

The Imaginative Basis of Vytautas' God-Belief, Part 3

Continued from [Part 2](#).

Vytautas wrote: "There are prophecies of the Old Testament that confirms the New Testament. Psalm 22 tells that a company of evildoers encircles Jesus; they have pierced his hands and feet-- Jesus can count all his bones-- they stare and gloat over him; they divide his garments among them, and for his clothing they cast lots. Matthew 27 says when the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. And John 19 says when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. So the Old Testament gives evidence for the New Testament."

I responded: Again this is all very weak. Anyone writing a biography about Jesus who wanted to give it the stamp of Old Testament authority, could (and would!) sprinkle that biography with allusions to the Old Testament, since the Old Testament was already held as an authoritative source. Much of the gospels read this way, and even suggest this explicitly when, for instance, Matthew writes things like "this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet..." (Mt. 1:22, see also 21:4, 26:56, et al.). If a passage in the Old Testament says that some people cast lots over a suffering servant's garments, the obvious thing to do would be to say this happened in the case of Jesus' garments after he was crucified, and PRESTO, the Old Testament passage becomes "prophetic." It's an easy trick, one which actually has precedent in many parts of the bible. The so-called "fulfillment" in the New Testament of so-called "prophecies" drummed up in the Old Testament, is so contrived as to give away the game.

Vytautas: "How can the Old Testament passage become prophetic, when the New Testament writers are recording the OT passage and not changing the wording of the passage when it is recorded in the NT? Are you saying that the writers of the NT are misquoting the OT?"

Misquoting an older passage is not necessary to fabricate it into a prophecy. The older passage is pulled out of context, however, and given a new one in order to treat it as a prophecy. The prophecy is thus artificial, not genuine.

Vytautas: "The writers are interpreting the events of their day using the Old Testament."

Sorta, but not exactly. They were not "interpreting events" that actually happened in their day. They were interpreting what they took as religious truths using familiar OT motifs. Hence the need to pull an OT passage out of its original context and give it a new context so that it can be seen to have contemporary relevance. What is telling in this respect is the fact that Paul nowhere puts his Jesus in a historical setting. Paul's Jesus is nothing like the Jesus we read about in the gospels. Paul's Jesus is not a miracle-working healer who conducts a ministry in and around Jerusalem and Galilee and their environs in the early years of the first century. He's not sermonizing on the mount, turning water into wine, quieting storms and walking on the waters of the sea. Paul continually draws from the OT to describe his Jesus. And when Paul gives moral instruction in his letters, he gives no indication that Jesus was the source of this instruction (Paul cites OT references), and later we find those same moral teachings put into Jesus' mouth in the gospels. For instance, from G. A. Wells:

Paul gives it as his own view (Rom. 13:8-10) that the law can be summed up in the one Old Testament injunction "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." According to Lk. 10:25-8, Jesus himself taught that love of neighbor (together with love of God) ensures salvation; but one could never gather from Paul that Jesus had expressed himself on the matter. In 1 Thess. 4:9 it is not Jesus but God who is said to have taught Christians to love one another. And in the injunction not to repay evil for evil but always to do good to all is given in the same epistle (5:15) without any suggestion that Jesus had taught it (as according to the gospels he did in the Sermon on the Mount). In his letter to Christians at Rome Paul says "bless those that persecute you" (12:14 and 17) and "judge not" (14:13). Surely in such instances he might reasonably be expected to have invoked the authority of Jesus, had he known that Jesus had taught the very same doctrines. (The former doctrine is ascribed to him at Mt. 5:44 and Lk. 6:28, and the latter at Mt. 7:1 and Lk. 6:37.) In the same epistle he urges Christians to "pay taxes" (13:6), but does not suggest that Jesus had given such a ruling (Mk.

12:17). It is much more likely that certain precepts concerning forgiveness and civil obedience were originally urged independently of Jesus, and only later put into his mouth and thereby stamped with supreme authority, than that he gave such rulings and was not credited with having done so by Paul and... by other early Christian writers. (*The Historical Evidence for Jesus*, p. 33.)

