

Inside Life

Issue 36

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Created equal, created to be free?



Hope for the missing
Resurrected pigs?

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Inside Life

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Printed by Ovato Ltd

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 twice a year, free of charge, as a community service.

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ISSN: 1177-3693

Our Cover: It is not widely known that the ideas of freedom and equality that form the foundation for western democracy began not in ancient Greece, but in the Hebrew Bible. Our lead article explains that freedom and equality are God-given gifts we should cherish and protect.

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Where did democratic ideals originate?

Created equal, created to be free?

by Dennis Gordon

How much do you value your democratic freedom? What was historically hard-won and what we take for granted is under threat in many parts of the world, including the West, with a particular low point being the storming of the US Capitol Building on 6 January 2021.

According to Hanne Fjelde, Associate Professor of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University, Sweden, one of the greatest challenges of our time (and

there are many), is to safeguard and strengthen democracy.¹ The current war against Ukraine is a deliberate and blatant attack on the democratic freedom of an independent state that wishes to move away from a history of autocracy.

While inherently messy and imperfect, democracy works pretty well, avoiding the extremes of anarchy and authoritarianism. Winston Churchill, Leader of the Opposition in the post-Second World War UK Parliament, famously said (in a speech to the House of Commons on 11 November 1947):

Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time; but there is the broad feeling in our country that the people should rule, and that public opinion expressed by all constitutional means, should shape, guide, and control the actions of Ministers who are their servants and not their masters.²

Democracy as one of the foundations of western civilisation was generally regarded as having originated in classical Athens, by 18th-century intellectuals who attempted to invoke those early democratic experiments into a new model for political organisation and a substitute for monarchy. In 507 BC, as a response to the tyranny of the aristocracy, Athenian leader Cleisthenes had introduced a system of political reforms that he called *demokratia*, or “rule by the people” (from *demos*, people, and *kratos*, power). It survived for only two centuries and was in any case a joke from our modern perspective—it applied only to about 16% of the population, i.e., free males 18 years and older,



A damaged military vehicle is pictured on the outskirts of Kharkiv, northeastern Ukraine, 26 February 2022. The current war against Ukraine is a deliberate and blatant attack on the democratic freedom of an independent state.



The principles underlying democracy originated in the Hebrew scriptures.

thereby excluding women, and the remaining 60% or so, who were slaves.³

The greater foundation of western civilisation is the Bible, and what is generally overlooked is that ideas of freedom and equality began there, long predating classical Athens. An analysis by Professor Joshua Berman, Bar-Ilan University, Tel Aviv, shows that the principles underlying democracy originated in the Hebrew scriptures.

Beginning with the Pentateuch, the Bible appropriated and reconstituted ancient norms and institutions to create a new blueprint for society. Theology, politics, and economics were reorganised, with the effect of weakening traditional seats of power, and to create a class of empowered common citizens. Much of this anticipates developments in the history of political thought that would happen again only during the Enlightenment and in the thought of the American Founding Fathers. Whereas ancient religion endorsed the ruling classes through sacred rites and symbols, and saw the masses as mere servants, the Pentateuch, by contrast, elevates the common citizenry in the eyes of God by...casting Israel as a subordinate king to the Almighty through the theology of covenant. The Pentateuch is history's first proposal for the distribution of

political power. Standard cultural practices in the ancient Near East concerning land tenure, taxation, and loans are reworked so that the common citizenry remains economically secure.⁴

Freedom and equality continue as key themes in the Greek New Testament (first century AD). In his letter to the ethnically and socially diverse Christians in the Asian province of Galatia, the apostle Paul insisted: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus".⁵ What could be more democratic than that? But we should hardly be surprised, since Paul was reflecting the life and teachings of Jesus, who himself modelled and endorsed fundamental biblical principles that are as old as the first chapter of Genesis:

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "...Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."⁶

Whether through over-familiarity or not understanding the context, many miss the significance of this declaration. It was, in fact, utterly revolutionary. Nothing else in the writings of the ancient Near East comes close. It democratises all human beings from the highest to the lowest, men and women, without distinction. Furthermore, it elevates all humanity to the role of delegated suzerainty, a form of kingship under the kingship of God.

Why was this declaration written at all? Because it was important for ancient Israel. Genesis was written after and because of their experience of enslavement and liberation. Another remarkable declaration is recorded in the book of Exodus: "Then say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, Let my son go so he may worship me'."⁷ Here, "God's son" constitutes all Israel (equality) for whom freedom is demanded; freedom and equality are linked in the same short verse.

At Mt Sinai the Genesis vocation is reframed and repeated: "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation".⁸ The point of the Genesis declaration to Israel (the recipient of this revelation)

was that God's intention was for all humanity ideally to represent Israel's God to the rest of creation, in short, "creation is good, look after it". What is sometimes referred to as the covenant with creation reflected extant suzerain-vassal and royal-grant treaties. In context, human equality sprang from the shared responsibility of all humans to act in God's interests (which were in fact human interests for those who got the point). The failure of Adam and Eve, the first hominids to be invited, out of an existing population, to have a covenantal royal-priestly relationship with God,^{9,10} was an example for Israel to avoid. But Israel, too, failed in this vocation, not just in the golden-calf incident at Mt Sinai, whereby only Levites became priests—the rest of the Tanakh (Old Testament) records the judgements of Israel's prophets—their social conscience—on Israel's repeated failures to live out their vocation.

Human weakness notwithstanding, God prevailed with Israel, and the

rest of the Pentateuch shows how democratic principles of equality and freedom could be expressed, even against the backdrop of the cultural river in which Israel lived. The book of Deuteronomy is particularly instructive regarding the general equality of Israelites within the nation. Among other things, the time would come when Israel wanted a king, like the other nations. How would that work if the whole nation has a collective status? Interestingly, the regulations in Deuteronomy limit the power of any one person or class of people. Here is one representative passage:

When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, "Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us," be sure to appoint over you a king...from among your fellow Israelites...The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself... He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray.

