

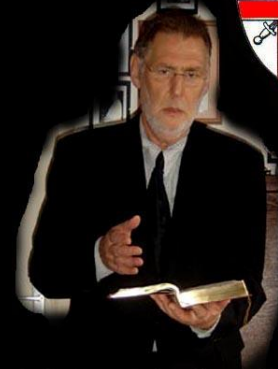


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**Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet
and a light unto my path.
Psalm 119: 105**



ds. Philippe L. De Coster, B.Th., D.D.

Evangelical House Churches

Berea Christian Apologetics

Research work and study by Rev. Philippe L. De Coster, B.Th., D.D.

Higher Criticism, Higher than What?

“Higher criticism” is not used in a popular sense of the word at all, and may convey a wrong impression to the ordinary man. Also, it is not meant to convey the idea of superiority. It is simply a term of contrast. Rather, it is used in contrast to the phrase, “Lower Criticism.”

One of the most important branches of Evangelical theology is called the science of Biblical criticism, which has for its object the study of the history and contents, origins and purposes of the various books of the Bible, the Sacred Word of God. In the early stages of the science Biblical criticism was devoted to two great branches, the Lower, and the Higher. The Lower criticism was utilized to designate the study of the text of the Scripture, and included the investigation of the manuscripts, and the different readings in the various versions and codices and manuscripts in order that we may be sure we have the original words as they were written by the divinely inspired writers. In fact, the term generally used is “Textual Criticism”.

There are Lower Critics, but in contrast, “Higher Criticism” is employed to designate the study of the historic origins, the dates, and authorship of the various books of the Bible, and that great branch of study which in the technical language of twenty-first century theology is known as “Introduction”. It is a very valuable branch of Biblical science, and is of the highest importance as an auxiliary in the interpretation of the Word of God. The term “Higher Criticism”, after all, means nothing more than the study of the literary structure of the

various books of the Bible, and more especially of the Old Testament, most laudable in itself. How is then, that the Higher Criticism has become identified in the popular mind with attacks upon the Bible and the supernatural character of the Holy Scriptures? The reason is this, no study maybe requires so devout a spirit and so exalted a faith in the supernatural as in the pursuit of Higher Criticism; It demands at once the ability of the student and the simplicity of the believing child of the Most High. For without faith no one can explain the Sacred Scriptures, and without theological scholarship no one can possibly investigate historic origins. Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Sacred Scripture is the greatest work ever, and invaluable in its vast reach of information for the study of God's Word. Pithily enough, the work of Higher Critic has not always been pursued in a reverent spirit nor even in the spirit of scientific and Christian scholarship.

Does anyone doubt that the Bible possesses apologetic dialogues? In the Acts of the Apostles we read in chapter 17: 17: "Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him." (KJV) Look at the Biblical structure anywhere in the Sacred Scriptures; look at its completeness; look at it in the clearness, fullness and holiness of its teachings; look at it in its sufficiency to guide every man that truly seeks light under the saving knowledge of God. Apologetics helps finding the answers defending the Christian Faith and Living of the children of God. Apologetics cover topics about the reliability of the Bible, biblical people, answering Christian Living and much more.

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Apologetics is the branch of Christianity that deals with the defence and establishment of the Christian faith. Christian Apologetics is something every true believer should be involved in even if it is only a little.

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear. (1 Peter 3:15 KJV).

Introduction

Apologetics is the science (and art) of presenting reasonable defences for the truth of Christianity. Or put another way, it is using reason, evidence, and testimony to explain the Christian faith. The word *apologetics* is derived from 1 Peter 3:15: "Always be ready to give a reason/defence [*apologia*] to every man for the hope that is in you."

Many Christians hold to the notion that Christianity is strictly a matter of *blind* faith. In this view, Christians have a power to believe that is graciously granted by the Holy Spirit as a result of the words of Scripture. Indeed, for many believers, this is sufficient. It is argued that only the Holy Spirit can change a person's heart, so logic or evidence is superfluous. Thus, one simply needs to have "the faith of a child."

However, it would be a gross error to place God the Holy Spirit in a box. While it is the Holy Spirit who convicts us of faith, He works through many avenues to bring people to faith. Many people come to faith by way of a critical examination of the truth claims of the Bible.

The Bible strongly encourages individuals to "test" all things (1 Thessalonians 5:21), to ask for wisdom (James 1:5), and to use our minds (Matthew 22:37, etc.). Apologetics can involve many disciplines to corroborate or validate the claims of the Bible. These disciplines would include, but are not limited to

science, history, and philosophy. It is this reasoned approach that can bolster one's faith and reach doubters when it comes to key questions such as "Does God exist?", "Is the Bible trustworthy?", and "Is Jesus Christ who He claimed to be?"

We reject as unbiblical all ideas that attempt to *limit* Christianity to blind faith. Such ideas include "fideism" (the idea that reason and faith are completely incompatible) or "presuppositionalism" (the idea that faith itself is the only basis for rational thought). While there will always be a step of faith for the Christian, the Christian faith is the only religion that is evidential in history. God's revelation is not just contained in the pages of Scripture (special revelation), but is evident through other disciplines including science (general revelation) as well.

The Biblical Case for Apologetics

"But in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence [apologia] to anyone who asks you for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect." (1 Peter 3:15)

In addition to the above passage in 1 Peter, the Bible commands us elsewhere to apologetics:

- *"He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it." (Titus 1:9)*
- *"I urge you to contend for the faith." (Jude 3)*
- *"For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)*
- *"Whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me." (Philippians 1:7)*

Apologetics was a common practice that accompanied the proclamation of the Gospel in the New Testament:

- Jesus used testimony and evidences (miracles and fulfilled prophecy) to confirm His identity (Matthew 4:23, 11:5; Luke 24:25-27; John 5:31-36; John 10:37-38; John 14:11; John 20:30-31).

- Paul routinely reasoned from the perspective of the audience (Acts 9:22, 14:15-17, 17:2-4, 17:16-32, 19:8, 26:25-29, 28:23-24; Romans 1:18-2:16; 1 Corinthians 9:20-23).
- Paul includes a strong apologetic with his clearest explanation, that is *definition*, of the gospel in the New Testament—1 Corinthians 15:1-11.
- Luke insists that the truth of his account was verified by "many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3)
- A model apologetic for Jews is Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. In verse 22 he appeals to Jesus' miracles. In verses 25-31 he appeals to fulfilled prophecy. In verse 32 he appeals to the testimony of witnesses of Christ's resurrection. By means of these arguments the apostles sought to show the Jews that Christianity is true.

Faith vs. Reason

- Thanks to sin, human wisdom has become entangled with pride. As a result, "not many who are wise" are among the believers in the gospel (1 Corinthians 1:21), which demands humility. Men "suppress the truth" (Romans 1:18-32) and are "blinded" to justify their unrighteousness. (Ephesians 4:17-18; Romans 3:10-11; 2 Corinthians 4:4)
- Faith is equally available to all. Unlike knowledge of, say, quantum physics or classical Chinese, faith requires no special intellectual gifts. *"I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes."* (Matthew 11:25)
- When Paul condemned human "wisdom" and "philosophy," or Luther condemned "reason," it is not the gift of reasoning and knowledge that is being condemned, but only its abuse, as twisted by pride and sin. (Isaiah 29:13-14; 1 Corinthians 1:18-21, 1:27-29, 2:1-5, 2:13-14, 3:18-20; Colossians 2:8, 23; 1 Timothy 6:20; James 3:15-17)
- Jesus instructed us to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and with all your **mind**." (Matthew 22:37)
- Luther's famous Diet of Worms proclamation in 1521: "Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain **reason**, my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything. Here I stand, I can do nothing else!"

Role of the Holy Spirit

We know that the Holy Spirit is actively engaged in regenerating a person and bringing him to faith. In fact, without the role of the Holy Spirit nobody would be saved. But this does not mean that we should not use apologetics. As put by

William Lane Craig in his book *Reasonable Faith*, "When one presents reasons for his faith, one is not working apart from or against the Holy Spirit." Indeed, it is unscriptural to refuse to reason with an unbeliever.

While there may be times when it is inappropriate to use apologetics in our witnessing, it is correct to say that the Holy Spirit often uses our apologetic arguments to bring people to faith. Are *you* prepared to give a convincing reason for the hope that you have (1 Peter 3:15)? Can you clearly tell others not only *what* you believe, but also *why* you believe it?

An illustration of what apologetics really is

Apologetics is somewhat of a lonely endeavour. It is possible for a person to give a great deal of effort to apologetic work, to defending God's word, to answering questions, to reasoning with people and have it all seem as though it was worthless. Discouragement is a reality to the apologist. There are certainly victories, by God's grace; but there are many encounters that could simply be classified as "unprofitable."

To help you keep your eyes on the real issue of apologetics, I offer the following illustration. The idea is to get you to understand what your job is as an apologist - as someone who answers questions and objections and points people to Jesus. I believe that if you understand where you are and what your 'job' is, then you won't be as overcome with discouragement as you might otherwise be.

Apologetics is like . . .

Apologetics is like a field. In the centre of the field is a garden. This garden has one door, and that door is Jesus. There is one path that leads to that door. Inside the garden is eternal life in the presence of God. Outside the field, however, are rocks, boulders, thorns, thistles, valleys, hills, and many false paths that lead nowhere.

The apologist resides in the field and points people to the true path, so they can find the Garden. The apologist seeks to remove the intellectual thorns and emotional rocks that prevent people from finding the true path to God. Also, there are many people who are walking false paths (cults, philosophies, etc.) who will never reach that Garden. The apologist gently guides the person, removes the obstacles, and points in the direction of the Garden. When people arrive there, it is between them and God as to whether or not they enter.

Picture yourself as a labourer in the field. It isn't your job to save anyone. It is your job to point the way. You aren't the only one in the field. Getting them to the Garden is not your job. They get there. You simply help them.

Are you an apologist?

Sometimes, when I do house church seminars, after I introduce myself, I give a very brief history of what got me started in apologetics and what keeps me going. Usually, those who are there are there to learn about Christian doctrine; evangelism; witnessing to Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, or other cult groups; or are simply there to ask questions on different subjects. Invariably, I introduce the term 'apologetics' to the group and define it as "that field of Christian study that defends biblical truth against anything that opposes it." Also, I state that apologetics is as varied as people and subjects, and that no one can master all areas. As God calls people into study, they will become proficient in what interests them according to the gifts and interests that have been entrusted to them by Him.

But one of my concerns when doing seminars is what I call "The Speaker Effect." Basically, when a group gathers to hear a speaker, it is assumed that the speaker knows his material and is very experienced in the subject. Given the fact that public speaking is America's number one phobia, the mere fact that a person can get up there and speak for an hour on a subject (and enjoy doing it) has a psychological effect of distancing the learner from the teacher. The speaker is often elevated to the status of "A Special Teacher Called of God." Actually, in my case, the speaker is just someone who likes to blab about what he knows. I'm no different than anyone else, and that is important. People need to realize that they are called by God to study and show themselves approved (2 Tim. 2:15). Furthermore, this "effect" tends to make people think that they can't be good apologists since they aren't up there speaking. This is not true, and I always try to motivate people to study and master those areas that the Lord calls them to study.

Apologetics is the attempt to make a defence for the Christian faith. If you do that in any way, then you are an apologist. In fact, you are commanded to be an apologist by Peter: "But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defence to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;" (1 Pet. 3:15).

If God commands you to make a defence, then He is commanding you to be an apologist. So you are, whether you like it or not, called to be an apologist. But

don't worry. God is not in the habit of sending people to accomplish His will without equipping them.

Now, what I am going to tell you is true. I've experienced this many times. But please understand that this is the work of the Holy Spirit--not me. There would be times in varying situations when I would be discussing something with an unbeliever. He would ask a difficult question that would give me pause. I'd nod, trust God, and inhale to begin to answer. The answer would come as I began to speak. In other words, I didn't know what to say until I started to say it. I am reminded of Jesus' words in Mark 13:11: "And when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not be anxious beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit."

I say this because I want you to learn to trust the Lord. He said He will be with us always to the end (Matthew 28:20). I believe it. He is there when we need Him. So, you need to study, be ready, and trust the Lord to provide what you need when you need it. Trust God and Go preaching the Word!

Apologetics and the Family Life

Why Apologetics is Important

The Bible commands us to give a defence of our faith (1 Pet. 3:15) and to contend earnestly for the faith (Jude 3). This discipline of giving answers to people's questions about Christianity is known as Christian apologetics. However, apologetics is integrally related to discipleship and evangelism. Jesus commanded us to evangelize the lost by making disciples. Since apologetics is known as pre-evangelism, it is important that we engage in apologetics.

The Importance of the Family

First, I strongly believe that the family is the bedrock of the Christian Church. If families are strong, the churches will be strong; if the churches are strong, communities will be strong; if communities are strong, nations will be strong; if nations are strong, then our world will be strong. As a result of the vast importance of the family, it is extremely important to make sure that your family is grounded in the truth. This is the case whether you are a single parent or a two-parent household.

Important Foundations

You must make sure that you are saved and trained yourself. As mentioned in a previous article, the foundation to proper apologetics is salvation and spiritual maturity, critical thinking skills, and sound theology. You do not have to have a Ph.D. in philosophy or theology to teach your family, but it is important that you at least have the willingness to learn. In fact, you will probably do most of your learning as you teach and disciple your family.

So how do we do apologetics with the Family?

#1: Take Personal Responsibility

First, take personal responsibility yourself to train your kids. Do not depend on the church or the school system to train and equip your kids. You must be willing to do it yourself. Unfortunately, many churches do not equip young kids to know their faith and how to share it.

#2: Personal Devotions and Prayer

Second, you must lead your family in personal devotions (Bible reading and prayer) on a regular basis. There is no magic formula of “You must have devotions as a family every day” or “You must have devotions as a family twice a week.” However, just make sure that it is something that you engage in on a regular basis. All you have to do is read basic passages from the Bible in a slow manner and (depending on your children’s ages) discuss the passages with your children afterwards. You could start with the book of Proverbs or the Gospel of John. You also could use a number of helpful children’s Bible study material such as the material from Children’s Bible books.

After or before reading the Bible, you could spend some time praying with your children. Teach your children to be able to pray out loud and in public. Teach them to have confidence to pray and have a relationship with God. This is extremely important as they grow up and get into the public square. If their faith is extremely private, they will never make a difference in the world.

Make sure that you read the Bible in a translation that your children can understand. The best Bible translations would be the New American Standard Bible (NASB), the English Standard Version (ESV), or the New King James Version (NKJV). Again, do not worry about being perfect--just make an effort and you will have good results.

#3: Talk to your Children about God

Third, talk with your children about God and their spiritual life. It is amazing how many parents do not even talk to their children about spiritual things or explain to their children the gospel message. Though your child must personally trust Christ as his or her Savior, I strongly encourage you to invite your children to get saved. Do not leave it up to the pastor or youth minister of your church. You must personally talk to your own children about the Lord.

Once your child is a believer, teach him how to share his faith with non-believers. Training your child how to evangelize others will build confidence and maturity in your child's walk with the Lord. It will also make him way more effective to reach others in the world.

#4: See that your Children Receive an Excellent Education

Fourth, make sure that your children receive an excellent education. There is much debate among Christian parents today regarding homeschooling vs. private schooling vs. public schooling. I honestly think that there are excellent public and private schools, but I think that homeschooling is the best means to train and equip your kids. I was homeschooled from Kindergarten through 12th grade; and if I had to do it over again, I would do the same.

Homeschooling places the burden of discipleship and teaching upon the parents where it belongs. It does not leave it up to a teacher or the public system to mold and shape your child's life.

If your child spends about half of his waking hours per day at a public school where he is not taught the fear of the Lord, is spoon-fed secular ideologies like evolution and socialism, and does not receive much training from his parents or church, it is not surprising that he will "lose" his faith and become a non-believer. If he is taught to think like an unbeliever and act like an unbeliever, then it is not surprising that he will start *being* an unbeliever.

If most of a child's young life is spent at a secular public school, he will spend most of his time being influenced by his peers. Who do you want to be the biggest influence on your children: yourself or his ungodly peers?

Logical Fallacies or Fallacies in Argumentation

There are different kinds of logical fallacies that people make in presenting their positions. Below is a list of some of the major fallacies. It is a good idea to be familiar with them so you can point them out in a discussion thereby focusing the issues where they belong while exposing error.

It is true that during a debate on an issue if you simply point out to your "opponent" a logical fallacy that he/she has just made, it generally gives you the upper hand. But then, merely having the upper hand is not the goal: truth is. Nevertheless, logical fallacies hide the truth; so pointing them out is very useful.

Ad Hominem--Attacking the individual instead of the argument.

Example: You are so stupid your argument couldn't possibly be true.

Example: I figured that you couldn't possibly get it right, so I ignored your comment.

Appeal to Force--Telling the hearer that something bad will happen to him if he does not accept the argument.

Example: If you don't want to get beaten up, you will agree with what I say.

Example: Convert or die.

Appeal to Pity--Urging the hearer to accept the argument based upon an appeal to emotions, sympathy, etc.

Example: You owe me big time because I really stuck my neck out for you.

Example: Oh come on, I've been sick. That's why I missed the deadline.

Appeal to the Popular--Urging the hearer to accept a position because a majority of people hold to it.

Example: The majority of people like soda. Therefore, soda is good.

Example: Everyone else is doing it. Why shouldn't you?

Appeal to Tradition--Trying to get someone to accept something because it has been done or believed for a long time.

Example: This is the way we've always done it. Therefore, it is the right way.

Example: The Catholic church's tradition demonstrates that this doctrine is true.

Begging the Question--Assuming the thing to be true that you are trying to prove. It is circular.

Example: God exists because the Bible says so. The Bible is inspired. Therefore, we know that God exists.

Example: I am a good worker because Frank says so. How can we trust Frank? Simple: I will vouch for him.

Cause and Effect--assuming that the effect is related to a cause because the events occur together.

Example: When the rooster crows, the sun rises. Therefore, the rooster causes the sun to rise.

Example: When the fuel light goes on in my car, I soon run out of gas. Therefore, the fuel light causes my car to run out of gas.

Circular Argument--See Begging the Question

Fallacy of Division--Assuming that what is true of the whole is true for the parts.

Example: That car is blue. Therefore, its engine is blue.

Example: Your family is weird. That means that you are weird, too.

Fallacy of Equivocation--Using the same term in an argument in different places but the word has different meanings.

Example: A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. Therefore, a bird is worth more than President Bush.

Example: Evolution states that one species can change into another. We see that cars have evolved into different styles. Therefore, since evolution is a fact in cars, it is true in species.

False Dilemma--Giving two choices when in actuality there could be more choices possible.

Example: You either did knock the glass over, or you did not. Which is it? (Someone else could have knocked the glass over).

Example: Do you still beat your wife?

Genetic Fallacy--Attempting to endorse or disqualify a claim because of the origin or irrelevant history of the claim.

Example: The Nazi regime developed the Volkswagen Beetle. Therefore, you should not buy a VW Beetle because of who started it.

Example: Frank just got out of jail last year; since it was his idea to start the hardware store, I can't trust him.

Guilt by Association--Rejecting an argument or claim because the person proposing it likes someone whom is disliked by another.

Example: Hitler liked dogs. Therefore dogs are bad.

Example: Your friend is a thief. Therefore, I cannot trust you.

Non Sequitur--Comments or information that do not logically follow from a premise or the conclusion.

Example: We know why it rained today: because I washed my car.

Example: I don't care what you say. We don't need any more bookshelves. As long as the carpet is clean, we are fine.

Poisoning the Well--Presenting negative information about a person before he/she speaks so as to discredit the person's argument.

Example: Frank is pompous, arrogant, and thinks he knows everything. So, let's hear what Frank has to say about the subject.

Example: Don't listen to him because he is a loser.

Red Herring--Introducing a topic not related to the subject at hand.

Example: I know your car isn't working right. But, if you had gone to the store one day earlier, you'd not be having problems.

Example: I know I forgot to deposit the check into the bank yesterday. But, nothing I do pleases you.

Special Pleading (double standard)--Applying a standard to another that is different from a standard applied to oneself.

Example: You can't possibly understand menopause because you are a man.

Example: Those rules don't apply to me since I am older than you.

Straw Man Argument--Producing an argument about a weaker representation of the truth and attacking it.

Example: The government doesn't take care of the poor because it doesn't have a tax specifically to support the poor.

Example: We know that evolution is false because we did not evolve from monkeys.

