What have contemporary Christians got to do with the twelfth century? How can Bernard, a medieval saint, affect the lives of those commuters traveling on the Washington, D.C., beltway? Technology and professional life together tend to eliminate the relevance of history for this generation. Yet the human desires for the integration of life, to make it meaningful, to pursue happiness, and to achieve self-fulfillment have not changed. The human heart still pulsates with desire. So perhaps there is not such a chasm of nine centuries between us and Bernard as we might casually think. At least that is the intent of this essay, to stimulate interest in being more informed and sympathetic about this remarkable leader of the Church. For Bernard had a political influence over Europe that today would be the envy of anyone on Capitol Hill. Indeed, possibly no other monk has ever had such influence over affairs of state, as well as of the religious life of his generation, and of the generations to follow...

Indeed, possibly no other monk has ever had such influence over affairs of state, as well as of the religious life of his generation, and of the generations to follow...

There are “hinge periods” of history which have profound significance for later times. The twelfth century was one of these, described as a “renaissance” in integrating faith and culture[i], for it witnessed the first stirrings of individual consciousness, with an active quest for personal values[ii]. It was richly reflective of the inner life of the Christian, while it actively promoted friendships in remarkable ways. It promoted a new status of dignity for women. It sought reform of the Christian life, in more imaginative depths of experiencing love than we know about today. Yet it also began to feel the clash of differing attitudes between monastic faith and the secular schools, in the teaching of theology. It witnessed the disastrous second Crusade, with its idealists and its villains.

Bernard was in the center of all these spiritual stirrings, an influential preacher, a rhetorical writer, an original theologian, and an extensive correspondent with all the leading players. His meditative depths,
We Belong to God, Not to Ourselves

All who would faithfully follow Jesus Christ must settle one fundamental issue before they can make any significant progress in the life of grace: To whom do I belong? There are only two possibilities—either I belong to myself, or I belong to God. The Apostle Paul says: Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, ESV).

John Calvin elaborates: “We are not our own: let not reason nor our will, therefore, sway our plans and deeds. We are not our own; let us therefore not set it as our goal to see what is expedient for us according to the flesh. We are not our own: insofar as we can, let us therefore forget ourselves and all that is ours. Conversely, we are God’s: let us therefore live for him and die for him. We are God’s: let his wisdom and will, therefore, rule all our actions. We are God’s: let all the parts of our life accordingly strive toward him as our only lawful goal. O, how much has that man profited who, having been taught that he is not his own, has taken away dominion and rule from his own reason that he may yield it to God! For, as consulting our self-interest is the pestilence that most effectively leads to our destruction, so the sole haven of salvation is to be wise in nothing and to will nothing through ourselves but to follow the leading of the Lord alone.

“Let this therefore be the first step, that a man depart from himself in order that he may apply the whole force of his ability in the service of the Lord.”

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2, ESV).

To whom do you belong?

1 John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, III.vii.1.
Isn’t It All Just a Matter of Faith?
by Michael Ramsden
European Director, RZIM Zacharias Trust

First published in 2006 in the UK Evangelical Alliance’s Idea magazine.

“Faith is believing what you want to believe, yet cannot prove.” Sadly many people, including many Christians, live with this definition of faith. For some it feels liberating. It means being able to believe in anything that you want to—and the more silly the belief is, the more faith you have.

It means that no explanation is required—indeed, that no explanation can be given—it is just a matter of faith.

For others, such a definition is stomach-turning. It suggests that to embrace faith is to stop thinking so that, as faith increases, reason and meaning eventually disappear. No explanations can be given, and none can be expected. To embrace faith this way is to live permanently in the dark. What is joy to one therefore, is death to another.

Sadly for both groups, the problem they have is the same. By starting with the wrong definition of faith, they have both asked the wrong questions, are therefore dealing with the wrong problem, and so have ended up with the wrong answer.

Faith is not wishful thinking. It is not about believing in things that do not exist. And so it is neither liberating by making everything believable, nor is it repellent by making meaning impossible.

So what is the right definition of faith? “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see,” the writer tells us (Hebrews 11:1). A few verses later he defines faith as knowing that God is—that He exists—and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him. How does this help us?

Perhaps the best simple word that can be used today to translate the biblical word pistis—faith—is the word trust, or trustworthy. Suppose that you say to a friend that you have faith in them. What does that mean? First, that you are sure that the person you are talking to actually exists—that they are real. Second, that you are convinced that they are trustworthy, you can believe what they are saying and depend on them.

Similarly, when the writer of Hebrews talks about faith in God, he talks about it in this way. Faith is knowing that God is real (that He is), and knowing that you can trust His promises (that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him). You cannot trust someone who isn’t there. You cannot rely on someone if you think that their promises are not reliable.

No Wishful Thinking
This is why faith is talked about as the “substance” of things not seen and as the “evidence” of things hoped for. Both words carry with them a sense of reality. Our hope is not wishful thinking. It is saying that we know we can trust God because of who He is and the promises He has made. Faith does not make God real. Faith is a response to a real God who has made Himself known.

The question therefore is not to do with whether you are able to believe, but has God so revealed Himself so as to make Himself believable?

Ever since the Church began, the refrain has always been the same. It has never appealed for people to leap into the dark, because no such invitation is found anywhere in Scripture. Instead, it has been to step into the light. The Christian Gospel is not a message that revels in ignorance; it is about the revelation of who God is in

(continued on page 16)
Demonstrating the Truth
by Craig J. Hazen
Professor of Comparative Religion and Apologetics, Biola University

Jesus and the Ethos of Demonstration

The Apostle Peter probably told the story on many occasions as he preached his way to Rome in the decades that followed the earthly ministry of Jesus. Mark, a close companion of Peter during his journeys, recorded Peter’s account of this event in the New Testament Gospel that bears Mark’s name. The event to which I refer is the miraculous healing of a man who could not walk, probably paralyzed for many years, if not from birth, recorded in Mark, chapter two. There are many healing miracles recorded in the Scriptures, but this one has a special twist in that this miracle illustrates, in a dramatic fashion and early in the ministry of Jesus, a key method our Lord himself utilized in communicating and confirming the center points of his message.

As Mark relates the story, Jesus had already garnered a large following that made it difficult for him to move around in populated areas. In Capernaum, Jesus began to teach in a local home, and a huge crowd quickly gathered so that there was no room left even outside the door. Reports of Jesus’ healing activities certainly added to the interest, and it is likely that many in attendance were anxious for a touch from this extraordinary rabbi. Four men in particular sought healing from Jesus, not for themselves, but for their companion who was unable to walk. They could not get though the crowd to Jesus inside, so they climbed up on top of the structure, burrowed through the roof, and lowered the “paralytic” down on his mat to Jesus in the room below.

Now comes the twist. When Jesus saw the paralytic and the faith of the men who had brought him, Jesus said, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Even the parallel passages recorded in Matthew and Luke do not tell us the reaction of the man on the mat, or those who brought him, to this unexpected statement by Jesus. All three synoptic Gospels, however, record the reaction of some “teachers of the law” who were likely following Jesus around in order to scrutinize his teaching and activities. Indeed, the text implies that the looks on their faces may have told the whole story, because they clearly thought Jesus had crossed a very serious line with his utterance to the paralytic. In their view, Jesus had blasphemed. After all, who could forgive sins but God alone?

Jesus’ response to the “teachers of the law” is the climax of this passage. Peter, who was likely an eyewitness and the source of Mark’s account, probably knew enough about the religious law of his day to sense that a conflict was looming. Ironically, and certainly the reason that this incident stayed so prominently in Peter’s mind, Jesus did not dispute the thinking of the teachers of the law on the point that God alone could forgive sins—simply because the point was a valid one. Instead, Jesus replied, “But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, get up, take your mat and go home.” The man got up in full view of the throng that had gathered and walked out, leaving everyone amazed.

I suppose any religious teacher could have wandered into Capernaum and made spiritual statements such as “your sins are forgiven” and convinced at least a few people to believe that a real activity in the unseen, spiritual world had taken place. But Jesus’ goal on this occasion and on many that followed (e.g., Matthew 11:2-5, Luke 7:18-23, John 3:2, 5:31-36, 10:38, and 15:24-25) was to help those in attendance have good reason to “know” that he had authority from God and, by implication in the case of the paralytic, that he was the divine Son of God. Jesus provided reasons to believe through many
different means, the most dramatic of which were miracles done in public as authentication of his message, identity, and authority. Of course, Jesus’ prediction of his own death and resurrection (Matthew 12:39-40, Luke 11:29-30, John 2:18-22, etc.), which he overtly labeled “the sign” to a wicked generation, took this to the highest level. New Testament scholar R.V.G. Tasker called the sign of the resurrection spoken of by Jesus “the supreme sign, which would be the Father’s unmistakable vindication of his Son.”

