

Y4 – Your Principles & Policies

Dear: In my attempt to “tie up some loose ends” and trying to do so within the context of my mantra (from the **P**-chapters)

The priorities are: first premisses, then purposes – and then principles, priorities, and policies – and finally: plans, procedures, and practices (with perseverance)

I want, in this chapter, to turn to “principles and policies” and then to address the challenging problem of establishing priorities. Before doing so, however, I want to reaffirm my opinion (based on more than four times your experiences, kid!) that your highest priority should be to decide how you plan to gain knowledge about “the reality” external to your mind.

If your basic premiss is that you can gain knowledge about this reality by “listening to your heart” or similar (by relying on your emotions, your indoctrination, various clerical authorities, etc.), then I’m afraid that “you’re a goner” and that writing this book for you will have been a waste of my time – although I hope it’ll be of some help to others. Yet, I keep writing to you, with the hope that you’ll decide to try to gain knowledge about reality in the same way that you did when you were a baby: by exploring, by testing, by experimenting, by seeing what works, by “guessing, testing, and reassessing”... that is, by applying the scientific method. If you do, I’m certain that you’ll conclude something similar to: “Hey, all supernatural stuff is silly! Gods and ghosts and goblins (and similar) are just silly speculations of savages.”

Once you’ve chosen how to gain knowledge about the reality external to your mind and begin to apply your chosen method, then your worldview follows, that is, your opinions about the nature of the universe and your place within it (e.g., your purposes). Others have said similar. Remember what Ayn Rand wrote in her book *Philosophy: Who Needs It?*

Are you in a universe which is ruled by natural laws and, therefore, is stable, firm, absolute – and knowable? Or are you in an incomprehensible chaos, a realm of inexplicable miracles, an unpredictable, unknowable flux, which your mind is impotent to grasp? *The nature of your actions – and of your ambition – will be different, according to which set of answers you come to accept.* [Italics added]

That is, Dear, how you live your life will depend, in large measure, on your answer to the fundamental question: how is knowledge about reality to be gained? Will you expend the effort needed to learn or will you pretend that you “just know”, relying on your emotions (like an animal), living in a world of make-believe, lazily “learning” by “wishing”, i.e., by “be-lief-ing”? I strongly encourage you to learn by studying, experimenting, examining evidence, evaluating data, estimating probabilities, holding beliefs only as strongly as relevant evidence warrants. Remember Mangasarian’s: “Religion is the science of children; science is the religion of adults.”

Your purposes follow from your choice of how to gain knowledge. If you choose the lazy way, to gain knowledge *via* your emotions (e.g., “if it feels good, it must be true”), and if you’ve been sufficiently indoctrinated that you “believe” some clerics know “the truth”, then you’ll adopt whatever purposes the con-artist clerics dictate, from having as many babies as possible to blowing yourself up in some Jihad. If you choose the harder way to gain knowledge, *via* the scientific method, then you’ll adopt whatever purposes seem to be most consistent with all relevant and reliable data, e.g., purposes consistent with your trio of survival goals (of yourself, of your extended family, and of your values), e.g., to try to help humanity solve its problems more intelligently – to try to help intelligent life continue to evolve. And with your decision about how to gain knowledge, your worldview established, and in pursuit of your purposes, then you’ll adopt a set of values consistent with your purposes (since values, including moral values, only have meaning relative to some purpose).

Yet, even though people’s worldviews and therefore purposes differ dramatically, if you look for similarities in values adopted by all people, I’m sure that, first, you’ll find an enormous number of similarities and that, second, you’ll conclude that the reasons are obvious. Thus, insofar as all people seek the survival of themselves and their families, then the values associated with those goals are essentially identical for all people throughout the world – certainly associated with basic needs (air, water, food, shelter, clothing...) but also associated with their families, such as “wanting the best for their kids”.

But as you dig deeper, you can start to see differences in values, many of which can be traced to differences in worldviews and, in turn, to different premisses about how to gain knowledge. For example, even in the category of “wanting the best for their kids”, you’ll find differences in what different

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groups define as “best” – and for which “kids”. Thus, many groups conclude that the only kids whose development is important are the boys, and in such male-chauvinist groups, members of one group conclude that “the best” is for the boys to follow in their father’s occupation. Meanwhile, members of another group conclude that “the best” is for all kids to get a broad education, while others conclude that “the best” is to memorize a portion of the Torah or the whole of the Koran, and so on. In fact, you can find vast differences even in values associated with the prime goal of one’s own survival, derived from different worldviews. Thus, convinced that what’s of prime importance is their “eternal survival”, suicide bombers strap explosives to their waists – and other mothers convince their daughters to divorce their husbands, because the husbands are no longer able to accompany their wives to an imagined “celestial paradise”.

In addition (finally bringing me to the thrust of this chapter!), all people similarly adopt various principles and policies in pursuit of their trio of survival goals – but again, the principles and policies they adopt depend on their chosen worldview. In your case, Dear, of course no one but you knows the principles and policies that you’ve adopted (or will adopt) to accomplish your purposes. Yet, I do know quite a bit about the principles and policies in which you’ve been indoctrinated since you were a baby – and in this book, I’ve been trying my best to have you at least consider other principles and policies. But as for which you’ll adopt and promote, once again: *Tuum est!*

Nonetheless, although the decisions are entirely yours, please be patient while I display some principles and policies for your consideration (or reconsideration), which I do in part to “tie up some loose ends”. For this display, given the purpose of this book (to answer a certain grandchild’s question about why I don’t believe in God) and given my many biases (as well as my tiredness!), my plan is to provide a truncated and skewed summary of principles and policies for your consideration. Thereby, I’ll “short-change” a huge number of extremely important scientific principles and only briefly review some proposed “principles for living” that I’ve found useful and have tried to show you in this book.

Maybe I should also remind you about my view of the distinction between ‘principles’ and ‘policies’. In my view, a ‘principle’ is more general than a ‘policy’. For example, upon being convinced (by an enormous amount of data) of the validity of the scientific *principle* that momenta can be changed if forces are applied, you might want to adopt several consistent *policies*:

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don't bang your head against any wall, be careful to see what your hand would hit if your wrench slips, don't drive a car at 90 mph into a brick wall, and so on. Thus, adopting a single principle can lead to your subsequent adoption of many policies consistent with that principle.

But again, I don't plan to review the huge number of scientific principles that have been uncovered during the past few centuries. As I mentioned before, in an earlier version of this book I attempted to do that; I'll include a few remnants of my attempts in the "excursion" **Zx** (principles that I'll use in trying to explain what I mean by "the Zen of Zero"). Maybe I'll yet try to produce a compendium of scientific principles before I "call it a life" (!), but it would be a huge challenge. During their lives, perhaps Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) and Francis Bacon (1561–1626), the last of the "Renaissance men", knew all there was to know, but during the subsequent centuries, hundreds if not thousands of additional principles have been discovered. When you're older (☺), after you get your Ph.D., perhaps you'll better appreciate how little a single person can learn.¹

Nonetheless, there is a specific scientific principle that shines above all others, illuminating all of science, which I should re-mention. It's what Bacon preached and Leonardo practiced, namely, the scientific method itself. In comparison, all other scientific principles (Newton's principles, the principles of thermodynamics, electrodynamics, quantum mechanics, etc., not even mentioning principles in agriculture, biology, chemistry, dendrology, economics... to zoology) are "just details"! Sorry for the language, Dear, but only a religious nut would fail to adopt the scientific method ("guess, test, and retest") as a fundamental principle – in fact, as far as is known, it's THE fundamental principle.

¹ Which brings to mind, Dear, that if you should ever become as weird as your grandfather with the beard... "Gimme a break!" Well, anyway, if you ever find yourself working on "reverse acronyms", then consider "Ph.D." The usual "Doctor of Philosophy" (or "Philosophy Doctorate") is rarely appropriate, since many with the degree (such as guess who) never studied any philosophy – but maybe it's not too bad if the meaning of 'philosophy' is stated explicitly: Doctorate in the Love of Learning. Yet, maybe I can see a better reverse acronym for Ph.D. – and one that's also consistent with Confucius' statement, "Real knowledge is to know the extent of one's ignorance", and with Socrates' humility, "I know nothing but the fact of my ignorance." Thus, before being awarded the Ph.D. degree, I'd advocate that any candidate demonstrate recognition that Ph.D. is a "Position of Humility and Doubt": humility from recognizing how little the candidate knows, and doubt about knowing even that! As Galileo said in 1630: "The vain presumption of understanding everything can have no other basis than never having understood anything. For anyone who had ever experienced just once the perfect understanding of one single thing, and had truly tasted how knowledge is accomplished, would recognize that, of the infinity of other truths, he understands nothing." Perhaps Einstein said it best: "I'm no Einstein!"

