

**A Layman's Guide to
Systematic Theology
And Apologetics**

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Acknowledgements

It is my sincere hope and prayer that this book will be a help to the Christian layperson. That it will be a means of equipping the saints for the work of ministry. I felt the need to write this; mainly because of my experiences as a pastor in which I found that many Christians could not give a reason for what they believe, nor did they even know or understand what their beliefs were. In America many a person claims to be a Christian simply because he or she was born a United States citizen. Others claim to be Christians simply because their mother and father were Christians. While others still claim that they are Christians because they were baptized in water. This clearly shows a lack of Biblical understanding among confessing Christians, at least in the U.S.

I have tried to write this book in a way that the common layperson can easily understand it, and though it is not an exhaustive systematic theology I have tried to cover as many of the bases that I could, without getting too bogged down in theological lingo and terminology. I must stress that this book is only intended to be an aid to Christians, a means to assist in the study of God's word, in theology, and apologetics. And as it is written by a fallible human, it should not be considered gospel or without errors. There is no doubt that Arminians will disagree with much of it, as will liberal theologians, as may some evangelicals.

I have written it in two sections, the first dealing with theology and doctrine, and the second with apologetics. The first is in the form of a summary as it would take several volumes of books to lay out the entire Christian Theology in book form. The second section I have tried to give brief backgrounds to the most common non-Christian religions and teachings and then refutations to those religions, cults, and false doctrines. Having earned my degree in History I have chosen to use the Turabian (Chicago) style of footnoting and bibliography simply because I am more comfortable with that style.

Some thanks are in order. I would first like to thank my father, Ken McKinley Sr. whose return to the Lord was no doubt a major influence in my coming to Christ. He has been and continues to be a great inspiration of faith to me. I would also like to thank my wife, MariJo McKinley, whose patience and understanding allowed me to stay up late nights while writing this work. (*I love you honey*). I owe a great deal of thanks to my uncle, Gary McKinley who has helped me get this published. I must also thank the numerous pastors, evangelists, apologists, Bible teachers, professors, and theologians who have influenced me throughout the years in so many ways; men of faith past and present, great is your reward. Most importantly, I must thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who saved the worst among you, when He saved a wretch like me. Without Him I could do nothing.

To my daughters, Leslie and Gabriel
Study to show yourselves approved workers that need not be ashamed
Rightly dividing the Word in Truth

Book One

Bibliology: The Bible

The term Bibliology comes from the Greek word *biblos*, meaning “book”. It literally means, “The study of the Book” with the “Book” being the Bible. Bibliology often includes such topics as revelation, inspiration, inerrancy, canonicity, illumination and interpretation, AKA hermeneutics.

Revelation

The term “revelation” means to “unveil” or “uncover”. Biblically speaking, revelation is the act and process whereby God makes Himself known to us. He has done this in various ways, including miracles, visions, dreams, creation, providence, conscience, Jesus Christ, and Scripture. Theologians have spoken of “general” revelation through nature, conscience and providence and “special” revelation found in Christ and in Scripture (Ps 19:1-6; Romans 1:18-20, 2:14-16; Acts 17:24-34; John 1:14-18).

Thus general revelation is equally available to all men at all times and while it alone cannot save, it is nonetheless both essential and preparatory to special revelation.¹

General revelation is also one of the reasons all mankind is guilty before God (See Romans Chs. 1 & 2).

Inspiration

“Inspiration” is the theological word, derived from the Latin term *spiro*, used to refer to the process whereby God superintended the human authors of scripture so that what they wrote was simultaneously their own words as well the Word of God Himself; God “breathed out” His words through the writings (using the minds and personalities) of His spokespeople (2nd Timothy 3:16). Thus, through Spirit-inspired writings God has preserved an historical/theological record of His words and deeds and has given it to His covenant people as a means of grace that they might trust Him fully and obey Him implicitly. As a result of our sinfulness and finiteness we stand in need of such divine guidance and wisdom; scripture was inspired to that end.

Inspiration, however, is not limited to mechanical dictation (indeed, very little of it can be said to be mechanical in any way), as we might have, say, in the receiving of the Ten Commandments (or the letters to the churches in Revelation 2-3), but rather, occurred in a variety of situations involving the writers as whole people (their minds, emotions, wills, etc.) in their own particular life situations (linguistic, religious, political, economic, etc.). The end product, however, was always God’s Word to man through man (2nd Tim 3:16; 2nd Pet 1:20-21) and carries God’s “full weight and authority.” Technically speaking, inspiration applies to the autographa (not later copies or translations).

Some theologians have referred to the verbal (extending to the actual words, not just concepts), plenary (the entire Bible, not only those parts that seem to speak directly to issues of faith and practice) inspiration of Scripture. This is the view that (1) best corresponds to the view of OT writers, the prophets, Christ Himself and His apostles, and

¹ The objective revelation of God through nature, history, and conscience (human nature) is not extinguished because of man’s fall (see Psalm 19:1-6; Rom 2:14-15; Acts 17:26-27), but is seriously distorted through suppression and deliberate contempt (Rom 1:18-20).

(2) best represents the historic position/understanding of the church on this issue. Since the Enlightenment in France and Germany (17th/18th centuries), however, it has been fashionable to deny the verbal plenary inspiration of Scripture in light of apparent historical inaccuracies and philosophical objections, particularly with the existence and nature of God as well as the limitations of language. But, while we can learn much from these views, we may safely set aside their anti-super naturalistic prejudices as both unfounded and contrary to the teaching of Jesus who Himself strongly upheld the complete trustworthiness of Scripture without reserve (e.g., Matt 5:17-20).

Inerrancy

Inerrancy, although not always properly defined, is a logical companion to inspiration and in no way diminishes the human authorship of scripture. If what the authors of Scripture penned was indeed under the supernatural influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit (as is properly affirmed), then since God is true, what they wrote and affirmed is in all ways true as well. Thus inerrancy applies to the autographa and Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic copies insofar as they faithfully reproduce the autographa. The doctrine rightly teaches that the scriptures are without error in all that they affirm (i.e., properly interpreted), whether they refer to geographical, historical, or theological issues. Thus the scriptures are the final authority in matters of faith and practice and take precedence over tradition, culture, and creed. This doctrine also allows for different literary styles, poor grammar, approximations in numbers, etc. (Psalm 119).

Canonicity

The sixty-six books of scripture constitute the Protestant canon in that they provide God's rule for faith and life. The process of canonicity involves the church's recognition of the divine origin and authority of the sixty-six books of scripture. The church, as the redeemed community, made up of those of those who have genuine faith in Jesus Christ, is qualified for this task. It is important to note, however, that the church did not determine which books were canonical, but only recognized those books which were canonical; scripture is self-authenticating. In the case of the Old Testament, generally speaking, the church received it as the authoritative Bible of her Lord and His apostles, i.e., the prophetic message of God which was now fulfilled in and through Christ. In the case of the New Testament, the church, by applying varying tests such as apostolicity (was it written by an apostle or authenticated by an apostle?), universality (was it widely read and accepted?), and character (sufficiently spiritual, directed at godliness, doctrinal content in agreement with other apostles) recognized which books were "from the Lord" and which were not, though the process was by no means finalized by the end of the first century. In AD 367, in the 39th Easter Letter of Athanasius, we find a list of the 27 books of the NT we have today. This list was accepted by the churches east of the Mediterranean while churches in the west came to accept the same list some 30 years later, in AD 397, at the Council of Carthage.²

There are undoubtedly many reasons which prompted early Christians to preserve the writings of the apostles, but perhaps the passing away of the apostles as well as the

² For more information on the canon of Scripture, see Roger Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985); F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988); Harry Y. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning*, New Testament Series, ed. Dan O. Via (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: University Press, 1987).

development of heresies and doctrinal disputes, were two of the most significant. Also, the Diocletian persecution (AD 303-11), in which Christians were tortured, their property taken, and their sacred books destroyed by fire, undoubtedly helped to move the church along in its recognition of which books were sacred (i.e., inspired) and which were not. That is, there arose the need to know which books to copy and preserve in light of the possibility that the state continue to try and destroy the faith.

The extent of the canon has been in some question among Protestants and Catholics since the addition of the Apocrypha at the Council of Trent (AD 1545-63). Anyone who has read these books may find them encouraging, much the same as reading great Christian literature, but they should not be regarded as on par with the 66 books, a fact which is recognized even by the Catholic Church in its reference to them as deuterocanonical.

Illumination

Illumination refers to the work of the Spirit in the believer/believing community enabling him/her/them to understand, welcome, and apply Scriptural truth (cf. 1st Cor. 2:9-14).³ For our part, we are to follow sound methods of interpretation in keeping with the nature of Scripture and generally accepted principles for understanding written communication. Further, we are, by faith in Christ, to put into practice that which the Scripture teaches us, lest we become blinded by our accumulated ignorance (James 1:21-22) and progressively blurred in our comprehension of spiritual realities. In this way illumination increases and our grip on the truth strengthens (or perhaps its grip on us!).

Interpretation

If Illumination is the work of the Spirit to help believers understand and apply Scripture, interpretation, broadly conceived, is the thought-through method we should follow in this endeavor. Interpretation involves, then, three elements: (1) coming to scripture humbly with a knowledge of my presuppositions, traditions, and cultural influences so as not to blunt or skew the force of scripture (but rather to allow it to leave its mark on me); (2) understanding what an author *meant* when he said such and such, and (3) understanding what he *means*, that is, how it applies to our lives today. Thus, in the first step we are interested in gaining an awareness of how our culture, tradition, and past acquaintance with Scripture have affected us. In the second step we are interested in the grammatical-historical meaning of a passage of Scripture. In order to achieve this we study the words of a text in their historical and grammatical context, the literary structure of a passage, its mood, and the kind (genre) of literature it is. Combined with this is the comparing of scripture with scripture (e.g., interpreting the obscure by the clear) and ultimately the teaching of the Bible as a whole. In this way, and through the illuminating work of the Spirit, the church comes to grips with the meaning and abiding relevance of Scripture. But this is only half the job. Moses did not write Deuteronomy and Paul did not pen Philippians simply to be understood (i.e., between one's ears). Rather, they wrote to save, guide, instruct, and even discipline other believers to God's will. In short, their writings call for a response and this involves first letting the Bible speak to the reader; convicting, educating, encouraging, and showing us where to go. We must bring our presuppositions

³ The entire passage from 2:6-16 has received no little attention in recent years. But even though there are disagreements regarding grammar, background, and theological emphases, there can be little doubt that the relevant thought for our purposes is quite clear: man in his unregenerate and carnal state cannot understand and accept the things of God (e.g., the cross-centered gospel), whereas the believer, who enjoys the enlightening ministry of the Spirit (cf. Eph 1:18), *is able to welcome* God's truth—now preserved for us in Scripture—in a deeply personal and transformative way.

and patterns of life to the passage and allow it to judge and straighten. Then we must allow the Scripture – as the very voice of God Himself – to influence our beliefs and world views according to His will. We must be careful to not fall into the trap of reading what we believe, and instead make sure that we believe what we are reading. The Lordship of Christ extends to the entire universe, and we must remember that His word is a primary way in which He expresses His grace oriented, kingly rule over us.

Hermeneutics

Biblical hermeneutics, the art of interpreting the Bible, aims to develop rules for its interpretation. Given below are two basic rules with important refinements for each, and these rules are based on the conviction that the triune God for the sake of His elect progressively revealed Himself, according to His own immutable counsel, through the inspired authors, and providentially superintended the collection of their writings into the canon, the Bible, to His own eternal glory.

Rule One: Interpret the Words of the Bible in the Light of Their Historical Context.

The different parts of the Bible must be interpreted according to the grammatical-historical method, that is, by studying the meaning of its words in the light of the time and place they were originally written. The books of the Bible are quite old, much older than other books most people have ever read. The world of the Bible is so different from ours that sometimes a translation cannot bridge the gap between these ancient texts and modern readers. But translators of this Bible and the contributors of the notes have not reinterpreted the Bible to suit modern attitudes; neither should the reader.

The application of the first rule is complex because the Biblical writings were continually relocated as the canon of Scripture progressively expanded. In this unfolding context earlier texts take on fuller senses. For example, the individual psalms addressed to the people in the first temple period became finally the written Word of God to the covenant people as a whole after they were collected and arranged in the Book of Psalms. From this point, the psalms had to be read and meditated upon (Ps. 1) in the light of their new literary social contexts. For example, Psalm 2, which proclaims Israel's king as the ideal son of God with a mandate to rule the earth through prayer and power, was sung before the Exile in the first temple, probably at the coronation of Israel's kings. When the Book of Psalms was edited after the Exile, however, Israel's throne was vacant, waiting for a promised king, “the Messiah.” In that light Psalm 2 became purely prophetic. After the coming of Christ the Psalms became part of the Bible that included the New Testament; in that light “the Messiah” of Psalm 2 takes on its fullest and clearest sense: He is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Understanding the Bible fully means keeping an eye on the developing stages of revelation.

Rule Two: Interpret the Parts of the Bible in the Light of the Whole.

The second important rule of interpretation is often called “the analogy of faith.” This rule asserts that Scripture interprets Scripture. The Bible itself says that all its parts are inspired by God (2nd Tim. 3:16), who is not a God of disorder (1st Cor. 14:33). The rule is corroborated by the existence of the Bible as a single volume. The collection of sixty-six books, written over a span of fifteen hundred years, into one book, reflects the church's conviction that the transcendent Author superintended the collection of the many writings into a harmonious whole. Interpretation that pits Scripture against Scripture dishonors the Alpha and Omega, who sees and rules from the beginning to the end of all things.

More specifically, the Old Testament must be interpreted in the light of the New Testament. This is required for both literary and theological reasons. In a linguistic discourse the flow of thought keeps screening out unintended meanings. For example, the word “before” in the statement, “she sang before the Queen,” is ambiguous until the speaker adds “before the Queen rose to speak,” or “before the Queen on her throne.” In a similar way, as God's story of revealing and establishing His kingdom unfolds, ambiguous texts become clearer. For example, the ambiguous “offspring” (one or many?) in God's promise to Abraham (Gen. 22:18) becomes focused on Christ (Gal. 3:16). The unidentified maiden and Immanuel of Is. 7:14 are seen to be the Virgin Mary and her Son (Matt. 1:23), and the anonymous Servant in Isaiah (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 52:13 - 53:12; 61:1, 2) is revealed as Jesus, the suffering and yet triumphant Savior (Matt. 12:18-21; Luke 24:44-49; 1st Pet. 1:11).

This rule is required theologically. Christ, who through the Holy Spirit administers His Word to the apostles, is not only the final but also the best revelation of God. God spoke at various times in various ways in time past (Heb. 1:1), including his revelation to Moses and to the prophets. In spite of their varying psychologies by which God revealed Himself to them, all biblical authors write with infallible authority. But they are not of equal weight in interpretation, as the conflict of Aaron and Miriam against Moses makes evident. Moses' brother and sister, themselves both prophets, challenged the priority of Moses' words over theirs (Num. 12:1, 2). In reply, God censured them for their pride, arguing that Moses' words were superior because God gave Moses a more intimate and clearer revelation than He gave to them (vv. 6-8). The story establishes the important principle that the forms of revelation require a hierarchy of interpretive priorities. Christ is as much greater than Moses as a Son over a house is greater than a slave within it (Heb. 3:5, 6). If Aaron and Miriam should have feared to make themselves equal with Moses, how much more should readers fear to make the Old Testament superior to the New Testament that completes it? In fact, as the conversation between Philip and the Ethiopian official shows (Acts 8:30, 31), the Old Testament cannot be fully understood without the New Testament. This does not mean that the New Testament corrects the Old Testament, but that it provides greater clarity in understanding the Old Testament.

With these two fundamental rules in hand we can now proceed to refine them. The grammatical, historical method recognizes that different kinds of literature, or “genres,” such as history, law, poetry, and prophecy, in the Old Testament, and parables, and letters in the New, will require different rules of interpretation. For example, in contrast to legal literature, prophetic literature, as Numbers 12:6,7 makes plain, is frequently symbolic and full of figures of speech, such as metaphor, personification, and metonymy. Moreover, the prophet's symbolic visions and dreams have taken their hue and coloring from their historical situations. For example, at the threshold of prophecy God warns the serpent: “He [the woman's offspring] shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” This is not a myth about the antipathy between humans and snakes, but a statement about the conflict between Christ and Satan (Rom. 16:20); the prophecy took its coloring from the situation in the garden.

This kind of symbolic language becomes even more intensified and extensive in apocalyptic literature such as Daniel in the Old Testament and Revelation in the New. The Ishtar Gate of Nebuchadnezzar, now in a museum in Germany, will readily explain why Daniel had fanciful dreams of animals. On that gate through which Daniel passed

many times, the patron deity of Babylon's chief administrator, saw a lion with the wings of an eagle leading a train of other bizarre animals representing Babylon and successive kingdoms (Daniel 7).

The Old Testament prophets, using the images of their world to show the greatness of Christ's rule from His heavenly throne, supercharged the old figures. To portray the heavenly character of Christ's rule, for example, Mount Zion is described as the highest mountain, presumably, were it known, higher than Mt. Everest (Mic. 4:1). To show the holiness of His kingdom, even the equipment of horses bears the inscription formerly reserved for the diadem of the high priest, HOLINESS TO THE LORD (Zech. 14:20). Jesus used enigmatic parables in order to conceal His meaning from unbelievers and to reveal it to His disciples (Matt. 13). Emphatically, the first rule of hermeneutics does not mean that words are always to be taken in their plain, "natural" sense; the interpreter has to take careful note of figures of speech and literary genres.

Prophetic and apocalyptic literature in the Old Testament and Christ's parables in the New must not be read in the same way as Paul's letters. Just as encyclopedia articles cannot be read as poems, so also the Psalms ought not to be read like Chronicles. Relatively clear texts like the epistles ought not to be interpreted in the light of the less clear prophetic and apocalyptic literature; in-stead, the unclear should be read in light of the clear. More subtly, even such letters of Paul as those to the Corinthians, which assume the reader knows the situation the apostle is addressing, are less clear than an epistle like Romans, which logically sets forth the Christian faith within a particular historical context.

Even what appears to be straight-forward history, such as Kings and Chronicles in the Old Testament, and the Gospels in the New, is not as straight-forward as may appear upon first reading. The inspired historians of both Testaments have carefully chosen and arranged their material to teach spiritual lessons according to the needs of their audiences. Sometimes incidents are arranged in topical or dramatic order rather than in a purely chronological sequence. For example, the Table of Nations in Gen. 10 chronologically came after Gen. 11, the story about the Tower of Babel, but Moses wanted his audience to view the nations under God's blessing (Gen. 9:1-17) and not under His judgment (Gen. 11:9). Sometimes the line between historical and symbolic literature is attenuated as in the stories of the early chapters of Genesis and, as some think, in Jonah. Specifically, no one thinks that Eve only was sentenced to return to the ground upon death (Gen. 3:16-19). Every reader intuitively perceives that Adam and Eve represent every man and woman. Nevertheless, the genealogies of the Old Testament and the teachings of New Testament validate their historical character as well.

The second rule, the "analogy of faith," needs to be refined particularly with reference to the political history of the Old Testament and its relation to the New. God is not pursuing two programs, one with earthly Israel and a second with the heavenly Church, as popularized in dispensational teaching. Rather, the earthly presentation of the kingdom in the Old Testament is typical of its heavenly and spiritual manifestation in the New Testament. For example, the political and religious deliverance of Israel from Egypt through the Passover lamb, Israel's baptism in the Red Sea and the pilgrimage through the wilderness, sustained by manna from heaven and water from a rock, and then entrance into the land of Canaan, depict in concrete terms the spiritual experience of the Church. The Old Testament history graphically portrays the exodus of the New Israel from the Satanic world with its bondage of sin and death through the Passover Lamb, Christ (1st

Cor. 5:17), baptism into His death and resurrection, that is a death to the world and rising to the newness of His resurrection life (Rom. 6:3,4; Gal. 6:14), pilgrimage to the heavenly city, nourished by the sacraments of bread and wine (1st Cor. 10:1-17), and final rest in the Promised Land (Heb. 4:6-11; 11:39,40). Israel's ritual, with its consecrated site at Mount Zion, its sacred Sabbaths and seasons, its holy priests and kings, and its hallowed institutions such as animal sacrifice, symbolized the heavenly realities (Ex. 25:9) now fulfilled since Christ entered the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 9:10). The earthly and temporal rituals were typical and became forever obsolete when Christ brought His glorified church to the eternal, heavenly realms. Today the church "is hidden with Christ" in the heavenly domains (Col. 3:1-4) and in the future He without a veil will be seen (1st John 3:2, 3). The Christian must read Israel's history and ceremonies not only with a view to understanding what Israel's history and ritual meant at the time, but also with an eye to their antitypical significance according to the New Testament.

Moreover, the prophetic promises, molded according to the political expressions of the kingdom as known before Christ, must not be interpreted as having a future, carnal fulfillment based on the typical model that has forever been done away (Heb. 8:13), as some dispensational teaching has supposed. Rather, the promises must be read in the light of the antitypical, heavenly, and spiritual realities that endure forever (2nd Cor. 4:18).

Lastly, although the Bible is a very old book, it is addressed to you. When introducing citations from the Old Testament, the New Testament writers frequently use the present tense, "God says," rather than "God said," and they reinforced the present relevance of His ancient Word by adding, "to us" and "to you," rather than, "to them" (1st Cor. 9:9,10). Both Moses and Paul say, "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (Deut. 30:14; Rom. 10:8). Second, because the Bible is God's Word, do not read the Bible in the same way as other books. Biblical writers consistently use such expressions as "God says" (Is. 1:18-20; Matt. 19:4; Acts 4:25). Often God says directly, "I say" (Mic. 1:6-8). Accept God's word in faith and mediate upon it with memorization, imagination, and reflection. And before reading, pray that the Holy Spirit might teach you what He would, so that you may rightly divide the Word of truth.

Theology Proper

Theology refers to the study of God, and more specifically, the triune God. It often includes such topics as rational arguments for the existence of God, the attributes of God, the Names of God, the trinity, and the decree or plan of God.

RATIONAL ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

It needs to be said up front that the Bible nowhere argues for the existence of God in the way envisioned in these “proofs.” The overwhelming orientation of the Biblical writers is to assume that God exists and then to move on from there. Also, the strength of these arguments has been variously debated; some people find them helpful and generally convincing, especially when taken together, while others are not the least bit convinced. It is doubtful whether there is any necessary logical fault involved in denying any one of their premises or assertions since in many cases opponents are simply beginning with a different set of axioms. Further, there are many variations (i.e., more than one cosmological argument) of the arguments listed here. One should consult a textbook on the philosophy of religion for further discussion.⁴ Also, one should note that these arguments have been criticized by more than atheists. The following is simply an introduction.

The Argument from Creation

The argument from creation or otherwise known as the *cosmological argument* states, in its most basic form, that everything we know in creation or in the universe has a cause. But there cannot be an infinite regress of causes. Therefore, the universe itself has an uncaused cause and this Cause is God. In one form or another, this argument has been advanced by Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, and C.S. Lewis. One potential defeater of this argument is the denial that one must look outside creation for a cause; creation might simply have always existed. But some take issue with this rebuttal arguing that such a response is in reality a cop-out since it does not explain why the universe of created, apparently contingent beings *continues* to exist. Also, it seems to be question-begging to *ex cathedra* postulate an infinite series of causes when such an argument is logically trivial and according to many philosophers and physicists, absurd. An infinite series of causes is an intellectual copout, they argue, and violates the principle of sufficient reason.

The Argument from Design

The argument from design or otherwise known as the *teleological argument* observes the harmony, order, and design of things within creation. It then argues that such design and order implies purpose and, therefore, there must be an intelligent Designer and that Designer must be God. This argument too has been advanced since Greek philosophy and was propounded by Aquinas as his Fifth Way, William Paley, and also by Swinburne in recent times. One potential defeater of this argument is the apparent randomness of certain things and events in creation and the apparent lack of design. The problem of the quantity of evil would fit in here as well. Proponents of the design argument often suggest that there do appear to be random events, and so on, but this still does not detract from the overwhelming sense of design we experience. If design were not so, it is doubtful that human beings could or would have survived even this long.

⁴ I would recommend the following books: *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, By John Calvin; *Systematic Theology*, By R.L. Dabney, and *Biblical Doctrines*, By B.B. Warfield

The Argument from Being

Anslem's argument from being, or otherwise referred to as the *ontological argument*, claims that God is that "than which nothing greater can be thought." Since existence is a necessary property of the most perfect being, He must actually exist, since if He did not, He would not be the most perfect being one could think of. One potential defeater of this argument is the claim that it entails the notion of God in its premises. It, therefore, assumes what it is trying to prove. "It begs the question," as some would say.

The Argument from Morality

The argument from morality argues from *the fact of morality*, not the existence of what appear to be varied moralities. It states that the fact of conscience and morality indicate that there must be a moral Law-Giver. One potential defeater of this argument is the claim that morality is an evolutionary phenomenon and one does not need to postulate God in order to account for its existence. Others attempt as well to argue that there are many different moralities, a fact they claim does not lead one to the conviction that there is just one God, as theism argues. Proponents of the argument from morality point out that the evolutionist cannot have it both ways. The mechanism for evolution is generally taken to be some form of "survival of the fittest." If, then, morality were an evolutionary phenomenon, one would not expect human beings to care for the aged, to help the sick, to create, fund, and advance hospitals and medical research. But we do, and we find ourselves with a sense of guilt when we do otherwise. Also, it is by no means certain that there are many different moralities among human beings on the planet. In fact, the overwhelming data from sociologists is that in terms of basic morality about murder, stealing, lying, etc. humans are for the most part very similar. This does not mean that lying is sometimes honored; it means that it cannot be practiced consistently and universally in any one culture without that culture ceasing to function.

The Attributes of God

The attributes of God refer to those qualities or properties that set Him apart as God and by which we recognize Him as such. They are the "traits" if you will that God has attributed to Himself through Scripture. Theologians have tended to distinguish His attributes in terms of those that He alone possesses and those which He shares in a derivative and finite sense with His creation. God reveals Himself through His attributes, and it is customary to distinguish between incommunicable and communicable attributes. The Incommunicable Attributes: These emphasize the absolute distinction between God and the creature, and include the following.

1. The self existence of God: This means that God has the ground of His existence in Himself, and unlike man, does not depend on anything outside of Himself, (Ps. 33:11, 115:3; Isa. 40:18; Dan. 4:35; John 5:26; Rom. 11:33-36; Acts 17:25; Rev. 4:11).
2. The immutability of God: The Bible teaches that God is unchangeable. He is forever the same in His divine being and perfections, and also in His purposes and promises, (Num23:19; Ps. 33:11, 102:27; Mal. 3:6; Heb. 6:17). This does not mean that there is no movement in God. The Bible speaks of Him as coming and going, hiding and revealing Himself. He is also said to repent, but this is only a human way of speaking of God and really indicates a change in man's relation to God, (Ex. 32:14; Jonah 3:10).
3. The infinity of God: This means that God is not subject to limitations. We can speak of His infinity in more than one sense. In relation to His being, it may be called His absolute perfection. He is unlimited in His knowledge and wisdom, in His goodness and

love, in His righteousness and holiness, (Job 11:7-10; Ps. 145:3). Seen in relation to time, it is called His eternity. God is beyond time and therefore not subject to its limitations. For Him there is only an eternal present, and no past or future. Seen in relation to space, this is called His immensity or omnipresence. He is everywhere present, but is in no way bound by space, (1st Kings 8:27; Ps. 139:7-10; Isa. 66:1; Jer. 23:23-24; Acts 17:27-28).

The Communicable Attributes: These are the attributes of which we find some resemblance in man. It should be kept in mind; however, that what we see in man is only a limited and imperfect likeness of that which is unlimited and perfect in God. The communicable attributes include the following.

1. The knowledge of God: This is that perfection of God whereby He, in a manner all His own, knows Himself and all things possible. God has this knowledge in Himself, and does not obtain it from without. It is always complete and always present in His mind. This is called omniscience. He knows all things, past, present, and future, and not only the things that have real existence, but also those things which are possible, (1st Kings 8:29; Ps. 139:1-16; Isa. 46:10; Ezek. 11:5; Acts 15:18; John 21:17; Heb. 4:13).
2. The wisdom of God: God's wisdom is an aspect of His knowledge. It is the virtue of God which manifests itself in election, and in the choice of the best means for the realization of those ends. The final end to which He makes all things subservient in His own glory, (Rom. 11:33; 1st Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:6-14; Col. 1:16).
3. The goodness of God: God is good, meaning that He is perfectly holy. This is not the goodness we have in mind here. In this connection we refer to the divine goodness that reveals itself in doing well to others. It is that perfection which prompts Him to deal kindly and graciously with all of His creatures. The Bible refers to this repeatedly, (Ps. 36:6, 104:21, 145:8-16; Matt. 5:45; Acts 14:17).
4. The love of God: This is often called the most central attribute of God, but in actuality it should not be considered as any more central than the other perfections of God. It may be considered from various points of view. The unmerited love of God which reveals itself in pardoning of sin is called His grace, (Eph. 1:6-7, 2:7-9; Tit. 2:11) That love relieving the misery of those who are bearing the consequences of sin is known as His mercy, (Luke 1:64-78; Rom. 15:9, 9:16-18; Eph. 2:4). When God's love bears with the sinner who does not heed the instructions and warnings of God it is called His longsuffering, (Rom. 2:4, 9:22; 1st Pet. 3:20; 2nd Peter 3:16).
5. The holiness of God: God's holiness is first of all that divine perfection by which He is absolutely distinct from all His creatures, and exalted above them in infinite majesty, (Ex. 15:11; Isa. 57:15). But it denotes in the second place that He is free from all moral impurity or sin, and is therefore morally perfect. In the presence of the holy God man is deeply conscious of his sin, (Job 34:10; Isa. 6:5; Hab. 1:13).
6. The righteousness of God: The righteousness of God is that perfection by which He maintains Himself as the Holy One against every violation of His holiness. By it, He maintains a moral government in the world and imposes a just law on man, rewarding obedience and punishing disobedience, (Ps. 99:4; Isa. 33:22; Rom. 1:32).
7. The veracity of God: This is that perfection of God in virtue of which He is true in His inner being, in His revelation, and in His relation to His people. He is the true God over and against idols, He knows things as they really are, and is faithful in the fulfillment of

His promises. This is also often called God's faithfulness, (Num. 23:19; 1st Cor. 1:9; 2nd Tim. 2:13; Heb. 10:23).

8. The sovereignty of God: This may be considered from two different points of view; His sovereign will and His sovereign power. The will of God is represented in Scripture as the final cause of all things, (Eph. 4:11; Rev. 4:11). On the basis of Deuteronomy 29:29 it is customary to distinguish between the secret and revealed will of God. The former is the will of God's decree, which is hidden in God and can be known only from its effects. The other, the revealed will of God is revealed in the law and in the gospel. The deeds of man are also under the control of His sovereign will, (Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23). The power to execute His will is called His omnipotence. That God is omnipotent does not mean that He can do anything. The Bible teaches us that there are some things that God cannot do. He cannot lie, sin, deny Himself, (Num. 23:19; 1st Sam. 15:29; 2nd Tim. 2:13; Heb. 6:18). It does mean that He can, by the mere exercise of His will, bring to pass whatsoever He has decided to accomplish, and that if He so desired, He could do even more than that, (Gen. 18:14; Jer. 32:27; Zech. 8:6; Matt. 3:9, 26:53).

Some will no doubt ask why God cannot do things such as lie, sin, or deny Himself. The simple answer is because such things are against His nature. God is perfectly holy, righteous, and just, to lie or sin would be contrary to His nature as well as contrary to His very being.

The Names of God

God has revealed Himself in many ways throughout history, now recorded for us in Scripture – a living, inspired record of His disclosures about who He is, His purposes, plan, character and will. On many occasions He has disclosed to us several names by which He has unveiled His nature and by which we are subsequently to understand Him. Some of these names include: Yahweh (the self-existent one); Yahweh Shalom (Yahweh is peace); Yahweh Maccaddeshem (Yahweh your sanctifier); Yahweh Raah (Yahweh is my shepherd); Yahweh Shammah (Yahweh who is present); Yahweh Rapha (Yahweh who heals); Yahweh Elohim (Yahweh, the mighty one); Adonai (Lord or Master); El (The mighty and feared one); Elohim (The mighty or majestic ones [denotes the Trinity]); El Olam (The mighty one, eternal); El Elyon (The most high mighty one); El Roi (The mighty one who sees); El Shaddai (Almighty God); Yeshua (Jesus; God saves); Christos (Christ; Messiah, Anointed one); Kurios (Lord); Soter (Savior), Abba (Father), and Theos (God).

When God gives names to persons or things, they are names which have meaning and give an insight into the nature of the persons or things designated. This also applies to the names which God has given Himself. Sometimes the Bible speaks of the name of God in the singular, and in such cases the term is a designation of the manifestation of God in general, especially in relation to His people, (Ex. 20:7; Ps. 113:3), or simply stands for God Himself, (Prov. 18:10; Isa. 50:10). The one general name of God is split up into several special names, which are expressive of His revealed being. These names are not of human invention, but are given by God to man. The greatest name of God, however always held sacred by the Jews, is the name Yahweh or Jehovah. Its origin and meaning is indicated in Exodus 3:14-15. It expresses the fact that God is always the same, and that He is unchangeable in His covenant relationship, and is always faithful in the fulfillment of His promises.

In the New Testament the names of God are simply Greek forms of those found in the Old Testament. The name Kurios is the word for “Lord” and it is a name that is not only applied to God, but also to Jesus Christ. It takes the place of both “Adonai” and “Jehovah”, though its meaning corresponds more particularly with that of “Adonai.” The name “Pater” (Father) found in the New Testament is often said to be a new name introduced in the New Testament. But this is incorrect. The name “Father” is also found in the Old Testament to express the special relation in which God stands to His covenant people Israel, (Deut. 32:6; Isa. 63:16). In the New Testament it still is a term relating covenant, but it is more individual in that it points to God as the Father of all believers. It also sometimes designates God as the creator of all, (1st Cor. 8:6; Eph. 3:14; Heb. 12:9; James 1:17), and sometimes the first Person of the Trinity as the Father of Christ, (John 14:11, 17:1).

The Trinity / Triune Nature of God

The doctrine of the Trinity is the affirmation based on the evidence of scripture that there is one God who exists eternally in three distinguishable persons, i.e., the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. A specific way of speaking about this phenomenon is to say that God is: one in essence/substance (*homoousios*), three in subsistence. The prominent contribution of the Old Testament to Trinitarianism, while providing what some consider to be evidence of the divinity of the Son and the Spirit, is to repeatedly affirm the unity of God, both numerically and qualitatively. This unity is developed in the New Testament, however, in light of the coming and teaching of Christ, and shown to be more complex than had previously been known or understood. In the New Testament all three (i.e., the Father, Son and Spirit) are said to be divine, to do the works of God, and to be worshipped as God. The Father is clearly divine in the New Testament. The Son is deity (John 1:1; Titus 2:13), yet constantly distinguishes Himself from the Father and the Spirit. And the Spirit is said to be God (Matt 28:19-20; Acts 5:3-5) and to be distinguished from the Father and the Son. Thus there is no room in the Biblical portrait for three gods (tritheism) or one God who manifests Himself in three different modes (modalism). The Biblical portrait of God is that He is Trinitarian.

The Father can and does speak to the Son and vice versa, and both can send forth the Spirit. The three are not subordinate in being the one to the other, though it may be said that the Son humbled Himself and put Himself “under” the Father for the purpose of mans redemption.

There are plenty of Scripture proofs for the Trinity.⁵ The Old Testament contains some indication of the more than one Person in God. God speaks of Himself in the plural, (Gen. 1:26, 11:7), and the Spirit of God is spoken of as a distinct Person, (Isa. 48:16, 63:10). Moreover there are some passages in which the Messiah is speaking and mentions two other persons, (Isa. 48:16, 61:6, 63:9-10). Even though the Old Testament

⁵ Called God (the Father) Phil. 1:2, (the Son) Col. 2:9, (the Holy Spirit) Acts 5:3-4; As Creator (the Father) Isa. 64:8, (the Son) John 1:3 & Col. 1:15-17, (the Holy Spirit) Job 33:4 – 26:13; As the One who resurrects the dead (the Father) 1st Thess. 1:10, (the Son) John 2:19 -10:17, (the Holy Spirit) Rom. 8:11; As the One who indwells (the Father) 2nd Cor. 6:16, (the Son) Col. 1:27, (the Holy Spirit) John 14:17; As everywhere (the Father) 1st Kings 8:27, (the Son) Matt. 28:20, (the Holy Spirit) Psalm 139:7-10; As omniscient (the Father) 1st John 3:20, (the Son) John 16:30 – 21:17, (the Holy Spirit) 1st Cor. 2:10-11; As the Sanctifier (the Father) 1st Thess. 5:23, (the Son) Heb. 2:11, (the Holy Spirit) 1st Peter 1:2; As the life giver (the Father) Gen. 2:7 & John 5:21, (the Son) John 1:3 – 5:21, (the Holy Spirit) 2nd Cor. 3:6-8; As eternal (the Father) Psalm 90:2, (the Son) Micah 5:1-2, (the Holy Spirit) Rom. 8:11 & Heb. 9:14

teaches that God is One, (Deut. 6:4, Isa. 44:6, 45:5) this does not conflict in any way with the Trinitarian beliefs. On the contrary, it actually helps to affirm them. One of the most compelling examples in the Old Testament of the composite sense of “One” is found in Genesis 2:24. Two people (created in the image of God) become “one flesh” in the marriage union and thus a sense of the “image” in a composite sense. The use of the Hebrew word for “One” (eXad) in other passages similarly demonstrates that the word means “one entity” rather than a strictly single, solitary thing.

Due to the process and progress of revelation, the New Testament contains clearer proofs. The strongest proof is found in the facts of redemption. The Father sends the Son into the world, and the Son sends the Holy Spirit. Also, there are several passages in which the three Persons are expressly mentioned, such as the great commission, (Matt. 28:19), and the apostolic blessing, (2nd Cor. 13:13; Luke 1:35, 3:21-22; 1st Cor. 12:4-6; 1st Peter 1:2). This doctrine was denied by the Socinians in the days of the Reformation, and is also rejected by the Unitarians, Mormons, and Jehovah’s Witnesses of our own day. Many of those who deny the Trinity attempt to say that the word “Trinity” is not found in the Bible, but much to their surprise, the word “Bible” isn’t found in the Bible either. Many also say that the doctrine of the Trinity was not mentioned until well after the 4th Century, however history disproves these claims.

The following quotes show that the doctrine of the Trinity was indeed alive-and-well before the Council of Nicea, which took place in 325 A.D.

Polycarp (70-155/160). Bishop of Smyrna: Disciple of John the Apostle. *“O Lord God almighty...I bless you and glorify you through the eternal and heavenly high priest Jesus Christ, your beloved Son, through whom be glory to you, with Him and the Holy Spirit, both now and forever.”*⁶

Justin Martyr (100?-165 approximately). He was a Christian apologist and martyr. *“For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water.”*⁷

Irenaeus (115-190). As a boy he listened to Polycarp, the disciple of John. He became Bishop of Lyons. *“The Church, though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith: ...one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and His manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father ‘to gather all things in one,’ and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race, in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Savior, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father, ‘every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess; to him, and that He should execute just judgment towards all...’”*⁸

Tertullian (160-215). African apologist and theologian: He wrote much in defense of Christianity. *“We define that there are two, the Father and the Son, and three with the*

⁶ “Early Trinitarian Quotes” CARM, <http://www.carm.org/doctrine/trinityquotes.htm> accessed on 6-14-05

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

*Holy Spirit, and this number is made by the pattern of salvation...[which] brings about unity in trinity, interrelating the three, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are three, not in dignity, but in degree, not in substance but in form, not in power but in kind. They are of one substance and power, because there is one God from whom these degrees, forms and kinds devolve in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”*⁹

Origen (185-254). Alexandrian theologian: Defended Christianity and wrote much about Christianity. “For if [the Holy Spirit were not eternally as He is, and had received knowledge at some time and then became the Holy Spirit] this were the case, the Holy Spirit would never be reckoned in the unity of the Trinity, i.e., along with the unchangeable Father and His Son, unless He had always been the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰

If, as the anti-Trinitarians maintain, the Trinity is not a biblical doctrine and was never taught until the council of Nicea in 325, then why do these quotes exist? The answer is simple: the Trinity is a biblical doctrine and it was taught before the council of Nicea in 325 A.D. Part of the reason that the Trinity doctrine was not “officially” taught until the time of the Council of Nicea is because Christianity was illegal until shortly before the council. It wasn't really possible for official Christian groups to meet and discuss doctrine. The early church believed in the Trinity, as is evidenced by the quotes above, and it wasn't necessary to really make them official. It wasn't until errors started to creep in, that councils began to meet to discuss the Trinity as well as other doctrines that came under fire.

There are many Scriptures within the Bible where we get the doctrine of the Trinity. For example: The Father is called God in Phil. 1:2, the Son is called God in Col. 2:9, and the Holy Spirit is called God in Acts 5:3-4. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all called Creator (Isaiah 64:8, Col. 1:15-17, Job 33:4). The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all are said to resurrect (1st Thess. 1:10, John 10:17, Romans 8:11). The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are said to be everywhere/omnipresent (1st Kings 8:27, Matt. 28:20, Psalm 139:7-10). The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are said to be all knowing/omniscient (1st John 3:20, John 16:30, 1st Cor. 2:10-11). The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all said to sanctify (1st Thess. 5:23, Heb. 2:11, 1st Peter 1:2). The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all said to give life (Genesis 2:7, John 5:21, 2nd Cor. 3:6-8). The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all eternal (Psalm 90:2, Micah 5:1-2, Hebrews 9:14). There are many other Scriptures which clearly show the doctrine of the Trinity, and though in one sense the Trinity is a mystery and not easily understood it is clearly taught within Scripture and must be believed.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Christology: Jesus Christ

The term “Christology” (from Greek Christos meaning “anointed one” or “Christ”) refers to the study of Christ. It often includes such topics as the preexistence and eternality of Christ, OT prophecies about Christ, Christ’s humanity, deity, and incarnation, as well as the issue of His temptations and sinlessness, His death, resurrection, ascension and exaltation, His return, three-fold office, and states.

The Preexistence of Christ

There are several texts in the NT that speak in one way or another to the preexistence of Christ. John says the “in the beginning was the Word” and the “Word became flesh” which implies that He had existed previous to His incarnation (John 1:1, 14). Jesus Himself suggests His preexistence in a number of texts. He said He had glory with the Father before the world was (John 17:5) and that He was sent from the Father (John 5:43; 6:38). These imply preexistence. Paul also, when he says that Christ was “rich,” but then became “poor,” that He was “in the form of God,” but “humbled Himself,” that He was “before all things” (Col 1:17). Both these references refer to the humiliation of the incarnation and therefore suggest that Christ existed previous to His coming to earth (see 1st Cor 15:45; and Phil 2:6). As do all the scriptures that mention Christ’s deity (see section on the Trinity). Jesus Christ was not created by God, He is God.

Prophecies about Christ

Taken in the light of the entire canon, the historical fact of the resurrection, and with a view to Jewish hermeneutics, there are many prophecies about Christ in the Old Testament. Some of the familiar ones include: His birth (Gen 3:15; Gal 4:4); His lineage (Gen 49:10; Luke 3:33); His place of birth (Micah 5:2; Luke 2:4-7); His Galilean ministry of compassion and judgment (Isa 9:1-2; Matt 4:14-16); that He was the prophet to come (Deut 18:15, 18-19; Acts 3:20, 22); that He would function as a priest (Psalm 110:4; Heb 5:5-6); His betrayal (Psalm 41:9; Luke 22:47-48); His being sold for thirty pieces of silver (Zech 11:11-12; Matt 26:15; 27:1-10); His violent death (Zech 12:10; Psalm 22:1-18); His resurrection (Psalm 16:10; Luke 24:7; Acts 2:25-28); His exaltation to God’s right hand (Psalm 110:1; Acts 2:33-34), His eternal reign in fulfillment of Davidic promise (2nd Sam 7:12-16; Psalm 110:1; Isa 55:3; Acts 2:33-34; 13:22-23, 32-34). We must remember that some of these scriptures were written thousands of years before Christ came into the world. When Psalm 22 was written crucifixion had not yet been used as a means of execution, and yet the Bible prophesied the death of Jesus with pin point accuracy.

The Humanity of Christ

There are several lines of evidence in the Scripture which converge to prove that from a Biblical point of view Jesus was truly and thoroughly human. Jesus had human names (i.e., Jesus, Son of David), was experienced by others as a human being (John 9:16), had a body (1st John 1:1), spoke normal human language(s), referred to Himself as a man (John 8:40); others referred to Him as a man (Acts 3:22); experienced life as a human being (Luke 2:52), including such limitations as hunger (Matt 4:2), thirst (John 19:28), tiredness (John 4:6), intense sorrow and distress (John 11:35; Luke 13:34-35); he had a human soul (Luke 23:46), and died (Hebrews 2:14-15). Jesus was 100% man, just as He was 100% God. He was not 50% human and 50% God as some claim.

The Deity of Christ

There are also several lines of evidence in Scripture which converge to prove that the Biblical writers regarded Jesus as human, but as more than human as well. They considered Him divine. John says He was divine or God (John 1:1), as did Thomas (John 20:28). Paul says He is the “very form of God” (morphe – theou; Phil 2:6) as well as our great God and Savior (Titus 2:13). He is referred to as Lord (Matt 2:43-45), Yahweh (cf. Rom 10:9, 13 and Joel 2:32) as well as the King of Kings (a designation a Jew such as John would only give God himself – Rev. 19:16). He does the works of God, including creating (John 1:3; Col. 1:15-20), sustaining (Heb 1:3-4), saving (Matt 1:23), raising the dead (John 5:25); judging (John 5:27), sending the Spirit (a work assigned to the Father as well; see John 14:26; 15:26), and building His church (Matt 16:18). He accepts, as God Himself does, worship from all men (Matt 14:33) and angels (Heb 1:6) and some day all men will bow to Him (something only God accepts; Phil 2:10, Isa 45:23). So we see that the doctrine of the simultaneous deity and humanity of Christ is not the invention of some fourth or fifth century church council (e.g., Nicaea [AD325] or Chalcedon [451]), but is clearly taught in Scripture. The precise formulation (i.e., a working model) of how this could be so may have had to await a response to the Arian heresy and other Christological developments (and a borrowing of Greek metaphysical language), but the essential features of the doctrine are found in apostolic and early church confessions.

The Incarnation & Kenosis

Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary (Matt 1:23; Gal 4:4) in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prediction (Isa 7:14). From a more theological point of view, John says that the eternal and divine Word became flesh and that God thus “tabernacled” among us (John 1:1, 14; Exodus 40:34-35). The doctrine of the incarnation means that the second person of the Trinity took on human flesh. Jesus Christ is both undiminished deity united with perfect humanity forever and without confusion of attributes. One person, two natures (divine/human).

God became a man in order to redeem His creation and rule over it. Thus He came to fulfill the Davidic covenant as the promised King (Luke 1:31-33). In His role as Lord and King He reveals God to men (John 1:18); saves sinners (Gal 1:4), destroys the works of the devil (1st John 3:8), judges men (Acts 17:31) and brings all things in creation back in submission to God (1st Cor 15:20-28; Ephesians 1:10-11).

