

http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2007/12/faith_turns_dreams_into_deeds_1.html

Faith Turns Dreams into Deeds

“The highest flights of charity, devotion, trust, patience, bravery to which the wings of human nature have spread themselves have been flown from religious ideals.”

No, that was not written by a promoter of any particular religion but by a Harvard psychologist and philosopher, William James, who in his “The Varieties of Religious Experience” (1902) viewed religion not as “poison” (Christopher Hitchens’ word) but as food and medicine. (The quotation is from page 239 of his “Writings: 1902-10,” The Library of America, 1987.)

The current “On Faith” question is whether religion-motivated benevolent behavior can suffice for human need: “Rick Warren’s Saddleback Church just hosted its third ‘Global Summit on AIDS and the Church.’ Do you think the world’s biggest social problems—poverty, disease, homelessness—can be cured by well-intentioned religious believers?”

Yes and NO. Success is power, and power releases the human potential for evil as well as for good. We Christians should make claims for God but not for ourselves. Jesus warned us against “false messiahs”—including ourselves when we get big ideas about our importance. In our daily praying of the Lord’s Prayer, we honor this realistic caution about human limits: “Our Father..., your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven....” Life is a gift from God, and life at its best will be—in this world and the next—not our achievement but God’s gift.

But also YES! “Religious believers” have, in William James’ metaphor, the “wings” to rise high over and descend benevolently upon social as well as personal problems.

The historical evidence for YES is persuasive, though much of it is *not in plain sight*. Millions of the medical, educational, and civil institutions begun by Christian missionaries in the past two centuries have survived, but few are now Christian in name. Christian missionary [Frank Laubach](#) (“each one teach one”) taught the basics of literacy through 92 of the world’s governments, but those highly successful programs are not Christian in name.

Not in plain sight may also be because secular society tends to repress the Christian origin of humanitarian endeavors. Our public schools don’t teach that [Johnny Appleseed](#) was a Christian missionary, and the fact that [Martin Luther King](#) was a Christian pastor is fading from public sketches of him.

Even more *not in plain sight* is the childhood Christian motivation of some humanitarians who are not practicing Christians. [Bill Gates](#) was a child in the Sunday school of a Seattle church the Sunday I preached there—a church with a strong emphasis on benevolence.

In the worldwide works of the Carter Center, Sunday-school-teacher [Jimmy Carter](#)’s Christianity is *not in plain sight*. Nor is Dame [Cicely Saunders](#)’ Christian commitment in the modern Hospice movement.

I’m not hopeful that governments will successfully attack the great social problems, but I am hopeful that “religious believers” will continue to do so. Government “can’t reach the inner recesses of man’s being which must be touched if life on this planet is to be...tolerable.”

So said [Clarence Jordan](#) in 1968, the year before he died. The final fruit of his life was HABITAT FOR HUMANITY, which has built hundreds of thousands of houses in more than a hundred countries, with no religious requirements for home ownership. The Christian motivation is *not in plain sight* except that the ceremony of ownership includes, with the presentation of the house-keys, the gift of a Bible.

Every Habitat house is a dream become a deed. My title is from Clarence’s “Cotton Patch” translation of the Bible’s Hebrews 11:1: “Now faith is the turning of dreams into deeds.” A fellow student, I remember him as determined to try to live the Sermon on the Mount. In ’42, he and [Florence](#) (+ another couple) started (in rural Sumter County GA) interracial “Koinonia Farm,” which suffered years of violence—machine-gunning, bombing,

burning, crop destruction, boycotting. In '69 (the year of Clarence's death), Millard and Linda Fuller joined, and the name was changed to "Koinonia Partners." (Jimmy Carter's wife Rosalyn came to Clarence's funeral with a turkey she had roasted.) Three years thereafter, Loree and I in the Jordan home drank with Florence the last bottle of scuppernong wine that Clarence had made. Then, in the Fuller home, the Fullers and Elliotts knelt to pray for guidance as to the next stage of the housing mission. In the Congo, Millard led in building four homes and sent me 20 slides showing the process. I returned them after making a duplicate set for Loree to use in money-raising meetings in NY churches. (In '76, the headquarters of HABITAT FOR HUMANITY INTERNATIONAL was set up in nearby Americus GA.) Everything starts small, not everything stays small.

God gives the human spirit wings to fly to human need.

BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | DECEMBER 5, 2007; 8:40 AM ETSAVE & SHARE:



PREVIOUS: [NO ARTIFICIAL DISTINCTIONS](#) | NEXT: [AMERICA'S REAL POWER](#)

Comments

Please report offensive comments below.

Well said, Terry.

POSTED BY: MAD LOVE | DECEMBER 17, 2007 12:54 AM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Begone - good series of posts. Right on about William James....he understood that mysticism was at the heart of all religion - and whose practitioners were nevertheless persecuted because of their trans-theological comments about 'God' based on their experience - and their revelations about our real self-less identity with the Source of all things. This was particularly true of Christians and mystics that diverted from accepted orthodoxy. Meister Eckert comes to mind.

