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"Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?"
Galatians 4:16

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Capital Punishment: Only for the Innocent

By L.L. (Don) Veinot, Jr.

In June of 2012, *The Huffington Post* had the bold headline: "Belief in Hell Lowers Crime Rate, According to International Study."¹

The study, appearing in the Public Library of Science journal PLoS ONE, found that criminal activity is lower in societies where people's religious beliefs contain a strong punitive component than in places where religious beliefs are more benevolent. A country where many more people believe in heaven than in hell, for example, is likely to have a much higher crime rate than one where these beliefs are about equal. The finding surfaced from a comprehensive analysis of 26 years of data involving 143,197 people in 67 countries.²

The article points out "criminal activity is lower in societies where people's religious beliefs contain a strong punitive component,"³ but offers no reason for why this is the case. *The Huff Post* has a more or less materialistic worldview and has little basis to answer metaphysical questions. Where does basic morality originate? Is it just based on superstition, or is it merely a social contract brought about by cultural agreement in order to slow down Darwinistic evolution? Or does it originate with the Creator? I would suggest belief in objective morals is a principle written into us by God as the Apostle Paul claims in Romans 2:14-15:

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience

bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, (NASB)

There is something inherently within us that believes justice must be carried out for crimes committed. The more heinous the crime, the harsher the punishment must be; and those most

affected by crime tend to be more insistent that punishment needs to be carried out. We live in changing times. Of course, we have always lived in changing times. Sometimes it is a move back toward a biblical worldview; but most often, it is moving further away from a God-centered and informed way of thinking. The debate over the death penalty for the convicted continues, and more states are banning the death penalty altogether. In March of 2011, the State of Illinois became the sixteenth state to ban the death penalty when Governor Pat Quinn signed the bill into law. Quinn stated:

Since our experience has shown that there is no way to design a perfect death penalty system, free from the numerous flaws that can lead to wrongful

convictions or discriminatory treatment, I have concluded that the proper course of action is to abolish it.⁴

The *Religious Tolerance*⁵ web site has a fairly long section devoted to this issue with both pro and con opinions. Some are well-reasoned, while others are based more on personal preference. A quote from retired Federal Judge H. Lee Sarokin claims the death penalty doesn't offer a deterrent, that it is discriminatory—that is, the death penalty is imposed more on

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minorities—and the death penalty is immoral:

This issue likewise has been discussed for years. After a lifetime of watching the death penalty at work, I believe that despite our understandable desire for revenge, retribution and even death for the most horrendous of crimes, the state should not be the carrier and enforcer of those emotions. I recognize and respect the opposite view, but I just cannot accept that the intentional killing by the state of an individual is moral.⁶

The opposing view on the deterrent question is quoted from John McAdams, professor of political science at Marquette University:

If we execute murderers and there is in fact no deterrent effect, we have killed a bunch of murderers. If we fail to execute murderers, and doing so would in fact have deterred other murders, we have allowed the killing of a bunch of innocent victims. I would much rather risk the former. This, to me, is not a tough call.⁷

This is, without a doubt, a highly volatile and emotionally charged issue. If belief in hell—the ultimate place of punishment—lowers the crime rate, wouldn't the practice of capital punishment also make a better-behaved society? Perhaps, but it doesn't necessarily follow.

An Eye for an Eye

Even as I write this, I am painfully aware we will have readers on both sides of the issue. Some with a strong and some with a passing interest; but most will have some sort of opinion. We find the death penalty in Scripture where God said in Genesis 9:6-7:

Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man.

It was a matter of justice. God entrusted the carrying out of the sentence and the executing to those in authority. A judge could have chosen to be merciful and apply a lesser sentence, but he was not allowed to choose a more severe sentence. The Lex Talionis⁸ or concept of "*eye for eye, ...*" (Exodus 21:24) seems to some to be barbaric and harsh, but that is mostly because they are reading into it something that isn't there. The whole point of the passage is that the punishment should fit the crime and not exceed the crime. It sets the upper limits of justice. If someone knocked out the tooth of another, the most that could be done was to knock out the tooth of the offender; one couldn't cut off their hand, foot or put their eye out. If someone took the life of another, that person's life could be taken but not the lives of one's family members or one's family's property. The sentence was to be determined by the judges (v:22). Far from being barbaric, it was designed to *prevent* barbarism and to keep the justice system as fair as humanly possible. It is certain humans will make mistakes. Sometimes evidence of innocence will not be available or will be over shadowed by seeming evidence of guilt. Eyewitnesses are fallible human beings. Sometimes the accused just "looks" guilty to the jury. However, I don't know that the flaws in the system provide justification for eliminating the death penalty. Perhaps it provides an incentive to eliminate more flaws as we see them creep up and have ways to address them. If we were consistent in applying the "flaws-in-the-system" argument, we really could not charge and try *anyone* for a crime, because there are inherent flaws in the system in *all* criminal cases simply because humans are involved, and humans are, by nature, flawed.

The need for "*eye for eye*" (Ex. 21:24, Deut. 29:21) and "*life for life*" (Ex. 21:23, Deut. 19:21) are important. These differentiate between justice and revenge. *Revenge* is defined as:

... to exact punishment or expiation for a wrong on behalf of, especially in a resentful or vindictive spirit: ...⁹

The "**resentful**" and/or "**vindictive spirit**," tend to drive bad behavior and, in turn, excessive punishment and torment to the one accused of a crime. Someone carrying out revenge will more likely make it a slow and painful process. The punishment inflicted would be more than the crime committed warranted. An "*eye for eye*" is, by definition, a just punishment commensurate with the crime. The judges may opt for something less. In Genesis 4, Cain killed his brother Abel. God was the judge; and even though the death penalty would have been the just sentence, God gave Cain a life sentence: A life separated from his farming, his family and from the face of God (Gen 4:12-14).

While assigning cities for the Levites (Nu. 35), God also designated six "*cities of*

refuge.” If someone accidentally killed another, they could flee to the nearest city of refuge for protection from a family member taking revenge on them. The family of the victim could come and bring charges. A trial would be held; if the death was accidental, the defendant was declared “not guilty” and protected in the city of refuge. If the defendant was found “guilty,” they were turned over to the family to carry out the sentence. But again, they could only impose a sentence befitting the crime.

God’s Justice or God’s Love?

The question of applying either God’s justice or God’s love to the death penalty is a false dichotomy. God is perfectly just *and* perfectly holy. They are not mutually exclusive attributes and we can, to the best of our ability, practice both. Some who are opposed to capital punishment sometimes appeal to Scripture as support for their position; but do their claims stand the test of scrutiny? Dudley Sharp, Death Penalty Resources Director, Justice For All, in his paper “**Death Penalty and Sentencing Information**,”¹⁰ addresses many of the biblical issues in section F: “**Christianity and the Death Penalty**.” Even though he points out that the biblical issues have little to do with the legal question, he does believe they are important for a full consideration of the issue. He gives a 32-point response; and with regard to the use of Scripture, he writes in point 26:

The opposition to capital punishment is not based on Scripture but on a vague philosophical idea that the taking of a life is wrong, under every circumstance, and fails to distinguish adequately between killing and murder, between punishment and crime. The argument that capital punishment rules out the possibility of repentance for crime is unrealistic. If a wanton killer does not repent when the sentence of death is upon him, he certainly will not repent if he has 20-50 years of life imprisonment. The sentence of death on a killer is more redemptive than the tendency to excuse his crime as no worse than grand larceny. Mercy always infers a tacit recognition that justice and rightness are to be expected. The Holy God does not show mercy contrary to his righteousness but in harmony with it. That is why the awful Cross was necessary and a righteous Christ had to hang on it. That is why God’s redemption is always conditioned by one’s heart attitude. The Church and individual Christians should be active in their witness to the Gospel of love and forgiveness; but meanwhile wherever and whenever God’s love and mercy are rejected, as in crime, natural law and order must prevail, not as extraneous to redemption but as part of the whole scope of God’s dealings with man. No matter how often a jury recommends mercy, the law of capital punishment must stand as the silent but powerful witness to the sacredness of God-given life. Active justice must be administered when the sacredness of life is violated. Life is sacred, and he who violates the sacredness of life through murder must pay the supreme penalty. It is significant that when Jesus voluntarily went the way of the Cross He chose the capital punishment of His day as His instrument to save the world. And when He gave redemption to the repentant thief He did not save Him from capital punishment but gave him paradise instead. We see again that mercy and forgiveness are something different from being excused from wrongdoing.¹¹

There are some who argue that Christ was opposed to capital punishment. Rather than create a new response, I think Sharp addresses this head on in point 31:

There are two passages in Luke which speak directly to Jesus’ position on capital punishment. In 20:14-16, Jesus states: “He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others”. Jesus is stating that the proper punishment for murder is death. In 19:27, “Christ pronounced this judgement on those who rebelled against their king: ‘But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here, and slay them in my presence’ (NASB). Thus, it is very clear that neither Christ nor His apostles [sic] intended to abrogate the God-given responsibility of the government (under Old Testament law) to protect its citizens and enforce justice by capital punishment.” *ibid*, D.14., pg. 342. In the 19:27 parable “their king” is Jesus.

Not a Deterrent

Those who oppose the death penalty have what they believe are legitimate reasons to oppose the practice. This, it seems to me, is a position based on pragmatism and avoids the point of capital punishment, which is justice. There are many laws which do little to deter crime, but we enforce them in order to uphold and serve justice. Punishing rapists,

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**HAVE
NOTHING TO
DO WITH THE
FRUITLESS
DEEDS OF
DARKNESS,
BUT RATHER
EXPOSE THEM.**

~EPHESIANS 5:11~

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Conversation with a New Ager

By Mariano Grinbank

This is a succinct retelling of a conversation betwixt me and an adherent of a New-Age worldview.

When it comes to evangelization, apologetics, polemics or into whichever field your ministry takes you, you ought to be confident in standing on the truth of YHWH's Word—the Bible—and His Holy Spirit. As it has been stated elsewhere: Know *what* you believe, and *why* you believe it.

