

**H A G G A I E S S E N T I A L S**

**Dr. Richard Bowie**

**DOES  
CHRISTIAN  
FAITH  
MAKE  
SENSE?**



**Published by  
Haggai Institute for Advanced Leadership Training**

Tanglin P.O. Box 422  
SINGAPORE 912415

175 East Lipoa Street  
Kihei, HI 96753-8137  
USA

Post Office Box 13  
Atlanta, Georgia 30370-2801  
USA

Phone: +1-770-449-8869  
Website: [www.haggai-institute.com](http://www.haggai-institute.com)

*Copyright 2007 Haggai Institute*

All rights reserved; no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the Publisher. This book may not be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise disposed of by way of trade in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published without the prior written consent of the Publisher.

**Printed and bound by  
BAC Printers**

*The author would like to dedicate this book to all our H.I.  
Alumni seeking to make Christ known to their peoples.*



Richard Bowie is a distinguished faculty member of Haggai Institute and served as International Director Of Training for H.I. for 16 years.

Born in India, he took medals at school in Calcutta and began a career in Patent and Trademark Law. But in 1955, he resigned to study theology at Bishop's College, Calcutta; St. Augustine's, Canterbury; and Serampore University in India, where he earned his Bachelor's and Master's degrees. He was ordained in the Church of England in India in 1958 and served the Church in India, Israel, England and Australia. In recognition of his contribution to missions he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity (honoris causa) by Hindusthan Bible Institute, Madras.

Dr. Bowie has authored many theological papers and three books, *The Holy Spirit and Modern Theology*, *Pathways to Joy*, and *Light for the Nations*.

He lives in retirement in Australia, with his wife Audrey, their four children and eight grandchildren.

# Contents

- Chapter 1:** The roots of secularism
- Chapter 2:** The secular mind
- Chapter 3:** Has science replaced God?
- Chapter 4:** Can the Gospels be trusted?
- Chapter 5:** Is Jesus Christ just a great man?

# Introduction:

Why a book on this subject?

A secular mindset has pervaded most of the Western world for nearly 200 years. More recently, it has penetrated well into the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America as well. This is evident especially among the educated classes in these countries.

The reasons are, of course, that most of the science studied in colleges and places of higher learning in these countries is Western science and, with modern, ultra fast electronic communications today, secularistic thinking and ideas are everywhere. A 12-year-old Christian student in Jakarta recently said to me, “Did God really make this world or did it all come by evolution?” Another student in Singapore questioned, “Is the Bible true; can we believe in it nowadays?”

Many among the intelligentsia in the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America are embracing modernistic and even postmodernistic ideas. The sciences occupy centre stage in their thinking and, whereas once the universe was seen as the creation of the one supreme God (certainly in Islam, Christianity and much of Hinduism), now evolutionary ideas predominate and have displaced “God” in the thinking of many of the educated. Christians, too, living in these countries sometimes find their faith shaken.

My objective in writing this book is to help Christians and Christian leaders to be able to see the reasonableness of their faith in the light of modernistic and postmodernistic thinking and to be able to believe without reservation in the Bible and in a supernatural God and the divinity of Jesus Christ. In this way, they can strengthen the faith of their own people. Before we can expect them to go out and proclaim Christ, Christians need to be sure they are on solid ground.

Some years ago, the Presbyterian missionary Lesslie Newbigin, who later became a Bishop in the Church of South India, reminded us that the Gospel is a secular event, that God so loved the world (*saeculum*) and that Jesus came specifically for people struggling to live in this world, earning their daily living, coping with sin, sickness, worry, bereavement and disappointment and trying to get on with others. It is hoped that this book will help us to proclaim in a more meaningful way that Jesus can and does give us “life, and life in all its fullness”.

And that in our secular world, believing in God does make sense.

# Chapter 1: The roots of secularism

*“The point at which the Gospel comes home to an ordinary man is [not in his religion but] in...his secular life”.*  
—Lesslie Newbigin

Secularistic thinking prevails everywhere. This climate presents a strong challenge to those who believe in God. Can we find points of contact in this climate for Christians to present the Gospel?

The word “secular” comes from the Latin *saeculum* meaning “world”. So secularism is the philosophy or way of thinking which focuses exclusively on this world, this life here and now, on human life on earth and dismisses anything otherworldly, spiritual or supernatural.

This mindset has given rise to secularising efforts by policy makers, administrators and educationists who tend toward excluding anything “religious” in public life in the interests of political correctness. Students entering places of higher learning in the Third World are told to leave their religion outside the door. There is no place for “God” or “gods” in the classroom. This is especially evident in science classes.

## **Modernistic secularism**

How did this secularistic thinking come about in the first place?



## Dr. Richard Bowie: Does Christian Faith make sense?

The basic belief is that *only that is real which can be verified by the five senses, reason or science*. This belief flourished for some 200 years, enjoying its heyday in the middle of the 20th century. The sources are many; I can only summarise.

Influential philosophers like David Hume (d. 1776) and A.J. Ayer (d. 1989) maintained that only that is real which can be verified by the senses or by reason – popularly known as *Empiricism*. Since God and supernatural entities like angels, demons, etc., cannot be so verified, they do not exist.

This modernistic way of thinking was boosted by Immanuel Kant (d. 1804) who maintained that one can't (Kant!) really know reality or what a thing is in itself. You can call something a tree or a flower, but what does "tree" or "flower" really mean? Therefore, all statements about reality are meaningless. Hence, anything you say about God is meaningless, therefore "God" cannot really be known. Interestingly, aspects of Hindu philosophy say the same thing; is God like this or like that and one has to keep answering "not this" or "not that" (*neti, neti*). God is unknowable. The best stance, therefore, is agnosticism, "we can't really know".

A third source giving impetus to secularistic thought came from Charles Darwin (d. 1882), the father of evolution. He said that all life has evolved by natural selection. This led many to think that there is no room for God or a creator.

A fourth impetus came from *scientific materialism*, which maintained that the universe was always here and is all that there is and that the only reality is what is available to the five senses and reason and that the only way of gaining knowledge about things and the universe is through science. This led to a kind of “scientism,” the inflated idea that science has all the answers and that one need not look anywhere else; sometimes this is called “scientism”. Science itself is simply “the study of the structure and behaviour of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment” (Oxford Dictionary of English). Richard Bube, a former professor of science at Stanford University, defined science as “a way of knowing based on human interpretation of publicly obtained data through interaction with the physical world”. We have no quarrel here. Simply put, science is “the ongoing process of learning things about the natural world”. True science is “honest, open ended, reasonable and humble,” says popular writer and speaker John Blanchard.

However, “scientific materialism” or “scientism” tends to go beyond proper science and make pronouncements that are more in the realm of philosophy or ideology than science, e.g. when it says that this universe is “all that there is” and that there is nothing or no one outside or beyond it. These are speculations, not scientifically verifiable statements.

These ideas have been exported in the name of science to the universities and places of higher learning in Third World countries and easily picked up by students. In due course, they play havoc with the traditional religious

## Dr. Richard Bowie: Does Christian Faith make sense?

beliefs of millions in Asia, Africa and Latin America in the name of progress, affecting Christians no less.

Scientific materialism, alas, gets good press when eminent scientists like Peter Atkins, author and professor of chemistry from Oxford, England, make exaggerated pronouncements such as “science can explain everything”, which it manifestly cannot, or “through your brains you will see you can do without God”. Carl Sagan, well-known astronomer and writer, said, “The cosmos is all that there is, ever was, or ever will be”. None of these statements are scientific statements, but philosophical presuppositions and speculations, but, because made by big name scientists, they are swallowed by the man in the street and taken to be scientific truth. Some go even further and want to go crusading with these untruths in the name of science! As James Barr, physicist, put it, “For many, scientific materialism is not a bloodless philosophy but a passionately held ideology which sees science as having a mission...to free mankind from superstition...especially in the form of religion”.