Dualism is the basis of exotericism and the religion of the masses. Esotericism is the solitary path less travelled, and the way to true knowledge.

In this case, your detractors don't know squat.

The Kaballah may be right after all - how could the Great Unmanifest be known by mere humans??

POSTED BY: TERRY | DECEMBER 15, 2007 5:46 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Bgone:

Your output can be generated by a very small shell script. Think about that.

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | DECEMBER 13, 2007 10:34 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Bgone:

Your posts do not pass the Turing Test. Are you a chat 'bot?

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | DECEMBER 13, 2007 10:31 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

TDAY:

Get your head out! I've never, unless sarcastically said there is no God. God has nothing to do with religion and rightly so. Religion is the oldest con, (short for confidence) that claims it's "faith in God." I have no problem at all with faith in God/gods.

Religion is faith in sacred scriptures, Bible, Quar'an, Book of Mormon and I understand others. But then there's confusion created by "faith in ministers" men who claim knowledge in sacred scriptures and that sacred scriptures are God's word.

This weeks question/subject is the relationship between religion and charity. That's an easy question to answer if the facts are made public. How much of the money collected by ministers goes to charity?

Al Capone operated a soup kitchen for the down and out during the great depression. He was neither religious or a con man, just an old fashioned criminal. Religions have no patent on either charity or God. The three great faiths have a patent on Devil that I'm honoring. Keep him and note that Pagans consider Devils/devils to be gods, and angels too are gods.

Devil, not God is behind:

1. Sacred scriptures - they're mostly stories of man getting help from a Devil named Lucifer.
2. Ministers - experts on sacred scriptures who collect money saying it's for charity and keep it.
3. Religions - organized groups of ministers - see (2. above).

In my opinion God wouldn't be caught dead in a church.

Is <http://www.foax-buster.org> page 2 the real history that's the real source of the Bible which is the "base" sacred scripture? You need to give that some thought and get off the "atheist" kick.

POSTED BY: BGONE | DECEMBER 13, 2007 12:40 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Rev Willis:

Are you sure about, "The highest flights of charity, devotion, trust, patience, bravery to which the wings of human nature have spread themselves have been flown from religious ideals."

No, that was not written by a promoter of any particular religion but by a Harvard psychologist and philosopher, William James.

.....

Charity - How much of the money you collect goes to charity?

Devotion - to what? <http://www.foax-buster.org/sellyoursoul>

Trust - Are religions and religious really trustworthy?

Patience - is your's being tested?

Bravery - "Pride of the Marines" Lt. Pat Robertson - the only Marine, (His era Marines didn't consider him to be a Marine - called him Lt. Patricia) in the history of the Corps to suffer combat fatigue days before the battle began - Inchon, Korea, 1950.

Thank God William James was a Harvard man and not Yale. He wasn't any kin to Jesse and Frank James?

POSTED BY: BGONE | DECEMBER 13, 2007 12:06 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Hi, btw, Reverend.

Had to make that quip. Still:

"In the worldwide works of the Carter Center, Sunday-school-teacher Jimmy Carter's Christianity is not in plain sight."

Is that what you think? I'd say it's in such plain sight it doesn't need *noise.*

Favorite charity of mine, actually: too bad they only take licensed contractors for the actual work. May not be in a condition to hold down a paying job, but I have some skills and in the past at least could put in a day or two if that's how they do it. I've asked.

Jimmy Carter (the real force behind Habitat For Humanity) is a *model* of walking the talk, particularly in terms of *getting it done rather than claiming the credit,* (that's someone else's department) and I assure you not everyone doing that work is a Christian, either.

Faith can certainly be a good motivator toward 'good works' as you may call it. It doesn't even have to be *your God,* as you define the guy.

Too often, Christians see the world too much through only their own eyes: that the world and people are bad and selfish and evil, except where someone manages to be pious.

Claim the credit for anything good, and blame others for their own bad....

You're the guys who have an agenda to use this to advertise.

Often *that* agenda *takes over* actually getting anything done.

Gods know I've seen it happen countless times when helping a wayfarer or showing good hospitality has been taken by people such that it could *only mean* I was Christian.

Usually, I let it slide, unless it meant reinforcing fear of others.

Most Christians take the story of the Good Samaritan to mean that Jesus being there somehow compelled people that others scorned to be nice to him, and thus duly he converted them.

What if it ain't like that?

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | DECEMBER 12, 2007 8:05 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

"Our public schools don't teach that Johnny Appleseed was a Christian missionary,"

Well, ain't that just a picture, considering what apples symbolize in your religion. :)

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | DECEMBER 12, 2007 7:39 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

"Even more not in plain sight is the childhood Christian motivation of some humanitarians who are not practicing Christians. Bill Gates was a child in the Sunday school of a Seattle church the Sunday I preached there—a church with a strong emphasis on benevolence."

Perhaps there's someone who will casually claim that Stalin's later life was strongly influenced his education in a Russian Orthodox seminary.

POSTED BY: BEMUSED | DECEMBER 9, 2007 11:48 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

"15 puny human assumptions about creation because we got nothing better to do than sit around and be mad at the world and all dem God believers"

Go back to your grave where you belong, Darwin.