He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold...he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the Levitical priests. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites.¹¹

These regulations were intended to limit the power of an Israelite king, in stark contrast to the surrounding nations, in which a king or pharaoh would rule in conjunction with a priestly class, interpreting the will of their imagined gods for their personal benefit. Sadly, Israel's kings all too frequently sought to be like pagan kings in boosting their own status.

Moses' final instructions to Israel underscore the democratic ideals that made Israel unique among the nations:

So Moses wrote down this law [Torah] and gave it to the Levitical priests...and to all the elders of Israel. Then Moses commanded them: "At the end of every seven years, in the year for cancelling debts, during the Festival of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing. Assemble the people—men, women and children, and the foreigners residing in your towns—so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this law. Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess."¹²

These words are notable for several reasons:

1. The Torah was given not only to the priests but also to Israel's elders. While the priests had important specific duties,



A handwritten scroll on display at the caves of Qumran. The Old Testament law commanded an Israelite king to "write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law... and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites".

they were not elevated above other Israelites (nor was any one tribe elevated above another). This is one reason why all Levites and priests had to offer animal sacrifices to God—they too had human nature, transgressed, and needed reconciliation.

2. Every seventh year, debts were cancelled. The reason? “There should be no poor among you.”¹³ The intention was to prevent a rich-poor divide in Israelite society.
3. All Israel (family representatives among all who were well enough to travel) were to go to one location for the Feast of Tabernacles (eventually that would be Jerusalem). There, men, women, children, and even resident foreigners, would learn the words of the Torah—its wisdom and instruction were for everyone, not just an elite.

Israel’s regulations, if followed through, would have the effect of limiting the power vested in any one person or class of people. The tithe of the third and sixth years in a cycle of seven was for

the poor and debts were cancelled in the seventh year, and all of this was to even out the inequalities that inevitably develop in any society. We see a parallel in the New Testament with the collection and distribution of relief among churches in times of need.

Concerning the status of women in Hebrew society—it was never going to be perfect in the ancient world—it’s just the way it was, and the Torah had to reflect existing realities—but scripture gives clues to what regulations and possibilities did exist. For example:

1. In the book of Numbers, the daughters of Zelophehad had the right to receive their father’s inheritance since he had no sons.
2. Deborah is presented as a female “judge” (tribal leader) who achieved a great victory and brought about 40 years of peace.
3. Proverbs 31 describes an astute industrious woman skilled in buying property, selling, trading, manufacturing, managing a large household of family and servants, and achieving public recognition for her skills.

There are other examples. The point is, regardless of the cultural constraints in the male-dominated world of the ancient Near East, and Israel was part of that world, the consistent message to Israel was that men and women are equal in God’s sight and the Torah showed ways in which that could be demonstrated.

When we come to the New Testament, the message of equality comes through loud and clear. In everything Jesus said and did, he treated everyone with equal respect in a way that was utterly unique. It should not have been the case, but in Jewish society in the first century there tended to be neglect by the wealthy elite of the poor, sick, elderly, and children; there was discrimination against non-Jews (regarded as unclean) and women were regarded as inferior to men. Jesus cut through every prejudice and cultural barrier that existed. He lived the reality that Paul wrote about concerning all being “one in Christ”. And as we have seen, that principle is as old as Genesis 1. Knowing that you are not intrinsically inferior to anyone else in God’s sight is very liberating.

The collection and distribution of relief in times of need parallels the Torah’s tithe of the third and sixth years, designed to even out the inequities that inevitably develop in any society. Firefighters in Granada, Spain, collecting food and basic necessities for victims of poverty from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Paul also wrote: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free”,¹⁴ and this is confirmed in John’s gospel: “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!”¹⁵ What did they mean? To a Christian ethnic Jew, it meant in the first instance that they were





Knowing that you are not intrinsically inferior to anyone else in God's sight is very liberating: "...if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!"

set free from the impossible demands of the Mosaic law. That law defined sin, and under that law sin was inevitable. But regardless of whether one was Jewish or not, all humans have sinned, formally beginning with Adam and Eve, and all are set free. All undertake their personal exodus from slavery to sin and death, if they accept what Jesus achieved in the crucifixion and the resurrection for all humanity. In its fullness, freedom in Jesus means genuine existential freedom—from sin and death and ultimately our present human nature—the freedom to be truly ourselves, beginning now. No one is excluded from the offer.

Freedom and equality are God-given gifts. May we cherish, preserve and protect what freedoms remain in our democracies and extend them to others, regardless of gender, ethnicity, and religious affiliation, loving neighbour as

ourselves. And in a time when wild nature suffers greatly from human greed and rapaciousness, let us think about how best we can also serve its needs, thereby obeying the Genesis mandate, honouring the creator and experiencing the benefits of creation.

Notes

- ¹ <https://kaw.wallenberg.org/en/research/present-day-threats-democracy> .
- ² <https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/quotes/the-worst-form-of-government/> .
- ³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_democracy .
- ⁴ *Created Equal: How the Bible Broke with Ancient Political Thought*, Oxford University Press, 2009, Kindle edn.
- ⁵ Galatians 3:28.
- ⁶ Genesis 1:26–28.
- ⁷ Exodus 4:22-23a.
- ⁸ Exodus 19:5b–6.
- ⁹ N.T. Wright in Walton, J.H., *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2–3 and the human origins debate*. IVP

Press, 2015, p. 177.

- ¹⁰ <https://biologos.org/resources/if-creation-is-through-christ-evolution-is-what-you-would-expect/> .
- ¹¹ Deuteronomy 17:14–20.
- ¹² Deuteronomy 31:9–13.
- ¹³ Deuteronomy 5:4.
- ¹⁴ Galatians 5:1.
- ¹⁵ John 8:36.



Dennis Gordon, PhD, is an ordained minister and former Deputy Chairman of the Council of Wellington Churches. He lectures at the Wellington Pacific Bible College, and is an associate member of the UK-based Society of Ordained Scientists.

