Science and Faith: Friendly Allies, Not Hostile Enemies

by John Lennox, Ph.D.

Contemporary science is a wonderfully collaborative activity. It knows no barriers of geography, race, or creed. At its best it enables us to wrestle with the problems that beset humanity, and we rightly celebrate when an advance is made that brings relief to millions. I have spent my life as a pure mathematician, and I often reflect on what physics Nobel Prize-winner Eugene Wigner called “the unreasonable effectiveness of mathematics.” How is it that equations created in the head of a mathematician can relate to the universe outside that head? This question prompted Albert Einstein to say, “The only incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible.” The very fact that we believe that science can be done is a thing to be wondered at.

Why should we believe that the universe is intelligible? After all, if, as certain secular thinkers tell us, the human mind is nothing but the brain and the brain is nothing but a product of mindless unguided forces, it is hard to see that any kind of truth, let alone scientific truth, could be one of its products. As chemist J.B.S. Haldane pointed out long ago: if the thoughts in my mind are just the motions of atoms in my brain, why should I believe anything it tells me—including the fact that it is made of atoms? Yet many scientists have adopted that naturalistic view, seemingly unaware that it undermines the very rationality upon which their scientific research depends!

It was not—and is not—always so. Science as we know it exploded on to the world stage in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Why then and why there? Alfred North Whitehead’s view, as summarized by C.S. Lewis, was that “men became scientific because they expected Law in Nature, and they expected Law in Nature because they believed in a Legislator.” It is no accident that Galileo, Kepler, Newton, and Clerk-Maxwell were believers in God.

Melvin Calvin, American Nobel Prize laureate in biochemistry, finds the origin of the foundational conviction of science—that nature is ordered—in the basic notion “that the universe is governed by a single God, and is not the product of the whims of many gods, each governing his own province according to his own laws. This monotheistic view seems to be the historical foundation for modern science.”

Belief in God, far from hindering science, was the motor that drove it. Isaac Newton, when he discovered the law of gravitation, did not make the common mistake of saying “now [that] I have a law of gravitation, I don't need God.” Instead, he wrote *Principia Mathematica*, the most famous book in the history of science, expressing the hope that it would persuade the thinking reader to believe in a creator.

Newton could see what, sadly, many people nowadays seem unable to see, that God and science are not alternative explanations. God is the agent who designed and upholds the universe; science tells us about how the universe works and about the laws that govern its behavio

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Heaven has been on my mind lately. A few weeks ago, I sat by my sweet mother’s bedside as she breathed her last breath and entered the presence of God. I grieved deeply at the time and know that I’ll shed tears the rest of my life when I reflect upon her loss (that is, my loss) here on earth. At the same time, I have a deep peace, a peace that passes all understanding, for I believe the promise of Jesus, that He has prepared a place in heaven for those who put their trust in Him (John 14:1–3). I know that my mom knew and loved Him, has entered glory and is now experiencing all of the joys of heaven.

While the Lord was preparing a room in heaven for my mom, I believe that He was also preparing me this summer for her passing as I traveled with my wife and thirty other lovely people on the C.S. Lewis Institute’s study tour, featuring the “life and faith of C.S. Lewis.” On our last day in Belfast, the birthplace and childhood home of Lewis, Sandy Smith, our knowledgeable and engaging tour guide, related a conversation between two Belfast natives that took place in Oxford, England. These two sons of Northern Ireland were David Bleakley, a young electrician who had won a trade union scholarship to attend Oxford University, and an Oxford don by the name of C.S. Lewis.

The two of them struck up a friendship that lasted through the years even though there was a large difference in age and Lewis hailed from a middle-class home while Bleakley had a working-class background. Deeper bonds existed between them: the common heritage of their native Ireland and their commitment to faith in Jesus Christ.

On one occasion, when the student Bleakley was preparing for a theology exam, the professor Lewis asked him, “What is your definition of heaven?” Bleakley’s mind raced as he reached for a solid, theologically minded answer to this profound question. He paused and then eventually mumbled a few academic statements filled with erudite words. Lewis replied, “My friend, you’re far too complicated; an honest Ulsterman should know better. Heaven is Oxford lifted and placed in the middle of the County Down.”

I imagine that all of my fellow travelers on the C.S. Lewis Institute study tour, after seeing the “dreaming spires of Oxford” and the magical, emerald hills of County Down, Northern Ireland, understood what Lewis was talking about.

On the tour, we learned that Lewis grew up outside of the shipyards of Belfast in a large home called Little Lea. It was in this home that Lewis and his brother, Warnie, discovered the attic that would allow their imaginations to run wild and create the fictional kingdom of talking animals, called Boxen. This home was also situated near the Church of St. Marks of Dundela in the County Down and affectionately known as the Lion on the Hill, the lion being the traditional symbol of St. Mark. On the door of Magdalen College, and added, “Although these funny English people call it Maudlin College.”

What Is Your Definition of Heaven?
Man exists on a little blue speck, hurtling through space, in a vast cosmos that is filled with billions and billions of planets, stars, and galaxies. Given the immensity of the universe and the smallness of Earth, it would seem foolish of humans to think they are somehow the focus of God’s creative activity, the pinnacle of His love, and the image of His very character. It is far more likely, argues the atheist, that man is merely the accidental (and lucky) product of chance and necessity over time.

While reflecting on an image of Earth taken by Voyager I in 1990 from the vantage point of 4 billion miles, the astronomer Carl Sagan pushed this point when he said, “Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves.” More recently, given all the hoopla about the so-called multiverse, the late atheist scientist and philosopher Victor Stenger opined,

The picture of the multiverse today starts with our own visible universe of 100 billion galaxies, each containing 100 billion stars, 13.8 billion years old…Besides that we also have the eternal multiverse containing an unlimited number of other bubble universes of comparable size…Surely, then, it is ludicrous to think that humanity…is the special creation of a divinity that presides over this vast reality.

Some try to find a silver lining to it all, arguing that, well, even though we are a tiny part of a vast universe, still, we are a part of it. Consider the science popularizer Neil deGrasse Tyson, who in 2014 hosted the television reboot of Sagan’s 1980 series, Cosmos. He has offered this balm of comfort: “Many people feel small, because they’re small and the Universe is big, but I feel big, because my atoms came from those stars.” While this might make some of us feel better, it does not move me. If we are just the “outcome of accidental colocations of atoms,” as the clear-eyed, old-line atheist Bertrand Russell put it, then all we can do is build our lives “on the firm foundation of unyielding despair.”

Can I Get an Argument?

The “Argument from Size” seems to be in vogue today among New Atheists and popularizers of naturalistic science. But what exactly is the argument? Or, more to the point, is there an argument to offer? How, exactly, would it go? The key premise would be something along the lines of “bigger is better” or “value is proportional to size,” as in a creator God, if there were such a thing, would value the big, the whole, not the individual planet or creature. But a moment’s reflection helps us see that that line of argument is pure folly. Value is not proportional to size. As C.S. Lewis argues in his book, That is, everything that exists—every truth discovered, every beauty (and every corruption of beauty), and every good (and perversion of good)—points to and illuminates the divine.

Miracles, “we are all equally certain that only a lunatic would think a man six-feet high necessarily more important than a man five-feet high, or a horse necessarily more important than a man, or a man’s leg than his brain.” Moreover, many of the things we value most in life, such as goodness, truth, and beauty, are not, strictly speaking, measurable in physical terms at all.

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Not long ago, I watched a hockey game and marveled at how the Chicago Blackhawks dominated play against the Tampa Bay Lightning. No matter how hard Tampa Bay tried to intercept the puck and clear their zone, the Blackhawks relentlessly pummeled the Lightning goalie. After what seemed like an eternity, the worn out goalkeeper hung on to a shot to stop play with the hopes of resetting the game in a more balanced way. I smiled when the play-by-play commentator tried to make sense of this lopsided contest by announcing, “It seems like the ice is tilted!” Of course, the ice was not tilted, but the phrase got my imagination running. What if the players came out from their locker rooms before the game and saw a tilted ice rink? I imagine one team would rejoice while the other would call its lawyers. No hockey player in his right mind would even put his skate on the ice to compete until the rink was leveled. The same would be true for any athletic contest. If the playing field isn’t level, you shouldn’t even start the competition.

