

Qx1 – Introduction to this “Quintessential Perspective” for Questioning the Quagmires, Quicksand, & Quackeries of “Revealed” Religions

Dear: Sorry about the title, but on the one hand, I gotta promote the “Q-theme” (☺), and on the other hand, the title’s length appropriately introduces the long trek ahead (☹). I can offer some consolation for the title, however, by mentioning that the purpose of this chapter is to explain the title!

To start, let me remind you of the “trail” that I’ve been pretending we’ve been walking on while I’ve been “talking”. Although I might have mentioned it once or twice before (grandfathers have a tendency to repeat themselves), once-upon-a-time, a long, Long, LONG, LONG time ago, a certain beautiful and brilliant four-year-old granddaughter asked me why I didn’t believe in God. A summary of my slightly delayed response (delayed more than a decade!) is: **Belief in god (any god) is bad science and even worse policy – sad personal policy and sick social policy.** In Part 3 of this book (i.e., in Chapters **J** through **Q**), I’ve been trying to show you what I mean by “Belief in god is... sad personal policy and sick public policy.” While presenting this assessment, to try to keep my sanity (☺), I’ve been pretending that I’ve been talking to you while walking on one of “my southern trails”, between the river and the mountains, up to the dam (used to divert water into the irrigation ditch). Now, in this “excursion” **Qx**, as if tramping through the river mud near the dam, I want to show you some details of the “pathetic policies” (both personal and public) advocated in the “holy books” of the principal, so-called “revealed” religions of our culture.

To start on this tromp through the mud and guck of these religions, I should alert you to a danger that earlier I didn’t realize. I wonder if you remember the time we walked to the dam when the river had almost dried up and you and your nearest-age brother wanted to walk out on the nearly dry riverbed. I reluctantly gave permission and followed you. And consistent with the “Q” theme of this excursion (☺), I’ll add that I had qualms about permitting the two of you to go out there, but I was in a quandary, because I was faced with the dilemma of not wanting to suppress your inquisitiveness while also not wanting you to be exposed to excessive danger. In turn, this quandary left me queasy.

Maybe you don't remember the incident, Dear, because (fortunately) nothing happened. But I sure remember it – because subsequently I learned (but not from personal experience!) that there are “quick-sand holes” in this part of the country: sand can appear to be safe (such as the sand on that river bed) but actually can belie holes filled with mud, from which it's essentially impossible to extricate oneself. Therefore, Dear, in the future, please be careful in the vicinity of any quagmire: beneath what appears to be safe footing can lurk significant danger. Similarly, in this excursion, I want to begin to show you some potential dangers lurking in the religious quagmires to which you have been exposed ever since you were a baby.

And if you think the warning in the previous paragraph sounds silly, Dear, let me mention something here that I'll try to explain more fully later in this book: your father fell into one such quick-sand hole, and after more than 20 years of my trying to help him out, he remained stuck in his religious quagmire. Consequently, although in this Qx I'll be encouraging you to read various “holy books” of our culture, at the outset I want to warn you about the dangers. In fact, I even want you to tie the following “life-line” around you for safety: if you feel your footing start to give way, then call me – or, if I'm no longer alive, call my wife (your grandmother) or my daughter (your aunt): they know how clerics can enslave a person, and provided that you haven't damaged your mind by taking mind-warping drugs, they'll probably be able to extricate you from any quicksand.¹

But pushing such horrors aside, let me turn toward describing the goal of this excursion Qx. What I want to do is dig into some quotations from various “holy books”, so you'll at least begin to feel queasy, with qualms and quandaries and more questions – just as how I felt when you asked permission to walk out on the dry riverbed. That is, although in some cases I'll expect you'll react more passionately, I hope you'll at least begin to question the wisdom of some of your religious indoctrination.

¹ Actually, Dear, my daughter recently informed me about something I should have realized – because it's obvious – and usually I can figure out stuff that's totally obvious by myself! Thus, given the usual mixture of water and sand of “quicksand”, a human body would be lighter than the mixture and therefore wouldn't sink! Consequently, the danger of quicksand isn't nearly so bad as is depicted in movies. Nonetheless, you can get stuck, exhaust yourself trying to get out, and die of starvation or exposure – if that's any comfort! Similarly, re. the quagmires of revealed religions, you needn't (and shouldn't) panic, trying to get out: there's time to think it through, talk to people such as me, my wife and daughter and other son [and now, your dad!], get your head screwed back on straight, and then emerge – no doubt bedraggled [viz., “dirty and disheveled”] by the experience, but otherwise “fit as a fiddle” to define your life for yourself.

PURPOSE OF THIS “EXCURSION”

Maybe my purpose for this Qx can be explained best by quoting one of Aesop’s fables:²

Aesop: The Ass in the Lion’s Skin

An Ass, having put on the Lion’s skin, roamed about in the forest and amused himself by frightening all the foolish animals he met in his wanderings. At last coming upon a Fox, he tried to frighten him also, but the Fox no sooner heard the sound of his voice than he exclaimed, “I might possibly have been frightened, myself, if I hadn’t heard your bray.”

As you know, Aesop included a moral for many of his fables. For this one, however, he didn’t; therefore, let me suggest one. **Dear, try to be like that fox: to decide if clerics are the lions that they claim to be or a bunch of braying asses, then read their holy books or listen to their sermons and harken to their braying!** But if that “doesn’t do it” for you, then how about this: the fact that all myths of all organized religions are scientifically silly doesn’t really matter; what matters is that most religious myths attempt to convey some “moral message” – and what I want to show you in this Qx is that many (if not most) of these moral messages are really quite horrible.

Of course, you’ve been taught otherwise. You’ve been taught, for example, that Jesus was “the most righteous of all beings”, and similar for the Mormon “heroes” Nephi, Moroni, and others. Meanwhile, Muslims are indoctrinated with the propaganda that Muhammad was “the most perfect – the most moral – of men.” In this Qx, in contrast, I’ll be emphasizing the immoralities of all of them. I expect, therefore, that you’ll have some difficulties agreeing with my conclusions (at least re. Christian and Mormon “heroes”). Consequently, Dear, to help you understand what I’ll be trying to show you, it would be helpful if you would begin to undertake a rather-challenging reading assignment, described as follows.

² Dear: You can find Aesop’s fables, e.g., at <http://classics.mit.edu/Aesop/fab.html>. As presented there, the fables were translated by George Fyler Townsend. Appended to this copy of Aesop Fables is the copyright statement: “The Internet Classics Archive by Daniel C. Stevenson, Web Atomics. World Wide Web presentation is copyright (C) 1994-1998, Daniel C. Stevenson, Web Atomics. All rights reserved under international and pan-American copyright conventions, including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form.” But surely no court would penalize me for quoting Aesop, when the slave of Samos freely gave his fables to all humanity more than 2500 years ago!!

Your Assignment!

Earlier, I suggested that you set aside a few hours each week to read this book. Now what I'd like you to do (if you plan to take this "excursion") is to set aside, in addition, a few hours each week to read the "holy books" that have been the source of your indoctrination [plus the "holy book" of Islam, the Quran (or Qur'an or Koran), if you're so inclined, e.g., to learn about what's "driving" the crazy terrorists]. Thus, Dear, I'm asking you to read, from cover to cover, first the Bible (both the Old and the New Testaments), then The Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price – and then, even the Quran (if you're so inclined). If you'll undertake this assignment, then you'll be able to better assess my evaluations of the same "data".

I recommend, Dear, that you obtain your own copies of these "holy books" and (if it's convenient for you) that you read the New English Bible (NEB) rather than the King James Version (KJV). I make this recommendation that you read the NEB (or a similar, modern-English version) mostly because it's easier to read; in addition, though, the NEB corrects some of the translation errors that exist in the KJV. But whatever version you obtain, I strongly recommend that you get your own copy – so you can make notes on it, or put "stickies" on it, for future reference. Similarly, Dear, please obtain your own copy of the Book of Mormon (BOM), and if you can't easily get a copy of the Doctrines and Covenants (D&C) and Pearl of Great Price (PGP), then "download" them from the internet. I would suggest, however, that you don't try to obtain your own copy of the Quran (even if you can find one in English rather than Arabic), both because I won't be spending much time on it and also because English translations are readily available on the web.

