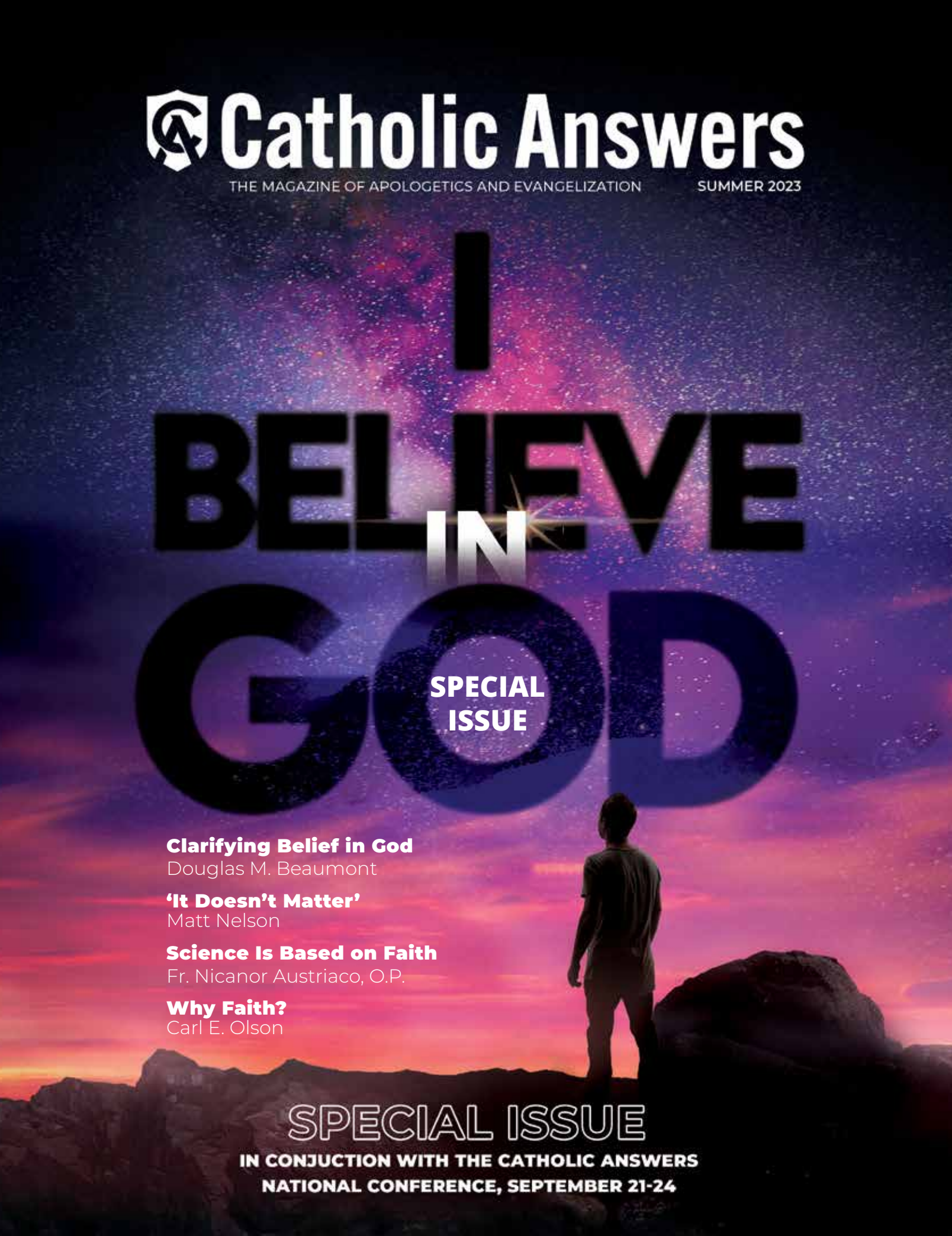




# Catholic Answers

THE MAGAZINE OF APOLOGETICS AND EVANGELIZATION

SUMMER 2023



# I BELIEVE IN GOD

**SPECIAL  
ISSUE**

**Clarifying Belief in God**

Douglas M. Beaumont

**'It Doesn't Matter'**

Matt Nelson

**Science Is Based on Faith**

Fr. Nicanor Austriaco, O.P.

**Why Faith?**

Carl E. Olson

**SPECIAL ISSUE**

**IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE CATHOLIC ANSWERS**

**NATIONAL CONFERENCE, SEPTEMBER 21-24**



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### DEAR READER,

The magazine you are holding is free.

But it is not free to produce, much less to print and to mail. To edit, publish, and deliver Catholic Answers Magazine costs \$500,000 a year. Our magazine is mailed to more than 30,000 homes, rectories, seminaries, convents, abbeys, dormitories, libraries, and prisons.

In this age when so many magazines have thrown in the towel in favor of easier and cheaper “online editions,” Catholic Answers did the opposite. We did away with paid subscriptions and committed to sending Catholic Answers Magazine to anyone who supports our ministry. In so doing we quadrupled our circulation.

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- Use it to inspire a patient or comfort a prisoner (see the letter on p. 4)
- **FREE YOURSELF FROM YOUR SCREENS!**

#### The evidence is clear.

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- \*\$500 sends the magazine to 30 households for a year.
- \*\$5000 sends the magazine to 300 households for a year.

With gratitude,

*dfgalk*

P.S. If you share my love of print and the Catholic faith and are financially positioned to help grow this magazine dramatically, call us at: 619-387-7200 or email us: [magazine@catholic.com](mailto:magazine@catholic.com), and we'll be more than happy to share our plans for its growth and to enlist help.



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## FRONTISPIECE

TIM RYLAND | EDITOR

# To Better Love God

I believe in God, or I wouldn't be writing this. Chances are, you believe in God too, or you wouldn't be reading this. What I'm hoping and praying for is that by providence you're reading this special issue and *don't* believe in God—and that you'll keep reading, all the way to p. 48.

Each year, we run a special issue in conjunction with our national conference. The theme this year is "I Believe in God," the foundation of all other creedal and dogmatic statements. The articles come at the topic from angles different than those of the conference talks, and we hope the ancillary knowledge informs and widens your understanding,

As I write this, it's Pentecost Sunday, sixty years ago to the day that my father—at the time an Episcopal priest—was baptized into Catholicism, along with his gaggle of five children. (My mother had been baptized Catholic as an infant but was not brought up in the Faith; she converted with the rest of us.)

I remember our family standing at the baptismal font in the narthex of Christ the King Church in Oklahoma City, afternoon sunlight streaming in through red and blue stained glass. A tight clip-on tie made the collar of my scratchy Sears dress shirt even scratchier on my six-year-old neck. I remember the Trinitarian form, the cool water on my head, the sense that something important had happened. So, I'm not a cradle Catholic; but it sure feels like I am. Growing up, I rarely questioned the faith my parents did their best to hand on to us children.

Oh, I certainly did as I grew older, but most of that had to do with selfishness. The Faith itself always made sense to me—that is, it coheres. E.g., if God creates every human as a unique, once-in-the-universe creature, then life is sacred. If each life is sacred, then it must be protected at all costs—especially, logically, those lives who are least able to protect themselves. If all lives must be protected at all costs, then abortion and euthanasia are wrong.

I'm no theologian—and, compared to other folks in the building, not much of an apologist—but I've always found the argument from design for God's existence

compelling. (See Doug Beaumont's article p. 18). The idea that the universe came into random existence so finely tuned that the slightest variation in the unimaginably complex laws that govern it would snuff it out—well, that beggars at least my imagination.

And yet . . . for much of my life, the practice of my faith has sprung from a sense of duty. If a loving God created me, shouldn't I live my life in the way he asks? After all, this life is less than the blink of an eye. And yet we—I—cling to the chaos and confusion of this mortal coil as if it's the only thing.

God blesses humans with different types of faith: to some it is a lamp unto their eyes, to others a fire in their hearts. I may know more theology than the prayer-warrior ladies I see praying before the Blessed Sacrament; but one blast of the love for God from their hearts likely would incinerate me. In my contrition, the fear losing heaven and gaining hell plays no small part. The work is to avoid sin simply because it offends God, who is all good and deserving of all my love.

Timothy Keller, the American Calvinist pastor and apologist who, although he got the doctrine of total depravity totally wrong (not a small thing), hit at the heart of what should be our life's work. In a video his organization released by shortly after his death, Keller said, "We no longer are obeying the law of God out of sense of duty or a sense of being forced or compelled. Instead, we want to please the One who did this for us [saved us through his Son, Jesus Christ]. We want to *resemble* the One who did this for us."

A tall order? See Matthew 5:48: Jesus Christ wants the same.

\* \* \*

It's been my privilege to edit this magazine for half of its thirty-four years of existence, but my professional time has come to an end. My deep affection for my co-workers and the nonpareil work they do is matched in degree by my anticipation of what the Lord has in mind for my wife and me. Loving him better is a good start. ■



**'The Good, the True, the Beautiful'**

**K**nown nationally for his vigorous and successful defense of religious liberty, attorney **Paul Jonna** is an award-winning Southern California civil litigator. A partner with LiMandri & Jonna LLP and special counsel for the Thomas More Society, Paul joined the Catholic Answers board of trustees in 2022 and brings a unique perspective to the team. He recently joined us to share more about his background and his thoughts on the work of Catholic Answers.

**PAUL JONNA**  
Board Member Defends Liberty

ABOVE: Paul Jonna in his natural office environment.

**US:** Thank you for talking to us, Paul. Please tell us a little about yourself and your background.

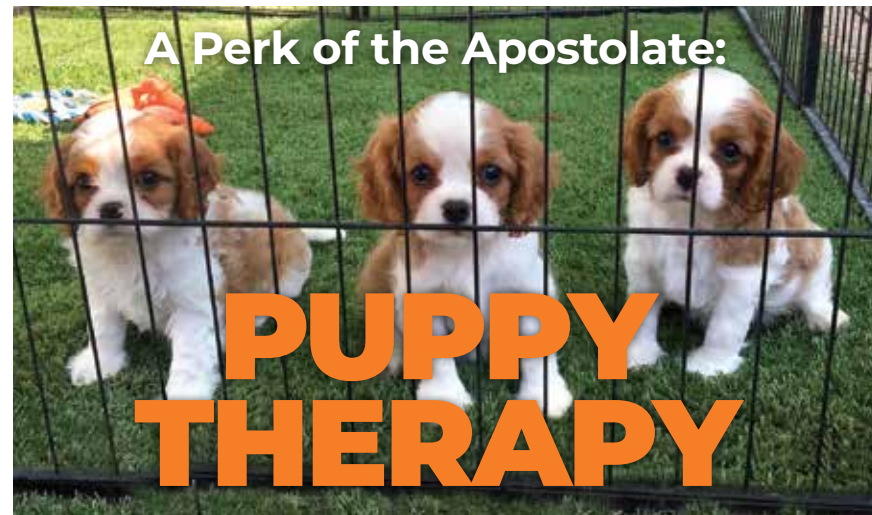
**PAUL:** My parents both came to the U.S. from Iraq, and my siblings and I were born and raised in San Diego. Our family is Chaldean—an ancient ethnic group of some of the earliest Christians who were evangelized by St. Thomas the Apostle. Chaldeans are Eastern Rite Catholics in full communion with the pope in Rome.

**How would you describe your faith journey and its impact on your family today?**

Even though I never stopped attending Mass, I didn't start taking my faith seriously until my early twenties. I was (See "Jonna," p. 7)

At the moment the rest of the world was enjoying an unusually competitive Super Bowl last February, Catholic Answers president **Christopher Check** and his wife, **Jackie**, whelped not one but two litters of Cavalier King Charles Spaniels—a total of seven puppies. Ten weeks later, the pups made their first appearance at a happy event that shows up every now and then on the office calendar: **Catholic Answers Puppy Therapy Day**. Staff and families felt all their cares dissolve in a bath of spaniel-induced serotonin as the little “puffs of Prozac” (as Jackie calls them) descended on the apostolate.

“If undergraduates at America’s Ivy League schools get to pet puppies to



alleviate the stress of final exams, I figure my staff deserves nothing less to relieve the stress of working for me,” Chris said.

“It’s pretty clear Chris is trying to buy our loyalty and affection by bringing puppies into the office a few times a year,” one Catholic Answers team member said on condition of anonymity. “It’s totally working.”

Chris and Jackie (who is the expert) have been showing and breed-

ABOVE: Top Meadow Cavaliers puppies await their turn for employee cuddling.

Charles II, who is said to have decreed that of dogs only Cavaliers could enter the halls of Parliament. This is a great story, but it’s an urban legend. What is true, however, is that by executive order, I have said Cavaliers will always be welcome at Catholic Answers!” ■

ing Cavaliers for more than fifteen years. Their kennel, Top Meadow Cavaliers, is named after G.K. Chesterton’s Beaconsfield estate. What’s more, Chris insists that Cavaliers are Catholic dogs.

“They were the companions of the Stuart monarchy. The breed is named

## Jonna

(continued from p. 5)

searching for the truth, and my wife **Rena** (my fiancée at the time) and I participated in a transformational Bible study that was taught by a Catholic Answers employee. Thanks to that experience and the influence of spiritual direction, the two of us grew quickly in our faith and started our marriage as serious Catholics. As Rena and I are expecting our eighth child, we are guided by our vocations—me in my religious liberty law practice and she as a home-schooling mother—and our faith is integral to every aspect of our lives.

### How has Catholic Answers helped you over the years?

Catholic Answers has always been a key resource for clear and concise explanations of Catholic teaching. The website, the radio show, talks by the apologists—CA has always been a go-to for me and been there when I needed it the most.

### What is the most important work the apostolate does today?

There is so much darkness and confusion in our society, even within the Church, and Catholic Answers has a profoundly compelling way of communicating the true, the good, and the beautiful in our broken and hurting world. But it’s not just the content. It’s also the means of delivery. I can’t think of a more important task in our day, and the Catholic Answers team takes this responsibility incredibly seriously. Looking ahead, the more CA can focus on reaching young people and clearing up confusion in the Church, the greater the apostolate’s impact will be. ■



## Dr. Ray, Burkes Pay Us Visits

Catholic Answers has long been blessed to have well-known Catholic personalities regularly stop by our El Cajon, Calif., headquarters. This spring was no exception. **Dr. Ray Guarendi**, a longtime friend of the apostolate, hung out a bit in March. Then in April, **Dan and Stephanie Burke** visited. All were in town for the popular Catholic Answers lecture series held each month at St. Therese of Carmel Church in San Diego.

Dr. Ray, a clinical psychologist, parenting expert, and host of **The Doctor Is In** on EWTN and Ave Maria Radio, has been a frequent guest. Since getting his start in media at Catholic Answers over a decade ago, he has appeared often on *Catholic Answers Live*, and his local talk, “The Logic of Being Catholic,” included a discussion of the role of logic and

ABOVE: YouTube manager Zach Maxwell created this thumbnail of Dan Burke’s local talk that has garnered six figures worth of views on YouTube.

reason in confidently believing the truth of the words of Jesus and of the Catholic Church.

The following month, Dan Burke of SpiritualDirection.com and the Avila Institute was joined by his wife, Stephanie, on the set of *Catholic Answers Live*. Dan spoke to the San Diego Legatus chapter as well before giving a talk at St. Therese. His presentation for Legatus, a national group of Catholic business leaders, was called “From Occult to Catholic: Love Builds a Bridge for Truth.” We posted the video to YouTube the next day, and it has become one of the most popular Catholic Answers videos ever with more than 120,000 views to date. If you haven’t yet, check it out! ■



Did you know **Dr. Ray** starred in one of the more popular episodes of *Life at Catholic Answers*? Search on YouTube for “Catholic Answers moustache meeting.”

If you would like to tour our offices and watch *Catholic Answers Live* in studio, just give us a call at 619-387-7200.



## We Come to Jesus Through Mary

This past Feast of the Annunciation, a group of at Catholic Answers completed their thirty-three-day preparation for the total consecration to Jesus through Mary according to St. Louis de Montfort. Their day started off with a three-mile hike to the Immaculata Church on the campus of the University of San Diego, during which they prayed the rosary according to a method by St. Louis.

On arrival at the church, they offered flowers to Mary and split off to do their private finalized consecrations. They finished with Mass said by Catholic Answers chaplain **Fr. Sam Keyes** at the Mission Basilica San Diego and a celebration lunch.