As for “principles for living” – not only for living ethically or morally, but for living productively and happily (as least as ‘happily’ as is consistent with the underlying inconsistencies of the concept of happiness!) – throughout this book I’ve shown you what I review while I’m walking. Among these principles, most important (to my mind) is: **Evaluate!** As applied to morality, that becomes: Always use your brain as best you can.

In an earlier chapter (**P10**), I showed you a condensed version of the principles and policies that I review when I walking, but consistently, I showed you only “A” through “P”. Below is a more complete list, but still condensed. And perhaps I should note that this list includes both ‘principles’ and ‘policies’. Maybe I should apologize for that, but I didn’t develop the list for anyone else – and “It works for me”! Besides, I’m not suggesting that you adopt any of these principles and policies – just that you consider them.

- A – Take time to be aware, of your surroundings and your thoughts.
- B – For complicated decisions, convene the “Board of Governors” in your mind (left brain’s analysis, right brain’s emotions, body’s instincts, and a representative of your universe of experiences).
- C – Be careful of confused thought; be aware of the inter-connectedness of opposites.
- D – Remember the motto: “Show me the data!”
- E – Evaluate everything, including your emotions.
- F – Dig out causes of your feelings; remember that, besides fight or flight, there’s also “fencing off”.
- G – Realize that life’s a game, which you win when you begin – but be careful how you choose your goals and pick up your winnings.
- H – Careful of hopes (= priorities for your goals) and realize that feeling of happiness are just signals telling you that you’re making progress toward your goals; therefore, don’t seek happiness; make progress!
- I – Apply ideas that form the basis of the scientific method in your daily life (“guess, test, and reassess”); thereby, gain control of your imagination (because “he who controls your imagination, controls you”). Also, distinguish earned ‘trust’ and ‘confidence’ from misplaced ‘belief’ and ‘faith’. In fact, it’s better not to “believe” anything; instead, estimate probabilities for the reliability of all ideas, and then “place your bet” on those with greatest expected value.
- J – Be your own judge and jury; establish your own “judicial code”, such as: “Everyone has an equal right to claim one’s own existence”.

- K – Be kind, if you can, but with keenness.
- L – Love within limits – and when trying to make decisions, “look at the limits”.
- M – Don’t forget that the highest moral code is to use your brain as best you can: Evaluate!
- N – Remember that there’s gain in saying “No!” – and potential pain, especially from removing masks.
- O – Be open with yourself, be careful forming opinions, and never forget to ask: “What’s the objective?”
- P – The priorities are: first premisses, then purposes – and then principles, priorities, and policies – and finally: plans, procedures, and practices (with perseverance). The prime purpose of life is to live; a prime purpose adopted by intelligent humans is to help solve our problems more intelligently. Also: follow principles, not people (because power mongers abound).
- Q – Pursue quality (as much as time permits) and never stop questioning – but question “Why?” only of things with purposes; otherwise, ask something similar to: “What’s the process by which...?”
- R – Relying on reason, alone, is extremely dangerous, like walking on a tightrope with no safety net below. Remember that deductions can never produce new information (at most, they just provide a different view of one’s premisses). As for inductions, require that your results be consistent with all relevant and reliable data – and never stop testing the predictions of your hypotheses.
- S – Science: the best that humans have so far achieved, all relying on the scientific method, a way to “try to make sure we’re not fooling ourselves”. Comparing religion vs. science, realize that “religion is the science of children; science is the religion of adults”, and also realize that religion is just outdated science, adopted by primitive people, promoted by clerical quacks, and which should be trashed.
- T – Truth is meaningful only in closed systems. In open systems, in reality, truth can only be approached asymptotically. If some claim is demonstrated to be “true”, then simultaneously, that demonstrates it has nothing to do with reality. For reality, at best we can estimate only probabilities that claims are “true” (or “false”, which is unity minus the probability of being “true”). Meanwhile, if a statement contains no information (e.g., “God exists”), then it’s impossible to demonstrate that it’s false – and if it’s not falsifiable, it should be tossed in the trashcan of useless statements.

- U – Uncertainty is ubiquitous; learn to live with it by evaluating probabilities, as best you can.
- V – Values have meaning only relative to some objective (or objectives). For humanists essentially all their values (save, perhaps, aesthetic values) are established relative to their dual survival goals (of themselves and their extended families, with the recognized extent of their families including at least all other humans).
- W – Be careful of words: they're just symbols for reality. Further, some "base words" such as 'existence' can't be defined in terms of other words but only experienced (i.e., defined only phenomenologically).
- X – EXpand peace and social justice by eXpanding knowledge (through liberating women and through eXpanding education in critical thinking) and by eXposing ignorance (through eXpunging data-less statements from public discourse, if necessary by ridicule).
- Y – Your premisses yield your worldview, within which you'll define your life (e.g., *via* your purposes and associated values). Therefore, be especially careful to evaluate your premisses about the nature of this universe and how information about it can be gained: all data suggest that the universe is entirely natural and that knowledge about it can be uncovered only *via* the scientific method.

Which then brings me to the other part of "Y" that I review when I'm walking, namely:

One more year left to live... yet, constrain yourself...

But before showing you what I mean by "constrain yourself...", I want to show you some additional examples of clerical stupidity. In fact, before I show you even that, before I try to tie up still more loose ends, first I need to collect a number of loose strands!

One strand is Ingersoll's magnificent statement:

When I became convinced that the Universe is natural [Boldface type added] – *that all the ghosts and gods are myths* [Italics added] – there entered into my brain, into my soul, into every drop of my blood, the sense, the feeling, the joy of freedom. The walls of my prison crumbled and fell, the dungeon was flooded with light, and all the bolts, and bars, and manacles became dust. I was no longer a servant, a serf, or a slave. There was for me no master in all the wide world – not even in infinite space.

I was free: free to think, to express my thoughts – free to live to my own ideal – free to live for myself and those I loved – free to use all my faculties, all my senses – free to spread imagination’s wings – free to investigate, to guess and dream and hope – free to judge and determine for myself – free to reject all ignorant and cruel creeds, all the ‘inspired’ books that savages have produced, and all the barbarous legends of the past – free from popes and priests – free from all the ‘called’ and ‘set apart’ – free from sanctified mistakes and holy lies – free from the fear of eternal pain – free from the winged monsters of night – free from devils, ghosts, and gods.

For the first time I was free. There were no prohibited places in all the realms of my thought – no air, no space, where fancy could not spread her painted wings – no chains for my limbs – no lashes for my back – no fires for my flesh – no master’s frown or threat – no following another’s steps – no need to bow, or cringe, or crawl, or utter lying words.

I was free. I stood erect and fearlessly, joyously, faced all worlds. And then my heart was filled with gratitude, with thankfulness, and went out in love to all the heroes, the thinkers who gave their lives for the liberty of hand and brain, for the freedom of labor and thought – to those who fell on the fierce fields of war – to those who died in dungeons bound with chains – to those who proudly mounted scaffold’s stairs – to those whose bones were crushed, whose flesh was scarred and torn – to those by fire consumed – to all the wise, the good, the brave of every land, whose thoughts and deeds have given freedom to the sons of men. And I vowed to grasp the torch that they had held, and hold it high, that light might conquer darkness still.

And no, Dear, I ain’t gonna apologize for quoting that again – I’d like to continue quoting it until you have it memorized! It’s so important and so beautifully written that I’d even go so far as to say that it’s more beautiful and more important than Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence: “more beautiful” is simply my opinion, but “more important” because it’s a Declaration of Independence from the tyranny of all supernatural silliness. And if you don’t understand what I mean by such “tyranny”, Dear, then consider another loose strand.

What follows is some of what the poet John Dryden (1631–1700) wrote more than 300 years ago about the source and horror of such tyranny, and the benefits of defeating it. First, the source:

By education most have been misled,
So they believe because they were so bred;
The priest continues what the nurse began,
And thus the child imposes on the man.

He also saw the horror of such indoctrination:

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Of all the tyrannies on human kind
The worst is that which persecutes the mind.

And he saw the benefits of breaking free from such tyranny:

Happy the man, and happy he alone,
He who can call today his own;
He who, secure within, can say,
Tomorrow, do thy worst, for I have lived today.

And if you don't see the "tyranny" of it all, Dear, if you don't see what Dryden meant by "Happy the man, and happy he alone, he who can call today his own", if you don't appreciate what Ingersoll meant by writing that, when he "became convinced that the universe is natural" that he was

free to judge and determine for myself – free to reject all ignorant and cruel creeds, all the 'inspired' books that savages have produced, and all the barbarous legends of the past – free from popes and priests – free from all the 'called' and 'set apart' – free from sanctified mistakes and holy lies – free from the fear of eternal pain...

then consider another loose strand, which is connected to a huge amount of tyranny (fear, servitude, even slavery) promoted in Mormonism (and similar occurs in all major religions, especially Islam).

