

Sunday, April 22, 2007

## Christian Reaction to Virginia Tech

It seems I've gone and caused some trouble again. This time it was by [asking how Christians could feel outrage](#) over last Monday's murderous rampage at Virginia Tech. This question was so disturbing that, not one, but *two* Christian apologists found it necessary to sit down and write reactions to me and post them on their own blogs. What's interesting is that neither apologist answered the question I asked! Instead, they spent their energy spitting and stammering over certain points I raised, claiming that I don't understand or took bible quotes out of context on the one hand, then basically agreeing with the points that I presented in developing my question. It all makes for some good wholesome atheological fun!

The two reactions can be found here:

[The Good, the Bad, and the Bethrick](#), by Steve Hays

[The Events at VT as Evidence Against Christianity](#), by Jet

Below I examine what these apologists say individually, beginning with Steve Hays' reaction.

### I. Hays' Reaction

It is unclear why Hays decided to title his reaction after a famous spaghetti western movie, for he never explains this. But this is only the beginning of what turns out to be a series of missed opportunities and ironic disappointments.

Hays opened his reaction with the following statement:

On a preliminary point, it's quite revealing to see so many militant unbelievers revel in this tragedy as a pretext to attack the faith.

It very often seems to be the case that, when Christians read my blog, they mix what they read with an ample dose of projection and presumption. Here Hays insinuates that I am "reveling" in tragedy, but nowhere supports this accusation. Toward the end of his reaction he characterizes my inquiry as "an attempt to exploit the Virginian Tech massacre," but fails to defend this accusation as well.

Asking whether or not a reaction of outrage is appropriate on Christianity's premises is hardly "reveling in tragedy" nor "exploiting" a massacre. But forcing such characterizations goes over big with many of Triablogue's readers, for they haven't much else going for them.

In [my blog](#), I had written:

Many Christians have expressed outrage over the senseless and bloody massacre that took place at the beginning of this week on the campus of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. But if they are truly faithful to the worldview they preach, why would they feel any outrage at all?

On the Christian worldview, life is eternal. For the 32 victims and the gunman who "died" on Monday, their lives did not really end. They just passed on to the next stage. Biological demise is simply a doorway to a supernatural eternity thereafter. Rather than great loss, "to die is gain," wrote St. Paul (Phil. 1:21). It seems believers should be rejoicing, if they truly believed, for the god of the bible is glorified by such things.

Hays responded to these two paragraphs in a most puzzling manner (I'm assuming he's as smart as he portrays himself). His first bullet point was the following:

i) This is a truly dumb statement since it would be, at best, applicable to the heaven-bound and not the hell-bound.

This is a truly dumb retort, for I make it clear in the very portion of my blog that Hays quotes that my question is for *believers* to consider. My question is directed to Christians about what Christianity teaches. So of course it is applicable to those who want to see themselves as “heaven-bound.” It was intended to be!

Hays continued:

When St. Paul said that “to die is gain,” he was referring the fate of Christians, and not the damned.

That’s exactly the point. As I had mentioned, Christians think that there is an afterlife and that they have been “chosen” to go on to a paradise once their biology meets its demise. The question I ask in my opening paragraph is not why non-Christians would feel outrage, by why CHRISTIANS would feel outrage. Whether he realizes it or not, Hays is simply confirming the appropriateness of a statement that he just called “truly dumb.”

Hays’ second bullet point was:

ii) And even where Christians are concerned, while death may be a boon to the individual, it is not necessarily a boon to those he leaves behind. The survivors. Mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, friends and spouses. They will suffer the emotional loss of extended separation.

Why wouldn’t it be “a boon to those he leaves behind”? It’s all part of “God’s plan,” isn’t it? Isn’t the glory of “God’s plan” a “boon” to believers? Or does “God’s plan” get them bummed out?

Hays’ presumption that “the survivors will suffer... emotional loss” begs the question, for it is not established that they are Christians who truly believe. Indeed, the question is not directed to unnamed “survivors” whose beliefs are not known, but to Christians who react with outrage. I’m fully aware that those who were touched directly by the consequences of Cho Seung-Hui’s massacre will suffer emotional loss. But my question was not directed to them. I’m asking Christians, like Hays, who were not directly affected by the incident. Hays gives us no answer to this question in his response. Hays needs to explain why HE feels outrage - if in fact he does (perhaps he doesn’t) - in response to the Virginia Tech massacre, given his professed beliefs. This is precisely what needs to be explained, given what Christianity teaches, if Christians truly believe.

