

Evidence For Christianity Newsletter

Vol. 6 Issue 1, March 2010

Teaching Trip to Madrid and Berlin By John Oakes



Madrid and Spain June 19-July 1

I am blessed to be able to travel with my wife Jan. Part of the purpose of the trip is to celebrate our 25th anniversary. Our first stop is Madrid. Here we are met by Susana and Autumn, a student from Boston. We are staying with Eliza who is from Barbados. It is quite hot here. The first day it is around 93 °F. Madrid is a very modern city of about 6 million. It is at the same time quite European, and uniquely Spanish. The city is quite compact, being relatively small for such a population. It is a city of coffee shops and tapas bars and many places for people to be together out in public.

The church we visited in Madrid has about 50 members and no full time paid leadership. The main leaders are Juan Zaragoza and his wife Olga as well as Carlos Vargas, who is engaged to Carla from Cuernavaca, Mexico. The church is a mixture of Spanish converts with a major sprinkling of Central and South Americans. On our first night I went to a fiesta to raise money for the baseball league which is run by church members. This is an extremely effective evangelistic tool. The church here is quite evangelistic. I am very encouraged by this. They have grown from 25 in 2004 to 50 members now, and they just planted a church in

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Christian World View Part VI

In the previous three essays, I have attempted to define the idea of a world view and shown why it is an extremely important thing for all of us to think about—in fact arguably THE most important thing for us to think about. In addition, I have proposed a tentative means by which we can determine what is a “good” world view. I proposed three criteria we can use. First, this world view must be true. In other words it must be consistent with what we know. Second it must give satisfactory answers to the big questions people really care about. Third, it must tend to cause those who accept it to be “better” people than they would have been if they had accepted other, competing world views. Having done this, I have attempted to describe some of the most common competing world views to that of Christianity. Specifically, we have looked at Naturalism, Postmodernism, and Eastern religion/philosophy and its cousin, the New Age philosophy/religion. Having defined these world views, I attempted to evaluate them with

respect to the proposed criteria for a “good” world view. Obviously, this treatment is not comprehensive. We have not evaluated the world view of the Nihilist (which is somewhat closely related to that of the naturalist), or the Existentialist, the Stoic, dualist, neo-Platonist or of the Muslim. All of these, with the exception of the world view of Islam, can be seen as more or less closely related to the ones we have considered. Time and space are not sufficient for us to cover all of these in detail.

In this, the final essay in the series, I want return to Christianity. We will consider in much more careful detail what the Christian world view really is. We will also analyze this world view with respect to the three criteria I have been using throughout. Many Christian believers may think that the Christian world view is fairly obvious and for the seasoned follower of Jesus relatively little need be said about it. By way of response, let me say that one point of this series of essays is that it is essential for those of us who seek to influence our neighbors to have a solid and deep understanding of both our own and of competing world views. I will make the claim that many Christians do NOT have a sufficiently deep understanding of the world view which they ought to have if they accept, by faith, the biblical view of the world. I make this statement because as I travel around the world to visit more than one hundred churches in dozens of countries, when I ask some rather basic questions about things such as predestination, natural and special revelation, salvation, the cause of suffering and so forth, the answers show a rather disturbing lack of understanding of who the God of the Bible is.

Of course, some will ask “Which biblical world view?” In other words, some claim that there is more than one world view found in the Bible—that one has to choose which of these competing views one will take to be the actual biblical/Christian world view. This is

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Carlos III statue at the Puerta Del Sol Plaza in Madrid

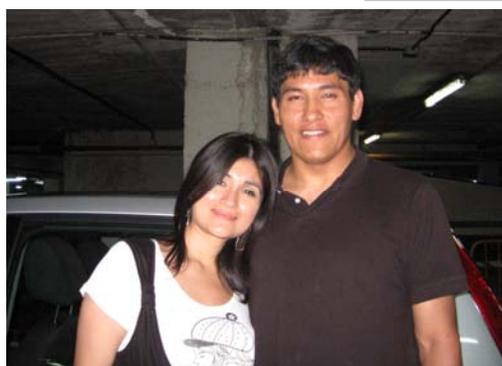
Barcelona. Plans are to plant a church within the next year in Malaga (the largest and fastest growing city in the South). This church has a lot of vision. They are starting an entire baseball outreach program through their league, with big plans to teach baseball to kids in Madrid schools. Every activity is geared around evangelism, and they have several studies going from this.

We spent time sharing our faith on the streets of the city, after which we visited the Royal Palace, the Madrid Opera and the spectacular Prado Museum. From there I taught a class on world religions and the Christian world view for a number of members of the church here. There were many questions, especially about Christian theology. Spain is, on paper a principally Roman Catholic country, but the reality is that most people are very skeptical of religion in general, tending to be agnostic or atheist. There is a need to learn how to reach out to those who have little if any background in believing in God. The next day was Sunday and we met with the Madrid church. I taught a class on Naturalism, Postmodernism and Christian World View for about 45—mainly the church members, followed by a lesson as part of the worship service on God and Science. There were several guests. We had a wonderful time fellowshiping with our new friends, including Carlos, Carla, Juan and Olga Zaragoza. The church here is so friendly and has such a great vision for being used by God.

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Olga and Juan



Carla and Carlos



Single men and women

Christian World View Part VI, continued

1. The physical world is: a. real b. created out of nothing (ex nihilo) and c. essentially good.

Genesis chapters 1-3 is in my opinion the most brilliant little piece of philosophy I have ever read. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1). As the Hebrew writer put it, “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.” If this statement is true, then animism, polytheism, pantheism, dualism, naturalism, nihilism, and postmodernism are all proved untrue. Just as significant to the Christian world view is this: not only did God create the physical universe, but this creation was essentially good. The way God puts it in Genesis 1:31, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” Eastern philosophy has the physical world to be an ephemeral illusion. Greek philosophy agrees, adding that the physical world is decaying and essentially evil. Naturalism agrees that it is real, but denies that there is a superior reality—that it was created. It certainly is not “good,” as such a description is meaningless in a random accidental universe. When God says his creation was good in its entirety, this does not deny the existence of evil. The question of evil will be addressed below.

2. There exists a parallel unseen spiritual reality which is not limited to or defined by the physical reality. Human beings have a spiritual aspect to their nature.