As only one example of many in which the expression "fear the Lord" appears in the *Old Testament*, there's the following from *Psalms 33*, 8:

Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere him.

That thought is combined with servitude at *Deuteronomy 10*, 12:

And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul...

In fact, such servitude is worse than bodily slavery: it includes servitude in "heart... and... soul"!

From the New Testament, as a single example advocating slavery, there's "Saint" Paul's data-less stupidity (*Romans 6*, 22):

But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.

George Bernard Shaw summarized such stupidity well in Act 2 of his *Heartbreak House*: “We know now that the soul is the body, and the body the soul. They tell us they are different, because they want to persuade us that we can keep our souls if we let them make slaves of our bodies.”

But before I dig deeper into such stupidity and such evil, Dear, I want to try to restate my assessment about the difference between stupid and evil people. In my opinion, although all evil people are stupid, not all stupid people are evil – although some stupid people can cause enormous evil. As I see it, the difference between stupid and evil people is in their intent. In my view, it’s evil to harm other people without cause; that is, I consider it (morally) right to recognize that everyone has an equal right to pursue one’s goals. A stupid person can infringe on other people’s rights to pursue their goals without meaning any harm; in such a case I would call the person stupid, not evil, because the stupid person didn’t intend to do harm – yet what the person did was evil.

Some examples of stupid people causing evil are Sidney Rigdon (essentially certainly the “author” of the Book of Mormon), “Saint” Paul (the creator of Christianity) and the current pope² (Pope John Paul II). Thus, giving him the benefit of doubt, I expect that the current pope is well meaning – but just too dumb or too poorly educated to realize the enormous evil that he does (e.g., re. birth control). In contrast, a stupid person who harms others purposefully (he’s stupid to do so!) is someone I would call evil, because he intends to harm others. An example is any con-artist cleric who knows he’s selling snake-oil medicine, robbing others and therefore harming them, for his own benefit (e.g., as I’ll show you in **Yx**, the “profit” Joseph Smith).

And maybe I should add, Dear, that undoubtedly there’s a “continuum” of clerics, over a range of stupidity and evil. At one end of this continuum are the stupid clerics (who, I expect, rarely make the rank of “prophet” or “Saint” or “High Priest”) who “believe” (or “believed”) in all the god garbage of their “holy books”. For them, I have some pity: they were probably born dumb (or were brain damaged) or are simply uneducated, indoctrinated simpletons; these are the “run-of-the-mill” clerics, whom one normally encounters, who probably mean well and are too stupid to realize the evil they do, peddling superstition.

² “Current” when I wrote that – but Benedict is just as bad!

Then, toward the other end of the continuum, sometimes hard to distinguish from the stupid clerics, are the insane priests (and “prophets” and “Saints”), probably schizophrenic (hearing voices, having delusions of grandeur). Examples probably include Jesus, “Saint” Paul (the founder of Christianity), Muhammad (the founder of Islam), and Sidney Rigdon (the founder of Mormonism). And at the extreme evil end of the continuum are the con artist, parasitic and power-mongering priests who know that their “holy books” are a pack of lies, but they seek profit in selling snake-oil medicine. Examples include most of the popes and Joseph Smith.

Correspondingly, there’s a large range in “immorality of the mystics.” In turn, this range depends on both the objectives of the mystics and their power. At the least objectionable end of this range of immorality are the simpleton mystics (probably such as Zoroaster, Jesus, and Sidney Rigdon) who are unable to think clearly, possibly are schizophrenic or brain-damaged in some other way, probably don’t mean to cause harm, and commonly the worst harm they cause is by being successful in attempts to convince others not to think for themselves. Somewhere in the middle of this range of immorality are the con artists, ranging from local priests to founders of new cults, such as “Saint” Paul, who in general seek power over people and, in particular, seek to relieve them of some of their valuables. And at the extreme of the immorality of the mystics are those who successfully combine their stupidity with power (for example, the story-book Moses, Muhammad, Martin Luther, Joseph Smith, the current pope, and the supreme Ayatollah of Iran); the result is always evil.

Yet, I admit that I don’t know enough about the intent of the huge number of mystics who have harmed humanity to know if they were evil or just stupid – and in truth, I don’t want to waste any more of life trying to determine their motives. Many of them (such Zoroaster, Jesus, “Saint” Paul, Muhammad, and Sidney Rigdon) were almost certainly “mental cases” (complete with hearing voices, seeing visions, and so). All of them were stupid (for example, to adopt ideas about “life after death”, without the least shred of evidence to support their assumptions). But I don’t know if any of them had intent to harm others, i.e., I don’t know if any of them were evil – although certainly Moses, Muhammad, Martin Luther, and Joseph Smith are prime candidates for that category and certainly their stupidities have caused humans enormous harm. That is, their stupidities led to enormous evils.

And from it all one can again see the wisdom in Socrates' summary: "There is only one good, knowledge [or willingness to learn], and one evil, ignorance [or refusal to learn]." To which I'd add only: "Clerics of the world, though your nickname is ignorance, your real name is evil."

Now, with that "explanation" out of the way, let me turn to the evil done by the clerics' Jesus. With Socrates' principle in mind that "There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance", maybe I shouldn't call Jesus evil, because in my view, that would depend on his intent (which I'll not waste my time trying to decipher – especially since most of his familiar characteristics are just inventions of the stupid/evil clerics who wrote the New Testament, with almost certain intent to gain sufficient power to become social parasites – as I'll show you in **Yx**). Thus, setting aside questions about the clerical Jesus' intent (or even his existence), consider the following evil advocated by the clerics' Jesus (as depicted in the New Testament):

- He never praised intelligence or skepticism; instead, he praised simpletons, urging his followers to be like sheep, like "little children",
- He never praised and thanked the producers of the world,
- He called those "wicked" who wanted to test his hypotheses,
- He promoted slavery and breaking families apart,
- He taught that "the good" was to obey, promoting all the "Commandments" – including how to beat your slaves to death and how to sell your daughters into slavery,
- He didn't practice what he preached (for example, while preaching, "judge not", he did little but judge others, e.g., while preaching "You hypocrites! First take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's", the foolish hypocrite called others "fools" and "hypocrites"),
- He promoted the concept that by punishing the innocent, the guilty could be absolved,

- He promoted the concept that people are guilty of crimes in which they weren't involved and of which they weren't even aware (for example, everyone's "original sin", even though we weren't there and which supposedly occurred before people knew the difference between good and evil), and so on, and especially I would point to the evil of the clerics' Jesus because
- He promoted torture of humans – and not just for a little while, but for all eternity.

Consequently, Dear, I would urge you, most strenuously, to evaluate your indoctrination to "follow Jesus". In 1831, Percy Shelley said it even more forcefully: "Prolific fiend, who peopled Earth with demons, Hell with men, and Heaven with slaves."

For your evaluation, consider the following four examples of what you've been taught in Mormonism:

1. Coleen K. Menlove (Primary General President), "Show You Know," *Ensign*, May 2003, 115:

Dear Primary children, this year we celebrate the 125th year since Primary was organized. It was organized by a prophet of God to help children learn and live the gospel of Jesus Christ with joy...

Being a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints means we have been given opportunities to receive all the blessings of the gospel. Each day you can say with full confidence:

I am a child of God.
I know Heavenly Father loves me, and I love Him.
I can pray to Heavenly Father anytime, anywhere.
I am trying to remember to follow Jesus Christ...

2. Thomas S. Monson (First Counselor in the First Presidency), "Models to Follow," *Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 60:

Down through the generations of time, the message from Jesus has been the same. To Peter and Andrew by the shores of the beautiful Sea of Galilee, He said, "Follow me..." To Philip of old came the call, "Follow me..." To the Levite who sat at receipt of customs came the instruction, "Follow me..." And to you and to me, if we but listen, will come that same beckoning invitation, "Follow me".

3. Ezra Taft Benson (President), “Born of God,” *Ensign*, July 1989, 2:

When you choose to follow Christ, you choose the Way, the Truth, the Life – the right way, the saving truth, the abundant life...

4. Joseph B. Wirthlin (Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles), “Follow Me,” *Ensign*, May 2002, 15:

How do we follow the Savior? By exercising faith. By believing in Him. By believing in our Heavenly Father. By believing that God speaks to man on earth today.

We follow the Savior by repenting of our sins – by experiencing sorrow because of them and forsaking them.

We follow the Savior by entering the waters of baptism and receiving a remission of our sins, by receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost and allowing that influence to inspire, instruct, guide, and comfort us.

How do we follow the Savior? By obeying Him. He and our Heavenly Father have given us commandments – not to punish or torment us, but to help us come to a fullness of joy, both in this life and for the eternities to come, worlds without end.

