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# THIS IS NICK

Articles from the pen of Nick Hawkes  
exploring science, faith, rational thought  
and the beauty of belief in God.

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*Time for another sticky bun and a coffee?*

*L.D*

*This Is Nick : Articles from the pen of Nick Hawkes exploring science, faith, rational thought and the beauty of belief in God.*

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# Introduction

Dr Nick Hawkes was a theologian, writer, communicator, research scientist, educationalist, apologist, pastor, author and radio broadcaster. Across his life he earned two degrees in science and three more in theology.

I had the joy of knowing Nick for over 14 years and found it an immense privilege, as so many other's can testify to in their own way, to chat with him about faith (especially as a fledgling pastor!), life and belief in God. It was always a deeply joyful and awe inspiring few hours to spend time with him (Most often with a coffee and sticky bun).

It has also been an honor to make his resources accessible to many thousands more through his online presence, still available, on his personal website - [nickhawkes.net](http://nickhawkes.net) - as well as his 'Stones' novels at [author-nick.com](http://author-nick.com).

What follows is the entire collection of all 114 articles Nick wrote over an 8 year period between 2014 and 2022.

Nick began by posting a variety of radio talks, but eventually began commenting on culture, science, faith, the political landscape as well as his own reflections on why he not only believes in the God of the Bible, but his own personal trust in Jesus throughout his life and into death.

A quick note on the quotes: If you ever had the privileged of meeting Nick, you'd know that he could spout off a dozens quotes from across a wide range of disciplines in a matter of minutes. His articles reflected this, with many of his quotes, while accurately quoted, have no reference to the source.

I would wager that Nick would love nothing more than for you to keep exploring the God whom he cherished and loved dearly. Perhaps this little book will play a part in that.

*Luke Dahlenburg*

*April, 2023*

# 1. Lost Something?

**October 20, 2014**

Ever lost something important?

NASA has. It's lost its little, yellow, plastic ducks.

If you've found them, do please return them.

In September 2008, some 90 yellow, plastic ducks were thrown into a hole in the ice in Greenland. Why did they do this, you might reasonably ask? They did so in order to study the movement of water under the ice's surface which was lubricating the base of the Greenland ice cap, causing the ice to slide faster toward the sea.

It was expected that the plastic toys would travel by internal channels within the ice and resurface somewhere in the sea. Unfortunately, none of them were ever seen again.

It may interest you to know that God has a keen interest in finding things that are lost. Jesus said he'd come to seek and to save what was lost (Luke 19:10).

Luke, chapter 15, particularly talks about God's priority in finding those who are lost.

Verses 3-7 talk about God being a shepherd who leaves his 99 sheep in order to find one sheep that is lost. This answers the question, "Does God care about me?"

Verses 8-10 talk about God being like someone searching diligently for a lost coin. This answers the question about how keen God is to find the lost.

Verses 11-24 talk about God's willingness to receive back a lost, wayward son. This answers the question, "Will God accept me?"

So, if you're lost, why not allow God to find you.



## 2. Evil, Culture and God

**October 20, 2014**

Christianity is thriving in China despite most of the Christian church being persecuted. However, sometimes there are reports of the Chinese government being so amazed at the difference being a Christian makes that they secretly study it to find out why.

One Christian industrial company they are watching is the Boteli Valve Group in Wenzhou. They make 5 million dollars worth of engine valves a year. The manager of the company encourages his workers to become Christians and have Bible studies because he has discovered that the Christian faith makes people more conscientious.

The fact is, Christianity is a whole new way of living that changes peoples character, causing it to become more and more like that of Jesus.

Maybe the West needs to remember this in its headlong rush to embrace secularism, other faiths and liberal ethics toxic to the values of truth, human worth and integrity, values derived from a Christian culture that has been the historical basis of our legal, medical and educational systems.

Nothing very good happens when authentic Christianity is abandoned. The complete absence of empathy, (that's to say, the ability to care about or identify with others) resulted in the torture and genocide of 6 million people in Nazi extermination camps. God, however, is passionate about justice, the plight of the poor and passionate about you. So, if you want to grow what is good, then come to God, embrace his character and allow him to transform you.

# 3. The Prodigal

**October 20, 2014**

Eric Clapton once lived the life of an alcoholic on the streets. He wrote a song about this experience on his Unplugged album, entitled: “Nobody knows you when you're down and out.”

Jesus once told a story about a young son who badgered his Father for his share of the inheritance, and then went off and squandered the lot on parties and prostitutes. He, too, discovered when he was broke that everyone deserted him. Eventually, he decides to go back home, confess his stupidity and ask to be taken back as a servant.

When his father sees him coming in the distance, he runs out to him, hugs him and welcomes him back. To signify his acceptance, the father gives his son three things.

First, he gives his son a high quality robe, a symbol of distinction and honour. Jesus said this to teach that no one is without honour in God's community.

Second, he gives him the family signet ring. This gave him authority to act on behalf of his father. Jesus said this to teach that no one is without God's authority in God's community.

Thirdly, he gives him sandals for his feet, because only slaves went barefooted. Jesus said this to teach that there are no second class citizens in God's community.

Jesus told this story for all who feel they are lost, deserted and not living their true purpose. If that's you, why not come home to God and be all you were meant to be?

## 4. Valentines Day

**October 20, 2014**

What did you get up to last Valentine's day? Did you do anything that scored you a kiss or did you 'crash and burn'?

The origins of Valentine's day are not known with any certainty, because there were at least three early Christians called Valentine who were martyred for their faith.

However, a lovely legend has arisen around one.

Marcus Aurelius Claudius was the Emperor of Rome from 268 to 270 AD. His problem was that he could not get enough young men to serve in his army to fight the foreign wars he was waging.

Rather than blame himself for the unpopular wars, he blamed the institution of marriage because he thought that marriage was keeping his men at home. He therefore banned marriage throughout his empire. The story goes, however, that Valentine, an early Christian bishop, still married people in secret. When a report of this reached Claudius, he had Valentine put to death.

The story could well be true.

Certainly, it makes you think. Valentine's day may well have had its origin in a man who had the courage to stand up for God's values even when it cost him his life.

So, by all means, continue to give the flowers and chocolates, but if you are not prepared to seek Godly values for your marriage and your family, it is simply sentimentality. If you really want to be like Valentine, then be prepared to stand for Christian values in your family and in your community.

## 5. Atheist Says That "God Is Good For Africa"

**November 7, 2014**

Matthew Parris, writer for The Times and former Member of Parliament, is not your typical atheist, for he wrote in an article on 27th Dec, 2008, saying, "As an atheist, I truly believe Africa needs God. Missionaries, not aid money, are the solution to Africa's biggest problem - the crushing passivity of the people's mindset."

As a result of researching a story on aid organisations in Africa, Paris wrote: "Travelling in Malawi refreshed a belief I've been trying to banish all my life, but an observation I've been unable to avoid since my childhood. It confounds my ideological beliefs, refuses to fit my world view and has embarrassed my growing belief that there is no God."

He goes on to say: "I've become convinced of the enormous contribution that Christianity makes in Africa: sharply distinct from the work of secular and government organisations and international aid efforts. These alone will not do. Education and training alone will not do. Christianity changes people's hearts. It brings spiritual transformation."

So, even atheists are discovering that no one is doing very well without Jesus. Without Jesus, Africa reverts to tribal warfare, abusive overlords and urban gangsterism. Parris says that removing Christianity from Africa risks "leaving the continent at the mercy of a malignant fusion of Nike, the witch doctor, ...and the machete."

If atheism and indifference to God is not working very well for you, perhaps you'd better re-connect with God and be what you were intended to be.

# 6. Mobile Phones

**December 10, 2014**

Ever wonder what would happen if we treated our Bible like we treat our mobile phone? Just imagine it.

- What if we carried it around in our purses or pockets?
- What if we flipped through it several times a day?
- What if we turned back to go get it if we forgot it?
- What if we treated it like we couldn't live without it?
- What if we gave it to our kids as gifts?
- What if we used it when we travelled?
- What if we used it in case of emergency?

Oh, and one more thing - unlike our mobile phone, we wouldn't have to worry about our Bible being disconnected. Why? Because Jesus has already paid the bill.

It is simply amazing that we have the truth about God and the eternal principles he wants us to live by written down for us in the Bible. We never need to be in doubt. So let's treasure it, eh!

# 7. Who Goes To Church?

**February 20, 2015**

According to a study, entitled, Religion and Occupation, (written by Philip Hughes of the Christian Research Association), the most religious folk in the country are farmers. Evidently, almost half attend church at least once a month.

I guess that when you work so closely with nature, relying on seed-time, harvest and rains, the need to rely on God would be hard to avoid. Those of us who live in cities can suffer from the illusion, surrounded as we are with man-made skyscrapers, bitumen, concrete and glass, that we are masters of our own identity, not God.

I suspect that farmers see the harsh realities of life, with its cycle of birth and death, and that these things force them to look beyond themselves. Sadly, in the cities, we can be so obsessed with entertainment and comfort, that we can fail to see the mystery of God.

Farmers also have the advantage of having to be patient. It is a truth that God sometimes works at the pace of a growing seed. In the city, we can be so distracted by 'hurry sickness' that we fail to wait for anything more profound than a cappuccino.

So, do you think its time you too slowed down enough to rediscover God, rediscover who you are and rediscover your intended destiny?

## 8. Faith And Action

**February 20, 2015**

Thaddeus Baklinski reported on the work of a group of professors at Grove City College. Evidently, they have found a clear relationship between active participation in church and the development of positive character traits, particularly self-control.

The research, conducted by Drs. Horton, Seybold and Welton, (all professors in psychology), discovered that personal faith combined with belonging to a church was vastly more beneficial in dealing with stressful life events than simply having a vague personal belief.

The professors preface their report by commenting on the claims by the atheist, Richard Dawkins, who wants to believe that religious people are not more moral. The researchers found that this claim was quite wrong.

When explaining the results of their research, the professors said, "The benefits of religion for character development seem most likely to come from participation in a community and commitment to a belief system rather than a generalised spirituality. This is because a belief system and community result in expectations for behaviour, whereas a general feeling of religiosity does not."

The researchers noted that those with an active faith, lived out in a faith community, generally exhibited an increase in humility, healthy behaviour, honesty, and a work ethic, all of which required self control. Self control, they discovered, was encouraged by an active faith.

So, being actively involved in a faithful, vibrant church helps grow resilience, self-control and character. Interesting eh?

# 9. What Evidence Will You Leave Behind?

**March 13, 2015**

Have you heard the story of how a leech solved an eight-year old criminal case of aggravated robbery in northern Tasmania? Evidently, that guy got caught because a leech found at the scene of the crime contained his blood.

DNA taken from blood in a leech identified a man who then pleaded guilty to robbing a 71-year-old woman eight years earlier. The man, Peter Alec Cannon, from Lilydale, stabbed the woman with a stick and robbed her of \$550.

This makes me wonder” what evidence will you and I leave behind us after we've gone? What will be written on your tombstone? It would be desperately sad if it said that all you did was to entertain yourself to death, and that you'd done nothing more than be nice to your family and friends.

To have not realised the purpose and destiny God intended for you would be tragic. Life does have meaning and your purpose is to find it out before you die. Finding your purpose will affect what you do and the legacy you leave. The Apostle Paul once spoke of faithful Christians leaving behind them the beautiful aroma of Christ. Now that's a legacy worth leaving. That's a legacy that has eternal consequences.

So, why not discover God so you can leave behind evidence of a life that lived its true purpose?



# 10. Atheists Who Are Struggling

**April 7, 2015**

In recent years Great Britain's chief export to the U.S. has been a stack of books by atheist authors such as evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins and literary critic Christopher Hitchens, both of whom claim that faith is irrational in the face of modern science.

This is interesting, given that other prominent British atheists seem to be having second thoughts. One of these is the philosopher, Antony Flew. His research led him to conclude that evolutionary theory was not enough to explain the origin of life. As such, he discovered that his atheism was not logically sustainable.

More recently, the author, A.N. Wilson, (a man who spent years mocking Christianity), returned to Christianity. He did so, he said, when he discovered that atheists were unable to make sense of the basic experiences of life. He noted that people who insisted we were just "anthropoid apes" could not account for things as basic as language, love, and music. They certainly could not explain how Christianity was able to transform lives.

In a similar vein, Matthew Parris, another well-known British atheist, saw the transforming power of the Christian gospel in Malawi, Africa. He said that his experience of Christianity at work "confounded his ideological beliefs, stubbornly refused to fit his world-view, and embarrassed his belief that there was no God."

Why do I tell you this? Because unless you discover the God who came to rescue you back to himself in Jesus, you too may struggle to make much sense of life.

# 11. Sex Doll!

**April 11, 2015**

A manufacturer in Las Vegas has created what he claims is the first talking robot sex doll. When asked why he had done it, he replied, "I built it so people could have a meaningful relationship with it."

Riiiiight. You build a robotic sex doll so you can have a meaningful relationship. That's what sex dolls are for, meaningful relationships! "Darling, I find your circuitry, diodes and silicon chips so meaningful to my life."

The inventor of the sex robot claims that she listens to you, speaks to you and feels your touch. The robot, called "Roxxy," has a silicone skin, a mechanical heart, and five personality options ranging from "Wild Wendy" to "Mature Martha." It retails for between \$7,000 and \$9,000 American dollars.

Come on guys! Don't debase yourselves so that you can only relate to lumps of plastic and metal. Don't let your sexual identity be determined by someone wanting you to pay \$9,000 American dollars. For goodness sake, you're worth more than that. God dreamed you into being and purposed you to discover real love, not fake love. He has purposed you to accept his love and to show it to others.

The commercial world wants you to have a meaningful relationship with a silicon chip so they can take \$9,000 dollars from you. God wants you to discover his authentic love – for free.

## 12. Make Up Your Mind

**April 23, 2015**

I wish society would make up its mind. When the church is surrounding itself with Gothic architecture, outdated music and not engaged in mission, the media attacks it for not being relevant. However, when it engages in mission and reaches into society, schools and the prisons, it is attacked for being too aggressive and for proselytising. Left wing, journalists have attacked the church's programs in prisons because they are too effective at bringing people to faith and in changing their lives. They've also attacked the idea of Christian chaplains being in schools. If Christianity was safely irrelevant and ineffective, the journalists wouldn't mind.

Jesus experienced the same frustration. Nothing he did pleased some people. He once said, "John the Baptist came neither eating nor drinking, and (this generation) said, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'" (Mt 11:18-19)

The Christian author, Selwyn Hughes, wrote that:

Society demands conformity. If you fall beneath its standards it will punish you. If you rise above its standards, it will persecute you. It demands a grey, average morality. For this reason most people look around before they act. But in reality they don't act, they react. They are echoes, not persons with voices. You have three choices: you can be self-centred, herd-centred or Christ-centred<sup>1</sup>.

I want to invite you break free of conformity and become Christ-centred - and work with him to do his work.

---

<sup>1</sup> Selwyn Huges, Every Day With Jesus, 13th January, 2010

# 13. Kindness More Pleasurable Than Entertainment

**April 30, 2015**

The American Psychologist, Martin Seligman, reported on an interesting debate between students at the University of Virginia about what it was that gave people the most pleasure. One student reported that when he watched a fellow student help an old woman shovel snow away from her driveway, it not only made him feel good, it made everyone watching him feel good. As a result of this discussion, some students decided to do an experiment and monitor how they felt after doing a number of different activities.

The results were not only surprising but for many, they were life-changing. They reported that the 'afterglow' feeling of doing pleasurable things like hanging out with friends, watching a movie, or eating a hot fudge sundae, paled in comparison with the effects of doing an act of kindness. The students reported that when they chose to use their abilities to do spontaneous acts of kindness, the pleasurable effects from doing it seemed to affect the whole day. They said they were able to listen better, empathise better, notice things with more clarity and were better 'tuned in' to life. It resulted in total engagement with life and in the loss of self-consciousness.

The Bible says that you and I are formed in God's image. This means that we, to some extent, reflect the heart and passions of God. It is, therefore, little wonder that when we share with God in doing acts of kindness, we are at our happiest.

# 14. The Historically Credibility Of Jesus

**June 7, 2018**

Christianity is not a culturally derived religious philosophy that gradually evolved over the years. Christianity is based on concrete historical events. It is based on the historical reality of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

This claim is hugely significant ... for if it can be shown that the New Testament accounts of Jesus are nothing but myths and exaggerations formed incrementally over the years by overzealous adherents, Christianity disappears in a puff of smoke leaving nothing behind but moralistic platitudes.

So let us take a look at the historical integrity of Christianity. John, the disciple who was closest to Jesus begins his epistles with these words:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of Life. The life appeared, we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us (1 John 1:1-3).

John is making it quite clear that he is writing from his first-hand experiences of Jesus. He is not at all interested in promoting myths that developed about him many years later.

Peter and the other apostles said similar things. Luke records them in Acts saying: We are witnesses to these things(Acts 5:32).

Christopher Hitchens who, when he was alive, was one of the most vociferous “New Atheists,” made the claim that there is, ‘no firm evidence whatever that Jesus was a “character in history”’.

He went on to say that, ‘The case for biblical consistency or authenticity or “inspiration” has been in tatters for some time, and the rents and tears only become more obvious with better research.’

Richard Dawkins, another leading “New Atheist,” made the extraordinary claim that the gospels accounts of Jesus are as much works of fiction as Dan Brown's The Da Vinci Code.

In order for the New Atheists to say such things, they need to ignore scholarly research and embrace selective rhetoric... then pass it off as informed comment. Hitchens' and Dawkins' assertions have less to do with scholasticism and more to do with Goebbels' craft of propaganda, obfuscation and deception. Their claims are mind-bogglingly inaccurate and shocking in their untruth. They are comments driven by their atheistic agenda, not by academic research.

George Eldon Ladd, professor of New Testament exegesis and theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, in California, says this:

Unlike other world religions, modern man has the means of actually verifying Christianity's truth by historical evidence.

Some of this compelling evidence comes from a chap called Josephus. Josephus was born around 37AD, just 7 years after Jesus' death. He was a Jewish military leader who sought to defend Galilee from the invading Romans in 67AD. Unfortunately, he was captured by General Vespasian (who later became emperor). Josephus abruptly changed his allegiance and agreed to become an interpreter and advisor to the Romans. The Romans gave him a villa in Rome and supported him while he wrote a history of the Jewish people called Jewish Antiquities in 90AD.

In this work, Josephus writes: (and I'm careful here to exclude any controversial sections that some historians think were added later):

About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man ... for he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people who accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks ... When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst us had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him.

(Jewish Antiquities, 18,63-64).

So if the atheistic influences around you had led you to believe Jesus was a fictional character, you might like to explore the truth about him... for these truths may lead you to understand your intended eternal destiny.

# 15. Bob Dylan And Jesus

**June 14, 2018**

The pop/folk legend, Bob Dylan, spoke of a time when he crashed his 500cc Triumph motorcycle in 1966. He said that the accident caused him to withdraw from public life for a while... and during this time, he recorded a song called "Sign on the Cross" (which was released in 1971). It would seem that something spiritual was starting to stir in Bob... and he was not at all sure his life was currently on the right track. He sang:

'Yes, but I know in my head, that we're all so misled, And it's that ol' sign on the cross, that worries me.'

Now, the sign on top of the cross Jesus was crucified on said: Jesus Christ, king of the Jews.

Is Jesus really king? Is the possibility that he might be something that has ever worried you?

Whether or not Jesus really is king is a question each of us needs to get right. Either Jesus is God, i.e. Lord of all, or he is not. There is not much room to manoeuvre; so you need to make a choice. If Jesus is Lord and King of all, then he deserves all your loyalty; if he is not, he deserves nothing.

It is ironic that shortly before his murder, John Lennon recorded the song Serve Yourself in response to the 1979 song Bob Dylan wrote in his Christian years called Gotta Serve Somebody. The song won Dylan a Grammy Award for Best Male Rock Vocal Performance.

Lennon's answer to the sign on the cross was to ignore it and "serve yourself".

But was he right?

What do you think?

Many rock music commentators wrote dismissively about Bob Dylan's encounter with Jesus.

Evidently, he went back to his hotel after a gig feeling pretty jaded with his celebrity world of booze, drugs, sex and endless performances. As he contemplated this, he had a vision of Jesus Christ, clearly portrayed as King of kings. This caused him to embrace Christianity and to begin a period of his career which people have dubbed the "gospel years." This was generally reckoned to have occurred between 1979 and 1981.

The first public expression of Dylan's newfound faith in God came with the album, Slow Train Coming. He gathered together a group of studio musicians including guitarist Mark Knopfler, and produced a batch of songs including Gotta Serve Somebody, When He Returns and Man Gave Names to All the Animals, that left no one in doubt about his faith.

His conversion infuriated many of his fans. According to music writer Michael Simmons, the reason for this was, quote:

‘Dylan represented free thinking, anti-establishment values, you know, “don't follow leaders.” And here he was following the ultimate leader.’

Evidently, the self-appointed custodians of rock culture would prefer that we “do what we want” and not follow any ultimate leader.

Autonomy from God; throwing God’s love and purpose in his face and living for self, is one of the best descriptions of sin I’ve heard.

In reality: the desire to be our own god, to have nothing bigger than ourselves to believe in – is a pretty shallow, sterile, unfulfilling form of freedom. It offers no ultimate good to hope for, no final resolution of evil, no forgiveness of sins, no purpose for existence, no hope of eternity, no godly transformation of character. It just offers the loneliness of being meaningless, temporary and self-obsessed. It may be “oh so trendy”... but spurning the love of the Ultimate Leader comes at a terrible cost. It comes at the cost of truth, meaning and hope. So please don’t get sucked in by it. Instead, rebel against the convention of being anti-God -- and find your true meaning.



# 16. Eternity

**June 21, 2018**

There is a sense within many people that we were created for something more than this life. We feel we have loved too much and meant too much for us to have no significance after death. There is a persistent suspicion that we are designed to have some sort of relationship with eternity.

The Old Testament writers understood this. One of them (probably King Solomon) wrote:

(God) has ... set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end (Ecclesiastes 3:11). In other words, the notion of eternity burns in our hearts, but we can't work out what God is up to.

The Bible is absolutely unambiguous about the existence of eternity.

God is described as "eternal" (Genesis 21:33; Deuteronomy 33:27)

Daniel writes about God's kingdom being an "eternal kingdom" (Daniel 4:3,34)

God's righteous laws are described as "eternal" (Psalm 119:160). Incidentally, this means that if you flout God's principles and patterns for living, you are flouting eternal principles.

In the light of the Bible's teaching about eternity, it's not surprising that people ask what it is they have to do to be part of it. This was also the case in Jesus' time. Let me read a bit from the gospel of Jesus' life written by Mark:

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life? (Mark 10:17)

It's a good question, isn't it? Sadly, too many of us don't switch off our mobile phones long enough to think seriously about it.

Arthur Malcolm Stace (1885 –1967), known as Mr Eternity, was an Australian soldier. He gained fame as a reformed alcoholic who converted to Christianity and spread his message by writing the word "Eternity" in copperplate writing with chalk on the footpaths of Sydney. He did this from 1932 to 1967 -- thirty-five years!

This one word that he wrote has since become part of Sydney folk-law. It was the word Sydney's civic leaders chose to be emblazoned in lights across the Harbour Bridge at the turn of the millennium. It is a disturbing and powerful word. It is one that challenges society's pursuit of meaninglessness, lack of boundaries, self-obsession and hedonism.

As I reflect on the Bible's teaching on eternity, the one thing it gives, more than anything else, is Hope. It gives us hope when faced with the obscenity and finality of death.

The existence of eternity also gives us dignity. Its existence means that we are created for more than collecting toys and tee-shirts from Bali. To simply content yourself with doing that is a woefully shallow/pathetic/inglorious mode of existence.

Whilst we have the nagging suspicion that eternity exists, we have to ask whether this belief is significant or whether it is simply a reflection of our inability to cope with the meaninglessness and hopelessness of death. In other words: is it true? What evidence is there that eternity exists?

Yuri Gagarin was said by some to have made the remark “I see no God” when orbiting Earth aboard Vostok 1 in 1961.

Christians were not surprised. No Christians thought he would literally be there in space. The laws of physics teach us that time and space are inseparably linked. This means that if God exists and is not physically there in space, he’s also not physically constrained by time. In other words, he must logically live in eternity.

It is significant that the ancient writers of Scripture described God as an eternal Spirit. They didn’t describe him as some sort of animal.

I think there are two reasons why we can take the existence of eternity seriously.

1. The first reason is the reasonable belief that God exists. Many of the greatest scientists of the past, including Newton, Darwin and Einstein have believed this, and many contemporary cosmologists e.g. Paul Davies, have also been convinced that there is a mind behind the cosmos. The beauty of the universe’s mathematical order and the ridiculously unlikely fine tuning of factors necessary for it to exist have persuaded them that the universe has meaning. So, if there is an eternal mind behind the cosmos, then we have to take the existence of eternity seriously.
2. The second reason we can take the existence of eternity seriously is because of the historical life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus not only taught about eternity, (particularly as it exists as “the kingdom of God”) but he also gave us a sneak preview into its reality by appearing to his disciples in his eternal resurrected form.

The Bible teaches that it is not the physical that is eternal, but the spiritual. It is worth noting that when we talk about the spiritual reality of eternity, we are not describing an existence of disembodied phantoms. Rather, we are talking about a world which is real and embodied but which is spiritually driven. After all, Jesus’ eternal resurrected body was real enough to eat with his disciples and to go fishing!

So there we have it: Eternity.

May I suggest that if there is even a faint possibility of it existing, that you seek out how Jesus can make you eligible for it.

# 17. Wonder At The Cosmos

**July 1, 2018**

Interesting things happen in space.

They've grown a rose in space to see if zero gravity would affect its smell. It does, evidently.

And there's a star, a white dwarf which scientists have nicknamed 'Lucy'. It sits in the constellation of Centaurus about 50 light years from Earth. It is only 4,000 kilometres in diameter and is the crystallised carbon remains of a once large star. However, the form of this crystallised carbon is none other than diamond. Yep: diamond! That's why scientists have nicknamed it 'Lucy' (after the song: 'Lucy in the sky with diamonds' by the Beatles). Now: you've got to be impressed! That's one very big diamond —some ten billion, trillion, trillion carats!

Amazed?

Try this:

The interstellar gas cloud, Sagittarius B, contains a billion, billion, billion litres of alcohol. Tragically, it's not drinkable.

And what about this:

One of Jupiter's moons (Europa) gets squeezed back and forth by Jupiter's gravity like a rubber ball, so much so that it gets hot through friction—hot enough to melt the ice under its surface into water that could potentially allow life.

I'm telling you these things to encourage you to be amazed at existence. Please don't take it for granted.

How do atheists explain the universe? They either shrug their shoulders and don't let themselves think about it—which is culpable, intellectual laziness... or they say that everything came from nothing, as a result of nothing, by a mechanism that hasn't been discovered and for which there is no precedent—which is pretty ridiculous. It is certainly unscientific. The very notion that everything can come from nothing fractures the law of "cause and effect" which underpins all science.

The most obvious answer to the intrinsic order and creativity of the universe is that there is a mind behind it all. And to deny the significance of this order by postulating the existence of an infinite number of universes is simply avoiding the issue... because the question remains: why did the first universe exist?

Now... with all this talk about God and the cosmos, you may be asking: Aren't scientific truths and theological truths irreconcilable?

No.

Perhaps I should expand on this. The logic is pretty simple. If God (as he has revealed himself in the Bible) is true, then all truth has its origin in God. This means that both scientific truth and theological truth come from the essence of who God is. As such, the two disciplines cannot fight each other. The two disciplines might answer different questions, but they must at least make room for each other. It might even be expected that each discipline helps to frame the other so they can dance together.

Essentially, science asks the question, ‘how’ whilst theology asks the question, ‘why’. As such, theology goes deeper. It explores why things are. It seeks to do more than lazily shrug its shoulders and say, ‘things exist because they do.’ Theology therefore puts science in a bigger context. This brings to mind Einstein’s aphorism, ‘Science without religion is lame, and religion without science is blind.’

So: If we really want to know about God, let’s read his invitation to get to know him in the cosmos – and let’s stop this silliness of saying science and faith are incompatible. They are not. Both come from God and, rightly understood, both reveal something of God.

## **18. God And The Universe**

**July 7, 2018**

You are a leftover. And, evidently, our world is made of leftovers. Even more astounding: our universe is made of leftovers.

For every one billion particles of anti-matter in the early universe, there were a billion and one particles of matter. When matter and anti-matter met, they annihilated each other—leaving relatively few leftover particles of matter. The universe and everything in it is built of the leftover—tiny remaining bits of matter that were not cancelled out by anti-matter.

Now, here’s the thing: Was this a cosmic accident, or was this an intentional outcome?

Rather a lot of things got annihilated in a massive bang in order for you to exist. It’s as if God was introducing his creation with a giant fireworks display.

Certainly, the opening chapters of the Bible teach us God was delighted with his creation, (he called it “good”) and it also teaches that God delighted to sharing a loving relationship with us. Perhaps this explains why God was pleased to begin his creation project with a bang.

Now, the big thing is: What are you going do with these amazing facts? Will you shrug your shoulders, commit intellectual suicide, and do nothing... or will you allow the extraordinary “show

and tell” of the cosmos prompt you to explore the mind behind it all. Quite frankly, it’s difficult to think what else God could have done to invite your faith—that wouldn’t result in forcing it.

The marvels of the cosmos... and the marvels of creation are designed to encourage us to reach out to God. The Bible says in Acts 17:27: God did this (create a remarkable world)so that people would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.

So... I invite you to do so.

I invite you to do so because there will be an ending. You will physically end. And interestingly enough, our solar system will end.

Scientists tell us that our sun will die in 4.5 billion years time. If you manage to escape to another solar system, you are not out of the woods, because the universe itself is due to die and fade away in what is known as ‘heat death.’

Professor David Wilkinson writes about how non-Christian scientists are feeling about a world without hope. In his book, *Christian Eschatology and the Physical Universe*, he writes:

This end of Universe in the heat death of futility raises a great deal of pessimism within the scientific community.

Certainly, the 20th century English philosopher, Bertrand Russell, didn’t express much hope. He said:

The world which science presents for our belief is even more purposeless, and more void of meaning ... all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction ... and the whole temple of man’s achievements must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins.

The American physicist, Steven Weingberg, author of the book, *The First Three Minutes*, says mournfully:

The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless.

In their search for hope, some physicist suggest that there are an infinite number of universes in existence, or coming into existence... so that the chance of there being one which allows life should not be surprising. The physicist and theologian, John Polkinghorne highlights the bleakness of this view, describing such universes as: occasional islands of meaningfulness in an engulfing sea of absurdity.

The cosmologist, Paul Davies summarises the overall feeling concerning this the death of our universe, saying:

(An) almost empty universe growing steadily more cold and dark for all eternity is profoundly depressing.

The huge question each of us needs to answer is “why”? Why does anything exist, if it’s just going to end? What on earth am I here for?

The Bible makes it clear that this is a question God expects us to ask. The Apostle Paul says that it is reasonable for people to look at existence, ponder its meaning and to let it introduce the possibility of God (Romans 1:20).

I invite you to do so. Let the miracle of existence point you to God; and let Jesus point you to your purpose in God.

# 19. Understanding Death

**July 10, 2018**

There is something awfully final about death. After the miracle of birth, death seems a bit of an anticlimax. There is no fanfare, just the slow turning off of the switch for many of us. It's hardly the curtain call sought by most actors who "strut and fret their hour upon the stage."

Any spiritual claim concerning humanity needs to make sense of both our beginning (why we exist) and our ending (why death exists). These two events peg out the limit of our existence and remind us that life is linear—it has a beginning and an end that is defined by time.

Death is certainly a mystery that has baffled humanity throughout history. Some of us dread it, a few of us welcome it... and all of us have to face it.

But we don't like it very much. Many people, such as the poet, William Cary, have a fear of it. When he saw a canary singing happily in a cage, he thought gloomily that it could only do so because it didn't know it was going to die.

Biologically, death is a handy thing. It allows the evolutionary process to happen. Death clears the stage of old organisms and makes space for new organisms to develop. The death of species less suited to an ecological niche allows better-adapted species to thrive. This process of selection drives the engine of biological adaptation and diversity. It has resulted in you. And it has given you an innate instinct to survive for as long as possible.

Interestingly enough, this instinct, does not switch off once we have done our biological duty and our children have become adults. We do not then meekly surrender to death, calm in the knowledge that we have done our job. Instead, we become social burdens. In our aged state, we use up resources, clog up supermarket queues, and require more than our fair share of medical resources. Surely evolution should have taught us to get out of the way with the minimum of fuss as soon as our biological job was done! But it hasn't. We hang on to life as tenaciously as possible. We hate death because of its uncertainty and because it ruptures the bonds of love we have formed.

The big question is: Have we invented God simply to give us the illusion that there is meaning and hope after death—making the prospect of death more palatable?

All this was a mystery until one man, Jesus Christ, defeated death and was resurrected. This did not happen in myth: it happened in history. It did not happen in fiction: the resurrection accounts of Jesus stand up to forensic investigation.

So, what will you do with Jesus? Will you ignore him and the way to eternal life he offers? Or will you join him in his resurrection and defeat of death?



Death... it makes you think, doesn't it?

It's odd seeing a dead body. I've seen a few as I've watched the strange phenomenon called "life" trickle away... turning a friend into a corpse. The really weird thing is that the body, at the point of death, contains all the elements necessary for life to exist—and yet there is only death.

So, what is the mysterious life force that breathes fire into the unlikely pile of atoms that make up your body? And, more intriguingly, why does this life force exist? These musings bring to mind a comment by St Augustine:

And men go abroad to admire the heights of mountains, the mighty waves of the sea, the broad tides of rivers, the compass of the ocean, and the circuits of the stars, yet pass over the mystery of themselves without a thought.

When pondering the possibility of God, it is important to study nature. If God exists, then the canvas upon which he painted his purposes was biology. The objects that God chooses to create and love are cast in the form of living, biological machines. As such, it is reasonable to expect that God might have left some clues to his own existence, character and purposes in nature.

If the biblical witness to God is true, we would expect these clues to be subtle so that they don't compel faith in God, but invite it. The question, is, "Have you seen God in the order and beauty of nature?" If not, I invite you to do so.

## 20. Can The New Testament Accounts Of Jesus Be Trusted?

**July 17, 2018**

The “New Atheists”, such as Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens’ claim that the New Testament accounts of Jesus are nothing but unreliable ideas passed on like “Chinese whispers” containing nothing but “hearsay upon hearsay”. As such, the New Testament accounts of Jesus are unreliable and fictitious.

In order for New Atheists to perpetuate such falsehoods, they need to avoid scholarly research. As I’ve said earlier: they have been very successful at this. They give little evidence of having done more than paddle about in the shallow end of Google—re-quoting anti-Christian rhetoric.

The thing is: Christianity is not a culturally derived religious philosophy that gradually evolved over the years. Christianity is based on concrete historical events.

This claim is hugely significant and very bold... for if it can be shown that the New Testament accounts of Jesus are nothing but myths and exaggerations formed incrementally over the years by overzealous adherents, Christianity disappears in a puff of smoke leaving nothing behind but moralistic platitudes.

So let us take a look at the historical integrity of the gospel stories of Jesus in the Bible.

John, the disciple who was closest to Jesus begins his epistles with these amazing words:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of Life. The life appeared, we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us (1 John 1:1-3)

John is making it quite clear that he is writing from his first-hand experiences of Jesus. He is not at all interested in teaching myths that might have occurred about him at a later stage.

Peter and the other apostles said similar things. Luke records them in Acts saying: We are witnesses to these things (Acts 5:32).

The apostle Paul was equally passionate about accurately transmitting Jesus’ words and actions. He understood that the revelation he had of Jesus, and the truths handed to him by the apostles, were a sacred entrustment that he needed to pass on faithfully in an untainted way.

The apostle Luke who wrote one of the gospel accounts of Jesus' life took real pains to research all that happened in the life of Jesus using first-hand accounts of the apostles. He begins his gospel, saying:

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught(Luke 1:1-4).

One of the extraordinary features of the New Testament regarding its witness to Jesus Christ is how soon the Scriptures were written after his death.

There is no hint of the theology of Jesus gradually being fabricated by over-imaginative Christians in the years after Jesus' death. Far from it! The fully finished theological and historical record of Jesus exploded into being fully formed very quickly after Jesus' time on earth came to an end.

What is more: we have an incredible number of early New Testament manuscripts that give us the assurance that what was written within easy living memory of Jesus, is what we read now.

The earliest piece of New Testament manuscript found by archaeologists is a tiny piece of papyrus found in Egypt. It is known as P52 and it is thought to be between 90-150AD -- possibly just thirty years after John wrote it.

Because so many early copies of the New Testament text have been found, the different texts could be crosschecked for accuracy. Remarkably, the texts have been found to retain an accuracy of over 99%. In archaeological terms, this level of accuracy is unheard of; it has no parallel.

So please don't dismiss the gospel accounts of Jesus in the New Testament as unreliable. As with multiple accounts of any event: of course they differ slightly -- but the accounts are remarkably consistent. They tell the story of God coming to us as Jesus to rescue us back to himself. Please don't miss out on it.

# 21. Origins Of Everything... And Genesis

**July 17, 2018**

The ideological battle between world-views for Australia's heart is a spiritual battle. The universe either has meaning, because God made it... or there is no God and we can do what we like. The Christian blogger, Virginia Orton, writes:

The foundation of any worldview is its view of origins. What a person accepts as ultimate will shape everything else. The biblical worldview is grounded in its doctrine of creation, which, in contrast to naturalism's irrational and indifferent universe, has explanatory power for a world in which rationality and responsibility exist.

In other words: if you don't get the truths of the opening few chapters of the Bible locked into place, your life will be adrift, untethered to an ultimate grounding for morality, meaning, worth, and hope.

So, let's take a look at origins—at the very start of the Bible.

Ever since the Christian church was quite young, the leaders of the church have come to understand that the first three chapters of Genesis (which speak about God creating the universe) were written to answer the theological questions of who and why rather than science's questions of how and when. These chapters teach the fundamental principles upon which the rest of the Bible is based. With peerless prose, they declare:

- in an age of many gods, that there is only one God.
- in an age when people try to worship creation, that all creation is created by God.
- in an age when the gods were thought not to care, that God thought his creation was fantastic and that he seeks a loving relationship with us.
- in an age which fails to explain the reality of evil, that evil is rebellion against God.
- in an age that cannot make sense of suffering, that suffering is the result of humankind going down a path God never intended.
- in an age that feels helpless in the jaws of suffering, that God has not given up on us.
- in an age that despairs of finding justice and which tolerates evil, God declares that he has a zero tolerance to evil and that he will ensure that justice will ultimately prevail.
- in an age that has lost God amongst its religions and philosophies, that God is rescuing his people and his creation back to himself.

This profound teaching at the start of the Bible is the foundation of all that follows. It is the foundation of the love story of God revealing himself to humankind and rescuing us back to himself

through Jesus. This is the place where all Christians can unite with pride and joy, and say: 'This is true.'

The big question is, of course: Is it true for you?

What is it you believe about your "origins?" Why do you exist? Are you a meaningless accident or are you really meant to be here? What evidence is there of you being a meaningless by-product of the absurd belief that everything came from nothing as the result of nothing, via a mechanism that has never been discovered and for which there is no precedent? Or does the extraordinary finely tuned order of the cosmos; its mathematical beauty and its ability to form humanity... indicate purpose?

What is the story of your origin?

What is more likely to be true?

May I suggest that if evidence suggests you are a meaningless accident, then the only course open to you is nihilistic, self-obsession -- or, as the apostle Paul put it: "eat drink and be merry for tomorrow you die."

Alternatively, if the order of the cosmos suggests that there is likely to be a mind behind creation, then I suggest it is incumbent upon you to fit in with the purposes of that mind... particularly as he has declared his love for you in history by dying on a cross for you.

Perhaps it's time to check out the moral, historical and spiritual truth of Jesus.

## 22. Check Out Jesus

**July 21, 2018**

In today's psyche, happiness, as it pertains to me, not you, seems to be the measure of what is "good." This is the Epicurean philosophy of twenty-one hundred years ago. The new ethic is therefore not godliness, or even goodness, but happiness. My happiness is the ultimate good. My happiness is the ultimate goal. The ultimate significance is therefore me. The ultimate god to be served is me.

I once listened to the Australian politician, Kevin Andrews, talk about his book on marriage. It was called, rather sadly, "Maybe I do." When introducing his book to us, he said that a few decades ago, marriage was considered to be a morally good thing to do... and it was morally good to do all you could to make your marriage last. However, in recent years, this has now been overtaken by a new morality. Now the focus is not in doing the right moral thing in marriage... Now the measure of all things is "does it make me happy?" It is now "me" focussed. Something is morally good if it makes me happy.

The term narcissism comes from the Greek myth of Narcissus, a young man who fell in love with his own reflection in a pool of water.

It's important to note that narcissism is different from self-esteem. Narcissism is having an inflated and untrue image of yourself. Self-esteem is having a true image of yourself and knowing your worth.

People with self-esteem value personal achievement and personal relationships. Narcissists lack empathy and have poor relationship skills -- therefore, don't marry one (just a hint).

Professor Jean Twenge and Keith Campbell, have been investigating whether people born in more recent generations are more narcissistic than previous generations. It turns out that they are... and they have documented their findings in their book *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement*.

Plastic surgery rates have increased, and there is a greater drive to be unique, to stand out rather than fit in. This is even evident in the names that people give their children.

Crucially, there is evidence that relationships are not as stable as they once were. More children are being born to unmarried couples and people don't stay married for as long.

Hmmm...

And into the midst of this self-worship and self-obsession comes Jesus. He comes to wash the feet of his disciples and to die on a cross for us.

The difference between his attitude and that of the world today is monumental.

The question is: Which morality will you represent?

Some people are a bit unsure about God, and would rather blame God, rather than believe him. So, what can we say? Perhaps this:

1. If God is distant and uninvolved with us, then blame God for being aloof. But if God has come to us to show us what he's like—then trust God.
2. If God is evil and is responsible for evil, blame God. But if God is good and has a plan to kill off evil—then trust God.
3. If God is powerless to change the character of a person on the inside, then blame God from being irrelevant. But if God has given us his transforming Spirit—then trust God.
4. If God has given us nothing to hope for beyond this life of suffering, blame God for being cruel. But if he has invited you to join his everlasting kingdom—then trust God.
5. If God is simply a theory, just one of many world-views competing for your allegiance, ignore him for being too vague. But if he is real and has come to us in history—then trust God.
6. If the idea of God has changed radically throughout history so that what is said about him is inconsistent, discard God for being confusing. But if the Bible has given a clear, consistent witness to God's character and purpose over the years—then trust God.
7. If God requires you to make yourself perfect enough to earn the right to be with him, then dismiss God for asking the impossible. But if he has died in your place to make it possible—then trust God... which I invite you to do.

## 23. God On Trial

**August 1, 2018**

The militant atheist, Richard Dawkins, has said on a number of occasions that any God who could cause his son to die a horrible death the pay for the price for the sins of humankind would be horrible and vindictive!

What do you think about that?

Hmm... In order for Dawkins to say such a thing, he needs to have a theological understanding that is both paper thin and wilfully distorted.

So what can we say in response?

Perhaps two things.

The first is this: God was not driven by vindictiveness to force someone else to die in order to appease his anger at sin. No; quite the reverse. God himself chose to die. He, himself, took the blame. He took on himself the violence surrounding the killing off of evil. Quite simply, it was the greatest act of selfless love in history.

So, Richard Dawkins, don't you dare, in your arrogance and ignorance, call the greatest act of sacrificial love in history "vile" or "vindictive." The very violence you accuse God of is the very violence that he is protecting you from.

Secondly: I'd want to say to you, Professor Dawkins: What is the alternative to God not killing off the sins of humanity in himself?

Do you seriously want rape, abuse, injustice, untruth, cruelty and selfishness to continue forever -- unresolved and unchallenged? Well, let me tell you: if a good God exists, that cannot be. And just quietly: because a good God exists, it didn't.

