

A CONVERSATION WITH CHRISTIAN CHAPMAN¹

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Christian Chapman is an aptly named evangelical Christian, a pastor by training, and a speaker for the Colorado-based Kingdom Building Ministries (K.B.M.). He is a graduate of Southern Wesleyan University, and he lives today with his wife and three sons in Charlotte, N.C.

I wrote to Christian in late December, 2011, after an article appeared in the *New York Times* concerning his evangelical work in public schools³.

“The students were addressed by Christian Chapman of Charlotte, N.C., who describes himself as a ‘traveling evangelist’ and often speaks at schools, he said in an interview. ‘I definitely think that we should try to get our relationship with Christ back into the schools,’ said Mr. Chapman, 43. ‘Jesus represents everything we want our students to live by.’ For non-Christians to hear this message, he said, is no worse than Bible believers being forced to hear about evolution every day.”

The following is the lightly edited text of a conversation that I had with Christian, via Facebook, from 2-13 May, 2012. The exchange illuminates how those with sufficiently deep faith justify positions that are strikingly inconsistent with what has been discovered through painstaking scientific research; and at least in part why it has proven so difficult to communicate scientific results to lay people in some parts of the United States.

2 May, 2012

CC: Sorry, Nicholas but I just now saw this email in my out box on Facebook. Wanted to apologize for being so late with a response. Hope you are having a great day, bro. Peace.

NCB: Dear Christian: The article that I sent you as an attachment⁴ provides a 1700-word science-based rationale for why putting ‘our relationship with Christ back in the schools’ is a truly dreadful idea. What you have in mind also contravenes church-state separation that has been repeatedly endorsed by the Supreme Court. The evidence for evolution is overwhelming and readily available to anyone interested in it. The mechanisms by which evolution occurs are inconsistent with creation, design, guidance, inherent purpose or the existence of a deity remotely like the gods of contemporary religions.

¹ Version of 20 May, 2012. At the time of this exchange, I was on sabbatical leave at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. I appreciate the hospitality of numerous faculty, staff, students and others encountered during our visit. Our apartment above False Bay on the south side of Simon’s Town proved to be an appropriate source of inspiration for a host of projects. Christian Chapman and Dwight Robertson are thanked for their contributions. Both were invited to provide corrections.

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³ <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/28/us/battling-anew-over-the-place-of-religion-in-public-schools.html>

⁴ Christie-Blick, N., 2011, Does God exist? Does it matter?: *American Atheist*, v. 49, No. 3, p. 20-21 and 39. http://www.ldeo.columbia.edu/~ncb/Selected_Articles_all.html

CC: I totally respect your opinion. Just a short challenge, then we will leave it at that, because I'm not changing you and you are certainly not changing me. The first Bible put into print in this country was by our Congress in the 1600's, and was distributed to the public school system. Why? Well it certainly wasn't to study science, and learn about how we were created from nothing and walked out of the jungle with no purpose at all. The Bible stayed in public schools and was put to use along with prayer until the 1960's, when it was taken out – which was the beginning of the decline of morality in the public school system. Since the 60's drugs, violence, murders, rape, gangs, drop-outs, pregnancy, abortion have all been on the rise. Maybe that's because in the animal kingdom morality isn't high on the priority list. Thomas Jefferson's separation between Church and State was written to protect the Church from the State not the State from the Church. There are actual historical records that show Thomas Jefferson supported churches having their services in government facilities. Have you ever walked around in D.C., and looked at all the references to God? You can't get away from the fact this country was founded as a Christian nation. The pilgrims were Christian from top to bottom, no getting around it. And as far as science goes, I would never put my trust in anything that has been wrong with their theories as many times as science has. I just read an article yesterday that said because of a new discovery in a cave in Nepal, science was going to have to rethink some of their earlier ideas. In 50 years from now, new technology will show how wrong science is today. So as we progress, we continue to learn more and more about science being untrustworthy. What's the number one thing we desire as humans? Love, plain and simple. We desire to love and be loved, and to have that love satisfied with relationships. Once Richard Dawkins was asked to explain love, and he said science could not explain love or why we as humans desire it. I can. It's because God is love, and He showed it by sending His Son Jesus to die for us and give us hope through a relationship with Him. Richard Dawkins was also once asked where did all life begin if not from God, and he said possibly a higher intelligence. What!!! So he can't explain love, and thinks we came from aliens. This is your champion right now in the scientific community. Dr. William Lane Craig challenged your champion not long ago in his own back yard at Oxford, and Dawkins was a no show. So no, I will never trust science. Beyond that I have seen God work miracles, and felt him bring me to life. So my hope will always rest on God's truth, and my peace will always come from knowing I'm loved unconditionally. Once again, I respect your opinion, but will fight against it till the end. No need to argue about it though. One day we will both die, and will know who was right. Peace.

NCB: Christian: I suspect that you mean well. And I appreciate your taking the trouble to write. However, you are so misinformed at so many levels, that one scarcely knows where to begin. So let me confine my response to low-hanging fruit.

1) The American colonists were largely of Christian heritage. The United States was nonetheless established as a secular nation. The Supreme Court's prohibition of state-sponsored prayer in schools since 1963 has no bearing on the right of anyone to pray. It is simply not the business of state schools to endorse any particular view with respect to religion. Parochial schools exist for that purpose.

2) Crime has declined steadily in the U.S. since the early 1990's. The crime rate was as low in 2010 as it had been in 40 years. The abortion rate rose in the 1970's following legalization, and has fallen ever since. Teen-age pregnancies mirror abortions. The per capita rate has fallen steadily since 1990, and is now appreciably lower than it was in the 1970's. None of the societal challenges that you list has anything to do with the absence of prayer in school.

3) Science has proven to be the most successful intellectual endeavor in human history precisely because its essence is to challenge what we think we know. Progress is made by repeatedly testing ideas or hypotheses against new data, discarding the ones that don't work, and retaining the ones that do. Evolution is an example of an idea that has not only withstood more than 150 years of testing. Expectations based upon comparative anatomy are now borne out and reinforced by molecular biology, a field that didn't even exist in the 19th century. Evolution also provides the basis for modern biology and medicine, on which all of us, including you, depend for survival. Indeed, if nations such as the United States have become successful in the past 100-200 years, it is due almost entirely to scientific discovery more generally, and to the technology that has emerged directly from such discovery. While every hypothesis is potentially falsifiable – and it doesn't qualify as science unless it is – as a practical matter, progress is most commonly achieved through increased sophistication of explanations. So for example, the Earth will never turn out to be flat or less than 10,000 years old. And nor will humans turn out to have been created. Science has already moved far beyond such questions.

4) There is no longer any doubt that the origin of every species, including our own, is an earlier species. We're all connected through common ancestors in a tree of life that extends back some 3.5 to 3.8 billion years. And because we have also learned how evolution occurs at a molecular to ecosystem level, we know that evolution not only wasn't guided. It couldn't have been guided, no matter how omnipotent we assert God to be. We have learned that the universe is vastly larger and older and more wonderful than imagined in biblical times, and that in the greater scheme of things we and our planet are on our own. Purpose and meaning, therefore, are for us to establish by the way we lead our lives. They are not handed to us on Sunday mornings.

