

NEW

Horizons

Vol 11 No 2

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addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



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CGOM

Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

With around two thousand Christian denominations vying for your attention, it's easy to miss the important issues of life and religion. It's our hope that through *New Horizons* our readers will come to understand the true meaning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel was proclaimed by Jesus and by his apostles in the clearest of terms - and recorded for us in the Scriptures. Over the centuries that truth has been buried, dug up, buried again. Our desire is to restore the simple apostolic message. We hope you will be excited by what the Scriptures reveal about life, and the horizons beyond

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new Horizons

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Do you believe there is no God? If so you are a rarity in our world

Tell your story to the billion plus Muslims or to the same number of Hindu or to the two billion Christians and you will hear derisive laughter. Add in the uncounted millions who follow some other form of religion - and you are a tiny minority.

Such a mere assertion as '*God exists*,' of course, is no proof - no matter how big the majority. Sceptics such as world-renowned evolutionist and atheist Richard Dawkins certainly won't buy that. They amass mountains of evidence, pen millions of words, to demonstrate that there's no need for a 'God hypothesis.' For such, all religion is an unnecessary and often destructive vestigial belief from which mankind - that almost six billion believers - needs to be freed. So let's consider the evidence.

Religions in error

Whatever the form a religion takes there is 'God.' Not that there's a lot of agreement as to His - or Her - nature. Some believe in a single Being. Others that He (let's stick with the masculine pronoun for the sake of sanity) is 'dual' or a 'trinity.' Still others go for myriad divine beings, as in Hinduism.

Anciently, as in Greece and Rome, certain men and women 'became God' when they died. It gave rise to a whole mythology, a hierarchy of divine beings each with suspiciously human characteristics. There were also local gods, tribal gods, worshippers of '*the host of heaven*' - sun, moon, stars. (A sane view is outlined in Psalm 115:1-8.) Then there are all the - often strange - ways by which

He is worshipped. They add up to a confusing kaleidoscope of belief. It takes a long stretch of the imagination to accept they are all true reflections of the same 'God.' In this the Dawkins of the world are right.

Creation or Evolution?

The Judaeo-Christian Scriptures (the Bible) make a sharp division between the One perceived as the Creator (Jehovah, the LORD, YHVH, Yahweh) and all other alleged divine beings of whatever nature. It excludes every other faith both anciently and in today's world. The Bible presents a God who is consistent in every way. He is also working to a plan that is consistent from Genesis to Revelation. It's a plan that is comprehensive through time and space.

DOES GOD EXIST?

It's also a plan that presents us with a character snapshot that is unpalatable to many. Yet He is loving and merciful. and not the cruel monster portrayed by many anti-God writers.

The prophet Elijah drew a sharp distinction between the true God and the false Baal. He pointed out the inadequacy of the Baal and powerfully demonstrated the reality of Jehovah. (Read the account in I Kings 18.) Of course, the atheist will ignore this as fiction, and unless the Scriptures are recognized as the Word of God the argument from Scripture doesn't hold.

In fact, the vast array of 'gods' are a degenerative spiritual mutation from the one true God, Jehovah.

Properly understood, the Biblical God is the only one worthy of acceptance. But simple assertion isn't evidence, not proof of His existence. Sadly, many of the 'arguments' proffered as evidence of His existence by proponents are weak. The battle-lines are usually drawn on the evolution-creation debate.

Getting It Right

For example, occasional statements by evolutionists or new scientific evidence that seem to favour the creationist view too often are exaggerated or misquoted and ignore context. A favourite argument is that of the 'irreducible complexity.' That is, the indisputable fact that an organ - e.g. a bird's wing, the human eye, the endocrine or cardio-respiratory system - has to be complete to function.

At face it is entirely plausible. The eye, for example, works only when the lens, the retina *etc* act together with complex neurological structures through the optic nerve - in reality a part of the unimaginably complex brain. Evolutionists dispute this, linking it to what they term 'the God of the Gap.'

This concept says that creationists jump on perceived 'gaps' in evolutionary theory: '*I told you so. This is so complex God had to create it...*' The evolutionist responds with the arguments of *time* (over billions of years) and *natural selection*. Given enough time, in other words, natural selection would cause the essential positive change. And, if we wait long enough some discovery will fill the gaps.

