



# Faith and Reason: A Classical View

Richard G. Howe, Ph.D.  
Southern Evangelical Seminary

## ∞ Uses of the Term 'Faith' ∞

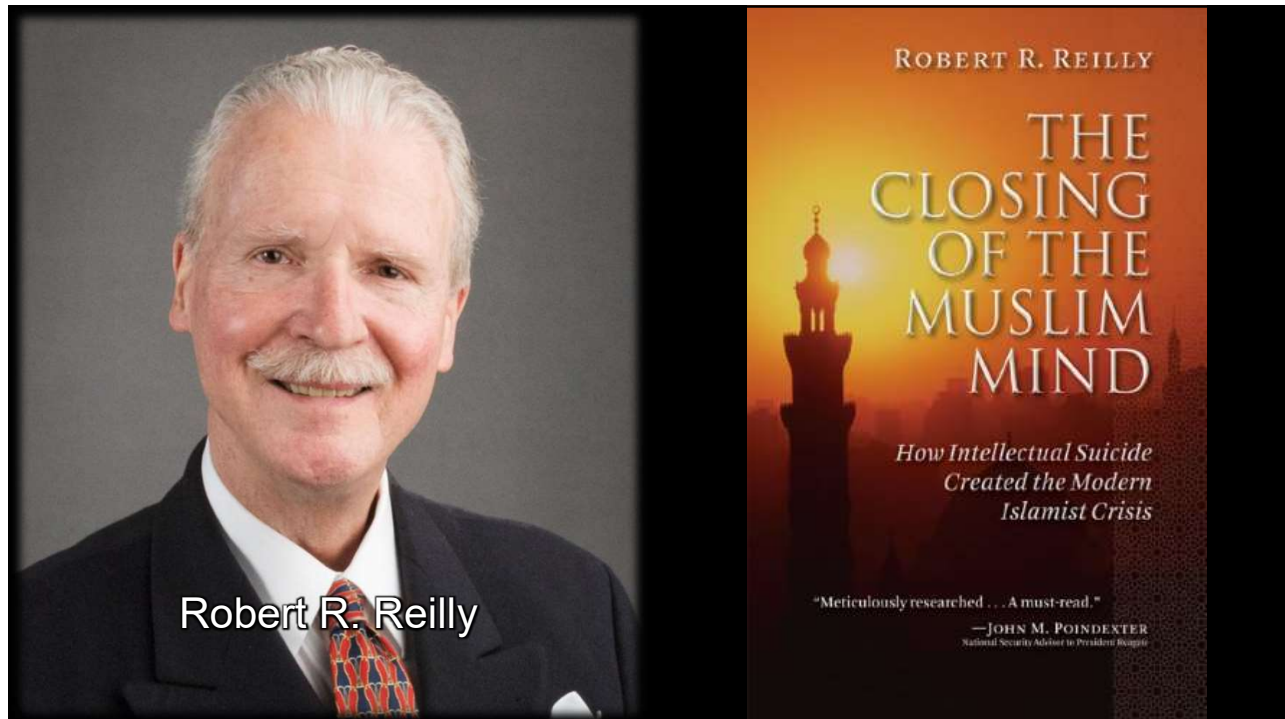
- COMMON: synonymous with the term 'religion', e.g., the Christian faith
- THEOLOGICAL: theological virtue, "... for by grace are you saved through faith ..." (Eph. 2:8)
- EPISTEMOLOGICAL: relevant to how we come to know reality and hold certain beliefs

