

http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2007/10/we_christians_dont_believe_in.html

Living the Afterlife

ON FAITH - WASHINGTON POST - WILLIS ELLIOTT

We Christians don't believe in life after death. We have full belief in Jesus, and afterlife with him is *implicit* in our experience of him as alive in our here-and-now. ("I am with you always," he says at the end of the New Testament's first book.)

Jesus is unique in that his is the world's only name with which the full range of possibilities exists:

1.....FULL UNBELIEF. Jesus never was born, never lived. Christianity's foundation is nothing but fantasy. Though this position is, most historians agree, highly improbable, it reappears whenever conditions are right for it.

2.....NATURAL belief. Like everybody else, Jesus lived and died. This is the Jewish position.

3.....HALF belief. Jesus lived but didn't die (he was taken to paradise): that was somebody else who was crucified. This is the Muslim position.

4.....FULL BELIEF. Jesus lived and died but **didn't stay dead**. Three days after his execution, he appeared among his followers—and continued to re-appear many times for more than a month—often enough, and in sufficiently different circumstances, to overcome all their understandable doubts that he could be alive again. His disciples experienced him not as resuscitated (restored to the life he had lived on earth) but as *resurrected* (re-created in newness of life, with powers of life as we know it but also beyond). We should not be surprised if these experiences—once, to "more than five hundred" (1 Corinthians 15:6)—were variously reported, as indeed they were: we should rather be suspicious if the Bible were to have given us a neat, mythic miracle-story. The materials we have point to a singular historical event in which nature and the supernatural converged. For us Christians, Easter is more than a festival of springtime.

Jesus' resurrection, and his disciples' experience of it, converted a small messianic movement into Christianity, which is his believers' life together after *his* death and its sequel. One of our "On Faith" panelists, Nicholas T. Wright, has written an 817-page magisterial work—THE RESURRECTION OF THE SON OF GOD—affirming our Christian faith and meticulously confronting all denials of Easter.

This week's "On Faith" question is three questions: (1) "Do you believe in life after death?" Yes. (2) "Have you ever been visited by the spirit of a dead relative or friend?" Yes, by Jesus resurrected and present in and among his believers. (3) "Do such visions or visitations have any theological meaning?" Yes, (1) to meet our need for correction and an open gate to newness of life here and hereafter, God has come among us as a human being; (2) moral seriousness (responsibility, accountability) is increased by belief that our behavior's consequences to us personally are not limited to life before death.

As the diameter of our knowledge of consciousness increases, so also does the circumference of its mystery. No scientific solution is possible to the question whether (as scientism says) mind emerges from matter or (as the religions and most philosophies say) matter emerges from mind.

Finally, in thinking about this week's questions, we moderns must deal with a learned disability. Scientism's genetic fallacy has mistaught us that we are—as are the other animals—nothing but physical bodies. I believe in evolution, and wonder how long it will take us to outgrow evolutionism.

BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | OCTOBER 14, 2007; 1:32 PM

Comments

Please report offensive comments below.

To/ Brothers & Sisters...As all good people to knowing God one must be equal with God,not the growling snivling fools that you having become. You but allow others to brainwash as abuse that you become as servants,to man,an prisoner unto their deceit cunning.God having no need or wish that you come a begging as a dog,unto its master to obey on call.Get off your knees,stand before God as your equal,thus win your freedom....Your BROTHER in ARMS...LUCIFER xxx X

POSTED BY: LUCIFER | OCTOBER 16, 2007 6:22 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Rev Willis writes:

"1.....FULL UNBELIEF. Jesus never was born, never lived. Christianity's foundation is nothing but fantasy. Though this position is, most historians agree, highly improbable, it reappears whenever conditions are right for it."

Where's the proof to say that it is "highly improbable" that Jesus never existed? There is NO PROOF outside of the Bible myths that he existed. You know it and everyone else on this blog knows it, *pace* those who think Josephus offer proof (he didn't, even if those 4th-century forgeries into his works seem to).