4 May, 2012

CC: I do you mean well, Mr. Christie because I love people very much. I enjoy conversations like these because I feel like if we could learn to communicate in peace, the world would be a much wiser and better place. First, I cannot agree with you when you say America was established as a secular nation. I have a friend in the Senate, a constitutional expert who has taught me many things about our great nation, none of which were secular. I have traveled from east to west coast studying different historical sites, and learning about our Founding Fathers and what they believed and desired for America. I even found an 81 foot tall granite monument tucked back in the woods in Plymouth, Mass. – left behind by our Founding Fathers as a reminder of who we are. At the top is a woman named 'Faith'. She is pointing to heaven while holding a Bible. Also on the statue are the words Evangelist, Mercy, Law (The Ten Commandments), Judgment, and Peace. Once again, all you have to do is go to downtown D.C. to see all the references to God, to see that we were never established as a secular nation. Our basic system of law comes from the Ten Commandments, which hang in the courthouse. You and your family are literally protected by a set of laws driven from biblical truth, and be glad of that, because if we were governed by the laws of an animalistic society, like evolution teaches, can you imagine the total chaos that would occur? Second, you said I had my facts wrong, but the numbers I gave you were numbers from the public school system not numbers from our country as a whole. Besides that, I speak in public schools across America, and have had many conversations with teachers, principals, and counselors, who have all told me that schools are a disaster right now, and are getting worst year by year. You seem to be a reasonable man. So I'm sure if you were honest you would have to admit our public schools are much different than they

were in the 60's. And it's not for the better. And third, I saw on your page where you are a fan of Richard Dawkins. You didn't respond to my comments on him being a no show when Dr. Craig challenged him. He is nothing more than a bully, but much like many bullies when they get punched in the mouth, they don't get back up. He's great when he's got the mic in an atheist friendly crowd, but not much for being a man on the real battle field of life, where intellect is flushed down the toilet, and the only thing that pulls us through is heart, faith, and experience. I'm sure we could go back and forth all day long, but would never understand the other. You are very book smart, and rely solely on your knowledge. I'm street smart, and rely on my ability to wing it by living life on the edge. Let me finish by sharing a short version of my story, so you will know why I believe. I was a ranked athlete in N.C. when I was a teen, with a strong family life until it all fell apart at 16, when my Dad walked out of my life for another woman. I was so broken I could no longer focus on sports or school – which eventually led to drugs, drinking, fighting, a drug overdose, jail, and every other pleasure of the flesh. One night, I left a party in Charlotte, N.C., and ran out of gas on my way back home on my street bike. I finally had a taxi pick me up, take me to get gas, and leave me at my bike. The driver accidentally left with my keys to the bike in his car, leaving me stranded yet again at 3 a.m. At that point, I unloaded it all. I cursed, yelled, wept, and then prayed for the first time in my life. I told God I didn't believe in Him. I told Him I didn't see Him, hear Him, or feel Him. But I also prayed that if He truly loved me and wanted me, there I was. He could have me. All He needed to do was let me know He loved me. When I prayed that prayer, a car pulled over all by itself without me thumbing for a ride. I walked up to the car, and the driver rolled down the window. He turned on the inside light, revealing a Bible on the front seat of the car. Then this man looked in my eyes at 3:30 a.m., and told me that God spoke to him and told him to pull over and tell me that He loved me. I gave my life to Christ by 4 a.m., and have never looked back. That, Mr. Christie, is something you, Dawkins, Hitchens, Darwin or science can never take away. It's my personal God story, and with Him living in my heart, I see, hear, and feel God all the time. One day, you will face death, and you will have to face one of two truths: we either came from nothing or we were created by a loving God who has a purpose for our lives. I'm sure I've bothered you enough. I hope you have a safe and blessed 2012!!! I truly love you and wish you the best my friend. On a lighter note, in the 1990's, I spent an entire summer in Cape Town, training their athletes in preparation for the Olympics. It is the most beautiful place I've ever seen!!! I enjoyed your pictures. Peace.

NCB: Christian: Your confusion about the secular foundation of the United States is understandable. Many of those with whom you associate undoubtedly feel the same way. The distinction that needs to be made is between the personal beliefs of early Americans and the wording and intent of the Constitution.

Evolution provides an explanation for the origin of species, for the observed diversity of life on Earth. It says nothing about how society ought to be organized. However, if our understanding of how evolution takes place is correct – and all of the observational evidence indicates that it is – then most of what people believe deeply about God is untrue. Religion is an elaborate human invention.

Given that most teenagers are in public schools, restricting the statistics for 'drugs, violence, murders, rape, gangs, drop outs, pregnancy, abortion' to public schools wouldn't change the overall pattern – which in any case reflects a host of factors. Every generation thinks that the next one is a disaster. Remarkably, young people find a way of stepping up to the plate.

I am not a ‘fan’ of Richard Dawkins, or a fan of anything. I am an established scientist at an ivy league university. However, I appreciate Richard’s leading the charge against the organized ignorance and superstition promoted by religion. And I join him in that endeavor – in a more modest way. Dawkins isn’t a bully. He is articulate and insistent, and most important, he is (mostly) correct on the facts.

Your personal story is touching. Your beliefs are very real to you. You cannot imagine that any of what you hold dear is untrue. So reflect on the following. Across the planet, deep faith is surely a characteristic of many cultures. Yet what people believe varies greatly and at the most fundamental level. It isn’t possible for that array of personal realities to be simultaneously true. The inescapable conclusion is that religion is an artifact of our culture. Scientific truth isn’t limited in this manner. Gravity works the same way in Asia, Africa and Australia as it does in Charlotte.

6 May, 2012

CC: You seem to be very intelligent and knowledgeable about many things, especially in the science community. You are an ivy league professor as well, with many accolades, degrees, and awards hanging on your wall I’m sure. I don’t have those things, but instead of great knowledge I have experience, and instead of degrees and awards I have scars and victories. I believe these to be much greater than intelligence and knowledge. Let me explain because I believe you to be reasonable. Every answer you have given has been thought out with reason. If you needed heart surgery would you want a doctor who had just graduated from Duke University top of his class, who was very educated in the new technologies of medicine? Or would you want a doctor with 40 years of performing successful heart surgery doing your operation? If you were in a war would you want a guy leading you who was a recent graduate from West Point with 1500 hours of training on a war simulator, or would you want a rough neck dog face sergeant with 1500 hours of real fighting and war, with no less than three conflicts under his belt? If you needed marriage counseling, would you want someone single who had many degrees of excellence, and achievements hanging on their wall, or would you desire a counselor who didn’t have all the degrees but had 40 years of success as a married man. If you wanted a baby sitter for your precious children, would you want a well respected child psychologist who was single with no kids or a mother who only had a high school diploma, but had raised, loved, and provided for her own six children? I could go on and on and on, but I believe you get my point, and I believe I know how you would answer all these questions. Experience will always be more powerful, and that is what Jesus meant when He said ‘Knowledge puffs up but love builds up’. In my humble opinion, I believe your knowledge is what blocks your faith, Mr. Nicholas. At the end of our life, we will be remembered not by our knowledge but by our life experiences, and I believe those experiences go further and make a greater impact on humanity when we walk and live with Christ. Let me ask you several questions in closing. What did Jesus ever say or do to offend you or cause you to stand against His life and teachings? What message did He speak that you would think damaging to the world today? Loving your enemy? Forgiving those who have done you wrong? Honoring your mother and father? Speaking only truth? Taking only what belongs to you? Respecting your body and others as well? Being faithful to your spouse? Providing and helping the orphan and the widow? What does evolution contribute to mankind? That we are nothing more than glorified animals with no purpose other than our own survival, no hope beyond this life, and no need for conviction or repentance for our wrong doing, because animals

don't care about right and wrong. Nor does the animal kingdom care about the message of love – which is really what makes the world a livable place. On your point about the Constitution being a secular document, I would have to agree with you after reading it, and apologize. I did find it interesting that the Constitution did say it would never stand in the way of a religious meeting if the people gathered peacefully, which is exactly what happened in Jefferson, S.C. when the A.C.L.U. sued the school after I spoke. All the teens gathered peacefully and heard a message of love and forgiveness, which according to what I read should be permissible. Anyway, I'm sure I've taken enough of your time. I'm willing to continue the debate, even if you are an intellectual from an ivy league university and I'm just a redneck from Kannapolis, N.C. We Southern boys got a lot of fight. Much love and peace to ya, Mr. Nicholas. I hope you are having a blessed weekend. Peace.

NCB: Christian: I do not doubt that your beliefs are earnest. And it is not my intent at all to speak from some pedestal. The only thing that matters when opinions differ is not status but an objective assessment of available facts. All of the evidence in this case points to the reality of evolution, as a phenomenon, and at scales ranging from the molecular to the level of ecosystems. The manner in which organisms interact with each other and with their environment is inconsistent with guidance or direction, intent or purpose. The changes are not unidirectional because selection pressures are themselves complex and continuously varying. And the result is diverse yet related organisms that retain elements of anatomy that are no longer needed and genetic codes with junk segments that no longer serve any purpose. Imperfection is the rule rather than the exception. We (humans) are a product of these same natural processes, emerging at least 3.5 billion years after life first appeared on Earth. In the end, it doesn't matter whether a god exists or not. If a god does exist, it has nothing to do with what most people believe. So yes, knowledge (evidence) blocks my faith. I see no value in believing stuff that is demonstrably not true.