## ∞ Uses of the Term 'Reason' ∞

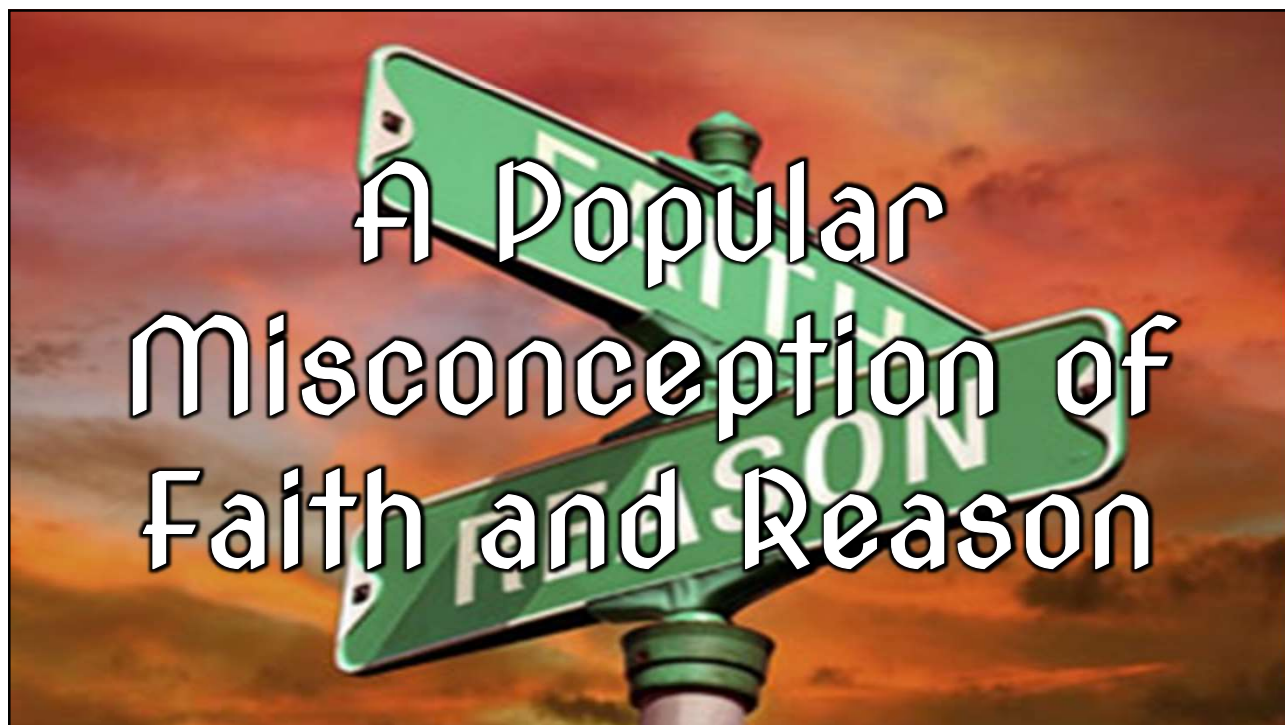
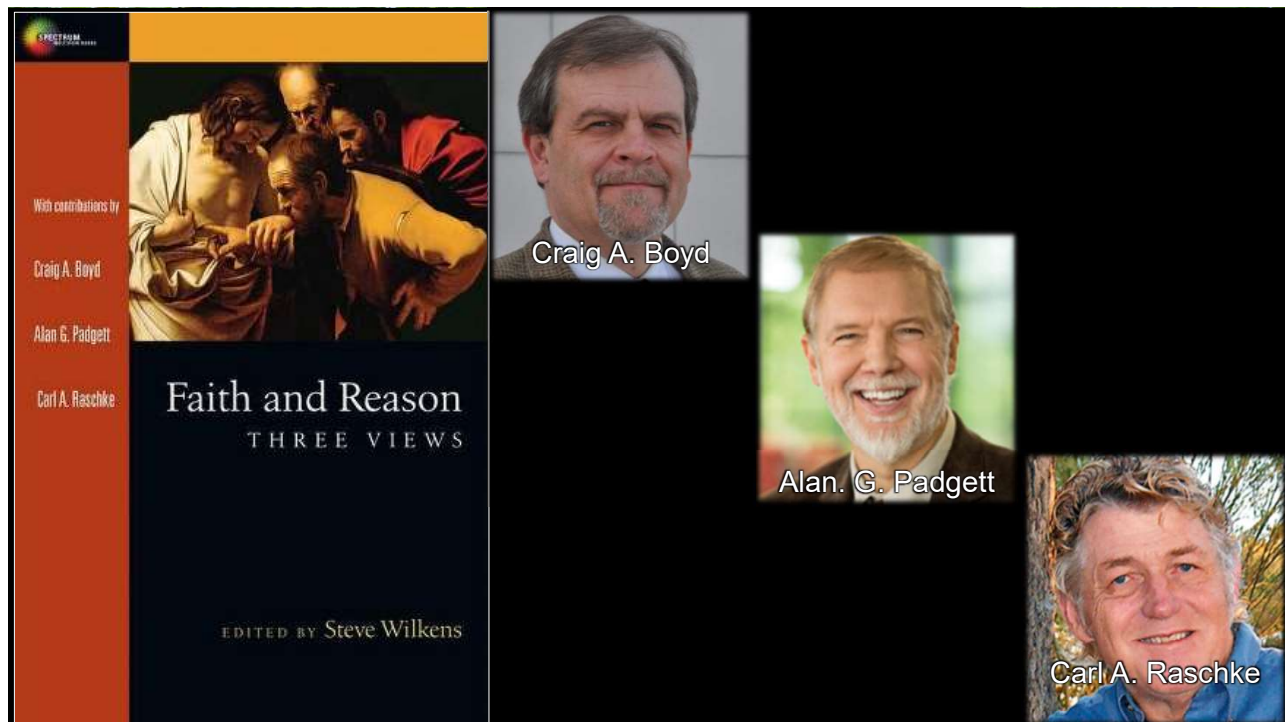
- GENERAL: "the generic capacity to think about any topic at all or even the capacity to grasp a concept or make a judgment"<sup>1</sup>
- CLASSICALLY: "the ability one has to think philosophically and to engage in philosophical argument according to those truths that are now by the natural light of reason."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Craig A. Boyd, "The Synthesis of Reason and Faith Response" in *Faith and Reason: Three Views* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 129.

<sup>2</sup>Boyd, "Synthesis," p. 129.



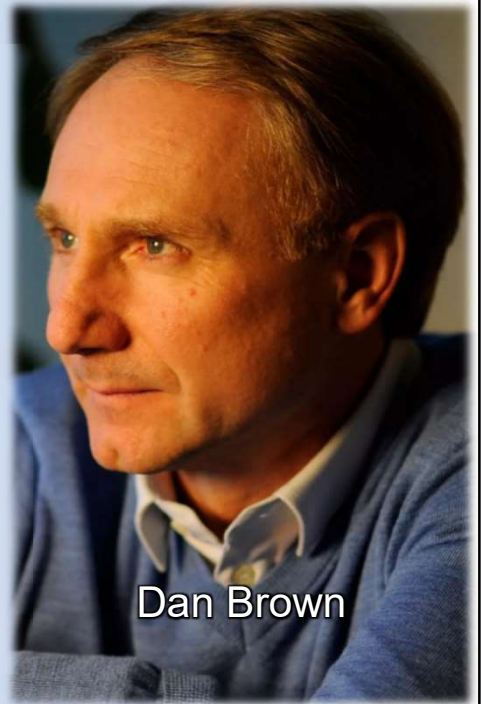
Robert R. Reilly



~~Faith is believing in something when  
common sense tells you not to."~~



"I really wasn't sure where to turn. Where science offered exciting proofs of its claims, whether it was photos, equations, visible evidence, **religion** was a lot more demanding. It constantly wanted me to **accept everything on faith**. As I'm sure you're aware, faith takes a fair amount of effort."