Of course, in conjunction with your reading those "holy books", I encourage you to read corresponding chapters of this **Qx**. For example, perhaps you would read a specific "chapter and verse" (e.g., in the Bible) either when I first reference it or after I comment on it. Alternatively, you might read a chapter from this book and then the corresponding chapter (or chapters) from the "holy book" being referenced. Also, I'll be encouraging you to visit various sites on the internet, which I'll identify, to dig deeper into specific topics in which my understanding is limited – I mean, more than my usual limitations!

And let me add an incidental note. I should admit that I'm somewhat reluctant to advise you to read the Book of Mormon (BOM), not because of its silliness, not because of its idiocies, not because of its corruption of data, and not because of the huge number of immoralities that it advocates – but solely because it's such an insult to the English language! In the most recent edition, apparently many thousands of spelling and punctuation errors that were in earlier editions were corrected (as you can confirm by exploring on the internet); yet, it still contains literally thousands of errors in English.

Let me put it this way. No good editor could possibly be a good Mormon! Worst is the general nature of the writing: if any seventh grader would have written a document so poorly, that seventh grader should be sent back to grade three or four, to learn how to convey ideas in writing. Mark Twain described the BOM as “chloroform in print” (and certainly its repetitions and cadences induced me to drowsiness), but I was kept awake by my anger: not only at the descriptions of so many immoralities, but by my disgust that, even after plagiarizing so much, the author of the BOM (almost certainly Sidney Rigdon) still couldn't convey his messages in half-decent English.

Yet, with all the defects and dangers, the quagmires and quicksand, in the “holy books” of our culture, I encourage you to read them (especially those of your mother's religion), just as she [and formerly your father], your other grandparents, and the leaders of the Mormon Church encourage you. Meanwhile, I expect you know that my encouragement has a purpose rather different from theirs!

SOME GENERAL FEATURES OF “REVEALED” RELIGIONS

Now, let me return to the main purpose of this chapter, i.e., preparing you for this “excursion” to what I call the “Quintessential Perspective” of the Quagmires, Quicksand, and Quackeries of “Revealed” Religions. At the outset, certainly I should mention that it's really quite a huge undertaking to show you even a little of the evidence supporting my claim that the religions of our culture promote pathetic policies (both personal and public). My proposed method is to quote at least some of these policies (as described in the principal “holy books” of our culture) and then examine these quotations from what I'm going to call a “quintessential perspective” – which will take me a while to explain.

At the outset, I should also mention that, although in this excursion I'll be emphasizing the policies proposed in various "holy books", these books of course contain much more. For example, I trust that you'll find that they contain some interesting phrases and concepts that permeate our culture; therefore, it should be useful for you to see their sources.

Religions as Businesses

More significantly, however, you should realize that the principal organized religions of our culture are big businesses: they advertise (and otherwise promote) various products and services to get customers "in the door", as with most businesses in our society, they promise more than they deliver and charge "as much as the traffic will bear", and if you'll dig into their finances (although it's hard to do, since they pay no taxes and therefore their financial "books" aren't "open to the public), you'll find that they're "making a killing" – fleecing their followers! That they do manage to "fleece their followers" results from a major difference between religions and other businesses in our society, described well as follows:³

[Other] Businesses may come and go, but religion will last forever, for in no other endeavor does the consumer blame himself for product failure!

In particular, Dear, when you read the various "holy books", I hope you'll notice (and I plan to alert you to) the many premisses, promises, and proposed purposes for humans that are "advertised". For example, consistent with their Zoroastrian roots, Christianity, Islam, and Mormonism (and some versions of Judaism) *promise* eternal life in various types of paradises (subject of course to various provisions, such as obeying their clerics), which in turn contains the *premisses* that people would want such a paradise, that the *purpose* of people is to get it, and that the clerics have the authority to offer it!

When you encounter such advertisements, I hope you'll pause to consider and question them – and I plan to stimulate you do so. For example, if your purpose is to be happy and if you're happy when you overcome obstacles, then as I've questioned you before, how could you be happy in any paradise containing no obstacles to overcome? And if there were obstacles, how could it be paradise? Duh.

³ I've seen a number of sources given for the origin of this quotation. Wayne Aiken gives the source as: Harvard Lamphoon, "Doon" (paraphrase).

Wouldn't you rather go to hell? That's where the real challenges would be! Imagine your happiness in hell when you found a way to use the advertised heat to power an air conditioner – and then, when you organized the people (who came to you to be cool!) to overthrow the tyrant who runs the place!

And if you think that's silly, Dear, then consider the alternative. I've seen a certain grandchildren who can't tolerate sitting around with nothing to do, without challenges, for as much as an hour, "bored out of their skulls"! So, which would be hell and which would be heaven? And so: the next time someone tells you to "go to hell", maybe you should ask: "Which one?"

The "Business" of Revelations

But enough of that for now. What I'd like you to consider, next, is the general idea of "revelations". Revelations are claimed to be "the essence" of the principal "holy books" of our culture; that is, these books allegedly contain "the revealed word" of God (or Allah), in the form of "divine revelations". The questions I pose for you are: what, exactly, is a "revelation" and to whom is a revelation revealed?

Now, Dear, please don't dismiss those questions as "trivial", because answering them "correctly" can have a major influence on your life. Let me phrase the question differently: if someone claims to have acquired "a divine revelation", then what criteria will you require the revelation to pass before you accept the person's claim?

For example, suppose that your nearest-age brother claimed that he had received a "divine revelation from God" that henceforth, every day, you were to make his bed? Why is it that I'm really quite confident that you would resoundingly reject his claim that what he received was a "divine revelation"? Why is it that, at this very instant in my mind, I can hear you respond to him with your familiar: "**Get real!**"

Why would you respond in that manner? For the moment accepting the possibility that your indoctrination has "taken" and, therefore, that you "believe" in the existence of a giant Jabberwock in the sky who doles out justice, why am I confident that you would unequivocally reject your brother's claim that, henceforth, you were to be his slave? Because you consider his claim to be unjust and you demand that all "revelations from God" reveal God's justice?

But your brother is a boy, and you've been indoctrinated with the idea that boys are better than girls; it therefore follows that... Or do you reject the "divine revelation" that boys are better than girls? Why? Because that would be unjust? Do you require that any revelation from God show fairness and reveal no preferential treatment for the "revealer" (or maybe it should be spelled "reveler", pronounced as the "revel" in "revelation")?

Be careful of what you require of your revelations, Dear, or soon you'll be rejecting a great number of revelations in the "holy books" of your mother's religion. As examples (details of which I'll provide in later chapters):

- According to the Old Testament (OT), Moses claimed the revelations that, after he had murdered an Egyptian, God dropped in to visit him, informing him that he was to specify a new set of laws for the Israelites (e.g., "thou shalt not murder"!), that he would become the leader of the Israelites (charging them plenty for leading them!), and that God would give the land of the Canaanites to the Israelites (which certainly wasn't "fair" to the Canaanites!)
- According to the New Testament (NT), the cleric's Jesus reportedly claimed the revelation that he would sit on the right hand side of God (benefiting the reveler but showing injustice to all people who are left-handed!)
- "Saint" Paul (who, I'll try to show you, was the real founder of Christianity and therefore of Mormonism) claimed that, while he was on the way to Damascus, Jesus appeared to him in a vision and revealed to him that he was to lead in the conversion of "gentiles" (i.e., non-Jews) to believe in still another version of Jewish balderdash (a revelation that was of great benefit to the vanity of "Saint" Paul – whose sanity, I'll show you, was questioned.)
- Muhammad claimed that God (aka "Allah") informed him (*via* the angel Gabriel) that he (Muhammad) was to convert the Arabs from their polytheism to monotheism; i.e., this was a claimed "revelation" to the "mad poet" (as Muhammad described himself!) that he was to be a "prophet" (and profit he did!), and
- Joseph Smith claimed the revelations that he was still another "prophet" who would profit from having as many wives as he wanted and from never having to work again (more revelations benefiting the reveler at other people's expense).

Thus, Dear, do you really require that any revelation from God reveal fairness, with no preferential treatment for the reveler? From their revelations, past "profits" gained far more than your brother would gain from your just making his bed every day!

