25

<http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2007/11/flabby_morals_and_cut_flowers.html>

**Flabby Morals and Cut Flowers**

*ON FAITH - WASHINGTON POST - WILLLIS ELLIOTT*

The next president of the United States will have done the best campaigning job of replacing this sentence’s “or” with “and”: “Is health care for children a parental responsibility or a moral imperative for society?” Who would not agree that whatever the proportions, the health care of children must be a concern of both parents and society?

My first response to the question was political--the politics of the home (the Republican Party’s emphasis) and of the state (the Democratic Party’s emphasis). And my conclusion is that, this time around, no ideological Democrat or ideological Republican is electable to the Oval Office.

Now that I’ve taken care of POLITICS, we can move on toMORALITY.

1.....My first impulse is to relocate “moral” from the second clause to the first: Is health care for children *a moral responsibility of parents*? YES!

2.....But as private morals continue to erode (partly as a cultural afterburn from the ‘60s), and the media rivet the public’s attention on the doings of government, the electorate’s measure-weight has been sliding on the responsibility bar *from private to public*. “Why doesn’t the GOVERNMENT do something about...?”

3.....The Republican side of me says that pain is a gift of God, and immoral people should suffer for their immorality. I have seen lepers with no toes or fingers: their disease removed the feeling of pain, and rats ate off their fingers and toes during the night. A child touches a hot stove—once. Morality is not optional, and government should do nothing to encourage the illusion that irresponsible behavior does not necessarily entail unpleasant consequences. If government protects children from suffering caused by parental immorality, immoral parents feel less pressure to shape up to their responsibilities. So, life isn’t fair and the children should suffer.

4.....The Democrat side of me says that society, by the arm of the state, has moral responsibility for protecting children from immoral, irresponsible parents. Some Democrat wrote this week’s question: “moral” is in its second clause: society should feel “a moral imperative” to act, through government agencies, for the good of children, who belong to society and not just to their parents.

There now, I’ve taken care of both the political and the moral dimensions of this week’s question.

Which brings me to RELIGION. “On Faith” is a religion blog, but the wording of this week’s question tempts us panelists to sound off on morality and politics and feel that we’ve done our duty to the question. Secularists will feel that we’ve done our job without mentioning religion, which they consider irrelevant or worse.

Down to business: What have I to say to the question from the religion angle?

1.....God the Creator—and not parents or society—is children’s fundamental owner. As our U.S. Declaration of Independence states, they are “endowed by their Creator....”

2.....Children are not born “clean slates” but with tendencies to good and evil: they need the guiding (directing, correcting) judgment of God, their parents, and society. Here’s the wry way that great public intellectual, Reinhold Niebuhr, often put it: “The only provable biblical doctrine is original sin.”

3.....Because of the Bible’s influence on America’s founding fathers, that realistic wisdom about the human condition is built into the structure of American government. Not all the fathers were church members, and some even disavowed biblical religion; but all had formed within them this biblical realism about human nature. It’s most severe form was Calvinism, which James Madison mastered as a student of theologians at the College of New Jersey, which was to become Princeton University. God as Judge of nature, history, and the human heart was and is the religious base of America’s historic realistic doctrine of human nature.

4.....As American public education no longer teaches that God is the Judge and that children are both evil and good (i.e., the biblical realistic doctrine of human nature), American morals have become (like our children’s fat bodies) increasingly flabby. The European Enlightenment’s emphasis on reason was welcomed into American public education, but not—at first—it’s romantic-Rousseauean notion that children are only good, not also evil. The West’s autonomous individual had sturdy morality, including the dignity of taking responsibility for self and family. The senses of must-pay and can-do were conjoint. The disciplining of children—by parents and teachers and officers of the law—was as severe as was necessary to produce this kind of adult. The motives were the glory of God and the good of the child (in light of, as the Bible puts it, “the kindness and severity of God” [Romans 11:22]).

5.....Many forces have compromised the Western autonomous individual’s ability to take full responsibility for self and family. For human good, government intervention has increased with the increase in societal complexity. The irony is that while moral muscularity has been becoming more necessary, American public education—now captive to the romantic nonsense that children are good—has been making it less likely. Result? We are sliding down out of our freedoms into a new techno-socialism. Increasingly, government (including the public schools) is lifting responsibilities from parents. “Family” no longer carries the plain and simple meaning of father/mother/child. And the declining moral level of the populace may soon make the American way of life, with its panoply of freedoms, unsustainable.

6.....No one who has read me thus far will be surprised at my prescription from this diagnosis. It is a return to our roots, the formative influences on America’s founding fathers—the Bible and the Enlightenment.
In 1941, I heard American philosopher Elton Trueblood give a lecture which became famous. It’s title so signals its content that I need not bridge from it to the burden of what I have been saying: “Our Cut-Flower Civilization.” (In our home, Loree and I have only potted flowers. We believe in the whole plant.)

**BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT  |  NOVEMBER 2, 2007; 4:59 PM ETSAVE & SHARE:                       
PREVIOUS:**[**NO EXCUSES FOR A GENEROUS SOCIETY**](http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/martin_marty/2007/11/parents_and_society.html)**| NEXT:**[**CITY (OF IMMIGRANTS) ON A HILL**](http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/eboo_patel/2007/11/city_of_immigrants.html)

**Comments**

**Please report offensive comments below.**

Okay, Catholic priests are pedophiles because hippies preached free love in the 60s. Very likely the priests also started doing it with their pet dogs because hippies also liked nature. And they also started screwing the exhaust pipes of their cars because hippies were seen driving VW buses.

Brother, you sure have some cloudy thinking.

**POSTED BY: RAFAEL | NOVEMBER 17, 2007 10:30 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

O W TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN, by Willis E. Elliott, 11.9.07

IDEALIST 11.6 / 1:01a

Thanks for your support.

You say “I don’t believe in the non-Biblical concept of ‘original sin’.”

I don’t either if it’s overread to mean that we humans are born guilty. The experience of guilt individualizes us, so each of us stands “coram deo” (in God’s presence) responsible-accountable only for personal behavior. Very clear in the Bible (e.g., Jeremiah 31 & Ezekiel 18).

But the doctrine is meant to point realistically to (the human tendency to evil (along with the human leaning toward good). That is what Reinhold Niebuhr meant with his ironic statement that “Original sin is the only provable Christian doctrine.” Humanity “as we know it” has not only the capacity for evil but the tendency toward it, & this universal fact has continuity variously explainable—genetic, societal, dramatic. The dramatic (story-form) explanation is that, as the McGuffy Reader put it, “In Adam’s sin we sinn-ed all.” The New Testament continues the dramatic explanation by saying that Jesus Christ as “the second Adam” delivered us from the curse of the first Adam’s sin.

RAFAEL

You overread me in saying that “at all times there must have been some dominant societal influence responsible for the deviant behavior” of Roman Catholic mandatorially celibate clergy. I consider mandatory celibacy (which is limited to one Christian denomination, & was not clamped down on its clergy until monks came to dominante the papacy) impracticable, & evil as corrupting both the individual & society. Its closed-a\_\_edness has even more disastrous effects when the “outside” culture is loose-a\_\_ than when it’s tight-a\_\_. The legal stats on pederasty among RC priests show, not surprisingly, that this outrage peeked in the ‘70s after the loose-a\_\_ed ‘60s. RC monk Martin Luther showed the cure for this monstrous oppression (mandatory celibacy): he grabbed himself a nun (with her enthusiastic permission) & lived a normal life as husband & father.

The way you speak of this sad scene indicates your unfamiliarity with the thinking of RC clergy some of whom, especially in the ‘70s, went loose-a\_\_ in relation to the most available sexual prospects, viz. children in various capacities under their tutelage. Through the ‘70s, at New York Theological Seminary (ecumenical), I taught many RC religious (priests, monks, nuns, brothers). I knew their post-Vatican II minds (Vatican II ended in ’65). And I knew the loose-a\_\_ mind of the ‘60s, where at Esalen I learned that “second dessert” meant choosing a bed-partner for the particular night. (No problem for me: I was tight-a\_\_ until marriage, as was my wife, & we’ve been faithful to each other.)
(Last year, 750,000 jr.hi pregnancies in the U.S. Tight-a\_\_ is better.)

Brother, you are such an innocent.

GERRY

Thank you for spelling out your reference to Goedel. Yes, intrasystemic assertions are intrasystemically unprovable—which applies to every science as well as to the Bible.

MAD LOVE, IDEALIST, & ENDER

Thank you for nailing my imposter.

It’s never happened to me before,
& never before have a clicked “Delete” on a comment.
“Who steals my good name” is the beginning of a great strophe in Shakespeare.
I’m never disturbed by insults to my person, because I can learn from them. But invading & inhabiting my name—a kind of demon-possession— expropriation of my personal reality—is a form of murder.

BGONE

Though you misspelled my name the same way the imposter did, I forgive you!

You are right about Jesus. “Love your neighbor” isn’t practical advice: no guarantee the love will be returned. You might even get yourself dead, as he did.

Your alternative—the way of calculating self-advantage--might get you deader, dead in soul as well as body. And, as a root of war, it’s gotten millions dead.

Ironically, Jesus’ vulnerability has resulted in life, spiritual life, for billions.

ANONYMOUS

Agreed. Dominiationism is as evil as Islamic Shari’a: both are totalitarian claims on the basis of a utopian vision (& “u-topia” is Greek for no-place).

PAGANPLACE

I agree: “sure” is Bad News.
“Sure” is not faith, it’s false knowledge—the kind of knowledge God expelled Adam & Eve from Eden for claiming.
Knowledge + faith = CERTITUDE.
Knowledge + arrogance = CERTAINTY.

**POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | NOVEMBER 9, 2007 1:08 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

I tried to read Mr Elliott's essay several times, to see what all the hub-bub is about. But I could not make any sense of it; it is too incoherent and obtuse. In some of his responses to the critical commenters, he speaks for Christians, but he does not speak for me. The most I could tell is that he seems to be in his own little world, doing his own little thing. How many ways can a person split a hair?

**POSTED BY: DANIEL | NOVEMBER 7, 2007 11:07 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Normally such people (Fred Phelps & Co.) would be in prison or in an insane asylum to prevent them from poisoning the "mental environment". You punish someone for "littering" and these social dirt throwers walk free and proselytize similar idiots and potential murderers.

There should be a reasonable limit for free speech (it does exist in most European countries to banish hate agitation, but I am unsure about the US): All the Nazis' atrocities with their Holocaust, Hitler and Stalin were originally based on free speech!

Karen Armstrong is quoting this, not supporting it herself (I hope!).

Hopefully Phelps gets convicted.

**POSTED BY: GERRY | NOVEMBER 7, 2007 9:16 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

My own death would be preferable to living in a society where ANY OF THE CULTS OF ABRAHAM RULE, whether christianity, islam or judaism. If I'm willing to die to avoid that nightmare, I'm certainly more willing to make the person(s) that try to force that on me die first.

Get some Terra!

**POSTED BY: ENDER | NOVEMBER 7, 2007 8:12 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Tend to think, Terra, that as much warrior stuff as I've been unfortunate enough to witness in this life....

Force is nothing.

Maybe valor is something, but force is nothing.

Force is the sickly sound of a head hitting pavement.

One can go through much of a life that's painted to be threat and counterthreat, people arguing that 'force' is righteous' in some way.

That death is some metaphor to be legislated.

I'd ben through a number of kinda-violent incidents before I saw that... Some bonehead claiming soeone was a b\*\*\* and a wh\*\*\* and took an ill-advised swing at said person, ...

Next second he was dead, cause of the move of someone at least as drunk as he was.

\*Kathunk.\*

Dead.

That was it.

All the things I've seen in this life, I don't think I'll forget that sound.

What was it about?

Guess he thought something.

He was sure he was 'right.'

I don't think he was.

Left a bunch of the rest of us with a sickly sound and no easy answers, though, whatever made him feel entitled to hurt someone, though.

So, I ask of the 'righteous.'

You sure?

Duty is heavier than a mountain: Death is lighter than a feather.

**POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | NOVEMBER 6, 2007 11:59 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Mad Love,
I agree with you. Can you imagine the nightmare that would be? I can not imagine what kind of people would want to live in that kind of world.

Well I have my oak staff for close quarters, but a 30/30 works too, if they decide to come after this Witch.

Funny how history tends to repeat itself.

terra

**POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | NOVEMBER 6, 2007 10:20 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

/\ That is some sick stuff right there.

**POSTED BY: MAD LOVE | NOVEMBER 6, 2007 9:09 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Maybe he is not arguing from an abstract point of view; there are some people who are more vocal and want to make it a reality:

"The Reconstruction movement, founded by the Texan economist Gary North and his father-in-law,Rousas John Rushdoony, is also engaged in a war against secular humanism, in a more extreme form than that waged by the Moral Majority...

Reconstructionists have abandoned the old premillennial pessimism for a more galvanized ideology. A Christian civilization must be established that will defeat Satan and usher in the millennial Kingdom. The key concept of Reconstructionism is Dominion. God gave Adam and later Noah the task of subduing the world. Christians have inherited this mandate and they have the responsibility of imposing Jesus' rule before the Second Coming of Christ...

When the Kingdom comes, there will be no more separation of church and state; the modern heresy of democracy will be abolished, and society
reorganized on strictly biblical lines. That means that every single law of the Bible must be put literally into practice. Slavery will be
reintroduced; there will be no more birth control (since believers must "increase and multiply"); adulterers, homosexuals, blasphemers,astrologers, and witches will be put to death. Children who are persistently disobedient must also be stoned, as the Bible enjoins.

A strictly capitalist economy must also be enforced; socialists and those who incline to the left are sinful. God is not on the side of
the poor. Indeed, as North explains, there is a "tight relationship between wickedness and poverty." Taxes should not be used in welfare
programs, since "subsidizing sluggards is the same as subsidizing evil." The same goes for the Third World, which has brought its economic problems on its own head because of its addiction to moral perversity, paganism, and demonology. Foreign aid is forbidden by the Bible. While waiting for victory -- which, North admits, may be
sometime off -- Christians must prepare to rebuild society according to God's blueprint and must support government policies which approximate these strict biblical norms."
Per religious scholar Karen Armstrong in her book "The Battle for God"(p 361)

**POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | NOVEMBER 6, 2007 8:50 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Waldo,
Well...I guess I want to know what your definition of Witch is. I have discovered that we can solve alot of disagreements in makeing sure we are on the same page.

What do you know about the word Witch and what it means?

Make sure of your own definition of Witch before you down someone that finds pride in carrying that title.
Thank you,
terra

**POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | NOVEMBER 6, 2007 5:53 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Interesting discourse, Reverend, but whatever the 'Republican' side of you says about making people suffer, it's just not as complicated as this:

"“Family” no longer carries the plain and simple meaning of father/mother/child. And the declining moral level of the populace may soon make the American way of life, with its panoply of freedoms, unsustainable."

No, you no longer own the word or definition of 'Family.' And it's about time.

Cause whenever your lot say 'Family' the last thing you think about is one simple word:

Child.

This definition of 'family' comes from a lot of people who think 'Child' is an abstraction, ...a \*thing\* that must always be better-served by \*taking them away\* from queer parents who love them,\* and putting them in, yes, \*state\* or \*religious-state 'care,' than be 'exposed to liberals.'

You say on one hand that 'state help for single mothers and orphans must be Totally-Wrong,' yet advocate \*abuse\* of the same children, and use politics to ensure the state \*can't\* really properly care for the children you rip from loving homes....

For your abstraction that 'The Wicked Must Suffer, Even Through Children we \*make\* to suffer.'

You bring up unmarried pregnancies as though making children suffer is a justifiable deterrent against people \*having sex,\* ...no matter who it hurts.

You tell yourself that this makes how we treat our children, our elders, our sick, \*Ultimately OK, somehow.\*

But it doesn't.

There's no abstraction or religious commandment that makes this OK, Reverend.

None.

You talk 'family values.' You hurt children.

Gods, when there's a sexual abuse scandal, you don't even \*think\* about it being \*abuse\* ...if it's not about \*sex\* you don't even \*care.\*

You \*defend\* non-sexual abuse, in fact, because you believe that 'the immoral must suffer.'

The sexual abuse is just the tip of the iceberg.

There's also just-plain violence.

There's also people being told, \*if you get sick, it's God punishing you, so suffer more.\*

Even some doctors believe that.

And in your Republican world where money is power and disputing Republicans is 'sin,' you better believe it hurts people.

And it's just that simple.

Conservatives get off on hurting people, funneling money to profiteers, and calling it Christian.

Even if it's sick kids.

It's simpler than you think, out here, Christian.

**POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | NOVEMBER 6, 2007 4:02 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Dr Elliott;
you say of my comment to BGone,at Nov.4. 10;04pm;

"Great statement: “we have this thing called imagination, this thing called a mind, which is always on, always thinking things; it’s a big wonderful world, the land behind our eyes. It’s bigger than all outdoors.”

"May I quote you? If so, who/where are you?"

Thanks Dr Elliott,I'm flattered you want to quote me. I am Brian Sharpe,and live in British Columbia,Canada;and recently retired after a long career in mental health and social work.
Regards.