POSTED BY: WHAT? | DECEMBER 6, 2007 5:05 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

I note that you mortals are arguing about my theory.

Are you going to believe Henry, or the creature called "What?"

or the article here from Scientific American (ID CLAIMS to be Scientific)

<http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?articleID=000D4FEC-7D5B-1D07-8E49809EC588EEDF>

called

"15 Answers to Creationist Nonsense."

POSTED BY: CHARLES DARWIN | DECEMBER 6, 2007 1:40 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

What is "What?'s" Intelligence

Mr W, with his impeccable logic, writes

"My creation is just as much real as your project on your work bench. Without God, human pride puts us at the center of the universe. Look where its getting us.

Think about it."

Since Mr W has endorsed Thinking here as opposed to pure Blind Faith,

perhaps He will read the "thinking" of the wide array of Scientific Thinkers regarding the logical and evidential status of "Intelligent Design."

It's reputation within the scientific community is that the movement is logically pathetic and laughable.

If you think it is improbable that I came out designed the way that I did (i.e. brilliant and charming) consider how much MORE improbable that there is a Creator intelligent enough to have designed me. Got a calculator.

The world has been debating the pathetic position called Intelligent Design and the widely held verdict is that it is a crock.

Behe was even disowned by his own academic department.

POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | DECEMBER 6, 2007 1:24 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Dr Elliott

I am so happy for you that God has spoken to you.

My Mormon God, when I was growing up, appeared and spoke to Joseph Smith.

Was that the same God who spoke to you?

How do you know?

I saw God in the 1960s when I was taking LSD.

Does that count?

There is a serious point behind this blasphemy. My philosopher brother William tells me that there is NO way that you can KNOW that the "God" who spoke to you was "really" a God, or the only one, or the Most Powerful One, or the ACTUAL creator of the earth, or just a product of your internally produced LSD. Which is the most plausible explanation.

Love you madly
Henry

POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | DECEMBER 6, 2007 1:12 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Henry,

And your verbage is not poetic, my friend...it is empty.

Your reply to TDAY re: 99% moral? somewhat of a stretch....the number really applies more to Godless.

..though, one day that will not be true.

Times a wasting, Henry....focus on the big picture. You are a created being..just like that project on your proverbial workbench. Thought out. Designed. Crafted. Created.

Accidents are the only things that 'happen' (big bang)...fine working machinery does not come from a cosmic explosion. Neither did the fine working machinery that is you, me and our neighbor beside us. To limit the family of man to an accident is sub-human thought. My creation is just as much real as your project on your work bench. Without God, human pride puts us at the center of the universe. Look where its getting us.

Think about it.

POSTED BY: WHAT? | DECEMBER 6, 2007 1:11 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

JEFF P

I can understand your leaving the CHURCH you describe: I would to! But how come you left the FAITH, instead of exploring other churches? You'd find mine—the United Church of Christ—very different from the one you left. We in the UCC don't have "antagonism to reason"; I wouldn't have been invited onto the national staff without my University of Chicago PhD (or equivalent)--& the University of Chicago was founded by Christians deeply dedicated to FAITH + REASON (Bible + Enlightenment).

As for Christopher Hitchens' "challenge" as to which faith-based good works "could not have been accomplished by a non-believer," my "On Faith" answer to him was FACTUAL: (1) They were accomplished by believers (with some non-believers helping, as you say in the case of Habitat for Humanity); & (2) How come they weren't accomplished by non-believers?

The "challenge" backfires twice.

I suggest that you see-hear the current "On Faith" conversation between Desmond Tutu a & Sally Quinn.

BGONE

Sorry you've had such a bad "hell" trip that it dominates & distorts your thinking about religion. You can even say "Hell is the seed from which all real religions grow."

In the Bible, the Psalms are "real" religion. But some of the Psalmists encourage people to hurry up with their praise of God because it's something that can't do after they're dead: "in death, there is no remembrance of You." Basic biblical religion was developed before there was any thought of hell—or even of an afterlife!

As for hoax-buster, sorry you can't see that it's a hoax. Or is it this: "A man convinced against his will / is of the same opinion still."

HENRY JAMES

The reason you continue to speak of thousands of gods is that not one of them has ever spoken to you. Convincingly, One has spoken to me & told me all the others are idols. Over 1/3rd of us human beings now alive claim that this One—only this one—has spoken to us.

Sometimes, the speech cuts across what the hearer wants to hear. Please read, in the New Testament, chapters 9, 22, & 26 of the Acts of the Apostles.

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | DECEMBER 6, 2007 1:06 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Dear "What?" You are so aptly named.
Every time I read you I say "What?"

I find infinitely more wisdom in the Buddha's teachings than I do in yours. Since your wisdom so far has been zero, that accounts for the ratio.

Elliptical statements CAN be poetical. Yours are non-sensical.

