

Why Is There Something Rather Than Nothing?

The Search for Meaning and Significance in an Impersonal Universe

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“Why is there something rather than nothing?” Gottfried Leibniz

“Jon—”

“Yeah!”

“Any luck yet?”

“No. . . not yet!”

Webster’s Dictionary says the word “fear” was derived from the idea of being “trapped,” and at two o’clock in the morning in a temperate rain forest on Vancouver Island, I knew exactly why that was.

My friend Jon and I had decided it would be a great adventure to backpack the West Coast Trail, a grueling fifty-mile stretch of trail along Vancouver Island’s untamed coastline. We had flown out of Kansas City to Seattle Washington and were making our way to Port Renfrew

on Vancouver Island when the scenery changed dramatically; instead of navigating the predictable, brightly lit streets of Victoria, we found ourselves wandering down a long and desolate road that felt its way through the dark Vancouver forest. At two o'clock in the morning, still short of our hoped-for destination, we decided to call it quits and look for a place to camp.

“Did you see that?” I said, snapping my head around.

Jon stopped the car and backed up to a narrow gravel road leading into the forest.

“What do you think?”

“I think it’s two o'clock in the morning and we need to find a place to camp.”

So Jon pulled the car off onto what appeared to be nothing more than two parallel gravel paths—you could hear the white rock protesting our presence with its gnashing and crunching. As we slowly crept along this overgrown side road there appeared to be a parking lot ahead of us—probably a trailhead parking lot—but the lot was deserted and pitch black. As the car’s headlights moved along the end of the gravel rectangle a black hole in the forest beckoned us like the Sirens of Homer’s *Odyssey*. It was a break in the forest that led down a well worn path.

Excited to get out of our little compact rental car, we began rummaging through our gear in the dim glow of the car’s trunk light looking for a flashlight. Jon pulled out a small Maglight. Self-confident and enthusiastic, we headed off into the darkness with this one small beacon of light.

Though we were on the surface of the earth, it felt as if we were in her bowels; the darkness encased us like the walls of a cave, and the silence of the place was truly unnerving—especially for someone who had grown up in the noisy forests of the Midwest.

As we walked, Jon pointed the small beam of light off to the side of the trail. All we

needed was a place to set up our tent, but what we found instead were boulders the size of cars that sent dark shadows undulating over rough terrain and towering Douglas firs that stretched up into the blackness.

“I don’t think we’re going to find a place here,” Jon shrugged “The terrain’s just too rough.”

After only five or six yards into the forest we decided to turn back.

A few minutes later Jon voiced what I had already been thinking. “Shouldn’t we be back by now?”

We walked a little bit farther, only to have the trail just seem to disappear in front of our eyes.

We were lost.

I’ve been lost before but not like that—a kind of lost that makes your heart feel as though it could burst out of its cage as you hear its violent pounding in your ears. Whether death is imminent or not, losing control of one’s circumstances can be a frightening thing. Facing the fact that we are dependent beings when there is no one to depend on, including ourselves, can be truly terrifying.

An Unjust World

We fear losing control over our circumstances because deep down we know the world is an unjust place, a place where, irrespective of our moral character, sickness or accident can strike us at any moment. We live in a world where it’s often the cheaters who are rewarded and the liars who are exalted, a place where it is not uncommon for the strong to victimize the weak and the rich to steal from the poor with impunity. Solomon said, “It is the same for all. There is one fate

for the righteous and for the wicked As the good man is, so is the sinner; as the swearer is, so is the one who is afraid to swear. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men.”¹ Solomon’s often-quoted saying, “there is a time for every event under heaven—A time to give birth, and a time to die . . . a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance . . . ”², is not about the beautiful seasons of life as so many suppose. Rather it is about the futility and injustices of life. It is about the fact that no matter who we are or what we do, there will be times of weeping and times of laughing; that no matter how good we are or generous or loving, we will have times of mourning and times of dancing; and ultimately it is about the fact that we must all face the same fate—death. Solomon ends his famous saying with, “What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?”³ If life is merely what happens under the sun, “Man does not know whether it will be love or hatred; anything awaits him.”⁴

The ancients fought this fear and despair of injustice with gods made of stone and wood—objects they believed, with enough prayer or sacrifices, could give them protection and prosperity. But today science declares there are no gods capable of providing us with such things, no forces outside of our knowledge which can transform this unjust world into a just one. The forces of gravity are not partial to the innocent; the weight of a heavy object will crush a good man as easily as an evil one.

We have abandoned a world controlled by a God or gods for one controlled by mindless natural laws. But the only way to live in such a world is to ignore this fact and the consequences it

¹ Ecclesiastes 9:1-3 (NASB).

² Ibid., 3:1-9.

³ Ibid., 3:9.

⁴ Ibid., 9:1.

most certainly demands. We must keep ourselves amused at every turn if despair is to be thwarted. Only in the quiet of night, when the TV has been turned off, the music silenced, and the computer shut down, does the fear of living in an unjust world close in on us. Only then do we whisper a prayer in hopes that science is wrong and that there may be a God capable of bringing justice to our world.

Justice implies life has significance and consequences in regard to who we are and what we do. Without justice, we are doomed to live lives of no consequence, of no significance. If there is no judge in heaven who acts, how can life have any hope of meaning or purpose? The great playwright Somerset Maugham wrote,

If one puts aside the existence of God and the possibility of survival as too doubtful to have any effect on one's behavior, one has to make up one's mind what the meaning and use of life is. If death ends all, if I have neither to hope for good to come nor to fear evil, I must ask myself what I am here for, and how in these circumstances must I conduct myself? Now the answer to one of these questions is plain, but so unpalatable that most men will not face it. There is no meaning.

Asaph, the writer of the seventy-third psalm, also realized this truth when he wrote, "Surely God is good to . . . those who are pure in heart!"⁵ But as he contemplated the world, he could find no evidence of this fact. As the wicked taunted him with "How does God know? And is there knowledge with the Most High?"⁶ he realized the hopelessness of a world that exists only under the sun.