Now, if a parent truly believed in the magic kingdom view of Christianity, and truly believed that his or her son or daughter killed in the rampage were “saved,” why wouldn’t that parent rejoice? The notion of “emotional loss of extended separation” smacks of utter selfishness, and yet the believer is called to “deny himself” (Mt. 16:24). Kreeft and Tacelli characterize selfishness as “the meaning of sin, the very disease Jesus came to cure” (*Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, p. 67). It seems dubious that non-believers need continually to remind believers of what their worldview teaches, but it happens.

Hays also wrote:

The Bible describes the grieving process. So there’s nothing unscriptural about our reaction to the massacre.

Consider Hays’ reasoning here. The bible *describes* many things, such as murder, harlotry, incest, disobedience, idolatry, haughtiness, deceitfulness, stealing, genocide, raping, pillaging, etc. Does the mere fact that the bible describes these things mean that “there’s nothing unscriptural about” them? The New Testament demonstrates crass, uncaring indifference to those whose loved one dies when one of Jesus’ disciples asks him to wait while he goes off to bury his dead father, and Jesus replies “Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead” (Mt. 8:22). So much for “the grieving process.” Corpses are to be left to rot in the streets.

Moreover, even if “the Bible describes the grieving process,” this does nothing to address my question. A *description* of the grieving process does not explain why someone who believes that the Virginia Tech massacre was all part of the “plan” of a universe-controlling consciousness who “has a morally sufficient reason” to sanction the evil that happens in the universe, would feel outrage over such an incident.

Also, my question has to do with what the bible *teaches*, not merely with what it *describes*. That Hays would slink to falling back to mere descriptions in order to justify actions is quite revealing indeed. Aren’t the teachings in “the good book” good enough?

Hays then really went into left field:

Most of the victims were twenty-somethings. Suppose I lost my older brother to this gunman. Suppose both he

and I are Christians. Even so, I will not see him again for another fifty or sixty years, give or take.

Okay. So? Even if “most of the victims were twenty-somethings,” or that one of those victims was Hays’ older brother, whether or not his older brother was a Christian, Hays professes to be a Christian who believes that everything that happens in the universe (including down here on little ol’ earth) is all part of some unfolding “plan” set in motion by an invisible magic being which “controls whatsoever comes to pass” and “has a morally sufficient reason for the evil which exists.” In comparison to the enormous “glory” that Hays’ worldview ascribes to the unfolding of “God’s plan,” is Hays really worried about not seeing his brother “for another fifty or sixty years”? I took Hays for a presumptuous man, but I didn’t realize he was *this* presumptuous. He would have probably scolded Cho Seung-Hui’s victims if they were so presumptuous as to figure they had “another fifty or sixty” years. And even then, “fifty or sixty years” is a mere blink of time when one has all eternity to contemplate his halo.

Hays’ next bullet point was:

iii) Let’s also recall the context of Phil 1:21. Paul is speaking for himself, as a sick old man who sacrificed the natural blessings of life in the service of the gospel. So, for him, at this stage, death would be a boon.

Hays can of course take this route if he wants. After all, just a few verses later, St. Paul writes: “Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you” (Phil. 1:24), suggesting perhaps that the members of his immediately intended audience are younger and still have “work” to do here on earth before passing through the door of death to the magic kingdom that awaits beyond the grave (as if that “makes sense”). But this misses the broader ethical context ever-present throughout the New Testament, namely that the believer should be willing to lay down his life at any moment, principally because he is not to think it his own, but a possession owned by an invisible magic being who can take it away any moment. In a parable about a rich man (both Jesus and Cho Seung-Hui expressed resentment for the wealthy), Jesus condemns the presumption that one can enjoy the wealth he has produced in his lifetime here on earth. The parable has the Christian god say to the rich man:

Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou has provided? (Lk. 12:20)

The New Testament puts the following words of advice into Jesus’ mouth:

“And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Mt. 10:28)

There are constant reminders in “Scripture” that the believer is not to think he can enjoy his life for long.

And if the individual whose life is taken from him by the invisible magic being “believes” what Christianity commands him to believe, then it would be hard to see how a Christian who truly believes this stuff would not count the prospect of death, as St. Paul modeled when he was apparently facing his biological demise, as “gain.” Though we may dismiss St. Paul’s words, as Hays is anxious to do, as merely autobiographical trivia given his particular circumstances, the revered apostle was in fact modeling the appropriate orientation of mind to the death that we all have coming. Why else would he include this kind of detail in an open letter to an entire congregation?

Hays continued:

This doesn’t mean that he would always regard death as preferable to life, regardless of one’s age or station in life.