Dan Brown

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Do we as Christians maintain that Christianity (as a religion) wants one to "accept everything on faith"?

## Popular Misconception

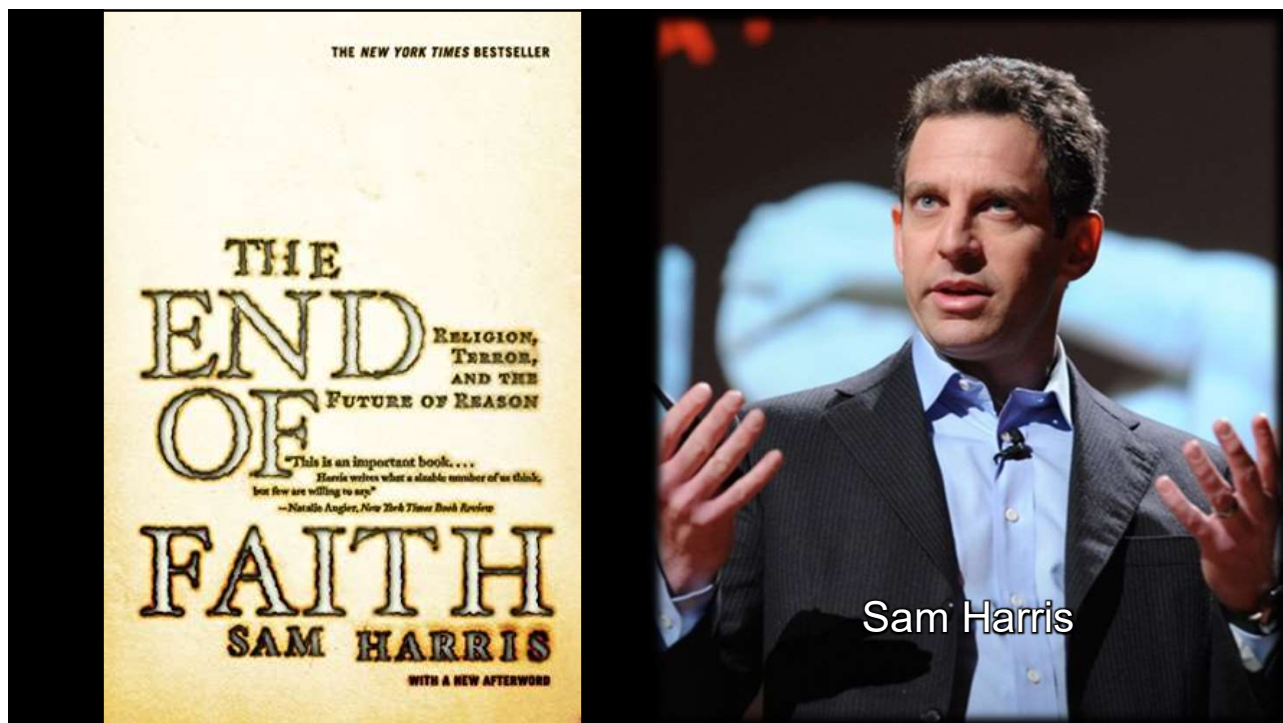
### Reason

truth  
facts  
outer  
public  
rational  
thoughts  
objective  
science  
true for all

### Faith

opinion  
values  
inner  
private  
emotional  
feelings  
subjective  
religion  
true for me

# The New Atheism's Misconception of Faith and Reason



***"Religious faith is the belief in historical and metaphysical propositions without sufficient evidence."***

[Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 232]