Jesus TV series

The CHOSEN

Why so popular?

by Rusty Wright

So, why would an online television series about Jesus be breaking popularity records? It has no big-name stars or producers. The stories are ancient. Are viewers looking for hope amid pandemic uncertainty? Are they bored with working from home and turning to diversions their bosses cannot monitor? What did TMZ think?

Maybe personal connection is driving all this. Surprised by *The Chosen* series' popularity, I decided to check it out. The episodes portray Jesus' life with believable dialogue and characters whose genuine, heartfelt emotions—pain, confusion, fear, exhilaration, contentment, awe—help viewers relate these stories to their own struggles and joys.

Unique distribution method

The Chosen producers also selected a unique distribution method: free of charge via online streaming.¹ As of this writing, over

300 million views have occurred² in over 190 countries. Translations include 50 languages.

Supported by the most successful crowd-funded campaign in history (16,000 people invested \$11 million for Season One), the show is still going strong, with producers now inviting fans to contribute to production costs and “pay it forward”.³

Warts and all

The series' popularity prompted⁴ a special Christmas 2021 episode including contemporary musical artists. The special was originally slated to screen in US theatres for two days last December. The theatre launch announcement spawned \$1.5 million in ticket sales in 12 hours, a record for short-run theatre specialists Fathom Events, stimulating an expanded theatre run to what became 23 days.

Screenwriters have succeeded in depicting real life—warts and all—with authentic human interaction.

The Chosen's Jesus enjoys relating to children, and they take to him. He

loves hanging with his followers and friends; the affection is mutual. He encourages the dejected, accepts and gently corrects his sometimes clueless and boisterous disciples, and warmly welcomes society's rejects. He touches a loathed leper, dines with social outcasts.

We see tender, playful, spousal communication involving Simon (later called Peter) and his wife, plus their own marital conflict and Simon's anger with God.

Race, gender, religion

One story—Jesus' encounter⁵ with a Samaritan woman—particularly moved me. Its themes of race,⁶ gender, and religion evoke today's headlines.

First-century Jews and Samaritans were locked in a blood feud. Divided by geography, religion, and race, the two groups spewed venom. Jesus, a Jew choosing to travel through Samaria, encountered a Samaritan woman at a well.

Surprised at first that a Jewish man would talk with her, she



Women were among Jesus' most devoted followers.

later accepted his offer of “living water” (personal faith)⁷ and enthusiastically told everyone she could about the wonderful person she'd met. In the series, her joy is contagious. I suspect some/many viewers will share my appreciation of her life transformation.

Producers sought⁸ faithfulness to long-respected biblical texts plus effective cinematic communication. They combined and condensed “some locations and timelines” and added “backstories and some characters or dialogue”, aiming “to support the truth and intention of the biblical accounts”, which they encourage viewers to read.⁹

TMZ's take

TMZ Live television interviewed¹⁰ series director/creator Dallas Jenkins about the challenges of shooting during the pandemic, especially about gathering and filming 2,000 extras in a field in Texas to replicate Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.¹¹ “A remarkable—even divine—undertaking...really impressive”, noted TMZ host Charles Latibeaudiere.

Jenkins explained that this scene required two months of planning. His team tested all 2,000 people for COVID and had to send several home due to positive tests.

Could they have used CGI (computer generated imagery) instead? “The most famous sermon in the history of the world” required the passion of a real audience, Jenkins decided, and “it was for sure worth it”.

“Congratulations. I think it's just incredible”, remarked TMZ founder and host Harvey Levin.

Notes

- ¹ <https://watch.angelstudios.com/thechosen> .
- ² <https://religionnews.com/2021/11/16/the->

chosen-christmas-special-hits-theaters-breaks-records/ .

³ <https://watch.angelstudios.com/thechosen/pif> .

⁴ <https://religionnews.com/2021/11/16/the-chosen-christmas-special-hits-theaters-breaks-records/> .

⁵ <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%204&version=NLT> .

⁶ <https://probe.org/christianity-and-racism/> .

⁷ <https://www.everyperson.com/features/know-God.html> .

⁸ <https://watch.angelstudios.com/thechosen/watch?vid=S1:E1&ap=true> .

⁹ <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%201&version=NLT> .

¹⁰ https://www.instagram.com/p/CLU7dQ-jsa3/?utm_source=ig_embed&utm_campaign=embed_video_watch_again .

¹¹ <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%205-7&version=NLT> .

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This article first appeared on WashingtonExaminer.com

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Jesus and his followers walked and talked a lot.

Hope for the missing

by Ian Woodley

Surprisingly, it's the quietness of my mum's house that unnerves me. I say that as someone who loves the still moment as an opportunity to ponder life.

My dad was a man who loved watching TV. Indeed, he liked introducing me to new films or TV programmes that I hadn't come across before. However, the house is now quiet. The Universe doesn't feel right: there is a piece missing that was there only a short time ago. Or, as I should say, a person is missing. The incurable illness finally won and my dad died. He is no longer here.

It does not feel right that the lives of the people we love just cease. I have great memories, but the life force, the soul that created those memories, has vanished. A gap has opened up in the world, a hole that seems irreversible.

Is that it? As I sit in the unusual silence of the house, I consider the evidence.

There is nothing to satisfy the scientific examination of, say, Professor Brian Cox, a well-known scientist, TV presenter, and humanist. I neither see nor hear anything that gives hope. I am aware that there is no test, no experiment that would give any indication of whether there is any future life for my dad.

My mind ponders the story of a woman called Mary.

She had an incredible story to tell. Someone she looked up to, a man who had helped her in her time of need, had suffered a terrible miscarriage of justice. The charges against him were trumped up. The city's governor, who saw through the plot, failed to act. Her friend was found guilty and condemned to death. A seemingly tragic end.

But the story did not end there. A few days later, Mary went to pay her respects. The body was gone. Mary broke down sobbing, believing that the body had been stolen. And then...in an amazing twist, that no-one expected...there he was. Mary's friend was alive!

How should I view that story? Should I believe or doubt? Well, there is another surprising witness to this story. A man called Thomas, who did

It does not feel right that the lives of the people we love just cease.