Again Hays misses the point of his own bible’s teachings, probably because he does not have both feet firmly planted in his professed faith. St. Paul would not have regarded his willingness to pass through his biological death as “preferring death to life.” On St. Paul’s premises, he found the afterlife that the Christian tradition promises to be preferable to mere biological existence here on earth. This is the real context underlying his statement to the church in Philippi that “to die is gain.” Christians can dismiss these words, as Hays prefers to do, but this only tells us about them, not about what Christianity teaches. Nor does it explain why Christians who truly believe what Christianity teaches would feel outrage over something like the Virginia Tech massacre.

Hays writes:

The Christian faith is a life-affirming faith. You can find that throughout the OT.

This of course depends on what one means by “life-affirming.” A *this-worldly* life-affirming orientation requires

reason, not [faith](#). Faith is preferred over reason when the object is *imaginary* and the goal is *irrational*. Contrary to what Hays asserts, Christianity is an *afterlife*-affirming faith, which is nothing short of death-worship (there's a reason why an instrument of execution is a fitting symbol of Christianity). To begin with, it is a view held on the basis of faith (i.e., on the *hope* that it is true; Hays does hope Christianity is true, does he not?), and the "life" it "affirms" is not the biological flourishing that is human life, but an eternity in a magic kingdom beyond the grave. This is the promise that is dangled like a carrot before the believer, keeping him as true to the faith as possible. But the question is essentially: How possible is that?

Hays also wrote:

It's one thing for a believer at the end of life to look forward to the afterlife (e.g. Lk 2:28), quite another thing for a teenager or twenty-something, who has yet to fully experience the natural blessings of manhood (or womanhood), to rate the afterlife above the earthly goods of God's handiwork here below.

It's one thing for a believer who thinks his death is imminent to begin taking his worldview's teachings about the afterlife seriously, quite another for someone who professes to believe but doesn't really believe to carry on before his peers as if he believes.

On my view, I can understand why a teenager or twenty-something would look forward to a bountiful and enjoyable future "here on earth." I would expect this to be the case. In what we might call the earlier part of human life, where one can look forward to future experiences, man's capacity for values is at its prime because his capacity for selfishness is at its prime. A young man or woman is learning what his or her abilities are, and the enjoyment produced by successful goal-oriented endeavors increases as the magnitude of his or her goals increases. This is what I would expect on my worldview's conception of life.

But this is what the Christian needs to explain on behalf of Christianity. What does the believer love more - his god and its alleged "plan" (which could include any fate for the believer at any time, no matter where he is in his life), or his life here on earth? Where does he put his treasure? In the magic kingdom, or in this life? He cannot have two masters, can he? According to the story, Jesus was in his early 30's when he was called (or called himself?) to give up his life. In his prayer to his god, Jesus is modeled as giving in to what he believed an invisible magic being required of him: "not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Mt. 26:39).

Hays offered yet another bullet point:

iv) There is, moreover, a difference between good and evil, on the one hand, and good, better, or best, on the other. The Bible doesn't teach us to despise the good just because something better might come along. Rather, we are to savor the good.

This just shifts the question over without addressing it. From the Christian perspective, what could be better than eternity in the magic kingdom? The teaching attributed to Jesus in the New Testament makes it pretty clear:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Mt. 6:19-21)

Values here on earth can be corrupted by moths and rust, so don't bother going after them. A promise awaits you in death.

I had written:

The lesson of Abraham (cf. Genesis chapter 22) is clear: Be willing to kill.

And in response, Hays asked:

And the point of this reference is what, exactly? Yes, there are times when we should be willing to kill. For example, what pity that none of the students was able to return fire and stop the assailant dead in his tracks before he could take any more innocent lives.

Hays wants to know what the point of my referencing the lesson of Abraham in Genesis chapter 22 is. Well, what's the point of the story in Genesis 22? This is a part of biblical teaching that is keenly relevant to Christianity, for the New Testament holds up Abraham and his willingness to kill his son on his god's orders as a proper example of faith.

“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac” (Heb. 11:17). So the point here is to identify what Christianity teaches and models to its adherents.

Hays agrees that “there are times when we should be willing to kill,” and as an example he cites a situation in which one should be willing to kill in self-defense. On a view which affirms the value of human life, such as my worldview, I can agree that one should be willing to kill in such circumstances if he has the opportunity.

But if one truly believes that the unfolding of events in the world are all part of “God’s plan” and that the believer’s moral duty is to “deny himself,” this readiness to kill in self-defense needs to be explained. A man’s resolve needed to act in self-defense requires a code of rational *values*, such as my worldview teaches. The bible teaches a morality of *duties*, and holds up as a virtue the unquestioning obedience of adherents to divine whims, not a morality of values. Jesus nowhere talks about man’s need for values.