And it's wrong to say that "most historians agree" that Jesus lived. Most either don't bother dealing with the issue at all or make their decision based on religious tradition, rather than on the kind of hardcore historic evidence they demand as proof for everything else they consider to be factual.

Rev Willis tries to downplay the current atheist movement by noting that this idea "reappears whenever conditions are right for it." Yes, it's like the bad penny. The problem for the theists is that the idea is asserting itself like never before and on all fronts.

Religionism will eventually hold a place of dishonor right next to racism and sexism, ie: its fellow isms who have so fueled religionism over the centuries.

POSTED BY: MR MARK | OCTOBER 15, 2007 5:08 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

"we moderns must deal with a learned disability. Scientism's genetic fallacy has mistaught us that we are—as are the other animals-- nothing but physical bodies."

What is so gosh darn difficult about this concept? We are.. we are born, we live, stuff happens, we die... I cannot imagine a simpler, more rational, more perfect explanation. Why are we so egotistical as to create entire metaphysical universes and realities, without one iota of evidence, just because we are self-aware?

POSTED BY: CLEVE | OCTOBER 15, 2007 4:31 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

From "Why I Am Not A Christian", by Bertrand Russell

Religion prevents our children from having a rational education; religion prevents us from teaching the ethic of scientific co-operation in place of the old fierce doctrines of sin and punishment. It is possible that mankind is on the threshold of a golden age; but if so, it will be necessary first to slay the dragon that guards the door, and this dragon is religion.

Bertrand Russell, "Why I Am Not A Christian", page 47

POSTED BY: BERTRAND RUSSELL | OCTOBER 15, 2007 2:49 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Dr. Elliott:

Cast me into your slow group because I really don't know what your answer said.

1. Did you say (in one way or another) that after our physical death we continue to live in some identifiable manner? 2. Did you say that there is a bodily resurrection (as some church groups claim), or a continuation of our soul or spirit (whatever you think those are)? 3. Did you say that the Easter event was an actual continuation of a life after an actual physical death? 4. Or were you speaking of some kind of mystical or psychological 'life after death' during our one and only physical life.

If your answers to questions 1, 2, or 3 are YES, then I think (but certainly can't prove) you are wrong. If your answer to number 4 is YES, then we may have some common ground.

As I confessed above, I am in your slow group. A little help (clear English) would be appreciated.

POSTED BY: CECIL | OCTOBER 15, 2007 1:01 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Actually this isn't completely true:

"NATURAL belief. Like everybody else, Jesus lived and died. This is the Jewish position."

There is no "The Jewish" position. However, the primary argument that can be made in all cases is that the word Jesus comes from a hebrew word that means salvation. The word 'Christ' comes from the messiah, which is another word for Anointed One or King. The original Jewish Christian position originally was that Jesus, lived, died, came to visit from beyond death once, and would come again and save Jews from their awful oppression at the hands of Romans. From his failure to do that he was rationalized into a Future Messiah who would come at the end of days. The main difference between the two camps is whether he's been here once before and will come again, or whether the Messiah should be seen as something still to be waited for. Since for Jews the conditions for Messiah still haven't been fulfilled, the Messiahhood of Jesuah Ben Joseph is still in question. And for Jews the divine can walk among us, but to hold any man as God is sacrilege.

As to this not dying thing. We have the testimony of a few witnesses to visitations, and we have the testimony of countless millions who have been reborn through the teachings of this savior. And we have this phenomena where people get a second chance by dying to their old attitudes and behaviors.

But salvation is always problematic. Some People get a second chance, but it is what they do with that second chance that counts. In their arrogance and presumption many Christians close the door to the very thing they seek when they forget that God made both space and time. The Hebrew for Universe means everything; And that means that his seven days are present at every moment. His book is our life. As long as the world is a place of conflict, confusion, dogmatic literalism, and delusion -- the Messiah is yet to be among us. There is no conflict between the theory of evolution and the bible. There is only a matter of the arrogance and presumption of those who interpret it,

claim to speak for God, and go then to war with those who disagree with them instead of actually listening to God -- who is talking through those things as well.