What of purpose, life after death, morality and so forth? As I have previously noted, purpose is what each of us decides to make of it according to how we live our lives. The responsibility is ours. It isn't something handed to us. There is (a form of) life after death. It is our legacy, the multitude of ways in which whatever we achieve influences or benefits those who follow. Morality is whatever society decides that it ought to be. Many of the rules are self-evident. They're needed for more or less any functioning community. Those rules have emerged with civilization, but interestingly many communities of non-human organisms are also characterized by elaborate organization to the mutual benefit of members. What we regard as morality is only a fine-tuned version of behavior that has existed in other organisms for millions of years.

7 May, 2012

CC: I didn't mean to accuse you of being on a pedestal, Mr. Christie. I'm just trying to challenge you about trusting your intellect and knowledge. You say that nothing else matters when opinions differ but objective assessment of available facts. But how can you say that science and intellect produce facts when they have been wrong more than a handful of times in the last hundred years. Science continues to say that past theories were wrong because of discoveries made through ground-breaking new technology. This leads me to ask how can we trust what scientists say today. Who can tell whether in 50 years, discoveries will be made through new technology that will reveal how wrong science was today with its claims of so-called truth. The

definition of science is the discovery of truth, which to me means searching for what is yet to be found. Once again I have to say that my claims of truth are much more trustworthy than science because my experience with God is based on what I've seen, touched, heard, and felt, not what I have read in a book written by a 130-year-old dead man named Darwin. That's why I keep hitting intellect and knowledge because you can't always trust them. But you can trust what brings you to life from the inside out by having a relationship with Christ. I feel Him, I hear Him, I see Him, and I trust him. So therefore I have given my life to Him. I would have to agree that the church today is doing a horrible job of presenting Christ for who He is. We have corrupted the pulpit, we have fallen into public sin with our poor decision making, we have become greedy and money hungry, we have split ourselves with ungodly denominations that cause us to fight against each other and take pride in self doctrines over the word of God. We have walked away from His truth, and have preached a gospel to make other people and ourselves happy. And we have gossiped and attacked each other in an attempt to gather members so we can feel good about our own insecurities. For all of this, I deeply apologize and ask you to forgive us. Christopher Hitchens's brother Peter Hitchens gave his life to Christ recently and wrote a book called '*Rage Against God*'. The book talked about how he became a Christian through atheism and how his brother Christopher was full of anger because of what he experienced growing up in the church. Once again, I apologize and ask you to remember Jesus has nothing to do with all these wrongs that people claim to be doing in His name. He loves you very much, so much in fact that He died for you so you could be forgiven for all your sins – which I believe you would admit your life is full of as well as mine. Let go of your intellect Mr. Christie. It's a wonderful thing to have, and God gifted you with it, but not so you could be your own god and claim to know the answers to all of life's questions. I want to leave you with the last words of many atheists, scientists, and men of great intellect, recorded by doctors and nurses who were in attendance in their final moments. Please don't get offended, but read their last words carefully, and ask yourself if you're willing to trust your knowledge with your eternity. You might think this to be untrustworthy, but my wife has been a critical heart nurse for 20 years, and has told me things that one would find it hard to believe unless there – the spiritual things that some people say when passing.

Voltaire: 'I am abandoned by God and man...I shall go to hell.' Thomas Paine: 'I would give worlds, if I had them, that the '*Age of Reason*' had never been published. Oh God, save me; for I am at the edge of hell alone...' Thomas Carlyle: 'I am as good as without hope, a sad old man gazing into the final chasm.' Gandhi 15 years before his death: 'I must tell you in all humility that Hinduism, as I know it...entirely satisfies my soul, fills my whole being and I find solace in the Bhagavad and the Upanishads.' Shortly before his death he wrote: 'My days are numbered, I am not likely to live much longer, perhaps a year or more...For the first time in 50 years I find myself in the slough of despond...All about me is darkness; I am praying for light.' Sir Thomas Scott, Chancellor of England: 'Until this moment, I thought there was neither God nor hell...Now I know and feel that there are both, and I am doomed to perdition by the just judgment of the Almighty...' Edward Gibbon, author: 'All is dark and doubtful.' Mazarin, French cardinal: 'Oh, my poor soul! What will become of thee? Whither wilt thou go?' Thomas Hobbes, political philosopher and skeptic: 'I am about to take a fearful leap into the dark.' Sir Francis Newport, skeptic: 'I know I am lost forever! Oh, that fire! Oh, the insufferable pangs of hell!'

And finally some encouragement:

‘Oh death, where is thy sting? Oh Hades, where is your victory?...Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.’ *1 Corinthians 15:55-57*

‘For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.’ *Philippians 1:21*

‘For our citizenship is in heaven.’ *Philippians 3:20*

‘Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit...’ *Colossians 2:8*

‘I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only, but also to all who have loved His appearing.’ *2 Timothy 4:7-9*

For anyone reading this now, there is hope for you, for the Lord Jesus Christ said:

‘I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.’ *John 11:25*

He also said: ‘I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’ *John 14:6*

CC: I felt like the Lord wanted me to say that I love you as well, Mr. Christie. I am grateful I had the opportunity to get to know you. I consider you a friend, and want you also to consider why God put us together in this conversation about His love for you. Nothing in my opinion happens for no reason – which means God loves you and desires your heart. Out of all the people you could have met and had conversation with, God chose me and I am grateful!!! Much love and peace, Mr. Christie. Have a blessed week!!!

NCB: Christian: Scroll back up to point 3 of May 2. The critical distinction that you are missing is the difference between scientific frontiers, where ideas (hypotheses) come and go rapidly as scientists struggle to make sense of whatever is not understood, and the fundamentals in any discipline, core ideas that have been so thoroughly tested that they are about as close to a fact as we’re going to get. The frontier in evolution is not whether it occurs. There is no longer any doubt at all about the basic principles. The focus these days is on the fine details of process and (in my own field) the history of what happened. Darwin is revered for having originated an elegant idea. However, the science has moved far beyond Darwin’s simple concept. So no, if you wait around for 50 years it won’t turn out that the biblical version is right after all. The Christian Chapmans of 1962 no doubt thought the same thing.

You accept certain propositions as an article of faith. Many people do. The difficulty is that what people believe turns out to be quite different in one tradition compared with another. So if what each person perceives as a personal experience of God is inconsistent with what others claim with just as much conviction, doesn’t that strike you as not an especially helpful basis for establishing the ‘truth’?

Religion survives mostly because it helps people deal with the daily challenges of life. Theology has become extremely elaborate over the centuries – to take care of the stuff that makes no sense. And it is self-reinforcing so long as you don’t talk with folk beyond your own religious community. Regrettably, all of it is a human invention, mythology, superstition, an illusion.

There is no God, Christian. No savior. No second coming. No afterlife. We’re not the purpose of the universe. We’re on our own, with just one shot to make something of life. It is enough I think if each of us can look back and know that along the way we have made a difference.

I am fortunate also in having had the opportunity to contribute to scientific discovery and to the education of the next generation, to have come to appreciate the natural world as it actually

exists, to have moved beyond the confines of religion, in short to have reached a place from which 95% of Americans are permanently excluded.