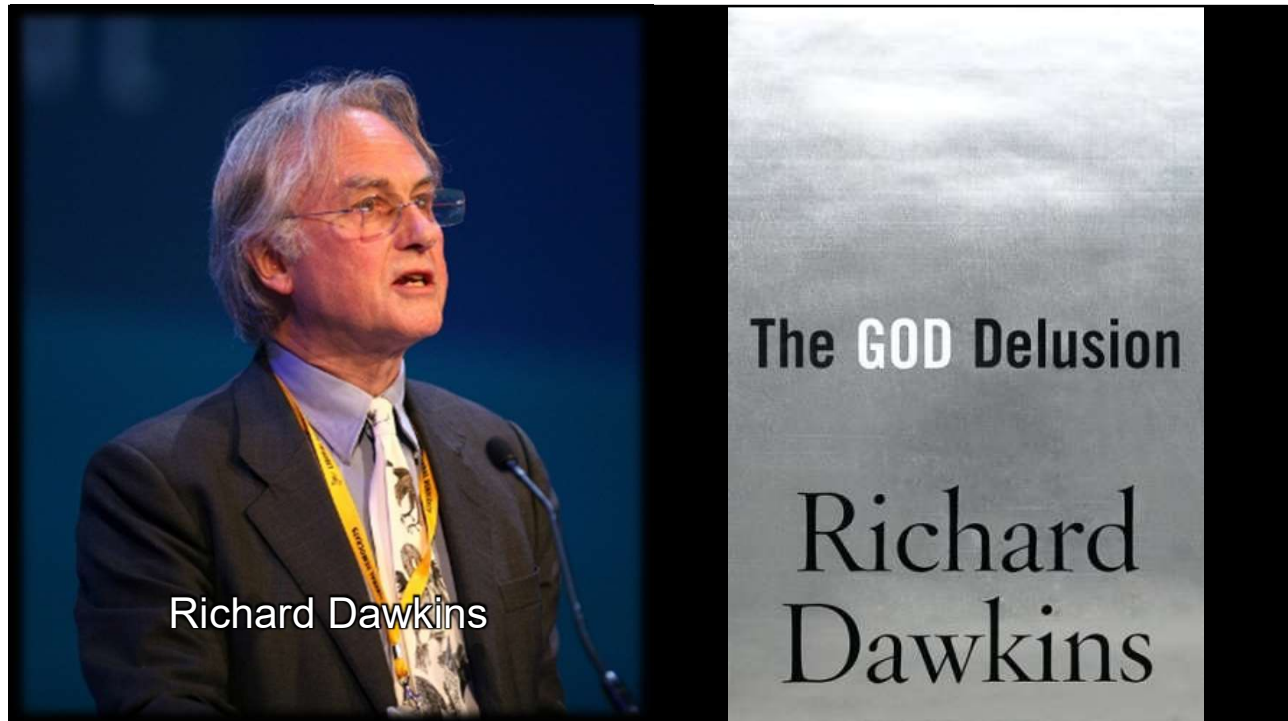
Sam Harris

***"Faith is the mortar that fills the cracks in the evidence and the gaps in the logic, and thus it is faith that keeps the whole terrible edifice of religious certainty still looming dangerously over our world."***

[Harris, *The End of Faith*, 233]