It was a beautiful day spent with co-workers and friends who had decided to devote themselves more passionately to the Lord Jesus and Mother Mary. The Lord places these opportunities in our paths for a reason. For some, the timing will be obvious; for others, the fruits may just need to be seen in time.

This consecration will change your heart and mind. If you have considered the consecration but not yet done it, we hope this is the encouragement you need. ■



## We Lose a Chaplain, Gain a Lifelong Friend

For the past year, Catholic Answers has been blessed to have **Fr. Sam Keyes** serve as our chaplain. In June, Fr. Keyes and his family moved to Philadelphia for his new assignment as part of the Anglican Ordinariate. It is with great joy for him, his family, and his priestly ministry that we see him off, but we're bummed for our sake that he's leaving.

As chaplain, Fr. Keyes provided daily Mass and made confession and spiritual direction readily available to our staff. Radio listeners know well Fr. Keyes' articulate, wide-ranging knowledge of the Faith. It has been a great blessing having him as a spiritual father.

"He is as educated as he is joyful," President **Christopher Check** said. "His heart for souls has made him perfect for our radio show. His erudition and insights have been welcome additions to *Catholic Answers*

*Magazine and Catholic Answers Magazine Online.* Above all, he knows that liturgy is at the center of the Christian life. I will miss the Ordinariate liturgy and the reverence with which he offers it."

Fr. Keyes has moved geographically, but he and his wife and children remain part of our family, and Fr. Keyes will continue to be an integral part of our mission. Our readers and listeners can be confident that they will see his byline and hear his voice for years to come. Please keep him and his family in your prayers.

We also humbly ask you to pray for Catholic Answers as we search for a new chaplain. And if you are a priest or know a priest who could serve for a couple of years (or more!) as our chaplain, please contact Chris Check at [president@catholic.com](mailto:president@catholic.com). ■

ABOVE: Fr. Sam Keyes and his family (from left): Mary, James, David, wife Gretchen, Frederick, and Edith.

## Our Cup Runneth Over—with Babies!

Spring came this year bursting as it does with life—eternal life! In the Catholic Answers family, four new souls entered the world beyond their mothers' wombs. With four staff marriages this year, this likely won't be the last babies we'll be welcoming soon.

### Mary Angela Dull

**MARCH 11**  
6 LBS., 14 OZ | 19 IN.

Born to **Annie and Steven Dull**, Mary is marketing director **Donna Barrack's** first grandchild. That's Grandma holding the new star of the family.



### Ford Wayne Phelps

**APRIL 22**  
7 LBS. | 20.5 IN.

Another first grandkid, Ford was born to seminars coordinator **Jennifer Phelps's** son **Ben** and his wife, **Kaylee**. Here his Uncle **Alex** holds him; Dad looks on.



### Raymond Casimir Belsky

**APRIL 28**  
8 LBS., 8 OZ. | 19.5 IN.

Content editor **Drew Belsky** and his wife, **Tory**, welcomed Raymond, born at home. "He was the heaviest of our four," Dad said. "Also the hairiest."



### Theodore Stefan Hermiz

**MAY 5**  
6 LBS., 9 OZ. | 19 IN.

Theo, second child of video producer **Andrew Hermiz** and his wife, **Reneta**, came "a bit early." "So it'll be margaritas and tacos for all his birthdays!" Dad said.



## Snacks? Headsets? Competition? It Must Be RADIO DRIVE

If you're a Catholic Answers employee and somehow, despite all the emails and headsets, forget it's Radio Drive day, your final clue, shortly before the phones start ringing, is development assistant **Sara Matheson** wheeling her cart of goodies through the hall like a town crier. "Snacks?" she asks at each office. Sustenance for the task of answering the phone for two hours? Yes, please.

Four times a year, nearly everyone in the building dons their phone headsets and takes pledges from loyal listeners who

are the lifeblood of the most popular Catholic radio show in the U.S., *Catholic Answers Live*. The radio drives give staff members a chance to thank supporters personally. And how often can you phone the office and find yourself talking to **Chris Check** or **Tim Staples**?

It's also a friendly competition: after everything's tallied, token awards are given for most money pledged, most number of calls taken, most time on the phone, etc. Bragging rights last three months—until the next radio drive. ■

## Expanding Our Reach, Karlo Moves to Midwest

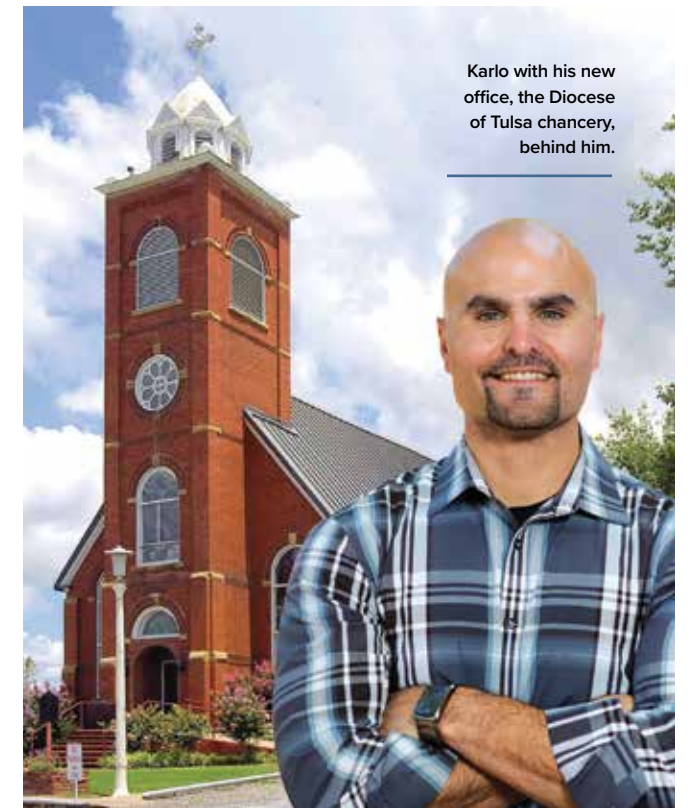
In June, a new chapter began for **Karlo Broussard**. Our staff apologist and his family moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma, to begin a formal partnership between Catholic Answers and the Diocese of Tulsa. Along with his work at Catholic Answers—radio, speaking, articles, podcasts—he will be collaborating with the Tulsa team to offer apologetical, catechetical, and evangelization training throughout the diocese.

For the first time ever, Catholic Answers will have an official presence in a diocese with boots on the ground assisting a bishop to share the apostolate's good work with his flock.

"We will miss Karlo at 2020 Gillespie Way very much, but I could not be happier for him, as well as for Jacqueline and the entire Broussard clan," Catholic Answers President **Christopher Check** said. "And I am overjoyed that Catholic Answers has been able to partner in this way with a diocese where a true renaissance of spiritual, cultural, and intellectual life is well underway.

"The faithful of Tulsa are blessed with a true shepherd in Bishop David Konderla. I invite all our readers to join us in Tulsa in spring 2024 for a joint conference May 10-11."

Please keep this new endeavor and the Broussard family in your prayers. ■



HOW WE HELP CHANGE LIVES

# ‘It Started with an Invitation’

By Annie Hillerman

Sometimes an invitation can change everything. An invitation to the Catholic Answers conference changed my family’s life.

As I was growing up, my family bounced between Protestant churches. My husband, **Eric**, is a cradle Catholic, but his faith was based on loyalty rather than teachings. I converted after we married, and both our daughters, **Holland** and **Sophie**, were baptized Catholic. We were passionate about Jesus but lukewarm on doctrine. We thought it was important that our girls develop a relationship with Jesus. We found the youth program at the local Methodist church to be enthusiastic and welcoming, and thus began a fifteen-year journey as “Catholics who at-

tend a Methodist church.”

In high school, Holland began studying Catholicism, and we occasionally attended Mass at her request. Upon graduation, she enlisted in the Marine Corps, and during boot camp she started attending Mass and found that the structure and deep reverence gave her strength.

When she arrived at her duty station in San Diego, she threw herself into researching Catholicism. Catholic Answers was a primary resource, and the more she learned, the more she wanted us to return to the Church.

Holland bought two tickets to the 2021 Catholic Answers Annual Conference and invited her dad to join her. They spent three days focusing on the most important issue in their lives: their faith. When



ABOVE: The Hillermans at Holland’s confirmation (l-r): Annie, Holland, Sophie, and Eric.

Eric returned to Texas, he invited me back to the Church, and we joined a wonderfully vibrant parish. We also joined SOCIETY 315 and began listening to *Catholic Answers Live*. Our faith exploded!

Meanwhile, Holland kept studying and began the RCIA process so she could come fully into the Church. This Easter, Eric, Sophie, and I were thrilled to witness Holland’s confirmation at the Easter Vigil.

When Holland and Eric

attended the Catholic Answers conference two years ago, the greatest period of our faith journey began. Last year, we all attended the conference together, and we already have tickets for this year. We have met the Catholic Answers team during visits to the Catholic Answers offices.

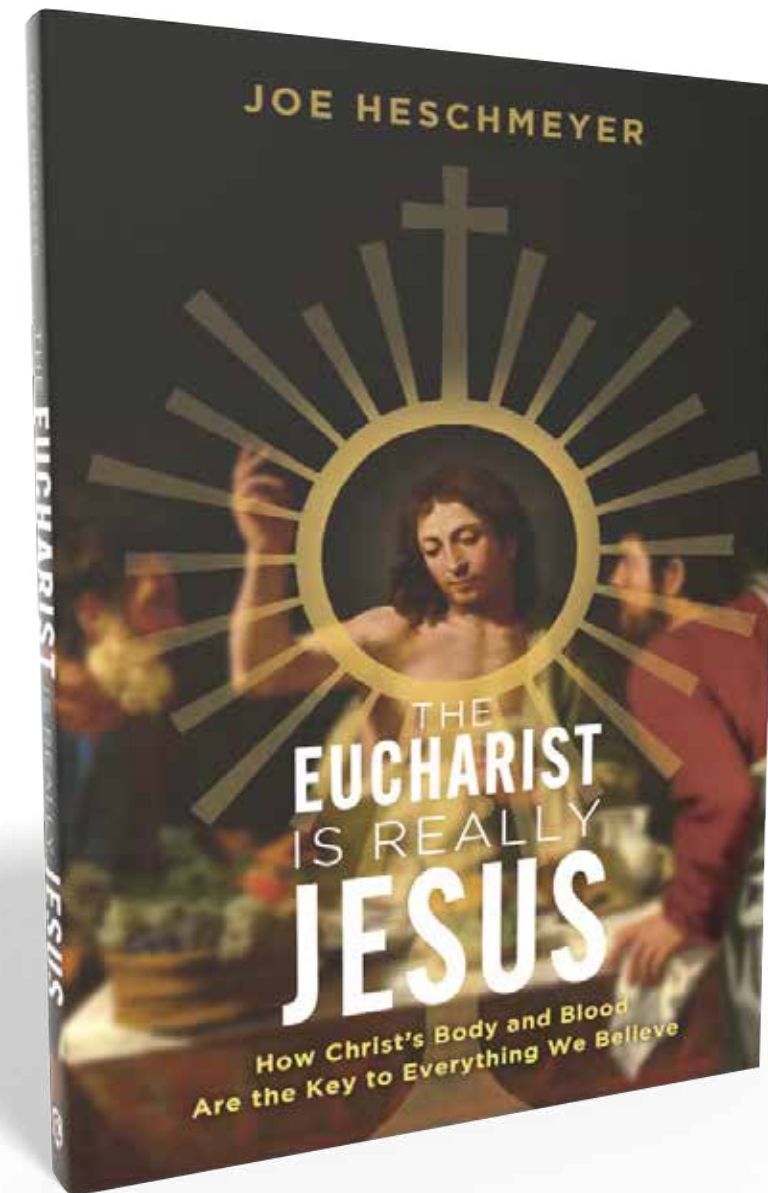
Like Christ knocking on the door of our hearts, it all started with an invitation. I am so thankful that we have returned to the Church and that Catholic Answers was instrumental in our journey home. ■

## You Make It All Possible

When you sign up for SOCIETY 315 at Catholic.com, send a photo of yourself to **Michelle Murdock** at [mmurdock@catholic.com](mailto:mmurdock@catholic.com), and it will appear within an article, such as the notice at right. It’s great way to show your support for Catholic Answers for people around the world to see.



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## To Be Willing—Nay, Eager— to Die for Your Faith

What would it mean to live in a church in which the believers were like the early Christians—I mean, in which practically all of the believers, just “ordinary” Christians, were ready to die as martyrs rather than deny the Faith before the world and its powers?

Such a church exists today among the Christians of Upper Egypt. These Coptic Christians, the descendants of the original Ancient Egyptians, have endured for many centuries a consistent and always-near-at-hand persecution, whether bloody or socioeconomic. Their persecuted state as confessors and martyrs of their faith in the Holy Trinity is so permanent a fact that their very calendar is dated from the last great persecution of the Roman emperors, that of Diocletian.

Despite centuries of Islamic persecution, Coptic Christians make up around ten percent of the population of Egypt, and the Upper Nile is where they are most of all to be found. With a regular rhythm, and much bloodshed, churches are bombed, houses burned, shops raided at the decree of some local imam.

Instead of trials for the criminals who commit such violence, the government holds “reconciliation” meetings in which the Christians are pressured to retract any complaints they may have. Social persecution

is so great that Coptic men suffer very high unemployment, almost complete during the recent pandemic.

It was this lack of work that in 2015 led twenty Coptic Christian men, mostly in their twenties and thirties, thirteen of whom were from a single village, to travel to neighboring Libya in search of work. They slept in a single room, most on the floor, since they did not want to spend on accommodations the money they intended to send home. They were joined by one other, an African from Ghana.

Terrorists of the so-called Islamic State captured them together at night. They sequestered them, clothed them in identical orange prison jumpers, and with a carefully choreographed video, led them to be beheaded.

The video is accessible online with some effort. The leader of the band of executioners addresses his viewers, mocking the worshipers of the cross and threatening the same fate for others as well. He concludes (they are standing in the video on the Mediterranean coast facing north) that Rome across the sea is their final goal: the destruction of Christians and their capitol city. The terrorists proceed to cut off the heads of each man with a hand-held knife, a gruesome and

hardly rapid method.

Not one of the martyrs stirs, not one begs to be let go, not one seeks to flee. No one denies Jesus and the Holy Trinity. Even the lone African from Ghana, not a member of the Church, proclaims, “Their God is my God,” and accepts martyrdom even though he was offered freedom. He is the twenty-first martyr, literally baptized in his own blood, which according to St. Thomas Aquinas is an even closer conformity to Christ’s death than baptism in water.

The traditionalist German novelist and essayist Martin Mosebach hastens to investigate, and writes a

fine book, *The 21: A Journey into the Land of Coptic Martyrs*, about these twenty-one new martyrs. He visits the village of the thirteen and finds poor people with no earthly status who express pride and joy that their sons and brothers were deemed worthy of martyrdom.

A Coptic bishop in Upper Egypt asserts, “This is not a Western church in a Western society. We are the Church of martyrs. I take no special risk when I say that not a single Copt in Upper Egypt would betray the Faith.” A young woman of the village explains, “They were ready to die, and even longed to. We all do! We’re all ready and yearning because we all want to vouch for Christ.”

If we were to read the same assertions in a standard story of some Roman martyrs, we might think, “Well, that’s how they always speak in these hagiographical compositions.” Hardly. This is what the martyrs actually say, bishops and faithful, men and women in every age, including our own.

Small wonder, then, that Pope Francis has ordered these martyrs to be included in the Roman Martyrology, the liturgical book that lists the saints and blessed venerated in the Church each of the days of the year. This is not as solemn as a canonization, but it does mean that these martyrs may be given liturgical honors at Mass and the Divine Office.

Some have objected that they should not be so honored since they were Orthodox and not Catho-

lic, and they bring arguments from conciliar documents taken out of their proper moral context to make their point.

Suffice it to say that the supreme act of love for Christ that gained these models of Christian manly courage heaven may surely be honored by Catholics with no danger to their faith! These apostolic Christians with fully valid sacraments are as innocent of the controversies of the fourth century as we are. And in any case, we could not honor them as much as the Holy Trinity does right now in the heights of heaven.

