

This book poses questions about whether true spirituality requires organized religion. It consists of dialogues between three imaginary characters: An independent spiritual seeker, a devout Christian, and a devoted skeptic about religion and spirituality. These three characters engage in passionate debates.

Religion Versus Spirituality

**Can Spirituality Flourish
Apart from Organized Religion?
(Debates in Dialogues)**

by Joseph Schrock

**Order the complete book from the publisher
Booklocker.com**

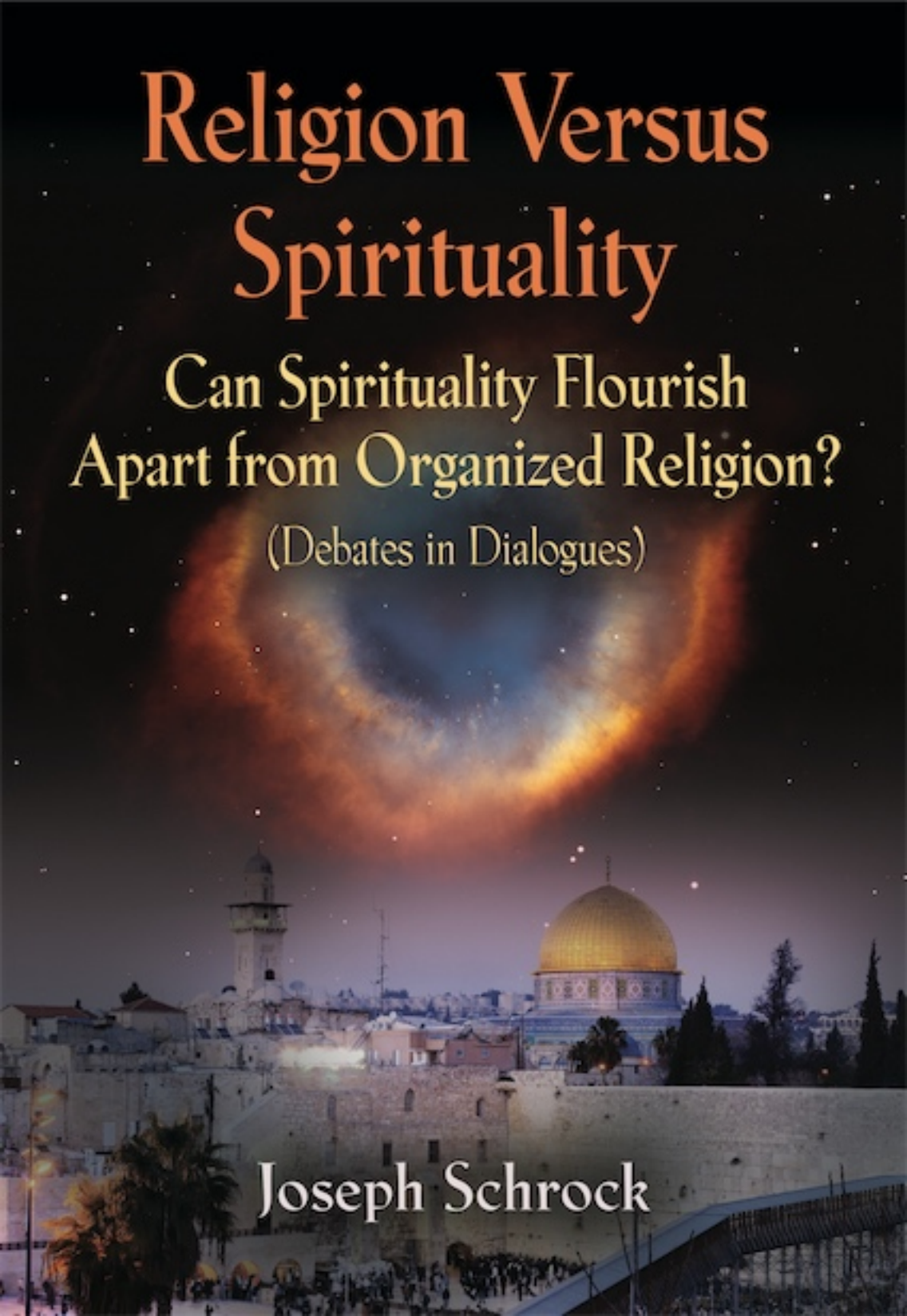
<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/10307.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**

Religion Versus Spirituality

Can Spirituality Flourish
Apart from Organized Religion?

(Debates in Dialogues)



Joseph Schrock

Copyright © 2019 Joseph Schrock

ISBN: 978-1-64438-504-3

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2019

First Edition

Contents

Preface	vii
Chapter One - What Constitutes the Contrast Between Religion and Spirituality?	1
Introductory Thoughts	1
Is Religion Necessary for Human Flourishing?	5
Can Spirituality Function Apart from Religion?	11
Does Spiritual Independence Constrain Devotion to God?	16
Reliance upon the Church Can Breed Spiritual Shallowness	21
Is a Personal Relationship with God, Unmediated by Organized Religion, Possible?	25
What are the Positive Aspects of Spiritual Independence From the Church?	31
What are the Liabilities for Independent Spirituality?	35
Chapter Two - How Can We Know God?.....	41
Must We Rely on the Church Only to Tell Us about God?.....	41
What Happens when the Church is Corrupted?	47
A Digression into Faith versus Works.....	53
Can We have a Personal Rapport with God?	59
Is Organized Religion an Evil?.....	64
Is Spirituality Compatible with Atheism?	69
Chapter Three - Human Nature without God.....	75
What is Human Nature?	75
Does God Create Human Nature?	80
Does God Create Evil?	85
Chapter Four - Will Religion and Spirituality Survive?	91
God is Present in All of Reality.....	91
God's Spirit is the Basis of Reality	97
Since God is Omnipresent, Belief in God will Always Prevail	104
Atheism is Bankrupt.....	109
Does Religion Cause War, or does Human Nature Cause War?.....	114
Chapter Five - What is the Source of the World's Religions?	119
Humanity Innately Craves God	119

Religions are Built upon the Foundation of Inspiration from God.....	126
Why Do Nearly All Religions Conflict?.....	133
Is God Schizophrenic?	139
Is a Universal Religion Possible?	146
Humanity Will Always have Conflicts.....	151
Human Insight is Finite and Fallible.....	157
Uniformity in All Religions is as Absurd as Uniformity in Musical Preferences.....	164
Ongoing Growth Must Prevail in Religion.....	170
Chapter Six - Which Religion is the Best?.....	175
Is Original Sin a Viable and Rational Concept?	175
If Original Sin is an Absurd Concept, then from Where do the Evils of Human Nature Come?	184
Can Humanity Learn from the Insights of Eastern Religions?	189
Reincarnation has a Logical Coherence that No Alternative Theology can Match.....	195
If Reincarnation is True, Why Do Most Western Religions Reject It?	203
Why do Many Different Religions Worship God on Different Days of the Week?	209
Can Cultural Preferences Determine Days for Worship, and Does God Honor Worship on Those Days?.....	218
Chapter Seven - Is Sexual Morality Important?.....	223
Does Modern Liberal Christianity Endorse Sexual Licentiousness?.....	223
Are there Important Consequences for Sexual “Freedoms”?	229
Can a Person be in Harmony with God and have Total Sexual “Freedom”?	233
If Jesus Pays for All Our Sins, Why is Good Spiritual Character Essential?.....	240
Is Sexual Immorality the Death Knell of a Civilization?.....	243
Chapter Eight - What is Spiritual Salvation?	255
Is there a Human Soul that Survives Death?	255
Does Science Debunk Belief in a Human “Soul”?	263
If Science is Deathly Mute on What Consciousness is, Why Should We Trust Science to Tell Us Whether there is a Soul?.....	269
Consciousness is Spirit	275
Spirit is “Trans-Physical”	283
Is Salvation Perfect Harmony with God?	289
Can We Live in Evil in this Life and then have Our Evils Stripped Away in the Next Life?	294

Is Salvation Given to Everyone Who Professes Christ?	300
Is Salvation Actually a State of Purification of Character?.....	303
Is Salvation Strictly by Free Choice?	310
What About Predestination?.....	315
Chapter Nine - Damnation and Hell.....	319
Is there a Hell?.....	319
Is Hell a Fiery Furnace?	323
Is Separation from God a Form of Hell?	329
Why Would Anyone Choose Hell?	331
Do those in Hell have any Opportunity for Escape?	335
Can the Church Preserve People From Hell?	340
Might Some Church Leaders End Up in Hell?.....	345
Chapter Ten - Prayer and Meditation.....	349
How Important is Prayer?.....	349
Why Should We Pray?	354
How Should We Pray?	356
Can Spiritual Leaders Determine Prayer Methods for Everyone?	360
Is Meditation a Viable Alternative to Prayer?.....	362
Weaknesses of Meditation Alone.....	366
Can We Effectively Combine Prayer and Meditation?	370
Does God Teach Us How We Should Pray or Meditate?	374
Must We Rely on Church Authorities For Our Prayer Styles?	378
Chapter Eleven - Love for God as the Ultimate Good.....	383
Can We Truly Love God?	383
Is Loving God Compatible with Disobedience to God?	388
Does Love for God Grow in Tandem with Humble Obedience to God?	393
When We Repent of Our Evils, Can We Love God and Go Back into Sin?.....	398
Why is Good Spiritual Character Necessary for Love of God?	402
Close Attunement to God Results in True Love for God.....	407
Attunement to God and Disobedience To God are Mutually Exclusive	412
Chapter Twelve - What is God?.....	417
Can We Define God?.....	417
Can We Describe God?	421
Is God Omniscient?	425
Is God Omnipotent?	429
Is God Infallible?	433
Is God's Will Eternally Perfect, Holy and Loving.....	438

Religion Versus Spirituality

Is God Spirit?	441
Is it Thinkable that God Would be Imperfect?	444
Is God the Universe, or is God the Creator of the Universe?	447
Do All Logic, Mathematics, Laws of Nature and Free Choice Issue from God?	451
Perfect Harmony with Divine Love is the Ultimate Good for All Free Beings	457
Is Heaven that Realm in which All Beings are Fully Obedient to God?	460
Index.....	465
About the Author	495

Chapter One

What Constitutes the Contrast Between Religion and Spirituality?

Introductory Thoughts

Daniel: Hello, Clare and Bertrand. It's good to see you both. How have things been for you?

Clare: Oh hello, Daniel. I'm doing rather well. It's a pleasant evening with such mild weather. How are things with you and Bertrand?

Bertrand: Good evening Clare and Daniel. It's nice to be here. I'm getting along well. Life always has its ups and downs, but things are moderately good for me right now. Do we have some good discussions all lined up for our evening?

Daniel: Well, I supposed that while we sip our tea and coffee, we could discuss some important spiritual issues. After all, we had all three agreed that in our regular discussions we would hash out a lot of issues that might well be deemed critical to human life and how to best live it. Let me first pose a question to both of you about spirituality versus religion. Is religion necessary so that one's spiritual life can be a genuine success? First, I'll ask you, Clare; what do you think?

Clare: Well Daniel, that's sort of a difficult question for me to answer. After all, I wish to ask where one will find spiritual thinking and spiritual ways of living, except through religious books or organized religion. Do we not need organized religion, or at least, spiritual books (like Scripture) to have any real spiritual insights?

Daniel: Clare, I'll try to answer your question shortly, but I wish first to let Bertrand weigh in with his views on this matter. What is your outlook, Bertrand?

Bertrand: To be quite blunt, Daniel, I don't think that we need organized religion. Furthermore, as both of you already know, my outlook on spirituality is such that the human animal has a real hunger – for reasons I don't think we yet fully understand – for finding something transcendent, something spiritual in life. That is, we yearn to find meaning in life, meaning that goes well beyond the mere enjoyments of food, drink, sex, physical activities, and so on. However, I'm a bit on the agnostic side concerning whether or not there is a transcendent reality that seeks personal communion with human beings. As I see it, Daniel and Clare, without getting too long-winded, any “spirituality” that we might have is best discovered on an individual basis. That is, we need to each find *what works for us*. This is true irrespective of whether there is an objective reality that seeks to inspire us or to even connect with us. Is not this a very sensible way to think?

Daniel: Bertrand, I grant that you do make some sense in your analysis. However, your outlook is such that there might well not be any transcendent reality with whom we should seek communion. Given this viewpoint, it makes perfectly good sense to reason that we should individually each find our path in life. In other words, it's simply up to us to discover what realities we can subscribe to or what we cannot reasonably believe. However, Clare and I both are convinced of the existence of a transcendent Reality (we might well label this reality “God”). Therefore, we believe that it's critical to have an understanding of the will of that God for our personal lives. You are skeptical on this matter, and I am very enamored of healthy skepticism in areas of human knowledge where I don't think I have any definite knowledge or hard facts. Yet, I cannot any longer doubt the existence of God, and I think I know Clare well enough to know that she does not doubt God's existence. But I'm not at all sure where she stands on the question of spiritual living that is independent of organized religion. Do you think, Clare, that to find God, we must make contact with organized religion – and maybe even the *one “right” religion?*

Clare: Daniel, you give me a very blunt – and highly sensible – question to answer. I lean toward the view that God works through the special human beings He has chosen to teach and lead humanity. Therefore, we need either the writings or the personal instructions from those spiritual teachers sent by God. By my understanding, there is only one book available to humanity that is genuinely the inspired Word of God, and that is our Judeo-Christian *Bible*. Furthermore, I believe that God will always send people, to whom He gives His divine guidance so that they can teach others about how to interpret God's Holy Word correctly. This, then, really places serious doubt on the idea that a person could be attuned to God without being led by a spiritual teacher sent from God. Does this satisfactorily answer your question, Daniel?

Daniel: Yes, Clare, you've made your outlook fairly clear. I happen to disagree with you – and I disagree strongly. First of all, it is my conviction that God does not work *only* through specially chosen people. Rather, I'm convinced that God is always, in all realms of human reality, seeking to encourage each of us to do our best. Now, by your understanding, I guess that you regard our mutual friend Bertrand to not have the guidance of God in his life, because he certainly is not being guided by any teacher of the *Bible*. However, I do not at all see the matter as that “cut-and-dried”. Rather, I believe that to whatever degree Bertrand seeks to do the best he knows in any given situation, he is, to some degree, inspired by the love of God. If he violates his conscience – even to a tiny degree – I believe that God is motivating within him some sense of guilt, such that God is actually “pulling” Bertrand toward obedience to the love of God. But let me not become too long-winded here. Just suffice it to say that your worldview does not at all gel with mine. Let's see what Bertrand thinks about this whole affair.

Bertrand: Daniel and Clare, I'm naturally far more positive toward Daniel's point of view than I am toward Clare's outlook. After all, I see Daniel's viewpoint as more reasonable and more, shall I say, democratic than Clare's. The unreasonableness of the very idea of a God who inspires only some select people to see His “truths”, and who summarily banishes everyone one else to damnation is so great, by my thinking, that I cannot even consider it to be a rational worldview. It makes of God an arbitrary and harsh monster that selects a few to be “saved” and damns the rest – utterly beyond the powers of those who are damned to do anything to save themselves.

Clare: Now Bertrand, you're not entirely fair. I did not mean to be arguing that God predestines some to damnation and others to salvation. Some people believe that, but I don't see it that way, myself. I believe that, somehow, by some means or other, God will grant salvation to everyone who is willing to accept as their Savior the One whom God sent to save humanity. Therefore, Bertrand, I believe that you have the opportunity every day to either accept Jesus or to reject Jesus. I believe it is in your hands. This is not predestination.

Bertrand: But Clare, what about people who have never had a chance to know about or accept or reject Jesus as their savior? Are they saved, or are they lost?

Clare: As for myself, I do not believe that anyone is ever damned for not having access to knowledge of Jesus as the Savior. Just how God handles this, I do not know, but I do trust in His justice and fairness.

Bertrand: I'm gratified, Clare, to see that you do have sufficient reasonableness to deny that God damns some people to hell just for being born in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Daniel: Clare and Bertrand, you had an interesting discussion there. Frankly, I would have to side with Bertrand on this issue, even though I am compelled to dissent from much of his philosophy of reality. But let's get back to the question of whether or not religion (organized religion) is needed for a person to have a close relationship with God. Let me quite bluntly ask if religion is even necessary for successful human spirituality. However, I believe that it would be best for us to pick up on this theme in our next get-together, given that it's getting a bit late, and the agreed-upon time for this discussion for the evening is about expired. How about if we next time probe into the question: Is religion necessary for humanity? We have already brought up the issue, but I wish to pursue it further and to probe into questions of why one could not be greatly inspired and guided by God independently of religion. I think I pretty much know what both of you will answer, but at least, I expect some lively discussions – and debates, since we do not see eye-to-eye on this issue. Have a nice evening, and we'll meet again soon for further discussions.

Is Religion Necessary for Human Flourishing?

Daniel: We're back for more discussions about our respective beliefs about the importance of religion. Clare and Bertrand, I wish to ask you both what your beliefs are about the importance of religion in human life. Do we need religion? And for those of us who believe in the existence of God, and also that God enables the blessed to enter eternal life in holiness, is organized religion critical for such "salvation" – into the blessed life?

Bertrand: Clare, excuse me for quickly taking the floor, but I feel rather strongly about this matter. I am rather convinced that humanity could function quite well without any organized religion, and I conclude that organized religion is a chronic threat to human peace, harmony, and well-being. My reason for saying this is simply that, even if there is a God who can be served by proper worship of Him and obedience to His will, I still believe that the best way for human beings to worship that God is through a highly personal reliance upon the inspiration that such a God might give His people. Organized religion, however, tends to get into very much politicking and power struggles. Organizations acquire power, and the leaders of those organizations have much power vested in them. Therefore, they greatly tend to wish to both increase their power and fight to perpetuate whatever powers they have already gained. Thus, organized religion becomes basically a matter of politics. Therefore, there will invariably be those within the religious organization who wish to acquire power that they currently don't have. Power struggles are inevitable. Then splits, schisms and divisions are likely to occur. Then we get sects breaking off from their "mother" church, and we're likely to get into factionalism and infighting. Furthermore, how can an organized religion gain much power and prominence without getting into the secular governments? When they get into the secular governments, then a "marriage" tends to take place between the religion and the government. This is a gravely dangerous situation. Let me ask, then, is not this a Pandora's Box that is opened when religion becomes organized and powerful?

Clare: Bertrand, I can see where you're coming from; however, as for myself, I believe that even with the dangers of religion and politics mixing, this is still not such a bad thing when it is the *true religion* that has the power. In other words, I believe that Christianity is the only true religion – a genuine revelation from God. Therefore, I see nothing wrong with religion interacting with and influencing the government. I do believe that it's critical in our modern times to keep a proper

separation of church and state. That is, the Church needs to tend primarily to spiritual concerns and issues of society, but the state (the government) is responsible for maintaining the secular controls of the society. Now, the Church should be allowed to teach spiritual values to the society at large, but should not be in control of the government. But, lest we get too far afield here, I want to address Daniel's question as to whether organized religion is needed for a healthy spirituality and salvation. I refuse to conclude that someone cannot have salvation apart from belief in any organized religion, but I also believe that the basic tenets of Christian theology (specifically, Jesus as our one and only Savior) must be subscribed to so that we can have salvation. Therefore, unless someone is truly of the Christian faith, I don't see how they could have salvation. Doesn't this make good sense?

Daniel: Clare, I understand very well that you have a whole lot of company in that worldview of yours. But let me throw a few numbers at you (I'm rather fond of numbers and mathematics, by the way). Are not the vast majority of contemporary Americans born into "Christian" homes? That is, do not most people in the U.S. grow up in homes where it is pretty much taken for granted that Jesus is their Savior and that they need to accept him as Savior to have salvation?

Clare: Honestly, Daniel, I believe that the answer is, undoubtedly, yes. But what is the significance of that? Where does that lead us?

Daniel: I'm going to very shortly show you where I'm leading. Let me pose another question: How many of the people of Iran or Saudi Arabia (what percentage of the people there) are reared in homes where Christianity is taught? How many are brought up to take it for granted that Jesus is their Savior?

Clare: Daniel, I don't know the statistics, but I'd guess that most people in those countries would be brought up in Muslim families. But what's the importance of that?

Daniel: Here's the importance of it, Clare. Suppose that 80% of American children are born into "Christian" homes. But suppose that 2% of Iranian or Saudi Arabian children are born into "Christian" homes. That means that by being born in the U.S. – an incident that the one being born has *not an iota of influence on* – one has 40 times as great a chance of being reared in a "Christian" home as if one were born in Iran or Saudi Arabia. How many of the people who are born into a "Christian" family here in the U.S. are likely to remain "Christian" – just by statistical odds? Furthermore, how many of those born into Muslim homes in the Middle East are likely to remain Muslim?

Clare: I don't see the relevance of those questions, Daniel. What does all this lead to? Maybe it is highly likely (even maybe with 70% probability) that a child born in America will grow up to be "Christian", whereas in the Middle East the probability might be something like 85% that the child will grow up to be Muslim. (I can use numbers, too, by the way.) But what's so big a fuss over this?

Daniel: I'm gratified to see that you know a little about how to apply statistical probabilities. However, to get to my point – and it seems to me to be a *really critical* one – I want to pose the question of how in the world it can be fair that children who are born in Iran have, according to our estimates, around 40 times greater a probability of being "lost" than children who are born in the U.S. Are our statistics that outrageously off base? Or do we conclude that, from a spiritual perspective, Middle Eastern children are at a terrible disadvantage? After all, by your theology, if I understand it correctly, this is the difference between being born into a place where it's rather probable that you will be blessed with eternal heavenly bliss versus being born into a place where the probability is very high that you will be damned to eternal torments in hell. Pray tell, where in the world does fairness or any semblance of justice ever come into the picture here? So, Clare, can you rescue yourself from this horrific conundrum?

Clare: Quite honestly, Daniel, I don't know of any clear-cut answer for you. Let me say that I don't worry myself much about such matters, because I trust in the Word of God, and I have complete faith that, regardless of how little I might understand God's infinite wisdom and justice, God will make everything turn out to be fair.

Daniel: In other words, Clare, you're just pleading to the defense of mystery that simply overrules logic and rationality? Is that the approach you take? As for me, this is just not good enough. I do not believe that the God, who is the infinite Master of all logic, truth, justice, and rationality wants me to accept something that human beings teach me and which my fundamental rationality and logic persuade me to be utter nonsense, or rank and blatant injustice from God Himself. If logic cannot possibly come to the rescue of a given doctrine, then I'm prepared to argue that this doctrine *must be held suspect*, or it must be simply jettisoned from my worldview. Do you have a viable defense of your views, Clare?

Clare: Daniel, you tend to try so hard to put everything in some sort of logical box. But can you not see that when it comes to faith in God, we must be prepared to trust the Word of God over human logic and wisdom?

Daniel: Clare, I sympathize with and strongly affirm the wish for full faith and trust in God; however, I feel compelled, myself, to conclude that God does not require

that when I use logic and clear mathematical principles, or when I apply rigorous logic to laws and forces of nature, such that I can devise very powerful calculating machines (computers), or send astronauts to the moon, that I should then suddenly toss aside all that logic and rational thinking when it comes to spirituality and faith in God. Would not such a schizoid requirement make God look like a Super-Schizophrenic?

Clare: I think you are a bit rash, Daniel. I'm not claiming that God is illogical or irrational, but merely that *our limited understanding* of logic and sound reason is so fallible in our "fallen" condition, as mere human beings, that we cannot arrive at explanations for why and how God might justly conduct His divine judgments on humanity.

Daniel: Clare, I really appreciate your efforts to defend the justice of God's judgments, because I fully trust that all of God's genuine judgments – *not necessarily our ideas of His judgments* – are perfect, fair, and infallible. I would never, for a minute, argue against that. However, I feel compelled to argue that God wants me to use my intellect to the max and that it is His will that all my thinking is just as logic-based as I'm cable of making it. If, in my application of this principle, I run afoul of Christian theology, then I think that I must question where Christian theology might go awry. I fully understand that you regard all biblical scriptures as divinely inspired and the infallible "Word of God". However, might it just be, Clare, that modern human knowledge, including the exponential explosions of human scientific and technological progress, suggest that we need to rethink a lot of our theological teachings and doctrines? Are we justified in sticking to the claims of bygone eras to the effect that certain human writings came directly from God, and that they are eternally valid and perennially infallible?

Clare: Well Daniel, you're perfectly free to question and challenge Holy Scripture, if you so wish. However, I would fear to try to challenge the Word of God.

Daniel: You're being a bit disingenuous and unfair, Clare, in suggesting that I wish to "challenge the Word of God". I'm not doing any such thing. What I *am doing* is to try to encourage others to question whether or not their age-old convictions that certain human writings ought to be regarded as eternally infallible are genuinely trustworthy. If those writings truly were the Divine Word of God, then surely they would be reliable perennially. However, maybe we should challenge ourselves to probe into the question of whether we can have strong faith in God, while simultaneously concluding that God's inspirations and enlightenment of human beings are always fraught with human fallibility and that just maybe *no writings, no book*, composed by humanity is *ever infallible*. Could God control the pen (or in

modern times, a computer keyboard) of a human being such that precisely every word that was written by that human being, under those circumstances, would be exactly what God willed to have written? I do not doubt that God could well do that. Do I believe that we have evidence that God ever has done it or ever will do it? My answer is no. Of course, I understand that you disagree.

Clare: Yes, Daniel, I'm afraid that I have to conclude that you're rejecting divine revelations from God and that you're doing so because your human reasoning suggests to you that logic overrules the infallibility of Holy Scripture.

Daniel: Okay, Clare. I understand that this is one of those issues where we likely need just to agree to disagree. But I wonder if Bertrand would like to comment on these matters.

Bertrand: Well, Clare and Daniel, I'm afraid that I certainly could not buy into Clare's outlook; basically, I agree with Daniel here, because I believe that, regardless of all the good things that can be said about Judeo-Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or other "scriptures", the fact of the matter is that they are highly culturally bound. They are written from the perspective of the writer and his culture – not apparently based upon literal dictation from a superhuman source. Furthermore, so many of the writings of these respective scriptures are highly revelatory of human limitations in knowledge, and they are reflective of the belief systems of religious leaders, prophets, seers, or mystics. For example, when the early Christian Church Fathers were debating over which books to include in their canon, they almost included some that were eventually deleted, and they had strong disagreements at times over which writings to include as scripture. Does this suggest that some of those books which were deleted, which, by the way, are written very much like those that were included, were simply human writings, whereas the other books (included in the canon) were of absolutely infallible divine origin? This seems almost unreasonable. Surely, the books included for scripture were, in many respects, almost identical to some that were excluded, and yet they're the *only ones* that are considered to be infallible scripture. Is not this a bit absurd? Should not infallible words of God Himself have some clear code or a reliable method of being differentiated from mere human writings? The modern intelligent and rational thinker almost has to side with the viewpoint that, regardless of whether certain human writings were greatly inspired by God, they were nevertheless very much based on the thoughts, ideas, understanding, and beliefs of highly fallible human writers. I realize that Muslims believe that the *Koran* was directly given to Mohammad through an angel of God and that God was dictating what was written. For those who believe there is a God, they might well conclude that God not only could, but did, specifically induce the writing of certain people at certain times. Yet,

our capacity for sound reason almost definitely will cast aspersions on the idea that God specifically writes through the auspices of certain human writers at certain times. Would you not both agree with this?

Clare: No, Bertrand. I don't agree with that at all. I believe that God has, on any number of occasions, specifically chosen certain human writers to write exactly the words of God – nothing more and nothing less. I realize that you, as a sort of skeptic, cannot well buy into such ideas. But my faith always comes to rest on the Word of God. I will not turn loose of it. It's my hope for salvation.

Daniel: Actually, I sympathize with Clare's very strong desire to trust in scripture as infallible, because that can provide us with a sense of security. A question I could ask, though, is whether it just might be a bit of false security. But Bertrand, my skepticism certainly has far more constraints than yours regarding spiritual matters. I do believe that God greatly inspires some spiritual writers to write their books. Yet, I will accept your analysis of how in early Christian times, spiritual leaders were very divided on which writings to include in their canon. They had to make choices, and it seems very reasonable to me to believe that God inspired their choices; yet, does this imply that some of those writings were merely human writings – normally written by human beings, and others were the very words of God? I believe that the answer is no, even though I deeply respect those, like Clare, who are convinced otherwise. Well, we're about at the close of the time we had allotted for our evening's discussions. We've each been through a couple of glasses of iced tea or some cups of coffee, but we hashed out some important ideas. Shall we get together in the near future for further discussions? And might we discuss issues surrounding how a person might be spiritually minded and have a powerful spiritual life without involvement in organized religion?

Clare: That would be fine with me, Daniel. As for myself, I believe that spirituality best flourishes in the true church. However, others disagree. I'll gladly discuss it. I hope to see you both in a few days.

Bertrand: Well, as you both understand, my spiritual convictions, if one can call them that, are always quite tenuous. But I'll quite bluntly state that I feel opposition to organized religion – it seems, to me, more like an evil than a good. Have a nice evening both of you.

Can Spirituality Function Apart from Religion?

Daniel: Hello, Clare and Bertrand. We're back together on a pleasant summer's evening. I hope both of you are in fine form and ready for some interesting and important discussions.

Clare: Hello Daniel and Bertrand. It's nice to see you here. My cup of coffee should have enough caffeine to keep my brain in pretty vigorous action this evening. Of course, discussing spiritual matters requires a different kind of cerebral activity than is the case with mathematics, the sciences, or even technical philosophy.

Bertrand: Hello, Clare and Daniel. Let's hope that you can endure my probing into philosophical issues with some equanimity this evening. After all, I do tend to get very technical and logical in a lot of my questioning and thinking. If I remember correctly, we were going to discuss in this session some issues about whether or not spirituality can be successful apart from religion. Is that right?

Daniel: That's quite right, Bertrand, and I'm hoping that we can get pretty deep into issues concerning the spiritual life. I want also to pose questions about whether God might call some people into a life that is pretty much independent of any organized religion, but is nevertheless a life of very great devotion to God. Clare, my understanding is that you might have considerable reservations about this entire issue, since you lean toward the view that God works only through His "Church". Would you confirm my thinking on this?

Clare: Quite frankly, Daniel, I am almost persuaded that for a person to have a close relationship with God, that person must be involved with, guided by, and nourished by the Church that is God's body of believers. Is this not pretty clearly indicated in the *New Testament*?

Daniel: Well Clare, I do believe that there are scriptures in parts of the *Bible* that are suggestive of the view that we should not fail to assemble with those of like faith. Thus, I think you have some scriptural support for that. Furthermore, let me quickly concede that I believe that most people *do need* an organized social group of people who are mainly like-minded in their faith. However, I'm also quite convinced that, even though most people need an organized religion to sort of "feed them spiritual

food”, there are *some* people – maybe only a fairly small minority – who really need the independence of freedom of thought, along with also a great deal of self-starting drive, to figure out the path to God that best works for them. Such people can easily find churches to be too intellectually constricting, and they might need to forge their path toward perfect harmony with God. Is this not reasonable, and why might not God guide some people into precisely that sort of approach?