I wonder if our world today, spiritually speaking, doesn’t resemble a tilted ice rink or an uneven playing field. Before we even start some evangelistic conversations, the deck is stacked against us, as nonbelievers assume they’re morally or intellectually superior to us. Many outside the faith see us as narrow-minded, intolerant, homophobic simpletons. Before telling people the good news of God’s love, perhaps we need to level the playing field so our words are considered rather than dismissed.

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I believe Paul employed a version of this strategy when he began his oration on Mars Hill with the provocative words, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious” (Acts 17:22 ESV). Given what we know about his audience, made up of Epicureans and Stoics who liked to talk about whatever was the latest idea, they might have argued with Paul. They might have insisted that, in fact, they most certainly were not religious. They were intellectuals who didn’t fall for such silly superstitions like the majority of Athenians who erected all those statues and monuments. But Paul knew—as we need to realize—that everyone is religious about something. All people base their lives on something that gives them meaning, purpose, hope, or a reason to get out of bed. And some people hold some aspects of their worldview “by faith” even if they would never use that terminology.

So Paul began by leveling the playing field so his hearers could consider that they, just like Paul, hold some presuppositions without verifiable proof. In our day, people may tell us that they believe only what can be “proven” by science. They would never believe anything “by faith.” But consider that their assumption—that science is a better way of knowing truth than by faith—is something they could never prove by science! It’s a leap of faith. (This might take a bit of reflection, but I think it’s worth the investment of time.)

I also wonder if Jesus sought to level the playing field before proclaiming the gospel to some of His skeptical hearers. Why else would He refuse to give a straight answer to the man who asked Him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17 ESV).
ever there was a perfect set up for a gospel presentation, that was it. But Jesus chose to answer the man’s question with a question, “Why do you call me good?” In addition to other goals behind this question, Jesus aimed to level the playing field by getting the man to see he wasn’t as righteous as he assumed he was. The rest of the dialogue bears this out. And we should note that Jesus never got around to telling the man about His impending sacrificial death on the cross. Until the man’s heart had been “leveled,” Jesus knew His words would be “pearls before swine.”

We need to do the same thing today. We need to show people that their atheism, agnosticism, naturalism, or any variety of unbelief rests on foundations that cannot be proven in a laboratory. We want them to be honest about their faith position so we can compare it to our faith position.

Timothy Keller models this well in his best-selling book The Reason for God. In his introduction, he urges Christians and non-Christians to admit their doubts. For believers, “such a process will lead you, even after you come to a position of strong faith, to respect and understand those who doubt.” Skeptics, on the other hand, “must learn to look for a type of faith hidden within their reasoning. All doubts, however skeptical and cynical they may seem, are really a set of alternate beliefs.”

This is difficult but necessary preparation for a proclamation of the gospel. It can sound something like this:

**You:** I’d like to talk to you about your religious beliefs.

**Your sister:** Oh, I don’t have any religious beliefs. I’m not religious like you are. I only accept things that I can prove rationally or scientifically.

**You:** But that sounds like a very religious thing to say.

**Your sister:** What do you mean?

**You:** Why do you think science and reason are better ways to determine truth than religion is?

**Your sister:** Because they just are.

**You:** Can you prove that scientifically?

**Your sister:** Can I prove what scientifically?

**You:** That scientific beliefs are more sound than religious ones.

**Your sister:** Well, no. I can’t. But it’s just obvious, isn’t it?

**You:** Not to me. And not to a lot of other people either. In fact, it takes a fair amount of faith to believe in science the way you do.

**Your sister:** Are you criticizing me?

**You:** Not at all. I just think we have more in common than you think. We both accept certain things by faith. You have faith in science. I have faith in religion. I’d just like to compare our two faiths.

**Your sister:** Hmmm. I never thought of it that way.

Our society has become more polarized and argumentative than ever. The very tone of most radio talk shows should cause most people to blush—and then switch stations.

I realize some scenarios might not go so well. But it’s worth a try. Especially if you face antagonism to your faith that starts off the whole conversation in a bad direction. If people begin with unfair jabs like “Why are you Christians so intolerant?” or “Why do Christians hate gays so much?” or “You’re not one of those anti-science idiots, are you?” you should not take the bait and start to answer their question. You’re about as likely to see success as a hockey team agreeing to play uphill on a tilted rink. Level the playing field first and see if the conversation moves along better—and seems more amicable. Here are some other ways this strategy might start:

**Your non-Christian friend:** Why are you Christians so intolerant?
In the West today, and in America especially, we live in a time when humanity is large and God is small. Man is the measure of all things. It has not always been this way, of course, but this is the reality of our day, a reality that exerts a pervasive and powerful influence on us.

The greatest need of every true believer (and nonbeliever) today is the recovery of a right view of God. From this flows everything else. As A. W. Tozer said, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”¹ This is so, says Tozer, because, “We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that composes the Church.”²

We don’t have to look far to see a quintessentially American example of this today. Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, widespread among millennials, is a view of God they seem to have picked up from their baby-boomer parents. Its main tenets are as follows: (1) A God exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth; (2) God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions; (3) The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself; (4) God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when God is needed to resolve a problem; (5) Good people go to heaven when they die.³

This reductionist and narcissistic view of God is very comfortable and easy to live with. It makes no real demands, has no cost, and allows one to live as one pleases with no concern about one’s sin and accountability to God and therefore no concern about forgiveness and reconciliation with God. This recently invented god is certainly not the God of the Bible, and it has the extremely serious effect of keeping people from the true God and the salvation He offers in Christ. This is only one of many substitute gods on offer in the American “marketplace of religion.”

It is not too much to say that the lack of the knowledge of the true God lies at the root of the problems that beset our personal lives, the church, and the culture. In this article, I would like to briefly describe the picture that God has given us of Himself, His Son and His creation. In an article of this size, I can only sketch some of the main contours of God’s attributes and hope that you will be inspired to seek broader and deeper understanding in some of the good books that are readily available.⁴

Our Approach to Learning Who God Is

As we seek to learn more about God, we need humility. It is good to remind ourselves that our Creator is infinite and we are finite. That means He is ultimately incomprehensible, in the sense that although we can indeed know Him personally, we can never fully comprehend Him. He says, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, / neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. / For as the heavens are higher than the earth, / so are my ways higher than your ways / and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8–9).⁵ God doesn’t tell us everything we might want to know about Him (we cannot handle it); but He does tell us everything we need to know. He does this by accommodating Himself to our finite limitations. With that we must be grateful and content.
The Bible nowhere attempts to prove the existence of God. Rather, it begins with the simple, majestic declaration that “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). This implies that God has infinite knowledge, understanding, and power. Or, to put it in slightly different terms, it shows God to be an all-knowing, all-wise, and all-powerful Creator, who is sovereign over His creation.

This fundamental starting point of God’s revelation of Himself is what we must embrace if we are to know God, and we do so by faith. The Bible says it is “by faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible” (Heb. 11:3). Faith is essential, because “whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Heb. 11:6). This is not blind faith, nor is it a leap into the dark. Rather, it is a leap into the light, the light of evidence, for God’s creation bears His fingerprints. The psalmist says,

*The heavens declare the glory of God and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world* (Ps. 19:1–4).

Drawing on this, the apostle Paul says that God’s “invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world” (Rom. 1:20). This evidence is obvious to every human being, giving an awareness that there is a God. That awareness may be strong or weak, bright or dim. It can be suppressed by willful choice, or it can be embraced by faith.

### God Reveals Himself as Spiritual, Personal and Good

The God of the Bible is a spiritual being (John 4:24) and does not have a physical body, though on rare occasions He has manifested Himself in physical form to interact with human beings. These manifestations are considered by many theologians to be appearances of the pre-incarnate Christ. God is also a personal being, and He is loving, good, and gracious to His people. Unlike the impersonal god of pantheism, God cares deeply for His people and is actively involved in their lives. His relationship with Adam and Eve displays this love. The rich, abundant blessings He confers on them in the Garden of Eden demonstrate His goodness. His grace is seen in forgiving their horrendous sin and sparing them from immediate death and destruction. It is also shown in the way He tempers justice with mercy in their punishment. The fact of punishment alerts us that God takes sin very seriously and that righteousness and justice are also among His attributes.

