

The Discerner

the voice of... **Religion Analysis Service**

A QUARTERLY EXPOSING
UNBIBLICAL TEACHING & MOVEMENTS

Volume 39, Number 3

July • August • September 2019

Eckankar
Confucianism
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Jehovah's Witnesses
Humanism
Jainism
Judaism
Neopaganism
MOONIES
Universalism
Wicca
Islam
~~Hinduism~~
Exposed!
MORMONS
BAHA' I FAITH
Buddhism
Scientology
Satanism

In This Edition:

With This Issue	3
Mission Statement.....	4
The Homegoing of Dr. Norman Geisler	6
The New Testament Canon <i>by Dennis Ingolfsland</i>	7
Practical Advice for Witnessing to Jehovah's Witnesses <i>by Steve Lagoon</i>	17
Minimizing God <i>by Don and Joy Veinot</i>	22
The Right to Life is a Settled Principle of Law: New York's Reproductive Health Act is NOT Progress <i>by Daniel J. Pilla</i>	25
QUIZ:	29



"Hereby know we the spirit of truth
and the spirit of error" 1 John 4:6

The Discerner
A Christian Apologetics & counter-
cult Ministry

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WITH THIS ISSUE

Our feature article for this issue of *The Discerner* is by Bible professor and pastor Dennis Ingolfsland on the New Testament Canon. He provides reasons for accepting the New Testament Canon and why the Early Church fathers wisely rejected the gnostic gospels.

We are also including an article I wrote with practical advice on how to witness to members of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Don Veinot, president of Midwest Christian Outreach and current president of the Evangelical Ministries to New Religions (EMNR), warns of the dangers of "minimizing God" and the compromises fashionable among segments of evangelicalism today.

We introduce to our Discerning readers our first article by Daniel Pilla. Pilla is a Minnesota attorney who explains the deep roots associated with 'right to life ideology' as a fundamental right among America's founding fathers and documents - rights established by God and not by the whim of changing political opinion.

Board member Doug Steiner found an important statement from the "founding fathers and documents" of Religion Analysis Service which explains our mission, first published in 1947 and now reprinted as our mission has never changed.

We also pay tribute to the great Christian scholar and apologist Dr. Norman Geisler on the occasion of his going home to be with the Lord. We were indeed honored that he had long served on our Board of Reference.

This issue's quiz is on quotes of famous Christians. We love to hear your comments and questions. You can contact us at info@ras.org.

Steve Lagoon

President, Religion Analysis Service

MISSION STATEMENT

Discerner readers, our board member Doug Steiner came across a statement in the May–June 1947 *Discerner* which clarified and captured the mission of Religion Analysis Service (RAS). Particularly, it explained the non-denominational nature of RAS. That is, RAS’s mission is not to settle intramural disputes among Bible-believing Christians. Rather, we stand with all Christians in opposition to false teachings that impugn, maline, and distort the biblical message, and particularly in areas essential to gospel truth.

The article first provides context to the question at issue followed by a clear affirmation of RAS’ position (in bold typeset):

During the past few months we have received numerous communications asking our position with reference to certain teachings within Christendom which, to the inquirer’s mind, seem heretical or, at least, to be misinterpretations of the Word of God.

Among the Lord’s people there always have been divergent theological views concerning various subjects which are not vital to God’s redemptive plan, nor essential to man’s eternal welfare. This difference of opinion among Godly men on matters non-essential to salvation, is accountable for the existence of the numerous evangelical bodies in the world today; and while there may be differences of judgment as to many things in the Scriptures not involving the saving grace of God in Christ Jesus, each individual should respect the other’s viewpoint, and neither should try to force the other’s conscience. In other words, we believe that ‘in fundamentals we must be firm and unyielding, in incidentals we may exercise liberty, and in all things we should practice charity.’ This is truly possessing the mind of Christ.

In the following paragraphs we endeavor to make clear our official stand as an organization concerning this matter, and we trust also, that we adequately answer our respondent’s questions:

Religion Analysis Service, Inc., believes that those errors within Christendom which, though controversial, are not

fatal to the eternal welfare of the soul, are distinct from, and ought not to be confused with, those Christ-denying heresies which preclude the functioning of God's plan of salvation. The fundamental purpose of this organization is to provide a comprehensive and aggressive specialized service, denominationally unrelated, designed to enlighten and safeguard uniformed and unwary individuals and groups against those false teachings which definitely prevent men from finding the saving grace that is obtainable alone through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE HOMEGOING OF DR. NORMAN GEISLER

We note the recent passing of Dr. Norman Geisler. Dr. Geisler was certainly one of the leading evangelical voices of the past generation. Doctor Geisler was a prolific author having written over 130 books and numerous articles. He was a staunch defender of God's Word and sound theology. He had the nickname 'Storming Norman' because he wasn't afraid to mix it up when it came to defending biblical truth.

One of his leading efforts was standing for biblical inerrancy. He was one of the team that formulated the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. It was a personal thrill for me in 2015 when Dr. Geisler phoned and asked if he could use my article on biblical inerrancy on his "Defending Inerrancy" website. You can see the article at <https://defendinginerrancy.com/accommodation-or-compromise>.

In the 1990's, Dr. Geisler joined a coalition of counter-cult ministries banded together under the leadership of Duane Magnani to expose the sub-Christian view of the bodily resurrection of Jesus then held by Trinity professor Murray J. Harris, whose views on the subject were nearly identical to the cultic views of Jehovah's Witnesses.