TDAY

I largely agree with you about the Casinos.

regarding Jesus and Moses: i thought it was now ok to eat pork and shellfish, and to NOT stone my children if they disobey me.

i am not denigrating the moral precepts of the 10 commandments. i am just saying that they are not original or unique, and one needn't believe in any God to follow them. And in fact, people who believe in NO God follow the moral commandments as well as people who are believers.

My other main point to you: 99% of the people in this "immoral Godless world" are as moral as you are, and as I am.

Headlines are titillating, but they really don't give you a good picture of how most people live.

love ya
Henry

POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | DECEMBER 6, 2007 12:29 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Henry,

Example: Its relative as to the first commandment.

Do people have other gods before the true God? (ie 'gods' other than deities)..you bet. For instance: The more casinos I see being raised around us...you can bet there are some 'gods', to some, that come before anything that resembles a responsible lifestyle. If one doesnt think that human beings can make a god out of something

physical, a 'god' that can ruin your life and possibly others....well, as ostrich with a head in the sand comes to mind.

By the way...Jesus categorized the commandments..he didnt do away with them. Scripture is clear on that point.

(first 4 = love toward God, last 6 = love toward neighbor)

Basic? Well, if you refer to them that way..Ill take 'back to basics' any day over the immoral cesspool that is rising around us.

Have a good day.

POSTED BY: TDAY | DECEMBER 6, 2007 11:13 AM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

I have to agree with BGone and Henry,that as far as we know there is no god.

As Voltaire said,if there were no god the people would invent one;in fact the people have invented hundreds;Apollo,Zeus,Jupiter,Allah,Krishna,Vishnu,

Shakti,Amun,Isis,Horus,Cupid,Balder,Thor,Hermes and Aphrodite are just a few of them.

Our ancestors invented gods because they had no idea what the world was all about.But as there has never been any evidence of the existence of any gods,we have to conclude that they existed only in the minds of the people.Which seems to be the case with the current god too,who nobody has ever seen,and who has left no clues that would have us believe that he ever actually existed.

POSTED BY: YOYO | DECEMBER 6, 2007 11:07 AM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

>>So your cute logic about oxymorons and negating itself gets you an F on your logic quiz.

As if youre my teacher?

I laugh.

You keep asking 'Muslim? Hindu?' (ie which is right)...I suggest you get off that soapbox..its already been answered. The family of man made that paradox...not God.

And by the way...you just reaffirmed through your short diatribe that man is his own worst enemy when it comes to any kind of understanding, including understanding God.

Again...not God's fault.

>>You note the folly of the humans who invent their own Gods, as opposed to following the "real" one, which is of course yours.

Yours also. As well as your neighbors. And the other guy half way around the world. Sad you havent reached that understanding yet.

By no means will that bronze buddah or pagan rite wont get you true understanding. Nada.

POSTED BY: WHAT? | DECEMBER 6, 2007 11:03 AM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

TDAY

Is the world ending soon? Is Jesus coming in the next 50 years?

While I sympathize with many of your points, I must disagree on a couple.

4 or 5 of the 10 commandments are a *pretty good* guide to morality, although incredibly basic, and existant in human societies long before Moses brought them down from Sinai.

And didn't Jesus changes lots of Moses' laws anyway? He said there were really only 2 you had to worry about. Love God. Love your neighbor.

As far as your statement that " Any sane person cannot deny that if all 10 were kept to the best of our ability...the world would be free of many of the ills we face."

Well, I am eminently sane, and I deny it. So there. There is no evidence that following the First commandment leads to a healthier society with fewer ills. In fact, most of the evidence is the other way. In Holland and Sweden and Japan, where fewer than 15% of the people believe in ANY God, their societal health is much higher than in the God Fearing US, measured by indices like homicide rate, rape rate, abortion rate, infant mortality, STD rate.

Love you.
\Henry

POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | DECEMBER 6, 2007 11:01 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Lespool stated:

>>Indeed, their god not only forbids knowledge, he demanded nudity and punished A&E for gaining modesty (aka naked shame).

Sadly, this person is also among the ranks of those who either blantly misrepresent or are blinded even to the simple example of the two trees and what they represented...an example of human confusion at its worst. Completely out of context to what the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil represented...whether you believe the account or not.

Though they think they are wise.....

POSTED BY: TDAY | DECEMBER 6, 2007 10:52 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

WHAT?

I consulted my Harvard Philosophy/Religion professor brother William

and we agree that your last post exhibits serious errors in both logic and theology (if THAT is not an oxymoron).

Which creator God of the Universe? The Muslim God? The Hindu God(s)? The Bahai (God)? If God is NOT a She, is He a White Male? Or insubstantial?

With 38,000 sects (including whichever yours is) telling me THEIR God is the Creator God, how do I know which to believe? I believe you because you are so credible? Moreso than Gandhi? Or Buddha? Or Moses? And YOUR Creator God is automatically superior to the Pagan Creator God because He is yours? Odious.

You note the folly of the humans who invent their own Gods, as opposed to following the "real" one, which is of course yours. I have NO reason to believe you over the other 37,999 choices.

"Intelligent Design" is patently Un-intelligent, according to 99% of the scientists who have studied it.