Really, Dear? For the promise (not the reality!) of eternal life in paradise you would follow someone who (repeating some of what I already wrote):

- Held such distorted views of natural, personal, and social justice,
- Understood neither the purpose of a judge nor the qualifications necessary to be a judge,
- Didn't understand that the purpose of punishment is to modify and, if necessary, eliminate certain behavior – not to make another person suffer,
- Taught that we should hate ourselves,
- Didn't understand the meanings of either love or money,
- Thought that “friends” could be bought with money,
- Didn't see the errors in his “do unto others...”
- Didn't see his error in promoting “giving” in order “to get”,
- Saw neither the double binds that his followers would experience nor the trouble he would cause by his “love your enemies” and “judge not...”,
- “Believed” that something existed – such as ghosts and spirits and gods – having no data to support such assumptions and failing to see that no data could ever be obtained,
- Never praised intelligence or skepticism; instead, he praised simpletons,
- Never praised and thanked the producers of the world,

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- Called those “wicked” who wanted to test his hypotheses,
- Promoted slavery and breaking families apart,
- Taught that “the good” was to obey,
- Promoted all the “Commandments” – including how to beat your slaves to death and how to sell your daughters into slavery,
- Didn’t practice what he preached,
- Promoted the concept that by punishing the innocent, the guilty could be absolved,
- Promoted the concept that people are guilty of crimes in which they weren’t involved and of which they weren’t even aware, and
- Promoted torture of humans – and not just for a little while, but for all eternity.

For the promise (not the reality!) of eternal bliss in paradise, would you follow Jesus if he had promoted your flying a jetliner into the Twin Towers?

That is, Dear, just as you were instructed to follow Jesus, Muslim children have similarly been indoctrinated to follow Muhammad. To be sure, Muhammad was quite likely the most influential leader the world has ever known (as the founder of both a religion and the leader of a political movement), but although he eliminated some of stupidities and evils of the teachings of the clerics’ Jesus (e.g., dealing with original sin), yet he continued to maintain most of the same stupidities and evils promoted by the clerics’ Jesus – and added more!

To all such followers, Einstein’s assessment is equally damning:

He who joyfully marches in rank and file has already earned my contempt. He has been given a large brain by mistake, since for him the spinal cord would suffice.

In your case, you were instructed to follow, also, even the various dimwits who have led the Mormon Church, as the following examples illustrate.³

The Lord Almighty leads this Church, and he will never suffer you to be led astray if you are found doing your duty. You may go home and sleep as sweetly as a babe in its mother’s arms, as to any danger of your leaders leading you astray, for if they should try to do so the Lord would quickly sweep them from the earth. [Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses, Vol. 9, 1862, p.289*]

³ Copied from <http://www.lds-mormon.com/thinking.shtml>.

The Lord will never permit me or any other man who stands as President of this Church to lead you astray. [President Wilford Woodruff (considered scripture; it's canonized at the end of the Latter-Day Saints' (LDS's) *Doctrine and Covenants*)]

When our leaders speak, the thinking has been done. When they propose a plan – it is God's Plan. When they point the way, there is no other which is safe. When they give directions, it should mark the end of controversy, God works in no other way. To think otherwise, without immediate repentance, may cost one his faith, may destroy his testimony, and leave him a stranger to the kingdom of God. [Ward Teachers Message, *Deseret News*, Church Section p. 5, May 26, 1945. Also included in the *Improvement Era*, June 1945 (which was the official magazine of the LDS Church before *Ensign*).]

Always keep your eye on the President of the church, and if he ever tells you to do anything, even if it is wrong, and you do it, the Lord will bless you for it, but you don't need to worry. The Lord will never let his mouthpiece lead the people astray. [LDS President Marion G. Romney (of the first presidency), quoting LDS President (and prophet) Heber J. Grant "Conference Report" Oct. 1960, p. 78]

When the Prophet speaks the debate is over. [N. Eldon Tanner, August 1979, *Ensign*, pp. 2-3]

Follow your leaders who have been duly ordained and have been publicly sustained, and you will not be led astray. [Boyd K. Packer (General Conference, Oct. 1992; *Ensign*, Nov. 1992)]

I sat in this tabernacle some years ago as President Joseph Fielding Smith stood at this pulpit. It was the general priesthood meeting of April 1972, the last general conference before President Smith passed away. He said: "There is one thing which we should have exceedingly clear in our minds. Neither the President of the Church, nor the First Presidency, or the united voice of the First Presidency and the Twelve will ever lead the Saints astray or send forth counsel to the world that is contrary to the mind and will of the Lord." [L. Aldin Porter of the Presidency of the First Quorum of Seventies (*Ensign*, Nov. 1994, p. 63)]

Dear: Dumb animals follow leaders; please don't be just another dumb animal! Don't defer to someone "in authority"; don't accept someone else's opinion over your own evaluation of the data; don't "believe" rather than use your brain as best you can. Please, Dear, never, Never, NEVER take any mind-warping drugs, and never, Never, NEVER, abandon your reasoning power to any authority. Tell anyone (including me) who would tell you what to think to "blow it out your ear!" – save for one exception, namely, when someone (such as I) says: "Figure it out for yourself!" And maybe even that's not an exception: reject what anyone tells you to think – but not when someone recommends that you do think!

And from the Latter-Day Saint's (LDS's) *Doctrines and Covenants*, consider just a single example of demanding obedience (*D&C 63: 5*)

Behold, I, the Lord, utter my voice, and it shall be obeyed

– although it was actually Joseph Smith doing the talking! Or how about the following quotation (which, on the day that I searched for the above quotation, was the “quote of the day” that appears at the upper-right-hand corner of the LDS homepage):

Happiness and spiritual progress lie in following the leaders of the Church. [Elder Dallin H. Oaks, *Ensign*, May 1999, p. 37]

So, according to that quotation, you don't need to obey either God or Jesus or even Joseph Smith – just obey the current Church leaders! Which then brings me closer to the point that I wanted to make, although there's still another loose strand that I need to grab, before trying to tie them all together.

This particular loose strand was left by the Mormon leader Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004). For the final 23 years of his life he was one of the twelve “apostles” of the Mormon Church. His obituary (in a LDS “News Release”) includes the following.

Elder Maxwell served as a member of the Presidency of the First Quorum of the Seventy from 1976 to 1981, and as an Assistant to the Twelve from 1974 to 1976 before being called as an apostle. *A lifelong educator, Elder Maxwell was executive vice president at the University of Utah at the time of his appointment as the Commissioner of Education for the Church Educational System* [Italics added], where he served from 1970 to 1976.

Prior to his call to full-time Church service, Elder Maxwell held a variety of administrative and teaching positions with the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. He earlier served as a legislative assistant to United States Senator Wallace F. Bennett of Utah.

He wrote some 30 books on religious topics, one of the most recent of which received a prize for Latter-day Saint literature. Earlier he authored many articles on politics and government for national, professional and local publications.

A political science graduate of the University of Utah, Elder Maxwell also earned a master's degree in that field from the same school. He later was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the University of Utah; an Honorary Doctor of Letters degree from Westminster College, Salt Lake City; an Honorary Doctor of

Laws degree from Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; an Honorary Doctor of Humanities degree from Utah State University, Logan, Utah; an Honorary Degree from Ricks College, Rexburg, Idaho; and an Honorary Degree from Salt Lake Community College.

From what I've read about "Elder" Maxwell, I'm confident that he tried hard to help others, that his "beliefs" were sincere, and that he was humble. But I'm equally confident not only that he was amply justified in being humble but also that he was astoundingly ignorant – and I shudder to think of how many people's lives he polluted with his ignorance. Below, I'll give you a few examples of what I mean.

- In his article entitled "Remember How Merciful the Lord Hath Been" in the May 2004 issue of the Mormon magazine *Ensign* (p. 44) he wrote:

Having virtually no quantitative skills, I was seldom if ever able to help our children with math and scientific subjects.

And yet, in spite of his confessed ignorance of science, he polluted others with a "scientific model" of the universe (and how to gain information about it) that reeks with mold.

- As an example of such mold, consider the first paragraph of his article entitled "Yet Thou Art There" (*Ensign*, Nov. 1987, 30):

What John and Paul wrote about God's creations and the plurality of worlds [~2,000 years ago, when the world was considered to be a flat plate with seven heavens above it!] the restored gospel [viz., Mormon "holy books"] grandly affirms, declaring that 'worlds without number' have been created... These *gospel truths* [italics added] are very significant assurances for us, situated as we are on this tiny 'speck of sand' at the outer edge of a minor galaxy, the Milky Way. Without the *gospel's fullness* [italics added], we would appear to be living during one tick of the geological clock and in the midst of unexplained vastness.

"Gospel truths" and the "gospel's fullness": childish jabberwocky for simple or jaded minds, unable to cope with data from the real world.

