



If the level of significance of church services doesn't match the challenges of the real world, then some people will seek alternatives.

Ralph D. Winter



Dear Reader,

Only when something is terribly important do we stretch a theme across two successive numbers of this bulletin. Last time it was "Why do people lose their faith?" This time it might be "Why people don't keep their faith." Those questions are almost the same, although being repulsed by the church, not drawn in and held, is clearly different from being drawn out of church.

Pastors and their churches come in many different flavors. It could be said that some pastors (and their churches) are like ticket salesmen, others, magicians, still others coaches. Not many are military officers fighting a war.

Of course, a congregation of people not fighting a war outside the church may find themselves fighting a war inside the church. But that is a focus in my article on page 6, "When the Church Staggers, Stalls, and Sits Down."

The Ticket Salesman

Let's go back to the pastor as *ticket salesman*. In one of my six different college and graduate school experiences I attended a little church led by an earnest pastor whose small congregation was almost never visited by anyone who was not already "saved."

This pastor's seminary training had apparently ingrained in him the vital importance and priority of giving an "altar call" every Sunday. Thus, every sermon ended with "Now, if there is anyone here who is not sure of going to heaven, this is the time to come forward and pray through." Something like that.



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His concept of his job was to get as many people as possible into heaven. That can't be bad!

The Magician

Some pastors, in contrast, have the knack, and have developed the skill, of speaking very entertainingly—putting them in the magician category is not meant to be demeaning. I once had a pastor, now deceased, whose sermons Sunday after Sunday were the most impelling I have ever heard.

He had actually worked his way through college and seminary as a magician. He had been in front of all kinds of audiences, from nightclubs to PTA meetings. What a great sense of timing and build up! All of my children, even my eight-year-old, were on the edge of their seats every minute.

However, I'm sure you don't have to literally be a magician in order to be a *magician pastor*. Lots of pastors just have a very engaging gift of holding our attention.

Okay, think megachurches. In some cases, it apparently does not take long these days to build a megachurch *if you can be entertaining* in the pulpit. Lots of people flock to that kind of thing.

Why? Because other churches may not entertain them—but does this describe the people more than the church? Some people don't need entertainment. They want to serve.

The Coach

For people who want to serve, the coach-type pastor may be just the thing. The Sunday morning meetings in the largest church in the world don't seem to me to be very entertaining. I've been there. The founding pastor simply strung together about fifty Bible verses. The secret of this 800,000-member church in South Korea may well be something rarely mentioned. Can you

imagine 60,000 midweek home and local small meetings? At these there is no escape from personal seriousness. To see change and progress both personally and in this world, people need to be coached as they move forward, to grow, to accomplish things, to be appreciated, well, to be held accountable for even their own goals.

Some pastors coach from the pulpit, especially in smaller congregations. Christian bookstores are bulging with self-help books which can coach people both in their personal lives and in their service to God and community. This is one reason for the vast popularity of Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Life*.

However, a recent study by the famous Willow Creek megachurch near Chicago pointed out the fact that while an exciting Sunday service can bring multitudes out to church on Sunday, such an achievement in itself does not ensure steady, ongoing growth in character and service. To do that is something different.

Perhaps one accomplishment of the megachurch phenomenon is to prove the existence of the unmet need for personal growth—the need for coaching, pacing, and accountability on a personal level.

Church Members Drawn Away

According to George Barna's studies, many people today are not abandoning the church or losing their faith because of unhappiness at church, but are drawn away from church meetings by the excitement of some sort of Christian service activity which seems more significant. It has been said that hardly anyone goes to church expecting to hear something they don't already know.

It is truly ironic, in any case, if people discover in Jesus Christ (quite possibly in church) a new angle of vision, a personal challenge, an insight into Christian service that actually leads to their absence at church services.

Of course, if this is true, and the world outside the church becomes more engaging than what goes on in church, people will leave church, some also actually leaving the faith—Ruth Tucker's article, p. 12, describes the latter. If the level of significance of church services doesn't match the challenges of the real world, then some people will seek alternatives.

Suppose a person has been blessed by all three kinds of pastors—he or she

I don't see anything wrong with the expectation that we are saved to serve.

has "been there, done that" in all three cases. Something is still lacking if the church service itself is the central concern. It can be the center, but it must not itself be its own central concern.

People want the help of church to be assured that heaven is ahead of them. They don't mind being entertained at least a bit. They want church to be a guide and coach.

But I heard one pastor say that we get together and talk and talk, and even argue and disagree, about how to "do church," when all the while God wants us to get out into the world and "be church." Just as we expect the supermarket to carry strawberries in more than one form—sliced, diced, smashed, whole, frozen, fresh, etc.—we may end up with two or three different kinds of church services in order to try to please everyone.

People attending church can easily constitute a religion, an art form, in itself. When that happens it may seem that anything goes.

In contrast, Leighton Ford quotes a pastor of a church in an urban area of Minneapolis as saying, "How many kids have to die while we go home still talking about churchy stuff? How many homicides have to happen before we stop playing church and become the Kingdom of God in the streets? Kids are dying and we are in church."

The Military Officer

What about the kind of pastor who assumes those who come to his church are showing up for military duty? Rick Warren says he wants "to turn his audience into an army." And his church has endless different ministries in which 7,000 of his members now participate. Some of these tasks are glorified church chores, like on Sunday, directing traffic in the acres of parking spaces that feed the church. Some tasks require travel across the Atlantic to Rwanda to serve in special ways.

I don't see anything wrong with the expectation that we are saved to serve, and that we should actively pray that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus talked of building a church which would breach the gates of hell. And 1 John 3:8 says simply that "The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the Devil." There is enough suffering, corruption, and violence to fight.

But, I don't see how an army of *individuals* can deal effectively with the major, angry evils in this world. When those are addressed by nonbelievers but not by believers, it brings disrepute to God and His slumbering church. We don't merely need individuals. We need armies of organized battalions. Mission agencies, existing and not-yet-existing, could take aim at a hundred truly major evils. The world would take note. God would be glorified. Our evangelism would be empowered.

That is one of the themes of my article on page 6. It is the theme of the upcoming issue of the *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* (see www.ijfm.org). f

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When the Church Staggers, Stalls, and Sits Down (In the Middle of a War!)

by Ralph D. Winter

I. THE DIAGNOSIS

The church, all around the world, is badly wounded today by the seeping departure of its members. We Evangelicals track the number of new members the way some people track the rise in the stock market. But we don't know how to count things when members just fade away.

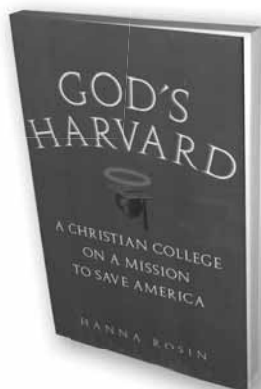
Our Inherited Doctrine and Church Culture

One high executive told me his denomination reports a total each year that includes disappeared members. Those people may have stopped attending, moved away, or died. They are still counted. "We are focused on getting people saved. We don't pay equal attention to much else."

That's not necessarily bad, but even casual contact with non-Evangelicals will tell you that a hallmark of Evangelicals (in the eyes of the outsiders) is their zeal to know decisively whether or not people are saved. To believe that God approves some people more than others is terribly important and crucial. But, to think that we Evangelicals can be certain who those people are and who they aren't is something else.

To an Evangelical it often boils down to whether a person is saved or not, and we often use our relatively simplistic and mechanical measuring stick such as repeat after me or "Do you believe that Jesus died for you and rose again?" If so, you're okay.

Jacob Loewen was one of the foremost missionary thinkers in his day. He deplored the Evangelical doctrine he called "Instant Conversion." It is not as though things of great importance, turning points, cannot happen in an instant. It is rather the fact that the Bible stresses far more a salvation that is constantly being worked out, as in Phil 2:12. We Evangelicals are thus often impatient and insistent on knowing only what God knows about the state of any one individual's life.



Homeschoolers' College

An example of this "hallmark trait" of Evangelicals can be seen in a relatively friendly book about the outstanding students at Patrick Henry College. The book is entitled *God's Harvard: A Christian College on a Mission to Save America*.

The author, Hanna Rosen, a Jewish woman journalist working for the *Washington Post*, was assigned for a year and a half to do an in-depth study of this college whose graduates are more and more in evidence in the corridors of congress and even the White House.

Again and again in passing she mentions the potential significance to this country of increased Evangelical influence in local, state, and national government.

This assignment took her into the confidence of the leadership of the college, into faculty meetings, classrooms, student center activities, and even student homes as far away as Montana, Seattle and California.

She is quite willing to admit how impressed she is by the dead seriousness and high morality of the students. They are all products of homeschooling! One of the many really fine girls she followed in great detail for that year and a half was invited to stay with a family that did not measure up to her Evangelical understanding of conversion. After some time in their home she was asked, "Do you believe that if we were to die today we would go to hell?"

This student, one of the campus leaders, paused a long time, and then said softly, "Yes, but I'm not jumping up and down about it."