Another weak - and unacceptable - argument for the existence of God is *subjective*. Claims of healing or a

personal communication from God (*'I know He exists because He spoke to me'*) or an experience or answered prayer are explained as mere placebos: *'It would have happened anyway,'* or, *'It's all in the mind'* or *'it's coincidence.'* The human mind is readily capable of constructing false concepts. However, those who have personally experienced divine intervention will be hard to convince!

The evidence for the existence of God, for an all-powerful First Cause, has to be incontrovertible. (Not that a dyed-in-the-wool atheist won't ignore or seek ways to circumvent the evidence.) However, evolutionists have their own mountains to climb.

Solid Evidence

It is increasingly evident that historical 'proofs' for natural selection are no longer viable. For example, Darwin's so-called 'tree of life' - meant to demonstrate that every biological existence (plant, animal, human) arose from a single source - has been disproved.

Then there are the many hoaxes which still litter science text-books: Piltdown man, Haeckel's forged embryos, Kettlewell's peppered moths, false - and falsified - dating of rock strata. Other 'proofs' have been disproved by later investigation: Archaeopteryx, human development, the Miller-Urey experiment postulating an atmosphere conducive to life. The evolutionary texts are still littered with *'perhaps,' 'possibly,' 'maybe.'* And, of course, *'given enough time.'*

What evidence, then, is there for the existence of God?

First Cause

The unanswered, by atheists, question is: *how did everything begin?* Even astronomer Fred Hoyle's theory that life came to earth from space begs this question. Postulate, as some

do, a series of physical universes - 'multiverses' - and the same challenge presents itself. There has to be a 'First Cause.' Most humans simply assume this. Indeed even some evolutionary scientists believe it is built into the human psyche. (Though many - including some Bible-believers - who do accept a First Cause believe in a subsequent evolutionary process. Unsurprising, given the universal onslaught of evolutionary propaganda.)

For non-atheists this First Cause is *God.* All mainstream religions - however varied, whatever their form - envisage a God who is without beginning and without end - eternal. The Biblical Jehovah calls Himself *'I*

Am,' 'the First and the Last,' 'Alpha and Omega.' In other words, *God is.* He exists outside time and space. He is Spirit. He has no rivals. By definition - and confirmed in the Scriptures - He is Omnipotent. He is the Supreme Intelligence.

God, that is, has by definition always existed. Always an integrated Being without beginning, without end. None but such could bring something - rocks, gases, physical laws, life from the simplest to the most complex - from nothing.

Creation Explained

Here's how it is explained in the book of Hebrews: *'By faith we understand that the worlds [the visible physical creation] have been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen has not been made out of things which*

appear' (Hebrews 11:3). [*Worlds: Gk aion* refers here to 'things seen.' That is, the physical creation.] The visible created from the invisible. ('Electrons' are invisible.) Modern scientific discovery confirms it - for advancing technology discovers ever tinier particles that make up solid matter.

It is noteworthy that Darwinists *start* from the premise that God does not exist, that all we see - even God! - is the effect of natural selection. It's a concept designed to eliminate God! Everything we see in the natural world is more readily explained by the 'God hypothesis' than by natural selection. *'In the beginning God...'* (Genesis 1:1).

The Moral Argument

Leading professed atheists claim, rightly, that morality is not solely the province of believers. Indeed religions - including Christianity (*e.g.* the Cathar persecution by the Roman church) and Islam (*e.g.* modern Iraq) - are not free from inflicting mayhem.

Morality can be viewed as *'love your neighbor as yourself.'* No Christian, atheist, Muslim *etc* would personally tolerate murder or adultery or theft. Self-preservation! And atheists and Christians may equally love and care for their children. We love whether or not God exists. So, as far as it goes 'morality' isn't an argument against atheism.

(However, it is largely the great atheistic states - and we can here include mediaeval Christianity! - which fall far short of persistent civilized behaviour. Think Stalin, Pol Pot, Mao Tse Tung, North Korea.)

Atheists, Jews, Christians, Muslims may all take off the hat to the last six of the Ten Commandments. The morality of atheism, however, is a shifting sand, whereas the true believer sees a moral code - *e.g.* Ten Commandments - as absolute. *cont'd p.8*

'By faith we understand that the worlds [the visible physical creation] have been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen has not been made out of things which appear'

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The Christian Scriptures - 'the Holy Bible' - is despised by those proud to call themselves 'atheist'. Yet the arguments against it show the poverty of thought of its detractors

A professed atheist scorns the Bible as evidence of a divine Being. But it is instructive to look at what it says - about the Earth, about man, about the purpose of creation. That purpose is misunderstood even by many ardent believers.

