

Inside Life

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and white pants, is sitting in a meditative pose on a boat. She is holding small, colorful stones in her hands. The background shows a calm body of water and a forested hillside under a clear blue sky.

Issue 28
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Does life have
a purpose?

Atheism is not so smart

Decisions, decisions

Conflict is an opportunity

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Inside Life

PO Box 304055, Hauraki Corner, Auckland 0750
Phone: 09 489 8910

Email: insidelife@gci.org.nz
Website: www.insidelife.org.nz

Editor: Rex Morgan
Graphic Design: Philip Baldwin
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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.

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Our Cover: What is life all about? Are we here simply because one odd group of fishes had a peculiar fin anatomy that could transform into legs? Or is there a special overriding meaning, value and purpose for human life? Our lead article examines this important question.

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Does life have a purpose?

By Rex Morgan

Is there any meaning to life? It's an age-old question that has exercised the minds of untold numbers of thinking people throughout the centuries.

What is life all about? Should we just live for the moment, or is there much more to it than that? Does each person's life, and the life of humankind as a whole, have a special purpose, an overriding meaning?

"The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why", wrote author Mark Twain. But is there anything to find out? Is there a reason why we were born?

In 1988, American Philosophy professor Hugh Moorhead compiled a book entitled *The Meaning of Life According to Our Century's Greatest Writers and Thinkers*. He asked 250 leading academics to respond to the question: "What is the meaning of life?" and published their replies.¹

The philosophers' answers

Philosopher Carl Jung wrote back: "Really, I don't know what the meaning or purpose of life is, but it looks exactly as if something were meant by it".

Novelist Joseph Heller said he had no answers to the meaning of life "and I no longer want to search for any".

Poet and essayist T.S. Eliot responded that this is a question "which one spends one's whole life in finding the

answer for, and he is sorry he has not yet got to the point where he can sum it all up on a flyleaf".

Many philosophers have tackled this most basic of all questions, but it seems that none of them has yet come up with a widely accepted and truly satisfying answer.

Walter T Stace, former professor of Philosophy at Princeton University, summed up the modern view of the meaning of life in this way: "The picture of a meaningless world and a meaningless human life is, I think, the basic theme of much modern art and literature. Certainly it is the basic theme of modern philosophy. According to the most characteristic philosophies of the modern world from Hume in the 18th century to the so-called positivists of today, the world is just what it is and that is the end of all inquiry. There is no reason for its being what it is".²

Noted palaeontologist Stephen Jay Gould wrote: "We are here because one odd group of fishes had a peculiar fin anatomy that could transform into legs for terrestrial creatures. We may yearn for a higher answer, but none exists".³

Eminent British philosopher Bertrand Russell referred to the universe as "purposeless" and "void of meaning". He said about mankind: "His growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms..."⁴

However the universe began, whether with a "big bang", with the development of life through millions of years of evolution, or in some other yet undiscovered way, this

must have all been the result of random chance only, if there wasn't a creative mind behind it. As far as purpose is concerned, in that case we would be no different than bugs which start out as eggs, grow into adults, in turn lay their own eggs and

The world stage

One of "the immortal bard" William Shakespeare's most famous speeches comes from *As You Like It*:

All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players; they all have their exits and their entrances.

This is a description of life that makes sense, and has been quoted over and over in the centuries since it was written. But if life is a stage and all people are actors, is there a playwright?

All of Shakespeare's plays were created by the hand of the celebrated "immortal bard". Can it be that life, the greatest play of all, is the one and only play without an author? Is it simply a random sequence of events with each actor unaware of what is behind it all? Or is there a master playwright directing the performance—an overall plan giving it meaning?

Shakespeare, sadly, was as mortal as the rest of us, but is there a truly "immortal" bard behind the scenes of life? The accompanying article examines this question.



Renowned Russian author Leo Tolstoy concluded that God had a purpose in creating life.

eventually are eaten by predators or die of old age, in an endless cycle that repeats itself over and over without any meaning.

But somehow this doesn't seem good enough for us as humans. We have the amazing ability to think and dream and even to ask questions about the meaning of life. We can set goals and struggle to achieve them. Surely we are different to the animals; surely there is meaning, purpose and value to our lives?