There have been many errors regarding the dual nature of Christ. We will briefly mention some here. The Ebionites denied Christ’s divine nature (they claim He only received the Spirit at Baptism) as also the Arians (cf. present day Jehovah’s witnesses who claim likewise that Jesus is the first and highest created being). The Gnostics (i.e., Docetism), affirming that Jesus only appeared human, denied that He had a *truly* human nature. Nestorius denied the union of the divine and human natures in one person (the divine completely controlled the human) and Eutychianism denied any real distinction in Christ’s natures at all (the human nature was engulfed in the divine resulting in a new third nature). Finally, Appolinarius denied a facet of Jesus’ humanity, namely, that He had a human spirit (the divine Logos took the place of Jesus’ human spirit). These are all errors in light of the Biblical data and were rightly rejected at various church councils. Finally, there have been many attempts to explain the meaning of the term *kenosis* in Philippians 2:7, especially since the mid to late 1800’s and the rise of psychology. It has been argued that the term *kenosis* refers to Christ willingly laying aside certain essential

attributes such as omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence in order to redeem man. This theology in its various forms has come to be known as Kenotic Theology.¹¹ But is this what Paul is saying in Philippians 2:6, that Jesus gave up the use of or the possession of certain divine attributes? This is not likely. In fact, the apostle explains what he means when he says that Christ emptied Himself *by taking on* the nature of a servant. Thus it is not the setting aside of any divine attributes that is being spoken about here in Phil 2, but rather the humiliation of the Son of God taking on human form and that “of a servant.” This, of course, is the point Paul is trying to make with those in the Philippian church. They too are to live the humble lives of servants, following Christ’s example.¹²

The Impeccability of Christ

In light of the true divinity and real humanity of Christ, the question arises as to whether His temptations were genuine and if it were really possible for Him to have sinned. Was Christ able not to sin or not able to sin? Some say His genuine humanity includes the idea that He could have sinned. Others claim that His deity makes it impossible for Him to have sinned. All evangelical scholars recognize the reality of His temptations and the fact that He did not sin, but beyond this there is not much agreement. The oft-quoted analogy of two boys attacking an aircraft carrier in their rubber dingy (using sticks and stones), where the sticks and stones represent temptation and the aircraft carrier Jesus, may go a long way in stressing Jesus’ deity and impeccability, but it simply fails to catch the reality and intensity of the attacks which Satan thrust upon Him (cf. Matthew 4:1-11). The bottom line in connection with this debate, however, is that Jesus was both God and man, suffered temptation victoriously (Heb 4:15), and can therefore draw near to help us in time of weakness (Heb 2:18); His temptations have given us confidence in His sympathetic heart. Beyond that we cannot know much at all. We can say that no man has ever understood the strength, viciousness, and deceit of temptation better than Him and this precisely because He never gave in.

Death of Christ

All four gospels record the death of Christ (under Pontius Pilate) which is interpreted in advance by Christ Himself as a death for the forgiveness of sins, the establishment of the new covenant, and the defeat of Satan (Luke 22:15-20; John 12:31; 16:11). The heart of Christ’s teaching on this matter became the authoritative teaching of the apostles (in keeping with OT assertions to the same). We will talk more about the proper interpretation of the death of Christ, as well as its purpose and ramifications when we discuss Soteriology, the doctrine of salvation, but for now let us examine the historicity of the crucifixion as well as the physiological and anatomical aspects of the Lord’s death. What did the body of Jesus of Nazareth actually endure during those hours of torture? The earliest recording of a crucifixion was in 519 BC when Darius I, king of Persia, crucified 3,000 political opponents in Babylon. Alexander and his generals brought it back to the Mediterranean world – to Egypt and to Carthage. The Romans apparently learned the practice from the Carthaginians and rapidly developed a very high degree of efficiency and skill at it. A number of Roman authors (Livy, Cicer, and Tacitus) comment

¹¹ See S. M. Smith, “Kenosis, Kenotic Theology,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 600-602. These speculative theories of the incarnation have little to do with the exegesis of Philippians 2:7. See also B. E. Foster, “Kenoticism,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 364.

¹² Thomas D. Senior, “Incarnation and the Trinity,” in *Reason for the Hope Within*, ed. Michael J. Murray (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 238-260.

on crucifixion, and several innovations, modifications, and variations are described in the ancient literature.

Without any historical or biblical proof, Medieval and Renaissance painters have given us our picture of Christ carrying the entire cross. But the upright post, or stipes, was generally fixed permanently in the ground at the site of execution and the condemned man was forced to carry the patibulum, weighing about 110 pounds, from the prison to the place of execution. A titulus, or small sign, stating the victim's crime was usually placed on a staff, carried at the front of the procession from the prison, and later nailed to the cross above the head of the accused.

But, of course, the physical passion of the Christ began in Gethsemane. Of the many aspects of this initial suffering, the one of greatest physiological interest is the bloody sweat. It is interesting that St. Luke, the physician, is the only one to mention this. He says, "And being in Agony, He prayed the longer. And His sweat became as drops of blood, trickling down upon the ground" (Luke 22:44).

Every explanation imaginable has been used by modern scholars to explain away this description, apparently under the mistaken impression that this just doesn't happen. A great deal of effort could have been saved had the doubters consulted the medical literature. Though very rare, the phenomenon of Hematidrosis, or bloody sweat, is well documented. Under great emotional stress of the kind our Lord suffered, tiny capillaries in the sweat glands can break, thus mixing blood with sweat.

After the arrest in the middle of the night, Jesus was next brought before the Sanhedrin and Caiphus, the High Priest; it is here that the first physical trauma was inflicted. A soldier struck Jesus across the face for remaining silent when questioned by Caiphus. The palace guards then blind-folded Him and mockingly taunted Him to identify them as they each passed by, spat upon Him, and struck Him in the face (Matt. 26:67-68).

In the early morning, battered and bruised, dehydrated, and exhausted from a sleepless night, Jesus is taken across the Praetorium of the Fortress Antonia, the seat of government of the Procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate. Pilate attempted to pass responsibility to Herod Antipas, the Tetrarch of Judea. Jesus apparently suffered no physical mistreatment at the hands of Herod and was returned to Pilate. It was in response to the cries of the mob, that Pilate ordered Bar-Abbas released and condemned Jesus to scourging and crucifixion (Matt. 27:15-26)

There is much disagreement among authorities on the unusual scourging as a prelude to crucifixion. Most Roman writers from this period do not associate the two. Many scholars believe that Pilate originally ordered Jesus scourged as his full punishment and that the death sentence by crucifixion came only in response to the taunt by the mob that the Procurator was not properly defending Caesar against this pretender who allegedly claimed to be the King of the Jews.

Preparations for the scourging were carried out when the Prisoner was stripped of His clothing and His hands tied to a post above His head. It is doubtful the Romans would have made any attempt to follow the Jewish law in this matter, but the Jews had an ancient law prohibiting more than forty lashes.

The Roman legionnaire steps forward with the flagrum (or flagellum) in his hand. This is a short whip consisting of several heavy, leather thongs with two small balls of lead attached near the ends of each. The heavy whip is brought down with full force again and again across Jesus' shoulders, back, and legs. At first the thongs cut through the skin only.

Then, as the blows continue, they cut deeper into the subcutaneous tissues, producing first an oozing of blood from the capillaries and veins of the skin, and finally spurting arterial bleeding from vessels in the underlying muscles.

The small balls of lead first produce large, deep bruises which are broken open by subsequent blows. Finally the skin of the back is hanging in long ribbons and the entire area is an unrecognizable mass of torn, bleeding tissue. When it is determined by the centurion in charge that the prisoner is near death, the beating is finally stopped.

The half-fainting Jesus is then untied and allowed to slump to the stone pavement, wet with His own blood. The Roman soldiers see a great joke in this provincial Jew claiming to be king. They throw a robe across His shoulders and place a stick in His hand for a scepter. They still need a crown to make their travesty complete. Flexible branches covered with long thorns (commonly used in bundles for firewood) are plaited into the shape of a crown and this is pressed into His scalp. Again there is copious bleeding, the scalp being one of the most vascular areas of the body.

After mocking Him and striking Him across the face, the soldiers take the stick from His hand and strike Him across the head, driving the thorns deeper into His scalp. Finally, they tire of their sadistic sport and the robe is torn from His back. Already having adhered to the clots of blood and serum in the wounds, its removal causes excruciating pain just as in the careless removal of a surgical bandage, and almost as though He were again being whipped the wounds once more begin to bleed.

In deference to Jewish custom, the Romans return His garments. The heavy patibulum of the cross is tied across His shoulders, and the procession of the condemned Christ, two thieves, and the execution detail of Roman soldiers headed by a centurion begins its slow journey along the Via Dolorosa. In spite of His efforts to walk erect, the weight of the heavy wooden beam, together with the shock produced by copious blood loss, is too much. He stumbles and falls. The rough wood of the beam gouges into the lacerated skin and muscles of the shoulders. He tries to rise, but human muscles have been pushed beyond their endurance.

The centurion, anxious to get on with the crucifixion, selects a stalwart North African onlooker, Simon of Cyrene, to carry the cross. Jesus follows, still bleeding and sweating the cold, clammy sweat of shock, until the 650 yard journey from the fortress Antonia to Golgotha is finally completed.

Jesus is offered wine mixed with myrrh, a mild analgesic mixture. He refuses to drink. Simon is ordered to place the patibulum on the ground and Jesus quickly thrown backward with His shoulders against the wood. The legionnaire feels for the depression at the front of the wrist. He drives a heavy, square, wrought-iron nail through the wrist and deep into the wood. Quickly, he moves to the other side and repeats the action being careful not to pull the arms too tightly, but to allow some flexion and movement. The patibulum is then lifted in place at the top of the stipes and the titulus reading "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" is nailed in place.

The left foot is now pressed backward against the right foot, and with both feet extended, toes down, a nail is driven through the arch of each, leaving the knees moderately flexed. The Victim is now crucified. As He slowly sags down with more weight on the nails in the wrists excruciating pain shoots along the fingers and up the arms to explode in the brain – the nails in the wrists are putting pressure on the median nerves. As He pushes Himself upward to avoid this stretching torment, He places His full weight on the nail

through His feet. Again there is the searing agony of the nail tearing through the nerves between the metatarsal bones of the feet.

At this point, as the arms fatigue, great waves of cramps sweep over the muscles, knotting them in deep, relentless, throbbing pain. With these cramps comes the inability to push Himself upward. Hanging by his arms, the pectoral muscles are paralyzed and the intercostal muscles are unable to act. Air can be drawn into the lungs, but cannot be exhaled. Jesus fights to raise Himself in order to get even one short breath. Finally, carbon dioxide builds up in the lungs and in the blood stream and the cramps partially subside. Spasmodically, he is able to push Himself upward to exhale and bring in the life-giving oxygen. It was undoubtedly during these periods that He uttered the seven short sentences recorded:

The first, looking down at the Roman soldiers throwing dice for His seamless garment, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

The second, to the penitent thief, “Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise.”

The third, looking down at the terrified, grief-stricken adolescent John – the beloved Apostle – He said, “Behold thy mother.” Then, looking to His mother Mary, “Woman behold thy son.”

The fourth cry is from the beginning of the 22nd Psalm, “My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?” Hours of limitless pain, cycles of twisting, joint-rending cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, searing pain where tissue is torn from His lacerated back as He moves up and down against the rough timber. Then another agony begins. A terrible crushing pain deep in the chest as the pericardium slowly fills with serum and begins to compress the heart. One remembers again the 22nd Psalm, the 14th verse: “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.”

It is now almost over. The loss of tissue fluids has reached a critical level; the compressed heart is struggling to pump heavy, thick, sluggish blood into the tissue; the tortured lungs are making a frantic effort to gasp in small gulps of air. The markedly dehydrated tissues send their flood of stimuli to the brain.

Jesus gasps His fifth cry, “I thirst.”

One remembers another verse from the prophetic 22nd Psalm: “My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou has brought me into the dust of death.”

A sponge soaked in posca, the cheap, sour wine which is the staple drink of the Roman legionaries, is lifted to His lips. He apparently doesn't take any of the liquid. The body of Jesus is now in extremes, and He can feel the chill of death creeping through His tissues. This realization brings out His sixth words, “It is finished.”

His mission of atonement has completed. Finally He can allow his body to die.

With one last surge of strength, he once again presses His torn feet against the nail, straightens His legs, takes a deeper breath, and utters His seventh and last cry, “Father! Into thy hands I commit my spirit.”

Christian, Roman, Jewish, and Greek sources all document the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and it is an accepted fact amongst all serious historians.

The Resurrection of Christ

All four gospels record the empty tomb and the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (Matt 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20). He appeared to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18), to another Mary (Matt 28:1-2), to Cephas (1st Cor 15:5), to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), to James (1st Cor 15:7), to ten disciples (Luke 24:36-43), to Thomas and the other ten disciples (John 20:26-29), to seven disciples at the Sea of Tiberias (John 21:1-14), to more than 500 people (1st Cor 15:6), to the eleven at his ascension (Matt 28:16-20; Acts 1:1-11), and finally to Paul (1st Cor 15:8). He appeared to the disciples over a course of about 40 days (Acts 1:3).

In recent times scholars have come to debunk most of the naturalistic theories (e.g., the swoon, hallucination) advanced to account for the resurrection and attending data.

Virtually every scholar agrees that “something happened,” and most would agree that the resurrection is the watershed issue in a biblically defined Christianity. The question that is posed most acutely, is whether the *kerygma* (the preached message of Christ’s resurrection) itself is sufficient to account for the data or whether a literal resurrection plus the *kerygma* is necessary to account for the data.

There is no valid *a priori* reason for rejecting the resurrection as portrayed in scripture. It is usually one’s theology of history that precludes whether resurrections happen or not.

In any case, the empty tomb, the eyewitness testimony, the transformed lives of antagonists such as James and Paul, the existence of the church, the inability of the Jewish leaders to disprove the resurrection and the claims of the apostles, the early date and solid character of the claim to resurrection (1st Corinthians 15:3-4), as well as the solid character of surrounding evidence such as Jesus’ existence, ministry, death by crucifixion, and burial. The explanation which possesses the greatest explanatory power, is the most plausible (not *ad hoc*), and stands the greatest chance of not being finally overturned, is that Jesus of Nazareth was actually raised from the dead and appeared to many people. His body was a physical body fit for spiritual existence and was not subject any longer to death and limitations.

The theological interpretation of Christ’s bodily resurrection includes the doctrine that it is central to the Christian life and hope (1st Cor. 15), that it demonstrates that he is the Son of God (Rom 1:4) and that He will someday return to judge the entire world (Acts 17:31).

In the area of Soteriology, the resurrection is the foundation of our regeneration and spiritual/ethical life (Rom 6:4-5; 1st Pet 1:2), our justification (Rom 4:25; Eph 2:6), our present ministry and work for the Lord (1st Cor 15:58), our hope of glorification and our eternal communion with the Father, Son and Spirit (1st Cor 15:12-28).

The Ascension & Exaltation of Christ

In Luke 24:50-53 and Acts 1:11, Luke records for us the historical fact and nature of Jesus’ ascension. The language seems to imply that Jesus ascended bodily to some place in the space-time continuum, but we are unable to see or know where.

Theologically, however, Luke has made it very clear as to what the ascension means. It was not just Jesus going somewhere. Indeed, His ascension led to His exaltation to the throne and His right to rule over creation, nations and the church. He was exalted to the right hand of God (a place of power and authority) in keeping with Davidic hope (Psalm 110:1; Acts 2:34-35) and currently reigns over the universe (Eph 1:20-22a) and is head over all things pertaining to the church (Eph 1:22b-23; 1st Peter 3:22). As divine founder, leader, captain, and goal of the church He has sent the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33) to endow

her with life, love and power and will someday return to bring her to be where He is, and to subject all things in heaven and earth to His Lordship. He has received, and continues to receive, glory, praise, and honor in light of who He is and what He has done (Rev 5:12). Every knee should bow before God's Christ, the exalted Lord of the universe. Someday, all will (Phil 2:9)!

The Return of Christ

The Bible predicts that someday Jesus Christ will return, suddenly, bodily and with great glory for all to see (Matt 24:30; Rev 19:11). At that time he will judge Satan and his angels, the living and the dead, and will establish His kingdom in its fullest sense. We will discuss the nature and timing of the rapture as well as the nature of the kingdom under Eschatology.

The States of Christ

It has been common among Reformed and other systematic theologians to speak of the two states of Christ: (1) humiliation, and (2) exaltation. Therefore, although we have covered some of the details already, we nonetheless survey them again in these terms. This will help to equip the student for further reading where these ideas will undoubtedly be discussed. "Christ's humiliation refers to His (1) incarnation; (2) suffering; (3) death, and (4) burial. His exaltation also contains four aspects: (1) resurrection; (2) ascension; (3) session (His being seated at God's right hand), and (4) return in glory.

The incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, while not involving the "giving up" of any divine attributes, entailed Christ's willing submission to the limitations and weaknesses of humanity, being actually found as a servant among men. His suffering in terms of spiritual hardship, physical deprivation, and emotional pain are all part of His sufferings in humiliation. Jesus' humiliation was furthered heightened by the enormous suffering of an unjust, cruel, and ignoble death, bearing the sin of a cursed humanity on a cross. Though He did not descend into Hell in the sense that most in modern times understand Hell, He nonetheless was dead for three days. From the time of the stable in Bethlehem until His death, He underwent humiliation in obedience to His Father for the salvation of the elect and the redemption of the cosmos.

Jesus' resurrection into a permanent physical body perfectly equipped for spiritual life is the turning point in His humiliation. It is here that He is vindicated and His defeat of all His enemies is secured. He received glory at His ascension and the right to rule as is demonstrated by His sitting at the right hand of God in fulfillment of Psalm 110:1 (Acts 2:34-36). Though the world awaits the final stage in the completion of Christ's vindication, and the salvation and judgment of the world, Christ will someday return bodily (Acts 1:11) and destroy all His enemies, including death. He will complete the final stage of his exaltation over all things.¹³

The Three Offices of Christ

While there were early church fathers who spoke about different offices of Christ, it was John Calvin in his *Institutes* (2.15) who systematized the idea of the threefold office of Christ: (1) Prophet; (2) Priest, and (3) King.

In Deuteronomy 18:18 Moses predicted that God would send another prophet like him to the people of Israel. Both John and Peter understood Jesus to be that one (John 6:14;

¹³ Wayne A. Grudem, "States of Jesus Christ," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 1052-54; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 2nd rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 331-355.

7:40; Acts 3:22-24; see also Matt 13:57, John 4:44). The title of “prophet,” however, is not found in the epistles. Nonetheless, it is clear that Christ functioned as the consummate prophet, one who both gave revelation from God (forth telling and foretelling) and was Himself the quintessential revelation from God (John 1:18). In this way He is unlike other prophets, a fact which may account for the absence of this title from the epistles.

Jesus Christ also functioned in the office of priest. While the prophet was God’s representative to the people, the priest was the peoples’ representative before God. But in contrast to priests in the Levitical order, Jesus did not offer any animal sacrifice for our sins; He offered Himself, an unblemished lamb of eternal worth. As a priest He has entered the holy of holies, not the copy on earth in the temple, but the heavenly place and is able to lead us, therefore, into the presence of God – a distinctly priestly function. He does not just enter the holy of holies once a year, but indeed He lives there forever now. Finally, both Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25 teach us that His priestly role continues even now as He “ever lives to make intercession” for us in our weakness!

Finally, Jesus Christ fulfilled the office of King. But in contrast to the greatest of Israelite kings, i.e., David, Christ rules over the entire world, indeed the universe, including the church (Eph 1:20-23). He is the consummate king who rules wisely, attentively and with final authority and justice (Ps 2:8-9). In short, He rules as the God-man over the entire cosmos and when He returns he will deal definitively with all hindrances and obstacles to His deserved reign. At that time He will be called “the King of Kings” (Rev 19:16).

Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit

The term pneumatology comes from two Greek words, namely, *pneuma* meaning “wind,” “breath,” or “spirit” (used of the Holy Spirit) and *logos* meaning “word,” “matter,” or “thing.” As it is used in Christian systematic theology, “pneumatology” refers to the study of the biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Generally this includes such areas as the personality of the Spirit, the deity of the Spirit, and the work of the Spirit throughout Scripture.

The Personhood of the Holy Spirit

The personality (and therefore “personhood”) of the Holy Spirit has been denied by certain groups throughout the history of the church. Some point out that the noun for “spirit” in the NT is *pneuma* which is neuter and, therefore, the spirit is correctly referred to as “it” rather than “He.” In keeping with this idea, some refer to it [Him] as “God’s active force,” almost in a Gnostic sense of an emanation from the one, true God. Before we look at the Biblical evidence, it is important to point out that there is no necessary connection in *Koine* Greek (common Greek) between grammatical gender and personal gender so it is simply false to say that since the Greek noun *pneuma* is neuter the spirit must be an “it.”

It is important, then, to see what the Scriptures say about His personhood, i.e., is He really a person, albeit divine? This is especially relevant in a culture moving more toward New Age thinking and pantheism. The Holy Spirit is not the “god” within us which we possess via our own natures, nor is He some magical feeling or “active force.” All these views degrade Him and rightly deserve rejection.

There are several lines of evidence in the NT which argue for the personality of the Holy Spirit. First, Jesus said He would send “another” in His place (John 14:16). The word for another is ‘*allos*’ in Greek and refers to another just like Jesus. It is reasonable to conclude from this that the Spirit is a person since Jesus is clearly a person. Further, Jesus referred to Him as a *parakletos*, (enabler, encourager, comforter, etc.) which requires that He be a person since the functions of a *parakletos* are personal; Jesus functioned as a *parakletos* to the disciples.

Second, the fact that the Spirit makes choices (1st Cor 12:11), teaches (John 14:26), guides (John 16:13), reveals Jesus (John 16:14), convicts (John 16:8), seals believers (2nd Cor 1:21-22), can be grieved (Eph 4:30), blasphemed (Matt 12:31), possesses a rational mind (Rom 8:26-27; 1st Cor 2:11-13), can be lied to (Acts 5:3-4), quenched (1st Thess 5:19), resisted (Acts 7:51), and on numerous occasions is distinguished from, yet directly linked with the Father and the Son as co-worker and co-recipient of worship, argues definitively for his personhood (Matt 28:19-20; 2nd Cor 13:14).

The Deity of the Holy Spirit

As we noted above, the Holy Spirit is distinguished from, yet closely related to, the Father and the Son – and that on an equal basis. He receives the worship due the Father and the Son (2nd Cor 13:14) and does divine works, including inspiring Scripture (2nd Peter 1:20-21; Matt 19:4-5), regenerating hearts (Titus 3:5), and creating, sustaining, and giving life to all things (Gen 1:2; Job 26:13; 34:14-15; Psalm 104:29-30). He is said to be eternal (Heb 9:14; only God is eternal), omniscient (1st Cor 2:10-11), and is actually referred to as God (Acts 5:3-4; 1st Cor 3:16; 6:19-20). There is very little room for doubt; clearly the Holy Spirit is divine.

Scriptural Metaphors for the Holy Spirit

Scripture uses several important metaphorical expressions to refer to the Spirit, His sovereign character and His manifested workings. For example, Jesus referred to Him as a *wind* – a metaphor which seems to underline the inscrutable nature of His moving in the hearts of people to give them life and bring them to faith (John 3:8).

In connection with His personal and glorious ministry to people, Jesus referred to Him as *water* in John 7:37-39. This symbol portrays the Spirit as the One who can fulfill the deepest longings of the heart to know God, i.e., to enjoy eternal life (John 4:14; 17:3). As such, the metaphor speaks of promised messianic blessing and the presence of the kingdom in a new and powerful way (Isa 12:3; 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 39:29; Zech 14:16-18; Joel 2:28-32).

In Matthew 3:16 (cf. Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32) the text refers to the Spirit descending out of heaven as a *dove*. The symbol of the “dove” probably represents the beginning of an age of blessing and the end of judgment or perhaps it symbolizes the beginning of a new creation through the work of the promised, Spirit-empowered Davidic messiah.¹⁴

Another metaphor for the Spirit is *clothing* (Acts 1:8). This idea involves being dressed by another person so that one is characterized by this new clothing. In the case of the Spirit, it refers to His gift of power to us so that we might live consistent with the gospel as we boldly preach it throughout the entire world.

The Spirit is also referred to as a *guarantee* or *pledge* of the Christian’s glorification (Eph 1:14; 2nd Cor 1:21-22). In this case, the present gift of the Spirit is the guarantee that the totality of what has been promised to us will someday be fulfilled (Rom 8:30). BDAG (the standard Greek lexicon used in NT studies) refers to the “Spirit” in these passages as the “*first installment, deposit, down payment, [or] pledge*, which pays a part of the purchase price in advance, and so secures a legal claim to the article in question, or makes a contract valid.”¹⁵

Closely related to the idea of the Spirit as “pledge” is the Spirit as *seal* or the One with whom Christians are sealed by God. In 2nd Cor 1:22 and Ephesians 1:14, 4:30, Christians are said to be “sealed” by the Spirit of God. A “seal” in the ancient world referred to a “*mark (with a seal)* as a means of identification so that the mark which denotes ownership also carries with it the protection of the owner (see Rev 7:3)... This forms a basis for understanding the symbolic expression which speaks of those who enter the Christian fellowship as being sealed with or by the Holy Spirit.”¹⁶ Thus the “sealing” of the Spirit speaks to the divine ownership of the Christian which translates into security and protection. This does not mean that the Christian will never sin or be chastened by God (1st John 1:9; Hebrews 12:1-11), but it does mean that God will never abandon them, neither in this life or the one to come (cf. Rom 8:38-39). We will discuss this more under “Soteriology,” the doctrine of Salvation.

The Pentecost Spirit is also likened to tongues of fire in Acts 2:3. Fire represents the holy presence of God, as for example, in Exodus 3:2-5 and the “burning bush.” One might also recall the pillar of fire (Exod 13:21-22), the fire on Mount Sinai (Exod 24:17) and the fire

¹⁴ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 33a (Dallas: Word, 1993), in loc.

¹⁵ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: BDAG*, 3rd Ed. (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2000)

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

associated with the wilderness tabernacle (Exod 40:36-38).¹⁷ In all these cases, the holiness of God is paramount. Now, recall that the Christian's election is unto holiness and Christlikeness (Rom 8:29; Eph 1:4) and so the Spirit has taken up residence in our hearts to make this transformation a reality (2nd Cor 3:18).

The Work of the Holy Spirit in Revelation

The apostle Peter makes it clear that the Holy Spirit was responsible for the production of the OT scriptures by carrying men along as they freely wrote God's message. Paul likewise asserts the Holy Spirit's involvement in the production of sacred Scripture (2nd Tim 3:16). When we go to the OT we see this phenomenon in several places, not the least of which is the clear example of Ezekiel 2:2: "As he spoke to me, the Spirit entered me and raised me to my feet and I heard him speaking to me" (see also 8:4; 11:1, 24). Other examples of the Spirit speaking to people include Balaam (Num 24:2) and Saul (1st Samuel 10:6, 10). Also, Jesus said that David spoke by the Holy Spirit (Matt 22:43; cf. Acts 2:30).¹⁸

There is not a great deal of discussion in either testament regarding the relationship between the Spirit and men during the production of Scripture. Peter uses the analogy of the wind filling the sails of a ship. So we may infer from this that the Spirit took the initiative and directed the work, but in no way suppressed the personalities, including the emotional and intellectual input, of the human authors. In fact, it appears that He used all of this (and more), for the spiritual/emotional/ethical experience of David writing lyric poetry (in the Psalms, for example) was not the same as Paul's experience in writing 1st Thessalonians or Ezra's experience in writing the book after his name or John writing Revelation. The fact that we have an intimate involvement of the Spirit of God with the writers of Scripture speaks not to mechanical dictation or even conceptual inspiration, but instead to a divine-human *concurrency* (1st Cor 2:12-13).

The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

The work of the Spirit in the OT is much broader than just the production of Scripture, as important as that is. The Spirit was involved in creating the *cosmos* (Gen 1:2; Job 26:13). He is currently involved in sustaining creation (Psa 104:29-30) and will someday, in a period of enormous divine blessing, completely renew it. The nature of the Spirit's present ministry testifies to this future work (Isa 32:15; Rom 8:18-27).

The Holy Spirit came upon certain people to impart wisdom and practical skills, strength and ability. He did this during the building of the tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, and all the tabernacle's furnishings (Exod 31:1-11). He was also the strength and guidance behind the building of the temple (Zech 4:6).

The Spirit was involved in the administration of the nation of Israel by giving gifts of administration and wisdom (Gen 41:38; Num 11:25; Deut 34:9). He also raised up national leaders during the dismal period of the Judges. He gave strength, courage, capability in war, and leadership abilities to several people (Judges 3:10; 6:34; 14:19). Later on He anointed Saul, David, and Solomon for leadership by giving them strength and ability to prophesy, but in the case of Saul, the Spirit subsequently withdrew because of his disobedience (1st Sam 10:10; 16:13).

The Holy Spirit was also involved in the regeneration (Ezek 36:26-28), instruction, and sanctification of Israel in the OT (Nehemiah 9:20; Psa 51:11; 143:10; Isa 63:10). It is also

¹⁷ Some also say that oil is a type of the Holy Spirit in the OT.

¹⁸ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 867.

said that He will produce righteousness and justice among the people of God in the messianic age (Isa 11:2-5; 32:15-20).¹⁹

The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Life of Christ

The Holy Spirit was involved in the birth of Christ, with the result that Christ, while fully human, was completely sinless (Matt 1:18; Luke 1:35). The Holy Spirit was also involved in Christ's anointing for messianic service (at His baptism [Luke 3:21-22]), filled Him during His temptations (Luke 4:1; John 3:34), and revealed the timing and nature of the beginning of that ministry (Luke 4:14, 18). The Holy Spirit was also present during Christ's performing of miracles and casting out demons (Matt 12:28). He was also involved in both the death of Christ as well as His resurrection (Heb 9:14; Rom 1:4; 8:11). Further, perhaps the best interpretation of 1st Peter 3:18-20 is that the pre-incarnate Christ preached *via* the Spirit *through* the mouth of Noah *to* the wicked back in the days before the flood.²⁰

The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Church

We will discuss the various aspects of the work of the Spirit in relation to the church under the headings of "soteriology" and "ecclesiology." Suffice it to say here that the Spirit is involved in the works of calling, regeneration, uniting the believer with Christ, indwelling, filling, teaching, guiding, gifting, empowering, and sanctifying the believer. His primary ministry is to mediate the presence of Christ and the knowledge of God to the believer (John 16:13-14).²¹

¹⁹ James I. Packer, "Holy Spirit," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 316-19.

²⁰ Buist M. Fanning, "A Theology of Peter and Jude," *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck and Darrell L. Bock (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 448-50.

²¹ J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1984), 49.

Anthropology

The word “anthropology” refers to the study of man and a Biblical anthropology is the study of man as understood primarily from Scripture. Thus it often involves discussion of the particular creation of man, man in the “image of God,” the constitutional nature of man and man after the fall. Other areas of concern include human dignity, freedom, depravity, culture, and society. “Hamartiology,” on the other hand, comes from two Greek terms, *hamartia* meaning “sin” and *logos*. Thus it concerns the biblical doctrine of sin including its origin, nature, transmission, effects, and judgment.

The Creation of Man

There are several points that can be made from the Genesis narrative regarding the creation of man (Gen 1-2). These ideas are expanded upon and developed in the rest of Scripture. First, the origin of man is not in naturalistic evolution, but in the mind of God. Man was not an afterthought of some kind, or the result of blind evolutionary forces, but was created according to the purpose, plan, and good pleasure of God. In Genesis 1:26 God says “let us make man...” Second, man has a certain place as the pinnacle of creation. We are made in the “image” of God. Nothing else, including the angels, is said to be made in the image of God. Thus we are, in this sense, unique in the created order, with the result that we are both privileged and responsible (cf. Gen 3). Both men and women together reflect the image of God. Third, we bear a special relationship to God. In our original creation, coming from the hand of God, we were holy, upright, and perfect and there was no hostility between God and us. Fourth, we have a certain role in creation. We were created to rule over God’s created earth, that is, to have dominion over it. Fifth, man was created in what appears as an instantaneous act of God, bringing together material aspects and “the breath of life.” According to Genesis 2:7, our creation gives rise to the dual nature of our *experience* as we relate in both a heavenward (spiritual) and earthward (material) direction.

Man in the Image of God

To be made in the image of God and after His likeness is a difficult expression to understand precisely. There have been many attempts to reduce it to various aspects of man’s being or relate it in some way to the functions he carries out in the world. Thus some have said that it refers to certain particular qualities in man such as his rational nature, morality, or religious capacity. Others, such as the Mormons, have claimed that the image of God is physical. Still others have suggested that the image is more relational in nature, and refers to man’s experience of being in relationship with God, other people, and creation. Some have collapsed the meaning of image into man’s God given function to have dominion over the earth. Thus, on this last reckoning, “image” refers to man’s ability to rule (cf. Gen 1:26; Psa 8:5-6).

Each of these views has a contribution to make, though it is doubtful whether the relational or functional view really answers the question as to what the image actually *is* (not *does*). Functional views describe certain realities which flow from being created in God’s image, but do not in themselves describe that image. The substantive view, long held throughout the history of the church, is the best view overall, but it is perhaps too narrow to restrict it to “knowledge,” righteousness,” “holiness,” “morality” or our ability for rational thought, etc. It is rather all of these and anything else that makes us like God,

maintaining, of course, the necessary and Biblical Creator-creature distinctions (*contra* Mormonism).

The Constitutional Nature of Man

The question has come up in theology as to the constitutional nature of man. Most naturalists would argue that man is monistic, that is, that he is purely physical and that he has no soul or immaterial substance to his being. There are many conservative theologians who would also argue along similar lines, though they nonetheless regard man as a special creation of God with a special destiny (at least for the saved). But, there are several good, scriptural reasons for rejecting the monist account of human constitution. First, since God is a person and He does not have a body, but is spirit, we can safely argue that possessing a body is not the *sine qua non* of being a person. That is, “personhood” can exist apart from embodiment. Further, God could be considered a *paradigm* case of personhood and if this is so, then only those beings that bear a similarity (i.e., possess the attributes, not just functions) to the paradigm case can be considered persons. Second, the OT term *nephesh*, while it can refer to a body or parts of a body, nonetheless often identifies a person after death. It therefore refers to the soul/person which has departed a body, is still conscious, and as the immaterial aspect of a person may return to the body if God so wills (Gen 35:18; 1st Kings 17:21-22). Third, the OT portrays man as created of both material and immaterial substances (Gen 2:7; Ezek 37:6, 8-10, 14). Fourth, Jesus continued to exist after His death and before His resurrection which seems to imply that there was some immaterial aspect to His (human) being. Fifth, human beings are regarded as living spirits in the disembodied state (Heb 12:23; Rev 6:9-11 [souls]). Sixth, the future resurrection of all people indicates that there is an intermediate state as departed souls await this resurrection. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still alive (Matt 22:37). Moses and Elijah are alive as well (Matt 17:1-13). The story of Lazarus and the rich man seems to imply conscious life after physical death (Luke 16:19-31). Finally, Jesus made a clear distinction between the soul and body in Matthew 10:28: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” All these observations are most easily understood on the basis of a substances dualism in man (i.e., he is both material and immaterial).²² We, therefore move on to talk about the two primary understandings of the immaterial aspect of man.

Many Christian theologians have argued for a trichotomous view of man, that he is body, soul, and spirit, where each term refers to separate substances. This view has often been advanced on the basis of passages such as 1st Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 4:12 and 1st Corinthians 14:14. The major problem with this view, and the reason it is not well received any longer, is the almost universal recognition that the Bible uses “soul” and “spirit” interchangeably (Luke 1:46-47; John 12:27; 13:21). Further, Mark 12:30 list four aspects of man: heart, soul, mind, strength. Are we to regard each of these as constituting a different substance? That is not Jesus’ point, nor is it Paul’s in 1st Thessalonians 5:23. The point in 1st Thessalonians 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12 are not to inform Christians as to the precise substances which make up their immaterial nature, but rather that sanctification is to encompass the *whole* person. Thus it is tenuous at best to infer from these two texts specific details about our immaterial nature.

²² J. P. Moreland and Scott B. Rae, *Body and Soul: Human Nature & The Crisis in Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 17-47

Taking all the Biblical evidence into consideration, it appears that the best view is some form of dichotomy. In any view of man, however, two things need to be held in tension: (1) that he is a composite being with both *complex material* as well as *complex immaterial* aspects; (2) that he is portrayed in Scripture as a *unified* being, so that what he does with his body involves his spirit and the motions his spirit engages in involve his body. In fact, both appear to be involved *in everything we do*. This view of man relates him well to his Creator in heaven and his commission here on earth. It also reads the Biblical data in a manner a little more consistent with the use of terms in Scripture (where two or more terms can refer to the same immaterial substance).

Finally, given our current culture, it is necessary to point out that when we argue for an immaterial aspect to man's being, using terms like soul and spirit, we are not saying as many in the New Age movement(s) have claimed, that we all possess "god" in us. What we are saying is that there is more to us than just matter; we are also spiritually oriented beings, created in God's image (but not that we are "gods" in any sense).

The Fall of Man and the Image of God

Genesis 3 describes for us one of the most diabolical and saddest points in our very early history. Adam had been commanded by God not eat from the fruit of the tree which was in the middle of the garden. The command was concise, yet clear, and the consequence of disobedience was lucidly and emphatically delineated: "you shall most certainly die" (Gen 2:16-17). But with the entrance of the Serpent, who we now realize was Satan himself (2nd Cor 11:3), came the entrance of deceit and trickery. He was more crafty than all the wild animals the Lord God had made, and he said to the woman... (Gen 3:1), and as Paul Harvey says, "Now you know the rest of the story." Man ate the forbidden fruit, died spiritually (something the Devil forgot [neglected?] to mention), were judged by God immediately (Gen 3:6-19), death through murder came almost instantaneously (Gen 4), and eventually we died physically (cf. "and then he died," Gen 5). From our first parents we receive both the guilt of sin as well as a corrupt nature (Rom 5:12-21).

The image of God, as a result of the fall, is effaced but not erased. The Noahic covenant, instituting a measure of authority among men for dealing with murder (Gen 9:6-7), the command to procreate, and prohibitions against such things as favoritism (James 3:9), are all based on the existence of the "image of God" in man, even after the fall; all these commands are related to the image of God in a post fall context.

The image of God, while severely distorted in the fall, is nonetheless being renewed progressively for those who are "in Christ" (in terms of "knowledge" in Col. 3:10).

Finally, when the saints reside in eternity, the image of God will be completely restored in them. In short, God has chosen us to be holy in his sight and to be conformed totally to the image of His Son (Eph 1:3-4; Rom 8:29; 1st Cor 15:49), who is said to be "the image of God" (2nd Cor 4:4; Col 1:15).

The Doctrine of Sin

A brief review of the fall of man leads us naturally into a discussion of the essential nature of sin, as well as its origin, transmission, effects, and punishment.

Many theologians rightly define sin as any want of conformity – in nature, disposition, or act – to the moral law of God. Again, this is an accurate definition as far as it goes (1st John 3:4), and perhaps better than referring to sin as experiencing personal finiteness, existential angst, desire to control others, selfishness, or sexual immorality. The one shortcoming, however, is that it does not really capture the heinous, aggressive, and vile

nature of sin as such. Biblically portrayed, sin is more than a “want of conformity.” Sin is “out and out” rebellion, an insidious plot to personally subdue God and his just rule over our lives. It is a foolish attempt at a usurping of God, an attempt to extinguish not only His commands to duty, and his wise prohibitions, but also to nullify his presence and to extinguish knowledge of him – and all this with each and every blow.

Thus sin is spiritual/ethical in nature and has at its core the idea of autonomy and rebellion. It is ethical in nature, not *ontological* in that it is not an essential privation of some kind. Even after the fall, man still has all the *faculties* with which he was created, but his moral nature is twisted by sin. There are many key terms in the Old Testament which nuance the idea of sin in some way. These include *chata* (“to miss the mark,” Exod 20:20;); (2) *ra* (“evil” or “ruin,” Gen 38:7), and (3) *taah* (“going astray,” Num 15:22). In the New Testament there are several terms as well. Some of the more frequently used and important ones include: (1) *hamartano* (“to miss the mark,” Rom 5:12; 225+ times); *kakos* (“disease” or “moral filth,”); (3) *poneros* (“moral evil,” Heb 3:12); (4) *anomos* (“lawlessness,” 1st John 3:4).

The origin of sin in the *cosmos* is to be found in the disobedience of Satan and certain angels. Though there is debate about Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:12-19, there are some theologians who argue that one or both of these passages hint at the fall of Satan. In any case, when Satan arrives on the scene in Genesis 3 (2nd Cor 11:3), he is already fallen and sinful. But as far as the entrance of sin into the human race is concerned, this occurred at the fall of man, also described in Genesis 3. Sin entered the human race through our first parents’ disobedience, as Paul makes clear in Romans 5:12.

There ought to be no doubt among Christians regarding the scriptural teaching that all men are sinful, though it is obviously true that not all men have expressed or will express their sinfulness to the same degree. But how did our first parents pass on sin to us? If it is true that sin entered the human race through the sin of Adam, how was it communicated to his offspring and thus to the race as a whole, given that we all descended from the *one man* (cf. Acts 17:26)?

Some have argued that there is no *direct* connection between the sin of Adam and Eve and the sin of the each member of the human race; rather, each person, perhaps following the example of Adam, has willfully chosen, on their own, to sin and violate God’s will. But this interpretation, while perhaps agreeing, at least formally, with the idea that “all have sinned” (Rom 5:12), does not do justice to Paul’s teaching in the whole of Romans 5:12-21. For it is said there, at least five times, that sin entered the human race through one man (transgression) and that the entire race was affected, not by sinning themselves, but rather through the sin of Adam.

Thus, there is a direct connection between the sin of Adam and the fallenness of the entire race. Some say this direct connection is *realistic* while others argue along *legal* lines.

The first group argues that the race as a whole was present seminally in Adam and thus sinned when he sinned. This seems to do justice to the “all sinned” of Romans 5:12 and has some support from the Abraham/Levi/Melchizedek parallel in Hebrews 7:10, but the meaning of “all sinned” ought to be determined more in keeping with the primary thrust of Romans 5:12-21 where the sin of Adam seems to be the direct cause of our sin; no *mediate* mechanism appears to be in view in Romans 5:12-21.

Perhaps the best view is to understand Adam as the federal head of the race and as such his sin was *imputed* (i.e., charged to our account) to us with the result that we too are

legally guilty. This seems to make the most sense out of the direct connections expressed in Romans 5:12-21. Again, over five times the phrase (or something similar) “for just as through the disobedience of the one man the many *were made sinners*,” appears in the paragraph.

Now the idea that there exists a legal, not just biological, relationship between a man and his posterity is not unheard of in scripture. Some refer to it as *corporate solidarity*. Perhaps the best known example illustrating this concept is the sin of Achan (Joshua 7). His sin of stealing "the city's riches" is counted as the sin of the nation of Israel (Jos 7:1, 11) and indeed his entire family was punished. In a similar way (but it is strictly speaking not identical), we often see today how the sin of one person directly affects others. When a person hijacks an airplane with 130 people on board and then crashes it into the Pentagon, all on board suffer because of the decision of one person.²³ The decisions of one person often have a “representative” character.

Now, some have objected to this doctrine on the grounds that we are blamed for something we did not do. This can be responded to in several ways, but in the end it must be realized that all men, including you and me, are sinners and will be judged for our *willful* and *personal* rebellion. Was it fair that Christ died for us so that we might escape God’s wrath? Is it fair that God imputes the righteousness of Christ to us when we simply believe in His Son? If the issue were really one of fairness, viewed humanly, who of us could stand in His presence?

But not only are we in a state of guilt before God, we also received at birth a sinful nature and so we are polluted by sin as well, hence our *willful* and *personal* rebellion. And it isn’t that some parts of us are fallen, but rather that our whole person, every part of us, is fallen and enslaved to sin. This also is a result of Adam’s sin. We prove the fact that we have a sinful nature each and every day (cf. Gal 5:19-21). Denial of sin, neurosis, estrangement from loved ones, enemies in the work force, inability to love and receive love from others, lying, stealing, cheating, as well as a host of other sins beset us daily. We were born, i.e., we are by nature children of wrath (cf. Eph 2:1-3).

The Christian and Sin

The question often comes up as to the effects of sin on the life of the Christian. Sometimes the question is posed most acutely as “Does a Christian lose their salvation when (not if) he sins? We cannot go into this in great detail here, but will cover it more thoroughly under Soteriology. Suffice it to say here, however, that a Christian’s sin is just as sinful as that of a non-Christian. Sin is sin, no matter who commits it; it is both an offense to and violation of God’s holiness. But the Christian stands in a posture of being justified once and for all (Rom 5:1). His standing or position before the Lord is immutable but his personal fellowship with the Lord and His people will be disrupted by sin, sometimes severely. At some point the Lord will probably chasten him, and in certain cases, ultimately shorten his life because of sin (1st Cor 11:30; Heb 12:1-13). When the Christian does sin, however, he is to immediately confess it to the Lord, and repent from it, knowing that God is faithful to forgive and cleanse (1st John 1:9). And, in many circumstances he will need to confess his sin to another offended person and make

²³ I am not saying that the others on the aircraft are guilty of hijacking (in the same sense that we are counted guilty because of Adam's sin). My only point is to show that the poor decisions of one person often adversely affect the many.

restitution. Failure to confess known sin leads to spiritual and moral hardening and delusion regarding one's true condition (Heb 3:12-13).

The Punishment for Sin

The first and primary reason God punishes sin is in order to prove Himself righteous and just. This, of course, He did most fully in the cross (Rom 3:21-26; 9:19-23). A second reason God punishes sin is to bring back an erring son or deter others from sinning. Spiritual death, physical death, and eternal death are all punishments for sin, as are certain sufferings in this life. But beyond question, eternal death is the gravest punishment for sin imaginable. In this case, God makes it impossible for the sinner who dies apart from the saving mercies of Christ to ever be reconciled with Him. Torment will be their eternal lot; they will be eternally separated from God, "shut out of the Lord's presence forever," as Paul says (2nd Thess 1:8-9; cf. also Matt 25:41, 46).

Sin always has consequences for both the present life as well as the next. The Christian cannot escape certain consequences of sin in this life or judgment for sin in the next, but this judgment does not revoke his salvation. He will still be with the Lord forever, but it does affect the nature of his reward (1st Cor 3:10-15; 2nd Cor 5:10; Romans 14:10-12).

Soteriology: The Doctrine of Salvation

The term “*soteriology*” comes from two Greek terms, namely, *soter* meaning “savior” or “deliverer” and *logos* meaning “word,” “matter,” or “thing.” In Christian systematic theology it is used to refer to the study of the biblical doctrine of salvation. It often includes such topics as the nature and extent of the atonement as well as the entire process of salvation, conceived as an eternal, divine plan designed to rescue lost and erring sinners and bring them back into eternal fellowship with God. Many regard it as the primary theme in Scripture with the glory of God as its goal.

There are two basic ways of approaching the doctrine of salvation. One is to stress the importance of man and his free will to choose for or against Christ. This school of interpretation is called Arminianism, named after Joseph Arminius. The other way of approaching salvation is to stress the importance of God and His sovereign will in bringing men to Himself through Christ. This school of interpretation is called Calvinism, named after John Calvin. It is unfortunate that one must call himself an Arminian or a Calvinist, but for theological purposes every Christian is either one or the other. The position one takes has nothing to do with his personal faith in Jesus Christ, it determines how he views salvation, but does not affect the fact of salvation.²⁴

The Nature of the Atonement

Throughout the history of the church a number of different views regarding the nature of the atonement (i.e., the theological significance of Christ’s death) have been advanced. The Recapitulation view was advanced by Irenaeus (ca. 120-ca. 200). In this view Christ sums up all humanity in Himself in that He went through all the stages of human life, without succumbing to temptation in any way, died, and then rose from the dead. The benefits of His life, death, and resurrection are then available to all who participate in Him through faith.

The Example or Moral Influence (or “subjective”) view has been advanced by theologians such as Pelagius (ca. 400), Faustus and Laelius Socinus (sixteenth century), and Abelard (1079-1142). Though there are certainly different moral example views,²⁵ their essential agreement consists in arguing that the cross demonstrates how much God loves us and this, then, awakens a response of love in our hearts; we then live as Jesus Himself lived. While there is biblical support for this idea (Phil 2: 6-11; 1st Pet 2:21), it is incomplete as it stands and fails to recognize the more crucial aspects of scriptural teaching on the issue.

Another theory of the atonement advanced in the early church – and really maintained as the standard view in the early church until Anselm – is the Ransom to Satan view. Origen (185-254) was one of the chief proponents of this understanding which asserts that Christ’s death was a ransom paid to Satan to secure the release of his hostages, his hostages being sinful men and women. While ransom language is used in Scripture to

²⁴ It is the authors opinion and belief based upon years of study that Calvinism is the correct view, the Biblical view if you will, and that Arminianism is erroneous.