This inevitably led to naturalism, the idea that the entire universe or nature is everything and that humans themselves are no more than a conglomerate of impersonal forces interacting with chemical molecules and electrical impulses. This has downgraded and devalued human beings and has made human life expendable (adding up to no more than a few dollars!). Is this atheistic, materialist philosophy what lies behind the killing of millions of people in two world wars and millions of others in Nazi

concentration camps or in so called “ethnic cleansing” and in escalating abortions? No wonder the 20th century has been dubbed “the bloodiest century in history”.

Summarising, the chief marks of modernistic thinking are:

- This material universe has always been here and is all that there is.
- The scientific method utilising reason and the five senses is the only way of discovering truth.
- Through science and technology, the universe can be conquered; therefore, there is unlimited hope and confidence for the future.
- Talk about God, the supernatural, miracles, faith, etc., is meaningless—the proper stance is atheism, or at least agnosticism.
- Some go further and take an anti-theistic stand, which does not sit well with traditional religions in Africa, Asia and Latin America where ‘God’ is assumed in the ordinary day-to-day life of people.
- Also, since there is no God, morality is left up to the individual or the state.
- All public life should be ‘secularised’ and no quarter given to ‘religion’. Again, this does not sit well and causes confusion in Third World countries where religion is closely tied to life.
- Finally, since humans are no more than atoms and molecules they are expendable.

### A critique

First, as I have earlier pointed out, we must disregard the exaggerated boasts of scientific materialism as totally unscientific. Science we believe in; scientism we reject.

Second, naturalism cancels itself out. For if the human brain is just the interaction of atoms and chemical molecules, how can we have confidence that what we are thinking or saying has any validity at all?

Third, scientific materialism is based on scientific theory now found by many scientists to be out of date. I'll discuss this in more detail in a later chapter. For now, since current scientific theory of the universe is that it all started with a 'Big Bang' or 'Big Surge' billions of years ago, the universe must have had a beginning and cannot be eternal as was once thought. Furthermore, if it had a beginning, what caused it? There is now room for positing a 'creator' of the universe. Christianity and other theistic religions are now in a better position to be heard and this augurs well for the preaching of the Christian Gospel.

Modernism is also rather limiting, for it confines the acquiring of knowledge to reason and the five senses only, totally ignoring other aspects such as intuitive knowledge, *a priori* knowledge, inferential knowledge and revealed knowledge.

By the middle of the 20th century, the modernistic, secularist dream of utopia had vanished. The dream bubble of unlimited economic and social achievement

had burst. The telling factors were legion: two world wars, the brutality of the Nazi concentration camps, the spread of AIDS, increasing poverty, internecine and tribal wars, the growth of violence and terror and the collapse of law and order in many societies, both East and West shattered naïve expectations. The modernistic dream had failed to take seriously the fallen nature of humans and our penchant for selfishness, greed, hatred and fear. Intellectually, modernism, with its limiting epistemologies (ways of gaining knowledge or truth), was found to be unsatisfying. People felt there was more to life than mere logic and reason and that humans were more than machines programmed by electro-chemical reactions.

The stage was set for serious change with the advent of existential thinking and the eventual emergence of postmodernism.

# Chapter 2:

## The secular mind today

As a result of the dissatisfaction and disillusionment with modernism and naturalism, people began to shift their thinking inwards, to human existence and the inner self. Since there is no certainty about objective reality and no confidence in the validity of one's thoughts and ideas, people were moved to retreat into subjectivism to try to find meaning for themselves in their own perceptions of reality. It's not objective reality that matters but only our individual understandings and interpretations, they felt. Therefore, what I think is good or right for me is good and right. No one else and no group, religious or otherwise, should presume to tell me because what's right for them may not be good or right for me. Relativism becomes the order of the day. The "kingdom of God is within you," said the existentialists, misquoting Jesus. We can achieve our highest potential "until we are rather more at one with god/the universe than we would otherwise be".

Borrowing from the Hindu pantheistic philosophy of *Advaita* (monism or non-dualism) many postmodernists, in particular New Agers, got carried away, through meditation and contemplation, popularised by the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, they proclaimed that you could realise that you and the universe/God are one. "You are God, I am God, we are all God," proclaimed actress Shirley

MacLaine. This experience-centred self-actualisation spread like wildfire and began to be proclaimed as a “gospel”—the gospel according to “me”.

Naturalism had devalued me since I am nothing more than a bunch of chemicals worth a few dollars, but now with postmodernism and New Ageism, I have recovered my value! I am somebody! New Age became popular overnight in both the East (among educated Hindus) and in the West.

Alas, these exaggerated aspirations have not been fulfilled, but the present postmodernistic, subjective mood continues and sometimes tends towards despair. Stanley Grenz said, “Generation X does not anticipate experiencing better economic circumstances than their parents experienced. Further, they do not expect that technology will solve the problems of the planet. There is ecological concern about the fragile condition of life and about the danger of an extensive war, so that both with respect to other peoples and to the rest of our planet, cooperation must replace the ideal of conquest”. Postmodernistic secularists are ripe for the good news that Christians have to offer.

### **A critique of postmodernism and New Ageism**

Since each individual is the final authority as to what is real or unreal, true or false, right or wrong, good or bad, and objective standards of truth and morality are rejected, we have a recipe for error, faulty thinking, anarchy, lawlessness and moral chaos.



Postmodernism and New Ageism do not take sufficient note of human self-centredness, prejudice and moral weakness in their quest for their new utopian dream and for peace. Inevitable progress has not happened. Materialism has failed to satisfy. Few are motivated to sustain meditation and such practices and their forms of spirituality have not overcome the strong drag of selfishness and self-indulgence that Paul noted long ago (Rom. 7:15ff). This, along with the idea that “anything goes”, has made it easier for people to resort to the uncontrolled use of drugs, sex, alcohol and violence. As the ancient prophet Jeremiah lamented of his own people, “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked” (or “sick” according to some translations – Jer. 17:9).

Postmodernists, with great assurance, proclaim that there are *no absolutes*, failing to discern the absoluteness of their own claim! They thus contradict their own philosophy. We have to present the Christian worldview of a Creator God, who alone has absolute claim to truth and morality and in whom is no contradiction. “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all”. And Jesus said, “I am the Light of the world; whoever follows me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life” (Jn. 8:12).

Postmodernism also needs to reassess the adequacy of its epistemologies (ways of knowing truth). While it allows for “rationalism” and “empiricism”, it also allows for intuition and *a priori* truth, which modernism disallowed. Christianity, however, takes a broader view of truth and reality by accepting the above ways of knowing but

## Dr. Richard Bowie: Does Christian Faith make sense?

including Revelation, both general and special revelation, as an important way of finding and knowing truth.

Postmodernism reinterprets many Christian ideas in its own existential way and Christians must be wary of not falling into that trap, e.g. “God” is a mythological way of speaking of the ground of our being. The incarnation is a mythological way of expressing our need to incarnate ourselves into the lives of those who need our help. They thus lead many astray since they do away with key Christian ideas such as God as “Transcendent Creator,” God’s sovereignty, the possibility of revelation and the supernatural and the fact of the Incarnation. However, their use of Christian terminology gives Christians points of contact for sharing the truth of the Gospel and pointing to Christ as the revelation of God.

Postmodernism and New Agers naively promote an easy-going pluralism – that all religions are but different ways to achieve oneness with God or the universe, so it doesn’t matter which one you follow. This is a popular idea in many parts of Asia where so many different religions co-exist. But nothing is further from the truth. How can theistic religions like Islam, Judaism and Christianity be on the same footing as a non-theistic system like Buddhism or a polytheistic religion like Hinduism? The facts just do not bear out that belief, as each religion itself bears witness. Pluralism is a direct contradiction of the religions themselves and, of course, of the words of Jesus, who said, “I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn. 14:6).

Facts and history are given short shrift. What's important is what do they mean for me? Christians who opted for existentialism began to sit loose to the Bible and the history of God's people, as well as the facts concerning Jesus' life, death and resurrection. All must be interpreted subjectively as having mythological meaning and significance for me.