POSTED BY: CHRISTOPHER HOLTE | OCTOBER 15, 2007 10:12 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Bill Murray

Yep.I totally agree with what you are saying.

Jesus is all myth and almost certainly bears no resemblance to any particular historical individual.

Folks don't seem to get it,that myths abound throughout history,and were never meant to be taken literally.The Jesus myth predates the man himself according to some writers.

Andrew Lee;

Yes.Maybe there is a God,maybe there isn't.It is that simple.Seems to me that the likelihood is that there never was;because people constantly make things up. Our ancestors made up countless gods.

If we got rid of the present god,people would probably make up another one.

We are only now realizing how dumb our ancestors must have been hundreds of years ago.Ignorance was rife.They knew nothing,and had gods for everything.How else can people who know nothing,make sense of things?

It is truly pathetic that we allow ancient myths to continue to intrude on modern realities.

Even the clown GWBush actually thinks there's someone in the sky that he can talk to about going to war.And that sky person told Bush it was fine to attack Iraq.

It looks likely that its crunch time for religion,because atheism is gaining ground,as folks get sick of the stupidity,irrationality and danger of religion.

My mind keeps going back to the extremely religious fellas who took down the World Trade Center on 9/11. They were only a little more wacky than the average christian who believes there's a heaven to go to for believers,and eternal hell for sane people.

Religion is laughable.It was invented by our childlike ancestors in their attempts to make sense of existence.

It's time is over.The atheist movement grows stronger by the day.Just read these threads for proof.

POSTED BY: DREW | OCTOBER 15, 2007 9:33 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Here's something very possible (and probably very offensive): What if we got it all wrong? What if we got "GOD" wrong? What if the Christian God or the Jewish God or the Muslim God or the Catholic God is not what God really is?

or What if the message that God sent us has been severely distorted throughout time?

I know it's blasphemous... but I am asking that people to not be tied to dogma so strictly. I don't think that anything that condones hatred is the message that anybody, including GOD, wants from humans.

Maybe there is a God, maybe there isn't. We'll never know. But, to paraphrase Gandhi, let's believe in the human religion... let's put humans first. I think, if we can do that, whether God exists or not, we can be happy in THIS LIFE. I mean if heaven exists, we really can't go wrong with treating people well...

POSTED BY: ANDREW LEE | OCTOBER 14, 2007 10:02 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

People refer to Jesus as if he were some devine being. What is interesting is that Jesus was not one person but consisted of many. In one role he was the sacred king of the Jews who periodically died as a substitute for the real king. The Semitic religions practiced human immolations longer than any other religion, sacrificing children and adult men in order to please their gods. The priesthood of the Jewish God insisted that "one man should die for the people... that the whole nation perish not" (John 11:50). Yahweh forgave no sins without bloodshed: "without shedding blood is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22).

Middle-Eastern culture presented a long line of slain and cannibalized Saviors extending back to prehistoric time. At first the kings became king-surrogates or "sacred" kings as the power of real monarchies developed. The Gospels' Jesus was not the first of them, though he may have been one of the last. One passage hints at a holy man's understandable fear of such brief, doomed eminence: "When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone" (John 6:15).

Our present day Jesus (the latest) appears to have made little or no impression on his contemporaries at the time of his existence. No literate person in his time mentioned him in any known writing. The Gospels were not written in Jesus time, nor were they written by anyone who ever saw him in the flesh. The books were written after the establishment of the church, some as late as the 2nd century A.D. and later, driven by the church's requirement for a manufactured tradition. Most scholars believe the earliest book of the New Testament was 1 Thessalonians, written perhaps 51 A.D. by Paul, who never saw Jesus in person and knew no details of his life.