²⁵ The Socinian view emphasized Christ’s human nature in order to present him as an *example* of the kind of love we are to show to God. The moral influence theory, as advocated by Abelard, and later by Horace Bushnell in the US, regards the death of Christ as a demonstration of *divine* love and Jesus’ divine dimension is emphasized. See Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 785.

refer to the atonement (e.g., Mark 10:45), it is probably incorrect to include in this the idea that a “price” was paid to Satan, for nowhere in Scripture is such an idea suggested. In his work *Christus Victor*, the Swedish theologian Gustav Aulen (1879-1977) argued for a Divine Triumph or Dramatic view of the atonement, similar to the ransom theories of Origen and the early church. In the dramatic view God overcame all the powers of hell and death through the cross and in doing so made visible His reconciling love to men. This too has some biblical support, but it is unlikely that it adequately summarizes all of scriptural revelation on this issue.

The Satisfaction or Commercial view of Anselm (1033-1109) argues that man has dishonored God by his sin and that through the death of the perfect, sinless God-man, Jesus Christ, that honor and more, including Satan’s defeat, has been restored to God. This theory also finds support in scripture, but more than God’s honor was restored through the death of His Son.

The Governmental view of the atonement, advanced by Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), places a high value on the justice of God and the demand of his holy law. In this view, the death of Christ upholds God’s moral government in that it demonstrates His utter commitment to His holy law. He could have forgiven men, however, without the death of Christ, but this would have left men without the true knowledge of His commitment to His Law. The death of Christ, then, is not as a substitute for us, but rather God’s statement about what He thinks about His moral government of the universe. This view has much to commend it, but as a global theory it simply cannot account for the tight connection between three important facts in Scripture: (1) the reconciliation of the believing sinner; (2) the forgiveness of sin; and (3) the death of Christ. Peter says that “Christ died for sins, once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring [us] to God” (1st Peter 3:18; cf. Rom 5:8).

The Penal Substitution view of the atonement – the view most often associated with the Reformers, in particular, John Calvin. Calvin argues that Christ died in the sinner’s place and appeased the wrath of God toward sin. Thus there are a cluster of ideas in this view including redemption (ransom), sacrifice, substitution, propitiation, and reconciliation. Though there are tensions in this view, and though the other views each contribute important insights to the idea of Christ’s atonement in the NT, this one perhaps rests on the best scriptural support, and brings together the holiness and love of God, the nature and sacrifice of Christ, and the sinfulness of man in a way that all are properly maintained. It is important, however, that the valid insights from the other views not be lost or eclipsed by this model.

The Extent of the Atonement

The question is often asked, “For whom did Christ die?” Evangelicals generally give one of two answers to this question. Both answers appear to enjoy support from Scripture, tradition, and logic. They are: that “He died for all men” (the *general* redemption view) and that “He died only for the elect” (the *limited* or *particular* redemption view). No evangelical believes that Christ died to save the entire world in the sense that every last man will go to heaven on the basis of His death. This is *universalism* and rightly rejected by scripturally informed Christians. Therefore, every evangelical *does limit* the application of the atonement to some degree; this is important to note!

Both sides in this dispute agree that the gospel can and should be genuinely offered to all men, that it is sufficient for the salvation of every man, but that not all men will be saved.

In the end, however, it seems that the most consistent summary of the Biblical evidence is that Christ died for the elect only. In this way, He paid the penalty for the sins of the elect only and all other people will pay for their own sins in eternal destruction. In this scheme there is unity in the workings of the Godhead in that the Father elects certain ones in eternity past, Christ dies for them in history (He does not die for all men, only for those the Father has chosen), and the Spirit applies that death to the elect and keeps them until the day of Christ. This is precisely the portrait we get in Ephesians 1:3-14 (see also John 17:9). In the case of particular or limited atonement, then, the term “world” in Scripture (e.g., John 3:16) does not mean all without exception, but all without distinction and the term “bought” in 2nd Peter 2:1 does not ultimately mean actually “bought” in a salvific way, but only that God is the rightful owner of these men though they deny this by their teaching (cf. Deut 32:6).²⁶

THE PROCESS OF SALVATION

Unconditional Election

The term “election” refers to God’s choice, before creation, of those individuals from the mass of humanity whom He would bless by delivering them from eternal condemnation and granting them eternal life. It is a choice that cannot be frustrated in any way as it is grounded in Trinitarian resolve.

The term “unconditional” coupled with “election” means that God’s choice had nothing do to with any foreseen merit of any kind in the objects of His choice. He chose them unconditionally; He freely chose unworthy sinners because of *His* love not because they in some way merited salvation.

Those who teach a “conditional election” often argue that God foresees a person’s faith and on that basis chooses them. In this scheme God’s foreknowledge is neutral with respect to the events of the future. But here again terms such as *yada’* in Hebrew and *progino-sko* in Greek do not indicate neutrality, but a positive relationship to the thing known (1st Peter 1:20). Further, conditional election is seriously flawed, since men are dead in sin and unable to believe or save themselves (Rom 3:9-11; Eph 2:1). Also, scripture nowhere teaches that because a man believes, God decides to choose him. Rather, it is the other way around: men believe *because God has chosen them*. From beginning to end, Scripture is clear that God saves men and they, left to themselves, would never turn to Him; indeed, they are unable (John 6:65; Acts 13:48; Rom 9:15-16, 20-22). Neither is there any teaching whatsoever in Scripture regarding prevenient grace that renders all men able to believe. Those who believe in Christ believe because of God’s work in their hearts first.

Effectual Calling

Generally speaking, there are two “callings” in Scripture.²⁷ There is a general call in which the good news is proclaimed to every creature under heaven. This includes the

²⁶ The language of “bought” (agorazo?) in 2 Peter 2:1 might come from the OT, as we pointed out, but it might be the specific language of Peter’s opponents, that is, it might be their estimation of themselves. Peter thus uses it in a sarcastic way. Also, when John says that Christ died not only for our sins, but also for (peri + gen) the sins of the entire world (1 John 2:2), he may simply be responding to an incipient form of Gnosticism which confined initiation to a select few. John says, “no, this gospel is equally for *all* men.” For a thorough discussion of this issue, the reader is encouraged to study John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, The Works of John Owen, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 10 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1967).

²⁷ This is not taking into view the call to serve as a minister.

preaching of the pure gospel coupled with a summons to repent and believe. Jesus called everyone who was weary and heavy laden to come to Him for rest (Matthew 11:28-30; Isaiah 45:22). Many did not come, but some did.

There is also what has been termed a special or effectual call wherein the Holy Spirit uses the preaching of the gospel to convict a sinner and bring him/her to faith. Those who are freely chosen (i.e., unconditional election) by God receive this special call. An unbeliever cannot thwart God's effectual call in their hearts, but this does not mean that people come into the kingdom "kicking and screaming" against their will. Rather, their choice is genuine, but it is generated, carried along, and brought to fruition by the Spirit. We see this special call on the elect in Romans 1:7; 8:30; 11:29; 1st Cor 1:9; and in 2nd Tim 1:9.

Regeneration

Regeneration is often referred to as the "new birth" (i.e., "born again") and is outlined for us in three principle texts, namely, John 1:12-13; 3:3, and Titus 3:5²⁸ (see also James 1:18; 1st Peter 1:3). It is a once-for-all act of God's Spirit (though every member of the Trinity is said to be involved in one way or another), not of human will or because of good deeds, whereby a person is renewed spiritually and made alive in Christ; they become a child of God and are "born" into His family and enjoy His special fatherhood. It is a gracious work of the Spirit in keeping with the promises of the New Covenant and is inscrutable from a human standpoint, though its effects are obvious: love for God that cries out "*Abba*" Father, prayer in dependence on God, hatred for sin, and love for other Christians as well as those without Christ. Regeneration logically precedes saving faith, for those who are dead in sin cannot believe. No one can enter the kingdom of God, Jesus said, unless he is born again (cf. John 3:5).

Conversion

If election, efficacious calling, and regeneration (cf. also justification and glorification) describe objective aspects of salvation, that is, God's work in salvation, then conversion describes the human or subjective response *to God's gracious working*. Conversion involves hearing the pure gospel and mixing it with saving faith and genuine repentance. Thus conversion has two closely related aspects to it: faith and repentance. Faith itself involves understanding the message of salvation through Christ, agreeing with it, and personally trusting Him to save you. An essential element of that trust is repentance from known sin. This involves a turning from sin to Christ for forgiveness. Thus saving faith is penitent and genuine repentance is believing; it is not just worldly sorrow (Acts 20:21; Heb 6:1; 2nd Cor. 7:10). Faith is not just mental assent and neither is biblical repentance. We are not dealing simply with historical facts in the gospel, though it indeed rests on these, but we are dealing with a person, "a consuming fire" as one biblical writer put it (Heb 12:29).

When one or the other element, either faith or repentance, is not mentioned in the biblical text, we are not to infer from this that the author thinks the other element unessential to the gospel. Rather, the author may be emphasizing one element over another, but not to the exclusion of the other. In many passages just *believing* is mentioned (e.g., John 3:16; 5:24; Rom 3:22) and in many others only repentance is mentioned (e.g., Luke 24:46-47;

²⁸ Regeneration seems to be associated in the early church with baptism, but it must be said up front that Scripture nowhere sanctions the belief that regeneration is materially related to anything other than Spirit sponsored, saving faith. The rite of baptism is the Christian symbol for salvation, and is often associated with faith, but of itself it contributes nothing to the salvation of a person.

Acts 3:19; 17:30; Rom 2:4). A genuine response to the gospel involves both elements. Someone has once said that repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin. Together they picture for us a genuine response to God's gracious offer of forgiveness in Christ.

Union with Christ

The expression "in Christ" (and its derivatives) is used in the NT to express our union with Christ as believers. It encompasses the whole spectrum of our salvation from its conception in the mind of God to its consummation in the new heavens and the new earth. Our election was "in Christ" (Eph 1:4) and so are all the ensuing benefits, namely, our calling, redemption, regeneration, conversion, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification (Rom 8:29-30, 38-39; 1st Cor 1:30; John 15:1-11; 1st John 2:5-6). Our entire present experience and future destiny is "in Christ."

Our experience of death to sin and resurrection to new life is in light of our union with Christ in *His* death and resurrection. Thus, not only are we "in Christ" but He (as well as the Father and the Spirit) is also in us (John 14:23) and through His indwelling Spirit we are sanctified in Christ and increasingly conformed/transformed to His image (Rom 8:29; 2nd Cor 3:18). And, all believers are "one body" in Christ Jesus which itself is a spiritual reality that should give rise to zealous efforts to develop unity (not disunity or uniformity) among true believers (Rom 12:5; 1st Cor 10:17; Eph 4:4).

Justification

The doctrine of justification is crucial to a proper view of the gospel and is not simply a doctrine developed in the heat of the battle in Galatians.²⁹ Several things should be noted briefly about this doctrine. First, justification refers to a legal declaration by God that our sins – past, present, and future – are forgiven through Christ and Christ's righteousness is imputed to us. Second, it is a once-for-all decision to declare (*not make, at least not right away*) us righteous in His sight so that there remains no longer any legal recourse or accusation against us. This is the meaning Paul intends when he asks in Romans 8:33-34: "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? God is the One who justifies." Third, since justification involves forgiveness of sin and dealing with actual condemnation, it ultimately settles the question of our guilt; we are no longer in a state of guilt. Fourth, we possess, in God's sight, the righteousness of Christ, and since God views it this way, this is indeed reality. It is not fiction as some have argued, but real, though the doctrine of justification does not deal directly with *practice*, but *standing* before God's holy law. Our standing has been forever changed and we are no longer guilty; the law no longer has recourse against us. Fifth, justification comes through faith and not by works as Paul makes clear in Romans 3:26-28; 4:4-5. We do not earn this standing, but rather it is credited to our account through faith in Christ. Sixth, it is dangerous to the purity of the gospel of God's grace to introduce ideas of moral improvement into the doctrine of justification. While justification is related inextricably to sanctification, they are not the same reality and should not be confused. Justification does not mean that God infuses righteousness into us in order to prepare us to receive his grace (which is really not NT grace at all). Again, justification deals with our legal standing and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us; it does not refer directly to our day to day growth in the

²⁹ Paul lists it as integral to the process of salvation in Romans 8:30. There it is linked with other important truths such as God's predestination of the elect, His calling them to salvation in history, and His commitment to bring them safely to glorification in the future. Justification is also an important doctrine for marking out the people of God who know they are saved not by works which they have done, but by the grace of God.

Lord. Seventh, there is an eschatology to justification. As N. T Wright says, “The verdict issued in the present on the basis of faith (Rom 3:21-26) correctly anticipates the verdict to be issued in the final judgment on the basis of the total life.”³⁰

Adoption

Adoption refers to God’s decision to make us members of His family and to offer us all the benefits and (ethical) standards involved in living “under His roof.” If justification deals with my legal standing before God as a sinner, then adoption deals with my familial relationship to the judge; I am now one of His own children through adoption (Gal 3:26) and He has become my Father. In many different texts one finds that God is our special Father through the gospel and that we are His children. It is in the context of this new relationship that we receive many, great blessings. First, God is our *Father*, the one who cares for us and all our needs. He is the one Jesus enjoined us to pray to, for our “heavenly Father knows what we need even before we ask” (Matt 6:25-34). Second, He forgives us when we confess our sin, for He is both a Father who is holy but who also understands our weaknesses and draws alongside to help in time of need (Matt 6:12-14). Third, He disciplines us and chastens us for our sin so that we might share in His holiness (Heb 12:10). He loves us so much that he will not let us wander forever, but will draw us back to His side. Indeed, by His Spirit He leads us into greater experiences of His holiness and this is essentially what it means to be a son or daughter of God (Rom 8:14). Finally, it is through our sonship that we become heirs of Christ, and of God, and of all that eternal life has in store for us, including suffering in the present life (Gal 4:7; Rom 8:17).

We note also that sonship or adoption leads to a new kind of life in God’s family. We are to imitate our Father who loved us with such a great love. We are to love others according to the example He set for us (Eph 5:1; 1st Pet 1:15-16). Through regeneration we are transformed morally and spiritually so that we can live like sons of God and not like slaves who do not know their masters.

Sanctification

The doctrine of sanctification can be spoken of in three tenses. With respect to the past, we have been set apart, both to belong to God, positionally speaking, and to serve Him, practically speaking. We were sanctified at the moment of conversion and were declared legally holy and belonging to the Lord (1st Cor 6:11). With respect to the future, we will be totally sanctified someday in our glorified bodies. At that time our practice will completely match our position or standing before God. At the present time we are being sanctified, that is, increasingly being transformed into the image of the Lord (2nd Cor 3:18). Thus the nature of sanctification is transformation; we are being progressively conformed into the image of the Son who died for us. This is God’s decreed purpose (Rom 8:29).

Sanctification in the present time, then, is the process of transformation into the image of Christ and the efficient cause of this glorious change is the Spirit living in us (2nd Corinthians 3:18). He mediates the presence of Christ to us and unfolds the moral will of God to us (John 16:13-14; 1st Cor 3:16; 6:19-20). The Spirit uses the people of God (Col 3:16), the word of God (2nd Tim 3:16-17), circumstances God ordains to mold and shape us (Rom 8:28), and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Matt 28:19-20; 1st

³⁰ N. T. Wright, “Justification,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 360.

Cor 11:23-26). We are on His potter's wheel, not a treadmill; relationship, transformation, and holiness are the goals, not exhaustion.

Therefore, the purpose for which the Spirit is aiming in our lives is Christlikeness and the degree to which we are conformed to Him is the degree to which we are sanctified. The fruit that should characterize our lives, then, ought to be love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control (Gal 5:23-24). The root of this transformation lies in our co-crucifixion and co-resurrection with Christ (Rom 6:3-4), and the process is never completed in this life (Phil 3:12-13). Nonetheless, we shoot for perfection (1st Peter 1:15-16), knowing that such will not be the case until the Savior comes from heaven to transform our lowly bodies (Phil 3:20). Until then, the process is colored by struggle against the world (1st John 2:15-16), the flesh (Rom 8:6-7; Gal 5:17), and the devil (Eph 6:12).

Our role in the process of sanctification relates directly only to the present time. It involves mortifying the deeds of the body; that is, putting to death those things that belong to our earthly (carnal) natures (Col 3:5) and conversely, putting on Christ (Romans 13:14). If, by the Spirit, we put to death the misdeeds of the body, we will certainly enjoy all the power, comforts, and joys of the spiritual life (cf. Rom 8:13). We must remember in our struggle against sin (and, for righteousness), however, that we live in relationship with God on the solid foundation of justification. Though we strive to please Him, it is not so that He will become our Father and take us in; rather it is because He has already declared His Fatherhood over us and because He is the One who works in us to this end. Again, our responsibility can be summed up in the word: "cooperation." God is the one who works in us both "the willing and the doing" (Phil 2:12-13).

Perseverance

The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is really the idea of sanctification taken through the whole of a person's life. If God is the author of their salvation, He is also the finisher of it. As Paul says, He will bring to completion the good work He has begun in Christ (Phil 1:6). Since faith itself is a gift of God (Eph 2:8-9), God enables believers by the power of the Spirit to persevere in their trust and to continually move toward Christlikeness, even if for a long while they err in sin. God does not revoke His call, nor annul the justification He has put in place (Rom 11:32). Those whom He has called...He also glorified (Rom 8:30). He will never let His own perish (John 10:28-30).

Passages such as Hebrews 6:4-6 have often been used to deny the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. But these passages do not teach that people can lose their salvation (cf. Heb 6:9). Rather, the writer is drawing inferences based on the evidence (i.e., behavior of his audience) he sees. Like a good pastor he is warning people of the real consequences for those who live with knowing or unknowing contempt for Christ's sacrifice. The human author does not know whether each and every one is saved, only that if they are going to withdraw from Christianity/persecution into the politically safe-haven of Judaism, then one may certainly question whether such a person knows Christ. Thus the writer warns them of the eternal consequences of life apart from Christ. The important point that these so-called warning passages demonstrate is that *one* of the means God uses to protect his saints and enable them to persevere is powerful preaching and His word of rebuke.

Finally, this doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, or as it is commonly called, the eternal security of believers (not exactly the same thing), does not lead to sluggish

behavior or a lack of zeal in the Christian life. First of all, it includes severe warnings in this regard; we saw this above. Second, perseverance means that the Spirit is persevering with us in order to bring about the fruit of the Spirit in us. He has been doing this from the beginning since we were at one time dead in sin when He breathed regenerating life into us. Why would He stop after we're saved? We are no more sinful now, than we were then. Third, our election is unto holiness and glorification and the Trinitarian plan cannot be thwarted (Eph 1:4; Rom 8:30). Fourth, to argue that believers can lose their salvation is to misunderstand many Biblical passages and to position the work of sanctification ultimately in the human will. This is unscriptural and contrary chiefly to the principle of grace. Finally, those who want to argue from Hebrews 6:4-6 that believers can lose their salvation if they don't live properly, or if they have a faltering of faith, must also accept the truth that once lost; it cannot be regained – as the passage clearly says. This would mean that Peter who thrice denied Christ was lost and doomed to hell. Yet Christ Himself told Peter to feed His sheep, the Holy Spirit descended upon Peter at Pentecost, and Peter led over 3000 to the Lord through the power of the Spirit. This would be quite contrary to what Scripture teaches if Peter was apostate and unable to return to the Lord. On the contrary, however, the Bible emphatically teaches the eternal security of the believer (Rom 8:38-39).

We must also note that not every one who claims to be a believer is a believer, and therefore is saved. Jesus said that many will say to Him on that day, "Lord, Lord," and He will say to them, "Depart from me, for I NEVER knew you" (Matt 7:21-23). Therefore, just because a person claims to believe in Jesus does not mean that they do. The doctrine of eternal security refers only to those who are truly born-again and who therefore persevere to the end.

Glorification

Glorification is the moment at which the life of God is strikingly manifested in us when we receive our resurrected bodies and are perfectly fitted for existence in the eternal state. There will be some similarity between our mortal bodies and our glorified bodies, as the example of Jesus after His resurrection demonstrates (e.g., John 21:4ff), but there will be great differences between that which was sown in dishonor and that which will be raised in honor (1st Cor 15:35-49). It will be a body similar to its predecessor, as a seed is to the plant into which it grows. But it will not be marked by dishonor, decay, weakness, and the absence of spiritual life. On the contrary, it will be a material body, specially fitted for spiritual existence and clothed with dignity, power, and glory. It will be patterned after Christ's own resurrection body (1st Cor. 15:49). In these glorified bodies there will be perfect concord between desire and fulfillment in terms of our obedience and service to our great King. Our experience of God will be one of complete fulfillment as well. At that time we will be truly human and able to worship and praise God in a way He rightfully deserves.

Ecclesiology: The Church

The Nature of the Church

There is a great need today to understand the essential nature of the church from what Scripture teaches and not firstly from the role some claim she ought to play in society. We cannot continue to define the church existentially, that is, by the way she interacts with the world and the resultant changes she undergoes. We must begin with the word of God in order to get a sense of the kind of entity she is, and from there we can decide on the kind of tasks she ought to be engaged in.

The term *ekklesia* is used predominantly throughout the New Testament to refer to the church. We may look at its use in Classical Greek to understand it, but even more important is its usage in the Septuagint. The term in Classical Greek most often refers to an “assembly” regularly convened for political purposes, such as voting on issues affecting the city in which the people live.

In the Septuagint (the Greek OT) the term *ekklesia* is often used to translate a Hebrew term which can refer to meetings for civil affairs (1st Kings 2:3), for war (Num 22:4), of nations (Gen 35:11), and a variety of other gatherings, including, and most importantly, Israel’s gatherings for religious purposes (Deut 9:10; 2nd Chron 20:5; Joel 2:16).³¹

The term *ekklesia* in the NT can refer to the “church of God” meeting in a home (Rom 16:5), in a particular city (1st Cor 1:2; 1st Thess 1:1), in a region (Acts 9:31) or a larger area such as Asia itself (1st Cor 16:19). When these data are taken together we realize that the church is a universal body composed of all true believers in Christ, united in Him by the Spirit, and that there are particular geographical expressions of it here and there and throughout history. Thus, though there are many local “churches,” there is really only *one* church (Eph 4:4; Heb 12:23).

This leads naturally to the idea that the church is both visible and invisible. It is invisible in that God knows who is *truly* a Christian and who is not. It is visible in that there are local expressions of it to which Christians commit themselves. Further, it is not necessary to belong to a local church to be a Christian, though, of course, one will want to out of obedience to Christ. And, just because a person goes to church, does not mean they are in fact part of the spiritual body of Christ.

Let us turn now to a discussion of the various metaphors used in reference to the church. This will give us yet more insight into the essential nature of the church. Though the list is long, we will concentrate on only a few.

Metaphorical Expressions in Reference to the Church

The New Testament writers refer to the church using several rich metaphors. *First*, in 1st Corinthians 12:12-27 she is corporately referred to as the body of Christ, and in Ephesians 1:22-23 she is the body and Christ is the head. *Second*, she is also referred to as God’s family; we are all sons and daughters of the Lord (2nd Cor 6:18). *Third*, her intimate and dependent relationship to her Lord is likened to a vine and its branches (John 15:1-11). *Fourth*, in her relationship to the world she is referred to as the pillar and

³¹ There is another term in the Hebrew OT, and it often refers to Israel as a “ceremonial community” centered in the cult or the Law. It is, however, never translated with *ekklesia*. See Jack P. Lewis, “qahal,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 789-90; Lothar Coenen, “Church,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 1:291-95

ground of the truth (1st Tim 3:15). *Fifth*, she is corporately referred to as a building (1st Cor 3:9), a living temple that actually grows (Eph 2:20-21) and a holy temple in which God dwells (1st Cor 3:16). *Sixth*, in her service before God and in her relationship to Him as His people she is referred to as a “holy nation,” a “royal priesthood” (1st Pet 2:9) and each member is likened to a living stone, built around the chosen and precious cornerstone of Christ Himself. *Seventh*, she is referred to by the Lord as the salt and light of the world (Matt 5:13-15; Acts 13:47; Col 4:5-6). *Eighth*, she is referred to as the Bride of Christ (Rev. 21:9).

The Church and Israel

There is a lot of confusion about Israel amongst Christians today. Much of this confusion can be traced to the erroneous teaching of dispensationalists such as Pat Robertson, Tim LaHaye, Hal Lindsey, some members of the Southern Baptist Convention, and others. Of course this confusion is nothing new. During the Lord’s earthly ministry and after His resurrection, and before His ascension, the disciples asked Him repeatedly, “Lord are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6 for example). Many of the Jewish leaders including the Pharisees and Sadducees also believed that the Messiah would be a powerful political/military figure resembling their long gone king David.³² However, it was not that the Jewish leaders and disciples timing were off, it was that an earthly kingdom was contrary to every purpose of the Lord. At the end of His life, during His triumphal entry, Jesus did not come to establish an earthly kingdom, but rather to fulfill prophecy (John 12:15; Isaiah 40:9; Zechariah 9:9).

Jesus had taught the disciples and others that He came not to bring an earthly kingdom as they expected, but rather He came to bring salvation from sin. It is a sad fact that many Christians have agreed with the chief priests and teachers of the law. Classic dispensationalism has long held that the Pharisees had the right method of interpreting the Bible, they just reached the wrong conclusion. Of course no modern day dispensationalist would agree with this outright, but their claims of dispensationalism agree with it. It is the Dispensational-Premillennial belief that God made a promise to Abraham (Genesis chapters 15 and 17), that He would give Abraham an earthly, national people with the result that it has always been God’s intention to have such a people and if the Jews refused the first offer, then there must be an earthly Jewish kingdom in the future millennium.

Many Premillennialists even hold to the belief that the creation of the modern Israeli state in Palestine in 1948, is a providential confirmation of this belief. And that God continues to work out history along two parallel tracks, with an earthly Jewish people and a spiritual, Christian people. This line of thinking however is fraught with difficulties. First, such a way of reading contemporary events is highly dubious. What man knows with certainty the exact meaning of providence? If a loved one gets cancer, should we speculate about what sin caused it? The Lord warned against trying to interpret providence in John chapter 9. If we cannot even guess the meaning of relatively small providences, how are we to interpret the meaning of larger providence? Though it is exciting to think that God is doing something spectacular in our time, it very well could be that this search of excitement is actually a search for certainty. Our age seems bent on finding confirmation of the faith in the thought that we are witnessing the end of history.

³² Believing that this new Messiah would slay his ten thousands as recorded of David in 1st Sam. 18:7, see also John 6:14-15

We cannot understand what God is doing in history apart from understanding one of the most important terms in Scripture: the word covenant. This is a frequently used word in the Bible.³³ Covenant describes the way God relates to creatures. It is a mutually binding oath in which there are stipulations, blessing for obedience and curses for disobedience as well as signs and seals of the oath.

God made the first covenant in human history, a covenant of works with the first man in the Garden of Eden. The promised blessing for keeping the covenant was eternal life, the curse for breaking the covenant was death. Adam broke the covenant and sin entered the world, and death through sin (Romans 5:12). The second covenant in human history was also made by God with Adam. This covenant however, was not of works, but rather was a Gospel covenant, a covenant of grace. In this second covenant God promised on oath a coming Savior who would crush the head of the serpent. The blessing of this covenant was also eternal life and the curse for breaking the covenant was again death. The good news (Gospel) of this covenant was that there is a Savior who will keep the terms of the covenant of works and sinners would benefit from it. In Biblical history the same Gospel covenant which God made with Adam was renewed with Abraham and the promise was restated (Genesis 15:6). And in Genesis 17:10-14, circumcision became the sign of initiation into the covenant.

The covenant of works did not simply disappear in the history of salvation. Rather, the covenant of works is repeated throughout Scripture every time the Law is read and God demands perfect righteousness from sinners (Galatians 3:10), and Jesus Himself repeated the covenant of works to the rich young ruler.³⁴ But also the covenant of grace is repeated throughout the history of redemption, whenever God says, "I will be your God and you will be my people." He is repeating the promise He made to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Moses, and it is even repeated in the New Testament by the Apostles in Acts 2:39.

So how does all of this fit in with Israel and the church?

The first time the word Israel appears in the Bible is in Genesis 32 where God renames Jacob after their wrestling match. Before this however, we must remember that there was Abraham and his miracle son Isaac, and before Abraham Jesus says, "I AM."³⁵ And Jesus even taught the Jews in John chapter 8 that it was He who made the promise to Abraham.³⁶ We must also remember that the fulfillment of that promise did not come by the will of man, but by the sovereign power of God when He allowed Sarah to conceive in her old age. We must also remember that God chose Jacob, not his twin brother Esau. With this background in mind we then come to the question of "Who are Abraham's children?" and "Who is the Israel of God?" Again we must look to John chapter 8 to see the Lord's teaching on the matter. In verses 28-29 Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the One I claim to be, and that I do nothing on my own, but speak just what the Father has taught me. The One who sent me is with me, He has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases Him." He went on to say, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." To which the Jews responded by pointing out that they are

³³ The word covenant is used 294 times to be exact.

³⁴ In Luke 10:28 when the rich young ruler asked Jesus what must "he" do to inherit eternal life, Jesus told him in simple terms. Thus the covenant of works was repeated.

³⁵ John 8:58

³⁶ John 8:56

physically descended from Abraham (verses 32 & 33). To that Jesus responded, “If you were Abraham’s children... then you would do the things Abraham did.” (vs. 39). Thus the Lord’s definition of a child of Abraham, a Jew, or Israel is one who does the things Abraham did. According to Jesus Abraham saw His day and rejoiced (vs. 56). Again according to Jesus a Jew, a true Israelite is one who has saving faith in the Lord Jesus before or after the incarnation.

Thus it should not surprise us to find substantially the same teaching in Paul’s theology. In Romans 4, Paul says that one is justified in the same way Abraham was justified, by grace alone, through faith in Jesus Christ alone (Rom. 4:3-8). Paul points out that Abraham was justified before circumcision and that by his faith, Abraham became the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised. He is also the father of the circumcised who are not only circumcised outwardly but inwardly, a circumcision of the heart; in other words, those having the faith of Abraham.³⁷

One of the clearest places in Scripture on this question is Romans chapter 9. The context is the very question we are addressing. Who is the Israel of God? Has God abandoned His promise to Abraham? Paul’s answer is, a Jew is one who is a Jew inwardly, who loves the Savior of Abraham. Since Jesus was circumcised for us on the cross (Col. 2:11-12), circumcision is morally and spiritually indifferent. The reason that only some Jews have trusted Jesus as their Savior is because “not all Israel is Israel.” What Paul teaches is that it is not the physical descendants who are God’s children, but the children of promise are the children of God. Remember that Isaac was born by the sovereign power of God, and God chose Jacob³⁸ It was not that Paul did not want Jews to be saved, he desperately did, but he knew the truth, that being simply a physical descendant of Abraham could not save anyone. He knew that people were saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, not by being a physical Jew.

Paul also rejected the notion of restoring the sacrificial system. Jesus has paid for the sins of man on the cross. There is no need to reinstate the sacrificial system as some dispensationalists would have the church believe will occur. Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice, and His death was more than enough to pay the penalty of man’s sin. To replace His death would be to tread the grace of God underfoot.

Has God rejected His people? No, the elect are His people, and always have been His people, and all the elect will be saved. There were and are believing Jews. Paul was an example of such, but he and the Bible as a whole agrees that Christians are the Israel of God in Christ Jesus.³⁹ God loves the Jews, and He has a plan for them, just as He loves the Arabs, and has a plan for them, just as He loves the Chinese and has a plan for them, just as He loves the Africans and has a plan for them, just as He loves the white Americans and Europeans and has a plan for them.

In a sense; what dispensationalists are doing, is re-hashing the same temptation that Satan attempted in the wilderness in trying to give Jesus an earthly kingdom to rule over, but this is bad theology and incorrect. Jesus has already established His kingdom through the preaching of the Gospel. This kingdom may not seem as exciting as ruling from Jerusalem during an earthly, golden age, it may not sell many books, but the world has

³⁷ Read Romans chapter 2 through 4 for a better understanding of this

³⁸ Mal. 1:2, 9:11-13

³⁹ Gal. 6:16; 1st Peter 2:9-10; Hebrews 8:8-10; Romans chapters 2-4

never found the Jesus of the Bible very interesting, that's why He is a stumbling block to so many, and foolishness to thousands

The church's mission to the Jews is that same with any other ethnic group, or race, to preach the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. To love them as we should all peoples, but not to turn a blind eye to any improper actions of the nation of Israel. The church should not be boldly saying, "Israel right or wrong." The church should stand on the side of truth, righteousness and justice in all instances.

Purpose & Service of the Church

The purpose of the church is to carry on the work of Christ in proclaiming the gospel and being a light to the world (John 14:13-14; Acts 1:8; Acts 13:47). Thus the gospel and its life transforming character stand at the heart of the church and are to be reflected in her members.

The church is to have a God-ward focus in worship, praise and prayer. This involves freely worshipping God and praying for each other as well as for those in the world, including our political leaders, whether Christians like their politics or not (1st Tim 2:1-3). The church is also commissioned to establish and equip new believers in the faith. This includes teaching concerning the gospel and its ethical concomitants, i.e., obedience to the Lord's commands, love for each other, and responsible and holy living in a fallen world. The church is also to have a consistent ministry to the world in terms of acts of kindness and witnessing to the truth and reality of God and the gospel. Thus a healthy church keeps in focus upward, inward, and outward calls as really three aspects of one call to know Christ and to make Him known. The primary authority in directing these activities is, of course, the Scriptures as interpreted and applied through dependence on the Spirit a secondary authority is the wisdom gained from the church throughout her history, not in the primary fashion used by the Catholic Church, but in a secondary fashion.

The Government of the Church

Throughout the history of the church there have been several different, yet basic forms of church government. These include: (1) Episcopalian; (2) Presbyterian; (3) Congregational, and (4) Non-government. We will briefly describe the first three here. In the Episcopalian system the chief ministers of the church are bishops. Other ministers are presbyters (or priests) and deacons. All these are mentioned in the New Testament, although there bishops and presbyters seem to be identical. Those who see an Episcopal system in the New Testament point to the function of the Apostles, which some think was passed on to bishops whom the Apostles ordained. They see as important the position of James in Jerusalem, which is not unlike that of the later bishop. The functions of Timothy and Titus as revealed in the Pastoral Epistles show these men to have been something of a transition between the Apostles and Bishops of later times.

The apostles are said to have practiced ordination by the laying on of hands (Acts 6:6; 1st Tim. 4:14), and they appointed elders in the churches they founded (Acts 14:23), presumably with the laying on of hands. On this view the apostles were the supreme ministers in the early church, and they took care that suitable men were ordained to the ministry. To some of them they entrusted the power to ordain and so provided for the continuance of the ministry in succeeding generations.

Further, it is believed that the organization of the church subsequent to New Testament days supports this view. In the time of Ignatius the threefold ministry was clearly in

existence in Asia Minor. By the end of the second century it is attested for Gaul and Africa by the writings of Irenaeus and Tertullian. Nowhere is there evidence of a violent struggle such as would be natural if a divinely ordained congregationalism or Presbyterianism were overthrown. The same threefold ministry is seen as universal throughout the early church as soon as there is sufficient evidence to show us the nature of the ministry. The conclusion is drawn that episcopacy is the primitive and rightful form of church government.

But there are objections. There is no evidence that bishops differed from presbyters in New Testament days. It is going too far to say that all the ministry of these times was of apostolic origin. There were churches not of apostolic foundation, like that in Colossae, which do not seem to have lacked a ministry. Again, some of the early church orders, including the Didache, are congregational in outlook. The case is far from proven. Nevertheless, episcopacy is undoubtedly early and practically universal. In time divisions appeared, notably the great schism in 1054 when the Orthodox Church in the East and the Roman Catholic Church in the West separated. Both continue to be Episcopal and hold to the doctrine of apostolic succession. But there are differences. The Orthodox Church is a federation of self governing churches, each with its own patriarch. The Roman Catholic Church is more centralized, and its bishops are appointed by the pope. There are doctrinal differences, such as different views of the filioque clause in the Nicene Creed.

At the Reformation there were further separations. The Church of England rejected Roman supremacy but retained the historic episcopate. Some of the Lutheran churches opted for an Episcopal system but did not remain in the historic succession. In more recent times other churches have decided to have bishops,⁴⁰ and these too have rejected the historic succession. There have been other divisions, such as the separation of the Old Catholics when the dogma of papal infallibility was proclaimed. More Christians accept episcopacy than any other form of church government, but Episcopal churches are for the most part not in communion with one another.

The Presbyterian system emphasizes the importance of elders, or presbyters. Its adherents do not usually hold that this polity is the only one in the NT. At the Reformation the Presbyterian leaders thought that they were restoring the original form of church government, but this would not be vigorously defended by many Presbyterians today. It is recognized that there has been much development, but it is held that this took place under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and that in any case the essentials of the Presbyterian system are scriptural. It is beyond question that in the New Testament presbyters occupy an important place. They are identical with the bishops and form the principal local ministry. In each place there appears to have been a group of presbyters who formed a kind of college or committee which was in charge of local church affairs. That is the natural conclusion to which exhortations like Heb. 13:17 and 1st Thess. 5:12 - 13 point. From the account of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 we see that the presbyters occupied an important place at the very highest levels of the early church. In the sub-apostolic age the bishop developed at the expense of the presbyters. This was due to such circumstances as the need for a strong leader in times of persecution and in the controversies against heretics and perhaps also to the prestige attaching to the minister who regularly conducted the service of Holy Communion.

⁴⁰ Some Methodist Churches most notably

There is much that is convincing in this case. But we must also bear in mind the considerations urged by upholders of the other ways of viewing church government. What is beyond doubt is that from the Reformation onward the Presbyterian form of church government has been of very great importance. John Calvin organized the four churches in Geneva on the basis of his understanding of the New Testament ministry as four fold: the pastor, the doctor (or teacher), the deacon, and the presbyter (or elder). It was the pastor who had the care of the congregation. This was not the full Presbyterian system, but it laid the foundation for it, and Presbyterianism developed in Switzerland, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and elsewhere. On the European continent the name “Reformed” is used for these churches.

Another important development in Geneva took place in a congregation of exiles from Queen Mary's England. They met under their elected pastors, John Knox and Christopher Goodman, and developed along Presbyterian lines. After the accession of Elizabeth, Knox returned to Scotland, and his work led in time to the full emergence of the Presbyterian Church in that country, from where it spread to Northern Ireland. England for a number of reasons did not accept Presbyterianism as wholeheartedly as did Scotland, but a Presbyterian church emerged there also. From this church Welsh Presbyterianism took its origin. From Europe, more particularly from Britain, the church spread to America, where it became one of the most significant groups of Christians. In the great missionary movement of modern times missionaries carried the Presbyterian form of the church far and wide, and national Presbyterian churches were formed in many parts of the world.⁴¹

Presbyterian churches are independent of one another, but they have in common that they accept such standards as the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, or the Westminster Confession and that they practice a presbyterial form of church government. The local congregation elects its “session,” which governs its affairs. It is led by the minister, the “teaching elder,” who is chosen and called by the congregation. He is, however, ordained by the presbytery, which consists of the teaching and ruling elders from a group of congregations over which it exercises jurisdiction. Above it is a General Assembly. In all courts parity between teaching and ruling elders is important. There has been a tendency for smaller bodies of Presbyterians to appear among those who are dissatisfied with the laxity (as they see it) in the way some of the larger churches hold to classic Presbyterianism.

The Congregational system puts the emphasis on the place of the congregation. Perhaps it would not be unfair to say that the chief scriptural buttresses of this position are the facts that Christ is the head of His church (Col. 1:18, etc.) and that there is a priesthood of all believers (1st Pet. 2:9). It is fundamental to New Testament teaching that Christ has not left His church. He is the living Lord among His people. Where but two or three are gathered in His name, He is in the midst. Nor is it any less fundamental that the way into the very holiest of all presences is open to the humblest believer, whether they be a layperson or an ordained minister (Heb. 10:19 - 20). Other religions of the first century required the interposition of a priestly caste if anyone wished to approach God, but the Christians would have none of this. Christ's priestly work has done away with the necessity for any earthly priest as the mediator of access to God.

⁴¹ The Presbyterian Church has evangelized more nations and peoples than any other denomination, and reached throughout the world through Evangelism Explosion

Added to this is the emphasis on the local congregation in the New Testament. There, it is maintained, we see autonomous congregations, not subject to Episcopal or Presbyterian control. The apostles, it is true, exercise a certain authority, but it is the authority of founders of churches and of the Lord's own apostles. After their death there was no divinely instituted apostolate to take their place. Instead the local congregations were still self governing, as we see from local church orders like the Didache. Appeal is also made to the democratic principle. The New Testament makes it clear that Christians are all one in Christ and there is no room for any absolute human authority.

Congregationalism as a system appeared after the Reformation. Some among the Reformed decisively rejected the idea of a state church and saw believers as forming a "gathered church," those who have heard the call of Christ and have responded. An Englishman, Robert Browne, published in Holland a famous treatise, *Reformation Without Tarrying for Any*" (1582), in which he affirmed the principle of the gathered church, its independence of bishops and magistrates, and its right to ordain its ministers. Denied the freedom to put all this into practice in England, many crossed into Holland. It was from the church at Leiden that the Pilgrims fathers sailed for America in 1620 and established congregationalism in the new world, where it became very important. Congregationalism is much wider than the church that bears the name. Baptists, for example, usually have congregational polity. They see the local congregation as independent and not subject to any outside authority. So it is with several other denominations. In addition there are Christians who from time to time set up their own congregations with no links with anyone. Congregationalists generally oppose creedal tests. This leads to an admirable toleration. But it also opens up the way to a distortion of New Testament Christianity, and some Congregationalists have passed over into Unitarianism. Nevertheless, congregationalism remains a widely held form of Christianity.

A consideration of all the evidence leaves us with the conclusion that it is impossible to read back any of our modern systems into the apostolic age. If we are determined to shut our eyes to all that conflicts with our own system we may find it there, but scarcely otherwise. It is better to recognize that in the NT church there were elements that were capable of being developed into the Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Congregational systems and which in point of fact have so developed. But while there is no reason that any modern Christian should not hold fast to his particular church polity and rejoice in the values it secures to him, that does not give him license to unchurch others whose reading of the evidence is different.

Ordinances Given the Church

There are two ordinances⁴² given the church by the Lord. They are baptism and the Lord's Supper, or as the latter is commonly referred to, the Eucharist or Holy Communion. We will begin our discussion with a summary of baptism, dealing with the command to be baptized, its mode, meaning, and significance, the subjects of baptism, and the effect of baptism. We will also briefly discuss the Lord's Supper.

Baptism

⁴² These are sometimes referred to as "sacraments." To some, the term "sacrament" suggests the idea that either participation in these rites is necessary for salvation or that they actually work in and of themselves, apart from the faith of the participant. Indeed, this is often how they are conceived in the Catholic Church.

The first thing that we note about Christian baptism is that within the overall framework of making disciples, the resurrected Lord commanded it. In Matthew 28:19-20 He told His disciples to go and make disciples of all nations. They were to do this in two ways: (1) baptizing them into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and (2) teaching them to obey everything that Christ had commanded. Baptizing new believers is not an option for each local expression of the church, though only certain members in any given church may actually do the baptizing (cf. 1st Cor 1:17). The early church understood the importance of baptism and faithfully practiced it in the case of new converts.

The most common meaning of the verb “to baptize,” both in Greek literature and the New Testament, is to “immerse,” “dip,” or “plunge.” It does not mean “to sprinkle.” The idea of “immersion” fits well with and best explains the evidence of the New Testament.

Several facts indicate this: First, John baptized people in the Jordan River and not on dry ground, a fact which is most easily explained if immersion were the mode rather than sprinkling. This, of course, is the case with Jesus’ baptism, who was said to go down into the waters and come up out of the waters.⁴³ Second, John baptized at Aenon near Salim because there was much water there. It seems reasonable to suppose that such a great amount of water would not have been needed if sprinkling were the method John used (see John 3:23). Third, there is the case of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8:37. If baptism simply involved sprinkling, it seems that they would not have had to wait until the Ethiopian saw a large amount of water. Also, why did both Philip and the Ethiopian go down into the water if only sprinkling were required? The explanation that best suits the meaning of baptizo and that makes sense of both Philip and the Eunuch in the water together is that when Philip baptized the Ethiopian, he submerged him in water and then lifted back out again.⁴⁴ Fourth, the fact that Peter associated baptism with the removal of dirt from the body indicates that he was thinking of something much more than simply sprinkling (1st Pet 3:21). This is in keeping with the idea of immersion. Finally, Paul uses water baptism in Romans 6:4 to symbolize the idea of “dying and rising” with Christ. The apparent parallel with “dying and rising” is much more easily understood if immersion is the method that Paul had in mind (see also Col 2:12).

In as much as baptism is an outward sign of an inward spiritual reality, and a new union between Christ and believer, it is to be administered to believers only. It does not work *ex opere operato* as the Catholic Church teaches, but is an ordinance given to those who have previously, personally trusted in Christ, conscious of what they are doing. There are several passages in Acts that make this clear (2:41; 8:12; 10:44-48; 16:14-15). Other passages that seem to speak of the baptism of households (Acts 16:32-33; 1st Cor 1:16), therefore, should not be understood to include infant baptism, or the baptism of unbelieving adults, but rather that everyone (or mostly everyone) in the house responded to the gospel and was, therefore, baptized.

There are also some who argue that baptism is necessary for salvation and they often refer to Acts 2:38 (though not just this passage) in support of their views. Usually these groups are affiliated with the Church of Christ, and the Christian Church, Disciples of

⁴³ Matthew uses the expression *anebe apo tou hudatos* (Matt 3:16) and Mark says *anabainon ek tou hudatos* (Mark 1:10). Both indicate that Jesus and John were in the water, not just beside it.

⁴⁴ The same language that’s used of Jesus coming out of the water is used of the Eunuch as well (i.e., *avebesan ek tou hudatos*).

Christ. These denominations assert that those who have not been baptized for salvation are lost.

This would mean that, throughout Christian history, the vast majority of those who confessed Christ, believed His Word, praised His holy name, and proclaimed His glories to the lost, were never saved. Even those who were martyred for Christ, and those who have translated our Bibles, and those who have given their lives to the mission field to proclaim Christ's glory to the lost, were, almost without exception, never saved and will end up in hell because they did not get baptized for salvation.

There are some passages of Scripture which seem to say that a person must be baptized in order to be saved.⁴⁵ However, as one examines the Scriptural teaching of baptism and of salvation, one sees that neither baptism nor any other ritual can save from sin. Salvation is by God's grace, through faith, apart from works (Eph. 2:8). God has not ordained water baptism to be a magical ritual by which we may obtain salvation.

So, what must a person do to be saved? Scripture answers this question in literally dozens of different passages. Romans 10:8-13 is such a passage. The Apostle Paul tells the reader that if they confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in their hearts that God has raised Him from the dead, they will be saved. He does not add any further requirements. Those who insist that a person must be baptized are rejecting this passage of Scripture, as well as the example given by the thief on the cross. Paul elaborates on this doctrine in that passage. He speaks of the heart; that with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness. Next he speaks of the mouth; that with the mouth a person confesses, resulting in salvation. He concluded the lesson in Romans with a quotation from Joel 2:32, "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved." If Paul believed that baptismal ritual was required in addition to faith and confession, then he would surely have said so. Salvation is too important a matter to omit essential ingredients. What in the world could Paul have been thinking, to promise salvation on faith alone, if he believed that no one could be saved without the ritual of water baptism? There are several other passages that specifically state that the one who believes will be saved without mentioning water baptism.⁴⁶

Those who teach that water baptism is required for salvation usually keep a list of four items which, they assert, are required for salvation. Faith, repentance, confession, and water baptism, they often deny that a person is saved through faith alone. Those who hold to the fourfold formula of faith plus repentance plus confession plus baptism, suppose that each passage which states that faith alone is needed for salvation leaves out certain necessary elements, and that we must pool all such statements together, if we wish to find out what God truly requires for salvation. However, this approach does not really accept any of the elements which God has made about salvation. John 3:16 says that everyone who believes in Christ will be saved. It does not say merely that faith is one of many things required in order to be saved. It does not leave open such an interpretation of the passage. It says that whoever believes in Jesus Christ will not perish.