⁵ Psalm 73:1-9.

⁶ Ibid., 73:11.

A Choice

Today we are faced with a choice. Is there a God who knows us, who cares for us, and can provide significance to our lives, or do we live in a world of matter and energy alone? Science declares that unknowing and uncaring natural laws have created us, and when we look at the reality around us as Asaph did, the injustice of the world and our seeming insignificance seems inescapable. But if matter and energy are all that exist, we are without hope of purpose, something each one of us needs as surely as we need food and water.

Christianity claims there is an explanation for the seeming lack of justice in the world. The writer of Ecclesiastes says God has set eternity in men's hearts by setting a time for laughter as well as weeping, dancing as well as mourning.⁷ It is not that God does not know or understand our circumstances, but He has postponed justice in order to teach us what it means to love sacrificially and to test our love.

Christ made it very clear that following Him was not the means to prosperity in this life—despite what the health and wealth evangelists proclaim today. In fact He said it would be tribulation that would cause many to abandon the faith.⁸ In a world where good is always repaid with good, love becomes simply the selfish act of pursuing peace and security. We would seek God for what He could do for us, not for what He would have us do for others.

Frankly we often deceive ourselves when it comes to our motives of love and good will; much of what we do in the name of love is in reality self glorification. A businessman once asked Mother Teresa if he could come to Calcutta and work for a few months in the mission. She told

⁷ Ecclesiastes 3:11.

⁸ Matthew 13:21.

him if he truly wanted to do something good, he could take the money he would have spent on the plane ticket and give it to the poor. She saw through his self-serving motives even when he could not. The Apostle Peter said we are being judged to see if our love is genuine here and now.⁹ That is why the Bible says we are to do our good works in secret, not letting even the right hand know what the left hand is doing, because love is serving the needs of others, not feeding our own egos.¹⁰

Each one of us has a choice to make about the injustice of this world. We either ignore the injustices of a world controlled by mindless natural laws, or we hope in a personal creator with a divine plan. But whatever choice we decide to make, I am not so naïve as to believe it will be an easy choice.

Not An Easy Choice

Believing in a God of justice and love in a world of injustices and hatred is not easy. But believing in a world of matter and energy alone is not an easy choice either. As a Christian I have often felt inferior to those who claim science alone can provide us with answers concerning life. I believed that my faith in a personal creator made me inferior because it was irrational. But I have come to realize that believing in a personal creator outside this impersonal world is not irrational. What is irrational is believing life has some purpose, some meaning without a personal creator. Those who live their lives as if they had some purpose, some meaning, without a personal creator are those who are living irrationally.

During a lecture on the nihilism of modern art, the Christian philosopher Francis Schaeffer

⁹ I Peter 4:17.

¹⁰ Matthew 6:1.

was asked by an art student, “What should I do? I want to destroy too.” In a world where matter and energy are all that exist, we fight our despair of being lost with violence. Schaeffer replied to this young man,

I would say to you tonight, that if we live in this intrinsically impersonal world, dress it up if you will with the word pantheism, either in the Eastern thought or in the new theology . . . if this is what I am, and all men are, with their aspirations, if this is all they are, unfulfillable products of chance . . . then come beside me, because I wish to destroy too If I am an artist, I should wish to destroy, I should say with Karel Appel, ‘I do not paint, I hit.’ I should say with John Cage, ‘It is only chance’; with a resultant noise and a devilish din¹¹

If there is no God, we are without hope that our lives have significance and meaning. To truly come to an understanding of what this means is to understand the artist and the young people who desire to destroy. To truly come to an understanding of what it means to live in a world of impersonal matter alone is to become a person who cannot be consoled with the mild sedative of entertainment.

A Fourth Way, Example

How do we reconcile a God of love with a world of suffering and injustice? The Russian author Dostoevsky, in his novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, says through the rebellious son, Ivan, that there are only three ways for our fears to be consoled concerning the suffering of this world and the seeming lack of justice—but God has chosen a fourth.

¹¹ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*, Vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1982), pp. 96, 97.

There are three forces, only three, on this earth that can overcome and capture once and for all the conscience of these feeble, undisciplined creatures, so as to give them happiness. These forces are miracles, mystery, and authority. But You rejected the first, the second, and the third of these forces and set up Your rejection as an example to men.¹²

Example. There is only one way to reconcile a world of injustice and suffering with a God of love and justice and that is through the willing and meaningful participation of that God in the pain and suffering of this world. The God of Christianity became flesh and blood not only to experience our suffering with us, but to teach us what it means to truly love one another, to inspire us to love in the face of injustice, to love irregardless of great suffering and loss. It is in this space and time example of Christ's life that one finds the meaning and purpose of life; that one finds what it means to truly love, and it is in Christ's resurrection that we find the hope that love has meaning.

Finding Our Way

Pascal once said, "Religion is so great a thing that it is right that those who will not take the trouble to seek it, if it be obscure, should be deprived of it." This book is about seeking, it is about understanding what it means to make matter and energy our god, and from there seeking and searching for our purpose in the "living God." If matter and energy are all that exist, we are without hope of purpose, we are lost, and we will be unable to find our true purpose. For if we continue to make matter and energy the sole source of who we are, we will be forced to continue ignoring the injustices of the world. We will be forced to keep love at arm's length, for loving

¹² Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. by Andrew R. Macabre (New York, New York: Banta Books, 1970), p. 307.

others in an unjust world is a terrifying thing. We need only contemplate this fact to know it's true. We need only think of the great sorrows we have suffered as a result of our love and the injustice of this world.