If Jesus existed at all he was most likely illiterate in that he wrote absolutely nothing, and nothing was written about him at the time of his supposed existence.

POSTED BY: BILL MURRAY | OCTOBER 14, 2007 7:16 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

I believe that religion, all religion, is a curse on humanity. Many millions have died in the past for the sake of religion and continue to do so today.

Prayer is nothing more than begging to a non-existent being in the hope of achieving some objective.

The total separation of church and state is a necessity. All one has to do is look around the world at the conflict among religions and within religious sects to understand why that separation is mandatory.

POSTED BY: BILL MURRAY | OCTOBER 14, 2007 6:51 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Who robbed the bank?

A person wearing a red shirt with a gun entered the bank, pointed the gun at the teller and demanded money. The teller cooperated, the man put the money in a brown paper bag and left the bank.

Just outside the bank a person with a gun wearing a red shirt and carrying a brown paper bag with money in it was arrested by a police officer and charged with bank robbery.

She was not convicted because the jury does not believe women rob banks and eye witnesses said it was a man. There must have been two people in the bank with guns wearing red shirts at the time one of them robbed it, a man and a woman. The woman brought a brown paper bag with money in it to the bank.

There are some people who don't believe the bank robbed, that the whole story was made up.

There are two people who did every significant thing Jesus did. There's Jesus of the Bible and there's the male imitating female Pharaoh, Amenophis IV. Not only did she claim she would come back to life on this earth but she supplied the science, how her return to this world not only possible but a matter of natural consequence.

The Jesus tale being a hoax does not rule out either there being one or more Gods or that there is more life after this life. It only complicates.

POSTED BY: BGONE | OCTOBER 14, 2007 10:12 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

' One of our "On Faith" panelists, Nicholas T. Wright, has written an 817-page magisterial work—THE RESURRECTION OF THE SON OF GOD'

And it never once finds space to quote Romans 7:24 where Paul asks to be rescued from his body.

Not does it quote a convert to Jesus-worship writing in 1 Peter 1:24 that 'all flesh is grass'

The author of 1 Peter knew what happened to corpses.

POSTED BY: STEVEN CARR | OCTOBER 14, 2007 9:43 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

One thing is clear.

Early converts to Jesus-worship believed that Jesus was still alive, but scoffed at the idea that God would choose to raise a corpse.

Nobody has dared answer the question of why these people converted to Jesus-worship.

Even when trying to answer questions about the nature of the resurrected body, Paul cannot give one detail of one person's alleged experience seeing a resurrected body.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that heavenly beings are as different from earthly things as a fish is different from the moon.

Nobody discusses how a fish can turn into the moon, so presumably this is why Paul regarded the Corinthians as 'idiots' for discussing how a corpse can turn into a resurrected being.

Paul then trashes the idea that resurrected beings are made from the dust that a corpse dissolves into.

'The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven. I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God...'

Paul reminds the Jesus-worshippers that Jesus became a spirit, in terms suggesting Paul believed all Christians would become spirits.

In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul explains to the Jesus-worshippers why it does not matter that the earthly body will be destroyed, as they will get a heavenly body.

Paul knew what happened to corpses, which is why he pleaded in Romans 7:24 to be rescued from his body of death.

POSTED BY: STEVEN CARR | OCTOBER 14, 2007 9:40 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Jim M, you have a point.

I was taught that where Christianity influences us to do good, it reflects our desire to please a loving G-d, not our fear of punishment. Seeing it as "obey my laws, or suffer for it" completely removes the action of our own discernment (a.k.a. conscience) which is itself a gift from G-d.

POSTED BY: VIEJITA DEL OESTE | OCTOBER 13, 2007 9:53 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

I take exception to the statement that belief in the afterlife increases moral seriousness. In fact all the evidence I've seen indicates the opposite is true. Religious notions cause people to crash planes into buildings. People who espouse to be christian justify their immorality with bumper stickers that say they are "not perfect, just forgiven." Nice thought from behind an irresponsible and aggressive driver.