Bertrand: Daniel, I’m very much in favor of this viewpoint, because I believe that organized religion is very inclined toward setting up rules, regulations, doctrines, and rituals such that those in that church have to simply buy into the church’s theology and set of regulations, or they are regarded with some real disdain – maybe even rejected by the church leadership. I see this as an evil, because human beings are terribly fallible and flawed, and if they set up doctrines and rules for the proper ways of worshipping God, then some of their rules will almost inevitably be off base. Then those who see through the doctrines and rules as contradictory, unfair, or incompatible with genuinely intelligent human thought, will also be people who become rejected by the leadership of the church. We ought to always maintain intellectual honesty and integrity. Is this not quite obviously true?

Clare: Bertrand, I’ll gladly grant that we should maintain intellectual honesty; however, I’m also convinced that we need to let God be the guide in our thinking and believing about spiritual and moral matters. Therefore, we ought to trust in God to show us the way *through the leadership* of His church – the body of right believers. Thus, to try to find God independently of the church is misguided. I realize that this puts me more on the side of the conservatives than I might wish to be categorized. Yet, I don’t see that God wants spiritual mavericks and “Lone Rangers” out there muddling their way through life without the guidance from God’s organized hierarchy and His divinely inspired leadership.

Daniel: Pardon me for butting in a bit, but Clare I want to make a very vital point here. I’m fully in agreement with you that we should let God guide our thinking and believing. However, are you justified in supposing that God cannot, or will not, guide (independently of the church) individual people concerning the conduct of their personal lives, as well as the belief system they need to maximally grow spiritually?

Clare: Well Daniel, I believe that God does, in some cases, call individuals to be involved with transforming, to some degree, the church, but that this will be done within the context of the church – not independently of the church. In other words, surely God can guide members of his church to play such a powerful leadership role in the church that they can even help to transform it for the better.

Daniel: Clare, I believe that your viewpoint there is highly reasonable. However, I take a highly universalistic and inclusive approach to God's working with humanity. That is, I believe that God can and does work through all major world religions – to some extent. Furthermore, I'm convinced that God can and does (sometimes) call people to pursue a spiritual path that steers them away from a commitment to any one religion. Of course, some such people who go somewhat independently of any particular religion end up being founders of some kind of religion or sect. However, I don't believe that this has to be the case, but rather that God sometimes just guides such spiritual people to devote their lives to God's service outside of any organized religion. I regard Emanuel Swedenborg as such a person. Of course, Swedenborg did profess Christianity – for the most part; yet, his spiritual teachings certainly seem, from my reading of some of his writings, to have been more based on his insights into the spiritual world than they were based strictly upon biblical teachings. Swedenborg did not establish any new religion, but he did some very brilliant and important writings regarding God and the spiritual worlds. He was not, to the best of my understanding, in any way a theologian of the Christian Church, and he was not ordained as a spiritual teacher by the Church. Therefore, I see him as mainly having been an independent spiritual thinker and writer, esoteric and abstruse though some of his writings might have been. My question is: Does not God sometimes use such people to go above and beyond organized religion in their dedication to God's service?

Clare: I'm inclined to think, Daniel, that God will work only through His Church – not through people independent of the Church. To my way of thinking, Scripture bears out that principle. Would you not have to agree that Scripture indicates that the spiritual leadership that people need is given through the leaders of the churches and organizations within the churches, rather than through individuals outside the church?

Daniel: I would concede, Clare, that you might have some scriptural principles that can be regarded as indicating that for which you're arguing. Yet, you need to understand that, from my perspective, the spiritual path is not exclusively revealed to humanity through scriptures of any particular religion alone. Furthermore, the *Bible*, or the *Koran*, or the *Upanishads*, or any other "scriptures" of any religion are not the only sources for guidance in the lives of God's people. God is always working through numerous different thinkers and spiritual teachers, and we can very seriously sabotage our spiritual growth by subscribing to convictions that our own church or our religion has *the one inside track* to God. It's best, as I see it, Clare, that we seek diligently for truth and justice. Then, if this, in fact, leads us away from either a church, a religion, a sect, or away from any human religious organizations, so be it. Far be it from me to say that a person cannot be totally devoted to one

religion or one church and still grow powerfully toward perfect harmony with God. What I do wish to say is that I'm convinced that highly spiritual people can have an extremely close and harmonious relationship with God, even if they are not necessarily involved with or dependent upon any church or religion. And pardon me for giving such a lengthy answer.

Clare: Oh, that's alright, Daniel. But I think that we don't see eye-to-eye on this matter and that you are not really on the right track if you think you can go your way independently of the Christian Church and still have God's full validation. If you believe that, then I think you're misguided. I believe that the way to God is exclusively through Jesus. Jesus himself stated that to be the case.

Bertrand: Clare and Daniel, you've made lots of points and counterpoints on these matters. However, what always boggles my mind is when religious people are absolutely convinced that their church (or religion) – usually the one they “happened” to grow up in – is the *only path to God*. Is it not clear to a rational thinker that most likely the primary reason they are committed to a given religion is that they *happened to be reared in that religion*? If they'd been reared in a different religion – maybe one they now call pagan – they would likely believe in and belong to that different religion. How can they, then, be so sure that they're the ones who have “the truth”? Should not such reflections on why we believe what we do make us at least someone open to the realization that, since our beliefs are based largely upon the way we happened to be reared, we should be very tolerant of those who were brought up differently and who now believe very differently from us? Maybe we are just as capable of being wrong as they are.

Clare: Does your approach, Bertrand, not lead you to utter skepticism about all of your beliefs?

Bertrand: To be honest, Clare, I feel compelled to hold most of my beliefs as being, possibly at least, substantially short of full truth and validity. That is why I cannot be dogmatic like you are. I *could* be wrong. Do you not believe, by the way, that God would be very merciful and understanding toward any person who humbly and sincerely sought the total truth, but who nevertheless got some beliefs substantially wrong?

Clare: Yes, Bertrand. I believe God is merciful toward those who truly do the best they know, but still get it wrong. Although I'm convinced that Jesus is the one and the only path to God, I also believe that God will see to it that, in due time, any person who is genuinely willing to serve God will eventually be shown that

acceptance of Jesus' sacrifice for their sins is the only way to achieve salvation. How this might be done, I cannot say, but I have faith that it is done.

Daniel: Clare, your thinking on this matter certainly seems to reflect the viewpoints of most professing Christians, but I believe that we serve ourselves – and others – well by refusing to buy into a theology that claims to be the only right track to God. I believe that we can serve God very well by being fully submissive to how He is pleased to guide our lives. I don't doubt that God leads many people directly into organized religion, but that this is done because that is what the people in question need – it is the route through which they can most effectively find God, given the degree to which they're willing to surrender their lives to God. But let me note that it is getting quite late, the coffee cups are empty, and it's getting toward bedtime. Shall we break this off for tonight and meet again soon?

Bertrand: I second the motion. What's on our agenda for our next session together?

Clare: I'd love to discuss this matter some more, and I think that maybe I can show why spiritual independence is not such a good thing spiritually.

Daniel: Clare, I go along fully with that idea. It sounds like a winner to me – not that I will necessarily agree with your conclusions, but we can at least discuss and debate our respective sides. Have a nice evening both of you. Until we meet again...peace.

Does Spiritual Independence Constrain Devotion to God?

Daniel: Hello once again Clare and Bertrand. It's such a nice summer evening! Last time we met, Clare mentioned her wishes to discuss why, by her views, spiritual independence might not be such a great idea. Bertrand and Clare, what do you have to say this evening?

Bertrand: Well Daniel and Clare, I'm enjoying my iced tea here, and I wish to simply mention that I'll probably be left out of most of this evening's discussions, because I have so little to say about how the spiritual life should be lived that I hesitate to discuss my views much. Let me say, though, first of all, that I'm very much for individual and independent thinking. Believing that one should allow another person to do one's thinking for oneself is, by my thinking, extremely foolish. We should use our "God-given" brains to the maximum that we're capable of – never leaving it to others to tell us what we should believe. If others can show us *how and why* we should believe as they do, then fine. We should be fully open to any new ideas, if they make sense to us. However, to believe someone merely on the basis of his/her authority is rather absurd – a cop-out, a repudiation of our need to *think for ourselves*. Please excuse my going off on a tangent about this, but it's an awesomely vital point – from my perspective. What do you say, Clare?

Clare: Honestly Bertrand, I can appreciate your determination to think for yourself, but I also feel simply compelled to believe that God calls certain people whom He enlightens with special spiritual insights. We need, of course, to use our intelligence, along with a great dose of faith in God, to try to determine who has credibility. We need to figure out to whom we should listen. Whether we rely upon a spiritually written book, or whether we think we've found a spiritual leader we can trust, we need to humbly accept the fact that God works through chosen human beings, and sometimes we need to learn to trust what they've written or what they say. Our need to trust God's chosen servants is where I'm convinced that independence of thought can go gravely astray. We need to trust God and the servants He chooses to send to us. The need to trust God's servants, then, as I see it, really argues against excessive over-reliance on our insights and understanding. Some scriptures warn us to not rely on our own understanding.

Daniel: Thank you both for your observations. We should expect that you two would think rather differently on this issue. As for myself, though, I wish to ask Clare if there is any reason why a person might not be intensely spiritual and devoted to God without belonging to any particular religion or following any spiritual leader. Furthermore, might not someone have the great overview of all religions such that he simply does not fully subscribe to any religion's "holy" scriptures, but has a very close and intimate relationship with God? Why could this not be the case – at least with some rather rare individuals?

Clare: I'll be honest with you, Daniel, and admit that I simply cannot know for certain that God might not work with some special people in very unusual ways. However, in general, I believe that we need to be "fed the Word" by spiritual teachers and our mother, the Church. Why would God establish a church, if it were not needed to guide and instruct people?

Daniel: Clare, I'm convinced that God inspires and, within limits, guides humanly-based churches. However, I'm also convinced that humanity comprehends God in such an extremely limited and minuscule fashion that there are bound to be numerous spiritual teachers – and leaders of churches – who see only bits and pieces of God's "Plan". Therefore, such leaders know only a little about what God is working out with humanity. To believe, to the contrary, that God's churches know *all* that God wants for humanity is, to me, not very rational. Human beings are extremely limited in their capacity to comprehend reality. Therefore, we are bound to see little more than glimpses and glimmers of Ultimate Reality (God), and we are destined to know only a small fraction of what reality truly is. Could God reveal everything about His reality and His purposes to humanity? Given human limitations, I believe that the answer is no. Thus, we're not capable of understanding very much.

Clare: But could not God at least be consistent in what He teaches humanity?

Daniel: That's an extremely good question, Clare, and I simply wish to answer by saying that it must be within God's outlook on humanity that He understands that the awesomely great varieties of humanity require, for maximum effectiveness, that God reaches many people very differently. That is, some people can best come to know God through a fundamentalist Christian church, whereas others might learn much better what God needs to work out in their lives by being in a Hindu religion, for example. God is not being inconsistent by reaching different people through different strategies. As I view reality, Clare, we human souls are all lost creatures – very largely separated from God. We are, by my understanding, in this world due to our having lived in previous lives where we knowingly violated the will and love of

God. Thus, we are in grave need of being redeemed. Some of us will grow much more toward redemption by being in one religion versus another religion. Furthermore, some of us might work far better by being in *no religion at all*.

Clare: Could it be, Daniel, that people who seek their independence in spirituality are, in fact, seeking to run their lives their ways without humbly acceding to a spiritual leader or teacher?

Daniel: That's something to think about, Clare; however, I'm convinced that religion tends to practice power politics. It has leaders who wish to increase the membership of their group. Also, they wish for status and recognition. Organized religion in the hands of human beings is almost bound to grow in its efforts to acquire power. Thus, the church establishes formal rules and regulations that make it difficult to be on good terms with the church apart from yielding to the church authorities. I fear that many people unthinkingly pursue the courses taught to them by the church, but to refuse to think for themselves. Thus, some independent spiritual people are independent precisely because the church would hinder their spiritual growth and devotion. Churches tend to have rules, regulations, and rituals by which their members can remain faithful, without ever getting at all close to harmony with God. But the independent spiritual thinker has to rely primarily on his/her personal relationship with God – not to say, however, that such a person might not place very great importance on religious scriptures and the teachings of spiritual thinkers.

Clare: Daniel, you almost make it sound as if the church were a liability to the diligent spiritual seeker. Is this what you're suggesting?

Daniel: No Clare, I'm not arguing that the church *necessarily* constrains spiritual growth. But I do believe that some people need to be independently reliant upon God's direct guidance in their lives to such an extent that they simply cannot adhere very closely to any church or organized religion. Therefore, my conclusion is that there are some people (just how many, I will not dare suggest) who not only are not hindered by independence from organized religion, but who thrive much better spiritually than they could in any organized religion. Thus, they are not in rebellion against the authority of God, but are highly devoted to seeking God through the personal inspiration and guidance that God so freely grants them. As for myself, Clare, my personal relationship with God comes first – scriptures, religious books, human spiritual leaders, and other sources of possible guidance in my life are secondary.

Bertrand: Daniel, I find this approach much preferable to being committed to the stifling influences of a church or some organized religious hierarchy. The former allows one to *think for oneself*, whereas the latter is restricting and inhibiting.

Daniel: Well Bertrand, I realize that you're very fond of independent thinking, and I'm also fond of it – to a degree. I do believe, however, that we *must be prepared to surrender our wills* to God. And if we are convinced that God is working in our lives via a church or religion, then it behooves us to submit our wills to the authorities humbly that we deem to be God's chosen ones. I'm leery of spiritual independence, except where the independent person earnestly and humbly seeks the will of God for his/her life. Our egos never easily yield to such a higher authority. Therefore, humble soul-searching is needed, and we must always be prepared to yield our wills to God's will.

Clare: Given how you've stated that, I think I could almost agree with you about independence from organized religion. Yet, I feel compelled, Daniel, to believe that God works through His organized churches. He vests in them authority and responsibility. Therefore, the obedient soul will be led directly into the security of the church.

Daniel: I agree, Clare, that many will be so led, but I'm not convinced at all that there are not people who are clearly guided by God to pursue a spiritual course mainly independently of the church. After all, whether one is in a church or independent of a church, the person who is devoted to God will humbly function by God's will. Thus, it's not critical whether a person functions in the church or whether he's outside the church – just so long as he's humble enough to listen to and accept the will of God truly. Church leaders, of course, are likely to consider any such doctrine anathema, because it might well generate a threat to the authority of the church hierarchy.

Clare: Daniel, you make it sound as if the church were merely some self-willed political entity, seeking to enhance its powers. This is not at all how I regard my church.

Daniel: Well Clare, I'll admit that I believe that we *must* bring into the equation human nature, where a humanly-led church is at issue. Since human nature is quite fundamentally evil, we must be prepared to transcend the guidance of merely human spiritual teachers.

Bertrand: I seriously object, Daniel, to the claim that human nature is evil. I believe that human nature is fundamentally a nature that seeks the good and shies away

from evils. I guess this makes me a liberal, but who cares? I believe that we do ourselves much damage by denying the goodness of human nature.

Daniel: To be honest, Bertrand, if you can look at this world and deny that we're in a world of evil, then I feel compelled to question what you would regard as qualifying for evil. Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, and the like were just the tips of the icebergs of human evil. To deny that is, I believe, to stick your head in the sand. But this is straying off the topic. Clare, do you have any concluding thoughts tonight?

Clare: Daniel, I only wish to reiterate my claim that most human beings (maybe everyone) need to be fed, nourished, and guided by God's true church. To try to live an independent spiritual life is to fail to surrender the self to God's church humbly and its authority that God has vested in it.

Daniel: Thank you for expressing your views on this matter. I suppose we cannot resolve this issue to arrive at any agreement, and I do deeply respect your views, even though I think that they are misguided. As within the human sciences, where new scientific theories must do battle with the contemporary paradigms, in human religions, it is often those who are either on the fringes of organized religion or maybe even working utterly outside any particular religion, to whom *new insights and new paradigms come at a cost*. They are usually met with great opposition, and great forces are needed to generate the desired reforms. Let me end here, as I believe that all three of us are a bit tired out and ready to prepare for a night's rest. Am I right?

Clare: I agree, Daniel. I'm rather exhausted myself. But I anticipate future discussions of a similar sort to what we had tonight.

Bertrand: I second the motion to call it quits for tonight. What're we going to discuss in the next session?

Daniel: I'd like to make a few points next time about how I'm convinced that reliance upon the Church can result in a serious spiritual shallowness and laxity by Church members. Let's touch on this topic next time.

Reliance upon the Church Can Breed Spiritual Shallowness

Daniel: Hello, Clare and Bertrand. We're back for more discussions on issues about spirituality independent of religion, and whether or not this is an acceptable way to go. How have things been with you since we last met?

Clare: Daniel, it's nice to be here again for some discussions. We'd had a considerable break from our discussions. As for me, it's been going okay. My teaching of theology at the university is going well.

Bertrand: Well, I'm getting along moderately well, even for one who does not claim to be getting a great deal of Divine guidance in his life. My understanding was that we'd discuss issues surrounding whether spirituality that's practiced independently of organized religion can be more fruitful than spirituality that relies upon church authority. To be honest, as for myself, I regard religion as always dubious, but it does make sense to me that one might seek a relationship with a Higher Power – if, indeed, such a power exists.

Daniel: Bertrand, I'm convinced that organized religion has a proper and vital role to play in human societies; however, that being said, I'm also convinced that, for some people, organized religion can stifle them and inhibit their spiritual growth.

Clare: Why would you suggest, Daniel, that religion would inhibit spiritual growth? What does religion do that would hinder or constrain a person's spirituality?

Daniel: Clare, that's a good question, and here's how I'll choose to answer it. People who are members of a church, or at least an organized religion, can very easily conclude that by having the church's blessings placed upon their lives, they have a "ticket to salvation", and that the critical spiritual concern is to be *right with the church*. Thus, it becomes the church, not God, which is the arbiter of how the person should be living. Thus, relying on the Church can very easily mean that such a person comes to regard his or her spirituality to be measured by how well they are in the good graces of the Church. Therefore, they turn over to the "spiritual authorities" nearly all of their spiritual concerns, which, in turn, results in their lack of dedication to seeking to be *right with God*. This, then, can result in a spiritual vacuity and shallowness.

Clare: But Daniel, does not the person need the guidance and instruction from the divinely blessed church to help them to learn how best to live by God's values? Furthermore, in our Christian religion, what is truly critical is that we learn to properly accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to cover our sins and the penalties that would otherwise defeat us spiritually. The church is our spiritual mother, and it is specifically inspired and guided by the Spirit of God, such that we should learn to trust the church. This is utterly incompatible with any kind of independent stance. Under the guidance of God, the church lets us know how we can best achieve salvation – which involves appropriate and sincere acceptance of Jesus' sacrifice. This means that spiritual independents are out there seeking to make it on just their own insights. Is this not a recipe for spiritual disaster, Daniel?

Daniel: Clare, I would certainly refuse to endorse any claim that the person who is working spiritually independently of the church is guilty of seeking to live one's life by one's own standards and values. I'm convinced that this is terribly wrong. God is perfectly capable of inspiring such a person, who seeks spiritual enlightenment directly from God, to see how best to conduct one's life. Such guidance from God might well set the independent spiritual seeker in better stead than would be the case if that person were, instead, relying upon the guidance of spiritual leaders. Such leaders might well be going a great deal by their egos in figuring out how to keep the church under the control of the religious hierarchy. Thus, these church authorities can well stifle independent thinking and maximal spiritual growth, which is best achieved by learning to surrender every aspect of one's life to God.

Bertrand: Daniel and Clare, I realize that I'm the least spiritually advanced of the three of us here, but I wish to comment that, from my own rather skeptical outlook, spirituality sought by the independent person is likely to be much more fruitful than "second hand" spirituality. In the latter case the person is merely focusing upon having church approval for one's life. Human authorities do, after all, have egos, and they are very likely going to wish to maintain stability and positive organization in their flocks. This seems very sensible to me.

Clare: Bertrand, I do not wish to devalue your outlook, but do you not have to admit that, first of all, you are a bit of a skeptic about all religion and spirituality?

Bertrand: Quite honestly, Clare, I concede that I'm not all so seriously convinced about the value of spiritual living. So, you do have a point; however, I'm approaching this matter from the standpoint of what seems logical to me, and I think that my logical analysis should carry at least some weight.

Daniel: Bertrand, I believe that you are entirely on the right track in wishing to invoke logic in the analysis of spiritual issues.

Clare: I don't mean to be harsh Daniel and Bertrand, but I'm convinced that we must entrust our spiritual lives to God's Word and the guidance of God's servants, who diligently study His word. When we start using logical analysis to figure out what are genuine truths in spirituality, we can quickly go far off the deep end. Human logic cannot compete with the infinite wisdom of God's Holy Word.

Daniel: I have to admit, Clare, that we must trust God's wisdom over and above human wisdom and human logical analysis. However, where I believe you go wrong is in denying that God's "word" can come to us directly through divine inspiration, apart from the words of organized religion or the traditional "scriptures" of religious bodies. Therefore, I affirm the belief that some people are, on many occasions, better served on the spiritual path by seeking out the wisdom and guidance of God *directly from God* Himself, rather than through organized human religions. My verdict, then supports the independent spiritual thinker, one, at any rate, who is humbly devoted to serving God.

Clare: Well, from my perspective, Daniel and Bertrand, you both are trusting your human logic above the divine Word of God. This seems, to me, arbitrary and gravely precarious. Do you not have to confess that I have a point?

Bertrand: Honestly Clare, I'm so skeptical of religion, period, that I hardly wish to deny that I trust my use of logic more than I trust any supposed "word of God". I'm convinced that this is wise.

Daniel: Clare, I do believe that it is unfair for you to lump Bertrand and me in the same class. You know that Bertrand is not very much fond of any form of spirituality, whereas I'm extremely serious about living my life by God's infinite wisdom. It just happens that this outlook of mine does not include the idea that God only reveals Himself and His will for us through some form of scripture or His church. Sometimes God guides us directly through inspiration, and this can transcend what scripture, which after all consists of human writings about their understanding of God and His will, has to say. I realize that you regard this as a lack of trust in "Holy Scripture" and in the "Church of God", but this might be a place where we simply agree to disagree.

Clare: Yes Daniel, I do fear that the best we can do here is to agree that we do not see eye-to-eye. I trust the Word of God, not myself.

Daniel: I believe that we must all learn to trust the genuine word of God, regardless of where we find it. But what you regard as the Word of God, I regard as human writings that were greatly inspired by God, but that are short of any complete infallibility. Therefore, the best we can do is to live a life of spiritual experimentation and gradual growth, never knowing for sure how well we're doing spiritually. Spirituality is never an exact science; we always work within the limitations of our human understanding of the will of God, and Clare, even those who claim to strictly rely upon supposedly revealed "scriptures" are faced with *how to interpret and how to understand* such "scriptures". That is precisely why so many different religious sects have such vastly varied interpretations of "scripture". For example, there are awesomely great differences between respective interpretations of the *Bible*. This alone should show us that interpreting scripture is anything but an exact science. But in changing the subject, let me suggest that we all seem rather worn out for tonight. How about us just calling it a day and getting ready for some rest?

Clare: I go along with that, Daniel; but let me first mention that just because Scripture can be understood very differently by different people or religions, it does not mean that we should not prayerfully seek to base our faith on Scripture. That is why I say that you and Bertrand are on dangerous spiritual ground for wanting to endorse independent thinking in spiritual matters. We just don't agree on this issue. But I too am ready for some rest.

Bertrand: Clare, you are very devoted to what you understand to be Holy Scripture, but just maybe you have an unjustified faith in certain human writings that have come to be called "Holy Scripture". It's not at all clear to me that you're justified in this faith. But I second the motion for calling it a day. I'm a bit tired, myself.

Daniel: I thank you both for all of your contributions to our discussions tonight. Let's be thinking about next time discussing matters about whether or not it is even possible to have a personal relationship with God unmediated by any form of organized religion.

Is a Personal Relationship with God, Unmediated by Organized Religion, Possible?

Daniel: Hello once more, Clare and Bertrand. How has it been going for you since we last met?

Clare: Hello Daniel. It's good to see you. I've been doing okay, in general. My job at the university is pretty demanding, but religious studies and such are interesting enough to me to make my job quite rewarding – most of the time.

Bertrand: Hello Clare and Daniel. I've been getting along okay. What was it that we'll be discussing tonight?

Daniel: Actually, what I'd hoped we would discuss has to do with questions surrounding the idea of having a personal, highly spiritual, relationship with God, such that the relationship is not mediated by any organized religion. Clare, my understanding is that you would have serious reservations about any such state of affairs. Am I right?

Clare: Yes, Daniel. I believe what we need our mother, the church, to teach us, lead us, motivate us, and direct us to harmony with God. Therefore, I believe that the person who goes out into the world to forge a path through the spiritual realms independently of other believers of like mind, and without the guidance of God's true church, are people who are headed for spiritual trouble. Both you and Bertrand are quite independently minded, but I'm convinced that we all need the church. It's our source of spiritual food and empowerment.

Daniel: Clare, I take very considerable issue with your claim that the church is our source of spiritual food. I believe, on the other hand, that *God* is our source of spiritual food. We get our spiritual nourishment, ultimately, from God. It is His Spirit that guides our spirit, and He empowers us to find the right paths through life. We can, through much prayer, meditation, and serious soul-searching efforts to find God, come into harmony with God. It is *not always* critical that we are led by a church or some spiritual teachers. God is personally the best possible teacher we can have. Humble surrender to Him will empower us to get our lives closer and closer to perfect harmony with God. Such is how I see it.

Clare: Oh Daniel, I think that you're overestimating how much a person can learn from God apart from a teacher.

Daniel: Well Clare, the persons leading us, by your worldview of what works best, are people who are human, fallible, finite, and seriously subject to the vices and evils of our human nature. Do you not agree?

Clare: Yes, such spiritual leaders are human and fallible, but God has called them to lead His people, and God can see to it that if such a leader deviates from the path of godliness, he or she will get demoted and replaced.

Daniel: Cannot you see, though, that it is *God Himself* who is teaching the spiritual leader. If God can direct the spiritual teacher, why cannot He direct an individual devotee of God, independently of other spiritual teachers and leaders? If God can direct a spiritual teacher, cannot He direct *any* human being who is humble enough to be taught by God?

Clare: I see your logic in your argument, Daniel, and I will not say that God could not lead such an independent spiritual person, but I believe that God decides how best to reach humanity at large. God, then, by my understanding, finds it more workable to reach people through spiritual teachers and leaders, rather than leading each individual person.

Daniel: Clare, you do make sense in what you say; however, I wish to make the point that *no* church leader can guide the person's life into a *personal relationship with God*. The latter will require that the person who is taught by a spiritual teacher is *also* guided by God directly. A second-hand relationship is not going to get the job done. We must have a love of God in our spirit, soul, and heart. We must have the personal transformation of our wicked human nature that only God, not some spiritual teacher, can give us.

Bertrand: Daniel, I wish to interject here a few thoughts. First of all, you have a very negative view of human nature. I think that it is unfair to call our nature "wicked". Yes, human nature does have flaws, but people, by and large, mean well and pretty much do the best that they can. Thus, your demeaning of human nature is, I think, unfortunate.

Daniel: Excuse me, Clare, for digressing from my discussion with you – and I'll get back to you in a minute. But Bertrand, how can you look at the human world, with the terrible and rampant evils of this world, and deny that our nature is evil?

Bertrand: Well Daniel, we do have some evil tendencies in our nature, but we also have many good tendencies. I'd like to think that the good tendencies outweigh the bad tendencies. Does that not make sense?

Daniel: If good outweighs bad in our human nature, then why do we not see a more loving, humble, kind, and patient humanity at large? Rather than peace, harmony, and good will among humans, we see much greed, selfishness, hatefulness, prejudices, competition, strife, and very often, warfare. As I see it, only an evil nature will produce such qualities that pervade humanity.

Clare: Now that we're on this topic, I wish to say that our human nature is a mixture of good and evil, but that without Jesus' redemptive powers in our lives, we cannot be wholly good, but will wander in the darkness of evil. Thus, I believe that we are all inheritors of original sin through Adam and Eve. Therefore, it's proper to say that we are born into this world as sinners, and we need Jesus' sacrifice to rescue us from that sinful nature.

Bertrand: Clare, can you take seriously any such story of Adam and Eve in Eden, bequeathing to us an evil nature through their choice to eat the wrong fruit? Look, this is sheer superstition, and history, as well as the sciences, amply document the fact that humans lived thousands of years (maybe even millions of years) before the story of Adam and Eve was written. Biological evolution documents the undeniable fact that we human beings are merely "advanced" animals. We are not special but are mere animals in a wild Nature that is, as far as I can see, indifferent to us.

Clare: Honestly Bertrand, I wonder how you could even get included in our discussions. You don't believe in the *Bible*, you believe that we're merely wild animals, and you are skeptical of any faith at all in God or anything spiritual. At least, Daniel believes in God and daily prayers. I wonder if you even believe that there exists a God at all.

Bertrand: Clare, I apologize if I've offended you, but let me tell you that I believe in the efficacy of human reason; without our reason, we are as "low" as the (lower) animals. Since reason dictates to me that science is our best source of humanly acquired knowledge, I feel compelled to dismiss unscientific superstitions as nonsensical bunk. You say that I don't believe in the *Bible*. Well, depending on how you wish to define "believe in", I very well *might not* believe in the *Bible*. I believe in some Higher Intelligence that is the progenitor of the universe; however, I refuse to regard this as any personal "Being", such that this Being would inspire every word of certain forms of human writing. The evidence that we have militates too strongly against any such worldview. Maybe there does exist some form of Higher

Intelligence such that personal meditation and prayer would have some efficacy toward getting one into a harmonious relationship with the universe. I don't rule this out, which is one reason why I think that our talks here can be of interest to me and also enable me to make some sensible contributions.

Clare: I just can't go along with your outlook on reality, Bertrand. You have not yet been "touched by God". Jesus is not in your heart. Might that also fit Daniel's status? I don't know. He might wish to allay my fears that he is not touched by the love of Jesus, our one and only Savior.

Daniel: Clare, I sincerely thank you for your concerns, but I'll honestly tell you that I'm convinced that I have the "love of Jesus in my heart" – if you allow me to define those terms according to my worldview. That is, I'm convinced that Jesus was a great servant and prophet of God, but not God, any more than other extremely spiritual human beings are God. Also, I believe that the same love of God that guided Jesus of Nazareth guides my life. Thus, I have the same love guiding my life as was guiding Jesus' life. Therefore, I can truthfully say that I have the love of Jesus in my heart. Now, Clare, I know that this doesn't satisfy you, but it's how I see things.

Clare: Daniel, I come much closer to agreeing with your outlook than with Bertrand's, but I'm afraid that if you fail to accept Jesus Christ as your Savior, you might as well not even believe that there is a God. You, in other words, would be missing the boat either way.