It is very important to understand that in justifying the task of Christian apologetics throughout the history of the Church, it was Jesus himself who set the stage. He did this not by writing apologetic tracts and treatises, but by creating what I shall call here an “ethos of demonstration” among his followers. Jesus demonstrated the truth of his message and his identity over and over again using nearly every method at his disposal, including miracle, prophecy, godly style of life, authoritative teaching, and reasoned argumentation. And although Jesus clearly authorized the apologetic ethos for his followers by living it out himself, it is also important to note that he did not create this approach ex nihilo during his three years of ministry. Indeed, Jesus himself was really just reaffirming an age-old ethos of demonstration that had been well established in the Old Testament tradition. From the miracles of Moses in Pharaoh’s court (Exodus 7), to Elijah’s contest with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18), to God himself calling for his opponents to “present your case...set forth your arguments” (Isaiah 41:21), a divine pattern was already fixed by the time Jesus came on the scene.

**The Apostles and the Early Church**

Perhaps there is no stronger argument that Jesus himself was an extraordinary source for the apologetic impulse in Christianity than the fact that his closest followers, those who so deeply desired to emulate their Master, were such ardent proponents of Jesus’ ethos of demonstration. Indeed, Paul, John, and Peter seemed almost obsessed with offering evidence, testimony, and argument at every turn in order to establish the truth of the Gospel message. The case for the Apostolic support for the full range of apologetic activity is very well known and has been affirmed by scores of preeminent evangelical scholars in the last fifty years. Anyone wishing to downplay the significance of the defense of the faith to the Apostles and the early Church is truly swimming upstream against an overwhelming current. Since it has been so well covered, I shall choose only a few of the most compelling examples to highlight.

Peter, who along with James and John was a member of the inner circle of Christ’s Apostles, was greatly influenced by the apologetic thrust of Jesus’ ministry and offers a direct command for all believers likewise to follow this model. In what remains today as a touchstone verse for those with a calling to defend the faith, Peter wrote, “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15). Jude, who was likely the brother of Jesus, also gives a very straightforward command to his brothers and sisters in the Way to defend the faith against false teachers. “I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3). The Apostle Paul makes it clear that anyone who is to be considered for eldership in the church should be proficient in arguing against those who hold false doctrine. Paul wrote that an elder “must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it” (Titus 1:9).

Even if Christ’s closest followers had not given direct commands to engage in apologetic activities, they modeled these activities so frequently and unmistakably in Scripture that their actions amount to a clear exhortation for all Christians to go

(continued on page 6)
Jesus’ ethos of demonstration was thriving among the New Testament figures and set in place a tradition of defending the faith that would be carried on by the Church Fathers in the centuries immediately following the founding of Christianity.

Objections to Apologetic Engagement and Responses

Because of the steady encroachment of secular culture onto the Church’s turf and the tremendous increase in the felt need by evangelicals for responses to the intellectual issues that challenge the Gospel and the Christian view of the world, objections by Christians to apologetic activity seem to be raised far less frequently. There are still objections, but it is my experience that even these seem to be formulated somewhat differently than those in the recent past. I shall offer responses to four objections to apologetic engagement that I have heard most often in recent years. I will present the objections I have heard in the same language with which I normally encounter them at public events.

I’ve never seen anybody come to faith in Christ through apologetics. Of course one would immediately wonder why the Apostle Paul was so enamored of reasoning, proving, and persuading if these methods were desperately ineffective, or why Peter and Jude would command the practice of giving reasons for belief at every opportunity. Indeed, in the passage from Acts 17:2-4 quoted above, Paul’s explaining, proving, and persuading is directly associated with “large numbers” of converts and undoubtedly played a role. People always come to Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit, but there are many tools the Holy Spirit uses to do his work. One of those tools is apologetic reasoning. There are many who give serious personal testimonies to the value of apologetics in assisting their movement toward salvation—Augustine of Hippo and C.S. Lewis, to name two easily recognizable and influential figures. Occasionally apologetics is the primary tool that...
Christian faith is not “blind faith”; that is, it is not opposed to reason, evidence, logic, or knowledge.

But without faith it is impossible to please God. This objection derives from a common misinterpretation of Hebrews 11:6: “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” The misunderstanding of this verse is based on a weak notion of the word “faith.” The only way this verse can be a problem for the task of apologetics is if one equates saving faith with “blind faith”—something that is illegitimate but done far too often by Christians today. Christian faith is not “blind faith”; that is, it is not opposed to reason, evidence, logic, or knowledge. In fact, the Apostle Paul allows no room for blind faith in a very provocative passage in First Corinthians. Paul wrote that if Christ did not rise from the dead, our faith is useless and futile (1 Corinthians 15:12-19). Here he locks together the resurrection of Christ, a knowable historical event—the truth of which can be determined through evidence and reason—with saving faith. He had a marvelous opportunity in this passage to decouple reason and faith. He could have encouraged us to have faith no matter what the evidence showed. But he did exactly the opposite. Paul confirmed that if we have no valid resurrection, then we have no valid faith. Christian faith is not blind in the least; rather, it is dependent upon a historical event that can be thoroughly investigated with eyes wide open. A good synonym for genuine faith in the Christian tradition is simply “trust,” and we can certainly trust that which we can know to be true—indeed, it is the wise thing to do. Our trust or faith is stronger when we have excellent reason to believe in whom we are trusting. Just preach the Word because it will not return void. The Bible verse from which this objection is derived (Isaiah 55:11) does not contain the word “just.” But it is the word “just” that creates the problem, because it implies that nothing else is ever needed in order to have the Word of God begin its regenerative work in the unbeliever. But Jesus and his Apostles demonstrated to us that other elements could act as a catalyst for the Gospel. As I showed earlier, miracle, prophecy, godly style of life, and reasoned argumentation were all employed to authenticate their message with great effect. And once again the commands of Peter and Jude to defend the faith do not make sense if the only tool permissible is Gospel preaching.

Let me look at this from another angle for a moment, because this objection actually made a lot more sense in previous generations. In years past it was not unusual that a believer could quote the Bible or “preach the Word” and have a good chance of engendering respect and perhaps deep reflection on the part of the unbeliever. This was possible because the Bible still carried significant cultural authority. An unbeliever would be likely to consider its words because there was a widespread recognition that the Bible was at the foundation of western civilization and brought wise counsel on many issues—even if the whole text was not considered true or without error by the skeptical recipient. Those days, however, are gone. There is a better than even chance today that a person will actually consider you immoral for quoting
Deluded About God?
A Reflection on Richard Dawkins’ The God Delusion
by Alister McGrath

Professor of Historical Theology, Oxford University,
and President of the Oxford Center for Christian Apologetics

The God Delusion has established Richard Dawkins as the world’s most high-profile atheist polemicist, who directs a withering criticism against every form of religion. He is out to convert his readers. “If this book works as I intend, religious readers who open it will be atheists when they put it down.” Not that he thinks that this is particularly likely; after all, he suggests, “dyed-in-the-wool faith-heads are immune to argument.” Along with Daniel Dennett and Sam Harris, Dawkins directs a ferocious tirade of criticism against religion in general and Christianity in particular. In this article, I propose to explore two major questions. First, why this sudden outburst of aggression? Second, how reliable are Dawkins’ criticisms of religion?

Let’s begin by looking at the first question. Every worldview, whether religious or not, has its point of vulnerability. There is a tension between theory and experience, raising questions over the coherence and trustworthiness of the worldview itself. In the case of Christianity, many locate that point of weakness in the existence of suffering within the world. In the case of atheism, it is the persistence of belief in God, when there is supposedly no God in which to believe. The shrill, aggressive rhetoric of his God Delusion masks a deep insecurity about the public credibility of atheism. The God Delusion seems more designed to reassure atheists whose faith is faltering than to engage fairly or rigorously with religious believers, and others seeking for truth. (Might this be because the writer is himself an atheist whose faith is faltering?) Religious believers will be dismayed by its ritual stereotyping of religion, and will find its manifest lack of fairness a significant disincentive to take its arguments and concerns seriously. Seekers after truth who would not consider themselves religious may also find themselves shocked by Dawkins’ aggressive rhetoric, his substitution of personal creedal statements for objective engagement with evidence, his hectoring and bullying tone towards “dyed-in-the-wool faith-heads,” and his utter determination to find nothing but fault with religion of any kind.

It is this deep, unsettling anxiety about the future of atheism which explains the high degree of dogmatism and aggressive rhetorical style of this new secular fundamentalism. The dogmatism of the work has been the subject of intense criticism in the secular press, reflecting growing alarm within the secularist community about the damage that Dawkins is doing to their public reputation. Many of those who might be expected to support Dawkins are running for cover, trying to distance themselves from this embarrassment.
To give an example: *The God Delusion* trumpets the fact that its author was recently voted one of the world’s three leading intellectuals. This survey took place among the readers of *Prospect* magazine in November 2005. So what did this same *Prospect* magazine make of the book? Its reviewer was shocked at this “incurious, dogmatic, rambling, and self-contradictory” book. The title of the review? “Dawkins the Dogmatist.”

