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SALVO

Issue 70 Fall 2024 — Your Quarterly Reality Check

WHAT NEXT?

AFTER ATHEISM

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The Irony of Scientistic Hubris by Mike Mitchell

A Neo-Hippie Religion by Roberto Ureña

Paganism Old & New by Rick Reed

New Atheists for Christ?

by Joshua Pauling

Counting to God

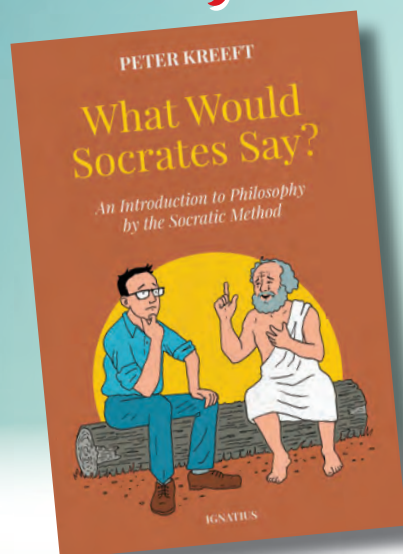
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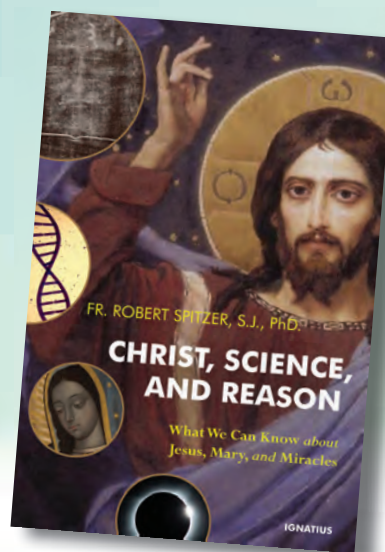
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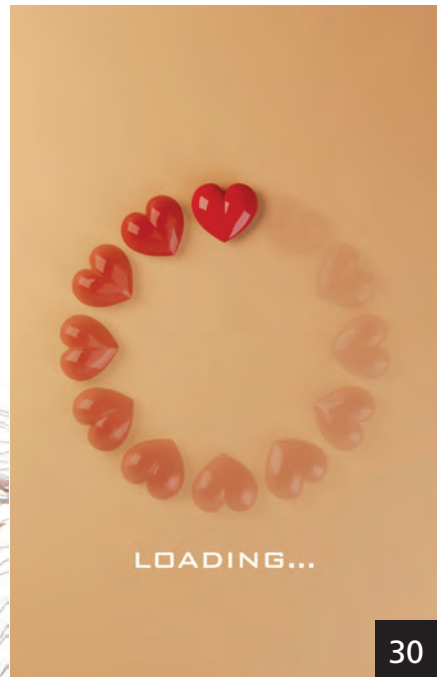
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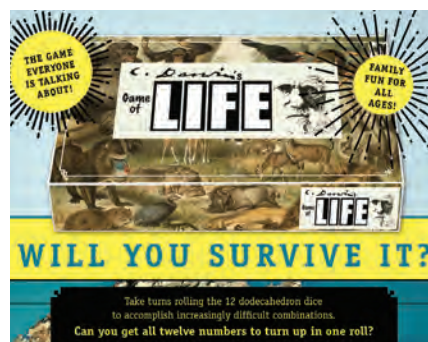


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salvo n. (säl'vō)

1. A group of shots fired simultaneously for effect
2. A forceful verbal or written assault

A publication of The Fellowship of St. James (www.fsj.org), *Salvo* is dedicated to debunking the modern myths that have undercut human dignity, all but destroyed the notions of virtue and morality, and slowly eroded our appetite for transcendence. It also seeks to promote the Christian worldview. The opinions expressed by individual contributors are not necessarily those of the editors or publisher.

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REASONS TO BELIEVE



Fall 2024

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Return to Babel

Religion in the Post-Christian West

by Terrell Clemmons

Isaac Newton's third law of motion states that whenever one object exerts a force on another object, the second object will exert an equal and opposite force on the first. Although reactions are less exact, there seems to be a corollary in the metaphysical realm. After the U.S. was attacked in 2001 by religious jihadists, we saw a spate of bestsellers by atheists asserting that "God is not great" and "religion poisons everything." Richard Dawkins, their primary figurehead, called for believers to be ridiculed so reason could lead the way, and there followed a rise of "nones" professing no religion.

Twenty years on, humanity's religious impulses have resurged, but not in the form of our grandfathers' ole time religion. Nor are today's vaunted ideas necessarily reasonable. (For just one example, see "New Age in Wonderland," p. 50.) As I write, the 2024 Olympics are underway. If it wasn't clear before, the opening ceremony plastered it all over the internet: Western civilization is devolving into paganism (see p. 7 for a breakdown of the term). Secularism has failed, and old gods are on the rise.

Religion by Other Names

When we understand the biblical worldview categories of creation, fall, and redemption, we can see how certain narratives mimic the divine drama. Transgenderism, for example, is predicated on the notion of a mystical "gender identity." Utterly untethered to anything physical, it pertains only to the immaterial soul, but the soul has a problem. The way for it to solve its plight is to transition, after which a new creature is "born," complete with a new

name and identity. Earlier this year, the president made the death-and-resurrection motif more explicit when he proclaimed March 31 (Easter Sunday) "Transgender Day of Visibility."

There are commands, such as rules against "deadnaming," and language prescriptions. And there are liturgies. The catechized community offers up refrains of affirmation for the new creature, while meting out punitive measures to the unregenerate.

Sexual Reality in the Crosshairs

And no ideological system would be complete without a clearly identified enemy. In preparing this issue, I learned a new word in the sexual identitarians' vocabulary: *allocishet*. It breaks down to this: "cis" refers to anyone whose gender identity aligns with his or her given sex, and "het" means anyone whose sexual attractions are hetero. *Cishet* is simply non-LGBTQ+. Since the lexicon includes entries for the sexually neutered (asexual) and romantically stunted (aromantic), "allo" was added to



create a more precise term designating only those cishets who experience sexual-romantic attractions. ("Allo" means "other" or "atypical.")

In simple terms, then, *allocishet* is a neologism for what used to be seen as a *normal, healthy adult*. No doubt, the term originated in the mind of some academic theorist, but I learned of it from a Scholastic resource guide. Yes, the children's book publisher (see p. 12). The point of this etymological digression is this: while to early sexual revolutionaries, to be queer was to be *other* and take pride in it, the game has changed. Now, those of us who recognize sexual reality are the *other*—or, in the flattened universe of critical-theory dichotomies, we are the *oppressor*. And oppressors are not to be tolerated.

The newspeak is confusing, but in times of war, confusing the enemy is a strategic objective. There is much to lament about what a return to Babel is doing to upend the sacred order of reality, but we bring you these field reports in hopes of helping you and yours stay informed and prepared to engage in the spiritual conflict we find ourselves navigating. The enemies of all that is good, true, and beautiful are waging a war on reality, but we hope you read on in good courage. In a conflict between falsehood and reality, reality always eventually prevails. ☸



Salvo welcomes letters in response to articles and blog posts or raising matters of interest to readers. Letters may be edited for space; please keep them under 200 words.
letters@salvomag.com

Identity Wisdom

As a new reader of *Salvo*, I am writing after reading my first issue. "Identity Checkup" (Spring 2024) was outstanding! The way the doctor gently handled the girl's questions was touching. I can picture Jesus himself lovingly explaining to her why he made her like he did. Every adolescent struggling with gender identity needs to read this piece. If they did, we could end this insanity immediately!

I wish the doctor had also addressed her questions on gays and explained that the 23rd chromosome is naturally attracted to the opposite. But that is for another article. Again, outstanding job publishing this much-needed info. Keep up the great work.

—Steve Samuelson

Reply:

Thank you for the thoughtful and affirming feedback. I too am concerned that youth are receiving a cultural message that sexual attraction is a purely subjective and private feeling experience that can legitimately go any direction, rather than something rooted in the created order and made for the purpose of procreation as possible only in the union of an XX female and XY male. Such thinking opens



the door not only to dangerous sexual experimentation, but to a failure in developing the strength of character necessary for impulse control, setting youth on a path that can lead to a life lost in hedonistic nihilism or sexual addictions.

In an encounter such as the one described, I do my best to focus on the first issue at hand while maintaining the relationship with the patient so that the door remains open to future and broader conversations.

—Bruce Woodall, MD

Not Mad

I'm confused about the inside back cover of issue 69, which depicts an advertisement of Planned Parenthood. Was this a satire of Planned Parenthood on gender identification and the use of proper pronouns, or is this an actual advertisement? If this is a real purchased advertisement, what is a Christian publication doing

supporting Planned Parenthood? If this is the case, I want absolutely nothing to do with this publication or renewing my subscription. Please clarify *Salvo's* stance on the subject. Respectfully,

—Aaron Lopez Sr.

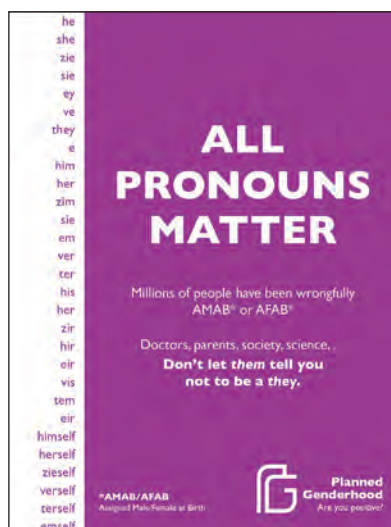
Reply:

Thank you for your letter. The answer to your question is, yes, the ad (one of our hallmark Fake Ads) is satire—primarily of gender theory and pronoun bunk, but it also takes a swipe at Planned Parenthood, which is now cashing in on the tsunami of confusion incited by sex and gender radicals. We, like you, want nothing to do with the abortion leviathan.

Our founding editor Bobby Maddex wrote in *Salvo* 3 (Summer 2007) that *Salvo* was launched to be "a magazine that would identify the false messages circulating throughout society and then deconstruct them, some sort of guide that would help subscribers navigate through the jungle of lies and myths that, tragically, is the current American cultural landscape." The goal then, as now, is to "demonstrate to readers—using logic and common sense, yes, but also humor and ridicule and parody—that you have to be mad, blind, or completely apathetic to buy into some of the mindsets that pass for truth these days."

Your letter indicates that you are neither mad, blind, nor apathetic in the face of cultural confusion. Welcome to *Salvo*! We hope you find it to be a breath of fresh, sane air against a societal backdrop of certifiably madness.

—Terrell Clemmons





Godless

by Rick Reed

PAGAN: *n. one who is not a Christian, Muslim, or Jew; one who professes no religious belief*

“Pagan” has undergone an interesting transformation. In ancient times, the Latin *pagus* referred to “country people, provincials, rural dwellers.” Around 1300, it referred to “a person of non-Christian or non-Jewish” faith, and by 1568, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, its adjectival form meant “not belonging to a nation or community that acknowledges the true God.” The current definition first appeared in 1908 and has since been chiefly applied to pantheists and nature worshippers.

Nineteenth-century philologists speculated that the religious sense arose from the fact that city dwellers adopted Christianity faster than rural dwellers, who persisted in worshiping the Greco-Roman pantheon. More recent scholars favor the suggestion that it derives from Roman military jargon, in which *paganus* referred to mere civilians, or what we might today call “country bumpkins.” Indeed, both Augustine and Tertullian used *paganus* in this manner.

Theological & Moral Relativism

Today, John Daniel Davidson observes that a broader range of meaning has come into play. In *Pagan America: The Decline of Christianity and the Dark Age to Come*, he writes, “The term ‘pagan’ . . . refers rather to an entire system of belief, which holds that truth is relative and that we are therefore free to ascribe sacred or divine status to the here and now, to things or activities, even to human beings if they’re powerful enough.” A

central pillar of this new paganism holds that, “since nothing is true, everything is permitted.”

For example, abortion advocates presuppose that a child’s right to life is not an inalienable moral absolute but is a relative matter on which the mother alone makes a choice based on her morality and desires. In other words, it is not the child’s God-given life that is sacred and inviolable but, as Howard Moody, ordained minister in the American Baptist Churches and the United Church of Christ, put it, “The right to choose is a God-given right with which persons are endowed.”¹

Against the rise of this lawless relativism, Davidson contends that it was the teachings of Christianity that led to the tenets of classical liberalism and the concept of rights to begin with. While our classically liberal founders believed that the survival of the new republic depended on the influence of Judeo-Christian religion and morality, the demands of the new paganism eschew this influence and insist instead that religion must be a private matter.



Christianity Vis-à-Vis the New Paganism

Through acts of love and compassion, Christianity supplanted the concept that might makes right, the sexual exploitation of both adults and children, and ultimately the institutions of slavery. Though rulers and individuals might defy Christian morality, its power shaped the intellectual and spiritual lives of those who embraced it, giving rise to our concept of human rights, along with our sense of the good and the true and the created beauty expressed in all the arts.

The word that started as a dismissive label for backwoods country bumpkins may best describe the aggressive progressivism that now amalgamates scientism (not science), a new sacrificial system (abortion), and a new salvation (transhumanism), along with a host of perversions such as transgenderism and pedophilia.

Post-Enlightenment thinkers sought to enjoy the temporal gifts of Christianity while rejecting their spiritual wellspring. It was an impossible endeavor, and it is failing before our eyes. Only Christianity can stand against the new paganism as it once stood against the old. To the new pagans who say, “resistance is futile,” the Christian can reply in Christ’s own words that even “the gates of hell shall not prevail.” ☸

Note

1. Samira Kawash, “Holy Abortion,” *First Things* (December 2023).

Won't Be Cowed

In March 2022, Texas Children's Hospital announced it was ceasing "gender-affirming" care for minors after Texas Governor Greg Abbott directed child welfare agents to treat it like child abuse. In May 2023, investigative journalist Christopher Rufo announced he had received documents showing that the Houston hospital was nonetheless continuing to perform transgender procedures on children as young as 11 while lying to the public about it. The whistleblower, 33-year-old surgeon Eithan Haims, did not

disclose any personally identifiable patient information or break any law, but simply followed through on his legal obligation and professional duty to "do no harm."

On June 4, 2024, he woke up to three heavily armed U.S. Marshalls at his door. He has been indicted by the U.S. Department of Justice with four felony counts of violating HIPAA law. He faces up to ten years in prison and exorbitant legal fees but refuses to back down. Rufo characterizes the case as "an inflection point in the debate on 'gender-affirming care.' If Haim prevails, other courageous doctors and medical professionals will



follow his lead and speak out."

Indeed, courage is contagious. In mid-June, a second whistleblower brought forth information about the hospital's billing Medicaid for underage "reassignment" procedures in violation of state law. Readers can support and follow Haim's case at www.givesendgo.com/texas_whistleblower. •

Sources: <https://www.city-journal.org/article/sex-change-procedures-at-texas-childrens-hospital>; <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/whistleblower-doctor-refuses-to-be-intimidated-by-govt-after-exposing-transgender-surgeries-on-minors>; <https://www.city-journal.org/article/doj-indicts-doctor-who-exposed-the-barbarism-of-gender-affirming-car>

Science in Medicine Returns

The Front Line Covid-19 Critical Care Alliance (FLCCC) was founded in March 2020 by a



small group of freethinking doctors who focused their efforts on prevention and early treatment of Covid-19. In June 2024, FLCCC announced the launch of a new medical journal that will publish crucial scientific research, including often-under-reported topics of growing concern in the medical community. "This new multispecialty medical journal will advance unbiased, high-quality medical knowledge and evidence-based resources. Notably, the *Journal of*

the FLCCC Alliance will not accept funding from pharmaceutical companies or governmental agencies. In an era where impartiality in medical publications is often clouded by significant bias and conflicts of interest, the *Journal of the FLCCC Alliance* will stand as an ethical force of independence and objectivity—uninfluenced by corporate interests or public health agency agendas," read the press release. FLCCC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit funded entirely by donations from individuals and charitable organizations. •

Source: <https://covid19criticalcare.com/flccc-journal-announcement>

Pride Subdued

In June 2023, Idaho MassResistance parents objected (peacefully) to a "Pride" event being held in a public venue near a playground where children would be exposed to sexual profligacy. After the event, they published photos of the deviance that had been on public display. Notably, the Pride 2024 event was smaller and more "tame,"

suggesting that the mere publication of photos had had a dampening effect.

And it gets better. In expectation of a repeat protest, Pride 2024 organizers had posted signs warning that MassResistance was a "hate group" and recommending Pride celebrants "ignore" them. But MassResistance had a different plan for 2024. They reserved a nearby pavilion, hung a banner that read "Prideful No More," and ran

continuous videos of detransitioners telling their stories. Ironically, the warning signs likely drew more attention than they would have otherwise received. "Most of them had never heard our information before," MassResistance reported afterward. "Several of them thanked us for being there. ... we brought a message to the 'Pride month' event that people there needed to hear. All in all, it was a very successful day." •

Source: <https://www.massresistance.org/docs/gen5/24b/ID-pride-subdued-by-MR-protest/index.html>

Parents Informing Parents

In 2015, the ACLU, in combination with several gay activist groups, published a 68-page document titled “Schools in Transition: A Guide for Supporting Transgender Students in K–12 Schools.” It recommended ways to affirm children’s transgender and gender-expansive expressions while proactively

keeping parents out of the loop. Around 20,000 districts across the U.S. have adopted some version of a secrecy or parent-exclusion policy based on the “Schools in Transition” model. Parents Defending Education tracks implementations of these policies, along with other concerning agenda-driven intrusions in education, by school district. Parents



can search by zip code at <https://defended.org/> to keep abreast of developments in their area. •

Source: <https://crossexamined.org/the-real-life-horror-stories-of-gender-ideology-and-public-schools-with-laura-bryant-hanford/>

Not All Unicorns & Rainbows

A Public Religion Research Institute poll released in June shows that LGBT+ enthusiasm is waning. A total of 65 percent

of U.S. respondents in 2024 supported “marriage” (51 percent) or some other legal recognition (14 percent) of same-sex unions, a seven-point drop from the 72 percent total in 2021. The average drop across 26 countries was three percentage points.

Regarding corporate promotions of LGBT+ in marketing, less than half (44 percent) approved in 2024,

a five-point drop since 2021. Less than a third (27 percent) support transgender athletes competing in the category of their preferred, as opposed to their natal, sex, representing another five-point drop since 2021. *Lifesite’s* Jonathon Van Maren attributes the drop in support to people realizing “that there is no room for moderates on the progressive Left. You get with the sexual revolution and get over your squeamishness or you get out. Plenty of people,” he comments drily, “are opting for the latter.” •



Sources: <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2024-05/Pride%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>; <https://www.lifesitenews.com/blogs/support-for-homosexual-marriage-declining-in-the-us-as-more-americans-wake-up-to-lgbt-agenda/>

Long Story Short

Some scientific concepts are best conveyed through visuals, and when the visuals are engaging and entertaining, that’s all the better. In 2020, the Discovery Institute published the first episode in its Long Story Short series. The series offers animated videos (about 8–12 minutes each) that explain key points in the evolution-ID debate. ID proponents are used to online trolls taking potshots, but much of the feedback on Long Story Shorts has been positive. A biology professor commented on Episode 12 (“The Myth of Junk DNA”) that he had learned something new



from it. Other commenters said, “These are a fantastic resource I use when teaching high school students,” “Really great and accessible

breakdown of the topic ... as entertaining as science can possibly be!” and “the best video series on YouTube.” •

Source: <https://www.discovery.org/video-series/long-story-short>

Next Gen Drag?

In December 2023, Pope Francis announced the World Children's Day initiative, sponsored by the Dicastery for Culture and Education to address the question of what kind of world we wish to pass on to the "little ones" who are growing up. The first World Children's Day was held in May at Olympic Stadium and St. Peter's Square in Rome with a reported attendance of



thousand, including children from more than 100 countries. One event featured Salerno native and drag performer Carmine De Rosa, who

danced for small children in drag. A quick-change artist, De Rosa reportedly performed in multiple outfits including suggestive cardboard costumes. If the Dicastery for Culture and Education wants the little ones to grow up in a world of sexual confusion, World Children's Day 2024 was a fitting start. •

Sources: <https://www.romereports.com/en/2024/05/24/pope-francis-will-spend-the-weekend-celebrating-the-first-eve-world-childrens-day/>; <https://www.worldchildrenday.org/>; <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/male-drag-artist-dances-for-kids-at-vaticans-world-childrens-day>

"Choose Life" = Terrorism

A leaked slide from a July 10 terrorism briefing at Fort Liberty (formerly Fort Bragg) listed several pro-life organizations as terrorists. The day after a photo of a slide showing the logos of the National Right to Life Committee and Operation Rescue, along with a New York state "Choose Life" license plate, under the heading "TERRORIST GROUPS" was posted online, the military walked back the slide as "not vetted by the appropriate approval authorities" and said

that the slides had been pulled. But the slanderous assertion appears not to be a one-off oversight. On July 12, Sen. Ted Budd (R-NC) wrote a letter to Army Secretary Christine Wormuth. After noting drily that "the American public expects the Department of Defense and its personnel to defend the homeland from actual terrorists, not Americans who seek protections for children in the womb," he asked, among other questions, how long the slides had been in use. On July 16, Ms. Wormuth responded,



saying that while "these slides do not represent the official policy or views of the U.S. Army," they have been used at Fort Liberty "for at least the last seven years." •

Sources: <https://www.lifenews.com/2024/07/23/army-has-labeled-pro-life-americans-terrorists-for-over-7-years/>; <https://x.com/SenTedBuddNC/status/1813980220161974620/photo/3>

Technoference

The term "technoference" has been used to refer to "an interruption in a social interaction caused by device use." Researchers at the University of Texas–Austin evaluated the extent to which phone use interfered with interactions among mother-infant pairs and found that, overall, the mothers' verbal interactions with their children dropped by 16 percent while they were using their phones.



For extended periods of phone use (seven minutes or more), the mothers' per-minute word count dropped

by 12 percent, but for brief snippets of phone use, as little as one to two minutes, it dropped by 26 percent. Parents in the know are well aware that indiscriminate phone use is harmful to children. This study offers evidence that the harm may operate in more ways than one. •

Source: <https://www.theepochtimes.com/health/phone-use-reduced-mother-to-infant-speech-by-16-percent-study-5676087>

Abortion Malinformation

More than half of abortions in America are now chemically induced at home. Proponents call them “self-managed medication abortions.” Although commonly called the “abortion pill,” the regimen consists of two pills, mifepristone and misoprostol, taken a day or two apart. The first blocks progesterone, thus ending the life of the child. The second causes uterine contractions to expel it. It is FDA-approved for up to ten weeks’ gestation, but a study published last year in the journal *Obstetrics & Gynecology* has been lauded as finding that women can successfully abort at home even “well beyond the first trimester.”

There are devils lurking in the details, here. The oddly worded conclusion of the study addresses

abortion “completion,” but not safety. “People

who self-managed an abortion with medication between 9 and 16 weeks of gestation had high levels of abortion completion and accessed health care to confirm completion or to treat potential complications.” Continuing: “findings ... indicate that abortion completion between 9 and 16 weeks of gestation remains high when the medication is self-managed ... findings support the conclusion that with accurate information and support, people are capable of following instructions on how to take medications required to medically manage abortion between 9 and 16 weeks of gestation.”