Daniel: Clare, I'm sorry that, by your outlook, I'm consigned to hell. But let's return to the subject we were on when we got a bit "sidetracked". Frankly Clare, based on what you and I were discussing earlier, I think that our primary disagreement on the matter at hand is that you are convinced that God pretty nearly exclusively works through the church. I, on the other hand, believe that God works very powerfully through humanly established and humanly led churches, but that He also works very powerfully through individual human beings. Therefore, I conclude that the church is not the only avenue to God, but that when a person truly humbles oneself, that person might be led into a church, but that person might also be guided largely by inspiration of God independently of any church. I realize that you have at least some of the biblical scriptures on your side, but I believe that, even within Christianity, some of the greatest spiritual people worked very largely outside the doctrinal domains of the church. Take, for example, people like St. John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, and Meister Eckhart, all of whom had "run-ins" with the Christian Church. The Inquisition was at times on their heels, because they had spiritual experiences, insights, and influences that were deemed to threaten church authority. If they were

not getting their inspirations and guidance directly from God, why did their experiences and convictions come to them at all? They were not restricting their spiritual lives just to church doctrines, but were allowing God to guide and transform their lives personally. Admittedly, they got their starts on the spiritual path through the teachings and guidance of the church; however, they also went *beyond* the church. God worked with them very personally and directly, sometimes so differently from church doctrines that they were at times deemed threats to the church.

Clare: Well, I'm aware, Daniel, that there were spiritual reformers of the Christian Church who were somewhat outside the box regarding doctrines and philosophies of proper Christianity. However, this in no way suggests to me that those spiritual people were working independently of the church. Rather, within and through the church, they strongly advocated certain ideas that the church had not yet fully accepted. Thus, I stick to my point that true Christians always work within the Christian Church – never independently of it.

Daniel: I'll confess, Clare, that within any given religion, most of the people in the religion who initiate revolutions to church doctrines, or who initiate the inception of a new religion work within the context of their own religion. Yet, I also believe that other people can best be servants of God by doing very much what Martin Luther did and what he taught his followers, that is, prayerfully read scriptures and understand them according to the inspiration you get from God. I'll freely confess that a person who reads no spiritual books, attends no church, and listens to no spiritual teachings is not likely to be a very spiritual person at all. But a person who *is* highly spiritual, but finds no church that he's comfortable with, can be very close to God spiritually and daily growing toward spiritual perfection. Also admittedly, such people might well be the exceptions rather than the rule. Let's face it, there are among us great geniuses who find ordinary human ways of living and thinking extremely boring, and they need to break out of the box of ordinary human behaviors – as practiced by the more-or-less average masses. Some such people might be bored stiff by ordinary religious teachings, religious services, rituals, etc. They can still be very spiritual, but just not interested in the ways that most people practice their religious faith. Let me also make a point that I hope I'll get a chance to express at some length in the future, namely, that human religions need to *grow* in certain respects, even as human knowledge and the human sciences grow. Bertrand, just a while ago was referring to what he considers to be the absurdities of taking the Adam and Eve story seriously. Honestly, Clare, and I hope this does not offend you, but in this instance, I agree with Bertrand.

Religion Versus Spirituality

Clare: Truthfully, Daniel, I think that you and Bertrand are mostly just religious skeptics, whereby you are skeptical of religion, but are not fully ready to chuck all religion. Yet, I appreciate your willingness to support religion. We disagree on how God works through humanity, but we do agree that God does work through humanity – at least, you and I do, even if Bertrand might dissent from that view. At any rate, I'm fairly tired and feel ready to call it a day. I wonder if there might be agreement on this.

Daniel: Clare, I also greatly appreciate your spirituality, even if I know that our discussions will keep giving rise to disagreements on many issues. So far as calling it a day is concerned, I second the motion to take a respite from our discussions until our next session together.

Bertrand: I'm in full agreement with both of you on the latter issue. I'll call it a day and see you next time for our additional discussions. I'm a bit the "odd man out" here, because I maintain a healthy skepticism about religion, even though I do not reject it, and I lean toward a spiritual worldview of my own.

What are the Positive Aspects of Spiritual Independence From the Church?

Daniel: Hello again, Clare and Bertrand. I hope that both of you are doing well and that you're also prepared to discuss some spiritual issues of potentially great import. It was my wish to pose a question that I did not have the opportunity to pursue fully in our last session. My question has to do with the matter of a person's being highly spiritual, but functioning on a spiritual path independently of the church – *any church, any organized religion*. Even though Clare has great reservations about whether or not a person can even be spiritually successful on such a path, I wish to pose the question: What are the positive things that can be said for such “independent” spirituality?

Clare: Hello Daniel and Bertrand. I feel so hesitant, Daniel, to give credence to such a “spiritual path” that I'm wondering if I can find anything genuinely positive to say about that way of life. I suppose one could say that it would give a person a sense of freedom to explore what works for oneself. But then, does not agnosticism or atheism give one even greater freedom? Maybe, then, atheism is the best way to go – it provides maximal freedom, doesn't it?

Bertrand: Let me interject a few thoughts here, if I may, Clare. Even though atheism does provide a “freedom” to live one's life any way he chooses – within the constraints of what laws of nature and other people will permit – it refuses to endorse anything spiritual at all. Thus, since none of us here is an atheist, I think that we should restrict ourselves to discussing some aspect of a spiritual outlook – and the very best way to live according to that spiritual outlook, as I see it, is a spiritual path independent of any religious organization or religious dogma. This is the ideal way to go. Why so? Well, one can figure out creatively and independently what works best for one's individual spiritual insights, and one can find value systems that seem maximally conformed to the understanding one has of God as that mysterious and glorious reality beyond all other realities.

Daniel: Thanks, Bertrand, for a rather insightful response. I understand very well why Clare is so hesitant to endorse any independent spiritual path, and I see her point very clearly in comparing it to atheism. However, I also think that the point was just made by Bertrand that we all (those of us here) do believe in the existence

of some Spiritual Realm. Therefore, discussing atheism steps outside the territory of our discussions here this evening. But the point I take from Clare's analogy is that merely because a path of pursuit in life offers more freedoms than an alternative path, does not necessarily imply that the former is better than the latter. Therefore, I think that we need to unpack somewhat what those freedoms mean, and also question whether or not freedom of choice is the most critical positive factor in such an independent spiritual path. I think that we need never to undervalue the fact that a passionate spiritual devotee can have a *passionate personal* relationship with God, such that the devotee is crying out personally to God for inspiration and guidance *from God Himself*. This can be true even if that person is not looking to some human mediator between himself and God. Having to entrust one's spiritual path and spiritual growth to the judgments and validation of a human mediator, means that there is a degree to which the personal nature of the relationship with God is diminished.

Clare: Daniel, I'm just not quite willing to let you get by with that last statement. I think that it's utterly unfair to suggest that merely having a human minister, pastor, or another spiritual guide to help one along the spiritual path needs to, in any way, imply that such a person has her spiritual devotion to God, and her closeness to God, at all sabotaged.

Daniel: But Clare, do you not need to concede that if a member of a church or some religious order is seeking spiritual guidance from one's spiritual "superior", it, first of all, implies that the "superior" *is*, in fact, spiritually superior to, or is at least better able to make spiritual judgments than is the spiritual layman? But what if the layperson is, in fact, much more intelligent, and maybe even more spiritually advanced than the minister or spiritual authority? Do we not then have a real problem on our hands?

Clare: Daniel, I can see your point there, but even though this might seem like an unfortunate state of affairs, is it not reasonable to argue that God can work it all out such that the spiritual leader will have the needed insights to give to the spiritual subordinate?

Daniel: Yes Clare, I'm sure that God can inspire the spiritual leader to offer the best advice of which that leader is capable, and I will not argue that any great damage will necessarily ensue from such an unhappy eventuality as a spiritual subordinate approaching a vastly inferior leader for advice and encouragement. However, must not my point, though, be well-taken, namely, that there *are cases* where reliance upon one's personal relationship with God might well offer superior help in one's spiritual growth than could reliance upon a less capable and competent spiritual

leader? After all, did not Dante in his *Divine Comedy* portray a pope of the Christian church ending up in hell?

Clare: I'd be quite unprepared to take my theology from Dante, Daniel. After all, that poetry consisted of fictional and imaginary events generated by an admittedly spiritually minded literary genius. However, for me to try to answer your questions, let me say that there *might be* some fairly rare spiritual thinkers who can best serve God pretty much outside the structure of organized religion. Yet, I fear that to acknowledge even that opens up a can of worms, and we can become confronted with questions like, "Well, if there are some people who best function outside the confines of the church, then how do you know that I'm not one of those? Also, how do you know that it might not be the case that the majority of people fit that category?" Such questions would seem to me, Daniel, to get the Devil laughing and celebrating? My approach, then, is that the bottom line concludes that God knows how best to guide His church, and He can very easily guide the church leaders to lead the flock in the best way for them to go. Even if there are some seriously unsavory characters within church leadership, God can prevent them from doing damage however He sees fit. Thus, I simply conclude that, although we can imagine hypothetical situations where it might seem that it's best for a person to function independently of the church, I'm convinced that ultimately God has reality so set up that we can *trust Him* to guide His people through His true church effectively. Don't I deserve a pat on the back, Daniel, for such a good rejoinder?

Daniel: Well Clare, even if I'm not necessarily inclined to pat you on the back, I will concede that you do struggle valiantly to make a good case for the authority of the church. I suppose that when it all comes down to the matter of *reliable knowledge*, we are all in a bit of a fog. In other words, fully reliable answers are most greatly difficult to come by. Yet, I can honestly refrain from conceding that there are not some (maybe even many) people who can best serve God fully outside organized religion. Admittedly, God *could choose* to work exclusively through His church. But do we have a good reason for thinking that He, in fact, does so? I think the answer is no.

Bertrand: Daniel, I have to acknowledge that it seems to me that you make a better case for your viewpoints than does Clare for her viewpoints. My apologies go to Clare for tending to take Daniel's side more than hers. However, Daniel always comes across as taking a highly rational approach to questions and discussions, and he gives more ground to what might be considered to be an inclusive or even "liberal" outlook than does Clare. Now, I'm pretty sure that Daniel would not be happy with the label "liberal", and I confess to being the genuinely liberal one in this discussion group. But to the point of our issue: Let me say that I'm convinced

that organized religion is a grave threat to human society, and it's best that religion loosens its grip on society. Therefore, I am compelled to support the side that claims that for many people (I say most people) God (whatever His mysterious nature may be) is best reached through independent searches and worship, rather than through organized religion.

Daniel: Thank you for taking a stand more on my side Bertrand, but you are a dubious support for my own passionately spiritual worldview. You have doubts about God's reality and nature such as I cannot, given my own life's experiences, ever endorse. Although I am more toward the liberal end of the spectrum, from the standpoint of modern professing Christianity, than Clare is, I am extremely committed to strict moral and spiritual values. My problem with the churches is that they tend too much to be kinds of organizations or power structures that seek to preserve their power and even seek to expand their powers. This is, to me, a frightening fact of human nature and human religious organizations. However, we've run about out of time tonight, and I'll tell you and Clare good evening for this session.

Bertrand: Alright. Maybe next time we can let Clare turn her "guns" on us and tell us what the great liabilities are that she sees in spiritual independence.

Clare: I'll be more than happy to do so, Bertrand. For now, I wish you and Daniel a good evening, on this muggy summer evening.

What are the Liabilities for Independent Spirituality?

Daniel: Good evening Clare and Bertrand. Thank you both for showing up for a discussion. I suppose it'll be Clare's turn to set us straight about why we should be attending church, rather than seeking a genuinely personal (and mainly independent) relationship with God.

Clare: Hello Daniel and Bertrand. Being here is nice. I hate to come across as the "party pooper" in this situation, but I'm prepared to point out some strong reasons why independent spirituality is so gravely deficient. But first, let me allow Bertrand to proceed with his greeting.

Bertrand: Thank you Clare, and good evening to both of you. I'm pretty sure that Clare's pastor would be pleased with her for taking a strong stance on why seeking a spiritual path outside the church might be considered spiritually dangerous.

Clare: Well Bertrand, I'm not going to be speaking this evening with the intention of supporting my pastor, my church, or any church. What I will speak can be regarded as my deep convictions about how best to find God and serve Him in our personal and public lives. Might I just start out by asking Daniel if it's not a matter of terrible spiritual confusion for individuals to each seek some independent spiritual path?

Daniel: Clare, you ask a highly sensible question, because each person might very well come to highly differing viewpoints on how best to serve God, if such people are not guided by a church or religious teacher. However, let me point out that there are not only many different religions to pick from, but even within many religions are sects and denominations in abundance, such that a spiritual seeker could be utterly confused over which religion or which sect to choose among the numerous possibilities. Any way we go, we will need Divine guidance in the choices we make about how best to worship and serve God. Therefore, whether we end up choosing to join a church, or, on the other hand, choose a more independent spiritual path, we *must ultimately rely upon God* and upon God's guidance.

Clare: I agree, Daniel, that we must rely upon God's guidance in our lives. However, I see it as critical that we have spiritual teachers to inform, encourage, and motivate us on the spiritual path. How will we be motivated, if we don't get the motivation from someone else who's inspired and guided by God?

Daniel: Well Clare, that person who is your teacher and who is so inspired by God must also receive his or her inspiration from someone else – at least, by your logic. Ultimately, the logical conclusion is that there *has* to be someone who is self-motivated, or motivated directly by God, such that the person does not principally rely on human motivation and guidance. The chain of human teachers is, after all, finite.

Clare: Daniel, I have to agree that there must be some spiritual teachers who principally get their inspiration directly from God. However, this fact leads me to the issue of how clear it is that some of us are called to devote our lives to discerning God's will for us and humanity. Those, then, are the people who are called by God to be our leaders and teachers. But not everyone is in that category. Otherwise, we'd all be teachers with no disciples. The vast majority of people, then, are called to listen to the relatively few teachers, prophets, and leaders, all of whom are supposed to have *special* inspiration and guidance from God. And here, Daniel and Bertrand, I think that I can clinch my case for following spiritual teachers, leaders, and church authorities – at least, in the case of the vast majority of people. Do I not have myself a knockdown point?

Daniel: Congratulations, Clare, on making such a good case for following spiritual teachers. To be honest, Clare, I do believe that your point is valid for a whole lot of people – maybe the vast majority of people. Yet, I hang tightly to my conviction that there are some among us who can learn a great deal of spirituality and a great amount of insight into God and His will, just through personal and independent spiritual seeking. Maybe such people are more the self-motivated types. Maybe they are more independent of thinking and reasoning than are most people, and maybe they are the rather “rare birds” among us. But I think that you ought not to dismiss them as rebels, or as secularists who stubbornly refuse to toe the church's line. Some of us do, after all, need our intellectual space. God is infinitely knowledgeable, and God is never intimidated by people questioning why He handles reality as He does. God grants some of us very incisive and probing intellects. He does not desire that we squelch our intellects, or that we become fearful of asking questions or challenging ways that church “authorities” claim are God's demands. Remember this: God is beyond intimidation – He has no apprehensions to the effect that we might “figure Him out”, or that we might threaten the legitimacy of His requirements for our lives. Therefore, Clare, I'm

convinced that if any church authority tries to intimidate a parishioner by criticizing the church member (or someone totally outside the church) for asking questions, that church leader is guilty of insecurity. Such a leader needs to humbly confess a need for more certitude in the legitimacy of his position and beliefs. A person who's fearful of being asked questions about his or her beliefs and positions of authority is a person operating on props, such that the person is fearful of being knocked off those props.

Bertrand: I'm in full agreement with you there, Daniel. But not only are far too many ministers and church leaders fearful of having the legitimacy of their position challenged, but the same principle also applies to many people who have authority in secular positions. Professors, far too often, want to impress their students. And horror of horrors if a student asks a question that the professor doesn't know how to answer – a question within the sphere of the professor's field of expertise. The truly humble professor, I believe, would confess that he/she doesn't know the answer at that point. However, if the student were seriously interested in knowing the answer, the professor would gladly seek an answer – on the supposition that the question is sensible and that there probably are people who know the answer. But to our critical discussion, I'm powerfully for intellectual freedom. This means that I shy away from any church or any religion that tries to do my thinking for me, and also expect me to swallow their “pre-digested” doctrines. My following the dictates of someone else's thinking is strictly anathema to me.

Clare: Bertrand, it's to be expected that you would vote for intellectual freedom, given that you're a confirmed skeptic. But as to Daniel's points against the idea of a church leader feeling intimidated, I primarily agree. Yet, I will emphatically stick to my point that the people who are called by God to be our leaders (such as pastors, some mystics, and spiritual teachers) bear the brunt of the responsibility to tell us how to live our lives spiritually. Therefore (putting on my logician's hat), I conclude that the vast majority of us need to humbly seek out some church or spiritual teacher that can show us the way we ought to live our spiritual lives. The experts regarding spirituality are supposed to be the ministers, pastors, and other spiritual leaders and thinkers; they are the ones that most of us should seek to follow humbly. Most people who try to play the role of a spiritual Lone Ranger are going to fall off their horse, and they will make of themselves spiritual failures and fools. Am I not on solid ground, Daniel, for declaring that the spiritual teachers should be the spiritual experts, and we look to the experts for telling us how to do what we're not experts at doing? Most of us have the soundness of mind and the humility to not try to self-medicate ourselves, but to seek out the knowledge and expertise of the medical doctors and other biological experts to tell us what we should do to remedy our health problems. Even so, most of us need to listen to spiritual leaders, who are the

experts in the field of spirituality. Is this not a clever argument, Daniel and Bertrand?

Daniel: Clare, you do make an excellent point, and yes, it is a valid issue that you raise. Most people do need spiritual teachers to help them out on the spiritual path. After all, they need guides who are more expert than they are themselves. Thus, Clare, I'll grant you that your case is made quite effectively for the vast majority of humanity. Yet, I still argue that some of us are so diligent in seeking spiritual enlightenment that we go well beyond where most spiritual experts go, and here's where they get into trouble. The spiritual teacher – usually being plagued with human ego, to some extent – does not relish having a spiritual “inferior” point out to the teacher where his advice is misguided.

Clare: Daniel, I believe that most of such people as you describe are those who are themselves becoming qualified to be spiritual teachers, and that they are among those who are going to write the spiritual guidebooks and give the spiritual leadership needed by others. But let me, please, make one extremely vital point, as I see it, namely, that there is a grave danger in having spiritual seekers running around trying to find their own paths to spiritual maturity, apart from spiritual teachers to guide them. To me, this is the very gravest danger in having people seek independent spirituality. Does this not make a lot of sense?

Daniel: Well Clare, you can call it a grave danger, but I'm not at all convinced that it's as great a danger as it is for people who seek guidance from church leadership but are refusing to diligently seek out the truths and realities of the Spiritual Realm for themselves. These people can easily get to have a smug self-satisfaction in that they're on “good terms” with their church. Their church is, after all, the *true* church – isn't this what the church leaders are saying? Since they constitute the true church, we can trust them to lead us on the road to salvation. How neat, how nice! As you can easily tell, I'm sarcastic. But this truly can be a serious pitfall, where people trust their church leaders to “guarantee” them a path to salvation. All that, then, is required is to be on good terms with the church. This should guarantee salvation for them. This is horrible, Clare! These people are looking to other fallible and finite human beings to give them guidance on the road toward salvation, when, in fact, *only God* can adequately guide us on that path. We certainly should not dismiss church teachings, but it's critical that we make more spiritual effort than to merely try to remain on good terms with the church. This is a dangerous and grave spiritual cop-out. We do not need to fall for it. So, Clare, I conclude that, although the church can mother us a great deal spiritually, we must have more than merely simplistic reliance upon the church to lead us toward total spiritual success. We must turn our sights to God – that's the only place where we can ever find true enlightenment.

Clare and Bertrand, I'll let one of you have the last words for tonight, and I'll point out that it is my wish that in our next session we switch our discussions to an entirely new topic, namely, how we can come to some intimate knowledge and understanding of God Himself. Have a very blessed evening.

Bertrand: Daniel, I'm also ready for a break from our discussions tonight. I only once in a while get to comment on the discussions, because you and Clare sort of "man the floor" during our sessions. I'm the liberal "odd man out", but that does not bother me much. I'd like to take some satisfaction in being a highly rational thinker – always aiming to bring good sense to our discussions. About tonight's topic, I unflinchingly vote for spiritual independence, and also that all liabilities that are leveled against it are insubstantial in comparison to the wonderful benefits that accrue from searching God's nature and His ways through independent thought, studies, analyses, and practices.

Clare: I see, Bertrand and Daniel, that I'm likely to be opposing both of you in our discussions. As I see it, Bertrand is a liberal skeptic, and Daniel is a passionate, but a liberal-leaning maverick. As for our next discussion, I'm happy to go along with Daniel's suggestion that we discuss how it is that we can know God – and by what methods we come to understand the nature and will of God. My hope is for a pleasant evening to both of you.

Chapter Six

Which Religion is the Best?

Is Original Sin a Viable and Rational Concept?

Daniel: Hello, Clare and Bertrand. It's nice to be back to discuss some critical issues regarding religion and spirituality. I want to steer our discussions in the direction of some extremely vital questions that get to the heart of religion. I refer to questions that pertain to the nature of evil, the origin of evil, the nature of punishment versus blessings for evil or good, the nature of an afterlife – if, indeed there is an afterlife. Such questions are highly critical matters, apart from which any religious worldview will be at least seriously deficient. Clare and Bertrand, I want to start our discussion today with the question of whether the concept of “original sin” really makes sense at all, and whether or not, given our collective modern understanding, it is at all a tenable concept. So, Clare, I ask you first: What sense does the idea of original sin make – where original sin refers to Adam and Eve sinning in the Garden of Eden and having *all their progeny* condemned to eternal damnation by their forebears' sins?

Clare: Hello Daniel and Bertrand. Let me try to answer Daniel's question by, first of all, suggesting that we simply are not privileged to go about picking and choosing what religious worldview we find most rational. Rather, we *must* turn to holy and inspired scriptures to *inform us* of God's purpose and plan for humanity. This is not a matter of philosophical brainstorming to try to determine what, to our highly limited insights, are the most rational doctrines to which to subscribe. That being said, let me say that, as I understand it, the rational justification for the doctrine of original sin is that God gave his creation (specifically, human beings) an opportunity to live in freedom, joy, peace, and eternal life – walking and talking with God Himself. However, Adam and Eve blew their opportunity by listening to the serpent – the ultimate beguiler and deceiver of all naïve creatures. Therefore, God, in His perfect justice, *had* to condemn Adam and Eve to death for their rebellion against God and for listening to the Devil's “wisdom”. Given the fact that all of Adam and Eve's progeny would naturally inherit the evil nature of their corrupted parents, it was necessary for God to condemn all humanity born from the

progeny of Adam and Eve. Now, God, in His infinite love and wisdom, had a perfect plan through which humanity could be – and would be – redeemed. This was through God’s willingness, in His great love for humanity, to offer His very own Son to die as the necessary sacrifice for all sins committed by all human beings. Thus, we have a perfect plan of salvation. Is this not all highly rational?

Daniel: Well Clare, you told the story pretty engagingly in a fashion that is very much in line with traditional Christian theology. However, one would be highly sensible in asking any number of questions about this supposed scenario. First, one might wish to ask *how* it is that this system of theology develops. Who came up with this worldview? Even when assuming the validity of the *Bible* teachings, is not the Apostle Paul the primary progenitor of this interpretation of God’s supposed plan? Is this, then, “Pauline theology”, or is it *Jesus of Nazareth’s theology*? Jesus gave no clear indication anywhere, *except* in the highly dubious Gospel of John, that he was coming to die for the sins of Adam, Eve, and all of their progeny. This all came *well after* Jesus’ death (and resurrection?), whereby Jesus’ followers (notably Paul of Tarsus) began to try to make sense of a supposed Messiah who did *not* rescue the Jews from Roman domination, and who did not bring peace to Israel or the world. Paul, a very brilliant thinker, tried to make sense of what had taken place, and he was convinced that he had *encountered* Jesus (the yet-alive Jesus, or the resurrected Jesus) on the road to Damascus. Therefore, by Paul’s understanding, Jesus was playing a very special role as the Master of the Christians, as their Guide, and even as their Savior. How was all of this to be made to fit into the *Old Testament* scriptures, wherein Paul was an expert? Was not Paul’s insight one through which Adam and Eve’s sins would (somehow) be atoned for by the death of Jesus on the cross? Did this not also imply that all subsequent human beings could have their sins forgiven, and be given the eternal life that Adam and Eve had forfeited by their sins? This all became Paul’s obsession. Here he was, having met Jesus *resurrected from the grave* and instructing Paul to preach to others the *living Jesus (the Messiah – died and resurrected for the sins of humankind)*. This was Paul’s insight – a brilliant leap into the unknown mysteries of the Divine. Here he could take Jewish scripture and make it neatly fit into a scenario that allowed the Jews to play a very special role to humanity. That role provided for God’s chosen Son to be born as a Jew, who was to be the Messiah – and by Paul’s leap of faith – the *Savior of all mankind!* Remember that Jesus himself *never* preached anything of that sort. John’s “Gospel” tries to sneak that “Pauline” theology into Jesus’ supposed sayings, but none of the other three (earlier and more credible) Gospels refer to any such theology. Rather, there is overwhelming evidence that Jesus was searching for the true meaning of his life, and he was highly inclined, given his miracle-working powers, his charisma, and his increasing fame, to think of himself as being the coming of the Messiah that the Jews anticipated. But the Jews had

never thought of the Messiah as God. Rather, the Jews hoped for a Messiah that was human-like, but much more powerful than a mere human, and also who was a warrior who would forcefully rescue the Jews from their humiliating subservient plight. There are indications that Jesus thought that he would come in power and glory to bring the government of God to the Jews (in particular – and also to the rest of the world). It is not at all clear what Jesus thought of himself, but the remotely reliable Gospels suggest nothing whatsoever about him having thought of himself as God the Son, who came to die for the sins of all humankind. These things (about Jesus being the Savior of humanity) were conjured up by Jesus’ followers (notably Paul) after the death (and believed resurrection) of Jesus. But it is not unusual for such great spiritual teachers as Jesus and the Buddha to be given, in the eyes of their followers, divine status, such as the teachers themselves *never* suggested. Lest I get too long-winded here, let me turn over the floor to Clare or Bertrand.

Clare: Well Daniel, you certainly have a highly non-Christian bias, and your interpretations of supposed “Pauline theology” and the like are simply your personal views. Scripture does not support those views, and you are overstepping your authority in trying to demote Scripture to merely subjective human reasoning, all fallible and flawed. This is a grave disservice to the *Word of God*. I fear for the salvation of someone who is willing to renounce the reliability and faithfulness of the *Word of God*. You are extremely presumptuous in your dismissal of Scripture as mere human interpretations of some Divine Reality. I think I am correct in regarding you as not an atheist or even agnostic about God, but one would never know it from your harsh dismissal of the biblical teachings.

Daniel: Clare, you are most highly correct in not regarding me as at all an agnostic or atheist, because I am a devout believer in God, and I pray daily to God. However, Clare and Bertrand, here’s where I deviate powerfully from many (most, indeed) religious people: I do not believe that human understanding of the Divine (God) is at all complete. I do not believe that any humanly produced writings (and what other writings do we have access to?) are at all infallible. This includes, by my perspective, the Judeo-Christian *Bible*, the *Koran*, the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the Buddhist scriptures, and all other spiritual and religious writings ever produced by humanity. This, of course, puts me greatly at odds with nearly all major religions, because they are (for the most part) convinced that their respective scriptures are *divinely revealed and infallible*. Therefore, I find no home in any extant religion, because it is my conviction that God’s works through humanity are works that are tainted with the fallibility and flaws of human limitations.

Bertrand: Well, it looks as if I’m too much of a skeptic to participate much in today’s discussions. After all, I’m unprepared to declare any faith at all in any

divine or spirit realm whatsoever. Therefore, I remain doubtful of whether *any scripture* has *any divine inspiration at all*. I do not rule it out that there might be a Transcendent Reality who inspires human writers – including writers of poetry, fictional stories, scientific treatises, etc.

Daniel: It warms my heart, Bertrand, that you leave the door open for the possibility, at least, of a wondrous and glorious Divine Realm who would inspire, work with, and direct human beings. This means to me, Bertrand, that you are not too far outside the “ballpark” of Divine Love. Maybe you will someday move into that glorious “ballpark”. But so far as the doctrine of original sin is concerned, we’ve not yet tackled it very much. Many questions and issues remain to be dealt with – why should we believe in such a doctrine? Is the doctrine itself even credible? Since Christianity is the only religion with such a doctrine, must we dismiss all other religions as hopelessly in error and even depraved – the works of the Devil? Is the doctrine fair to beings that are brought into creation, burdened with guilt for nothing they ever did? Such questions *beg* to be answered.

Clare: Daniel, I regard your willingness to question the validity of scripture as a fatal flaw in your worldview. I’ll honestly confess that I don’t know just how original sin is to be rationally defended, but I feel no need to analyze it under the microscope of rationality. It comes to us directly from the inspired writings of God’s chosen servants; therefore, I will not question it.

Bertrand: But Clare, how do you ever get to be so sure that this scripture is divinely inspired? Self-proclamations of divine inspiration are emphatically no guarantee of having been divinely inspired. Anyway, I regard it as utterly obscene to think that any perfectly good Creator would create beings by the billions who were already condemned to damnation because of their forebears’ sins. This is terribly far-fetched. I cannot recall the scripture right now, but it seems to me that somewhere in your beloved *Bible* there’s a scripture which declares that no person will be held accountable for the sins of any other person. At any rate, is this not the *only fair and reasonable* way to conduct reality? How can it ever be fair to impute guilt (even the guilt of *eternal punishment*) to any person other than the one who committed the wrong deed? To suggest that you should be held accountable for my wrong choices is, I say again, *obscene!* It makes *no sense!* And God is supposedly perfect in judgment, loving, and compassionate; none of that would ever allow for imputation of guilt for evils, except to the perpetrators of the evils. How can you take any scriptural interpretation to be credible, if it implies such horrendous miscarriages of justice?

Clare: Who am *I* to condemn God? Who are *you* to accuse God of injustice? You are arrogant, presumptuous, and impudent!

Bertrand: Well Clare, if you expect me to leave my rational powers at the door and walk into your temple of irrationality, all the while endorsing a worldview that *any rational mind would declare to be absurd*, then you, my lady, are bereft of your senses!

Clare: Call me what you will, Bertrand. I rely on the *word of God* – not my rational understanding. If this is absurd to you, then I fear that you will face the harsh judgment of God, all the while condemning God’s judgment of you as irrational and absurd.

Bertrand: Clare, whatever Intelligence there is behind the glory and beauty of our universe, I do have some elements of faith, and those elements of faith tell me that the Intelligence undergirding the universe is highly rational, sound in judgment, and not guilty of malfeasance or injustice. This much elementary faith I do hold, and it emphatically repudiates your claims that this Divine Realm would render to its creation such absurdities and gross miscarriages of justice as your outlook suggests. Please do not even attempt to induce me to buy into such a patently irrational and absurd system of “justice” – a “justice” that would make an utter mockery of any true justice. I will not, and I *cannot ever* buy into any such worldview. It does utter violence to my sense of fairness, equity, and justice. Anyway, if such universal guilt were so unfairly imputed to all human beings who are born, how could the death of one man erase such universal guilt?