The former president of Religion Analysis Service, Dr. William BeVier, told me on one occasion that he had Norman Geisler as a student and I could tell that he was proud of his association with Norm. With that in mind, we have been honored to have Dr. Geisler serve on Religion Analysis Service's Board of Reference for many decades.

I had the privilege to hear Dr. Geisler in person at the 2016 Evangelical Ministries to New Religions conference in Chicago. Even with his advanced age, he had absolute command of the facts and an impeccable delivery that had us all on the edge of our seat.

He was indeed a giant among servants of the Lord!

THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

by Dennis Ingolfsland

Introduction

Discussions about the origins of the New Testament are often extraordinarily misleading. Some revisionists write as if there was no consensus on a New Testament until powerful Christian bishops gathered together in the fourth century to select those books that agreed with their theology and to exclude the more than 80 documents with which they disagreed. This is so misleading and deceptive that it is hard not to think of it as deliberate lying.

First, as will be seen below, the vast majority of books in the New Testament have always been quoted or alluded to as the final authority for the churches—sometimes even being specifically called Scripture or inspired by the Spirit—from as early as we have records, including even the first century.

Second, the so-called “lost gospels” (discovered at Nag Hammadi in Egypt) were never “kicked out” because it is impossible to kick something out that was never included in the first place! Christian churches never included these lost gospels in their canon—and for good reason. Their worldview is not Christian!

For example, a Judeo-Christian worldview holds to one and only one God. These “lost gospels” proclaim many gods. In a Judeo-Christian worldview, God is good and wise. In some of these “lost gospels the God of the Old Testament is an evil, ignorant God (no wonder some opponents of Christianity like them). In a Christian worldview, Jesus is God and man. In some of these “lost gospels” Jesus is not really human at all. He is just a divine being who appears to be human. In a Christian worldview, Jesus suffered on the Cross. In some of these “lost gospels” Jesus didn’t suffer at all. In a Judeo-Christian Worldview, God created them male and female and it was good. In several of these “lost gospels” the female is described as “illness,” “madness,” “defective”, and “not worthy of life”! Asking why these books are not included in the Bible is a bit like asking why the New Testament doesn’t include the Atheist Manifesto!

Conservative Evangelicals have sometimes spoken of certain criteria used to determine what books should be part of the New Testament. For example, was the book written by an apostle of Jesus or one of

their close associates? These discussions may well have taken place in fourth and fifth century church councils, but there is no record that the earliest churches in the first couple of centuries used any list of criteria. As far as any record exists, there was no disagreement among mainline Christians about a core of New Testament documents (e.g. Gospels, Paul's letters, First Peter, First John) at any time. In fact, it will be shown that even many of the "heretics" tended to accept this core as sacred.

The following is a brief overview tracing the development of the New Testament "canon" (authoritative list), moving backward in time from the church councils which were convened to discuss the issue at the turn of the fourth century AD, back to the first century AD. It should be noted that since books found in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox "apocrypha" were all written before the time of Jesus they do not fall in the category of New Testament and are not part of this discussion.

Fourth and Third Centuries

We'll begin by working backwards from those church councils in which "powerful Christian bishops" supposedly selected the current New Testament book and threw out more than 80 other gospels and other documents with which they disagreed. Many of these documents were discovered in 1945 in the Egyptian town of Nag Hammadi. As far as anyone knows, the first Council to discuss the issue of the New Testament Canon was the Council of Hippo in AD 393. The next ones were the Third Council of Carthage in AD 397 and the Sixth Council of Carthage in AD 419. The New Testament agreed on by these councils is identical to the New Testament found in all Bibles since that time (books contained in the Catholic apocrypha were all written before Jesus was born).

Some writers seem to imply, however, that before these councils met, there was virtually no consensus on what books the New Testament should include, and that "powerful bishops" were free to choose from a large number of documents. This idea is simply erroneous. Even before these councils met, the "Canons of Laodicea" (AD 363), Cyril, the Bishop of Jerusalem (AD 315–386), and Gregory of Nazianzus (AD 330–390) all accepted all the books of the New Testament, except the Book of Revelation. But there is more.

Athanasius (AD 296–373: At least 20 years before Council of Hippo):

One of the earliest and greatest theologians of the early church was a black man named Athanasius. He was certainly one of the most influential bishops in the ancient church, but, far from being “powerful” he spent a considerable amount of time fleeing persecution from powerful heretical bishops. The New Testament of Athanasius included all the books in modern New Testaments and no others. He said that the Didache and the Shepherd of Hermas were read to early believers but were not part of the New Testament.

Sinaticus and Vaticanus (AD 325–350: 43/68 years before Council of Hippo):

The entire New Testament was compiled into a single book about a half-century or more before the Council of Hippo met. Two of the oldest copies of such books are known by scholars today as Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaticus (copied between AD 325 and 350).

Codex Vaticanus contains the modern New Testament through Hebrews 9 after which the text is missing. The order of books in Codex Vaticanus is not the same as that of modern New Testaments. For example, the letter of James is included after the Book of Acts.

Codex Sinaticus, on the other hand, includes all of our New Testament books plus the Letter of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas. None of the so-called “lost gospels” from Nag Hammadi are included in either the Vaticanus or Sinaticus.

Eusebius of Caesarea (AD 314–339) 54 years before Council of Hippo):

Eusebius provides a list of New Testament books by category. In his “Universally Acknowledged” category, i.e. accepted by Christians all over the empire, he includes Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, all of Paul’s letters, Hebrews, First John, First Peter and Revelation.