### God Reveals Himself as Redemptive

As people multiplied on the earth and became utterly corrupt, God’s righteousness and justice are seen again: “The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). Human-
I have made two important discoveries: first, there is a God; second, I’m not Him.

This quip, while humorous in its delivery, is amazingly profound in its essence. With a culture that increasingly encourages self-absorption, it’s not surprising that many people act like “little gods” who are confused about their role in life versus God’s role over all of life.

While many well-meaning men and women may believe in God, there is a tendency to usurp His function. People try to act like God all the time, attempting in their own power to achieve that which only God alone can accomplish. We try to control circumstances, manipulate situations, prevent mishaps, redefine morality, exalt ourselves or avoid the inevitable. In the end, we must face reality: we are mere mortals who are limited, finite, and powerless. We do a lousy job of playing God, and the sooner we realize this, the better.

It is not my intention to write about God’s attributes, as there are already many great classics that brilliantly address the nature and character of God by looking at who God is. Instead, I want to focus on what God does and what we are to do accordingly.

Our society glorifies self-sufficiency, intellectual prowess, personal achievement, creative genius, and survivor instincts. We are told to “just do it,” but do what? And for what purpose?

In the 1980s movie “Chariots of Fire,” Eric Liddell, on his journey to participate in the 1924 Olympics, shares a key observation about his call to missionary service and his passion for running. He told his sister: “God made me for a purpose – for China – but He also made me fast. And when I run, I feel His pleasure.” I believe there can be pleasure in doing what God made us to do, but we must remember God’s priorities for His kingdom, as well as his provisions for His people.

A monk once overhead St. Francis of Assisi repeatedly praying, “O God, who are You, and who am I?” In a similar fashion, we might do well to pray, “O God, what are You doing in the world, and what am I supposed to do?” Or, more precisely, “What is Your Job, and what is my job?”

I would be naïve and arrogant to think I could even scratch the surface of the infinite activities of God in His universe. But I do believe the Scriptures give us an exciting glimpse into what He’s working on as He unfolds His divine plan for His most-prized creation, His image bearers—people just like you.

Consider one reflection on the difference between one of God’s “jobs”— to reveal, and one of our corresponding “jobs”—to discover.

One of the traditions of Easter Sunday is the egg hunt whereby excited and energetic children scurry about in search of brightly colored eggs hidden by the grown-ups. Some are placed in easy-to-find locations, and others require the help of a mom or dad giving the kiddies a hint on where they might be. (Some eggs still haven’t been found to this day.)

Life is like the ultimate hunt. God has many hidden mysteries, and yet He also intends for mankind to constantly make new discoveries. Did man invent gravity, electricity, relativity, thermodynamics or even cures to polio and other diseases? No, humans merely uncovered them. God revealed them to the seeker.

As much as we’d like to take credit for our diligent searches, the Almighty always has a hand in helping us discover all kinds of truths. We can be glad that He shares the joy when men and women uncover amazing new facts and artifacts. It’s all a part of His plan to use human ingenuity to benefit mankind.
The more we get what we now call “ourselves” out of the way and let Him take us over, the more truly ourselves we become...

He invented—as an author invents characters in a novel—all the different men that you and I were intended to be… It is when I turn to Christ, when I give myself up to His Personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own.

C.S. Lewis

Consider other pairings of God’s “job” and our “job”:

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<td>Our Job: Rejoice</td>
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Let’s explore ways to diligently pursue our jobs while humbly remembering we are not God! 🙌

RECOMMENDED READING

Michael Wm. Schick, God’s Job, Our Job: Knowing the Difference Makes All the Difference (Credo House Publishers, 2012)

A practical compilation of thirty-one insights that focus on some of the most important roles God plays in our world and what we are to do in light of these truths. This book provides powerful and thought-provoking insights that help to see God and oneself in a new light.
At the center of the spacious Old Town Square in Prague stands the John Hus monument. This massive statue, erected in 1915, commemorated the five-hundredth anniversary of the great Czech reformer’s death. His notable words are inscribed around the base of this monument: “Love each other and wish the truth to everyone.” This has often been succinctly summarized as “the truth prevails!” The year 2015 marked the six-hundredth anniversary of Hus’s martyrdom and provides an important reminder of his life and ministry. Yet many people hardly recognize his name or his substantial contributions to the church and the Christian life.

John Hus (c. 1372–1415) was a pastor and church reformer born into poverty in southern Bohemia. He was educated at the University of Prague, now known as Charles University, and received his master’s degree in 1396. He became a faculty member that same year and taught until 1412. Hus served as both dean of the faculty and later rector at the university. During this early formative period, Hus read the writings of the English reformer John Wycliffe. While Hus identified with the Augustinian theology of Wycliffe and was indebted to his thinking, especially on the nature of the church, nearby Bohemian writers also inspired Hus.

In 1402 Hus took on an additional role, as pastor at the Bethlehem Chapel, the center of the growing Bohemian Reform movement. Significantly, the name Bethlehem was chosen for its meaning, “house of bread.” The chapel was established as a site for preaching in the vernacular rather than the traditional Latin. This was a period of rampant immorality and corruption among the priests and officials within the Western Catholic Church. Hus’s sermons frequently addressed the corruptions, most notably the ancient ongoing practice of simony or the purchasing of church offices. Wealthy parents and others would secure ecclesiastical positions to ensure the lucrative and stress-free livelihoods for their sons. Not surprisingly, these men rarely took their leadership seriously, creating a spiritual vacuum. Hus’s messages, marked by spiritual zeal, also addressed critical issues of moral purity, including priestly celibacy and the abuse of indulgences, often angering the clergy and church hierarchy.

Unfortunately, similar to the situation with John Calvin, we know little of Hus’s personal life, including specifics about his conversion. However, at some point early in his ministry, Hus was convicted by the truth claims of Scripture and thereafter stressed the importance of obeying the pope or church decrees only to the extent that they agreed with Scripture. The best window into Hus’s inner life and motivation is through his letters. Repeatedly he reminded his friends, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” These are the words of Peter from Acts 5:29. Hus’s resistance to following the teachings of the Church further irritated the leadership and brought frequent condemnation and led to his excommunication.

After his fourth excommunication, Hus voluntarily went into exile from 1412 to 1414 and lived among wealthy nobility in southern Bohemia. During this period, he wrote numerous books, including his most influential treatise on the church, De Ecclesia, written in 1413. Other major writings included On Simony, expositions on the Apostles’ Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer, and a short devotional work known as The Daughter, or How...
to Know the Correct Way to Salvation. This was penned for a community of women, known by Hus through one of his friends. In 1414 Hus agreed to travel to Constance, Germany, to attend the council that had been convened to deal with him, but also to resolve the embarrassing dilemma of the multiple popes; 1378 had marked the beginning of the Great Schism in which initially two and eventually three rival popes fought for exclusive supremacy. Hus’s teaching had been condemned as heretical, and he naively thought he would have the opportunity to defend himself before the learned doctors of the church. Instead he was imprisoned and later condemned as a follower of Wycliffe. After frequent attempts to coerce Hus to recant, he was removed from the priesthood and burned at the stake on July 6, 1415, charged with being an obstinate heretic.

The Protestant Reception of John Hus

As early as Martin Luther, prominent Protestants have embraced the teachings of Hus. Luther’s perception of Hus was marked by growing appreciation and deep respect. His original rejection of Hus was transformed when in his monastery library he discovered—and was astonished by—some sermons by Hus. Luther shocked his opponents with his growing approval of Hus. This led to Luther’s famous confession in February 1520: “I have taught and held all the teachings of Jan Hus, but thus far did I not know it . . . In short, we are all Hussites and did not know it.” More recent examples illustrate the continuing Protestant approval of Hus. Harry Emerson Fosdick’s Great Voices of the Reformation, written in 1952, singles out, as being critically important, Hus’s dedication to the Bible. He writes:

Behind all else in Huss’ teaching stood his devotion to the Scriptures as the ultimate guide of life and thought. Here we run decisively upon one of the major issues dividing Roman Catholicism from the whole movement which issued in the Protestant Reformation. According to Roman dogma one did not believe in the church because Scriptures say so, but believed in the Scriptures because the church says so.