In his book, *A Confession*, the renowned Russian author Leo Tolstoy asked: "What is the meaning of my life? What will come of my life? Why does everything which exists

exist and why do I exist?" After spending many years searching for the answer to this quandary, in the end Tolstoy concluded that the solution was found in religion and faith—it had to do with God.

When you think about it, Tolstoy's conclusion makes some sense. If there is a God, surely he would have a purpose in creating life? But in the absence of a God, logic suggests that the only explanation for the universe is that it got here by chance. In that case, it is devoid of meaning or purpose, something that just "happened", nothing more than a serendipitous cosmic "accident".

Celebrated writer CS Lewis touched on this concept with the following

words in his book *Mere Christianity*: "If the whole universe has no meaning, we should never have found out 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 a word without meaning".⁵

So we are left with just two realistic alternatives. Either the world began by random chance, in which case life has no meaning, or it was brought into being by a God, in which case it would seem likely that he did it for a reason and it does have meaning.

As a matter of interest, let's follow the latter line of reasoning for a moment and assume that God exists

and the Bible is his revelation to mankind. Is there something in the Bible to indicate God's purpose for making the world and is that purpose something that makes good sense?

The Biblical view

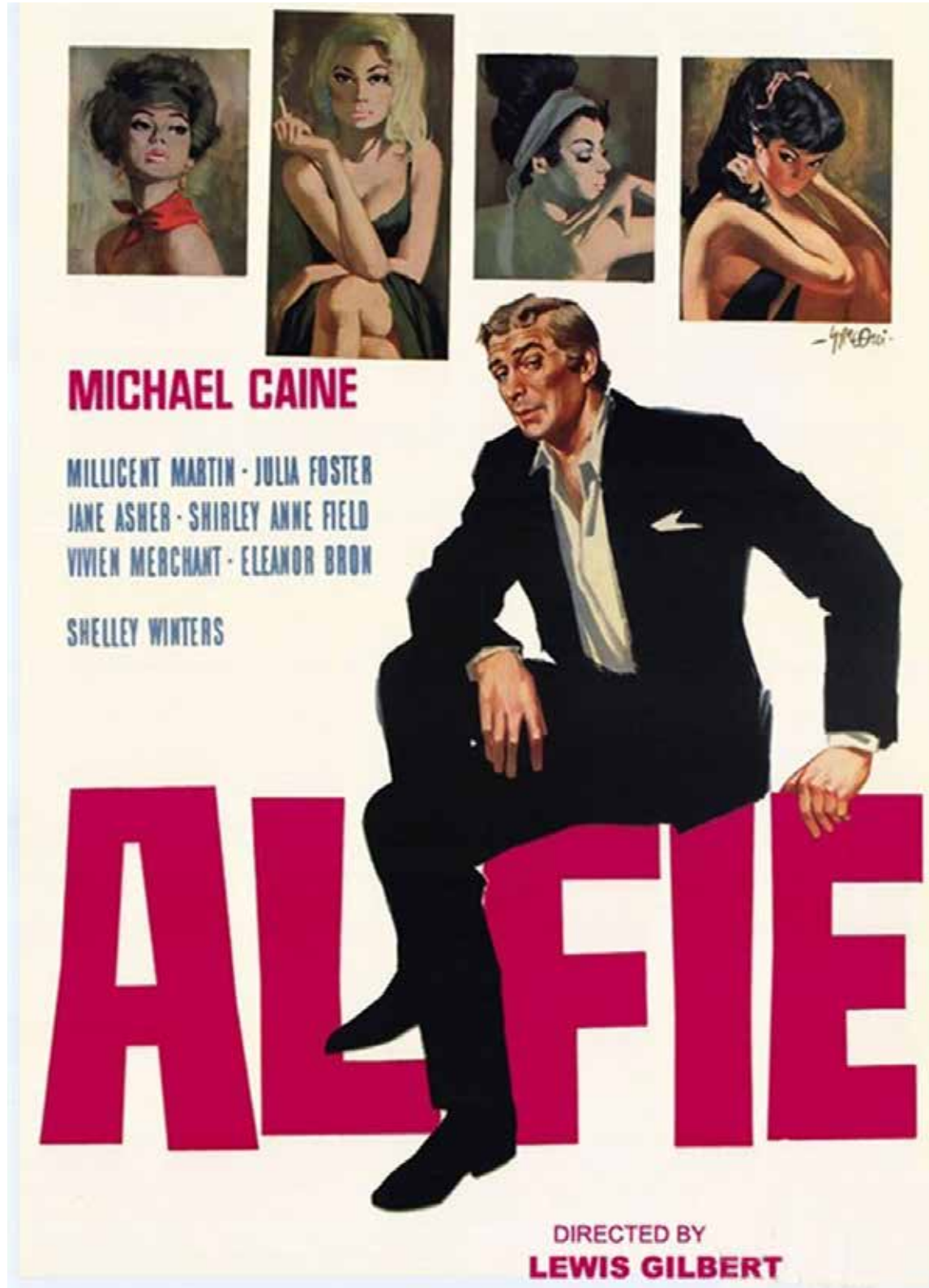
According to the opening passage of the Bible, at the creation of the world God said: "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground".⁶