So then why does Scripture sometimes list other things besides faith as necessary for salvation? Why, for example, does Romans 10:8-13 say that confession is also needed? It is simply because true faith will confess Christ. The Bible teaches that there is such a thing as a counterfeit faith. In the eighth chapter of John, certain Jews came to believe on

⁴⁵ Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16

⁴⁶ John 3:16, 3:18, 20:31; Acts 13:39, 10:43, 13:48; Romans 1:16, 4:3, 4:5, 4:11; and many, many more

Jesus. Yet as Jesus continued speaking with them, it soon became clear that their faith was not genuine, for Jesus accused them of seeking to kill Him.⁴⁷

The purpose of adding confession or baptism to simple faith is not to give a list of things which must be added to faith, but to qualify the kind of faith which accompanies salvation. Saving faith is a faith which confesses Christ. Saving faith is a repentant faith. Saving faith is one which seeks to be joined to, or identified with Christ and His people. This brings us to a point which will be developed as we proceed. The words baptize and baptism (Greek: *baptizo* and *baptismos*) do not necessarily imply a water ritual. Their root meaning is to “immerse into, so as to permanently join to.”⁴⁸ Scripture says that we are “baptized into Christ” (Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27). The object in these passages is not water, it is Christ Himself. We are “immersed” into Christ, so as to become permanently joined to Christ.

This is accomplished in three distinct ways. First: we are judicially baptized into Christ in eternity past.⁴⁹ Secondly: we become experientially baptized into Christ at conversion.⁵⁰ Thirdly: we become manifestly baptized into Christ when we confess Him as our Lord and join with others who confess His holy name.⁵¹ Each of these could properly be called a “baptism,” since each one, in some sense, joins us to Christ. Water baptism is symbolic of the first two, but effectual only in the third sense, of openly manifesting our relationship to Christ. Yet, we need to realize that any of the things which manifest our faith in Christ, or publicly joins us to Christ and to the company of believers, could properly be termed a “baptism.” A verbal confession could identify us with Christ, and join us to the company of believers just as effectively as the water ritual. Granted, water baptism is the normal way for a believer to initially express his faith, and to be numbered among the people of God, but it is not the only or necessary way. Our Lord is not as concerned with the ritual itself as with what it symbolizes and accomplishes. Thus there is one baptism, and that is when we are immersed into Christ by the Holy Spirit.

A comparison of Acts 2:38 with Romans 10:9 reveal that they both teach the same requirement for salvation, namely true faith. Each passage requires a changed heart. Acts 2:38 demands repentance, whereas Romans 10:9 says you must believe in your heart. Repentance and faith are almost used interchangeably in Scripture for one simple reason: true faith is a repentant faith. Or to put it another way, true repentance is believing repentance. Either way, the faith must be placed in Jesus Christ. Each passage requires outward evidence of this inward change, in the form of confessing Christ before men. Also, Acts 2:38 commands that this be done by being baptized, Romans 10:9 commands that it be done by verbal confession of Christ. This outward evidence should

⁴⁷ John 8:30-40. It is clear that the “faith” which these individuals had was of a different kind than that of Cornelius in Acts 10:44-48, or the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-39, or the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:34

⁴⁸ Strong's

⁴⁹ God, from all eternity, chose us *in Christ* (Ephesians 1:4), and *imputed* our sins to Christ and His righteousness to us (2 Corinthians 5:21). This judicial *identification with Christ* is the basis of our *justification before God* (Ephesians 2:4-10).

⁵⁰ The Holy Spirit, at the appointed time, *creates a new heart* within us (Titus 3:5; Ezekiel 36:26). This is the source and fount of the *faith* which we have in Jesus Christ and of our *repentance* toward God (Ephesians 2:8-10; Philippians 1:29; Acts 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25). In this way the Holy Spirit *communicates* to us many of the blessings which Christ purchased for us on the Cross.

⁵¹ We *express* our God-given faith and repentance in a *variety* of ways: through *confession*, *water baptism*, *the fruit of the Spirit*, *acts of love and kindness*, and *by assembling with other believers* (Galatians 5:22-23).

not be thought of as an additional requirement, but as the natural, inevitable expression of true saving faith.

When we compare Acts 2:38 and Romans 10:9 with one another, we see that Scripture is not as concerned with the mode of expression as with the condition of the heart, that it possesses the kind of faith which openly confesses Christ before men (Matt. 10:32-33; Luke 12:8-9). Thus we see that anyone who possesses a repentant, believing heart, and who shows it by confessing Christ, will be saved. This also agrees with the teachings in James concerning faith and works.⁵²

We must understand that water alone cannot unite anyone with Christ. There is something more significant involved than just getting wet or going under water. People go under water every day when diving in pools, lakes, or oceans. The Greek words *baptizo*, *baptisma*, and *baptismos*, when accompanied by the phrase “into Christ” or “into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” signify immersion into Christ. It is not immersion into water. Ultimately, it is the Holy Spirit’s work of giving us a new heart which issues forth in faith in Christ, which manifests our salvation and applies its benefits to our lives (Titus 3:5; 2nd Thess. 2:13; Romans 8:11; Galatians 5:22-23).

When God moves in this way, it is His work which unites us to Christ. We are baptized into Christ by the mighty works of God.

So what is the purpose of water baptism and why should Christians even bother with it? Water baptism is a ritual ordinance in Scripture. Like other ordinances of the Bible, it involves symbolism. For example the sacrifices depicted the death of Christ on the cross. Circumcision depicted the removal of the sinful nature (Colossians 2:11). In each ordinance, there is an outward physical ritual, and also an underlying spiritual reality of which the ritual is but a shadow or type. These ordinances did not possess some magical power to invoke the spiritual reality they symbolized. The Old Testament Jews did not actually receive a new dose of forgiveness from God each time they brought an animal to be sacrificed. Rather, each sacrifice served as a retelling of the gospel; a reminder that we are sinful and cannot save ourselves; that we need a Redeemer who will lay down His life for us, bearing our sins.

Water baptism is also a confession; it serves as a way for an individual to express his new faith in Christ. Because of its cleansing imagery, water baptism serves as a confession of sin, and of the need for cleansing and forgiveness. It is a declaration of repentance, and of the desire to live a changed life; one that is dominated by a changed attitude and a proper understanding about God, sin, righteousness, the Bible, and Jesus Christ.

We are not saved because we are baptized. Faith is the gift of God,⁵³ as is the ability to repent⁵⁴

The Lord’s Supper

The New Testament contains remarkably few references to the Lord’s Supper. We have the Gospel accounts of its institution (in Matthew, Mark, and Luke). We have some references in Acts to the breaking of bread, and in 1st Corinthians one or two references from the pen of Paul. These exhaust the New Testament references to the subject. Some detect allusions in other passages, but these are only allusions.

⁵² James

⁵³ Ephesians 2:8-10; Philippians 1:29

⁵⁴ Acts 11:18, 2nd Timothy 2:25

All this reminds us that, though the Supper is not to be marginalized; it certainly is not what lies at the heart of Christian life and discipleship. It has its own importance, but the preaching of the Word is always more important than any sacrament.

Secondly, it is remarkable how anxious Paul was to indicate the precise dating of the institution of the Supper. He tells us that it happened on the same night in which the Lord was betrayed (1st Cor. 11:23). It is a tribute to the Jesus' pastoral concern that on this night when so many other claims pressed upon His attention, this night when he was faced with His coming crucifixion, He was so concerned for His church that for its benefit He set up this ordinance. Jesus was so focused on the needs of His people that for their sakes He calmly attended the Passover meal and with great dignity, instituted this sacrament for the benefit of the church.

Thirdly, Paul claims that his teaching on the subject came directly from the risen Lord Himself (1st Cor. 11:23). This is all the more important in that First Corinthians is probably earlier than all our existing Gospel accounts, and therefore contains the earliest canonical account of the institution of the Supper. Paul uses a very interesting form of words in introducing the matter. "I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you." Paul tells us that he received this teaching from the Lord Himself. The natural meaning of these words is that his teaching on the subject had come to him by direct revelation from Christ. Paul was not himself present with the 11 disciples at the original Supper. Nevertheless, his account was not derived from any other Apostle, but from the Lord Himself. Again taking into account that the epistle to the Corinthians was written before any of the Gospel accounts, we can rest assured that Paul was in agreement with the other disciples in the matter of Communion.

The Nature of the Lord's Supper

The word sacrament comes from a Latin word, *sacramentum*, which speaks of the oath taken by a Roman soldier. It is therefore suggested that the Lord's Supper was the taking of an oath to Christ and an entering into an obligation of loyalty to Him at a personal level. Now that of course is true, but the word *sacramentum* is a Latin word, not used in the Bible, but is a word used in translation of the Greek word. There is a further difficulty: the word, *sacramentum* entered Christian vocabulary in dubious circumstances. The Latin Vulgate used it to translate the New Testament word "mystery." For example: when Paul discusses marriage in Ephesians 5:32, he says, "This is a great mystery" a great *mysterion* (Greek). The Vulgate rendering is that marriage is a great *sacramentum*. One result of this is that in subsequent Catholic thought, marriage came to be seen as a sacrament. But the even more serious result was that the word "sacrament" came to be identified with the word "mystery." People began to speak of the "mystery" of the Lord's Supper. It was a short distance from that to actually mystifying the Lord's Supper.

There were in New Testament times, or shortly thereafter, so called "mystery religions." In some ways they were like secret clubs, Masonic Lodges, or weird fraternities. They had mysterious initiation rites and it is important for the Christian to distance themselves as far as they can from such a view of Christianity. In fact, the word sacrament has very limited value in helping us understand the Lord's Supper. It is a Roman, not a Christian word, and because it was used (quite wrongly) to translate the Greek word *mysterion* it now has unavoidable connotations of mysticism.

Another word which is often used of the Lord's Supper is Eucharist. This term is more common in Episcopal and Catholic circles than among Reformed believers and Anabaptists. But it is utterly Biblical. Its use in connection with the Lord's Supper goes back to the fact that on the night of His betrayal Jesus "took bread and, giving thanks (Greek: *eucharistesas*), broke it" (1st Cor. 11:24). This rite of thanksgiving has become central to the Sacrament in virtually all Christian traditions. The Supper becomes an occasion for saying, "Thank you Lord. Thank you for the broken body, for the incarnation and for the death of Christ on the cross of Calvary."

Thirdly: the Lord's Supper is a proclamation. "You proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1st Corinthians 11:26). In some ways, of course, this proclamation takes place through the visible signs; the bread and the wine, the sacramental actions and the sacramental words. Through all of these there is a proclamation of the Passion of Christ; His death, burial, and resurrection. As early Christians would sit at the Supper, the story of the cross would be retold, from oral recollection in the first instances, but later from the various written accounts which gradually appeared. And it would be told of the suffering He endured upon the cross, how He was wounded for our transgression, bruised for our iniquities, and the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and how by His stripes we are healed. It would be told of the shed blood that forgives sin, and washes whiter than snow, and that Christians were participating in the Supper in remembrance of Him.

So then, the Lord's Supper is a sacrament, the Lord's Supper is a Eucharist, and the Lord's Supper is a proclamation. But it is also a memorial. It takes us back to the foundation of redemption. It is a reminder that Jesus Christ, God's Son, came into the world and literally gave Himself for sinners. The Lord's Supper is there to make sure we never forget. And lastly, the Lord's Supper is an ordinance. In some Gaelic communities they call the Lord's Supper "the ordinances."⁵⁵ That phrase was also prevalent in some parts of Scotland at one time. The Lord's Supper is a divine ordinance. Thus Christians should participate in the Lord's Supper, if for no other reason other than simple obedience. Like baptism, it is a work of faith, a profession of faith, a proclamation of faith, and something that one who is in the faith should want to participate in.

Unworthy Participating

Paul does raise the question of unworthy participation. We can come to the Supper in such a way that we incur guilt, and guilt of the gravest kind (1st Cor. 11:27). But the question is, "What is an unworthy manner?" It is not a poor, trembling soul fearing that it may be a hypocrite. The nature of the offence is defined by the context of Scripture. The abuses at Corinth were horrible. The sacrament had become almost like an orgy. There was drunkenness, gluttony, and snobbery, and it was all happening around the Lord's Table. It was that level of abuse that distressed Paul. So taking this into account, as well as what we have already seen with regard to the nature of the Lord's Supper; to come in an unworthy manner is to come in a way that is not controlled by the nature of the Supper. In a way that disregards the purposes it was meant to serve. That was Paul's basic complaint. He speaks of "this bread and this cup." The Lord's Supper is not just any old feast. It is not a party. It is not an orgy.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*, Edinburgh: 1866, pp. 212-291.

⁵⁶ *Zwingli and the Doctrine of the Sacraments* is probably the best book written in the English language that deals with the subject of the Lord's Supper.

Church Discipline

The decline of church discipline is perhaps the most visible failure of the contemporary church. No longer concerned with maintaining purity of confession or lifestyle, the contemporary church sees itself as a voluntary association of autonomous members, with minimal moral accountability to God, much less to one another.

The absence of church discipline is no longer remarkable; it is generally not even noticed, mainly because the present generation of both ministers and church members are without experience of Biblical church discipline.

Without a recovery of functional church discipline, firmly established upon the principles revealed in the Bible; the church will continue its slide into moral dissolution and relativism. Evangelicals have long recognized discipline as the “third mark” of the authentic church.⁵⁷ Authentic Biblical discipline is not an elective, but a necessary and integral mark of authentic Christianity.

The abandonment of church discipline is linked to American Christianity’s creeping accommodation to American culture. As the 20th century began, this accommodation became increasingly evident as the church acquiesced to a culture of moral individualism. In the 19th century manuals of church discipline and congregational records indicate that discipline was regularly applied. Protestant congregations exercised discipline as a necessary and natural ministry to the members of the church, and as a means of protecting the doctrinal and moral integrity of the congregation. As ardent Congregationalists, the Baptists left a particularly instructive record of 19th century discipline. Historian Gregory A. Wills commented, “To an antebellum Baptist, a church without discipline would hardly have counted as a church.”⁵⁸ Churches even had days when the congregation would gather to heal breaches of fellowship, admonish wayward members, rebuke the obstinate, and if necessary, excommunicate those who resisted discipline. In doing so, churches understood themselves to be following a Biblical pattern laid down by Christ and the Apostles for the protection and correction of disciples. Members were considered to be under the authority of the congregation and accountable to each other and the church government.

By the turn of the century, however, church discipline was already on the decline. In the wake of the Enlightenment, criticism of the Bible and of the doctrines of Christian orthodoxy was widespread. Even the most conservative denominations began to show evidence of decreased attention to theological orthodoxy. At the same time, the larger culture moved toward the adoption of autonomous moral individualism. The result of these internal and external developments was the abandonment of church discipline as ever larger portions of the church member’s life were considered off limits to the

⁵⁷ The identification of proper discipline as the third mark of the true church goes back at least to the Belgic Confession [1561]: “The marks by which the true Church is known are these: If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin; in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church. Hereby the true Church may certainly be known, from which no man has a right to separate himself.” “The Belgic Confession,” in *The Creeds of Christendom*, ed. Philip Schaff, rev. David S. Schaff, Vol. 3 (New York: Harper and Row, 1931), pp. 419-420. Similarly, the *Abstract of Principles* of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1858) identifies the three essential marks as true order, discipline, and worship.

⁵⁸ Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South 1785-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), P. 12.

congregation. By the 1960's only a small minority of churches even pretended to practice regulative church discipline. Significantly, confessional accountability and moral discipline were abandoned all together.

Many congregations have forfeited any responsibility to confront even the most public sins of their members. Consumed with pragmatic methods of church growth and congregational engineering, most churches leave moral matters to the domain of the individual conscience. Naturalistic reductionism has invited us to reduce alleged individual sins to social influences for which individuals are not responsible. Narcissistic hedonism has demeaned any talk of sin or confession as un-gratifying and dysfunctional. Autonomous individualism has divorced sin from a caring community. Absolute relativism has regarded moral values as so ambiguous that there is no measuring rod against which to assess anything as sin. Thus modernity, which is characterized by the confluence of these four ideological streams, has presumed to do away with confession of sin, and has in fact made confession an embarrassment to the accommodating church of modernity.⁵⁹ The very notion of shame has been discarded by a generation for which shame is an unnecessary and repressive hindrance to personal fulfillment. "Go and sin no more" has been replaced with "Judge not lest you be judged."

Demonstration of this moral abandonment is seen in mainline Protestantism's surrender to an ethic of sexual "liberation." Liberal Protestantism has lost any moral credibility in the sexual sphere. Homosexuality is not condemned, even though it is clearly condemned in the Bible. Evangelicals have overwhelmingly capitulated to the divorce culture. Where are the evangelical congregations that hold married couples accountable for maintaining their marriage vows?

The secular world has taken notice, even noting that many ministers seem more afraid of offending members of their congregations than they do of God.⁶⁰ Tied to this worry about offending church members is the rise of the "rights culture," which understands society only in terms of individual rights rather than moral responsibility. Unable, or unwilling to deal with moral categories, modern men and women resort to the only moral language they know and understand; the unembarrassed claim to "rights" that society has no authority to limit or deny.

Holiness and the People of God

Throughout the Bible, the people of God are characterized by a distinctive purity. This moral purity is not their own achievement, but the work of God within their midst. As the Lord said to the children of Israel, "I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy" (Lev. 11:44).⁶¹ Given that we have been chosen by a holy God as a people carrying His own name, God's chosen people are to reflect His holiness by their way of living, worship, and beliefs.

This holiness is central to the understanding of the Old Testament. The nation is reminded that it is now known by God's name and is to reflect His holiness.⁶² God promised His covenant faithfulness to His people but expected them to obey His Word and follow His law. In the New Testament, the church is likewise described as the people

⁵⁹ Thomas C. Oden, *Corrective Love: The Power of Communion Discipline* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1995), 56.

⁶⁰ David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 231.

⁶¹ This verse is quoted in 1st Peter 1:16 and is addressed to the church.

⁶² See Deut. 7:6

who are visible to the world by their purity of life and integrity of word and deed. As Peter instructed the church, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1st Peter 2:9-10). Peter continued and urged his listeners to abstain from sinful desires, and to live such good lives that those outside of the faith would see the Christians good deeds and glorify God (1st Peter 2:11-12).

The apostle Paul clearly linked the holiness expected of believers to the completed work of Christ in redemption: “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation” (Col. 1:21-22). Clearly, this holiness made complete in the believer is the work of God; holiness is the evidence of His redemptive work. To the Corinthian congregation Paul urged, “Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God” (2 Cor 7:1). The identity of the church as the people of God is to be evident in its pure confession of Christ, its bold testimony to the Gospel, and its moral holiness before the watching world. Nothing less will mark the church as the true vessel of the Gospel.

Discipline in the Body of Christ

The first dimension of discipline in the church is that discipline exercised directly by God as He deals with believers. As the book of Hebrews warns, “You have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: ‘My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son.’ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?” (Heb. 12:5-7). As the passage continues, the author warns that those who are without discipline “are illegitimate children and not true sons” (v. 8). The purpose of discipline, however, is righteousness. “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (v. 11).

This discipline is often evident in suffering – both individual and congregational. Persecution by the world has a purifying effect on the church. This persecution is not to be sought, but if the church is “tested by fire,” it must prove itself pure and genuine and receive this suffering as the Lord’s discipline, even as children receive the discipline of a father. The fact that this analogy is so foreign to many modern Christians points out the fact that discipline has disappeared in many families, as well as in the church. Children are treated as moral sovereigns in many households, and the social breakdown of the family has diminished its moral credibility. The loving discipline portrayed in this passage is as foreign to many families as it is to most congregations.

God’s loving discipline of His people is His sovereign right and is completely in keeping with His moral character – His own holiness. His fatherly discipline also establishes the authority and pattern for discipline in the church. Correction is for the greater purpose of restoration and the even higher purpose of reflecting the holiness of God.

The second dimension of discipline in the church is that disciplinary responsibility addressed to the church itself. Like God’s fatherly discipline of those He loves, the

church is to exercise discipline as an integral part of its moral and theological responsibility. That the church can fall into moral disrepute is evident in the New Testament itself.

The apostle Paul confronted a case of gross moral failure in the Corinthian congregation that included “immorality of... a kind that does not occur even among pagans” (1st Corinthians 5:1). In this case, apparent incest was known to the congregation, and yet it had taken no action.

“And you are proud! Shouldn’t you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?” Paul accused the Corinthian congregation (v. 2). He instructed them to act quickly and boldly to remove this stain from their fellowship. He also warned them, “Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast – as you really are” (vv. 6-7a).

Paul was outraged that the Corinthian Christians would tolerate this horrible sin. Incest, though not literally unknown in the pagan world, was universally condemned and not tolerated. In this respect the Corinthian church had fallen beneath the moral standards of the pagan world to which they were to witness. Paul was also exasperated with a congregation he had already warned. Mentioning an earlier letter unavailable to us, Paul scolds the Corinthians.⁶³

The moral outrage of the Apostle is evident in these verses, which call the Corinthian church to action and the exercise of discipline. They have now fallen into corporate sin by tolerating the presence of such a bold and arrogant sinner in their midst. Their moral testimony is clouded, and their fellowship is impure. Their arrogance has blinded them to the offense they have committed before the Lord. The open sin in their midst is like a cancer that, left unchecked, will spread throughout the entire body.

In the second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul offers similar instruction, combining concern for moral purity and doctrinal orthodoxy: “In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us” (2nd Thess. 3:6). Paul instructs the Thessalonians to follow his own example because “We were not idle when we were with you” (2nd Thess. 3:7).

The Pattern of Proper Discipline

How should have the Corinthian church responded to this public sin? Paul speaks in 1st Corinthians of delivering this sinner unto Satan and removing him from fellowship. How is this to be done? To the Galatians Paul wrote that “if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). This teaching is clear, indicating that spiritual leaders of the church are to confront a sinning member with a spirit of humility and gentleness, and with the goal of restoration. But what are the precise steps to be taken?

The Lord Himself provided these instructions as He taught His disciples: “If your brother sins against you go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector” (Matt. 18:15-17).

⁶³ See 1st Cor. 5:9-13 for the full account.

The Lord instructed His disciples that they should first confront a sinning brother in private. “Show him his fault,” instructed the Lord. If the brother acknowledges the sin and repents, the brother has been won. The fact that the first step is a private confrontation is very important. This limits the injury caused by the sin and avoids a public spectacle, which would tarnish the witness of the church to the Gospel. In the event the private confrontation does not lead to repentance, restoration, and reconciliation, the next step is to take witnesses. Jesus cited the Deuteronomic law which required multiple witnesses of a crime for conviction. Yet His purpose here seems larger than the mere establishment of the facts of the case. Jesus seems to intend for the witnesses to be an important presence in the *event* of the confrontation, thus adding corroborating testimony concerning the confrontation of a sinning brother. The brother cannot claim that he was not confronted with his sin in a brotherly context. If the brother does not listen even in the presence of one or two witnesses, this becomes a matter for the congregation. “Tell it to the church,” instructed Jesus, and the church is to judge the matter before the Lord and render a judgment that is binding upon the sinner. This step is extremely serious, and the congregation now bears a corporate responsibility. The church must render its judgment based upon the principles of God’s Word and the facts of the case. Again, the goal is the restoration of a sinning brother or sister, not a public spectacle.

Sadly, this congregational confrontation may not avail. If it does not, the only recourse is separation from the sinning brother. “Treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.” instructed the Lord, indicating that the separation is to be real and public. The congregation is not to consider the former brother as a part of the church. This drastic and extreme act is to follow when a brother or sister will not submit to the discipline of the church. We should note that the church should still bear witness to this man, but not as brother to brother, until and unless repentance and restoration are evident.

The Power of the Keys

What is the church’s authority in church discipline? Jesus addressed this issue directly, even as He declared the establishment of the church after Peter’s great confession: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 16:19). This “power of the keys” is one of the critical controversies between evangelicals and the Church of Rome. Roman Catholics believe that the pope, as Peter’s successor, holds the keys, and thus the power of binding and loosing. Protestants, however, believe that the Lord granted the keys to the church. This interpretation is supported by the Lord’s repetition of the matter in Matthew 18:18, “I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Here the context reveals that the power of binding and loosing is held by the church. The terms *binding* and *loosing* were familiar terms used by rabbis in the first century to refer to the power of judging matters on the basis of the Bible. The Jewish authorities would determine how (or whether) the Scriptures applied in a specific situation and would render judgment by either binding, which meant to restrict, or loosing, which meant to liberate. The church still bears this responsibility and wields this power. John Calvin, the great Genevan Reformer, believed that the power of binding should be understood as excommunication, and loosing as reception into membership: “But the church binds him whom it excommunicates – not that it casts him into everlasting ruin

and despair, but because it condemns his life and morals, and already warns him of his condemnation unless he should repent. It looses him when it receives into communion, for it makes him a sharer of the unity which is in Christ Jesus.”⁶⁴

Calvin’s interpretation is fully in agreement at this point with Martin Luther, whose essay on “The Keys” (1530) is a massive refutation of papal claims and Roman Catholic tradition. Luther saw the keys as one of Christ’s great gifts to the church. “Both of these keys are extremely necessary in Christendom, so that we can never thank God enough for them.”⁶⁵ As a pastor and theologian, Luther saw the great need for the church to bear the keys, and he understood this ministry to be gracious in the recovery of sinning saints. What about a church leader who sins? Paul instructed Timothy that a church leader; an elder, is to be considered “worthy of double honor” when he rules well (1st Tim. 5:17). When an elder sins, however, that is a matter of great consequence. First, no accusation is to be received on the basis of only one uncorroborated witness. If a charge is substantiated by two or three witnesses, however, he is “to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning” (1st Tim. 5:20). Clearly, leadership carries a higher burden, and the sins of an elder cause an even greater injury to the church. The public rebuke is necessary, for the elder sins against the entire congregation. As James warned, “Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly” (James. 3:1).

The scandals of moral failure on the part of church leaders have caused tremendous injury to the cause of Christ. The stricter judgment should be a vivid warning to those who would violate the Word of God and lead others into sin by example. The failure of the contemporary church to apply consistent biblical church discipline has left most of these scandals unresolved on biblical grounds, and thus a continuing stain on the church. The mandate of the church is to maintain true Gospel doctrine and order. A church lacking these essential qualities is, Biblically defined, not a true church. That is a hard thing to say, for it clearly indicts hundreds, if not thousands of American congregations who long ago abandoned this essential mark and have accommodated themselves to the spirit of the age. Fearing lawsuits and lacking courage, these churches allow sin to go unchallenged, and heresy to grow unchecked. Inevitably, the false unity they seek to preserve gives way to the factions that inevitably follow the gradual abandonment of Biblical Christianity. They do not taste the true unity of a church grounded on the truth and exercising the ministry of the keys.

⁶⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, *Library of Christian Classics*, Vol. 20 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), p. 1214.

⁶⁵ Martin Luther, “The Keys,” in *Luther’s Works* (American Edition), ed. Conrad Bergendoff, gen. ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, Vol. 40 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), p. 373.

Eschatology: End Times

What position we take on the millennial reign of Christ's kingdom is very important to the Church. Despite the many voices of denial, eschatological agnosticism is akin to blindfolding ourselves to part of the scriptures concerning the kingdom. And it is doing so while endeavoring to preach on the nature of that very same kingdom. The reality is that whatever God has inspired written is a revelation to us, and it cannot ever be looked upon as non-essential or unimportant. As good Christians we should have the mindset that all of God's Word is essential and necessary for us. That is the way that we should approach eschatology.

The four major theologies of Christ's return and reign are called: Amillennialism, Premillennialism, Postmillennialism, and Praeterism. Each is incompatible with the other, and therefore, at best, only one of these eschatological positions can be the truth. It therefore becomes necessary for those who desire truth to search out the scriptures and to earnestly contend for the faith that was once delivered unto the saints. True understanding comes through the study of God's Word (2nd Timothy 2:15) via the Spirit, and is of the faith of Christ. God didn't inspire the doctrines of eschatology and incorporate them into Scripture just to take up space. They are there because God wants us to know about these things that were, things to come, and the things that are. So that we can better understand the debate, we will start with a brief definition of the four major millennial positions in the Church today. Because in understanding these different theologies, we will get a better awareness of how each views the Church's mandate, plan, and final victory in accomplishing its mission.

Amillennialism

The word millennium is a Latin term meaning one thousand years. It's from the root words [*mille*], meaning thousand, and [*annum*], meaning years. In Greek, placing the letter "A" before a word negates the word. So a-millennial literally means no millennium. However, we should note that Amillennialists do in-fact believe there is a millennial reign of Christ, but not on an earthly throne upon this sin cursed earth. They believe that the Messiah has come to reign upon the throne of David in the Kingdom of heaven. So the word Amillennial itself is literally accurate as it is understood to mean, "No millennial reign on an earthly or worldly throne." Use of this word in any sense other than a "no future earthly kingdom reign," would be a misnomer.

This view of eschatology maintains that the present reign of Christ (Revelation 20:4), began with His ascension to the throne of God, and that this is what the apostle Peter was speaking about in Acts 2:30-32. Christ instituted His kingdom reign by His death, resurrection, and ascension to the throne of David, and it will be fully realized and manifested at His second coming.

Amillennialism does not support the idea that the Kingdom of Christ is an intangible, but that it is incontrovertibly real, effectual, substantive, factual, essential, and of a spiritual rather than worldly (earthly) or carnal nature. They believe that the Kingdom of Christ is now being both extended and advanced through the preaching of the gospel by the servants of their King, Christ.⁶⁶

Premillennialism

⁶⁶ See the section on Israel and the Church for more information on this view

By contrast, the term Premillennialist identifies Christians who believe that the thousand year reign spoken of in Revelation chapter 20 is earthly in nature. It is where Christ literally returns to earth as King to rule. Pre-millennial literally means before millennium, or before the thousand years. This doctrine teaches that sometime in the future Christ will return to this earth and begin a literal one thousand-year reign upon a literal throne in the Middle East. He will reign and govern from Jerusalem, and peace will rule on earth from the nation of Israel. Generally, Premillennialists believe in two separate and unequal salvation programs; a national or racial (rather than individual) salvation plan for the Jewish people, and another plan for everyone else (any non-Jew or Gentile). They hold that future redeemed Israel will be the center of government and the spreading of the gospel to the nations of the world. In this, they generally reject the contention that Christ has already come to redeem and deliver Israel, and that He is now the center of rule and Government.

There are different forms of premillennialism (Dispensationalism, Historical, etc.), but in general, they do not believe that many Old Testament scriptures which were fulfilled, are “completely” fulfilled. They take the position that fulfillment in Israel (if any) is incomplete, and the pertinent scriptures dealing with this have yet a further future literal fulfillment. e.g., some premillennialists look for Elijah to literally come back to prepare the way for Christ's rule, because they don't believe that John the Baptist “completely” fulfilled that prophesy.

Postmillennialism

A view that is increasing in popularity within some circles recently, is Postmillennialism. This is the view that the millennium will produce a future golden age of the Church that will precede the second advent of Christ. They (as do the Amillennialists) offer up the scriptures that declare that Christ is ruling in His kingdom now, and that the kingdom of God is now being extended through servants of that kingdom preaching the gospel. But they differ from the Amillennial view in that they believe that at the end of this kingdom age, there will be an age of righteousness and worldwide turning to Christ.

The word “post,” means after, and thus postmillennial identifies those who believe in the return of Christ after this future golden age or period. The belief is usually that this golden age of the Church will feature the exercise Christ's power and authority in this world whereby its rulers are hindered in their wickedness. The influence of Christianity will excel and spread until a future time when most of the world will be in obedience to God's laws. They expect that after they have created this just, God-fearing society, Christ will then return, and the judgment and resurrection occur.

Praeterist

The Praeterist (or Preterist) view means its past fulfillment. *Praeterit* is Latin and means Pre (before) in fulfillment. It is expressing time fulfilled. Praeterists believe that most or all of Bible Prophecy has already been fulfilled in Christ, and the on-going expansion of His Kingdom. They hang this belief of Past-fulfillment on many different verses, including the witness that Jesus and his apostles said that His coming (or presence) and the end of all things, would occur soon (in that generation).

Full Praeterists spiritualize Matthew 24 as having already taken place in the past, and believe that Christ actually returned in 70 AD fulfilling the prophesy of the Second Advent.

Each of these systems has areas that can cause confusion. It is the author's belief that true eschatological teaching lies somewhere in the realm of Amillennialism or Postmillennialism though there are some areas within those two views that are open for debate. However the Praeterist and Premillennial views are filled with errors. Having said that let us look at one error that seems to have a hold on modern Evangelical and Charismatic churches that hold a premillennial view; namely the doctrine of a pretribulation rapture.

The pretribulation rapture teaching is that there will be a second and third coming of Christ. They agree with Amillennialists and Postmillennialists that Christ did come during the First Advent, but then, the Second Coming is secret and occurs before the future seven years tribulation. At this coming Jesus comes for the saints, both living and dead. These saints meet the Lord in the air and then are taken to heaven to escape the horrible judgments that take place during the seven year tribulation. At the end of the great tribulation Jesus returns to the earth with the saints. This coming (the 3rd) is not secret but is observed by all. At this coming Christ crushes His opposition, judges mankind and sets up a one thousand year reign of saints upon the earth (the millennium). We must note that some pretribulation advocates speak of this second and third coming as actually one coming in two separate stages or phases.

Although the pretribulation rapture doctrine is very popular and is even considered crucial to some, the exegetical and theological arguments used by its advocates are all classic cases of forcing one's theological presuppositions onto particular texts (eisegesis). The fact is that the pretribulation rapture theory is not plainly taught or directly stated in any place in Scripture, and it cannot be deduced from Biblical teaching. It contradicts the general teaching of the Bible regarding Christ's Second Coming and it was never taught in any branch of the church prior to 1830.

The Origin of the Pre-trib Rapture Doctrine

Whenever a Christian encounters a doctrine that has not been taught by anyone in any branch of the church for over 18 centuries, one should be very suspect of that teaching. This fact in and of itself does not prove that the new teaching is false. But, it should definitely raise one's suspicions, for if something is taught in Scripture, it is not unreasonable to expect, at least a few theologians and exegetes to have discovered it before. The teaching of a secret rapture is a doctrine that never existed before 1830. The first person to teach the doctrine was a woman named Margaret Macdonald. Margaret was not a theologian or Bible expositor but was a so called "prophetess" in the Catholic Apostolic Church. Apparently Margaret had a vision that a select group of Christians would be caught up to meet Christ in the air before the days of the Antichrist. An eye (and ear) witness of her claims, Dr. Robert Norton, preserved her hand written account of this pre-trib rapture revelation in two of his books. His writings, along with much other Catholic Apostolic Church literature, have been hidden many years from the mainstream of Evangelical thought and only recently surfaced. Margaret's views were well known to those who visited her home; among them was John Darby of the Brethren. Within a few months her distinctive prophetic outlook was mirrored in the early Brethren assembly at Plymouth England.

Early disciples of the pre-trib interpretation often called it a new doctrine.⁶⁷

John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) was the leader of the Brethren movement and the father of modern Dispensationalism, took Margaret Macdonald's new teaching on the rapture and incorporated it into his dispensational understanding of Scripture and prophecy.

Darby would spend the rest of his life speaking, writing and traveling, spreading the new rapture theory. The Plymouth Brethren openly admitted and were even proud of the fact that their teachings were totally new, and had never been taught by the church fathers, medieval scholars, Protestant Reformers, or the many Bible commentators.

The person most responsible for the rather widespread acceptance of the pre-tribulation rapture doctrine and dispensationalism among Evangelicals is Cyrus I. Scofield (1843-1921). Scofield published his Scofield Reference Bible in 1909. This Bible, which espoused the doctrines of Darby in its notes, became very popular in Fundamentalist circles. In the minds of many a Bible teacher, pastor, and multitudes of professing Christians, Scofield's notes were nearly equated with the Word of God itself.

Today there is a whole multitude of books advocating the pre-tribulation rapture theory and the dispensational understanding of eschatology. Given the fact that among professing Christians the pre-trib rapture is still wildly popular, a comparison of this theory with Scripture is warranted. When this is done, one sees that the typical arguments offered in favor of this theory are in conflict with the Bible.

Revelation 3:10

A passage of Scripture that is considered crucial for a defense of the pre-tribulation rapture position is Revelation 3:10. "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth." It is argued that this passage refers to the great tribulation ("the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world") and that the church is promised a physical removal from the world for protection. The "from the hour of trial" (*ek tes horas tou peirasmou*) is interpreted in a spatial sense. The preposition *ek*, translated *from*, is interpreted as a preposition of motion. The saints will be taken *out from within* the earth to heaven. Thus, they are kept or preserved from the hour of trial. The pretribulation interpretation of Revelation 3:10 is totally off the mark for a number of reasons. First, standard Biblical methods of interpretation (hermeneutics) must be completely ignored to apply this passage to a future tribulation 2,000 years in the future. The letter is addressed to a specific church (Philadelphia) in Asia Minor in the first century. The specific promise that is made by Jesus is given to the Philadelphia Christians and cannot be applied directly to all the churches of Asia Minor or the universal church. For example, the church of Smyrna is told that they "will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful unto death" (Rev. 2:10). They are to take comfort in the fact that they cannot be hurt by the second death (2:11). They are not promised protection from the coming time of tribulation. Further, the promise to the Philadelphian Christians is based on their past behavior. The church held fully and completely to the

⁶⁷ Dave MacPherson, *The Incredible Cover-Up: The True Story of the Pre-Trib Rapture* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1975), p. 93. The following scholars are cited by MacPherson who agree with MacPherson's contention that pre-tribulationism is a fairly modern doctrine that originated in or around 1830: Samuel P. Tregelles, Alexander Reese, Floyd E. Hamilton, Oswald T. Allis, D. H. Kromminga, George E. Ladd and J. Barton Payne. MacPherson also cites several Dispensational, pre-trib scholars who admit that the pre-trib theory is in fact a new doctrine: W. E. Blackstone, H. A. Ironside, Charles C. Ryrie, Gerald B. Stanton and John F. Walvoord.

Word as stated in verse 8. Because the promise is based on the behavior of a particular church in Asia Minor it cannot be universalized to include all Christians in the distant future. To do so is to render the commendation to the Philadelphians meaningless. Second, the time indicators within the passage render impossible the idea that the promise was not to take place for 2,000 years. The passage says that the hour of trial is about to happen. “I also will keep thee from the hour of trial that is about to come upon all the world.”⁶⁸ When the verb *mello* is joined to the present infinitive which is what is found in Revelation 3:10 (*tes mellouses erchesthai*), it always expresses imminence. When Jesus says that the hour of trial is “about to come,” He means it will happen soon.⁶⁹ To place the promise thousands of years away is a denial of the plain meaning of the Greek language. Would it make sense for Christ to promise the church in Philadelphia protection from something that would happen thousands of years later? “Be of good cheer you faithful, suffering Christians of the first century Asia Minor: I won’t let those Soviet missiles and killer bees of the 20th century get you.” What did the Philadelphian Christians care about Hal Lindsey’s imaginative horror stories?

Third, the pretibulationist’s idea that *ek* (Greek: from) in verse 10 is used in a spatial sense and thus refers to the saints being moved outside of the earth away from tribulation is not supported by the immediate or broader context of the book of Revelation. This novel interpretation cannot be found in any theological work or commentary prior to 1830 when the theory was first espoused by Margaret Macdonald. The idea that Revelation 3:10 refers to the rapture is a classical case of reading one’s own preconceived opinions into the text. The most logical understanding of *ek* (from) in Revelation 3:10 is that Christ will protect the Philadelphian Christians from the soon to come trials. This understanding is exactly how the identical Greek phrase is used in John 17:15, “Keep them from the evil one.” Jesus’ prayer does not refer to a spatial separation but to protection from the wiles of Satan. The church of Philadelphia is not going to be beamed out of the Roman Empire, but it will be protected and preserved through the coming trials.⁷⁰

Further, according to the Dispensational understanding of the great tribulation, all genuine Christians must be raptured at the beginning of the tribulation while the Jews must stay on earth and go through the tribulation. The problem with this view is that it involves both an abandonment of the literal principle of interpretation and an arbitrary interpretation of the word “from” (*ek*). In other words when *ek* is used of Christians it means they will be raptured to safety in heaven, but when it is used of Jews it means they

⁶⁸ Rev. 3:10 *Young’s Literal Translation of the Bible*

⁶⁹ For a scholarly defense of this assertion see Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (Tyler TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), pp. 141-142.

⁷⁰ After spending a number of pages analyzing the pretribulation approach to the word *ek* in Rev. 3:10 Douglas J. Moo writes: “1) The evidence that *ek* can mean ‘outside position’ in a spatial sense is nonexistent in biblical Greek; 2) The combination *tareo* or *diatareo ek* denotes protection from, or guarding against a real and threatening danger.... 4) The phrases qualifying ‘the hour of trial’ imply nothing at all about the presence or removal of the church. The lexical and contextual evidence strongly favors the interpretation according to which Christ in Revelation 3:10 promises His church protection from the real and present danger of affliction when the ‘hour of trial’ comes. Thus, we reject four different meanings commonly attached to the phrase *tareo ek*: ‘removal from’ (Pentecost); ‘keeping outside of’ (Townsend, Feinberg); ‘removal from the midst of’; and ‘Protection issuing in emergence’ (Gundry)” (“Response to the Pretribulation View” in *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulation* [Grand Rapids, MI: Academic Books, 1984], p. 97).

will remain on earth but receive protection. Oswald T. Allis writes: “Jeremiah 30:7 declares, ‘but he shall be saved out of it’ (literally, ‘from it’). Daniel 12:1 says only, ‘thy people shall be delivered.’ In Revelation 3:10 we read, ‘I also will keep thee from (*ek*) the hour of trial.’ In chapter 7:14 we are told of those ‘who have come out of (*ek*) the great tribulation.’ Matthew 24:22 by speaking of the shortening of the days of the tribulation clearly implies that the elect will pass through it. John 17:15 illustrates the ambiguity of the preposition ‘from’ (*ek* in the same sense of ‘out of,’ ‘away from’) the world, ‘but that thou shouldest keep them from (*ek*) the evil.’ the purpose of the sealing of the servants of God before the pouring out of the plagues (vii. 3) favors the view that they are to pass unscathed through them. Why should not the same apply to Revelation 3:10? It seems rather inconsistent to insist that ‘from’ in Jeremiah 30:7 must mean that Israel will pass through the tribulation, but that ‘from’ in Revelation 3:10 must mean that the church of Philadelphia, and by implication the entire church then on earth, will not pass through it but be delivered from it by rapture.”⁷¹

Dispensationalists, who are the chief advocates of the pre-tribulation rapture, claim that they are the champions of a literal approach to biblical interpretation. They say that a literal approach to prophecy logically leads to the pre-tribulation view. Yet there are a number of important passages such as Revelation 3:10 where dispensationalists take a very non-literal approach while their theological opponents take a very literal approach. It has already been noted how the literal view of Revelation 3:10 has been totally ignored in order to posit a tribulation and rapture thousands of years in the future. This contradiction to the literal method of interpretation is also found in their overall view of the letters to the seven churches. According to C. I. Scofield and the vast majority of dispensational authors, the seven churches of Revelation chapters 2 and 3 represent seven consecutive chronological periods of church history. According to the general outline of this scheme the church of Philadelphia represents a period of church revival and great missionary activity (A.D. 1750-1925) while Laodicea (the seventh century) represents the final period of church history, which is one of compromise and apostasy. This interpretation raises a number of questions. First: If the seven churches are seven consecutive periods of church history, why is the rapture passage in the sixth period, the time of revival and not the seventh and last period, the time of apostasy? If dispensationalists were to be consistent they could not claim Revelation 3:10 as a proof text for the rapture. The dispensational view of Revelation contains serious internal contradictions. Second: There is not one thing within the text or context of this passage that indicates that the seven letters are somehow prophetic of seven long periods of church history. Although such an interpretation may be popular, one is not obligated to hold to a view that has no exegetical basis. Third: The interpretation that claims the seven churches are seven long periods of church history is a very non-literal approach to biblical interpretation. Dispensational scholars are fond of accusing Amillennial and Postmillennial expositors of spiritualizing various Scripture passages. Yet the idea that the seven letters are long periods of church history is itself a blatant example of spiritualizing Scripture. The dispensational slogan of “literal whenever possible” is a claim that obviously is not a reality.

⁷¹ Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1945, 47), pp. 213-214. There are several instances where they do not take passages of Scripture literal such as Rev. 1:1-3; 2:10

Revelation 4:1

Another “proof” text for the pre-tribulation rapture theory is Revelation 4:1. Pretribulationists cite this verse and then remark that the church is not observed on earth again until Revelation chapter 19, when believers return to earth for the millennial reign of Christ. Pre-tribulationists reason that since the church is not mentioned as being on earth during the great tribulation after Revelation 4:1, then John’s removal to heaven must be equated with the rapture. Hal Lindsey gives us an example of the typical Pretribulationist understanding of this verse. He writes: “It’s important to note that the Church has been the main theme of Revelation until Chapter 4. Starting with this chapter, the Church isn’t seen on earth again until Chapter 19, where we suddenly find it returning to earth with Christ as He comes to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords.... Although Revelation 4:1 does not specifically refer to Christ’s reappearance at the Rapture, I believe that the Apostle John’s departure for heaven *after* the church era closes in Chapter 3 and *before* the tribulation chronicle begins in Chapter 6 strongly suggests a similar catching away for the Church.”⁷²

Does Revelation 4:1 and the fact that the word church (*ekklesia*) is not mentioned in chapters 4 through 18 prove or support the pre-tribulation rapture theory? There are a number of reasons why this argument in favor of Pre-tribulationism should be rejected. First, this argument is an argument from silence in which the idea of the pre-tribulation rapture is presupposed and then imposed upon this section of Scripture. In the immediate context (Revelation 4:2) it says that John the apostle is transported to the throne room of heaven. Not one word is uttered that suggests that John represents the church or that the people of God as a whole are taken to heaven. Also, there is not any mention or any indication whatsoever of a descent by Christ or a resurrection of the saints. In Revelation 4:1 there is mention of a trumpet but this is not the trumpet blast announcing the rapture. It is a voice that has a sound of a trumpet just like the voice of authority that John heard in Revelation 1:10, “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet.” What occurred in Revelation 4:1 with John was no different than the transportation and throne room scenes experienced by other prophets (e.g., Ezek. 1:1, 22-28; 8:3-4 [Ezekiel is apparently below the crystal sea looking up to the throne room]; Isa. 6:1 ff.; 2nd Cor. 12:1-4).

Second, the argument from silence is arbitrarily applied to Revelation and could be used to prove many heretical doctrines if applied to other theological topics. The argument from silence consistently applied would not prove the rapture of the saints but the annihilation of the saints, for not only is the word church (*ekklesia*) not used of the saints on earth in chapters 4 through 18, it is also never used of the saints in heaven. Does this mean that all the saints have vacated heaven and moved to Limbo or some other place during these chapters? No! Of course not!

Further, the reasoning that pre-tribulationists use to make Revelation 4:1 a proof text for the rapture could also be used to prove many dangerous doctrines. In the book of Esther the words for God and Jehovah do not occur even once. Does this fact mean that God does not exist? After all He isn’t mentioned. No. It certainly does not. It should be clear to everyone from this example that arguments from silence are useless and bad exegesis and terrible hermeneutics.

⁷² Hal Lindsey, *There’s a New World Coming*, pp. 59, 61.

Third, a careful examination of Revelation 4 through 19 proves conclusively that the church is on earth during this period. John does not use the word church (*ekklesia*) in these chapters but given the nature of the apocalyptic literature where allusions to the Old Testament are constantly used to dramatically portray coming events, the non-use of the word church in the highly symbolic prophetic section of the book is not surprising. In chapter 6, after the opening of the fifth seal, the martyred saints ask God to avenge their death on the persecutors “who dwell on earth” (verse 10). These martyred Christians are told to wait “until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed” (verse 11). The phrase fellow servants and brethren are used in Revelation to describe Christians in Revelation 6:11, 19:10, and 22:9. Paul uses the same terminology in Colossians 1:7, 4:7. There is not a shred of evidence to support the idea that those martyred during the tribulation are a Jewish remnant. These are Christians of every nation (Rev. 7:9, 14) who die because the church is persecuted on earth.