The fact that God, one who is “invisible,” created the universe establishes that there is a non-physical reality which is at least in some sense greater than the physical. The physical universe is real, but it is not all there is. Jesus confirmed this idea. “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:24) Acknowledging that there is a spiritual reality is not the same as dualism. Dualism has the world being governed by more or less evenly matched forces of good and evil. It is also not naturalistic monism, which denies the existence of spiritual reality entirely. We have a soul and a spirit. That we are created “in the image of God” (Genesis 1:27) is a spiritual rather than a physical claim. It is not a statement of our equality with God, but rather a description of our spiritual nature. I have a body, but I am not a body. “I” exist, and “I” am not defined by the chemicals which compose my body. Consciousness is not a mere epiphenomenon as naturalism requires. Our God-likeness has to do with our spiritual nature, our possession of a soul, our inherent understanding of good and evil, our ability to create and to love.

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Can you please explain how the Gabriel stone will affect Christianity?

The "Gabriel Stone" has now been around for a while and it is a good time to begin thinking about its significance. I have learned from experience that when a new find comes out it is good to hold off at least for a while on forming too strong a view of the find one way or another while some of the dust clears. I remember when the James Ossuary came out several years ago, I was very skeptical of this find and refused to join the bandwagon for this "very important discovery." It turned out to be a hoax.

Having said that, I think the requisite period of time to listen to the initial response to the report of the Gabriel Stone discovery has passed and it is now a good idea to formulate a response to this discovery.

First, it is good to ask what this discovery is. Where was it found? What is its provenance (in other words, who has put his or her hands on it since its discovery, and how confident are we about where it was found)? Who probably wrote it? What was its significance in its own time? Did it represent a broad view at the time or was it just the random thought of one relatively uninformed person? What are the meaning and interpretation of the inscription itself? Only after we answer these questions are we ready to ask what is the significance of this find.

We cannot answer all these questions, but it seems an initial response is possible. First, the question of what it is arises. This object is rather unusual because it is written in ink on stone. I do not know of any other important document from that time and area of this sort. Some have called this the Dead Sea rock (as opposed to a Dead Sea scroll). Second, there is the date of this inscription. It has been dated to either the second half of the first century BC or the very early first century AD. This date does tend to increase the possible importance of the inscription, because it is from a time relatively near to the lifetime of Jesus and the writing of the gospels. Third, there is no evidence that this inscription represents an important view at the time. Unlike the book of 1st Enoch or some of the documents found at Qumran, there is no reason for us to suspect that what was written on this scroll was ever taken seriously by a large group of Jews. Of course, lack of evidence is not evidence of lack, but it should cause us to take what is written here more cautiously, as it could very well just be the idea of one relatively obscure person. Now, to the inscription itself. Below is a translation (found at <http://1peter315.wordpress.com/2008/07/14/responding-to-the-gabriel-stone/>) of the relevant lines:

69. Thus He said, (namely,) YHWH of Hosts, the Lord of Israel ...:
 70. Prophets have I sent to my people, three. And I say
 71. that I have seen ...[...]
 72. the place for the sake of(?) David the servant of YHWH[...]...
 [...]
 73. the heaven and the earth. Blessed be ...[...]
 74. men(?). "Showing mercy unto thousands", ... mercy [...].
 75. Three shepherds went out to/of? Israel ...[...]
 76. If there is a priest, if there are sons of saints ...[...]
 77. Who am I(?), I (am?) Gabri'el the ...(=angel?)... [...]

78. You(?) will save them, ...[...]
 79. from before You, the three si[gn]s(?), three ...[...]
 80. In three days ..., I, Gabri'el ...[?],
 81. the Prince of Princes, ..., narrow holes(?) ...[...]
 82. to/for ... [...]... and the ...
 83. to me(?), out of three – the small one, whom(?) I took, I,
 Gabri'el.
 84. YHWHof Hosts, the Lord of(?) [Israel ...]...[...]
 85. Then you will stand ...[...]
 86. ...\
 87. in(?) ... eternity(?)/... \

Some have seen in this document evidence of a Jewish belief in the resurrection of the Messiah after three days. If we look at this translation, we can see immediately that it is not at all obvious that this document reflects a belief in a resurrection of the Messiah. In fact, it is quite incomplete and the meaning is very obscure. It does seem to be messianic in its focus (see line 72 and its mention of "David the servant of YHWH), but that it is predicting a resurrection on the third day or even a resurrection at all is quite unclear, to say the least. The number three here is being used in rather obvious symbolic ways, making a literal interpretation of a resurrection on the third days very unlikely. Even if the evidence for a predicted resurrection is extremely weak, it is interesting to see a Jewish person associating messianic expectation with Gabriel. There may be some significance to this find in its connection of Gabriel with the Messiah (not necessarily to Christian belief, but to studies of Jewish expectations).

Those who claim that this is indeed a story of a messianic resurrection after three days fall into two camps as to what this implies. Some say that this is a reflection of Jewish messianic expectation which is in line both with what Jesus did and with earlier Old Testament statements about the Messiah, making the idea that Jesus fulfilled Jewish messianic expectations more credible. Others say that this is evidence that the gospel writers may have borrowed the idea of the resurrection, not from historical fact, but from Jewish ideas which were already around at that time.

Let me give my response to this controversy.

First of all, there is no evidence at all that this document represents a significant view of Jews as a whole at the time of Jesus. We simply do not have enough information from the time to support the idea that this is more than just the reflection of a single relatively insignificant opinion. The idea that the gospel writers were influenced by this document seems a wild speculation.

Second, that this document is messianic seems fairly clear, but what it is saying about the Messiah is garbled and very unclear. For this reason, any conclusion about its meaning--never mind its significance should be correspondingly quite tentative. To conclude that this is proof of an expectation of resurrection on the third day is to grossly overstate the case.

Third, Christian apologists should be very hesitant to put this document out there as evidence in support of the gospel accounts. I believe that the Old Testament documents themselves are vastly more useful than this rather obscure and difficult to read (never mind interpret) document at telling us what the Jews expected or should have expected with regard to the resurrection of Jesus. The story of Jonah (Matthew 12:38-42) and the fact of Abraham receiving his son back from the dead on the third day (Hebrews 11:17-19) seem to

Can you please explain how the Gabriel stone will this affect Christianity? Continued

be a far better indication of resurrection of the Messiah on the third day than this rather obscure document by an unknown author.

Fourth, the idea that this document might lend support to the claim that the resurrection of Jesus was a Christian invention if simply ludicrous. Which is more likely--that the apostles actually believed Jesus was raised from the dead, or that they stole the idea from this document or from others who thought like its author and invented the story out of nothing? I think we can say that for anyone who makes this conclusion we learn more about that person than about the believability of the New Testament accounts.

