

An Apologetics Primer

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ABSTRACT: *This work is an introductory presentation on responding to intellectual challenges to the Christian Faith in the Caribbean, for Cell-/Small- Group leaders and other Christian “Youth” or “Lay” leaders. In it, the case is first made that reason and belief are inextricably intertwined; thus the question is not so much whether one has a faith, but which one. The intellectual credibility of the historic Christian Faith is then discussed, in the context of the biblical and historic witness. Next, six issues of particular concern to Christians in the Caribbean are addressed: Sectarianism, Political Messianism, the Media and Education, Evolutionary Materialism, Post Modernism, and Islam. Thus, the importance of the life of the mind to credible Christian witness, life and leadership in the region are explored. Finally, discussion questions and an introductory level short bibliography are attached.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
1. Reason and Belief: Towards Reasonable Faith	2
2. The Bible: Authenticity and Authority in an Age of Suspicion	5
3. Apologetics in the Caribbean	9
3.1 The Sectarian Civil War	9
3.2 Political Messianism	11
3.3 The Media & Education	13
3.4 Evolutionary Materialism	14
3.5 Post Modernism	17
3.6 Islam in the Caribbean	19
Concluding Remarks	25
Questions for Discussion	25
Useful Books and Web Links	25

NOTICES: *This course module was originally created by Gordon Mullings, in 1985, for use as part of a manual for Cell Group Leaders for the UCCF, in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean. It has been subsequently revised and developed, to date. (DISCLAIMER: While reasonable attempts have been made to provide accurate, fair and informative materials for use in training, no claim is made for absolute truth, and corrections based on factual errors and/or gaps or inconsistencies in reasoning are welcome.) FAIR USE: The contents of this module are intended for use as a support for learning about responding to the typical intellectual challenges to the Christian Faith and gospel that are commonly encountered in the Caribbean, especially in tertiary education and in commentary in the regional and international media. Permission is therefore granted to cite this module for fair use under intellectual property law, and for reasonable use for church- or parachurch- group related training and/or for personal or academic use; this specifically excludes reproduction, linking or citation for commercial, controversial or media purposes without the author's written permission -- especially where matters relating to the validity and value of Faith/Religious/Atheological Commitments and Truth-Claims are being debated or disputed. HTML version available, under similar terms: http://www.angelfire.com/pro/kairosfocus/resources/Mars_Hill_Web/apologetics.htm . COPYRIGHT: GEM 2002. All rights are reserved.*

AN APOLOGETICS PRIMER

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"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect . . ." (1 Peter 3:15)

Peter exhorts us that, as Christian disciples, we must be prepared to give a reasonable answer for our eternal hope. Thus, we see both the task of Apologetics and its method. For, thoughtful Christians should be able to cogently respond to those who ask for the *reasons* behind our commitment of faith; and we must always do so gently and respectfully.

However, too often Christian believers in the Caribbean are not sure of what the Faith is, or of why we believe it. So, when we are challenged we often seem to be vague, insecure, confused, or even foolish. As a direct result, those who distort or oppose the gospel have been able to acquire an unwarranted aura of credibility, and have cast many people in the Caribbean — including many Christians — into confusion, unnecessary doubt, or even outright deception.

As a further damaging result the gospel often appears to be irrelevant or even absurd to many of the most thoughtful people in our region. This obviously hampers our witness — “Why should we take you seriously?” — but it also cripples our ability to think, speak, work and lead with confidence in the school, on the campus, in the workplace and in the wider community. In short, when we are not “prepared to give an answer . . . for the hope that [we] have,” it undermines our ability to be salt and light in a sin-darkened, deceived and confused region that hungers for a credible framework for thinking about truth, values and the way to build a desirable and sustainable future.

So, as educated Caribbean Christians, we must learn to handle key intellectual challenges and issues that we are likely to encounter in living, witnessing, studying, working and contributing to community development. Such issues typically hinge on: (1) the reasonableness of the Christian faith and lifestyle in today’s high-tech, post-modern scientific age; (2) the validity and proper use of the Bible as a primary authority for belief and behaviour; (3) specific issues, such as secularism, the rise of the post-modern age, or the recently proposed Islamic alternative for understanding our past and building our future.

In this primer, therefore, we will focus on: (1) the role of faith in all our reasoning; (2) the authority of the Bible; (3) several specific strategic issues in the Caribbean — with a view to helping us to begin to think through key issues as we prepare to serve Christ effectively in the Caribbean in our generation.

1. Reason and Belief: Towards Reasonable Faith

Since by definition *issues* are matters of argument, let us start by asking how arguments persuade, and how some arguments prove (or fail to prove) their conclusions. In so doing, we will see the vital role faith plays in all human thinking and reasoning. This will set the stage for the more specific issues.

First, we can easily see that arguments make three main persuasive appeals: (1) to “**facts**” and **logic**, (2) to **authorities**, and (3) to **emotions**.¹ Of the three, only the first actually has the potential to *prove* its conclusions. For, emotional appeals (although often quite effective) cannot ground any conclusions whatsoever. Likewise, no authority is better than the facts and reasoning behind his or her opinions.

¹ Cf. Aristotle’s *The Rhetoric*. “Facts” is used to distinguish perceptions or claims from established facts. (NB: One has a right to believe that one’s *direct* sense perceptions, memory etc. are typically accurate, but are subject to the possibility of error.)

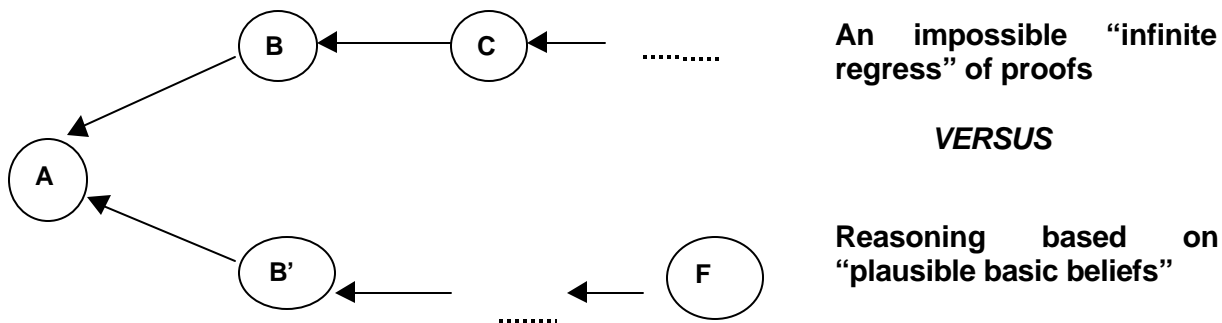
This is why we should examine claimed facts and inferences from them carefully, to see if “facts” are true and representative of the truth, and that conclusions follow logically from these *premises*.² Second, since appeals to authority are a practical necessity for real world arguments³ we must discipline ourselves to authenticate the “authorities” we appeal to; and we should also be alert to bias, mistakes, debatable assumptions and other limitations. Most of all, while an emotional response may well rest on an accurate *perception* of a situation, we must always be wary of being blinded by our feelings, fears, ideals, prejudices, assumptions, impulses, lusts, greed and/or envy, or even by unmet needs.

As Luke records in Acts 17:11, the First Century Berean Jews were a good example of such an open-minded but critically aware approach:

The Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

This example of critically aware, reasonable faith leads to the second main issue. For, faith and reason are often cast in opposition to one another, as if faith always lacks adequate reason, and as if one can reason without faith. Indeed, the two are often said to be contradictory.

This view is false. For, as Jesus points out in Luke 6:39 – 40, blind faith is liable to lead us about as far as the nearest ditch. Further, once we try to *prove* a claim A, we need further claims and/or evidence B to establish it. But B needs C, and so on. (Philosophers call this an infinite regress.) So, what we always do, sooner or later, is to accept some things, F say, as "true" without further proof, whether consciously or unconsciously — “axioms,” “presuppositions,” "obvious facts," “intuitive knowledge,” “self-evident truths,” “properly basic beliefs” or whatever else we may call them:



F, then, is our “**faith-point**,” from which we begin our thinking and reasoning. For instance, most people take for granted: (1) that there is a real world, (2) that other people have minds, (3) that we can therefore significantly communicate with one another, and (4) that error exists (which directly implies that truth exists and that there is a real world to be in error about⁴). Other things are then accepted or rejected based on such “plausible basic beliefs.”

That is, if we try to prove everything, we can prove nothing: even proofs must start from faith. Thus, faith and reasoning are necessary and interconnected components in our thinking, rather than mutually

² If, granting premises P, then a conclusion Q must *necessarily* be true, Q follows logically from P: P => Q.

³ Not least, because none of us has the time or wisdom to prove for him- or her- self the accumulated learning of the ages.

⁴ Therefore, we should humbly face the possibility that we may be in error, but insist on good reason for accepting “corrections” to important beliefs. Cf. Trueblood, *General Philosophy*, pp. 47 – 52, ff.

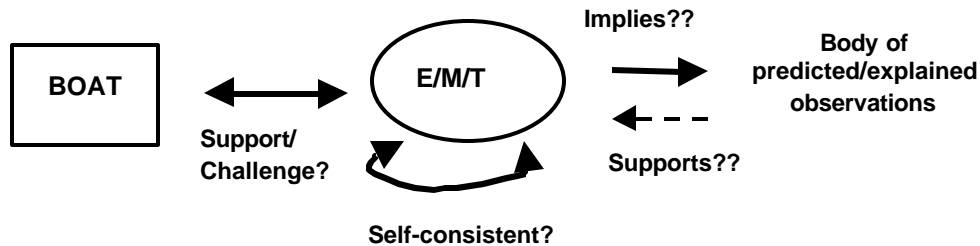
hostile competitors in the battle for our hearts and minds. For, all of us must live by faith — whether Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist or New Ager; Marxist, Secularist, Relativist or Scientist.

The idea that Science in particular is shot through with faith is jarring at first sight. But it is quite true: for, we first infer scientific theories as educated guesses that work to “explain” observed patterns in the world. Then, we test such models for their ability to predict new observations. If such a theory/model/explanation accurately predicts the observations made in a wide variety of tests, it is held to be “verified.”

In effect, we argue: "IF *Theory*, THEN *Observations*; *Observations*, SO *Theory*." The underlying logic is thus the same as that of: "IF *Tom is a pig*, THEN *Tom is an animal*; *Tom is an animal*,⁵ SO *Tom is a pig*" — an obvious fallacy, the affirming of the consequent. [That is, we tend to confuse the logic of implication (A is *sufficient* for B to be true: $A \Rightarrow B$), with that of equivalence (A is both *necessary and sufficient* for B; that is, $B \Rightarrow A$ as well as $A \Rightarrow B$,⁶ written: $A \Leftrightarrow B$).]