And the world is full of things that were Un-intelligently designed. The Iraq war,for instance.

So your cute logic about oxymorons and negating itself gets you an F on your logic quiz.

POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | DECEMBER 6, 2007 10:50 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Bgone,

It is very sad that you are among the ranks of mankind that have chosen to misunderstand and misrepresent God and see things through your own eyes - clouded by the prevalent confusion that grips this world.

Part of the fallacy of man. Why we have never, and will never, be able to solve our problems through our wisdom alone. We chose war over peace. We chose human kings over God. We choose freedoms that bring heartache, disease and broken lives over the basic guidelines of the 10 commandments. Any sane person cannot deny that if all 10 were kept to the best of our ability...the world would be free of many of the ills we face.

The result is a confused, volatile and increasingly immoral world. The headlines speak for themselves. Sadly, too, your hoaxbusters web site is testimony to religious confusion in and of itself and is a perpetrator of the same to any gullible person who peruses it.

POSTED BY: TDAY | DECEMBER 6, 2007 10:41 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

As we ponder avoiding hell by "rendering to God" so hungry children can eat let us notice something about those "organized charities" called religions. Hell is their foundation.

Suppose there is no hell and everyone goes on to a new world from here. Killing someone does not really kill but only sends one on to the next life early. Hitler was responsible for a whole lot of that. Picture Hitler facing a few million, "recently educated" Jews to say nothing of a couple hundred thousand highly educated GIs.

Any ideas? All those unbaptized Jews go to hell? GI were all Christians that loved their enemies? Hitler call the pope and get his sins forgiven so he's in heaven - along with GIs? God's in the next world to referee and doesn't allow violence? Give your brain a chance.

POSTED BY: BGONE | DECEMBER 6, 2007 10:40 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

lespool:

How true is what you said, "Judeo-Christian and Islamic religious institutions are all based upon the same fundamental (and oh so fundamental) principles found in the Book of Genesis."??

I doubt there's a minister of any kind willing to bet it all on what Genesis says. 9-11-2001 19 young men "bet it all" on something. Genesis? Absolute rubbish.

They bet on hell, that their "unsaved" victims were all going to hell while they were all going to heaven. That is the key to understanding terrorism and in turn religion. We are forever stopping short, saying they had faith without saying what their faith was in. Without hell there is nowhere to dispose of their victims - without hell victims must be faced in the next world.

Early man was docile, didn't hurt early man for fear of reprisal. The invention of hell allowed man-on-man violence by giving the aggressor a place to dispose of the victims. Hell is the seed from which all real religions grow, (there are folks taking advantage of the tax laws to operate tax free, tax deductible dues at tax exempt halls that are nothing more than social clubs).

Read the Bible. Tells you all about it. And if you have a problem reading the Bible - <http://www.foxbuster.org/sellyoursoul> The God that takes care of, saves aggressors is really Devil. It's Devil that welcomes the faithful in Christ into His kingdom. The father of Jesus was the being in the ball of fire you know. It's the victims of the faithful that do Devil's work in the next life, punish the guilty. The faithful aggressor needs hell while civilized people don't.

All that faith is in men who say you can be an aggressor and get away with it because they have spoken to God and God wills it. Those men who speak to God, (Pat Robertson private jet) have a way of capturing more than their fair share of the wealth of earth. Everyone knows sale of soul to Devil brings the wealth of earth to the seller. Mr Hunt noticed that rule mostly applies to those who lead the multitudes to hell - something to do with the cheapness of souls these days.

Genesis? What a stupid con! Who was there when God said, "let there be light" to record it? Moses, Muhammad and Joseph Smith all three no doubt.

POSTED BY: BGONE | DECEMBER 6, 2007 10:20 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

>>Henry James:
>>What? writes

>>"There is a God."

>>What does She look like? And WHAT does She do?

Cute. I think you are confusing the creator God of the universe with the 'she' goddess referred to by pagans...

>>Oh, and WHICH of the 39,000 Gods we humans have invented is the Right one.? Yours, i presume?

Exactly..what humans have invented. Not God's problem....mankind made that bed and lied in it (pardon the pun).

>>As to your "too simplistic" crack,
are you implying that Un-Intelligent Design is less simplistic than it's alternatives?

The term 'Unintelligent design', even in its basic sense, is an oxymoron and inherently negates itself

POSTED BY: WHAT? | DECEMBER 6, 2007 10:06 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

When I worked in government my name was often in the media.

This prompted a nice lady to send me letters which always began: "Mr. Hoyt, God has a message for you!".

Secrets-from-the-Lord's post above reminds me of the lady and her letters.

POSTED BY: NORRIE HOYT | DECEMBER 6, 2007 9:40 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Judeo-Christian and Islamic religious institutions are all based upon the same fundamental (and oh so fundamental) principles found in the Book of Genesis. Unfortunately, their fateful flocks have yet to control the impulse to kill one another (as Christians are always ready to crusade) in a dogmatic attempt to monopolize god. Ergo, there is little hope they will ever evolve beyond naked animals that have no shame. Indeed, their god not only forbids knowledge, he demanded nudity and punished A&E for gaining modesty (aka naked shame). The true believers have no use for an altruistic spirit --- and why should they? --- What with a god like this who needs devils.