The end result is that Jesus is a concoction, not only in the gospels, but also in Paul's letters.

Vytautas: "The NT writers understood that what was written in the OT and uses those passages to explain the events that were happening in the gospel days. David in Psalm 22 was writing about Jesus since the events match up with the account of the crucifixion."

On the contrary. The later writers took elements in the Psalm, for instance, as cues for the story they were concocting in order to utilize themes and motifs which were already familiar to them. The result is to make it seem like the story was foreseen by some prophet in the past. The elements are retold, but in a new context, one that is completely fictional, but because the elements are borrowed from earlier writings, the new context now has a significance that it would not have had were it completely fresh. This is the Jewish practice of midrash: isolating verses found in the Old Testament and reworking them into a new story. The author of the Psalm nowhere mentions someone named Jesus. But the elements in the Psalm were extracted from the Psalm and reworked, so that they told a new story, a story intended to be taken symbolically rather than as history.

I wrote: That's not a "better explanation" by any rational measure. A better, rational explanation is that we're reading a legend that has germinated from relatively more inert seeds. Are you saying that is not possible?

Vytautas: "When we deal with history, we cannot accept what is only possible but we should have good evidence to the events that we say happen."

On my worldview, to suppose that something is possible already requires some evidence to begin with. While some might say, for instance, that "it is possible that there is a colony of water-breathing men living in a city on the bottom of the Atlantic," I would say, "show me the evidence." I wouldn't accept this claim into the category of "possible" without at least some objective backing.

Vytautas: "A legend did not germinate since the gospels were written during the apostle's lifetimes who were eyewitnesses to the events."

How do you know this? We know very little about the apostles. We don't know their birthdates and death dates. We don't know where they lived. And even if they were still alive when, say, Mark was written, how does this indicate that what is recorded in Mark could not have been legend? It's curious how apologists seem to think that the apostles were over the authors' shoulders, supervising the editing process of their narratives. The evidence shows that the gospels were not in general circulation until the mid-second century at the very earliest. And, as I pointed out above, Paul nowhere puts his Jesus in a historical setting. It is only because Christians are used to reading Paul's letters through gospel-colored goggles that they assume Paul is talking about a man who lived in recent decades. But nothing Paul gives (in the genuinely Pauline letters anyway) indicates this.

Vytautas: "Germinated from relatively more inert seeds sound curious. I think it means there is not much evidence to show the New Testament is historical."

The New Testament itself shows a track record of legendary development. In the earliest letters we don't find the Jesus described in the later narratives. By the time the evangelists got around to writing their gospel stories, the Jesus story had developed quite a bit from the days of Paul.

Vytautas: "There is also the testimony of Jesus who claims to be God."

We have nothing from Jesus' own hand to serve as his own "testimony." We only have what later writers, well after Jesus had allegedly "died and resurrected and ascended," had inserted into Jesus' mouth. And many of the things which he is made to say are found in the OT and in Paul's letters, even though Paul nowhere indicates that Jesus said the things that the gospels attribute to him in an early ministry in and around Jerusalem in the first century. That's not "testimony of Jesus." That's concocted narrative.

Vytautas: "He said, truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am (John 8:58). If Jesus is a person who claims

to be God and is not God or insane, then his life of healing the sick and feeding the hungry does not match up to someone who lies about being God or is insane, since liars and insane people would act in accord to what they actually are.”

And if the stories of Jesus as a healer of the sick (stories which none of the early epistle writers corroborate) are legends, then there’s no need to think of Jesus as either insane or deceptive. Quite simply, Jesus is a religious invention, nothing more.

I wrote: Besides, in the case of I Cor. 15, which refers to a large group of people who supposedly saw Jesus, it’s important to keep in mind that this one reference does not constitute mass corroboration. That Christian apologists seem to think it does only shows how silly their position is, and how desperate they are to defend it. It is the statement of one man artificially given the weight of many. So there’s really no need to assert mass hallucination here. Although mass hallucination has been shown to be possible (really, are you expecting me to accept that mass hallucination is not possible, but resurrection of the dead is?), if the very claim that the people in question is very shaky at best, as in the case of the anonymous 500 brethren in I Cor. 15, then it’s moot to begin with.