So God made man to live on a higher level than the animals. In contrast to the animals, man was made "in the image of God", in other words, possessing godly attributes which weren't given to the animals—things such as the ability to think and reason abstractly, to imagine, to appreciate beauty, to love, and to have a concept of, and even a relationship with, God.

One of these remarkable attributes was described by wise King Solomon, when he observed that God had "set eternity in the hearts of men".⁷ That would explain our fascination with the vast and seemingly limitless universe and our ability to grapple with concepts such as infinity and eternity. No wonder we think about the desirability and feasibility of living

forever. God has equipped our minds to deal with these thoughts and concepts, of which animals have absolutely no inkling. The very fact we ask ourselves "What is the meaning of life?" highlights our remarkable capacity to contemplate and explore such intangible things.

Three thousand years ago, King David of Israel recorded his musings on the meaning of life in one of his poems. Referring to God, he said: "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are



The lyrics of 'What's it all about, Alfie?' the hit song from the 1966 movie Alfie, point out that life has no meaning without love.

mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?"⁸

He went on to boldly respond to the age-old question about the purpose of life: "You made him a little lower than the angels and crowned him with glory and honour. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet".⁹

This is a rather grandiose statement, claiming that everything is put under the control of mankind and that we are crowned with glory and honour. But it is obvious that we don't have control of everything that happens around us, not even our own desires and emotions!

Later in the Bible, this statement is expounded with the note that although things aren't fully this way yet, David's poem foreshadowed, or pointed to, what will occur in the

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When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?

future.¹⁰ It goes on to repeat these astounding promises of glory and honour, and of ruling over everything in the universe. It adds that God is “bringing many sons and daughters to glory”.¹¹

Children of God

The Bible refers in a number of places to humanity as “children” of God. For instance, the gospel of John, which speaks of Jesus Christ’s time on the earth says: “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God”.¹²

Writing to the church in the city of Rome, the apostle Paul called the church members “God’s children” and went on to say: “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory”.¹³

In other words, the Bible shows the reason God created human beings is that he is producing a *family*, with whom he is going to share the universe! He is a God of love and wants to share all of his wealth and property with others.

Included in this promise is the opportunity to live forever. One of the most often quoted Bible verses says: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”.¹⁴

At the very end of the Bible, this amazing plan or purpose of God for mankind is repeated: “Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children”.¹⁵

Mankind: worthless or priceless?

One of the greatest astronomers of all time, Carl Sagan, was interviewed by Ted Koppel on the United States *Nightline* TV programme just a few days before his death in 1996. He was asked if he had any final words of wisdom to share with the people of the earth, and this was his answer:

We live on a hunk of rock and metal that circles a humdrum star that is one of 400 billion other stars that make up the Milky Way galaxy which is one of billions of other galaxies which make up the universe which may be one of a very large number, perhaps an infinite number of other universes. That is a perspective on human life and our culture that is well worth pondering.

This perspective places us in a rather insignificant position—just a tiny, inconsequential speck buried in a vast universe.

It is interesting to contrast this view with that held by Christians and Jews, who believe a loving God designed this as a special planet carefully crafted to be a fitting home for the human beings who formed the pinnacle of his creative acts. Christians even believe that God himself stooped down to become a human being and suffered for each person he had created. This means we are so amazingly valuable that the incomprehensibly great God who created us was willing to die to save us! In that case we are priceless rather than worthless!