The reason postmodernists propose this theory (for that's all it is) is based on (a) their extreme subjectivism that each person decides for himself what is true and what is not, and (b) their reaction to and rejection of modernism's emphasis on rationality and certainty. Certainly, modernism was too confining, as we have shown. But postmodernists have reacted and swung the pendulum too far the other way, rejecting objectivity and objective truth and facts, opting instead for *extreme subjectivism*. This lies behind their naivety, believing that all religions are equally true, which is very difficult to justify. Later I will show how we can best approach postmodernists with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

## **Conclusion**

All in all, postmodernism should be viewed in a positive light so far as the Gospel is concerned. As Lesslie Newbigin, theologian and missiologist, wisely said, "the point at which the Gospel comes home to an ordinary man is [not in his religion but] ... his secular life," his daily problems of earning a living, relating to people, contending with disappointments, overcoming failures, ill health,

## Dr. Richard Bowie: Does Christian Faith make sense?

family break up, etc. He says the Gospel is a “secular (event and) announcement”. God so loved the *whole world!*

Christians therefore need to find ways to successfully present the truth of Christianity to postmodernists and Hindu Advaitans and to present Christ as the answer to all those longings and aspirations that they experience in their daily life.

Jesus said, “I have come to give life ... in all its fullness”. To the woman of Samaria he said, “The water that I shall give you will be in you a well, springing up in eternal life” (Jn. 4:7-10f). The woman, probably an “existentialist” before her time, found Jesus’ promise to be true for she turned from her old way of life to follow Him and help extend His Kingdom.

For many secular people, however, there remain barriers to accepting Christ because they have been taught to believe that secular thinking has somehow undermined religion and proved it untrue. In the remainder of this monograph, therefore, I want to deal with three big questions that secular thinkers will ask of the Christian faith.

# Chapter 3:

## Has science replaced God?

*“Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind” . —Einstein*

For the last 200 years, many scientists have argued that the universe arrived at its present state by means of natural forces. God, they have said, is just a fairy-tale explanation for something that modern science can account for in a much simpler way.

As Ravi Zacharias put it, “The idea that humans evolved by natural selection from the animal world laid the axe at the very root of religious belief...the gigantic trunk of theism, which had clung tenaciously to the foundation of God as Creator, was being uprooted” or, as the atheist Feuerbach more graphically put it, “modern science had dissolved Christianity in a vat of nitric acid”.

Darwin’s theories attributing the origin and diversity of life to natural causes gave to moderns’ grounds for replacing God with science and adopting a distinctly secular or worldly worldview. “You can have God or natural selection, but not both,” wrote Nancy Pearcey.

These ideas have been served up in places of learning all over the world, including places of higher

learning in Asia, Africa and Latin America, affecting the faith of theists of all shades, not least Christians.

The truth, however, is far less straightforward.

## **What does the universe really tell us about God?**

### **1. The universe has a cause**

We now know from recent scientific observations that the universe is expanding. If this is true, it implies that, like an explosion, the process of expansion had a beginning.

In fact, Albert Einstein had predicted this in 1915, when he put forward his Theory of General Relativity. The idea, however, did not gain wide acceptance among his fellow scientists until 1927, when the astronomer Hubble offered evidence that galaxies were indeed moving further apart. Stick sequins to a balloon and then blow it up and you will better understand what Hubble was saying.

Since the universe is expanding, so reasoned the astronomers, working backwards there must have been a point in time when, billions of years ago, the universe was much, much smaller than it is now. Almost overnight, this swept away the belief, long held by evolutionists and naturalists, that the universe was eternal and unchanging. Scientists are now mostly agreed that the universe began with a “Big Bang” or “Big Surge” around 15 billion years ago.

What caused the Big Bang? Scientists are at a loss to explain, since there is no data. That hasn’t, however, prevented some wild speculation. Secular science is

reluctant to admit that something might come out of nothing. So some have developed the multiple universes theory, stressing the role of chance in cosmology. However, other scientists find such ideas unconvincing, arguing instead that all things have a cause and that, therefore, the universe must at some point have begun to exist.

In the words of cosmologist William L. Craig, “As long as the universe is governed by general relativity, the existence of an initial singularity—or beginning—is inevitable...*there has never been a time in history when the hard evidence of science was more confirmatory of belief in God than to-day*” (italics added).

This means a huge paradigm shift for the sciences and cosmologists. As someone once remarked, when scientists finally scale the vast mountain of Truth, they will find a group of theologians up there waiting for them! Applying the old Muslim Kalam argument—*Whatever began to exist was caused; the Universe began to exist, therefore the Universe was caused*—we are encouraged to see the distinct probability of the handiwork of a Creator. Christians say that the Creator of the Universe is none other than the God of the Bible; Muslims point to Allah as the Creator, while theistic Hindus point to Parameshwar (The Great God).

If someone asks “well, who created God?” we have to answer that only things that *began* to exist must have been caused, and that since God always existed, He is uncaused. Those who once found no difficulty in affirming that the universe was eternal should find no difficulty in accepting that the Creator of the universe is eternal!

## 2. The universe is running down

Science provides a second line of argument that the universe must have had a beginning, based on the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

This law states (a) that the universe is running out of usable energy and (b) that the universe is subject to entropy—that is, that all things gradually slide into disorder and decay. This is a matter of everyday experience. Your car, refrigerator, TV and computer all eventually deteriorate and need replacing. The human body gradually wears out and dies. If the universe were eternal it would have run out of ‘gas’ before now and would have fallen apart long ago. Since it hasn’t, the universe is not eternal; it must have had a beginning. Who or what caused it to begin? Someone or Something caused matter and energy, space and time to begin to exist. First, there was nothing, then the “Big Bang” or “Big Surge” and the universe came into being. Sir Arthur Eddington, by no means a believer, made the astounding remark, “The beginning seems to present insuperable difficulties *unless we agree to look on it as frankly supernatural*” (italics mine).

Astronomer Robert Jastrow, an agnostic, said astronomers, “Have proven...that the world began abruptly in an act of creation...the result of forces they cannot hope to discover...*That there are supernatural forces at work, is now, I think, a scientifically proved fact*” (italics mine). In fact, Nobel Prize winner Robert Wilson said, “I can’t think of a better theory of the origin of the universe (The Big Bang) to match with Genesis”.



In finding that the universe was caused by forces other than natural forces, scientists are really affirming that the universe was in fact caused by *supra-natural* forces, thus endorsing the Biblical view of a supernatural creation by a supernatural creator!

### **3. The universe is fine-tuned for the existence of life**

Scientists call this the “anthropic principle” (from Gk. *Anthropos*, meaning man or human). What this fancy phrase means is that very precise and interdependent environmental conditions operate in the universe and on planet earth in particular, which make all life, human, animal and plant life eminently possible. These environmental conditions are called “anthropic constants” and there are some 122 such environmental constants such as the precise levels of oxygen, carbon dioxide, water vapour, the thickness of the earth’s crust, the speed of light, the precise tilt of the earth’s axis and gravity, to name a few. Even slight variations of one or two of these and the earth is liable to freeze up or burn up. For example Jeffrey Zweerink, a research physicist at UCLA, stated that if the gravitational force were altered ever so minutely, say by 0.0000000...(37 zeros)...01 %, our sun would not exist and we wouldn’t be here! The likelihood of all these constants being the result of mere chance is almost zero, says astrophysicist Hugh Ross, like one chance in 10 to the power of 138, i.e. 10 with 137 zeros, or one in several billion billions! Cosmologist Ed Harrison says this “fine-tuning of the universe is *prima facie* evidence of deistic design” and, says physicist Robin Collins,

“Some intelligent being had intentionally and carefully designed and prepared (the universe) to support living creatures”. Many atheistic scientists agree, as I have already mentioned. Astronomer Fred Hoyle commented, “Some super intellect has monkeyed with physics...chemistry and biology and there are no blind forces...in nature”.