Why couldn't she have simply said, "I am not your judge. All I want for you (as well as for me) is to know God better, the Bible better, and Jesus better. God is the only judge of a person's status before Him."

But she didn't say that. Of course the Jewish journalist knew better than to ask such a question. She knew where she stood in this admirable girl's eyes.

This is one thing that drives people out of church and keeps outsiders away from Evangelicals. This is so sad, because, as this book clearly describes, there is

immense good, significant morality, and impressive integrity in the Evangelical movement.

Truly amazing are the aspirations of these incredible students, many having scored all 1600 points on the SAT. They are super confident about Evangelicals taking back the government. At least three are hoping to become President of the United States, others senators, etc. Already 200 grads have infiltrated Washington and are optimistic that in time Evangelicals can dominate the government.

Thus, until now the unblinking eye of the world has never stared so seriously at the Evangelical movement. Ever. Patrick Henry's collection of super-achieving and super-believing Evangelical youth may represent one of the pinnacles of the movement, and only the tip of the iceberg.

New Confrontations

Suddenly both inside and outside the Evangelical movement it has become terribly important to test out every belief and trait of Evangelicalism, which is now the major religion of the USA—a religion which some hope (and some fear) will be the major political force.

Sure, thousands are being attracted to this Evangelical movement, which is becoming the culturally established church of America. But could these be paper gains and concrete losses? Does Evangelicalism also contain within itself seeds of its own destruction?

Actually, the situation in some respects is no less than a catastrophe. Much of our carefully, patiently, and proudly built-up global church is coming apart at the seams, even in the USA. Is this true? Many good things are happening, but there are deep problems as well.

Nowhere, in fact, is this catastrophe more obvious than in the United States. Here, estimates are that 75% of the teenagers in Evangelical homes will lose their faith after high school. One denominational study says 85%.

No doubt Evangelicals can fairly claim to be experts on getting people TO faith. But in the case of our children coming to faith, that may happen only after they have floundered in the world for twenty years, finally sensing an emotional emptiness, and a few of them limping back.

But "Is that trip into the world necessary?" Do 75 percent of our young people have to first lose their faith and then only a fraction of them later stumble back into the church confused?

Why do they leave in the first place? And why do so few return? And do those few who return see Christianity as merely a preferable environment for

their kids—but in fact a more healthy pattern of habits than a matter of personal faith?

Missionaries to Japan and Japanese churches are embarrassed by the tiny percentage of Christians. However, studies show that Japan's tiny church wins proportionally as many people into the church as do churches in other mission fields—but few stay.

Similarly, around the world millions of poor and uneducated (desperate) people flock to churches because they vaguely see hope there—hope for better things in this life (and only maybe for the life to come). How long will they stay?

In contrast to the many of the poverty-stricken populations of the world, fewer people in Japan are forced (out of desperation) to take chances on a foreign faith. When they do duck into church they may not see any significant problems in this world being addressed. Even if they stay awhile they may not discover that the Kingdom of God includes the conquering will of God in this world as much as it assures eternal life. Such drop-ins may eventually leave thinking that Buddhism is not that different.

Quite a few people in the USA who seem to be "coming to Christ" may not be coming to a belief system as much as to a preferable community. That community glue may not always hold. If it does hold, it may only add numbers but not add to the number of truly believing and committed members.

The Powerful Acids of Rust and Corrosion in the University World

We need to realize that almost all our Evangelical youth are exposed to more facts, opinions and pressure in college than in all their years in church. In fact the time they put into grade school far out-ranked the time spent in Sunday School.

Since 15 out of 17 Evangelical youth never go to a Christian college, what goes on in the university world is a defining experience.

Why do we need a film called *Expelled—No Intelligence Allowed*? Why is the university world so harshly anti-theistic? And masses of people in the media and politics so ballistic about the growing Evangelical influence?

This was discussed in an earlier issue. Evangelicals began the 20th century as predominantly a non-college movement. It took a hundred years for 157 Bible institutes to turn into colleges, universities and seminaries. At the end of the century thousands of Evangelicals had crept back into faculty positions in higher education. But they discovered that they were in a decided and rejected minority.

For decades, if they kept their heads down they were mainly oddities. Now with the new visibility of their tribe in secular society, there is a strident voice against them.

In my editorial in the last issue of *Mission Frontiers* I mentioned two Evangelicals who had attained professorships in religion in state universities. Yet, in the process they had apparently been drawn into an agnostic or atheistic position. That takes the pressure off!

Give up on the Bible?

One of them, Hector Avalos, had been a Pentecostal minister, and is now a Professor of religious studies at the University of Iowa (in mentioning him last time I mistakenly said University of Illinois). His book is entitled *The End of Biblical Studies*. He has come to calling himself a Secular Humanist and sets out to prove in great scholarly detail that everything in the Bible is irrelevant. Consider the final paragraph of his Introduction:

Biblical studies as we know it should end. We should now treat the Bible as the alien document it is, with no more importance than the other works of literature we ignore every day. Biblical studies should be geared toward helping humanity wean itself off of the Bible and toward terminating its authority completely in the modern world. Focus then could shift to the still thousands of other ancient texts still untranslated and unread. One day, the Bible might even be viewed as one of the curiosities of a tragic bibliolatrous age, when dependence on a text brought untold misery and stood as an obstacle to human progress. We might then study the Bible as a lesson in why human beings should never again privilege any book to this extent.

Now, obviously, with this book if not before, he has proven to his faculty associates that he is no longer beholden to his earlier religious role. It must be a relief to him, in a way.

I would suppose his Evangelical heritage must have allowed him to embrace a false view of the Bible in the first place. He could well have thought we were supposed to believe that the Bible in every verse gives us only good, not bad examples. True, we do skirt around the most depraved things. The ancient Gothic Bible left out long portions of 1 and 2 Kings, apparently because their pre-Scandinavian forebears already knew too much about warfare. The Taiping movement in China simply dropped out chapter 19 in Genesis. Thus, when Avalos found bad things

described in the Bible, things understandably not mentioned in normal church life, he rejected the Bible as if it were *teaching*, not accurately and honestly *describing* those things.

Rather than being impressed by how long God had to wait, how much patience was necessary, as a Divine School teacher, to lead a ruffian nation into New Testament times, he treats the Bible as though it approves everything it describes. He even quotes the Dallas Seminary journal, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, as admitting that not everything in the Bible is “valid” for today.

True, the Bible pulls no punches. It describes the weaknesses and limited understanding of its greatest leaders. It does not make unblemished heroes out of its human characters. It could not be inerrant if it did.

In contrast to his perspective, we can and do learn a great deal from biographies of individuals. But if they are accurate, we don't expect to find adult brilliance in every grade-school homework assignment. If we did it would be erroneous. The Bible in one sense is a startlingly honest and certainly accurate biography of a *nation*. It would not be inerrant if it described the failings of fallible humans as if all they said or understood was correct and edifying. God was patiently leading them in their understanding during two millennia.

Give up on God, Too?

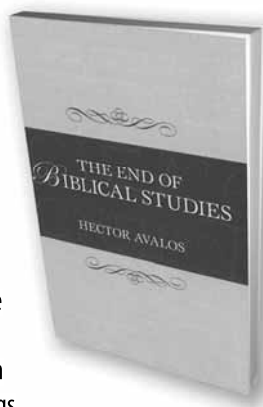
Another book barely mentioned last time is the one by a very famous Biblical scholar, Bart Ehrman, a graduate of Moody Bible Institute and Wheaton College, also a former pastor, now a professor of religious studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Last time I quoted him from an article in *Biblical Archeology*, explaining why all the evil in the world led him to give up his faith:

This made me think more deeply about my own understanding of why there is suffering in the world. Finally, because I became dissatisfied with all of the conventional answers I decided that I could not believe in [a] God who was in any way intervening in this world given the state of things. So that's how I ended up losing my faith

Now I have space to quote him from his most recent book, *God's Problem, How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question—Why We Suffer*.

He tells of going to a little Anglican church in England on Christmas Eve with his wife (who is still a believer) and how moved he was when a layman prayed,



You came into the darkness and you made a difference.
Come into the darkness again.

He comments:

Yes, I wanted to affirm this prayer, believe this prayer, commit myself to this prayer. But I couldn't. The darkness is too deep, the suffering too intense, the divine absence too palpable. During the time that it took for this Christmas Eve service to conclude, more than 700 children in the world would have died of hunger; 250 others from drinking unsafe water; and nearly 300 other people from malaria. Not to mention the ones who had been raped, mutilated, tortured, dismembered, and murdered. Nor the innocent victims caught up in the human trade industry, nor those suffering throughout the world from grinding poverty, the destitute migrant farm workers in our own country, those who were homeless and inflicted with mental disease. Nor to mention the silent suffering that so many millions of the well-fed and well-tended have to experience daily: the pain of children with birth defects, children killed in car accidents, children senselessly taken by leukemia; the pain of divorce and broken families; the pain of lost jobs, lost income, failed prospects. And where is God? (p. 6)

His book searches the Bible for explanations of suffering and finds four—and they don't all agree. Therefore he can't believe in God? Like Avalos he is apparently employing a false view of the Bible. Did he get that from Evangelicals? At Moody? At Wheaton? Possibly. Doesn't God have reason to give us an accurate account of *people as they were*, being guided by God as fast as they obeyed, but not always thinking or doing the right things?