Another category was “Disputed, but recognized by the majority of churches.” In this category were James, Jude, Second Peter, Second and Third John. Finally, Eusebius adds a category of “Spurious”, i.e. rejected by the churches: Acts of Paul, Shepherd of Hermas, Apocalypse of Peter, Epistle of Barnabas, Didache, and Revelation . Eusebius probably listed these books because some churches had once recognized some of these books as authoritative.

Churches in Eusebius' time, as far as Eusebius was aware, seem to have universally rejected these books, although, as seen above, the Sinaiticus manuscript includes the Letter of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas. Eusebius does not mention any of the books discovered at Nag Hammadi, most likely because no churches had ever recognized them as Scripture.

Origen (AD 184–254) 139 years before Council of Hippo):

Origen wrote,

As I have understood from tradition, respecting the four gospels, which are the only undisputed ones in the whole church of God throughout the world. The First is written according to Matthew, the same that was once a publican, but afterwards an apostle of Jesus Christ, who having published it for the Jewish converts, wrote it in the Hebrew. The second is according to Mark, who composed it, as Peter explained to him....And the third, according to Luke, the gospel commended by Paul, which was written for the converts from the Gentiles, and the last of all the gospel according to John. (HE 6.25.4–7. Patzia, 66).

Like Eusebius after him, Origen also distinguished between undisputed and disputed books. In the undisputed category were books apparently recognized by virtually all Christians throughout the empire. In this category Origen lists Matthew, Mark, Luke John, Acts, First John, Revelation and Paul's letters (Origen doesn't actually list Paul's letters, but his citations show he was familiar with all of them). The "disputed" category consisted of books that some churches questioned in Origen's time. This list included Hebrews, Second Peter, Second and Third John, Jude, the Didache, the Letter of Barnabas, and the Shepherd of Hermas. It is important to note that at no time were the Nag Hammadi documents ever under consideration.

P45 and p46 (AD 200) 193 years before the Council of Hippo):

One of the oldest ancient collections of New Testament Gospels is often designated by scholars as p45 (about AD 200. The p stands for papyrus). P45 is in codex/book form, and contains Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts. P46 (also AD 200) is one of the oldest collections of Paul's letters. Only 86 of 104 leaves (i.e. pages written on one side) have survived but these include Romans (incomplete, beginning with Romans 5:17), Hebrews, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, and First Thessalonians.

Second Century

Irenaeus (184 AD) 209 years before the Council of Hippo:

In the 180's AD Irenaeus, a Bishop in France, quotes extensively from New Testament books, clearly believing them to be inspired by God. He makes it clear that there were four and only four Gospels accepted by the churches: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. He quotes from every book in our New Testament except Philemon, James, 2 Peter and 3 John (about 6 pages out of about 260 pages in a modern print Bible). This doesn't necessarily imply that he rejected these four little letters. It may be that they are just so short that he didn't have occasion to quote from them.

Aside from these four short letters, Irenaeus quotes from every other book in the New Testament and, in fact, is the first one we know of to have actually called this collection "The New Testament" (twice). Numerous times he refers to individual writings in this collection as being Scripture and inspired by God, but not only that, he never sees the need to argue this point but always just seems to assume that his readers everywhere will agree with him. Although the exact boundaries of the New Testament were still under discussion (i.e., whether Hebrews, Revelation or the Letter of Barnabas, etc. were Scripture), the core of the New Testament does not seem to be in dispute at all.

What drove Irenaeus nuts was that although the "heretics" appealed for their authority to the same New Testament writings that Irenaeus did, they ripped passages and words out of context and interpreted them to say things entirely different from anything the original authors could possibly have intended. For example, they took Paul's use of the common Greek word for "peace," "wisdom" etc., and turned them into the proper names for some of their gods! By the way, we now know, from the Nag Hammadi documents, that Irenaeus was entirely accurate in this analysis.

Second, it drove Irenaeus nuts that the "heretics" would add their recent fictional creations to the books that Christians had accepted for so long as sacred. Irenaeus argued that Christians could trace their beliefs back to the original apostles and followers of Jesus himself, whereas the "heretics" were coming up with fictional gospels to support their nonsensical doctrines that no one had ever heard of before.

Tatian (AD 110–180) 213 years before the Council of Hippo:

Tatian wrote the first known harmony of the four New Testament Gospels. This harmony appears to have been considered authoritative among Syrian Christians. Tatian also quotes James 1:5 as Scripture.

Muratorian Canon (AD 170) 223 years before the Council of Hippo:

Although, as shown below, by the end of the second century, the Gospels and Paul's letters had been accepted by Christians as Scripture for decades, one of the earliest known attempts to provide a list of sacred Christian documents was compiled about AD 170. This list is now known as the Muratorian Canon, named after its discoverer. Several lines are missing from the beginning of this ancient list but what is left says that Luke is the third and that John is the fourth of the Gospels. Scholars have little doubt that Matthew and Mark were first and second.

The Muratorian Canon contains all of Paul's letters and Acts of the Apostles, saying specifically that it was written by Luke. The only books contained in modern New Testaments that were omitted by the Muratorian Canon were Hebrews, James, First and Second Peter, and possibly 3rd John.