Again, Christians and other theists find much encouragement and confirmation for their beliefs in a theistic universe. The shoe is, in fact, on the other foot now, with some atheists, naturalists and evolutionists clinging in blind faith to the belief that this universe is eternal, the result of blind chance and natural selection, whereas it seems far more likely that the universe is the result of the work of an intelligent creator and designer. “The creation/evolution debate is not about religion vs. science, it’s about good science vs. bad science...it’s about reasonable faith vs. unreasonable faith,” say Norman Geisler and Frank Turek. It’s about one theory (evolution) against a better theory (creation).

#### **4. Evidence from biochemistry shows purpose and design**

The amazing and incredible complexity of the cell is further strong evidence against Darwinism, argues Michael Behe, professor of molecular biochemistry. The cell exhibits all the complexity of a modern factory and could not be the result of piece-by-piece assembly (which, interestingly enough, Darwin admitted). In 1859 Darwin wrote, “If it could be demonstrated that any complex

organ existed, which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down”. And it seems it may have broken down! There are many such organs, systems and processes, e.g. the cell. These molecular machines are not simple but are irreducibly complex, like a car engine, for example. You can’t change one part, say the size of the pistons, without changing the rest of the engine, such as the cylinders, if it is to function. Evolution cannot produce a complex biological machine (the cell) suddenly, all at once, because it is much too complex, so the micro-biochemists tell us. This is “strong evidence of a purposeful, intentional design by an intelligent agent,” says Behe.

#### **5. The evidence of DNA implies a highly capable and intelligent “Creator”**

Molecular biologists tell us that for the chemicals in a cell to function properly they need the right information as to “how to arrange them in a very specific configuration” to tell the cell’s machinery (remember, it’s like a factory) how to produce proteins required for the cell’s continued functioning. “The amount of organised information required by the human DNA *exceeds the amount of information in the entire (30 volumes) Encyclopaedia Britannica,*” said George S. Johnson in *The Wall Street Journal* on October 15, 1999.

Only a highly capable and intelligent agent could be responsible to provide such information. “This kind of information is invariably the result of mind – not

## Dr. Richard Bowie: Does Christian Faith make sense?

chance, not natural processes,” said Stephen C. Mayer. Chance cannot produce information any more than the various parts of a computer, if thrown together on a table, can produce a computer or the type fonts in an old time printer’s shop, if thrown onto a table, can produce one of Shakespeare’s plays! The human brain, weighing less than 1.3 kg, has ten thousand million of these nerve cells, each cell sending out enough fibres to create a thousand million million connections. It would take a lot of faith to believe all this happened by accident over billions of years, rather than the result of an intelligent designer, whom we believe is the God of the Bible.

I close this section with a comment from John Baumgardner, identified by *U.S. News & World Report* as “the world’s pre-eminent expert” in computer designed models for “geophysical convection”. He said, “If ever there was in the history of mankind clear evidence for a super intelligence behind what we see today, it’s the genetic code. Incredibly complex information structures, coded in DNA, form the genetic blueprints for every living organism. Evolutionists have absolutely no clue as to how such structures could arise by natural processes, much less how the code itself could come into existence”.

Belief in God as intelligent, wise and benevolent creator of the universe is not only most consistent with the best of modern science, but it also seems the only logical conclusion that can be drawn from the findings of science. Two thousand years ago, John the Evangelist wrote under divine inspiration, “In the beginning was the Word

(*reason, intelligence, wisdom*) and the Word was with God and the Word was God...Through Him all things (Gk. *Ta Panta* – the entire universe) were made and without Him nothing was made” (Jn. 1:1f).

### **What kind of a Creator?**

Can science’s findings about the universe tell us what sort of a creator brought about this amazing universe?

There are some signals as to a few of the characteristics of this creator, such as:

- He is self-existent, without limit and eternal.
- He is personal – capable of creating human beings with whom He can enter into personal relations and who can similarly relate personally to Him and one another.
- He has supreme intelligence and power to create such a universe that functions with such precision at planetary levels, as well as at atomic and sub atomic levels, as I have indicated.
- He is highly creative and imaginative to design such a universe with organic beings, in particular human beings, “so fearfully and wonderfully made”.
- He is the Life-Giver.
- He is supernatural and acts supra-naturally in creating and sustaining the universe. Within His universe, He also works from time to time in ways that defy explanation and can only be called “miracles” of His creativity. The laws of nature

are not something outside the realm of the Creator but simply describe how He normally works. Miracles are how He works on special occasions – just as by a “miracle” He brought about the universe in the first place. Such a Creator may, if He chooses, take upon Himself a human body, turn water into wine, multiply a few pieces of bread to feed thousands of people, still a storm with a word or bring a dead person to life, all for His benevolent purposes without being arbitrary. Having created beings that have a strong moral sense, He is the author of all moral law.

- Finally, He is a loving Creator, having created beings capable of loving Him and each other.

All this information about the Creator of the universe can be deduced from the nature of the universe *without reference* to the Bible! Yet it is in perfect accord with the Bible. This is why we can affirm, without hesitation or fear of contradiction, that the Creator of the universe, whom we meet in science, is none other than the God of the Bible, the God of Jews and Christians. No wonder Paul, in writing to the Roman Christians in the 1st century, could say, “What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain... For since the creation of the world, God’s invisible qualities – His eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen from what He has made, so that men are without excuse (Rom. 1.19f).

## **Conclusion**

As leaders, we owe it to ourselves and to our people to acquaint ourselves with information of this nature so that we can give an answer to genuine enquirers who ask, and hopefully remove some of their objections to believing in God. Eventually, one may be able to point them to His Son Jesus Christ, the fullest revelation of God available to humans. Creation offers natural revelation of God, while Jesus and the Bible offer special revelation of God. That's the subject of a later chapter.

Our young people should be equipped as they go into universities and places of higher learning to give reasons for their faith and be able to stand up to arrogant (and, alas, sometimes ignorant) professors who ridicule the faith of many Christian young people and cause them to stumble. Christians should also urge educational authorities to afford them the right to teach alternatives to the current theory of evolution and thus allow students to judge for themselves instead of forcing down their throats a theory now seen to have so many holes in it.

# Chapter 4:

## Can the Gospels be trusted?

*“Since I have investigated all the reports in close detail, starting from the story’s beginning, I decided to write it all out for you, most honourable Theophilus, so you can know beyond the shadow of a doubt the reliability of what you were taught” (Luke 1.1).*

Can we really rely on such ancient documents, supposedly written some 20 centuries ago, to give us a reliable record of whom Jesus was and what He did and taught? How can we respond to people who might ask this question? Christians believe that we can rely on the truth of the Gospels as regards Jesus. Jesus Himself promised that the Holy Spirit would reveal to the disciples the truths about Him and lead them into all truth (Jn. 14:16). That’s good enough for believers.

However, this does not cut much ice with secular-minded people. They would like to know if the Gospels can stand up to the tests that ordinary historians normally apply in order to get at the truths about ancient leaders, personalities and events. We Christians agree. And that’s our second reason for believing in the



## Dr. Richard Bowie: Does Christian Faith make sense?

truths of the Gospels, namely that they do stand up to accepted standards of historical investigation, as I shall try to show.

How do we know what is true about Julius Caesar or Alexander the Great or, for that matter, any of the ancients? How did the ancients preserve and pass on the facts about great men, women and events? They had none of the tape recorders or computers that we find indispensable today to keep accurate records and data. We must be careful not to judge their standards by our modern technology. Yet they were amazingly successful in preserving essentially true data and information so that we can accept without too much question what we learn in the classroom about Caesar, Hannibal, Alexander the Great and others. Yet some people refuse to accept the Gospel records as essentially preserving the truths of what Jesus taught and did.

As a result, the Gospels and the New Testament have been subjected to the most rigorous critical examination by historical, textual and linguistic experts and found to be authentic and historically accurate. Barring a relatively few scholars on the fringe who, for theological and philosophical presuppositions (rather than on historical grounds), regard the Gospels as largely unhistorical; most others accept the four canonical Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John as authentic. A few extreme scholars, with insufficient evidence, say that 80% of Jesus' sayings in the Gospels are inauthentic.

