

Inside Life



Issue 19
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The Church— Heading for Extinction?

Three Habits of
Excellent Leadership

Einstein & Theology

Man of Steel movie: Got Hope?

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Inside Life

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Inside Life is a magazine of understanding. Rather than just reporting on life, **Inside Life** seeks to delve inside the marvellous mystery that is life, to discover what it is all about. What does life mean? Where did it come from? How can we make the most of it?

Inside Life provides insight and answers to life's deep questions and challenges, and aims to provide articles of lasting hope, help, and encouragement for successful living in today's fast-moving world.

Inside Life is published three times a year, free of charge, as a community service.

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Our Cover: The crumbling shell of an abandoned church surrounded by graves cuts a striking symbol of the decline of the church in modern society. Our lead article considers the reasons why Christianity's influence continues to diminish in today's sophisticated world, and asks if the church is on the way to extinction.

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The Church— Heading for Extinction?

By Rex Morgan

Fewer and fewer people are going to church these days. For thousands of years the church was at the centre of society. In the middle ages it had immense influence, and was able to sway kingdoms. Christian missionaries played an integral part in the colonising of NZ, and the church held an important place in the first half of the last century. NZ's rural landscapes are still dotted with picturesque churches, which once used to be at the heart of community life.

But recent census figures have shown a continual decline in church attendance. A 2011 study using census data from NZ and eight other developed nations (Australia, Austria, Canada, the Czech Republic, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Switzerland) indicates religion is 'set for extinction' in all these nations, according to an article in *The NZ Herald*.¹ The BBC put it this way: 'The result, reported at the American Physical Society meeting in Dallas, indicates that religion will all but die out altogether in those countries'.

Figures from the last three censuses show the number of people identifying as Christian in NZ declined from 64.2 per cent in 1996 to 54.4 per cent in 2006. It is widely expected that the 2013 census figures when released will show for the first time that less than 50 per cent of the population of 'God's Own Country' identify as Christian!



Is the earthquake-ravaged shell of Christchurch's Knox Presbyterian prophetic of the church's demise?

There are a number of reasons for this trend. Rapid advances in scientific and technological knowledge have caused many, particularly of the younger generation, to consign the idea of a God to the dustbin of outdated myths and legends. Media reports of church scandals and abuse by clergy have given rise to doubt and dismay. Religious wars, money-grabbing preachers, judgmental attitudes, and intolerance shown by religious adherents—all of these have negatively influenced people's perceptions. Some people have visited a church and found it to be a bad experience. Others feel that all Christians are self-righteous hypocrites, and that religious services are dull, boring, and meaningless. Many are so busy with the necessities of modern life that they don't have time for God.

Is the Church outdated, heading for extinction? Or does it still have a worthwhile place in our world? Have you been disappointed by Christianity? Can Christianity be 'redeemed'?

God Is Disappointed, Too

If you look at the Bible, it is fascinating to note that God himself says that he has often been disappointed by religion! Addressing the religious leaders of the period as he walked the roads of Palestine, Jesus remonstrated: 'You're hopeless, you religion scholars and Pharisees! Frauds! You burnish the surface of your cups and bowls so they sparkle in the sun, while the insides are maggoty with your greed and gluttony'.²

Through his ancient prophets, God vigorously railed against the

Returns of the Jedi

A humorous but interesting insight into the decline of traditional religion in the western world was highlighted by the movement initiated in 2001 urging residents of a number of countries to record their religion as 'Jedi' or 'Jedi Knight' (after the quasi-religious order of Jedi Knights in the fictional Star Wars universe) on national censuses.

Over 53,000 people listed themselves as Jedi in New Zealand's 2001 census. New Zealand had the highest per capita population of reported Jedi in the world that year, with 1.5% marking 'Jedi' as their religion. Statistics New Zealand treated Jedi responses as 'Answer understood, but will not be counted'. If Jedi were counted it would have been the second largest religion in New Zealand. The percentages of religious affiliations were: Christian: 58.9%; No religion: 29.6%; Object to answering: 6.9%; Jedi: 1.5%; Buddhism: 1.2%; Hindu: 1.2%.

There was a fall in the number of New Zealand Jedi five years later, with some 20,000 people giving this as their religion in the 2006 census.



Jedi Anakin Skywalker

If we want to be fair about it, Christianity shouldn't be judged by what its frail human followers do, but on the basis of how Jesus taught and lived. It is a fact of life that churches are made up of human beings, and all humans are imperfect. All clubs, organisations, and groups have a mixture of 'good, bad, and ugly' people, and churches are no different. There is no perfect church, and if there were, once you or I joined it, it would no longer be perfect!

Full of Hypocrites

In a survey of unchurched Americans, 72% said they think the church is 'full of hypocrites'.⁵ It is easy to spot hypocrisy in the church, but that is because church is the very place sinners go in order to find forgiveness and answers to the problem of sin. It's like saying a rugby club is full of people who need to get better at playing rugby, or Alcoholics Anonymous is full of alcoholics. That is why they go there!