The Bible is not merely a flash picture of a people at a given time. It gives flash pictures of a very lengthy sequence, more like a motion picture portraying growth and change, deeper insights and qualities of behavior.

I am not happy to say, but two things in the book I cannot put together. Ehrman says plainly (pp. 122, 123),

Since human beings misbehave and hurt others out of their free will (which exists even if God does not) then we need to intervene ourselves and do what we can to stop the oppression, torture, and murder—whether here at home or in developing countries where the atrocities are more blatant and less restricted.

All things considered, here is an author—who has already endured the suffering of producing 20

books—a person not mainly building a case against believing in God but presenting and agonizing about the astounding catalog of suffering both in the Bible and within the human story in general. No book I am aware of is as comprehensive and feelingly a portrayal of evil.

But he lives in a university world where, almost in order to survive, you need to stop thinking about anything supernatural, especially intermediate beings like Satan and evil angelic forces.

I can't write to him and say, "Did you forget Satan?" You can be sure that a New Testament scholar would be very familiar with the numerous NT references to Satan, far exceeding OT insights. But such thoughts are even more off limits today in university circles than a benign belief in some kind of a supreme being.

Thus he could easily be aware subconsciously that thinking like that would likely endanger his entire career—now after many years of hard work in the limelight of the secular world. He might even think that his legitimate anger about evil and what should be done about it would be damaged! If that were true, then this is in fact a book shocking us into an awareness of the true amount of evil that we may not want to think about.

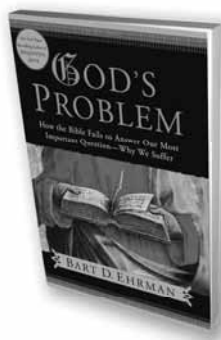
We can thus be thankful that he has so keenly described evil, even if he does not mention evil angels. Yet, we must see this omission in the context of the enormous social pressures in the university world. Even in Christian colleges little is said of intermediate beings (angels) good or bad, especially in papers written for secular consumption.

Unfortunately, as he says, he is not providing a *solution* but describing the *problem* of evil. This leads him to an impossible tension between, as he says, enjoying life as fully as possible and also doing as much as is possible about defeating evil in this world. This is no doubt a view from the very real limitations of being a full-time university professor. Professors are to think and write, but for the most part in a world of young students, little action is possible.

We do not have to agree with their conclusions. They do help us see ourselves as others see us.

The Inadequacy of Our Cultural Theology of Suffering and Evil

A book, *Reasons to Believe*, to which I did not even make a passing reference last time, is written by John Marks, once an Evangelical who worked in Young Life for a number of years and attended a very fine, large Evangelical church in Dallas.



He wrote for ten years for *U. S. News and World Report*, became a producer for Morley Safer in the CBS *60 Minutes* program, and authored three novels before this non-fiction *Reasons to Believe*. He should have added a question mark because he sought those “reasons” diligently and did not find them.

First, he felt that he had to withdraw from Evangelicalism. After marrying a Jewish girl with whom he is very happy, he got to thinking that if he continued to be an Evangelical, he would have to believe she was going to hell.

Some years later, covering Bosnia for CBS he ran into the fact that Serbian Christians had slaughtered tens of thousands of Bosnian Muslims. He says he could understand how nominal Christians could do that. But he could not understand why God would allow them to do it. So he felt he should withdraw from even a belief in God.

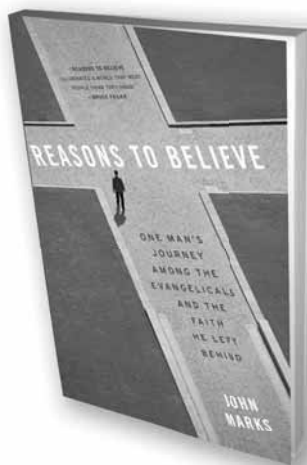
As mentioned earlier, Hanna Rosen spent *a year and a half* studying Evangelicals from the standpoint mainly of a single college—Patrick Henry, exclusively populated by super-achieving homeschooled students. In contrast, John Marks, already possessing an Evangelical vocabulary, spent *two years* going everywhere and interviewing a whole range of different Evangelicals. His is thus a remarkable handbook on Evangelical culture—well-written, informative and consistently respectful of those he interviews.

He tells of the time he did the behind-the-scenes production of *60 Minutes* on the “Left Behind Series.” He was asked at the end, “Are you going to be left behind.”? At this point he had been swimming in the secular world long enough to be disturbed by Evangelical exclusivism which allows them (us) to tell, on the basis of relatively superficial details, just who is going to be raptured and who isn’t.

The whole book, in a sense, is one long quest for clarification—would he or wouldn’t he be “left behind.”

But, as I say, he is very respectful, admiring, and even loyal in a sense. He is extravagant in his praise for the work of the churches in the aftermath of the Katrina devastation in New Orleans. By contrast the work of government agencies, he says, was pathetic.

He is not bothered merely by the quirks of Evangelical theology and our in-house jargon. Like Ehrman he is also deeply disturbed by the rampant evil in this world. The final paragraph in his book makes this clear:



The twentieth century, my century, asks its own terrible questions. Bosnia? Hiroshima? Rwanda? Armenia? So many people, and so many Christians, looking away when the Jews of Europe were led to their deaths? So many people, and so many Christians, embracing racist policies all over the world during the era of colonialism, policies that led to murder and catastrophe on a cosmic scale? One species allowed its full, unfettered measure of violence for so long? A god has overseen this nightmare? A god whose divine plan accounts for all the torment, horror, and loss visited upon ourselves by ourselves over the course of this century, and all centuries? And it's not over yet, surely. Someone else, some other

nation, is already preparing itself for the next slaughter, in which I do not want to voluntarily, unnecessarily implicate myself. A god who can't stop it has no right to my loyalty, or my belief. I can't speak for others. For now, I'm a free man in a free land. I am a man of the twentieth century, and I rest on the authority of the uneasy dead. Leave me behind [at the Rapture].

My basic response to this is not to question the rationale but to suspect a significant impact on Mark's thinking of an environment of anti-supernaturalism. Unlike Avalos and Ehrman, he has not been working for years in a university faculty where supernatural factors are unmentionable, he has been in the secular world of Washington D.C., New York City, and the media in general, where workers will also be sneered at if they are very religious or believe that Jews automatically go to hell.

Furthermore, in view of his both needing to defend his wife and also to face what he considers the unexamined fanaticism of many Evangelicals, he, like Hanna Rosen refers again and again, *with fear*, to what would happen if Evangelicals were to take over the country.

What Hope Our Young?

It would seem then, that both when our young people go off to college, and also when they get out into the secular world, the wind blows hard against them. Just to survive, to keep a job, to talk as equals with non-Evangelicals of whatever stripe, it may seem necessary to most of them to drop some of their inherited Evangelical views.

If people are being won into the front door and eventually move out the back door, what could be the answer? Is France the end product, where 80% are “Christian” but only 20% believe in God?

II. THE CURE

In my opinion a basic problem is our blindness to the essentially wartime calling of those who follow Christ. The church has largely gone AWOL, distracted or preoccupied with programs that serve our own ends.

Everyone knows what happens to a peacetime army—it tends to fall apart, demoralization sets in. Soldiers want to get out of the army.

Evangelicals have misread the Bible. They are bored. Many are getting out of what they think is a peacetime army. But the Bible does not call us to save ourselves, to solidify our security, and just to talk about world problems.

There was a time in the USA, and it is still true in many parts of the world, that people did not worry about world problems simply because modern communications did not bring that world into their small world.

Now, the world's problems are ever present in our media. In addition, we are astoundingly more capable of doing something about those problems. We have greater opportunities and greater obligations than ever in history. Yet the chasm between our unemployed resources and an effective challenge to big world problems is very great.

A major reason people are leaving the church, losing their faith, and staying away in the first place, is thus because the church has not adequately stepped up to bat along with civil forces to beat down the corruption, disease, and poverty of at least a billion hopeless people.

It is apparent that organized believers are largely missing in the conduct of the Kingdom of God, in bringing His will into the dark and suffering places in our world.

The world is rightly impressed with the Gates Foundation, Buffer's \$50 billion gift, and now Ted Turner's recognition that his \$200 million is more likely to do good if mediated through overseas Christian communities than if he were to give it to the World Bank (which in the last 32 years has given away \$3,600 billion "causing mostly harm and very little good," as the subtitle of a book indicates).

Is there any explicitly Christian organization with the specific purpose of fighting global malaria? Why not? Is there any explicitly Christian mission designed to fight the sources of disease in general—as does the Carter Center? Why not?