The Apocalypse of Peter was included, though the writer acknowledges that not all churches agree. This seems to imply that other churches agreed on the basic core of the four Gospels, Acts, Paul's letters, First Peter, First John, etc. The apocryphal "Wisdom of Solomon" was accepted and "The Shepherd of Hermas" may be read, but since the author of the Muratorian Canon says The Shepherd of Hermas was written in his own time, he does not place it on the same level as the other New Testament books.

Marcion (AD 100–165) 228 years before the Council of Hippo:

Marcion had strong disagreements with the mainline church over the nature of God. The God of Jesus, the apostles and mainline Christians was the Jewish God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Marcion argued that this God was an inferior "demiurge" and that Jesus came to reveal a rival God to this Jewish God. In AD 144 Marcion was excommunicated from the church for his views.

Marcion deliberately selected Christian writings that would not contradict his theology. His bible consisted of Paul's letters of Romans, First and Second Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians,

Colossians, Philemon, First and Second Thessalonians, and as well as the Gospel of Luke, which he purged of parts he deemed to be too Jewish. He rejected Matthew, Mark and Luke as being entirely too Jewish. The significance of this is that even someone like Marcion, who was called a “heretic” and was excommunicated by the church, accepted a significant part of the New Testament as Scripture as early as AD 140. Those Marcion left out were omitted because of his anti-Semitic views.

Justin Martyr (AD 100–163) 230 years before the Council of Hippo:

Justin Martyr writes that on Sundays the “memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits.” That “memoirs of the apostles” is a reference to the Gospels is inferred from the fact that Justin often quotes from them, and no others, as his authority. That they are read along with the prophets in the churches implies that they are considered Scripture by the churches.

Basilides (fl. AD 120–145) 248 years before the Council of Hippo:

Basilides was a Gnostic leader who was viewed as heretical by the mainline church. He uses the formula “as it is written” to introduce a quote from Paul’s letter to the Romans. The same writer quotes Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians as Scripture too. Basilides’ status as a leader of a sect of “Gnostic Christians” may indicate that his opinion of Paul’s letters as Scripture is not just a private opinion, but shared by his followers as well.

Marcion and Basilides are both examples of very early “heretical” leaders who agreed with the church in accepting at least some of Paul’s letters as Scripture.

Papias (AD 70–140) 253 years before the Council of Hippo:

Papias (AD 70–140) was a bishop of Hierapolis in what is now modern Turkey. He was reported to have been a disciple of St. John. He says that Mark wrote down what he had heard Peter preaching and that Matthew had first written in Hebrew (Aramaic?).

Letter of Barnabas (AD 70–130) 263+ years before the Council of Hippo:

In the Letter of Barnabas, written by an unknown Christian sometime between AD 70 and 130, the author introduces a quotation

from the Gospel of Matthew with the words, “as it is written,” which is a formula used to designate a quotation from sacred Scripture.

Polycarp (AD 69–155; writing about 120) 273 years before the Council of Hippo:

Polycarp was the Bishop of Smyrna in what would be modern Turkey. He specifically called Paul’s letter to the Ephesians “Scripture.” He apparently had the same view of Paul’s other letters as well because he quoted several of them as his authority. Again, Polycarp was not writing as a private citizen but as a bishop who represented the churches in his region. This would seem to be evidence that the view of Paul’s letters as Scripture was not just isolated to one region, like Rome, but was widespread. In his letter to the Philippians, Polycarp is already quoting or alluding (as his authority) to passages from Matthew, Acts, Romans, First and Second Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Second Thessalonians, First and Second Timothy, First Peter and First John.

It is important to note that these early second century writers, and others not mentioned—like Ignatius (AD 50–117), the author of the Didache (AD 70–150), or Epistle of Diognetus (AD150–225)—constantly cite or allude to books now contained in the New Testament as if their readers will accept them as authoritative.

In other words, they write as if there is no need to introduce their copious quotes of New Testament books by reminding readers that these books are sacred or authoritative. They seem to assume that their readers already know it.

First Century

While conservative evangelicals believe that the New Testament letter of First Timothy was written in the early 60’s AD by St. Paul, critical scholars believe it was written by followers of Paul somewhere around the 80’s AD. Regardless of who is correct, the author of First Timothy (5:18) cites as “Scripture” a phrase that appears only in Luke 10:17. This would seem to indicate that in at least some circles, the Gospel of Luke was considered Scripture before the end of the first century AD, and maybe even as early as the middle of the first century AD.

While many evangelicals believe that the letter of Second Peter was written by Peter in the 60’s AD, critical scholars are virtually unanimous in arguing that Second Peter was written by an anonymous writer some time between AD 80 and 130. Again,

regardless of who is correct, the author of this letter refers to Paul's writings as Scripture (2 Peter 3:16). While it is impossible to know exactly how many or which ones of Paul's letters the author had in mind, the implication was that by the end of the first century, or at latest, the beginning of the second, there existed a recognizable collection of Paul's writings that at least some Christians believed to be Scripture.

In AD 96, Clement, the Bishop of Rome, wrote a letter to the Corinthians. In this letter he quotes from the New Testament Gospels, calling them Scripture. He also calls Hebrew scripture and in chapter 47 of his letter, Clement refers to the letter Paul had sent to the Corinthians, saying that Paul wrote it under inspiration of the Spirit. Since Clement was not just a private individual, and Rome was one of the centers of Christianity, it seems likely that at least the Gospels and Paul's letters were considered Scripture by the churches even before the end of the first century AD.

While this evidence doesn't prove that the Gospels or Paul's letters are inspired by God, they do show that they were believed to be sacred by at least some Christians as early as the turn of the first century or earlier.