All humans are hypocrites to some extent—we all say one thing and do another at times! But Christians can more easily be identified as hypocrites because they make no secret of the standards they hold, which are laid out in the Bible for all to see. Because churches espouse these lofty standards of morality and ethics, they are judged severely, and so they should be. But in the end they are composed of human beings, so they are bound to make mistakes.

Indeed, it is people who have had tough lives and perhaps don't possess so much in the way of money or intellect that are most likely to feel a need for God. So it isn't surprising that Christians exhibit various weaknesses. One of the earliest church leaders, the apostle Paul, recognised this, pointing out: 'Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that

churches of their time. For example, on one occasion he protested: 'Quit your worship charades. I can't stand your trivial religious games: monthly conferences, weekly Sabbaths, special meetings—meetings, meetings, meetings—I can't stand one more! I'm sick of your religion, religion, religion, while you go right on sinning'.³

At another time he warned: 'Don't listen to the sermons of the prophets. It's all hot air. Lies, lies, and more lies. They make it all up. Not a word they speak comes from me. They preach their "Everything Will Turn

Out Fine" sermon to congregations with no taste for God, their "Nothing Bad Will Ever Happen to You" sermon to people who are set in their own ways'.⁴

God doesn't mince words! If you've been disappointed by Christianity, you're in the best of company! God is disappointed, too. He definitely doesn't approve of religious wars, abuse, and hypocrisy. Where these things are found in 'Christianity', it is not God's type of Christianity. But that doesn't mean all Christianity is ungodly!



Aid workers help survivors living in a Haitian church compound after losing their homes to flooding from Hurricane Ike in 2008.

are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him'.⁶

However, church people should be transformed for the better by their relationship with God, and thankfully the majority are. So a lot of good is done by churches—the good far outweighing the bad. Thousands and thousands of Christians are found in the most impoverished of places, their kind hands tending to the sick, comforting the traumatised, feeding the hungry, giving hope to those who have lost everything, and putting a smile on the faces of the lonely.

When disaster strikes, churches are often in the forefront of the relief effort, offering facilities to homeless people, collecting clothing and food for the stranded. Humanitarian aid organisations such as World Vision and Tear Fund are underpinned by strong Christian values.

After the recent devastating storms in Oklahoma, a local news reporter saw church volunteers move onto the scene after the tornadoes left. He told his listeners: 'Wait for government aid and you'll be here forever. The Baptist men will get it done tomorrow'.⁷

The fact that Christians follow a man who died for his enemies, praying for them to be forgiven, and that they are taught week by week to practice sacrificial service, generosity, and peace-making means society is greatly benefitted by their compassion and good works. A US study found significant differences in charitable giving between secular and religious people. Those with religious commitment were 25 percentage points more likely than secularists to donate money (91 percent to 66 percent) and 23 points more likely to volunteer time (67 percent to 44 percent).⁸

Bad things have been done by accountants and investment advisers, people like the infamous Bernie Madoff, but that doesn't mean we should steer clear of all accountants. Numerous tragic 'medical misadventures' have been recorded, but that doesn't put us off going to the doctor. We need to choose our professional advisers carefully, with our eyes wide open, and so it is with selecting a church.

What about the arrogance of Christians? There is a perception the 'God-botherers' are arrogant because they claim to know the truth. But surely the claim that Christians are misguided 'God-botherers' is arrogant in a similar way?

Simply claiming to know truth isn't necessarily arrogant. The manner in which that is claimed can be a problem, though. If Christians smugly boast that they know more than

Feedback Requested

Have you been disappointed by Christianity? Have you had a bad experience at church—or a particularly good one? We would appreciate readers' comments on this article, for possible use in a further piece on this subject.

Please send any thoughts to : *Inside Life*, PO Box 304055, Hauraki Corner, Auckland 0750

others, and certainly there are some who do, then they are indeed arrogant. But most Christians realise they are not to behave in that way. They know God wants them to act with humility, the very opposite of arrogance. God makes it very plain that he hates conceit and arrogance.⁹

Christians who act as if they are better than everyone else are certainly not living by the creeds of Christianity. The Bible says very clearly that all people are sinners, and strongly condemns a 'holier than thou' attitude.¹⁰ Christians who are judgmental are going directly against the instructions of their founder, who cautioned: 'Judge not, that you are not judged'.¹¹

Some churches give the impression they are always out for money. Once again, such Christians are letting down the God they claim to serve. God's way actually emphasises giving, not getting.¹² There is no record of Jesus asking for money, although some funds were donated to his ministry.¹³ It is fair enough for churches, as do all clubs and societies, to seek adequate funds to do their work. And believers may wish to voluntarily make offerings as part of their worship of God. But no one should be forced to give, or made to feel guilty for not giving.

Boring, Boring, Boring

A survey of 8,500 people in Australia¹⁴ found the top reason

non-attenders don't go to church is that they find church services to be boring or unfulfilling.

