

L I V E W I T H P U R P O S E

ESCAPE

MORAL TERRORISM

*What is the difference
between right and
wrong, good and bad?*

TWO MASTERS AT WAR

*We see it, we feel it, we
experience it, not only in our own
lives, but on a grander scale in
world events themselves!*

.....
**IS THERE
ANY HOPE
FOR US?**

*Are there reasons to
hope? What are they
and why should we
believe in them?*

.....

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ESCAPE

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What is the difference between right and wrong, good and bad?

How do we begin to explain why an infant dies, leaving bereaved parents behind?

Humans, given free will, free choice, made the wrong choices, and thus 'the entire world is guilty before God'.

and more...

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The beginning of CORRUPTION

Atheist Alex Rosenberg argues that life – with all its suffering, pain and corruption – is, basically, meaningless.

*His solution?
Take drugs.*

Atheist Alex Rosenberg argues that life – with all its suffering, pain and corruption – is, basically, meaningless.

His solution? Take drugs.

'What they do need,' he writes, 'if meaninglessness makes it impossible to get out of bed in the morning, is Prozac.'¹

Most of us, however, would probably find doping ourselves a very unsatisfactory way to handle life's struggles.

But, then, what is the answer to the struggles and problems and tragedies of life? Are we just doomed to suffer pain, disappointment and corruption, with no explanations, no answers, no hope of anything beyond what we face now? Is this the fate that awaits us all?

Some would say, 'Yes! That's exactly what we must accept.' Others, though, say, 'No way!'

Our world is corrupt, and (let's face it) we all have been tainted by that corruption. But once we finally come to understand *how* this corruption began, and *where* it got started, we might also realise that, yes, there is a way out, the hope of an escape. By learning how it started, might we even understand how it might end?

Read on, and open your minds to the possibility of reality being grander, bigger and more hopeful than you have ever, previously, imagined!

¹ Rosenberg, Alex (26.09.2011). *The Atheist's Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life without Illusions* (p. 281). Norton. Kindle Edition.

Why are we here?

'Seem like we're just set down here,' a woman said to me recently, 'and don't nobody know why.' Annie Dillard¹

Don't nobody know why? Maybe, but a lot of people sure think that they know why. They believe that 'we're just set down here' by pure chance, by sheer luck, nothing more. Everything – from the Sombrero Galaxy, to Shakespeare's sonnets – has a material origin. All that exists is made *only* of atoms and the subatomic particles that compose the atoms. In this view, the single difference between falling in love and having a bowel movement are the molecules involved in each process.

If true, this view means, then, that there is no purpose, no intention, no goal for us or for the universe we find ourselves stranded in, third rock from the sun. More conscious thought went into someone getting a barbed wire tattoo on a wrist than went into the creation of all life on Earth. In an oft-quoted sentence from his book, *The First Three Minutes*, Nobel Prize winning scientist Steven Weinberg famously (infamously?) wrote: 'The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless.'²

In contrast to this position, however, is one that encompasses a perspective wider

and bigger than the narrowness of a purely material creation. This view is that everything created came from God. We exist and are here, not by chance, but for a purpose, and some of these purposes can be divined through the creation itself, which testifies to the existence of a Creator. As the Bible itself says on this topic: 'The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.' (See Psalm 19:1.)

In the past hundred years, science has (however unintentionally) given that view quite a boost. For millennia, people thought that our universe always existed, that it was eternal. Hence, there was no need to speculate about how it got here, how it was created, because it *always* was here. It had no beginning and was not created.

In the past century, however, powerful scientific evidence has shown that, indeed, the universe was created, that it once didn't exist. According to the Big Bang theory, the universe (time, space, matter and energy) came into being about 13 billion years ago. This view had had startling implications regarding the existence of God. Big Bang science, in fact, helped turn the 'world's most notorious atheist',

Anthony Flew, into a theist, because a created universe, he realised, needed a Creator, and who else could that be but God? When first proposed, the Big Bang theory upset the Soviet intelligentsia, who understood that a created universe implied a Creator, a concept very hostile to atheistic Marxism.

This idea that the universe had a beginning leads, however, to the obvious question: Who or what began it? It's commonly understood that only something greater than a creation could make the creation itself. (After all, was not Leonardo da Vinci greater than the Mona Lisa?) Thus, whatever started the Big Bang had to be powerful enough to set the forces in motion that led to life on Earth, not to mention the existence of billions of galaxies. And who, or what, could that be other than God, because who, or what, is greater than the universe itself?

The only other logical explanation is that 'nothing' created the universe.

Nothing?

Yes, and that's precisely what many are saying right now about how the universe was created.

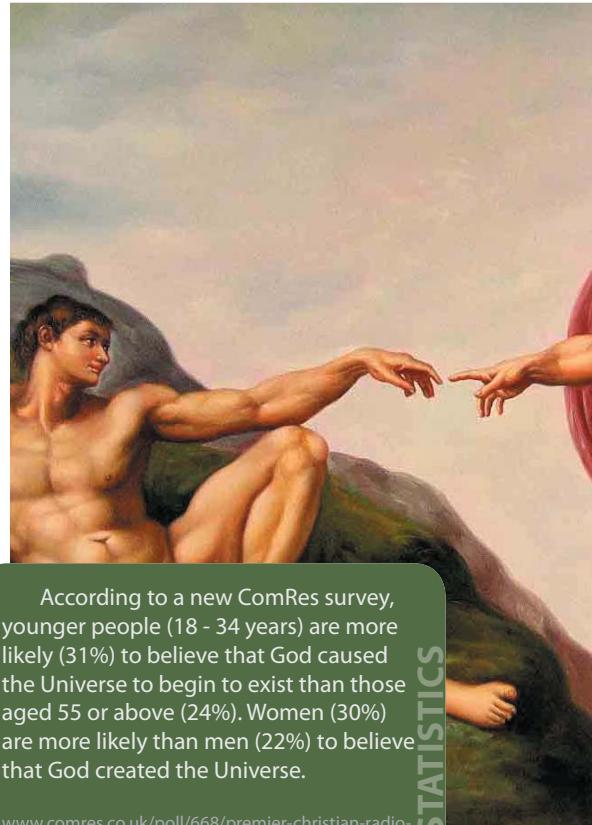
'It seems impossible that you could get something from nothing,' wrote author Bill Bryson, 'but the fact that once there was nothing but now there is a universe is evident proof that you can.'³

'Conceivably,' wrote physicist Alan Guth, 'everything can be created out of nothing. And "everything" might include a lot more than we can see . . . it is fair to say that the universe is the ultimate free lunch.'⁴

'Because there is a law such as gravity,' wrote arguably the world's most famous living scientist Stephen Hawking, 'the Universe can and will create itself out of nothing.'⁵

What is going on here? Why are these people saying that universe was created from *nothing*?

The answer is easy: Nothing is the only logical option for the atheist, because if something



According to a new ComRes survey, younger people (18 - 34 years) are more likely (31%) to believe that God caused the Universe to begin to exist than those aged 55 or above (24%). Women (30%) are more likely than men (22%) to believe that God created the Universe.

www.comres.co.uk/poll/668/premier-christian-radio-universe-poll.htm

• • • • • While I know myself as a creation of God, I am also obligated to realize and remember that everyone else and everything else are also God's creation.

Maya Angelou - author and poet

The whole difference between construction and creation is exactly this: that a thing constructed can only be loved after it is constructed; but a thing created is loved before it exists.

Charles Dickens

STATISTICS

QUOTES

other than an eternal, uncreated God (such as the God of the Bible) created the universe, then whatever it was, it had to be created by something before it, which had to be created by something before it, and on and on into eternity past. Even if scientists could peel back our origins to the most fundamental level possible, something had to precede that level in order to create it, to give it the laws and principles and



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formulas that allowed it to become the universe. And whatever preceded it also needed something prior to explain how it got there, and on and on in an infinite regress. It would never end, because whatever explained it would need to be explained itself.

The only way out of this trap is one of two possibilities. The first is that an eternal God created the universe, because an eternally existing God always existed and, therefore, needs no explanation as to how He got here. He was always here, period. The only other logical option is that 'nothing' created the universe, because 'nothing' – as opposed to anything else (except an eternal God) – needs no explanation. After all, it is nothing, and nothing comes from nothing, right?

In short, we are left with one of two choices: 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth' (see Genesis 1:1). Or, 'In the beginning, nothing created the heavens and the earth.'

Which option seems most logical to you?

Therefore, as we struggle through the stresses and toils of life, as we at times might wonder why 'we're just set down here', I invite you to think through the implications of our origins. One story has nothing as the father of our existence, the other presents a loving and powerful heavenly Father as that source. Besides making the most sense (after all, look at the alternative), the God option is the only one that offers us the hope of escape from a dismal world and even a worse future.

Taking his atheistic premises about human origins to their logical conclusions, renowned British author Bertrand Russell said of our destiny that 'no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins...'⁶

That's one way to look at it. Another is like this: "As surely as my new heavens and earth will remain, so will you always be my people, with a name that will never disappear," says the Lord.' (Isaiah 66:22.)

Yet, if this God is good, why were we 'just set down here' in a world so filled with pain, suffering and evil? Who is this God, what is He really like, and what hope does He offer us in regard to escaping the evil and corruption that stalks us even into the grave?

¹ Dillard, Annie, *An Annie Dillard Reader*, HarperCollins e-books, p. 525.

² Weinberg, Steven, *The First Three Minutes: A Modern View of the Origin of the Universe* (Kindle Location 1617). Kindle Edition.

³ Bryson, Bill, *A Short History of Nearly Everything* (Broadway Books, New York) 2003, p. 13.

⁴ Quoted in Danielson, Dennis Richard, ed. *The Book of the Cosmos* (Perseus Publishing, Cambridge, Mass) 2000, p. 483.

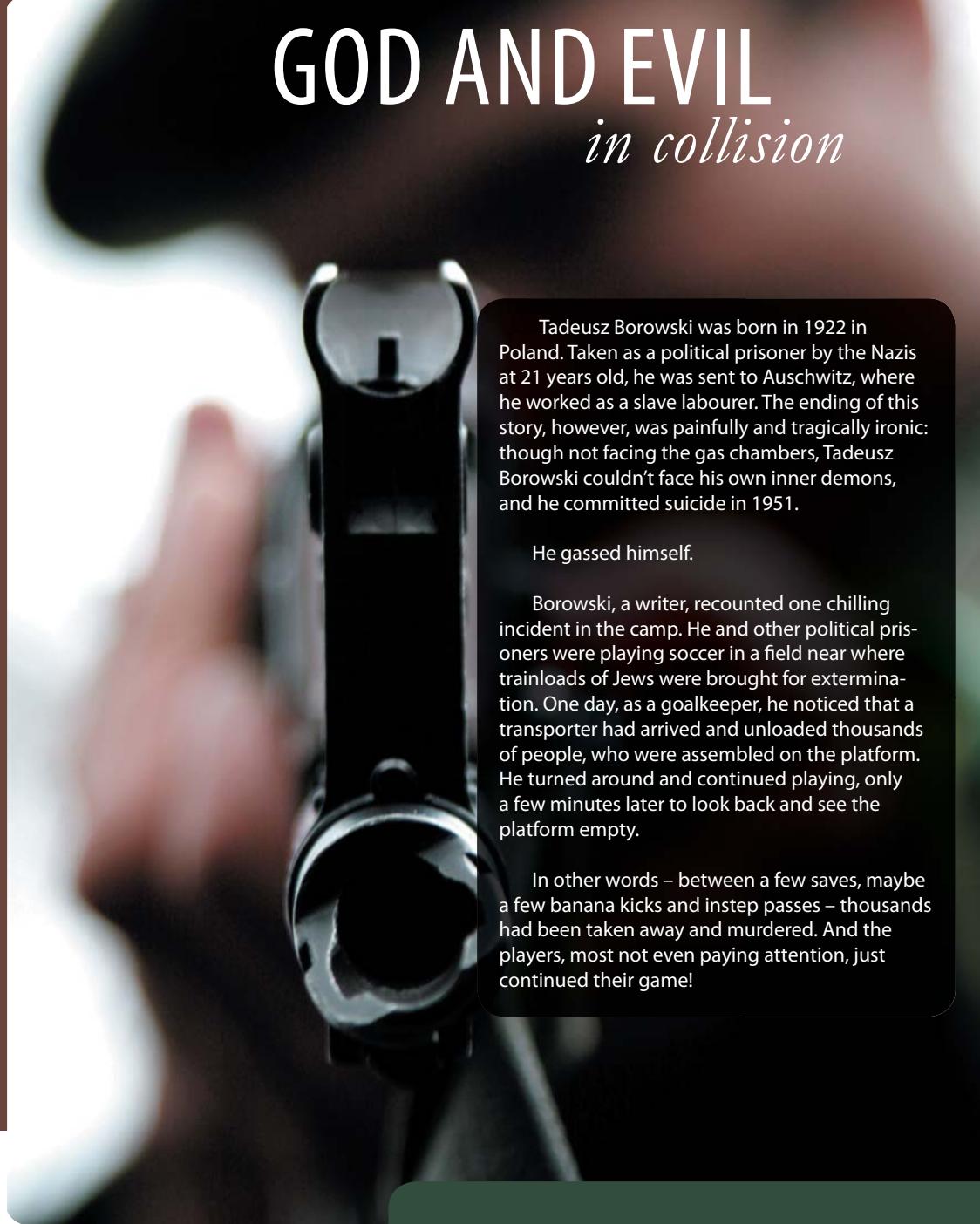
⁵ Hawking, Stephen; Mlodinow, Leonard (7.9.2010). *The Grand Design* (Kindle Locations 1817-1818). Random House, Inc.. Kindle Edition.

⁶ Russell, Bertrand, 'A Free Man's Worship' www.users.drew.edu/~jlenz/br-fmw.html

'We had been fighting for two years,' he wrote, 'and killing had become a daily activity. I felt no pity for anyone. My childhood had gone by without my knowing, and it seemed as if my heart had frozen.'

GOD AND EVIL

in collision



Tadeusz Borowski was born in 1922 in Poland. Taken as a political prisoner by the Nazis at 21 years old, he was sent to Auschwitz, where he worked as a slave labourer. The ending of this story, however, was painfully and tragically ironic: though not facing the gas chambers, Tadeusz Borowski couldn't face his own inner demons, and he committed suicide in 1951.

He gassed himself.

Borowski, a writer, recounted one chilling incident in the camp. He and other political prisoners were playing soccer in a field near where trainloads of Jews were brought for extermination. One day, as a goalkeeper, he noticed that a transporter had arrived and unloaded thousands of people, who were assembled on the platform. He turned around and continued playing, only a few minutes later to look back and see the platform empty.

In other words – between a few saves, maybe a few banana kicks and instep passes – thousands had been taken away and murdered. And the players, most not even paying attention, just continued their game!

I t's not that these men were necessarily bad; they were just, as we all are, hardened in the harshness and prevalence of evil. Who of us, while munching on breakfast, doesn't calmly listen to, or watch on TV, or read about one tragedy after another without missing a bite? *Wow, darling, the BBC says five thousand children died from a cholera outbreak in Uganda last week. Please, pass the sugar, will you?*

'What were you doing,' wrote Annie Dillard, 'on April 30, 1991, when a series of waves drowned 138,000 people? Where were you when you first heard the astounding, heart-breaking news? Who told you? What, *seriatim*, were your sensations? Who did you tell? Do you weep? Did your anguish last days or weeks?'¹

Please! Most who even heard about it probably felt more angst about their football team losing in the semi-finals than they did about the 138,000 drowned Bangladeshis.

Ishmael Beah had been a child soldier during the civil war in his native Sierra Leone. At 13 years old, he was forced into the army to fight against rebel insurgents. For the next few years, this fun-loving child, who should have been in school, was doped up and trained to kill, which he did with great skill and dexterity.

'We had been fighting for two years,' he wrote, 'and killing had become a daily activity. I felt no pity for anyone. My childhood had gone by without my knowing, and it seemed as if my heart had frozen.'²

But, at 16, Ishmael had been rescued by UNICEF and brought to a rehabilitation centre with other child soldiers in an attempt to get them off drugs and re-integrated into society. This all sounded nice, except for one great problem: the well-meaning UNICEF staff had put in the same rehabilitation centre those who had been child soldiers for the army with those who had been child soldiers for the rebels!

'It hadn't crossed their minds,' wrote Ishmael, 'that a change of environment wouldn't immediately make us normal boys; we were dangerous, and brainwashed to kill.'³

Indeed, right there in the compound, some of these rebel child-soldiers attacked the army child soldiers with bayonets. Ishmael pulled out a smuggled grenade and threw it at them. A grenade. The MPs came running in to break up the fight; the kids knocked them down, grabbed their weapons, and began shooting at each other.

What else would they have done? All that these kids knew was violence. This is what you had to do; this is how you survive. It was how the world, *their* world, worked.

We accept for granted things that we shouldn't accept. And that's because we get so acclimatised to our environment that even the harshest things don't faze us, and we can become exceedingly insensitive to them.

Of course, we're not like the child soldiers of Sierra Leone. But we're not that different, either. We're used to things that we shouldn't be used to. We accept for granted things that we shouldn't accept. And that's because we get so acclimatised to our environment that even the harshest things don't faze us, and we can become exceedingly insensitive to them. After he had a fellow communist's wife executed, Stalin said to the distraught husband, 'Don't worry, Boris, we'll get you another one.'