Fifth, having said all that, I do feel that this document is not completely without significance. Despite what I said about the greater importance of the Old Testament with regard to messianic prophecy and understanding Jesus, this document is in fact from the time fairly near when Jesus lived and the gospels were written. For this reason, I do feel it can shed some light on Jewish thinking about the Messiah at that time. Scholars will want to spend significant time trying to narrow down possibilities about the meaning of the text and continuing to find sufficient connections to other materials in an attempt to discover what line of contemporary Jewish thinking it might represent. However I do not think this particular document will be viewed in the long run as being one of our major finds. Once the dust settles and people move on to other things, the Gabriel Inscription will be a fairly minor blip on the radar screen.

My co-workers here in Dubai, who are Muslim say Jesus is already passed, and that Islam is the last and final religion. How can you answer this claim?

Your co-workers are making a claim which is hard to support or disprove because it is completely a matter of opinion. Basically they are saying that Islam is better than Christianity and that it will eventually replace Christianity. Muslims believe that Muhammad is the final and greatest prophet. They say that Jesus is a prophet as well, but that Mohammed is an even greater prophet. Of course that is their opinion, but obviously you do not accept this opinion. Let me tell you a few reasons I believe this is not a valid claim. First of all, let me compare a few facts about Jesus and Mohammed. Jesus was born of a virgin. Jesus never sinned. Jesus raised Lazarus and several others from the dead. Jesus healed the blind and the deaf. Jesus fulfilled dozens of amazingly specific prophecies which were made about the Messiah hundreds of years before he lived (for example Psalms 22:16-18, Micah 5:2, Isaiah 53:1-12, Zechariah 9:9, Zechariah 12:7-12 and many others. For more examples see my book From Shadow to Reality www.ipibooks.com), Jesus was a man of peace and love. Even those who are not Christians know that Jesus love, his character and his example is beyond comparison. To top all this off, Jesus was raised from the dead.



Dubai's Grand Mosque

Let us compare this to Mohammed. Mohammed worked no miracles. He did not heal the sick or raise the dead. Mohammed did not fulfill any clear prophecies. Mohammed was a rather blatant sinner. He married more than a dozen women. He took a nine year old little girl as a wife. He forced his relative to divorce a woman so that he could marry her. He had hundreds of Jews massacred in Medina. He was a pillager and robbed many caravans. His bad temper was legendary. Even Islamic scholars admit that Mohammed had a temper. Mohammed was not a teacher of love and peace, but instead preached war and violence in his name.



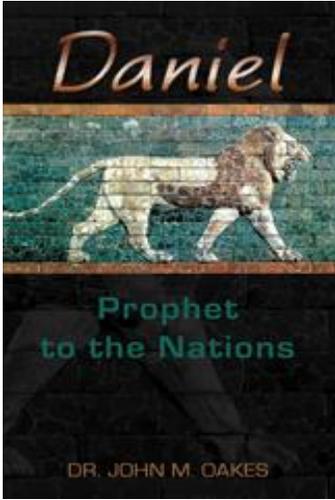
So, some Muslims may believe that Mohammed is better than Jesus, but I definitely do not agree. Jesus had a superior message and a superior life. Then there is the comparison between the Bible and the Quran. I have read both. The Quran has many obvious historical errors and blatant historical contradictions with the Hebrew scripture, as well as rather obvious scientific errors (see the power point on Islam at my web site for a few examples). In my opinion, the text is boring and hard to follow. It is not supported by any fulfilled prophecies. It is confusing because sometimes it says Jews and Christians are good, while other times it says that Jews and Christians should be killed. It says that Jesus is a prophet, yet does not agree with what he taught. It advises husbands to beat their wives if they are not obedient. It contains dozens of commands to make war and kill enemies. The Bible has so many proofs of inspiration, including fulfilled prophecies, accurate history, scientific proof. You can find examples of all of this by looking around at my web site or by getting a copy of my book Reasons for Belief (www.ipibooks.com)

One more thing is a comparison of the view of God in the Quran and the Bible. In the Quran, God is distant from mankind. In Islam, we must approach God based on our own good deeds. There is no grace. There is no sacrifice for sins. In Christianity God is a loving Father who reaches out to us. In Islam we reach out for God. In Christianity God reaches out to us. God offers us forgiveness for sins through coming to earth as his Son to die and bring forgiveness. There is no assurance of salvation in Islam, but only the hope that maybe one can go to heaven. Christianity is a religion of love and of compassion. Islam is a religion of obedience, but not one of love.

Your Muslim friends can claim that Islam will replace Jesus. I sure hope they are wrong, because Christianity is a vastly superior religion. Not only that, but Christianity is true. It is not a false man-made religion as proved by the obvious inspiration of the Bible. Christianity is validated by Jesus when he was raised from the dead. Bottom line, the Quran is not truth. You should not be intimidated by your friends. They are wrong. They are just expressing their opinion, with no evidence to support it. I could say a lot more, but hopefully this gives you a little to go on.

Recent Publications

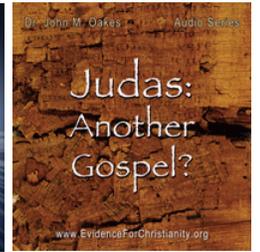
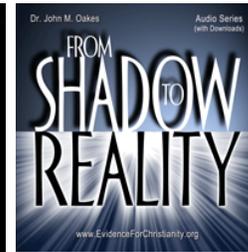
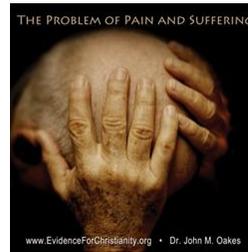
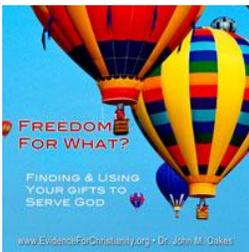
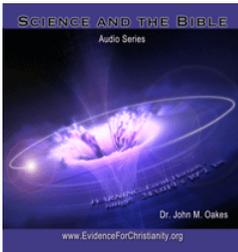
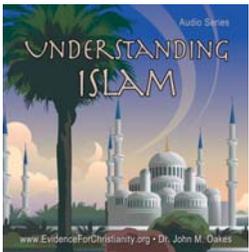
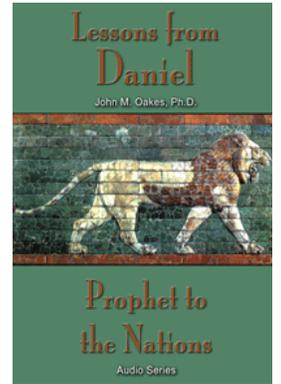
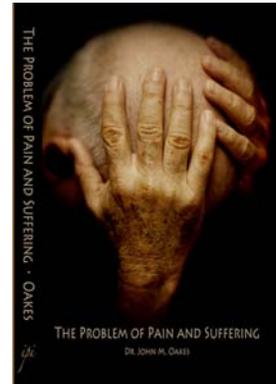
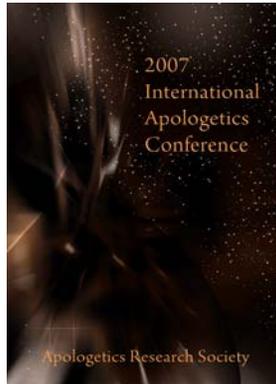
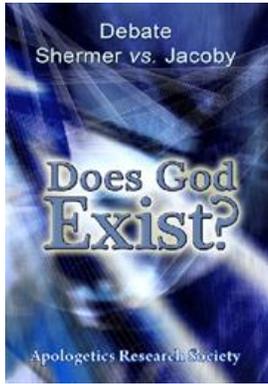
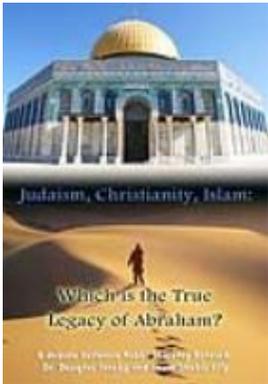
John Oakes' Newest Release DANIEL: PROPHET TO THE NATIONS