By divine fiat, according to the Bible, matter came into existence and was organized into 'the Universe' (in the larger sense). The Earth - alone in this Universe - was the centre stage on which God would work out a divine plan. When complete, the physical Earth was tailor-made for His purpose (Isaiah 45:18).

The pinnacle of creation to date - common ground here, with the atheist - is the human race, which for all its present faults is the dominant force on the planet. Mankind was formed from the earth's elements. Every anatomical and physiological system was perfect - the whole a fully integrated, functioning being *from the beginning*. There was harmony with Earth and with the Creator. Not mere flotsam, a product of random selection born to live and die, the Universe and man were *created with purpose*.

Divine Plan

By the exercise of his God-given free-will, man chose to ignore the Creator's 'instruction manual' - the guide by which he would live in harmony with his Creator, his fellow-man and the lower creation. By this choice he disrupted the course of nature. It's a decision that reverberates to this day in the chaos and suffering around us.

From the moment of that choice God has largely allowed man to pursue his own destructive path, intervening

only to keep His Plan on track. Ever since we have made the same choices - with the same consequences. He has set a finite time to complete it, and when the time is ripe will intervene to restore Earth to its pristine harmony. The Plan will be completed - 'on time and on budget.'

Step-by-Step Plan

The God of the Christian Scriptures is portrayed as a divine Family, the all-powerful Creator of the Universe, the Supreme Intelligence. Man was created to become a part of that immortal Family.

The Plan is multi-stage, worked out over time through experience and by resurrection. From the beginning God has singled out those who are willing to believe in His existence and who trust Him - even with their life.

It is called *faith*. And '*... without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*' (Hebrews 11:6). With the eye of faith these select few - some are named in Hebrews 11 - could see in the world around them sure evidence that God does indeed exist: '*...the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead*' (Romans 1: 20).

Through a lifetime of experience they trusted God. As said Job: '*Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him*' (Job 13:15). Having remained faithful to death they will experience

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Created With Purpose

resurrection to spirit life for eternity at the return of Jesus as King of kings. By resurrection they become a part of the divine Family.

Millennial Reign

A further stage finds these 'Firstfruits' (James 1:18) working with Jesus Christ for the thousand years following their resurrection. They will form His Government, reigning over and restoring the entire planet. All false religion, all corrupt government, will be swept away.

Their 'subjects' - all of mankind who survive the horrors of the end-time, and their descendants - will have the same opportunity as the Firstfruits to join the divine Family. The presence of God in the person of Jesus on earth in Jerusalem at that time will remove any lingering doubts as to His existence!

The Rest of the Dead

What, then, of the billions who lived before Jesus brought salvation? What of the further billions who have never heard of Him? Recall that the Christian teaching is that: '*...neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*' (Acts 4:12). What of them?

We now reach a further stage in the Plan that was begun when man first set foot on Earth. Said Jesus (John 5: 28-29): '*...the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation [i.e. judgment]*.'

When the millennial reign of Jesus is over all those billions, say the Scriptures, will be resurrected and given their chance to believe. The Plan is ready for its final stage - *eternity*. **Ω**

What makes morality religious?

Some atheists - like some Christians or Muslims - are wild-eyed hard-line propagandists of their 'faith.' Civilised atheists, however, can be every bit as 'moral' as a dedicated believer. Which begs the question: *what do you mean 'moral'?*

Atheists complain that they are branded as having no morals. Not true. The so-called 'empirical self' dictates self-preservation. So, I don't want someone to steal from me, commit adultery with my wife or husband, or kill me. Nor would the average professed atheist - despite rejecting religion - wish harm to his parents or his children. That's universal - not needing religion.

Those criminal activities might stir a memory of Bible texts: *'You shall not...'*. Right - they are the last six of the Ten Commandments. They express a sentiment common to all mankind, religious or not. And they are the foundation principles of every code of law. In fact, they are the Creator's rules by which mankind ought to live his life. Break them and someone suffers - atheist or religious zealot.

Spirit in Man

The human *body* - its flesh and bones, its nervous and other systems - is 'animal,' with all its appetites and with the desire for immediate satisfaction at every level of physical and material existence. It is infantile. That's why those laws are needed - to keep society on an even keel.

These basic laws are written in our psyche, whether by culture or by gene. All sensible parents - atheist, agnostic, religious - instil them in their children. But that's not all there is to man. We are more than 'animal.'

The animal creation acts by instinct - the animal 'spirit.' Its every action is 'built in.' By divine decree some are more astute - incredibly so. Compare the worm and the chimp.