In Revelation 7 there are 144,000 saints of God. Dispensationalists argue that this large group refers to literal Israel and not the New Testament church which supposedly has been raptured. This view is based on a literal understanding of verse 4. Although the idea of “literal whenever possible” is good, Revelation 7:4 is obviously not meant to be interpreted literally. In Revelation chapter 7 God uses the imagery of the old covenant Israel’s military camp divisions (1st Chronicles chapters 4-7) to symbolize the new covenant church of God as an overcoming conquering army of God. This is evident for the following reasons. First, the book of Revelation often employs descriptions of Old Testament Israel directly to the new covenant church. The church is called a kingdom of priests (*textus receptus*) which is an allusion to the Old Testament identification of Israel in Exodus 19:6 (found in Revelation 1:6, 5:10, 20:6). The church of Jesus Christ is identified as the New Jerusalem, the gates of which bear the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. The foundation of the city bears the names of the twelve apostles. Second, we are specifically told in Revelation itself that the 144,000 are those redeemed by Jesus Christ from among men. “These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes; they were redeemed from among men, being first fruits to God and to the Lamb” (Rev. 14:4). Third, the literal interpretation of Revelation 7:4 ignores the fact that ten of the twelve tribes had disappeared in Assyria. Virtually all the ten tribes had inter-married with pagans and had long ago lost their ethnic identity. Further, if Israel according to the flesh were meant, why should Ephraim and Dan be omitted? Surely not all the people in the tribe of Dan were lost. Not Reuben but Judah is mentioned first. Remember that our Lord Jesus Christ was of the tribe of Judah. Fourth, the teaching of the New Testament is that the church which is composed of both Jews and Gentiles is the true Israel of God (Rom. 2:28-29, 9:6; Gal. 6:16; 1st Pet. 1:1, 2:9-10). James, writing to Christians, even calls them “twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” (James 1:1). Paul taught that all who believe in Christ are the true sons of Abraham (Rom. 4:11-17; Gal. 3:7); that the middle wall of partition has been removed by Christ; the believing Jews and Gentiles are one body (Eph. 2:14). The church of Christ is one building (Eph. 2:20-22) and one bride (Eph. 5, Rev. 21:9). Fifth, that the 144,000 refers to all believers is provided from Revelation 9:4 where the demonic scorpions are told they can only harm those who do not have God’s seal on their forehead. Are we to believe that Jewish believers are protected while their

Gentile brothers are left to perish? The church of Jesus is definitely still on earth during the great tribulation.

2nd Thessalonians 2:6-7

Another argument for the pre-tribulation rapture is based on 2nd Thessalonians 2:6-7. The standard dispensationalist understanding of this passage is that the restrainer spoken of is the Holy Spirit. Pretribulationists argue that since the Holy Spirit dwells and works to restrain evil by means of the church, a removal of the Spirit entails a removal of the church. Once the church is raptured the Antichrist will be revealed. The idea of the removal of the Holy Spirit is theologically impossible and totally contradicts the dispensationalist's own interpretations of the events that are supposed to take place during the tribulation. The Bible teaches that no one can be converted without the regenerating and drawing power of the Holy Spirit (Ezek. 36:25-26; Jn 1:13; 3:5-8; Ac. 5:31; 11:18; 16:13-14; 1st Cor. 2:12-14; 2nd Cor. 4:6; Eph. 2:1, 5; Col. 2:11; Tit. 3:5). Yet pretribulationists teach that the 144,000 Jews are converted after the departure of the Holy Spirit. They also teach that the preaching of these converted Jews will be much more fruitful without the Holy Spirit than the preaching of the church with the Holy Spirit during the so called "church age."

Realizing the obviously unbiblical nature of this view, many modern dispensationalists have changed this teaching and now argue that the Holy Spirit is not taken away, and that He continues a divine activity to the end, though not as a restrainer of evil through the church.⁷³ The idea that the Holy Spirit is dependent on the church to restrain evil is not supported by Scripture. Further, even if the restraining power of the Holy Spirit came by means of the church, would not the massive revival throughout the earth caused by the preaching of the converted Jewish remnant also be a restraining of evil by Christ's disciples (His church)?

Another reason that 2nd Thessalonians 2:6-7 should not be considered a proof text for a pre-trib rapture is Paul's teaching in the immediate context of the passage. The Thessalonians were troubled because of false teaching regarding the day of the Lord. Many within the church believed that the day of the Lord had already taken place. Paul wanted to remove any misconceptions they might have had by pointing out that certain events must take place before His coming. In verse 3 he says there will be a falling away, this coincides with 1st Timothy 4:1, and the man of sin will then be revealed. Paul then does not tell the Thessalonians to look for the rapture, but to look for a time of apostasy, or rebellion, and the man of sin being revealed.

1st Thessalonians 5:9

One of the most popular arguments for the pre-tribulation rapture is based on 1st Thessalonians 5:9. It is argued that the great tribulation is an unprecedented time of God's wrath falling upon the whole world. Since believers are specifically told that there are not appointed to wrath, it is only logical to conclude that the church will be removed from the earth before God's wrath is poured out. This removal is the rapture of the saints. This argument for the rapture is fallacious for a number of reasons. First, it assumes that the wrath spoken of in verse 9 is the wrath poured out during the tribulation. The context of chapter 5 however makes it abundantly clear that the wrath spoken of in verse 5 is not the wrath of the tribulation but the wrath that occurs at the second coming of Christ, the

⁷³ E. Schuyler English, chairman of the editorial revision committee, *The New Scofield Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1967 [1989]), p. 1460, footnote 1.

day of the Lord (1st Th. 5:1-3). Second, it assumes that the only method at God's disposal for protecting the church from His wrath is a total removal from the earth. An examination of the wrath of God in both testaments reveals that the pretribulationist assumption is totally unwarranted. When God poured out His wrath upon Egypt, He spared the people of Israel (Ex. 8:22-23, 9:4-11, 10:23, 11:7, 12:13, 14:28-29) without first removing them out of the land. The prophet Isaiah says explicitly that God can judge the earth without harming His own covenant people who remain on earth (Isaiah 26:20-21). Also in Revelation 6:16 God's people are protected from His wrath during the tribulation. It is the heathen that ask the mountains and rocks to protect them from the wrath of the Lamb. After the fifth trumpet is sounded, the locusts of destruction are ordered by God only to harm "those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads" (Rev. 9:4). God's saints are specifically protected from harm. Revelation 16:1-2 says that God's wrath (the 1st bowl) is only to be poured out on the worshipers of the beast, who have his mark. Once again believers are excluded. A careful reading of Revelation demonstrates that although God's people experience persecution, death, and harm at the hands of wicked men, they are carefully and lovingly excluded from every act of God's wrath.

Although the pre-tribulation rapture theory is very popular today, given arguments that are offered in support of this doctrine we must declare pretribulationism to be contrary to the clear teachings of Scripture. Simply put, there is no evidence that can be found in the Bible to support the pre-tribulation rapture.

Book Two

Apologetics

Christian Cults

Apologetics is the field of study concerned with the systematic defense of a position. Someone who engages in apologetics is called an apologist. The term comes from the Greek word “*apologia*,” meaning defense of a position against an attack. Early uses of the term include Plato's *Apology* (the defense speech of Socrates from his trial) and some works of early Christian apologists, such as St. Justin Martyr's two *Apologies* addressed to the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius. In the modern Christian sense when one speaks of Apologetics they are speaking of defending the Christian faith against various forms of attacks. These attacks can come from within the church (false teachings and heresy) or from without (other religions, secularism, and anti-Christian philosophy and teachings).

Jehovah's Witnesses

The Jehovah's Witnesses was begun by Charles Taze Russell in 1872. Russell was brought up in a religious home but he had great difficulty in dealing with the doctrine of hell and in his studies came to deny not only eternal punishment, but also the Trinity, the deity of Christ, and the deity of the Holy Spirit. In 1879, at the age of 27, he sought to popularize his aberrant ideas on doctrine. He co-published *The Herald of the Morning* magazine with its founder, N.H. Barbour. By 1884 Russell controlled the publication and renamed it *The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom*, and founded Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society (now known as the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society). The first edition of the Watchtower magazine was 6,000 copies each month. Today the Witnesses' publishing complex in Brooklyn, New York, turns out 100,000 books and 800,000 copies of its two magazines daily.

Russell claimed that the Bible could only be understood according to his interpretations. A dangerous path since he controlled what was written in the Watchtower magazine. This kind of assertion is typical among leaders of cult religions. After the death of Russell in 1916, the Jehovah's Witnesses has gone through a series of presidents and leaders, and today that group has around 10 million members world wide. The Watchtower Society statistics indicate that 740 house calls are required to recruit each of the nearly 200,000 new members who join every year.

The Jehovah's Witnesses members argue that they are Christians, and much of their language has a Christian “sound” to it, but the Jehovah's Witness organization is most definitely not Christian; instead they are a cult attempting to appear to be a Christian organization.

Like all cults the Jehovah's Witness organization distorts the essential doctrines of Christianity. It denies the deity of Christ, His physical resurrection, and salvation by grace. These facts alone make the Jehovah's Witness organization non-Christian. To support its erring doctrines the Watchtower organization has even altered the Bible to make it agree with its changing and non-Christian teachings. Also typical with cults that use the Bible and claim to be Christian, the Jehovah's Witness organization has a host of interpretive errors. They take verses out of their immediate context. They refuse to read

verses in the entire Biblical context. They insert their theological presuppositions into the text. They alter the Biblical text to suit their needs. They latch onto one verse to interpret a host of others; and they add liberally to the Word of God. Additionally, the Jehovah's Witness organization requires of its members regular weekly attendance at their "Bible Study" meetings where they are repeatedly indoctrinated with anti-Christian teachings. This is done by reading the Watchtower magazine, following along with what it says, reading the questions it asks, and reciting the answers it gives. In other words, the Watchtower Organization carefully trains its members to let the Organization do their thinking for them.⁷⁴

The Witnesses are told they will be persecuted when they go door to door teaching their doctrines. They are further told that this is simply the enemy fighting against God's organization because they are in "the truth." So, when someone disagrees with them, they are conditioned to reflect on what the Watchtower has told them. They then feel confirmed in being in God's true organization (just as most cults claim). They are strongly encouraged to have friends and acquaintances that are only in the organization, thereby keeping outside examination to a minimum. They are told to shun those who leave their group, that way, there is no way to see why someone has left and no way to find out that they are in error from those who have found the truth in Christ. They are conditioned to shy away from any real Biblically knowledgeable person; and critical examination of their doctrines is not encouraged by the Watchtower Organization.

The Jehovah's Witnesses consider themselves to be Christians because they believe they are serving the true and living God. Like many cults, they think they are the only true church on earth. They are discouraged from looking into the Jehovah's Witness history or old Watchtower literature which is replete with contradictions, altered doctrines, errors, and false prophecies. Instead they are indoctrinated repeatedly against basic Christian doctrines (Trinity, deity of Christ, etc...) and into the notion that they alone are the true servants of God and that all others are unbelievers.

Primarily, the Jehovah's Witness organization is a mind control organization that uses its people to pass out literature and send in "donations" to the headquarters in Brooklyn, NY. The organization uses its people to promulgate false doctrines, sell an enormous amount of literature, and expand its grip into the lives of its members and their families. Thus, while the Jehovah's Witnesses profess to be Christians, they are outside orthodox Christianity and are considered to be, theologically, a cult of Christianity.

Christians who encounter members of the Jehovah's Witness organization should be aware that most Jehovah's Witnesses have a very good knowledge of their doctrine, and are quite good at debating and defending their stance, beliefs, and views. However; this should not be a cause of fear of, or unwillingness to evangelize the Witness, because most of the Witness doctrine is less stable than a house of cards; that usually falls when Jesus Christ is shown to be Jehovah God, just as God the Father is Jehovah God. What it should be a cause of is a desire to know true doctrine better than the cults and cultists who the Christian may encounter.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ For confirmation of this statement please read the following: The Watchtower, July 1, 1973, pp. 402.; The Watchtower, Oct. 1, 1967. p. 587.; The Watchtower, February 1, 1952, pp. 79-80.; 1939 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses, p. 85.; The Watchtower, Feb. 15, 1981.; The Watchtower, August 15, 1981.; The Watchtower, October 1, 1967, p. 591.; The Watchtower, October 1, 1994; p. 8.

⁷⁵ For more information on the Jehovah's Witness organization read *Reasoning From the Scriptures With the Jehovah's Witnesses*, by Ron Rhodes, Harvest House Publishers (July 1993).

Most Christians know and realize that the Jehovah's Witnesses are a cult group, and so we will not spend any further time on the subject of the Jehovah's Witness organization.

Mormons

Headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormonism) is one of the fastest growing cults in the world. The organization claims a worldwide membership of over 10 million and over 52,000 full-time missionaries throughout the world. Mormons also claim having 64 temples in use around the world, making it a significant world religion.

The Mormon Church was founded by Joseph Smith. Smith was born in 1805 in Sharon Vermont and he and his family migrated to western New York in 1816. According to Smith, when he was fourteen years old he became concerned as to which church to join. The different churches in the area were at odds with one another, each claimed to be holding true doctrine. After reading James 1:5, Smith went into the woods to ask God which church he should join. Smith then says, while praying in the woods near his home he received his "first vision" of God. Smith stated that a pillar of light descended upon him and two personages appeared in the pillar of light. Although they never explicitly identified themselves, Joseph Smith described the personages as God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. He asked the Son which church he should join and the answer was, "None of them, for they are all wrong... that all their creeds were an abomination in God's sight, and that those professors were all corrupt..."⁷⁶

In September of 1823 Joseph Smith allegedly received several visitations from the angle Moroni (reportedly, a resurrected prophet/warrior). According to Moroni, God had chosen Smith to be a prophet of the restoration. He was to restore the power and authority of the priesthood, and translate a book containing an account of the origin and history of the former inhabitants of Central America. This book contained an alleged account of the resurrected Jesus visiting these people. But it was not until 1827 that Smith was lead by the angel Moroni to unearth the golden plates, upon which was inscribed the text of the Book of Mormon in "Reformed Egyptian."

In May of 1829, while in the process of translating the golden plates, Joseph Smith and his scribe, Oliver Cowdery, decided to pray and ask God about baptism and the authority to baptize (they had read of it in the Book of Mormon). As they prayed, a light engulfed them and John the Baptist allegedly appeared. He bestowed the Aaronic Priesthood upon both Joseph and Oliver – authorizing them to preach the gospel and to baptize and administer the sacraments. But this priesthood was only one of two priesthoods reportedly granted to Joseph. Being the lesser, it did not authorize the laying on of hands, nor did it authorize the reestablishment of the true church.

Sometime in 1829 or 1830, Joseph and Oliver prayed and were answered in another vision. This time, the apostles Peter, James and John are said to have appeared to bestow the Melchizedek Priesthood (the more authoritative priesthood) upon both Joseph and Oliver.

On April 6, 1830, the "Church of Christ" was established in Fayette, New York, and the new church quickly grew. (The current name of the church; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, would not be adopted until 1834.) In 1831, the church began constructing its first temple in Kirkland, Ohio. But after a few years, opposition to the church grew strong, and in 1838 the church migrated to Independence, Missouri.

⁷⁶ Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith—History 1:19

In 1839 the church established the city of Nauvoo, Illinois, which soon grew to be one of the largest cities in the state, second only to Chicago. It was here that Joseph's practice of polygamy became known to the public. Because of this practice, in addition to several doctrinal changes, opposition to Joseph and his church increased among members and non-members alike.

After being excommunicated from the church for opposing Joseph's polygamy and unbiblical teachings (e.g. a plurality of gods), William Law, a citizen of Nauvoo, along with several associates, founded *The Nauvoo Expositor* (a newspaper exposing these doctrines and practices of the "fallen prophet"). Upon the newspaper's first issue, Joseph, as mayor of the city, declared the press a public nuisance. The city marshal, along with hundreds of Mormon men, destroyed the press and office of the *Expositor*.

This event eventually led to Joseph's incarceration in Carthage, Illinois.

On June 27, 1844, an armed mob attacked the Carthage jail. Although Joseph shot three of the intruders (killing two) with a handgun that had been smuggled into the jail, both he and his brother, Hiram, were overwhelmed and killed.

Following Joseph's death, great confusion arose as to who would be his successor. Two factions gained significant control. One group, lead by Joseph's widow, Emma, and her son, Joseph Smith, III, parted and settled in Missouri. They are known today as *The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*. The second and larger group was led by Brigham Young to the Utah Territory. It is known today as *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*.

Four books comprise the scriptures of the Mormon Church; these are known as "The Standard Works" and they are as follows: *The Bible (KJV)*, *the Book of Mormon*, *the Doctrine and Covenants*, and *the Pearl of Great Price*.

The eighth Article of Faith of the Mormon Church reads, "We believe the Bible to be the Word of God as far as it is translated correctly." Although Mormons believe the Bible is the word of God, they believe that the text has been corrupted by the errors of copyists and translators. They also believe that key doctrines, even entire books, have been omitted over the course of its transmission. As stated in the *Book of Mormon*, "Wherefore, thou seest that after the book [the Bible] hath gone forth through the hands of the great and abominable church, that there are many plain and precious things taken away from the book, which is the book of the Lamb of God" (1 Nephi 13:28). Thus they deny that the Bible is wholly trustworthy and reliable.

First published in 1830, the *Book of Mormon* was given a new subtitle in 1972: "Another Testament of Jesus Christ." Supposedly translated from "reformed Egyptian" (an unverified language) inscribed on golden plates, this book alleges that the resurrected Jesus Christ visited the Americas. It also contains selections of the history of the inhabitants of the ancient Americas. Two groups are primary to the narrative: the Nephites, who were mainly faithful to God; and the Lamanites, who were enemies both of God and the Nephites. As these two groups battled, the Lamanites gained victory over the Nephites. One of the last living Nephites, Moroni (the angel who allegedly appeared to Joseph), buried golden plates in the hill Cumorah, located in upstate New York. These plates contained the *Book of Mormon*.

While Mormons hold strong allegiance to the *Book of Mormon*, it is interesting to note that it contains very little distinctly Mormon doctrine. It does not teach a plurality of gods, that humans may progress to godhood, temple marriage, or baptism for the dead.

First published in its present form in 1870, the Doctrine and Covenants is a compilation of modern revelations, primarily received by Joseph Smith. It consists of 138 “sections” (individual revelations), and two “Official Declarations” (one delivered in 1890 by the fourth President of the church, Wilford Woodruff, disallowing polygamous marriages, and one delivered in 1978 by the twelfth President, Spencer W. Kimball, allowing black males to hold the priesthoods of the church).

Unlike the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants presents several distinctively Mormon doctrines. For example, it teaches there are three levels of heaven (Section 76); the Word of Wisdom (Section 89); the practice of baptism for the dead (Sections 124, 127, 128); that God the Father has a body of flesh and bone just like humans (Section 130); the necessity of temple marriage (Celestial Marriage) for all eternity (Section 131); polygamy and godhood (Section 132); and missionary work in the spirit world (Section 138).

The Pearl of Great Price is a compilation of several different writings: selections from the Book of Moses (a reworking of Genesis); the Book of Abraham (allegedly translated by Joseph Smith from ancient papyri; also a reworking of Genesis, teaching a plurality of gods); a brief extract from Joseph Smith's “translation” of the Bible; Joseph Smith-History (which contains accounts of Joseph's alleged visions and early persecutions); and The Articles of Faith (a vague summary of Mormon beliefs).

The beliefs of the Mormon Church are based primarily on the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and the numerous teachings of church leaders. They are based little on the Book of Mormon, and only verbally on the Bible. Several contemporary leaders of the church speak and write about their doctrines, expounding upon them and developing them.

The Mormon Church teaches that the original apostles were given the charge of teaching the gospel and establishing Christ's church. But they were often opposed and persecuted, and many were killed. Other believers also were persecuted and killed, leaving only the less faithful who were carried away by false teachings and unrighteousness. Because of this, God took the priesthood authority from the earth, and neither the fullness of the gospel nor the authority of the true church remained. Since no church was directed by divine revelation, many have mistaken man-made doctrines for divine revelations. Mormons call this sad state of the church the great apostasy, and they believe this apostasy persisted until the time of the restoration.

Mormons believe that through Joseph Smith, the true church has been restored to the earth. The priesthood authority, the fullness of the gospel, and the guidance of continuing revelation are again available in their fullness through the Mormon Church.

The first Article of Faith of the Mormon Church reads: “We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.” While this may sound Christian at first glance, upon further examination it is found to be radically different. The Mormon Church explicitly rejects the biblical doctrine of the Trinity. Said Joseph Smith, “I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and that the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit: and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods.”⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 370

Mormons believe that our Father in heaven has not always been God, but was once a mortal man who progressed to godhood. Joseph Smith declared: “God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man... I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see... He was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did.”⁷⁸

Mormons also believe that God is literally the Father of our spirits, that he is married, and that with his wives he procreates spirit children: “Our Heavenly Father and mother live in an exalted state because they achieved a celestial marriage. As we achieve a like marriage we shall become as they are and begin the creation of worlds for our own spirit children.”⁷⁹ They also believe that all faithful members may become gods (or goddesses), just as our heavenly Father and Mother have. Mormons believe that Jesus is literally our older brother, the firstborn of our Heavenly Parents, and that he progressed to godhood while in the preexistence, before he came to earth.

The church teaches that while still in the preexistence, both Jesus and Lucifer (the second-born of our heavenly parents) offered plans of salvation. Jesus' plan was accepted and Lucifer's was rejected. Lucifer rebelled, along with one-third of the spirits in heaven (who literally are our spirit-brothers and sisters), thus becoming Satan and the demons. The Mormon Church teaches that our Father in heaven, who has a body of flesh and bone like man (Doctrine and Covenants, Section 130), with Mary, procreated the human Jesus in a natural, human way. As Joseph Fielding Smith, a former prophet of the Mormon Church, alludes, “Christ was begotten of God. He was not born without the aid of Man, and that Man was God!”⁸⁰

Mormon doctrine distinguishes between the Holy Ghost and the Holy Spirit, even though there is no biblical distinction. (This teaching actually derives from the King James Version of the Bible. The translators translated the same Greek words (*hagios pneuma*) sometimes “Holy Spirit” and sometimes “Holy Ghost.”) To the Mormons however, the Holy Ghost is a personal being, a god, although without a body of flesh and bone. The Holy Spirit is a force of God, the “power” or “presence” of God.

According to Mormon doctrine, all humans preexisted as spirit children of God before coming to earth. Even before we became spirits, we existed eternally as individual intelligences. Now that we have come to earth and have mortal bodies, we have the opportunity to become worthy to return to our Father in heaven and become gods. This is the core teaching of Mormonism and is called “the Law of Eternal Progression.”

The fall of Adam and Eve was a necessary and important event. According to Mormon teaching; it allowed for us to enter a mortal state where we can become worthy to return to our Father in heaven.

The Mormon Church teaches that Adam and Eve were given two conflicting commands: 1) not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; and 2) to multiply and fill the earth. Allegedly, Adam and Eve could not have children while in a state of innocence, an immortal, un-fallen state. Therefore, they could not procreate bodies for all the spirit children still in heaven. Adam and Eve had to make a choice between mortality and

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 345, 346.

⁷⁹ Achieving a Celestial Marriage, p. 1

⁸⁰ Doctrines of Salvation, vol. 1, p. 18

immortality, and Mormons believe the right choice was made when they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The Mormon Church's teaching on the plan of salvation is well-developed, and shows that their belief system is very different from biblical Christianity.

Mormons believe in two kinds of salvation: general salvation and individual salvation. General salvation is also called immortality. It is given to all mankind because of the atonement of Jesus Christ for Adam's transgression. This salvation is by grace alone, it is not conditioned upon any individual's faith or works. This salvation allows all mankind to be physically resurrected.

The individual salvation, according to Mormon doctrine is also known as exaltation or eternal life, and can be achieved only by individual faith, repentance, and obedience to God's laws and ordinances. One is exalted based on one's worthiness. These laws include temple marriage, obeying the Word of Wisdom, proper tithing, faithful church attendance, and obeying the Mormon prophets.⁸¹

If one gains exaltation, then one will attain ultimate salvation according to Mormonism: one will live forever in the presence of our Father in heaven, and one will become a god. Joseph Smith taught, "Here, then, is eternal life, to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves. . . . When you climb up a ladder, you must begin at the bottom, and ascend step by step, until you arrive at the top; and so it is with the principles of the Gospel, you must begin with the first, and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation"⁸²

According to Mormon doctrine, at death people either go to spirit prison or to paradise. Mormon spirits go to paradise where they will continue to progress toward godhood, and they also will have opportunities to present the Mormon gospel to the spirits in spirit prison. If the spirits in prison receive the Mormon gospel, they will also receive the benefit of proxy baptism, living Mormons will be baptized on their behalf (this is known as baptism for the dead).

With few exceptions, everyone will attain to one of three levels of heaven or heavenly kingdoms: the Celestial Kingdom, the Terrestrial Kingdom, and the Telestial Kingdom. Those who are faithful in the things of God, baptism, membership in the Mormon Church, keeping the Word of Wisdom, etc. . . . will live with the Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost forever in the Celestial Kingdom, and will have their faithful family members with them (hence the Mormon commercials regarding "Families are Forever"). Those who attain the highest level of the Celestial Kingdom, by means of complete faithfulness, which includes temple marriage, will become gods: creators of their own planets, and procreators of their own spirit children.⁸³

Those who did not receive the Mormon gospel while on earth but receive it in spirit prison, and those who did receive the Mormon gospel but were not faithful, will inherit the Terrestrial level of heaven. Their family unit will not be retained, and they will be eternally single. Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost will visit them, but the Heavenly Father will not.⁸⁴

The lowest of the heavenly kingdoms is the Telestial Kingdom. The occupants of this level did not receive the Mormon gospel either on earth or in spirit prison, and they suffer

⁸¹ see Gospel Principles, 289-292

⁸² Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 346, 348

⁸³ Doctrine and Covenants 76:51-53, 62; 131:1-4

⁸⁴ Doctrine and Covenants 76:73-79; 131:1-4

for their sins in hell, though only temporarily. They will be forever single, without their family members. Neither the Father nor Jesus Christ will visit them, but they will be visited by the Holy Ghost.⁸⁵

Mormons believe hell is a place where the future inhabitants of the Telestial Kingdom (the lowest heaven) will suffer for their own sins; though their punishment is not eternal in duration. As Joseph Fielding Smith wrote, “Those who live lives of wickedness may also be heirs of salvation, that is, they too shall be redeemed from death and from hell eventually. These, however, must suffer in hell the torments of the damned until they pay the price of their sinning, for the blood of Christ will not cleanse them.”⁸⁶

Those who received the Mormon gospel and the Holy Ghost but reject both will be cast into outer darkness. Like the biblical doctrine of an eternal hell, assignment here is for all eternity.⁸⁷

This is marriage for time and all eternity. Mormons believe this practice will allow them to live with their family members in the life hereafter. Celestial marriage is essential to attaining godhood. Worthy Mormons who attain exaltation (godhood) will, in this married state, be able to procreate spirit children to populate their own planetary system, just as their heavenly parents have.

There is also a practice whereby living Mormons are baptized proxy for the spirits of the dead, who are in “spirit prison.” Mormon youth often participate in this ceremony. The practice of baptism for the dead is the driving force behind Mormon genealogical research, for which they are widely known. The purpose is to gather the names of people who did not have an opportunity to become Mormons in their earthly lives, and to be baptized on their behalf.

As with the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Mormons are indoctrinated, and quite skillful in articulating their beliefs and doctrines, and so again the Christian who attempts to evangelize the Mormon should be knowledgeable of the Bible and true Christian doctrine. Unlike the Jehovah’s Witnesses, some Christians are not aware that the Mormon Church is a cult. This is mainly because of the “Christianized” language that Mormons use. The Christian should not let this language fool them, as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is indeed a cult.

The Word of Faith Movement

One of the fastest growing cults today is the Word of Faith Movement, also known as the Positive Confession Movement, or simply the “Faith” Movement. Its growth is at least partially due to the massive amounts of money the leaders are able to extract from their followers. This influx of cash allows for huge buildings and extensive ministries, and more importantly, wide exposure on television. Not only do many Word of Faith preachers broadcast their services and campaigns, but Word of Faith adherents, Paul and Jan Crouch, own the largest religious based television network in the world. The Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN). The networks has an estimated net worth of approximately 600 million dollars, and it is capable of televising the “Faith” message all over the world.

For the most part, when asked who is the founder of the Word of Faith Movement, most within the movement would say Kenneth Hagin, but the fact of the matter is that E.W.

⁸⁵ Doctrine and Covenants 76:81-86, 103-106

⁸⁶ Doctrines of Salvation, vol. 2, 133-134

⁸⁷ Doctrine and Covenants 76:28-35, 44-48

Kenyon is the founder of the movement. Kenyon came up with every doctrine that is taught in the Word of Faith Movement, and it would appear that his teachings were plagiarized by Kenneth Hagin. It is important to note that Kenyon was heavily influenced by the teachings of Christian Science, and other metaphysical cults. E.W. Kenyon was known to read faithfully after Mary Baker Eddy, and to endorse her teachings on several occasions.⁸⁸

Therefore, seeing that E.W. Kenyon was influenced by what are clearly cultic organizations, and Kenneth Hagin was influenced by E.W. Kenyon, we can come to the conclusion that the Word of Faith Movement is not a sect of Christianity, but is instead a cleverly disguised cult.

The base scripture that the Word of Faith Movement uses for their teachings on faith is Mark 11:22. The Word of Faith teachers claim that the correct translation of this verse is, "Have the faith of God." The Greek reads *echete pistin theou*, or "have faith of God." However literal translations are not always complete translation, for we also have to check the Greek grammar. *Theou* is an objective genitive; that means that the noun (*theou*) is the object of the action, thus God is the object of faith, and so the verse is actually and accurately translated as, "Have faith in God." The Word of Faith teaches that the law of faith is to the spiritual realm as gravity is to the physical realm, and thus anyone; Christian, or non-Christian can plug into it and get results. Man does not therefore have to deal with a personal God, but rather with impersonal laws, which can be manipulated by anyone, regardless of their relational standing with God through Jesus Christ.

The Word of Faith teachers' claim that this law is set into motion by the words of ones mouth. "*What we confess is what we possess*". The Word of Faith doctrine also teaches that ones words have creative or destructive power, depending on whether it is a positive or negative confession. This makes man not only a creator but also a god. Word of Faith teachings also claim that God Himself is bound to these spiritual laws, and thus has to move on our behalf, when we put them into practice. However if God must obey these spiritual laws, it has reduced Him to something less than sovereign. It has made God into mans puppet. (In other words, if God can be controlled by man, through mans free will or mans confession then he is no longer God, but simply a supernatural gift giver under the authority of man.) The Bible is very clear that God is sovereign. The faith theology also depersonalizes God; it renders Him an impersonal force, which must do mans bidding. As far as man having creative power; man is a creature, and no creature in the Bible is ever accorded creative powers: no man, no angel, no devil no demon, or animals. The closest that man comes to having creative power is Gods command to be fruitful and multiply. But if pro-creation constitutes creative powers, then animals are creators too. Creation, *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) is entirely the prerogative of God!

Faith teachers often quote the scripture found in Romans 10:17 "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God". However the actual Greek says, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the *Rhema* of God". Many a sincere Christian has diligently spent hours reading their Bibles hoping to increase their faith, but unless God speaks the word

⁸⁸ Mary Baker Eddy was the founder of the cult known as Christian Science, which teaches that God is in the mind, and that by positive thinking and positive confession one can become like God. A teaching that has been around for a long time, as Michael Servetus who was executed by John Calvin in Geneva had taught a similar doctrine and was condemned for such by both the Catholic Church and the Reformed Churches of the time

into ones spirit, and makes the word alive, it never produces faith. The Bible states in 2nd Corinthians 4:13 “I have believed and therefore spoken”. Not I spoke and therefore believed. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks”, (Matthew 12:34). This clearly shows that we are to believe it first and then will speak what we believe. No person will go around saying that they have the flu, unless they first believe that they have the flu, but yet the Word of Faith movement insists that people go around and say that they are healed, rich, and righteous when it is clear that we are sick, poor, and sinful. The Word of Faith movement is also zealous on its teachings of healing. Healing is an accepted doctrine of the Pentecostal movement, and the Charismatic movement, yet the difference between the Word of Faith’s teachings and the Pentecostal, or Charismatic teachings are as drastic as night and day. The Bible clearly shows that God is a healing God. Healing was a gift that was given by the Holy Spirit (1st Cor. 12:9), the church has been commissioned to pray for the sick (James 5:14-15). However Christianity is not a healing cult. The Word of Faith emphasis on health and wealth distorts the centrality of Christ and His gospel. The Bible teaches that believers will not be entirely free from bodily suffering until the return of Christ and we are changed from the corruptible to the incorruptible. In Romans 8:19-21 Paul tells us that all of creation groans under the curse of suffering. It is because of our sin nature that we still sin. And it is because of our sin nature that we still suffer sickness. The Word of Faith movement often claims that sickness is a direct result of a specific sin, but they tend to forget that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, (Romans 3:23). We have a sinful nature. So the answer to the question, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” is simple. There are no good people.

God frequently preformed miracles at the hands of Paul (Acts 19:11) yet Paul was often unable to heal some of his closest companions. “Trochimus I left sick at Miletus.” (2nd Timothy 4:20). “Use a little wine for your stomach... and your frequent ailments.” (1st Timothy 5:23). It is important to note that Timothy had frequent ailments. Also, if the Word of Faith doctrine was Biblical doctrine, then why didn’t Paul tell Timothy to confess healing scriptures? Paul himself was sick on occasion, (Gal. 4:13-15 is an undisputable truth of this statement). In 2nd Corinthians 12:7-9 Paul states that he asked the Lord three times to remove the thorn in his flesh, yet God sovereignly refused. Whether this thorn was a physical sickness or some other physical attack, is not relevant. What is relevant is that God was not subject to the prayers of Paul. The sufferings of Job are another example of where the Word of Faith theology contradicts the biblical teaching. The faith teachers contend that Job brought all of his problems on himself through negative confession and fear. However they seem to miss that Satan could not have touched Job without Gods permission. In Job 2:3 God Himself states that He ruined Job without cause. Also Job was spoken of by God as blameless (Job 1:8 and Job 2:3). If God says that someone is blameless, then it is safe to assume that person is blameless. (Meaning that there was no reason for Jobs sufferings other than the indistinguishable will of God.) The Word of Faith teaches that Jobs statements in Job 1:21 and Job 2:10 were wrong statements by Job, spoken out of ignorance, but the Bible is clear to show that Job’s statements were correct and not spoken in error or in ignorance. Job 1:22, “Through all this, Job did not sin, nor charge God with wrong”. Job 2:10, “In all this Job did not sin with his lips”. Also Job’s faith in God was steadfast throughout his trials (Job

13:15). The Bible tells us that all scripture is given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. (1st Tim. 3:16)

God is a healing God, but the fact remains that not everyone receives healing, whether they are men and women of faith mentioned in the Bible, or men and women of faith in the Body of Christ in the present day. Elisha, one of the most powerfully anointed men of the Bible suffered and died a sick man, Job suffered sickness, the great reformer John Calvin died at a young age, Jonathan Edwards the powerful evangelist of the Great Awakening, did as well. The Word of Faith movement claims that healing is in the atonement, and is accessed by faith. If so, then if one doesn't have the faith for healing, does he or she have the faith for salvation? Therefore it would only seem reasonable, if following this doctrine, that those who die, due to a lack of faith end up in hell, for the same reason. Healing was in-fact provided for in the atonement, just as deliverance from sin, but it is a mystery how the Word of Faith movement can see that sin isn't done away with until the return of Christ, and yet claim that if you are not receiving your healing here and now, then you are lacking faith.

The Word of Faith movement also teaches that sickness is caused by allowing Satan in due to a lack of faith or some secret, un-confessed sin, but in John 9:2-3 Jesus clearly stated that the man was born blind due to a sovereign act of God, so that the works of God would be made manifest in him. In John chapter eleven Jesus stated that the sickness of Lazarus was not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son may be glorified through Him, and yet Lazarus died. So what did Jesus mean? Simply that the end result of Lazarus's sickness was not death, but resurrection for the purpose of glorifying God and His Son.

Faith teachers will frequently say, "The Bible teaches more on prosperity than on heaven or hell". But what they fail to admit is that though the Bible does teach more on money than either heaven or hell, it's teachings on money are warnings about seeking it and trusting in it. Perhaps the best way to show the Biblical doctrine on prosperity is to list the scriptures that deal with it and let the reader read them for himself or herself. Matthew 6:19-24, Mark 4:19, Mark 10:25, Luke 6:20, Luke 6:24, 1st Cor. 11:22, 1st Tim. 6:17, James 5:1-3. These are just a few of the New Testament scriptures that deal with prosperity. In the Old Testament there are also several warnings about money. One of the most notable scriptures that describes and rebukes the Word of Faith prosperity doctrine is 1st Timothy 6:3-11. Verse five tells the believer to withdraw from those who suppose that godliness is a means for gain (financial gain). Verse six clearly shows us that godliness with contentment is great gain. Verse nine states that those who desire to be rich (seek after wealth) will fall into temptation. The Word of Faith teachers stress that prosperity is ours and that we should seek after it; that we should stand up and boldly claim *our* right to our money! Another false doctrine of the Word of Faith dealing with prosperity is that they teach that Jesus and His disciples were rich. But this claim can easily be disproved by asking oneself the following questions. Why did Jesus have to borrow Peter's boat to preach in Luke 5:3, instead of renting a boat, or better yet buying one? If the disciples were rich why did Peter ask Jesus what he and the other disciples would receive in Matthew 19:27? Also in this same verse, was the hundred-fold return that Jesus spoke of literal? I know of no one who has received 100 times the land that they have given up, not even the prosperity teachers in the Word of Faith movement, and I know of no one who even wants 100 wives. No it wasn't literal; Jesus was speaking of

brothers and sisters in Christ, and a land that was not seen with the human eye. Why did Jesus walk everywhere He went, instead of having a horse or wagon, or at least some sort of transportation? Why did Peter have to get the temple tax money out of the fish's mouth? Why did Judas settle for only thirty pieces of silver? We know that Judas was stealing from the bag. If Jesus was so rich, then surely Judas could have stolen more than thirty pieces of silver, and he would have weighed the cost. Thirty pieces of silver one time or much more through out Jesus' ministry on earth. And what about Paul? Why did he have to resort to tent making? Word of Faith teachers will say that Jesus was so rich that the Roman soldiers cast lots to get His designer clothes. But this also is false. The Roman soldiers cast lots to get the clothes of Jesus as a trophy, much as World War Two Veterans kept Japanese battle flags and such. Common sense will show that Jesus and His disciples were not rich.

The Word of Faith movement also teaches that we as believers have become little gods. "The believer is called Christ... that's who we are; we're Christ."⁸⁹ "And when we stand up here, you're not looking at Morris Cerullo, you're looking at God, you're looking at Jesus."⁹⁰ "I am a little God! Critics be gone!"⁹¹ These Word of Faith preachers and teachers have wrongly interpret the word Christian, and say that it means "little Christ", when actually the word Christian means a follower of Christ, or like Christ in the sense of belief and practice. Everyone should understand that if the Bible teaches that we are "Little Gods" then God is confused, because He clearly teaches in His Word that there is only one God, (Mark. 12:29 / Deut. 6:24 / Isaiah 43:10 / Isaiah 44:6 / and many more). This teaching of the faith theology is very similar to Satan's temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden. "Eat the fruit and become as God." Believe in the Word of Faith doctrine and become as God. One other error of the Word of Faith Movement is their practice of binding and loosing. Many faith teachers, when something is not right in their estimates, will declare that demons or supernatural forces are at work, and thus they will then set about binding these evil spirits. They are often quite fond of loosing things, such as the anointing, the blessings of God, finances, liberty, etc... The problem with this teaching is that it is taken out of Biblical context. The Scripture that the Word of Faith teachers use is found in Matthew 10:18 where Jesus said to His disciples, "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." As stated Word of Faith teachers will bind Satan, bind demons, bind spirits, bind depression, bind sickness, bind just about anything that is contrary to their teaching. The question one must ask then is, "How then do these things get loose?" "Does Satan get paroled?" "Do we or someone else loose them?" Secondly, if we bind demons on earth how is it that they are bound in heaven when they have already been expelled from heaven? And what if someone were to loose a demon on earth, is it then allowed to re-enter heaven? This teaching is just plain silly. In context, Jesus was speaking to His disciples about forgiveness and the correction/restoration of a church member who is in sin. First we read a parable relating to God's forgiveness of a lost sheep (sinner) who has repented (Matthew 10 vs10-14). Then the restoration of a fallen church member, a brother or sister in Christ, (vs15-20) is given, finally summed up in vs21-22 is that we are in no way limited to the number of times we are to forgive one another. The teaching

⁸⁹ Kenneth Hagin *Zoe, the God kind of life* 1989.

⁹⁰ Morris Cerullo *The Endtime Manifestations of the Sons of God*, audio tapes 1 and 2.

⁹¹ Paul Crouch *Praise the Lord program*, July 7th 1986.

deals entirely with forgiveness, and is in conjunction with the Lord's other teachings on forgiveness. It has nothing to do with binding demons, or loosing the anointing, or finances.

Having briefly shown the fallacies of the Word of Faith teachings one must then ask, "what about the Word of Faith teachers?" Are they men and women of integrity who are just repeating what they themselves have been taught? Or are they charlatans who know full well of their deceitful and fraudulent practices? In 1987 Oral Roberts told his followers that if he didn't raise 8 million dollars by a certain date, that God was going to take his life. The money came in, but it came in nearly two months after the deadline, and yet Oral Roberts lived for quite some time after his failed prophecy. Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Jesse Duplantis, Creflo Dollar, Marilyn Hickey, and several others of the faith teachers have supported, and preached the "seed faith" teachings. "Have a need? Plant a seed." They claim that God Himself used this principle when He sent His Son Jesus into the world, "God wanted man so He sowed His seed, and that seed was Jesus." If that was true in the sense that the Word of Faith teachers claim, then all of mankind would be reconciled to God. This entire teaching is heresy! It tells people that they can buy the blessings of God. The Bible does teach that we reap what we sow, and that if we give it shall be given unto us, but the motives and the heart of the giver must be in line with the will of God. We can not give an old used car with the expectation of receiving a new one. We can not give money with the expectations of receiving more money. The Christian is to give out of love for God and love for our fellow man. Fred Price, a well-known faith teacher and student of Rhema Bible College stated, "We don't allow sickness in our home." And yet his wife Betty profoundly thanked her doctors for the chemotherapy treatment she received for her cancer. Kenneth Hagin had claimed several times that he has not had one sick day in nearly 60 years, yet his hospital records show that was a blatant lie. He had been to the hospital at least four times for chronic heart problems when he had made that statement. Oral Roberts suffered a heart attack just a few hours after supposedly being healed by Paul Crouch on the Praise the Lord program. Kenneth Copeland stated that Jesus Christ was the biggest failure in the Bible, and that Jesus took on the nature of Satan. But the Bible plainly states that Jesus was the sacrificial Lamb without spot or blemish, meaning that He was without sin. When the Bible tells us that He (Jesus) became sin, it doesn't mean that He literally became sin or sinful, just as when the apostle Paul stated that he became all things to all men, it didn't mean that he literally became all things. Our sins were laid upon Jesus. He paid the penalty and the price for them, but He did not become sinful, and He did not take on the nature of Satan! Benny Hinn recently claimed that Jesus Christ would literally and physically start appearing with him (Hinn) on stage at his conferences. However the Bible tells us that Jesus will not return to the earth until His second coming, and Jesus Himself warned believers in Matthew 24: 22-23 Mark 13:21-22 that if anyone says "lo here is Christ or He is there, do not believe them. They are false prophets." Benny Hinn also uses questionable tactics at his meetings, he states that it is best to "stack" the first two rows with those of "like minded faith," in other words, stack the front two rows with those people who fully believe in the Word of Faith teachings and are easily sucked into the emotional hype.⁹² Kenneth Copeland supposedly

⁹² One of Hinn's assistants made this statement during a lecture at Victory Bible College in Tulsa Oklahoma in 1999, in the presence of the author.

speaking by the Spirit of the Lord said, “They crucified me because they said that I claimed that I was God, but I never claimed that I was God, I just claimed that I walked with Him.”⁹³ If the Holy Spirit told Mr. Copeland this then He was lying; because Jesus stated several times that He and the Father are one. Jesse Duplantis claimed that he had an out of body experience and saw God face to face, but again the Bible is clear when it tells us that no man shall see God and live. Mr. Duplantis’ story has also changed several times in his telling of it, usually when someone points out how it is erroneous. All of the above mentioned Word of Faith teachers along with several others including Joyce Myers, Creflo Dollar, T.D. Jakes, and Rod Parsley have been shown their errors and the errors of their teachings, by various Christians and Christian organizations yet they continue to teach and preach lies. It is clear and obvious that they are not men and women of integrity, but in-fact something far worse.

The fact of the matter is that the Word of Faith doctrine is not Biblical, it is not orthodox, not even for Charismatic denominations. The leaders in the movement have twisted Scripture through bad hermeneutics and exegesis, and have made the Word of God to no effect. It is self seeking hedonism disguised as Christianity. And many who have not been taught the principles of interpreting the Bible, or discernment can easily be sucked into the Word of Faith doctrines which promise health, wealth, and the ability to get what they want from God. Though in reality the Word of Faith movement has the potential to lead people away from the true gospel, and it can cause disillusionment with God and His Word.

Some will no doubt say, “Well some of the Word of Faith teachings may be wrong but some of it isn’t. Why not just filter out the bad?” That is like saying that some of the Jehovah’s Witness doctrine is bad but some of it is good, so just take the good, and leave the bad, or even Islam, but the Bible tells us that a little leaven leavens the whole lump. How many Christians will actively sit and listen to a Jehovah’s Witness or Muslim preacher for hours on end? They don’t because they know that often times false teachers will use truths to justify and add credence to their lies.

Gnosticism

Gnosticism or Gnosis (Pronounced: No-Sis) is a system of belief that in its most basic sense teaches salvation by knowledge. Gnosis is actually the Greek word for knowledge. Previously believed to have originated in the Christian era, Gnosticism is now believed by most scholars to have originated several hundred years prior to Christianity.

Whereas Christianity teaches salvation by faith in Christ alone as revealed in Scripture, Gnosticism teaches something vastly different. Even pagan religions that taught faith plus works differed from Gnostics in that Gnosticism claimed that salvation came through the possession of a type of semi-intuitive knowledge of the mysteries of the universe and of magic formulae indicative of that knowledge.

Gnostics believe(d) themselves to be superior to all “unenlightened” beings by right of their gnosis (knowledge). Early Gnosticism though, as it met with Christianity almost immediately adopted its language, form of sacraments and to a large degree, even it’s outward form. As Christianity grew, Gnosticism followed with the claim that it was the only true revelation of Jesus Christ and only the “initiated” or “illuminated” were able to understand its true meaning, setting up a class distinction within even its own body of belief.

⁹³ Copeland said this while speaking at the Rhema Camp meeting in Tulsa Oklahoma 1999

Gnostics believe that the world is imperfect, because they believe that it was created in a flawed manner. Like Buddhism, Gnosticism begins with the fundamental recognition that earthly life is filled with suffering. Gnostics believe that all forms of life consume each other, thereby visiting pain, fear, and death upon one another.⁹⁴ This differs with Scripture in the sense that the first words one sees in the Bible concerning creation was that it was created “Good.” Man and all of creation was declared by God as, “Good.” Gnostics however believe that God originally created a flawed creation, and that all within that creation was flawed as well.

In the Gnostic view, there is a true, ultimate and transcendent God, who is beyond all created universes and who never created anything in the sense in which the word “create” is ordinarily understood. While this “god” did not fashion or create anything as Christians understand it, he (or ‘it’) brought forth from within himself the substance of all there is in all the worlds, visible and invisible. In a certain sense, it may therefore be true to say that all is god, for all consists of the substance of god. By the same token, it must also be recognized that many portions of the original divine essence have been projected so far from their source that they underwent unwholesome changes in the process. To worship the cosmos, or nature, or embodied creatures is thus tantamount to worshipping alienated and corrupt portions of the emanated divine essence.

Thus the Gnostic “god” is vastly different from the God of the Bible. Genesis chapter one portrays a God who speaks all of creation into existence. A perfect, transcendent (yet knowable), good God who created good things. In the Gnostic cosmology and their view of deity, we see that they view the material world as flawed and pain filled because it came from a flawed and pain filled god. There is no sense of the real God who reveals Himself in Scripture as the one and only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure Spirit; immutable, immense, eternal incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, and absolute, working all things according to the counsel of His own righteous will.

Gnostics view good and evil as largely equal powers. They teach that man contains both the essence of the bad, a dark side if you will, and a portion of the essence from the good side, or the “light side.” They are what can be traditionally called “dualistic.” There is a duality in their teaching, which mirrors nature in that it contains both good and bad. Gnosticism teaches that most men are ignorant of this fact, and as such their gnosis is either limited or nonexistent because they fail to recognize that truth. In the Gnostic belief there is therefore no real sin or transgression against God, because their god himself is flawed and has created a flawed universe.