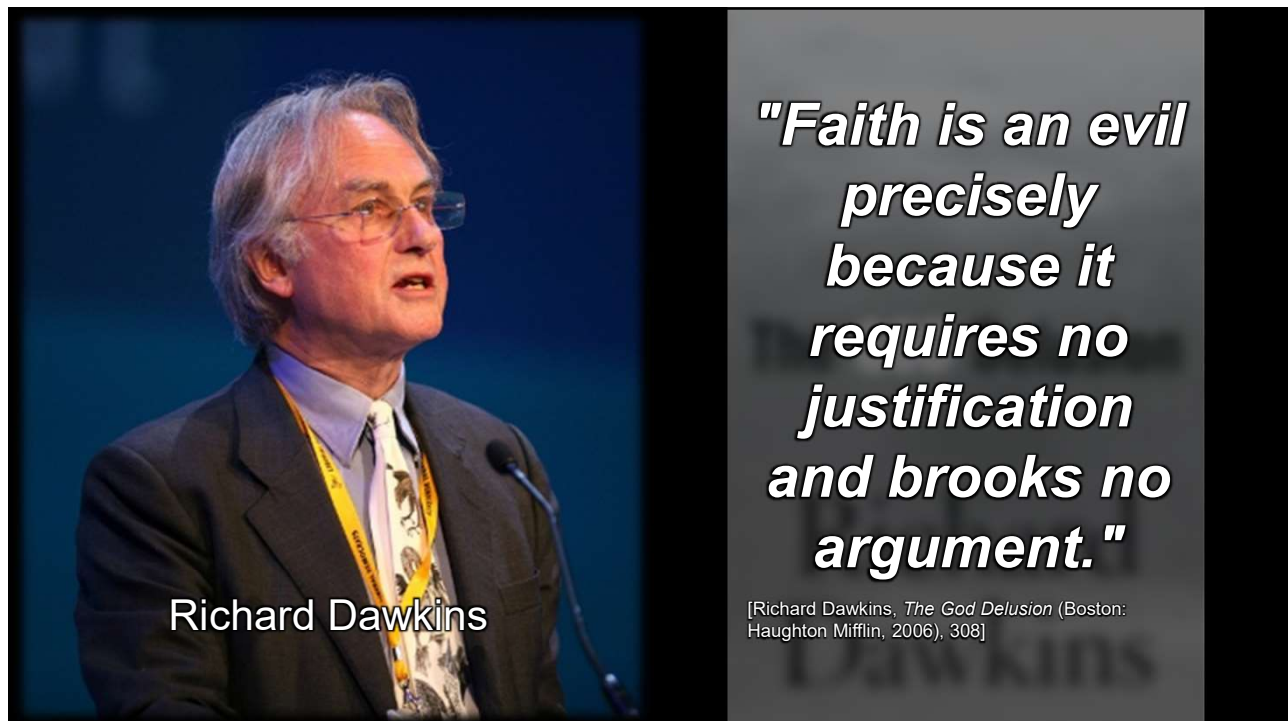
Sam Harris



Richard Dawkins

The GOD Delusion

Richard  
Dawkins

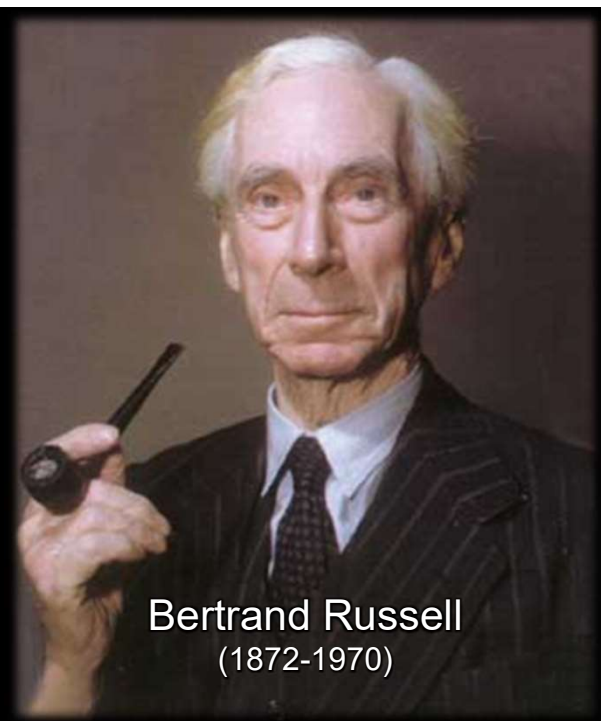
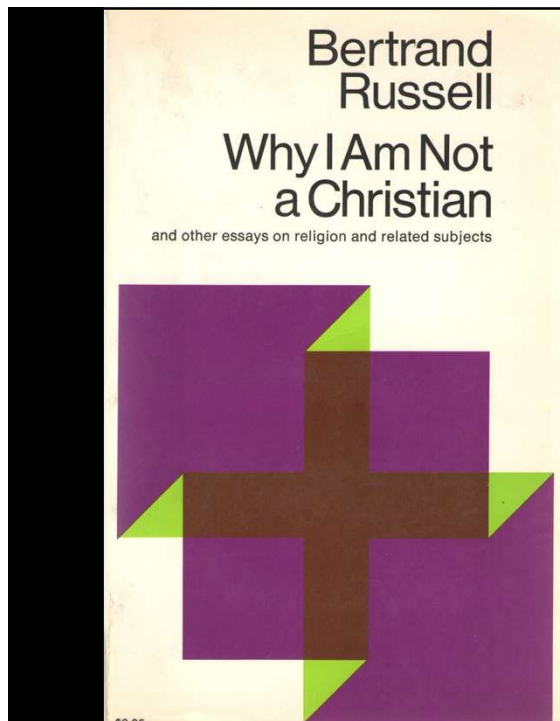
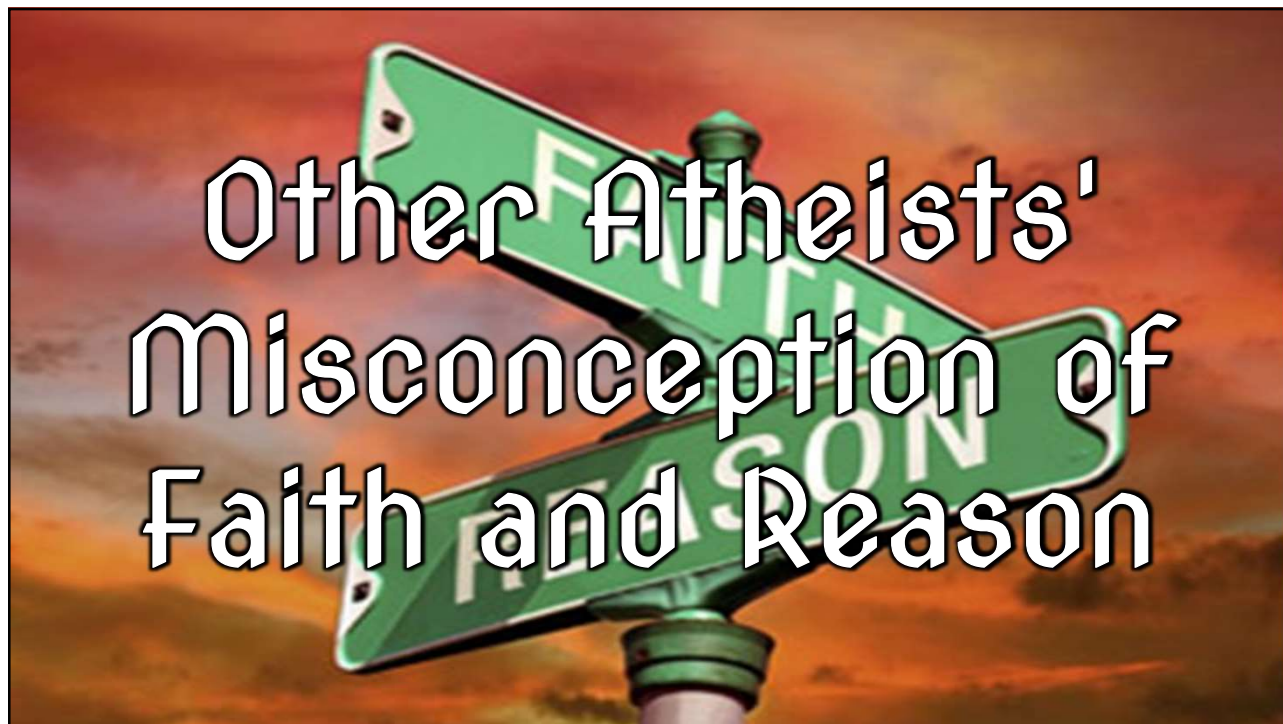


