's Prayer, Jesus prayed, "*Our Father who art in heaven hallowed by thy name.*" Jesus prayed that the Father's Name, that his Nature, would be hallowed, cherished, esteemed.

But the people whom Malachi addresses hardly did so. In fact, they "despised" God's Name. I am intrigued by how frequently the name of God is mentioned in these four short chapters. I count no less than ten times that "esteeming", "cherishing", "honoring", "reverencing", or "fearing" the Name of God is mentioned in this short prophecy.

Malachi 1:6 (2 times)

"A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my **name**. But you say, 'How have we despised your **name**?'"

Malachi 1:11 (3 times)

For from the rising of the sun to its setting my **name** will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my **name**, and a pure offering. For my **name** will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts.

Malachi 1:14b

For I am a great King, says the Lord of hosts, and my **name** will be feared among the nations.

Malachi 2:2

If you will not listen, if you will not take it to heart to give honor to my **name**, says the Lord of hosts, then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings. Indeed, I have already cursed them, because you do not lay it to heart.

Malachi 2:5

My covenant with him (that is Levi) was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him. It was a covenant of fear, and he feared me. He stood in awe of my **name**.

Malachi 3:1

Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another. The Lord paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his **name**.

Malachi 4:2

But for you who fear my **name**, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.

But here is a people who rather than esteeming God's Name, despised God's Name. Let's be clear. They didn't use a cuss word, per se. Nevertheless they did use God's name in vain just as blatantly by offering empty religion, by going through the motions, by offering the left overs, and by living only for themselves. That's why God loved Jacob, but hated Esau (Malachi 1:2-3). Jacob loved God's Name. Esau didn't. In fact, in Hebrews 12:16 Esau despised God's provision, his birthright. He placed no value on spiritual matters and cut himself off from God. That's essentially what the people in Malachi's day were doing.

Do you wonder how God felt about such deceit, such defamation? Do you wonder how the LORD feels towards those whose hearts are hard like stone?

Look at Malachi 1:10-14. Through the prophet the Lord bemoans,

Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand. For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts.

But you profane it (that is, you profane my name, you blaspheme my name, you use my name in vain) when you say that the LORD's table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised. But you say, "What a weariness this is," and you snort at it, says the LORD of hosts.

You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand?"

Cursed by the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the LORD what is blemished. For I am a great KING, says the LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared (esteemed, cherished, respected, revered) among the nations.

Not only that but the hard-hearted hypocrisy was negatively influencing others. God lays that charge against them in chapter 2 and says that their hypocrisy was actually malignant. Their influence was turning others astray (verse 8):

“But you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by your instruction,....”

Do you see God’s grace in this strong word? God cared enough to confront them. God would rather hurt them with words than with judgment. This prophecy’s intent was to call the prodigal people then and in every age to return from the far country and to fall into the secure embrace of a loving God. He declares in Malachi 3:7:

“Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts.”

Repent and I’ll relent. Come to me and I’ll come to you. And on this point, the prophecy turns from reporting merely the bad news turns to celebrating the Good News. From confronting those who were despising God’s name, he turns to comforting those who were esteeming God’s Name. You see the remnant thought that they were forgotten. Not so.

Notice the two ways the Lord reassures his people in that and in every age does this.

1. The righteous ones (plural) - those who live by faith - those who esteem God’s Name - will be remembered (Ma. 3:16-18).

Those who cherish God will themselves be cherished. Those who treasure God will themselves be treasured.

In Malachi 3:16ff we have a picture of those in the past, present, future who choose to live by faith, those who are in a right relationship with God.

Those who choose to honor, reverence, esteem the LORD’s name. Those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. Note verses 16:

Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another.

This speaking is not simply that they conversed with one another. The speaking here implies fellowship - intimacy - communion. It implies that the household of faith was loving one another. God delights when we, the household of faith, similarly honor, esteem,

commune, edify, and encourage one another. Our communion reflects not only who we are, but it reflects whose we are. When we build one another up in the faith, we exalt God, we honor Him. How do you parents feel when you see your children reveling in each other's company instead of reviling each other? I believe that's the picture we have here in verse 16. The faithful "spoke with one another." They reveled in their love for each other. But there's more...

The Lord paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name.

That is, not only did they love each other, they loved God. They feared the Lord. They responded in faith. They esteemed his name. They celebrated both what God does and who He is. While Malachi, to be sure, confronts those who are comfortable in their self-help religion, he comforts those who are confronted. He urges the remnant in every age to live by faith—to press on—to persevere—to live with hope. What encouragement!

Do you notice the promise in verses 17-18?

They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.

There's more Good News in Malachi. In fact, contained in this prophecy is the ultimate Good News! The prophecy explains that the reason why the righteous ones (plural) can live by faith and with hope, is because the Righteous One (singular) is coming!

2. The Righteous One Is Coming! (Malachi 3:1-5; 4:1-6).

Notice how this Good News is proclaimed. It's interesting to note that this prophecy was given by a man whose very name means "*my messenger*." This prophecy delivered by one messenger of God foretells the coming of two other messengers. Notice Malachi 3:1

"Behold, I send my messenger [in Hebrew that would be "Behold, I send Malachi"] to prepare the way before me..." (Malachi 3:1a ESV).

Jesus explains that John the Baptist was that messenger.. the one who came in the spirit of Elijah.. to prepare the way of the Lord

and to announce the coming of the ultimate messenger from God - Messiah, Christ.

In fact, in the next phrase Malachi announces the coming of that Messenger. Notice the end of Malachi 3:1:

“...and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant...” (Malachi 3:1b ESV).