Category Mistake--Attributing a property to something that could not possibly have that property. Attributing facts of one kind are attributed to another kind. Attributing to one category that which can only be properly attributed to another.

Example: Blue sleeps faster than Wednesday.

Example: Saying logic is transcendental is like saying cars would exist if matter didn't.

What is Hate Speech?

"Hate Speech" is a term often used by liberals in their attacks on Christians. Anything that does not agree with the liberal viewpoint is sometimes labelled as hate speech and ridiculed. But, what really is hate speech?

- dictionary.com, "speech that attacks a person or group on the basis of race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation."
- usaeducationguides.com, "A term for speech intended to degrade, intimidate, or incite violence or prejudicial action against someone based on race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, or disability. The term covers written as well as oral communication."
- definitions.uslegal.com, "Hate speech is a communication that carries no meaning other than the expression of hatred for some group, especially in circumstances in which the communication is likely to provoke violence. It is an

incitement to hatred primarily against a group of persons defined in terms of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and the like. Hate speech can be any form of expression regarded as offensive to racial, ethnic and religious groups and other discrete minorities or to women."

So we can see that hate speech is that which attacks a person or group based on race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation and has the potential result of inciting harm.

Maybe the Liberals should study hate speech a little more. Apparently they don't get it. Don't we Christians have the right to our opinions? Don't we have the right to exercise the freedom of our religious beliefs? We do--for now. But that may change as a result of the hate speech of liberals, which is so often directed at Christians. Liberals like to name-call (homophobes, hate-mongers, etc.), label us as bigots, and say that we serve an antiquated God. In doing this they commit the very error of which they accuse us. Here's how . . .

They degrade and attack us as Christians (a religious group); and, I am sure, attempt to intimidate Christians into abstaining from the political realm and social structuring of our culture--based on our religious beliefs. They degrade our Christian lifestyle which includes the right to disapprove bestiality, paedophilia, polygamy, polyandry, pornography, etc. Also, they incite prejudicial action against Christians with their ill-informed misrepresentations of Christianity. For example, they will sometimes call the God of the Old Testament a baby-killer, murderer, genocidal maniac, homophobe, etc. Such accusations can easily incite anger, hatred, and violence towards Christians. After all, if you accuse a religious group long enough, people will begin to believe the accusations. And, as we all should be aware of, beliefs lead to actions (think of Hitler's propaganda effect on the Jews). What would happen to Christians if everyone around them thought they were following a murderous, baby-killing God that was labelled homophobic and casually supported genocide? Think about it. By labeling people groups (i.e., Christians) in negative ways, it makes it easier for one group (liberals?) to hate another, to become emotionally detached, increasingly irrational, and potentially violent. Would those thus indoctrinated by the hate speech of liberal hypocrisy (which modern societies seem to embrace so readily) treat the Christians with love and kindness or with fear and intimidation? Which couplet brings peace and which brings persecution?

Ah, but such reasoning does not stop liberals from their doublespeak and hypocrisy (probably because they haven't thought things through very far). The name-calling, accusatory, intolerant liberals are quick to judge and slow to love.

They are eager to blame while ignoring their own guilt. They readily condemn and remain blind to how they do the very thing of which they accuse others. Who knows? Perhaps their attitudes have been shaped by their own hate speech more than they realize.

But if we are persecuted, count it a blessing for Christ who was also persecuted unrighteously (1 Corinthians 2:8). Our response is to bless those who persecute us (Romans 12:14). If we are accused, we should bear it well (1 Pet. 4:16). This does not mean to be idle and do nothing. We have the right of self-defence (Luke 22:36) as we give an answer to everyone who would ask (1 Peter 3:15). Yet, while we do this, our love is to be without hypocrisy (Romans 12:9). We are never to pay back evil for evil (Romans 12:17); and as far as it is possible, we are to be at peace with all people (Romans 12:18)--even though many may not want to be at peace with us.

Finally, it is not bigoted, narrow-minded, or hate speech to say we follow God and believe that pornography, paedophilia, rape, adultery, etc., are all wrong. We are expressing the freedom of our religion--in spite of what the liberals fear and foment. Rest assured, fellow Christians, it is for righteousness and truth that we are persecuted, reviled, mislabelled, and falsely accused by those who seek to sit in judgment over our faith. However, Christians must make sure that they are not misusing their freedom through imposing the Christian Faith the hard way as Christianity (the Vatican and the Governments) have done for many centuries, and as the I.S. (Islamic State) does today, a worldwide danger. Our Lord preached love and equality.

The Reasons for Apologetics

The main reasons for apologetics are:

The **first** and most obvious is that we are commanded to defend the faith: 1 Peter 3:15 says, "but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defence to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence."

Second, we need apologetics because it helps Christians know their faith. This is something that is sadly lacking among believers. Most don't know much about their faith, let alone be able to describe the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, His physical resurrection, or even to tell the difference between justification and sanctification. Apologetics helps to define and defend what the truth of the gospel is.

Third, as Christians, we should be motivated to present the truth of salvation in Jesus. We should not sit idly by and ignore the dilemma of the unbeliever. We need to tell them that sin is real because God is real, and that breaking God's law has a consequence. Since we have all sinned, we cannot keep God's law perfectly. Also, we cannot undo the offense to an infinitely holy God because we are not infinite or holy; the only thing left for us is to fall under the judgment of God. But God has provided a way for us to escape that judgment. That is why God became man in Jesus. He claimed to be God (John 8:24 and 58; compare with Exodus 3:14). Jesus bore our sins in His body on the cross (1 Pet. 2:24). By trusting in Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, we will be spared from the rightful judgment of God upon the sinner. Salvation is not found in Buddhism, Islam, relativism, or in one's self: It is only found in Jesus. We need to not only defend God's word and truth but also present the gospel to all people, so they can escape the judgment to come.

Fourth, we need apologetics to counter the bad image that Christianity has received in the media and in culture. Televangelists and their scandals--both sexually and monetarily--are a disgrace to Christianity. The Catholic church hasn't helped with its scandals involving priests. On top of that, the media is very biased against Christianity, and you will see negative opinions of Christianity promoted everywhere.

Fifth, we need apologetics because there is a constant threat of apostasy in the visible Christian church.

Sixth, another reason we need apologetics is that of the many false teachings out there. Mormonism teaches that God used to be a man on another world, that he brought one of his goddess wives with him to this world, that they produce spirit offspring that are born into human babies, and that you have the potential of becoming a god of your own world. The Jehovah's Witnesses teach that there is no Trinity, that Jesus is Michael the Archangel, that there is no hell, and that only 144,000 people will go to heaven. Atheism denies God's existence, openly attacks Christianity, and is gaining ground in public life and schools. Islam teaches that Jesus was not God in flesh, that Jesus did not rise from the dead, and that He did not atone for our sins. It teaches that salvation is partly based on one's works and partly based on Allah's grace. It teaches that the Holy Spirit is the angel Gabriel (Surah 2:97; 16:102); that Jinn are unseen beings created (51:56) from fire (15:27; 55:15); and that Muhammed was greater than Jesus. Even within the Christian church there are false teachings. We can see that from both within the Christian church and outside of it, false teachings are bombarding believers (and nonbelievers) all over the world.

The fact is that Christianity is under attack in the world, and we need to fight the good fight of the faith without shrinking back. We need apologetics to give rational, intelligent, and relevant explanations of Christian viability to the critics and the prejudiced who would seek to undermine the teachings of our Lord Jesus.

Logic in Apologetics

To defend the faith, the Christian must use truth, facts, and reason appropriately and prayerfully. The Christian should listen to objections and make cogent and rational comments in direct response to the issues raised.

Logic is simply a tool in the arsenal of Christian apologetics. Logic is a system of reasoning. It is the principle of proper thinking used to arrive at correct conclusions. Of course, some people are better at thinking logically than others, and there is no guarantee that using logic to the best of one's ability will bring about the conversion of anyone. After all, logic is not what saves a person. Jesus does that, and we are justified by faith (Romans 5:1).

Therefore, the proper use of logic in apologetics is to remove intellectual barriers that hinder a person from accepting Jesus as Saviour. Logic is not to be looked at as the answer to every problem facing Christianity nor every objection raised against it. Logic has its limits. It cannot guarantee wisdom. It cannot prove or disprove inspiration or love. It cannot replace the intuition gained through experience, the prompting of the Holy Spirit, nor the clear truth of God's word. Nevertheless, logic is still very valuable and can be quite powerfully used by people--both saved and unsaved.

Opponents of Christianity use logic

Sometimes an opponent of Christianity might use logic problems as a type of evidence against God's existence. Consider this rather basic objection:

- Proposition: God can do all things.
- Statement: Can God make something so big that He cannot pick it up? If He can, then He cannot do all things because He could not pick up the rock. If He cannot, then He cannot do all things because He cannot make a rock so big He can't pick it up.
- Conclusion: Since God can do all things and we have shown that there are things He cannot do, therefore, God does not exist.

On the surface, this logic could be difficult to answer. But, all we have to do is think a bit more, and we can see that the problem asserted above is not logical to begin with. Here's the answer:

- Proposition: God cannot violate His own nature; that is, He cannot go against what He naturally is.
- Statement: God's nature does not permit Him to lie, to not be God, etc.
- Conclusion: Therefore, the statement that God can do all things is not true, and the conclusion raised against God is also not true.

Logic is a valuable tool in witnessing particularly when using proofs of God's existence. Consider the following basic approach using logic:

1. The universe exists.
2. The universe cannot be infinitely old; because if it were, it would have entered into a state of entropy long ago. The following are opinions not shared by everybody in this scientific world.

Entropy is the second Law of thermodynamics which states that all things are moving toward chaos and non-usable energy. In other words, everything is running down.

The universe is not in a state of non-useable energy; therefore, it is not infinitely old. If the universe were infinitely old, the universe would have run out of usable energy long ago.

3. Since the universe is not infinitely old, it had a beginning.
4. The universe could not have brought itself into existence.
5. Something before the universe and greater than the universe had to bring the universe into existence.
6. That something is God.

All logical proofs for God have strengths and weaknesses. But the Christian should not be afraid to use logic, reason, and evidence when defending the faith.

Is logic a common ground between the believer and the unbeliever?

Some state that there is no common ground between the believer and the unbeliever, and that the unbeliever's initial presuppositions against the Christian God do not allow him to accurately reason concerning God, the world, truth, or himself. Therefore, some Christian theologians conclude there can be no

ultimate common ground because the unsaved are unregenerate, and their presuppositions are opposed to true rationality.

"Logic is true--not because it is logical but because it is a reflection of God's nature, which is order and truth."

I believe that logic is indeed a type of common ground. But I do not believe that it possesses some innate quality that renders it above human capacity or limitations, nor does it possess any ethereal, mystic qualities that somehow transcends the blinding influence of sin. I think that logic, used properly, always vindicates the truths found in the Bible and points to God--whether or not an unbeliever acknowledges it.

Logic belongs to God. This is so because God has invented the universe, the physical laws, mathematics, and all other natural and true phenomenon in it. Existence has an order because God gave it order. Logic is true--not because it is logical but because it is a reflection of God's nature, which is order and truth. Therefore, logic ultimately belongs only to God and can only properly be used by Him and in matters pertaining to God by the Christian.

This is not to say that an unbeliever cannot master the logic, say of mathematics, better than a believer. There are areas of knowledge common to both, and God has given some people abilities not possessed by others. However, this not an assertion that all Christians, when speaking of God, do so flawlessly. Many Christians are very illogical when they try to defend God.

The fact is that no one can claim to have ultimately mastered logic. In a perfect world with unfallen people, reasoning would be a marvelous adventure that would lead us to more of God's revelation and truth. But we don't live in a perfect world. We live in a fallen world where sin has influenced not only our bodies, emotions, and wills but also our minds.

Is logic enough?

Is logic enough for the Christian? No, it isn't. Logic has two major flaws: First, it is only as good as the one who is using it (though that really isn't a flaw in logic). Second, logic doesn't save. Jesus does. We cannot reason someone into the kingdom of God. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts of sin and righteousness and who opens the heart to understand the truth (John 16:8).

But if that is true, then should we even bother to try to reason with unbelievers? Absolutely, yes, and for several reasons:

- We are commanded by God to give an answer to unbelievers (1 Peter 3:15) and to reason (Isaiah 1:18).
- God can, in His sovereignty, use our witness and reasoning to bring someone into the Kingdom. He is not limited by our inadequacies.
- Answers that are in agreement with God's word and given to unbelievers, even if they are rejected, are still true answers. The unbeliever will be held accountable on judgment day for rejecting those truths.

Conclusion

Logic is a tool for the Christian. It is nothing to be afraid of. In fact, if you accept the truth that logic "belongs" to God, then you should be encouraged to use it. But, don't let it become an idol, that is, it is not the answer to the problem. As Christians, we need to use logic as well as evidence, prayer, God's word, love, kindness, etc., in our efforts to win people to Jesus. Reasoning has a valuable place in apologetics and with the believer. It is worth doing well. But use it with love, prayer, and patience.

Prayer in Apologetics

One of the dangers of the apologist is falling into the trap of relying on his own intellectual abilities to try to wrestle someone into the kingdom of God. I am sad to say that I have been guilty of this.

Pride hides itself in the heart, so it cannot be seen. When we find ourselves relying on our knowledge instead of God's word mercy and grace, then we have fallen into that trap. It is not reason that converts but God's Spirit. It is not logic that draws us to God but Jesus (John 12:32). It is not evidence that convicts a person of his sins but the Holy Spirit (John 16:8). That is why we need to rely on God and trust that He will use our defence of the truth for His glory and their benefit.

To ignore prayer in apologetics is to be prideful. It is the same as saying we don't need God. But we do. We need to pray for those who are lost, pray for their minds to be opened, pray that God's word will ring true to them, pray that our witness will be strong, and pray that the evil one will not have a foot-hold with them or with us. We are fighting a spiritual battle and need spiritual tools. Prayer is perhaps the most important of them all.

It is the Lord who opens the heart and mind--not you (Acts 16:14). Ask God for guidance (John 14:14). Ask for blessing in your understanding (James 1:5) and

your speech (Colossians 4:6). Ask the Lord to also open their understanding to God's word (Luke 24:45). This is what He does.

Prayer brings humility to the one praying. It admits dependence on God. If we are humble and depend on God, we are more likely to hear His voice. Prayer means that you are seeking divine intervention. It works power to your words. It changes your heart. It moves you closer to God.

Being a great apologist is not a badge of honour to be worn by the Christian as a demonstration of his intellectual abilities. Rather, it is a response to the calling of God upon all Christians (1 Peter 3:15) that is to be undertaken with love and humility: love of people and humility before God.

Never let your study and practice of apologetics replace the power--received by faith--in prayer before the Holy Creator. Ask God to empower your words and open the hearts of those with whom you speak . . . and then study and witness to the best of your abilities.

Are there Guidelines for doing Apologetics?

Almost every discipline has a set of rules and guidelines that help a person perform better. In fact, guidelines could be produced for nearly any endeavor. Why should apologetics be any different?

Following are some things I have found that are very helpful in developing apologetic skills. I am not saying that these are definitive or exhaustive in scope. Rather, these are simply the things that I have found that have helped me. I hope they help you.

Remember, there is no method for apologetics that works in all situations. There can be no outline approach that, if followed, will always lead a person to understanding and accepting the truth. That is why apologetics is a combination of what you know and are. It is a fluid expression that must adapt to the obstacles in its course.

Apologetic skill is directly related to your experience and knowledge. You gain knowledge by experiencing a situation where you defend the truth. This is "doing" apologetics. It is through this doing that you polish what you know, discover your areas of weakness, and plan ways to improve your abilities. You need to learn as much as you can through study, practice what you learn in real situations, think of ways to apply what you know, mess up, and keep going. All of this is what apologetics is and is how you get better. So, is there one single

rule that will help you develop skill in apologetics? Yes, there is. Go for it! You will have success and failures.

In fact, when I teach seminars on apologetics, I can confidently state that I have probably made more mistakes in evangelism, witnessing, apologetics, etc., than any ten people combined. My wife will attest to that. But hey, that's okay. You don't grow if you don't go.

Nevertheless, here are some guidelines.

1. **Pray**
It is the Lord who opens the heart and mind--not you (Acts 16:14). Ask God for guidance (John 14:14). Ask for blessing in your understanding (James 1:5) and your speech (Colossians 4:6). Ask the Lord to also open their understanding to God's word (Luke 24:45).
2. **Memorise Scripture**
Few things are as powerful when defending the faith as being able to cite chapter and verse of a particular verse (Psalm 119:11; 2 Timothy 3:16).
3. **Memorise the locations of information**
. . . whether it be in cult material, secular material, or any other source you've got. It is extremely valuable to know material in different disciplines. Of course, you cannot know everything, but you can memorize a few pertinent facts about Mormonism or evolution or philosophy or the Bible or whatever else may be needed. You will learn what you need as you witness.
4. **Listen to what is being said to you**
. . . and respond to what is said. It is by listening that you will then know what to say. Listen for errors in logic. Listen for motives, for hurts, for intent. Listen.
5. **Don't interrupt**
This is just common courtesy. You need to earn the right to speak. Just because you have an answer doesn't mean it must be heard right away. When interruptions become the norm, learning is thrown out the window.
6. **Don't be afraid to make mistakes**
One of the best ways to improve is to discover your weaknesses. The best way to discover your weaknesses is when mistakes uncover them for you.
7. **Study what you discover you don't know**
If you don't know something, then study it. Get books and read. Write down what you learn.
8. **Don't be afraid to take a chance**

This takes real faith. All you have to do is be available, speak up, and take a chance in defending the Christian faith. You'll be surprised at how well you do. And when you mess up, don't worry--review guideline #6.

9. Rehearse

Perhaps the best place to do apologetics is in your head. Think of a situation, a scenario that you need to have an answer for and develop an answer. Practice in your mind. Try to corner yourself and then get out of it.

10. Read books that deal with what you need to know

The knowledge of others is invaluable. Isaac Newton said, "If I have reached the stars, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants." In other words, he learned from others.

Basically, the guidelines are common sense. All you have to do is try--don't worry about failure, keep going, pray, and trust God. It works.

Classical Apologetics

Classical Apologetics is that style of Christian defence that stresses rational arguments for the existence of God and uses evidence to substantiate biblical claims and miracles. It is quite similar to evidential apologetics and appeals to human reason and evidence. Early Classical Apologists include Augustine, Anselm, and Thomas Aquinas. Contemporary classical apologists are Norman Geisler¹, William Craig², J. P. Moreland³, and R.C. Sproul⁴, etc.

¹ **Norman L. Geisler** is an evangelical scholar, Christian apologist, and the author/coauthor of over fifty Christian books defending the Christian faith by means of logic, evidence, and philosophy. He has also authored many scholarly articles on a wide range of theological and philosophical topics. Dr. Geisler has taught at the university and graduate level for over forty years. Geisler's work *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* has been well received and is considered a systematic and comprehensive work of Christian apologetics.. Dr. Geisler is also known for holding many debates with various scholars, as well as making frequent guest appearances on Christian radio programs. His views are broadly conservative and evangelical. And he participated in signing the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. He holds a B.A. and an Th.B from Wheaton College (1960), and a Ph.D. in philosophy from Loyola University (1970). Dr. Geisler is former president of Southern Evangelical Seminary, which he co-founded with Ross Rhoads in 1992.

² **William Lane Craig** (born 1949) is an American analytical philosopher and Christian theologian. Craig's philosophical work focuses on philosophy of religion, metaphysics, and

Some of the arguments relied upon for proofs of God's existence are the cosmological argument and the teleological argument. The cosmological argument attempts to prove that God exists by stating that there has to be an uncaused cause of all things. That uncaused cause is God. The teleological argument uses the analogy of design; that is, the universe and life exhibit marks of design. Therefore, there must be a Designer. Other times, strict evidence is used to establish Christianity's validity. Of course, both aspects are also combined in classical apologetics.

Focus on prophecies as follows:

1. The Bible claims to be the word of God.
2. The Bible has been accurately transmitted to us through the copying method.
3. The Old Testament was written before the New Testament.
4. The Old Testament contains prophecies of Jesus fulfilled in the New Testament.
5. Jesus fulfilled the prophecies.
6. This shows that the Bible is inspired.
7. Since it is inspired, it is accurate.
8. It says that God exists.
9. Therefore, God exists.

philosophy of time. His theological interests are in historical Jesus studies and philosophical theology. Craig has contributed to discussions of the cosmological argument for God's existence, divine omniscience, theories of time and eternity, and the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. His current research deals with divine acuity and the challenge posed by Platonist accounts of abstract objects. Craig is an author of several books, including *Reasonable Faith*.