It shouldn't be that way—and if it is, there is something wrong. True Christianity is far from boring. It is about living life to the full. Jesus said: 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full'.¹⁵ This is a reference to a whole new way of living, with a spiritual dimension that reveals exciting and satisfying new insights on the issues of life.

William Barclay's *Daily Study Bible* comments: 'When we walk with Jesus, there comes a new vitality, a superabundance of life. It is only when we live with Christ that life becomes really worth living and we



Thirty volunteers from the St Vincent de Paul Society and the Parish of Christ Church in Geelong, Australia, joined together in 2012 to put on a three-course Community Christmas Day dinner for more than 150 people in need.

begin to live in the real sense of the word'.

Writing in *The NZ Herald*, columnist John Roughan, although he says he is 'not consciously religious', expressed appreciation for Christianity in an article entitled, 'Celebrating a force for good'. He stated: 'Religion is a conviction that there are greater and better forces at work on the world than human reason. Christianity should be capable of moving rich and poor to moments of awe and excitement at life and its infinite possibilities'.¹⁶

The church has changed a lot over the years. The long and ponderous sermons of the past have given way in many places to modern services incorporating contemporary music (all genres are available), and shorter interactive sermons often utilise technology such as videos, vimeos, and Powerpoint presentations. Christianity is relevant in today's world because it has to do with living—the process of living our daily life to the full, with an understanding of who put us here and the meaning God intended for our lives. Christians learn about marriage and family relationships, love, forgiveness, honesty, and integrity. They are encouraged with principles of happy, healthy, and spiritually satisfying living, and the assurance of eternal life.

Among the benefits of attending church are friendship and a sense of belonging. Friendships made at church often become close and lifelong because they are based on deeply held mutual values and faith. Churches put on activities for all age groups, with events tailored for singles, for the elderly, and so on. Christian youth camps provide a wonderful opportunity for young people to spend time with their peers and learn a wide variety of indoor and outdoor activities in a safe yet challenging environment.

Participation in a positive endeavour greater than oneself is a great help in facing the challenges of life.

Ten Reasons for Not Washing

It is interesting to take the reasons people use for not going to church, and apply them to other areas of life, to see how inconsistent we can be in our logic. For example, if the commonly held reasons for not going to church are valid, they are good reasons for not washing either...

1. I was forced to wash as a child.
2. People who wash are hypocrites—they think they are cleaner than everybody else.
3. There are so many different kinds of soap, I can't decide which one is best.
4. I used to wash, but it got boring so I stopped.
5. I wash only on special occasions, like Christmas and Easter.
6. None of my friends wash.
7. I'll start washing when I get older and dirtier.
8. I can't spare the time.
9. The bathroom is never warm enough in winter or cool enough in summer.
10. People who make soap are only after your money.

There is a story about a pastor and the CEO of a soap manufacturing company who went for a walk together.

'What good is religion?' asked the CEO. 'Look at all the trouble and misery of the world! Still there, even after years, thousands of years, of teaching about goodness and truth and love and peace. Still there, after all the sermons and teachings. If religion is good and true, why should this be?'

The pastor said nothing.

They continued walking until he noticed a child playing in the gutter. Then the pastor said: 'Look at that child. You say that soap makes people clean, but see the dirt on that youngster. Of what good is soap? With all the soap in the world, over all these years, the child is still filthy. I wonder how effective soap is, after all!'

The CEO protested: 'But pastor, soap can't do any good unless it is used!'

'Exactly', replied the preacher. 'Exactly.'

Another benefit of the church is its care for, and support of, its members. Many churches have groups that join together to look after the sick, take meals to shut-ins, and distribute food to the needy, both in and outside the church.

Church also provides a much neglected luxury in the midst of today's hectic helter-skelter society: the chance to slow down, pause, and reflect—an opportunity for meditation: just being quiet and contemplating what is truly important in life.

You are invited to come and meet the sponsors of *Inside Life!*

Worldwide Church of God services are held weekly in the following locations:

Auckland: The Mt. Eden Senior Citizens' Club Hall, Balmoral
(corner Dominion Rd and Brixton Rd)
Saturdays at 2.00 pm.
(contact: Rex Morgan, ph. 09 489 8910)

Rotorua: Contact Peter Lindop, ph. 07 349 2272

Wellington: Thumbs Up
5 Elizabeth Street, Petone
Saturdays at 2:30 pm.
(contact: Dennis Gordon, ph. 04 386 2094)

Invercargill: The Southern Light Community Centre
64 Conon Street
Saturdays at 1:00 pm.
(contact: Les Evans, ph. 03 216 3680)

Other NZ locations: Small groups meet regularly in other cities nationwide. For details, contact Dennis Richards, ph. 06 353 6224 or visit www.wcg.org.nz

The greatest benefit, however, is to tap into the power of a relationship with God, to learn about him, and his will and direction for your life. Church is all about an encounter with God and others that changes who we are and provides a new source of power for living.