### **So how did the ancients preserve history?**

First, we must remember that the ancients had a strong culture of *memorisation*. In the case of the Jews, this oral tradition was particularly strong – going back long before Jesus. The authors behind the books of the Old Testament and their auditors memorised, told and retold the stories of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the subsequent histories of the Judges and the Kings, from generation to generation. They also succeeded in preserving whole sections of the Psalms and other poetic and wisdom segments of the Old Testament often made easier because of the poetic form called Hebrew parallelism. Children in the elementary schools and in the schools run by the synagogues were taught to memorise.

For the disciples, and especially the Apostles, to remember many of the works and words of Jesus was not as much a problem as it would be for us who have largely lost the art of memorisation, depending heavily instead on modern technology. However, some older Christians (like me) were brought up to memorise important verses of the Bible. Indeed, as a young Christian I recall challenging myself to memorise the 108 Bible verses recommended by the Navigators, plus Isaiah 53 and the whole of John's Gospel (I only got as far as the first three chapters). To this day, 50 years later, I can recall large numbers of Bible passages that I memorised as a young Christian.

Second, followers of prominent Rabbis often jotted down their favourite sayings using a rough kind of shorthand, much as we might do today when writing

notes of a sermon or a lecture. Rainer Raisner, who has done extensive studies of ancient Jewish writers, suggested this was the case with some of the followers of the revered “Rabbi Jesus”.

Third, what of Greco-Roman culture? The Greeks in particular were careful about preserving information accurately. The Greek historian Thucydides, 400 years before Christ, in reporting the speeches he had heard wrote, *“I have given the speeches in the manner in which it seemed to me that each of the speakers would best express what needed to be said... but I have kept as close as possible to the total opinion expressed by the actual words”*.

In the same vein, Luke, writing in the Hellenistic milieu in which he lived, wrote in his introduction to the Gospel of Luke, *“Many have undertaken to draw up an account... just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses... Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account”* (Luke 1:1-4, italics mine).

The ancient Greek and Roman writers certainly were not free to embellish or develop the material they were reporting. Why then do some modern sceptics feel it necessary to theorise that the followers of Jesus embellished and put their own spin on the teachings of Jesus to the extent of making Him say things which (they claim) He never said, such as that He was the divine Son of God, Messiah and Saviour of the world, and that He performed those many and great miracles? The sceptics say He was

only an ordinary Jewish peasant, sage and teacher. In this way, they discount large sections of the Gospels (in some cases over 50%, including 90% of John's Gospel) as not the authentic teachings of Jesus, but later embellishments by Christians trying to commend Jesus to the outsider. Their evidence for making these claims is paltry and highly questionable. One can only think they must have some preconceived notions that cause them to reject historical data. Others, influenced by Existentialism, sit loosely to historical data anyway by mythologizing it.

Fourth, Jerusalem was the centre of Christian leadership during the first century of the Christian era, and those leaders such as James, the brother of our Lord, Peter and others would have taken the responsibility to preserve and ensure that the teachings of Jesus were properly and correctly passed on. They would have quickly stamped out what they suspected were false ideas or embellishments put forward by anyone. The actions of the first Church council in Acts 15 are an instructive example of the kind of action they took at that time.

Fifth, while there is strong basic agreement about Jesus among the various Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, as well as the writings of Paul and Peter, slight variations of detail are not sufficient to disqualify the main block of the Gospel tradition. Half a dozen people reporting the same incident may be expected to faithfully represent the broad facts and some variation of detail is to be accepted as a mark of authenticity without the charge of collusion.

New Testament scholars agree there were several “sources” circulating from which the Gospels emerged, including material special to Matthew, called “M”, material special to Luke, called “L”, and a hypothetical source of material common to Matthew and Mark, called “Q”. Luke was probably aware of some of these sources as he hinted in the introduction to his Gospel as indicated above. There were also strands of material circulating from which John’s Gospel was put together. Suffice to say that in the absence of our modern methods of data recording, the Jews, Greeks and Romans did remarkably well in memorising, recording and passing on to posterity the information and teaching of some of the great figures of history, including that of Jesus of Nazareth.

Speaking of John’s Gospel (which sceptics tend to dismiss too easily), New Testament scholar and historian Paul Barnet, in commenting on John’s familiarity with the topography of southern Palestine, says, “It is difficult to escape the conclusion” that the author of the fourth Gospel is basing his material on existing history and geography. He cites the comment of noted archaeologists Myers and Strange, “These examples could be multiplied many times and supplemented with examples of lore, customs and other bits of information known to the author of this Gospel. The point we wish to make...is simply that an unprejudiced reading of the Gospel of John seems to suggest that it is in fact based on a historical and geographical tradition...not one that simply repeats information from the synoptics”.

Sixth, we should not forget that five of the nine N.T. writers were friends and eyewitnesses of Jesus. They proclaimed what they had seen and heard and were not relying on hearsay! Read the words of John in Jn. 1:1-4: *“What we have seen and heard, and our hands have handled we declare to you of the Word of Life”*. And Peter in II Pet. 1:16-18, *“We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received honour and glory from God...saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased’”*. The other writers of the N.T., Luke and Paul, were close associates of the Apostles. If any one of these writers was inventing stories about Jesus, one can be sure there were hundreds of people around who would have contradicted them, including the hierarchy at Jerusalem. It is significant that Paul, in reporting the resurrection of Jesus, mentions that of the more than 500 of those who had seen Jesus alive after his crucifixion, most were still living at the time Paul was writing, around 55 AD. No evidence exists to support the notion that all this was “invented”. Besides, why would these early believers invent stories about Jesus’ divinity when that was the very thing they were being persecuted for by both Jews and Romans and that eventually some of them would have to die for it? It doesn’t make sense.

Seventh, when were these documents and Gospels written? Certainly not generations later. The fact is that, since several of these early writers were actual eyewitnesses, they most likely wrote down their materials before the

critical date of 70 AD, which is when Jerusalem and the revered Jewish temple were destroyed, since there is no mention of these significant events in the Gospels or the writings of Paul. The fact that James was executed in 62 AD suggests the Book of Acts was written by Luke before 62 AD, as he refers to James as still alive. That would mean that Luke's first volume of the Gospel of Luke had to have been written still earlier, possibly 60 AD, according to some scholars. Hence, Mark would have been written before 60, possibly 55 or 56 AD – less than 20 years after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection! That's far too early for legends to appear, especially considering that many or most of Jesus' disciples and followers were still alive and could verify the veracity or otherwise of statements about Jesus.

Paul's earliest writing, I Corinthians, was also written about 55-56 AD. In it, he says he received the tradition (about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus) from the Apostles Peter and James when he visited them three years after his conversion (Gal. 1:18), which would be around 38 AD – just five years after the crucifixion (generally assumed to be in 33 AD). In other words, the tradition was well in circulation five years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. New Testament scholar, Gary Habermas suggests one and a half to eight years, which makes the dating of the earliest records around 40 AD. This accords well with the findings of famed New Testament scholar J.A.T. Robinson, who posited that most of the New Testament was written between 40-65 AD.

Eighth, there is corroborating historical evidence outside and apart from the N.T. non-Christian writers of that period confirm at least twelve facts about Jesus. These writers were by no means sympathetic to Christians and include Josephus, the Jewish historian; Tacitus, a Roman historian; Seutonius; Pliny, the Governor of Bithynia; and Lucian, a Greek writer. If anything, they were biased against Christianity! Yet these are some of the facts they recorded:

*Jesus lived during the time of Tiberius Caesar;  
He lived a virtuous life; He was a wonder worker;  
He had a brother named James; He was acclaimed  
to be the Messiah;*

*He was crucified under Pontius Pilate; He was  
crucified on the eve of the Passover; Darkness  
and an earthquake occurred when He died; His  
disciples believed He rose from the dead; They were  
willing to die for their belief; Christianity spread  
rapidly as far as Rome; His disciples denied the  
Roman gods and worshipped Jesus as God.*

If we had no Bible, Jesus Christ would still have been known to the world through the secular historians! And if he was just a harmless Jewish sage from Galilee, why did non-Christian writers bother to notice Him at all?