So, Dear, again I ask you: why would you (I'm confident) reject your brother's revelation that you were to be his slave? Would you judge your brother "unworthy" to receive a revelation from God? And would you reach such a judgment in spite of the cleric's Jesus reportedly warning: "**Judge not, that ye be not judged.**" Aren't you worried that your brother (who claims to have a direct and open communication with the ruler of the universe) will end up sitting on the left-hand side of God and will judge you to be unworthy of a life of eternal bliss – because you refused to make his bed? Pretty gutsy, kid!

And you're especially gutsy if you reject your brother's "divine revelation" just because you consider him to be unworthy of being in direct communication with God. If you do require that anyone who receives a divine revelation must be "worthy" of such an "honor", then to be consistent, you'll need to reject most revelations in most "holy books"!

To see what I mean, consider some characteristics of the following revelers:

- As I'll detail later, the Bible describes Moses as a murderer both before and after he received his divine revelations
- As described in the Bible's *Gospel According to Mark*, "the cleric's Jesus" promoted not only the torture of humans but also their continued and continuous torture, forever
- As described in the *Gospel of Thomas*, "the Gnostics' Jesus" was a fanatic: without a shred of data to support his ideas, he promoted his ideas at the expense of normal relations among family members (e.g., "**Whoever does not hate father and mother cannot be my disciple, and whoever does not hate brothers and sisters... will not be worthy of me.**")
- As described in the New Testament's *Acts*, "Saint" Paul started his career by promoting the execution of those horrible people called Christians
- As you can find both in the Quran and by searching on the internet for "Muhammad's biography", Muhammad was (and continued to be) a robber, blackmailer, and butcher of humans (seeming to relish describing details about how to cut off heads, hands, and opposite limbs of his victims, e.g., the right arm and the left leg), and
- Joseph Smith, Jr., who freely admitted to his "wicked ways", was at least an adulterer and a convicted con artist, and unlike Socrates (who willingly stayed in jail and accepted the death sentence imposed on him by the people of Athens – to thereby support the Athenian justice system), Smith died in a jailhouse gunfight even before his trial.

So, Dear, I ask you: are you (renowned for seeking justice!) really being “fair” to your brother? I mean, on occasion maybe he doesn’t behave quite so well as you might hope, but surely you agree that he’s a “paragon of virtue” compared to those whom others accept as being sufficiently “virtuous” to have received divine revelations. Besides, your brother asks only that you make his bed, not for your utter devotion to him for the rest of your life – plus 10% of your income!

Revelations as Part of Clerical Con Games

So anyway, Dear, welcome to the quagmire of the “holy books” of our culture! Maybe you’re now beginning to experience what it’s like to try to make progress while your boots are stuck in the mud. And in case that ever happens to you, Dear, let me mention one way out: untie your boots and step out of them! Thus, Dear, from the perspective (of the barefoot!) naturalist, we see all this business of “divine revelations” as a con game, which (by the way) has become very big business, consuming a substantial fraction of the world’s economic output – my guess is that it totals to more than \$100 billion per year, which would be much better spent on teaching all children in the world some basic techniques of critical thinking.

But, Dear, even if you don’t agree that all “divine revelations” are part of a con game, I urge you to consider similarities between how a con artist “cons his mark” and how a reveler convinces a “revelee” to part with something of value. Thus, in all con games, for the reveler (e.g., your brother) to con the revelee (you) into believing in his divine revelation, entitling him to something of value (e.g., your making his bed), then the con artist must first build “the mark’s” confidence in the con artist’s capabilities. Thus, Dear, I expect that one reason you wouldn’t be cowed by your brother’s con is because he failed in the first task of any con artist: to build your confidence that he was worthy (or capable) of receiving divine revelations.

In fact, Dear, the toughest job of all con artists (including all “prophets of god”) has always been to gain their marks’ confidence (of the con-artist’s abilities, honesty, trustworthiness, etc). In this **Qx** (and more so in **Yx**), I’ll show you some examples, but here, I’ll first mention a principle that con artists summarize with the familiar: “You can never cheat an honest man.” Stated differently, through thousands of years of experiences, all con artists (e.g., clerics) have learned that, to be successful, they must offer their “marks” more than they deserve – and the more, the better.

For example, if a con artist offers to turn a mark's \$1 into \$10, then some people may buy the con artist's "bill of goods" and, thereby, display confidence in the con artist. In contrast, if a con artist offers to turn the mark's \$10 into \$10 million, then the con artist expects that many more people will buy into the scheme.

Similarly, quite a few people apparently bought into Moses' alleged offer to give them a "land of milk and honey" (even though the land belonged to another group of people). And similarly, many people (in different groups) bought into the alleged offer of the clerics' Jesus of eternal bliss (although he warned that it wasn't easy to win the prize). Others bought Muhammad's offer of a paradise that was easier to get into (plus other booty, including up to four wives per man while he's alive and 72 "perpetual virgins" after he dies – especially if he dies killing those who refused to buy into Muhammad's con game!). Still others bought Joseph Smith's offer not only of land, easy entry into an eternal bliss in paradise, and an unlimited number of wives per man, but even a personal "godship"! That is (surprise, surprise), many people will buy into a con artist's scheme – even treating the con artist as a "prophet of god" – if the payback is sufficiently alluring.

Actually, though, con artists have found that even fantastic offers are insufficient to develop the needed confidence in the minds of many marks: usually some "proof" of capability, or trustworthiness, or similar is needed. Recognizing this, there's almost no end to the trickery (or quackery) that con artists develop. If you want to gain some appreciation for how non-religious con artists perpetrate such frauds, you may want to rent the old movie entitled "The Flimflam Man". In Chapter **M1**, dealing with the origins of "The Mountainous God Lie", I showed you a little about similar quackery perpetrated by some religious con artists. In the excursion **Yx** (dealing with "Your Indoctrination in the Mountainous God Lie"), I'll show you at least a few details about how such religious con games developed. Here, without yet providing details and references, I'll just outline a few illustrations.

- The stories about Moses describe him to be a master magician, able to turn his wooden staff into a snake, transform the water of the Nile River to blood, part the Reed Sea, and so on.
- The stories about the clerics' Jesus describe him as performing many "miracles", including walking on water, curing illnesses and disabilities, bringing dead people (including himself!) back to life, and so on.

- Some claims are made about the “miracle healing-abilities” of “Saint” Paul; in contrast, I’m pleased to note that no mention is made in the Quran about Muhammad’s abilities to perform any miracles – although he did claim to have routine conversations with the angel Gabriel.
- And you know the stories about the magical abilities of Joseph Smith, Jr., including the ability to translate documents into English from “reformed Egyptian” (a nonexistent language!) using his magical “seer stone” (which his neighbor found while digging for “treasures” after the “money digger” Smith had “divined” the treasurer’s location).

There is, however, a facet of all such quackery that perhaps you didn’t notice and that illustrates another trick that successful con artists have perfected. This additional trick is to keep moving! Maybe con artists continue to move because they quickly run out of “marks”. Or maybe they keep moving because their quackery is discovered. And maybe religious con artists, in particular, keep moving because tales of their capabilities seem to grow in grandeur the farther they travel from the site of their original “miracles”! Whatever the reason, there does seem to be a pattern in their method. Thus, Moses reportedly kept moving for 40 years, Jesus was always wandering, Muhammad was always moving, and as you well know, similarly for Joseph Smith. For contrast, Dear, think of Socrates, who never seems to have ventured even from the city of Athens.

In view of the above, Dear, maybe you see more reasons why (I suspect) that you’d reject any “divine revelation” from your brother that, henceforth, you were to make his bed. First, you know him too well – he hadn’t adequately perfected the technique of “hit and run”. Also, he failed to build your confidence in him: first, he might have at least tried to pull off a few magic stunts! Further, he failed to offer you any significant return for your “investment” – he might have at least tried something similar to: “I have had a divine revelation, informing me that if you make my bed from now on, then every Christmas, Santa will give you whatever you desire.”

That is, to be successful, a con artist must be a sufficiently astute to know what will sell, i.e., what his “marks” will be willing to buy. In general, a mark’s vulnerability to a con artist’s “pitch” increases with the mark’s perception of profit, not only financially but also mentally (including support for deeply felt opinions, prejudices, and beliefs).