Conclusion

It is important to note that the idea that powerful Christian bishops in the fourth century sorted through 80 gospels and just kept the four they agreed with is absolute nonsense! The fact is that the Gospels, Paul's letters, First Peter, and First John have been cited by Christians (and even "heretics"!) as authoritative for as long as we have record. The Gospel of Luke and Paul's letters are even cited as Scripture before the end of the first century AD. Although the exact boundaries of the canon continued to be debated up until the church councils, there was unanimous agreement on the core of the New Testament two or three hundred years before these church councils ever met!

Finally, it is ironic that radical revisionist critics, who for so long have denigrated the first century Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) for being written too long after the time of Jesus (40–70 years), are now speaking in such glowing terms of truly bizarre and unquestionably unhistorical gospels written 100–300 years after Jesus—as if these later gospels should have been considered on the same level as the first century Gospels! Clearly something other than objective scholarship is going on.

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PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR WITNESSING TO JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

by Steve Lagoon

The following is advice offered for witnessing to Jehovah's Witnesses garnered from personal experience.

Be prepared

If one is planning on serving as a missionary in a foreign land, it is typical and prudent to prepare by learning the language, culture, customs, and beliefs of that land, in order to effectively preach the gospel to them.

It is best to be prepared for a particular topic and not get sidetracked. This includes knowing what the Jehovah's Witnesses believe on the topic, how they typically respond to objections, and how to refute their beliefs (and not a simplistic caricature of them).

Begin strong

I have made the past mistake of beginning an encounter with Jehovah's Witnesses slowly, trying to build rapport and trust, and then building on that relationship by moving to more challenging points as the conversation continued. The problem is that it is so easy to get sidetracked and never again have the opportunity to make the strong points you really wanted to. I have found that it is better to begin with your strong points in a loving but firm manner and never turn back.

Best defense is a good offense

In a similar manner, it is best to play offense than defense. I have been in many situations in which the Jehovah's Witnesses dominate a conversation by keeping the Christian on the defensive, overwhelming them with a panoply of Watchtower apologetics. While there may be good answers to teach during the conversation, you are forced into fighting on turf familiar to the Witnesses. But why should this be? I have learned that the best strategy is turn the tables and be on the offense. Let the Christian challenge the Jehovah's witness from the beginning with strong arguments against Watchtower teachings.

Don't play off your knowledge

Another mistake that is so tempting to make is to begin your discussion with a Jehovah's Witness by feigning to just be investigating the Watchtower and concealing the full range of knowledge one has. The motive for doing this may be good, but my experience has taught me that this approach ultimately backfires.

Someone might think that if a Witness knows how much they know, they will break off the conversation (or not even entertain talking in the first place). But the downside is that you will have your hands tied behind your back in the conversation, and not be able to respond and refute Watchtower points as they are made (unless you are willing to blow your cover). You may say, "That's an interesting point, I will look into that and respond at our next meeting." But that may be easier than it sounds. In fact, you may never get that opportunity. Further, it just doesn't seem appropriate (even for a good cause) to use deception.

Have one person lead in the discussion

I have observed that it is important to have one person leading in a conversation with a Jehovah's Witness. Otherwise, the conversation can meander and get off track from the important issues that need to be made.

Don't play to an audience

It is important to avoid having an audience during discussions with Jehovah's Witnesses. When there are too many people in the room (interested family members, church officials) it can often degenerate into a battle of wills and egos. It is simply hard for people to admit they're wrong in front of a larger group.

Further, good intentioned, but less informed people will often derail the conversation with unhelpful questions or points. This will often (if not always) lessen the chance for a successful witnessing encounter due to increased opportunities for unwanted emotional bursts, personal insults, and attacks.

Be humble

This includes being able to say to Jehovah's Witnesses things like "That's a good point. I don't have an answer for that. I will have to look into that." It may also mean that occasionally, you might have to say, "You are right. I never noticed that before." This is much better

than desperately trying to defend a point that has been shown to be weak.

Be prepared for these subterfuges and ploys by Jehovah's Witnesses

They will attack and question your motives.

When you are making powerful points that expose Watchtower errors, you should not be surprised to hear comments like:

"You are an apostate, aren't you!"

This is an attempt to shut you down. In my case, I have never been a Jehovah's Witness, so I ask them why they are lying and bearing false witness against their neighbor.

"You think you're a real hotshot, don't you."

This is an attempt to shut you down by humiliating you. Don't be sidetracked. Simply remind that that you are committed to biblical truth.

"You just want to tear down."

"You just want to argue."

With these attacks, the Watchtower member plays the victim. They feign that they come in peace, trying to share the truth, and you, nasty rascal that you are, just want to attack the poor innocent witness. You meany!

This approach is difficult to accept from a group notorious for their persistent and pushy visits to every house in town. It's supposed to be ok if they constantly attack every religion but their own, but when the tables are turned, they know how to play victim and make you the villain.

Whack a Mole/Change the Subject

Just like in the game, as soon as you make a strong point refuting a Watchtower teaching, don't be surprised if rather than answering the point, the Witness will just move to a different attack on biblical truth.

Lies

Don't be surprised if during your effective refutation of Watchtower teaching, a Jehovah's Witness lies. We can gently try to correct them, but we do well not to press too hard and embarrass them. We are not trying to humiliate them as though we are trying to crush an opponent. We are "Speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15), and this may include graciously allowing another person to save face when backed into the corner.

