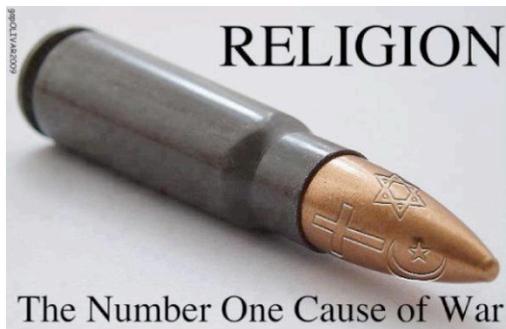




## Demythologizing False Arguments Against Christianity

Someone mentioned to me yesterday that she did not believe in “religion.” I responded that neither did I. Do we adhere to God because of *religion*...because the way of Christ is merely one way among many and that we can select it “as ours” the way one might check off one’s musical or culinary preferences when presented with a menu of options? Or, do we adhere to Christ because He is the Truth, and that the spiritual principles He reveals to us are True and operating in the world whether we prefer them or something else?

Certain myths have become commonplace amidst those who like to dismiss followers of Christ. Often these false arguments operate by first taking our deeply personal and spiritual walk with Christ and turning it into an ideology called religion. Once this is done, inaccurate or false claims are then made against “religion.” Over the next few weeks, we will take a look at some of these claims.



**The Claim:** “Religion has been the primary cause of war and oppression throughout the history of mankind.”

*The TRUTH:* In their comprehensive *Encyclopedia of Wars*, Phillips and Axelrod document the recorded history of warfare. Of the 1,763 wars presented, a mere 7% involved a religious cause. When Islam is subtracted from the equation, that number drops to 3.2%.

*In terms of casualties, religious wars account for only 2% of all people killed by warfare. This pales in comparison to the number of people who have been killed by secular dictators in the 20th century alone.* [from the blog, “Well Spent Journey”]

The deeper issue that such a claim masks, of course, is to what degree it is the presence of Christ, which is peace-bringing, that leads humanity to wage war and to slaughter? One need only look at those who practice the Christian faith—the saints—to see that the only warfare Christ brings to this world is spiritual warfare, which St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain and St. Theophan the Recluse say is, “the hardest of all wars—since in fighting against ourselves it is in ourselves that we meet opposition” (*Unseen Warfare* 81). The saints transform those around them by their love and peace. How can the followers of Christ be made to answer for those who take on the language and outward signs of our Holy Path, and yet who feed the passions that lead them to strike out against their brothers? Must the Apostles answer for Judas? Instead, we must be armed “with invisible weapons [to] (a) never rely on yourself in anything, (b) bear always in your heart a perfect and all-daring trust in God, (c) strive without ceasing, & (d) remain constantly in prayer” (*Unseen Warfare* 81).

13 October 2013

### DEMYTHOLOGIZING FALSE ARGUMENTS AGAINST CHRISTIANITY, part 2

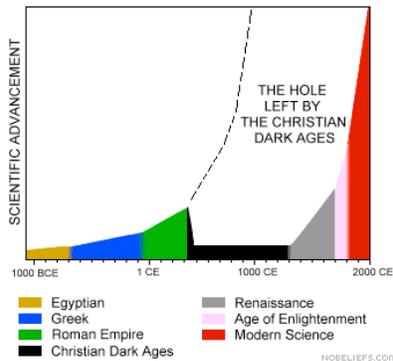
**The Claim:** “Thanks to modern science, the days of religion are numbered. Humanity’s superstitious belief in miracles and sky gods will soon be replaced by an era of atheism and rationalism.”

*The TRUTH:* Whereas science is construed as authoritative for knowledge, meaning, and morality, the above claim contradicts current scientific projections. The following are expected net gains/losses in religious adherents, worldwide, from 2010-2050: Christianity: +1,066,944,000 (net gain); Islam: +1,001,101,000 (net gain); Hinduism: +316,288,000 (net gain); Agnosticism: -1,995,000 (net loss); Buddhism: +61,405,000 (net gain); Atheism: -4,039,000 (net loss) [from the blog, “Well Spent Journey”].

20 October 2013

### DEMYTHOLOGIZING FALSE ARGUMENTS AGAINST CHRISTIANITY, part 3

The Claim: “The Dark Ages were a time of ignorance and superstition, thanks to religion’s negative influence on scientific progress.”