Vytautas: “I have not heard reports of claiming mass hallucination of 500 seeing the same person at once.”

Do some research. There are some amazing firsthand anecdotes out there, many of them in recent times.

Vytautas: “Perhaps you think the 500 saw a cloud in the sky or a tree that looks like Jesus, but that cannot be shown from the text.”

The point is that extremely little can be shown from the text, at least so far as the Christian faith program is concerned. It doesn’t name one individual among these alleged 500 brethren, and does not say what they saw, what they experienced, where it happened, when it happened, etc. If there were 500 people who “saw” something, there’s no reason to suppose it was anything more than what [Canon Michael Cole](#) is said to have experienced. So even on its own indicators, there’s far too little in I Cor. 15 to corroborate anything like what we read in the gospel narratives or the book of Acts.

Vytautas: “Paul propose [purpose?] was to help solve problems for those at the church at Corinth and giving the citation of the 500 witnesses would be one of those solutions, so that the Corinthians could have checked out the matter for themselves at the time.”

What purpose did Paul have where a conspicuously scant allusion to an anonymous 500 brethren who supposedly had some unspecified experience of Jesus at some unspecified place at some unspecified time would have sufficed, but details about Paul’s own conversion experience would be inappropriate? Again, [as I asked in my last posting](#), how can we suppose that “the Corinthians could have checked out the matter for themselves” when Paul gives none of the details they would need to follow up on his report?

Vytautas: “If it was mass corroboration, we would have 500 written accounts that Jesus rose from the dead, but we do not have these records.”

Right. We don’t even have one record of any individual claiming to be among those 500 brethren, who had some unspecified experience at some unspecified location at some unspecified time. There is zero corroboration here. Indeed, Paul never mentions it again in any of his letters.

I asked: What “other testimony”? Where is that “other testimony”? Essentially, you’re saying that the virgin birth is hearsay for the author who put it in his biographical narrative of Jesus. Historically speaking, that’s as unreliable as it gets. Yet you want people to believe this as if it held sway over their lives forever. You’re emotionally invested in the story, just as you’re emotionally invested in the outcome of our discussion.

Vytautas: “If personal knowledge is reliable, and if we can report that knowledge to others, then hearsay evidence is reliable evidence if the person testifying to the event has reliable information.”

So why suppose Paul had “reliable information” when he mentions the 500 brethren in I Corinthians 15? What

evidence supports this assumption? Who were the 500 brethren? Where were they gathered when they “saw” Jesus? When did this happen? What specifically did they “see”? What “information” does Paul himself even give of the event itself, let alone his sources? To call this reference threadbare would be an understatement. Also, if Paul is reciting a creedal formulation (such as Christian apologist Craig Blomberg insists), then why suppose there is any “personal knowledge” of the event on Paul’s part? At this rate, it wouldn’t even be hearsay, but essentially a propagandizing slogan, as reliable as a verse from a pop tune.

Vytautas: “If we do not allow for hearsay evidence, then we cannot be sure if knowledge can be communicated from one person to another.”

Let’s not also overlook the *content* of the hearsay in question. If an acquaintance of mine returns home after a trip overseas, and he mentions how he heard of 500 people who saw a 900 foot tall giant walking through the rainforest, do you think we should trust this account as “historically reliable”? Where’s your judgment, Vytautas?

Vytautas: “So if you have knowledge of history, it can only be if you seen the event yourself.”

I’ve never argued this. Indeed, you’re taking an all-or-nothing approach here. Either we accept every statement as historically reliable, or none at all. I do not ascribe to this policy. Rather, I ascribe to the policy that rational judgment decides all. This would entail rejecting irrational accounts, including claims about [“the supernatural.”](#)

Vytautas: “But communication of ideas is reliable when people share a common language and live in the general area during ancient times.”