**POSTED BY: BRIAN SHARPE | NOVEMBER 6, 2007 1:18 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Waldo, I bet you're completely oblivious to the fact that you're every bit as repugnant as any (other) fundamentalist anyone has ever encountered aren't you? Your view is the only correct view and everyone else is a fool. There is not a nickels difference between you and, say, that Canyon Shearer goof ball. The philosophy is different, but the end result is the same: a person not capable of decent human interaction.

Still, howl on to your hearts content, fly your freak flag high and wave it proud. Just don't fool yourself into thinking that you've got it sussed. You don't. You're just another boorish loudmouth.

**POSTED BY: MAD LOVE | NOVEMBER 6, 2007 1:08 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Waldo:

You don't believe there are UFO's? So much for you. Like the man said, "it was flying and I couldn't identify it." Now just what was it if it wasn't an Unidentified Flying Object?

The earth is smothered in aliens. They're called people. And some of them think they're legal.

You don't believe in witches? I suppose you don't believe in Santa Claus either. Santa hasn't brought you anything lately? No believe = no presents. It's your loss.

Now about the Easter Rabbit...

**POSTED BY: BGONE | NOVEMBER 6, 2007 12:59 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Terra Gazelle

I would not want to be your neighbor.
I would not want to know you,or stand near you.

You are so full of yourself,it's a wonder you don't explode.
And what infantile beliefs you have. Witchcaft indeed.
Among the gullible,you are the most gullible.
Do you also believe in UFO's and alien abduction;
fairies and ogopogos?The boogieman too?
Whow. No wonder America is in deep trouble.
Its president thinks a god told him to go to war.
Its citizens believe in witches and fairies.

These things exist in Hollywood movies
and American television all the time;
and now some of you think they're real.
O brave new world,still stupid after all these years.

**POSTED BY: WALDO | NOVEMBER 6, 2007 12:31 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Willis E. Elliot:

For your next sermon, point your flock in the right direction.

Jesus said, "love thy neighbor as thyself." Sounds good but anticipates thy neighbor returning the love. What to do when, the usual case thy neighbor takes advantage of your love? Thus Jesus spoke nonsense.

Instead -

"Respect thy neighbor's rights as thou demand thy rights be respected." That leave the door open to deal with the usual case of thy neighbor failing to respond in kind. All too often it is necessary to knock sense into thy neighbor's head. When thy neighbor says, "ah ha, my neighbor will do the right thing and I can take advantage of that" thou getest the short straw.

**POSTED BY: BGONE | NOVEMBER 6, 2007 11:50 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Ender

Next you will be saying that I am not \*really\* Henry James.

**POSTED BY: HENRY | NOVEMBER 6, 2007 10:50 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Just out of curiosity Ender, what discipline is your Doctorate in?

**POSTED BY: MAD LOVE | NOVEMBER 6, 2007 10:15 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

You dumb arses. None of the post other than the original titled Flabby Morals and Cut Flowers have been 'Dr' Elliot.

BTW, what is a Doctorate in Theology worth? Equal to a Doctorate of Astrology, or maybe Numerology? Equal to a Doctorate of History based soley on the "Egyptian Book of the Dead"?

**POSTED BY: ENDER | NOVEMBER 6, 2007 9:53 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Note to all readers of above comment:
Since the preceding comment didn't sound like Dr. Elliott (though I suppose I could be wrong), please note that the writer spelled his last name incorrectly, perhaps deliberately to not be accused of forgery but yet an obvious deception, nonetheless.

**POSTED BY: IDEALIST | NOVEMBER 6, 2007 9:47 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

/\ Any point you might have had was undermined by your hijacking of Dr, Elliot's name. Better luck next time. (tip- aim the gun away from your foot)

**POSTED BY: MAD LOVE | NOVEMBER 6, 2007 9:43 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

What a pile of crapola! Neither political cult believes children should not have needed health care; the difference , sorta, is whether the corporate insurance industry should get a major portion of the health dolllar or should more dollars actually go to the peopel who actually provide the care?

If you are a republican or a purchased democrat (who isn't by the way!); then you give the legal rip-off insurance companies the right to make as much money as possible segmenting the population into groups by the amount of money that can be made! By definition, those who actually need care or cannot afford the insurance company profit surcharge are in the least desirable group! The fact that claims adjusters are trained and indoctrinated to avoid paying claims rather than working to ensure all those who need care get the best; puts "in your face" the criminal and immoral aspect of using for profit insurance in this sick game!

One of the legitimate functions of a government for the people is to set aside the monies, food, oil, etc, to take care of the society when there is a famine, depression, oil shock, etc.! This is just one example of Capitalism, corporatism, Fascism exploiting the people and their society.

It is time to redress this growing imbalance before it is to late; start by making corporations not equivilant to live humans; forbid their influence(lobbying) in any monitary or services support of any political candidate or voting process; tax all corporate income as income to the owners of the corporation whether distributed or not as regular income; and finally have all corporations die when the founders die and any non purchased stock liquidate without compensation when the stock owner dies.

**POSTED BY: CHAOTICIAN | NOVEMBER 6, 2007 9:40 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Dr.,

1. I am "blind" (facon de parler for non-acceptance or disagreement) for Allah, Jahwe, Zeus, Zoroaster, Re, Jesus, Joseph Smith, n....gods. Yes. Language ("blind") is treacherous, can lie, fake, kill, betray, seduce...

2. I am not blind for spiritual reality, Cosmos, beauty, awe, wonder - like Einstein. According to you, he was also blind. Good company. I am a musician, knowing that music is an emotional metaphor for life and development (life IS development, aka evolution!). That is what I do and teach as a rather successful artist and international music author.

3. I never use the word "truth" other than quoting somebody, like you, who claims it for himself.

4. Goedel stated (among other things!) that you cannot make a defining statement from within a system. Therefore bible quotations only make statements about bible quotations and cannot define the validity of the Christian system.

**POSTED BY: GERRY | NOVEMBER 6, 2007 4:33 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

I'm a little too young for the 60's, but it seems like a time of drawing sides with lasting consequences. I can't help but feel we are reaching such a time again.

**POSTED BY: MAD LOVE | NOVEMBER 6, 2007 3:55 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

"I see I shocked you. But there is no doubt that Roman Catholic clergy pederasty incidence peeked in the ‘70s, in the American atmosphere (from the ‘60s) of loosened genitals.
On the basis of your ignorance of that, you advise folks not to believe anything I say."

Apparently you don't see well, as I expressed no shock, only disbelief at your continued poor use of logic. This could be the weakest correlation I have ever heard anyone put stock in, especially given that it involves deflecting responsiblity from clergy who were raping children. Clergy were raping children in the 50s and by many accounts for several hundred years before. But by your argument, at all times there must have been some dominant societal influence responsible for the deviant behavior of religious zealots, which couldn't have possibly emerged from the culture of absolute priviledge, authority, and ultimate cover provided by the church. Was it Elvis shaking his hips in the 50s?

You say you have none, but until you can cite evidence of any clergy who were influenced by hippies in their preferences for raping small children, you might consider staunching your impulse to make excuses for the perpetrators of one of the most heinous crimes of our time.

"I was on the San Francisco scene at the height of hippiedom, when hippies were (you might say) crawling all over the place & doubtless were encountered by some Catholic priests."

Doubtless many people were encountering hippies even more than were Catholic priests, but that apparently did not induce the full-scale raping of children. And, the systemic raping of children did not emerge out of your "scene" in San Francisco. You think that by dropping the term "loosened genitals" (a phrase I wouldn't doubt you've said along with some inner thrill for years) that you can equate the relaxation of sexual mores with the raping of children.

Your argumentation is so laughable that it's hard to believe you've made a career from it. The moniker "contrarian" sounds impish and resourceful, but when you fill up all those little spaces with just so much crap, it serves as a resource for no one.

**POSTED BY: RAFAEL | NOVEMBER 6, 2007 1:09 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Dr. Elliott,
Thank you for the many lessons here by example on how to communicate respectfully while disagreeing or partially agreeing. I have enjoyed your responses as also the others' remarks and points of view. I marvel at your ability to not get emotional when others pretty clearly wanted to provoke an emotional response.

I hope the idea expressed in the last comment you made can be realized, but it is truly at the heart of why this topic can be addressed superficially but not deeply without getting into a quagmire.

I like your clear observation that if government is going to get more involved than it already is, it had better bring a lot of bright minds reflecting different backgrounds and points of view to the table, and openly discuss the complicated issues of preserving individual responsibility while acknowledging that government involvement usually leads to incredible wastes of money/inefficiency, much opportunity for dishonesty/greed/milking the system, and a greater desire by the "governing" to "help" run the lives of the "governed"--which I fear most of all.

I also like your idea (though I firmly don't believe in the non-Biblical concept of "original sin") that, to paraphrase Thoreau, society ought to look for the "roots" of this sad and morally repugnant result in our society, and not just hack away at the branches.

Thanks again for the many enlightening and respectful comments. What a good read here!

**POSTED BY: IDEALIST | NOVEMBER 6, 2007 1:01 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Dr. You asked about the religion I left...Methodist. I was 13 and just did not see the god of the bible as one that I wanted to revere. I think I was born a Pagan...I found Wicca like a homecoming when I was in my 20's.

terra

**POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | NOVEMBER 6, 2007 12:33 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

DR. I am not Buddhist...I am Wiccan, a Witch.

You are most likely correct and we would agree on the same for many things. I think I would like to have a cup of tea with you. Maybe get in a one on one argument about the meaning of life and the birth of your god. ; )

terra

**POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | NOVEMBER 6, 2007 12:24 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

... Belief is the deceit of the credulous; it has no place in the heart of a pagan.
But while we are sad for those who are bemused by Reason, we are deadened by those who see no further than his syllogisms as he turns the eternal wheel of the Great Tautology. We were not fashioned in the mathematician's computations,
and we were old when the first alchemist was a child. We have walked in the magic forest, bewitched in the old Green Thinks; we have seen the cauldron and the one become many and the many in the one; we know the Silver Maid of the moonlight and the sounds of the cloven feet. We have heard the pipes on the twilight ferns, and we've seen the spells of the Enchantress, and Time be stilled. We've been into eternal darkness where the Night Mare rides and rode her to the edge of the abyss, and beyond, and we know the dark face of the Rising Sun. Spin a spell of words and make a magic knot; spin it on the magic loom and spin it with the gods. Say it in the old chant and say it to the Goddess, and in her name. Say it to a dark well and breathe it on a stone...
Tony Kelly

Mr. Mark, We believe in Evolution...heck, I hear tell that the earth is round! Who woulda thought it??
Infantile mind? Now... you do not know me at all. I do not care if you do not believe in my gods...I have not tried to convert you or anyone. I have put in my two cents worth here, just like everyone else. I do not give a fig if you are Christian, Pagan or a believer in the The God of GreenCheese of planet Gonad. So please...do not call me or any one infantile.

terra

**POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | NOVEMBER 6, 2007 12:03 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Dr E

may be because i am falling asleep, but your last reply to all of us made more sense than your previous columns and responses. Maybe you're learning something. :-)

you did seem less "preachy", more discussive, and it becomes you.

good night and sweet dreams.
Henry

it is still admirable that you respond to these cormorants here. and admirable that we respond to you for that matter.

praise to us all

**POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 11:56 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Dr Elliott:

Where did you get the idea that Terra is Buddhist? She's Wiccan.

As for your hot stove analogy, yes, I would prefer that my child never feel the pain of placing her hand on a hot stove. I would prefer that she never feel any pain at all, but I know that isn't possible. It doesn't mean that I consider any pain she feels as a gift, just that I would spare her as much as possible, often by warning her ahead of time - "Hey, punkin, that stove is hot - don't touch it or it will burn you." If that warning suffices to prevent her ever burning herself on a hot stove, then I will certainly not bemoan the fact that she never felt the pain of touching a hot stove.

I am truly sorry for the loss of your child. I have come close to losing my daughter and I never wish to feel that level of fear or pain again. Holding her in my arms safe and whole after the scare was a gift - neither her pain nor my own was any gift I would ever put on my wish list. But I don't see the person who administered your child's accidental overdose as depriving him (her?) of the gift of pain, but as a tragic accident resulting from a laudable desire to offer comfort.

I do agree with you that sometimes an abortion is the best pro-life decision for the children a parent already has. It's a decision I had to make many years ago. While I regret the fact that it was necessary, I believed then, and still believe, that it would have been detrimental to both the daughter I already had AND to a second child to have continued the pregnancy.

We will have to agree to disagree about the whole "fallen" business. I grew up Christian - I know what it means. I just don't believe in it any more. My daughter (or any other child) was not born "sinful." What sin could she possibly have committed in utero? There really wasn't much opportunity for her to make mischief in there - unless you count morning sickness and practicing her soccer dribble with my bladder. As she has grown, she has made mistakes, yes. She has done things that she later regretted. But, to my mind, that's not "sin," it's just human. And if your God tried to destroy his creation and start over, then he must not be perfect either.

**POSTED BY: LEPIDOPTERYX | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 11:38 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Well Doc. Which righteous word(s) did somebody get wrongeous?

I misspelled monstrance somewhere today. It's in the dictionary between monster and monstrous. Baptists don't have them things? Too poor to afford them but coming up fast. I noticed Dr Schuller wearing popey looking vestments.

Does the sun have anything to do with materialism? What is materialism anyhow? I believe no mass equals no force is from the physics book but it's been a while since I read one of them and anyhow, folks who write physics books know nothing that the righteous are concerned about.

Egypt is where the Bible begins with anything a same person would consider being even close to being for real. You're not one of them that claim there were reliable witnesses to God saying, "let there be light?" There's no escaping Egypt as the critical portion of the Bible. Mr Hunt says Moses and the Israelites never left Egypt, everything they did they did just across the river and a place today known as El Amarna.

I was just curious if Bible scholars have anything to counter the Lucifer buying the soul of Moses reading of the Bible. I have gotten my answer via silence. From that I conclude that Mr Hunt knows what he's talking about. Did he misspell some biblical words? Does that make his finding erroneous?

One should guard against being offended by the facts. Don't you think?

**POSTED BY: BGONE | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 11:32 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Dear Dr Elliot -

I appreciate your direct response to me and your engaging in the conversation transpiring here.

I do believe that writing effectively for a blog is a very different talent than writing a good book or newspaper article. People who read and post on blogs don't curl up with a blog as they do a book. They often alight on a column like yours as they are in the act of surfing. That surfing may be limited to On Faith at a given time or it could be a much-broader effort, in which case the amount of attention that they devote to your words will be even more limited than the norm.

I don't come to blogs to wade through verbosity posing as profundity. Neither do I read blogs to be impressed with shallow bromides and sound bites posing as truisms. Like any other form of communication, those articles posted at blogs that are most-direct are usually the ones that get the biggest read.

As a person who started my own writing career reviewing classical music recordings, I had to make a big adjustment when I took that skill into the commercial world where my job was to write "sell copy" for those same recordings. That's a much different style of writing than review writing, especially when you're asked to keep your article to half the word count of a normal review. More important, the PURPOSE of a "sell copy" review is much different than that of a standard review. If one doesn't know the difference, success is unattainable.

Which is my roundabout way of saying that I have a very difficult time reading your columns at On Faith. Perhaps the fault is mine entirely, but then that's my loss.

There's a famous tale of the meeting between Gustav Mahler and Jean Sibelius, both titans of the symphonic form in the early 20th-century. Mahler's symphonies typically run for well over an hour, while Sibelius' works became more terse as he advance in age.

When discussing their approach to composing symphonies, Mahler justified the length of his works by stating that he believed that for the audience, "a symphony should encompass the entire world."

Sibelius responded, "well, I'm serving them cold, clear water."

Perhaps when it comes to writing, you're a bit of a Mahlerite while I'm a Sibelian.

Good chatting.

**POSTED BY: MR MARK | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 11:19 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Dear Dr Elliot -

I appreciate your direct response to me and your engaging in the conversation transpiring here.

I do believe that writing effectively for a blog is a very different talent than writing a good book or newspaper article. People who read and post on blogs don't curl up with a blog as they do a book. They often alight on a column like yours as they are in the act of surfing. That surfing may be limited to On Faith at a given time or it could be a much-broader effort, in which case the amount of attention that they devote to your words will be even more limited than the norm.

I don't come to blogs to wade through verbosity posing as profundity. Neither do I read blogs to be impressed with shallow bromides and sound bites posing as truisms. Like any other form of communication, those articles posted at blogs that are most-direct are usually the ones that get the biggest read.

As a person who started my own writing career reviewing classical music recordings, I had to make a big adjustment when I took that skill into the commercial world where my job was to write "sell copy" for those same recordings. That's a much different style of writing than review writing, especially when you're asked to keep your article to half the word count of a normal review. More important, the PURPOSE of a "sell copy" review is much different than that of a standard review. If one doesn't know the difference, success is unattainable.

Which is my roundabout way of saying that I have a very difficult time reading your columns at On Faith. Perhaps the fault is mine entirely, but then that's my loss.

There's a famous tale of the meeting between Gustav Mahler and Jean Sibelius, both titans of the symphonic form in the early 20th-century. Mahler's symphonies typically run for well over an hour, while Sibelius' works became more terse as he advance in age.