Sometimes, Jehovah's Witnesses will deny that the Watchtower has taught certain things when you know they have. It may well be that they simply don't know or don't want to believe it. All you can do is document the fact and move on.

Don't be surprised if a Jehovah's Witness brashly denies the truth of one of your points, and then, when it is proven, simply downplays the significance of the point. You might counter this by asking leading questions before the subject is raised such as "What would you think of a religious group that taught such and such?"

Accuse you of Nit-Picking/Quibbling

When you have effectively critiqued a Watchtower teaching, a more experienced Jehovah's Witness might try to dismiss your points by simply dismissing them as so much quibbling or nit-picking.

Downplay Significance of Watchtower Literature

When one considers the essential and primary role that Watchtower literature plays in the understanding of the Watchtower and its members, it can be surprising to hear Jehovah's Witnesses downplay the significance of Watchtower literature. They may say, "So what if the Watchtower said that, we go by the Bible first."

Of course, this is just an attempt to sidestep your effective point. The reality is that the Watchtower itself teaches that it is God's sole channel of communication to the world, as disseminated in the pages of Watchtower literature.

Final thoughts

I don't evaluate my witnessing encounters with members of the Jehovah's Witnesses by how long the meetings last, or how many meetings are held. Rather, I consider it a success if I have in a loving but firm manner exposed them to the lies of the Watchtower and the truths of the Bible.

One should not be surprised to be attacked and for Jehovah's Witnesses to break off a meeting. Let's just make sure that we remain calm and examples of Christian love throughout our conversations.

Further, don't be disappointed if the evidence you have provided to the Witness seems to have no effect on the Witness. We have to remember that the Watchtower is a mind-control cult. There is a lot of fear instilled by the Watchtower organization into Jehovah's Witnesses, and indeed there is a high price to pay for Witnesses who leave (or are kicked out) of the society.

Therefore, even if you are getting through and helping a Jehovah's Witness to have a free-mind from Watchtower deceptions, they are unlikely to show or reveal in such a conversation when another Witness is present. On the contrary, they are more likely to battle vigorously to prove their loyalty to the other Witness. So lovingly plant the seeds of truth to members of the Jehovah's Witnesses and trust the Holy Spirit to make the seeds grow as He will.

Above all, let your ministry among Jehovah's Witnesses be seasoned by prayer and in love. As the apostle Paul said, "Speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15).

MINIMIZING GOD

by Don and Joy Veinot

Could it be that many who like to claim Christianity as their faith can only do so by minimizing God? In *Christianity & Liberalism* by J. Gresham Machen, Machen spends a fair amount of time addressing how liberal theologians in his day, who were “in search of the historical Jesus,” claimed to believe that Jesus is God – but only after they had refashioned Jesus to look more or less like themselves. He makes an intriguing statement: “The modern liberals, on the other hand, say that Jesus is God not because they think high of Jesus, but because they think desperately low of God.”¹

That is profound. “They think desperately low of God.” How did Machen arrive at that conclusion? He maintained they had diminished the holiness of God by lessening the gravity of sin. He [Jesus] did not say: “Trust me to give you acceptance with God, because acceptance with God is not difficult; God does not regard sin so seriously after all.”²

We see this attitude played out in various ways in the church today. Rob Bell, William Paul Young, Brian McLaren and others promote universal salvation. God is love after all, and your sin isn’t really so bad. God’s vast holiness isn’t part of their equation.

We have more and more Evangelical leaders accepting, embracing, and endorsing same gender sexual engagement, and now many include it in the category of “marriage.”³ Love and commitment to a relationship is what is important; people should act on what they feel is right. This of course redefines sin out of existence, since most (or all) sin can “feel right” and be easily justified in the eyes of sinners.

Homosexuality is far from the only sin that has been redefined in our time. Heterosexual co-habitation and immorality are very widely accepted today. Society is led to believe murder, violence, envy and theft do not arise from the fallen human heart but from poverty, societal ills, and the unfair nature of life. “It’s not their fault.” “Undesirable behavior” is completely understandable, excusable, and no big deal to many. Everything you do is just A-OK with their little

1 Machen, J. Gresham. *Christianity & Liberalism* (Kindle Location 1501)

2 Machen, J. Gresham. *Christianity & Liberalism* (Kindle Locations 1143–1145)

3 <https://www.charismanews.com/culture/66212-8-evangelical-leaders-who-have-publicly-embraced-apostasy>

god, which is a good thing, since *this* god's arms are far too short to box with you.

This idea of a “little god” plays itself out in the Word Faith and New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movements as well. Give in to your greed and desire for material stuff. Name it and claim it. God wants you to be happy and after all, you have within you the same creative power He has! Cool!

As Kenneth Copeland so happily reports, God Himself needed faith to create and spoke “faith-filled words” to create the universe. When He created Adam, He purportedly (according to Copeland) created an exact duplicate of Himself. A being, Copeland says, about 6 feet tall, a couple hundred pounds more or less, and when they are standing side by side you couldn't tell the difference! Whoa! Either we are *really* BIG or God is very small. Yes, Word Faith teachers have a very low view of God.

Then we also have the “heavenly tourism genre”, with folks claiming they have been to heaven and back. Some have even described having water fights with Jesus. How does this “playmate Jesus” measure up with the Jesus of Scripture? The apostle John fell down as dead when he saw the powerful and fearsome glorified Christ in heaven. (Revelation 1:12–18) The Lord was very gracious and reassuring to John on that occasion, but He didn't hand him a squirt gun!