But what of the arguments themselves? *The God Delusion* is often little more than an aggregation of convenient factoids, suitably overstated to achieve maximum impact, and loosely arranged to suggest that they constitute an argument. This makes dealing with its “arguments” a little problematic, in that the work frequently substitutes aggressive, bullying rhetoric for serious evidence-based argument. Dawkins often treats evidence as something to shoehorn into his preconceived theoretical framework. Religion is persistently and consistently portrayed in the worst possible way, mimicking the worst features of religious fundamentalism’s portrayal of atheism.

Space is limited, so let’s look at his two core arguments—that religion can be explained away on scientific grounds, and that religion leads to violence. Dawkins dogmatically insists that religious belief is “blind trust,” which refuses to take due account of evidence, or subject itself to examination. So why do people believe in God, when there is no God to believe in? For Dawkins, religion is simply the accidental and unnecessary outcome of biological or psychological processes. His arguments for this bold assertion are actually quite weak, and rest on an astonishingly superficial engagement with scientific studies.

For example, consider this important argument in *The God Delusion*. Since belief in God is utterly irrational (one of Dawkins’ core beliefs, by the way), there has to be some biological or psychological way of explaining why so many people—in fact, by far the greater part of the world’s population—fall victim to such a delusion. One of the explanations that Dawkins offers is that believing in God is like being infected with a contagious virus, which spreads throughout entire populations. Yet the analogy—belief in God is like a virus—seems to then assume ontological substance. Belief in God is a virus of the mind. Yet biological viruses are not merely hypothesized; they can be identified, observed, and their structure and mode of operation determined. Yet this hypothetical “virus of the mind” is an essentially polemical construction, devised to discredit ideas that Dawkins does not like.

So are all ideas viruses of the mind? *The God Delusion* is often little more than an aggregation of convenient factoids, suitably overstated to achieve maximum impact, and loosely arranged to suggest that they constitute an argument. This makes dealing with its “arguments” a little problematic, in that the work frequently substitutes aggressive, bullying rhetoric for serious evidence-based argument. Dawkins often treats evidence as something to shoehorn into his preconceived theoretical framework. Religion is persistently and consistently portrayed in the worst possible way, mimicking the worst features of religious fundamentalism’s portrayal of atheism.

The main argument of *The God Delusion*, however, is that religion leads to violence and oppression. Dawkins treats this as the defining characteristic of religion, airbrushing out of his somewhat skimpy account of the roots of violence any suggestion that it might be the result of political fanaticism—or even atheism. He is adamant that
Deluded About God?  
(continued from page 9)

he himself, as a good atheist, would never, ever fly airplanes into skyscrapers, or commit any other outrageous act of violence or oppression. Good for him. Neither would I. Yet the harsh reality is that religious and anti-religious violence has happened, and is likely to continue to do so.

As someone who grew up in Northern Ireland, I know about religious violence only too well. There is no doubt that religion can generate violence. But it's not alone in this. The history of the twentieth century has given us a frightening awareness of how political extremism can equally cause violence. In Latin America, millions of people seem to have “disappeared” as a result of ruthless campaigns of violence by right-wing politicians and their militias. In Cambodia, Pol Pot eliminated his millions in the name of socialism.¹

The rise of the Soviet Union was of particular significance. Lenin regarded the elimination of religion as central to the socialist revolution, and put in place measures designed to eradicate religious beliefs through the “protracted use of violence.” One of the greatest tragedies of this dark era in human history was that those who sought to eliminate religious belief through violence and oppression believed they were justified in doing so. They were accountable to no higher authority than the state.

In one of his more bizarre creedal statements as an atheist, Dawkins insists that there is “not the smallest evidence” that atheism systematically influences people to do bad things. It’s an astonishing, naïve, and somewhat sad statement. The facts are otherwise. In their efforts to enforce their atheist ideology, the Soviet authorities systematically destroyed and eliminated the vast majority of churches and priests during the period 1918-41. The statistics make for dreadful reading. This violence and repression was undertaken in pursuit of an atheist agenda—the elimination of religion. This doesn’t fit with Dawkins’ highly sanitized, idealized picture of atheism. Dawkins is clearly an ivory-tower atheist, disconnected from the real and brutal world of the twentieth century.

Dawkins develops a criticism that is often directed against religion in works of atheist apologetics—namely, that it encourages the formation and maintenance of “in-groups” and “out-groups.” For Dawkins, removing religion is essential if this form of social demarcation and discrimination is to be defeated. But what, many will wonder, about Jesus of Nazareth? Wasn’t this a core theme of his teaching—that the love of God transcends, and subsequently abrogates, such social divisions?

Dawkins’ analysis here is unacceptable. There are points at which his ignorance of religion ceases to be amusing, and simply becomes risible. In dealing with this question he draws extensively on a paper published in Skeptic magazine in 1995 by John Hartung, which asserts that—and here I cite Dawkins’ summary:

Jesus was a devotee of the same in-group morality—coupled with out-group hostility—that was taken for granted in the Old Testament. Jesus was a loyal Jew. It was Paul who invented the idea of taking the Jewish God to the Gentiles. Hartung puts it more bluntly than I dare: “Jesus would have turned over in his grave if he had known that Paul would be taking his plan to the pigs.”

Many Christian readers of this will be astonished at this bizarre misrepresentation of things being presented as if it were gospel truth. Yet, I regret to say, it is representative of Dawkins’ method: ridicule, distort, belittle, and demonize. Still, at least it will give Christian readers an idea of the lack of any scholarly objectivity or basic human

There are points at which [Dawkins’] ignorance of religion ceases to be amusing, and simply becomes risible.
sense of fairness which now pervades atheist fundamentalism.

There is little point in arguing with such fundamentalist nonsense. It’s about as worthwhile as trying to persuade a flat-earther that the world is actually round. Dawkins seems to be so deeply trapped within his own worldview that he cannot assess alternatives. Yet many readers would value a more reliable and informed response, rather than accepting Dawkins’ increasingly tedious antireligious tirades. Let’s look at things as they actually stand.

In the first place, Jesus explicitly extends the Old Testament command to “love your neighbor” to “love your enemy” (Matthew 5:44). Far from endorsing “out-group hostility,” Jesus both commended and commanded an ethic of “out-group affirmation.” As this feature of the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth is so well known and distinctive, it is inexcusable that Dawkins should make no mention of it. Christians may certainly be accused of failing to live up to this demand. But it is there, right at the heart of the Christian ethic.

In the second place, many readers would point out that the familiar story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) makes it clear that the command to “love your neighbor” extends far beyond Judaism. (Indeed, this aspect of the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth seems to have resulted in people suspecting Jesus of actually being a Samaritan: see John 8:48). It is certainly true that Jesus, a Palestinian Jew, gave priority to the Jews as God’s chosen people, but his definition of who was a “true Jew” was radically broad. It included those who had excluded themselves from Judaism by intimate collaboration with Roman occupying forces. One of the main charges leveled against Jesus by his critics within Judaism was his open acceptance of these out-groups. Indeed a substantial part of his teaching can be seen as a defense of his behavior towards them. Jesus’ welcome of marginalized groups, who inhabited an ambiguous position between “in” and “out,” is also well attested in accounts of his willingness to touch those considered by his culture to be ritually unclean (for instance Matthew 8:3, Matthew 9:20-25).

So what are we to make of this shrill and petulant manifesto of atheist fundamentalism? Aware of the moral obligation of a critic of religion to deal with this phenomenon at its best and most persuasive, many atheists have been disturbed by Dawkins’ crude stereotypes, vastly over-simplified binary oppositions (“science is good, religion is bad”), straw men, and seemingly pathological hostility towards religion. Might The God Delusion actually backfire, and end up persuading people that atheism is just as intolerant, doctrinaire, and disagreeable as the worst that religion can offer? As the atheist philosopher Michael Ruse commented recently: “The God Delusion makes me embarrassed to be an atheist.”

Dawkins seems to think that saying something more loudly and confidently, while ignoring or trivializing counter-evidence, will persuade the open-minded that religious belief is a type of delusion. For the gullible and credulous, it is the confidence with which something is said that persuades, rather than the evidence offered in its support. Dawkins’ astonishingly superficial and inaccurate portrayal of Christianity will simply lead Christians to conclude that he does not know what he is talking about—and that his atheism may therefore rest on a series of errors and misunderstandings. Ironically, the ultimate achievement of The God Delusion for modern atheism may be to suggest that actually atheism itself may be a delusion about God.