Jon and I found our way out of the forest that night on Vancouver Island, but not by denying or ignoring our true circumstances. Rather we faced our fear and made the effort to find our way back. We embraced life instead of ignoring it. We decided that night that one of us would stand in the dark while the other circled around with the sole flashlight looking for the path that would lead us to safety. Every few minutes we would call out to one another, keeping the person searching oriented and preventing ourselves from becoming even more lost. Eventually we found the trail and got out of the forest. We must search for God in much the same manner, with a fear in the pit of our stomach, but with a determination to keep looking—as the apostle Paul said, we must work out our salvation with fear and trembling. And we must do it together. It is my hope that this book will fulfill that objective.

There is a voice, as Jon's was to me, calling out to us in the dark, a voice that keeps us oriented and from losing our way. That voice is our existence. The philosopher Gottfried Leibniz once asked, "Why is there something rather than nothing?" If there is no God, there is no reason for existence. But we do exist, and that existence demands a reason, a purpose for its existence.

Chapter 2

Hope of Purpose Requires: A God of Purpose

“As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee, O God.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.” King David

Just before writing this book I had a non-Christian friend ask me to read his collection of Carl Sagan books. I had heard of Sagan from his TV programs many years ago, but had never read any of his books. Never one to turn down a challenge or learn something new, I accepted.

Dr. Sagan, I learned, was an educator, astronomer, and a prolific writer for the cause of science. It was unmistakable from his books that he believed science solely capable of giving mankind hope. In a book he coauthored with his wife, Ann Druyan, entitled *Shadow of Forgotten Ancestors*, Sagan writes, through the findings and methods of science, there “may be found a light by which to see our children safely home.”¹³ Science for Sagan was the answer to all of mankind’s problems and the path to prosperity and a peaceful future.

But there is a fatal flaw in Sagan’s reasoning, and what initially seems to be about sound scientific methods and findings, inevitably must turn to idolatry for its hope. The friend who

¹³ Carl Sagan and Ann Druyan, *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (New York: Random House, 1992), p. 415.

loaned me the books may have thought a rational person like myself would see the logic in Sagan's way of thinking. But what happened instead was a keen awareness that without a personal creator we are left without hope and must turn to worshipping idols.

My epiphany concerning modern day idolatry occurred while driving home from church one Sunday morning. I was in my Jeep with the top down and all my senses were attuned to the moment: the fresh smells of spring, the multiple shades of dark and light green leaves, the cool breeze whisking through my hair. As I was taking in this beautiful morning, something occurred to me. For a moment I felt a strange sense of detachment from reality, a touch of melancholy perhaps from reading all those books about how time and chance alone were our creator. As I drove home that morning, I thought maybe Sagan was right. Church that morning seemed to be, as the Christian philosopher Francis Schaeffer has put it, full of "religious language with no reference to reality or historical content," just pie in the sky. Maybe we are nothing more than products of time and chance. To believe that a lightning strike in the primordial sea billions and billions of years ago could create all of this, myself included, was truly a thing to be amazed by—not denied. Then I remembered Sagan's words in response to a quote by George Bernard Shaw. Shaw wrote,

The Darwinian process may be described as a chapter of accidents. As such, it seems simple, because you do not at first realize all that it involves. But when its whole significance dawns on you, your heart sinks into a heap of sand within you. There is a hideous fatalism about it, a ghastly and damnable reduction of beauty and intelligence, of strength and purpose, of honor and aspiration, to such casually picturesque changes as an avalanche may make in a landscape, or a railway accident in a human figure.

Sagan's reply to this inevitable consequence—"Fine words. But what if undreamed-of powers lie hidden in 'inert and dead matter,' given 4 billion years of preserving what works?"¹⁴ We have become like the ancients—worshippers of stone and wood and stars. Sagan's inert and dead matter must have undreamed-of powers because inert and dead matter cannot, by themselves, preserve what works. Nor can they provide us with hope of purpose.

The humanist H. J. Blackham wrote,

On humanist assumptions [the assumption that there is no God and life has evolved by time and chance alone], life leads to nothing, and every pretense that it does not is a deceit. If there is a bridge over a gorge which spans only half the distance and ends in mid-air, and if the bridge is crowded with human beings pressing on, one after another they fall into the abyss. The bridge leads to nowhere, and those who are pressing forward to cross it are going nowhere. . . It does not matter where they think they are going, what preparations for the journey they may have made, how much they may be enjoying it all . . . such a situation is a model of futility.¹⁵

Blackham's words only echo the long history of man's dilemma. Solomon's famous saying, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."¹⁶ is our desperate cry. The author Cervantes Saaverda framed the question most poignantly when his character Don Quixote tells Sancho Panza about the look he saw in the eyes of the soldiers who lay dying in his arms; the eyes, he said, seemed to be asking a question. Sancho asks, "Was it the question 'Why am I dying?' " and Quixote replies, "No, it

¹⁴ Sagan and Druyan, *Shadow*, p. 64.

¹⁵ H. J. Blackham et al., *Objections to Humanism* (Riverside, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1967).

¹⁶ Ecclesiastes 1:2.

was the question, “Why was I living?””

Without a personal creator life is meaningless. Without God man is forced to hide from reality. But science has gone one step further and convinced many it is irrational to believe in anything outside of this closed system of impersonal matter and energy. A friend once asked me, “How do I believe?” He really wanted to believe in God, he said, but he just couldn’t. “How can you believe in something you can’t see or hear or touch?” I asked him what he believed the purpose of life was if there was no God. His only response was a vague notion that somehow evolution could provide us with purpose. Like Sagan he believed evolution could provide us with the answers to life. But can it?