8 May, 2012

CC: Many things I could respond to, but I will only highlight a few and then comment. You said “So no, if you wait around for 50 years it won’t turn out that the biblical version is right after all.” I never said in 50 years the Bible would be right because I believe the Bible is right today, tomorrow, and forever. Instead I said that in 50 years science would make claims, because of new technology, that would abolish their claims today – making them wrong. I believe that new technology in science 50 years from now will only show the ignorance of the intellectuals of today, and 100 years from now it will show the ignorance of intellectuals who made so called claims of truth in 2062, and so on and so on. The Bible has never changed it’s message, never claimed new scriptures revealing new truths, never dug up a new site in the desert claiming they found something that was going to change it all. Christians have had a consistent message for thousands of years, laying their lives down for the gospel because they had a hope that goes beyond this life. How many scientists have laid down their lives and been persecuted for their beliefs? How many burned alive at the stake? How many torn to pieces by lions in Rome? How many stoned to death? How many imprisoned? How many lost their heads to the blade? I think I pretty much know the answer to that one. You said “You accept certain propositions as an article of faith. Many people do. The difficulty is that what people believe turns out to be quite different in one tradition compared with another. So if what each person perceives as a personal experience of God is inconsistent with what others claim with just as much conviction, doesn’t that strike you as not an especially helpful basis for establishing the ‘truth’?” There is only one truth, and it’s the truth of Christ. Jesus was the only one to make a claim that He was the Son of God. He was the only one to say the only way to heaven was through a relationship with Him. He was the only one to say that forgiveness could only be found through believing. He died for the world’s sins. Jesus was the only one to rise from the dead and give us hope beyond the grave. All the other major religions believe in Jesus. Gandhi said the greatest sermon ever preached was the Sermon on the Mount, but when he visited a church in London while in school, and was rejected at the front door, he never looked back. Did you notice his last words before dying? The Muslims believe that Jesus was a prophet and one cannot be a prophet unless He tells the truth all the time, and is never wrong. If that be true it is still hard to understand how the Muslims question Jesus as the Son of God. So the more I study other major religions the more faith I have in what I believe to be true. You said “There is no God, Christian. No savior. No second coming. No afterlife.” Very true, not for the one who shuts his heart out to the truth. You said “I am fortunate also in having had the opportunity to contribute to scientific discovery and to the education of the next generation, to have come to appreciate the natural world as it actually exists, to have moved beyond the confines of religion, in short to have reached a place from which 95% of Americans are permanently excluded.” I have to ask: Has science and your contributions ever fed the hungry, clothed the naked, sheltered the homeless, held the hands of a stranger to comfort them while they were dying of cancer, raised money to pay people’s bills when they were close to being evicted, dug a well to provide clean water to those without, adopted a child suffering with H.I.V. and who was alone because both their parents were dead? Christianity has. Peace my brother.

NCB: Christian: So here is the thing. You believe very much in what you are telling me. That the ‘Bible is right today, tomorrow, and forever’, because it is consistent, because people have laid down their lives for it. In comparison, you say, the science of today will be gone tomorrow, ultimately proving not to be correct. You have politely responded. Yet you haven’t listened. And I regret that you are among the 95% who will probably never learn the truth because you are impervious to it.

Your obvious concern for other people is wonderful. Keep it. Celebrate it. But reflect on what you are saying. The physics that makes it possible for planes to fly is wrong. One day, the planes will crash. The medicines that you take when you are sick, all of which were developed through science, don’t really work. Your car, your cell phone, your ability to communicate with me half a planet away – they are all imaginary, ephemeral.

You say that there is only one truth – Jesus Christ. Yet, if you talk with a Muslim or a Jew, a Hindu, a Buddhist or an Australian aboriginal, you will discover that they believe in ‘truths’ with just as much conviction, but they’re not the same. And in many parts of the Middle East, southeast Asia and Indonesia, you will learn that in the eyes of Muslims, you are not merely misguided. You are an infidel, a nonbeliever because you have not yet accepted the truth of the Quran. A suicide bomber is doing precisely what you say demonstrates the truth of the Bible: he is so convinced that he is doing God’s work that he is prepared to die for it, to kill you (an infidel) so that he may go immediately to heaven.

CC: I have listened, Mr. Christie, and I’m thinking the same thing. Why is this guy not getting it? I believe I have proven beyond a doubt that experience is far greater than science, and you haven’t refuted it, or really even challenged it. You keep going back to your intellect. For example, one of my best friends years ago was at a remote village at the top of the Himalayan Mountains, sharing the gospel with a team of people, when they were approached by a group of desperate non-believers. This group came to them because a family member was in physical trouble, and one of the team members was a nurse. This group led them to a small hut where they saw a woman lying on a dirt floor in a pool of her own blood. She had been giving birth to twins for about 30 hours. The nurse got down, looked inside the womb and realized the first child was lodged sideways and unable to make it out. She had to reach in and break the child’s hip to be delivered. When the child came out it was blue, cold, and had been dead for around three hours. The nurse said: My friend felt God speak to his heart, telling him to pray in the name of Jesus to be healed. So he did. After several minutes of prayer, the child went from blue to pink in his arms, and came back to life. You have two thoughts right now, I’m sure. One, it’s a coincidence. Nature just took over and the kid got lucky. Or two, you think that my friend and I are off our rocker. Nature didn’t take over, Mr. Christie, because after the child was examined, the hip the nurse had just broken was completely healed. And I know my friend and myself. Neither of us would ever lie to get others to believe what we believe. Both of us present the truth, and then we let people decide what to do with it. Many people believed in that village as well as the head monk in the region – who happened to be there looking in the window of that hut when that child came back to life. He leads my friend on all his crusades in India now, and the last one he was on, 12,000 people gave their lives to Christ. This is what I mean when I say experience will always be greater than science. No-one’s accomplishments, achievements, and intellect in science will ever come close to matching that experience. I have been reading every word very clear and have weighed them very carefully with my experiences, and the scales have not just tipped, but have slammed down in my favor. That’s why I wrote the book ‘*Testify*’. I want

people to understand that our God stories are more powerful than anything else in the world. No need to respond to that point because no science you throw on the table can match a story where God raised a child back from the dead, so that an entire country could be impacted. To respond to the other point you made, I do agree many people believe different things, and I don't believe God will ever send someone to suffer if they never heard the truth or had a chance to receive the message of Christ. I do think those who strap on bombs to kill, bully, and put fear into people's hearts are on their way to hell for sure. God is a God of love. The one thing we desire most as humans is the one thing God is. The world does not need science. Nor do we have to have science and intellect to survive. But the world cannot and will not survive without love. Love is a word I have used quite often in our conversation, but you have failed to use once. Not saying this for sure, but maybe your intellect and science have made you cold inside. One thing I do know is that God has definitely eliminated your excuses when you face judgment one day because I have for sure shared the message of Christ with you. Jesus loves you, Mr. Christie, and died so that cold place of intellect could come to life by experiencing God's love. At this point I feel like we are done. I feel like we have both shared our hearts and know what the other believes. One thing we can both agree on is that one day we will both die and know the truth. If I'm wrong, then nothing is lost, but everything is gained if I'm right. If you are right, nothing is lost, but if you are wrong ... I love you, Mr. Christie, and hope you have a safe sabbatical. I'm sure you've earned it. Peace.

NCB: Christian: You're fighting the wrong battle. Compassion, concern for others, the value of family and community – these are all good things. And, it may surprise you, they don't depend on religion. Most atheists I know are fine people, and perhaps even finer because unselfish behavior in their case is not in anticipation of a reward.

The objective of science is to figure out how the natural world functions. It isn't an alternative to social awareness. And to the extent that we have figured out how to grow more food, make clean water available, cure disease, deal with natural hazards, and so forth, science has had a huge impact on those least equipped to deal with the daily challenges of life. You may be correct in stating the science isn't needed for survival. Yet I do not think that you are prepared to live in a mud hut or to return to the days in which life expectancy was around 30 years.

With regard to stories of miraculous recovery, I don't have the facts. So I'm in no position to reach any firm conclusion one way or another. However, I'll make one observation. Sometimes, the improbable happens. In fact, if you wait long enough or examine enough examples, the improbable eventually becomes probable. It is nonetheless inevitable that folk programmed to see God's intervention will claim that any unexpected outcome is a miracle. (This is an example of 'confirmation bias'.) All of the occasions in which prayer failed to produce a positive result are ignored or rationalized as God's will. Right?

You acknowledge that people believe different things. And you assume very reasonably that God may not be too impressed by suicide bombers. Yet you miss the point. Those same people regard **you** as evil because you do not accept the literal teachings of the Quran – which for them are also God's word. So how is one to know which stance is correct? Were you born in Kabul rather than North Carolina, you would undoubtedly think differently. So aren't your views mostly an accident of your place of birth?

And this brings me back to where we started. For thousands of years, people have been eager to explain the world around them, to establish rules for the ways in which communities function, to

maintain control and political power. Religion has played a central role. And the details of what people have believed have changed with the maturing of civilization. I am confident that whatever was believed in the past was defended with just as much passion as you defend your own views. Yet we look back now, and dismiss all of it as mythology, reserving the beliefs that we hold today as ‘the truth’. We acknowledge the existence of those of different faith in far-flung countries. However, they’re misguided. Right? And in the United States, we fudge the whole thing by insisting on freedom of religion – essentially, I won’t knock your beliefs if you don’t knock mine.