Note


Dawkins seems to think that saying something more loudly and confidently, while ignoring or trivializing counter-evidence, will persuade the open-minded that religious belief is a type of delusion.
Profiles in Faith: Bernard of Clairvaux
(continued from page 1)

his mystical and charismatic spirit, his rhetorical skills as a communicator, even his apparent inconsistencies, mark him as inexhaustible. So he continues to remain challenging and debatable, certainly the opposite of mediocrity!

He is better known now than before, when he was so enveloped in hagiography, and his authorship was mistakenly diffused. Since the last fifty years much attention has been given to him by scholars. This began with a papal encyclical letter in 1953, to “the Mellifluous Doctor,” celebrating the eighteenth anniversary of his death, as “the last of the Fathers” [of the Church] [iii].

Bernard: His Life and Character
Bernard was a younger son of Tescelin, feudal lord over territories in Burgundy and Champagne in France. Groomed for knighthood, he decided instead in 1111 to enter the monastic way of life. He first did this in his own home, and then shortly after moved into an obscure and poor monastic house at Citeaux, along with thirty companions, including eventually all his brothers. This house had been founded by Robert of Molesme in 1098 to promote the new order of the Cistercians, a reformed movement of the Rule of Benedict.

In 1115, Bernard was sent to found the monastery of Clairvaux, as its abbot. He was installed by the Bishop of Chalons-sur-Marne, William of Champeaux, who became one of his loyalist friends. He connected Bernard with influential leaders and launched him into public affairs, with extensive travels and wide diplomacy—unusual for a monk, let alone one still in his mid-twenties.

Bernard was subject to inner conflicts, was touchy, had an onerous sense of dutyfulness; and was sometimes judgmental; some of his early letters show his immaturity. Trying to keep a balance between busyness and the contemplative life plagued him all his life. The rapid expansion of the Cistercian houses imposed onerous burdens on him also, not to mention the theological issues of heresy and papal politics. Prolonged periods of illness as well as the austerity of an ascetic life left its physical toll on him. Yet some twenty new foundations were created by Clairvaux alone, and within the next century, over 350 houses had spread from France as far north as Lapland, as far west as Ireland, and as far east as Lebanon. Bernard wrote over 500 letters; more are still being identified in widely scattered archives in Europe.

Associated with the Templars in his early days, he was asked by his pupil, the first Cistercian Pope, Eugenius III, to preach for the Second Crusade. It ended in disaster, and although Bernard had condemned its evil practices, he was blamed for its failure, and died under a cloud of failure. Because of his letters and the recording of many sermons and treatises which he re-edited throughout his life, we have remarkably detailed insights into his mind and heart.

Bernard’s Anthropology
The common bond between the twelfth and the twenty-first centuries is perhaps the constant need of reflection upon theological anthropology. Influenced greatly by Augustine of Hippo, Bernard sees everything in tripartite ways, whereas today we see more flatly, as “this or that.” But for him everything was viewed as an analogy of the mystery of God as Trinity. We see things factually; medieval Christians saw them allegorically, because all things on earth lay under heaven, and they gazed heavenwards, in a way we have lost.

In his Sermon 11 on the Song of Songs, he notes three faculties in the soul: “the reason, the will, the memory, and these three may be said to be the soul herself.” But where we would emphasize the importance of reason, he would focus on the will, with its associates of desire and love. The human capacity to love is truly human, truly divine. Yet he also takes the intellect seriously, for without knowledge...
we cannot have discernment, nor make proper choices. But the will is not necessarily governed by the intellect: for human dignity is given freedom of will, even to make wrong choices. As Bernard argues: “Reason is given to the will for instruction, not destruction.”[iv]. For good choices are preceded by the exercise of right reason. But choice is free, and Bernard values the will as the most important faculty in determining one’s happiness [v].

It is commonly assumed that Bernard, as an ascetic, denigrated the body. But in his Sermon 3 on the Ascension, he would have us accept our bodies as seriously as God has taken them, in becoming incarnated in flesh. In many of his sermons on the incarnation, Bernard emphasizes that if God took the human body so seriously as to become a human being himself, in order to identify and know us, we should not despise our bodies. “But the reason why the Lord showed himself in the flesh to his disciples was this: to withdraw their thoughts and affections gradually from earthly things, at teaching them at first to his own sacred flesh (by which, as they perceived, he spoke and wrought so many wonders) so that from there he might lift them up to a purely spiritual love of himself; for ‘God is a spirit, and they who adore him must adore him in spirit and in truth’ [John 4:24]” [vi].

Humans are created in the image and likeness of God. Like the early Fathers, Bernard distinguishes between the “likeness” which has been lost by the Fall, and the “image” which is still retained [vii]. But whereas Augustine locates the “image” in reason, Bernard sees it in the will. “I believe that in freedom of choice lies the image, and in the other two [freedoms, i.e., freedom of counsel and freedom of pleasure], is contained a certain twofold likeness [viii]. But the Fall brought disastrous consequences, in the twofold loss of the freedom of counsel and of pleasure. The former means we cannot stop sinning, while with the second loss we seek pleasure wrongfully. Consequently

the misdirection of the will in its use by the intellect has brought pride. The will is now dominated by concupiscence. Envy becomes the negative appetite.

So the body has been profoundly affected by “the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life.” Indeed, the body, he argues, has become the recipient rather than the primary source of misdirection, which is the will. Thus we have lost the humanity God intended us to have, in perfect freedom. Only the grace of Christ can restore us, in a process of gradual, lifelong changes within our whole life, body and soul.

Conversion as our Lifelong Journey
“Instant conversion” was not on Bernard’s radar screen, even though it was needed to recruit young adults from being knights in a feudal society to becoming “knights in and for Christ.” That is still our tension today, of putting “conversion” too impatiently behind us; now we are “Christians”—at least as far as our “churchy friends” think of us. Yes, “a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step,” as a Chinese proverb observes, but a step should not be confused with the thousand miles still ahead! This is where Bernard helps us to map out the journey in much more detail. For him, “the Church” is not merely an institution nor a corporation, but the intimate love-relation between the Bride and Jesus Christ, as her Bridegroom. Now you cannot institutionalize “love”; it is personal, intimate, relational, and so deeply desirous. Thus Bernard’s famous sermons on the Song of Songs (86 sermons) are all about the dynamics of the love between the Christian and her Lord. “I have only one desire,” Bernard writes, “to show the hidden delights of the love between Christ and the Church” [ix].

But “the journey” differs for variant callings, as typified by Noah, Daniel, and Job. For the church leaders it is more like a sea voyage, such as Noah undertook to

(continued on page 14)
save humanity; for the monks focused on their contemplative life, it was like Daniel, standing at his window in prayer to his God; and for the people of God generally, it was like Job enduring much suffering in everyday life.

But however diverse these roles may be for the benefit of the whole Church of God, participation is a key element, of all sharing together in the love of God. “For there is not just one path to follow, just as there is not only one [heavenly] room toward which we journey. For whatever path one follows to whatever room, one will not be left outside the Father’s house” [x].

For Bernard there is no question that “faith” is the Christian’s guide for the journey, for “believing is having found [Christ]. The faithful know that Christ dwells in their hearts by faith (Ephesians 3:17). What could be nearer?”

So as he teaches his novitiates, he urges us all: “Seek him [Christ] with longing, [i.e., in prayer]; follow him in your actions; find him in faith. How can faith fail to find him? It reaches what is unreachable; makes known what is unknown; it apprehends what cannot be measured, plumbs the uttermost depths, and somehow it encompasses even eternity itself in its vast embrace. I speak in faith when I say that I believe in the eternal and blessed Trinity. Although I cannot grasp it with my mind, I hold fast by faith” [xi].

Another guide is charismatic knowledge, personal knowledge imparted by the Holy Spirit. It is experienced as the third of three “kisses”: that of the feet in contrition and repentance; that of the hand in submissive obedience to his service; and that of the “lips” in the contemplative union of love.

But of course, we can all be “charismatic,” for how can I distinguish between “my spirit” and the “Holy Spirit”? So Bernard responds: “The Holy Spirit searches not only the minds and hearts of men but even the depths of God. [1 Corinthians 2:10]; so whether it be into our own hearts or into the divine mysteries, I shall be secure in following him wherever he goes. He must keep watch over our hearts and our minds, lest we think him present when he is not.” So he concludes that just as the Bride in the Song of Songs searches for her Beloved precisely because she knows he is absent, “the one who is indifferent to his absence will be led astray by other influences; the one who is blind to his coming cannot offer thanks for the visit” [xii].

Contemplation: As Degrees of Loving God
This then leads Bernard to seek for the life of contemplation as the _summum bonum_, the destiny of our journey into divine love. For while we serve as “Martha,” we are called to live as “Mary,” and while we actively need to “know yourself,” we are seeking to know and to be known of Christ. By “consideration,” Bernard advises Pope Eugenius III (his former Cistercian mentee) that we all need to pursue the “double knowledge” of knowing ourselves in the light of knowing God [xiii]. This is the quest of humility, indeed the true understanding of humility, that Bernard writes his treatise about, “The Steps of Humility and Pride” [xiv]. This then frees us to desire more clearly and freely to live in union with God, as the Bride seeks the Bridegroom.