Notice how minimal this criterion is. It allows no room for rational judgment. On the basis you endorse here, if the account of 500 unnamed persons witnessed a 900 foot tall giant walking through an unspecified rainforest at an unspecified time were conveyed to me in “a common language” and the person telling me about it is a contemporary who lives in the same general area as I do, I would have to accept this “testimony” as “reliable communication.” Thanks to the choices I have made in life, I have more judgment than this.

Vytautas: “Plus Isaiah prophesies of the virgin birth (Isa 7:14) that Matthew and Luke record. The Hebrew term can be translated young woman, but it can also be translated virgin.”

If it is the case that “the Hebrew term can be translated young woman,” then why suppose that Isaiah was talking about a virgin? What in the Isaiah passage itself indicates that he was writing specifically about a virgin? Also, what in the Isaiah passage indicates that he was writing specifically about a woman named Mary who lived several hundred years after Isaiah? What gives the author of Matthew the warrant to suppose that Isaiah had Mary in mind? Again, what we have here is a case of midrash: either the author of Matthew, or a source which he incorporated into his elaboration of Mark’s gospel, took the Isaiah passage and reworked it so that it would have reference to a contemporary individual that is nowhere in mind in the original Isaiah passage. Since this is one way how legends are nurtured along, it should be no surprise why Paul never mentions the part about Jesus being born of a virgin. For Paul, Jesus wasn’t born of a virgin. When he has occasion to mention Jesus’ birth into the world (cf. Gal. 4:4), Paul fails to corroborate the later story element that Jesus was born of a virgin.

Vytautas wrote: “[The author of the gospel of Matthew] sensed the people who witnessed the event [Jesus’ virgin birth] that gave the testimony.”

I asked: So, what people did he sense? Who are these “people who witnessed the event that gave the testimony”? Why didn’t those people record their testimony themselves? And think of the time span here. Earliest dates for the writing of the gospel of Matthew put it to 70 AD, if not later. When was Jesus born? At least 70 years prior to Matthew’s writing. Whoever these “people who witnessed the event” of Jesus’ virgin birth would have been adults at the time it allegedly happened. So some 70 or 80 years later, they’re telling this guy Matthew that Jesus’ mother was a virgin when she gave birth to him? Come now, Vytautas, surely you don’t expect me to believe this, do you?

Vytautas: “Matthew was one of the 12 apostles, so that he had contact with Jesus who would have obtained information about his birth from Mary and Joseph.”

Where do we learn this about Matthew’s sources? What supports these assumptions about the author of Matthew?

You seem to assume it's simply not possible for the author of Matthew to have either invented the virgin birth story, or that he got it from an unreliable source, or that the story of Jesus' virgin birth was not inspired by a midrashic reworking of an unrelated passage in Isaiah. Why is that?

Vytautas: "Paper was scarce during the gospel days, so that people did not write as much as people today who could write on blogs."

Okay. So? Is it supposed to follow from this point that everything we read in the gospel of Matthew is historically true? The scarcity of writing materials does not in any way argue for the truth of what is written with them.

Vytautas: "A late date is given for the gospels, since scholars assume that the theology had to develop over time,"

A relatively later date is given to the gospel of Matthew because it was obviously modeled on the gospel of Mark to a very large degree. This means the gospel of Mark had to have been written earlier than Matthew. Scholars generally put the date of the writing of the gospel of Mark around AD 70. Thus the writing of Matthew, since it drew heavily on the gospel of Mark, would have come later, perhaps by a decade or more.

And indeed, the theology *evolve* over time, and in different directions in different communities (a comparison of theological points between those in, say, Paul's letters and those in the epistle of James, for instance, or those in the different gospels, or between those in the early epistolary strata and the latter narrative strata, will show this). We see the evolution of theological points continue beyond the documents of the New Testament, and well into the third, fourth and fifth centuries, even to this day, they are still evolving. This evolution follows a ping-pong course, resulting from the antiphonal discourse that takes places in every generation. Just as today, we see different strains of apologetics (see for instance the book *Five Views on Apologetics*, edited by Cowan & Gundry), we also see the continued, further splintering of the Jesus cult into thousands of different divisions, sects, denominations, etc. It is a never-ending process of evolution producing a never-ending cornucopia of takes on the Jesus motif.