Richard Dawkins

***"Faith is an evil  
precisely  
because it  
requires no  
justification  
and brooks no  
argument."***

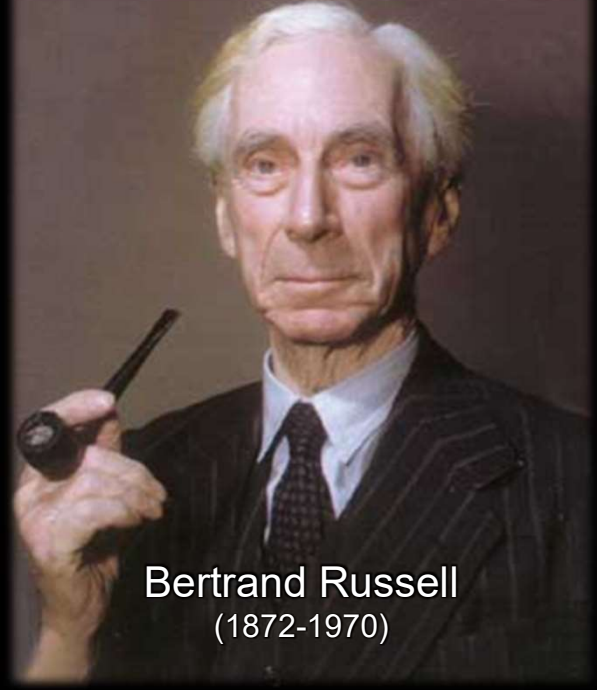
[Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 308]



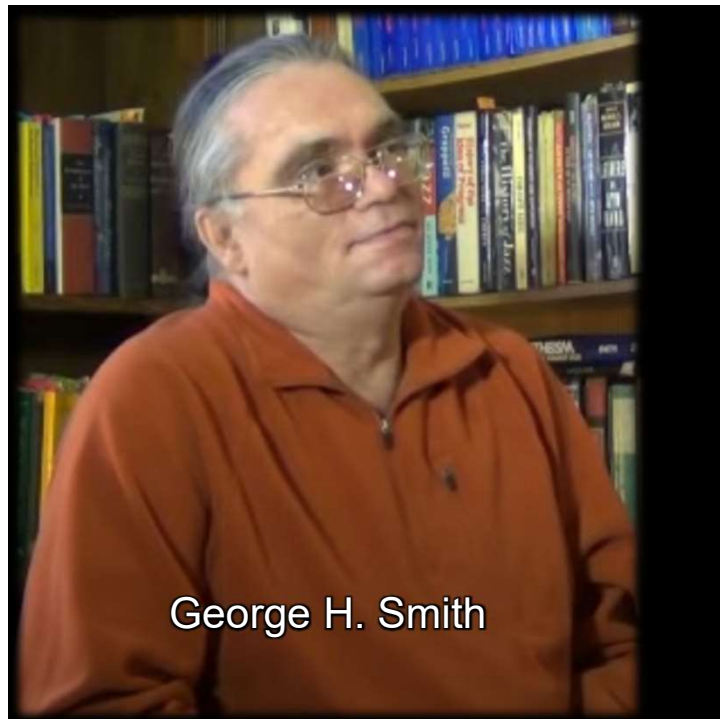


**"As regards the kind of belief: it is thought virtuous to have Faith—that is to say, to have a conviction which cannot be shaken by contrary evidence. Or, if contrary evidence might induce doubt, it is held that contrary evidence must be suppressed."**

[Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), from the preface, p. vi]