Clare: Bertrand, you are highly arrogant and presumptuous; however, I will bear with you a bit and try to answer your questions. The death of Jesus on the cross was much more than a man’s death; it was the death of the *Son of God* – the very Being of God, no less. This is how Jesus’ death could pay, once and for all, for all human sins.

Bertrand: So you’re saying that God died on the cross? If so, who could rescue or resurrect God?

Clare: Oh Bertrand! Are you as ignorant as you pretend to be? God is comprised of a family – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. If you try to get hair-splitting and technical about this, let me confess that it is the mystery of how God is a family and yet God is one God. God the Father resurrected God the Son. That is how it works. It’s not any more mysterious than some of your far-fetched scientific and mathematical theories.

Bertrand: To my mind, Clare, the entire idea of God dying on a cross and God then resurrecting himself is about as absurd an idea as one could be. This is taking theology to an absurd extreme. If one has to buy into such absurdities to believe in Christian theology, then I must either reject all theology, or set my sights on Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, or some other religion that does not do such violence to rationality.

Clare: Well Bertrand, you're free to choose whether or not to accept the word of God.

Bertrand: First of all, Clare, I believe that Daniel makes a good case for the fact that there's no reason to believe Jesus himself ever remotely regarded himself as the savior of humanity. He might well have thought that he might be the hoped-for Messiah that many Jews had hoped would rescue them from Roman domination. It was *only after Jesus' death* that many of his followers began to attribute to him divine status. And based on all written records that we have, it was probably mainly under the leadership of Paul that the Christians began to regard Jesus as possessing divinity. Furthermore, Clare, do we not need to show some respect for and give some credence to religions other than Christianity? None of those religions subscribe to any system of salvation that comes even close, so far as I know, to the attribution of original sin to all of humanity, and also claims that God died to save humanity from its sins. The whole thing seems utterly far-fetched and absurd. Religion has options to offer that are more sound and reasonable than that.

Clare: The trouble with you, Bertrand (and somewhat for Daniel, too) is that you think you can reason your way into spiritual truths. That's a fatally erroneous outlook.

Bertrand: Should I dispense with reason when I get to theology, Clare?

Clare: No, Bertrand. I'm not saying that you should not use your reason to understand as much as you can about *revealed truth*. You ought to reason about what is revealed to be true, but all the while remembering that *God reveals* all fundamental truths. You cannot philosophize and reason your way into Divine truth. God must reveal it.

Bertrand: But Clare, *how* am I supposed to know what is divinely revealed truth, *except through the use of reason?*

Clare: You must take God's word on faith, Bertrand. It's all about faith.

Bertrand: Suppose I have been brought up by atheist parents; then I too am an atheist, or I find some justification for joining a religion. *How* do I correctly choose which religion I should join – Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, Christian, or some other?

Clare: God will open your eyes to the truth, if you're willing to receive His truth.

Bertrand: But suppose that I come to believe in Hinduism? Does this prove that I was not receptive of God's inspiration?

Clare: Well Bertrand, given my understanding, it seems clear that if you're open to the inspiration of God, then you'll certainly choose the true religion, which is the religion based upon the *Bible* – the Christian religion.

Bertrand: Clare, is it not obvious to you that you're saying this from *your own* (Christian) perspective? A Hindu would give a different answer. So would a Muslim or a Buddhist.

Clare: Bertrand, you're throwing at me all this philosophical relativism. It's almost as if there were no truth of any kind regarding God and religion – all just opinion. You refuse to acknowledge that God will reveal Himself to humanity – to those who are open-minded to His inspiration.

Bertrand: Clare, to make your religious worldview at all credible, you *must* find a way of *rational justification* for picking your religion as opposed to any number of others. Merely claiming that if I'm open to the inspiration of God, I'll automatically choose *your* religion is rather naïve and even absurd. This is as shallow a defense of your belief as to say that "Since I'm correct, if you come to know the truth, you will agree with me". This is childish.

Clare: I believe in a Christianity that transcends any such analysis as you suggest. However, any defense I could come up with would be one that you would seek to rationally analyze to the point of its destruction – given your close-mindedness.

Bertrand: Obviously, Clare, since I disagree with you, I must be close-minded. If that's your best defense, then your views are hopelessly inefficacious.

Daniel: Clare and Bertrand, you've been at it for quite a while. Let me make a few observations of my own. I somewhat agree with Bertrand's stance that in order to do the concept of God's goodness, justice and fairness their due, we need a religious or spiritual worldview that acknowledges that each person is responsible *exclusively* for *his or her own choices* – not for the choices or sins of any forbears or anyone

else at all. To repudiate this does violence to any rational sense of fairness or justice. We must trust that God will not burden us with the guilt of anyone but our own guilt. I trust that we do not have to suffer or die for anyone else's misdeeds. We are always held accountable strictly for our own conduct and our choices of attitudes and behaviors – no one else's. I'm afraid that the doctrine of original sin does violence to this dictum. Therefore, I cannot find that doctrine to be tenable – with all due respect to the very highly spiritual and wonderfully Godly Christians, there have been throughout the centuries. To have misunderstandings about the technical natures of matters pertinent to God's ways and means of judgment does not keep a person from coming very close to the love of God, and it does not keep a person from becoming attuned to and harmonious with God. Knowledge of reality is less important than character. Character is determined by one's choices of conduct and attitudes, not by one's technical knowledge or understanding. Therefore, two people can be in very great disagreement over aspects of religious and spiritual outlook, even if the love of God wonderfully guides both of them. Knowledge is not what makes character (for good or ill), but attitudes, choices, and behaviors, *they* are what determine one's character. They are the qualities that either bring us into harmony with the love of God, or drive us, conversely, out of the wondrous paradise of the peace and joy of God. Don't misunderstand me. Wrong beliefs about how one should behave will affect one's behaviors; therefore, they can do terrible damage to character. However, mere technicalities that do not substantially affect one's character and conduct of life and do not determine one's spiritual fate. However, conduct regarding serving God and serving one's fellow creatures through the love of God is critical to one's spiritual well-being. The mere technical errors of belief (like which day of the week to set aside as a special day of worship, which foods to eat, which drinks to drink, precisely how to dress, and any number of other things that are relatively inconsequential) are all rather minor. But, as Jesus of Nazareth so powerfully emphasized, the weightier matters of the law are justice, mercy, faithfulness, humility, and such (Matt. 23:23) are the important rules by which to live. I do not believe that Jesus would ever have been light on matters of immorality or idolatry, but he was accusing the scribes and Pharisees of picking on more trivial matters like just how much to tithe, etc. Let me conclude this evening's discussions by submitting to you the claim that the very concept of original sin is so gravely fraught with weaknesses and flaws that one is nearly compelled to distance oneself from it, or completely eject it from one's spiritual outlook – and the latter is what I do.

Clare: Daniel, you reject the Word of God at your peril. Christianity is based upon the conviction that Adam and Eve brought sin into the world by disobedience to God, and that it was required that the Son of God would die for those sins, as well as all the sins of all humanity, so that God could rescue us from eternal damnation.

Now, it's up to us to accept the Savior's sacrifice so that our sins can be forgiven. Otherwise, Hell stares us in the face.

Bertrand: The Christianity you proclaim, Clare, is Pauline theology, and it is not at all the Christianity that Jesus of Nazareth taught his followers. The former is based upon *later interpretations* of Jesus' supposed role in God's plan. Jesus himself simply preached nothing of the kind; John's Gospel, which can be seen as contradicting my statement, is not a credible record of Jesus' sayings, and the other three (earlier) Gospels attest to that fact. But you're welcome to live in superstitious illusions, Clare, and I will end by wishing you a good evening.

Clare: Good night, Bertrand and Daniel. You both are in need of repentance. My prayers are that you will have your hearts melted by the love of your wondrous Savior.

Daniel: Thank you kindly, Clare. I hope that your and Bertrand's evening will be productive and rewarding. Good night.

If Original Sin is an Absurd Concept, then from Where do the Evils of Human Nature Come?

Daniel: Good evening Clare and Bertrand. As usual, we're here to thrash out concepts about religion and spirituality. Of course, the secular philosophers conclude that we're all into discussions of fanciful illusions – discussions, that is, of utterly non-existent realities. To them, our discussions are no better than silly jokes. Of course, some highly intelligent people could point out that much of what secular philosophers discuss is little more realistic or coherent with reality than silly jokes. As for myself though, I have no doubts about the existence of a glorious Divine Realm – a reality so glorious that our puny intellects can never do that Being remote justice. But let's get to the matter at hand. In our last discussion, Bertrand and I pretty much agreed that the very concept of original sin is so laden with logical difficulties that a rational mind must balk at its acceptance. Clare, of course, vehemently disagrees, and I deeply respect her disagreement; after all, she has all major Christian philosophers for the past two millennia standing as support for her claims. So, I will not lightly dismiss original sin as a concept that has had a very strong and persistent track record in Western philosophy of religion. But the question I wish to address this evening is that of *what alternative* to original sin we have to offer as a reasonable explanation for why a loving and just God would engender a world so fraught with the wicked vices inherent in human nature. Clare, I hope that you won't be too severely bored this evening; after all, by your understanding, the entire discussion is a moot point – original sin is the only reasonable possibility for an explanation of the terrible lot of humanity in this very troubled and turbulent world. But Bertrand might find this discussion a bit refreshing; after all, it does endorse highly rational thinking, something that Bertrand claims to value. But before prolonging my comments, let me give both Clare and Bertrand a chance to speak.

Clare: Hello Daniel and Bertrand. I hope that both of you are in good spirits. Given my faith in my wonderful Savior, I usually feel a great deal of joy, even when the struggles of life sometimes tend to overwhelm one. And yes, Daniel, I do think that tonight's discussion will likely be an exercise in futility, from my perspective. After all, if I did not have the faith that my sinful life is a consequence of the sins of my ancestors (way back), and that my wonderful Savior, the Son of God, died for me, I'd feel hopeless. If it were not for my trust that I can be released from the guilt of a

sinful life, I suppose that I'd go out and live life with utter cynicism and despair. However, my faith in Jesus is firm and unshakeable. Therefore, even if I tune both of you out much of the evening, let me say that I'm not trying to be rude, but have simply concluded that if you choose to trash the *Bible*, you might as well go "a-fishing".

Bertrand: Hello Clare and Daniel. I'm really happy not to be so serious about spiritual matters. I'm a fairly carefree fellow, and I don't dwell much on the more serious philosophical questions. We cannot answer them, anyway, and I hope that if there's justice undergirding reality, then I'll never be punished for failing to have the right insights merely because I sought to use my intellect to the max, and sought to make rational sense of a very confusing reality. In other words, I'm fairly optimistic that I have nothing serious to fear.

Daniel: Bertrand, I like your sensible approach, but I would earnestly warn you that we can use rational and logical justification for affirming what we *wish to believe*, even if our belief is fallacious and is *not* the most rational belief system available to us. That is, self-deception is an ever-present threat to us. The old ego turns what it wishes to be true into the "most rational explanations" at its disposal. Therefore, beware lest the ego tricks you – all the while using very clever logic to perpetrate the trick.

Clare: Daniel, that's a brilliant explanation for how people can refuse, through intellectual ratiocinations, to accept their one and only Savior, all the while believing that no such Savior exists. Could *you*, Daniel, perhaps be in that boat?

Daniel: Clare, I appreciate your concern and your warning; however, remember that I never suggested to Bertrand or you that we ought to shut down our rational faculties, but *only to be brutally honest with ourselves* – admittedly a difficult enterprise. But lest we get too far side-tracked from our evening's discussions, let me simply ask a question. Is there a reasonable way of looking at the human predicament, and then make a reasonable evaluation of how a perfectly loving, infinitely competent, and totally just Creator could bring into being such a terribly troubled world as ours, in which evils are inherent drives and impulses to all of its rational creatures?

Bertrand: Daniel, I truly wonder if there's any theological explanation that could perform the feat that you described. If so, what would it be?

Daniel: Let me take a stab at answering you, Bertrand. We are confronted with possessing ourselves (as human beings) inevitably evil tendencies. We are naturally

proud, selfish, inclined to compete with others in such ways that we hurt them, and wish to have priority for ourselves at the expense of others. We tend toward prejudice and hatred toward those who are deemed different from ourselves, and we are capable of utter hatred and viciousness toward those of our species whom we regard as enemies. Thus, I think that it is simply unreasonable to doubt that human nature is burdened with an evil nature. The evidence is all over the place – even in cute, chubby, “innocent”, and helpless babies. Evil pervades our nature. So, the question arises: Is God himself evil? Why would He create such a mess as we encounter in our greedy, selfish, and hateful nature? Is this the best world that God could create? Leibniz seemed to have thought that he’d figured out that our world is the best of all possible worlds. From my perspective, that is a rather unrealistic and even absurd outlook. How could such a stance be rationally validated? I realize that Leibniz was a brilliant thinker; however, I fear that he merely concluded as he did because of his disinclination to go contrary to prevailing theology. At any rate, let me tell you quite bluntly and succinctly that I’m convinced that this world is *emphatically not the best of all possible worlds*. This is a *purgatory!* This is a prison for souls who have rebelled against the love of God, and they have persisted in rebellion against Divine Love and perfect humility. By their choices (those choices having been made both in previous lives and in the current life), they have corrupted themselves, and they must suffer in hellish worlds, or they must suffer the agonies of *relearning* surrender to God. God does *not create evil*. Evil comes only through free choice, and when free choice is used to make evil and hurtful choices, evil consequences ensue. Thus I say, Clare and Bertrand, that God originally creates only holy and loving beings. Some of those beings then freely choose to violate the love of God. Pride brings them to a fall. Self-will, which is a will in opposition to the Divine Will, destroys the holiness of their character. God summarily banishes them into worlds where evil, violence, suffering, struggling, anguish, and agony prevail upon them – doesn’t that sound a whole lot like this world?

Bertrand: How, then, do you account for animal suffering, Daniel?

Daniel: Bertrand, this is a difficult question, one on which I find myself perplexed. However, I do not believe that a perfect and holy Creator will create any creature that suffers in pain if that being has not (in some realm of reality) repudiated Divine Love. It logically follows that if animals suffer – and I believe they do – then animals possess something like a “soul” that carries with it guilt from the evils of previous lives. I realize that a lot of baggage comes with that stance, but it’s simply the most reasonable explanation I can think of for the realities we encounter.

Bertrand: You’re saying, then, Daniel, that all souls that are originally brought into being by the Creator are holy, loving, and guilt-free beings. This would, I suppose,

be a way in which one could vindicate God, even in light of horrific evils and unspeakable suffering. Do I understand you correctly?

Daniel: Yes, indeed, Bertrand. You've got it exactly right. All evil souls *corrupted themselves after* God brought them into being, and they are guilty of making wrong choices. God did not create them evil – He did not create them with an evil nature. Rather, their nature was perverted (corrupted) by evil choices. Those evil choices were in opposition to the humble love of God. The greatest and most prevalent sin of all is *pride*. It is a sin wherein the prideful being *rebels* against the power and love of God. The “created” being rebels against God by willing to go contrary to its understood requirement of full obedience to the Divine Will. Thereby, that being gets corrupted. That's when it is thrust into a world in which rebels are its fellow citizens. There are at least two possibilities for such a world. Either it is a hell, wherein all beings are simply banished from the love of God, or it is a purgatory. In a purgatory the beings are given very great opportunities to redeem themselves – that is, come back into harmony with God, through very hard work, much sacrifice, and intense humbling.

Bertrand: So you regard Earth as a purgatory, do you, Daniel?

Daniel: Honestly Bertrand, this is the only explanation for the situation in this world that I'm aware of that can do what I would regard as justice to this vale of tears.

Bertrand: What forms of life have souls, by your worldview? Do plants, ants, roaches, mice, and other such organisms all have souls, Daniel?

Daniel: Far be it from me, Bertrand, to pretend that I have answers to all of the questions that you can properly ask. Many issues are in some domains, like penumbras, such that I refuse to take any stand on the nature of the issues – it being the case that I plead agnosticism in those matters. However, in an attempt to answer your question, let me say that I suppose that any creature that has sufficiently complex a nervous system to experience genuine pain or pleasure has a sort of soul that is the focal point of a being that rebelled against God. Now, plants, I believe, lack any such nervous system; even ants and roaches, I suspect, cannot experience any genuine pain or pleasure, but conduct their lives according to light and subtle sensations impinging upon their nervous system. Now, a mouse might well – and I would think likely does – have a soul.

Clare: My understanding, Daniel, is that you're not a vegetarian. How do you justify eating animal flesh, if the animals have souls?

Daniel: Clare, that's a very good question, and I'm just inclined to answer as follows: Our fellow humans constitute the only species of a creature whose life we are expressly forbidden to take. However, I lean very substantially toward the viewpoint that when (or if) a person reaches the perfection of spiritual character, such a person will eat no flesh at all but will restrict all foods to those of plants, seeds, eggs, milk, etc., and that the person will avoid eating meats. There's far more about the nature of the souls of creatures that I don't know than there is that I do know. But it's getting late. How about us calling it a night and going on our respective ways?

Clare: I'm all for that, Daniel. So, good night to you both.

Bertrand: That's just what I wanted to hear – the day is now far spent. Have a good night Clare and Daniel.

Daniel: In our next session, I hope to discuss whether or not, and if so, how we can learn from Eastern religions. Have a good night Clare and Bertrand.

Can Humanity Learn from the Insights of Eastern Religions?

Daniel: Well hello Clare and Bertrand. It's nice to see you here today, hopefully being all set for intense discussions of religious and spiritual questions and issues.

Clare: Hello Daniel and Bertrand. I'm pleased to be here to discuss such vital issues, even if I sometimes feel as if I'm the only participant who truly believes in the Word of God.

Bertrand: Good afternoon, Clare and Daniel. As for myself, I feel as though I might be the only one here who considers it critical to think of spiritual issues from a genuinely rational and scientific perspective.

Daniel: Well, I can see why Clare feels a bit out of place; after all, she's the only participant here who believes in taking all of the *Bible* entirely literally. If her views on the nature of the *Bible* are correct, then Bertrand and I are guilty of rejecting at least aspects of the Word of God – that being a serious charge against us. My belief (given what I understand) is that Clare is not quite justified in her outlook, regardless of how godly a person she might be. I am personally convinced that with the modern knowledge we have access to about the nature of human history, archaeology, anthropology, literary criticism, etc., it's utterly untenable to take nearly all of the *Bible* literally. But I do respect Clare for hanging on to a devout spirituality and a commitment to serious moral and religious values. At any rate, what I wish to discuss today has to do with the question of whether or not religions in our Western World can learn from many aspects of some of the Eastern religions. Clare, I understand that you regard the Eastern religions as pagan and works of the Devil. Am I right in this assumption?

Clare: Quite honestly, Daniel, I have to give my assent to such an evaluation of Eastern religion. They are not religions founded by the God of the *Bible*. Therefore, they are false religions, and the Devil is the ultimate author of deception and lies. Thus, those religions are works of the Devil. Yes, I have to concur there.

Bertrand: Clare, do you not see how narrow your approach is, and how much you are guilty of ascribing to God the authorship of works that you are convinced to be infallible *merely* by your upbringing and the culture into which you were born? This

is worse than ethnocentrism. After all, different ethnicities have different physical and mental characteristics. Therefore, it could be scientifically plausible to regard some ethnicities as superior to others, even if that is politically incorrect. Now, let me make it clear that I'm not favoring ethnocentrism, but merely point out that judging another religious system as depraved or devilish merely because one happens to have been born into some other culture is genuinely absurd – utterly unworthy of an intelligent and objective person.

Clare: Bertrand, you can try all you wish to bash me and my devotion to God, but I refuse to let myself be hoodwinked into your liberal, relativistic worldview, merely because you reject a commitment to the true God and His infallible Word. I consider you to be a reprobate, one who is on the road toward hell. But my hope and prayer for you are that you find within yourself the wherewithal to repent of your wicked rejection of the Word of God and the writings of His faithful servants. With your liberal “scientific” worldview, arguing with you is a lost cause.

Bertrand: Well, honestly, Clare, are you not merely casting aspersions against my arguments because of your conclusion that I'm a reprobate? You have no rational defense, but attack me (and my arguments) on the basis of my supposedly ungodly character. You're educated enough, Clare, to realize that trashing the messenger in efforts to destroy his rational arguments is utterly senseless – unworthy of an intelligent person. You are using the almost universally rejected fallacy of *ad hominem* argumentation. You are simply trying to evade the logical force of my arguments based on your conviction that I'm a godless reprobate. I can hardly overlook this, because you're too well educated to employ such a tactic sincerely.

Clare: How have I been guilty of the fallacy of *ad hominem* attacks?

Bertrand: Well, I pointed out to you, Clare, that it's rationally indefensible to deny that if you'd been reared in a very different culture (say, in India or China), you would very likely not take at all an accepting view of the *Bible* as the Word of God. But rather than addressing that claim of mine, you simply resorted to attacking my character as a presumed “reprobate”. If this is not an *ad hominem* argument, what is it?

Clare: First of all, Bertrand, neither you nor I know with any certainty that if I'd been born in India or China that I would not have converted to Christianity. We don't know.

Bertrand: Admittedly, Clare, there is at least a remote possibility that you would have converted to Christianity. Yet, we need to reckon with the odds against that

having happened, which by your theology suggests that *very likely* if you'd been born in India or China, you would have grown up to be and to remain Hindu or Buddhist. Then, by sheer virtue of circumstances, utterly beyond your control (you didn't choose where you'd be born), you very probably would have believed that Hindu or Buddhist scriptures are the true scriptures – *not* the Judeo-Christian *Bible*. Then by your current doctrines, you would have failed to accept Christianity, and you would have been consigned to Hell in the afterlife – all because of the mere *happenstance* that you were born in the geographic and cultural environment where you were. How can you rest peacefully with such an outlook – it being the case that billions of people are condemned to damnation by happenstance?

Clare: Bertrand, I do not have a clear-cut logical argument to combat what you say, but let me tell you that I trust in the goodness and justice of God. I trust that God is fair and loving. Therefore, I have peace with God, unlike rebels like you.

Bertrand: I wish to know, Clare, how you can rationally argue that God is fair, loving, and just, if he condemns billions of people to eternal torment, merely because they happened to be born in the wrong places. This sort of argumentation, Clare, is what drives some very intelligent and very good people away from religions like yours. Resorting to blind faith that God is just, when in fact your religious worldview renders God utterly incompatible with justice and goodness, is thorough justification for the rational and intelligent person to emphatically reject your religious outlook.

Clare: This is obviously going nowhere, Bertrand. I'm ready to drop the whole matter, given that it's obvious that you don't accept or love your God and Savior. You will believe as you wish in your rigorously logical arguments that I cannot answer, except to reassert my faith in God, His goodness, and His justice.

Bertrand: I see, Clare, that you've been defeated by rational argumentation, and I feel sorry for your predicament, given how you seek to defend the indefensible. If you can be satisfied with blind faith, then you have my sympathy, because I cannot consider that to be intelligent.

Clare: Bertrand, you can ridicule my intelligence all the way into Hell. May God have mercy on you!

Daniel: Well, Clare and Bertrand, I feel inclined to avoid taking clear-cut sides in this argument, but let me just concede this much: I regard it as incompatible with the most rational and godly stance to defend religious doctrines that force us to part company with our most incisive powers of rational thought. But we have thus far

failed to attack the question that I had most desired to discuss today: Can we Westerners learn from the wisdom of Eastern religions? I understand that Clare believes that the Eastern religions are pagan and devilish. I now wish to ask you, Bertrand, whether you believe that Eastern religions have some things (maybe *many* things) to teach us Westerners.

Bertrand: Of course, Daniel, I believe that we can learn a lot from Eastern philosophy and religion. I am not prepared to buy into the theology of any Eastern (or Western, for that matter) religion. However, such principles as the unity of nature that seems to be espoused by Eastern religion and philosophy, I greatly appreciate. The Eastern proclivity to operate by our feelings, as opposed to sheer logic, is, I think, a proper value. Of course, we in the West, mainly starting with the Greeks, have disseminated to the rest of the world our rationalist, logical, and scientific approaches to reality. Whether or not this is more good than evil, I feel unprepared to assert. Of course, with modern Western quantum physics, it seems that there are hints that reality is more holistic than had been thought by most of the modern scientists. Therefore, we may be moving full circle from empiricist reductionism toward a more holistic worldview. I think that we might be discovering in quantum physics what the Eastern philosophies were proclaiming all along. Also, the spiritual side of nature and the natural side of the spiritual realities might be aspects of Eastern philosophy that we would do well to inculcate more into our worldview. Trying to tear reality apart and dissect it into its constituent parts might be destructive of the unity nature has to offer us. Radical reductionism seems, to me, to be simply taking things too far. Maybe the body and the “soul” are a unity, and it might do violence to our philosophy of reality to dissect the person into radically separate compartments: body and “soul”.

Daniel: Bertrand, I like a lot of what you’ve had to say about this, but I’m inclined to think that we must allow for not only gradations of entities, but distinct *qualitative differences* in certain things. Take what modern physicalists try to do with the human mind – reducing mind to some monistic property of matter. My conviction is that this ultimately fails. Of course, the radical empiricist physicalists wish to reduce all that is mind, thought, emotion, etc. to sheerly physical properties. This is a grave despiritualization of the human being, one that I believe is utterly incompatible with what can most effectively be rendered a unified philosophy of all reality. To seek to annihilate mind, emotion, and spirit to wipe out the powers and efficacies of mind and spirit does fatal violence to any coherent philosophy of reality. Eastern religion and philosophy do not seek to eviscerate mind and spirit from our world, and it is mostly in Western analytical philosophy where one finds the radical reduction of all reality to physical entities. This reduction includes all the things that matter most to us (our feelings, desires, pains, pleasures, hopes, dreams,

dreads, anticipations, etc.) – reducing them to merely physical, empirically measurable, and tangible (in principle, at least) entities. The latter (the physical and material) have *no intrinsic value*; they are, unlike mind and emotion, meaningless and valueless – in their own right. What a perverse nature we in the West have tended to postulate, such that we have sought to obliterate from our worldview the *only* things that *really matter*? This is perversity of the worst kind.

Bertrand: I cannot very much disagree with you, Daniel, except that I would declare that the analytical and reductionist approaches are pragmatically very effective in science and in dealing with the universe.

Daniel: Bertrand, I'm willing to grant that reductionism works quite well in most aspects of material objects and entities. However, this reductionism cannot intelligently be transported into psychology, sociology, religion, and much of philosophy. We must maintain holism in many aspects of these mental/spiritual entities and forces. Take consciousness itself; it is unquestionably holistic. We cannot reduce consciousness (or mind) to specific points or locations. It refuses to yield to such a radical reduction to parts. This suggests, then, that a philosophy which seeks to deal with the whole person *must reckon* with the *unity of consciousness*. Consciousness refuses to be localized. It, my friends, is "spirit", and spirit transcends matter. Spirit is of a *higher order* than matter. Spirit can encapsulate matter; matter cannot encapsulate spirit. This is critical. Refusing to endorse or acknowledge mind and spirit is a radical "homicide" of the spirit. Spirit pervades all reality. Therefore, the Eastern religions and philosophies are less murderous than Western radical reductionism toward the only values of humanity that ultimately matter – our minds, our consciousness.

Bertrand: Here, Daniel, I think that you're going over the edge a bit. Your idea that consciousness is universal and pervades all of reality is sheer mysticism. There's no scientific, logical, empirical, rational, or philosophical justification for such an outlook. I reject it. It's the sort of thing one might expect from a hippie who's high on LSD.

Daniel: Honestly, Bertrand, I must confess that this sort of outlook of mine cannot be scientifically, logically, mathematically, or empirically *proven* to be true, but I dare you to try to disprove it.

Bertrand: I agree, Daniel, that it can't be disproved, but that just goes to show how mystical and otherworldly it really is. Since it's a merely mystical outlook that does not empirically or scientifically bear upon the nature of our world, it's simply little more than idle and fanciful words.

Daniel: Well, this entire matter is a bit off topic, and I wish to make a few concluding comments today about how convinced I am that any viable future religion will have to incorporate into its theology some absorption of aspects of both Eastern and Western religious ideas. Western science tends to eviscerate spirit from its worldview, and Eastern religion and philosophy wish to hang onto spirit and mind as genuine realities in their own right. Furthermore, one thing in Eastern religion that I believe that the West should not be so hostile toward is the idea of reincarnation. Reincarnation in religion can help to very rationally account for any number of mysteries that traditional Western religions have been utterly unable to account for or to explain in any really intelligent manner. Therefore, when we come back for our next session, I wish to discuss reincarnation (an Eastern religious doctrine – for the most part) and how many wonderful aids it could bring into our religious worldview that would explain reality as ultimately fully fair, just, and filled with the love of the Infinite Divine. So until our next session, good evening Bertrand and Clare. Have a nice remainder of the day.

Bertrand: I anticipate that discussion, Daniel. And I wish both of you a pleasant evening.

Clare: As for myself, Daniel and Bertrand, you're welcome to discuss such false doctrines, but I will be of little help, since reincarnation is emphatically not taught in the Word of God, and I refuse to endorse what God does not endorse. Both of you, though, have a nice night.

Reincarnation has a Logical Coherence that No Alternative Theology can Match

Daniel: Good afternoon, Clare and Bertrand. I'm pleased to be back once again to discuss spiritual issues that theists might well contend with a great deal. The issue of main interest for today's topic is reincarnation, how coherent it compares to alternative theologies, and what reincarnation has to offer – or fails to offer. I know that Clare is powerfully opposed to all concerns related to reincarnation, given that she's convinced that it's a false doctrine – she emphatically informed us of that in our last session. However, Bertrand might consider it a reasonable option for those who believe in an afterlife – the latter being something concerning which he seems to have serious reservations. At any rate, are we ready to bat back and forth some ideas relevant to these issues?

Clare: Hello Daniel and Bertrand. It's nice to see both of you, but I regard the discussion of reincarnation as a bit of a waste of time. After all, as I see it, it's clearly pagan theology, and it has no grounding anywhere in Holy Scripture.

Bertrand: Hello Clare and Daniel. As for myself, I regard belief in an afterlife of any kind as most likely an illusory engagement in wishful thinking. However, if someone does believe in an afterlife at all, I'm willing to look at whatever evidence might be found in favor of reincarnation. Clare's repudiation of reincarnation because it's not "in Holy Scripture" seems to me to be a seriously narrow approach. After all, to my way of thinking, Hindu scriptures are just as much "holy" as biblical scriptures.

Clare: As I understand you, Bertrand, you do not believe that *any* scripture is holy. Therefore, I can hardly afford to take your pagan/agnostic/skeptic viewpoint very seriously. Now, with Daniel's conviction that there is a Divine Realm (a God), I find myself at greater pains to deal with his endorsement of reincarnation. I cannot discount his outlook as easily as I can that of a skeptic.