What a marvellous promise! God is going to share everything he has with the human beings he has created. We are destined to inherit everything he possesses and live in an intimate family relationship with him forever. According to the Bible, that is the purpose of life.

What’s it all about, Alfie?

The 1966 movie *Alfie*, starring Michael Caine, was a resounding success on its release and became a classic, prompting a remake in 2002 with Jude Law in the lead role. Hal David and Burt Bacharach’s catchy tune from the original movie became a hit song that has achieved enduring popularity. Many people can hum the tune and remember the opening words: “What’s it all about, Alfie? Is it just for the moment we live?”

In this song, the character Alfie stands for all of us. We can even change the question by re-arranging two of the letters of his name, to make it: “What’s it all about, a life?”

So indeed, what’s it all about, Alfie? Interestingly, the lyrics of the hit vocal point to the answer we have just seen in the Bible! They include the words: “I believe there’s a heaven above, Alfie” and “I know there’s something much more, something that even non-believers can believe in”. This “something” turns out to be love: “I believe in love, Alfie”.

The Bible verses we have just looked at can be summed up in the word “love” too. God is going to share the universe with his children because he loves them. The reason God is having a family is no different from the reason we humans have families—because of love.

As another famous song accurately puts it: “Love makes the world go round”. Love is what makes life worthwhile and meaningful.

Hal David’s lyrics continue with the sentiment: “Without true love we just exist, Alfie”. When people find true love, it gives wonderful new meaning and purpose to their lives. No longer

“Everything is meaningless”

Believe it or not, a passage in the Bible says “Meaningless, meaningless. Everything is Meaningless.”¹ The writer goes on to say that there is no meaning in wisdom, wealth or pleasure, because ultimately it all ends in death. You wouldn’t expect to find statements like this in the Bible!

The writer, King Solomon, a man highly respected for his wisdom, wrote these words out of frustration after spending a huge amount of time and resources in search of the purpose of life, and how to find true happiness. Solomon was an extremely wealthy king, and had plenty of resources to call on. So he was able to throw everything at this problem. He built mansions, gardens, parks and vineyards. He bought more animals than anyone else in memory, had numerous slaves serving him, amassed piles of gold and silver, and even took on a harem, consisting of hundreds of women. “I denied myself nothing my eyes desired”, he said. Yet when he surveyed all of this, he concluded that it was all meaningless, and hadn’t brought happiness and fulfilment.²

So why is this story in the Bible? What can we learn from this experience?

There is one vital key at the end of this account that puts it all in perspective. The author begins to sum up: “Now all has been heard, here is the conclusion of the matter.”³ Then he brings God into the picture, and declares that the whole duty of humans is to honour their heavenly father.⁴

The lesson is clear: apart from God, everything is meaningless. But with God in the frame, everything is full of meaning and life has a wonderful purpose after all.

Notes

¹ Ecclesiastes 1:2.

² Ecclesiastes 2:10–11.

³ Ecclesiastes 12:11.

⁴ Ecclesiastes 12:13.

Christians are encouraged to find that God assigns special meaning to each and every individual life.¹⁹

In summary, we have two choices set before us. Either the universe and life appeared by blind chance and life is meaningless, or God created us through his love, for the tremendous purpose of sharing the universe and his boundless love with us forever. It’s quite a contrast, isn’t it? What do you think makes the most sense?

Notes

¹ http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2002-06-03/news/0206030147_1_mr-moorhead-philosophy-answer.

² Walter T. Stace, “Men Against Darkness”, *The Atlantic Monthly*, Sept 1948.

³ David Friend and the Editors of *Life*, “The Meaning of Life, Reflections in Words and Pictures on Why We Are Here”, 1991, p. 3.

⁴ Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian*, Touchstone Books, New York, 1957, pp. 106–107.

⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Collins, Glasgow, 1978, p. 42.

⁶ Genesis 1:26.

⁷ Ecclesiastes 3:11.

⁸ Psalm 8:3–4.

⁹ Psalm 8:5–6.

¹⁰ Hebrews 2:8.

¹¹ Hebrews 2:10.

¹² John 1:12–13.

¹³ Romans 8:17.

¹⁴ John 3:16.

¹⁵ Revelation 21:7.

¹⁶ 1 John 3:1; 4:9–11; Romans 5:8.

¹⁷ Ephesians 1:11 (*The Message*).