Machen's response to those who have such a low view of God is clear:

Jesus presented the wrath of God in a more awful way than it was afterwards presented by His disciples; it was Jesus – Jesus whom modern liberals represent as a mild-mannered exponent of an indiscriminating love—it was Jesus who spoke of the outer darkness and the everlasting fire, of the sin that shall not be forgiven either in this world or in that which is to come. There is nothing in Jesus' teaching about the character of God which in itself can evoke trust. On the contrary the awful presentation can give rise, in the hearts of us sinners, only to despair. Trust arises only when we attend to God's way of salvation. And that way is found in Jesus. Jesus did not invite the confidence of men by a minimizing presentation of what was necessary in order that sinners might stand faultless before the awful throne of God. On the contrary, He invited confidence by the presentation of His own wondrous Person. Great was the guilt of sin, but Jesus was greater still.⁴

4 Machen, J. Gresham. *Christianity & Liberalism* (Kindle Locations 1145–1151)

I was struck by the concept of standing “before the awful throne of God,” not because God is “awful” in the sense of evil, mean, and vindictive but because His holiness stands in such stark contrast to our sinful unworthiness. God alone set the standard for goodness and holiness, right and wrong—He does not bend His truth to accommodate Himself to our pitiful standard of “doing what is right in our own eyes.” And yes, He does love us, and so has, in His love, provided a way of forgiveness and salvation for men and women who place their trust in Jesus.

Without the cleansing provided for those who call on His name, we would shrink away in fear and shame—lost with no hope. The truly awesome and holy God Almighty is not someone we find in the Word Faith, Universalism, or NAR camps. We don’t find Him in someone’s fantasy tour of heaven. However, we do find Him in the description of a true prophet, Isaiah:

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple.

Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”

And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.

And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” (Isaiah 6:1–5)

The utter greatness and holiness of God was eye opening and overwhelming to Isaiah. What is it that gives us confidence to stand before such a holy and perfect God? I think Machen expresses the real answer. It isn’t minimizing God that closes the gap but that Jesus “... invited confidence by the presentation of *His own wondrous Person*. Great was the guilt of sin, but Jesus was greater still.”

Don and Joy Veinot are the directors of Midwest Christian Outreach. Visit their website at: <http://midwestoutreach.org>

**THE RIGHT TO LIFE IS A SETTLED PRINCIPLE
OF LAW:
NEW YORK'S REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH ACT IS
NOT PROGRESS**
by Daniel J. Pilla

As I watched legislators in New York rejoice as Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed the Reproductive Health Act, I found myself wondering out loud why the issue of the right to life was even a debate in the U.S. As a matter of historical fact, the question of the right to life, and that of the government's responsibility to protect life, was settled more than 200 years ago. The Founders adopted the Judeo-Christian worldview on the question of life. They did so with the plain language of the Declaration of Independence, one of the four organic documents representative of the founding philosophy of the U.S.

In addressing the question of the right to life, the Declaration states:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator, with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

Consider the basic principles expressed in that simple statement:

1. Humans are created by God,
2. They are all equal,
3. God grants them certain rights which cannot be abridged,
4. They include the right to life and liberty, and
5. Governments are instituted to protect God-given rights.

Governments do not “give” rights. Rights come from God. God is the source of life. He alone grants people their natural rights. Government's sole responsibility is to protect those rights, perhaps especially the right to life. Such protection derives from the fact that God-given rights are “inalienable” – which cannot be encumbered.

The greatest leap in the progress of the human condition came after the recognition that government is not the source of rights, God is. Government is not free to arbitrarily infringe those rights, as was the unbroken history of government for 5,000-plus years up to the point of America's Declaration.

Yet our Founders were not the first to express these ideals. As I discuss in my book, *Salt and Light, the Secret to Restoring America's Culture*, the Founders drew extensively from the teachings of John Locke and William Blackstone to inform their views on life.

Locke was an English theologian and author. His two primary writings, released in 1690, are *Two Treatises on Civil Government*. In his discussion of the responsibilities and limitations on civil government, he drew heavily from the Bible. He referred to the Bible over 1,300 times in his first treatise and over 157 times in his second. Jefferson borrowed heavily from Locke's thinking in drafting the Declaration.

As to the right to life, Locke states in his First Treatise on Civil Government that "all men are the workmanship of God Almighty." He declares that people are God's property, and that "no one may harm another's life, health, liberty, or possessions."

Blackstone was an English judge and law professor. He was perhaps the most prominent English jurist and preeminent legal scholar of the mid-eighteenth century. Between 1765 and 1769, Blackstone published his four-volume series on English law, entitled *Commentaries on the Laws of England*. The treatise was wildly popular in the colonies. Indeed, despite the fact that the population of England was three times that of the colonies, more copies of the *Commentaries* were sold in the colonies than in England.

Blackstone's work was the gold standard of legal reference material during the Founding Era. The series were standard textbooks for all American law students throughout the nineteenth century. Abraham Lincoln learned the law by reading Blackstone's *Commentaries*. Between 1787 and 1890, American judges cited Blackstone as authority for their legal positions more often than any other writer.

Blackstone declares that "Life is the immediate gift of God" and "the right is inherent in every individual." More particularly, he states that the right to life "begins in contemplation of law as soon as an infant is able to stir in the mother's womb." Blackstone goes on to say that "no man has the power to destroy life but through the law of God, who is the author of life." Blackstone stated that the settled rule of law was

that “One who is in the womb is held as already born, whenever a question arises for its benefit.”