It was the work of the Lord Jesus on the night before the Cross to take wine and bread with his disciples and holding the cup up to say,

“This is my blood of the new covenant” (Matthew 26:28).

The messenger of the covenant is the Lord Jesus himself. As we read Malachi, we hear not only the music of Christmas, but also the music of Passion Week and all that Jesus accomplished for us on the Cross and through the Empty Tomb. What is more, the prophet anticipates the Hallelujah Chorus when we behold the return and reign of Jesus Christ as KING of kings and LORD of lords!

“...and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. (That is, ‘he burns and he cleanses.’) He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD” (Malachi 3:1c-3 ESV).

And skip down to Malachi 4:1ff

“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, (you who esteem my name) the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts.

The Sun of Righteousness shall rise.

- and for those who refuse him, there is a burning,
- but for those who receive him, there is a healing.

It's the same Son. Just as the same sun hardens clay and melts wax, so the Son will separate the goats from the sheep. He will banish the faithless to Hell and escort the faithful to Heaven.

Conclusion:

One last thought: Notice the very last word of the Old Testament. It's noteworthy to observe that the last word of the Old Testament is "destruction" (ESV) or "curse" (NIV). While it is not a definite prediction, it is a warning. This prophecy begins, "Behold, I have loved you, says the Lord," and it ends with the warning that if the message of love is not received, the result is a curse. Now compare that with the last word of the New Testament (apart from the final salutation). It is a prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20).

The answer to God's curse, is Christ. That's the Gospel, isn't it! That's John 3:16. The Father so loves you that he gave his one and only Son to redeem you from the curse of the law, by being made a curse for you (Galatians 3:13). God loves you so much. He delights to shower you with the blessings of his presence that comes as you honor His NAME, as you cherish His NAME, as you reverence His Name, as you esteem His Name.

As this New Year begins, won't you hear Malachi's clarion challenge to esteem the Name that is above every Name. Might you resolve to live out the hymn, *All Hail the Power of Jesus' NAME!*

DO CATHOLICS POSSESS LIFE ETERNAL?

by Richard Bennett

In my 48 years as a Catholic and my 22 years as a Catholic priest I believed in the Catholic Church. Consequently I thought that as I had the Sacraments by means of which, when I died, I would have everlasting life. Like other priests, I taught the people that once they were faithful to the Church as Catholics and died in the state of “sanctifying grace,” they would go to heaven. With deep respect for these who have been so misled, I now write on the topic of Catholics and eternal life. As an Irish Catholic, I remember the grip that Catholicism had on my own soul; in a sense, it was second nature to me. So it is with sensitivity that I write on a Christian’s relationship with God the Father and a Catholic’s relationship with the Holy Father in Rome.

A Christian’s relationship with God the Father is a crucial topic. Jesus Christ declared, “*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.*”¹ Not to know and believe in “*the only true God*” is to be deprived of “*life eternal.*” However, a Catholic is first required to believe and know that the “Church is the mother of all believers.” This is because, according to the Catholic Church’s official teaching,

“‘Believing’ is an ecclesial act. The Church’s faith precedes, engenders, supports and nourishes our faith. The Church is the mother of all believers. ‘No one can have God as Father who does not have the Church as Mother’”(Para 181).²

Consequently, a Catholic in daily life willingly has a relationship with “the Church as Mother” replacing what ought to be a relationship with God as his adoptive Father. The essence of this substitution is obvious when a devout Catholic refers to the Pope as “Holy Father.” In fact, the Catholic news agency, Zenit, normally calls the Pope the “Holy Father.”³ And for most Catholics, the term the “Holy Father” usually means the Pope.

1 John 17:3

2 *Catechism of the Catholic Church Catechism*, Second Ed., Para. 181. All quotations citing the *Catechism* are taken from this source.

3 For example, “The Holy Father received..” <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/all-this-must-not-be-taken-for-granted-says-holy-father> 8/9/2014

The Concept of God as Father

It is noted that in Scripture the word “Father” was on the lips of the Lord Jesus no less than one hundred seventy times. Christ Jesus spoke of God distinctively as Abba Father.⁴ In Scripture the same concept, “Abba Father,” is explained to the believer in these words, “*for ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.*”⁵ Beholding the Father’s love by the intimate title of “Abba Father” gives the true believer the deep sense of being loved personally as a child of God.⁶ The Lord Jesus Christ offered the following prayer for all those who would genuinely believe in God as their Father, “*Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.*”⁷

In contrast, the official law of the Roman Catholic Church speaks of the necessity of submitting one’s highest faculties, that of mind and will, not to God the heavenly Father, but to the Supreme Pontiff in Rome. Thus, the official law of the Roman Catholic Church states,

“A religious respect of intellect and will, even if not the assent of faith, is to be paid to the teaching which the Supreme Pontiff or the college of bishops enunciate on faith or morals...”⁸

However, the Lord Jesus Christ has commanded, “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*”⁹ One cannot serve two sovereigns, for the Lord’s command contradicts that of the Pontiff. A man cannot be impartial between two masters who are incompatible and demanding total allegiance. The necessity of a choice arises. So a Catholic ought to decide who indeed is his or her Lord!