It is of secondary importance to know something about that which others believe. There are some standard things to keep in mind in this regard such as *asking them* to define their views and terminology rather than *telling them* what they believe. For example, you can ask a Jew, a Muslim, a Mormon, a Buddhist, an Atheist, a New Ager, et al, "Do you believe in Jesus?" They will all answer, "Yes."

But to the Jew: Jesus could be a prophet whose followers mistakenly deified or a false prophet.

To the Muslim: Jesus is one of many prophets who were all superseded by Muhammad.

To the Mormon: Jesus is one of many sons of one of the many Mormon gods.

To the Buddhist: Jesus was a bodhisattva* or another Buddha.

To the Atheist: Jesus was just a man who may have had some nice things to say (that is, if they believe Jesus existed at all).

To the New Ager: Jesus was an *ascended master*.

You get the picture: All terms must be defined by both sides of the conversation lest it be thought agreement is being reached, while what is being agreed upon is mere terminology but not substance.

In fact, this New Ager claims she is a Christian, because she believes in Jesus. However, how she defines "Christian" and "Jesus" is not what biblical Christianity is and likewise with Jesus. This is how the New Ager and I met:

A fellow parishioner brought her New-Ager friend to services one Sunday, and the New Ager wanted to speak to someone. As I am the styled resident apologist, she was directed to me. She very quickly stated that the pastor had stated some things in his sermon with which she completely disagreed. I assured her, "Well, I'm sure we all feel that way sometimes." Empathy has a way of

disarming. Well, her statement was great news, because it meant she had a standard of truth upon which she was basing her disagreement. So, I would be able to ask her: "What is truth?"

Let us very succinctly take a step back, and consider just what is meant by "New Age?" In a manner of speaking, New Age is a very, very wide, general and generic term for a belief in a very, very wide range of concepts.

For example, a New Ager generally believes our universe is an illusion. This may come in various forms from it being an actual illusion—such as the dream a deity is having (as in some forms of Hinduism)—to basing such a view on the assumption that, as this particular New Ager stated, matter is mostly empty space. Note: Many New Agers appeal to what perhaps may be best termed *pseudo-physics* for some of their views about energy, vibrations, etc. Yes, matter is thought to be mostly empty space (on the sub-atomic level), but matter is matter nevertheless (she did affirm the existence of an actual material realm). That for which one needs to be discerning is the New Age appeal to actual, verified, empirical science in order to come to metaphysical conclusions. (For example, noting that we all consist of molecules that vibrate, which is true; but concluding we can evolve spiritually by heightening our vibration.)

"God" may be a higher being, but the New Age "god" is likely to be a non-personal, cosmic spirit or energy which infuses all things.

"Spirit guides," "ascended masters," "higher beings," and other terms are used for non-physical beings who allegedly are more spiritually evolved than us and, thus, can help us.

UFOs often are something to which New Agers often appeal as the work of actual aliens from another part of the universe who may be higher beings or "angels" mistakenly thought of by us as being aliens, etc.

Much, much more could be said, but the point is that one needs to be ready for virtually anything. For example, I knew a New Ager who had a conversation with a tree which could travel through time. He also claimed that when he was taken aboard an alien space craft, he asked the aliens if they knew where there was any gold, and they showed him some images of landscapes. Thus, he would occasionally drive around the mountains where he lived to see if anything looked familiar.

Back to our meeting: Upon arriving at our meeting, the New

Ager stated she did not know why she was here, but she was *supposed to be* (“here” meaning meeting with a member of a Christian church). As it turned out, she mostly was interested to learn what Christians were being taught now-a-days. She came from a Christian background (whatever *that* means), had been away from the church for a very long time, and was curious to learn what was occurring therein today. Thus, she initially and specifically asked about my view of God.

Well, in my life before Christ, I had been somewhat involved in the New Age Movement, and so I knew how to approach her and that there were certain things that were sure to come up as well as certain things with which we must deal. Certainly, this seemed like an open door to preach the Gospel to her, but...

I thought she could find just about anyone in the church who would do that. However, she then would proceed in accordance with her *modus operandi*—the basic New Age manner whereby she was accustomed to doing things: She would hear it, decide what portions to keep, and which to discard. This would be based on how the Gospel matched or did not match her preconceived notions.

I thought she could not find just anyone who would question her and have her dig deep into herself and her beliefs. My purpose was to have her face the fact, and a fact it is, that she had *absolutely nothing* upon which to rely for that which she held to be true. I purposed to question her presuppositions, and so we began by discussing truth.

I gracefully sidestepped her initial question and noted she had told me of her disagreement with the pastor. I also noted she was making truth claims—she had to be basing her disagreement upon something she believed to be true and something the pastor said with which she and the pastor were in disagreement; and it was *that* something about which I wanted to know.

Her reply was all but expected: The issue was that the pastor was expressing “**his truth**” and she was expressing “**my (her) truth.**”

This has been a very popular manner whereby to look at disagreements for a long time and is used by many people. (It even came up in a 2012 episode of Donald Trump’s *Celebrity Apprentice*.) I explained that truth has no ownership—it cannot be mine, yours, or anyone’s—but rather, truth is absolute. That it is absolute is the very definition of *truth*; it is the very concept of truth. Now, *absolute* means *something is that which it is regardless of whether we like it or not, whether we agree with it or not, whether we prefer it be different or not, whether we know about it or not*. I used this as an example: If I sincerely believe with all of my heart and mind that $2+2=5$, is this true? No, but is it “my truth?” No, it is not even “my truth” due to the very fact that it is not *true* since $2+2=4$ is true, then $2+2=5$ is not true. Yes, indeed, $2+2=5$ can be said to be something that is “my view,” something that “I believe,” something that “I claim,” etc., but *it is not true* as it does not reflect the truth (as far as ultimate truth, Jesus personified it when He stated, “***I am ... the truth***” in John 14:6).

Then came another anticipated request which was an appeal to the story of the blind men and the elephant. This story purportedly proves all is but perception, and each has their own truth. A group of blind men (or, should I say “vision-challenged, non-gender-specific personages?”) gathered around and felt an elephant. One feels the tail and claims it is a rope. Another feels the ear and claims it is a fan. Yet, another, feeling the leg, states it

is a tree trunk. On it goes, you get the picture: Each has his own perception, conclusion, idea, and thus, their own “truth”—it is all relative. But is it all “truth?”

I reiterated her conclusion so as to ensure we understood each other. Indeed, that was her point. Then I inserted a Lt. Columbo moment, you know the one, a “There’s-something-about-this-that’s-bothering-me” moment. I noted that, yes, indeed, each had their own *perception*, but *they are blind* whilst we have 20/20 vision and can see the elephant. The story is actually the exact opposite of what so many people think it is. The point is: *We know that it is an elephant!* The blind men are all *claiming* to know what it is, but they are wrong, and we know that they are wrong, because the *absolute truth* is it is an elephant. They can believe what they will, but they are wrong—period.

Well, thereafter, whenever such an issue as conflicting views came up, she would catch herself and replace “my” or “your truth” with “my view” or “belief” and “your view” or “belief.” Of course, if you ever deal with anyone who denies absolute truth, you can ask them if that claim is absolutely true. If it is, which it is, then they have just admitted to absolute truth. If it is not, well then, just tell them that since their claim is not absolutely true, then you will feel free to disregard it.

Now, the conceptual acknowledgement that there is such a thing as truth, absolute truth at that, is one thing; yet, how we discern truth is another matter altogether.

Thus, I observed she kept referring to things, her views, as if they were so; but just how had she come to believe and/or rely on them? Well, she offered another expected statement to the effect that she runs concepts through her heart and sees how they *feel*. Indeed, from New Agers to Mormons, this is just about the only way many have: Just see how it *feels*. If it feels right, then it is so; and if it does not feel right, then it is not so.

That is very interesting, but I asked if she had ever had the experience of passing something by her heart filter—having it feel right and true—but then later on, changing her mind—discerning that it was not right and true after all? Her answer was, “Yes,” that happens “all the time.” Well then, I remarked she had admitted her manner of ascertaining truth is unreliable. And now we know why the Bible states: “***The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?***” (Jeremiah 17:9). Oddly enough, she agreed (How could she not?). But later on, whenever I would mention she was making a truth claim which she felt in her heart was right and true and remind her she had admitted her method was unreliable, she would actually deny it by stating I had said that and not she. However, when we discussed the particulars of that which she considers to be true, we did agree that her views were—*almost*—completely tentative. This may have meant she was coming to terms with and attempting to accommodate the realization of the tentative nature of her views on the spot, but I do not know.

This, too, is a lesson as attempting to, quite literally, come to grips with a New Ager’s views that is tantamount to grasping a handful of helium. In fact, you may find New Agers will both agree and also disagree with everything you say.

Note the qualifying term “*almost*—completely tentative” this is because she made reference to a set of core beliefs such as: There is one God; we are to be tolerant in accepting each other as we are, etc. However, I commented she cannot even claim she

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"New Ager" Continued from page 5

has a "core," because a "core" implies a *firm foundation*, and this is precisely what she is lacking. ***"Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it."*** (Psalm 127:1) and ***"For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."*** (1 Corinthians 3:11).

Now, I will address the particulars of that which she considers to be true. She would qualify her truth statements by prefacing them with ***"in my readings ... (such and such),"*** so that her ***"readings"*** revealed this or that as a truthful fact. I asked to what ***"readings"*** was she referring? It turns out she reads the writings of New-Age spirit channelers who are people who open themselves up to communication with who-knows-who ... or what. These "spirits" are variously Ascended Masters, more spiritually evolved beings, messengers from another time or universe, aliens, or (and actually) in short: demons. ***"There shall not be found among you anyone who ... practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD ..."*** (Deuteronomy 18:10-12).

Once I got her to perceive that even her most cherished core beliefs were tentative, she took a fallback position and employed a New-Age term and concept which is that all there is, is ***"the eternal now."*** In a way this makes sense, because, after all, we do not inhabit the past nor the future. Rather, there is a future which momentarily becomes the present, the now, and instantly becomes the past. This is simply the nature of the space-time continuum in which we live: Linear time (boy oh boy, with linear time, it's one thing after another). However, it is noteworthy to consider she is employing this concept as a tool, a styled psychological band aid. You see, since she has no foundation upon which to base even her supposedly core beliefs, she must rely on what? She relies on what she believes *right now*. She *must* live in the now, because she must hold on to that which she believes right now as an anchor to whatever reality might be. She must hold on to that ever-fleeting ***"now"*** because she knows she has nothing else.