Ninth, archaeology has confirmed the historical reliability of the Gospels. Names of political personalities, rulers and governors such as Quirinius, Pilate, Herod, Caiphas the High Priest, as well as historical and



## Dr. Richard Bowie: Does Christian Faith make sense?

geographical sites such as Solomon's Porch, the five porticoes at the pool of Bethesda, and towns such as Cana, Tiberius and Sychar have received confirmation from archaeologists' findings.

Tenth, the authenticity and accuracy of the New Testament is well corroborated by the huge volume of the early manuscripts and versions of the Gospels, Gospel portions and N.T documents available today. As an example, the writings of Julius Caesar, from about the same time as the Gospels, are corroborated by ten copies of manuscripts, the first of which was not found until nearly 1,000 years after Caesar died, and their accuracy is dubbed by scholars as "uncertain". By contrast, the earliest manuscript of parts of the N.T. was found just 130 years after Jesus and today we have over 5,700 of such manuscripts and versions (so comparison for accuracy is far better determined) – and the accuracy is reckoned by scholars to be 99.95%! A glance at the table below should prove instructive:

### Comparison of ancient texts\*

<u>Author</u>	<u>Date</u> <u>Written</u>	<u>Earliest</u> <u>Copy Found</u>	<u>Copies</u>	<u>Accuracy</u>
Caesar	1st C. BC	900 AD	10	uncertain
Tacitus	c.100 AD	100 AD	20	uncertain
Livy	1st C. BC	—	20	uncertain
Herodotus	5th C. BC	900 AD	8	uncertain
Demosthenes	4th C. BC	1100 AD	200	uncertain
Homer	9th C. BC	—	643	95 %
New Testament	1st C. AD	c. 130 AD	5,700	99.95 %

\*Adapted from Norman Geisler.

Summing up, the following criteria used by historians demonstrate in a remarkable way the authenticity and historicity of the New Testament and, in particular, the Gospels.

1. Is there early testimony? Yes, from as early as five to eight years after Jesus.
2. Do we have eyewitness testimony? Yes, five of the nine N.T. writers were eyewitnesses.
3. Are there multiple eyewitness and independent testimony? Again yes, as we have shown, including many hostile, non-Christian writers.
4. Are the eyewitnesses trustworthy? The character of the writers Peter, John, Matthew, Mark and James cannot be shown to be impeachable.
5. Do we have corroborating evidence? Yes, both non-Christian writers and archaeologists have confirmed many of the details.
6. Do we have enemy attestation? Yes, most of the non-Christian writers, like Josephus, Tacitus and Lucian, were unsympathetic toward Christianity.

As Geisler and Turek put it, “Documents that meet most or all of these historical tests are considered trustworthy beyond reasonable doubt”.

Cynics and critics contend that since Jesus was a good man, He could never have claimed to be God. The early Christians invented and embellished the sayings of Jesus, especially John, who wrote His Gospel later than

the others and put words into the mouth of Jesus claiming divinity.

When you think about this, you will realise how absurd it is, first because it's not only John's Gospel that shows Jesus as making divine claims, but also the other three Gospels concur. Mark, the earliest Gospel, shows Jesus forgiving the paralytic's sins, accepting worship and saying before the High Priest when asked if He was the divine Messiah and Son of God, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man at the right hand of God and coming in the clouds of Heaven" (Mark 14.62). At which point the High Priest tore his garments, accused Jesus of blasphemy and said, "Why do we need any further witnesses?"

In the second place, as I mentioned earlier, why would the Apostles invent Jesus' divinity when that very claim that the crucified one was the divine Messiah was what got them into trouble with *both* the Jewish and the Roman authorities, and got them persecuted, thrown into prison and eventually killed?

The main reason I suggest as to why many secularists and sceptics reject the divinity of Christ and the authenticity of the New Testament is prejudice against anything supernatural, especially a supernatural creator God, based on preconceived ideas, naturalism and a now-outdated evolutionary worldview. In particular, they cannot comprehend the possibility of God becoming man in Jesus.

At heart, it's the now-outdated modernistic idea that you can't believe anything that cannot be proved or

demonstrated by the five senses and reason and a rather limited awareness of the latest discoveries in the sciences, which tend to support creation of this universe by a supra-natural creator or God, as I have shown earlier. Miracles such as God becoming a human being or Jesus rising from the dead are quite in keeping with the new scientific worldview. As indicated in Chapter 2, the world of science has changed and many scientists have moved away from the idea of this universe being eternal, the result of chance evolution, to the idea that this universe came about by deliberate design of a super-intelligent Creator who is beyond nature or 'supra'-natural. Since, therefore, this universe itself is a supernatural miracle by a supernatural Creator God, for this God to perform a further miracle and incarnate Himself into our human life in Jesus Christ to save the world, seems to me to be eminently reasonable. For the same reason, is it reasonable to believe in prophecies, miracles – and especially the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead?

What we have in the Gospels and N.T. are historically valid documents that bear witness to the Divine miracle of the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of the Son of God. As John unambiguously announced, “And the Word became flesh and lived among us and we saw His glory, the glory of the One and only Son of God” (Jn. 1:14). And like Thomas of old, we too may fall at Jesus' feet and confidently exclaim 'My Lord and my God.'

But that's our final subject.

# Chapter 5:

## Is Jesus Christ just a great man?

*“They tried all the harder to kill Him; not only was He breaking the Sabbath but He was...making Himself equal with God” (John 5.18).*

On the fact of Jesus being human, there is no debate. Almost everyone agrees He was a real person in history, born as a babe in Bethlehem; he grew up under the watchful eyes of Joseph and Mary. He was definitely human as He felt hunger, thirst, pain and tiredness. He wept and felt disappointment. He was tempted and finally suffered and died on a cross at the hands of His enemies. That He was also a great human being, almost all agree.

However, for 2,000 years the Church in almost all its branches, Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant believed that Jesus was also divine, the eternal Son of God and, as the Nicene Creed puts it, “God from God, Light from Light, Very God from Very God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father”.

The Church also had accepted the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John as canonical and part of Scripture, as well as the rest of the books of the New Testament. These books, as mentioned earlier, have been

subjected to the most rigorous and thorough examination by scholars of any literature in the world, and have come out unscathed and still recognised by the Church at large, of all shades, Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant, as authentic and part of the canon of Scripture.

These documents affirm that Jesus is God and the Church has continued to believe it for 2,000 years as affirmed by the Creeds. Christians pray to Jesus Christ and worship Him as God. The hymns and sacred songs glorify Him as God; millions have staked their lives on it. Tens of thousands have been martyred for this belief and the world is a different place because of who Jesus Christ is.

There have always been some, though, calling themselves Christians who have rejected the divinity of Jesus Christ, such as the Arians in the 4th century, present day Jehovah's Witnesses and, in very recent years, a fringe group of well-educated scholars calling themselves *The Jesus Seminar*. They proclaim that Jesus is not God and never claimed to be God, never did all those amazing miracles and certainly did not bodily rise from the dead. They claim the story is an ancient piece of Christian mythology. For them, Jesus was just another human being, certainly a sage and wise teacher and a holy man, but not divine. Some of them claim Jesus was a religious genius, others that he was a social revolutionary. One of the founding fathers of this fringe group, Dominic Crossan, says, "The historical Jesus was a peasant Jewish cynic...his strategy, implicitly for himself and explicitly for his followers, was the combination of free healing and

common eating, a religious and economic egalitarianism that negated...Jewish religion and Roman power”.

Another of their scholars, Marcus Borg, claims that Jesus was a “Spirit person” for whom God “was an experiential reality” but “not transcendent Creator”. This “Spirit” is “all around us” on a par with the Spirit as conceived in all the various religions by different names, “Yahweh, Brahman, Atman, Allah...Tao...etc”. In that case, there is nothing unique about Jesus. He’s on a par with other “Spirit persons” such as Buddha, Mohammed, Confucius, etc. That’s not the Christian faith that has come down from the New Testament and early Church fathers to this day and embodied in the Creeds – it’s an attempt to accommodate the Gospel to the secular mindset of today. This attempt is well intentioned, perhaps, but betraying the same weaknesses which have bedevilled modernism, namely confining the gaining of knowledge only through the five senses and reason and completely rejecting revelation.