Moreover, as the Lord Jesus Christ deeply treasured the word “Father,” He gave this commandment, “call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.”¹⁰ This is the essence of the message of the Lord concerning our Father in heaven. Thus, the Father in heaven is worthy of worship, and a true believer will speak the words, “The Holy Father” for God alone! Nonetheless, the Church of Rome teaches that her pope is called “Holy Father.” For example, the Vatican website announced regarding Francis I,

4 Mark 14:36

5 Romans 8:14-17

6 “*And I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*” II Corinthians 6:18

7 John 17:11

8 Canon 752

9 Matthew 22:37

10 Matthew 23:9

“Address of the Holy Father” in the Vatican Gardens Sunday, 8 June 2014.11

The Lord God is Sovereign

God is all-loving, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. The Lord God is sovereign with complete, supreme, and universal power of all things, in heaven and on earth. Even on the topic of the sovereignty of God, Papal Rome’s claim is stated in the following official words,

“For the Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, and as pastor of the entire Church has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered.”¹²

Thus, the Roman Pontiff attributes to himself the sovereign rule of the entire Church that belongs to the Lord God alone. Let us make no mistake, the Catholic Church throughout its history has persistently and arrogantly assumed and appropriated to itself the offices of the Heavenly Father. For example, Pope Boniface VIII in 1302, in the Papal Bull “Unam Sanctam” decreed, “Furthermore we declare, say, define, and proclaim to every human creature that they, by necessity for salvation, are entirely subject to the Roman Pontiff.”¹³ The papal arrogance is blasphemy of the highest order!

God the Father’s Love in Salvation

God the Father’s love always achieves its purposes, “*In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love ... that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*”¹⁴ The design and intention of God the Father was that salvation should come to sinful man in and through Christ Jesus. Emphatically, grace in its most proper sense is free as *given*, a gift from heaven. Thus, as Scripture says, sinners are saved by grace; it is “*the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.*”¹⁵ The reign of sin is overcome by the reign of God’s grace, as the Scripture says, “*even so might grace reign!*”¹⁶ The abundance of grace far surpasses the evils of sin. Once a believing sinner trusts upon Christ Jesus as his only surety and substitute, he discovers that not only is he freed from his sins, but also he is made to “*reign in life.*” As

11 http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/june/documents/papa-francesco_20140608_invocazione-pace.html#Distinguished_Presidents

12 *Catechism*, Para. 882

13 Henry Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum, The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, Tr. by Roy J. Deferrari, 30th Ed.(1984), #469.

14 1 John 4:9-10

15 Ephesians 2:9

16 Romans 5:21

Scripture states, “for if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.”¹⁷

Attempting to imitate this, the Roman Catholic Church claims that its sacraments are necessary for salvation. Its official teaching states the following, “The Church affirms that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are *necessary for salvation*.”¹⁸ Thus, the Catholic Church presents her seven physical sacraments - mediated through her - as the means of obtaining the grace of the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ The Vatican’s pretense is to present her symbolic sacraments as the efficacious cause of salvation. These enticing ways to obtain salvation are but the age-old temptation of looking to physical performances and human works to gain favor with God. Such teachings as these come under the eternal curse of perverting the Gospel of Christ.²⁰ Nevertheless, to administer her seven sacraments, the Catholic Church ordains priests of whom she states, “Priests have received from God a power that he has given neither to angels nor to archangels...God above confirms what priests do here below.”²¹ In the New Testament, no sacrificial priests are mentioned, only elders and pastors.²²

Thus the Catholic Church’s man-made belief system is a catastrophic imposition on the souls of men and women. However, the true Gospel lays before each person the solution that is ample to face all evil. The power of it is strong enough to raise people up to life, peace, and heaven itself. The same Gospel causes the Lord’s redeemed people to rejoice in the glorious grace that flows through His own plan of eternal life. “*And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.*”²³ The eternal Son of the Father has life in His own essence and person as the Word of God.²⁴ From Him eternal life is given to each true believer, both here and in heaven.²⁵ However, the Catholic Church teaches that God’s grace comes through the Roman Catholic sacraments.²⁶ Anyone who believes in the Catholic sacramental system and places his or her soul’s trust on ceremonial proceedings is not trusting on Jesus Christ alone.

17 Romans 5:17

18 *Catechism*, Para. 1129

19 “The sacraments impart grace, but, in addition, the very act of celebrating them disposes the faithful most effectively to receive this grace in a fruitful manner, to worship God rightly, and to practice charity.” See: <http://www.catholic.org/prayers/sacrament.php>

20 “If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.” Galatians 1:9

21 *Catechism*, Para. 983 Stated Sub-Para. 3

22 The terms overseer and elder/pastor are used interchangeably, Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-4.

23 1 John 5:11

24 John 1:1-4

25 John 1:12-13

26 <http://www.adelaide.catholic.org.au/our-faith/sacraments>

A Catholic Believes in the Mass i.e. the Eucharist

At the heart of Roman Catholicism is the Mass or Eucharist, described by the Second Vatican Council as “the fount and apex of the whole Christian life.” Rome claims that the Mass is a sacrifice and that the sacrifice of Calvary and the Mass are the same; namely, “one single sacrifice.” Thus she teaches,

“The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one single sacrifice*: ‘The victim is one and the same: the same now offers through the ministry of priests, who then offered himself on the cross; only the manner of offering is different.’ ‘And since in this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and offered in an unbloody manner... this sacrifice is truly propitiatory.’”²⁷

To propose a bloodless sacrifice is a contradiction in terms.²⁸ A bloodless sacrifice is a senseless inconsistency that can have no purpose other than to deceive. The Lord’s Supper is not a sacrifice; it is a memorial. The bread and wine are tokens symbolizing the body and blood of the once and for all sacrifice of Calvary. A true believer eats the bread and drinks the wine to remember Him and His atonement with thanksgiving and praise until He returns. Again what a different relationship there is in the faith of a true believer regarding the Lord’s Supper and the belief of a Catholic regarding the Mass or Eucharist. There can be no more remembrance of sin against a true believer, either to shame him now or to condemn him hereafter. The sacrifice of Christ was once for all time. Its power is eternal. “*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.*”²⁹ Jesus Christ the Lord procured a perfect, eternal salvation for one who truly believes in His finished sacrifice. Not so for the poor Catholic who persists in depending on a so-called, “divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass.”