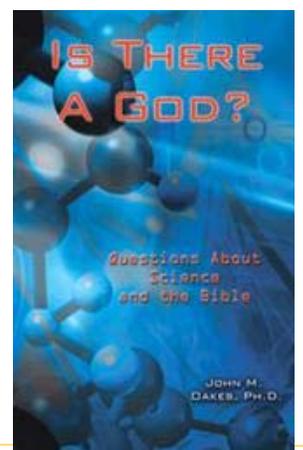
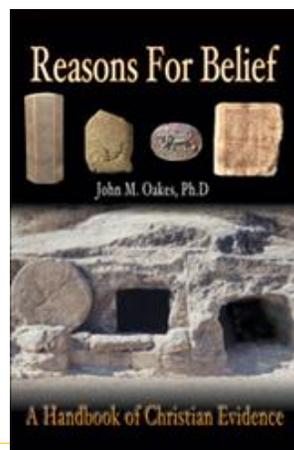
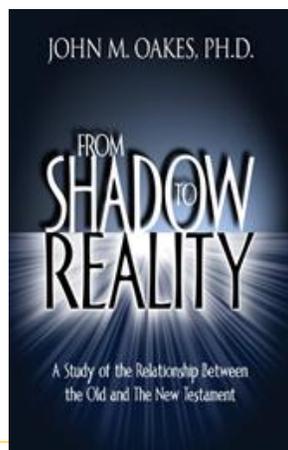
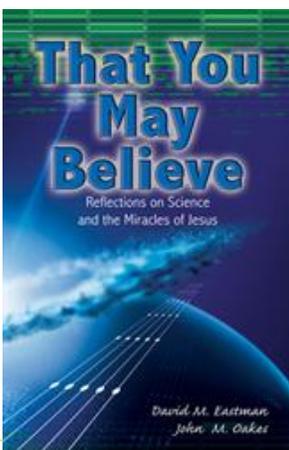
Bible readers have always loved the book of Daniel, inspired by heroes like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who faced persecutions and strove to remain committed to God while held captive in a secular society. But when reading the book's prophetic and apocalyptic sections, many people feel mystified and confused.

In **Daniel: Prophet to the Nations**, John M. Oakes presents a balanced and objective attempt to unlock the prophetic message of Daniel, while placing the book in its proper historical context. For the twenty-first century reader who is able to look back in time and see how countless specific prophecies have been realized, the validity of the message of Daniel is proven in a very convincing manner.

The faith and deep convictions that can be gained from understanding the book of Daniel will help Christians apply the practical examples of righteous living (even in a godless culture) to their own individual lives.



Books Published



Class on the book of Daniel

Dates: **03/20/10-04/17/10** Time: **9-10:30 AM** Location: **San Diego, CA Mission Center of HOPE**

This will be a five week class on the book of Daniel. It will be taught by John Oakes for the San Diego Church of Christ. The cost of the entire series is \$10. You can sign up on the first day of class, but we would prefer to know who is coming ahead of time. To register, contact Jan Oakes at joakes01@san.rr.com or at 858-505-8841.

2010 International Christian Evidence Conference lass on the Book of Daniel

Dates: **06/11/10—06/13/10** Time: **9am- 4pm** Location: **Irvine, CA**

The 2010 ICEC (International Christian Evidences Conference), sponsored by ARS (Apologetics Research Society) will be at Concordia University in Irvine, California. The theme will be Science and Christianity. Events will include a four-way forum on Christianity and Evolution, to include PhD scientists taking the following views:

1. Naturalistic Evolution. The universe is designed and created, but life has evolved by a natural random process. All living species are related by natural descent. The evidence supports the conclusion that natural processes such as mutation and natural selection has created the vast variety of living things. All this was designed and planned by an omniscient God, but he did not intervene in his pre-ordained means of creating human beings. Humans definitely evolved from lower primates.
2. Theistic Evolution. Life itself was created by special creation. Evolution is a good scientific theory/paradigm and the evidence for common descent is sufficient to consider this as proved, but God has determined and directed the process of evolution. Evolution is not merely a random, natural process. Adam and Eve may well be special creations, but the evidence does support common descent even in their case.
3. Intelligent Design. This view accepts as proved that the earth is about 4.5 billion years. It also accepts that microevolution has in fact occurred, leading to new species, but it also proposes that special creation of different "kinds" has occurred. The apparent evidence for common descent hides the fact that various species were created by special creation. Specifically, Adam and Eve are a special creation. Macroevolution is ruled out by such evidence as irreducible complexity.
4. Young Earth Creationism. This view challenges the idea of an old earth and of uniformitarianism. Instead it proposes catastrophism. The evidence for an old earth is misleading and in fact the earth is only several thousand years old. Common descent is a complete illusion. Evolution has occurred, but only to a very limited extent. All species, especially human beings are a special creation. For more information or to register contact Jan Oakes at joakes01@san.rr.com

Missionary Teaching Trip to Kenya and Uganda

Dates: **06/25/10-07/03/10** Time: **All day**, Location: **Africa**

John Oakes will be teaching for churches in Nairobi, Kenya June 25-27, June 28-30 in Eldoret, Kenya and July 1-3 in Kampla, Uganda. For more information, contact John Oakes or locally in Kenya Steve Mukenya at mukenya2000@yahoo.com Topics and specific locations are TBA.