Let me tell you a little about the love of God. It is powerful, perfect and persistent. A fair description of it is given in the Old Testament book, The Song of Songs. This is what it says:

Place me like a seal over your heart,

like a seal on your arm;

for love is as strong as death,

its jealousy unyielding as the grave.

It burns like blazing fire,

like a mighty flame. (Song of Solomon 8:6)



That's what God's love for you is like. He wants you to place him over your heart because his love for you is strong as death. It is unflinching and it burns like a blazing fire. That's that nature of God's love for you. And that's the love you are impugning.

God's jealous love for you and me was such that he could not allow our evil to keep us from him. But neither can he turn a blind eye to it. Why?... because he is holy and can't simply ignore sin.

God therefore chooses to die in our place to kill off our sin that would keep us from him. You see: That's what perfect love does.

God died. He was therefore not vindictive. He didn't force anyone else to die because of our sins. He was motivated by love to die in our place.

Now here's the important bit. All of God paid the price for our sins. Jesus made it plain that he and the Father were one (Jn 10:30). This point was beautifully made in the book, *The Shack*, (written by William Young) in which book's hero accuses God the Father of callousness in asking Jesus to die for our sins. God the Father's reply was simply to show his accuser his hands... which had the same crucifixion scars as his Son.

So, Richard Dawkins: don't turn the greatest act of love in history into an evil thing, and throw God's grace back into his face. To do that would be a terrible injustice and a terrible evil. In saying what you have, I fear you are standing in a very dangerous place.

## 24. The Story Of My Cancer, Death & Hope

**August 16, 2018**

Without wanting to sound overly dramatic, I should be dead. Curiously, I'm not. The doctor told me that I had a fifty-fifty chance of seeing last Christmas. So far, so good!

'And what are my chances after that?' I asked.

He drew a graph of life expectancy over time. It was a straight-line graph that showed that I had a zero probability of being alive in five years.

I'd got a nasty "stage 4" cancer, you see... and it was all rather surreal.

To be honest, I don't remember much about the dreary months of having needles stuck into me administering cocktails of horrendous poisons. But I do remember my first visit -- largely because of a nurse. She was wonderful. After making me promise not to Google the chemicals she was about to put into my veins (how's that supposed to make you feel!) she fussed about, pausing her irrepressible humour occasionally to say, "You poor Dear." She was honest, encouraging and compassionate.

Let me say that the levity she showed in my dire situation was aided and abetted by the presence of my twin brother who'd insisted on accompanying me to protect and to love in a way that is unique to twins. He was a great foil for my nurse's wit and humour -- when my own foil began to flag.

When I wasn't entertained by watching her poke a pen into her curly red hair... and then trying to find it again when she needed it, she rhapsodised with us over the genius of the Welsh rugby legend, Gareth Edwards and the singing in the stadium at Cardiff Arms Park. We were tempted to sing their unofficial anthem, the hymn *Cym Rhondda*, but wisdom prevailed and we settled instead on quoting the poetry of Dylan Thomas -- specifically his poem, *Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night*. Ironically, it is a poem about death.

Do not go gentle into that good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

I was interested to learn that one of the poisons (and I might say, the least toxic) was paclitaxil. It comes from the bark of the Pacific yew tree, *Taxus brevifolia*. Evidently, Native Americans used it to make anti-inflammatory treatments -- before big pharmaceutical companies took it over, fiddled with it and increased the price tag by a zillion percent.

The doctors had told me that my cancer was incurable... and that the best they could do was to prolong my life for as long as possible. But amazingly, the doctors can (at the time of writing) now find no sign of the cancer. One doctor, who claims no faith at all, has called it a miracle.

It is all wonderfully strange. I mean: why me? As a pastor, I have stood beside the beds of many people and watched the grip of cancer tighten until that miraculous thing called life trickled away. They were not healed. But I was.

Why?

I've no idea -- for what I can assure you is that I am no more deserving of being healed than anyone else. My healing was even more bewildering given that, as a Christian, I was very content to die and be with my Lord.

So, I have no idea why I am still alive. All I can do is trust God's purposes. What I am convinced of is that my healing is a gift, a sacred entrustment that comes with the responsibility of using well. It would seem I have yet more people to reach with love and truth.

When I was being treated for cancer, people said I was brave. It was an odd thing to hear... because I'll tell you what true bravery is. It is my wife wrestling with the prospect of grief, yet keeping the family together. It's her fighting for me by researching and making various anti-cancer brews... and driving me to my interminable medical appointments... and keeping both home and church running. Wow! That's bravery.

As I've already said, I was never afraid of dying. Knowing God's love meant that I could simply rest back into his arms... and be content. Cancer brought no big spiritual renaissance or revelation. I loved God before I got cancer; I loved him as much during cancer, and I love him now they can't find any cancer. What having cancer did do, however, is highlight even more the absurdity of pandering to ego or chasing riches and a hedonistic life dedicated to collecting t-shirts from Bali.

Life is so much more. Those who do not know God's gospel of hope are, in reality, soul-blightingly destitute when it comes to hope, identity and purpose. And so it should be of not surprise to you that a passion to make God's love and truth known in our time is something that burns within me more than ever.

So, let me ask: Do you know this hope? If not, will you search it out?

## 25. Being Stewards Of Our Environment

**August 30, 2018**

I could live anywhere in the world... if it weren't for Second Valley. You see: it's spoilt me for living anywhere else. Now: before I tell you any more, I have to insist you promise not to share this information with anyone. Otherwise, the world will turn up at Second Valley, and spoil its charm.

It is, unsurprisingly, a valley, which runs between steeply rounded hills to the sea. The hillsides are golden in the summer -- particularly when highlighted by the setting sun -- and green in the winter. Winter is best. In the mornings, there's a hint of wood-smoke in the air, and cattle munch contentedly on steep hills silvered with dew.

Houses are sparse, and there are old stone cottages with secret stories hidden amongst them.

The beach is a arc of sand squeezed between rocky headlands and dramatic cliffs. It looks like something from the front cover of an Enid Blyton "Famous Five" book. Note to millennials: Enid Blyton wrote innocent adventure books about children who did not spend their lives chained to social media platforms. Her literary legacy was largely killed off some decades ago by political correctness which, in its creative way, managed to conjure offence from its innocence. Today, children are required to read about gender fluidity and stranger danger instead.

But I digress. Second Valley is a place where you can sit and listen to the sea gurgling as it lifts and falls between the rocks... and marvel at the symmetry of the wings of a seagull -- all important things.

If you look beyond the harshly minimalistic metal toilet block and the modern safety rails on the jetty, the place still whispers its history.

And why do I tell you this?

Because life, despite being corrupted by sin and suffering, is miraculous. Something of its beauty and design still pierces the armoured protection we've place over our hearts to protect ourselves against the possibility of God.

Ours really is an amazing universe. Please don't take it for granted and fail to ponder what might be behind it.

I was listening to an atheist on TV, a scientist, who was trying to convince the lady interviewing him that she had no significance beyond being a random bag of protons, electrons and neutrons.

There was no purpose to her, no meaning to her, and nothing significant about her existence. The

atheist smiled at her with the smile of someone who was a scientist and therefore knew that what he was saying was true.

Did he know the truth, I wonder. What do you think?

There are three rather obvious problems with his claim. Firstly: He has manifestly failed to explain why how the extraordinary complex, quantum world of sub-atomic particles came about. To assume they came from nothing, as a result of nothing by a mechanism that has never been discovered and for which there is no precedent, is scientifically absurd. Science relies on the principle of “cause and effect.” The atheist has given no explanation as to what caused the sub-atomic particles to exist and do what they do in their marvellous micro world.

Secondly: He has given no explanation as to why these atomic particles have been organised over in time to form sentient life on the third planet out from a middle-aged star. He has not explained why beautiful laws of physics and mathematical codes have come about to build life... to build people capable of laughter, compassion and creativity.

Thirdly: If everything is just a cosmic accident, then there is no fundamental philosophic truth inside of anyone. All there is, according to the atheist, is a bag of sub-atomic particles. Therefore, how can the atheist reliably know there is no God? By his own admission, all he is, is a bunch of meaningless particles from which it is impossible to produce a truth claim of any philosophic substance. In other words, if what he says is true, he cannot know he is speaking the truth about truth. His highly reductionist model of humanity reduces everything to meaninglessness, including his own truth claims. He's like someone who just sees bits of metal, plastic and carbon fibre... but doesn't know he is actually looking at a formula one racing car that has been built for a purpose.

If these three reasons aren't enough to reject such atheistic claims, there is also the fact that most of humanity has had the conviction, at least at some stage in their life, that there is a mind behind the cosmos. In other words, it seems as if we are programmed to relate to God. Notwithstanding our predilection for rebelling against obeying anyone other than ourselves, there's still the nagging in our hearts that suggests we should seek God.

And this particularly happens when you slow down enough to enjoy the beauty of places such as Second Valley.

Don't you think its time you sought out the mind behind your existence and discovered his love for you?

## 26. Different Faiths And Truth

**September 17, 2018**

Authentic Christians are passionate about truth. They have to be, because Christians believe that God requires it, embodies it, defines it... and is it. Christianity, more than any other religion, is preoccupied with truth. Certainly, Jesus was. He said, “I tell you the truth” about eighty times in the gospels, which is a pretty fair indication of the importance that he placed on it.

The primacy of truth is not easily found in other religions. Hinduism is essentially based on mythology, Buddhism on mysticism, and Islam on a private revelation that others can't verify.

The new, syncretistic religions of today, such as New Age, are fairly careless about truth, whilst secular Postmodernism goes even further and has given up on the idea of truth altogether.

In contrast to this, Christianity is vitally concerned with truth.

Christianity, you see, is not just a faith, just one among many; it is faith based on truth. In other words, Christianity is evidence-based. If it can be shown that any of the essential truths about Jesus are false, Christianity is completely invalid. Notwithstanding the cancerous invasions of deism into Christian institutions in the guise of liberal theology, Christianity is founded on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in history. Wherever the institutional church has forgotten this, it has emptied its churches, lost its passion for mission, and found itself unable to offer anything in the way of hope. It has simply preached moralism.

Christianity, is palpably not just a philosophy. It is based on historical, verifiable truth.

Truth matters. Instinctively, we know this is so. There is something good about truth. Truth seems to be something outside of us, beyond us—something that measures us and invites us to climb up to it. Most of us are glad that truth is there, even if we can't always reach it.

To act in a way that is true and right is to live out a concept of truth that is unique to humans.

Simply to act in a way that is merely expedient or programmed by evolution is to be sub-human—to be less than we have been called to be. It is to collapse back into nature's “red in tooth and claw” where it makes perfect sense to enslave, kill and exploit others to ensure that we thrive.

Please don't be sub-human. There is good evidence that truth is important.

The psalmist writes, When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do? (Psalm 11:3)

What indeed? It's a good question.

The moral lostness of a society that has lost its foundations for truth is frightening. It results in all things historically considered as evil now being lauded as good, e.g. witches and ghouls... and good

things now being considered evil. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah warned against this when he said, Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness (Is 5:20).

I'm staggered at society's carelessness with truth—so perhaps a word or warning is warranted. Carelessness with truth will kill you. Being careless of truth risks disqualifying yourself from the eternal destiny God intends for you. God places the highest priority on truth – not because he wants to bully and impose of control, but because it is right.

God is a God of truth. Truth reflects his essential character. Therefore, if you are not in synch with God's truth, you are not being trendy, enlightened, tolerant or progressive... you are simply being wrong. It means you would be acting God's values and purposes. If you were looking for a shorthand way of describing this state of being, you could call it being 'evil.'

Without the ultimate significance and moral absolutes that flow from the existence of God, humankind has fallen from the high calling of being an image-bearer of God to being a mere animal. Some in society want to normalise some sexual behaviours, because they occur amongst other animals. It's extraordinary: we are turning to baboons for our sexual ethics rather than God.

Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear!

The twentieth century British philosopher, Anthony Flew, was a strong advocate of atheism. Nonetheless, he was committed to following the path of evidence wherever it led when analysing religion. Doing so finally caused him to confess his belief in God. When explaining why he changed his mind, he said that his decision was in keeping with his lifelong Socratic commitment to go where the evidence leads.

Truth. Isn't it time you really sought out the truth about Jesus and God's purposes for your life?

## 27. Nature and Society

**October 1, 2018**

Organisms in the plant and animal world will generally seek to kill off anything that threatens their ability to thrive. This includes eating other organisms in order to live. In this dangerous world, everything comes under the all-consuming instinct to dominate and thrive.

When human societies discard Christianity, they invariably default to the behaviour of the plant and animal world.

Vishal Mangalwadi was imprisoned a number of times in India because he promoted the education and social wellbeing of the poor. Some high caste Indians in authority felt that he was threatening their exclusive claim on status and power, so they locked him up. One police chief even promised to kill him if he continued to help a poor community repair roofs that had been shattered by a hailstorm.

When Christian principles are absent, you get the killing fields. When Christian principles are absent because the church has been corrupted or muzzled, Auschwitz happens. When Christian principles are absent, it becomes expedient to kill thirty million people through starvation in order to institute a collective farming ideology in China. Without the morality, hope and principles of Christianity, humanity falls back into the harsh pragmatism of the animal and plant kingdom.

This Machiavellian pragmatism allows you to do anything that is necessary to stay in power. It allowed a French queen and a Pope [for goodness' sake!] to conspire together to murder tens of thousands of Huguenots on St Bartholomew's Day in 1572. It allowed laws to be passed that resulted in the murder of six million Jews. It allowed thirty thousand people perceived as a political threat to "go missing" in Argentina between 1976 and 1983.

If society is not guarded by a respect for God, then whoever has power wins. If society is not guarded by Godly principles, Hitler's National Socialism is a logical outcome. If society is not guarded by a respect for God, it makes perfect sense for your values to be those of the animal kingdom. There is no right to life in this pragmatic world, only the "law of the jungle." If your life gets in the way of my ambitions, I will kill you or enslave you. This is what happens in human societies without an authentic Christian foundation. The truth is, when people stop ruling "under God," they will seek to be like God.

Christianity understands that God is the ultimate authority. The American Pledge of Allegiance describes America as "one nation under God," not "one nation under a president or king." President Nixon discovered that he was not above the law regarding the Watergate affair. The law of the people, under God, stood over him.



The significance of this is: If you reject God, you condemn yourself to be ruled by those who are driven by selfish ambitions and a lust for power. This inevitably causes a lot of people to be oppressed. It is significant that people generally move (as refugees or migrants) away from a nation without the values of a Christian heritage to one that has these values. They seek that nation's safety, civility, justice and prosperity. My own country of Australia has had to institute tough, and I might say contentious, immigration policies in order to stem the flow of immigrants from Sri Lanka, the Middle East and Asia.

However, many Western nations with a Christian heritage are now losing that heritage. Its people are turning away from Christianity to atheism, or to one of the non-demanding, pluralistic, self-designed religions.

I'm not sure that this bodes well for a nation's ability to continue to be a refuge for those seeking its justice, order and hope.

Please rediscover your intended purpose, identity and worth in God. The future history of your family and nation will be grateful.

## 28. God and Society

**October 15, 2018**

John Newton was a difficult young man who had been hardened by a life at sea and brutalised by a public flogging. He had seriously contemplated murdering the ship's captain who ordered his flogging and Newton came to have little compunction about abusing others. Perhaps not surprisingly, he became a slaver. Ironically, he was later forced to become a slave himself to the African wife of a slave master in West Africa. He was eventually rescued, and encountered God during a storm at sea as he returned to England.

After his conversion, Newton trained to become an Anglican priest. He worked in London as an evangelical minister and became an ally and friend of William Wilberforce, helping him to bring about the abolition of slavery in Britain. The fact that God could forgive Newton after all that he had done moved him to pen the words of the great hymn, Amazing Grace.

No religion in the world has transformed so many people as profoundly as authentic Christianity. This claim has been put well by the Eastern Orthodox theologian, David Bentley Hart in a big juicy statement. He says:

"Among all the many great transitions that have marked the evolution of Western civilisation ... there has been only one—the triumph of Christianity—that can be called in the fullest sense a "revolution": a truly massive and epochal revision of humanity's prevailing vision of reality, so pervasive in its influence and so vast in its consequences as to actually have created a new conception of the world, of history, of human nature, of time, and of the moral good."

It seems that God causes people to be good—and this has enormous implications for society. It can have enormous implications for you... if you don't allow atheism to rob you of it.

The English rabbi and scholar, Jonathan Sacks, has written an explosive article entitled Atheism has failed. Only religion can defeat the new barbarians. In it, he says,:

“You cannot expect the foundations of western civilisation to crumble and leave the rest of the building intact.”

He goes on to speak of the German atheist philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche. In Nietzsche's later writings, he warns that losing the Christian faith will mean abandoning Christian morality. This, as Sacks explains, leaves us in some very chilly waters: “No more ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’; instead, the ‘will to power’. No more ‘Thou shalt not’; instead, people would live by the law of nature, the strong dominating or eliminating the weak.”

Sacks makes the point that the new atheists are both presumptuous and careless when talking about secular morality:

“If asked where we get our morality from, if not from science or religion, the new atheists start to stammer. They tend to argue that ethics is obvious, which it isn’t.”

He’s right. The American Declaration of Independence proclaims that people have equal worth and an equal right to life, liberty and happiness. It says: “We hold these truths to be self-evident.” The fact is, however, that for those parts of the world that lack a Judea-Christian heritage, e.g. Africa and Asia, these truths are not at all evident; they are actually quite foreign. The idea that a prince and a pauper should both suffer the same consequence for the same felony is not self-evident for much of humanity. Notions of equality of worth, equality in law, and equality of opportunity are primarily evident in nations founded on Judea-Christian principles. These biblical principles have undergirded the Western world’s legal system, hospital system, education system and democratic system of governance.

The American philosopher and historian, Will Durant, wrote an eleven-volume work with his wife, Ariel, called *The Story of Civilisation*. As a result of his research, he concluded:

“There is no significant example in history, before our time, of a society successfully maintaining moral life without the aid of religion.” This is a hugely significant statement.

The strident atheists, humanists and secularists of our time are asking us to create a society in which there is no God—when no such society has ever been shown to work well."

Jonathan Sacks voices a similar concern to Durant. He said: I have not yet found a secular ethic capable of sustaining in the long run a society of strong communities and families on the one hand, altruism, virtue, self-restraint, honour, obligation and trust on the other. A century after a civilisation loses its soul, it loses its freedom also.

This is a vital point to make.

Yet Christianity should not be adopted simply for the sake of pragmatism, that is, because it results in a “nicer” society. Christianity only deserves to be embraced if it is true.

If it is true... and you have not embraced the love and hope of God, that would be a tragedy.

Please don’t invite that tragedy on yourself.

## 29. How Special Are You?

**October 29, 2018**

It may be a little unsettling but the fact remains: a chimpanzee and a human being have 98.8 per cent of their DNA in common. We are very close cousins, biologically speaking—but we are also vastly different. Only humans have the ability to reach for the stars and comprehend the cosmos. Through the agency of mathematics, and the beautiful equations that define the laws of nature, we have unlocked many of the secrets of the universe and discovered how it works. It seems that we have been given the ability to do so, and perhaps even the invitation to do so.

Some scientists are asking why humankind has this wonderful power to understand things. It seems that we alone have the ability to unlock the secrets of the universe. The particle physicist and theologian, John Polkinghorne, marvels that the universe is so astonishingly open to us and rationally transparent to our enquiry. In his view, the fact that we understand the subatomic world of quantum theory and the cosmic implications of general relativity goes far beyond anything that could conceivably be of relevance to survival fitness.

Our universe is extraordinarily intelligible to us, and it allows mathematics to unlock its secrets. This remarkable feature requires an explanation. Polkinghorne suggests that the existence of God provides the best. He says: “If the universe is the creation of a rational God, and we are creatures made in the divine image, then it is entirely logical that there is order in the universe and that it is accessible to our minds.”

That’s not a bad statement from one of the best academic minds around. So why not explore the existence of God for yourself.

God says in Genesis 1:26, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness.” What does this mean?

Can I suggest that it means this?

- The big-heartedness of God lives in us.
- The passion for good to win lives in us.
- The creativity of God lives in us.
- The desire for significance lives in us.
- The ache for the love of God lives in us.
- The hunger for the eternity of God lives in us.

It also explains why:

- Death is obscene to us.

- Lack of meaning is obscene to us.
- Lack of relationships is obscene to us.
- Lack of a purpose is obscene to us.
- Lack of being able to give and receive love is obscene to us.

All this makes sense if we are made in God's image as spiritual beings.

Christians believe that we are the result of a deliberate act of self-expression on the part of God. We are made in his image. This is profound. No other religion in the history of the world has made this claim.

Being made in the image of God means we have the ability to make spiritual, intellectual and moral judgements in a way that no other created animal can—even those to which we are closely related biologically. Dr Ian Tattersall, in his book, *Becoming Human*, says that humanity represents a totally unprecedented entity on Earth.

So, don't write yourself off! Don't just think of yourself as a race of animals who have climbed to the top of the evolutionary pole... and have since become toxic to the rest of the planet.

If you are made in the image of God... it means you were created to relate to God. From this, it follows that if you are not relating to God with love and respect, you have fallen vastly short of your calling and you are operating merely as an animal.

Please don't. You were meant for so much more.

## 30. Science, God and Multiverses

**November 12, 2018**

It is not the case that science is driven by scepticism, observation and experiment, while Christianity requires you to believe “six impossible things before breakfast.” Science and Christianity are both built on evidence... and both require faith.

The cosmologist, Paul Davies, puts this well. He says: All science proceeds on the assumption that nature is ordered in a rational and intelligible way. You couldn't be a scientist if you thought the universe was a meaningless jumble of odds and ends haphazardly juxtaposed. When physicists probe to a deeper level of subatomic structure, or astronomers extend the reach of their instruments, they expect to encounter additional elegant mathematical order.

He goes on to say that the intelligibility of the cosmos is reflected in the laws of physics—the fundamental rules that determine how nature runs. These laws of physics are regarded as sacrosanct, phenomena that have always existed in our universe. The obvious question prompted by this is, of course, where did these laws come from? After all, the idea that they exist without reason is anti-rational. So, this is not a question that can be shrugged aside.

Davies says:

“Clearly, then, both religion and science are founded on faith—namely, on belief in the existence of something outside the universe, like an unexplained God or an unexplained set of physical laws.”

He concludes by saying:

“Until science comes up with a testable theory of the laws of the universe, its claim to be free of faith is manifestly bogus.”

That's not a bad conclusion from a renowned scientist with no conventional faith.

Some have tried to suggest that our universe is just one of an infinite number of universes—which, because there are an infinite number of them, must eventually chance upon a set of scientific rules able to develop intelligent life? After all, if this were not so, we wouldn't be here to observe ourselves.

The challenge to the existence of God posed by multiverses can be met in part by saying this: It isn't just that we exist which is the miracle; it is the manner of our existence. The self-observing life form we call “humanity” is not simply a blob of brain able to know itself to be alive for a brief moment of time. It is significantly more. It is Mozart. It is Mother Teresa. It is humour, compassion, creativity, love, heroism and science. It is also a shy but persistent ache that compels 96 per cent of

us to reach towards a higher being, someone who will give us meaning. The life form that is “us” really is very remarkable—too remarkable, I suggest, to lazily dismiss as simply the chance product of an infinite number of universes.

So, it is not just a case of life existing but of appreciating the manner and nature of that life.

I’ve heard someone explain the significance of this with this analogy.

Suppose some drug smugglers had tampered with your travelling case while you were touring in a foreign country and customs officials find five kilograms of heroin inside it. The judge refuses to believe you are innocent and condemns you to be shot to death by a firing squad. You are led out of prison, placed against a wall and blindfolded. Ten of the army’s top marksmen stand eight paces away. At a command from the officer, they cock their weapons. Then you hear, “Ready, aim... FIRE!”

To your amazement, you discover that you are still alive. You feel all over your body, but don’t find any bullet holes. Might I suggest that at this point you would do more than shrug with indifference and say, “Well, since I’m here to report on the situation, I must have fluked a set of circumstances that has enabled me to do so.” No. You would justifiably seek some sort of explanation.

Caution needs to be exercised when using the term “infinite” to dilute the significance of the existence of humankind. The word “infinite” is not an escape clause that allows any possibility. It is not a magician’s hat from which anything can be produced. We still need to ask, “who” or “what” began the first universe? Why has “chance” been given the opportunity to build a universe that is able to develop humankind?

You do not explain a book simply by pointing to a library of books. Neither do you explain our ordered universe by pointing to the possibility of an infinite number of universes. More needs to be said.

The scientific laws of “cause and effect” mean it is quite reasonable for us to seek the ultimate cause of the universe... the ultimate source of the codes and the scientific laws that underpin it. These things point to a mind... to a God. And the claim of the Christian gospel is that this God wants to be known... and has come to us as Jesus to rescue us back to himself, so that we fulfil our true destiny. Please don’t miss out on it.

# 31. Truth Is Beautiful

**November 26, 2018**

There is nothing so beautiful, transcendent, foundational, perspective-giving, hope engendering — as truth. Note, I deliberately include the words transcendent and hope-engendering because I'm not talking about what's culturally fashionable to believe, and I'm not just talking about scientific empirical truth. I'm talking about full truth. I'm talking about truth grounded in the only one who embodies and guarantees what actually is true. I'm talking about God's truth. Why? Because all truth, spiritual, moral and scientific, has its origin in God. As such, it makes no sense talking about fundamental truth without reference to God.

Truth is very dangerous. It challenges ignorance; it challenges false foundations built by those seeking to bolster their own significance and power. As such, God's truth is hated by the arrogant and the evil.

It is also hated by those who seek compromise and tolerance of all things. As G.K Chesterton once said, wryly:

“Tolerance is the virtue of someone who doesn't believe anything.”

You see, truth cannot compromise. Truth cannot allow 20% of untruth and still claim to be truth. Quite the reverse. Truth shines a light on untruth and exposes it for what it is.

So it is sad that truth is not a concept that has much credence today. In our postmodern, relativist culture, truth is being defined as whatever works for you. It seems as if the idea of real truth was just a little too optimistic for today's society. It suggests a certainty, perhaps even a God—ideas which have long since been dissolved in the acids of today's cynicism.

Certainly, truth can be hard to find. Thanks to the half-truths of advertising, politics and ideological Zealots, many people have given up hoping to find it... and reached for a bottle of Shiraz instead. Hedonism, at least, gives better rewards than trying to find your way through a maze of truth claims. But some truth claims just keep hanging on, like chewing gum to the sole of your shoe. You can try and ignore them, but their ability to stick is hard to ignore, unless you smother them with dirt -- as some choose to do.

So, I invite you to be brave, scandalous and counter-cultural. I invite you to explore the possibility of truth – specifically truth about God.

Why? Because only God's truth will give you fulfilment, meaning, identity and hope.

Secular society, particularly its politics, won't.



Social researchers are now beginning to question the wisdom of relying on politicians and government institutions to bring up the next generation. They say that its institutions are poorly positioned to instil notions of good, evil and truth. Why? Because they are prone to manipulating people, or saying what people want to hear in order to stay in power. Some governments force their will on others with the threat of violence and imprisonment. Others just slavishly reflect the declining morality of wider society. Either way, truth becomes a rubbery tool used to hang on to power.

It is, of course, reprehensible when those within Christian institutions engage in untruth in order to promote or protect evil. Some institutions engage in untruth because it reflects their leader's morality. However, when anyone claiming to be part of Christ's church tells lies, they are disobeying their leader -- Jesus Christ.

Jesus' standards of truth are not rubbery. His values are absolute and have never been improved on. Whenever any society has based itself on biblical standards, it has thrived. Whenever it has not, it has collapsed and lost its civility.

I have to say: the notion of truth has not fared well outside of Christianity. Some religions allow people to lie and deceive if it benefits their religious cause. The result of this is that you can never tell if such people are telling the truth. Leaders of totalitarian secular regimes often lie—so much so, that we've come to expect it. They lie about atrocities and malicious activities they have been responsible for and are engaged in. As such, they have long since used up the capital of trust people have invested in them. No one believes them any more.

And in the animal world, where there is no morality, it makes perfect sense to deceive, enslave and predate in order to thrive. And that's where a society's morality must inevitably end up if you think you are just another animal and ignore Jesus Christ.

However, if you value truth... and value a civilised future for your children, then please explore the truth of Christ Jesus.

## 32. The Story Of Atheism

**December 10, 2018**

The oldest and most pervasive sin of humankind was the first sin mentioned in the Bible. It was the desire of Adam and Eve to have the authority of God when it came to their opinion about right and wrong.

This has expressed itself in history either by humanity inventing religions that they can use to control God... or deciding they didn't need God at all. In recent years, Western civilisation has largely chosen the latter.

The philosophy used to promote the conviction that there was no God was provided by Democritus who lived around 400BC. He was the father of atheistic scientism. Atheistic scientism says that we should not look at creation and ask why it exists and who is responsible for it; we should only ask how it works—and get on with life without any thought of God. As such, scientism shuts people down from asking the really interesting questions regarding reason, identity and meaning. It is actually a very shallow, two-dimensional way of thinking... and it is one that results in communities living without purpose and without a moral bedrock. Plato was dismissive of such thinking and said that no atheist could be trusted because they had no god to whom they were accountable.

Democritus' atheism was rebadged as Epicureanism and found its way to France, Germany and England—largely through the rediscovery of Lucretius' atheistic poem *De rerum natura*. This was taken up by philosophers during "The Enlightenment" and spread throughout Europe.

America's contribution to the spread of atheism came from fuelling into flame the idea that religion was at war with science.

And now this atheism has trickled down through history to you... and been spruiked by the likes of Richard Dawkins.

So, what on earth are you going to do with it? Atheism is a fabulous tool for giving yourself a philosophic mandate to "do your own thing," to do what you like, to be your own king. This mandate for self-obsessed autonomy is, of course, particularly attractive to the young. Only later do they discover that it turns to ashes in their mouths, leaving them with the taste of meaninglessness and lack of hope. Their suicide rates have risen alarmingly.

So, be careful with atheism. God has revealed his glory in the cosmos, and revealed his love in Jesus.

In the light of this, here's a word for the self-styled urban literati. It is directed at the deistic priests of our time who tell us what is permissible to believe. It's a message for trendy libertines who have

a monopoly on our media –who huff and puff their political correctness and atheistic convictions.

The message is this:

Hands off our children. Don't you dare damage our children by imposing atheistic meaninglessness on them in the guise of secularism. Don't rip their value and their sacred identity from them. Don't rip away their ground of truth and leave them floundering in shallow hedonistic, self-obsession.

Your legacy to them is one of meaninglessness and lack of identity...a meaninglessness and lack of identity that helps fuel the statistics of their suicide.

Don't you dare damage our children with your atheistic, values free convictions and claim you are being rational. You are not being rational. To claim that everything came from nothing as a result of nothing through a mechanism that has never been discovered and for which there is no precedent, takes a staggering level of faith. It certainly fractures the laws of cause and effect – the basic principle that undergirds science.

God came in history as Jesus – a verifiable fact – to die for our sins and rescue us back to God. This is a life-giving, hope-giving, value-imputing act that stands in stark contrast to the illogical meaninglessness you are seeking to impose on our children.

## 33. Archaeological Evidence Of The New Testament Gospel Accounts

**December 24, 2018**

Let me tell you about an archaeological find -- one of many that cements the gospel accounts of Jesus Christ firmly in history.

In 1941, the Hebrew University professor was excavating the tombs of the Kidron Valley that runs along the eastern edge of the temple mount. He discovered a tomb that had been blocked by a large closing stone. When he entered the tomb, he found eleven ossuary boxes containing bones. The professor documented his findings, and the artefacts were stored away.

For some reason, the findings of the professor were not made public until 1962. When they were, it caused a sensation. On the side of one ossuary box facing the wall was inscribed "Simon Ale," the name "Simon" and the first three letters of "Alexander". Realising he didn't have enough room to carve "Alexander", the engraver started again on the second line, carving "Alexander". Then, on the third line, he inscribed "(son) of Simon."

The lid of the box was inscribed "of Alexander" in Greek... and below it, the Hebrew word (slightly miss-spelt) for "Cyrenian."

Archeologist conclude that it is "highly probable" that these bones were those of the son of the man forced to carry the crossbeam of Jesus' cross. Mark writes: A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. (Mk 15:21).

Doesn't that blow your mind!

Here's another story:

Liberal theologians who cast doubt on a lot of biblical historicity have claimed that the gospel of John contains fictitious accounts written to embellish the Jesus story. They used to cite the account of Jesus healing the lame man at the pool of Bethesda as one such example (Jn 5:1-9), as there was no archaeological evidence of such a pool with five porticoes existing.

And then... yes, you've guessed it... in 1964, archaeologists working in the grounds of St Anne's church, just north of the temple mount, confirmed the existence of an extensive pool complex that comprised the pools of Bethesda.

John's gospel describes the pool in some detail. He speaks of the existence of five covered porticoes. These have all been found. One of the reasons excavations took so long was that so many

buildings had been built over the top of the pools during the ages, including a pagan temple and a large Byzantine church.

Excavations showed the existence of two main pools separated by a dam wall. The depth of the pools is surprising. It is thought that these pools were used to water animals being taken through the sheep gate to the temple to be sacrificed.

So, there we have it: Just when some thought it safe to dismiss the gospel accounts as historic fiction, they turn out to be true.

Christianity has a long history of being attacked by atheists. You may have done it yourself.

It's extraordinary, isn't it, that despite the confident predictions of Christianity's demise by Roman emperors and atheist philosophers, Christianity is still around. So maybe, it is not quite so fictional as you thought.

Here's something else to make you think. Historians once attacked the historical credibility of Jesus' being buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. They said that no person defiled by crucifixion would ever be allowed to be put into a family tomb.

Then, in 1968, building contractors working in northeast Jerusalem uncovered a family grave. Inside it was an ossuary, (a stone box containing the bones of someone who had died). The ossuary had a Hebrew inscription on it saying that the bones were those of Jehohanan the son of Hagkol. Jehohanan had been crucified some time in the first century and his lower leg had been fractured—just like those of the two rebels crucified either side of Jesus. The end of the nail that had pierced Jehohanan's heel had bent, making it difficult to withdraw, so they'd left it imbedded in the bones that were inside the box.

So it seemed that crucified people were allowed to be placed into a family grave after all.

Archaeological evidence shows that the gospel accounts of Jesus' life have historical integrity.

I therefore invite you to check them out... and discover the plans God has for you; plans made possible by Jesus coming to us 2000 years ago.

## 34. Fulfilment

**January 7, 2019**

I don't know whether you remember the American Rock band Imagine Dragons? The band gained notoriety in 2012 when it shot to fame with its debut album *Night Visions*. It sold over 2 million copies in the US and it went platinum in twelve countries. They were named "The Breakthrough Band of 2013", and *Rolling Stone* magazine named their single *Radioactive* "the biggest rock hit of the year."

They went on to win a Grammy Award for Best Rock Performance, and a World Music Award. In May 2014, the band was nominated for a total of fourteen different Billboard Music Awards, including Top Artist of the Year and a Milestone Award. They had reached the top... and experienced the goal they had worked for all their life.

However, the band's lead singer, Daniel Reynolds, became disturbed by the things that went along with fame. He found himself growing increasingly disconnected with his family and from life in general as the band's success grew. He stated:

"That's a scary thing when you get everything that you could have wanted but yet you still feel an emptiness, because at that point you think 'oh man, if this doesn't fill it, then I don't know where to look any more'."

He had achieved the goal that he had dreamed of and pursued his whole life... but when he'd reached it, he found that it left him empty.

So tell me: How's your sense of emptiness? What has not yet been fulfilled in your life? What are you still hungering for concerning hope, identity and meaning?

The Australian aborigines have a saying – "A man remains a child until he knows his story."

Tell me: do you know your story? Do you know who you are; why you exist on this planet and what your intended destiny is?

If you listen to the current bevy of strident atheists – life is pretty bleak. There is only darkness. The twentieth century French biologist, Jacques Monod, said:

"The ancient covenant is in pieces: man at last knows that he is alone in the unfeeling immensity of the universe, out of which he has emerged only by chance. Neither his destiny nor his duty have been written down."

The danger in remaining a child and not knowing your identity, your purpose or the hope of God is that you give up ... and when people give up, things get pretty ugly.

When Germany gave up its authentic Christian heritage, it embraced Hitler's socialism.

When the Christian church leaves remote aboriginal communities in Australia, the result is socially catastrophic.

When the Hebrew people gave up waiting for Moses and got no input from his God, they built themselves a golden calf – they ended up worshipping their own ideas. It's the oldest folly of humankind – and we still do it today.

So, let me ask. What are you waiting for? What has yet to be fulfilled? What don't you yet know about your identity?

Psalm 27 says: "The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid ... Wait for the Lord: be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." (Psalm 27:1-14)

Have you given up waiting for God? Is he off your radar now?

Here's a story from the Bible of bloke who didn't give up waiting. Let me read it to you:

"Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout ... It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: 'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations." (Luke 2:25-32).

Please promise me this: don't die until you too have met Jesus -- and through Jesus, allowed God to show you your true identity and what true fulfilment is in the purpose of God.

# 35. Truth And Heritage

**January 21, 2019**

It can fairly be said that we are currently living in the twilight of truth. We live in a world of half-truths, manipulation and deceit which has made truth hard to find. This is interesting given that our Christian heritage once provided a culture of valuing truth. Fortunately, some in society have retained enough memory of Christian morality to not abandon the concept of truth entirely. In fact, it can be said that our current secular society is parasitic on its Christian heritage for its claims of tolerance and justice... whilst simultaneously undermining these ideals by promoting meaninglessness, moral laxity and lack of absolutes. This is a pity because the best that secularism can offer society is a list of rubbery rules that lack any real concept of 'right.'

As the West free-falls away from its Christian heritage, it still retains some subconscious knowledge of the Christian ideals that have underpinned its legal system, its hospitals, its education and its legal system. This Christian culture is still vaguely present in people's psyche but is all but invisible to them because they have swam in it for so many centuries -- just like a fish swimming in water doesn't know it is wet. In reality, most people in the West can't conceive of truth, or good, or have a concept of value without instinctively drawing on their Christian heritage. Despite their excursion into postmodern ideals of relativism and the scorning of meta-narratives such as the Bible, most people in the West do not fully appreciate the level to which they are still influenced by the values of its once Christian culture.

But now, society is marching into a future without Christianity, it does not know the significance of where it is going. What will a future without God-guaranteed values look like?

The indications so far are not promising.

If the best prediction of the future is the past, then we should have real concerns. Societies that have cast off Christian values almost inevitably collapse into some sort of abusive totalitarianism that dehumanises and devalues people. It has consigned millions to starve to death in its pursuit of communist collective ideology; it has murdered people in gas chambers, and littered "killing fields" with bones in Cambodia. At a societal level, history teaches us that humanism inevitably transmutes to in-humanism despite the ideals of its secular opinion leaders and philosophers.

Despite this, the West is now blindly stumbling towards an atheistic future, banning Jesus from its schools, from its politics, and from its laws on sexual morality and marriage. Forgive me if I am not optimistic about this. It is difficult not to feel a little bleak as a new generation emerges that does not its identity or what it is that guarantees worth and hope.

So, what does this mean?



It means this: There is an urgent need for our nation to repent, to discover its true purpose, true value, true meaning and true hope. It is time to again look seriously at the claims of Jesus. Jesus said:

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6).

I reckon that’s motive enough for you and I to check out who Jesus is and what his message of hope was.

And it is significant that you can check it out. Why? Because Christianity is evidenced based. It centres on Christ Jesus, a man whom even non-Christian historians in the first century, such as Tacitus and Josephus, wrote about.

So the Christian hope is not just wishful thinking. It is not a philosophical analgesic someone dreamed up to make them feel better in the face of the inevitability of death. It has at its heart, the love of God, the initiative of God and the presence of God amongst us as Jesus.

Christian hope is therefore a future certainty grounded in the reality of Jesus.

There is not much hope without the truth of God, is there? The German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, popularised the idea that “God is dead” and attacked all doctrines which he considered to drain life’s “expansive energies.” (This probably helped explain why he went mad he died - probably of syphilis in 1900.) Without God, his “life expanding” comments didn’t amount to much. He said:

"In reality, hope is the worst of all evils, because it prolongs man's torments."

So, when you are tired of the deceits of humankind and feel ready to embrace truth, check out the hope that Jesus’ death on the cross has won for you.

## 36. Anxiety

**February 4, 2019**

Ours is an age of anxiety. As the twentieth century physician, Lewis Tomas, wrote in his book *The Medusa and the Snail*, 1979:

"We are, perhaps, uniquely among the earth's creatures, the worrying animal. We worry away our lives."

Notwithstanding the technological breakthroughs of our age and the benefits they bring, we continue to worry, even though we know that 90% of the things we worry about won't actually come about. As Mark Twain said:

"I am an old man and have known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened."

Worry, can, as most of us know, become addictive, a habitual way of thinking. The American author Arthur Somers Roche said famously:

"Anxiety is a thin stream of fear trickling through the mind. If encouraged, it cuts a channel into which all other thoughts are drained."

What are we to do with our predisposition for anxiety? Hopefully we can do more than Charlie Brown, the comic character invented by Charles Schulz who said:

"I've developed a new philosophy... I only dread one day at a time."

Let's see if we can do better and learn from what Jesus taught.

Jesus tells us in Luke 12:22-34, not to worry.

We are tempted to say, "It's all very well for you, Jesus, you're in heaven and we are down here where there is persecution, injustice, droughts, tsunamis, earthquakes and violence.

Jesus, of course, says, "I know, I was there. I was born a suspected illegitimate child in an occupied land. I had to flee as a refugee when a young child from the murderous designs of Herod. I had no home of my own, was misunderstood by my family, was betrayed by someone close to me, was shown no justice in a kangaroo court, and was put to death in the most humiliating and painful way devised by humankind."

The first thing Jesus teaches us is how to think. Whilst our consumerist society defines life in terms of clothes and possessions, Jesus says that Christians are to have an altogether more radical, holistic and truthful way of thinking. In the simple words of verse 23, he teaches this profound truth: Life is more than stuff.

In teaching this, Jesus is saying, "Don't you dare reduce the miracle of life to mindless obsession with getting stuff. Please don't define yourself by this. It is a travesty of your true meaning. Your

purpose is so much more. Yours is a greater dignity than scrambling around to see who can collect the most pleasurable experiences and possessions.”

Some of the deep-seated questions behind our anxieties concern our identity, value and purpose.

They are questions such as: “Am I significant?” “Does God care?” “Does God have a plan for me?”

Jesus crashes against these anxieties by making a very significant statement. It is this:

“God is pleased to give you his kingdom.” (Luke 12:32)

This statement by Jesus changes everything. In the face of all the dangers of this world, we can now say there is a significance that lies beyond this world. It is a kingdom... and you were designed to be part of it. In other words, God is up to something big and wants you to be part of what he’s doing.

This truth introduces us to our value, our identity and our purpose. It introduces us to a whole new way of living -- one that has an eternal dimension. It is a way of living we are invited to share in.

# 37. The Challenge Of Quantum Physics For Atheism

**July 11, 2019**

*This is an article Nick wrote in the ISCAST Online Journal, Christian Perspectives on Science and Technology, (June, 2019). He posted it to his blog shortly after.*

## **A reflection on science and faith**

If God exists, and is rightly described in the Bible, then scientists and theologians could well benefit from looking at each other's work. Of course, neither discipline should be controlled, or bullied by the other. Humankind largely got over that sort of silliness centuries ago. Both disciplines are concerned with uncovering truth. And as such, both have something to contribute. Put bluntly, science can stop theology from making stupid claims; and theology can help free science from its narrow, empiricist prison.

If Christianity is right, God has drawn progressively closer to us in four steps.

First, he shows us the probability of his existence in the wonders of creation (Romans 1:20; Acts 17:24-27). The order, beauty, and rational accessibility of the universe can be appreciated by anyone, but the details of its workings are understood by science, not theology.

God then comes closer, and reveals something of his nature to his chosen prophets in the Old Testament. They record their experiences in documents that begin to make up Scripture.