Should we wonder why John Marks and others can be amazed and full of admiration for the way churches in America dove in to help with Katrina, but unhappy when in general we are absent from the frontlines

against many of the ugliest ongoing tragedies in our world? In fighting evil we can glorify God, not just help our own species. Remember, both Ehrman and Marks are thinking that Evangelicals believe that God must create or at least approve all of this evil. Why? Since the church does not believe forthrightly that it is Satan's not God's work? Are Evangelicals content to survive rather than to soldier against it?

What do Evangelicals have to offer at present? Some intellectual concern. Also, confusion about what we are able to do. And, a history of super individual Christianity that does not readily see the necessity of highly organized teams (mission agencies) to solve the most serious problems. We tend to assume that a whole lot of saved individuals (as beneficial as that is) will be all that is needed.

Evangelicals do have a conscience. They do have an intuition of God's will, even if they do not have a clear mission theology of the Kingdom of God. Is it any wonder that between 2001 and 2006 mission agencies thought to be doing mainly evangelism and church planting grew 2.7%, while mission agencies that focus on "relief and development" grew by 75%?

We are sending hundreds of long-term mission teams out around the world without either the knowledge, skill or theology to tackle effectively most of the profound practical problems real people have. We do a good job in talking to people about following Christ, but when their other needs cry out for serious practical solutions, we are often unprepared.

Historically, in hundreds of foreign fields, schools and hospitals have portrayed God's love, and have given meaning to the words of the evangelist, just as did the practical dimension of Jesus' ministry. Missionaries in the past have transformed whole countries in many practical ways. Today we know far more about the problems and far more about the solutions than ever before. Yet the world still sees us as merely religious fanatics propagating a salvation that is not here but only in the hereafter.

The cure for a church that is in many ways staggering, stalling, and sitting down, the cure for our malaise and evaporating faith, is clear-cut definitive obedience. We must face and define the need to get organized answers to this world's problems as well as getting individuals reconciled to God.

In fact, getting people reconciled to God AND to His Kingdom business must go together. Otherwise our absence at the frontlines of major global problems means we are misrepresenting God's will and misusing the wisdom and resources He has given us to act out and speak out His love and glorify His Name among all peoples. f



"Great is Thy Faithfulness":

Some Reflections on the Loss of Faith

by Ruth A. Tucker

Dan Everett was born and raised in a tough town in California on the Mexican border. Life seemed to be going nowhere until he met Keren Graham. The daughter of missionaries to Brazil, she invited him to come with her to church. One thing led to another and they got married—but not before he got born again in 1968. "I felt that my life had changed completely," he recalls, "that I had stepped from darkness into light."

Three babies came along quickly, as did a diploma in missions for Dan from Moody Bible Institute in 1976. After Moody they made plans to join Wycliffe Bible Translators after they had completed the Summer Institute of Linguistics course, followed by field training in Chiapas, Mexico. In 1977 they were assigned to work in Brazil among the Piraha people whose language had heretofore stumped even some of the most sophisticated linguists.

During their home assignments, Dan took graduate education in linguistics and his life changed. In fact they left the mission field for his university teaching. But as he remembers, "I began to feel that academics was a hollow and insignificant way to spend one's life." So in 1999, the family returned to the Piraha village—this time with a two-room house, a generator, and all the amenities of modern life, including a stove, a water system, a freezer, TV, and DVD player. Soon he had translated the Book of Luke, with plans for other books of the Bible to follow.

Despite the difficulties with the language and culture, both Dan and Keren were dedicated to the tribal people and were determined to break through the language barrier. Today their bond with the people is stronger than ever, but their bond of marriage has broken. Keren continues to work with

Wycliffe, while Dan studies the language as a professor and independent linguist. Keren seeks to learn the language in order to bring the gospel to this native tribe, while Dan admits he is now an atheist. "As I read more and I got into philosophy and met a lot of friends who weren't Christians," he recalls, "it became difficult for me to sustain the belief structure in the supernatural."

But Dan's faith did not evaporate in an instant or even in a matter of a few months or years. His doubts and unbelief slowly brought him to the point of admitting publicly that he no longer believed in God.

Dan's story is not as unusual as we might imagine. Most such missionaries and ministers and evangelists, however, are in the closet. Of all the sins discussed among contemporary Christians, unbelief is the most taboo. A little doubting here and there is deemed good for the soul, but not unbelief. So it festers beneath the surface, often hidden from even close family members.

From a missiological perspective, ones who have left the faith are generally ignored—as are those who may continue to hold to the beliefs of earlier years but are no longer participating in worship or involved in any other church activities. Perhaps here is what we might define as another "people group." As with other such categories of individuals, we begin by seeking to understand who they are—through case studies and other means.

Common Myths

In my research for *Walking Away from Faith*, I identified five common myths about people who lose their faith. Here is a list ready-made for challenge, including additions and deletions:



Ruth Tucker makes her home in Grand Rapids where she taught for six years as a professor of missions at Calvin Theological Seminary. Previously she taught for 17 years at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and has taught part-time at Calvin College, Fuller Theological Seminary, Moffat College of Bible in Kenya, and other schools. Her graduate degrees from Baylor University (M.A.) and Northern Illinois University (Ph.D.) are in the field of historical studies. She is the author of 17 books, including Walking Away from Faith and her Gold Medallion award-winning From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya.

1. Those who lose faith are rebellious and angry.
2. Those who lose faith can be argued back.
3. Those with serious doubts should go to Bible college or seminary.
4. Those who walk away from faith do so to live a promiscuous lifestyle.
5. Those who lose faith were never sincere Christians to begin with.

It is simply not true that leaving the faith is prompted by the kind of rebellion we associate with a teenager who refuses to participate in family outings or church. The stories more often show initial hesitance and anguish and fear of alienating friends and relatives.

That people can be argued back to faith if we use the best apologetics is also false. In fact, many of those who lose their faith do so while seeking to argue others back to faith. These individuals are often enthusiastic and very bright Christians with a high degree of confidence—or as some would say, arrogance.

The notion that Bible colleges and seminaries offer secure protection from doubt and unbelief is not sustained by statistics. In fact, when the environment seeks to curb hard questions and doubt or to marginalize the doubter, such institutions can serve as an incubator for unbelief. The strictest regulations often foster an atmosphere of doubt.

That individuals walk away from faith in order to live a profligate lifestyle is not supported by the literature. Christians must be cautious about pointing the finger. They themselves are prominent among the Enron CEOs and elected officials who hire prostitutes—to say nothing of televangelists and megachurch ministers. It is true that some walk away from faith to feel more comfortable in gay or lesbian relationships. But many testify that they walked away because they could no longer live a lie—that they had tried to hide their unbelief but conscience got the best of them.

That people who walk away from faith were never really sincere Christians is an issue more closely related to theology than to character or sincerity. Theologically, the matter of losing faith is a topic

that many people find troubling—especially those who hold fast to a belief in eternal security. From an Arminian perspective, the matter is easier to handle; people who lose their faith need to be re-evangelized and “saved” and brought back into the fold. For Reformed folks, on the other hand, a true experience of saving grace is a matter of God’s election and is something that cannot simply be undone.

Yet, apart from one’s theological perspective, there is surely the appearance of people losing faith—and not just the university student who abandons the faith of earlier years. Even among the most outwardly

committed evangelists and ministers there are ones who have served faithfully for many years, only to walk away from it all. The theological implications are important, but it is also critical to consider this matter from a missiological perspective.

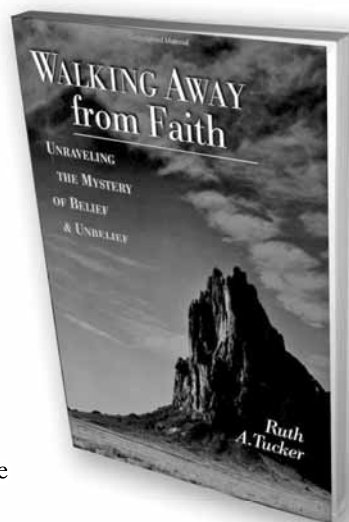
There are two aspects of mission to highlight as we consider the matter of walking away from faith. The first is preventative and the second is curative. Such a medical metaphor, however, is probably not helpful. Most individuals who have walked away from faith do not regard themselves diseased—nor should we. The most helpful way to move beyond such common perceptions is to interact openly with ones who have left the faith, as I did with Rob and Kim some years ago. Both had been raised

Catholic, but as young adults became “born again” believers and joined the Reformed Baptist church, where they were actively involved for more than a dozen years.

“I would have given my life for the faith,” Rob recalls. “Fifteen years ago, I couldn’t have imagined in my wildest dreams that I could be sitting here tonight telling you I am an atheist.”

His story is one I have heard and read over and over again. First there were questions—relatively minor questions—regarding apparent biblical inconsistencies. Then major questions and unresolved issues. And finally the whole system seemed to crumble and crash. The journey from fundamentalism to liberalism to agnosticism took several years. “I could never go back,” says Rob. “Never.”