Evolution

Science has tried to answer the question of purpose with evolution, and evolution does give some workable purpose to a portion of this world—survival. But can survival be considered a purpose? Evolutionists maintain that the purpose for everything that exists is survival, but the question is: Survival for what? Peter Atkins wrote in his book *The Second Law*, “We are the children of chaos, and the deep structure of change is decay. At root, there is only corruption, and an unstemmable tide of chaos. Gone is purpose; all that is left is direction.”¹⁷

If we want to know how to believe in God, the first thing we must do is be *honest* about what it means *not* to believe. We cannot turn the pointless direction of evolution into some glorious and noble cause. Daniel Quinn attempted to do this in his book *Ishmael* and was forced

¹⁷ Peter William Atkins, *The Second Law* (New York, New York: Scientific American Books, Distributed by W. H. Freeman and Company, 1984), p. 200.

to make a type of hara-kiri our noble calling. For Quinn death is the agent of change and our noble calling is to accept it, so evolution can continued unhindered by our technological advances. We should not be clinging to life, but instead should be embracing death so evolution can do its good and noble work. If time and chance are all that exist though, even the words “good” and “noble” are without meaning—for by what standard do we measure whether a thing is good or noble? Being simply fodder for mutation in a pointless process, simply receptacles for the transfer of DNA from one generation to the next, has no goodness or nobility to it. If we are to accept evolution as our creator perhaps goodness and nobility do not exist? But can we live this way?

The New Religion

Scientists, at least those in the nineteenth century, were not ignorant of the fact that what they were dealing with had consequences in regard to the meaning and purpose of life. The novelist Colen Wilson made this observation,

He [man] is not yet a “spiritual being,” for spiritual, in its ultimate sense, means capable of exercising freedom, and freedom is meaningless without ultimate purpose. . . . What has been suggested is that the answer is to be sought in the idea of evolution. . . . What if science could replace that *sense* of individual meaning, the *feeling* of having a direct telephone line to the universal purpose?

(Italics added)

Wilson says it is the hope of evolutionary scientists not to give us real, concrete answers to our purpose, but rather to give us a “sense” of meaning and a “feeling” of purpose. The great evolutionist Sir Julian Huxley called it the “new religion,” and many are followers and don’t even realize it.

Progress

At first this “new religion” of science preached progress. Living things had progressed from simple forms to complex, man had evolved from apes, and with man’s mastery over science we would progress from imperfect beings to perfect. Writers like Shaw and Bergson wrote that “man must become perfect.” Evil and immorality “must disappear.” The Christian religion sought to change an immoral person into a moral one, but if the religion of science were to work man would need to be moral from the beginning. The first tenant of faith in the religion of science is that man is inherently good. Once we believe in the inherent goodness of man, it is a simple matter to convince us that salvation lies in science. We simply wipe out all of man’s enemies like disease, poor living conditions, superstitions, and the hardships of daily living, and in so doing allow man to become what he was meant to be—good.

The question of man’s goodness, however, for those of the twentieth century, was shaken when World War I came along and later when Hitler and Stalin rose to power. All thoughts of man’s progress seemed mere fantasy. When the first mushroom cloud loomed in the sky from an atomic bomb test, it became evident that the child of science and technology, may not be our salvation, but in fact could be our very annihilator. Progress now only holds despair as individuals acquire the destructive power only nations could hold in the past.

But the progress science preached had more problems than the goodness of man. Some evolutionist are beginning to understand that evolution cannot explain progress, and it clearly cannot explain some intrinsic need for progress. To explain progress one would need to explain how random changes in environment could dictate a progressive direction of evolution. If environmental change is as random as the mutations evolution must choose from for the fittest,

how do you get progress? It would seem we are just as likely to digress as progress. Mankind has come to realize that the fittest may be the most ruthless, or even the most simple of organisms, such as bacteria and viruses. Those who still believe in the progressive complexity of nature and the goodness of mankind as a result of evolution and science must step outside of natural explanations to supernatural ones, Sagan's "undreamed of powers." But real science cannot accept supernatural explanations, and has left itself without a gospel.

Science As Entertainment

No longer able to maintain its gospel of progress, Science has tried to calm the fears of its believers by diversion, by becoming a form of entertainment. Richard Dawkins, a scientist and author, writes in response to the despair his evolutionary books have caused,

Presumably there is indeed no purpose in the ultimate fate of the cosmos, but do any of us really tie our life's hopes to the ultimate fate of the cosmos anyway? Of course we don't; not if we are sane. . . . In this book [*Unweaving the Rainbow*] I shall try a more positive response, appealing to the sense of wonder in science because it is so sad to think that these complainers and naysayers are *missing*. . . . the feeling of awed wonder that science can give us is one of the highest experiences of which the human psyche is capable.¹⁸

Once again we have returned to trying to ignore reality in regards to our purpose. The science of the twentieth century had to abandon the optimism of the nineteenth and make nature and the

¹⁸ Richard Dawkins, *Unweaving the Rainbow* (New York, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), pp. ix,x.

discovery of nature our escape. The universe is quite capable of entertaining our intellect and satisfying our need to worship something larger than ourselves. Moses warned the people of Israel to “beware, lest you lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them. . . .”¹⁹ But as amazingly beautiful and awe-inspiring as the universe is, it cannot provide us with real hope, and simply dismissing it as insanity to think about our ultimate purpose does not change our very real need for an ultimate purpose. If insanity is defined as being something abnormal, how can we claim despair over our lack of ultimate purpose insane? For people who remove the mind-numbing drug of entertainment and allow themselves to think will find the despair of which I speak. The fact that most refuse to sober up is not an excuse for calling those who have insane.

Today there is a somber desperation in our preoccupation with discovery, a desperation which reveals the true state of a world that has accepted an impersonal, purposeless god as its source of hope. There is a great need to identify with the universe emotionally and spiritually. Sagan writes, “Our feeblest contemplations of the Cosmos stir us—there is a tingling in the spine, a catch in the voice, a faint sensation, as if a distant memory, of falling from a height. We know we are approaching the greatest of mysteries.”²⁰ The hyperbole Sagan uses in the opening line of his book, *Cosmos*, betrays the gravity and also the necessity of our emotional involvement with the universe. In a world which has turned to science for hope we must find something to keep our intellect from contemplating our true circumstances.