We need to go back and examine again the Gospels and the New Testament to listen to what those who were in close touch with Jesus had to say and their reports of what Jesus Himself claimed and did. As I mentioned earlier, the critics and cynics tell us, without sufficient evidence, that the N.T. writers didn’t always report accurately and were giving their own later opinions and not really what Jesus said or taught. The Gospels and the New Testament writings are the work of actual eyewitnesses and colleagues and associates of those

eyewitnesses and not later developments. Their writings are very early and not generations later.

### **1. Jesus claimed to be God and accepted worship**

At various times and on different occasions He said things like this, “I and my Father are One”; “He who has seen me has seen the Father”; “Before Abraham was born I am”; “I am the Resurrection and the Life, he who lives and believes in me will never die”; “I did not come to judge the world but to save the world”; “He who believes in me will not perish but have everlasting life”; “The Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins”; “All authority in Heaven and earth are given to me”; “You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming in the clouds of heaven”. (See Jn. 3:16; 8:58; 10:30; 14:9; Mark 2:10; 14:62). Like the disciples, we too are constrained to ask, “Who can this be?” Jesus also accepted worship from various people – the Canaanite woman, the rich young ruler and Thomas, a Jew, who, after the resurrection, fell at Jesus’ feet and exclaimed, “My Lord and my God”.

Remember the Jewish creed was embodied in the words, “Hear O Israel, the Lord thy God, the Lord is One”. Jesus showed no signs of correcting Thomas or any of the others that fell at His feet and worshipped Him. Recall, on the other hand, when people at Lystra tried to worship Paul and Silas after seeing their miracles and hearing their teachings, Paul protested vehemently and forbade them saying, “Get up, we are but men like



yourselves”. Jesus never protested in this way when people were moved to worship Him.

## **2. The Prophets substantiated His claims to Divinity**

After all, anyone can make great claims – as many in the past have done. Various Jews arose in history claiming to be the Messiah, such as Bar Cochba did 100 years after Christ. How could those 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews (or people in any century for that matter) recognise who the true divine Messiah was and who was an impostor?

Jesus miraculously fulfilled some 190 ancient prophecies according to some scholars, and many of those prophecies were given more than 700 years before He was born! Here’s a sampling:

- The Messiah would be a divine figure and come to earth as a baby – Isa. 9:6. Notice the epithets given to this baby “*Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, and of His Kingdom there will be no end*”. A baby – called a Mighty God? Strange, coming from a Hebrew prophet!
- His birth would be miraculously from a virgin – Isa. 7:14
- He would be born in Bethlehem – Micah 5:2
- Of the seed of Abraham – Gen. 12:1-3
- Of the tribe of Judah – Gen. 49:10
- Of the House of David – II Sam. 7:12f
- He would be anointed by the Holy Spirit – Isa. 11:2

## Dr. Richard Bowie: Does Christian Faith make sense?

- He would die a humiliating death – Isa. 53:1-12
- He would rise from the dead – Ps. 2:7
- He would ascend to heaven and sit at the right hand of God – Ps. 68:18; 110:1

These are just a few of the many ancient prophecies that Jesus amazingly fulfilled. If he fulfilled, say, only 16 prophecies, the chances of our being mistaken would be less than 1 in  $10^{45}$ ! (Which is one in several billions).

Louis S. Lapidès, a Jew who later became a Christian, was asked, “Was it not possible that Jesus and his followers cleverly maneuvered his life to fulfil the prophecies? He replied, “How would He control the fact that the Sanhedrin offered Judas thirty pieces of silver to betray him? How could he arrange for his ancestry, or the place of his birth or the method of his execution or his resurrection? And how would he arrange to be born when he was?”

### 3. He performed many and mighty miracles

His miracles, mostly out of compassion, attested to His divinity. He said, “If you do not believe me, at least believe the works that I do” (Jn. 5:36). He pointed to His miracles as evidence of His “Messiahship” (Mat. 11:4).

Those who have difficulty believing in miracles should remember that in a theistic universe where everything is dependent on God, He is free to work either “naturally”, either as He usually does or “supernaturally” as He does on particular occasions. In chapter 1, I pointed out how science itself suggests that the creation of the

universe is itself a miraculous, supernatural act on the part of the Creator. For Him to do a further miracle and incarnate Himself into His universe as a human being and through Him do miraculous things for His own higher purposes and for his people's benefit is eminently in keeping with His nature.

**4. Jesus forgave sins – which only God can do.**

Jesus demonstrated His divinity by forgiving the sins of the paralytic (which is the sole prerogative of God) and the truth was demonstrated and confirmed by the man's subsequent healing (Mark 2).

**5. His moral perfection confirmed His divinity**

Even people like Pontius Pilate could not find fault in Him. And He himself said, "Which of you can show any sin in me?"

**6. He transformed the lives of those who were willing to follow Him**

All the disciples found their lives transformed from arrant self-centredness to loving and caring for others and in such loyalty to Christ that they were willing to lay down their lives for Him. Apart from the Apostles, there were people like Mary Magdalene and Zacchaeus who were radically changed by Jesus.

**7. His resurrection confirmed His divinity**

His resurrection from death was God's decisive demonstration of Jesus' divine claims. And there is sufficient evidence for the resurrection. By a combination

of eyewitness evidence with impressive pieces of circumstantial evidence, we can believe that Jesus, once crucified, dead and buried, was raised by God the Creator in an act of re-creation, totally in keeping with His nature. Such pieces of evidence include the empty tomb, the undisturbed grave clothes, and, perhaps most convincingly, the dramatic change in the behaviour of the disciples in the days after the crucifixion.

Speaking of changed attitudes and behaviour, John Polkinghorne says, “Something happened to turn the defeated and demoralised disciples of Good Friday into the confident proclaimers of the Lordship of Christ, just a few weeks later. Eventually...to die for that belief. Whatever induced that transformation must have been of a magnitude commensurate with the total reversal of attitude that it produced”.

The eyewitness evidence for the resurrection is immense. This is not to say that anybody witnessed the actual process of Jesus rising from the dead, but experts in jurisprudence like Sir Norman Anderson tell us that in the first place, all that is needed forensically is to find witnesses who could testify that Jesus was actually dead. Of that there were many, including the Jewish hierarchy and the Roman guards. In the second place, were there any witnesses who later actually saw Him alive? If so, that is sufficient forensic evidence that resurrection had taken place. Again, there are many. Peter was one of those and said so, “God has raised this Jesus to life and we are all witnesses of the fact” (Luke reporting in Acts 2:32). Later

John, along with Peter, said, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what *we have seen and heard*” (Acts 4:18ff, italics mine). Or Thomas, whom we earlier mentioned who fell at the feet of the risen Jesus and shouted, “My Lord and my God”. Later Paul, an associate of Peter, James and John, wrote of the tradition he had received from the apostles that over 500 others had seen the risen Jesus (I Cor. 15:1ff).

Sir Lionel Luckhoo, named in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the world’s most successful lawyer, honoured by Her Majesty the Queen of England, became a believer late in life. He said, “I have spent more than 42 years as a defence trial lawyer... I have been fortunate to secure a number of successes in jury trials and I say unequivocally the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is so overwhelming that it compels acceptance by proof which leaves no room for doubt”.

Sir Edward Clarke, former King’s Counsel, said, “I have made a prolonged study of the evidences for the events of the first Easter Day...the evidence is conclusive...over and over again in the High Court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling”.

Physicist John Polkinghorne writes, “The only explanation commensurate with the phenomena is that Jesus rose from the dead in such a fashion...that He is alive to-day, glorified and exalted...still...related with the historical figure who lived in Palestine”.