³ **James Porter Moreland** (born March 9, 1948), better known as **J. P. Moreland**, is an American philosopher, theologian, and Christian apologist. He currently serves as a Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at Talbot School of Theology at Biola University in La Mirada, California.

⁴ **Dr. R.C. Sproul** is co-pastor of Saint Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, Fla., and the founder and chairman of Ligonier Ministries. His many books include "*Scripture Alone*" and "*Everyone's a Theologian*."

No argument is without strengths and weaknesses, and all Classical Apologetic approaches have been tackled by critics. But, the critics are not left unanswered; and Christians have, in turn, refuted the refutations. This back-and-forth process of point-counter-point is going to continue until Jesus returns. Nevertheless, God commands that we do our best to defend the faith, and classical apologetics is one of the means to do that.

Much of the information here on Berea Theology can be used in a classical defence. There is documentation for biblical manuscript evidence in the Bible as found in the Dictionary of Biblical Prophecy and End Times, by J. Daniel Hays; J. Scott Duvall and C. Marvin Pate (Zondervan.com). Whichever you do, think of apologetics as a mosaic of skills and knowledge that God uses in the believer to bring truth to the world. At first it is not that easy to do, but it gets easier and easier the more you do it.

Presuppositional Apologetics

This form of Christian apologetics deals with presuppositions.¹ A Christian presuppositionalist presupposes God's existence and argues from that perspective to show the validity of Christian theism. This position also presupposes the truth of the Christian Scriptures and relies on the validity and power of the gospel to change lives (Romans 1:16). From the scriptures, we see that the unbeliever is sinful in his mind (Romans 1:18-32) and unable to understand spiritual things (1 Corinthians 2:14). This means that no matter how convincing the evidence or good the logic, an unbeliever cannot come to the faith because his fallen nature will distort how he perceives the truth. The only thing that can ultimately change him is regeneration. To this end, the presuppositionalist seeks to change a person's presuppositions to be in conformity with biblical revelation.

I have found that a person's presuppositions are extremely important when discussing God and the validity of Christianity. I always ask diagnostic questions to find out where a person is philosophically and presuppositionally, so I might better discuss Christianity. This is a very important point to focus on because one's presuppositions will govern how one interprets facts. Please consider the following dialogue as a realistic example of how this works.

Evidential Apologetics

Evidential Apologetics is that style of Christian defence that stresses the miracles found in the Bible particularly Christ's resurrection as an evidence for

the existence of God and the validity of Christ and His words. It also uses historical evidences to support the veracity of the biblical account(s). In this, it is very similar to Classical Apologetics, which stresses reason in its approach to evidences. Basically, evidential apologetics stresses evidence such as miracles, fulfilled prophecies, etc., and uses reason to support them.

Memorisation of Biblical Verses

Look at it this way: if you spend one year memorizing the fifty verses, and the next year reviewing those fifty and memorizing a chapter, and then go back to those fifty verses again to make sure you have them down, and then the next year go back and do a different chapter, and so on, over the course of ten years you'll have 50 verses and 5 chapters so committed to memory there is no way anyone could ever forget it.

1. Isaiah 9:6
2. Isaiah 40:28
3. Genesis 1:1
4. John 3:16-17
5. Romans 3:23
6. Romans 6:23
7. Revelation 3:20
8. John 14:6
9. Ephesians 2:8,9
10. 2 Corinthians 5:17
11. Romans 8:28
12. Isaiah 40:30-31
13. Romans 8:38-39
14. Matthew 11:28-30
15. Psalm 27:1
16. Jeremiah 29:11
17. Hebrews 13:8
18. 2 Peter 3:9
19. Lamentations 3:22-23
20. 2 Corinthians 12:9
21. 2 Corinthians 4:18
22. Psalm 37:4,5
23. Proverbs 3:5,7
24. Philippians 4:13
25. Galatians 2:20
26. James 1:22
27. Colossians 3:23

28. 1 Corinthians 15:58
29. James 4:7
30. Luke 16:13
31. 1 John 4:7,8
32. Galatians 5:22-23
33. Hebrews 12:1-2
34. Acts 1:8
35. Romans 12:1-2
36. 1 Thessalonians 5:18
37. Psalm 19:14
38. Philippians 4:6,7
39. 2 Timothy 3:16
40. Psalm 119:105
41. Psalm 119:11
42. Hebrews 4:16
43. 1 John 1:9
44. James 5:16
45. 1 Corinthians 10:13
46. Micah 6:8
47. Matthew 25:40
48. Matthew 28:19-20
49. Matthew 5:16
50. Ephesians 6:12

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Arguments for God's Existence

The Cosmological Argument attempts to prove that God exists by showing that there cannot be an infinite number of regressions of causes to things that exist. It states that there must be a final uncaused-cause of all things. This uncaused-cause is asserted to be God. The Cosmological Argument takes several forms but is basically represented below.

Cosmological Argument

- 1. Things exist.**
- 2. It is possible for those things to not exist.**
- 3. Whatever has the possibility of non-existence, yet exists, has been caused to exist.**
 Something cannot bring itself into existence since it must exist to bring itself into existence, which is illogical.
- 4. There cannot be an infinite number of causes to bring something into existence.**
 An infinite regression of causes ultimately has no initial cause, which means there is no cause of existence.

Since the universe exists, it must have a cause.

5. **Therefore, there must be an uncaused cause of all things.**
6. **The uncaused cause must be God.**

Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) had a version of the Cosmological Argument called the Argument from Motion. He stated that things in motion could not have brought themselves into motion but must be caused to move. There cannot be an infinite regression of movers. Therefore, there must be an Unmoved Mover. This Unmoved Mover is God.

Strengths of the argument

The strengths of the Cosmological Argument lie in both its simplicity and easily comprehensible concept that there cannot be an infinite number of causes to an event. Some arguments for God's existence require more thought and training in terms and concepts, but this argument is basic and simple. Also, it is perfectly logical to assert that objects do not bring themselves into existence and must, therefore, have causes.

Weaknesses of the argument

One of the weaknesses of the argument is that if all things need a cause to exist, then God Himself must also, by definition, need a cause to exist. But this only pushes causation back and implies that there must be an infinite number of causes, which cannot be. Also, by definition, God is uncaused.

The Cosmological Argument

The argument to be made here is a form of the cosmological argument which originated in the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, and was refined by Thomas Aquinas. With the advances of modern science, the version I will provide will be perhaps clearer for some than the form set forth by Aquinas. It is a composite of Aquinas' vertical cosmological argument and the Kalam cosmological argument:

1. Everything that has a beginning needs a cause.
2. The universe had a beginning.
3. The universe needs a cause.
4. There cannot be an infinite regress of caused causes.
5. There must be a cause for all else which has no beginning and needs no cause for its own existence.

Premise #1 is self-evident. A thing cannot bring about its own existence, since it cannot be before itself. But if it began to exist, it cannot have popped up from nothing and from nowhere; nothing produces nothing.

There are several pieces of evidence that support the contention of **Premise #2** that the universe had a beginning. The scientific community has long since accepted the beginning of the universe via the big bang.

To quote from Norman Geisler, “Logically and mathematically, the evidence for the big bang suggests that originally there was no space, no time, and no matter.” (Geisler, 1999) Here are some much summarized points to demonstrate why the universe is thought to have begun, most of which was set forth by astronomer Robert Jastrow (Jastrow, 1982), and some of which has been subsequently discovered:

1. The second law of thermodynamics shows that usable energy is running down, which means there had to be a time when the process started. If not (if there was infinite time before us), all the energy in the universe would have been used up, and we would not be here.
2. The universe is expanding. Traced backward, there would have to be a place it started to expand. The universe cannot be continually expanding and retracting, since it would eventually run out of energy and collapse on itself.
3. If the universe were eternal, time would also be eternal. But we could never have gotten to this point if time were infinite. Time measures the intervals between movements. There was no movement until the universe began, therefore there was no time. It would be impossible to traverse an infinite amount of time.
4. We see matter continually degrading rather than becoming more complex. If things fall apart when left to themselves, the world could not be infinite. It would already be destroyed. Only that which is self-sufficient and self-sustaining can be infinite.
5. There is a radiation “echo” throughout the universe which scientists at first thought was merely static or a malfunction of their equipment. This emanation of radiation is consistent with what would be expected of an enormous explosion in the past, down to the wavelength that should be produced by such light and heat.
6. After the big bang theory became the predominant view of the universe’s origin, scientists began looking for a large mass of matter associated with the original explosion, but none could be found until the Hubble made it possible to find it. One astronomer, Michael Lemonick said “by peering back into the beginning of time, a satellite finds the oldest structure ever observed—evidence of how the universe took shape 15 billion years ago.” (Lemonick, 1993) This

was exactly what they were looking for, if the theory were to be shown to be true beyond a reasonable doubt.

Premise #3 is true by the laws of logic if the first two points are true. I will quote a fellow student, Glenn Smith, on this point: “Everything we currently observe depends on something else. This includes sub-atomic particles, our planet's atmosphere, the sun, and everything observable. If it weren't for our atmosphere, you and your computer would vaporize. So if everything in the universe is currently dependent, the whole universe is currently dependent.”

Premise #4: One cannot posit an unending string of caused causes. This just seems obvious, but if you need some reasons why this is so, I will try, though it seems the more obvious something is, the more difficult it is to explain. If the causes of the universe itself needed a cause, and the cause of that cause needed a cause, ad infinitum, the string of causes could never be put into motion. An infinite series is impossible because one more moment (or cause) could always be added. But it is impossible to add to an infinite. Plus, if there were an infinite number of causes, there would be an infinite number of moments in which the act of causation took place. But if there were infinite moments, the current moment could have never arrived, since it is impossible to traverse an infinite number of moments. Quantitative infinity is merely a convention of mathematics, but has no metaphysical counterpart. Without a first cause, there is no causality in the series.

Conclusion

Final premise #5: If the universe needs a cause for its existence, and there cannot be an unending string of contingent causes, there must be a Cause whose existence is necessary. (“Necessary” is used in opposition to “contingent,” in which a contingent being needs a cause for its existence, and a necessary Being has no cause, and no beginning.) Something must be eternal for anything else to exist. For nothing produces nothing. If nothing ever existed, then nothing could exist. But the universe, as you have seen, is not eternal; it began to exist. So, there must be something else, or someone else, who does not depend upon any other for existence, but exists by virtue of itself. This is beyond human understanding (because we have never experienced anything that is beginning-less), but it is not contradictory to logic for there to be a being without a beginning. As I hope to have shown, no other state of affairs is possible, for if something is not eternal, than nothing could have ever existed at all.

This has been a brief account of the cosmological argument. It has not taken into consideration certain objections. These objections are dealt with well in Norman Geisler's *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* in the article "Cosmological Argument." This argument does not, in itself, produce the Christian God, but leads to it if one follows all of the implications and other evidence for the God of the Bible, which cannot be provided in one article. This argument is merely an attempt to show that there is a Supreme Being to which the universe owes its existence.

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The Teleological Argument

The Teleological Argument is also known as the "argument from design." Quite simply, it states that a designer must exist since the universe and living things exhibit marks of design in their order, consistency, unity, and pattern.

A typical analogy of this is the Watchmaker Argument, which was given by William Paley (1743-1805). The argument goes as follows. If you found a watch in an empty field, you would logically conclude that it was designed and not the product of random formation. Likewise, when we look at life and the universe, it is natural to conclude there is a designer since we see how perfectly the universe and life forms operate. The eye is typically used as an example of design. It is a marvellous development. In order for it to work, there must be many different convergent parts that individually have no function but have value only in a designed whole. It is only in the combined total that they exhibit their total function. This function is by design.

Paley's argument is as follows:

1. Human artifacts are products of intelligent design.
2. The universe resembles human artifacts.
3. Therefore the universe is a product of intelligent design.
4. But the universe is complex and gigantic in comparison to human artifacts.

5. Therefore, there probably is a powerful and vastly intelligent designer who created the universe.

Strengths of the argument

This argument is simple to understand and has merit since humans are designers by nature, and it is natural to think in terms of things having purpose. It is also consistent with Romans 1:20:

"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."

I think the teleological argument carries weight because it is consistent with Scripture. The Bible states that we are made in God's image. Therefore, there are certain things with which we will resonate. Even though the unbeliever suppresses the truth of God in his unrighteousness (Romans 1:18-32), the truth is still there.

Additionally, evolutionists have difficulty accounting for apparent design in objects like the eye, the heart, and the brain where many different parts come together to form the whole. These individual parts have no purpose except in the function of the whole. How can evolution account for these detailed congruent occurrences? So far, it can't.

Weaknesses of the argument

The idea that the universe is designed is subjective. Different observations in the natural world can produce different theories to account for their existence. Also, this proof is built upon an analogy. If we find things in the universe that are chaotic, then by analogy, that would imply there is no designer.

The Sanctity of Life

Abortion - Christians have always opposed abortion

There was universal condemnation of abortion in the early Church. The practice was roundly condemned in early Christian writings including the *Didache* and the writings of Clement of Alexandria, Ambrose, Jerome, John Chrysostom, and Augustine.

David Braine in his study concludes that:

“For the whole of Christian history until appreciably after 1900... there was virtually complete unanimity amongst Christians, evangelical, catholic, orthodox, that, unless, at the direct command of God, it was in all cases wrong directly to take innocent human life.”

Historically, pagan societies generally accepted abortion. W E H Lecky (1838-1903), the Irish historian, commented that “The practice of abortion was one to which few persons in antiquity attached any deep feeling of condemnation.” For example, in Roman times abortions were carried out for social reasons.

Though Lecky often disagreed with Christian doctrine, he commented with approval that:

“...it was one of the most important services of Christianity, that besides quickening greatly our benevolent affections it definitely and dogmatically asserted the sinfulness of all destruction of human life as a matter of amusement, or of simple convenience, and thereby formed a new standard higher than any which then existed in the world. The influence of Christianity in this respect began with the very earliest stage of human life.”

Lecky summarised the view of the early church in regard to abortion:

“With unwavering consistency and with the strongest emphasis, they denounced the practice, not simply as inhuman, but as definitely murder.”

John Calvin (the 16th century French theologian) said:

“The foetus, though enclosed in the womb of its mother, is already a human being... If it seems more horrible to kill a man in his own house than in a field, because a man’s house is his place of most secure refuge, it ought surely to be deemed more atrocious to destroy a foetus in the womb before it has come to light.”

Commenting on the 12 million abortions carried out in the USA up to 1981, John Stott says:

“Any society which can tolerate these things, let alone legislate for them, has ceased to be civilised. One of the major signs of decadence in the Roman Empire was that its unwanted babies were ‘exposed’, that is abandoned and left to die. Can we claim that contemporary Western society is any less decadent because it consigns its unwanted babies to the hospital incinerator instead of the local rubbish dump? Indeed modern abortion is even worse than ancient exposure because it has been commercialised, and has become, at least for some

doctors and clinics, an extremely lucrative practice. But reverence for human life is an indisputable characteristic of a humane and civilised society.”

When the mother’s life is in danger

Situations can arise where continuing with a pregnancy will put the mother’s life in imminent danger. Under these difficult circumstances, medical intervention to save the mother is accepted as justifiable by many Christians who hold to a pro-life position, even though it has the effect of ending the baby’s life.

Key points

- Many women who have abortions later deeply regret doing so and some experience psychological problems. For many the decision to have an abortion is made under pressure and with little time for careful thought. Those who pressurize women in this way are morally responsible.
- Adoption is a positive alternative to abortion.
- There is no legal right to abortion on demand, though in practice many doctors permit abortions on this basis.
- Social abortions are not permitted after 24 weeks. Parliament reduced this from 28 weeks in 1990 because it was accepted that a foetus could survive outside the womb at 24 weeks. But the age of ‘viability’ has now fallen to around 22 weeks.
- Hadley Arkes, Professor of Jurisprudence at Amherst College, USA, has written on the ethics of abortion: “...if the proposition were put to us explicitly, as a matter of principle, we would not consider for a moment that people may have a licence to kill those who stand in the way of their education or the advancement of their careers.”
- Professor Arkes has pointed out that strictly speaking from the point of view of an American Court “...the right to an abortion would be taken to mean *the right to a dead fetus*, not merely the removal of the child from the womb. After all, the prospect of giving a child up for adoption has always been present...”

Church positions

The Church of England and the Church of Scotland

The official positions determined respectively by the General Synod (1983) and the General Assembly (1985) both state that abortion is only permissible where

the mother's life is in danger. Both Churches have called for a review of the Abortion Act.

The Board of Social Responsibility for the Church of Scotland recommended in 1988 a position much weaker than that adopted by the General Assembly, but still much stronger than the present law. The Board advocated that abortion should be permitted "only on grounds that the continuance of the pregnancy would involve serious risk to the life or grave injury to the health, whether physical or mental, of the pregnant woman."

Roman Catholics

The Papal Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968) states:

"The direct interruption of the generative process already begun and, above all, directly willed and procured abortion, even if for therapeutic reasons, are to be absolutely excluded as licit (lawful) means of regulating birth."

In 2004 the Catholic Bishops' conference of England and Wales stated:

"Though it [abortion] is performed with all the appearances of medical care, and surrounded by euphemisms, termination of pregnancy is the termination of a human life. Taking the life of a child in the womb is as unjust to the unborn child as taking the life of a new born baby is to the infant...In the words of the Second Vatican Council, both abortion and infanticide are 'abominable crimes'."

Abortion of the Handicapped

Facts

- The grounds on which an abortion can be performed are laid down in the Abortion Act 1967, as amended by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990.
- While the general limit for a legal abortion is 24 weeks gestation, under certain circumstances there is no time limit. These circumstances include a threat to the mother's life.
- Abortion can also be performed up to birth when a doctor believes "that there is a substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped."¹
- There is no need for a doctor to justify his decision by specifying which serious handicap he believes the child would have suffered from.

- In reality there is a wide variation of opinions amongst doctors as to what constitutes a “serious handicap”. Pro-life organisations argue that relatively minor handicaps such as missing fingers or a cleft palate have been deemed to fall within the definition.
- In 1990 there was an attempt to tighten up the law to require doctors to specify the handicap for which they are aborting a child.

Key Points

It is wrong to abort babies just for being handicapped.

Requiring doctors to specify the handicap for which they are aborting a child is not a particularly onerous requirement. Either there is a ‘substantial risk’ that the child is handicapped or there is not. If there is such a risk then it can be quantified and recorded to prove that the law is being complied with. If the doctor cannot do this then he cannot legally perform the abortion.

At the time when the attempt was made in Parliament to require the handicap to be specified, babies were being aborted for minor defects. Requiring the handicap to be specified would at least prevent this by forcing the doctor to certify that the handicap is serious and the risk substantial.

Abortion: Register of Pro-life Doctors

In 1990 there was an attempt to require a public register of doctors who held pro-life views.

The overwhelming effect of a register of pro-life doctors would have been to limit, if not destroy, the employment and promotion prospects of those pro-life doctors. Given that a pro-life position is often caused by having a strong religious faith, the requirement would in fact have been a serious infringement of religious liberties.

1 Timothy 2:1- 4 urges Christians to pray “for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.”

A legal requirement which stigmatised Christian medical professionals would be a serious restriction on their ability to live out their Christian calling. Either Christians would be forced to compromise their beliefs, or else they would likely be denied the opportunity to serve Christ in the medical profession for holding fast to their pro-life views.

Embryo Experiments

Historical background

- Experiments in human embryology were largely unregulated until 1990. The new regulations came about in that year at the recommendation of the Warnock Inquiry.
- Abortion was legalised in 1967. Consequently it might have been thought inconceivable for an official committee of inquiry to come out against destructive experiments on human embryos. In fact this inconceivable event almost occurred.
- The Warnock Inquiry, reporting in 1984, had only a majority of one vote to recommend that experimentation be permitted on human embryos up to 14 days.
- Four dissenters on the Inquiry argued that such research should only be conducted on embryos unused after in vitro-fertilisation (IVF) treatment and should be done with a view to enabling a woman to become pregnant.
- An additional three dissenters rejected any deliberate destruction of human embryos.
- In response to the recommendations the 1990 Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act legalised experimentation on human embryos of up to 14 days development for the purposes of research into infertility, congenital disease, causes of miscarriages, contraception and detecting gene or chromosome abnormalities. Only spare embryos arising from In Vitro-Fertilisation (IVF) treatment could be used.
- In 2001 new regulations were made to allow cell nuclear replacement (therapeutic cloning) to be licensed by the Human Fertilisation and Embryo Authority (HFEA). The grounds for research were extended to include increasing knowledge about embryos and serious disease and to enable such knowledge to be applied in developing treatments.
- In 2002 the HFEA granted the first licence to carry out research on human embryos to produce stem cell lines. The embryos were donated.
- In 2004, the HFEA granted the first licence to create human embryonic stem cells using therapeutic cloning.