Missionary Teaching Trip to Eastern Europe

Dates: **07/04/10-07/13/10** Time: **All day** Location: **Kiev, Bucharest, Sophia and more.**

John Oakes will be teaching for churches in Kiev, Ukraine July 4-6, Bucharest, Romania July 7-10 and Sophia and Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria July 11-13. Topics are TBA. For local information contact in Bucharest Christian Paduraru (cristian@relate4ever.com) or Erika Paduraru (erika@theremixlabel.com), in Sophia contact Kiril Kirilov [dete4udo@gmail.com] In Kiev, contact Shawn Wooten (shawnkiev@gmail.com)

Missionary Teaching Trip to Jamaica and Trinidad

Dates: **7/16/2010 - 7/21/10** Time: **All Day** Location: **Kingston, Jamaica .**

John Oakes has been invited to Kingston, Jamaica and to Trinidad for a teaching weekend. He will be in Jamaica Fri-Sun July 16-18, followed by a brief visit to Trinidad to teach for several churches in that part of the Caribbean.

Christian Apologetics Class: The Existence of God

Dates: **08/27/10 - 08/28/10** Time: **5:30 — 10pm** Location: **San Diego, CA Mission Center of HOPE .**

This class is part of the Apologetics Certificate Program put on by the Apologetics Research Society. The class is on the philosophical theological and other basis for belief in God in general and in the God of the Bible in particular. The principle instructor is Dr. Douglas Jacoby. Dr. John Oakes will do some of the teaching as well. This is a ten hour class. The approximate schedule is Friday 8/27 5:30-10:00 PM and Saturday 8/28 8:30-4:00 PM. Dinner on Friday will be provided. Cost will be \$50. The class can be taken for credit or students can "audit" the class. If taken for credit, there will be both required and optional reading assignments which are TBA. Go to www.evidenceforchristianity for a class flyer, schedule and outline (not available yet). For more information or to register for the class contact Jan Oakes at 858-505-8841 or joakes01@san.rr.com

3. The creator of both the physical and spiritual realm is the God who is revealed and who reveals himself in the Bible.

Not only did God create the physical universe (Genesis 1), he also created the spiritual—the heavenly realms. In Colossians 1:15-16 Paul says of Jesus, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers of rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. God has made himself known to his people “from what has been made.” (Romans 1:20), but he has also revealed himself and his will in the Hebrew and Greek scripture. Most particularly, he has revealed himself through his Son, Jesus Christ, the image of God. “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.” (Hebrews 1:1-2). No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son who is at the Father’s side, has made him know.” (John 1:18) God has revealed himself to us through creation, through the Old and New Testaments and through the person Jesus Christ.

4. Human beings have both a physical and a spiritual nature, but the spiritual nature is more essential as it is eternal.

Our physical nature is obviously more apparent to us than our spiritual nature, but this fact is deceptive when compared to our ultimate reality. Like Jesus said, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell.” (Luke 12:4-5) As Paul put it, We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:18)

5. God cannot be easily defined but he can be characterized by certain qualities. God is love, God is just, God is holy, God is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent.

What God is he is fully and infinitely. God is not merely loving: he is love. Love defines and determines all his actions toward us. From a human perspective, this seems to conflict with his justice and his holiness. God is not merely just: he is justice. He is incapable of an unjust act, even if we feel his love and his justice are in apparent conflict. God is holy, in him there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). These are facts about God. How does this affect our world view? In every way. Every act in our life and in the lives of our neighbors is subject to the justice of God. This has a profound effect of how we view our own lives and how we should respond to injustice. “Do not take revenge,... ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.” If God really is love, then this has an unfathomable effect on how we understand the events which surround our lives. All of them are either caused or permitted by an omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent God who acts toward all out of love.

6. Although all God’s creation, including the physical world is good, evil does exist. Such evil is the result of freedom of will given to created beings and their subsequent decision to use that freedom to “sin” (defined as transgressing the will of God).

This brings us back to Genesis. The story of Adam and Eve is the story of us. God gave us everything for our pleasure and enjoyment. Why? Because he loves us and because he wants us to love him. But what did we all do? We rebelled and chose to do things which are unholy. As Augustine put it, evil is not a thing in and of itself. If it were, that would be dualism. Rather evil is good which has been corrupted by free moral agents. Something which was created for good purposes is turned for evil. Nothing God created is evil, but some of what God created is capable of doing evil. God gave us a choice. He asks us to “choose life” (Deuteronomy 30:19), but many of us choose rebellion. The physical laws which are discoverable by science are not the only “natural laws.” There are moral laws as well, and they are as inescapable as the law of gravity. Rebellion against God’s holiness produces suffering in this world (Exodus 20:5-6), both on those who sin and on those around them. This is the answer to the “problem” of pain, suffering and evil.

7. Because of God’s justice and his holiness, those who choose to rebel against him will ultimately be judged and separated from God for eternity.

Not only does our choice to rebel and to sin bring on temporary physical and emotional suffering in this life, it also brings judgment in the world to come. “For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat.” (Romans 14:10) “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Hebrews 10:30-31). God cannot be mocked. He is patient and kind, and he wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4), but “the wages of sin is death.” Again, as with all the qualities of God, this fact is unavoidable. God does not change or compromise his holiness.

8. The solution to evil and its eternal consequences is provided by God through the atoning substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

This is the essence of the gospel. As was prophesied, “the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:6) “By his wounds we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:5). “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8). God’s holiness and justice were not superseded or violated in this substitutionary death. “He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus.” (Romans 3:26). Biblically, this is a theological fact. How does this affect one’s world view? If this is true, then everything is different. Suffering makes sense. The existence of evil makes sense. Our innate and universal sense of justice makes sense as well. Yet, we can live as free men and women, not using our freedom as an excuse to do evil, but giving us the freedom to love and serve others (paraphrasing Galatians 5:13-15) without living in constant fear of judgment when we fall short, as we inevitably will do.

Is This a “Good” World View?

In describing the Christian world view, some might choose to emphasize certain points more and others less than I have, but this seems to reasonably well summarize how the Bible describes the world. Having done this, we will now proceed to do the somewhat subjective

¹ Admittedly, this “answer” is rather simplified. For example some suffering is the result of natural physical laws acting in a way which God has established. Therefore, not all suffering is the result of sin. Things do happen in this world which are not the will of God, as he clearly does not will us to hate and to kill.

job of asking whether, by the criteria described above, this is a “good” world view.