Hays makes reference to “innocent lives,” but [elsewhere](#) he has already stipulated - in agreement with what Christianity teaches - that “no human being is completely innocent.” We’ll revisit this issue below.

It should be pointed out that, when Abraham was preparing to kill his own son, he was *not* acting in self-defense. His son did not pose any threat to Abraham’s life and well-being. To interpolate a motive of self-defense to the Genesis story of Abraham misses that story’s point completely. Abraham’s son represented no threat to his father’s values. Quite the contrary, the story says that Abraham loved his son very much (Gen. 22:2); Isaac was one of Abraham’s chief values. Abraham believed his god wanted him to kill his son as a proof of loyalty. The story nowhere depicts Abraham resisting this. In the story, Abraham nowhere attempts to reason with his god, or even make sure he got the instruction right. We don’t read a dialogue between Abraham and his god such as the following:

**Abraham:** “Excuse me, Lord. I know you’re great and wonderful and all, but did I understand you correctly? You want me to kill my son Isaac?”

**God:** “Yep, you heard right, Abe. Go now. Gather up thy sticks and thy son and thine ass and get on your way to the altar.”

**Abraham:** “Well, hold on, Lord. Can I ask why you want me to do this? You know that I love Isaac. He’s my son! Why do you want me to act against my own values?”

**God:** “You’re not to value anything over me. Go now, get ready to kill your son.”

**Abraham:** “What is that supposed to accomplish? Do you think I’ll love you more once I’ve killed my son?”

**God:** “Go now, do as I command thee, or you will suffer. If you question my commandments, you will wish you had never been born.”

**Abraham:** “I guess I just don’t understand.”

**God:** “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding” (Prov. 3:5).

**Abraham:** “Alright, alright. You don’t have to start quoting Scripture on me! Isaac! Where are you, boy?”

No, we don’t see Abraham even questioning his god’s instructions to prepare his son for sacrifice. And this is no accident. This is precisely what the story intends to model: unquestioning obedience, even if it means the irrevocable destruction of human life. This can all be rationalized in the believer’s mind as an intended part of “God’s plan,” which means he is not morally opposed to whatever happens, because whatever happens is part of “God’s plan” anyway. To oppose what happens is really to oppose “God’s plan.”

I wrote:

The lesson of Jesus (cf. the four gospels) is also clear: Be willing to die.

Hays replied:

A nice case of acontextual proof-texting. Indeed, there are situations in which a Christian should be willing to die. But, needless to say, there is no general mandate in Scripture to lay down your arms.

How is my point that Jesus was willing to die a “case of acontextual prooftexting”? Jesus’ sacrifice is commonly held up to Christian believers as a model sacrifice. The Christian atonement for sins by sacrifice has its roots in the Old Testament tradition of animal sacrifice.

Also, to lay down one’s arms, he first had to have taken them up. Where does the bible mandate that one take up arms in the first place?

At any rate, the bible need not be so explicit as to command believers to lay down their arms (assuming they’ve taken them up to begin with). The general mandate of the bible to the believer is to lay down his *will to live* for the sake of an invisible magic being that could not gain from the believer’s sacrifice in the first place.

“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.” (Mt. 16:25)

“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.” (Lk. 14:26)

Perhaps Kreeft and Tacelli make the point clearest when they tell us that “religious faith is something to die for.” (*Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, p. 14)

Regarding Cho Seung-Hui and his murderous rampage, I had written:

And his victims? On the Christian worldview, the ideal attitude proper for the believer is one of selflessness. The believer is to “deny himself” (Mt. 16:24), to “resist not evil” and “turn the cheek” (Mt. 5:39), and to present his body as “a living sacrifice,” which is said to be a “reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1).

Hays retorted:

i) We’re treated to more acontextual prooftexting. For example, the Sermon on the Mount is dealing with personal slights to one’s honor—and not a threat to life and limb.

The instruction that the believer is to “deny himself” is not taken from the Sermon on the Mount. This is a general precondition for being a follower of Jesus:

“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” (Mt. 16:24)

Also, the instruction that the believer present his body as “a living sacrifice” is also not from the Sermon on the Mount. It is an instruction from St. Paul’s letter to the Romans.

The New Testament is chock full of instructions which undermine man’s self-interest. The god of the bible is too small-minded to allow human beings to live for their own sakes.

Moreover, it is only consistent that a worldview which enshrines a god that “has a morally sufficient reason for the evil which exists” to command its adherents to “resist not evil.” We should not forget that the god of the bible is on very cozy terms with evil.