Biblical Arguments

Life is sacred from conception. Experiments on human embryos therefore involve the destruction of human beings.

The deliberate taking of an innocent human life breaks the sixth commandment “You shall not murder”. The state ought to prohibit such activity, not regulate it. Human beings are not commodities.

Research on human embryos involves the destruction of some human beings for the benefit of others. This is to treat human beings as commodities.

Embryos are the weakest members of society. It is wrong to exploit the weak merely because some ‘benefit’ can be derived from it. Destructive experimentation on embryos means that people can be killed as a means to an end.

Duty to care

The Bible strongly encourages mankind to care for his fellow man. We are our brother’s keeper (Genesis 4:9). We are to love our neighbour as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40) and Jesus taught that a stranger in trouble was our neighbour (Luke 10:25-37).

Established Churches Position

Church of England

In July 2003 the General Synod affirmed the sanctity of the human embryo and the need to treat it with profound respect. The Synod recognised there are different views among Christians on the morality of embryo research.

In addressing the Synod, the Bishop of Norwich concluded: “We recognize the absolutist tradition and we are trying to give respect to that in the motion.”

A research paper endorsed by the Synod in July 2003 further stated:

“It is plain that for Christians the key question concerns the status of the embryo. Does it have the same right to deserve the protection that is accorded to early human life on the basis of the traditional respect for the sanctity of human life? The new developments promise benefits of various kinds in the advance of scientific understanding and medical knowledge, and in the eradication of serious disabilities. But in Christian thought, where the ends are not simply taken to justify the means, it must be a prior question whether what is done in pursuit of these goals is itself morally acceptable.”

Church of Scotland

In 2006 the Church of Scotland revised its official position on embryo experiments. This was the Kirk's first major change on the issue since 1996, representing a significant shift from its previous policy of completely opposing embryo experiments. Since 1996 the Church of Scotland had held that "the human embryo must be regarded as an actual person, and regarded as a person at all stages of development from the moment of conception. Therefore all treatment of a human embryo which is not for the benefit of that embryo is morally wrong and as such all research on human embryos is morally wrong."

However, a 2006 report by the Kirk's Church and Society Council which was accepted by the General Assembly in May 2006 moves away from this position, giving the green light to embryo experimentation in certain circumstances. The report stated: "While it recognises that for some in the church 'the embryo already has the same human dignity as a person who has been born', the majority of the working group took the view that 'the moral status of the human embryo is not established until some time into its biological development after conception.'"

However, the 2006 report opposes "the deliberate creation of human embryos for research by IVF methods or nuclear transfer cloning methods, except into serious diseases and only under exceptional circumstances".

Roman Catholics

In 2004 the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales stated:

"Medical research which involves the destruction of human embryos is a 'crime against their dignity as human beings' (*The Gospel of Life*, Paragraph 63). It should also be noted that there are good alternative sources of stem cells which do not require cloning or the destruction of embryos."¹⁵

The Papal Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* states:

"When the Church declares that unconditional respect for the right to life of every innocent person – from conception to natural death – is one of the pillars on which every civil society stands, she 'wants simply to *promote a human State*. A State which recognises the defence of the fundamental rights of the human person, especially of the weakest, as its primary duty'."

Euthanasia

- Euthanasia is the intentional killing of a patient by act or omission as part of their ‘medical treatment’ when the patient’s life is felt not to be worth living.
- Euthanasia is currently illegal in the UK and virtually all countries of the world, but there are strong pressures to make it legal.
- Supporters and opponents of euthanasia alike have argued that the courts, in a small number of cases following the *Bland* judgment, have allowed euthanasia involving patients in a persistent vegetative state (PVS). This claim is contested by the Government and the British Medical Association (BMA).
- On 12 May 2006 the House of Lords blocked the latest attempt to legalise euthanasia. Peers voted by 148 to 100 against the Second Reading of the ‘Assisted Dying for the Terminally Ill Bill’.
- The Bill, put forward by Lord Joffe, sought to allow ‘competent’ terminally ill adults to end their lives with an injection or medication supplied by a doctor. The Bill was opposed by many, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, and Cardinal Cormac Murphy O’Connor, the leader of the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales.
- In June 2006 the British Medical Association voted overwhelmingly against legalising physician assisted suicide and voluntary euthanasia. The Royal College of General Practitioners and the Royal College of Physicians also oppose legalising euthanasia.

Biblical arguments

The Sanctity of life

Life is sacred from conception Euthanasia involves the killing of human beings.

Euthanasia is *intentional* killing of the innocent and so contravenes the Sixth Commandment : “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13). This applies even in the case of suicide.

The Image of God

The fundamental prohibition on killing, and the basis for it, is set out in Genesis 9:6: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God has God made man”. Our significance, and so the claim to

protection, derives not from our 'quality of life' or gifts and abilities, but from our status as being made in God's image.

Our lives are not our own

The Bible is clear that God is our creator. Human life is not 'our property'. We may not just 'dispense' with it. As Job said: "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away" (Job 1:21). Our lives are meant for the service of God. It is not for us to 'take' life, even our own.

It was for fallen humanity that God sent "his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). All men are created beings who owe worship and thanks to their creator (Romans 1:21). In that sense our lives are not our own.

Duty to care

The Bible strongly encourages mankind to care for his fellow man. We are to love our neighbour as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40). Jesus also taught that a stranger in trouble was our neighbour (Luke 10: 25-37).

Key points

Voluntary euthanasia leads to involuntary euthanasia

Voluntary euthanasia for some in practice soon becomes compulsory euthanasia for others. The slippery slope can be well illustrated by considering what has gone on in Holland.

Official statistics show that in 2001 there were 4,664 cases of medical intervention to shorten life in Holland, representing 3.3% of all deaths. Yet of these there was no explicit request for euthanasia in 938 cases. Thus 20% of all medically assisted deaths were involuntary.

Holland has allowed voluntary euthanasia for some years, but the Dutch Government has acknowledged that there is a serious problem with involuntary euthanasia. Furthermore, in 2004 the Dutch Government called for an investigation into the non-reporting of euthanasia by doctors. One study suggested only 54% of cases were reported in 2001.

Recently, a group of senior Dutch doctors formally reported themselves for killing 22 terminally ill newborn babies. They called for the Dutch Government

to legalise infant euthanasia. This shows just how slippery the slope is when society accepts euthanasia is acceptable.

Euthanasia is wide open to abuse

By definition the key witness to an act of euthanasia is always dead. People who feel uncertain about whether their lives are worth living are vulnerable to being manipulated. Spring 2014 discovered in Flanders (Belgium), a permanent ordained deacon (in payable part-time Roman Catholic ministry), also a nurse having for years, and on his own decision, without the consent or intervention of doctors given deadly injections on about forty sick people in the hospital where he was employed. He gave as reason that he could not stand their suffering. He is now in prison, waiting for his trial.

Profound damage to the doctor-patient relationship

Legalising euthanasia would have a profound effect on the relationship between doctors and their patients. Instead of only having a healing or caring role, doctors become killers once euthanasia is legalised.

Dame Cicely Saunders, founder of the Hospice Movement, said of supporters of euthanasia: “I don’t think they can have a law that makes that [euthanasia] possible without undermining the needs of a great many other vulnerable people. I think you can’t have a freedom that takes freedom away from others.”

Suffering can be treated without euthanasia

There is a clear distinction in medicine between, on the one hand, taking action with the specific intention of shortening life, euthanasia; and, on the other hand, withholding medical treatment because that treatment is of no further benefit to the patient or is burdensome to the patient.

It is also acceptable to administer pain-relieving drugs when the primary desired effect is to relieve the pain, but where there is a secondary and undesirable effect of shortening life. Such cases are said to be examples of ‘double effect’.

Palliative care

With modern advances in the care of the terminally ill there is no need for such patients to suffer uncontrolled physical pain or discomfort. It is essential that expertise in palliative care is disseminated throughout the NHS.

The suggestion that the only way to kill the pain is to kill the patient is simply wrong.

The UK currently leads the world in the provision of hospice or palliative care. Any legalisation of euthanasia would discourage further advances in this area.

Human cloning

What is cloning

- Cloning involves the creation of an embryo which is an identical copy of another human being. Clones can be created through dividing an embryo at its earliest stage (creating two identical embryos). They can also be created using Cell Nuclear Replacement, the technique used to create Dolly the Sheep in 1997.
- In Cell Nuclear Replacement the nucleus of one cell is placed into an egg which has had its own nucleus removed. It is then stimulated to divide so that it becomes a clone.
- The Government has sought to make a distinction between ‘therapeutic’ and ‘reproductive’ cloning. However the process of creating a human life in embryo form is the same in either case.

Reproductive cloning

- In reproductive cloning the created embryo is implanted into a human womb, leading to the birth of a human being. Whilst this is now technically possible, it has never been done anywhere in the world.
- The Human Reproductive Cloning Act 2001 banned all human reproductive cloning in the UK.

Therapeutic cloning

- Therapeutic cloning also creates human beings in embryo form through cloning but the embryos are experimented upon and destroyed.
- ‘Therapeutic cloning’ has no therapeutic value for the subject involved. In fact it is literally lethal, necessarily bringing about the death of the embryo.
- On 19th December 2000 the House of Commons became the first legislature in the world to vote explicitly to legalise human cloning. The House of Lords confirmed this decision on 22nd January 2001. This was done not by primary legislation but by a Ministerial Order.

- In 2004, the HFEA granted the first licence to create human embryonic stem cells using therapeutic cloning.

Why scientists want to clone embryos for research

“Stem cells” are of great importance to research into curing human diseases. Stem cells are a unique kind of cell that can potentially develop into any other human cell. It is the demand for these cells which is the background to the whole debate on cloning.

- Stem cells are found in human embryos and in human tissue such as bone marrow. Human embryos are very difficult to come by as it involves extracting female ova by an operation and then fertilising them.
- Scientists believe that stem cells will be useful in replacing cells that have become diseased. Many claim that embryos provide the best source of these cells and that cloning is necessary to be able to create more embryos as a more readily available source of stem cells.
- However, taking stem cells from an embryo necessarily involves the destruction of the embryo. Currently the supply of embryos comes as a by-product of In-Vitro Fertilisation (IVF). Some parents donate their excess embryos for the research.

Biblical arguments

Human cloning creates human beings – from conception

Whether it be “therapeutic” or “reproductive” cloning – both techniques create human life.

Life is sacred from conception. The embryo has personhood at conception regardless of how that conception comes about. Once a new life has been created through cloning there is no moral distinction between it and any other embryo. All embryos deserve our protection.

“Therapeutic” cloning is morally repugnant because it creates life with the specific aim of experimentation and destruction. The stem cells are extracted for research and the embryo dies. Pro-lifers have called this practice “technological cannibalism”.

“Reproductive” cloning is also morally indefensible on the following grounds:

Human cloning is biological manufacturing by man not creation by God

Human cloning, and particularly “reproductive cloning”, puts the choices about a new life in the hands of a person rather than God. It will be left to the scientist to decide which embryo appears fit for implantation and which should be discarded. Human cloning usurps God’s position as the Almighty Creator. Job acknowledged, “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away” (Job 1:21).

Under this new regime man, and not God, chooses the desired characteristics of any resultant children. It gives man control over the next generation. Cloning gives humans control over human fertility and therefore over the design/genetics of future generations. Thus man exerts a tyranny over future generations. As C. S. Lewis said:

“In reality, of course, if any one age really attains, by eugenics and scientific education, the power to make its descendants what it pleases, all men who live after it are the patients of that power. They are weaker, not stronger: for though we may have put wonderful machines in their hands we have pre-ordained how they are to use them.”

Children are a gift from God

Children are a gift from God. No one has a ‘right’ to have children even though they may be earnestly desired and infertility is usually found to be deeply distressing. However, cloning and many forms of In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) make commodities out of children who are “made to order”. Procreation is taken out of God’s hands and given to man.

Cloning breaks the link with parents

God created man and woman; He instituted marriage for their mutual benefit and for the procreation of children. God told Adam and Eve to “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.”

In this way human relationships are based on relations between a husband and wife, their children and the wider family. God’s creation of the marriage relationship, and its central place in the procreation of the next generation, is for our benefit.

God’s intention is that children are procreated using genetic material from both their parents. With cloning the genetic material comes from only one ‘parent’.

The child will be the genetic brother of the ‘father’ or the genetic sister of the ‘mother’. This profoundly undermines God’s intended order for procreation.

Key points

The legislation was universally condemned by national Christian leaders and leaders of non-Christian faiths

Prior to the vote in the House of Lords (22nd January 2001), which approved the Ministerial Order on cloning, eleven prominent religious leaders wrote to Peers in the House of Lords opposing the move. These included: the former Archbishops of Canterbury and York (Dr George Carey and Dr David Hope); the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster (Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O’Connor) and the late Roman Catholic Archbishop of Glasgow (Cardinal Thomas Winning); the Chief Rabbi (Dr Jonathan Sachs); the General Secretary of the Evangelical Alliance (Revd Joel Edwards); as well as leaders from Muslim and Sikh organisations, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Baptist Union, and the Free Church.

In February 2005, the United Nations passed a declaration calling for an international ban on all forms of human cloning, including therapeutic cloning. The UN stated any form of human cloning was incompatible with human dignity and the protection of human life.

So called ‘therapeutic cloning’ is unnecessary

- There is no need to clone human embryos since stem cells can be taken from adults (“adult stem cells”), a process not involving the creation and destruction of embryos.
- Ongoing research into taking stem cells from adults is proving fruitful. Recent advances include treating cardiac problems, liver disease and spinal paralysis. In fact using adult stem cells has benefits over embryo stem cells as they will, if taken from the patient, match their genetic make up, removing the possibility of rejection.
- The report which led to the Government’s proposals (*The Donaldson Report*) recommended that research on cloned embryos should not take place if alternatives are available. More research should be directed into the use of adult stem cells. Beginning research on embryos and cloning may well divert attention from adult stem cells.

The extraordinary way in which the Government has legalised cloning

Rather than introducing a Bill, the Government used a Statutory Instrument to make changes to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 ('The 1990 Act'). It claims that the changes could be dealt with in this perfunctory way because the issues were dealt with in the debates surrounding the 1990 Act.

This is untrue. Cloning was seen as science fiction during those debates. One pro-experimentation MP said at the time: "We have heard much scare talk about hybrids, clones and designer babies, but such talk comes from people who do not understand the limitations of the work, and these ideas are strictly banned by the guidelines which have so far been adhered to voluntarily and which, if the Bill is passed, will have statutory force when the licensing authority is set up."

Ann Winterton (MP for Congleton) quoted from an editorial in *The Daily Telegraph* during the House of Commons debate:

"When, in 1990, the law was changed to permit embryo research, cloning was still science fiction; there was no debate about its ethics. It was never Parliament's intention to allow cloning, even if it had been conceivable. The new regulations are being presented as if they merely clarified the existing law, whereas in reality they mark a radical departure from it. This is a serious abuse of parliamentary procedure."

Legalising cloning without mentioning cloning

The Government has chosen indirect means to legalise human cloning. The Statutory Instrument widens the purposes ("the ends") for which research may be conducted under the 1990 Act. In doing so it legalises human cloning as the means to produce the embryos from which stem cells are extracted for research into disease.

The Statutory Instrument "merely" details the new areas of research. Cloning is not mentioned at all, yet the Government's whole purpose is to legalise the cloning of human embryos for research. The Research Paper from the House of Commons Library explaining the Statutory Instrument summed up its purpose as follows: "The Regulations will therefore extend the use of early embryos in research to include research into treatment of serious disease, including the use of embryos created by cell nuclear replacement for this purpose."

The ends have been legislated for, but the Statutory Instrument is silent on the means. Human cloning is assumed. This is a fundamentally dishonest approach.

A change as profound as human cloning should have involved primary legislation. This point was even made by supporters of the Government's plans.

Turning the embryo into a commodity

The Government's intention is that cloned human embryos can be used as a source for spare parts such as a replacement liver. This reduces the embryo to a commodity.

The embryo is human life albeit in its earliest stages. This is not merely a religious position. It is a statement of fact. The embryo that develops over the 9 months from conception until a baby is born at no point ceases to be one thing and begins to be another. From conception it is a member of the species *homo sapiens* and is genetically complete. All it takes to become a baby is a womb. It therefore deserves our respect.

The idea of creating human life with the sole purpose of using it for experimentation and then destroying it should horrify us. A moral Rubicon is crossed at this point.

The purpose of medical intervention has always been to help the subject of the intervention. Any intervention which has no benefit to the individual should only be with their express consent and even then the duty remains to protect the life and health of the patient. To alter this principle in medicine is to put all who are weak and vulnerable in a perilous position.

Whilst medical research should look for new ways to relieve pain and suffering, this should not be at any price. The reason people care for the sick is because of their status as human beings. Anything which undermines respect for human beings, whatever their circumstances, is bad news for the weak and the vulnerable in society. It is a bad thing if the "potential benefits" to society are used as a justification for destroying the weak.

Illegal not to kill

Ironically, the Government's commitment never to allow reproductive cloning simply means it will be a criminal offence *not* to kill these human embryos. As one ethicist has commented: "These embryos will be created only for destruction – in fact it will be illegal to try to bring such an embryo to live birth. Government will define a class of human beings that it is illegal not to kill!" Can this ever be morally right?

Reproductive cloning will result

In theory reproductive cloning was banned by the Human Reproductive Cloning Act 2001. Only therapeutic cloning is lawful and only provided the cloned embryos are destroyed after 14 days – the current time limit for research on embryos.

Human cloning has not been banned entirely. Given this is so, many believe that reproductive cloning is inevitable. As Professor Nigel Cameron has stated: “Those who argue the inevitability of reproductive cloning are, sadly, probably right.”

Cloning pulls apart traditional family relationships

If a man could go to a clinic and have himself cloned, the resulting child would, genetically, be his twin brother. The child’s sociological parent is his identical twin. His sociological grandparents are his biological parents. His sociological sister is his niece. The human clone is not the next generation, but the same biological generation as his sociological parent. This bizarre arrangement disrupts normal family relationships, and will have an effect on the laws governing incest and even inheritance.

Cloning produces children created for an expectation rather than valued because they are a human being

The clone may be produced in order to replace someone, for example, the son who was tragically lost at a young age, the world class footballer or the brilliant academic. No-one should be born with such expectations. Moreover a person is more than his genes. The environment is much more influential than hereditary factors. Will parents seek to manipulate their child clone’s upbringing to influence their character? What happens if the child does not fulfil expectations?

The process is very unreliable and human beings should not be used in experiments

Dolly the sheep was not the only attempt at cloning. In fact 277 embryos were created. Only a percentage of these were suitable to implant and only one survived to birth. 276 were therefore lost. This terrible wastage emphasises the disregard for the embryo. Experimentation on embryos can never be considered acceptable or ethical. Added to this are the unknown health risks to the cloned embryo and resulting child. Cloned animals are likely to develop complications as they grow older. There is no reason to think the cloned human being would fare better.

Marriage and Family

Adoption

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 legalised joint adoption by The Act came into force on 30 December 2005. By February 2006 10 adoption applications had been received from same-sex couples.

The 2002 Act replaced the 1976 Adoption Act, which allowed joint adoption only by a married couple. The 1976 Act also allowed single people to adopt.

- Some 95% of all adoptions are by married couples. The remaining 5% are by single persons.
- The Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 legalised joint adoption by cohabiting heterosexual and homosexual couples in Scotland and elsewhere in the world..

Biblical arguments

Adoption by cohabiting heterosexual couples and homosexual couples is radically opposed to the Judaeo-Christian family ethic which views marriage as the only right context for sexual relations and the procreation of children.

The book of Genesis states: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh”. Parenthood is male and female. Children need male and female role models. The fifth of the Ten Commandments enshrines this. In Christian understanding, children are not possessions but a gift from God. There is no ‘right’ to have children. To “Be fruitful and multiply” is the normal expectation of marriage, though it is recognised that not all married couples can have children. Having children is one of the three purposes of marriage universally recognised across the Christian Churches.