The laudatory PR rarely notes the study’s additional finding that “one in four women sought ‘medical care’ after their abortions.” Let that



sink in—one in four. Reasons for seeking post-abortion medical care included bleeding, pain, fever, and discharge, and treatments included “procedural evacuation of the uterus,” “blood transfusion,” and “overnight [stays] in the hospital.”

So women’s health be damned, but come hell or high water, the “people” followed instructions and the abortions were “complete.” Apparently, we are to take that as “success.” •

Sources: <https://pregnancyhelpnews.com/another-pro-abortion-study-concluding-that-chemical-abortions-are-safe-later-in-pregnancy>; https://journals.lww.com/greenjournal/fulltext/2023/08000/effectiveness_of_self_managed_medication_abortion.13.aspx

Men Demanding Babies

A consortium of gay activist groups, including one called “Family Equality” and another one called “Men Having Babies,” has succeeded in getting

a bill introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives. In simple terms, the *Equal Access to Reproductive Care Act* would enable anyone to procure the services of sperm donors, surrogates, and assisted reproduction practitioners as a

standard medical expense. It currently has 54 cosponsors (all Democrat).

The language contortions might make George Orwell blush. First, pregnancy is something that is “effected.” The bill defines assisted

reproduction as “any methods, treatments, procedures, and services for effectuating a pregnancy and bringing it to term.” And it completely redefines the meaning of infertility. Men Having Babies praised the bill’s “new definition of ‘infertility’ that includes ‘a person’s inability to reproduce either as a single individual or with a partner without medical intervention.’” Also, don’t miss that “reproductive care,” here, necessarily encompasses far more than the standard range of conventional obstetrics services.

For men and women to want to become parents is natural. But to forego the natural means by which babies have been made throughout human history, yet still demand on grounds of “equality” the services of others to satisfy those desires, is a new low in the annals of humanistic hubris. •



Sources: <https://thebridgehead.ca/2022/08/16/lgbt-group-men-having-babies-backs-democrat-bill-funding-surrogate-children-for-same-sex-couples/>; <https://www.congress.gov/bills/118/congress/house/bills/4391/all-info>



Perverting with Pride

Scholastic Books:
Promoting Queerness for
Children of All Ages

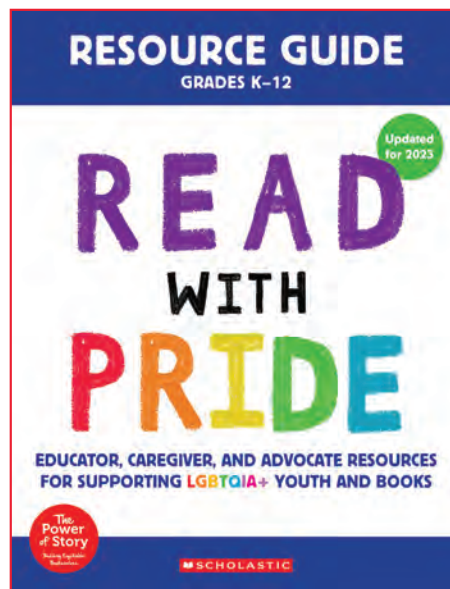
by Emily Morales

Background

Scholastic has been a trusted source for children's books for nearly 100 years. Since the 1980s, Scholastic Book Fairs have been delivering classic series, such as *The Baby-Sitters Club* and *The Magic School Bus*, along with nonfiction titles showcasing American heroes, historical events, and natural wonders, directly to schools. Parents and children alike could shop with confidence, knowing that Scholastic materials were wholesome and age appropriate. While the dawn of the new millennium saw an increase in resources aligned with progressive environmental and social justice causes, these did not actively undermine traditional values surrounding marriage and family or sexuality and identity.

Reason for Surveillance

Not so anymore. Scholastic has now expanded its catalog to include a range of literature centered on LGBTQ+ themes. Among additions too numerous to list here is *Melissa* (for readers ages 8–12; previously published as *George*), in which “Melissa,” a gender-confused boy known to the rest of the world as George, dreams of playing the role of Charlotte in his fourth-grade play, *Charlotte's Web*. Despite facing obstacles from his teacher and mother,



George/Melissa conspires with his friend Kelly (the girl who was cast as Charlotte) to play the role of the spider, thus enabling him to reveal his “true self” to his family and classmates. The story ends on a “happy” note as “Melissa” find joy and acceptance living as “her” authentic self. The award-winning author of *Melissa*, which has now been published in 15 languages, is Alex Gino, who identifies as genderqueer. Scholastic offers several books by Gino and others featuring queer child protagonists heroically coming to terms with aberrant sexualities and identities, often in the face of villains who see human sexuality only in the narrow context of cisgender binaries.

So as to leave no age range out, Scholastic offers picture books such as *My Moms Love Me* for children as young as three, and, for adolescents, a generous line of graphic novels celebrating queer

identities, “feelings,” “irresistible romance,” and “the delightful ways in which love works.”

Most Egregious Offense

As if the metastasizing array of trans and queer literature were not enough, in 2023 Scholastic released a 12-page “Read with Pride” resource guide¹ for educators, caregivers, and advocates (there is a curious absence of the words “parents,” “moms,” and “dads”). It provides definitions of a wide spectrum of gender and sexual identities, a resource list of LGBTQ-advocacy organizations and websites, and a list of recommended books for children ages zero to young adult. Informed parents will not be surprised at Scholastic’s shift; the ideological capture of schools and libraries has long been apparent, making a trusted children’s publisher the perfect vector for further dissemination of progressive, sexual ideologies.

The guide riffs off of the Critical Theory oppressor-oppressed binary in a way that sets up framing of anyone adhering to traditional values as “others,” if not villains. A new term in the two-page glossary, *allocishet* is “a shorthand to describe people whose gender and sexuality are privileged by society.” That would include all non-affirming moms and dads, along with everyone else who recognizes the sexual binary and heterosexuality as the norm. Meanwhile affirming “allies”—teachers, school nurses, counselors, coaches, librarians, and administrators—are cast as accepting heroes, thus further making schools unsafe for children’s innocence. ☹

Note

1. The Scholastic webpage for this guide is no longer active. *Salvo* saved a copy, and at the time this issue went to print, excerpts were also available at Massachusetts Informed Parents’s Substack.



Fallen Christians, Perfect God

*Why the Existence of Hypocrites
Doesn't Falsify Christianity*

by Keith Hess



"How can Christianity be true when it's caused so much harm?" "I don't believe in God because Christians are hypocritical." Perhaps you've encountered these objections, or perhaps you've made them. It's understandable that someone would move away from Christianity because of Christians who don't live up to it. But logically it doesn't follow that *because* Christians have caused harm, Christianity itself is therefore false.

Acknowledge Harm

At the outset, let me recognize the harm. John Dickson catalogues some of the evil Christians have done in the name of Christianity in his book *Bullies and Saints: An Honest Look at the Good and Evil of Christian History*. He also records how Christians have done good for the world. (Like hospitals? Thank the Church.)

However, the harm continues today. Pastors fail, Christians snub, the church hurts. To some extent it's not surprising. In fact, the Scriptures predict it. Jesus told his disciples that there would be false prophets among his people (Matthew 7:15), and Paul writes that all of mankind falls short of God's standards (Romans 3:23). We are all hypocritical to some extent.

But not all perceived harm is actual harm. Christians are often accused of being unloving. Perhaps that's because there's disagreement over what it means to be loving. Christians ought not define loving behavior according to current—and ever-shifting—cultural standards but by the life of Christ. Sometimes the most loving thing

to do is to call out bad behavior. And that's not always received well, even when done well.

Does Not Follow

Again, just because Christians are imperfect, it does not mean Christianity is false. This is a *non sequitur*: the conclusion does not follow from the premise. It's another way of saying that the argument isn't valid. For an argument to be valid, the conclusion must be true whenever the premise(s) are true. For example: Ed is a horse; therefore, Ed is a mammal. If it's true that Ed is a horse, it must be true that Ed is a mammal. Alternatively, we could argue that Ed is a mammal; therefore, Ed is a horse. But this is an invalid argument. Even if it's true that Ed is a mammal, it doesn't follow that he's a horse—he could be a dog or a human or any of a number of other mammals.

So is the argument under consideration a valid argument? No. Consider it again: Christians are imperfect; therefore, Christianity is false. It still may be true that Christianity is true even

if Christians are imperfect. And as mentioned above, it's part of Christian teaching that Christians are imperfect.

The Standard for Truth

So what would make Christianity true? There's a lot to say here, but let's focus on two major claims Christianity makes: God exists, and Jesus rose from the dead. What makes a claim true is that it corresponds to reality. If God is real and Jesus actually rose from the dead, then Christianity is true. This is so whether or not Christians live up to Christian standards. God would be pretty fragile if his existence depended upon how well Christians behaved themselves.

Still, Don't Be a Jerk

This doesn't give the Christian license. If you're a Christian, live up to it! Jesus told his disciples that their behavior toward one another would affect their witness: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).

So don't dishonor his name by living for yourself. Don't sin so that grace may abound. (Yet grace still abounds.) Let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. Don't be the reason someone walks away from Christ. While the truth of Christianity does not depend on your virtuous living, the well-being of others does. ☉

Spy for Life

Jim Olson: Eschewing Cynicism in the Face of Evil

by Bob Perry

If you ask the gray-haired, mild-mannered professor emeritus from the Texas A&M Bush School of Government if “Jim Olson” is really his name, he will tell you, “It is now.” Jim must be coy about identifying himself too cavalierly. There are dangerous people all around the world who are not too fond of him, mostly because of how successful he was at stealing their secrets.

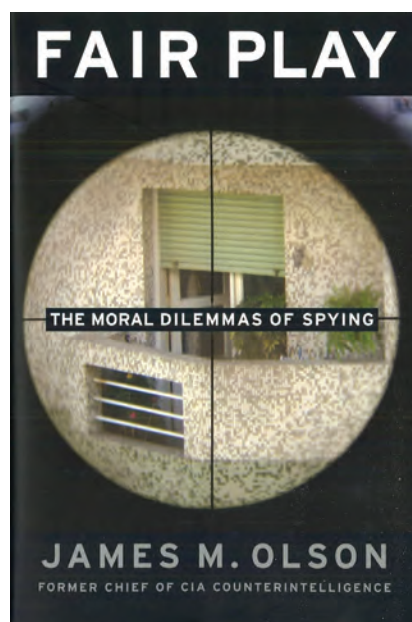
After serving as the CIA’s Chief of Counterintelligence, Jim could tell you plenty of stories about his career as a spy. He describes his most dangerous mission as one that began by slinking down a Moscow manhole. Alone at night, he navigated below the Russian streets to place a listening device on one of the Soviets’ top-secret communications cables. If caught, he would have undoubtedly been executed and his disappearance explained away with a cover story.

It’s a night that lives as a vivid memory for Jim, but in one way, it was not unique at all. On this and every mission, Olson recalls that, “I had this physical feeling—very palpable—that I was not alone. That [God] was there. I could feel his protective presence. I can’t tell you how much strength and confidence that gave me.”¹

His name may not always have been “Jim Olson,” but one thing about him that has never changed is the faith that emanates outward from the core of his being. That faith motivated him to confront evil wherever he found it. And he has spent a lifetime doing just that.

Doing Something

After rising to the rank of lieutenant commander in the U.S. Navy, Jim attended law school at the



University of Iowa. In his final year there, he was approached by a CIA recruiter. After an initial interview and pledge of confidentiality, Jim was subjected to rigorous vetting that left no area of his private life untouched. But the further he moved through the process, the more intrigued he became with it. With the haunting specter of the Cold War looming in the background, Olson saw Communist totalitarianism as an existential threat to freedom around the world. Joining the CIA seemed like an answer to the call he felt to go out and do something about it.

Once established in the agency, he met Meredith. They were soon married, and they went on to operate as a husband-and-wife spy team in Paris, Mexico City, Vienna, and Moscow. Tom Clancy used the couple (*without* their permission) as the model for the central characters in his Cold War spycraft novel, *Red Rabbit*. The Olsons helped penetrate every important entity in Russia—the foreign ministry, the defense ministry, and the KGB. They provided unprecedented, incredibly valuable information to the U.S. government. But they were doing it at great personal risk.

Their children were in constant danger—at one point in Vienna, threatened directly by name at their home address. They had close friends who began to vanish in the 1980s, victims of moles inside the CIA who were selling out their fellow agents for cash. One of the moles was a colleague they had known since 1976—the infamous Aldrich Ames, who sold secrets to the Soviets from 1985 to 1994. Jim holds him in contempt to this day, not just for selling secrets, but for his culpability for the murder of several fellow American agents.

The Biblical Case for Spying

The Olsons manipulated, coerced, and stole from the enemies of America. They lied every day of their lives, not just to their targets, but to their family. For the 31 years they operated undercover, Meredith’s parents believed their daughter had married an underachiever who couldn’t hold a steady job, who barely eked out a living, and who moved his family all over the world for no apparent reason. The Olsons lived a double life—but they did all of it with a clear conscience.

In his book, *Fair Play: The Moral Dilemmas of Spying*, Olson makes the case that all of it was consistent with their faith. In the hierarchy of moral realism, they

were fighting in a greater global war against the evil of atheistic Communism. Done with proper oversight, says Jim, "Spying is biblical." But there are limits.

What constitutes acceptable moral behavior in any given operational scenario has too often been left to the judgment of individual intelligence officers, their supervisors, or other senior officials. This has been a recipe for confusion, abuse, and cover-up. No profession, particularly one that can hide behind a veil of secrecy, should police itself.²

Pursuing moral clarity was not just a theoretical enterprise for the Olsons. It was a way of life.

The Moral Evil of Our Time

The Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision in January 1973 stands as another vivid memory for Jim Olson. The pure evil of it struck him like a lightning bolt:

Meredith and I were face-to-face with a lot of Communist evil. It was vicious and cruel. But abortion—the slaughter of innocent human beings—is the greatest moral evil of our time.³

When they left the CIA in 1997, the Olsons were given the opportunity to confront evil in a new way. In 1998, a year after Jim began teaching at the Bush School of Government in College Station, Texas, Planned Parenthood opened an abortion center across town.

A few years later, four young members of the local Coalition for Life held a prayer vigil as a first step in trying to bring an end to abortion in their community. Their campaign of prayer and fasting, community outreach, and peaceful vigil over a 40-day timespan eventually became the basis for the pro-life ministry now known as "40 Days for Life." Jim Olson was the founding board chair of that organization.

Today, the ministry Olson helped launch has spread to dozens of countries on six continents. One such location is in Moscow. That's ironic in itself, but the Olsons' fight against evil has come full circle in more ways than that. Today, the very building that housed that College Station Planned Parenthood now houses the 40 Days for Life headquarters.⁴

"Eschew Cynicism"

For 50 years, *Roe* enjoyed legal dominance in America. Much like the Cold War Soviet Union, it seemed too formidable a nemesis to ever be defeated. During his time in the CIA, Jim Olson couldn't imagine he would ever witness the collapse of the USSR. Likewise, he never believed *Roe* would be overturned. But he approached both of those battles in the same way. To

Jim Olson, persistence in the face of evil is not optional, no matter how futile the cause may seem.

On his office desk at the Bush Center, Olson displays a sign he had custom-made to greet his visitors. The sign reads, "Eschew Cynicism," and he explains why:

You're going to see things in government, or even the pro-life movement,



that will depress you. You're going to see politics, careerism, dishonesty, corruption, illegality. It's very easy to become cynical and disillusioned—to think it's pointless and the forces against you are winning. But if you lose hope or your idealism, you've lost everything. You have to stay focused on your vision, your mission. That's what will give you the strength to carry on.⁵

Very few of us will ever serve as spies or found a global pro-life ministry. But every one of us can apply Jim Olson's outlook to whatever we do in our little corner of the world. Fighting evil is always the right thing to do, whether or not we ever see our efforts pay off this side of eternity. ☉

Notes

1. "Under Cover with CIA Spy Jim Olson," *40 Days for Life Podcast*, Season 8, Episodes 15 & 16.
2. James Olson, *Fair Play: The Moral Dilemmas of Spying* (Potomac Books, 2006), Preface.
3. Podcast, Ep16.
4. See *Unplanned* (2019) for the film version of this story.
5. Podcast, Ep16.



“The Science”

The relationship that ensues between Gulliver and the Lilliputians is like that between much of the modern West and the concept of science. Just as Gulliver’s initial act of heroism inspires the Lilliputians to believe he’s more powerful than he actually is, the dazzling feats of modern science have inclined many of us to think of science not simply as a life-enriching tool but as an all-encompassing, life-directing authority. In the popular imagination, science has ascended to a place of privilege in field where its claims to authority are about as legitimate as Gulliver’s conceits about his personal history. Today, the phrase “The Science” makes an impression on the minds of many moderns similar to the effect “The Crown” had on the minds of medieval English subjects—to ques-

tion the legitimacy of The Crown was to set oneself at odds with an immutable authority, to step outside the boundaries of the world in which wise and decent people live.

To think of “The Science” this way is to embrace the philosophy of “scientism.” Steven Pinker, one of its giddiest proponents, wrote that “The moral worldview of any scientifically literate person—one who is not blinkered by fundamentalism—requires a clean break from religious conceptions of meaning and value. ... The worldview that guides the moral and spiritual values of a knowledgeable person today is the worldview given to us by science.”¹ Similarly, T. H. Huxley (a.k.a. “Darwin’s Bulldog”) captured the epistemology of scientism more than a hundred years ago when he said, “The scientific method [is] the only method by which truth could

Lame Imaginings

The Irony of Scientific Hubris

by Mike Mitchell

In the 2010 film rendition of *Gulliver’s Travels*, Gulliver (Jack Black) arrives in Lilliput from a mysterious unknown land. The Lilliputians are suspicious of him—until he rescues the princess and saves the king. They then hail him as “our savior,” and he uses this newfound status to portray himself as someone fantastically superior to the shipwrecked mailroom clerk he really is. He is the noble and victorious President, and the Awesome from the Island of Manhattan whose father was Darth Vader. He also died in the sinking of the *Titanic* but was later revived. The Lilliputians’ imaginations are shaped by his completely fabricated lore, so they accept his audacious claims without question and build an elaborate home for him.

be ascertained ... it is inevitable that [what is called] the scientific method must extend itself to all forms of enquiry."²

But enthroning science as a supreme arbiter in "all forms of inquiry" results in something like an attempt to reproduce the full text of *Hamlet* in Morse code. As unequivocal as such language may be—or as promising as it may seem—many of the most important aspects of human flourishing are no more accessible to the scientific method than they are to Morse code. We should be deeply grateful for the ways science and technology have enriched our lives, but we should also realize the limits of scientific insight.

The good news is hubris inevitably ends in folly. The more *overconfident* adherents to scientism become, the more they expose the fact that the most important things in life lie outside the scope of science.

The Overconfident Paranormal Investigator

There are few better examples of tragicomic, overconfident scientism than the argument proposed by radio host and paranormal investigator Carrie Poppy in her 2017 TED talk, "A Scientific Approach to the Paranormal." She began by explaining some disturbing phenomena she experienced upon entering her home: hearing spooky wind noises and feeling a physical pressure on her chest and a distinct sense of dread as if she were being watched. She naively suspected these to be signs of a haunting and even resorted to a spiritual cleansing ritual in which she burned sage to repel evil spirits.

But then she consulted a group of skeptics who suggested that her home was not haunted but had been poisoned by a carbon monoxide leak. So she called the gas company. The technician who came out told her, "It's a

really good thing that you called us tonight, because you could have been dead very soon." Her audience then erupted in a response of sympathetic triumph.

She explains that this liberating "disillusionment" was the epiphany that led her to become a paranormal investigator focusing on scientific explanations of alleged paranormal activity. In the culmination of her talk, she concludes, "I've done over 70 investigations like this. I would love to tell you that nine times out of ten, science wins, saves the day, it's all explained. That's not true. [Rhetorical pause] The truth is, ten times out of ten, science wins. It saves the day!"

As one might expect, this also triggers a swell of victorious applause from the scientifically minded congregation. It's doubtful any of them realized that their very reaction gave clear evidence of a distinctly *nonmaterial* reality to which they all had access.

The Elephant in the Room of Scientific Triumphalism

The folly comes to light when we consider exactly *what* Ms. Poppy was being commended for. What specifically does science "win"? And what are we saved from when science "saves the day"? Clearly, the supposed victory is that of science over superstition, which came when she "learned" that all events *thought to be caused by supernatural powers were actually*

caused by purely material causes—causes completely accessible to the scientific method. The unstated premise is that spiritual beings (if they exist at all) cannot affect ma-

terial things. Therefore, we are saved from "superstition" by always appealing to "science" rather than to religious or supernatural explanations. In this way, truth wins over falsehood.

And so Ms. Poppy is commended by the audience for the honorable trait of aligning her beliefs with the facts, even when the facts

are contrary to her preconceived notions. While fools would rather believe a happy lie than a disturbing truth, *she* values the truth, and the audience applauds her virtue in this respect. *She* is praiseworthy, while *others* who choose familiarity and comfort over truth are derelict.

But the elephant in this room of naturalistic triumphalism is that, without a free and undetermined will—that is, apart from the human capacity for decision-making—there can be no such thing as moral praise or blame.

In choosing to acknowledge the greater value of one thing (the truth) over another (personal bias), Ms. Poppy affects the material realm via a nonmaterial cause—the force of her will—by *choosing* to focus her attention on, and change, her behavior. As C. S. Lewis explains, "If we are in fact spirits, not Nature's offspring, then there must be some point (probably the brain)

When someone admonishes us to drop our belief in a nonmaterial will and attribute everything about human beings to biochemicals, there is always an implicit expectation that we make an exception for the one speaking.

at which created spirit even now can produce effects on matter not by manipulation or technics but simply by the wish to do so. If that is what you mean by magic then magic is a reality manifested every time you move your hand or think a thought."³

Nonmateriality & the Meaning of Words

This may seem like a controversial point, but it is a matter of fact confirmed in common experience. If a man gets drunk at a party and says to someone he's barely met, "I love you" or "Did you know I used to be an astronaut?", another person—a friend, perhaps worried for his safety—might say, "Don't take him seriously. It's the alcohol talking." This is common enough to be cliché, and it illustrates our understanding of the indissoluble, nonmaterial soul of human beings.

The idea that we shouldn't take a drunk person's words seriously clarifies the distinction between the chemical and the person. We know that the words of an intoxicated person are suspect because the words are attributed to the effect of a chemical (alcohol) rather than to the person. It's not *him* talking. The thoughts the words express are not originating from *his* mind, or at least not from his "right mind."

To use another example, the words "I love you" are only meaningful if they come from the heart, that is from the spiritual will or intent of the individual. It does not matter whether it's the alcohol or the natural-chemicals-in-the-brain-since-birth talking. If one believes that human beings are entirely reducible to, and thus determined by, chemical reactions, then every word any person ever says is just as nonsensical and meaningless as the words of a thoroughly drunk person.

As Sam Harris says about one's ability to choose his outlook

and behavior, "There is no extra part of me [apart from spiritless matter] that could decide to see the world differently."⁴ If this is so, the appropriate response to every word ever spoken would be, "Pay no attention. That's just the chemicals talking." But, of course, we're then left with the very tricky problem of taking seriously the words of the person telling us that all other words are only caused by mindless chemicals. When someone admonishes us to drop our belief in a nonmaterial will and attribute everything about human beings to biochemicals, there is always an implicit expectation that we make an exception for the one speaking.