A Catholic Prays not to Christ Jesus Alone but also to Mary and the Saints

A true believer looks to Christ Jesus as the one mediator, “*for there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.*”³⁰ The splendor of the Gospel is that the believer’s heart is set on Jesus Christ, the fountain of life. A Catholic, however, will also pray to Mary and their declared Saints. This is because the Catholic Church officially teaches,

²⁷ *Catechism*, Para. 1367 (underlining added in this paper)

²⁸ Hebrews 9:21 “*without shedding of blood is no remission.*”

²⁹ Romans 8:1

³⁰ 1 Timothy 2:5

“Communion with the dead. In full consciousness of this communion of the whole Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, the Church in its pilgrim members, from the earliest days of the Christian religion, has honored with great respect the memory of the dead... Our prayer for them is capable not only of helping “them, but also of making their intercession for us effective.”³¹

The Bible teaches that God alone is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. Thus, He alone hears prayers, He is the all Holy One; in a word, He is God alone. Prayer directed to the dead, and not the Lord God alone, is consummate blasphemy! Calling up or invoking the dead; i.e., necromancy, is strictly forbidden in the Bible.³² As the One great true High Priest, Jesus Christ completely satisfies all the intercessory prayer service that a true believer needs; as Scripture states, *“It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”*³³ Again, a poor deluded Catholic who persists in following the Roman Catholic tradition of prayers to, or invocations of the dead, has no biblical warrant for being heard by God the Father. Scripture asserts that in seeking other mediators, Catholics reject the unique redemptive office of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the sole mediator of the covenant of Grace appointed by the Holy Father.³⁴

Conclusion

In Scripture, the believer looks to Christ Jesus as *“THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”*³⁵ The splendor of the Gospel is that the believer’s heart is set on Christ, the Fountain of life, where the believer drinks more and more deeply of the rivers of pleasure that are at Christ’s right hand. Eternal life is to be found only in Christ Jesus, His perfect life, and Him being an all-sufficient sacrifice. *“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”*³⁶ This is the true focus, because a believer learns more and more consistently to look always to the Lord Jesus Christ alone for life. How completely different this is from the goal and destiny that Papal Rome holds out to people. Rome directs her people, and mankind in general, to look to physical sacraments and her ruling hierarchy that uphold her sacraments. However, the biblical Gospel does not involve looking to physical signs; rather,

31 *Catechism*, Para. 958

32 Deuteronomy 18:9-11

33 Romans 8:34

34 Hebrews 9:24

35 Jeremiah 23:6

36 I Corinthians 3:18

believers are to follow the biblical injunction to look “unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”³⁷ He is the author and finisher of their faith: its beginning and end. “Looking to Jesus” is to trustfully keep one’s heart and mind stayed upon Him. In Him is grace. He is the Fountain of all grace and supplies all the needs of each believer. The believer’s life is drawn from Christ, and directed to Him; he is its initial principle and the final end of it. True life is that which is lived in personal, intimate communion with Christ, as the Apostle Paul so eloquently stated, “For to me to live is Christ.” It means that as a person is justified by the All-Holy God alone, he is to walk with the Lord Jesus Christ, taking Christ’s yoke upon him and learning of Christ, so that he drinks deeply from God’s Written Word and begins to follow what the Scripture says, rather than devising his own ways.

The Lord faced the sincere and devout Pharisees with a very strong word. They were looking to their leader and chief, Caiaphas, the High Priest. The Lord said to those Pharisees, “if ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins.”³⁸ Like the Pharisees, many present-day Catholics look to the Pope. And likewise today, as with the Pharisees, if any Catholic continues to recognize the Pope as “Holy Father,” he is, in fact, denying the true Father and Son.³⁹ He who persists in his sins, will likewise die in his sins. The Lord Jesus Christ died in place of the true believer. His life and finished sacrifice alone are the ransom for the believer. “The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”⁴⁰ This was the price demanded by the All-Holy God in order that His justice might be satisfied in the forgiveness of sins. As a result of this payment, the true believer on Christ Jesus alone is freed forever from sin and Satan. “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”⁴¹ Such a gift of God engages our hearts in deep gratitude as we proclaim, “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.”⁴²

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37 Hebrews 12:2

38 John 8:24

39 “He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.” I John 2:22

40 Mark 10:45

41 Romans 6:23

42 Romans 11:36

WHY I BELIEVE IN GOD

by Steve Lagoon

With this article, I do not intend to write an exhaustive treatise examining every argument for or against the existence of God. Rather, I want to share with our readers some of the reasons why I am personally convinced of God's existence, most particularly as He is revealed in His Son Jesus Christ.

Is There Absolute Proof of God's Existence?

I want to begin with a clear assertion. I do not claim to have absolute and undeniable proof that God exists. I don't think such an argument exists or is possible. Indeed, I am convinced that this is just how God wants it to be. No matter how sound and reasonable the arguments are, yet there is still the necessity of faith in the search for God.

I am not concerned by the possible charge that I am conceding too much at the beginning. I am only affirming what the writer of the book of Hebrews says: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1).

What Does the Preponderance of the Evidence Show?

What I am suggesting, to borrow from legal terminology, is that although there is not an absolute case to prove the existence of God, yet the preponderance of the evidence strongly swings in favor of the so-called "God hypothesis." No. I cannot argue for the existence of God in such a way that even the most strident atheist will feel compelled to submit.