Since Gnosticism teaches that god is flawed and therefore men and all of creation is flawed, they extend this logic to the Biblical idea of salvation, stating: “Humans are caught in a predicament consisting of physical existence combined with ignorance of their true origins, their essential nature, and their ultimate destiny.”⁹⁵ According to Gnostic teachings, from the earliest times, “messengers of the light” have come forth from god in order to assist humans in their quest for Gnosis. Only a few of these figures are mentioned in Gnostic scriptures; some of the most important are Seth (the 3rd son of Adam), the “prophet” Mani, and Jesus. Gnostics do not look to salvation from sin

⁹⁴ Stephan A. Hoeller, *The Gnostic World View: A Brief Summary of Gnosticism*.
<http://www.webcom.com/%7Egnosis/gnintro.htm>

⁹⁵ *The Gnostic Handbook*, " from The Gnostic Apostolic Church

(original or other), but rather from the ignorance of which sin is a consequence. Ignorance, whereby is meant ignorance of spiritual realities, is dispelled only by Gnosis. They do not believe that the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus is what affects salvation, but rather salvation is gained through His life and teachings, and His establishing of mysteries. Thus salvation from sin is nonexistent, because sin itself is nonexistent. Christ is no longer God who became man to atone for man's sins, but is a spiritual illuminator for those who are unenlightened and salvation is nothing more than a growing in a special knowledge, through a special spiritual revelation.

Gnosticism, one of the oldest heresies plaguing the church, has distorted so many of the base aspects of Christianity so that it cannot be considered Christianity at all, though many confuse it as such. It denies the reality of a creating God who came and died for man. It denies that man is in a state of sin and teaches that by denying the "real world" and seeking spiritual enlightenment through gnosis then you can achieve an exalted state. In summary, Gnosticism denies a real need for a savior and neglects to address man's depraved state by claiming that special knowledge and enlightenment can come through experiential revelation rather than the unchanging Word of God.

The Jesus Seminar

Robert W. Funk is the director of the Westar Institute, and author of several books and articles. He is also founder and co-chair of the Jesus Seminar, which began in 1985 with a presupposition, a predetermined idea of what he believed. Reaching his conclusions on the issues, he subsequently recruited scholars agreeing with his biases. Funk's claim, however, was that he was gathering these "scholars of academia" for the purpose of "discovering the truth" about the historical Jesus. The fact is, they already knew what their subjective conclusions would be. Obviously, this kind of thinking hardly represents true scholarship. Funk, who calls prominent Biblical scholars like F.F. Bruce and Leon Morris "fringe scholars" (an obviously false statement to anyone acquainted with these academic giants), is a naturalistic atheist who denies outright anything miraculous or supernatural. When intellectuals such as Dr. James R. White confront him with his biases, he won't give an honest answer concerning what he believes.⁹⁶

The Jesus Seminar declares that the "scholarly" search for the historical Jesus has a 275 year history, being carried on by the Jesus Seminar for the last two decades. The Jesus Seminar consists of liberal Protestants and Roman Catholics, Jews, and atheists. Many hold earned degrees from highly esteemed colleges such as Harvard, Claremont, and Vanderbilt divinity schools. These institutions have some of the strongest liberal departments of New Testament studies found in the U.S., some Jesus Seminar fellows serving as professors in these departments.

One would only have to read Funk's 21 theses for *The Coming Radical Reformation* to understand his bias towards historic Biblical Christianity. Simply put, they are anti-

⁹⁶ Dr. White engaged in a discussion with Dr. Funk on live radio in 1989. It is very rare to find Funk engaged in this type of discussion with such a theologian as Dr. White. This audio tape is well worth acquiring. It can be purchased through Alpha & Omega Ministries: See, "Is the Bible for Real?" [Two Debates: James White vs Dr. Dietz (ASU) and Dr. Robert Funk (Jesus Seminar)], 1989, Alpha & Omega Ministries, tape # 1-602-973-0318; and also, "A Search For Jesus? Found: The Jesus Seminar Instead," The Dividing Line Archive radio broadcast from Alpha & Omega Ministries. Director, James R. White (click on Real Audio, 7-1-00).

Christian presuppositions, and conclusions. It does not take a rocket scientist to recognize his severely biased pseudo-scholarship. Consider the following examples.

On Theology:

1. The God of the metaphysical age is dead. There is not a personal god out there external to human beings and the material world. We must reckon with a deep crisis in god talk and replace it with talk about whether the universe has meaning and whether human life has purpose.

5. Prayer is meaningless when understood as requests addressed to an external God for favor or forgiveness and meaningless if God does not interfere with the laws of nature. Prayer as praise is a remnant of the age of kingship in the ancient Near East and is beneath the dignity of deity. Prayer should be understood principally as meditation, as listening rather than talking, and as attention to the needs of ones neighbor

On Jesus Christ:

6. We should give Jesus a demotion. It is no longer credible to think of Jesus as divine. Jesus' divinity goes together with the old theistic way of thinking about God.

On the Canon of Scripture:

19. The New Testament is a highly uneven and biased record of orthodox attempts to invent Christianity. The canon of Scripture adopted by traditional Christianity should be contracted and expanded simultaneously to reflect respect for the old tradition and openness to the new. Only the works of strong poets, those who startle us, amaze us with a glimpse of what lies beyond the rim of present sight should be considered for inclusion.

The canon should be a collection of scriptures without a fixed text and without either inside or outside limits, like the myth of King Arthur and the knights of the roundtable.

20. The Bible does not contain fixed, objective standards of behavior that should govern human behavior for all time. This includes the Ten Commandments as well as the admonitions of Jesus.⁹⁷

On the Westar Institute's website there are over 90 fellows listed who participate in the Jesus Seminar. Counting those not listed there are over two hundred involved. Robert W. Funk, John Dominic Crossan, and Marcus Borg are the frontrunners. Although they do believe that Jesus was a historical person, they deny just about everything else about Jesus; His deity, virgin birth, miracles, bodily resurrection, second coming, and 82% of His Words that are recorded in the Bible.

The Jesus Seminar would like us to believe that the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas was written earlier than all other Gospels (around 50 A.D.), but the majority of honest scholarship would date this book well into the second century, and well after the Apostolic age. The Jesus Seminar completely loathes the Gospel of John, and have omitted all but one verse, and highly favor the Gnostic, non-canonical Gospel of Thomas; considering it to be equal or superior to the other Gospels. It's revealing to see their high regard for this gospel, especially since the Gospel of Thomas teaches the Gnostic heresy exalting the spirit over the body (dualism) as well as its extreme demeaning of women in the very last passage.⁹⁸ The Jesus Seminar believes they are the very expression of

⁹⁷ Robert W. Funk, *"The Coming Radical Reformation, 21 Thesis"*

⁹⁸ "The Gospel of Thomas," as quoted by Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company and the Polebridge Press, 1993), p. 532.

scholarship, even having the audacity to call their compiling and translating the twenty so-called gospels, “The Scholars Version.”

Using two options with various colored beads the Jesus Seminar has the audacity to actually vote, by the process of elimination, on what Jesus did and did not say. To assure the members’ secrecy they drop the colored beads into voting boxes. Besides the two voting options, they include some other procedures as well to determine the outcome; some of which are reminiscent of casting lots, or rolling dice. Using such methods, the Jesus Seminar concludes that only 18% of what is recorded in the Bible of Jesus’ words are indeed His actual statements. This so-called scholarship is ludicrous. Their majority vote and heaving leaning on academic achievements rather than the facts result in nothing more than biased conclusions. In any case, a “majority vote” can never negate the substantial factual evidence. This is simply common sense. It all comes down to the Jesus Seminar making outrageously bold assertions and statements, with absolutely no credible evidence to back up their claims.

In other words, what we have with the Jesus Seminar is a group of anti-Christian scholars, who being two thousand years removed from the time that Jesus lived, and being two thousand years removed from the time when Jesus words were written down by eyewitnesses, are now voting in a meeting on what Jesus really said and what He didn’t.

The Jesus Seminar is not affiliated with either the Society of Biblical Literature or the other international association for New Testament scholars, the *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas*. It does not, therefore, represent anything like a consensus view of scholars working in the New Testament, but only the view of a group that has been; for all its claims of diversity, self selected on the basis of a prior agreement concerning the appropriate goals and methods for studying the gospels and the figure of Jesus. It is, from beginning to end, an entrepreneurial venture guided by Dr. Robert Funk.⁹⁹ Yet the secular press seems to enjoy the Jesus Seminar hodgepodge, especially around Christmas and Easter, when we see the skeptical articles in various popular magazines and newspapers. These articles regularly question and attack historic Christianity, blaspheming our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. These journalists (such as Peter Jennings), like the Jesus Seminar fellows, do not realize the compounded wrath of God they pile upon themselves.

To the average person, the Westar Institute’s web page, home of the Jesus Seminar, has an impressive layout on many fellows listed. One may examine the many fellow participants’ personal academic achievements and so forth. Again, to many this looks very impressive, but is hardly the case when one considers the broader world of New Testament scholarship (or any scholarship for that matter).

While the Jesus Seminar masquerades as the “only true” Christian scholarship on the planet, they are actually a biased group of lunatic fringe kind of scholarship, on a quest to shoot down historic Christianity in the open media. They are an extremely biased, far leftist group of skeptics, and revisionists who have suppressed the truth in unrighteousness.

⁹⁹ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: HaperSanFrancisco, 1996), p. 2; as quoted in CRI’s Point-by-Point Response to ABC’s Special *The Search for Jesus*.

Christianity is not a blind leap of faith. Historically Christians did not leave their brains at the door of the church, or anywhere. Jesus said he was the only way (John 14:6) and that He is God Himself. If the Jesus Seminar can demonstrate that the claims of Jesus recorded in Scripture are untrue, then what assurance does any Christian have of salvation, and forgiveness? What would be the point of following Christ, if the words that are attributed to Him are all lies? The fact of the matter is that either all religions are false, or only one is the truth. The Scriptures command believers to “love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.” Not a mindless faith, but a thinking faith, a faith that is based on evidence.

It is vitally important to understand that the copies of the Old and New Testament manuscripts possess more unsurpassed evidence than any other ancient document. If we cannot believe what they tell us about the historical Jesus, then we cannot believe any ancient document. Honest historians agree that the manuscripts which make up the Bible are far greater in number and accuracy, and much closer to the originals than any other document from antiquity. We have over 5300 New Testament manuscripts in Greek alone which enable us, with careful examination, to get back to the *autographa* (the original) within a 98% accuracy range. The remaining differences are very minor and leave no major (or minor) doctrine in question. We can know precisely what God has spoken to us.

The Dead Sea Scrolls found in the caves of Qumran in 1947 are just another example of the many infallible proofs for the validity of the Bible. Among all the manuscripts discovered, and the greatest find, was the 24 foot long scroll of Isaiah that was written in the late B.C. era, approximately two hundred years before the birth of Christ. This scroll is virtually the same book of Isaiah we have today. The only variations are minor, slightly misspelled words, which do not affect the meaning of the text in any way.

The evidence of the Dead Sea Scrolls confirms what we already had good reason to believe; namely that the Jewish scribes copied and recopied the text of the Hebrew Bible with utmost fidelity. Bruce W. Metzger, a renowned professor of Princeton in New Testament studies, and holder of five doctorate degrees said, “Of the twenty thousand lines in the New Testament, only 40 are up for debate, all others are a given authority.”¹⁰⁰

The rapid spread of Christianity throughout the Greek speaking world and from there to Latin, Syriac, and Coptic-speaking areas together with the accompanying need for manuscripts for reading in church and the survival of many of these manuscripts means that today we are able, scientifically, to reconstruct, almost to perfection, the text of the New Testament as they were originally written.¹⁰¹

When people say that the Bible has been altered, or that things have been removed from the Bible, we can prove beyond a shadow of a doubt, on the basis of literally thousands of manuscripts from all over the world, as well as the ancient world, that there has been no such major changes made.

If the Jesus Seminar was actually seeking the truth there is a good possibility that they would be transformed by the truth as so many other intellectual skeptics have been.

Skeptics such as Sir William Mitchell Ramsay (1851-1939). Ramsay, born in Glasgow Scotland was a brilliant intellectual. Educated at the universities of Aberdeen, Oxford,

¹⁰⁰ Bruce W. Metzger, “The Bible: Fable, Fraud, or Fact?” quoted by Ravi Zacharias (Florida: Coral Ridge Ministries, 1998), video.

¹⁰¹ Paul W. Barnett, *Is The New Testament Reliable? A Look at the Historical Evidence* (Dowers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1986).

and Gottingen. He was a fellow of Exeter Collge, Oxford in 1882, a fellow of Lincoln College in 1885, and professor of classical art and professor of humanity at Aberdeen University. He was knighted by King Edward VII in 1906. He initially set out to disprove the Bible. As in so many cases his research instead convinced him that the Bible was reliable and he subsequently wrote several books about it. He boasted of St. Luke, that he was an outstanding historian who documented events in minute detail. Simon Greenleaf (1783-1853) was the royal professor of law at Harvard. He was arguably the greatest on the subject of evidences permissible in a court of law, during his time. He was Jewish and an atheist. One of his students challenged him to investigate the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus rather than speculate that the resurrection was not true from his bias or hearsay. He examined every thread of evidence he could find on Jesus Christ and in particular, His resurrection. Finally, Greenleaf wrote a book on his findings entitled *The Testimony of the Evangelist*, in which he considered the evidence presented by the writers of the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. His conclusion: if the evidence for Christ's resurrection were presented to any unbiased jury in the world, they would have to conclude that Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead. Through the examination of such evidence, Greenleaf became a Christian.¹⁰² Another example is that of General Lew Wallace. Wallace, the author of *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ*, which became the basis for the 1959 film that still holds the record for the most Oscars (Tied with the movie Titanic), in film history. But earlier in his life Wallace was a skeptic and set out to disprove the Christian faith. After several years of intense research, he became a Christian. It would have been intellectually dishonest if he did otherwise.¹⁰³

There are several other examples one could point to concerning intelligent men, scholars of some renown, who were not believers, yet had the courage to honestly investigate the claims of the Bible and found the truth, and were in turn set free by it. Frank Morris, Josh McDowell, and Lee Strobel are all fine examples of such men.

One could also look at secular evidence for the historical Jesus and find a multitude of evidence that contradicts the Jesus Seminar. There are at least 19 early pagan writers who refer to Jesus Christ as an actual, real-life, historical figure: Tacitus, a great historian of Rome; Suetonius, also a historian; Pliny the Younger, one of the leaders of the Roman Empire; Epictetus; Lucian; Aristides; Galenus; Lampridius; Dio Cassius; Emeritus; Annianus; Marcellinus; Eunapius; and Zosimus. Some wrote entire works about Jesus, such as Lucian, Celsus (the first great antagonist, who wrote a book attacking Christianity), Porphyry, Hieracles, and Julian the Apostate.¹⁰⁴ Josephus was the most highly reputed historian of his day. Born in 37 A.D., shortly after Christ's death, he wrote about the Jew's history and wars. He also was a general in the Jewish army. In *The*

¹⁰² D. James Kennedy, *Skeptics Answered* (Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 1997), p. 51.

¹⁰³ Gen. Lew Wallace, as quoted in Frank S. Mead, *The Encyclopedia of Religious Quotations* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1965), p. 59; as quoted in D. James Kennedy, *Skeptics Answered* (Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 1997), pp. 14-18.

¹⁰⁴ D James Kennedy, *Skeptics Answered*, pp. 73-74. D. James Kennedy holds nine advanced degrees and has written a great deal on the subject of the veracity of the Bible in such books as *Why I Believe*, *Skeptics Answered*, *Messiah: Prophecies Fulfilled*, *What If The Bible Had Never Been Written*, *The Gates Of Hell Shall Not Prevail* and several others. Kennedy and Coral Ridge Ministries have also produced videos such as "The Bible, Fable, Fraud, or Fact?" and "Who Is This Jesus?" Kennedy co-hosted with actor Dean Jones the *Who Is This Jesus?* prime time TV special (aired 12-25/26-00), which interviewed various top theology/history scholars. These two videos alone provide awe-inspiring facts and evidences.

Antiquities of the Jews: book 18, chapter 3, section 3, he writes, “About this time lived Jesus, a wise man, if it be proper to call Him a man, for He was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as received the truth with pleasure. He drew over to Him both many of the Jews and many Greeks. He was the Christ. And when Pilate, at the instigation of the principled men among us, had condemned Him to the cross, those who had loved Him at first, did not forsake Him, for He appeared to them alive again on the third day, the divine prophets having foretold these and many other wonderful things concerning Him. The sect of Christians so named after Him are not extinct to this day.”¹⁰⁵ C.S. Lewis, the great scholar and Christian apologist, put it so well when he wrote, “A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a good moral teacher. He would be either a lunatic, on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg, or else he would be the devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit on Him and kill Him as demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”¹⁰⁶

A Note On The Catholic Church

It is unfortunate that this section is necessary; for no doubt there are some within in the Catholic Church who are indeed Christians, saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. However those within the Catholic Church who are Christians did not become so through the teachings of the Catholic Church as their doctrine is filled with error, and false teaching. We are not going to focus on all of them in this work; instead we are going to examine the foundation of the Catholic Church, for if the foundation is found to be faulty then the entire structure will be as well.

The Catholic Church claims that they are “the” true church, the first church, and that they can trace their lineage directly back to the Apostle Peter. This claim is false, an outright lie. They also base all their authority upon this lie, and thousands, if not millions of Catholics believe it whole heartedly.

Matthew 16:18 is the critical passage of Scripture for the establishment of the authority claims of the Roman Catholic Church. It is upon the interpretation of the rock and keys that the entire structure of the Church of Rome rests. And Vatican I plainly states that its interpretation of Matthew 16 is that which has been held by the Church from the very beginning and is therefore not a doctrinal development. The Council asserted that its interpretation was grounded upon the unanimous consent of the fathers. In saying this Vatican I is claiming a two thousand year consensus for its interpretation and teaching. It specifically states that the Roman Catholic Church alone has authority to interpret scripture and that it is unlawful to interpret it in any way contrary to what it calls the “unanimous consent of the fathers.” This principle does not mean that every single father agrees on a particular interpretation of scripture, but it does mean that there is a general consensus of interpretation, and Vatican I claims to be consistent with that consensus. This is very important to establish because it has direct bearing on the Roman Church’s claim, that of being the one true Church established by Christ, unchanged from the very beginning.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1960), 56.

Roman Catholic apologists, in an effort to substantiate the claims of Vatican I, make appeals to certain statements of Church fathers which they claim give unequivocal and unambiguous evidence of a belief in papal primacy in the early Church. Briefly, the arguments can be summarized as follows:

1. The fathers often speak in lofty language when referring to the apostle Peter implying a personal primacy.
2. Numerous fathers interpret the rock of Matthew 16 as the person of Peter.
3. While some of the fathers interpret the rock to be Peter's confession of faith, they do not separate Peter's confession from his person.
4. The fathers refer to the bishops of Rome as successors of Peter.

Roman apologists historically have often resorted to the use of selected statements of major Church fathers, interpreting them as supportive of papal primacy. An example of this type of argumentation can be seen in the following references to the writings of Cyprian, Ambrose and Augustine by a Roman Catholic apologist:

St. Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258 A.D.) in his letter to Cornelius of Rome (c. 251 A.D.) speaks of the Church of Rome as the 'chair of Peter (*cathedra Petri*)' and 'the principle Church in which sacerdotal unity has its source' (Ep. 59, 14). St. Ambrose (d. 397 A.D.) states that 'where Peter is, there is the Church' (Comments on the Psalms 40, 30)...St. Augustine's recognition of the authority of the Pope is manifested by the famous words with which he welcomes the decision made by the Pope: *Roma locuta est; causa finita est* – Rome has spoken the case is concluded (Sermon 131, 6:10). Why does Augustine believe the Bishop of Rome has the final word? The answer is because the Pope is the successor of St. Peter, a fact clearly recognized by Augustine in his Letter to Generosus (c. 400 A.D.) in which he names all 34 of the bishops of Rome from Peter to Anastasius (Letter 53, 1,2).

The above arguments are very common. They are precisely the same citations found in *The Faith of the Early Fathers* by the Roman Catholic patristic scholar William Jurgens as proof for the purported belief in papal primacy in the early Church. And Karl Keating uses the same reference to Augustine in his book *Catholicism and Fundamentalism*. But these statements of these fathers do not actually support the claims of papal primacy. The facts do not support this contention. These statements are given completely out of context of the rest of the writings of these fathers thereby distorting the true meaning of their words. And in the case of Augustine, as we will see, his words are actually misquoted. All too frequently statements from the fathers are isolated and quoted without any proper interpretation, often giving the impression that a father taught a particular point of view when, in fact, he did not. But for those unfamiliar with the writings of the Church fathers such arguments can seem fairly convincing. An example of this kind of methodology is seen in a recent Roman Catholic work entitled *Jesus, Peter and the Keys*. This work is being touted by Roman Catholics as providing definitive evidence of the teaching of the Church fathers on the meaning of the rock of Matthew 16 and of Peter's role. But the actual references from the fathers cited in this work are very selective, often omitting important citations of their overall works that demonstrate a view contrary to that which is being proposed. What we will discover, if we give the statements of the fathers in context and in correlation with their overall writings, is that their actual perspective is often the opposite of that claimed by Vatican I and these Roman Catholic apologists.

In his book, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism*, Karl Keating states that the reformers had invented a novel exegesis of Matthew 16 in order to aid them in their rebellion against the papacy. This is a complete misrepresentation. As historian Oscar Cullmann points out, the view of the Reformers was not a novel interpretation invented by them but hearkened back to the patristic tradition: “We thus see that the exegesis that the Reformers gave...was not first invented for their struggle against the papacy; it rests upon an older patristic tradition.”¹⁰⁷

An examination of the writings of the fathers does reveal the expression of a consistent viewpoint, but it is not that of the Roman Catholic Church, as the documentation of the major fathers of the East and West will demonstrate. From a strictly scriptural point of view, the Roman Catholic interpretation of Matthew 16:18 is divorced from its proper biblical context. The Roman Church states that Matthew 16 teaches that the Church is built upon Peter and therefore upon the bishops of Rome in an exclusive sense. What is seldom ever mentioned is the fact that Ephesians 2:20 uses precisely the same language as that found in Matthew 16 when it says the Church is built upon the apostles and prophets with Christ as the cornerstone. The same Greek word for build upon in Matthew 16 is employed in Ephesians 2:20. This demonstrates that from a biblical perspective, even if we were to interpret the rock of Matthew 16 to be the person of Peter, the New Testament does not view the apostle Peter to be unique in this role. Christ is the foundation and the Church is built upon all the apostles and prophets in the sense of being built upon their teaching. And in addition, the Roman Catholic interpretation imports a meaning into the Matthew 16 text that is completely absent. This text says absolutely nothing about infallibility or about successors. The fathers of the Church did not isolate particular verses from their overall biblical context and consequently they have a biblical perspective of the foundation of the Church, which by the way is not the view of the Roman Catholic Church.

Tertullian (A.D. 155/160 – 240/250)

Tertullian was born in Carthage in North Africa and practiced law before his conversion to Christianity (A.D. 193). As a Christian he was a prolific writer and has been called the ‘Father of Latin Christianity’. He was most likely a layman and his writings were widely read. He had a great influence upon the Church fathers of subsequent generations, especially Cyprian. He is the first of the Western fathers to comment on Matthew 16. In one of his writings Tertullian identifies the rock with the person of Peter on which the Church would be built:

“Was anything withheld from the knowledge of Peter, who is called the ‘rock on which the church should be built’ who also obtained ‘the keys of the kingdom of heaven,’ with the power of ‘loosing and binding in heaven and earth?’”¹⁰⁸

Though Tertullian states that Peter is the rock he does not mean it in a pro-papal sense. We know this because of other comments he has made. But if we isolate this one passage it would be easy to read a pro-Catholic interpretation into it. However, in other comments on Matthew 16:18–19, Tertullian explains what he means when he says that Peter is the rock on which the Church would be built, and we find that when Tertullian says that Peter is the rock and the Church is built upon him he means that the Church is

¹⁰⁷ (Oscar Cullmann, *Peter: Disciple–Apostle–Martyr* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), p. 162).

¹⁰⁸ (Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), Volume III, Tertullian, *Prescription Against Heretics* 22).

built through him as he preaches the gospel.¹⁰⁹ This preaching is how Tertullian explains the meaning of the keys. They are the declarative authority for the offer of forgiveness of sins through the preaching of the gospel. If men respond to the message they are loosed from their sins. If they reject it they remain bound in their sins. Tertullian explicitly denies that this promise can apply to anyone but Peter and therefore he does not in any way see a Petrine primacy in this verse with successors in the bishops of Rome. The patristic scholar, Karlfried Froehlich, states that even though Tertullian teaches that Peter is the rock he does not mean this in the same sense as the Roman Catholic Church: “Tertullian regarded the Peter of Matthew 16:18–19 as the representative of the entire church or at least its ‘spiritual’ members.”¹¹⁰

Not only do we see a clear denial of any belief in a papal primacy in Tertullian’s exegesis of Matthew 16, but such a denial is also seen from his practice. In his later years Tertullian separated himself from the Catholic Church to become a Montanist. He clearly did not hold to the view espoused by Vatican I that communion with the Bishop of Rome was the ultimate criterion of orthodoxy and of inclusiveness in the Church of God.

Origen (A.D. 185 – 253/254)

Origen was head of the catechetical school at Alexandria during the first half of the third century. He was an individual of enormous intellect and was by far the most prolific writer of the patristic age. He has been called the greatest scholar of Christian antiquity. He had immense influence upon fathers in both the East and West in subsequent centuries. Origen is the first father to give a detailed exposition of the meaning of the rock of Matthew 16:18. His interpretation became normative for the Eastern fathers and for many in the West. Often, Origen is cited as a proponent of papal primacy. However; in his mind Peter is simply representative of all true believers and what was promised to Peter is given to all believers who truly follow Christ. They all become what Peter is.

This is the view expressed in the following comments:

“And if we too have said like Peter, ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,’ not as if flesh and blood had revealed it unto us, but by the light from the Father in heaven having shone in our heart, we become a Peter, and to us there might be said by the Word, ‘Thou art Peter,’ etc. For a rock is every disciple of Christ of whom those drank who drank of the spiritual rock which followed them, and upon every such rock is built every word of the Church, and the polity in accordance with it; for in each of the perfect, who have the combination of words and deeds and thoughts which fill up the blessedness, is the church built by God. But if you suppose that upon the one Peter only the whole church is built by God, what would you say about John the son of thunder or each one of the Apostles? Shall we otherwise dare to say, that against Peter in particular the gates of Hades shall not prevail, but that they shall prevail against the other Apostles and the perfect? Does not the saying previously made, ‘The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it,’ hold in regard to all and in the case of each of them? And also the saying, ‘Upon this rock I will build My Church?’ Are the keys of the kingdom of heaven given by the Lord to Peter only, and will no other of the blessed receive them? But if this promise, ‘I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven,’ be common to others,

¹⁰⁹ (Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), Volume IV, Tertullian, *On Modesty* 21, p. 99).

¹¹⁰ (Karlfried Froehlich, *Saint Peter, Papal Primacy, and Exegetical Tradition, 1150-1300*, pp. 13. Taken from *The Religious Roles of the Papacy: Ideals and Realities, 1150-1300*, ed. Christopher Ryan, *Papers in Medieval Studies* 8 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1989)

how shall not all things previously spoken of, and the things which are subjoined as having been addressed to Peter, be common to them? ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ If any one says this to Him...he will obtain the things that were spoken according to the letter of the Gospel to that Peter, but, as the spirit of the Gospel teaches to every one who becomes such as that Peter was. For all bear the surname ‘rock’ who are the imitators of Christ, that is, of the spiritual rock which followed those who are being saved, that they may drink from it the spiritual draught. But these bear the surname of rock just as Christ does. But also as members of Christ deriving their surname from Him they are called Christians, and from the rock, Peters...And to all such the saying of the Savior might be spoken, ‘Thou art Peter’ etc., down to the words, ‘prevail against it.’ But what is the ‘it’? Is it the rock upon which Christ builds the Church, or is it the Church? For the phrase is ambiguous. Or is it as if the rock and the Church were one and the same? This I think to be true; for neither against the rock on which Christ builds His Church, nor against the Church will the gates of Hades prevail. Now, if the gates of Hades prevail against any one, such a one cannot be a rock upon which the Christ builds the Church, nor the Church built by Jesus upon the rock.”¹¹¹

This is one of the most important passages in all the writings of Origen for an understanding of his view of the rock of Matthew 16. Yet this passage is not included in those referenced by the authors of *Jesus, Peter and the Keys*. This is a glaring omission given the importance of the passage and the fact that it is easily accessible in the work the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. One can only conclude that the authors purposefully omitted the passage because it is antithetical to the position they are seeking to establish.

James McCue in *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue* affirms these views of Origen in these statements:

“When Origen is commenting directly on Matthew 16:18, he carefully puts aside any interpretation of the passage that would make Peter anything other than what every Christian should be... (His) is the earliest extant detailed commentary on Matthew 16:18 and interestingly sees the event described as a lesson about the life to be lived by every Christian, and not information about office or hierarchy or authority in the Church.”¹¹²

Origen and Tertullian are the first fathers, from the East and West respectively, to give an exposition on the meaning of the rock of Matthew 16 and the role and position of Peter. Their views are foundational for the interpretation of this important passage for the centuries following. Strands of their teaching will appear in the views of the fathers throughout the East and West. It is important to point out that the first Eastern and Western fathers to give an exegesis of Matthew 16 do not interpret the passage in a pro-Catholic sense.

Cyprian (A.D. 200/210 – ca. 258)

Cyprian was a bishop of Carthage in North Africa in the mid-third century. He was one of the most influential theologians and bishops of the Church of his day and gave his life in martyrdom for his faith. He was greatly influenced by the writings of Tertullian, the North African father who preceded him. He is often cited by Roman Catholic apologists as a witness for papal primacy. In his treatise *On the Unity of the Church* Cyprian gives the following interpretation of the rock of Matthew 16:

¹¹¹ (Allan Menzies, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, Chapters 10-11).

¹¹² (Paul Empie and Austin Murphy, Ed., *Papal Primacy in the Universal Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974), *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue V*, pp. 60-61).

“The Lord saith unto Peter, I say unto thee, (saith He,) that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven (Matt. 16:18–19). To him again, after His resurrection, He says, Feed My sheep. Upon him being one He builds His Church; and although He gives to all the Apostles an equal power, and says, As My Father sent Me, even so I send you; receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye remit, they shall be remitted to him, and whosoever sins ye shall retain, they shall be retained (John 20:21); yet in order to manifest unity, He has by His own authority so placed the source of the same unity, as to begin from one.”¹¹³ Cyprian clearly says that Peter is the rock. If his comments were restricted to the above citation it would lend credence to the idea that he was a proponent of papal primacy. However Cyprian’s comments continue on from the statements given above. His additional statements prove conclusively that although he states that Peter is the rock he does not mean this in a pro-Catholic sense. His view is that Peter is a symbol of unity, a figurative representative of the bishops of the Church. Cyprian viewed all the apostles as being equal with one another. He believed the words to Peter in Matthew 16 to be representative of the ordination of all Bishops so that the Church is founded, not upon one Bishop in one see, but upon all equally in collegiality. Peter, then, is a representative figure of the episcopate as a whole.¹¹⁴

Cyprian, like Tertullian, states that Peter is the rock. But such a statement must be qualified. He definitely does not mean this in the same way the Church of Rome does. In his treatise, *On the Unity of the Church*, Cyprian teaches that Peter alone is not the rock or foundation on which the Church is built, but rather, he is an example of the principle of unity. He is representative of the Church as a whole. The entire episcopate, according to Cyprian, is the foundation, though Christ is himself the true Rock. The bishops of Rome are not endowed with divine authority to rule the Church. All of the bishops together constitute the Church and rule over their individual areas of responsibility as co-equals. If Cyprian meant to say that the Church was built upon Peter and he who resists the bishop of Rome resists the Church (cutting himself off from the Church), then he completely contradicts himself in his other writings.

Peter is the source of the church’s unity only in an exemplary or symbolic way...Peter himself seems, in Cyprian’s thought, to have had no authority over the other apostles, and consequently the church under Peter’s rule cannot reasonably claim to have any authority over the other churches.¹¹⁵

This judgment is further affirmed by the Roman Catholic historian, Michael Winter who states: “Cyprian used the Petrine text of Matthew to defend episcopal authority, but many later theologians, influenced by the papal connexions of the text, have interpreted Cyprian in a pro-papal sense which was alien to his thought... Cyprian would have used Matthew 16 to defend the authority of any bishop, but since he happened to employ it for

¹¹³ (*A Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church* (Oxford: Parker, 1844), Cyprian, *On The Unity of the Church* 3-4, pp. 133-135).

¹¹⁴ See (*A Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church* (Oxford: Parker, 1844), Cyprian, *On The Unity of the Church* 3, p. 133). And (*A Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church* (Oxford: Parker, 1844), *The Epistles of S. Cyprian*, Ep. 33.1).

¹¹⁵ (*Papal Primacy and the Universal Church*, Edited by Paul Empie and Austin Murphy (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974), *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue V*, pp. 68-69).

the sake of the Bishop of Rome, it created the impression that he understood it as referring to papal authority... Catholics as well as Protestants are now generally agreed that Cyprian did not attribute a superior authority to Peter.¹¹⁶

This Roman Catholic historian insists that it is a misrepresentation of Cyprian's true teaching to assert that he is a father who supports the Roman Catholic interpretation of Matthew 16. And he says that both Protestant and Roman Catholic scholars are now agreed on this. Once again, Roman Catholic historians specifically repudiate what some Roman apologists often teach about Cyprian and his comments on the 'Chair of Peter'. Karlfried Froehlich states: "Cyprian understood the biblical Peter as representative of the unified episcopate, not of the bishop of Rome... He understood him as symbolizing the unity of all bishops, the privileged officers of penance... For (Cyprian), the one Peter, the first to receive the penitential keys which all other bishops also exercise, was the biblical type of the one episcopate, which in turn guaranteed the unity of the church. The one Peter equaled the one body of bishops."¹¹⁷

World renowned Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox historians reveal a consensus of scholarly opinion on Cyprian's teaching effectively demonstrating the incompatibility of Cyprian's views with those espoused by Vatican I. This consensus also reveals the danger of taking the statements of Church fathers at face value without regard for the context of those statements or for seeking a proper interpretation of the meaning of the terms they use. It is easy to import preconceived meanings into their statements resulting in misrepresentation of their teaching. Yet the Vatican still makes the claim that Peter was the first Pope, and that the Roman Catholic Church alone has authority to interpret Scripture, and that Protestant denominations are the ones who are in error.

Eusebius (A.D. 270/275 – 339)

Eusebius was born in Caesarea in Palestine around the year 263 A.D. He took the name Eusebius Pamphilus after his mentor and teacher Pamphilus. He was consecrated bishop of Caesarea in 313 A.D. and was a participant at the Council of Nicea. He is known as the father of ecclesiastical history for his work on the history of the Church. He has very clearly expressed his views on the meaning of the rock of Matthew 16:

"And he sent out arrows, and scattered them; he flashed forth lightnings, and routed them. Then the channels of the sea were seen, and the foundations of the world were laid bare, at thy rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of thy nostrils' (Ps. 18.14)...By 'the foundations of the world,' we shall understand the strength of God's wisdom, by which, first, the order of the universe was established, and then, the world itself was founded – a world which will not be shaken. Yet you will not in any way err from the scope of the truth if you suppose that 'the world' is actually the Church of God, and that its 'foundation' is in the first place, that unspeakably solid rock on which it is founded, as Scripture says: 'Upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'; and elsewhere: 'The rock, moreover, was Christ.' For, as the Apostle indicates with these words: 'No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus.' Then, too, after the Savior himself, you may rightly judge the foundations of the Church to be the words of the prophets and apostles, in accordance with the statement of the Apostle: 'Built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Christ Jesus

¹¹⁶ (Michael Winter, *St. Peter and the Popes* (Baltimore: Helikon, 1960), pp. 47-48).

¹¹⁷ (Karlfried Froehlich, *Saint Peter, Papal Primacy, and the Exegetical Tradition, 1150-1300*, p. 36, 13, n. 28 p. 13. Taken from *The Religious Roles of the Papacy: Ideals and Realities, 1150-1300*, ed. Christopher Ryan, Papers in Medieval Studies 8 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1989).

Himself being the cornerstone.’ These foundations of the world have been laid bare because the enemies of God, who once darkened the eyes of our mind, lest we gaze upon divine things, have been routed and put to flight – scattered by the arrows sent from God and put to flight by the rebuke of the Lord and by the blast from his nostrils. As a result, having been saved from these enemies and having received the use of our eyes, we have seen the channels of the sea and have looked upon the foundations of the world. This has happened in our lifetime in many parts of the world.”¹¹⁸

Eusebius unambiguously teaches that the rock is Christ. He correlates this interpretation with the parallel rock and foundation statements of 1st Corinthians 10:4 and 3:11. He goes on to say that there is a subsidiary foundation, from Ephesians 2:20, of the apostles and prophets, the Church also built upon them, but the cornerstone is Christ. However he interprets this to mean that the Church is to be built upon the words or teachings of the apostles and prophets as opposed to their persons. It is in this sense that it can be said that the Church is built upon Peter and the other apostles. It is clear that Christ alone is the true foundation and rock of the Church and that Eusebius sees no peculiar Petrine primacy associated with Christ’s statements in Matthew 16. Peter is simply one of a number of the apostles who is a foundation of the Church. This has nothing to do with his person, but everything to do with his words, his confession. The Church is built upon Peter by being built upon his confession of faith. In light of his comments from his Commentary on the Psalms we can conclude that Eusebius did not interpret Matthew 16:18 in agreement with the Roman Catholic Church. It is Christ and Christ alone that fills Eusebius’ vision from this passage. However, one will search in vain for the above quotation from Eusebius in the Roman Catholic work *Jesus, Peter and the Keys*, and other Catholic apologetic works.

Augustine (A.D. 354 – 430)

Augustine is considered by many the most important theologian in the history of the Church for the first twelve hundred years. No other Church father has had such far reaching influence upon the theology of the Church. His authority throughout the patristic and middle ages is unsurpassed. He was the bishop of Hippo in North Africa from the end of the fourth century and on into the first quarter of the fifth, until his death in 430. William Jurgens makes these comments about his importance:

“If we were faced with the unlikely proposition of having to destroy completely either the works of Augustine or the works of all the other Fathers and Writers, I have little doubt that all the others would have to be sacrificed. Augustine must remain. Of all the Fathers it is Augustine who is the most erudite, who has the most remarkable theological insights, and who is effectively most prolific.”¹¹⁹

He was a prolific writer and he has made numerous comments which relate directly to the issue of the interpretation of the rock of Matthew 16:18. In fact, Augustine made more comments upon this passage than any other Church father. At the end of his life, Augustine wrote his *Retractations* where he corrects statements in his earlier writings which he says were erroneous. One of these had to do with the interpretation of the rock in Matthew 16. At the beginning of his ministry Augustine had written that the rock was Peter. However, very early on he later changed his position and throughout the remainder of his ministry he adopted the view that the rock was not Peter but Christ or Peter’s

¹¹⁸ Eusebius (*Commentary on the Psalms*, M.P.G., Vol. 23, Col. 173, 176).

¹¹⁹ (William Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1979), Vol. 3, p. 1).

confession which pointed to the person of Christ. The following are statements from his *Retractations* which refer to his interpretation of the rock of Matthew 16:

“In a passage in this book, I said about the Apostle Peter: ‘On him as on a rock the Church was built’...But I know that very frequently at a later time, I so explained what the Lord said: ‘Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church,’ that it be understood as built upon Him whom Peter confessed saying: ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,’ and so Peter, called after this rock, represented the person of the Church which is built upon this rock, and has received ‘the keys of the kingdom of heaven.’ For, ‘Thou art Peter’ and not ‘Thou art the rock’ was said to him. But ‘the rock was Christ,’ in confessing whom, as also the whole Church confesses, Simon was called Peter.”¹²⁰

Clearly Augustine is repudiating a previously held position, adopting the view that the rock was Christ and not Peter. This became his consistent position. He does leave the interpretation open for individual readers to decide which was the more probable interpretation but it is clear what he has concluded the interpretation should be and that he believes the view that the rock is Christ is the correct one. Augustine could not have been clearer in his interpretation of the rock of Matthew 16. In his view, Peter is representative of the whole Church. The rock is not the person of Peter but Christ Himself. In fact, in exegesis of Matthew 16, he explicitly says that Christ did not build His Church on a man, referring specifically to Peter. If Christ did not build his Church on a man then he did not establish a papal office with successors to Peter in the bishops of Rome.

According to Augustine the Apostles are equal in all respects. Each receives the authority of the keys, not Peter alone.¹²¹ And Augustine doesn’t think of Peter as the rock. According to Augustine’s exegesis, Jesus called Peter “Rocky.” The rock on which He would build His church was both Christ and Peter’s faith, as evident in Peter’s confession.¹²²

Ambrose (ca. A.D. 333 – 397)

Ambrose was bishop of the see of Milan in the latter part of the fourth century. He was one of the greatest fathers of the Western Church, the mentor of St. Augustine, and universally recognized as one of the greatest theologians of the patristic age. He is one of a handful of Western fathers who would be recognized theologically by the Roman Catholic Church as a doctor of the Church. He was the leading theologian and outstanding bishop of the Western Church. He is a father who is often cited in support of the present day Roman Catholic interpretation of Matthew 16:18. The following quotation is the one that is most often given in support of this view:

“It is to Peter himself that He says: ‘You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church.’ Where Peter is, there is the Church.”¹²³

¹²⁰ (*The Fathers of the Church* (Washington D.C., Catholic University, 1968), Saint Augustine, *The Retractations* Chapter 20.1).

¹²¹ (John Rotelle, Ed., *The Works of Saint Augustine* (Hyde Park: New City, 1994), *Sermons*, III/8 (273-305A), On the Saints, Sermon 295.1-3, pp. 197-198).

¹²² (John Rotelle, Ed., *The Works of Saint Augustine* (New Rochelle: New City, 1993), *Sermons*, Sermon 265D.6, p. 258-259, n. 9)

¹²³ (W.A. Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1979), Volume 2, St. Ambrose, *On Twelve Psalms* 440, 30, p. 150).

The impression given by Roman Catholic apologists is that in these comments Ambrose supports the Roman Catholic interpretation of Matthew 16. They apply the following logic to his statement: The above quote seems to suggest that Peter's person is the rock. And since the bishops of Rome are the successors to Peter they are, therefore, by succession, the rocks of the Church. Therefore, according to Ambrose, the Church is founded upon the universal rule of the bishops of Rome. To be in communion with Rome is to be in the Church. To be out of communion with Rome is to be out of the Church for where Peter (that is, the bishop of Rome) is, there is the Church. Is this what Ambrose meant? If we divorce this one sentence from its context and from the rest of his comments on Peter in other writings, we could certainly lean towards that interpretation. However, Ambrose made other comments on Peter and Matthew 16 which explain exactly what he meant when he said that Peter is the rock. Unfortunately, these other comments are often neglected in discussions by Roman Catholic apologists. Often a quote like this is given out of the context. The result is that an interpretation is given the words of Ambrose that is completely foreign to his true meaning. This becomes clear upon examination of his other statements:

“He, then, who before was silent, to teach us that we ought not to repeat the words of the impious, this one, I say, when he heard, ‘But who do you say I am,’ immediately, not unmindful of his station, exercised his primacy, that is, the primacy of confession, not of honor; the primacy of belief, not of rank. This, then, is Peter, who has replied for the rest of the Apostles; rather, before the rest of men. And so he is called the foundation, because he knows how to preserve not only his own but the common foundation...Faith, then, is the foundation of the Church, for it was not said of Peter's flesh, but of his faith, that ‘the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’ But his confession of faith conquered hell. And this confession did not shut out one heresy, for, since the Church like a good ship is often buffeted by many waves, the foundation of the Church should prevail against all heresies.”¹²⁴

In his *Commentary in Luke*, Ambrose says that Peter is the foundation in the sense that he was the first to openly confess faith in Christ as the Messiah and Son of God. The rock is not Peter himself but Peter's confession of faith.

We could go on and look at men like John Chrysostom, who was an Eastern father who lived during the second half of the fourth century, a priest of Antioch, and bishop of Constantinople. Or Theodoret of Cyr, who was the leading theologian of Antioch in the 5th century. Or, Cyril of Alexandria, one of the most influential theologians of the Eastern Church; who was a bishop of Alexandria from 412 A.D. to 444 A.D. and presided over the Council of Ephesus. We could look at Hilary of Poitiers, the bishop of Poitiers from 350 – 368 A.D. and a doctor of the Church. Or Jerome, the great Biblical scholar of the Western Church of the patristic age; or perhaps Epiphanius, the bishop of Salamis on Cyprus; or Basil of Seleucia, or Paul of Emesa, or John of Damascus, or countless other early Christian fathers who all agree that the rock was not Peter himself, but that the Church is built on faith in Christ.

From the primary documentation of the writings of the fathers and the comments of Church historians we can summarize the patristic understanding of Peter and the rock from Matthew 16. Generally speaking, the fathers viewed the rock and foundation of the

¹²⁴ (*The Fathers of the Church* (Washington D.C., Catholic University, 1963), Saint Ambrose, Theological and Dogmatic Works, *The Sacrament of the Incarnation of Our Lord* IV.32-V.34, pp. 230-231).

Church as the person of Christ, or Peter's confession of faith which pointed to Christ. Though the fathers spoke in very exalted terms about the apostle Peter, their comments were not applied in an exclusive sense to the bishop of Rome, nor did they view the Roman bishops as given universal jurisdiction over the Church.

Roman Catholics assume that when a Church father speaks of Peter he is also talking about the bishops of Rome but this is not the case. That is to read a preconceived theology into their writings.

Let us now examine what Scripture has to say about this subject, as it is our authority. In Romans 16:1-15 Paul wrote to Rome, and Paul was very specific in greeting the saints in Rome, and in recording their names. We can also see that Paul does not mention Peter. Why would Paul ignore Peter if he were the bishop of Rome? Most likely because Peter was not in Rome at that time. Another important fact to note: if Peter was the bishop of Rome, on what authority and grounds did the Apostle Paul have in writing instructions to the Church of Rome? It would have been Peter's responsibility to teach the Christian faith and doctrine to those within his church, not Paul's.

While Paul was imprisoned in Rome he wrote to Timothy, and in 2nd Timothy 4:9-12 we see that Paul says that only Luke was with him. Where was Peter? Certainly not in Rome, or Paul would have mentioned him. And once again we have Paul writing instructions of a religious nature. That would have been (according to the Catholic Church) the job of the Supreme Pontiff (Peter). However, we see that Peter was not in Rome, Peter was not the bishop of Rome, nor was he the Supreme Pontiff. In other words, Peter was never a pope. According to Hippolytus, the first bishop of Rome was Linus, not Peter.¹²⁵

In Galatians 2:11-21 we see the Apostle Paul chasten Peter. This in and of itself should make it clear to Roman Catholics that Peter had no more authority than any other Apostle. If Peter was the first pope it would be interesting to see how the Catholic Church reconciles that with the fact that he was married (Matthew 8:14), as well as Peter's own words in 1st Peter 5:1 where he claims equality with other Elders of the church, but not supremacy.

In the account of the Church's first general council reported in Acts 15, it is James, the brother of Jesus, and not Peter, who provides the solution to the problem under discussion. (Acts 15:13-23.) Even before that council, Peter was not acting like the supreme leader of the flock. Rather than directing the actions of others, he was being directed, as the following attests. "Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John." (Acts 8:14) It was the same John, who, along with his brother James that had sought from Jesus the promise of sitting one on His right hand, and one on His left in the coming kingdom. This, long after Matthew 16:18 had taken place, and a clear indication that the Apostles had no idea Peter had supposedly been ordained their leader.