Sebastiano del Piombo (1485–1547) painted “The Resurrected Christ”, imagining Thomas’ encounter with the resurrected Jesus, who challenged him to stop doubting and believe. The painting hangs in the side altar of San Nicolo church in Treviso, Italy.

not believe Mary’s experiences. He demanded better evidence that their friend was alive again. And who can blame him?

Thomas got more than he bargained for. One week later he found himself confronted by that better evidence. There was his friend, right there in front of him! What’s more, his friend challenged Thomas directly: “Stop doubting and believe”.

These two stories were recorded by a third witness, a man called John. John also recorded his experiences: he saw his friend die, he saw the empty grave, and then he saw his friend alive again.¹

Jesus—the friend of Mary, Thomas, and John—had conquered the impossible. Jesus had taken on death, and won! I could go on and consider the other witnesses: the Pharisee Saul, who met the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus, then Peter, Cleopas, and James. In fact, Saul (later

called Paul) claimed that over 500 people saw Jesus after his resurrection.² Something must have



Jesus told a grieving lady named Martha: “I am the resurrection and the life”.

galvanised these people, because they started the movement we now call Christianity.

So, there is hope. Hope for me, hope for my dad, and hope for you. In the silence of my parents’ house, with no scientific evidence to hand, I asked myself: “Is that it?”

The story of Jesus tells us “No, that isn’t it”. We all know people who are now missing from this world. Yet, Jesus tells us that he is saving up the day when he will put that all right. “I am the resurrection and the life”, he once told a grieving lady called Martha. And to demonstrate that he could make such a bold statement, he brought Martha’s dead brother Lazarus back to life.³

I miss my dad. But I know we will meet again. For Jesus has defeated death and we will all one day benefit.

NOTES

- ¹ All these stories are recorded in John’s account of Jesus’ life, chapter 20.
- ² Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian church, chapter 15:3-7.
- ³ John’s account of Jesus’ life, chapter 11.

Is there a God?

by Rex Morgan

Here is an age-old question, but a very important one—the most foundational question of all. What could be more critical to our view of life? Does God exist or not? If so, what does he have to say to us?

In ancient times, people were much more inclined to believe in a power or powers beyond human comprehension. They revered the sun, moon, and stars as gods. There was a god of the sea and of the forest, gods were everywhere: a literal pantheon of countless deities.

In recent years, people in their droves have abandoned belief in God, for various reasons, including the behaviour of some Christians and clergy, problematic aspects of church history, captivation with material pursuits, and the belief that humankind is clever and resilient enough not to need help from any divine source.

Nevertheless, millions of people still believe in God, and many claim to have a personal relationship with him. Are such people simply naïve and superstitious? This is an important question for each of us to face with an open mind and come to our

own informed decision. It's a vital question because if there is a God, maybe he has something to say to us? And if he does exist, that opens up the intriguing potential of ongoing life after death.

Have you personally considered this question and made up your mind about it?

Having studied the matter carefully, here are two reasons I personally believe there is a God. Have a look at them and see how they stack up for you. This question is too important not to do some thinking on!

At the outset, it is important to recognise that no one can irrefutably prove the existence of God. But neither is it possible to prove he doesn't exist. I propose in this article that it is far more reasonable to believe that God exists than that he doesn't. And many people have found the evidence so compelling they have been willing to die for it.

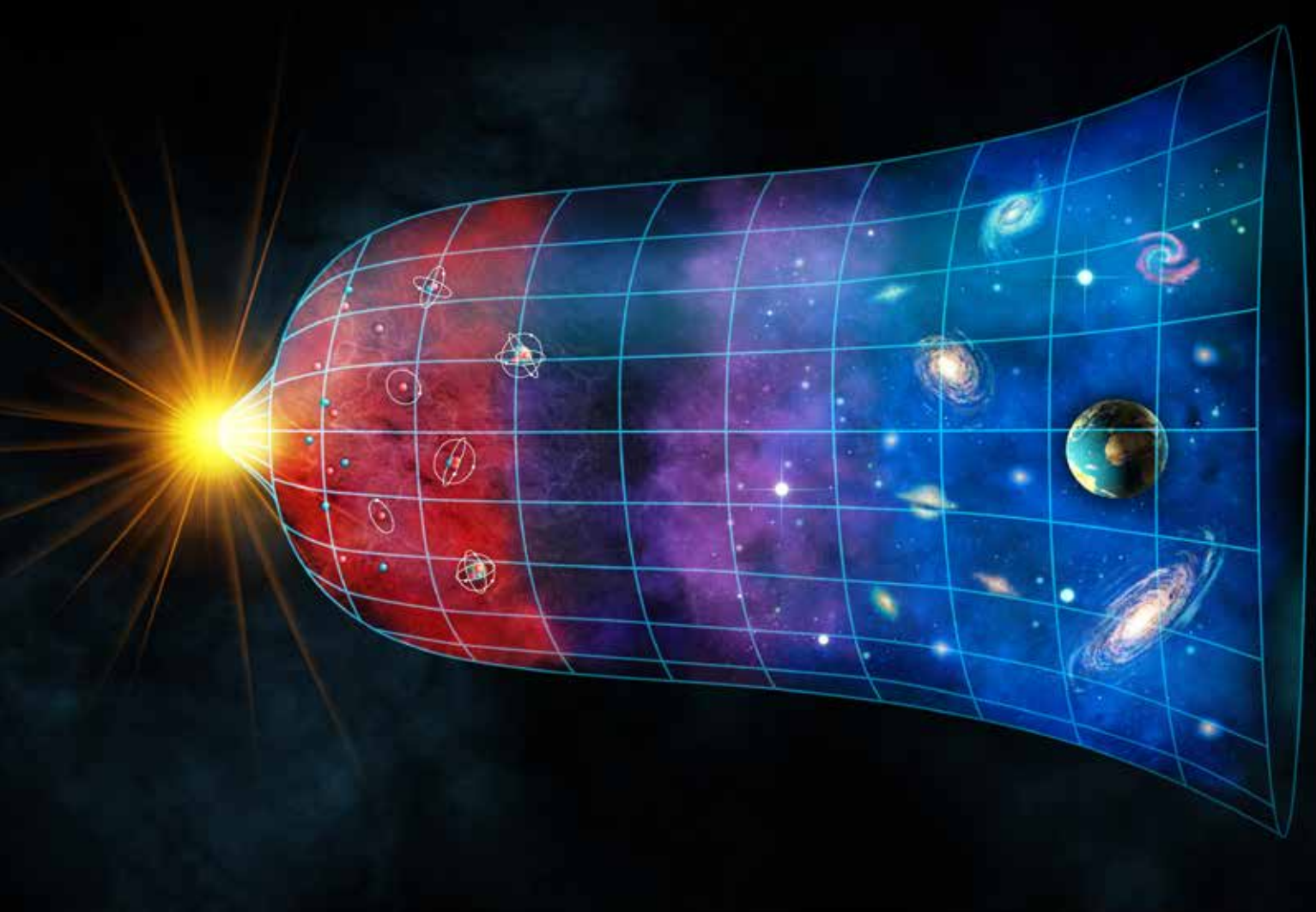
So, let's look at two reasons for belief in God, noting that there are many other reasons that lack of time and space prevent us from including here. First, we'll look at the world outside and around us, and then take a look at the world inside us.