¹⁹ Deuteronomy 4:19.

²⁰ Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* (New York, New York: Ballantine Books, 1980), p. 1.

New Spirituality

Science is gradually adding a new element to its teaching—a more spiritual side. More and more we hear writers trying to calm our fears with the idea of oneness with the universe. In fact, this oneness with the universe has become the West's new spirituality. The universe is our mother, and we must embrace and respect her because we owe our existence to her. All things living are our brothers and sisters because we have all evolved from the same origin. This new oneness that the religion of science has begun to preach has gained a sense of legitimacy because of its seeming likeness to Eastern religions. But the religions of the East are not at the heart of our new-found spirituality. The fact is, the oneness with the universe which science is preaching has very little in common with the oneness understood by Buddhism.

The West has changed the teachings of the East (a union with the impersonal) with “nothingness,” to a union with a personal, purposeful force. We have made the universe somehow caring, somehow a source of love and comfort. But where do these ideas come from? Do they not stem from our Christian heritage and not the realities of the universe? Eastern religions are at least honest about the nature of the universe—the fact that it is impersonal. But we in the West have made our spirituality an oxymoron—union with a *loving Force*. How can something personal like love, come from something impersonal like a force. If we are to be true to the universe, we must follow the example of Buddhism and attempt to rid ourselves of the personal, of personality and purpose, and become a drop of water in the ocean, a person who is unidentifiable from any other person, and ultimately unidentifiable as even human. To reach Nirvana—the union with “nothingness”—is to become nothing, to do nothing, think nothing, be nothing. That doesn't sound like love, and it doesn't really sound like a purpose, either. Love in the Eastern sense is a

means to an end, “nothingness,” not the end itself.

Personal Universe

Many have recognized the need for the personal if we are to have hope of purpose. Carl Sagan, consciously or unconsciously, realized it. I remember as I was reading my friend’s collection of Carl Sagan books, coming across this statement in *Cosmos*, “two cells banded together for the common good.” He denied that this was possible—the banding together for the common good—yet he still used the terminology. It seems we must use such terminology if we are to ease our fears of a world in which banding together for the common good could not have happened. Even if this phenomenon could be explained, as some are trying to do right now, the word “good” can have no meaning in a world of mere matter. Sagan knew that if we were to have hope we must somehow make the impersonal universe personal. Sagan and his wife, go so far as to make the entire formation of the solar system into a metaphor of human social development. One line reads: “Despite the good neighbor policy of the well-mannered worlds, you can occasionally make out a flagrant rogue world set on a collision trajectory.”²¹

You might think this is good writing, but the whole premise of the book is to give us hope by the findings and methods of science. Can planets scientifically be said to have good neighbor policies, be well-mannered, or considered flagrant rogues? Only if you desire to comfort yourself in a world where hard, cold rock controlled by inescapable natural law is the only thing that exists. We must use clever logical fallacies if we are to ward off the despair of a world of mere matter. We are only superior to the ancients in that we have dropped the names of the gods, and instead

²¹ Sagan and Druyan, *Shadow*, p.15.

of giving personality and purposefulness to gods outside of matter, as the ancients did, we have made impersonal matter itself into a god, and our new spirituality is to somehow feel a part of this fictitious personal universe.

Self-Delusion

For many this belief in a personal, purposeful god is simply the projection of man's need onto a nonexistent being, not much different than Sagan's projection of personality upon the impersonal. They have concluded that belief in God is an act of self-delusion, a psychological weakness. But it is not a weakness, it is our nature. The Pulitzer Prize winner Ernest Becker in his book *The Denial of Death* said, "Man is a 'theological being,' concludes [the psychoanalyst Otto] Rank, and not a biological one." Man must live as if there is a God to give his life meaning; there is no way around it, and Rank proved it through the science of psychoanalysis.

Becker continues:

In all this it is as though Tillich were speaking and, behind him, Kierkegaard and Augustine; but what makes it uncanny in the present world of science is that these are the conclusions of the life work of a psychoanalyst, not a theologian. The net effect of it is overwhelming, and to someone trained narrowly in a field of science the whole thing seems confused. Such a mixture of intensive clinical insight and pure Christian ideology is absolutely heady. . . . At this point the 'tough minded' scientist (as he likes to call himself) slams shut the book of Rank and turns away with a shudder. 'What a shame that Freud's closest collaborator should turn so soft in the head, should deliver over to the easy consolations of religion the hard-

won knowledge of psychoanalysis.' So he would think—and he would be wrong.²²

Even Freud himself said, “The idea of life having a purpose stands and falls with the religious system.”²³ Rank simply proved through psychoanalysis that man is in desperate need of a purpose, or destined to believe the lie of the serpent, “You surely shall not die!”²⁴

Purpose is like food and water. We need it to survive. Shouldn't we then consider a purposeful god's existence? How do we develop a need for something which has never existed? A man dying of thirst in the desert may be told that what he is seeing is only a mirage, a projection of his need for water upon the waves of heat rising up from the sand. But the assertion that the vision of an oasis is nothing more than a mirage in no way nullifies or negates the existence of water; our very need and thirst are an irrefutable confirmation of water's existence. It is our thirst for purpose, like that for water, which should cause us to consider a purposeful god's existence.

I am not denying the fact that we may be able to imagine things which do not exist, that somehow we can project our fears and desires onto a nonexistent being. But the question is not that we are capable of imagining things that do not exist, but whether there exists a need within man that can justify our imaginative beliefs in a personal purposeful creator. Like a person putting together a puzzle and discovering a piece is missing, we can imagine what the piece must look like by examining the void it is to fill. Would we be wrong, then, to assume the piece existed, that somehow our ability to imagine such a piece disqualified it from existing simply because we could imagine it? Imagination does not disqualify the existence of God; it only proves that a need exists.

²² Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York, NY: Free Press Paperbacks, 1997), p. 175.