## Dr. Richard Bowie: Does Christian Faith make sense?

As a result, we find the earliest Apostles, some of who were also eyewitnesses, making statements such as:

**Peter:** “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts. 2:36). “It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed” (Acts 4:10).

**John:** “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God...Through Him all things were made...In Him was life and that life was the light of men...He was in the world and through Him the world was made, but the world did not recognise Him.... The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us and we have seen His glory....” (John 1:1-14).

**And Paul:** “He was the image of the invisible God...by Him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth.... He is before all things and in Him all things hold together....and in Him all the fullness of the Godhead dwells” (Col. 1:15-19); God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19f).

But the critics are not satisfied. Say the critics, all this is from the Bible. Our response is, “Why not?” We are talking history here, not just theology, as I have pointed out in the previous chapter. We happen to be quoting from well-documented historical literature comprising 27 first-century documents by nine different authors. If you reject these as unhistorical, give us the evidence. They can’t.

In fact, if one rejects the historical evidence of the N.T., one might as well reject all ancient history and not believe in Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar or the writings of Homer, since (as I have shown) there is far more historical certainty about Jesus than about all these other ancient figures.

Most people agree that Jesus was a good man. However, a man who claimed to be God and believed Himself to be God cannot be “a good man”. He would be insane. Or, if He claimed to be God but knew He wasn’t, He would be a blaspheming liar. Or, He really was God. C.S. Lewis put it well when he commented on people who say that Jesus was a great moral teacher but they cannot accept him as God. “That is the one thing we cannot say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would rather be a lunatic – on a level with a man who says he’s a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil from Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was and is the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit on Him and kill Him as a demon, or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher, He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to”.

To those who say that the whole Jesus thing was a myth, Dr. Peter Kreeft, Professor of Philosophy at Boston College, replies convincingly as follows:

## Dr. Richard Bowie: Does Christian Faith make sense?

1. The texts do not have the quality of myths. They are eyewitness accounts.
2. They expressly claim to be eyewitnesses and repudiate the idea of being myths (II Pet. 1:16).
3. Jesus' followers were Jews, not pagans, and therefore not likely to follow pagan myths about gods dying and rising again.
4. No mythic symbol has ever revolutionised the world and changed millions of lives – softening hard Roman hearts, turning cowards into heroes, timid men and women into martyrs and sinners into saints.
5. A mythical cause is far too weak to produce the immense historical effect that Jesus has done.

He concludes, “If Christ is not God, why has this lie made people better people than any truth has ever made them”.



## Notes

- Barnett, Paul. *Is the New Testament History?* Sydney: Aquila Press, 2004.
- Barr, Stephen. "Retelling the Story of Science". *First Things*, 131 (2003): 16-25.
- Blanchard, John. *Has Science Got Rid of God?* New York: Evangelical Press, 2004.
- Borg, Marcus. *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*. San Francisco: Harper, 1994.
- Carson, D.A. *The Gagging of God*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.
- Clifford, Ross. *The Case for the Empty Tomb*. New South Wales: Albatross Books, 1993.
- Crossan, John. *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*. San Francisco: Harper, 1994.
- Eddington, Arthur. *The Expanding Universe*. New York: Macmillan.
- Geisler, Norman, and Frank Turek. *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004.

- Geisler, Norman, and Paul Hoffman. *Why I Am a Christian*. Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 2003.
- Geisler, Norman. *Christian Apologetics*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976.
- Grenz, Stanley. *A Primer on Postmodernism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.
- Heuren, Fred. *Show Me God*. Wheeling: Dayton, 2000.
- Jastrow, Robert. Article in *Christianity Today*, Aug. 6, 1982.
- Kung, Hans. *Freud and the Problem of God*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.
- Lewis, C.S. *Mere Christianity*. New York: Macmillan, 1952.
- Newbigin, L. *The Finality of Christ*. London: S.C.M., 1968.
- Pearcey, Nancy. "Design and the Discriminating Public" in Wm. Demski & James Kushiner (Eds.), *Signs of Intelligence*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001.
- Polkinghorne, John. *Science and the Christian Faith/The Faith of a Physicist*. London: SPCK, 1994.
- Polkinghorne, John. *Science and Theology*. London: SPCK, 1998.
- Sagan, Carl. *Cosmos*. New York: Random House.
- Strobel, Lee. *The Case for a Creator*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.

Strobel, Lee. *The Case for Christ*. Grand Rapids:  
Zondervan, 1998.

Wilkins, Michael, and J.P. Moreland. *Jesus Under Fire*.  
Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.

Zacharias, Ravi. *The Real Face of Atheism*. Grand Rapids:  
Baker Books, 2004.

## For Further Reading

- Barnett, Paul. *Is the New Testament History?* Sydney: Aquila Press, 1986.
- Behe, Michael. *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution.* New York: Touchstone, 1996.
- Blanchard, John. *Has Science Got Rid of God?* New York: Evangelical Press, 2004.
- Blomberg, Craig. *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels.* Downers Grove: IVF, 1987.
- Bruce, F.F. *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960.
- Carson, D.A. *The Gagging of God.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.
- Clifford, Ross. *The Case for the Empty Tomb.* New South Wales: Albatross Books, 1993.
- Craig, W.L. *Assessing the N.T. Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus.* Lewiston: Edwin Mellin, 1989.
- Denton, Michael. *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis.* Adler & Adler.
- Drummond, Lewis A. *Reaching Generation Next.* Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002.
- Fernando, Ajith. *I Believe in the Supremacy of Christ.* London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1997.

- Geisler and Douglas. *Bringing Your Faith to Work*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005.
- Geisler and Hoffman. *Why I Am a Christian*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001
- Geisler, Norman, and F. Turek. *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004.
- Geisler, Norman. *Christian Apologetics*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1976.
- Gidoomal, Ram, and M. Fearon. *Karma 'n Chips*. London: Wimbledon Publishing Co., 1994.
- Grenz, Stanley. *A Primer on Post Modernism*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.
- Johnson, Philip. *Darwin on Trial*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993.
- Lewis, C.S. *Mere Christianity*. New York: MacMillan, 1952.
- Lewis, C.S. *Miracles*. UK: Fontana Books, 1960.
- Lewis, C.S. *The Problem of Pain*. Fontana Books, U.K. 1957
- Little, Paul. *Know Why Do You Believe*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1968.
- Marshall, I. Howard, ed. *The Origins of N.T. Christology*. Downers Grove: IVF, 1990.
- McDowell and Hostetler. *Beyond Belief to Convictions*. Wheaton: Tyndale House, 2002.

- Metzger, Bruce. *The Text of the New Testament*. New York: Oxford UP, 1964.
- Morris, Henry. *Men of Science – Men of God*. Master Books.
- Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Finality of Christ*. London: S.C.M, 1968.
- Packer, J.I. *Knowing God*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1973.
- Polkinghorne, John. *Science and Theology*. London: S.P.C.K., 1998.
- Polkinghorne, John. *The Faith of a Physicist*. London: S.P.C.K., 2000.
- Robinson, J.A.T. *Redating the New Testament*. Santa Ana: The Westminster Press, 1976.
- Sire, James. *The Universe Next Door*. Leicester: I.V.P., 2004.
- Stott, John. *Basic Christianity*. Leicester: I.V.P., 1958.
- Stott, John. *The Cross of Christ*. Leicester: I.V.P., 1986.
- Strobel, Lee. *The Case for a Creator*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.
- Strobel, Lee. *The Case for Christ*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.
- Strobel, Lee. *The Case for Faith*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.
- Wilkins, M.J. and J.P. Moreland. *Jesus Under Fire*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.

Williamson and Frost. *Thinking Clearly about God and Science*. Monarch Press.

Yancey, Philip. *Where is God When it Hurts?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990.

Zacharias, Ravi. *Can Man Live without God?* Nashville: W. Publishing Group, 1994.

Zacharias, Ravi. *Cries of the Heart*. Nashville: W. Publishing Group, 1998.

Zacharias, Ravi. *Deliver Us from Evil*. Nashville: W. Publishing Group, 1998.

Zacharias, Ravi. *The Real Face of Atheism*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004.