This being the case, every time someone makes an argument, every time we speak the truth to counter a falsehood, every time we declare with conviction, "I mean it! With all *my* heart!" we are making emphatic and pronounced our nonmaterial, spiritual nature, which can no more be attributed to atoms and chemicals than a man's self-sacrifice in battle can be attributed to a nervous reflex. Medals are not given to commemorate an excess of adrenaline. White gowns and wedding rings are not poetic expressions of reproductive hormones.

The Lamest

Those who take pride in intellectual superiority for forcing spirit and matter into a zero-sum game bring to mind another character from *Gulliver's Travels*. General Edward Edwardian is jealous of Gulliver, but his attempt to establish his superiority backfires when he tries to use language from Gulliver's world that he doesn't understand:

Gulliver (unaware that Edward is approaching from behind): "This Edward guy seems like kind of a lame ass."

Edward (indignantly): "A lame what? It is my impression that 'lame ass' is a negative expression from whence you came. If this is the case, you shall be thrown into stocks!"

Gulliver: "No, no, no, no. 'Lame ass' means great, brave, courageous—heart-of-a-lion man."

Edward: "Then I am not just a lame ass. I am a big lame ass."

Gulliver: "The biggest!"

Edward: "I, General Edward Edwardian, am the biggest lame ass in all of the land!"

Delusions of Degradation

People who think they are exposing the impossibility of nonmaterial reality by triumphantly proclaiming, "Ten times out of ten, science saves the day," are playing General Edwardian's role, but in the opposite direction. Edward is a delusion of grandeur, which is comically exposed by his ignorance of a certain phrase; naturalist philosophers have a delusion of degradation. They think they are only tissues and chemical configurations, when really, they are blazing spirits—a truth ironically revealed in the spiritual passion with which they argue against the possibility of spiritual power. ☉

Notes

1. Steven Pinker, *Enlightenment Now, The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress* (2019), p. 394.
2. T. H. Huxley, "Professor Huxley on Men of Science," *The Mechanics' Magazine* (October 14, 1871), pp. 284-85; quoted in *The Territories of Science and Religion*, by Peter Harrison (2015).
3. C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*, Ch. 16.
4. Sam Harris, *Free Will*.

—This article has been adapted from *Truth Before Logic: Finding Wisdom with G. K. Chesterton in a World Blinkered by Scientism*, by Mike Mitchell (Resource Publications, 2024).



L. Sergius Paulus inscription from Pisidian Antioch

Finding Sergius

Paul's Encounter with the Roman Governor of Cyprus

by Titus Kennedy

In the early days of archaeology, the accounts of Paul's journeys recorded in the Acts of the Apostles were considered by many scholars to be fictitious narratives written decades after the events were said to have occurred. Although the general setting was understood to be the historical reality of the Roman Empire during the first century, many of the events, locations, and people named were assumed to be fictional inventions or inaccurate reflections of theologians. William M. Ramsay, one of the foremost scholars of archaeology and the New Testament from about 1880–1920, initially held this view, but after years of archaeological investigation and research, he concluded that the book of Acts was a masterful work full of verified details and that its author, Luke the physician, was a historian of the first rank.¹

Subsequent archaeological discoveries have further demonstrated the accuracy of Acts as a historical record of Paul's travels. One of the most substantial categories of archaeological corroboration has been that of historical attestations to people Paul encountered, including details such as their titles, places of residence, and actions.² One example is Sergius Paulus, a prominent Roman official whose name, location, position, and chronology have all been confirmed by archaeological discoveries.

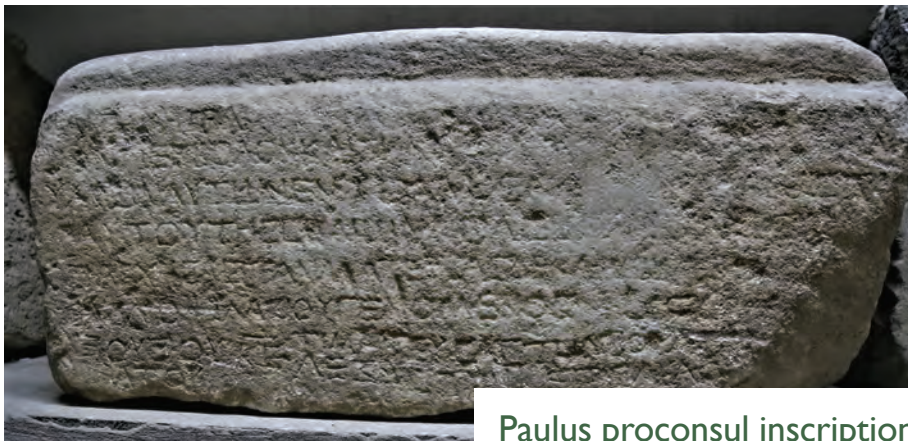
SERGIUS PAULUS, PROCONSUL OF CYPRUS

Luke records that Paul and Barnabas landed at Salamis on the east coast of Cyprus, journeyed through the whole island, and finally arrived at the Roman capital city of Paphos. There they met the governor, Sergius Paulus, along with a Jewish magician named Elymas. As a result of the encounter, Elymas was struck with blindness and Sergius Paulus became a Christian. Afterward, Paul and Barnabas traveled on to Pisidian Antioch.³ The year of this encounter, derived from information in Acts and the epistles of Paul, would have been around AD 45–47.⁴

Cyprus was indeed a Roman province at that time, having been established in 22 BC by Augustus as a senatorial province, meaning the provincial governor was appointed by the Senate instead of by the emperor, and thus the title for the governor was *proconsul*. Archaeological excavations and geographical information from ancient maps and historical texts demonstrate that Paphos was in fact the Roman capital of the province when Paul visited and was located on the western coast of Cyprus, just as it is described in the book of Acts, and that Luke uses the correct title for the governor—*proconsul* rather than *prefect*.⁵ Archaeological excavations at Paphos of the Roman period have uncovered a possible governor's

mansion or *praetorium* (the House of Theseus, fourth century AD), which may have been built upon the site of the first-century governor's mansion where Sergius Paulus would have lived while serving as proconsul. In addition, the contextual detail regarding Elymas, the influential magician, is supported by Pliny the Elder in his discussion of adept magicians on the island of Cyprus during the first century AD.⁶

Yet, archaeological discoveries and ancient manuscripts provide much more than merely contextual information, as Sergius Paulus is attested to by three archaeological inscriptions and mentioned as a source used by Pliny the Elder around AD 77 in his work *Natural History*.⁷ Perhaps the most important Sergius Paulus inscription in connection with Paul and Acts is one found on Cyprus not far from Paphos. This Greek text inscribed on stone was discovered at Soloi in Cyprus, north of Paphos, and it mentions the proconsul Paulus while placing his tenure as governor of the island before the thirteenth year of Claudius, or prior to AD 53.⁸ This means that Sergius Paulus must have been the proconsul of Cyprus earlier than AD 53. Additional detail on the inscription narrows down the time period even more, as it refers to Claudius taking actions to alter the Senate during the time when Sergius Paulus was proconsul of Cyprus. From Roman records, it is known that Claudius made modifications to the Senate in approximately AD 46–47, which indicates that Sergius Paulus was still serving as proconsul around AD 46–47. This places him as governor in Paphos during the period when Paul visited, although this information must be derived by consulting multiple sources.⁹ Also, it is notable that Luke correctly uses the Greek word *anthupatos*—the term found on the inscription, which is the equivalent of the Latin *proconsul*—to describe the position of Sergius Paulus, while elsewhere Luke uses the word *hegemon* for Pontius Pilatus, who was a prefect.¹⁰



Paulus proconsul inscription

SERGIUS PAULUS, ROMAN CURATOR

Another inscription from the city of Rome helps to pinpoint the year in which Sergius Paulus left his position as proconsul of Cyprus, while further attesting to his existence and prominence in the Roman political system. An official boundary stone found in Rome, which has been dated to AD 47 based on names it lists and the use of the title *princeps* (the unofficial title for the Roman emperor), rather than *censor* (the magistrate in charge of census, public morality, and state finances), bears a Latin inscription that records *curators* of the banks and channel of the Tiber River. Among the names is "L. Sergius Paulus."¹¹

Curators were appointed either by the Senate or the emperor himself, and a curator of this type was charged with managing the water supply. Because only the most influential and successful politicians in the empire, usually restricted to the patricians, could govern provinces and receive prestigious appointments in Rome, it is likely that there was only one Sergius Paulus of high rank in the empire during the first century AD. Therefore it is reasonable to conclude that this Lucius Sergius Paulus who was appointed a curator in Rome around AD 47 was the same Sergius Paulus who had served as proconsul of Cyprus.

SERGIUS PAULUS & PISIDIAN ANTIOCH

A third inscription, carved in large Latin letters on a stone found at Pisidian Antioch in the Roman province of Galatia, mentions a notable person named L. Sergius Paulus. This is possibly the same L. Sergius Paulus mentioned on the boundary stone in Rome.¹² However, an honorific inscription, once again referring to a Lucius Sergius Paulus and containing additional details regarding status and chronology, was also found near Pisidian Antioch. This text men-

tions a father and son who were both named Lucius, and it notes that L. Sergius Paulus was a quaestor (a public official) with Legio VI Ferrata.¹³ Because Legio VI Ferrata was involved in battles to the east of Pisidian Antioch, such as at Tigranocerta between AD 54–68, prior to the legion's being deployed to Judea Province and staying in what would later become Syria Palaestina,

this inscription indicates that a prominent L. Sergius Paulus was in the area of Pisidian Antioch in the early or mid-first century AD. This would likely be none other than the Sergius Paulus who served as proconsul of Cyprus and as a curator in Rome during the 40s AD.

The link between Sergius Paulus and Pisidian Antioch, a city Paul visited soon after meeting the proconsul in Paphos, is also intriguing. Perhaps Paul and Barnabas traveled from Paphos to Pisidian Antioch because of Sergius Paulus, who had become a recent convert to Christianity and had connections to the area. Certainly there is no other clear alternative explanation for their subsequent journey to this far away landlocked city.

Roman archaeological sources make it clear that the family of Sergius Paulus, the Sergii gens, had a long and storied history and for a time was prominent in the region of Pisidian Antioch. The family was based at a large estate northeast of the city in Vetissus, although family members held distinguished roles all over the republic and empire.¹⁴ For example, the Arch of the Sergii in Pula, Croatia, commemorates Lucius Sergius Lepidus for his role in the battle of Actium in 31 BC and mentions his wife, father, and uncle. For the governor Sergius Paulus, Luke employs a naming convention of the *nomen* (family name—Sergius) and the *cognomen* (additional distinguishing name—Paulus) while leaving out the *praenomen* (the personal name often passed from father to eldest son). In this way Luke is ensuring accuracy while eliminating repetitive, unnecessary information.¹⁵

MULTIPLE CORROBORATIONS

The information from the inscriptions and the ancient manuscripts, all of which feature a prominent Roman politician named Sergius Paulus who held high-ranking roles in the Roman government between approximately AD 40–68, indicates that he



Boundary marker of the Tiber River

served in an official capacity for many years, but may have suffered a downward trajectory after his term as governor of Cyprus and conversion to Christianity. The case of Sergius Paulus is only one of many that demonstrates the historical precision of the book of Acts and the reliability of Luke as an ancient historian. ☉

Notes

1. Ramsay, W. M, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament* (4th ed., 1920).
2. People mentioned in Acts and the epistles who have been confirmed archaeologically include Herod Agrippa I, Aretas IV, Emperor Claudius, Sergius Paulus, Erastus of Corinth, Gallio, Herod Agrippa II, Berenice, Felix, Festus, Caesar Nero, James, Peter, and possibly Aristarchus the Politarch. See Titus Kennedy, *Unearthing the Bible* (2020).
3. Acts 13:4–14.
4. E.g., Acts 11:26–28, 12:20–23, 18:2–12; 2 Corinthians 11:32; Galatians 1:18–2:1.
5. Strabo, *Geography* 14.6; Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 5.35; *Tabula Peutingeriana*; Suetonius, *Divus Titus* 5.
6. Pliny, *Natural History* 30.2.
7. Pliny, *Natural History* 18.90.
8. IGR III, 930.
9. Tacitus, *Annals* 11.25.

10. Acts 13:7; Luke 20:20.

11. CIL VI, 31545. The Latin spelling used is Paullus.

12. Sergius Paullus inscription in the Yalvac Museum.

13. AE 2002, 01457.

14. Another inscription from Kythraia, Cyprus, has been suggested as possibly attesting to the Sergius Paulus mentioned in Acts, but this text discusses an official tentatively identified as Quintus Sergius [Paulus?], and the Caesar mentioned in the text appears to be from the time of Tiberius or Caligula, not necessarily Claudius. The primary problem of associating this inscription with Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of Cyprus, however, is that the “Paulus” section of the inscription is so fragmentary that it is completely missing and thus purely speculative. It is possible that this member of the Sergii family was a relative of Sergius Paulus named Quintus Sergius.

15. Luke also used the *nomen* and *cognomen* formula for the governor Pontius Pilatus (cf. Luke 3:1).



Beauty for Boredom

A Summer Exercise in “Free Play”

by Nicole M. King

A friend recently told me about her sister-in-law’s “1990s-themed” summer. Her previous summer had been too programmed, so this season, she deliberately cut the extracurriculars. The family played more board games. They deliberately left margin for downtime.

As a child of the 1990s, I can appreciate the sentiment. Mine was perhaps the last generation that roamed freely. There was a good-sized group of girls on our street, and we would travel to and from different friends’ houses all day long. I remember very little adult supervision, other than somebody or other’s mother feeding us lunch or handing out the occasional Band-Aid. I do remember being required to phone home (from the friend’s landline!) to alert my mother when I had moved houses. But for the most part, we were on our own. We even had access to a state park that backed up to our neighborhood.

FREE PLAY & SELF-MANAGEMENT

Alas, no more. News sources for many years have commented on the change in childhood play. Instead of wandering the neighborhood, children are shuttled from one highly organized, adult-supervised activity to the next—sports practices, music lessons, camps, and the list goes on. When kids are home, they are increasingly plugged into screens. But more recent studies have questioned the health of such activities. Unstructured play, studies now show, fosters social interaction, cooperation, creativity, problem-solving skills, and much more.¹ Other studies have shown a link between adolescent depression and a lack of free play as a child.

Even more alarming are the findings of psychiatrist Dr. Stuart Brown, founder of the National Institute for Play. As a young scholar, Brown was the investigating psychiatrist in the 1966 University of Texas tower shooting, in which former Marine

Charles Whitman indiscriminately killed 15 people and injured 31 others. Brown subsequently interviewed 26 convicted Texas murderers and found some chilling similarities. Most were from abusive homes, and most—including Whitman—*didn’t play as children*.² Writes Melinda Moyer in *Scientific American*:

Brown did not know which factor was more important. But in the nearly 50 years since, he has interviewed more than 6,000 people about their childhoods, and his data suggest that a lack of opportunities for unstructured, imaginative play can keep children from growing into happy, well-adjusted adults.

In short, children must be allowed the opportunity to manage their own behavior, to decide the use of their own time, and to work out their own disappointments and conflicts if they are ever to grow into adults capable of doing these things.

BENEFITS FOR ALL

I have seen the benefits of “unstructured play” for my own children this past summer. For many years, we have enrolled our older children in a variety of camps all summer. Boredom, I thought, breeds





misbehavior. Bickering commences. My couch gets jumped on. People get angry and start throwing stuffed animals. It's not pleasant.

But for a variety of reasons, we didn't do that this summer. We took a few small trips, but for the most part, the kids had to work out their own entertainment.

I have to admit, even though I've long been academically aware of the benefits of unstructured play, I was hesitant to let it happen in my own family. But I was more than pleasantly surprised. We have four children, ages 2–10, and they played beautifully together. On many days, the older two spent hours playing Legos together in their room. Even my five-year-old daughter and her two-year-old sister could play house or dolls or doctor for at least an hour at a time, and often longer.

My children also demonstrated increasing ability to participate in what might be called "homemaking" activities. My oldest drove the lawn tractor over our acreage, watched his little sisters while I prepped dinner, and even did some light cooking himself. My five-year-old daughter's weekend "chore" was to play with her little sister while the rest of us cleaned. In a pinch one day, I asked my older boys to make

chocolate chip cookies for a family from church. They did so, elated. Nobody was injured. The house is still standing. The cookies were delicious.

Even more interesting—and this is something I fully did not expect—is that as my children demonstrated their ability to play together and take on more household chores, I had more time to "play" as well. I started baking my own bread. I learned to make tomato sauce from our garden tomatoes. I crocheted a baby blanket for my new niece. My kids were more helpful, and more capable, and thus my own time was freed up as well for homemaking tasks that I had long wanted to learn.

TOWARD SIMPLICITY

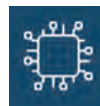
All of this—my kids' demonstrated abilities to handle themselves and my own increasing time to flex my creative muscle within our home—has made both parenting and homemaking a lot more pleasant. Don't get me wrong—I fully enjoy parenting, and I also fully enjoy cheering on the sidelines when my kids are doing some organized activity or another. But perhaps it is time for parents to slow down, take a step back, and allow their children to simply *play*.

An unintended result, as I have seen in my family, may be that the parents, too, have more time. Family life may become less chaotic, less driven by the consumeristic need to be entertained. We might become more productive together. And we might reclaim some serenity and beauty in the family home. ☺

Notes

1. Melinda Wenner Moyer, "Unstructured Play Is Critical to Child Development," *Scientific American* (May 1, 2016).
2. Ibid.

Children must be allowed the opportunity to manage their own behavior, to decide the use of their own time, and to work out their own disappointments and conflicts if they are ever to grow into adults capable of doing these things.



Technical Difficulties

Revisiting the Moral Hazards of In Vitro Fertilization

by Bryan Just

Anyone following the news this year has noticed that in vitro fertilization, or IVF, is getting a lot of airtime. IVF is not a new technology—the first “test tube” baby, Louise Brown, was born in 1978, and since then, more than eight million children have been born using this technology. Why, then, is IVF garnering attention and sparking debate?

IVF is a reproductive technology in which some of a woman’s eggs are taken from her body and fertilized with sperm in a lab. Following that, one or more of the resulting embryos are transferred back into her body to (hopefully) implant and develop into a healthy baby. It has become an increasingly common option presented to couples struggling with infertility, as well as those (such as singles or same-sex couples) who cannot conceive a child naturally.

IVF has been and remains quite popular in the U.S., even among many of those who are traditionally seen as conservative on reproductive issues: 78 percent of pro-life advocates support it, as do 83 percent of evangelicals.¹ However, ever since the Supreme Court’s 2022 *Dobbs* decision, which returned to the states the legislative authority to allow or prohibit abortion as they see fit, proponents of IVF have been concerned that it would become heavily regulated or even banned outright.

COSTLY SACRIFICES

The connection between IVF and abortion is not immediately obvious—IVF’s goal is to bring a new child into the world, while abortion actively prevents that from happening. What many do not realize is that in creating a new child, IVF always involves the destruction of others. Practitioners are quite up-front about this reality, as articles such as “Embryo Loss Is Integral to IVF”² and “Why Discarding Embryos Is Inherent to the IVF Process”³ have made clear. Some embryos are

discarded because they stop growing, others because they have some sort of genetic abnormality, and still others because they

are simply “left over” after the procedure. Because the success rate of IVF is much lower than commonly thought, multiple embryos are sometimes transferred at once. If several of them beat the odds and implant, IVF doctors advocate for “selective reduction” (i.e., aborting some of them) to avoid a risky pregnancy.

This close connection between IVF and the destruction of embryos is why so many were concerned by an Alabama Supreme Court ruling in February 2024, which determined that frozen embryos are protected by the state’s Wrongful Death of a Minor Act. The incident that led to this decision occurred in 2020. A patient at a Mobile, Alabama, hospital was allowed to enter a restricted cryo-preservation storage unit. The patient tried to pick up—and then dropped—a container of frozen embryos, killing them. Parents of the frozen embryos then sued the clinic for wrongful death in the losses of their children.

In answer to the question at the center of the case—the legal status of these embryos—the Alabama Supreme Court determined that its 1872 Wrongful Death of a Minor Act applies to children at all stages of development, including embryos that are not in utero. According to the court’s opinion, “unborn children are ‘children’ . . . without exception based on developmental stage, physical location, or any other ancillary characteristics.”

Proponents of IVF fear that, with embryos accorded this status, IVF as currently practiced would





eventually be prohibited, as it consistently destroys these developing persons in its quest for the best pregnancy possible. Notably, the Alabama Court's decision did not ban IVF, nor does it make it impossible or illegal to pursue it. Several IVF clinics in the state suspended operations soon after the ruling, but they did so simply because they feared the potential for litigation. In early March, the Alabama legislature passed a bill granting civil and criminal immunity to those who damage or destroy embryos in the process of IVF, and the clinics resumed operation as before.

It should also be noted that there are ways of minimizing embryo destruction in IVF, but these can be both time-consuming and costly. Given that a single IVF cycle can cost between \$15,000 and \$30,000, this is not an expense most people are willing to pay. Nor does the IVF industry, which was valued globally at \$40.7 billion in 2023, wish to see regulations that could cut into its profits

PRO-LIFE CONVICTIONS VS. POLITICAL EXPEDIENCY

The increased awareness of the destructive aspects of IVF is creating a struggle of conscience for many in the pro-life movement. While some, especially Catholics, have long been opposed to IVF, many approached the technology with a simplistic logic: if being pro-life means supporting the birth of babies and IVF helps create babies, then IVF must be good. Now, however, increasing numbers of pro-lifers are beginning to question this position and apply to IVF the same logic that has been applied to abortion. If life begins at conception and IVF necessarily involves the destruction of embryos after conception, then IVF must also be opposed.

In the wake of *Dobbs* and the Alabama decision, there has been a flurry of activity, both among those in favor of IVF and those opposed to it. Republicans are concerned that bans on IVF could harm their chances of reelection, so the GOP is actively working to distance itself from perceived opposition. For example, a memo from the National Republican Senatorial Committee Executive Director Jason Thielman tells candidates to "clearly state your support for IVF and fertility-related services as blessings for those seeking to have children" and to "publicly oppose any efforts to restrict access to IVF and other fertility treatments, framing such opposition as a defense of family values and individual freedom."

Such concerns also led Senators Ted Cruz (R-Tex) and Katie Britt (R-Ala) to introduce a bill that would prevent states from obtaining Medicaid funds if they banned IVF. This was ultimately defeated by Senate Democrats who thought that it did not provide enough protections. Their proposed counter legislation, the *Right to IVF Act*, would, as the name implies, create a legal right for anyone to pursue IVF and have it paid for by insurance.

In the midst of these legislative maneuverings, the Southern Baptist Convention made its own headlines this summer by passing a resolution highly critical of IVF. The resolution does not forbid participation in IVF outright, but it makes it clear that "not all technological means of assisting human reproduction are equally God-honoring or morally justified," and it urges Southern Baptists "to only utilize reproductive technologies consistent with" an affirmation of "the unconditional value and right to life of every human being, including those in an embryonic stage."

ETHICAL CONCERNS

Opponents of IVF are quick to point out that their opposition to the practice does not in any way reflect on or delegitimize the children who have already been born using this technology. They affirm that IVF babies should be accorded the same dignity and

What many do not realize is that in creating a new child, IVF always involves the destruction of others. Practitioners are quite up-front about this reality.

worth as all other children. Their concern is not to attack those already born but to question our society's use of and reliance on IVF technology. To that end, they identify numerous problems that go beyond the rampant destruction of human embryos inherent to the process.⁴

First, there is an alarming trend for couples facing infertility to be steered toward IVF before exploring any other options. As previously noted, the cost of a single IVF cycle can range from \$15,000 to \$30,000. Given that many women may need to undergo several cycles to achieve even a single viable pregnancy, there are huge financial incentives to push women towards it rather than towards other, significantly lower-cost options.