POSTED BY: LESPOOL | DECEMBER 6, 2007 5:59 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Willis E. Elliott:

That's wonderful, no threat of hell. Then if I choose to NOT do "thy will be done" I have nothing to worry about?

The secret, which is no secret at all is to DIG the subtle "left outs" out. The Lord's Prayer should read, "thy will be done OR ELSE HELL."

I know the Lord's prayer very well. It's a thumbnail sketch of ancient Egyptian history, i.e. "give us this day our daily bread" which is a dead giveaway to anyone who UNDERSTANDS "that which is written" for "it is written" with a purpose in mind by the writer.

BTW the God to whom they prayed was a preying God called God AKA Pharaoh who sentenced folks to hell via the forever wound, a pole through the gut - takes about 3 hours to die that way. How long did Jesus take to die on the cross?

My response sounds aggressive. It's not intended to be that way. There's nothing personal from me for anyone here and especially you. The facts always sound that way.

POSTED BY: BGONE | DECEMBER 5, 2007 11:12 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Jeff

a heartfelt and touching story.
thank you for telling it to us.

and then, right after your lamenting the Unreason you found in the church,

as if right on cue

we get

"Secrets from the Lord" to illustrate what you mean.

Bless You

Henry the Pagan Buddhist

POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | DECEMBER 5, 2007 11:00 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Saturday, December 1, 2007

Praise the Lord from on high! The Spirit of God says today He has great plans for the world. That is for the world to fall in love with Christ. Watch this winter, for I am about to bring unusual manifestations in the Middle East. Watch what I do in Iran they will say, do we need to bomb this nation? And I will tell you I am bombarding it with the power of the Spirit of Christ! They will say we must know who this Christ is!

China, do not feel afraid of the Christians in your nation for if you will listen to them if you will allow them to show you there power in Christ you will be one of the greatest nations for the end times church to fulfill the great commission!

I am telling you be ready America for this Christmas Christ will say have compassion for the homeless, for He says this Christmas and I will invade the homes and they will have a glimpse of the Christmas spirit in a way that they have never felt before.

A secret from the Lord today is remember Russia, I am going to do something in Moscow that will be beyond your belief and it will be called a tragedy of tradition because I am going to break the traditions of Moscow and Russia and send a fresh new wave of the Spirit of the Lord to start something brand new in that nation. Be ready for Putin will no longer know the right thing from the wrong thing because the new tradition will be above all else as this leader comes into Russia shall bring them a new wave for the orthodox church to shake in a mighty way, says the Lord.

<http://jcadell.blogspot.com/>

POSTED BY: SECRETS FROM THE LORD | DECEMBER 5, 2007 10:40 PM
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Dr. Elliot,

I was a Christian for about 40 of my 47 years, but (?sadly) de-converted about two years ago, as I began to question those elements of the faith that rubbed against reason--and since then there's been no lookin' back.

I agree that hoaxbusters and some other sites generally are a dis-service to anyone wanting to authenticate facts, particularly those you mention in your prior post.

I had many experiences with our church's activities in serving the homeless, building Habitat for Humanity houses, involvement in Interfaith Hospitality Network programs. Truly, good does get done in the name of religion--I can't formally answer Christopher Hitchens' challenge in asking me which of those activities could not have been accomplished by a non-believer. In fact, many participants weren't believers.

Alas, I left the church mostly because of how I saw it's antagonism to reason, it's fear of science and it's battle with enlightenment values and the scientific method, the hypocrisy of avowed "moral values" candidates, it's agenda for theocracy, it's pretense for "correct and true belief" versus the failed and hopelessly sinful "world." In short, I left precisely because the fruit of the tree has become a bitter and unacceptable taste for me and for many others.

POSTED BY: JEFF P | DECEMBER 5, 2007 10:17 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

BGONE 12.5.07 / 1:19p

Nothing in your post distresses me except what I cannot escape concluding is your willful avoidance of fact.

1 The fact is that the Lord's Prayer includes no threat of hell but quite the opposite, namely, a petition that God deliver us from evil. You're interjection of HELL is an egregious corruption.

2 You say "religion is based upon 'it is written' without ever question[ing] what it is that is written." The reverse is truer: "it is written" is based on religion. And the question has been continuous, among Christian scholars, from the beginning.

3 You ask a series of questions as to how you are to "verify...." You want answers, but your negative attitude toward religion filters out pro-religion answers. Besides, you filter out pro-religion facts vis-à-vis the positive effects of religion. When questioned, Jesus said, "Come and see." He was equally pragmatic about others: "By their fruits, you shall know them." When John the Baptist sent some disciples of his to check out Jesus' ID, the only words he used directed them to check out the effects of his ministry.

For example, on homelessness you read my account of how prayer led to the building of hundreds of thousands of houses, & your response was that religion does "absolutely nothing positive" about homelessness. Your antireligious fundamentalism is so blinding that you cannot see facts counter to your ideology. All fundamentalisms frighten me, including yours.