Procreation is tied to marriage. Children are not to be spawned in random relations, but begotten in arrangements in which their parents are bound to their offspring by the ties of law as well as nature. The intention is for parents to be as committed to the nurture of their children as they are as committed to each other as husband and wife.

Marriage is best for raising children

The Government itself has stated “marriage is still the surest foundation for raising children and remains the choice of the majority of people in Britain.”

- Children need a mother and a father. They need both complementary role models.
- The adoption law review concluded that only married couples should be allowed to jointly adopt, on the grounds married couples were more likely to provide the stability and security that the child needed because married couples have made a joint, publicly recognised, legal commitment to each other.
- The Office for National Statistics has found that co-habiting couples are six and a half times more likely to split up after the birth of a child than a married couple.

Key points

- The Government’s justification for changing the law was to increase adoptions of children in care. The Government argued there were not enough married couples adopting and changing the law would ‘widen the pool’ of available adopters.
- This argument was a red herring. The problem was not a lack of married couples wanting to adopt, but bureaucracy and political correctness which deterred and prevented many married couples from doing so. The Government has been addressing this problem. During 2004-05, even before the Act came fully into effect, 1,000 more children were adopted than in 1999-2000. This represents a 38% increase.¹²
- The real agenda for changing the law was to legitimise and normalise co-habitation and homosexuality – to use ‘children as trophies’.

“I’m not in favour of gay couples seeking to adopt children because I question whether that is the right start in life. We should not see children as trophies. Children, in my judgement, and I think it’s the judgement of almost everyone including single parents, are best brought up where you have two natural parents in a stable relationship. There’s no question about that. What we know from the evidence is that, generally speaking, that stability is more likely to occur where the parents are married than where they are not.”

Civil Partnership Sibling amendment

Facts

- During the passage of the Civil Partnership Bill, an amendment was put forward by Edward Leigh MP to extend the Bill to siblings who have lived together for twelve years or more. The amendment was defeated in the House of Commons by 74 votes to 381.
- An earlier amendment, initially passed in the House of Lords, extended the Bill to include close family members as well as siblings. However, when it became clear that such a broad extension would be unlikely to succeed in the House of Commons, the narrower amendment was put forward by Edward Leigh MP.

Key points

- The Civil Partnership Act is unfair. The scheme only applies to gays and lesbians, whilst other house-sharers are excluded.
- The major argument advanced by the Government in favour of civil partnerships is that there were ‘hard cases’ which needed to be remedied – individual cases of disadvantage suffered by homosexual couples in comparison to married couples.
- Yet for every ‘hard case’ cited for a homosexual couple, there will be *almost 60 times* as many cases which apply to people in ordinary families – a daughter living with her elderly mother, a grandson living with his infirm grandfather, a friend who looks after a disabled person on a long-term basis.
- For example, two elderly sisters live together for twenty years. One dies, and the other can’t afford the inheritance tax and has to sell the home they shared. A gay couple register their partnership. One dies after only a year and the other inherits a large property, tax-free.
- Over 80% of the public believed the Civil Partnership Bill should have been fairer to ordinary families according to an opinion poll. Even the Government and supporters of the Bill were forced to admit that civil partnerships created injustice for ordinary family members.
- If the Government was really concerned about injustice it would have helped ordinary families as well. The fact that it was content to ignore them proves the Civil Partnership Act was really about rewarding sexual relationships that are morally wrong.

Civil Partnerships

Facts

The Civil Partnership Act 2004 created a scheme for the legal recognition of homosexual relationships. The Act applies to England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

‘Civil partnerships’ are ‘gay marriage’ in all but name, extending all the legal rights and privileges of marriage to homosexual couples. The formal requirements precisely mirror civil weddings.

‘Civil partnerships’ thus equate holy matrimony with homosexual liaisons. Marriage is *not* morally equivalent to such lifestyles.

The Civil Partnership Act came into force on 5 December 2005. By 31 March 2006 a total of 6,516 Civil Partnerships had been registered in England and Wales, 343 in Scotland and 43 in Northern Ireland.

Biblical arguments

Marriage is a lifelong exclusive union between one man and one woman. It is a creation ordinance, instituted by God. Quoting from the book of Genesis, the Lord Jesus Christ said:

“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’?”⁵

The Book of Common Prayer recognises three purposes, according to Scripture, for which marriage was ordained:

1. the procreation and nurture of children;
2. as a remedy against sin (fidelity); and
3. for the mutual society, help and comfort of man and wife.

These three purposes of marriage have been historically accepted across the Christian denominations.⁷

Key points

The Civil Partnership Act creates a form of *counterfeit marriage* by:

- Creating a status equivalent to marriage for homosexual couples even though their relationships do not and cannot meet the same criteria.
- Attaching to that status all the legal and financial rights of marriage and copying all its formal requirements.
- Completely dismantling the Western legal tradition whereby marriage is accorded special respect and protection. The state has an interest in marriage. Marriage involves a public undertaking to stay together for life and is a union for the procreation of children.

The Government argued that same-sex couples were denied the legal recognition available to heterosexual couples through marriage. Yet everyone has access to marriage so long as he or she meets the legal requirement. Someone in a homosexual relationship has rejected the possibility of marriage by choosing a ‘partner’ of the same sex.

The Government has admitted that very few homosexuals (3.3%) will enter into a civil partnership.

The Civil Partnership Act was not about access to marriage and the legal recognition it provides, but about redefining marriage to something it has never been. The Act creates counterfeit marriage.

The ultimate agenda

- The ultimate aim of the gay rights agenda is to completely equate homosexual relationships with marriage. UK gay rights groups are fully aware of the significance of civil partnerships in achieving legal same-sex marriage. The Government commented on its consultation: “it was clear that many of those who supported the principle of a civil partnership scheme would prefer that marriage was made available to same-sex couples.” Civil partnerships equate homosexual relationships with marriage in law, though not in name. The Government’s Women and Equality Unit wants all official documentation asking for a person’s ‘marital status’ to be altered to read ‘civil status’. This would include both marriage and civil partnerships.

Divorce

Facts

The five basic grounds for divorce are the same throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland:

1. Adultery
 2. Unreasonable behaviour
 3. Desertion
 4. The parties to the marriage have lived apart for at least two years and both consent to the divorce
 5. The parties have lived apart for at least five years
- The first three grounds are ‘faults’ that can be committed by one spouse against the other, allowing the ‘innocent’ spouse to apply for a divorce. Grounds 4 and 5 are ‘no-fault’ grounds requiring evidence of separation.
 - Divorce was only legalised in 1857. Prior to that an Act of Parliament was needed to obtain a divorce. The 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act permitted divorce for the innocent party where their spouse had committed adultery. The grounds for divorce were widened in 1937 to include desertion, cruelty and incurable insanity.
 - The 1969 Divorce Reform Act restated the three existing fault grounds of adultery, desertion and cruelty (widened to ‘unreasonable behaviour’) and added the two ‘no-fault’ separation grounds. Scotland and Northern Ireland subsequently adopted the same five grounds.
 - The so-called ‘special procedure’ introduced in England and Wales in 1973 means a divorce can be conducted by post. In Northern Ireland the divorce rate is only a quarter of that in England and Wales. There must be a proper hearing before a judge where the reasons are explained. There is no special procedure where divorce is obtainable by post.
 - The Family Law (Scotland) Act 2005 dramatically reduces the amount of time required for a divorce on the grounds of separation in Scotland. The five year period where one party does not consent has been reduced to two years. Where both parties consent the time period has been reduced from two years to one. The Act also abolishes desertion as a ground for divorce; though adultery and unreasonable behaviour remain.

Key Statistics

- In 2003 there were 166,700 divorces in the United Kingdom. In 2003 the percentage of married couples divorcing per year in England and Wales was 1.4%. In Scotland it was 1.0%.
- More than half of divorces in England and Wales involve children under 16. In 2003, 55% of divorces involved one or more children under 16. In 1997 it was calculated that more than one in four children will see their parents divorce before they are aged sixteen.

- In 2001 11.5% of children lived in households headed by a divorced or separated parent (see table below). It still needs to be remembered that over 70% of children lived in a household headed by a married couple.

% of dependant children living in households by household type ⁷	
70.7	Married couple
6.5	Divorced parent
5.0	Separated parent
9.5	Cohabiting
7.2	Single parent, never married
1.2	Widowed

- For many years the UK had the highest crude divorce rate in the EU. In 2002, the UK had the 6th highest crude divorce rate (divorces per 1,000 population) out of the 25 countries in the Eurozone. Only Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia and Lithuania had a higher rate.

Biblical arguments 1:

The grounds for divorce

- God spelled out the importance of marriage for mankind right at the beginning of human history when, after Eve was created for Adam, the Bible records: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24).
- Jesus Christ was asked a specific question about ‘no-fault’ divorce by the Pharisees: “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?” (Matthew 19:3). His answer was emphatic “What ...God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matthew 19:6 King James Version).
- Christ said that the provision in the Law of Moses permitting a man simply to write a certificate to divorce his wife was allowed only because

of the hardness of men's hearts. Christ rejected this by appealing directly to Genesis: "But it was not this way from the beginning".

- The apostle Paul emphasised the sanctity and permanence of marriage vows when he compared the relationship between a husband and wife with the relationship between Christ and the Church. Such doctrine brings home the seriousness of divorce in the eyes of the God who says "I hate divorce" (Malachi 2:16).
- "No-fault" divorce is unknown in Christian theology.
- Jesus clearly taught that adultery is a basis for divorce (Matthew 19:9). Some Christians also believe that in 1 Cor 7:15 Paul allows for desertion as a ground of divorce. Both of these are clearly grounds of 'fault'.

Church viewpoints on the grounds for divorce

- There are sincerely held differences of view amongst credally orthodox Churches on the question of re-marriage after divorce. There are essentially two views. Some do not allow remarriage at all; others permit it only for the innocent spouse.
- Amongst Protestants, theological conservatives can be found in both groups.
- The Church of England teaches that marriage is for life. Its long-standing position until very recently has been to permit divorce but not remarriage since it is argued that in God's sight the couple are still married. However, in 2002 the synod of the Church passed a motion stating that in exceptional circumstances, a divorced person may marry again in church during the lifetime of a former spouse.
- The Roman Catholic Church believes divorce is immoral and a grave offence against the natural law. It therefore considers re-marriage while both husband and wife are alive as adultery. The Roman Catholic Church has said, "It can happen when one of the spouses is the innocent victim of a divorce decreed by civil law; this spouse therefore has not contravened the moral law. There is a considerable difference between a spouse who has sincerely tried to be faithful to the sacrament of marriage and is unjustly abandoned, and one who through his own grave fault destroys a canonically valid marriage." The Westminster Confession (1647) associated with Presbyterian Churches permits divorce and re-marriage for the innocent party in the case of adultery.
- Historically for centuries the tendency was for churches of all denominations not to permit any divorce at all. They only allowed legal separation (i.e. non-cohabitation) of spouses and even then only where one spouse had committed a serious sin against the other, such as

adultery. Both parties remained legally married and therefore could not remarry.

- Outside the UK the reformers permitted remarriage after divorce for the innocent party. But despite the theoretical possibility of divorce and re-marriage, after a detailed study of court records in Reformation Germany, Joel Harrington found that “divorce was a relatively little exercised option”. The possibility of collusion in order to obtain a divorce “was considered so great by Protestant authorities that they would not even consider allowing re-marriage unless the innocent spouse was free from any suspicion and willing to endure a series of legal and financial obstacles intended to dissuade him or her from such a course”.

Biblical arguments 2:

The case for promoting reconciliation

- The Bible is clear that marriage is intended to be lifelong. This is for everyone’s good irrespective of whether the married couple are Christians.
- Even where there are grounds for divorce in a particular case Christians have always advocated that strenuous efforts at reconciliation must be attempted first. In 1 Corinthians 7:10 Paul specifically requires spouses to stay together, or, if they have separated, to attempt reconciliation. When this fails legal separation (where the couple are still married in law) has often been seen as preferable to divorce.
- Christians must press for the law and public policy to support reconciliation for couples whose marriages are in difficulty.
- During the passage of the 1996 Act, Christians sought to extend the period before a ‘no-fault’ divorce could be obtained. This would have given more time for couples to work out their differences and save their marriages. In the event it is likely the 1996 Act will never be implemented (see below).
- Many divorced couples know how the divorce process can be like a conveyor belt. Even so, a significant number of people change their minds. Every year an average of 14% of husbands or wives drop their divorce petitions. Typically between 18,000 and 34,000 divorces are dropped every year.

Key Points

No-fault divorce

The 1996 Family Law Act replaced the 1969 Divorce Reform Act with no-fault divorce in England and Wales. It is a great relief that the ‘no-fault’ divorce provisions of the 1996 Act are to be repealed without ever having come into force. The reason for this is that the pilot schemes have shown the Act to be unworkable.

Under the Act, it would have been easier to get out of a marriage than a hire purchase agreement.

The consequences of the high divorce rate

The breakdown of the traditional family structure has many consequences for society, including financial consequences.

- The average cost of divorce in the UK now costs £25, 575. More than a third of couples are forced to sell their marital home when they split up. A report in 2000 put readily identifiable welfare costs of family breakdown at £8.5 billion and the total direct costs to the taxpayer as at least £15 billion. In its green paper *Supporting Families* the Government itself acknowledged that “Rising crime and drug abuse are indirect symptoms of problems in the family.” Of the 60,000 children living in care, 98% are there due to family breakdown
- As Professor A H Halsey, Professor of Social Policy at Nuffield College, Oxford and co-author of *English Ethical Socialism* states:

“No one can deny that divorce, separation, birth outside marriage and one-parent families as well as cohabitation and extra-marital sexual intercourse have increased rapidly. Many applaud these freedoms. But what should be universally acknowledged is that the children of parents who do not follow the traditional norm (i.e. taking on personal, active and long-term responsibility for the social upbringing of the children they generate) are thereby disadvantaged in many major aspects of their chances of living a successful life. On the evidence available such children tend to die earlier, to have more illness, to do less well at school, to exist at a lower level of nutrition, comfort and conviviality, to suffer more unemployment, to be more prone to deviance and crime, and finally to repeat the cycle of unstable parenting from which they themselves have suffered... The evidence all points in the same direction, is formidable, and tallies with common sense.”

A devastating report produced in 1998 and reviewed by the liberal-minded Joseph Rowntree Foundation concluded that:

“Children of separated families have a higher probability of:

- being in poverty and poor housing;
- being poorer when they are adults;
- behavioural problems;
- performing less well at school;
- needing medical treatment;
- leaving school/home when young;
- becoming sexually active, pregnant, or a parent at an early age;
- depressive symptoms, high levels of smoking and drinking and drug use during adolescence and adulthood.”
- The *Exeter Family Study* found that divorce does not usually reduce conflict for the children: in fact the *opposite* is true:

“...the experience of most children whose parents have divorced is of *increased* conflict over an extended period, with the child involved to an extent that may not have been the case while the marriage lasted.”

A report from *One Plus One* has shown that adults who divorce have a greatly increased incidence (compared to those who remain married) of heart disease, cancer, alcoholism and suicide.

Given the devastating effects of divorce on adults, children and society, even those who do not hold to a Christian view of divorce should be opposed to measures which make divorce even easier. The statistics show that every time the law on divorce has been liberalised, the number of divorces has increased.

- In 1936 some 5,915 divorce petitions were filed. In 1938 (the first year of operation of the more liberal provisions of the Matrimonial Causes Act 1937) there were 10,350 divorce petitions.
- By 1961 there were around 32,000 new divorce petitions a year. In 1971 (the first year of operation of the 1969 Divorce Reform Act) the number rose sharply to around 110,000.

Smacking

Facts

- Parents across the UK are legally allowed to smack their children as a means of parental discipline.
- The Children Act 2004 restricted the defence of “reasonable chastisement” for parental smacking of children. The Act applies to England and Wales.
- Under the law, any smack that leaves more than a temporary mark may be illegal. Any smack that causes reddening of the skin that is more than transitory could potentially result in prosecution. A similar law exists in Northern Ireland.
- In Scotland it is illegal to discipline by shaking, or using any implement, or any smack directed at the head.

Biblical arguments

In the Bible it is parents who have the responsibility for raising children. Parents have a God-given authority over their children.

The fifth commandment requires a child to honour their father and mother (Exodus 20:12). This was quoted by Jesus and by the Apostle Paul.

Parents are expected to exercise loving discipline over their children. As part of this most parents use physical chastisement such as smacking. Discipline must not be harsh. Fathers are told to instruct children according to what is good and not to exasperate their children (Ephesians 6:4). That discipline can be painful is clearly accepted in Scripture (e.g. Hebrews 12:7-11). However, attempts to make the administration of reasonable chastisement a criminal offence should be strongly resisted – as should other moves which usurp the authority of parents.

Key points

- Smacking is not child abuse. Most reasonable people see there is a world of difference between abuse and a loving smack.
- The public is overwhelmingly opposed to banning smacking. 65% of people in Great Britain say it is ‘sometimes necessary for a parent to smack a child’. Almost seven in ten people in Wales oppose a ban on parents smacking their children.

- The present law is clear and widely understood. A new law would only divert resources away from protecting abused children.
- Some parents might not feel the need to smack their child. But for most parents, smacking is a necessary means of loving discipline.
- Evidence from Sweden, which banned smacking in 1979, suggests that the ban not only failed to reduce child abuse, but made the situation dramatically worse. By 2010, records of assaults by relatives against children under seven were over 21 times the 1981 figures.

Religious Freedom and Heritage

Incitement to Religious Hatred

Facts

- The Government first tried to introduce an offence of ‘incitement to religious hatred’ in November 2001 in its *Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill*. However, it was forced to drop the idea the following month after two defeats in the House of Lords.
- In November 2004 the Government tried again, slipping the offence into the Serious Organised Crime and Police Bill. In April 2005, with time running out before the General Election, the Government was forced to drop the proposed offence.
- Following the General Election the Government re-introduced the offence in the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill in June 2005. Throughout 2005 an unprecedented campaign against the Bill by Christians and secular groups resulted in sustained opposition to the Bill in both Parliament and the media.
- On 31 January 2006 the Government suffered extraordinary defeats in the House of Commons over the proposed offence. In two successive votes MPs backed House of Lords amendments that dramatically narrowed the scope of the law and introduced a broad protection for free speech. The Racial and Religious Hatred Bill received Royal Assent in February 2006, but with the excellent Lords safeguards included.
- Although the Act only covers England and Wales it had the potential to profoundly affect Scotland. Scottish publishers would have been liable for any publications sold in England or Wales as would any Scottish television or radio broadcast transmitted south of the border.

The proposed offence

- The Government’s original proposal for an incitement to religious hatred law would have seriously harmed freedom of speech and had the potential to criminalise ordinary religious debate.
- The following is an extract of the proposed Offence before it was amended by the House of Lords:
 1. A person who uses threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour, or displays any written material which is threatening, abusive or insulting, is guilty of an offence if—
 - a. he intends thereby to stir up racial or religious hatred, or
 - b. having regard to all the circumstances the words, behaviour or material are (or is) likely to be heard or seen by any person in whom they are (or it is) likely to stir up racial or religious hatred.
- The proposed offence set out alternatives ranging from threatening to insulting words. It was not that the words be threatening *and* abusive *and* insulting but threatening *or* abusive *or* insulting.
- Under the proposed offence, a conviction could have been secured if the prosecutor could prove that “insulting words” were used and: “...having regard to all the circumstances, the words, behaviour or material are (or is) likely to be heard by any person in whom they are (or it is likely) to stir up racial or religious hatred.”
- The legal threshold of what is deemed to be “insulting words” is disturbingly low following the case of *Harry Hammond v DPP* [2004] EWHC 69. A pensioner who displayed a sign equating homosexuality with immorality was deemed to have used insulting words for the purposes of a public order offence.
- Given the Hammond case as legal precedent, it would be easy to see how a person of a non-Christian faith could be insulted by the claim of the Christian faith that the only way to God is through His Son, Jesus Christ (John 14:6).
- The wording of the Bill went much further than intentional stirring up of hatred. In addition, the Bill gave no definition of religion; it simply says that “‘Religious hatred’ means hatred against a group of persons defined by reference to religious belief or lack of religious belief”.
- Whilst the offence excludes behaviour which takes place within a “dwelling”, this exception did not extend to churches or other places of

worship. Sunday morning sermons were therefore within the ambit of the Bill.