For religious con artists, in particular, for a “revelee” (mark) to accept a “reveler’s” (con-artist’s) claim, it seems that the revelation must be consistent with the mark’s basic concept of God (e.g., all powerful, totally honest and just, etc.) and with the mark’s basic prejudices (e.g., that the mark’s beliefs are good, that the mark is “entitled” to “salvation”, and so on). And certainly any successful con artist must know how to capitalize on a mark’s irrational greed.

Thus, although most people want more than they deserve (i.e., most people are greedy), those who buy into con games irrationally expect to get more than they deserve (i.e., some people are irrationally greedy). For example, Dear, think of the few people throughout history who (you might think) would be “worthy” of “eternal life”. Although I’ve never given the matter much thought (because it’s a silly concept), let me mention the names of a few people whom I would certainly expect to be nominated: Shin-eqi-uninni (author of the most complete version of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*), Homer, Socrates, Hippocrates, Aristotle, Epicurus, Marcus Aurelius (the “emperor-philosopher” of Rome), Omar Khayyam, Leonardo de Vinci, Shakespeare, Francis Bacon, Galileo, Newton, Leibniz, David Hume, Robert Burns, Voltaire, Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Mozart, Beethoven, Fourier, Laplace, Charles Darwin, Robert Ingersoll, Robert Frost, Maxwell, Boltzmann, Plank, Einstein,...

Now, Dear, for contrast, think of the literally billions of people who, in their irrational greed, bought into the con game that they, too, “deserved” eternal life – even though, in many cases, a “fair judge” might be expected to conclude that they didn’t “deserve” even the life they had! Among the latter, I would include the murderer Moses and those who promoted torturing billions of humans for eternity (including the “clerics’ Jesus”, Muhammad, and Joseph Smith). In fact, if you would ask me for nominees for such eternal torture, then...

GENERAL FEATURES OF OUR CULTURE’S “HOLY BOOKS”

But enough of all the mud and guck of revelations and associated con games. Now, I want to turn toward other aspects of reading the principal “holy books” of our culture, starting with why such books are called “holy”! If you’ll think about the matter for a minute or so, I think you’ll agree that calling a book “holy” is simply a matter of convention, a convention adopted only by “believers” of the associated religion.

Thus, Mormons consider their religious books to be “holy”, but Muslims, Christians, and Jews consider the same books to be “only the works of men”. Similar occurs for the “holy books” of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism: all followers of any religion don’t consider the books of other religions to be “holy”. Meanwhile, I (and other “nonbelievers in religious balderdash”), being famously agreeable (☺), agree with Thomas Paine and all religious people when they talk about other religion’s holy books: none is “holy”!

Next, consider the sheer bulk of such “holy books”. For example, in preparation for taking you on this “excursion”, I read the entire Bible, which (including “The Apocrypha” and for the rather small print-size in my copy) has $1164 + 275 + 336 = 1775$ pages (of sometimes very slow reading of very convoluted and confusing text). I also read all the “holy book” of Mormonism, which didn’t take me very long to read (but the poor English throughout the Mormon “holy books” was almost more than I could bear). I also read the entire Quran, and would add here: as a literary production, I found it to be even worse than the Book of Mormon (which some people might think would be impossible, but I suppose that the cause is partly that readily available translations from Arabic aren’t in very stimulating English). I also read at least some of Islam’s “Hadiths” (i.e., “traditions” allegedly containing saying by Muhammad) and did some reading about Zoroastrianism (available online) and from some of the “holy books” of Hinduism, as well as re-read some about Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism (although these later three aren’t really religions but rather, old philosophies – containing some good ideas).

Some Different Perspectives

But for what I’m leading up to, more relevant than mentioning the depiction of such books as “holy” and their bulk is to mention (and try to explain) that all “holy books” can be read from many different perspectives, like reading any book with different kinds and amounts of lighting. Each perspective results in different “illuminations”. Of these many perspectives, I’ll try to explain five in the subsections to follow: those of the “literalist”, the “allegorist”, the historian (e.g., “Biblical scholars”), the scientist, and a fifth – for which I don’t think there’s a “standard name” but which I’ll call “the quintessential perspective”. In this “excursion” **Qx**, I’ll emphasize this quintessential perspective; in it, my goal is “simply” to show you some of the personal and public policies advocated in the “holy books” of our culture.

Perspectives of “Literalists”

“Literalists” of course take their “holy books” literally, meaning that they take every statement in (for example) the Bible or the Quran or the Book of Mormon to be exactly “true”, i.e., “the revealed word of God”. These literalists are also commonly called “fundamentalists”, e.g., “Christian fundamentalists” and “Muslim fundamentalists”, although sometimes it’s more accurate to describe them as “fanatics” and in some cases “terrorists”.

For example, using the literalists’ perspective, groups of Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and Mormon fundamentalists called “creationists” apparently “believe” that some giant Jabberwock in the sky actually did create the world in exactly six days, exactly as described in the Bible, totally disregarding the geological and fossil records. As other examples, various literalists (or fundamentalists) use statements in the Bible or the Quran or the Book of Mormon to support some really sick public policies, such as slavery, racism, male chauvinism, and polygamy, as well as murdering “heretics”, burning witches, torturing scientists, persecuting homosexuals, promoting terrorism, initiating wars, and so on.

As you might expect, my assessment of literalists is that they have dysfunctional brains. Literalists are similar to young children who “believe” TV-cartoons to be “true”. Most literalists are among the least intelligent and most poorly educated adults, but some who claim to be literalists are actually quite intelligent and well educated. Typically, however, such people just cynically and deceptively claim to be literalists, using their claims to promote some other objective (usually associated with their gaining power over people of lower intelligence and less education). To identify if someone is (or claims to be) a literalist, Dear, listen for asinine braying such as that from President Clinton “**The Bible is the authoritative Word of God and contains all truth**” or (at the opposite end of the political spectrum) from the 1990 Republican Presidential Candidate Pat Robertson’s “**Look, my view is, I believe God created heaven and earth... I think this: What ought to be taught as fact is what is known as fact. I don’t believe it is demonstrably true that we have descended from apes...**”⁴

⁴ As reported by Leah Garchik in the San Francisco Chronicle, 27 November 1995, and as given in Aiken’s compilation at <http://www4.ncsu.edu/~aiken/>.

Perspectives of “Allegorists”

In contrast to literalists, “allegorists” don’t take (for example) the Bible literally, but only allegorically, that is (according to Webster’s dictionary) as a group of stories “in which people, things, and happenings have a hidden or symbolic meaning.” Alternatively it’s said that allegorists interpret statements in the Bible (for example) not literally but “figuratively”, that is (according to Webster’s): “not in its original, usual, literal, or exact sense or reference [but] representing one concept in terms of another that may be thought of as analogous with it; metaphorically.”

Actually, allegories and fables have similarities – but also, differences. To explain, I’ll quote from http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms_F.html:

FABLE: A brief story illustrating a moral. Unlike parables, fables often include talking animals or animated objects as the principal characters. The interaction of these animals or inanimate things reveals general truths about human nature, i.e., a person can learn practical lessons from the fictional antics in a fable. However, the lesson learned is not allegorical. Each animal is not necessarily a symbol for something else. Instead, the reader learns the lesson as an *exemplum* – an example of what one should or should not do.

Earlier in this chapter, I already showed you one of Aesop’s fables; in chapters to follow, I’ll show you more. And though there’s the indicated difference between fables and allegories, I’ll add: What a contrast Aesop provides to all clerical allegorists; one Aesop is worth more than a million of them! It’s astounding to me that Aesop saw so much so early: he lived more than 500 years before Jesus allegedly lived, and mentally, he was thousands of years ahead of all currently living “devout” Mormons, Muslims, Christians, and Jews! But I won’t try to defend those statements; I’ll leave it to you to come to your own conclusions after you’ve read more. Instead, Dear, please permit me to try to pass on some “words of wisdom” to you: promise yourself to read all of Aesop’s fables!⁵

To encourage you to read Aesop’s fables, consider the following paragraph that I found on the internet written by Donna L. Preble in her article about Aesop entitled *The Storyteller from Samos*. I’ve put the last sentence in this quotation in italics in hopes that you don’t miss it.