4 I'm somewhat sympathetic, learning where you're coming from, when you refer me to what we religion scholars agree is a fraudulent source of anti-religious fantasy, namely, hoax-buster.org/sellyoursoul. Access it, & you'll see immediately the claim that we Bible-believers see, in Exodus 3, that "God looks like a man." That's not in the text, & I've never heard of it except in hoax-buster.org. Also, the hoax-buster.org claim that the presence in the burning bush was not God but the anti-God, Lucifer—well, that fantasy (as far as I know) is also confined to [hoax-busters](http://hoax-buster.org). My first earned doctorate in the Bible was 64 years ago; I have known thousands of books on the Bible; & the greatest hoax on the Bible I've ever encountered is—what greater irony?—hoax-buster.org, which exists only to claim that the Bible is a hoax!

The Bible's God is the God of Truth, so I'm not afraid of truth. But fundamentalists right & left, up & down, are enemies of truth, refusers of fact--&, as I said, they do frighten me; & I'm sorry you are among them.

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | DECEMBER 5, 2007 7:51 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Wha and Lotsaquestions

Apologies. Mea Culpa Mea Culpa

i address to What?

what should a been addressed to

Lotsaquestions.

sorry folks.

POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | DECEMBER 5, 2007 7:40 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Friends and neighbors:

Henry James, that's real close. "the world's biggest social problems—poverty, disease, homelessness" have been around a long time just like religion. In other words they, problems and religion are in it together. If you walked into a messed up room wouldn't you tend to blame those in the room for the mess? Agreed, you'd also tend to insist they clean it up. But how long and how much money are you willing to give them before you throw them out and get someone to actually solve the problem? As long as you give them money they have no real incentive to fix the problem do they?

Doesn't is say something for someone to stand in a huge ivory tower, (Crystal Cathedral) with real Italian imported stained glass windows reading from a book where God says, "sell all your earthly possessions and give to the poor" taking up a collection to feed hungry children? And if that's not enough there's no accounting for the money collected. Ask how much of the money collected actually gets to the poor and they'll call you an atheists.

WHAT? <http://www.hoax-buster.org/sellyoursoul> says and I agree the problem is with men who use Devil, not God to collect and keep money given to them to feed hungry children. We need to get our supernatural beings straightened out before we blame God for anything.

Neither God nor Devil need exist. God is altogether unnecessary for their purposes. Devil is the required being, real or imaginary that is plenty good enough to extort money from ignorant people. "...Thy will be done OR ELSE HELL..." If that isn't extortion there is no such thing as extortion.

POSTED BY: BGONE | DECEMBER 5, 2007 6:32 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

What? writes

"There is a God."

What does She look like? And WHAT does She do?

Oh, and WHICH of the 39,000 Gods we humans have invented is the Right one.? Yours, i presume?

As to your "too simplistic" crack,
are you implying that Un-Intelligent Design is less simplistic than it's alternatives?

POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | DECEMBER 5, 2007 6:29 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Hey Henry James,

If the web site Bgone touts is any reflection on his intellect on the subject, then one might take caution in considering him any type of authority on the subject. Er, or any subject. Ill take even the basic views of Christianity any day over his.

Yikes. Scary.

Oh, by the way. There is a God.

If you think millions or billions of humans have been duped thru the millenia...well, youre dreamin', dude. Let alone passing a pretty nasty judgement on living, thinking human beings who for the most part found more to life than just physical existence and refuse to swallow that they just 'happened'....tell me, did that burger you ate recently just 'happen'? Too simplistic? Not really. Think about it.

POSTED BY: WHAT? | DECEMBER 5, 2007 6:16 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

hey WHAT?

Bgone is saying the problem is with humans who either believe in religion or who use it cynically for their own purposes.

you are right. the fault is not God's , since there is no God. Bgone would agree, I think, but I'll speak for him since I am so pushy.

POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | DECEMBER 5, 2007 5:31 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

>>. Bgone's inventory of whether religion cures or ACTUALLY PROMOTES poverty, disease, and homelessness is worth paying attention to.

Since many on these threads tout that religion is man-made (in essence, I would tend to agree)...then who is bgone, et al pointing the finger at or presenting wherein the problem lies? With man, or God?

POSTED BY: WHAT? | DECEMBER 5, 2007 4:39 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

This is not a criticism of Willis Elliott, just some observations.

The world that Jesus inhabited is quite different than the world that we inhabit. In Jesus's world, there was no point to be interested in the government; there was no such thing as medical care, other than the simple human kindness of offering comfort to the sick; there was no money or wealth, no things to own, other than a few utilitarian implements. All of the things that challenge us now, did not exist then. And so, a Christian must infer many things that Jesus did not directly say, about the modern world in which now live.

Still in the personal conduct of your life, the teachings of Christ are applicable, and do-able. When you get into a discussion on large church organizations and the proper role of the govenment, I am not so sure that you can gain much insite from Jesus on what is the proper thing to do.