Is it True?

First, is it “true?” By this I mean, is this world view consistent with what we know? I am not asking whether we can provide a mathematically precise, scientific, logical “proof” of the truth of the biblical world view. This is obviously not possible.

Is the physical world real? I will challenge the post-modernist or the practitioner of Eastern religion on this question. I say it is real. A wise Christian philosopher once challenged his Hindu friend to prove his own confidence that physical reality is not real by allowing him to strike him with a club. The guru politely declined the opportunity to show confidence in his own philosophy. Science has shown that this “illusion” is surprisingly, uncannily consistent and predictable. Fantasies and illusions are rarely so predictable. Our naturalist friends may be out on a limb when they say there is no evil and no justice, but surely they have it right in this. The physical world is real.

Is it good? Given the existence of disease and natural disasters it certainly is reasonable to question the claim that physical creation is “very good” as God says in Genesis. My response is that creation is very, very good. Physicists tell us that the universe we live in is absolutely, spectacularly fine-tuned so that advanced life forms can exist. If any of more than two dozen parameters which define how the universe functions were changed by even a small fraction, we would not be here. To avoid the obvious implications, naturalists have speculatively proposed there is an infinite number of universes, and we are lucky to live in the right one. Lucky indeed! Suffering brought on by earthquakes may be troubling, but without plate tectonics (and their associated earthquakes) the earth would be sterile and we would have virtually no atmosphere. Bacteria cause disease, but without this marvelous creation we would have no nitrogen in the soil and no oxygen in the air. God’s creation is spectacularly wise and good. To those who do not agree, I challenge them to conceive of a better set of working physical laws and then to bring their conception into existence.

Is the physical reality the only one, or is the Biblical world view correct when it describes a co-existent spiritual reality? This is harder to prove. Yet there are a number of things which are true which point in this direction. We are self-aware. We are “conscious.” We are able to understand the universe. The universe itself exists and was created. All of these and many more point toward a non-physical creator and a non-physical nature for human beings. Naturalists may choose to dismiss the reality of beauty, of love, of natural human rights, of conscience (not to be confused with consciousness), of good and evil and many other things, but very few people can really accept that these things are not real. Their existence implies there is a spiritual reality. Perhaps it is true that the majority does not determine truth, but very few believe they are a body (rather than they have a body) and the vast majority of all who have ever lived agree that there is a spiritual reality. The biblical view that there is a spiritual reality which supersedes the physical agrees with what we know.

Is it true that evil exists? And if so, what is the cause of this evil? Whether or not North Korea, Iran and Iraq were, in fact, an axis of evil as George Bush claimed is debatable, but the existence of evil is hard to deny. Sexual abuse of children, murder, genocide, warfare for selfish ends and arrogance—all of us recognize that evil is very real indeed. Ignoring this fact is a poor way to make it go away. Even arrogant atheists such as Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins, while denying the existence of evil wax poetical in complaining about the evil done in the name of religion. The Bible claims that God did not create evil. Like it says in James chapter one, those who sin should not claim that God is tempting them because God does not tempt us to do evil. Evil is the result of those who choose to rebel against God’s laws. Until someone can legitimately show to me that anything God has done is evil, I will stand by the claim that creation is good and evil in this world is the corruption of what is good by morally free agents.

The reality of God’s judgment on evil and his grace and mercy for those who repent is proved by the history of Israel. The support of this claim would require much reference to history, quoting from biblical prophecy and description of historical foreshadows in the Old Testament. I have published a book on this subject for those interested in pursuing it further (*From Shadow to Reality* www.ipibooks.com). God told his people in Deuteronomy 28 that if they did not obey the Lord and carefully follow his commands, he would drive them to a nation unknown to them—that they would suffer at the hands of their enemies, and would be scattered among the nations. They did and He did. God judged his people at the hands of Assyria and Babylon. He also told them that if they were to repent, even if driven to the farthest part of the world, he would bring them back and bless them in the land he gave them. They did and He did as he had promised. He provided Cyrus to set his people free and send them back to build Jerusalem. The story of Israel is the story of rebellion and judgment, followed by repentance and salvation. Rebellion produced slavery, but when God’s people cried out for mercy, God always sent a savior to save them—whether the savior was Joseph, Moses David or Cyrus. Jonah’s rebellion brought on the sentence of death, while his repentance led to salvation. God prophesied that salvation will come through one who will be pierced (Isaiah 53:5) and through one who will be crucified (Psalms 22:16). He even predicted that a savior would come to Jerusalem to atone for wickedness in about AD 30 (Daniel 9:24-25 and see my book *Daniel, Prophet to the Nations*). That God will judge his creation for wickedness and that he will provide salvation through the death of Jesus Christ is difficult to prove mathematically, but the history of Israel and fulfilled prophecy makes the reality of this claim a reasonable conclusion.

Is the Christian world view true? What I can say with confidence is that it agrees with what we know to a degree which is demonstrably much greater than any competing world view.

Does it Answer the Questions People Care About?

Second, does the Christian world view answer the questions people really care about? How did I get here? (God created us) Where am I going? (to eternal honor or shame) What is my purpose in life? (to know God and be known by him) What is my value? (Jesus died for us) What is my relationship with the ultimate reality? What is the right thing to do? Why is there evil and suffering in the world? Why is it that we exist? Why is it that we can understand the universe? The Biblical world view addresses the problem of sin (Romans 7:24-25). Not only does it tell us why there is suffering, it also tells us what to do about it (Matthew 9:35-36). The Biblical world view even makes sense of death. “Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:54-56) The objective truth of all these biblical answers is something which can be debated. Some might call all this wishful thinking. What cannot be denied is that the Christian

world view provides reasonable and satisfactory answers to every one of the important questions common to man. No other world view, be it human philosophy, Eastern religion or any other comes close.

Does One's Acceptance of This World View Make Us Better People?

In my earlier essays I addressed the question of whether alternative world views make one a better person. Each world view has at least some things which commend it. However, in every case, we were left with serious questions. Naturalism denies the existence of absolute moral truth. Like postmodernism it leave us without a standard for how we should treat one another. Eastern and Greek philosophy deny the goodness of the physical creation and teach dispassion rather than compassion. Muslim theology, with its emphasis on fate and predestination removes human responsibility for our fellow humans to some extent. Let me state my conclusion on this question right at the start. I can say with great confidence that both in theory and in practice, the Christian (and the Jewish) world view is superior to all others in its effect both on humanity as a whole and on individual people. The positive effect of Christianity is certainly not left for one's life after death.