Aesop did not put his fables into writing. Neither did the tales he told all originate with him. He often took them from existing folk traditions. The fable holds a special

⁵ Available, e.g., at www.classics.mit.edu – or borrow the copy I gave to your brother!

kind of wisdom, the wisdom of collective folk experience, but usually expressed in the words and deeds of animals. Although possibly deriving from a common Indo-European source and carried by migrating peoples East and West, the “beast fable” emerged in literary form independently in India and Greece... The fable is not, like myth, a revelation of transcendental mysteries, but a clever illustration of a political or ethical point. *Fables are not to be believed but understood.*

Thereby, what an astounding contrast there is between Aesop’s fables and religious parables, such as those in the Bible. Aesop’s fables convey moral messages with imaginative, entertaining stories about animals (the original cartoons!) – stories that “are not to be believed but understood.” In contrast, all “holy books” attempt to convey moral messages with stories about their gods – doctrine and dogma *to be believed rather than understood!* If Bill Gates would like ideas for how to use some of his enormous wealth to benefit humanity, I’d recommend that he offer to trade 10 new copies of Aesop’s fables for any copy of any “holy book” – and then burn all the “holy books” he collects!

Anyway, Dear, skeptics (such as I) generally give more credit to the intelligence of allegorists than of literalists (many of us even question the sanity of literalists); yet, allegorists can also be a pain. Clerics who promote the allegorical view of course find bountiful employment “explaining” to their “faithful flocks” all the hidden and symbolic meanings of all the parables! And it’s not that skeptics are opposed to alternative interpretations of various allegories and parables, but allegorists become a real pain when they claim (as clerics commonly do) that the only “correct” interpretations of the allegories are their own!

Actually, most if not all religions initially conveyed their messages allegorically. In the Bible’s New Testament (NT), for example, the authors (whom I call “the clerics”) have the disciples of Jesus asking him why he didn’t speak more plainly, to which he reportedly responded (*Matthew 13, 11-14*):

“It has been granted to you [the apostles] to know the secrets of the kingdom of Heaven; but to those others [the people] it has not been granted. For the man who has [whatever!?] will be given more, till he has enough and to spare; and the man who has not will forfeit even what he has. That is why I speak to them in parables; for they look without seeing, and listen without hearing or understanding.”

The above continues to be a fairly good description of the “allegorists”, which in plainer words is: the people are too dumb to understand; they just love the mesmerizing sounds of lilted words.

Actually, though, if Jesus existed (as other than as a character in a fable, similar to William Tell, Robin Hood, and King Arthur), I rather doubt that the above is an accurate report of what he said – or maybe I should say that I rather hope that the above is not what he said! – because it’s an atrocious attitude for any teacher to take. If students don’t understand their teacher, the teacher should blame himself, not the students, and seek better ways to convey his message. For example, if the writers of the NT had been more perceptive (or if they were sufficiently perceptive, then if they had been more honest), they would have claimed that “the clerics’ Jesus” (i.e., the Jesus of the NT) said something closer to:

I speak in parables because, rather than possessing knowledge, I have only the vague feelings that each of us is a part of the whole universe. Further, I have the feelings that those of us who are good are like the light while those who are bad are like the dark. And whereas I have only these vague feelings, I therefore do my best to convey these feelings to you as best I can, using analogies and parables.

I blame “the clerics” for inadequate reporting, because in the “Gnostics’ Bible” (details of which I’ll get to later), the reporters conveyed Jesus’ message much more clearly. For example, the Gospel of Thomas reports that Jesus said:

“I am the light that is over all things... Split a piece of wood; I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there.”

That is, according to “the Gnostics’ Jesus” (as opposed to “the clerics’ Jesus”), once you split the piece of wood or lift the stone, you’ll find light there – provided that you’re not (like a cleric) perpetually in the dark! (☺)

Later in this Qx and more so in Yx, I’ll go into details about how the Gnostics’ Jesus came to the crazy conclusion that he (and everyone who realized it) was a part of “light”, which was his god. For now, I’ll just summarize by saying that, basically, the Gnostics’ Jesus mixed together Persian (i.e., Zoroaster’s) ideas about “the good light” with Egyptian ideas about the soul, concluding that everyone’s soul possessed some of this “good light” and that to be “saved” and to experience the “kingdom of heaven” (which he considered to be here on Earth – an attitude within each

person) then all we need do is realize that each of us has a “spark” of this “good light” (the “good essence” or the “quintessence”) within us.

But more to the point that I was trying to get to, usually it’s a “happy time” when a religion is in its formative stage. “Apostles”, “disciples”, and “converts” attempt to understand the parables and “the messages in the myths” of their “teacher”, and in the process, usually there’s much discussion about the meanings. Also, commonly there’s friendly sharing of rather-loosely held opinions. Eventually, though, dogma sets in: a fixed, rigid, official, or “orthodox” interpretation of the religion’s myths is first adopted by “the priests” and then eventually enforced. This enforcement has varied from “excommunication” of “the sinners” (who don’t accept the orthodox interpretations) to torturing and murdering “the heretics”. In the process, to survive, allegorists become literalists!

Actually, if one could ignore the inhumanities that the clerics perpetrate during this transformation of allegorists into literalists, one could probably see substantial humor in the process. For example, in the case of Christianity (and similar occurred in Judaism and Islam), the Gnostics (to be described later) seem to have been the original allegorists, but by about 500 CE, almost all of them had been massacred by the Catholics, who became the first Christian literalists. But the original parables contained so little information (and therefore, permitted so many interpretations) that other literalists successfully forced their own interpretations, leading first (in about 1000 CE) to the split of “the Catholics” into those who followed either the Roman Catholic Church or the Greek Orthodox Church. Subsequently, starting about 1500 CE, during “the Reformation”, the Roman Catholics were fractured into a huge number of “splinter groups”, including Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists, and so on. Further, a particular (fourth-order?) split, which unfortunately became of special importance to certain grandchildren, was the fracturing of the literalist Baptists into various splinter groups. One of these “splinter Baptist groups” was led by Sidney Rigdon, who then apparently massaged a novel that he had stolen (a fictitious story about how the first Americans populated the continent) into what he called the Book of Mormon, to promote his particular literalist view of the Bible. Meanwhile, the humor of it all is seen in the punch line: currently, all except the most “radical fundamentalists” in all branches of Christianity (including Mormonism) have renounced literalism and claim to be allegorists!

Perspectives of Historians

In the above (long!) paragraph, I included some shades from the historical perspective. There is, however, much more to the historical interpretation of any “holy book”. In the historical approach, in essence, historians acknowledge only the existence of some “holy book” and then address the deceptively simple question: “How did it get here?”

If you’ll think about that question, Dear, I’m sure you’ll see that it’s astoundingly difficult to answer. It’s already difficult to determine the origin of ideas in any old book (given the normal difficulty of discerning what actually occurred from records that usually deteriorate). But in the case of the various “holy books” of our culture, there are huge additional complications, caused by deliberate clerical destruction of ancillary records from “competing” religions (e.g., the “Gospels” of the Gnostics) and caused by deliberate clerical deceptions (e.g., by altering records that would have shown natural origins of their “supernatural” religions).

Later in this excursion, I’ll give you at least a few glimpses from “the historical perspective” of the main “holy books” of our culture; in **Yx**, I’ll show you more. When I do, I hope you’ll begin to appreciate the enormous efforts and accomplishments of historians: many of them clearly spent decades digging into details with astounding care and resourcefulness. In addition, when I show you more from the historical perspective, I trust that you’ll appreciate that I’m no historian! I spent my life studying and working in science. I’ve tried to learn a little history while preparing this book for you, but I admit to having learned relatively little. If you want to learn more, then you’ll need to dig into the details yourself.

But immediately I would caution you, Dear, to think carefully about the matter if you should think about becoming a historian. As far as I can make it out, not only is history a field of endeavor that requires enormous diligence, patience, and perseverance, it’s a field crowded with very competent people and with relatively little support from the public (i.e., relatively few jobs). Therefore, unless you’re prepared to make a life-long commitment of enormous dedication to your profession and are comfortable with the likelihood of poor job prospects, then perhaps you should think of doing something simpler – such as becoming a rocket scientist or similar! Yet, Dear, except for that “warning”, I don’t actually discourage you from becoming an historian – though I think that you could better help humanity by becoming a scientist, or the President of this country, or...!