Man, however, has an added dimension. It is 'the human spirit,' which sets mankind apart from the lower creation. Animals were created '*after their kind*' (Genesis 1:24-25). Mankind, by contrast, is '*... in the image of God*' (v.27).

But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty gives them understanding
Job 32:8

The human spirit - in all of mankind, no matter how dulled - is intellectually curious, aspirational, altruistic, plans, takes the long view. It is self-aware. The spirit in us propels man to achievement, to scientific endeavour, to philosophy. It gives reason and understanding. It provides the option of choice - so much abused. And it is what made man in the image of his Creator.

Missing Dimension

Hence man looks God-ward. The human spirit seeks, perhaps unknowingly, to fill by whatever means the

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The First Four...

'God-shaped hole' in each of us. For many it is religion, however bizarre. For increasing numbers it is filling the gap with 'bread and circuses.' For others it is intellectual pursuits.

What, then, separates atheistic morality from religious morality?

The true faith, the faith that has accompanied mankind from the beginning, has been distorted beyond recognition. Hundreds of gods and thousands of religions have evolved - the product of human imagination, demonic influence and cross-fertilization. Choice - fuelled by antipathy to the true faith.

The key to that true faith is in our title: *'The First Four...'*. That is, the first four of the Ten Commandments. They identify the one and only God, Creator of heaven and earth. This is the dimension missing from atheism.

Natural v. Supernatural

It is these four Commandments which separate atheistic morality from the only faith authored by God. Wrote Paul to the Romans: '*...the carnal mind [our natural inclination] is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be*' (ch 8:7).

Atheism is *naturalistic*. By definition, the atheist rejects the very notion of a supreme Creator God. His moral compass is relative - based on the shifting sands of personal conscience modified by his environment.

True religion by contrast is *supernatural*. Biblical morality is based on conscience informed by the solid rock of the immutable Word of the Creator as revealed in the Christian Scriptures. It is '*...the same yesterday, today and forever.*'

Those who willingly *cont'd p.8*

King Solomon (Ecclesiastes 7:16) tells us not to be *'overmuch righteous.'* As Christians we are, of course, to pursue the perfect righteous example set by Jesus. That's not the issue. The King's concerns were reflected in the behaviour of the Pharisees, so roundly condemned by Jesus (Matthew 23).

The Pharisees - externalists - were focused on the minutiae of doctrine and behaviour yet negligent of the true meaning of the divine Law: *'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and dill and cummin, and you have left aside the weightier matters of the Law: judgment, and mercy, and faith. It was right to do these, and not to have left those aside. Blind guides, straining out the gnat, but swallowing the camel'* (Matthew 23:23-24).

Could it be that Christians might inadvertently follow in their narrow footsteps?

Salvation Assured

For example, some brethren are perpetually concerned about their salvation, wondering if they are 'doing enough to attain the Kingdom.' As Christians, of course, we must be striving to *'...lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us'* (Hebrews 12:1).

Yet it's true that *'... now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is. And every one that hath this hope set on him purifies himself, even as he is pure'* (I John 3:2-3).

We strive for purity of life - yet are confident that *even now* we are God's children, knowing we are far from perfect. If we stay faithful our salvation is assured.

Knowledge That Counts

The wide diversity among the Chris-

tian churches highlights the challenge of interpretation of the

Scriptures. It's from the Bible that we discern 'truth.' Some teachings ('doctrines') are quite clear, and it is difficult to figure why there is diversity of interpretation.

For example, the Scriptures could not be clearer as to the day we set aside for weekly worship. Or the regular annual festivals. Or the intrinsic nature of man. Or the clear teaching on heaven and hell. Yet the broad swathe of denominations can't see it - too often blinded by tradition or personal preference - or simple Bible illiteracy and ignorance.

Beyond such matters there is considerable room for diversity. Some denominations, however, exclude from fellowship those who diverge even a little from their 'doctrinal statement.' The New Testament church welcomed newcomers to its fellowship:

If therefore the whole church be assembled together and all speak with tongues, and there come in men unlearned or unbelieving, will they not say that ye are mad? But if all prophesy [i.e. preach], and there come in one unbelieving or unlearned, he is reprov'd by all, he is judged by all; the secrets of his heart are made manifest; and so he will fall down on his face and worship God, declaring that God is among you indeed.