But upon what is the ***"now"*** based? Well, nothing, but she has to have something. I wanted to confirm to her what was clear to me, which is: She has no basis upon which to base any of her beliefs at all. Thus, over and over and over again, whenever I discerned she was making a truth claim—an assertion, I would say, "But that's just for *now*, right?" and she would agree, at which time I would follow up with, "And it could *change* tomorrow, right?" and she would agree. I wanted her to face, again and again, the fact that everything she said, thought, and believed was utterly lacking any foundation whatsoever. I took this even farther by asking/stating that, in fact, she may even change her mind about how she determines truth. I said that tomorrow she may decide not to run things through her heart filter, but she may decide to run things through her brain and to treat them as data—ones and zeros. Yes, she agreed that even her manner of determining truth was tentative.

But now, back to her ***"readings"*** via which she held as a core belief that there is one God (whatever *God* may mean to her). How does she justify claiming there is only one God? She sought to buttress this by claiming we all believe in one God. Even when two people claim to believe in one "God," the one god in whom each believes could be a different god. For ex-

ample: The one God of Christianity has a Son, but the one god of Islam cannot have a son (but that is another issue). I asked her: How if, say, the majority of the world became Hindus and were therefore polytheists, could she then claim monotheism is true? Well, it would be her claim against theirs, and according to her belief, we must tolerate and accept each other.

Great, but we must continue to question these types of pre-suppositions. And so it must be asked: Why tolerance? Why acceptance? Why love? "What if," I asked, "I determined that it was beneficial to me, to my clan, tribe, family, city, nation, etc. to violently conquer others?"

Well, this brought us to the assertion that ***"we all have a 'path to God'."*** Well, this is also a very popular claim and a very all-encompassing, tolerant view. However, this too must be questioned. You see, when people say such things, they are thinking about that elderly Jewish gentleman davening (praying) at the Western Wall, that smiling Buddhist monk meditating on a mountain top, a whirling Dervish, etc. However, something that people who say such things generally do not consider is that which I prompted her to consider. So, ***"we all have a 'path to God' "*** *all of us*. "But what," I asked, "if I decided my ***'path to God'*** was that I would fly an airplane into a building?" She had to affirm that, yes, indeed, that would be my path to God. I took it up a notch and referenced Adolf Hitler's Nazism, and she affirmed, yet again that, indeed, that was Hitler's path to God—he showed us a way to God.

Once one asserts ***"we all have a 'path to God' "*** they have included us all—excluded none, and thus, must logically accept that each and every—all paths—are to God, regardless.

You see, one of the problems here is that if you believe ***"we all have a 'path to God',"*** then how can you condemn anything as being immoral?

Although if someone insists, perhaps you could agree and state: "Indeed, we are all on a path to God—some to meet Him as Judge and some as to meet Him as Savior."

Almost in passing, she asserted that the Bible was dismissive of women. Well, how can she condemn this as the Biblical writers and the Jews and Christians ***"all have a 'path to God'?"***

But I thought I would squelch this common misconception, which only takes about one minute. I noted that if she wanted to say something to the effect that the medieval Roman Catholic Church had a problem with women, that is one thing; but the Bible itself? I told her, off the top of my head (although I will include citations here), that in the Bible we find:

Males and females were both created in the image of God.

Women had the right to own land.

Received inheritance.

Were prophetesses (in both testaments).

Were judges.

Were disciples.

Were deaconesses.

Were teachers.

Worked and owned businesses.

Women were present at the day of Pentecost.

Books of the Bible are named after women (Ruth and Esther).

Women were the first at the empty tomb while the male Apostles were hiding in fear.

For these facts, see: *Genesis 1:27; Exodus 15:20; Numbers ch. 27; 2nd Kings 22:14; 2nd Chronicles 34:22; Job 42:15; Proverbs 31:16; Isaiah 8:3; Judges 4:4; Luke 2:36; Romans 16:1-2; Acts 1:12-14, 2:1, 16:14, 21:7-9, 9:36, 18:26; Titus 2:3-4.*

Now, for 90% of the conversation, it was the case that **“we all have a ‘path to God’.”** However, she then changed her mind when referring to 1987AD.

What, pray tell, occurred in 1987AD? Some may recognize that year as the year of the great **“harmonic convergence”** championed by such notable New Agers as Jose Arguelles. This was supposedly a time of spiritual, vibrational enlightenment. At this time, she claimed **“they”** determined that 51% of humanity did not want to be destroyed by an Earth-bound asteroid but wanted to continue in this plane of existence. She defined the **“they”** as beings whom I would refer to as *angels*. I did not sidetrack us at the time, but it is noteworthy that what I define as *angels* and what she was referring to are completely different things—different beings.

In any case, at that time those who truly were on a **“path to God”** were kept on Earth, whilst those who were not began being removed, along with their influence, into another realm of existence. So now, I had her affirm that we *do not all “have a ‘path to God’,”* but rather some do and some do not. She agreed. But (and, yes, indeed, I am a Socratic gadfly), I then asked her if even those who had been removed would eventually reach God. She agreed. Of course, she could not have anyone *forever condemned*, but even those so far removed from being on a **“path to God”** that they had to be removed from Earth would eventually and somehow find their way to God.

As an aside: In regard to being a *Socratic gadfly*, let us take a moment to generally consider the *Socratic Method* or, being a Jew, I rather prefer the term *Rabbinic Method*. Have you ever spoken to someone and it is obvious they are not listening, but they are just waiting for you to take a breath so as to cut you off and get their say? When that or something like that happens, it is not even a case of “in-one-ear-and-out-the-other;” it never even makes it in!

This is why it is preferable to ask probing questions rather than simply making statements. When you ask questions, you cause the person to actually think about issues, and thus, cause them to actually construct connections in their brains whereby they handle the information. By allowing them to consider issues via answering questions, you are ensuring that, as it were, the seeds of thought have been planted, and they cannot as easily go un-watered thereafter.

Now, when she referenced the 51%, I wiped my forehead with a *whoosh* of relief and noted 51% is awfully close to half—what a relief! I mentioned that to refer to 51% is a very specific data point, and I asked how she knows it was 51% and not, for instance, 52%, etc. She stated she did not know. For that matter, how did she know this even took place, this global survey? Well, her **“readings”** and how does she know her **“readings”** are accurate? Well, you know the answer.

In fact, she also referenced our **“four bodies”** which is another popular New-Age belief, which are generally listed as the physical body, the mental body, the emotional body and the ethereal body. I asked how she knew that; perhaps we have twelve bodies? She replied she did not know.

Understand that we are all exclusivists if for no other reason that inclusivists exclude the exclusivists and, thus, show themselves to not be inclusivists, but exclusivists. Here is a simple proof: Claim that we are all exclusivists and if someone disagrees with you, simply note that they just proved your point. By doing so, they have just excluded you from those who hold true views.

You will notice I could take her in any direction I wanted and get her to agree with me; and then I could reverse our direction and get her to agree with me yet again. I was doing this in order to show her, again and again and again and again, that since she had no base, no foundation, she was being tossed to and fro with any wind of ... well, wherever I wanted to go. **“We should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting”** (Ephesians 4:14). If I asked her about point “A,” I was already at point “Z” in my mind and would simply walk her from “B” to “Y” and let her stumble into “Z.” It is the method employed by the lawyer who does not ask a question to which he does not already know the answer. It is like playing chess and getting your opponent to be forced into positions that will draw him into your trap. Yet, she is not my opponent, and she is certainly not the enemy; she is a pawn of the enemy. I should note that all of this is to be done out of compassion, sympathy, empathy, love, respect, clamminess and not pride or boastfulness. **“But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account of the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;”** (1 Peter 3:15, NASB). In fact, I would take time to consider what she said, indicate that I was attempting to understand her, would reiterate her position to ensure that I was getting it right, and then would ask her simple, probing questions which left her to have to face her folly all by herself without me pushing her in terms of shoving it in her face or any such thing.

Another issue arose about her **“readings.”** She had made the ubiquitous claim that the Bible could not be relied upon because it had been translated and interpreted so very many times. Well, I very quickly noted that, for example, the oldest Old Testament manuscript(s) we had prior to the 1940s were the Masoretic Text(s) which dated to circa 800AD—let us round it to 1,000 years ago. Then in the 1940s the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, which took us back to circa 2,000 years ago. Now we could see, by the leaps and bounds of millennia, 2,000 years ago compared to 1,000 years ago compared to today, and we could see, in essence, that which the Bible says is the very same.

Well, she posited this was because there are certain elements of fundamental truth. You see what I meant about New Agers both agreeing and also disagreeing with everything you say? For example: The Bible is corrupt, except when it is not. It is corrupt; but when it is proven to not be corrupt, then it is not corrupt, because it contains certain elements of fundamental truth. How do you know? What are they? How do you determine them? Yes, all these are the very same relevant questions which we discussed all along.

As an example of the incorrupt Bible’s corruption (or, something), she alleged that reincarnation had been ... pay attention to the qualifying term here ... **“taken out”** of the Bible.

—Continued on page 8

"New Ager" Continued from page 7

This was great to hear, because if she said the Bible simply neglected to reference reincarnation that is one thing; but she claimed it had been **"taken out"**—removed—from the Bible. I suggested if that was the situation, it is a simple enough case. For the Old Testament, we have major manuscripts that are 2,000-years and 1,000-years old plus many, many other fragments. For the New Testament, we have some 24,000 manuscripts (5.5 thousand in Greek and the rest in other languages). Thus, if it was **"taken out,"** all we have to do is look at an early manuscript which refers to reincarnation, then look at a more recent manuscript in which the reference is missing and viola: Proof that it was **"taken out."**

Well, she had an answer to this, and it was that the manuscripts which still reference reincarnation are hidden away in the Vatican. Lack of evidence is not evidence. Clearly, someone once claimed it was **"taken out"** of the Bible and had no evidence when asked for it, and so they concocted a tall tale about a Vatican conspiracy. I submitted that arguing thusly, one could claim *anything* was in the Bible, it was **"taken out,"** and hidden away in the Vatican. She assured me she would provide me with the evidence; I am still waiting.