Perspectives of Scientists

A fourth perspective for reading any “holy book” is that of a scientist – a perspective that I plan to avoid, for reasons that I’ll try to illustrate later in this chapter. But though I plan to avoid this perspective, let me at least briefly describe it: this perspective is the one your father and I (and thousands of other scientists) use to review scientific papers. In such reviews, the fundamental question addressed is: how good is the science? In the case of the “holy books” of our culture, let me summarize the reason why I’m certainly not going to read any of them from a scientific perspective: the science is so bad that it can’t even be called science. If a friendly editor of a scientific journal sent me even a portion of one of these books to review, I’d try to discern a way to send the editor, in return, something that would cause also the editor to burst out laughing!

Let me try to explain what I mean. In general, Dear, please notice that the essence of any “revelation” (divine or otherwise) is the trivially obvious concept: all “revelations” are just ideas. Therefore, if you seek to know how much “faith” to allot any “revelation”, Dear, then subject it to the same set of conditions that you demand of any idea.

To remind you of those conditions, maybe you recall (from Chapter **I2**, entitled “Some Basic Ideas in Science”) my analogy between assessing ideas and filtering a sediment-loaded river for some gems. From walking on my “southern trail” with me, maybe you also recall that the nearby river is very muddy, loaded with sand and silt. Well, that sediment-loaded river is similar to the flood of ideas (or speculations or revelations) in all “holy books”. And in making any scientific assessment of any “holy book”, the first task is to filter out (from the river of ideas) the suspended silt and sand that can justifiably be called “hypotheses”. Then, the next step is to search through all the sediment (the hypotheses) to find those few nuggets (if any!) that can justifiably be called “understanding” (or “useful working hypotheses”). And of course there are additional steps: keep on testing predictions of all the “useful working hypotheses”, until everyone is so “sick and tired” of such testing that we all decide to call them “scientific principles”.

Let me state that again, without using that “muddy-river analogy”, i.e., let me try to show you what I mean from a literal rather than an allegorical perspective! Thus, start from the statement (with which I suspect even all religious people will agree) that all “divine revelations” are just ideas –

although they may object to the adjective “just”! Consequently, in viewing any “holy book” from a scientific perspective, Dear, you should subject all revelations (i.e., all ideas) to the same filtering process used for all ideas. Thus, never mind the fairness of the idea, its beneficiaries, the character of the “reveler”, the hopes, ambitions, greed, etc. of the “revelee” (although these may stimulate your skepticism!); instead, in the end, demand only that any idea pass the same criteria that all ideas must pass before you accept them as “working hypotheses”.

Specifically, as I showed you in Chapter **I2**, the following questions should be asked (or, better, demanded!) of any idea:

- Does the idea summarize any direct data? Is the hearsay evidence reliable? What is the nature of the circumstantial evidence?
- Is the idea stated succinctly – or can it be shaved with Ockham’s razor?
- Does the idea conflict with established scientific principles?
- Does the idea provide testable predictions?
- Have the predictions passed or failed experimental tests?

If any idea (“divine revelation” or otherwise) fails to yield satisfactory answers to any of these questions, then, Dear, toss it where it belongs: into the trashcan of human mistakes.

From a scientific perspective, claims that any ideas are “divine revelations” are neither accepted nor rejected but considered irrelevant: from the scientific perspective, the only relevant questions are those dealing with the quality of the ideas. Thereby, Dear, please don’t accept any interpretation of anything by anyone (including me!) who starts out by saying, in effect, “this is the way it is.” Instead, seek to understand what the data suggest. It’s a horrible policy (personal or public) to lock oneself into a specific interpretation of anything: stay loose; see what new data tell you.

Perhaps I should mention, also, two obvious ways to view any “holy book” from a scientific perspective. One way is to view it “microscopically”, as if one could examine each idea “under a microscope”. I’ll show you an example later in this chapter. In an earlier chapter (**Ix5**, entitled “Flood & Genesis Myths in the Bible”), I illustrated the method by showing you how

the Bible's first genesis myth violates established scientific results in astronomy, biology, botany, etc. and how the Noah flood myth violates established ideas in meteorology, geology, and engineering.

From such examples, you might conclude (as you'd probably expect) that examining the science in any "holy book" microscopically can become extremely tedious. What follows is a list of a few ideas in the Quran and other "holy books" of Islam (e.g., the Hadith) whose "science" is ridiculous. The list⁶ was posted by "NoShackles" in the *Comments* associated with the report by Bilal Farooqi entitled "Being Pakistani and atheist a dangerous combo, but some ready to brave it", published in the 17 September 2011 issue of *Pakistan Today*:

The Earth is not flat. (Quran 15:19, 20:53, 50:7...)
 The Sun does not set in "a spring of murky water." (Quran 18:86)
 The Sun and moon do not orbit the Earth. (Qur'an 21:33)
 Stars are not lamps to be used as missiles for Shai'tan [Satan]. (Qur'an 67:5)
 The Moon is nowhere close to any star. (Qur'an 71:15-16)
 [There's] no evidence that the Moon was ever split in two. (Qur'an 54:1)
 The Earth was not created in 6 days; rather it took billions of years. (Qur'an 50:38)
 Human(s) living for 900+ years [!] (Qur'an 29:14)
 Humans transforming into apes and pigs [!] (Qur'an 2:65)
 Mythical creatures (Jooj/ Ma'jooj) still reside on this planet [!] (Qur'an 21:96)
 Living inside a fish. (Qur'an 37:142)
 Ocean split into half. (Qur'an 2:50)
 Creation in an instant, goes against the scientific consensus on evolution through natural selection. (Qur'an 2:117)

Need I list more? Perhaps a sampling from Hadith?

Adam was 90ft tall. Whaaaat? (Sahih Bukhari 4:55:543)
 Women are deficient in intelligence. (Sahih Bukhari 3:48:826)
 Looking at the sky while praying may cause blindness. (Sahih Bukhari 1:12:717)
 Fever is caused by heat from Hell. (Sahih Bukhari 7:71:619)
 Camel urine as a medicine. (Sahih Muslim 16:4130)
 Eating 7 Ajwa can mitigate effect of poison. Willing to test it? (Sahih Bukhari 7:65:356)

In later chapters in this "excursion" (namely, **Qx21–24**, all entitled "LDS Ludicrousness"), I'll subject at least a few of the ideas in the Book of Mormon to similar "microscopic examinations", but as I already mentioned,

⁶ Available at <http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2011/09/being-pakistani-and-atheist-a-dangerous-combo-but-some-ready-to-brave-it/>.

in general I plan to avoid such examinations – except on a few occasions – and mostly to provide some comic relief!

A second way to examine any “holy book” from a scientific perspective, besides microscopically, is “macroscopically” (or maybe “telescopically”) i.e., to try to get an overall picture, similar to viewing the Earth from a satellite. I don’t intend to pursue such a procedure, in part because, if I did, this whole “excursion” would be reduced to not much more than a single paragraph! Thus, in sum, the Bible and the Koran attempt to “explain” how everything was formed, but they’re wrong! In addition, the Book of Mormon attempts to explain the origin of Native Americans; it, too, is wrong. As M.M. Mangasarian summarized:

Religion is the science of children; science is the religion of adults.

The Proposed “Quintessential” Perspective

Which then brings to me the fifth perspective for reading any “holy book”, the method that I plan to use for this **Qx** and that I’ve called “the quintessential perspective” or “quintessential approach” – partly as a joke (pursuing the “Q-theme”). And in case you don’t get “the joke”, Dear, let me ruin it (☹), with the following details.

In ancient philosophy, the “quintessence” was (literally) “the fifth essence” of which everything was assumed to be composed, with the first four being earth, air, fire, and water. This “fifth essence” (the quintessence) was assumed to be ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’. Further, according to Constantin-Francois de Volney (1757–1820), who wrote an astounding book whose short title is *The Ruins* and which is available on the internet, the unspoken name of the Jewish god Yahweh (which is incorrectly translated from the Hebrew into English as Jehovah) means “essence (of being)”, i.e., the same as “soul of the universe”. In Egyptian this “soul of the universe” was “Ioupiter”, and then in Latin, it became “You-piter”, evolving to Jupiter, which is one of many symbols for the clerics’ Jesus. Thus, Dear, the “quintessence” is actually what the Bible (and the Quran and the Book of Mormon) is “all about”, i.e., Ioupiter → Yahweh → Jupiter → Jesus → soul of the universe → the quintessence.