²³ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* trans. By Joan Riviere (New York: J. Cope & H. Smith, 1930), p. 1930

²⁴ Genesis 3:4.

It is up to us then to rationally seek it out.

Seeking God is not for those who have abandoned reason, for those who wish to delude themselves, but rather for those who desire to embrace reason and face reality. If we refuse, we are only left with Becker's final conclusion: "The most that any one of us can seem to do is to fashion something—an object or ourselves—and drop it into the confusion. . . ." ²⁵ Becker could not free himself from Freud's atheistic prejudices and is left wandering in the dark.

Jesus said, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scriptures said, 'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.'" ²⁶ A personal purposeful creator is the only thing which can satisfy our need for meaning and purpose in life, and when that purpose is found, Christ said it would flow from us like rivers of living water quenching the thirst of those who desired to drink of it. King David said, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the *living* God" ²⁷ (italics added).

Chapter 3

²⁵ Becker, Denial, p. 289.

²⁶ John 7:37, 38.

²⁷ Psalms 42:1-2.

Hope of Purpose Requires: A God of Reality

“Fundamental trust is a gift. Reality is given to me from the start: if I commit myself trustingly to it, I get it back filled with meaning and value.” Hans Küng

Sitting in the breakroom at work one night I had a coworker ask me if I believed in the Bible. I said, “Yes, I do.” He was incredulous that I could be so interested in science and yet still believe in a book full of “fairy tales and myths.” But the thing that surprised me was not my coworker’s disbelief in the Bible, but the great anxiety I felt at his questioning of my faith. When our religious beliefs are questioned, we often feel anxiety, and our tendency is to either change the subject or become defensive and respond with anger. Religion is one subject most of us would rather avoid. As I began contemplating our need of purpose, the reasons for this angst became clear.

We Need A Purpose

Many people today are confounded by the rise in superstition and spiritualism. They can’t understand how a society could hold objective science in such high regard and yet still believe in such subjective and irrational things. It would seem to them Nietzsche’s famous declaration that “God is dead” should hold no more ramifications for our lives than declaring Santa Claus to be

dead. But the fact is, if there is no God we have much more to lose than presents on Christmas morning, and it is what we have to lose—our purpose—which makes this dichotomy of spiritualism and science a necessity.

As I have said, purpose is as essential to our survival as food and water. I didn't know it at the time but that simple discussion in the breakroom triggered in me a small self-defense mechanism—a kind of fight-or-flight response. We must defend ourselves when our beliefs in purpose are challenged because not to do so would be an act tantamount to suicide. The Christian philosopher Francis Schaeffer writes,

If the universe we are living in is what the materialistic humanists say it is, then with our reason (when we stop to think about it) we could find absolutely no way to have meaning or morality or hope or beauty.²⁸

If time and chance alone are our creator, man has no purpose, no means of attributing significance to his actions. Schaeffer goes on to say,

This [materialistic view of the world] would plunge us into despair. We would have to take seriously the challenge of Albert Camus in the first sentence of *The Myth of Sisyphus*: “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide.” Why stay alive in an absurd universe? Ah! But that is not where we stop. We say to ourselves—“There is hope!” (even though there is no help). “We shall overcome!” (even though nothing is more certain than that we shall be destroyed, both individually at death and cosmically with the end of all conscious

²⁸ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, Vol. 5, 2d ed. (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1982), p. 375.

life). This is what confronts us on all sides today: the modern irrationalism.²⁹

We cannot deny the existence of God and remain rational about our purpose, yet we cannot live without purpose, either. We have become nearly schizophrenic. Science says there is nothing outside of impersonal matter and energy, yet we cannot accept this impersonal, purposeless world, and have turned to our emotions and personal convictions to validate our reason for existing.

We have abandoned reality for our feelings because we have abandoned any hope of finding a reason for our existence from reality. We seem to be able to determine the purpose of everything in the universe by examining its form and order, but what we have been unable to do is find a purpose for the universe as a whole. Why do we exist, and how are we to determine our purpose if we have no context for ourselves or the universe?

Hope and Wishful Thinking

This turn to our emotions and personal convictions—to irrationalism—in regards to our purpose has made hope and wishful thinking synonymous. Let me give you a simplistic illustration to point out why we have tried to make them the same and what the real difference is. Let's say you are sailing on the ocean and are caught in a violent storm. The storm completely incapacitates your boat and all means of communication, and you only have enough water for a day—two at the most. If you had told someone before you left where you were going, and that you would only be gone for the afternoon, you would have hope—hope that you would be rescued before your water ran out. But what if you hadn't told anyone where you were going, and

²⁹ Ibid., p. 375.

no one was expecting you to be at a certain place at a certain time? If you still felt you would be rescued, those feelings of hope would better be described as wishful thinking, and anyone pointing out the obvious would be met with anger and denial. The difference between hope and wishful thinking is that hope requires a rational basis for its good feelings and expectations of the future; wishful thinking does not. Hope must be based on a reality outside of one's self; wishful thinking looks inward for its justifications.

Most of the time we can function on the basis of wishful thinking. There may be nagging doubts, but we find ways of ignoring them. Wishful thinking only becomes an inadequate substitute for hope when our beliefs are challenged, whether it be by another person or reality itself. What this, "basing our hope of purpose on wishful thinking," has led to is religion being off limits for discussion. Just think about the man in the boat who didn't tell anyone where he was going or when he would be back. He may have been able to ignore the fact he had no basis for his beliefs of rescue, but if those beliefs were challenged, his only avenue of defense against despair would be denial and anger.

Religious Discussion Taboo

Frank E. Peretti, a popular Christian fiction writer, made this observation of our present culture, "There is no right or wrong, so no one feels ashamed; all opinions are equal, so no one is allowed to think; religious convictions are private, so they are meaningless in any discussion."³⁰ Religion no longer has its foundation in reality and therefore has no means of establishing a meaningful discussion.