Even more amazing are the authors that claim Hus to be an “evangelical.” David Otis Fuller’s Valiant for the Truth: A Treasury of Evangelical Writings (1961) incorporates a section from Hus’s work on the church. Hus clearly satisfies the prerequisite for this volume that “each man possessed the same fierce conviction—that all truth is absolute, never relative . . . in theology, their absolute authority was the Bible.” In the same year, James McGraw wrote Great Evangelical Preachers of Yesterday. This book begins with Wycliffe and moves to Hus and Luther. Mc-
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havior. God no more conflicts with science as an explanation for the universe than Henry Ford conflicts with the laws of the internal combustion engine as an explanation for the motorcar. The existence of mechanisms and laws is not an argument for the absence of an agent who set those laws and mechanisms in place. On the contrary, their very sophistication, down to the fine tuning of the universe, is evidence for the Creator’s genius. For Johannes Kepler, German seventeenth-century mathematician, astronomer, and astrologer: “The chief aim of all investigations of the external world should be to discover the rational order which has been imposed on it by God and which he revealed to us in the language of mathematics.”

As a scientist, then, I am not ashamed or embarrassed to be a Christian. After all, Christianity played a large part in giving me my subject.

The mention of Kepler brings me to another issue. Science is, as I said earlier, by and large a collaborative activity. Yet real breakthrough is often made by a lone individual who has the courage to question established wisdom and strike out on his or her own. Johannes Kepler was one such. He went to Prague as assistant to the astronomer Tycho Brahe, who tasked him with making mathematical sense of observations of planetary motion in terms of complex systems of circles. The view that perfect motion was circular came from Aristotle and had dominated thought for centuries. But Kepler just couldn’t make circles fit the observations. He took the revolutionary step of abandoning Aristotle, approaching the observations of the planets from scratch, and seeing what the orbits actually looked like. Kepler’s discovery, that the planetary orbits were not circular but elliptical, led to a fundamental paradigm shift for science.

Kepler had the instinct to pay careful attention to things that didn’t fit into established theory. Einstein was another such groundbreaker. Things that don’t fit in can lead to crucial advances in scientific understanding. Furthermore, there are matters that do not fit into science. For, and it needs to be said in the face of widespread popular opinion to the contrary, science is not the only way to truth. Indeed, the very success of science is due to the narrowness of the range of its questions and methodology.

Nor is science coextensive with rationality. If it were, half our university faculties would have to shut. There are bigger matters in life—questions of history and art, culture and music, meaning and truth, beauty and love, morality and spirituality, and a host of other important things that go beyond the reach of the natural sciences, and, indeed, of naturalism itself. Just as Kepler was initially held back by an assumed Aristotelianism, could it not be that an a priori naturalism is holding back progress by stopping evidence from speaking for itself?

It is to such things that my mind turns when I think of Jesus, the human, above all others, who did not fit into the preconceptions of this world. Just as Johannes Kepler revolutionized science by paying close attention, observing why the planets did not fit in to the mathematical wisdom of the time, I claim that my life and that of many others has been revolutionized by paying close attention to Jesus and why He did not, and still does not, fit in to the thinking of this world. Indeed, the fact that Jesus did not fit in is one of the reasons I am convinced of His claim to be the Son of God.

For instance, Jesus does not fit into the category of literary fiction. If He did, then what we have in the Gospels is inexplicable. It would have required exceptional genius to have in-
vented the character of Jesus and put into His mouth parables that are in themselves literary masterpieces. It is just not credible that all four gospel writers with little formal education between them just happened simultaneously to be literary geniuses of world rank.

Furthermore, there are relatively few characters in literature who strike us as real people, whom we can know and recognize. One of them is my intellectual hero, Socrates. He has struck generation after generation of readers as a real person. Why? Because Plato did not invent him. So it is with Jesus Christ. Indeed, the more we know about the leading cultures of the time, the more we see that, if the character of Jesus had not been a historical reality, no one could have invented it. Why? Because He did not fit in to any of those cultures. The Jesus of the Gospels didn’t fit anyone’s concept of a hero. Greek, Roman, and Jew—all found Him the very opposite of their ideal.

The Jewish ideal was that of a strong military general, fired with messianic ideals and prepared to fight the Roman occupation. So when Jesus eventually offered no resistance to arrest, it was not surprising that His followers temporarily left Him. He was far from the Jewish ideal leader.

As for the Greeks, some favored the Epicurean avoidance of extremes of pain and pleasure that could disturb tranquility. Others preferred the rationality of Stoicism, which suppressed emotion and met suffering and death with equanimity, as Socrates had done.

Jesus was utterly different. In the Garden of Gethsemane, facing such intense agony that He sweat drops of blood, He asked God to let Him skirt the torturous cross. No Greek would have invented such a figure as a hero.

And the Roman governor Pilate found Christ unworldly and impractical when Jesus told him: “My kingdom is not of this world . . . For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I came into the world—to bear witness to the truth” (John 18:36–37).

So Jesus ran counter to everyone’s concept of an ideal hero. Indeed, Matthew Parris, an atheist, suggested in the Spectator recently that if Jesus hadn’t existed not even the church could have invented Him! Jesus just did not fit in.

Nor did His message. St. Paul tells us that the preaching of the cross of Christ was regarded by the Jews as scandalous, and by the Greeks as foolish. The early Christians certainly could not have invented such a story. Where, then, did it come from? From Jesus Himself, who said, “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). Jesus did not fit into the world. So they

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that the laws of arithmetic have been broken but possibly the laws of England. The laws of nature describe to us the regularities on which the universe normally runs. God, who created the universe with those laws, is no more their prisoner than the thief is prisoner of the laws of arithmetic. Like my room, the universe is not a closed system, as the secularist maintains. God can, if He wills, do something special, like raise Jesus from the dead.

Note that my knowledge of the laws of arithmetic tells me that a thief has stolen the money. Similarly, if we did not know the law of nature that dead people normally remain in their tombs, we should never recognize a resurrection. We could certainly say that it is a law of nature that no one rises from the dead by natural processes. But Christians do not claim that Jesus rose by natural processes, but by supernatural power. The laws of nature cannot rule out that possibility.

Philosopher David Hume said that you must reject a miracle as false, unless believing in its falsity would have such inexplicable implications that you would need an even bigger miracle to explain them. That is one good reason to believe in the resurrection of Jesus. The evidence of the empty tomb, the character of the witnesses, the explosion of Christianity out of Judaism, and the testimony of millions today are inexplicable without the resurrection. As Holmes said to Watson: “How often have I said to you that when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth?” As Russian Christians say at Easter: “Khristos Voskryes. Voistinu Voskryes! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!”

Notes:
3 Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), Astronomis Nova de Motibus (published in 1609).
4 Miracles, 62.

I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.

C.S. Lewis

RECOMMENDED READING

John C. Lennox, God’s Undertaker: Has Science Buried God? (Lion Hudson, 2009)
This captivating study evaluates the evidence of modern science in relation to the debate between the atheistic and theistic interpretation of the universe, addressing such topics as the origin of life; the genetic code and its origin; the nature and scope of evolution; and the scope and limits of science. Gripping and thoroughly argued, it is an illuminating look at one of man’s greatest debates.
Sure, there are good cookies and kids, true statements and beliefs, and beautiful paintings and platypuses, but these are concrete instances of something transcendent, something beyond the cookies and kids, statements and beliefs, paintings and platypuses. Goodness, truth, and beauty—values one and all—find their source beyond nature, beyond space. They cannot be measured by a yardstick, scale, or tachometer. In short, there is no philosophical “Argument from Size” to atheism.

Modern Man’s Obsession with Bigness

If there is no argument, what gives? Again, C.S. Lewis provides insight. This popular difficulty advanced by atheists is gaining traction, because in modern times, according to Lewis, “the imagination has become more sensitive to bigness.” Lewis suggests that this new sensitivity to bigness is a by-product of the eighteenth-century Romantic movement in poetry. Maybe so. What is clear is that modern man is fascinated with bigness. We want a bigger phone, a bigger home, a bigger car, a bigger paycheck, a bigger Twitter following. We supersize our burgers and fries and sip seventy-two-ounce Big Reds. (I am mindful of the fact that I write this while living in Texas—a big state—full of big trucks, big highways and byways, and miles and miles of bigness masquerading as cattle ranches.)