Hays also writes:

ii) In addition, Bethrick isn’t bright enough to realize that there is more to resisting evil than self-defense. For example, a Christian husband and father should be prepared to defend his wife and kids at the risk of his own life. So it isn’t just a case of protecting myself against an assailant. To the contrary, it may often be the case of protecting others from an assailant, at my own risk.

Always one to resort to personal attacks (“Bethrick isn’t bright enough to realize...”), Hays still tries to skirt around the issue. Of course I realize that “there is more to resisting evil than self-defense”; Hays cites nothing in my writings to establish that I do not realize this. He simply manufactures an opportunity to belittle those who do not believe in his invisible magic being.

So again, I ask: Why would a Christian believer, who truly believes that “God controls whatsoever comes to pass,” think it necessary to resist evil regardless of whose well-being it threatens when the explicit instruction in the bible is: “resist not evil”? If he truly thinks that “God has a morally sufficient reason for the evil” it sanctions in the world, why resist this evil?

I wrote:

And we cannot call Cho's victims "innocent," for - as one believer puts it - "no human being is completely innocent." Either the Christian god was calling them home, or they were getting their just desserts.

Hays writes in response:

More simplemindedness. The fact that everyone is guilty before God doesn't mean that everyone has wronged everyone else. It doesn't mean that Cho's victims did anything to him deserving of death at his hands. They can be innocent in relation to him without being innocent in relation to God.

Whether or not Cho's victims did anything to him to deserve his massacre is irrelevant since, in a Christian universe, the primary concern on this point is that one is guilty before the Christian god. Since "God controls whatsoever comes to pass," whether Cho's victims "deserved" to die at his hands or not is completely beside the point, from the Christian perspective. The primary concern in the Christian perspective is that the Christian god is calling all the shots, and according to the storybook we've all been judged guilty of sin (cf. Rom. 5:12), even before we've had our day in court. Being "innocent in relation" to Cho is utterly nugatory. Cho is just a vehicle for "God's plan," a character in the [Immaculate Animation](#).

Hays then stated:

For someone who prides himself on the intellectual superiority of atheism, Bethrick likes to raise an awful lot of awfully lame-brained objections to the faith.

It is expected that apologists are going to call any objection to their faith "lame-brained" or worse. Their refutations often consist of negatively charged adjectives indicting the non-believers who present them rather than actually addressing the concerns they have raised. For instance, Hays offers nothing in his response to explain why someone who truly believes the Christian worldview would be outraged by the Virginia Tech massacre. It's as if he didn't even realize the question had been asked. I'm sure the man can read, but his zeal clouds his comprehension.

He then writes:

Finally, like so many other unbelievers, Bethrick acts as if he's discharged his own burden of proof by simply punting to the believer. But leveling a string of objections to the Christian faith, even if they were successful objections, would do nothing to refute the objections to his own position.

What burden of proof is Hays talking about here? And to whom am I called to prove anything? To those who believe in invisible magic beings on faith? I have no delusion that I am going to be able to prove something that adherents to a faith-based worldview don't want to accept. As for objections to my position, I have already presented those in my blog, and my detractors have fallen silent.

Hays concluded his post with the following statement:

As a matter of fact, though, Bethrick loses on both counts. In his attempt to exploit the Virginian Tech massacre, his feeble attempt at showing the inconsistency of the Christian reaction is systematically inept, while, in the meantime, he has done nothing to show, on his own grounds, why Cho did anything wrong.

Hays is really reaching here. The purpose of my blog was not to identify the reasons why Cho's actions were wrong. Nor was it "to exploit the Virginian Tech massacre," as Hays has alleged. Rather, it was to explore whether or not feelings of outrage in response to the massacre are compatible with Christianity given what it teaches. Hays has not added any positive substance to this effort. Rather than focusing on the issues I raise, Hays' primary concern seems to be to disparage me personally for raising such questions, which is telling in itself and also quite typical.

## II. Jet's Reaction

Now we turn to a blog entry written by someone who signs his name "JET." I will refer to him as "Jet" in my response to him. (I'm assuming Jet is a man.)

Jet writes:

Dawson Bethrick (the author) is asking Christians, “On the basis of your worldview, why consider what happened at VT an outrage?” So, the tables seem to have been turned. The problem is that this argument fails, and fails badly at a number of points.

Why is it that apologists for Christianity so often fail to distinguish a *question* from an *argument*? It’s probably because they want their questions to be considered arguments in their own right. The problem is that a question is not an argument. It’s a question. Why do Christians have such problems coping with simple questions?