— Fr. Hugh Barbour



### Does Capitalism Breed Dog Moms?

In comments at a May 2023 demographics conference, Pope Francis lamented the dire lack of births in Italy (which is more or less the same throughout Europe and indeed the Western world). He had especially sharp remarks for a woman who he said recently requested a blessing from him for her “baby” only to reveal that it was a dog.

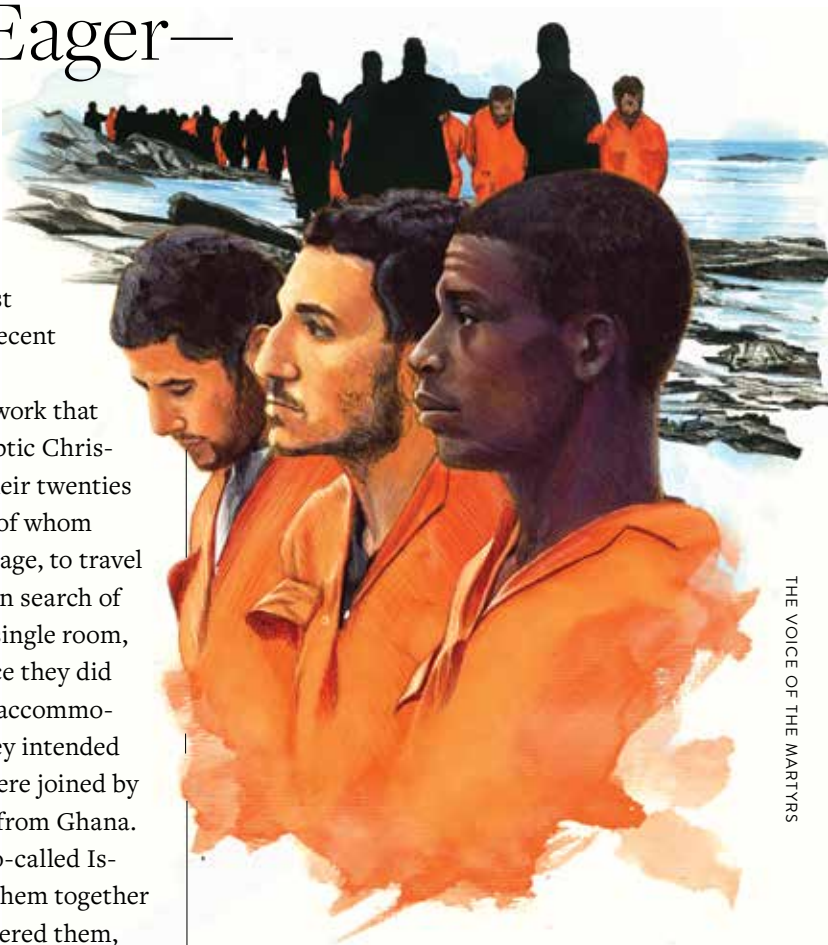
Now, we know that Pope Francis likes to employ colorful anecdotes that may include composites or at least embellishments. So maybe the woman wasn’t quite so brazen as this. But we have all seen the “dog mom” bumper stickers and the general growing ridiculousness of pet-obsessive culture. And we can see how our culture’s vanity seems to be growing in indirect proportion to the falling birth rates.

So I thought the Holy Father was dead-on when he knocked young people’s replacement of marriage and having children with “mediocre substitutes” such as careers, travel, leisure—and fur babies.

But I had to scratch my head at the way he framed it. He said these young people are in fact “forced” into seeking these replacements, because the “savage” free market was making marriage and parenthood too expensive.

He didn’t elaborate or connect the dots in his comments, which makes it hard to understand or critique his reasoning. But on the face of it, it seems counterfactual. Birth rates in Italy have declined by more than half in the last fifty years, but this decline has been accompanied by a tenfold increase in Italy’s per-capita gross domestic product.

The steady upward trend of Italians’ wealth during that time has been accompanied by improvements in health care and air quality, lower food prices, decreases in infant and maternal mortality, and the steady march of material



THE VOICE OF THE MARTYRS



progress that has left people better fed, more comfortable, more mobile and educated, physically safer, longer lived, and with more disposable income than before.

Indeed, all this comfort forms the basis for the more-typical critique of capitalism that one often hears in Catholic circles: that it has led to consumerism. With so many choices, so many distractions, so much extra money, we're prone to spiritual softness. Francis and modern popes before him have rightly called out the West on this serious problem.

But the idea that the market system that created the conditions for all this wealth-generation is to blame for economic disincentives to raising families? It just doesn't seem to track. And I don't think you have to be an unabashed cheerleader for capitalism, or to ignore its real flaws, to see this. That free markets tend to make things cheaper and more abundant is not an unalloyed good, but it's a fact.

But Italy is far richer than it has been in living memory, and politically it is far more committed to providing living necessities for its residents. Yet its birth rates have cratered.

Maybe, then, we should not speak of young people being "forced" by their conditions to raise dogs instead of babies or to choose cars or careers over families. Let's focus instead on diagnosing and healing whatever spiritual disease has caused us as a culture to value things over people, personal pleasures and freedoms over the experience of self-sacrificial love.

— Todd Aglialoro



## The Early Christians, Dragons, and Flying Snakes

Today people are fascinated by cryptids—hidden creatures—such as Bigfoot and the Loch Ness Monster. In the ancient world, the most famous cryptid was the dragon; so, did early Christians believe in them?

The term *dragon* (Greek, *drakôn*) appears in the Greek Bible, but normally in a symbolic context, such as when the devil appears in the form of a dragon in the book of Revelation (e.g., Rev. 12). So this doesn't provide good evidence for belief in literal dragons.

The term also appears in other contexts. For example, in Daniel 14, the prophet Daniel kills a large *drakôn* that the Babylonians worshiped. However, in secular Greek, the term *drakôn* originally referred to a snake or serpent.

This is clear in Wisdom 16:10, where the author refers to the snakes that bit the Israelites in Numbers 21 and describes them as "venomous *drakontôn*." The author of Daniel 14 may have expected readers to imagine a big snake, and some modern Bible translations, including the Common English Bible,

use *snake* in the passage. The Bible thus doesn't provide a good basis for documenting belief in literal dragons. However, we do find some in the early Church who were open to the idea; for one, St. Augustine:

As for dragons, which lack feet, they are said to take their rest in caves, and to soar up into the air. While these are not too easy to come across, this kind of animated creature is for all that definitely mentioned not only in our literature but also in that of the Gentiles (*Literal Meaning of Genesis* 3:9:13).

This passage may not mean what it suggests. Augustine says dragons have no feet—which would point to snakes—but that they fly. There were indeed references to flying snakes in ancient literature. Isaiah mentions them (14:29, 30:6), and so does the Greek historian Herodotus (*Histories* 2:75-76, 3:109). So Augustine is likely not referring to what we would think of as a dragon but to flying snakes. (Note:

flying—or, technically, gliding—snakes exist in some parts of Asia.)

The flying snakes Herodotus referred to were small, but in another passage, Augustine envisions dragons that are very large:

Now, dragons favor watery habitats. They emerge from caves and take to the air. They create major atmospheric disturbance, for dragons are very large creatures, the largest of all on earth. This is probably why the psalm began its consideration of earthly creatures with them (*Expositions of the Psalms* 148:9).

Augustine wasn't alone in thinking about real, enormous dragons. Other Church Fathers did so also, and so did non-Christian thinkers.

The reason is obvious when you think about it. Although the term *paleontology* was only coined in 1822, humans have been running across fossils for as long as there have been humans. When they came across the bones of giant, monstrous animals, they correctly concluded that there used to be giant animals in the area.

In *The First Fossil Hunters*, historian Adrienne Mayor argues that it was the ancient discovery of fossils that formed the basis of the legends of dragons and similar creatures the world over. Augustine himself reports finding a giant tooth on a beach, where the action of the waves presumably uncovered it:

Once, on the beach at Utica, I saw with my own eyes—and

there were others to bear me witness—a human molar tooth so big that it could have been cut up, I think, into a hundred pieces each as big as one of our modern teeth. That tooth, however, I can well believe, was the tooth of a giant (*City of God* 15:9).

I'm not a Young Earth creationist, but I have to agree with musician Buddy Davis's fun children's song "D Is for Dinosaur":

*"When dinosaurs first roamed the earth, many years ago  
People called them dragons (and just thought you'd like to know),  
So dinosaurs and dragons are both the same thing  
The only thing that's different is we changed the dragon's name."*

— Jimmy Akin

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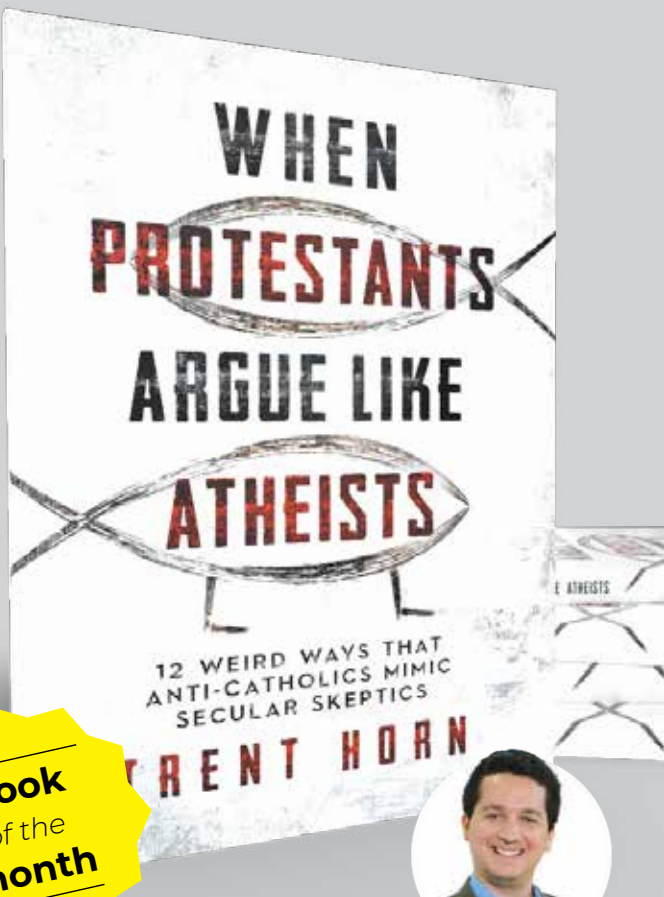
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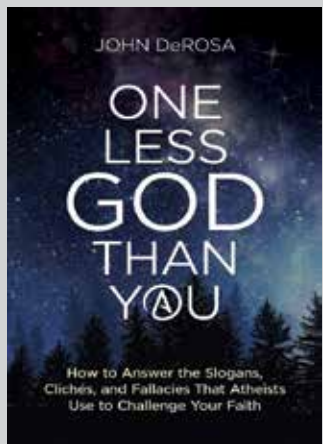


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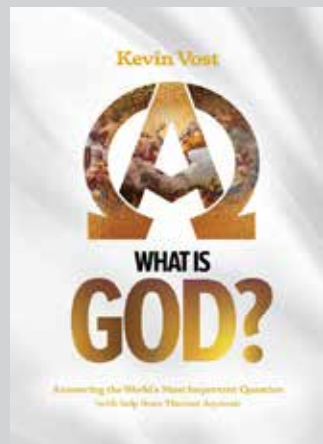
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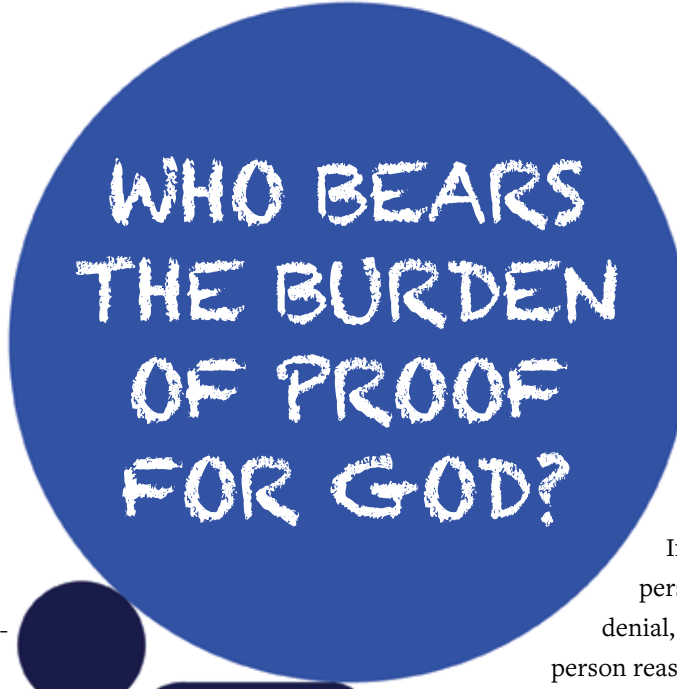
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### CHALLENGE

"The burden of proof is on those who believe in God. Atheists don't have to prove God doesn't exist; believers have to prove he does."

### DEFENSE

This misunderstands the concept of the *burden of proof*.

The concept is borrowed from civil law, where it refers to the obligation a party has to provide sufficient evidence for a claim or lose his case. U.S. law establishes a presumption of innocence, according to which a prosecutor must prove the accused is guilty of an offense, or else the accused will be acquitted and be legally considered innocent.

The presumption of innocence is a choice our society has made to favor the accused, lest prosecutors use the power of the state to falsely convict innocent people and bring about a reign of terror.

However, the burden of proof works differently in other settings, such as philosophical or religious discussions.

From a logical point of view, it does not matter whether one is arguing for a proposition (P) or for its denial (not-P). In the absence of evidence, *neither is more*

*probable than the other.*

Consequently, as long as things remain in the abstract, nobody has a burden of proof.

The burden is created when one person begins asserting either P or not-P.

If he wants to convince a person of a proposition or its denial, then he needs to offer that person reasons why. The philosophical

burden of proof thus does not intrinsically fall on either party. It is something you assume when you try to convince someone else of a position.

All of this applies to situations where one is making a claim about whether something exists. Until you consider the evidence, neither the proposition "X exists" nor the proposition "X does not exist"—and it doesn't matter what X is—can be deemed more

probable than the other. As long as you have no evidence favoring the existence or nonexistence of X, both propositions are equally probable.

Thus, if a theist wants to convince a nontheist that God exists, he needs to provide arguments for his position. But if an atheist wants to convince a nonatheist that God does not exist, he similarly needs to offer arguments for his position. The burden of proof is assumed by whoever is trying to convince the other. ■

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# CLARIFYING BELIEF IN GOD

DOUGLAS M. BEAUMONT

*There are multiple arguments for the existence of God, but if we're not accurate when using them, their evangelical value will likely be lost.*

There are many good arguments for the existence of God, each with their own strengths and difficulties. As some arguments have become more popular, however, certain confusions have entered into the mix even among Catholics and other Christians, weakening the case for God even among those who want to know and defend the truth.

This can have negative consequences for Christian apologetics, because when arguments are misunderstood,

they can be easily dismissed. And it is important that we do not assume that because one has had an education in the Faith that he is prepared for every challenge.

## The cosmological argument

The most popular cosmological argument today is the “horizontal” or Kalam argument. It argues that the existence of the universe is an effect, whose cause is God, the Creator:

1. Everything that begins to exist has a cause of its existence.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. There cannot be an infinite number of causes.
4. Therefore, the universe has a first cause of its existence (God).

The heart of this argument lies in the impossibility of

an infinite regression of causes or events (premise 1). An actual infinite number of things cannot exist because an “infinite number” is a contradiction, nowhere observed in nature. If the universe had no beginning, then the number of causes or moments before today would be an infinite number of moments. But there cannot be an actually infinite amount of moments, so the universe must have begun and was therefore caused to begin by something uncaused (and outside the universe). This cause is God.

The above problem of an infinite regress has sometimes been incorrectly applied to other cosmological

arguments such as the contingency (“vertical”) argument based on the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas, however, actually denied the validity of arguing for the beginning of the universe based on an infinite regress! His “vertical” cosmological argument is actually making a completely different claim than the “horizontal” version:

1. At least one contingent being (i.e., an existing being whose existence is not necessary, or who could possibly not exist) exists.
2. Contingent beings must have an external cause of their existence.
3. An infinite number of contingent beings cannot account for the existence of all contingent beings.
4. Therefore, a necessary being (a being that cannot not-exist) exists (God).