But this affair with size, Lewis points out, is not an affair of reason but of emotion. We behold the immensity of a mountain range, or canyon, or the night sky and our imagination awakens. We attach some quality—sublimity, greatness, big-league-ishness—to quantity and are thusly overcome by immensity; we look upon the night sky with awe. And rightly so. We ought, when face to face with reality, whether it be the vast universe or our own shadow, be moved to awe and wonder. As Lewis so eloquently puts it:

*It is a profound mistake to imagine that Christianity ever intended to dissipate the bewilderment and even the terror, the sense of our own nothingness, which come upon us when we think about the nature of things. It comes to intensify them. Without such sensations there is no religion.*
Is Bigger Better? C.S. Lewis, Atheism, and the Argument from Size

When we see things in their proper light, we are moved to awe. We catch a glimpse of the enchanted world, imagination awakens, and the transcendent breaks into the mundane.

But modern man has mistaken this sign of transcendence for a philosophical principle. Since nature is all there is, this sense of awe and wonder in the face of immensity cannot point to something beyond. It must help us understand something about nature. Yes, that’s it. The bigger the better; size and importance are proportionally related.

An Argument in the Neighborhood

The emotional response elicited from size points in the opposite direction from the Argument from Size. The feeling of awe, the awakened imagination, the sheer terror of our nothingness in a vast cosmos serve as a kind of religious experience that is suggestive of a transcendent Other. It is one of many signals of transcendence. It is an echo of the divine found within the domain of our “natural” reality that cries out for attention and points beyond that reality.

In fact, I believe these signals of transcendence are everywhere, even in the mundane gestures of our everyday human experience. Clear the dust, point the finger, shine the light, and they are easy enough to see. They are right in front of us; no excavation from the depths of our experience or mind is required. They are hidden in plain sight. Perhaps this blindness to reality is responsible for many of our problems. Perhaps the spiritual lethargy that characterizes many of us is a result of our disenchanted, overly materialistic, and hedonistic view of the world. Perhaps our evangelism so often falters because we fail to attend to, in our own life and in the lives of others, the deep mysteries, enchantments, and beauties that exist hidden in plain sight and point beyond us to God. The good news is that the solution to these problems and perhaps others is not far from us nor so hard.

Sociologist Peter Berger, in his excellent book A Rumor of Angels, is of some help, noting five signals of transcendence from our everyday lives and experiences. First, there is the human propensity for order. Every society is burdened with the task of bringing order out of chaos. Even such commonplace acts as mowing the lawn, making a to-do list, and a mother assuring her upset child that “everything is in order, everything is all right” point to humanity’s faith in order. What best explains the observable human propensity to order reality? If there is no God, if there is nothing beyond nature, then everything is not in order, everything is not all right. Yet we take it upon ourselves to represent reality as ultimately in order and trustworthy. “This representation,” Berger argues, “can be justified only within a religious (strictly speaking a supernatural) frame of reference.”

Second, Berger notes the ubiquity of human play. In play, time is suspended, the seriousness of the world is set aside, and a separate universe of intense joy and delight is created and entered. The experience of joyful play can be readily found in ordinary life even as it points beyond to a world where all is as it should be, the good triumphs over evil, and everyone in the end is known by his or her true name.

Moreover, many of the things we value most in life, such as goodness, truth, and beauty, are not, strictly speaking, measurable in physical terms at all.
Third, there is the unconquerable human propensity to hope. Humanity is essentially “future directed,” looking forward to the fulfillment of all desires and to a day when the difficulties of the here and now will be no more. We think infinite happiness is really there. We hope that one day we will reach the rainbow’s end. Such hope is absurd if there is no God, no afterlife. As C.S. Lewis famously argued, “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”\(^\text{10}\) The human characteristic of hope, again, points beyond itself and this world. It is a signal of transcendence.

Fourth, in the face of horrendous evils, such as the massacre of the innocent, rape, or murder, there is the human demand for not only condemnation, but damnation. In our hearts we curse the perpetrators of such monstrous evils. No human punishment seems enough. Only eternal banishment of the guilty from God seems appropriate. Horrendous evil “raises the question of the justice and power of God. It also, however, suggests the necessity of hell—not so much as a confirmation of God’s justice, but rather as a vindication of our own.”\(^\text{11}\) Both the human gesture of protective reassurance and a human counter gesture of damnation point us to a reality of something beyond this world.

Finally, there is the reality of humor. Life is full of the unexpected, the unforeseen. Who would have expected to find the great and serious philosopher Socrates hanging in a basket, contemplating the air (as Aristophanes portrays him in the Greek comedy *The Clouds*)? Who would have foreseen Wile E. Coyote, run over by a truck, emerge unharmed? The comic points to a discrepancy between our understanding of the world and another possible interpretation of it. We are forced to ask: which picture of the world is true to the way things are? Berger argues that at its most fundamental level, the comic reflects the “imprisonment of the human spirit in the world” and “implies that this imprisonment is not final but will be overcome.”\(^\text{12}\) Comedy is a foretaste of things to come and, as such, another signal of transcendence.

Admittedly, much more could and should be said about each of Berger’s signals of transcendence. But here I want us to notice that there is an argument in the neighborhood of the atheist’s Argument from Size, pointing in the other direction, and grounded in the Christian doctrine of creation. The core premise of the argument is quite simple: *everything points to God, to something beyond nature.* That is, everything that exists—every truth discovered, every beauty (and every corruption of beauty), and every good (and perversion of good)—points to and illuminates the divine. Since God is the Creator of everything distinct from Himself, everything bears His stamp. Moreover, each of the signals of transcendence we’ve considered—bigness, order, play, hope, damnation, and humor—and many more that we have not, point not only to a transcendent reality but to the gospel story as the true story of the world. For in the gospel we find an enchanted, supernatural world where love is eternal, death is cheated, victory is snatched out of the hands of defeat, and, in the end, all turns out for the good.

Bigger isn’t always better. What bigness does point to, however, if we pay attention, is God. But so does everything else, if properly followed. My proposal is one of re-enchantment. We must begin to see everything in its proper light, not as ordinary, mundane, familiar, but as sacred, holy, a gift from our Creator. In doing so, like John the Baptist in the Gospels, we will be

*We ought, when face to face with reality, whether it be the vast universe or our own shadow, be moved to awe and wonder.*
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pointing others to the King and Creator of it all. That is big news! That is good news! 🌍

Notes
6 Ibid., 73.
7 Ibid., 70.
10 Berger, Rumor of Angels, 86.
11 Ibid., 87.

Many a man, brought up in the glib profession of some shallow form of Christianity, who comes through reading Astronomy to realise for the first time how majestically indifferent most reality is to man, and who perhaps abandons his religion on that account, may at that moment be having his first genuinely religious experience.

C.S. Lewis

RECOMMENDED READING


In thirteen short, accessible chapters, McGrath leads the reader through a nontechnical discussion of science and faith. How do we make sense of the world around us? Are belief in science and the Christian faith compatible? Does the structure of the universe point toward the existence of God?
Leveling the Playing Field: A Strategy for Pre-Evangelism
(continued from page 5)

You: Well, everyone’s intolerant of some things, right? Aren’t you? I think the question for all of us is, how do we determine what we should tolerate and what should we reject?

or

Your non-Christian friend: Why do Christians hate gays so much?

You: Hate? That’s a pretty strong word. I think both gays and Christians today have a pretty serious challenge. We’ve got to find different ways to address this very sensitive issue, and there’s plenty of blame to go around on both sides. Some people certainly are homophobic. But I think there may also be a fair amount of people who are Christophobic.

or

Your non-Christian friend: You’re not one of those anti-science idiots, are you?

You: Is that a real question? It doesn’t sound like the kind of even-handed way a scientist would investigate things. I’d love to talk about science and faith. But could we try to avoid words like idiot?

Our society has become more polarized and argumentative than ever. The very tone of most radio talk shows should cause most people to blush—and then switch stations. We need to find ways to lower the temperature while challenging people to think clearly. Leveling the playing field may be one of those ways that help people move from “you’ve got to be kidding” to “maybe I should consider this” and then, prayerfully, to “this is the best news I’ve ever heard.”