Author Philip Caputo – in his memoir about serving in Vietnam – wrote about his idealism in wanting to respond to John F. Kennedy's famous phrase, 'Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.' He thought he could do something for his country by serving in Vietnam.

He wrote: 'In the patriotic fervor of the Kennedy years, we asked, "What can we do for the country?" and the country answered, "kill VC."'⁴

The violence, the insanity, the mind-numbing slaughter were taking their toll on the men until the officers had to come up with a new strategy to motivate the soldier to fight. 'From now on,' Caputo wrote, 'any marine in the company who killed a confirmed Viet Cong would be given an extra beer ration and the time to drink it. Because our men were so exhausted, we knew the promise of time off would be as great an inducement as the extra ration of beer. So we went along with the captain's policy, without reflecting on its moral implications. That is the level to which we sunk from the lofty idealism of a year before. We were going to kill people for a few cans of beer and the time to drink them.'⁵

THE MAN WHO SMUGGLED HIMSELF INTO AUSCHWITZ

Denis Avey is a remarkable man by any measure. A courageous and determined soldier in World War II, he was captured by the Germans and imprisoned in a camp connected to the Germans' largest concentration camp, Auschwitz.

But his actions while in the camp are truly extraordinary. When millions would have done anything to get out, Mr Avey repeatedly smuggled himself into the camp.

Now 91 and living in Derbyshire, he says he wanted to witness what was going on inside and find out the truth about the gas chambers, so he could tell others. He knows he took 'a hell of a chance'.

He arranged to swap for one night at a time with a Jewish inmate he had come to trust. He exchanged his uniform for the filthy, stripy garments the man had to wear. For the Auschwitz inmate it meant valuable food and rest in the British camp, while for Denis it was a chance to gather facts on the inside.

www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8382457.stm

so loving, then how did evil arise to begin with? How does one reconcile evil, and the suffering it brings, with the God of the Bible, a God who loves us so much that He sent Jesus to die on the cross for us?

Good questions, so good in fact that they deserve good answers. Therefore, read on.

No question, however hardened we can become to it, evil is for real, it's part and parcel of human existence, even from the earliest days. Way back, in the first chapters in the first book of the Bible, it says about the human condition: 'The LORD observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil.' (See Genesis 6:5.) Some would say, looking back at the last century, that things haven't changed much, have they?

The question of evil has been, and remains, one of humanity's most daunting challenges. Some have argued that evil's a mere illusion, or that evil is just a lack of something good. Some argue that evil is merely cultural, relative, and that what one society deems evil, another deems as normal, or even good – and that we aren't to judge, because what gives us, in our cultural milieu, the right to pass judgment upon what people in another culture do?

The Bible, though, is clear: evil is real, evil is contrary to God's will, and evil will be punished and, ultimately, destroyed. One could, indeed, argue that, at the most fundamental level, the Bible and the whole plan of salvation portrayed in it are nothing but the story, the narrative about how God ultimately gives humanity a way to escape evil and all its painful consequences, once and for all.

However fine that sounds, it does lead to the most difficult and yet the pertinent question about evil: If God exists, and if God is so good, so kind and

¹Dillard, Annie, *Harper's*. 'The Wreck of Time.' January, 1998, p.53.

²Beah, Ishmael, *A Long Way Gone* (Farrar, Straus, Giroux; New York) 2007, p. 126.

³Ibid, p.135.

⁴Caputo, Philip, *A Rumor of War* (Henry Holt; New York), 1996, p. 230.

⁵Ibid, p. 311.

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TWO MASTERS AT WAR

Ever seen the 2008 documentary, 'A Man on a Wire', about a few teeth-grinding minutes in 1974 when Frenchman Philippe Petit hung a cable between the top of the Twin Towers in Manhattan and walked across? The city below all but froze, watching in astonishment as he managed to keep from falling to one side or the other.

Have you ever felt like Philippe Petit, walking a tightrope, trying to balance yourself, trying to keep from going off one side or the other, not knowing which choice will hurl you down one abyss or another? Have you ever sensed yourself immersed amid a raging battle between unseen forces, each trying to pull you its own way?

You're not alone.

The poet T. S. Eliot wrote: 'The world turns and the world changes/But one thing does not change./In all of my years, one thing does not change; . . . /The perpetual struggle of Good and Evil.'

Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the most influential philosophers of the modern age, said: 'Let us conclude. The two opposing values "good and bad", "good and evil" have been engaged in a fearful struggle on earth for thousands of years.'²

'To begin with,' wrote sixteenth-century theologian Erasmus, 'we must be constantly aware of the fact that life here below is best described as being a type of continual warfare.'³

But we don't need to be a theologian, a poet, or a philosopher in order to sense the reality of this controversy. Who hasn't felt a conflict, a battle, a struggle between opposing forces going on inside his or her own very mind, conscience and heart? *Should I steal from my work, especially because my boss is such a jerk? Should I lie to my friends? What about the sexual advances that this married woman at work is making towards me?*

No question, many people sense the struggle between opposing forces, between good and evil, right and wrong. We see it, we feel it, we experience it, not only in our own lives but, on a grander scale, in world events themselves.



What are these forces? Are they just figments of our imagination? If not, where did they come from, what do they want, and how do we relate to them?

To begin with, one thing is certain: our universe is big, and it would seem like an incredible waste of space, literally, if our little planet alone were inhabited. Many don't believe we are alone. A branch of science, astrobiology, is devoted to finding intelligent life somewhere else in the cosmos. But as astronomers point sensitive machines towards the stars in hopes of hearing any kind of intelligent mutter or squeak, the Holy Bible makes clear what science merely suspects: Earth isn't the only place in the universe that's inhabited.

'For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.' (See Ephesians 6:12.)

'Instead, I sometimes think God has put us apostles on display, like prisoners of war at the end of a victor's parade, condemned to die. We have become a spectacle to the entire world – to people and angels alike.' (See 1 Corinthians 4:9.)

'One day the members of the heavenly court came to present themselves before the LORD, and the Accuser, Satan, came with them. "Where have you come from?" the LORD asked Satan. Satan answered the LORD, "I have been patrolling the earth, watching everything that's going on.'" (Job 1:6–7.)

From these few texts alone we can see not only the existence of supernatural beings from other parts of the creation, but that they interact here with us on Earth – and that some are overtly hostile, too.

The most powerful verses in regard to what is truly going on behind the scenes in this literal cosmic battle are these:

'And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him ... Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.' (Revelation 12:7–9, 12.)

In short, behind our senses, which give us such a thin slice of reality, a great controversy between good and evil, Christ and Satan, is being played out at every level of human existence, from the interplay of nations to the

quiet struggles in every human soul, and the issues are of eternal consequence. We are in the midst of a real cosmic battle with supernatural, invisible powers that originated in other parts of creation, which is, most definitely, being waged here.

Many people laugh off the idea of Satan, or of angels, or of the supernatural itself. For them, only the natural world, what follows natural laws and scientific principles, exists. But that is a very narrow view of reality. Though the Bible acknowledges the existence of natural laws and principles, it just doesn't limit reality to them, that's all.

For instance, how many mobile phone calls are in the air right around us, right now, as real as the breath coming out of our mouths? And yet, because we can't see those calls, because we don't have in and of ourselves the receptors to pick them up, are we going to deny their reality? Ask the people who got sick from radiation after the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki if we can't be hurt by what we don't see?

Through no choice of our own, then, we exist in a world in which good and evil, right and wrong, law and lawlessness, dignity and dishonour, faith and unbelief vie for supremacy. Every day our thoughts, actions, words place us on one side or another in this great spiritual conflict, a conflict that we see all around us and which we sense every day in our own lives and hearts.

A popular American comedian in the 1970s named Flip Wilson used to throw out a line that eventually became part of the American vernacular: 'The devil made me do it.' It got a lot of laughs, for sure. As we look around at our world, though, at the corruption, the suffering, the violence, usually caused by what people have done, the line – though meant to be a joke – might be more real than Flip Wilson ever imagined. If so, then despite the laughs, it's not so funny.

The great news is that God has offered us a way of ultimate escape, ultimate victory. This world, with all its toils and troubles, isn't all that there is, and the suffering and corruption and

evil that we see everywhere don't have to have the last word in our lives. 'Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature *and escape the corruption in the world* caused by evil desires.' (2 Peter 1:4.)

The key is – *Whose side do we choose in this battle?* Keep reading: we want to help make your options clear.

¹Eliot, T. S., *The Complete Poems and Plays* (Harcourt Brace; New York) 1980, p. 98.

²Nietzsche, Friedrich, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (Random House, New York) 1967, p. 52.

³Erasmus, Desiderius, *The Essential Erasmus* (Penguin Books; New York) 1993, p. 28.

38% OF BRITONS BELIEVE IN THE EXISTENCE OF ANGELS

A university lecturer has criticised parents for being dismissive when their seven-year-old daughter told them that she saw an angel at her bedside every night, which she felt comforted by.

Angels are not cuddly toys, and it is not just children who believe in them. Books like *Angels in My Hair* by Lorna Byrne or *Angels Watching Over Me* by Jacky Newcomb sell millions.

Guardian angels remain most popular, with 38 per cent of us believing in them,

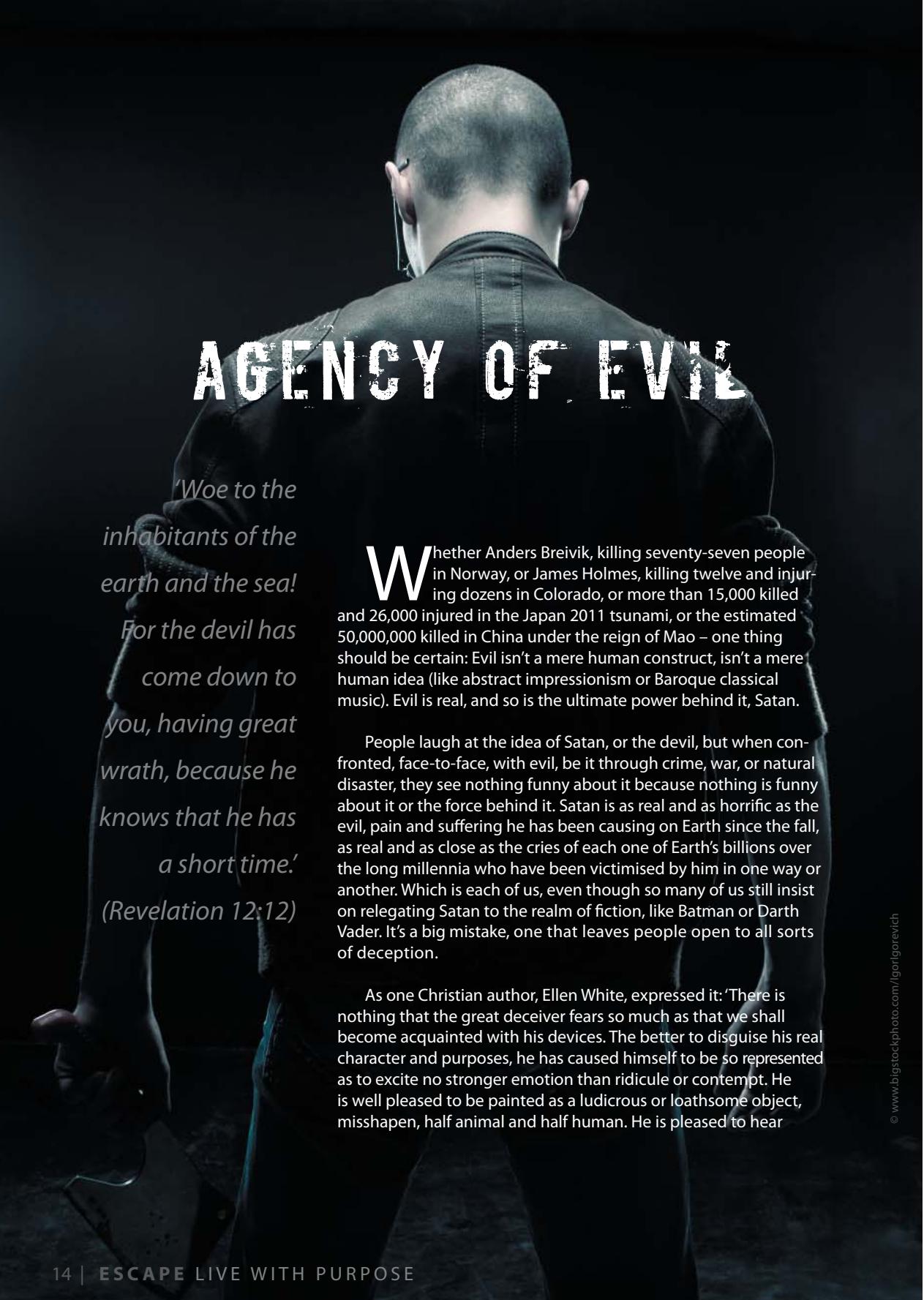
The Bible says that the angel Gabriel, for example, brought word to the Virgin Mary. But the wobbly Sixties generation of priests tended to explain away such references as a metaphor for more earthly kinds of messenger.

Gabriel is also credited by Muslims with delivering the word of God to Mohammed in the Koran. It would be a brave know-all who publicly pooh-poohed that belief.

Theologically, angels are perfectly respectable. God is an uncreated spirit; human beings are bodily creatures with a spiritual component; angels are spiritual creatures with no bodily component. They have intellect and will and are much cleverer than we are. Satan is an angel gone to the bad.

Traditional Jewish, as well as Christian, speculation holds that there are millions more angels than there are human beings. So encountering one at your bedside would be only too likely.

www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/columnists/christopher-howse/6133673/Do-you-believe-in-angels.html



AGENCY OF EVIL

'Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.'
(Revelation 12:12)

Whether Anders Breivik, killing seventy-seven people in Norway, or James Holmes, killing twelve and injuring dozens in Colorado, or more than 15,000 killed and 26,000 injured in the Japan 2011 tsunami, or the estimated 50,000,000 killed in China under the reign of Mao – one thing should be certain: Evil isn't a mere human construct, isn't a mere human idea (like abstract impressionism or Baroque classical music). Evil is real, and so is the ultimate power behind it, Satan.

People laugh at the idea of Satan, or the devil, but when confronted, face-to-face, with evil, be it through crime, war, or natural disaster, they see nothing funny about it because nothing is funny about it or the force behind it. Satan is as real and as horrific as the evil, pain and suffering he has been causing on Earth since the fall, as real and as close as the cries of each one of Earth's billions over the long millennia who have been victimised by him in one way or another. Which is each of us, even though so many of us still insist on relegating Satan to the realm of fiction, like Batman or Darth Vader. It's a big mistake, one that leaves people open to all sorts of deception.

As one Christian author, Ellen White, expressed it: 'There is nothing that the great deceiver fears so much as that we shall become acquainted with his devices. The better to disguise his real character and purposes, he has caused himself to be so represented as to excite no stronger emotion than ridicule or contempt. He is well pleased to be painted as a ludicrous or loathsome object, misshapen, half animal and half human. He is pleased to hear

his name used in sport and mockery by those who think themselves intelligent and well-informed.' (Think, 'The devil made me do it!')

As we saw in the last chapter, the Bible is clear not only about the reality of evil but about its origins – its *supernatural* origins in another part of the cosmos but now being fought out here, for real, in this world. 'Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.' (See Revelation 12:12.)

The Bible confirms what should be obvious: considering the size of the universe, we are not the only inhabitants (far from it) of the creation. It is teeming with life and intelligent inhabitants. And the Bible shows, too, that, unfortunately, some of those inhabitants are powerful and malevolent and seek to destroy us. Hence, this great conflict, this great controversy between good and evil, Christ and Satan, with Satan a literal (and powerful) being, a supernatural 'person' bent on our destruction. Many people sense the reality of the struggle between good and evil. What they need to see is the reality of the powers behind it, including the reality of the devil as a personal and literal being.

'Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.' (See 1 Peter 5:8.) And devouring is exactly what he has done and is doing and will do until the end of time.

One of the most crucial books in the Bible that reveals not only the reality of the devil but his malevolent designs on humanity is the book of Job. It tells about a man named Job whose life was going really well – wealth, health, big loving family and fame – until one calamity after another struck, all designed to get him to renounce his faith in God. Though poor Job, who in quick succession lost his children, his property, his health, had no idea why this was happening, the Bible pulls back the curtain and shows the battle between God and Satan, a battle that began in another part of the universe but is now being waged here. Though

the Bible doesn't give us details about how this battle began, it has in various places given us powerful insights into the reality of Satan and what he is doing here on Earth.

Such as in the book of Job.

'So Satan left the LORD's presence, and he struck Job with terrible boils from head to foot. Job scraped his skin with a piece of broken pottery as he sat among the ashes. His wife said to him, "Are you still trying to maintain your integrity? Curse God and die." But Job replied, "You talk like a foolish woman. Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?" So in all this, Job said nothing wrong.' (See Job 2:7-10.)

'It is Satan's constant effort to misrepresent the character of God, the nature of sin, and the real issues at stake in the great controversy. . . . At the same time he causes them to cherish false conceptions of God so that they regard Him with fear and hate rather than with love.'

Though so much more is involved, these few verses show that Satan would do whatever he could to torment Job, even using Job's wife to try and turn him away from his Lord. And though Job thought God responsible for his woes, as we so often do (after all, why are calamities like earthquakes and floods deemed 'Acts of God'?) – Job determined to stay faithful to Him anyway!