(I Corinthians 14:24-25)

The account of 'the seven churches' (Revelation 2,3) is evidence that despite sometimes horrendous variety of belief each local assembly was recognized by Jesus himself as part of the church of God - even lukewarm Laodicea.

Each quotation from the Bible in New Horizons is from the translation which most clearly expresses the original language. Unless otherwise stated, the King James is used

The Balanced Christian

Christian Diversity

It often goes unrecognized by church leaders that each individual called by the Father to be part of His church is directly answerable to Jesus - who has concern for each one. Each brother or sister must act in accord with conscience.

Paul, for example, addresses this in the matter of vegetarians, introducing his comment by saying: *'Welcome all the Lord's followers, even those whose faith is weak. Don't criticize them for having beliefs that are different from yours'* (Romans 14:1). He adds, v.4, *'What right do you have to criticize someone else's servants? Only their Lord can decide if they are doing right, and the Lord will make sure that they do right.'*

A newcomer to the faith (and to the local church) is on 'the bottom rung' of spiritual growth. Paul calls such *'weak in the faith.'* In the bosom of the church he or she is gently nourished to a fuller understanding of God's revelation in the Scriptures. It is through this process that an assembly comes to *'speak the same thing'* (I Corinthians 1:10).

Commenting on this passage, one writer says: *'...men should bear with each other, and not be so ready to imagine that none have the truth of God but they and their party.'* But given the diversity of the human family there will always be differences of opinion. As - *if!* - a church grows in Christian love, however, such differences will be minimized.

Closed Mind

The patriarch Job sums up a common attitude. Speaking to his 'comforters' he said: *'For truly you are the people, and wisdom will die with you'* (Job 12:2). Irony, of course, but all too common.

There used to be a tradition among

some - perhaps it's still in circulation - that all Protestants or Catholics are 'of the household of the devil.' Avoid them at all costs. Don't enter their 'temples.' Don't sing their - often uplifting - hymns. *Etc.* Many, perhaps most, may be nominal, 'go to church on Sunday' folk. Yet many of such people - like the people of God in Old Testament times - have been touched by God's Spirit. They diligently study God's Word and worship as they see fit. Indeed most of the great Bible helps - dictionaries, commentaries *etc* were compiled by 'Protestants.'

Your neighbor may call out 'Happy Christmas' or send you a card or ask about your Xmas plans. How do you respond? Turn away grumpily or perhaps launch a tirade against paganism? A close relative is being married in a church - and on your holy day: Do you decline the invitation to attend a - hopefully! - once in a lifetime event? Do you forbid birthday celebrations? Refuse to attend a memorial service? Do you judge those who 'eat out' on Sabbath, or ladies who wear make-up? 'Scared' to enter a church building? And separate over an obscure point of prophetic interpretation? Or over church décor?

Just a few examples of the closed mind that can become a barrier to understanding within and outside the church. There are ways, however, to explain your faith without driving away your hearers!

Cause for Celebration

We should celebrate the effect God's Word has had on people of every denomination. Without the influence - sadly now much diminished - of church and Sunday School and religious education and mission and worldwide dissemination of the Bible our nations would be in a far worse moral - and economic - state. Many godly people live exemplary lives of service to all - and are worthy of emulation.

God's Word is powerful - but acts

mysteriously. Said Isaiah:

'For as the rain and the snow comes down from the heavens and do not return there, except it waters the earth and make it bring forth and bud, and give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My Word be, which goes out of My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in what I sent it to do!

Isaiah 55:10-11

Do we believe that?

So who knows what God is doing long-term? Through ignorance and through deception millions are blind to the true Biblical faith, for He is at this time calling out but a few whom He will '*purify [as] a special people for himself*' (Titus 2:14). But they are few and even they have limited understanding of His 'big picture' as it is presently being worked out in the lives of countless 'believers.'

Law of Liberty

Too often Christianity is perceived as the practice of a long list of 'do's and don'ts.' The faith becomes a wearisome grind rather than a joyous celebration of the divine way of life. And why not, given the exciting future planned by a loving Father for His children!

There are many activities to be

avoided by Bible believers, and these 'works of the flesh' are spelled out clearly in the Scriptures. For example:

'...if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under Law. Now the works of the flesh are clearly revealed, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lustfulness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, fightings, jealousies, angers, rivalries, divisions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and things like these; of which I tell you beforehand, as I also said before, that the ones practicing such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control. Against such things there is not a law. But the ones belonging to Christ crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become vainglorious, provoking one another, envying one another

Galatians 5: 18-26

Surely that's enough to keep us busy for a lifetime!