Then, God comes closer—and now comes to us in person, as Christ Jesus. Jesus is the perfect “icon” (representation) of God, because he is God (Colossians 1:15-20). He shows us what God is like, and he pays the price for our sins so we can be with God.

Finally, God comes even closer: he comes within us by his Spirit—to empower his followers for mission, and to build a godly character in them.

If this is true, then Christianity is well positioned to put science into a bigger picture. Theology is able to frame science's “how” with theology's “why.”

As such, the two disciplines should at least be civil enough to raise their hats to each other.

Sometimes they can do more. The recent discoveries of quantum physics are very exciting and should be of great interest to theologians—not least because they show that atheism (which says that there is no god) is a worldview that is scientifically unlikely.

Let's look at two things:

Firstly: how theology can point out issues relevant to science, which would help scientists understand the order they see in the universe.

Secondly: how science can enrich theology, by showing how quantum physics makes atheism highly implausible.

Now let's turn to a remarkable feature of the universe—its extraordinary order; and explore how theology can point out a possible truth concerning this order to science.

## **Order**

The Judea-Christian scriptures teach that God has chosen to reveal himself—at least in part, in creation. This idea was given prominence in 17th century England by the concept of there being “two books,” which were able to point people to God. These were: 1) The Bible; and, 2) the wonders of creation. The idea was that something of God's nature could be understood through the study of the natural world. The famous 17th century scientist, Robert Boyle, wrote: ‘When with bold telescopes I survey the old and newly discovered stars and planets ... when with excellent microscopes I discern nature's curious workmanship, when with the help of anatomical knives and the light of chemical furnaces I study the book of nature ... I find myself exclaiming with the psalmist, “How manifold are thy works, O God, in wisdom hast thou made them all!”’ (1997, 32)

Boyle was able to celebrate the two disciplines of science and theology, declaring, ‘as the two great books of nature and scripture have the same author, so the study of the latter does not at all hinder the inquisitive man's delight in the study of the former’ (Boyle, 1674).

Thomas Brown, physician and author (1605–1682), was another who was convinced of the veracity of both the Bible and nature in revealing God. He wrote: ‘Thus are there two books from whence I collect my divinity: besides that written one of God, another of his servant nature, that universal and public (sic) manuscript, that lies expanded to the eyes of all. Those that never saw him in the one have discovered him in the other ’(1642, sec. 16.18-19).

This seventeenth century sentiment continues to be voiced today. Francis Collins, who directed the thirteen-year project that identified the 3.1 billion letters of the human genome, says: ‘I have found there is a wonderful harmony in the complementary truths of science and faith. The God of the Bible is also the God of the genome. God can be found in the cathedral or in the laboratory. By investigating God's majestic and awesome creation, science can actually be a means of worship’ (Collins 2007).

Mathematics has been another tool used by scientists to lay bare the order of the universe. One of the areas this has occurred has been in the field of quantum physics.

Quantum physics seeks to understand the world of sub-atomic particles. The scientific laws of this branch of physics are very different from those that operate in Einstein's world of “special relativity.” Whilst quantum physics looks at very small objects, special relativity looks at objects

which are very fast. The discontinuity between these two branches of physics caused the English physicist, Paul Dirac, to wonder what would happen if the two sets of laws were brought together, and an electron was accelerated so that it went very fast. He worked out from mathematics that the only way the two branches of physics could be resolved, is if a totally new object existed—a positively charged, mirror image of the electron. He called this theoretical particle a “positron.”

The positron was the anti-matter counterpart of an electron.

Four years later, the American Physicist, Carl Anderson, discovered the positron using a cloud chamber.

The significant thing about all this is that a particle was discovered by mathematics—before it was discovered in reality.

Paul Dirac later reflected on the power of mathematics, and why the universe was constructed along beautiful mathematical lines. He said: ‘God is a mathematician of a very high order, and he used very advanced mathematics in constructing the universe’ (1963, 208:45-53).

The Hungarian-American theoretical physicist, Eugene Wigner, expressed a similar thought. He spoke about the ‘unreasonable effectiveness of mathematics in the natural sciences’ (1960, 13:1).

A more recent example of the faith scientists have in the power of mathematics occurred when their calculations persuaded a research team to spend \$4.75 billion to build the Large Hadron Collider, near Geneva. Their faith in mathematics was rewarded in 2012 when they found the Higgs boson, a sub-atomic particle they reasoned must exist as a result of mathematics.

Mathematics is the scientific language of the universe—and this is only made possible because the universe is so incredibly ordered. Quite simply: order is the big surprise of the universe.

### **Order in chaos**

Scientists are starting to discover that order can sometimes even be found in chaos.

It seems that some chaotic systems can behave in non-chaotic ways.

If you plot the successive events of a chaotic system on a three dimensional graph, you would expect to end up with a chaotic mess. Often, you do. However, you sometimes end up with a beautiful pattern in which the sequence of events seems to circle around one particular point for a long time. These favoured possibilities have been dubbed “strange attractors.” In other words, there appears to be orderly disorder in some chaotic systems (Polkinghorne 1991, 36). It’s even possible for a chaotic system to have more than one strange attractor. Others don’t seem to have any.

### **A conversation**

Imagine that a mathematical physicist studying strange attractors is having coffee with a Christian theologian.

What might the theologian say on hearing about strange attractors?

That theologian might nod their head and say: ‘As a theologian, what you say doesn’t surprise me at all. God is the one who brings order out of nothing, and creates. I therefore suspect you will never find perfect disorder in any physical system that God has been responsible for. If you’ve not found strange attractors in some chaotic systems, perhaps you’ve not run the experiment for long enough. After all, long periods of time are no problem to a God, who exists both within and beyond time.’

The theologian might pause for a moment, before adding: ‘The only place where theologians would expect to find chaos, would be where there is evil. All Satan can do is destroy. He can only “kick down God’s sandcastles.” He can never build them.’

That might make for a mutually enriching discussion.

The theological question prompted by the order we see in creation is this: Does this order illustrate a quality of God? In other words: Is the order of creation a language God has used to point to his essential nature? Was king David right when he wrote, 3,000 years ago:

The heavens declare the glory of God;

the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

Day after day they pour forth speech;

night after night they reveal knowledge.

They have no speech, they use no words;

no sound is heard from them.

Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,

their words to the ends of the world (Psalm 19:1-4 NIV)?

If God is whispering something about his nature through his creation, then perhaps theologians and scientists might benefit from having an occasional cup of coffee together. Of course, scientists must be careful to maintain the integrity of scientific method, but this doesn’t mean they can’t let theologians look over their shoulder, and hear them say, ‘Yes. That makes sense.’

This brings to mind the closing comments of the astronomer and physicist, Robert Jastrow, in his book, *God and the Astronomers*. He writes: ‘At this moment, it seems as though science will never be able to raise the curtain on the mystery of creation. For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries’ (Jastrow 1978, 116).

### **Understanding God in science**

Christian theologians fully expect that something of God's nature will be understood from science —and are therefore able to rejoice when new scientific findings are discovered.

However, theologians also have to look beyond the order they see in the cosmos, and make sense of suffering, chaos and evil. They understand that whilst the universe is “God-breathed,” it is also something which has been corrupted by sin and suffering (Romans 8:20-21). Theologians understand that this universe is not God's “end game.” They speak of a fulfilment that lies beyond it —which each of us is invited to participate in.

It must also be said that God is infinitely more than that which can be determined simply by the order of creation. Nonetheless, the order of the cosmos does point us to something of the character of God. It tells us that God is rational.

Theologians understand that God is not a fraudster. By this, they mean that God reveals himself as he actually is. God does not wear a mask to misrepresent himself because we can't cope with the reality of who he is. To do that would be relationally dishonest. So, when God reveals himself through the order of the universe, he is revealing himself as he actually is. God's strategy is to reveal as much of himself as we can comprehend. He does not overpower us with so much self-revelation that it quashes our “free choice” and removes our need for faith.

This “honesty” of God in his self-revelation is a consistent feature. For example: God allows us to see his essential reality in Jesus (Colossians 1:15-20). Similarly, when God showed us that he lives in community within himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, this was not a mask. God was allowing us to see his essential being.

If this self-revelation of God is difficult to comprehend—good. It has to have aspects of mystery. God must logically be beyond our understanding if he is to be more than something created by our imaginings.

### **“Order” as the fingerprint of God**

Theologians understand that God is inherently creative. God brings order from nothing. This means that wherever we see order in created systems, we see the fingerprint of God.

The order we see in creation therefore suggests that faith in God is reasonable.

Physicist and cosmologist, Paul Davies, says that scientists also have to share this faith. They have to have faith ‘that the universe is governed by dependable, immutable, absolute, universal, mathematical laws of an unspecified origin ... (To) think that such laws exist without reason is anti-rational’ (2007, A17).

These understandings suggest that there is room for theologians to talk to scientists about the order they see.



## **The scientific problem for atheism, posed by quantum physics**

The universe is made up of tiny sub-atomic particles that are governed by physical laws quite unlike the normal Newtonian physics that operate in the macro world. Quantum physics is the field of physics that studies this strange sub-atomic world—and believe me, it is strange. The Danish physicist, Niels Bohr, says that those who are not shocked when they first come across quantum physics cannot possibly have understood it (1971, 206). The American physicist, Richard Feynman, agrees. He says, ‘I think I can safely say that nobody understands quantum mechanics’ (1965, 129). So let’s retreat back to the safety of theology for a moment.

The Bible speaks of God being the one who brings order out of nothing. The theological stories that teach this truth are contained in the creation accounts at the very beginning of the Bible. They speak of God seeing something in his mind’s eye—and of him then calling creation out of nothing.

Please remember that phrase: ‘...God seeing something in his mind’s eye’...

...Now let’s go back to the world of quantum physics.

Imagine that a ray gun (shooting sub-atomic particles, like an electron) is aimed at a barrier. This barrier has two vertical slits cut into it.

There is a back wall some distance behind the barrier which stops those particles that pass through the slits. This back wall has the ability to measure where these particles hit.

When all is in place, the scientists fire the gun.

The result amazes them.

Scientists discovered that the electrons didn’t behave like tiny marbles, but behaved like waves.

When the electrons passed through the slits, they fanned out in semi-circular ripples. The two sets of curving ripples (from the two slits) interfered with each other, before hitting the back wall in a wave pattern.

Scientists then wondered what would happen if they fired the particles one at a time. Doing this meant there was no chance of particles being able to interfere with each other.

However, a wave pattern still formed on the back wall.

The scientists were stunned. Each particle had apparently split itself into two, gone through two slits simultaneously, and interfered with each other, before hitting the back wall. As particles don’t do this, it was concluded that each particle must exist as a “wave of potential” which allowed it to pass through both slits, yet still be physical enough to interfere with itself.

If that wasn’t strange enough, things soon became even more complicated.

Scientists then placed a measuring device near the slits so they could observe which slit an individual electron actually passed through. They then fired the electron gun, shooting one particle at a time towards the two slits for a period of one hour.

The result of this was stranger than anyone could have imagined. When the electrons were being “observed,” they stopped behaving like a wave and began behaving like tiny marbles. The electrons now hit the wall behind the slits in two vertical lines.

So there we have it: Sub-atomic particles, such as electrons, don’t actually exist as physical particles until they are observed.

...Which brings us back to God.

The first three verses of the Bible say: ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, “Let there be...”’ (Genesis 1:1-3 NIV).

In other words, God saw something in his mind’s eye—and that caused what he saw to come into being. This is consistent with quantum physics. The act of God “observing,” caused something that was once just a wave of potential to become physical reality.

This truth should be of some interest to us because you and I exist within physical reality. We are composed of sub-atomic particles that someone has observed, causing us to become a physical reality.

This truth calls to mind the words God spoke to Jeremiah in the Old Testament: ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you...’ (Jeremiah 1:5 NIV). Perhaps these words have a significance we’ve not been able to appreciate until now!

The idea that sub-atomic particles need to be observed before they become a tiny package of matter is a discovery that leaves the atheist in a difficult position. Quantum physics makes it clear that an atheist should not exist, except as a wave of potential that is in superposition with itself—because no God has observed them into physical reality.

Your existence requires someone to observe you into being. In other words, your existence needs someone outside of you who is capable of intent.

The quantum “double slit” experiment raises a number of questions:

- What would happen if you switched off the instrument that was doing the observing?
- What would you see if you dismantled the observing instrument, and just put its component bits in place?
- How far away would you need to put the observing instrument, before the image on the back wall changed from two horizontal lines back to a wave pattern?

I don't know the scientific answers to these questions because I haven't done the experiments. (Someone probably has.) But I think I can give you an answer theologically. A theologian would expect the image on the back wall to be that of two horizontal lines—only when the instrument functionally measures, and the results are seen by someone with the ability to cognate.

This begins to suggest some highly significant things about the existence of God.

Let's explore this further and expand on what it means to "observe." Here are a few definitions:

- To observe means to view with the expectation of understanding the reality of something.
- To observe means to seek to understand, and establish a relationship with the physical reality of something.
- To observe is to bring something into significance in the consciousness of the observer.
- To observe is to establish a cognitive relationship with something.

At first look, this language conjures an image of something that is conscious enough to be relational.

So, let's explore further.

### **And there's more...**

Some leading scientists working in the field of quantum physics are now beginning to speak of matter itself being a "content of consciousness." One of the scientists making this claim is the Nobel prize-winning physicist, Eugene Wigner. He says: 'Study of the external world leads to the conclusion that contents of consciousness are the ultimate reality' (1967, 171). His view is shared by John von Neumann (also a Nobel prize-winning physicist). He says: 'All real things are contents of consciousness' (2011, 21).

It has to be said that not all quantum physicists agree with these scientists.

The issue at stake is this: Is it the electron that is conscious and is observing the instrument watching it? Or is the reverse? Is it the consciousness of intelligent observers, metered through the observing instrument, which is exerting power over the electron?

It is difficult to imagine how an electron could be conscious, for it would not be enough for it to simply be conscious; it would also have to be intelligent. The electron would need to be intelligent enough to recognise that a measuring instrument was in place, and was working.

It is interesting to speculate what might happen if scientists were to add complexity to the measuring device. How complex would they have to make it before it was beyond the comprehension of the electron to recognise that the device was observing it—if that were even possible?

It therefore seems more likely that it is the cognitive intent of the observer that collapses the electron from being a wave of potential, into being a tiny particle of matter.

Whilst this conclusion seems reasonable, it is not an “open and shut” case—particularly given the existence of another strange feature of the quantum world: the phenomenon of “entanglement.”

Physicists have discovered that if two sub-atomic particles have connected with each other—and then flown off to different parts of the universe, the particles will still act as if they are connected. What you do to one particle will instantly be mirrored in the other. (The Irish physicist, John Bell records Einstein’s disparaging reference to quantum entanglement when Einstein described it as ‘spooky action at a distance.’) (Bell 1987, 143)

This feature of the quantum world suggests a level of connectedness between sub-atomic particles that is independent of the physical strictures imposed by the speed of light. Perhaps this could be “consciousness.”

So let’s digress, and consider what it might mean if it was the consciousness of the sub-atomic particles, and not the observer, that caused the particles to collapse into tiny bits of matter.

It would suggest that all matter is imbued with consciousness. That conclusion would sit well with the convictions of Eugene Wigner and John von Neumann. If it were true, such a finding would have enormous impact, as it would break science out of its empiricist prison, and force it to consider a wider reality. It would certainly present a challenge to atheism. Conversely, it would make perfect sense to theologians, for it would suggest that all creation exhibits, in part, the consciousness of God.

It might be reasonably pointed out that the fact that atoms and molecules exist as tiny particles doesn’t mean that their electrons are behaving as tiny particles. They may still be behaving as waves of potential. This is true—to a point. The fact remains that if anything physical is to exist in the universe, sub-atomic particles need to build it. Nothing physical can be built just by collecting a whole bunch of “waves of potential” together. An unbound particle that exists as a wave of potential somehow needs to transition into being a “bound” particle, i.e. one that links with other particles—if it is to build an atom. An unbound particle will allow itself to become “bound” because it allows the particle to exist in a lower energy state. (All matter rolls downhill when it come to energy.)

However, energetics cannot explain why a cloud of potential collapses into a physical particle that can co-operate with others. The only mechanism physicists are currently aware of that causes anything like this to happen is ‘consciousness.’

One way or another, it seems that consciousness lies behind the existence of all physical things.

Sub-atomic particles in the quantum world only collapse into physical bits of matter when observed.

This phenomenon, of course, does not occur in the larger world of biology. There is no evidence that a person collapses into a physical form only when another person observes them...and this is significant. It appears that all the sub-atomic particles that constitute physical things in the universe have already been observed—and so exist as physical realities.

And this also poses a very real problem for atheists.

### **The Atheist's dilemma**

Atheists generally fall into two camps when asked the question: 'Why does anything exist?'

Some say that the universe has always existed. The great English physicist, Fred Hoyle, (an atheist), desperately tried to believe this for many years, until evidence for the "Big Bang" became overwhelming.

The idea that the universe has always existed has recently been resurrected by those positing the idea that there are an infinite number of universes that collapse and give rise to new ones. A moment's thought, however, shows that this doesn't solve the question. It just shifts it to another level. Where did the infinite number of universes come from? No scientist of any worth will lazily invoke the term "infinite" to magically make anything they want to happen, happen.

Fundamentally, the idea that the universe has always existed falls foul of the second law of thermodynamics, which says, in essence, that everything that exists is slowly sliding down an entropic slope into disorder.

Other atheists believe that the universe has come from nothing. One of these is Lawrence Krauss who wrote a book called: *A Universe from Nothing* (2012).

His book evoked a sharp response from the American Orthodox philosopher, David Bentley Hart, who wrote: '...it would be a very poorly trained theologian indeed who produced anything as philosophically confused or as engorged with category errors as Lawrence Krauss's, *A Universe from Nothing*' (2018).

This calls to mind a wry comment made by Einstein, who said: 'the man of science makes a very bad philosopher' (1936). A look at the diatribes against religion emanating from the English biologist, Richard Dawkins, would also bear this out.

The essential difficulty with believing that the universe came from nothing is this: It requires you to believe that everything came from nothing, as a result of nothing, as the result of a mechanism that has never been discovered, and which has no precedent...and which fractures the law of "cause and effect," which underpins all science.

As such, it is not tenable.

### **Conclusion**

So what can we conclude?

Science and faith have important things to say to each other, and can be mutually enriching.

It is also fair to say that the findings of quantum physics raise big issues for atheism—and Christian apologists would do well to understand these issues. Until very recently, atheists have claimed to be the ones standing on the high ground of evidence—and have looked down at theologians with disbelief and barely concealed derision. Now it seems it is the theologian who is standing on the high ground of evidence.

However, there are many reasons for atheism—and not all of them have much to do with truth. So, whether or not the findings of quantum physics present a mortal blow to atheism... is something only you can decide.

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## 38. The Media, Atheism And Hope

**October 20, 2019**

In his song “Two Thousand Years,” Billy Joel sings about our children’s future... and he poses a question to his own generation, asking if it has passed on a “blessing or a curse.”

What does the future hold for our children? It is a good question.

This week (as I write), the media has reported that people were offended by Australia’s Prime Minister saying that he was praying for drought-stricken farmers. The media reported that some atheists were offended by their prime minister praying to the “sky fairy,” and that he should apologise for saying that he did.

This was not just a monumentally ungracious comment by atheists, but a highly dangerous one. In reality, everyone has a “worldview,” a chosen philosophy that guides how they live. Many may not have put a label on their worldview, but nonetheless, everyone has one. For some, it is faith in God. For others, it is atheism. What the complaining atheists are saying is that only their secular worldview is acceptable, and only their worldview should be portrayed in the media. Those with a worldview that involves faith in God should be marginalised and not heard.

History has given us a word for such thinking; it is totalitarianism—and it stinks. Those who advocate such thinking should be ashamed. The complaining atheists should be invited to look at the testimony of history. Nations that have adopted atheism as their foundational philosophy, such as those led by Hitler, Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot, have never produced a civilised, free society. Quite the reverse. So we have to ask: why are we content to let atheists lead us there?

An excuse for letting them do so is that they are being “rational,” whilst those with faith in God are irrational.

Really?

If you boil everything down to its basics, the supposed “rationality” of atheists is this: It requires you to believe that everything came from nothing, as a result of nothing, via a mechanism that has never been discovered and for which there is no precedent... and which defies the law of “cause and effect” which underpins all of science.

So tell me, who is the rationalist—really?

Christians see the remarkable order that exists in the universe. They note the beautiful mathematics used to build it. They note that quantum physics suggests that sub-atomic particles only exist when observed. They note that if ratio of the electromagnetic force to gravity had differed by as much as one ten-thousand trillion, trillion, trillionth, the universe would



not exist. They note that the historical evidence for Jesus is overwhelming and that his morality has never been improved on. Finally, they note the unique power of Jesus to transform individuals, families, towns and civilisations for good. It gave us Mother Theresa.

So, I say again: Who are the rationalists?

As I look at what is happening in Western society (as it chooses to scorn Christianity and embrace neo-Marxist ideas) I note the following: 1) Our children no longer know their meaning and are suiciding in record numbers. 2) The level of civility in our society has plummeted. 3) The notion of “truth” is disappearing. It seems that our atheistic opinion leaders have not led us to utopia, but to hell.

The same paper that reported the offence of atheists at a praying Prime Minister also devoted a huge amount of space on its pages to an attack on Australia’s biggest church, Hillsong<sup>2</sup>. Barely disguised scorn was poured on its contemporary music. It seems the poor old church can’t win. If it sings Victorian hymns, it is accused of being culturally irrelevant. But if it sings upbeat contemporary songs, it is accused of being manipulative. The article showed a photo of worshippers, some of whom had their hands raised in worship. The caption read: “The crowd at the Hillsong Sydney Conference at fever pitch.”

Wow! So I daren’t hold my hands up in worship of God anymore for fear of it being reported that I am at “fever pitch.” The reality, is of course, that I am simply choosing to worship God.

So, can I say this to the atheistic darlings of the media: By all means keep us honest when we depart from Christ-like Christianity, but stop attacking authentic Christianity. Authentic Christianity brings everything that is good to a nation. The testimony of history is that atheism does the reverse —so don’t lead us there.

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<sup>2</sup> The Weekend Australian, 19-20th October, 2019

# 39. Politically Correct Language And Identity Politics

**October 31, 2019**

When politically correct language contributes to justice and honour, it is a good thing. Justice is beautiful and God loves it. It is therefore a fundamental Christian value to honour others and not give offence. So, why is there a gathering disquiet about politically correct language? The short answer is: when it is no longer used to give equal honour, but to bludgeon people into conforming to an imposed ideological culture.

What sorts of things are happening in the world, that are causing concern?

Canada has recently passed a law making it illegal to use the wrong gender pronouns. Canada's Senate passed Bill C-16, puts "gender identity" and "gender expression" into both the country's Human Rights Code, as well as the hate crime category of its Criminal Code.

Critics say that Canadians who do not subscribe to progressive gender theory could be accused of hate crimes, and be jailed, fined, and made to take anti-bias training.

Those who proposed the bill say that it is not aimed at gaoling those who use the wrong pronoun. It is aimed at punishing those who wilfully promoted gender hatred. However, this offers poor protection in today's sociological climate in which you can be accused of hatred if someone "feels" your comment to be hate... because they don't like the fact that you didn't refer to them by one of the new gender-neutral pronouns such as 'ze' or 'zir'.

Jordan Peterson, a professor at the University of Toronto, is one of the bill's fiercest critics. He insists that it infringes people's freedom of speech and institutes dubious gender ideology into law. So... what do you think?

## **The use of language has changed**

It is important to note that the use of language has changed in this post-modern world we're living in. The validity of language used to be determined by truth. However, in these postmodern times, this has changed. The validity of language is no longer determined by truth, but by how it makes someone feel. Therefore, if your language makes me feel shame, or makes me feel devalued, it is wrong — whether or not what you say is true.

The other thing that has changed in our time is what determines "right behaviour." Morality used to define what was right. But now, the "rightness" of behaviour is not determined by morality, it is determined by whether or not it makes me "happy." My happiness is the sole measure of what is right.

The pre-eminence of what I “feel,” and what makes me “happy,” in determining language and behaviour, are both symptoms of a society delaminating from its Christian bedrock.

### **Identity politics**

Identity politics have sought to make good use of politically correct language. It has done so in order to promote the political power/rights/interests/perspectives of groups defining themselves by their: sexual orientation; ethnicity; disability; class; diet; generation; nationality... and a host of other things.

Of course, everyone loves justice. It is a beautiful and godly thing. But people are now asking if the language of political correctness has been pushed too far.

It is a sad fact that “identity politics” can use the language of “justice” and “rights” to oppress those who disagree with it... and also be used to promote “victimology” (i.e. a culture of playing the “victim”).

When people are true victims, they should, unquestionably, have justice. However, when being a victim is overplayed, it can result in a culture of “victimology.” Victimology traps people in a whirlpool of resentment and entitlement.

### **Use and abuse of language**

Language is power.

Causes seeking social acceptance and political power choose the words for their slogans with great care. Wherever possible, the politics of social engineering will seek ways to represent their cause as a “justice issue.” This can be abused. No issue can rightly be seen as a “justice issue” until the issue has first been determined to be inherently “good.” Only once this has been determined, can it be considered to be a justice issue. Too many activists try and put the cart before the horse.

Activists will also try to enlist positive-sounding words and images to support their cause. They will try to use words such as “progressive,” “yes” and “correct.” After all, no one wants to be associated with the reverse of what these words say: it’s just not cool.

A huge problem with identity politics is its inability to self-evaluate and self-criticise. Today; there are some things which those seeking truth are simply not allowed to voice or investigate without you being accused of hate, abuse or intolerance. When the language of identity politics shuts down debate, it can do the very reverse of what it claims to do — seek justice. Instead, it can become a tool of repression used to enforce conformity.

So, the right use of politically correct language is laudable. However, the abuse of politically correct language is sociologically frightening. When objective, truth-seeking, debate is impossible

because those seeking it are shut down by accusations of racism, imperialism, and being hateful... you have arrived at a scary place.

### **Conformity**

The ultimate end of extreme politically correct language, when hand in hand with identity politics, is enforced conformity on everyone. It says:

‘This is how you will speak. This is what you will believe. There must be no questions asked. No objective scholarly truth must be allowed to intrude. No critique will be tolerated. You must conform. If you don’t, you will be sacked from your job in a child-care centre. If you don’t, you will not win a government grant or be employed as a youth worker. If you don’t, you will be caricatured by half-truths and “beat ups”... and pilloried by the press. And you will be stalked by media trolls who will seek to destroy your business and your reputation. We, will punish you if you do not conform.’

This is frightening language. It is the power play of ideological activists seeking to take control of a disintegrating civilisation.

### **A larger debate**

The politically-correct language debate is really part of a much larger debate about where society is going — and its current trajectory is taking it a long way from Christianity. The fact that today’s society is letting its Christian heritage slip through its fingers, is a concern.

A major newspaper this week reports that Australian ‘millennials’ now want to embrace socialism. They do so, evidently, because they have no knowledge of how the socialist world-view has played out in history. No one has tapped them on the shoulder and pointed out that refugees are not flocking to seek out the civility and culture of any Communist or neo-Marxist state. Communism, in the form of Lenin, Stalin and Mao was responsible for killing tens of millions of people. Many were murdered and many others were starved to death because of the enforced ideology of collective farming. Pol Pol was less subtle: he simply engaged in blatant genocide. By any measure: Marxism’s socialist heritage is “blood red.”

But it seems that many Australians don’t remember. This is ironic because in their lust for unbridled liberty, they are, in fact, laying themselves open to a repressive ideology that will enforce conformity... and which will lack any form of Christian civility.

At a conference on Marxism in Melbourne in 2015, Roz Ward spoke about how she developed the Safe Schools program for the express purpose of implementing Marxism in the classroom. This sort of indoctrination of our children should be of concern. It should also be of concern that the

state, rather than parents, is taking control over the sexual patterning, teaching and upbringing of our children. This sort of forced conformity is deeply disturbing.

### **The removal of God from society**

The Russian philosopher and dissident, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, was asked to give the address at the University of Harvard's anniversary in 1978. It's worth hearing what he said:

The defence of individual rights has reached such extremes as to make society ... defenceless against certain individuals. ...Destructive and irresponsible freedom has been granted boundless space. Society appears to have little defence against the abyss of human decadence. ...As a survivor of the Communist Holocaust I am horrified to witness how my beloved America, my adopted country, is gradually being transformed into a secularist and atheistic utopia, where communist ideals are glorified and promoted, while Judea-Christian values and morality are ridiculed and increasingly eradicated from the public and social consciousness of our nation. Under the decades-long assault and militant radicalism of many so-called "liberal" and "progressive" elites, God has been progressively erased from our public and educational institutions, to be replaced with all manner of delusion, perversion, corruption, violence, decadence, and insanity. It was Dostoevsky ... who drew from the French Revolution and its seeming hatred of the Church the lesson that "revolution must necessarily begin with atheism." That is absolutely true. ...Within the philosophical system of Marx and Lenin, ... hatred of God is the principal driving force, more fundamental than all their political and economic pretensions. Militant atheism is not merely incidental or marginal to Communist policy; it is not a side effect, but the central pivot. ... millions of our countrymen have been corrupted and spiritually devastated by an officially imposed atheism. ... Western societies are losing more and more of their religious essence as they thoughtlessly yield up their younger generation to atheism.

Hmmm.

In our nation, Jesus is now being banned from the societal landscape and societal norms have been turned on their heads. Fathers are becoming sidelined; sexuality has become anything you want it to be; morality is scorned... and tolerance has become intolerance.

### **Tolerance**

A catch-cry of some political correctness is "tolerance." But, as G.K. Chesterton once said: Tolerance is the virtue of someone who doesn't actually believe anything.

So, should everything be tolerated? Who decides what's in and what's out? Who has the power... and by what means do they choose?

Tolerance, as it pertains to civility and gracious behaviour, is a good thing; but preaching “tolerance” can be a trick used by those in power to erase traditional truth from society. It works like this:

If everything must be tolerated... then nothing can be said to be really true. And if Christianity, with its exclusive claims about hope, salvation and godly behaviour can be said to not really be true, then it can be relegated to a place of insignificance in society. This leaves “rationalism” as the only thing left standing. But this rationalism has no “ground of truth.” It can therefore be manipulated by “politically correctness” so that it becomes irrational, coercive and controlling.

If you disallow the Christian world-view a place in society—you are not journeying towards tolerance; you have become intolerant. You are reversing the centuries of good work by people who fought to have religious freedom and for their lives to be determined by God’s consistent principles in Scripture.

And if Christianity is repressed, it should be of huge concern... for no other world-view other than Christ-like, authentic Christianity has ever produced civilisations that have been so fruitful, emancipating and civil.

## 40. The Wrong Period Of History

**November 11, 2019**

Help! I've been born in the wrong period of history.

I'm a white male living in a time when white males are not allowed to be heard. My kind are, evidently, despotic and abusive. I doubt there has been a single episode of *The Drum* in the last two years that hasn't alluded in some way to us being unfair to women. De-powerment, suspicion and shame have been rained down on us.

Pity the boys growing up at this time. What are they to do with their testosterone induced strength and inclination to strive and compete? Do we consign them to a shadow existence, socially acceptable only as effeminate metrosexuals? Men should rarely be seen and never heard... until, of course, the next war or disaster, when the call will go out for warriors and heroes... and be met by silence.

Being a white male means, of course, that I must conform to the expectations of the highly feminised, virtue signalling gate-keepers of Western literary culture. "Do not write about a woman in your books, for you are not a woman. And do not write about an indigenous Australian. In fact, unless you write about men being unfair to women, you won't be published at all."

Yes, I've been born in the wrong period of history, for I am old in a culture that sees no value in age. It has no place for its seers. New truths have been invented, truths that scorn the wisdom of history.

But there's worse to tell: for I am also a Christian. Today's opinion leaders tell me that Christianity should be scorned for its unchristian behaviour. (The irony of this statement has yet to be appreciated.) Society today only learns about Christianity through the jaundiced eye of atheistic commentators and liberal clerics who have lost their faith. Those who truly know are kept in the shadows—unseen.

So, as an old, white, Christian male, I am struggling to be allowed to write. The fact that I dare to do so is a form of madness.

But there again, prophets have always been seen as mad.

...And now (sigh) some caveats for the scandalised:

- Of course there should be zero tolerance for abuse of woman.
- Of course women should have equal opportunity to men.
- Of course we need to respect the culture of indigenous Australians.

- Of course the church should be called to account for vile behaviour that is the antithesis of authentic biblical Christianity.

No, I am not claiming for myself the status of seer or prophet. That is for others to decide.



# 41. The Environment, God, Science and Paganism

**November 18, 2019**

Some have sought to integrate science and faith by turning science into theology. This sort of thinking was proposed by the Jesuit anthropologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the environmentalist James Lovelock, and the panentheists Charles Hartshorne, John Cobb and Charles Birch.

Lovelock promoted the idea of a global ecosystem. He argued that the global ecosystem should be regarded as an entity, even an organism, which he has named “Gaia”. The earth’s ecosystems interlock to create a global network of feedback systems that regulate the earth’s being. Lovelock describes Gaia as: “A complex entity involving the Earth’s biosphere, atmosphere, oceans, and soil; the totality constituting a feedback or cybernetic system which seeks an optimal physical and chemical environment for life on this planet.”<sup>3</sup>

Lovelock’s idea of Gaia is in part description of what undoubtedly exists (vis: the interlocking, interdependent ecosystems of planet Earth that have allowed life to develop) and part plea for humanity to put their faith in Gaia and co-operate with it.

We are to put our faith in Gaia...? Hmmm.

Let’s turn to the thinking of a French anthropologist Teilhard de Chardin.

Teilhard believed that God has implanted into sub-atomic particles an urge to attain unity, greater complexity and consciousness. Sub-atomic particles therefore have a rudimentary consciousness. Particles and organisms continued to evolve until fully functioning human consciousness (“noogenesis”) occurred. He believed that life would continue to develop further until planetary consciousness occurs, and everything is brought into union with God. This “Omega Point” is where the church becomes the body of Christ in a literal sense<sup>4</sup>.

It is fair to say that the thinking of Lovelock and Teilhard de Chardin differs from most Christians who understand that atoms and planets are the result of a “mind,” but are not themselves “mind.”

Whilst it would be unfair to say that Teilhard and Lovelock’s positions are a form of paganism, they do, perhaps begin to point in that direction. So, what is Paganism?

The driving philosophy behind paganism is “monism,” the conviction that everything is “one.” It believes that everything shares the same substance and the same force of nature—god. As such, there is no external creator. Everything that exists constitutes god.

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<sup>3</sup> J. E. Lovelock, *Gaia: A new look at life on Earth*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p.11.

<sup>4</sup> P. Teilhard de Chardin, *Towards the Future* trans. R. Hague, (London: Collins, 1975).

Paganism therefore has no room for a personal God and can offer no sense of personal meaning. You just lose your identity in something bigger. Neither can paganism offer any answer to the intractable conundrums of suffering or the reality of evil. Crucially, paganism has no provision for forgiveness or eternal hope.

Christians, on the other hand, understand that the Earth is sacred, not because it is God, but because God made it. This means that even though Earth has been corrupted by evil and suffering, it remains special. It remains special even though God will eventually remake its brokenness and combine it with heaven to create an eternal kingdom (2 Peter 3:12-13; Revelation 11:15; 21:1-2).

The Bible says that God has given humankind the ability and the authority to tend the environment much as a gardener would tend an unruly garden, i.e. make it fruitful (Genesis 1:27-28). The Hebrew word *kabash*, meaning “subdue” used in Genesis 1:28 can mean “violate” but that is not the meaning here. In this context, it means, “to have control over.” The clear teaching of the Bible is that the environment should not be abused by the greedy or the selfish. Far from it! God’s commandment to Adam and Eve was that they work the land and “take care of it” (Genesis 2:15).

It is very wise and appropriate wisdom for our day.

So, let’s look after the planet. It is a sacred entrustment.

## 42. It's Not Fashionable To Be A Christian

November 7, 2019

A 2013 survey by McCrindle Research, revealed that just 8% of Christians attend church at least once a month in Australia.

That's not many.

In the 1980s, the prominent historian Manning Clark, defined Australian spirituality as:

a shy hope in the heart .... (It is) understated, wary of enthusiasm, anti-authoritarian, optimistic, open to others, self-deprecating and ultimately characterised by a serious quiet reverence, a deliberate silence, an inarticulate awe and a serious distaste for glib wordiness<sup>5</sup>.

But things have changed in recent years. Australian society is now more selfish, secular and atheistic. Hedonism has trumped humility and God is increasingly being seen to be: "irrelevant to my life" or "inconvenient to my lifestyle."

Australia received its Christian heritage from England. It was colonised at a time when to be a good Englishman meant attending the Church of England. All of England was at least nominally Christian, and this gave some credence to the practice of baptising infants. It was taken for granted that a baby would be Christian because it was growing up in a Christian society. Now, of course, it is significantly unfashionable to be a Christian... and being a follower of Jesus requires a deliberate counter-cultural choice.

This prompts the question: Should Christians be worried at now being in a minority?

I don't think so.

If the Bible teaches us anything it is this: God's people will always be in a minority. I suspect this has been the case even when a nation has been "institutionally" Christian. Now, however, as the West is lurches drunkenly towards atheism, it is now particularly so. But as I've said, being in a minority is nothing new for Christians. It is "situation normal."

Helpfully, the Bible gives instructions on how Christians should live in such times. Christians are to allow persecution to refine them of institutional abuse, unbiblical practices and unfaithfulness (Ps 66:10-12; Jas 1:2-4; 1 Pet 1:6-7). The Bible goes on to instruct Christians to live lives of such quality that it prompts people to honour God and ask about him (Mt 5:16; 1 Pet 2:12). And when people do ask, the Apostle Peter tells Christians to: Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect (1 Pet 3:15). These are great words.

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<sup>5</sup> Manning Clark, "Heroes," in *Australia: The Daedalus Symposium*, ed. S. Graubard (London: Angus and Robertson, 1985), pp.77-78.

One of the shortest parables Jesus told was about people choosing either to enter a wide gate and follow the broad road that leads to destruction, or enter a narrow gate and follow the narrow road that leads to life (Mt 7:13-14). It is an uncomfortable parable. It prompts us to ask: If most people are going to miss the mark with God, what exceptional thing am I doing to ensure that I don't?

So let me ask: Are you lazily following the secular "don't know, don't care, God's not convenient to my lifestyle" path of most in society... or are you seeking out Jesus, who said: I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (Jn 14:6)?

Which path are you on?

Which destiny are you heading towards?

## 43. The Christmas Challenge To All Things Political

**December 11, 2019**

I have a friend who is passionate about social systems that deliver justice. He has worked in Africa doing voluntary service, and from this experience wonders whether tribal communities that have needed to rely on each other in order to survive value its members more highly and share their resources more evenly.

Perhaps there is a degree of truth in this, but I'm far from sure. I am not an anthropologist, but as a biologist, I have studied animal behaviour enough to know that you don't want to be on the lowest social rung in a troop of baboons, or in pack of African wild dogs. Communal living doesn't always produce equality, and I very much suspect that Rousseau's "noble savage" is myth. Primitive communal living is probably only utopian in the imagination of privileged Western ideologues.

So, is it possible to say what political system of governance is better than another? We are hearing much at the moment about the failure of Western democracy, largely, I suspect as a result of the West turning its back on the Judea-Christian culture whose values have underpinned it. Unbridled capitalism without Christian moderation is inherently exploitative.

So should we embrace neo-Marxism instead and destroy religion, morality and traditional family units? Should we give all the wealth to a central government so that it can meter the little it doesn't waste back to the workers? Probably not if history has anything to teach us. Marxism has simply resulted in the bloody totalitarianism of Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot.

So, where should we look for hope?

I've lived long enough to be convinced that the inherent foibles of humankind will ensure that we will act the same play regardless of the political stage-set we build. If society is to truly find justice and hope, a much more fundamental change needs to occur.

To merely act as our own gods in a way programmed by evolution is, I believe, to be sub-human. It is to be less than we have been called to be. It is to collapse back into the behaviour of the animal world that is, as Alfred Lord Tennyson so eloquently put it, "red in tooth and claw." Where only the law of the jungle exists, it makes perfect sense to enslave, kill and exploit in order to ensure that you, as an organism, thrive. But is that the best that humankind can hope for?

Of all the beasts alive on the planet, humanity alone has the privilege of escaping the gravity pull of Tennyson's "tooth and claw" inclination. To us has been given an invitation to be more, to know the mind behind the universe... and be part of a bigger story. But what on earth is it?

Whatever a person's worldview, three burning questions beg to be answered:

1. Why does the cosmos exist?
2. What does it mean to be human?
3. Do I have meaning?

Personally, I believe God hangs his business card in the cosmos; teaches us his character in Scripture; and comes seeking us in person as Jesus. In other words, he invites us to share in a divine friendship that is as large as the cosmos, as intimate as a child in a manger, and as committed as a man on a cross.

And that's not a bad hope to celebrate at Christmas, is it?

Happy Christmas.

## 44. A Prophetic Look At Our Future

January 14, 2020

I once lived just a few kilometres from a place of mass murder.

At the time, my father was a chaplain to the NATO forces who were stationed at Hohne in north Germany. I spent my holidays there when term ended at boarding school. The infamous Nazi concentration camp, Belsen, was just a couple of kilometres away.

I remember it clearly. A straight concrete road ran to Belsen from Hohne. I visited it once when I was sixteen years of age—but being so young, I was not able to understand the full horror of what I was seeing in the photographs on display there. What I did notice, however, was that I couldn't hear the sound of any birds singing. It was as if nature itself was holding its breath, appalled at the evil that had taken place.

What little I was able to absorb caused me to wonder how the country I lived in and admired, could be capable of such evil? Somehow, the most civilised nation in the world; a nation of exquisite culture and scientific excellence, had walked away from its Christian heritage—and produced the extermination camps of Belsen, Auschwitz, Treblinka and Majdanek.

General William Donovan, a member of the US prosecution team at the Nuremberg war trials, kept records of all that was learned at the war trials conducted there. These records were organised into 150 volumes, and are now kept at Cornell University. They make sobering reading as they reveal that the Nazis understood that Bible-believing, evangelical churches would have to be neutralised by infiltration, extermination and indoctrination. Only those churches that compromised their Christian values would be spared. Donovan reported, “National Socialism by its very nature was hostile to Christianity and the Christian churches. The purpose of the National Socialist movement was to convert the German people into a homogeneous racial group united in ... aggressive warfare.” Donovan's reports make it clear that, notwithstanding public rhetoric, the Nazi party planned to eliminate authentic Christianity completely<sup>6</sup>.

It would seem that atheism, whether it be in the form of Hitler's National Socialism, Communism, or the neo-Marxist ideologies that are currently on the rise in the West—cannot help but remove all that is sacred from what it means to be human... and this paves the way for the vilest abuses that humankind can perpetrate. Tragically, it seems that without God, humanity reverts to the law of the animal kingdom where it makes perfect sense for the strong to enslave, predate and abuse the weak.

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<sup>6</sup> Donovan X, 18, 03, 02 (Cornell University).

The Austrian psychologist, Viktor Frankl, survived the horrors of no less than four Nazi concentration camps. When he reflected on his experience, he wrote:

I am absolutely convinced that the gas chambers of Auschwitz, Treblinka and Majdanek were ultimately prepared not in some ministry or other in Berlin but rather at the desks and lecture halls of Nihilistic scientists and philosophers<sup>7</sup>.

Abuses by any military regime cannot occur unless its nation's opinion leaders first establish a philosophic climate that removes both the sacredness of humankind and godly moral boundaries. Sadly, the West is now doing both. The humanity departments (particularly) in our universities have been allowed to develop an intolerant anti-Christian, Neo-Marxist, culture that is oppressive. The justification for this is that they are being "enlightened rationalists." In reality, they neither understand the scientific wonders and mysteries of the cosmos, or the historical and theological underpinnings of Christianity. They just re-quote tired anti-Christian clichés which they have failed to examine for truth.