1. The existence and design of the universe

Almost all scientists believe the universe had a beginning. In fact, even logic shows that there must



Many millions of Muslims, Jews, and Christians (pictured from top to bottom) claim a personal relationship with God through their prayers.



An artist's depiction, in compressed form, of the "Big Bang", commonly believed to be the beginning of the physical universe. Could it simply have created itself out of nothing?

have been a beginning, because it is impossible for there to have been an infinite number of years in the past. You can always add one more to infinity, so there is no such thing as an infinite number of years: there had to be a beginning. That means there was nothing before it. So where did things come from? How did the universe come out of nothing?

Logic, experience and scientific observation all combine to affirm that it is impossible for something physical to come from nothing. The physical universe simply couldn't have created itself out of nothing. So there had to be some cause from outside of space and time that brought the universe into being. It had to come from something beyond itself, therefore something immaterial, non-physical, or super-natural.

Adding to the impossibility of the material universe emerging

out of nothing, there is also the conundrum that living things exist in the universe, on earth at least. But where did life come from? The law of biogenesis states that "Life can only come from pre-existing life". Non-living material or mix of chemicals cannot give rise to life. It is evident that the fact of creation necessitates a creator, and life needs a living source. And if God is not that creator and source of life, who or what is?

So that is one valid reason for believing in God. And this belief isn't naive and superstitious—it is logical and scientific. Is there a better explanation? I haven't seen one. Maybe in the beginning there was some sort of primordial vacuum, but how could anything arise out of that? I think we have to conclude that God is the best explanation for the cause of the universe.

Of course, this begs the question of where God came from. See the accompanying box (p. 14) for an explanation.

Not only does the universe exist, but it is spectacularly and intricately designed, fine-tuned for human life. In recent years scientists have discovered numerous factors in the structure and nature of the universe, the solar system, and the earth that are precisely what are needed for life to exist.

For example, it so happens that the earth is located just the right distance from the sun. If it were only fractionally, say around 2%, further away, we would all freeze. If it were as little as 2% closer, we would all burn up.

It so happens also that the earth moves at just the right speed. If it moved marginally faster in its orbit

around the sun, the earth would be shifted outward to an orbit where it would cool significantly and life would cease, frozen. If it travelled only slightly more slowly, the sun's massive gravity would draw our planet closer, causing the extinction of all life.

Looking at the universe as a whole, a number of fundamental forces or laws of nature combine to make it what it is. One is the force of gravity, which happens to be at just the right strength. If it were stronger, the stars would be so hot they would burn out, but if it were weaker, they wouldn't become hot enough to ignite nuclear fusion, and no planets would have been formed.

Another is the strong nuclear force, which binds protons and neutrons within the nuclei of atoms. If it were any more than about 1% weaker,

protons and neutrons wouldn't stick together, resulting in the existence of only one element in the universe, hydrogen, and life would be impossible. But if the strong nuclear force were slightly stronger there would be no hydrogen and therefore no life.

Physicist Dr Robin Collins says:

Over the past 30 years or so, scientists have discovered that just about everything about the basic structure of the universe is balanced on a razor's edge for life to exist. The coincidences are far too fantastic to attribute this to mere chance or to claim that it needs no explanation. The dials are set too precisely to have been a random accident.¹

Commenting on the multiple forces and parameters of the universe that are "just right", acclaimed scientist Stephen Hawking observed:

The remarkable fact is that the values of these numbers seem to have been very finely adjusted to make possible the development of life.²

Hawking also observed:

The odds against a universe like ours emerging out of something like the Big Bang are enormous...I think clearly there are religious implications whenever you start to discuss the origins of the universe.³

He quantified the odds with this astonishing statement in his bestseller, *A Brief History of Time*:

If the rate of expansion one second after the Big Bang had been smaller by even one part in a hundred thousand million million, the universe would have re-collapsed before it ever reached its present size.⁴

Even the renowned atheist Fred Hoyle famously stated:

A common sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super intellect has monkeyed with physics, as well as chemistry and biology, and that there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature. The numbers one calculates from the facts seem to me so overwhelming as to put this conclusion almost beyond question.⁵

Celebrated British cosmologist Martin Rees, who has been Astronomer Royal since 1995, wrote that if the six numbers that underlie the fundamental physical properties of the universe were altered "even to the tiniest degree, there would be no stars, no complex elements, no life".⁶

Astrophysicist Dr Hugh Ross has catalogued 38 cosmic characteristics that must have values falling within narrowly defined ranges for life of any kind to exist.⁷ Noted physicist Paul Davies remarked:

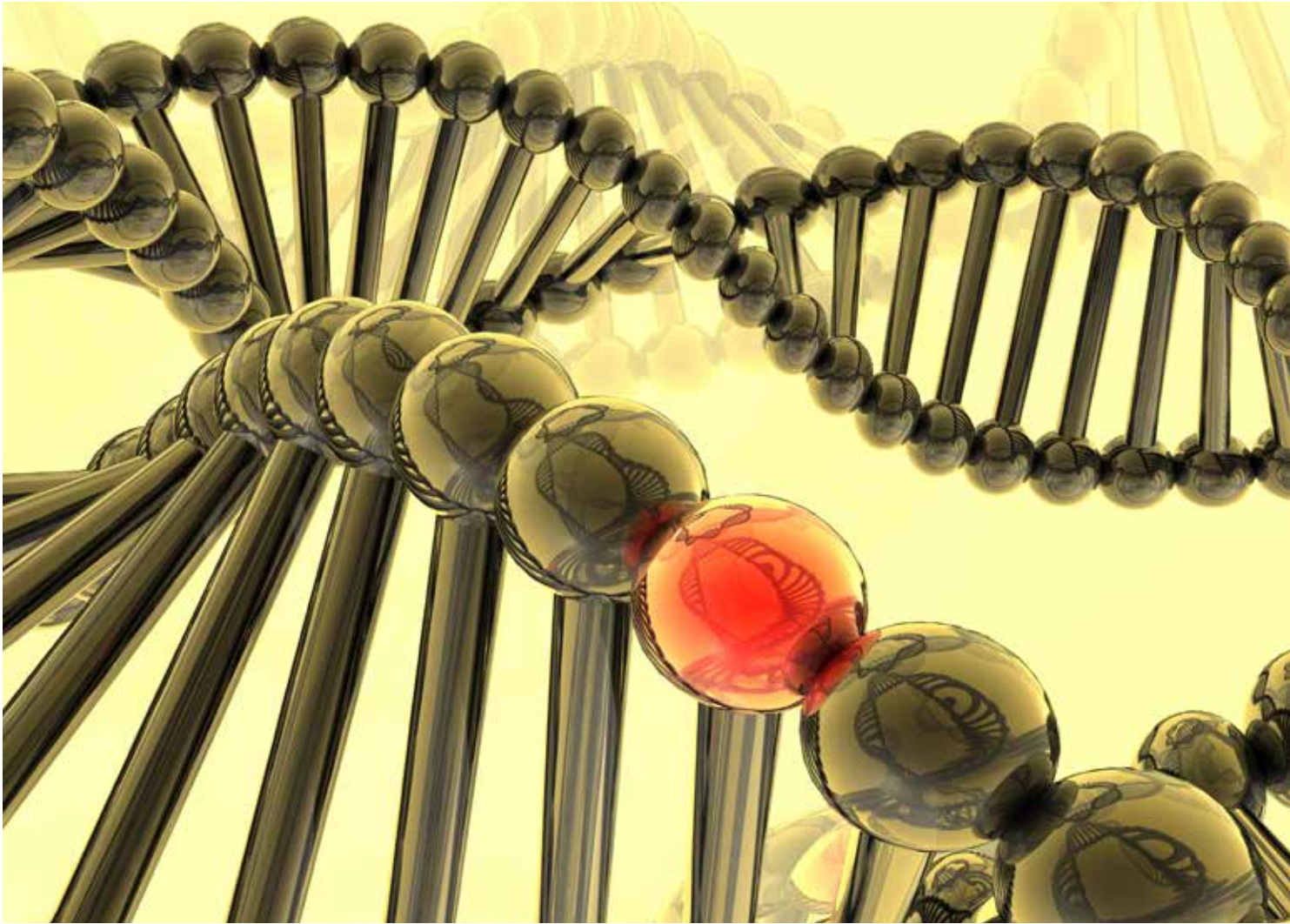
It seems as though somebody has fine-tuned nature's numbers to make the universe... The impression of design is overwhelming.⁸

Where did God come from?

This is a tough question for us to get a handle on because we are physical and material. But since matter is not eternal and can't create itself from nothing, something outside the bounds of the material universe must have brought it into being. The Bible claims that God exists above and beyond time.¹⁹ From our viewpoint, he is "everywhere" and "everywhen" simultaneously, because he created space and time. He has existed eternally. Asking "Who created God?" limits our enquiry by assuming God is confined to the same limitations as human beings. It's as if we are characters in a novel trying to comprehend the reality of the novelist, who exists totally outside the "world" of the novel.

One way to help grasp this point is to consider your own mind and thoughts. How many things can you think of at one time? How much room do your thoughts take up? Can you see or touch your thoughts? Thoughts are an example of something that is outside space, and not limited by time—you can instantaneously cast your mind back many years if you wish; thoughts are unlimited by physical constraints.

In this way, our imagination gives us a peek into the realm outside the material world, the realm of the 'spiritual' or 'supernatural', the dimension inhabited by God. Eternity, where God exists,²⁰ doesn't refer to time going on forever and ever; rather it references a realm or dimension outside of time—transcending time and space. So God exists without beginning and end. He didn't have to come from anywhere—we only think he did because we are looking at it from the material standpoint.



The breath-taking complexity of one molecule of human DNA—far too tiny to be seen by the naked eye, an intricate spiralling ladder with about 100 million twists, highlighting a single gene. Did this amazing self-replicating mechanism come into existence by an astonishing accident, or was it designed by a wise creator?

When we replace the telescope with a microscope and look into the inner world, the same breath-taking complexity again astounds us. For instance, one molecule of human DNA, far too tiny to be seen by the naked eye, comprises an intricate spiralling ladder with about 100 million twists, and about 100 billion atoms. The human eye looking into the microscope contains 40 different mechanisms, such as a lens, a pupil, and a retina, and is made up of 130 million cells. And is there anything more marvellous than the human brain, which processes more than a million messages every second?

At every level the world of nature shows evidence of design. Humankind keeps on trying to copy the design of nature, and usually is unable to do a very good job. And

how can there be design without a designer?