Jet then says that I “seem ignorant of the Bible,” and then quoted me at length, where I wrote:

On the Christian worldview, life is eternal. For the 32 victims and the gunman who “died” on Monday, their lives did not really end. They just passed on to the next stage. Biological demise is simply a doorway to a supernatural eternity thereafter. Rather than great loss, “to die is gain,” wrote St. Paul ([Phil. 1:21](#)). It seems believers should be rejoicing, if they truly believed, for the god of the bible is glorified by such things.

The lesson of Abraham (cf. Genesis chapter 22) is clear: Be willing to kill.

The lesson of Jesus (cf. the four gospels) is also clear: Be willing to die.

Cho Seung Hui and his victims find their models in the bible, which Christians claim is divinely inspired and fit for us to follow.

In response to these statements, Jet wrote:

Without trying to be argumentative, this is an outrageous twisting of what the Bible actually teaches!

It is?

Yes, the Bible does teach that once created, the souls of man are eternal. God sustains them forever.

Okay, I was correct there.

But, when the Bible uses terms like “eternal life” is speaking more of the quality of life.

It is? Why doesn’t it say “better life” instead of “eternal life”?

Eternal life is life forever in God’s blessed presence.

Ah, so I was right about this as well.

So, while those who are judged in eternity will never cease to exist, biblically speaking, they do not have “eternal life.”

So, the human soul lives eternally, or it doesn’t. Which is it? Pick a position and stick with it. Meanwhile, the New Testament is pretty consistent with itself in affirming belief in an eternal afterlife.

Jet then tried to explain why life is sacred:

Life is sacred because man is created in the image of God.

How does that make life “sacred”? And what exactly is this “image of God” that we are “created in”? The god of the bible is said to be supernatural, infinite, omniscient, everpresent, infallible, omnipotent, incorruptible, indestructible, perfect, etc. It is as inhuman as one could imagine. After all, in contemplating what believers tell us about the god they worship, imagination is all we have to go on.

To attack the image is to slander the One whose image we represent. To slander God’s vice-regent is to slander the Great King of the universe.

How does one “slander” that which is supernatural, infinite, omniscient, everpresent, infallible, omnipotent, incorruptible, indestructible, perfect, etc.? And if it feels slandered by someone’s actions, why doesn’t it confront that individual and discuss the matter? The way it is here on earth, it all sounds like a mere human being getting all offended because we aren’t taking his imaginary being seriously. This is probably not too far from what sent Cho



Seung-Hui over the edge.

The distinct worth of human life is intimately tied to our position as God's image.

"...distinct worth of human life..."? And this "distinct worth" hinges on the will of a deity which sent a tsunami in December 2004 to kill some 300,000 human beings? This deity, which "has a morally sufficient reason" to sanction evil against man, determined in its unrivaled wisdom to wipe out the equivalent of Toledo, Ohio of "images of God" in a single day's work. And this "loving" deity is central to "the distinct worth of human life"?

In [Gen. 9:6](#) it says, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image." Notice that the reason for capital punishment of murderers is that man is created as God's image (and we'll leave the issue of whether this command is still in play today on the backburner for the moment).

So how does this go to show that what I wrote is "an outrageous twisting of what the Bible actually teaches"? Was not Abraham, a man whose faith is held up as a model for all believers in Hebrews 11:17, expected by his god to be willing to kill his son, Isaac? The story in Genesis nowhere shows that he was unwilling to do so. Was Jesus not expected to be willing to die?

Also, when Paul says that to die is gain, he is referring to Christians.

Very good. And the question I asked in my blog was directed to Christians.

For a Christian to die is to go into rest with God until the resurrection.

I really wish Christian bloggers would proof-read their entries before they post them. This sentence is missing a verb, just as the author of the blog entry itself is missing the point. At any rate, it's clear enough that death for the Christian means going to the magic kingdom and enjoying cosmic hymnal lessons for eternity. So why would someone who looks forward to this find all the bloody details of a college campus shooting disturbing?

For the nonbeliever, judgment for cosmic treason awaits them.

Oh no! Cosmic treason! Sounds cosmically over-melodramatic if you ask me.

I had written:

And what of Cho Seung Hui and his actions? What about them? "God controls whatsoever comes to pass," says Van Til (*The Defense of the Faith*, p. 160). It's all an inevitable part of God's plan. Were Cho Seung Hui's actions evil? The question is irrelevant, given what Christianity teaches. Why? Because "God has a morally sufficient reason for the evil which exists," writes Bahnsen (*Always Ready*, p. 172).

Jet responded:

Does the Bible teach that God controls all things, including the sinful actions of humans? Absolutely ([Eph. 1:11](#)).