The key issue is that even an infinite number of contingent beings cannot ultimately explain the existence of a single contingent

being (in the same way that positing an infinite number of train cars does not explain the motion of the first train car—there has to be an engine). The problem is not that there cannot be an infinite number of things (Aquinas argued that there could be). Rather, it is that even an infinite number of contingent beings could never ultimately account for itself.

Familiarity with these kinds of arguments allows one to respond with precision, which in turn helps make dialogue fruitful. While it may seem nitpicky to insist on such precision, terminology is important because words and ideas are intertwined. Confusion about how these arguments work can have negative and long-lasting effects.

Even simply confusing two types of arguments that fall under same general category can make them seem to lack the support or strength they actually have. This, in turn, could lead to an unwarranted abandonment of a reasonable conclusion—in this case, that God the Creator exists.

## Argument from design

Design arguments are based on some fact of creation that appears to require a creator. Two primary forms—arguments based on *intelligent design* and on *teleology*, or ultimate ends—are often lumped together, although they do not work the same way.

An example of this confusion can be found on the popular Christian apologetics website GotQuestions.org. In an article titled “What is the teleological argument for the existence of God?” the author moves from teleology to design without indicating any difference: “The word *teleology* comes from *telos*, which means ‘purpose’ or ‘goal.’ . . . In other words, a design implies a designer.”

The problem is, design and purpose are not the same thing. There is some overlap between arguments from design and from teleology, but if we are to offer our best arguments, we have to be precise in our language and make necessary distinctions.

Intelligent design arguments typically proceed from the identification of various patterns, information, or statistical probabilities to God’s existence as the best explanation for these phenomena. Many of these arguments are directed against evolution, but their end goal is really to show that an intelligent agent had to be behind these features. Intelligent design arguments are usually of the form:

1. The universe exhibits some property that is evidence of design (e.g., information, improbability, hospitality to life, etc.).

2. Design is always thought to be caused by some intelligence.
3. Therefore, the best explanation for the evidence is that there exists an intelligent designer (God) who intentionally brought it about.

There are both micro and macro versions of intelligent design arguments, some from things smaller than we can observe unaided (DNA, bacteria, etc.) and some larger (atmosphere, galaxies, etc.). To the extent that any of these things are shown to have some kind of design, they are used as evidence for a designer and thus having an intelligent cause.

**“The story of the dust of the earth and the breath of God does not in fact explain how human persons come to be but rather what they are.”**

*Telos*, on the other hand, is the Greek word for “end” or “goal.”

A true teleological argument, therefore, looks for purpose in creation—not simply randomly improbable states, information codes, or irreducibly complex systems. Aquinas’s “fifth way” argument, for example, relies on the explanation for goal- or end-directed natures, activities, or properties found in creation. It goes like this:

1. We see that natural things without knowledge act toward some end (specific goal).
2. What lacks intelligence is directed to its end by something intelligent.
3. Therefore, a creator (God)

exists who directs these natural things to their end.

Goal-directed systems are accounted for by the existence of an intelligent being who directs that system. Since all created things seem to operate according to some goal (even goals that are not their own, such as those of rocks and protons), the entire universe can be explained only by the existence of an intelligent being beyond creation.

This distinction between intelligent design and the teleological argument is important because the refutation of one is not that of the other. For example, intelligent design arguments are often employed against Darwinian evolution, whereas teleology is not affected by questions about the method the Creator used to create. As Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) said in regard to the creation narrative in Genesis 2:

The story of the dust of the earth and the breath of God, which we just heard, does not in fact explain how human persons come to be but rather what they are. It explains their inmost origin and casts light on the project that they are. And, vice versa, the theory of evolution seeks to understand and describe biological developments. But in so doing it cannot explain where the “project” of human persons comes from, nor their inner origin, nor their particular nature. To that extent we are faced here with two complementary—rather than

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mutually exclusive—realities (*In the Beginning: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, 50).

Further, while intelligent design arguments are sometimes at the mercy of interpretive statistics and open to such rejoinders as have been levied against William Paley's famous "watchmaker" argument, teleological arguments (which are philosophical and not scientific or mathematical) are not so vulnerable.

So, when someone like Richard Dawkins makes claims such as, "the teleological argument, sometimes called the Argument from Design . . . is the familiar 'watchmaker' argument, which is surely one of the most superficially plausible bad arguments ever discovered" ("Why There Almost Certainly Is No God," online at edge.org), he is confusing two completely different arguments.

Nowhere is precision in language more required than when arguing for the existence of God. Small mistakes in language and logic in the beginning of an argument can lead not only to losing an argument but could lead to losing one's faith.

### Argument from morality

Moral arguments, when employed to support the case for the existence of God, generally proceed from conscience or from laws of action back to their ultimate cause. This is where we often run into questions and claims about natural law and how such law can be known at the level of conscience by any rational person, regardless of his faith.

Two important things to note

right away are, first, that natural law and conscience are not the same thing, and, second, natural law does not simply point to, as many claim, what we see occur in the created world. Confusions between these kinds of related ideas can ruin otherwise good arguments based on them.

Natural law refers to the order of creation and how beings flourish according to their ontological nature (i.e., what they are). Conscience, on the other hand, refers to one's inner motivation to act according to moral laws (to do good and avoid doing evil). These two often overlap as to their content, but they are not the same thing.

For one thing, while natural law points to a being's purpose and consequently what is good for it, the fact that something is good for that being does not necessarily imply any moral obligation (i.e., just because something is good to do does not mean I must do it). Conversely, one's conscience motivates one to follow its dictates even when one does not understand why exactly.

Another difference is that natural law is based in ontology and is discoverable in philosophy, whereas conscience can be formed (or distorted) more easily by subjective means.

Here is a good example of the confusion regarding natural law:

Natural law has different meanings. It can mean those laws that are naturally derived from observing nature and are therefore obligatory to all mankind. In philosophy, it can mean those moral laws that are naturally inherent in being human and are

thus knowable ("Natural Law," online at carm.org).

Note that while the second meaning corresponds to a certain degree with the traditional definition, "observing nature" as it is used in the first case here is said to morally oblige humans in some way. Yet "nature" here is referring to observations from the created world, not to what a thing is ontologically.

The moral law argument for God from conscience is often said to be based on St. Paul's writings:

When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them (Rom. 2:14-15).

Paul shows here that God's laws are not limited to his supernatural revelation; rather, humans can come to know moral precepts by following their (properly formed) internal conscience.

C.S., Lewis famously used this argument in the first pages of his book *Mere Christianity*. It usually goes something like this:

1. All people recognize that some things are right and some things are wrong, which implies a universal standard or "law."
2. Standards and laws require a lawgiver to ground them.
3. This universal law requires a

universal law-giver (God).

The key here is that moral intuition, or a sense of right and wrong, seems to be built into humans, regardless of the society in which they were raised. The point is not that no one disagrees or fails to do the good, but that when this occurs, a society tends to recognize it and penalize it accordingly.

This universal conscience seems to imply a universal moral law that serves as the standard for all people. Being "above" all people, the cause of this moral intuition must transcend mere humanity, because all humans seem to be aware of and captive to this standard. A transcendent law implies a transcendent lawgiver.

Now, it is one thing to ground universal moral laws in God—it is another to explain how we come to know that law. At this point, understandably, many people confuse the moral law argument from conscience with the natural law argument from goodness.

Natural law arguments proceed from the nature of things (what they are) to moral laws (what they should do) based on those natures. Thus, it is more of a mechanism for discovering goodness than arguing that it must be pursued.

1. All beings have particular natures, including their purposes, and an action is morally good if it contributes to the

being's achievement of its purpose.

2. Moral acts track with a thing's achieving of its purpose but must be given their status as moral laws by the creator of those things.
3. Natural laws become obligatory moral laws through the creator (God).

Natural laws are derived from observations and experience of things in the world around us. By knowing what something is we can know its purpose and objectively determine what is good or bad for it. This part works whether or not natural laws are expanded upon—or explicated by—some deity.

That is why the natural law is not necessarily the same thing as the moral law "written on the heart" by God. A space alien could observe humanity and discover natural human moral principles without knowing any specific human moral code (which is often violated anyway).

Getting from observable natural law to obligatory moral law is a

move that requires a law maker. The conscience, on the other hand, seems to operate without this kind of philosophical investigation, and is thus more properly considered the law "written on the heart." While both of these laws ultimately require God, they are not the same things.

\* \* \*

Apologetic arguments suffer when they are misstated, often making them seem to lack the support or strength they actually have. In this article we've considered some nuanced distinctions that may be missed in popular restatements of classic arguments from the cosmos's existence, its design, and the moral law. Getting these right is important, because their perceived failure could be the excuse someone needs to abandon their conclusion: the existence of the God of Christianity. ■



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# ‘IT DOESN’T MATTER’

## How to Deal with Closed Indifference

MATT NELSON

*To some, any transcendent deity seems absurd. But arguing from a purely natural level, without an appeal to the supernatural, may compel them to consider the possibility of God.*

**D**o you know someone who isn’t exactly hostile to God and religion but just doesn’t seem to care much about them one way or the other? Such a person exhibits religious indifference: the question of God just doesn’t matter, and he fails to think seriously about religion and accordingly to give God his due.

This is a general definition, but in real life indifference occurs in a variety of forms and to varying degrees. One common form of indifference involves a failure to take religion seriously due to disbelief in a personal, present God. Such disbelief leads the indifferentist to treat all religious beliefs and behav-

iors as absurd since God—whatever he may be—cannot know (or care) what we do in this life. This radical closed-mindedness toward religion that results from such skepticism is called *closed indifference*.

Not every unbeliever is a closed indifferentist. Some skeptics take religious claims seriously. This was notably evident in the twentieth century, before the rise of the New Atheism. Atheist philosopher J.L. Mackie, for example, made an honorable attempt at rebutting theistic arguments when he published *The Miracle of Theism* in 1982. Many theistic philosophers took his philosophical charges against the classical arguments for God’s existence seri-

ously then—and still do today.

Mackie was not alone. Antony Flew, one of the most prominent philosophers of the twentieth century, was respected by believers and unbelievers alike. Indeed, Flew took the arguments against and for God so seriously that at the turn of the millennium—despite his first-rate philosophical contribution to atheistic thought—he would argue himself into deism, finding himself rationally unable to reject the existence of God. In a discussion in 2004 with Christian professor Gary Habermas, Flew said:

I don’t believe in the God of any revelatory system, although I am open to that. But it seems to me that the case for an Aristotelian God who has the characteristics of power and also intelligence is now much stronger than it ever was before. And it was from Aristotle that Aquinas drew the materials for producing his Five

Ways (“My Pilgrimage from Atheism to Theism,” online at [digitalcommons.liberty.edu](http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu)).

Aristotle’s first cause argument for God so impressed Flew that it led him to theism, even though he insisted his “discovery of the divine has proceeded on a purely natural level, without any reference to supernatural phenomena . . . a pilgrimage of reason and not of faith” (“There Is a God,” online at [hyperphysics.phy-astr.gsu.edu/Nave/html/Faithpathh/Flewq.html](http://hyperphysics.phy-astr.gsu.edu/Nave/html/Faithpathh/Flewq.html)).

Catholics everywhere, like Flew, have also found the Aristotelean approach to arguing for God—especially as developed later by St. Thomas Aquinas—to be deeply compelling. Richard Dawkins, on the other hand, would beg to differ. Consider the following remarks in his book *The God Delusion*, which are representative of all-out dismissal of St. Thomas’s philosophical case for God:

Even if we allow the dubious luxury of arbitrarily conjuring

up a terminator to an infinite regress and giving it a name simply because we need one, there is absolutely no reason to endow that terminator with any of the properties normally ascribed to God: omnipotence, omniscience, goodness, creativity of design.

In only a few pages, Dawkins attempts to reduce to mere rubbish Aquinas’s classic Five Ways and his related arguments for the divine attributes. But as other critics have pointed out, one can hardly take seriously this four-page attempt to take down one of Western civilization’s greatest philosophers. If Dawkins wants to take a serious stab at heavy hitters such as Aristotle and Aquinas, so be it—but he should at least try. We should not take Dawkins seriously, except for the fact that many armchair skeptics today have done so.

Such dishonest caricaturing is symptomatic of closed indifference; and the intellectual apathy it betrays has upset even fellow unbelievers such as philosopher and atheist

Michael Ruse, who writes:

Unlike the new atheists, I take scholarship seriously. I have written that *The God Delusion* made me ashamed to be an atheist and I meant it. Trying to understand how God could need no cause, Christians claim that God exists necessarily. I have taken the effort to try to understand what that means. Dawkins and company are ignorant of such claims and positively contemptuous of those who even try to understand them, let alone believe them. Thus, like a first-year undergraduate, he can happily go around asking loudly, “What caused God?” as though he had made some momentous philosophical discovery (“Dawkins et al bring us into disrepute,” online at [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com)).

How do we awaken the closed indifferentists? The solution could be as simple as reintroducing arguments for God’s existence and inviting the spiritually indifferent



into a serious discussion. It could be that many closed indifferentists have simply never heard a proper explanation of such proofs before.

Antony Flew admitted, after his conversion to deism, “I was not a specialist on Aristotle. . . . I was reading parts of his philosophy for the first time.” It is easy to assume nonbelievers have heard more than they have.

It could also be the case that, in addition to never hearing a clear and rational case for belief in God, many indifferentists have never been challenged to give an account for their own skepticism. As the respected atheist philosopher Quentin Smith observes, “The great majority of naturalist philosophers have an unjustified belief that naturalism is true

and unjustified belief that theism (or supernaturalism) is false” (“The Metaphilosophy of Naturalism,” online at [pdcnet.org](http://pdcnet.org)).

We might also remind closed indifferentists of the costs of their beliefs. Many skeptics are strict materialists, for example—they believe in nothing outside of physical reality. This obviously rules out God, angels, and the like. But this also means that mental thoughts, for instance, amount to nothing more than a kind of secretion of the brain. It also means that we have, to quote biologist Anthony Cashmore, no more free will than a bowl of sugar. This calls into question whether we can really be responsible for our actions—a line of reasoning most closed indifferentists probably hav-

en’t considered.

Since God has placed in our hearts a hunger for him and his truth, I would like to think that, deep down, every human being has in interest in religious questions—like those regarding the meaning of life, morality, and life after death. Our evangelical task therefore is, first and foremost, to show that we are willing to take the indifferentist’s thoughts and questions seriously and, second, to be prepared to give a compelling account for the hope that is within us. We plant the seeds; God takes care of the growing. ■

*For a deeper dive, order Matt Nelson’s book Just Whatever, available at [shop.catholic.com](http://shop.catholic.com).*

## BE PREPARED TO MAKE A DAILY DEFENSE

### CHALLENGE

“Christians use God to explain what science can’t yet explain. But as scientific knowledge grows, the necessity for God shrinks to nothing.”

### DEFENSE

Christians understand God as the ultimate explanation for everything, not just things science can’t presently explain.

God causes some things directly and some indirectly, using created things as secondary causes. “The truth that God is at work in all the actions of his creatures is inseparable from faith in God the Creator. God is the first cause who operates in and through secondary causes” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 308).

Scripture often attributes “actions to God without mentioning any secondary causes. This is not a ‘primitive mode of speech,’ but a profound way of recalling God’s primacy and absolute Lordship over history and the world” (CCC 304).

Science is a valuable tool for understanding secondary causation. By studying the visible, created world, we have gained a better understanding of it, and that continues to grow.

When confronted with a scientifically unexplained phenomenon in the natural world, it would be a mistake




to reflexively say, “God must have done it; it’s a miracle.” It may be that further investigation will produce a scientific explanation. If so, science will have increased our understanding of how secondary causation works in God’s plan.

However, some events are genuine miracles that resist scientific explanation. These are examples of God using primary causation.

We cannot assume, without investigation or reflection, into which category a phenomenon falls. Neither can we assume that either category is empty: we must open-mindedly allow for the possibility of both the scientifically explainable and the miraculous. To assume all events must be scientifically explainable would be just as prejudiced as assuming none are.

Regardless of whether an event is produced by primary or second-ary causation, God is its ultimate explanation, at least in the sense that he created the world and allowed the event to occur as part of his providential plan.