Again, the nation's "intellectuals" are removing the sacredness of life and God-given moral absolutes from society. Men now marry men, and some women want it to be legal to kill the baby they are carrying just minutes before birth. It seems as if the wisdom of millennia accumulated by the world's cultures is being trashed, and the lessons of history ignored. No one remembers that Communism once tried to dismiss the historic concept of family, but had to reverse their decision when they saw its ruinous consequence on society.

Today's liberal, secular ideas have been smuggled into our society under the banner of "compassion" and "justice." These emotive words have been used to shut down rational debate. This sometimes causes me to wonder whether I've woken up in some sort of evil parallel universe. It's hard to believe what's now happening.

With some surprise, I discover that I am now a grandfather. This lovely reality brings with it some disquieting fears. I confess to being deeply concerned for my grandchildren's future. My generation had the choice of passing on to them either a blessing or a curse. Sadly, I fear we have not done well. Our children have been brought up to have a state-sanctioned secular worldview. As a result, they don't know anything about why they exist, what their meaning is, what their moral boundaries are, or what destiny they can hope for. As a result, they believe themselves to be meaningless and are committing suicide in record numbers.

And what of today's church?

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<sup>7</sup> Viktor E. Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy*.



The abuse carried out by paedophiles hiding in the church, and the lack of biblical faithfulness displayed by some of its leaders, have both contributed to disintegration and demise of the church. There is no way God will allow either obscenity to continue unchallenged. He will bring judgement—and has, as our newspapers attest.

Many in the church are now desperately looking for today's Elijahs and Isaiahs who will lead our nation back to repentance and restoration, but where are they? Who will be the catalyst for unity and reform? Who will earn the grudging respect of a wayward nation by their integrity and their lifestyle?

Perhaps Rick Warren is someone who comes close. He is the senior pastor of Saddleback church (a huge church in America with many campuses), he chose to drive an old car for many years, and gave 90% of his income back to the church. With Rick at least, we saw something of the simplicity of living and integrity displayed by John the Baptist and Jesus.

So, what of the future?

Historians such as the Englishman, Arnold Toynbee, tell us that civilisations are not destroyed when nations attack them from the outside; rather, they die on the inside when they commit cultural suicide. They die when they lose faith in the central beliefs that once held their civilisation together. History indicates that this life-cycle of a civilisation is inexorable and inevitable—almost. Only one thing has ever reversed a civilisation's decline and injected new life into it, and that one thing is Christianity. John Wesley's Methodism is one such example. It is widely credited with preventing England's poor from descending into total gin-sodden depravity, and it introduced a moral climate that probably prevented England from suffering the bloody uprisings and revolutions that were occurring in Europe. The poor and the desperate encountered the gospel.

So, we need spiritual revival... and I know of no revival that was not birthed without desperate, prevailing prayer.

So that is what I want to give myself to this year. I invite you to join me.

## 45. Are you Significant?

**January 28, 2020**

A dear friend (who would claim no conventional faith) recently challenged my assertion that no one can have any sense of meaning if we dispense with the notion of God. She said that people do have value and meaning because it is conferred on them by the love of a family.

I thought she raised a great point. So, what do you think? Is the love of a family enough to give a person a fundamental sense of value and meaning?

Certainly, if a child is denied the love of a father and mother, it often results in a dysfunctional life. So, at the very least, we can say that the safe, healthily functioning love of family is vital for a person's well-being.

The whole notion of love is a bit of mystery, isn't it? We have the sneaking suspicion that love is more than the result of evolution teaching us to care for the next generation. It seems to have the echo of something more profound behind it. The question is: could this have something to do with God? Are we the objects of God's love... and is this the reason we share his capacity to love? Or is our love simply the consequence of an evolutionary survival mechanism?

So, let me ask again: Is the love of family and friends enough?

I think the answer, at best, is: "only sometimes."

Not long after I began being a minister in a new church, I had the heartbreaking task of caring for a couple whose son, (a young adult), had committed suicide. He'd left school and gone to work as a farmhand in a remote outback homestead—and hung himself. Somehow, things had become so hopeless for him that he committed suicide—despite the love of his parents.

This raises the issue of whether or not we have fundamental value and meaning. And beyond that question lies another: Is there an eternal destiny beyond the crazily unlikely reality of our current existence?

These are the sort of questions that gnaw at our soul in those disturbing times of quiet and profundity that can come when we are not looking at our smartphones and being distracted by giggling entertainment.

So, what have you concluded as a result of sitting alone and looking at the night sky? Does it whisper the possibility of a greater meaning, or have you concluded that the love of a family is enough to give you significance?

For some, the love of a family is enough. However, the brutal reality is: any sense of a person being significant to anyone will be lost after three generations. Beyond that, no one can expect to be remembered.

So, there you have it. If there is no God, you have three generations in which to be significant. Make the most of it!

It is fascinating to see how some people have sought to do just this. I have had the privilege of going to India a few times. When I go, it is not uncommon for me to see statues of wealthy businessmen in town squares that businessmen have erected in their own honour. This is but one symptom of people seeking to clutch at immortality.

It is not hard to see others. Some leaders of world's countries are doing the same thing when they give expression to their ambition to establish an empire that dominates, exploits and controls as many other nations as possible. They too are seeking to immortalise their memory and ensure a place in history. The sad reality is, however: such people will simply be remembered as tyrants. So, the question remains: Is there evidence of a meaning to life beyond the brutal reality that you will make good fertiliser and be forgotten within three generations? Does it even matter to you? It all depends on what is true, doesn't it?

If Christianity is right, then God exists. And if that is true, it changes everything. It means that a new reality now beckons to us—inviting us to share in a deeper significance.

But for belief in God to be reasonable, it must line up with:

- the best thinking of rational science
- the best morality that can be conceived
- sound historical evidence

The question is: Have you checked out the evidence? Is the question of your significance important enough for you to do so?

What I can assure you is that there is no mechanism known to humankind that explains the order of the universe other than that there is an intelligence behind it. And there is no morality greater than that taught by, and epitomised by, Jesus Christ. Finally, I can assure you that the historical evidence for the existence and reputation of Jesus Christ is overwhelming. Even non-Christian historians living in the first century (Josephus and Tacitus) wrote about him.

So, where are you with all of this now? Surely the issue of your significance is important enough to at least explore the possibility of God. If you don't, you run the risk of missing out on a level of significance you can't even conceive of. It is impossible to conceive because it is bound up in the

relentless love of God—a God who wants to be known... and who has done everything possible to win your love.

## 46. There Is No Forgiveness On The Internet

**March 3, 2020**

With the Internet, there is no forgiveness. Thanks to modern digital technology, your mistakes now last forever. Any dumb thing you have displayed or said on the Internet can be brought up at any time in your life and be used to end your career or ruin your reputation.

More alarmingly, it is not just what you have said in some distant adolescent past that can ruin you. It's what malicious keyboard warriors can say about you whilst hiding from accountability behind a silicon chip. Not only can there be no forgiveness on the Internet, there can be no justice either.

It is somewhat concerning that this vile behaviour is not just perpetrated by malicious individuals, it can also be perpetrated by the media. Their comments about people also live on forever, thanks to Google.

At some stage in the last two decades, a significant section of the media have succumbed to two cardinal sins in their hunger for sales. First: they've allowed sensationalism to replace substance. Second: they've allowed opinion to replaced reporting.

I have a friend who was a senior editor of a major newspaper. He is now retired. I asked him what changes he'd seen in the media over the span of his career. He answered without hesitation and spoke of his frustration in recent years at having to remind his reporters to give him facts not opinions.

The press quite rightly want to insist on press freedom. I agree. Press freedom is a vital pillar of democracy. However, when the press no longer give the facts but engage in unjust sensationalist reporting, we have a problem. And when the press become self-appointed cultural opinion leaders who seek to lead society to some sort of "woke" Nirvana, someone needs to point out to them that this is not what they have been given the freedom to do. They are, in fact, engaging in propaganda, which is a constraint on freedom.

The media is increasingly seen to be generating news rather than reporting it. Typical of this was Waleed Aly, a TV host, choosing to air what appeared to be a crushing "put down" of the Australian Prime Minister, Scott Morrison by a female volunteer fire-fighter, who said, "You're not my Prime Minister."<sup>8</sup> In reality, Ali had aired an "edited" piece of film in which the woman was explaining she was volunteering to help Australian fire-fighters, even though she was a UK citizen. This prompts the question: Who will protect us from the media?

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<sup>8</sup> See reports from the 24th of December, 2019.

The behaviour of the media springs from its culture.

It is alarming that our major federally funded news organisation, the ABC has been allowed to develop such a defined culture that, notwithstanding expensive self-promoting advertising aimed at persuading us that it represents all Australians, it has become the butt of a good number of jokes—some very funny. It is certainly difficult to imagine anyone getting a job in the ABC who doesn't ape its culture. Over time, of course, this has meant that its culture has become further entrenched and even more alienated from mainstream society. Sometimes it takes a shock election result to remind them how far they have strayed from the norm. But the shock doesn't last for long. Nothing much has changed in the last two decades.

There is a pervading arrogance of those in the media who seek to lead the nation in their relentless pursuit of social agendas. They seem to have become today's self-appointed "Gnostic priests" possessed of secret wisdom the rest of us don't have. We are simply "useful idiots," (to borrow a term used by Communist leaders to describe non-Communists during the cold war).

The deification of self (a heritage of the Enlightenment) and the scorning of Christianity is a culture fostered particularly by the humanities departments of our universities. These, of course, have provided most of our media personnel.

It is a wonder to me that much sense comes from the warring interests of competing minority groups at our universities. The university culture that currently exists seems united in only two things: the denigration of Western civilisation and the ridicule of Christianity. As such, the path they point to for humanity's future looks both bleak and poorly defined. Very little thought seems to have been given to what the origins of humanity are; what our meaning is; what the basis of morality is; and what destiny we can hope for. Our humanities departments seem unable to teach anything other than a resentment philosophy that leaves people floundering in a sea of self-obsessed meaninglessness.

But I digress.

Do be wise when it comes to the Internet. It offers no forgiveness.

God, on the other hand...

# 47. The Scientific Credibility Of Faith

**March 17, 2020**

“Science is rational and Christianity is not”... such is the claim of many strident atheists. Many go further and say Christianity is actively at war with science, suppressing its truth.

In reality, this claim is but one of the myths some people wrap around themselves in order to hide from truth and stay huddled within the rhetoric of their own kind.

The truth is far more complex.

It may surprise you, but it is not just Christians who display faith, scientists need it too. They need to have faith that the universe is put together in a way that is ordered, consistent and open to rational enquiry. If they didn't have faith in these realities, they couldn't do science. This has led to some of the world's top scientists saying that belief in God is scientifically reasonable. Paul Davies, a mathematical physicist and cosmologist says:

“I belong to the group of scientists who do not subscribe to a conventional religion but nevertheless deny that the universe is a purposeless accident. Through my scientific work I have come to believe more and more strongly that the universe is put together with an ingenuity so astonishing that I cannot accept it merely as a brute fact.”<sup>9</sup>

Here's another interesting fact:

Robert Grosseteste and Roger Bacon were clerics in the church in the 13th century. Both men were responsible for revolutionising how science was done. Until they turned up in history, science was largely restricted to passive observation. However, when Grosseteste and Bacon arrived, they introduced the notion of experimentation. It can therefore be said that experimental science (at least in the West) was born in the Christian church.

In fact, it is very hard to imagine how science could have flourished in the West without Christianity. This was because science was sometimes seen as a spiritual discipline. Why? Because it helped uncover the creative hand of God. Many of the world's top scientists still say the same thing today. Francis Collins (Director of the human genome project), said:

“I have found there is a wonderful harmony in the complementary truths of science and faith. The God of the Bible is also the God of the genome. God can be found in the

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Davies, *The Mind of God: Science and the Search for Ultimate Meaning*. (New York: Simon & Schuster Ltd., 1992), p.16.

cathedral or in the laboratory. By investigating God's majestic and awesome creation, science can actually be a means of worship."<sup>10</sup>

One of the key events in history used by atheists to ridicule Christianity and support their claim that Christianity is inherently anti-science is the story of the Roman Catholic Church putting Galileo on trial for heresy. They did so because Galileo taught that the earth was not the centre of the universe but a heavenly body that circled the sun—an idea first put forward a century earlier by Copernicus. The real story is, again, more complex... and it's a ripping yarn, so it's worth telling.

Galileo lived at a time when the Roman Catholic Church was desperately trying to regain control in the face of The Reformation, which saw different groups of Protestants going off in a thousand different theological directions. In response to this, the Catholic Church called the Council of Trent (1545–63) at which they decided that only doctors of the church were allowed to give definitive interpretations of Scripture.

Galileo, however, fractured this ruling and was giving interpretations of scripture in the light of his scientific findings. He taught his heliocentric model of the universe as fact, despite the Catholic Church only permitting him to teach it as a hypothesis. (This is worth noting for it shows that the church was not trying to suppress his scientific enquiry.) The Catholic authorities instructed Galileo to get scientific proof for this theory, and then let the church's doctors of divinity interpret the significance of his findings for the church.

The problem was, Galileo didn't actually have the knockout proof for his heliocentric theory of the earth circling the sun. Proof could only come from measuring the parallax of a distant star (measuring its angle from the Earth at different seasons of the year). Unfortunately, the instrument required to measure parallax to the required level of accuracy simply didn't exist. It wasn't until 1832 that the German scientist Friedrich Bessel built one capable of doing so. Galileo did his best to find the proof he needed, but failed. He even asked the German astronomer Johannes Kepler for help, but Kepler couldn't give him the proof he needed either.

Galileo could actually be obstinate and even wrong when it came to science. For instance, he ascribed the movement of the ocean's tides to the heliocentric motion of the earth, even though Kepler had shown that tides were linked to the phases of the moon.

In reality, Galileo's fight was not so much with the Catholic Church but with the Aristotelian philosophers whose understanding of the universe was particularly challenged by Galileo's hypothesis. Put simply, Aristotelian thinking thought of the earth as an imperfect cosmic garbage

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<sup>10</sup> Francis Collins in an interview with CNN on 3 April 2007.



heap. They believed that the sun and the moon circled the earth, but beyond the earth, the rest of the cosmos was perfect, unchanging and immovable.

Galileo's hypothesis challenged this thinking, and the Aristotelians refused to look through Galileo's new invention (the telescope) at Jupiter's moons to see evidence of his theory for themselves. One of these was Guilio Libri, professor of Aristotelian Philosophy at Pisa. Another was Cesare Cremonini, Professor of Aristotelian Philosophy at the university of Padua. He was more friendly towards Galileo and did look through the telescope, but he complained it gave him a headache and said he wouldn't do it again!

It was a cadre of Aristotelians who set about engineering Galileo's downfall with the Pope.

Galileo greatly assisted their endeavours by putting the theological objections of Pope Urban VIII (who was once kindly disposed towards Galileo) into the mouth of the fool, Simplicius, in a satirical book he wrote. So, it was probably not surprising that Galileo was brought to trial on 22 June 1633, and was required under threat of torture to "abjure, curse and detest" his Copernican theories.

So there you have it in a nutshell.

I hope the story reminds you to be careful with atheistic claims that Christianity is inherently anti-science.

If there is a mind behind the universe, (as is suggested by the remarkable order and "fine-tuning" of events that have allowed its existence), then scientific truth and theological truth have the same origin—God. Therefore, the two disciplines can't, or should not, fight. They should, however, be allowed to answer different questions. Science answers the question "how?" whilst theology answers the question "why?"

...and "why?" is a very, very, interesting question.

# 48. Church That Is Shocking

**March 24, 2020**

At the time of writing, the Covid 19 virus is wreaking its havoc medically, socially and economically around the world. Everyone now has to find an entirely new way of living as they practice ‘social distancing.’ This is an extraordinarily difficult thing to do in practice, as it is our relationships and our social connections that give us meaning and identity.

Times of crisis bring the best and the worst out in people. We see the selfishness of people fighting over toilet rolls, and we see the grace of people handing out food to those who are shut in. It has been said that if you want to find out what is contained in a glass, bump it so that some of it spills. We have all been ‘bumped.’ What, I wonder, has spilt out of you?

Christians are no more immune from suffering and pandemics than anyone else. As the Bible says, “the rain falls on the just and the unjust” (Matthew 5:45). Does this mean that God doesn’t occasionally bring his healing to people’s lives? Certainly not. All Christians have the responsibility of seeking God and discerning his will regarding healing when faced with suffering. But miracles of healing are, by definition, rare. Therefore, Christians need to be as wise and vigilant as anyone else when putting into place measures that will help them and their families stay safe.

Christians have an extraordinary advantage over those who do not know God. We have one foot in the brutal reality of this world, and another in the kingdom of God that is to come. This means that we can view the challenges of ‘now’ from the perspective of eternity in which God has promised to “wipe away every tear,” (Revelation 21:4). As such, we can sit over times of suffering rather than be crushed under them. Suffering and death do not have the last word for Christians. God does.

You and I have been chosen to exist at this particular time in history. God has reserved us for this time. So, let me say: “This is our time. This is our time to shine and leave our mark on people’s lives and on history’s page.”

When the world despairs of life; let them see our hope. When the world is being selfish and hoarding resources that should be shared; let the church be shocking in its kindness and self-sacrifice. This is the way of Christ. It is also, incidentally, the only way the church can rebuild its shattered reputation in the psyche of the Western world that has scorned the church for the abuses it has allowed to occur within its institutions.

So, may I say again: This is time for the church to be shocking in its level of kindness and self-sacrifice. Only by doing so, will we, the church, be faithful to Jesus’ command. He said:

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another (John 13:34-35).

It is significant that Jesus says he is issuing a “new command” to love, even though God had already commanded his people to “love your neighbour” centuries earlier in the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:17-18). So what ‘new thing’ was Jesus introducing?

The key phrase that tells us is, “as I have loved you.” In saying this, Jesus is lifting the bar on the quality of love he wants us to show, so that it matches his sort of love, i.e. the sort of love that is sacrificial. Jesus makes this clear a few chapters later in John’s gospel when he says:

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends (Jn 15:12-13).

This is our challenge for today, dear friends.

## 49. Did God Send Covid 19?

**March 30, 2020**

As I survey the theological landscape during this time when Covid 19 is creating havoc, I see pastors and ordinary Christians struggling with this question: “Did God send Covid 19?” Some thump their Bibles and say it is God’s judgment. Others daren’t look in that direction and speak only of it being an opportunity for doing good. Yet others speak of God promising to keep us from harm, whilst others struggle to find the relevance of God (or the goodness of God) in the middle of the crisis at all.

So, what can I say that will help?

Whenever we are faced with a tough theological question, a good practice is to go the Scriptures and identify those key truths that are relevant to the question, which we can be certain about. These truths act like fences that keep us from straying into danger.

We can then ring our tough question with these truths (fences) and say that the answer to our question has to be contained somewhere within that ring of truths.

If we do this with the question: “Did God send Covid 19?” it would be reasonable to come up with the following eight truths within which our answer can be found. Here they are:

1. God is loving, and is the perfect definition of love (John 3:16; 1 John 4:10). He has promised to be with us in all situations (Psalm 23:4).
2. Times of crisis are times of opportunity when we can show God’s kingdom principles of love, generosity and self-sacrifice (John 15:12-13; 2 Corinthians 1:3-5).
3. God always has the right to bring judgement on us in this life as a consequence of us choosing evil. He has warned us of this reality (Genesis 3; Deuteronomy 28:58-59; 30:1-20). God’s judgement is always aimed at bringing about our repentance so that new beginnings and blessings can follow (2 Chronicles 7:14).
4. God is just, and is the perfect definition of justice (Deuteronomy 32:4; Is 30:18)
5. Evil (encouraged by Satan) is a reality. We all live in a broken and fallen world, and we all share in its dangers (Matthew 5:45). Even nature itself is waiting to be redeemed (Romans 8:22-23). This means that Christians will not have an easier time of it than everyone else. They will, for example, be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12).
6. God sometimes uses a situation of sickness to display his glory by healing people (John 9:2-3).

7. Times of trial can help us grow godly character (James 1:2-4) and grow our trust in God (2 Corinthians 1:3-9; 12:10).
8. This life is not all there is. Christians can view it from the perspective of eternity. God, and his goodness will ultimately triumph. Evil will be judged and killed off (Romans 8:35; Revelation 21:1-4).

If we do theology this way, it will stop us from considering one truth in isolation from all the others. It will remind us that any truth claim we make must be congruent with all the others we have identified.

How do we make this list a little more helpful?

Some of the eight truths are, (for Christians at least), “givens.” In other words, we can accept them and lean on them as they are. This would be the case for truths 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8.

Other truths call for discernment, e.g. truths 3 and 6.

Yet other truths are Christian ‘obligations.’ They state what Christians do (as unambiguously taught by Scripture) in relation to the issue, e.g. truth 2.

And some truths are a mixture of the above, e.g. truth 3.

The challenge for us is to live these truths out in our daily lives.

So, there it is. I hope that helps.

As with all things concerning God, we have to allow for bit of mystery when considering the big issues of life, so, be humble enough to allow it. However, we must also be wise enough to learn what God has had written in Scripture—things he wants us know—things he has put there for our own good.

God bless you.

# 50. Is It Worth Praying During The Covid 19 Pandemic?

**April 7, 2020**

These are extraordinary days. We have seen films on the Internet of Italians prostrating themselves in prayer before God in city squares beseeching God to have mercy on them. The big question, of course, is whether prayer changes anything. What do you think?

According to research done by associate professor Jeanet Bentzen at the University of Copenhagen, the number of Google searches for “prayer” has increased by 40 percent during the Covid pandemic. This has been the case for almost all nations, with requests peaking typically forty days after the first case is reported in a nation. This phenomenon was not seen in the global financial crisis of 2007 – 2009... and that is probably understandable. The GFC might make you broke, but it didn’t kill you.

Covid 19 is a pandemic, a plague of truly biblical proportions.

Biblical... hmm... there’s a thought.

People have responded differently to Covid 19 depending on their character and what their world-view is, i.e. what they believe about their origin, meaning and destiny. It appears, however, that this pandemic has pricked the atheistic/hedonistic hubris of many in the West. Perhaps we have been reminded that we are not gods; we can’t do everything “my way,” and centre everything on “my” pleasures. This plague has brought us all face to face with our mortality. It has forced us to think about what it is that truly is good, worthwhile, and what it is that gives meaning. Faced with the reality of a plague, the banal antics of “Married at First Sight” leave a bad taste in more people’s mouths. They are seeing it for what it is: salacious immorality with pretentious of social virtue.

Even the media seems to have become kinder. They are no longer savaging politicians or fuelling stories of crisis in quite the same way. They now have a real crisis on their hands. Stories of kindness and humour have become part of the daily news report.

There is a real danger that our society may become better as a result of this dreadful pandemic. It would be a lovely outcome, wouldn’t it? My only hope is that it is true... and that it lasts.

But this is avoiding the issue we began with: Does prayer change anything?

The answer depends, in part, on the type of prayer. I suspect that some of the increased interest in prayer is a reflection of people’s desperate search for comfort and relief in the face of crisis. For some, it will be little more than superstition—loading “the odds” in your favour. This sort of prayer

is a bit like “not walking on the cracks of a pavement,” or “walking under a ladder.” Whilst God, in his grace, may hear such prayer, I’m not convinced of its efficacy.

But what about prayer that is truly relational? What about prayer that seeks the reality of God—prayer in which the petitioner sees the holiness of God, and in that light, sees the state of their own sinfulness and the sinfulness of their nation? What about prayer in which there is true humility and repentance? Wow! If the testimony of biblical history is true, that type of prayer is powerful.

The Bible makes it clear that God created so that he could have a loving relationship with us. Love was his motive. But whilst love was his motive, holiness is his character. And that means that he has a zero tolerance for selfishness, cruelty and arrogance. That’s why he has promised to kill it off and make all things “new”—eventually.

Meanwhile, God holds his hands out to us, and invites us to pray, i.e. to talk with him honestly. Why?... because he is relational. The relevance of this is fairly obvious. If prayer didn’t change anything, God wouldn’t ask us to pray. It would be a futile exercise. But God loves doing life with us... and prayer is the language of communication.

The consistent theme of the prophets in the Old Testament is God pleading with his people to stop being evil, selfish and unfaithful because such behaviour will earn his judgment. God is not indifferent to evil. However, this message is always paired with another — a message of encouragement in which God beseeches his people to repent and embrace what is holy and true. God promises that if they do, God will “heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14). God’s agenda, you see, is not one of punishment but one of healing. God wants us to have a restored relationship with him.

And that is why people of humility and conviction pray.

It has been the testimony of history that prayer changes things. That doesn’t mean that bad things never happen to Christians. They do. The Bible says that the “rain falls on the just and the unjust” (Matthew 5:45). It also says that God has chosen never to be so obvious as to compel faith. He always leaves room for the need for us to have the faith of a trusting child if we are to know him. Christians know full well that the best is yet to come, (when God will bring his kingdom). But in the meantime, they pray, for they know that prayer changes things.

I invite you to be one of those who bring about that change.

# 5 1. Who Are The Prophets Of Our Time?

**April 11, 2020**

Where does today's society get its sense of identity from? Where does it get its values from?

I suggest that society doesn't get it from anything very academic. Society gets its values from films, songs and media opinion leaders who speak in fifteen-second sound-bites. I'm reminded of Simon and Garfunkel's song, Sounds of Silence, in which they sing: "the words of the prophets are written on the subway walls..."

Today's society, it would seem, lazily absorbs the cultural values taught by films, songs and media opinion leaders who ape the trending values of the day.

Should this be of concern?

Yes and no.

I say "no" because I am very glad society does not go to our university's philosophy departments for answers about meaning and values.

Why do I say this?

Many Western philosophers have closed their minds to the idea of God and can only see life through the filter of atheism. As a result of this, the art of philosophy has largely died... and philosophy departments have closed in many universities. Hardly anyone in our nation can name a current philosopher who is making a significant impact on the culture of our time.

Why is this?

I've had a little peek into the world of modern philosophy, and I don't like much of what I see. It is a world that has invented its own vocabulary—a secret language that is unintelligible to most other people. But whilst modern philosophy's inability to communicate itself in common language is a major failing, it is not its main failing. Its main failing is that philosophers in the last century or so have chosen to put on "blinkers" that stop them seeing the rational, moral, social, philosophic and historical evidence for God. As it is only God who gives humankind any grounds for knowing our identity, meaning, values and hope, modern philosophy has nothing to say. It can only offer silence when it comes to the "big" questions of life.

As a result of this, modern philosophy has been in retreat, and can only do two things:

1. It has stopped asking questions about the big issues of identity, meaning and values... and concentrated on bickering about the rules of logical thought. In other words, today's philosophers have turned philosophy into a sterile academic mind game. And nobody cares much about that.



2. The second thing modern philosophy has done as it journeyed down its atheistic rabbit hole, was to come to the inevitable conclusion that life is meaningless; that there is no such thing as truth. Nothing is inherently “good” or “sacred.”

Well... thanks very much you modern philosophers. You are not only incomprehensible, but you are so blinkered that you are completely unable to offer anything to humanity other than meaninglessness... and a philosophy of living that is as mournful as it is destructive.

It is destructive because their thinking boils down to “do your own thing; be your own God.” This, of course, opens the doors to unbridled, self-centred hedonism. This really got under way in 1960’s with the thinking of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905 – 1980). He advocated polygamy and had, at one time, four mistresses on the go. His philosophy of “loose-living” and revolutionary ideas perfectly suited the climate of the 60s. Then eventually, all the revolutionaries woke up sexually dissipated, without knowing who they were. And when they grew up a bit more, they couldn’t pass on any meaning or values to their children. Some of the better informed also noticed Jean-Paul’s revolutionary Marxist ideals being played out by Pol-Pot’s murderous regime in Cambodia.

Earlier in history, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900) had formulated his atheistic philosophy. It was essentially a philosophy of “might is right,” that espoused the need to ape the animal kingdom and compete so that you became strong. Notions of compassion, empathy and self-sacrifice must be scorned in life’s quest to be “superman.” Hitler massaged this philosophy so that it underpinned his Nazi ideals and the horrors of his extermination camps. Sadly for Nietzsche, his loose living resulted in him getting syphilis, which was probably responsible for sending him mad for the last ten years of his life.

So... if that’s the best modern philosophy can offer—good riddance.

But there is a part of me that knows that notionally, philosophy should be concerned with ideas of truth, meaning and sound reasoning—and that, surely, is a good thing. I, for one, would welcome truth that was a little more than that written on a subway wall. But if you are to do philosophy well, you will need to take off the blinkers and consider the rational, social, historical and moral evidences that exist for God.

Anti-theism removes reason from existence, and removes what’s sacred from humanity. This has led to scientific absurdity and the most horrific evils of history. Put simply: The madness of anti-theism has delivered hell on earth. In contrast, authentic Christianity has been civilisation’s greatest blessing.

So, when you hear of the love of a man dying on a cross to pay the price for your sins... take him seriously.

Happy Easter.

## 52. Why Unbelief?

**April 20, 2020**

In my experience, people don't commit their lives to Christ for one of four reasons. I wonder if you agree. These four reasons are:

1. the rational failure of God
2. the moral failure of God
3. the moral failure of the church
4. the moral failure of self

The rational failure of God is the conviction that the very idea of God is logically absurd.

I have given reasons why belief in God is rationally credible in earlier blogs so I won't repeat myself here. But permit me to say something that may appear back-to-front reasoning. It is this: If God exists, then it cannot be true that belief in him is irrational. It has to be rational. In fact, belief in God has to be the "last word" in rationality, because God (if he exists) is the last word in what is rationally true.

Personally, I believe there are very good reasons for taking the existence of God seriously. But I think it is important to understand that whilst people of faith know that what they believe is rational, they also know that their faith in God is more than rational. This makes logical sense. The truth about God is (and necessarily has to be) more than that which our rational brains can conceive if God is to be more than something our brains have conceived.

Let's move on to the perceived moral failure of God—particularly in regards to suffering.

Suffering is a vexing subject and, for all of us, a deeply personal one. It is impossible to give quick, trite answers. I will therefore mention just two things. The first is that God shares your grief. He grieves with you because he loves you. The shortest verse in the Bible is: "Jesus wept." He did so when he saw the grief of two sisters caused by the death of their brother Lazarus. God understands your grief... and shares it.

The second thing is this: If you have suffered from grief, abuse or injustice, know that God is angry. He hates it. That's why he has set a time when the imperfections of this world will end, will be judged, and will be killed off. God's eternal kingdom is God's "end game," and he wants you to be part of it. That's the place where every tear will be wiped dry (Revelation 21:4) and all the things that once bewildered you will become clear... although I very much suspect that you won't even remember your questions when you're there!

Another reason for lack of belief is the moral failure of the church. Sadly, there is no shortage of examples here. I think it has to be said that the institutional expression of church has often been imperfect, evil, unfaithful and un-Christ-like. People with a lust for prestige and power have sought to use Christianity as weapon to further their ambitions. But alongside the fallible institutional church, there exists the “true church,” the church that embodies the grace and truth of Jesus. We see its beautiful influence on individuals, families, cities and nations.

None of us would dare say who belongs to which church—only God can do that. In reality, most Christians know themselves to be living in both the fallible church and the faithful church. We know this because the church is a reflection of us. We are both. That is why every single one of us needs God’s grace and forgiveness.

...Which brings us to the final reason for unbelief: The moral failure of self.

What I mean by “the moral failure of self” is the deliberate choice of someone to live autonomously from God so they can “do their own thing.” Note: this is a moral failure from God’s perspective, not from the perspective of the person who spurns God. They are usually very happy living life without reference to the meaning, purpose, forgiveness and protective constraints of God.

I have very little to say about this other than to urge you not to be one of them. The very worse thing God can do (and will do) is honour your decision to have nothing to do with him—eternally. And that would be a pity, for you were created to live forever with God in his kingdom. God’s judgement is a reality, so please choose well.

## 53. It Only Takes One Generation

**April 28, 2020**

Following The Reformation, ninety percent of Hungary and Poland was Protestant. However, within one generation, both countries were solidly Roman Catholic. The reason for this extraordinary turnaround was that the aristocracy of both nations hired Catholic Jesuits to educate their children.

It only took one generation.

Without passing judgment about whether it was a good thing for Poland and Hungary to be Catholic, this story should remind us of the importance of being eternally vigilant about whom we allow to educate our children. If your son or daughter is being educated in the humanities department of a Western university, you can almost guarantee they will finish college well indoctrinated with an anti-West, anti-Christian culture.

Sadly, the church gave up its responsibility for teaching its young adults a robust, reasoned faith, and the mournful atheistic worldview of our society has taken over their minds, leaving them anxious, angry, self-obsessed and struggling under the burden of meaninglessness.

It is a woeful indictment of Western Christianity that most churches have never taught the rational and scientific case for God in a cogent way. Even worse, some have insisted that its young adults believe scientifically absurd (and theologically unnecessary) things about creation. All I can say is that church leaders who do this will be accountable to God for putting pitfalls in front of young people seeking God. And we are not just talking about a lack of good teaching on science: most churches have not taught the basics of the philosophical reasons why faith in God is morally, historically and existentially reasonable.

There are generally two reasons for this. The first is because too many pastors, ministers and priest are themselves ignorant. Whilst they may be able to give you the latest theories of the atonement, too many remain ignorant of the issues young people are really seeking answers to: issues such as the scientific credibility of faith, suffering, and other faiths. As such, the church has not given its young adults the philosophical foundations or language they need to engage with the atheistic tsunami that is waiting to deluge them at university.

The other reason young people have left church is because its ministers, particularly in Protestant churches, lost their passion for the gospel. In 1968, America was in turmoil. Once revered pillars of society, including religious institutions, were being protested against, and the Nihilistic winds of postmodernism were being felt everywhere. It was a time when young adults could avoid being sent to Vietnam if they went to college. You may be interested to know that Bill Clinton, Joe

Biden, and Dick Cheney all had “student deferments” (but it cannot be said it was because they wanted to avoid Vietnam).

Another way you could avoid the draft was if you were a cleric. This helped lead to an influx of ordinands who brought with them from their seminaries and universities a radicalised liberal culture. It was a culture that put a priority on being critical of the gospel rather than proclaiming it. People in their congregations soon picked up on the hopelessness of liberal theology and left the church.

It only takes the loss of one generation. So, what can we do to avoid being the generation that drops the baton? How will you and I influence the next generation? Let’s pick up our responsibility and leave a worthy legacy.

# 54. The Real Reason for Atheism

May 12, 2020

Social researchers tell us that the percentage of people who are atheists is increasing in the West. It is interesting that most of them claim rational reasons for their non-belief in God.

However, research conducted by the American Psychological Association suggests this is not so. They conducted studies in which they interviewed atheists and graded the extent to which their atheism was influenced by experiences of disappointment, anger, hurt, or alienation.

What is fascinating is that 54% reported that they had relational and emotional reasons for non-belief. Another study of 429 Americans put the number even higher, at 72%. In other words, people were atheists for emotional reasons. Their non-belief had very little to do with being rational.<sup>11</sup>

After the harsh atheism of the mid twentieth century, Time magazine reported that there was a revival of belief in God amongst many of the world's top philosophers. It said:

God? Wasn't he chased out of heaven by Marx, banished to the unconscious by Freud and announced by Nietzsche to be deceased? Did not Darwin drive him out of the empirical world? Well, not entirely. In a quiet revolution in thought and arguments that hardly anyone could have foreseen only two decades ago, God is making a comeback. Most intriguingly, this is happening not among theologians or ordinary believers ... but in the crisp, intellectual circles of academic philosophers<sup>12</sup>.

It is significant that atheism's preeminent intellectual philosopher in the late 20th century, Sir Anthony Flew, came to believe in God in 2004 at the age of 81. His reason he gave for doing so was that he'd gone "where the evidence led him."

Notwithstanding the advent of the "Society of Christian Philosophers" in 1978, the interest in God by Western university philosophy departments has not generally been maintained. Atheism is now the only worldview most philosophy departments allow; and this is a pity.

Despite the fact that atheists claim their worldview is based on rationalism, in reality, it is a worldview with massive gaping holes. Atheism requires people to have a very blinkered view of reality, and requires them to hold scientific convictions that are irrational. Specifically, it requires:

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<sup>11</sup> Bradley, D. F., Exline, J. J., & Uzdevins, A. (2016, March 17). Relational reasons for nonbelief in the existence of gods: An important adjunct to intellectual nonbelief. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*. Advanceonline publication.

Exline, J. J., Park, C. L., Smyth, J. M., & Carey, M. P. (2011). Anger toward God: Social-cognitive predictors, prevalence, and links with adjustment to bereavement cancer. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 100, 129-148.

<sup>12</sup> Timemagazine, 7th April, 1980.

1. the belief that everything in the universe (or universes) came from nothing, as a result of nothing.
2. the belief that the absurd level of order and ‘fine-tuning’ of the universe (which has allowed life) is the result of some unknown factor... when the only factor known that has ever explained such a thing is ‘intelligence.’
3. an ignorance of world history and of worldviews that have been responsible for the best when it comes to civility and justice.
4. the belief that the deep-seated moral code within us is simply a product of evolution which has taught us that things are more ‘efficient’ for our species if we co-operate and are nice. It requires you to believe this, even when evolution has taught us the most other animals to kill off rivals from other species, and sometimes even from within their own species.
5. an ignorance of Jesus Christ and the historical evidence surrounding the gospel claims of his life, death and resurrection.

Put simply: the empiricist prison of atheism doesn’t match most people’s experience of life.

So, what can we conclude?

Atheism may hide behind the coat-tails of rationality, but when you sweep the coat-tails away, it is difficult to see anything other than wounded people... or those who are ‘wilful atheists,’ i.e. those who ‘want to’ not believe, because they want to ‘do their own thing.’

Evidence suggests that there is a mind behind the universe... and if this is so, we’d do well to find out about that ‘Mind’... and co-operate with the big plan.



# 55. Why Do I Believe In God?

**May 19, 2020**

Why do I believe in God?

It's a good question. Why do you and I believe what we do? Is what we believe simply what is convenient to us? Crucially, is it based on truth? Or... have we not really thought about what we have staked our life on?

If you were to ask me why I believe what I do, I might, in a whimsical moment, say this:

Imagine a five-inch thick slab of concrete resting on two walls, three yards apart. If you were to drop a bowling ball onto that slab, it would shatter and collapse. If, however, that same slab was reinforced with iron mesh, you could drop bowling balls onto it for as long as you like, and it would remain intact.

Why do I tell you this?

Because the consistent principles of God taught in Scripture are for me my reinforced iron mesh. It holds everything together in my life. And because the mesh is something "given" to me, I can't boast about having created it. I can claim no merit, other than having the God-given wisdom to accept it.

This does not mean that I accept the mesh mindlessly without testing its worth. I do test it. I test it for strength by trying to bend it and break it to see if it is trustworthy. I test it against all the things in life that whisper truth.

Is what I believe scientifically reasonable? Yes, it is. There is no evidence that everything can come from nothing as a result of nothing.

Is it morally true? Yes: The morality epitomised by Jesus has never been improved on.

Is it historically true? Yes; Christianity is not just a philosophy, but is something grounded in history—a history for which there is evidence.

Is Christianity truly transformative of the human condition? Yes: It changes individuals, families, cities and nations, making them "good." It has been the testimony of history that nothing produces a civilised society so well as authentic Christianity.

These are some of the tests I do to examine the worth of the reinforcing mesh.

Conducting these 'tests' is not an expression of lack of faith. It is sensible. If God is God, then all truth has its origin in God. Therefore, all truths, whether scientific, moral or philosophical, should support each other and make room for each other.

However, I will admit that when I come to testing the reinforcing mesh, I do so with a degree of respect. This is not to pre-empt the outcome of what I will believe, but because the mesh has earned respect. I pick it up knowing that the mesh (the consistent principles of Scripture) has stood the test of time. It is the testimony of millions of people that these principles have never been improved on. This respect is also fuelled by knowledge of what occurs when these principles are ignored e.g. by the atheistic philosophies of Hitler, Stalin, Chairman Mao and Pol Pot... and increasingly, by the secular West. The results are very ugly.

So, I have tested God's biblical principles that I've sought to use to mould my life and hold it together... and I have found them to be fabulously strong.

You might reasonably ask at this point: "What is it, Nick, that you bring to the party, if you are just relying on God to give you your strength?"

In short, I bring the cement. That is to say: I bring myself—and nothing more. My contribution is simply:

1. my identity
2. my ability to comprehend, at least in part, those things that are true and good.

So, there it is: That's why I am a Christian. That's why I put my trust in God's word—as embodied in Scripture. That's why my hope is in Christ... and that's why my joy is in Christ.

Now, may I ask: Why do you believe in what you do?

## 56. True Atheists Can't Allow Moral Outrage

May 26, 2020

Some evil is so shocking that it defies belief. A Nazi guard asking a mother to choose which of her two children will be taken to the gas chamber; the rape and mutilation of women in war; tossing babies in the air and catching them on bayonets...

How do you respond to this?

This sort of raw evil cause a visceral outrage in most of us. Only the depraved and those who are evilly deluded could think otherwise. We know instinctively that these things are wrong.

This prompts the question: How do people become evil, and what worldviews encourage it?

Hitler adapted Nietzsche's atheistic philosophy and used it to underpin his Nazi ideology. Without the constraints of God, it became perfectly okay for Hitler to dominate, enslave and kill the weak. His abiding ambition was for the Arian race to take over Europe through savage warfare, and establish itself as the crowning power of Europe, indeed: of history.

In doing this, Hitler was simply imitating the brutal reality of the animal and plant world. It was therefore 'natural.' But whilst there is some sort of perverse logic to this thinking, most of us would recoil at the evil it sanctioned... and we would do so at a deep, visceral level. The same is true for Communism. It too has stripped humanity of its sacredness and subsumed everything to the wellbeing of 'The Party.' This philosophy explained the evils committed by Pol Pot and his army. (They did the bayonet thing with the babies.)

But here's the question: If there is no God to guarantee what is morally good or morally evil, how can we know what 'good' actually is? At best, all we can say is that evolution has taught us that things are more 'efficient' for our species if we co-operate and are nice. But that doesn't really satisfy. After all, evolution has taught most other animals to kill off rivals from other species, and even from within their own species.

So, the big question then is: Where do atheists get their 'visceral' moral code from? If they hold true to their atheistic tenets, atheists can't have moral outrage. They can only talk in terms of what is efficient for the wellbeing of their DNA.

From this, I can only conclude that most atheists actually make very bad atheists. Put simply: Their worldview is not consistent with what they experience in reality.

Some atheists speak of 'good' as something that is self evident, and therefore we don't need God to be moral. There are two responses that can be made to this claim.

The first is that for many atheists, morality is self-evident only because they have a folk-memory of the Christian culture that instilled it in the lives of their grandparents<sup>13</sup>.

The sad reality is that many atheists are leaning on the Christian heritage of their forbears... whilst simultaneously whittling these values away. Quite how long these values will last in their hands, who knows.

The other thing worth mentioning is that Christian morality is not self-evident in many cultures that have no knowledge of Jesus. In some cultures, trickery and deceit are lauded (e.g. by the Sawi tribe in Irian Jaya, pre 1960). In others, strength and dominance over others was lauded above all else (e.g. the early Roman Empire).

What we can say, however, is that most humans are instinctively moral beings. The Bible suggests this is so because we are made in the image of God, who is the preeminent moral being.

So, what can we conclude?

Simply this: If you want to be authentically and consistently moral, you need to acknowledge God. Otherwise, there is no reason, value or purpose in the 'good' you define for yourself. And what happens when the 'good' of my happiness is threatened by your 'good?' Whose 'good' wins? Without God, morality falls into a heap.

This reality has even percolated through to Richard Dawkins, the Oxford biologist who has made a career from being a strident atheist. He admitted that if God were eliminated from society, people would behave poorly. Dawkins cited an experiment carried out by Professor Melissa Bateson of the University of Newcastle. It entailed setting up a coffee station with an 'honesty box' system of payment. Evidently, when a picture of a large pair of eyes was displayed near the honesty box, customers were three times more likely to pay. It instilled the idea that someone was watching. So, if morality is important to you, seek out the God who guarantees it.