Vytautas: "but we can see internally in the gospel of Matthew that there are several references to money and taxes because Matthew was a tax collector and would have interest in these things (Mat 17:24-27, Mat 18:22-35, Mat 20:1-16, Mat 22:16-22)."

A few "references to money and taxes" are not sufficient to mean that the author was actually a tax collector. There are several references to money in the gospel of Mark, and if Matthew were modeled on Mark, it would not be surprising to see references to money in Matthew also. There are numerous mentions of money in Luke-Acts as well. Would this indicate that the author of these narratives was a tax collector instead of a physician? In fact, a search of the [keyword "tax"](#) reveals several mentions of "tax" in the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. On the reasoning you offer here, Luke at least should have been written by a publican. No?

Vytautas wrote: "But you would prefer that we dismiss this and accept, for apparently no good reason whatsoever, that Matthew took drugs."

I responded: **Well, if I am expected to believe that dead people rose from their graves and walked around in a city showing themselves to many, and only one person reports this - in passing, to boot - with no corroboration whatsoever, why shouldn't I at least entertain the possibility that the person who wrote this may have been under the influence? And likewise, we have no historical evidence whatsoever that a bunch of zombies crawled out of their graves, walked through a city and showed themselves to many. But if you want evidence that someone was taking drugs, look at what they say, do and write. There's an indication there. Of course, it could be that the author of Matthew was not on drugs, and soberly invented his elaboration of Mark's gospel.**

Vytautas: "So was J.K.Rowling on drugs when she wrote Harry Potter? Is not Potter a subliminal message to the youth? Of course not."

Was Rowling on drugs when she wrote her Harry Potter novels? I have no idea. Perhaps. But maybe not. It's possible that she was, given the abundance of drugs (both those that are illicit and those that are clinically prescribed), but maybe she wasn't. I don't know, and I doubt she would come forward and tell her reading public that she was on drugs. I do understand that Rowling is a member of the Church of Scotland, and that she struggles with her Christian beliefs. So I can see why she has a fascination with fantasy-fiction.

Vytautas: “We have Matthew reporting the people coming out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection, and they went into the holy city and appeared to many, and also Acts 1 records that there was 120 in the upper room near Jerusalem with the rest of the remaining apostles, so that I would identify a good portion of these people as the same because they were at the around the same time and place.”

Let me get this straight: some of the unnamed 120 persons mentioned in Acts 1 are at least some of the unnamed (and unnumbered) reanimated corpses mentioned in Matthew 27:52-53? That’s a new one for me. I don’t think I’ve ever heard anyone make this claim before. That’s quite an imagination you have there, Vytautas.

Regarding Mt. 27:52-53, I wrote: **Matthew claims that this happened. But where’s the proof? If dead people rose out of their graves and showed themselves to a bunch of people, who were those people, and why don’t we have any of their firsthand testimonies? Was Matthew among these people? Even the author doesn’t claim to have seen this himself.**

Vytautas: “Acts collaborates with the event in Matthew, so that these are the people that Peter says the prophet Joel wrote of (Acts 2).”

Where does Acts at all suggest that any of the 120 individuals mentioned in chapter 2 were reanimated corpses which crawled out of their graves? If Acts does not state this, how can it be seen as corroborating Matthew 27:52-53?

Vytautas: “I don’t see the need of scores of people writing the same thing that they were witnesses of these events because they would add no new information than that which is already given in the NT.”

So Matthew’s passing reference to unnamed individuals rising out of graves, as in a famous 1980’s Michael Jackson music video, is sufficient for you. This only confirms my suspicion that the Christian mindset requires of an individual the attitude that he accept whatever he reads in the bible as truth, regardless of the absence of corroborating evidence. This can only mean that the claim that Acts 2 corroborates Matthew 27:52-53 is simply a sham. If Acts 2 could not be construed as corroborating Matthew 27:52-53 (by a most unlikely stretch of the imagination), would it really matter?