When discussing their approach to composing symphonies, Mahler justified the length of his works by stating that he believed that for the audience, "a symphony should encompass the entire world."

Sibelius responded, "well, I'm serving them cold, clear water."

Perhaps when it comes to writing, you're a bit of a Mahlerite while I'm a Sibelian.

Good chatting.

**POSTED BY: MR MARK | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 11:19 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

THINK...:

You are so right about the difficulties in making sense of suffering. It’s a universal human problem. When things go our way, THEY make automatic sense, WE don’t have to. The natural assumption is that whatever Person or process gave us birth from the woman-womb will support us in the world-womb. (We Christians call it the doctrine of “creation-providence.”)

To use a familiar metaphor, the human sense-making task—because it becomes a CONSCIOUS task only when “things just don’t make sense”--sees the glass as half-empty: “How come there’s so much evil in the world?”

We Christian call it the theodic (“God-justifying”) problem. Milton, in his intro to PARADISE LOST, stated his intention in the book to be “to justify the ways of God to man.”

But if we take a philosophical step away from the suffering problem (as God has given us the ability to do), we can ask “How come there’s so much GOOD in the world?” A next step may be seeing that the two questions are the bright & dark sides of a single reality....

....the wisdom displayed in Isaiah 9:2 (which, as I said, hundreds of us said as we began Christian worship yesterday morning): “The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light.”

The photeric (light/darkness) metaphor is polyvalent. For our present purpose, darkness=nonsense & light=SENSE. We human beings are, vis-a-vis life’s untowardnesses (here, suffering), sense-SEEKERS (though some seem to shed the task with “It’s just one of those things”). And sometimes we are sense-FINDERS: feeling in the dark, we find the light-switch. Sometimes, sense-MAKERS (as in the children’s song, “put it all together, it spells m-a-m-a”). Finally, sense-RECEIVERS.

At age 11, I asked the blind-&-deaf Helen Keller (her fingers on my lips), “Who is God for you?” Without hesitation, she lifted her head & with a transcendent smile said, “God is the light in my darkness and the sound in my silence.”

Prominent British atheist C.S.Lewis, out of the blue one day, was (& this is his book-title for the experience) SURPRISED BY JOY, a joy he could not explain other than it was a gift from God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. He was brilliantly able to produce non-supernatural explanations (such as the materialist reduction that it must have been sometime he ate), but they all were mismatches to the experience.

Prominent scientist Francis Collins (present head of the Genome project), on a walk in the mountains, saw three objects in a row & instantly experienced (as he puts it in the book he wrote to describe it, THE LANGUAGE OF GOD) the Trinity (Father, Son, & Holy Spirit).

Or take the case of the earliest Christians. Just before they became Christians, Jesus their teacher was executed as a criminal. Three days later they became sense-RECEIVERS:
Jesus was back! (Historically, the conversion of Jesus’ disciples into Christians is the world’s most dramatic instance of making sense of suffering--& also as the sense of suffering being given as a gift.)

Rationalists (including the current “new atheists”) insist that sense is to be made “ex ANTE facto” (as the result of our mind’s being “pro-active” in [inductive] dealing with data). They have had no experience convincing them that their life’s primary sense-making should be “ex POST facto” (their mind’s being [deductively] “post-active”). Dogmatically, they believe that since they themselves have never RECEIVED a life-converting, life-centering sense, such a sense is not to be had & nobody ever had it! To stay with the photeric metaphor, they are blind. To introduce the birth metaphor, they’ve been born only once (never born a second time, not “born again”).

Now, on the other side of the “new birth” (of which you could read in the 3rd chapter of the Gospel of John), we talk a different language & reason differently. Not all the trouble the once-born have with my “style” & “content” is from the fact that both could (I readily agree!) stand improvement.

The last word of your comment is “(shudder).”
Since I, too, shudder at what you’ve detailed, you & I reject what you say I affirm. Room for improvement in both of us: I could write better, & you could read better.

ANON...:

My point of God as “Creator...owner” of the child was that parent/society claims on & responsibility for the child are relativized by (1) God’s owner-rights to the child & (2) parent/society responsibility to God for what happens to the child. It’s a responsibility triangle, not a parent-society straight-line stand-off.

But of course you are right that “The Buck Stops Here” on God’s desk: creation was his idea. When he got to thinking about giving humanity all this FREEDOM, he concluded that creation had been a bad idea. Yes, the Bible is that realistic in its portrayal of God as personal: in Genesis 6:6-8, God is twice “sorry” he made people & decides to drown us all; & if he hadn’t changed his mind, children wouldn’t have all their suffering & we wouldn’t have all these “sense” problems.
Staying in the poetic-personal dimension (say, right-brain; we need to use also our left brain for light from the prosaic-impersonal dimension), I remember a little child in a church I was pastoring, her answer to why nature causes so much human suffering: “God so loved us that he just couldn’t wait for nature to settle down before he made us.”
When Jesus said we must “become as little children to enter the Kingdom of God,” at least one of his meanings is this imaginative ability & spiritual willingness to suspend rational disbelief. Some—the rationalists--cripple this ability by making a religion of reason.

MR MARK:

Thank you for the generous thought that somebody “hijacked” my “moniker”! Sorry! Since you read me literally, my sarcasm obviously was too subtle by half. The half that wasn’t subtle was from my observation that few commenters deal with the point of my column: typically, the commenter finds something to complain about & is off on his/her own toot.

Notice the parallel between what I said (above) about the skewing of our sense-making toward “Why is there so much evil in the world?” & away from “Why is there so much good in the world?” My experience is that NOBODY has ever been critical of my style or content except online commenters: all those using other media have been positive, & “On Faith” readers who agree with my columns don’t bother to say so online: they’re happy. Result: almost all comments are by those in whose innards a NO! has arisen. (This is no complaint: it’s only an observation about human nature. I love y’all, & I behave the same way.)

Now, sir, in this light, can you find anything positive & useful in my “SUGGESTIONS ON READING ‘OL WILLIS”?

GERRY:

The reason we Christians believe “nature is ‘lacking’ something” is that God told us so. He suggested that we look for the label “Made by....” (See, in the New Testament, Romans 1:20.)

But quickly I move on to affirm the wondrous riches in nature! You are so right!

Notice, however, that in biblical perspective, the question is not “Does nature lack anything?” but “What do those humans lacked who can’t see God in/through/beyond nature?” You personally are so blind that you can see only nature. Your blindness leads you to present the false alternatives of “awe towards life and nature” & “superstition.”

Your blindness, however, is optional.
You need not hang yourself up on false reductions such as the “nothing but” in this sentence: “’God’ is nothing but a mirror of human properties....there isn’t a trait in the God picture which can NOT be found in our human nature.” Can you not feel the narrow dogmatism of you “nothing but”? And why do you not see the truth the Bible proclaims, viz. that WE are a mirror of GOD, made “in his image”? Rationally, there’s no more basis for locating the mirror above than below.

Finally, your last paragraph is one more unreal either/or. Hadn’t you noticed that the so-called “Dominionists,” who want to theocratize America, as as hot for the afterlife as they are insistent on trying to take over everything in this life?
“All this and heaven to” is an old slogan. And this from the Lord’s Prayer: “Your kingdom come ON EARTH as it is in heaven.”

EILIDH

Over against your reading of me as insisting on the notion of the inexorable grinding of cosmic millstones (as in the Greek “moira,” the Hindu-Buddhist “karma,” & the Arabic “kismet”), the Christian gospel is accused of being IMMORAL by providing a bypass of the moral consequences of one’s behavior: only believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord & Savior, & your sins will be forgiven.

From the fact that “Jesus fed the hungry and cured the sick,” you falsely generalize (1) that his mission was meeting physical needs (whereas clearly he saw it as spiritual, & used the physical dimension as support), & (2) that government’s mission is to meet physical needs. Neither extrapolation is a proper understanding of the Gospels.

Further, you falsely pit your following Jesus to what you call my “selfish philosophy.” Please read me more carefully.

But I do honor you for your Chistian commitment & your courageous care for your own children. God bless you!

BGONE:

“No mass equals no force” is a slogan of materialism.
The philosophy of materialism can’t make sense of the Bible.
Materialists produce such nonsense as “hoax-busters,” so I’m not surprised that your post ends with a reference to that source (which was written by someone so biblically ignorant as to misspell Bible-words).

TERRA:

Thanks for affirming “the broadness and universality of the religious impulse.” But next you appear to demean the impulse by suggesting that the more one knows about the religions, the less specifically will one respond to one’s religious impulse! Isn’t it just as likely that this increase in knowledge will lead to a deeper appreciation for & commitment to one’s own particular religion—or, as in your case, to another religion? Should not knowing more about “cultural relativity” in all aspects of human life (not just religion) DEEPEN one’s commitments rather than TRIVIALIZE them into indifference/skepticism/cynicism?

You don’t mention the religion you left in your choice of Buddhism.

I’ve known a number of Christian missionaries in Buddhist lands. Buddhism is, in many ways, “praeparatio evangelii” (a preparation for [receiving] the gospel of Jesus Christ). As, you indicate, the reverse is also true.

You conclude “why shouldn’t all the citizens of the world be taken care of”? One big foodline? One big hospital? How patronizing! How demeaning of human self-responsibility! At Esalen, we had a resident who so moved toward suffering that whenever anybody was in any distress she was right there. Clearly, she was compulsive about it. But we couldn’t help but notice that it was her way to power (on the “bear trapper” model).

Your last line: “Politics has no place in this discussion.” How Republican (in the bad sense). I’m for a universal health-care program that balances individual/societal responsibilities, so I’m for the politics inducive to that end. You’re not?

LEPID...:

AGREED: Immorality is not the only reason parents fail to provide for their children’s necessities. You well state other reasons, & conclude (with my enthusiastic agreement) that society has “an obligation to help them care for their children while they get back on their feet.” (Under “Democrat,” I said the same in different words.)

AGREED: “people should not have children they cannot support.” By refusing to have an abortion, some parents are unkind to the children they already have.

You are right in saying that I believe “children are born fallen beings,” but your “therefore” is wrong: it doesn’t follow that “children are not entitled to any special treatment....” The reverse is true: because they are “fallen” (a highly technical term I’ll not discuss here), they need more “special treatment” than if they were NOT fallen!

You say I said (in effect) “Pain is a gift from God, and we would not want to do anything to deprive children of this divine gift.” Would you want to deprive a child of the pain of feeling heat—with the result of serious damage when the child touches a hot stove? One of my own children died from an overdose of pain-killer. The injector of that pain-killer killed, in my child, God’s gift of pain. Your sentence is (& you’ll understand that I say it with some heat) sentimental nonsense.

HENRY:

Vicarious suffering: Thank you for feeling sorry for me so I don’t have to feel sorry for myself.

I could rightly say that y’all are hypocrites for preaching to me “respect for persons” while “thoroughly lambasting” me for both “style and content.” But that’s not what I’m feeling. I’m feeling grateful that you’re honestly expressing to me your feelings--& if you weren’t, I wouldn’t be bothering to respond to you.

VIE:

Ya got it! I write oral literature, to be subvocalized or (preferably) read aloud (as Chas.Dickens read aloud everything he wrote, in hope that his readers would do the same).

The text of my opening paper for my national debate with Billy Graham (Triennium of the National Council of Churches, Miami Beach, ’68) was a puzzle to reporters until they were told to read it aloud to themselves. And national-church-executive Truman Douglass used to tell people that to understand my (thousands of) Thinksheets, “read aloud while walking up and down.”

Better advice than the “SUGGESTIONS” I gave you for reading me.

BRIAN:

Great statement: “we have this thing called imagination, this thing called a mind, which is always on, always thinking things; it’s a big wonderful world, the land between our eyes. It’s bigger than all outdoors.”

May I quote you? If so, who/where are you?

And how plain, simple, humble, true-to-human-life-&-God’s-gifts is your last clause: “it’s interesting to try to figure things out.”

DREW:

YES to this in your Einstein quote: “A knowledge of the existence of something we cannot penetrate....this knowledge and this emotion constitute the truly religious attitude....” Notice, too, his further confession of what reason cannot reach, what he can’t “conceive of,” what is “beyond my comprehension.” As we all do, he’s mixing his basic religious impulse with some of his moral & personal opinions.

At Princeton in ’37, I experienced Einstein face-to-face as a Jew of kind, penetrating eyes—like those of another Jew I experienced face-to-face, the great Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. In our egalitarian-multicultural society, it’s dangerous to refer to any ethnic characteristics (especially Jewish!). But I do think that God has given his “chosen people” a deep spiritual potential; &, as a Christian, I believe that when God decided to become a human being, he came as a Jew. (No, I’m not Jewish.)

RAFAEL:

I see I shocked you. But there is no doubt that Roman Catholic clergy pederasty incidence peeked in the ‘70s, in the American atmosphere (from the ‘60s) of loosened genitals.

On the basis of your ignorance of that, you advise folks not to believe anything I say.

I must note this overreading on your part: “under the influence of hippies.” I know of no direct influence of hippies on any Catholic priests, but I was on the San Francisco scene at the height of hippiedom, when hippies were (you might say) crawling all over the place & doubtless were encountered by some Catholic priests.

GERRY:

From the Bible, I quoted something you (we all) believe: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.”

Bible-believers like to know a quote is from the Bible.
Bible-haters scowl when any quote is identified as biblical.

You say “Bible quotations...cannot prove the validity of anything within the Bible,” & you offer the support of Goedel’s Proof (which has nothing to do with intra-textual validity but only with the mind’s inability to conclude upon absolute truth). Within paradigmatic hermeneutics, OF COURSE a Bible quote made validify truths within the Bible.

But you are certainly right that “truth” is “one of the most missued words.” The way you put it gives me the feeling that you’d like to lay on us truth’s real meaning if we’d only hold still.

TERRA:

So true: Some folks “make of god a small and petty tyrant.” More than a half century ago, J.B.Phillips wrote, as a cure for this baneful condition, a book titled YOUR GOD IS TOO SMALL.

You say “people like you tell them [gays] they are evil and damned.” Who, ME? My church, the UCC, was the first to ordain gays. I happen to agree with all your complaints about foot-dragging religion on sexual issues.

Any religion penetrating a culture will have devotees (& clergy) at all cultural levels, & the religion’s shape will fit the particular cultural level (or, at the particular cultural level, the religion could not survive). That is a CULTURAL (not a religious) statement. One of debate’s dirtiest tricks is to compare the best of your side with the worst of your opponents. Much of what y’all complain about in my religion is at so much lower a cultural level than mine that I’ve long ago repudiated it.

Furthermore, religions differ in the force of their clergy’s authority, & the clergy’s authority is under the continuous evaluative judgment of the laity. E.g., as between Catholic & Protestant use of contraceptives there’s no difference: the Catholic clergy’s law against contraception is of no effect &, in this practical sense, “null and void” (as, in my opinion, it should be).

Terra, my guess is that you & I would vote the same on almost every issue.

MAD LOVE:

Wow, thanks! Nothing bad to say of me.

RAFAEL:

An insightful remark. The “wide gap” is inside this contrarian, who has his s... together in a way y’all find hard to grasp. I speak up for what’s being left out, because I believe “it’s what you leave out that wreaks you.” Also, by speaking up for what’s being left out, I avoid having too many friends to take my time.

**POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 10:55 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Drew, thank YOU for rerunning the Einstein quote.

You may remember I posted "Give Up the Einstein/God Shibboleth," urging needy believers to give up their desparate attempts to make Einstein a believer in their wacky supernatural schemes.

ALSO, thank you for your deconstruction of the Good Doctor's Pee Wee Herman level of witticism.

And here is the answer to this question that you posed to Willis

"Why should anyone think your God is any more real than those old gods were?"

Because He is MY God, that's why!!!!!!!
My God!!!!!!!!

**POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 10:06 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

I posted this earlier,but I think a rerun might be a good idea.
Einstein felt the awe and wonder of existence and the mystery of the universe,that both Mr Mark and
Terra Gazelle feel.
It is interesting that such a great and curious mind would put it this way;

"A knowledge of the existence of something we cannot penetrate,of the manifestations of the profoundest reason and the most radiant beauty,which are only accessible to our reason in their their most elementary forms...it is this knowledge and this emotion that constitute the truly religious attitude;in this sense,and in this alone,I am a deeply religious man.

I cannot conceive of a god who rewards and punishes his creatures,or has a will of the type of which we are conscious in ourselves.An individual who should survive his physical death is also beyond my comprehension,nor do I wish it otherwise;
such notions are for the fears or absurd egoism of feeble souls".

Albert Einstein
"The World as I see it"
page 5

**POSTED BY: DREW | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 9:52 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Dr Elliott;

Let’s put two sentences beside each other:
MINE:
“If the main premise, that a God exists, is mistaken, then religion is complete and utter nonsense.”
YOURS:
“If the main premise, that God does NOT exist, is mistaken, then Irreligion is complete and utter nonsense.”

(You)It’s a wash, man. No?

(Me) No. Your reply reminds me of Pee Wee Herman's response when he was called an idiot.
He wittily replied,"I know you are ,but what am I?