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<sup>13</sup> Even non-atheistic philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and Søren Kierkegaard have fallen into this trap. Both tried to think of rational reasons for morality that didn't require God. Although Kant and Kierkegaard believed in God, they tried to find a philosophy for morality that didn't require people to believe in a higher being.

# 57. What Will Our Future Look Like?

**June 3, 2020**

Thirty-seven percent of Australians didn't agree that same sex people should be able to marry according to the national poll that resulted in Australia allowing same sex marriage.

What on earth are we to do with that thirty-seven percent?

As time passes, it is becoming very evident what is being done. They are being banned from trading (having gainful employment). They are being pilloried on social media; they cannot get tenure in an academic department at a university, and they very definitely will not be employed by the Australian Broadcasting Commission.

They do not conform, so they cannot be tolerated, you see. Since the Christian civility of "love your enemies" has been trashed, those who don't think mainstream Woke must be attacked as enemies. Not only do you have to be allowed to think your neo-Marxist ideas, everyone else must too. There can be no exceptions.

Wow! I'm bound to ask: Is this the freedom people bled and died for? It is frightening. People now speak in hushed whispers, if at all, about their true feelings about what common sense and a balanced understanding of history show to be true. But they daren't say it out loud. Someone might hear... then 'bang' goes your reputation and job. Shh... the Communist Stasi police, sorry, the Woke keyboard warriors might hear.

And no one is questioning it. The free, civilised, open debate once so prized by a Western civilisation that was underpinned by Christian principles, is no more. Western civilisation must now be condemned as being racist, homophobic, imperialistic and inherently destructive of planet Earth.

Now I am the first to say that Western civilisation is not perfect and has its flaws... but I am hard pressed to point to a political culture that is doing things better. Has Russian or Chinese communism—which collectively killed over 60 million of their own people in their drive to enforce farm collectivisation? Did Pol Pot? Did the nations founded on the worldview of Islamic fundamentalism (about which Western Woke-ness is strangely quiet)? Whenever has it been shown that Marxism, (with its deconstruction of Christianity, family and morality) ever worked? And yet, the jack-booted strictures of today's media and academic institutions are taking us there.

And what does "there" look like? What is the Nirvana they aim for? Does anyone know?

Is it a world where everyone must be the same? Is it a world that can allow no differences between the sexes, perhaps other than to say that women are superior? Is it a world where conformity is

insisted on? Is it a future where you will be marginalised and robbed of opportunity if you don't conform?

Well... I just want to say, that I don't like the look of that very much. And I'm not very excited at the idea of it being foisted on my grandchildren. Will they, I wonder, look back with incredulity in the history books (if they are allowed to read them) to a time when people put a value on truth, on common sense, and on civil debate, i.e. to a time when they were free?

I wonder where the thinkers of our time are. Who is saying, "The king has no clothes on," and wake us up from this madness? Do we find them in our academic institutions? No, they must conform, or lose their jobs. Do we find them in the media? No, they must conform to the prevailing Woke culture, or lose their job. So, where are the prophets of our time, the ones who will speak truth; the ones who will do so even though Jesus warned that God's prophets would always be killed, ridiculed or imprisoned (Matthew 23:34,37). (Matthew is a book in the Bible. And the Bible was once a book... oh well, never mind. It's now been cast off as an irrelevancy.)

So, here is a message to the brave: Continue to whisper the dangerous truth of God's grace. Continue to read the stories of an eternal God whose love for us took him to the cross. Continue to teach what good thinking looks like, what freedom smells like. Tell it to your children and your grandchildren... and who knows, maybe again, freedom will burst forth like the sun to warm our bones, bones chilled by the dead hand of enforced Neo-Marxist thinking.

# 58. The Atheist's Dilemma Over Death And Suffering

**June 10, 2020**

Death and suffering are a reality for every one of us. So... may I ask: How well does your “world-view” handle it?

If you are (very reasonably) wondering what I mean by “world-view;” it is what you believe about your origins, meaning, morality and destiny. How well does your world-view address the reality of death and suffering which you must face?

The reason I ask this is that I'm not sure atheism handles it very well.

When faced with death or suffering, the atheist can do one of two things:

1. He or she can rail in moral outrage against God—which was what the Russian revolutionary Lennin did, right up to the moment he died (according to the biography of his daughter). The problem with this, of course, is that if there is no God, it is senseless thing to do. To do is logically absurd.
2. The alternative course of action is to simply shrug the shoulders at the obscenity of death and suffering and say that both are nasty symptoms of the meaninglessness of existence. (Note: This will require the atheist to be blind to the ridiculously high level of order, codes and finely balanced forces that have enabled life to develop in the universe.)

For the atheist, death and suffering should evoke no emotion at all. Both are simply symptoms of the meaningless “fluke” they have found themselves alive in.

In the face of this meaninglessness, there can be only three responses:

1. Live a life that gives as much pleasure as possible, i.e. a life of self-centred hedonism. But a note of warning: If this option is chosen, it has been the experience of history that it will not satisfy. You will be left with a withered soul that aches for more. The soul seeks inexorably for meaning as a compass needle seeks North Pole.
2. Another option is to be appalled at the brutal reality of meaninglessness and bale out of the whole dreadful “bad joke” by being a mournful depressive. Some people are beginning to ask whether there is a connection between the growing incidence of suicide in the West, and the growing sense of meaninglessness in society<sup>14</sup>.
3. The final option is to borrow some of Christianity's principles and live a life that is relationally rich and full of acts of service. In other words, an atheist can elect to live a

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<sup>14</sup> See: “A crisis of meaninglessness is to blame for the rise in suicides” (Dallas News, 25th June, 2018).

“good” life and thereby force a meaning on a meaningless life—even if it is only self-delusion. Of course, the atheist can’t really call what they do “good” because there is no God to guarantee what “good” is. Good is simply what leaves them feeling... well, “good.” And isn’t that interesting? When the atheist lives the Christian way, they feel fulfilled and happy despite knowing that everything they do has no ultimate meaning.

And so we leave the bewildered atheists in their conundrum. Their soul wants to point north, whilst their head wants to point south.

The reality is, atheism is not kind to the soul—unless it borrows some principles for living from Christianity. Neither is it kind to the mind because it requires its adherents to live with contradictions. An atheist also has to be very careful not to dwell too much on the logical outcome of their concept of truth. Truth is a beautiful thing when it shines a light on hope, but it is a terrible thing when it shines a light on hopelessness.

So, what can we say to conclude?

Atheism may give you the mandate to live life as you want, but you will have to pay a heavy price for it.

May I therefore recommend the alternative? Consider carefully the evidence for a god... who has hung his business card in the cosmos, taught us his purpose in Scripture, and come for us in person to rescue us back to himself<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Quoting an earlier blog.



## 59. Why Atheist Intellectuals Become Christians

**June 23, 2020**

It is enlightening to read the testimonies of eminent academics who were once atheists, and learn what it was that caused them to do a U turn and embrace belief in God.

One of them was the British writer and intellectual, Francis Spufford, professor of creative writing at Goldsmiths College, London. His is an interesting case because he came to faith partly as a result of observing the difference in moral behaviour between atheists and Christians. He said that he lost his faith in atheism partly as a result of feeling that his secular circle was more judgmental and unforgiving than the church he and his atheist friends had mocked. It dawned on him that; despite not consistently living up to their ideals, Christians at least held the key to human acceptance and community. Christians were under no illusions; they had a profound belief in each other's imperfection and guilt. However, they had an even deeper trust in God's forgiveness. In this "league of the guilty," as Spufford put it, no one had grounds for looking down on anyone else, and no one had any bragging rights. This highly attractive aspect of Christianity helped him become a practicing Christian. Spufford even married an Anglican priest, the Reverend Dr. Jessica Martin who, at the time of writing, is a canon at Ely Cathedral.

The other intellectual who became a Christian is, of course, Anthony Flew. It is difficult to do justice to the shock his conversion caused the atheistic world. In the late twentieth century, Flew was the front-runner making the philosophic case for atheism. He was their 'thinker.' So when he came to believe in the existence of God, it caused dismay and unbelief amongst atheists.

What I love about Flew's story is the courage he displayed in seeking truth. He did not withdraw from debate with leading Christians, but sought out their thinking with the sincere objective of understanding it. So it was that in 2004, Flew became a theist.

The reason he gave for believing in God was the extraordinary 'fine tuning' of our universe that enabled it to develop sentient life. He said, "I now believe that the universe was brought into existence by an infinite Intelligence. I believe that this universe's intricate laws manifest what scientists have called the Mind of God. I believe that life and reproduction originate in a divine Source." Flew made it quite clear that he had come to his position, not because of fear of death in his advancing age, or because he had lost his intellectual faculties. Quite the reverse: he said that, "the journey to my discovery of the Divine has thus far been a pilgrimage of reason. I have followed the argument where it has led me. And it has led me to accept the existence of a self-existent, immutable, immaterial, omnipotent, and omniscient Being."

Flew went on to say: “Science spotlights three dimensions of nature that point to God. The first is the fact that nature obeys laws. The second is the dimension of life, of intelligently organised and purpose-driven beings, which arose from matter. The third is the very existence of nature.”

So, there we have it: observations of morality and observations of scientific reality have caused intellectual atheists to believe in the existence of God.

# 60. Science Led Einstein To God

**June 30, 2020**

If you Google ‘Einstein and Christianity’ you will discover an unseemly squabble between Christians wanting to claim Einstein was a Christian, and atheists who want to insist he was an atheist. Each wants Einstein, and his brilliance, to be on their side to lend them credibility.

The truth concerning Einstein is actually much more interesting—and, I submit, significant.

Einstein was a brilliant scientist. He was not, however, a brilliant theologian... and it is perhaps unfair for people to expect him to be one. Theology was not his area of study. What is significant is that science took Einstein as far as it could toward God. Einstein’s scientific study convinced him of God’s existence. It gave him good reasons to believe in a higher being. However, that was as far as he was able to go. Although he was firmly convinced of the historical reality of Jesus Christ, theology was not his forte. As such, he was not able to give a conventional Christian definition to the God he’d discovered.

Einstein’s parents were atheistic Jews, so he didn’t have a Christian heritage. He had also observed some overbearing behaviour from church institutions, and this did nothing to endear him to conventional Christianity. As such, Einstein contented himself in being a theist (someone who believes in a god). Why? Because that’s where the science took him. He did not believe in a god who was interested in us personally. As such, his brand of theism could best be described as “Deism.” Sometimes, in his uncertainty, he described himself as an agnostic (someone who isn’t sure about God’s existence.) But he made it quite clear that he was not, and never had been, an atheist (someone who is convinced that there is no God.)

The significance of Einstein’s story is that science took one the greatest minds of modern history to God. Therefore, to suggest that science must inevitably do the opposite is quite wrong.

Here are some of his quotes:

I’m not an atheist, and I don’t think I can call myself a pantheist. We are in the position of a little child entering a huge library filled with books in many languages. The child knows someone must have written those books. It does not know how. It does not understand the languages in which they are written. The child dimly suspects a mysterious order in the books but doesn’t know what it is. That, it seems to me, is the attitude of even the most intelligent human being toward God.

In view of such harmony in the cosmos which I, with my limited human mind, am able to recognise, there are yet people who say there is no God. But what really makes me angry is that they quote me for the support of such views.

I want to know how God created this world ... I want to know His thoughts, the rest are details.

So... if you wish to be influenced by one of the greatest scientific minds in history, let Einstein introduce you to God.

# 61. The Finest Scientific Minds In History... And God

July 8, 2020

Some, who may not know much about science, think quite wrongly that rational science has no place for God. Nothing could be further from the truth—as these quotes from the finest minds in history show:

The French biochemist, **Louis Pasteur** (1822 – 1882) arguably the father of modern medicine.

Posterity will one day laugh at the foolishness of modern materialistic philosophers. The more I study nature, the more I stand amazed at the work of the Creator. I pray while I am engaged at my work in the laboratory.

The Scottish scientist, **James Clerk Maxwell** (1831 – 1879) responsible for formulating the classical electromagnetic theory.

Science is incompetent to reason upon the creation of matter itself out of nothing. We have reached the utmost limit of our thinking faculties when we have admitted that because matter cannot be eternal and self-existent it must have been created.

**Charles Darwin** (1809 – 1882) the English naturalist who gave scientific evidence for biological evolution.

I have never been an atheist in the sense of denying the existence of God.

I feel compelled to look to a First Cause having an intelligent mind, in some degree analogous to that of man; and I deserve to be called a Theist.

**Arno Penzias** and his colleague Robert Wilson discovered the cosmic microwave background radiation left over from the ‘big bang.’ They were awarded a Nobel Prize for their work in 1978.

Penzias wrote:

If there are a bunch of fruit trees, one can say that whoever created these fruit trees wanted some apples. In other words, by looking at the order in the world, we can infer purpose and from purpose we begin to get some knowledge of the Creator, the Planner of all this. This is, then, how I look at God. I look at God through the works of God’s hands and from those works imply intentions. From these intentions, I receive an impression of the Almighty.

Astronomy leads us to a unique event, a universe which was created out of nothing, one with the very delicate balance needed to provide exactly the conditions required to permit life, and one which has an underlying (one might say ‘supernatural’) plan.

**Christopher Isham** (theoretical physicist at Imperial College London, and one of Britain's leading quantum cosmologists)

Perhaps the best argument ... that the Big Bang supports theism is the obvious unease with which it is greeted by some atheist physicists. At times this has led to scientific ideas ... being advanced with a tenacity which so exceeds their intrinsic worth, that one can only suspect the operation of psychological forces lying very much deeper than the usual academic desire of a theorist to support his or her theory.

**Werner Heisenberg**(1901 – 1976) was an eminent German quantum physicist.

In the course of my life I have repeatedly been compelled to ponder on the relationship of these two regions of thought (science and religion), for I have never been able to doubt the reality of that to which they point.”

**Colin Russell** (1928 – 2013) was professor of history at Cambridge and the UK's 'Open University.'

The common belief that... the actual relations between religion and science over the last few centuries have been marked by deep and enduring hostility... is not only historically inaccurate, but actually a caricature so grotesque that what needs to be explained is how it could possibly have achieved any degree of respectability.

**Freeman Dyson** (1923 – 2020, theoretical physicist and mathematician)

The more I examine the universe and study the details of its architecture, the more evidence I find that the universe in some sense knew we were coming.

If the truth of science has led these brilliant minds to God, where will you allow it to lead you?

## 62. Do Atheists Know Enough

July 14, 2020

Those in the university science departments have noticed that the philosophy departments of our universities have become clubhouses for atheists. Robert Griffiths, winner of the Heinemann Prize in mathematical physics, said: “If we need an atheist for a debate, we go to the philosophy department. The physics department isn’t much use.”

It is extraordinary, isn’t it, that you don’t go to the science department (the place of all things empirical and rational) to find an atheist; you go to the philosophy department. Now, I know Griffiths’ comment is a generalisation, but it nonetheless it makes you think.

The geneticist, Baruch Shalev, documented the religious views of all 719 Nobel Prize winners from 1901 to 2000, noting the percentage that were atheists, agnostics or ‘freethinkers.’ Surprisingly, only 10.5% fell into that godless category. Very significantly, this figure dropped to only 4.7% for physicists, and rose to 35.2% for winners in literature. It would seem that those who really ‘know’ the empirical reality of the universe are those who believe in God.

If this is true, it rather suggests that our atheistic philosophers don’t know enough.

Christian Anfinsen, Nobel Laureate in chemistry said the same thing with rather less grace: “I think only an idiot can be an atheist. We must admit that there exists an incomprehensible power or force with limitless foresight and knowledge that started the whole universe going in the first place.”

The extraordinary order scientists see in the universe demands some sort of explanation. The American astrophysicist, Gregory Benford, writes: “The overwhelming impression is one of order. The more we discover about the universe, the more we find that it is governed by rational laws ... You still have the question: why does the universe bother to exist?”

Whilst science can lay bare the workings of the universe, it can’t tell us why it exists. As such, it is silent on the really big questions of life. Erwin Schrödinger (1887 – 1961) a Nobel Prize-winning physicist put it well when he said: “The scientific picture of the world around me is very deficient. It gives me a lot of factual information, puts all our experience in a magnificently consistent order, but is ghastly silent about all that is really near to our heart, that really matters to us.”

So, what does this mean for you?

I invite you think in a BIG way... and reach out to the God who holds his hands out to you.

## 63. Emmanuel, God With Us

**December 30, 2020**

It's probably fair to say that almost every heresy that has afflicted the church, whether originating from within or outside the church, has the effect of reversing "God Emmanuel". In other words, instead of promoting the idea of God being "with us" (which is what Emmanuel means), most heresy has had the effect of distancing God from us.

Such heresies began early in the life of the Christian church. Gnosticism was probably the earliest. It flourished between the second and fifth century AD. Gnosticism taught that God was too holy for sinful humanity to get close to. As such, God protected himself behind a series of emanations (like different layers of an onion). These layers could only be breached if you were considered worthy enough to be told secret "knowledge" (the Greek word for which is gnosis) that would get you through the next layer. This, of course, bred an odious form of spiritual elitism—quite apart from it being plain wrong.

It could be argued that the teaching of the highly influential 5th century theologian, Saint Augustine, had the effect of distancing people from God. He wrote some wonderful insightful stuff but he had harsh convictions concerning the utter depravity of humankind, and a harsh understanding of God who, he said, had predestined some people to go to hell and others to go to heaven. This brutal separation of people from God helped fuel a church culture that felt the need to introduce kinder and more holy intermediaries that could represent our interests to God. And so Mary and the saints were inserted. Mary was given a mythical makeover and declared to be sinless, even of having been born by St Anne by immaculate conception. People then forgot that they had direct access to God through Jesus and revived the idea of having priests, people who could act as intermediaries between people and God.

The Protestant church have been no less prone to folly. In their case, it came through allowing anti-biblical, liberal revisionism into the church – often in the form of deism. These revisionists stripped everything that was unique, diagnostic, and hope engendering from Christianity so that all that was left was bland moralism. Their god had not come to us to rescue us back to himself. Nor had Jesus been resurrected to give us hope that we too will be resurrected. No, their newly defined god remained unknowable, confusing and hidden behind the masks of a thousand different religions.

Let's agree, you and I, to step between these follies and embrace with joy "God with us" – Emmanuel. God's motive, both in creation and salvation, is to establish an eternal loving relationship with us. That's God's end game.

So, this Christmas, and this new year, let's run with God's plan.



## 64. The Wide And Narrow Gate

**January 14, 2021**

Jesus taught a terrifying truth in one of his parables. He said that most people, (please note, most people), are lazily following the mainstream of society through a wide gate that is leading to destruction (Matthew 7:13-14). If true, this is a deeply disturbing thought.

How much would you like to bet on this teaching of Jesus not being true? Would you bet your life on it? Would you bet eternity on it? Would you tell Jesus at the end of time that he was wrong and that in reality, everything will end up all right for everyone? You might insist that your idea is right because it's a nice, cuddly, inclusivist thought.

Except that Jesus actually said something very different... and he deliberately aimed what he said at those mindlessly following society's opinion leaders, who slavishly follow the "norm" in living a life of functional atheism.

Jesus said that those who truly discover life are those who actively turn against the tide of popularism and have the conviction to walk away from the broad gate where most people are headed, and push towards the narrow gate that most people ignore. This narrow gate to eternal life is, of course, Jesus. He likened himself to a gate in his famous teaching in John 10:7-10.

Here's the thing: You won't find that gate (Jesus), if you don't look for him (Matthew 7:7). To find him, you must turn away from where the mainstream is taking you, search for him... and when you see him, head resolutely towards him.

It is perhaps pertinent at this point to ponder the reasons people have for not investigating Jesus. There are many of them. But in my experience, when I dig a little deeper, the most common reason people have for not investigating Jesus is wilful ignorance fuelled by a desire to live autonomously from God.

I suggest that in the light of all God has sacrificed to win our love, to engage in such wilful ignorance is culpable behaviour worthy of God's judgement. God came to us in history to rescue us back to himself by dying on the cross to pay the price for our sins which would otherwise keep us from God. This is not an act worthy of indifference.

So, you must make your choice: Go with the flow, the majority, who are heading towards a destiny of destruction; or seek out Jesus and find life.

Your call.

## 65. Left Or Right... Or Stranded In The Middle?

January 16, 2021

It's getting hard for many Australians to find their place in today's political landscape. The left and right are now so impossibly polarised that there is no civil dialogue. Both extremes become increasingly hardened in their positions as they shout into their own echo chambers, protecting themselves and their clan with their own selected and sometimes distorted information.

It makes you wonder if we are seeing a civilisation in decay. I suspect that China rather hopes it is. Universities have allowed their humanity departments to have their thinking narrowed and conformed to a social engineering agenda. Its lecturers promulgate their green-left ideas; secure in their government funded jobs and safe in the knowledge that they have no responsibility for making their neo-Marxist or nihilistic ideas work in reality. (Who can think of a time when they have ever worked?)

It is curiously ironic that their radical agenda is funded by the institutions/government they seek to undermine.

Our university's humanity departments have generated society's opinion leaders who have become our Gnostic priests. They dominate the media and tell us what we should believe... and you depart from their teaching at your peril. You will be 'cancelled', de-platformed, rendered jobless, trolled, and pilloried unless you stay within the confines of their narrative.

Sadly, the likelihood of our universities reforming their humanity departments so that they are truly inclusive and educational is probably about the same as the ABC's ability to reform itself, i.e. zero. Both have immersed themselves so deeply in their culture that they simply don't see themselves as they truly are, or recognise they have a problem. I doubt very much will happen unless government brings some financial consequences to their narrowing of education, confining it to issues of race, gender, and sexuality, as reflected in the woke, resentment and cancel cultures they promote.

Are these militant clans partly the result of Facebook selectively feeding its subscribers the favoured rhetoric of their own clan... to the exclusion of other valid views? Is that exacerbating the problem? Certainly, the power of the giant Internet platforms is worrying. The CEO of Twitter now sits in judgement over an American President and cancels his account—and action that would be easier to accept if it was universally applied to all the vile despots using Twitter. In Australia, we have the CEO of Qantas electing himself as the nation's moral leader in the sexuality debate. He has filled the vacuum left by the institutional church that has been shamed into silence both by the abuse it has allowed to flourish within its ranks and by its lack of unity over basic doctrine.

And then we come to the appalling actions of the conspiracy theorists of the far right who feel disenfranchised and forgotten by the privileged ruling elite that has been careless of their wellbeing. I'm not sure I have the words to describe the horror and absurdity of what I have been seeing, particularly in America. I see intimidating bullies carrying assault rifles in the streets. I see people waving a pistol in one hand and a Bible in the other. What holistic understanding of the Bible has given them this mandate? How has their doctrine become such a polluted distortion of Christianity? Where do they see the likeness of their actions in the life and teaching of Jesus? Who has taught them these distortions... and why haven't church leaders risen with one voice and called it out for what it is?

And so the bewildered middle Australian is left stranded and abandoned by the absurdities of left and right. Who will speak for them?

This is the question that is currently exercising the minds of the Australian Labor party. What is their identity? Who will they represent? On one hand, they are courting the green-left vote of the inner city, latte-sipping set, whilst also wanting to protect the jobs and incomes of workers whose industry relies on affordable energy, sensible wages and a healthy market economy. After all, the workers are the ones at the end of the line who actually make things. Their industry underpins all of society. Personally, I think this opportunity to re-think, and carefully re-evaluate, could be very healthy and fruitful for the Labor Party. I want them to become a credible force that encourages a more equitable sharing of wealth. (The rate at which the richest 1% is getting richer, whilst the poor are becoming poorer is a distinct concern.) However, to do this, they will need to move beyond mindless class-warfare rhetoric, and do some seriously relevant and creative thinking... because the middle Australian, stranded between left and right, is looking for hope.

## 66. The Mauling Of Truth

**January 22, 2021**

The history of the truth being mauled by Western civilisation began innocently enough. It began with the laudable convictions of Francis Bacon, the 16th century father of scientific method. His thinking helped lay the foundation for The Enlightenment that followed in the 17th and 18th centuries. Bacon insisted that science should be restricted to the study of physical actions on material things. As such, it should not give any thought to telos (a Greek word meaning “the inherent purpose of things”). He taught that science was not the place to consider the purposes of God.

Bacon was not, however, anti-God. He was a man who had a deep faith in God and he didn't deny that there was a telos to existence. It was just that he believed that consideration of God's inherent purpose lay outside the discipline of science.

Over time, Bacon's thinking was pushed further so that it gave rise 'scientism' (the belief that science is the only valid truth, and that it alone should be used to determine our values). These were ideas popularised by the philosophers of The Enlightenment, notably John Locke (of the 17th century) and David Hume (of the 18th century), both of whom were following in the footsteps of the pre-Socratic philosophers, Democritus and Leucippus.

Their conviction that the only valid truth is that which is empirically derived was shattered by the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre. He said that truth was not fixed. There was, in reality, no empirical basis for moral truth, let alone a divine one. Consistency and reason were therefore not required. Moral truth could “define itself in the moment” depending on what was going on.

The notion of truth about the inherent purpose of things had, by now, been consummately mauled. Scientism had ripped truth from the hands of God and imprisoned it within the rational human mind. And Sartre had ripped truth from rationalism and said it could be anything you chose it to be in the moment.

The final coup de grâceto the notion of truth was delivered by postmodernism. It trashed the idea of truth altogether, saying that truth was whatever worked for you, and it viewed permanent truth claims with deep suspicion as tools of oppression.

This, of course, played neatly into the hands of the Nihilist disciples of Friedrich Nietzsche who wanted to expunge all notions of truth (and hope) and replace it with a lust for personal power. Just as worryingly, it also played into the hands of the neo-Marxists who needed to dismantle all truths held dear by the institutions that had power in society. They wanted to invert society, placing 'workers' at the top, all of whom could share a nation's bounty... whilst, paradoxically, being ruled

by another privileged elite (Communist this time), but a more odious elite that lacked the notions of truth and kindness that once existed in a society kept civil by its Christian culture. It is little wonder that Marxism has always resulted in abusive totalitarianism. There is no example of it ever working well.

So, the notion of truth has not fared well in recent Western history.

For Christians, the idea that truth's horizon is entirely contained within that which is currently understood by a human brain (whether Bacon's reasoning, Sartre's silliness or postmodernism's chaos) is a profoundly unchristian thing. Certainly, to forbid any notion of truth until scientists have uncovered it is to trap human thought into an empirical prison. It also prompts the question: Where is truth before a scientist discovers it? Does it exist?

This debate has rather a lot of relevance for God. A moment's rational thought should lead to the conclusion that truth (whether scientific or theological) is "out there" beyond us, waiting for us to encounter it, adopt it and honour it... which is what I invite you to do.

# 67. Cathedrals, Scary Things, And God

**January 28, 2021**

I once had the intriguing experience of visiting some of the cathedrals of England with my children. Whilst they were too young to fully appreciate the history and imagery carved into the stone, they could “feel” a cathedral’s atmosphere. My daughter particularly spoke of spooky cathedrals and nice ones. The spooky ones often featured pictures or carvings of souls being damned and falling into the pit of hell. Fear and judgement were the central motifs.

It was sometimes difficult for me, a theologian, to make much connection with what the children were seeing and the Christian gospel.

So, with this in mind, may I make an apology to all of you who have been put off Christianity because you have experienced a culture of fear and judgementalism in the church. Fear and judgementalism are not the central tenets of Christianity. The word “gospel” literally means “good news,” and it is this that is (or should be) the central theme of the church.

When Jesus came to earth to pay the price for our sins that would otherwise keep us from God, it was a peerless act of love. The gospel is a rescue story, and it is very good news. Furthermore, it’s worth noting that the subject Jesus preached about more than anything else was “the kingdom of God” and the fact that its eternal benefits were now available to everyone... if they choose to accept it.

Jesus was not shy of speaking about the reality of God’s judgement and of our ability to disqualify ourselves from God’s intended destiny for us, but the whole tenor of his teaching was the “good news” of God seeking to restore a broken relationship with us and his creation... and giving us a future. As such, this is the theme that should characterise the culture of the church.

It is worth pondering a moment, how these medieval horrors, some still perpetuated in mainline churches, came to infiltrate the church.

The fifth century theologian, St Augustine, is partly to blame. He wrote some profound stuff but he also had a well-developed loathing of his own sinful state... and this came out in his theology.

Augustine promoted the idea that everyone was born sinful, and that some people had been predestined for judgement and hell. Only a minority had been chosen for salvation.

His ideas were taken up by the institutional church, not least because it bolstered the level of control the church had over society. As a result, fear came to be featured in many of England and Europe’s cathedrals.

The sixteenth century Reformation had the result of splitting the Protestant church away from the Roman Catholic Church. You might think this would have resulted in a softening of the “fear”

aspect of the church's culture. Alas, this was not so. The teaching of the reformer, John Calvin, (particularly as it became hardened in the hands of his disciples) enshrined the idea that God had predestined some people to hell. As such, both the Catholic and the Protestant branches of the church have been guilty of an overemphasis on fear.

And some of that fear (and judgementalism) may have trickled down to you and put you off Christianity. If so, I am deeply sorry. What you should have encountered was "good news" and hope. The central reality of Christianity is God... and his love for you. God was prepared to sacrifice himself to win you back to himself. That is the gospel story... and that is the message I want to leave with you.

## 68. Cosmic Laws Point To Moral Laws

**February 5, 2021**

What a combative, contentious world we live in today. Modern philosophers, free-thinkers, and many of our media opinion leaders are now trashing any idea of transcendent truth saying that truth is whatever works for you and makes you “happy.”

Oh dear!

So it is some relief to rest back in the safe assurances of science. Science does not allow (and cannot operate) with such a cavalier attitude to truth. In fact, it has been a sense of wonder to scientists that the physical laws, that govern life on Earth, are exactly the same as those that operate in every corner of the universe. The “gravitational constant”, discovered by Sir Isaac Newton, is one of them. The “Fine Constant Structure” that determines an atom’s energy level is another... and the “conservation laws” yet another. These remain true anywhere in the universe, whether you are feeling “happy” or not. Physical laws exist and they are inviolable.

But can we say the same for moral laws that are currently being trashed by many of media’s libertine opinion leaders today?

I think we can, and here’s why.

It is difficult for scientists today to get the average non-scientist to understand the ridiculous levels of “fine-tuning” that exist in our universe that has allowed it to be life-friendly. Levels of fine-tuning down to levels of many trillions in exactitude exist for many forces and values. These cannot be ignored by a lazy shrug of the shoulders. That is simply crass anti-rationalism. Neither can they be dismissed by postulating the existence of an infinite number of universes, one of which (ours) has stumbled on the correct physical laws that allow life. That is simply to make the whole scenario even more complex. Why do an infinite number of universes exist that might be able to produce intelligent life?

The existence of this fine-tuning and the inviolable laws seen across the universe all point to the existence of intent, i.e. of there being a “mind” behind it. This, I suggest, is a reasonable conclusion. To believe anything else fractures the law of “cause and effect” that underpins all of science.

So, there is good reason to believe there is a “mind” behind the universe. This means that the “mind” has an intention and an idea. And if this is so, it would be very wise to know what it is, so we can key into it.

But what can give us any assurance that we are meant to understand anything about that “mind”?



Here again, science can help. One of the extraordinary features human beings possess is that our intellect exactly matches that which is required to unlock the workings, mathematical beauty and laws that govern the running of the universe. It must be clearly said that the universe is under no obligation to be rationally transparent to us—but it is. The most obvious reason for why this is so is that it is the intent of the “mind” that we do understand it. In other words, the “mind” wishes his/her actions to be understood. The cosmos is an invitation to connect with the ultimate “mind”.

Christians believe that this was just the first step in God’s revelation to humankind (Romans 1:18-20). His next step was to teach us his character and purpose through the events recorded in the Old Testament. God’s final step was to come to us personally as Jesus (God’s peerless and final revelation of himself) who came to rescue us back to himself. In the process of this, God gave us his moral laws, which are just as real as the physical laws he instituted in the cosmos. These laws were not given to rob us of freedom or spoil our day. They were given as boundaries within which we would operate best with the minimum of hurt. We are invited (not forced) to stay within those boundaries.

In Medieval times, men who were not in service to an overlord and the structures and securities the overlord imposed were called “lawless men”. They became bandits because of their lack of order, morals and boundaries. Interestingly enough, the apostle John uses the same term “lawless men” when speaking about those who choose to flout God’s moral laws (see: 1 John 3:4). I beg you not to be lawless and anti-God in this way. It will lead to hurt and dysfunction... and the eternal prospects are not good. God has given us a beautiful life-giving pattern, which we depart from at our peril. Nothing I see in the life of lawless hedonists persuades me otherwise. God’s ways work best.

# 69. Dare To Speak

**February 11, 2021**

Christianity has not often fared well in the hands of us humans. Britain and Europe institutionalised Christianity to bolster the political power base of the ruling class. America commercialised Christianity to bolster people's bottom line. The right-wing has tried to recruit Christianity to their cause (God wants us to have guns!). The left-wing has tried to expunge God from society as an impediment to their social engineering agenda. Somehow, both have missed the prophetic message and transformative power of true Christianity.

As I look at the magnificent soaring architecture of medieval cathedrals, the impossibly intricate stone filigree framing acres of stained glass, I am truly in awe. At least a significant section of society wanted to honour God in those days with the best that they were capable of giving. Today, artists are lauded and celebrated because they put a crucifix in a jar of urine. Just a bit of a difference! And, I can't help noticing, today's architects have rarely produced anything as beautiful as the Medieval chapel at King's College, Cambridge. They build little boxes resembling shipping containers... and give each other architectural awards. Does ugliness of a nation's culture leak out in its architecture I wonder? Hmm.

Honouring God, it seems, has become passé. It has become passé because there is no fear (holy awe) of God. This is quite understandable. It's a bit hard to be in awe of a God you don't believe in—or, more correctly, you want to not believe in. I guess every one of us will find out what is true at the end of time, won't we. What's your bet? What's the evidence—or daren't you look too closely? After all, it's much easier to wrap yourself in the easy clichés of your tribe and participate in society's collective “unthink”.

But for those who dare seek for truth, there is a promise: “Seek, and you will find” (Matthew 7:7).

Happy seeking.

# 70. Dare I Speak?

**February 17, 2021**

This is not a good moment in history to speak truth on some matters. The curtain is coming down on civil informed debate on some issues as strident voices now insist that theirs is the only view that can be countenanced. Those with any memory of history will recognise this sort of language as the precursor to totalitarianism.

The Austrian psychologist, Viktor Frankl, survived the horrors of no less than four Nazi concentration camps. When he reflected on his experience, he wrote: “I am absolutely convinced that the gas chambers of Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Majdanek were ultimately prepared not in some ministry or other in Berlin but rather at the desks and lecture halls of nihilistic scientists and philosophers.”<sup>16</sup>

So we need to be vigilant and watch out (and call out) uncivil language from today’s opinion leaders, be it from the extreme left or right. But dare I? The Old Testament prophet, Amos, spoke of a time when the prudent were forced to keep quiet because “the times are evil” (Amos 5:13). It’s extraordinary, isn’t it that we now have to worry about such things.

Having once been a research biologist, do I keep quiet about the fact that a human foetus feels pain after 20 weeks gestation? The Victorian premier, Daniel Andrews, voted against a foetus being given pain relief before being dismembered (usually) in a late term abortion. It is impossible for me to comprehend why. Would the administration of pain relief be tacit admission that the foetus was in fact a human being? What Andrews has pushed through as law is unconscionable barbarism, a barbarism that is a shame on any nation. It is a million miles away from authentic, life-honouring Christianity—which, in case Andrews has forgotten, is adhered to by 51% of the Australian population.

And where were the weak-kneed opposition Liberal Party in the debate? Shame on you for going to water even in the face of scientific evidence. Have you really been so caught in the headlights of populist wokism that you have kissed your principles goodbye? By your inaction, you are helping to herald a new era of barbarism.

Mothers in pre-Christian Rome would put their unwanted babies on the roadside either to die or be picked up by a stranger to be raised as a slave. Some of the mothers had been raped themselves as slaves, or had become pregnant as the result of being used as playthings by the rich and powerful. Babies born to them faced a terrible plight. Daniel Andrews has reverted, in part, to this same

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<sup>16</sup> Viktor E. Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy*, R. and C. Winston (tr.), (New York: Knof, 1955).

barbarism by enshrining in law that all foetuses that survive abortion should be left to die if the mother and two doctors agree to it<sup>17</sup>.

I confess to being lost for words!

The decision is now a very different one from “aborting a foetus”. It is now killing a baby. The feminist argument, “It’s my body, I can do what I like” no longer applies, because there is now another body lying in the next room dying of neglect. That baby should rightly enjoy protection both from the law and from the Hippocratic oath doctors have to give when promising to preserve life.

Similarly, allowing a baby to die cannot be said to be done to ensure the safety of the mother. She has already given birth. Preserving the life of the mother is currently the only reason for terminating a viable baby under South Australian law (section 82A of the Criminal Law Consolidation Act). So, as the South Australian government now contemplates following the state of Victoria’s lead, it will be considering something very different.

I fear for the sort of society we will hand to our grandchildren. So please do what you can to ensure that theirs is a good inheritance by writing to your politicians now. I did, and received a fairly terse and unsympathetic letter back from Vickie Chapman (the current Liberal Attorney General for South Australia) who is pushing for the Andrews laws to be implemented in my state. Her reply was a disappointment.

So: voters, take note!

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<sup>17</sup> There were 310 late term abortions in the state of Victoria in 2016. Ten percent of them were born alive.

# 71. The Beginning Of The Universe, And You

February 24, 2021

Can everything come from nothing?

Rather a lot rides on the answer.

The strident American atheist and physicist, Lawrence Krauss thinks it can. (I wrote about him in an earlier blog<sup>18</sup>.) He wrote a philosophically muddled book called *A Universe from Nothing* in which he speculates that it is possible for a universe to come from nothing... provided some parameters (such as quantum fields and the physical laws that govern them) are already in existence to allow it. He wants to call the empty space of the cosmos ‘nothing’ whilst also insisting that this ‘nothing’ is actually a cauldron of virtual particles which can pop into physical existence when interacting with powerful fields.

As Neil Ormerod, Professor of Theology at Australian Catholic University, has pointed out: “Scientifically this may well be correct, but it clearly does not address the question of whether something can (italics mine) come from nothing.”<sup>19</sup> Krauss’ great mistake, of course, is to fail to understand what ‘nothing’ really means.

In all human scientific endeavours, scientists have never exhausted the beautiful mathematical order that has underpinned their discoveries. This is even true for the non-intuitive world of quantum physics... and this, I submit, is hugely significant. The esteemed English astronomer and mathematical physicist James Jeans (1877 – 1946) said in his book *The Mysterious Universe*: “The universe appears to have been designed by a pure mathematician.”<sup>20</sup>

But does God actually exist?

Whether or not he does depends on which sequence of events is true concerning the building of the universe.

Did matter give rise to information (as atheists believe), or did information give rise to matter (as theists believe)?

Krauss suggests that matter gave rise to information. He does so by championing the idea that there are an infinite number of universes, each with a different set of physical laws. And because there are an infinite number of universes, we should not be surprised that one universe must eventually

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<sup>18</sup> See Chapter 37. The Challenge of Quantum Physics for Atheism

<sup>19</sup> Neil Ormerod, “The metaphysical muddle of Lawrence Krauss: Why science can’t get rid of God.” See: <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/the-metaphysical-muddle-of-lawrence-krauss-why-science-cant-get-/10100010> Uploaded: Monday 18 February 2013 3:36pm.

<sup>20</sup> James Jeans, *The Mysterious Universe*, (Cambridge University Press, 1930 edition), 134.

stumble on a set of physical laws that has allowed life to develop. The significance of our ordered universe can therefore be dissolved in a sea of infinity.

However, if one universe is hard to explain, it is even harder to explain the existence of an infinite number of them. As such, the multiverse option does not explain anything. It merely lifts the conundrum up to the next level.

Another principle atheists appeal to in order to explain the existence of our universe is to say that there exists a fundamental physical principle—a theory of everything—that makes the development of a life-friendly universe inevitable.

The trouble is, there is no hard evidence for this existing.

A third option available to atheists is to believe that our universe has always existed—and has done so without reason and without purpose. This, of course, is simply a ‘faith statement’. It also suffers from the fact that there is no precedent for anything existing without a cause. In fact, the very idea shatters the law of “cause and effect” which underpins all of science.

Let’s now explore the idea that information gave rise to matter. This is the claim that divine information has resulted in coded matter existing... and it is this information that has built a universe that has resulted in sentient life.

What’s the evidence?

Nothing in the long history of human experience has ever resulted in complex ordered information existing other than rational thought. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that rational thought has given rise to a rational universe.

So, what can we say in conclusion? All science relies on ultimate rationality existing. Christians call this rationality, ‘God’. And whilst it is important to understand that God is more than cosmic rationality, it is a very good place to start!

## 72. Tragedy And Truth

**March 4, 2021**

As I write this, I am reflecting back on a tumultuous week, one marked by several tragedies.

A beautiful young woman in our church died in a traffic accident. She was an innocent passenger in a car. Her death has left her single mother without any children. The whole church community came together in grief and love... and the mother, a stranger to church, was embraced by their love.

Days later, I received a phone call about a young man, (the grandson of dear friends) who had been taken to hospital Emergency after a terrible accident. Rather beautifully, he was conscious enough to ask for his grandfather. Although the young man was not a follower of Christ, his grandfather was... and the young man now hungered for everything his grandfather represented.

On the same day, I learned of the anger and bitterness of a young woman towards Christianity. She had lost her faith, embraced a non-Christian lifestyle, and was now shoring up her position by hurling atheistic half-truth claims at Christianity on social media. Tragically, she was exhibiting a bitterness of spirit that is horribly corrosive to the soul. Her Christian friends have seen it and it has left them greatly saddened.

And in recent weeks, I learned of the betrayal of two wives by their husbands. Both men had walked away from their Christian faith some years ago. The justification for their adultery makes perfect sense in a non-Christian world where “personal happiness” is the final, and only determinant of what is “good”.

It's been quite a week!

What am I to make of it as a Christian?

Perhaps this: When dark clouds come, no one is doing very well without God's love, truth, hope and help.

So, to whom will you turn when you are in intensive care, when you lose a child, or when you are abused and betrayed? Whatever you do, please don't be indifferent about God.

I recently listened to the testimony of how a friend of mine, a highly successful author, came to faith. It was a terrific story that included an account of her, an adopted child, being reconnected with her birth mother. She didn't initially want to be reconnected and was happy to be classed as a “hostile non-seeker”. As I reflected on the phrase, “hostile non-seeker”, I remember thinking that it perfectly describes the new culture of atheism I am increasingly coming across. It is the culture of uninformed, visceral anti-Christianism. (How's that for a new word?) The neo-atheism of today has, it seems, severed all ties to the Enlightenment and to rationality. Truth has been abandoned in

favour of ignorance, and ridicule is now its only discipline. This is perhaps not surprising given that the whole notion of truth has been trashed by society.

I confess to being a little irked when bloody-minded ignorance masquerades as social sophistication. But, sadly, I have long since ceased to be amazed at the non-thinking of many who attack Christianity and declare themselves to be indifferent to the historical reality of Jesus Christ.

It has been my experience that when tragedy tests the “world view” by which people live, no one is getting on well without him.



## 73. Wistfulness

**March 11, 2021**

Wistfulness is an ache of the heart that is perhaps beyond words. It is a sadness, a hope. Often, it is a longing for meaning, a yearning for something beyond your current reality. It is sometimes seen when reflecting on a life that has been broken by abuse or by the folly of your own decisions. It can be a longing for healing and hope.

Wistfulness is a disquiet of the soul.

Maybe you've heard a story about a holy man, someone who has earned the reputation for bringing hope to broken people. Maybe you've heard he's around but have never stopped to talk with him.

There's a story about a blind man begging at the city gates of Jericho who wouldn't shut up when he learned that Jesus was passing by (Mark 10:46–52). He wouldn't let the opportunity go where he might meet with Jesus and be healed. He was wistful for what might be, and seized the moment to reach out to Jesus.

What is the opposite of wistfulness? I think perhaps it is “hardness of heart”. Certainly, hardness of heart would suppress wistfulness.