Daniel: Let us look at some aspects of reincarnation that might seem reasonable and rational, from the perspective of what a Divine Being who is perfectly loving, fair, just, and merciful might incorporate into reality. First of all, Judeo-Christian theology does not provide for an opportunity to come into harmony with God once a

person's *one life* has passed. And it seems self-evident that some people start life being almost condemned to damnation, according to traditional Christian theology. That is, there are people born into circumstances where they have practically no chance of ever accepting Jesus Christ as their Savior. If they are then condemned to Hell, they have *never had a chance* for salvation. This is a terrible indictment of Divine "justice". However, from the perspective of reincarnation, that person already has had opportunities for salvation in a previous life or multiple lives but didn't make it. Now, that person is here and is given opportunities to at least grow toward spiritual maturity – if the person ever even lives long enough to grow into adulthood. At any rate, if the person does well with what little opportunity he or she has here in this lifetime, they will come back in a future life to have an even better opportunity to grow toward spiritual maturity and perfection. This, then, means that it's not either Heaven or Hell after this life, but opportunities for future growth and progress toward perfection of the spirit (the soul). This allows for an awesomely greater degree of fairness than is present for the "one-shot" deal where this one life's outcome results in either Heaven or Hell. This latter scenario is a terrible fate for those who simply had essentially no opportunity for salvation in this one life. How do you explain that, Clare?

Clare: Well, Daniel, I must confess that God's ways are so much higher than my ways and His understanding so awesomely greater than mine that I refuse to try to tell where God is just or unjust. I fear to tread into such presumptuous judgments. However, let me tell you that not all Christians believe that those who never had an opportunity to confess Jesus Christ in this life will go to Hell. Rather, God in His infinite mercy will give them salvation if they did essentially the best they could, given their opportunities. But even if God does create some beings whom He condemns to damnation, who am I to judge the fairness and justice of God?

Daniel: Clare, you have tried to offer two possible ways out of this dilemma. One is via very liberal Christianity which essentially says that everyone has salvation, except for those few who know very well of Jesus and His offer of salvation and then reject it. While this might seem like one way out of the box, it seems terribly inept on the part of a Creator who creates creatures with the option for salvation or rejection of salvation. Yet, He has His plan for salvation so inefficiently presented to His creatures that the majority of them have to simply be granted salvation *carte blanche* as a gift, regardless of how they lived or whether they at all played by the "rules for salvation". Your other way out is to simply resign yourself to giving up on any truly rational explanation for what flatly appears to be grave injustices. I am convinced that we should trust God's judgment, but if a set of doctrines would require a repudiation of God's justice, maybe those doctrines should be modified or entirely ditched. Anyway,

Clare, it seems to me absurd to the point of utter perplexity why a Creator would create such a terrible “vale of tears” as this world. But then He would give the vast majority of citizens of the world a total escape from this near-hellish realm into a heavenly realm without any justification whatsoever for even being ever placed in such a hellish place as life on Earth is for far too many people. If the people here (or their souls) never lived in a previous realm, *how, pray tell*, can it be loving, kind, merciful, fair, and to stick them into a world of pain and anguish such as this? Why are they created with a nature that innately gravitates toward vanity, strife, competition, greed, and hostility toward their Creator? What is the justice or fairness in this? What sense does it make? Reincarnation repudiates that sort of scenario. It has the virtue of declaring that we were originally angelic or other holy beings – that being how we were created. However, at some point, we *freely chose* rebellion against Divine Love, and we *became self-willed, vain, and rebellious*. Then we were assigned to a purgatory to be redeemed, to be rescued from our warped, egoistic, and God-rejecting values. *That*, then, was precisely when we encountered a world of pain, anguish, fear, insecurity, competition, sickness, and death. We were not, reincarnation would allow us to say, *created* to be put into such a terrible world as this, but we were *assigned here after we gravely messed up*. We had been created without spiritual flaws, but we freely chose to incorporate into our character spiritual flaws. That was when the trouble began for us – *not* at our creation. Is this not a beautifully fair, compassionate, and just system of judgment, contrasted with supposed “original sin”? The latter system has billions of people being born into a terrible world of suffering, with an evil nature, and with a struggle to overcome the evil nature to try to avoid eternal punishment in damnation? This, Clare and Bertrand, is why I claim that reincarnation offers us such wonderful insights into a worldview that allows for perfectly rational, fair, and just judgment for *all creatures* – if the lower animals are allowed to enter into this scheme of things. Original sin, juxtaposed with this outlook, appears utterly absurd. Reincarnation avers that we do *not start out* evil in this world, but that we are shoved into this near-hell because we made terribly wrong choices of rebellion against Divine Love and Divine Power. We came, at some point, to try to take matters into our own hands, and we rebelled against the Infinite Divine Will. Divine Reality is perfectly fair and just; no creature will ever have to suffer if that creature does not rebel against Divine Love, Divine Power, and Divine Justice. But rebellion will always result in banishment to lower realms of reality, where suffering, violence, death, and destruction are concomitants of the world.

Clare: Well Daniel, you make it sound so enticing to believe in reincarnation as somehow “fixing” everything. Unfortunately, there’s no justification for any such theology in Scripture, and if Scripture does not support it, who am I to try to ascribe to God’s plan some supposedly rational explanation of the way God has set up His

Creation? Scripture will be my guide. If that's not good enough for you, well, all I know to do is to pray for you.

Bertrand: Clare, you are buying into a theology that is based upon what you have been taught – by sheer happenstance of where you were born, what family religions you were exposed to, and such strictly coincidental circumstances. You refuse to reckon with logic and sound reasoning. You shut the door to logic, and you want to simply hang on tenaciously to what you've been taught – sheerly because you were taught it. Is not that a bit absurd?

Clare: Bertrand, all I know to say to you is that I refuse to listen to your condemnations of my rationality, just because I refuse to be a God-rejecting reprobate like you are. I have faith in Scripture. There are numerous people smarter than you are who accept, with full conviction, the very Scriptures I affirm.

Bertrand: I'm aware, Clare, that there might well be smarter people than I am (just how you would know that, I'm not so sure I could guess) who do believe in the validity of the scriptures you worship. However, I suppose that such people, if confronted with my questioning, would simply use faith as a cop-out, or they would say that they simply choose to believe in the validity of the biblical scriptures, or something of the sort. There's something about logical argumentation that is hard to bypass successfully and gracefully. Logic plays such a key role in what renders a person a rational being that if one's logic can be shown to be flawed, it tends to demean the value of one's ideas. Actually, to get a tad into philosophy, logic seems to be built into the structure of all reality. If a person renounces what is almost universally accepted as logical, then that person is in danger of being dismissed as (somehow) failing to operate by the rules of human thought and human knowledge. However, it seems that, for a lot of people, religion should be based on "faith"; then it's by faith that they believe and live. But if faith is not ultimately grounded in logic, how is the faith rational? How is it better than foolish absurdities? Now, I'm not arguing that all of religion is illogical, but I will suggest that people should have some *rational basis* for their religious faith; otherwise, they are opening themselves to the charge of irrationality, stupidity, or religious craziness. And Clare, I don't mean to be harsh, but it honestly appears to me as if you wish to shunt out of your thinking a lot of rational questions and probes that can be directed at your faith. Then your best defense seems to be to simply resort to charging the questioner with being a pagan or reprobate. It's simply the old logical fallacy of *ad hominem* defense; that is, if I use the *ad hominem* fallacy, I claim that I can reject your criticism or your argument because of the poor quality of your character. Obviously, that is a logical fallacy – regardless of how often some otherwise fairly intelligent and educated people are inclined to apply the fallacy in their arguments. But as for

reincarnation, I have questions to pose to Daniel. I have some doubts, among those being the almost undeniable fact that billions of subhuman creatures live, suffer, and die in this world – seemingly gratuitously. Also, what sense does it make that a soul should be brought to life in human form, only to die of AIDS before age two – or even dying as a fetus? I'd like to hear your explanations for the sense in such occurrences, Daniel.

Daniel: Okay, Bertrand. I'm willing to do my best, but I'll honestly have to confess right from the start that I do *not have all the answers*. I have a lot of questions that I wonder about, but I try to make just as much sense of reality as I can. Let's face it, Bertrand, neither you nor any scientist, philosopher, logician or anyone else will ever have a complete explanation for all of the basic realities we encounter in life and this universe of ours. Numerous unknowns, numerous unknowabilities, and uncountable questions will forever loom before the acute thinkers. Therefore, we must be satisfied with a merely *partial account (partial explanation)* of reality. My reason for dwelling on this a bit is to drive home the point that regardless of how relatively clear and coherent an account I might give of the causes of life, death, pain, sources of life, destinies of life, etc., there will be possibly infinitely many unanswerable questions that could be presented to me. So, I ask of you not to render too harsh or negative a judgment on my explanations for the life, meaning, purpose, rewards, and such pertinent to the soul, and how reincarnation might offer the best bet we have for making sense of the welter of mysteries that assault our intellects. Now, I'll take a stab at answering your questions. So far as animal life is concerned, that's a really tough question for me, but given all the numerous hours I've spent contemplating related issues, I feel pretty confident that animals do not suffer gratuitously or senselessly. Rather, I have hope, and I dwell in the belief that *all* animals with complex enough a nervous system to experience pain and pleasure are creatures that also possess some forms of souls such that their experiences here in this animal life will impact upon their future existence in other realms.

Bertrand: I have a serious – and I believe difficult – question for you, Daniel: do those creatures possess free will? If not, how can they learn or benefit from their animal existence?

Daniel: That's a very good question, Bertrand. My answers are first: They don't possess any appreciable freedom of will. Secondly, I believe that their struggles and their sufferings impact upon their souls (the substratum of their consciousness) such that they then proceed to another life, where they very well might then be granted some free will. Here they will have at least subliminal remembrances of their struggles, pains, and sufferings of the animal life. That way, their animal existence could have had some elements of salvatory impacts in the long run. Even though the

animals could not choose freely to do good or ill in their current state, they would still be imprinting upon their “souls” the memories of their animal sufferings, desires, impulses, etc. Then those memories might remind them of how dangerous it is to yield to animalistic drives and urges. And now to your question about human infants dying, or fetuses dying in the womb, I’d be inclined to claim that we know so little about the nature of the soul, what impacts can be imprinted upon the soul when exposed to infant life or in utero life, etc. that we cannot make a definite judgment on this matter. We know too little about what all might play roles in such a scenario to make any judgments about how or why it is that some souls end up having their human lives terminated (usually, naturally terminated) prematurely. There is no reason to believe that the Divine is in a hurry to get things moving regarding a soul’s growth toward spiritual health and maturity (I speak here of *spiritual* health, not physical health). Maybe going through four months, eight months, or any such length of time in the womb will serve beneficial effects upon some souls. Maybe when souls depart from (say) a human life, they then are placed in a dormant stage in some realms of reality before they enter into the life process of another human development. There are too many total unknowns here to allow us to make pronouncements about what happens, how it happens, or why it happens regarding souls, the rewards of souls, etc. So, I’m satisfied with nothing more than sheer speculations on these matters, although I would surely wish for intelligent and sensible speculations. But my crucial point, Bertrand and Clare, is that some scenario that allows for human beings (maybe also animals) to go through numerous lifetimes to learn lessons and to develop toward spiritual redemption makes vastly more sense – to me, anyway – than does any alternative. Does it make any sense to be thrust into a near-hellish world with our having an evil nature, having no justification for being so punished, having never earned any reward or punishment, and then being in mortal danger of succumbing to the evil nature such as to earn eternal torments in Hell? This, my friends (the latter scenario of “original sin”) seems to me, quite bluntly, grotesque. I’m sorry to categorize your worldview in such a way, Clare, but I do think that such a set of doctrines is *long overdue* for some critical scrutiny and critical analysis.

Clare: You can say what you will, Daniel. You will not dissuade me from my faith in God and His Holy Scriptures. If you and Bertrand consider this to be irrational, so be it. I’ll gladly join with the Apostle Paul in being deemed a fool by the wise of this world.

Daniel: Clare, I certainly don’t consider you to be a fool, and I am not about to lay claim to being one of the “wise of this world”. However, I think that you are misguided – along with well over a billion professing Christians around the world who have not rationally or intelligently analyzed their theology as much as they

could have done, had they somehow gotten the motive to fire questions at their faith. The rationality of much of Judeo-Christian theology is in serious jeopardy, and with the explosive growth of the scientific enterprises, along with rationalism in philosophy, positivism, etc., it's about time that someone submits questions to the religions of the west. At any rate, does Christian theology with its package of "original sin", Christ's supposed death as payment for sins, etc. have a sufficiently solid leg on which to stand? Islam is another matter, and so is Judaism. I'm not taking a jab at either of those religious faiths – at the moment, at least. However, much of Christian doctrine is due for some serious critiques. I know, Clare, that from those who are of like mind to you, this sort of thing that I'm recommending is anathema, and in the middle ages it would almost certainly have gotten the proponent of these ideas placed under the guilt of heresy and burned at the stake. I don't say the things I'm saying lightly, but I believe that religion truly needs to conform to our rational worldview – but of course not scientific materialism. Scientific materialism cannot explain anything about the most important matters of life – such as why we are conscious, how it is possible to be conscious, what makes for proper life values, what is it that is moral versus immoral, what makes a life truly worthwhile, and so on. Science simply cannot weigh in on those questions. Therefore, we must look to religion, philosophy, or some realm of reality that transcends science even to address those questions. Science cannot effectively address them. Nevertheless, I say that our religious faiths should make *rational and logical sense*. If they don't, can we blame people for ignoring or even scorning us?

Bertrand: I largely agree with you, Daniel, but I also believe that religion is too dependent on what has to be accepted on faith to allow it to make many inroads into the scientifically enlightened and educated folk. Philosophy, largely independently of religion, is best suited to come to our aid.

Daniel: That is one viewpoint to hold, Bertrand, but for those individuals like myself, who have very unquestionably encountered the Divine, philosophy just doesn't "cut the mustard" for us. We need answers to genuinely spiritual and religious questions; we need to deal with not only what appears to work best pragmatically, but what the Infinite Divine, Whom we worship, desires that we do, think, and feel. Here's where the "rubber meets the road" – our personal I-Thou encounter with the Glorious Divine. You, Bertrand, have yet to meet that Divine on your "road to Damascus", but I hope that you will be wondrously blessed in the future such as to find that glorious encounter. But it's time for us to wind down the discussions for today. We had some good comments, questions, and discussions here today. Have a nice evening, Clare and Bertrand.

Religion Versus Spirituality

Clare: I did not get to participate so much in today's discussions; after all, I'm an unworldly-wise fool. But I rejoice in Christ, my glorious Savior. Have a nice rewarding evening, Daniel and Bertrand.

Bertrand: Actually, it seems as if Daniel had the floor in most of today's discussions, but then he's essentially our leader and moderator, and we'll tolerate his domination of the scene with some congeniality. At least, we all get a chance to do some critical thinking – which is always good for the old brain; it tends to keep it alive and active. Have a good evening, Clare and Daniel.

If Reincarnation is True, Why Do Most Western Religions Reject It?

Daniel: Good afternoon, Clare and Bertrand. Let me right away suggest that we somewhat further discuss possible foundations for reincarnation versus the concepts of original sin, resurrection, etc. Is reincarnation a reasonable spiritual outlook?

Clare: Hello Daniel and Bertrand. As for myself, the answer is quite simple: Holy Scripture does not confirm any religious views such as reincarnation. Rather, the resurrection is what is claimed to be what we will face – some form of resurrection into some life hereafter. Since scripture says nothing about our having lived before or having the opportunity for future lives in the human realm, I see no reason to believe in anything of that sort. I consider it to be false and pagan theology – which when believed in will lead toward Hell.

Bertrand: Hello Clare and Daniel. I see once more that Clare is highly opposed to rational thinking, and that she believes one must simply accept at face value what she chooses to call “Holy Scripture”. From my perspective, that is foolish; however, I realize that she considers me a senseless reprobate who is blinded by the Devil. At any rate, I want to direct my questions regarding this matter at Daniel rather than Clare. I dismiss Clare’s outlook as incoherent and fundamentally superstitious. However, regarding Daniel’s views, I need to show the fallacy of his reasoning rationally. So, here’s my question: If it is the case that reincarnation is a valid worldview about the human phenomenon, why do all the major Western religions essentially renounce it and refuse to endorse it? Why do not at least some Western religious thinkers endorse it?

Daniel: Bertrand, you pose highly sensible questions, and I wish to answer you in-depth in the sequel. Before answering in much detail, let me inform you (if you don’t already know this) that the very great Western religious thinker and profound Greek philosopher, Plato, believed that the human being here on earth had lived in at least one previous realm. That is, the soul that is born into the human body is a soul that had previously lived, and that the soul grew tired, grew bored, or in some manner or other “fell” from its privileged spiritual domain into the world of physical bodies, crudity, misery, and ignorance. He furthermore seems to have believed that the life of the dedicated philosopher, who largely renounced the sensual aspects of bodily living and devoted one’s life to the life of reason and perfection of spirit, was

the proper kind of life. This life would pave the way for a return of the soul to a realm of the forms, ideas, and spirit, rather than the crudities of the body, pain, hunger, disease, and death. Therefore, Plato, in short, taught (based upon what seem to have been his views when reading his numerous dialogues -- specifically, Plato's *Phaedo*) that we human beings are each a possessor of a soul that preexisted this body of ours and that we had a much more glorious life in that preexistence. Thus, we have in Plato (before the Christian era) a great spiritual thinker who believed in some form of reincarnation. Now, since Plato laid no claim to being a theologian, I'm not aware that he made any explicit pronouncements about how many times a soul might have the possibility of being reborn into the human realm. However, my point is that we have in Plato a form of reincarnation. Now, let me also remind you -- or inform you, in case you didn't know -- that there were in early Christianity, some great spiritual thinkers (theologians) who believed in some form of reincarnation. Rather than being descendants of a fallen set of parents (Adam and Eve), we are reincarnated from previous lives of living in rebellion against God. There is evidence that the 16th-century Christian thinker Giordano Bruno, who was burned at the stake for "heretical" teachings, held to beliefs in reincarnation. The Christian Church was far too powerful to allow itself and its theology to be threatened by viewpoints that seriously deviated from its orthodoxy. Therefore, those thinkers who did believe in some form of reincarnation had to either remain silent about their beliefs or face the threat of the long arm of the Inquisition. The brilliant early Christian theologian, Origen, seemed to have believed that our freedom of will implies reincarnation -- namely, that we are always given the opportunity to *transform our character* and grow into holy beings, even if we have been demonic. For example, see as an important reference: *Reincarnation: The Missing Link in Christianity*, by Elizabeth Clare Prophet. There is much evidence that there was an undercurrent of serious interest in reincarnation throughout much of Christian and Jewish theology, but that the powers that be always seemed to hold sway in opposition to such "heretical" theology. Suffice it to say that it's not quite correct to categorize Christianity as devoid of reincarnation oriented thinking. However, it must be acknowledged that the dominant Western religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, have avoided ever accepting as Orthodox doctrine any belief in reincarnation. Who knows what factors might have played roles in that fact? Now, although it is to be conceded that the dominant Western religions have not endorsed reincarnation, it is very clear that reincarnation is simply pervasive and dominant in most major Eastern religions. A question that I would like to pose is: Can we in the West *learn from* Eastern religions? I am convinced that we can, even as Eastern religions can learn from Western religions (such as the Western views on monotheism, for example). Furthermore, it needs to be conceded that, based on recent research, even though few Christian or Jewish denominations officially accept the doctrine of reincarnation, a considerable percentage of European and

American Christians privately hold to the tenet of reincarnation. Therefore, given how dominant the belief in reincarnation is in the East and how widespread it is privately held to in even the Western religions, it seems reasonable to subscribe to a suggestion that the *majority* of the human population who believe in any form of spiritual outlook or life beyond this one human life, believe in some form of reincarnation. Obviously, this neither makes it right nor wrong. It merely would suggest what the dominant viewpoints are of religious and spiritual people around the world. (Admittedly, given the sparseness of information about such matters around the world, my estimates about the numbers of believers in reincarnation could be considerably off the mark.)

Clare: Daniel, I'm inclined to take issue with your suggestion that belief in reincarnation is the dominant view of modern humans, although if it were, from my perspective, it would only demonstrate how effective the Devil has been at deceiving the world. Since it's not in Scripture, and since I have full faith in Holy Scripture, I refuse to even consider the doctrine as valid. You can call me narrow-minded if you wish, or even scorn me as close-minded. Let me affirm my faith in Scripture – not in some consensus of human opinion.

Bertrand: But Daniel, if the sort of God you believe in exists, wouldn't it be very helpful to humanity if He revealed quite clearly what the nature of the human condition is? Would not He reveal why we are here, what went wrong to bring us to this near-Hell, and how we can get back to a spiritual world of true well-being?

Daniel: That's an excellent question, Bertrand, and my answer is simply and honestly that I don't claim to know the mind of God – not in any full or complete sense. So, I have a lot of questions, including my questions about whether or not lower animals get to be born (ever) into better worlds. Or are their terrible sufferings and violent deaths (in many cases) simply gratuitous “collateral damage” that (somehow) the Divine sees fit as being the best that can be done? To be honest, the latter would terribly perplex me, and it would engender an element of sadness in my soul. Now, I do have faith – but a faith whose certitude of being valid is deficient – that all animals that are brought into this world and then suffer substantially at all will be blessed in the hereafter with better circumstances and opportunities for growth and advancement. But in getting back to your questions, let me say that I believe that every human being who's come into this world was guilty in some previous life (or lives) of very grave evils. Otherwise, I claim that we'd never be condemned to sojourn in such a “near-Hell”, as you referred to it. Given that we are condemned here to ignorance and darkness, why would it be incumbent upon God to provide us clear insights as to why we're here and what must be done to get out of here? We have gravely rebelled against God. We have seriously corrupted

ourselves. Now we must pay the price for our harshly negative “karma” that has resulted from our previous lives’ rebellions. So, it’s not clear to me that perfect love and perfect justice would owe it to us to clearly show us what’s really going on here. We are much like human prisoners who have knowingly violated the humanly devised laws of our respective countries. Thus, since we are in prison (I do not refer to those gravely unfortunate circumstances where people are falsely or unjustly imprisoned, but only those who *knowingly did wrong*), we deserve no pleasant and comfortable treatments or circumstances surrounding our experiences as prisoners. We have forfeited our rights to the treatments that are due to law-abiding citizens. And even as we here in this human realm have been guilty in previous realms of forfeiting our rights for the loving and kind treatments from the Divine Realm, we must suffer in various degrees of pain, anguish, ignorance, and deprivation. Thus, we need to humbly confess the wickedness of our nature – a wickedness that we have brought upon ourselves through our rebellion against Divine Love and Divine Justice. If I am then right, Bertrand, we have no gripe against God for our terrible darkness, ignorance, and limitations in this world of tribulation. Had it not been for our rebellion, this world of darkness, confusion, chaos, mystery, ignorance, apprehensions, pain, and death would never have been our lot. Do you see any weakness or flaw in my explication of my outlook?

Bertrand: Well Daniel, I cannot say that there’s any serious logical flaw; however, your outlook is based upon presuppositions that I see no reason for buying into. First of all, science has not found God, and scientific knowledge in its leaps ahead seems to be able to explain more and more about our world, all the while finding no inkling of evidence that there’s a God of any sort behind the scenes, or in the laws and forces of nature. It all appears very God-free – God-less, if you will.

Daniel: I wish to make two observations in response to your assertions, Bertrand. First of all, science has simply made no real inroads into explaining either what consciousness is or why it should exist. It seems to have reached an utter impasse regarding explaining consciousness – notwithstanding Daniel Dennett’s famously absurd (by my view) book title, *Consciousness Explained*. Therefore, I aver that science has come close enough to the limitations invoked by God in its reckoning with consciousness that it has simply been primarily blocked (by its intrinsic material limitations) from deeper insights into the nature of consciousness. God is beyond human comprehension, and I can see why it might be a serious affront to God for puny human scientists to discover a little bit (or a lot, if you so insist) about the nature of the physical universe, only to arrogantly declare that God was nowhere to be found. It was God working in their very consciousness that enabled them even to comprehend scientific principles and forces. It is in our consciousness that we’re enough like God that we shall never figure ourselves out (that is, our conscious

powers) via the scientific method. Consciousness, my friend, is Spirit, and Spirit is that realm which is most like the Infinite Divine Himself. Secondly, let me ask you how it would even seem plausible – assuming, for the moment, that there is a God – that science with its physical instrumentation should ever find Infinite Divine Spirit that is the Ground of being upon which scientific laws and forces have their foundations?

Bertrand: Well, why wouldn't God wish to show the arrogant jerks who mock claims for His existence that He *does, in fact, exist?* God could cause an entire cyclotron to go up in smoke suddenly, and God would generate a miraculously produced booming voice that would say something like, "Hello, you puny human fools, you who wish to deny I exist. I can show you whenever I please that my power over this entire universe is total. So, be very careful how you mock me. There can be hell to pay, and don't you forget it – goodbye until I choose to shake you up again." Then there'd be silence, and the only evidence for the cyclotron ever having existed there would be a hole in the ground and some singed vegetation around it. Would not this make worldwide headlines of epidemic proportions?

Daniel: Actually, Bertrand, I do think that this might shake up some scientists (and millions of others) right then. But might not some brilliant skeptical scientist come up with the idea that there very well might be an alien civilization that had awesomely advanced technology such that they could spoof humanity, and make a joke of humanity, showing themselves (the advanced civilization) to be like God in comparison to poor fledgling humans? Anyway, why should God even bother with that sort of scenario? What good would it do? How many scientists or others would go through a life-changing spiritual conversion? Furthermore, most of humanity already is convinced that there's a God, but how much good does it do them? How many of them humbly seek God on a daily basis? How many are willing to humbly obey the Divine Will? Your hypothetical scenario would only make God look a lot pettier than I believe Him to be. As I see it, Bertrand, people who are truly willing to acknowledge God and His power over their lives will find that there's a God, and they will begin seriously seeking to serve Him. That is the way I see the matter. There's no need for God to play clever tricks upon humanity to make fools of arrogant atheists or anyone else. God's spirit is always present in your very consciousness, gently beckoning you to humble yourself and listen to the guidance that God is more than happy to give.

Bertrand: As for myself, Daniel, I don't think of myself as being at all rebellious toward God. I somewhat believe (at times, anyway) that there exists some kind of Divine Being, and I'd sort of like to commune with and relate to such an impressive

being if there be such. Are you saying that God is beckoning to me, but I refuse to heed the call? If so, why am I unaware of any such call?

Daniel: I noticed something in what you said about your wish to relate to such an impressive Being as the Divine. Well, maybe ego is a far greater force in your life, Bertrand, than you acknowledge. You're looking for something impressive. God is perfectly humble. God will not cater to your ego. By the very act of egoistic thinking, we block out the beckoning of the humble love of God. So you see, a humble and inviting spirit is what is needed, not someone looking for a God who bluffs His way into the scientists' arena by destroying their very expensively built cyclotron. Humility will bring you close to God; humility will open wide the door to the power of God, but I aver that a proud spirit will block out God and His loving and enlightening inspiration. There you have my answers, Bertrand and Clare. But I think that we've about hashed out these things enough for today. Let's call it a day and plan to come back next time, refreshed and ready to discuss issues about why people of different religions worship God in such different ways. Have a nice evening.

Bertrand: Okay, Daniel. You sort of have the floor in these discussions; so you more than anyone else call the shots. My ego is just big enough that this fact irks me a tad – I'm mainly just kidding. Good evening Clare and Daniel.

Clare: Good evening to both of you. Since you've not delved into scriptural spirituality today, I had relatively little to say, but at least I listened – and I might have learned some things. I'll see you next time.

Why do Many Different Religions Worship God on Different Days of the Week?

Daniel: Good afternoon, Clare and Bertrand. It's nice to be back to our discussions and debates – after having had a considerable hiatus. I hope that both of you are doing well.

Clare: Hello Daniel and Bertrand. I, too, am pleased to be back to discussing some of the most important aspects of our lives – our spiritual and philosophical outlooks, those outlooks that are largely the blueprints for how we conduct our lives and the values that motivate and drive us. As for myself, I think I'm doing rather well.

Bertrand: Good afternoon Clare and Daniel. Even if I'm the most "reprobate" of the three of us, I am nevertheless gratified to have the opportunity to discuss again and debate (yes, I like debates) our various and sundry worldviews. And as Clare so aptly stated, they are the springboards from which our values and life's activities spring. I'm in good form and ready for challenging debates. What's on the table for today, Daniel?

Daniel: Well, the particular issue that I thought we'd address this afternoon is that of why many of the different religions of the world have a weekly day (or days) of worship. But in very many cases, they worship on different days and yet claim that their respective days are sacred and holy to God. Why is this so? Does God sanction these conflicting outlooks? I ask you first, Clare: What is your viewpoint on this matter? Furthermore, I'd like to ask you how you know that your own religion's special weekly day of worship is "sanctified" by God.

Clare: To be honest, Daniel, I regard it as God's prerogative to determine the day of the week which He wants His people to set apart as a day of worship. For the Christian Church, God revealed (way back in New Testament times) that His sanctified day is the first day of the week – the day we now call Sunday.

Bertrand: Clare, I'm sure you're very well aware that the Jewish people worship on the seventh day of the week (our Saturday), and furthermore, this is the same day of the week as was instituted for ancient Israel in the Ten Commandments. How in the world do Christians come up with the first day of the week as the day of worship?

Furthermore, Clare, it should be evident that Jesus, being a Jew as he was, worshipped on the seventh day (what the Jews called the Sabbath). Also, there's no evidence that the early Christian church worshipped on any day other than the Jewish Sabbath and, of course, possibly other Jewish holy days (holidays). Where and how, I ask, did the Christians come up with Sunday worship?

Clare: Yes, Bertrand, I'm fully aware of all that you say about the original day of worship for the Israelites – the seventh day Sabbath. I'm not a *Bible* scholar, nor am I a historian. However, I understand that soon after Jesus' death and resurrection, the Christian Church was guided by God to begin to observe the first day of the week as the weekly day of worship. This was, after all, the day upon which Jesus was resurrected – the first day of the week. Since Jesus gave birth, so to speak, to the Christian Church, it is not unreasonable to claim that the day upon which he was blessed by the Father in Heaven to have conquered death through the resurrection would henceforth be the special weekly day of worship. Is this not perfectly logical – since you like logic so much, Bertrand?

Bertrand: My first thought, Clare is, what scriptural support do you have for any such claims as you make? – note that I'm not so impressed by scripture, but since you are, you need, I would think, scriptural support.