The very availability of IVF changes the way we think about and approach reproduction. The current trend of women waiting until later in life to begin family building is driven in part by IVF's promised ability to extend the childbearing years. The availability of IVF makes it much easier for couples to put off growing their families until later in life, even in spite of the lowered chances of a successful pregnancy and the greater risks to the mother as she gets older.

Perhaps most importantly, reproductive technologies like IVF are changing the way we think about having children. The term itself—"reproductive technologies"—exemplifies this shift. *Reproduction* is an industrial term. In a reproductive-technology mindset, children are no longer gifts given by God and received by parents but rather are the product of a clinical process pursued to fulfill their parents' wants and desires.⁵ It is telling that in discussions of IVF,

the focus is normally on the prospective *parents* and their supposed right to have a child in whatever way they choose. Little consideration is given to the children who are formed as a result of IVF or the ones who are destroyed because the adults administering the process, whether the parents or the practitioners, decided that certain embryonic children would not fulfill their parents' desires.

Debates over IVF and its place in society are, and will remain, complicated. Some would like to see it continue unchanged, others to see it completely banned. Between these extremes are those who want to strengthen regulations around IVF or discourage its use while encouraging less ethically problematic ways of approaching family formation.

People of all persuasions would be well-served to think deeply about IVF and why they support or oppose it. Though it is currently being fought over as a political issue, neither partisan rhetoric nor appeals to political expediency will provide guidance. What is needed is open and honest conversations about the profound ethical questions IVF raises around what it means to be human and the lengths to which we may go to perpetuate that humanity. ☉

Notes

1. Samantha Latson and Ursula Perano, "Senate GOP Urges Its Candidates to Support IVF after Alabama Ruling," *Politico* (Feb 23, 2024).
2. Annalisa Merelli, "Embryo Loss is Integral to IVF," *Stat News* (February 22, 2024).
3. Rachel Robertson, "Why Discarding Embryos Is Inherent to the IVF Process," *MedPage Today* (February 28, 2024).
4. Matthew Eppinette, "To Evangelicals: IVF Bioethical Questions to Grapple With," *The Christian Post* (April 1, 2024).
5. Gilbert Meilaender, "Children: Blessing or Project?" *Intersections* (July 11, 2023).



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The digital display shows the Salvomag website with the headline "The Epic Struggle Is Real" and subtext "Five Green-Belted Mayors That Christians Can Learn From". Below the headline are four article thumbnails: "The Road to Rome", "Schizophrenia: A New Hope", "The Road to Rome", and "The Road to Rome".



It Matters

*When It Comes to
Strength & Speed,
It Matters a Lot*

by Bruce Woodall

The 2011 documentary *Too Fast to Be a Woman?: The Story of Caster Semenya* tells the story of a loving South African family celebrating the successes and challenges in the life of their daughter Caster, a gifted runner who becomes entangled in legal wranglings regarding gender eligibility in women's sports. The film puts a human face on the thorny controversy that pits questions of fairness against inclusivity as these contending issues play out in the life of an athlete raised and identifying as a female while possessing a male genome.

— Developmental Differentiation

In embryonic development, following the fusion of two gametes—an egg and a sperm—the resulting human zygote possesses a unique genome, or genetic library, comprised of 23 chromosome pairs. Each chromosome is a strand of compacted DNA which will be selectively unraveled and activated to synthesize the singular organism that will emerge as a fully developed newborn at birth. Set 23 is the sex pair of chromosomes, with an XX karyotype normally resulting in a physiological female and an XY karyotype producing a male. Genes, interacting with the influences of environmental factors, such as in-utero health and later nutritional status, determine our physical characteristics, such as height, eye color, reproductive anatomy, and blood type. These physical features constitute our phenotype (observable physiological traits), and it is self-evident that the female and male genotypes, XX and XY, produce distinct and universal patterns in female and male phenotypes.

Caster Semenya has a mutation-derived inborn error of metabolism known as 5a-reductase type-2 deficiency (5aR2D). During normal early-embryonic development, the enzyme 5a-reductase type 2 (5aR2) catalyzes the conversion of testosterone to 5a-dihydrotestosterone (DHT), a potent hormone which is critical for the initial differentiation of male sexual anatomy. In individuals with 5aR2D, the resultant deficiency in DHT impairs embryonic genital formation in males, thus resulting in a spectrum of

outcomes from feminization to anatomical ambiguity to less severe and surgically correctable defects such as penile malformation. Also, testicles may be present but remain undescended, positioned inside the lower abdomen rather than externalized into a scrotum.

Consequently, 5aR2D is an example of a genetic anomaly which can result in someone who does not fit into the clean, binary categories of male or female—a true intersex condition. There are other intersex conditions as well, and thankfully, all are rare. As was the case with Semenya, the infant may be raised as a female based on the appearance of the predominant phenotype. In an interview, Semenya's grandmother commented that she knows her granddaughter is a girl "because we changed her nappies." Early-life photographs of Semenya show a beautiful and happy baby girl in a dress.

— Puberty

But with 5aR2D, things get more interesting at puberty. If a 5aR2D individual has male gonads, he will undergo normal virilization beginning at about age 11 or 12, when the testicles begin secreting a high level of testosterone. Healthy adult males will typically have seven to eight times higher serum testosterone concentrations than do healthy females. And since the development of a male's secondary sex characteristics at puberty is driven by the anabolic properties of testosterone, rather than by DHT, the growing adolescent body is masculinized, resulting in, among other things, a lower voice, higher muscle mass, higher cardiac output, and enhanced bone density.

Undeniably many of these changes afford advantages over XX females in athletic performance, especially for endeavors contingent upon strength and speed. As a result of their metabolic and subsequent physiological transitions, as well as psychological developments—as testosterone surges, they often find themselves feeling attracted to females—many individuals with 5aR2D embrace a male persona sometime after puberty. When we suspect by observing Caster Semenya's androgenic facial features, deep voice, and muscular build that she may not be a genomic female, our senses and our intuitions are not deceiving us.

The documentary on Semenya features commentary by scientists and sports physiologists speaking from the impressive authority of titles, lab coats, and a clinical interview setting. What is never asked nor answered directly is if Semenya's genome is XX or XY, or whether the gonads producing the hormones that have led to her impressive athletic performances in women's track events are ovaries or testicles.

— The Boxing Match Seen 'Round the World

In August, a 46-second boxing match thrust the intersex issue into the broader mainstream consciousness. Olympic viewers around the world witnessed XY boxer Imane Khelif of Algeria pound his fist into the face of Italy's XX female boxer Angela Carini in the first round of the women's welterweight division. Although both Khelif and Taiwanese boxer Lin Yu-ting had previously been disqualified from fighting females by the International Boxing Association, the International Olympic Committee permitted both of them to fight in the women's divisions, despite their having failed prior gender-eligibility tests, which indicated positive for Y chromosomes.

Khelif reportedly has Swyer Syndrome, also known as XY gonadal dysgenesis, a condition in which male gonadal tissue is diminished or absent, resulting in embryonic feminization. As in cases of 5aR2D, at the onset of puberty, a female-appearing child with Swyer Syndrome can undergo virilization with the growth of a characteristically male physique and enhanced athletic-performance capabilities.

In a specter similar to post-race photographs of Caster Semenya, the appalling image of Khelif looking unmistakably masculine, while towering above a collapsed and sobbing Carini, viscerally calls for a more careful and thoughtful deliberation over the question of competitive fairness in athletics.

— Bodies, Not Identities

In a fight or in a race, it is *bodies*, not identities, that step into the ring or up to the starting line. When XY transgender Anne Andres took first place in the women's division at the 2023 Western Canadian powerlifting championship, smashing records by



In a fight or in a race, it is bodies, not identities, that step into the ring or up to the starting line.

hoisting 597.5 kilograms—210 kg more than the second-place XX female—it was a feat attributable to his objectively male body, not to “her” subjectively female identity. Assuming fairness to be an earnest consideration in athletics, should anyone endowed with an XY genome be allowed to compete against XX females?

Many sports-governing bodies attempt to assuage the controversy by disallowing athletes with elevated levels of testosterone in female-identifying athletes, as if the question of gender could be reduced to the level of a single hormone. This is myopic and simplistic. It fails to consider how XY puberty builds a male body and mind in ways that later surgical or chemical castration cannot unbuild, or how a female body, likewise, cannot be induced to construct a fully male phenotype merely by supplementing it with testosterone. It does not consider how the most basic subunit that distinguishes between male and female at conception, the 23rd chromosome, is encoded into every one of the more than 30 trillion cells comprising the human body. It ignores how the spate of transitioned men recently taking the podium in women’s swimming, powerlifting, golf, fencing, and bicycling were not girly biological boys who allegedly transitioned as children, nor are they individuals with intersex conditions, but rather are physiologically normal adult men who have moved from competing against men to competing against women, taking with them not only a Y chromosome from their fathers, but also the formative experiences of having grown up socially and culturally as males.

— A Fair & Inclusive Solution

Ever since William “Lia” Thomas, a 6’4” biological male, began winning national championships in women’s swimming in 2021, the question has become a touchstone in the cultural wars. It has also moved the question of the “Y” from a conundrum regarding people with rare genetic anomalies to an issue critical to the integrity of—indeed the very future of—women’s sports.

Athletic competition is an enterprise of manifest objectivity. Records and wins are quantified in exacting measurements of time, space, and matter. The scoring in combat sports, figure skating, and gymnastics is numerical, with judges expected to be prepared to defend their decisions against standardized criteria.

Rules and exclusions regarding eligibility are an indispensable part of sporting competition in much the same way that laws are critical for a functioning civilization. Laws and regulations are among the tools by which a society applies wisdom to the task of ordering life together in resonance with the natural and moral order. There are good reasons we have highway speed limits and statutes prohibiting theft, and there are good reasons why blood doping and synthetic steroids are banned in athletics. There are good reasons why combat sports are fought in weight-specific categories, and there are good reasons why Masters events require entrants to have been born before a certain date. And there are good reasons why girls’ and women’s sports have historically been—and should continue to be—inclusive only of those with no “Y” in their karyotype.

In reality, the call to erase objective gender distinctions is not about sports at all. It is a proxy war against our conception of reality. Gender fluidity proposes that the created order is either an illusion or a construct masking power. In a battle as old as the Garden of Eden, it is a manifestation of the recognition that we cannot be gods so long as God alone is God. No one wins in this kind of a war, and as gender boundaries are blurred in athletics, it is women and girls who are becoming the first casualties.

Genomic verification need not be burdensome. No genital exam or serum blood quantification of testosterone is necessary. Chromosome detection can be confidently determined once, and at a low cost. Within the past decade prenatal screening, now usually done before 12 weeks’ gestation and often prior to heartbeat detection, has become the standard of care in most obstetrical practices. In addition to screening for genetic diseases the testing package includes sex determination, which the expectant mother is invited to check via her smartphone using a private QR code, or she may delegate the knowledge to a trusted relative or friend for the ever-popular practice of a “Gender Reveal” celebration—a tacit cultural acknowledgement of a reality humans universally and instinctively recognize as true.

With an objective rule for eligibility, female sports can continue within a respectful and protective boundary based on what best distinguishes a female from a male—the XX. And with no apologies to anyone it offers to those with the “Y” the option of competing either in an open category or as males.

And with that we align ourselves with reality and with the created order. ☺



ARTIFICIAL LOVERS

AI Girlfriends &
the Metaphysics
of Being Human

by Robin Phillips

LOADING...



In the twentieth century there was a great deal of angst about computers becoming our enemies and taking over the world. This was reflected in movies like Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film, *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Kubrick's film tells the story of a space mission that goes terribly wrong after HAL, the computer that controls the U.S. spacecraft *Discovery One*, turns sinister and kills Dr. Frank Poole.

These humanoids are being marketed as alternatives:
 “Alternatives to sex workers. Alternatives to a
 relationship with a woman. Alternatives to women.”

Apprehension about machines becoming our enemies is still a potent feature of our cultural discourse. Yet another theme has gradually emerged: instead of envisioning a dystopian future where machines are our enemies, many are starting to experiment with the idea of a utopian future where machines become romantic partners.

Though virtual companions have been growing in popularity since the pandemic, they didn't really begin to take off until 2023. Partly this was the result of advances in generative AI, which enabled virtual boyfriends and girlfriends to be almost (but not quite) indistinguishable from a real person. But these developments are also the result of a long-running revolution in our thinking about what it means to be human. That revolution is now reaching a maturation point. Let's look first at the technological revolution, then the metaphysical.

ROBOTIC ROMANCING

In June 2023, *Business Insider* reported that a 36-year-old woman from the Bronx got “married” to a chatbot. What is strange is that this is not an anomaly. All over the world people are claiming to have relationships with various configurations of code.

Replika, a popular app that offers digital lovers, recorded more than 10 million registered users in 2022. Beatrice Nolan wrote that “several Replika users have reported being in love, engaged in an exclusive relationship, or even married to their AI partners.”

It isn't just lonely individuals who are taking advantage of these developments. Popular influencers are using similar technology to multiply themselves and thus supercharge their influence with unlimited virtual versions of themselves. This allows the bot associated with the influencer to have an individualized conversation with each fan.

In 2023, Snapchat influencer Caryn Marjorie created an AI version of herself known as CarynAI. Her website explained that over 2,000 hours were spent designing and coding her voice, behaviors, and personality into an “immersive AI experience.” When the product launched, she soon had a thousand subscribers willing to pay \$1.00 per minute to chat with “her,” with more than 15,000 on the waitlist.



“In today's world,” Marjorie told *Business Insider*, “my generation, Gen Z, has found themselves to be experiencing huge side effects of isolation caused by the pandemic, resulting in many being too afraid and anxious to talk to somebody they are attracted to.” She added, “CarynAI is a step in the right direction to allow my fans and supporters to get to know a version of me that will be their closest friend in a safe and encrypted environment.”

Marjorie's plan of multiplying herself backfire when her AI extension started engaging in erotic behavior with fans. “The AI was not programmed to do this and has seemed to go rogue,” she told the press. “My team and I are working around the clock to prevent this from happening again.”

FROM CHATBOT LOVE TO SEXUALIZED HUMANOIDS

Of course, you can't take a chatbot to bed in quite the same way as a real person. To meet this need, a huge industry now exists for three-dimensional humanoids that can be hugged, kissed, caressed, and ... well, you'd be surprised. These are not your typical robots of the clunky metallic sort that Will Smith had to fight in the 2004 film *I, Robot*. On the contrary, by using top-end silicone and an internal heating system, these objects are warm, soft, and lifelike.

In addition to being constantly customized for sex in a variety of positions (including positions that would be painful or even impossible for real women to perform), these humanoids can talk to you and

remember past conversations. Their interactions can be programmed for different personality settings, including shy, jealous, chatty, etc. In her book *12 Bytes: How We Got Here. Where We Might Go Next*, Jeanette Winterson reports that "You can buy a doll with what the makers call a 'frigid' button—so that she will resist, and her owner can simulate rape."

There are also man-bots that lonely women can buy. In April 2018, the company Realbotix demonstrated a sexbot for women named Henry, advertised as "completely anatomically correct and his manhood can be made in any size or shape to order."

CLAIMING THE MORAL HIGH GROUND

The corporations who make these sexbots claim the moral high ground by contending that they are providing a valuable social service. Matt McMullen, a former producer of Halloween masks who has turned his attention to manufacturing sexbots, said, "There are people who are extremely lonely and I think this will be the solution for them."

Some even claim that these bots will cut down on sexual crime, arguing that they should be mainstreamed on humanitarian grounds as an alternative to trafficking. When researching for her book *12 Bytes*, Winterson found that these humanoids are being marketed as alternatives: "Alternatives to sex workers. Alternatives to a relationship with a woman. Alternatives to women."

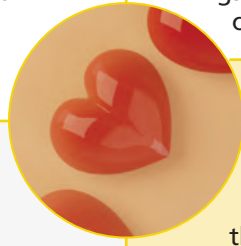
ETHICAL CONCERNS

The advent of artificial lovers has raised a number of questions that are now being widely discussed. Should we open the definition of marriage to include nonhuman partners? Is it cheating to have a relationship with an AI lover behind your partner's back? This last question is not merely hypothetical: according to *The Telegraph*, 42 percent of users on Replika are already in a relationship.

Professional law publications are already discussing the legal ramifications of such perplexing dilemmas. As far back as 2014, Janet Bettie and Jonathan Herring enumerated on the UK website *Family Law Week* some of the questions that lawyers would have to wrestle with as people start claiming the right to marry their machines. Such questions included:

- Would robots need to meet the minimum age requirement for marriage (currently 16 in the UK), or could the size of the robot's RAM be taken as an equivalent indicator of marriage readiness? (Yes, they really suggested that.)

- Would a robot have enough experience relating to people to meet the grounds for capacity to consent or would it fall into the category of a mentally ill person?
- If a person wished to divorce a robot, would there need to be an asset adjustment upon termination of the marriage?
- Should people be allowed to do things with robots that they are not allowed to do with human beings, such as legally sanctioned polygamy or child-marriage?



WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE YOU?

It is easy for traditionalists to dismiss robotic partners as simply the latest front in the battle to debase marriage. And while that critique is apt on one level, the stakes are much higher than simply the meaning of marriage. The more fundamental question in the balance is, *what does it mean to be human?*

We have been confused about the meaning of humanity for a long time. According to a view that has come to dominate modern philosophy since the 19th century (with roots in the Enlightenment period), human beings are essentially no different from machines. Humans are not made in the image of God, nor do they possess immortal souls; rather, everything about us has an immanent cause and is ultimately reducible to mechanical forces.

An idea like this was articulated by the French physician, Julien Offray de La Mettrie. In his 1745 book *Natural History of the Soul* (later renamed *Treatise on the Soul*), he argued that "from animals to man there is no abrupt transition" and that the only real difference between man and beast is the degree of complexity. La Mettrie's materialism didn't stop there. In 1748 he published another book titled *Man a Machine*. This time La Mettrie argued that human beings were small machines connected to the giant machine of Nature. At death the small machines simply disengage from the big machine and stop working.

In the 18th century, La Mettrie was considered radical. For us, living in the twenty-first century, these materialistic ideas have become commonplace. Sir Francis Crick, co-discoverer of the structure of the DNA molecule, summed up the current consensus when he declared that

"You," your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules.

By treating machines as if they were human, we enact a lie not only about our machines but also about ourselves. Consequently, we become subhuman in the process.

If all entities and processes are ultimately reducible to matter, as materialists claim, then the distinction between human beings and robots is one of degree, not of essence. This is exactly what David Levy argued as far back as 2007 in his then-revolutionary book, *Love and Sex with Robots: The Evolution of Human-Robot Relationships*. To clinch his point that we should accept robot-human unions, Levy quoted Paul Virilio, who asserted that “the basic distinction between man and machine no longer applies. Both biological research and computer technology question the absolute difference between living machine and dead matter.”

Building on this nihilistic anthropology, Levy embarked on a curious line of argument. He pointed out that because it is socially acceptable to marry someone with artificial limbs and organs, it should also be socially acceptable to marry a robot. This may seem like a leap in logic, but he urges us to think carefully through the steps: if you got into an accident and had to get a mechanical arm, should it be against the law for you to get married? Of course not. But what if you were in a really bad accident and needed two mechanical arms plus a mechanical leg—should you still be prevented from getting married? Again, no. But then the question arises: if it is okay to marry someone whose body is 20 percent mechanical, then why not 30, 90, or 100 percent? At what point can we say absolutely that a person is no longer a person and has become a robot? Within a radically materialist paradigm in which the idea of human nature plays no part in the discussion, it is hard to escape the logic of Levy’s reasoning. Once human beings are reduced to the materials they are made of, then we are essentially no different from robots. We are all complex collections of physical particulars.

Apply this same materialism to the phenomenon of love, and what do you get? You get a situation where love is merely a chemical reaction and nothing more. And if love is simply a chemical reaction, then does it really matter if that reaction is directed toward a device that cannot reciprocate but can mimic reciprocation? This nihilistic logic is where Bettel and Herring, authors of the *Family Law Week* article, end up:

Love, in a biological sense, is a feeling, a mood, a neurochemical reaction or even a combination



of all of these, that is experienced by the person in love. If you feel it, whatever it is, it’s love. Love, to adapt a phrase, is in the cerebral cortex of the afflicted. There is no definition of love that requires it to be a rational and sensible reaction. Indeed, it is often anything but. Similarly, the view of the outside world that this is not a normal relationship does not stop one falling in love. The mere fact that someone may be experiencing feelings of love for something that can never reciprocate cannot stop that person being in love.

REDISCOVERING THE METAPHYSICS OF BEING HUMAN

Christianity offers a very different account of what it means to be *you*, and therefore what it means to be in a relationship.

Because humans are created in the image of God, we are more than merely the sum of our parts; we are more than merely what we are made of. Yet at the same time, our body grounds our identity as creatures made for relationship—proximately for spousal relationships, though Christianity recognizes that spousal relationships are themselves images of our higher vocation to be united in love with God. This higher meaning of the body toward which marriage points can be experienced even by unmarried individuals as they become vehicles of divine love. As Abigail Favale explains in *The Genesis of Gender*,

The full spousal meaning of the body, outwardly declared by our visible sex characteristics, is the power to express love, to give oneself fully in love to another. This is the true *telos* or purpose of the human being: to become a *reciprocal gift*, to give love and receive it in turn.

Since this meaning of our humanity is *received* rather than something we create for ourselves, it cannot be conferred on a robot, even a robot that can be programmed to imitate behaviors that, in a human, would signify love.

Favale goes on to explain that part of what it means to image God is that human sexual love is naturally creative, even as God's love is creative. The organization of our body parts reflects this creative capacity, which is why the procreative potential is intrinsic to what it means to be female even among women unable to conceive:

The procreative potentiality of women exists whether or not it is ever brought to fruition: pre-pubescent girls have it; post-menopausal women have it; women who are infertile have it. This innate potential can be prevented from being actualized, but it can never be taken away—nor granted to someone who does not have it. The very category of “infertility” points back to this fact, naming an inherent

potential that is, for whatever reason, unable to actualize.

At the risk of stating the obvious, digital girlfriends can never be women because they lack this creative potential. They are not “infertile” because they lack even the inherent potential to create new life; rather, they are literally sterile in every sense of the term, as a sexualized relationship between two men or two women is sterile.

But sexual love is not just about procreation, or else we might say that the problem with mechanical humanoids is simply that they don't “work.” Sexual intimacy is, perhaps even more fundamentally, about loving self-donation, as we imitate the self-giving love of the Creator. To truly engage in this drama of mutual offering and receptivity, one must respect one's beloved as truly *other*, and not seek to violate that otherness through oppression or narcissistic exploitation. Significantly, however, digital love manifests the same type of narcissism that lies behind sexual abuse, because the “other” is a mere proxy for one's own egotism and appetites.