You don't have time to go to church? It only takes two to three hours a week, about the same time as going to a movie, or a meal out. That's not really a lot of time to invest in an activity that can deliver so many benefits! Churches don't meet only on Sunday mornings; services are available on Saturdays or midweek. Isn't it time you thought about connecting with a church to experience the joy of worshiping God, making new friends, learning vital life principles, giving practical help to others, and discovering the joy of spiritual understanding leading to eternal life?

Some people prefer to seek God personally rather than via organised religion, noting that all organisations are man-made and fraught with difficulties. A survey showed a massive 86% of unchurched Americans believe they can have a good

relationship with God without being involved in church.¹⁷

It is true that God is everywhere and we can communicate with him in any place at any time. But Jesus does want his disciples to follow him as a community that can work together in proclaiming the gospel.¹⁸

After he returned to heaven he gave the Holy Spirit to his people in a group setting.¹⁹ Thereafter, the New Testament records him operating in the context of local church congregations, where members can grow together as a 'body', learning from one another, caring for one another, worshipping God, and spreading the gospel in a united effort.²⁰

Is the church heading for extinction? Is it fast becoming obsolete? Far from it! In fact, we can be assured this will never happen because it was founded by Jesus Christ, as his way of carrying out his work on earth. It has gone through many ups and downs over the centuries. Aggressive governments have persecuted it and tried to stamp it out. But Jesus promised it would never die out, giving the guarantee: 'I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'.²¹

Jesus also famously said 'I am the way, the truth and the life'.²² If this is correct, Christianity is extremely relevant and meaningful to each of us. Surely it is worth giving it a try to see if he was right?

Notes

- ¹ *The NZ Herald*, March 22, 2011, citing a study by academics from Northwestern University, Arizona University, and a research company in Tucson.
- ² Matthew 23:25-26, *The Message* version.
- ³ Isaiah 1:13-14, *The Message* version.
- ⁴ Jeremiah 23:16-17, *The Message* version.
- ⁵ Survey of 1402 adults conducted by LifeWay Research in 2008.
- ⁶ 1 Corinthians 1:26-29, New International Version.
- ⁷ <http://holysoup.com/2013/06/05/reaching-the-community-with-no-strings/>
- ⁸ 'Religious Faith and Charitable Giving', by Arthur C. Brooks, reporting on *The Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey* of 30,000 observations of 'civic behaviour' in 2000.
- ⁹ Proverbs 8:13
- ¹⁰ Matthew 6:1; Galatians 6:14
- ¹¹ Matthew 7:1
- ¹² Acts 20:35
- ¹³ John 12:6
- ¹⁴ *Why People Don't Go to Church*, 1998 Australian Community Survey, conducted by Perth's Edith Cowan University and National Church Life Survey Research.
- ¹⁵ John 10:10
- ¹⁶ 'Celebrating a force for good', *The NZ Herald*, 24 December 2011.
- ¹⁷ Survey of 1402 adults conducted by LifeWay Research in 2008.
- ¹⁸ Matthew 28:19
- ¹⁹ Acts 2:1-4
- ²⁰ Ephesians 4:11-16, 1 Corinthians 1:10, Hebrews 10:24-25
- ²¹ Matthew 16:18
- ²² John 14:6



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years and has contributed articles to a number of international publications. Rex can be contacted at rex@wgc.org.nz

Three Habits of *Excellent* Leadership

By Aubrey Warren

One of the 'prizes' I enjoy awarding at the end of workshops is a desk plaque with the words of Aristotle: 'We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit'.

All of us have habits. Some good, some not so good. Some of our habits help us achieve, experience, and model excellence. Some of our habits hold us back from excellence. And, of course, in a leadership context our habits have amplified effects on those we work with—encouraging or inhibiting excellence in teams, processes, productivity, innovation, and communication.

So what might be some practical, everyday habits of excellent leadership?

1. Powerful conversations that challenge, focus, support, and encourage



Our everyday conversations, both formal and informal, are central to our effectiveness in influencing others. So, the ability to engage in conversations that produce positive results is a key leadership habit. Every interaction produces a result—good, bad, or indifferent. Every conversation creates or reinforces others' perception of us. Every conversation is thus important and therefore worth managing. What do you want your conversations to

achieve? Sometimes you need to challenge people, processes, or priorities. Sometimes you need to focus or refocus individuals or teams. Sometimes a conversation needs to clearly communicate support. And sometimes (often) our conversations should encourage.

2. Attentive listening that invites input and enables insight

It could be argued that listening is obviously part of conversations, but it's also such an important behavioural habit that it deserves its own space. Listening is called 'the neglected communication' skill, which suggests it may not be as habitual



as we'd like to think. Active listening is first a choice. Attentive listening takes time and effort, but it rewards us with richer information (think about the quality of information you choose to give to those who listen attentively). It produces greater clarity. It also communicates respect.