But actually, none of the above is really why I propose to call my approach a “quintessential” approach! Instead, because “quintessential” has come to mean “the real essence” or “the most important feature” of anything, and

because what I seek to show you of our culture's "holy books" is their "quintessence", therefore my naming of this approach. And what (a certain grandchild might be asking) is the "quintessence" of these holy books? Funny you should ask, because I was just going to answer that question: **the quintessence of all "holy books" is the policies they propose – and it's the policies that I intend to expose in this "excursion"**.

In this quintessential approach, generally I'll ignore any science that the "holy books" of our culture contain. In addition, I won't quibble over distinctions between literal *versus* allegorical interpretations. Instead, in whatever way possible, I want "just" to understand the "messages" these books contain. Yet, let me warn you in advance: as I'll show you, sometimes the messages become so confusing and the policies so crazy (and commonly so disgusting), that I've had to shine a little historical light to try to see what "messages" the crazy clerics who wrote the books were trying to convey!

An Illustration of the Different Perspectives

To try to do a better job of explaining the message that I'm trying to convey, let me give you an example. For this, consider the following first few lines from the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible's *Book of Genesis* (usually shortened to just *Genesis*).

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
And the earth was without form, and void;
and darkness was upon the face of the deep.
And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.
And God said, Let there be light; and there was light.
And God saw the light, that it was good;
and God divided the light from the darkness.
And God called the light Day, and darkness he called Night.
And the evening and the morning were the first day.

I chose to quote the KJV of the Bible (rather than a version written in more modern English), to make the following point. Thus, Dear, without yet illustrating any of the five perspectives outlined above, maybe you'd first notice an amazing feature of the above quotation, namely, its rhythmic and mesmerizing (mind-numbing) qualities. The source may be that, of the 88 words quoted, 16 (or 18%) are "the", 13 (or 15%) are "and", and 6 (or 7%) are "God". That is 35 of the 88 quoted words (40% of them!) are just the three words: "the", "and", and "God"! Maybe it's this repetition that gives

this quotation (and much of the KJV) its mesmerizing quality. But that point aside, it's obviously the case that, with 40% of the words being “the”, “and”, and “God”, relatively few words remain to convey any message! It's similar to the way a young couple commonly convey their feelings to each other, using many words to say relatively little.

Thereby, maybe you see another, potentially productive perspective to view any “holy book”, namely, a psychological perspective (or a “**psychologist's perspective**”). Such a perspective seems especially appropriate when one realizes that all con artists (all clerics!) manipulate people's wants and fears, i.e., they're the original psychologists! Further, recall that the religious idea of ‘belief’ is derived from the root, Anglo-Saxon word ‘lief’, meaning ‘wish’; so, what religious people “believe” is what they “wish to be”. Consequently, I expect it would be quite productive (quite revealing) to focus just on how “holy books” manipulate people's feelings – but in what follows, throughout **Qx**, I'll also ignore this psychological perspective.

So, with that point made, now consider the above passage from a **literalist's perspective**. For literalists, everything written in their “holy books” is the exact “truth”. In response, anyone whose brain still functions would say something similar to: “**Ya gotta be kidding!**” I'll now expand on that response by viewing the quotation from a (microscopic) **scientist's perspective**. From such a perspective, it's seen immediately (i.e., starting at “the beginning”), that the first sentence doesn't address any “absolute beginning”; instead, it simply defines its use of the word ‘beginning’. Therefore, the topic sentence of the paragraph could alternatively be written (with more information and less mesmerization): “**This paragraph concerns ‘the beginning’, defined to be the time when God created heaven and earth.**” Alternatively, the sentence could be written as: “**Define ‘beginning’ to be the time when God created heaven and earth.**”

Those alternatives, however, lead to major problems. Thus, the reader is next led to the question: “**What was going on before this ‘beginning’?**” Unfortunately, no answer is supplied. Additionally, an inquisitive reader might remark: “**You forgot to define ‘God’.**” And of course that leads to a seemingly endless series of questions:

What was God doing before “the beginning”? Where did he come from? Who made him? What are some of his characteristics? From what material did he make “heaven and earth”? What was the process? What was the design?

Thus, from a scientific perspective, the first sentence of the Bible is off to a very poor start, raising far more questions than it purports to answer!

Now, in an attempt to view these first lines of the Bible in the most favorable light, let me “shine a little light” from a **historian’s perspective**. Without yet considering the historical origin of the above quotation, I’ll acknowledge that its original statement is almost certainly lost. Thus, part of this book called *Genesis* were probably first communicated only orally for at least a thousand years, and all of *Genesis* was probably first written, roughly in its present form, approximately 2500 years ago. Subsequently, the text has suffered through a large number of rewrites and translations into other languages (such as Greek, then Latin, and then English). In the meantime, meanings for many words have changed. As a result, anyone trying to evaluate the ideas contained in the Bible should allow considerable leeway for intentional or unintentional misrepresentations of the original ideas.

Thus, consider again the first sentence of the Bible: **“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.”** For now, I’ll ignore the facts that this sentence only defines “the beginning” and fails to define “God”, and instead, I’ll consider the expected intent of the words “heaven” and “earth”. In our day, we have our ideas of “heaven” (as in “the stars in heaven”), but from what is reported in *Genesis* to have occurred on the second day (viz., water was separated into a part on Earth and a part **“in heaven”**, from which rain later reportedly falls), on the fourth day (viz., stars were made and **“placed in the vault of heaven”**), and on the fifth day (viz., birds were made to fly **“across the vault of heaven”**), it therefore appears that the original intent would have been more closely preserved if use was made of the word “sky” rather than “heaven”.

Similarly, given the many later references in the Bible to the idea of a flat earth, it appears that the original intent would have been more closely preserved if use were made of the word “land” rather than “earth”. Consequently, Dear, in an attempt to examine the original ideas in *Genesis* in their most favorable, historical light (for otherwise, as I’ll show you, the ideas seem even more bizarre!), I would give the original author (or authors) the benefit of the doubt and read the first sentence in a form something similar to: **“In the beginning God created the atmosphere and the land.”**

Now, Dear, consider the above (believe it or not) favorable interpretation of the first sentence from *Genesis*. Whereas this sentence only defines “the beginning” and doesn’t define “God”, it could be replaced with: “**Assume the existence of air and land.**” As for the quality of the ideas contained therein, I think that the author deserves credit: I, for one, am quite willing to accept the assumption of the existence of air and land as a useful working hypothesis. I’d even go so far as to call it a fundamental scientific principle, right up there with other “existence axioms” (that I’ll get to later).

Unfortunately, though, the quality of the ideas in the Bible’s first paragraph then quickly begins to deteriorate. Thus, when viewed in the most favorable light that I can apply to it, this first paragraph in *Genesis* becomes:

Assume the existence of air and land. Originally, the land was flat and empty and dark, with the land covered with water. Somehow, light was then created – and luckily, an off-on switch for the light was found.

Now, I’ll go back to the first sentence and the assumed existence of air and land (or, if you prefer, of earth and heaven), with the land covered by water, and reconsider it from a (macroscopic) **scientific perspective**. As you know, water contains hydrogen and oxygen. If the air had anything similar to the current elemental composition (and nothing in the Bible suggests otherwise), then the air had substantial nitrogen, oxygen, and many other elements such as argon, carbon, and so on. And if the land had a composition anything similar to its current composition, then it had even heavier elements (such as silicon, iron, uranium, and so on, i.e., the metals).

So, pray tell, how does the author of *Genesis* account for such heavy elements? Modern science suggest that, at least “near the beginning” (i.e., after the Big Bang), the predominant element in the universe was hydrogen (as it still is, save for whatever might be the elemental composition of “dark matter”), and only within stars are the heavy elements created (through the fusion of lighter nuclei, in turn caused by the enormous gravitational pressure within stars). Yet the author of *Genesis* postulates that the stars (including the Sun) weren’t formed until the fourth day! Therefore, Dear, as I expect you expect, even after just starting to examine the first paragraph on the first page of the Bible, I’m sorely tempted to chuck the entire book back into the river of speculations, as a bunch of dumb ideas.