**Bertrand Russell**  
(1872-1970)



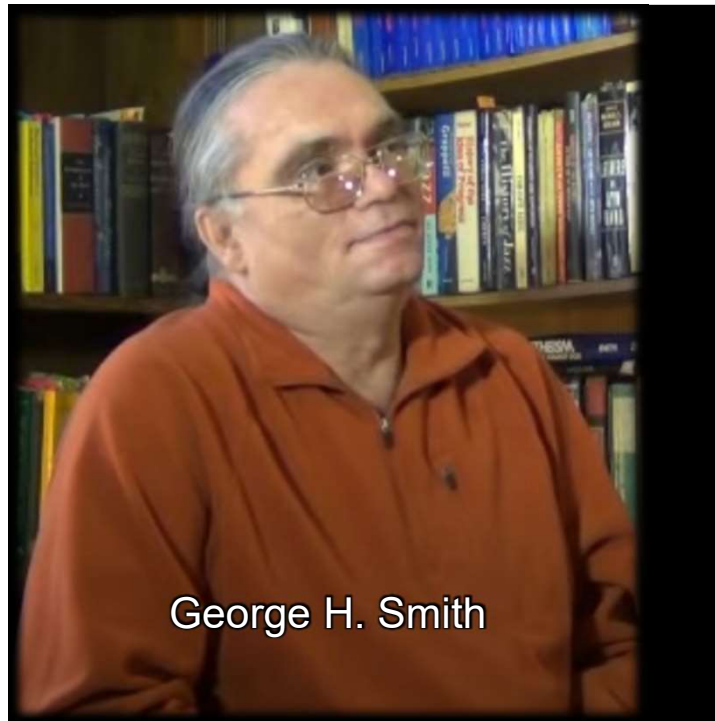
**George H. Smith**

**ATHEISM**

**THE CASE  
AGAINST  
GOD**

**BY GEORGE H. SMITH**

The Skeptic's Bookshelf



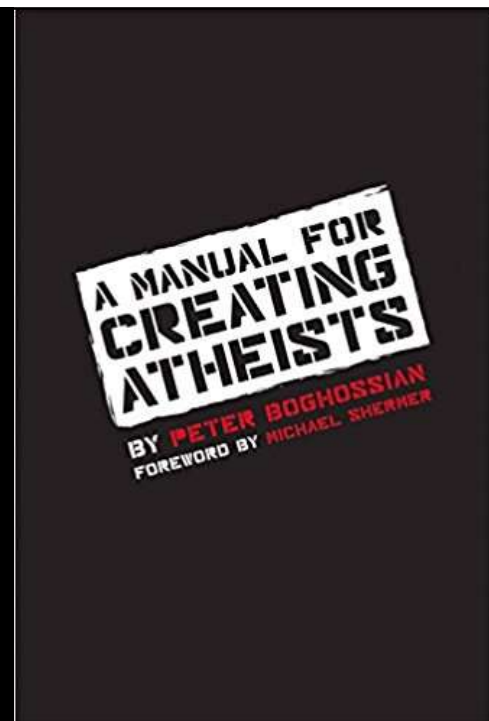
George H. Smith

**"Reason and faith are opposite, two mutually exclusive terms: there is no reconciliation or common ground. Faith is belief without, or in spite of reason."**

[George H. Smith, *Atheism: The Case Against God* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1979), 98]