Clearly, the capability of a scientific theory to predict observations cannot be a test of its ultimate truth. For, Science can only argue to *the best current explanation*.⁷ So, while scientific methods may help us to discover and test truths, the theories/models/explanations and empirical findings of Science are always provisional — open to clarification and correction. (The classic case is Newton's Laws of Motion: they withstood every test for nearly two hundred years, then had their limitations sharply exposed between 1880 and 1930.⁸)

The key to understanding these limits of scientific thinking lies in the two-way, asymmetric link between explanations/models/theories and the bodies of observations they explain/predict. First, models *logically entail* observations; but observations can only provide *provisional empirical support* for the models. Second, such explanations/models/theories [E/M/T] must face two critical further tests: (1) self-consistency; (2) supportive/challenging relationships to exiting bodies of accepted theory [BOAT]:



For, if a scientific model is not consistent with itself each half refutes the other; so it must be false. If it is consistent and easily integrates into the existing body of accepted theories, there is mutual reinforcement. However, occasionally a new model or theory may provide a superior [perhaps, the only] explanation of existing observations and accurately predicts fresh ones, but is inconsistent with accepted theories. In that case, the new theory becomes a challenger to the accepted body of theory, and a Scientific Crisis and/or Revolution may follow. (This is how Quantum Theory and Relativity became the accepted fundamental physical explanations for the motion of bodies between 1900 and 1930.⁹ And, today, Intelligent Design is

⁵ Say, a cat.

⁶ In a valid implication, $P \Rightarrow Q$, P is a *sufficient condition* for Q and Q is a *necessary condition* for P.

⁷ Charles S. Peirce called this process of argument by proposed *best explanation/model/theory* “abduction.” In deductive arguments, one reasons from “facts” to their logical implications, which are thus “proved” from the “facts.” By contrast, in Science we argue that if certain hypotheses were true, then certain observed (and/or predicted) “facts” would follow as direct implications. Thus, the observed/predicted “facts” provide “support” — but not actual proof — for such hypotheses/explanations.

⁸ The case also strongly shows that the power of a theory/model to explain/predict observations (and even to guide us in developing technologies to control or influence events) cannot be a proof of its ultimate truth.

⁹ Newtonian Dynamics has been retained as a relatively simple model for the motion of large, slow moving bodies.

challenging Darwinism as the best explanation for the apparently irreducible complexity of life-forms, e.g. the bacterial flagellum — a molecular scale, electrically powered outboard motor.)

So, scientific explanations, at best, give provisional knowledge. At worst, they may become little more than a clever attempt to explain away the cosmos — everything from hydrogen to humans — on materialistic philosophical assumptions. In either case, Science deeply embeds faith; it should therefore leave room for reasonable doubt and debate about its current “best explanations/models/theories.”

Many people, however, sharply reject such an organic link between Science and faith, because for them "Science" is synonymous with “rationality,” or even "knowledge" — and "faith," with "irrational or intellectually dishonest, closed-minded belief," or even "ignorant superstition and prejudice." Nevertheless, the point plainly still stands: scientists, too, work by the light of faith (cf. Thomas Kuhn’s paradigm concept in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*).

We may thus safely conclude that each of us, consciously or unconsciously, holds to a set of plausible basic beliefs, which define our different *worldviews* — different ways of understanding/interpreting ultimate reality, the world and ourselves. Fortunately, our basic beliefs need not be arbitrary; for we can be open to correction in light of experience and/or the discovery of inconsistencies¹⁰ or other logical errors. However, we must also be aware that even if certain ideas "make sense" or “seem absurd,” such perceptions may well owe more to debatable assumptions, or gaps in our knowledge, or mistakes in reasoning — or even to outright bias and closed mindedness — than to what holds in the real world.

The Early Church's experience with Jews and Greeks provides a good example of this problem. Often, people were not willing to listen to eyewitness testimony about Jesus' life, death and resurrection, because it did not fit in with their preconceptions about God. Five hundred eyewitnesses notwithstanding, they had closed their minds! (See 1 Cor. 1:18-25, 15:1-20; also Acts 17:16-33.)

Plainly, we need to beware of the fallacy of the closed mind. On the other hand, since it is impossible to "be neutral" on the big questions — we would then face an infinite regress of proofs — our intellectual commitments need to be open-minded, critically aware and honest. Therefore, as educated Christians, we should think through our own basic commitments, and seek to bring those we argue with to the point where they too can be aware of their own core beliefs and values; so that they in turn may recognise their need for repentance and to cry out to God, who "rewards those who earnestly seek him." [Heb 11:6.]

Of course, this requires diligent study, careful reasoning, humility, patience, prayer, and last but not least, courage. For, we must not forget that Stephen was both the first Christian Apologist [Acts 6:8 – 10], and — precisely because of the irresistible force of the Spirit-filled wisdom of his case — the first Martyr [Acts 6:11 – 8:1]. But equally, it was one of his chief opponents who — through his own encounter with the risen Christ — would take up the torch of Spirit-anointed truthful wisdom and run with it: Saul of Tarsus.

2. The Bible: Authenticity and Authority in an Age of Suspicion

Traditionally, Christians hold that the Bible is "God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every

¹⁰ Logical inconsistencies affirm and deny (usually implicitly) the same claim, resulting in confusion. For example, the claim “there are no absolute truths” is itself an absolute truth-claim. It therefore *refutes itself*. No good comes of such confusion, so we must purge our thinking of contradictions.

good work." (2 Tim. 3:16, 17.) Thus, we see the Bible as being the recorded Word of God that breathes out his redemptive, life-transforming, perfect truth, love, moral purity, wisdom, authority, and power.

Consequently, we understand ourselves and our world in light of the biblical plot-line¹¹:

- ❑ God is the eternal, holy, perfect, all-powerful, all-knowing, loving Creator and Sustainer of the cosmos, who made humanity in his image, to be his stewards of the earth.
- ❑ This stewardship implied the power of choice, thus necessarily the potential for virtue or vice. Unfortunately, our first ancestors chose to walk in their own way, and ever since, each of us has ratified that choice through our own wilfully sinful behaviour — which wreaks havoc on our own selves, other people and the whole earth.
- ❑ So, naturally, all of us are subjects of God's just anger at sin. However, in love, God made a way for us to be reconciled to himself and so seeks to rescue us from the enslaving and destructive power of sin.
- ❑ To effect this plan, God chose a particular people (the Jews) and joined covenant with them, creating a culture within which he sent his prophets with his words that guided them through times of faithfulness and unfaithfulness, blessing, and judgement, preparing the way for his chosen Messiah — Spirit-empowered deliverer.
- ❑ In due course, that Messiah/Christ was sent by God: Jesus of Nazareth, the unique Son of God. He loved, served, taught, healed and delivered from Satanic bondage. But he was rejected and declared worthy of death (as a blasphemer) by the leaders of his own people, and "suffered under Pontius Pilate," who — for political expediency — unjustly condemned him to death, having declared Jesus innocent of sedition against Rome.
- ❑ But, in dying on a cross, Jesus bore our sins and brought redemption for us. Then, triumphing over the Devil, he rose from the dead as Lord. In ascending to his Father, he sent out his church into the world under the power of his Spirit, with the Good News that freely brings forgiveness, reconciliation, salvation, healing, wholeness and liberation to all men who will but receive it.
- ❑ So, even now, through the church, the Risen Lord works to fill all things with his grace and glory, creating a foretaste of what shall be in perfect fulness at his Coming.¹² Then, he shall establish his Eternal Kingdom in its fully manifested power and glory, triumphing over all human and demonic rebellion and chaos.

Few things are as controversial today as these traditional, Bible-based Christian claims!

Basically, they have been challenged from three directions:

1. Some feel that during the centuries of copying by hand from one text to another and due to "inevitable distortions" in the translation process, the original text "must" have been badly distorted or even totally lost. Thus, such people believe that we can have no way of knowing that the Bible's story line is authentic.

¹¹ Cf. UCCF Statement of Faith, or similar creedal statements, for specific Scripture references.

¹² See the companion paper, *Fulness and our Mandate*, for an expansion of this theme, with a strategic framework for its application to the reformation and sound development of the Caribbean.

2. It is claimed, often by learned Theologians (such as Dominic Crossan and the Jesus Seminar, or Bishop John Spong of New Jersey, and many others) that much of the Bible is simply a collection of pre-scientific myths and pious forgeries, which has to be "demythologized" and "reconstructed" before use. In particular, such thinkers are suspicious of the idea that History, under the Lordship of Christ, is moving along a path from Creation and fall, through redemption and witness to all nations, towards a culmination at the Second Coming.
3. Some argue that the Bible is factually inaccurate, that is, it does not square with what we know today about the world in the past — especially in Genesis, in its prophecies, and reports of miracles. That is, they hold that (based on our ability to reconstruct the past through historical, archaeological and scientific investigations) we can discredit and dismiss the Bible's claims.

The first challenge is easiest to deal with. Simply put, we have a mountain of ancient textual evidence to the Bible (in both the original languages and ancient translations), which enables us to be reasonably confident that we know what the original text was, in all essential details at all essential points. Moreover, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, the original languages, are still understood and studied today, so we can easily check the accuracy of any particular translation. Of the many available good modern English versions, the Revised Standard Version, the New American Standard Version, the New King James Version and the New International Version are generally highly respected. (For more details, consult J. McDowell's *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, or F.F. Bruce's *The Books and the Parchments*.)

The second is somewhat more technical and not usually relevant to laymen — unless they have been influenced by the claims of the Jesus Seminar or the like. Suffice to say that, for example, the idea that Moses' books were written in the tenth to sixth centuries BC originally depended upon the assumption that writing had not been invented in Moses' day; a theory which has long since exploded. Similarly, there is little or no sound reason to conclude that the New Testament documents are pious forgeries dating to the second century. In general, such sceptical scholarly theories are based upon materialistic and evolutionary assumptions that are debatable, or even arbitrary, and which we are by no means compelled by the evidence to accept without question. For details, see J. McDowell's *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, and various articles in *The New Bible Dictionary*, IVP.

The third objection is more fundamental. The Bible is full of reports about the supernatural works of a sovereign God, in creation, revelation, salvation, healing, and deliverance. It is often claimed that such reports cannot be true, either because they contradict the scientifically established laws of nature or else known facts about the past.

Clearly, the issue is not one of proof beyond all doubt or dispute — no such "proofs" exist. Rather, the issue is whether it is intellectually honest or sensible to believe a book making claims such as the above.

The best place to begin, as always, is with Jesus, his life, death, and claims. Luke, in beginning his Gospel, for instance, claims:

[S]ince I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you . . . *so that* you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. [Luke 1:3, 4; emphasis added.]