In the Christian world view every single human being has an unlimited value. The Son of God died to redeem us individually. All people are of equal value and importance in the eyes of their Creator, even if some are given different roles. "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:26-28) Looking from our Western perspective in the 21st century, it is difficult to grasp how radical a statement this was in the 1st century. If one investigates history, one will discover that it was Christian ethics which led to the idea of human dignity and human rights. Where did the idea that "all men were created equal" come from? Of course the Bible was way ahead of the framers of the US constitution on this one, as full and equal rights were not given to slaves until 1863, and to women until well into the twentieth century. Slavery has been an ever present institution from the dawn of human history. It was men and women who acted out the Christian world view who turned this upside down. William Wilberforce was not alone in pushing the abolition of slavery out of his Christian convictions. Jesus Christ was a revolutionary in the way he treated women, the poor, the diseased, the deformed and those not of his nationality.

Of course, Christians are not the only good people in the world, but it is worth asking where humanists, atheists and others got their ideas of what is "good." Is it possible that they hijacked it from Christian ideas? History certainly hints at this conclusion. Jesus said that the entire Law is summed up in the command to love God and to love one another as oneself. This idea of the centrality of our need to love and be loved comes from the Christian world view. Why? The reason we were created is because of love and for love. According to the Christian world view, we are valuable beyond comparison. Jesus implied that a single soul is more valuable than the entire world (Luke 9:25). This world view which gives the individual person unimaginable dignity, yet which calls all of its believers to pour their life out in love to others has to be the best of all the competing pictures offered by religion and human philosophy in the effect it has on those who accept it.

The Christian world view tells us that suffering is not inherently evil. In fact, suffering is good for many reasons. It makes us stronger, it helps us to understand and experience joy. When we suffer because of our own sin, it trains us to change, it helps us to know Jesus, and when we respond to suffering in a godly way, it allows us to glorify God. So suffering is not evil, but the Christian world view nevertheless impels those who accept it to respond to suffering with compassion. Why? Because of love, of course. James tells us that "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." (James 1:27). "Does it make you a king to have more and more cedar? Did not your father have food and drink? He did what was right and just, so all went well with him. He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me? Declares the Lord." (Jeremiah 22:15-16)

Jesus was perhaps the most compassionate man who ever lived. "Jesus wept." (John 35) Why? Because Lazarus had died? No, as he was about to raise him from death. He wept because Mary and Martha wept. "When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them." (Matthew 9:36). Like I already said, Christians are not the only loving people in the world, but when they are selfish, greedy or arrogant they are violating the direct command and example of the founder of their movement. I have visited Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim countries. In most of these countries, the Christian groups, even though a small minority, do most of the benevolent work in these societies. Why? Because of the Christian world view and the personal example of Jesus of Nazareth. Besides, those who accept the Christian world view believe that they will be held accountable for putting its tenets into practice. Accountability can be powerful motivation. These other religions either tell us that suffering is an illusion or that it is God's will. Does accepting the Christian world view cause one to be better for it? The answer is that if it does not, then very obviously that world view was in fact not accepted by that person. I do not want to disrespect any world religion or philosophy and I know that many who accept these as their world view are sincere and want to do right. Besides, there is at least something to be commended in all these philosophies, but the example of Jesus, the teaching of Christianity, the world view of the Christian and the facts of history lead me inexorably to the conclusion that of all the well-known world views, the Christian one is by far the best at making its believer a better person by almost any accepted measure. Why? Because the basic ethic of this world view combines fantastic personal dignity with love, unselfishness, and unstinting service for others.

Have Christian believers ever violated the ethic implied in their world view? That is an easy question. Yes. Has evil been done in the name of Christianity? Yes, but it has never been done because of genuine Christianity and those who divide, hate, steal and abuse the poor and needy are by that very action rejecting the Christian world view.

The Christian world view is superior to all others on many grounds. First, it, more than any other, is most consistent with reality as experienced by real people every day. Second, because it provides rational, reasonable and helpful answers to the important human questions, and third, because those who take this world view not only as a philosophy but as a way of life are made to be the best possible human beings that they can be. Let us accept, embrace and teach the Christian world view with the authority of its creator and greatest example, Jesus Christ.

We spent the next six days touring Spain as part of our anniversary celebration. The tour included Toledo, Granada, Torremolinos, Gibraltar, Jerez, Seville and Cordoba. We had a fantastic time visiting these cities with so much history, architecture and culture. Highlights included the Alhambra in Granada and the mosque in Cordoba. Everywhere in southern Spain one finds a blend of Roman, Visigoth, Moorish and Christian architecture and religious buildings. There are charming castles and churches in every little town. In the old section of Granada and Seville we visited the old Moorish and Jewish Quarters, with their labyrinthine maze of unbelievably narrow streets and wonderful architecture everywhere. The houses all have wonderful balconies overlooking the streets. In Seville we saw an amazing display of Flamenco dancing.

After the tour we returned to Madrid. We had dinner near the Plaza Major with many from the church. The dinner included sardines, blood sausage and pig ears—a bit controversial for an American. The next day, Sunday, was our last meeting with the church in Madrid. Jan taught a class in Spanish for twenty women on Christian forgiveness. I gave a sermon titled Jesus: Man, Myth or Messiah? for the church. Juan Zaragoza is a fantastic interpreter. My Spanish is still not up to teaching without translation, but being able to teach in Spanish is a goal.

Leaving Madrid, we spend two days in Santiago de Compostela, the ancient city of pilgrimage in Galicia in northwest Spain. This region is very wet and green. Santiago has a beautiful cathedral and wonderful architecture, streets and food. A different dialect of Spanish known as Gallego is spoken here. This is the home of Jan's ancestors in Spain. We returned to Madrid to fly to Munich where we spent two days with our good family friends Helga and Herbert Streibel in the fantastically gorgeous area of Tegernsee in the foothills of the Alps.



Gift shop in Toledo



Café in Torremolinos



Tower of Hercules in La Coruña



Royal Alcazar Palace in Seville



Guadalquivir river, Roman bridge in Cordoba



Ocean front view in Galicia's La Coruña



Rock of Gibraltar



Santiago de Compostela Cathedral



Columbus Monument in Granada



Chalet in Bavaria

From there we took a train to Berlin to visit with and teach for the Church of Christ in Berlin. We were met by my good friend Andreas Weber and Sebastian. Thirty minutes after being met at the train station I was already speaking at Berlin Technical University on God and Science. There were over one hundred in attendance, including about fifty guests. The questions were unusually penetrating, reminding us that Germany is a country of deep thinkers. The great majority are very skeptical of religion in general. There are about fifteen students from the Boston Church of Christ here spending six weeks evangelizing on campus to build up the campus ministry. The church in Berlin is about one hundred and fifty members, but the campus group has become quite small so the help from the American students has really been a boost.