Notes

Now, today, this moment, is our chance to choose the right side. God is holding back to give us that chance. It will not last for ever. We must take it or leave it.

C.S. Lewis

RECOMMENDED READING

The Engaging with … series (The Good Book Company, 2014)
A new series of short books (96 pages each) that helps Christians understand the beliefs of people of different religions and worldviews, and how to reach out to them with the good news of Jesus in a relevant and clear way. These titles are now available: Engaging with Atheists, by David Robertson; Engaging with Muslims, by John Klaassen; Engaging with Hindus, by Robin Thomson.
kind had become so irreversibly wicked that total destruction was the only option left. The ensuing flood graphically illustrates that there are limits to God’s mercy and that persistent, unrepented sin and deliberate rejection of God’s gracious warnings can bring catastrophic judgment on a massive scale. Yet even in judgment, God showed mercy where He could. We read that “Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.” And “Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD” (Gen. 6:8–9). He was spared, along with his family.

As God’s redemptive work in the world progressed. His personal, gracious love was powerfully demonstrated in His choosing the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to be the ancestors of Israel, a special people with a unique destiny. Through provision, protection, and extraordinary promises of blessing, God revealed His grace and love and future plans to them. His grace continues to unfold as He reveals Himself to one of their descendants, Moses.

**God Reveals Himself as Holy and Self-Existent**

At the burning bush God commissions Moses to deliver His people, Israel, from Egyptian bondage, and at the same time reveals His holiness. God said to Moses, “‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then he said, do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Exod. 3:4–5). In this encounter, God accentuates His holiness, the most emphasized of His characteristics and one of the central themes of the Scriptures. It is one that we know little of today.

The essence of God’s holiness is

*His separateness, i.e., His uniqueness, His distinction as the Wholly Other, the One who cannot be confused with the gods devised by men (Ex. 15:11), the One who stands apart from and above the creation. Secondarily the holiness of God denotes His moral perfection, His absolute freedom from blemish of any kind.*

Because of God’s holiness, even the ground in His presence was holy, that is, set apart, separated from normal use to divine use, which required Moses to remove his sandals. People and material things that are set apart and devoted to God are also designated as holy. Moses’ encounter with God’s blazing holiness made a profound impact on him, one that would powerfully shape his life and produce a deep, lasting humility in him. So much so that we are told “the man Moses was very meek, more than all the people who were on the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3). The impact of God’s holiness was lasting and is still seen when, near the end of Moses’ life, he exclaims, “Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? / Who is like you, majestic in holiness, / awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?” (Exod. 15:11).

God emphasized His holiness not just to Moses, but through him to the entire nation of Israel. He did this by giving laws, statutes, and precepts, in which everything is in some way connected to holiness. He commanded, “You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine” (Lev. 20:26). Because God is morally pure, these requirements include human moral and ethical behavior, including truthfulness, fair dealing, and sexual purity. The response God sought from His covenant people is summed up by Moses in what is called the Shema: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.
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and with all your might” (Deut. 6:4). The concrete expression of this wholehearted love was obedience to God’s commands. God’s call for holiness continues throughout the Old Testament and into the New Testament, where it is emphasized by Jesus, Paul, Peter, and others. Peter sums it up well: “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’ (1 Pet. 1:14–16). The seriousness of the call to holiness is highlighted by the writer to the Hebrews, who says with simple directness, “Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).

As his encounter with God continued, Moses asked to know God’s name in order to answer the Israelites when they asked. In response, “God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And say to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Exod. 3:14). This mysterious, enigmatic response was in fact God’s personal name, which He had not disclosed, even to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In Hebrew it is represented by the four consonants YHWH and comes from a verb meaning “to be.” It represents the idea of self-existent being and could also be translated “the One Who Is.” God does not depend on anyone or anything for His existence. He needs nothing and is entirely self-sufficient.

God Reveals Himself as Eternal

Moses also comes to understand that the God of Israel, YHWH, is eternal. He had no beginning and will never have an end. He is not bound by time, which he created, but rather exists outside of time. From God’s vantage point of “the eternal present,” He sees the end of things from the very beginning. Many years later, Moses would pen the words “Before the mountains were brought forth, / or ever you had formed the earth and the world, / from everlasting to everlasting you are God” (Ps. 90:2). And in his final blessing to Israel, he assured them, “The eternal God is your dwelling place, / and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deut. 33:27).

God Reveals His Glory and Grace

Moses’ growing relationship with God inspired in him (as it should in us) a deep desire to know God even better and led him to pray, “Please show me your glory.” God’s holy, awe-inspiring response is the high point in His self-revelation in the Old Testament. This new revelation “proclaimed that God is love, but that kind of love in which mercy, grace, long-suffering, goodness, and truth are united with holiness and justice.” God said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name.” But “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live,” therefore “I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen” (Exod. 33:18–23). The Lord then passed before Moses, proclaiming His name and saying,

The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keep-
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...ing steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and fourth generation (Exod. 34:5–7).

This became the classic description of God in the Old Testament, reappearing over the centuries in other passages such as Numbers 14:18; Nehemiah 9:17, 31; Psalms 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Jonah 4:2; and Joel 2:13. It is also the view of God the Father held by the writers of the New Testament and has enduring value for God’s people, so we will examine it more closely.

It is not too much to say that the lack of the knowledge of the true God lies at the root of the problems that beset our personal lives, the church, and the culture.

Of the specific Hebrew words with which God describes Himself, in Commentary on the Old Testament, Keil and Delitzsch note:

Here grace, mercy, and goodness are placed in the front. And accordingly all the words which the language contained to express the idea of grace in its varied manifestations to the sinner, are crowded together here, to reveal the fact that in His inmost being God is love. But in order that grace may not be perverted by sinners into a ground of wantonness, justice is not wanting even here with its solemn threatenings, although it only follows mercy, to show that mercy is mightier than wrath, and that holy love does not punish till sinners despise the riches of the goodness, patience, and long-suffering of God.

Let’s examine what these words mean:

- **Merciful,** or compassionate, meaning that He “genuinely cares about humans and holds toward them a tender attitude of concern and mercy.”
- **Gracious,** meaning He “does things for people they do not deserve and goes beyond what might be expected to grant truly kind favor toward people, favor of which they are not necessarily worthy.”
- **Slow to anger,** meaning He is “ready, and disposed, to pardon, but that He patiently waits for those who have sinned, and invites them to repentance by His long-suffering...as if He would abstain from severity did not man’s wickedness compel Him to execute punishment on his sins.”
- **Abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,** translates the Hebrew word hesed, and “connotes long-term, reliable loyalty of one member of a covenant relationship to another. However fickle and unreliable humans may be in their relationship to God, He is nothing of the sort but can be counted on in every situation and at all times to be completely faithful to his promises for his people.”
- **Keeping steadfast love for thousands,** means certainly thousands of persons, but more likely thousands of generations and assures that He will not forsake His people as long as they do not abandon Him and give themselves over to evil that demands punishment.
- **Forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,** means that His forgiveness encompasses the full range of human sin and “thus the greatness of His clemency is set forth, inasmuch as...
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He not only pardons light offences, but the very grossest sins; and again, remits not only sin in one case, but is propitious to sinners by whom He has been a hundred times offended. Hence, therefore, appears the extent of His goodness, since He blots out an infinite mass of iniquities.

• Who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and fourth generation applies to those who would presume upon God’s mercy and stubbornly persist in the wickedness of their forefathers in disregard of God’s law: “After God has spoken of His mercy, He adds an exception, viz., that the iniquity is by no means pardoned, which is accompanied by obstinacy...The words, therefore, may be properly paraphrased thus: Although God is pitiful and even ready to pardon, yet He does not therefore spare the despisers, but is a severe avenger of their impiety.

The eventual fate of the rebellious nation of Judah is an example of how God, who is merciful, gracious, abounding in love, and slow to anger, is compelled to bring judgment against those who stubbornly persist in the wickedness of their forefathers and reject His compassion, patience, and repeated overtures of mercy:

The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy (2 Chron. 36:15–16).