³⁰ Ravi Zacharias, *Deliver Us from Evil*. (Dallas, Texas: Word Publications, 1996), p. 65.

Let's consider our illustration again. This time there are two men in the boat and one believed the caring wind would bring them to shore, and the other believed in the power of faith, believing that if he only believed hard enough they would be rescued. Which belief would be right? Really, neither. But what we have decided to do is say both are equally right for each individual. We have eliminated any meaningful discussion of our purpose by making our individual beliefs autonomous from reality. If there is no reality by which our beliefs can be established, we are only left with our private opinions, and one person's beliefs become as relevant as anyone else's. This way of thinking of the world is pretty much the state of the world today in regards to religion. Religion has become a private matter because mankind has determined there is no reality upon which our hope of purpose can be based.

But let's return to our illustration again, and this time suppose there was a third man who was able to send a "mayday" before the radio went dead. His hope rests on the fact that he talked to the Coast Guard and was able to give them the boat's location. Could we still say the belief of those based on the caring wind, or the power of belief, were equal to the man who made the "mayday" call? No. But this is the unfortunate thing. When it comes to religion, we have equated the "no" to this question as a position of arrogance and intolerance. Why? Because the world has decided reality cannot provide us with a reason for our existence, and anyone claiming it can must be wrong—a rather arrogant and intolerant position itself.

Intolerant and Arrogant

Christians are often seen as intolerant and arrogant because they claim there is only one way to true hope—Jesus Christ. Christians truly believe this, but what they have not understood is that in our society this statement does not communicate the real truth. To communicate truth you

often have to be as aware of the audience's prejudices as you are about what you are saying. When a Christian makes the statement that Christ is the one true way to hope, what he or she is really saying is that reality matters. It is only the reality of Christ's resurrection in space and time which makes Christ the one true hope. The Apostle Paul said that if Christ has not been raised our hope is in vain.³¹ Like the third man in our illustration the question is not that he was able to get out a Mayday before the radio went dead, but rather whether we are willing to give up our personal opinions and emotional experiences for a hope which rests on a reality outside ourselves. It would seem from our illustration to be an easy choice—but it is not. Much is riding on it; the foundation upon which we have managed to escape despair and maybe more importantly the loss of personal authority over what we choose to believe are riding on it.

I said earlier that it is unfortunate that the label of intolerance has been given to anyone who claims reality matters, however it is not without merit. The man making the “mayday” call, if he insisted his hope was different the others, could be considered to be intolerant. Intolerance—if it is defined as a belief in reality and not personal convictions or emotions—is by its very nature intolerant, because reality is singular and exclusive. Reality is such that something cannot be both true and not true at the same time and in the same manner. One of the fundamental movements of logic derived from reality is that “A” cannot be both “A” and “non-A” at the same time. We cannot say we believe in reality and not believe in it at the same time. Either the man in our illustration who made the “mayday” call has hope because of that reality or he doesn't, and the quality of his hope is either true hope because of that reality or mere wishful thinking. Concerning Christianity either the eyewitness accounts of Christ's resurrection are true and worthy of giving

³¹ I Corinthians 15.

us hope or they are not. We can't have it both ways, and we cannot say reality matters and reality doesn't matter.

The claim that reality is our basis for hope brings up another problem. For some this claim that reality matters has been seen as a claim by Christians to superior spirituality. But if we look at our illustration again, you can see that saying there can be a rational basis for hope has nothing to do with being better or more spiritual than anyone else. It only has to do with one having knowledge the other one does not. Paul said Christianity is nothing we can boast about.³² It is nothing we can boast about because Christianity is simply belief in the eyewitness testimony of Christ's resurrection and the realization of what Christ's resurrection means to mankind. The third man on the boat certainly would have no grounds for gloating in his hope, and neither do Christians. In fact it should be just the opposite. Having a solid foundation for your hope should allow you to find compassion and understanding for others.

I wish I could leave this subject at that, but unfortunately I cannot. Christians have fallen prey to the world's answer of putting their trust in emotions and personal convictions. They have followed the philosophies of the world and ended up resting their hope on personal experiences and private opinions. Unbelievably, many Christians have given up the solid foundation of the reality of Jesus' eyewitnessed resurrection for their hope and sought the same unsupported emotional and personal conviction the world has come to accept as a basis for hope. They have followed the way of the world and disregarded reality, yet still claim the authority of a belief which rests in reality. The Apostle Peter said Christians should be able to give a reason for their hope, and it is in their ability to give a reason that they can do so in an attitude of gentleness,

³² I Corinthians 1:29-31.

respect, and with a good conscience.³³ Those Christians who do not rest their hope on concrete reality, but rather on emotional experiences, are no better than the men in the boat claiming the caring wind will bring them to shore. And as a result they must fight the fear of losing their hope with arrogance and anger, not gentleness and respect. The vile nature of intolerance is not in the knowledge of a reality that can support hope, but in the acceptance of personal conviction as a basis for hope.

Christians Have Followed the World

Christians are not immune to the world's way of thinking and have themselves become arrogant and intolerant. You may not think the world is arrogant and intolerant, but try telling a person of the world there is one true way, and you will find in fact they are as intolerant as those they are condemning for intolerance. This belief in our emotions and feelings as a valid basis for hope has corrupted many Christians' understanding of Christianity. Many Christians, although they may have a reason for their hope based on reality, have chosen to ignore it for one based on personal experience. They, like the world, have decided that hope must rest on some emotional experience or private conviction. If we use our illustration again, it would be like the man who made the "mayday" call deciding reality was not enough and he would need some further authentication. He would need to see some sign, to have some personal experience to validate his hope. Many Christians have made that further authentication some emotional or private experience and have been forced into defending their hope with the same denial and anger as the world. Those who choose this path, instead of using reality, are seen by the world as arrogant and

³³ I Peter 3:15,16.

intolerant. And I would have to say rightly so. There is no arrogance in Christianity because there is no private experience in Christianity, and therefore there is no need for our insecurity in that experience to be confirmed by making others accept it as well.