3. Modeling and reinforcing the right values

Everyone says they 'lead by example'. And of course we do—we can't help it because people observe our behaviour and create impressions based on that behaviour far more readily and powerfully than they do in response to our words. (And, of course, our intentions are completely unknown to them.) The only question

about leading by example is what that example is. Fundamentally a leader's responsibility is to exemplify the values and standards that are the team's and organisation's aspirations. After all, the values should be reflected in our habitual behaviour. A



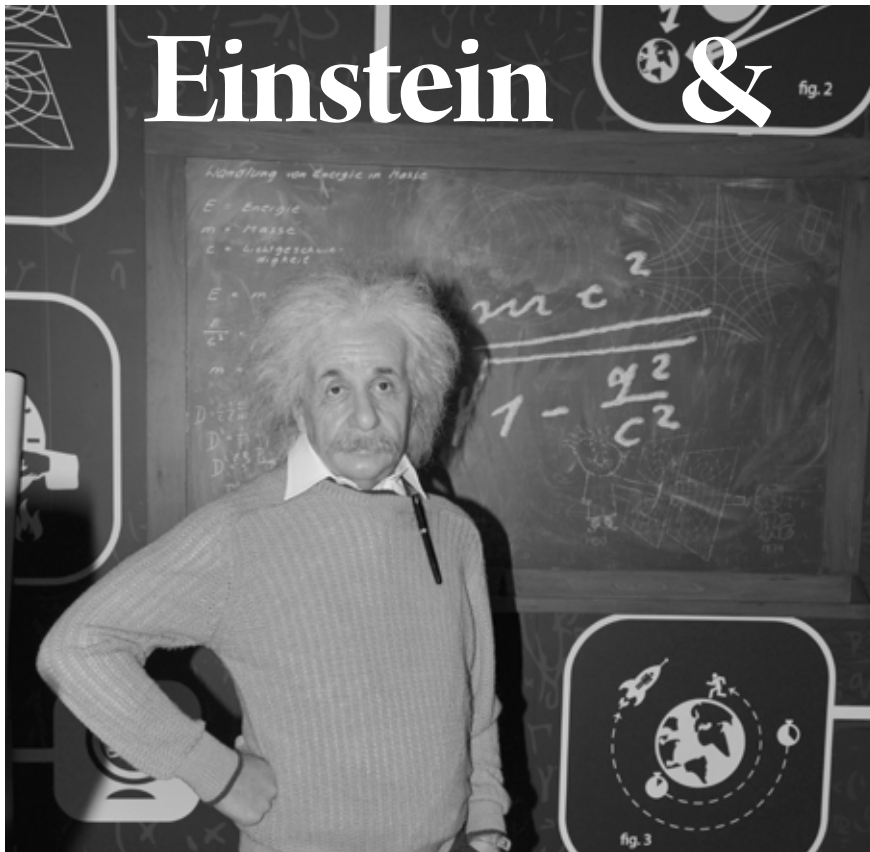
leader's conversations should also reinforce the practice of positive values. (This is also a practical way of having supportive conversations.)

These three apparently simple daily habits are individually and collectively at the heart of a group, team, or organisation's culture. As Edgar Schein wrote: '...there is a possibility...that the only thing of real importance leaders do is to create and manage culture and that the unique talent of leaders is their ability to work with cultures'.

Culture is largely the creation of habits. So the question is simply which habits we want to shape our culture. And if we want an 'excellent' culture, it makes sense to cultivate and celebrate excellent habits.

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Einstein & Theology



The legendary physicist, Albert Einstein, at Madame Tussaud's in Vienna.

By Joseph Tkach

Albert Einstein has always been a fascinating personality to me. More than a hundred years ago, he wrote a paper describing a radical insight into the nature of light, which turned the conventional physics of that day on its head and led to the development of Quantum Theory. What may be less recognised is the potential impact that Einstein's ideas had on theology.

Disciplines like physics and chemistry are called 'hard sciences'. Not because they are difficult, but because those physical phenomena respond to the scientific method, yielding testable predictions through controlled experiments that can produce accurate and quantifiable data. Disciplines like sociology, political science, and theology are less exact, more difficult to quantify and don't easily yield predictable results outside the experimental environment. So they are sometimes called 'soft sciences'.

Einstein showed that hard sciences are not so hard after all. He realised that what were considered established ideas about the nature of matter were too simplistic. Light, for example, behaved in some unfathomable way, as both a wave and a particle. This apparent paradox defied a simple scientific explanation. Einstein said: 'What I see in nature is a magnificent structure that we can comprehend only very imperfectly, and that must fill a thinking person with a feeling of humility'. The idea of light acting as both a wave and a particle is still a difficult concept to grasp. It is an idea that would seem to belong to a soft science, not physics.

As scientists probe ever further into the realms of the very large and the incomprehensibly small, they have found even more extraordinary paradoxes. In *The Grand Design*, Stephen Hawking, a brilliant contemporary theoretical physicist, has written: 'Quantum physics is a new model of reality that gives us a picture of the universe. It is a picture in

which many concepts fundamental to our intuitive understanding of reality no longer have meaning'. According to physicist Lisa Randall in *Knocking on Heaven's Door: How Physics and Scientific Thinking Illuminate the Universe and the Modern World*:

We are poised on the edge of discovery. The biggest and most exciting experiments in particle physics and cosmology are under way and many of the world's most talented physicists and astronomers are focused on their implications. What scientists find within the next decade could provide clues that will ultimately change our view of the fundamental makeup of matter or even of space itself—and just might provide a more comprehensive picture of the nature of reality.