Now along comes science, a completely new way of looking at everything – not based on an ancient book or received knowledge or convention or doctrine passed from one generation to the next, but on careful observation and the testing of ideas. In this new framework, it is no longer OK to assume that an idea is correct just because it has been long accepted. As the decades roll by, much of what has been assumed turns out to be untrue. Natural explanations emerge for all manner of phenomena that formerly were attributed to a god or gods. The Earth turns out not to be the center of the universe. Humans turn out not to have been created. This new knowledge turns out to be predictive, only reinforcing that it is on the right track. And it turns out to have copious applications that more than anything have improved the lot of billions of people in less than one century.

However, there is a problem. No matter how hard we try to avoid the obvious, it becomes clear that this new knowledge directly contradicts much of what people believe. So we face a choice. Your choice is to insist that this new knowledge must be incorrect because it conflicts with what you yearn to be true. As one who has been a professional scientist for 33 years, I have to tell you that that is the wrong conclusion.

And it’s important. So long as a great many people follow your lead in rejecting science as self-evidently false, ignorance will persist, poor choices will be made, lives will be lost. The nation will lose its competitive edge. I have chosen to engage people like yourself because I am not prepared to see it all chucked away. What we need going forward is to retain all of the good things about religion – the stuff that gets you up in the morning – but to discard the mythology. There is no God, Christian, at least no God remotely likely that of any contemporary religion, and no amount of scriptural repetition, personal testimony or alleged miracles will make it so. Peace indeed.

10 May, 2012

CC: Hello, Mr. Christie. Hope you are well today. My oldest son, Malachi got me sick. So I have been off line for a couple of days on the couch. Hey, K.B.M. called me and said that you emailed them. You said there was no God, and that we were all wasting our time. I love ya bro, but feel that was completely weak to try and take the fight to someone else’s door step. You would never catch me emailing your school or administration. If I have something to say to you, I will do it like a man, and will come to you, not run to others. K.B.M. told me to tell you they are praying for you and love you as well. I told them the reason you emailed them is because you are losing miserably on this side of things, that you are looking to try and even things up. You have not answered my questions about love. You have not responded to why Richard Dawkins was a no show. You certainly know for sure that experiences such as mine and others are much more powerful than science and knowledge. And you have not addressed why we as humans

should trust science when it has been wrong in the past. You just keep hitting me back with intellect that I have proven to be weaker than my experiences. Once again, you or science can never take away what myself and other Christians have experienced. You will never be able to disprove the miracles that God has done in our lives, and that is why those who support science get so mad. No matter what proof you say you have, you will **never** be able to explain how a child was raised from the dead at the top of the Himalayan Mountains. You just pass it off and say you don't have the facts. But I just gave them to ya bro. You refuse to see them because your head is so puffed up about what you say you can prove that you miss the true meaning of life. Do you really think that life is about science? Do you think that life is really about knowledge? Do you think that life is really about experimental data? No!!! It's about love, relationships, community, friendships, intimacy, forgiveness, and much more. Once again the world can definitely do without your science, but it cannot do without these things, and all these things come from God. I have also explained very clearly to you about other religions, and why Christianity is right in trusting the words of Christ. Here is another one that I wasn't going to bring up, but since you emailed K.B.M. I will take the gloves off as well. Do you think your accomplishments in science are at the top? I can name scientists who are Christians, and who have greater credentials than yours, if you really need me to. They have more degrees, more years, and more discoveries than you, and have testified that their studies in science have led them to a Creator. If you want me to name drop I would be happy to. Darwin himself said after studying the eye, and realizing how complex it was, that it caused him to wonder if a Creator was a part of it's function. In fact, it was reported by noblewoman Lady Hope, who visited Darwin at his home in England at the close of his life, that he gave his life to Christ. She described him as reading the book of Hebrews in the New Testament of the Bible. She also said that he regarded his writings about evolution to be questions that people made into a religion. Lady Hope said Darwin asked her to conduct a meeting outside a summer house he owned so he could hear the singing of the hymns. I'm sure you would call B.S. on this as well. You call B.S. on a lot of stuff, Mr. Christie. I tell ya what. Please do me a favor and don't respond to anything I've written so far, but only respond to my next question. Where did all life begin? I'm not talking about what happened after the Big Bang, but what caused life. Where did all the energy come from that caused life to happen, when there was nothing but blackness in space? If science can't prove that then please stop telling people you **know** exactly where we come from, and that there is no God.

11 May, 2012

NCB: Christian: Sorry to learn that you and your son have been sick. I hope you are feeling better.

I'm going to answer your question about the origin of life, but after I have taken care of your other issues.

I'm just tickled that my 'prayer request' didn't go unanswered. I was intrigued that K.B.M. sees that as part of its mission. Please feel free to make whatever claim you wish if the call was embarrassing.

I haven't responded directly to your comments about love, etc. because I do not disagree with them. Of course, interpersonal human relationships are important. They simply have no bearing on the scientific enterprise. And nothing in science has anything to say about love – except perhaps insofar as research deals with the neurological expression of human emotion. But here's

the thing. There also isn't any necessary connection between human relationships and religion. Atheists do just fine on that score.

You are correct. It isn't possible to disprove miracles. Nor can they be proven without first assuming that God exists. And the fact remains, folk claim miracles all the time simply because some outcome was unexpected. No firm conclusions can be drawn from uncontrolled anecdotal experiences no matter how real they seem to those involved.

No, I'm not 'puffed up'. Just really interested in figuring out how things are. As to the meaning of life, well that is for all of us to discover for ourselves. For me, it is to have made a difference. I remain hopeful that one of these days, I'll actually get through to someone like yourself. It isn't easy because a requirement of faith is to be resolutely resistant to any other idea.

Yes, you have made the case for why your faith is superior to all others. Were you to spend time with non-Christians, you'd discover swiftly that they feel pretty much the same way. What can I say?

You ask whether there are scientists who are more successful than I. Well of course there are! I don't suppose that too many of us – scientists and non-scientists alike – lose sleep over such matters. We do the best we can, don't we?

What about Christian scientists? Yes to that one too, though they're a pretty small subset of top scientists. Science and religion are philosophically incompatible. So it is quite a trick to be able to partition one's life in that way. A bit like a nun who moonlights as a hooker. I cannot speak for them all, but a couple of things strike me from conversations. First, it is really hard for all of us to escape the prejudices with which we were raised. Scientists are only human after all. Second, Christian scientists tend to adopt a watered down version of orthodoxy – rejecting a literal reading of the Bible, for example, for reasons that I have explained to you.

Yes, a lot of B.S. has been written about Darwin. He was certainly religious in his early years. However, by the time that '*On the Origin of Species*' was published, he was fully aware of the idea's profound implications. And it bothered him because his wife remained devout.

So what about the origin of life? It's one of the two questions that invariably arise at this point in a conversation. Of course, there are lots on unanswered questions. As I have already explained, **every** discovery leads to another set of questions! The origin of life is especially tricky because it likely occurred in a span of about 300 million years (3.8 to 3.5 billion years ago) for which the geological record is exceedingly incomplete. It is nonetheless a very active area of research, because it is possible to investigate the conditions and mechanisms that may have played a role. Attached is an accessible summary for non-scientists from the September, 2009 issue of *Scientific American*⁵. The surface temperature of the planet would not have been too different then from what it is now. And there would have been plenty of volcanic centers because the Earth's interior would have been substantially hotter. So energy isn't a problem.

There is, however, a second answer. It doesn't matter. We have a pretty good understanding of how life evolved from then to now. We know that the processes by which evolution takes place cannot be guided. So even if we were to hypothesize a role for God in the creation of life – just for the sake of argument – there is no basis for connecting that God to contemporary theology, no reason why God, in just the last couple of thousand years, would begin to take particular

⁵ Ricardo, A., and Szostak, J.W., 2009, Life on Earth: *Scientific American*, September issue, p. 54-61.

interest in a species that had arisen without God's intervention on a small rocky planet in a universe of billions and billions of stars (actually 10 followed by 21 zeroes). The critical issue then is not whether God can or cannot be proven or disproven. It is whether God played a role in the evolution of life. And the answer to that question is that it didn't.

At this point we know only about life on Earth. A lot of research is under way in a search for life elsewhere in the solar system (especially Mars), and on planets orbiting other stars in the Milky Way galaxy. Hundreds of planets have been discovered. So I suspect that it is just a matter of time before extra-terrestrial life is recognized.

I hope that helps. You have been very patient, even if you reject everything I say as a matter of principle.