Really Doctor,I would have expected something a little better from you.
He's your God,not mine. I don't see any god.
Like I don't see any Zeus,or Jupiter,or any of the countless other gods that we been making up eversince we could walk on two legs.
Why should anyone think your God is any more real than those old gods were?

**POSTED BY: DREW | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 9:26 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Creators

I can "see" why humans would believe in a Sun God.

The Sun
brings light
is the source of energy
governs the path of its planets

Three things Muslims believe that Allah does.

So if you said "The Creator"
was the Sun God

in a (somewhat metaphorical) sense it would resonate with me.

In a similar way that the Moon Goddess resonates with me. Again: I can SEE (and feel) the Moon.

But my psyche does not \*need\* to believe in a creator to justify my wonder at the universe and the galaxies.

**POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 4:58 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

This is for POSSUM and anyone else worried about taxes. And, Dr Elliott, sorry for mentioning ancient Egypt again.

The present tends to be a repeat of the past so keeping track of what has already happened is always in order.

How will any public health care of any kind be funded, paid for? But of course, taxes. And Possum already pays a fair share even though it's less than "the poor woman" Jesus mentioned giving one half, that's 50% compared to Possum's 45%. That may be why Jesus mentioned, "the poor you will have with you always."

The ancient Egyptians had a fair share of "Possums" that drug their feet paying their taxes. To counter that they came up with "tax beaters." Taxes amounted to a share of what farmers grew, money yet to be invented at the time. Tax beaters accompanied the tax collector with his ox cart going door to door at harvest time and "beat the taxes out" of Egyptian tax payers.

Tax payers struck back, hid their food and lied to the tax collector saying things like, "we ain't got no food here" (for his majesty Pharaoh and his bureaucratic thugs). Expecting, and rightly so that the farmers were lying the tax beaters had a turn at changing minds, turning liars into righteous tax payers.

In extreme cases farmers only harvested what they needed themselves and left the rest in the fields. In cases like that the tax beaters with their long poles beat on the farmers while they completed the the harvest and presumably took it all.

I've been reluctant to mention this for fear of giving the IRS ideas. It's probably the only way to fund socialized medicine beginning with beating on the doctors. Possum and everyone else need not be surprised at the next government bureau, "tax beaters."

By the way, the farmers won that fight. In the end Pharaoh gave up and confiscated all. The Bible says he did that because a slave Jew interpreted his dreams. And, no big surprise, a slave Jew named Joseph who had a coat of many colors was put in charge of the ancient Egyptian national treasury.

**POSTED BY: BGONE | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 4:50 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Just a little note...
They have proven that slaves did not built the pyramids.They can tell that the workers had the best food and medical care...not exactly what you would think of as the life style of slaves.

The Israelites were in Egypt in the 19th Dynasty and the Pyramids were built in the 4th dynasty, 1400 years earlier.And the proof seems to show that the builders of the Pyramids gave their time and effort as offerings to the Gods. Not forced as slavery, but like missionaries today as volunteers.

The word Hebrew - traces the name of a Hebrew root-word signifying
"to pass over," and hence regard it as meaning "the man who passed over," viz., the Euphrates; or to the Hebrew word meaning "the region" or "country beyond," viz., the land of Chaldea.
This latter view is preferred. It is the more probable origin of the designation given to Abraham coming among the Canaanites as a man from beyond the Euphrates (Gen. 14:13).

Hebrew does not mean Woman. It seems to me it means "Nomad" then anything else.

When the Hebrews got to Canaan/Palestine they had to kill the people whose land it was...and steal the land. It was a land of milk and honey because others had made it so.

**POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 4:47 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Terra writes:

"I am at a loss about how anyone can see this world, this universe and not see the Creator in Creation, in the act of becomeing. Just to see our own galaxy...then to know there are millions if not more galaxies changing and growing and becoming. It is past words of awe."

Just as I am at a loss to imagine why anyone would/must imagine that there was a creator.

A Creator is a construct of man's mind, and his infantile mind at that.

The human fancy of a Creator has been surpassed by the facts of evolution and science's breakthroughs in cosmology. I find the awe presented in these ideas far greater and more compelling than the bargain-counter explanation of a Creator.

But that's just me.

**POSTED BY: MR MARK | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 4:00 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

JOZEVZ - God so loved the cheerful giver He sacrificed His only begotten son so there could also be cheerful receivers. Are you suggesting receivers become givers? Finders keepers, losers weepers.

Those on public assistance are not in God's favor while those who collect God's taxes and spend them to spread God's word are in God's favor. God will decide. We need God only. In God we trust, everybody else cash, (Citibank only wishes). You'll get your reward in heaven if you agree with God's representatives, be a cheerful giver while all others can just go to hell.

We can fund health insurance for poor cheerful givers by selling tickets to public hangings,, bring back burning at the stake,, for those already sentenced to hell,, by God's representatives. There's not enough smokers left to pay for it,, just as long as you don't tax me,, to pay for anything. Did I mention cheerful givers and cheerful receivers?

Cheer up. It'll get a lot worse before it gets better. Keep smiling, the boss loves idiots. So does God,, representatives. When are WE going to get represented?

**POSTED BY: BGONE | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 3:33 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Henry James,
I so thank you for the good words. Thank you for the Phd's also...though I am a Third Degree in my tradition in Wicca. lol.

I am at a loss about how anyone can see this world, this universe and not see the Creator in Creation, in the act of becomeing. Just to see our own galaxy...then to know there are millions if not more galaxies changing and growing and becoming. It is past words of awe.

How can anyone see the power of creation out of destruction all about us every second, and make of that power that is responcible for it, this petty, quibbling, list making, bean counter?

I believe all of us are the conduits of this power of change and creation. We are part of the creation of life, not special except in our ability to cause damage to the wheel of life.

Aiding our brothers and sisters, I thought was what Jesus was all about.It is what Wicca is about...and to us our brothers and sisters do not stop at the two leggeds. When you acknowledge that the trees and the waters are part of this web of life...that the mounatains and sky is also part of it as well as every living being...then what we do to each other...how we take each other's hands and help each other up from their knees...it matters. Health care for children is such a basic human neccessity...how can we question it? I am, as our British friends say...gobsmacked.
terra

**POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 3:13 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Henry James:

"Dr Elliot would have us believe that it was only the Old Testament barbarians (psst: they were \*Jews\*) who unhesitantly practiced slavery."
~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

There's a lot to the \*Jew\* - slavery story. Moses led them out of slavery in Egypt. Dr Elliott doesn't want to talk about Egypt with respect to the Bible. Dr, Egypt is where it began. May we begin in the beginning. Please?

The real joke in the Bible is the fact that Judah, (psst: Jews are folks from Judah) was occupied by a foreign power for it's entire history and another 2,000 years after the name was changed to Palestine. Yet we hear about all those "Israelite" not "Jewish" kings. There may be a small disconnect that needs to be made, Israelites are not Jews?

I was watching an "archaeological" - Bible search program on HIST, "in search of king Solomon's mine." They went to an ancient copper mine in the Negev and "prayed" over it. Nope they said, that's not it. As a footnote they observed that the copper mine was run by Egyptians. Reckon who did the digging? Locally conscripted slaves or did they bring workers along with the army?

I think the word "Israelite" means "builder" and refers to the "pyramid builders" the ancient Egyptians. And, the word "Hebrew" means "woman" in particular "woman Pharaoh" that was forbidden in Egypt prior to the arrival of the Greeks, Alexander the great, (great something or the other).

Bottom line - the Bible is the highly barfed on history of ancient Egypt where someone, Josephus being the prime suspect decided to "create" a Jewish history and used a "power house" for his base, ancient Egypt. Kinda odd that the archaeological trail going backwards from here seems to dead end about the time of Josephus.

**POSTED BY: BGONE | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 1:58 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Dr Elliot: will You Admit Your Error

Henry's slavery citations seem pretty water tight to me.

Will you come back here and admit that you are in error, and that Christians used Christian scripture to justify slavery?

It would be humanizing to see you admit at least one of your errors here, rather than continually accusing OTHERS of ignorance.

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you, I heard someplace.

**POSTED BY: BETTY | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 1:12 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

The Christian Approach to Slavery

Dr Elliot would have us believe that it was only the Old Testament barbarians (psst: they were \*Jews\*) who unhesitantly practiced slavery.

He is either lying to you, or he is ignorant. And he has 6 ph.d.s so he CAN"T be ignorant, can he?

Here is Paul, who wrote half of the Christian New Testament (there are other Paul quotes as well)

One of the favorite passages of slave-owning Christians was St. Paul's infamous instruction that slaves to obey their owners in the same way that they obey Christ:
bullet Ephesians 6:5-9: "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him."

For a fuller description of NEW Testament endorsements of slavery, which were used over and over by 19th Century Christian Clergy to justify slavery, go to

[**http://www.religioustolerance.org/sla\_bibl2.htm**](http://www.religioustolerance.org/sla_bibl2.htm)

**POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 1:06 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Brian Sharpe:

I have a story about those 'bejesus' expressions. When they become less reflex.

A family of desk pounding atheists were on the lake one Sunday when a sudden storm came up, (kinda biblical). A family member and co worker told the story and explained the tenseness of the situation with, "then we began calling upon deities for help." Must have worked. Huh?

There are no atheists on the battle field for that reason alone. And, all fighting is done for the soldier beside you. Why? Because he's the only one that is offering you any protection at all.

God is the most frequent word heard in battle yet the least dependable. All the patriotism and 'God will protect you' crap is just that, crap. Patton really said, "when you put your hand in a pile of goo that was your best friend's face, well, you'll know what to do." Yeah George! Get a new best friend on the double before your face turns into a pile of goo.

The song writer got is straight. It's "Jim Dandy to the Rescue" not God. "Go Jim Dandy, Go!" Turns out the atheists were rescued by the Coast Guard and immediately lost faith in God, again.

**POSTED BY: BGONE | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 1:04 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Is the Bible a Hoax?

The central organizing belief of those who "worship" the Bible is that it is the "word of God."

For that to be "true" (ie not a Hoax)

1. there must actually BE a God. the monotheistic God of Abraham, to be specfic. (humans have believed in about 34,000 different gods: Zeus is my current favorite).
2. that God must always speak the Truth.
3. the Bible must be an example of that unerring truth that God always speaks.

Dr Elliot, we've got trouble,right here in River City.

1. There is no evidence that there is a God, not evidence I would admit into a court of intellectual respectability, let alone law.
2. The Bible is full of UN-truths. Need I enumerate them for you, or do you have a 4th grade education.
3. See #2.

Q.E.D.

Now there is some lovely literature in the Bible. Ecclesiastes is one of my favorite books.

But Truth rather than Hoax? Do you believe everything you read in Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy?

**POSTED BY: PERRY MASON | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 12:54 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Dr Elliott: you didn't mention me personally but my ears are burning so I'll reply. You wrote the following to which I will respond and hopefully clarify.
~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~
Thanks for your flat-out rejection of a nonsensical either/or:
“I may disagree with Dr.Elliott’s interpretation, but I wouldn’t call the Bible either ‘bogus’ or a ‘hoax.’ There are more gradations of faith...than merely atheists on this side and fanatics on the other.”

If you’d been in church with Loree & me this morning, in good conscience you could have joined your voice with the voices of hundreds of others in reading this from the Bible (Isaiah 9:2):

“The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light:
those who lived in a land of the shadow of death—
on them light has shined.”

The Bible is centrally concerned with en-LIGHT-enment—but you’d never guess it from the comments of those so blind that they see it as “bogus” or a “hoax.”
~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~
If stated to be fiction the Bible is not “bogus” or a “hoax.” The “bogus” or a “hoax” comes from saying it's the word of God which opens a door that only the ignorant will go through, (angels fear to tread).

[**http://www.hoax-buster.org/sellyoursoul**](http://www.hoax-buster.org/sellyoursoul) says it all. How ignorant can one be? Can Devil say emotionally stimulating things like, "the Lord is my shepherd" or "love thy neighbor as thyself"? Can Devil enjoy beautiful music? Does Devil dream of being worshiped, honored, adored, glorified and sacrificed to? Does Devil seek a beautiful mansion with stained glass windows? Does Devil want to be God? Did Lucifer try to take over heaven? Do the bears go --- in the woods?

Who do you serve when you call the congregation to services? When you decided to take holy orders was the notion of making a living part of your decision process. I understand you "remember Pearl Harbor." You've probably heard of a few who got the calling to the ministry on the way to the mail box that just happened to have the draft notice? Pride of the Marines, Lt. Pat Robertson got his calling on the way to the Inchon landing, so I've heard.

Many philosophers have made equally profound statements but do not claim they came from God. Those who read them aloud do not get tax breaks although it's not uncommon to refer to them as "the better class of people." It's the God part that's "bogus" AND a "hoax." Others have made the point that the Bible supports all sorts of unacceptable practices including slavery. Wo be it to those who lay that at God's doorstep and expect to get into heaven. Don't you think?

**POSTED BY: BGONE | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 12:42 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Gerry: you enrich us Spiritually
Much More than the Bible Ever Did

I have nothing against the Bible except for its admonishments to brutality, ignorance, and immorality.

But whatever eloquence and spirituality it has is utterly dwarfed by the views you describe of the universe.

Its eloquence is dwarfed by Shakespeare for that matter. Or Tolstoy. But the Galaxies!!! Oy Vey.

Thomas Mann wrote that a TRUE religious sensibility consisted in "having a taste for the infinite," which you have just exemplified for us, Gerry. What a breath of "fresh air" after the Dr.s turgid defenses of Biblical blinder visions.

**POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 12:42 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Another "simple-minded" thought from a "naturalist" (a word again!): If you zoom into the universe on Google Earth a couple of million or even billion light years away in time and space, for instance into the "Whirlpool Galaxy" (your grandson can show you), and just meditate a few minutes about what you SEE through the Hubble telescope, what there really IS, I get a deep and genuine, breathtakingly enlightening feeling of magnificence, awe, miracle, "religion", moral accountability, if you wish, against which any, ANY bible quotation is dwarfed to mostly ridiculous unimportance, if not human perversion as in the OT.

Here, there is no more bickering about "truth", about "heaven", about "original sin" or any word or human concept - it is just there, it is all real, unfathomable, but without the slightest demand for superstition, which is at the core of a monotheistic religion the PhD propagates.

The bible writers thought the earth was flat, and you refuse to accept centuries (not millenia, alas: 1500 years of advancement of the human spirit were destroyed by superstition!) of human brain work, to avoid the knee jerk causing word of "science"...

**POSTED BY: GERRY | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 12:17 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

A False Accusation

Dr.: as far as I can tell, I didn't say the bible endorsed "Child Sacrifice". I said it endorese "stoning disobedient children", which it does. Rescind your charge of inaccuracy against me forthwith.

I did write this, and I copy directly"

"finally, it is absurd to posit that either
1. one needs to read the bible to have values, or
2. secularists like me might not be thoroughly familiar with the Bible, including its innumerable endorsements by God of grossly immoral practices llike genocide, slavery, selling one's daughter, stoning disobedient children."

Note as well that I said "read the bible", not "practice Christianity."

Though Paul, who wrote half the new testament, endoresed slavery as well.

**POSTED BY: HJ | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 11:28 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Just an experiment to see if anyone can post under this name. If it post, then the other post by Willy E. is most likely an imposter. I don't think the real Willis has the moral fiber to read the replies to his dimwitted hate letter.

BTW Terra G. the cults of Abrahan do represent a petty little god created by petty, little, warlike humans.

**POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOT | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 11:23 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Terra
You last post/response to the Dr was cogent and powerful, and so intelligent.

William and I award you
An Honorary PhD.

Or three. You deserve to have more than the good Doctor.

**POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 11:17 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Despite Elliot's Evasions,
the Bible Condones Genocide, Slavery, and Murder of Children

Read Henry's two posts directly above,
and
google
"bible genocide",
"bible slavery",
and
read Deuteronomy on child disobedience.

Who are you going to believe: Dr Elliot, or your own eyes?

Of course there are nice things in the Bible. Jesus said "love your neighbor as yourself" 5,000 years after hundreds of other moral teachers had said exactly the same thing.

The Dr says you Christians don't need to follow the Old Testament any more. I have 10 new commandments for you, in that case.

**POSTED BY: BETTY | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 11:10 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Dr Elliot
You say it is mindless to attack Christians by citing the OT.

In my quote above and earlier I wrote
"As far as the \*Bible's\* 4 sins: I still disagree with you, and have plenty of citations:"

Very very few normal people, or the 19th century preachers I cited, make the PHD distinction that Christians don't follow the OT. Throw out the 10 commandments, would you?

In practicality, your point about Jesus updating the OT is a dodge. Christians use the OT today ALL the time to justify many odious beliefs. Just one example: Leviticus on Homosexuality.

As far as your disavowal of Genocide: another Phd fine point: Human readers of the King James Bible see exactly the admonition to commit genocide on the Canaanites, and they don't read the Phd thesis to modify it.

And YOU accuse me of ignorance in citing it.

Don't believe that the Bible teaches genocide? Check out the following verses, just two of the many from the Bible that suggest that God himself thinks that genocide is a wonderful idea:

Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I am driving out from before you the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. But you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images (For you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.)