¹⁸ Romans 8:29 (*New Living translation*).

¹⁹ Psalm 139:13–14; Matthew 10:29–31.

do they just exist, but suddenly there is a reason, a meaning, for life.

The song continues: “Until you find the love you’ve missed you’re nothing, Alfie”. In other words, life has no meaning and we are of no value without love. The reference here is to love on the human level, which is vitally important, but the Bible talks about a “love that we’ve missed” which is even greater than that. People who read the Bible and understand it come face to face with the love of God. When they see that love demonstrated by the sending of Jesus into our world as a human being to die for us so that we can live forever as his brothers and sisters,¹⁶ they begin to see a wonderful new meaning and purpose for their lives.

In the light of Mark Twain’s comment on the importance of the day you find out why you were born, it is pertinent to note the Bible’s statement: “It’s in Christ that we find out who we are and what we’re living for”.¹⁷

When Christians come to appreciate the importance of Jesus Christ there is a major change in the way they live, because they now understand why they were born. They now know the purpose of life, and have a personal relationship with the one who created them. They discover that “God chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters”.¹⁸ Even better than appreciating the meaning or purpose of human life as a whole,



Rex Morgan, the editor of *Inside Life*, and his wife Marilyn live on Auckland’s North Shore. Rex has worked in Christian ministry and office administration for over 40 years and has contributed

articles to a number of international publications. Rex can be contacted at rex@gci.org.nz

The pale blue dot

By Tony Goudie

Many people remember where they were when big events happen. We all have our memory moments: JFK, Martin Luther King, Princess Diana. I remember I was watching a television comedy with a gale blowing outside when the news broke of Nelson Mandela's demise.

Perhaps you remember 'The Pale Blue Dot'? Carl Sagan (1934-1996) was an American cosmologist who gave the request to Voyager's cameras in 1977 to turn and take a last look at earth from 6 billion kilometres out as the probe travelled away at 63,000 kilometres an hour heading out of the solar system. The resulting image very faintly showed our good Earth as "a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam" as he cleverly commented.

His poetic and sobering words are recorded for us: "That's here. That's home. That's us. On it every one you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every 'superstar', every 'supreme leader', every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there—on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam".

He ended by saying, "The Earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena. Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that in glory and triumph they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of

underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another and to preserve and cherish the Pale Blue Dot, the only home we've ever known".¹

Mandela and others looked for a time when mankind could live at peace, and Nelson Mandela did his part in bringing this about. President Obama commented after Mandela's death: "Nelson Mandela doesn't now belong to us; he belongs to the Ages".

'I wish the whole world could see what I see. Sometimes you have to go up really high to understand how small you really are.'

—Felix Baumgartner, record-setting Austrian skydiver

a dot. Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants on one corner of this pixel on the scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner. How frequent their misunderstandings, how eager they are to kill one another, how fervent their hatreds. Our posturing, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the universe, are challenged by this point of pale light...There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it

Another One who belongs to all the ages is Jesus Christ. He is eternal, everlasting, the Creator of all, and the real Peacemaker and Reconciler—the Jesus who loves us, and who has the greatest love and favour for our Pale Blue Dot and all who live, have ever lived, and will ever live, upon it.

Notes

¹ Carl Sagan, *Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space*, 1997, pp xv-xvi.



Decisions, decisions

By Cliff Neill

As we journey through life there are times when we all encounter a crossroads: a time when some decision needs to be made that will probably be instrumental in shaping the rest of our lives and so is not to be taken lightly, especially if we are young enough to have most of our lives ahead of us.

People have used many methods in the past to find their way around the stress of making a decision for themselves. You've probably heard them all—let's draw straws, flip a coin, read our horoscope, weigh up the pros and cons, or seek wise counsel from older and more mature friends or close family members.

In 1914 Edward Thomas and Robert Frost, two poets who had met in Gloucestershire and had become firm friends, were sitting on an orchard stile close to Frost's home when word arrived that Britain had declared war on Germany. Edward was British but his friend Robert came from New Hampshire in the US. On that fateful day they discussed just what this war would do to their families.

Robert Frost opted to return to the United States and, as a result of this decision, Edward decided to join him with his family. They planned to live side by side in America: working, teaching, and farming. And so Robert returned to the safety of his home state thousands of miles from Europe and the violent war with all of its death and destruction.