NCB: Christian: Take a deep breath and watch this clip. It expresses the central reality: that life evolved from something simple to the extraordinary diversity that we see today.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F0sszxXlzlY&feature=related>

There is no debate about the observations or the essential mechanisms. The difficulty, as we have discussed, is that what has been discovered through painstaking scientific research runs counter to what many people believe. Unlike the teachers figured in the documentary, I have no trouble pointing that out.

The whole program is available on YouTube, in five parts: '*The Genius of Charles Darwin: God Strikes Back*' (2008). You should be able to access the URLs under Notes on my Facebook page. Access is set to Public. If not, you can find them with a couple of clicks in YouTube. The note, if you are able to reach it, provides a synopsis of the content of each segment of the documentary.

CC: You are too funny, Mr. Christie. Telling me to watch this video, and take a deep breath, as if you are about to change my life forever with this bombshell of new evidence proving evolution. I watched it, and started laughing at the 3 second mark, and continued all the way to 6:24. The bully is back at it, and the only change is that he is bullying his own instead of Christians. You said Richard Dawkins was not a bully, but watch from 2:28-3:45. Classic bullying at it's best. Instead of respecting others for their points of view, and giving them the freedom to choose, he wants the teachers to force the evidence through attacking and challenging their students' faith. That's what a bully does. He tries to force his will on others, and when they won't be forced, he makes fun of them, and ridicules them for their beliefs. I would have loved to have been there when he said the science teachers were running scared. I would have reminded him how he ran scared and is still running scared from Dr. William Lane Craig. Once again, classic bullying at it's best. Loves to stand up and roar like a lion when he's in the right environment, but cowers like a chicken when someone stands up to him. You said you weren't a fan, but I would imagine that most of your evidence would be YouTube videos from Richard Dawkins. You need to find another hero, Mr. Christie. You need to have a drink, smoke a cigar, watch *Braveheart* several times, and quit walking hand in hand with such pansies. To quote your words "I'm just tickled" when I think of the look on your face after reading that. Richard also mentioned Darwin's family in this video, which I find interesting because most of his children remained believers along with his wife. You would have thought that at a time when the man's viewpoint on life ruled the home he would have had more influence over his family's beliefs. I guess their experiences with God were much more powerful than all his intellect and knowledge. I'm sure I've said that somewhere before. I gotta say, Mr. Christie, that I'm a little disappointed

that you don't have more game than what you have. When I played baseball in college, I always got excited when we faced someone throwing in the mid to upper 90's. The other players would be terrified in the dug-out, and I was licking my lips ready for the challenge. I want you to bring it, but don't send me anything with Dawkins in the future. The man has no credibility with me at all, and won't until he shows up for his showdown with Craig. Not too long ago I was challenged to show up at Winthrop University to debate against three lesbians who were leaders in the community and the science professor from the university. I showed up all by myself, with my Bible in my hand, and debated against a very left wing liberal crowd, three lesbians with their clans close by, and the science professor with all his evolutionist students front and center. I stood my ground for three hours, and at the end of it had a lot of people clapping, cursing, crying, but also standing in line to ask me questions. I got no respect for anyone who won't stand their ground and defend what they believe. If you had a gun to my head I wouldn't deny the name of Jesus, **ever!!!** By the way I got several friends on stand-by at M.I.T. who said if I needed them to hit them up. But I told them we were nowhere near that yet. With every email you send I gain confidence and faith in what I believe. You never know, maybe my talking with you wasn't for you at all, but for me. Got nothing but love for ya, homie!!! Have a blessed weekend. Peace.

NCB: Christian: I appreciate that it must be very hard to have long-held beliefs challenged. However, it isn't enough to be convinced of a personal relationship with God, or of the reality of miracles, or to insist that sundry human attributes are God-given, or that an ancient book is God's word. Lots of people believe stuff just as passionately as you. Yet their beliefs are inconsistent with yours. Deep faith has no bearing on whether any of it is true.

A YouTube clip isn't going to change your mind. Taking the trouble to find out the facts to which Dawkins alludes might. Give it a go. What have you got to lose?

The teachers in the clip appreciate this. They're simply too timid to run with the obvious conclusions. If someone makes a claim that is inconsistent with available evidence, I have no trouble pointing that out – in the nicest possible way!

Before you go totally off the deep end by suggesting that the sum total of my scientific knowledge is a YouTube clip, let me remind you that I am a full professor in the top-ranked academic department in my field in the United States. I teach this stuff. And I'm trying to find ways to communicate at a level that a non-scientist might actually grasp – apparently without much success.

With regard to Richard Dawkins declining to debate with William Craig, he has provided a plausible rationale. What's the big deal?

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/oct/20/richard-dawkins-william-lane-craig>

To review: Science has revolutionized our understanding of the natural world. All of us have benefited greatly from applications of this new knowledge – even you.

The essence of science is to test ideas against observational evidence. **Most** ideas turn out to be wrong. And that is precisely why science works. Contrary to popular perception, science isn't about proving stuff. It's about showing what doesn't work. And we can do that with a great deal of confidence. The ideas that stick – and evolution is one – have survived repeated testing.

Around 40-50% of Americans think that the Earth and everything that lives on the Earth – including humans – were ‘created’ in more or less their present form within the past 10,000 years. Another 40% accept a version of evolution in which changes were guided by God, with humans as the purposeful outcome. Much of Christian theology is rooted in the assumption that God not only exists, but interacts with us in our daily lives. If the human species was not in fact created, and is not in fact the result of guided evolution, it doesn’t matter whether God exists or not because there is no basis for accepting a theology for which either proposition is a point of departure. We’re not the purpose of the universe. In the bigger scheme of things, we’re irrelevant.

So let’s recognize belief for what it is: a response to the need to believe. I have to tell you, Christian: the real universe is vastly more wonderful than the fairytale version.

12 May, 2012

CC: Watch this video. I watched yours. We will leave Craig out, and I will bring to you a great hero of mine in the faith who explains how science points to a God. You are not responding to my experience theories. So I will come and play in your back yard a little. I will respond with much more after the week-end, Mr. Christie. Be blessed, and hope you are enjoying your time abroad. Peace.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0UIbd0eLxw&feature=related>

13 May, 2012

NCB: Christian: The arguments of both John Lennox and Richard Dawkins are familiar. Lennox believes because he desperately wants to believe that there is a Christian God. His ‘evidence’ isn’t evidence. It’s a pre-19th century perception. Lennox cannot conceive that a universe or life or complexity could exist in the absence of God. He doesn’t accept our scientific understanding of how evolution occurs. He doesn’t understand that the occasional nudge wouldn’t in fact make any difference. He thinks that God is a ‘person’ – an assertion that makes no sense given that personhood is so manifestly a product of evolution. He turns the possibility that a god might exist into an insistence that it must exist. And indeed, that it must be the Christian God though no shred of evidence exists for either proposition. He thinks that there is such a thing as ultimate or universal morality and justice, when such notions are clearly an outgrowth of emerging civilization, and vary from one place and time to another. And how exactly do such concepts relate to a universe in which life itself is so exceedingly rare even if it may exist in other stellar systems?

It becomes evident as the conversation continues that Lennox believes in God ultimately for the very same reasons that you do: He needs an anchor. Belief establishes purpose. It provides hope and comfort, the promise of life after death. And he believes in the Christian God because he was born and raised in Britain. Had he grown up in Saudi Arabia he would be a Muslim, and had he spent his early years in India he would be a Hindu. His choice is cultural. He is an intelligent fellow. Yet he cannot escape his upbringing and cultural milieu in precisely the same way that you cannot escape yours.

So let me close with the following editorial observations.

1) I have no need for belief. I accept myself for what I am, and my circumstances for what they are. I recognize that I am responsible for how my life has turned out, that along the way I have encountered both good fortune and tough breaks. That is just the way it is. I do not expect to experience life after death. However, I hope that some of what I have contributed will live on to the benefit of those who remain. And given just how improbable every single human being is, I count myself fortunate to have lived at all.

2) You and the rest must make your own determination. I have no wish to impose my views, with one important caveat. Beliefs that are inconsistent with well established fact are intellectually bankrupt. Please, if you are going to insist on the existence of a god, at least fudge a little – like my Christian scientist colleagues – so that what you believe is minimally consistent with what we know. Rejecting evolution and, in your case, all of science is foolish and ignorant. It's backward and counterproductive. It's dishonest. It's a huge disservice to our young people. And it's unnecessary – because your evident concern for others doesn't depend on the existence of God. Keep up the good work!