Rather, for the honest enquirer, we don't have to quibble over who has the burden of proof in making their case, whether atheist or theist. We just want to know what an honest person serving on a court jury would find to be supported beyond a reasonable doubt.

What Should the Honest Inquirer Do?

After thinking seriously about such things for the better part of my life, I humbly suggest that most reasonable people, having heard excellent presentations both for and against the existence of God, will find the case for God more compelling.

Again, I am not at all concerned by my concession that there are not absolute proofs for the existence of God because even PhD

philosophers will admit that the same is true concerning the case for atheism – it cannot be proven either.

In other words, one cannot absolutely prove whether God exists or not. What I think that means is that honest hearted people should weigh the arguments for both sides fairly. I find that God does pretty well under such conditions!

Do We Need Absolute Proof to Believe?

At this point, some might wonder if it is the safest or wisest choice to simply jump on the agnostic bandwagon claiming the truth of God's existence is just too hard to determine. This seems to me to be an intellectual dodging of the question, equivalent to the proverbial ostrich sticking its head in the sand. Refusing to put forward the effort of thinking the issue through is simply to evade responsibility for contemplating one of life's most basic questions. It would be like a court jury refusing to weigh the evidence in a murder trial because there was not a video of the crime scene available, despite the fact that there is ample evidence to try the case.

“I Think, Therefore I Am”

Further, life is filled with examples in which we do not demand the kind of proof that atheists demand to believe in the existence of God. For instance, can atheists prove their own existence? Philosophers put forward various arguments to cast doubt even on Rene Descartes' (1596-1650) great maxim: “*I think, therefore I am.*”¹ Such questions have even formed the basis of popular movies like *The Matrix* in which the entire world of human experience was shown to be a simulated one imposed by sinister forces.

So while it is true that philosophers can put forward reasonable arguments to discredit “*I think, therefore I am,*” yet most people find Descartes to be on some fairly solid ground. In other words, just because someone can come up with a clever argument challenging the reality of our very existence, does not mean we should check ourselves in to the nearest mental health facility. Indeed, most sane people ignore these philosophical theories in favor of the overwhelming and compelling intuition that they do in fact exist!

In the same way, just because it is possible to raise philosophical objections to the existence of God, does not mean that such arguments are compelling. The most prudent course is to weigh the arguments concerning God's existence as fairly and objectively as possible.

¹ Rene Descartes, as quoted by James K. Feibleman, *Understanding Philosophy: A Popular History of Ideas*, New York (Horizon Press, 1973) 103.

In my own personal journey I have found that there are some reasonable arguments against the existence of God, but many more and stronger ones in favor of His existence.

“Plane” Truth

Neither in the real world do we make such demands of absolute proof as Atheists demand as we live our lives. Do most of us fully understand how an airplane can fly before we will travel in one? I confess I certainly do not, though good people have tried to explain it to me. Yet, the preponderance of the evidence suggests to me that it is safe, and so I fly.

Even if the theory for flying is sound, how do we know that the particular plane we are getting on is safe? Perhaps the mechanics have missed something important, or a sinister person has planted a bomb in the cargo hold. These objections are well within the range of possibility. Yet, it is still a reasonably safe bet that the plane we are getting on will be safe, and so we fly.

Just the same, though skeptics try to raise issues against the belief in God, yet I find the evidence for the existence of God so overwhelming that believing in Him is the most reasonable option.

Ockham’s Razor

Let us now consider how Ockham’s razor is helpful in this discussion. William of Ockham (1285-1349) was an English theologian and philosopher who suggested that when weighing various solutions to practical and philosophical problems, the less complicated or simpler explanation should be given preference. To this point Antony Flew gave this classic definition: “The principle of ontological economy, usually formulated as *entities are not to be multiplied beyond necessity*.”²

This is, of course, not an iron tight law, as sometimes the more complicated solution is found to be correct. But quite often, Ockham’s razor has been very helpful. For instance, it has been pointed out that both the heliocentric and geocentric models of our solar system can be made to work, yet the heliocentric one (the simpler model) was eventually proven correct as Copernicus himself argued.³

The Origin of the Universe

In applying Ockham’s razor principle to the question of God’s existence, it seems much more natural and simpler to accept that

² Antony Flew, *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, Revised Second Edition, New York (Gramercy Books, 1999) 253.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occam's_razor

the universe was created by God than to believe that it just somehow popped into existence out of complete nothingness, perhaps as some kind of “quantum fluctuation”, as is being advanced by some today. We are asked to believe that the entire massive, infinite universe that we know today, stretching beyond distances that we can barely comprehend, just suddenly came into existence without any cause or creator. I ask the fair reader, which is a bigger miracle to believe, that God created the universe, or that it just suddenly was there?

The Universe as a Quantum Fluctuation

When we hear arguments suggesting that quantum fluctuations can explain (at least theoretically) how the universe could have just popped into existence from nothing, we should be aware that a verbal sleight of hand trick is at play. For those who support the universe as a quantum fluctuation admit that even in quantum vacuums, something rather than nothing is there already. In other words, the theory explains a possible, though quite unlikely way, in which the universe came to exist as it is, but it doesn't explain the origin of all the energy that was there to fluctuate in the first place. In this regard, it is like the big bang theory because neither theory can explain where the initial and massive amount of energy in the universe came from in the first place.

What Was Loaded Into the Cannon for the Big Bang?

Certainly, the prevailing theory for the origin of the universe (cosmology) in our culture over the last generation has been the Big Bang theory. However, even if one accepts the Big Bang hypothesis, one has still the problem of explaining the origin of the universe, for all the big bang suggests is that perhaps 14 billion years ago, all the matter and energy that make up our present universe were at that time formed as a dense singularity that then exploded. I repeat, it does not tell us anything about where this matter and energy came from in the first place.