- Then, in his article entitled "From Whom All Blessings Flow" (*Ensign*, May 1997, 11), to which I've added some italics, he informs the world of some fundamental "facts" and "truths" about the "reality" he "experienced":

The redeeming presence of our loving Father-God in the universe is the grand *fact* pertaining to the human condition. It is the supernal *truth* which, along with His plan of happiness, reigns preeminent and imperial over all other *realities*. Other *truths*, by comparison, are merely fleeting factoids about which we may be “ever learning” without coming to a knowledge of the *grand truths*... *Mortal experience points evermore to the Atonement of Jesus Christ as the central act of all human history*. The more I *learn and experience*, the more unselfish, stunning, and encompassing His Atonement becomes!... Of course, we do not comprehend it fully any more than we understand how He bore all mortal sins, but His Atonement remains the *rescuing and reassuring reality*.

I wouldn't be surprised if someday (in the not too distant future, I hope), historians will conclude that the only reason why people who “thought” that “the Atonement of Jesus Christ [was] the central act of all human history” weren't confined to various “looney bins” was because, then, too few people would have remained outside to administer medication to all the confined schizophrenics!

- Another illustration (from the first article referenced above) is Maxwell's:

By the way, do not expect the world's solutions to the world's problems to be very effective... Only the gospel is constantly relevant, and the substitute things won't work... I testify to you that God has known you individually, brethren, for a long, long time... He has loved you for a long, long time. He not only knows the names of all the stars... He knows your names and all your heartaches and your joys!

What a nincompoop! Living in his dream world, he polluted other people's worlds: he “testifies” that he knows that God has known you, etc., but what evidence does he present that his testimony is anything other than the braying of another donkey – or the squawking of still another parrot, perched on a dead branch of knowledge, endlessly repeating the same silly “truths”.

- In addition, in his “Yet Thou Art There” article, there is:

The ultimate human questions are really the ‘why’ questions! The gospel is positively ‘brim’ with answers to the ‘why’ queries concerning human purpose. *Gospel truths* [italics added] are the vital integrating and ordering truths, not only telling us of “things as they really are” but also “as they really will be.”

And it's "true enough": "the gospel is positively 'brim' with answers to the 'why' queries concerning human purpose" – but he neglected to mention that all the answers are not only wrong, they're "positively" stupid! And he ends this article with his frequently quoted expression "one day, the faithful will have it all..." And I'm sure they will: natural and personal justice will eventually prevail; "the faithful" will get exactly what they deserve (namely, the same as everyone else: reality).

- And then, Dear, consider some of the harm that Maxwell's ignorance caused. An illustration is available from his first article referenced:

Some years ago, when our grandson Robbie was about five, we dropped by to see his family in Orem. He was asleep upstairs, and his mother called, "Robbie, Grandpa Neal is here!" A tired little voice floated downstairs saying, "Shall I bring my scriptures?"

The poor little kid: similar to certain grandchildren I know, his mind was polluted in "scriptures" by the time he was five.

But further, Dear, think of how many students whose minds Maxwell polluted, in his positions as professor of political science at the University of Utah (teaching "do not expect the world's solutions to the world's problems to be very effective"!), as Dean of Students at the same university (even though he had "virtually no quantitative skills"), as executive vice president of the university (what does it say about the caliber of a university when its vice president is a nincompoop?), and then as "Commissioner of Education for the [LDS] Church Educational System" (and what does that say about the quality of "education" in the LDS Church?!). And thus the god meme – the mental virus – continues to infect still another generation of victims.

Further and again, it's easy to see why the god virus is so virile. Humanists admit that data support the idea that humans are just "living during one tick of the geological clock and in the midst of... vastness." Such an idea doesn't provide much comfort – unless, of course, one considers the only realistic alternative, i.e., not living at all! But how can such an idea compete with delusions offered by religions? They offer ideas such as "God has known you individually, brethren, for a long, long time... He has loved you for a long, long time. He not only knows the names of all the stars... He knows your names and all your heartaches and your joys!" What arrogant and ignorant person wouldn't choose to "believe" the latter?! And thus the mental pollution continues.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) saw it clearly, more than 100 years ago. In his book *Thus Spake Zarathustra* [or Zoroaster], he wrote:

I conjure you, my brethren, to remain faithful to earth, and do not believe those who speak unto you of super-terrestrial hopes! Poisoners they are, whether they know it or not.

Indeed – in their deeds, in their acts, in their writings, in their words, in their thoughts – they are “poisoners”, and most (as with Neal A. Maxwell) almost certainly with “the best of intentions”. But intentions are of minor importance compared to consequences, and such people are not only prisoners but poisoners: poisoners of the well of knowledge and, especially horrible, poisoners of children’s minds.

Dear: think of the enormous struggles of those humans who managed to add to the well of knowledge and to purify its contents: from those who learned how to tame fire, make axles, and irrigate crops, to those who invented writing, printing, and the internet. Think of the depths of knowledge in astronomy, biology, chemistry, dentistry, ecology, farming, geology... And then for contrast, Dear, think of the damnable clerical poisoners, poisoning the minds of modern children with the “scientific knowledge” of the Ancient Egyptians. The biologist J.B.S. Haldane (1892–1964) said it well:

Scientific education and religious education are incompatible. The clergy have ceased to interfere with education at the advanced state, with which I am directly concerned [although that’s obviously no longer the case with religions establishing so many “universities”], but they have still got control of that of children. This means that the children have to learn about Adam and Noah instead of about Evolution; about David who killed Goliath, instead of Koch who killed cholera; about Christ’s ascent into heaven instead of Montgolfier’s and Wright’s. Worse than that, they are taught that it is a virtue to accept statements without adequate evidence, which leaves them a prey to quacks of every kind in later life, and makes it very difficult for them to accept the methods of thought which are successful in science.

Yet the poisoning goes on, by Neal A. Maxwell and tens of thousands of similar clerical fools and con artists – as illustrated by the following last strand – or last straw!

I bumped into this last straw of stupidity while searching for something else at the LDS homepage. It’s contained in Maxwell’s article entitled: “The Prohibitive Costs of a Value-free Society” (*Ensign*, Oct. 1978, 52).

Our value crisis gathered some of its momentum because at first it produced an artificial sense of new freedom. Morris West warned [*In the Devil's Advocate*, New York: William Morrow Co., 1959]:

“Without the Faith, one is free, and that is a pleasant feeling at first. There are no questions of conscience, no constraints... It is only later that the terror comes. One is free – but free in chaos, in an unexplained and unexplainable world. One is free in a desert, from which there is no retreat but inward, toward the hollow core of oneself.”

What astounding stupidity! Maxwell mentions the freedom that Ingersoll extols, but Maxwell foolishly describes such freedom as “artificial”.

Maxwell then approvingly quotes West, who claims:

- 1) that the consequence of such freedom is “terror... in an unexplained and unexplainable world” (but neglects to mention that it’s “unexplained and unexplainable” only to those, such as Maxwell, who “have virtually no quantitative skills” and who bury themselves in the “science” of the Ancient Egyptians)
- 2) that “there is no retreat but inward, toward the hollow core of oneself” (but neglects to mention that it is only those who refuse to think for themselves who have such a “hollow core”). And then the worst is West’s claim
- 3) that freedom from supernatural silliness leads to “no questions of conscience, no constraints.”

What jabberwocky!

Which then returns me to the task of trying to tie up all such loose strands, which I do when I’m walking and get to “Y”, starting with:

“One more year left to live... yet, constrain yourself...”

As I tried to explain to you a couple of chapters ago, I use “one more year left to live...” to stimulate me to put my goals in priority. As someone else said, “Nothing focuses your mind like a hanging in the morning.”

Consistently, I try to determine what I want to do in case it's my last opportunity to do anything. Faced with a similar and true (!) "deadline", others might chose to "party 'til they drop" (or similar), and while I admit that I might chose to have another strawberry milkshake (I haven't had one in more five years!), yet when I'm walking, I add: "constrain yourself."

By "constrain" I don't really mean to constrain activities such as consumption of strawberry milkshakes. Instead, I mean constraints such as those listed below.

Constrain inappropriate imaginations with reality,

Constrain all beliefs by evaluating probabilities of their validities,

Constrain excessive desires with awareness of desires already satisfied,

Constrain undesirable emotions with experiences and assessments,

Constrain dangerous experiences with reasoned care,

Constrain all acts by evaluating potential consequences,

(Constrain even honesty with tact, love with limits, and kindness with keenness),

Constrain outdated instincts with reason,

Constrain reason with logic and carefully obtained data,

Constrain data with replication and skepticism,

Constrain skepticism with common sense,

Constrain common sense with scientific results,

Constrain science and its applications with values,

Constrain values with objectives,

Constrain objectives with premisses and fundamental principles, and

Constrain premisses and fundamental principles by applying the scientific method.

In a word: evaluate!

And now, Dear, I plan to constrain myself! Do I really need to explain any of the above? Please read the list again. Haven't I already tried to explain every item in the list? And would you mind if I pause here, for a moment, to bask in the possibilities that you already know what I mean, that I don't need to provide you with more details, and that I've successfully constrained myself?!