In this article I'm focusing only on first causes. Science has made it clear that today's world has developed through a process of evolution over millions of years. But that doesn't account for the original or first cause. Something or someone had to put evolution into process, and a wise Creator God is the only candidate I can see for this. In his brilliance, he set in motion a process by which all life would "create" itself in this way.

What is the alternative, if you don't believe in God? The only answer can be that everything somehow came into being by chance, that it is all a massive coincidence, an astonishingly unlikely accident!

I actually think it takes more faith to believe in that than to believe an eternal God brought our universe and world into existence!

For our second evidence of God's existence, let's move from the outside world to what happens inside human beings.

2. The existence of qualities like personality, morality, and reason

In addition to proposing that physical matter somehow arose from nothing, an entirely material view of the universe also requires that non-physical elements such as personality, consciousness, rationality, free will, and moral values resulted from random chance.

There is an immense gap between the capabilities of human beings, who have personality, identity, and reflective self-awareness, and non-living things, or even other animals and plants. How could the marvel of human consciousness and personality possibly originate from the inorganic, impersonal matter of which the universe is composed? If there is a personal God, then human personhood makes perfect sense. Without God, it is inexplicable.

What about moral and ethical values, such as the sense of right and wrong that every human being feels? Values like kindness, concern, forgiveness, and love: how did they arise out of mere molecules and matter?

Atheists are quick to raise the question: "How could there be a God when the world is full of evil and suffering?" It's ironic that they protest about evil when in their worldview there can be no such thing as evil, since every occurrence is just what happens in the natural world. The very fact of their outrage at evil indicates that they are in touch with some standard of goodness

by which they judge the world as defective. In other words, there is an overarching standard of goodness, which surely points to God!

The fact that they can even ask this question means that they are able to reason and query the existence and even the character of God, and the fairness of life. But when you think it through, none of these abilities makes sense if everything about humanity arose from inert matter.

Influential British writer, C.S. Lewis, who converted to Christianity when he faced up to questions such as these, remarked:

Supposing there was no intelligence behind the universe, no creative mind. In that case, nobody designed my brain for the purpose of thinking. It is merely that when the atoms inside my skull happen, for physical or chemical reasons, to arrange themselves in a certain way, this gives me, as a by-product, the sensation I call thought. But, if so, how can I trust my own thinking to be true? It's like upsetting a milk jug and hoping that the way it splashes itself will give you a map of London. But if I can't

trust my own thinking, of course I can't trust the arguments leading to atheism, and therefore have no reason to be an atheist, or anything else. Unless I believe in God, I cannot believe in thought: so I can never use thought to disbelieve in God.⁹

How can dust and mud give rise to intelligence and reason, without a guiding hand shaping and giving vitality to it? It just doesn't make logical sense. Intelligence demands an intelligent source. Yet atheism requires us to believe that intelligence and reason somehow arose from non-intelligence and non-reason.

Consider also for a moment the origin of information. The article you are reading contains information. If the page was to be burnt, the printed words would disappear, but the information would still exist. It has no mass or energy, and takes up no time or space. Because it is a non-material entity, its origin can't be explained by material processes. How does information come into existence? The information in this article came from my thinking,

research and writing. In doing this I produced a non-material entity. This is something we all do, whenever we think a thought and then manipulate it alongside other already existing thoughts. Meaningful information and thoughts alike must come from an intelligent non-material source. It is impossible for purely material causes to account for the immaterial.

It is thought that the whole universe arose from a singularity the size of a hydrogen atom,



Intelligence demands an intelligent source. How can dust and mud give rise to intelligence and reason, without a guiding hand shaping and giving vitality to it?

and yet we cannot plumb the information content of the universe. The more we scrutinise creation the more we discover. Interestingly, the Bible refers to Jesus as (the) *logos*, meaning “word, reason, information”, and says that he was there in the very beginning, and created all things.¹⁰

The fact that we have free will is further evidence that we are not simply products of blind chance or accident. In that case thoughts would be simply products of the automatic chemical reactions going on in our brain and we would not be free to think things out for ourselves.

What about attributes such as creativity, imagination, and the ability to reflect, and even to worship? How could they stem from physical processes? From where does the common human desire to worship a higher being arise?

If we were created by a personal, loving God, then it makes total sense that he would be interested in imbuing us with our individual personality, self-awareness, values, emotions, and a desire to worship him.

To advance from non-living matter to consciousness and morality involves a quantum leap, the crossing of a vast chasm from measurable substances into the area of unmeasurable spiritual qualities.

If there is no God, there is no standard for what is right and wrong. We are left with each person's viewpoint, with none being more valid than any other. Yet we all agree that despicable crimes like child abuse and mass murder are wrong for everybody, everywhere. This isn't just a personal preference or opinion: it is an objective moral standard. And that is best explained as having been put within us by a moral God.

Inability to explain away mankind's sense of objective moral values is the chief reason a scientist of the stature of Francis Collins converted to Christianity. Dr. Collins, former

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head of the Human Genome Project, explains why he believes in God and how this is compatible with being a leading scientist in his book, *The Language of God*.

We all have a conscience, a sense of right and wrong, much as it sometimes seems that some people don't! The rightness or wrongness of actions or attitudes can't be determined by any kind of scientific methodology. Yet there is love and hate, selfishness and self-sacrifice, evil and goodness. How could these

values or qualities arise from inert, meaningless matter? Surely there has got to be something outside the physical—something that can be called “spiritual”.

C.S. Lewis mused on the phenomenon of love and put it this way:

You can't, except in the lowest animal sense, be in love with a girl if you know that all the beauties both of her person and of her character are a momentary



If our thought processes are explained in entirely physical terms, where do compassion and love come from? But if there is a personal loving God who made humans in his image, such qualities are easily explained.

and accidental pattern produced by the collision of atoms...¹¹

How can any chemical reaction or series of reactions lead to the appreciation of beauty, self-consciousness and self-awareness? How can personality, personhood, and identity come from something impersonal like matter? Where does compassion come from if our thought processes are explained in entirely physical terms?