Luke, then, starts out by saying his writings are a carefully researched, accurate and orderly account of the life of Jesus and — taking in the Acts, also addressed to Theophilus — also of the early history of the church; based upon eyewitness testimony and (apparently) records of such testimony. His main aim was

to provide warrant for Christian faith, and he argued that an accurate, orderly account of what happened to Jesus and his followers would be quite sufficient.

This is a claim to be writing objective history, and within the lifetime of eyewitnesses. If these claims are false, "Luke" is out and out guilty of fraud, however pious.

But Luke is open to checking, as he tosses out names, dates, and places with abandon, even (in the "we" passages in Acts) implying that he was himself present as a participant in some of the events he records. So, if he were, say, a second century forger, he would be likely indeed to get the facts wrong.

At one stage this was commonly felt to be so, "but it is generally admitted by scholars today that the author's historical accuracy has been vindicated." [J. N. Geldenhuys, "Luke, Gospel of," *New Bible Dictionary*, IVP, 1976, p. 757.] F.F. Bruce adds: "The historical trustworthiness of Luke's account has been amply confirmed by archaeological discovery. While he has apologetic and theological interests [mostly, to commend the Christian faith to the Romans as not being a security threat and as being based on a true understanding of God's intervention into human history in the person and work of Jesus], these do not detract from this detailed accuracy." ["Acts, Book of the," *NBD*, p. 11. Parenthetical summary added.] For instance, it has been pointed out that his account of Paul's voyage and shipwreck in Acts 27 provides one of the best accounts of ancient seafaring. Indeed, the course of the voyage, the weather systems that led to the shipwreck and its likely location can be reconstructed from the account!

This pattern of confirmed accuracy is vital when we turn to the main line of the account. For, accuracy, as has been often said, is a habit — as are carelessness and deceitfulness. And, Luke's main plot-line (while tossing out abundant and well authenticated incidental references to life in First Century Palestine and the wider Mediterranean) weaves momentous claims into the basic fabric of the times: the birth, life, teachings, miracles, death and resurrection of Jesus and the origin and progress of a church which testified to these things, did similar miracles, and could not be stopped, not even by force. Indeed, the claim that the Church's opponents had to resort to force, even within walking-distance of Jesus' now empty tomb, is itself significant.

Luke contends that all of this is fact, carefully researched and orderly presented fact. If he was wrong, surely the church's opponents would have been able to ram his false or inaccurate claims back down his throat, followed by copious helpings of crow!

Instead, we read of Paul, challenged by Festus: "You are out of your mind, Paul! Your great learning is driving you insane!" His reply: "I am not insane, most excellent Festus . . . What I am saying is true and reasonable. The King [Agrippa] is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner." (Acts 26:25, 26.)

Here we see Paul, before his accusers, preaching to his judges, and appealing to their knowledge of the well-known facts. To my mind, this is plainly not consistent with the idea that the reports are mere tall tales, pious forgeries made up long after the eyewitnesses had died out. Moreover, five hundred people simply do not suffer the same hallucination at the same time, nor are hallucinations able to confer miraculous powers, or utterly change murderous persecutors into bold missionaries, as Luke records. Tellingly, Luke claims that the church's opponents could not deny the life-transforming impact of the gospel, especially the powerful miracles wrought in the name of Jesus.¹³ (Cf. Acts 4:14: "since they could see the [formerly crippled] man who had been healed *standing* . . . there was nothing they could say.")

¹³ For that matter, the gospel yet changes lives, and many miracles in the name of Jesus have continued to happen down through history, right up to our own time. [Cf. Acts 4:7 – 12, and Acts 9:1 – 38 (nb. 24:1 - 26:32, esp. 26:4 - 8, 9 - 23).]

We, then, must make up our minds as to whether we can accept Luke's record. If we reject it, we must know why — and why we do so in the teeth of his demonstrated, detailed historical reliability. (We hardly need to detain ourselves with the circular argument that miracles are “impossible” because they violate “exceptionless laws of nature.” For, why should it be “impossible” for the All-Powerful, All-Wise Creator of the cosmos to sometimes act beyond the usual course of nature as we — all too fallibly — perceive it?)

If, on the other hand, we accept the Lukan claim, it implies that the New Testament is the authentic record of Jesus, his life, teachings, claims death and resurrection, and of the church that bore witness to him. In turn, this validates the Old Testament record of how God acted into the flow of history to prepare the way for just such a Saviour as Jesus of Nazareth. [Cf. 2 Peter 1:1- 3:18, esp. 1:12 – 2:3, & 3:1 -18.]

If it is credible at all, the Bible is the Word of God. The choice, with its implications and consequences, is ours.

3. Apologetics in the Caribbean

We live, think, work and evangelise in the Caribbean. We must therefore be sensitive to the yet unhealed wounds from our past — Christianity, slavery and colonialism were all brought here from Europe, for instance — and we must work towards dealing with the issues facing the church today, in the twenty-first century. Six issues — sectarianism, political messianism, the media and education, evolutionary materialism, post-modern relativism, and Islam, will therefore be focussed upon, not because they are exhaustive but because they are representative and important.

3.1 The Sectarian Civil War

Too often in the Caribbean, church is pitted against church in a vicious war over doctrine and over followers. As a direct result, many simply dismiss the church as a whole, and the gospel — "If you Christians can't even agree among yourselves, why should we believe any of you?"

I suppose this is part of why Jesus prayed that we would "be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." (John 17:23.) Clearly, we have to learn to accept one another in Christ, and to show the love that is the proof of the discipleship we profess. (John 13:35.) Thank God that the UCCF, YFC and many other groups, over the past several decades, have (however imperfectly) modelled a framework that can show the way forward:

- Unity in essentials (such as our understanding of God as Creator and Sovereign Lord; the Person and Work of Christ; the Scriptures; the Gospel and why and how we must be saved — cf. the UCCF Statement of Faith);
- Respect for diversity, and room for dialogue and personal convictions on other important (but less essential) concerns and issues;
- Balanced by a stress on faithful discipleship under the Great Commission, that leads to a life of service, love and purity in the power of God's Holy Spirit.

If such a model is to work out on the ground across the Caribbean, the area of Bible study will need much attention. For, many of our doctrinal and practical quarrels, frankly, are rooted in sloppy interpretation

that does not understand or respect context, language, logic or the culture gap between two or three thousand years ago and today.

For example, some sects reject the historic Christian understanding of Jesus' claim to be the Incarnate, unique Son of God: that is, that Our Risen Lord is the Second Person of the Trinity. What is sad is that members of such groups often fail to realise why the Church, upon much careful reflection, has come to see that the real alternative would be to conclude (with the Jewish leaders who put him to death) that he was a blasphemer.

Mark 2:1-12 will make this point clear. Jesus is teaching in a house, and a paralytic is let down, through a hole in the roof. He pauses and says to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

Some teachers of the Mosaic Law were present, and reacted sharply, thinking to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Jesus knew what they were thinking, *but did not respond*: "No, you are mistaken,¹⁴ it is not God alone who can forgive sins — so can I." Rather, he healed the paralytic as a visible sign of this power.

Some may object that an account of a miracle cannot record an event that actually happened in a certain house in Capernaum some time around AD 30; it "must" be a pious myth. To such, we must ask on what grounds they reject the possibility of miracles? If the response is that they violate laws of nature, we must point out that the God who made nature plainly has power to act beyond the usual course of nature.

Others may feel that, perhaps Jesus did say such things; but, although a great teacher and reformer, he was clearly mistaken. The problem with this objection (as C. S. Lewis so often pointed out) is the sheer magnitude of the "error" — it would immediately call his sanity into question; or worse. And, that simply will not wash.

Yet others, perhaps influenced by the Jesus Seminar, may feel that the whole story is made up by second century church leaders to respond to their own times.

To these, we point out that: (1) there is no solid evidence for such a charge; (2) the canonical gospels simply do not play to the debates of the second century (or even the later First Century); and (3) the history of the Church, from the First Century on, knows of no other Jesus than the one who worked miracles, made amazing claims about his Person and Work, who died on a cross for our sins, and who rose from the dead in power and glory. This is attested, not only by the New Testament documents — for which we now have significant manuscript evidence and citations dating to the very edge of the First Century — but also by the early and later Church Fathers, by opponents, and by secular historians and commentators.

We then see a stark choice: is Jesus our Divine Lord, a demonic Liar, or a crazed Lunatic? No other significant option exists — Jesus saw to that.

In the text we are examining, this is very clear: either Jesus is able to exercise a prerogative that belongs only to God, or else he is a crazed or demonised blasphemer,¹⁵ for he clearly claims that his ability to heal, in this case, is a proof of his power to forgive sin. And, in the end, only God can have this power.

¹⁴ Sin is at its root an offense against God, so indeed it is God who ultimately must forgive it.

¹⁵ Indeed, it was on the charge of blasphemy that Jesus was put to death [John 5:17 – 30; Mark 14:53 – 64], and Christians have always viewed the resurrection as a vindication of his claims to be the Son of God [Acts 2:31 – 41; Rom. 1:1 – 4]. (The *Talmud*, written by later Jewish leaders, is inadvertently consistent — it accepts that Jesus indeed performed miracles in First Century Palestine, but explains them by accusing him of deception and magic. And even these accusations confirm the Gospel reports: cf. Luke 11:14 – 28, Matt 12:1 – 45, John 10:22 – 42, nb. Jesus' challenge in vv. 37, 38.)

In our dealing with such doctrinal controversies, then, we should use the power of inductive Bible study to unearth what the Bible actually says, as opposed to what people may claim it says. Once we clarify the significance of what happens or is said, we can apply it to our own situations. As is clear from the above, this approach can yield startling insights and forces momentous decisions.

But also, we must go beyond mere arguments and controversies, so that “speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him, the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” [Eph. 4:15 – 16.]

If we do otherwise, we will simply be to be traitors to the church and its message in the wider community, contributing to its rejection of the true Messiah, resulting ultimately in ruin.

3.2 Political Messianism

Often, politicians in our region project themselves as messiahs, anointed to lead us into new promised lands. However, as Christians, we know that it is only God who can save us from all the bitter fruit of our sin and selfishness, and it is only God who knows what is in men's hearts and can thus know the exact motives or attitudes of those who question or oppose him. (See 1 Sam. 16:7.)

Therefore, when mere men project themselves as messiahs able to deliver our people into a new age, free of want, misery and suffering, and thus demand unquestioning support, or claim that politics is a sphere in which questions of right or wrong are irrelevant, they demand loyalties which properly belong only to God.

The first commandment still stands: "You shall have no other gods before me." (Deut. 5:7.)

Marxian ideology — now lying in a shallow and noisily stirring grave — added to this potent idolatrous brew a philosophical framework, based upon materialism. For, starting from the basic stance of rejecting any notion of a personal, Sovereign God, it asserted that matter and the purposeless laws that govern matter are all that exists. It then claimed that social injustice is due to how some men have invented the notion of property and have used it to steal the fruit of other people's work to fatten themselves, inventing complex social structures, notably religious and political/economic ones, to legitimise their action. The proposed solution was revolution: the oppressed must throw off their chains and violently seize what "rightfully" is theirs.