3) I care, and I have made a point of engaging folk like yourself over the past several years, because you have no right to impose your views on others. I object very strongly to legislation based upon religiously informed perceptions of morality in a country established to respect religious freedom – including the right to adopt no religion at all. This week's vote in North Carolina⁶ provides a timely example. And I object very much to the religiously based anti-intellectualism that pervades our schools and communities. I hope that one day the United States will be able to move beyond the mythology and superstition that so many still embrace. I do not think that the country has much of a future unless it does.

CC: I will respond to several things, and then will end our debate with my mentor's response after reading our dialogue.

The evidence that Lennox has is a personal relationship with Christ, which is what I've been telling you for weeks now. It's his anchor, and he need not worry about your anchor when his is just fine. Science can explain how gravity would pull the anchor to the bottom, and how much force would be needed to stop the boat after scientifically figuring the weight and speed of the craft, and how much wind would be needed to blow into the sails to get the boat moving again, but science can't be the anchor itself. Science is very valuable and helpful in our world, but it is not the anchor (God) and never will be. The sad thing to me is one day you will be on your death bed, as we all will, or you will be forced to watch someone you love take their last breath (and maybe you already have, as I have as well). At that point science will be able to tell you how much time you yourself or your loved one has. It will be able to tell you why you are sick and why your body is beginning to shut down. It will be able to offer you temporary pain medications to ease your suffering, but it will never be able to give you peace that can only come from Christ. It will never be able to give you forgiveness for the many mistakes you have made in your life that have separated you from a loving God. That's what I have, what Mr. Lennox has, and many others in the world today. Yes, you can live a good life and do good deeds as a

⁶ On 8 May, 2012, North Carolina voters approved a constitutional amendment defining marriage solely as a union between a man and a woman. Unofficial returns showed that the amendment passed with about 61% of the vote to 39% against. North Carolina became the 30th American state to adopt a ban on same-sex marriage.

non-Christian, but you will never be complete and experience who you were really created to be (hit your sweet spot) until you have the relationship with Jesus that God desires you to have. This can only come from humbling yourself and getting on your face, and asking God to forgive you, something I don't believe you have the courage to do. You say you have no need for belief, that you have no problem accepting yourself for who you are. To me that is at the very core of the problem with science. If we are nothing more than glorified animals then why not act like it. So you are satisfied with your failures, fits of anger, lack of forgiveness, lust for the world, evil desires, greed for more, and other terrible things your flesh struggles with as well as mine? Well I'm not satisfied with it, and neither is my God. He has another way and another plan (*John 3:16*). You also say that I need to modify my beliefs, or at least fudge a little, like your other Christian scientist colleagues. I will never compromise the gospel of Jesus Christ!!! There are many who do. They live their lives scared, or trying to please everyone by stepping away from the truth a little so they can be accepted. At the end of the day, if anyone is upset with me for my life and handling of the gospel, it will certainly not be God. Everyone else can just deal with it like yourself, the A.C.L.U., the *New York Times*, and so on. I'm not scared, and nor will I back away. I will never sell out like Judas. I will be judged one day for how I lived out the call God has given me in my life. I will continue to speak in schools, continue to speak out against gay marriage and any other sinful life our country tries to pass off as a normal lifestyle, and continue to speak out against our government as they try to take us away from our Founding Father's foundation. Remember that the definition of religion is a belief and study about the set cause and purpose of the universe, and the rituals practiced in living that belief out. That, Mr. Christie, is what evolution has become, a religion!!! If you want to keep Christianity out of public schools, then we need to kick evolution out as well since it is a religion. You and others sit around and complain about me talking about the love of Christ and living life with a purpose, and seem to forget that Christian teens have to sit in a classroom and listen every day, five days a week, nine months out of a year, to how we came from sitting in a tree eating bananas, picking our butts and throwing feces at each other, to the beautiful creations we are today. To be honest, people who agree with that one-sided viewpoint are the biggest hypocrites on the planet. Enough said. I have truly enjoyed our debate. I respect your opinion and believe too many people have died in places all over the world so that we can all have the freedom to speak out. I would never try to squash your right to do so. With that being said, please don't try to squash mine, and know that I will continue to fight against your view point that there is no God. You can hit me back anytime in the future if you just want to talk. I do consider you a friend, and have enjoyed getting to know you. I always think it's a good thing for people to be able to communicate in love and respect. Here is my mentor's⁷ response in closing.

Christian, He says, from what I've garnered, that he is bound to a naturalistic viewpoint. The tenets of his arguments find their validation for him there. You are trying to answer him at the level of his disbelief, not the level of his belief. He cannot hear you, because you are not offering him a point of reference by which he can accurately contrast and compare his opinions. His stance is extremely weak in that he says science is his answer, that science refutes a creation-based world view. You must challenge him, as in all debates, at the level of his foundation. Such as, What is his infallible source? He will say that science is his infallible source. But your question must then be, Whose science? Not one scientist agrees completely with another. Remember that science said for 150 years

⁷ Dwight Robertson is Founder and President of Kingdom Building Ministries. <http://www.kbm.org>

that absolutely, our solar system had 9 planets. Now, just 5 years ago, they say that there are only eight. Pluto is not a planet any more. Their infallible source can **never** be absolute, even in a naturalistic world view, because it is subject to discovery. Well, here is a question to ask when the facts are still changing. What if the facts keep changing until one day you discover that there is a Creator after all? If he is willing to shut the door, right now, and say that there need be no more scientific study, that there need be no more investigation to validate or invalidate the information that now exists, that science and scientists have every bit of information there is that is necessary, and we can close that book forever and hold it accountable, just as Christians are willing to say about the Bible, then he can be respected as a man of integrity. However, as scientists are learning, evolution is bunk. There are thousands upon thousands who believe this, and they **are not Christians**. So he must accept that his world view has no ‘infallible source’. There is no absolute truth that needs no appendices, and that his best position would be to humble himself and be willing to investigate. I recommend you getting two books immediately: One, ‘*Evolution is a Lie*’ by Ken Ham. Two, ‘*Scientists that Believe*’. Sorry this was so long. But I read **nothing** in his discourse that was worth debating. He sounds like a man who has sat in a bunch of seminars. I have debated guys like this before, and their premises are flawed in that they do not put the same effort into discovering truth as they do in condemnation. I didn’t even bother sending this to my M.I.T. guys⁸. They’ve destroyed guys like this before, and they’re really not interested in this stuff again. These guys hit the same brick wall, and eventually make a dismissive remark because they don’t want to be honest enough to investigate **all** of the facts. Hope this is a help. Type back at me if you need me. – Dwight

NCB: Christian: Yes, for you and Lennox, deeply yearning for something to be true **is** reality, the adult equivalent of a stuffed animal or a security blanket – though as he reveals in slightly more candid moments, that may not be enough.

No matter how repeatedly you misrepresent the scientific enterprise, science doesn’t claim to play that role (to provide an anchor), and I have no idea why you think that it might. Humans, like many animals, have discovered the value of family and community. If churches didn’t exist, we’d have invented them for this purpose. Your beliefs provide **you** with inner peace. You cannot understand that I too have inner peace, indeed a sense of wonderment that I appreciate things about the world around us that folk in religious bubbles will never experience.

All of us make mistakes, Christian. And we do our best to atone for them. Again, if this is a justification for the existence of God, please refer to point one.

I shall never experience who I was ‘created’ to be for a very simple reason. I wasn’t created. Please re-read my final remark in paragraph two.

If we’re no more than glorified animals, why not act like it? Well, Christian, regrettably we do. The crime rate here in southern Africa is exceedingly high. So is devotion to a Christian God.

⁸ Reference by Christian to ‘friends on stand-by at M.I.T.’ and (here) by Dwight Robertson to ‘my M.I.T. guys’ is intriguing – a veiled threat to bring in heavier rhetorical weaponry, and an allusion to two or more individuals with creationist inclinations and M.I.T. credentials. The possibility that the views of the unnamed sources might not be representative of faculty or students at Massachusetts Institute of Technology isn’t broached.

We have nonetheless learned that societies function better with order and co-operation, and religion has, as a practical matter, played a role in making that possible. As New York City discovered a few years ago, putting more policemen on the streets also works.