So in the opening sentences of his treatise, “On Loving God,” Bernard begins: “You wish me to tell you why and how God should be loved. My answer is that God himself is the reason why he is to be loved. As for how he is to be loved, there is no limit to that love” [xv]. He then proceeds to show how God deserves our love. Living within the teaching of the Fathers, Bernard sees here no need for doctrinal polemics, for once one is secure in the arms of the Beloved, only love is needed to go on loving. So the way in which we also begin to love other people is to see Christ in them and with them, even if they themselves are unaware or ignorant of such love.
But there is progression in the journey of love. First of all, we love ourselves for our own sakes. In our fallen condition, this is destructive, for being created in God’s image implies that God gave me myself before I was ever aware of it. As I become aware of this, then I can enter the second degree of love, where for our own benefit we begin to love God; this is prudential. Then through frustrations and sufferings we learn that only God’s grace frees and sustains us through the difficulties of life. In the third degree a breakthrough occurs, when we begin to love God for God’s own sake. A liberation indeed has occurred, for what greater freedom can there be than being free from ourselves, especially in our own narcissistic culture today! But there is progression in the journey of love. First of all, we love ourselves for our own sakes. In our fallen condition, this is destructive, for being created in God’s image implies that God gave me myself before I was ever aware of it. As I become aware of this, then I can enter the second degree of love, where for our own benefit we begin to love God; this is prudential. Then through frustrations and sufferings we learn that only God’s grace frees and sustains us through the difficulties of life. In the third degree a breakthrough occurs, when we begin to love God for God’s own sake. A liberation indeed has occurred, for what greater freedom can there be than being free from ourselves, especially in our own narcissistic culture today! But there is progression in the journey of love. First of all, we love ourselves for our own sakes. In our fallen condition, this is destructive, for being created in God’s image implies that God gave me myself before I was ever aware of it. As I become aware of this, then I can enter the second degree of love, where for our own benefit we begin to love God; this is prudential. Then through frustrations and sufferings we learn that only God’s grace frees and sustains us through the difficulties of life. In the third degree a breakthrough occurs, when we begin to love God for God’s own sake. A liberation indeed has occurred, for what greater freedom can there be than being free from ourselves, especially in our own narcissistic culture today! But there is progression in the journey of love. First of all, we love ourselves for our own sakes. In our fallen condition, this is destructive, for being created in God’s image implies that God gave me myself before I was ever aware of it. As I become aware of this, then I can enter the second degree of love, where for our own benefit we begin to love God; this is prudential. Then through frustrations and sufferings we learn that only God’s grace frees and sustains us through the difficulties of life. In the third degree a breakthrough occurs, when we begin to love God for God’s own sake. A liberation indeed has occurred, for what greater freedom can there be than being free from ourselves, especially in our own narcissistic culture today! But there is progression in the journey of love. First of all, we love ourselves for our own sakes. In our fallen condition, this is destructive, for being created in God’s image implies that God gave me myself before I was ever aware of it. As I become aware of this, then I can enter the second degree of love, where for our own benefit we begin to love God; this is prudential. Then through frustrations and sufferings we learn that only God’s grace frees and sustains us through the difficulties of life. In the third degree a breakthrough occurs, when we begin to love God for God’s own sake. A liberation indeed has occurred, for what greater freedom can there be than being free from ourselves, especially in our own narcissistic culture today! But there is progression in the journey of love. First of all, we love ourselves for our own sakes. In our fallen condition, this is destructive, for being created in God’s image implies that God gave me myself before I was ever aware of it. As I become aware of this, then I can enter the second degree of love, where for our own benefit we begin to love God; this is prudential. Then through frustrations and sufferings we learn that only God’s grace frees and sustains us through the difficulties of life. In the third degree a breakthrough occurs, when we begin to love God for God’s own sake. A liberation indeed has occurred, for what greater freedom can there be than being free from ourselves, especially in our own narcissistic culture today! But there is progression in the journey of love. First of all, we love ourselves for our own sakes. In our fallen condition, this is destructive, for being created in God’s image implies that God gave me myself before I was ever aware of it. As I become aware of this, then I can enter the second degree of love, where for our own benefit we begin to love God; this is prudential. Then through frustrations and sufferings we learn that only God’s grace frees and sustains us through the difficulties of life. In the third degree a breakthrough occurs, when we begin to love God for God’s own sake. A liberation indeed has occurred, for what greater freedom can there be than being free from ourselves, especially in our own narcissistic culture today! But there is progression in the journey of love. First of all, we love ourselves for our own sakes. In our fallen condition, this is destructive, for being created in God’s image implies that God gave me myself before I was ever aware of it. As I become aware of this, then I can enter the second degree of love, where for our own benefit we begin to love God; this is prudential. Then through frustrations and sufferings we learn that only God’s grace frees and sustains us through the difficulties of life. In the third degree a breakthrough occurs, when we begin to love God for God’s own sake. A liberation indeed has occurred, for what greater freedom can there be than being free from ourselves, especially in our own narcissistic culture today! But there is progression in the journey of love. First of all, we love ourselves for our own sakes. In our fallen condition, this is destructive, for being created in God’s image implies that God gave me myself before I was ever aware of it. As I become aware of this, then I can enter the second degree of love, where for our own benefit we begin to love God; this is prudential. Then through frustrations and sufferings we learn that only God’s grace frees and sustains us through the difficulties of life. In the third degree a breakthrough occurs, when we begin to love God for God’s own sake. A liberation indeed has occurred, for what greater freedom can there be than being free from ourselves, especially in our own narcissistic culture today! But there is progression in the journey of love. First of all, we love ourselves for our own sakes. In our fallen condition, this is destructive, for being created in God’s image implies that God gave me myself before I was ever aware of it. As I become aware of this, then I can enter the second degree of love, where for our own benefit we begin to love God; this is prudential. Then through frustrations and sufferings we learn that only God’s grace frees and sustains us through the difficulties of life. In the third degree a breakthrough occurs, when we begin to love God for God’s own sake. A liberation indeed has occurred, for what greater freedom can there be than being free from ourselves, especially in our own narcissistic culture today! But there is progression in the journey of love. First of all, we love ourselves for our own sakes. In our fallen condition, this is destructive, for being created in God’s image implies that God gave me myself before I was ever aware of it. As I become aware of this, then I can enter the second degree of love, where for our own benefit we begin to love God; this is prudential. Then through frustrations and sufferings we learn that only God’s grace frees and sustains us through the difficulties of life. In the third degree a breakthrough occurs, when we begin to love God for God’s own sake. A liberation indeed has occurred, for what greater freedom can there be than being free from ourselves, especially in our own narcissistic culture today! But this is only possible when we have “tasted that the Lord is good!” This is why in his Encyclical letter of 1953, Pope Pius XII called Bernard “the Mellifluous doctor,” for he describes the nutrient sweetness of God’s love as being like honey. As the psalmist invites, “O taste and see that the Lord is good.” (Psalm 35:9) But it is a slow journey, for it requires an exchange of desires, from loving the world to loving Christ, and from self-reliance to reliance alone in Christ. Only then shall the “sweetness of Christ” grow in increasing esteem. This involves a great change of attitudes. For now we begin to love others also, whether they deserve it or not, as our Lord himself loves us. All is now being done in the obedience of love. Thus the fourth degree of love is also the ultimate degree of selflessness, of loving God with His own love. For the only love now worth having is God’s love. In this realization, the Christian grows increasingly in unconscious self-forgetfulness, whether in helping and loving others, or indeed of experiencing no separation from the abiding presence of God within oneself.

It certainly illustrates the command of Deuteronomy 6:5 and of Mark 12:30, to love God with all our heart, soul, and strength. But to experience this perfectly will require that we have resurrected bodies in the eternal state. We can only have glimpses of this stage while here in our human bodies, for its realism does require embodiment, to provide availability to others, as ghosts never can provide. Such then is “a perfumed nosegay” of the mind and heart of Bernard. As he assures us so hopefully and joyously: “Nothing is impossible to believers, nothing too difficult for lovers, nothing too hard to the meek, nothing too arduous to the humble; to them grace lends its aid, and devotion gentles a command to the obedient person. Indeed, it is a great and marvelous thing to be the servant of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God” [xvi].

Notes
[v] Ibid., 2, 5.
[vii] Yet Bernard is inconsistent, sometimes saying it is rather the “image” which has been lost, and the “likeness” retained.
[xi] Bernard of Clairvaux, The Song of Songs.
[xii] Ibid., sermon 17.1, pp. 126-7.