Unfortunately, the decision for Edward wasn't so easy and he lingered on in England. His decision was whether to enlist and join the conflict or to go with his friend, as planned, to the safety of America. During this period of time Robert

Frost wrote "The Road Not Taken" and sent it to Edward.

This poem has been interpreted many ways over the years: is it about indecision, regret, joy, the delight that comes from going the way few others have chosen? Perhaps it's about all of these emotions, depending on our state of mind as we read it. What do you think? I also wonder just how Edward reacted to it. We'll never know. And also, I guess we will never know why he chose France, war, and death instead of peace and life in New Hampshire. Was he embarrassed not to, or was it the posters of Lord Kitchener pointing a finger with the caption: "Your country needs you!" Or, perhaps, he saw it as a chance to make a difference.

Whatever the reasons, and even though their friendship meant a

great deal to both of them, Edward Thomas chose to go to war. Sadly, he was killed in the first battle of Arras, Easter 1917. He had survived a little over two months in France!

When faced with decisions, there may be more than two options. It could be there are several paths we could take. A book that can help us is the Bible. It has some things to say about making decisions and urges us to be wise, to seek counsel from others who are more mature, and perhaps know quite a bit about the particular choice that we need to make. Maybe they had taken that same path themselves years before and know all about that journey's pitfalls and perhaps its blessings.

The writer of Proverbs puts it this way: "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed".¹ Why seek counsel? Because the decisions we need to make during life's long journey are vitally important for us and our families, and, hopefully, they will lead us onwards to life and peace.

So let's all choose wisely.

The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveller, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same.

Both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.²

Notes

¹ Proverbs 15:22 (NIV).

² poemhunter.com/poem/the-road-not-taken/

This article was first published in the September 2016 issue of *Because* magazine (www.because.uk.com). Reprinted with permission.

Atheism is not so smart

By Roy Lawrence

Many years ago I discovered John Bunyan's famous book *Pilgrim's Progress*. Recently I have read it again and have been surprised to discover in it some characters I have never noticed before.

There is 'Atheist' who meets 'Christian' and 'Hopeful' on their way to the Celestial City. He asks where they are going and when they tell him of their hopes of heaven, 'then Atheist fell into very great laughter' explaining 'I laugh to see what ignorant people you are.' He insists: 'there is no such place as you dream of.'

There is another similar character called 'Shame', not because he feels any shame himself, but because of his habit of calling out 'Shame' whenever he meets a Christian. His view, like that of Atheist is that it is 'a pitiful, low, sneaking business for a man to mind religion.'

These two characters are not uncommon today. Secularism has become fashionable. Atheism is thought to be quite smart, whereas the media often portray believers as bigots and boobies. The same view can be found in some educational circles. I know of a school where a new head teacher has banned the Christmas crib because she says it is not 'politically correct' for a modern school to have one.

I am sure she feels smart and fashionable in having these views, and fashionable she may well be, but smart she is not.