Clare: I emphasize again, Bertrand, that I'm not a scholar of the *Bible*, but I do think that there are scriptural references that can support this outlook. Firstly, let me point out Acts 20:7, where the Christians had gathered on the first day of the week to hear Paul preach. This was in the very early church, and already they were congregating to worship on the first day of the week. This alone is good support for Sunday worship of God. But let me also point out to you I Cor. 16:2, where Paul instructed the churches to set aside money on the first day of every week so that when he arrived, he could get the collections and have them taken by the proper officials to the Christians in Jerusalem. Those two scriptures seem, to me, sufficient to show that there is scriptural support for worshipping and assembling with other Christians for worship on the first day of the week. Furthermore, has not the Christian Church, as far back as recorded history goes, been worshipping on the first day of the week, rather than on the seventh day?

Bertrand: Well Clare, you show yourself to have some expertise with scriptural knowledge; however, there are churches (Christians) who vehemently argue that those two scriptures you quoted are unrelated to holding church services on the first day of the week – for example, take the Seventh Day Adventists. Since I, quite frankly, don't take the scriptures very seriously, I'm not prepared to do any scholarly investigation into the pros and cons regarding when the “biblically

sanctioned” day of worship is. However, from a logical perspective, it seems a bit strange to me that given Jesus’ own worship on the Jewish Sabbath, and given the fact that there’s no recorded scripture at all about any changes in the day of worship, the Christian church should suddenly be worshipping on a different day of the week than the day the founder of that religion had as his day of worship. I think that Sunday worship is very likely not at all *Bible*-based, but that it was initiated by Roman influence on the Christian Church – especially when Constantine, the Roman Emperor, was converted to Christianity. Sun worship was very prominent among Romans, and the first day of the week is named “Sun-day” (day of the sun), which suggests to me that worshipping on Sunday was initiated under Roman influence, and was an adoption of Roman custom into the amalgamation of Christianity with pagan (Roman) practices. What I can see as a (“disinterested”) secularist (largely a secularist, that is), it looks almost too rational to deny that most Christian days of worship (“holy days” or holidays) definitely have their origins in pagan (Roman) polytheism. Therefore, Clare, I regard your two scriptural references as extremely limp and insufficient to support a genuinely Christian basis for Sunday worship, as opposed to Saturday, for the Christian Sabbath. Of course, to my way of thinking, all religion is pretty much full of confusion and convergences of different theologies and eruptions of new practices. Frankly, I’m not at all impressed by religion. Science, though, is an oasis from mass confusion, and in science, one finds *genuine evidence* for the theories and beliefs to which scientists almost universally subscribe. Science converges into greater and greater unanimity, whereas religion diverges into increasingly great varieties of splits, schisms, factions, denominations, and almost infinite divisions. What should that tell you? – and I wish to direct that question at both you Clare and at Daniel.

Clare: Bertrand, you are welcome to your Godless skepticism. I see no reason to adopt your rejection of Christian theology, including Sunday worship, Christmas, Easter, etc. You are a hopeless skeptic, and you reject revelation from God, because you don’t even believe in God. I hang on to my devout faith, and if you’d rather choose science and Hell than God’s true religion and Heaven, I say have at it, Bertrand.

Bertrand: Now, now, Clare. You wish to banish me to your idea of damnation. Surely your God would not operate a universe by the rigorous laws of logic, but then condemn me to be singed in Hell for eternity just because I have the “audacity” to invoke His very laws of logic in my efforts to cope with the realities He created via His logical laws. I’ll tell you, Clare, although I am a bit of a skeptic, I have enough faith in ultimate justice to trust that no being worth worshipping would ever condemn me to eternal torments for applying to my powers of reason. I apply the very rules of thought and rules of operations of His universe of which He is the

omniscient author. Faithless though you think I am, I have enough faith to trust that I'm never penalized and prosecuted for rational thinking and for asking rational questions.

Clare: Actually, Bertrand, your asking "rational questions" springs from your rebellion toward God. It's certainly not the case that God wants you to be irrational; however, He does want an obedient spirit, which is what you don't have. Therefore, you ask questions that are of a nature such that the "rational" answer, from your perspective, rejects God.

Daniel: As for myself, Bertrand, I'd wish to grant Clare's point as having some real validity. After all, questions can be so posed that, depending on the way they are asked, the rational answer might appear to lead to one conclusion, but that if asked just a bit differently would lead to the opposite conclusion. And quite frankly, I'm not buying into the philosopher-logician Graham Priest's "dialetheism", such that a statement and its negation can both be true. You and Clare might not have heard of this idea, but there are claims afloat (of which Priest is the chief apostle) to the effect that contradictions (yes, *real contradictions*) can be true. But that's off our topic, so let me get to our current discussion, which has to do with the question of whether or not rational thinking results in unbelief toward the very idea of God. I say that the answer is no, but that questions can be cleverly posed to suggest answers that would reject belief in God. We need, thus, to be very careful with our language construction. However, I want to address a critical question that a little while back Bertrand posed to both Clare and me: What does it suggest about religion and religious faith that science tends toward greater and greater consensus, whereas religion tends toward splits, schisms, divisions, conflicting sects, and so on. I acknowledge that Bertrand is right and that this is the way it truly goes. I don't see that Clare's response to this was all so helpful, even if there might be some real truth in what she said. My explanation for this state of affairs is that, as we all understand, science deals *only* with those things that can be detected and (to some degree) measured using sense data. That is, we can see a rock, and we can see how heavy the rock is, compared to some other object. We can do this by creating a balance scale that lets us put the rock on one side of the scale and the other object (like a small bag of beans) on the other side of the scale. Then by measuring the respective distances to the point of the fulcrum, we can tell which object (the rock or the bag of beans) weighs more. This is, of course, an extremely crude and elementary example; however, the point is quite clear: we're dealing with physical objects that we can see and feel. Now, in modern times, we have detectors in conjunction with particle accelerators and so on that determine whether or not given particles of hypothesized mass, charge, orientation, etc. will be shown to exist. Yet, the machines that measure the particles are physical, and we can see them. Logical

and mathematical theory tells us what the machines will show under given conditions, and we can predict what to expect the machine to show if a given anticipated particle does not show up, versus what to expect if it does show up. I apologize for such a technical exposition since none of us here is a physicist; however, the point is critical: Science deals with what can be seen and measured. Thus, my point is, Bertrand, that while science deals only with physical objects and physically measurable energies, religion and spirituality deal with the mind, the spirit, consciousness, and things that pertain to morals, right and wrong, good and evil. The latter set of things can *never be measured* by any physical or tangible device. Therefore, we are constrained by our powers of reason to invoke ideas and beliefs about mind and spirit, whenever we deal with spiritual and moral issues, which are utterly outside of and beyond those things that can be detected and measured with sense data and detectors that are tangible to us. By sheerly logical reasoning, we can easily see that the latter sets of issues (those that are amenable to physical detection) are capable of being manipulated to have all who wish to measure and detect the objects to come to a consensus about what to expect. However, the former sorts of issues (the spiritual and moral issues) remain *utterly beyond* physical measurement and empirical proof. Therefore, Bertrand, it is clear that when we deal with issues pertaining to consciousness (which we cannot detect by physical means), mind, and spirit, we are dealing with infinitely more complex issues than those that the scientists (who measure only physical objects, entities, and forces) have to reckon with. The greater the complexity of what we study and discuss the greater room for misunderstanding, disagreement, and confusion. Furthermore, not only is complexity in mental/spiritual matters infinitely greater, but they can never be settled to anyone's satisfaction using physically detectable arbitration. Is it not only rational, Bertrand, to conclude that biology is more subject to confusion than physics, psychology more subject to confusion than biology, as well as morals and matters about "eternal verities" subject to greater confusion than psychology? If so, as we proceed from physics to biology to psychology and then to spirituality and morals, we progressively move into the ever greater mystery and complexity – with the last category diverging into nearly infinite mystery. This, then, is why I aver that religion and spirituality will forever, in the human realm, be much more subject to diversity, confusion, and error than is the case with the physical sciences. While religion, spirituality, and morals are vastly more important and more interesting than physical sciences, the former are also pretty much infinitely more complex and subject to confusion than the latter.

Bertrand: I grant you, Daniel, that matters of psychology are much more complex (and yes, in some sense, much more interesting) than the physical sciences. However, I still say that you need to do some fancy footwork to deal credibly with any explanation for why different religions declare that their God demands of them

that they worship on specified days of the week (or days of the year, as the case may be). How is it that the same God would direct the Jews to keep the seventh day holy as God's very Sabbath Day of rest, whereas He directs the Christians to play football on the seventh day, and then spend some of the first day of the week worshipping God? Then He even goes further and instructs his faithful Muslims to worship on the sixth day of the week? Is this not confusion – chaos, indeed? How could a rational God who can direct a universe as complex and rationally ordered as ours engage in such contradictory directions of his creation?

Daniel: Bertrand, you ask a very sensible question, and it is one that, doubtless, many other people have asked with a great sense of disdain for religion and its confusions. As for myself – and I confess to not belong to any particular religion – this can make perfectly good sense, *if* we understand that the Divine Realm is *only partially comprehended* by humanity. And this is credible if it is the case that we, at best, grope in near darkness looking for splashes of light to help us find our way through the thickets of mystery and uncertainty.

Bertrand: But Daniel, how can a rational being direct people to be utterly persuaded that all of humanity ought to worship on their Holy Day of worship when the same God directs another group of people to be convinced that they (and all humanity) must worship on a different day? Is this God terribly confused? Do the people simply choose their own days of worship without divine guidance? What is going on? This begs for an explanation.

Daniel: I acknowledge, Bertrand, that this can look very confusing to human beings, especially when they're so convinced that they know the only precise path to God. However, as I understand the matter, this entire world is a realm that is predominantly in rebellion against God. Now, God has not given up on these billions of struggling and suffering souls, but wills to do all that can be done to rescue them from their deadly rebellion. In the process of working with people, God precisely knows what each culture, each ethnicity, and each region of the world in each era needs to help the greatest number of souls to move toward surrender to God. Therefore, Bertrand and Clare, the Divine gloriously works in intricate and (seemingly devious) ways to encourage the maximum number of souls toward surrender to His perfect, loving, and glorious will. In this procedure, it is necessary to appeal to as many people as is possible. Now, appealing to them includes encouraging and inspiring them to worship their Creator in ways and at times that will be most conducive to generating spiritual devotion and surrender to the Divine. Thus, the most propitious path for one civilization and a given time frame might be to worship on a certain day of the week. However, in another era, or another culture, it might be most propitious and most conducive to spiritual success to encourage

and inspire the people to select an alternative day of worship. The Divine (God, we can call that Reality) wants all His creatures to always be in worshipful frames of mind. He wants us all to be highly cognizant not only of his presence but to also be humbly and appreciatively striving to function in perfect harmony with the wondrous Divine perfection. We are finite; we are fallible; however, we can learn how to grow closer to perfect union with Divine Love, Divine Harmony. God knows (eternally) precisely what we need to encourage us to come into union with His infinite love and peace. In the process of pursuing this agenda, the Divine will work in infinitely complex ways to encourage the maximum number of souls (those who have departed from the “straight and narrow” path of humble obedience) to move and grow toward full surrender to Divine Love and goodness. This, then, Bertrand and Clare, is, as I see it, precisely why God inspires some of his creation to select a certain day of worship, but to inspire (at other times or other locations) other people to worship on alternate days. My own belief is that the particular day of worship does not matter to God since His objective is to have all creatures worship Him every day – in all times and all seasons.

Bertrand: I’m still not satisfied, Daniel. Will your God lie to His people and tell them that they must worship on a given day and that this is the day of worship for all future generations at all times? Will He then be telling another group of people that they must for all generations worship on some alternate day and that their souls are in danger of damnation for failing to worship on that day? This seems, to me, gravely disingenuous and unworthy of the Author of Truth and perfection. Are you saying, Daniel, that your God is a liar and a deceiver?

Daniel: Bertrand, God does not lie, but in His inspiration of His imperfect creatures, He must reckon with the fact that they need to believe that they know what is right – not only right for them but right for all people for all times. In humanity’s great hubris, most are convinced that if God gives them directions to worship Him on a certain day of the week, then this day of the week is a necessary time of worship for all people for all time. This is not right. Now, some spiritual principles and values apply *universally to all beings*. Some of those principles are ones that demand respect for the rights of the other creatures, truthfulness, honesty, and faithfulness to promises made. Others involve a refusal ever deliberately to defraud or mistreat another person. These apply universally the principle of treating every other person with whom one has dealings as one could honestly and justly wish to be treated if in the position of that other person. Another principle is total reliance upon the Divine and a refusal ever knowingly to violate any directive from God. I could enumerate further, but those are some critical examples of eternal verities and values – for all cultures in all times and all realms of reality. However, let me point out that times (days, seasons, years, eras, etc.) are relative to our world, on our particular planet,

and with our particular seasons of the year. Such days, times, and seasons pass into oblivion when this particular planet (our particular world) ceases to be or becomes engulfed in the fires of our sun – in due time, if the astronomers have things properly figured out. Goodness and justice prevail for eternity in all worlds and all realms; however, there are many rules and regulations that God directs His people to keep here that might be quite temporary, that might involve only a certain segment of the world’s population, and that might not be of universal or eternal import. Now, some people will surely try to bring into the picture a “new morality” that says that the teachings of God’s faithful servants of past eras are no longer to be invoked and that much more liberal sexuality is the way to God. This can be a *gravely dangerous* ploy, and if we are not very careful, we can allow our Godless lusts and fleshly weaknesses to encourage us to endorse liberal policies toward sexual mores. This is dangerous territory because humanity is predominantly the same regarding psychological and sexual needs – over time and into different eras. Therefore, although sexuality might not exist at all for many creatures in many realms of reality – indeed where biological organisms and sexual reproduction don’t even exist – we need to be very careful in hoping for loopholes in the sexual constraints and disciplines that God instructed His faithful servants to teach the people almost as far back as human history goes. I have digressed significantly, but I bring out this critical matter in conjunction with Bertrand’s criticisms of a God who would direct His people to worship on different days of the week or at different times of the year. We must never confuse an issue like human sexuality and the psychology about it -- which are factors that change relatively little regarding fundamental needs and obligations throughout human history – with matters like different days of worship. Quite clearly, there is nothing intrinsic to human nature or the human condition that makes worship on the last day of the week particularly more critical to serving the Creator than does worship on the first day of the week. God can, very rationally and coherently, direct peoples from different ethnicities and cultures to worship Him on alternate days of the week. This does no violence to God’s perfect rationality and consistency.

Bertrand: Well, you are not known for having a shortage of words and ideas, Daniel, but I’m prepared to hang onto my skepticism about a God who would direct worship on different days of the week. And then He goes about punishing those who, in their respective culture, didn’t follow the “arbitrary rules”. This seems, to me, unjust.

Daniel: I don’t see why it would be unjust, Bertrand. After all, if I’m a business owner, I can direct one employee to show up at seven in the morning, and for another person in a different position, I can let him or her come in 3 hours later – for the same rate of pay. I need not necessarily even explain to the employee who is required to be there at 7:00 why another employee is allowed to come in at 10:00.

Yet, if the one who's instructed to show up at 7:00 refuses to do so, he can justly be punished with the termination of his or her employment. There is no irrationality or injustice in my handling the matter that way. Even so, if God directs me to believe that I should pray on my knees every day before noon, and if He allows my neighbor to wait to devote time in prayer until evening – or maybe to go entire days without prayer – who am I to judge God with unfairness or inconsistency? My neighbor and I might have very different callings, and God might have very diverse expectations and requirements for our respective lives. This, then, Bertrand and Clare, is how I see the matter. But I think that we've run out of time for today's session. By my understanding, we covered some critical territory today in our discussions. Have a good evening, Clare and Bertrand.

Clare: Thank you, Daniel. I've not had much opportunity to voice my viewpoints in today's session, but I need to be honest in confessing that I'm outnumbered with my very strict and narrow understanding of how the word of God is to be applied and how God wants us to worship and serve Him. Both you and Bertrand approach the matter from a perspective that shows moderately little respect for the infallibility of the Word of God – our Holy *Bible*. Nevertheless, I wish you both a pleasant evening, and my hope is too that you will find your way to Jesus and His saving Grace. Peace.

Bertrand: Clare, your company here is always appreciated, and I'm happy to have someone present who challenges me to constrain my considerable ego. After all, I do have enough respect for Christian humility that I realize that letting my ego run amok is not wise at all. Thank you for your humble presence – even if you do condemn me (at times) to Hell. Have a good evening, Clare and Daniel. Next time, I hope that I can better defend my views against Daniel – he's, after all, not entirely inexpert at logic and critical thinking. Sometimes I even fear that his intellect is a challenge for mine – ha, there goes the old ego. Good evening.

Can Cultural Preferences Determine Days for Worship, and Does God Honor Worship on Those Days?

Daniel: Good afternoon, Clare and Bertrand. I wish this afternoon to discuss some issues that pertain to worshiping God on certain special days of the week – or even, as the case may be, specific special days of the year. I hope that both of you are feeling well today. Let me pose two related questions: 1) Do (or can) cultural values and preferences encourage cultures to set aside a certain day of the week (or certain days of the year) to worship God? 2) Does God honor such “sanctified” days – days set apart by people, with their convictions that God directs them to worship on those special days? Firstly, Clare, I’ll ask you to reply.

Clare: Hello Daniel and Bertrand. As for myself, I believe that cultures can very much determine the days on which they choose to worship *their God*. However, and this is critical, I believe that when we worship the *true God*, *He* will be the one who tells us what day of the week, or which days of the year, we should worship Him. When mere humans choose days of worship that they prefer, well, those are *not honored* by God.

Bertrand: It’s nice to be back, Clare and Daniel. I’ll answer by saying that I have zero confidence in any Divine Being having inspired anyone to worship on any day whatsoever. Therefore, I might be the “odd man out” in this discussion. However, I want to pose a few questions to Clare. First of all, did not ancient (as well as modern) Israel (Judaism) worship the Judeo-Christian God on the seventh day of the week (our Saturday)? Also, does not the modern Christian church (for the most part – with some few exceptions) worship the Judeo-Christian God on the first day of the week (our Sunday)? If God sanctified the seventh day as holy and commanded his people to work on the other six days of the week, pray tell, how can it be that the same God now sanctifies the first day of the week as holy and tells His people that they can work (or play) on the remaining six days of the week? Is this not a gross and terrible inconsistency? How can you rationally defend that, Clare?

Clare: Bertrand, you are always being skeptical and refusing to acknowledge Divine Powers. Cannot God change the times of proper worship for His people however He chooses? Yes, for ancient Israel, the proper day of worship was the last day of the week, and after Christ came, God changed the special weekly day of worship to the

first day of the week. God can justifiably sanctify any day He so chooses. Is this not perfectly rational for an omnipotent and infinite Creator? I can use logic, too, Bertrand.

Bertrand: Well, Clare, if God arbitrarily sets apart certain days of the week as holy, then those days are only holy because He decrees them to be so. There is nothing intrinsic to the day that makes it holy, but it becomes holy whenever God arbitrarily chooses to define it as holy. I guess that one cannot argue logically against that, but it does make God appear whimsical and inconsistent. After all, by that worldview, God arbitrarily decides to contradict himself from time to time – stating at some point that a certain day of the week is to be observed as holy “*forever*” (*for all generations*). He then turns around and *changes* the day of worship such that the “forever” ended up being temporary. This seems, to me, to be pretty close to God contradicting himself. Am I not right in this?

Clare: Well Bertrand, the “forever” that you refer to can be understood as meaning that it will be in place so long as the present conditions prevail. When Earth and times related to it are no longer in existence, “forever” would not apply to such a time – Earth days and nights would not exist anymore. So, the word that the *Bible* used that can be translated as forever would be better understood to mean at all times in which present conditions prevail.

Bertrand: You can try to worm your way out of the Judeo-Christian contradictions, Clare, but they make it appear like God uses the wrong kind of language for his dictation to human writers. If we start interpreting the biblical language to suit what we understand to be rational, then people can pick and choose how they wish to understand scriptures.

Clare: Yes, Bertrand, people do that quite a lot – sometimes to their own destruction. I do not deny that it’s a bit of a delicate matter, and we need Divine inspiration to help us decide how to understand Holy Scripture properly.

Daniel: Clare, now that you and Bertrand have taken your respective arguments to their limits, I want to bring in my outlook on matters of worship on certain days of the week or certain days of the year. My understanding – which has a total disclaimer regarding anything like infallibility – is that Clare is right that God does hold total jurisdiction over which days He wants people to set aside as special days of worship. Furthermore, I declare that God might, indeed, even direct some of His servants to worship equally much on *every* day of the week and *every* day of the year. After all, God knows very well when certain nations, ethnicities, or those in particular religions, as well as certain individuals, can best worship Him. So, God

might, indeed, direct some ethnic groups (or nations or religions) to set apart a certain day of the week (or certain days of the year) to devote especially to worshipping God. Thus, it does not seem particularly problematic that God would have directed Jews to worship on the seventh day, Christians on the first day, Muslims on the sixth day, and some in other religions on various combinations of days. Furthermore, some individuals might come to see that God directs them to worship equally much on every day of the week and every day of the year. This is not more irrational, so far as I can see, than to think that God might direct one person to become a mathematician, another person to become an electrician, another one a hospital nurse, another one an elementary school teacher, etc. Now, if the person who is directed by God to be a mathematician claims that the electrician is not doing God's will, he is presumptuous, even as the nurse who claims that the school teacher is failing to serve God is totally out of place. God has diverse callings for different people.

Bertrand: Daniel, this has some rational aspects to it, but I see red flags flying – at least, so far as my thinking goes. Suppose that in the same society there are Jews and Christians, as well as Muslims. If society sets apart (by its legal system) Sunday as the day of worship, then the Jews who are orthodox enough to refuse to work on Saturday are at a terrible disadvantage. So will be the Muslims who must take off from work on Friday – a major workday for their society. Is this not chaos? Why would God not choose universally for all nations and ethnicities the same days for worshipping Him? Would not that make God appear a lot more rational and reasonable?

Daniel: I can easily see your point, Bertrand, but I don't think that we can impute to God any irrationality because of His directing some groups or religions to worship on diverse days of the week. After all, God can very intelligently direct various individuals to join the respective religions that would enable them to serve God best. Furthermore, different days of worship in the same society could serve as an opportunity for people to learn tolerance of differences. And it's not at all clear that a society where all people (all those believing in God) worshiped on the same day of the week would function any better than a society where there were various religions which observed different days of the week as holy. At any rate, Bertrand, I'm not at all sure that I could remotely suggest how God should set up our world to make the best possible circumstances for people to learn spiritual lessons and to come into harmony with God. Humanity has infinite varieties of talents, inclinations, strengths, weaknesses, predilections, and dispositions. Having various days set aside for special worship of God does not seem problematic to me. It seems quite reasonable and worthy of an infinite intelligence – one who is infinitely rational.

Bertrand: I'm not so sure that I can buy into your analysis, Daniel, but I'm also not sure that I can offer any viable and strong refutation. Therefore, I suggest that God's supposedly directing different religions to worship on different days – especially in light of how quick human beings are to be prejudiced and hateful toward those with different beliefs – makes it appear as if God is specifically trying to set up obstacle courses for humanity. Or then He is sloppy and inconsistent in how He directs His people. From my perspective, Daniel, it does not speak well for faith in religion or God.

Clare: Here's one of the rare times when I'd be inclined to agree with Bertrand on this matter. I believe that God is perfectly consistent, and I believe that He will not at the same time have different groups instructed to worship Him on different days. Therefore, I say that it's not like my concept of God that He would instruct Jews to worship on Saturday and simultaneously instruct Christians to worship on Sunday. This sort of thing looks like confusion to me, and I do not believe that God imposes on humanity confusing guidelines for living.

Daniel: Well, Clare and Bertrand, it appears that on this issue, I've been somewhat outnumbered. Yet, the very same convictions of mine that allow me to believe that God is the author of quite diverse religions – many of them contradicting aspects of other religions – also allow me to conclude that God simultaneously directs different peoples in diverse directions. That is, He directs some people to set aside one special day of the week for worship while simultaneously instructing other people to set aside other days of the week for worship. This merely points to the infinite variability and infinite complexity of the Mind of God. It need not be considered contradictory or inconsistent. But also remember this: In this world, by my understanding, God is dealing with greatly fallen beings, beings who are to very large degrees rebels, opposed to the guidance and love of God. God wants to reach just as many of those rebels with His infinite love as He can, and it can be that through very great variety, He can reach more souls and bring them toward harmony with Him than He could do with a more strictly consistent structure of reality. However, I suggest that we wind this discussion down for the day and get with our respective activities for the remaining time of this day. At our next meeting, I wish to introduce to this discussion a very important and controversial topic: human sexuality, as well as what we can justifiably argue that God has to say about this issue. So, let's prepare for that, and I want to wish you both a pleasant remainder of the evening, Clare and Bertrand. Until next time, I wish that peace may guide your life.

Clare: I actually got to say a good deal in today's discussions. So, I don't feel so much today as if I were an irrelevant piece of furniture. Have a pleasant evening, Daniel and Bertrand.

Bertrand: Clare, never feel as if you're merely a spectator here. Your presence always makes itself felt. You provide a good counterweight to my intense skepticism about organized religion, and sometimes your challenges become a bit formidable. Clare and Daniel, let rationality and its attendant joys infuse your beings until next time.

Chapter Seven

Is Sexual Morality Important?

Does Modern Liberal Christianity Endorse Sexual Licentiousness?

Daniel: Good evening Clare and Bertrand. I'm honored to be back here to discuss with you some very critical spiritual issues. I hope that both of you are doing well. This evening I thought that we'd address issues surrounding human sexual morality and how it relates to religion – especially Christianity – and our spiritual walk with God. I will ask both of you to comment on whether or not modern, generally liberal, Christianity has in recent decades and centuries begun to widely endorse sexual licentiousness – “free sex”, in other words. Clare, let's start with you. What do you say?

Clare: Hello Daniel and Bertrand. I'll be quite honest and concede that, from my perspective, modern Christianity certainly appears – for the most part, barring the ultra-conservative Christians – to have come to an understanding that the strict sexual constraints of both the Old Testament and the early Christian Church are not valid in our modern societies. And I think that this is a good thing, because both sexism and prohibitions on just when sexual behaviors are allowed to be expressed, whom one is allowed to express them with, etc. are needlessly generative of pain, anguish, and even torment. I believe that the modern Christian Church, for the most part, has come to have a much more open and permissive approach to sexuality than was allowed in ancient Israel or the early church. Thus, I believe that it is needlessly constrictive to deny homosexuals the opportunity to express their sexual needs, as well as it is unjustifiably conducive to stresses in young people who are not married to be denied sexual fulfillment.

Bertrand: Good evening Clare and Daniel. As for myself, it should not come as a surprise to you that, on this rare issue, I agree very largely with the liberal stance taken by Clare. I believe that it is patently immoral to refuse to permit people who are attracted to the same sex either sexual satisfaction or to deprive them of the benefits of marriage. Now, this flies powerfully in the face of all the fundamental

teachings of the *Bible* on sexual behaviors. Therefore, being rational, as I try very hard to be, I wonder very much how Clare manages to negotiate her faith in biblical teachings and her serious demands that one must rely on Christianity for one's salvation into this *radical shift* on an issue as fundamental as human sexuality. How can you, Clare, remotely claim to be a faithful Christian and endorse both same-sex relationships and premarital sex? This boggles my mind.

Clare: Well Bertrand, you confess that your views agree largely with mine regarding sexual morality. So, I don't see why it should be shocking to you that I agree with what you find to be reasonable, fair, and just. However, since I know that you're not Christian and since we are quite aware that ancient (early) Christianity certainly did not endorse premarital sex or same-sex relations, I am quite willing to explain to you why I come to the understanding I hold. In our modern world, it makes much more sense to refuse to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation or sexual behaviors between consenting adults who happen not to be legally married than it does to restrict who is going to be allowed to fulfill their sexual needs. Here's how I'll explain it. Given the conditions of ancient Israel, and the rather primitive cultures of the early Christian Church, it was deemed best at that time to place very strict confines on sexual freedoms. One factor in this was that methods of artificial birth control were non-existent. So, free sex (between opposite-sex couples) could lead to numerous and rampantly out-of-control pregnancies and unwanted children. Therefore, it was highly appropriate then to very greatly restrict sexuality between unmarried people. But now, with modern artificial birth control being so widely available, we understand that we no longer need such extreme restraints on sexual freedoms.

Bertrand: Clare, I'm surprised that you don't see how contradictory you are making yourself appear. After all, you have in past sessions of ours vehemently argued that one must rely upon scripture for spiritual guidance and not use reason or logic to figure out how to behave, what to believe, or what the requirements are for salvation. Now that we've gotten to a topic where your sound reason seems to conflict violently with all fundamental scriptural teachings on the matter, you want to start appealing to logic, rationality, and fairness. Is this not inconsistent – even two-faced and insincere? How can you claim that since scripture does not seem to endorse the belief in reincarnation, we must banish that belief from our repertoire of doctrines, while simultaneously claiming that in light of modern science and technology, we can dispense with scriptural teachings on sexual morality and rely instead upon logic and sound reason? This seems to me grossly duplicitous.

Clare: Bertrand, you're trying to cow me into another one of your logical boxes. However, I think that I can defend my honesty and consistency by arguing that the

modern church still clings to the fundamental principles of Christianity, namely that Jesus died on the cross as the Son of God for rescuing hopelessly lost humanity from Hell. But for some of the details on how the church is to operate and how it should teach on more peripheral issues of social and psychological natures, we (at least, the leaders of the Christian Church) are guided by God to endorse certain much more humane values in our church about sexual morals. I don't see that as duplicitous, Bertrand. If you do, then I think that you need some clarification of your powers of reason.

Bertrand: Clare, I refuse to let you off the hook so easily. After all, sexual conduct and values about sexual morality are *very fundamental* issues. They are *emphatically not peripheral!* To try to categorize them like this is disingenuous. The very nature of the family structure, the very critical social and personal psychological issues surrounding sexual conduct are among some of the most critical issues for human society. Therefore, if the ancient Christian church simply got it wrong in regard to sexual morality, and taught, for the most part, strict sexual abstinence until marriage, and even had people executed for homosexuality (historically recorded to have been done in the early Middle Ages, or thereabouts), and now the church is being revealed to have gotten it grossly and mercilessly wrong, how can any rational person have any real faith in Christian theology?

Clare: You are making too great an issue of this, Bertrand. What ultimately really matters is that we have faith in Jesus' wonderful sacrifice for our sins, and it's not so critical to our salvation just how we live, just so long as we humbly confess to being hopeless sinners and realize that we have to throw ourselves upon the mercy of Jesus. I refuse to accept your argument that Christianity should be considered inert and a matter of mere opinion just because the early church did not get every major issue just exactly right. Something like reincarnation is incompatible with the conviction of Christians that Jesus died one time on the cross for our sins of *one lifetime*. But merely allowing modern Christians more sexual freedoms than ancient Christians were granted in no way invalidates Jesus glorious sacrifice for our sins.