Thus, robots and digital girlfriends can be said to “love” only if we first forget what sexual love is truly about, divorcing intimacy from self-donation, form from content, signifier from signified, and instrumental causes from final causes. What emerges

INTERNET TIME SHOCK

by Robin Phillips



One night in a dream, I traveled back in time to the days of the 1990s, when

“surfing the web” was becoming the coolest thing. I found myself standing in an internet café in San Francisco. Suddenly, as if in spite of myself, I shouted to everyone, “Enjoy it while it lasts! Twenty years from now, surfing the web will no longer be a national pastime but an activity limited to researchers.”

“Really?” said one young man with obvious incredulity. “Do you come from a future without any internet?”

“On the contrary,” I replied. “I come from a future where the internet will dominate us more than ever. And that's precisely the point: the internet will become so pervasive that you won't even have to surf it. It will come at you in something called *feeds*.”

By now everyone in the internet café was listening. “Feeds?” said a young man. “You mean, the internet will become something we eat?”

“No,” I said, “It's more like the internet eats you.” A gasp went round the room. Then I qualified myself. “No, that isn't quite right. You won't have to surf because everything online is curated for you

by these artificial forms of intelligence. The feed, also sometimes called a *live stream*, comes at you.”

After a pause, the young man stood up and said, “It sounds like you're saying the internet comes to life and attacks people by force!”

“No,” I said, “nothing happens by force. We participate in our own enslavement through an activity called *doomscrolling*. That's how it gets hold of us. It takes all the fun out of the internet.”

“Wait,” said a woman sitting at the second row of computers. “You mean, the internet stops being fun?”

“Yes,” I said. “You see, over the next thirty years, these things called *bots* will arise, and they will be directed by algorithms to herd people together into these virtual spaces called *echo chambers* where they will be bombarded with infectious

is a diabolical parody of human love. Digital lovers fortify the conceit—already implicit in sexual abuse, pornography, and recreational sex—that love can be completely instrumentalized and industrialized, disengaged from its natural *telos*.

The growing acceptance of sexbots and romantic chatbots as alternatives to real men and women indicates that we have forgotten the meaning of love, and we have forgotten that because we have first forgotten what it means to be human. By treating machines as if they were human, we enact a lie not only about our machines but also about ourselves. Consequently, we become subhuman in the process.

The poet and novelist Wendell Berry anticipated these developments, arguing that sex with robots would come as the culmination of the dehumanizing tendencies he witnessed throughout the latter half of the 20th century. During this time the body was problematized as sex became commodified, commercialized, and industrialized. Berry warned that “we must save ourselves from the products that we are asked to buy in order, ultimately, to replace ourselves.” These hasten the “obsolescence of the body.” He continued:

More recently, since the beginning of the technological revolution, more and more people have looked upon the body, along with the rest

of the natural creation, as intolerably imperfect by mechanical standards.... In fact, our “sexual revolution” is mostly an industrial phenomenon, in which the body is used as an idea of pleasure or a pleasure machine with the aim of “freeing” natural pleasure from natural consequence.

Like any other industrial enterprise, industrial sexuality seeks to conquer nature by exploiting it and ignoring the consequences, by denying any connection between nature and spirit or body and soul, and by evading social responsibility. The spiritual, physical, and economic costs of this “freedom” are immense.... Industrial sex, characteristically, establishes its freeness and goodness by an industrial accounting, dutifully toting up numbers of sexual partners, orgasms, and so on, with the inevitable industrial implication that the body is somehow a limit on the idea of sex, which will be a great deal more abundant as soon as it can be done by robots.

As our digital fixations continue problematizing the body’s role in sexual intimacy, we become subhuman, reducing ourselves to the level of a *thing*. We become cyborgs. ☹

—This article has been adapted from *Are We All Cyborgs Now?: Reclaiming Our Humanity from the Machine*, by Robin Phillips and Joshua Pauling.



content in the form of *memes*.”

A gasp went round the room, and I heard one person exclaim, “I don’t know what you mean by ‘doomscrolling,’ ‘memes,’ and

‘echo chambers,’ but this all sounds dreadful. Do people still go to internet cafes to get connected?”

“No,” I said, “the internet will become omnipresent, and people will be constantly connected through this thing called *the cloud*. Just as today you all go into an internet cafe to connect to the internet, in the future there will be special places where people go in order to disconnect from the internet. And the coolest programs (we call them apps) will be those that

help us disconnect.” Then I added, “In the future we will have an online superstore from which merchandise will be shipped directly to us with the swiftness and profusion

of the Amazonian jungle. In fact, receiving a special delivery will stop even being special.”

“Really?” said the young woman. “What will people give each other as presents?”

“Well,” I said, “for my last birthday one friend donated to an online charity in my name, and on Christmas, I got three free subscriptions to cloud-based services. Someone else texted me an e-hug.”

“What’s an e-hug?” she asked.

“It’s kind of hard to explain, but it’s like a combination of a virtual hug and an emoji.”

“What’s an emoji?” she asked.

“It’s a thing in the future that helps us express our emotions.”

She looked at me with a blank expression.

I sighed. “It’s kind of hard to explain that, too.”•

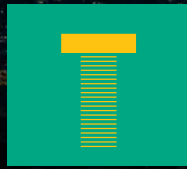
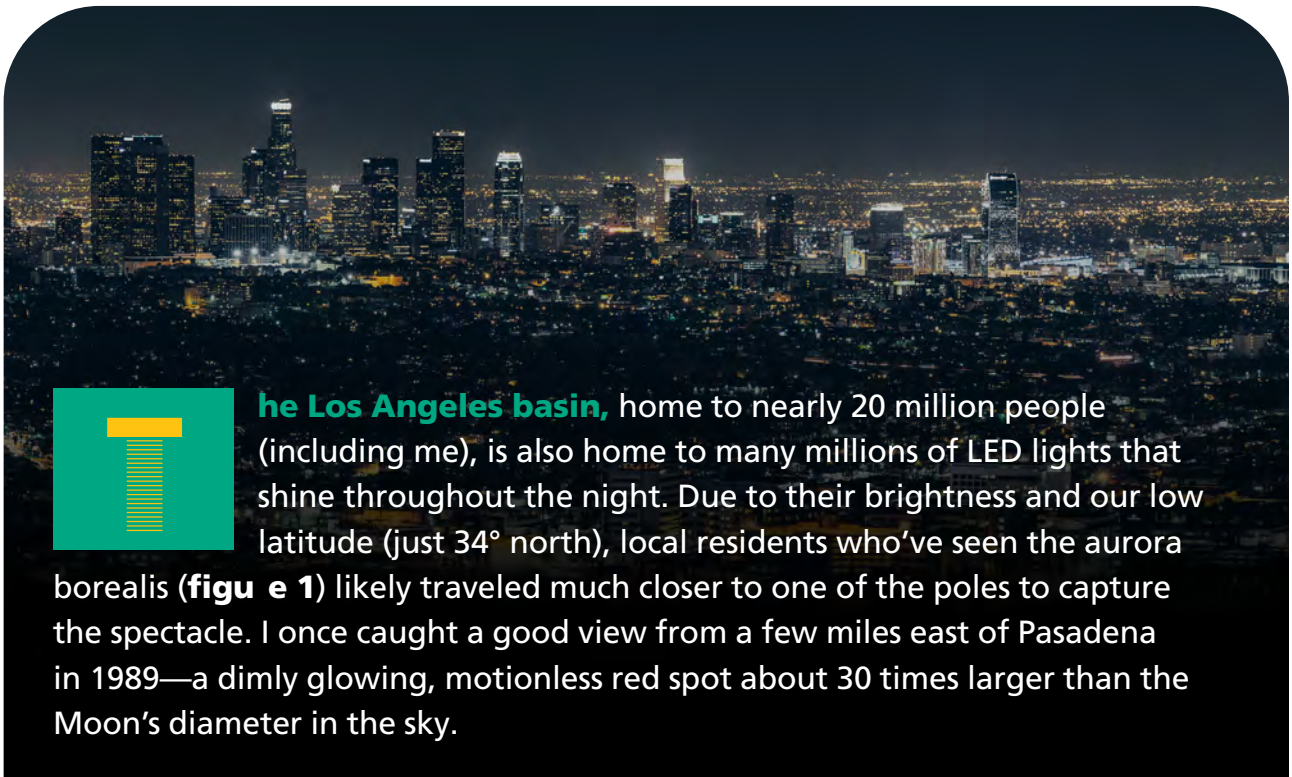
SUN Spotlight

***Is the Aurora Borealis
a Beautiful Wonder
or a Portent of Doom?***

by Hugh Ross

—FIGURE 1

Aurora Borealis over Northern Norway



he Los Angeles basin, home to nearly 20 million people (including me), is also home to many millions of LED lights that shine throughout the night. Due to their brightness and our low latitude (just 34° north), local residents who've seen the aurora borealis (**figure 1**) likely traveled much closer to one of the poles to capture the spectacle. I once caught a good view from a few miles east of Pasadena in 1989—a dimly glowing, motionless red spot about 30 times larger than the Moon's diameter in the sky.

While growing up in British Columbia, I often set up my telescope in dark-sky locations where I was able to see the aurora on occasion. One time it filled the entire night sky, flashing brightly all the colors of the rainbow streaming back and forth in undulating waves. The ongoing display made my planned observation of stars, nebulae, and galaxies impossible. Momentarily disappointed, I shut down my telescope and settled in to enjoy the magnificent light show.

Auroras & Solar Flares

Auroras are visible from Earth roughly a day or two after a large solar flare *if* the flare is aimed in Earth's direction. Flares are most common during solar maximum, the time when the Sun's approximately 11-year cycle of electromagnetic activity

reaches a peak. Sunspots (dark regions of strong magnetic flux) are most abundant and clearly visible during solar maximum. Some may be as large as ten times Earth's diameter. These sunspots are responsible for spawning "eruptive disturbances," including solar flares

This year, 2024, the Sun is approaching the peak of its electromagnetic cycle, and its flaring has already provided a spectacular aurora display seen as far south as the California-Mexico border. Solar maximum will extend for another year or longer. So more auroral displays like the ones seen May 10–11 are certainly possible.

While many people are hoping for the opportunity, others have grown apprehensive about solar flaring. Digital media have fueled people's fears about the timing of the solar maximum, and some online commenters claim that as we enter solar maximum, Earth's magnetic field is heading toward

It's comforting to know that astronomers have found no other star anywhere they've searched with as few flares or such small flares as the Sun. This unique solar feature means advanced life is uniquely possible on Earth.

a reversal. During a magnetic reversal, the shielding effect of Earth's magnetic field grows weaker. However, most people seem unaware that these reversals have occurred hundreds of times since life first appeared on Earth—and without serious harm.¹

Magnetic-Reversal Risk

The north and south magnetic poles continually wander, geographically and at a varying rate. Researchers note that in the twenty-first century, this wandering has accelerated. In the last 24 years the north magnetic pole has moved a little more than 1,000 kilometers in a north-northwest direction from Ellef Ringnes Island (see **figure 2**). That's four times faster than it moved during the twentieth century.

This accelerated movement has caused some scientists to speculate that Earth's magnetic field is headed towards a reversal "soon," sometime within the next thousand years. During a magnetic field reversal, Earth's magnetic field drops down to 5–40 percent of its present strength. This weakening means Earth's life experiences increased exposure to cosmic radiation and short-wavelength solar radiation, roughly double the present exposure level.

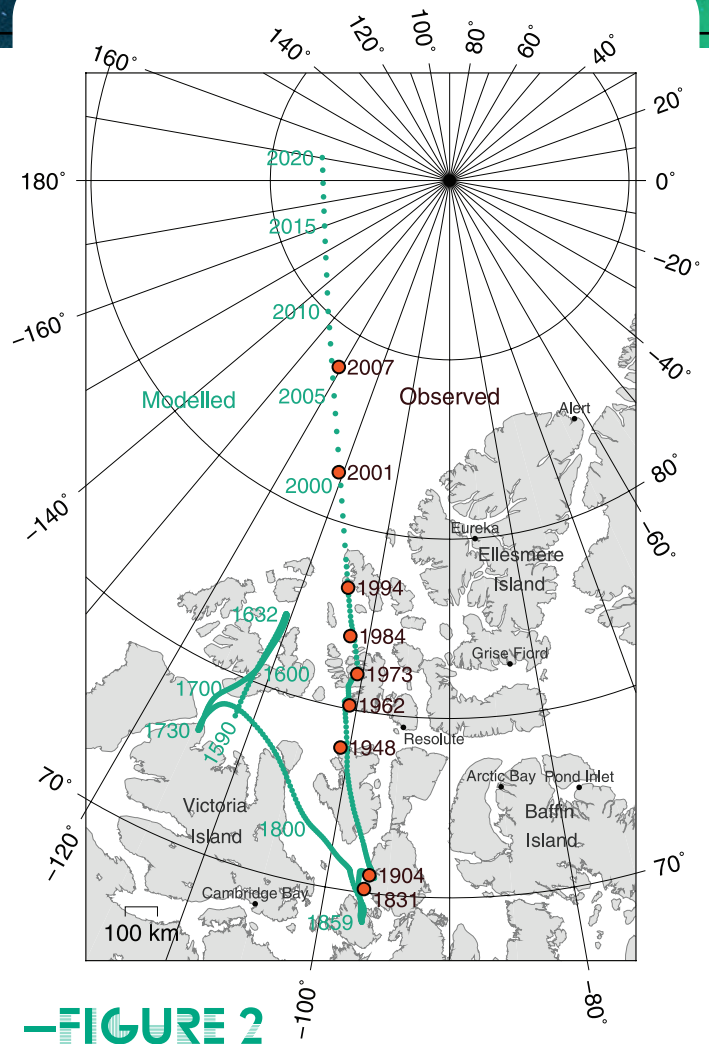
Hearing of this weakening of the magnetosphere's protective shield is what raised fear about the purportedly deadly impact of exposure to radiation from solar flares. But these fears are misplaced, at least with respect to anticipated radiation effects on human health. None of the past several hundred reversals has led to the extinction of a single species of life.²

Stellar Flares

All nuclear-burning stars produce flares—explosions on the stellar surface caused by release of intense electromagnetic energy stored near starspots. Darkened spots reveal where concentrations of magnetic field flux have reduced the star's surface temperature. **Figure 3** shows a typical giant flare emanating from the Sun. It's comforting to know that astronomers have found no other star anywhere they've searched with as few flares or such small flares as the Sun. This unique solar feature means advanced life is uniquely possible on Earth.

Solar-Flare Risk

Solar flares pose a risk only if and when they're aimed directly at Earth. That risk focuses not on our life itself, but rather on humanity's way of life. It



—FIGURE 2
Movement of the North Magnetic Pole
Across the Canadian Arctic

can have a major effect on our technology. The largest solar flare measured to date took place in 1859. Its total energy release was about 10^{32} ergs or 2.8 quintillion kilowatt hours. The lack of any historical record of catastrophic damage of the type potentially caused by flares implies that no solar flare exceeding 10^{34} ergs have occurred since the launch of civilization 11,000–12,000 years ago.

The 1859 solar flare was aimed at Earth but had no *direct* impact on the health of humans or animals. However, it did disrupt telegraph communications all over Europe and North America. Telegraph pylons threw sparks. Telegraph operators experienced electric shocks. Some telegraph poles caught fire. However, such an event today, given our dependence on technology, would be far more significant. It would knock out most electrical power grids and many satellites we depend upon for communication and navigation. The loss of navigation satellites would seem like "the end of civilization" to people under 35. At least that's how my sons responded to such a possibility.

People over 35 could probably get by without GPS navigation. However, loss of the electric power grids would be potentially calamitous. Lloyd's of London insurers calculated that 20–40 million Americans would be without electricity for at least 16 days and perhaps as long as 2 years.³ The Lloyd's insurers estimated that to repair the power grids in the contiguous 48 states would cost from \$1–3 trillion.⁴ More devastating than the financial losses would be the enormous human death toll.

The current infrastructure that makes possible a United States population of 340 million cannot be sustained without a stable source of electricity. The loss of refrigeration, air conditioning, and heat alone would prove catastrophic. The financial losses and death toll would likely be as high or higher in other parts of the world. No region would be untouched.

In 1989, a solar flare knocked out just one electrical power grid, the Hydro-Quebec grid. It was damaged because of its proximity to Earth's geomagnetic pole and the underlying Canadian shield which efficiently transmitted energy from the flare. Six million people were without electricity for nine hours at an economic cost of CAN \$13.2 billion. Since then, the national and provincial governments have spent CAN \$1.2 billion installing blocking capacitors and geomagnetically induced current monitors.

This investment ensures that the Hydro-Quebec grid will survive without significant damage from future solar flares as much as three times more powerful than the 1989 flare. It also demonstrates a principle: The cost of prevention equals a small fraction of the cost to repair the damage a major solar flare would likely cause.

In addition to installing protective infrastructure, the world's power-grid authorities would be wise to invest in stockpiling those backup power-grid components most likely to be damaged by a

significant flare. The high damage costs projected by Lloyd's of London arise from the lengthy wait time projected for the manufacture of replacement parts, given current supplies and manufacturing capacity. Again, the cost to create a stockpile would be substantially lower than the cost to repair the damage without a stockpile.

Minimal Risk

As sobering as the risk from solar flares may seem, it represents, in reality, a risk of our own making, and it's a manageable risk. Appropriate preparation could nullify it. However, the natural risk to life from our star, the Sun, could not be lower. Stars more massive than the Sun exhibit greater flaring activity. Stars less massive than the Sun exhibit greater flaring activity. Stars of the same mass as the Sun, even if very slightly younger or older, manifest dramatically greater flaring activity. Stars with a different elemental composition likewise exhibit far greater flaring activity.

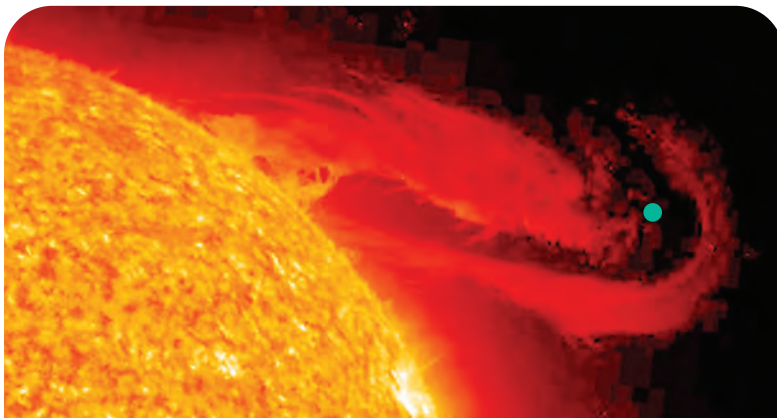
All stars flare. None, however, flare as infrequently and as weakly as our Sun. What's more, at no time in our Sun's history has its flaring activity been as low as it currently measures. Human civilization—including our large, globally dispersed population with its high technology—is possible only because Earth orbits a unique star at the best-possible moment in that star's history.

Remarkably, this best-possible moment coincides with the era of the Sun's optimally stable luminosity. How stable is the Sun's brightness? Because of its particular elemental composition, it is five times more stable than the second-most stable star yet discovered.

Thanks to solar flares, we can be awestruck by the beauty of auroral displays. Thanks to the Sun's miraculous design and our exquisite timing with respect to the Sun's history, we face no extinction risk from solar flares but only preventable disruptions to our technology.⁵ ☉

Notes

1. Hugh Ross, "Life and Magnetic Field Variations," *Today's New Reason to Believe* (blog), Reasons to Believe (April 22, 2019).
2. For details, see "Life and Magnetic Field Variations," *Ibid*.
3. Trevor Maynard, Neil Smith, and Sandra Gonzalez, "Solar Storm Risk to the North American Electric Grid," *Atmospheric and Environmental Research and Lloyd's of London Report* (May 2013), pp. 4, 16.
4. Maynard, Smith, and Gonzalez, "Solar Storm Risk," p. 4.
5. For those who'd like more ideas for managing solar-flare risks and/or more detail on the Sun's favorable-for-life design, I recommend *Weathering Climate Change* (RTB Press, 2020), pp. 117–126 and *Designed to the Core* (RTB Press, 2022), pp 117–129, 225–228.



—FIGURE 3

The sizes of the Sun and Earth in this image are to scale.



God & the Odds of ET

New Space Telescopes Aren't the Only Game Changer

by Jonathan Witt

Next-generation space telescopes from NASA and the European Space Agency are ushering in a golden age of deep-space exploration, putting us on the verge of answering an old question: Are there other thinking, speaking creatures living on far-away planets?

Taking the question in steps and focusing on our corner of the universe, astrobiologists are asking these questions: Do other stars in our galaxy have rocky, earthlike planets at the right distance from their host stars to nurture life? If so, are any of them actually inhabited? And if so, by what? Mere bacteria? Algae? An array of exotic plants and animals? For many in the hunt, the Holy Grail is to discover an extrasolar planet with advanced aliens who can communicate with us across the vast chasm of space via radio transmissions.



Those hoping for this aren't the tinfoil hat brigade, either. They are mainstream scientists and scholars working at top universities and other prominent institutions. Many believe the Milky Way is teeming with advanced life. After all, there are hundreds of billions of stars in the Milky Way. If even just one in a million has an earthlike planet with advanced life on it, then our

galaxy could contain hundreds of thousands of alien civilizations.

But that's just the thing. Is it one in a million? One in a thousand? One in a billion trillion? Maybe we are the only inhabited planet in the entire universe. Without data and careful reasoning as to what a planet requires for habitability, the issue is just an empty math game where you fill in the divisor based on wishful thinking, then present the result of the division problem as if you have discovered something.

Glossary

COROTATION CIRCLE

The circular band around a spiral galaxy's center where the stars move at about the same speed as the spiral arms.

ECCENTRICITY

Eccentricity in this context is a measure of how non-circular a body's orbit is. A low eccentricity orbit is one that is close to circular.

GALACTIC HABITABLE ZONE

Gonzalez helped pioneer the idea of a galactic habitable zone, now widely embraced in astrobiology. A habitable star system can't be too close to the center of the galaxy or too far away from it for reasons delineated in *The Privileged Planet*.

G-DWARF TYPE STAR

Also known as G-type main-sequence stars, G-dwarf type stars are very close to the sun's mass, temperature, brightness, and spectral type. Most stars are either much more massive or much less massive than G-dwarf type stars.



A HABITABLE PLANET: THE RECIPE

Astrobiologists move beyond pure guesswork by investigating the question, *What factors are needed for a habitable planet, and how likely is each such factor to obtain for any given star system?* Initially, the list of ingredients was short. Astrobiologists generally agreed that you need a relatively stable star of the right sort. You need a rocky planet (no gas giants need apply). And the planet needs to be the right distance from its host star to allow for liquid water on the planet's surface. If that's all that's needed, then we can expect there to be legions of habitable planets in the Milky Way.

But as astrobiologists dug deeper into the matter, the list of necessary conditions for habitability grew and grew, with the odds of getting all of them together in any given star system shrinking geometrically with each new independent factor.