While we are at it, she also claimed Jesus acquired his mystical wisdom and abilities whilst traveling in Egypt, Tibet, India, etc. and learned from the great masters of those regions. This too is a very, very common claim. It is common enough that it was researched in detail and discredited. No, it was not researched via an internet search engine, but via actual boots on the ground. People traveled to the various localities where Jesus supposedly traveled, to the very places said to still contain record of Jesus' stays, and what was turned up was just a lot of very confused monks and otherwise holy men who had no idea about what the researchers were talking.¹ Of course, Jesus did some of His growing up in Egypt, but that He learned the mystical ways of their gods and clergy is simply unknown, it is not *mystical* but *mythical*.

In this regard, she made yet another expected and popular claim which is that the human man Jesus **"became 'the Christ'"** when He advanced spiritually enough to tap into the **"Christ consciousness,"** which is something we can all do. Of course, the Bible preempts this claim by stating:

For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:11, NKJV, underline for emphasis).

Thus, Jesus was **"the Christ"** meaning *"the Messiah," "the Anointed One,"* and was so from birth. Oh, right, this must have been inserted into the text later, and the earlier manuscripts which do not include this statement are well, you know where.

What Jesus-Who-**"became-the-Christ"** learned in His travels and studies were certain, what is generally known as, **"power words"** or **"phrases"** which are known in common parlance as **"positive affirmations."** This means that He learned key words and phrases which amounted to the power to change reality. Within Christianity, you may be aware of the Word Faith Movement, the Prosperity Gospel, "Name-it-and-Claim-it" (or, "Blab-it-and-Grab-it"). The context is different, but the concepts are exactly the same.

For example, she stated you have to be very careful of what you say after having said "I am." For example, Jesus learned a very powerful phrase, ***"I am the resurrection and the life"*** and

likewise claimed to be the ***"I am."*** So, she informed me that every morning she says things to herself or, rather, to the universe (or, what have you) ***"I am perfect health," "I am perfect vision"*** and explained that people use these affirmations which also include references to wealth.

That is fascinating, indeed, so I asked whom of all of those she knows who do this (including herself) is perfectly healthy, has 20/20 vision (she is a septuagenarian), is wealthy, etc.? The anticipated answer was, of course, that since such results require such a high level of spiritual development, no, she did not know of any.

This is reminiscent of a conversation which I ear-witnessed between a Buddhist and a young lady who was suffering pretty badly. The Buddhist's essentially un-empathetic and dismissive statement to her was that the Buddha taught if she were to cease from desire, she would cease from suffering. Upon being asked how she could go about doing that (note now she desired to rid herself of desire) the Buddhist even more un-empathetically and dismissively stated he did not know, as such results require ... well, you know the rest of it. Great concepts on the surface, but results are elusive to say the least.

Now, a few of Jesus' ***"I am"*** statements came up as she affirmed Jesus came to show us ***"the way."*** This is very significant: observe that she qualified it accurately. She did not claim that Jesus came to show us *"a"* way (one of many ways) but rather, ***"the"*** way (one way). But, she followed up by (falsely) claiming, "Jesus did not say, ***'No one comes to the Father except through me.'*** "

I pointed out that, indeed, Jesus had not come to show us *"a way"* but came to show us ***"the way."*** And what was this ***"way?"*** It was Jesus Himself. You see, Jesus said, ***"I am the way, the truth, and the life"*** (John 14:6a, NKJV) and since ***"the way"*** is He, Himself, He could, therefore, go on to say, ***"No one comes to the Father except through me"*** (John 14:6b, NKJV).

Let us back up a moment to recall her claim that the Bible was unreliable and corrupt due to the many translations and interpretations. I asked if her ***"readings"*** included reading the writings of channelers who were from other countries. Yes, they were although she claimed the USA has become a center of such activity. In that case, I asked how she knew what she read was reliable and not corrupt? After all, the channeler interprets the spirit's message, writes it down, it is translated into English, she reads it, and further interprets it, etc. She had to affirm that even in her ***"readings,"*** she did not know if what she was reading was reliable and not corrupt, but rather had to judge via her heart filter. So it must be the case that even when it came to her truth claims based upon her ***"readings,"*** she could not be assured beyond the fleeting ***"eternal now"*** that these things are so. (Yes, this is an oxymoron, but one to which she must temporarily be beholden.) She agreed ... just for right now and tentative.

Now, let us get personal. As it turns out, sadly and not surprisingly, she came from a background of very severe and strict parents she said were Christian—Sunday-school teachers, etc. Thus, she peppered some comments with disparaging remarks about ***"religion."*** I assured her when it came to ***"religion,"*** we agreed completely. When what is meant by ***"religion"*** is *a man-made, hierarchical, authoritative system* then, indeed, ***"religion"*** is the greatest corruption ever conceived by humanity and one of the greatest obstacles between humans and YHVH.**

I summarized how the Bible is *the* most anti-religion book (set of books) ever published, and that the New Testament concludes:

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, [and] to keep oneself unspotted from the world. (James 1:27, NKJV)

I revealed that in the Old Testament, YVHV ends up condemning “**religion**.” Mind you, this was the very “**religion**” with the priesthood, laws and sacrifices which YVHV Himself had established. She interrupted here in order to state she did not believe it, “Well, how do you know?” Actually, that question had to wait, because the point was to get her to see, well, the point.

I spoke of the phenomenon of being *institutionalized* whereby, for example, when a person gets out of prison after decades, they find they cannot function. This is because they have become *institutionalized* as for decades they have been told what to do, and when to do it, 24/7.

Think about the Hebrews as slaves in Egypt for four centuries. Imagine you are a slave, your parents were slaves, their parents were slaves, etc. Now imagine sudden freedom. The Hebrews were institutionalized and actually longed for that which was familiar: idols, familiar foods, etc. YHVH had to shape a people from the ground up by providing commandments, laws, authorities, rituals, etc. which were meant to teach something individually and nationally. By observing holidays, sacrifices, kosher laws, etc., they were supposed to become a people who were worshippers of YHVH. Yet, there came a time when the priests were corrupt and made the people loath temple services. Of the corrupt priests Hophni and Phinehas it is stated: ***“Therefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD, for men abhorred the offering of the LORD”*** (1 Samuel 2:17). There came a time when people offered sacrifices to YHVH which they would not have seen fit to offer to their governors (see Malachi 1:8). There came a time when these life lessons—which were meant to provide true spiritual growth—became nothing but empty practices of religion, and people were just robotically jumping through ritualistic hoops.

This is when YHVH in effect said, “No more” and condemned the manmade manner whereby they were going about doing “**religion**” (cf. Isaiah 29:13).

Point being, do not feel as if you have to defend the indefensible. Once I understood what she meant by “**religion**,” I was more than glad to agree and actually take its condemnation further and get to the point that what Jesus offers is not “**religion**” but “**relation**” (cf. Romans 8:15-16, Galatians 4:6).

While I believe all things eventually break down into spiritual warfare, there was a manifestation of that war in terms of *psychological* factors. You see, when she heard certain terms, she would disregard the context in which those terms were being used, redefined them with her own concept, and then react negatively toward (what turns out) was not actually stated, but rather toward her misunderstanding or misinterpretation.

For example, what the pastor had stated, with which she completely disagreed, is that the Bible’s main message is *relationship*. No, she insisted, it is not about relationship, but it is about *love*. Well, indeed, but I offered that relationship is based upon love. She denied this and made reference to abusive relationships for example. Well certainly, but within the context of his sermon, a very specific sort of relationship was being con-

sidered, which was a relationship based upon love. It was the *context* of the sermon which defined the term *relationship*. This is a proper, interpretative principle and also common sense.

However, since she expanded the definition of *relationship* beyond the confines of the context, she proceeded to read *her* definition of the term into the sermon, which resulted in an utter miscomprehension of that which the sermon was meant to convey.

She likewise referred to a very lovely lady’s luncheon she attended which included a very nice message. However, the message made reference to Jesus having been a “sacrifice,” which, in her view, He most certainly was not. (Jesus) ***“offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God”*** (Hebrews 10:12). She explained that as she was growing up, she was expected to sacrifice for family, for work, for country, etc., and this resulted in her being unfulfilled as the self was sacrificed for everyone and everything else. Do you see the pattern? Again, she inserts her, loaded, definition of a term into a message. This results in the message being misunderstood, and she is left to reject not the actual message, but rather her misunderstanding of it. In her view, Jesus *gave* Himself, but He was not *sacrificed* or a *sacrifice*. Well, yes, He gave Himself (cf. Ephesians 5:2) and was given as a sacrifice (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:7).

I explained this to her and, later on, took it further still by pointing out that when she referred to “**Jesus**” and when I referred to “**Jesus**,” we were not referring to the same person. Thus I pointed out, it seemed to me she was not viewing Jesus as He really is, as those who actually knew Him—those who walked with Him, talked with Him, traveled with Him, ate with Him—portray Him. Rather, she was coming to Jesus with preconceived notions in mind, and these preconceived notions were actually blurring the true Jesus and leaving her with a Jesus made in her own image. This is how and why she could read the New Testament and parse it: Jesus said and did this, but did not say or do that. She was not doing this based upon literal reading/understanding of the text, grammatical context, historical context, cultural context, manuscript-based “higher criticism” or anything of the sort, but she was doing it merely by “**feeling**” her way through the text.

You may note that previously I purposefully employed the term *judge* as in she “judged it via her heart.” This is because the issues of judgment, passing judgment, being judgmental, are issues which one must breach with New Agers, et al.

She shared that one thing upon which she is spiritually working is to cease judging. I replied we all pass judgments all day long i.e.: when deciding what is true or false, when considering ours and other people’s behaviors, when deciding what to eat, and what to wear, etc. Indeed, but she more meant judgment with regard to other people, because ***“we must accept people as they are.”*** I pointed out that Jesus taught: ***“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”*** (Matthew 7:1-2, NKJV). Thus, you will be judged in the same manner in which you, yourself, judge others. This brings us to another of statement by Jesus regarding the matter of judgment: ***“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”*** (John 7:24). The problem is not judgment, but rather, *how* we judge.