*The TRUTH:* There is an atheist writer, Tim O’Neil, who in a review of the book *God’s Philosophers*, writes about this claim:

“It’s not hard to kick this nonsense to pieces, especially since the people presenting it know next to nothing about history and have simply picked up these strange ideas from websites and popular books. The assertions collapse as soon as you hit them with hard evidence. I love to totally stomp these propagators by asking them to present me with the name of one – just one – scientist burned, persecuted, or oppressed for their science in the Middle Ages. They always fail to come up with any. They

usually try to crowbar Galileo back into the Middle Ages, which is amusing considering he was a contemporary of Descartes. When asked why they have failed to produce any such scientists given the Church was apparently so busily oppressing them, they often resort to claiming that the Evil Old Church did such a good job of oppression that everyone was too scared to practice science. By the time I produce a laundry list of Medieval scientists – like Albertus Magnus, Robert Grosseteste, Roger Bacon, John Peckham, Duns Scotus, Thomas Bradwardine, Walter Burley, William Heytesbury, Richard Swineshead, John Dumbleton, Richard of Wallingford, Nicholas Oresme, Jean Buridan and Nicholas of Cusa – and ask why these men were happily pursuing science in the Middle Ages without molestation from the Church, my opponents usually scratch their heads in puzzlement at what just went wrong.”

Of course, the very notion of the “Dark Ages,” marginalizes the Eastern Roman Empire, Byzantium, the longest standing empire in the history of humanity and one of only one or two others (and none nearly as large geographically) that spanned a millennium. The revival of Greek philosophy precipitating the Renaissance was not necessary in Byzantium, where the works of Plato, Aristotle, and other philosophers and natural philosophers (= scientists) were never lost. The Renaissance began in Italy—the center of the former Western Roman Empire—and spread north and west, not east; in the east, the Renaissance’s intellectual *revival* was not necessary. Not only did rational discourse thrive there, but so did fine civilizing achievements. For example, we see in the wake of the First Ecumenical Council (325 AD), the creation of hospitals—complete with libraries and separate wings for lepers—in every cathedral town.

The above myth obscures how reason thrived in the Middle Ages. O’Neill writes, “Thanks to Clement of Alexandria and Augustine’s encouragement of the use of pagan philosophy, and Boethius’ translations of works of logic by Aristotle and others, rational inquiry was one intellectual jewel that survived the catastrophic collapse of the Western Roman Empire and was preserved through the so-called Dark Ages.”

Fr. Daniel  
27 October 2013

## DEMYTHOLOGIZING FALSE ARGUMENTS AGAINST CHRISTIANITY, part 4

The Claim: "Christianity is the brainchild of Paul; Christianity as it is understood today, with the belief in Christ as God, does not represent the views of the Apostles.



*The TRUTH:* "Some make the claim that the Apostle Paul never met Jesus and was not a disciple or apostle of Christ. Of course, this is not true. St. Paul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus in Acts 9, after His Resurrection. Jesus spoke to him and commissioned him. So, Paul met Jesus. Furthermore, Paul visited the Jerusalem apostles Peter, James, and John who affirmed Paul's mission and message (See Gal. 2:9. Also, see the context of Galatians 1:18 - 2:10.) Peter, who was a disciple of Jesus, personally authenticated Paul's writings by calling them scripture in 2 Pet. 3:15-16. If they are inspired, then they cannot contradict Jesus' words.

"In addition, some claim that Jesus never claimed to be God and that Paul is the one who wrote that Jesus was God. If they admit that Paul wrote that Jesus was God, then remind them of 2 Pet. 3:15-16 where Peter calls Paul's writings Scripture and affirms Paul's message in Gal. 2:9. Nevertheless, they sometimes assert that Paul hijacked Christianity and took it over and made Jesus into something He was not. This is false.

"Perhaps the primary area where some think St. Paul alters Christ's message is in the area of Who Christ is. St. Paul states that Jesus is God in flesh: Col. 2:9 says, "*For in Him the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form,*" (cf. Rom. 9:5). Some repeat claims that no where in the Gospels did Jesus claim to be God. Therefore, they claim, Paul's

words are not true and the Bible is not trustworthy.

"This attack is misplaced; Jesus did claim to be God. In John 8:56-59, Christ says, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." The Jews respond: "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am." Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple." Why did the Pharisees want to kill Jesus? They explain in John 10:33, when they say, "For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God," (KJV). The text clearly states that the Pharisees understood that Jesus was claiming to be God. Also, consider John 5:18 where the Apostle John says, "Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God," (KJV). In this verse Jesus healed on the Sabbath and the Pharisees thought He was breaking the Sabbath law. John the Apostle also states that when Jesus claimed that God was His Father, that it was "making himself equal with God." Some will always search for a way to argue with these passages. But, two facts remain: 1) Jesus claimed to be God and 2) the Pharisees denied that Jesus was God" (slightly modified and edited from "Methods Muslims Use to Attack Christianity," Matt Slick)

St. Paul's Epistles, which compose *one third* of the New Testament, are among the earliest writings preserved by first-century Christians. Galatians is likely written before the Apostolic Council of 50 AD, and 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, and Romans are from around that time – a time when a number of those closest to Christ (Peter, James, and John) were alive; yet no one contradicted them. In fact, these early Christians participated in preserving St. Paul's valuable letters.

*Fr. Daniel*  
3 November 2013