This is not “God of the gaps” thinking because it does not see God as explaining only those things that science can’t presently explain. Neither does it assume that something must be miraculous just because there is no known scientific explanation. It allows the open-minded exploration of both primary and secondary causation. ■



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# Science Is Based on Faith

FR. NICANOR AUSTRACO

*Many skeptics fail to see that scientific knowledge, like religious faith, must be grounded in nonprovable beliefs about the nature of the universe.*

Most religious conversations between believers and nonbelievers lead to a contrast between religion and science. “Science is based on reason; religion relies on faith,” the nonbeliever will assert, believing that this in some way damages the respectability of belief. In fact, he is only echoing St. Thomas Aquinas, who taught that theology is done on the light of faith while philosophy—including the philosophy of nature and hence modern science—is based upon the natural light of reason.

This, of course, is not what the

nonbeliever wants to say. In contrasting religion and science, he is implying that the believer is a victim of superstition who fails to acknowledge that only science can lead to true knowledge because it alone is based on empirical verification and rigorous testing.

How is the believer to respond? Is it true that science alone is rational because it is based on demonstration and logical reasoning?

Most people would agree that religious faith is grounded in truths that cannot be demonstrated empirically using the scientific

method. For the Catholic, these beliefs of faith are justified because they are accepted as true on the revelation and authority of God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived. What is not obvious is that scientific knowledge too must be grounded in essential, nonprovable beliefs about the nature of the universe.

What follows is a brief summary of the scientific method that grounds the scientific enterprise. As many philosophers of science have shown, the success and justification of the method rests on premises

that cannot be demonstrated. Instead, these premises are accepted as true by the scientific community because science would be unable to function without them. These premises constitute the essential beliefs of every scientist—his natural faith—and reflect his implicit acceptance of classical metaphysics.

## First step: induction

The first step in the scientific method involves the process of induction. The scientist looks around himself, collects data, then makes a probable conclusion. For example,

all the swans he sees are white. He therefore proposes the hypothesis that all swans are white.

But using this process of induction alone, the scientist can never assert truths with absolute certainty. No great number of white swans could rule out the possibility that the next swan could be black. Consequently, the scientist often constructs his hypothesis so that it can be verified and tested through experimentation. The experiment is then thought to confirm or dismiss the hypothesis.

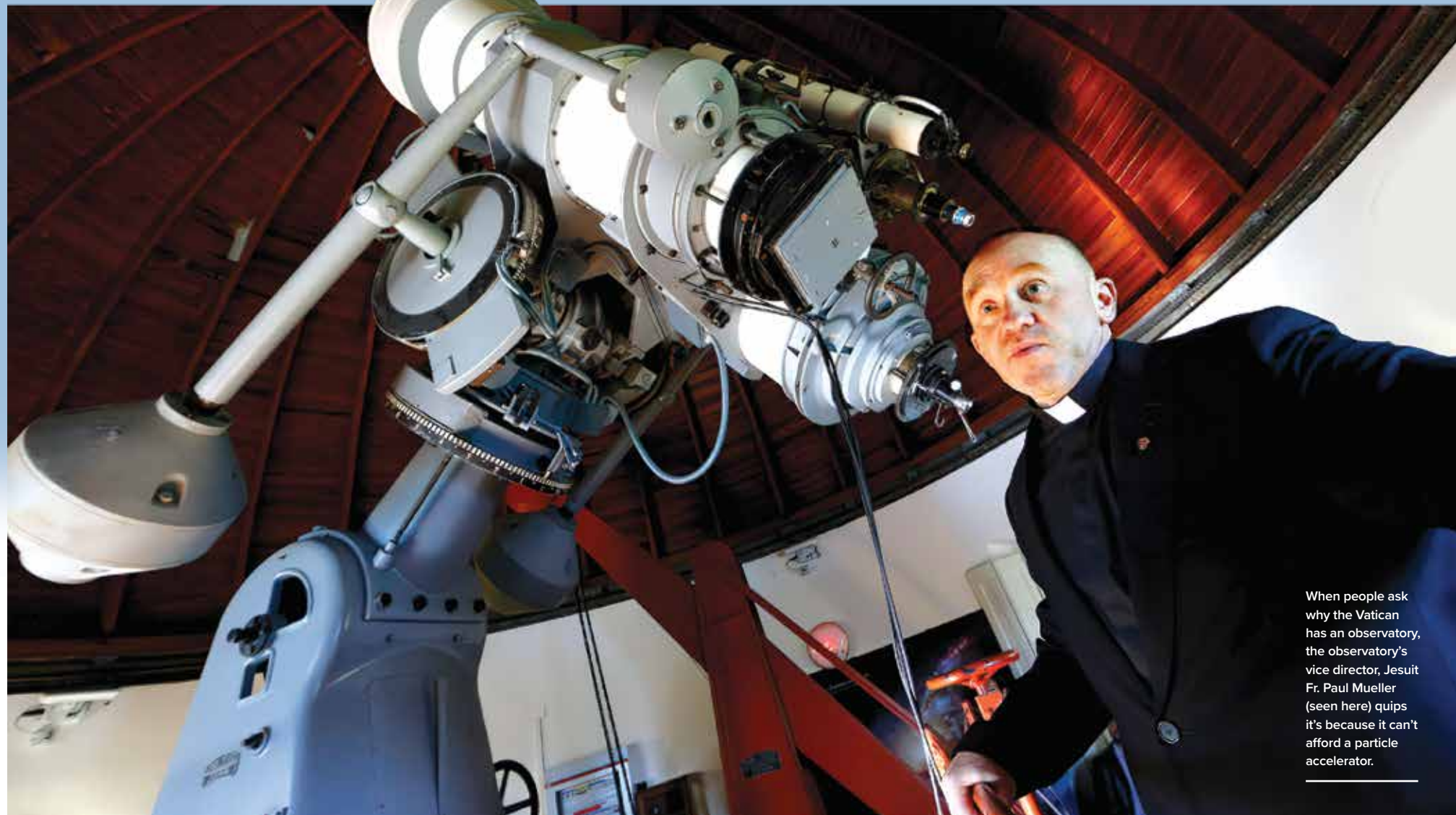
But even this safeguard cannot

guarantee the truth of scientific conclusions. This is illustrated by a simple example used by the philosopher Richard Swinburne (*Simplicity as Evidence of Truth*, 15-19). Let us say that a scientist is analyzing data composed of four pairs of numbers, the first number in each set being designated  $x$  and the second  $y$ : (1,2), (2,4), (3,6), and (4,8). He wants to determine the relationship between the first and the second numbers in the series where  $x$  increases by 1 and  $y$  increases by 2.

Using induction, he compares the pairs of numbers and proposes that  $y = 2x$ . It is a reasonable hypothesis, but he resorts to more testing and comes up with two more pairs of numbers, (5,10) and (6,12). They seem to confirm his hypothesis, and he rejoices.

What is not usually realized, however, is that this series of paired numbers can be adequately explained by an infinite number of alternate equations of the form  $y = 2x + x(x-1)(x-2)(x-3)(x-4)(x-5)(x-6)z$ , where  $z$  can be a constant or another function of  $x$ . No further testing and collecting of data would be able to distinguish between these alternative equations and the basic equation  $y = 2x$ .

In choosing  $y = 2x$  as his hypothesis, the scientist has made the assumption that simplicity is a marker for truth.



When people ask why the Vatican has an observatory, the observatory's vice director, Jesuit Fr. Paul Mueller (seen here) quips it's because it can't afford a particle accelerator.

CATHOLIC HERALD

## Tell These Folks Faith Has Nothing to Do with Science

The list is long of notable scientists who were or are Catholic. A very few are mentioned here.

**ALBERTUS MAGNUS** (c. 1206-1280): A precursor of modern science and patron saint of natural sciences, he worked in physics, logic, metaphysics, biology, and psychology.

**BONAVENTURA CAVALIERI** (1598-1647): Known for his work on the problems of optics and motion, his principle in geometry partially anticipated integral calculus.

**NICOLAUS COPERNICUS** (1473-1543): Famous for his heliocentric cosmology that set in motion the Copernican Revolution.

**FRANCESCO MARIA GRIMALDI** (1618-1663): Discovered the diffraction of light, investigated the freefall of objects, measured geological features on the moon.

**PIERRE ANDRÉ LATREILLE** (1762-1833): An entomologist whose works describing insects assigned many of the insect taxa still in use today.

**GEORGES LEMAÎTRE** (1894-1966): Belgian priest was the father of the Big Bang theory. (continued on p. 33)

## Does simplicity beg the question?

James D. Watson, describing his and F.H.C. Crick's discovery of the double helical structure of deoxyribonucleic acid, or DNA, said it was "an adventure characterized by youthful arrogance and by the belief that the truth, once found, would be simple as well as pretty" (*The Double Helix*, ix). And despite the absence of any definitive data that would favor the heliocentric over the geocentric model for the solar system, Copernicus believed that his hypothesis that the Earth revolved around the sun was true because it was simpler. These are only two examples that suggest that the simplest theories are most likely to be true. Most scientists believe this. Why?

Swinburne discusses three possible answers (*Simplicity*, 44-51). First, some might claim that there are reasons why scientists choose simple theories beyond the greater probable truth of a simple theory. But examples from the history of science suggest this is not true. As Watson believed, simplicity itself is thought to be a marker of truth.

Second, some might argue that the presumption of simplicity is justified because history has shown that simplicity is a reasonable assumption that has worked. Swinburne points out that justifying simplicity this way itself already relies upon the criterion of simplicity and as such begs the question. He points out there are many ways of extrapolating from past historical data.

"Usually, simplest theories predict better than more complex theories" is one way, but "Usually theories formulated by Greeks in

the bath, by Englishmen who watch apples drop, or Germans who work in patent offices . . . predict better than other theories" is another way. (Swinburne is referring here to Archimedes, Newton, and Einstein.)

This second explanation of past data explains history equally well but is obviously absurd. The first alternative, the simpler one, has to be preferred. However, since simplicity itself is presumed, the appeal to history cannot be used to justify simplicity.

The third possibility is that some mathematical or logical theorem justifies belief in simplicity. This, in fact, is only a more sophisticated

## If the principle of simplicity is true, it is a fundamental, indemonstrable truth that the scientist must accept on faith.

way of saying that some mathematical formula can be devised to demonstrate that induction can give rise to certain knowledge. But, as the skeptic philosopher David Hume wrote, "There can be no demonstrative arguments to prove that those instances of which we have had no experience resemble those of which we have had experience" (*Treatise on Human Nature* 1:3:6).

The future always remains contingent. Ultimately, if the principle of simplicity is true, it is a fundamental, indemonstrable truth that the scientist must accept on faith. It allows him to do science.

## Truth is beautiful

The quote from Watson above is a reminder that the conviction that truth is simple is not the only belief

held by the scientist. Closely related to this is the belief that the truth is beautiful or, using Watson's word, "pretty."

The mathematical physicist Paul M. Dirac—after recalling that the greatest modern physicists have looked for "beautiful theories," "beautiful equations," and "beautiful generalizations" to explain nature—recounts the case of a physicist who refused to accept his mathematical theory because it did not agree exactly with the observed data. Eventually, it turned out that the mathematical solution was true, and the observation was erroneous. Dirac wrote:

I think that there is a moral to this story—namely, that it is more important to have beauty in one's equations than to have them fit experiments. . . . It seems that if one is working from the point of view of getting beauty in one's equations, and if one has really a sound insight, one is on a sure line of progress" ("The Evolution of the Physicist's Picture of Nature," *Scientific American*, no. 208, 47).

Today, theoretical physicists still use elegance and coherence, elements that reflect the beautiful, as signposts for formulating explanations for nature that may not at first be provable with empirical methods. String theory, with which scientists are attempting to unify all the fundamental forces with gravity, is one example.

In fact, string theory is just one of many attempts to find a theory-

of-everything, a single equation that can be emblazoned on the T-shirt of an M.I.T. student. It is a search driven by the realization that the standard model used by physicists to describe the structure of nature seems too complicated. It is not pretty enough.

Clearly, it is not easy to justify this intuitive understanding that truth is beautiful in a logical demonstration. However, alongside simplicity, beauty allows the scientist to choose among his different hypotheses. It allows him to accomplish his task.

Finally, as Pope St. John Paul II points out, the scientist takes for granted that truth exists and is the object of his endeavors:

When scientists, following their intuition, set out in search of the logical and verifiable explanation of a phenomenon, they are confident from the first that they will find an answer, and they do not give up in the face of setbacks. They do not judge their original intuition useless simply because they have not reached their goal; rightly enough they will say that they have not yet found a satisfactory answer (*Fides et Ratio* 29).

Hence, for the scientist, the truth is attractive—or, in classical terminology, the truth, because it attracts, is good.

## Based on an act of faith

We have seen that the scientific assumption that truth is simple, beautiful, and good cannot be

(continued from p. 32)  
**JEAN MABILLON** (1632-1707): A Benedictine monk and scholar considered the founder of palaeography.

**GREGOR MENDEL** (1822-1884): An Augustinian monk and the father of genetics.

**GIUSEPPE MERCALLI** (1850-1914): A volcanologist best known for his Mercalli scale for measuring earthquakes, which is still in use.

**BERTHOLD SCHWARZ** (c. 14th century). Franciscan friar reputed to be the inventor of gunpowder and firearms.

**NICOLAUS STENO** (1638-1686): Beatified by Pope St. John Paul II, he is often called the father of geography and stratigraphy.

**POPE SYLVESTER II** (c. 946-1003): Endorsed and promoted Arabic knowledge of arithmetic, mathematics, and astronomy in Europe, reintroducing the abacus and armillary sphere, which had been lost to Europe.

**PIERRE TEILHARD DE CHARDIN** (1881-1955): A Jesuit paleontologist, geologist, and theologian who took part in discovering Peking Man and Piltdown Man.

**FRANCESCO LANA DE TERZI** (c. 1631-1687): Referred to as the father of aeronautics, he also developed the idea that developed into Braille.



metaphysical and methodological principles that though non-demonstrable are accepted by them as true and certain.

Is it surprising that there are truths that cannot be proved? Though most scientists would be suspicious, they shouldn't be. Kurt Gödel, one of their own, showed in 1930 that there will always be some truths whose truth or falsity cannot be established using the axioms and deductive rules of arithmetic (John Barrow, *Impossibility: The Limits*

ABOVE: Non-empirical criteria such as the simplicity of a solution are fundamental elements of the scientific process.

*of Science and the Science of Limits*, 218-231). He used logic to prove that there were things that could not be proved. Some of these include the metaphysical first principles that ground the scientific enterprise.

Thus, if science is considered the paradigm of rationality as many people suppose, then one must conclude that believing is also rational. The believer can now correct the nonbeliever who has contrasted science and religion: science is based primarily upon reason but, as does every rational enterprise, including religion, science relies upon principles that are grounded in faith. ■

**Alongside simplicity, beauty allows the scientist to choose among his different hypotheses. It allows him to accomplish his task.**

These attributes reflect common metaphysical beliefs that must be presupposed in order for anyone—scientist or philosopher or theologian—to be rational. Hence, at the very heart of science's rationality is an act of the will—an act of faith.

Science is one example of human reasoning at its best. Most scientists would contend that their work attains truth, pointing at the successes of science—we fly planes, we cure diseases, we communicate on the internet—to support their argument. These same scientists often fail to realize that these successes necessarily presuppose

demonstrated and yet must be accepted as true. As Swinburne has pointed out, an inductive argument cannot be used to justify this belief, since it has to be assumed in order to construct any conclusions from historical data. It is a metaphysical first principle, a basic assertion about the nature of reality that, as the ancient and medieval philosophers understood, is fundamental and non-demonstrable.

Ultimately, it is nothing more than the scientist's implicit acceptance of classical metaphysics that equates being with truth, unity, beauty, and goodness. Every scientist has to accept that reality is ordered and intelligible. As such, simplicity, beauty, and goodness constitute non-empirical criteria that must be adopted by every scientist in order to accomplish his work.