In fact, if someone condemns judgmentalism, they are

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1000 *one thousand gifts*

by Ann Voskamp

“It is I Who made the earth, and created man upon it. I stretched out the heavens with My hands and I ordained all their host.” Isaiah 45:12²

There are many good things about *One Thousand Gifts* by Ann Voskamp. The story of how she learned to be grateful to the Lord in all things (Phil. 4:6; Col. 3:17; 1 Thess. 5:18), and how this forged a closer walk with the Lord for her is inspirational, and she has a heartfelt way of expressing her experiences and insights. I would think this message encouraged many readers to more earnestly seek how to cultivate daily gratitude to the Lord in their lives, which is a good practice.

Were it not for two problematic issues, there would be no need to write about this book. However, these two areas are of sufficient concern and should be addressed. I am not including any literary criticism or disagreements with more minor issues due to time limitations.

God’s Omnipresence and Immanence

Biblical theism understands God to be both transcendent—beyond the created world—and present in the world or immanent. God is omnipresent (present everywhere) because He cannot be contained in any one locality: ***“Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest?”*** (Is. 66:1; see also 1 Kings 8:27; 2 Chron. 2:6; Ps. 139:7-10; Jer. 23: 23-24; Acts 17:24).

Those who reject this view in favor of pantheism (all is God) or panentheism³ (all is in God) misunderstand God’s distinction from creation to mean He is not interactive with creation except in supernatural interventions such as miracles. Thus, God is mistakenly viewed as mostly absent and remote. However, God reveals in His Word that He is present; God cannot be restricted to a locality or impeded from any place (Prov. 15:3; Ps. 139:7-10; Is. 57:15; Jer. 23:24).

Panentheism and Other Views

The first area to address is panentheism. Panentheism is not well understood nor easily recognized, since it less obvious than

pantheism. Pantheism, which Voskamp disavows several times in the book, is the belief all is God, and therefore, there is no distinction between God’s nature and creation. In pantheism, the rocks, rivers, trees, clouds, sun, moon, humanity, etc. are all part of God and imbued with the nature of God. This view is found in some areas of the New Age, modern Witchcraft (though God might be the goddess), some forms of Neopaganism, and in aspects of certain world religions. The idea the earth is sacred is usually tied to pantheism. Still, even with these distinctions, pantheism and panentheism can blur together, so it is not always easy to discern between them.

Panentheism is often defined as the belief that all is contained *in* God (versus all *is* God in pantheism). There are many forms of panentheism, but that is beyond the scope of this article. *Theopedia* defines it this way (*ontologically* means *the nature of*):

“Panentheism, literally ‘all-in-God-ism’, “affirms that although God and the world are ontologically distinct [i.e., not the same] and God transcends the world, the world is ‘in’ God ontologically.” This is not to be confused with pantheism, which understands God to be the world. For most panentheists, God is intimately connected to the world and yet remains greater than the world. In this view, events and changes in the universe affect and change God, and he is therefore a temporal being. As the universe grows, God learns as he increases in knowledge and being. Panentheism has been associated with process theology and aspects of open theism, including theologians such as Paul Tillich, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Jurgen Moltmann, Robert Jesnson [sic], and possibly Karl Rahner.”⁴

Wikipedia states a common view found in panentheism:

... the divine interpenetrates every part of nature and timelessly extends beyond it.

Also:

God is viewed as the eternal animating force behind the universe. Some versions suggest that the universe is nothing more than the manifest part of God. In some forms of panentheism, the cosmos exists within God, who in turn “pervades” or is “in” the cosmos.⁵

In discussing panentheistic aspects of theologian Karl Rahner’s philosophy, authors Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson state in *20th Century Theology* that Rahner’s view implies that

“the source of the difference between God and the world lies in God himself, and therefore the difference is not absolute.”⁶ Any stance which renders God’s interaction with the world a part of His nature or an interaction of necessity falls into the panentheistic category.

In addition to what is listed in *Theopedia*, panentheism is also found in the New Age, forms of Christian-New Age syncretism (such as the beliefs expressed by Episcopal priest Matthew Fox), New Thought, mysticism, Theosophy, Neoplatonism, and popular works such as William P. Young’s *The Shack*. Panentheism is not uncommonly found in the ideas of some of the Emergent Christian spokespersons (for example, Rob Bell’s *Love Wins*). It is not surprising that some Emergents would lean panentheistic since many of them have admitted an influence from and admiration for Matthew Fox and for New Age Buddhist Ken Wilber.

Biblical Texts Used to Support Panentheism

What of texts such as Colossians 1:17: **“And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together”** (ESV)? Does this mean the world is “in” or “part” of Christ? No, it means that Christ sustains the order of the universe (cf. Heb. 1:3). Bible scholar and commentator John Gill comments on this passage regarding Christ:

[H]e upholds all things by the word of his power; the heavens have their stability and continuance from him; the pillars of the earth are bore up by him, otherwise that and the inhabitants of it would be dissolved; the angels in heaven are confirmed in their estate by him, and have their standing and security in him; the elector [sic] God are in his hands, and are his peculiar care and charge, and therefore shall never perish; yea, all mankind live and move, and have their being in him; the whole frame of nature would burst asunder and break in pieces, was it not held together by him; every created being has its support from him, and its consistence in him; and all the affairs of Providence relating to all creatures are governed, directed, and managed by him, in conjunction with the Father and the blessed Spirit.⁷

Similarly, Ephesians 4:10 is often misused for panentheism: **“He Who descended is the One Who also ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things”** (ESV). In this case, **“fill”** also means **“fulfill”** and **“to complete.”** Gill comments:

... that he might fill all things, or “fulfil all things”; that were types of him, or predicted concerning him; that as he had fulfilled many things already by his incarnation doctrine, miracles, obedience, sufferings, death, and resurrection from the dead.⁸

And

... that he might fill all persons, all his elect, both Jews and Gentiles ...particularly that he might fill each and every one of his people with his grace and righteousness, with his Spirit, and the fruits of it, with spiritual knowledge and understanding ...”⁹

At its basic level, panentheism is expressed by seeing God in nature or aspects of creation. This differs from seeing nature as the work of a Creator God as Romans informs us: **“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse”** (Rom. 1:20).

The created universe points to a Maker Who brought it into existence; a Maker Who is immeasurable beyond the vastness of space and more formidable than anything seen in nature. Man can come to the knowledge there is a Creator through the evidence of the creation. God the Creator interacts with His creation as a distinct Being, but He exists apart from His creation and existed prior to it. God does not interact with creation *out of necessity*; and no part of God’s nature interpenetrates, mixes with, manifests as, or pervades the creation.

Panentheism in *One Thousand Gifts*

Although creation points to a Creator, it is not a container for the Creator, nor do we literally see God in creation. Voskamp writes about seeing God in space and time as she is doing dishes. She talks about light in the soap bubbles and then says, **“This is where God is.”**¹⁰ She describes a bubble trembling, then states the space is holy, **“The God in it.”**¹¹ God is **“framed in the moment,”** and **“time is the essence of God, I AM.”**¹²

She continues in this vein about the present and how God enters time **“hallowing it.”** One can certainly sense God’s presence anywhere, and it is a special moment; but God is not *in time*, nor is he a *part of time*, and time is not part of God—these views are classic panentheism.

In a long passage, beginning on p.104, Voskamp writes about going outside one night to see the harvest moon, which becomes a transformative experience for her. The entire vista impacts her to say, **“Sky, land and sea, heavy and saturated with God,”**¹³ and God’s glory **“punctures earth’s lid and heaven falls through the hole.”**¹⁴ I realize this could be mere poetry, but further statements indicate she takes it in a more literal fashion.

She talks about yearning **“to see God”**¹⁵ (though she does not define this), and that she’s been **“hungry for Beauty.”**¹⁶ She seems to equate the beauty of nature with God’s nature or with God Himself (109 ff.). She states, **“True Beauty worship, worship of Creator Beauty Himself”**¹⁷ and explains this is not pantheism. However, this statement by itself is consistent with panentheism (it could also be pantheism, though it is clear Voskamp is not a pantheist).

She explains, **“Pantheism, seeing the natural world as divine, is a very different thing than seeing divine God present in all things.”**¹⁸ The problem is that the latter is panentheism. She then asks rhetorically if theology is the study of books about God, then is not the study of nature also **“the deep study of the Spirit of God?”**¹⁹ Well, no, it isn’t. It is the contemplation of the handiwork of God. In Roman 11, we read, **“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor?”** (vv. 33-34)

Voskamp has apparently concluded that because she does not view nature as God, it is okay to see God literally in creation. This is very different from seeing that nature points to God, or allowing the beauty of nature to initiate thoughts of God, or understanding that beauty on earth reflects the majesty of God. I never gaze at a beautiful sunset, or a scattering of stars, or a tranquil lake and think, “I am looking at God.” That would never enter my head, because I know I am not looking at God or seeing God when I look at these things. Frankly, it would seem idolatrous for me to say or even think this. It is alien to me as a Christian.

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God the Father is invisible, for one thing (John 4:24; Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17; Heb. 11:27); His glory is too much for us to bear (Ex. 33:20); and Jesus stated that seeing Him was seeing God the Father (John 14:9; also, John 12:45; Col. 1:15).

Voskamp also sees God in **"all faces."** She asks, **"Isn't He the face of all faces?"**²⁰ and continues on that the **"face"** of the moon, the doe, and even that of **"the derelict"** are **"His countenance that seeps up through the world."**²¹ She questions, **"Do I have eyes to see His face in all things?"**²² Here again, this is equating nature and the faces of people with the face of God. Faith, she asserts, is **"a seeking for God in everything."**²³

God's Word, however, tells us that faith is **"the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen"** (Heb. 11:1, emphasis added; see also 2 Cor. 4:18, 5:7). Yet Voskamp writes that Jesus said people **"need to see and then believe—that looking and believing are the same thing."**²⁴ She gives no scriptural reference for this; she could be referring to Jesus' acts which demonstrated His fulfillment of Messianic prophecies through miracles of healing, casting out demons, and power over nature. In that case, when Jesus was on earth, those who witnessed these miracles and denied Jesus as Messiah were reprimanded or condemned. At that time, they were to look and believe. This is not the case today, because Jesus is not presently on earth as He was then. We cannot look at Jesus this way today, nor is there any command to Christians after the ascension that one is to "look and believe." (cf. John 20:29, **"blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."**)

Voskamp tries to connect this idea of viewing and believing with seeing God in nature and somehow eliciting faith. Going back to Romans chapter 1 verse 20, it is true general revelation through nature provides evidence for a Creator God, so man is without excuse if he denies God exists; but that is not the point Voskamp seems to be making. Salvific faith which accepts the remedy for sin that separates us from God comes only by special revelation through the Holy Spirit and God's Word, not through general revelation (the creation).