If there was one thing that most impressed me during the visit, it was how likable and engaging Rob and Kim were. Intelligent and well-read, the parents of three children, they communicated easily with each other and with me, and there was no reason to



doubt that they had found a measure of happiness in life—happiness that Rob insisted did not characterize their life of faith. They were experiencing the routine ups and downs of what seemed to be a very normal life. This is not the picture of a happy family life that Evangelicals allow themselves to imagine.

Why do people leave the faith? This is another question that requires a response if we are going to approach the subject from a missiological perspective.

Reasons for Losing Faith

In my research I have found that rarely is there one single issue that precipitates loss of faith. And apart from so-called reasons, there is an environment in the Western world, and within Christianity, that makes the loss of faith an easy transition—or if not that, at least an acceptable transition.

In Europe and North America, religious beliefs are often relegated to the private world and not part of the public cultural world as a whole. The loss of faith

is a private matter, not a community or even family matter. Furthermore, North American political democracy and religious denominationalism also provide an environment for unbelief. Religion has become very democratic; we pick and chose our particular set of beliefs, and among the many choices are varieties of unbelief.

Enlightenment rationalism and scientific discoveries have also had an impact. In many ways modernism still

In many ways modernism still reigns, and the same arguments against Christianity used by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophers are still used today.

reigns, and the same arguments against Christianity used by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophers are still used today.

I have identified five broad categories of reasons for people losing faith. Here again is a list ready-made for challenge, including additions and deletions:

1. Scientific and philosophical issues, particularly evolution and naturalism.
2. Biblical perplexities and higher criticism.
3. Disappointment with God regarding personal and wide-scale suffering.
4. Hypocrisy and lack of caring among leaders in the church.
5. Lifestyle and perspective, including homosexuality, feminism, secularism, and pluralism.

As with all lists, this is a skeletal beginning. It is designed to challenge us to think missiologically, while at the same time helping us grasp how complex and varied these matters are.

How Do We Respond?

Before attempting to answer that question we need to contemplate how not to respond. Some years ago James Bruckner posted an online story entitled, “The Anguish of Leaving the Faith.” Here he explained how he and his wife abandoned their faith of many years—causing great pain for his wife’s family and for the Evangelical church community in which they had been actively involved.

It was not his neglect of his faith that created doubts, but his study of Scripture—while “giving Christianity every benefit of the doubt.” He tried to overlook the difficulties, assuming there were resolutions he had not discovered. “However, the more I studied, the more numerous and prominent the difficulties became.” Then one day before Christmas, he sat down and opened his Bible for his daily devotions and as he stared at the pages he admitted to himself that he did not believe it anymore. He initially kept his unbelief to himself, but when he stepped down from leading a small group and stopped going to church those close to him became suspicious. Responding to an accusatory letter from his father-in-law, he expressed the struggles he was facing:

Our loss of faith is something that happened to us while we were doing the things that Christians are supposed to do—not something that we willfully or maliciously decided The whole process has been wrenching for us, and, like you, I have lost many hours of sleep because of it. However . . . to affirm something that is impossible for me to believe would be lying, and I cannot do it with a clear conscience It is because we wanted to maintain good family relations that we did not reveal our loss of faith when it first occurred. We wanted to slowly move away from the faith to give you all a chance to get used to the idea and spare you the shock. But we were found out by accident, and so now we all must deal with it

James also received a letter from his pastor. How should a pastor respond to such disclosures? Should he express love and friendship and some words of appreciation for the years of service that James and his wife had given to the church? Should he listen to their story and try to comprehend what they were saying—and confess his own doubts and struggles? Might he ask if they were demanding too much from their faith—for example, proofs that the Christian faith never promises? Should he express his deep disappointment that they felt it necessary to separate from the church family—encouraging them to at

least remain a part of social activities? Should he assure them he would be available to help them during these troubled times in the family or at work? Here is how his pastor responded:

You have not had a "Loss of faith". You have believed a lie (Romans). You are a smart man, James, but you are not smarter than Jesus! . . . You are a smart man, but not likely any smarter than King David, King Solomon, Moses, the Apostle Paul, and other historical figures who were smart enough to believe in God . . . You are a smart man. Seek wisdom. Don't be the fool who has said in his heart that there is no God! You are a smart man, James, but you are not smarter than God. Humble yourself under his mighty hand! . . . I will count it a privilege and an act of friendship to help you back when you are ready.

James' pastor exhibits all the marks of insecurity—a man who is threatened by this disclosure of unbelief. It is not his responsibility to argue or to shame James back into the faith. He should not have reacted so sharply but instead encouraged James not to make any final decisions right away. He should have urged him and Allison to allow the children to continue their church activities and for the whole family to

continue sharing in social outings. And James, he might have said, we just can't get along without you playing shortstop again this year.

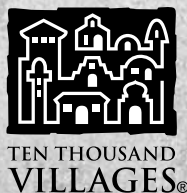
Some years ago, a second-career seminary student told me his story. David had previously been in seminary when he lost his faith. In the twenty years that followed, he married, raised children, earned an engineering degree followed by a law degree, and was making a sizable six-figure income. He considered himself an agnostic. Then his daughter became involved in a church youth program. He and his wife attended a Sunday service featuring music by her youth group. His mind wandered through the prayers and Bible reading and sermon, but on the last hymn, "Great is Thy Faithfulness," he began weeping—so hard that he had to walk out of the service. That was the first step of his recommitment to faith. Today he is in full-time ministry.

God's ways are mysterious. David's emotional return to faith makes absolutely no sense on a rational level. Sometimes we do well to step aside and trust in God about whom we can sing with assurance: "Great is Thy Faithfulness." f



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The Truth Behind the New Atheism

Taken from the book *The Truth Behind the New Atheism*
by David Marshall

I arrived by bus from Heathrow Airport to begin a research program at the Oxford Centre for Missions Studies. I began walking up High Street jet-lagged, dragging a suitcase and carrying a backpack, but curious for my first look at the famous little town. After about 100 paces, I noticed a plaque on the stone wall to my left, and set down my luggage to read:



Robert Boyle



Hooke's Microscope

In a house on this site between 1655 and 1688 lived ROBERT BOYLE. Here he discovered BOYLE'S LAW and made experiments with an AIR PUMP designed by his assistant ROBERT HOOKE, Inventor, Scientist and Architect who made a MICROSCOPE and thereby identified the first living cell.

Boyle and Hooke were founding members of the Royal Society, which put Francis Bacon's famous call to apply science for the good of humanity into action. Hooke, an inventor and experimental scientist of many talents, published breathtakingly beautiful still-life drawings of microscopic herb spores, woven silk, mold, and even fleas that are still admired today. Boyle, one of the leading scientists of his day and a devout Christian, established a lecture series in his will for "proving the Christian religion against notorious Infidels, to wit, Atheists, Theists (Deists), Pagans,

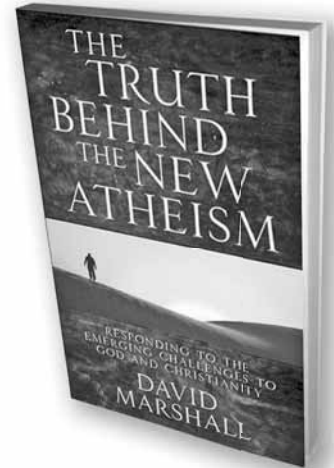


Jews and Mahometans; not descending lower to any controversies that are among Christians themselves."¹

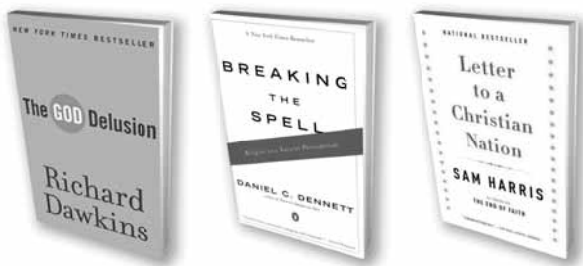
Religious controversy, one might say, has come to a new "Boyle" today. The most notorious infidel of our time works in New College across the street and down an alley. Richard Dawkins, Oxford Professor of the Public Understanding of Science, is—like Boyle and Hooke—passionate about science. And like Hooke, he is meticulous and artistic in the pictures he draws (verbal rather than engraved) of the living world. But besides his artistry with words (he won the 1987 Royal Society of Literature Award), Dawkins is known for a concept of evolution that focuses on the "selfish gene," for a controversial branch of knowledge called *memetics*, and most of all for his impassioned public attacks on religion, Christianity in particular.

With his friend the American philosopher Daniel Dennett and a young protégé named Sam Harris, who, like Dennett, studies human consciousness, Dawkins has attempted to parlay the prestige science has accumulated since the time of Boyle and Hooke into overthrowing *The God Delusion*, as the title of his bestselling 2006 volume put it. Dennett's book, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomena*, also released in 2006, attempts to show that evolution can explain religion without change. Harris also hopes to make an *End of Faith*, as his first book advocated. Harris' bestseller *Letter to a Christian Nation* added to the chorus.