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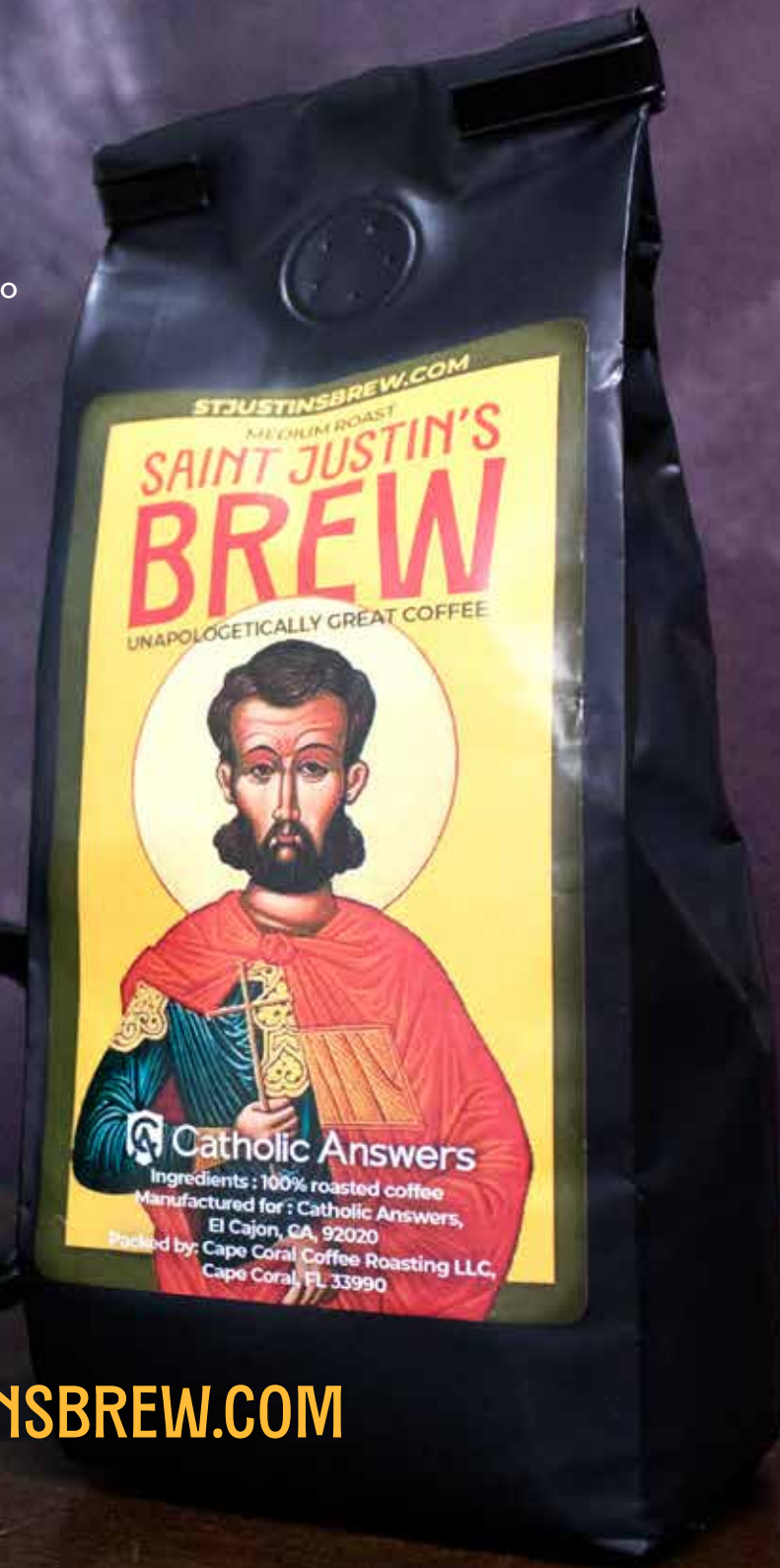
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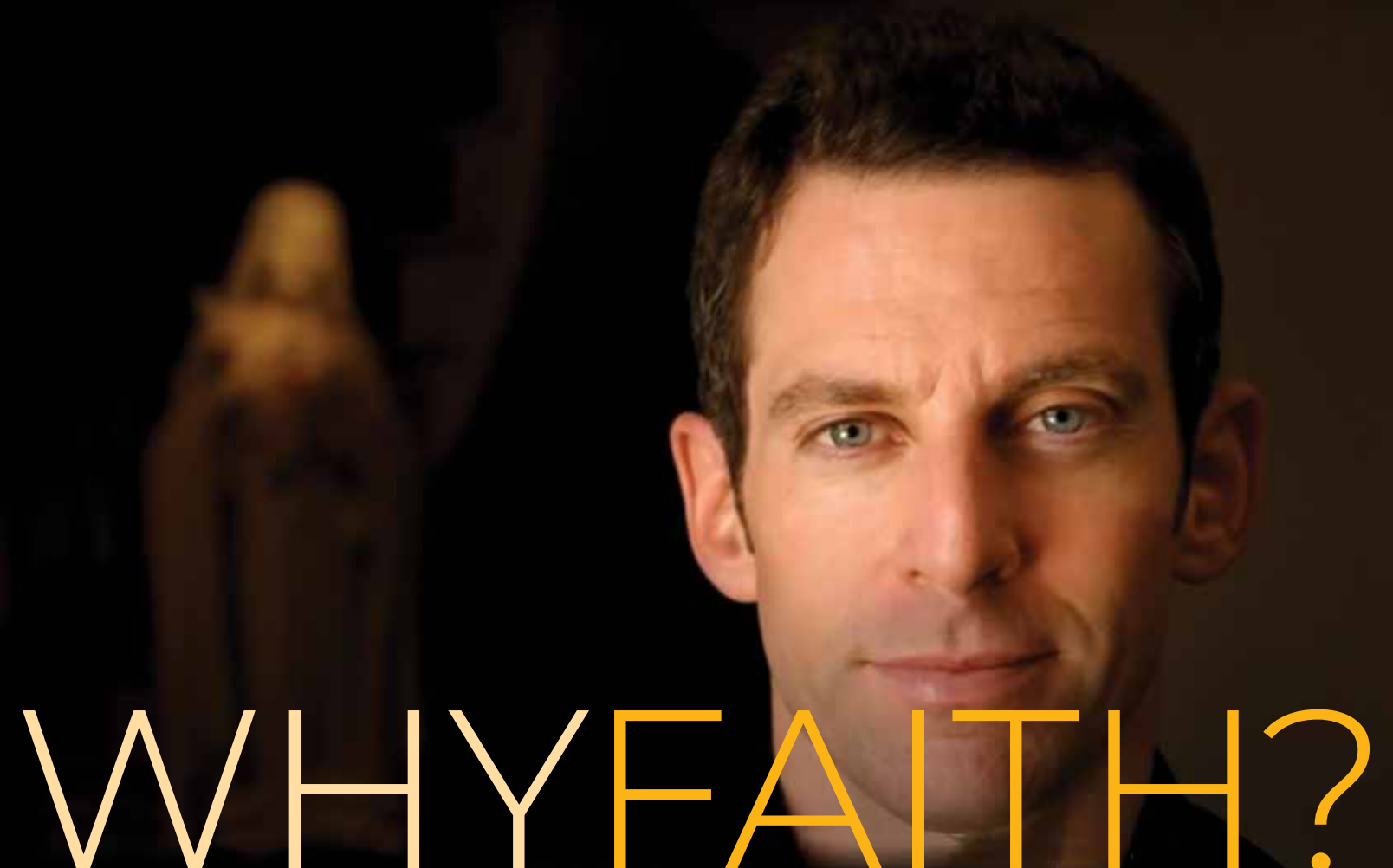
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# WHY FAITH?

CARL E. OLSON

*Many atheists claim that not only is belief in God irrational, religion itself is evil. But every human acts what we would call rationally based on faith in things they cannot prove.*

“Faith” is the Christian word. Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., in his masterful theology of faith, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, writes, “More than any other religion, Christianity deserves to be called a faith” (3). He points out that in the New Testament the Greek words for *faith* and *belief* occur nearly 500 times, compared to less than 100 for *hope* and about 250 for *charity* or *love*.

There is no doubt—pun intended—that faith is essential to being a Christian and to having a right relationship with God, as the author of the epistle to the Hebrews states: “And without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Heb. 11:6).

As with hope and love, the virtue of faith can appear initially rather simple to define, often as “belief in

God.” But some digging beneath the surface suggests a far more complicated task, as some basic questions suggest: What is belief? How is faith obtained? Is it human or divine in origin? How should man demonstrate his faith? What is the relationship of faith to the will, to the intellect, and to the emotions?

The apologist, meanwhile, must respond to charges against faith: that it is “irrational” or that it is the cause of conflict and violence. In recent years a number of popular books written by atheists have called into question not only tenets of Christianity—the historical reliability of the Bible, the divinity of Jesus, the Resurrection, and so forth—but the viability and rational soundness of faith itself.

One such book is *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the*

*Future of Reason* by Sam Harris, which repeatedly—mantra-like—uses words such as *ignorant* and *irrational* in making the case that religious faith is not only outdated but evil. Every religion, Harris says, “preaches the truth of propositions for which no evidence is even conceivable. This puts the ‘leap’ in Kierkegaard’s leap of faith” (*The End of Faith* 23). He adds: “Religious faith represents so uncompromising a misuse of the power of our minds that it forms a kind of perverse, cultural singularity—a vanishing point beyond which rational discourse proves impossible” (Ibid. 25).

LEFT: Atheist Sam Harris says no “rational discourse” can be had regarding religious belief.

Of course, even the skeptic understands that life in the material world requires certain types of belief or faith, using those terms broadly and non-theologically: the belief that stop lights will work correctly, faith that I will be given a paycheck at the end of the month, the trust that my grasp of basic math will keep me on the good side of the IRS.

One argument posits that sitting on a chair is an act of faith, so even atheists have faith when they sit on a chair in, say, a home they are visiting for the first time. The argument only goes so far when it comes to faith in what cannot be seen, touched, or proven by scientific means. It does, however, suggest what many people are reluctant to admit: that all of us have beliefs and we live our lives based on those beliefs, even if we never articulate or define them.

We as creatures have limited knowledge, and so must make

decisions—practical, relational, philosophical—without the luxury of proof. We use common sense and rely on our experience and, significantly, on the experience and testimony of others.

I may not know for certain that the chair will hold me, but I conclude it is rational to think it will, based on certain observations: the chair looks well-constructed; it appears to be used on a regular basis; and it is in the home of someone who isn’t the sort of person to ask guests to sit on a chair that might fall apart. Sitting on the chair is a reasonable thing to do. Implicit here is the matter of trust. Do I trust the chair? Do I trust my host? And, more importantly, do I trust my perception and assessment of the chair?

Consider another example. Your best friend, who is also your neighbor, calls you at work. He exclaims, “Your house is on fire! Come home quickly!”

What is your reaction? You believe your friend’s statement—not because you’ve seen a live shot of your house in flames on the local news but because of your faith in the truthfulness of the witness. You accept his word because he has proven himself worthy of faith in various ways. This type of trust in testimony and witness is an essential part of a theological understanding of faith.

### God’s gift and our response

The Old Testament emphasizes trusting in God and obeying his utterances, which were often (although not exclusively) entrusted (there’s that word again) to patriarchs and prophets. But while there

are many men and women of faith in the Old Testament, trustworthiness and faithfulness are most clearly ascribed to God: “Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments” (Deut. 7:9).

The New Testament places more emphasis on the doctrinal content of faith, focusing upon man’s response to the message and person of Jesus Christ. Again, faith is a gift that comes from God, accompanied by God’s promises of life. “No one can come to me,” Jesus declares, “unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:44).

Paul repeatedly states that faith is intimately linked with trust and obedience, referring to the “obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5), exhorting the Christians at Philippi to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12), and telling the Galatians that circumcision is not the issue of concern “but faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6). Faith is portrayed as a living, vital movement that brings man into a grace-filled union with the Father, through Jesus, in the Holy Spirit.

According to James and John, while faith is distinct from good works, it is never separate from them, because they display the reality of faith: “Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith” (James 2:18), and “this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us” (1 John 3:23).

### At the threshold of belief

Sts. Augustine and Aquinas stressed that the object of belief cannot be seen or directly perceived nor proven by mere logic. If you can prove it, you don't need to believe in it. And yet, as Josef Pieper explained in his essay, "On Faith," the believer must

know enough about the matter to understand "what it is all about." An altogether incomprehensible communication is no communication at all. There is no way either to believe or not to believe it or its author. For belief to be possible at all, it is assumed that the communication has in some way been understood (*Faith Hope Love*, 24).

God has revealed himself in a way that is comprehensible to man (in an act theologians call "divine condescension"), even if man cannot fully comprehend, for example, the Incarnation or the Trinity. Reason and logic can take man to the door of faith but cannot carry man across the threshold. "What moves us to believe," explains the *Catechism*, "is not the fact that revealed truths appear as true and intelligible in the light of our natural reason: we believe because of the authority of God himself who reveals them, who can neither deceive nor be deceived" (CCC 156).

Belief can also rest upon the testimony of someone else, as Paul states: "But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?" (Rom.

10:14). Aquinas remarks: "Now, who ever believes, assents to someone's words" (*Summa Theologiae* II:2:11).

Pieper points out, however, that this leads to a significant problem: that no man is superior enough spiritually to serve as "an absolutely valid authority" for another man. This problem is solved only when the One who is above all men communicates with man. This communication, of course, reaches perfection in the Incarnation, when God becomes man—that is, when the Word, God's perfect communication, becomes flesh. And this is why, to put it simply, the historicity of Jesus Christ and the witness of those who knew him are at the heart of the Catholic faith.

Faith is ultimately an act of will, not of emotion or deduction. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, quoting Aquinas, teaches, "In faith, the human intellect and will cooperate with divine grace: Believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the divine truth by command of the will moved by God through grace" (155). Logic, reason, and recognition of authority go only so far; an act of will, dependent upon God's grace, is required for faith to be realized.

Yet this response of the will is not an impersonal act, like selecting numbers for the lottery, but an intensely personal response. "We believe because we love," wrote John Henry Newman in a sermon titled "Love, the Safeguard of Faith Against Superstition." "The divinely enlightened mind," he said, "sees in Christ the very Object whom it desires to love and worship, the Object correlative of its own affections; and it trusts him, or believes, from

loving him."

So much for understanding what faith is. What are some of the popular, common criticisms of faith that need answering?

### 'Faith is contrary to reason'

Atheist Sam Harris puts it in this provocative form:

And so, while religious people are not generally mad, their core beliefs are. This is not surprising, since most religions have merely canonized a few products of ancient ignorance and derangement and passed them down to us as though they were primordial truths (*The End of Faith*, 72).

Yet the claim, "I don't need faith" is a statement of faith. If reason is the ultimate criteria of all things, can the skeptic prove, using reason, that reason explains everything about reality? To say "I will trust only that which I can logically prove" raises the question: "How do you know you can trust your mind and your logic? Aren't you placing your faith in your reason?"

Thus, atheism requires belief, including faith in (choose one) the perfectibility of human nature; the omniscience of science; the equality of socialism; or the steady conquest of political, technological, and social progress. But reasoned observation shows that the "truths" produced by these philosophies and systems of thought are lacking and incomplete; they cannot provide a satisfactory answer to the big questions about life, reality, and existence.

The belief in science is a good example. The Catholic Church

recognizes that science, the study of physical realities through experimentation and observation, is a valid source of truth. But this is quite different from believing that science can and will provide the answers to every question put forth by man. That is a belief—commonly called *scientism*—that cannot be proven but rests upon the unstable premise of materialism, which is a philosophical belief, not a matter of proven scientific study.

For example, Harris writes there is no reason that our ability to sustain ourselves emotionally and spiritually cannot evolve with technology, politics, and the rest of culture. Indeed, it must evolve, if we are to have any future at all (*The End of Faith*, 40). If that isn't an overt statement of dogmatic faith, what is?

Put simply, the Church believes that reason is limited and not contrary to faith. True faith is not irrational but supra-rational. In the words of Blaise Pascal, the seventeenth-century French philosopher: "Faith certainly tells us what the senses do not, but not the contrary of what they see; it is above, not against, them" (*Pensées*, 68). So faith does not contradict the facts of the material world, but goes beyond them.

### 'Faith is a crutch'

I once worked for a delightful Jewish lady who was married to a self-described atheist. She told me that he would often tell her that faith in God was simply "a crutch." This is not an argument at all; it is simply a way of saying, "I'd rather trust in myself than in God."

But belief in self only goes so far;

it obviously does not save us from death, or even suffering, disease, tragedy, depression, and difficulties. Everyone has a "crutch," that is, a means of support we turn to in the darkest moments. These can include power, money, drugs, sex, fame, and adulation, all of which are, by any reasonable account, limited and unsatisfying when it comes to the ultimate questions: What is the meaning of life? Why am I here? Who am I?