True Christian practice is indeed a 'narrow way' - but *it is not narrow-minded*. God's way of life (James 1:25, 2:12) is lived by '*the law of liberty*'. Wrote Paul: '*...stand firm in the freedom with which Christ made us free and do not be held again with a yoke of slavery*' (Galatians 5:1). **Ω**

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Pentecost.....May 27
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**Do you ever wonder if God exists?
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The fact was undisputed - even to the Jewish authorities: The tomb was empty. The body of Jesus had disappeared! Since the hour of this discovery, much has been penned to explain - or to explain away - this startling discovery. That Sunday morning at first light the rock tomb in which Jesus of Nazareth had been laid after his crucifixion was bare and empty. Indeed it had lain empty all night.

Within hours of the first report by the women, the guards had roused from their coma and staggered into Jerusalem bearing a weird tale of an earth tremor followed by a blinding light. And, after they recovered, they said Jesus' body was gone. The authorities disputed the story, but it was true - *the tomb was really empty.*

How could it be possible? Was Jesus spirited away by some cunningly contrived human plot? Were the disciples hallucinating? Had Jesus merely swooned? What really did take place?

Too Many Questions

The Jewish authorities admitted the fact that Jesus had gone - and they "knew" the answer: the body had been stolen by the disciples. They had pierced the almost impenetrable defence set to forestall this very act. Thus were doubts smoothed away and conscience eased!

Such explanations were widespread even a century later in the time of Justin Martyr. Later still, Tertullian reported the account extant in his time: The gardener had stolen the body to protect his lettuce!

More seriously, in modern times various ideas have circulated among scholars. For family reasons, Joseph of Arimathea buried the body elsewhere without telling anyone (Holtzmann). The women, in the darkness, went to the wrong tomb (Lake). It was all a clever invention by the disciples (Reimarus). Jesus had swooned on the cross, recovering later in the coolness of the tomb (Venturini, Schleiermacher). The Gospel story was a myth (Arthur Drew: *The Christ Myth*). Or the resurrection appearances were merely visions: There had been no resurrection (S.V. McCasland).

Of course, all such attempts to explain

away the Bible record are designed to eliminate the miraculous. The aim - to negate the intervention of a divine Creator. Yet, aside from this, they fail to account for the facts as recorded by eye-witnesses.

These facts pose too many questions. Who moved the stone? When? How? What about the missing body? And the wraps? And the guards? Why the strange reaction of the disciples in the tomb? What then, is the answer?

Let's look at just one convincing proof that Jesus did rise and was not spirited away by the machinations of any group of men, no matter how determined. Here's proof that the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah was real.

The Impossible Answer

First reports of the disappearance of the body of Jesus were received with scepticism by the disciples, who discounted them as "*idle tales.*" Even though they had heard Jesus tell them time and time again that he would rise from the dead, none of them were convinced. So how can we account for the dramatic turnaround in attitude evoked by what they saw inside the dim tomb?

One Bible account reads, "*Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first went in, too, and he saw and believed.*" Seconds before he deemed the idea preposterous! What was the convincing proof? Could a mere empty tomb work such an instantaneous, such a profound, intellectual somersault? An empty tomb proves little. John had witnessed a phenomenon that convinced him of the impossible. *There had been a resurrection!*

This was no physical resurrection such as John had witnessed when Lazarus had stumbled from the tomb bound hand and foot in his grave clothes. This resurrection was different, unique.

John's first glimpse of the shadowy sepulchre through a narrow slit of a window seemed to confirm that the women bore a wild and nonsensical tale. The body appeared *undisturbed*. John saw the faint whiteness of the wrapped body gleam against the blackness of the rock wall. But, when he went inside and had a close look, he believed. Why? What had so disturbed his scepticism? What startling

The Empty Tomb

proof of a resurrection did John now have?

The evidence rests in the appearance of the clothes in which Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea had wrapped Jesus' body. The custom of the time was to wrap the body from neck to toe in a long "bandage" and with many pounds of blended spices. The head was separately encased, leaving visible the face. (Incidentally, this negates the notion of the one-piece "Turin Shroud" as the burial cloth of Jesus)

Picture then what John saw as he stood by the body. On the bench hewn from the living rock lay the grave clothes packed with spices - as if Jesus' body were still within. In a depression in the rock lay the head napkin. But...*the body was not there!* The grave clothes were empty.