In the first days of Earth's history, in Eden, Satan (here in the guise of a serpent, though in other places he is depicted as a dragon; see

Genesis 3:1; Revelation 20:2) led humanity into sin. Since then, and even through the earth's last days, when Satan's actions are described like this: 'And the dragon was angry at the woman and declared war against the rest of her children – all who keep God's commandments and maintain their testimony for Jesus' (Revelation 12:17) – the devil's goals and intentions are to malign the character of God, to wreak as much havoc as possible, and to keep as many people as he can away from the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

The devil's goals and intentions are to malign the character of God, to wreak as much havoc as possible, and to keep as many people as he can away from the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

We can, though, rest in the assurance, the hope, the promise of escape that is found in Jesus and what He has done for us at the cross. We repeat our theme: 'Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises,

so that through them you may participate in the divine nature *and escape the corruption in the world* caused by evil desires.' (2 Peter 1:4.)

Two things you must never forget: Christ died for you, and one day you are going to die. Your death, though, doesn't have to be permanent. That's the whole point of the Gospel: it offers us a way out, starting now, from the wholesale devastation that the devil has inflicted upon humanity. 'But the Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil.' (1 John 3:8.)

If you're watching a football match, but know beforehand who's going to win, how foolish not to choose the winning side, right? Well, more important than a football game is the great conflict between good and evil, a conflict in which, if left to ourselves, we are certain to lose. But God, in the person of Jesus, has won the war, pure and simple, and He offers us a share, now and forever, in His victory. We know which side has won; hence, our most important choice is to make sure it's the side that we're on.

¹ White, Ellen, *The Great Controversy* (Pacific Press Publishing Association; Nampa, Idaho) 1995, pp. 516-517.



FOCUS on hope

This issue focuses on the subject of hope – hope when jobs are scarce, hope when the future seems bleak, hope in the Bible.

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About human DESIR

*Why do we have
this desire to
worship systems,
powers, traditions,
materialistic
things, even
other people
– everything but
God?*

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Humans, it has been said, have to worship something. Just wander through any museum of ancient history; it would be hard not to find idols, statues of the ‘gods’ to whom our ancestors sacrificed everything from chickens to their own children.

Idol worship wasn’t just a trait of our pre-scientific forefathers, though. The tabloids and Internet overflow with the photos and antics of celebrities to whom millions bow down and do obeisance, regardless of just how unworthy these human idols are.

Why this need to worship among the most rational and intelligent flesh-and-blood beings on the planet? Why do we have this desire to worship systems, powers, traditions, materialistic things, even other people – everything but God, the only thing in the entire creation worthy of our worship?

The answer is that we are all immersed in a great conflict, and central to this conflict is the question of worship, of allegiance. Whom do we worship, and why? Upon this question our eternal destiny hinges. Yes, it’s that important.

We have been created as free beings, free to choose whom or what we want to worship. What are the choices before us, and how can we know how to make the right ones?



WORSHIP of THINGS

When people love money and wealth more than they love God, and when they will sell their own souls to get it, that money becomes the most corrupting force in the world.

It's one of the most well-known holidays in America, though you won't find it, like Christmas or Easter, on the calendar. It's called Black Friday, the Friday after the American holiday of Thanksgiving, which falls on the fourth Thursday of each November. Black Friday got that name because, as the busiest shopping day of the year, it's when many retailers finally get 'into the black', that is, make a profit. Because Black Friday is considered the start of the Christmas shopping season, many retailers open early, some even at midnight on Thursday, in order to attract as many customers as they can.

And the customers do come, by droves, in the *mad, mad rush* to *buy, buy, buy*, and at the cheapest prices, too. It has become for many almost a religion – one so passionately held that people will follow it, no matter what the consequences.

For instance, on a Black Friday at the Wal-Mart in Valley Stream, New York, the crowds had been gathering all night, and by 3.30am (the store was to open at 5.00am) the mob had become so large the police had to be summoned. By 4.55, before the police arrived, about 2,000 Wal-Mart shoppers began banging on the sliding-glass double doors. The glass shattered and the eager minions of free market economics, credit cards crisp and shiny in their wallets and purses, barged in, trampling to death a store employee. Even when it was announced that everyone had to leave due to the death of an employee, many refused, arguing that they had



been waiting too long and weren't going to leave until they bought what they had come for, and at bargain prices, too. The faithful were worshipping their god at the shrine of Wal-Mart, and only the police could get them out.

Though an extreme case, it does reveal something about human nature, and that is our insatiable desire to own things, to buy things, to have possessions. Whether in Europe, the Middle East or the Far East, most people everywhere, regardless of race, nationality, religion or political persuasion, have a natural propensity towards materialism.

In other words, people are people, money is money, things are things, and most people, if they have money, are going to use it to buy all that they can, whether they need it or not, such as the 17-year-old boy in China who sold his kidney for £2,000 in order to buy an iPhone and iPad!

Indeed, while millions struggle with enough to eat, for a mere \$27,000 you can munch on a Golden Phoenix Cupcake (a cupcake!) in the UAE. While billions struggle to find clean water to drink, a wine connoisseur recently paid £75,000 for a single bottle of white wine. Millions are still out of work, but the CEO of Viacom was paid \$84.5 million in 2010, not counting the \$70.5 million in stocks and options. And, as homes were being foreclosed on in the Great Recession, and while so many more people never have lived in anything but shacks, Mumbai billionaire Mukesh Ambani built a twenty-seven storey, 40,000



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square foot home, billed the 'Taj Mahal of the twenty-first century', and worth \$1,000,000,000.

'Greed is all right, by the way I think greed is healthy. You can be greedy and still feel good about yourself!' These were the immortal words of Wall Street financier Ivan Boesky to the 1986 Harvard graduating class. (Boesky's greed, though, eventually ended him up in jail for a few years.)

As to the old question, *When is enough enough?* the answer seems obvious: *Enough is never enough.* It never can be enough, because no matter how much we worship them, covet them and treat them like gods, material things can never truly satisfy the longing of our souls. People still don't understand that truth, so we

amass more and more, often at the expense of other people, and yet no matter how much more we amass it doesn't satisfy our wants, because our wants come in dimensions that materialism and greed can't fulfil.

We were originally created to worship only God, nothing else, but once we fell away from Him we have become idolaters, worshippers of anything and everything except God. What Paul wrote in the Bible centuries ago about us remains as true now as it was then: 'They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshipped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! Amen.' (See Romans 1:25.)

That's exactly what Satan wants; he wants us to worship anyone or anything (movie stars, celebrities, sex, power, our own bodies), anything but the Lord. And for many people, in an age of great wealth, money and materialism is their god of first choice, even though it cannot save and does not, ultimately, satisfy.

'Once you make a billion dollars,' said media mogul Ted Turner, 'it's not that big of a deal. . . I thought bells and whistles would go off. Nothing happened at all. Having great wealth is one of the most disappointing things. It's overrated, I can tell you that. It's not as good as average sex. Average sex is better than being a billionaire.'²

As Saint Paul the apostle also warned: 'But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.' (1 Timothy 6:9, 10)

The problem is not money; it's when money, becoming their new god, draws them away from the true one, just as Paul warned about here. The Bible cries out against greed and exploitation, especially exploitation of the poor. Money itself, wealth itself, are not evil or condemned in the Bible. It's when people love money and wealth more than they love God,

and when they will sell their own souls to get it, that money becomes the most corrupting force in the world.

We are supposed to worship only the Lord, the God who created the cosmos and sustains it (see Hebrews 1:3). But in the great controversy, Satan has been more than happy to deceive millions with the false sense of security that comes from wealth, from money, even though that security is, ultimately, worthless.

As one Old Testament prophet had warned:

'They will throw their money in the streets, tossing it out like worthless trash.
Their silver and gold won't save them
on that day of the LORD's anger.
It will neither satisfy nor feed them,
for their greed can only trip them up.'
(See Ezekiel 7:19.)

Greed (and the corruption it brings) is one thing we all need to escape from. Jesus offers us the way out. He offers us Himself, and says to us,

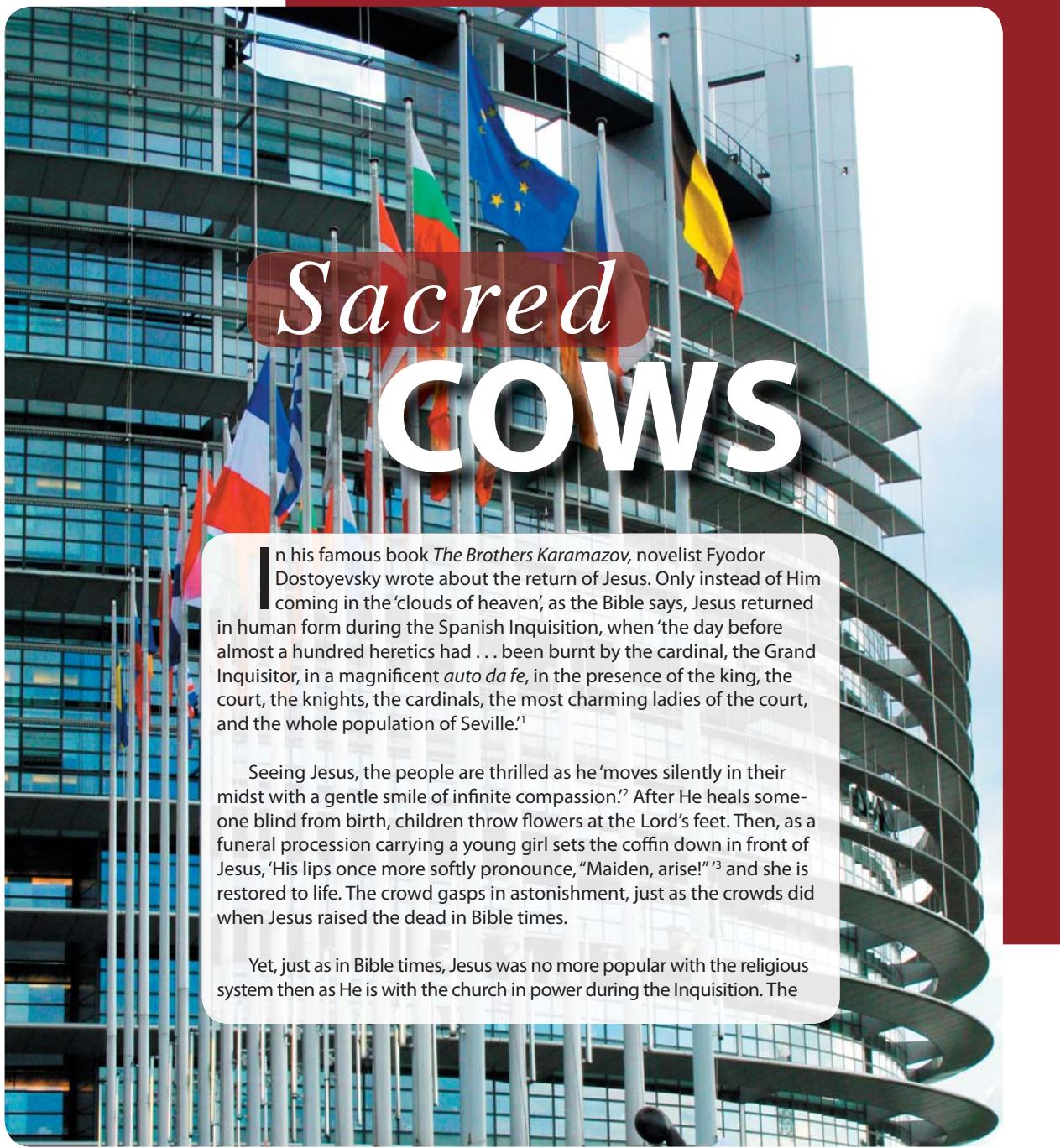
'Why spend your money on food that does not give you strength?
Why pay for food that does you no good?
Listen to me, and you will eat what is good.
You will enjoy the finest food.
Come to me with your ears wide open.
Listen, and you will find life.
I will make an everlasting covenant with you.'
(See Isaiah 55:2, 3.)

He's saying, come and worship only Me, and I can satisfy your needs and spare you from the corruption that idolatry, especially the idolatry of materialism, always brings. He's saying, I can offer you something that will last an eternity, something that will satisfy your soul long after your iPad breaks, your house floods, and your body breaks down. We were originally created for eternity; and eternity, beginning now, is what Jesus gives us, but only we choose to claim it for ourselves.

¹<http://www.worldofquotes.com/author/Ivan+F.+Boesky/1/index.html>

²Quoted in 'Ted Turner's Big Letdown,' *Harpers Magazine*, June 1997, p. 33.

History, and even the world today, is filled with tragic accounts of those whose worship and adherence to a religious system has led them to do horrific acts.



Sacred COWS

In his famous book *The Brothers Karamazov*, novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote about the return of Jesus. Only instead of Him coming in the 'clouds of heaven', as the Bible says, Jesus returned in human form during the Spanish Inquisition, when 'the day before almost a hundred heretics had... been burnt by the cardinal, the Grand Inquisitor, in a magnificent *auto da fe*, in the presence of the king, the court, the knights, the cardinals, the most charming ladies of the court, and the whole population of Seville'.¹

Seeing Jesus, the people are thrilled as he 'moves silently in their midst with a gentle smile of infinite compassion'.² After He heals someone blind from birth, children throw flowers at the Lord's feet. Then, as a funeral procession carrying a young girl sets the coffin down in front of Jesus, 'His lips once more softly pronounce, "Maiden, arise!"'³ and she is restored to life. The crowd gasps in astonishment, just as the crowds did when Jesus raised the dead in Bible times.

Yet, just as in Bible times, Jesus was no more popular with the religious system then as He is with the church in power during the Inquisition. The

Grand Inquisitor sees what happens and, as the crowd cowers in fear before him, the cleric has Jesus arrested and thrown in jail. That night, as Jesus sits in the dungeon, the Grand Inquisitor comes to Him and says, 'Why, then, art Thou come to hinder us? . . . [T]o-morrow I shall condemn Thee and burn Thee at the stake as the worst of heretics. And the very people who have to-day kissed Thy feet, to-morrow at the faintest sign from me will rush to heap up the embers of Thy fire.'

Though fiction, Dostoyevsky's story reveals an important and unfortunate truth about humans: they have a tendency to worship anything and everything except God Himself, and that even includes the worship of religious institutions as opposed to the God whom those institutions claim to represent!

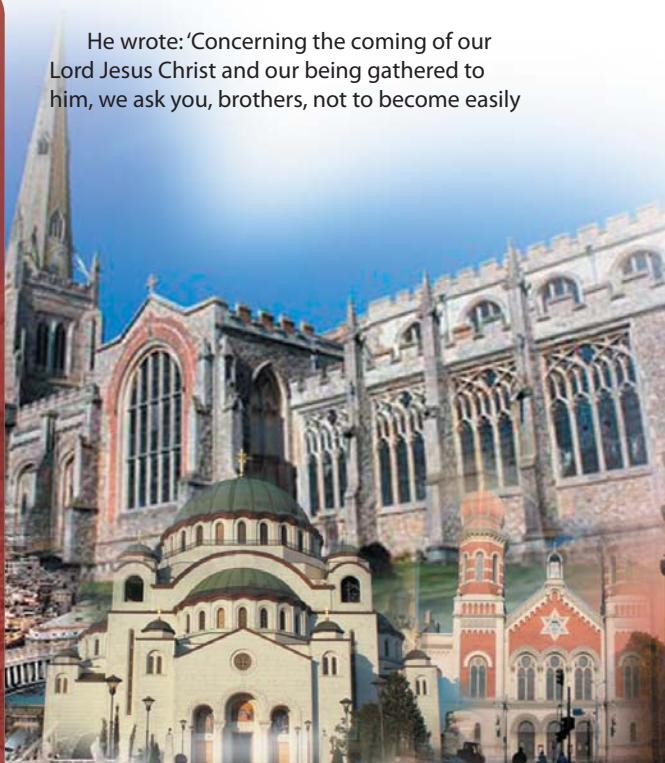
In this case, Dostoyevsky was attacking specifically the Roman Catholic Church, but the principle is the same with any religious institution that takes over the prerogatives that belong only to God. When that happens, these institutions become, in English slang, 'sacred cows'.