Harris argues that Eastern mysticism is a thoroughly rational and legitimate means for living a full life. In the end, his book says, "Religion is evil. Spirituality is good." But spirituality does not provide answers; religion does.

### 'Faith is the source of superstition, bigotry, and violence'

We've all heard variations on this theme, mouthed by the increasing number of people indoctrinated to believe that nothing good ever came from Christianity and that every advance in human history has been due to the diminishing influence of Christian thought, practice, and presence. Never mind that the bloodiest and most savage century in human history was dominated by forms of atheistic Marxism (e.g., the Soviet Union) and neo-pagan Fascism (e.g., Nazi Germany), accounting for the deaths of tens of millions. Harris insists that Communism and Nazism were so bad because they were religious in nature:

Consider the millions of people who were killed by Stalin and Mao: Although these tyrants paid lip service to rationality, commu-

nism was little more than a political religion. . . . Even though their beliefs did not reach beyond this world, they were both cultic and irrational (Harris, *The End of Faith*, 79).

This is actually true and provides further evidence that every "ism"—even atheism, materialism, and the "pragmatism" endorsed by Harris—is religious in nature. History readily shows that man is a religious animal who thinks religious thoughts and has religious impulses.

G.K. Chesterton suggests that if you wish to be free from contact with superstition, bigotry, and violence, you'll need to separate yourself from all human contact. The choice is not between religion and non-religion but between true religion and false religion.

\* \* \*

Christian faith, then, is not contrary to reason. Nor is it merely a crutch built on pious fantasies. Neither is faith the source of evil. Faith is a supernatural virtue, a gift, and a grace. Faith is focused on God and truth; it is the friend of wisdom. "Simple secularists still talk as if the Church had introduced a sort of schism between reason and religion," wrote Chesterton in *The Everlasting Man*. "The truth is that the Church was actually the first thing that ever tried to combine reason and faith" ("Man and Mythologies").

The challenge for every Catholic is to give assent and to have faith. The Catholic apologist must strive to show that such assent is not only reasonable but brings us into saving contact with the only reason for living. ■

## God's Irresistible Call

EDGAR LUJANO

God's call comes in many ways. His call can come through a person or group of people; maybe it's a life-altering event or a realization after years of searching. There were three distinct moments in my life where I felt God's call in each of these forms. Although I may not have understood his call or answered each time, he never stopped pursuing me. His faithfulness was strong through each part of my journey, a journey that ultimately resulted with living the scriptural call to "sell everything and follow me."

I grew up in the Central Valley of California in a family of immigrants. There wasn't much to do in the neighborhood besides getting into trouble with my friends. My introduction to gang culture began in middle school, and it influenced my thoughts, wardrobe, and way of living.

By the time I hit high school, I had romanticized and found pride in representing a color, number, and Mexican street gangs. Though I was never officially initiated into a gang, I was a documented gang member on file with the authorities, and as an officer once told me, "Walks like a duck, talks like a duck, must be a duck."

In the beginning of my freshman year in high school, I was already ditching most days to go drinking with friends. If I wasn't preoccupied with the drama of the next potential fight, I was thinking about tagging in the evenings. I had little care for the world around me and was seeking the next thing to fill the growing emptiness in my heart.

During my sophomore year, not much had changed in my behavior, but everything was about to change

in my life. In February, my parents took me to the doctor with a cold. While I hadn't thought much of them, a few lumps on my neck right above my collarbone caught the doctor's attention. I was sent for a biopsy of my thyroid.

Shortly thereafter, my parents picked me up from school on a weekday. This was unusual since they were always working. It was a quiet trip to the doctor's office, and something felt wrong. We arrived and were given the news that I had thyroid cancer.

I went into shock and had a hard time processing what I had been told. One moment I was at school, and the next I was sitting in an office being told that I would need to undergo surgery and radiation therapy. How does a sixteen-year-old process the thought of a disease associated with suffering and death? I was living a carefree life, but that day I became aware of my own mortality.

### The presence of God's love

My saving grace at the time were the confirmation classes at my local parish. I was introduced to a man named John who had been recruit-

ed by Fr. Peter, the parish priest, to teach confirmation. While he may not have seemed like the typical guy to be preparing teenagers for confirmation, there were two things that were apparent about John: he understood what it was to live around gangs, and he had a deep love for God.

The weekend following my diagnosis, I attended my confirmation weekend retreat. After informing them of my cancer, something changed. I can't say exactly what it was, and there wasn't anything that particularly stood out in the talks or activities. However, there was the unshakeable presence of God's love. John, Fr. Peter, and all the confirmation staff came together and poured their hearts out for us. There was conviction and true witness.

I walked away from that retreat knowing that the life I was living and the decisions I was making needed to change. If I wanted a better life, I had to live for Christ. While I felt the stirring in my heart at that retreat, there was still a long road ahead before I responded.

After being confirmed, I was invited to the youth group that John eventually took over. John was not the type of guy to follow the typical LifeTeen model. As great and as fruitful as the model is, he took a different approach.

He sat us down and told us, "You're going to be challenged by

people who will seem like they know the Bible and have it all together. But they have only seven Bible verses memorized. All you have to do is memorize those seven and two more, and you'll know more than they do."

With that, he introduced us to biblical apologetics. He started by teaching us 1 Peter 3: 15: "Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is within you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence."

Those apologetic sessions lit the flame in my heart. I knew there was something here. I began to understand that Jesus established one Church and that he gave us the priesthood, the papacy, the sacraments, and so much more.

### Chin check

Unfortunately, I began to slip back into my familiar ways of misbehaving and associating with the wrong people. While God's first call allowed me to be surrounded by loving people, his second call did not. One night I ended up at the wrong place at the wrong time. It began as a normal night with friends that led to a fight with some rivals and ended with me having charges pressed against me that resulted in me spending one month in a juvenile detention center.

There were many tests during my time there, but one stands out. One test

RIGHT: The author in his clubbing days.



among the inmates is called a “chin check” to see if someone is tough enough to deserve respect. One day, an inmate took it upon himself to test me. He walked up to me, punched me, and said with a grin, “What are you going to do about it?”

I knew if I punched back more charges would be added to my case, which meant more time behind bars. So what I did went against every fiber of my being: I clenched my fists, swallowed my pride, and turned away.

I lost a valuable thing behind bars: respect. But I knew God had something in store for me.

Shortly after that incident I had a court date to determine my release date. The judge gave my family the task of gathering letters from those who could speak on my behalf. I never had the chance to see how many letters came nor what those letters said. What I would give to be able to see and read those letters, but the only way to show my appreciation of those letters is sharing my story. The judge was surprised by the number of letters I received, and I was released.

A condition of my release was 100 hours of community service—to be served at none other than the same church where my stirring began on retreat. Every Saturday I dutifully went to the church and completed my service hours.

However, it was more than just picking up trash and digging holes. It was an opportunity for God to work through other people to bring me closer to him. Fr. Peter began to teach me about the lives of the saints, particularly the Mexican martyrs of the twentieth century. He also educated me on the details of the

Mass, which allowed me to enter into a deeper connection with Christ.

While my interest in the gang life dwindled, my partying and drinking didn't. They say that your twenties are the best years of your life. I spent so much time chasing that in the club and, ironically, often found myself in an adoration chapel by the end of the night questioning why the emptiness kept growing. I knew I wanted something different but didn't know how to find it.

I was chasing the empty lies of the world, and I wasn't fully aware that until one of my cousins lost his life in a drunk-driving accident. We were the same age and lived a similar lifestyle. I was faced again with the reality of my mortality. After hearing the news, I coped the only way I knew how: I went to the club.

It was there I found myself on Christmas Day. I remember standing on the dance floor with a drink in my hand and tears rolling down my face. As I gazed at all the people partying and looking happy, I finally understood why I could never find the fulfillment they seemed to exhibit: it was nonexistent. It was a mask. All of them were as empty as I was. How could I be such a fool thinking that there was something more this world could offer?

I remembered the times in youth group, learning apologetics and experiencing a peace I had never felt anywhere else. In the midst of my sobbing, the music blaring. I said aloud, “Okay, God, I will follow you.”

### No more walking the fence

That moment changed everything. I started distancing myself from those who walked with me toward

the darkness. I prayed to God to send me good friends who would challenge me in my life and faith. He answered my prayers and sent me good Catholic men whom I call brothers to this day.

I couldn't get enough of talks by Lighthouse Catholic Media and Catholic radio, especially *Catholic Answers Live*. I started to dive deeper into apologetics and theology. Everything my heart desired was being fulfilled in getting to know who Jesus was. I no longer defended a color or a gang but the Catholic faith itself. I was no longer getting to know other gang members but Jesus through the Mass and adoration.

This love for the Faith led me to Franciscan University of Steubenville in Ohio to earn my theology degree. After graduating, I worked in high school and college ministry and eventually taught high school theology. However, it all came full circle when I landed a job at the very organization that formed me both directly and indirectly—Catholic Answers.

For a long time, I walked the fence between two different lives. One seemed to promise fulfillment and satisfaction, but only if you gave into the world's pleasures. Then there is the other life, the life that Jesus calls us to, the life where he says, “Sell everything and follow me.” The life that says pick up your cross daily. For he who gives up his life will inherit eternal life. One lifestyle promises fulfillment, but the other actually gives it.

While the call isn't always easy to answer, and you may not answer it the first time, what are you willing to lose to gain everything? ■

## BE PREPARED TO MAKE A DAILY DEFENSE

### CHALLENGE

“If God really exists and wants us to know him, why doesn't he make his existence more obvious to us?”

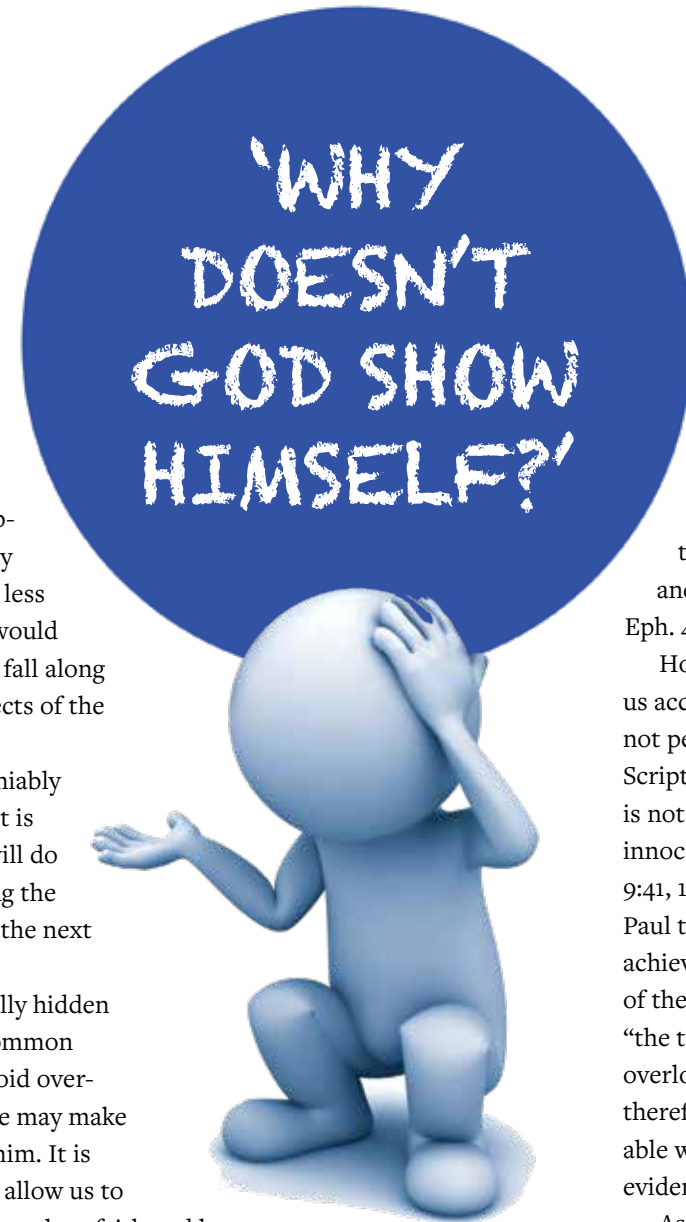
### DEFENSE

This is a subcase of the problem of evil—specifically, why God would allow us to have less knowledge of him than we would prefer to have. Its solutions fall along the same lines as other aspects of the problem of evil.

God could make it undeniably obvious that he exists, and it is commonly understood he will do so in the next life, paralleling the way he will vanquish evil in the next life in general.

Why God remains partially hidden in this life is a mystery. A common proposal is he does so to avoid overwhelming our free will so we may make a free choice for or against him. It is also proposed he does so to allow us to exercise and grow in virtues such as faith and hope.

Not having the amount of evidence we would like does not mean God is committing an injustice, however. He remains just, even while remaining partially hidden, as long as he ensures that we have adequate evidence concerning him. Even if it isn't the amount of evidence



we would prefer, we have the evidence we need as long as we have the philosophical proofs of God's existence (cf. Rom. 1:18-20).

Also, the difficulty we have in processing this evidence is due in part to the effects of both original and personal sin (cf. Rom. 1:21, Eph. 4:18).

However, God will not hold us accountable for what we are not personally responsible for. Scripture recognizes that one is not accountable for what one innocently does not know (John 9:41, 15:22, 24; James 4:17). Thus Paul tells the Athenians—who had achieved a measure of knowledge of the divine (Acts 17:22-29)—that “the times of [their] ignorance God overlooked” (Acts 17:30). God will therefore not hold people accountable who innocently lacked the evidence they needed.

As with other aspects of the problem of evil, a mystery remains, but “faith gives us the certainty that God would not permit an evil if he did not cause a good to come from that very evil, by ways that we shall fully know only in eternal life” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 324). ■

From *A DAILY DEFENSE: 365 DAYS (PLUS ONE) TO BECOMING A BETTER APOLOGIST* by JIMMY AKIN  
AVAILABLE AT SHOP.CATHOLIC.COM

# ‘Mother of God’ in the Early Church?

## Was Mary as the Mother of God something the early Christians recognized?

Yes. Consider, for example, St. Ignatius of Antioch. In his *Letter to the Ephesians*, he writes, “For our God, Jesus Christ, was, according to the appointment of God, conceived in the womb by Mary, of the seed of David, but by the Holy Ghost” (18.2). Notice that, for Ignatius, “God” (the Son) was conceived in Mary’s womb. That makes Mary the mother of God.

St. Irenaeus is another example from the second century. Although he doesn’t use the exact wording, the idea is present. He writes, “The Virgin Mary . . . being obedience to his word, received from an angel the glad tidings that she was to bear God” (*Against Heresies* III.16.6). Given that only a mother is someone who “bears” another, it’s clear that Irenaeus viewed Mary as the mother of God.

Bishop Alexander of Alexandria, in the early fourth century, used the *theotokos* title explicitly in a letter to Alexander of Constantinople in reference to the heresy of Arius (“Epistle of Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria to Alexander, to Bishop of Constantinople”). Gregory of Nazianzen wrote in the mid- to late fourth century, “If anyone does not believe that Holy Mary is the Mother of God, he is severed from the Godhead” (“*To Cledonius the Priest Against Apollinarius*”).

— Karlo Broussard

## Is Vatican II in error because it teaches the Jews are not rejected by God? Doesn’t Scripture teach that since the Jews rejected Christ, God has now rejected them?

*Nostra Aetate* says, “Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures.” In fact, St. Paul says in Romans 11:28-29,

As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God, for your sake; but as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable.”

In other words, the Jews in Paul’s time who rejected the gospel were still part of God’s plan because of the promises he made to their ancestors. God did not reject them because his calling of them is “irrevocable.” This even made it possible for Paul to speculate a few verses earlier that “all Israel will be saved” (Rom. 11:26).

— Trent Horn

## Can a soul be transmitted or is it directly created by God?

God directly and immediately creates souls. This is a matter of reason and faith. We know metaphysically that a purely immaterial substance such as the human soul cannot be caused in any way by

matter (you can’t get spirit from matter). Furthermore, it can’t be caused by a finite being, since it requires coming into existence from nothing. It requires infinite power for it to come into being. Therefore, only God can create the human soul.

We also know this as a matter of faith. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says,

The Church teaches that every spiritual soul is created immediately by God—it is not “produced” by the parents—and also that it is immortal: it does not perish when it separates from the body at death, and it will be reunited with the body at the final resurrection (366).