No, on the contrary. The overwhelming evidence I've seen is that belief in the afterlife leads to failure to be accountable or responsible.

I think it is very sad that Mr. Elliot believes that people need to believe in consequences after death to control their behavior in this life. And based on what? A fairy tale book. Perhaps he's right, but he should limit his belief to himself, not others. The fact that I don't makes me morally and ethically superior. The fact that I do control my behavior without such belief makes me morally and ethically superior.

POSTED BY: JIM M | OCTOBER 13, 2007 4:38 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

In the cold.

In the cold
of a darkness
I see the profile
of a beautiful sun,
and so, when
a pleasure seems
a sorrow at the
end of the morning,
I hear the sensitive
wind recalling
my faith.

POSTED BY: FRANCESCO SINIBALDI | OCTOBER 13, 2007 2:48 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

I mean, don't get me wrong... it's like... In a world of people saying that only a certain kind of 'faith' can 'save' one from... what, ..Life?

People throwing themselves behind dogmas and institutions dedicated to use someone else's form of sexuality for political purposes...

Trying to marginalize a good portion of humanity (very righteously, of course) for loving each other....

Apart from the usual 'can't keep it in their pants cause they hate themselves so much in the name of Heaven....'

Actually strangling themselves to death in two scuba suits *just masturbating* while advocating all these real harms to people in the name of what 'greater good?'

To avoid what 'evil?'

Liberalism? Non-literalism?

I say... What?

What if it's not about classifying how much someone believes in Jesus?

What if... It's life. No matter how much neoprene is applied?

More weight. :)

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | OCTOBER 12, 2007 11:59 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Errr.... If whatever you said makes you think your Jesus is with you at all times, you need to ignore all observation of evolution, and claim you have the right and need to deny other Americans human rights and dignities... why?

What if you're ...OK, without hurting people?

Or at least, hurting others doesn't help?

I mean, it seems Falwell's successor *strangled* himself masturbating with a couple of wetsuits... *two,* mind you... not just one...

Somehow that leads me to question if sex is as bad as enslaving oneself to sexual taboos...

Somehow... I question if Christian fear of death, promises of reward and threats of punishment, ambitions of dominion or any of the other things that supposedly righteously get between people and life....

Really have the effects they're claimed to.

What if faith isn't about *control,* whether you compress yourself or press another to death or not?

What if...

Life and death are not commodities?

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | OCTOBER 12, 2007 11:44 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

I believe in death after life.

There's no avoiding it.

Religion has a big investment in death.

Without death,there would be no religion.

Without death,we wouldn't need God.

Death scares us.And religion promises us paradise,
if only we believe in magic,and the skygod.

But it's so darn childish I just can't do that.

I don't understand how ANYBODY can do that.

Maybe the only way a grown-up can believe this stuff,is to be indoctrinated as a child,which,mercifully I wasn't.

POSTED BY: YOYO | OCTOBER 12, 2007 7:51 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

John Stuart Mill;

"My father's rejection of all that is called religious belief was not,as many might suppose,primarily a matter of logic and evidence: the grounds for it were moral, more than intellectual. He found it impossible to believe that a world so full of evil was the work of a God combining infinite power with perfect goodness and righteousness.

His aversion to religion,in the sense usually attached to the term,was of the same kind with that of Lucretius; he regarded it with the feelings due not to mere mental delusion but to a great moral evil.

It would have been wholly inconsistent with my father's ideas of duty to allow me to acquire impressions contrary to his convictions and feelings respecting religion;and he impressed on me from the first that the manner in which the world came into existence was a subject on which nothing was known".

John Stuart Mill,quoted in "Why I Am Not A Christian",by Bertrand Russell.

POSTED BY: DREW | OCTOBER 12, 2007 6:11 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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