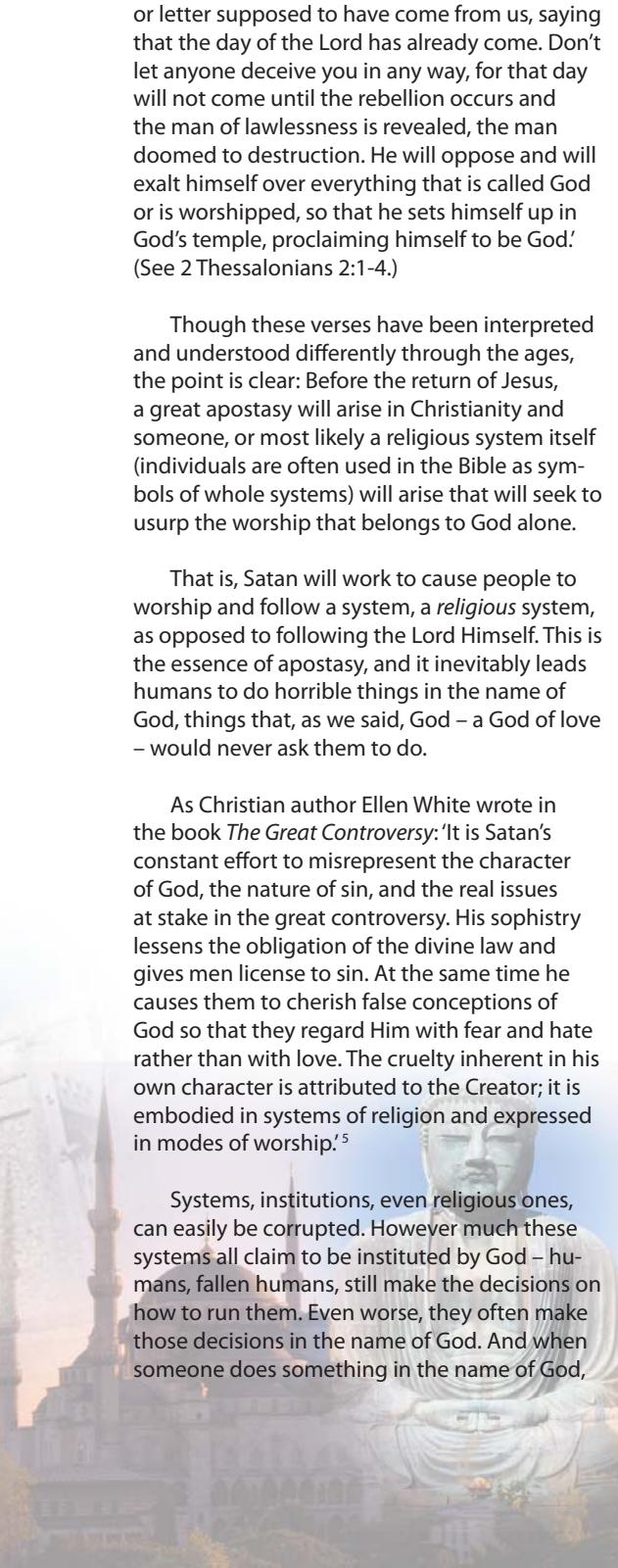
Humans: they have a tendency to worship anything and everything except God Himself, and that even includes the worship of religious institutions as opposed to the God whom those institutions claim to represent!

What is a sacred cow? It is when something, so often a religious body or institution, becomes an object of worship, of veneration, something that is above and beyond criticism – something that all but takes the place of God Himself. As such, this institution can have almost complete control over the minds of its worshippers. And when this happens, it can lead to acts done in the name of God that God Himself would never have approved of. Hence, history, and even the world today, is filled with tragic accounts of those whose worship and adherence to a religious system has led them to do horrific acts. From the suicide bombers of 9/11, to the drug cartel in Mexico, the Familia, whose members carry a Bible even when they chop people's heads off – the world is plagued by those whose worship of sacred cows brings only tragic results.

As humans, we have been created to worship God, but Satan's concentrated effort since the fall is to get humans to worship anything and everything *but God*, and if that includes religious institutions claiming to represent Him, all the better. In fact, centuries ago, the apostle Paul specifically warned that many people would, indeed, fall into the trap of worshipping a false religious system that seeks to take the place of God Himself.

He wrote: 'Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily





unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.' (See 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4.)

Though these verses have been interpreted and understood differently through the ages, the point is clear: Before the return of Jesus, a great apostasy will arise in Christianity and someone, or most likely a religious system itself (individuals are often used in the Bible as symbols of whole systems) will arise that will seek to usurp the worship that belongs to God alone.

That is, Satan will work to cause people to worship and follow a system, a *religious system*, as opposed to following the Lord Himself. This is the essence of apostasy, and it inevitably leads humans to do horrible things in the name of God, things that, as we said, God – a God of love – would never ask them to do.

As Christian author Ellen White wrote in the book *The Great Controversy*: 'It is Satan's constant effort to misrepresent the character of God, the nature of sin, and the real issues at stake in the great controversy. His sophistry lessens the obligation of the divine law and gives men license to sin. At the same time he causes them to cherish false conceptions of God so that they regard Him with fear and hate rather than with love. The cruelty inherent in his own character is attributed to the Creator; it is embodied in systems of religion and expressed in modes of worship.'⁵

Systems, institutions, even religious ones, can easily be corrupted. However much these systems all claim to be instituted by God – humans, fallen humans, still make the decisions on how to run them. Even worse, they often make those decisions in the name of God. And when someone does something in the name of God,

especially when God hasn't asked them to – we have a recipe for corruption and evil.

Here, perhaps more than anywhere else, we can find the reason for all the bad things done by those who claim to be religious. 'A Nobel Prize-winning physicist, Steven Weinberg, once said, "With or without religion, good people can behave well and bad people can do evil; but for good people to do evil, that takes religion." He had a point.'⁶

None of this is new, however. Two thousand years ago, Jesus, when tempted by the devil to worship him, replied, 'The Scriptures say, "You must worship the LORD your God and serve only him."' (Luke 4:8.)

This is a crucial point for a number of reasons. First, because God is our Creator, He alone is worthy of our worship. Second, it's a principle of life that we will rise no higher than whatever it is we worship. If we worship corrupt institutions, we will never be better than them; in fact, we tend to become just like them. That's what happened to ancient Israel: 'They worshipped worthless idols, so they became worthless themselves' (2 Kings 17:15); that is, they became like what they worshipped.

The only way to escape this trap, this deception, is to worship God and Him alone; our only safety is to obey Him, and to allow Him to mould our lives in His image, as He has promised to do. Institutions and organisations have their place, but we must never put them in place of God. We should worship only 'him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all the springs of water' (Revelation 14:7). Anything else we worship is a sacred cow, and who wants to rise no higher than a cow, no matter how 'sacred' it supposedly is?

¹Dostoyevsky, Fyodor, *The Brothers Karamazov* (Oxford University Press) 1985, p. 279.

²Ibid.

³Ibid, p. 280.

⁴Ibid, p. 281.

⁵White, Ellen, *The Great Controversy* (Pacific Press Publishing Association; Nampa Idaho) 1985, p. 569.

⁶Rosenberg, Alex (26.9.2011), *The Atheist's Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life without Illusions*. Norton. Kindle Edition.



Man in a lab **coat**

A train wreck in North Korea had killed more than a hundred people. The train, carrying fuel, exploded and set a nearby building on fire. According to official North Korean sources, several citizens lost their lives attempting to save from the fire pictures of then North Korean leader Kim Jong-il and his deceased father Kim Il-sung.

'Upon hearing of the sounds of the heavy explosion on their way home for lunch, Choe Yong-il and Jon Tong-sik, workers at the Country Procurement Shop, ran back to the shop. They were buried under the collapsing building and died a heroic death when they were trying to come out with portraits of President Kim Il-sung and leader Kim Jong-il. . . . Many people of the county evacuated portraits before searching for their family members or saving their household goods.'

Of course, it's one thing to love your country, and to support its leaders; it's another to make idols of out of them. Yet it's easier to do than most realise, and that's because, as humans, we want to worship something, *anything* – even the power of the great political systems that exist over us. What makes this kind of idolatry so frightening, however, is it can often be subtle (unlike the over-the-top craziness in North Korea); that is, people can worship these systems without even realising it.

This worship of power, of the system itself, is manifested most clearly in the way these systems can get people to do things that otherwise they might never do.

After all, who can even begin to document the horrible things that 'ordinary' people have done all in the name of their country? The bloody pages of world history show just what worship of the state can lead to.

In the 1960s, a Yale professor named Stanley Milgram conducted one of the most famous, and disturbing, experiments on the power of human authority to play God. Having put an ad in a newspaper, the Yale professor got volunteers off the street. He then placed them in a room with a series of dials marked with an ascending scale of volts, starting at 30 and increasing, in 15-volt increments, to 450 volts. In another room was someone attached to a chair that could receive the shocks coming from whichever level the dials were turned to. The participants were told to ask the person in another room a question, and if the question were deemed wrong, he or she was to crank up the voltage.

In reality, there was no electricity coming to the chair; the person in the chair was part of Milgram's team. The participants, however, didn't know that, and they thought that the cries, the screams and pleas for mercy were real. In the end, despite the pleas and cries, a staggering 65% of the participants in Milgram's study delivered the strongest shocks. And though many of the participants became extremely angry at the person giving them the orders – they followed those orders anyway!

That's the power of authority, and if ordinary people will succumb like that to a man in a lab coat, how much more so to the great systems that rule over them?

Interestingly enough, the Bible gave an account of people succumbing to and even worshipping a political system, a story that will, in its own way, be repeated on a world-wide scale as the battle between Christ and Satan reaches a climax in the last days.

... it's one thing to love your country, and to support its leaders; it's another to make idols of out of them.

The book of Daniel, the third chapter, talks about Babylon, a massive political and religious empire that dominated much of the known ancient world. The ruler, King Nebuchadnezzar, set up a golden image, an image of himself as the symbol of the empire (see Daniel 2:38), and it was demanded that everyone bow down and worship the image. 'As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.' (Daniel 3:5.) Worse, anyone who wouldn't worship the image, a symbol of

CELEBRITY WORSHIP SYNDROME

Leicester University's Professor John Maltby, who has researched 'celebrity worship syndrome', found that one in ten people had such a strong interest in a celeb that they exhibited signs of depression or anxiety.

'About eight per cent of people believe they've found a soulmate in a celebrity, displaying intense personal attitudes,' he says.

'One per cent exhibit a condition that is borderline pathological, veering into delusional. Both groups tend to be withdrawn, neurotic and moody.'

If you think you don't fit into either category, think again: one-fifth of us follow celebs for 'entertainment-social' reasons.

Although they have healthy attachments, they could move along a scale that ends in erotomania – the delusional belief that a celebrity is secretly in love with them.

www.metro.co.uk/lifestyle/10483-in-love-with-celebrity

STATISTICS

Our only hope, our only escape, is to do the same as Jesus, never mind the man in the lab coat and the pressure he applies.

the state, was threatened with the death penalty; that is, through the act of worship, everyone was to show that their highest allegiance, their 'god', as it were, was the state.

In the story, three Hebrew captives of the empire refused (you can read the whole chapter to see their escape).

What's relevant for us is that, using imagery directly from the story, the book of Revelation, which deals with last day events, talks about something similar happening: a massive political and religious system, symbolised in Revelation by beast powers, that demands our worship, the kind of fealty that belongs only to God.

Revelation describes it like this: 'And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast – all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world' (Revelation 13:7-8.)

It also warns: 'Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast.... He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.' (Revelation 13:11-12, 15.)

In the time of Jesus, the religious leaders, on their own, were unable to persecute Jesus or His followers. They needed the power of the state. According to these texts, something similar will happen in the final battle between Christ and Satan in the great controversy: there will be a union of political and religious elements into a massively corrupt system run, basically, by those who end up worshipping the system itself and doing the evil it demands of them.

In contrast, the Bible depicts a group of God's faithful followers. Immediately after warning about those who worship the beast or his image, the text says: 'Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus' (Revelation 14:12.), and they remain faithful to Jesus because they obey God's commandments – and one of those commandments is against worshipping anything other than God Himself: 'You shall have no other gods before me' (Exodus 20:3.)

From the beginning of the great controversy, Satan sought to make himself out as god, to be worshipped, and today he uses everything, even the massive political systems of the day, to turn people away from worshipping God to worshipping anything else instead. Whether the EU, the United States, Russia, China, any system wielding great power has the potential to be worshipped, to take the place of God in the lives of its citizens.

The gospels tell about the time Jesus was led by the devil into the wilderness, and he showed Jesus all the glory and power of the world's kingdoms, offering them all to Him if only Jesus would 'bow down and worship me' (Matthew 4:9). Jesus responded: 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only."' (Matthew 4:10.)

Our only hope, our only escape, is to do the same as Jesus, never mind the man in the lab coat and the pressure he applies.

¹Harper's Magazine, August 2004, p. 14.

THE DEAD

Whatever else this corrupt world offers, it offers no solution to life's biggest challenge, and that is death. To be born means, sooner or later, to die.

Tapping into the human fear of and fascination with death and what happens after death, M. Night Shyamalan's 1999 movie, *The Sixth Sense*, became an international phenomenon. Who, if they saw it, can forget the child's famous line, 'I see dead people'?

No question, for as long as humans have lived, they have all faced the reality of death. No one escapes it. No matter who we are, how much money we have, who our parents were (or weren't), it makes no difference. After all, look at Steve Jobs, the deceased CEO of Apple Computers. He had everything the world could offer, *which is precisely the problem*. Whatever else this corrupt world offers, it offers no solution to life's biggest challenge, and that is death. To be born means, sooner or later, to die.

As *The Sixth Sense* showed, though, many believe that death is, really, just a step into another realm, and that humans possess an immortal soul,



and that at death this soul is released into a new phase of life. Even many Christians believe something similar: that, at death, the soul goes immediately either to the bliss of heaven or to the torments of hell.

The only problem? This view is contradictory to the Bible. Even worse, it opens people up for more of Satan's deceptions. Indeed, this belief, that death leads immediately to another form of conscious existence, is one of the devil's greatest and most effective lies, and only by knowing the truth about death can we be spared from this deadly spiritual rip-off.

How so?

There are, in the Christian world, two grand views of death. One is that the dead go soaring off, either to heaven or to hell, the moment that they die; the other view is that the dead are unconscious in the grave until the resurrection, which happens at Christ's return.

Which is correct? Since death and the resurrection from the dead is the key element in the Bible, and the Bible has been around for 2,000 years in Europe, it is the best authority even today when it comes to learning about the state of the dead. Modern science cannot explore the state of the dead, because it is not observable. It can only be approached by hypothesis based on deductions and/or spiritual insights. If God is the giver of life and He speaks in the Bible, it is relevant to look for answers in the Bible. What, then, does it say about the dead: immediate reward (or punishment) at death, or an unconscious sleep until the resurrection?

For starters, here's Jesus Himself talking about the dead:

'Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.' (See John 5:28, 29.)

Do these words give the idea that the dead have gone right away to their reward or to their punishment? Or do they give the idea that they sleep in the grave, awaiting judgment? Sounds like the latter, for sure. (Read it again.)

How about this text? 'Many of those whose bodies lie dead and buried will rise up, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting disgrace.' (See Daniel 12:2.)

Again, if the dead were already being rewarded or punished as soon as they died, what is Daniel 12:2 talking about?

In response to those who denied the resurrection of the dead, Paul wrote:

'And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost!' (See 1 Corinthians 15:17, 18.)

Those fallen asleep (as in *dead*) in Christ are lost if there's no resurrection? How could they be lost if the dead in Christ are already in heaven with Him and enjoying the bliss there? If, however, the dead are asleep, unconscious in the grave, the texts make perfect sense, because it would mean that the dead, in the grave, would stay there if there were no resurrection for them.

What do the following texts about death mean if, indeed, the deceased are already either in heaven or in hell?

'When they breathe their last, they return to the earth,
and all their plans die with them.'
(See Psalm 146:4.)

'The dead cannot sing praises to the LORD, for they have gone into the silence of the grave.'(See Psalm 115:17.)

'The living at least know they will die, but the dead know nothing. They have no further reward, nor are they remembered.'
(See Ecclesiastes 9:5.)

The Bible seems, then, to be exceedingly clear about the dead: they are in an unconscious state until the resurrection. And the hope of their resurrection is found in the reality of Jesus' resurrection!

But what about Near Death Experiences (NDE), in which people die, come back to life, and give extraordinary accounts of a conscious existence after death? What do we do with these events, many of which have been studied by scientists in laboratories?

To begin with, we urge great caution. They're not called *Near Death Experiences* for nothing. They're only *near* death, and to be near something isn't the same as to *be* that thing. To be '*near*' death isn't the same as to be dead, any more than to be near birth is to be born. None of who those who had an NDE were dead dead, as in *rigor mortis* dead; therefore, we ought to be careful about what conclusions we draw from these experiences about what death is.

Secondly, if you were the devil, and had supernatural powers, and you wanted people *not* to believe in Jesus, what better way than to give them experiences about an afterlife that has nothing to do with Jesus? Indeed, many who have NDEs talk about encountering a being, or beings of light, who they believe are the dead, or angels, or even God Himself. And yet, in almost all cases, these personalities almost never teach them the most generic biblical truths. Instead, they utter comforting platitudes

about love, peace and goodness but nothing about sin, the need of Christ's atoning blood, or coming judgment. One would think that, while supposedly getting a taste of the Christian afterlife, they would have got a taste of Christian truth. No wonder most of those who had NDEs come away less inclined towards Christianity than they were before having 'died'. It's a powerful deception, one that can leave millions thinking that they have no need of Jesus or the plan of salvation, because there's something inherently immortal in them that will live forever, regardless of what they believe or how they act.

No question, death is real and death is powerful. But, thanks to Jesus, it doesn't have to have the last word. No, through His own sacrifice and then resurrection, Jesus promises anyone who claims Him by faith the opportunity to partake in the eternal life that He offers to the whole world.

And, as He said in the book of Revelation: 'Look, I am coming soon, bringing my reward with me to repay all people according to their deeds.'(See Revelation 22:12.)

He's bringing His reward with Him? Again, how does one reconcile this with the idea that the faithful dead get their reward immediately at death, soaring off to heaven, at least as commonly taught? One doesn't. Instead, the Bible teaches that the dead are asleep, unconscious in the grave.

But, because of Jesus, 'the last enemy to be destroyed is death' (see 1 Corinthians 15:26), which means that when Christ returns, 'the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."'
(See 1 Corinthians 15:52-54.)

Talk about an escape!

Until then, how crucial that we don't fall for one of Satan's most corrupting lies!