(continued on page 22)
Isn’t It All Just a Matter of Faith?
(continued from page 3)

the person Christ, so that we might know Him.

It is about stepping into the light to see things as they really are, and not as we would simply like them to be. Faith is trusting in a God who has revealed Himself, and made Himself available to us. That revelation, that God is and is trustworthy, is plain to all, we are told (Romans 1:19-21).

The problem therefore is not really about information. The problem is about whether you know God well enough, so that even when things happen in your life that you don’t understand, you have someone you can talk to who does.

Faith is not something psychological that you can generate. It grows in strength as you get to know God more. Sadly, some people feel that the journey is not worth beginning. Even more tragically, we often start the journey and then put it on hold. Just as you are able to trust someone as you grow to know them, faith increases as you grow to know Christ.

The answer to the issue of faith, therefore, is not whether you are able to believe in something that does not exist—which would make you insane. It is whether your relationship with God is grounded in that which is real. It is whether you know the Creator of the universe.

If you do not, then the Christian Gospel invites you to find out, and even commands you to be honest in your commitment to know that which is true and authentic.

Is Jesus real? Who did He claim to be? Did this really happen? Is He really alive today? Faith comes in response to knowing the answers to these questions.

If you do have faith in Christ, that is you know who He is and why He came into this world, don’t stop in your knowledge of Him following your initial introduction. If your relationship with God feels shallow or even forced, it is probably because a lack of time with Him means that you haven’t gotten to know Him.

At critical times therefore, He seems absent. This is not because He isn’t talking to us, but because we haven’t been talking to Him.

The great joy of the Christian faith is knowing that we are engaged to the most marvelous person, Christ. One day, we will be sat at a wedding feast with him. Spend a little time getting to know Him better now—you will never regret it. “Faith is knowing and trusting God, even when you don’t want to.” Faith then is not about convenience, but about reality. Faith is our response to the God who is real and true.
the Bible, because the Bible is often viewed, inappropriately of course, as misogynist, racist, violent, religiously exclusive, and the basis for much of the conflict in our world. Clearly, the Scriptures are still “living and active” and “sharper than any double-edged sword” (Hebrews 6:12) and able to make us “wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15). However, the armor that the opposition is wearing may need to be lowered for the sword to penetrate. A robust defense of Scripture as the Word of God—a pillar of modern apologetic work—can be used by the Holy Spirit to do this and is needed now more than ever.

What really matters is that you love Jesus and are willing to be used. It is difficult to argue with this sentiment, because there is so much truth in it. After all, if we do not put loving Jesus first and are not willing to be used, we are way out of touch with Christianity ourselves and are in serious need of discipleship. However, on close inspection this objection, like the one just before it, is problematic in that it is in principle excluding as unimportant a whole area of God-ordained activity. Putting this objection in a slightly different way, loving Jesus is where our focus should be and not on ivory-tower dialogue. Of course, once again we run into the problem of the commands and examples of Jesus and his followers. If they valued reasoned argumentation on behalf of the Gospel, then so should we. Moreover, since loving Jesus entails obedience to him and to the commands of his inspired Apostles, then engaging in apologetic activity would certainly be a mark of obedience and therefore consistent with loving Jesus.

When I hear this objection to apologetic activity I can’t help but think there is something lying beneath it—something that is not being stated clearly or completely forthrightly. I shall conclude with a brief word about this underlying issue. As one can quickly tell, the popular objections that I have addressed here are not particularly precise or persuasive. Very often when Christians dispute the validity of defending the faith, they may not be reacting to the legitimacy of the apologetic task itself, but rather to their negative experiences with some who take up the apologetic task. This has been at times a serious problem with the effectiveness of our overall Christian witness. Apologists are sometimes out to win arguments and not souls, impatient with illogic from their counterparts, and arrogant in their demeanor. I am convinced that this can strip even the brightest apologists of their effectiveness for the Lord. Indeed, the “ethos of demonstration” that I identified in the daily ministry of Christ and his Apostles included living out the second greatest commandment, to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39). The most effective apologist is not the one who has the greatest academic prowess alone, but the one who has excellent intellectual preparation and reflects Christ’s love in every way. When Peter penned his great apologetics command (1 Peter 3:15), he was compelled to attach a qualifier that captures this notion: “But do this with gentleness and respect.” Paul likewise confirmed this when he explained to Timothy that “the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 2:24-25).

Christians who are able to bring it all together—a bright mind, comprehensive intellectual preparation for the proclamation and defense of the faith, the deepest devotion to and emulation of our Lord, and an unflinching commitment to the Great Commission—are instruments of great power in the hands of the Holy Spirit for furthering the Kingdom. It should be our goal to raise up apologists such as these. I am convinced that even in small numbers they will foment a spiritual revolution in a world that is thirsty for knowledge of the truth.
How Accurate Is McLaren’s Description of Foundationalism?

McLaren claims that modernity has foisted upon the church the mind-set that we must have absolute, bombproof certainty in our Christian beliefs, and the culprit behind the scenes is an epistemological view known as foundationalism. Like many others, McLaren targets this view as the source of the expectation that we cannot ever have doubts and still be a good Christian. Based upon that contention, he suggests that we need to move on to a new way of being a Christian in postmodern times, which will allow us room to embrace a new epistemology, one which will not keep pressuring us to not have any doubts. But is he accurate in his description of foundationalism?

We should first observe that the version of foundationalism that McLaren targets is from Descartes. In his quest to find an unshakeable foundation for knowledge, Descartes used a “methodological doubt,” a method by which he tried to doubt all beliefs whatsoever, until he could find one that he thought he could not possibly doubt. Since it was possible that he could be deceived by a demon, Descartes proceeded to doubt most every belief, but he finally concluded that to even doubt, he must be thinking, and he therefore must exist.

Descartes’ foundationalism deserves serious criticism, for it raises the “bar” for knowledge far too high. It is exceedingly unrealistic to require certainty in order to have knowledge, and skeptics take advantage at this very point. After all, someone like David Hume could always retort, “Isn’t it just possible [regardless of how unlikely it is] that you could be mistaken?” To be at all honest, we probably should answer that with most beliefs this is possible (i.e., logically conceivable), but once we admit that, skeptics have us where they want us: “But since it is possible you could be mistaken, then by your own standard, that you must have certainty to know, then you cannot know.”

McLaren is right to find fault with this kind of foundationalism, for it raises the standard for knowledge too high. There are many things I know, even though it is possible (i.e., is logically conceivable) I could be mistaken. For instance, I know that today I started teaching a new, distance ethics class for Biola University’s apologetics program. While it is possible that I could be mistaken, why should I think that to be the case? I also know that I am married to Debbie, and that we have been married for twenty-one years. Surely it is conceivable that I am mistaken, but, again, where is the evidence that is strong enough to overturn the strength of evidence I have for holding this belief?

Furthermore, I know that 1 + 1 = 2, that murder is wrong, that George W. Bush is president now, that terrorists attacked the United States on Sept. 11, 2001, and that the shirt I now have on is a dark red in color. There are some particular things I simply know, even without utter certainty, and now the burden of proof is on the skeptic to defeat my knowledge claims. I simply rebut...
McLaren claims that modernity has foisted upon the church the mind-set that we must have absolute, bombproof certainty in our Christian beliefs...

(continued on page 20)
We can know truth, even with great confidence, and yet be humble...
cannot know the real world; indeed, that is what he calls the world well lost.⁴ He explains that we just do not escape the influence of our theories, to somehow know an objective world:

The notion of “the world” as used in a phrase like “different conceptual schemes carve up the world differently” must be the notion of something completely unspecified and unspecifiable—the thing-in-itself, in fact. As soon as we start thinking of “the world” as atoms and the void, or sense data and awareness of them…we have changed the name of the game. For we are now well within some particular theory about how the world is.⁵

However, that view has significant implications for how we understand core Christian doctrines, such as Jesus’ resurrection, which, if he is right, cannot be a knowable fact of history, but instead something constructed (made) by Christians.

McLaren himself offers provocative comments about language and our ability to know reality as it truly (objectively) is, apart from language use. He seems to indicate that we cannot achieve an objective vantage point, in that our views are always contingent, changing, and not privileged.⁶ Elsewhere he claims “to understand anything, we need to apprentice ourselves to the community that honors what it is we want to understand.”⁷ This idea seems to be at home with a philosophical idea that truths are not accessible in principle to anyone from just any standpoint, but only from the standpoint of a community and its language. That is, there are no freestanding, ahistorical truths we may know. McLaren also writes “all is contextual,” that “no meanings can exist without context.”⁸ More remarkably, through Neo, McLaren asserts that history began with our ability to write it.⁹ How should we understand that statement? At first glance, it seems he means that history itself is identical to the writing of it; that is, the writing of the history makes it what it is. Later in the same book, Neo tells us that though we live on the same planet, “we live in different universes—depending on the kind of God we believe in and on our understanding of the master story we are a part of.”¹⁰ This claim seems to go beyond the more innocuous view that we may have different perspectives on the same world. Instead, we actually live in different worlds.