Vytautas: “Matthew was close by these people that rose from the dead (Acts 1:13).”

Where does the book of Acts number any the risen corpses of Mt. 27:52-53 among the 120 it mentions in its first chapter?

Vytautas: “Of course, Luke does not say in Acts that these were the people that rose from the dead as Matthew records, but these people were not recent converts since Peter did not get up to preach yet.”

So what justifies the supposition that they were people who rose from the grave, a la Mt. 27:52-53? Again, what text corroborates the reanimated corpses mentioned in Mt. 27:52-53? Acts surely does not. Neither does Matthew name any of these reanimated corpses, nor does Acts indicate that any of the 120 gathered on the day of Pentecost were reanimated corpses.

Vytautas wrote: If you can dismiss historical events because there is only one person that wrote about the event, then I can dismiss your stories that you tell me.

I responded: **Threatening to dismiss my stories will not make me suddenly believe what is written in the New Testament. You’re free to dismiss my stories all you like. Besides, it is not simply because the stories in the New Testament are not corroborated that I do not accept them. There are other factors. For one, they all presuppose the primacy of consciousness metaphysics, which I know is false. I’ve demonstrated this time and time again on my blog. That’s sufficient reason as any to dismiss them. Any position which reduces to a subjective foundation should be dismissed because of this. There’s also the fact that the New Testament is riddled with evidences showing that the Jesus story was elaborated on over time, growing from faint glimmers in Paul’s letters to full-blown legends in the gospels and the book of Acts. So there are numerous reasons why I “dismiss” the New Testament as unhistorical, not just the one reason you cite here.**

Vytautas: “You fail to note the infinite distance between the Creator and the creature, so that what we cannot do such as move a rock by thinking it will move does not mean the Creator cannot do this.”

It is nonsensical to speak of “infinite distance” between two things, unless of course one is actual and the other is fictitious. If both are actual, then any distance we posit or discover between them is measurable, such as the distance between Flagstaff and Butte, between Munich and Tokyo, or between earth and the moon.

As for attributing to an invisible magic being a power of consciousness such that we do not find in nature, it is up to those who assert such abilities to such alleged entities to validate those claims. I have no obligation to keep something like “the infinite distance between the Creator and the creature” in mind, for such immeasurable and indiscernible phenomena are not something I affirm in the first place. Indeed, how does one distinguish such things from something he is simply imagining?

Vytautas: “So you reject the New Testament on a philosophical basis and not a historical basis.”

I don't accept the implied false dichotomy here. I can reject it on both bases. Essentially, I reject it because it is not true. And I have shown that my criticisms of its philosophical basis and its claim to historicity sustain inquiry and the various objections you've attempted to raise against them.

Vytautas wrote: “God is able to create matter out of nothing.”

I responded: **Good. Let's see a demonstration of this ability. Give me more than just the claim that a being with such ability exists. Anyone can imagine such a being. But so far, you've not given me any good reason to suppose your god is something other than imaginary. And, I don't think you can.**

Vytautas: “Moses gives the creation account in Genesis chapter 1 and 2. It gives an account of God creating the heavens and earth in six days, so that it explains things such as what are the sun, moon, and stars for and where man came from. The heavenly objects are given in order to keep time, man was created from dust, and woman was made from the rib of man.”

Here we have an appeal to a storybook which serves as nothing more than a red herring. None of this is a demonstration of the ability you claim on behalf of your god. As I said, anyone can imagine a being creating matter out of nothing. But it's an entirely different thing to demonstrate it. Pointing to an ancient storybook only suggests that this whole notion is utterly imaginary and arbitrary.

Vytautas: “Existence itself does not answer the former questions, and cannot speak what the interpretation of the sun, moon, and stars are for as well as what man is here for.”

More stolen concepts here. Reason, purpose, goal-orientation all presuppose existence. However, you are using these concepts as if they had meaning prior to existence. That's the fallacy of the stolen concept. If we start with existence (as opposed to non-existence), none of these “former questions” that you have in mind have any validity. They are complex questions, for they assume the stolen concepts which I have exposed and corrected, but to which you nonetheless still cling.