In the midst of

CORRUPTION

The evil, the corruption, the violence manifested in us is a reflection of the character of Satan, not God.

t has been said the one Christian doctrine that doesn't need to be taken on faith is human sinfulness.

Look around. Why are crime, violence, greed and exploitation just as rampant today as they have been in every era? Why have all our technological advances not been followed by many moral ones? Why, if anything, have our complicated gadgets and devices simply given us new and more convenient means of expressing the corruption within us? From child predators using the Internet to find more victims, to Predator drones taking out enemy combatants, our moral skills haven't kept pace with our technological ones.

Why are humans so corrupt? Why are we like this, especially when, according to the Holy Scriptures, we were beings made in the 'image of God' (Genesis 1:27)? It is because that image has all but been erased. Instead, the evil, the corruption, the violence manifested in us is a reflection of the character of Satan, not God.

Are we, though, simply left to this corruption? Is this just the way it is, or is there a way out, an escape? If so, what is that escape, and how can any of us find it?

Do we have any hope, or are we just left to wallow in the midst of corruption?



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*And while
these corporate
creeps take the
money and
run, around the
world untold
masses struggle
with poverty,
hunger and
homelessness.*

In Oliver Stone's 1987 *Wall Street*, Michael Douglas played a corporate raider named Gordon Gekko whose ruthlessness and hunger for money got him thrown in jail for fraud and insider trading. One of the more memorable lines, symbolic of the character's greed, was, 'Lunch is for wimps'; another was, 'If you want a friend, get a dog.'

Though Gekko was just a fictional character (loosely based on Ivan Boesky, a Wall Street trader worth 200 million dollars who did get locked up for insider trading in 1986), the fact is the things he did were small compared to the outrageous incompetence, greed, and perhaps criminality, that brought the Great Recession, which has caused millions around the world to lose their jobs, or homes, or (in some cases) both – acts for which these men were, nevertheless, paid millions of dollars.

One of the most infamous of these high-priced conmen was Angelo Mozillo, of Countrywide Financial, the biggest lender of toxic loans in America. Though this company's malfeasance helped cause millions of Americans to lose their homes and help bring down the world's greatest economy – what happened to Mozillo? Besides the ban from serving as an officer on any public company, he had to pay 67.5 million in fines. That sounds harsh, except that Mozillo was worth *about 800 million dollars* by the time he was forced out of the company. Worse, he didn't spend a day in jail. (Gekko, who did a lot less damage to others, got twenty years!)

Who can forget British Petroleum's CEO Tony Hayward, who famously said that he wanted his 'life back' as millions of gallons of oil poured into the Gulf of Mexico, ruining the livelihood of hundreds of thousands and damaging about 16,000 miles of shoreline? For his trouble, Mr Hayward was given a 16.8 million dollar severance package (small change compared to ousted Merrill Lynch CEO Stan O'Neil's \$160 million severance pay after he led the company to disaster in the sub-prime mortgage collapse of 2007-2008, the same collapse that left millions without homes or jobs).

In the LIBOR scandal of 2012, in which Barclay's bank deceitfully manipulated interest rates in order to allow the bank to make massive profits at others' expense (and helping ruin the world's economy), ousted Barclay's CEO Bob Diamond decided, given the public outrage, to forego a £20 million severance package; however, with an estimated personal worth about \$160 million, Diamond could afford to skip it.

Of course, most people aren't surprised that the big bosses of these large banks and corporations are greedy. Rather, most people were shocked at *how much* these men, especially those in failed companies, were still paid, despite the incredible damage that they caused.

And while these corporate creeps take the money and run, around the world untold masses struggle with poverty, hunger and homelessness. Though these numbers fluctuate, 1% of the population possesses 40% of its wealth; that is, if you had one hundred people, one person would possess almost half of all their accumulated wealth! And, if current trends continue, that one person will, over time, have even more.

This inequality is manifested in various ways, such as:

People will pay \$168,000 for a bottle of Australian wine producer Penfolds' '2004 Block 42' wine, even though hundreds of millions have to drink water from unclean sources.

A Hyde Park apartment in London, called the Penthouse, is worth £123 million (cheap



compared to the billion dollars for a house in Mumbai) while it's estimated that about 100 million people worldwide are now homeless.

The rich will spend \$30,000 for a ten-course meal (including Tartar of Kobe beef with Imperial Beluga caviar, Belon oysters, and Lobster Osso Buco) at The Dome Restaurant in Bangkok, while one in seven people (about a billion) don't know where their next meal is coming from.

No wonder the Bible rails against economic injustice. From the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, the Israelites are told: 'Never take advantage of poor and destitute labourers, whether they are fellow Israelites or foreigners living in your towns. You must pay them their wages each day before sunset because they are poor and are counting on it.' (Deuteronomy 24:14, 15.) In the New Testament, the book of James cries out: 'Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.' (See James 5:4, 5.)

Everywhere in between, too, the Bible speaks strongly against the rich exploiting the poor:



*'They sell the righteous for silver,
and the needy for
a pair of sandals.
They trample on the
heads of the poor
as upon the dust
of the ground and
deny justice to the
oppressed.'*

'They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed.'
(See Amos 2:6-7.)

'Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights . . . making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless.'
(See Isaiah 10:1-2.)

'On your clothes men find the lifeblood of the innocent poor' (see Jeremiah 2:34).

It's interesting, too, that in our tough economic times, when jobs and homes and life savings and retirement accounts are all in jeopardy, the Bible does say that financial issues will play a big role in the climactic scenes of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, the book of Revelation warns about an economic boycott against those who refuse to obey the orders of an end-time religious-political power that will rule the planet. 'He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.'
(See Revelation 13:16-17.)

Notice that people are forced, coerced, to get this mark. In fact, it later says that the powers that be will force people into a false worship: 'He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.'
(See Revelation 13:15.)

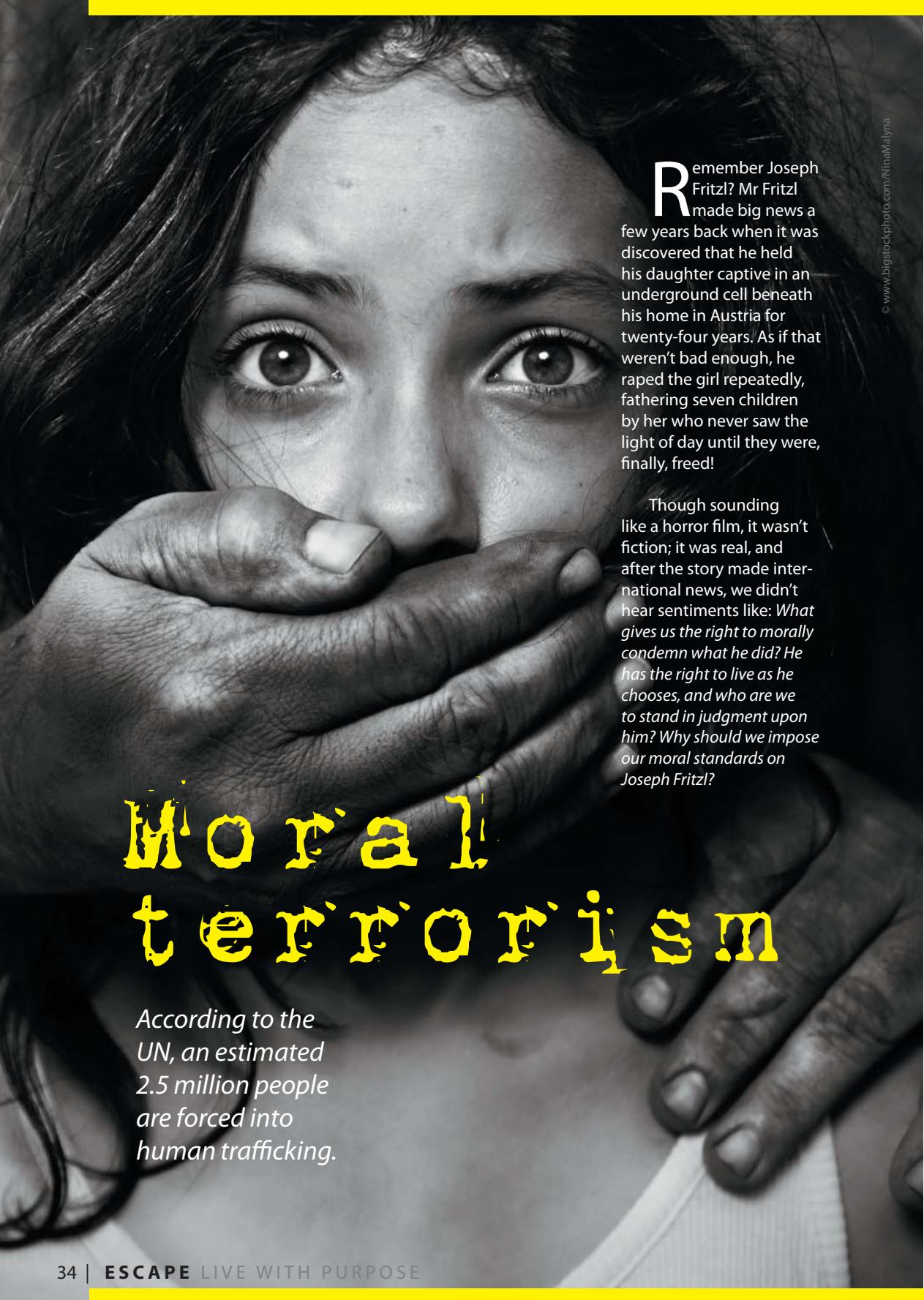
As we have seen, the Lord God alone is worthy to be worshipped, even though Satan works diligently to get people to worship anything and everything *but the Lord*. And, in the last days, he will use the power of the state to try and force that worship, and one of the weapons will be economic.

The Bible never speaks against wealth, but only against greed and the exploitation of the rich over the poor. The apostle Paul said that 'the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil' (see 1 Timothy 6:10). And it's true – the love of money can be such a corrupting force. Jesus Himself even warned about the 'deceitfulness of riches' (see Matthew 13:22). That's why, time and again, the Bible tells us to escape from these traps, not to let the world consume us with its lures and charms – lures and charms that, in the end, lead only to ruin and loss.

Jesus offers us a way out, offers us something enduring, something lasting, something satisfying in ways that nothing else can. Hence we are told:

'Come, all you who are thirsty,
 come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
 come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
 without money and without cost.
Why spend money on what is not bread,
 and your labour on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
 and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.' (See Isaiah 55:1-2.)

We need to see for ourselves just what He offers.



Moral terrorism

According to the UN, an estimated 2.5 million people are forced into human trafficking.

Remember Joseph Fritzl? Mr Fritzl made big news a few years back when it was discovered that he held his daughter captive in an underground cell beneath his home in Austria for twenty-four years. As if that weren't bad enough, he raped the girl repeatedly, fathering seven children by her who never saw the light of day until they were, finally, freed!

Though sounding like a horror film, it wasn't fiction; it was real, and after the story made international news, we didn't hear sentiments like: *What gives us the right to morally condemn what he did? He has the right to live as he chooses, and who are we to stand in judgment upon him? Why should we impose our moral standards on Joseph Fritzl?*

In his recent book, *The Atheist's Guide to Reality*, Alex Rosenberg, who believes that all life is nothing but the random movement of subatomic particles, argued that morality is an illusion and does not really exist. 'What is the difference between right and wrong, good and bad?' he asked. 'There is no moral difference between them.'¹

No difference between good and bad, right and wrong? So there was no difference between what Joseph Fritzl did to his daughter and a person who helps rescue children from the sex trade?

What the universal repugnance regarding Joseph Fritzl shows is that no matter how much philosophers and pundits like to tell us that morals are relative, that moral issues are purely cultural, and that morals are no different than taste in music or art (subjective and personal) – the fact is, no one really lives that way. No one would want to live that way. No society would survive were people to live with such moral relativism.

An atheist and a Christian were debating morality, the Christian arguing that moral values came from God, the atheist that they were purely human creations, arising from personal feelings, culture and society. As such, the atheist continued, no one could justifiably claim one moral view as superior to another; they all, he said, were relative. 'Kind sir,' the Christian replied, 'in some societies people love their neighbours, in others they eat them, all based on moral codes. Which do you prefer?'

Look at the following:

Every year millions of women are raped, either in war, in human trafficking, or by 'intimate partners'.

According to the UN, an estimated 2.5 million people are forced into human trafficking.

Of them, an estimated 1.2 million are children, and they are used mostly for sex.

Though numbers are hard to come by, untold numbers of children have been photographed and abused for child pornography.

Over 1,400 people, each day, are murdered worldwide.

Now, is Alex Rosenberg going to tell any of these victims, or their family members, that what happened to them is not really bad? Moral questions tend to find black-and-white clarity much more quickly and easily when they happen to you than when they remain just the ethereal musings of philosophers. The fact is, good and evil, right and wrong, do exist, and everyone – especially those who have been victims of evil – knows it.

A story made international news about a seven-year-old Cambodian girl who was sold by her mother (*her mother!*) to a brothel in Phnom Penh to work as a sex slave, where she had been locked in a cage, gang raped, tortured, and then forced to have sex with as many as twenty men a day. The outrages continued until she eventually escaped. Is not this an evil that transcends every and any culture, society, or philosophical view of right and wrong? Of course!

A young Muslim woman, the mother of a toddler, was shot dead in Berlin, one of many Muslim women murdered by close male relatives in what is deemed an 'honour killing'.

'In the past four months,' said a German publication, 'six Muslim women living in Berlin have been brutally murdered by family members. Their crime? Trying to break free and live Western lifestyles. Within their communities, the killers are revered as heroes for preserving their family dignity. How can such a horrific and shockingly archaic practice be flourishing in the heart of Europe?'²

'Horrific and shockingly archaic practice'? How dare the author impose his moral views on others! If morals are, like art and music, human creations alone, how could these deaths, 'honour killing' in one culture, be considered crimes in another? Who has the right to judge something another culture believes is moral, even honorable? Is not the outrage the Germans felt a moral interpretation of the events, nothing more? If only humans create morality, the calling of 'honour killings' or cannibalism wrong is like calling preference for the Clams Casino over the Steak Diana 'wrong'.

The fact is, certain things are just flat-out evil, immoral, wrong, regardless of whatever culture or society says. And the key to understand what is evil, and the reality of evil, and immorality, is a word that many people don't want to hear, at least until they are victims of those who violate it, and that word is 'law'.

Law, as in the *antiquated, outdated, decrepit* Ten Commandments? That kind of law?

Precisely!

Ask a child whose family was destroyed because his mother or his father violated the commandment that said, 'You must not commit adultery' (see Exodus 20:14), if he thinks that the law is antiquated, outdated and decrepit. (According to one report, about 37% of American males will prove unfaithful to their wives, while 29% of wives will be unfaithful to their husbands; meanwhile three in five American children born in 1986 will live with a single parent by the age of 18.)³

Ask a person whose life savings and retirement account were wiped out in the recent economic crisis if she thinks the commandment 'You must not steal' (see Exodus 20:15) is antiquated, outdated and decrepit.

Ask the mother or father of an Anders Breivik victim if the commandment 'You must not murder' (see Exodus 20:13) is antiquated, outdated and decrepit.

Whether people want to acknowledge it or not, God's moral law, the Ten Commandments, is the universal standard of good and evil, right and wrong, and all it takes is to be on the receiving end of the violation of one of those commandments in order to know just how relevant they remain today. It is, in many ways, the ultimate embodiment of love – love for God and love for each other.

Look around at the world, at the things we find wrong with it, at all the immorality and injustice and the suffering, and at their core you will find a violation of the principles seen in the Ten Commandments. And that violation is what is known in the Bible as sin: 'Everyone who sins is breaking God's law, for all sin is contrary to the law of God.' (See 1 John 3:4.)

No wonder, when Jesus was here He not only uplifted the principles of the law, He took them to a deeper level. 'You have heard the commandment that says, "You must not commit adultery." But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed

Because Jesus knows that our ills and suffering have so often arisen from violation of His law, He seeks to give us, even now, the power to escape the stranglehold of sin, which violation of His law is.

adultery with her in his heart.' (See Matthew 5:27, 28.) He even equated anger with murder!

Yes, because Jesus knows that our ills and suffering have so often arisen from violation of His law, He seeks to give us, even now, the power to escape the stranglehold of sin, which violation of His law is. He promises us a way of escape, now, and for all eternity. 'And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires' (see 2 Peter 1:4), especially when those desires are often so self-centred and selfish.

Anyone who has been on the receiving end of evil (and that's all of us) knows it's real; fortunately, the power and promises of God, which offer us an escape, are just real as well.

¹Rosenberg, Alex (26.9.2011), *The Atheist's Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life without Illusions* (p. 3). Norton. Kindle Edition.

²Spiegel Online, 2 March 2005. (<http://service.spiegel.de/cache/international/0,1518,344374,00.html>)

³www.ucg.org/christian-living/societys-slide-sexual-immorality/

POWER HUNGRY

Bombers Kill _____ in _____. Fill in the blanks. Government Troops in _____ Massacre _____ Civilians. Fill in the blanks. Party Leader in _____ Resigns in Scandal. Fill in the blanks.

It was, we had been told, 'The End of History'. That is, after decades of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States, the great power struggles between nations and ideologies had ended, the prospect of war had diminished, and the universalisation of Western liberal democracy was to begin. The world, we were assured, was to enter a time of unheralded peace and prosperity as it began the twenty-first century.