Is the Universe Itself Eternal?

Others, noting the difficulties of suggesting that the universe just popped into existence without a cause, and noting that the Big Bang theory does not account for the origin of the material make up the universe, opt for a different explanation in which it is suggested that the universe itself is eternal (which would, it is suggested, call into question the need for God). Indeed, it might be reasoned that if Christians can believe in an uncreated being called God, why can they not believe in an uncreated and eternal universe (more on this in a moment)?

The Steady-State Model

One model attempting to explain how the universe could be eternal is known as the “Steady-State” model. But the advocate for an eternal universe runs into a huge philosophical and scientific roadblock known as the laws of thermodynamics.

Heeren explains how the first law of thermodynamics, also called the law of conservation, impacts on the theory of an eternal universe:

Also called the law of conservation of mass and energy, this law states that matter and energy can be neither created or destroyed . . . neither mass or energy can appear from nothing . . . Concerning the first law of thermodynamics, Isaac Asimov wrote: ‘This law is considered the most powerful and most fundamental generalization about the universe that scientists have ever been able to make.’ Thus the steady-state theory’s demand for a continual creation of new matter violates the first law of thermodynamics.⁴

In other words, in order to maintain a theory of an eternal universe, Steady-State advocates have argued for a continued source for new matter and energy, and this simply cannot be maintained since it violates the fundamental first law of conservation.

But it gets worse for eternal universe advocates since such belief runs directly counter to the second law of thermodynamics as well. Stanley W. Angrist explains:

An interesting implication of the concept of entropy and of the second law of thermodynamics is the indication that ‘time is a one-way street.’ That is, time moves in one direction only; toward the future . . . Like time, it is a one-way variable that marks the universe as being older today than it was yesterday. As the British astronomer Sir Arthur S. Eddington once said, entropy is ‘Time’s Arrow.’⁵

“Time’s Arrow,” the second law, shows that the universe had both a beginning and is moving toward an end. In that sense, the universe can be thought of as a pre-wound clock ticking down until all its energy is spent and the clock stops. In the same way, we know the universe had a beginning (when the clock was wound up) and is winding down toward an end.

4 Fred Heeren, *Show Me God: What the Message from Space is Telling Us About God*, Revised Edition, Wheeling IL (Day Star Publications, 1997) 128-129

5 Stanley W. Angrist, *Entropy in The New Book of Popular Science*, Deluxe Library Edition, Volume 3, Danbury CT (Grolier International, 1994) 219.

Fred Heeren further explains the implications of the second law of thermodynamics for our universe: “Thus we know that the universe cannot be eternal; it could not have been dissipating forever. If it had been eternally dissipating, it would have run down long ago”⁶

The Oscillation Model

The same problems exist for supporters of the Oscillation Model in which it is theorized that the universe has been going through endless cycles of expansion and contraction. Roy Peacock explains the problem that the 2nd law of thermodynamics presents for this theory by comparing it to a bouncing ball on a gym floor:

Potential and kinetic energy are repeatedly exchanged as the ball bounces . . . Entropy takes its toll and available energy progressively reduces until the ball no longer bounces. The picture of a universe following a series of cycles of expansion and contraction gives a similar pattern. Entropy takes its toll again and the process runs down, each cycle being at a higher temperature with the increase of entropy . . . the process in the universe is constrained to have an end and a beginning.⁷

It must be clearly noted here that whereas the laws of thermodynamics are an insurmountable roadblock to theories of an eternal universe, they are not at all a problem for those who believe in an eternal God. The reason for this is that God existed before the universe and is separate from it. Therefore, God the creator of the universe is not subject to the laws of the universe He created.

In other words, believing in an eternal universe places one in the dilemma of violating fundamental laws of science, whereas no such problem exists for those who believe in God.

A final point concerning the claims for an eternal God against those that claim the universe is eternal – it seems that all who think about the matter must admit that one or the other choice is true. Either God is eternal and is the creator of the universe or the universe itself is eternal. In either case, you have the difficult yet inescapable reality of something that exists that was uncreated.

Another way to think about it is to start from the fact of the existence of the universe. Since it is now here, it has either always

6 Fred Heeren, *Show Me God: What the Message from Space is Telling Us About God*, Revised Edition, Wheeling IL (Day Star Publications, 1997) 129

7 Roy E. Peacock, *A Brief History Of Eternity*, Wheaton IL (Crossway Books, 1990) 89. For more problems with the Oscillation theory, see Hugh Ross, *The Fingerprint of God*, Orange CA (Promise Publishing Company, 1991) pp. 97-105.

been here or it had a beginning. We have just seen that the laws of thermodynamics are devastating to claims of an eternal universe. But if the universe had a beginning, we naturally wonder how. It seems there are again two choices; it just began without a cause or it was brought into existence by a creator. Now either option presents us with the difficulty of something that exists without a cause, and so no matter how difficult that is to understand, we have to accept that it is not only possible, but logically necessary.

Therefore, the atheists attack in which they ask who made God or how there could be an eternal uncaused being is proven groundless in that they themselves believe in an uncaused source for the existence of the universe. This is so because they either believe the universe is eternal and uncaused or that it had a beginning without a creator; in either case, they join theists in believing in the difficult notion that something exists without a cause.

The logical advantage, however, must be with the theist since the belief in God is consistent with logic, reason, and modern science, whereas beliefs in either an eternal universe or in an uncaused universe that just suddenly appeared require their proponents to violate fundamental laws of science (i.e. the first and second laws of thermodynamics).