Similarly, Dear, I plan to constrain myself from explaining any more about principles, policies, and priorities – save the following statement: I maintain not only that your most important premiss is to decide how to gain knowledge about reality but also that your most important principle (leading to an inviolable policy) is to be honest with yourself.

To illustrate the significance of both those top-priority characteristics, please read the following “deconversion story” by Joe E. Holman.⁴ Similar to you, he was indoctrinated with the god idea when he was a child. Similar to you, he was intelligent – and most significantly, he was honest with himself. I hope that you learn from his story; it's long, but it's well worth the read.

From Gospel Preacher to Good Atheist ⁵ by Joe E. Holman

My Early Years

Growing up, I was a typical American kid. I had a brother and a sister, a loving mom and dad, and we were taught to believe in Christianity, America's *status quo* faith. Mom and dad were not religious fanatics, but they were mild fundamentalists who believed that Christianity was the only way and that no one could have the highest morality without belief in the Christian God. I swallowed this philosophy hook, line, and sinker from day one, though I didn't become a baptized believer until my eighteenth birthday.

I was converted for the same reason that many others were – I was at a time in my life when I needed emotional and psychological support. I had fought my own battles with depression growing up, but when Christianity came along, that was the end of my singing the blues! Finding something to believe in is a big part of the psychological make up of the individual. I had also just fallen out of a relationship with a girl and this made me begin to “look upward” for help like I'd never done before. I was a party-goer, by and large, but I knew that someday, I would have to give up my selfish life and become a part of what I was taught God told me to do – to be baptized and live as a Christian.

⁴ His homepage is at <http://www.ministerturnsatheist.org/index.html>.

⁵ Copied from <http://www.ministerturnsatheist.org/mydeconversion.html>.

I remember how it felt to start looking for answers in the bible and pray like I never had before. I was a changed man at my conversion one cold February morning in 1994. What I felt Christ did for me was all too apparent in my mind. I decided to live for him since he gave so much for me, and I was so thankful that I had escaped the eternal flames of Hell that awaited me for my former lifestyle's conduct! From then on, my life would change in ways I never imagined.

During the first year of my conversion, I read the bible through, bought perhaps 50 apologetic books and Christian evidence materials, and read them through nearly at the pace of one book per night. Nothing else seemed important to me anymore except the study of God's word. I was a living, breathing, scripture-quoting machine. Only a couple of months after my conversion, I found that I had an easier time memorizing than anyone I knew, so I put this skill to work. This came in handy as I became a determined personal evangelist.

From me, no one was safe from an argument on religion! I'd talked to everyone I knew, beginning with my close family, my friends, and my acquaintances, and they all knew where I stood on the issues: Jesus was the way, Genesis is accurate in all its teachings (and literal too), and only those in the Lord's true church (the Church of Christ to which I belonged) would be saved on the last day. I went door to door for multiple blocks, talking to every soul I could find. I had to save them from the fires of Hell like I had been saved. I sure made a lot of people mad at me who didn't want to hear it! I had two college professors walk away from me after I basically refused to let them leave their classrooms in arguments from what they said during class. I had a math professor tell me, "Listen, I'm not going to convert to your religion, guy!" I remember another teacher saying to me, "I'm happy with my church. I don't need another!" This little crusade of mine continued until a year and a half after my conversion when I decided to enter preaching school and officially prepare myself for the work I had ahead. Secular college was much too worldly and "evil" for me, so preaching school shined out as my only real option.

Let it be clear that the Church of Christ is an ultra-fundamentalist group, far more conservative than even the most stubborn protestant churches out there: so conservative, in fact, that members of my group were constantly withdrawing fellowship from each other and our sister congregations that disagreed with us over greater or lesser points. According to our group, an unscriptural marriage, a second marriage without meeting the scriptural standards of God, constituted adultery, and therefore, had to be broken up, even if there were children involved. Of course, no one could be saved outside of our group and every detail of the scriptures was the absolute word of God and had to be true! Using musical instruments during church services was wrong and sinful and Hell would be the penalty for it if done! The God of the Church of Christ was a very legally-minded God, indeed. Even a sincere candidate making his way to the baptistery out of faith to obey God, should he die, would find himself in Hell because he had to get immersed to get any forgiveness (Acts 2:38).

Beginning Ministerial Training

I began attending the Southwest School of Bible Studies in 1995 and graduated in 1997. This well respected, 216 hour preparation for my preaching work taught me a lot about every area of the work of the minister. It was a thorough walk-through of every book and chapter of the bible, preaching protocol, and particularly, the fact and the how of bible apologetics. That is, the bible needed a lot of defending. It brood so much controversy and conflict on every level of thought that it needed scholars at its aide. But my best arguing experience came from real life, from running into people with radically different beliefs than mine and learning how to defend my position over theirs. I ran into the Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses, the Baptists and Adventists, the Catholics and Greek Orthodox, the infidels and mystics, the psychics and the Buddhists, and the typical “unchurched” folk who weren’t interested in religion, one way or the other. To me they all didn’t make sense. With each encounter, I became more and more confident that my faith was the right one to have. Every debate I watched or heard, I found that my side seemed to make the better points and this bothered me a little because I felt that I didn’t understand the opposing side’s views well enough. This demanded yet more study.

In heart, I have always been a bit of a rationalist, even back then. I felt the need for compelling evidence to back up a claim, especially in a world of religions where so many flimflam artists are at work. So it bothered me when I heard others express the “just have faith” aspect of religion. Others, most people, in fact, weren’t like me. They didn’t care like I did if a claim made sense or not. If their parents said it, if the bible said it, if they had heard it for a long enough time, then it was true, period. I kept trying to understand why the faith of most people wasn’t as urgent a thing to them as my faith was to me. This led me to believe even more so that I was truly converted and most of those around me were not. But even among my own brethren, so many seemed to not be as flexible with their views as I thought they should be. Very few of them would stick their necks out in an argument like I would and put their faith on the line: “Prove to me that my religion is wrong and I’ll convert to the right one tonight.” I didn’t see this attitude very often and this worried me. Throughout my ministry, I remember watching and reading debates just to prove myself wrong, though this never happened early on. It seemed I could never get to a point in my mind where I just accepted I had truth. My quest for answers was unending.

Preaching life begins

After graduating from seminary in 1997, I held down four preaching works until my resignation as minister in 2003. In August of 1997, I began my first work. I didn’t end up staying there long on account of financial reasons. The church couldn’t afford to pay me enough, so after six months, my wife and I headed out for work number two. I spent two years at this church and learned a lot about human nature and people’s unwillingness to change.

Throughout my Christian life, I always had little doubts that bothered me from conversion onward. They were small doubts that made my stomach burn from time to time, but I would study them away before they became a problem. It was towards the end of this work (in 1999) that I began to experience doubts a little harder. This was the time in my life that I began to first question prayer.

On one occasion, our church diligently prayed that a dear elderly sister with cancer get better. She seemed to improve as her cancer went into remission for a while and I considered this a true evidence of prayer, until a year later when the cancer relapsed and she died quite suddenly! God was really working there! From then on, it was as though my mind kept a log of unanswered prayers and the results always seemed to be 50/50 at best. This was my beginning of questioning what I believed, though I didn't acknowledge it altogether. It was just in the back of my mind. I prided myself on being able to "answer" infidel arguments, but I would later find that my study of evidence on these issues was one sided. Up till now, my knowledge pool was theological and Christian. I had no way to reason outside of the box. I could only arrive at Christian conclusions because that was my worldview. So I decided to take a little harder look at the other side.

I began acquiring some other books, this time books on the natural sciences and freethought. I began with Thomas Paine, George H. Smith, and Ingersoll (to name just a few), and my library expanded monthly. Plus, I began to take a closer look at astronomy, cosmology, geology, and microbiology. I was beginning to get a different picture of the world than my bible was giving me. But even now that I was broadening my horizons, my faith was still not in any danger of being destroyed just yet. I still readily and fervently opposed, like a true, belligerent fanatic, anyone (including those in the books I read), who opposed fundamentalist Christianity. It would take time to see a better way.

2000 rolls around and the doubts worsen

Before I knew it, the summer of 2000 had rolled around. I was at my third preaching work now and the work of God in the local church went on as normal. It was a hot night in August as a guest speaker addressed my congregation in regard to his missionary work that we were supporting overseas. I had been fighting away my doubts successfully up until this point, but this was about to change. Behind him was the screen where he showed us a video of the work that the brethren were doing in India. The pagans were pulling apart a bull in a town square in honor of a pagan god.

It is unfortunate that this sort of pagan worship goes on in the world today, but it does, and we must remember as Christians that these souls are lost without the gospel. If people can be saved without it, then we are wasting our time and money trying to save souls.