Unfortunately, as the aftermath of the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe in 1989 – 1991 revealed, Marxist revolutions have simply substituted one oppressive, unjust and often incompetent ruling class for another. So, the collapse of the East Bloc has for the moment settled the debate over whether centrally planned economies outperform market-based economies: across time, they have not.

However, as Bob Goudzwaard points out in *Capitalism and Progress*, the underlying greed and oppression issues first raised by Marx and other Socialists remain unresolved. For, those who own or manage the capital assets of a firm often think only in terms of maximising profits. They thus tend to neglect the legitimate rights, needs and interests of other stakeholders: workers and their families, suppliers (especially when their bargaining power is weak), customers, the wider community, even the environment.

Therefore, in recent years, the ideological and moral controversies that have dogged capitalism from its inception have simply moved on to other grounds. These include: market failures and environmental

damage; [un-]sustainability of development and North/South globalisation agendas; capitalist/patriarchal oppression of workers, women, black people, and other racial/cultural minorities. (Nor have the usual noises about profit maximisation as an efficiency measure put the critics to flight, for the key theorems relate to idealised, not real world markets.) That is, the underlying theme of oppression/liberation remains unresolved, and the underlying materialistic thinking and hankering after political messiahs still set the agenda for public debate.

This is fundamentally problematic, for secularist political messianism/liberationism rejects God, as its first step in thinking. So, however good the analysis may be at particular points — and it can be uncomfortably close to the truth, even though such thinkers have more than their fair share of misleading arguments — such thinking has no clear and firm basis for respecting truth, rights, and values; even though it often reflects a splendid sensitivity to the cry of the oppressed.

Now, it is an easily observed fact that we naturally become angry and complain or quarrel when we are treated unfairly, though we often fail to live up to the standards we thus set for others. That is, as C. S. Lewis was fond of pointing out, how and why we quarrel reveals that we expect other people to respect our rights — binding moral claims on others. In short, in practice, we all accept that at least some moral principles are objectively binding. Unfortunately, at the same time, we often wish to escape the force of such claims against our own selves!

As a result, it is an all-too-common human failing to be busy about sawdust in the next person's eye, when we have planks sticking out of our own eyes. [Matt. 7:1 – 5; cf. 18:15 – 18.]

It is therefore quite easy for political messianists to highlight the failings and hypocrisies of others. But, more importantly, it is quite another thing for would-be saviours of society to give an adequate basis for the binding nature of our rights. For, what “rights” can “an accidental by-product thrown off by the random chaos of a chance world” ultimately claim against those who hold the levers of power in the community?

This is crucial, as secularist thinking naturally tends to reduce morality to subjective feelings driven by accidents of genetics or of culture, religion and history. Would-be political messiahs therefore typically resort to manipulative media and political power games as they attempt to deliver their promised utopias. But, since secularists reduce truth to subjective perceptions, and cut rights down to being mere entitlements granted through control of the levers of political, legal and regulatory power, they are usually blind to the planks in their own eyes — their own fallen, sinful, deceitful and desperately wicked hearts. [Cf. Jeremiah 17:5 – 11, esp. 9 – 10, and Deut. 8:17 - 20.]

Consequently, secularist utopian reformers all too easily fall prey to the corrupting temptations of power. For example, they often ruthlessly exploit media access and academic/ideological power to push through their policy agendas — often based on questionable or even deceptive scientific, factual, moral or legal claims. In some instances, they have even abused the power of police agencies and the courts — and not just Nazis and Communists, either.

As a result, public policy dominated or controlled by such ideologues soon drifts away from sound foundations, in pursuit of ever-receding mirages, often ending up in shipwreck. This has already become all too clear in the case of the Marxists, who have now left behind the daunting challenge of repairing the political, social, cultural, economic, educational and environmental havoc created by forty to seventy years of ruinous rule by tyrannical Communist Dictators.

Similarly, should they gain or hold power for long enough, bitter fruit will also come from the current crop of would-be political messiahs, precisely because they have lost sight of their own inner corruption

and need for redemption, inner renewal and transformation through the only true Messiah. For, as the great Russian writer and dissident, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, observed — consciously echoing the ancient prophets — the line between good and evil passes, not between classes and nations, but right through the individual human heart.

The main question, in short, is NOT over particular issues, theories, rights and policies, but rather over who is Lord: man, or Jesus? (For, as Rom. 13:1-7 points out, governing authorities are servants and stewards of God, responsible for upholding justice, rewarding good, and punishing evil. When those who hold power drift from this mooring, they inevitably follow a road to ruin.)

In short, the state is, and must always be, accountable to God. For, it is only he who can truly establish justice in the community.

3.3 The Media and Education

Issues of communication, control, credibility and clarity are critical if the church is to speak effectively to the people of the Caribbean during this generation. If we fail to be clear, credible, and relevant, we will simply be isolated and dismissed as other sources and their messages take over our region. For, a message is comprehended only by those who find it clear; it is believable only to those who give its sources a high credibility; it is effective only for those who find it relevant.

Unfortunately, credibility is not the same as truth — it is a perception that a particular source is believable. As well we know from the study of Rhetoric, messages and arguments can be extremely persuasive, even if they are not true or sound. So, demagogues and other misleaders have long since discovered that if one tickles itching ears with what they want to hear, self-deceived people will believe it and trust you, even in the teeth of the actual evidence. [2 Tim. 3:1 – 8, 4:1 – 5, cf. 3:12 - 17.]

Moreover, unless their current belief system is manifestly failing, people generally accept what accords with what they already believe and reject whatever does not accord with what they already believe, so once a false ideology has taken root in a community, it is very hard indeed to uproot.

This brings out the critical strategic roles played by major community institutions. For, as we grow up, our core beliefs and values are accepted from and shaped by authorities such as parents, churches, schools, the media, our peers on the street, popular leaders and politicians — it is only later in life, if ever, that we critically assess them. As a direct result, the key battle in the war of ideas is always political: which authorities and agendas will dominate the media, the school and the academy. Victory or defeat in these three institutions determines the dominant ideas, perceptions and messages that spread through a given community — and, in an ever more global age, the world.

Over the past several decades in our region, the tide of this battle has clearly been shifting to the secularists and their post-modern fellow travellers, especially as the dominant media power of the United States spreads through our region. Key factors include: penetration of satellite/cable TV and the Internet; the messages spread by popular music, art forms and entertainment; the spin put on news and issues in the global media and international forums such as the UN; the dominant secularist ideological underpinnings of higher education; and even project requirements of major funding agencies. If we simply drift with this tide, our region will increasingly be pulled into the orbit of the latest trends in North America and Europe, often to our demonstrable detriment.

Consequently, if we are to counter the tide, and fulfil our calling to be effective as Christian leaders working to disciple the nations in our region, we must be ever alert to the various philosophies, ideologies, agendas and underlying values and beliefs that are being communicated to our communities,

whether openly or subtly. We must also understand how the various persuasive techniques work, and learn how to effectively respond. Most of all, we must be willing to respond effectively, using art-forms, schools, media-houses, books, and whatever other legitimate means are at our disposal.

3.4 Evolutionary Materialism

The intellectual powerhouse that energises secularism is Evolutionary Materialism.¹⁶ Consequently, we must take its measure, and understand then respond to its claims, strengths and limitations, if we are to be effective as educated Christian thinkers and leaders in our region.

Now, except in intellectual circles, Evolutionism is not yet an openly dominant influence in our region, due to the lingering hold of the Bible on the popular mindset. As time goes on, however, the secularist trend is clearly gathering momentum, and so it is imperative for us to respond to it without further delay.

The core issue, of course, is that the biological Theory of [Macro-] Evolution is often held to "prove" the philosophy of Materialism, thus discrediting the Bible and the Christian Faith. This leads to four critical questions:

- (1) Is biological macro-evolution a proven fact?
- (2) Do the various evolutionary philosophies and theories in various fields of study necessarily follow from biological macro-evolution?
- (3) Can these philosophies and theories stand up as proven facts?
- (4) Does Evolution therefore disprove the existence of God?

The critical issue is the linkage between observable data, the inferred theory of macro-evolution, and the claimed implication, materialism. If the inference is good and the implication holds, then God is dead, full stop. So would be Man.

First, a clarification. It is macro-evolution which is at stake, not the minor population variations commonly called micro-evolution. We are not discussing well known small scale changes, such as Darwin's Finches or Industrial Melanism, but rather the grand theory that seeks to explain the origin and diversification of life into the many forms in the fossil record and those existing today.

All such macro-theories face three major difficulties: explaining the origin of life; explaining the mechanism that allows, say, a fish to evolve into a man in several hundred million years; explaining the all-too-characteristic "sudden appearances and disappearances" of life-forms in the "almost unmanageably rich" fossil record, which is the major evidence.

For, as many competent commentators have repeatedly pointed out,¹⁷ the leap from amino acids formed in spark-in-gas experiments to a complete and functioning life-form is vast. Colour changes in moths are one thing, "amoeba to man" quite another. A fossil record of gaps and postulated but still all-too-missing links is more of an embarrassment than a proof (and has always been so).¹⁸ In short, it is hardly proper to conclude, after more than a century, that macro-evolution is proven fact.

¹⁶ Often called "Naturalism." *Evolutionary Materialism* is used here because it is a more descriptive phrase.

¹⁷ See the references at the end of this module.

¹⁸ In Darwin's day, it was confidently expected that the "gaps" would be filled in, hence the search for "missing links." The persistence of the gaps in the fossil record — though often denied in debate — is sufficiently serious that the late Steven Jay Gould (of Harvard), Niles Eldredge et al proposed an alternative to Neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory: Punctuated Equilibrium.

Of course, to many, macro-evolution "must" be true — the alternative, creation and/or intelligent design, "is incredible." Their basic reason, of course, is that they are philosophical materialists — they begin by *assuming* that there is no God, rather than with an open-minded assessment of the evidence. Plainly, this is a circular argument — one obvious alternative is that God/the Intelligent Designer used evolution as his means of creation! Another, given the problems with the evidence, is that macro-evolution simply did not happen. (This may be intellectually unfashionable, but it is definitely not ruled out by the available evidence.)

In short, while macro-evolution may well fit into an atheistic view of the world, it is itself open to significant challenge and simply cannot prove materialism to be true.

Philosophical materialism, however, has deeper problems. It argues that the cosmos is the product of chance interactions of matter and energy, within the constraint of the laws of nature. Therefore, all phenomena in the universe, without residue, are determined by the working of purposeless laws acting on material objects, under the direct or indirect control of chance.