Like the flood, this is another illustration of the fact that there is a limit to God's mercy. Finally, God unleashed His wrath and brought against them the Chaldeans, who captured Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple, killed many people, and took the rest into exile in Babylon for seventy years. From this catastrophic event, we can see that God's wrath is not arbitrary and capricious or an expression of bad temper such as humans often display. Rather, it is the visceral reaction of a holy God against persistent and outrageous moral evil.

Much more remains to be said about who God is, and in part 2 of this article we will explore those things further, including additional major attributes as well as His Trinitarian life, and how we can come to know Him through His Son, Jesus the Messiah, and be transformed by His Holy Spirit.

Until then, let us remember that no matter how well we may know God, there is always more. And let us press on to better know this great, glorious, and awesome God of holy love, who is a redeemer, father, and shepherd to His people. He has loved us with an everlasting love and has drawn us to Himself and continues faithfully to love and care for us and desires fellowship with us (Jer. 31:3; John 6:44). And He invites all who do not yet personally know Him turn to Him and to experience His holy love.

Did you see the article on Science and Faith: Friendly Allies, Not Hostile Enemies by John Lennox?

He’s our banquet speaker this year on April 14, 2016!
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through faith in His Son and Savior, Jesus the Messiah: “Turn to me and be saved, / all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other” (Isa. 45:22).

Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD” (Jer. 9:23–24).

Notes

2 Ibid.
5 All Scripture quotations in this article are from the English Standard Version.
8 Ibid.
9 This is how the NIV and NASB translate the Hebrew word.
11 Ibid.
13 Stuart, Exodus, 715–16.
14 Calvin and Bingham, Commentaries, 3:387.
15 Ibid., 3:388.

There is but one good; that is God. Everything else is good when it looks to Him and bad when it turns from Him.

C.S. Lewis

RECOMMENDED READING

A.W. Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy (HarperOne, 2009)

A modern classic of Christian testimony and devotion, The Knowledge of the Holy shows us how we can rejuvenate our prayer life, meditate more reverently, understand God more deeply, and experience God’s presence in our daily lives.
what is your definition of your heaven?
(continued from page 2)
this church’s rectory is a doorknob in the shape of a lion, which would have met Lewis’s eye to eye when Lewis visited this home. And Lewis would have come fairly often as a child, since his grandfather served there as the parish priest of St. Mark’s.

Just down the road from Little Lea, in the other direction from the church, Lewis and his brother were able to see the mystical and intriguing hills of County Down. They loved to ride their bikes through these hills and let their minds dream of castles, knights, talking beasts, and adventure. County Down for Lewis evoked fantastical and joyful memories of childhood, which were in stark contrast to the sad and painful experiences Lewis faced following the loss of his mother when Lewis was only nine years old. Two weeks after the loss of his mom, Lewis’s father, unable to cope emotionally, sent Lewis and Warnie off to face the horrors of English boarding school. His childhood would never be the same.

Knowing this about Lewis’s childhood world, is it any wonder that later in his life, when Lewis sought to communicate truth and joy to children, he would write of a lion named Aslan who roamed the green hills of Narnia? County Down represented the idyllic part of Lewis’s childhood and influenced the fictional world that we now know as Narnia.

For Lewis as an adult, the history, beauty, and intellectual stimulation of Oxford created a place in which he would shine and excel. As a student at University College and as a tutorial fellow at Magdalen College, Lewis was able to explore literature, philosophy, classics, and eventually, in a search for truth fall on his knees, and become, “the most dejected and reluctant convert in all of England.”

Oxford represented for Lewis a place in which both his reason and imagination could flourish as he was challenged and encouraged by friends such as J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, among others.

Lewis became a very popular lecturer, and following his conversion he would publish more than thirty books in thirty years in the areas of science fiction, children’s fiction, Christian apologetics, and literary criticism. Oxford was a wonderful place for Lewis, and yet it also was a place in which he experienced great pain and sorrow. At Oxford he recovered from the nightmares of World War I. He experienced jealousy and animosity as he was denied a chaired position at Magdalen College due to political infighting even though he was one of the most brilliant teachers of his day. He also experienced the joy of marriage and the extreme grief of losing his wife, Joy Davidman, to cancer. And so Lewis’s life in Oxford, like that of his childhood in County Down, was filled with great joys and great sorrows. Within the ideals of Oxford and County Down, however, were windowpanes that offered glimpses into heaven and gave Lewis hope that this sinful world would one day be redeemed.

In his book *Mere Christianity*, Lewis writes, “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.” After visiting the emerald hills of County Down of Lewis’s childhood and the dreaming spires of Oxford from his adult world, I can see why Lewis defined heaven as “Oxford lifted and placed in the middle of the County Down.” It’s not that Lewis experienced a perfect world in these places, but rather, the Lord used the temporal beauty and grandeur of these places to give him the desire for another world.

What is your definition of heaven?

Gratefully,

Joel

Notes


Graw’s definition of evangelical reflects greater precision. For him

the term “evangelical” means “preaching the good news”…Such preaching as was done by the subjects studied in this book was not bound by form or method, but was guided by need. It was done for a purpose—the exaltation of Christ and the nurture of faith in his power to save.6

Later he adds, “Wycliffe and Hus seemed to be good subjects with which to begin. They represent the preaching which awakened interest and focused attention upon truths Luther and the others were able to portray during the Reformation times.”7

Timothy Larsen has also included Hus in his highly regarded reference work, Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals (2003). His classification was based on David Bebbington’s well-accepted definition of evangelicals (i.e., conversion, Scripture, cross, and activism) that places the origin for this movement in the 1730s. Though Larsen quickly adds, “Nevertheless, the inclusion of a ‘pre-history’ of evangelical forebears was thought to be useful—those by whose work evangelicals have often been shaped and with whose examples they have identified.” Larsen’s inclusionary decisions were also determined by individuals’ significance of influence, and this “book has been biased towards figures who have had a substantial impact in the wider evangelical movement.”8

Regardless of this strong Protestant identification with Hus, we must be honest and realize that Hus was certainly not a Protestant! Thomas Fudge, the foremost English-speaking scholar on Hus, articulates it more firmly: “Jan Hus was a medieval Catholic reformer rather than a premature Protestant.”9 Hus held to the traditional Western Catholic teachings on transubstantiation, belief in purgatory, and intercession to the Virgin Mary.10 Yet Hus was a significant reformer and has much to teach the contemporary church about how to live and follow Jesus.

**John Hus’s Message for Today**

First, Hus would challenge us to be grounded in Scripture. Writing to his friends in Bohemia the day before he was executed, he declared what was a constant reminder throughout his ministry: “Be diligent in the Word of God.”11 Instead of being diligent, we are often distracted and inattentive to the Word of God. Reading habits of many contemporary followers of Jesus are embarrassing. But our condition is even more disappointing when we compare the behavior of Christians with that of unbelievers and recognize how little observable difference sets us apart. Hus speaks personally that Scripture has been his “foundation and food, by which my spirit is refreshed, that it may be strong against all adversaries of the truth.”12 This is why he hungered after the Word and encouraged his friends to be equally zealous and conformed to its teachings, and always to “stand firmly in the love of the Word of God, and cleave to it with the greatest desire.”13

Hus would certainly affirm the name of this periodical: Knowing & Doing. Beyond his emphasis on knowing Scripture, he practiced and exhorted “doing” and living out its truth. He wrote to his friends at Prague with great urgency: “I beg you…that you gladly attend the preaching, diligently hear it; and hearing it, understand it; and understanding it, keep it; and keeping it, learn to know yourselves; and learning to know yourselves, know rightly your dearest Saviour.”14 This strong reliance upon hearing the Word created an equal responsibility on preachers, and Hus urged them to be likewise diligent in their preaching. He was deeply grieved during his exile when he was unable to preach and candidly confessed that “I preach the sacred Scriptures—not I, but principally the Holy Spirit.”15

There is considerable scholarly debate regarding the extent of Hus’s contribution to the revisions of the Czech Bible; he was involved at some level, providing increased access for the common person. Hus devoted himself, much
like Luther and Calvin later, to study the Scriptures and discover the truth.