- However, it had always been clear from the wording of the offence that it was not a blanket ban on preaching the Gospel. The Bill would not have outlawed all preaching about the uniqueness of salvation in Christ or criticism of religious belief overnight. Nevertheless, at its lowest threshold the offence criminalised “insulting words likely to stir up religious hatred”. And court cases could have held this to outlaw evangelism or reasonable opposition to particular religious beliefs. Under the law proposed by the Government, the fear was that case after case would ratchet up restrictions on free speech.

The House of Lords amendments

- The House of Lords amendments deleted the most troublesome parts of the offence. They removed the words “abusive” or “insulting” and removed the “likely” test, so that only threatening conduct intended to incite religious hatred is covered.
- The House of Lords also introduced a sweeping free speech defence that protects:
“...discussion, criticism or expressions of antipathy, dislike, ridicule, insult or abuse of particular religions or the beliefs or practices of their adherents, or of any other belief system or the beliefs or practices of its adherents, or proselytising or urging adherents of a different religion or belief system to cease practising their religion or belief system.”

The Government told the House of Commons on 31 January that if the Lords amendments were passed “...it would be virtually impossible to bring a successful prosecution.”

Biblical arguments

Christians are to pray for those in authority and for the state to provide freedom for the gospel to be preached and for men to live “quiet lives in all godliness and holiness” (1 Timothy 2:1-3).

Jesus’ final command to his followers before his ascension was that they should “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15) and “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). Telling others about Christ and his teachings is central to the Christian life (1 Peter 3:15-16). Christians must therefore oppose any law which could prevent the preaching of the Gospel.

Key arguments

- The Government argued the proposed offence was needed for two reasons:

To combat activities of extremists who stir up hatred against people because of their religious beliefs.

To close a loophole that exists under the current incitement to racial hatred laws, whereby mono-ethnic faith groups such as Jews or Sikhs are protected from those who stir up hatred against them, but multi-ethnic faith groups are not.

- However, there was already a criminal offence to incite a crime against another person, whether or not religion is the cause. In addition, the ‘religiously aggravated’ offences (passed in 2001) could also be used.
- ‘Religious belief’ is not like race. Religious belief and atheism are about ideas on which people can change their minds and have vigorous debate. However, no-one can choose their race.
- The race laws only protect Jews and Sikhs as a race. The law does not protect their religion as a religion but as a sign of their race. The proposed offence could see courts adjudicating on the fundamental beliefs of Jews and Sikhs, as well as Muslims and Christians, in an unprecedented way.
- Some cults are litigious. They will be able to hold the threat of litigation over any one who criticises them.
- Even if prosecutions against ordinary religious debate are unsuccessful, the threat of prosecution may cause many to keep quiet. This will have a chilling effect on freedom of speech.
- In a recent case under a similar law in Australia a pastor was found guilty of “religious vilification” for highlighting the dangers of fundamentalist Islam and Sharia law.
- Attempts have already been made in the UK to stop responsible evangelism to Muslims. In 2002 police visited a member of a church near Rochdale, Lancashire and told him he had committed a serious racial offence by distributing Christian literature to Muslims. The church member took legal advice which confirmed the church had not broken any law and the police had acted wrongly. This was subsequently confirmed by the police. But a new religious incitement offence would have made the situation substantially worse and could have resulted in a prosecution.

Religious Education

Facts

- At least the law in England and Wales requires that the main content of religious education in non-denominational schools must be devoted to the study of Christianity.
- The content of religious education is determined at the level of the local education authority. The law requires that syllabuses “shall reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.”
- There must also be a daily act of collective worship in schools (this usually takes place as an assembly) and it must be “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character.”
- Worship is deemed to be of a broadly Christian character “if it reflects the broad traditions of Christian belief without being distinctive of any particular Christian denomination”. State schools can positively promote Christianity although they cannot promote any one Christian denomination.
- There are provisions for pupils from non-Christian faiths to have collective worship and RE according to their own faith.
- The law has always provided for a parental right of withdrawal from both worship and RE. Teachers also have a right of withdrawal.
- The 1988 reforms followed concerns that worship was becoming a secular ceremony in too many schools and that RE had become a confusing multi-faith amalgam.
- In Scotland there are parallel arrangements, which rely on traditional practice. Although there is no daily collective worship required by legislation, schools often appoint chaplains from the Church of Scotland and other denominations, and it is not at all uncommon for a school to hold termly services in the local Parish Church.

Biblical arguments

According to the Bible, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10). True education must start with an acknowledgement of the one true God. This applies across the curriculum, not just in RE.

Jesus Christ commanded Christians to “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15). In the past Christians have seen education as part of fulfilling Christ’s Great Commission.

Secularism is not neutral. It is hostile to Christian belief and cannot provide a neutral basis for education. In 1944 when the Education Act was passed County schools were assumed to be non-denominational but Christian. This assumption was widely accepted until the late 1970s.

The Bible provides God-given moral absolutes for personal and social conduct. All children should be given the opportunity to examine the teaching of the Bible.

Theological pluralism

Teaching approaches in religious education are very important. Teaching which denies the exclusive truth claims of Christ, and the other faiths is of particular concern. Poor RE teaching can deny the integrity of all faiths. To teach that all religions are the same is a faith position which must be vigorously challenged.

This position is sometimes called theological pluralism. John Hick, one of its leading advocates, argues that all religions are cultural expressions of the same reality.

Jesus made exclusive claims: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me”.

The other faiths also make exclusive claims. Christians must fight against theological pluralism, which denies the mutually exclusive truth claims of Christianity and the non-Christian faiths.

Practical involvement

Many schools invite local churches to help them fulfil their RE and collective worship obligations. Christian teachers can also play a full role. Given the decline in church attendance amongst the young, an RE lesson or school assembly might be the only opportunity a young person will ever get to hear the gospel.

Key Points

- The legal requirements for RE and collective worship in state schools are quite modest: they provide the opportunity for young people to examine the truth claims of the Christian faith. Given our Christian heritage and the fact that Christianity is a major world religion, it makes sound educational sense for young people to study Christianity.

- Because of poor or inadequate religious education there is much ignorance amongst young people on the basic facts of the Christian faith. A survey in 2000 found that only 38% of 18-34 year olds could say what happened on Good Friday and only 45% knew what happened on Easter Day.⁹
- Christianity is the major world religion which transcends all barriers of culture and race. It has a major role to play in the elimination of racism and cultural intolerance.

The Blasphemy Laws in Great Britain

Facts

- The legal notion of blasphemy dates back many centuries. The laws of blasphemy and blasphemous libel still stand in common law in England and Wales.
- Since 1838, the law of blasphemy only protects the tenets and beliefs of the Church of England. Other Christian denominations are protected where their beliefs overlap with those of the Church of England.
- In the twentieth century there were only four reported judgements. No blasphemy case has been prosecuted in England and Wales since the passage of the Human Rights Act 1998.
- Northern Ireland inherited Irish Common law, which included the offence of blasphemy. Because the Irish law of blasphemy protected the beliefs of the Church of Ireland, some have argued the offence ceased with the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1869.

To date there have been no prosecutions in Northern Ireland for Blasphemy. However, in Northern Ireland, incitement to religious hatred is an offence, although it is rarely prosecuted.

- In Scotland the last reported prosecution for blasphemy was in 1843. Since Scottish law, unlike English law requires a personal interest in a matter for there to be any private prosecution, and since the state is unlikely to want to instigate a prosecution for blasphemy, a prosecution is unlikely to occur.

Biblical arguments

The Bible clearly teaches that the name of the Lord is sacred. The third commandment states: “You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.”

The blasphemy laws are an extremely important expression of principle – that Jesus’ name is above every other name. Paul states in Philippians:

“Therefore God exalted him [Jesus] to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name...”⁷

It is this symbolic nature of the law that secularists object to. If this were not so secularists would not show such interest in repealing the law on blasphemy, given it is rarely used in practice.

Key points

- The blasphemy law recognises the unique contribution and status of Christianity in Britain. To remove the blasphemy law, or extend it to other religions, would challenge this. Any reform or abolition of the blasphemy law cannot be looked at separately from the constitutional role of Christianity in the state.
- The blasphemy law is essentially a defensive measure – no one is going to be put in prison for breaking the blasphemy laws (unlike the recently proposed offence of ‘incitement to religious hatred’).
- In January 2005 the BBC broadcast ‘Jerry Springer the Opera’. The show contained hundreds of swear words and features God the Father, Jesus Christ, Mary, Adam and Eve and Satan as warring guests on a special edition of the Jerry Springer show – staged in Hell. The show included a portrayal of Jesus as a childish, foul-mouthed woman beater with a sexual predilection for human excrement and who declares himself to be ‘a bit gay’.
- One group is to undertake a prosecution for blasphemy. And rightly so. We have no doubt that the broadcast of ‘Jerry Springer the Opera’ is blasphemous. However, we recognise that a conviction under the blasphemy laws is highly unlikely in the present climate.

General Information around Homosexuality accepted in a range of Christian Churches, and others not.

Foreword

Human experience is the one datum of all philosophies, and science. The experience of everyone and of the race is the grist which is poured into all

scientific and philosophic mills. However, the Christian experience as a distinct form of human experience ought to receive more attention than it is ever received before at this time and age.

One may call things by any names wished and it will not affect experience. Various metaphysical societies claim that all is mind; that a cobble stone, as an example, is simply the idea and not real piece of matter. As such, we will suppose that someone hurls it and strikes your head and send you off for relief. And, this is followed by an experience in the realm of an ideal. You have an ideal stone, striking an ideal head, and raising an ideal bump and producing an ideal dizziness even pain, and requiring the application of an ideal liniment, which produces the cure, and affords you an ideal satisfaction and peace of mind. But, all this does not in the slightest degree alter the experience itself. And if you were going to rear a philosophic system on the principle deduced from sudden contact of cobble stones with human craniums, you would be compelled to take this concrete human experience to begin with.

Science and philosophy are beginning to recognise the evidential value of spiritual or metaphysical experience, though they are very slow about it and even very reluctant about it even yet, apparently because it is not as obvious to the sense as the facts of the physical world.

Nobody now even doubts the existence of radium, and yet as one says, it has been “bombarding” the universe for aeons and under the very nose of science, and yet it was only discovered yesterday as it were and already threatens to revolutionise Science. Now religious experience is the radium of the universe, which needs only discovery to revolutionise any man’s thought as to living in freedom and as such building up the destiny. What was true, good or bad in the past, arrived in a changing and transforming world today, and that means what was bad in more older or ancient times is good today, except murder and anything against human freedom, and this only is the philosophy reaching up towards God. Also, Christian experience is the experience of renewal and regeneration, conversion, and of moral transformation, based on “love one another.” The I.S. (Islamic State) also preaches “compassion” among their own believers while they are killing other religious and good people.

We are in no way discrediting philosophy on the contrary, philosophy and the Bible go pair. Men fail to find the secret of freedom until God and His dealings with men are considered. When this current of thought is reached of man’s freedom as God revealed it in Jesus Christ, a new day is dawn for each one of us. Christian experience takes all the abstractions of philosophy and life and recombines them and gives us the conception of the Loving Father, God. And, Christ places in the Christian experience humanity’s moral problems. Only

when churches stop condemning men and women's aspirations and way of life, the belief in God's existence will return, and the churches again packed. Only when Christian doctrine is reviewed and adapted to modern living, and a renewed sense of moral power comes with man's experience, the religious heights will reach the very heavens. In this Christ will become final in man, final for his reason, final for his conscience, final for his will, final for his intellect and most of all, final for his faith, his hope, his aspiration, and his love. Nothing higher can be conceived.

The Churches and Homosexuality

Although liberalism has made many inroads into the Western churches, unfortunately a lot of Christian denominations throughout the world still uphold Biblical teaching on homosexuality, urging governments to severely sanction them, in some countries through imprisonment and even death sentence.

Gay rights campaigners have urged Churches to change their stance. They claim some success with the Methodist and United Reformed denominations and amongst some liberal Bishops in the Church of England.

However, for the conservative Anglicans, the Lambeth Conference in 1998 firmly restated that homosexual practice is incompatible with the Bible. While some liberal Bishops from the UK and USA and in many parts of the world opposed Lambeth Resolution 1.10, while a majority agreed with its statement that:

- Homosexual practice is incompatible with the Bible;
- Christians can experience same-sex attraction and that the church should seek sensitively to minister to such people;
- For those not called to marriage, sexual abstinence is the right course; and
- Same-sex unions are to be rejected.

Key points

Young people at risk of manipulation

Legalising homosexual acts with teenage boys puts them at risk because they are at an age when they can be vulnerable to sexual approaches from other males, especially older men. Teenage boys can be confused about their sexual attractions. They can go through a phase of being attracted to those of the same sex, but in the vast majority of cases they simply grow out of it and develop a normal attraction for women. Engaging in homosexual activity at this age could entrap them in a lifestyle which they would otherwise have avoided.

Lowering the age of consent for buggery also means that 16 and 17 year old *girls* will be exposed to the health risks of anal intercourse.

Widening the range of sexual practices which can be committed with young people puts even more pressure on them to be sexually active and to engage in even more dangerous activities.

Current prosecution policy means that age of consent offences are often not prosecuted where the young person is just a year or two from the age of consent. This means that acts of buggery committed against 15 and even 14 year olds are much less likely to be prosecuted now that the age of consent for those acts is 16.

The legislation which lowered the age of consent introduced a new offence of “abuse of trust”. This was retained in the 2003 Sexual Offences Act. This is intended to criminalise those who use a position of trust over a young person to take sexual advantage of them. However, the new offence is too narrow in its scope, welcome though it is.

A Homosexual lifestyle carries great health risks

The largest and most detailed study to date, *Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles*, showed that the proportion of men reporting large numbers of partners is much higher for homosexuals than for heterosexuals. Of those men who had had sexual partners within the previous five years, 24% of homosexuals had had 10 or more partners compared with 5% of heterosexuals. *Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles* also found that less than 4% of British men have ever had same-sex genital contact in their life. Yet, a total of 66.0% of all male HIV infections in the UK were acquired through homosexual intercourse. In comparison, heterosexual intercourse made up only 20.2% of male infections and almost all of these (87.4%) were acquired through exposure abroad or through sexual contact with someone who had been infected outside Europe.

Men who have *ever* engaged in any homosexual sex are banned for life from giving blood in the UK, even if it was ‘safer sex’ with a condom.

The risk of HIV infection from anal intercourse is extremely high: for men it is at least 2,700 times the risk from vaginal intercourse.

The condom company Durex said in October 2000: “Anal intercourse is a high risk activity because of the potential for infection from STDs including HIV transmission. Currently there are no specific standards for the manufacture of condoms for anal sex. Current medical advice is therefore to avoid anal sex.”

Public opinion

Opinion polls repeatedly showed that around 70% of people opposed lowering the homosexual age of consent.

Most parents want their children to grow up to get married and have children. Legitimising homosexual acts involving teenage boys threatens that by increasing the likelihood that they will be drawn into homosexuality, denying them the opportunity of marriage and having children.

Churches in a changing world, adapting themselves

A new study states that, overall, acceptance of gay and lesbian people has been on a steady increase. The National Congregations Study, released by Duke University, shows that from 2006 to 2012, the number of congregations accepting gay and lesbian members increased from 37.4 percent to 48 percent. Additionally, the number of congregations open to gay or lesbian volunteer leadership also rose about 18 percent.

The greatest progress in the period came in black Protestant churches, white liberal churches, and non-Christian congregations, offsetting a decrease in acceptance in Catholic congregations and a mixed record in conservative white Protestant churches, which indicated increased acceptance of gays and lesbians as members but not as volunteer leaders.

One interesting finding was that support among Roman Catholic parishes actually declined over that same period. The Associated Press spoke with several people, who named a few possible factors. The first possibility was that the survey was taken while Benedict was still Pope, who took a very different tone than Pope Francis' "Who am I to judge" comment. Another is that today's younger Roman Catholic priesthood tend to be more theologically conservative. A third is that during 2011 and 2012, the Roman Catholic hierarchy was leading several campaigns opposing marriage equality.

However, the overall trend in places of worship is for greater openness and somewhat increased leadership positions for gay and lesbian people. This was especially true in white protestant churches. Many of these denominations have a formal welcoming congregational program. These programs work with congregations to craft a formal statement of welcome that includes people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. From 2006 to 2012, the number of these congregations rose dramatically.

Additionally, this time period is when some large protestant denominations, including The Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Presbyterian Church (USA), adopted policies to more formally accept LGBT people in their communities.

Additionally, the study found that congregations are becoming more racially diverse, prefer more informal worship, and that overall congregation size is decreasing.

Like many other Christian churches today, the House Church Evangelicals for Marriage Equality says Christians can support marriage equality in the civil sphere regardless of their churches' beliefs on the issue.

We must work harder to decriminalize homosexuality and end homophobic attitudes that have made LGBT people strangers in their own countries and refugees when left with no choice but to flee. Let us not forget the injustices faced by young LGBT people like Aurel in Cameroon and renew our resolve to end homophobia and support the rights of all young and older people. We, Evangelical House Church Christians believe that we are in the beginning of the greatest outpouring of the Holy Spirit that the world has ever seen before. We are all called to be part of it. The straight allies must study the Sacred Scripture in a new light, and call us to be who LGBT are in a vibrant relationship with Jesus. Remember, God is the God of us all and we are His people whoever we are.

Is being gay a sin?

Obviously not! Both the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church and the U.S. Catholic Bishops recognize that sexual orientation is not a choice and is not sinful: “Generally, homosexual orientation is experienced as a given, not as something freely chosen. By itself, therefore, a homosexual orientation cannot be considered sinful, for morality presumes the freedom to choose” (“Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers,” U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1997).

Being gay is not sinful. It is another part of the great mystery of humankind, created in the image of God. But the Church teaches that sexual relations are reserved for the sacramental union of a man and a woman in marriage, where that intimacy has twin purposes: their union, as a couple, and procreation, expressed as openness to the gift of life. Sexual relations between men or between women cannot fulfil both purposes of sexual intimacy. Thus the Church calls gays and lesbians to celibate chastity. Likewise, the Church calls for

respect, compassion and sensitivity to gays and lesbians: "Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2358). Gay or straight, every single one of us has the same call: "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12)

In the New Testament we have no record of Jesus saying anything about homosexuality, either as a sexual orientation or as a practice. The major New Testament references are found in two Pauline letters and in 1 Timothy. The context of Paul's widely quoted statement in Romans 1:26-27 is clearly his concern about idolatry. Three things should be noted. First, concerned about the influence of paganism upon the Roman Christians, Paul sees homosexual expression as a result of idolatry, but he does not claim that such practices are the *cause* of God's wrath. Second, in this passage we have a description of homosexual *lust* ("consumed with passion for one another") but not an account of interpersonal homosexual love.

Third, Paul's wording makes it plain that he understands homosexual activity as that indulged in by heterosexuals, hence that which is contrary to their own sexual orientation. Thus, it is difficult to construe Paul's statements as applicable to acts of committed love engaged in by persons for whom same-sex orientation is part of the givenness of their "nature." Indeed, Paul uses "nature" as a flexible concept expressing varying concerns in different contexts. An ethical position that condemns homosexuality as a violation of natural law must turn to a non-biblical philosophical position -- but not to Pauline material -- for its content.

The Apostle Paul's other reference to homosexual acts (1 Cor. 6:9-10) is similar to that of the writer of I Timothy (1:8-11). Both passages list practices that exclude people from the kingdom -- acts that dishonour God and harm the neighbour, including thievery, drunkenness, kidnapping, lying, and the like. Thus, if it is apparent that here homosexual acts are not singled out for special condemnation, it could also be argued that there was general disapproval. What, then are we to make of Paul's moral judgment in this case?

Perhaps we should accept Paul for what he was -- a peerless interpreter of the heart of the gospel and one who was also a fallible and historically conditioned person. If the norm of the new humanity in Jesus Christ obliges us to question the Apostle's opinions about the proper status of women and the institution of human slavery, so also that norm obliges us to scrutinize each of his moral judgments regarding its Christian faithfulness for our time -- including his perception of homosexuality.

Surely, the central biblical message regarding sexuality is clear enough. Idolatry, the dishonouring of God, inevitably results in the dishonouring of persons. Faithful sexual expression always honours the personhood of the companion. Sexuality is not intended by God as a mysterious and alien force of nature, but as a power to be integrated into one's personhood and used responsibly in the service of love.