Exodus, Chapter 34, verses 11-14

You will chase your enemies, and they shall fall by the sword before you. Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight; your enemies shall fall by the sword before you. For I will look on you favorably and make you fruitful, multiply you and confirm My covenant with you. You shall eat the old harvest, and clear out the old because of the new.

Leviticus, Chapter 26, verses 7-9

Google "bible genocide" and you get 1.8 million hits. and not ALL from ignorant atheists.

You are on completely shaky ground here, Dr, in your blanket defense of the Bible as the word of a God who would not be put in jail today for His sins.

And did you REALLY say that the Hippies were responsible for Catholic Child Sexual abuse?

I will check for myself, but THAT would be shameful if it is true.

**POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 11:02 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Dr Elliot Kudos for responding

You ARE the best columnist here as far as that is concerned, and I appreciate your participation.

As far as the Bible's 4 sins: I still disagree with you, and have plenty of citations:

Slavery: Paul told us to be kind to our slaves. Go to "Religious Tolerance" (a non profit non sectarian fair site) and search on "bible slavery" and you will see MANY passages in the bible that justify slavery.
Intelligent people reject slavery, but they are also rejecting these odious verses in the bible that affirm it.
Child Sacrifice: Sorry: should have said that Deuteronomy tells us it is ok to stone our children to death if they talk back too much. I DID sloppily call that child sacrifice. I should have said "child murder".
GEnocide: right after God tells us "thou shalt not kill" he tells the israelites to go wipe out the Canaanites, every woman and child and the livestock too. there are other instances: again check "religious tolerance" site.

the Slavery documentation is totally UNambiguous.
here are two 19th century clergy
"There is not one verse in the Bible inhibiting slavery, but many regulating it. It is not then, we conclude, immoral." Rev. Alexander Campbell
"The right of holding slaves is clearly established in the Holy Scriptures, both by precept and example." Rev. R. Furman, D.D., Baptist, of South Carolina

and a 21st century update:

"If we apply sola scriptura to slavery, I'm afraid the abolitionists are on relatively weak ground. Nowhere is slavery in the Bible lambasted as an oppressive and evil institution: Vaughn Roste, United Church of Canada staff.

read the whole section at Religious Tolerance. you might learn something.

Like for instance, that you rather than I are the one who is ignorant on this score.

Love
Henry

(more to come)

**POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 10:38 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

My impression is that by interacting with us he tends to dig his holes even deeper, creating a greater distance between what he professes to be (an Esalen-style liberal Democrat) and what he seems to be through his writing (a reactionary provocateur). I've never seen such a wide gap in someone's writing.

**POSTED BY: RAFAEL | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 8:42 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

I will say in your defense Dr. Willis, that while I agree with the criticisms of your viewpoints and the way you present them, I do admire your willingness to come back into the thread and interact with us.

**POSTED BY: MAD LOVE | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 3:43 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Rev. do you think that this kind of morality makes a better world? That petty judgements is what the creator of the oceans and mountains are interested in?

I think it comes down to how we treat each other...how we help the other children of God/dess. How we care for what was given us...I do not think that God gives a care about who we love, but that we love. I don't think S/he cares what we call It but that we do the work here that is given to us to do. What ever name God/dss has does not matter. How we pray does not matter...the Face of God that we see, does not matter. Even that we believe does not matter...it is how we treat each other. Greed and hate and bigotry is not a family value. Not in my family.

Some Christians are good people, kind and gentle. Some are filled with greed and hate and anger. As a Pagan I get a certain kind of reaction, some of which does not say much good about your religion.

Oh then there are those who are waiting for the Rapture...they like the war in the middle east, they are waiting for the war to enlarge and Israel to be envolved in a killing war. They are waiting for the Jews to convert and become Christian(perfected)...then Jesus will come again. They do not care about saving the planet, after all they are going to be wafting up to heaven...

Then there are the (un)intelligent creationists. What can I say about them? My step daughter in law and her family are some of them. They went to the Museum in Ky. There were two baby dinos on the ark...I bet they were so sweet. (sarcasm alert)

Then there are the dufi that do not believe in evolution...three of the Republican candidates don't, and of course they are the Christian team.

So do I think you all care about the planet?

On the whole? NO. You care about your idea of morality, not people. I find that immoral.

terra

**POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 3:21 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Rev. Elliot,
I do not think your religion is narrow..I think the way many practice it is narrow. I do not blame the religion or God for what the followers say and do in Her/His name. They make of god a small and petty tyrant.

Man tends to have their god reflect who they are, instead of man reflecting their gods. A mean, petty man sees his god as mean and petty. A loving, giving man sees his god that way. A man that sees helping kids as immoral has a problem.

~And I like this you say: “we are co creators in this world....it matters the kind of world we create and the future we leave.”
But why do you say we Christians don’t believe that?~

Rev. I see, not only you but Cal Thomas and TV preachers saying the same things, not wanting to help children grow up to be healthy and successful. I see Christians that would rather see people die of aids then use something as safe and effective as a Condum. I see that Christians would rather a poor woman continue having children until she is old and worn before her time...barely surviving to feed her children...who live in misery and malnurishment. Rather then teach family planning and how to take care of her self so that her children can better survive.

Morality is more then a persons sex life. And that is all I see Christians careing about. They would rather tell a gay man he is going to hell..or they can "change" him in 90 days if he loves Jesus. So suicide is what happens, self hate and self abuse...because people like you tell them they are evil and damned. Young gays feel lost and alone. Families that discard them, a society that hates them...and why? Because of your religion. Gay people are part of our world...of our communities.

**POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 3:14 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Thanks for the distribution of grades. You should actually add C- or F+ or whatever. It helps to increase our education.

I rejoice in being judged both simple-minded and over-complex. I feel in better company with Einstein than with you, however. (Thanks, Drew!)

Bible quotations, by simple logic, cannot prove the validity of anything within the bible (Goedel). So you might just omit them, if you want to convince anybody of any "truth" (one of the most misused words in existence).

**POSTED BY: GERRY | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 2:54 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

"Almost all of the clergy rape cases were in the 1970s & by Roman Catholic priests who had been deeply influenced by the 1960s’ hippie loosening of the genitals."

Catholic clergy raped children because they were under the influence of hippies? Do you expect anyone here to regard anything you say with authority?

**POSTED BY: RAFAEL | NOVEMBER 5, 2007 1:14 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

Thank you for continuing to try to educate me even beyond (in the case of some of you) having concluded that I’m uneducable. Since I’m continuing to respond to your comments, I am entitled to include myself in the compliment.

I mustn’t respond to each comment; but please note that in some responses I’m including what was said by others than the person I’m addressing.

VIE:

Thanks for your flat-out rejection of a nonsensical either/or:
“I may disagree with Dr.Elliott’s interpretation, but I wouldn’t call the Bible either ‘bogus’ or a ‘hoax.’ There are more gradations of faith...than merely atheists on this side and fanatics on the other.”

If you’d been in church with Loree & me this morning, in good conscience you could have joined your voice with the voices of hundreds of others in reading this from the Bible (Isaiah 9:2):

“The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light:
those who lived in a land of the shadow of death—
on them light has shined.”

The Bible is centrally concerned with en-LIGHT-enment—but you’d never guess it from the comments of those so blind that they see it as “bogus” or a “hoax.”

HENRY:

In your second comment, you said well what VIE implied: “One must read the Bible with intelligence.”

BGONE: On your “hoax” line, you need help from Vie & Henry. “Fiction” is one genre of literature, the archive called the Bible has many genres, & fiction is one of them. So?

You say “If stated as the absolute word of God it’s a hoax.” What a straw man! I don’t know anybody who thinks it’s “the absolute word of God.” You must be confusing both the book & the religion: Islam does consider the Qur’an the absolute word of Allah. We Christians believe that the Bible, of all literature, has the highest potential of communicating to the reader the Word of God. Of course Christians grasp this truth according to their conceptual & cultural levels, & the lowest level (in all cultures, whatever the religion) is literal.

What I find both risible & sad is that so many “On Faith” commenters, from ignorance or malice, judge the Bible from the perspective of its least advantaged (by nature & culture) readers. This produces such a stupid conclusion as that the Bible-believing founders of the University of Chicago must have been literalists &, as literalists, cultural ignoramuses! (I am leery of using the word “stupid,” because it easily slips over from being a judgment on ideas to being disrespect for their promulgators--&, in my religion, respect for all human beings is a fundamental.)

But Henry, your last sentence-question is good. No, I do not believe that the Bible is, word for word, “the word of God.” In teaching lay readers to read the Bible in church, I have always asked them to begin not “Let us listen TO the word of God” but rather “Let us listen FOR the Word of God [THROUGH the words about to be read].” The only folks I know of who read the Bible literally are children, fundamentalists, & atheists. Mortimer Adler, a teacher of mine, wrote the classic HOW TO READ A BOOK. It’s a good start on a much more difficult hermeneutic project, viz. how to read a thousand-year archive (which the Bible is). Of course that doesn’t mean that one must be highly sophisticated to “get” the Bible’s message as a book FROM and not only ABOUT God. In a church of which I was pastor, a 6-year-old girl said she was hesitant to open the Bible—because as long as it’s closed, God can’t see you! A person who opens (or listens to) the Bible in hope of hearing God (“the Word of God”) understands what the Bible is FOR.
Further, the biblical materials are of various depth. As an ancient scholar put it, “A rabbit can wade in the Bible, and an elephant can swim in it.”

RAFAEL:

Good point about children suffering. That clause was not in my revised column, which (by an online fluke) didn’t replace the original. My point was that no matter how hard society tries, it cannot eliminate all the suffering immoral-irresponsible parents cause children; & children “should” suffer only in the sense that society needs to address sick family-units, not just the symptoms & effects of the sickness.

You say “no one mentioned the lack of health care as a result of parental immorality.” Since I’m one, your “no one” is wrong. Besides, I find it often mentioned in publications you must not be reading.

As to your last paragraph, I presume we are to distribute successively into the second sentence the actions in the first.
Thus: raping children is done by “the clergy,” and shooting up schools is done by “the confused offspring of religionists.”
“The children of hippies,” you say, are not guilty of either horror. How about the hippies themselves? Almost all of the clergy rape cases were in the 1970s & by Roman Catholic priests who had been deeply influenced by the 1960s’ hippie loosening of the genitals. And as for school shootings, most of the shooters have had no significant religious background.

HENRY:

I must challenge your “most”: “the mindless obeisance most religionists give to the ‘good book’ that recommends slavery, genocide, child sacrifice, and sexual slavery.” That makes four times you are wrong.
SLAVERY? The Bible so undermines slavery that it was the chief authority (in the hands of Wm.Wilberforce) for Britain’s outlawing the slave trade in 1835, 30 years before the U.S. did.
GENOCIDE? An excellent Jewish scholar (& former counselee of mine), Philip Stern, did his PhD at U.Pennsylvania to spike this overreading of the biblical text.
And Norman Gottwald (who for four years was my teaching assistant in Hebrew & Greek) showed how the Canaanite-genocide version was only one of three ways to tell the story of the Hebrew-Israelite settlement in Canaan.
CHILD SACRIFICE? Repeatedly condemned in the Bible (e.g., Genesis 22:1-18 & Deuteronomy 18:10).
SEXUAL SLAVERY? It was so common in that world that it would not be surprising if there were instances in which the Bible does not criticize the practice—but I can think of no instance of its approving the practice.

Henry, you criticize “mindless” Bible-believers. Are you yourself not a case of a mindless Bible-Unbeliever? I cannot believe that your four false accusations are malicious, so I must attribute them to your ignorance.
A fundamental Bible-reading principle you seem not to be aware of: The Bible is a book of TWO religions, not one—so it cannot be read as though it represents one religion. “The Hebrew Scriptures” is what the Jews call what we Christians call “the Old Testament.” And we Christians see the OT through the eyes of Jesus—so, e.g., we don’t practice circumcision & do eat pork. It’s just ignorance for anybody to attack the Christian religion by quoting the OT (though it’s commonly done by “the new atheists” & other secularists).

MARIANNE:

I agree with you on (1) the economic factor in inadequate home child-health care & (2) “some form of universal coverage.” You seem not to have read my assertion that “society should feel ‘a moral imperative’ to act, through government agencies, for the good of children, who belong to society and not just to their parents.”

You worked yourself into such a tizzy because you are so hotly partisan for the values in my “Democrat” paragraph as to be blind to the values in my “Republican” paragraph. (With voters like you, I’m glad I’M not running for president!)

TERRA:

What? You’re only 60--30 years younger than I--& you’re NOT (in comparison with me) a “youngster”?

But I like these words of yours: “Every one who reads your words have experiences that you know nothing of. We all have talents and knowledge that you cannot touch...we all deserve respect....” Enthusiastically, I agree! And I hope you can all agree with me on this: you’re all thin-skinned, touchy, imagining insults to YOURSELVES when I intend only to criticize some of your IDEAS. My generation was thicker-skinned, able to enjoy & profit from logomachies (idea-battles) without feeling insulted. We went through the depression (when I was making ten cents an hour) and World War 2 (having been born in World War 1). I am in daily contact with several score of my generation, & none of them would lay on me any of the negative adjectives you lay on me. Maybe there’s here a generalization worth heuresis: The easier a generation has it, the thinner its skin.

You accuse me of “look[ing] down on those who do not share” my “narrow belief.” NEVER! I look down on NOBODY! In 1939 I ministered to people who didn’t bring their Bibles to church; they didn’t have Bibles; all of them were illiterate. And if I’d looked DOWN on them, I’d’ve been (deservedly) outa there!

But of course, being human, I am an evaluator-chooser. I look UP to what I consider worth honoring & emulating & DOWN on what I consider I cannot value (e.g., Islamic shari’a). So, naturally enough, I look down on some of your ideas, & even jump up & down on some of them.

Did you notice your disrespect for my religion, calling it “narrow,” “a religion filled with hate, greed and intolerance”?
To give them an occasion for laughter, I’ll read your words to some of my same-generation colleagues.

I do like this in your last sentence: “we are all students on the same journey.”

WILLIAM:

Thank you for agreeing with me on the need for “a return to God and Country” (though I’d write “country”). Cultures tend to become amnesiac, forgetting their roots.

In church this morning, we studied the Gospel of Luke’s account of the birth of John the Baptist (1:5-57). It was expected that he’d be given his father’s name, Zechariah; but an angel said to his father “you will name him John” (which means “God is gracious”—get that? Not “God is wrathful” or “God is jealous”). John’s God-given job? To cure his people’s amnesia by “turn[ing]” them “back to the Lord their God” (verse 16). (John’s RESTORATIONIST movement led to Jesus’ ministry.)

You & I believe America needs a RESTORATIONIST movement calling us all back to America’s sturdy roots in Bible & Enlightenment.

CULTURAL analysis requires asking a number of questions. I’ll mention two:

1 Are the reason-&-freedom values of the 18th-century British-&-European Enlightenment ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS in the American mind? No one even slightly familiar with the founding fathers’ mind could doubt it.

2 Is the BIBLE an ESSENTIAL COMPONENT in the American mind? Many “On Faith” commenters doubt it, indeed deny it. Some of them say that some other ancient literature would do as well in presenting essential values.

Notice: This is a CULTURAL, not a religious, issue. Every culture has a “mind,” a way of seeing-&-thinking-&-deciding. And every cultural “mind” is rooted in its people’s whole historical-flow of life. The “mind” includes common assumptions & hopes, & a common language. All of America’s founding fathers were FAMILIAR with the Bible’s “mind,” including those who dissociated themselves from the “church” side of America’s “church & state” culture.

(1) Familiarity with the Bible’s mind is essential to the continuation of the American mind, without which America cannot continue to be America. That is precisely what John McCain meant when he said that familiarity with “Christianity” should be required of candidates for the presidency of the U.S. He did NOT say what he was accused of saying, viz. that American presidents must be Christians! (He revised his statement to “Judeo-Christian” values, which certainly includes familiarity with the biblical mind.)

(2) In all the languages of the Bible and the West, “Spirit” means, physically, WIND (& so also breath). (Metaphorically, it means—among other things—the self-consciousness of God & of human beings.) Now, there’s a wind blowing through the Bible which could well be called the wind of FREEDOM. This is not the place to spell it out, but I speak of it only to make one point:
The Enlightenment was BORN IN CHRISTENDOM, the Bible-marinated mega-culture. The freedom of reason was born in a civilization which understood the continuity from the mind of the Creator through the whole creation, which therefore can be explored (the scientific method) by the correlative human mind.

America’s roots are the Bible + the Enlightenment.
THE AMERICAN MIND is the Bible’s mind + the Enlightenment’s mind.
THE AMERICAN FUTURE, as American, is dependent on the maintenance, in the American people, of the American mind.
The present American public-school establishment is an enemy of the American mind, & need not continue to be so.

HENRY:

I agree that listening is not “a natural talent.”
When people disagree, it IS natural for each to suggest to the other the taking of a listening course. To be specific, you & I agree that each the other is a poor listener.