POSTED BY: DANIEL | DECEMBER 5, 2007 3:55 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

My Atonement

To temper my kind words earlier about Dr Elliot's post here, let me note that

a. Bgone's inventory of whether religion cures or ACTUALLY PROMOTES poverty, disease, and homelessness is worth paying attention to.

Churches when they become established become PART of the power structure. and the power structure is interested in Maintaining their Power, NOT achieving Justice and Equality.

b. Read Susan Jacoby's column, which highlights the negative as well as the positive effects of religious belief on the problems of the world, while also highlighting that Churches are rarely a force for social justice. Here is a telling paragraph from Jacoby (but read the whole thing)

"Finally, Pope Benedict XVI issued an encyclical blaming atheists for the loss of hope in the modern world. This would be funny if it were not so willfully blind to truth. Seen any atheists committing suicide bombings lately? Have atheists denied funds for public health programs that encourage people to use condoms in countries where AIDS is rampant? Were atheists responsible for "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia. Oh, wait, the Serbian Christians were the biggest offenders."

POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | DECEMBER 5, 2007 1:28 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Rev, let me help you out a bit with the "Lord's Prayer."

Your version, "Our Father..., your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven...." leaves out the impetus for doing God's will. It should be, "...thy will be done OR ELSE HELL...."

Many people have written many "good" things about religion. William James is but one. And, as you noticed, Christopher Hitchens and many others have written many negative things about religion. What is new under the sun is what has recently been written about religion - Religion is based upon "it is written" without ever question what it is that is written.

The core question about religion is it's charter. Where do men, yourself being one man that uses "it is written" as you basis in fact. How do I verify that which is written? How do I know a Harvard professor got the story straight? How do I know Christopher Hitchens isn't just another wacko atheists?

This weeks question begs an answer to a question. Is religion anything it's advertised to be? Does religion have a possible role in solving, "the world's biggest social problems—poverty, disease, homelessness"? So lets see if there's a reasonable answer to the question.

1. poverty - what does religion do for poverty, create it or relieve it?
2. disease - does religion do anything positive in the search for cures for diseases?
3. homelessness - what does religion do to solve that problem?

The short answer is absolutely nothing positive. But then there is the negative, causes harm, helps create "the world's biggest social problems—poverty, disease, homelessness."

1. poverty - Religion would appear to cause poverty. Example: Were Mexicans as impoverished as they now are when Christianity replaced their native religions? Is Christianity the cause of their poverty? Certainly didn't help did it? Why not remove Christianity and see if their poverty goes away? Maybe if the gold looted from Latin America by the religious Conquistadors was returned?

2. disease - Religion has propped itself down in the middle of the road claiming morality as it's basis for denying science the tools to search for cures for disease. Could stem cell research lead to a cure for aids? Is Rick Warren's Saddleback Church pushing stem cell research? If religion gets it's way we will never know what "incurable" diseases might be cured using stem cells. Religion is scientifically backward is the only reasonable conclusion and is much more likely to trigger a plague than either prevent or arrest one.

3. homelessness - You got me there. Sanctuary is still in vogue. Manuel Noriega was given it. If Saddam had only known he could still be alive at the Vatican?

The problem is, "for it is written" so I understand how quoting that which is written comes natural for you. Well, I notice there are exceptions to your quoting that which is written.

Have you read this? <http://www.hoax-buster.org/sellyoursoul> Can you show what it says is in error? Are you sure the God you worship and lead others to worship is really God and not Devil? Seems to me what religion does to cause world problems is circumstantial evidence Moses did as that "it is written" says, sold his soul to become the most important man that ever lived - founder of great faiths.

It's never too late to square one's mistakes with God or does Devil worship remove that possibility? Devil worship would appear to be the source of "the world's biggest social problems—poverty, disease, homelessness" the failure to resolve them or both.

Now tell me about all the good religious charities doing handouts to starving people. Please include stats - how much of what religion takes in, in the name of God, is actually handed out.

POSTED BY: BGONE | DECEMBER 5, 2007 1:19 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Ah, Dr Elliott, so now you have turned my own brother William against me? Et tu, Billy?

Seriously, I essentially applaud your column, believe it or not! Of course with a couple of differences of opinion.

Belief, and specifically christian belief, can, and often does, lead its followers to acts of social goodness and concern for the misfortunes of others.

And all the examples you cite seem laudable.

I would just make the modest addition that one NEED NOT be a Christian to have this orientation.

Buddhists believe in loving kindness towards all humans as their first principle, very similar to Jesus's teaching. And this belief leads them to altruistic acts as often as it does Christians, without a belief in God.

Secular Humanists and Unitarian Universalists (who can only very loosely be said to believe in God) have a similar profile.

And Holland and Sweden, where under 15% of people are believers, perform much better on indices of social health and kindness to neighbors than does the God-Fearing US - indices like infant mortality, child poverty, homicide, rape, abortion, STDs.

So I will tell William tonight, when we have a glass of Heavenly Nectar, that he was largely correct in 1900, and today the picture has broadened considerably.

POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | DECEMBER 5, 2007 10:53 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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