A second challenge from Hus is to keep Jesus Christ as the head of the church. Hus formulated his understanding of the nature and purpose of the church from Scripture, in particular the writings of the apostle Paul, through the lens of Augustine. For Hus the church was the gathering of all predestined believers in heaven and earth who confessed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and not a corporation of people controlled by the pope or church councils. However, if the church leadership followed Scripture, Hus would gladly conform to its teachings: “Whatever the holy Roman Church or the pope with the cardinals shall decree or order to be held or done according to the law of Christ, that I, humbly and as a faithful Christian, wish to respect and reverently to accept.”

Hus’s understanding of the nature of the church also emphasized true inner convictions rather than a polished external veneer, portrayed in the Pharisees of Jesus’ day. His communal emphasis on the church seems foreign to much of our American individualized practice, which has contributed to the secularization of the body of Christ. Instead of cooperating with other Christians, even within our own denominations or close-knit associations, we tend to divide from one another. Inherent within Hus’s teaching on the church is the principle of consistency. Hus struggled with following the decrees of the pope who “lived contrary to Christ” who was “the supreme head” of the church. Here again, Hus would proclaim the critical need to know and defend the truth. While Hus was a reformer, he recognized that his desired goal of church unity was possible only through true faith that was elusive if church-goers were not devoted to Scripture. As we critique programs or ministries today, we likewise can be challenged to base our actions on Scripture and not personal power or pride.

Third, Hus recognized the centrality of worship to connect people to God. This would become more developed in Luther’s teaching on the priesthood of all believers, intended to increase the person’s focus on God. Unfortunately there is a trend today in many churches to create a more horizontal focus in public worship.

Hus would be alarmed to discover that more time is devoted to announcements than the reading of Scripture in a representative cross section of churches. A similar diminishment of prayer is also detected in some worship experiences. Likewise, musically, large robed choirs presenting polished oratorios or high-powered pulsating praise bands can divert the proper focus from God to the singers or the worshipers who feel the performance is for their benefit. Hus desired to increase participation and create a vertical flow of worship by preaching and translating the liturgy and hymns into the vernacular, allowing the people to participate more fully.

During this period, only the priest received the wine while the laypeople were limited to receiving the Eucharistic bread. Central to the Czech Reformation that followed Hus’s death was to return the cup to the laity. This was symbolized by a chalice placed on an open Bible, communicating the free proclamation of Scripture and the celebration of the Lord’s Supper with both bread and wine. Hus’s motivation again was derived from Scripture. In writing to his replacement at the Bethlehem Chapel, Hus asserted: “Do not oppose the sacrament of the cup of the Lord which the Lord instituted through Himself and through His apostle [i.e., Paul]. For no Scripture is opposed to it, but only a custom which I suppose has grown up by neg-
ligence. We ought not [to] follow custom, but Christ’s example and truth.”

Fourth, another important challenge from Hus concerns cultivating the spiritual life. He would have been shocked to discover our contemporary gap in understanding between the nominal term Christian and a disciple who seriously dedicates his or her life to following Jesus. Speaking to one of his closest friends and supporters, Hus exhorted him to “firmly and steadfastly love the Lord Jesus Christ,” noting that Christ suffered and provided this as an example in following Him. After citing, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Luke 9:23 ESV), Hus frankly confessed something that any honest disciple recognizes: “O most kind Christ, draw us weaklings after Thyself, for unless Thou draw us, we cannot follow Thee!”

Jesus’ earthly years serve as a model; believers are to “follow Christ’s life in poverty, purity, humility.” Realizing the realities of persecution for the truth, he writes less than a month before his death: “Do not fear to die for Christ if you wish to live with Christ.” Similarly Hus asserted, “It is better to die well than to live wickedly.” Given the unrestrained immorality and corruption among some priests and other church leaders, Hus’s emphasis on following the Ten Commandments is understandable. Whether he is writing to priests or lay people, he exhorts all to “live a devout and holy life.”

Additionally Hus, reminiscent of Jesus, warns against constructing the exterior of your house without similar attention to your soul. This is reinforced by the ethical mandate “that if you are a builder of a spiritual building, [be] kind to the poor and humble.”

Beyond the continual message of reading Scripture and seeking to live out that truth, Hus mentions the importance of praying devoutly, especially using the Psalms, to cultivate the spiritual life. Hus is also pastoral and realistic when he writes that the Christian life is a journey: “Always keep in mind what you are, what you were, and what you will be.”

Fifth, Hus would be very quick to warn us of the reality of temptation. Many people seem unaware of the formative nature of culture. We naively think that our environment is neutral when actually it is continually shaping us in ways that are typically opposed to the gospel. Hus preached against seeking wealth for its own sake and ignoring the needs of the poor. In writing to an unnamed monk, he reminded him that “the basic rule for clerics concerning the owning of property, particularly those who have vows, is to possess all things in common, according to Acts 2: ‘They had all things in common.’” In the same letter, he marshals support from “blessed Bernard” [of Clairvaux] who declared: “A monk owning a farthing, is not worth a farthing.” The Bohemian reformer reveals his pastoral wisdom in writing to two friends. He first counsels them to perceive “how the wheel of worldly vanity spins.” Initially it may lift a person with the fleeting pleasures of sin but soon after crushes that person to destruction that can, if unchecked, lead to “eternal torment in fire and darkness.”

Hus’s sermons frequently addressed the corruptions, most notably the ancient ongoing practice of simony or the purchasing of church offices.

Often Hus would speak of the three traditional categories of the world, the flesh, and the devil and the necessity for Christians to be vigilant and persevere in the face of such seductive temptations. On other occasions he was more explicit in naming specific temptations. For example, in an epistle to an unknown priest, Hus counsels him to preach fervently “against debauchery, for that is the most ferocious beast which devours men for whom Christ’s humanity suffered” and that further he should “guard himself against fornication.” He concludes this letter on spiritual combat by declaring: “Whatever you do, fear God and keep His commandments. You will thus walk rightly and not perish, tame the flesh, spurn the world, vanquish Satan, put on God, find life, confirm others.” Hus learned this personally, through the school of affliction, that suffering and temptation can arise at any moment. Among other things, he faced the heart-wrenching sense of betrayal when some of his one-time close friends in his ministry became his most vocif-
erous accusers at Constance. Throughout his varied experiences, Hus always placed his hope in God. Writing to his close associate just two weeks before his execution, Hus affirmed: “God almighty will strengthen the hearts of His faithful whom He has chosen before the foundation of the world that they may receive the unfading crown of glory.”

Clearly the life and teaching of John Hus was significant not only for Luther and other early Protestants, but also for us today. It is fitting to conclude with the famous words for which Hus is often remembered: “Therefore faithful Christian, seek the truth, listen to the truth, learn the truth, love the truth, speak the truth, adhere to truth and defend truth to the death.”

Notes

1 Czech and European writers typically refer to Hus as Jan Hus. Most Americans call him John Hus or Huss. I will follow the lead of most American publications and use Hus.


7 Ibid., 9.


12 Ibid., 103, cf. 186, etc.

13 Ibid., 77, 93, 107.

14 Ibid., 115, cf. 93, 122, where Hus reinforces the necessity of both knowing and living out the truths of Scripture.

15 Ibid., 90, 34.

16 Ibid., 100–01, cf. 36, 52, 53. Huss is adamant that Jesus Christ is the true head of the church. Spinka, ibid., 96, etc.

17 Ibid., 99.


19 Spinka, Letters of John Hus, 181.


21 Spinka, Letters of John Hus, 187, 43.

22 Ibid., 23, 170, 102.

23 Ibid., 153, 170, 128, 132.

24 Ibid., 121.

25 Ibid., 9, 153.

26 Ibid., 168.

27 Ibid., 69, 71.

28 Ibid., 177.

29 Ibid., 128, 129.

30 Ibid., 186.

31 Cited by Fudge, Jan Hus, 28.
I hope, by God’s grace, that I am truly a Christian, not deviating from the faith, and that I would rather suffer the penalty of a terrible death than wish to affirm anything outside of the faith or transgress the commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ.

John Hus

RECOMMENDED READING
Timothy George, Theology of the Reformers (25th Anniversary Edition), (B&H Academic, 2013)
Timothy George profiles five principal figures from the period of the Reformation: Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, John Calvin, Menno Simons, and William Tyndale. He establishes the context for their work by describing the spiritual climate of their time, and does justice to the scope of their involvement in the reforming effort.

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