If, somehow, Jesus had recovered, where were the tangled yards of linen evidence? If somehow, the disciples had stolen past or bribed the guards would they have stopped to unwrap, then rearrange, the wraps? Could they indeed?

The bandages were not in disarray. Nor had they been removed. We are left with the rather uncomfortable fact that Jesus' human flesh had been transformed as spirit - and had *passed through* the wraps as easily as he later passed through a solid door.

He had risen! This was no human plot. The infinite power of the Almighty Creator had worked a miraculous change and released His Son from the bands of death forever. *Jesus was - and is - alive!*

Challenge

The proof convinced those men and women of the first century. Jesus was with them on numerous occasions in the six weeks following that memorable morning. When the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians some twenty years later, he cited the living testimony of almost five hundred witnesses of the greatest miracle ever to shake our world.

The resurrection was the central teaching of the New Testament Church of God,

The apostle Paul pinpoints where this universal morality, this in-built sense of right and wrong originates. It is the divine Law written - by the Creator - into the mind of every human being (Romans 2:15). Without it mankind - atheistic or not - would have long ago destroyed itself.

Point of Origin

The mind cannot conceive that nothing can become something, that the First Cause can be anything other than an overwhelmingly all-powerful intelligence.

Where did the First Cause come from? That's a question even died-in-the-wool atheists can't answer. None can conceive of total nothingness, though some have claimed that matter has 'always' existed. A succession of 'universes' has been proposed - birthing, expanding by a form of natural selection, dying.

But that begs the question: how did the 'first' one - go back as many trillion 'years' as you like - originate from nothing?

Out of Nothing

Imagine it! Nothing. Not even thin air. No light. No sound. Then - gradually out of this bleak nothingness there emerges a minute 'egg' of incredible energy from which developed the vastness of the Universe. It does stretch the mind into insanity!

Science postulates an original 'Big Bang'. On the unbelievable assumption that the material already existed to enable the 'bang' - we ask by what complex physical laws was it dispersed? How did those complex laws arise? How did dead, inanimate solid matter become energized to produce living biological material? What was the process? How did - does - 'new' genetic material appear?

Every biological change, every development, stems from a pre-existing 'information bank.' No new genetic information is being created. Natural

selection - an in-built marvelous divine tool - can draw only on what already exists. All positive change results from a re-combining and exchange of genetic material, while mutations almost invariably result in adverse change.

Looking for God

So, matter in all its forms had to have a beginning. But it will 'perish.' Wrote the Psalmist: *'Before time You founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They shall perish, but You shall endure; yea, all of them shall wear out like a garment; You shall change them like clothing, and they shall be changed'* (Psalm 102:25-26 LITV)

Where then, asks the atheist, did God come from? Surely He had to have an origin? Nothingness, at some point in time, must have become God - so why not matter?

But by definition God is here, there, always - 'eternal.' He exists outside time - which is a universal characteristic inseparable from the physical creation. He is without beginning, without end. God is eternal Spirit, unlimited by anything not contrary to His innate character.

"The first man..."

(I Corinthians 15:45)

"Perhaps the most interesting thing about these [DNA] tests is that they cut through pretty much all of our notions of nationality and cultural identity (which are, of course, social constructs) to a much greater truth: we are all related to one another. According to [Doctor] Thomas, it has been estimated that someone living approximately 6000 years ago is a direct ancestor of every single person living in the world today."

*Dr Mark Thomas
Centre for Genetic Anthropology
University College*

request

God's Grand Design

All creation shouts the need for such a Being - alive, active in the affairs of men, all-powerful, loving, and working out an eternal purpose for His precious creation.

No raucous clamor from pseudo-scientific pronouncements can refute the reality of a living God. Ω

The Empty Tomb...cont'd

and upon it is based the enduring religion of Christ.

The record of the momentous event remains preserved for 21st century man in the Holy Bible. And the fact of the resurrection remains as much a challenge to us - to all mankind of all faiths - as to those men in the cold sepulchre some nineteen centuries ago.

It's a challenge none of us can afford to ignore. It irrefutably proves God is alive. It is evidence that He intervenes in human affairs. It affirms His intense and loving concern for every human on this planet. It testifies to the happy knowledge that we are not alone in this universe, that our Creator will never allow His creation to drift to utter destruction.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an uncompromising challenge to each of us. It is a challenge to you to search out His plan for your own life!