But human thought, clearly a phenomenon in the universe, must now fit into this picture. Thus, what we subjectively experience as "thoughts" and "conclusions" can only be understood materialistically as unintended by-products of the natural forces which cause and control the electro-chemical events going on in neural networks in our brains. (These forces are viewed as ultimately physical, but are taken to be partly mediated through a complex pattern of genetic inheritance and psycho-social conditioning, within the framework of human culture.)

Therefore, if materialism is true, the "thoughts" we have and the "conclusions" we reach, without residue, are produced and controlled by forces that are irrelevant to purpose, truth, or validity. Of course, the conclusions of such arguments may still happen to be true, by lucky coincidence — but we have no *rational grounds* for relying on the "reasoning" that has led us to feel that we have "proved" them. And, if our materialist friends then say: "But, we can always apply scientific tests, through observation, experiment and measurement," then we must note that to demonstrate that such tests provide empirical support to their theories requires the use of the very process of reasoning which they have discredited!

Thus, evolutionary materialism reduces reason itself to the status of illusion. But, immediately, that includes "Materialism." For instance, Marxists commonly deride opponents for their "bourgeois class conditioning" — but what of the effect of their own class origins? Freudians frequently dismiss qualms about their loosening of moral restraints by alluding to the impact of strict potty training on their "up-tight" critics — but doesn't this cut both ways? And, should we not simply ask a Behaviourist whether s/he is simply another operantly conditioned rat trapped in the cosmic maze?

In the end, materialism is based on self-defeating logic, and only survives because people often fail (or, sometimes, refuse) to think through just what their beliefs really mean.

As a further consequence, materialism can have no basis, other than arbitrary or whimsical choice and balances of power in the community, for determining what is to be accepted as True or False, Good or Evil. So, Morality, Truth, Meaning, and, at length, Man, are dead.

As Francis Schaeffer and others have so ably pointed out, this inner contradiction explains modern man's dilemma and confusion. For, his soul — created by God, our real Maker — tells such a man that he is significant, but what he thinks he knows tells him that he is nothing but a random bit of rubbish cast up by an ultimately chaotic and purposeless universe. He therefore knows not which to believe, and so lives under a cloud of hopeless despair, "a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

It is consequently no surprise to detect the consistent theme that all of reality is ultimately meaningless in modern and post-modern Literature, in contemporary Philosophy, and in the Arts generally. Equally unsurprisingly, when materialistic evolutionary frameworks are applied to academic/professional disciplines such as Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology, Linguistics, Economics, Management, or Media and Communication, it is the implications of materialism that invariably are the root of anti-Christian bias.

In Law, Government, and Public Policy, the same bitter seed has shot up the idea that "Right" and "Wrong" are simply arbitrary social conventions. This has often led to the adoption of hypocritical, inconsistent, futile and self-destructive public policies.

"Truth is dead," so Education has become a power struggle; the victors have the right to propagandise the next generation as they please. Media power games simply extend this cynical manipulation from the school and the campus to the street, the office, the factory, the church and the home.

Further, since family structures and rules of sexual morality are "simply accidents of history," one is free to force society to redefine family values and principles of sexual morality to suit one's preferences.

Finally, life itself is meaningless and valueless, so the weak, sick, defenceless and undesirable — for whatever reason — can simply be slaughtered, whether in the womb, in the hospital, or in the death camp.

In short, ideas sprout roots, shoot up into all aspects of life, and have consequences in the real world. Paul therefore aptly summarises the bitter fruit of dismissing God from our thoughts:

since they did not think it worth while to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve those who practice them. [Rom. 1:28 - 32; cf. 18 - 27, which shows the significance of widespread sexual perversions in a culture.]

However, since evolutionary materialism has become the orthodoxy of the academic community and that of many policy-makers and opinion leaders, it is often simply embedded in the foundation of contemporary academic discourse, public discussion of issues, and the policy-making and implementing process.

Therefore, educated Christians must learn how to unearth these hidden assumptions, and then to expose the resulting contradictions, foolish policy recommendations and their likely bitter fruit.¹⁹ Once that is done, we can then set about separating the wheat of sound insight from the chaff of anti-Christian bias, then work towards a sounder, more sustainable future for our region.

¹⁹ NB: Much more could be said on this topic, and the above is, due to the short space available, almost over-simplified. It should be clear, however, that the materialist rebellion against God has led to many of the characteristic problems of the modern world. I urge you to read widely in this area. It would especially be useful to consult the second edition of C. S. Lewis' *Miracles*, Ch. 3, and Ronald Nash's *Faith and Reason*, Ch. 18, which are the basic sources for the above argument about the self-defeating nature of materialism.

3.5 Post-Modernism

The logically self-defeating, morally bankrupt, environmentally destructive, economically unjust nature of secular humanist thought has led to an ongoing disintegration of modernity, thus to the rise of post-modernism. For, it has become all too evident that men, starting from themselves and observation of the world around them, cannot come to an enduring consensus about ultimate reality in general, and in particular, specific and vital issues over truth, knowledge, values/morality, law and public policy.

As a result of this lack of consensus and resulting polarised diversity of views and agendas, a radical relativism has increasingly dominated the academy, the media, public policy, the arts and popular culture. “Tolerance” and “diversity” are therefore the watch-words of the emerging global era — as we slide towards collective suicide in a cesspit of sensual perversion and self-indulgence. [Cf. Eph 4:17 – 24.]

Against this backdrop, the church been shaken by the secularist idea that God is simply a fairy tale, and that morality is simply a matter of personal or cultural values and norms. So, we have not been quick to publicly expose secularism's bankruptcy and respond to the huge wave of spiritual hunger that has swept the globe in the 1990's.

Such a deep hunger in a relativistic, pluralistic age has also naturally accommodated the idea that all religions are equally roads to "God." Thus, "tolerance" is now often redefined from *respect for diversity* to the notion that one must never assert or imply that another person's faith may be in error.

But, on closer inspection, it turns out that this concept may sometimes simply be *atheism in disguise!* For, its advocates often quietly assume that religious beliefs are only true in the sense that those who believe feel that they are true. Granting this, of course it follows that all religions are equally roads to god: "god" being simply a fairy tale that props up weak hearts and minds.

For others, the idea that "all roads equally lead to God" means that they have simply reinterpreted — "wrenched" is a more accurate, though less polite, word — the world's major religious traditions out of context in light of their own ideas. Typically, they hold a vague notion of "a common thread of truth" in all the traditions, dismissing anything that runs counter to such assumed "common truths."

For instance, one popular guru has attempted to take "Be still and know that I am God" out of its context of quiet worship before our Creator, the LORD, into the utterly different Hindu concept that *Atman is Brahman* (roughly, "each of us is a little spark of god"). Far from being "tolerant," such sloppy thinking actually disrespects the fact of diversity in those traditions.

Thus, dramatic changes are also taking place in the world's spiritual climate. While many people are still skeptical over any form of spirituality, the inner emptiness caused by trying to dismiss God as a fairy tale has created a great hunger for spiritual experience. Many forms of "New Age" spirituality — repackaged paganism — are therefore emerging and are rapidly spreading across the world. Islam, too, is aggressively responding to the hunger, and is working hard to win converts and to build a strong base in the Caribbean. Even Hinduism is now taking a far more assertive stance in our communities.

In short, there is a regional spiritual crisis, one that is largely taking place at the expense of the church. It is therefore necessary for us to respond vigorously to the underlying themes and issues.

First, we need to establish a self-evident — but often denied — fact: the basic existence of truth. For instance, as Elton Trueblood argues in his *General Philosophy*, if we try to deny the claim: “Error exists,” that would imply that the challenged claim is in error — proving it! Thus, we may freely infer that at least one true claim exists, so truth exists. It also follows that there is something to be in error about: the

real world. [Of course, such an “existence proof” should give pause to those who try to deny that objective truth exists, but it does not give us a golden key to the content of truth in general.]

But, is truth knowable? This can best be responded to by noting that if one tries to claim that “we cannot know the truth,” this is itself a claim to know an objective truth: the “un-knowability” of truth — again, a self-defeating claim.

So, it would be wiser to accept that, while our specific knowledge-claims are provisional — i.e. subject to correction in light of further evidence or reasoned argument — we can discover, recognise and understand truth and right. Thus, however imperfectly, we reflect the image of our Creator, who know all things and can reveal them to us, through: (1) Creation [thus, the value of sound scientific research]; (2) our inner, intuitive awareness of truth and right [thus, the power of conscience-guided reason]; (3) his Word given through true, authenticated spokesmen/prophets [thus the importance of the Holy Scripture]; and — most important of all — (4) his Incarnate Son, authenticated by the resurrection from the dead. [Cf. Heb. 1:1 – 14, esp. 1 - 4.]

We can then turn to questions of values and morality. In this sphere, the Caribbean is now rapidly entering the post-modern age of cynical relativism — Yale Law Professor Arthur Leff’s age of “the grand ‘Sez who?’” For, many people now think there is nothing more to truth and morality than “this seems true or right to me.” Therefore, they mistakenly challenge any asserted truth or moral claim that does not suit their fancy: “Who are you to impose *your* standards and views on me?”

They thus fall into a glaring inconsistency: how can you at one and the same time say that truth and right are relative to individuals and cultures, then expect others to accept as binding the moral obligation that they *should not* “impose their views on others”?

Clearly, then, relativists accept that at least one moral principle, respect for the views of others, is universally binding — or else, they would be the most blatant of hypocrites. Why, then do they so often try to deny the binding nature of other time-tested, godly moral principles, such as respect for marriage and the family, for life, for property, for truth, and for the reputation and achievements of others? [Cf. Exodus 20:3 – 17.]

Broadening this argument, the key point is that we all believe we have rights, and become quite upset or even angry when we feel that our rights are violated. So, as C. S. Lewis observed, we quarrel in the private sphere, and we cry out for “equal rights and justice” in the public arena. So, we reveal that we believe in objective moral standards that bind duties on other people. (Unfortunately, we too often fail to bind ourselves by these duties as well, and become hypocritical. Thus, the bite in “whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.” [Matt. 7:12, KJV.]

So then, all of us, in practice (but not necessarily in theory) believe in the objectivity of truth and of morality. This, of course, sharply cuts across the evolutionary materialist’s picture of the world, “red in tooth and claw,” but it sits quite comfortably with the picture Paul painted on a fateful day in Athens.

As Acts 17:16 - 34 records, he had gone to Athens to take a brief rest from his stressful Macedonian adventures. However, he found the shock of Athens’ extreme idolatry and associated moral bankruptcy in the very centre of Western Culture’s intellectual tradition too disturbing to keep silent. So, as Socrates had so often done five hundred years earlier, he went to the marketplace and started to discuss the things of God with passersby.