Historical Basis

Christianity's hope is not like that of the world's. Christianity is deeply historical, and it is the historical soundness of it which makes the difference. The most misunderstood concept about Christianity today is its appeal to reality for its basis. Luke writes, "To these [Christ's apostles] He presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs"³⁴ Christianity does not appeal to a nebulous group of spiritual teachings that makes one person more spiritual or better than another. Jesus said whoever believes in Him shall have eternal life. There's not a whole lot of bragging room about our spirituality if this really is the case. When Jesus says, "Believe in me," He means do you trust He is who He claims to be? Christianity does not appeal to some emotional or unexplainable religious experience. It appeals instead to the concrete reality of a man who claimed to be God in the flesh and proved it by his resurrection. To believe in Jesus is to believe in the historical accounts of the eyewitnesses. Paul said, "He [God] has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."³⁵ It is the resurrection and its validity as a historical act in space and time that is the basis of Christian hope, and that hope must be rejected or accepted on the grounds of whether the eyewitness testimony is credible.

³⁴ Acts 1:3.

³⁵ Acts 17:31.

Many people have set out to prove Christianity to be false by studying the historical facts of the Gospels and ended up becoming Christians. Sir William Ramsay, for instance, one of the greatest archaeologists of all time, trained in the German historical school of the mid-nineteenth century, set out to prove the scriptures to be false. But after years of archaeological digs he concluded “Luke’s [the writer of the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts in the New Testament] history is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness.”³⁶ He ended up writing many books on to the accuracy of the New Testament including *St. Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen*. Frank Morison was an English journalist who set out to prove Christ’s resurrection was a myth. However, after studying the Bible he became convinced of Christ’s divinity, and instead of writing a book about the myth of the resurrection, he wrote a book in support of the historical resurrection of Christ entitled *Who Moved the Stone?* Lew Wallace became convinced of Christ’s divinity after studying the Bible in preparation for writing *Ben-Hur*. The great British author and teacher C. S. Lewis became convinced of the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus Christ in 1931 and changed from a skeptic into a strong supporter and apologist for Christianity. Most recently Lee Strobel, award-winning legal editor of the Chicago Tribune, has written *The Case for Christ*. These are only a few of the many well-known converts who have become Christians because of their belief in the resurrection.

Some become angry with Christianity because they do not want to be told they are responsible to a personal Creator. But others become angry because they do not want to be told reality matters. They like being their own authority on life. On the other hand, others are just too

³⁶ Ramsay, W. M. *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953. P. 81

afraid to trust reality because they have learned from philosophy and more importantly from their childhood or circumstances in life, that it's best to create your own reality. But Paul says we are without excuse if we say reality does not confirm that we have a purpose, a purpose which can be determined from that reality.

Without Excuse

Christianity demands to be put to the test of reality, not only that of Christ's resurrection recorded for us by eyewitnesses, but that of our everyday lives. Paul writes in the first chapter of Romans, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they [mankind] are without excuse."³⁷

We are without excuse, Paul says, because the external reality of this world, created by God, makes an undeniable statement that reality is purposeful. Paul says the invisible attributes of God, which have been revealed to man through His creation, are undeniable. We are not at liberty to determine the purpose of this world for ourselves because that purpose lies in the form and order of the world. We are made, and the world is made, in such a way that the purpose of our lives can be found in that reality, and we cannot allow our emotions and personal convictions to override it. We must put God's word to the test and verify that the explanations for our purpose are compatible with reality. Compare it, if you will, to anatomy and physiology. Anatomy describes the form of bones, muscles, organs, etc., while physiology describes the purpose of the bones, muscles, and organs. The truthfulness of the purpose is easily confirmed or denied by the

³⁷ Romans 1:20.

form and order it professes to describe. The world is no different Paul says. When you look at the form and order of the world and you compare it to the Word of God, you will be without excuse because the purpose given for reality lies confirmed in its form and order.

True Hope

Mankind has decided there can be no hope, so whatever makes you feel good is right. If the man in the boat wants to believe he will be rescued by caring tides and concerned winds, we should not question his beliefs nor point out the fallacies of such beliefs. To do so would be to brand ourselves as arrogant and intolerant. But how does becoming one with nothingness, or a drop of water in the ocean, give us hope of purpose? How does being reincarnated into another person or animal give us hope that who we are is of any benefit or purpose? How do we have hope of purpose by believing we can become good enough that God will accept us into His presence? None of these positions can provide us with a hope of purpose, if we are honest. Only a personal creator who is willing to demonstrate His love and willingness to forgive us, in concrete reality, can give us true hope.

Reality Matters

Christianity declares our beliefs do not matter when it comes to determining our purpose. The Gospel of Luke starts out,

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the Word have handed down to us, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you

in consecutive order. . .³⁸

Luke says, “I have made a careful search of the facts concerning Jesus Christ’s resurrection.” It is not important what we believe, because what we believe makes no difference in regard to our ultimate purpose. It is what is real that makes the difference. If this were not the case Luke could have simply said Jesus rose from the dead and skipped the careful investigation of what happened from eyewitnesses. Luke could have reported the spiritual teachings of Christ and left out all the historical references in his Gospel. But God knew that, if we are to have true hope, it must rest on concrete reality. The only question is, are we willing to give up our personal convictions for reality? Do we have the courage to stop ignoring reality for our wishful thinking?

The German theologian Hans Küng said, “Fundamental trust is a gift. Reality is given to me from the start: if I commit myself trustingly to it, I get it back filled with meaning and value.”³⁹

³⁸ Luke 1:1-2.

³⁹ Hans Küng, *Does God Exist?* trans. by Edward Quinn (New York, New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991), p. 451.