These books are aptly titled. They argue not only that religion is wrong and there is no God, but that faith is a curse upon the human race. Harris' books



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were written in the context of 9/11 and are passionate about the dangers of religion. He describes the Bible as inarticulate, morally repugnant, and false. Dawkins enlists a company of adjectives to battle the Old Testament Yahweh:

Arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it, a petty, unjust, unforgiving control freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynist, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.²

Dennett finds a bit more good in religion, but in a way, his criticism is even more radical. He offers a theory as to how the human race fell into this trap. By backwards muttering, he hopes to “break the spell” of faith.



Voltaire



Thomas Paine



Bertrand Russell

These attacks don't come in a vacuum. In recent years various schools of skepticism have argued that religion can be explained naturally, the Gospels are unhistorical, Gnostic “Gospels” are just as good or better than the ones in the Bible, the Vatican was led by “Hitler's Pope” during World War II, and the “religious right” brings the threat of “Christian fascism” to the United States. One is reminded of the passengers in the airline disaster spoof *Airplane* who line up with boxing gloves, a whip, a baseball bat, and a gun to take their anxiety out on one of their fellow passengers.

Dawkins, Harris, and Dennett form the core of what I call the New Atheism. They agree much, and quote one another often and warmly. They borrow what they like from many schools of skepticism and from rationalist arguments going back to Voltaire, Tom Paine, and Bertrand Russell (to whom Dawkins is often compared).

Between them, they advance seven arguments:

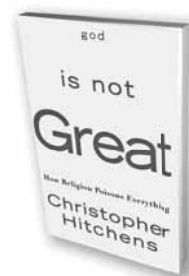
1. Faith is irrational. Faith means “believing not only without evidence, but in the teeth of the evidence,” as Dawkins famously put it.³
2. Evolution undercuts any reason there may have once been to believe in God (which is why few eminent scientists are religious).
3. Biological and social evolution can explain the origin of religion.
4. The Bible is, at best, a jumbled aggregate of theological cullings that do little to enrich humanity and much to harm us.
5. The Jesus of history was (at best) mortal.
6. Christians in the United States (the “American Taliban,” Dawkins calls them) constitute a profound threat to democracy.
7. All in all, the world would be better off without the gospel of Jesus Christ, or any religion.

The trio harmonizes in tone almost as much as in substance. None mourns the death of God: they are eager to heap dirt on his coffin, and volunteer to dig his grave deeper. Dawkins is called an “evangelist” or “Darwinian fundamentalist” even by some secular colleagues, like his *bête noire* Steven Jay Gould (who, with the likes of biologist E.O. Wilson and Michael Shermer, offers skepticism in a mellower tone). Dennett compares himself to a “revivalist preacher,”⁴ while Harris's passionate jibes at theistic religion (“an average Christian, in an average church, listening to an average Sunday sermon has achieved a level of arrogance simply unimaginable in scientific discourse”) seem designed to rankle as much as subvert.⁵

The talented polemicist Christopher Hitchens chimed in a year later with his subtly titled *god Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, violating all the rules of grammar, never mind courteous discourse, to express contempt for his Creator.

How should a Christian respond?

An answer to such “notorious infidels” needs, I think, to find a middle path between two errors. On the one hand, a mocking or sarcastic response would feed the Us vs. Them mimesis, giving readers something to cheer or jeer, depending on who you're rooting for, but not persuade anyone. Such a tone is also unworthy of the gospel. On the other hand, the New Atheists are often contemptuous of moderates (and for Gould's well-intentioned suggestion that religion and science be assigned separate spheres of influence—“Non-Overlapping Magisteria,” or “NOMA”). The New Atheists have set the cathedral on fire. I plan to put it out, not roast marshmallows while it burns. The skeptics, I will argue, are flatly and often spectacularly wrong.



But I also think these and other critics do believers, and those who want to know whether or not to believe, a favor. The Christian tradition has always taught that faith needs to be tested by reason. Dawkins consolidates the most common modern objections to Christianity. Harris asks a few key questions with “burning anxiety” (to borrow a phrase from one of those issues, the debate over the role of Christianity in the Holocaust). Dennett popularizes new anti-God theories, giving us a chance to look more closely at this strange phenomena called *man* and consider why he tends to believe in God, even at gawdfor-saken times and places.

Some of Jesus’ greatest sayings came in response to criticism. In the second century, a skeptic wrote an attack on Christianity known today from the philosopher Origen’s response, *Against Celsus*. If the blood of martyrs is the seedbed of the church, intellectual criticism can be the showers that make those seeds grow.

Of course I won’t cover all the issues that these or other new atheists (Christopher Hitchens, Carl Sagan, Steven Weinberg) bring up. I won’t venture too deeply into philosophical “proofs” for or against God. Dawkins disputes Thomas Aquinas’ arguments and offers what he sees as a telling blow against theism: “Who designed the designer?”⁶ Any Creator must be more complex than what he creates, so doesn’t belief in God just complicate matters? Better philosophers than Dawkins or I, including Alvin Plantinga and Richard Swinburne, have answered these questions. Dawkins also assumes the cosmological argument for God (“the universe had a beginning, therefore a Beginner”) has fallen into disuse. In fact, William Lane Craig jousts with leading unbelieving philosophers on this very issue in debates that can easily be found online, and the big bang theory has moved quite a few physicists and astronomers to discuss it openly. I leave readers to judge for themselves how moribund that argument is.

Evolutionary biologist Alan Orr doubts the question of God should center on abstract reasoning too much, however:

Since when is a scientific hypothesis confirmed by philosophical gymnastics, not data? The fact that we as scientists find a hypothesis question-begging—as when Dawkins asks “who designed the designer?”—cannot, in itself, settle its truth value. It could, after all, be a brute fact of the universe that it derives from some transcendent mind, however question-begging this may seem.⁷

What we’ve learned about the origin and nature of the universe has given these old debates new life in recent years. But I, too, prefer brute facts. I’ll concentrate my response on earthbound evidence for the rationality and value of the Christian faith.

The challenge of the New Atheists can be summarized in three sets of questions, and High Street in Oxford, standing across from St. Mary’s Cathedral (where C.S. Lewis preached his famous “Weight of Glory” sermon), outside the home where Boyle and Hooke worked, a block from the garden where penicillin was discovered, and the college where Schrodinger’s cat first met her fate, is a good place to ask them. First, we ask about God and science. Is faith irrational? Does evolution make belief untenable? If not, why do so few modern heirs of Boyle and Hooke believe? Did God create man, or did man create God?

Second, Dawkins’ friend and colleague Sir John Krebs is the principal of “Jesus College.” The richest college here—where John Wesley, Lewis Carroll, and John Locke taught, and 16 future prime ministers studied—is Christ College. Who is Jesus Christ? How does he help solve the riddle of God and the meaning of life? The answer, of course, lies in the Bible, which the New Atheists see as a dubious document. Are they reading it right?

Third, look around this town, founded in the early eighth century as a monastery by the semi-legendary shy princess St. Frideswide (whose unwanted suitor, following a tradition already half a millennia old, was struck blind in a forest, then healed by the virgin saint). Does faith blind or heal? Is an incipient “American Taliban” on the verge of dragging the United States back into the Dark Ages? Does morality evolve? What did the Enlightenment have to do with Adolf Hitler and Joseph



Origen



John Wesley



Lewis Carroll



John Locke

Stalin? Is religion mainly a horror story of witch-hunting, inquisitions, and caste oppression? (Such as the burning of three famous Anglican bishops for heresy a five-minute walk from this spot?) Or has the gospel molded the very stones upon which the New Atheists walk, the key foundational principles of Western, and now world, civilization?

The value of any viewpoint lies in what it allows us to see. The makers of the modern world—Rousseau, Voltaire, Freud, Marx, Darwin, Kinsey, Mead—often tangled their facts. But they inspired people to see life from new perspectives. They opened doors to what followers perceived as a wider world.

Dawkins, Dennett, and Harris are talented storytellers too. The power of their arguments lie primarily, I think, in the map of reality they draw as apprentices to the aforementioned and other Enlightenment cartographers.

After describing the flaws in their map of reality, therefore, I will briefly sketch a map of my own. If Dennett aims to break the spell of faith, you might accuse me (in this final chapter) of casting a new one. But enchantments are set to liberate as well as to bind, to help people see as well as to blind them. f

Endnotes

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3. Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 198.
4. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 20.
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7. Alan Orr, *The New York Book of Reviews*, January 11, 2007.

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November 3–7

Understanding the Western Missionary Movement IV: The Second World War and the Old Age of the Western Missionary Movement. Dr. Andrew F. Walls, honorary professor, University of Edinburgh, and former director of the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World, presents OMSC's fourth **Distinguished Mission Lectureship** series—five lectures with discussions. Consultation with participants on topics of interest. Cosponsored by Areopagos, American Baptist International Ministries, Evangelical Covenant Church World Mission, United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries, and Wycliffe International. \$115

November 10–14

Mission in Europe—East and West. Dr. Peter Kuzmic, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and Evangelical Theological Seminary, Osijek, Croatia, explores the new context and new role for missions in a changed Europe, both East and West. Cosponsored by Black Rock Congregational Church (Fairfield, Connecticut) and Wycliffe International.

