

# CHRISTIAN CONTROVERSIES

Seeking the Truth



Scott S. Haraburda, PhD

# **Christian Controversies**

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## *Seeking the Truth*

**Scott S. Haraburda, PhD**



Spencer, Indiana

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## Chapter 1. What's This Book Really About

*It was the best of Christianity, it was the worst of Christianity, it was the age of Wisdom, it was the age of Ignorance, it was the time of Belief, it was the time of Doubt, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of Hope, it was the winter of Pessimism, we had everything, we had nothing, we were all going directly to Heaven, we were all going directly to Hell<sup>1</sup>.*

Even though this sounds cheesy, this is my Christian translation of Dickens' classic story about two cities, which is very applicable to Christianity today. Think about this.

As you're probably aware, there are millions of books written about Christianity, many of them contradicting one another. As a matter of fact, religious leaders and religious academic experts wrote many of them. For example, I heard many of those so-called leaders preach that we should return to the traditional biblical family values. If you hear this, run the other way. Why? For starters, the Bible is full of rules that describe women as property. They can be forced into marriage without their permission, whether it's their father's demands based upon receipt of payment from the future husband (otherwise known as the bride price<sup>2</sup>), or after being captured in a military battle<sup>3</sup>. Sacred prostitution was also acceptable<sup>4</sup>. These are some of the traditional biblical family values that I do NOT support!

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<sup>1</sup>This is the famous introduction to this classic Dickens' story, which during every age, people experience the same contradictory struggles, difficulties, and joys. I took the liberty to rewrite this for Christianity instead of for life.

<sup>2</sup>Exodus 22:16-17 and Deuteronomy 22:28-29. Also in Genesis 29. This was probably the reason that Jacob worked two consecutive seven-year terms in order to marry both Leah and Rachel.

<sup>3</sup>Numbers 31:17-18.

<sup>4</sup>Genesis 38 in which Judah paid to have sexual relations with Tamar. As a result, she gave birth to Perez, an ancestor of King David and Jesus. Judah was one of the brothers who sold Joseph into slavery. See also Westenholz 1989.

I'm none of those religious leaders or experts. So, why should you read this book? I'm just a humble servant of the Lord with no formal religious training. Nevertheless, I profess myself to be a Christian, having started my life as a Catholic and having attended a Protestant church throughout most of my adulthood. While as a former Army Brigade commander, I supervised the religious programs for more than 2,000 Soldiers, with a variety of different Christian denominations and different non-Christian religions, such as Wiccan, Judaism, and Muslim faiths. Furthermore, I spent several years teaching Sunday School classes in various non-denominational Christian churches (or chapels), including the United Methodist Church. Moreover, I also served one year as the Sunday School Superintendent while teaching at West Point.

During my life's travels, I experienced life in different regions of the world; and, I read the Bible several times over in my feeble attempt to understand it. Yet, in my extensive scholarly research of the biblical messages, I have come to believe that God wants us to understand the basic theme throughout the Bible, and that involves the Greatest Commandment to love our neighbors. If that is the basic and simple premise behind being a Christian, then why do we have thousands of denominations, each trying to complicate the issues by telling us that the other ones are incorrect? I guess that is the basic Christian controversy. They must be both correct and incorrect, or one correct and the other incorrect. So, what do we need to know? Who do we believe?

Today, we live in a very selfish and terrifying world. It's full of greed and brutality with millions starving, people slaughtered indiscriminately, environmental degradation, widespread ignorance, and insidious prejudices. Franklin Spinney, an expert known for fighting fraud, waste, and abuse inside the Pentagon, described this quite accurately when he wrote that the United States has, "become a fearful nation, a bunkered nation, bogged down in never ending wars abroad accompanied by shrinking civil liberties at home"<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> 2011

No wonder Americans, being fearful of everything, have a difficult time understanding Christianity. They should be fearful, especially about their spiritual well-being. Based upon my understanding of ancient history, specifically about the Athenian Empire, failure to learn from historical failures condemns us to repeat these failures<sup>6</sup>. This ancient empire was very similar to that of the United States. It started off as a democracy, expanded itself by gaining control over other countries, and lost everything when it destroyed itself from the inside out. The same is happening with Christians today. When we become more focused upon controlling what other people and organizations do, we begin to neglect ourselves. Then, eventually, we begin to lose ourselves spiritually and no longer believe in and follow the teachings of Jesus.

Although intended to be ironically humorous, George Carlin's monologue on religion portrays the perceptions that many Christians have regarding their faith, which I paraphrase below<sup>7</sup>.

*The Christian religion requires its members to believe there's an invisible man living in the sky who constantly sees everything we do. And this Voyeur has a bunch of rules for us. If we break any of them, He'll send us to a fiery hot place where we'll suffer forever. What's more, He loves us.*

A Christian should be able to respond to the errors implied within Carlin's monologue, but most of us can't. Largely, this results from lacking the wisdom of our faith, especially when dealing with contemporary controversial issues. As implied by its title, my book addresses many of the modern controversies surrounding the Christian faith and in a philosophical way, discusses different topics such as logic, epistemology, metaphysics, and even science.

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<sup>6</sup>Santayana 1905-06. A paraphrase of "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

<sup>7</sup>Dawkins 2006, 317 . You can read the entire monologue in this book.

I'll share with you topics such as ethics, leadership, Bible-thumping judgment of each other, a perfect Bible, sex, lying, killing, and women's equality to men (or women's rights), and what we find in the Bible on these subjects.

To illustrate several items graphically, I have included several historical paintings, some that most people have never seen. Ultimately, my book will extend beyond just an academia view of the history of Christianity and enter into the real volatile world of globalization in which people live as they confront modern issues.

So, fasten your seatbelt and put your tray in the upright and locked position, because you're about to take off on a fantastic journey that explores how dealing with these Christian controversies impacts everlasting survival along your life's path.

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## Chapter 2. Wise Christians are Open-Minded

*Can wise Christians possess absolute understanding about the teachings of Jesus? This is the Christian wisdom controversy. Only God has complete knowledge about this. Christians, who are mortal humans, should remain open-minded and grow in their faith, even if it means replacement of previous beliefs. Otherwise, faith will be nothing more than blind credulity, retrospective backwardness, and idle superstition. Becoming wise requires us to understand the wisdom hierarchy: data, information, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. Without this wisdom, Christians risk making numerous defective decisions resulting from misleading experience, misleading prejudgments, inappropriate self-interest, and inappropriate attachments.*

Wisdom is a controversy too and is mentioned first because we need wisdom to fully understand the other controversies. My general hypothesis of this controversy, though, is that most Christians tend to welcome advances in science and technology but fear similar advances in religion. This close-minded faith prevents Christians from becoming wise, making it difficult for them to develop a closer relationship with God. To illustrate my point, I have witnessed many Christians taking full advantage of current technologies while still believing that the world is only five thousand years old, its first human inhabitants were Adam and Eve, the stories contained in the Bible are a completely accurate account of human history, along with the future destination of the condemnation of billions of people today. This same Christian mindset is based upon creeds which represented people living more than 1,500 years ago, even though common sense, reason, technology, and average intelligence have advanced significantly since then<sup>8</sup>. It's no wonder that for more than forty years that some

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<sup>8</sup> Gulley 2010, 74.

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