It was as though time stopped for me at that moment. The speaker's words made my heart race like never before, even though I had preached and heard the same message a thousand times by now. But unlike before, I was now actually thinking of the implications of what I believed!

According to my God, these ignorant, bull-slaughtering, heathens were going to be condemned to eternal fire to burn forever, and yet so many of them had lived and died under their own wrong pagan ways and laws for countless generations. It wasn't right for God to put them in Hell for simply living in ignorance as they had been taught. I felt like a twerp with my no-other-way-to-salvation gospel, futilely trying to convert a people who already had a belief system and a culture to direct their lives. My heart began pounding and I began to sweat. I was beginning to think for myself and not just sweep every lost person into a secret compartment in my mind, never to be thought about again (as I had been doing). This Hell idea I had been preaching was starting to seem like a terrible thing. Though I wouldn't have admitted it, I never could harmonize the concept of Hell with the concept of a merciful God, especially when God could easily rehabilitate sinners or just blot them out of existence. After all, you get rid of a sick dog, you don't torture it, right?

But this posed a dilemma; if God could choose to save some lost souls without the gospel, then he must do the same for everyone lest he be branded a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34-35), in which case, his word would not always be true (John 10:35). Or, if it is as the bible says, and literally no one can be saved without the gospel, then you have the uncomfortable and unjust position of making God a tyrant who condemns helpless and ignorant pagans who never heard of Jews or Jesus or the Christian Church (Luke 12:4-5; Mark 16:16; Matthew 7:21-23; John 14:6). There is no way to answer this dilemma and maintain both the soundness of God's word and the mercy of God. I used to be content explaining this by saying that since God himself was the only immutable standard of morality, then he could do whatever he wanted with souls and his will would be "good" and ours would be "bad," but this no longer resolved the problem in my mind. Now the idea of eternal torment started to seem like the truly malicious thing it was. God was running a "little shop of horrors" all his own! The more I thought about it, I wasn't so sure I wanted to serve a monster capable of such cruelty. It would take time, but this would soon begin to interfere with my evangelism efforts.

Not a month had passed by until I found myself working late one night at the church building. I spent all the time I had to prepare bible classes and sermons, studying out bible discrepancies and evidences for and against evolution, instead. My doubts, though not unmanageable, were starting to interfere with my work, and things would finally reach the breaking point by the next year. Looking back now, I can see it all clearly. My experience tells me it's the same with just about everyone; once you begin to think critically and analyze what you are taught in the bible, faith will eventually terminate in atheism.

My Last Work

The last church I preached at was my biggest work yet. I loved preaching the gospel and had given my life to cherish and defend it. I had so much on my plate with this new work: visitation, counseling, prison correspondence, bulletin preparation, preaching and teaching sermons and bible classes, and a Sunday morning radio program. When I tried to look at this as a wonderful thing, I still found that most of

my time and effort was being spent in apologetics. I found myself constantly explaining away bible atrocities, such as the Midianites' extermination at the hands of Israel (Numbers 31:15-18), and why God allowed bad things to happen to good people. Answering the problem of evil and innocent human suffering was a big thing to all churches because it is a relevant question and every member of every church worldwide has heard every preacher they know try to explain it, but they all failed just like I did. The scriptural problems never would quit coming at me. I was constantly explaining away bible discrepancies, "patching up" the old book to make it fit a skeptical, modern world. I was constantly explaining away many errors in the text.

For instance, one passage says Ahaziah was 22 years old when he began to reign and another passage says he was forty two (2 Kings 8:26 vs. 2 Chronicles 22:2). One text has Josiah dying in Megiddo and another has him dying in Jerusalem (2 Kings 23:29-30 vs. 2 Chronicles 35:24). I was taught contradictions like these were just "scribal errors" from copying mistakes in earlier manuscripts. However, it didn't sit well with me that God did not provide us with a spiritual roadmap that could be trusted without having to go digging through a pile of human-penned manuscripts to finally stumble upon what God actually intended to say! It was difficult trying to find scientific truths in God's book, while explaining away the many unscientific things that bothered me, like flat earth passages such as Job 9:6 and I Samuel 2:8, "the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and he hath set the world upon them." The idea that striped rods produce striped offspring in animals (Genesis 30:35-39), proved very difficult to explain, and let's not forget the work I had to do in explaining what the bible really meant when it mentioned those cud chewing rabbits (Leviticus 11:6)!

I couldn't keep up with all the work I had to do to make Christianity seem viable. This worsened my doubts and I started realizing that the issues I was explaining away were valid discrepancies, indeed, and my way of correcting these problems could be applied to any false book, making it impossible to find a contradiction in anything! I was using bad reasoning to find my way out of erroneous conclusions, brought on by false bible statements.

The doubts were now so bad I found myself having to take mini-vacations, usually for a weekend or so, to clear my head and ask myself where I stood on the issues. The problem was, the vacations ended and I came right back to my problems! I decided to use my off time to keep resolving my doubts. I prayed and cried and stayed up late into the nights looking for those magic resolutions that would shed light on my problems – needless to say, they never came! Those feelings of depression and loneliness, the feelings of fear of an angry God, were quite troubling. Joe, the once-proud preacher of the gospel, was now weak in faith and questioned the validity of the most esteemed message on earth. I was hurting and doubting, and I still had no evidence or experience with this God at all, yet all these years I trusted and prayed to him and this seemed to justify my worldview.

What had happened? Did I sin? Did I not pray sincerely enough? Did I need to learn patience? Was my God going to burn me for doubting when I couldn't help it and while I still wanted to continue with him in full faith? Come to think of it, I couldn't even define this god! I could tell you traits God had (omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, omni-benevolence) and what God wasn't (a man, a liar, etc. Numbers 23:19). I could even tell you that God was a "perfect spirit entity" (John 4:24), but again, I had no experience with a "spirit" entity. What was that? Was it matter? No. It can't be matter because matter is a thing of the temporal universe, but God was eternal, outside and above the universe. Therefore, whatever God was, he was unknowable because he was outside of the universe, but now my speech about God was again rendered unintelligible. I might as well say that God is a "dagegfqyeulm" or something?! So, I was forced to retreat back into the safe-haven of illusive, theistic-agnostic jargon by saying that "God is above our understanding. God is unknowable. We would have to be God to understand him." Now I was right back where I started – with no answers! And if you think defining God is hard, imagine trying to define a Trinitarian God (Matthew 28:19)! As a minister, I would explain the trinity as water, steam, and ice – three components making up one substance. This doesn't apply very well to individuals, does it? Now I had three uncreated, perfect, and infinite beings existing forever! This was an even less intelligible idea!

Like a retard in the mall, I was lost and left to wander aimlessly, playing the same old guessing game of finding what solution would solve this problem and what God wanted me to do. My spiritual world was turned upside down. Like most religious people, Christians are very theatrical in their thinking, and so was I. I kept imagining the drama that went on as Satan was before God telling him I would fail the test, but that God was telling Satan that I would pass it, just like Job's triumphant journey into greater faith. I had to stay faithful! But, this disposition could only last so long. The time comes when you develop the courage to admit to yourself, "If there is a God, he sure has done a good job at making a universe where so many like me can't see it." In such dilemmas, you keep waiting for the right tract or email or book or conversation from a friend to come along and set you straight, but it never happens.

When 2002 came around, things were definitely changing. My preaching work was now showing serious signs of sloppiness and hurt. I stepped into that pulpit every Sunday and gave my weekly motivational speeches and forgot about my doubts for the time – but they always came back! By mid-2002, I was a virtual atheist undercover, trying to keep a paycheck coming and almost resigned to finally accepting that my god had bailed on me!

As one last measure, I decided to reach out to other ministers for help. I went to their houses, swore them to secrecy, and unloaded on them my issues. I had tried this a couple of times before with no success, but I thought I'd try it again. They didn't understand and actually attacked me viciously for asking them demanding questions they only thought they had answers to. They tried to come back with the same theistic hogwash I once so proudly peddled, but those words had lost their power. The people I went to for comfort ended up chiding me for a situation I wished I

wasn't in. Several of them refused to speak to me again. I was hurt and it didn't take long to realize that I was on my own in this search.

I took any down-time I had and investigated other world religions more clearly than I had in the past. To sum up the matter, not one of them struck me as divine and all of them seemed at least a little more credible than the religion I promoted! No one of them had any of the big answers to the world's problems and no one of them could explain human suffering. None of the basic philosophical arguments for God (the cosmological, teleological, axiological arguments, etc.) were valid, and a thorough investigation of the roots of Christianity revealed that it was not unique at all.