These are some quick samplings of his various claims about language. However, when we examine more closely the claims of people he heartily endorses, such as those of Nancey Murphy in Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism, or Stanley Grenz and John Franke in Beyond Foundationalism, we see a more thoroughgoing position.¹¹ Grenz and Franke state it very clearly: “we do not inhabit the ‘world-in-itself’; instead, we live in a linguistic world of our own making.”¹² Furthermore, they claim that theology is the exploration of “the world-constructing, knowledge-forming, identity-forming ‘language’ of the Christian community.”¹³ Somehow, language’s influence is so pervasive that we do not have epistemic access to the real, objective world, to know it as such; our only access to it is by the use of our language, by which we shape and even make the world by using the language of our community.

Thus, from this brief survey, we see evidence that lends credence to the belief that McLaren endorses a similar view, one that he at least owes to his readers to clarify. And, if his view is a constructivist one in which we cannot know reality, but instead we “construct” or “make” it, then what are the implications for core beliefs of the faith (such as, that Jesus died for our sins and arose bodily from the dead)? It seems that it would be true because that is how Christians talk and have made their world. I have discussed these implications in detail in various places, and if I am right, then the consequences for orthodox Christianity could be serious.¹⁴

(continued on page 22)
I also think [McLaren] owes his readers a candid discussion of the philosophical views that inform his own thinking...
One time, on a train ride from Vienna, Austria, to Budapest, Hungary, my wife and I were sitting in a car with four others. Two were atheists, and the other two had at least some connection in their background to the church. As we talked, my wife found out that one was a believer who was related to a prominent leader in the Christian community who faced many difficult struggles. This led to the subject of the difficulty of relationships and the unique way Christ calls us to forgive and to love. One of the atheists, a young man, shared his desire for a loving marriage and family and asked, “Can’t atheists love and forgive?” I responded, “Yes, of course atheists can love and forgive but not because of their atheism.” There ensued a lengthy discussion that went along these lines: in the atheist perspective all is matter. There is no God, no solid basis for moral values (other than my own individual and community preference), and no source for the other-centered (“agape”) love that Christ embodies and teaches his followers to practice.

Atheism leads inevitably to a grim meaningless universe. It encourages autonomy rather than love. Atheist Bertrand Russell held that as a result of his denial of God’s existence, we need to build our lives on the basis of “unyielding despair.” Fellow atheist and existential philosopher Albert Camus said that the only really serious question is whether or not to commit suicide. Fyodor Dostoyevsky has one of his characters argue that if there is no God, everything is permitted. Another atheist, Jean Paul Sartre, said that no finite point had any meaning without an infinite reference point. He believed that there is no infinite reference point; therefore, life is meaningless. He said, whether you choose to help an old lady across the street or beat her on the head, just be authentic. Where in atheism is there a basis or motive for love and forgiveness? If anything, atheism seems to undermine love and forgiveness. Certainly, atheists often love their spouses, children, and others, but not because this is encouraged by or a necessary consequence of their atheism.

Throughout the conversation on the train, the young man followed each point and admitted that he had never thought about this before. I went on to point out that love is at the core of Jesus’ message. We live in a universe where personality is valued (not just impersonal matter). God is personal, in fact tri-personal—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Personality is at the center of the cosmos. The members of the Trinity are in an eternal relationship of love. So love and relationship are also at the center of reality. God has made us in His image. We are given worth, value, and dignity that can never be taken away from us. Furthermore, we are made in the likeness of God to express our God-given personalities, engage in relationships, and love God and other people.

Jesus places love at the very center in His summation of the Old Testament law. When asked which is the greatest commandment, Jesus replies, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). Then He quickly adds, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39). On another occasion, Jesus gives an additional exhortation, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (John 13:34). He (continued on page 24)
How Will They Know? They Will Know Them By Their Love

(continued from page 23)

goess on to make this kind of love the mark of discipleship—the evidence and confirmation by which people can know that these are His followers: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

Jesus even goes so far as to say, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). He also calls us to radical forgiveness—to forgive “seventy times seven” (Matthew 18:22). Not only does He say that if you forgive you will be forgiven, but he also says, “If you do not forgive others, then your Father in heaven will not forgive your transgressions” (Matthew 6:14-15).

On the train, after giving a summary of the above, I asked the young man, “Which view do you think gives an adequate basis for love and forgiveness, your atheism or faith in Christ?” He readily admitted that it wasn’t his atheism and seemed fascinated by these new insights.

At that moment we arrived at the border of Hungary, where this man found out that as a Canadian he needed a visa to enter the country (Americans didn’t need one), so the border guards escorted him off the train. We made plans to meet him at a certain time in Budapest the next day, but he didn’t make it. I’ve often wondered what happened to this honest, open young atheist.

Some atheists hold to a kind of humanism. Though they agree that our origin is out of matter, time, and chance, and though our destiny is oblivion (no life after death), somehow people are significant. You might diagram it like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Mankind</th>
<th>Destiny</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atheism</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanism</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some atheists say that our origin is insignificant, our destiny “full of sound and fury signifying nothing,” and that people are merely a “useless passion” (Sartre). In fact, Sartre wrote in his play *No Exit*, “Hell is other people.” For an atheist, human origin, existence, and destiny are nothing but big zeros.

Humanists, on the other hand, being atheists, contend that we emerged spontaneously out of the cosmic slime, and even the noblest person rots in the grave. Yet somehow humans are a great big plus. But humanists have no basis for giving humans dignity. Perhaps they know in their consciences, the law written on their hearts (Romans 2:14-15), that this is so. Yet they give no sufficient reason why we ought to treat humans with such value. Psychologist Erik Erickson once made the comment that he could think of no other reason to give humans dignity than that they are made in the image of God. In any case, there seems to be no intrinsic basis for an atheist to encourage love and forgiveness.

Christianity argues that God is the origin of life and we are made in His image; therefore, we have intrinsic worth and dignity based not on what we do but on who we are. Because of a loving Creator, we have value, our lives matter, and our destiny is eternal, either for salvation or for judgment.

Atheists find no solid basis for love in a universe where “all is matter.” Followers of New Age spirituality find no firmer foundation for love in a universe where “all is spirit.” There are many forms of Hinduism and Buddhism. I will be focusing on what might be called absolute pantheism as exemplified in the Hindu philosopher Shankara and others holding a similar view. This perspective, as it has come through to the New Age movement in the west, holds that “all is One.” Marilyn Ferguson in her classic book, *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, points out that the negative way to express this positive principle is “non-distinction.” There are no real distinctions anywhere. Matter, time, space, cause and effect are all illusory. A second related principle is that “you are divine.” Since you are part of the “One,” you are in a sense “god” or “divine.” A third implication of this view is that the purpose of our existence is
to “alter consciousness” so that we come to see that there are no real distinctions in this world. We need to transcend this illusory world and realize that “All is One.” Only then will we be able to achieve “unlimited power” to create our own reality. The only limit to what we can do is our own imagination. Note that the “One” is not a “personal” being but an impersonal force—an “it” rather than “he” or “she.”

Other recent advocates reaffirm this same All is One (non-distinct) philosophy. For instance, Deepak Chopra says in his bestseller, *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*, “The physical universe is nothing other than the Self curving back within Itself to experience Itself.” In the same context, he said that there are “seeds of divinity within us” and that we are “divinity in disguise.” In Chopra’s book, *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind*, he agrees with an Indian teacher who said:

> As is the microcosm, so is the macrocosm.
> As is the atom, so is the Universe.
> As is the human body, so is the cosmic body.
> As is the human mind, so is the cosmic mind.

Andrew Weil has emerged in the alternative medicine field and, after years of obscurity, made the cover of *Time* magazine (May 12, 1997). He also echoed this all-is-one perspective. He said in *Natural Health, Natural Medicine*, “All religions and spiritual traditions stress the importance of overcoming the illusion of separateness and experiencing unity.” Weil, like Chopra, was educated in medicine and applies his philosophy to issues of health.

Gary Zukav, who like Chopra was given extensive national publicity by appearing on the Oprah television show, also holds the belief that all is one. In his popular book, *The Seat of the Soul*, he said, “Physical reality and the organisms and forms within physical reality are systems of Light within systems of light, and this Light is the same Light as the Light of your soul.” The ancient Hindu way of saying the same thing is “Atman is Brahman”—the individual is one with the divine.