— Karlo Broussard

## How can Mary be the “Ark of the New Covenant” when Mary’s reception by Elizabeth is so different from how David received the Ark? The Ark for David was a cause for fear, not joy, since that Ark was an instrument of God’s judgment; but this wasn’t the case with Mary.

Typological parallels sometimes subvert what happened in the Old Testament as part of their fulfillment. For example, we call Christ the New Adam because he was created without original sin just like the original Adam; but, unlike the original Adam, Christ perfectly

obeyed the Father.

Likewise, Mary is the new Ark of the Covenant that is given the proper welcome and respect the old Ark did not receive in the book of 2 Samuel. In fact, the *Protestant Word Biblical Commentary* on Luke’s Gospel says,

Echoes of 2 Samuel 6:2-19 are to be found in verses 41, 43, 44, and possibly 56. . . . If the last be granted (v. 56) [Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months], then we must go further and say that this taking up of paradigmatic responses has been artistically carried through by treating the presence of Mary (or the unborn Jesus) as equivalent to the presence of the Ark of the Covenant (74).

— Trent Horn

## Were Mary and Joseph married? Some translations say they were engaged; others say they were “betrothed.”

For Matthew, this “betrothal” was a real marriage. Immediately after, in verse 19, Matthew tells us Joseph sought to divorce Mary quietly. Why would Joseph seek to divorce her if they were not legally married?

Furthermore, in verse 19, for example, Matthew refers to Joseph as Mary’s “husband” (Greek, *anēr*). *Anēr* also means “man,” but the context concerning Joseph’s contemplation of divorce confirms its marital sense. Then in verse 20, Matthew quotes the angel: “Do not fear to take Mary your wife [Greek,

*gunē*].”

Now, some translations (ESV, NIV, NLT) translate verse 20 as “take Mary as your wife,” allowing for the meaning that Mary is not Joseph’s wife yet. But this contradicts verse 19 where Joseph is said to be Mary’s “husband,” a translation on which both the ESV and NIV agree. The NLT (New Living Translation), however, renders verse 19 as “Joseph, to whom she was engaged.” But this is clearly an interpolation, since, as mentioned above, the Greek word for husband, *anēr*, is used to describe Joseph, and it’s within the context of Joseph contemplating divorce. Joseph is Mary’s “husband.” Mary is Joseph’s “wife.” That’s language of a real and legally binding marriage.

The point of Matthew’s narrative is that Mary was found to be with child during the interim period between vows and consummation. It was customary in ancient Israel that a man and woman would become legally married, the husband would go off to prepare a place for his bride, and then come back to take his wife to begin their life together in one household, at which point consummation would occur. It’s this interim period that both Matthew and Luke describe as “betrothal” (*mnēsteuō*).

— Karlo Broussard

## Is Pope Francis the first non-European pope?

Over the past 2,000 years, the Catholic Church has been guided by 266 popes. Of these, 217 have been

Italian. But there have always been exceptions to the general norm of popes being from Italy.

That’s true from the first pope, a Palestinian Jew, to the most recent, an Argentine (albeit one with an Italian father). Of the forty-nine non-Italian popes, eight of them were from Asia, either the Holy Land or Syria, and another three (Victor I, Miltiades, and Gelasius I) were from North Africa, which was in those years a Roman province and a major hub of Christianity. So Pope Francis is actually the twelfth non-European pope.

That said, he’s the first non-European in well over a millennium. The last was the Syrian-born Gregory III, who was pope from 731 to 741.

— Joe Heschmeyer

## Is original sin in the Bible?

The Council of Trent defined original sin as “the death of the soul.” The *Catechism* reaffirmed this definition (403) and added a key nuance that such sin is called “sin” “only in an analogical sense: it is a sin ‘contracted’ and not ‘committed’—a state and not an act” (404).

The biblical text that is appealed to for support is Romans 5:12, where Paul writes, “Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned.” Paul is not talking about personal sin here. The key is the connection that Paul makes between death and sin: “death spread to all men



because all men sinned.” Notice Paul draws a parallel between the “all” that constitutes the group “all have sinned” and the “all” that constitutes the group “death spread to all.”

Moreover, Paul sees the death that extends to all as an effect of the sin that extends to all. Now, do infants and the severely mentally handicapped die? Yes. Given the parallel between the two groups, it follows that infants and the mentally handicapped are included within the category of “all have sinned.” And if that’s the case, then Paul is not thinking of personal sin here; he’s thinking of original sin.

— Karlo Broussard

### **Did Pope Francis really say “no one can be condemned forever”? Doesn’t this contradict the Church’s teaching on hell?**

Pope Francis says: “No one can be condemned for ever, because that is not the logic of the gospel” (*Amoris Laetitia*, 297). However, in context, the pope is talking about condemnation from the Church. We know this because before this statement, he writes, “It is a matter of reaching out to everyone, of needing to help each person find his or her proper way of participating in the ecclesial community and thus to experience being touched by an ‘unmerited, unconditional, and gratuitous’, mercy.”

And in the previous paragraph, he writes, “The way of the Church is not to condemn anyone forever; it is to pour out the balm of God’s mercy on all those who ask for it with a sincere heart.” This is why

even excommunications can be lifted—they aren’t meant to be immediate sentences of damnation but medicinal penalties to bring about repentance.

That Pope Francis believes in hell can be seen in a 2014 statement when he told members of the Italian mafia, “Convert! There is still time, so that you don’t end up in hell.” In 2016 he said, “The danger always remains that by a constant refusal to open the doors of their hearts to Christ who knocks on them in the poor, the proud, rich, and powerful will end up condemning themselves and plunging into the eternal abyss of solitude, which is hell.” And when it comes to being lost forever, in a 2019 angelus the pope said, “The possibility of conversion is not unlimited. That’s why it is necessary to seize it immediately; otherwise it may be lost forever.”

— Trent Horn

### **Why only three persons in the Trinity?**

First, we believe it because Jesus reveals it. However, we can apply reason and see that it’s reasonable that there are only three persons in the Godhead. Throughout the history of the Church, the Son is seen as proceeding from the Father by way of the divine intellect. The Holy Spirit has been taught to proceed from the Father and the Son by way of the divine will. Since there are only two faculties in the Godhead from which processions can occur, intellect and will, there are only three persons.

— Karlo Broussard

### **I have a friend who thinks the Church invented the doctrine of purgatory. He says that in the past the Church spoke of purgatory as being a physical place where people undergo all kinds of specific tortures, but now the doctrine is watered down to simply “purification” in order to appease modern people.**

The problem with your friend’s argument is that it cuts against most Protestant explanations of hell. When you read Christian authors prior to the modern age, they don’t pull any punches about what hell is like. It’s fire, brimstone, and often horrifying punishments. But when you get to the modern age, theologians tend to describe hell more as the state of being isolated from God and treat the biblical descriptions more metaphorically. They say hell isn’t a place where people are arbitrarily punished through torture devices but that the condition itself of being separated from God is the punishment the damned endure.

We can find a similar development in the language used to describe the nature of purgatory in relation to it as a punishment and what believers endure in purgatory. While theologians had different opinions about the nature of purgatory, the Church never had a specific teaching on what happens to souls in purgatory because God has not revealed this just as he hasn’t revealed most specific aspects of the afterlife.

There is a similar trajectory in understanding the intrinsic rather

extrinsic nature of the punishment that happens there.

— Trent Horn

### **Catholics claim they do not teach a “works justification,” yet the Council of Trent, session 6, canon 4 condemns Luther’s teaching “that man’s free will moved and excited by God, by assenting to God exciting and calling, nowise co-operates towards disposing and preparing itself for obtaining the grace of justification.” This sounds like “works justification” to me.**

This canon was teaching against Luther’s idea that man’s will is entirely passive to the point of his denying man’s essential freedom. In fact, if you keep reading after your selection, the Council Fathers go on to condemn the idea that “[man’s free will] cannot refuse its consent, if it would, but that, as something inanimate, it does nothing whatever and is merely passive; let him be anathema.”

The Catholic Church has always and rightly condemned the idea the man can “merit” the gift of grace itself. In chapter 8 of that same session 6, the Church declared:

None of those things which precede justification—whether faith or works—merit the grace itself of justification. For, if it be a grace, it is not now by works, otherwise, as the same apostle says, grace is no more grace.

Thus, we do not believe in a “works justification.” However, once a Christian freely enters into

a relationship with Jesus Christ, he must cooperate with the grace of God, and it is only then that he can merit the reward of eternal life as St. Paul teaches in Romans 2:6-7 and Galatians 6:7-9.

— Tim Staples

### **There was death before ensouled humans (Adam and Eve). But the Bible says Adam and Eve brought death with their sin. How do we reconcile this?**

The Church teaches only that Adam’s sin introduced death entered into human history (CCC 400). Moreover, the Church affirms that “physical evil” existed before the fall:

With infinite wisdom and goodness God freely willed to create a world “in a state of journeying” toward its ultimate perfection. In God’s plan this process of becoming involves the appearance of certain beings and the *disappearance of others*, the existence of the more perfect alongside the less perfect, both constructive and *destructive forces* of nature. With physical good there exists also *physical evil* as long as creation has not reached perfection (CCC 310, emphases added).

So, to affirm that there was death for non-human beings before the fall is consistent with Catholic teaching.

— Karlo Broussard

### **Is original sin unfair because it punishes innocent people?**

### **Does it contradict the Bible because Ezekiel 18:20 says “The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son.”**

It’s true the Bible teaches that people will not be punished for the sins of their parents. If my father commits a murder, it is unjust for me to be legally punished for that crime if I had nothing to do with it.

But the Bible also teaches that a person’s sins can have a negative impact upon his descendants. When the Bible speaks of “visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation” (Deut. 5:9), it is talking about the lasting negative effects sin has on one’s descendants, the consequences they inherit or the behavior they imitate—not to punishments they received solely because of their ancestor’s crimes.

The deprivation of grace we have because our parents lost the spiritual gifts God gave them is not a punishment but a consequence of their disobedience.

— Trent Horn

### **Did Jesus inherit a sin nature since Romans 8:3 says he came in the likeness of sinful flesh?**

No. Hebrews 4:15 says Jesus is “without sin.” Romans 8:3 says Jesus came in the “likeness” of sinful flesh. He looked like any human being, but he is not like any human being because he is a divine person and so is he is free from sin as well as a sinful nature.

— Trent Horn



## DUC IN ALTUM

CHRISTOPHER CHECK | PUBLISHER

# Live Your Religion Out Loud

“I BELIEVE IN ONE GOD.”

We say these words so often that we risk losing our sense of their significance. As an antidote, start your next Holy Hour by telling God you believe in him and asking him to increase your belief. Next, call to mind just how many people (the number is growing at an alarming rate—see Matt Nelson’s article p. 26) do not, in fact, believe in one God. Pray for them.

Then ask yourself if you are culpable. Have you, for example, let slide an opportunity to talk about the existence of God? Catholic Answers is here to help you feel more confident in such conversations—not because we want you to crush an atheist in a battle of wits but because we want you to be ready when the Holy Spirit wants to use you as a conduit of his grace.

This is a good time to remind yourself of the reality that your belief is whole and entire a complete and utter gift. No matter how much you’ve worked through St. Thomas, Pope Benedict XVI, Karlo Broussard, or Edward Feser (his book on the five proofs is the gold standard), your faith is the effect of the grace of God. Good for you for your study; now the Holy Spirit can use you.

Save at least half of the Holy Hour (or more) for contemplating not how well you talk about God but something far more important: how well you live in his presence. Or better (not surprisingly!), as St. Paul puts it: do you “live, move, and have your being” (Acts 17:28) in God? Does your daily life reflect your belief? If you do not have a disciplined liturgical and prayer life (maybe you aren’t making Holy Hours?), there of course is where you need to begin.

But I’m suggesting you ask yourself: “Do I watch television, drive, talk to my spouse, run my business, vote, invest, help my next-door neighbor, pay my taxes, buy coffee, select my child’s college, vacation, weed the garden, and clean the kitchen as if I believe in God?”

What would a world look like if all aspects of our lives—public as well as private—were suffused with belief in God? The question is one best being answered today by my friends at the brilliant political and economic journal *New Polity*. I am reluctant to use the modifiers *political* and *economic* because they represent to the modern ear con-

finied areas of human experience: exchange of goods and services, international trade, securities markets, currency, electioneering, voting, legislating, etc.

Yet as one of the founding editors of *New Polity*, Andrew Willard Jones, makes clear, man for more than 200 years has labored under an erroneous liberal idiom in which “religion operates within the private realm of personal activities and opinions—the same realm as romance, hobbies, friendships, and morality.”

The modern state has, through the power of legislation, confined religion, like our favorite colors, Jones points out, to our private lives while convincing us of the delusion that we enjoy freedom of religion! I’d call it Orwellian, but the liberal redefinition of religion predates Orwell by centuries.

Within this rhetoric, the moment our religion becomes public, Jones explains, it’s no longer religion: it’s “politics” or “economics”; but the truth is, both are deeply religious spheres of human experience. Just ask the bakers, for example, represented by Catholic Answers trustee Paul Jonna, who refuse to cooperate in mockeries of marriage.

“You can’t legislate morality” goes what must be the most unexamined canard of all time. All law is the expression of a moral code—or an immoral one, as is the case today, essentially you cannot do anything that interferes with another’s subjective sense of the fulfillment of his/her personal “freedom.”

The antidote to this madness is to begin living our religion—and here let me be explicit: the Catholic faith—as publicly as possible. In fact, more publicly than is possible. That’s what the martyrs in the Circus of Nero did in the first century A.D. It’s what the Cristeros did in Mexico in the 1920s. It’s what Christians in Sudan and Nigeria and Nicaragua are doing today (see Fr. Hugh Barbour’s moving piece p. 12).

You can warm up by cleaning the kitchen like a Christian, but I’m sure in your next Holy Hour you will come up with more public expressions of your belief. To get your intellect ordered on this essential question, visit [NewPolity.com](http://NewPolity.com) and subscribe to my favorite magazine of political and economic thought—in the fullness of the meaning of those words—that is, *religious*. ■

last things

# Jimmy Akin

THE HOST OF A DAILY DEFENSE PODCAST, SENIOR APOLOGIST, & AUTHOR SITS IN THE HOT SEAT FOR ‘LAST THINGS’



### Last great book I read

I’m almost always reading more than one book. Among the most recent is *Who We Are and How We Got Here* by Harvard geneticist Dr. David Reich. It covers the breakthrough in ancient DNA research in the last decade and what it reveals about how modern human populations emerged from earlier ones, including our mixing with Neanderthals and Denisovans.

I’ve also been reading *The First Ghosts* by British Assyriologist Dr. Irving Finkel. It discusses what Mesopotamian clay tablets reveal about what Sumerians, Babylonians, and Assyrians believed about the afterlife and how to deal with troublesome souls that don’t want to stay in it. (Your grandfather keeps coming back? Marry him to a ghost wife to keep him happy!)

### Last time I took a plane

This isn’t actually the last time I took a plane, but it was the last time for a long time, and I was asked to tell the story. I was flying into New York City during a winter storm. The turbulence was rough, and I asked a flight attendant about it. “Oh, this is nothing,” he said. “I’ve been on flights where people were being thrown up out of their seats.” People then proceeded to be thrown up out of their seats. We circled the airport for over an hour, and the man sitting behind me was a commercial pilot. He began narrating our descent: “Okay, the pilot is building up speed now. He needs to get up to 120 miles per hour to avoid the sheering winds on the runway. . . He’s not building up enough speed! . . . He should be aborting this landing!” When we hit the runway, the plane rocked so violently that I thought one of the liner’s wings had impacted the ground. After we finally came to a stop, the flight crew burst into applause. Afterward, the commercial pilot told me that he would not have been qualified to attempt that landing and would have wet his pants.

### Last movie I remember making me cry

*Toy Story*. I noticed that after my wife died, symbolic resurrection sequences can be so emotionally powerful that they can make me tear up. At the end of *Toy Story*, Woody and Buzz are desperately trying to get onto the moving truck as it’s pulling away, but Slinky Dog can’t hold onto them, and they are seemingly lost forever (symbolic death). Then Woody lights a firework strapped to Buzz’s back, and they rocket forward, soar through the air, and are joyfully and dramatically reunited with Andy and his family (symbolic resurrection). It’s a foretaste of all of our joy on the Last Day.

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