The Origin of Life Itself

And what of life itself; how did it arise? The simpler explanation, in accord with Ockham's principle, is that God created life on earth (or wherever it exists). But the prevailing theory of scientists today is that the beginning of life on earth was simply a random accident. Now our top scientists with the most advanced labs and technology have been trying to replicate life for decades and yet have failed. Nevertheless, we are asked to believe that life just randomly happened when one day lightning struck some pre-biotic soup in early earth history.

What is most remarkable about this whole supposition is that scientists believe it despite the fact that it violates one of the fundamental laws of science, that being the law of biogenesis. It is worth quoting a public school biology textbook at this point:

Have you ever walked out after a thunderstorm and found earthworms all over the sidewalk? . . . It is no wonder that people used to think the earthworm had fallen from the sky when it rained. It was a logical conclusion based on repeated experience. But was it true? Jan Baptist van Helmont wrote a

recipe for making mice by placing grain in a corner and covering it with rags. For much of history, people believed that living things came from non-living matter, an idea called the theory of spontaneous generation. People also believed that maggots came from decaying meat. In 1668, Francesco Redi, an Italian doctor, performed one of the first controlled experiments in science. He showed that maggots hatch from eggs that flies had laid on the meat, and not from meat itself . . . It was not until the mid-1800s that Louis Pasteur, an French chemist, showed conclusively that living things do not come from nonliving materials . . . The work of Redi, Spallanzani, Pasteur, and others provided enough evidence finally to disprove the theory of spontaneous generation. It was replaced with biogenesis, the theory that living things come only from other living things.⁸

I quoted this passage at length because the amazing dichotomy of thought presented in the textbook. It does a great job clearly showing how scientists like Redi and Pasteur proved that spontaneous generation simply does not and cannot happen and so was replaced by the law of biogenesis that says life can only rise from other living things. Then on the very same page, the textbook attempts to speculate, against everything it had just said, that life on earth did in fact come from non living chemicals.

Again, which is a simpler and more reasonable supposition? That all the complexity in the universe, in the human body, or even in the smallest cell is a result of a completely random process or that it was a designed by an infinitely wise creator?

Paley's Argument from Design

My suspicion is that William of Ockham would have strongly supported another English theologian, William Paley (1743-1805), and his argument from design. Geisler and Brooks summarized Paley's argument:

“William Paley (1743-1805) insisted that if someone found a watch in a field, he would rightly conclude that there had been a watchmaker because of the obvious design. The same must be of the design found in nature.”⁹

Since Paley's time, this argument has only gotten stronger as scientists have opened the window on life at the micro-biological and cellular level to reveal incredible complexity. In his 1996 book

8 Lucy Daniel, Edward Paul Ortleb & Alton Biggs, *Merrill Life Science*, New York (Glencoe Division of Macmillan/McGraw-Hill School Publishing Company, 1994) 10-11.

9 Norman L. Geisler & Ronald M. Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask*, Wheaton IL (Victor Books, 1990) 20.

Darwin's Black Box, biochemist Michael Behe described various biochemical processes in the body including the workings of the cilium and the flagellum in the cell as well as the amazing cascade of effects involved in blood clotting.¹⁰ Reading these descriptions do not alone prove that God is their designer and creator, but they strongly suggest it! I cannot but stand in awe of the great God who has created not only our amazing bodies, but the whole universe in its vast array (Psalm 19:1, Isaiah 44:24).

It is not only science that causes me to believe in God. There are multiple other arguments that also lead me to believe in God's existence. For example, theism best accounts for the possibility of ethics in the world.

Ethics and Morality

Most of us, at least, live in cultures that have laws. Where do these laws come from? That seems simple enough; they come from our governmental leaders regardless of how they have become our leaders. And then we have police organizations and courts to administer and enforce those laws.

Now, as a Christian, I suggest that the proper source of moral and ethical laws is God. In other words, just as human leaders give us legal laws, God gives us His laws to live by. However, it seems that there is a problem for those who deny the existence of God. If there is no God to give His moral law, how then are men to know what is right or wrong, or what they should or should not do? Sure, our government can tell us what is legal and not legal, but they cannot tell us what is right or wrong.

Is Government Law a Basis for Morality?

For instance, the laws of the United States once allowed for and even protected the practice of slavery treating African-Americans as property rather than persons deserving protection as citizens.

Now most of us would agree that the law was morally wrong at that time, so it simply was not a reliable guide for personal ethics. Further, there was a time when slavery was banned in the United Kingdom (England) while it was legal in the United States. If the law is a basis for morality, then we would have the untenable notion that slavery was moral and ethical in the United States and immoral and unethical in the United Kingdom, at the same time.

¹⁰ Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*, New York (The Free Press, 1996).

Examples like this abound. During the Nazi period in Germany, was it ethical to exterminate Jews and anyone that resisted Hitler? Now it really gets interesting. If you were living in Hitler's Germany, and you were an atheist, on what basis could you condemn Hitler? He had the law of the government on his side.

Can We Each Decide Our Own Morality?

If you were to have said to your local SS officer that it was wrong to kill Jews, he might have responded, "Says who?" If you were to have responded, "I say so." He would likely have responded, "Well, that's just your opinion. Who are you to tell me what I can or cannot do? Who are you to try to impose your morality on others? If you don't want to kill Jews, that's your decision, but you have no right to tell us what to do."

And if you were a Jew, and they were dragging you away, you could not have said, "What you are doing is evil" but only, "I think this is wrong." But if you were a Christian, and a believer in God, then you could have appealed to the moral law that transcends both the laws of the government and the personal opinions of man. You could have said definitively that what Hitler and his supporters were doing was unequivocally evil and murderous since they violated God's moral law.