You're not satisfied with 'your failures, fits of anger, lack of forgiveness, lust for the world, evil desires, greed for more', and so forth? Well then, you haven't reached **my** level of inner peace, have you? No wonder you need a God to take care of it for you.

You will 'never compromise the gospel of Jesus Christ'. You are determined not to consider the possibility that you might be mistaken. And that is the most glaring difference between the two of us. It can be dreadfully annoying, but every scientist recognizes on a daily basis that he (or she) may have gotten it wrong – even ideas that form the basis for an entire career. It is actually quite humbling. It is also why we prefer to cast interpretations in the form of hypotheses subject to additional testing.

When I use the word 'fudge', I do so in a practical sense. Francis Collins and the BioLogos Foundation⁹ would regard the practice as seeking common ground between science and religion, a way in which both might be justified simultaneously. It is a wonderful sentiment, even if it is ultimately without merit.

I'm not asking you to 'sell out'. I'm inviting you to enrich your life by discovering the real world outside your religious bubble. Any belief in God that I may once have had dissipated by the time I was in college. It is nonetheless only in recent years that I have fully grasped the significance of a godless universe.

Yes, you will continue to speak out against same-sex marriage, without ever discovering the damage that you are doing. For you homosexuality is a sin because that is what the Bible says. You will never understand that the spectrum of human sexuality is broad and grey, that homosexuality isn't a 'lifestyle'. It is tendency with which people are born. Those who rail against same-sex marriage have no interest in the loving families that arise from such arrangements. Nor have they ever explained how same-sex marriage takes anything from those of us in more traditional relationships. It is among the best examples of religious bigotry in contemporary America.

No, evolution isn't a religion, though that is a standard line of the 'teach both sides' lobby. If some bright-eyed, bushy-tailed Ph.D. student discovered a better explanation, there would be a lot of thrashing around for a while, but he'd wind up with a Nobel Prize once the dust settled. However, that isn't going to happen any more than we're going to discover that stars are pin-pricks in the ceiling. As I have explained repeatedly, we now understand not only what happened (from the geological record and systematic paleontology). We understand how it happened (biochemically, organismically, within species, within ecosystems).

The transition from pre-human to human took place more than six million years ago. Our own species – *Homo sapiens* – arose around 200,000 years ago, and what we might regard as civilization within only the last several thousand. Your idealized view of a 'beautiful creation' came to the party only recently, Christian. Those are the unvarnished facts. There is no 'other side'. It isn't a matter of opinion.

⁹ <http://biologos.org/>

Your final paragraph (from Dwight) again misrepresents the scientific method. If Dwight has read what I have sent you, he appears to have paid little attention to my several responses on this topic. Falsifying hypotheses (figuring out which ideas don't work) is precisely **how** science gets to an approximation of the truth. Truth isn't the first idea that pops into someone's head any more than it is the fixed wording of an ancient text. And it is absurd to claim that disagreements among scientists at the frontiers of their fields somehow imply that all of it is wrong, and can be conveniently ignored. In this context, I like Dawkins's allusion to jumping out of a tenth story window if you choose not to 'believe' in gravity. The business about Pluto isn't worth the ink. Eight versus nine planets has to do with classification, not understanding. And if certain phenomena – like gravity and evolution – have attained the status of facts, that doesn't mean that no more needs to be learned about either. Newtonian gravity works well for ten-story buildings, but it becomes messy at close to the speed of light, and figuring out how the principal forces of nature relate is at the forefront of modern physics. Research in evolution is similarly very active today. Only those who are utterly closed to reality – or misled by well-meaning but misinformed pastors – claim that 'evolution is bunk'. Ken Ham is such a person. It is truly hard to know what to do with '*Answers in Genesis*'¹⁰, the website that he established. It falls so wide of the mark. Dwight can't be serious.

I appreciate your taking the time to respond. The facts are readily available. It is up to you (and Dwight) to pluck up enough courage to discover what you are missing. There is only so much that I can do for either of you. At least I tried.

Epilogue

At stake are two different and, in my opinion, wholly irreconcilable world views. Christian Chapman represents a position that has been adopted by nearly half of all Americans – that a God exists, that humans were created recently by God, for a purpose, and that God is ultimately responsible for such qualities as love, morality and justice. A second view is that humans exist as a species and as individuals solely as a result of good fortune – the product of billions of years of evolution by natural selection on an insignificant planetary speck in a vast and ancient universe. Christian's reality is informed by what he regards as personal experience of God's love, and by unimpeachable accounts of miracles. The second world view is informed by science – more than two centuries of research that has revealed, with considerable confidence, both the history and cosmic context of our planet and the mechanisms by which new species arise from earlier species. Science, by its very nature, is a work in progress. Yet it advances not by wholesale rejection of one set of ideas and replacement by another, but by spiraling towards explanations with ever increasing levels of sophistication – discarding hypotheses that fail to withstand scrutiny along the way, and building upon those that survive repeated tests. Evolution is one such successful idea. So we face a choice: to reject Christian's theological orthodoxy; to ditch the science as self-evidently false; or perhaps to seek some compromise position.

The most widely accepted compromise is to agree that the universe and Earth are ancient, and that the concept of evolution correctly describes the history of life, but to suppose that evolution was guided by God, with humans the inevitable and purposeful outcome. Unfortunately, the idea of guidance is inconsistent with everything that we have learned about **how** evolution occurs.

¹⁰ <http://www.answersingenesis.org/>

God not only didn't direct what happened. It would not have been able to do so, no matter how omnipotent, unless it controlled everything – essentially a supernatural universe¹¹.

An alternative compromise adopted by some religious scientists to steer around this problem is to suppose that God started the clock, and was perhaps responsible for the origin of life, but – consistent with available evidence – played no role in evolution. The obvious difficulty with this modified view, at least for theists, is that God's asserted interest in our daily lives for only the past several thousand years becomes so tenuous as to be implausible. And it is surely for this reason that those with only a passing knowledge of evolution as a phenomenon tend to go with guidance or a literal reading of *Genesis* (creationism), or with the special creation of humans separate from the emergence of other life on Earth.

Available facts therefore converge on a purely naturalistic science-based explanation for our origins. Yet belief in God persists for all of the deeply visceral reasons that Christian expresses, through inculcation at an early age, and because familiarity and general acceptance are self-reinforcing. In Christian's world, it doesn't matter that one person's beliefs differ from or are incompatible with those of another. Christian is utterly convinced that he is right. And it is in any case easy to paper over inconsistencies as different understandings, to dissemble on the literal truth versus symbolism of scripture, to insist that all views are equally valid even if that cannot possibly be true, or to change the topic of conversation – I won't knock your beliefs if you don't knock mine. However, the human qualities that Christian believes must come from God – love, concern for others, morality, justice, and so forth – can now be seen for what they really are: attributes acquired in the course of evolution, and not necessarily restricted to humans or even primates; and rules and structures that every human society and social group has seen fit to establish in one form or another during the emergence of civilization. It simply isn't possible to co-exist peacefully at close quarters without them.

Some rules are self-evident – the prohibition against murder, for example. Yet even a cursory examination of conventions and laws in different countries, or through time in the same country, reveals the obvious: that each community sets rules as it sees fit, for a host of competing reasons, in a cultural and historical context, and according to who controls the levers of power. When it comes to establishing laws in a country as inhomogeneous as the United States, compromises are needed to accommodate the range of opinion. Battles over such highly polarized issues as racial inequity, abortion and same-sex marriage play out over decades, as one constituency or another gains or loses political advantage. There is no universal standard, no absolute right and wrong. The teachings of the monotheistic religions differ appreciably. And many explicit requirements and prohibitions no longer make any sense, if they ever did. 'God's will' may be a widely accepted point of reference, but it doesn't count if we cannot agree on what that is or if there is no God, and nor does intolerance, prejudice or bigotry dressed up as moral conviction.

So does the scientific explanation of our origins make human existence sterile and pointless in the way that Christian supposes? Well of course it doesn't. All of the things that get Christian up in the morning still apply. Concern for family, friends and neighbors is admirable. However, responsibility for establishing purpose in our lives rests with us, and not with an imaginary deity. And the afterlife is not some place we go. It is what we leave behind, and the people we influence by the way we lead our lives.

¹¹ The BioLogos view – that God used the process of evolution purposefully to create all of the life on Earth today – is a fudge. 'Natural' phenomena are either natural or they aren't.