Soon, a group of Philosophers invited him to a meeting of the same Council of Athens' leading citizens that had passed unjust judgement on Socrates.²⁰ There, Paul addressed Athens' leaders about nationhood under God:

- ❑ First, he picked the shrine that exposed the critical flaw in Pagan thought: an altar dedicated TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. That is, on the most important possible point of knowledge, the Athenians — the founders of the Western intellectual, artistic and democratic traditions — were forced to admit their ignorance, in a public monument!
- ❑ Paul continued: “what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.” For, God created the nations from one man, and “he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this *so that* men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him.” [Acts 17:25 - 27; emphasis added.] That is, *the nations were created to foster godliness*, and we are God’s tenants and stewards on the lands in which we live. God therefore so controls our times that he brings us to the point where we must decide whether to seek or serve Him.
- ❑ The Apostle then turned to the folly of devoting ourselves to substitutes for God, concluding: “now [God] commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day in which he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.” That man, of course, is Jesus.

So the Athenians got more than they bargained for. Starting from a careful analysis of their culture, religion and thinking, the leaders of Athens were forced to face the challenge of nationhood under Christ. Sadly, at their moment of decision, most of the leaders failed to follow the truth, but we know now who had the better case that fateful day — the future belonged to the Apostle, not to the Philosophers and Politicians.

3.6 Islam in the Caribbean

Islam is now being strongly promoted in the Caribbean as a major alternative to the Christian Faith, to postmodernism and to neo-paganism, as people grope for meaning in the aftermath of the disintegration of modernity. It is also not well understood in the region, and so it is properly the capstone Apologetics in action case in this primer.

The Islamic Challenge

Islam is rapidly growing as a spiritual challenge in the Caribbean. For example, Suriname and Guyana — the latter with Muslims as some 10 – 12% of the population — are now both full members of the Islamic Conference Organisation, OIC, and are therefore officially Islamic countries. In the mid 1990’s in Barbados, over half of recorded conversions were to Islam. Jamaica, too has a rising Islamic influence, especially through the claims²¹ that the Spanish settlement from 1494 on was predominantly Moorish, and that “Moor”: (1) implies Islamic – true, and (2) includes Black African (misleading²²).

²⁰ In 399 BC; cf. for instance Ross’ Commentary on the *Apology* of Socrates at <http://www.friesian.com/#contents> . At least, with Paul, the issue seems to have been intellectual frivolity, rather than the proverbial cup of hemlock given to Socrates.

²¹ Drawn from several recent academic papers, newspaper articles and exhibitions by Dr. Sultana Afroz of UWI, and others. Cf. Prof. Maureen Warner Lewis’ devastating response: <http://www.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20021020/focus/focus3.html>

²² The OED notes: (1) “**Moor**: a member of a Muslim people of mixed Berber and Arab descent, inhabiting N W Africa”; (2) “**Berber**: a member of the indigenous mainly Muslim Caucasian peoples of N. Africa”; and (3) “**Arab**: a member of a Semitic people inhabiting originally Saudi Arabia and the neighbouring countries, now the Middle East generally.” For, arising from the Islamic conquest of The Middle East and North Africa in the seventh century, and from a process of conversion to Islam

It is then inferred that the majority of Jamaicans are descended from Islamic Moors, who were brought here as slaves by the Spanish or the British, so that: “[c]ontemporaneous to the autonomous Muslim Maroon *ummah*, hundreds of thousands of *Mu’minun* (the Believers of the Islamic faith) of African descent worked as slaves on the plantations in Jamaica.”²³ Specifically, the Maroons are viewed as resisting the British invaders of 1655 by *jihad*, as Saladin resisted and finally defeated Richard the Lion Heart and the other Crusaders in the Middle East. Slave revolts, similarly, are reinterpreted by Dr. Afroz as jihads, especially the 1831/2 “Baptist War” rebellion:

Jihad became the religious and political ideology of these crypto-Muslims, who became members of the various denominational nonconformist churches since being sprinkled with the water by the rectors of the parishes.²⁴ Despite the experience of the most cruel servitude and the likelihood of a swift and ruthless suppression of the rebellion, the spiritually inspired *Mu’minun* collectively responded to the call for an island-wide *jihad* in 1832. Commonly known as the Baptist Rebellion, the *Jihad* of 1832 wrought havoc of irreparable dimension to the plantation system and hastened the Emancipation Act of 1833. [Afroz, p. 227.]

Thus, it is concluded by Islamic advocates that the Caribbean’s ancestral and cultural roots are largely Islamic. Islam, then, seeks cultural legitimacy in the Caribbean as being linked to our predominantly African identity, which is specifically tied to an emphasis on jihad as military struggle. On this basis, Caribbean peoples are in effect invited to turn away from both secularism and the Christian religion of our oppressors, and “return” to Islam.

Responding to the Islamic Challenge

The shaky historical and cultural foundation for the above claims should be quite evident: the overwhelming historical and anthropological evidence is that our “crypto-Muslim” African ancestors were in fact predominantly and very actively animistic, and that Islam first gained a significant institutionalised presence in the region with the settlement of Indian indentured labourers in the mid-nineteenth century. As for the concept that the Maroons were Moorish/Islamic to the point of constituting an Islamic community under Islamic law (i.e. an *ummah*), one should start by considering the fact that they have been famous, from Spanish times, for Jerk Pork — a major Islamic no-no²⁵!

But, while it would be relatively easy to challenge the above in a Seminar Room, it is another matter to take it on in the streets, or even on middle class verandahs, given the unhealed wounds of our unfinished history of oppression and injustice at the hands of “Christian” Europeans and North Americans.

That is, just as has been the case with Rastafarianism, mere argument is not enough. For, until and unless the Church takes the lead, and demonstrates successful reformation and renewal of the cultures of our

and intermarriage, the Moors emerged as a new people. They played a major role in the Islamic invasion of Europe from 711 - 714 AD on, and ruled much of the Iberian Peninsula (making significant cultural contributions to Iberia and to Europe as a whole) until the *Reconquista* was completed when the Moorish Kingdom of Granada was defeated by Ferdinand and Isabella in 1491. There was an infusion of black, sub-Saharan Africans into the Moorish mix, largely due to the Islamic slave trade. Trade and travel into sub-Saharan Africa also led to the penetration of Islam East, Central and West Africa. However, the predominant religions and cultures of sub-Saharan Africa continued to be animistic until quite recent times, with the rise of the Christian Missionary movement — in which Jamaicans (especially the Baptists) and other Caribbeans played no small part from 1839 on.

²³ Afroz, S.: “The *Jihad* of 1831–1832: The Misunderstood Baptist Rebellion in Jamaica,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2001, p. 227. In short, the Afroz claim is that Afro-Jamaican slaves were *predominantly* Islamic.

²⁴ NB: Highly unlikely, as such Anglican rectors as a rule frowned on non-conformists, especially Baptists — “immersionists.”

²⁵ Similarly, Nanny is far more readily understood as an adept of African Religions than as a miracle-working Sufi Saint.

region towards sustainable prosperity and development, Islam will have a powerful appeal to many Caribbean people.²⁶

Understanding Islam

As a part of our overall response to the growing regional Islamic challenge, it is necessary to understand and respond to Islam in general²⁷:

In the early seventh century, the Angel Gabriel reportedly appeared to Muhammad, a merchant from Mecca in SW Arabia, and initiated a series of revelations that have been handed down in the *Quran* [“Recitation”] and the *Hadiths* [traditions and sayings of the Prophet]. These revelations and traditions are the foundation for Islamic teachings/belief and faith [*iman*], law [*sharia*] and community [*umma*], all of which are to be integrated, instituted and enforced in a properly established Muslim state.²⁸

Muhammad first hesitated — he wondered if he was going mad under demonic influence, and had to be encouraged by his wife, Khadijah — but then began to preach in Mecca, where he made but few converts. While his basic sincerity was clear, he found that his claims were rejected by the Christians and the Jews,²⁹ and by the majority of the pagan Meccans; some of whom threatened his safety and persecuted his followers. So, after being invited to be its ruler, he fled to Yathrib in 622, which was renamed Medina, the City of the Prophet.

From the base in Medina, Islam then spread by alliance, conversion and military victories. Within a decade, Arabia was under Islamic rule. Jews and Christians were reduced to subject people status as *dhimmis* [protected persons], and were ultimately expelled from Arabia under Umar. It also seems that pagans were often viewed as having no religion, and were at least sometimes offered the options of conversion to Islam, or being put to the sword. All of this was in accord with the temper of the times, and it seems that at least some Christians in Syria saw the prospect of Islamic rule as an improvement over “Christian” Byzantine rule!

After Muhammad’s death in 632, at the [approximate] age of sixty-three, the process of conquest continued under Abu Bakr and the other early *Caliphs*. Islamic armies swept over the Persian and Byzantine empires, spreading across the Middle East and North Africa, and on into Europe and India by 711. In the West they were stopped by Charles Martel at Tours, about a hundred miles from Paris, in 732. Reportedly, Islamic sea raiders attacked the Irish coasts as well.³⁰

Beyond those regions, Islam has been predominantly spread by traders and the teachings of Islamic holy men, especially the mystical *Sufis*. Thus for instance, Indonesia became the world’s most populous Muslim country, and sub-Saharan Africa saw a gradual Islamic penetration from the North from about the tenth century on.³¹ (In recent decades, there has also been a large-scale, well organised *Dawa*, a missionary campaign to proclaim and establish Islam in all nations.)

²⁶ Over the past five centuries, once the Scriptures were put in the hands of the ordinary man, Christianity has frequently played a leading prophetic role in cultural and social reformation, not least in the abolition of slavery. Even the modern democratic nation-state is largely a heritage of the Protestant Reformation. [Cf. The Dutch Declaration of Independence, 1581, Duplessis-Mornay’s 1579 *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*, and Rutherford’s *Lex, Rex* as well as the second paragraph of the American Declaration of Independence, 1776.]

²⁷ Summarised from various sources, especially Chapman’s *Cross and Crescent*, Cooper’s *Ishmael My Brother*, Sookhdeo’s *A Christian’s Pocket Guide to Islam*, the Caner’s *Unveiling Islam* and the Web site <http://www.answering-islam.org.uk/>.

²⁸ That is, Islam traditionally seeks territorial control as a legally established religion, through state power.

²⁹ As a false prophet teaching doctrines contrary to the Jewish and Christian traditions and Scriptures.

³⁰ The Crusades, strictly speaking, were therefore counter-offensives; however despicably carried out in contravention of the letter and spirit of the Gospel. They were apparently initially provoked by the harassment of Christian pilgrims in the Holy Land — e.g., in 1064-5, seven thousand German pilgrims were ambushed, with much slaughter. [Cf. the Caner’s *Unveiling Islam* (Kregel, 2002) pp 73 -5, and the *Internet Medieval Sourcebook* article at <http://www.fordham.edu/halshall/source/1064pilgrim.html>.]