Of course, people thought something similar about the beginning of the twentieth century, as well. 'Neither the earth nor even the sun,' wrote Hans Konig about those opening moments of the century, 'was in the centre of the universe anymore, but as Queen Victoria's chaplain, Charles Kingsley, had earlier written, "The railroad, Cunard's liners, and the electric telegraph are . . . signs that we are, on some points at least, in harmony with the universe; that there is a mighty spirit working among us . . . the ordering and creating God." Men and women, more than ever before or since, felt at home on earth and in control of their destiny. That natural demons of the past had been banished by reason and electricity, and the human demons of the new century were still hidden.'¹

Well, if you believed that you probably would have believed Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's (now infamous) words, 'Peace in our time' after his meeting in Munich with Adolph Hitler in 1938 – one year before World War II began!

The sad reality is that those headlines above come just as easily now, in the twenty-first century, as they would have in the twentieth, the century that gave us the great power struggles between nations and political ideologies that led to the two most violent and destructive wars in human history, wars that ended, finally and only, with the unleashing of the most destructive weapons ever known: atomic bombs.

Today, less than two decades into a new millennium, and into a new century, the struggle for power continues. And though some of the players and the ideologies have changed, far more ominously the weapons have, too. Almost a hundred years ago Albert Einstein had warned that 'our entire much-praised technological progress, and civilization generally could be compared to an axe in the hand of a pathological criminal.'² An axe? How about a suitcase nuke? A pathological criminal? How about an Al-Qaeda fanatic instead?

Whether Islamic extremists seeking to drive the United States out of the Middle East, or Chinese attempts at domination in the East, or Russia's desire to regain her lost 'glory', or the United States' determined effort to maintain military and economic hegemony in areas deemed of vital interest, or endless other political and economic struggles – nations are as power hungry now as they were when the Greek and Persian empires battled for control of the ancient world more than 2,300 years ago.

Arms sales, for instance, show just how power hungry they are. By far, the United States, the world's richest nation, spends the most on weapons, more than *the next ten biggest spenders combined*. According to the Stockholm International Peace Institute, the United States spent 711 billion dollars on defence in 2011 alone, more than 40% of the entire world's defence budget. China, by contrast, the second largest spender on military, spent 'only' 143 billion, with Russia, third, spending 71 billion. The top ten military spenders, together, shelled out in 2011 a staggering 1.29 trillion dollars on military budgets, 74% of all world expenditures combined!

Why wasn't that money used to help feed the poor, or buy the homeless homes, or to fight AIDS, malaria, or cancer? The answer is that humans are power-hungry creatures who, if not defending themselves from those who would dominate them, are busy trying to dominate others. And to do so, they need power.

Indeed, the whole great controversy between Christ and Satan began with a power struggle when Satan, a created being, sought to usurp the place and power of the Creator Himself.



Nations are as power hungry now as they were when the Greek and Persian empires battled for control of the ancient world more than 2,300 years ago.



'How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer . . . , For you have said in your heart: "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High,"' (see Isaiah 14:12-14). This power struggle eventually led to war in heaven, in which Satan, Lucifer, lost. 'Then there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and his angels. And the dragon lost the battle, and he and his angels were forced out of heaven. This great dragon – the ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, the one deceiving the whole world – was thrown down to the earth with all his angels.'¹ (See Revelation 12:7-9.)

In contrast to Jesus, who said that we should be a 'servant of everyone else' (see Mark 9:35), the human spirit follows the 'god of this world' (see 2 Corinthians 4:4), Satan, in an unceasing attempt to dominate and control, a spirit that has led to untold violence and corruption through the long centuries.

No wonder the last book of Bible, Revelation, talks about massive end-time political systems (depicted in prophecy as powerful beasts) that use religion – which still proves to be a great means of controlling the masses (how else do Jihadist leaders seem to find an endless supply of folks willing to blow themselves up?) – to exert power over the entire world. 'And the beast was allowed to wage war against God's holy people and to conquer them. And he was given authority to rule over every tribe and people and language and nation... And all the people who belong to this world worshipped the beast ... Then I saw

another beast come up out of the earth. He had two horns like those of a lamb, but he spoke with the voice of a dragon. He exercised all the authority of the first beast. And he required all the earth and its people to worship the first beast... .' (Revelation 13:7, 11, 12.)

This isn't, however, the first time in the Bible that great beasts, symbols of massive political powers, are seen. Using beasts as symbols to describe the history of the world's great empires, Daniel 7 takes us down through the ages, showing the rise and fall of these great political powers until, finally, God Himself will set up His eternal kingdom, one that will last forever. 'The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth. But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever – yes, for ever and ever.' (Daniel 7:17, 18.)

In other words, the Bible points us to a great hope, that the power struggles (and the violence that always attends them) will end, and God's faithful people will 'receive' that kingdom 'for ever and ever'. The fact that they 'receive' it shows that it's not one that they have built for themselves. No, for all human-made kingdoms, including the Western liberal democracies, have been built on corruption. This kingdom, instead, is built on the blood of Jesus, the same Jesus who will one day say to His faithful people, '"Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world."' (Matthew 25:34.) Indeed, Christ will create a kingdom, one not of this world.

¹Konig, Hans, 'Notes on the Twentieth Century'. *Atlantic Monthly*. September 1997, p. 90.

²Quoted in, Lightman, Alan, *A Sense of the Mysterious* (Vintage Books, New York) 2006, p.110.



'There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.'

Atheists in London, led by Richard Dawkins, had a campaign in which the following sign appeared in large letters on the side of city buses. 'There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.'

Much could be said in response to that sentiment. One group, for instance, put the following Scripture on the side of 125 of London's red double-decker buses. 'The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.' Another response could be the question: *What makes God's existence something to worry about to begin with?* That is, why should someone worry if God did, indeed, exist?

Well, if people were committing grave injustices, doing what they knew was wrong, what their conscience told them was wrong – then, perhaps, those people would worry about God's existence. Because, maybe, just maybe, they just might one day have to answer to *Him* for the injustice and evil that they seem to be getting away with now!

A philosopher named Emmanuel Kant said that if you could accept one premise, just one, which is that ‘God is just’, then you had to assume that some sort of afterlife had to exist. Why? Because God’s justice was not being revealed in this life, that’s for sure.

Who doesn’t cringe, who doesn’t at times cry out in anguish and despair over the endless injustice that seems as part of human existence as is breath? From the treachery of nations, races, economic classes, friends, even families, all one against another, every page of human history, front and back, footnotes and endnotes included, is crammed full, single-spaced, with injustices that have not been rectified, with evils that have not been made right *in any way*.

One rainy day years ago an elderly widower from America named Anthony Elliott climbed into his bathtub and committed suicide. He slit his wrists with a straight razor. Why? ‘There is nothing left for me...’ he had written in his suicide note. ‘My government is supposed to serve and protect, but whom? Those who can gather the most savings from retired people.’¹

Mr Elliott had lost his entire savings, \$200,000 – coaxed out of him by an unscrupulous bank, Lincoln Savings and Loan. Though federal regulators had been concerned about the bank’s practices, the bank recruited Alan Greenspan, for decades one of America’s most revered and respected economists, who told regulators that Lincoln was ‘financially strong’ and presented ‘no foreseeable risk’. Not long afterward, Lincoln collapsed, taking the life savings of many people, including Anthony Elliott.

Greenspan, meanwhile, has been doing just fine in all the years since, thank you!

Author David Berlinski wrote about the Nazi advance: ‘[B]efore the possibility of Soviet retribution even entered their troubled imagination, Nazi extermination squads would sweep into villages, and after forcing villagers to dig their own graves, murder their victims with machine guns. On one such occasion somewhere in Eastern Europe, an SS officer watched languidly, his machine gun cradled, as an elderly and bearded Hasidic Jew laboriously dug what he knew to be his grave.

‘Standing straight up, he addressed his executioner. “God is watching what you are doing,” he said.

‘And then he was shot dead.’²

Who knows what happened to the SS officer, who might have killed hundreds, if not thousands of people? And, even if he had died in battle, or if he were arrested and tried and executed for his crimes, how would executing one man for the death of hundreds be considered justice?



Where is the justice for the millions of Africans through the centuries who were torn from their homes, crammed on ships unfit for pigs, carted across the seas, and forced into slavery?

Where is the justice for the millions Stalin killed? Or Mao did? Or Pol Pot?

Where is the justice for Carlos Deluna, executed in Texas in 1989 for a murder that many now believe was done by another man who repeatedly confessed to the crime?

Where is the justice for the thousands of infants born each year with HIV?

Where is the justice for those living in cardboard boxes while some build their third mansion?

Where is the justice for the thousands, including children, forced into the sexual slave trade?

Where is the justice for the millions of women around the world abused and exploited?

Where is the justice for the millions duped over the years by false advertisements, or those conned into on-line gambling?

Where is the justice when the richest tenth of the population makes about nine times as much in average income as the poorest tenth?

Where is the justice for the child soldiers of Africa who are killed or maimed in war?

Where is the justice for the innocent civilians whom those child soldiers killed or maimed?

Where is the justice for those who don't have fresh drinking water while some guzzle \$10,000 bottles of wine?

Where is the justice that even the rocks all but cry out for?

It's here:

'God will judge us for everything we do, including every secret thing, whether good or bad.' (See Ecclesiastes 12:14.)

'But the LORD reigns forever, executing judgment from his throne. He will judge the world with justice and rule the nations with fairness.' (Psalm 9:7, 8.)

'And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practising such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?' (Romans 2:3.)

'Look, I am coming soon, bringing my reward with me to repay all people according to their deeds.' (Revelation 22:12.)

'But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.' (2 Peter 3:7.)

'Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.' (Revelation 14:7.)

These texts, and many others, promise that God will bring justice. How could He not? How could a just God at some point not manifest the justice that is so lacking in this world now? God is righteous and just, so how could He do anything else but eradicate evil and injustice?

There's probably no God? So relax and stop worrying? Yeah, you don't have to worry about all the wrongs that have happened ever being made right. You don't have to worry about the corruption and evil that so pervade the world ever being purged and ended. You don't have to worry that there's ever going to be answers to the terribly hard questions that cry out for answers. You don't have to worry about ever seeing all the wrongs righted, because it will never happen; how could it if there is no God to make them right? Because, if God doesn't – who will?

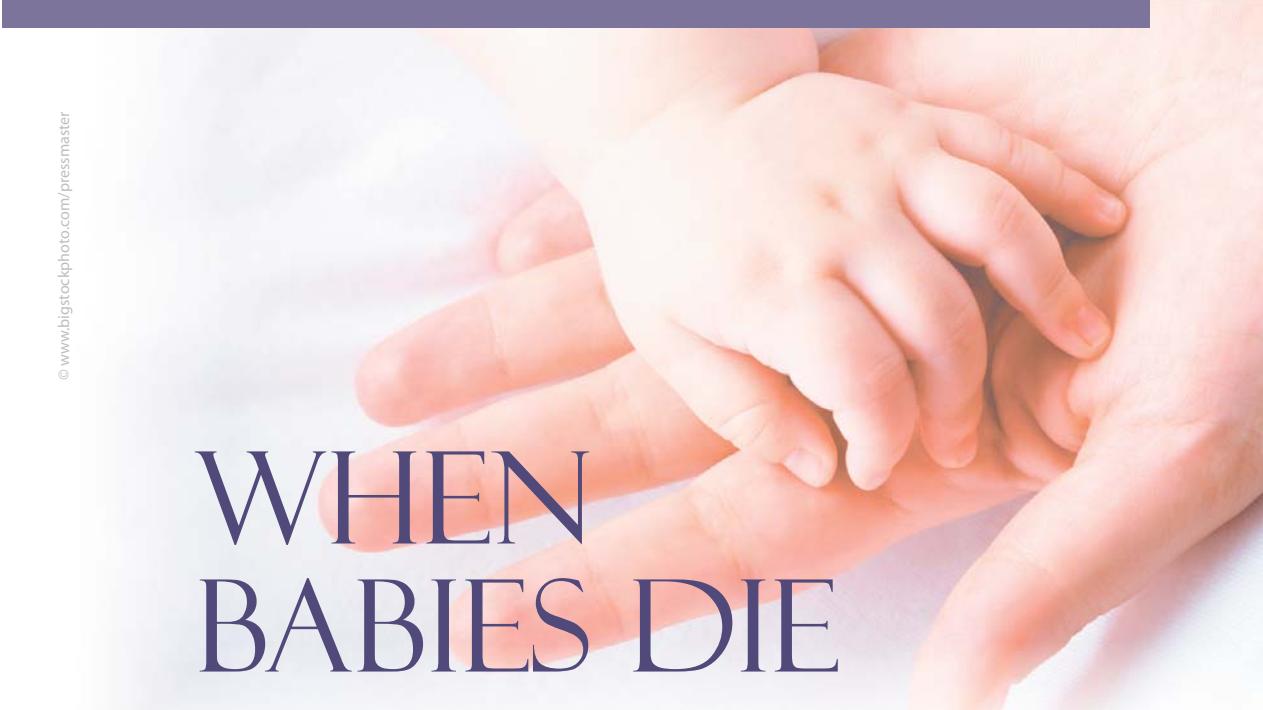
There's probably no God? If that's true, then there's certainly no justice, either, not now and not tomorrow and not in any one of a million days after tomorrow. Which means, then, that all the centuries of evil and injustice that have not been made right will never be, either. Instead the injustice we see will just continue to multiply and multiply.

Injustice is here, and it's not going away any time, certainly not now. But if the Bible teaches anything, it teaches that judgment is coming. Jesus didn't die on the cross only to leave the world the cauldron of evil and injustice that it is. Because God is God, justice will be done.

There is probably no God? We'd better hope that's wrong.

¹<http://www.tnr.com/book/review/monster-michael-hudson>

²Berlinski, David, *The Devil's Delusion* (Crown Forum; New York) 2008, p. 26.



WHEN BABIES DIE

The New Yorker magazine ran a powerful article written by a father whose infant daughter had just died from a brain disease. 'One of the most despicable religious fallacies,' he said, 'is that suffering is ennobling – that it is a step on the path to some kind of enlightenment or salvation. Isabel's suffering and death did nothing for her, or us, or the world. We learned no lessons worth learning; we learned no lessons that would benefit anyone. And Isabel most certainly did not earn ascension to a better place, as there was no better place for her than at home with her family.'¹

How powerful, how bitter and angry, and how understandably so. How do we begin to explain why an infant dies, leaving bereaved parents behind? Or is the problem trying to explain what is, essentially, inexplicable?

If, as many scientists, journalists and philosophers declare, there is no God, no purpose to life, no purpose to the entire creation itself – then there's no hope for anything, much less answers to the question of suffering and evil. In 1958, a pioneer of quantum mechanics, Erwin Schrodinger, wrote: 'Most painful is the absolute silence of all our scientific investigations toward our questions concerning the meaning and scope of the whole display. The more attentively we watch it, the more aimless and foolish it appears to be.'²

The whole display, the creation itself, aimless and foolish? If so, what hope does that leave us, sentient beings stranded in the middle of an aimless and foolish cosmos, beings who always die and, at times, whose babies die before them?

How do we begin to explain why an infant dies, leaving bereaved parents behind?

Or if, as physicist Steven Weinberg wrote a few decades later, 'the more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless,'³ then what could anything, even the death of an infant, mean?

Nothing, or so it would seem. After all, how could that death, or any death, or anything at all mean anything in a universe that, itself, as a whole, is pointless?

'Why should it have a point?' asked Harvard astronomer Martha Geller about the universe. 'What point? It's just a physical system, what point is there? I've always been puzzled by that statement.'⁴

Just a physical system, a pointless physical system that has no meaning, no purpose, no point? If the entire cosmos is a pointless physical system, where does that leave us, very tiny and exceedingly transient specks of organic matter living on an itty-bitty planet around one of billions of stars rotating in just one of billions of galaxies? It leaves us even less pointless than the universe itself, a tough slog for beings like ourselves whose every cell, it seems, cries out for meaning and purpose.

Others argue that we have to try and make meaning for ourselves, that we alone can create meaning for our lives. The influential German atheist Friedrich Nietzsche argued that each of us, individually, has to create our own meaning based on conscience and on being authentic and true to self.

How well did his philosophy work for Nietzsche himself? Not too well, actually. Nietzsche, who never married (and never, apparently, had a long-lasting romantic relationship with any woman), collapsed on a street in Italy at 44 years old, and spent his final eleven years in semi-catatonic insanity.

Nietzsche's wretched life doesn't disprove his philosophy, but it does lead to the question, *How does one build a meaning for life when the very fabric of life and all that is has to work with is 'just a system,' a 'pointless' one at that?*

Christian apologist William Lane Craig argued that if atheism is true, then 'mankind is thus no more significant than a swarm of mosquitoes or a barnyard of pigs, for their end is all the same. The same blind cosmic process that coughed them up in the first place will eventually swallow them all again. And the same is true of each individual person. The contributions of the scientist to the advance of human knowledge, the researches of the doctor to alleviate pain and suffering, the efforts of the diplomat to secure peace in the world, the sacrifices of good people everywhere to better the lot of the human race – all these come to nothing. In the end they don't make

We are beings created 'in the image of God,' of a God who loved His creation so much that He, in the person of Jesus, died for it.

one bit of difference, not one bit. Each person's life is therefore without ultimate significance. And because our lives are ultimately meaningless, the activities we fill our lives with are also meaningless.'⁵

Therefore, too, suffering and death in such a cosmos become as meaningless and pointless and as hopeless as everything else in it.