Okay, good. So I got another point right.

After all, in [Acts 4](#) we're told that the most heinous action ever taken, the murder of the innocent Son of God, Jesus Christ (what theologian John Murray used to call the arch crime of human history) was planned and brought about by the hand of God. So, Yes, the Bible does teach that God, in some mysterious way, does bring about these things. Ultimately, God's the One telling the story. But this in no way means that the characters in it (you and I, and Cho Seung Hui) do not commit morally significant actions. And with moral significance comes responsibility.

It can only mean that we are all analogous to characters in one very long cosmic cartoon, some having bigger parts than others, but none in control of what's going to happen next. The one in control is the cosmic cartoonist. The cosmic cartoonist conceived of a cosmic cartoon in which he would insert himself as one of its central characters. He then created other characters whose role was to fasten him to a cross. After they did this, he got angry at them and then drew them in the confines of a cosmic torture chamber. See, isn't that a logical use of one's creative powers?

I had written:

The gunman's proper attitude, given what the doctrine of predestination teaches, could only be expressed by one uncompromising statement: "Yes, Lord." He is only carrying out the ruling consciousness' will. And his

victims? On the Christian worldview, the ideal attitude proper for the believer is one of selflessness. The believer is to “deny himself” (Mt. 16:24), to “resist not evil” and “turn the cheek” (Mt. 5:39), and to present his body as “a living sacrifice,” which is said to be a “reasonable service” ([Rom. 12:1](#)). And we cannot call Cho’s victims “innocent,” for - as one believer puts it - “no human being is completely innocent.” ...

Jet then asserted:

There is nothing, either in the Bible or in Christian theology, that says that people who do things that directly contradict things that God forbids can appeal to the fact that God has ordained it. Absolutely nothing.

So, biblegod did not require Abraham to be willing to kill? That’s what the story clearly models.

In fact, in [Isaiah 10](#) we find the opposite dynamic at work. In this chapter the nation of Israel has violated the covenant with God, and He must now punish them according to the stipulations made in the book of Exodus. The model of discipline that God uses is the nation of Assyria. In fact, in the chapter they are called God’s “rod of anger.” Assyria will defeat Israel in battle as God’s punishment.

Just by citing Isaiah 10 as a counterexample, Jet is assuming that the entirety of the bible is wholly consistent with itself. But where does he establish this? If the bible does not present a wholly consistent position on such matters and in fact contains mixed messages, then it will be possible to run to one section of the collection in order to say “See! Look here! The Bible says the complete opposite to what you’re saying!” in reaction to any cited passage. This is why apologists have an easy time defending many objections - because the bible affirms multiple positions on the same matter. At points “God’s chosen” are commanded to kill, at others they are commanded not to kill.

Jet continued:

Now, here’s the interesting bit. Later, in the same chapter, God states that He will now punish Assyria for attacking Israel. Why, because the nation of Assyria, while in one way is being used of God for His purposes, does not acknowledge God, and attacks Israel for its own glory. So, we find a two-level “responsibility” at work, and Assyria is punished because it is a sinner, rebellious nation.

I’m always curious about what wheels are turning in the Christian’s mind when he speaks of “responsibility.” Christianity tells us that everything in the universe was created ex nihilo by their god, and that this god “controls whatsoever comes to pass,” and that everything that happens is part of one enormous, unfolding “plan.” Clearly they think their god is calling the shots. But whenever they speak of “responsibility,” they never tell us what responsibility their god has. Indeed, they want to say that their god made everything the way it is and dictated every event that ever occurs in the world, but then act as if their god has no responsibility whatsoever. It can do just whatever it wants, but man ends up being “responsible” for all its blunders. The believer’s capacity for delusion is seconded only by his ability to compartmentalize.

Likewise, Cho Seung Hui can properly be acknowledged as wrong, sinful, and horrible. Why? Because he explicitly violated the commandment of God forbidding the murder of innocents.

Two points. One, the bible nowhere says that murder is “wrong.” I defy Jet or any other apologist to show where the bible says “murder is wrong.”

The other point is that, according to Christianity, no one is innocent. If the Christian wants to call Cho Seung-Hui’s victims “innocent,” he’s borrowing from a non-Christian worldview, for Christianity couldn’t be more explicit on this point (cf. Rom. 5:12).

The apostle Paul, who himself had an extremely high view of God’s control over all things, frequently condemns certain types of practices, despite knowing that God brought the event about.