Bertrand: To be honest, Clare, for you to claim to have such strong faith in the infallibility and inviolability of the scriptures of the *Bible*, but to turn around and say that both the Old Testament and the New Testament simply teach atrocious falsehoods about sexual morality is a glaring inconsistency of such magnitude that I don't see that you can salvage your cherished Christian religion. It looks to me as if you are logically *forced* to do one of two things: 1) Dispense with your conviction that scripture is infallible; or 2) Refuse to buy into modern, liberal, anything-goes sexuality, thereby affirming the validity of the scripture you seem to wish to worship as God.

Clare: Bertrand, I quite frankly don't see that logic forces me into either of such unacceptable stances.

Bertrand: Well Clare, if scripture is infallible, then the modern church is dead wrong in its sexual licentiousness. If the modern church, however, is not wrong, then scripture is not infallible. This is a very basic proposition and its contrapositive (to introduce a little elementary logical terminology). How can you possibly deny the soundness of my argument – viz. that if scripture is infallible, then scripture cannot have gotten the matter of sexual morality wrong, which then means that the modern church is wrong? After all, surely you do not deny that the New Testament is rife with condemnations of fornication, adultery, and the like, do you?

Clare: Your logic chopping gets old, Bertrand. I'm not exactly sure how to answer you, but I believe that scripture is infallible, and yet I believe that the early Christian Church got some issues right for their era that are no longer fully applicable to our modern era. How's that for a defense?

Bertrand: That won't cut it, Clare. If scripture is merely right (infallible) for the era in which it was composed, then it's emphatically not the *eternally infallible word of God*. You cannot get by with relativizing scripture to be valid merely for its own era, but dead wrong for future eras, and then go on and claim the scripture to be the eternal word of God. Clare, you've simply lost this argument, and I wonder if Daniel sees it my way or your way – or neither one.

Daniel: Well, Bertrand and Clare, I've been sort of quietly amused here observing you two debate so vigorously. Frankly, I'll have to confess, Clare, that the sheer logical force of Bertrand's argument is hard to circumvent. Therefore, I side with his viewpoint on this: If scripture is infallible, then the modern liberal Christian Church is getting it gravely wrong on sexual morality. Now, if the modern church is going gravely astray from Godly teachings, then about this one issue, the infallibility of scripture can be salvaged – I emphasize, regarding *this one issue*. Let me, now, point out where I come from in this matter. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament condemn fornication and homosexuality. As both of you already know, I do *not side* with the claim that biblical scripture or any other humanly written scripture is fully and eternally valid (infallible, in other words). However, not only the *Bible*, but the *Koran*, many Hindu scriptures, and even Buddhist doctrines argue in favor of sexual morality, and a rejection of anything akin to sexual freedom to do as one's passions encourage one to do. Furthermore, mere observation of humanity in action can enable one to see that the results of the modern, sex-crazed, anything-goes morality is generating a bumper-crop of social, psychological, and spiritual problems for the human family structure, childrearing,

the beauty and sanctity of marriage, and the enervation of moral strength and moral fiber, a moral strength apart from which any civilization will find its vitality and efficacy so vitiated as to gravely threaten its long-term survival. Furthermore, my own personal “walk with God” has enabled me to clearly see that I *must* live my life with *very strict sexual morality*. Therefore, then, Clare and Bertrand, while I feel utterly unable to endorse any humanly written scriptures as infallible in their entirety, I do believe that there are many great spiritual books that have been written – some of which are regarded by respective religions as infallible scriptures – whose writings were powerfully inspired by the Divine. I believe that we ought to always take seriously such scriptures, even if in some cases we certainly cannot affirm the infallibility of specific scriptures, because, if for no other reason, some scriptures (even in the same religious book) contradict what other scriptures say. About sexual morality, the critical issue concerning tonight’s discussion is whether or not the modern, liberal, Christian Church endorses sexual licentiousness. Neither one of you denies that basically (for the most part) the answer is that it does do so. Now, a critical question that will, in due course, need to be dealt with is whether or not sexual morality is critical to either society’s functioning or is critical to one’s personal spiritual walk with God. I know for sure that in my personal calling from God (the Divine and Holy One), it has been mandatory that I take sexual morality *very seriously*. Since I do not believe that God is inconsistent or contradictory – ever or in any circumstance – I feel compelled to conclude that the modern Christian Church – by wishing to fit in with what is politically correct – has begun to so gravely water down its moral teachings as to render the viability of the Church as a moral guide little better than a sick joke. No sound-minded person will try to endorse any religion that does not teach moral constraints on human sexuality. Human sexuality is far too pervasive in our lives, far too strong a drive, and the consequences of its functions are far too influential on effective psychological and social vibrancy to allow our spiritual doctrines to become hijacked by liberal, atheistic, and secular political correctness. We must not endorse the powerful modern, Western tendency to regard sex as no more sacred and no more needful of constraint than just what kinds of foods we eat and how much of them we eat. This is an extremely grave threat to modern Western civilization, and if we cannot manage to reindulcate into our civilization greater respect for the importance of sexual constraints and inhibitions, the survival of Western liberal democracies is gravely dubious. Thus, we are in danger of becoming merely defunct relics of the history of failed experiments with liberal democracy. I say that it’s high time that we wake up and begin to stir ourselves morally and spiritually. If we fail to do so, history *will not prove to be kind to us*

Bertrand: Daniel, you sound way too much like a prophet of gloom and doom. I suspect that nothing is going on in our human world that’s of more moment (more

importance) than merely intelligent animals trying to survive in a hostile environment. Thus, I'd very much side with science as our best hopes for making the human species the gleaming jewel of our galaxy and maybe of the entire universe. Religion and spirituality have utterly failed us – even Clare with her desperate efforts to hang onto the viability of a set of human writings as infallibly inspired, even she is managing to awaken to the enlightenment of science and its wonderful tools and methods. So, Daniel, I say that you're on the wrong side of history regarding the matter of sexual morals – you're trying to resurrect that which is irretrievably dead, namely conservative moral values.

Daniel: Well Bertrand, I respect your right to your views, but I will categorically declare them *dead wrong*. Nietzsche famously declared over a century and a half ago that “God is dead”, but my friends, God is very much alive and is powerfully inspiring and guiding who knows how many thousands or millions of human beings toward much greater harmony with His infinite divine love. That love is freely accessible to all humble, disciplined, and moral seekers of truth and reality. Even as Nietzsche proved to be wrong in his proclamations that humanity had outgrown the need for God, your proclamation that moral freedoms and sexual liberalism are the waves of the future is an ill-fated prognostication. It shall fail just as surely as the Godless atheist Nietzsche's proclamations are daily demonstrated to have widely missed the mark. But it's time to bring our session to a close for tonight. Have a nice remainder of the night, Clare and Bertrand, and I wish for us to commence next time with more discussions of human sexuality and how seriously we should take all matters about it. Good evening.

Clare: Goodnight, Daniel and Bertrand. Even though skepticism has me outnumbered in these discussions, I feel that I held my ground pretty well tonight.

Bertrand: Well Clare, you did amazingly well to try to redeem an argument whose logical consistency and soundness simply cannot be made to square with reality, but you gave it a masterful try. Good night Clare and Daniel.

Are there Important Consequences for Sexual “Freedoms”?

Daniel: Hello, Clare and Bertrand. Let us begin today’s discussions with questions about the importance of human sexuality, as well as whether or not the nearly universal trend in religions has been to proscribe sexuality, that is, constrain sexual conduct and live by fairly strict moral discipline. What do you say, Clare? Is human sexuality very important at all – especially regarding *how, when, and where we express* our sexuality?

Clare: Hello, Daniel and Bertrand. I certainly believe that human sexuality is important. After all, it is the “glue” that holds families together, and it is the means by which the human species is perpetuated. So, it must be a very vital part of human conduct.

Daniel: Does that not suggest that subscribing to “free sex” is a recipe for disaster?

Clare: I’m not sure what you mean by “free sex”, Daniel. Can you clarify?

Daniel: I’ll tell you precisely what I mean, Clare. I refer to the conviction (held by most liberals today) that sexual drives are simply a natural aspect of the human being and that it is needless, senseless, and (maybe) immoral to inhibit or restrict in any major way the expressions of those drives. In other words, most liberals (including liberal “Christians” – most “Christians” these days *are liberal*) hold to the view that it is nearly as fundamental to human well-being to experience ongoing sexual gratification as it is to reward oneself with eating enjoyable (and hopefully) nutritious foods. Thus, the argument goes – and Sigmund Freud was the chief apostle of his time for this philosophy – that it is psychologically unhealthy to inhibit or restrain in any substantial way human sexual urges. Therefore, then, it follows that the sound and sensible way of living is to give a great deal of free expression to one’s sexual urges – at least, where and when those don’t do some obvious damage to oneself or others. Now, since sexuality has consequences very far beyond what puny human beings – even with their brilliant (often atheistic) psychologists making sweeping announcements about the sciences of psychology and sociology -- can tell us, or what we can figure out on our own through the social sciences, it is quite critical that we allow spiritual leaders to give us guidance. We should also turn to spiritual writings (including scriptures), and spiritually minded

philosophers to *help guide us* in regard to *proper and Godly sexual values*. If we allow atheistic sciences to give us the guidelines for proper sexual standards, all Hell might break loose regarding the devastating consequences for the gravely destructive sexual “freedoms”. My apologies to you, Clare, for going off a bit on a tangent, but I do feel extremely strong about these matters. Now, Clare, that I’ve defined my meaning of “free sex”, do you agree with me that this is a recipe for disaster, or do you believe that fairly much open and unrestricted sensuality is healthy and conducive to society’s flourishing?

Clare: Daniel, you make it sound like such a grave matter, and I agreed earlier that sex is important, but I also believe that you needlessly cling to inhibitions and restrictions that do more damage than good. So, to answer your question, I do believe that there are dangers for too open and unrestricted sexuality, but I also believe that it is even worse to powerfully inhibit the natural, normal, and healthy human urge to gratify sexual needs.

Daniel: Clare, I want to bring to bear a bit of discussion on the matter of “sexual needs”. What in the world are sexual needs? The needs for food and water are simply straightforward; if we don’t get them, we die. Now admittedly, barring modern means of artificial insemination, without sexuality practiced by *at least some people* (and note that this is *opposite-sex* sexuality), the human species would die out. However, since overpopulation is a much graver threat to modern humanity than underpopulation is, we cannot declare any justification for free sex on account of any need for reproduction of the species. Yet, I fully understand that the supposed sexual needs are of a *personal* nature. So, let me discuss that a bit. There have been (especially in centuries and millennia past) numerous people of great achievement and great fame who were strictly celibate. Even in the secular domains, think of people like Isaac Newton (a virgin for life) who accomplished some of the greatest secular and scientific feats in human history, and like Immanuel Kant (one of the greatest philosophers of all time). And there were many others, whose names either I do not know or whose names do not come to my momentary consciousness, who were brilliant, creative, and highly successful people who never married and lived celibate lives. Thus I say, Clare, that this idea of “sexual needs” might be blown way out of proportion, and it might be a modern sensually obsessed and licentious culture that is foisting off on us the idea that, as a song of the 1970s said, “If you’re not loving [having sex was what was meant], you’re not living”. Could these “values” be producing a bumper crop of perverts, child molesters, broken homes, miserable people, and even a very substantial increase in the suicide rate? Are those alleged “needs” *really needs*? Or are we the dupes of a secular (largely atheistic) value system that those who are obsessed with political correctness have bought into, and that they are telling us that if we’re sexually abstinent (even permanently

abstinent), life is passing us by? Maybe sexual needs are really not so terribly fundamental aspects of human needs for health, happiness, and well-being. Now, don't get me wrong; I freely acknowledge that the human sex drive is *rather strong* for most people, and that most people (especially among the young) have a pretty powerful psychological and physiological craving (or urge) to gratify the sex drive. Furthermore, I believe that nature – through biological evolution – has endowed humanity with a sufficiently strong drive to reproduce to assure that the species continues to flourish and perpetuate itself. Thus, sex is not trivial or frivolous. However, a culture that goes *way off balance* in the direction of sensuality and an obsession with physical sexual gratification can be gravely endangering not only its spiritual viability, but endangering its very survival as an effectively functioning species. We human beings possess the powers to *transcend* nature, or conversely to *descend below* the levels of nature. I'm convinced that the Divine wants us to transcend nature and to become Divine-like in character and Godly love. But for many of us, this might require us to *suppress nature* within ourselves so that we can *rise above* the drives, urges, and powers of the natural order – the physical creature that is entwined with the spirit realms of reality. Bertrand, I should express my apologies for having left you entirely out of today's discussions thus far. What do you have to say on these critical matters?

Bertrand: Well Daniel, I bet that you had no idea that I could keep silent this long in such a discussion as this. At any rate, I did have a sense of amusement at seeing you and Clare get into some tensions over the nature of sexuality and the roles it should play. As for myself, I confess to being largely a skeptic about the human phenomenon. That is, I'm not at all sure what's going on in this world of ours. Are we merely more intelligent animals – *if, indeed*, we can be shown to be more intelligent – or are we (somehow) here for some higher purpose? I refuse to take a stand since I “swear by” logic, and since logic does not seem to me to deliver any clear-cut answers on such matters. However, in this session, as with the immediately preceding one, I take sides more with Clare's stance on sexuality than on yours. Of course, I cannot even remotely buy into her religious beliefs – they seem utterly devoid of rationality and logic to my way of thinking. Yet, her belief that Christianity has made a proper move to liberalize sexuality is one for which I can vouch. I believe that, barring some clear guidance to the contrary, we human beings can best serve each other and perpetuate ourselves by being relaxed and free concerning sexual mores. In other words, we need to go with nature – riding the waves without trying to make (or change) the waves. You see, Daniel and Clare, I value rational thought above all else. If there is one fundamental property that separates us from the “lower” animals, it is surely in our powers of rational thought (our use of logical reasoning – with this power automatically giving rise to language, which is another beautiful artifact of human ingenuity). Aristotle pretty

much understood this, and he called the human being the “rational animal”. Surely, if there is any God, He must be supremely rational – not that I would aver that He’s not also (as, I suppose, facetiously pronounced by the mathematician, Paul Erdos) the “Supreme Fascist”, although Erdos meant that affectionately, by my understanding. Suffice it to say that I powerfully value logic and its attendant rational applications. Summarizing my views on sexuality, I say, “Go with the flow”.

Daniel: Well Bertrand, that’s precisely what the secular world (including the atheists among us) are telling us. They say, go with nature, do what comes naturally, do what is easy. But you know, Clare and Bertrand, this is precisely the sort of outlook that opens doorways to the Hitlers, Stalins, and the Pol Pots of our world, those who do not want a Higher Power dictating to them the values to which they should subscribe. But we’ve run out of time for today’s discussions. Thank you both, and have a nice remainder of the evening.

Clare: Goodnight, Daniel and Bertrand. I’m very leery of being as much on the same side as Bertrand as seems to be the case in this matter we’ve been discussing. It scares me that a Godless skeptic would be on my side.

Bertrand: Clare, maybe it’s precisely a matter where you’re utilizing your intellect rather than your superstitious upbringing that leads you to the sound and rational judgments I make. At any rate, we both know that Daniel is hung up on his mysticism thing. So, he steers clear of sexuality and its taints of the human “spirit” – my apologies to you, Daniel, for my jab at you. Have a good evening Clare and Daniel. Let’s hope I’ll have more chances to apply my powers of rational thought – truly my forte.

Can a Person be in Harmony with God and have Total Sexual “Freedom”?

Daniel: Good morning, Clare and Bertrand. We’re back to discuss spiritual and moral issues. I hope that both of you are doing well. The question I wish to deal with today is whether or not it’s possible to be totally “free” sexually (by that I mean, feeling no need to restrict or inhibit any fundamental sexual urges) and to still be right with God – in harmony with God. Now, I realize that Bertrand is a bit of a skeptic in our midst, which means that the very idea of having harmony with God is a highly dubious issue. But I want first to ask you, Clare, what your views are. After all, you do believe that being “right with God” is very important.

Clare: I’ll try to answer this rather difficult question the best I can, Daniel. First of all, I believe that if we’ve accepted Jesus as our Savior, we will wish to live by Jesus’ values – all the while knowing that we will fall far short of doing that perfectly well. So the question for me is: What would Jesus wish that I (or anyone else) do concerning sexual behaviors. As we well know, in Old Testament times and the early Christian Church, sexuality was greatly restricted and inhibited. Therefore, premarital sex, same-sex relationships, etc. were prohibited. I do think that Jesus affirmed their sexual restrictions back then, given the place where society was at that time. But now that we’re in a much more modern era with much sharper sensibilities about people’s natural needs and our understanding of the need for equality and fairness, Jesus would now affirm a more liberal and inclusive approach to sexuality. I do not, however, wish to endorse the expressions of *all* sexual urges. Rather, we must always live our lives with some elements of restraint, self-control, and self-denial. Yet, I also believe that we should now understand human sexuality from a more modern and liberal perspective. This means that people who are attracted to the same sex do not have to be deprived of all sexual satisfaction, and young people who wish (for financial or other reasons) to delay marriage until later in life, do not need to be deprived of romance and sex.

Daniel: Well Clare, it looks as if you’re saying that in modern times, we can be free to dispense with scriptural teachings about sexuality. Yet, you claim that all scripture is infallible. Bertrand has in past discussions pointed out to you the grave inconsistencies in this outlook, and I wonder how an intelligent and educated person can subscribe to such an inconsistent worldview. If scripture cannot be trusted to guide us in matters of sexuality, then how can we hope that it is trustworthy in other matters pertinent to our salvation? I wish for you to take this question seriously,

because it is a case where glaring inconsistencies crop up. What is your defense for such a rather radical inconsistency?

Clare: Daniel, you try to box me into a corner with logic, and I do not deny that this seeming inconsistency calls for explanation, but I feel confident that the matter is not at all fatal to my spiritual belief system. Here's how I wish to answer the matter: Scripture is fully reliable regarding matters necessary for our salvation – such as our need to rely upon Jesus' death and resurrection for the forgiveness of our sins and our salvation. However, it is different in matters of relatively minor details, like how people should be ordained to serve in the Christian ministry, who can serve as a minister, dress codes, and matters about human sexual function, like birth control, whom to have sex with, and such matters. These are all matters that are peripheral to our salvation, and they do not determine who can be saved or who is lost. On the fundamental issues, like the *Bible* being the *Word of God*, as well as how human beings can be spiritually saved, here we must fully rely on God's Word and its teachings. Whether or not to sacrifice animals for the forgiveness of sins, whether to worship on Sunday or Saturday or some other day, on such matters we realize that the *Bible* is not to be used literally in every detail for how we should live. Is this not a highly rational answer?

Daniel: Actually Clare, I believe that your inconsistencies cannot be so easily disposed of. First of all, if the *Bible* is considered to be infallible, then one would think that it should be written so that it clearly tells what is to be done versus what is not to be done for all of humanity and for all times. Secondly, your outlook allows us to simply pick and choose from the *Bible* whatever we wish to reject as not fundamental to salvation. (Now, I'm not necessarily criticizing someone for picking out some scriptures as more critical than others, or even for rejecting certain scriptures, *if* that person sees the *Bible* as "inspired" by God, but not precisely dictated by God to be an infallible "Word of God". That is the approach I take. However, for those like you who claim for the *Bible* infallibility and inerrancy, there is a problem with simply rejecting some biblical teachings.) But thirdly, and more critically, I want to point out that human sexuality, notwithstanding modern liberal approaches, is *emphatically not* a peripheral issue. It is one of the most important human issues for how societies and the family should be conducted. Sexuality involves reproduction, family structure, some of the most important relations among human beings, childrearing, social values, legal matters, responsibilities for child care, who should be allowed to adopt children, personal value systems, and numerous other concerns with human behavior. To try to bypass human sexuality as a peripheral issue is disingenuous. Human sexuality is a powerful drive, and its control or lack of control and gratification are among some of the most critical societal concerns. Therefore, I say again that if the *Bible* teachings on human

sexuality get it totally wrong, such a supposed “Word of God” is little better than a joke. Merely living in modern times, with much scientific knowledge, does not in any way vitiate or disannul the extreme importance of how to properly handle the powerful and explosive force of sexuality. We need to acknowledge this, and making light of sexual behaviors is suggestive of a civilization that is drifting into its dying days. Furthermore, we need to realize that God Himself (the Creator) is the author of the human body and soul; so God knows precisely (for eternity) what works for human behaviors and what does not work. Sex is a fundamental characteristic of the human species, and its primary properties do not substantially evolve over the passage of civilizations – at least not, if barring very long-term evolutionary changes. So, we need to listen to what God tells us about human sexuality, not what the liberal, largely atheistic scientific and secular cultures tell us is most workable. Now, let me be sure to point out that I have very high respect for science, and I regard the revelations of true science to be of critical importance; however, it’s also critical that we understand that sociology and psychology are, at best, quasi-sciences. They operate in the interface between matter (the human body in this case) and mind (or spirit, or the soul). Science tells us nothing whatsoever about what consciousness or mind is, and it is utterly silent on how it’s even possible for mind to erupt from or interact with matter. Therefore, it becomes problematic to call psychology a science, because science can only measure behaviors (physical actions), brain states, etc. Science cannot measure, or in any way detect, mental or emotional activities. It cannot even tell us whether or not they exist. We know that we have emotions and thoughts – not because science tells us that (it is infinitely mute on the issue), but because we *directly (consciously, mentally) experience them*. Furthermore, as is inevitable, science can tell us nothing about what is moral or immoral, right or wrong, how we should behave, or how we should feel. Therefore, I aver to you that it is *gravely dangerous* to entrust our moral and spiritual lives to the “scientific theories” of the social “sciences”. I’m putting “scientific” and “sciences” in quotes because the social “sciences” are truly not better than quasi-sciences. That point I want to drive home – with a vengeance! But let me allow you, Clare, to reply to my claim that human sexuality is not a merely peripheral concern. How do you defend your claim that it is “peripheral”?

Clare: Well Daniel, I think that you overrate the importance of sex, and I think that it’s less critical to society’s functions than you claim it to be. But so many things have changed in human knowledge with the advent of the sciences that we now have much more understanding than did biblical cultures of what the nature of human societal structures should be. Therefore, I think that the biblical teachings on sexuality need modification in modern times – after all, the sciences help to show us what works better.

Daniel: I want to point out two things, Clare. Firstly, it's not at all clear that the sciences have revealed anything about the human being and its functions that would fundamentally bear upon the question of whether or not same-sex relationships should be prohibited or should be allowed. Science simply has made no inroads into this issue. Also, whether premarital sex is in the best interests of society is a matter about which science really cannot tell us much. To make a scientifically valid comparison between restrictions on premarital sex and the liberal values of "free" sex, one would need to establish two separate, very large communities (like nations). In this experiment, one nation allowed "free" sex and the other nation strictly disciplined its citizens to restrict them to sex in marriage only. Then one would need to see what the positives and negatives were for each society. This, of course, cannot be pragmatically done; therefore, scientific input on sexual liberalism versus sexual restrictions is extremely limited and is largely puerile. Thus, to invoke science as a justification for sexual liberalism is inert – it fails to possess potency of meaning. But secondly, I wanted to point out another one of your inconsistencies. You claim to rely a great deal on science to (allegedly) tell us what is sexually and morally best for us, but you, if I'm not mistaken, refuse to endorse one of the most fundamental of all scientific theories – evolutionary biology. This, to me, Clare, seems grossly duplicitous. How do you justify placing your (ill-conceived) bets on sociology and psychology regarding sexuality, and then deny that a very fundamental theory about how human beings got to be here and how nature works in human biology is a valid theory?

Clare: Well, well, Daniel. You're always trying to break down my theology with your "logic boxes" and trying to point out my supposed inconsistencies. As for myself, human biological evolution is not true science, and therefore I do not see any need to acknowledge that human beings evolved from lower animals into the human species. The theory of evolution blatantly contradicts the Word of God where it is clearly stated that God created Adam, as the first man, and then went on and created Eve, as the first woman. Thus, I am compelled to acknowledge that God's Word on this matter is the truth and that humanly devised biological sciences are going off on a limb when they claim that humans evolved from lower creatures. This is critical; it is fundamental to all biblical theology about the Fall of humanity and the need for Jesus' redeeming death on the cross. With the idea of biological evolution resulting in the human species – over millions of years – the very issue of the Fall of Adam and Eve and the need for human redemption are no better than a joke. That is why I am compelled to reject evolutionary theory.

Daniel: Let me see if I understand you correctly, Clare. You reject all of the evidence for biological evolution because of the scriptural teachings about a (possibly) allegorical and mythical story of Adam and Eve, but then you want to

turn right around and accept very poorly documented concepts on human society and human personality arising from the quasi-sciences of sociology and psychology. If I hear you right, you're not rejecting biological evolution by scientific evidence (or the lack thereof), but on the authority of scripture. But when we get to human sexuality, you make a flip-flop, and you say that biblical authority on human sexual morality must be dispensed with because of supposedly new "scientific" information on human sexuality. This is an ill-conceived "grab-bag" of religious ideas that, so far as I can see, has no logical consistency and has no rational or logical justification. I'm sorry if that seems harsh, Clare, but your religious worldview is full of inconsistencies and irrationalities. That much I see as not reasonably deniable. However, let me allow Bertrand an opportunity to contribute his two cents' worth before we wind down for the day. So, what do you have to say about these issues that Clare and I have been debating all morning long, Bertrand?

Bertrand: Thanks, Daniel, for finally allowing me to voice my rational insights in this matter. Since I'm the skeptic (the odd man out) in this discussion, let me say that I agree with you that Clare is highly inconsistent in her theology – a truly rational mind cannot hold (concurrently) such a set of contradictory, or at least inconsistent, ideas as all being true. However, I also will have to tell you that I disagree with your views on sexuality; first of all, you seem to claim that your views of sexual morality come from God, and furthermore, it seems as if this validation of your worldview by your supposed God is confirmed by your personal mystical experiences. How could I (or any other rational person) wish to endorse strict sexual prohibitions based upon one man's mystical insights? I think that Clare is right in wishing to endorse the insights of modern psychologists (like Sigmund Freud) and the insights of sociological data that favor a freer sexual outlook than is possible with traditional morality. Thus, I disagree with both you and Clare on some issues, and I agree with both of you on other issues – with the specific issues where I agree or disagree being *different ones* in each of your cases.

Daniel: Bertrand, you make considerable sense; however, I want both you and Clare to understand that my strict moral stance on human sexuality (whereby I condemn all same-sex relationships, as well as *all* sexual behaviors outside of marriage – even having my doubts that a person greatly devoted to God could ever divorce and remarry, while the original partner still lives) is based not at all exclusively upon my personal encounters with the Divine (persuasive though they are). Rather, I look also to biblical teachings on morality, teachings of the *Koran*, Buddhist teachings (for monks and nuns), as well as some Hindu teachings, and the general thrust of the fact that highly spiritual people throughout human recorded history have *tended to be very strict on sexuality*. Mystics, monks, nuns, and other highly spiritual people have usually been either celibate completely, or in very restricted marital sexuality.

Thus, I declare that my mystical insights (my intuitions from the Divine) are combined with and supported by most of the great spiritual teachers throughout recorded human history. Even though Muhammad was married (eventually even had more than one wife), Islam has always been very strict on most aspects of sexual behaviors. Jesus, quite evidently, was never married, presumably remaining celibate until death, and the Apostle Paul (at least during his time in the Christian Church) was unmarried (presumably strictly celibate). The Catholic Church requires priests who serve in the ministry, monks, and nuns to all be celibate, and there is a strong thread of sexual discipline and even asceticism running through the highly spiritual and religious traditions of history. Therefore, Bertrand, I do not think that I'm (spiritually) out of place in having strict sexual morality for my standard of sexual conduct. Of course, I'm very well aware that in the modern, liberal, anything-goes culture, I'm very far outside the mainstream, and I'm a great oddity. But do you know what I do with that? I take that as a compliment. After all, to be greatly devoted to God in human culture is to *be very far out of the mainstream necessarily*. Most people do not want God directing their lives, and most of them *will not have* God guiding their lives. So, if I'm out of the mainstream, more power to me – praise and glory be to God for helping me to learn obedience to so great a degree that few individuals ever advance that far spiritually.

Bertrand: At the least, Daniel, one cannot accuse you of having a poor opinion of your spirituality. As for me, being a skeptic, mainly devoted to scientific philosophies, I regard your supposed spirituality as rather childish, but if it makes you happy, why should anyone care?

Daniel: Let me make it clear to you – and to Clare – that I do not think proudly of any spiritual devotions of mine (doing so would vitiate any true spirituality). I'm merely thankful to God in a humble fashion for having helped me get rescued from licentiousness, vanity, secularism, and the awesome powers of the human ego upon our lives. So far as my faith in God being childish is concerned, your accusations don't carry much weight for me. Rather, I joyfully serve God and acknowledge that the vast majority of humanity will consider me a hopeless fool. But a good relationship with God and true peace and harmony with God, all make me, in the face of such disdain, quite undaunted. Our time for today, though, is about up. All of us got to speak at least a little, and I guess that in today's session, I did the lion's share of pontificating – although I hope that I was not deemed by my listeners to be unduly pontifical. Let me wish both of you a good rest of the day -- rough seas may come at times, but if the Divine Will guides our ship, we are assured that seas will never be rougher than what we can negotiate. Peace to you.

Bertrand: Well, I did manage to get in a few words toward the end of our session, but given how much insight I have about many important issues, it seems a shame that I was not granted more time on the floor. Clare and Daniel, have a good day.

Clare: Oh well, Bertrand, your ego knows no boundaries, does it? Even though your ego might bump into a lot of things, my wish is for you (and Daniel) to have a nice rest of the day.

If Jesus Pays for All Our Sins, Why is Good Spiritual Character Essential?

Daniel: Well, we've had quite a hiatus from our discussions now, and tonight I wish to resume our discussions of morality and why morality is important. Since Bertrand is essentially a skeptic about spiritual issues, I suppose that he might be left out a lot tonight. After all, these discussions are going to center around obedience to God, and especially about sexual morality. Clare, since Bertrand does not have faith in there being a God who would be concerned with morality, let me ask you why it is essential that we live according to God's divine moral laws? In other words, if Jesus died for our sins, and thus all our sins are summarily forgiven, why should good moral character even be an issue in our lives?

Clare: Well Daniel, our sins are forgiven if Jesus Christ is guiding our lives, but I believe that we must at least strive to live by God's rules to be a child of God. However, I think that morality is not so much a critical issue as some would have us believe – particularly those who believe that salvation is works-based. It is good to live by properly strict moral values, but if we do slip up and sin, it's not fatal to our spiritual well-being.

Daniel: But Clare, is it not your conviction that once we accept Jesus into our lives, all of our sins are always and forever forgiven? If this is so, then it appears that we have salvation whether we are moral and righteous or immoral and wicked. Either way, don't we have Jesus' sacrifice atoning for all of our sins? Why, then, is it at all necessary to overcome our sins?

Clare: Well Daniel, if we are truly a child of Jesus, then we will wish to become righteous even as Jesus is righteous. So, we will strive to overcome sins.