It is this view held by the Roman Catholic Church that gives birth to so many of their erroneous teachings. It has caused them to see themselves above reproach, above error, above accountability. And unfortunately; instead of admitting their mistake, and repenting, they have tried in various ways throughout the years to suppress this truth, and hide it away from prying eyes. The Catholic Church has a long history of suppressing,

¹²⁵ Hippolytus, Book XLIV; ON The Twelve Apostles Where Each OF Them Preached, And Where He Met His End

opposing, and even forbidding the open use of the Bible. It was first officially forbidden to the people and placed on the index of Forbidden Books List by the Council of Valencia in 1299 A.D. The Council of Trent (1545 – 1563 A.D.) also prohibited its use and pronounced a curse upon anyone who would dare oppose this decree. Many popes have issued decrees forbidding Bible reading in the vernacular of the people. The Roman Catholic Church has openly burned Bibles and those who translated them, or promoted the study of the Bible (William Tyndale, 1536 A.D. is a good example of such). This erroneous teaching of the Catholic Church has only given birth to more erroneous teaching. After all, when an organization is above accountability and the words and teachings of the organizations leader are held in the same regard as the very words and teachings of God, false doctrine is only a step away.

None of the major traditions or doctrines of the Catholic Church were taught, defended, practiced, or embraced by the apostolic church. For example the Catholic teachings on prayers for the dead originated around 300 A.D., the veneration of angels and dead saints (375 A.D.), the exaltation of Mary and the use of the term “Mother of God” (431 A.D.), the doctrine of purgatory, instituted by Gregory I (593 A.D.), the title of “Pope” (first given to Boniface III in 607 A.D.), holy water blessed by a priest (850 A.D.), canonization of dead saints (instituted by Pope John XV in 995 A.D.), the rosary used in prayer (1090 A.D.), the sale of indulgences (1190 A.D.), transubstantiation (first proclaimed by Pope Innocent III in 1215 A.D.), Auricular (private) confession of sins to a priest (instituted by Pope Innocent III in Lateran Council in 1215 A.D.), the doctrine of seven sacraments (1439 A.D.), the Hail Mary (1508 A.D.), tradition declared to be of equal authority with the Bible (Council of Trent 1545 A.D.), the Apocryphal books added to the Bible by the Council of Trent (1546 A.D.), Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary (proclaimed by Pope Pius IX in 1854 A.D.), infallibility of the pope in matters of faith and morals (proclaimed by the Vatican Council in 1870 A.D.). Many other traditions of men could be added to this list, all of which are not rooted in Scripture. When one carefully compares the major teachings of the Roman Catholic Church with the Bible it becomes clear that it is a religious system composed of many man made practices and teachings, which often contradict the clear truths contained in the Word of God. The Scriptural facts should offer a sobering challenge to all Roman Catholics who love God and earnestly desire to follow the truth. As stated there are no doubt members of the Catholic Church who have been saved by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ, but they (as must we all) must recognize that it is difficult to serve God acceptably and be approved by Christ if they willfully continue to condone teachings or participate in practices which violate the Holy Scriptures. A persistent unwillingness to respond to Scriptural truth is usually an indication that an individual has not fully surrendered his life to Christ’s Lordship.

The inevitable challenge confronting Catholics is whether they are willing to risk salvation and eternal life by continuing to rely upon a religious system which openly contradicts the Bible. It is a crucial choice which confronts all conscientious Catholics who sincerely desire to embrace the truth and trust solely in Jesus Christ for their salvation.

False Religions

The famous playwright George Bernard Shaw once said, "There is only one religion, though there are a hundred versions of it." In our pluralistic society an increasing number of people find Shaw's idiotic interpretation of religion appealing. Is it possible that Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam represent differing, yet valid paths that lead to the same eternal destination? If this were the case then there would be no reason to debate which religion was the "true" religion. Such disputes would be pointless. Some argue that viewing religion in this way would lead to less religious bigotry, less religious violence, and greater cooperation among the world's various peoples.

On the other hand, what if all paths did not lead to the same destination? Religious traditions such as Islam and Buddhism differ significantly from one another. How does one account for these differences and maintain that all paths lead to the same destination? If all paths do not lead to the same destination then each of us must make an informed choice which may have significant and eternal consequences.

When examined closely and honestly it becomes quite clear that all of the major world religions are irreconcilable in doctrine and belief, thus they cannot all be true. It is only the dishonest or uninformed who would make a claim like Shaw's.

Buddhism

For centuries, Buddhism has been the dominant religion of the Eastern world. Today it remains the predominant religion in China, Japan, Korea, and much of Southeast Asia. With the rise of the Asian population in the U.S., Buddhism has made a tremendous impact in the United States. Presently, there are over 300,000 Buddhists in the U.S. It remains the dominant religion in the state of Hawaii and many prominent Americans have accepted this religion, including the former governor of California, Jerry Brown and countless Hollywood movie stars.¹²⁶

Buddhism began as an offspring of Hinduism in the country of India. The founder was Siddhartha Gautama. It is not easy to give an accurate historical account of the life of Gautama, since no biography was recorded until hundreds of years after his death. Today, much of his life story is clouded in myths and legends which arose after his death. Even the best historians of our day have several different, and even contradictory, accounts of Gautama's life.

Siddhartha Gautama was born in approximately 560 B.C. in northern India. His father Suddhodana was the ruler over a district near the Himalayas which is today the country of Nepal. Suddhodana sheltered his son from the outside world and confined him to the palace where he surrounded Gautama with pleasures and wealth. Despite his father's efforts, Gautama one day saw the darker side of life on a trip he took outside the palace walls. He saw four things that forever changed his life: an old man, a sick man, a dead man, and a beggar. Deeply distressed by the suffering he saw, he decided to leave the luxury of palace life and begin a quest to find the answer to the problem of pain and human suffering.

Gautama left his family and traveled the country seeking wisdom. He studied the Hindu scriptures under Brahmin priests, but became disillusioned with the teachings of Hinduism. He then devoted himself to a life of extreme asceticism (the rejection of

¹²⁶ Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis: Bethany House 1985), p. 261.

bodily pleasures) in the jungle. Legend has it that he eventually learned to exist on one grain of rice a day which reduced his body to a skeleton. He soon concluded, however, that asceticism did not lead to peace and self realization but merely weakened the mind and body.

Gautama eventually turned to a life of meditation. While deep in meditation under a fig tree known as the *Bohdi* tree (“tree of wisdom”), Gautama experienced the highest degree of God-consciousness called *Nirvana*. Gautama then became known as *Buddha*, the “enlightened one.” He believed he had found the answers to the questions of pain and suffering. His message now needed to be proclaimed to the whole world.

As he began his teaching ministry, he gained a quick audience with the people of India since many had become disillusioned with Hinduism. By the time of his death at age 80, Buddhism had become a major force in India. Three centuries later it had spread to all of Asia. Buddha never claimed to be deity but rather a “shower of the way.” However, seven hundred years later, followers of Buddha began to worship him as deity.¹²⁷

The question Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, sought to answer was, “Why is there pain and suffering?” Also, he held to the Hindu belief of reincarnation: after death one returns to earthly life in a higher or lower form of life according to his good or bad deeds. This belief prompted a second question that needed to be answered, “How does one break this rebirth cycle?” The basic teachings of Buddhism, therefore, focus on what Gautama believed to be the answer to these questions. These basic tenants are found in the “Four Noble Truths” and the “Eight-fold Path.” Let us begin with the Four Noble Truths.

The First Noble Truth is that there is pain and suffering in the world. Gautama realized that pain and suffering are omnipresent in all of nature and human life. To exist means all will encounter suffering. Birth is painful and so is death. Sickness and old age are painful. Throughout life, all living things encounter suffering. The Second Noble Truth relates to the cause of suffering. Gautama believed the root cause of suffering is desire. It is the craving for wealth, happiness, and other forms of selfish enjoyment which cause suffering. These cravings can never be satisfied for they are rooted in ignorance. The Third Noble Truth is the end of all suffering. Suffering will cease when a person can rid himself of all desires. The Fourth Noble Truth is the extinguishing of all desire by following the eight-fold path. “The eight-fold path is a system of therapy designed to develop habits which will release people from the restrictions caused by ignorance and craving.”¹²⁸

The eight steps of the eight-fold path are as follows: The first is the Right Views. One must accept the four noble truths. Step two is the Right Resolve. One must renounce all desires and any thoughts like lust, bitterness, and cruelty. He must harm no living creature. Step three is the Right Speech. One must speak only truth. There can be no lying, slander, or vain talk. Step four is the Right Behavior. One must abstain from sexual immorality, stealing, and all killing. Step five is the Right Occupation. One must work in an occupation that benefits others and harms no one. Step six is the Right Effort. One must seek to eliminate any evil qualities within and prevent any new ones from arising. One should seek to attain good and moral qualities and develop those already possessed. Seek to grow in maturity and perfection until universal love is attained. Step seven is the Right Contemplation. One must be observant, contemplative, and free of desire and

¹²⁷ Kenneth Boa, *Cults, World Religions, and the Occult* (Wheaton: Victor Books, (1977) p. 35.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 32.

sorrow. The eighth is the Right Meditation. After freeing oneself of all desires and evil, a person must concentrate his efforts in meditation so that he can overcome any sensation of pleasure or pain and enter a state of transcending consciousness and attain a state of perfection. Buddhists believe that through self effort one can attain the state of peace and eternal bliss called Nirvana.

Three important concepts in understanding Buddhism are *karma*, *Samsara*, and *Nirvana*. *Karma* refers to the law of cause and effect in a person's life, reaping what one has sown. Buddhists believe that every person must go through a process of birth and rebirth until he reaches the state of nirvana in which he breaks this cycle. According to the law of karma, "You are what you are and do what you do, as a result of what you were and did in a previous incarnation, which in turn was the inevitable outcome of what you were and did in still earlier incarnations."¹²⁹ For a Buddhist, what one will be in the next life depends on one's actions in this present life. Buddha believed, unlike Hinduism, that a person can break the rebirth cycle no matter what class he is born into.

The second key concept to understand is the law of *Samsara* or Transmigration. This is one of the most perplexing and difficult concepts in Buddhism to understand. The law of Samsara holds that everything is in a birth and rebirth cycle. Buddha taught that people do not have individual souls. The existence of an individual self or ego is an illusion. There is no eternal substance of a person which goes through the rebirth cycle. What is it then that goes through the cycle if not the individual soul? What goes through the rebirth cycle is only a set of feelings, impressions, present moments, and the karma that is passed on. "In other words, as one process leads to another ... so one's human personality in one existence is the direct cause of the type of individuality which appears in the next."¹³⁰ The new individual in the next life will not be exactly the same person, but there will be several similarities. Just how close in identity they will be, Buddha did not define.

The third key concept is *Nirvana*. The term means "the blowing out" of existence. Nirvana is very different from the Christian concept of heaven. Nirvana is not a place like heaven but rather a state of being. Again, Buddha never really articulated what exactly Nirvana was but we can assume that in some sense, Nirvana is an eternal state of being. It is the state in which the law of karma, and the rebirth cycle come to an end. It is the end of suffering, a state where there are no desires and the individual consciousness comes to an end. Although to our Western minds this may sound like annihilation, Buddhists would object to such a notion. Gautama never gave an exact description of Nirvana, but his closest reply was this. "There is disciples, a condition, where there is neither earth nor water, neither air nor light, neither limitless space, nor limitless time, neither any kind of being, neither ideation nor non-ideation, neither this world nor that world. There is neither arising nor passing-away, nor dying, neither cause nor effect, neither change nor standstill."¹³¹ Although no Buddhist really understands the condition of Nirvana, it is their eternal hope.

The concept of a personal God does not fit into the Buddhist system of religion. Today there are many sects of Buddhism. Many differ in their concept of the divine and of Buddha. In general, Buddhists are pantheistic in their view of God. Many view God as an impersonal force which is made up of all living things and holds the universe together.

¹²⁹ Davis Taylor and Clark Offner, *The World's Religions*, Norman Anderson, ed. (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity, 1975), p. 174.

¹³⁰ John Noss, *Man's Religions* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1968), p. 182.

¹³¹ Taylor & Offner, p. 177.

Here are what some of the most prominent of scholars say of the Buddhist view of God. Dr. John Noss states, “there is no sovereign Person in the heavens holding all together in unity, there is only the ultimate impersonal unity of being itself, whose peace enfolds the individual self when it ceases to call itself 'I' and dissolves in the featureless purity of Nirvana, as a drop of spray is merged in its mother sea.”¹³²

Here is what the late Dr. Suzuki, one of the greatest teachers of Zen Buddhism, says about his concept of God: “If God after making the world puts Himself outside it, He is no longer God. If He separates Himself from the world or wants to separate Himself, He is not God. The world is not the world when it is separated from God. God must be in the world and the world in God.”¹³³

Since Buddhism in general does not believe in a personal God or divine being, it does not have worship, praying, or praising of a divine being. It offers no form of redemption, forgiveness, heavenly hope, or final judgment. Buddhism is, therefore, more of a moral philosophy, an ethical way of life.

Professor Kraemer describes the Buddhist system as “a non-theistic ethical discipline, a system of self training, anthropocentric, stressing ethics and mind-culture to the exclusion of theology.”¹³⁴

Since Gautama's death, many sects have developed within Buddhism. Many of these sects differ in many fundamental ways and comparing them to one another is like comparing two separate religions. Many sects have developed their own unique concept of God. Some are pantheistic in their view of God. Others are atheistic. Still others have developed a polytheistic system of gods. Some have combined pantheism and polytheism. Several sects have elevated Gautama (or Buddha) to the level of a savior or divine being although it is clear he never claimed to be a deity. Other sects have combined some of the doctrines of God from other religions with Buddhism.

Since Buddha never emphasized his concept of the divine, Buddhism is left with some life's deepest questions unanswered, questions such as the origin of the universe and the purpose of man's existence.

It is quite clear that Christianity and Buddhism differ from one another in fundamental ways. Some sects of Buddhism have tried to synchronize the two together. However, the two are so different, they cannot both be right at the same time, nor can the two be blended together.

Much of the Buddhist scriptures and sayings attributed to Gautama were written about four hundred years after his death. By the time they were written, Buddhism had split into many sects. What do we have then? Even the best scholars are not sure of the accuracy of the Buddhist scriptures. In Christianity, however, we have an accurate historical account written by eyewitnesses to Jesus and the events surrounding His life. The two differ in their concept of God. For Buddhists in general, the idea of an absolute God does not play a vital role in daily living. Gautama said little about his concept of God. Buddha denied the existence of a personal God but was monistic in his view of the “Absolute” as an impersonal force made up of all living things. The Bible teaches of a God who rules the universe, and cares for man in a personal way.

¹³² Noss, p. 183.

¹³³ D. T. Suzuki, *The Field of Zen* (London: The Buddhist Society, 1969), p. 16.

¹³⁴ Taylor & Offner, p. 177.

It is clear that Buddha never claimed to be deity. Although several sects have elevated him to the status of a god, he did however, clearly claim to be only the way-shower to Nirvana. Jesus, however, claimed to be God and not simply a way-shower but instead the only way to eternal life. Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 1:1 also states, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

There is another clear distinction between these two religions. Buddhism offers neither assurance of forgiveness or eternal life. Buddhists hope to enter into the state of Nirvana, but there is no clear, objective proof or teaching on what occurs beyond the grave. Even Buddha himself was not certain what lay beyond death. He left no clear teaching on Nirvana or eternity. What he did leave are philosophical speculations. Today the body of Buddha lies in a grave in Kusinara, at the foot of the Himalaya Mountains. The facts of life after death still remain an unsolved mystery in Buddhism.

In Christianity we have One who amazed His audience because He taught eternal truths with authority. His authority came from the fact that He existed before creation, and He proved His claims by rising from the dead. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is a proven fact of history and clearly demonstrates Christ's authority over sin and death. When witnessing to a Buddhist, ask him this: "Do you have tangible proof of what occurs after death?" All the Buddhist has is hope in a teaching Buddha was not sure of. As Christians, we have a certain hope in a risen Savior. There is no guessing what happens beyond the grave because Christ alone has conquered the grave.

Hinduism

Though Hinduism may seem far removed from our everyday experience, it's becoming increasingly important that we as Christians understand this mysterious religion from India. This is so, if for no other reason than that Hinduism claims 1/6 of the world's population, with over 750 million followers worldwide. But it's also important because its influence is being felt more and more in our own country.

Most of us have had at least some exposure to what has become known as the New Age movement. If so, we have probably realized that Hinduism is the wellspring of a good deal of New Age thinking. Most of us are probably also aware that an increasing number of Asian Indians are residing in the U.S. We may be surprised, in fact, to learn that there are approximately 200 Hindu temples or Hindu centers in the U.S. Many believe that due to its eclectic nature, Hinduism has the potential to serve as a major vehicle for uniting much of the non-Christian religious world.

The appeal of Hinduism to Western culture is not difficult to comprehend. For one, Hinduism is comfortable with evolutionary thinking. As modern science emphasizes our physical evolution, so Hinduism emphasizes our spiritual evolution. As much of modern psychology emphasizes the basic goodness and unlimited potential of human nature, so Hinduism emphasizes man's essential divinity. As modern philosophy emphasizes the relativity of all truth claims, so Hinduism tolerates many seemingly contradictory religious beliefs. As a religion that also emphasizes the primacy of the spiritual over material reality, Hinduism appeals to many who are disillusioned with strictly material pursuits.

Though there are some core beliefs common to virtually all Hindus, there really is no "Hindu orthodoxy", no hard and fast dogma that all Hindus must believe. It's actually a family of gradually developing beliefs and practices.

Hinduism has its roots in the interrelationship of two basic religious systems: that of the ancient civilization residing in the Indus River Valley from the third millennium B.C., and the religious beliefs brought to India by the Aryan people (possibly from the Baltic region) who began infiltrating the Indus Valley sometime after 2000 B.C.

The religion of the Aryans is described in the writings of “holy men” contained in the *Vedas* (meaning “knowledge” or “wisdom”). The Vedas are four collections of writings composed between about 1500 and 500 B.C., which form the basis for Hindu beliefs, and which reveal a gradual development of religious ideas. The later sections of the Vedas are known as the Upanishads. These Vedic writings are considered inspired. Later Hindu writings, including the renowned Bhagavad Gita, are of lesser authority, but widely popular.

An understanding of the Hindu beliefs about God is important even if we don't know any Hindus or people from India because we are all in contact with the New Age movement, and it draws its ideas about God from Hinduism. What then do Hindus believe about God?

The early portions of the Hindu scriptures known as the Vedas describe a number of deities who for the most part are personifications of natural phenomena, such as storms and fire. Prayers and sacrifices were offered to these gods. An extensive system of priestly rituals and sacrifices was eventually developed which served as means of obtaining the blessing of these gods.

The later portions of the Vedas, called the Upanishads, reflect a significant development in Hinduism's concept of the divine. Many of the Upanishads, instead of speaking of a multitude of gods, refer to an ultimate reality beyond our comprehension called *Brahman*. Though Brahman is impersonal in nature, it is sometimes referred to in personal terms by the name *Isvara*.

Along with this idea of a single divine reality, the Upanishads also teach that at the core of our being (referred to as “Atman”) we are identical with this ultimate reality. A popular saying in Hinduism is “Atman is Brahman!” In fact, to the Hindu, all living things are Brahman at their innermost core! In addition, instead of ritual sacrifice, intuitive knowledge of the oneness of all things came to be endorsed as the way of contact with divine reality. Also found in the Upanishads is the teaching that the material world (including our conscious personalities) is less than fully real. The word “maya” is used to designate the power by which God, or ultimate reality, brought this less than real world into existence.

Though this monistic or pantheistic philosophy provided a comprehensive intellectual understanding of the divine reality for Hindus, it lacked a strong appeal to the heart. As a result, just before the dawn of the Christian era, a great transformation occurred in Hinduism, spurred particularly by the writing of the Bhagavad Gita, the “New Testament” of Hinduism. The Gita records a conversation between the warrior-prince Arjuna and his charioteer Krishna (who is revealed as an incarnation of the god Vishnu), in which personal devotion to deity is endorsed as a way of salvation for all classes of people.

From this time forward, these two major streams of Hindu thought and practice grew and developed, the more intellectual and philosophical stream that emphasized the oneness of all things, and the stream that emphasized personal devotion to a god. The latter stream has predominated among the common people of India to this present day. Chief among

the gods so venerated are Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the preserver), and Shiva (the destroyer). In India there are many temples devoted to Shiva (or to one of his wives, such as Kali), or to Vishnu (or to one of his ten incarnations known as avatars). All in all, it is often stated that Hinduism possibly claims over one million gods and goddesses! One might wonder how such a multitude of beliefs about the divine could possibly co-exist in one religion. But they do. There is, however, a widespread recognition that none of the personal gods of Hinduism is in any way exclusive or unique. They are all simply different ways of conceiving of the one reality behind all things... Brahman.

Next we must turn our attention to two core beliefs of Hindus: (a) what they believe about the source of evil and suffering and (b) what they believe about life after death. The first of these core beliefs is the doctrine of *karma*. The word karma means "action." But the religious concept has more to do with the results or consequences of actions. The doctrine of karma states that every thought and action results in certain consequences born by the actor or thinker. If a person lies or steals, he will be wronged in some way in the future. Hindus believe that all suffering is due to one's own past actions, in this or in a previous life. Some believe that karma implies strict determinism or fatalism (that one must simply resign himself to living out his karma). Most, however, believe that though our present is determined by our past, nonetheless we can influence our future by conducting ourselves in a proper manner in the present.

Some have equated the doctrine of karma with the statement in Galatians 6:7 that says, "whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." It is certainly a biblical teaching that our actions have consequences, for good or ill. But this is not the same as believing that every experience in life is a consequence of one's own past actions. This is definitely not a biblical idea.

The second core belief of Hinduism is the doctrine of reincarnation, or transmigration of souls, called *samsara*. Since it is impossible that all of one's karma be experienced in one lifetime, the Hindu scriptures state that after death individual souls are "reborn" in this world, in another body (human or otherwise). The nature of one's rebirth is determined by the karma resulting from past actions.

Closely associated with the doctrine of reincarnation is that of *ahimsa* or non-injury to living things. This is the core moral value of Hinduism, the protection of all life (which is ultimately divine), and is the main reason why many Hindus are vegetarian.

Also associated with reincarnation is the caste system. According to Hindu teaching, there are four basic castes or social classes (and thousands of sub-groups within the castes). Each has its own rules and obligations pertaining to nearly every facet of life. At the top are the Brahmins or priests. Second in rank are the Kshatriyas or warriors and rulers. Third are the Vaisyas or merchants and farmers. Below these are the Shudras or laboring class. Salvation is possible only for the top three castes, who are called the "twice born." Outside the caste system are the untouchables or outcastes. Though outlawed in India in the late 1940s, many in the countryside are still considered outcastes. One's caste is determined at birth by his or her own personal karma. Attempts, therefore, to bring about social change or to improve one's social position would appear to run contrary to the law of karma and the caste system.

It's little wonder that the chief aim of the Hindu is to experience release or liberation from this cycle of death and rebirth caused by karma. Hindus call this liberation *moksha*.

It may come as some surprise to some that the practices of yoga and meditation are central to the Hindu search for salvation. As stated, the chief aim in Hinduism is to gain release from the cycle of reincarnation caused by karma, the consequences of past actions, in this or in previous lives! In order to look at the primary ways in which followers of Hinduism seek to achieve this salvation we must mention the four goals of life permissible to Hindus. Hinduism recognizes that in the course of many lifetimes people may legitimately give themselves to any of these goals. The first is the goal of pleasure or enjoyment, particularly through love and sexual desire. This is called *kama*. The second legitimate aim in life is for wealth and success. This is called *artha*. The third aim in life is moral duty or *dharma*. One who gives himself to dharma renounces personal pleasure and power, to seek the common good. The final aim in life, however, is *moksha*; liberation from the cycle of lives in this material world, and entrance into Nirvana.

Hindus recognize three possible paths to moksha, or salvation. The first is the way of works or *karma yoga*. This is a very popular way of salvation and lays emphasis on the idea that liberation may be obtained by fulfilling one's familial and social duties thereby overcoming the weight of bad karma one has accrued. The Code of Manu lists many of these rules. Most important among them are certain rituals conducted at various stages of life.

The second way of salvation is the way of knowledge or *jnana yoga*. The basic premise of the way of knowledge is that the cause of our bondage to the cycle of rebirths in this world is ignorance or *avidya*. According to the predominant view among those committed to this way, our ignorance consists of the mistaken belief that we are individual selves and not one with the ultimate divine reality called Brahman. It is this ignorance that gives rise to our bad actions which result in bad karma. Salvation is achieved through attaining a state of consciousness in which we realize our identity with Brahman. This is achieved through deep meditation, often as a part of the discipline of yoga.

The third and final way of salvation is the way of devotion or *bhakti yoga*. This is the way most favored by the common people of India; it satisfies the longing for a more emotional and personal approach to religion. It is self-surrender to one of the many personal gods and goddesses of Hinduism. Such devotion is expressed through acts of worship, (*puja*), at the temple, in the home, through participation in the many festivals in honor of such gods, and through pilgrimages to one of the numerous holy sites in India. In the way of devotion, the focus is one obtaining the mercy and help of a god in finding release from the cycle of reincarnation. Some Hindus conceive of ultimate salvation as absorption into the one divine reality, with all loss of individual existence. Others conceive of it as heavenly existence in adoration of the personal God.

What should be the appropriate Christian perspective on this religion of the East that is making such an impact in the West? At the outset we must say that as Christians we concur with Hindus on a couple of points. Hindus are correct in their recognition that all is not right with the world and with human existence in it. They are correct as well in suggesting that the ultimate remedy to the human dilemma is spiritual in nature. Beyond these two points, however, there's little common ground between Hinduism and Christianity. Let's note just a few of the more important areas of divergence.

First, Hinduism lacks any understanding that God created this world for a good purpose. It is common for Hindus to speak of God bringing the universe into existence simply as a

“playful” exercise of His power. Also lacking is a conception of God as infinitely holy and righteous and as the One to whom we as His creatures are accountable for the way we conduct our lives.

The second major area of contrast between Hinduism and Christianity is the conception of human nature and of the source of our estrangement from God. According to Hindu teaching, man is divine at the core of his being. He is one with God! The problem is that man is ignorant of this fact. He is deceived by his focus on this temporal and material world, and this ignorance gives rise to acts that result in bad karma and traps us in the cycle of reincarnation.

According to the biblical teaching, however, the source of our alienation from God (and ultimately of all that is imperfect in this world), is not ignorance of our divinity, but our sinful rebellion against God and His purpose for our lives.

This leads to the third and final point of contrast; the way of salvation. According to most Hindu teaching, salvation from the cycle of reincarnation is achieved by our own efforts; whether through good works, meditation, or devotion to a deity. According to the Bible, however, our spiritual need is for deliverance from God's judgment on our sin and for restoration to a life under His direction and care. This salvation can be provided only by God's gracious and undeserved action in our behalf.

It is true that in certain Hindu groups there is a similar emphasis on God's grace (probably as a result of past Christian influence). But even here, there is a major distinction. The Hindu teaching about grace sees no need for an atonement for sin, but simply offers forgiveness without any satisfaction of the judgment on sin required by a holy God.

In contrast, the Christian gospel is this: God the Son became a man, died a sacrificial death on the cross, making real forgiveness of real sins against the real God possible to those who place complete trust in Christ. All who do so can experience true forgiveness, know God and His purpose for their lives, and have the certainty of eternal life with Him!

Islam

Islam is the fastest growing religion, not only in the world, but also in the United States, growing at a rate of 400% per year in the U.S.¹³⁵ Islam is also the second largest religion in the world having over 1 billion members.

Islam was founded by Mohammed who was born in Mecca in 570 A.D., nearly 600 years after the time of Jesus Christ.

Through contact with Jews and Christians, the people of Mecca had acquired a certain awareness of monotheism and developed vague notions of a Supreme Being. They believed however, that they could gain access to the Supreme Being only through intercessors, gods and goddesses in the forms of idols. So they installed 360 such idols in the Ka'bah, a shrine in Mecca, with the moon god being the chief deity. The idols remained in the Ka'bah until Mohammed destroyed them and reconsecrated the Ka'bah, which subsequently became the holiest shrine of the Islamic religion.¹³⁶

Muslims claim that Allah is the same God of the Bible, and that the message of the Qur'an is consistent with that of the Bible. The word Allah was derived from al-ilah which had become a generic title for whatever god was considered the highest god at the time. Each Arab tribe used Allah to refer to its own particular god. At the Ka'bah, Suen,

¹³⁵ U.S. News and World Report, Oct. 8, 1990

¹³⁶ Diller, Daniel C.; The Middle East, Congressional Quarterly Inc: Washington, D.C.; 1994, p. 173

the moon god was the central focus of prayer and people prayed to Suen using the name Allah. This worship of Suen was the most widespread religion in the Middle East.¹³⁷ The symbol of this moon god was the crescent moon, and was constantly found on ancient pottery or artifacts of worship. In Mesopotamia the word “Suen” was transformed into the word “Sin” by the Sumerians as their favorite name for the moon god.¹³⁸ The Old Testament rebuked the worship of the moon god because it often caused the Israelis to commit idolatry.¹³⁹

When Mohammed was 40 years old (610 A.D.), he claimed to have received messages from God by way of the angel Gabriel. These messages were later compiled and recorded in the Qur’an. Also about this time, Mohammed began preaching against the greed, economic oppression, and idolatry that plagued the Arabic people. He called on the many factions of the Arab peoples to unite under the worship of Allah. Though his message was initially rejected, by the year 630 he had succeeded in gaining control of Mecca, the economic and religious center of the Arabian Peninsula.

Though Muhammed died two years later, the religious/political movement he founded rapidly spread throughout the Arab world, and far beyond. By A.D. 750, the Muslim empire spanned from Spain¹⁴⁰ in the west to India in the east. In the centuries that followed, Islam penetrated deeper into Africa and Asia, extending as far as the Philippines. During its “golden era” Islam claimed some of the world's finest philosophers and mathematicians. It was during this time also that Islam and Christianity clashed as a result of the Crusades to reclaim the Holy Land from the Muslims.

Beginning around 1500 and accelerating after the industrial revolution of the 1700 – 1800’s, Islam felt the increasing influence of the European powers. Eventually, large portions of the Muslim world were colonized by European countries. This political and economic domination by Europe continued until the end of WWII, after which Muslim countries began to attain political independence. With the discovery and development of the vast oil reserves in many Muslim lands, economic independence suddenly came within reach also. At last, Islam had in its grasp both the opportunity and the resources to reassert itself as a powerful force in the world. After being on the defensive for many centuries, Islam was now on the offensive!

At this point we should discuss the current status of Islam. In doing so, it's important to realize that Islam is not a monolithic system. Though all Muslims draw their inspiration from Mohammed and the Qur’an, there are many identifiable groups and movements within Islam. The most obvious division is that between Sunni and Shia Islam. The Sunnis (who compose about 90% of all Muslims) draw their name from the fact that they look both to the Qur’an and to the “sunna” in establishing proper Muslim conduct. The “sunna” is the behavior or example of Mohammed and of the early Muslim community. Of course, there are many sub-divisions among the Sunnis, but they all identify themselves as Sunni.

The other major sect of Islam is known as Shi’ites (who compose about 10% of all Muslims and reside mainly in Iraq and Iran). The word Shi’ite means “partisan,” and refers to the fact that Shi’ites are “partisans of Ali.” Ali was the son-in-law and cousin of

¹³⁷ Hall, Mark. 1985, *A Study of the Sumerian Moon-god*, Nanna/Suen; University of PA. See also: Coon, Carleton S.; 1944. *Southern Arabia*, Washington D.C.: Smithsonian, p. 398

¹³⁸ Austin Potts, 1971, *The Hymns and Prayers To The Moon-god, Sin*, Dropsie College, p. 2

¹³⁹ Deut. 4:19, 17:3; 2nd Kings 21:3-5

¹⁴⁰ It is a point of historical fact that Islam first attacked Europe long before the Crusades

Mohammed and one of the early Caliphs or successors to Mohammed as leader of the Muslim people. Shi'ites believe that the leader of Islam should be among the descendants of Ali, whom they believe possess a special divine anointing for this task. The last of these divinely appointed leaders, or "imams" is believed to be in "hiding" in another realm of existence by many Shi'ites, and the Ayatollah Khomeini was believed to have been a spokesman for this "hidden imam."

A third group that should be mentioned are the Sufis, those Muslims (among both Sunni and Shia) who seek a mystical experience of God, rather than a merely intellectual knowledge of Him, and who also are given to a number of superstitious practices. Though the beliefs of Muslims worldwide are about as diverse as those among Christians, there are six basic articles of faith common to nearly all Muslims. With the first being: There is no god but Allah. The pre-Islamic Arabs were polytheists. But Mohammed succeeded in leading them to devote themselves solely to the chief god of the pantheon. To worship or attribute deity to any other being is considered "shirk" or blasphemy. The Qur'an mentions numerous names of Allah, and many Muslims believe these names have a near magical power when uttered. The second article of faith is belief in angels and jinn. Jinn are spirit beings capable of both good and evil actions and of possessing human beings. Above the jinn in rank are the angels of God. Two of them are believed to accompany every Muslim, one on the right to record his good deeds, and one on the left to record his evil deeds. The third article is belief in God's holy books, 104 of which are referred to in the Qur'an. Chief among these are the Law given to Moses, the Psalms given to David, the Gospel (or Injil) given to Jesus, and the Qur'an given to Mohammed. Each of these is conceived to have communicated the same basic message of God's will to man. Obvious discrepancies between the Christian Scriptures and the Qur'an (particularly with reference to Jesus and Mohammed) were accounted for by Mohammed in his suggestion that the Bible had been tampered with by Jews and Christians. The fourth article of faith is belief in God's prophets, through whom Allah appealed to man to follow His will as revealed in His holy books. There is no agreement as to how many prophets there have been; some say hundreds of thousands. Among them were Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. But all agree that Mohammed was God's final and supreme prophet – the "seal" of the prophets. Though Mohammed himself said that he was a sinner, nonetheless there are many Muslims throughout the world who appear to come close to worshiping him. The fifth article of faith is belief in the absolute predestinating will of Allah. Though some Muslims have modified this doctrine somewhat, the Qur'an seems to support the idea that all things (both good and evil) are the direct result of God's will. The sixth and final article of faith is belief in the resurrection and final judgment. At the end of history, Muslims believe that Allah will judge the works of all men. Those whose good deeds outweigh their bad deeds will enter into paradise (pictured in rather sensual terms). The rest will be consigned to hell. The paramount feature of Islamic belief, aside from its strong monotheism, is that it is a religion of human works. One's position with regard to Allah is determined by his success in keeping His laws.

Islam is a religion of works and the most important of Islamic works are summarized in what are usually called the "Five Pillars of Islam."

The first pillar is recitation of the creed: "There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet." It is commonly held that to recite this creed in the presence of two

witnesses is to constitute oneself a Muslim, one in submission to Allah. Of course, the word Islam simply means “submission.”¹⁴¹

The second pillar is the regular practice of prayers. Sunni Muslims are required to recite specific prayers accompanied by prescribed motions five times daily. (Shi'ites do so only three times a day.) All male Muslims are also enjoined to meet for community prayer (and sermon) each Friday at noon.

The third pillar is almsgiving. Born an orphan himself, Mohammed was surprisingly concerned for the needy. The Qur'an requires that 2.5% of one's income be given to the poor or to the spread of Islam.

The fourth pillar of Islam is the fast during the month of Ramadan (the ninth lunar month of the Muslim calendar, during which Mohammed is said to have received the first of his revelations from Allah, and during which he and his followers made their historic trek from Mecca to Medina). During this month, Muslims in good health are required to forego all food and liquid during daylight hours. This fast promotes the Muslim's self-discipline, dependence on Allah, and compassion for the needy.

The fifth pillar is the Hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca. If possible, every Muslim is to make a pilgrimage to Mecca once during his life. It can be made properly only on a few days during the last month of the Muslim year. The Hajj promotes the ideas of worldwide unity and equality among Muslims. But it also contains many elements of prescribed activity that are of pagan origin.

A sixth pillar; that of jihad, is often added (The term means “exertion” or “struggle” in behalf of Allah.) Jihad is the means by which those who are outside the household of Islam are brought into its fold. Jihad may be by persuasion, or it may be by force or “holy war.” The fact that any Muslim who dies in a holy war is assured his place in paradise provides strong incentive for participation!

Muslims around the world look to these pillars for guidance in shaping their religious practice. But in addition to these pillars, there are numerous laws and traditions contained in the Hadith (teaching literature that was compiled after the completion of the Qur'an), that reportedly contains the example and statements of Mohammed on many topics. Because the laws of the Hadith and Qur'an cover virtually every area of life, Islam has well been referred to as an all-encompassing way of life, as well as a religion.

At this point it is appropriate to offer a brief evaluation of Islam from a Christian perspective. At the outset, it must be stated that there is much in Islam that the Christian can affirm. Among the most significant Islamic doctrines that can be genuinely affirmed by the Christian are its belief in one God, its recognition of Jesus as the virgin born, sinless prophet of God, and its expectation of a future resurrection and judgment.

There are, however, some very significant areas of difference. We will mention just a few. First, the Muslim perception of God is by no means the same as that revealed in the Bible. Islam portrays God as ultimately unknowable. In fact, in the Qur'an, Allah reveals his will, but he never reveals himself. Neither is he ever portrayed as a God of love, nor as a father to his people, as God is in the Bible.

Second, though Jesus is presented as a miracle working prophet, and even without sin, Islam denies that He is the Son of God, or Savior of the world. Muslims also deny that

¹⁴¹ Many claim that the word Islam means “peace” though this is not factual. However it could mean “peace through submission” which would be a proper meaning of the word

Jesus ever died at all, that He was not crucified, and therefore was never resurrected for the justification of Christians.

Third, though mankind is depicted as weak and prone to error, Islam denies that man is a sinner by nature and in need of a Savior, as the Bible so clearly teaches. People are capable of submitting to Allah's laws and meriting his ultimate approval. According to Islam, man's spiritual need is not for a savior but for guidance. This leads to the fact that since in Islam, acceptance by Allah is something we must earn by our works, it cannot possibly provide the sense of security that can be found in the grace of God as taught in the Bible.

The attitude of many Muslims toward Christianity and toward the West is colored by their revised versions of history, as well as the actual history of conflict between the two. Many Muslims also see the depravity of the West in the pornographic hedonistic culture we have become and equate that with Christianity. Yet these are no excuse for the terrorism and violence that Islam propagates upon the rest of the world. When comparing the violence of Islam with the violence of those claiming to be Christians there is no comparison. For example; more people are killed by fundamentalist Muslims each year than in all 350 years of the Spanish Inquisition combined.¹⁴² Islamic terrorist murder more people every day than the Ku Klux Klan has in the last 50 years. Their religion teaches them to do such, and those who follow its teachings are the true followers of Islam, not fanatics, or those who have "hijacked" Islam. They are being obedient to the teachings of Mohammed and Islam; it is those within Islam who seek peace with Christians, Jews, and other religions that are betraying the doctrines of their faith. In contrast, Jesus Christ taught that His followers should love all men, including their enemies, that Christians should follow the golden rule and do unto others as they would have them do unto them. Jesus said that Christians should, "Love your neighbor as yourself." The Christian gospel teaches that man can know God, and come to receive His forgiveness through the sacrifice of His Son. Whereas the Qur'an teaches murder, rape, theft and terror.

The obvious conclusion is that the major world religions are fundamentally opposed to one another. Despite this, there are a lot of attempts to "reconcile" Christianity with the "big family" of world religions. The God of the Bible is totally opposed to spiritual syncretism, as demonstrated in the first commandment (Exodus 20:3-5). Christians cannot compromise in this area. The people of Israel met disaster precisely because they didn't obey the first commandment and worshiped the gods of other nations. In Jeremiah 15:4 God said, "I will make them abhorrent to all the kingdoms of the earth because of what Manasseh son of Hezekiah king of Judah did in Jerusalem." What was it that Manasseh did? He brought idols inside the temple and thus generated a double worship system in God's holy place,¹⁴³ which perverted the only possibility for reconciling the nation with God. Even if his deeds might have been politically justified (in order to have peace), spiritually it was against the clear command of God. Although Manasseh later repented, religious syncretism entered people's hearts, and they reached a point where repentance was impossible and spiritual confusion became so great that God had to punish them according to the Mosaic covenant.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Thomas F. Madden, *The Truth About the Spanish Inquisition*. Crisis Magazine, Oct. 1, 2003

¹⁴³ 2nd Chronicles 33:2-10

¹⁴⁴ See Leviticus 18,24-30

The same situation is presented in the New Testament. Jesus Christ did not claim to be “one” of the many ways to God, but the “only” way. He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). This statement needs no training in hermeneutics to understand. It means what it says.

Secular World Views and Philosophies

A world view is the composite set of presuppositions, beliefs, and values a person possesses that shape how he or she sees reality and determines how he or she will act. The term “world view” can refer to the collective set of fundamental convictions people hold and on which they base their actions ... A set of assumptions and perspectives that are true, partly true or completely false, which we hold consistently or inconsistently, consciously or unconsciously, through which we make sense of our lives and our world. This is the case for individuals and collectively for a society or culture, as well. For instance, liberalism, as an ideology, has a creedal character and is rooted in a fundamentally secular worldview. To begin with, liberalism starts with a basic faith in human autonomy extending well beyond a mere attachment to personal freedom. Autonomy means to be self-directed, to govern oneself in accordance with a law which one has chosen for oneself. Each of the ideologies attaches this autonomy to some manifestation of humanity, be it the individual or some community such as the state or nation. Liberalism assigns this autonomy to the individual, who is deemed to be the centre of the cosmos.

Relativism

Relativism is the philosophical position that all points of view are equally valid and that all truth is relative to the individual. This means that all moral positions, all religious systems, all art forms, all political movements, etc... are truth that are relative to the individual. Under the umbrella of relativism whole groups of perspectives are categorized. In obvious terms, some are: Cognitive relativism which states that no system of truth is more valid than another one and that there is no objective standard of truth. Moral and ethical relativism states that all morals are relative to the social group within which they are constructed. Situational relativism states that ethics (what is right and wrong) are dependant upon the situation and the individuals involved. These are just a few of the areas where the philosophy of relativism has infiltrated.

Unfortunately, the philosophy of relativism is pervasive in our culture today. With the rejection of God, and Christianity in particular, absolute truth is being abandoned. Our pluralistic society wants to avoid the idea that there really is a right and wrong. This is evidenced in our deteriorating judicial system that has more and more trouble punishing criminals, in our entertainment media which continues to push the envelope of morality and decency, in our educational systems which teach evolution and “social tolerance.” In addition, the plague of moral relativism encourages everyone to accept homosexuality, promiscuity, pornography, and a host of other sins that were once considered wrong. They are now tolerated, even accepted and sometimes promoted in our society. It is becoming so pervasive that if someone speaks out against moral relativism and its “anything goes” philosophy, they are labeled as an intolerant bigot, or worse. Of course this is incredibly hypocritical of those who profess that all points of view are true, yet reject those who profess absolutes in morality. It seems that what is really meant by the moral relativist is that all points of view are true except for the views that teach moral absolutes, or an absolute God, or absolute right and wrong.

Some typical expressions that reveal an underlying presupposition of relativism are comments such as, “That is your truth, not mine” or, “It is true for you, but not for me,”

and “There are no absolute truths.” Of course, these statements are illogical, in fact, they are self refuting.

If all truth is relative, then the statement, “All truth is relative,” would be absolutely true. If it is absolutely true, then not all things are relative and the statement is false. The statement, “There are no absolute truths,” is an absolute statement which is supposed to be true. Therefore it is an absolute truth which would make the statement false. If there are no absolute truths, then we cannot believe in anything at all, including the statement that there are no absolute truths, therefore nothing could be true, including relativism. As for the statement, “What is true for you is not true for me,” then one must ask, if what is true for me is that relativism is false, then is it true that relativism is false? If the answer is no, then the statement about what is true for you may not be true for me becomes a false statement. If the answer is yes, then relativism is false. Relativism can be refuted over and over using this simple logic, as relativism is in reality a very foolish philosophy, almost childlike in its idiocy.

Society cannot flourish nor survive in an environment where everyone does what is right in their own eyes, where the situation determines actions and if the situation changes, lying or cheating is acceptable. Without a common foundation of truth and absolutes, our culture will become weak and fragmented.

It should be pointed out that cultural differences and customs (such as driving on the left side of the road in the UK, as opposed to driving on the right in the US) are not relativism. These customs to which a “right and wrong” are attached are not universal, and are purely societal or culture based. Child rearing principles vary in different societies as do burial and wedding ceremonies. These things are agreed upon within the society and have no bearing upon humanity as a whole, and so in this sense relativism can be valid, but only in this sense.

If all moral views are equally valid, then do we have the right to punish anyone? Can we ever say that something is wrong? In order to say that something is wrong we must first have a standard by which we weigh right and wrong in order to make a judgment. If that standard of right and wrong is based on relativism, then it is not a standard at all. In relativism, standards of right and wrong are derived from social norms. Since society changes, the norms would change and so would right and wrong. If right and wrong change, then how can anyone be rightly judged for something he did wrong if that wrong might become right in the future?

Many relativists say that it is not fair to apply logical analysis to relativistic principles. But why not? If a relativist were to convince me that logic is not necessary in examining relativism, he would have to convince me using logic, which would be self defeating. If a relativist uses relativism, the subjective view of his own opinions, to validate his position, he is using circular reasoning; namely, he is using relativism to establish relativism. So either way, he has lost the argument. Relativists say that it is not fair to use logic to analyze relativism because quite simply, logic destroys relativism. If relativism is true and all points of view are true, then is the point of view that relativism is false a true point of view? The truth does not, nor has it ever contradicted itself.

Darwinism (Evolution)

Many books on evolution, including the prestigious National Academy of Science’s book *Teaching about Evolution and the Nature of Science*, contrast religious opinions with so called scientific evolutionist facts. It is important to realize that this is a misleading

contrast. Creationists often appeal to the facts of science to support their view, and evolutionists often appeal to philosophical assumptions from outside science. While creationists are often criticized for starting with a bias, evolutionists also start with a bias, as few of them will admit. The debate between creation and evolution is a dispute between two worldviews, with incompatible assumptions.

It is wrong to believe that facts will speak for themselves; they are always interpreted according to a framework. The framework behind the evolutionists' interpretation is naturalism; it is assumed that things made themselves, that no divine intervention has happened, and that God has not revealed to us knowledge about the past. Evolution is a deduction from this assumption, and it is essentially the idea that things made themselves. It includes these unproven ideas: That nothing gave rise to something, non-living matter gave rise to life, single-celled organisms gave rise to many-celled organisms, invertebrates gave rise to vertebrates, ape-like creatures gave rise to man, non-intelligent and amoral matter gave rise to intelligence and morality, and that man's yearnings gave rise to religion.

Evolution is a theory that is accepted among scientists, not because it can be proven by logical, coherent, evidence, but because the only alternative is a special creation, which in their minds is simply too incredible.¹⁴⁵ So it's not a question of biased religious creationists versus objective scientific evolutionists; rather, it is the biases of the Christian religion versus the biases of the religion of secular humanism. Therefore it is not really a question of who is biased, but which bias is the correct bias and which bias the scientific evidence supports.

Many evolutionists like to chide creationists not because of the facts, but because creationists refuse to play by the current rules of the game that exclude a supernatural Creator and it is no accident that the leaders of evolutionary thought are ardently opposed to the notion of the Christian God as revealed in the Bible.¹⁴⁶ Stephen Jay Gould and others have shown that Darwin's purpose was to destroy the idea of a divine designer.¹⁴⁷ Many atheists have claimed to be atheists precisely because of evolution, and many people do not realize that the teaching of evolution propagates an anti-Biblical religion. Some think that the two are compatible; others attempt to reconcile evolution with theology by the creation of theistic evolution. Yet the first two tenets of the *Humanist Manifesto II* (1973), signed by many prominent evolutionists, are:

1. Religious humanists regard the universe as self-existing and not created.
2. Humanism believes that man is part of nature and has emerged as a result of a continuous process.

This is exactly what evolution teaches. Many humanist leaders are quite open about using the public schools to proselytize their faith. This might surprise some who think the schools are supposed to be free of religious indoctrination, but this is not the case as the following quote shows: "I am convinced that the battle for humankind's future must be waged and won in the public school classroom by teachers, who correctly perceive their role as the proselytizers of a new faith;... These teachers must embody the same

¹⁴⁵ D.M.S. Watson, Adaptation, *Nature* 124:233, 1929.

¹⁴⁶ D. Batten, [A Who's Who of evolutionists](#), *Creation Ex Nihilo* 20(1):32, December 1997–February 1998; *How Religiously Neutral Are the Anti-Creationist Organisations?* cited 6 June 2006.