Besides, you're misappropriating the concept ‘interpretation’ here. Interpretation does not apply to concretes. On the contrary, it applies only in complex conceptual matters. We interpret volitional actions, statements, language, codes, not rocks, dust particles and stellar phenomena. We *identify* those things, not “interpret” them.

Vytautas: “If Existence was always here, then there is no ending point to history to which a goal or final cause can be given.”

That's another stolen concept, one which is encouraged by [the cartoon universe premise of theism](#). The idea here is that history is planned and choreographed by an invisible magic being, reducing reality to a cartoon, and human beings to characters in a cartoon. Again, it is invalid due to its dependence on stolen concepts. Besides, notice the underlying argument from depression in your remarks: If such and such is the case, then the situation is depressing, and I don't like it. Therefore, such and such cannot be the case. That's essentially what's being argued here. It is mere fallacious consequentialism.

Vytautas: “If you operate with no aim, then the present can not be given a coherent interpretation, since you will talk of means to no end which explain why things happen.”

This is just more argument from depression here. And notice how it depends on more stolen concepts. While I can operate with ends in mind (since purpose is concurrent with biology), it is just more fallout from the cartoon universe premise to assume that “the present” exists to serve some supernatural goal. Indeed, it makes no sense to suppose that an immortal, eternal, indestructible, perfect and complete being which lacks nothing would act in the interest of a goal. It would have no basis for goal-setting whatsoever. It will always be what it is, nothing can change it, nothing can harm it, nothing can threaten it, nothing can deprive it, nothing can be of any value to it. It would be incapable of valuing anything. Again, we have another stolen concept here: the concept ‘goal’ (and its philosophical cognates, e.g., aims, ends, values, etc.) are affirmed in a context which denies their genetic roots. The religious view of the world is rife with such fallacies, and it is the nature of religious faith to persist in affirming them even after they’ve been pointed out and corrected. That is why I expect Christians like you, Vytautas, to continue affirming them even after their underlying error has been exposed.

I wrote: These “reasons” not only fail to address my questions, they beg the question for they assume that the god in question exists, which is precisely what you’re called to validate. The notion of “creation” assumes a creator, which is your god (isn’t it?), so affirming that there is a creation created by the creator in question gets you nowhere. Similarly with the notion that man was “created in the image of God.” Man is nothing like the god which Christians describe, so it’s unclear in what respect man is supposed to bear the Christian god’s image. I’ve examined many attempts to validate this and will post some material on it soon on my blog, but nothing so far seems to answer the important questions. Rather, what we have here is a Christian slogan which doesn’t really mean anything and has no objective basis whatsoever, a slogan which is asserted in order to stop inquiry rather than address legitimate questions.

Vytautas: “Man made in the image of God means that God gave man dominion over the fish and animals, just as God rules over the heavens and earth. Man is given the position of vice-regent over the earth such as giving names to the animals. Adam was made in righteousness and true holiness, so that he was able to obey the law given by God but with the possibility of transgressing. Romans 2 reveals that this law is written on the heart of man explaining why people have a guilty conscience when they know they do wrong. If we were not created, then we would not be bothered the slightest when we do something wrong.”

It’s interesting to observe how different Christians explain what “made in the image of God” means. Where the bible gives no consistent explanation of this assertion, apologists do realize that it does need some kind of explanation. So you get all kinds of explanations. Here you say it means an invisible magic being’s bestowal of “dominion over the fish and animals” on man’s part. I guess lions must have been made in the image of the lion god, for they are clearly “king of the jungle.” The idea that man has “dominion over the fish and animals” would be more credible if indeed man had such dominion over them. But put any man in the rain forest by himself for a few weeks, and his chances for survival drop quite quickly. It’s certainly no easy task, and many do not make it. Dominion over the flora and fauna is something man does not automatically have. Indeed, he needs to earn it; it was not something he was born with.

Stay tuned for Part 4!

by Dawson Bethrick

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