To believe or not to believe

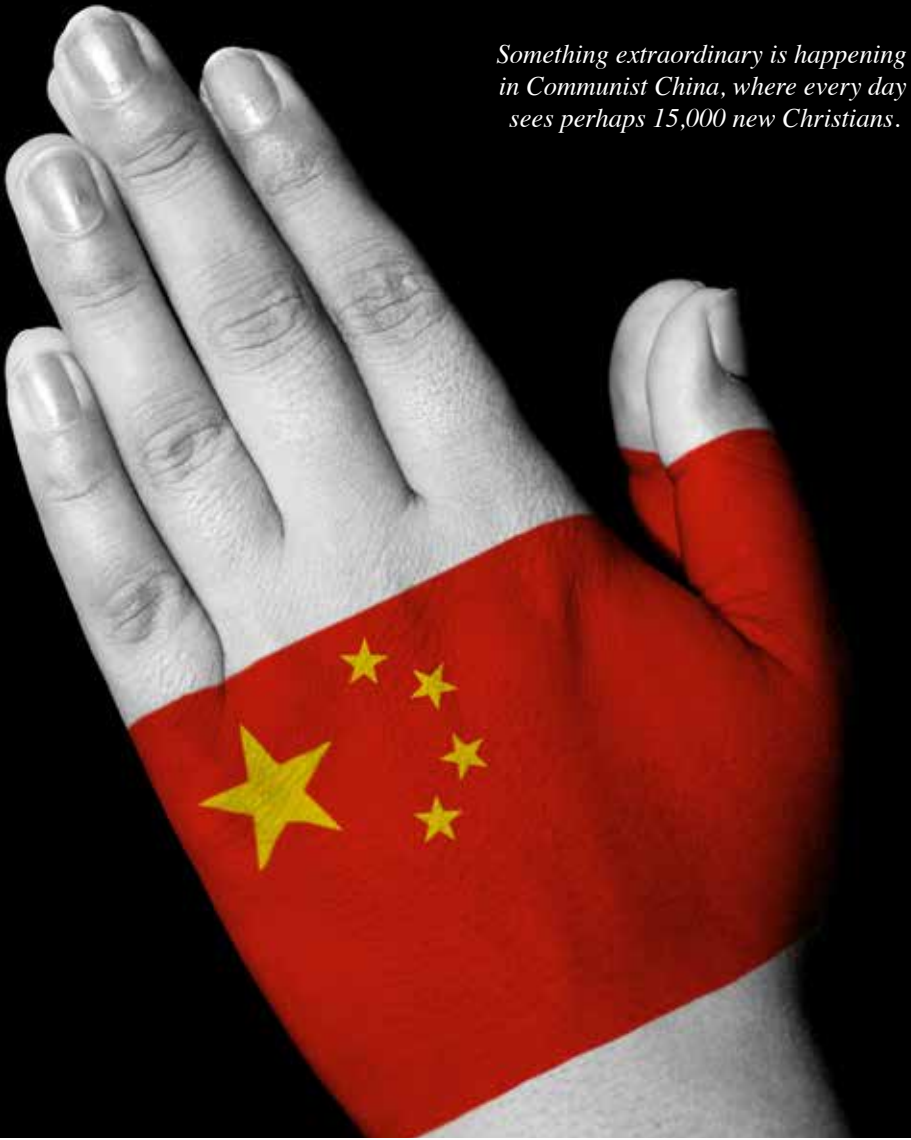
When I was training for the ministry, I had the good fortune to spend four years at Oxford, obtaining a degree in classics and theology, and then two years of post-graduate study in Cambridge. The purpose was to teach me to think.

If Bunyan's Atheist was right and having a Christian faith is a sign of laughable ignorance, training the clergy in this way would make no sense. It would just expose the folly of belief. However, all I can tell you is that the effect on me was precisely the opposite. The impact of those six years was to convince me that Christian belief is well able to stand up to the most searching of thought processes.

Also, I could not help noting that many others had come to the same conclusion. Think for instance of CS Lewis, author of the famous Narnia stories, who taught at both Oxford and Cambridge, and whom I was privileged to meet. He was an atheist in his earlier years but found he could not continue to be so. Or think of Professor CEM Joad, once a frequent broadcaster on the BBC Brains Trust, whose atheistic views were well known.

I remember reading his book *God and Evil*, which revealed that he was slowly and painfully working his way back to believing in God, a process which was completed when he wrote his final book, *Recovery of Belief*. The writer and





Something extraordinary is happening in Communist China, where every day sees perhaps 15,000 new Christians.

know that, when she does so, she is quoting Parmenides, who lived five centuries before Jesus?

It is hard to look at the universe and not wonder where it has come from. And what a universe it is! Think of the glory of a sunset, the loveliness of a rose, the symmetry of a snowflake. Even if creation could happen inexplicably by accident, what are we to make of all the evidence of order and design? Of beauty? Of moral laws or the visionary experience? Or of art and literature and great music? Can we contemplate any or all of these things without a sense of mystery? A sense of that which is greater than we are—greater than anything which we can conceive or understand? In Bunyan, *Atheist and Shame* try to dispel these questions by mockery. However, mockery is a two-edged weapon.

Laughter in heaven

C. S. Lewis suggested that in heaven atheism would be mentioned only as a sort of joke. Perhaps for a moment we can share the humour.

Imagine you want to buy a car. You go to a local car dealer, point to a model you fancy, and ask about its production. What if the salesman said there was no production line, no design team, and that the car happened by accident? There was an explosion in the corner of the factory and when the dust settled there it was! Wouldn't you go to another salesman?