GERRY:

YES to your “immense complexity and relativity of our human condition.” Are you suggesting that all solutions must be complex? Gandhi said that Christianity would be a simple solution to the human condition, “but it hasn’t been tried.” The weaker side of human nature often runs into cheap complexity in order to avoid expensive simplicity.

But speaking of simplicity...

1 Your picture of my “musings” as “a-social” is simple-minded. You seem determined to misread me.

2 In my judgment, you are simple-minded in deciding to “settle for some individual sort of spiritual atheist naturalism.”

DREW:

Let’s put two sentences beside each other:
YOURS:
“If the main premise, that a God exists, is mistaken, then religion is complete and utter nonsense.”
MINE:
“If the main premise, that God does NOT exist, is mistaken, then Irreligion is complete and utter nonsense.”

It’s a wash, man. No?

BRIAN:

I agree: religion is “the biggest issue of our time.”
Generations ago, secularists were predicting that by now religion would be no issue at all. It would be gone.
YOU are making the same prediction. It goes around & it comes around.

This statement of yours is pure speculation with massive cumulative evidence against it: “The supenatural world is [nothing but] the world of our imagination.” Did you not imply “nothing but”?

You are correct: “science introduced a new paradigm; a new way to look at life and the cosmos without reference to the supernatural.” As I said (above), this was a development within Christendom. I rejoice in it, & was president of a science club. In our left brain, God gave us the freedom to be done with the supernatural & content ourselves with what we could manage by use of our intuitive-analytic power. God gave us also the corpus callosum as a two-way bridge between that penis-like left brain & our womb-like right brain.
(Neurologists argue about the distribution, but not about the two types of brain-function.) I started in science (dreaming of a PhD in chemistry), then—because of a Christian conversion—switched to religion. God made the WHOLE brain, & I rejoice in all its functionings.

TERRA:

Your “one Creative Force” reminds me of the sci-fi word to Luke Skywalker, “The Force be with you.” I prefer “Person,” but “Force” ain’t bad.

And I like this you say: “we are co creators in this world....it matters the kind of world we create and the future we leave.”
But why do you say we Christians don’t believe that?

JOET:

Amen to everything you say except your last line. There’s no way to keep “religion or politics” out.

**POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 11:33 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Gerry,
Great little post.I agree with you.
so did Einstein who said pretty much the same thing.
Here's Einstein...
"A knowledge of the existence of something we cannot penetrate,of the manifestations of the profoundest reason and the most radiant beauty,which are only accessible to our reason in their their most elementary forms...it is this knowledge and this emotion that constitute the truly religious attitude;in this sense,and in this alone,I am a deeply religious man.
I cannot conceive of a god who rewards and punishes his creatures,or has a will of the type of which we are conscious in ourselves.
An individual who should survive his physical death is also beyond my comprehension,nor do I wish it otherwise;
such notions are for the fears or absurd egoism of feeble souls".
Albert Einstein
"The World As I See It",page 45

Thanks for giving me a reason to quote it.

**POSTED BY: DREW | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 10:24 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

BGone
and I say things like 'honest to god'.and 'my god'
and 'holy Jesus!',and I'm an atheist.
They're just phrases,cultural cliches,like saying
'Holy Donut',or 'jeepers creepers'.

**POSTED BY: BRIAN SHARPE | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 10:11 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

BGone;
you say...
" You do get the feeling someone is watching you sometimes? That there is some force, living or otherwise that's suddenly gone against you? Ever play football, gamble - craps in particular?"

Yeah ok..but that could be a lot of things.
It could be the Freudian thing about how childhood is spent looking over our shoulders for bigdaddy to approve or disapprove of whatever we're up to, and carries over into adulthood,to a greater or lesser extent.
Then again,I just read a book on sociobiology called "The Whisperings Within",which suggests that our genes do the whispering,and subtly influence our behaviors,in order to ensure their survival and transmission into the next generation.
Then again,we have this thing called imagination,
this thing called a mind,which is always on,always thinking things;its a big wonderful world,the land behind our eyes.Its bigger than all outdoors.

I don't know BGone. I'm as curious and as confused as the next guy...its interesting trying to figure things out.

**POSTED BY: BRIAN SHARPE | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 10:04 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

It is possible that Dr. Elliott -- who is a preacher and lecturer -- is trying too hard to give the words on paper the same "sound" as if he were delivering an oral opinion. If you look at it as a radio script rather than a essay, it makes a little more sense. Maybe his next contribution should be a podcast or audio file, so we can see if it holds together better that way.
I'd probably still disagree, but maybe I'd have a better idea why....

**POSTED BY: VIEJITA DEL OESTE | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 9:37 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Dr Elliot has been so unanimously and thoroughly lambasted for both his style and content here (deservedly, I admit)

that \*even\* I am starting to almost feel sorry for him.

Almost.

and you all thought I had no compassion. I have a smidgen.

**POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 8:40 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

So let me see if I understand the good doctor's rather meandering post.

According to Dr. Elliott, only immoral people fail to provide health insurance for their children, therefore for the state to assist in any way is to promote and subsidize immorality.
While I am of the opinion that people should not have children they cannot support, I don't condone punishing children for having irresponsible parents. And there are plenty of parents who were capable of providing for their children when the children were born, but lost that ability through corporate downsizing, natural disaster, or sudden disability of the parent. Do we not have an obligation to help them care for their children while they get back on their feet?

According to Dr. Elliott, children are born fallen beings, and therefore are not entitled to any special treatment simply by virtue of being children and unable to fend for themselves. Pain is a gift from God, and we would not want to do anything to deprive children of this divine gift.
While I do believe that when unpleasant things happen to me, I should try to learn from them, I also believe that it is up to adults to minimize the pain and suffering that children undergo. There's plenty of time for them to learn from painful experiences after they grow up. It's up to adults to make sure they have a chance to grow up.

**POSTED BY: LEPIDOPTERYX | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 8:30 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

I will have to say that Dr. Elliot and I do share a common heritage of sorts - I took all of my schooling in comparative religion from his compatriots and ex-patriots that departed the University of Chicago divinity school back in the 1960s to found the religion department at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan - I'm certain he knows them well.... most notably E. Thomas Lawson. Dr. Lawson is among the the seminal thinkers in the field of comparative religion, and a thoroughly enjoyable educator (now emeritus) that demonstrated the broadness and univerality of the religious impulse like few others. I would think that the more one knew about religion, the more one would forsake a committment to any particular religion, knowing the cultural relativity of all religion and religious practice - nevertheless, I've found myself being pulled (more like an undertow than a ripetide) toward Buddhism and Zen in particular since that early exposure to world religions some 40 years ago.
In this view what's good for one is good for all - and visa versa. As the third Zen patriarch stated, 'All in one, and one in all - once this is realized, why all the worry about not being perfect?!' Jesus had the same message for all of you Christians - what you do to Me you do to the least of My brethren . It's always better to default to the right thing - if Christians could actually decipher the message contained in the Sermon on the Mount, they'd be getting very close to Buddhism. As a noted Zen master said upon hearing the Sermon for the first time - 'that person is a great Bodhisattva, and is very close to becoming a Buddha'. So then - why shouldn't all the citizens of the world be taken care of? - much less the children within our very own borders??

Politics has no place in this discussion.

**POSTED BY: TERRY | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 8:29 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

I did not comment on Dr. Elliot's writing style in my first response, but only to the substance. However, in view of the tortured self justification above, I would like to add that the good Dr.'s writing is atrocious. My 10th grade English teacher would have shredded this. This makes me suspect your PhD is from some mail order source.

**POSTED BY: MARIANNE EVANS | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 6:53 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Terra Gazelle:

"Pagans believe that all life is connected...after all we are all energy."?

I recall that the accepted theory says matter and energy are interchangeable but not that everything is one or the other. That's how the "bomb" is explained, burning matter, and the sun too.

You know the ancient theory of the sun says it's made from "the fire that burns but does not consume." Maybe that should be "the fire that burns slowly"? Them ancient boys never got as close to the sun as the Bible would have us believe. It only looked like it was in that bush. They drew an optical conclusion of some kind that comes up short of reality. Oh! My God? Yeah, I'm afraid that's Dr Elliott's God alright, the one Moses made the deal with.

**POSTED BY: BGONE | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 6:53 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Brian Sharpe:

I left a word out. That should be: "Most everyone feels some supernatural [like] or at least unknown power that causes both good and bad things to happen."

I agree. There is no supernatural power or beings. You do get the feeling someone is watching you sometimes? That there is some force, living or otherwise that's suddenly gone against you? Ever play football, gamble - craps in particular?

Pagan gods are the outcropping of saying things like the wind are alive, have minds, can be altered by speaking to them make sacrifice even. Then someone comes along and shows the wind has a body, regular mechanics apply where none seemed possible and "blows" the wind god away.

Gods are bodiless forces. Is there such a thing? No mass equals no force. No force equals no work. But what's happening when those gambling hunches turn out to be wrong? If anything it's natural, and, a source of great humor.

That still doesn't stop people from exclaiming, "oh my god" when the unexpected happens, (fumble, tsunami etc). I'm nearly deaf but can plainly hear people yelling "Oh, my God followed by please dear God, not my God" when they read,[**http://www.hoax-buster.org/sellyoursoul**](http://www.hoax-buster.org/sellyoursoul)

**POSTED BY: BGONE | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 6:37 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Mr Elliott,

You wrote:

"The Republican side of me says that pain is a gift of God, and immoral people should suffer for their immorality."

"The Democrat side of me says that society, by the arm of the state, has moral responsibility for protecting children from immoral, irresponsible parents."

"Many forces have compromised the Western autonomous individual’s ability to take full responsibility for self and family. For human good, government intervention has increased with the increase in societal complexity. The irony is that while moral muscularity has been becoming more necessary, American public education—now captive to the romantic nonsense that children are good—has been making it less likely. Result? We are sliding down out of our freedoms into a new techno-socialism. Increasingly, government (including the public schools) is lifting responsibilities from parents. “Family” no longer carries the plain and simple meaning of father/mother/child. And the declining moral level of the populace may soon make the American way of life, with its panoply of freedoms, unsustainable."

So you are a UCC and American Baptist minister.

Perhaps you can enlighten me as to what all that nonsense over the loaves and fishes and feeding the hungry was about. Surely, if people couldn't be bothered to bring their lunch they should have gone without. The pain of their hunger would have been a moral teaching lesson on "personal responsibility".

According to your values, that Jesus bloke really was a screw-up.

Now I know those miracles can be extrapolated into interpretations about bread - God - eternal life, and all that. None of that changes the fact that Jesus fed the hungry and cured the sick. He did all of that without blame and without wittering on giving narrow interpretations of morality and diatribes on "family values".

I choose to follow the example that Jesus set, and not buy into your selfish philosophy.

You need more Jesus Christ and less theology. I suggest that you go back to the NT and this time read only the quotations attributed to Jesus.

By the way, I am the widow of a clergyman now raising my children alone. It was people like you and the society that has resulted from belief systems like yours that was a major factor in my deciding to emigrate from the US to a village in rural France.

**POSTED BY: EILIDH | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 6:22 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Why do Christians think that nature is "lacking" something? As long as it harbors such an immensity of undiscovered, unimaginable secrets, undetected varieties even on our little earth, unfathomable vastness (anybody have a realistic picture what a light year is, let alone a billion light years, or a galaxy of billions of suns?) - demanding a "super"-natural entity to take care of the next football game to me is nothing but "willful ignorance", nourished by fear, in short: Genuine religiosity would be awe towards life and nature instead of superstition.

Nature already is beyond "super". To me, this attitude lacks what I would call real awe and spirituality, instead creating a proxy where ignorance prevails. "God" is nothing but a mirror of human properties: Love, hatred, revenge, power through fear (Goering's famous words in the Nuremberg trial, Rumsfeld's recent confession about his strategy of creating fear), pouting, compassion sometimes, corruption (rewards, gifts), punishment for disobedience - all typical human traits. In fact, there isn't a trait in the god picture which can NOT be found in our human nature.

So, why not use our mental potential to create a household here on earth worth living, instead of postponing everything into a fictitious personal afterlife?

**POSTED BY: GERRY | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 3:44 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Dr Willis Elliot writes:

"SUGGESTIONS ON READING OL' WILLIS:
1
If your going to read me, keep going to the end no matter how your feelings tempt you to quit.
2
If you feel the urge to write a comment, please do so--but don't post it.
3
Next day, re-read me, this time more slowly. Then re-read your comment & revise it in light of your second reading.
4
Post your comment (unless, of course, you think you need a third reading + comment-revising)."

That stands as the most self-serving excuse for the inability to write compellingly and concisely that I have ever seen.

It's also quite arrogant and smug.

Please, Dr Elliot, weigh in and tell us that it wasn't you who wrote that but someone who hijacked your moniker.

**POSTED BY: MR MARK | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 3:37 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

I think Niebuhr was being sarcastic.

**POSTED BY: JOET | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 3:08 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

"Here’s the wry way that great public intellectual, Reinhold Niebuhr, often put it: “The only provable biblical doctrine is original sin.”

Prove this for us then please.

This was an invention of St. Augustine, from what I have read of history.

you say you have proof otherwise?????

such piffle

**POSTED BY: WHATDIDYOUSAY? | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 2:34 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Interesting point Doc...

"God the Creator—and not parents or society—is children’s fundamental owner"

If you take this statement as fact (which I don't, being a heathen), God is thereby morally responsible for all of the hunger and childhood illnesses on the planet.

A more immoral and incompetent example of parenting I cannot imagine.

**POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 2:16 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

"The Republican side of me says that pain is a gift of God, and immoral people should suffer for their immorality. I have seen lepers with no toes or fingers: their disease removed the feeling of pain, and rats ate off their fingers and toes during the night."

Huh? You leave out: Are all lepers "immoral" and therefore deserving of this degree of suffering? Really? you imply yes (unless they are children. So why do they suffer?)

I have seen right wing Christians jeer that all AIDS victims are immoral and deserving of their suffering -- but your piece would appear to expand this to imply ANY ADULT who suffers is immoral?

Churches that are damaged from "acts of God" like fires and tornadoes -- had it coming to them? I read about a little girl who died during services when the church roof caved in on her (there was heavy rain the night before).
Her fault?

In your worldview:
Jesus wants you to help the rich, not the poor. When Jesus said "Blessed are the poor" to you, he must be referring to corporate executives who didn't get their usual big bonuses?

Destroying the environment on the planet assures the Second Coming must be around the corner -- so is a "blessing" in disguise.

You are proof the right wing's religious beliefs are spiritually bankrupt. I laugh now when people tell me I should be more spiritual like them. I say, "No thanks -- I'd have to turn off my brain and pronounce evil as really "good"".

(shudder)

**POSTED BY: THINKABOUTIT | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 2:09 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

The conservative theory is that removing consequences to behavior degrades behavior. fine, but it's about the consequences to oneself, or ones own interests, not consequences to others, like ones children, which won't motivate anything in any kind of timeframe that matters. that and the fact we are talking about employers dropping health coverage, which is not a moral choice of the employee to be discouraged by making his kids sick, unless the conservative theory is that it's immoral not to find another job where coverage is a benefit.

anecdotes about welfare moms are really beside the point. until we fix the broader coverage issues which give us massive pass throughs of the cost of care to the uninsured through providers to the payors that make GM cars too expensive to compete (I proposed using the mandatory auto insurance model Romney adopted a decade ago), at least we can cover kids with subsidized private insurance premiums (SCHIP isn't government run, it's subsidized private coverage like most folks have) so they don't become sick uninsured adults it's too late to help.

making this about religion or politics is just a bad idea all 'round.

**POSTED BY: JOET | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 1:37 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Bgone,

Pagans believe that all life is connected...after all we are all energy. No matter whether you are a man or a montain it is all energy. A storm, an illness...both forms of energy. All things are part of the Whole...all life is in the process of becomeing/changing.

What Witches/Wiccans do is work with energies. Some of those powers/energies we call gods, some the basic elements that make up life.

And there are many different Pagan religions. I happen to be a Witch/Wiccan, as is Starhawk, but she and I have different traditions, so does make slight differences.

I am a soft polytheist. Meaning I believe that those powers/energies we call Gods/Goddesses are all aspects of the One Creative Force. I do not see that creative force in the same way that Christians see their God. To me we are co creators in this world. What we do matters...it matters to the kind of world we create and the future we leave.

I believe we were given three gifts...Life, this world and free will. What we do with those gifts is up to us.

terra

**POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 1:15 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

BGone;

Hi. Interesting post. Your point;
"Most everyone feels some supernatural or at least unknown power that causes both good and bad things to happen."
That's a big generalization,and I for one disagree.
There's a difference between "supernatural" power,and an"unknown" power.
There may be powers we don't understand,of course.
But the supernatural is something altogether different.As I said in my earlier post,I think the supernatural is pretty well another word for the imagination, As far as we know there is only this natural world we see around us.And nothing we know of the cosmos suggests anything supernatural either.
We certainly don't have all the answers regarding the big questions;but why introduce magic and superstition? That complicates matters and explains nothing.
Maybe most superstitious people feel what you feel;and maybe most people in primitive times also felt that way. But science introduced a new paradigm;a new way to look at life and the cosmos without reference to the supernatural.
Regards.