¹⁴⁷ C. Wieland, [Darwin's Real Message: Have You Missed It?](#) *Creation Ex Nihilo* 14(4):16–19, September–November 1992.

selfless dedication as the most rabid fundamentalist preachers, for they will be ministers of another sort, utilizing a classroom instead of pulpit to convey humanist values in whatever subject they teach, regardless of the educational level, preschool, day care, or large state university. The classroom must and will become an arena of conflict between the old and the new, the rotting corpse of Christianity, and the new faith of humanism.”¹⁴⁸

It also might surprise many people to find out that many church leaders either do not know what their own Bibles (or other holy books) teach on the subject, or quite simply, do not believe what they teach on the subject. The Bible plainly teaches that God created all things in six consecutive normal days, and that this creation was recent when compared to the evolutionary time frame. God made things to reproduce “after their kind,” and that death and suffering resulted from Adam’s sin. This is one reason why many Christians regard evolution as incompatible with Christianity. Also Biblical Christians also believe that there was no death until sin entered the world (after all that is what is clearly taught in the Bible), thus there would be no fossils prior to Adam, as Adam’s sin resulted in sin’s entrance into the world, and death followed sin.

Many historians, of many different religious persuasions including atheists, have shown that modern science started to flourish only in largely Christian Europe. For example, Dr. Stanley Jaki has documented how the scientific method was stillborn in all cultures apart from the Judeo-Christian culture of Europe.¹⁴⁹ These historians point out that the basis of modern science depends on the assumption that the universe was made by a rational Creator. But if there is no Creator, why should there be any order at all? So, not only is a strong Christian belief not an obstacle to science, such beliefs were the foundations of science. In-fact, most branches of modern science were founded by Christians who believed in the Biblical account of creation. That list includes:¹⁵⁰

Physics: Newton, Faraday, Maxwell, Kelvin

Chemistry: Boyle, Dalton, Ramsay

Biology: Ray, Linnaeus, Mendel, Pasteur, Virchow, Agassiz

Geology: Steno, Woodward, Brewster, Buckland Cuvier

Astronomy: Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Herschel, Maunder

Mathematics: Pascal, Leibnitz, Euler

Today, many evolutionists have abandoned the only rational justification for science. But Christians can still claim to have such a justification. In-fact the list of scientists living and dead were and are believers in creation and their accomplishments is quite impressive to say the least.¹⁵¹ And though it is true that the majority of scientists still hold to the hypothesis of evolution, truth is not decided by a majority vote.

The great Christian apologist C.S. Lewis pointed out that even man’s ability to reason would be called into question if atheistic evolution were true.¹⁵² For if life was accidental, and evolution was accidental then man’s own thought process would be accidental as well.

¹⁴⁸ J. Dunphy, A Religion for a New Age, *The Humanist*, Jan.–Feb. 1983, 23, 26, cited by Wendell R. Bird, *Origin of the Species Revisited*, vol. 2, p. 257.

¹⁴⁹ S. Jaki, *Science and Creation* (Edinburgh and London: Scottish Academic Press, 1974).

¹⁵⁰ Ann Lamont, 21 Great Scientists Who Believed the Bible (Australia: Creation Science Foundation, 1995), p. 120–131

¹⁵¹ H.M. Morris, *Men of Science Men of God* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 1982).

¹⁵² C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), p. 52–53.

Science does have its limits. Normal (operational) science deals only with repeatable, observable processes in the present. This has indeed been very successful in understanding the world, and has led to many improvements in the quality of life. In contrast, evolution is a speculation about the unobservable and unrepeatable past. Therefore it is wrong to claim (as some evolutionists do) that denying evolution is rejecting the type of science that put men on the moon.

In dealing with the past, “origins science” can enable us to make educated guesses about origins. It uses the principles of causality (everything that has a beginning has a cause), and analogy (we observe that intelligence is needed to generate complex coded information in the present, so we can assume the same for the past). But the only way we can be really sure about the past is if we have a reliable eyewitness account.

Evolutionists claim there is no such account, so their ideas are derived from assumptions about the past. Christians however believe that Genesis is an eyewitness account of the origin of the universe and all life. We also believe that there is good evidence for this claim, and therefore reject the claim that faith is a blind leap.¹⁵³

Charles Darwin was worried that the fossil record did not show what his hypothesis predicted,¹⁵⁴ and it is no less of a worry for evolutionists today.¹⁵⁵ Most evolutionists avoid discussing the vast gulf between non-living matter and the first living cell, single-celled and multi-celled creatures, as well as invertebrates, and vertebrates. The gaps between these groups (if they could be found) should be enough to show that molecules to man evolution is a fact. There are many examples of different organisms appearing abruptly and fully formed in the fossil record. For example, the first bats, pterosaurs, and birds were fully fledged flyers.

In nature, a well preserved fossil generally requires rapid burial (so scavengers do not obliterate the carcass), and cementing agents to harden the fossil quickly. Only catastrophic conditions can explain most fossils (for example: a global flood and its aftermath).

¹⁵³ Some supporting information can be found in the following works, among others: H.M. Morris with H.M. Morris III, *Many Infallible Proofs* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 1996); G.L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982); G.H. Clark, *God's Hammer: The Bible and Its Critics* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 2nd ed. 1987); P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1989), chapter 18; N.L. Geisler and R.M. Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1990); N.L. Geisler and T. R. Howe, *When Critics Ask* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992); N.L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1986); H. Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976); J. McDowell, *More Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, revised ed. 1981); John W. Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (Guildford, Surrey, UK: Eagle, 3rd ed. 1993).

¹⁵⁴ Charles R. Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 6th edition, 1872 (London: John Murray, 1902), p. 413

¹⁵⁵ C. Patterson, letter to Luther D. Sunderland, 10 April 1979, as published in *Darwin's Enigma* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 4th ed. 1988), p. 89. Patterson later tried to backtrack somewhat from this clear statement, apparently alarmed that creationists would utilize this truth. See also: S.J. Gould, in *Evolution Now: A Century After Darwin*, ed. John Maynard Smith, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1982), p. 140. *Teaching about Evolution* pages 56–57 publishes a complaint by Gould about creationists quoting him about the rarity of transitional forms. He accuses creationists of representing him as denying evolution itself. This complaint is unjustified. Creationists make it very clear that he is a staunch evolutionist the whole point is that he is a ‘hostile witness.’ And also: S.J. Gould, The Ediacaran Experiment, *Natural History* 93(2):14–23, Feb. 1984.

Teaching about Evolution and the Nature of Science says on page 19:

According to recent evidence, based on the sequencing of DNA in a part of human cells known as mitochondria, it has been proposed that a small population of modern humans evolved in Africa about 150,000 years ago and spread throughout the world, replacing archaic populations of *Homo Sapiens*.

This evidence deals with comparing the DNA from mitochondria. This DNA is inherited only through the mother's line. The similarities indicate that all people on earth are descended from a single human female. Even evolutionists have called her "Mitochondrial Eve."

While this is consistent with the Biblical account, we should note that it is not proof. Evolutionists contend that "Mitochondrial Eve" was one of a number of women living. The mitochondrial line of the others would have died out if there were only males in any generation of descendants. Evolutionists believed that they had clear proof against the Biblical account, because "Mitochondrial Eve" supposedly lived 150,000 to 200,000 years ago. However, recent evidence shows that mitochondrial DNA mutates far faster than previously thought.¹⁵⁶ This new evidence indicates that "Mitochondrial Eve" would have lived only 6,000 to 6,500 years ago.¹⁵⁷ Of course this is perfectly consistent with the Biblically indicated age of Eve, but an enigma for evolutionists.

Interestingly enough, there is a parallel account with males; evidence from the Y-chromosome is consistent with all people being descended from a single man.¹⁵⁸

A Note on Theistic Evolution

It is a sad and unfortunate fact that some Christians have bought into the lie of evolution. In many cases it was an instance where their public school teacher or college professor told them that evolution was a proven, scientific fact that was beyond debate. And therefore they, being rational people were forced to reconcile their theology with these so called "facts." Thus theistic evolution was born.

However, theistic evolution is not a viable alternative for the Christian who wishes to be faithful to the Lord. It goes against the clear teachings of the Bible and makes God and man something that they are not, nor never were.

Most adherents to theistic evolution argue that the Hebrew word for day is the word "Yom", which literally means a period of time, not a specific 24 hour day. Therefore the 6 days of creation (or 6 Yom's) could be any period of time, thus allowing the millions and billions of years needed for evolution. However they miss that God clarifies the specific time of the Yom with the phrase, "and the evening and morning," which are found throughout the Genesis chapter one creation account. The evening and morning were the first Yom (period of time), the evening and morning were the second Yom (period of time), the evening and morning were the third Yom (period of time), etc... Thus the Bible teaches a 24 hour day, 6 day creation time frame. To state otherwise is to call the Bible erroneous or worse, to call God a liar.

¹⁵⁶ T.J. Parsons et al., A High Observed Substitution Rate in the Human Mitochondrial DNA Control Region, *Nature Genetics* 15:363–368, 1997.

¹⁵⁷ L. Loewe and S. Scherer, Mitochondrial Eve: The Plot Thickens, *Trends in Ecology and Evolution* 12(11):422–423, 1997; A. Gibbons, Calibrating the Mitochondrial Clock, *Science* 279(5347):28–29, 1998.

¹⁵⁸ R.L. Dorit, Hiroshi Akashi, and W. Gilbert, Absence of Polymorphism at the ZFY Locus on the Human Y-Chromosome, *Science* 268(5214):1183–85, 26 May 1995; perspective in the same issue by S. Pääbo, The Y-Chromosome and the Origin of All of Us (Men), p. 1141–1142.

One must also realize that the Genesis account tells the reader that God created man (not an organism that would evolve into man), and that He created man in His own image and after His likeness. This image and likeness of God has more to do with the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual, than it does with the physical for God is a Spirit, not flesh and blood. So if man was a single celled organism, an amoeba, or a glob of who knows what, he must have had his full mental capacity, his full emotional capacity, and his full spiritual capacity at that time. Again to say differently is to say that the Bible is wrong, or that God has lied to man concerning man's creation.

The one who professes Christ yet wishes to believe in theistic evolution must ask themselves, "Is evolution true?" For only when evolution is proved to be absolutely true does man need to concern himself with "harmonizing" evolution with theism. This level of proof has not yet been achieved, and never will be. Nor have attempts to "harmonize" evolution with theism met with acceptance by leading scientists, educators, or the courts. Many liberal theologians suggest that God set up the universe in the beginning and now works through the laws of nature. This silly way of trying to have one's cake and eat it too is indistinguishable from atheism. No intellectually, honest Christian evolutionist position exists.

Theistic evolution is clearly not the solution to quieting the creation – evolution controversy for many reasons. One is because leading educators, scientists, and major science organizations are all opposed to any and all worldviews that involve God, and this view now actually faces much more opposition than creationism. The solution is not to compromise the clear teachings of the Bible, nor is it to adopt a position that does justice to neither belief system.

Secular Humanism

Many people view Secular Humanism as mere fiction, a construct of the "religious right."¹⁵⁹ It is asserted that secular humanism is the new "bogeyman" for religious conservatives, a phantom suspected around every corner, in every classroom, and over every courtroom. But a denial of the reality of secular humanism is an attitude founded more in fantasy than in facts.

To find the facts, one need not look all that far. Humanists are quite open about their belief system and their goals. Books such as the *Humanist Manifestos I & II* and publications like *Free Inquiry* and *The Humanist* openly proclaim the humanist world view and agenda. The secular humanist worldview is described comprehensively in David A. Noebel's 912 page textbook, *Understanding the Times: The Religious Worldviews of Our Day and the Search for Truth*.¹⁶⁰ Even a precursory examination of the evidence makes it clear that secular humanism is a real worldview adhered to and propagated by many intellectuals and leaders in the 20th century. What is also evident, and more startling, is that secular humanism is a religion, and the only worldview granted privileged access to our government-sponsored public schools. The "wall of separation" between church and state has effectively established secular humanism as the official religion of America's public schools.

How did America move from its founding from Judeo-Christian principles to the post-Christian era we see today? In late nineteenth-century England, several small groups of

¹⁵⁹ See, for example, David Bollier, "The Witch Hunt Against 'Secular Humanism,'" in *The Humanist* (September/October 1984), 11-19.

¹⁶⁰ David A. Noebel, *Understanding the Times: The Religious Worldviews of Our Day and the Search for Truth* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1991).

scientist and scholars organized under the leadership of Thomas H. Huxley to overthrow the cultural dominance of Christianity. Their goal was to secularize society, replacing the Christian worldview with scientific naturalism. Though secularists, they understood very well that they were replacing one religion with another, for they described their goal as the establishment of the “church scientific.” Huxley even referred to his scientific lectures as “lay sermons.”¹⁶¹

As this cultural shift gained momentum in England, it was exported to America. During the same time, the American educational establishment was gradually turning its back on Christianity,¹⁶² and the left wing, Unitarian church began preaching secularism in the form of humanist sermons and humanist religion.¹⁶³ The tide of anti-Christian sentiment has swelled in recent times. The secularist camp now represents the fastest growing community of “moral conviction” in America.¹⁶⁴ Today, a state sponsored and defended secular perspective is offered as “neutral.” Contained in this secular perspective are all the basic elements of the secular humanist worldview. Indeed, the practices negated by secular humanism are negated in our public schools. For example, in contrast to traditional religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and even Islam, secular humanists do not pray. The negation of prayer is the default practice of the common schools of our day. This is far from neutral; it is practical atheism. How could practical atheism ever be neutral?

The nineteenth century Catholic leaders found it necessary to establish their own private schools, lest their children be instructed in non-neutral, practical atheism. In the same way, many Christians today find it imperative to establish private schools or to initiate home – schooling in order to avoid the indoctrination of their children in a non-neutral, humanistic theology that is promoted and practiced in public schools. Tragically, this humanism has even influenced many modern mainline Christian churches. One of the primary differences between traditional/orthodox wings of religious traditions and liberal/progressive wings is that “liberal religious traditions share more in common culturally with one another and with the growing secularist population than they do with those orthodox believers in their own religious heritage.”¹⁶⁵

As secularism gradually has gained great influence over American culture,¹⁶⁶ the champions of secular humanism have almost unanimously described themselves as promoters of a new religion, a religion more highly evolved than “the rotting corpse of Christianity.”¹⁶⁷

If “religion” is defined narrowly, as that which posits a transcendent deity, then secular humanism is not a religion. But if “religion” is defined in a way that includes non-

¹⁶¹ Nancy R. Pearcey and Charles B. Thaxton, *The Soul of Science: Christian Faith and Natural Philosophy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 19.

¹⁶² See George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹⁶³ *Humanist Sermons*, Curtis W. Reese, ed. (Chicago: Open Court, 1927); *Humanist Religion*, Curtis W. Reese (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1931).

¹⁶⁴ James Davison Hunter, "Religious Freedom and the Challenge of Modern Pluralism," in *Articles of Faith, Articles of Peace: The Religious Liberty Clauses and the American Public Philosophy*, James Davison Hunter and Os Guinness, eds. (Washington, D.C.: The Bookings Institution, 1990), 57.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ See James C. Dobson and Gary L. Bauer, *Children at Risk: The Battle for the Hearts and Minds of Our Kids* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1990), 22

¹⁶⁷ John H. Dunphy, "Public Education," *The Humanist* (January/February 1983), 26.

theistic worldviews like Buddhism or Confucianism, then it certainly applies to secular humanism. Defining religion is no easy task. To succeed, one must provide a definition that properly includes well-known religious traditions, and yet excludes those social realities which are not authentically religious (such as over-zealous sports fans, or political activists). The latter may ape religion in fervency, thus functioning in a quasi-religious form; nevertheless, they fail to develop in terms of full fledged worldviews. There are two basic approaches to defining “religion”: the substantive approach, which focuses on the content of the belief system, and the functional approach, which focuses on what the belief system does for the individual or community. The substantive model generally limits religion to the range of traditional theisms; Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and so on. The functional model, in contrast, is more inclusive. By defining religion according to its social function, the functional model treats religion largely as synonymous with such terms as cultural system, belief system, meaning system, moral order, ideology, world view, and cosmology. The fatal flaw of most substantive definitions is their insistence that a belief in the divine is essential to religion. Of course, such approaches miscarry in that they fail to encompass the realities of non-theistic religions such as Confucianism. Thus, even though it is appropriate to employ a substantive definition of religion, it is clear that we must avoid a default inclusion of the divine.

One promising proposal defines “religion” as a “set of beliefs, actions, and emotions, both personal and corporate, organized around the concept of an ultimate reality. This reality may be understood as a unity or a plurality, personal or non-personal, divine or not, and so forth, differing from religion to religion.”¹⁶⁸ Such a definition adequately encompasses both theistic and non-theistic worldview traditions. It also avoids inclusion of non-religious social realities such as sports team advocacy and political parties, neither of which properly makes reference to an ultimate reality. Of course, such a definition clearly encompasses secular humanism.

As America has moved toward secularism, her courts have gradually accepted less restrictive understandings of religion. The U.S. Supreme Court has progressed from a substantive understanding toward a functional understanding.¹⁶⁹ In the 19th century, the Supreme Court understood “religion” in terms of traditional religions. In *Davis v. Beason* (1890), for example, the Court ruled against the teaching and practice of polygamy (declaring both to be criminal actions), on the basis of “the general consent of the Christian world in modern time.”¹⁷⁰

In the 20th century, a broader understanding of religion, one that would include non-Christian and non-theistic religions has emerged.¹⁷¹ The Supreme Court’s understanding

¹⁶⁸ Michael Peterson, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, and David Basinger, *Reason and Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 4. Italics removed from the original.

¹⁶⁹ John W. Whitehead and John B. Conlan, “The Establishment of the Religion of Secular Humanism and Its First Amendment Implications,” in *Texas Tech Law Review* 10, no. 1 (1978): 1-66; and John W. Whitehead, *The Second American Revolution* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1982), chapter 9.

¹⁷⁰ *Davis v. Beason*, 133 U.S. 333, 343 (1890). See also: *Church of the Holy Trinity v. United States*, 143 U.S. 457, 471 (1892). Where Justice David Brewer ruled that America is a Christian nation.

¹⁷¹ *United States v. Kauten*, 133F. 2nd 703, 708 (2d Cir. 1943). See also *United States v. Seeger*, 380 U.S. 163 (1965), where the court adopted Paul Tillich’s understanding of religion to justify its use of the functional definition of religion. See also *Fellowship of Humanity v. County of Alameda*, 153 Cal. App. 2nd. 673. And also *Torcaso v. Watkins*, 367 U.S. 488, 495, fn. 11 (1961).

of religion has broadened enough to include non-theistic religions like Buddhism and secular humanism. Unfortunately, the Court has not been consistent in applying this understanding to its present interpretation of the First Amendment. If the no-establishment clause of the First Amendment really means that there should be a “wall of separation” between church and state, why are only theistic religions disestablished? If secular humanism is a religion, something the U.S. Supreme Court has claimed, and something countless humanists proclaim, why is it allowed access to our public schools when there is to be no established religion? Secular humanism is a real worldview, and it is a real religion. It has thrived in our secularized culture. Secular humanism is neither simple science nor neutral.

As Christians, our argument with secular humanism centers on its denial of the supernatural, especially as that precludes any idea of God. Unlike the quasi-religious secular movements mentioned above, secular humanism is a well organized movement with unified beliefs, goals and presuppositions. In 1933 secular humanists, drawn together by like beliefs and ideas, drafted a manifesto which became the creed of secular humanism. It was called the Humanist Manifesto I, and it dealt with 15 major themes, or convictions of secular humanism. It asserted that the universe was self-existing and not created, that man is a result of a continuous natural evolutionary process; that mind is a projection of body and nothing more; that man is molded mostly by his culture; that there is no supernatural; that man has outgrown religion and any idea of God; that man’s goal is the development of his own personality, which ceases to exist at death; that man will continue to develop to the point where he will look within himself and to the natural world for the solution to all of his problems; that all institutions and/or religions that in some way impede this “human development” must be changed; that socialism is the ideal form of economics; and that all of mankind deserves to share in the fruits from following the above tenets.¹⁷²

World War II and Adolph Hitler rudely contradicted the unmitigated optimism of the secular humanists who signed the 1933 Manifesto. Not only had World War I failed to rout evil, but evil had reared its ugly head much more powerfully through the Nazi atrocities of World War II, having rejected the supernatural and a higher judge in favor of the basic goodness and perfectibility of man, the secular humanists turned toward modifying their previous statements.

As in 1933, humanists still believed that traditional theism, especially faith in the Christian God, who hears and answers prayers, who loves and cares for persons, was an unproved and outdated faith. The thrust of the new Manifesto, published in 1973, is much more aggressive than that of the first. No longer content to let basically good mankind evolve naturally towards his zenith, the secular humanists now have a consuming drive to help accomplish that transformation as quickly as possible. A study of Manifesto II reveals that its 17 propositions can be categorized into six groups and we will present them within those groupings of Religion, Philosophy, Mankind, Society, One-World Government, and Science.

Religion is the topic of the first two resolutions. Quoted below is a portion of the first resolution and the (shorter) second resolution.

“First: We believe, that traditional dogmatic or authoritarian religions that place revelation, God, ritual, or creed above human needs and experience do a disservice to the

¹⁷² Paul Kurtz, ed., *Humanist Manifesto I and II*, Buffalo, NY Prometheus Books, 1973, p. 3).

human species. Any account of nature should pass the tests of scientific evidence; in our judgment, the dogmas and myths of traditional religions do not do so. Even at this late date in human history, certain elementary facts based upon the critical use of scientific reason have to be restated. We find insufficient evidence for belief in the existence of a supernatural; it is either meaningless or irrelevant to the question of the survival and fulfillment of the human race. As non-theists, we begin with humans not God, nature not deity. Nature may indeed be broader and deeper than we now know; any new discoveries, however, will but enlarge our knowledge of the natural... But we can discover no divine purpose or providence for the human species. While there is much that we do not know, humans are responsible for what we are or will become. No deity will save us; we must save ourselves.”

“Second: Promises of immortal salvation or fear of eternal damnation are both illusory and harmful. They distract humans from present concerns, from self-actualization, and from rectifying social injustices. Modern science discredits such historic concepts as the "ghost in the machine" and the "separable soul." Rather, science affirms that the human species is an emergence from natural evolutionary forces. As far as we know, the total personality is a function of the biological organism transacting in a social and cultural context. There is no credible evidence that life survives the death of the body. We continue to exist in our progeny and in the way that our lives have influenced others in our culture.”

The world view of humanism, as expressed by these first two tenets, is diametrically opposed to Christianity. While the humanists start and end with man, the Bible starts and ends with God. It was God who was in the beginning (Genesis 1:1, John 1:1-3), not impersonal, self-creating nature. The Bible consistently teaches that it is upon the infinite God that this finite world depends for its existence. For primordial, non-intelligent mass to produce human intelligence assumes, contrary to reason, that an effect is greater than its cause. To account for that human intelligence by a higher intelligence in whose image the human was made, and who sustains the very life of the human and his world, is reasonable, and Biblical. When the Apostle Paul argued with the Greek philosophers of his day, he testified about this sustaining God (Acts 17:24-28).

For the humanists to dismiss all religions philosophy and all evidence in support of the existence of God in two simple propositions does not settle the matter of God’s existence. As Christians we believe that our reasoning ability was given to us by God, in whose image we were created, and that responsible use of our reasoning ability to understand the world around us can lead us to sound evidence for the existence of God.

When Manifesto II says that it can find no design or purpose or providence for the human species, it devaluates man to a level below that on which God places him, as His highest creation. The humanist pretend to esteem the human being above all else; in reality, as Manifesto II shows, the humanist takes away all worth from mankind. Unless our worth is rooted and grounded in something objective and outside ourselves, we are of value only to ourselves, and can never rise above the impermanence of our own short lives. The God of Christianity is outside our finite and transitory universe and His love for us gives us a value which transcends not only ourselves but our finite universe as well. Humanist Manifesto II states that we must save ourselves. While we believe this statement was made somewhat tongue-in-cheek, since humanists do not believe man needs saving from anything, there is still a need to comment on the statement. Christians

believe it is not possible for an individual to save himself, the Bible definition of salvation leads us to believe that it is an operation undertaken by God, because the individual man cannot help himself. The spiritual condition of man is such that he is past the point of saving himself. He needs outside intervention.

If there is a God, and if man really is in the state of decay in which he finds himself because of his sin against God, then he must turn to God for his salvation. To use an illustration, if one man hits another, he cannot rectify the situation by saying, "The man I hit is not angry with me anymore because I forgave myself." No, the man who was hit was the one offended, and he is the only one who can extend forgiveness to his attacker. That is the Biblical picture of sin and salvation. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8-10). Contrary to humanist declarations, Christianity gives true worth and dignity to man and secular humanism makes all human dignity subjective and self-centered.

Secular humanism rejects the idea of life after death, dogmatically asserting that it is impossible to prove. On the contrary, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is a fact of history, verifiable by standard historical tests. His resurrection becomes the seal and the hope of every Christian. The evidence points unmistakably to the fact that on the third day Jesus rose. This was the conclusion to which a former Chief Justice of England, Lord Darling, came to. At a private dinner party the talk turned to the truth of Christianity, and particularly to the resurrection. He said, "We, as Christians, are asked to take a very great deal on trust; the teachings, for example, and the miracles of Jesus. If we had to take all on trust, I for one, should be skeptical. The crux of the problem of whether Jesus was, or was not, what He proclaimed Himself to be, must surely depend upon the truth or otherwise of the resurrection. On that greatest point we are not merely asked to have faith. In its favor as living truth there exists such an overwhelming evidence, positive and negative, factual and circumstantial, that no intelligent jury in the world could fail to bring in a verdict that the resurrection story is true."¹⁷³

Humanists are specifically concerned with ethics first and then with reason. Again this comes from the secular humanists' presupposition of the autonomy and self-sufficiency of man.

The humanists are right to point out that their ethics (morals) are situational. Since they are based in and come forth from the individual, they are necessarily self-centered and subjective. They have no objective basis or root. On the surface, this appears to promote one's idea of the importance and power of man.

However, upon closer examination, we find flaws with this view. If moral values are determined from human experience, there is no objective basis for calling anything right or wrong. There is no such thing as intrinsic good or intrinsic evil. Whether something is good or not depends on the context of the individual or the group of like-minded individuals within society.¹⁷⁴ On this basis it would be impossible to condemn the society of Nazi-Germany for judging the moral value of Jewish life as worthless. Nor could we condemn Islamic terrorists for their actions.

¹⁷³ Michael Green, *Man Alive*, (Downers Grove, IL. InterVarsity Press, 1968) 53-54.

¹⁷⁴ This is discussed more on the section dealing with Relativism above.

Because humanism does not offer any absolute value system, mankind has no absolute system of right and wrong. In such an instance, why should I believe and accept the value system of the group (society) of men who drafted and signed Manifesto II? What compelling reason can they give us for accepting their dogmatic ethical assertion that “commercialization, bureaucratization, and dehumanization” are “debasement?” What happens if someone believes that it is good to promote those things?

Christianity asserts that there is absolute good and absolute evil. Our moral values are patterned after the nature and attributes of our creator, God. He is the absolute standard by which everything else is judged. Hitler’s Germany was wrong because our God has declared that all human life is sacred and of equal value, whether it is the human life of a Jew, a German, an unborn child, or a senile old man who is crippled and bedridden.

A persistent erosion of man’s view of himself is occurring. The fact that man has made so many significant scientific discoveries points strongly to the significance of man, yet the content of these same scientific discoveries underscores his insignificance. Man finds himself dwarfed bodily by the vast stretches of space and belittled temporally by the long reaches of time. Humanists are caught in a strange dilemma. If they affirm the greatness of man, it is only at the expense of ignoring his aberrations. If they regard human aberrations seriously, they have to escape the dilemma raised, either by blaming the situation on God (and how often those most strongly affirming the nonexistence of God have a strong propensity to question His goodness), or by reducing man to the point of insignificance where his aberrations are no longer a problem. A supreme characteristic of men today is the high degree of dissatisfaction with their own views of themselves. If man continues to recognize no fundamental difference in kind between himself and the world of animals and machines, then his view of himself in terms of his moral dilemma or his metaphysical being must alter irretrievably.

As Christians we believe that God is the source of our ethical system. Because He commands us to have respect and love for others, it is therefore wrong to engage in exploitive and denigrating forms of behavior. A Christian’s ethics should follow from God’s character, expressed to man. The Bible strongly disagrees with certain sexual behaviors; it strongly disagrees with murder, even if such murder is disguised with the empty word “abortion.” In Christianity lying, stealing, and all sorts of abuse (physical, mental, emotional) are wrong because God says they are wrong, and because man is created in God’s image. If man comes from the same common ancestor as animals then why not kill one another as animals do? Why not have the sexual ethics of dogs, why not set aside the weak and disabled, after all they are not fit to survive. The humanist, though influenced by evolution would argue that man has evolved to the point where he had developed a higher moral standard, and thus is capable of pity and compassion, but does pity and compassion progress the human condition in its drive for perfection, or does it slow it down and hamper it?

Articles seven through eleven of Humanist Manifesto II deal with the secular humanist view of and hope for society; these articles touch on politics, sociology, and economics. ”Seventh: To enhance freedom and dignity the individual must experience a full range of civil liberties in all societies. This includes freedom of speech and the press, political democracy~ the legal right of opposition to governmental policies, fair judicial process, religious liberty, freedom of association, and artistic, scientific, and cultural freedom. It also includes a recognition of an individual's right to die with dignity, euthanasia, and the

right to suicide. We oppose the increasing invasion of privacy, by whatever means, in both totalitarian and democratic societies. We would safeguard, extend, and implement the principles of human freedom evolved from the Magna Charta to the Bill of Rights, the Rights of Man, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Eighth: We are committed to an open and democratic society. We must extend participatory democracy in its true sense to the economy, the school, the family, the workplace, and voluntary associations. Decision-making must be decentralized to include widespread involvement of people at all levels social, political, and economic. All persons should have a voice in developing the values and goals that determine their lives. Institutions should be responsive to expressed desires and needs. The conditions of work, education, devotion, and play should be humanized. Alienating forces should be modified or eradicated and bureaucratic structures should be held to a minimum. People are more important than decalogues, rules, proscriptions, or regulations.

Ninth: The separation of church and state and the separation of ideology and state are imperatives. The state should encourage maximum freedom for different moral, political, religious, and social values in society. It should not favor any particular religious bodies through the use of public monies, nor espouse a single ideology and function thereby as an instrument of propaganda or oppression, particularly against dissenters.

Tenth: Human societies should evaluate economic systems not by rhetoric or ideology, but by whether or not they increase economic well-being for all individuals and groups, minimize poverty and hardship, increase the sum of human satisfaction, and enhance the quality of life. Hence the door is open to alternative economic systems. We need to democratize the economy and judge it by its responsiveness to human needs, testing results in terms of the common good.

Eleventh: The principle of moral equality must be furthered through elimination of all discrimination based upon race, religion, sex, age, or national origin. This means equality of opportunity and recognition of talent and merit. Individuals should be encouraged to contribute to their own betterment. If unable, then society should provide means to satisfy their basic economic, health, and cultural needs, including, wherever resources make possible, a minimum guaranteed annual income. We are concerned for the welfare of the aged, the infirm, the disadvantaged, and also for the outcasts-the mentally retarded, abandoned or abused children, the handicapped, prisoners, and addicts-for all who are neglected or ignored by society. Practicing humanists should make it their vocation to humanize personal relations....”

Rather than picking these articles apart piece by piece, we will offer some general observations in criticism. Our two major criticisms go back to two of the most basic presuppositions of secular humanism: relative morals and the basic goodness of mankind. Because the secular humanists state that all ethics/morals/values are subjective and situational, they cannot support their system consistently and yet retain absolute values. However, many statements in these five articles do assume absolute values. We are told (article seven) that the individual “must experience a full range of civil liberties” to “enhance freedom and dignity!” What's so great about freedom and dignity? Why should we accept the humanists' dogmatic assertion that human freedom and dignity are values all men should strive for? We are told that the individual has the “right to die with dignity, euthanasia, and the right to suicide.” How can relativistic secular humanists make such a value judgment? Why have the secular humanists decided that it is universally wrong to

kill someone else (murder), but it is morally right to choose to kill yourself (suicide)? As Christians we are not asked, nor do we ask others, to support an arbitrary, finite system of absolute values just on the basis of our having proposed it, based on our own notions. We believe that there are absolute values and morals because God, the framer and sustainer of this world, has designed the world to work in accordance with His intrinsic attributes of goodness, love, etc., and to malfunction (as in the fall) when its members do not harmonize with God's will. As Christians we are dedicated to the freedom of man as an individual because God demonstrated the importance of that freedom in the freedom he gave man. As Christians we believe that life is sacred because it is a gift from God, its origin and sustainer. It is not for man to decide the time of death, for another person or for himself. Christianity has an absolute standard of values based on the Creator of all things. Secular humanism and Christianity are diametrically opposed on the moral bent of mankind. Secular humanism assumes that everyone is basically good (with a few exceptions) and that evil comes from outside people and societies, rather than from within. This is somewhat like the naive view of Marxism, which taught that if the evils of society were only eradicated, evil men would cease to exist.

While Christians should applaud secular humanism's commitment to racial, social, and sexual integration, we should not lose sight of the fact that removing the trappings of bigotry does not remove the evil seeds of that bigotry from within the individual. Society will never be transformed by tampering with the mechanics of social intercourse. Neither will it be reshaped into Utopia by temporarily forcing evil men to act like good men.

Morality cannot be legislated, whether it is Christian morality or humanistic morality.

The only way to change society is to transform the individuals within that society.

Christianity teaches that all of mankind made its choice for evil in the person of Adam at the fall. The Bible says that man is not basically good, but basically bad (see Romans 3:10, 23, 30; 6:23). Only through the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross can a man be turned from evil to good.

Many people in Western society are turning toward the idea of a one-world government as the solution to the problems of mankind. This idea does not belong to the secular humanists alone. A great number of those who are oriented toward Eastern philosophy and religion believe that world unity will be accomplished only in this way. However, under discussion here is the secular humanist view of a one-world system, as described in Manifesto II, articles twelve, thirteen, fourteen and fifteen.

Christians believe that men live by absolute ethics even if they claim to believe only in relative ethics. One may say that all ethics and moral values are relative to one's society or to the individual conviction, but one rarely lives by such a maxim.

The beginning of Manifesto II declares that morals and values are relative and largely governed by society. Yet in articles 12 – 15 we find such absolute moral values as “the best option is to transcend the limits of national sovereignty,” belief in “peaceful adjudication of differences by international courts and by the development of the arts of negotiation and compromise,” “the cultivation and conservation of nature is a moral value” and “it is the moral obligation of the developed nations to provide... massive... assistance, . . . to the developing portions of the globe.”

Christians would not necessarily disagree with the above moral values. But Christians have an absolute ground for their ethics. Christian morality does not depend on the

shifting subjective standards of any particular society or vocal group of people. Biblical Christianity depends on the Sovereign of the universe for its moral values.

In the twelfth article the humanists say that adopting a one-world government would commit us to “some hard choices.” Unfortunately for the layman, those choices are not identified. We would worry that, in their zeal to establish Utopia, secular humanists might consider it a hard but necessary choice to sacrifice certain dissident individuals for the better choice of promoting the one-world Utopian government. Isn't this just the sort of “choice” we Westerners decry as human rights violations in many Marxist countries today? The Christian cannot endorse article twelve without knowing just what “hard choices” face the one-world government advocate (nor should anyone).

Some Christians believe that just before the second coming of Jesus Christ to establish His kingdom, the forces of Satan will attempt to set up a one-world system, implementing worship and submission to Satan's representative, the Anti-Christ. (See Matthew 24, 1 and 2 Thessalonians and the book of Revelation.) The secular humanists, at least in that day, will get their wish of a one-world government. But it will not usher in Utopia, rather it will bring on Armageddon.

As we discussed previously, the secular humanists diverge sharply from the Christian perspective by assuming that mankind is basically good. Many of the goals of a one-world government are lofty and not in opposition to Christianity. However, the feasibility of implementing such changes is almost non-existent given the Biblical presupposition that man is basically bad instead of good.

It sounds good to say that the “world community must renounce the resort to violence and force” and that “war is obsolete.” However, a proclamation by itself never altered reality. Just how do the secular humanists propose to guarantee that everyone in a position of power will give up the use of force? And if even one person with power chooses to use it to force his own views, what will the humanist recourse be? Will he sweet-talk the offender? Or use force to teach him not to use force?

Christianity does not advocate the use of force to spread one's values and beliefs.

However, Christianity recognizes that self-centered men will use force. Christianity sees the ultimate “weapon!” against force as being an individual whose life has been transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit and whose will has been surrendered to the Lord Jesus Christ. Only when men are changed will violence cease. The Bible tells us the time will come when there will be no more violence. Such a world will not come about by proclamation of secular humanism, but by the divine command, judgment and forgiveness of the Lord (Revelation 20, 21).

In the meantime, the Bible specifically places responsibility for self-defense on the individual. We have a God-given obligation to protect those who depend on us. We must ensure the safety of our families. Christians may disagree about what sort of resistance is meant in the Bible. Whether or not a Christian allows for the use of force to safeguard those for whom he is responsible, he understands the serious charge God has given him. The use of abortion appears to be allowed by both articles fourteen and fifteen of Manifesto II. Article fourteen states that “excessive population growth must be checked” and article fifteen calls birth control techniques a “human right.” Taken with the previous Manifesto II statement in article six regarding abortion as a human right, we can see that it is very likely that the secular humanists, if given the chance, would solve population booms with, among other things, abortions (or perhaps mass executions). Does it

contribute to the dignity and value of the individual human life to murder it if it is inconvenient, if it doesn't fit into the world plan for conservation of resources and if it just happens not to have been born yet? Christians cannot agree to the taking of innocent human life in the name of any world plan.

Article fifteen presents a socialistic world economy as the only society of value. How is this new society to be obtained? It is easy to say “disproportions in wealth, income, and economic growth should be reduced on a worldwide basis.” But how is this to be accomplished? Do the secular humanists actually think it likely that the wealthy of this world will, en masse and without exception, give up their wealth and distribute it to the poor? If so, why hasn't it already happened? If mankind is basically good, society should need no impetus such as a Humanist Manifesto II for the wealthy to share with the poor.¹⁷⁵

Perhaps the secular humanists are not as naive as that. What then, is their solution? Should they use force to relieve the rich of their “economic burdens” and then bless the poor with the wealth taken from the rich? It seems the humanists will break either article thirteen banning violence or article fifteen banning private wealth. Marxism and socialism have similar economic goals. A look at the “freedom” of contemporary Marxist and Socialist societies show us that these goals are not realistic.

The last two propositions by the secular humanists offer the tools for implementing the grand scheme: science and technology. Somewhere in science, they say, lies the solution to the problems of mankind.

When all else is said, it appears that the humanists rely on science and its evolution to provide the magic formulas needed to materialize the new world order envisioned by the humanists. Christianity is not intrinsically antagonistic to science. In fact, it is the Christian God who created the world around us and who determined its laws and functions, which have been categorized by what we call science. Colossians 1:16-17 reminds us that it is to the Lord Jesus Christ that we owe our existence, “For in Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” Science does not create laws of nature, it discovers them. When science does discover one of those laws, it is no surprise to God. However, science is no substitute for God. All science can do is discover and describe, it cannot create reality *ex nihilo* (out of nothing). While we would not dismiss out of hand any particular advance of science, we would question the humanists' assertion that all science will be used “for the good of humankind” and that “carefully judged by the consequences of its use; harmful and destructive changes should be avoided.” We return to the same but still valid critique: who is to determine what the “good of humankind” is, and who is to enforce the judgments of whomever has been chosen to determine that good? The specter of George Orwell's 1984 looms threateningly as we think of the abuses, intentional or not, to which such judgment and enforcement could be put.

Most Christians would probably agree with the last sentence of proposition seventeen in the Humanist Manifesto II, “We must learn to live openly together or we shall perish

¹⁷⁵ It is also important to note that many of the signers of the Humanist Manifesto II were themselves among the more wealthy members of society, yet the author could not find any instances where they gave up their wealth in order to help fight the war on poverty.

together.” This is exactly what the Bible has to say. However, the Bible states that because man is basically self-centered and sinful, he will forever be unable to live peaceably with his fellow man on his own initiative. It takes the supernatural intervention of God to transform individuals into selfless, caring, loving people who really will sacrifice their own desires for the sake of their fellow men. Universal peace will come, only with the intervention of Almighty God. We see expressed in 2nd Peter 3:3-14 the Biblical vision of the future, a future cleansed of evil by judgment and restored in love by the Lord Jesus Christ.

It’s easy to see the influence Darwinism and relativism have had in secular humanism. It is also influenced by Marxist communism, socialism, and from Satan’s lie that man would be like God if he just eats from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Man is not, nor will he ever be like God in the sense that humanists believe. Man is not his own savior, all throughout mans history he has been his destroyer, his own worst enemy. 6000 years of human history will not be changed by the proclamations of secular humanism.

Conclusion

There are no shortcuts to spiritual maturity, this book is no exception. Nevertheless, there are certain things we can do to empower ourselves spiritually for the race ahead. Indeed, the most important thing we can do is take part in God's means of grace; for He has given us means of His grace to sustain us in our faith so that we might run the race and fight the good fight. Because He loves us He has provided us with His Word and with prayer.

We often find ourselves setting out to accomplish certain goals and making certain plans, and we often find God working through these plans to bring us to maturity. Regardless of the plans we make, or even if we do not make plans at all, we will soon find that many obstacles will come into our paths in order to prevent us from becoming spiritually mature. Though there are many obstacles that may stand in our way, through the centuries theologians have come to identify three major categories of obstacles in the Christian life. In order to progress in the Christian walk, we must fight daily against the world, the flesh, and the Devil.

Anyone familiar with the basics of anthropology or sociology understands that each world culture and society is structured by particular customs, taboos, and restraints. A person who lives within a culture generally behaves according to these customs. Most of the time, out of fear, or out of integrity, he will do what his society approves of and will stay away from what his society forbids. These accepted customs and restraints heavily influence most people in any given society. When we look at teenagers for example, we find this to be especially true. The behavior acceptable to a teenager's peer group often comes to define the world and life view of the teen. As we grow older, we often find this to be less true, at least consciously. Nevertheless, as we look at our lives, we find that even as adults, societal customs often determine our thoughts on certain subjects and our behaviors.

Since the fall of man, humans have been at constant enmity with God. The fallen cultures of this present evil age seek to exalt themselves and live independently of God. Romans 12:2 says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Our hearts and minds must be transformed by the Word of God, and conformed to His will. Though our lives will be a constant fight against the influence of the world, as we prayerfully study Scripture and ask the Holy Spirit to apply its teaching to us, our lives will become more and more conformed to the image of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Our second obstacle to spiritual maturity is, as mentioned, the flesh. Galatians 5:16 says, "Walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh." The passage in Galatians is but one of several instances in the New Testament where the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit is discussed; there, and in many other places, we are exhorted to live by the Spirit and not by the flesh.

Unfortunately there has been a lot of misunderstanding about the flesh in the history of the church. Many times people think that the term "flesh" refers to the physical body, resulting in the assumption that our bodies are bad and our spirits are good. This idea however, is rooted in Greek philosophy, and it denies that all things were created "good." The Bible teaches that the physical world, in and of itself, is a good thing (Genesis 1:31).

It is only since the fall of man, that the physical world has been corrupted. This world is being redeemed and should not be regarded as less important than the spiritual realm. When the Bible speaks of the war between flesh and spirit, it is not speaking about a war between the body and soul. Rather, it is speaking about a war within us, a war of our desires. This war is fought between the new life granted to us by the Spirit, and our sin nature, which has not yet been removed from us completely.

The flesh is a term for the sinful nature. This nature will not be eradicated until we are glorified. Until then, we are commanded to put it to death so that we will keep in step with the Spirit (Colossians 3:5).

The struggle to overcome sin and grow to spiritual maturity is not an easy one. The last general obstacle to be overcome is the Devil. Regrettably, popular culture tends to trivialize this adversary. Often he is depicted as a character with horns and a tail. Sometimes the entertainment media portrays him as one who is easily overcome by men. However, this is not how we find Satan depicted in the Bible. He is a roaring lion, who goes about seeking those whom he may devour (1st Peter 5:8). This image depicts the strength of the Devil. The fact that he commands an army of demons (Ephesians 6:11-12) and appears as an angel of light (2nd Corinthians 11:14) makes him a dangerous foe. Left to ourselves we are no match for the Devil. However, this is not true of Almighty God. No matter how strong the Devil may be, he is still only a creature. The Christian faith does not teach a dualism where God and the Devil are equal in power and strength. Instead, the Devil is subservient to the will of our Father in Heaven (Job 1-2). The Bible teaches that one of Satan's works is tempting us to sin (Genesis 3:1-7), but this is not his only work. He is also called the accuser of the brethren in Revelation 12:10. When we sin, Satan comes to accuse us. He tells us that we can in no way be forgiven by God. He tries to make us think that our dirtiness makes us of no use to the kingdom of God. In all actuality, when we sin both Satan and the Holy Spirit will come to us; the Devil accuses us in order to paralyze our growth. However, when the Spirit convicts us, He brings grace to restore us and to renew our fellowship with God. As we live a life of repentance, we must not allow Satan's accusations to keep us from fulfilling God's purposes for us. Rather, we must be reminded that while we sin, we are in Christ, and because of that we can be forgiven, for His blood cleanses us from all sin. 1st John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us from our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Grace is not a license to sin. By grace we need not sin, and by grace we can receive forgiveness when and if we do. May God add His blessing to this book, may it be used for His glory, praise, and honor, and may it be a source of strength to those Christians who read it so that they can fight the good fight of faith.

Recommended Resource for Further Study

The Westminster Confession of Faith (can be purchased from monergism books online)

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia, PA. Westminster Press, 2000)

James R. White, *The Forgotten Trinity* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1998)

Bob L. Ross, *The Trinity And The Eternal Sonship Of Christ: A Defense Against "Oneness" Pentecostals Attacks On Historic Christianity* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications).

“*The Bible: Fable, Fraud, or Fact?*”, produced by Coral Ridge Ministries (video); 1-800-229-WORD.

“Who Is This Jesus?”, produced by Coral Ridge Ministries (video); 1-800-229-WORD.

Dr. D. James Kennedy, *Why I Believe* (Word, 1999)

Dr. D. James Kennedy, *Skeptics Answered* (Multnomah, 1997)

Dr. D. James Kennedy, *The Gates Of Hell Shall Not Prevail* (Thomas Nelson, 1997)

Dr. D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcomb, *What If Jesus Had Never Been Born?* (Thomas Nelson, 1997)

Dr. D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcomb, *What If The Bible Had Never Been Written?* (Thomas Nelson, 1998)

“A response to ABC's: The Search for Jesus”, produced by The John Ankerberg Show (video)

“10 Reasons To Believe In The Bible”, produced by RBC Ministries (video)

Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence For The Life Of Christ*; available from the Christians Research Institute at equip.org

Lee Strobel, *The Case For Christ* (Zondervan, 1998); book &/or cassette tape series available by calling 1-949-858-6100.

Simon Greenleaf, *The Testimony Of The Evangelists* (Kregel, 1995)

Hank Hanegraaff, *Resurrection* (Word, 2000), available at the Christian Research Institute's Resource Center at www.equip.org

Paul W. Barnett, *Is The New Testament Reliable? A Look at the Historical Evidence* (InterVarsity Press, 1993)

M.J. Wilkins and J.P. Moreland, *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus* (Zondervan, 1996)

Paul Copan (editor), *Will The Real Jesus Please Stand Up? A Debate Between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan*. Moderated by William F. Buckley Jr. (Baker Book House, 1999; cassette also available).

Norman Geisler and Ron Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask* (Baker Book House, 1995)

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Paul Maier (editor), *Josephus: The Essential Writings* (Kregel, 1990)

Edwin Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible* (Baker Book House, 1997)

John McRay Ph. D, *Archaeology & The New Testament* (Baker Book House, 1991)

R.A. Torrey (editor), *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* (Kregel, 1990)

Roger Steer, *George Muller: Delighted in God* (Harold Shaw Pub., 1981) [a powerful testimony for the Biblical God]

Douglas Groothuis, *Searching for the Real JESUS In An Age of Controversy* (Harvest House, 1996)

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