Since God raised Jesus Christ from cold death and transformed him from flesh to spirit - then you must face what that means for you! Since Jesus Christ was without doubt raised from the dead, then *God exists*. There is life after life. And that means you must respond to Him - for He holds you accountable! Ω

First Four...cont'd from p.4

submit to the God of the Bible, Jesus the Messiah, and to His instruction ('the Law') reflect the bed-rock of morality. Obedience to the first four of the Commandments sets them apart as worshippers of the one and only living God. Ω

MiniStudy**God Is Love...?**

'God is love, and anyone who doesn't love others has never known him' (1 John 4:8)

Go and attack the Amalekites! Destroy them and all their possessions. Don't have any pity. Kill their men, women, children, and even their babies. Slaughter their cattle, sheep, camels, and donkeys' (I Samuel 15:3 CEV)

Now there's a conundrum. How do you get your head round those two texts? *'I am love personified - but go kill everyone - even the children and the animals,'* says God. One, of course, was Old Testament, and one New. But then God says He is *'the same yesterday and forever.'* It puzzles theologians. It's a question that many a philosopher and many a layman has considered. And it is used as an excuse for rejecting the God of the Christian Scriptures, the Bible. Can the two apparently conflicting sides to God's character be reconciled?

- 'gods' are legion. Every faith looks to its 'god' - or in Hinduism its myriad 'gods.' Yet there is no consensus as to what he (or she) wants: how to behave, what to believe, the purpose for mankind. And 'god' is often made in the image of his believer
- based on behaviour the god of Islam would likely choose the Samuel text (above) in their pursuit of growth. For Christians it is 'God is love,' though that faith launched the mediaeval Crusades in the name of their god
- the LORD of the Christian Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, lays claim to be the one and only God, while acknowledging the existence of other claimants to be 'gods' (Heb. *elohim* - e.g. Deuteronomy 17:4). There can, of course, be but one such supreme God. And He says *'I change not'* (Malachi 3:6)
- on the one hand this God is 'love,' and on the other He authorises the 'ethnic cleansing' of entire nations (e.g. I Samuel 15) - and indeed of virtually all mankind, as in the great flood in Noah's day: *'... Jehovah said, I will wipe off man whom I have created from the face of the earth, from man to beast, to the creeping thing and to the birds of the heavens; for I repent that I made them'* (Genesis 6:7)
- no whim, this, but an essential step towards the fulfilment of His purpose. The whole of creation had overstepped the bounds of civilised behaviour: *'And Jehovah saw that the evil of man was great on the earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the day long'* (v.5). Much like the way mankind is headed today!
- mankind was, at his creation, *'very good.'* Straight from the hand of God he was in the divine image: *'And God created the man in His own image; in the image of God He created him. He created them male and female'* (Genesis 1:26-27). Complete in body and mind but with freedom to choose how to live: follow God's optimal path, or devise his own defective path. Man, influenced by the Adversary, chose his own way - which led to assured self-destruction. The LORD began again with one righteous family, that of Noah (*ch* 9:1-2)
- the pattern was repeated in ensuing centuries. When nations corrupted themselves God, for the sake of His grand design, having given them time to change (e.g. Genesis 15:16, *ch* 19:24), intervened. Yet through all this the unchanging divine character is described as *'gracious and merciful'* (e.g. II Chronicles 30:9), having *'loving kindness'* (Psalm 51:1). Remember this is the *Old Testament!* Consider, too, the New Testament teachings: *'...out of His mouth goes forth a sharp sword, that with it He might smite the nations'* (Revelation 19:15). That speaks of the not-so-gentle Jesus, who will come *'in flaming fire giving full vengeance to those not knowing God, and to those not obeying the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ'* (II Thessalonians 1:8). Perhaps it's time to bring our understanding of *divine love* into line with revelation - and reality
- all those men, women and children - wiped out by divine command - died that we might live. Had their corruption infected all mankind we would not exist! Speaking of the 'end time' Jesus said: *'And except those days were shortened, not any flesh would be saved'* (Matthew 24: 22). Can anyone challenge that possibility? But for the sake of *'the elect'* the LORD will intervene to end the mayhem. *'Diseases desperate grown, By desperate appliances are relieved, Or not at all'* (Hamlet)
- God, however, has plans even for such: *'And they will come out [of their graves], the ones having done good into a resurrection of life; and the ones having practiced evil into a resurrection of judgment'* (John 5:29). After the thousand-year reign of Jesus they will, by means of a resurrection to a period of assessment in the flesh, be educated to *God's way.* His love is more comprehensive than man can imagine (Romans 8:38-39) Ω

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