A typology of four possible theological stances toward homosexuality can begin with the most negative assessment. A *rejecting-punitive* position unconditionally rejects homosexuality as Christianly legitimate and bears a punitive attitude toward homosexual persons. While no major contemporary theologians defend this position and while official church bodies have moved away from it, this stance unfortunately is amply represented in Christian history.

If we have been ignorant of the persecutions of homosexuals, it is not without reason. Unlike the recognized histories of other minority groups, there has been no "gay history." Heterosexual historians usually have considered the subject unmentionable, and gay historians have been constrained by the fear of ceasing to be invisible. A conspiracy of silence has resulted. Yet, the facts are there. Stoning, sexual mutilation, and the death penalty were fairly common treatment for discovered homosexuals through centuries of the West's history. While the church frequently gave its blessings to civil persecutions, in its internal ecclesiastical practice its disapproval was even more frequently shown through the refusal of sacraments and ostracism from the common life.

The rejecting-punitive stance today may be milder in its usual manifestations, though it continues to bear highly punitive attitudes along with its theological arguments. If the latter are based upon a selective biblical literalism, the former are rooted in familiar stereotypes. All lesbians are hard, and all male gays effeminate; homosexuals are compulsive and sex-hungry; male gays are inherently prone to child molestation; homosexuals are by nature promiscuous. Each of the preceding stereotypes has been thoroughly discounted by reliable research; yet they persist in the minds of many, buttressed by untenable biblical interpretations. But the key criticism of this stance is simply the incongruity of a punitive orientation with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The ecclesiastical implications of full acceptance are undoubtedly complex. Very understandably, however, many gay Christians are tired of waiting for such complexities to be resolved. They have waited -- and hurt -- long enough. Their impatience, I believe, is a call for repentance and for urgent work by the rest of us. At its root the basic issue is not about "them," but about us all: What

is the nature of that humanity toward which God is pressing us, and what does it mean to be a woman or a man in Jesus Christ.

What is Roman Catholicism?

Whereas Protestantism, Roman Catholics holds that authority for Faith and practice rests uniquely with the sixty-six books of the Holy Bible, Roman Catholicism teaches that authority rests also with the apocryphal writings (extra biblical books accepted as canonical by Roman Catholics) and church tradition a declared by the Church Fathers and the papal pronouncements – as well as with the Bible. This agreement over authority marks a foundational difference between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism.

Roman Catholicism recognises fifteen books as authoritative in addition to the sixty-six books of the Holy Scripture. These are known as the Apocrypha (meaning “hidden”) and are First and Second Esdras, Tobit, Judith, additions to Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Song of the Three Children, Susanna, Bell and the Dragon, Prayer of Manasseh, and the First and Second Maccabees.

The Council of Trent in 1546 officially decreed the authority of tradition as well as Scripture in this statement:

Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures

The sacred and holy, ecumenical, and general Synod of Trent,—lawfully assembled in the Holy Ghost, the same three legates of the Apostolic See presiding therein,—keeping this always in view, that, errors being removed, the purity itself of the Gospel be preserved in the Church; which (Gospel), before promised through the prophets in the holy Scriptures, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, first promulgated with His own mouth, and then commanded to be preached by His Apostles to every creature, as the fountain of all, both saving truth, and moral discipline; and seeing clearly that this truth and discipline are contained in the written books, and the unwritten traditions which, received by the Apostles from the mouth of Christ himself, or from the Apostles themselves, the Holy Ghost dictating, have come down even unto us, transmitted as it were from hand to hand; (the Synod) following the examples of the orthodox Fathers, receives and venerates with an equal affection of piety, and reverence, all the books both of the Old and of the New Testament—seeing that one God is the author of both —as also the said traditions, as well those appertaining to faith as to morals, as having been dictated, either by

Christ's own word of mouth, or by the Holy Ghost, and preserved in the Catholic Church by a continuous succession.

And it has thought it meet that a list of the sacred books be inserted in this decree, lest a doubt may arise in any one's mind, which are the books that are received by this Synod. They are as set down here below:

Of the Old Testament: the five books of Moses, to wit, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; Josue, Judges, Ruth, four books of Kings, two of Paralipomenon, the first book of Esdras, and the second which is entitled Nehemias; Tobias, Judith, Esther, Job, the Davidical Psalter, consisting of a hundred and fifty psalms; the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Canticle of Canticles, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Isaias, Jeremias, with Baruch; Ezechiel, Daniel; the twelve minor prophets, to wit, Osee, Joel, Amos, Abdias, Jonas, Micheas, Nahum, Habacuc, Sophonias, Aggaeus, Zacharias, Malachias; two books of the Machabees, the first and the second.

Of the New Testament: the four Gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; the Acts of the Apostles written by Luke the Evangelist; fourteen epistles of Paul the apostle, (one) to the Romans, two to the Corinthians, (one) to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, to the Philippians, to the Colossians, two to the Thessalonians, two to Timothy, (one) to Titus, to Philemon, to the Hebrews; two of Peter the apostle, three of John the apostle, one of the apostle James, one of Jude the apostle, and the Apocalypse of John the apostle.

But if any one receive not, as sacred and canonical, the said books entire with all their parts, as they have been used to be read in the Catholic Church, and as they are contained in the old Latin vulgate edition; and knowingly and deliberately contemn the traditions aforesaid; let him be anathema. Let all, therefore, understand, in what order, and in what manner, the said Synod, after having laid the foundation of the Confession of faith, will proceed, and what testimonies and authorities it will mainly use in confirming dogmas, and in restoring morals in the Church.

The Council of Trent also decreed the Latin Vulgate as the standard Bible for reading and teaching. A further important decree of the Council was that the Roman Catholic Church is to be the only interpreter of the Holy Scripture.

Furthermore, in order to restrain petulant spirits, It decrees, that no one, relying on his own skill, shall,—in matters of faith, and of morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, —wresting the sacred Scripture to his own senses, presume to interpret the said sacred Scripture

contrary to that sense which holy mother Church,—whose it is to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the holy Scriptures,—hath held and doth hold; or even contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers; even though such interpretations were never (intended) to be at any time published. Contraveners shall be made known by their Ordinaries, and be punished with the penalties by law established.

This is important to note. The Roman Catholic Church declared it is the official interpreter of the faith; no one is to interpret Scriptures for himself in a way that is contrary to the Roman Catholic interpretation.

Is the Roman Catholic Church, the One True Church founded by Christ?

The simple answer is that Jesus Christ founded the church which began at Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost and continued in the lives of those who truly belonged to Him and put their faith in Him, no matter what their relationship was to any particular leaders in the visible church structure. Sadly, institutional church leaders transformed the expression of Christianity from what it was in the days of the apostles – a family of royal priests who knew God personally, to a kind of hierarchical religious institution which came to dominate the people of God and wrote the history books of the church their way.

A concerned Roman Catholic wrote to me, "...we cannot only look at the Bible without looking at the tradition of the Church. It says in scripture (1 Thess 2:15) "Stand firm in the teachings passed on to you by WORD and in letters." *So we must also look at the teaching of the Catholic Church which Jesus began.* In the purity of the faith, is there any other Christian Church, group or otherwise that has had the same teachings since the time of Jesus? The Traditions (foundational teachings of the church) of the Catholic Church have been the same since the days of the apostles and nothing has been changed since then.

The traditions (small t – or in other words the way things are done) have changed and can continue to change (married priesthood, the language the Holy Mass is celebrated in, etc.)." And later he writes: "If Peter is not the Rock than why did Jesus call him such, and then say on this rock I will build my church?" I believe it is really important to address these issues, because the question of religious authority is fundamentally important. Who or what truly speaks for Christ? Many claim to represent Christ today, and the contradictory claims have caused a great deal of confusion in the world.

The Roman Catholic church does not claim to be merely one valid expression of the Church which Christ founded. It claims to be **the** church which Christ founded. It claims that it has faithfully preserved the Traditions given to us by Christ and the apostles, which, although not written in the Scriptures of the New Testament, have equally binding authority upon all who wish to enjoy God's favour.

The biblical foundation for these ideas is derived from the Roman Catholic understanding of Matthew 16:16-19. 16 And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal [this] to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. 19 "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (NASB).

Roman Catholics understand this as follows: When Jesus said, "this rock" he meant Peter. Therefore Peter is the rock upon which the true church of Christ is built. Peter was to receive the keys of the kingdom of heaven, giving him the authority to make authoritative decrees concerning doctrinal truth, tradition, practice, and to exclude or include people from the Kingdom of Heaven. Peter was therefore the first pope and as bishop of Rome he passed these keys onto a successor, Linus (the second pope). The keys were passed in this way from pope to pope and the full authority of Christ Himself has always been invested in the pope. It follows therefore that anyone not submitting to the pope is in rebellion against God.

Roman Catholics are taught that the Catholic church headquartered at the Vatican in Rome is the only true church. Many believe that salvation is only to be found in the Catholic church. In the Roman Catholic worldview, the Bible derives its authority from the Church, not the other way around. The Bible is seen as just another Tradition of the church – one that was written down. From this viewpoint, any attempt to use the Bible to show the errors of Catholic tradition is a misuse of the Bible - because it is only really the official living teaching organ of the Church which correctly interprets the true meaning of the Bible.

Roman Catholics argue on the basis of history and Christ's words that the Catholic Church must be the church of which Jesus spoke, since he promised that "the gates of hell would not prevail against (or overpower) it". It is clear enough that the view of the Reformers was not the general view of the church

during the dark and middle ages. This is seen as proof enough that Jesus was in favour of the views of the Church at this time. To deny this would be to imply that somehow the gates of hell *did* prevail against the church, which would be a contradiction of Jesus' own words on the subject.

I invite any Roman Catholics who feel I have misrepresented the Catholic viewpoint in the above paragraphs to e-mail me on this, because it would not be fair on my part to attack a "straw-man" - a misrepresentation of the official Roman Catholic position.

The devil knows that a big lie can sometimes be far more convincing than a small one. It's my conviction that the above doctrine is a Big Lie, and is responsible indirectly for the eternal damnation of millions of souls. This teaching has done more to undermine the authority of the Holy Scriptures than any other I know of. The practical result is that even now the majority of Roman Catholics never bother to read their Bibles.

This is because they feel that all they'll ever need to know and receive from God will come through the teaching and ministry of their church, and not through personal study and consideration of the Scriptures. Let's now get down to the issues.

What is the True Identity of the Rock upon which the church is built?

16 And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal [this] to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 "And I also say to you that you are Peter [Gk: petros - a boulder or stone], and upon this rock [Gk: petra – a large mass of rock] I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. 19 "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (NASB).

I have heard of two major alternatives to the Roman Catholic identification of the Rock upon which Jesus would build his church. One is that *Peter's confession* of Christ is the rock upon which the church is built. That is to say, by "this rock" Jesus meant the foundational revelation that Peter was the first man to confess, that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God." The second alternative is that **the Rock was Jesus himself**, while Peter was the first stone to be built upon the rock of Christ in the church which Christ Himself is building.

This latter interpretation makes more sense to me, because it is in perfect harmony with the tradition which the Scripture itself establishes concerning the spiritual meaning of the word "Rock".

Allow Scripture to interpret Scripture

An important principle in evangelical thinking is to allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. Since "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." it follows that every interpretation of Scripture should be in harmony with the rest of Scripture. The Scriptures have a lot to say about who the rock is. For example:

1 Corinthians 10:4 "and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ". Romans 9:33 just as it is written, "Behold, I lay in *Zion* a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed."

Habakkuk 1:12 Art Thou not from everlasting, O Lord, my God, my Holy One? We will not die. Thou, O Lord, hast appointed them to judge; And *Thou, O Rock*, hast established them to correct. Isaiah 26:4 "Trust in the Lord forever, For in God the Lord, [we have] an everlasting Rock . Psalm 144:1 (of David.) Blessed be the Lord, my rock , Who trains my hands for war, [And] my fingers for battle; Psalm 94:22 But the Lord has been my stronghold, And my God the rock of my refuge. Not only is the Lord God Himself consistently portrayed as the rock throughout both the Old and New Testaments, but the Scriptures go so far as to say that *only the Lord God* is our rock.

Psalm 62:2 He *only* is my rock and my salvation, My stronghold; I shall not be greatly shaken. Isaiah 44:8 'Do not tremble and do not be afraid; Have I not long since announced it to you and declared it? And you are My witnesses. Is there any God besides Me, Or is there any [other] Rock? I know of none.' "

2 Samuel 22:32 "For who is God, besides the Lord? And who is a rock , besides our God? The interpretation of the Lord God being our only true rock ties in nicely with the words of the apostle Paul, "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus" (1 Corinthians 3:11). Truly then, Jesus is the foundation upon which the true church is built, not Peter.

Peter therefore, cannot be the primary rock on which Jesus will build his church. As we will see, Peter himself did not have the stability or the stature to be the foundation rock upon which the eternal church of Christ was to be built. Peter denied the Lord during the trial of Christ. And a few verses later in the

Matthew 16 passage Jesus identifies Peter as being inspired by Satan (Matthew 16:23), while in Galatians 2:11 Paul reports an incident which revealed Peter's ongoing tendency to weakness. According to Paul, Peter was in the wrong and stood condemned, and was not being straight forward about the truth of the gospel! This is hardly the image of a solid infallible rock upon which all future generations of Christ church were to be built. Only Jesus Himself can carry that weight, and thank God, He does.

It seems to me that Roman Catholics have taken their conception of Peter as the rock upon which they build their entire system. Church history reveals the moral depths to which these so-called vicars of Christ have fallen. I'm not sure it is edifying to go into a full list of these things, but if it turns out to be important to some of my readers I may make the effort to document this on another web-page. In any case, it seems that common sense as well as the Bible itself would indicate that Jesus was not meaning that Peter was *the* rock upon which he would build his church. We can all freely acknowledge that Peter had a key role in the development of the early church and that he did have a great deal of spiritual authority from Christ.

This is beyond dispute. But the Roman Catholic position goes far beyond this, and in so doing, gets our eyes of Christ and onto men, something which is never advisable for those wishing to build a solid and enduring relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

It is also interesting to note that Peter certainly did not fit into the current conception of a pope, since he had a mother-in-law, meaning he was married. Read Mark 1:30, which speaks of "Simon's wife's mother". The topic of celibate priesthood is outside the scope of the current discussion, but it is another aberration from the plain teaching of Scripture (1 Timothy 3:2-4; 1 Timothy 4:2).

Incidentally, the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven were not given exclusively to Peter. The same authority of binding and loosing were given to all Jesus' disciples in Matthew 18:18. All Jesus' disciples have the authority to use his Name, and the truth is, Jesus never gave anyone the authority to abrogate (nullify) His own plain words and teachings.

Did the Gates of Hell Prevail Against the Church Christ Built?

The reasoning of the Roman Catholic Church is circular on this point, because they assume and do not prove from Scripture that Jesus was describing their system as "His church". Their point would be powerful if they could prove that

at some point in history there were no disciples of Christ who did not acknowledge the bishop of Rome as their supreme pontiff. However, history just doesn't support this view. The supremacy of the roman bishop indeed rose because of the political power of Rome as the capital of the empire, but there were always groups of Christian disciples who did not hold to the doctrine of the papacy. The doctrine of the papacy wasn't really spelled out until the time of Gregory the Great in any case, in the 6th century.

The Eastern Orthodox church, for all its weaknesses, doubtless did include many true believers in Christ, and the schism which was formalised in the 11th century between Rome and the Orthodox church based principally at Constantinople reflected a major difference in opinion concerning the authority of roman bishops that had been going on already for centuries. At that time the pope and the Patriarch at Constantinople basically excommunicated each other because of their differences – a natural outcome of their common rejection of the Word of God as their highest and supreme authority. For their man-made traditions had evolved in different directions and because of this neither could accept the other as truly being of God.

Apart from this, I'm sure there were many Christian churches, such as the Celtic churches in the British Isles and many nameless faceless Christian groups with no political power who enjoyed the life of Christ without seeing the pope as their spiritual Father. (Incidentally Jesus himself taught against the use of the word "father" as a spiritual title for men (Matthew 23:9). I have never heard any reasonable Roman Catholic explanation on why this verse has been apparently abrogated in the favour of popes and priests!). In the middle ages various groups such as the Waldeneses, the followers of John Huss, Wycliffe and others were faithful believers in Christ and suffered cruel persecution for their stand against the Roman Catholic tyrants of the day, just like the I.S. (Islamic State) people today.

Furthermore there were obviously people in the Roman Catholic system itself who, for all their loyalty to the pope, had a revelation of the true Christ and were truly the Lord's children. A shining example of Christian discipleship was St. Francis of Assisi. Whichever way we look at it, the church was not utterly defeated by Satan at any time although obviously there were some pretty dark moments.

God has always had a faithful remnant, and today they number in the hundreds of millions – a fact for which we may praise God. Truly the gates of hell have not overcome the true church of Christ. Believers in Christ are more than ever on the increase today and with the increase of knowledge that is upon us today

there is no way that we will ever return to the Dark Ages where men just simply did not have access to the Bible in their own language to check out things for themselves.

I hope it is noticed that I am not arguing that all believers who identified with Rome were not real Christians. I am sure than many Roman Catholics today are true born again Christians. But this is true in spite of, not because of the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

If Matthew 16:16-19 does not mean what the Roman Catholic church says it means, then what does it mean? We can get plenty of valuable truth out of Matthew 16:16-19. Firstly, God the Father Himself revealed to Peter the true identity of Jesus as being the promised Messiah, or Christ – the one whom God sent to save the people from their sins. Secondly, this had nothing to do with the fact that Peter saw Jesus physically as a man. This makes this kind of revelation available to us also. It is timeless. Thirdly, Peter confessed with his mouth the revelation which he received from God the Father. Fourthly, Jesus pronounced a blessing on Peter on account of this revelation of who Jesus was. We too will be blessed if we received from God a true revelation of who Christ is and then confess Him before others. The surest way to open yourself up for such a revelation is to read the Bible for yourself with an open heart and mind. The Bible says, "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9). If you have not done this I urge you to believe the teaching of this Scripture here and begin to openly confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Master in all you say and do.

Roman Catholicism under Pope Francis today!

Pope Francis is turning out to be one of the most controversial popes in modern history since his election to the papacy. During the four months he has been on the papal throne, he has made numerous statements that not only suppress the truth of God's Word, but also oppose the doctrines of the Catholic Church. The day he was elected pope he said he would pray to Mary for the protection of Rome. Later he appeared to contradict himself by saying, "He who doesn't pray to the Lord, prays to the devil." Is the pope saying that Catholics who pray to Mary and the saints are praying to the devil? In May, the pope said everyone, even atheists, are redeemed with the Blood of Christ. The pope followed this heresy with another placating statement, saying, "If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?" Possibly his most controversial decision was to make the reporting of sex crimes against children illegal.

The Vatican also jumped on the heretical bandwagon last month by offering indulgences, to reduce time in purgatory, to those who follow Pope Francis on Twitter during World Youth Day. As foolish as this sounds to intelligent people, we must wonder if Catholics will ever wake up and realize their religion teaches a false and fatal gospel that leads them on the broad road to destruction? How many more blatantly false teachings must come out of the Vatican before Catholics realize they have been deceived about life's most critical issue, the salvation of their soul?

Catholics, who believe a purifying fire will purge away their sins, are deluded victims of a fatal fabrication. The diabolical invention of a place for the purification of sins called Purgatory is not only a flagrant denial of the sufficiency of Jesus Christ, but also a blasphemous rejection of His precious blood as the only purification for sin (1 John 1:7).

The concept of Purgatory became a Catholic doctrine around 600 A.D. due to the fanaticism of Pope Gregory the Great. He developed the doctrine through visions of a purifying fire. According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, Pope Gregory said Catholics "will expiate their faults by purgatorial flames," and "the pain is more intolerable than any one can suffer in this life." Centuries later, at the Council of Florence in 1431, Purgatory was pronounced an infallible dogma.

Over the centuries, billions of dollars have been paid to Roman Catholic priests to obtain relief from sufferings in Purgatory's fire. The Catholic clergy has taught that purchasing indulgences, novenas and Mass cards can shorten the period of suffering in Purgatory. We have heard of Catholics who have willed their entire estates to their religion so that perpetual masses could be offered for them after they die. It is no wonder that the Catholic religion has become the richest institution in the world. The buying and selling of God's forgiveness has been a very lucrative business for the Vatican. "Think on these things!"