I find this a fascinating topic to explore. In some ways, it has helped me in my journey to appreciate the triune nature of God. When I see that paradoxes exist in nature, it is not so difficult for me to accept that the nature of the Creator of light would also seem, to my limited human understanding, also somewhat paradoxical.

Albert Einstein was not a 'believer' in the traditional sense. Though he considered himself an agnostic, he was a firm critic of atheism. He would have deplored the strident voices of some scientists today who angrily insist that God does not exist. He wrote: 'In view of such harmony in the cosmos which I, with my limited human mind, am able to recognise, there are yet people who say there is no God. But what really makes me angry is that they quote me for the support of such views'.

Although Einstein did not believe in a personal God, he never missed chapel service at Princeton when prayers were being offered for Jews

trapped in the concentration camps. He maintained: '...even though the realms of religion and science in themselves are clearly marked off from each other', there are 'strong reciprocal relationships and dependencies, as aspirations for truth derive from the religious sphere'. He once explained that 'science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind'.

Einstein died in 1955. It is not only the hard sciences that owe him a debt of gratitude. When asked how he came to his great new discovery, he said: 'I stood before the universe and listened'. He showed that being scientific does not mean making everything understandable with absolute certainty. He demonstrated that great new advances in knowledge come only when we let a reality, far greater than our previous understanding would allow, determine how we are to know it and in humility let it tell us its nature.

In this way, Einstein surely opened the door for some to recognise the legitimacy of the so-called 'soft science' of theology; for in theology we stand before a Reality that far exceeds our understanding. But when we listen in humility at the place where God has personally made himself known, we can indeed have real, if not absolutely comprehensive, knowledge of God. And that place is a person, Jesus Christ.

Christian theology is not unscientific and science does not and cannot rule out a reality greater than ourselves, greater than our universe. Doing so would be, well, unscientific. As Einstein wrote:

Everyone who is seriously interested in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that a spirit is manifest in the laws of the universe—a spirit vastly superior to man, and one in the face of which our modest powers must feel humble.

Joseph Tkach is president of Grace Communion International: www.gci.org.

The Yellow Pages

and the



By Joseph Tkach

The *Yellow Pages* have been a familiar feature of homes and businesses for well over a hundred years. Even in this age of online directories, you have probably got one of them around somewhere.

We all know how to use them. They provide an alphabetical listing of businesses and services by subject. So, if I want to find a plumber, someone to fix my computer, or make a reservation at a certain kind of restaurant, all I have to do is look in my *Yellow Pages*.

But suppose I want to know—for example—the favourite colour of my city Mayor. Well, I just look up the Mayor's office in the section on local government, and check under 'favourite colour' and...well, of course, I don't find it.

Have the *Yellow Pages* failed me? Of course not—it would be ridiculous to think that. We all know that kind of information isn't in the *Yellow Pages*.

So why, then, don't we have the same approach to another old book you most likely have in your home? The *Bible* has been around a lot longer than the *Yellow Pages*.

And yet, it is surprising how many people do not really know what the *Bible* is for. It's brought out for weddings and funerals and for 'swearing in' ceremonies. But many of us don't touch it at other times. It is known as the 'good book', but we don't seem to know exactly what it's good for.

Some believers seem to think they can find the answer to any question imaginable somewhere within its pages. They regard it as the final authority on matters of diet, what to wear, what entertainment is appropriate, what hobbies to have, and so on. Some claim it gives us advance information about the major world events of our time. Some even claim that embedded in the text of the *Bible* is coded information that allows them to predict when the world will end.

And even though their end-time predictions are always wrong, it doesn't deter them. They plunge back in, searching the Scriptures carefully until they come up with another secret, scripture-based interpretation.

The second letter to Timothy tells us that the Scriptures are 'able to make

(continued on p. 12)

MAN OF STEEL movie:



Got Hope?

By Rusty Wright

What's the "S" stand for?' Lois Lane asks Superman in the new movie. 'It's not an "S"', responds the Man of Steel. 'On my world, it means "hope".'

A symbol of hope for humanity: that's how *Man of Steel* portrays the legendary hero.

There's plenty of action and drama: General Zod, a villain from Krypton,

warns Superman: 'Surrender within 24 hours, or watch this world suffer the consequences', and appeals to earthlings to turn him in. The explosive action and special effects were so fast-paced in places that I found myself wishing it would slow down so I could take a breath.

There's also light romance: journalist Lois Lane (Amy Adams) and Superman/Clark Kent (Henry Cavill) kindle some sparks as she seeks to unlock his past.