Her book has too many passages suggesting or expressing panentheism to mention, but some of them are equating the moon with God's eye (**"All Eye,"** 115), and the moon with God's face (132); God manifesting in the world (116); equating God with us (**"God stretching us open to receive more of Himself,"** 117); the activities of nature being God's **"experience"** (ibid); touching God through nature (118); **"God seeping up through all things"** (ibid.); longing to **"pound on the chest of God"** (119); wanting to **"Enter into God"** (ibid., italics in original); God in all faces (134, 137), and **"all faces become the face of God"** (138).

Theological Erotica

The second troubling area is an eroticization of God's love for us and our love for God. This seems to be, in fact, an extension or result of panentheism. If God is present in creation itself, if we can see or feel God in nature, He is reduced, philosophically speaking (not that God actually can be reduced), to the vulnerability of material and/or carnal concepts and interpretations. The last chapter in the book displays this in blatant erotic language (with some foreshadowing earlier, such as on 119).

The final chapter opens with the statement, **"I fly to Paris and discover how to make love to God."**²⁵ Even if we know

Voskamp does not mean this literally, the term **"make love"** has almost exclusively a sexual implication throughout our culture. If this were the only lapse, one could perhaps forgive Voskamp for her attempt to express her love for God in a new way. However, this is just the beginning of a full immersion into theological erotica (if I may coin a phrase).

She ties this love to being God's bride and God as **"Lover"** (119, 146, 204, 213, 218). But *individually*, we are not *brides* of God or Christ. The composite church of believers is the Bride of Christ and **"bride"** is spoken of in the singular, not the plural (Rev. 19:7, 21:9, 22:17; see also Eph. 5:23).

She pursues this topic by talking about union, but mostly using carnal, erotic language (she equates communion with consummation and union). She refers to the scriptural picture of the union of man and wife as pertaining to Christ and the Church becoming one, but then she takes it into romantic and carnal territory.

She writes that Christ and the church will become **"one flesh—the mystery of that romance,"**²⁶ but this idea is not in Scripture. Scripture says we shall **"be like Him."** (1 John 3:2). **"One flesh"** is used for the union of husband and wife (Matt. 19:5, 6; Eph. 5:31). We see from 1 Cor. 6:16, in reference to a man joining with a prostitute, that it has definite sexual meaning. While **"one flesh"** in marriage may imply more than a physical union, it certainly does include a physical, sexual union. Also, the way she uses **"romance"** denotes a sexual element. Not all love is romance, and I certainly do not want to think of God in those terms.

She continues with phrases like **"the long embrace," "the entering in," "God as Husband in sacred wedlock, bound together, body and soul, fed by His body,"** and **"mystical love union."**²⁷ I do not want these images in my head. This is not how Scripture leads me to think of the Lord or of what it means to be **"one in Christ,"** (Gal. 3:28) which biblically is *without* carnal or erotic implications.

The reader may hope for a respite from this imagery, but none is given. In fact, it is only building up. A few pages later, describing her experience seeing the painting "Pentecost" by Jean Restout, she is moved to write, in reference to herself and God, **"It's our making love."**²⁸ **"God makes love with grace upon grace"**²⁹ and she asks, **"couldn't I make love to God ... to know Him the way Adam knew Eve."**³⁰ However—and this is a crucial point—the way Adam **"knew"** Eve was sexually, and this is what is meant by the Hebrew word *yada* translated **"knew"** in that passage (Gen. 4:1). One cannot simply equate the spiritual oneness and connection with God through Christ with a sexual union. They are not the same.

Yet, the erotic language continues to flow, even after that. Voskamp states that Jesus is **"bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh,"**³¹ using language from Genesis 2:23 where Adam describes his partner, Eve. **"I want to be in God and God to be in me, to exchange love and blessings and caresses,"**³² she writes, moving on to employ words like **"interchange," "intercourse"** (twice), **"disrobed,"** and declaring how this intercourse is **"the climax of joy."**³³ Voskamp longs to **"burn," "flush of embarrassment up the face"** and tells the reader that we are to **"cohabit"** with God.³⁴

Even after the above, further terms with lovemaking overtones follow: **"love-drunk,"** many **"union"** words, **"ardent,"** and **"one holy kiss."**³⁵ However purely Voskamp experienced,

thought, or intended these experiences and expressions is irrelevant when such overt sexual language and imagery is used—especially in connection with God and Jesus Christ. Though Christians are to know God’s love (Rom. 5:5) and love God (Deut. 6:5, Matt. 22:37), it is not romantic or erotic love.


Moreover, eroticizing God’s love belittles it. God’s love in sending His Son to atone for sins (John 3:16; Rom. 5:6, 8), and Jesus’ willingness to lay down his life and take the penalty for sins (John 10:17; Gal. 2:20) is almost too incomprehensible a love for us to grasp. First Corinthians chapter 13, verses four to seven, describe the kind of love that is from God and we can know through Christ; and it is not as Voskamp expresses it.

No matter what some men may have written (Voskamp has offered this to support her sexual language), evaluation of any book about God should be consistent with biblical principles, not based on man’s standards—which are ever-changing—no matter who those men may be.

WHY BOTHER?

If panentheism were not making a re-invigorated entrance into the culture and church, an analysis of this book might not be necessary. However, the panentheism in the book offers an opportunity to discuss it and, therefore, inform.

One may argue that Voskamp is using metaphor. Although metaphor has its place, when it conveys a wrong view of God and nature, especially in a recurring fashion, it should be avoided. The sheer repetition of panentheistic imagery in this book is too much to ignore. The popularity of a book or author is irrelevant when it comes to the responsibility to assess the content. Are Christians supposed to put the Bible aside and not use it to evaluate books or writings about God and Jesus?

Panentheism actually undermines God’s glory and majesty, because it depicts creation as an extension or necessary corollary of God, and/or imbues creation with some of God’s attributes. Whenever panentheism appears in a popular work, deliberately or not, especially one written by a Christian, it becomes necessary to respond. It can only be beneficial to recognize panentheism and to respond biblically. 



Before trusting Christ in late 1990, **Marcia Montenegro** was a professional astrologer and taught astrology for several years, as well as having been involved in Eastern and New Age practices. Through her ministry, Christian Answers for the New Age, Marcia speaks around the country and writes on New Age and occult topics.

Based in Arlington, VA, she is the author of ***Spell-Bound: The Paranormal Seduction of Today's Kids***. (Life Journey/Cook, 2006).

ENDNOTES:

1 Note: This is not a book review. This is only a commentary on two issues of concern I have with the book. I am not saying Voskamp deliberately holds the ideas I critique, but she presents them, inadvertently or not, and I am free to exercise my right as a reader and writer to assess them as presented.

2 All Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise indicated

3 Disclaimer: The meaning of the terms *immanence*, *pantheism*, and *panentheism* and their implications are not always agreed upon by theologians or scholars. One quickly finds that definitions and understanding of these terms vary. It is particularly difficult to find information on panentheism from a Christian point of view, except for the type found in Process Theology (a Neo-Orthodox view positing a God who is both beyond the universe and contained within and connected to it).

Furthermore, there are those who adopt pantheist or panentheist ideas and mix them together, even in contradiction to other beliefs they claim to hold. Therefore, overlap and mixture are not uncommon.

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5 Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia – Panentheism; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panentheism>

6 Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *20th Century Theology*, Inter-Varsity Press, 1992; 249

7 Biblos, Gills Commentary of the Entire Bible; <http://biblecommenter.com/colossians/1-17.htm>

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10 Ann Voskamp, *One Thousand Gifts*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, Copyright Ann Morton Voskamp 2010, 69

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Wikipedia

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<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panentheism>

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On Seeing God

"The Invisibility of God," by Bob Deffinbaugh

<http://bible.org/seriespage/invisibility-god-genesis-3222-30-exodus-249-11-1-timothy-117>

"Has Anyone Seen God?"

<http://carm.org/bible-difficulties/genesis-deuteronomy/has-anyone-seen-god-or-not>

Recommended Reference Book for the serious student of theology:

Stanley J. Grenz & Roger E. Olson, *20th Century Theology*

WALKING IN THEIR WORLD

By L.L. (Don) Veinot Jr.



Some years ago, a youth pastor from a nearby community called me. He was concerned about a large group of Vampires who gathered regularly in his town's park. He thought, perhaps, there were 300, and some people from the churches would show up with bull horns to announce loudly that the Vampires needed to repent. It didn't seem to be working. I have to confess: Other than in films and books, I had never heard of any actual Vampires roaming the countryside, and I thought it might be interesting to check it out. We arranged a time to meet, and a few of the MCOI volunteers and I headed out on a Friday evening to meet up with the youth pastor. When we arrived, we saw several hundred youth—all of whom were engaged in something which did not seem to me to be overly threatening, so I suggested we swim into the crowd and find someone to talk to. We even took video equipment to record some of the conversations. About a half dozen agreed to sit down and talk, and the first question was quickly answered. What they were engaged in was a role-playing game—*Vampire: The Masquerade*. Each participant had developed a character to play in the acting out of the game:

The game uses the cursed and immortal vampiric condition as a backdrop to explore themes of morality, depravity, the human condition (or appreciation of the human condition in its absence), salvation, and personal horror. The gloomy and exaggerated version of the real world that the vampires inhabit, called the "World of Darkness," forms an already bleak canvas against which the stories and struggles of characters are painted. The themes that the game seeks to address include retaining the character's sense of self, humanity, and sanity, as well as simply keeping from

being crushed by the grim opposition of mortal and supernatural antagonists and, more poignantly, surviving the politics, treachery, and often violent ambitions of their own kind.¹

This is guided by a "Storyteller." As we talked, I asked if there was a particular worldview being used or taught. The teenagers assured me it was just a game, and no worldview was involved. I turned to the Storyteller and asked him if he was incorporating his worldview. He was 46 and, without hesitation, acknowledged that he was. I asked his views, and he admitted he was a Buddhist. The teens were shocked. We spent a few hours talking, and the next Friday the youth pastor returned and met up with the same group. Three of them accepted the Lord that night. Just spending time in their world and having a conversation on their turf, so to speak, made a big difference. I suggested to the senior pastor that the church put on a cook out or dinner in a neutral setting, invite the whole group to join them, let the Vampires even put on a role-play demonstrating how they view the church, and

then engage in some conversation. The pastor declined. He thought the Christians would be too offended. Why would using bull horns to blast non-believers be okay, but possibly finding out what the non-believers think of Christians be offensive? Hmmm....