But, in hopes of helping certain grandchildren, let me resist the temptation and push on to the next sentence and consider it, also, from a (macroscopic) scientific perspective. In its “original version” (in the KJV), we have: **And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.** Thereby, Dear, perhaps you see why, when considering a historical perspective, I was prepared to accept that the original author intended that the first sentence reflects a “flat-earth theory”: otherwise, how could any material substance “**be without form and void**”? Something “without form and void” sounds suspiciously like a vacuum!

But then, additional problems arise. Assuming that the original author meant that that, initially, the flat earth was perfectly flat, i.e., featureless (for if it were spherical, it would have form!), then the author would need to explain what constrained the air and the water (mentioned in the next sentence) from flowing off from the end of the flat plate! If one tried to be as kind as possible to the original author by proposing that the “water” was actually ice (which then would be consistent with there being no light, i.e., everything was at absolute zero temperature), then it might be thought that the problem of water flow would be solved. But then, if everything were at absolute zero temperature, all gases in the air would also have frozen out; therefore, there would have been no air, no “heaven”, and certainly no birdies!

Thus, the only satisfactorily interpretation that I can see is to assume that the author’s flat-plate non-zero temperature earth extends to infinity. Unfortunately for that idea, however, if the land had any depth to it whatsoever, then not only would the Earth have infinite mass, but the resulting gravitational force on any plant that tried to grow, on any bird that tried to fly, or on any human who tried to stand would also be infinite – which makes it very tough for flying, growing, and standing! Stated differently, Dear, it’s hard to rescue the ideas of the author of *Genesis*, no matter how favorable one tries to view them – and the ideas only get worse as the passage continues.

Thus, I challenge anyone to give a reasonable explanation for: **And God said, Let there be light; and there was light.** Pray tell: what was the source of the light? It’s alleged to be “days” before the Sun and stars are to be created (yet stars must have appeared first, or otherwise there would have been no heavy elements for the atmosphere and the land), and either in the case that there was land and air, or heaven and earth, the author makes no

mention of any charged particles that were accelerating or whose energy states were changing, which would have been needed to create light. Then, at least consistently, the author gives no suggestion about how the uncreated light was terminated. But left completely unexplained is why, when somebody turned off the light switch (?!), this caused the termination of what was then called the first day? Does this mean that days are not defined by the rate of rotation of a spherical Earth but by the rate at which someone throws some light switch?!

Anyway, Dear, with the above, maybe you're beginning to understand why I wrote that it's hard to imagine how anyone whose brain still functions could adopt the "literal truth" of the Bible. You may also understand why I'm not going to engage in a scientific review of the Bible (or any other "holy book"). One reason is that I doubt if anyone could accomplish such a task: the science of the Bible, for example, is so backward, so infantile, that it would drive a scientist up the wall!

In an earlier chapter (in **Ix**), dealing with genesis and flood myths in the Bible, I showed you some of these idiocies (concerning the formation of land from the water versus the more likely volcanic extrusion of water from the land, concerning the formation of plants that require photosynthesis before any sunlight was available, concerning the formation of life on land before life in the sea, and so on). In this **Qx**, therefore, I plan to totally ignore the scientific silliness in all "holy books" – unless sometimes they might provide a little "comic relief". I therefore will simultaneously ignore the literalists' approach.

Again, Dear, I don't plan to waste my time (or yours) showing you scientific silliness in various "holy books", in part because a serious scientific investigation of the Bible (for example) will be unable to proceed past the first sentence: "**In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.**" Given that single, ridiculous sentence and just a little thought, any scientist worth her salt will throw the Bible into the trashcan of human mistakes and turn to more productive inquiries. About the only "payback" from examining such "science" is to be able to get a few laughs from such infantile ideas (if one is inclined to laugh) and to be amazed at the juvenile responses of "modern" people (e.g., "creationists") who attempt to defend such "science".

Yet, maybe I should add something, Dear, in case you encounter such people in your Church, i.e., those who “explain” how Noah managed to load all types of dinosaurs onto his boat (or why he didn’t!), where all the water for the flood came from, where the heavy elements came from so God could make the Earth “in the beginning”, what was going on before “the beginning”, where God came from, and on and on. What I (strongly) recommend that you do when you encounter such people, Dear, is just smile politely and quickly disengage from them. I’ve found that trying to show them the errors in the science and the silliness of their opinions is worse than useless: they won’t change their ideas (“**My minds made up; don’t confuse me with facts**”) and more significantly, they’ll resent your trying to enlighten them.

In addition, I plan generally to ignore allegorical interpretations. To do otherwise would also be essentially impossible, because there’s an enormous number of such interpretations – the number constrained only by people’s imaginations! As an example, an allegorical interpretation of the first part of the Bible’s *Genesis* can be the following (made up as I type!):

Look. Never mind the details about how God created the world. Descriptions of these details can be corrupted over time with different translations. It’s the message that’s important. And the important message, revealed right at the start of God’s holy book, is that man was made in God’s image, and the image is this. As God did, so are we to do. He worked hard for six days, and then he sanctified the seventh day as holy. The seventh day is holy. You’re not to go to work on the seventh day, you’re not to goof off, you’re to treat it as holy. You’re to thank God for all the blessings He bestowed on you. You’re to pray to Him for forgiveness for your transgressions – and you’re to promise to Him not to sin any more. And you’re to mean what you say: no more dishonoring your parents, no more fornication, no more lying and cheating, and no more skipping payment of your tithes. And it’s not just another cleric saying this, it’s the revealed word of God.

Anyway, Dear, what I was trying to do with the above was show you that both literalists and allegorists encounter major problems convincing others of the “truth” of the “revelations” in their “holy books”. Sane people question the sanity or motives of both literalists and allegorists.

Meanwhile, besides the options of viewing any “holy book” from the perspectives of the literalists or allegorists, there’s the perspective of the historian. This historical perspective is enormously different from the views of the literalist or allegorist, and in my view, competent historians deserve enormous respect for their intelligence, diligence, and perseverance. I’ll be

showing you some examples later (especially in **Yx**); if you don't want to wait and want to explore some examples on your own, maybe start by searching on the internet for writings by Volney, Gerald Massey, and the recent book by Graham Lawrence.

Yet, let me at least mention something about the historical perspective of even the first few lines of the Bible's *Genesis*. Basically an historian asks: "What's the origin of these ideas?" The answers that historians have uncovered are really quite amazing. As I already showed you a little in **Ix**, the idea of "the creation" occurring in six days (or actually, six "periods") was copied by the Jewish authors of the OT (i.e., probably by Ezra and co-authors) from the "holy book" of their Persian conquerors. Also, the idea that creation commenced from everything being covered by water was copied from both Egyptian and Sumerian myths that had been around for thousands of years. Specific ideas, such as the idea that light was "good" and dark was "bad", have been around as long as humans have – and even longer – as long as there have been predators around who could see better at night than most mammals can!

Which then, finally, brings me to the perspective that I plan to use in the following: not an historical, allegorical, or literal perspective, and not even a scientific perspective (in the sense of examining the science in any "holy book"), but what I've dubbed "the quintessential approach", by which I mean "a policy perspective". That is, "all" that I want to do is show you (and comment upon) the policies that seem to be advocated in our culture's "holy books".

For example, in the first few lines of the Bible's *Genesis*, regardless of their literal, allegorical, historical, or scientific "significance", I want to call your attention to the obvious "policy" that's being advocated, namely, that light is good and darkness isn't. And if your immediate response is something close to "What silliness!", then, Dear, wait a bit – I'll show you what else the "holy books" of our culture describe as 'good' and 'bad'. Then maybe you'll change your comment to something close to: "That's horrible!"

But that's enough (probably too much!) for now – except, I'd like you to do something additional. Thus, after taking a break from this book, getting some exercise, and doing other stuff that you really should do, then before you start on the next chapter, please read the first few pages of the Bible, up to and including the myth about Adam and Eve.