November 17–21

Multicultural Partnerships: Strategies for Training and Leadership. Dr. Judith E. Lingenfelter, Biola University, and Dr. Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, Fuller Theological Seminary, senior mission scholars in residence at OMSC, focus on strategies for building communities of trust and for equipping leaders to empower team members from different cultural backgrounds to work more effectively together. Cosponsored by Christar, InterVarsity Missions, Mennonite Central Committee, Moravian Church Board of World Mission, SIM USA, and The Mission Society.

December 1–5

The Gospel of Peace Engaging the Muslim Ummah (Community). Dr. David W. Shenk, Eastern Mennonite Missions, explores the church's calling to bear witness to the Gospel of peace in its engagement with Muslims whether in contexts of militancy or in settings of moderation. Cosponsored by Eastern Mennonite Missions–Global Ministries and St. Andrew's Episcopal Church (Livingston, Montana).

December 8–12

Exploring Images of Jesus in Various Cultures. Dr. Diane B. Stinton, Daystar University, Nairobi, a senior mission scholar in residence at OMSC, examines God's revelation of Christ as recorded in the New Testament and then explores human reflection on Christ in later centuries and across various cultures. Cosponsored by Mennonite Central Committee.

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What Happened to *Freedom of Speech?*

In a major motion picture release Ben Stein exposes the frightening agenda of the "Darwinian Machine" in *EXPELLED: No Intelligence Allowed*, April 2008



by **Premise Media**

What freedom-loving American wouldn't be outraged to discover that teachers and professors are teaching a theory as indisputable fact and that scientists who dissent from that theory are being silenced and ousted? No, this isn't a third-world dictatorship. It's America, and it's the startling story of Ben Stein's disturbing new documentary.

Produced by Premise Media, *EXPELLED: No Intelligence Allowed* (in theaters April 18, 2008), is being marketed by Motive Entertainment, the company that has spearheaded the grass-roots marketing for Hollywood blockbusters like *The Passion of the Christ*, *Polar Express* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Rocky Mountain Pictures, an established distribution company, which has enjoyed numerous box-office successes, will distribute the film.

Ben Stein, the highly recognizable television personality, actor and former White House presidential speech writer, is on a journey to answer one of the biggest questions ever asked: "Were we created, or are we the result of random chance—a mud puddle struck by lightning?" Stein, who is also a lawyer, an economist, an author and social commentator, is stunned by what he finds on his journey. He discovers an elitist scientific establishment that has traded in its skepticism for dogma. But even worse, Stein uncovers a long line of biologists, astronomers, chemists and philosophers who have had their reputations destroyed and their careers ruined by a scientific establishment that allows absolutely no dissent from Charles Darwin's theory of random mutation and natural selection.

"Big Science in this area has lost its way," says Stein. "Scientists are supposed to be allowed to follow the evidence wherever it may lead, no matter what the implications are. Freedom of inquiry has been greatly compromised, and this is not only anti-science, it's anti-American."

EXPELLED: No Intelligence Allowed uncovers that educators and scientists are being ridiculed, denied tenure and even fired in some cases for the fact that they believe there is evidence of "design" in nature, challenging the idea that life is a result of random chance. For example, Stein meets Richard Sternberg, a double PhD biologist who allowed a peer-reviewed research paper describing the evidence for intelligence in the universe to be published in the scientific journal *Proceedings*. Not long after publication, officials from the National Center for Science Education and the Smithsonian Institution (where Sternberg was a research fellow) began a coordinated smear and intimidation campaign to get the promising young scientist expelled from his position. This attack on scientific freedom was so egregious that it prompted a congressional investigation.

On his journey, Stein meets other scientists such as astrobiologist Guillermo Gonzalez, who was denied tenure at Iowa State University in spite of his extraordinary record of achievement. Gonzalez made the mistake of documenting the design he has observed in the universe. There are others, such as Caroline Crocker, a brilliant biology teacher at George Mason University who was forced out of the university for briefly discussing problems with Darwinian Theory and for telling the students that some scientists believe there is evidence of design in the universe. The list goes on and on.

Unlike some other documentary films, *EXPELLED: No Intelligence Allowed* doesn't just talk to people representing one side of the story. The film confronts scientists such as Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion*, influential biologist and atheist blogger PZ Myers and Eugenie Scott, head of the National Center for Science Education. The creators of *EXPELLED: No Intelligence Allowed* crossed the globe over a

two-year period, interviewing scores of scientists, doctors, philosophers and public leaders. The result is a startling revelation that freedom of thought and freedom of inquiry have been expelled from publicly-funded high schools, universities and research institutions.

"The incredible thing about *EXPELLED: No Intelligence Allowed* is that we don't resort to manipulating our interviews for the purpose of achieving the 'shock effect,' something that has become common in documentary film these days," said Walt Ruloff, co-founder of Premise Media and co-executive producer. "People will be stunned to actually find out what elitist scientists proclaim, which is that a large majority of Americans are simpletons who believe in a fairy tale. Premise Media took on this difficult mission because we believe the greatest asset of humanity is our freedom to explore and discover truth."

The extensive grass-roots campaign for *EXPELLED: No Intelligence Allowed*, spearheaded by Motive Entertainment president Paul Lauer, will include nationwide screenings and endorsements with key leaders, promotional materials, a promotional resource DVD, publicity, radio promotions and Internet. In addition, a pre-launch campaign will include unprecedented partnerships and a widespread campaign together with educators, youth, scientists, families and the media nationwide.

EXPELLED: No Intelligence Allowed is scheduled for release in April 2008. For more information on Ben Stein's journey visit www.expelledthemovie.com.

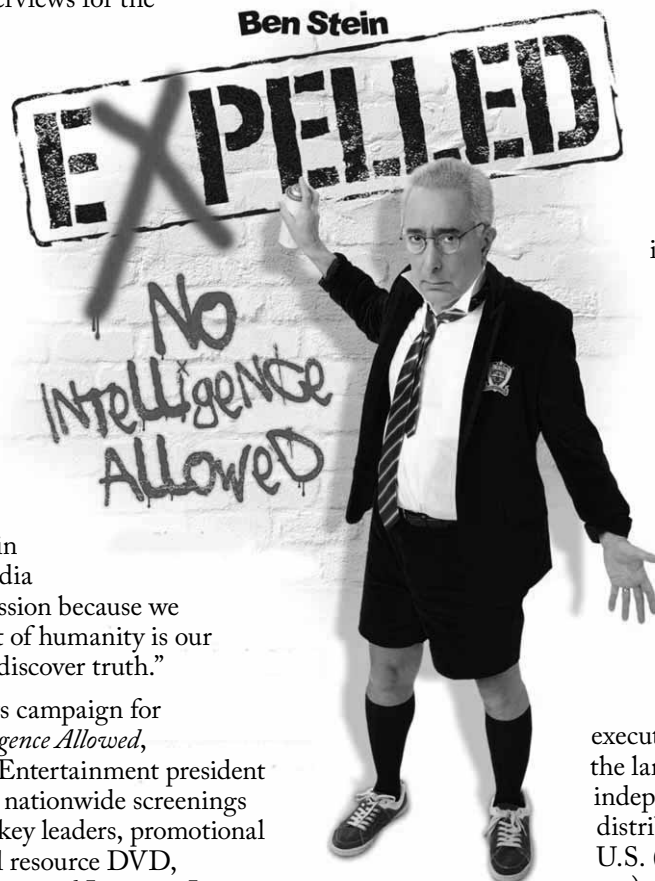
About Premise Media: Premise Media Corporation develops, finances and produces independent films, books and DVD's for the domestic and international marketplace, "producing world class media that stirs the heart and inspires the mind to truth, purpose and hope." Company principals and producers

Logan Craft and Walt Ruloff can be contacted via its website (www.premisemedia.com).

About Motive Entertainment: Los Angeles-based Motive Entertainment, which directed the grass-roots marketing campaigns for Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, the Tom Hanks/Robert Zemeckis film *Polar Express* and the record-

breaking Walden Media/Disney epic series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, is a leading company in film and entertainment marketing (www.motivemarketing.biz).

About Rocky Mountain Pictures: Specializing in the independent motion picture industry, Rocky Mountain Pictures provides full-service theatrical film distribution including strategic marketing development. Principal partners Ron Rodgers and Randy Slaughter each have more than 35 years of theatrical distribution and marketing experience, having previously served in executive positions with some of the largest and most profitable independent production and distribution companies in the U.S. (www.rockymtnpictures.com). f



Editorial Note:

This is a thoroughly professional film. It is mostly about the kind of repressive effect the university world can have on unpopular thinking. Only secondarily, although effectively, does it support the concept of Intelligent Design in nature. It does not address the barrier to belief that troubles the authors of the books mentioned in the article on page six. They are concerned about the horrifying amount of violence and suffering the world, which really cannot be explained without believing in widespread Satanic deception, destruction and distortion of God's creation.