The universe is much more complex than a car. I am not competent to know whether those who speak about a 'big bang' are right or not, but common sense tells us that

broadcaster, Malcolm Muggeridge, made a similar journey not long afterwards. It was meeting Mother Teresa which brought him to the point at which he realised he could no longer be an unbeliever. His book *Jesus Rediscovered* told the story of his conversion.

I have a list of some fifty former atheists who became Christians. They include politicians of the left and the right, scientists, journalists, poets, and pop singers.

What has happened to individuals has happened to nations too. Russia has abandoned atheistic communism and returned to the beliefs of the Orthodox Church, and at this very moment something extraordinary is happening in Communist China, where every

day sees perhaps 15,000 new Christians.

The logic of faith

None of this is surprising. From the dawn of human thought, men and women have felt that this remarkable universe of ours cannot be a mere accident. If you have enjoyed *The Sound of Music*, you may remember Maria singing 'nothing comes from nothing, nothing ever could', but did you





this cannot be the whole story. And what about those who prefer to talk about creation in terms of a 'steady state'?

A story was told to me of two university lecturers, one a Christian, the other an atheist. When the atheist visited the Christian he was impressed to see a working model of the solar system in the other one's house. There was a representation of the sun and around it all the planets were rotating. 'My goodness, who made that?' he asked. The Christian could not resist answering: 'I thought you believed it just happened!'

Struggle for the soul of the nation

Perhaps, however, though atheism may cause laughter in heaven, the fact that it is becoming fashionable these days is not such a joke. Most of the best things in our national life come from the Christian faith. Our best laws have a Christian basis. Our education system has a Christian origin. Medical care was pioneered by Christians. That is why a number of our best hospitals and hospices are named after

saints. Our traditional standards of decency and honour are based on the Christian ethic.

If we were to remove the Christian influence, the result would be sheer disaster. Yet that is what is happening. The place of Christianity in the UK (from where I write) is being steadily eroded. Christian couples find it difficult to adopt or foster children. Christian teachers

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and medics can be disciplined and even dismissed if they show their faith. Christian hoteliers are penalised for their principles. By contrast it has become easier, more politically correct, to be an atheist. We ask ourselves what is going wrong, but we do not wait for an answer.

During World War II there was a slogan: 'Don't you know there's a

war on?' You might hear it if you broke the blackout regulations or put more than five inches (12.5 cm) of water in the bath or tried to obtain more than your ration of food. It is a slogan we could well revive, because there is certainly a war going on now, a war of values and belief. There is a struggle for the soul of our nation and we all have to work out where we stand.

For myself, my conviction, formed over the course of many years, is that I cannot do better than to stand with and for Jesus. The main reason why I believe in God the Father is that I take him on trust from Jesus. Atheists have to believe they know

better than Jesus. I can't do that. Can you?

Canon Roy Lawrence has spent most of his life in the ministry working in Anglican churches in the North of England, as well as serving as a hospital chaplain. A well-known Christian writer and broadcaster, Roy has authored fourteen books.

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CONFLICT

is an opportunity

By Philip Stevens

Conflict: it's not just limited to one nation being aggressive towards another, but on a smaller scale can involve spouses, parents versus children, employers against employees—the list can go on.

But whatever the scale, the results are detrimental to long-term well-being.

However, let's consider the possibility that conflict can be viewed as an opportunity—both for helpful self-examination and personal development. But beware, this approach does demand courage.

Let's face it, in any conflict it's all too easy to blame the other party for starting the dispute, and to pass on that view to anyone who will listen. But it takes a brave individual to ask: "What have I done or said that may have been inappropriate, even thoughtless?"

Maybe, just maybe, that is the cause of the conflict. And it takes a big person to go to the other party in the conflict and say "sorry". But it is worth the effort.

Now, let's reverse that situation. Supposing we are on the receiving end of that apology. Is that a positive opportunity? Absolutely!

Instead of responding: "I wondered how long it would be before you apologised", how about exercising grace? (Yes, that is a religious-sounding word, but it means showing favour and forgiveness

that is underserved—the way God readily forgives us when we do something wrong.)

If someone has been big enough to apologise, then it presents an opportunity for us to change an aggressive attitude into one of

reconciliation. It's a classic win-win situation.

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