The bottom line is that it is impossible to have a foundation for ethics that is universally applicable apart from a belief in the God who reveals His will to us. Indeed, we find ourselves in such a situation today, as more and more people reject God and His word the Bible, and do whatever they choose. This is behind the explosion of crime in our culture over the last half century as the *times they are a-changin'*.¹¹

Can There Be Justice Without God?

And what about justice? What I am asking is how we can have justice in an ultimate sense if there is no God? Returning to the example of Hitler; can we really say that justice was done when after being responsible for the killing of literally millions of people, he took a quick bullet to the head and avoided any human tribunal or punishment?

However, because there is a God, justice will ultimately be done because Hitler will without doubt stand before a perfect, holy, and just God for his deserved punishment. The same can be said for every

11 Bob Dylan, *The Times They Are a-Changin'*, 1964, Columbia Records.

rapist who thought he got away with it, for every killer that thought he got away with murder, and the like. They will all be judged before the God who knows all of man's secrets.

The Invisible Monster at the Atheist Summer Camp

There is so much more that I could add to this paper in support of why I believe in God, but space just doesn't allow. Yet I do want to address one particularly interesting argument I had heard being used by atheists who were a part of an atheist group in Minnesota several years ago.

The context was that these Minnesota atheists wanted to give their children an experience like unto the experience that children at Christian summer camps enjoyed. In the newspaper account of this camp, it described one of the activities for the children. The children were told that there was some kind of invisible monster with incredible features living in the woods near the campsite. The children were then asked to investigate and share why they did not fear this creature.

Now the whole implication of this activity was to suggest that belief in God was just as irrational as believing in this imaginary invisible beast out in the woods. The leaders took great joy in poking fun at those who believed in God while they prided themselves for having cast off belief in such supernatural fairy tales.

Not to ruin all their fun, but the exercise was simply unreasonable at best and completely misleading at worst. I say that because while there was absolutely no evidence that the invisible creature existed in the woods near their camp, there is incredibly compelling evidence that the being we call God does in fact exist, the kinds of evidence I have spoken of in this article. Indeed, there are many books filled with much more sophisticated arguments than I have presented here, and that are worth the sincere searcher's time to investigate.

Pascal's Wager

I want to close by calling to your mind what is known as Pascal's wager named after the famed French philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal (1623-1662). After he passed away, a collection was made of notes Pascal had made concerning the truths of the Christian religion and these eventually formed the work we know as the *Pensees*.

His "wager" argument is found in *Pensees* 233 and can be summed up as follows. We are all going to die and this cannot be avoided.

We must all decide if the claim that God exists is true. So we either choose to believe it and live in accordance with that belief or we choose not to believe and again live accordingly (ignoring the question is a vote against the belief in God).

Now, after we die, we will find the truth. If we have bet **for God** and we were right, we are most blessed indeed. But if we were wrong, we have lost very little.

On the other hand, if we have bet **against God**, and we were right, we have gained very little. However, if we were wrong, we are most damned indeed for all eternity.

Pascal suggests that the most logical thing to do, given the options available to us, is to believe in (bet on) God. If one finds that difficult, he should be as open as possible to belief in God, even taking the time to seriously pursue the possibility, since the consequences for betting against God are so profound.

As a pastor, I would add that if you are on such a quest for truth, with all sincerity, ask God that if He is real, to reveal Himself to you. That was my experience and I have found the greatest purpose and peace in my life from that time till now, and I suspect through all eternity. Praise the Lord!

Steve Lagoon

QUIZ: GENEALOGIES, BIRTHDATES

1. According to the Jewish calendar, we are now living in the year:

<u> </u> a. 5774	<u> </u> c. 6025
<u> </u> b. 4996	<u> </u> d. 5326
2. Which statement is correct? Jesus was born

<u> </u> a. in the reign of Tiberias Caesar
<u> </u> b. in the reign of Augustus Caesar
<u> </u> c. before the reign of Julius Caesar
<u> </u> d. after the death of Herod the Great
3. Whose genealogy is part of the Edomite nation?

<u> </u> a. Joseph	<u> </u> c. Ishmael
<u> </u> b. Lot	<u> </u> d. Isaac
4. An Amalekite who tried to exterminate the Jewish people in Persia?

<u> </u> a. Haman	<u> </u> c. Nebuchadnezzar
<u> </u> b. Cyrus	<u> </u> d. Xerxes
5. What name is not included in any genealogical record?

<u> </u> a. Jabez	<u> </u> c. Melchizedek
<u> </u> b. Boaz	<u> </u> d. Seth
6. Adolph Hitler's background included Jewish blood. What name indicates this?

<u> </u> a. Dietzmann	<u> </u> c. Schickelgruber
<u> </u> b. Cohen	<u> </u> d. Goldberg
7. The longest genealogical records in the Bible are in?

<u> </u> a. 1. Chronicles	<u> </u> c. Matthew's Gospel
<u> </u> b. Luke's Gospel	<u> </u> d. Genesis

8. Luke's genealogy begins with

- a. Abraham
- b. David

- c. Adam
- d. Joshua

9. Which cult is known for its genealogical research?

- a. Jehovah's Witnesses
- b. Mormons

- c. Christian Science
- d. Scientology

10. A.D. means

- a. "after the death"
- b. "according to an angel's declaration"
- c. from Latin: "in the year of our Lord"
- d. "after the death of Augustus Caesar"

Answers:

1. (a); 2. (a); 3. (b); 4. (c); 5. (a); 6. (c); 7. (a); 8. (c); 9. (c); 10. (c)

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