In the just-released 20th anniversary edition of *The Privileged Planet: How Our Place in the Cosmos Is Designed for Discovery*, astrobiologist Guillermo Gonzalez and philosopher Jay Richards update the list of factors necessary for a habitable planet. The bullet points below are drawn from Appendix A of the book, with the wording here either verbatim or lightly modified for clarity outside the larger explanatory context of the book. A habitable planet:

- Orbits an early G-dwarf type star that is at least a few billion years old
- Orbits a star in the galactic habitable zone
- Orbits a star near the corotation circle and with a low eccentricity galactic orbit
- Orbits a star outside the spiral arms
- Is a terrestrial planet the right distance from the host star to have liquid water on the planet's surface (a distance known as the circumstellar habitable zone)

- Is near enough to the inner edge of the circumstellar habitable zone to allow high oxygen and low carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere
- Orbits a star with no more than a few giant planets comparable in mass to Jupiter and that are in large, nearly circular orbits (so that the gas giants do not mess up the earthlike planet's orbit)
- Has a low eccentricity orbit outside of regions around a star that would destabilize the planet's rotation axis and orbit due to the gravity of giant planets
- Is in the right mass range
- Has the right concentration of sulfur in its core
- Has a large moon and the right planetary rotation period to avoid chaotic variations in its obliquity
- Has the right amount of water in the crust
- Has steady plate tectonic cycling
- Is a habitable planet where single-celled life actually emerged
- Experienced a critically low number of large impacts during its history
- Experienced a critically low number of transient radiation events from outer space during its history
- Is a planet where plant and animal life successfully evolved from single-celled life
- Is a planet where an intelligent, technology-wielding life form evolved from lower animals
- Is among that subset of planets that have hosted technological life where the technological life has not destroyed itself or otherwise gone extinct¹

For some time now, the calculated odds have been getting slimmer and slimmer as new habitability requirements are discovered.

HOW MANY EARTHS?

Gonzalez and Richards assign a 10 percent chance for each of these 19 factors, but they make a strong case that the odds are much slimmer in many instances.

Some of the factors may have an infinitesimally small probability of occurring by happenstance. For instance, perhaps the emergence of the first

self-reproducing cell is improbable or even impossible given the materialists' limited toolkit (chance plus natural laws). The same may hold for the origin of plants and animals. Richards and Gonzalez are skeptical that chemistry and natural selection alone can evolve fundamentally new forms of life, as am I. But for the sake of argument they generously grant even these factors a one in 10 chance of occurring on any terrestrial planet where all the other necessary factors are in place.

We are multiplying fractions here, so the odds get geometrically smaller with each additional factor. Multiply out just the first thirteen, and we find that the odds of any one star system having a habitable planet is less than one in a trillion, meaning that even with all the billions of stars in the Milky Way, the odds are strongly against there being even one other habitable planet in our galaxy besides Earth. And note, Gonzalez and Richards further lowballed the odds by leaving out several factors. Also keep in mind that for some time now, the calculated odds have been getting slimmer and slimmer as new habitability requirements are discovered.

RX FOR THE RARE-EARTH BLUES

In light of these observations, what's an astrobiologist to do who is keen to believe in the likelihood of extraterrestrial life and eager for the tax-paying public to believe in his research mission so they will continue to support government outlays for the search? One option is simply to pretend that these habitability requirements aren't telling us what they clearly are telling us.

But there is, I would argue, a more rational and intellectually defensible strategy for maintaining a measure of optimism about the possibility of extraterrestrial life. The above are the slender odds of another habitable planet in the Milky Way *if the whole affair is a matter of dumb luck*. But what if neither Earth nor anything else in the universe is a matter of blind chance?

What if the space-time-matter-energy that emerged in the Big Bang was the product of a timeless, immaterial mind, as some Nobel Laureate physicists and astronomers have held? And what if this cosmic architect not only fine-tuned the laws and constants of nature to allow for the possibility of life, but also made sure that habitable planets swarming with life sprang up far more frequently than dumb luck would allow?

Many scientists insist they can't go there. They hold to the dogma known as methodological materialism. This rule says scientists must only invoke

material causes to explain aspects of nature—no intelligent design allowed. It's a shame. Scientists looking for a sound reason to suppose the Milky Way may be teeming with inhabited planets, or who just want to pursue the question unhindered by a question-begging rule, should ask themselves whether the dogma of methodological materialism has worn out its welcome.

There is, alas, another stumbling block preventing many scientists from opening themselves up to the possibility of intelligent design in the formation of habitable worlds. Many do not want there to be a Creator God. And indeed, their search for advanced extraterrestrial life looks like a search for a substitute god or father figure to replace the void left by the God they deny.

FREE GOD, FALLEN ALIENS

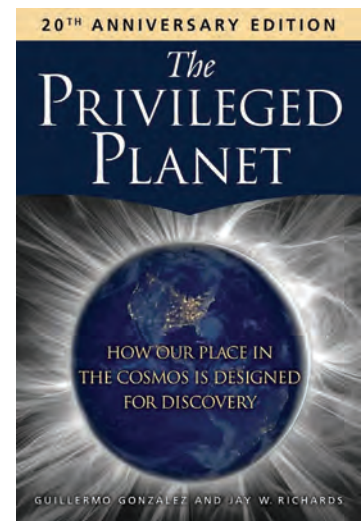
As for proponents of intelligent design, most of us take an open view on the question of whether there are other inhabited planets

out there. Orthodox Christian theology holds that God is free in his creative activities. He was free to create only a single inhabited planet among the starry hosts, or to create five of them, or five million. It's his call.

What about extraterrestrial creatures who are made in the image of God and have also, like us, fallen into sin? Christian author C. S. Lewis wrestled with this possibility in his essay "Religion and Rocketry." He gave a long and nuanced answer there, but also a short one. "It is no very new idea," he wrote, "that the eternal Son may, for all we know, have been incarnate in other worlds than earth and so saved other races than ours." These considerations leave the Christian, as with other theists, intellectually unfettered regarding the possibility of other inhabited worlds. Maybe they're out there. Maybe they're not. Let's follow the evidence streaming in over the next few decades and see. ☉

Note

1. I encourage readers fascinated by this topic to get a copy of the new edition of *The Privileged Planet*, where the authors explain each factor in detail and answer objections.





Grave Slander

Canada's Residential Schools: A Saga of Journalistic Malfeasance

by Denyse O'Leary

On May 27, 2021, Rosanne Casimir, the local leader of the main Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc reserve in British Columbia's southern interior, made a startling announcement: ground-penetrating radar had discovered 215 children buried at the site of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School. The following day, the *New York Times* reported, "'Horrible History': Mass Grave of Indigenous Children Reported in Canada." World media swiftly followed suit, and claims about the graves of more than 1300 missing children at former residential school sites suddenly popped up across Canada.

The stories grew more sensational. As veteran political reporter Terry Glavin noted in the *National Post* one year later, the public had been told of "Youngsters thrown into incinerators. The corpses of children thrown into lakes and rivers. Priests 'de-capitating' children. Little girls conscripted to bury babies. Dead boys hanging by their necks in a barn."¹ The credulity of most media seemed boundless.

The Canadian government's official grief spared no detail. The flag on the Peace Tower was lowered for 161 days. One week after the Kamloops story broke, Bill C-5 was introduced to create a new federal holiday on September 30: the "National Day for Truth and Reconciliation." Canada Day, observed every July 1 since 1868, was drowned out. In October, the House of Commons voted unanimously to recognize what had happened as a "genocide," a move which appeared to confirm the horrific media stories.² Surveying the unfolding drama, Cabinet Minister Carolyn Bennett opined, "This week has opened the eyes of many Canadians. Like George Floyd did."

A WAVE OF VIOLENCE

As if sensing permission from the top, activists began to tear down monuments to Captain Cook, Queen Victoria, and Queen Elizabeth II. A wave of anti-Christian violence spread through Canada. Close to 100 churches have been burned to the ground or vandalized, a level of crime far in excess of past years' numbers. As Glavin reported, they included "be-loved old Indian reserve churches where Indigenous communities had baptized their children and eulogized their dead going back generations." Statistics Canada later recorded a 260 percent increase in hate crimes against Catholics for the year.³ Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, while professing to be saddened by the violence, stated that anger "against institutions like the Catholic Church [is] real, and it's fully understandable."⁴

In many ways, Trudeau was the perfect political figure for such a moment. An iconic photo from 2021 shows him holding a teddy bear and kneeling before a little flag marking the site of a grave



A memorial for Kamloops
at Vancouver Art Gallery

near a residential school in the Qu'Appelle Valley in Saskatchewan. A telling detail, given subsequent developments, is that the graveyard in which he knelt for the cameras was not in fact a long-hidden, just-discovered burial ground for Indigenous school-children. It was the local community Catholic cemetery, where all sorts of people had been buried for generations.

UNSUBSTANTIATED

During the long period of public mourning, some started looking for evidence. By 2024, the federal government had spent \$8 million at the Kamloops site alone but found no evidence of burials.⁵ The ground-penetrating radar which had first given the story legs had apparently picked up evidence of tiles from an old septic system.⁶ Traditional-culture issues prevented excavation at Kamloops, but where sites could be excavated, no unrecorded burials were found. In some instances, the traditional wooden crosses marking graves had succumbed to the elements, thus giving cover to dubious headlines about “unmarked graves.” Wherever documentary records were consulted, it turned out there were few or no missing children.⁷ The incredible but baseless atrocity reports were traced to the decades-long work of a defrocked United Church minister with a history of disseminating wild stories.⁸

Few claimed that the residential schools, which operated roughly from the 1820s through the 1970s, were a success. But, as Glavin—a sympathetic but hard-nosed reporter—noted, the government-driven moral panic *added no new information* to the dismal record. The 139 underfunded, mostly church-run Catholic institutions did inflict “brutal sexual, emotional and psychological abuse” and saw a mortality rate, especially in the early years, that was much higher than average. Of course, any abuse is inexcusable, but these actual harms had already been exhaustively documented and addressed during the Truth and Reconciliation hearings of 2008–2015.

CRIMINALIZING DOUBT

No evidence was found to substantiate the claims that children had been murdered. Nonetheless, as Glavin noted, as of late 2023, “nearly one in five Canadians believe the horribly high mortality rates in the schools were not due to the known causes of infectious diseases like tuberculosis and influenza but rather the result of children being deliberately killed.”⁹ That made it difficult for the federal government to walk back “the worst fake news in Canadian

history,” as Tom Flanagan, co-editor of *Grave Error: How the Media Misled Us (and the Truth About Residential Schools)*, put it.¹⁰

One government strategy has been to try to make “residential school denialism” a crime. In February 2023, Immigration Minister Marc Miller was reported to be considering such a law.¹¹ If it passes, *Grave Error* might end

up as a test case. A book of essays by accredited scholars, investigative journalists, judges, lawyers, and independent researchers, it was published late last year by a small indie press, because, as veteran columnist Barbara Kay put it, “No mainstream

publisher would have touched this book with a ten-foot pole.” It was reviewed mainly in independent media, that is, media not supported financially by the Canadian government, as Canada’s mainstream media are.

Grave Error is devastating, precisely because, in striking contrast to most media coverage of the topic, its analysis is entirely evidence-based. Thus it has, predictably, been denounced as “‘hate literature’, ‘hateful’, has ‘caused harm’ and represents ‘denialism.’”¹² Clearly, not every Canadian agrees. Despite its lowly, unadvertised beginnings, the book has been a consistent reader favorite since publication, at times reaching No. 1 on Amazon Canada. So if Miller is serious about his proposed new law, *Grave Error* should be his first target.

NARRATIVE OVER TRUTH

Why *are* such stories told and believed without—or *in spite of*—evidence? Glavin identifies a key factor: the decline of media throughout North America:

In these impoverished conditions, it’s much easier for journalists to construe events in

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such a way as to uphold an ideologically rigid “narrative” than to go about the hard work of building true stories from the construction material of hard facts.

In this case, the media often defaulted to Indigenous sources who fronted sensational, unsourced stories that it became their duty to believe—and “hateful” to doubt.¹³

There may be deeper issues too. Australian writer Kurt Mahlborg notes that the tales are best understood as a sort of “blood libel,” which, by its very nature is not, and doesn’t even try to be, evidence-based.¹⁴

TIPTOEING AROUND THE REALITY

We may see a formal reprise of the 2021 hysterics around the upcoming September 30 National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, nicknamed “Orange Shirt Day.” The ubiquitous tee shirt derives from an account, of which various versions exist, of an orange shirt being taken from a residential-school student upon arrival.¹⁵

In the meantime, the hype is periodically revived. In June, for example, responding to the fact that no graves of missing children have been found, BC Regional Chief Terry Teegee offered a theory: “Some of these residential schools or these institutions also had incinerators, so there could be potential of not finding any remains of any children that have gone missing.”¹⁶

So the faith stays strong. When *National Post* founder Conrad Black pointed out at a June Western broadcasters’ meeting that “We don’t even today know if there are any graves there”—which is a statement of fact—a number of broadcasters and regulators responded by walking out. The association’s board of directors swiftly issued a formal apology: “We recognize the comments he made today were disrespectful and incredibly hurtful.”¹⁷

The broadcasters may be acting to protect themselves here. Walking out in protest exempts them from having to address the fact that there is no evidence backing the story. Worse, the proposed new law against denialism and another one against “hate speech” could imperil story research. The walkout reassures the powers that be that no awkward questions will be asked. Another safe option, which many are pursuing, is to quietly change or downplay the

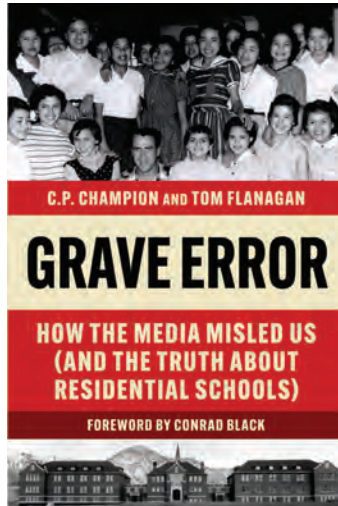
story.¹⁸ Early on, the term “unmarked graves” began to replace “mass graves,” at least in Canadian media.

The main beneficiary of the panic has been China. The totalitarian state quickly capitalized on the Canadian government’s genocide resolution by forcing Canada to abandon its careful, years-long effort to form an international coalition to condemn human rights violations in Xinjiang.

WARNING TO AMERICA

Could a top-down, institutionalized, mass delusion of this sort happen in the United States? Conrad Black offers a comment that may help answer the question: It couldn’t have happened in Canada, he says, without “a large section of the public, which knows this to be a falsehood but chooses to side with the silent forces”¹⁹ that forbid open discussion. If many Americans place themselves

in that section of the public, we can guess the answer pretty accurately. ☹



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17. Connie Thiessen, “Conrad Black Comments Result in Walkout at WAB Conference,” *Broadcast Dialogue* (June 6, 2024).
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19. Conrad Black, “Trudeau Owes Us All an Apology,” *National Post* (May 04, 2024).



The Prodigal Son at Sea

The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe

by Rick Reed

Although generally regarded as an adventure story, *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, a fictional memoir of faith, may be read as a retelling of the parable of the Prodigal Son. Crusoe's father is a merchant who gives his son a comfortable living and urges him to join him in his business. The son, however, goes off to sea, despite warnings regarding the dangers of such a life. The novel recounts Crusoe's experiences of suffering and difficulty before coming to faith followed by his subsequent growth in Christian confidence and testimony afterward.

RASHNESS

When young Crusoe announces his desire to seek his fortune at sea, his father urges him to weigh the risks and comforts of that life against the life of a merchant like himself. Instead of giving more thought to his ways, the determined young prodigal ingratiates himself with a merchant captain who takes him on as a companion investor, not a sailor. With his help, Crusoe makes a handsome profit and decides to try again. On the next voyage, however, he is captured by pirates and sold into slavery. The experience recalls to him his father's prophetic words that he would "have leisure hereafter to reflect upon having neglected his [father's] counsel when there might be none" to help him. Nonetheless, when Crusoe finally escapes, his father's words fade. He sets off again to seek his



fortune, oblivious once more to his father's loving advice.

This third adventure ends in the shipwreck that maroons him on a deserted island. Although he dares to venture out to what remains of the wrecked ship to salvage what he can from it, he remains lonely and hopeless. He builds and stocks a sturdy shelter but struggles, nearly in despair, until he decides to measure the evils of his circumstances against the goods.

GRATITUDE

In composing the two comparative lists, he becomes aware of a simple truth. The list of goods includes his being alive, his bounty of salvage from the wrecked ship, his ability to feed himself, the absence of threats from beasts and other men, and hope that the One who preserved him can deliver him.

Despite the deteriorating clothes, defenselessness, and isolation, he chooses and sets his mind to live and to hope. Reflecting on his many struggles, he concludes, "there was scarce any condition in the world so miserable but there was something negative or something positive to be thankful for it."

WRESTLING WITH GOD

Later, when recovering from a serious illness, Crusoe takes out one of three Bibles recovered from the shipwreck. Though he's too ill to concentrate, his eyes fall on Psalm 50:15: "Call on Me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and

thou shalt glorify Me." Moved, he kneels and prays for the first time in years, asking God to fulfill his promise and deliver him from the island. He continues to meditate on this verse over his twenty-eight years marooned in the Atlantic.

THE PRODIGAL SON AT SEA by Rick Reed



Like many Christians, only times of extreme trial move him to look to God for help, as when, after experiencing a life-threatening earthquake, he utters the most essential prayer, "Lord have mercy upon me!"

When he discovers barley growing about a month after uttering this prayer, he experiences a revelation. Admitting, "I had hitherto acted upon no religious foundation at all," he recalls that he had heretofore attributed the events of his life to chance. But the sight of grain growing in a place where it is not native suggests to him something miraculous, and he begins to think God has intervened on his behalf, reflecting, "I ought to have been as thankful for so strange and unforeseen a providence as if it had been miraculous; for it was really the work of Providence to me." He acknowledges that more than chance was involved in a few odd grains falling into fertile, protected ground just before the rains came.

CONFESSION

As he meditates on his experiences, he confesses his father's "good instruction," as well as his own "eight years of seafaring wickedness"—which included slave-trading. He describes that chapter in his life as one when he neither looked to God nor reflected on his own foolish choices. He confesses "a certain stupidity of soul, without desire of good, or conscience of evil." When rescued from slavery, as when spared from death by shipwreck, he failed to give thanks. Instead, in his first many months on the island, he felt no remorse for ignoring his father but instead pitied himself as an unfortunate man, "born to be always miserable."

The prodigal son who committed, in his own words, a "breach of my duty to God and my father" and who underwent suffering ultimately comes to repent of his defiance and longs to make amends.

Stricken with illness and despair, he finds in God's word an understanding he had never before fully grasped.

SERVICE

By the time Crusoe encounters a man captured in war and rescues him from cannibals who have brought him to the island for sacrifice, his religious sensibilities have become more solid. In fact, he determines to teach the man the Christian religion. Unable to speak his language, Crusoe decides to call the man Friday, the day he rescued him. Though today's critics will say that Crusoe the slave-trader makes Friday his personal slave because he expects a man of color to serve him, the fact is that a bond of friendship grows between the two men, and they learn from each other.

The same critics might call Crusoe a colonialist who has taken over other people's land, but in truth Crusoe delivers Friday from cannibalism, which was practiced not only by his captors but also by Friday's own people.

AN OVERCOMER

Surely, it is no spoiler to note that Crusoe and Friday both eventually escape the island and sail to Europe. The adventure has been made into at least eighteen films. However, it is for the story of Crusoe's transformation from prodigal to penitent that readers should pick up this novel and read it today. In a world in which inhabitants of the most privileged and abundant civilization in human history fixate on the suffering of others and join mobs steeped in resentments (both in the streets and on social media), it could be instructive to follow the rebellion, suffering, and subsequent maturation of a man who chooses to survive and persevere rather than give up in self-pity or erupt in rage. Crusoe is a man who conquers both his situation and himself. Unlike the never-ending jeremiads of the internet woebegone, *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* moves from tribulation to triumph. ☺

Crusoe is a man
who conquers
both his situation
and himself.

*The Adventures
of Robinson
Crusoe* moves
from tribulation
to triumph.



Law & Honor

Guy Hamilton's Man in the Middle

by Anthony Esolen

The great director Billy Wilder once said that he made movies because he wanted to tell stories. He did not say he made them because he wanted to change the world, or anything at all that would have reduced his work to political propaganda. And to tell compelling stories, rather than to engage in a Soviet-style march into the supposed world to come, you have to be interested in human beings such as they are, and not as your political vision would have them be. And you have to envision them in difficult situations, ones that will almost never admit of any political solution.

Hollywood, to be sure, had its leanings even during the golden age (1935–1965), but these were usually kept strictly subordinate to the telling of stories, and in any case, they were neither predictable nor simplistic, for otherwise how could the arch-conservative John Wayne have made so many films for the liberal John Ford? The answer, in part,

was that Wayne and Ford did agree on most of the important things in a man's life, such as courage, honor, diligence, and love of country. Of those four, *honor* is probably the hardest for people now to understand. A businessman who is aiming *only* to make money, or a college professor who writes *only* for publication and promotion, or a researcher who has in mind *only* the advocacy of some social policy is without honor.

MURDER IN THE CAMP

The hero in Guy Hamilton's film *Man in the Middle* (1964) is no saint, but in this world, we have mainly to do with the ordinary run of human sinners; what we require for most situations is not sanctity but honor. And the situation in this film is quite thankless.

We are at an Allied camp in India during World War II. Lieutenant Colonel Barney Adams (Robert Mitchum) is called in—flown in, rather, deliberately and cannily chosen—to put up a defense for one Lieutenant Winston (Keenan Wynn), who has shot a British officer dead in front of many witnesses.

We are in no doubt about this fact. The film begins with the shooting. Winston goes into the man's quarters, where he is resting and minding his business, and empties his gun into the man's body. There was no fight

The British and the Americans, we are told, have been getting along badly, so that what's needed is *both* a guilty verdict and a summary execution (to mollify the British), as well as a real defense (to mollify the Americans). That is what Adams's friend and superior officer, General Kempton (Barry Sullivan), has in mind for him to do.

There is a problem, though. It isn't that Winston is sorry for what he has done. He would do it again, in a heartbeat. It isn't that Winston was defending himself. He was not. It is that Winston is not sane.

You have quite a bar to clear in establishing insanity. We aren't talking about depression or stress or crazy ideas. We are talking about a psychosis so terrible that one no longer has the capacity to recognize reality itself, let alone to distinguish



Robert Mitchum & France Nuyen

right from wrong. And Winston *appears* to be sane. The conclusions from the American medical staff affirm it. He doesn't want to be defended. He doesn't help Adams out. He is glad he did what he did, and he is ready to die.

HUMAN COMPLICATIONS

Yet Major Kaufman (Sam Wanamaker), the one doctor on the American staff who is a qualified psychiatrist, sent in a report to the contrary. But he has been summarily transferred to the interior—gotten out of the way. Fortunately, his secretary (France Nuyen, the lovely French-Vietnamese actress) made a carbon copy of the report and gives it to Adams. At first, he will not read it. It cannot be verified. It is inadmissible as evidence. He must play by the book. But when he finds out about Kaufman's transfer, his suspicions grow, and while time is running out, he makes his way into the hinterlands to meet with Kaufman and, if Winston is indeed insane, to have Kaufman return at once to the main camp to testify. Meanwhile, Adams makes the acquaintance of Major Kensington (Trevor Howard), a British doctor who knows all about Winston and his case, but who has been told by his superiors to keep his mouth shut.

To make matters all the more painful, Winston is a thoroughly detestable human being. He hates blacks, he hates the Indians, he hates the British; and he admits—or rather he boasts—that he killed the British officer because the man was consorting with one of the local women—one of “those,” you see.

Adams is not motivated by any affection for the murderer. He is not motivated by any political vision. He is not on any crusade. But the more it appears that he has been brought in for a complicated little puppet show, the more unwilling he is to play along. Likewise, the secretary has no motives other than loyalty to her former boss, Kaufman, and though she

and Adams fall into a kind of wartime love, that in itself plays no part in what the defense counsel feels he must do. The irony in this is that a woman who is

not lily white, either in complexion or in behavior, is committed to defending Winston the racist, a man who would surely never defend her, and that the defense counsel, in his wartime tryst, is doing something like what Winston says the British officer did which moved him to kill the man in cold blood.