In contrast, if you believe in God, and in the great controversy scenario, you at least have *some* hope, *some* prospect of answers to the terrible dilemma of suffering and death. In this view, instead of being nothing but the chance products of a mindless creation, we are beings created 'in the image of God' (see Genesis 1:27), of a God who loved His creation so much that He, in the person of Jesus, died for it.

Evil is real, suffering is real, and death is real because the devil is real, a literal being who rebelled against the moral order of the creation and has brought that rebellion to Earth. In the book of Job, we can see the reality of this conflict and the terrible consequences it has here, on Earth, and in our lives. Besides losing his health and his property, Job lost all his children as well. 'Your sons and daughters were feasting

in their oldest brother's home. Suddenly, a powerful wind swept in from the wilderness and hit the house on all sides. The house collapsed, and all your children are dead!' (See Job 1:18, 19.)

And yet, even as the story ended, Job was given no answer, no justification for those deaths, and that's because evil has no justification, has no explanation; to explain it would be, in a sense, to justify it – and we never want to do that.

Instead, we are given this precious promise that, when this whole terrible conflict with suffering, evil and death is over, God 'will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.'

(See Revelation 21:4.)

Though there will be tears (how could there not, considering all that has gone on before?), we are here given hope that not only will life continue but that death, sorrow, crying and pain will be 'gone forever'. We are promised, then, an ultimate escape from these things, the

things that make this existence so miserable and wretched for so many now.

Suffering and evil and death are the true facts of life, at least this life now. We've all tasted their bitterness and unanswered grief. If there is no God, they have the final say; if there is a God, a God who in the person of Jesus died on the cross and was then resurrected to life, all in order to end suffering, evil and death – then life, happiness and comfort will, indeed, prevail.

One option offers no hope; not even the possibility of hope. The other offers not only hope but great reasons to make that hope your own. Otherwise, you have nothing.

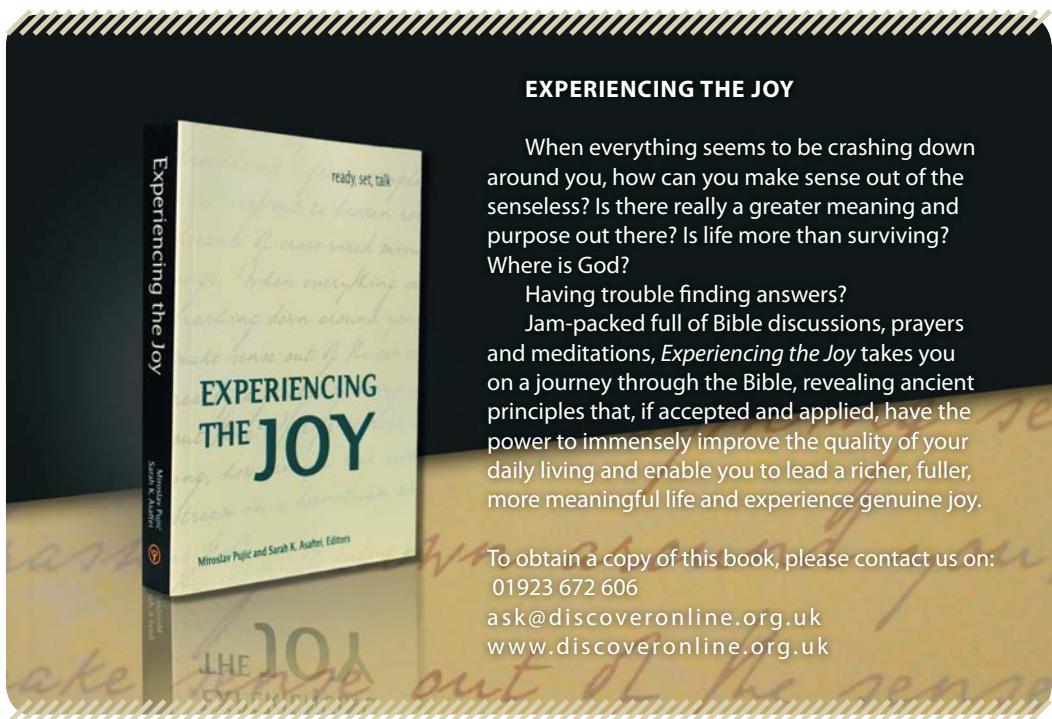
¹The New Yorker, 13 & 20 June 2011, p. 62.

²Schrodinger, Erwin, *What is Life?* Cambridge University Press, p. 138.

³Weinberg, Stephen, *Dreams of a Final Theory*, Vintage Books, New York, 1993, p. 255.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Craig, William Lane (23.7.2008). *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Kindle Locations 1397-1404). Good News Publishers/Crossway Books. Kindle Edition.



EXPERIENCING THE JOY

When everything seems to be crashing down around you, how can you make sense out of the senseless? Is there really a greater meaning and purpose out there? Is life more than surviving? Where is God?

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Is there any HOPE FOR US?



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It's not fun, being stranded here, third rock from the sun, on a tiny planet destined (depending upon whose physics and equations you believe) either to burn up, freeze over, or get crushed to the size of an atom.

Is this the fate that awaits us all?

It depends. If the atheistic, materialistic view of reality is true, then, well, yes, the earth and all life on it is doomed; sooner or later, one way or another – we're toast. After all, if cold, uncaring forces first created us, what's to stop those same cold, uncaring forces from swallowing us up as well?

But is that view correct? Or do we have reasons to believe that reality is bigger, broader, and more full of possibilities – even the possibility of the miraculous – than what the secularists tell us? Dare we hope, and if we do dare hope, what reasons do we have for that hope? Is this hope just the desperate longing of people desperate for an escape from the corruption of this world, or are there good reasons to believe in this hope, to believe in the miraculous?

And if there are those reasons, what are they, and why should we believe in them?

SQUARE CIRCLES?

*A forced love is as impossible
as a square circle.*

When it's time to lay its eggs, a Sphex wasp digs a small hole. It will then sting a cricket (not enough to kill but enough to paralyse it) and drag the victim into the hole. The wasp then lays eggs next to the cricket, leaves, closes up the hole and never returns. When the eggs hatch, the babies feed on the cricket, which hasn't decayed because it hadn't died.

Now, just before the wasp puts the cricket inside, it leaves it at the entrance and goes in and inspects the hole. During the inspection, an experimenter can move the cricket a few inches away. When the wasp returns, it finds the cricket missing, drags it back to the opening, but goes back and inspects the hole again. If the experimenter moves the cricket again, the wasp will do the same thing, drag it back but inspect the hole before bringing it in. This happens over and over. The wasp seems unable to escape its programmed behaviour of inspection. Some have used this experiment as proof that even seemingly thoughtful behaviour can be mindless, the opposite of free will.

Of course, how much one can extrapolate from wasp behaviour to human free will (or the lack of it) is another matter. But even after thousands of years, the debate about whether or not we have free will still rages, with people using wasps to try and prove their point!

In contrast, the Bible doesn't declare that we have free will; it just assumes it. That is, almost nothing in the Bible makes sense apart from what we, in the deepest corners of our soul,

believe, which is that we do, indeed, have free choice.

Perhaps the most amazing biblical text about free will, however, doesn't even deal with humans. It deals, instead, with Satan, Lucifer, the fallen angel who has been wreaking incredible havoc here on Earth.

Talking about Lucifer, in heaven, the Bible says: 'You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, Till iniquity was found in you.' (Ezekiel 28:15.)

The word for 'created' here comes from the same word used in Genesis 1:1, when God 'created' the heavens and the earth, a word that is used only in reference to what God Himself creates. Thus, we have a perfect being, created by a perfect God, in a perfect heaven – *and yet iniquity was found in him?*

How could that be? The answer is revealed in one word: *love*.

Love? Yes, because love, to be love, by definition has to be freely given. Even God cannot create a love that is forced. To force love is to negate it. Just as God can't create a married bachelor, because by definition a 'bachelor' is unmarried, He cannot create a forced love, because by definition love has to be freely given. A forced love is as impossible as a square circle.

As Ellen White expressed it: 'The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God's government; He desires only the service of love;

and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened.¹

But even if we concede (as we must) that love, to be love, must be freely given, and that God had no choice, if He wanted beings who could love Him, He had to create them free – this leads to another question. If God is all-knowing, why did He create us, knowing that we would fall into sin and bring such misery upon the world? The answer has to be that, because God is also all-loving, He will bring out a greater good; that when this terrible conflict between good and evil is over, God will prove His fairness and goodness and love before the entire creation.

Thanks a lot! In other words, how fair is it that we are suffering as we do in the midst of the great controversy here on Earth, while God, proving His point, sits safely ensconced in heaven?

There is, really, only one answer to that important question: the cross, where God in the person of Christ suffered corporately what we, as individuals, can know only individually.

What do we mean?

Atheist Friedrich Nietzsche once wrote: 'In the final analysis, one experiences only one's self.'² Nietzsche's right. When we grieve with the grieving, weep with the weeping, and suffer with the suffering – we experience only our own grief, only our own cries, and only our own anguish, never anyone else's. We bleed our own blood, spew our own spit, secrete our own sweat – never another's, no matter how fused our flesh. Other people's pain comes to us filtered, always and only, through our own; our own, then, is all the pain that we can ever know.



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Though the numbers (10,000 dead here, 6 million dead here, 200,000 dead here) make us shudder and cringe, not one of those people suffered more than what an individual can suffer. They knew no more pain than their own individual metabolism could allow. We know only our own pain, and never a speck more.

In contrast, God in Christ bore in Himself, corporately and at once, all the pain and suffering that we know only as individuals. At the cross, God suffered so much more than any single human being in all human history ever has or ever could.

Isaiah 53, talking about Jesus on the cross, said that 'Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows,' (see Isaiah 53:4). Whose infirmities, whose sorrows? Those of the entire world's; that's what Jesus bore in Himself. All human pain, all sorrow, all sickness – they all came as the result of sin, and at the cross the full weight of that sin, the world's sin, and all its doleful consequences (our 'infirmities' and our 'sorrows') fell on Jesus.



Therefore, instead of remaining 'safely ensconced in heaven', God in Christ suffered so much more than any one of us here ever had or could. No one has paid the price for free will, or we should say, for the abuse of free will, more than did God Himself.

At the cross, God suffered so much more than any single human being in all human history ever has or ever could.

The Bible says that Jesus was 'the lamb slain from the foundation of the world' (Revelation 13:8). This means that even before the world was created, the plan of salvation was already in place. Look at how sacred, how fundamental, then, free will, free choice, must be to God. Even before the world began, God knew what would happen and, despite the cost to Himself, He created us with free will anyway, rather than make us mindless robots who could not love.

Love is the grand metaphysic of God's moral universe. We can love only because we have been created free, and we were created free so that we can love – love others and, most importantly, love God. Love for God is our escape route out of this world. 'For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments' (see 1 John 5:3), and 'Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city' (see Revelation 22:14).

¹White, Ellen, *Desire of Ages* (Pacific Press Publishing Association; Mountain View, CA) 1940, p. 22.

²Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (Penguin Books; New York) 1969, p. 173.



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DR O O F E R W

'...and the horror of what lies in the grave other than our body nailed into a box and lowered into the earth to become wormfood.'



British author Simon Critchley introduced *The Book of Dead Philosophers* with these words: 'This book begins from a simple assumption: what defines human life in our corner of the planet at the present time is not just a fear of death, but an overwhelming terror of annihilation. This is a terror both of the inevitability of our demise with its future prospect of pain and possibly meaningless suffering, and the horror of what lies in the grave other than our body nailed into a box and lowered into the earth to become wormfood'.¹¹

Critchley's got a point. Death ruins everything about life. What can life mean if, sooner or later, you will die, if anyone who ever knew you will die, if anyone ever impacted by you will die, and if every memory of you will be gone, swallowed up in the 'cosmic heat death' of the cosmos? (Some astronomers, though, think that the universe will fall back in on itself, becoming no bigger than a fist, a denouement called 'The Big Crunch'.) However the universe dies out (and astrophysicists say that it will, one way or another, die out), in the long run, we're all dead, anyway – so

what does it matter? '[I]s there any meaning in my life,' asked Leo Tolstoy, 'that will not be annihilated by the inevitability of death which awaits me.'²

Bryan Magee had been a well-known English author, music critic, and MP. In his early thirties, he was suddenly overwhelmed with the stark, cold realisation of his own mortality. As an atheist who believed that this life *was it*, period, with no hope of anything beyond, he saw how little it all, ultimately, meant. No matter what he did, whether his life was a failure or a success – 'none of it would make the slightest difference to me or to anyone else when all of us were nothing, as everyone was going to be, including everyone not yet born; that it could therefore make no difference when I died, and would have made no difference if I had never been born; that I was in any event going to be for all eternity what I would have been if I had never been born; that there was no meaning in any of it, no point in any of it; and that in the end everything was nothing.'³

Everything 'was nothing'; yes, but only if no God exists and if this life itself were all that there was. And it's like this because of death and what it does to this life. We often say that death is part of life. But that's wrong. Death is the negation of life, not part of it. So brainwashed by the ubiquity of death, so flooded is our blood by our breathing the spectre of mortality fused to each atom of air – we put opposites together and call them the same!

Sure, science has been able to give us an extra *what?* Twenty years, thirty years? Please! Twenty or thirty years are a sick joke in contrast to an eternity that marches on while we're left in the dust as nothing but dust. And even with all human progress – sending rovers to Mars, creating the iPhone, mapping the Genome – it's all ultimately meaningless in a godless universe where our most inflexible and uncompromising enemy, death, accepts no surrender and takes no prisoners but strafes, snipes, and shells until every cell wall crumbles and all within drains out and decays. Death is a foe impossible for us to hunt out and destroy, because it's made out of what we are. In a naturalistic, atheistic creation, what is life, what is death, but different

mixes of the same stew? And the living become pubescent versions of the dead.

That's why over and over the New Testament talks about death and tells us that Jesus has overcome death and that He offers us the promise of eternal life. In the New Testament, we are given powerful evidence to help us believe in the reality of His resurrection, and in that resurrection we can have the hope and promise of our own. In the end, eternal life is the only thing that makes this life meaningful. After all, what can a life, any life, mean that's destined to be dust, and to be it forever, if even that long?

But dust doesn't have to be our end. Jesus has made a way of escape. His main purpose in coming was to save us from the eternal death that would, otherwise, be our fate. And by saving us from that death, and giving us, *now*, the hope of salvation, He can infuse our lives with a meaning and a purpose that, otherwise, they could not have (read again those quotes from above!).

Everything 'was nothing'; yes, but only if no God exists and if this life itself were all that there was.

Here are just a few of the incredible promises that can be ours in Jesus:

'And the last enemy to be destroyed is death' (see 1 Corinthians 15:26). 'I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me' (John 10:28). 'For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.' (See Romans 6:23.) 'And this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.' (See 1 John 5:11.) 'This truth gives them confidence that they have eternal life, which God – who does not lie – promised them before the world began.' (See Titus 1:2.)

Otherwise what? The Big Crunch? The Cosmic Heat Death? Even without such grandiose cosmic endings, the secular atheist world-view, which is such a narrow and limited view, offers us nothing but despair and hopelessness. How could it not, postulating us as mere chance products of a cosmos that spat us out as beings who can conceive of the eternal and the transcendent, but who do so with brains and bodies that, mostly dust and water, are transient and earthly?

In contrast, not only have we been given great hope in Jesus, we've been given great reasons to believe in Him. Though there's much we won't understand, we can understand enough to trust Him, even now, and to know the promise of the resurrection, the promise of eternal life, a promise that offers us a way out of this mess that's much better than Simon Critchley's 'wormfood' thesis.

Critchley presented one view of life and death: here's Paul presenting another: 'For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.' (See 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18.)

Encourage, indeed. In Jesus, and with the great promises He offers us thanks to His death and resurrection, we can know, even now, that this world, and the death that's so prevalent in it, don't have the final say. God does, and what He says to us is this: 'Look! I am creating new heavens and a new earth, and no one will even think about the old ones anymore.' (See Isaiah 65:17.)

¹Critchley, Simon, *The Book of Dead Philosophers* (Vintage Books; New York, 2008) p. xv.

²Tolstoy, Leo, *A Confession and Other Stories* (Penguin Book; New York, 1987) p. 35.

³Magee, Bryan, *Confessions of a Philosopher* (Random House; New York, 1997) p. 251.

■ The research – released as part of Dying Matters Awareness Week, which ran from 14-20 May 2012 – finds that although 54% have been bereaved in the last five years and a third think about dying and death weekly and 11% say they think about it daily, discussing dying and making end of life plans remains a taboo for many people.