Rosaria Champagne Butterfield in her article "My Train Wreck Conversion" relays a similar experience she had as a "leftist lesbian professor" with a pastor and his wife, who left the comfort of their church to walk in her world a bit. It started with a kind letter he sent:

With the letter, Ken initiated two years of bringing the church to me, a heathen. Oh, I had seen my share

**I have to confess:
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of Bible verses on placards at Gay Pride marches. That Christians who mocked me on Gay Pride Day were happy that I and everyone I loved were going to hell was clear as blue sky. That is not what Ken did. He did not mock. He engaged. So when his letter invited me to get together for dinner, I accepted. My motives at the time were straightforward: Surely this will be good for my research.

Something else happened. Ken and his wife, Floy, and I became friends. They entered my world. They met my friends. We did book exchanges. We talked openly about sexuality and politics. They did not act as if such conversations were polluting them. They did not treat me like a blank slate. When we ate together, Ken prayed in a way I had never heard before. His prayers were intimate. Vulnerable. He repented of his sin in front of me. He thanked God for all things. Ken's God was holy and firm, yet full of mercy. And because Ken and Floy did not invite me to church, I knew it was safe to be friends.²

"I knew it was safe to be friends" is a profound statement in light of the Seeker-Sensitive/Purpose-Driven Church Movements of the last 30-40 years, as well as the attempts of so many churches over nearly the last 200 years to try to get non-believers into the church to hear the Gospel. Meeting people, whether they are a "Vampire," a "leftist lesbian professor" or just a regular non-believer comes down pretty much to the same thing: They want to feel safe. That is the work of the missionary and was very much the attitude of the First-Century Church. This really comes out in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (NASB):

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the Gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.

The First-Century Church was in the minority. They recognized they were missionaries or, as Paul put it, "ambassadors" (1 Cor. 5:20). What we find in these two passages is Paul and, through his teaching, us going to non-believers in *their* settings, building relationships for the sake of building relationships, not for the goal of adding them to our church rolls. It means spending more time learning why they believe what they believe and caring about them as a person rather than getting them through the doors of our church building.

In some ways, walking in the world of non-believers is scary to believers. But then, if you want to reach the lost, that is where they will be found. It can be an adventure as well. Our friends at Haven Ministries³ regularly go to New-Age and Psychic Fairs. Bill Honsberger (from Haven Ministries) and I first met at the Parliament of the World's Religions in the 1990s where we have many opportunities to talk with Wiccans, Pagans, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, etc. Bill spent a great deal of time at tables in the exhibition hall, because the folks manning the tables "can't go anywhere." We spent several hours with Donald Frew, one of the P.R. guys for The Covenant of the Goddess⁴; and I spent a

few hours interviewing Lady Olivia Roberts, the founder of The Fellowship of Isis.⁵ Lady Olivia was surprised that Evangelicals would come on her turf and be able to carry on a civil discussion. Donald Frew's reaction was very enlightening: After several hours, he said that if becoming a Christian is what we were, he would do it in a minute; but he asserted we were an anomaly. He said that in his experience, Christians (Mike Warnke, *The Satan Seller*) were liars (see *Selling Satan: The Evangelical Media and the Mike Warnke Scandal*) and hypocrites who misrepresent the beliefs of others.

Training Christians in church to be missionaries in culture can go a long way toward overcoming these sorts of obstacles. This also has other benefits. Culture is transformed as individuals are transformed. Doesn't it strike you that under our current church models, the church is being transformed by culture rather than the other way around? Just wondering. ☐

Don's photo and bio can be found at the end of his cover article on page 19.

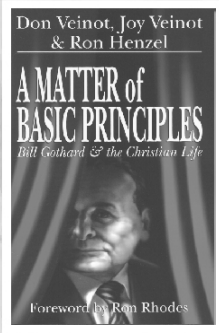
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- 3 <http://havenministry.com/newsite/>
- 4 <http://cog.org/>
- 5 <http://fellowshipofisis.com/>

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Westminster Theological Seminary
Philadelphia, PA

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Update Letter to our Readers

Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc. is about to begin its 18th year. I am surprised, blessed and thankful for the opportunity to serve Him in this ministry to which I have no doubt Joy and I have been called. We are also very blessed to have pretty much the same team still serving together all of these years later. All of us are bi-vocational, which, to me, makes this even more incredible. The valuable research and insight of our Senior Researcher, Ron Henzel; the YouTube videos to reach out to Jehovah's Witnesses by Bill Cwik, the "Snarky Apologist;" the careful and very professional editing of the *Journal* by our Senior Editor, Corkey McGehee; the layout and artwork of her husband, Todd; as well as the design and maintenance of the website by the newest member of the team, Stephen Burnett; keep most things moving along.

Over the last few years we have had to cut back on a few things as our income-producing jobs have changed along with the dramatic change in the economy. Todd, Ron, Bill, Joy and I have all had major changes in our income-producing jobs. We also had an approximately 50% drop in financial support, but this past December, we were able to retire some substantial debt. All of this has impacted the *Journal* probably the most. We have gone from four issues a year to one or two. However, we have tried to maintain the quality and are looking for ways to begin moving back to more issues each year. Joy and I have persuaded our company (we are currently over-the-road truck drivers) to experiment with a new schedule. If it works out, we will have more time at home to work on ministry-related things. An area we have expanded is our ministry blog. We do have a new article each Thursday, which is linked to from our *Crux* e-letter. If you do not receive that, you may want to go to our web site, www.midwestoutreach.org and sign up. I think you will be challenged and blessed. We truly thank you for your prayer and support.

Blessings,



L.L. (Don) Veinot Jr., President
Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.

"New Ager" Continued from page 9

judging judgment to be condemnable and also condemning judgmentalism—and two judgments do not make for a condemnation of judgment.

She mentioned that in her youth, she was judged and judged severely. One simply must be sympathetic with this, as she was obviously still affected by it over half a century later. However, I just had to ask, or rather point out, that according to her very own standards, she had to first affirm that those people who had severely judged her were on a **"path to God,"** and second, she had to **"accept them as they are."** Indeed, she had to agree.

Yet, I wanted to dig a little deeper into this as she had mentioned her concern for that which children were being taught both by Christians and society. She implied Christians were likely still teaching children they are sinners; whilst society did not offer them any self-esteem, but encouraged them to feel bad about themselves if (as an example she gave) their bellies stuck out a little bit.

As an aside: Christianity's theology contains a tension, as it where, between affirming we are all created in God's image and condemning all as sinners, but that Jesus came to save us from our sins. As far as society goes, she seems to have gotten it all but backwards. Yes, there are some very troubling issues pertaining to body image for example. However, even children who are morbidly obese at a time when their metabolisms are supposed to be able to melt steel are being told they are beautiful, should not feel badly about themselves, and maybe there is a health concern or something. Our society is swimming ... nay, drowning in humanistic self-esteem i.e.: feel good about yourself and tell yourself you are a good person regardless of evidence to the contrary.

In fact, our problem is not lack of self-esteem, but lack of God-esteem:

He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, [our] faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. (Isaiah 53:3, NKJV).

In any regard, all this was to say I also wanted her to see this whole thing about **"accept(ing) others as they are"** is faulty. At this point, it may be useful to point out that someone once stated: "God loves us just the way we are, but He loves us way too much to let us stay that way." Thus, I proposed that with regard to her concern for children in relation to **"accept(ing) others as they are"** (on their own **"path to God,"** etc.) it goes beyond simple acceptance.

Again, this concept is generally considered in purely positive terms such as all nice people can be accepted as they are. It is, of course, more difficult to **"accept"** the non-nice **"as they are"**—to love the unlovable.

I compelled her think about this: It is not just a case of you do your thing, I will do mine; and we just "accept each other as we are;" because some of us are teaching children things with which others of us disagree.

As the night closed, and we exchanged parting pleasantries, she told me I had solidified some things for her: God is in control, and we all have a path to God.

So in the end, did I simply succeed in driving her even deeper into the New Age? Well, perhaps. One thing with which a Christian *must* be comfortable is the fact that it is not *our* job

to convert anyone. Jesus told us to **"make disciples"** (Matthew 28:19) and not converts. A disciple is a person who wants to learn. Our job is to plant or water a seed, and it is the Holy Spirit's job to convert (cf. John 16:8).

But what did she mean by concluding God is in control, and we all have a path to God? I most certainly do not know, however, this is the sense I got. Have you ever heard the phrase "Let go, and let God?" It is a way of metaphorically throwing one's hands up and saying, "Well, there's nothing more I can do, I am done, tapped out, finished; God will take care of it," etc. Perhaps it is a righteous resignation and admission of having reached the end of our ability's rope.

I believe she had to come to terms, again and again and again, with the fact she had nothing. All of her beliefs had been shown to be nothing but tentative feelings. She even had to confront the manner whereby she comes to her beliefs is nothing but a tentative feeling. She was done, finished, emptied, weighed and found wanting.

Thus, she affirmed God is in control because she most certainly had none.