Well here we have it laid out explicitly: the believer condemns parts of “God’s plan.” By doing so, the believer indicates that he would plan differently if he were calling all the shots, and thus implies that he knows better than his god does. This might explain why the believer would experience moral outrage at something like the Virginia Tech massacre, but it requires that the believer presume himself a higher authority over his god. This of course is not a problem for non-believers, because they aren’t under the delusion that there is an invisible magic being calling all the shots in the first place.

It appears as if Bethrick is erecting an argument based on cut-and-paste quotes. He references to “turn the other cheek,” “deny yourself,” etc. are all taking radically out of context.

So, is the believer to “deny himself” as Mt. 16:24 requires, or not? Should we go by what the bible says, or by some internet apologist who doesn’t give his name?

This ties into another point mentioned in the “Pointers” series. Bethrick is launching his critique against Christianity based on what he think is appropriate for Christians to think and feel, rather than what is actually taught in the Bible.

This is amazing! Even when I cite what the bible teaches, I am accused of going by what I think rather than what the bible teaches. This is as humorous as it is incredible.

Christianity does not teach fatalism, and that’s exactly what Bethrick makes it out to be.

Here we have simple, unadorned and outright denial. What could be more fatalistic than the belief that whatever happens in the world was predestined to happen from all eternity?

Such an attack against the faith cannot be seriously considered.

On the contrary, the apologist shows that my observations cannot be seriously countered. All he can do is deny them. But simply denying them does not prove them untrue or mistaken.

And when I say this I do not mean that Bethricks comments are worth listening to. As a creature created in God’s image, Bethrick’s thoughts are valuable.

So, on the one hand, my “thoughts are valuable,” but he does “not mean” that my “comments are worth listening to.” He’s apparently not sure whether he’s coming or going.

What I *do* mean is that this type of argumentation betrays a ignorance of scripture and a lack of care in taking people’s words in context.

The common habit of dismissing an objection on the unargued grounds that it “betrays a [sic] ignorance of scripture” or stems from an out-of-context reading, indicates an anxious readiness to resort to the cheapest of defense tactics. The goal here is not to enlighten and explain the texts that have allegedly been taken out of context, but to settle the matter in the mind so that he does not continue to fidget in persisting doubts. By writing his blog entry, Jet can say “I answered that guy!” even though he nowhere explains how the believer can truly experience moral outrage over an incident like the Virginia Tech massacre while remaining faithful to what Christianity teaches.

If I grabbed various quotes from Bethricks blog and pasted them together to make him out to say the very opposite of what he actually believes, he couldn’t appreciate it.

Deliberately taking something out of context would simply result in mischaracterization. This is what Jet accuses me of doing. But as we have seen, even from his own statements, he agrees with many of my points without outright saying so.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Christian god](#), [Christian Psychopathy](#)

*posted by Bahnsen Burner at [12:00 PM](#)*

## 2 Comments:

[USpace](#) said...

Very thought provoking...

absurd thought -  
God of the Universe says  
you may not defend yourself

guns are for criminals  
just hope police show in time

[April 22, 2007 3:40 PM](#)

[Future](#) said...

Despite *many* claims being made here and in the other posts, many of which claims seem confused at points, I thought I should post two things:

(1) I think there is confusion regarding your question and their responses: When they said that 'to die' is gain [btw, "is" is the verb in this sentence, and "to die" is the subject], they said that was true for Christians. By this I think they meant not that death of any individual is gain when considered by a Christian looking on, but rather (I'm avoiding infinitives because their subject is less clear): that should a Christian die it is for him in a way gain. Should a non-Christian die, it is certainly not gain for him if Christianity is true. I think "Jet" and "Hays" both missed this confusion if indeed it is there.

(2) Your question hasn't been answered yet (as far as I have seen): "how Christians could feel outrage" at the VT shootings? (Surely many people have answered similar questions throughout history, but here seems a possible response if a Christian wanted)

It seems from what I understand of Christian teaching that a Christian can be outraged at the VT shootings because (a) someone did something **evil** [Jet seems to hint that Christians are the only ones with good reasons to make such a claim, whether or not he is correct] and even God hates evil (which is why, I think, Christianity claims he will destroy it someday); (b) Sin and death occurred, neither of which fit into God's end/final purpose for this world (Jet and Hays can correct me if I'm wrong with that); (c) lives were taken when it seems they had good to offer the world (of course, this could be considered speculation....but I will speculate in their favor, I don't mind).

Of course, this won't answer all the questions, because it feeds directly into discussions you all are having based on evil and God's will and stuff, which is probably too much for me right now. Whether one of these Christian apologists or someone else has other reasons, I thought I could speculate a few!

-BPF

[May 02, 2007 8:55 PM](#)