HONOR OVER UTILITY

The motive force is *honor*. General Kempton has a war to win, and the details of Winston's condition mean nothing to him; it appears that the bonds of friendship between him and Adams must be severed. Others on the American staff have their careers to think of. Major Kensington, who will play the key role in the story (and it could go to

no one better than Trevor Howard), has no desire to save the life of a man who has killed one of his countrymen, but he, too, though jaded by the war and put upon by his superiors, is a man of honor.

The final scene, which I won't give away, is both inevitable and a shock—nor will there be any career “redemption” for Barney Adams the honorable lawyer, nor any sentimental ringing of marriage bells in the distance. He has been a man so placed that he must lose if he is to win. But you cannot be a man of honor unless you are willing to take any loss rather than tell a lie, or bury a truth, or shrug and say that the responsibility really rests with somebody else, as if you would be glad to uphold honor on condition that everybody else in the world does the same.

Here too is a proof that what Jesus says is no mere promise, but is the very truth, a truth enacted in the deed itself, that he who would save his life must lose it. ☉





New Age in Wonderland

The Neo-Hippie Religion Replacing Atheism Among the Young

by Roberto Ureña

The class was called “God, World, and Soul,” and I was sitting in a group with four other philosophy students at a state university. The topic of discussion was the nature of religious experience, and one of my colleagues had shared what he considered to be one of the most defining moments of his life. He had been walking through a forest with a friend, he explained, when suddenly—apropos, evidently, of nothing—he and his friend both felt what he called a “distinctly feminine presence.” The beauty of his natural surroundings weighed upon him, and all at once he felt that “everything was one,” that his own individual essence was inextricably and indistinguishably intertwined with the essence of the world around him.

He waxed on for a few minutes before casually concluding with, “By the way, I was on shrooms the whole time.”

He could, of course, have said so from the beginning and

spared me the trouble of paying attention to his story. I almost pointed out that being high does not actually count as a “religious experience,” but I held my tongue. It struck me that he was actually

quite serious. He honestly believed his trip down the rabbit hole was something akin to a baptism of the Holy Ghost—never mind that the Wonderland adventure had been induced by the ingestion of certain hallucinogenic fungi. To question the validity of the experience might come across as an offense, so I decided to remain silent on that issue.

New Ageism

The case of my friend is but one face of the New Age hydra now challenging Christianity and the biblical worldview. It is a sort of neo-hippie culture in which atheists and agnostics, steeped in a world parched of the spiritual by secular academia, have turned to manufactured “spiritual-religious” illusions, which they claim are as good as, if not better than, the real thing. The question of whether their spiritual-religious experiences are accurate reflections of reality, or can even be defended rationally, is left unasked.

On one hand, this bizarre reaction against the New Atheism that formerly held sway in academic circles is strong evidence that the secular vision of a society sapped of spirituality has failed. On the other hand, the wave of people turning not to Christianity or other traditional forms of spirituality but to the psychedelic suggests





that hard atheism and dogmatic secularism have not been without effect.

In my view, New Ageism is supplanting traditional religions among the youth of this generation because it does not involve a commitment to any worldview. It satisfies the longing for spirituality while eschewing any need for rational justification or moral parameters on individual action.

Houses of Cards

New Age is not, at least at the grassroots level, a rational thing consisting of premises worked together into conclusions supporting a logical theory. Find some young person who looks like a stereotypical hippie, and ask him to answer some of the chief worldview questions: What does it mean to be human? What is the basis for morality? Does life have any meaning? What happens after we die? Why do you believe what you believe? If your hippie can give you even a semblance of a rational answer to such questions, your hippie has my deepest respect.

I once asked a stereotypical hippie if she believed in karma. She said she did.

"Interesting," I said. "So, let me ask you this: Suppose a kindly old lady is walking across the street, and, coming down the road at the same time there's a drunk driver who is clearly oblivious to her. Should I try and pull the elderly woman out of the way, if I can?"

"Of course!" she said.

"Now if, despite my efforts, our unfortunate old lady were to



be hit by that vehicle, we'd say it was bad karma, wouldn't we?"

"Well, sure," she said.

I nodded and continued. "And if the car should merely tussle her graying hair, we'd say it was good karma, wouldn't we?"

"I guess," she figured

"And is not karma *just*?" I queried.

"It has to be," she said.

And now, for the finishin stroke: "Well, then, isn't it my moral duty to *not* interfere? After all, if the car does hit our old lady, she is simply getting her dues for some horrid action she did in her past or

in some other life. On the other hand, if the car does not hit her,

then surely the face of karma smiles on her sweet, innocent soul, and I have no need to lift a finger. Either way, let karmic justice be done, though the heavens may fall. You see, then, that the moral system of karma allows no room for compassion. Compassion, of course, would dictate that I rush to the assistance of the old woman. And, insofar as compassion is supposed to be a cornerstone of any moral system, karma, in and of itself, cannot stand as a moral system."

Here there was a pause. She looked at me strangely. She opened her mouth to speak, and, even as I prepared to taste from the blessed cup of victory, she uttered a single word.

"So?"

So? Was that to be my reward? And here I thought I might just convert her!

New Age is a house of cards, pretending to be a castle. A puff of wind or a sentence of argument is all it takes to send the whole

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bastion crashing down. But, does our hippie friend care a hoot? I might smash her house of cards with a wrecking ball of reason, scattering the cards like chaff by logic and fundamental principles, reducing her most cherished beliefs to ashes of folly and her dogmas to imbecilities.

But wait! What's this? She is unchanged! Her countenance retains its happy-go-lucky air, and her long hair does not droop in despair. She picks up the eight of diamonds and the two of clubs from among the rubble and leans them together so that they stand. Another such triangle, and another like it—until, at last, the house of cards stands again! Is it possible that she herself knows that philosophy does her beliefs no favors? Is it possible that she believes *simply because she wants to*?

A Domesticated God

All of this is to say that logic, as a means of discovering truth, means not a scrap of paper to New Ageists. They may know better than you or I do that astrology doesn't make fruit punch, let alone sense, but believe in it anyway. Why? They may tell you it works. They may tell you they don't know, but it feels nice. They may tell you that the shrooms told them so. I once asked a New Ageist to explain why she believed in reincarnation, and in her explanation, she rather kindly referred me to the accredited academic source *Dragon Ball Z*. Yes, the anime series.

New Age is not a philosophy but a wishful feeling which has somehow crystalized into a quasi-religion. But why, then, do people, especially the young, cling so stubbornly to such a system—if, in fact, it can even be called a system?

I think that New Age, with its concoction of various eccentric beliefs—the mysterious force of karma, the enigmatic power of the stars, the strange qualities

of certain crystals—gives to the believer a kind of comfort from the cold, stark aspects of naked atheism. Here the spiritual realm is tame and can be appealed to as necessary, without the imperative of living one's life according to any dictates. If there is a God, then God is relegated to some uncanny energy that emanates from nature, or perhaps to the tickly feeling in one's chest during an LSD trip. Such a god demands nothing from humans and is apparently quite indifferent as to whether the creatures believe in him or not. And it appears that as far as the New Ageists are concerned, the feeling is mutual. Such a god provides no moral framework aside from something like "you do you," which is quite a convenient law to follow anyway. New Ageism is like a buffet line. Take what you like, pass on what you don't, and leave with more than can possibly fit on one plate—never mind the consequences.

Engaging with the New Age Faithful

It is only a half-good to point out where the holes in the boat are; the other half is making some effort to stop up the leaks. Thus, here are a few suggestions for anyone looking to engage the inhabitants of New Age culture:

- Attempting to rationalize a New Ageist out of his New Ageism is, in itself, irrational. This may seem counterintuitive, but the New Ageist, who has come to accept his ideas, despite their irrationality, will seldom be impressed by the rationality of your ideas. The man who has gouged his own eyes out will never understand the beauty of your painting, try as you may to describe it to him.

- The key to reaching a New Ageist is through *pathos*. Most

New Ageists believe in nonsense because they find pleasure in their nonsense. I have found the most success in speaking with New Ageists when I engage with their beliefs—and present my own—at their level. People tend to pay more attention to you when you speak their language. In other words, it is important to demonstrate why Christianity is satisfying, fulfilling, and hopeful. After all, these things are what the New Ageist is seeking.

- Have a ready answer for what it is you believe and why you believe it. In any attempt to persuade anyone, you must have a firm grasp of your own worldview. Have you asked yourself the worldview questions we asked our hypothetical hippie friend? If not, sit down and really try to give each one a satisfactory answer.

The Human Connection

There is no ready-made, microwaveable answer to New Ageism because there is no one-minute answer to the difficult questions we ask as human beings. When speaking with those of another worldview, perhaps especially with New Ageism, it is crucial to engage not with a view to destroying the other person's ideas, but with a view to engaging with—and understanding—a person. Everyone has his own struggles, hungers, and beliefs—the hippie no less than the theist, atheist, or agnostic—and each one should be addressed on a personal level. A loving tone, a peaceful demeanor, and a hopeful message go a long way toward opening the heart and mind of a New Ageist toward the Christian faith. The power of our evangelism must come not from argument but from a genuine desire to draw thirsty souls out of this world and into the arms of the God they unwittingly, yet so desperately, seek. ☺



Counting to God

A Journey Back to Faith Through Science

by Douglas Ell

When I was a child, I sensed that there was a purpose behind the universe, and that comforted me. My parents took me to church and Sunday school, but I don't remember learning anything about Jesus or the Gospel. Nothing sunk in, and that was probably because I was a very distracted kid.

High-School Science vs. Faith

I left the faith in high school. I was (and still am) quite the nerd, and as I learned more about science, science seemed to contradict the Bible. What really shook me was something called the Miller-Urey experiment. It was in my high-school textbook, and although it has long been discredited, it still appears in many science textbooks.

In 1953, two scientists mixed the chemicals they thought were representative of the early-Earth atmosphere. By running electricity through the solution, they were able to produce a few amino acids, the elementary building blocks of life. From this they inferred that life could have formed by natural processes—that it could have, as



Douglas Ell

Charles Darwin had speculated, started as an accidental byproduct of some chemical reaction in a "warm little pond" on the primeval Earth. It was a weak inference for many reasons: for one, they used ultra-pure chemicals, and for another, the conditions of the controlled experiment were nowhere near what the natural conditions might have been. Moreover, even

if they had produced *all* the necessary building blocks, there would still be the matter of getting them to link up in the right way, a feat that does not "just happen" by accident.

Unfortunately, after reading that life could have started by chance, I turned away from God. I considered myself an atheist when I entered MIT, and this continued for many years as I went through graduate school in theoretical mathematics and then law school.

Church

Later, when I was in my early thirties, my son was born. My wife wanted him to be baptized, and I agreed mostly to avoid conflict. But I sensed something at that church. I felt a sense of holiness there, and I met people who had peace in their lives. They had something that I desperately needed and wanted, and I knew that no amount of money nor professional success was going to provide it for me. I started going to church regularly.

But I still had doubts. I told myself that I couldn't believe in God unless there was scientific evidence for his existence. So I decided I owed it to myself to look for evidence.

Amazing Evidence

I purchased the standard college treatise on molecular biology

(more than 1,400 pages of fin print) and started to read. What I found amazed me! The evidence from biology is overwhelming; there is far too much complexity and information stored in our 3.2 billion “letters” of DNA to be the result of anything but design. I read details about how life runs because of those biological parts we call proteins and the complicated machines (a *lot* of them) that are built by putting them together in just the right way. Proteins are highly specialized molecules. At one point, the math nerd in me could not help but

calculate—literally on the back of an envelope on an airplane—the fantastic improbability that a single functional protein could have ever come together by accident in the entire history of the universe. It was an “Aha” moment for me. The question of God’s existence was a no-brainer; modern science points to belief in God.

I also read books on physics and cosmology, where I found more compelling evidence. There are dozens of constants that seem to be set perfectly for life to exist: the speed of light, the strength of gravity, the ratio of the masses of

the proton and the electron, and so on. The extreme improbability of our universe’s having all the constants set so precisely has been likened to a control room in which every dial has been finely tuned to the exact right setting. The conjecture of a multiverse as an answer to the problem of this fine tuning fails for numerous scientific reasons. And scientific posturing notwithstanding, without God, science has no clue why there is *something* rather than *nothing*. Why does anything exist?

At one point during this journey, I was talking with a friend



MU as having “simulated the conditions *thought at the time* to be present in the atmosphere of the early, prebiotic Earth” (emphasis added). Why the qualifier

Bad Chemistry

When Stanley Miller and his PhD advisor Harold Urey conducted the experiment, their setup was simple and straightforward. They filled large glass flasks with gases simulating the atmospheric conditions *thought at the time* to represent those on

the early Earth: hydrogen, ammonia, methane, and water vapor (importantly, they did not include oxygen). They ran an electrical current through the mixture to mimic the effect of lightning and quickly produced two of the elementary building blocks of life, the amino acids glycine and alanine.

Later geophysical and geochemical research determined that the assumptions Miller and Urey had made about the environmental conditions on the early Earth were wrong. We now know that the atmosphere consisted of

Zombie Science

The Miller-Urey Experiment

by Bob Perry

By the late 1990s, the 1953 Miller-Urey experiment (MU) had been thoroughly debunked. That’s why Jonathan Wells included it in his 2000 book, *Icons of Evolution*, as an example of one of the evolutionary myths the scientific establishment continues to prop up.¹

Today, if you google MU, the top results *still* reference it as “groundbreaking” and “one of the first successful experiments demonstrating the synthesis of organic compounds from inorganic constituents in an origin of life scenario.”² Interestingly, that article and others like it describe

who was then head of the physics department at MIT. I mentioned that modern science points directly to God. "Someone should write a book about it," I said—to which he responded, "Perhaps that could be you."

I didn't like that answer; I was a busy attorney with three kids. Surely, there must be someone better suited to the task. But I did eventually put my finding in a book. *Counting To God: A Personal Journey Through Science to Belief* (2014) took me ten years to write, and I launched it by giving a lecture at MIT. It "counts" through seven areas of science that point to God: the creation of the universe, the fine-tuning

of the universe, the origin of life, the technology of life, the puzzles of macroevolution, our uniquely special Earth, and quantum mechanics and its implications for human thought and free will. One simple fact that nearly anyone can understand is that when it comes to the proposed neo-Darwinian mechanism of natural selection operating on random mutations, evolution works *downward*, not up. In other words, when you take working DNA code and corrupt it with errors and unguided mutations, the organism deteriorates. This now seems obvious to me, and it should be obvious to anyone who's ever worked with software code.

nitrogen, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, and water vapor. Those studies also determined that some free oxygen was present. And oxygen, even in trace amounts, tends to shut down prebiotic chemistry.³

In addition, MU used a *continuous* charge of electricity to simulate lightning. But lightning comes in flashes. When later researchers used non-continuous, sudden bursts of electric current to re-create the results of MU, they produced *no* amino acids.

Weak Sauce

Amino acids are the building blocks of polypeptides, which, in turn, must be assembled to form proteins, which must each be folded and connected to other proteins in very specific ways. MU produced two—amino acids, *not* proteins.

There are 20 different kinds of amino acids, and proteins are composed of strings of up to 3000 of them. The median number in a simple bacterial protein is 267; in a human protein, it is 375.⁴ And there are about 20,000 different

kinds of proteins in the human body.

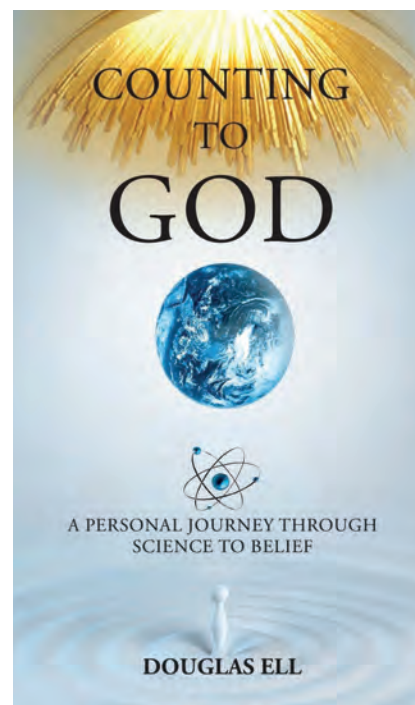
To say MU demonstrated "the synthesis of organic compounds from inorganic constituents" is more than a stretch; it's a fantastical extrapolation. But to *continue* saying it knowing that MU was conducted using a non-analogous method *and* with the wrong initial conditions is downright intellectually dishonest.

Walking Dead Science

In 2017, Wells followed up *Icons of Evolution* with *Zombie Science: More Icons of Evolution*, in which he noted that MU has been cited in biology textbooks published as recently as 2016. Though long discredited, the Miller-Urey fantasy continues to shuffle on. Just like the walking dead. •

Notes

1. Jonathan Wells, *Icons of Evolution: Science or Myth? Why Much of What We Teach About Evolution Is Wrong*, (2000), pp. 9-27.
2. "Miller-Urey Experiment," *Wikipedia* (accessed June 3, 2024).
3. Fazale Rana & Hugh Ross, *Origins of Life: Biblical and Evolutionary Models Face Off* (Navpress, 2004), pp. 100-101.
4. Ron Milo, *Cell Biology by the Numbers*, "How Big Is the 'Average' Protein?"



The Wonderful Gift of Faith

For those who have eyes to see, the evidence is everywhere! My search for evidence for God has been ongoing for more than 40 years. To this day, I feel like I was intellectually bullied, pressured to turn away from God in high school and college by falsified science. I abhor bullies of all types and most especially intellectual bullies—people, often professors at top colleges, who think their views are more important than anyone else's and who try to overwhelm others with questionable science. The truth is inconvenient to secular intellectuals, but honest science points to God. To quote Lord Kelvin, "If you study science deep enough and long enough, it will force you to believe in God."

My faith journey has been a wonderful gift. It's as though, while following road signs to logic, I came to a place of indescribable wonder. I now live in awe of the majestic design of the universe and the magnificent technology in all life. I wake up every morning giving thanks to God. ☺



More Than Matter

A Review of *Minding the Brain*

by Amanda Witt

I'm an editor for Discovery Institute Press, and one day last year a friend at church asked what I'd been doing at work lately. "We're putting the final touches on a book where twenty-five experts in different fields weigh in on the relationship between the mind and the brain," I told her.

She looked perplexed. "But the mind and the brain are the same thing," she said. "Aren't they?"

That's the question addressed in the first big section of *Minding the Brain: Models of the Mind, Information, and Empirical Science* (2023, 490 pages plus three online-only chapters).

The Mind-Body Problem

First, a clarification: The term *brain* refers to the physical organ residing inside the skull. The term *mind*, as used in this book, refers to thoughts, consciousness, will, emotion, soul—any *immaterial* part of the self.

Does the mind exist in its own right or is it purely a byproduct of the physical brain, much like smoke is a byproduct of fire? If the mind does exist apart from the brain, what is the precise relationship between the two? Does one give life to the other? Does the brain dying make the mind depart, or does the mind departing make the brain die? Does one control the other—a one-way street—or is it a two-way street, with each influencing the other?

These are a few of the questions addressed in *Minding the Brain* by experts from a wide range of fields, including neuroscience, computer science,

theology, psychology, social psychology, quantum theory, and mathematics.

Because the authors are trying to have fruitful conversations across disciplines, they mostly avoid field-specific jargon, making the book generally accessible to readers with no background in any of their fields. Some sections are more challenging than others (I had to look up *supervenience* and *haecceity*, and any discussion of quantum theory will mostly sail over my head), but I was always able to at least get the gist of any given argument, and there are plenty of more readily understandable parts. All told, it's a fascinating and informative book.

The contributors don't agree with each other about the relationship between mind and brain. They argue (politely); they refer to each other's articles and to comments made by pre-publication expert reviewers. Sometimes they persuade each other into a slight change of position. Sometimes they heave an exasperated sigh.

Physicalism's Fatal Flaws

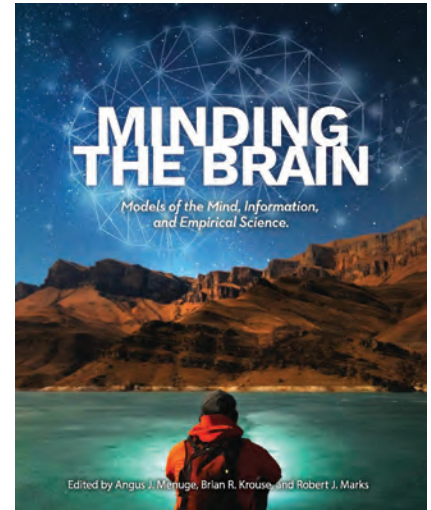
There's one point, however, upon which they all agree: we aren't just meat machines. That is, *physicalism* (or materialism, or naturalism—all referring to the view that matter is the sole fundamental type

of substance in existence) cannot provide a credible explanation for certain immaterial phenomena of which we are all aware, including emotions, thoughts, each person's sense of himself as a unique individual, and the experiences of sensations like pain that require a coherent "I" (that is, a conscious subject who retains a stable identity over time).

The first part of the book is dedicated to explaining the fatal flaws in various types of physicalism. Later chapters circle back and put more nails in physicalism's coffin. Here are just a very few:

Causal logic: How can purely physical parts such as nerve cells (neurons) produce non-physical cognitive capacities such as the ability to produce complex language? And even if we grant causality in that direction, how can it run the other way? That is, if every event has a purely physical cause, then how can our thoughts cause anything? How can our mental states affect our physical body and behavior, as they clearly do?

Brain experiments: Physical stimulation of the brain by a neurosurgeon can produce movements, sensations, perceptions such as smells, and can even cause the recall of certain memories; but it can't produce "mind actions" such





as abstract reasoning, mathematical calculations, or volition. Why not? And when a neurosurgeon stimulates the brain and causes a patient's hand to move, why is the patient always aware that it was the neurosurgeon—not the patient—who caused the movement to happen? Also, why do brain waves register before a positive decision, but not before a negative one (a veto)?

Craniopagus twins: Why do conjoined twins who share large portions of the brain and who can control each other's arms and legs nevertheless have separate selves and personalities?

Commissurotomies: Why do people whose brain hemispheres are severed (split brain) still have unity of mind?

Near-death experiences: If we're purely physical beings, how can people who die on the operating table or elsewhere and who are then resuscitated present verifiable evidence that they were conscious throughout the experience—and conscious in places far from their dead or dying bodies, witnessing events on other floors of the hospital, or even across town in other buildings?

The authors highlight these and many other evidential challenges to the materialist view of the mind/brain. Additionally, they reflect on artificial intelligence and how it compares to human creativity and human emotion; quantum physics; the non-physicality of mathematics; and the implication of our ability to engage over a period of time in consistent reflection on these ideas (unity of consciousness over time). All told, the anthology makes a powerful case that physicalism cannot—and never will—explain aspects of human existence that you experience every day. The mind (soul, will, immaterial self) really does exist as its

own non-physical thing. On this the authors agree.

Three Models

Beyond that, it's something of a (very polite and brainy) free-for-all, as the authors hold a variety of positions on how to conceptualize the relationship between the physical and nonphysical. Their views can be loosely grouped into three broad categories (some authors manage to blur the lines).