During a long dinner conversation with a senior researcher from a large New Age think tank, we discussed the idea of this impersonal force. For fifteen years this man had been deeply immersed in Eastern philosophy—researching, writing, and advising radio and television specials on New Age topics. He came to me because he was considering returning to his roots (being brought up in a Christian church). One reason he gave for this desire was that he couldn’t find a “home” in any of the Eastern philosophies. He had tried them all and found that they didn’t fit what he had discovered about the universe. Above all, he had met all the top Eastern gurus and New Age advocates and was profoundly disappointed. They were all so “narcissistic.”

I explained to him that the thrust of New Age philosophy is “inward” (to the divine within), or “upward” (to merge your identity with that of the One), but definitely not “outward” (to a distinct world that is illusory). I asked why they would be motivated to care a great deal about distinct people and things that their philosophy regarded as illusory. He quickly agreed that if they were true to their philosophy, they would not.

Recently, I asked a college professor (let’s call her Susan), who had been for many years a strong advocate of the New Age perspective, why she would talk about love given her former view. She said that she would have answered that we need to love “being” in general (“the One”). But when I asked her if this love applied to particular, distinct (illusory) things, she admitted that she wouldn’t have had an answer for that question. She said that the disconnect between her idea of love and the inability to practice it even on a small level never occurred to her.

Tal Brooke, president of Spiritual Counterfeits Project based in Berkeley, California, spent a number of years in India being groomed to be a Western spokesman for Sai...there seems to be no intrinsic basis for an atheist to encourage love and forgiveness.

(continued on page 26)
How Will They Know? They Will Know Them By Their Love

(continued from page 25)

Baba, the guru of gurus in India. Sai Baba is the guru most respected by those in the New Age spirituality. He is the one that many other gurus visit to be blessed. Thousands go to even catch a distant glimpse of him, for he is known as the “miracle”-working guru because of the many stories of his powers that have been passed around. Tal had numerous private audiences with Sai Baba.

During his time in India, Tal met a missionary couple, and he tried using his brilliant mind and his logical skills to convert them to Hinduism. They put some dents in his arguments. However, what he noticed about them over time was that they really seemed to care for him more than they did for themselves. Later he described this as other-centered, (“agape”) love. Though the other Hindu disciples were gentle, Tal noticed that they lacked this quality. Above all, after numerous private audiences with Sai Baba, Tal noted that the guru also utterly lacked this other-centered love. He was beginning to understand what the Apostle John meant when he said, “How will they know that these are disciples of Jesus? They will know them by their love” (John 13:35, paraphrased).

Note the context of this last statement. Jesus says in verse 34: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another even as I have loved you.” Underline the fact that this is a commandment which believers in Jesus are to obey. This, of course, implies that it is possible to disobey that charge. In other words, it is not automatically true that believers in Jesus will be loving. They could be disobedient to what Jesus asks of them.

The radical nature of the love required, to love “as I have loved you” is stunning. Jesus gave His life for those who were in rebellion to the God He served. This self-sacrificial (agape) love is to be the indicator that one is a follower of Jesus. Also, note that in verse 35, the way people will know that believers are disciples is “by” their love “if” and only if they love one another.

When those who bear the name of Christ fail to demonstrate God’s love, people are often hurt in the process and feel justified in unbelief. That emotional pain caused by Christians becomes an obstacle to even being able to consider who Jesus is. At a retreat center with top New Age and evangelical leaders, I had the opportunity to engage in discussions about this subject and how they viewed Jesus in light of it. After a few days, the final person to share was the wife of one of the most prominent New Age advocates. She shared that because of what some Christians had done to her fifteen years earlier (she didn’t say what it was), for fifteen years she had not been able to say the name of “Jesus Christ.” When she said that name, she broke down and wept uncontrollably. She thanked me and others present for freeing her to be able to consider who Jesus was and for the first time in a long time to say His name.

As I have traveled around the United States and overseas interacting with believers and non-believers, certain common themes have emerged. First, many people desire passion, a passionate commitment to something or someone. Second, many also desire a mentor who exemplifies love and shows them a good way to live. Third, many people crave a perspective that is comprehensive enough to make sense of personal and public life. Often they have not found what they desired in the church. Many desired passion but found in their churches coldness or lack of emotion. They desired a mentor who embodies truth and love and were disillusioned by hypocrisy and lovelessness. Despite their desire for a perspective that made sense of things, sometimes what they encountered in their churches was narrow in scope and ineffectual to answer the questions they were asking. They desired passionate commitment, modeling of character, and an educated conscience, but were unable to satisfy their hunger for these things.

Of course, there are plenty of exceptions to this pattern. Many believers are passionately committed to Jesus, have found a mentor, and have found solid answers to the big questions. In all these areas, love is at the center. Each one of these believers has been
pulled (sometimes kicking and screaming) out of their self-centeredness and overwhelmed by God’s love for them. They have responded by passionately desiring to love Him with their whole being. They found God’s love demonstrated in what Jesus said and did for us and were motivated by His example to reach out and love others. They sought to grow in this love by finding a mentor, someone who could teach in theory and in practice this life of trust in God. They eventually desired to love God more with their minds and take every thought (in personal and public life) captive to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Theoretically, the whole message of the Gospel is saturated with love. By contrast, atheism (all is matter) and New Age spirituality (all is spirit) have no adequate basis to stimulate or sustain love at all.

My purpose is also to point those who bear the name of Christ to more truly be examples of Christ’s love. A story is told about Alexander the Great. One day the great Greek conqueror was holding court, and a young man was brought to him who was guilty of being a coward in battle, something Alexander despised. Alexander was high on his throne above the young man and asked him “What is your name?” The young man, knowing that Alexander had the power of life or death over him, was shaking and could barely speak. He answered in a trembling voice, “Alexander.” Alexander the Great stood up from his throne and asked him “What is your name?” The young man, knowing that Alexander had the power of life or death over him, was shaking and could barely speak. He answered in a trembling voice, “Alexander.” Alexander the Great stepped down from his throne and shouted, “What is your name?” By this time the man could hardly speak and responded in a barely audible voice, “Alexander.” Alexander the Great shouted, “Change your conduct or change your name.” We, too, must take the name of Christ with courage and care.8

Further, I want to stress the uniqueness of Christ’s love in theory and in practice. Sometimes that love is expressed in words, as in the example of the missionary couple who talked to Tal. Sometimes it is a silent love. I recently heard of a tribe in Nigeria who came to a missionary who didn’t know them. The chief said, “We all want to believe in Jesus. What do we do?” The missionary was confused and asked if someone had preached to them? They replied, “No,” but again said that the whole tribe wanted to follow Jesus. When the missionary asked, “Why?” the chief explained what had happened. Apparently, some of those who believed in Christ had come to their village regularly over a number of years and built a school, wells, a hospital, and other things to help their village. They said no one else had done anything for them. They were attracted to the loving attitudes and actions of these believers. So, you see, there is a spoken love and a silent love. At different times both are needed.9 Love has both a theoretical and practical place in demonstrating the reality of Christ.

Notes
3 Ibid., p. 3.
7 For a more thorough look at this passage, see Francis Schaeffer, The Mark of the Christian.
8 Alexander the Great story from a talk by James Kennedy.
9 From a talk given by Dr. Denny McCain at a conference of the International Institute for Christian Studies, July 20, 2006, tape available from IICS at (800) 776-4427.
Become a C.S. Lewis Fellow

The C.S. Lewis Fellows Program is designed to strengthen the discipleship of men and women who want to grow deeper in their relationship with Jesus Christ and to be more credible and effective for Christ in their vocations and spheres of influence. The Fellows Program offers life-changing teaching and reading in key biblical themes in theology, spirituality, and apologetics and provides small group discussion and one-on-one mentoring as well. Opportunities are also provided for fellowship, social gatherings, and special sessions with respected authors and speakers. Past guests have included Dr. Jim Houston, Dr. Alister McGrath, Dr. J.I. Packer, Dr. Michael Ramsden, Lee Strobel, and others.

Fellows will grow significantly in their understanding of biblical worldview and can expect to experience substantial spiritual growth, becoming more loving as a person, more effective in church, and more credible in the workplace.

An application as well as more information on the Fellows Program is available on our web site, www.cslewisinstitute.org.

RZIM Zacharias Trust Oxford Summer School

BY WHOSE STANDARD?
1-7 July, 2007
Oriel College, Oxford

Spend a week this summer in intense training in Evangelism and Apologetics at Oxford University.

The RZIM Zacharias Trust Summer School will tackle some of the most penetrating questions skeptical thinkers have about the Christian faith, and will present a spiritual challenge to our own hearts and minds. You will hear these issues addressed by some of the leading evangelical scholars, evangelists, and apologists of our time, including Ravi Zacharias, Michael Ramsden, Amy Orr-Ewing, Alister McGrath, and Tom Tarrants, President of the C.S. Lewis Institute. Don’t miss this opportunity to discover the depths of the Christian response to a world of confusion, and to be equipped to engage effectively with our Christian culture.

Find more information at www.cslewisinstitute.org. Click on “Oxford University Study Program.”