Christianity was composed of borrowed components of many religions. There were a myriad of virgin-born, savior-gods in the world before Christ's time. Justin Martyr admits this much in his work *Apologia I*. I found nothing but dishonesty in my preaching comrades who showed no real interest in finding (or facing) the truth. I came to see that all those shelves of creationist books spoke for not so much as a microscopic part of the scientific community and that even my preaching brethren with actual degrees in the natural sciences rejected fully the scientific consensus of the real experts' opinions on evolution and cosmology. I had been listening to dishonest crackpots who knew very little to nothing about what evolution really taught, and yet they trashed it and taught nonsense just to support the worldview of an archaic book that told of a six thousand year old earth, had numerous contradictions, false prophecies, and a plethora of errors. I was starting to see a bigger world out there than my limited Christian worldview would allow for, and I was starting to see that I needed to go back and relearn what little I was taught about science, knowing that the sources I trusted before were no good now.

There was no water canopy that surrounded the earth at creation as I had been taught (Genesis 1:6-8). In an attempt to bolster the credibility of the Noahic flood account (Genesis 6-8), I had been told that many flood myths of cultures around the world existed. This was true, but what I was not told was that a huge portion of those myths were not stories of universal floods, but local floods – natural exaggerations from floods in history which came about as fall-off from our most recent ice age. Exaggerations like this are to be expected as myths have always developed about natural disasters. There are plenty of fire myths too. I also learned that many of these flood sagas had virtually nothing in common with each other; for instance, some flood legends, like the Pygmy version of the myth, describe a flood as an act of a god creating humanity in water. Other accounts, like that of the Hopi Indians, have an impending flood averted. The Hebrews' take on the flood was not unique and not original. Many flood stories predate theirs. The Egyptians have detailed and reliable records going back a long way, verifying that no flood occurred some 5,000 years ago or roundabouts.

So, what I once thought supported the Genesis record actually robbed it of credibility. Different races did not exist because Noah had three sons that emerged from an ark and repopulated the world (Genesis 9-11). The earth was not six thousand years old.

Languages did not originate from a mysterious separation of peoples while building some tower to heaven (Genesis 11:1-9). The pyramids of different cultures around the world were not built in similar shapes because their ancestors came from the Tower of Babel. They were built as pyramids simply because they had no rebar or similar technology that would allow them to build straight upward to support their own weight when multiple stories were added to a structure.

I had been misinformed about the 2nd law of thermodynamics, which is continually misapplied by creationists everyday. The second law did not prevent or hinder evolution or an eternal universe at all. I had been misinformed about DNA and the facts of taxonomy, mutations, and genetic variants in species. I jumped at the opportunity to know the truth now. My knowledge pool was filling, and my worldview that was kept so small before and full of intolerance and scientific illiteracy, was now growing, and with this knowledge came peace like the bible only claimed to give me.

Too, I was realizing that morality which I thought was delegated by a book, had nothing to do with religion. I was stunned to see many different forms of morality all over my world. Almost all higher forms of life showed the beginnings of culture, and to one extent or another, forms of morality. The morality of my people was a little different from the Head Hunters of Borneo, yet we had a similar rule that said that it wasn't right to steal. This rule was never given by a god. It was a result of rationality in species who understood that stealing could never be allowed in structured societies. Prides of lions have the same rule. It became apparent that the greatest morality was not to do right for the bribe of a reward (Heaven), or because of the threat of punishment (Hell), but to do right for right's sake. This, to me, sums up higher morality. Morality comes no more to man from a god than it does from a god to a baboon to sacrifice himself to the leopard to preserve the lives of his troop. Once again, I looked around and saw a bigger, more natural world around me, a world that made more sense.

The Finality

I never quit getting asked what it was that finally closed my door of faith forever. If I had to pick a "nail in the coffin" that ended my theological journey, I don't think I would be able to. De-conversion takes time and a lot of thinking and rethinking. But I suppose, if my feet were to the fire and I had to pick the biggest blow, I would have to say that it came by way of understanding the basic premise of the law of rationality. I was taught in school, KISS: Keep It Simple Stupid! Look for the simplest answer first and not the most complex. You've probably heard this too. Logicians would call this principle, Occam's Razor – in a dilemma, pick the simplest answer whenever you can.

I was compelled as a freethinker to draw only those conclusions which were warranted by the evidence. That meant that if I can explain design by means of evolution, then I don't need a god. If I can explain the construction of the bible on natural processes and that it is of human origin, then I am not warranted to conclude

that a god wrote it. If I can look up at the stars at night, as I so fondly do, and see a natural explanation for them, then it is pointless to throw a god into the process somewhere.

Science had been replacing the god notion for centuries. Now God only existed in the gaps of our knowledge of the world. I had been holding back the progress of mankind by holding onto a book that promised the world, but delivered nothing. It was the very source of some of the problems it claimed to solve. I could now embrace a more fulfilling and enlightening worldview. I could now have a glass of wine without fear of eternal damnation and I could breathe the fresh air of being honest with myself. I do not expect that everyone can be an atheist. I am convinced that it will not happen for a good many people, because religion is a psychological thing and many people just aren't ready to make the leap to a purely material world, but as it was for me, so it will be the right move for a good many religious thinkers who find no stopping place short of rejecting theism.

I tried to resign from the ministry quietly, but the ministers I trusted in made that impossible. September 28, 2003 was the date of my resignation. I have never regretted that decision for a moment. In fact, I look back now and wonder how I could ever have believed in an angry tyrant of a god who brought unimaginable guilt and fear of eternal torture on his children. It was hard for my wife (who is still Christian) and my family to adjust to my new views, and it was very difficult to hunt a new career, but it had to be done. I don't have a single regret.

After I resigned, I was put on more prayer lists than I could imagine – a lot of good they did! I got my share of emotional phone calls from ministers, friends, and members of the churches I preached at before, pleading me to “hold on”, telling me I was too good a minister to leave the fold. Generally, I got the usual thoughts from people who didn't understand my outlook and made every effort to blame my change on all the wrong reasons: “You were never really converted.” “You were pushed into preaching too soon.” “You just had too strict a church and their interpretation ruined you to real moderate Christianity.” “You were just frustrated by the brethren.” “You are just going through a phase, a sort of midlife crisis.” But when I defended my decision to leave, I quickly became the flaming heretic without hope of saving: “You are evil!!” “Do you worship the devil now, Joe?” “Joe, you have no morality!” “Will you beat me and take my wallet now that you're an atheist, Joe?” They called me not knowing what they were in for. It was almost funny to listen as they got upset and tried to get off the phone as quickly as possible! At least several preachers and long-time church friends, forbade me to contact them ever again, and most of them haven't reached out since, except for one, maybe.

Looking back now, I can remember sitting on my couch shortly before my resignation and recalling the end of a movie I saw years earlier, the 1991 movie *Drop Dead Fred*. It's a silly little flick that focuses on a troubled girl who has an imaginary friend who stays with her until this friend feels she has grown up enough to be on her own. I can remember the emotion that ran through me as I applied it to my situation. Drop Dead

Fred says to her towards the end of the movie, “I’ve got to leave you now. You don’t need me anymore.” After that, the girl went on about her life as a normal girl and Fred became some other little girl’s imaginary friend.

For me, it was exactly as though my god, my imaginary friend who was a stepping stone to help me develop confidence and to reach out towards maturity in life, suddenly said to me, “I’ve got to leave you now. You don’t need me anymore.” It was sad at first, but I knew all along it was necessary. I “grew up” in my mind. My imaginary friend was gone. Santa Claus was dead. There was no ghost in the machine. Pinocchio’s strings had been cut. Cinderella’s magic carriage ran out of gas. My little green dragon I clutched so tightly in my arms as a small child at bedtime was useless now.

My journey through Christianity and into atheistic freethought was a journey of finding myself, and now I can say with great confidence that I have. I am one small link in a long chain, and all I can do is my little part to make my fellow links feel that much happier and that much more loved. The standards of peace and happiness I sought as a believer, I found as an atheist. Who would have thought?

What shocked me was that the evidences for materialism were there all along, right in front of me, only I never noticed them because of my former, religious delusions. Anyone who wanted hard facts that would support a natural universe could find a good number of evidences, if only they were willing to accept what they saw. I could now aim to live out my life with self-honesty and intellectual dignity. I was never a “sinner” and didn’t need a savior. What I needed was truth and the liberty of enlightenment.

I found that life is not about Joe Holman, or planet earth, or my wants and desires, or those of my family. Life is about change: blind, but awesome, disappointing, but surprising, change. Life is about being born, growing, and dying, for no purpose at all except for the one we make for ourselves. Life is about the evolution of all things, great and small, and in the process, it is as though the universe, through us, developed a way to view itself. For me, life is not the main event anymore. When my time on earth is spent, I will enjoy my eternal sleep, the only place where genuine, lasting tranquility can be obtained. In an eternal universe, who knows how unthinkably long it will be before another galaxy sprouts up somewhere someday and another planet is formed, where another innocent, naive, and zealous Joe Holman comes around again, asking the same questions and learning the same lessons.

I hope, Dear, that you can learn from him – even though he neglected to mention a critical idea: get more exercise!