Berlin is a unique city, being composed of former West Berlin which was an enclave of democracy for over forty years after World War II, and the former East Berlin, which was a rather depressing place for those years, with its drab apartment buildings. Much is changed here since the wall came down and Berlin has become the capital of united Germany again. While here we visited the memorial to the Jewish and Roma holocaust. It was inspiring to see the Brandenburg Gate, the Pergamum Museum and the beautiful avenue Unter den Linden.

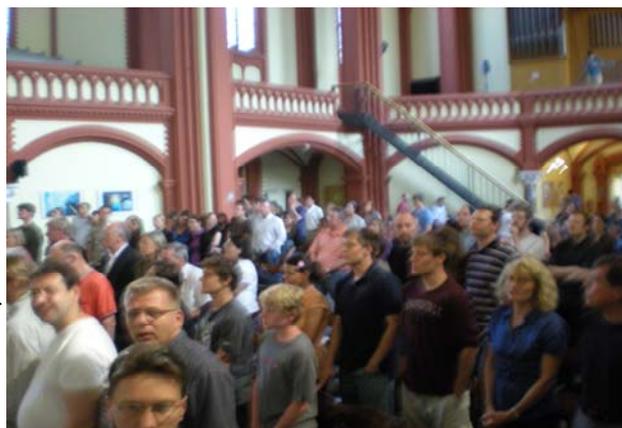
I taught a class on Christian World View for the campus group on Saturday. This is particularly needful here because the vast majority of youth have virtually no concept of real Christianity or the idea of God or scriptural authority. Germany may be the home of the Reformation, but it has become a home of atheism. In order to share Jesus, we must understand the philosophical and practical mindset of people and start by contacting people where they live intellectually. The students had many questions and even doubts which have come up because of their exposure to so much skepticism. Perhaps a basic talk about Christian theology was what they needed. Saturday evening was July 4th. Of course, Jan and I had completely forgotten about this completely American holiday. We had a barbecue, including a rendition of the Star Spangled Banner.

Sunday we were able to meet with the Berlin church. I spoke on From Shadow to Reality to about two hundred. The church was very encouraged. We could feel that the faith of many was really encouraged. Of course, this is why we came here—to make friends and encourage the faith of many. We toured the city with our good friend Katja Perkoski. Tomorrow we head home, tired but encouraged.

John and Jan Oakes



Andreas and Chris



Berlin Church



Brandenburg Gate



Pergamum Museum



Jan and Katja



Holocaust Museum in Berlin

John

I want to thank you for your service to the Boston Campus Ministry. It has been so encouraging to see Tyshaun baptized (Freshman at MIT). He is doing great and a big part of his faith was impacted by the time you were here. It is also incredible that we have seen over 80 MIT/Harvard Student visitors from the weekend. Something that has not been done in over 3 decades. We are currently in many studies and have seen great things happen as a result of this event. I am also touched by your heart for the lost as you have spent your precious time with someone like Lin Fei - a poor soul who has deep bitterness and rage toward his maker. We will pray for him but your conduct with him was like Jesus. Thanks for your heart to serve and your example.
Your Brother and Fellow Worker in the Lord
Glenn Petruzzi

Hi John,

I hope you and Jan are fine, after many months since you left Spain. I'm still very happy of having received your classes and wisdom in God.
Let me tell you that I have read your books,

Reason for Belief and Is there a God?, and I have shared and preached to my agnostics and atheist friends, **until now nobody has been able to contradict God's** word, we are studying and have good friendships with non-Christian friends and we hope God saves them.

Thanks for your work for God and your inspiring teachings, I'm sure that God is going to be very blessed in Madrid, Spain and across all Europe, pray for us John, pray for God gives the strength, the wisdom and the words to save the people. How are things going in the SD Church? Love in Christ.
Carlos Vargas

Dear John and Jan,

My Name is Achai and My wife's is Ernie, God bless us with 3 children, Sam, Gail and Josh. we are from Jakarta Church and have been a disciple for 5 years.

We would like to share that we are very grateful to both of you to have come all the way to equip and encourage all of us. To us your lessons has always been a revelation, to the extent of building our foundational faith, even then, 3 years ago, I was studying the Bible with David, he is the brother that de-

cidated to be baptized after your lesson, 3 years ago, it becomes our testimony wherever we share our faith.

We also thank both of you to have given to us your knowledge and understanding that you have work and collected for 30+ years, you have shown great love for God and God's great love to not only in words but in faith and hope.

Lastly we pray that God continue to bless your family, ministry and keep downloading more wisdom to you. Have a good trip back and looking forward to get to know you more in your next visit.

Love ,
Acay & Ernie

Dear Brother Oakes,

I want to thank you for writing the book, From Shadow to Reality. This book is solid food and has encouraged my faith in a great way. Your explanations of Old Testament foreshadows of New Testament teachings are concise, yet gave plenty of evidence to make your points. I learned a great deal from your book. THANK YOU.

Christopher Jacobs

A Note From The Authors

The newsletters contains questions and answers, new articles, information about future events, and letters to the editors. Send letters to john.oakes@gccd.edu or reply to joakes01@san.rr.com. Send links to other sites, book reviews and the like, any suggestions or ideas for articles, format of the newsletter, ideas for the web site www.evidenceforchristianity.org. Archived newsletters in Newsletter page on web. We have recently added a store to the website, where premium audio and video lesson can be downloaded for \$2 and \$3. This will help with the cost of the website.

The purpose of the Apologetics Research Society is to disseminate and discuss materials relevant to the evidence supporting faith in Jesus Christ and in the Bible. Relevant topics will include science and the Bible, historical and archaeological evidence, theological questions, answers to common criticisms of the Bible (such as supposed inconsistencies and errors), questions about the text of the Bible, prophecies, miracles, and others. Our goal is not necessarily to give THE answer, but to give out useful information, bring up a variety of points of view, and incite people to think about why they believe what they believe. We will remain as non-denominational and non-sectarian as we can.

ARS is a California 501(c)3 tax exempt, non-profit corporation. We are currently raising funds for the teaching ministry of John Oakes, the sending of apologetic materials to developing countries, translations and other projects. Donation can be sent to Apologetics Research Society 5758 Avenida Sanchez San Diego, CA 92124, or given by credit card at the Make A Gift page of www.evidenceforchristianity.org.