Why are such protections extended to the unborn? Blackstone observed that a child “in the mother’s womb is supposed in law to be born for many purposes.” That is, every human life has a God-ordained purpose. It is not within the preview of man to extinguish such a life before it has a chance to flourish. “On this point,” Blackstone affirmed, the “civil law” is settled. Blackstone’s *Commentaries*, Book 1, Chapter 1, The Rights of Persons.

As popular as Locke and Blackstone were, neither was the most relied-upon authority for the legal and moral positions of the Founders. The single most quoted authority was the Bible.

Various historians studied approximately 15,000 writings of the Founders, produced during the period from about 1760 through 1805. Researchers looked at letters, books, newspaper articles, pamphlets, etc. The record reveals that the Founders cited the Bible as authority for their positions on civil government more than any other source. Historian David Barton points out that the Bible accounted for “34 percent of the direct quotes in the political writings of the Founding Era.”

What does the Bible tell us about choosing life? Carefully consider the following:

This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. Deuteronomy 30:19–20.

The Reproductive Health Act allows for abortion on demand into the third trimester, even up to birth. The law puts the power of life and death over the unborn child squarely in the hands of the mother. The only difference between this and ancient Rome’s infanticide practice is, under Roman law, the father controlled whether the child lived or died.

Gov. Cuomo referred to the law as evidence of “progress.” Actually, it’s quite the opposite. It’s a throwback to the pre-Christian era when cultures openly practiced infanticide. It’s a throwback to a time when human life, especially that of babies and children, had little or no value. True progress was achieved when Western culture recognized that life was the immediate gift of God. That life was to be protected, especially innocent life, especially helpless life.

That the government of New York gleefully rejects the right of a fetus to live is likewise a throwback to a time when governments wielded absolute and arbitrary power over life and death. This is not progress. It tears at the fabric of our national conscience. It rends asunder the plain language of the Declaration of Independence, which holds that governments are to protect life, not permit the wholesale destruction thereof.

Dan Pilla's primary calling is that of tax litigator. He is considered America's leader in taxpayer defense, taxpayers' rights, and IRS abuse prevention and cure. Regarded as one of the country's premiere experts in IRS procedures and general tax financial-problems resolution techniques, he has helped hundreds of thousands of citizens solve personal and business tax problems they thought might never be solved. As the author of fifteen books, dozens of research reports, and well over a thousand articles, Dan's work is regularly featured on radio and television, as well as in major newspapers, leading magazines and trade publications nationwide. Dan is a frequent guest on numerous talk radio and TV programs where he is heard by millions of people each year. Dan works with various local and national Christian organizations, teaching God's Word in churches across America. Topics relate to tax and financial issues as well as life's general challenges. Dan served on the board of directors of various Christian organizations over the years. He currently works closely, as a board member and a ministry team member, with a local church and a Christian men's group. In that role, he developed the curriculum for a men's Bible study group, which he has taught for the past four years. He lives and works in Stillwater, Minnesota (east of St. Paul), with his wife, Jean, of 32 years, and their family.

Visit Daniel Pilla's website at: www.danpillabooks.com.

QUIZ: QUOTES OF FAMOUS CHRISTIANS

Identify the correct author of each quote.

1. "He is no fool, who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose."
 - a. Mother Theresa
 - b. Mother and Child Reunion
 - c. Bishop Fulton Sheen
 - d. Jim Elliot

2. "How many observe Christ's birthday. How few, His precepts?"
 - a. Benjamin Franklin
 - b. Franklin Graham
 - c. Dr. Greyham Cracker
 - d. Dr. Doolittle

3. "Preach the gospel at all times. When necessary, use words."
 - a. The Reverend Billy Sunday
 - b. Saint Nicholas
 - c. Saint Bernard of Pount
 - d. Saint Francis of Assisi

4. "The more we know of God, the more we will trust him; the greater our progress in theology, the simpler and more child-like will be our faith."
 - a. Donald Gray Barnhouse
 - b. J. Dwight Pentecost
 - c. J. Gresham Machen
 - d. The Highwaymen

5. "I cannot and will not recant of anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand. I can do no other, so help me God. A-men."
- a. Martin Luther King Jr.
 - b. Martin Luther
 - c. Luther Vandross
 - d. Joan of Arc
6. "A dog barks when his master is attacked. I would be a coward if I saw that God's truth is attacked and yet would remain silent."
- a. John Calvin
 - b. Theodore Beza
 - c. John Knox
 - d. Philipp Melanchthon
7. "The function of prayer is not to change God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays."
- a. John Wesley
 - b. Philip Jacob Spener
 - c. Soren Kierkegaard
 - d. Henry Blackaby
8. "God proved His Love on the cross. When Christ hung, and bled, and died, it was God saying to the world, 'I love you.'"
- a. Lowell Lundstrom
 - b. D. James Kennedy
 - c. Larry Norman
 - d. Billy Graham
9. "You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee."
- a. Rene Descartes
 - b. Saint Augustine
 - c. Thomas Aquinas
 - d. Red Green

10. "I have a fundamental belief in the Bible as the Word of God, written by those who were inspired. I study the Bible daily."

- a. Ken Ham
- b. Ken Bacon
- c. Henry Morris
- d. Sir Isaac Newton

Answers:

1. d; 2. a; 3. d; 4. c; 5. b; 6. a; 7. c; 8. d; 9. b; 10. d.

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