Ted Turner to Fight Malaria in Africa with Christian Groups

Taken from ASSIST News Service Wednesday, April 2, 2008

by Michael Ireland

U.S. media mogul Ted Turner, who once called Christianity a “religion for losers,” has announced he is joining forces with two Christian organizations to combat malaria in Africa.

According to Louis Charbonneau, writing for Reuters news agency, Turner’s United Nations Foundation will together with the United Methodist Church and Lutheran World Relief, try to raise \$200 million to fight the disease.

Media Mogul Ted Turner

“Together, we are announcing a new initiative to contribute to the internationally agreed goal of eliminating malaria death,” Turner said in remarks prepared for delivery at a meeting of the U.N. General Assembly.

“Stopping malaria will go a long way toward giving people of all countries new hope and confidence that we can succeed in the fight against poverty,” he said.

Reuters’ reporter Charbonneau, with additional reporting by Patrick Worsnip, said Turner, 69, was attending a debate on the slow progress being made toward meeting U.N. Millennium Development Goals aimed at halving poverty by 2015.

According to the Reuters report, Sub-Saharan Africa is the region worst hit by malaria. Most of the world’s malaria deaths of more than one million occur there every year, the news agency says.

Economists say combating Africa’s epidemics—HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria—is vital to improving the continent’s economic growth, Reuters said.

Turner said his alliance with the two churches would enable the initiative to reach out to their combined 25 million members to raise a targeted \$200 million. The money would be used to strengthen individual and church health systems in African countries.

Turner was asked why he had decided to team up with the churches after once dismissing Christianity as “a religion for losers” and suggesting observers of Ash Wednesday were “Jesus freaks.”

“I don’t know,” he said. “As I get older ... I get, you know, more tolerant.”

Turner is chairman of the United Nations Foundation, created in 1998 when the CNN founder pledged \$1 billion to the United Nations. f

Is This the Beginning of a New Era in Kingdom Work?

For years now Ralph Winter has called on the Church and mission communities to recognize our obligation under the Great Commission to follow the example of Christ in destroying the works of the Devil as part of building the Kingdom of God. Meeting the needs of hurting people is an essential part of establishing the Church among all peoples.

President Bush has allocated federal funds for the elimination of malaria in Africa. The Bill Gates Foundation has allocated funds as well. Ted Turner has wisely recognized that it is best to work with Christian missionaries in the field because they are the most trustworthy agents to see to it the work is effectively accomplished and the funds wisely used. Perhaps this signals a new era in cooperation between the secular forces of benevolence and the Church’s Kingdom purposes in destroying some of the most demonic pathogens on earth.

Rick Wood, Managing Editor, *Mission Frontiers*

Michael Ireland, Chief Correspondent of ANS, is an international British freelance journalist who was formerly a reporter with a London newspaper and has been a frequent contributor to UCB Europe, a British Christian radio station. Michael’s involvement with ASSIST News Service is a sponsored ministry department—Michael Ireland Media Missionary (MIMM)—of ACT International at: Artists in Christian Testimony (ACT) International.

Raising LOCAL Resources

by Glenn Schwartz

My Encounter with Self-Reliance Thinking

The first thing I remember about encountering self-reliance thinking happened nearly fifty years ago when I was a college student. I read a story about missionary work in Vietnam following the Indo-China war. It was about the return of missionaries to Vietnam following the devastation caused by the war. When they saw the ruined pastors' houses, the missionaries felt compassion and wanted to help rebuild. The local people, however, had other ideas. They asked the missionaries not to help, saying that it was their privilege to rebuild their own pastors' houses. That was a very small seed sown in my thinking a long time ago.

The second experience that brought this issue to my attention happened when I served as a missionary in Zambia in the 1960s. Several Zambian believers and I were sitting under a grass shelter discussing their desire to start a church in the village. They wanted to know if there would be outside funding available to provide a building. I noticed that they constructed the shelter in which we were sitting using only local material. I also noticed that next to us there was a grocery store made with burnt brick and a metal roof. I asked if the missionaries built the grocery store for them. They were happy to say, "Of course not, we did it ourselves." A few more seeds were sown in my thinking. That was in 1967—about twenty years before I began to deal in-depth with self-reliance issues.

My third experience was an encounter with a small book written by an Assemblies of God missionary by the name of Melvin Hodges. The book is called *The Indigenous Church*. Many people credit Melvin Hodges with getting them to think



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seriously about indigenous principles and issues of local sustainability. I first read it in the 1960s, but a year or two ago I picked it up and read it again. I discovered that many of the things I have been saying about dependency over the last several decades are direct quotes from Melvin Hodges. It was a good reminder of where I got many of my ideas.

The fourth thing that brought self-reliance thinking to my attention happened when I enrolled in formal missionary training following missionary service in Africa. At the Fuller Seminary School of World Mission (now School of Intercultural Studies) I was introduced to three books written by missiologist Roland Allen. Those books are *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours*, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church*, and *The Missionary Principle*.

According to Allen, the great missionary principle is the work of the Holy Spirit. I have concluded that avoiding or overcoming unhealthy dependency is not so much economic, social or theological as it is spiritual. In other words, we should not expect people who are not genuinely committed to the Lord to joyfully put tithes and offerings into the church collection.

The fifth thing that influenced my thinking on issues of indigeneity and self-support came from listening to and interacting with hundreds of church leaders and missionaries while traveling in Africa from 1984 to the present. Many times, church leaders or missionaries would say, "Let me tell you my story." Recently I was in Canada speaking on self-reliance issues. One man in the audience spoke up saying that he had been a missionary in Botswana for twelve years. As he was preparing for his return to Canada, the local churches in Botswana took a collection equal to US\$1000 to help him and his family relocate back home. He made a point of saying that some of the churches doing the giving were poor churches. Like others, this missionary learned how humbling it can be to receive from those who give out of their relative poverty.

Conclusion

Notice that my understanding grew over a long period of time. One does not grasp issues like this instantaneously. Anyone planning to work through issues of dependency and self-reliance should allow time for prayer, discussion, reading, reflection and growth in understanding. Don't be disappointed if progress is not as fast as you had once hoped. But, with determination, progress can be made and both you and others stand to benefit. God bless you on the journey. †



Political Models for Spreading the Faith—or *NOT!*

Greg H. Parsons



Those of you reading from around the world probably know that we are in the midst of the election of our U.S. President. Unlike many countries, this happens every four years—which has advantages and disadvantages.

During the election, we watch candidates argue as to why they are the best person to take on this job. They give their background and they parade around to all kinds of events with all kinds of people. Broad appeal is crucial, so the presentations and audiences are often hand-selected and choreographed.

Along the way of course, they usually also put down the other candidate (even when they agree on most things!). They tell why that other person isn't the best candidate. They argue why their ideas, policies, track record, co-workers and associates are bad or won't work.

In the process, if they say anything good about the other person's view(s)—especially in an official debate—they may lose, and suffer a decline in the perception of their "real leadership." And candidates from the other side jump on that.

Here's the sad parallel: we do the same thing when we interact with Christians of other backgrounds and often with non-Christians when we discuss our faith with them. We argue about what we believe as opposed to what they believe. We don't concede any points. We can't acknowledge any parallels or similar features in Islam, for example. We feel that if we do, we will be perceived to be showing a crack in our doctrinal/theological armor. If that happened, we would be sliding down a slippery slope of doctrinal change!

Actually, we really don't have all the answers. And just like the presidential candidates, we really can't solve any problem—no matter what job or role we have. 2 Cor. 3:5-6a says, "Not that we are adequate to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who has made us adequate as servants of the new covenant."

It is God who is at work through us. He is the one who accomplishes everything. He will defend himself. When Paul talks about being placed here to

defend the Gospel in Phil 1:16, the passage points to Paul's particular role at that point in time—not a role we all have. In many situations in Acts, Paul and others give a defense, but that is often in a legal situation where there are specific accusations.

But the main point is: when we express our faith, we must refer directly to the Scriptures, not to Christian doctrines or history. A friend of mine answers every spiritual question with: "I don't know, let's look at the Scriptures," or "I have the same view on that as Jesus has." He really does know often, so I guess you could call that a lie. But the main advantage is that it points to *the Source* for our authority and not to our knowledge or knee-jerk catch-phrases. It naturally leads to someone asking, "What does Jesus think?" It keeps discussions going if you admit you don't know sometimes.

For example, when people ask how God can allow evil, we say, "It is part of His sovereign plan," and, "We can't understand it with our finite minds." Those are both true. But perhaps we should try to share a passage such as where Jesus weeps over Lazarus? What Jesus does there is, of course, not an answer at all. In fact, Jesus resolves the problem by raising him from the dead. But it demonstrates the compassion of Jesus in death. That is the kind of thing people are looking for.

I find it very freeing to not have to have answers for every question. But it means that we need to know our Bibles even better. A standard way of sharing our faith does not work for many people. For all of us, it is a process.

Try it out! Saturate yourself in the Scriptures and let the Bible speak—especially Jesus. See where it takes the discussion. Let me know how it goes.

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Rev. Greg Parsons is General Director of the U.S. Center for World Mission. He and his wife have been on staff at the USCWM since 1982.