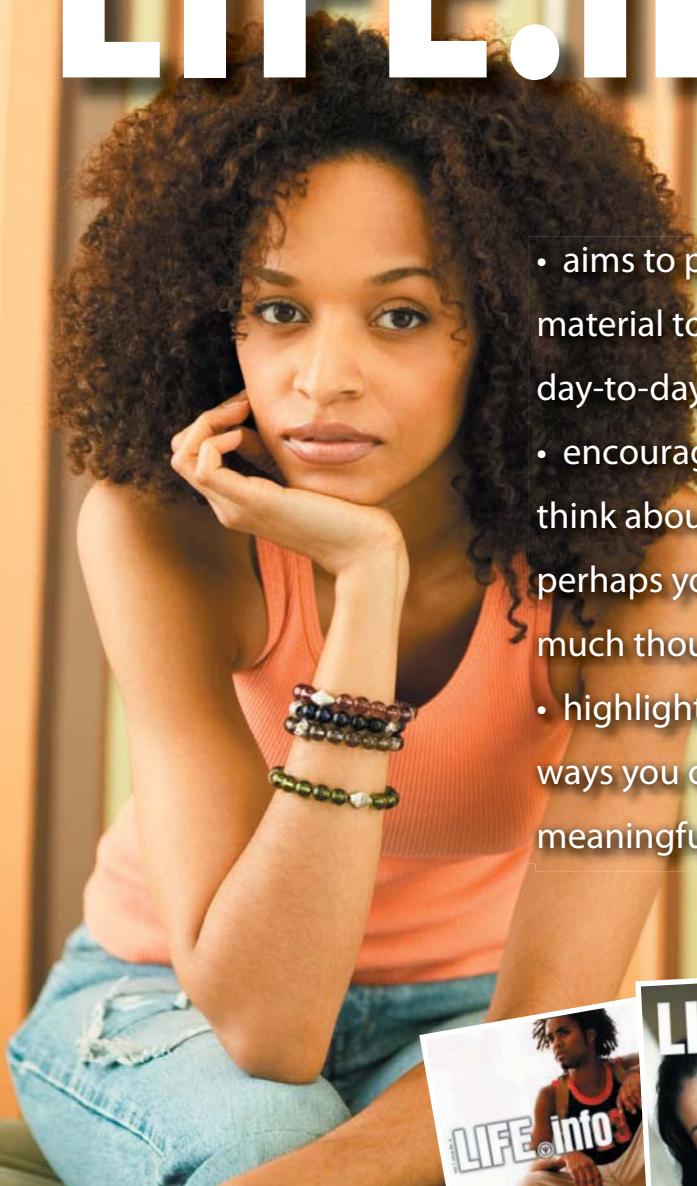
Seventy-one per cent of the public agree that people in Britain are uncomfortable discussing dying, death and bereavement. A quarter (25%) of Brits said they felt uncomfortable discussing dying with those close to them. Only sex is more of a taboo subject than dying, with 39% of Brits reporting feeling uncomfortable discussing sex with family and friends, compared with money (23%), religion (14%), politics (13%) and immigration (11%).

Eighty-two per cent of all people say they would be concerned about being a burden on those close to them if they were dying, and 74% would be concerned about what would happen to their family after their death. Just 25% of people who have been bereaved said they received the support they needed. Thirty-five per cent of people say they wouldn't be able to afford the funeral if someone close to them died tomorrow, 28% wouldn't know which authorities to notify and 24% wouldn't know how to organise a funeral.

Despite these concerns, just 27% of the public have asked a family member about their end of life wishes and only 31% have talked to someone about their own end of life wishes. Just 37% of the public have written a will, 31% have registered to become an organ donor or have a donor card and only 8% have written down their wishes or preferences, should they become unable to make these decisions themselves.

www.dyingmatters.org/page/brits-paying-price-refusal-talk-about-dying

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Who is the CHAMPION against corruption?

Humans, given free will, free choice, made the wrong choices, and thus 'the entire world is guilty before God.'

Remember comedian George Carlin, the foul-mouthed irreverent funnyman George Carlin? Thus saith St George: 'I'm also tired of hearing about innocent victims; this is an outmoded idea. There are no innocent victims. If you're born on this world you're guilty, period ... end of report, next case. Your birth certificate is proof of guilt.'¹

Though not known for theological acumen, Mr Carlin had a point. We are all guilty; we are all sinners. Sure, it's easy to compare ourselves with others and then think we're not so bad. *Hey, I never took an automatic weapon and shot up a movie theatre.* ... *Hey, I never sexually abused four-year-old boys.* ... *Hey, I never robbed a bank and took hostages.* ... *Man, I'm a pretty good person, aren't I?*

Of course, Joseph Fritzl, the Austrian who locked his daughter in an underground cell and raped her for years, wasn't as evil as the Austrian Adolf Hitler, but that doesn't make Fritzl good. You might be a wretched, selfish and greedy sleaze, but you'll always find someone more wretched, more selfish, greedier and sleazier than you.

Most of us, even in our post-modern, non-judgmental world, live with some guilt. We might not be serial killers or child pornographers, but even trying to hide behind the truth-is-relative spiel, we all deep down know that we have done wrong. After all, simply ask yourself this question: *How many things have I done that I would not want published on-line or in the daily newspaper, things that I would be horribly ashamed of if they were made public?* If you have done nothing shameful, you're the exception that proves the rule, and the rule is found in these Bible texts: 'No one is righteous – not even one. . . . Obviously, the law applies to those to whom it was given, for its purpose is to keep people from having excuses, and to show that the entire world is guilty before God.' (See Romans 3:10, 19.)

Look at the world, the wars, the violence, the crime, the economic disparity, the pollution, the corruption, the injustice; it didn't get this way by chance. Humans, given free will, free choice, made the wrong choices, and thus 'the entire world is guilty before God'. And that includes *each of us* as well.

Which is precisely why Jesus Christ came, to do for *each of us* what none of us could ever do for ourselves, and that is make a way of escape from the corruption of this world. The Bible speaks about God who knows our dilemma and wants to save us, providing for us an escape from the corruption of this world, which we have caused. He has to save us from ourselves and that is why Jesus appeared among us. Jesus helps us see who we really are and provides an escape from the consequences of our many wrong choices. This is what the Bible tells us in John 3:17: 'God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.'

It works like this. Whatever your past evil, whatever your present evil, whatever you have done wrong, whatever you *are doing wrong* – two thousand years ago, at the cross, Jesus Christ paid the penalty for all that you have done or are doing now. The punishment that you, as a sinner who has done evil and hurt others (and admit it, you have hurt others!), the punishment that you deserve fell on Jesus instead so that you never have to face it yourself!

'Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His.'²

The punishment that you deserve fell on Jesus instead so that you never have to face it yourself!

What this means is that, unlike every human being ever born, Jesus was sinless, was perfectly righteous. He never committed sin, ever. As such, He has a record of perfect law keeping, of perfect righteousness. And what the Gospel, the good news, says is that first, not only did Jesus die for us – 'while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us' (see Romans 5:8) – paying the penalty for our wrong deeds; but second, that Christ's perfect record, His perfect righteousness, becomes credited to us, so that it is considered our own record, our own righteousness.

The religious term is 'justification by faith', which means that by faith in Jesus, we stand before God clothed in Jesus' righteousness, Jesus' holiness. His perfect record of obedience and holiness is imputed, or credited, to us as our own. Thus, we are accepted by God, not because of our own deeds – which would condemn us – but because our defects and faults are covered by the righteousness of Jesus. This righteousness is a gift from God, something that we can't earn by our works, or by our obedience to the law. No, it is given to us when we claim it for ourselves, by faith.

'Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.¹
(See Romans 3:20-24.)

Yes, by faith in Jesus, we stand before God as if we were as sinless, as holy, and as perfect as Jesus. Talk about good news!

By faith in Jesus, we stand before God as if we were as sinless, as holy, and as perfect as Jesus. Talk about good news!

But the good news gets better. Not only do we stand perfect in the sight of God, but by faith our lives will be radically changed. The word 'Christian' really means 'like Christ', and not only is His life credited to us, but it starts to become manifested *in us*. Jesus was the only human being who lived without a taint of corruption; and now, through faith, through humbly seeking to emulate His life and character, we are given the power to follow His values so that we can be spared from the corruption that permeates so much human life.

And that's because when we claim Jesus for ourselves, we die to our own self and its old corrupt ways, and have a new life in Jesus. Or, as Paul wrote: 'My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.' (See Galatians 2:20.)

This doesn't mean you are perfect; it means only that God views you as perfect, and works towards making you that way, a lifelong process that has its ups and downs, though the apostle Paul has said: 'And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.' (See Philippians 1:6.)

George Carlin was right. 'You are guilty, period ... end of report, next case,' which shows

that even non-Christians see it. But Jesus, the Son of God, wasn't guilty, not of anything, ever. He was righteous and perfect, and thanks to Him and the amazing plan of salvation, that holiness and perfection becomes yours, by faith. You simply have to claim it for yourself, and then your new life begins.

¹<http://psychologyproductsandservices.blogspot.com/2011/09/psychology-of-guiltpart-iii.html>

²White, Ellen, *The Desire of Ages* (Pacific Press Publishing Association, Nampa Idaho) 1980, p. 25.

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THE RESCUE

At the Second Coming the faithful will be rescued from the worst corruption we ever face, the corruption of death itself.



Imagine the following story: a child is kidnapped and the parents pay a huge ransom to the kidnappers. Only one problem: after paying the demands, the parents never get the child!

If that sounds ridiculous, it's not as ridiculous as the idea of Jesus Christ not returning to the earth in order to rescue us. Why? Because He paid a very expensive ransom for us: His own life.

'For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many' (See Matthew 20:28.)

'For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men – the testimony given in its proper time,' (see 1 Timothy 2:5–6).

The Bible says that we were redeemed by 'the precious blood of Christ' (see 1 Peter 1:19).

The idea of 'redeemed' carries with it the same idea as 'ransomed'. Christ paid for our redemption with His own life. What could be more ludicrous, then, for Him to have done that, to pay such a great price for us, and yet not come back and get what had cost Him so much?

And that is what the Second Coming is: Jesus returning to get what He Himself had paid for at His first coming. The whole purpose of the first coming was the Second. The first coming of Jesus is the guarantee, written in blood, Christ's blood, of the Second. If Jesus doesn't come back, then everything He did at the first coming – from His incarnation into human flesh, His sinless life, and His death on the cross – all becomes a waste, and who believes that?

Remember the *Left Behind* series of books and movies? They were about the Second Coming of Jesus; however, the series depicted the Second Coming as a secret event in which faithful Christians were quietly taken to heaven, with everyone else (the poor people 'left behind')

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wondering where all these other ones disappeared to.

The Bible, in contrast, paints a very different scenario regarding Christ's return. Read the following texts and ask if these verses make the Second Coming sound quiet and secret, as depicted in the *Left Behind* stories, or something very loud and public, an event we aren't likely to miss.

'For as the lightning flashes in the east and shines to the west, so it will be when the Son of Man comes.' (See Matthew 24:27.)

'Look! He comes with the clouds of heaven. And everyone will see him –' (see Revelation 1:7).

'For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the Christians who have died will rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever.' (See 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17.)

Whatever else one believes about the Second Coming, it's not quiet and secret. His return will be like lightning across the sky. Every eye shall see Him. The dead in Christ shall be raised.

That is, all of Christ's faithful followers from the beginning of the world, 'those dead in Christ', will be brought back to life in physical bodies. Please, that's not an event one can miss, especially when it says that those who are alive when He comes will be taken up in the air with Him!

Indeed, at the Second Coming the faithful will be rescued from the worst corruption we ever face, the corruption of death itself.

Here's how Paul graphically describes what happens when Christ returns: 'Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.' (See 1 Corinthians 15:52, 53.)

The corruption of death will be reversed; this is talking about the resurrection of the dead to eternal life in Christ. Death, the greatest corrupter of all, does not have the last word. No, Jesus, and the eternal life He offers to all who claim it – that is the last word.

When Jesus comes back, this world, and all the corruption and evil and injustice and violence and death come to an end. Our planet, as we have known it, will cease to be. Instead, it will be laid waste:

'But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.' (See 2 Peter 3:10.)

Yes, the earth as we have known it is gone, but before Jesus is done, the earth will be made over, and we can have a place in the new one, one that will last for eternity.

'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming



down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever." (See Revelation 21:1-4.)

Death, sorrow, crying, pain – gone forever! That's the hope, that's the promise, that's what we're offered in Jesus. The cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan will, indeed, come to an end, and all of the redeemed will live in a new earth, under a new heaven, in a whole new existence without any of the evil things that have corrupted our lives here.

Yes, Jesus is coming back. And when He does, we're either on one side or the other. You can, right now, be ready, and you can do that by making a choice, at this moment, to give yourself to Him, a total commitment to 'love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength', 'and your neighbour as yourself' (see Mark 12:30; Matthew 22:39) and to live out that love by obedience to His commandments: 'For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments' (see 1 John 5:3).

All human attempts to end corruption have failed. All the great -isms have failed. In our world everything is moving towards collapse, towards destruction and chaos, and mankind – with all his technology and science – only prolongs the agony but never ends it. If anything, we always seem to make it worse. We need a way out but left to our own, we are helplessly trapped.

Jesus, alone, has made a way of escape for us, and none of us needs to be left behind, not now and certainly not at the Second Coming.

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THE FINAL WARNING

In Northern Israel sits a 380 square kilometre area known as The Valley of Megiddo, a place rich in archaeological finds, a testimony to its long historical significance. Many believe, too, that in this valley the final and climactic struggle between good and evil, between Christ and His followers and the devil and his, will take place in the last days.

Though people can challenge whether this battle, also known as Armageddon, will climax in the Valley of Megiddo, one thing is clear: the final and climactic struggle in the great controversy is fast approaching and every human being will have to make a choice on whose side he or she will stand. We're either with the Creator, the One 'who made heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them,' (Psalm 146:6), or with a creature, Satan, a fallen being whose greatest deception is his ability to hide not only his existence but his great evil, a being whose ultimate destruction is assured. 'Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.' (Revelation 12:12.)

Look around. You don't have to believe in the Bible and Satan to see how the whole world is heading to a great

crisis of some sort. A tiny minority of the super-rich continues to hoard wealth while billions languish in crude poverty. The planet is heating up faster than many have anticipated. The world economy teeters towards collapse. Weapons, chemical, biological, nuclear, continue to be created and stockpiled; it's not a question of if terrorists ever get their hands on some but when. Natural disasters are everywhere, and it seems all the time, too. It's amazing that we've lasted as long as we have.

Sooner or later, we will face what the Bible describes as 'a time of anguish greater than any since nations first came into existence' (Daniel 12:1). For a secular person, such a massive 'time of anguish' would be just another example of the meaninglessness, absurdity and purposelessness of a chance creation in which all our pain and suffering is for nothing anyway. In contrast, for those who know the Lord, and trust in Him and in His promises of redemption and escape, this tragic time is a harbinger of not just the end of this world but of a whole new existence that begins when Christ returns.

Before that return, the great controversy between Christ and Satan will climax into a bitter worldwide struggle that will force every human being openly to choose one side or the other.

To help clarify the issues, to prepare people for what is coming, and to help make the difference between God's side and the devil's as clear and as distinct as possible so that no one, despite Satan's great deceptions, need be deceived – God has given a special message to the world: 'And I saw another angel flying through the sky, carrying the eternal Good News to proclaim to the people who belong to this world – to every nation, tribe, language, and people. "Fear God," he shouted. "Give glory to him. For the time has come when he will sit as judge. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth,

the sea, and all the springs of water." (Revelation 14:6, 7.) Foundational to this message is the call to worship the only true God, the Creator. After all, what else makes Him God other than that He, alone, is the Creator, and as such the only entity in all the cosmos worthy of our worship?

Interestingly enough, the language of this message comes directly from the Ten Commandments, specifically from the one commandment that points to the Lord God as the Creator. 'Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the *LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them*, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the *LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*' (Exodus 20:10, 11.)

That link becomes even more relevant when, just a few verses later, after the call in Revelation 14:6, 7 to worship the one who made 'the heaven, and the earth, the sea, and all the springs of water', the Bible describes what the Lord's faithful worshippers will be like. 'Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the *commandments of God* and the faith of Jesus.' (Revelation 14:12.)

These people are presented in contrast to all the rest of the world, who are shown as worshipping another power, a religious-political power depicted as a beast (in biblical prophecy, massive political and/or religious powers are symbolised by beast imagery). 'He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.' (Revelation 13:15.)

■ One in seven (14%) agrees 'the world will come to an end during my lifetime' – 4% strongly, 10% somewhat – while the rest of the world (86%) disagrees – 66% strongly, 19% somewhat. Two in ten of those in Turkey (22%), the United States (22%), South Africa (21%), Argentina (19%), Mexico (19%) and Indonesia (19%) agree with the statement while only 6% in France agree, followed by Belgium (7%), Great Britain (8%) and Sweden (11%).

What is clear from these texts is that the whole world will be divided into one of two camps, those who worship the Creator, or those who worship the image of the beast. And to worship that image means, eventually, to face the wrath of God Himself!

'With the issue thus clearly brought before him, whoever shall trample upon God's law to obey a human enactment, receives the mark of the beast; he accepts the sign of allegiance to the power which he chooses to obey instead of God. The warning from Heaven is, "If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation." [Revelation 14:9, 10].'¹

And though those who seek to remain true to God will face persecution – 'all who refused to worship the image to be killed' (Revelation 13:15) – their deliverance is sure, because amid this persecution Jesus Christ will return as a conquering hero, and all who were faithful to Him are guaranteed escape.

Two thousand years ago, at the cross, God poured out His love on the world by offering Himself as a full and complete sacrifice for all the evil and wrongdoing that we, each of us, have done. He paid the penalty in our behalf, offering each one of us a way out of the corruption and evil that so pervade every aspect of this present world, which is why this world will be replaced by a new one: 'But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. . . Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.' (2 Peter 3:10, 13.)

Best of all, Jesus has made a place for each of us in this new heavens and new earth. We, each of us ourselves, have to choose whether or not we want it for ourselves.

¹White, Ellen, *The Great Controversy* (Pacific Press Publishing Association; Nampa, Idaho), 1995, p. 604.

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