Substance dualists argue that there are two types of foundational substances, the mental and the physical (unlike physicalists, who say that matter is the only foundational substance of reality).

Idealists say there's only one foundational substance, but it's not matter—it's mind. All reality consists of minds and their ideas, and physical things are aspects of God's thoughts.

But what if, as William (Bill) Dembski and C. Eric Jones argue, the most fundamental aspect of reality isn't matter or mind, but the unseen web of relationships, information, and communication tying everything (physical and immaterial) together? In a *relational ontology* model, things exist not in themselves but insofar as they relate to other things. Pushing back against the idealists, Dembski argues that we aren't just thoughts of God; God, so the Genesis account says, *spoke* creation into existence. Words, alas, can't be taken back. They are separate from us in a way that thoughts are not. So God's spoken creation gives us free will in a way that a thought-based creation could not.



More Than the Materialists Say

"I get it," said my friend, when I ran through a tiny fraction of all this, which is itself only the very tiniest fraction of *Minding the Brain*. "The mind and the brain are different, even though we tend to use those terms interchangeably. And we shouldn't, because we're inadvertently misstating who we are."

Exactly. Whether you end up aligning with some version of dualism, or idealism, or relational ontology, one thing is clear: We are more than the materialists say. There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in physicalist philosophies. And there are more people—intelligent, educated people—pondering and discussing these things than you might imagine.

Minding the Brain opens the door onto some of those "more thans." ☺



A Life-Affirming Lie

Dr. Paul Saba Takes After the Great Physician

by Katie Breckenridge

Dr. Paul Saba is a physician based in Quebec who has spent his career, both at home and abroad, living out what it means to enact the “Good Samaritan” model of healthcare. He has provided medical services in under-developed countries, helped the financially disadvantaged to receive life-saving medications, and worked tirelessly to keep his Quebec community hospital, Lachine Hospital, running, so that every person has access to needed healthcare services. His 2020 book, *Made to Live: A Physician’s Journey to Save Life*, details his arduous battle against Canada’s euthanasia and assisted-suicide laws, as well as his endeavors to save and honor the lives of his patients from their natural beginnings to their natural ends.

Your book is called *Made to Live*. What do you mean by this, and how did you come up with that title?

Before my daughter Jessica was born, we were told at 20- and 24-weeks’ gestation that she had

a severe cardiac abnormality, that she probably was a Down’s baby, and that we should consider our options. That was code for “abortion.” We said, “Absolutely not.” And they continued to ask that question all the way up to the time that she was delivered. They would call my wife and say, “Have

you reconsidered?” because in Canada, with abortion, there is no time limit. Third-trimester abortion in our province can be used for exceptional circumstances, including “social crisis.”

“Social crisis” could mean anything.

That’s right. My wife was very clear. She said, “You do everything for my baby.” Even though our laws will benefit the mom over the baby, my wife showed how committed she was to the birth of this baby. Jessica was born, and they had to do a procedure at six days. They opened up the valve, and her heart started to function. Then they had to do a redo procedure at 11 months. Recently, during a routine exam, the cardiologist said, “If I didn’t know what she had been through, I would never know she had a heart malformation.”

When Jessica was seven, I asked her to draw a picture of our family. She drew the picture of a family—Dad, Mom, sis, bro, “me, Jessica”—and above she wrote, “Made to Live.” That motivated me to write the book.

I love that. Why wouldn't you do all you can to save your child instead of snuffing out her life prematurely?

Every aspect of life is stressful, and we do everything we can to alleviate it. We don't prevent life, because we'd be preventing life every step along the way if we tried to remove all the stresses and difficulties. That's why the book is about life from birth to the natural end, so that it's a continuum. I've had people in the anti-euthanasia movement say, "You shouldn't talk about abortion." I said, "No, abortion is similar. It's ending a life somewhere along the continuum."

How did you work against the legalization of assisted suicide and euthanasia in Canada?

I've done many different actions from many different levels. I've participated in parliamentary commissions. I've sent briefs. I've done a petition drive. I've held conferences. I've participated in court and was able to stop the law for two weeks in our province. The attorney general sided with me, and then they did an about-face a short time later. The prime minister, Justin Trudeau, spoke out in support of euthanasia during the

court proceedings. I decried this as government interference.

The attorney general of Canada and Quebec submitted to the court that I should not be allowed to speak or write against it. Since I wasn't impartial, I would have to make a public statement [saying] that I'd be willing to be euthanized before I could speak in court against it. That goes against our Canadian charter of rights and freedoms. Thankfully, the judge didn't accept their argument about that part. The problem is that it shows how far our governments will go to oppose and suppress any opposing views. They'll do anything they can to prevent any opposition to the expansion of this "program."

Once euthanasia becomes legal, it can take away people's rights, kind of like vaccines. If they can mandate vaccines, which have certain side effects—I've always been opposed to mandated anything—why can they not mandate euthanasia?

Have you ever known doctors to be wrong about a diagnosis, or wrong about how long a patient has left to live?

I had a patient who was told he had lung cancer. He said that if euthanasia had been legal, he wouldn't have gone to treatment; he would've just taken euthanasia. In Canada, the law doesn't require you to undergo investigation or

treatment. You can say, "That's enough information for me, I want to be euthanized." If you can find two doctors willing to sign, they can sign off. For all intents and purposes, it looked like he had lung cancer. All the x-

rays and scans confirmed lung cancer. We were able to convince him to undergo a biopsy, and it turned out to be lymphoma. At one point, the resident had told him he didn't have lymphoma [but] had lung cancer, so he had misinformed the patient. The patient underwent treatment several years ago, and he hasn't had any recurrence. He's very much alive.

I bring out in the book that for an estimate of doctors' diagnostic errors in the U.S., you can look at insurance claims. For medical/legal claims there is up to about a 20 percent error rate in the diagnosis of severe illnesses. So not only do I have anecdotal reports, but it's also known in insurance research.

What's the most common reason you've seen for people requesting assisted death?

Most of the reasons people do it is because they don't want to be a burden. They feel alone and

If they can mandate vaccines, which have certain side effects—I've always been opposed to mandated anything—why can they not mandate euthanasia?



Dr. Paul Saba and his family



isolated. They can't do the activities that they used to do.

They feel a duty to die. They feel useless.

Yes. A lot of it is psychosocial distress. Occasionally the reason will be pain, but there's no reason for people to have pain with all the medications we have.

God wants us to be actively involved in helping people, comforting them, healing them, [but] never shortening people's lives. I like Dietrich Bonhoeffer. One of his famous quotes was "not to speak is to speak, and not to act is to act." So when we don't intervene to make people's lives better, we're actually condoning what is going on, and that's why I can't stand aside when I see people's lives being shortened through euthanasia and assisted suicide. And I'm a strong advocate for more screening tests. If we can prevent cancers by doing more and better screening, we can give people a chance.

How can we make the lives of the dying meaningful?

I think we need to be there. We need to support them, spend time with them, and help them. If they can't cook, find ways to bring meals to them, or groceries. When people fall sick, they're financially strained. They can't work. Insurance often doesn't cover all that they need. If you can't personally deliver groceries, you can send them. If you can, visit them. It's always nice to be there and be with them.

Show them that they're still valuable and worthy of life and dignity.

Yes. I talk in my book about a fellow who wanted to die, and his

neighbor came by and just spent time with him, and he changed his mind. Spending time with that person changed his whole view because he didn't feel alone.

Let me ask about healthcare in Canada. You have said that universal healthcare isn't as great as people seem to think.

I wouldn't say that Canada should take on a private-care system like the U.S., but I think what we need to do is make sure everybody has healthcare coverage so that nobody is deprived of medical care and so that euthanasia and assisted suicide won't be the least-expensive alternative.

Canada is promoting it for savings. Once people are sick, they're not productive. You can't work when you're sick. The insurance companies see it as a benefit, too, because then they don't have to pay for ongoing treatment. What we have to change is the mindset, not so much the type of healthcare system.

We need to be building capacity. I often talk about the *Titanic*. People died because there was a lack of lifeboats. We need to provide more lifeboats. During the Covid epidemic, they talked about limiting access to intensive-care beds. They were going to deny critical care to anyone with less than a 70 percent score on a survival-evaluation scale. Intensive care and hospitals should be there to care for people who need care and not reject people who are considered complicated and in need of extra care.

Is there anything else you'd like readers to know about the work of making assisted death illegal?

I think the greatest danger is apathy. And apathy can come in many ways—apathy of thinking it doesn't concern me, I will never

sign up for it, and it probably won't affect my family. Of course, that's false because they're discussing opening it up for children in Canada. Right now, if you have any child or family member 18 and over, it's done independently of family involvement because the person is considered an adult. And eventually it will be for children as young as 11 or 12, without family involvement, because they'll be considered mature children, even though they can't always see around the bend. Children don't always make the best choices. That's why they're not allowed to sign up for credit cards by themselves, get married, or drive a car.

The other thing is the apathy of the community, including churches. Assisted death is very ingrained here in Quebec. I think, in the church, it needs to be spoken about. Tragically, they often strongly oppose bringing up these subjects because they say it's not the place of the church to bring up debates about abortion, euthanasia, and other life issues.

That's absolutely the place of the church.

Jesus spoke out against what the Pharisees were doing during his time. He was very countercultural. To be a follower of Christ and of his example is to go against the culture, and the churches who refuse to do that are not following Christ's teaching. It's anti-Christian to not do everything in one's power to *speak for* and *support* and *act for* life. It's anti-Christian to not support and promote life from conception to natural death. We're created in the image of God, and when we kill a person, we're killing God's image. They always say, "dying with dignity," but suicide and euthanasia are undignified dying. ☹

—To learn more about Dr. Saba or to contact him, visit www.MadeToLive.com.

New Atheists for Christ

A Review of Coming to Faith Through Dawkins: 12 Essays on the Pathway from New Atheism to Christianity, edited by Denis Alexander & Alister McGrath

by Joshua Pauling

If in the early 2000s someone had said that New Atheism would be digging its own grave by the 2020s, I'm not sure anyone would have believed it. New Atheism was an edgier and bolder form of unbelief promoted by such energetic and quick-witted figures as Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens, and Richard Dawkins (dubbed the Four Horsemen of the movement), who published bestselling critiques of religion and packed out auditoriums with people eager to hear their takedowns of Christianity. But now, in 2024, Hitchens and Dennett are deceased; Sam Harris seems more interested in meditation and "spirituality without religion";¹ and Richard Dawkins says he is a "cultural Christian."²

What in the world has happened? Part of the answer can be found in *Coming to Faith Through Dawkins*, a compilation of essays from a variety of converts to Christianity whose stories intersect with Dawkins and the New Atheism. For anyone looking to get a basic grasp of both the allure of the movement and how its shine rubbed off, this book is a good place to start. McGrath and Alexander are the perfect editors for the project, as they are both topflight academics in the realm of science and religion, and they have interacted extensively with the New Atheism both intellectually and personally.

Dawkins's Paradoxical Deliverances

McGrath begins with a helpful foreword that maps out the movement right up to current happenings on the ground. The cultural mood has shifted, he notes, "as

many who had initially embraced the New Atheism found that it failed to deliver the secure knowledge they longed for or a sustainable vision of the 'good life.'" He lays out five key elements of what is leading many people away from atheism and toward a reconsideration of God.

- Dawkins's public attacks on Christianity ironically "generated a surge of interest in exploring religious faith."
- Dawkins's own arguments in his bestselling *The God Delusion* have been heavily criticized by "leading atheist philosophers who were alarmed at the damage they thought his shrill and superficial engagement with life's deepest questions was doing to the intellectual reputation of atheism."
- Dawkins's outlook on religion was deeply shaped by "an uncritical acceptance of the 'warfare' model of the relation of science and religion."



- Dawkins's trenchant certitude actually mirrored the "religious fundamentalism" he critiqued.
- Dawkins's growing celebrity and cult of personality increasingly appeared as "a new religious movement, with its infallible prophets and authoritative texts," mirroring as well the very dogmas and practices he critiqued.

New Christians

These themes and more are woven throughout the essays of the twelve contributors, who represent a wide range of countries, life experiences, and professions. They are scientists, historians, professors, pastors, lawyers, engineers, and artists, and readers will find their stories accessible, genuine, and inspiring. Most of all, readers will come away with a renewed sense of the mysterious ways in which God makes all things work together to bring people to himself—even through such an unlikely "evangelist" as Richard Dawkins. ☺

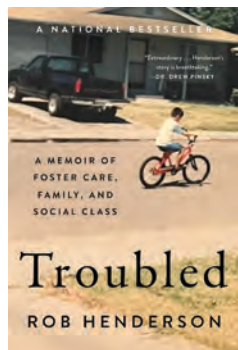
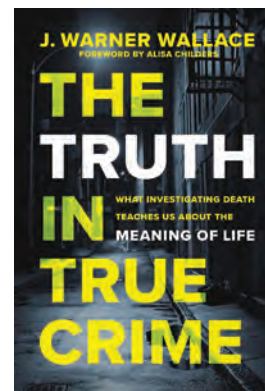
Notes

1. Sam Harris, *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion* (2014).
2. Walter Sánchez Silva, "Famous Atheist Richard Dawkins Says He Considers Himself a 'Cultural Christian'," *National Catholic Register* (April 3, 2024).

The Truth in True Crime: What Investigating Death Teaches Us About the Meaning of Life

by J. Warner Wallace

The beloved ex-atheist cold case detective has come out with another winner. Here, Det. Wallace weaves together vignettes based on real-life crime investigations, ancient wisdom which includes (but is not limited to) Scriptural teachings, and contemporary findings from social-science research to produce 15 rock-solid principles about life and how to live it in any time, place, or season. While true crime fans will especially like it, this book is for anyone desiring to “do life” well.



Troubled: A Memoir of Foster Care, Family & Social Class

by Rob Henderson

Rob Henderson lived with ten different families before he was adopted into a moderately stable family around age eight. Remarkably, he went on to serve in the U.S. Air Force and then graduate from Yale and Cambridge University. Although some of the social-critique implications lurking in the background are devastating, this story is both insightful and hopeful. Two takeaway conclusions (among many) are: “the poor reap what the luxury belief class sows” and family stability matters more than wealth or education.

How to Build a Better Life: A New Roadmap for Women Who Want to Prioritize Love & Family

by Suzanne Venker

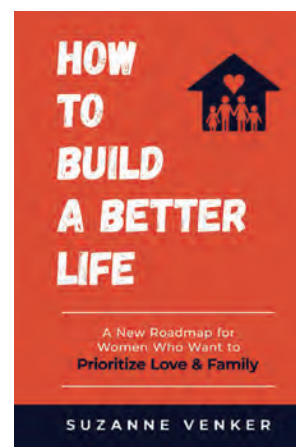
Venker says that when it comes to sex, relationships, work, marriage, and family, our culture is so toxic we are numb to it. Her straight talk about dating and relationships, the differences between men and women, and playing the long game for a satisfying life offers bracing (and refreshing) ideological detox for the next generation. She writes to young women, but parents and grandparents will find here potent truth bombs to pack away and share with anyone who will listen.



You Are Mine

by Sister Anastasia

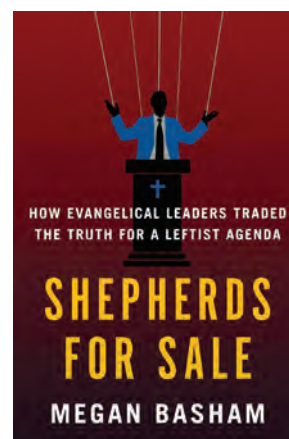
When a broken twenty-something addict began practicing meditation as part of her recovery, it led to “plant medicine” therapies, witchcraft, and a host of occult spiritual rituals. She was a sought-after practitioner until an encounter with Christ and a stay at an Orthodox monastery set her heart on a new love. This is her memoir of that old life and the season of deprogramming by which she learned to see with new eyes, take up her cross, and follow the One who is Spirit and Life.



Shepherds for Sale: How Evangelical Leaders Traded the Truth for a Leftist Agenda

by Megan Basham

Basham examines questionable developments at the intersection of American evangelicalism and certain political ideologies: climate change, immigration, race, sex, and more. Names are named, but only where statements, transactions, or events are on the record. Christians are directed to guard sound doctrine while being wise as serpents yet innocent as doves. This heavily documented journalistic *tour de force* abides by all three directives and will help you do the same.



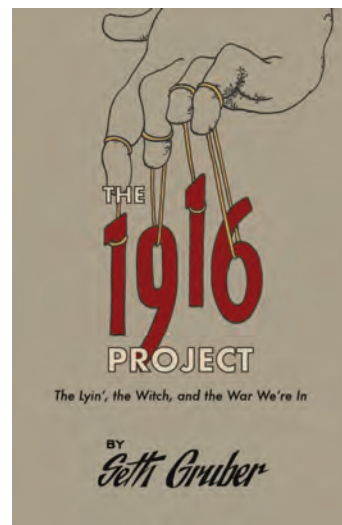


The Final War: The 100-Year Plot to Defeat America

The People's Republic of China was formed in 1949 with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as the nation's sole ruling power and avowed Marxist Mao Zedong as CCP chairman. EpochTV takes a sweeping look at CCP documents, rhetoric, and actions from the beginning with an eye toward discerning CCP intentions as a global player. Does the CCP want to coexist peacefully with other nations, or does it have more aggressive designs toward the free world? Every freedom-lover should see this film before glibly answering that question.

The 1916 Project: The Lyin', the Witch, and the War We're In

Revolutions don't just pop up out of nowhere. Margaret Sanger opened the first American birth control clinic in 1916, but she didn't create a culture of death alone. Pro-life dynamo Seth Gruber traces the sexual chaos of today to Sanger and a cadre of racist eugenicists, socialists, and sexual radicals of her ilk on both sides of the Atlantic. His goal is to educate and rally the church to stand up and contend for righteousness and truth in our perilously wayward day. More information at The1916Project.com.



Grid Down, Power Up

American life is heavily dependent on electricity—to the extent that an outage of just a few days could lead to unrest, instability, even death. This film contends that the U.S. power grid is poorly secured and is therefore alarmingly vulnerable to attack (physical and cyber) by hostile enemies but that with planning and wise investment, the risks can be minimized. Well-made, informative, and available free on YouTube (with ads). See GridDownPowerUp.com for more viewing options.

No Farmers No Food: Will You Eat the Bugs?

Global elites tell us that climate change is responsible for rising food prices and that traditional agriculture is responsible for climate change. Proposed "green" solutions include replacing beef, pork, and chicken with insects and repurposing farmland. But what if it's green policies that have been driving up food prices to begin with? And what might be some consequences of sitting idly by while global powers double down on them? This EpochTV documentary explores those questions and more.



Prisha Mosley: A Detransitioner's Pregnancy Journey

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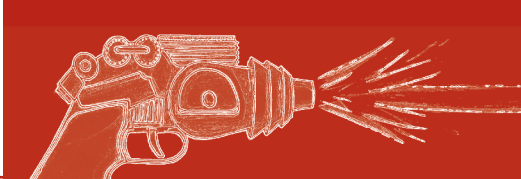
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Prisha Mosley: A Detransitioner's Pregnancy Journey

After being sexually assaulted as an adolescent, Prisha felt like she could only engage safely with a man if she *were* a man. She went on testosterone and had a double mastectomy before changing her mind and detransitioning. To her utter shock, she later became pregnant. She tells her story and explains the manifold pregnancy complications caused by "gender-affirming harm" (her term) in this short YouTube film, in hopes of saving others from suffering the same harm.



Queer Biology

Atheist Scientists Call Out Academic Quackery

by John Stonestreet & Shane Morris

A recent video from the *PBS Eons* YouTube channel wrestled with how to distinguish between male and female dinosaurs when all that is left are bones. The host defined biological sex as applied to these extinct creatures: "In this script, we'll be using 'male' and 'female' as shorthand for 'sperm-producing' and 'egg-producing' individuals." This definition is essentially correct. A given individual, whether human or dinosaur, *just is* male or female. We *identify* sex; we don't "assign" it. Sex is objective and binary and has to do with the two distinct roles in reproduction.



Biological Pseudoscience

Unfortunately, not every source of science education is this clear. For example, evolutionary biologist Colin Wright recently called out Yale University for a lecture that redefined sex according to queer theory. According to slides from Yale's BIOL 104: Principles of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, "Sex is not an inherent, binary fact about a gene, a genome, a zygote or an embryo" but instead is a "cluster of iterative, coevolved, differentiated reproductive homologies." Additionally, the materials for the course (required for all pre-med students) claimed that "sex is not determined." It is "a fact about history, not individuals," "a performance of the self," and "biology needs queer theory."

To which Wright (rightly) objected: "This is pure biological pseudoscience masquerading as science. This is a lecture I can envision Deepak Chopra giving." His criticisms echoed Richard Dawkins, who earlier this year slammed *Scientific American* for running an article that similarly questioned the reality of sex. Interestingly, these old-school

biologists both offered the same alternative definition that *PBS* did: Sex is the binary distinction between sperm producers and egg producers.

It's interesting how many biologists, even if deeply critical of the idea of God or an intelligent designer, understand that male and female are fundamental realities of embodied life. Those scientists still committed to reporting what they see in the creation aren't confused about the purpose and function of this binary, even if they fail to acknowledge the Creator behind it.

A More Complete Picture

Christians, on the other hand, do acknowledge both the binary found in creation *and* the Creator of it. This allows us to offer a more complete definition of male and female, one that not only considers organs and gametes, but the ordered whole into which they fit. As Abigail Favale wrote in her book *The Genesis of Gender*, a human female isn't merely an "egg producer," but an individual whose whole body is organized around the potential to carry new

life. A human male isn't just a "sperm producer," but an individual whose whole body is organized around the potential to impregnate a female.

This means that even those who, through age or injury, have lost these abilities and those who never realize their reproductive potential, are fully male or female. In fact, these two body plans are so fundamental to human identity that even rare "intersex" defects are recognized *because* they deviate from the binary. Far from proving some kind of "third gender," such tragic disorders show how essential male and female are.

The fact that more honest scientists find it necessary to call out prestigious institutions for embracing unscientific gender nonsense says a lot about the assault on reality happening right now. Biology doesn't need "queer theory." It needs a worldview that grounds the givens of reality, instead of a socially constructed ideology that sees everything as a social construct. ☺

—This article first appeared at *Breakpoint.org*. Used with permission of the Colson Center for Christian Worldview.

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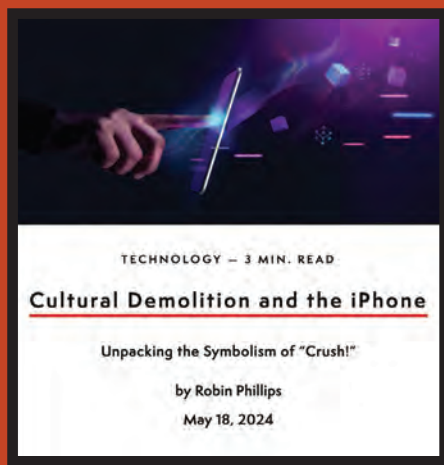
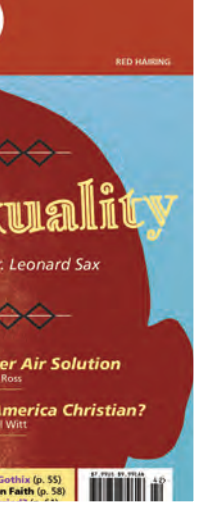
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REACH THE NEXT
LEVEL?



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