Higher Purpose

But beyond the escapism, at its core the classic Superman story is about good vs evil. This movie highlights sense of purpose: young Clark's adoptive earth father, Jonathan (Kevin Costner), encourages his quest for identity: 'You were sent here for a reason'.

There's nobility and inspiration: Jor-El (Russell Crowe) predicts of his biological son Kal-El (Superman), whom he sends to earth from

(continued from p. 11)

you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ'.¹ It also says: 'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness'.²

That, then, is what the *Bible* is for. And that is how we should use it—as a reliable guide to salvation. It

teaches us about Jesus, and how we can look to him and always rely on him.

The *Bible* answers the really important questions of life. But we shouldn't expect it to answer every question. That's not what it's for, and to use it that way makes about as much sense as, well, looking in the

Yellow Pages to find out the Mayor's favourite colour.

Notes

¹ 2 Timothy 3:15 (NIV)

² 2 Timothy 3:16 (NIV)

This is a transcript of the weekly 'Speaking of Life' radio programme by Joseph Tkach, president of Grace Communion International. For more information visit www.gci.org.

Krypton: 'You will give the people of Earth an ideal to strive towards. They'll race behind you. They will stumble. They will fall. But in time, they will join you....In time, you will help them accomplish wonders'.

There's no Jimmy Olsen and no Kryptonite, but there is *Daily Planet* editor-in-chief Perry White (Laurence Fishburne). And there's a motif that might surprise you.

Misinterpreting the Story?

When I first heard talk of biblical parallels in the Superman story, I thought that overzealous Christians were reading their biases into the popular tales. Then I looked deeper. They were right. *Superman Returns* (2006) clearly displayed biblical themes. *Man of Steel* is full of them.

CNN asked composer Hans Zimmer if there were any similarities between his two recent projects—*Man of Steel* and History Channel miniseries *The Bible*—since both involve a saviour figure (Jesus, Kal-El) sent by his father to Earth.

'Yes', Zimmer laughed. 'Once you see Superman, you'll see how close you are....Both stories are passions...about a struggle to do the right thing'.

Multiple Parallels

Jor-El views Superman as Earth's saviour: 'You can save her [Lois]...you can save all of them'.

Public-rejection concerns accompany both figures. Kal-El's biological mother worries: 'He'll be an outcast. They'll kill him'. 'How?' replies Jor-El. 'He'll be a god to them.'

The adult Clark recalls: 'My [adoptive] father believed that if the world found out who I

really was, they'd reject me. He was convinced that the world wasn't ready'.

Jesus, of course, got a mixed reception. His close friend recalled: 'He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God'.¹

Life Insights

As for Superman's public reception...well, I don't want to spoil this movie for you. One could make a game of seeing how many biblical parallels you can find. (I've only mentioned a few here.) And you might want to consider some life insights from what you'll find there, too.

Man of Steel is a fun film, simple in plot but deep in theme as it taps profound human desires for self-identity, purpose, and hope. 'Hope' is especially timely in our world filled with nuclear rogues, homeland terrorists, devastating disease, and financial uncertainty.

But in real life, absent some trustworthy basis for lasting hope, are we all just whistling in the dark?

Paul, a first-century General Zod (of sorts) who became a follower of Jesus, wrote: 'I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope'.²

Got hope?

Notes

¹ John 1:11–13

² Romans 15:3

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Moore Than Meets the Eye

By Tony Goudie

The British astronomer Sir Patrick Moore CBE FRS FRAS died peacefully at his home in Selsey, Sussex on Sunday, 9 December 2012 following a short illness. He would have been 90 on 4 March 2013, having been active in astronomy for an astonishing 83 years.

Patrick Moore had many friends, and being an outspoken man, a few adversaries, too.

But I was amongst his friends, having met him in early 1955 when I was just twelve years old and he was thirty-two. I have known only a few people longer who are still alive. So maybe this short appreciation of my friendship will bring *Inside Life* readers some other aspects of an

extraordinary life that might not otherwise appear in the media.

My mother Muriel had taken me to the Hampstead Scientific Society meetings not far from Golders Green, where he had been invited to speak. That encounter started me off on both my astronomical journey and our close friendship.

When we met, the long-running TV programme 'The Sky at Night' (Patrick completed 710 'Sky at Night' programmes.) was still two years in the future, as was the Queen's first televised Christmas address and the first Sputnik. Einstein was still alive (he died in April 1955).

Patrick Moore and I used to meet regularly. I stayed with him both in East Grinstead and then in Armagh, where he lived for a little while, along with his beloved opera singer mother Gertrude and many cats. He moved

down to Selsey by the sea, just south of Chichester, over 40 years ago—a site that provided excellent southern skies over the Channel (providing the weather was good!).

We would observe the sky at these locations when clear until at least 4.00am, with pipes and strong coffee to keep us going.

At that time he became actively involved in—amongst many other things—cricket, chess, music, and practical jokes. (He never really thought he grew up!) Patrick stayed with my parents Don and Muriel when TV first beckoned. I remember him doing our breakfast washing up in the sink, and making light of a heart condition which threatened to have taken his life as a young man.