**POSTED BY: BRIAN SHARPE | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 1:06 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Gerry:

In the beginning there was no religion of any kind. Then came the notion of gods that govern the universe and the possibility of altering their decisions by praying and making sacrifices to them. Anyone seeking "That Old Time Religion" is a pagan.

Now I'm not saying there really are gods and I'm not saying there's no gods. However, don't you think it odd that when the ground quakes, the volcano suddenly erupts, the wall of water rolls in off the sea and the wind blow strong the first words spoken are, "oh my god."? That's singular, god. Must be different ones for different events.

I'm not promoting paganism but must note that only pagans have recorded instances where speaking the correct magic words and phrases and making proper sacrifices to particular gods have the results been positive. Christians say Jesus performed miracles, brought the dead man back to life. Actually that didn't "take" for the man died later. When pagans have effected a halting of the volcano erupting for example it stayed stopped. I don't know if pagans call that miracle or just standard practice.

Most everyone feels some supernatural or at least unknown power that causes both good and bad things to happen. The question is, can it/they be altered, controlled in any way? Whether or not praying and making sacrifices does any good is with a doubt a matter of speculation. Claiming one has the formula to alter and control unseen forces and then and thereby demand money "or else" ("It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a[recently updated from the] needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" used successfully to cause the dying wealthy to leave the whole estate to the "church") for "services" is a matter of criminal law, in my opinion.

I suspect we are all pagans to some extent, naturally.

**POSTED BY: BGONE | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 11:53 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Gerry, Drew, and Brian

What a refreshing trio of posts exhibiting sanity and humanity to wake up to.

Bless you all.

Gerry, I was a Pagan for a long time without realizing it. So don't be surprised.

One Goddess whom I am sure exists is the moon.

peace, brothers
Henry the Buddhist Pagan

(Gerry: you are older than Terra, and I am older than you).

**POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 10:22 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

I can imagine a world in the future where gods are seen as relics of our weird religious past.We are not yet quite ready,but getting there,especially since the religious insanity of September 11,2001,which no doubt prompted atheists to come out of the closet and add their voices to the current conversation on the relevance of religion.
Those of us who overcame, or avoided,religious indoctrination,are no longer comfortable being silent on this issue,which is the biggest issue of our time.
The supernatural world is the world of our imagination.We have to understand that our imaginings have nothing to do with reality.
The future of our civilization may depend on it.

**POSTED BY: BRIAN SHARPE | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 9:32 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

I have always felt that a PHD in religion is like a PHD in astrology,or black magic. If the main premise,that a God exists,is mistaken,then religion is complete and utter nonsense.
And it would definitely seem that God's existence is at least arguable;we've all been arguing about it for thousands of years.
The fact that His existence has never been verified should give us pause to consider the probability that we made it all up. Common sense would seem to be on the side of the skeptical.
The bottom line,as many commenters on these threads consistently point out,is that we have made up thousands of gods in the past,and there is NO REASON to think that the 'present god' is anymore real than any of the other gods.

**POSTED BY: DREW | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 8:54 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

William Partington,

God called Israel again and again to commit genocide, to kill anyone working on sabbath and similar moral and humane feats. Why do Christians never read their oh so "holy" bible? Leviticus? Deuteronomium 28, e.g., full of graphic horror, fear, threats, to keep them in the flock? I don't want to be a sheep in a flock.

Return to God and country? Which country? Iraq? Iran?

It is so depressing to read again and again the simplistic black-and-white idiocies (the stupid, anti-intellectual Manichaeism of good vs. evil, heaven vs. hell), despite the fact that the immense complexity and relativity of our human condition is proved in practically every moment of our existence. Simple solutions - that is what has brought this world close to the abyss!

Reading Dr. Elliot a-social musings almost lures me into the direction of communism, where at least in theory there was a (Christian?!) demand for responsibility to other people, instead of the infantile notion that if you are poor it is because of your, or worse, your parents low morals.

The Dr. must have gotten his PhD credentials by reading and spreading only the opulent literature which enhances his prejudices. Any "socially" colored book or paper must be anathema for him, so he can stay "clean" of "socialism". Can he read a book without his particular "Christian" spectacles? I doubt it. It would mean, at least experimentally, to tentatively abandon his "faith" for a short moment - and cultivate a real Christian responsibility!

Terra, I enjoy your comments. I am older than you, btw., and if I had not settled for some individual sort of spiritual atheist naturalism, I probably would end up being a Pagan! Maybe I already am a Pagan...

**POSTED BY: GERRY | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 6:53 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Terra

you have hit Dr Elliot's nail right on his head.

He should stop trying to teach - he has nothing to teach the world - and spend the next 10 years trying to listen.

He may need to take a course or two to help him learn to listen: it doesn't seem to be a natural talent.

HJ

**POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 1:12 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Like good and evil the solutions to our melodious dilemma, this culture, is succinct. As suggested, I find myself agreeing with Willis Elliot. A return to God and Country might seem ludicrous in our present state of increasing perplexity. Yet, simple solutions are the answer. God called Israel again and again to return from the pursuit of anything outside of His direction. Right now Americans are dancing about the golden calf, and God will call us to account.

**POSTED BY: WILLIAM PARTINGTON | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 12:54 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Like good and evil the solutions to our melodious dilemma, this culture, is succinct. As suggested, I find myself agreeing with Willis Elliot. A return to God and Country might seem ludicrous in our present state of increasing perplexity. Yet, simple solutions are the answer. God called Israel again and again to return from the pursuit of anything outside of His direction. Right now Americans are dancing about the golden calf, and God will call us to account.

**POSTED BY: WILLIAM PARTINGTON | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 12:54 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Dr. Elliot,
I am not a "youngster" in fact I may be close to your age, soon to see my 60'th birthday. And I am a contrarian. I am contrary to the fad of " looking out for just one's self", I am contrary that any one religion has all the answers, even my own...I am contrary to thinking that any one man has all the answers for me,and I am contrary to thinking that you are anyone speacil because you happen to have degrees.

Every one that reads your words have experiences that you know nothing of. We all have talents and knowledge that you can not touch... we all deserve respect which you do not know how to show. You are a little man with a large ego...it is not a good thing to allow your PHD's to be more important then who you are writing for...

You believe in your religion...and look down on those who do not share your narrow belief. That is fine that you love your religion, you should, I love mine...but your way of communicating with us is not makeing friends here for your faith. You are not showing thoughtfulness and compassion for others...you are proveing what so many are saying...that your religion is filled with hate, greed and intolerance.

Now I know that you can not teach an old dog not to such eggs, but why not try to see all of us as students on the same journey that you are on.

terra

**POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 12:49 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Marianne
Thank you for your burning moral voice.

You write
"I am appalled at your selfish, arrogant and uncaring attitude, which is not at all in line with what I would consider Christian( although it certainly is Republican, your other Faith, apparently)."

"Doctor" Willis tries to excuse his egregious inhumanity by passing himself off as a "contrarian". Contrary to humane values, certainly. Brave stand, Doctor.

I can't muster quite the eloquent moral outrage that Dr Elliot deserves, so thank you, Marianne, for expressing it for all of us.

Love
Henry

(and Dr Elliot has the obscenity to accuse others of "flabby morals."

**POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 12:11 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Excuse me, Minister, but exactly what does all your severe discipline mandated by a harsh, judgmental , rod-wielding Heavenly Father have to do with the cost and availability of medical care? Is an unemployed parent morally irresponsible because they can't afford to pay for the medical costs of a child with chronic disease such as asthma or cancer?

Do you pay for all your own care, or do you have insurance? Are you planning to refuse Medicare coverage on the grounds that it's your own responsibility? I am appalled at your selfish, arrogant and uncaring attitude, which is not at all in line with what I would consider Christian( although it certainly is Republican, your other Faith, apparently). Every advanced country in the world provides some form of universal coverage-except ours.

Some goods, such as police and fire protection, highways and armies, are to costly or too impractical for individuals to provide for themselves. That is what government is for. It's time for medical care to be added to the list.

**POSTED BY: MARIANNE EVANS | NOVEMBER 4, 2007 12:03 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Viejata

there are lovely christians and lovely secular humanists.

and there are odious christians and odious secular humanists.

and one must read the bible with intelligence. there are many odious prescriptions in the bible. and many christians read it in a humane and intelligent (usually metaphorical) way.

there is not much moral or intellectual justification for reading it literally.
which leads some to call the bible "bogus."
an oversimplification, but understandable given the mindless obeisance most religionist give to the "good book" that recommends slavery, genocide, child sacrifice, and sexual slavery.

an intelligent and moral person can NOT possibly say the bible is thoroughgoingly inspired by the kind of God any humane human would want to worship.

love
Henry

**POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | NOVEMBER 3, 2007 11:57 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Betty: your typo "Jesish" is a nearly perfect slip.

**POSTED BY: RAFAEL | NOVEMBER 3, 2007 9:30 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

I agree about the politics, though I would put your point differently: it seems unlikely we will elect a caricature to office.

The only part of this post that was necessary to understand the moral dimensions of action on this question was the "Democrat" side. The religious side was superfluous, and the "Republican" side was downright immoral, as no one mentioned a lack of health care as a result of parental immorality, and in any case the idea that children should suffer for the behavior of their parents is morally indefensible.

And by the way, it's not the children of hippies who are raping children in their care and shooting up schools. It's the clergy and the confused offspring of religionists.

**POSTED BY: RAFAEL | NOVEMBER 3, 2007 9:00 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

I mean Dr. Sorry about the stuck caps.

**POSTED BY: VIEJITA DEL OESTE | NOVEMBER 3, 2007 8:41 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Hey, wait a second. I may disagree with DR. Elliott's interpretation, but I wouldn't call the Bible either "bogus" or a "hoax." There are more gradations of faith -- here and elsewhere -- than merely atheists on this side and fanatics on that.

**POSTED BY: VIEJITA DEL OESTE | NOVEMBER 3, 2007 8:38 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

You're all making me feel guilty for pointing out to the reverend that the bible is bogus. I'm trying to be clear. I need one of them writing coursed too.

The bible is fiction. If stated as such then it's like all other fiction. If stated as the absolute word of God it's a hoax.

Rev Elliott: You can cure moat all your problems with many of the folks here by simply acknowledging the bible is a hoax, the part that refers to, identifies God is plenty enough. Then you can use it the way Henry used Lincoln, quote but only for what quotes are worth. Quotes are fine with me as long as I have no obligation to believe and especially take action based upon them.

So let me ask the question. Do you believe, have faith the bible is the word of God or are you using it like I might use Shakespere or Mark Twain, faith in what they said optional?

**POSTED BY: BGONE | NOVEMBER 3, 2007 2:15 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Dr Elliot: you consider yourself older than me?

I know plenty of people your age, and let me tell you, you take the cake, whatever age we are discussing.

You note that i accuse you of hubris, meanness, and condescension, and then say "anything else?", as though it were improbable for one human being to show all three of those characteristics.

It seems pretty consensual that 8 of 9 of your readers do in fact consider you
1. Hubristic
2. Mean
3. Condescending

and while they find it disagreeable, they find those characteristics highly correlated.

If we found you kind, condescending, and modest, THAT would be an odd combination.

I have seen hundreds of contrarians in my day. You are a mean condescending contrarian. Many do not qualify for those adjectives.

And I do suggest you take a writing course from Viejata. You are frequently so convoluted as to be well nigh incomprehensible.

Finally, it is absurd to posit that either
1. one needs to read the bible to have values, or
2. secularists like me might not be thoroughly familiar with the Bible, including its innumerable endorsements by God of grossly immoral practices llike genocide, slavery, selling one's daughter, stoning disobedient children.

One should take a Morals course as a Corrective to reading the Bible.

**POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | NOVEMBER 3, 2007 1:52 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

I thank y’all who are trying to educate me in return for my trying to educate you. It’s tough. We have whole bodies, & we’re trying to get the job done only through our fingers....

....which can lead to wild misperceptions.

“Communication is improbable,” said an excellent communicator in my hearing. “And when it happens, consider it a miracle.”

Intergenerational communication is especially improbable. A cartoon might show a white-beard (as I am) talking with somebody much younger. The balloon above the oldster has CIRCLES in it; that above the youngster has SQUARES. The youngster is looking up and saying, “You think funny.” (I used a similar poster in teaching communication-skills to clergy.)

Understandably, you children think I think funny. (No insult intended!
Y’all are of later generations than mine. No surprise that members of my generation have of me a perception far different from yours.)

I do not write you off: I’m eager for your input. And I hope you will not write me off--in spite of the fact that YOU JUST CAN’T STAND ME!

HENRY JAMES:

You perceive me as guilty of “hubris,” “meanness and condescension.” Anything else? Not that I’m unguilty. We Christians see ourselves not as pure & righteous but as forgiven sinners (“at the same time” God-forgiven-in-Christ & sinners in need of repentance—in Luther’s Latin phrase, “simul justus et peccator”).

A CLUE to reading-&-understanding me: I’m a CONTRARIAN. (The subtitle to one of my books is, “Thinksheets of a Contrarian Christian.”) Around any table intending civil conversation on any human concern needing addressing, I ask (though not always aloud) “Who’s not here who should be? What point of view is unrepresented?” I often quote the American philosopher Elton Trueblood on making sure everything’s in play that should be: “It’s what you leave out that wrecks you.”

So, this reading-clue: My “On Faith” columns often speak to what I believe is being left out. A poor reader will conclude that this means I think unimportant what’s NOT being left out!

Another way to get at what I’m trying to communicate is to consider that communication-structure whose purpose is to advance knowledge/communication-skills/action by deliberately leaving things out. DEBATE is the name of this communication-structure, & participants are PARTISAN in that everyone, to make one’s side look better, leaves out the good things that could be said about the other side. Note that the debater is almost the reverse of the CONTRARIAN (in the sense I’m using the word), who speaks for the things that should not be left out. (E.g., I believe that leaving the Bible out of American ed is fatal to American values. And when I say so, I’m nailed as a fundamentalist! A parallel: When anybody says anything critical of Judaism or Israel, that person gets nailed as anti-Semitic!)

Hang in there, “America’s greatest literary critic”!

I close on an ironic note. You suggested that I “write a second article elucidating the meaning and tone of your first article.” I did, &--by an online fluke—the first one got published.

TERRA:

You say “Do not claim to be a Democrat.” It’s big tent! Some months ago among the comments on a column of mine there was a debate as to whether Susan Thistlethwaite (the other United Church of Christ panelist) & I could be in the same church. Answer: big tent! The UCC is America’s most liberal Christian denomination (i.e., church), & I was a decade on its national staff. Our children have long been involved in liberal causes, & are faithful members of the UCC. Our family is Democrat!
Another thing about us is that we are evangelical.
Actually, LIBERGELICAL (i.e., liber[al-evan]gelical—a neologism of mine).

Thank you for continuing to read a panelist whom you see as “over the top arrogant” & “obnoxious.” You are to be congratulated for your liberal spirit.

VIE:

Glad to hear you’re helping 12-year-olds learn to write. I know few of your virtues, but one of them is patience. (For a decade, I edited a magazine whose pieces had to be written for the 12-year-old level, &--you’ll not be surprised—I haD to rewrite DOWNWARD many of the submissions.)

If you could get over your writing-teacher prejudice against boldface/underlining/italics, you would find them helpful in reading me. E.g., try reading ONLY the boldface on some column of mine; it may give you both the continuity-flow of the text & the content I hope will be memorable.

I agree that “Flabby Morals and Cut Flowers” lacks a “unifying point.” I thought so, so (as I said) I rewrote it (but the rewrite failed to replace the first submission). But even in the case of the original (which got published), there’s a FLOW from politics through morality to religion, which is introduced by this UNDERLINED sentence: What have I to say to the question from the religion angle? (I just underlined that sentence, but—as you know—the only form of emphasis possible in “On Faith” comments is capitalization.) The remainder of the column spells out my numbered answer to that question.

As for editing “On Faith” columns, one should not expect panelists to be as assiduous as we are when writing books & articles-for-paper-publication. But on my present column, I got this from a well-known editor: “by far the best and most faithful response to that issue I’ve ever

**POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | NOVEMBER 3, 2007 1:16 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

There are some interesting "failed" experiments in bringing health care to the poor. In Michigan a few years back and during the automotive gold rush when the state was rich they issued credit cards to welfare cases. That was the easy, simplified accounting way to handle health insurance for their poor.

What happened? You guessed it. Doctors offices filled with welfare mothers and their babies. The doctor that told me the story said, "I looked into the waiting room and there was a party going on. When I saw the first patient and ask what was wrong with the baby she tole me that I was the doctor and I could tell her what was wrong, that there was something wrong with me." His solution that rapidly became the standard, a little sign that read, "welfare credit cards not accepted as payment."

There will be the need to enact and enforce slavery laws for socialized medicine to becomes a reality, make the doctor see patients he doesn't want to see. Maybe we need to think of some incentive for doctors as well as patients? It's clear that money isn't it. Radical! No free market capitalism for medicine! Do free market capitalists take on all commers?

Doctors are probably like ministers, money is not the objective they have in mind when pursuing the career. Could the motive have something to do with the class of people they expect to deal with?