When I see evidence of wistfulness in someone I'm speaking to, I know I'm seeing a crack in the shell they have constructed around their convictions and preconceptions. Even if it is just for a moment, I'm seeing a vulnerability, an honesty of the heart—an ache.

The British theologian, John Stott, wrote a book called *The Contemporary Christian*<sup>21</sup>. In it he speaks of a television interview with Marghanita Laski. Marghanita was an English journalist and social commentator who was an outspoken atheist. In a moment of candour, she said: “What I envy most about you Christians is your forgiveness.”

I think we see in her comment an element of wistfulness.

No one meets God without humility, a humility that allows wistfulness, and looks—even for a moment—at the possibility of peace and hope.

Moments of wistfulness are precious. They are honest moments... and they are moments you can meet with God if you invite him into your space. The most extraordinary and transformative things happen if you do.

Honesty and humility are the key. Enjoy the adventure.

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<sup>21</sup> John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian*, (London: IVP, 1992).

## 74. What You Think Matters

**March 17, 2021**

Here's an interesting tit-bit for you: the word "cosmos" comes from a Greek word meaning "orderly system." The philosopher, Pythagoras (570 – 490 BCE) was the first to use the term in relation to our ordered universe. "Cosmos" therefore refers to the opposite of chaos, and this is significant, because our universe is not just any sort of universe; it is a highly ordered one.

The fact that it is ordered should inform everyone's belief system. If it doesn't, then one of the greatest realities inviting us to look beyond ourselves lies ignored and stillborn in our hearts.

As my philosopher friend, Dr Leonard Long, always reminds me: all beliefs, including atheism, are belief systems based on presuppositions that cannot be proved. They can, however, be informed by reason and experience—which, happily, is the case for Christianity. So, may I ask: how reasonable is your "faith"? Can I suggest that if it has not taken adequate account of the extraordinary order and fine-tuning of the physical forces in the universe that have allowed life to develop—then, that faith is poorly founded.

Taking care with truth, certainly in the world of modern philosophy, is not in vogue at the moment. Modern philosophers have largely trashed the idea of truth. I confess that when reading the life of philosophers in the 1960s, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that their Nihilistic or neo-Marxist ideas were designed to support their sexual addictions. In other words, they did not so much get their thinking from philosophy, as bolster their addictions with philosophy. It's not hard for radical ideas to become attractive if you can offer unbridled hedonism or greater personal power in a new world order.

Many modern philosophers inherited their radical ideas from the "Frankfurt School" of philosophy that flourished in Goethe University between the two world wars. Hitler's persecution of such thinking resulted in some of its proponents fleeing to America. This began the long march of revolutionary philosophy through the academia of the West, which reached fever pitch during the university occupations of 1968. The Frankfurt School is still a major influence in many humanities departments of the West today.

Significantly, the big three Greek philosophers: Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, did not follow the functional atheism of the atomist philosophers who preceded them. All three of them saw evidence of "mind" in the cosmos and the necessity of mind in ethics.

Centuries later, the Roman Stoic philosopher, Seneca, examined the atheistic thinking in Lucretius' highly influential poem *De Rerum Natura* (that sidelined God and advocated a purely materialistic

understanding of truth). Seneca argued against the sentiments of the poem and he also spoke of the evidence of “mind.”

The thirteenth century Dominican philosopher, Thomas Aquinas, went further. He put the case for the existence of God into a logical argument that he called the “Five Ways.” Aquinas’ thinking has been attacked through the centuries but his essential reasoning remains sound. It is logically sensible to believe in a First Cause, a Necessary Being, a Grand Designer.

All sorts of truths surround people today, but sadly, most of it is ignored. The perversity of humankind means that we tend to select the statements, claims and beliefs that support our chosen lifestyle. In other words, we select the information generated by our “tribe”—right or wrong.

May I suggest that there is more honesty and a brighter future if you choose that which is right?

Truth matters.

# 76. Men, Sexual Abuse, Hormones, And Civility

March 31, 2021

Almost no one will get through life without experiencing unwanted sexual advances. Even as a male, I've experienced a few. Women experience even more. This is because men have been hard-wired in their brains, (as a result of male hormones irreversibly rewiring their brains), to go after sex as hard and as often as possible. They therefore have a particular responsibility to manage their sexuality well. Testosterone (produced by the male XY chromosomes) is particularly influential. It is first produced when the foetus is six weeks old, and it deluges the brain again (unless interfered with), at adolescence. As a result, the hypothalamus is a different shape in males than women, and the cerebral cortex is thicker<sup>22</sup>. Crucially, the cross over link (the corpus callosum) between left and right brain has fewer connections and is thinner than in women, which makes men less skilled in multi-tasking and verbal articulation.

To be an asexual being is (with one or two rare medical exceptions) neither possible nor desirable. Imagine the outcry if we were not allowed to dress in a way that advertised our masculinity or femininity. The Communists tried it for a while when they attempted to declare families obsolete, but quickly gave it up, although their severe unisex dress code took a while longer to relax.

Men particularly, are visually driven when it comes to sex. This makes them "sitting ducks" when it comes to pornography (the subject of my next blog), and it means they have to work harder at controlling their sexuality when they see a woman who looks alluring. But manage it they can... and should. There is never, never, never, an excuse for a man to behave in a sexually inappropriate way to women, because of her dress. Her dress does not say "yes".

As someone who has studied biology, I've had to attend lectures on animal behaviour, which, if it teaches you nothing else, makes it clear that different species have been signalling their sexuality to each other for a very long time. The fact that humans have made it to the top of the food chain means we have been particularly good at it. It has also been the case that males can be overzealous in this exercise. But is the human male just a helpless victim of biology? Can they shrug their shoulders when they are sexually abusive and simply say, "My genes made me do it"?

No, no, no! To say that is to say that you are no different from an animal, and whilst this may be true biologically (you share 96% of the same genes as a chimpanzee) it is NOT true of the essential 'you'. Humans are unique in that they can choose behaviour in violation of their genes. Some do it every morning: they shave! (I know it is much more inconsequential, but you get the idea.)

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<sup>22</sup> Anne Moir & David Jessel, *Brain sex: the real difference between men and women*, (London: Mandarin, 1989), pp. 21-28

The thing is, if you are locked in to atheistic thinking (which is being encouraged by society today), women will be at increasing risk of sexual abuse. This is because the Judaea/Christian ethic of honouring the other, of civility, of there being moral boundaries within which we operate best—are being trashed. Society (quite irrationally) is swallowing the lie that we have no more significance beyond being a chance collection of atoms. As such, it is rather easier to blame your genes for your behaviour, because you had little say in it. It's just the way your atoms are configured.

However, if you are an authentic Christian (stress “authentic”), i.e. someone who has made Jesus the leader of your life, you will know that you have been created in God's image. And as God is THE moral being, it means that you are a moral being. As such, you can manage your hormones, and are obliged to. It is what love does. So, if you are anti-moral in your behaviour and abuse a woman, you are being less than human, and have sunk back to being a mere animal.

With the trashing of God's best will for us, sex has become (particularly for males) simply a recreational activity that has the added bonus of flattering the ego. As such, it had been cut adrift from commitment, responsibility and authentic love. It is, “Tonight, we will fake love.” Such promiscuity is poor preparation for marriage, in which the woman hopes her partner will be faithful, and will make her the highest priority in life. Failure in this is devastating for the stability of families—and children become the main casualties.

I fear society is paying a high price for discarding the historical Jesus. It is desperately trying to legislate on what we must do on the outside, but has nothing to say about reforming the inside. The best it can do is throw some ‘education’ at it—but education without the ‘why’ has no foundation and therefore not much power.

Men... please don't be subhuman.

# 77. Pornography, How It Works, And A Plea To Politicians

**April 15, 2021**

In my last blog, I gave some straight talk to men about abusing women, and some honest talk about whether or not they can blame their genes and hormones for their behaviour. (They can't.) One of things I did say was that men are particularly visually driven, and this makes them 'sitting ducks' when it comes to pornography

Those who sell pornography exploit one of the most powerful drives that exists in humankind: the sex drive. It is a cheap shot. Curiosity, sexual excitement, loneliness, and a frustrated sex drive lead many into the pornography trap.

Pornography is not bad because Christians don't consider the human body to be beautiful (as claimed by some in the pornography industry). It is bad for five reasons.

First: It is predatory on one of the most powerful drives known to humankind. One of the things that makes it particularly predatory is that pornography has to become progressively more explicit and degrading in order to maintain the same level of sexual excitement. In this way, it is addictive, can be ruinously expensive, and take control of your life. Pornography is a predator that loves to attack the weak.

Second: It is a lie. Pornography pretends an intimacy and sexual fulfilment that does not exist in reality. Those caught up in pornography have a distorted view of real life that often results in them being unable to have healthy relationships with real women.

Third: It spoils lovemaking with your partner. People caught by pornography are unable to divorce pornographic fantasy from the reality of lovemaking with their partner. Those immersed in pornography can also dissipate their sex urge, so that they have little to offer their spouse in the way of sexual fulfilment. Sometimes, they even need to employ pornography in their lovemaking, so that their spouse is left unsure about who their partner is really making love to.

Fourth: The life of someone caught in pornography can be secretive, solitary, and unhealthy, as they can spend many hours looking at pornographic websites. This can lead to guilt and shame.

Fifth. It degrades women by portraying them as sex objects.

Since the advent of the Internet, porn use has skyrocketed to dizzying heights. Pornhub, the world's largest free porn site, received over 33 billion site visits during 2018 alone.

**Some Biology**

Through evolutionary design, the brain is wired to respond to sexual stimulation with surges of dopamine (by activating the brain's ventral striatum). This is associated with the limbic system at the core of our brain.

Continual porn stimulation damages the dopamine reward system and leaves it unresponsive to natural sources of pleasure. This is why users begin to experience difficulty in achieving arousal with a physical partner. And if that wasn't concerning enough, porn addicts show reduced cellular activity in the orbito frontal cortex (just above the eye sockets). This area of the brain is responsible for making strategic, rather than impulsive, decisions. The American researcher, Fowler et al. writes:

“Patients with traumatic injuries to this area of the brain display problems – aggressiveness, poor judgment of future consequences, inability to inhibit inappropriate responses that are similar to those observed in substance abusers.”<sup>23</sup>

### **A Call To Our Politicians**

With the fading of the Christian church from society (because of its inability to speak with one voice on moral issues, and because it has lost credibility with the abuses that have occurred within its institutions), politicians have to step up and become, to some degree, society's moral guardians. This will require more than sticking your fingers in the air to gauge the direction of popular opinion—or more accurately, the loudest and most strident political lobbying, which is not always the most moral or helpful for society—for example: the gun lobby in America.

It seems absurd that society can applaud the banning of some books by the children's writer, Dr Seuss, (of “The Cat in the Hat,” fame) and yet allow our children unfettered access to porn sites that train our adolescent men to see woman as sexual objects that can be pursued without love, responsibility or commitment. To politicians, can I say: It is no use throwing up your hands like scandalised virgins at what is happening in Parliament house (and in wider society) if you then sit on your hands, and give no leadership on the issue of pornography.

Leadership requires bravery. The Republican governor of Utah has banned porn from cell-phones and tablets (March, 2021). Civil libertarians are already crying foul saying it is an infringement on civil liberty. Not allowing twelve-year-olds to drive cars is also an infringement on civil liberty—but we insist on it nonetheless for the safety of society.

Australia passed the Interactive Gambling Act in 2001, which included a long list of requirements a gambling operator had to fulfil in this country. This act made it illegal for local and offshore online operators to offer most forms of gambling to Australians. The biggest exception was sports

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<sup>23</sup> Fowler JL, Volkow ND, Kassid CA. Imaging the addicted human brain. *Sci Pract Perspect.* 2007; 3:4–16.

and race betting (whose adverts now plague our TV watching.) Here's the thing: If you can regulate gambling, you can regulate pornography. Please do so for the sake of our women, our adolescent kids and for the betterment of society.

To do this, you will need courage. It is something you could do that is really good for society, something that would win you credibility. You have the power. Australia desperately needs leadership in this area.

When ancient Rome modelled its religion on Greek culture, it imported its sexually libertine culture. The Greek philosopher, Demosthenes, said: "We have courtesans for the sake of pleasure; we have concubines for the sake of daily cohabitation; we have wives for the purpose of having children legitimately and of having a faithful guardian for all our household affairs."

When Rome took on this culture, it became ruinous for families. The British classical scholar, A.W. Verral said that the chief disease from which the Roman civilisation died was its low view of women. Things got so bad that emperor Augustus had to pass Lex Papia Poppaea (the 'bachelor tax') in 9 AD to encourage marriage!

Please be brave (and good) and take action. Curb the scourge and give our women hope.



# 78. 'Truth' Is A Sacred Entrustment

**April 27, 2021**

Modern atheistic philosophers such as Nietzsche and Sartre have trashed the idea of 'truth' existing. This has led to today's society being flavoured by postmodern thinking that has debased the idea of truth with claims that all truth is relative, i.e. it is whatever you feel it to be at the moment.

As I reflected on the nature of truth, I came to understand that truth was actually a 'sacred entrustment.'

We don't manufacture truth (sorry, you modern philosophers). Neither do we invent it, only to change it in the next breath (sorry, you chaotic postmodernists). No, true truth is not an artefact of any human at all. Real truth is something that is beyond us. It is something we discover; something we are allowed to come across when we search for it diligently. In other words, it is out there, waiting for us to take hold of it.

Christians have always understood this to be so because they know that:

- truth has its genesis in God,
- derives its culture from God, and...
- comes with an invitation from God to discover it.

God is therefore the source and final definition of truth.

What on earth do I mean by 'derives its culture from God'?

Simply this: Moral truth is 'good' in the most profound way it can be. Goodness is therefore its cultural stamp. And when it comes to scientific truth, 'beauty' is its cultural stamp. Scientific truths (e.g. the equations for the laws of physics) are beautiful rather than ugly. (The English quantum physicist, Paul Dirac, was one who popularised this understanding.)

Now, here's a question: Are atheists correct in saying that humankind either invented truth in order to invent God; or invented God in order to promote the myth that truth exists?

I think both notions are wrong because there is evidence that truth not only exists, but it exists with defining characteristics. Truth can be found by looking for three things:

1. Looking for what is good
2. Looking for what is beautiful
3. Looking at what is consistently so, i.e. not subject to chaotic change.

It could be argued that these parameters rather load the dice in favour of God's existence, but I would disagree. The reason for this is that the real universe is not chaotic, it is highly ordered. It is

therefore reasonable for truth to be grounded in this basic characteristic of the cosmos. Truth, I submit, is there for us to see and discover.

Therefore: respect it enough to chase it down. If you do, you'll find God waiting at the end of your search.

# 79. I Haven't The Faith To Be An Atheist

May 9, 2021

There seems to be a lot of anger on Facebook. Week after week, I see the same people venting their anger – from both left and right. It must be a heavy burden to have to go through life seething with such resentment. I've seen it eat away at people's character until it becomes their character. This raises an interesting question doesn't it: How do you have a passion for justice, but maintain a sweet spirit? Perhaps the secret is in being able to "love one's enemies" – a shocking idea that Jesus left us with.

I write this because I got a bit grumpy this weekend. A journalist writing in one of the weekend papers contrasted "those with (religious) faith", with "those of us who are rationalist."

It was a mincingly self-righteous comment that I found difficult to be gracious about. Sadly, sentiments like this are popping up with increasing regularity in the media, penned by journalists whose theological ignorance apparently presents no impediment to them speaking about Christian belief.

The truth is, of course, everyone has faith – particularly atheists. An atheist believes that everything can come from nothing, as a result of nothing, via a mechanism that has never been discovered (and for which there is no precedent) – an idea that fractures the law of "cause and effect" that underpins all of science. They believe this despite the outrageously unlikely "fine tuning" of the universe that has allowed life to develop. So, theirs is an extraordinary faith. It is one that all too often has led to absurdities. It has led to some calling science "god" (which is rather dodging the issue). It has led to others, such as the atheist, Francis Crick (of DNA fame), proposing that aliens caused the order we find on Earth. Other atheists have simply replaced God with "infinity". They have sought to erase the significance of our ordered universe by postulating the existence of an infinite number of universes. This prompts the rather obvious question that if the existence of one universe was hard to explain, the existence of an infinite number of them is even harder!

So, I got grumpy at another atheistic journalist throwing up the false dichotomy of "scientific rationalism"... or "faith in God". The truth is: my scientific rationalism invites me to investigate a rational God who is responsible for the rational order I see in the universe.

And I am by no means alone in this. The apostle Paul appealed to the "natural world" as something that pointed to the existence of God (Romans 1:19-20). He said that the order of creation was designed to encourage people to 'reach out and find him' (Acts 17:26-27). Science can therefore start you on the road to knowing God. And this makes logical sense. If God exists, then both

scientific truth and theological truth has its origins in God. As such, the two disciplines should never fight.

To promote the myth that Christians are irrational is wilful perversity – a fondly held fiction designed to bolster a sense of academic superiority. It is odious, and it is a lie.

So, I invite you to allow science to begin you on your journey toward God... and then allow a personal encounter with Jesus to continue it.

# 80. Surrender

**May 19, 2021**

Standing in the ancient church – alone and still... with only the dust motes as company, I hear a whisper – a sound beyond words.

It speaks over my noisy protests and anger... above my smug rationalism... It is the call of mystery.

It mingles with the ache deep within... and I am disturbed by a terrible peace.

And from that peace, a voice speaks, “Come closer.”

But I will not. I cover my ears.

Barricaded, braced and blinded by the clichés I have chosen, I stumble outside into the sunshine.

But the call pursues me, “Come closer.”

The churchyard is full of drunken headstones talking to each other:

“We were once alive.”

Life... surely a miracle. Why have I not seen it before?

A daisy lies crushed and bruised at my feet – where I have walked.

But it is still beautiful... and obscene in its innocence.

“Consider the lilies of the field.”

I hold it up to the light.

It is silent... and then softly as the breeze, it speaks of things too wonderful to comprehend.

Here, in my hands, is mystery beyond mystery.

Here is life... and it’s pointing to something... to someone.

“Come closer.”

“No.”

But I don’t get far – just to the old wooden gate.

A rusted nail has been driven into its post...

A nail... that says nothing.

It undoes me... and I surrender.

# 81. Don't Mess With The Christian Gospel

**May 26, 2021**

Media opinion leaders would have us believe that atheism is for the elite, i.e. for those who are truly rational (intellectually superior). But if you must have a god, you must make sure that god is no more special than a human being. As such, your god must:

- Not be born of a virgin
- Not be able to perform miracles
- Not be unique
- Not be able to overcome death, i.e. be resurrected

“So, providing your god is not god-like, we will let you believe in him/her. No god must be bigger than ourselves. We have said so.”

In reality, such thinking is both crass and illogical.

Either God is... (and is therefore so much more than we can conceive), or God doesn't exist. But the emasculated, watered down god of liberal theology neither satisfies the logic of the atheist, or the rationality of conventional Christian theists.

If God really did come to us in history – it would be entirely logical, even probable, that events such as those recorded in the gospels occurred. What else, other than the events recorded in the Bible, would convince us:

- That God exists
- That God is the final definition of love and goodness
- That God is inviting us to know and love him
- That God identifies with us completely
- That God came up with an idea to rid us of sin that would otherwise disbar us from his presence
- That God will finally kill off injustice and suffering
- That God's end game is that we live with him in his eternal kingdom

So, wrap your desire for autonomy in simplistic, poorly thought-through atheistic clichés if you must, but don't mess with the Christian gospel and turn it into a pale reflection of what it really is. To do that is to turn Christianity into a bland moralism that offers no hope.

Here's a special aside to the Uniting Church in Australia, which, sadly, has charged well down the liberal rabbit hole:

In the last 25 years, the Uniting Church Assembly has invented legal ways to disenfranchise its people and foist on its congregations non-biblical morality most didn't want. As a result, despite branding itself as the most socially progressive denomination, the UCA is the fastest dying denomination in Australia. Recent "National Church Life Survey" data shows that it is now only the fifth biggest denomination (in terms of church attendance) – and it would be a great deal smaller if it weren't for some big evangelical/charismatic churches that have more in common with Hillsong than the UCA. Sadly, to date, there are no indications that the UCA Assembly has either the will or the capacity to repent and reform.

So, to return to my original thesis: Accept it, or reject it... but don't mess with the Christian gospel.

## 82. Finding Hope in The Face Of Suffering

June 2, 2021

I would never have made a good Stoic... although I applaud much of their thinking.

Stoicism was a Greek school of philosophy founded by Zeno in the 3rd century BC. It taught that the universe was governed by an all-pervading “Reason” (that Christians know to be “God”).

Stoicism was inherently optimistic, for it believed that this “Reason” was good. As such, whatever happened in our world must also be good. We must therefore live in such a way as to not be troubled by the ebb and flow of events<sup>24</sup>. Rather, we should develop self-control and fortitude in order to overcome negative emotions... and develop the sort of clear unbiased thinking that will allow us to understand the universal “Reason” (logos)<sup>25</sup>.

What do you think of that?

The trouble with me is that I have way too much passion to be a Stoic. I grieve and weep too much at the cruel injustices of the world, and am brought almost to despair at the level of evil and untruth that exists. But, paradoxically, like the Stoics, I know that the God who created the cosmos is fundamentally “good”.

How can I say this when faced with the obscenity of pandemics, tsunamis, cancer and Nazi extermination camps? Nature itself seems fundamentally flawed. This is entirely consistent with Christian thinking that understands that nature and humankind have both been corrupted and are waiting for God to make all things new (Romans 8:19-21).

Christianity gives me three reasons to hope:

1. God the Father has assured me in Scripture that he has already set a time when all things will be renewed and every tear will be wiped dry (Revelation 21:1-4).
2. God the Son (Jesus) has experienced terrible suffering, which he endured to pay the price for our sins. God therefore understands the suffering I experience.
3. God the Holy Spirit inspires me to address suffering and injustice now, wherever I come across it.

On top of this, God promises to be with me in my suffering, giving me all I need to remain undefeated by it. (I’m currently battling cancer.)

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<sup>24</sup> William Carrol, “Metaphysics and the Experience of God: The Meditations of David Bentley Hart”, January 17, 2014[1]Uploaded to “Public Discourse” (a journal of the Witherspoon Institute) 17th January, 2014, see: <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2014/01/11916/William> E. Carroll is Research Fellow in Theology and Science at the Aquinas Institute of Blackfriars Hall, University of Oxford.

<sup>25</sup> See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stoicism>



The philosophical enemies of the Stoics were the Epicureans. (The Apostle Paul debated with both groups of philosophers when he was in Athens – see: Acts 17:16-18).

The Epicureans were impossible optimists. They dreamed of a utopian, egalitarian world – in which they didn't need to acknowledge any god (or trouble themselves with thoughts of death and judgement), but only concern themselves with things rational – and making life as pleasurable as possible for everyone. However, their egalitarian dream was found to be unworkable because it lacked a foundation that guaranteed what 'good' was. In just a few years, it degenerated into unbridled hedonism (like it did again, much later in history in the 1960s). Marxism similarly (and inevitably) degenerates into bullying totalitarianism for the same reason – it has no ultimate foundation that determines what is truly true and good.

Charles Darwin allowed a Christian faith to flourish briefly in his life (whilst at Cambridge), but it died – primarily because he failed to understand the Christian answer to suffering. Please don't be like him. Stoicism and Epicureanism don't have much to offer as alternatives. Jesus, however, can lift you above your suffering so you are not crushed under it.

## 83. Atheism, Truth And Peace

**June 17, 2021**

Bertrand Russell (known as “Bertie” to his friends) was arguably the leading academic atheist in the early twentieth century. He wrote a book called, *Why I am Not a Christian*. Sadly, Russell fell into the trap (later developed into a fine art by Richard Dawkins) of building grotesque caricatures of Christianity – which he found easy to destroy. His daughter, Katherine (who became a Christian) wrote about this habit of his, saying: “When [father] wanted to attack religion, he sought out its most egregious errors and held them up to ridicule, while avoiding serious discussion of the basic message.”<sup>26</sup>

Russell was determined to hold on to his atheism in defiance of his strict Protestant upbringing. His passion for doing so may have been partly fuelled by his sexual appetite, for he found the moral boundaries of Christianity inconvenient to his quest for sexual happiness. However, his atheism came at some cost to his peace of mind. His daughter, Katherine, wrote:

“I believe myself that his whole life was a search for God.... Indeed, he had first taken up philosophy in hope of finding proof of the evidence of the existence of God ... Somewhere at the back of my father’s mind, at the bottom of his heart, in the depths of his soul [which he did not believe he had] there was an empty space that had once been filled by God, and he never found anything else to put in it”<sup>27</sup>

Russell’s lack of peace was well expressed in a poem he wrote to Edith, his fourth wife. The first stanza of the poem says:

Through the long years  
I have sought peace,  
I found ecstasy,  
I found anguish,  
I found madness,  
I found loneliness.  
I found the solitary pain  
that gnaws the heart,  
But peace I did not find<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Katharine Tait, *My Father Bertrand Russell*(South Bend, IN:St. Augustine’s Press, 75th edition, 1996), 188.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 185.

<sup>28</sup> Bertrand Russell, in: Ray Monk, *Bertrand Russell, The Spirit of Solitude, 1872-1921*, (Free Press, 2016), xix. Russell wrote this in the preface of his *Autobiography*.

This is such a terribly sad epitaph.

Atheism is not kind to those who dare to think.

Jesus said he had come to seek and save those who were lost (Luke 19:10). So if you are feeling lost and without meaning, do seek Jesus out.

## 84. Boo To The Church... And Hurrah For Voltaire

June 24, 2021

“Down with the Christian church! A plague on its legalism and its bullying throughout history. And ‘hurrah’ for Voltaire, that Enlightenment literary wit who tweaked the tail of the Roman Catholic Church, and insisted that science and philosophy be free of ecclesial bullying, superstition and all things metaphysical.” Rationalism and the ‘separation of church and state’, he said, should be the basis of civilised society.

The crowd is cheering for Voltaire... but what’s this? One of those cheering in the crowd looks a lot like Jesus! Why is this?

Three reasons:

First: Just as Voltaire’s greatest critics were the clerics of his time, Jesus’ main enemies were also the religious leaders of his time.

Second: Jesus would agree that non-biblical superstitious accretions adopted by some churches deserve to be ridiculed.

Third: Rational truth makes perfect sense to Jesus, who was the one who created a rational universe that could be understood.

But in a time of quiet, I think Jesus might have had a few things to say to Voltaire – things to do with truth and integrity.

Despite being a rationalist who claimed to champion truth, Voltaire didn’t let truth get in the way of propaganda. He was responsible for the myth that the early Christian church had fifty different gospels of Jesus’ life, before they settled on just four. Voltaire also claimed that the early church fathers were responsible for the phrase, “I believe because it is absurd” – presumably because it suited his anti-Christian rhetoric.

Jesus might reasonably say that being a rationalist did not give him the mandate to tell outright lies. By lying, he was displaying a classic symptom of what happens when people dismiss God – the one who fundamentally guarantees what truth is.

Voltaire’s scurrilous accusations against French royalty earned him an eleven-month stint in the Bastille, and his intemperate language also resulted in him spending some time in exile in England.

Voltaire’s morality was certainly rubbery. He became distressingly anti-Semitic in his latter years... and he conducted a 16-year-long affair with Émilie du Châtelet, a highly intelligent, unabashed free spirit who – remarkably for her time – was a distinguished scientist. (Émilie was responsible for translating Newton’s Principia into French.)

There have been occasions when the institutional church has engaged in unconscionable behaviour in direct contradiction to the life and teaching of Jesus. It has to be said that whenever the Christian church has been institutionalised and wedded to the monarchy, it has become corrupted by power and greed. However, when it has behaved in an authentically Christian way, it has been beautiful. It has provided legal civility, hospital care, education and social welfare to millions.

If you only commit to human-centred rationalism, it will be impossible for you to believe in anything bigger than yourself. This will inevitably lead to rubbery ethics, a sense of meaninglessness and the deification of self.

But I am not advocating an anti-rational faith. A rational God has created a rational universe designed to point people to him. Christianity is not 'anti-rational'; it is 'rationality AND'... Therefore, think big and seek God. Embrace more in your mind than yourself.

# 85. Setting Truth Free

**July 8, 2021**

The banishment of theology from intellectual debate in our universities has been an impoverishment. It has resulted in science locking itself into an empiricist prison, for it will only allow investigations into 'how' things come to be. The much more interesting question, 'why' is left languishing on the sidelines unremarked on.

Scientism (the belief that the only truth that exists is that which is scientifically, i.e. rationally) provable... together with 'reductionism' (which states that you have no more significance beyond being a bag of atoms) has resulted in a poverty of understanding.

I confess to finding the reductionist argument curiously circular. It claims we have no meaning because all we are is a 'bag of atoms'. And because we are a bag of atoms, (similar to all other life forms), we have no significance. The obvious rejoinder, of course, is to point out that if you are unwilling to see beyond the structure of atoms, then that is all you will see. But by doing so, you will be contenting yourself with a desperately poor understanding of truth. You will only be seeing one waveband in the full spectrum of reality. The compassion of Mother Teresa and the laughter of Billy Connolly will be beyond you... and the historical life, death and resurrection of Jesus will receive nary a nod. As a result, your truth will be imprisoned into a very small space, a space that gives those advocating 'scientism' the illusion they can control and understand what's within it.

I don't like academic prisons. I like them even less when people who don't know much about theology get on an atheistic soapbox and speak about God from the paucity of understanding that comes from their ignorance of all forms of truth.

Contrary to the claims of some, Christianity is not anti-rational. There are good reasons for me to see evidence of 'mind' in the cosmos. Nothing else in human experience has ever explained such fine-tuning as we see in the universe other than the operation of a mind.

I am further confirmed in my convictions by the discovery that sub-atomic particles only collapse from being a cloud of probability into being tiny physical particles when they are observed.

Quantum physics therefore also points to the existence of mind.

Similarly, it is difficult to conceive what can put to work the beautiful, highly advanced mathematics of the cosmos so that it will build a universe, if not mind. (Information has to travel from mathematics to the quantum world if it is to build a universe, and the only way know to humankind this can happen is through the agency of 'mind'.)

And information that informs what we hold to be true doesn't stop there. When these scientific realities are overlaid with evidence of a morality (which we have a sneaking suspicion, lies beyond

us) – and when this is also overlaid with the historic reality of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; the result is a synergy that allows for a very much greater understanding.

When you allow all these sources of knowledge to speak together, will have a symphony of understanding, a symphony that has been freed from scientism's empiricist prison... and which whispers the possibility of God.

# 86. Faith, Truth And God

**July 15, 2021**

I am continually appalled at my level of ignorance and fearful of the potholes it provides for me to fall into.

And yet, there is a shy conviction within me that enables me not to be completely transfixed by the coming headlights of a fast-approaching atheistic society.

There are truths that are worth staking my life on. And the reason I can stake my life on them is because these truths are bigger than me. They are bigger than those I could have cooked up in my mind – and as such, these truths are beyond the tyrannous gravity of ego. They are eternal truths. They are magisterial... and they have stood the test of time.

There is therefore a real sense in which I understand that I am a custodian of something very precious; something lent to me for the brief season I am alive on the planet. And it is in every sense, good.

When modern philosophers tried to dispense with it, they didn't do very well. The nineteenth century German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, advocated the unfettered expression of personal power, a power untroubled by notions of truth or empathy. He became mad for the last ten years of his life before dying at the age of 55 – probably as a result of syphilis contracted during his sexual escapades.

The French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, similarly trashed the idea of conventional truth and morality, scorning it as bourgeois. His thinking helped give momentum to Marxism's deconstruction of Western civilisation (and Christianity in particular) in the mid twentieth century, so that it could impose its own odious form of dehumanising totalitarianism. In the latter part of his life, Sartre became conflicted and disillusioned. A month before his death, he wrote these words in his journal:

'... with this wretched gathering which our planet now is, despair returns to tempt me. The idea that there is no purpose, only petty personal ends for which we fight! We make little revolutions, but there is no goal for mankind. One cannot think of such things. They tempt you incessantly; especially if you are old . . . the world seems ugly, bad and without hope. There, that's the cry of despair of an old man who will die in despair. But that's exactly what I resist. I know I shall die in hope. But that hope needs a foundation.'

The French 20th century philosopher, Paul-Michel Foucault, is being lionised in many of our university's philosophy departments. Foucault's philosophy formed the basis for postmodernism and its trashing of all forms of truth. It brought him no joy, however, as Foucault's mental landscape



was characterised by the macabre, sado-masochism, homosexuality and rather distressingly, paedophilia. He often contemplated suicide. His sado-masochistic and homosexual escapades resulted in him dying of AIDs in 1984 at the age of 57.

Foucault was a lost soul who similarly didn't thrive outside the safety barriers Christianity provided.

I have to wonder if Foucault really does represent the 'gold standard' for civilised philosophical discourse worthy of our next generation of societal opinion leaders. His answers to philosophy's greatest questions of meaning, morality and destiny offer very little that is good, just or true.

No one is getting on without true truth... and no one is getting on very well without God.

So, may I ask? ...How are you getting on?

## 87. A High View Of Women

July 21, 2021

The British classics scholar, A.W. Verral is reputed to have said that the chief disease from which civilisations died was their low view of women<sup>29</sup>.

Other scholars, such as the British historian, Arnold Toynbee, tell us that civilisations don't die from being attacked from the outside; rather, they commit suicide when they rot from the inside through losing faith in the hope and moral certainties they once held.

If you put these two assertions together: it is not difficult to conclude that Western civilisation is in the rotting phase... and one of the chief casualties of this is women, as the dreadful statistics on domestic violence and abuse of women in the workplace attest.

And I don't like it.

I am old enough to make a claim that may seem outrageous to the protesting libertarians of today, and it is this: Fifty years ago, there was more respect and honour accorded to women. True, a lot less women were in leadership positions then... and I totally applaud the fact that this is being rectified. But I grieve at the 'brave new world' our daughters now have to navigate.

If social researchers are correct, a woman has a fifty-fifty chance of having sex after a first date with a man who has taken her to dinner. So what sort of mental pressure is now being loaded onto a woman before she goes out to socialise?

Immodesty has been touted as sexual freedom, but it has actually encouraged sexual objectification – as our execrable TV reality shows demonstrate.

There's now an expectation that women should work to help pay off the mortgage... but this has backfired for many who secretly wish they were less busy and had more time for their children. They don't want to feel guilty at delegating the upbringing of their children to strangers.

Political correctness now requires us to have unisex toilets. Women now have to cope with men peeing on the seat and writing obscenities on the wall. And then there's the issue of changing rooms...

Men are now competing in women's sports at Olympic level. There's a 'trans' New Zealand weight lifter, Laurel Hubbard, who is able to compete as a woman because she's managed to get her testosterone level down so that it is only four times that of a normal biological woman. But you daren't complain at its injustice because it will be seen as hate speech. I wonder what you feel like

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<sup>29</sup> It has not been possible to cite the original source of this statement – although it has been widely quoted. You can find the quote cited in: R.L. Deffinbaugh, "The New Testament Church—The Role of Women", Bible.org. (2004) – available at: <https://bible.org/seriespage/6-new-testament-church-role-women> (Accessed on 14 February 2018).

when you reflect on these things in quiet times... when you allow yourself to converse with your soul. Has it worked out well?

Although it hasn't always played out fantastically in history, I submit that the best friend of women is the Judea-Christian ethic... for if that is trashed, so is a person's sacredness. (Rape was part of the culture of the Greek pantheon of gods; and the Communist leader, Pol Pot, sanctioned the rape and torture of women during his reign of terror.) The institutional expression of Christianity has not always worked out well for women, but here's the thing: Christianity has always managed to reform itself by returning to the foundational principles of Jesus Christ.

It's worth remembering that Jesus involved women in the key moments of his life – notably at his death and resurrection. And women featured significantly in the early church during the time of the apostle Paul. He mentions several influential women in the Roman church including Phoebe (who is described as diakonos from which we get the word deacon, and Junias (usually a female name) who is described as being an apostle (Romans 16:7). Paul also mentions a bunch of other influential women including Priscilla, Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis and Julia (Romans 16:3-16). Chloe seemingly led a Christian household in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:11) and Lydia one in Philippi (Acts 16:14-15). Both Priscilla and Aquila taught Apollos in Ephesus (Acts 18:26), whilst the daughters of Philip were prophetesses (Acts 21:8-9). Paul made it quite clear that women and men are equal before God (Galatians 3:26-29). Where Paul advocated modest behaviour from women, it was always in relation to what defined social propriety at the time. These facts didn't stop Richard Dawkins (notorious for his abuse of truth) from making the outrageous claim that Christianity was "loathing of women"!<sup>30</sup> Perhaps someone can whisper truth into his ear at some stage.

Christianity was seen as so emancipating for women in the third century that it caused Celsus to write scathingly about Christianity saying it was only suitable for women and slaves<sup>31</sup>. What a glorious recommendation! Perhaps Australia needs to look to Jesus if it wants to take the sacredness and honour of women seriously – because the law of the jungle is not working out well.

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<sup>30</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Bantam Books, 2006), p. 37.

<sup>31</sup> Origin, *Contra Celsus*, Book 3, Chapter 59.

## 88. Atheism, Truth And Evidence

July 28, 2021

The leading atheistic philosopher in the early twentieth century, Bertrand Russell, was once asked what he would say to God by way of explanation when asked why he didn't believe in him. His reply was: "Not enough evidence; not enough evidence"... which raises the really good question: "What would enough evidence look like?"

What if God answered this question by creating a universe of unimaginable wonder – a universe constructed according to the rules of very advanced mathematics? Would that cause our atheists to accept the probable existence of God? And what if the universe had many factors finely tuned to a degree of many, many trillionths of exactitude so as to allow life to develop on at least one planet? Could atheists reasonably dismiss that as coincidental? How many trillionths would an atheist need before he or she reviewed their position?

In Bertrand Russell's case, he simply refused to look at the evidence. During a 1948 debate with the Jesuit philosopher, Father Frederick Copleston, he said: "I do think the notion of the world having an explanation is a mistake. I don't see why one would expect it to have."<sup>32</sup> This comment from a leading academic is an extraordinary one. Russell's answer to the existence of mind-boggling complexity, codes, and fine-tuning of the universe, was simply not to ask any questions about it. This, I submit, can in no way be construed as intellectual honesty.

Let's muse for a moment: What if Bertrand Russell was persuaded that God existed? He might still claim that it was impossible to actually know that God.

But, but, but... What if God came to Earth 2,000 years ago to show us what God was like – and to die to pay the price for our sins which would otherwise disbar us from him? What if God did that? Would that be enough to persuade Bertrand to accept God's love and lordship?

Quite honestly, it is difficult to know what else God could have done to invite an atheist to respond to his love with his or her own. What else could God have done that would also preserve the need for faith to be freely chosen rather than forced? God knew full well that a forced relationship is not an authentic one.

Is that what Bertrand Russell wants – a totally unambiguous revelation of God's identity and glory, a self-revelation even clearer than that revealed by the universe, and clearer than that revealed by Jesus? Does Bertrand want God to force himself on humanity? Because if so, it is not going to happen. God won't force anything. He invites faith with a language that is only heard by the humble – in the language of the cosmos, and through the person of Jesus.

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<sup>32</sup> Reported in: Howard P. Kainz, *The Existence of God and the faith-instinct*, (Cranbury, NJ: Rosemont Publishing, 2010), 21.

Not enough evidence? Really?

What do you think?

## 89. Do You Know The Story Of You?

August 4, 2021

Indigenous Australians can teach us a thing or two. They have the custom of regularly returning to country to reaffirm their identity and their connection with place. They do this by retelling the stories of their origins – stories reinforced by song and dance. Time and time again, throughout their lives, they gather to remind themselves of who they are and how they came to be.

Tell me: where do you go to hear the story of you?

It seems to me that many in the West are spiritual orphans. They don't know who they are, where they come from, why they are or what their meaning is. The indigenous Pastor, Ray Minniecon, tell us in his article "Healing Country", "Most non-indigenous peoples don't know who they really are. And if they don't know who they are, how can they connect to where they are?"<sup>33</sup> He laments this... because this lack of connection leads to a lack of respect for the land and its degradation for commercial gain.

The Western atheist, who sits in the middle of conforming media opinion, doesn't know their story. And this is a pity, for as I've heard an indigenous Australian say: "If you don't know your story, you are still a child." Because spiritual orphans don't know their origin, they have no identity. A woman punk rocker said in Gene Veith's book, *Postmodern Times*: "I belong to the Blank Generation. I have no beliefs. I belong to no community, tradition or anything like that. I'm lost in this vast, vast world. I belong nowhere. I have absolutely no identity."<sup>34</sup>

If you ask a Western atheist about their origins, they simply shrug and say they don't know. When asked why the universe exists. Again they shrug and say that it has probably always existed – in defiance of all of human experience that tells us that everything is linear, i.e. everything has a beginning and an end. If you ask them what their meaning is, they might quote Nietzsche, Foucault or Sartre and say they have no meaning... and because they have no meaning or purpose, there is no such thing as morality... and they therefore allow dissolute living to slowly destroy them and those who are close to them.

Spiritual orphans have no ceremonies to point them back to the beginning – to tell them why they exist. You might argue that indigenous ceremonies exist, but this doesn't mean that their dreamtime stories are true. They might to our Western ears simply be fanciful delusions conjured up to fill the

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<sup>33</sup> Ray Minniecon Healing Country – Genesis 1 and 2, Tearfund <https://www.tearfund.org.au/stories/healing-country> (viewed 4th August, 2021).

<sup>34</sup> Gene Veith, *Postmodern Times*(Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 71.

vacuum of meaning and understanding. But now that we are enlightened and mature, we simply need to “suck it up” and live the reality of our meaninglessness as co-operatively as possible.

However, we need to realise that aboriginal thinking is not the wooden empiricist thinking of the West. It is metaphor and story. The stories may not have the ‘right’ science, but their main purpose is to acknowledge the truth of meaning, morality and connectedness – and the reality of a causative mind. As such, it is a pattern of belief that satisfies. If a Westerner asks if a story is true, it is seen as being crude. It is more important that a story has meaning... and that it be interesting.

The atheist’s thinking that there is no beginning, no meaning and no story might be defensible if the universe didn’t reek of precision and order... which nothing can cause other than “mind”. So, perhaps it is time to stop being a spiritual orphan and to seek that “Mind”... as that Mind has come seeking you as Jesus in order that you may know your story.

# 90. What I Am A Christian?

**August 12, 2021**

Truth is important. None of us want to believe things that are untrue. I certainly don't. So, you might wonder what I say when I'm asked why I am a Christian. When this occurs, I usually say something like this:

- Christianity makes sense scientifically (with the fine-tuning of the cosmos to the level of multi-trillionth's).
- Christianity makes sense morally. (Jesus' teaching on morality has never been improved on.)
- Christianity makes sense sociologically. (Wherever authentic Christianity has been adopted, it has brought civility and transformed societies for their good.)
- Christianity makes sense historically. (Christianity is not a philosophy. It arose fully formed as a result of historical events surrounding Jesus' life – events that can be forensically examined.)
- Christianity makes sense personally, for I know God to be living and active within my life.

Scientists have discovered that scientific truth exists, but it takes a bit of work to uncover it.

Similarly, theological truth exists, but it too takes a bit of work to uncover it. Those who are lazy or proud will never discover it. Jesus taught the importance of having a posture of humility towards God when he taught that God's revelation is best understood by children (see: Matthew 11:25.) In saying this, Jesus was not advocating childish, immature faith, he was pointing to the need for a soft heart rather than a soft head! Certainly, those who want to 'not believe', will never discover God's truth.

So, I invite you to be open in your quest for truth. If you are, Jesus gives you this promise: "If you honestly seek, you will find" (Matthew 7:7).