Daniel: Your answers are filled with the outcome that even if you ought to strive to be righteous, if you fail to do so, then by having accepted Jesus as your Savior, your sins are automatically all forgiven. You cannot have it both ways. That is, if good character is necessary for salvation, then if you do not develop good character, you simply don't have salvation. If, however, good character is not a requirement for salvation, then regardless of how sinful your life is, you can nevertheless have salvation – given the fact that your sins are forgiven. Which way is it? Are good

deeds and good character necessary for salvation, or is it all a matter of having faith in Jesus?

Clare: I refuse to say, Daniel, that good character is what brings one salvation. However, I claim that if one has accepted Jesus as Savior, fully, then one will be striving to be righteous, even if one messes up a lot and commits many sins. After all, it is your faith in the sacrifice of Jesus that is your saving grace – and not your good works. Salvation is about allowing the purifying blood of Jesus to atone for your sins and remove their curse from you.

Bertrand: Well Clare, let me point out an absurdity in what you say. If God is perfect and holy, then why in the world would he not wish for His creatures to be holy? What sense does it make that God would bless sinners and evil doers with eternal felicity, and then turn around and cast into Hell a person with much better character? In other words, the former (the sinner) would happen to be the one who had accepted Jesus, but the person with much better character happened to be of some other religion, and thus God would severely punish the latter while blessing the former. This seems grossly unfair and utterly irrational, because the rank evil-doer is blessed based merely upon professing a certain creed, whereas the much more righteous person is punished for failing to have the right beliefs or to have failed to profess just the right creed. This would seem to render God's fairness, justice, and goodness seriously questionable. How can you deny that?

Clare: Let me point out to you, Bertrand, that God is the ultimate authority, and it is His right to establish the rules for salvation. So, if He says that we must confess Jesus as our Savior to have salvation by having our sins forgiven, who are we to condemn God? After all, even your hypothetically more righteous person still has sinned and come under the penalty for sin, which is death. So, the only way that either the rank sinner or the more moderate sinner is forgiven through Jesus' sacrifice being applied to their sinful lives.

Bertrand: But don't you see, Clare, that this makes God look highly irrational, and it looks as if He does not care much for good behavior, but only cares for right beliefs or the profession of just the right creed. Any human ruler who would operate like that would be roundly condemned; therefore, I say that your idea of a holy God operating in such an absurd fashion makes your religion nonsensical and ridiculous.

Clare: You can mock God if you wish, but it is God's right to establish the rules for salvation, and it is best that you and everyone else humbly operate by those rules.

Daniel: Clare, Bertrand does have a valid point, and I am personally convinced that God will bless those who live lives of obedience to His divine goodness and justice, not people who happen to have just the right religion or who profess just the required creed. If your faith is based on an absurdity, then I do not regard it as reasonable to expect for yourself salvation. Furthermore, throughout the *Bible* and in other religious books, as well as from the mouths of many great spiritual teachers, good works and right conduct and character have been almost universally proclaimed to be the requirements for blessings and approval from God. Anything else is a sham. At any rate, we're at the end of our session for tonight, and I hope that we can be back for another session at some future date, at which time we can discuss sexual immorality as it pertains to a dying civilization. So, Clare and Bertrand, I'll let you two have the final words tonight. Until next time, goodnight.

Clare: Daniel, you can ridicule and condemn my faith and the God who is the author of my faith, but my salvation is assured because of faith in Christ, and you and Bertrand are God-rejecting rebels. Let's hope that both of you will renounce your rebellion and entrust your lives to the only possible Savior, Jesus Christ. Goodnight.

Bertrand: I'm not personally religious, Clare, but I do say that your brand of religion is an utter absurdity, and it makes a mockery of the very concept of a perfect, fair, just, and holy God. That harsh fact you cannot rationally deny, and on that rather blunt note, let me encourage you to apply some logic and rationality to your worldview. Have a good night.

Is Sexual Immorality the Death Knell of a Civilization?

Daniel: Hello, Clare and Bertrand. I hope that both of you are doing well and that you're prepared to discuss some critically important issues today. Let me briefly tell you what I've decided to discuss for tonight – as a general rule, even if we might deviate from this theme at times. So, here's the critical topic for today: Can a civilization survive when it degenerates into moral debauchery, such that sexual morality becomes a “free for all”? What do you say, Clare and Bertrand?

Clare: Hello, Daniel and Bertrand. I want to tell you first off that I'd need to know what you declare to be moral debauchery before I could seriously answer the question.

Daniel: Let me clarify a bit, then, Clare. I am referring primarily, in this instance, to sexual immorality. That is my topic of interest today, as has been the case in several of our recent sessions. But you will surely wish to know what I am referring to as sexual immorality. Here's the essence of what I wish to say. Sexual morality is either an oxymoron, or it fundamentally exists, and it then follows, if it is not an oxymoron that, some things sexual are moral and other things are immoral. I understand very well that many people will wish to argue that what is moral in one civilization is immoral in another one, and what is immoral in one era may be considered to be perfectly moral in another time period. There is *some truth* to that viewpoint. After all, human beings do establish values for their civilization, and they do define certain sexual activities to be immoral that other contemporary civilizations define to be moral. However, I hope, Clare, that you're not a relativist who says that it's simply up to individual human beings, or individual societies, to determine what is moral. After all, you *are a theist*. This means that you regard it as a given that there exists a deity, and generally people who acknowledge the existence of a deity also believe that this deity is concerned with human affairs and human conduct. Certainly, the Judeo-Christian worldview is utterly devoted to that stance. Now, from this perspective, is it not up to the Deity to figure out (or more accurately) to *know and to specify* what is good and right for humanity and what is bad and evil for humanity?

Clare: Yes, Daniel. We're on the same page here. I believe that it is God's will to reveal to his people what is moral versus immoral. But, pray tell, how will we always know what God's will is?

Daniel: Clare, here's how I approach the matter of morality. I look at what the spiritual books of the major world religions have to say about sexual morality and sexual immorality. Usually, religious books do not specify what it is okay to do as much as they proscribe (restrict) and specify that which is immoral or wrong. Now, if some kinds of sexual behaviors are almost universally condemned as immoral and unacceptable to God in the great religious books that we have access to, I regard that as a serious piece of evidence that God *does not condone* those particular sorts of behaviors. Furthermore, I place very great importance on what I experience in my "walk with God" – my sojourn here on Earth in which I humbly and diligently seek God's guidance in my life. If my own experiences in contemplating issues of sexual morality, and if in my own personal struggles with morality, I have been mightily inspired by God to proscribe (to prohibit) certain kinds of behaviors in my own life, then if those proscriptions confirm what the great world religions teach in their respective great books, I take these two pieces of evidence as an even stronger affirmation of the moral teachings of the scriptures of the great religions. Let me also point out that I believe that God wishes for me to utilize my God-given intellect to think and reason about moral and spiritual concerns, and that God wants me to think rationally about the consequences of violating the guidelines of the great religious books. That is, if by logical and rational analysis, it appears very reasonable that what is condemned in scriptural teachings is also quite obviously hurtful to a society's long-term well-being, then I have yet a third means of affirming those scriptural condemnations of certain behaviors. When all three of those sources of input into my reasoning and thinking converge to a central set of values, then I feel very compelled to take extremely seriously the moral proscriptions that are given in scriptures – even very ancient scriptures dating back thousands of years. Here, then, Clare, is how I determine what is morally right and what is morally wrong.

Clare: Well Daniel, what do you think are the moral values that are so greatly taught by the great religions?

Daniel: Clare, let's stop and think a little. What kinds of sexual behaviors could reasonably be deemed to be immoral? First off, could it be that God's will is for all people to abstain from all sexual behaviors? That is one possible proscription. Quite obviously, this is not what the great scriptures say at all. In Genesis, it is said to Adam and Eve "Be fruitful and multiply". That, of course, meant that they were instructed to engage in marital sexual relations. As for myself, I know of no

scripture that prohibits sex in a legitimate and God-ordained marriage. So, we can dispense with the question of whether sex is ever moral. Obviously, it is, and the survival of the human species depends upon it – even if modern technology is rendering that statement less forcefully true. That is, artificial insemination has become a means of arriving at reproduction – in the absence of sexual intercourse. That need not concern us at the moment, though. Okay, let's ask whether sex between parent and child or between siblings is given approval in the great spiritual books. Actually, there are proscriptions placed upon sexual activity between close family members and very close relatives, but most people do not find that sufficiently restrictive to be an issue of much moral concern – of course, there are some child molesters and such for whom prohibitions against sex with family members is deemed, by them, too restrictive. However, grave as this problem is, it seems to be so nearly universally declared (even by atheists and other secularists) as gravely hurtful and wrong that it's not a critical issue regarding sexual morality for society at large. Now, let's discuss the matter of whether sex outside of marriage is just as blessed of God as sex within marriage. This is a highly hot-button issue for modern moral teachers, especially since, so far as I know, nearly all the world's great religious books and religious traditions have condemned premarital sex as well as adultery – sexual behavior by someone who is married with one other than their spouse, or for an unmarried person who has sex with a married person. Now, this is really critical an issue, but I wish to discuss the issues that are of possibly the greatest moral concern for society at this juncture – later I'll explain why I believe this particular behavior to be wrong. Another kind of sexual behavior that could be deemed immoral is same-sex sexuality. This, again, is a highly charged issue in contemporary moral concerns. Does God bless, and is it okay to have sex with another person of the same sex? That is a highly critical question, and we need to address it at greater length in due course. Right now, let's point out that it's a critical issue of moral concern – at least, for spiritual and religious people. For secularists, morality is more a matter of what human beings, with their very limited intellect and wisdom, can decipher to be workable and in humanity's best interest. God's wisdom and God's will do not fit into their equation – since they dismiss God as not existing, or if existing, then not being involved with or concerned with human behavior. Since these discussions center on spirituality versus religion, it will be (primarily) a given that belief in God is a criterion for impacting these discussions very seriously. Of course, I realize that here Bertrand is sort of the “odd man out”, since he subscribes to no explicit faith in a Creator God of any kind and leans toward a view of reality from the perspective of skepticism and pragmatism. Let's highly respect his intelligent contributions to the discussions, though. Now, back to the issue of what can reasonably be regarded as sexual immorality versus morality. We've already touched on the matter of sex outside marriage and the question about the propriety of same-sex sexuality. Those are, I think it is evident, extremely

critical and crucial concerns. In questioning what else might be deemed to be morally significant concerning sexuality, let us mention whether or not breaking up a marriage with divorce can be proper, and if it can be, is it okay to marry another person if one has divorced? Also, can a person who was never married (or is widowed) properly marry a divorced person? That's not a trivial issue, for that matter. Then another fairly important issue arises, namely at what age a person can properly become sexually active. Is sex okay for 15-year-old teens? If so, is marriage okay at that age? If not, at what age is sex proper – if all other criteria for marriage are met? This, although of concern, is not usually so much an issue if people believe that sex is only permissible in marriage. But in liberalizing sexuality to endorse premarital sex, whether or not children at ages 10 or 12 can properly be allowed to move into romance and sex is more of an issue – even if such extremely early ages for sex would be almost universally frowned upon. Yet, another question arises: What about some form of autoeroticism? Is it permissible? A final issue that I will raise right now is the question of whether age differences between sex (or marriage) partners are important and whether the age difference can be so great as to constitute an impropriety or immorality. Thus, Clare, those are the issues that I consider to be of moral concern, even if the two really hot-button issues for contemporary cultures seem to be premarital sex and same-sex sexuality -- given how very widespread they are, and how critical they are to the social structures of a society. Of course, the issue of bisexuality (which does involve same-sex sexuality) gets critically challenged in this set of questions. The questions I have over whether or not a culture that becomes morally debauched can long survive has to do with the approaches that the civilizations take to those sorts of questions. In other words, Clare and Bertrand, can “free sex” (I define this as allowing for almost all sexual behaviors that are not quite obviously hurtful to those engaging in them – from a secular perspective) indefinitely coexist with a genuinely viable and stable, and lasting society? As for me, the answer seems definitely no. But I want to find out just where you two stand on these issues, and then I'll express my outlook on the matter.

Clare: Well Daniel, you've covered a lot of ground in your discussion. As for myself, I believe that it is important to realize that some of the sexual constraints placed upon people of biblical times – and affirmed by scripture as constraints – need to be reconsidered in the light of modern science and the advancements of civilization (socially and otherwise). I believe that we need to listen to what the social scientists and psychologists have to say about such matters. We, of course, need to take the *Bible* seriously so far as salvation is concerned; however, salvation has been shown in the Christian faith to be dependent upon accepting Jesus Christ as one's personal Savior, and it is not contingent upon how holy and good our lives are. Thus, it seems that moral values can be regarded as subject to change and

modification, but the crux of the matter is that regardless of what sins we commit or do not commit, our only hope for salvation is the precious sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

Bertrand: Clare, I have to wonder how you can regard your Holy Book, the *Bible*, as the word of God, and then turn right around and say that you can spurn the commands given in that literary work while having the blessing of your God. Does that make any sense? Why would an infinitely intelligent and infinitely knowledgeable God write (or expressly direct the writing of) a book that becomes obsolete in time as civilization advances? This seems absurd to me. I certainly appreciate your respect for the social sciences – I think you’re right on the money there. However, if you wish for credibility and respectability among rational thinkers, then you must find a way of making it at all credible that a perfect book, and an infallible book, would be written at the demands of a Creator God, only to have the teachings of that infallible book become obsolete. Can you fail to see the utter credulousness of this stance? It makes you appear like someone who has thrown to the winds her logical thinking faculties and has simply swallowed a worldview that is utterly incoherent. If logic is to be trusted, then our reasoning must conform to logical laws; if logic cannot be trusted, pray tell, how can we even discuss anything intelligently? Logic – and its rules of thought – are the foundation of all rational thinking and rational living. It even requires elementary logic to figure out that if you want a cold glass of tea from a picture of tea in your refrigerator, you must either go to the refrigerator and get the tea, or you must have someone else do that for you, or you must have a robotic device at your beck and call to do that for you. Logic inheres in all reality. Without logic, “intelligence” is a word without meaning. Logic must be applied to every aspect of living; yes, even the lower animals operate, in very elementary ways, by logic. Come to think of it, Clare, I’d say that animals must, in some cases, use quite complex logic. After all, the navigation of a hummingbird requires awesomely complex movements of its wings, and without instinctual “knowledge” of how to flutter its wings, it couldn’t fly, and it would not survive. My point, which I’m laboring a bit, is that it’s unintelligent and counterproductive to violate logical rules of thought and behavior. Therefore, if your religious faith makes a mockery of logical rules of thought, how could you reasonably hope that highly intelligent, rational, and educated people would do other than to dismiss you as a fool – from a rational perspective?

Clare: Bertrand, you are hell-bent on your logic and your emphasis on intelligent thinking. What matters is that we surrender our lives to our Savior, and then we don’t have to worry about just how intelligent or logical we are.

Bertrand: Speaking to you is utterly frustrating, Clare, because you fail to justify whatsoever why I or anyone else should have any faith in your supposed Savior. If you cannot back up your claims with intelligent, rational, and logical reasoning, how is it even credible to try to argue that your understanding of reality is valid? After all, you must know that the vast majority of the human race does *not believe* that your supposed savior can save anyone. So, unless you can rationally justify why you regard such a historical figure as still living and having the power to save you (whatever that means), then your religion cannot have credibility with intelligent and educated people. Therefore, your very adoption of a belief system for which you have no rational grounds, and whose structure is built upon wishes, desires, platitudes, and various and sundry illusions is unsound. It is a belief system that no highly intelligent person can take very seriously – if such a person uses his/her intelligence effectively.

Clare: Well Bertrand, you're just a Godless reprobate, a skeptic, and a fool – thinking that in your foolishness you achieve wisdom. If I have to base my faith on your logical and rational edifice, then I might as well turn to studying and living by strictly secular teachings and values.

Daniel: Let me interject a thought here, Clare. You are denouncing Bertrand for relying upon logic and rational thought, and then you go about arguing that if you step outside of the world of faith, then you might as well join the secularists. I understand your dilemma, Clare, and I'm personally convinced that trusting in our logical or rational powers, without a humble enough spirit to stand in awe of infinite mystery that confronts us on nearly every front, is a matter of relying exclusively on our intellects. I see this to be very, very dangerous, spiritually speaking. However, I also support Bertrand's point in that we *must use reason (powers of logical thought)* if we hope to understand reality; after all, Bertrand is correct in arguing that logic inheres in all of reality. Therefore, to fail to utilize logic to the best of our abilities is to defraud our capacity for arriving at the best worldview of which we're capable. So, we *must use sound logic*. It is ultimately the only tool of reason to which we have access. However, we need to get back to our discussion of human sexuality and how we might arrive at sound rules and principles by which to channel our sexual behaviors – or abstinence from sexual behavior. So, let me proceed to tell you both what I regard as critical to sexual morality. Firstly, nearly all the great religious traditions – in their original form (and I exclude modern liberalization of those traditions) – denounced as unacceptable the following kinds of behavior: 1) Adultery (sexual activity of a married person with a person to whom one is not married, or an unmarried person having sex with someone who is married); 2) Premarital sex (fornication), which is to be understood as having sexual relations prior to marriage, or at least while not being married; 3) Same-sex relations,

whereby a person engages in some form of sexual behaviors with a person of the same sex; 4) Sexual relations with an animal (this is so rare a concern that it might be only in the *Old Testament* that it is referred to in the great spiritual traditions); and 5) Having sex with a family member or closely related “blood relative”. So far as I know, this covers pretty much all the bases for forbidden sexual behaviors in the Judeo-Christian traditions and Islam (the principally Western religions). However, the two crucial concerns have to do with premarital sex and same-sex relations. Of course, it’s not a trivial issue that divorce is terribly (and critically) rampant. That is a terrible evil – one that brings untold suffering upon millions of people of the world. However, homosexuality would be a relatively rare occurrence, *if* it were the case that *all* homosexual behavior were restricted only to people who are not interested in sex with the opposite sex. The fact is, though, that in modern, highly liberalized, societies, sexual behaviors that can be termed “bisexual” (since the people so engaged seek sex with the opposite sex *and* – to some extent also – the *same sex*) are extremely prevalent. Thus, they are issues that cannot be conveniently and sagaciously side-stepped by any person seeking to provide sexual guidelines for society. We will discuss this issue at some length in short order. My question to both of you, then is that of whether or not modern Western societies – and the non-Western societies, to the extent to which Western influences infiltrate their societies – need to concern themselves much with the issues of premarital sex, adultery, and same-sex sexuality (in other words, the questions over “free sex” – an up-for-grabs ethos). Are we straining at gnats in making a great to-do over these issues?

Clare: Well Daniel, I can hardly believe that a sound-minded person would argue that proper sexual behaviors are insignificant; however, I also believe that a highly modern, compassionate, and sensible approach to sexuality must be practiced, if one is to be regarded as a credible moral guide.

Daniel: Just what does that mean, Clare? Does it imply that we should let the social scientists with all their statistical data and research be our guides?

Clare: I’m not suggesting that we should turn to the social scientists as our moral guides, but I also believe that we should pay attention to what modern science and a more enlightened outlook on our world can tell us about how to live morally and healthfully. Thus, we should not ignore what science and the social scientists tell us works best regarding sexuality.

Daniel: Clare, do you not believe that our very Creator (the One from whom arises all reality) is perfectly qualified to tell us precisely how best to conduct our human sexuality – such a highly critical aspect of human personal and social practices?

Clare: I believe, Daniel, that God is capable of telling us precisely how best to live, but He might also expect that we use our intelligence, knowledge, and scientific expertise to figure out what works best for us.

Daniel: It seems to me incongruous with sound thinking, Clare, that God, in His infinite wisdom and awesome concerns with human conduct and character would leave it up to humanity to figure out what works best sexually and morally. Will He leave it simply up to us to decide what moral restrictions to place upon human sexuality? This is especially noteworthy given the fact that nearly all great spiritual thinkers throughout human history have had a good deal to say about sexual morality. The Old Testament moral codes were quite strict on sexual conduct; the New Testament teachings largely echoed what the Old Testament had to say about those issues. Jesus never addressed same-sex relationships, because they were not an issue that the Jewish society considered controversial – same-sex sexuality was simply forbidden, period! However, the Apostle Paul did mention it, and he condemned it. A major reason for him to bring up that issue is that he was a Roman citizen, and he was aware of the widespread practice of same-sex sexuality in Greek and Roman cultures of his time. Given the fact that he preached and taught in those cultures where same-sex sexuality was widespread, and given his understanding that this violated the will of God for His people, Paul felt that it was appropriate to address that issue – offering it his stern condemnation. We can see this quite clearly stated by Paul in Romans 1:26-27 and I Corinthians 6:9. There are those who simply refuse to acknowledge what Paul quite obviously was condemning here. In Romans, Paul says the following (I'll refer to the *NIV Study Bible* in all quotes): “Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.” (Rom. 1:26-27). That, in itself, should be sufficient for any rational mind to acknowledge that Paul was opposed to homosexuality. But we also find him saying in I Cor. 6:9-10 the following: “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.” So Clare, if you're willing to accept the *Bible* as the infallible Word of God, you have a serious problem in coming up with a “New Morality” that endorses “free” sex (fornication, adultery, homosexuality, and bisexuality). How are you going to deal with those scriptures? Are you going to simply renounce the teachings of Paul as archaic and reminiscent of the Dark Ages? Are you going to say that God inspired the *Bible*, but that God wants us to transcend the biblical teachings with the modern discoveries of psychologists and sociologists? What is your way out?

Clare: Well Daniel, I'm not doing like you do and simply pick and choose from the *Bible* what makes sense to me. Rather, I accept *all* of the *Bible* as the *Word of God*. However, I think that we need to understand that in Paul's time there was much idolatry, temple prostitution, etc. going on in Roman society. So, Paul was not condemning homosexuality at all, since those were not the behaviors he was discussing.

Daniel: Honestly Clare, for you to deny that Paul was quite clearly condemning same-sex relations seems utterly disingenuous. There are different translations of the scriptures, but it requires serious violence to quite obvious scriptural teachings to deny that Paul regarded same-sex relationships (sexual relations, of course) as contrary to the will of God and that those who practice such behaviors cannot enter the "kingdom of God". Frankly, Clare, it appears to me that the people who try to twist these scriptures into references to activities other than what they quite clearly say are using an utter last-ditch effort to deny that the *Bible* condemns the modern, liberal sexual agenda. No sensible scholar of the *Bible* -- that is, no one who's not trying to rescue a liberal agenda -- will deny that, by Paul's understanding, God condemned homosexuality -- and thus, by implications, bisexuality.

Clare: You can make all the declarations you please, Daniel, but I'm convinced that Paul was not condemning same-sex relationships. We just don't have enough information about the contexts in which those words were written to reach any definite conclusion about what Paul was referring to.

Bertrand: Now, mind you, Clare, I'm not taking sides with Daniel, because I don't subscribe to his theology -- actually, I'm more or less a skeptic about theism and religiously-based morality. However, I feel utterly compelled to repudiate your arguments in this case. That is, Paul clearly was denouncing same-sex sexuality, which was very widespread in Roman and Greek societies. Now, I don't pay much attention to what Paul said, wrote, or thought, since I'm not buying into any concepts of divinely inspired "scriptures". Those are merely the writings of men, and so they have value according to the extent to which they can make human lives better. I don't take them seriously, but apparently, you and Daniel do. But I'll honestly tell you, Clare, that I'm almost certain that if you find highly competent scholars of ancient literature or highly competent scholars of biblical writings, you will find that the scriptures quoted by Daniel will be reckoned as Paul's references to homosexuality. That is, unless the scholar has a bias in the matter, in which case his scholarly competence would be compromised. Furthermore, Clare, quite some sessions earlier you freely confessed that the *Old Testament* and the *New Testament* both condemn same-sex sexuality. Your way out of those restrictions regarding sexuality in the *Bible* was to claim that the teachings of the *Bible* regarding sexuality

can be regarded as outdated because modern society has new and more advanced understandings of proper sexuality. You're now switching over to the attempt to render Paul's condemnation of same-sex relationships *not*, in fact, a condemnation at all. That is a major flip-flop and an utter inconsistency. How do you defend that?

Clare: Well Bertrand, I might have too hastily agreed with what Daniel was saying about the scriptural condemnation of a liberal sexual stance. But just because I off-the-cuff agreed with that stance does not mean that I seriously even thought about the Apostle Paul's comments that have mistakenly been interpreted as a condemnation of same-sex relationships. At any rate, I do acknowledge that the *Old Testament* does condemn homosexuality. And even if Paul also intended to condemn homosexuality, what I said earlier about our more modern and advanced understanding of sexuality still holds. Anyway, you're a self-professed skeptic about the *Bible*; therefore, I don't take your views very seriously. I take Daniel much more seriously since he's blessed with at least knowing that there is a God; yet, he seems to generate his own ideas about God, rather than allowing God's Holy Word to be his guide. Nevertheless, when he finds scriptures that fit his agenda, he'll merrily quote them to support his stance.

Daniel: Clare, you're not quite faithful to my worldview, but I do concede that my understanding of scripture is less traditional than yours. But I want you to understand that I take scriptures (*not only* Judeo-Christian scriptures) very seriously. That is because I'm convinced that whether they're Judeo-Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or some others, scriptures they should be taken as signs that Ultimate Reality (God) is inspiring specially chosen individuals to empower them to tell their fellow humans very much about God and His wondrous purposes for human life.

Bertrand: Now, from my perspective, Clare and Daniel, it appears that religions have a notorious inclination to repudiate or censor sexuality – something that I regard as a manifest disaster. After all, sex is totally natural, and to suppress it is unhealthy – psychologists from Freud on down have understood this.

Daniel: You are partially correct, Bertrand; religions *have, indeed*, had a very great tendency from time immemorial to restrict human sexuality. But where you go wrong is to decry this tendency as disastrous for humanity. Unfortunately for humanity, psychologists like Sigmund Freud (Freud was an atheist, by the way) look at the sexual and sensual side of the human phenomenon, and they fail to acknowledge that perfection of character is the prime concern of *truly enlightened* (not necessarily scientifically enlightened) human beings. Therefore, since sexuality is so closely tied to human psychology and human character development, it's

critical that the spiritual aspirant devote his or her life to proper use of sexual drives and passions. In many cases, they find that the best bet is to contain, restrain, and so control the sex drive as to fundamentally channel sexuality into behaviors through which the sexual passions become sublimated into creativity, character development, intellectual endeavors, or some form of substitute for the explicit expression of one's sexuality. It used to be that quite a lot of the great artists, musicians, poets, intellectuals, scientists, and spiritual devotees -- too many to enumerate -- lived lives of strict celibacy and sublimated their sexual drives into productive and highly useful works of the arts, sciences, writings, and spiritual adventures. Unfortunately, we have witnessed the advent of modern efforts to dethrone sexual morality and replace it with utterly rank, licentious, and self-indulgent sensuality and so-called "free sex". Thus, people with moral courage and the willingness to renounce sexual gratifications tend to be looked upon with pity, the latter being regarded as poor fools who are letting life pass them by. This, I aver, is a singular travesty for humanity, and a civilization that so endorses a repudiation of sexual and moral discipline is gravely sealing its demise and doom. Furthermore, Clare, I claim that by modern, liberal Christianity's endorsement of ideas to the effect that all that God requires for salvation is a "decision for Christ" it has introduced a spiritual snake pit. Also, by its concomitant denial that good character and good conduct are prerequisites for salvation, liberal Christianity has become a force for great evils. I furthermore declare that it is precisely Christianity's acquiescence to liberal, secular, and atheistic moral and sexual license that is sowing the seeds of the downfall of Christianity as a truly respectable and viable religion. This, in turn, plays right into the hands of atheistic secularism, whereby the vital foundations of a strong civilization are so compromised by sensuality and secularism that the downfall of Western civilization as a viable force in human societies is becoming a certitude. It appears to be merely a matter of time until the "bell tolls", and a stronger, more morally courageous civilization arises from the ashes of a great civilization gone badly wrong. Yes, history does very often repeat itself, and far too often foolish humanity utterly fails to learn the lessons of history -- meaning that history tragically repeats itself.

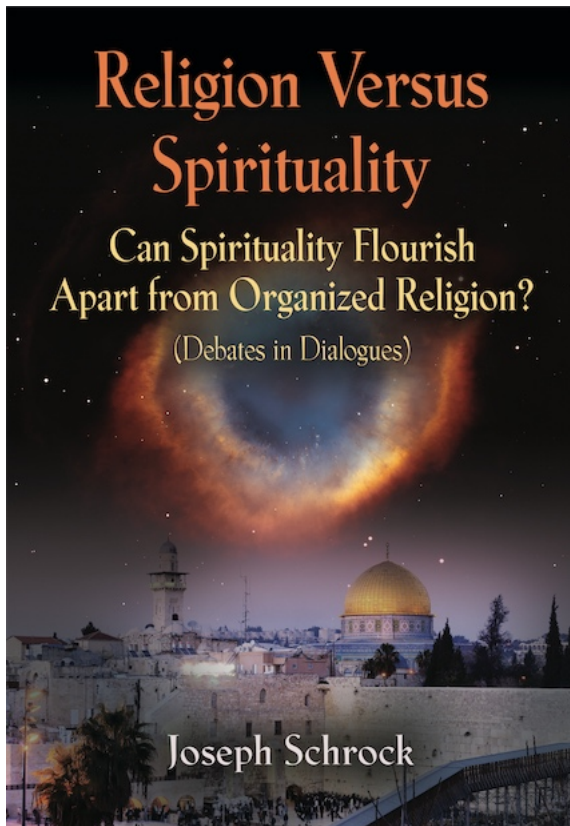
Bertrand: You're too full of gloom and doom, Daniel. Don't you see the brilliant wonders of science and how its methods are so empowering humanity as to make us the masters of our planet -- maybe even (eventually) the masters of the universe. Don't disparage us humans; we deserve far more credit than you give us. So, lighten up.

Daniel: You have a right to your views, Bertrand, but poor humanity is a mere "pipsqueak" civilization in an awesomely wondrous and glorious universe. Our universe is the work of Infinite Intelligence, Infinite Power, and Infinite Goodness -- this

being the One whom I will worship, as opposed to worshipping the paltry handiworks of a humanity that is burdened with an ego far greater than and awesomely disproportionate to its intellect. But, for now, let us bring this discussion to a cessation so that we can each proceed to our respective endeavors of the remaining evening. Let peace be to you – Clare and Bertrand.

Clare: Goodnight, Daniel and Bertrand. I'm not as pessimistic as Daniel; however, neither can I endorse the fanatical optimism of Bertrand – I take the middle path.

Bertrand: As for myself, I'm intelligently and rationally optimistic – the scientific and technological fruits of the past three centuries bear me witness. Have a nice evening, Clare and Daniel.



This book poses questions about whether true spirituality requires organized religion. It consists of dialogues between three imaginary characters: An independent spiritual seeker, a devout Christian, and a devoted skeptic about religion and spirituality. These three characters engage in passionate debates.

Religion Versus Spirituality

**Can Spirituality Flourish
Apart from Organized Religion?
(Debates in Dialogues)**

by Joseph Schrock

**Order the complete book from the publisher
Booklocker.com**

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/10307.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**