Like Winston Churchill, David Attenborough, Neil Armstrong, and others, he was a man for a moment.

Television was in its early days and space travel was for the future. Astronomy was mostly considered rather a boffin's pursuit.

He wrote over 100 popular books that changed all that, each one on an old 1908 Woodstock typewriter, and with only his two middle fingers. He gave away most of his fortune during his life, sending children to college and university, and buying telescopes for kids (I was one of them). In the



Tony Goudie with his friend, the late Sir Patrick Moore

early days he and Richard Hearne (TV's 'Mr Pastry') provided money for swimming pools for disabled children.

An 'Amateur' in His Field?

Patrick Moore came on the scene in a whirlwind of enthusiasm. He could speak to a hall of 500 people with no sound system and hold everyone's attention with his staccato delivery and humour. But he always considered himself as 'an amateur' (which actually means a lover of a subject), claiming he never did a day's work in his life because he so much enjoyed what he did! He was certainly somewhat eccentric both in appearance and manner, (he had worn a monocle since age 16) which really only served to endear himself to many—but not all.

About a year ago I asked Sir David Attenborough whether he could join Sir Patrick for a possible TV *Panorama* documentary. Both were Knights of the Realm, both were pioneers in the early television days, both were also respected in their fields, and both were in their eighties. One knew so much of what lay above the horizon and the other what lay below. But sadly it was not to be.

I took one of our two sons to meet Sir Patrick a few years ago. I wanted this link with the past to go on another generation, with a man who is in the Guinness Book of Records as the longest presenter of any television programme. (He only missed one recording in over 700 monthly 'Sky at Night' episodes due to 'a dodgy duck egg' and the salmonella poisoning which nearly killed him.) A pacemaker then undoubtedly gave him a few more years of life.

Our 23 year-old Alexander will now be able to remember that he once met a man who knew one of the pioneer Wright aviators: Orville, who died at the end of January 1948. Patrick Moore took the piano part for Albert Einstein, who once wanted to play Saint-Saens' 'Swan' from *The*

Carnival of the Animals on his violin. He met Serge Rachmaninoff, Yuri Gagarin (the first man in space), and all the 'moon men', including Neil Armstrong, whom he interviewed. Patrick played the xylophone at a Royal Command Performance (he also wrote brass band music and a number of operas), danced on a Morecambe and Wise Christmas Special, knew comedians Arthur Askey, Michael Bentine, and Les Dawson, among many others. He also appeared on most game shows of the 70s and 80s, being awarded a BAFTA for his services to television in 2001, the same year that he received his knighthood from Prince Charles.

Many people, including a whole generation of today's astronomers, are so thankful for his efforts and for his great personal concern and accessibility. He was never ex-directory, wanting anyone, especially the young who wished to contact him, to do so with minimum delay.

Patrick Moore was one of those in life who, when you met him, made you feel so special, just as if nobody else was around at that moment.

The Queen guitarist Brian May, who had appeared alongside Patrick Moore on a TV programme, was among those paying tribute to the late star, saying: 'Patrick will be mourned by the many to whom he was a caring uncle, and by all who loved the delightful wit and clarity of his writings, or enjoyed his fearlessly eccentric persona in public life. Patrick is irreplaceable. There will never be another Patrick Moore. But we were lucky enough to get one.'

Death, not the Final Frontier?

Patrick Moore was not religious, but the older he became, the more he was sure death was not the end of things. He made provision on March 4th this year for a party at which a candle was to be lit. He said he would do his **** best to blow it out during the toast. 'Quite a show—plenty of drink', he said!

He and I often talked about Christianity. He knew I was a minister but the conversation never seemed to go anywhere. I am sure he will be absolutely amazed when he realises that the loving mind of God was and is behind all that he enjoyed in life. It will be such a different and such a marvellous experience.

He never married. Patrick mourned his first and last love Lorna, killed by a German bomb as she drove an ambulance during the War when they were both just 17. He was once asked whether he ever thought of her since then. He said that maybe he could go half an hour without Lorna coming to mind. One day they will be re-united, and perhaps we can all learn a lesson about devotion to another, who should never be out of our love and thinking, either.

Pat and I had a friendly hug a month or so before he died, both knowing that time had caught him up. At 89 years there was not much left, and he was in poor health. He made his last programme only a few days before dying. His final 'good night' at the end was especially poignant after 55 years. Two million watched the repeat, shown following his death.

I suppose a bit of me has gone as well now. I have had the privilege of seeing someone through the span of life from 32 to 89 years of age.

Patrick Moore was a kind man who excelled in so many fields with the gifts he was given. A star indeed, awaiting, as will be Sir David Attenborough one day, 'the new heaven and the new earth' wherein dwells righteousness.

He will indeed be sorely missed by many. And I am only just one of them.

Tony Goudie is a pastor in the UK. This article was first published in the Winter 2012-2013 issue of *The Plain Truth* (<http://www.plain-truth.org.uk>). Reprinted by permission.

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