And here's a poem:

*I am content with my position, please be quiet.*

*I am content,*

*except sometimes, when I look at the night sky.*

*I am content with my morality,*

*except when I know I've sinned...*

*which I do not accept is real,*

*until I see the hurt in others, and I ache inside.*



*I am content with my position, don't bother me.  
I have reviewed the clichés and convictions  
I've chosen to wrap around myself...  
and they are sound,  
except that they are mine, and not God's...  
who I don't accept is real –  
except in those moments when I ache for hope.*

# 9 1. Is Christianity True?

**August 23, 2021**

The reason people don't accept God's love and lordship are many and varied. Not all of them are rational.

The real issue concerning Christianity is this: "Is it true?" Nothing else really matters. If God really has revealed himself through Jesus Christ, then God is worthy of our full commitment. If God has not; then Christianity is not worthy of anything.

So, let me say again: The real issue is – "Is it true?"

If people are so wedded to their need to live autonomously from God that they refuse to investigate whether Jesus is true, then there is little anyone can do. That is simply wilful atheism... and it is not rational.

But for those who dare to seek; their quest is to find an answer to the question: Is it true? From this, it follows that discarding Christianity because of abuses committed by the church in history – is irrelevant to the question.

Discarding Christianity because the church once treated you poorly is similarly irrelevant to the central question. Meeting religious people whom you judge to be hypocritical is also irrelevant.

A desire to fit in with society's atheistic opinion leaders, who tell you that God is not 'on trend' – is avoiding the more pertinent question: Is it true?

Whether or not you believe you can live a moral life without being a Christian is also irrelevant to the question.

To be perfectly honest, I am not greatly interested in whether or not you say, "being a Christian is boring and inconvenient to your lifestyle"; the issues is whether or not it is true.

If the love-story of the Christian gospel is historically and rationally true, then it is worthy of your full commitment. But if you wilfully choose to hide from the truth in a cave of ignorance – justifying your position with lazily held clichés... then that, I submit, is culpable behaviour.

Over and against that sort of behaviour stands the historical Jesus... and a universe of unimaginable wonder – if you choose to look up.

## 92. Evidence Of God

**August 30, 2021**

God is not “on trend” at the moment. He’s been banished from biology by Darwin, and pronounced dead by the philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche. If this were not enough, he’s been discredited by the disunity and abuses that have occurred within fallible church institutions tasked with representing him.

Despite this, there remains a troublesome concept, which – although largely dispensed with by modern philosophers – is still appealed to by those working in the hard sciences... and that is the notion of truth.

Scientists rely on scientific truth, and the cosmos being both ordered and rational to do their work. It’s worth remembering that the universe is under no obligation to be rationally understandable, but remarkably, it is. So, do we shrug with indifference or is this significant?

There are four forces that build the universe. Two of them are the electromagnetic force and the gravitational force. If the ratio of the relative strengths of these two forces had differed by one ten-thousand trillion-trillion-trillionth... there would be no life on planet Earth. (That staggering statistic is just one of a number that suggests that our universe has been very finely tuned so as to allow life.) Again: should we shrug with indifference, or do we ask if this is significant?

As physicists look at the cosmos, they are discovering that it is constructed in way that suggests there was an intent that it be understood. The universe is built along mathematical lines – and not just any sort of mathematics. When mathematicians see that an equation for a foundational law of physics that is ugly, they know it is wrong. The mathematics of the cosmos, it seems, is both beautiful... and of a very high order.

The English physicist Paul Dirac (the man who discovered the positron) said: “God is a mathematician of a very high order, and he used very advanced mathematics in constructing the universe.”<sup>35</sup> In saying this, he was echoing a conviction of Galileo who said:

Philosophy is written in the grand book, the universe, which stands continually open to our gaze. But the book cannot be understood unless one first learns to comprehend the language and read the letters in which it is composed. It is written in the language of mathematics<sup>36</sup>.

So, again, may I ask: Do we shrug with indifference on learning this, or is this significant?

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<sup>35</sup> Paul Dirac, (May 1963). “The Evolution of the Physicist’s Picture of Nature, *Scientific American*. Retrieved 4 April 2013.

<sup>36</sup> Galileo Galilei Saggiatore, quote translated by R.H. Popkin in *(The Philosophy of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966), 65.*

Let me now take you a little way down the crazy rabbit hole that is quantum physics – the physics of particles that are smaller than an atom. In this microscopic world, the normal laws of physics don't apply. In quantum physics: a subatomic particle collapses from a "cloud of probability" into a solid particle only when it is observed. If this doesn't sound absurd to you, it should! We are saying that a sub-atomic particle doesn't actually exist as a tiny bit of matter. It exists only as a cloud of potential. And this cloud of potential only collapses into a tiny bit of matter when an intelligent mind watches it.

This characteristic seems to point to the existence of consciousness. One of the scientist making this claim is the Nobel prize-winning physicist, Eugene Wigner. He says: "Study of the external world leads to the conclusion that contents of consciousness are the ultimate reality."<sup>37</sup> John von Neumann (also a Nobel prize-winning physicist) shares this view. He says: "All real things are contents of consciousness."<sup>38</sup>

It appears that empirical truth being uncovered by quantum physics is pointing to God. Do we shrug with indifference, or do we take note?

If all these empirical truths don't result in you taking the existence of God seriously, then I submit that you are just falling back into wilful atheism – and there is not much that anyone can do about that.

So what can we say to conclude? Perhaps this: Whilst trendy philosophers in the humanities departments of our universities have given up on the notion of truth, those engaged in the hard sciences have not... and what they are discovering suggests that science gives very real reasons to believe in God.

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<sup>37</sup> Eugene Wigner "Remarks on the Mind-Body Question," pp. 171-174 in *Symmetries and Reflections*, Bloomington: IN, Indiana University Press, 1967), 171.

<sup>38</sup> John von Neumann, in Keith Ward, *Is Religion Irrational?*(Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2011), 21.

## 93. Black Holes, God And You

**December 7, 2021**

Come with me “to the dark side,” to the world of black holes.

Cosmologists tell us that black holes will eventually gobble up all material matter in the universe. This means that the only things that will be left in the universe will be black holes. The question is: do black holes then become the eternal prison for all the information of the universe?

As it turns out, it would seem that the information in black holes is not lost. Stephen Hawking has shown that black holes are not completely black. They glow slightly with radiation (which has been labelled, ‘Hawking radiation’). This means that black holes slowly lose mass, erode and die over a period of trillions of years. Hawking suggests that the information that has been swallowed by the black hole is radiated back out into the universe, or even to another universe. So, as the English cosmologist, Brian Cox, says: “it would seem that black holes are not tombs, but gateways.”<sup>39</sup>

It is significant that the language of scientists is now sounding remarkably theological. Here are two more quotes from Brian Cox.

Black holes tell us that our intuitive understanding of space and time are wrong, and that a deeper reality exists...

Space and time are not fundamentally a property of nature. They emerge from a deeper reality in which neither exists<sup>40</sup>.

These words cast a shadow over the thinking of ‘materialist reductionists’ who reduce humanity to ‘materials’ and say there is nothing more that makes humans significant. It seems that scientists are now whispering theological truth to us!

Another intriguing thing to emerge from the study of black holes is that evidence it gives for the interconnectedness of reality. (This was something also hinted at by ‘quantum entanglement’.) Scientists are suggesting that information contained within a half eroded black hole becomes the ‘same place’ as distant information emitted eons earlier through Hawking radiation<sup>41</sup>. If this confuses you, you are in good company. The exact mechanism of this is currently baffling scientists and is still being worked out.

So, where does this leave us?

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<sup>39</sup> Brian Cox, *The Universe with Brian Cox*(film), Series 1, Episode 4, “Heart of Darkness: Black Holes,” 2021 (see: 41 – 50 minutes). <https://view.abc.net.au/video/ZW3171A004500>

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

If we have dispensed with space-time as the fundamental reality and have replaced it with 'information,' that is highly significant. Information is not random chaos. It is something that is ordered. This suggests that at the heart of reality is order... and that begins to sound a lot like 'Mind'.

So, here's the question: Does this deeper reality have a divine origin? Is this deeper reality God?

Brian Cox would say, quite rightly, that deeper reality may be natural, not supernatural. Certainly, no one can rightly posit God just because they have reduced reality to information. To do that is to fall into the discredited thinking of inventing a 'God of the gaps.' But what we can say is that the discovery of a deeper reality beyond space-time is totally consistent with theistic belief.

Wahoo!

## 94. Mutton Birds, God And Christmas

**December 15, 2021**

Because of the generosity of some very special people, Mary and I were able to spend ten days on Lord Howe Island. Lord Howe Island is a majestic place and a gentle place. It is kind to writers.

Whilst I was there, I came across the Mutton Bird. Now, here's the mystery. The adult Mutton Birds lay their eggs and raise the chicks until they can look after themselves. The adults then fly off to Japan. The chicks fly off some time later when they are stronger. And without any parent to follow, they too fly to Japan.

You've got to be amazed, haven't you? How do they do it? Is the information in the DNA?

When I was at university studying biology, it was thought that some information might be contained within the cytoplasm of a living cell. Goodness knows what theories exist today. But one thing is for certain; there are a lot of mysteries in our remarkable world.

But we don't invent God to explain mystery. That is to constrain God into a being we invent to fill in the gaps of our knowledge... a gap which contracts when we learn more about science. So, no. Rather, we know about God because he chose to reveal himself to us.

The biggest mystery that has exercised the mind of humanity is whether the cosmos is the result of a monstrous fluke working on eternally existing particles; or whether the cosmos shows signs of design. In other words: does God exist, or not?

It was a mystery... and it remained a mystery until God came to town.

When Jesus came to Earth that first Christmas, we saw God in human form... and God was no longer a mystery. God was "with us", which is what the word "Emmanuel" literally means. He came to share our life of pain, and to pay the price for our sins that would otherwise separate us from God. And in doing so, he gave us a hope that lay beyond pain and beyond death.

"Cancel culture" has, sadly, become endemic in our society. It is one of the nasty results of us letting our Christian culture fall to the ground. So here's my challenge to you: Don't cancel Christ this Christmas. If you do, what's left to celebrate? A happy holiday? Are you really content to disempower Christmas so much, that all it means is a pause from routine work and an excuse to overindulge?

That, I submit, sounds pathetic when held against the love story of the Galilean.

So, I invite you to rejoice in God's love and lordship this Christmas. Why? Because God has no desire to cancel you.





# 95. Aren't Christians Just Frightened Of Death?

**January 4, 2022**

It's a little odd, isn't it, when you listen to someone who has the temerity to tell you the reasons you believe what you do. I mean... how would they know? They are not you. So let me confess that I find it a little galling when atheist opinion leaders try and tell me the reason I am a Christian – and then portray that reason as something pathetic and rationally vacuous.

Bertrand Russell, arguably the leading exponent of atheism in the early 20th century, played this game. In his lecture, “Why I am not a Christian,” given to the National Secular Society in 1927, Russell said that people believe in God fundamentally because of their fear of death. This is a familiar stick Christians are beaten with, and it is, of course, a fallacy; a fiction designed to make atheists feel both superior and comfortable in their narrative.

How on earth would Russell and the legions of atheistic opinion leaders know why Christians believe? It is as cheeky as inviting a baker's apprentice to give an opinion on nuclear physics. The reality is: an atheist is experientially ignorant of the transforming reality of God in a person's life. Almost always, they are also crassly ignorant concerning the historical evidence for Jesus Christ, and what Christianity has to say about the big issues of life, such as suffering.

So, just in case there are a few “Bertrand Russells” reading this, may I share the reasons why I am a Christian?

It is not primarily because of fear. It was because I encountered the love story of a God who pursues me with relentless grace. It is the story of a God who died on a cross to pay the price for all the dumb things I've done that would disqualify me from his presence.

Secondly: I was prompted to look at the possibility of God because our universe exists with a level of “fine tuning” (to a degree of many, many trillionths) that has allowed intelligent life to develop. To not ponder the possibility of God is to believe that everything came from nothing, as a result of nothing – which, I submit, is irrational.

There is an ache in the human soul that is divinely given. This ache is not fear. It is the discomfort that comes from feeling you don't yet fit where you were meant to fit. It is an ache for meaning, morality and hope that is as restless as a compass needle until it finds true north.

I pray that you find that “north.”

Finally; let me admit to being guilty of one aspect of fear – to the type of fear often referred to in the Bible. It is a fear that more accurately can be defined as reverence, respect and awe. Personally, I think such reverence is entirely appropriate when faced with the reality of a holy God who dreamed you into being... and who invites you to be part of his eternal adventure.



# 96. What Is Our Future

**January 11, 2022**

I was listening to David Suchet (who famously played Agatha Christie's crime solving sleuth, Poirot) read the Bible – and he does it very well. As he did, I reflected on the fact that I was listening to literature that was between 2,000 – 3,000 years old. Imagine that! It is extraordinarily old. For that reason alone, why don't people read it and honour it. Instead, our cultural opinion leaders ignore it, are crassly ignorant of it, and treat it with disdain by putting its words into fictional film characters carefully crafted to be despised.

It is almost as if a feeding frenzy of evil is being directed against the book that has civilised humanity by introducing the themes of equal justice for all, compassion for the poor, and education for all. As Tom Holland's book, *Dominion* has reminded us, humankind wasn't doing too well until the civilising influence of the Christian's book was allowed to shape the thinking of society. This is why I view the sustained attack on Christianity by today's opinion leaders with deep concern. The nature of the attack is also deeply worrying as it features ignorance, unfairness, and blind prejudice rather than balanced reasoning. As I said, there seems to be a 'feeding frenzy' of derision and scorn against that which has been responsible for the greatest good in human history.

Please note: I am not talking about fallible, supposedly Christian institutions that have behaved badly in history. They deserve criticism, because they have not been faithful to the tenets of Jesus Christ.

Here's the thing: If you remove the godly wisdom of consistent biblical principles from society, humankind must inevitably collapse back into the rule of nature which is 'red in tooth and claw,' where only the apex predator wins. This is a brutal world where might is right. It is a world where the elite predate the vulnerable. It exhibits a morality that makes perfect sense if the highest ideal is the flourishing of yourself and your offspring above all else. It is the world of Friedrich Nietzsche's 'superman' – whose philosophy of 'will to power' underpinned the elitist, domineering philosophy of Nazism.

This apex predator thinking looks distinctly shoddy when contrasted with a man who washed the feet of his disciples... and who died on a cross the pay the price for the evil you and I have committed that would otherwise disbar us from God's presence.

So what happens when the love and grace of God is ridiculed and scorned, and culled from society? What is left?

Well, I think we are getting a bit of an idea of what is left. We are seeing greater anger, the weaponising of resentment and entitlement thinking for political advantage, and the lack of fair

debate. In other words, we are seeing the death of civility. Along with it, we are seeing the light of hope, meaning and purpose fade from the eyes of our children. They don't know who they are, or why they are. This current generation has handed them a legacy of meaninglessness and loss of moral absolutes that is brutal.

So, may I encourage you to take a stand against the "endarkenment" of our civilisation, and to read and understand the timeless gospel story... a story that our children need to hear?

# 97. Do You Have To Kiss “Truth” Goodbye To Be A Christian?

**January 28, 2022**

Both Christian theology and atheism have to contend with the humbling concept of “truth.”

Let’s begin with Christianity.

History and culture have shaped people’s understanding of Christian truth through the ages. In general terms, conservative Christianity, as seen in evangelical, Pentecostal and Roman Catholic traditions, sees biblical truth as more literal. As such, they have no difficulty believing in miracles, Jesus’ bodily resurrection, or traditional biblical sexual ethics.

Liberal Christians, however, have been particularly prominent in the last 150 years in Western Protestant denominations. The United Church of Canada, followed by the Uniting Church in Australia, have been seen to be particularly “progressive” – particularly in regard to sexual ethics. Sizeable cadres in both denominations have been devotees of the theology of the late John Spong, who was once the bishop of Newark in New Jersey. It was the liberals in the Uniting Church in Australia who agitated for, and funded, the visit of John Spong to Australia in 2007.

These progressives see the consistent principles of the Bible as being revisable. They view biblical truth claims through the filter of rational empiricism, and modern social mores. For example, liberals follow the moral lead of wider society when determining sexual ethics.

Spong, thought he was being both rational and progressive when he said in his 5th “article” of faith: ‘The miracle stories of the New Testament can no longer be interpreted in a post-Newtonian world as supernatural events.’<sup>42</sup>

I have a number of difficulties with this comment. The first is that it is patronising, as it suggests that Christians have not caught up with the Enlightenment or Newtonian physics. It implies that conventional Christians are irrational. Spong has, of course, conjured up a false dichotomy, and in doing so, has continued a long tradition of atheists who build a “straw man” of their enemy (conventional Christians) that he finds easier to burn, rubbish and ridicule<sup>43</sup>. In reality, most Christians have no problem with rational science, and for almost the entire history of Western civilisation, Christians have led the way when it came to scientific research. Sir Isaac Newton himself had a firm belief in God. So, it is not a choice between miracles or Newtonian physics. The

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<sup>42</sup> John Spong, “A Call for a New Reformation”, (Westar Institute, Volume 11-4, July-August 1998), see Article 5.

<sup>43</sup> Bertrand Russell and the “new atheists” Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens have all been guilty of this.

issue, which Spong has not appreciated, is whether there is anything more than physical reality (as Christians believe), or not (as Spong believes).

This brings us to my second difficulty with Spong's anti Christian assertion. By saying what he did, he seems to suggest that all reality has to be defined by Newtonian physics. Unfortunately for Spong, science has moved on a long way from the macro-mechanical world of Isaac Newton. Newtonian physics is now not seen to be a discipline that explains all of scientific reality. Therefore, his claim that Christians are out of date with science must now be directed at himself. His rational empiricism can no longer be believed. Scientists now know that reality is composed of more than tiny particles of matter. This means that our identity must now be defined by more than tiny physical particles moving about in space/time. In other words, we are more than the sum of tiny bits of matter that have come together fortuitously and without reason.

Two areas of research have led to this new thinking. The first is research into quantum physics. The second is research into black holes.

Early research into the extraordinary non-intuitive world of quantum physics has uncovered the primacy of "consciousness" in determining whether a sub-atomic particle exists as a tiny bit of matter, or whether it exists as a "cloud of probability". No less than two Nobel Prize winners for physics, Eugene Wigner and John von Neumann, have said that "contents of consciousness" now seem to be the ultimate reality<sup>44</sup>.

Similarly, the English cosmologist, Brian Cox, has said (as a result of studies into black holes): 'Space and time are not fundamentally a property of nature. They emerge from a deeper reality in which neither exists.'<sup>45</sup>

The discovery that there is a deeper reality behind physical things is consistent with the idea of their being a "mind" behind the cosmos. We see it in the ridiculous level of "fine tuning" of forces (to the degree of many trillionths) that has allowed life to develop in the universe.

Christians would be forgiven for smiling at this point, thinking it nice that scientists are beginning to discover things Christians have known for centuries!

So, what does all this mean for us practically?

First: it means that Christian belief in God is scientifically reasonable.

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<sup>44</sup> Eugene Wigner "Remarks on the Mind-Body Question," pp. 171-174 in *Symmetries and Reflections*, Bloomington: IN, Indiana University Press, 1967), 171.

John von Neumann, in Keith Ward, *Is Religion Irrational?*(Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2011), 21.

<sup>45</sup> Brian Cox, *The Universe with Brian Cox*(film), Series 1, Episode 4, "Heart of Darkness: Black Holes," 2021 (see: 41 – 50 minutes). <https://view.abc.net.au/video/ZW3171A004500>

Secondly: it means that the liberal thinking of “progressive” theologians (such as John Spong) is actually regressive. Not only is such thinking scientifically out of date, it also has the unenviable reputation of emptying churches. This is perhaps not surprising given that Spong has no answers to the questions of sin or suffering. He offers no hope, either in this world or the next.

What, then, is the truth that Christians can believe about Jesus and his teaching? May I suggest it is a truth that is in line with the consistent principles espoused by the apostles John, Peter and Paul. This biblical position has been the “safe place” where Christians have gathered throughout history, and it is the place to which the Holy Spirit has never failed to return the church whenever a God-breathed revival has occurred. The consistent principles of Scripture have stood as a bulwark against the excesses of centralised power and institutionalism, and against the excesses of popularist licence.

So, I invite you to stay within that “safe place.”

# 98. Post-Modern Thinking And The Significance Of You

**February 10, 2022**

“Critical theory” will have been knocking on your door fairly hard in the last decade, even though you may not have recognised it. So, what is it, and how does it affect you?

Critical theory involves critiquing society and culture in order to reveal and challenge power structures that are abusive of minority groups. But here’s the question: Where does critical theory end? Does it end when nobody has any power?

A moment’s sensible thought should convince you that that is an illusory goal. Anybody who influences another has, by definition, power. This power comes in a variety of forms. There is the power of a bank manager, the power of an institutional religious body, the power of a person with knowledge, the power of a person who designs their image to look alluring, and it is the power of an academic body to craft the culture of a university.

We should therefore not be talking about the abolition of power, but rather the just use of power. This means forensically examining all power structures for injustices. Jesus was passionate about justice and care for the vulnerable and so this exercise should evoke a loud “amen” from all Christians,

The problem comes when critical theory’s battle cry against the repression of minorities and gender groups itself becomes unfair. I can’t help but wonder whether we might be seeing this when it comes to gender inequality in the educational testing of males and females in our schools. Feminist activism has resulted in academic standards in schools being increasingly loaded in favour of word-rich disciplines that favour girls. This has translated into the growing gender imbalance between males and females at our universities. It is worth asking whether critical theory should, or could, be applied to right this injustice.

## **Cancelling culture**

Critical theory has been weaponised by “cancel culture.” Cancel culture is a modern form of ostracism in which someone is thrust out of social or professional circles, either online or in person, for ideological reasons. Significantly, cancel culture has been extended to include cancelling any positive reference to a nation’s heritage. This is called “critical race theory”. For advocates of critical race theory, only the cries of oppressed minority groups should be heard. Sadly, this plays out as dismissing, or cancelling, a nation’s Judea-Christian foundation for justice, compassion and civility, so that all that is left is a cultural vacuum. This is an outcome dearly sought by Neo-



Marxists. They want to sweep society clean of any vestige of Judea-Christian influence so they can impose their own ideology.

The big problem with Marxism is, however, that whilst it can thrive in privileged federally funded Western universities (that, paradoxically, have come into being because of a Judea-Christian culture), Marxism has only ever resulted in totalitarian charnel houses of horror when practiced in the real world.

Marxism and post-modern culture cancelling share the common goal of seeking to invert existing power structures. And therein lies its great weakness. Inverting existing power structures doesn't solve injustice; it simply puts power in the hands of another group of power-hungry people. For real change to occur, there has to be a transformation of character... and nothing does that as well as authentic Christianity.

We should therefore not allow critical theory to play into the hands of Marxist ideologues. However, we should remain eternally vigilant to see that justice is sought and maintained.

The reality is, without Christianity, society lacks a moral compass, meaning and hope. A deficiency in these things is deeply wounding to the human spirit. History teaches us that with the demise of a Christian culture, humanity migrates to one of two extremes. It either turns left to Marxism and its dehumanising, brutalising control; or it turns right to Friedrich Nietzsche's "might is right" philosophy which apes the morality of the animal kingdom – as demonstrated by Nazism.

It is difficult to overstate the civilising affect that Christianity has had on society – notwithstanding the sometimes very unchristian behaviour of its institutions. The historical author, Tom Holland, has documented in his book, "Dominion", how Christianity introduced the concepts of justice for all, compassion for the needy, and the virtue of humility. This was in stark contrast to the culture of the pre-Christian Roman Empire that considered "dominance" over non-Romans and slaves to be a patriotic duty. Similarly, the distinguished Australian historian, Edward Judge, says that the Greeks and Romans at that time scorned the idea of humility. They saw it as a degrading of self<sup>46</sup>.

Christianity brought a massive cultural change.

The cancelling of Christianity should therefore be of great concern. Our children, and our grandchildren, will not do well without meaning, morality and hope.

### **Scientific naturalism**

The tottering pillar of critical theory needs to lean on another tottering pillar in order to give it the appearance of standing upright, and that other pillar is "scientific naturalism."

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<sup>46</sup> Edward Judge, see: <https://www.publicchristianity.org/on-the-scandal-of-humility/> (posted: 3rd August 2021).

Scientific naturalism is a world without God. It is the belief that all phenomena, including human cognitive, moral and social phenomena, can be explained by natural physical causes governing the universe.

What does this mean in reality?

It means that you are simply the sum of tiny sub-atomic particles that have come together without reason and purpose. You are, when it comes to significance, nothing – and you are “nothing” in the most profound sense that nothing can mean. All you can do in response to the absurdity of existence is to invent a significance for yourself. But in reality, that significance has no foundation. It is simply an ephemeral self-delusion, a mental analgesic designed to help you cope with meaninglessness.

Fortunately, there is a logical absurdity to this thinking, for in essence it says: everything comes from nothing, i.e. everything that exists has its cause in something that does not yet exist. This, of course, is ridiculous and an affront to any philosophy that claims to be grounded in rationality.

As I mentioned in my last blog, scientific naturalism has been dealt a severe blow by recent discoveries in science. Quantum physics has, with its famous “double slit” experiment, revealed that “consciousness” appears to be a fundamental constituent of matter. And recent investigations into our universe’s black holes have resulted in the English cosmologist, Brian Cox, saying: ‘Space and time are not fundamentally a property of nature. They emerge from a deeper reality in which neither exist.’<sup>47</sup>

Science is now pointing us to a reality that is beyond physical matter. I hope you investigate that reality, and discover the God who intended you to exist... and who has an idea about your future.

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<sup>47</sup> Brian Cox, *The Universe with Brian Cox*(film), Series 1, Episode 4, “Heart of Darkness: Black Holes,” 2021 (see: 41 – 50 minutes). <https://view.abc.net.au/video/ZW3171A004500>

# 99. Western Democracy And Our Future

**February 23, 2022**

Western democracy is in trouble. America, the world's democratic flag-bearer, is increasingly confusing democracy with "freedom-without-responsibility," and our Western civilisation is under siege. Dark forces are causing it to rot on the inside, and malevolent forces are attacking it from the outside. So, let's take a look at what is happening, and how we should respond as Christians.

You will have noticed that there is a lot of anxiety, anger and recriminations about at the moment. People are shouting into their own "sound shells" on social media, where anonymity can protect them from any moderation in their rants. They are like dogs peeing on lampposts – leaving their vitriol whilst not actually being present.

Just think how beautiful life would be if we obeyed Jesus' command to love our enemies!

Those who study leadership will be familiar with the life-cycle bell curve of an organisation. On the upward slope, there is optimism and certainty over core beliefs. On the downward slope, there is anxiety, recriminations and a loss of confidence in core beliefs. Significantly, the same symptoms occur with the rise and fall of civilisations. The English historian, Arnold Toynbee, has analysed this in his twelve volume *A Study of History*, which is an analysis of the rise and fall of the world's civilisations. He concludes that civilisations don't end because they are attacked from the outside, rather, they commit suicide by rotting from the inside.

So, are we rotting?

I think we are. The old certainties of morality and God have been trashed, and there is an increasing lack of civility – as can be seen on our social media platforms. This loss of civility is widespread. We now need rules to stop political staff having non-consensual sex in our parliament buildings! And we have to have signs on busses asking young people to give up their seats for the old and infirm.

The lack of civility, and the loss of God from public consciousness, have gone hand in hand. Even the ardent atheist, Richard Dawkins, is concerned about what will become of Western society without God. Of course, no one should believe in God just because they want a civil society; they should believe in God because it is true, i.e. it is a faith that is rational and experientially sound. But therein lies another problem: even the notion of truth has been trashed by our Western "would-be" social engineers. Nietzsche, Sartre, Foucault et al. have helped to fuel a culture of resentment, rebellion and hedonism... and this has been taken up enthusiastically by our university's social science departments – who have produced many of today's media opinion leaders.

Between you and me, I am sorry to see the passing of civil debate and the rigorous pursuit of truth. There was a time (before “cancel culture”) when a lot more people thought it a good thing to be civil to those they disagreed with. They also used to understand the “rules” of civil debate – one of which was the obligation to debate your opponent’s best and most well attested argument. Today, people rarely move on from abuse... and if they do, they build an unjust, highly distorted “straw image” of their opponent, which they find easier to burn.

So, what happens to a society without God? The history of God’s people in the Bible gives us a sobering clue. When they lost faith in God and lost their moral compass, it resulted in abuse of the poor by the rich, unbridled sexual licence, and brutal practices such as the sacrifice of children to false gods. The consequence of this was that God “gave them over” to the desires of their hearts (Psalm 81:12; Romans 1:21-32). In other words, God allowed them to crawl out from under his protection. For the ancient Jews, this usually meant being invaded by a foreign nation such as Assyria or Babylon.

The West has had the shadow of hardline Islam fall over it, and it now has China breathing down its neck. China has a different view of sexual morality than the “progressive” post-Christian West. China also has a desire to see wealth distributed more fairly in their nation, as some of the multi-billionaires have recently discovered. What if God allowed the Chinese to teach us the lessons we would not learn from him? What if he allowed us to learn it from a totalitarian regime that would exert total control and show no mercy... and have no time for our progressive Western views?

I do hope that it won’t be necessary.

There is hope, but the path to hope passes through the door of repentance (2 Chronicles 7:14). That’s the place to start.

# 100. Does Meaning Exist?

**March 3, 2022**

Recent scientific research into black holes suggests that there is a reality beyond “space-time” in which space, matter and time do not exist<sup>48</sup>. If that isn’t weird enough, research into quantum physics suggests that consciousness has a part to play in calling physical existence into being. Here’s the thing: Both of these findings are supportive of the idea that God exists.

It is significant that a lot of convictions from top scientists are now coming together to form a picture that theologians have long recognised, and which causes them to smile. Scientists have been amazed at the level of “fine tuning” of the forces of nature (to a level of multi-trillionths) that have allowed life to develop in the universe. They have also wondered why our minds have been “tuned” to a degree that gives us the ability to unlock the secrets of the universe.

So let me take you on a whistle-stop tour of some scientific and philosophic thinking that will lead us to some exciting conclusions about God.

Kurt Gödel (1906-1978), a logician, mathematician and philosopher, said that science is not exact. It speaks in analogies. Maths is simply a language. Therefore, you can’t define things exactly with maths. Maths can’t prove anything in a closed system.

But before you surrender to the postmodern despair of there being no truth to believe in, let me hasten to say that maths is still pretty useful, and that it does shine a light on some truth. Let me refer you to the distinguished physicist, Paul Dirac, who said: ‘God is a mathematician of a very high order, and he used very advanced mathematics in constructing the universe.’<sup>49</sup> The theoretical physicist, Eugene Wigner, expressed a similar thought. He spoke about the ‘unreasonable effectiveness of mathematics in the natural sciences,’<sup>50</sup>

Some scientists (both Christian and non-Christian) are “critical realists.” Critical realists don’t believe we ever see the “real” world; we only see approximations and models of the real thing that have been filtered and fermented by our fallible human perceptions. Of course, there has to be a lot of truth in this. Science is forever marching onwards, giving us new insights. But again, you wouldn’t want to push this too far. Many basic scientific truths have remained “true” for a very long time. Whilst some truth has had to be revised, other truths have provided a sure foundation for new truths to stand on.

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<sup>48</sup> Brian Cox, *The Universe with Brian Cox* (film), Series 1, Episode 4, “Heart of Darkness: Black Holes,” 2021 (see: 41 – 50 minutes). <https://view.abc.net.au/video/ZW3171A004500>

<sup>49</sup> Paul Dirac, (May 1963). “The Evolution of the Physicist’s Picture of Nature, *Scientific American*. Retrieved 4 April 2013.

<sup>50</sup> Eugene Wigner, 1959, “The unreasonable effectiveness of mathematics in the natural sciences,” Richard Courant lecture in mathematical sciences delivered at New York University, 11th May 1959.

The English particle physicist and theologian, John Polkinghorne, was fond of saying: ‘epistemology models ontology,’<sup>51</sup> In other words, how we know things to be true (epistemology) gives a fair approximation of the essential nature of what actually exists (ontology). If this is so, then his conviction very much supports the idea that God wants us to know a bit about him through his creation (Romans 1:20). Reality is therefore not a complete illusion.

This brings us to Ludwig Wittgenstein. He was a philosopher who worked primarily in logic, and mathematics. Wittgenstein is considered to be one of the greatest philosophers of the modern era. The trouble is, people can’t actually agree on what it was that he said – particularly in the latter half of his career. From what I understand, his central conviction was that philosophical speculation is a complete waste of time! Now, that’s a conviction that would put a lot of university philosophy departments out of business, but is he right?

Again, if we believe that God wants his creation to point to him and give us an idea about meaning, morality and destiny, we can’t say that philosophy (that takes seriously the idea of telos, i.e.ultimate goal) is a waste of time. So, sorry Ludwig.

Finally, let’s look into the fertile mind of the theoretical physicist, John Archibald Wheeler (1911-2008). He was the chap who popularised the term “black hole”. He also coined the term “participatory anthropic principle”. Now, before your brain has conniptions, let me explain. The “strong anthropic principle” is the conviction that the universe has been designed to allow intelligent life to develop. (As I said earlier, the apparent “fine tuning” of the universe that has allowed us to exist, has convinced many scientists that this is the case.) The wrinkle that Wheeler has added is this: Because a divine “mind” wanted humankind to develop, we have become “participants” in the overall plan. This, of course, fits beautifully into Christian thinking.

So, what can we say to wrap up?

Gödel says that maths can’t prove anything in a closed system. Wittgenstein said that philosophic talk is meaningless. What both men are touching on is the fact that a created being (us) cannot fathom the ultimate reality of the system it exists within, because he/she is smaller than it. In order to comprehend the system (the universe/s and life), we would need to be bigger than the system, (in the same way a tapeworm in the gut of a pilot flying a jet fighter cannot comprehend what the pilot is up to.)

Wittgenstein and Gödel’s suggestion that we can’t know ultimate things would be totally convincing, if it were not for one thing. What if God wanted humankind to understand some profound things about the universe (Psalm 19:1-4). If this were so, then it would make philosophy

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<sup>51</sup> John Polkinghorne, *Quarks, Chaos and Christianity*,(London: SPCK, 1994),67-68.

and mathematics valid enterprises – if conducted with at least a nod towards “telos” (ultimate goal), i.e. God. In other words, philosophy without God is pointless – which probably explains the desperate sense of meaninglessness, lostness and senselessness felt by many modern atheistic philosophers.

Science is giving us good reasons to believe that meaning exists. And that’s good news.

# 101. Do We Have Free Will?

**March 24, 2022**

Are we slaves predestined to be as we are, or do we have free choice? This is one of the great questions of humankind. The American science writer, John Horgan, has written an article entitled, “Does Quantum Mechanics Rule Out Free Will?”<sup>52</sup> in which he talks about “super-determinism”.

Super-determinism is a concept first proposed by the Irish physicist, John Bell. He was troubled by three things: 1) the apparent randomness of quantum events, 2) the phenomenon of quantum entanglement (where what is done to one sub-atomic particle is instantly mirrored in another particle that it was once entangled with – even though they are now a great distance apart), and 3) the bewildering fact that the form of a sub-atomic particle depends on whether or not it is being observed by a “consciousness”.

Bell said that the scientifically untidy problems of probability, interconnectedness, and the mystery of the role of consciousness in quantum physics, all disappear if it is understood that everything is pre-determined, so that it cannot be anything else. In essence, he suggests that the reason things don't look to be predetermined, is that we don't yet know enough. When we know more, we will know that things have to be what they are.

At first blush, this conviction simply appears to be a “faith statement”, a hoped-for scenario that is impossible to verify. As such, I'm not sure it is persuasive. Bell and his disciples seem to be looking for a mechanism that will return the mysteries surrounding reality to a deterministic prison where scientific reductionism can once again regain control. One wonders if ideological factors rather than scientific ones motivate this theory.

At the heart of the matter is the question of how to reconcile the deterministic (cause and effect) patterns we seen in science with the untidy realities of consciousness and randomness that are also seen in science. At the foundation of all these questions is the mystery of human existence. Did a consciousness intend us to exist? Is there a telos, a meaning and purpose to our existence?

It is significant that whilst science struggles to answer these questions – having to choose between scientific reductionism and what looks to be metaphysical consciousness, Christian theology does not. In fact, super-determinism could, in its broadest sense, be considered to be a euphemism for God. This is ironic given the suspicion that the concept was devised to obviate the need for God.

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<sup>52</sup> John Horgan, “Does Quantum Mechanics Rule Out Free Will?” *Scientific American*(March 10, 2022), see: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/does-quantum-mechanics-rule-out-free-will/>



Christians believe that fundamentally, everything exists because of the consciousness of God. They also understand that a rational universe exists because God is rational and wants to be understood, at least in part, through his creation (Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:19).

If super-determinism is given an atheistic overlay, it can be used to give support to the idea that the essential pre-requisites of the universe have existed eternally without reason... and that everything that happens in the universe is predetermined by physical laws that have arisen by chance. An atheist might note that quantum “entanglement” suggests that everything is interconnected, from which they infer (somewhat spuriously) that everything is pre-controlled. There is therefore no such thing as free-will.

What all this highlights, of course, is the mystery surrounding who, or what, is the “first cause” or, in Aristotle’s words, “prime-mover” of the universe – or whether a first cause even exists.

The American theoretical physicist, John Wheeler (1911-2008) was one person who was convinced, through his science, that a causative “consciousness” exists, and that because this consciousness wanted humankind to develop, we are “participants” in a grand plan.

The celebrity atheist, Richard Dawkins, does not agree. His is a deterministic world. We are just a chance collection of atoms. Somehow, these atoms have stumbled on the ability to assemble themselves into genes, and we hapless humans simply have to dance to their tune<sup>53</sup>.

In essence, this debate is the modern day version of what has arguably been the greatest debate humankind has ever engaged in. It is a debate that became prominent when the atheistic-orientated Epicureans argued with the theistic Stoics (from 400BC to 200AD). At its heart was the question: Does the universe exist by chance or design?

Super-determinism really has nothing to add to this debate. Atheists claim that blind physical forces exist without reason, and that these forces determine (and perhaps predetermine) everything. On the other hand, theists claim that there is a degree of truth in super-determinism, because God, who stands outside of time, has determined that humankind come into existence – as John Wheeler believed.

A number of questions and observations arise from thoughts of super-determinism. The first is that interconnectedness doesn’t necessarily mean that everything is predetermined. One needs to ask is how connectedness would cause anything to be predetermined. Crucially, super-determinism fails to address the question of “first cause”. What starts the web of interconnectedness off? It seems that we are inevitably drawn back to John Wheeler’s cosmic consciousness, i.e. God.

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<sup>53</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

# 102. Does God Intervene In History?

**May 7, 2022**

I've been reading Psalms, a remarkable collection of songs, some written over three thousand years ago. Because they were written over many hundreds of years, they are a record of how the Jew's belief in God developed over the centuries.

It is significant that despite the time-span in which the psalms were written, the theology they espouse dovetails together to form a unified narrative. Arguably, the main unifying feature of the Psalms is their strong focus on love – both the love of God for his people, and the love of the people for God. The Psalms are a strong reminder that the Jewish God was not a precocious god to be feared, like the gods of the surrounding nations such as Chemoth or Moloch – both of which demanded child sacrifices. The pre-eminent attitude of the Jews towards God was to be “love.” This is perhaps surprising, given that the Jewish God could not be seen or even be represented by an idol. So, it is therefore reasonable to ask: How could this love develop?

The answer is simple and significant. The motivation to love came from the overwhelming conviction that God was active in his people's history. The Jews experienced God chastening them, teaching them, providing for them, and above all loving them.

This simple truth has huge implications for the traditional main-line churches of the Western world. Since the Enlightenment, the Western church has been infected by Deism, which has masqueraded as Christianity behind the mask of “Christian liberalism.” The Western church's main-line denominations are currently reeling drunkenly from its influence. Liberal church after liberal church has collapsed and died under the weight of the meaninglessness they preach. Liberal theology has no room for a God who acts in history. It cannot allow that God may choose to override his laws of nature and do something that impinges on the life of his people. Similarly, liberal theologians cannot allow Jesus to be anything other than a moral example. They have forbidden Jesus from being any more special than themselves. They don't believe that Jesus did any miracles, or that he rose from the dead.

The relevance of this is, I hope, apparent. The God of liberal theology would have totally failed to earn the love of his people in the Old Testament. For many Old Testament saints, their experience of God acting in history was their only source of hope, as many of them had not yet developed a theological understanding of life after death.

The failure to acknowledge God acting in history means that the liberal God remains impersonal, distant and not much more than a theory. This helps explain why worship in liberal churches rarely shows much evidence of love for God. Rather, it is characterised by formalism and a sense of

duty. It is difficult to reconcile this relational bleakness with the primary commandment of Jesus who taught us to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength.

In recent years this emotional sterility has prompted some contemporary liberals to “gee things up” a bit by doing creative things in worship that feature the wonder of creation. When I attended a liberal theological college, this expressed itself in people doing “meaningful things” with tree leaves, candles and floaty scarves. It seems that when people feel they cannot worship a personal God, they compensate by sacralising his creation. Whilst honouring God’s handiwork is a good thing, worshipping nature is certainly not. The old-fashioned name for doing so is “paganism”.

The crucial question, then, is this: Can we believe in a miraculous God?

It is actually too late to ask this question as we already live in a miraculous universe. The laws that govern the existence of life have required a balance of nuclear, electromagnetic and gravitational forces finely tuned to the level of several trillionths of a degree. And, here’s the thing: Our existence continues to require “miraculous” intervention in order to avoid our planet becoming as sterile of life as the rest of the universe (as far as we understand it). In other words, the fact that you exist is a pretty fair indication that God has intervened with the laws of nature in order to suit his purposes. Even the English astrophysicist, Fred Hoyle, (an atheist) wrote:

A commonsense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super-intellect has monkeyed with physics, as well as chemistry and biology, and that there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature<sup>54</sup>.

God is active in history and has revealed (and is revealing) himself in history. We have seen him peerlessly as Jesus.

It is truly the case that God can be known... and therefore loved.

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<sup>54</sup> Fred Hoyle, “The Universe: Past and Present Reflections”, *Annual Review of Astronomy and Astrophysics* 20 (1982): 16.

# 103. Making Sense Of Australia's Census Data - As A Christian

**June 29, 2022**

Australia's latest census data has just been released with headlines in the press proclaiming that there are now fewer Christians than non-Christians in the nation. I had a rueful smile at this. Jesus once told a deeply disturbing parable. (A parable is a story that teaches a spiritual truth). He spoke of there being two gates. One was wide, and an easy path led through it. The majority of people went down that path. But there was another gate, a narrow gate, which led to eternal hope. Only those who sought it out, found their way through it and found life. So, the reality is: authentic Christianity has never been in the majority, even in times when "church-going" was the social norm in society. Authentic Christianity involves asking Jesus for forgiveness, and it involves making him the leader of your life. Being a Christian is no easy option. Jesus made that plain. This is particularly the case now that Christianity is no longer "on trend". Christians today have to expect to be scorned and maligned – particularly in films and in the media.

According to Jesus, only a minority will discover the truth behind the order we see in the cosmos. Only a few will discover a hope that lies beyond the harsh realities of this life. Some will be convinced that there is a higher power, but that the truth is too hard to fathom. Others have an ideological difficulty with any one religion being right – which, of course, is a neat way of not allowing any truth to exist at all. Everything is reduced to being a construct of the human mind. For others, God is inconvenient to their lifestyle choices. They want sexual freedom and the ability to lie-in on a Sunday morning. So they wrap themselves in poorly researched atheistic clichés, and roll towards the wide gate.

The unconscionable behaviour of sexual predators who have infiltrated the Christian church, has greatly encouraged people's distrust of the institutional church... and if that has affected you, I'm more sorry than I can say. If it is of any comfort, God hates it too. The vile, addictive compulsion of predators is not what characterises Jesus Christ. Jesus is the guy who hung on a cross for you. Do please see the difference. If you've not checked Jesus out and discovered why he came – I invite you to do so.

There is a sense in which I welcome the census data. The reality is: God is refining his church. He is clearing out the dead wood of those who are merely religious rather than those who love Jesus and are obedient to him. The traditional denominations are quickly losing their nominal Christians, as well as (sadly) losing some of their elderly saints due to old age. But other

denominations are growing. The reality is, there are many churches that are faithfully preaching the Christian gospel to those who really want to know. The trick is to find one and be part of it.