Andy Rooney said that the problem is clear. We don't need better schools and teachers. What we need is a better class of kids. I wonder if that rule applies to medicine. Maybe a better class of patients?

**POSTED BY: BGONE | NOVEMBER 3, 2007 11:53 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

#3 Rev Elliott: I think you're not seeing the government for what it is. At least as it was intended to be, the people. That includes the parents of the child that needs medicine. So the question is, shall we as the government worry about, do anything about the health of the kid next door or will we just watch the news and "thank God" it wasn't out kid.

The morality here if any at all is invisible. There is none on my opinion. It's not morality but rather humanity. And, most compelling, the children, all the children are the future. The question is, do we as the government have any real concern for OUR future?

**POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | NOVEMBER 3, 2007 10:43 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

typo of course

"Sorry this letter is so \*long\*. I didn't have time to write you a short one."

(another testament to the utility of editing)

**POSTED BY: HENRY | NOVEMBER 3, 2007 10:17 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

My Esteemed Viejita

Your post reminds of the famous quote attributed to Lincoln

"Sorry this letter was so short. I didn't have time to write you a short one."

love
Henry

**POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | NOVEMBER 3, 2007 10:09 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Dr. Willis,
Your last few columns here have the air of being thrown together in a hurry. I think you need to slow down and edit yourself a bit. I'm having trouble finding any unifying point here. Sometimes you come on later and clarify, but wouldn't be easier to tighten up the original post?
All the underlining and all caps and italics are giving me a headache. If you were one of my 12-year-old writing students I'd send this back for an edit. I would say: You have lots of ideas, some of them good ones, but you need to focus.

**POSTED BY: VIEJITA DEL OESTE | NOVEMBER 3, 2007 1:15 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Your a DINO!Democrat In Name Only! Do not claim to be a Democrat..Of course David Duke thought he was too, until he tried to run under our banner...the Party said NO. So he joined the repubs. Who welcomes him with open arms.

You are over the top arrogant, and all we have for proof that you deserve to be arriogant is your word. Sorry, but I find you obnoxious, not eccentric...or endearing. I have read your missives again..and find them just as hateful.

You pat yourself on the back...which only proves that you know no one else will.

The Democrats are a big tent...and I guess you can call yourself what you want. Just please don't say it too loud, I would not want others to know you are a Democrat. Gods above...protect us!

Some times I think you are playing with us...which would be even more hateful.
terra

**POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | NOVEMBER 2, 2007 11:08 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Dr Elliot

Perhaps you need to write a second article elucidating the meaning and tone of your first article.

Either EVERYONE who read you here and thought you were a boor is incapable of basic reading skills, including yours truly, America's greatest literary critic,

OR: you are so used to writing for an "extremely" academic audience, in the kind of academic prose that deservedly has earned the epithet of "indecipherable".

Additionally:

your evident meanness and condescension - unrecognized by you but clear to virtually all who read you both here and in your previous column - deprives you of any benefit of the doubt that your good-hearted readers might grant you.

Dick Cavett once recommended to Norman Mailer what Norman could do with suggestions that were in the same category of hubris as yours in the above response. I am too polite to repeat it here (something about folding a paper and then...), but it is a great moment in literary history. First-class, and would be appropriate to be rerun in this thread.

Affectionately,
Henry

**POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | NOVEMBER 2, 2007 10:55 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

To whom it may concern:

I'm a Democrat.

I'm STRONGLY pro-choice.

Mike Murphy, founder of Esalen Institute, asked me to teach there in 1968. (Some of you may not know that Esalen was the flagship of the human-potential centers into which many Woodstockers flooded.)

I was fired three times for being too liberal.

I'm so different from the stereotypic take many of you commenters have on me....I don't know whether to laugh or cry, so I guess I'll do both.

SUGGESTIONS ON READING OL' WILLIS:
1
If your going to read me, keep going to the end no matter how your feelings tempt you to quit.
2
If you feel the urge to write a comment, please do so--but don't post it.
3
Next day, re-read me, this time more slowly. Then re-read your comment & revise it in light of your second reading.
4
Post your comment (unless, of course, you think you need a third reading + comment-revising).

Am I suggesting that what I write is worth such close attention on your part? No! It is that I think YOU are worth my trying to help improve your reading skills.

**POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | NOVEMBER 2, 2007 10:10 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Dr Elliot

don't pay any attention to all of these ill-educated religious/moral illiterates who think you are two notches short of a monster.

keep praying to jesus and He will get you through this hell of public exposure, calumny, and ridicule.

with great compassion
Henry

**POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | NOVEMBER 2, 2007 8:43 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

"The Republican side of me says that pain is a gift of God, and immoral people should suffer for their immorality...If government protects children from suffering caused by parental immorality, immoral parents feel less pressure to shape up to their responsibilities. So, life isn’t fair and the children should suffer."

And we are to believe this is the prolife party? So being an employee of a company that does not provide health insurance or enogh income to purchase such a plan out of pocket is a sign of immorality?

So the income disparity between white and black citizens is due to immorality and has nothing to do with racial bias present or past?

If this is how Republican Christinists think I am proud to be morally secular.

The fact that the Republican Christianists don't howl nearly as loud about taxpayer monies lost to fraud and waste tells me that they are really just selfish, sanctimonius jerks.

**POSTED BY: SOMNAMBLST | NOVEMBER 2, 2007 7:19 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

You have a 'Republican side' and a 'Democratic side'? Are you capable of political thought independent of this ONE political party that we have?

**POSTED BY: TJ | NOVEMBER 2, 2007 6:08 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Henry James:

Dr Elliot certainly lives in another world from 60’s children like myself.

First, he holds himself up as morally superior to the rest of us. He does have more degrees than the rest of us, as he will not doubt remind us. But he has no edge on morality.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

A degree gained by memorizing and expressing undying faith in the erroneous is what? Could that be labeled "negative education" worse off than never going to school? Would you go to a doctor that insisted "bleeding" was a legitimate treatment?

I agree with him that the OR must be AND. No one's all wrong about everything even though I see people who are trying their best.

**POSTED BY: BGONE | NOVEMBER 2, 2007 6:05 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Dr. Elliott writes of his "Republican" side the following, "Morality is not optional, and government should do nothing to encourage the illusion that irresponsible behavior does not necessarily entail unpleasant consequences. If government protects children from suffering caused by parental immorality, immoral parents feel less pressure to shape up to their responsibilities. So, life isn’t fair and the children should suffer."
Seems that this is precisely the morality that President Bush and his supporters adhere to--right now with respect to the current children's health care controversy--and, of course, in other areas as well.

**POSTED BY: BRIGITTE N. | NOVEMBER 2, 2007 5:17 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

INCONCEIVEABLE!!! "The Republican side of me says that pain is a gift of God, and immoral people should suffer for their immorality." So the Republicans are the Party of God???? These immoral people should suffer? Tell me, does god speak to you directly about what is moral and what is not? How about the morality of naked self interest? every time I think that you religious freaks have hit the top in self delusion I am again proved wrong. Probably my earthly punishment for considering my fellow man equally worthy with those favored by god.

**POSTED BY: KENNYBOY | NOVEMBER 2, 2007 5:01 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

INCONCEIVEABLE!!! "The Republican side of me says that pain is a gift of God, and immoral people should suffer for their immorality." So the Republicans are the Party of God???? These immoral people should suffer? Tell me, does god speak to you directly about what is moral and what is not? How about the morality of naked self interest? every time I think that you religious freaks have hit the top in self delusion I am again proved wrong. Probably my earthly punishment for considering my fellow man more worthy than those favored by god.

**POSTED BY: KENNYBOY | NOVEMBER 2, 2007 5:00 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

You are one mean old coot, Willie.

**POSTED BY: ASH | NOVEMBER 2, 2007 4:42 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

terra
since i am sans corporeality
the only enchantment i am susceptible to
is spiritual

**POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | NOVEMBER 2, 2007 2:30 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Henry,
LOL..oh yes I have a black cat called Magi...and he is a sweetheart...I will pout if you equate my loverly cat with that mean man!
lol.
Oh I think we all can tell Toad from Prince...and darlin you are a prince.

I can not figure out how a man that got that old learned so little. He is so blind...and wrong so much of the time. I mean factualy wrong. He may know alot, but no one can know all things, yet he will try to bluff. Even us poor lowly commentors do know some things.

Henry James...at my age my enchantments only work on line!
lol
terra

**POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | NOVEMBER 2, 2007 2:02 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

As far as the 60's...
The time when kids felt that they had something to say...that they could make a difference. A difference in ending war, in fighting for the equality of others..of Democracy really being for everyone, of there being a connetion between people, yes and of experimenting with their minds and spirtuality.

I was 12 in 1960. I grew up as a non pot smoking, non alchohol drinking,non free love, moral woman who also happens to be Pagan. I know alot of old drunks who hated us "dirty" hippies...and every word is Praise God. And "not with my taxes you don't."
When Woodstock was going on there was alot of pot and free love...
~~
Aug. 18,1969: Woodstock music festival ends

Thousands of young people are heading home after three days and nights of sex, drugs and rock and roll at the Woodstock music festival.
An estimated 400,000 youngsters turned up to hear big-name bands play in a field near the village of Bethel, New York state in what has become the largest rock concert of the decade.

About 186,000 tickets were sold so promoters anticipated that around 200,000 would turn up. But on Friday night, the flimsy fences and ticket barriers had come down and organisers announced the concert was free prompting thousands more to head for the concert.

Traffic jams eight miles long blocked off the area near White Lake, near Bethel, some 50 miles from the town of Woodstock.
--------------------------------------------------
"These people are really beautiful"
--------------------------------------------------

Dr William Abruzzi, chief medical officer

Local police estimated a million people were on the road yesterday trying to get to Woodstock. They were overwhelmed by the numbers but were impressed by a good level of behaviour.

The festival's chief medical officer, Dr William Abruzzi told Rolling Stone magazine: "These people are really beautiful. There has been no violence whatsoever which is really remarkable for a crowd of this size."

Those who made it to the makeshift venue were treated to performances by Janis Joplin, The Who, Grateful Dead, Canned Heat, Crosby-Stills-Nash & Young, Jimi Hendrix, Joan Baez and Ravi Shankar.

High and naked

Rainstorms failed to dampen the spirits of the revellers, many high on marijuana, some dancing naked in the now muddy fields.

The main organiser, 49-year-old dairy farmer Max Yusgur, who provided $50,000 and 600 acres of his land, addressed the crowds on the last day of the event.

"You have proven something to the world ... that half a million kids can get together for fun and music and have nothing but fun and music."

There were however two deaths - a teenager was killed by a tractor as he lay in his sleeping bag and another died from a drugs overdose.

a baby was also born.

In Context
Woodstock, a holiday centre and artists' colony, had held an arts and music fair since 1906 but the 1969 Woodstock festival made the town world famous.

The final cost to the four sponsors - John Roberts, Joel Rosenman, Artie Kornfeld and Michael Lang - was $2.4m.

A film of the concert was release the following year and Woodstock became synonymous with flower power, the hippie culture and anti-Vietnam war protests that dominated the 1970s.

The "Woodstock generation" look back on the event with nostalgia and an anniversary Woodstock festival was held in 1994.

But the second - highly commercialised - anniversary concert in July 1999 ended in riots, fires and at least eight allegations of rape.
~~~
There is a difference between those of the 60's and now...We cared about the other guy. It was not religion, it was human.
terra

**POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | NOVEMBER 2, 2007 1:50 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Terra!!

Why do I always agree with you????

Have you entranced me with your Satanistic Moon Goddess Wiccan Charms, so that I can no longer tell the Toad Stools from the Toads?

Well, fools rush in, so here I am,
awfully glad to be enchanted.

Peace
Henry

(that Willis IS a mean Cat, ain't he? And I know you witches know all about cats.)

**POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | NOVEMBER 2, 2007 1:41 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

I wish the Doc had been in front of me as I read his offal offering. If he is supposed to be the example of what being a Christian is.."I thank you Gods for tapping me as one of your own".
His type is one of the reasons I found the bible and preachers as hate mongers and bigots in a time when other people were being beat up, killed and harrassed for fighting to be allowed their own worth. I left as a youngster...no, kids are not a blank slate. Some can think and act and deserve to beable to at the best of their potential.

God does not own anyone. You can give yourself over to what ever deity/feeling/belief you want...But our kids are our future and so belong to all of us. The same cretins that will squeal about abortion will swallow such bull excretion that the good doc has posted, and call themselves Pro Life. blah!

terra

**POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | NOVEMBER 2, 2007 1:27 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Betty

Your typo "derisable" is derisible.

**POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | NOVEMBER 2, 2007 12:37 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Gaby
the long and short (mostly VERYYYY long) of the Dr's Essay is

Go back to your Christian Biblical roots, and we won't have any poor sick children.

It will be heavenly.

What??? You're Jesish/Muslim/Hindu/Buddhist/Confucian???

Well, go back to your Christian roots anyway. You couldn't have had any real morality over there.

Derisable.

**POSTED BY: BETTY | NOVEMBER 2, 2007 12:29 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Dr. Elliot’s Post Democratic Conclusions

The Dr starts his next section with this gratutitous and mean-spirited slap at those who don’t share his orientation:
“Secularists will feel that we’ve done our job without mentioning religion, which they consider irrelevant or worse”.
Some of my most esteemed moral conversants are believers.
(it is clear that Hitchens is mean-spirited too, btw. Love to see Willis and Chris polish off a bottle of scotch together.)

The Dr says “God the creator is children’s fundamental owner”!!!!! NO. the Parents don’t own the children either. What an odious assumption.
“endowed with liberty” is the opposite of “therefore I, your God, OWN you.” Odious.

2. “Sin” is not the only way to describe humans’ negative tendencies, but it fits with the Calvinist orientation of joyless moralizing that the Dr generally exhibits (but I love him).
But I do at least agree that children are not born “clean slates.” Anyone who thinks so these days IS ignoring reams of scientific evidence.

3. the Dr’s summary of the Bible’s influence is simplistic and misleading. Many books exist for us all to broaden our understanding, but many disagree with his conclusion (and lots of them have as many Phds as he has).

4. His point #4 is so unjustified by evidence as to be laughable. It’s Hogwash.
Much evidence shows that “Godless countries” – where believers constitute less than 20% of the population – are significantly more moral than the 90% believing US of A on measures like homicide, rape, abortion, infant mortality (if you, unlike Dr Elliot, consider that a moral issue), and many others.
And there is reams of evidence that atheists are just as moral as believers on an individual basis.
5. Dr Elliot DOEs make me doubt that Children are good, assuming he was once a child.

A “new techno-socialism???” Now we are getting eerily close to those characters in the subway screaming about the second coming.

6. No, none of us are surprised at your solution.
Why is it better than a mass conversion to Buddhism, for instance? A tradition that does not depend on lies, myths, and superstitions, that has a 2,600 year old highly developed moral system that is at least as good as the Christian one (what Religio-Centrism to think Christianity is the only way to morality – and in ThIS day and Age!!).

**POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | NOVEMBER 2, 2007 12:23 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

And the long and the short of the essay is???????

**POSTED BY: GABY | NOVEMBER 2, 2007 12:02 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Dr Elliot certainly lives in another world from 60’s children like myself.

First, he holds himself up as morally superior to the rest of us. He does have more degrees than the rest of us, as he will not doubt remind us. But he has no edge on morality.

He makes an odiously gratuitous slap at our 60’s morals. My 60’s college classmates are just as moral as their parents, thank you very much, and the most immoral thing they do to their children is give them too MUCH attention and care.

He is fantasizing when he implies that such parents slide their obligations off on the government. The baby boomers of the 60s who were responsible for Dr elliot’s “moral decay” are the most highly educated generation in history, and in general pretty well off. Their greatest govt concern is NOT for their own kids, but for the 47 million uninsured, mostly poor kids.

Dr Elliot’s “on the one hand” republican side – it serves them right to suffer, is the most human attitude I have seen in a long time. Why don’t we torture the kids while we are at it? Our attorney general designate is thinking about it.

Regarding the Doctor’s democratic side: I’d suggest we only give health care to the children of the “deserving poor”. Those who are poor through “no fault of their own.” The children of the immoral can starve in the street, as far as I am concerned.

I will address the Post Democratic part of Dr Ellot’s speech in my next post: I am sure you can’t wait. Sorry Dr: i TRIED to agree with you on something. Professor William in on my side on this one, by the way.

Interim conclusion: based on Dr Elliot’s laying out of his assumptions, I would rather have Charles Colson be my moral guide.

**POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | NOVEMBER 2, 2007 11:58 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

At least Cal Thomas is honest about it. All that rhetoric to claim poverty is the fault of the individual. Now why don't you expose your Calvanist roots, and admit that corporate socialism and the wealth that it brings to those with capital, is the real goal of modern right wing christianity. You are nothing but a propagandist for big business. Compassion and Charity are becoming the provense of the secularist and 'left wing socialist' you condemn for their rejection of your false morality and twisted pretention to compassion.

**POSTED BY: ENDER | NOVEMBER 2, 2007 10:42 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

The comments to this entry are closed.