She affirmed we all have a path to God, because she had simply lost her ability to discern anything at all. Thus, she had to admit I had a *certain something*, and she wanted to hold on to her *certain something*; and since these "certain somethings" conflict, we both must somehow be able to have our certain somethings and eat them too. ☐

*bodhisattva=a being that compassionately refrains from entering nirvana in order to save others and is worshipped as a deity in Mahayana Buddhism (Webster's)

**YHVH=the tetragrammaton the four Hebrew letters usually transliterated YHWH or JHVH that form a biblical proper name of God—compare Yahweh (Webster's). NOTE: YHVH is used in this article as there is no "w" or "j" sound in Hebrew.

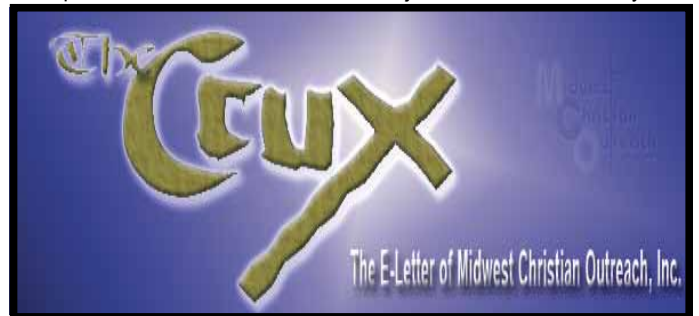


Mariano Grinbank is a Jewish-Christian who attended private Jewish school, had his Bar Mitzvah in Israel, and accepted Jesus' messiahship at the age of 27 years. He has written thousands of articles pertaining to issues relating to Christian apologetics. He has presented apologetics lectures for many years and in many venues covering topics such as Rabbinic Judaism, the Baha'i Faith, multiverse theory,

and debated an Atheist at Wilfrid Laurier University. You can find him online at: <http://www.examiner.com/worldview-and-science-in-national/mariano-grinbank>.

ENDNOTES:

1 Mariano Grinbank "Jurassic Ark - Christ's 'Lost Years,'" *True Freethinker*, <http://www.truefreethinker.com/articles/jurassic-ark-christs-lost-years>



"Cap Punishment" Continued from page 3

for example, doesn't seem to diminish the incidence of rape, but we punish rapists as a matter of justice. Amnesty International argues for pragmatism rather than justice in their paper **"The Death Penalty and Deterrence,"** which states:

A 2009 survey of criminologists revealed that over 88% believed the death penalty was NOT a deterrent to murder.¹²

This obviously is a consideration, but notice a very important word in the statement. The percentage of criminologists **"believed"** the death penalty was not a deterrent. It didn't say they have proven it or that it was statistically a fact, but rather it merely was their belief. They include a graph which, at first glance, appears to support their belief; but is the state's lack of a death penalty the actual reason for a lower murder rate? Have they demonstrated a direct cause-and-effect link between states not having a death penalty and a lower murder rate? Are there other factors which come in to play that may show reasons other than the lack of the death penalty for the lower murder rates? The lack of ability to actually demonstrate the link renders the claim almost meaningless. Perhaps we could substitute another statistic to replace the one about the states which do not have the death penalty. Perhaps we could find out the percentage of people with tattoos; and if we find the states with higher capital crime are also states with a greater percentage of the population sporting tattoos, we could then claim tattoos cause a greater percentage of capital crimes. Someone may laugh, but that is at least as credible a suggestion or "belief" as the one Amnesty International has put forth.

An issue of concern—and it should concern all on both sides of the question—is: What about cases where the innocent are convicted and given the death sentence? There are many who go to this as nearly the first argument against the death penalty. Amnesty International claims:

Since 1973, over 130 people have been released from death rows throughout the country due to evidence of their wrongful convictions. In 2003 alone, 10 wrongfully convicted defendants were released from death row.¹³

There seems to be legitimate debate on whether the death penalty or life imprisonment without the possibility of parole is the correct sentence for murderers, perhaps serial rapists, and even pedophiles. There are some reading this who will be certain that I am in favor of capital punishment and, although I tend to lean in that direction, I, like others, am concerned about those who were tried and wrongfully convicted. In other words, I am uncomfortable seeing the innocent executed for crimes they did not commit. But that leads me to another very important issue.

Capital Punishment for the Innocent

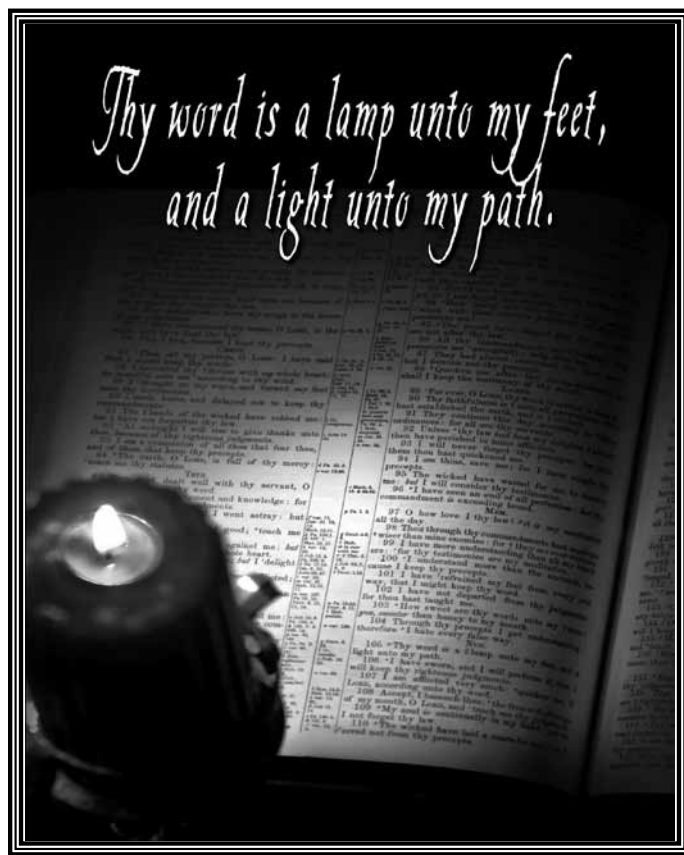
Of all the trials held, it is a small percentage where the accused and convicted are sentenced to the death penalty. Once sentenced, there are a series of appeals which take years before the execution can actually be carried out. This is all part of the system in an attempt to overcome the flaws inherent in the system and to be able to change the sentence or even free the convicted individual if it can be proven there is new evidence which demonstrates either innocence, problems in the court proceedings, or some other extenuating circumstance(s). Again, we are concerned as a society, even after someone is charged,

tried and convicted, that the judicial system got it right.

Many who argue against capital punishment consider pro-life advocates who are also pro-capital punishment as being inconsistent. After all, they argue, if life is sacred and should be protected while in the womb, how can you be so inconsistent by being in favor of the death penalty? This is seen by some as a somewhat schizophrenic position.

Actually, I think our society is schizophrenic on the issue of capital punishment and abortion but in the opposite direction. They seem to be arguing that the morally, financially and culturally correct position is to eliminate the death penalty for one who has been tried and convicted, but a mother should have the right and sole authority to pronounce the death sentence on her child who has committed no crime, has not been charged, tried, or convicted. The mother is not an officer of the court; but because the innocent child is living in her womb, she can act as judge and jury without accountability. So, on the one hand, the group currently holding legislative power in these issues is pro-life for the tried and convicted and pro-capital punishment for the innocent.

Then there is the question of methodology. Firing squads and hanging have been pretty well eliminated as inhumane methods and lethal injection as the more humane way to carry out capital punishment. The humane methods of abortion are dismemberment, chemically burning to death in saline solution and then, of course, partial-birth abortion—which I will not describe here. Then, there is also the "born alive" bill, which would require doctors to care for a child which was scheduled to be put to death, but the process failed, and it was born alive. While an Illinois Senator, Barack Obama voted *against* this bill three years in a row¹⁴ favoring leaving the child on a counter or table untouched and untreated until it died. Capital punishment



for the innocent, untried, and unconvicted; and preservation of the life of the charged, tried and convicted who are to be considered sacrosanct.

So, I wonder, would those who view these abortion methods as humane be more comfortable if we used them as capital punishment for the guilty? You know, death by dismemberment, or death by drowning in saline solution, or even death by exposure without food, water or any other care? Would there be howls of inhumane treatment of serial killers? I think there would be. Counting the body parts of a convicted felon to be sure they are all there would and should spark a public outrage over unnecessary barbarism in our penal system. There is hardly a peep when it comes to these methods being used against infants. I wonder, what does *that* say about a society that values the life of a convicted serial rapist above that of an innocent unborn child? [Q]



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ENDNOTES:

- 1 Huff Post Religion, "Belief in Hell Lowers Crime Rate, According to International Study," 6/19/2012; http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/19/belief-in-hell-lowers-crisis-n_1609247.html
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 New York Times, "Illinois Governor Signs Capital Punishment Ban," John Schwartz and Emma G. Fitzsimmons, March 9, 2011; http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/10/us/10illinois.html?_r=0
- 5 <http://www.religioustolerance.org/execute.htm>
- 6 Opposing views on the death penalty: Allegedly invalid techniques of biblical analysis; "An article by a retired federal judge opposing the death penalty"; <http://www.religioustolerance.org/execute.htm>
- 7 Opposing views on the death penalty: Allegedly invalid techniques of biblical analysis; "A comment by a professor of political science in favor of the death penalty"; <http://www.religioustolerance.org/execute.htm>
- 8 1 the principle or law of retaliation that a punishment inflicted should correspond in degree and kind to the offense of the wrongdoer, as an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth; retributive [justice](#); Dictionary.com; <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/lex+talionis>
- 9 Dictionary.com; "revenge"; <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/revenge?s=t>
- 10 Dudley Sharp, Death Penalty Resources Director, Justice For All, in his paper "Death Penalty and Sentencing Information,"; <http://www.prodeathpenalty.com/DP.html>
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Amnesty International; "The Death Penalty and Deterrence"; <http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/issues/death-penalty/us-death-penalty-facts/the-death-penalty-and-deterrence>
- 13 Amnesty International; "Death Penalty and Innocence"; <http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/issues/death-penalty/us-death-penalty-facts/death-penalty-and-innocence>
- 14 Born Alive Truth; <http://bornalivetrueth.org/timeline.php>

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just as He said."*

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