But I must also confess to a growing sense of sadness at the census results. The reasons for this are two-fold. The first is: it risks a secular society pointing to the numbers and saying that Christians are now so insignificant that they don't deserve special status as school chaplains (something which has already happened), or have tax breaks because of the social work they do, or have the Christian ethos of their schools protected. (The fact that there are record enrolments of students at faith-based schools – presumably because parents view the state's secular morality with some alarm – should, however, cause governments to think a bit!)

The second reason I view the “unchristianising” of Australia with concern is that Christianity has revolutionised the world's thinking about justice; obligations to the poor, education for all, gender equality, working for peace and hospital care. All of these things are a product of a Christian culture. The trouble is, these values have been around for so long that we take them for granted. Please don't. (If you doubt this, you will discover a study of pre-Christian Rome enlightening.) A brief glance at the autocratic despots around the world is also instructive. One of their defining features is that they reserve to themselves the right to determine what is true (irrespective of reason or facts). The reason they can do so is that they see no greater authority beyond themselves. They have no God to guarantee what is good and true. It would be tragic indeed for Australian society to lazily disintegrate into a values-free “dark age” or become a society ruled by despots. It's not a future I want for my grandchildren.

The census data says that the dominant generation in society is now “Millennials”. As I recently said to someone very dear to me: There are some things that are easier to ignore when living with the flush of youth. But there will be a time when you will wonder about your meaning, about why the universe bothers to exist, and whether there is such a thing as eternal hope.

If you look through the narrow gate, you will see a man dying for you on a cross in order to give you that hope. If you look through the wide gate, you will see nothing at all.

# 104. How Do We Make Sense Of The Bad Behaviour Of The Christian Church In History?

July 13, 2022

The Christian church is a paradox. It is simultaneously a community of people who are (or should be) infused with the presence of God's Holy Spirit who empowers their ministry and grows the character of Jesus within them (Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 4:15-16.). Yet it is also composed of fallible, failing and unfaithful human beings (Colossians 2:19). As such, what you see in the institutional church (both today and in history) depends on which bit of the church you are looking at – the true church or the unfaithful church. One is beautiful, and you see in it the sacrificial love that transforms people, families, communities and nations. The other is vile and you see the worst of things: the Crusades, the Spanish inquisition, the sectarian violence of Northern Ireland, and more recently, the abuse perpetrated by sex addicts who have infiltrated church institutions in order to predate the vulnerable.

This brings us to the first point: Christianity is authentic only when it reflects the teaching and values of Jesus Christ. It is inauthentic when it doesn't. It is as simple as that. This brings to mind a quote by the English writer, philosopher and lay theologian, G.K. Chesterton. He wrote: "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried."<sup>55</sup>

The toxicity of the unfaithful Christian church in history should in no way be minimised, but it is also true that it has been exaggerated, particularly in recent years by today's celebrity atheists who claim that religion has caused most of the world's wars<sup>56</sup>. So, what is the reality? According to the Encyclopaedia of Wars, out of all 1,763 known/recorded historical conflicts, 121, or 6.87%, had religion as their primary cause<sup>57</sup>. In the last 100 years, it has been the very unchristian ideology of Hitler, Stalin, Chairman Mao and Pol Pot that has killed most people. It is significant that scholarly works such as that by Tom Holland (an agnostic) have reported on the extraordinary civilising affect of Christianity on Western Human History<sup>58</sup>. He reminds us that Christianity has been responsible for our hospital system, legal system, educational system and our social welfare.

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<sup>55</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World*, (1910), Part 1, Chapter V.

<sup>56</sup> Richard Dawkins begins his book, *The God Delusion*, (Bantam Books, 2006) by quoting John Lennon's song "Imagine" (1971) which portrays a world with no religion or wars.

<sup>57</sup> Alan Axelrod and Charles Phillips eds. (2004). *Encyclopedia of Wars* (Vol.3). Facts on File. "Religious wars", pp 1484–1485.

<sup>58</sup> Tom Holland *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind*, (Little, Brown, 2019).

One of the greatest dangers for the Christian church occurs when it becomes institutionalised. When this happens, it can be easy for people take their eyes off Jesus and allow themselves to become corrupted by power and greed. Despots throughout history have tried to use Christianity to legitimise their ambitions and claim to power – and this includes leaders of church institutions. It is sobering to remember that Jesus’ fiercest enemies were the leaders of the religious institution of his day.

The other reality that needs to be appreciated is that no Christian is perfect. Every Christian is a “work in progress,” therefore all of us need God’s continual forgiveness. Christians are in the process of being transformed as they surrender more and more to Jesus’ lordship (Romans 12:1; 2 Corinthians 3:18). Having said this, people should be able to look at Christians and see something of the grace and truth of Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 Peter 2:12).

You too should expect it, and probably have – perhaps without knowing. Here’s a little exercise to illustrate this. Picture yourself stepping out on a dark city night in a none-too-salubrious precinct... and four swarthy men step onto the street behind you. How would you feel? And here’s the thing: Would you feel any better if you knew that those four swarthy men had just been to a Bible study?

The reality is, God is good for you. The Australian journalist, Greg Sheridan, popularised this phrase with his book, *God is Good for You*<sup>59</sup>.

Organisms in the plant and animal world will generally seek to kill off anything that threatens their ability to thrive. They will eat or enslave other organisms in order to survive. In this dangerous world, everything comes under the all-consuming instinct to dominate, thrive and reproduce. Here’s the thing: When human societies discard Christianity, they invariably default to the behaviour of the plant and animal world. When Christian principles are absent, you get Cambodia’s “killing fields.” When Christian principles are absent because the church has been corrupted or muzzled, Auschwitz happens. When Christian principles are absent, it becomes expedient to kill forty-seven million people through starvation in order to institute a collective farming ideology in China. Without the morality, hope and principles of Christianity, humanity falls back into the harsh pragmatism of the animal and plant kingdom. The truth is, when people stop ruling “under God,” they will seek to rule like God.

Despite the West gradually letting go its Christian heritage, it still retains an “encultured” understanding of Christian values which it instinctively holds to be right – generally. However, without a true Christian foundation, it cannot last. The eroding of Christian notions of “truth” and “right” will gradually result in the West becoming uncivil. This inevitability was one that greatly

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<sup>59</sup> Greg Sheridan, *God is Good for You*, (Allen Unwin, 2018).

troubled the atheist philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche. He despised Christianity, but feared what society would look like without it.

So, what can we say in conclusion? Perhaps this: A mouse visiting a cookie jar is not a cookie. In the same way, a person attending a Christian institution is not necessarily a Christian. Real Christianity does not feature abuse. It features Jesus dying on a Cross to take the blame for all those things that would disqualify you from sharing in God's eternal hope. Please see the difference.



# 105. Are There Rational Reasons For Seeing God's Hand In The Formation Of The Bible?

**August 21, 2022**

The Dutch philosopher, Baruch Spinoza, lived approximately 350 years ago. He was one of the fathers of The Enlightenment, and his thinking paved the way for what came to be known as “Higher Criticism”. He disallowed any notion that God’s supernatural hand was responsible for the formation of the Bible and insisted that the Bible be critiqued and analysed in the same way as any other historical manuscript. This thinking gave momentum to “liberal theology” which relegated the Bible to nothing more than a piece of fallible human writing, which, being fallible, is revisable. This has led to a large number of Protestant clerics in the Western church becoming “revisionists”.

Revisionists differ from reformists. Revisionists feel free to revise consistent principles taught by Scripture e.g. those surrounding sexual ethics. Reformists, in contrast, want to return people to the consistent principles of the Bible<sup>60</sup>.

History has shown that a significant downside of revisionist thinking is that it empties churches. It is not hard to see why. Revisionist clerics have dispensed with the hope of the resurrection, the hope of God’s coming kingdom, and the reality of God acting in people’s lives. As such, they offer no hope. The only thing they can do is to preach morality – a morality that has no firm basis. This bland diet has been responsible for killing off the Protestant church in the West.

Fortunately, you do not have to kiss your brains goodbye to be a biblical Christian. There are good reasons for challenging Spinoza’s thinking (and the liberal revisionism it spawned), and there is rational evidence for believing that a divine hand was involved in the formation of the Bible. Here are three of them: patterns, prophecy, and power.

## **Patterns**

Despite the Bible being written over a thousand-year period, it knits together to form a consistent, coherent story. Right from the start of the Bible, God introduces “patterns” which are reinforced throughout Scripture. Significantly, these patterns all reach their fulfilment in Jesus.

One of the repeated patterns is the concept of a sheep being sacrificed. This theme is first introduced when God provided a sheep (specifically, a ram) for Abraham to sacrifice at Mt Moriah instead of sacrificing his son, Isaac (Genesis 22). This began the theme of God providing a sheep for sacrifice. This pattern is continued in the story of the first Passover. On this occasion, the blood of a lamb was daubed on the doorframes of the huts of the Jews who were enslaved in Egypt. This blood meant

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<sup>60</sup> It is worth noting that Christian renewal movements in world history have never failed to return people to biblical principles, i.e. to bring reform.

that the judgement of God (the death of every first-born creature) would “pass over” the Jews and not harm them. The significance of a sheep being sacrificed reached its crescendo when Jesus came. He is referred to in all the gospel accounts of his life as the “Lamb of God.”

Two other concepts (or patterns) that keep re-occurring are, 1) the pattern of “covenant” (which reaches its fulfilment with Jesus at the last supper), and 2) the concept of “atonement” (of something dying in your stead to pay the price for your sins) – which was what Jesus did).

### **Prophecy**

The hand of God in forming Scripture is also seen in the existence of biblical prophecies.

The Bible records numerous prophecies being fulfilled centuries later. Most notably, it includes prophecies about Jesus, prophecies incidentally, that Jesus expected us to see and appreciate (Luke 24:25-27; John 5:39).

There are also prophecies concerning nations and cities. Ezekiel prophesied that the city of Tyre would be flattened and its stones and timbers thrown into the sea, never to be rebuilt (Ezekiel 26:3-14). This must have seemed highly unlikely at the time. However, about 260 years later, Alexander the Great demolished the city to build a causeway to an offshore island in order to defeat the Phoenicians who were based there. The old city of Tyre remains flattened and desolate to this day, as the new city of Tyre has been built in a different location.

### **Power**

The third piece of evidence indicating the hand of God in the formation of the Bible is the power the Bible has demonstrated throughout history for its ability to transform individuals, families, cities and nations for their good. Authentic biblically-based Christianity has brought civility and goodness wherever its principles have been adopted.

There are good rational reasons for believing that the hand of God was involved in the formation of the Bible. We are therefore not at liberty to revise its consistent principles.

# 106. The Truth About Dying

**September 3, 2022**

I've got some good news about dying.

Rather obviously, how “well” you die will depend a good deal on your circumstances, but here's the thing: the “wellness” of your dying also depends on the choices you make. Before I tell you why, let me share with you my credentials for writing about this.

I have been fighting stage 4 cancer for six years. I have come close to death on many occasions. The disease is throughout my torso and I am under palliative care. Yet despite the grim reality of all the medical procedures, the last six years have been the most joyful and fruitful of my life – due entirely to God's love and the love of others. By God's grace, I've continued to write. This writing has not been done because of a need to be significant or to be remembered. Rather, it has flowed naturally. In a very real way, cancer has rescued me from myself... and from all things dull and meaningless, focussing me on the things that are important.

Back to “choices.”

Your first choice is whether or not you learn to live for the moment. This means choosing to hear and see beauty wherever you go. Look for it. Remark on it. Savour it. Dwell within it. Don't settle for mere entertainment and wait to die. See life and be part of it. Over the years, I have schooled myself to say “wow!” often, as I walk in the garden or stroll in the park.

The second vital choice to make is whether or not you choose to forgive and let go of resentment. Put bluntly: your soul will not fly free if it is caged in bitterness. Bitterness is the most toxic emotion to personal wellbeing. So forgive. Fix the broken places before you die. To die in peace is very special.

Your third choice is a really big one: it is whether or not to embrace God. Fundamentally, it all comes down to a gamble, doesn't it? Atheists believe that the universe came from nothing as a result of nothing, (or they believe the universe has existed eternally without reason or cause). It is a position that presents a challenge rationally. Alternatively, you can see the extraordinary order that exists in the cosmos and conclude that there is a mind behind it all. Is there a God or not? Which way will you bet?

Its relevance for dying is this: The obscenity and finality of death will be replaced by hope and meaning if God exists. This will be particularly the case if you have a personal relationship with God which you develop through prayer. But a word of caution: I am not advocating the adoption of absurd spiritual beliefs as an analgesic to calm the angst over the finality of death. To do that is

simply self-delusion. The issue isn't whether or not God makes you feel better, the issues with whether or not God is true.

The fact is: if God is true, God is worthy of your full commitment. If God is not, he is worthy of nothing. So... Did God really die on a cross 2,000 years ago to win you back to himself? Check it out. But when you do, do so with humility, for it is only the humble that find truth. Personally, I believe the invitation to seek God hangs there in history and beckons to you from the cosmos.

Your next choice follows on from the last, and it is this: As much as it depends on you, finish your mission on planet Earth. Your mission can be as humble as being a good influence on others.

Whatever it is, it will feature compassion and truth. Therefore, find your purpose, and live it fully.

But a word of caution is warranted here. The world will always be broken and imperfect, so no one can ever really say that their mission is complete. The real question, therefore, is this: Have you finished as much as you can?

Finally: Choose to be beautiful in character. Simply decide – and stick with your decision. It is as simple (and hard) as that. Choose to be the good person you want to be, for doing so will bring both peace and joy.

And that's it.

I'll see you on the other side. Don't let me down!

# 107. Are We Alone, Or Is There Life On Other Planets?

**September 18, 2022**

One of the most profound questions humanity can ask is: “are we alone?” Is there intelligent life on any other planet somewhere in the immense 93 billion light year span of our observable universe?

Atheists have long scorned the medieval Catholic Church for believing the Aristotelian idea that the earth was the centre of the universe. Copernicus and Galileo had given good reasons to believe it wasn't, although, interestingly enough, they didn't have the knockout proof<sup>61</sup>. How could humankind believe that the planet they lived on was special in any way? How dare they believe they, as a species, were special – a unique creation of God, as the opening chapters of the Bible suggest.

And then... science progressed, and these atheistic assertions started to unwind.

The celebrity cosmologist, Brian Cox, was interviewed by the Weekend Australian Magazine, and asked whether he thought there was sentient life anywhere else in the universe. Cox answered with a quote from his friend, the American physicist, Sean Carroll who said, “I think there are none.”<sup>62</sup> Cox went on to say that the belief that we are alone in the universe is a “good working assumption”.

Wow! This suggests that planet Earth is a very special planet – and quite probably unique.

There were only ever two options you could believe regarding whether or not Earth was unique. Either there was life on many other planets or moons – in which case you would need to ask why the universe was so fruitful and conducive to life. Or that planet Earth was unique within the immensity of the universe, which is a reality so extraordinary that it suggests divine intention. Well, it now appears reasonable to believe that our planet is the result of divine purpose, a deliberate act set within the vastness of a universe designed to show off God's grandeur.

But there are none so blind as those who will not see.

Brian Cox's friend, Sean Carroll, is an atheist despite him believing that the Earth is probably the only place in the universe with intelligent life. He once turned down an invitation to speak at a conference sponsored by the John Templeton Foundation (a foundation that exists to explore the interface of science and faith) because he wanted to maintain that science and faith were

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<sup>61</sup> Proof could only come from measuring the parallax of a distant star (measuring its different angle from the Earth six months apart). The instrument needed to measure this didn't exist until 1832 when the German scientist, Friedrich Bessel, succeeded in inventing one.

<sup>62</sup> “Q&A,” Weekend Australian Magazine, September 17 – 18, 2022), 11. Sean Carroll is an American theoretical physicist and philosopher who specialises in quantum mechanics, gravity, and cosmology.

irreconcilable. He wrote: “I don’t think that science and religion are reconciling or can be reconciled in any meaningful sense, and I believe that it does a great disservice to the world to suggest otherwise.”<sup>63</sup>

This is an extraordinary comment, and one I find quite troubling. Carroll has come to a massively significant conclusion about the uniqueness of planet Earth, but is so locked within his atheistic prison that he will not let himself explore the philosophic consequences of his scientific convictions. His actions bring to mind Einstein’s wry comment: “the man of science makes a very bad philosopher.”<sup>64</sup> It is impossible not to equate Carroll’s actions with the behaviour of the Aristotelian philosophers who refused to look through Galileo’s telescope for fear of finding evidence that the earth was not at the centre of the universe<sup>65</sup>.

So, what do you think? Is the growing scientific conviction that there is sentient life on only one planet in the galaxy more in sympathy with atheism or theism (belief in God)?

As I’ve said: Christianity used to be scorned by atheists who insisted that planet Earth was un-special because it was not at the centre of the universe. However, it now appears that Earth is more special than we can possibly conceive. Science suggests that humankind exists on a unique planet in a universe of unimaginable size and wonder – and the reality of this needs a better response than a lazy shrug of the shoulders.

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<sup>63</sup> Sean Carroll, “Science and Religion Can’t be Reconciled: Why I won’t take money from the Templeton Foundation,” May 09, 2013, Slate: See: <https://slate.com/technology/2013/05/i-wont-take-money-from-templeton-science-and-religion-cant-be-reconciled.html>. Posted 1.07PM, May 09, 2013.

<sup>64</sup> Albert Einstein, “Physics and Reality” in the Journal of the Franklin Institute, vol. 221, Issue 3, 1936. See also: Albert Einstein, *Out of My Later Years* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), 58.

<sup>65</sup> Cremonini actually did look through the telescope, but he complained it gave him a headache and said he wouldn’t do it again! In reality, it would have cost him his job if he had given credence to Galileo’s theory.

# 108. There Is Always A Way Back

**October 4, 2022**

As a pastor, I see too many ruined lives. So, as someone very aware of my own imperfections, may I say this: It doesn't have to be this way. There is always a way back. But in order to move forward, you may first need to break a promise.

Please don't be alarmed. I'm not talking about doing anything unethical. I'm talking about breaking those bad promises you made to yourself years ago – promises that have shaped you and sabotaged your life. These promises may have been made so long ago that you've forgotten you made them. However, your subconscious has not forgotten. You have trained it over the years, and it now controls your life, causing you to self-sabotage.

Here are some examples of self-sabotaging promises I've heard people make:

“I can never make the grade. I will fail, so I won't try and do anything significant in life.”

Or

“I'm going to distance myself from those who challenge my folly – and then invent a narrative to justify my actions.”

Or

“I'm not going to acknowledge God because God didn't make something happen that I wanted.”

Or

“I'm not going to measure up to people's expectations so I'm going to define myself by living against their values in defiance of them.”

Or

“I'm going to associate with people of poor character so I can feel good about myself – relative to them...”

These are examples of the sort of “self-talk” that can become rooted in your subconscious and control your behaviour.

But it doesn't have to be this way. There is always a way back.

The way back begins with facing reality. Once you feel enough life opportunities have been wasted; once you feel that enough relationships have been ruined, once you have allowed yourself to see the brutal reality of what you have become, then, and only then, will you have the motivation to change.

Change means making different choices, and the first of these choices is to no longer live out the promises you made to yourself earlier in life – promises that have blighted your life.

Two other things are vital. There can be no change without honesty; and there can be no change without humility. Humility is the prerequisite for turning your life around and living life differently. Humility will also allow you to fix the broken relationships you have with others. Crucially, it will enable you to seek, and give, forgiveness.

These principles will be familiar with those acquainted with the Bible, and this is significant. If you have rebelled against those things that are good and godly, you will have lost your moral compass and your relationship with God. This will not only ruin your current life, it will also mean that you have spurned God's invitation to live with him forever.

Frankly, that is a scenario that horrifies me.

The reality is: you are more sacred than you can possibly conceive... and more loved than you can possibly realise.

There is always a way back.(For more, go to [nickhawkes.net](http://nickhawkes.net) and click on "What is Christianity?" (under the "Free Discipleship Resources" banner).



# 109. Truth Is 'Thrown To The Ground'

**October 10, 2022**

The Old Testament book of Daniel speaks of a time in history, a time when truth is 'thrown to the ground' (Daniel 8:11-12). I can't help but wonder if we are starting to see this happen today. We now live in a time when feelings trump facts; rudeness supplants grace; anger replaces wisdom; opinion is lauded instead of truth; horoscopes replace biblical principles; truth becomes fiction... and society is becoming untethered to any sense of truth or meaning.

The Western world is ceasing to base its culture on authentic Christianity. It doesn't want God anymore and has deified the individual instead. As a result, people have nothing bigger than themselves to believe in. They are basing their actions on what makes them happy rather than what is moral. This should be of some concern, for whenever the Christian God is acknowledged and obeyed, goodness and servant-hearted lives are lived. Many would say that the life of Queen Elizabeth II demonstrated this. With her passing, many are wondering what sort of leadership the world will now experience.

Leadership without Christian grace becomes a win-lose battle of egos. At its worst, it turns into abusive autocracy. This autocracy is particularly odious when it tries to recruit Christianity to its cause, as is currently happening in Russia as I write. President Putin has recruited bishop Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, to help him inflame hatred for the West in order to justify his war on Ukraine. In reality, Kirill has so distanced himself from the life and teachings of Christ as to beggar belief. He has defiled the Russian Orthodox Church and turned it into something grotesque. It is a truism that whenever the world has ignored authentic Christianity or defiled it, the results have invariably been ugly.

What is particularly strange is that truth is often being 'thrown to the ground' in the name of rationalism. Anti-Christian "scientific rationalism" is being promoted relentlessly by the media. However, secular rationalists who claim to be children of The Enlightenment might be surprised to learn that they have been left stranded by recent science. The reality is, they are now standing in the company of those who belong to the flat earth society. Here's why:

Quantum physics now suggests that there is a consciousness that lies behind the physical existence of matter<sup>66</sup>. And there is an interconnectedness between sub-atomic particles that old-fashioned rationalism can't comprehend. Intriguingly, scientists are now saying that the "space-time" that

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<sup>66</sup> Eugene Wigner "Remarks on the Mind-Body Question," pp. 171-174 in *Symmetries and Reflections*, Bloomington: IN, Indiana University Press, 1967), 171.

John von Neumann, in Keith Ward, *Is Religion Irrational?*(Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2011), 21.

defines our universe is not the ultimate reality<sup>67</sup>. On top of this, the staggering statistics behind the elementary forces of the universe suggest that life on at least one planet was intended<sup>68</sup>.

But truth is being ‘thrown to the ground.’ There appears to be a wilful blindness to any scientific finding that points to the possibility of God. They are seen as inconvenient truths. This even extends to the scientific world. In the world of quantum physics, there is evidence of metaphysical things been dismissed by a phrase that has become notorious amongst quantum physicists: ‘shut up and calculate.’

Unfortunately, the fruit of this anti-rational, anti-academic, anti-truth reaction to scientific truth is a legacy of hopelessness and meaninglessness – a meaninglessness that no amount of holiday tee-shirts from Bali can assuage.

As I’ve said in an earlier article: God hangs his business card in the cosmos, and comes to us personally as Jesus. Jesus came in history to die on a cross to pay the penalty for the things we’ve done that would otherwise disqualify us from eternal life with him. This is a beautiful truth, and it is one that your children need to hear.

The Old Testament book of Amos warns us of a time when the prudent “keep quiet because the times are evil” (Amos 5:13). Today, good and godly people are being marginalised. But things are not yet so dire that that you are unable to speak of, or seek, the God of the cosmos.

For more information, go to [nickhawkes.net](http://nickhawkes.net), then click on “Evidence of God”.

Take courage.

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<sup>67</sup> Brian Cox, *The Universe with Brian Cox*(film), Series 1, Episode 4, “Heart of Darkness: Black Holes,” 2021 (see: 41 – 50 minutes). <https://view.abc.net.au/video/ZW3171A004500>

<sup>68</sup> Anthony Flew with Roy Abraham Varghese, *There Is A God: How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*(New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 155.

# 110. Answering the Atheist, Phillip Adams And His Article “Guardian of the Galaxies”

**October 21, 2022**

*The article Nick refers to is in the Weekend Australian Magazine, 8-9 Oct, 2020, 50*

Phillip Adams, what a naughty boy you have been. Fancy using all those sexual innuendos to pour scorn on God. So risqué.... but oh so clichéd. This might once have been considered brave, bold and pioneering, but no more. Such atheistic writings are now *de rigueur*. It's on trend and chic amongst the cafe latte and Chardonnay set. Atheistic rants have been *passé* for so long that they are no longer seen as being *avant garde*. They have become as boringly predictable as they are prevalent, because the atheist slant is almost the only world-view that the Western media will permit these days.

There are two reasons for this. The first is because of the appalling behaviour shown by sexual addicts who have hidden in our Christian religious institutions. It's hard to imagine behaviour that is less Christ-like. Thinking about this prompts me to share a personal conviction: Nothing good seems to happen to Christianity when it becomes institutionalised. That's why it is important to seek a relationship with Jesus rather than religion.

The second reason why atheism is now so prevalent, is that the media and the humanities departments of our universities have led a relentless attack on Christianity for decades. They have done this in the name of rationalism and to facilitate the deification of self. Paradoxically, this has resulted in a collective “closing of the mind” that forbids people asking the “why?” questions about life. It is now hard to find anyone talking about God in the media unless they are atheists. This is strangely odd when you think about it. If the public's view of God only comes from those who have had no experience of God, we have indeed embraced a scary “brave new world.”

Adams has given voice to an immature understanding of faith. This has enabled him to build a “straw image” of God, presumably because he finds a straw image easier to burn. He doesn't talk of a God who loves us and seeks a personal relationship with us; he talks of a god who scowls at us for our moral imperfections, one who would be quite unable to keep all the spinning plates swirling in the cosmos, and who would find it impossible to remain abreast of all that is happening. I'm compelled to ask: Who on earth told him that God was so pathetic, a mere projection of himself. The Bible certainly doesn't teach this. Psalm 19:1-4 gives us a clue about the motive behind the seemingly super-abundance of the cosmos: It is to show off God's glory – pure and simple.

Adams will not acknowledge any reason for why faith in God is intellectually reasonable. His mind is closed, and that's a pity because there are some remarkable things to consider. Here's one of

them: There are four elementary forces that have built the universe. Two of them are the electromagnetic force and the gravitational force. If the relative strengths of those forces had varied by as much as one 10,000 trillion, trillion, trillionth, we would not have life on any planet. (This is but one of a number of similar statistics.) So, how many trillionths would it take to persuade anyone that life was intended? How long can we shrug our shoulders and say that everything came from nothing as a result of nothing – and pretend that such a position is academically defensible? Atheism has yet to show that it is able to be a major force for good in bringing civility to a nation. We didn't see it in Stalin's purges, (he killed 21 million of his own countrymen), or with China's Chairman Mao (who starved to death 47 million of his own people). Neither did we see it in the brutal, murderous actions of Pol Pot in Cambodia, or with Hitler in the Second World War. Nations that have generally fared well (in which people are freer and more prosperous) are those that have embraced authentic Christianity. I think we are beginning to see the consequence of Australia letting its Christian heritage slip between its fingers in the lack of civility that is now appearing in society. So, if you are seeking hope and truth, may I commend the real deal to you – Jesus.

# 1 1 1. Does “Time” Teach Us Anything About God?

**October 26, 2022**

One of the great conundrums puzzling cosmologists today is the concept of time. We experience time as something linear; it goes in one direction, passing from prior events to future events. The intriguing thing is this: There is no reason why the laws of physics should not apply equally well in a universe where time goes backwards. In reality however, we only experience time going forwards. What is extraordinary is that this forward movement of time is not experienced at a sub-atomic level. According to an article written by Martha Henriques, (“Why Does Time Go Forwards and Not Backwards?” BBC Future, 4th October, 2022), it is only when you step back from the microscopic world to the larger macroscopic world that directionality in time emerges – something that the Austrian physicist-philosopher, Ludwig Boltzmann, brought to our attention<sup>69</sup>. So, what is it that forces the directionality on time?

One thing that might do so is “entropy.” Entropy can be thought of as a measure of disorder, a subject that features in the laws of thermodynamics. In its simplest form, these laws say that heat cannot travel from a cold object to a warm object. It always has to be the other way round. This reality therefore gives us directionality, and this may give us the reason why we experience time that only heads into the future<sup>70</sup>.

Puzzled?

Let me put it another way.

The second law of thermodynamics states that all high-energy states (that can be expressed by things being highly ordered) will inevitably decay into lower and less ordered energy states with time. There can be no going backwards. This means that if something becomes fantastically ordered later in time – as in the evolution of human beings – it is only because the system has imported a lot of energy from another source, for the sad reality is, overall, the universe is heading towards a cooler, less organised energy state. It is heading towards something that scientists call “heat death.”<sup>71</sup> At the time of the Big Bang, however, (at the very start of things), the universe had a massively low entropy level. However, ever since the Big Bang, the entropy level has increased, i.e. the level of energy and order is fading away.

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<sup>69</sup> Reported by Martha Henriques, “Why Does Time Go Forwards and Not Backwards?” BBC Future, 4th October, 2022. See: <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20221003-why-does-time-go-forwards-not-backwards> (Martha Henriques is Editor of BBC Future Planet.)

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> There is a theory that the universe might “bounce” back into existence, but at the time of writing, it is a theory that is viewed as being less likely.

Marina Cortês, an astrophysicist at the University of Lisbon, says: “The likelihood of our current Universe having initial conditions of this kind [for the Big Bang], and not any other kind, is around one in 10 to the 10 to 124 ( $1:10^{10^{124}}$ )... which is quite possibly the biggest number in modern physics, outside of philosophy or mathematics.”<sup>72</sup>

This prompts a number of questions: Where did the fantastic level of energy (with the potential for fuelling amazing levels of order) originally come from? What fuelled the Big Bang and gave the universe its direction in time? Where did this restless energy for linear development come from?

The “heat death” of the universe will occur when the universe reaches its maximum entropy level, i.e. when it has reached a state of maximum disorder, having no energy or structure. This means that there will be no macro-structures for time to act on. Therefore, intriguingly, time itself will cease.

What can be said by way of conclusion? Perhaps this:

It can be said that time began when matter, larger than atoms, was created. Intriguingly, this realisation did not come about as a result of recent scientific discoveries. The early church theologian, Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430AD), spoke of creation being a single timeless act through which time itself came into being<sup>73</sup>.

It is so nice when scientists catch up with what theologians have been saying for centuries.

Let me conclude by saying that the phenomenon of forward-facing time is totally consistent with the action of a divine mind, a divine mind who wanted events in history to be significant, although that mind itself stands outside of time.

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<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Martha Henriques, “Why Does Time Go Forwards and Not Backwards?” BBC Future, 4th October, 2022. See: <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20221003-why-does-time-go-forwards-not-backwards>. (Martha Henriques is Editor of BBC Future Planet.)

<sup>73</sup> Augustine, Confessions XI.14, trans R.S. Pine-Coffin, (London: Penguin, 1961), 263.

# 112. What Do Sunflowers Teach Us About God?

**November 7, 2022**

If a rational God exists, then it is reasonable to expect to see signs of divine rationality in everything he has created. The good news is that we do. We see evidence of God's rationality in the patterns we observe in nature. One of the places we see them is in the humble sunflower.

But first: some background information.

Scientists and mathematicians have known for a long time that key numbers and patterns occur in creation, being seen in things as diverse as galaxies, sea shells and flowers. Artists too have appreciated this. The most pleasing shape of a rectangle has sides with the ratio of 21 to 34. We see this ratio in the design of the Parthenon and in the features of the Mona Lisa. A rectangle with this ratio is known as the "golden rectangle".

If you were to take two adjacent sides (a short and long side) of a golden rectangle, join them together and make a circle with them, the angle from the centre of the circle to that part of the circumference made from the short length is 137.5 degrees. This is known as "the golden angle," and it occurs everywhere.

Another series of numbers that keeps popping up is the Fibonacci series. This is a simple progression of numbers, with the next number being the sum of the previous two numbers, i.e. 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34 and so on.

Let's now return to our humble sunflower.

A sunflower keeps adding seeds to the outside edge of the seed head as it matures. Here's the interesting thing: A new seed will always develop at 137.5 degrees – the golden angle (as measured from the centre of the seed head), from the previous seed.

And

The pattern of seeds in the flower head is made up of 21 left-hand spirals of seeds, and 34 right-hand patterns of seeds (which happens to be the most efficient way of packing seeds into a confined space). Both of these numbers are sequential numbers in the Fibonacci series.

And

21 and 34 is the ratio of the sides of a Golden Rectangle.

Do you want some more?

If you take a golden rectangle and draw across it so that one end makes a square, the piece remaining will be another (smaller) golden rectangle. And if you draw across this remaining rectangle to make another square, you will also be left with another golden rectangle... and so on.

If you join the same corner of these golden rectangles with a curved line, you will have a spiral. Unsurprisingly, this spiral is known as “the golden spiral”, and its shape is seen in things as diverse as spiral galaxies and spiral seashells such as the nautilus.

It is little wonder that the English physicist, Paul Dirac, said ‘God is a mathematician of a very high order, and he used very advanced mathematics in constructing the universe.’<sup>74</sup>

Be amazed.

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<sup>74</sup> P. Dirac, (May 1963). “The Evolution of the Physicist’s Picture of Nature, *Scientific American*. Retrieved 4 April 2013.



# 113. Reply To A Journalist's Atheistic Attack On Christianity

**November 15, 2022**

Nikki Gemmell's article, "Losing their Religion"<sup>75</sup> exemplifies the zeitgeist of our time and gives a good insight into the thinking of atheists today. As such, it deserves attention.

To be fair, Gemmell doesn't say that she is an atheist, but she begins by quoting the late celebrity atheist, Christopher Hitchens, who asked if it was good that modern religion should "terrify children with the image of hell" and "to consider women an inferior creation." This opening puts Gemmell's prejudices and ideology on full display. And what follows is the rhetoric that is now consistently taught in the humanities departments of Western universities, and has become almost the only voice that the media will allow.

The lack of balance in Hitchens' comment is breathtaking. Rightly considered, Christianity is about the "gospel", a word which in its original Greek, means "good news." Christianity centres on the actions of a loving God who died on a cross to pay the price for all the bad things we have done which would otherwise disbar us from his presence.

Later in her article, Gemmell quotes a disaffected female cleric who wrote to expose patriarchy in the Pentecostal church. I suspect that some of her comments are warranted. But to suggest that Christianity is inherently anti-women is quite wrong. Jesus involved women in the key moments of his ministry. And in the second century, Christianity was attacked by the Greek philosopher, Celsus, because he thought it was only fit for women and slaves<sup>76</sup>. It's also worth remembering that it was Christian organisations, not atheists, who agitated for women to get the vote. Having said this, it is fair to acknowledge that things often go amiss when Christianity becomes institutionalised. When this happens, it is all too easy for the beauty of Jesus' grace and truth to become distorted by people's lust for power. However, authentic Christianity is beautiful, and it is this that atheists wilfully misrepresent.

Gemmell's mention of the protests against Islamic clerics in Iran allows her to sow the idea that her readers should view the Western expression of Christianity with the same abhorrence. The fact that the protestors were largely young adults, particularly women, means that Gemmell can recruit sentiment from both feminism and the young. The point she wants to make is that youth are marching out of the church, with its old-fashioned ideas of morality, and are now marching in

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<sup>75</sup> Australian Magazine, 5-6th November, 2022

<sup>76</sup> Origin, Contra Celsus, Book 3, Chapter 59.

defiance of the church. “They’re coming for you,” she says, using language that might be employed to describe the storming of the barricades in a Parisian revolution.

The reality is, however, all is not well with this young adult revolution. Things are not as rosy as she suggests. Many young adults have indeed cut themselves off from the moral boundaries God has given for their protection, but statistics tell us that they are also committing suicide in record numbers and are suffering more mental disorders than previous generations. The reasons for this are many and varied, but it is difficult not to conclude that in losing God, they have lost both meaning and hope.

An inconvenient fact that Gemmel ignores is that those young adults who do attend church prefer to attend evangelical churches that hold to conventional biblical ethics. The National Church Life Surveys tell us that young adults are leaving liberal churches that advocate non-biblical libertine values<sup>77</sup>.

In the true tradition of “wokeism”, Gemmel makes good use of emotive words to excoriate, misrepresent and demonise those she contends with. Christians who hold to conventional biblical teaching are lumped in with those she describes as ‘religious extremists.’ She uses phrases such as ‘Christian fundamentalism’ and speaks of the ‘dogma of religious ultra-conservatives.’ I simply don’t recognise the loving, faithful, accepting church I attend in her writing. Such misrepresentation is, I submit, unjust and deceiving. The reality is, the ‘religious extremists’ she speaks of simply hold to the teaching that conventional Christians have always believed. It has been these convictions that have brought civility to the West, a point that the agnostic sociologist, Tom Holland, makes in his magisterial work, “Dominion”. It is a civility that we are fast losing.

Gemmel also attacks Christians for being sure of their faith. She quotes the Australian singer, Nick Cave, who said that ‘being sure’ tends to give people a sense of moral superiority. However, the New Testament teaches plainly that we should have faith (2 Timothy 1:12; Hebrews 11:1). Whilst Christianity will necessarily have elements of mystery (because it involves a God who is bigger than us) it also makes clear the essential truths that Christians can, and should, be rightly sure of.

Nikki Gemmell speaks nicely of Jesus. It quickly becomes apparent why. She uses this “nice tolerant Jesus” to attack intolerant and out-of-touch Christian institutions. The problem, of course, is that Jesus was not tolerant of everything. He was a fierce supporter of the moral boundaries introduced in the Old Testament (except for the concessional laws he augmented in order to bring them fully into line with God’s values). Here’s what it boils down to: Jesus loved everyone.

However, he didn’t tolerate the behaviour of everyone. Big difference.

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<sup>77</sup> See also an article entitled: ‘Hip’ churches fading fastest, (The Advertiser, January 13, 2000, Page 33). The National Church Life Surveys occur every 5 years.

It's also worth remembering that whilst it is fashionable in the woke world to say that disagreeing with someone means you hate them, this is manifestly unfair. It should certainly not be applied to the church. The church may not agree with someone's life choices, but it will (or should) love and accept everyone.

Gemmel seeks to rub the faces of Christians in the reality of the falling church attendance numbers, so I'll end by saying this. Christianity has never been a popularity contest. Jesus actually warned that authentic Christians would always be in the minority (Matthew 7:13-14). Further than that, he said that they would always be persecuted (John 15:20).

Perhaps that's what I'm catching a whiff of.

# 114. An Answer To An Atheist's Attack On Miracles

**November 28, 2022**

The thinking of the Scottish philosopher, David Hume, gave impetus to atheism and the Enlightenment in the 18th century. Today, his thinking is still appealed to by those who attack belief in God. One of the issues Hume attacked was the existence of miracles, which of course, has relevance for the Christian understanding of the resurrection of Jesus. Hume expressed his convictions about miracles in Section X which he added to his book *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*<sup>78</sup>. He had omitted this section earlier for fear of upsetting religious people. Section X “On Miracles” has also been published as a separate book<sup>79</sup>.

Hume defines a miracle as, ‘a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent.’<sup>80</sup> The term ‘transgression’ is an emotionally loaded word, and it is likely that its use was not accidental. It was probably chosen because he wanted to sow the idea that miracles constituted an indefensible breaking of the rules. In other words, this may be a case of vocabulary betraying preconceptions.

A definition that conventional Christians would be happier with (and which would be less unfriendly) is this: A miracle occurs when God superimposes his greater authority on the existing authority he has given expression to through the natural laws of nature.

Hume says, quite reasonably, that if there is any probability that the person giving witness to a miracle is deceived or is not speaking truthfully, then he or she should not be believed<sup>81</sup>. Whilst this is indisputably so, this is a conviction that neither proves or disproves the existence of miracles. Hume seems to suggest that it does, for he says that because there is no natural explanation for miracles, they don’t exist. However, this is not a logical conclusion. The very definition of a miracle is that it is something unnatural, but this quality does not disprove their existence.

Some care needs to be taken over what is meant by the term “natural”. If God exists, he is under no obligation to be constrained in what he does so that he only does those things that appear natural to

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<sup>78</sup> See: David Hume, 1748 et seq., *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Tom L. Beauchamp (ed.), New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

<sup>79</sup> David Hume, *Of Miracles* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court Classic, 1985).

<sup>80</sup> David Hume, *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p.90.

<sup>81</sup> Hume, 1748/2000, p.89.

us. The reality is: if you allow the existence of God, everything changes, and miracles are no longer impossible.

We need to ask, then, whether it is reasonable to believe in the existence of God.

I think it is. Evidence for the existence of a “supreme mind” is seen in our universe being fine tuned to the level of many trillionths of a degree so as to allow life. One of those convinced by this, was the English philosopher, Anthony Flew. Flew gave the intellectual lead to atheism in the mid-late twentieth century. The relevance of this is that as an atheist, Flew wrote an introduction to Hume’s booklet *Of Miracles*<sup>82</sup>. However, later in life, Flew saw evidence of a “divine mind” in the fine tuning of the universe, and this convinced him of God’s existence<sup>83</sup>.

Acknowledging that God exists is massively significant in the debate about miracles. It does so because it introduces an agent that exists beyond the constraints and understandings of human beings – an agent that could be responsible for miracles. This means that whilst miracles involve an overriding of the normal laws of nature, this may not be abnormal to God. To him, it could be, and probably is, perfectly normal. Indeed, it would be strange if God did not superimpose his sovereign will in an event important to the plans he has for creation.

An uncomfortable reality faces all atheists, and because it is uncomfortable, atheists try to downplay it and dismiss it by any means possible. I refer to the miracle of the universe’s actual existence. Not only does a universe exist, but there now seems to be a steadily growing consensus amongst scientists that our planet is the only one with intelligent life on it. It has to be said that this conviction is hugely supportive of belief in God.

By any measurement, the universe is miraculous. If it came from nothing, as a result of nothing, it is miraculous. If it has always existed and propagated itself without reason or cause, it is miraculous. And if it came into being because of a divine mind, it is miraculous. Whatever the cause, it is miraculous. The significance of this, of course, is that if you admit to one miracle... then you have to allow for the possibility of others.

Sadly, there have been many frauds and delusions surrounding claims of things miraculous. Such claims have bedevilled Christianity throughout history and have sometimes brought the Christian faith into disrepute. Whilst this is so, conventional Christians have no problems with the concept of miracles – the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, being a peerless example.

This brings us to a point that is often overlooked when discussing miracles. It concerns how well a miracle, such as Jesus’ resurrection, fits into a broader narrative.

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<sup>82</sup> David Hume, *Of Miracles* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court Classic, 1985).

<sup>83</sup> Anthony Flew with Roy Abraham Varghese, *There Is A God: How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 141 and 150.

The miracles that occur in the Bible do not appear haphazardly. They don't blaze for a short time in the night sky like a soon-to-be-spent firework. They always appear as part of a larger story. This means that Christian miracles make sense when they are in synch with a grander narrative, a narrative that can be forensically examined historically, morally, scientifically and experientially<sup>84</sup>. Hume ends his Section X "Of Miracles" by giving one last reason why he believes divine miracles don't exist. He says that all religions have miracle stories, and it wouldn't be right to accept the miracle stories of one religion and not another. This leads him to say that as all religions contradict each other, no religion, and therefore no miracle story, can be true.

Hume's comment would be a perfectly valid if it were not for one rather obvious exception, and that is: unless just one religion and its miracles were true.

What, then, can be said in summary?

If God exists, he has to be the God of both the natural and the miraculous. God is not so feeble or inept that he must only work within the constraints of human perception. The strict boundaries we put on our reality are not constraints to an omnipotent God – an omnipotent God who has already shown his miraculous hand in building our universe.

So I invite you to seek him out.

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<sup>84</sup> Of course, this can also lead to the abuse of miracle claims (inventing a miracle to substantiate a grander narrative). Whilst this is acknowledged, the point I wish to make is that a miracle gains credibility when it is in synch with the wider narrative of God's action in history, a history that can be forensically examined.