³¹ This is why in many African nations in the band from say the Ivory Coast and Nigeria to Sudan, Uganda and Kenya, there is a consistent pattern of an Islamic North, and a Christian and/or Animist South. (The strong Christian presence in sub-Saharan

Islamic believers famously practice the Five Pillars of Islam: (1) Confession that Allah alone is God and Muhammad his Prophet/Apostle — Authoritative Spokesman; (2) Prayer to Allah while prostrated towards Mecca, five times per day; (3) Fasting (especially during Ramadan); (4) Almsgiving; (5) where possible, Pilgrimage to the *Kaaba* in Mecca.³² Some add a sixth pillar, *Jihad*, or struggle: classically, in the sense of religiously motivated military conflict to extend the sphere of Islam, but the term is also used in the “higher” sense of spiritual/moral struggle.

In the process of its initial territorial expansion, Islam viewed the world as divided into two zones: *Dar al Islam* [the house of submission to Allah³³]; and *Dar al Harb* [the house of the sword/war]. In the former domain, those who hold to other religions — most notably Judaism and Christianity — may continue to practice their belief, but are often subjected to the conditions of the Pact of Umar, and are *Dhimmis* [“protected persons”] with sharply restricted Civil Rights relative to Muslim men.³⁴ From the Seventh Century on, this has materially contributed to the conversion of subject peoples to Islam, as people sought to gain the status of full members of the community.³⁵

Treaties with non-Islamic states, on this classic Islamic view, are inherently temporary truces,³⁶ and the expansion of Islam by military means is always an open option. (According to some observers, the classic example of this was set by Muhammad himself, who they say broke a peace treaty between Medina and the *Quraysh* of Mecca,³⁷ and so conquered his native city, putting to the sword key opponents and critics, including a poetess who had composed satirical poems challenging his integrity.) However, from the Middle Ages on, there have been Muslim scholars, jurists and statesmen who have argued for a more permanent character to such treaties.³⁸

Islam views the Old Testament prophets and Jesus as Prophets of Allah, and regards the Bible as inspired, to the extent that it has not been corrupted.³⁹ In particular, the concept of the Trinity is viewed as an attempt to elevate Mary — yes, *Mary* — and Jesus to divine status alongside Allah, that is

Africa is in the main due to the modern Christian Missionary movements of the past three Centuries. That in Northern Africa is due to the strong base of early Christianity in the African provinces of the Roman Empire.)

³² Originally, the Kaaba was a Pagan shrine, reportedly dedicated to 360 gods, including Allah. The three goddesses, Al Lat, Al Uzza and Manat — who in the “Satanic Verses” Muhammad allowed prayers to be directed to — were apparently traditionally identified as Allah’s three daughters, in the native pagan religion. (Cf. Sura 53:19 – 23, subsequently abrogated and modified to read very differently in the current version.)

³³ The root meaning of the word “Islam” is submission; such submission to Allah then results in “peace.” A “Muslim” is one who has submitted, and thus has found peace. This contrasts with the Christian/Hebraic message that there is a radical alienation from God due to sin and guilt, which must be expiated. [Cf. Rom. 5:1 -11, 7:14 – 8:19.]

³⁴ For instance, their testimony in Court is regarded as not credible relative to that of a Muslim. This sharply restricts the ability of dhimmis to engage in commerce with confidence, to own property or to hold responsible positions. Thus, since this condition is deeply rooted in Islamic tradition, even where it is not officially the law of the land, it leads to a distinct second class citizen status for such dhimmis. Cf. http://www.dhimmitude.org/archive/by_lecture_10oct2002.htm for Bat Ye’or’s detailed review.

³⁵ The consensus of the four main schools of Islamic law, *Hanifi*, *Maliki*, *Shafi* and *Hanbali*, is that adult males who leave Islam are subject to the death penalty. Even where this is not enforced through the state, such converts are often isolated from their families, sometimes under threat to their lives, and need the understanding and ongoing support of the Christian community.

³⁶ Islam regards deception in war as religiously justifiable. Thus, Muhammad’s treaty with Mecca reportedly set the precedent for *Takiya*, described as “peace when you are weak for the purposes of defeating your enemy when you are stronger.” [Cf.

Farah, *The lesson of al-Hudaybiyah*, http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=27712.]

³⁷ Others assert that the Meccans provoked Muhammad’s assault by attacking his allies. (It should be noted that such disputes over who first started hostilities are common. But the most salient points for our attention are that: (1) what may constitute a “provocation” in Islamic eyes is extremely flexible, and (2) “temporary truces” is a clear Islamic model for dealing with powerful opponents in the short term while preparing for renewed hostilities at a more favourable time. For, in Islamist eyes, true peace is only possible when the world is reduced to submission to Allah — the root meaning of “Islam.”)

³⁸ The ambivalence in the commitment of Islamic nations to the UN Charter on Human Rights is a most important case in point.

³⁹ Thus, attempts to use NT or OT texts to demonstrate the Deity of Christ will often be dismissed as instances of corruption of the text. The secularist-influenced biblical criticism of the past several centuries may also be pressed into service to support such claims, compounding the argument. Although the historical and textual critical evidence, in fact, do not support such a corruption thesis, the issue rapidly becomes one of the Authority/Credibility of Muhammad as God’s final Prophet, and so it is very hard for the evidence to be heard. Thus, relationship and trust must come before argument and debate: the truth, in love.

Shirk,⁴⁰ and Christianity is therefore often viewed as idolatrous. Muhammad, as Allah's final Prophet, has the last say on matters of revelation and fact.

As Surah 4:156 – 158 records, the Quran specifically denies the crucifixion of Christ: “they killed him not, nor crucified him Nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself.”⁴¹ Thus, the Quran's message is explicitly incompatible with the core gospel message: “on which [we Christians] have taken [our] stand. By this gospel [we] are saved if [we] hold firmly to the word that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures And if Christ has not been raised [from the dead], our preaching is useless and so is [our] faith . . . [we] are still in [our] sins.” [1 Cor. 15:2 – 5, 14, 17.]

As Dr Patrick Sookhdeo — intimately familiar with Islam in the Caribbean, being a native of Guyana — also reports, “Muslims believe that Jesus will come back to earth as a Muslim, will marry and have children, then die and be buried near Muhammad. Some traditions assert that at this second coming He will destroy every cross, kill all Jews, convert the Christians to Islam, and reign as king of all Muslims.” [Sookhdeo, p. 22.]

Farrakhan's Nation of Islam [NOI] is somewhat divergent from mainstream Islam, as it is rooted in the rejection of racism in the United States, and views Islam as the answer for the Black man. It is somewhat syncretistic between Muslim, Jehovah's Witness and more orthodox Christian beliefs, has Afrocentric elements and views the White race as the product of breeding experiments over six hundred years by an evil scientist. In some cases, NOI spokesmen reportedly may go so far as to view white people as incarnate devils.

Responding to Islamic Theological Claims

Clearly, the critical theological divergence between Islam and the gospel is that Islam does not accept the need for Christ as the Redeemer/Saviour and reconciler between the Holy God and sinful, rebellious and morally defiled man. Consequently, Islam redefines Jesus as a merely human Prophet of Allah, and rejects the biblical testimony to Christ's Eternal Sonship, Incarnation, atoning death on the cross, and his resurrection — by raising the charge that the texts have been corrupted.

However, there is no real evidential basis for such corruption of the text, since we can directly trace its history, and that of the teachings of the Church Fathers, to the edge of the First Century. Indeed, this history is also externally supported: for example Pliny the Younger, Roman Governor of Bithynia *circa* 110 AD, in discussing trials of Christians, confirms the doctrinal picture we read in the New Testament. Josephus, a Jewish historian, and Seutonius, a Roman historian, allow us to carry this recognizable picture back to the 30's to 70's. Pagan graffiti in Roman Arenas mocks early Christians for worshipping a crucified Christ (who is sometimes mockingly caricatured with an Ass' head). Even the Talmud, by accusing him of blasphemy and demonic powers, provides inadvertent support to the historicity of Jesus' teachings, claims and miracles.

⁴⁰ See *Surah* 4:48 and 171, and 5:116. *Shirk* is viewed as the most deadly of all sins, 4:48 describes it as unpardonable: “Allah forgiveth not that partners should be set up with Him; but He forgiveth anything else.” However, the Islamic view on the Trinity reflects Muhammad's encounters with heretical sects in Arabia rather than the biblically rooted orthodox Christian understanding of the Tri-unity of the Godhead. [Especially see Heb. 1:1 – 14, John 1:1 – 14, Phil. 2:5 – 11, 1 Cor. 12:2 – 6, Acts 5:3 - 4.] The historic Christian teaching asserts that God is One, a complex unity: a unity of Eternal being, integrated with a diversity of personal manifestation: Father, Son and Spirit. (It bears noting that Son, here, is not used in the physical sense; the incarnation is not at all parallel to the pagan tales of gods and their proclivities for pretty girls.) Thus, the tension between unity and diversity in the cosmos finds its resolution in the inherent nature of the Godhead. This is mysterious, but it is not contradictory, for even water, ice and steam share a common nature while being vastly diverse as to manifestation. More profoundly, “God is Love” [1 John 4:8] — an interpersonal, relational concept — is viewed by Christians as integral to the essential nature of God.

⁴¹ Cited, Patrick Sookhdeo, *A Christian's Pocket Guide to Islam* [Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2002], p. 39.

In short, biblical, orthodox Christian teachings and beliefs are, beyond reasonable doubt, rooted in the historic New Testament Faith. Paul summarises the core of that Faith as he sets out the theme of his Epistle to the Romans, which dates to the 50's in the First Century — within thirty years of Jesus' ministry:

[T]he gospel of God — the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. [Rom1:2 – 4.]

Thus we may see the critical contrast between authentic Christian faith and Islam's underlying principles: a gospel of salvation that leads to righteousness through personal spiritual transformation by the power of the indwelling Spirit⁴² vs. a framework of religious laws, traditions and precedents that seeks to bring people and communities to submission and, through conformity to its rules, to reform them towards righteousness.

Unfortunately, such a law-centred framework for achieving righteousness simply will not, and cannot, work.⁴³ The agonized, lived-out words of the Apostle Paul — who started his life as “a Hebrew of Hebrews . . . as for legalistic righteousness, faultless”⁴⁴ — explain why:

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. Who will rescue me from this body of death?⁴⁵

In short, knowing and delighting in the righteous requirements of God is good, but it is utterly incapable of breaking through our underlying problem: enslavement to sin. Is there any hope for us?