Mary, the Mother of Jesus in Roman Catholicism

Roman Catholics have an extremely high view of Mary the mother of Jesus and have attributed some astounding characteristics and abilities to her, such as her interceding for us, atoning for us, and delivering our souls from damnation (documented below). Protestants consider this elevation to be not only extreme but also idolatrous since they attribute to Mary what should only be said of God. Roman Catholicism responds by saying it venerates Mary and gets its doctrines on her from Sacred Tradition, which is an "inanimate thing passed from hand to hand,". Alright, so which is it, the sin of idolatry or the blessing of veneration?

The Roman Catholic Church teaches there is a difference between idolatry and veneration. It says, "Idolatry etymologically denotes Divine worship given to an image, but its signification has been extended to all Divine worship given to anyone or anything but the true God . . . An essential difference exists between idolatry and the veneration of images practiced [sic] in the Catholic Church, viz., that while the idolater credits the image he reverences with Divinity or Divine powers, the Catholic knows "that in images there is no divinity or virtue on account of which they are to be worshipped, that no petitions can be addressed to them, and that no trust is to be placed in them."

The Roman Catholic Church has defined idolatry far too narrowly in its favour. Let's consider two things.

Their Worship in the Roman Catholic Church

First, notice that it says "divine worship" should be given only to God. This works out to mean that other forms of worship to Mary are okay as long as it isn't "divine worship." But what is "divine worship?" After searching through the Vatican Website as I did today, the Catholic Encyclopedia, the entire Council of Trent, Vatican II and the Catechism of the Catholic Church,⁷ Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma, and the Catholic Dictionary the best I could find was, "Now the divine worship is directed to the glorification of God."

That is a nice and brief comment, but it isn't descriptive enough. Why is it that in all these sources Divine Worship is not defined? Perhaps it is because offering a strict definition might make them vulnerable to criticism concerning their worship of Mary.

Roman Catholicism says that divine worship is for God only, yet it also says it is okay to bow down before a statue of Mary, pray to Mary, believe that Mary delivers us from death, believe Mary atoned for us, etc., as long as you don't give her "divine worship." In other words, you can do almost anything worship-wise to Mary as you would to God--just don't call it "divine worship."

Exodus 20:5 and "worship"

The Hebrew word for "worship" in Exodus 20:5 (the Ten Commandments) is "shachah" s Enhanced Lexicon says about "Take a look at what the Strong .שָׁחָה .the word "172 occurrences; AV translates as "worship" 99 times, "bow" 31 times, "bow down" 18 times, "obedience" nine times, "reverence" five times,

“fall down” three times, “themselves” twice, “stoop” once, “crouch” once, and translated miscellaneously three times. 1 to bow down. 1a (Qal) to bow down. 1b (Hiphil) to depress (fig). 1c (Hithpael). 1c1 to bow down, prostrate oneself. 1c1a before superior in homage. 1c1b before God in worship. 1c1c before false gods. 1c1d before angel."

Bowing down is part of the act of worship--as you can see above. Clearly, Roman Catholics who bow down before statues of Mary (and others) are risking breaking the commandment not to worship other gods and not to bow down before idols. The Catholic Church responds by saying that as long as it isn't divine worship given to Mary, it is okay. But this is nothing more than a word game. They do the same thing to Mary that they would to God and excuse it by saying that it isn't divine worship. The funny thing is that God doesn't make the same distinction as the Catholics do. God says don't do it. Don't bow down before images (Leviticus 26:1)

The Forbidden Idolatry

The Roman Catholic definition of idolatry used above says "the idolater credits the image he reverences with Divinity or Divine powers." Again after searching all the sources listed above, divine powers is not defined. The best I found was "divine power preserved Christ's body from corruption." (CCC 627) and "Divine power is inexhaustible" (Catholic Encyclopedia, Omnipotence). Roman Catholicism does not attribute divinity to Mary (at least, not yet), but it does attribute divine powers to her: atonement of sin, divine access to God, delivering our souls from death; her intercession brings us salvation, etc.

Such magnificent attributes of Mary are found nowhere in Scripture. Let me say this again, none of these things are found in God's inspired word. They are, however, said to be found in the Roman Catholic Church's Sacred Tradition. I cannot help considering what God said through the Apostle Paul about not exceeding what is written in the word of God.

"Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that in us you might learn not to exceed what is written, in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against the other." (I Corinthians 4:6)

So, the Roman Catholic Church is commanded by Scripture to not exceed what is written in God's word. Has it done that? Has it exceeded the limits of Scripture? Yes, it has.

In the Bible, NASB, the word idol (and its cognates idols and idolatry) occurs 175 times in 162 verses. I read every one of the 175 verses, and not once did I find a reference to the idolators actually considering the idols in their hands and/or to which they bowed as actually being alive because that is what it would mean to claim that they were divine. Remember, Catholicism says, "the idolater credits the image he reverences with Divinity or Divine powers.". But this is wrong. You see, the Catholic Church is stacking the definitional deck in its favor so as to separate itself from the biblical teaching of idolatry and maintain its practice of bowing down before various statues and praying to saints.

But saying the Roman Catholic Church is practicing idolatry doesn't prove anything. So, let's turn to God's word and take a look at the examples of idolatry and then see if the Roman Catholic Church practices the same thing concerning Mary:

Altars to Idols: (2 Chronicles 33:15)

"From the beginning of Christianity special veneration was paid to the Mother of God, which in the language of theology is called hyperdulia, to distinguish the honour rendered to her from that given to the other saints. It is not strange, therefore, that after the main or principal altar, the most prominent is that dedicated in a special manner to the Mother of God; and to indicate this specific preference, this altar is usually placed in the most prominent position in the church, i.e. at the right (gospel) side of the main altar. In general it signifies any altar of which the Blessed Virgin is the titular."

Bowing down to images: (Leviticus 26: 1; Joshua 23: 7)

All across the world, images of Mary are elevated in Feasts and Churches. In those churches, people very often bow down to statues of Mary. This is a violation of scripture.

Images in the House of God: (2 Chronicles 33: 6-7)

Roman Catholic Churches are full of images of all sorts in, what we could call, the houses of God, the Roman Catholic Churches. The most prominent are those of Mary.

Idols in the hearts (Ezekiel 14:3)

Veneration of Mary is accomplished in the heart. "The Blessed Virgin, as manifesting in a sublimer manner than any other creature the goodness of God,

deserves from us a higher recognition and deeper veneration than any other of the saints; and this peculiar cultus due to her because of her unique position in the Divine economy, is designated in theology hyperdulia, that is dulia in an eminent degree."

Kissing statues (Hosea 13:2)

All over the world, Catholics not only bow to statues of Mary but also will ceremoniously kiss the statue's feet. There is no record found from the Vatican that denounces such a practice.

Making graven images (Exodus 20: 4-5)

It should go without saying that statues and images of Mary are too countless to number within the Roman Catholic Churches around the world. If Mary is in heaven and they make images of her, then they violate the Scripture.

Making Male and Female images (Deuteronomy 4:15)

The Roman Catholic Church is full of male and female statues representing Jesus, Joseph, Mary, and others. They are often used in worship services, and many people bow down before them.

Praying towards (Isaiah 44: 17)

CCC par. 2675, "Beginning with Mary's unique cooperation with the working of the Holy Spirit, the Churches developed their prayer to the holy Mother of God, centering it on the person of Christ manifested in his mysteries . . . "

Request for deliverance (Isaiah 44:17)

Par. 966, " . . . You [Mary] conceived the living God and, by your prayers, will deliver our souls from death."

Worshipping images (Deuteronomy 4: 19; Exodus 20: 4-5)

" . . . when she [Mary] is the subject of preaching and worship she prompts the faithful to come to her Son . . . " (Vatican Council II, p. 420). Statues of Mary often have her depicted with Stars in her crown, an allusion, says Catholicism to Revelation 12:1-2, " And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; 2

and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labour and in pain to give birth."

Worship of false gods, canonising people to become saints and be venerated

Acts 10:24-26, "And on the following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends. 25 And when it came about that Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him. 26 But Peter raised him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am just a man." Revelation 22:8-9, "And I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. 9 And he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book; worship God."

" . . . when she [Mary] is the subject of preaching and worship she prompts the faithful to come to her Son . . . " (Vatican Council II, p. 420).

Purgatory, a non-sense

Purgatory is believed by Roman Catholics, and very few other Christians, to be a location or state where the souls of most individuals go at the time of death. It has traditionally been viewed as a place of torment, where "*nearly all of us shall...have to pass a period more or less long in the excruciating fires of Purgatory after death.*" ² Gregory the Great wrote "*that the pain be more intolerable than any one can suffer in this life.*"

Augustine and St. Bonaventure agree. The purpose of this pain is to cleanse the individual from the temporal consequences of her or his sins while on earth. Eventually, the person will be sufficiently purified to be eligible to be transferred to Heaven. The end result of this teaching is that many Catholics are particularly frightened of death. Belief in Purgatory as a place or process is rejected by essentially all Protestants. Eastern Orthodox Churches have no detailed teaching of Purgatory.

Where it is!

Some have puzzled whether Hell and Purgatory are actually in the same location. St. Thomas Aquinas quotes Gregory the Great as quoting St. Augustine

who wrote: "*Even as in the same fire gold glistens and straw smokes, so in the same fire the sinner burns and the elect is cleansed.*" St. Augustine apparently believed that the same fire that tortures the sinful in Hell also is used to purify the saved in Purgatory. Some believe that this implies that Purgatory and Hell are either adjacent or in the same location. Aquinas wrote that there are probably two Purgatory locations: one is inside the earth and is close hell so that they can share the same fire. The other location is above the earth, between us and God.

Throwing doubt on Aquinas' beliefs are two more recent developments:

Space exploration has not yet uncovered any sign of Purgatory above the earth. Deep holes drilled into the earth have not discovered Purgatory either, although there have been some interesting Christian urban legends to the contrary.

However, Father Francis Xavier Schoupe S.J., has provided an explanation for the apparent inability of science to locate Purgatory :

" The opinion concerning a subterranean Hell has nothing to fear from modern science. A science purely natural is incompetent in questions which belong, as does this one, to the supernatural order. Moreover we know that spirits may be in a place occupied by bodies, as though these bodies did not exist. Whatever, then, the interior of the earth may be, whether it be entirely of fire, as geologists commonly say, or whether it be in any other state, there is nothing to prevent its serving as a sojourn of spirits, even of spirits clothed with a risen body. The Apostle St. Paul teaches us that the air is filled with a multitude of evil spirits: We have to combat, says he, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places. (Eph. 6:12). ... Now, if angels and other spirits can inhabit our atmosphere, whilst the physical world is not in the least degree changed, why cannot the souls of the dead dwell in the bosom of the earth?"

Various beliefs about Purgatory

Many unofficial beliefs have arisen among individual Catholics: One source quotes Mary as saying that there are many levels in Purgatory. Living Christians can pray on behalf of individuals in Purgatory in order to give the latter temporary relief from pain. Those in the lowest level of Purgatory can only receive respite from their torture through the prayers of the living on NOV-2. The greatest number of souls leave Purgatory on Christmas day.

One writer comments:

"Do penance, or you will burn long years in Purgatory, is a fact that there is no getting away from...Which of us does not tremble when he thinks of those who have been burnt to death in a slow fire? What fear would not be ours if we had to face a similar death? Yet their suffering was of relatively short duration. The incomparably fiercer fire of Purgatory, which we may have to face, may last 20, or 50 or 100 years!"

Another source lists a *Prayer of St. Gertrude the Great*, which M. Cardinal Pahiarcia allegedly said (at Lisbon, Portugal, on 1936-MAR-4) would release 1000 souls from Purgatory each time it is recited:

"Eternal Father, I offer thee the most precious blood of thy Divine [sic] Son, Jesus, in union with the Masses said throughout the world today, for all the Holy Souls in Purgatory, for sinners everywhere, for sinners in the Universal Church, those in my own home and with in my family. Amen."

It is not beyond the realm of possibility for a single person to repeat this prayer 1000 times a day, and thus release 1 million souls from Purgatory daily. A three person team, working for an entire year could release over one billion souls!

The morality of Purgatory

Some suggest that Purgatory must have been created by God to fulfill its specific functions. The morality of torturing people like Christianity always have done (we cannot deny it, and today the I.S. (Islamic State), perhaps for millennia, in Purgatory cannot be considered immoral, because God cannot perform an immoral act (same is heard in the Islam).

However, if the activities in Purgatory were to be replicated by humans on Earth, then they would be regarded as depraved crimes against humanity -- far more serious than anything that went on in Iraq's *Abu Grahbab* prison. Those responsible would be considered moral lepers and receive long jail sentences.

Conclusion

It is doubtful that any consensus can be reached on the morality of Purgatory and the activities there.

Of all the doctrines invented by the Church of Rome, that of purgatory, with its associated teaching about indulgences, seems to have been one of the most

harmful. It is still an integral part of its teaching. The Roman Catholic Catechism states that it is 'the place where souls suffer for a time after death on account of their sins'.

Every person, so the Church of Rome teaches, is liable to eternal and temporal punishment for his sins. God, on account of his Son, pardons the eternal punishment for Christians so that they need not go to hell. But even the Christian after death will suffer in purgatory, which is defined as a place where the pain is as intense as that of hell but does not last for all eternity. Thus the temporal punishment due to sins, which God has not forgiven the sinner, has to be worked off by acts of penance in this life, and in a state of suffering and misery hereafter.

A doctrine of this magnitude and importance ought surely to be plainly stated in Scripture, yet a careful study of the Bible reveals no evidence of it. The one or two texts quoted are quite inadequate. Where Paul speaks of being saved 'yet so as by fire' (1 Corinthians 3:12 ff), is a good example, and is also regarded by the Church of Rome as a full proof of its teaching about purgatory. Examination of the passage shows that, first, Paul is not speaking about Christians in general, but teachers in the church, and the nature of the work they do in building up the church, some of which is shoddy and poor workmanship and will not stand the test, but some of it is good and will endure. Secondly, the nature of the test, 'as by fire', refers not to the cleansing of the person, but the testing of the work of such teachers in the church, which is a very different thing. Thus the passage has nothing whatever to do with the doctrine of purgatory as taught by the Church of Rome. It is unthinkable that on a matter as important as this our Lord and his apostles would have given the church no clear teaching.

More than this, the Gospel itself makes no distinction like that which the Church of Rome makes between eternal and temporal punishment. There is no suggestion that God reserves a clause relating to temporal punishment when he commands the Gospel of full forgiveness of sins to be preached. What would we think of a government that declared a general amnesty without reserve, but then later, when the offenders came forward, stated that it related only to certain kinds of offenses and not to others.

The teaching of the Scriptures on the state of the believer after death contradicts the doctrine of purgatory. To die, says Paul, is 'to depart and be with Christ which is far better' (Philippians 1:23). To have everlasting life, through faith in Christ, means that we 'shall not come into condemnation; but have passed from death to life' (John 5:24).

The doctrine of purgatory inspires fear and binds the laity ever more tightly to the priesthood who claim to be able to release souls from purgatory by the offering of the sacrifice of the mass for the dead, though, strangely, the priest is quite incapable of saying when a soul is released and when such masses should cease.

Associated with this is also the doctrine of indulgences. The church, it is claimed, has the power to remit punishment in purgatory upon the performance of certain pious acts, such as the saying of certain prayers, or visits to holy places.

It is well known that in earlier centuries the Roman Church gained great income from the direct sale of indulgences. Although this iniquitous practice has now been discontinued, the Roman Church still makes huge profits out of indulgences, by the alms which are encouraged when indulgences are sought, and by the sale of rosaries and other articles to which indulgences are attached. We can be sure that if the Church of Rome got rid of its doctrine of purgatory a great part of its wealth would disappear with it.

Article XXII of the Church of England rightly condemns the doctrine of purgatory as 'a fond thing vainly invented and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God'. Nothing has happened to change the validity and relevance of those words, and we must be thankful that they speak so plainly and warn so clearly of the danger.

Final Evaluation

While Roman Catholic theology has a number of doctrines in common with conservative Protestant theology (Trinity, deity of Christ, etc.) there are many serious deviations from orthodox theology. A fundamental difference is the authority of tradition in addition to the authority of the Bible. In its outworking, tradition in a sense supersedes the authority of the Bible because tradition and church councils make decrees that countermand and/ or add to the explicit teachings of the Holy Scriptures. The recognition of the Apocrypha is a further deviation. The place of Mary in Roman Catholic theology removes Christ from His rightful place as unique mediator between God and men (I Timothy 2:5). Also the entire system of sacraments is a genuine rejection of the true grace of God and salvation by grace. Salvation in Roman Catholic theology is not by grace through faith but a complex adherence to the sacraments and rituals as legislated by the church hierarchy.

The Inventions of the Roman Catholic Church throughout the Ages

All that the Roman Catholic Church has taught throughout the Ages are certainly not divinely inspired. The Papacy alone, aided by the temporal power, imposed these “ideas”, to the clergy and the faithful, most of the time completely non-biblical. So:

- Were introduced in the year 120 by the Roman Church: the penances.
- In year 200 the institution of ordination established the priesthood.
- The papacy in the year 220 creates as means of grace to obtain salvation: indulgences.
- In the year 325, the Council of Nicaea accepts the dogma of the 'Holy Trinity' which was introduced by the Council of Constantinople.
- In the year 364 was the “Sunday” introduced, already celebrated by Emperor Constantine.
- In the year 378, Gratien, Emperor of the Western Roman Empire from 375. It prohibited the pagan worship in Rome and forbade the wear the insignia of 'Pontifex Maximus'. Damascus Christian bishop, used the title for himself (year 378).
- In the year 381, the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople meets to define the dogma of the "Holy Trinity". Nectarius was appointed Patriarch of Constantinople and assigned to occupy the second rank after Rome.
- The worship of relics was allowed in the year 397.
- In the year 431, Mary was recognised as the ‘Mother of God’.
- In year 440, Leo I becomes Pope in Rome. He was the first to consider himself, as the “Vicar of Christ”, by creating a new theocracy and decided to wear a tiara rather than a diadem, considering it as a symbol of universal sovereignty.
- In the 449 years, the authority of the Popes as superior to other bishops was recognised.
- In the year 476, Pope Felix III excommunicated the Patriarch of Constantinople. The crisis between the churches of East and West grew worse!
- In the year 595, Gregory the Great introduced in the Catholic Church, a new dogma: the purgatory.
- In the year 600, incense was admitted.

- In the year 815, the invocation of Mary and the Saints was elevated to ecclesiastical tradition.
- In the year 726, Emperor Leo III of Constantinople prohibits the worship of images and orders to destroy them all. The war of the iconoclasts began. Pope Gregory II in Rome excommunicated the Emperor.
- In the year 800, the Pope crowned Charlemagne, King of the Franks, as Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire; and, in so doing not only places himself above every kingship (the sovereigns), but interferes even in political affairs. He totally ignored the existence of Empress Irene, who reigned in Constantinople.
- In the year 855, concerning the feminine Pope Joan (Jeanne), (known as John the Englishman), with two years reigning after the death of Pope Leo IV, no pope or clergyman had questioned her existence. The reformer John Huss referred to her at the Council of Constance in 1415, but nobody protested. All the bishops present believed in her existence. Only pope Pius II (1458-1464) first disputed the existence of Pope Joan. (True or fiction!)
- In the year 1000, the holy water made its appearance.
- In the year 1054, Pope Leo IX attempts to conquer the Eastern Church in Rome. He excommunicated the Patriarch of Constantinople Cerulius Michel. It is believed that this failure was the main cause in preaching the crusades preached against the pagans and the great schism.
- In the year 1074, the celibacy of the priests was decided.
- In the year 1200, the sacrament of extreme unction.
- In the year 1220, was introduced the worship of the host
- In the year 1311, it was decided that the tiara "crown of the Popes" will be without thorns but richly adorned with gold and diamonds.
- In the year 1349, Indulgences in 1349 began to be easily applied: Sobald des geld in der Kasse klinget, die Seele in den Himmel springt (Once the money in the fund sounds, the soul passes into heaven).
- In the year 1545, it was decreed that the traditions of the Catholic Church have the same value as the Holy Scriptures.
- In the year 1549, was instituted the feast of the dead by the Council of Trent.
- In the year 1854, the Catholic view of the "Immaculate Conception" becomes a dogma.
- In the year 1870, the pontifical infallibility also becomes a dogma.
- In the year 1950, the Papacy created the doctrine of Assumption, solemnity on August 15, or the next Sunday in some countries.

- And, this is not finished, as we all know too well.

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