But qualities like compassion and love are the attributes of a personal loving God who exists, and “made man in his image”,¹² which is what the biblical book of Genesis stated, thousands of years ago!

It has been convincingly argued that life without God is absurd. At the very least, it is meaningless. The atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell referred to the universe as “purposeless” and “void of meaning”. He wrote that man’s “origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms...”¹³ Without God, life is all a hit and miss matter of time and chance, and there is no inherent value, purpose or design in life. But with God in the picture, life is of immense value, so much so that God was willing to die for each one of us.¹⁴

C. S. Lewis argued incisively:

If the whole universe has no meaning, we should never have found out that it has no meaning. Just as, if there were no light in the universe and therefore no creatures with eyes, we should never know it was dark. Dark would be without meaning.¹⁵

British philosopher Antony Flew was a vociferous advocate of atheism for most of his life. Between 1950 and 2000 he authored about 30 books and papers, all arguing against belief in God. However, in 2004 he shocked his fellow atheists when he dramatically changed his position, stating that he now believed in the existence of an intelligent creator of the universe. In 2007, he published

a book entitled *There is a God: How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*.

Flew said that he decided to lay aside his personal bias and preconceptions and follow the evidence wherever it led him. A methodical analysis of the scientific evidence caused him to change his mind.

He states in his book:

I must say that the journey to my discovery of the Divine has been a pilgrimage of reason. I have followed the argument where it has led me. And it has led me to accept the existence of a self-existent, immutable, immaterial, omnipotent, and omniscient Being.¹⁶

and

The only satisfactory explanation for the origin of such end-directed self-replicating life as we see on Earth is an infinitely intelligent mind.

We’ve looked at just two reasons for believing that there is a God. Christians point to several other powerful evidences, such as the reliability and wisdom of the Bible, the accuracy of biblical prophecies, the uniqueness of the life and teachings of Jesus, the historical proof of Jesus’ resurrection, and the presence of God in the lives of believers.

God can be personally known and experienced by anyone who wishes to be in contact with him. The Bible promises that those who seek God will find him,¹⁷ and if we draw near to God he will draw near to us.¹⁸ Numerous people have taken up this challenge down through history and have found that God has become a personal reality in their lives. If you would like help in pursuing this further, please be sure to contact the staff of *Inside Life* at the address given on the inside front cover of this magazine.

Notes

- 1 Lee Strobel, *The Case for a Creator*, Zondervan, 2004, p.160.
- 2 Stephen W. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*, Bantam Books, New York, 1988, p. 125.

³ Stephen Hawking quoted in Fred Heeren, *Show Me God: What the Message from Space Is Telling Us about God*, Day Star Publications, 2000, p.186.

⁴ Stephen W. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*, Bantam Books, New York, 1988, p. 125.

⁵ Fred Hoyle, “The Universe: Past and Present Reflections”, *Annual Review of Astronomy and Astrophysics* 20 (1982), p.16.

⁶ Brad Lemley, “Why Is There Life?”, *Discover*, Nov 2002, and Marin Rees, *Just Six Numbers: the Deep Forces that Shape the Universe*.

⁷ Hugh Ross, *The Creator and the Cosmos*, Navpress, 1993, p. 111.

⁸ Paul Davies, *The Cosmic Blueprint*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1988, p. 203.

⁹ C.S. Lewis, *The Case for Christianity*, p.32.

¹⁰ John 1:1–3

¹¹ C. S. Lewis, “On Living in an Atomic Age”, in *Present Concerns*, Collins, 1986, p. 76.

¹² Genesis 1:26.

¹³ B. Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian*, Touchstone Books, New York, 1957, pp. 106–107.

¹⁴ Matthew 10:28–31; John 3:16.

¹⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Macmillan, New York, 1943, p. 46.

¹⁶ Antony Flew, *There Is a God: How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*, Harper Collins, New York, 2007.

¹⁷ Jeremiah 29:13.

¹⁸ James 4:8.

¹⁹ e.g. Isaiah 48:12–13; 2 Timothy 1:9; 2 Peter 3:8; Hebrews 11:3; Revelation 1:8.

²⁰ Isaiah 57:15.



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worked in Christian ministry and office administration for over 30 years and has contributed articles to a number of international publications. He can be contacted at rex@gci.org.nz

Resurrected pigs?

by Richard Fowler

Did you see the news (ironically issued three years ago at Easter, the time when Christians remember the resurrection of Jesus), that brains from dead pigs have been partially revived!¹

Forget flying pigs, this is life after death. It raises questions about one of the greatest mysteries: the difference between life and death. So what gives us life?

This question of what gives us life is closely related to consciousness. So what gives us consciousness and awareness?

This is one of the most exciting areas of scientific research. But, at the moment, no one knows what gives us consciousness. Modern science leans towards attributing the brain itself as creating the sense of a separate “I”. But many differ, including the late René Descartes, known as the father of modern philosophy. He said that consciousness was caused by something that was immaterial, not physical. Life and consciousness were just too mysterious.

The evolution of brain function and

consciousness is also too hard to trace. This is something Professor Alice Roberts expressed at the New Scientist Live convention.² In sharing her thoughts about the inability of evolutionary biologists to capture how sentient beings developed their cognitive capacity, she explained: “We are a long way away from understanding what happens on an individual neuron level”.

So is there any way of knowing?

Well, if Descartes is correct, we may have a clue in another observation by a very wise king who wrote it down in the Bible. King Solomon believed there was something else to man and beast when it came to what might give us consciousness. He shares with us: “For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as

one dies, so dies the other...All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust. Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth?”³

If you have ever seen the stark difference between someone who is alive and then dead, it is sobering. It almost seems incomprehensible. Something is irreversibly missing—it’s like they’ve gone. For me, the idea that there is a spiritual element to both people and creatures makes the most sense.

Maybe Descartes was correct after all.

Notes

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-47960874> .

² <https://live.newscientist.com/2019-show-highlights> .

³ Ecclesiastes 3:19–21.



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