Thank God, yes! Paul, speaking from experience, explains why the gospel lives up to its name — Good News:

Thanks be to God — through Jesus Christ our Lord because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set [us] free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit And if the Spirit of him who raised Christ from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.⁴⁶

Thus, while it is appropriate to point out to our Muslim friends that there are significant misunderstandings in the Islamic picture of Christianity, that there is good historical evidence for the claims that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, died on a cross and rose from the dead, and that there is solid reason to reject the claims that the New Testament is fraudulent or corrupted, these are not the heart of the matter.

Instead, let us focus on the core issue: sin, enslavement to sin even in the teeth of delighting in laws that identify and command what is good and right, and our consequent profound need for radical Salvation and transformation from within by the Spirit of God. To access that hope and transforming power, we must put our

⁴² Cf. Gal. 5:1 – 6:10.

⁴³ Cf. Rom. 9:30 - 10:21, Gal. 3:1 – 14 & 5:13 – 6:10, Eph. 4:17 – 5:21 and Col 2:8 – 3:17, esp. 2:20 – 23.

⁴⁴ Philippians 3:5 – 6.

⁴⁵ Rom 7:14 – 15; 21- 24.

⁴⁶ Rom 8:1 – 14.

trust in the Incarnate Christ and Eternal Son of God, who came in love, humbled himself and became obedient to the point of dying on a cross for our sins as our sinless substitute, and then rose in power on the third day as Son of God and Lord, in order that he might fill all things with his grace and glory.

Consequently, we conclude, on a note of both warning and hope⁴⁷:

All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the law.” Clearly no-one is justified before God by the law because, “The righteous will live by faith.” The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, “The man who does these things will live by them.” Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.” He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the *ethne* [Nations] through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: The above survey is desperately compressed — libraries have been filled with books on just a few of the themes touched on. However, more or less, we have covered enough ground to give us an idea of issues and approaches; we have also seen the vital importance of the life of the mind to credible Christian witness, life and leadership in our region. To fulfil this challenge, further reading, discussion, and much thought are clearly necessary. To help in this ongoing exploration, I therefore append a list of useful books and some questions for discussion. For, it is only by investigation, thinking, discussion and, yes, argument, that we will be able to adequately handle the issues we must face as we go out with the gospel into our region. Then, we will be able to properly understand our past, act wisely in the present and thus help to positively shape the Caribbean’s future under God.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Is it true that we Christians are often unsure of what and why we believe?
2. Luke commended the Bereans for their open-mindedness. Should we, as Christians, be open to change what we believe?
3. Nearly everything we believe is hotly contested. How should we decide to accept or reject the claims and counter-claims we will meet?
4. Is the idea that we all live by one faith or another true? Does this mean that all such commitments are equally acceptable? Why? Or why not?
5. Read 1 Cor. 15:1-8, 12-19, 32. Paul claims that the resurrection of Jesus is decisive in validating Christianity. In light of Luke 1:1 – 4, Acts 1:1 – 11 and 26:1 – 32, can the reports stand up to scrutiny?
6. Read 2 Peter 1:12 – 2:3 & 3:3 – 18. What are the key marks of the Bible’s authenticity? In light of the last days scoffing at the miraculous power of God predicted by Peter in 3:3 – 7, how will/do false teachers seek to undermine the credibility of the Word of God? How will/do their teachings affect their own behaviour and that of their followers? Based on 3:8 – 17, how can we detect and escape their snares?
7. It is also often claimed that one can "prove anything" using the Bible. In light of the above and 2 Tim. 2:14 – 26 & 3:14 – 17, how would you respond to such a claim?
8. List ten major alternatives to the historic, New Testament Christian faith in the Caribbean. What are their basic claims? What are their strategies for penetrating our region? Is there a common pattern? How should we respond?

USEFUL BOOKS AND WEB LINKS

1. *World on the Run*, Michael Green, IVP, 1983. [online: <http://www.worldinvisible.com/library/green/runworld/runwcont.htm>] A very readable overview of issues from a vigorous Christian perspective. (The best simple introduction I have seen.) For those needing a more in-depth overview, Ronald Nash’s *Faith and Reason* (Zondervan, 1988) is an excellent, undergraduate

⁴⁷ Gal. 3:10 – 14; Cf. Rom. 9:30 – 10:21.

level introductory text. His *Worldviews in Conflict* (Zondervan, 1992) gives good supplementary information on worldviews.

2. *More Than a Carpenter*, Josh McDowell, Tyndale, 1979. A simple, thought-provoking look at the life of Jesus. His *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Vols. I and II, is a compilation of research notes that gives more details.
3. *Knowing Scripture*, R. C. Sproul, IVP. A good introduction to Bible study, giving details on the inductive approach outlined in this Primer. Cf. the assessment of the reliability of the Bible at <http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/bib-docu.html>, and a similarly non-technical assessment of the Jesus Seminar's claims at <http://jesus.com.au/library/jesus/seminar/index.html>. Bishop Spong's proposed "reformation" of Christianity, along atheistic lines, is posted on the web at <http://www.dioceseofnewark.org/jsspong/reform.html>, and a response is at <http://www.starcourse.org/spong/>.
4. *How Should We Then Live?*, Francis Schaeffer, IVP and Crossway. An overview of the intellectual currents of our civilization. His *A Christian Manifesto* is a call to political action in the light of this analysis, with historical and theological roots in works such as Duplessis-Mornay's *Vindiciae*, Rutherford's *Lex, Rex*, and the Dutch and American Declarations of Independence (1581, 1776).
5. *The End of Man*, John W. Whitehead, Crossway, 1986. Extends and updates Schaeffer's analysis, providing an extensive bibliography. Chs. 6 - 9 provide an important perspective on technology, including AI.
6. *Christian Apologetics in a World Community*, William Dyrness, IVP. Dealing with major intellectual challenges from various perspectives in today's world. A bridge to the Postmodern era.
7. *Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions*. Kreeft, Peter, & Tacelli, Ronald. (Crowborough, E. Sussex: Monarch Publications, 1995.) A "summa" on conceptual, logical, factual and values issues relating to Christian faith. Very helpful as a quick first reference on questions, or as a good short resume of the field of intellectual challenges to the faith and typical informed responses.
8. *General Philosophy*, D. Elton Trueblood, Baker, 1981. An excellent overview of and introduction to Philosophy from a Christian perspective.
9. *Contours of a World View*. Holmes, Arthur F. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983.) A survey of general world view concepts, issues, options and implications for life; including those tied to ethics. A basic primer for thinking through the underlying (hidden?) assumptions and agendas associated with ideas, ideals, academic disciplines and schools of thought, the arts, socio-cultural movements, policies and politics.
10. *Epistemology, the Justification of Belief*. David L. Wolfe, IVP, 1982. A look at the basic philosophical issues related to knowledge, reasoning and world views.
11. *Christianity and the Nature of Science: A Philosophical Investigation*. Moreland, J[ames] P. (Grand Rapids, MI: 1992.) Perhaps a tad more than introductory, but this is such a path-breaking analysis of Science, its methods, strengths and limitations that is a necessary foundation for any serious reflection on matters linked to the Sciences. Also, a necessary backdrop for informed critical reflection on Naturalism. Every Science major, every Science or Technology Educator, and everyone concerned with scientifically linked policies should read it. Dembski's *The Pragmatic Nature of Mathematical Inquiry* [http://www.designinference.com/documents/2002.07.Math_Inquiry.pdf] addresses the parallel limitations in Mathematical thinking, in light of Godel's famous incompleteness theorems. His *Is Intelligent Design a Form of Natural Theology* [http://www.designinference.com/documents/2001.03.ID_as_nat_theol.htm] addresses the question of the project of Natural Theology and its distinction from ID: "What if the methods for identifying intelligence tell us that Michael Behe's irreducibly complex biochemical machines are in fact designed? What if careful analysis of such systems shows that natural causes (like the Darwinian mechanism of natural selection and random variation) are in principle incapable of generating such systems? In that case to charge intelligent design with trading in arguments from ignorance or invoking a god-of-the-gaps is no longer tenable. In that case gaps in naturalistic explanations for such systems are not gaps of ignorance about underlying natural causes but rather gaps in the very structure of physical reality."
12. *Darwin on Trial*, Philip E. Johnson, IVP, 1991. A Lawyer's expose of the manipulative rhetorical devices used by evolutionary materialists. Eye-opening reading! His *Reason in the Balance* (IVP, 1995) exposes case after case of Machiavellian political, academic and legal manoeuvres (often including the unjustified breaking of careers) in the interests of the continuing secularist control of the commanding heights in the battle for the ideas and ideals that will guide the future path of western culture. More general intellectual issues linked to philosophical Naturalism may be considered at <http://www.leaderu.com/menus/apologetics.html>. Cf. the Discovery Institute's web site at <http://www.discovery.org/crsc/index.php3>.
13. *Shattering the Myths of Darwinism*. Milton, Richard. (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 1997.) A critique of the scientific foundations of contemporary Darwinism, by "an inquisitive reporter," on the premise that since knowledge is "justified, true belief," the justification of those beliefs should be open to public inspection. However, Milton reports that biologists and medical men who have made discoveries bearing on evolutionary biology "have sought to publicize these discoveries in journals such as *Nature* but have been universally rejected because their discoveries are anti-

Darwinian in implication and hence counter to the ruling ideology in the life sciences. They have appealed to me—a nonscientist—to help them gain publicity.” [Pp. ix, x.] A devastating claim, indeed, and an independent, corroborating witness to Philip Johnson’s similar claims in his books.

14. *The New Atheism and the Erosion of Freedom*, Robert A. Morey, Bethany, 1986. A primer on how materialists put their case, its flaws and damaging implications for freedom. It also illustrates how to respond effectively.
15. *The Challenge of Marxism*, Klaus Bockmuehl, IVP. An introductory look at Marxism, a key case illustrating the implications of evolutionary materialism. For economic issues, see Mark Blaug's *Economic Theory in Retrospect*, Cambridge, 1978, (3rd edn.), especially the chapter on Marxian economics and the introduction.
16. *Capitalism and Progress*. Goudzwaard, Bob. (Carlyle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1997.) A groundbreaking study of the rise of modern economies as the medieval worldview broke down, and an elaboration of its challenges and prospects. The discussion of the contrast between *oikonomia* and *chrematistike* [roughly: stewardship in the interests of all stakeholders of an enterprise vs. greed and exploitation], pp. 211 – 216, is a telling critique of modern market economies, in the interests of truly sustainable economics. More relevant today than when it was published in 1978, in Dutch.
17. *A Christian’s Pocket Guide to Islam*, Patrick Sookhdeo, Christian Focus/Isaac, 2002. A short and well-documented, evangelistically oriented summary of Islam for Christians by a Theologian familiar with Islam in his native Guyana. Colin Chapman’s *Cross and Crescent* (IVP, 1995) provides more details. (The web site, <http://www.answering-islam.org.uk/> is an online dialogue of Christians and Muslims. The Christian Resources section is very useful, and includes good training materials.)