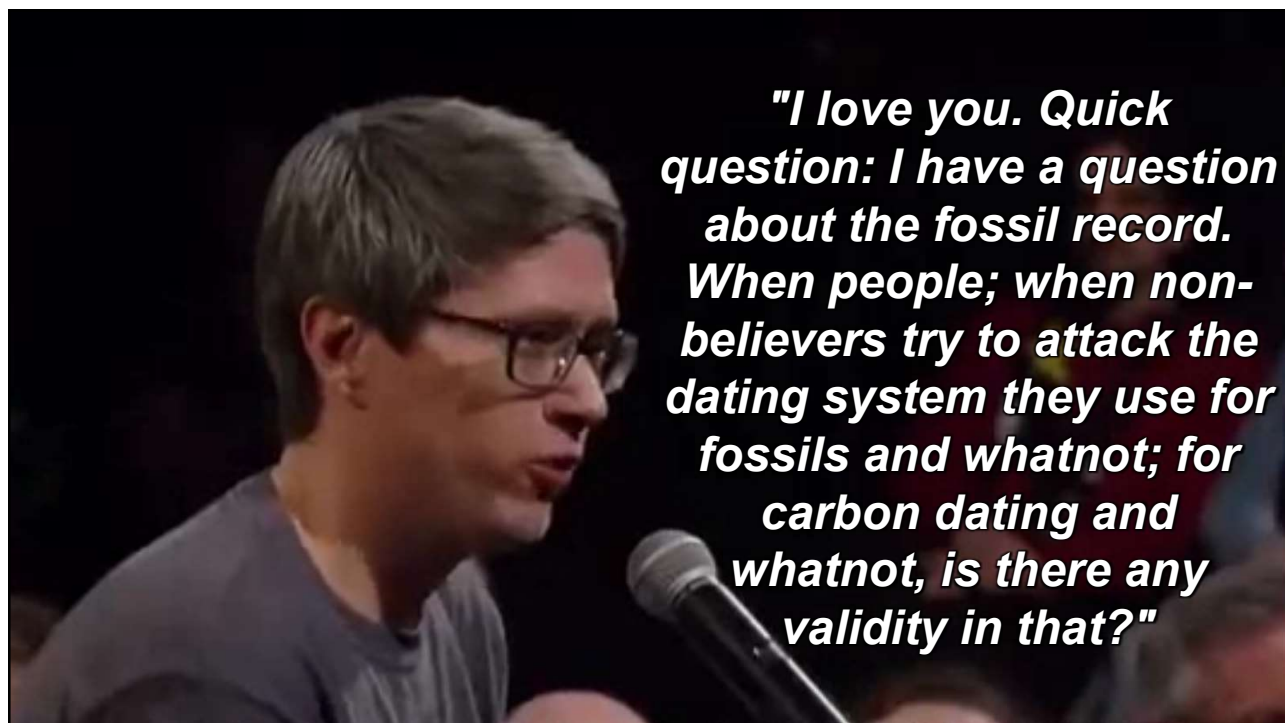


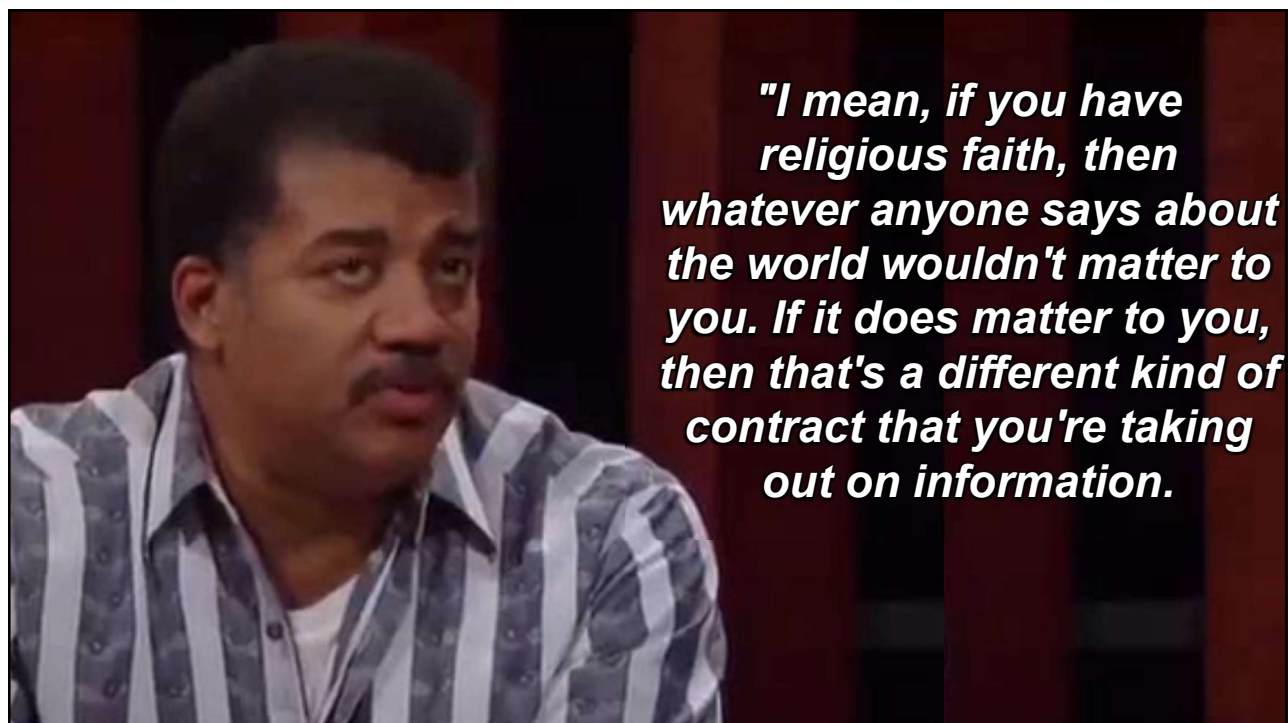
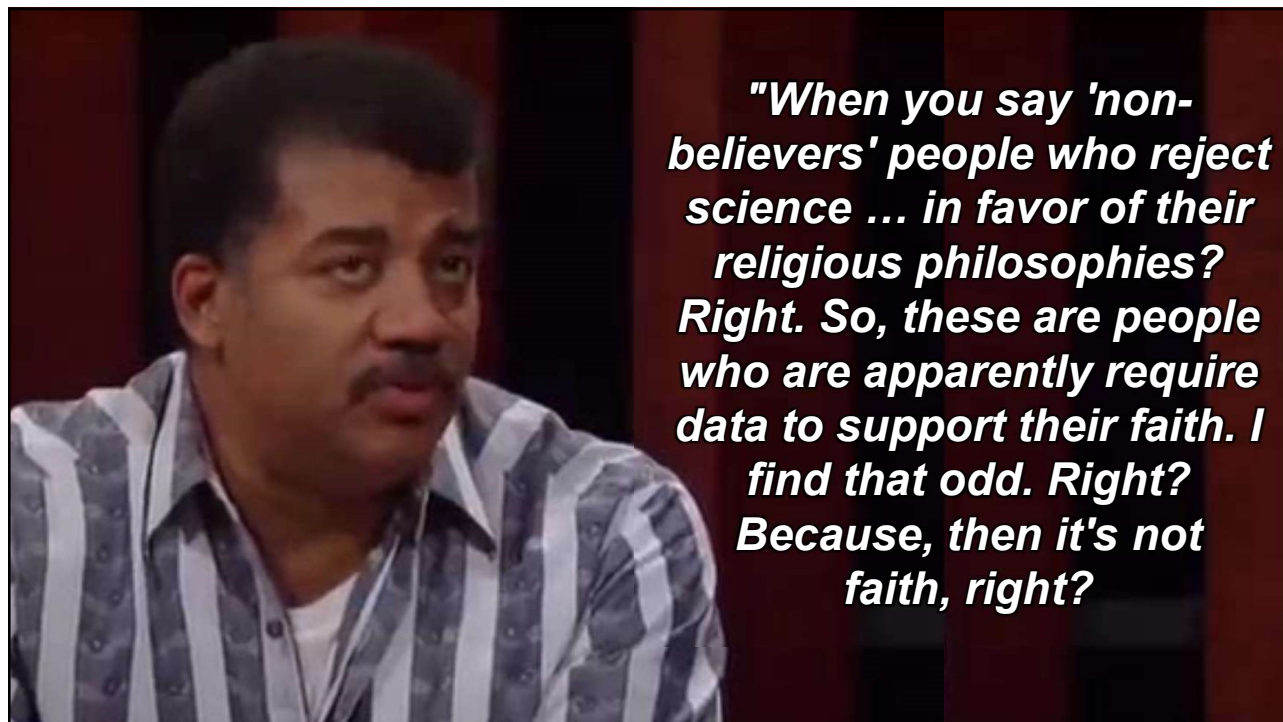
Peter Boghossian

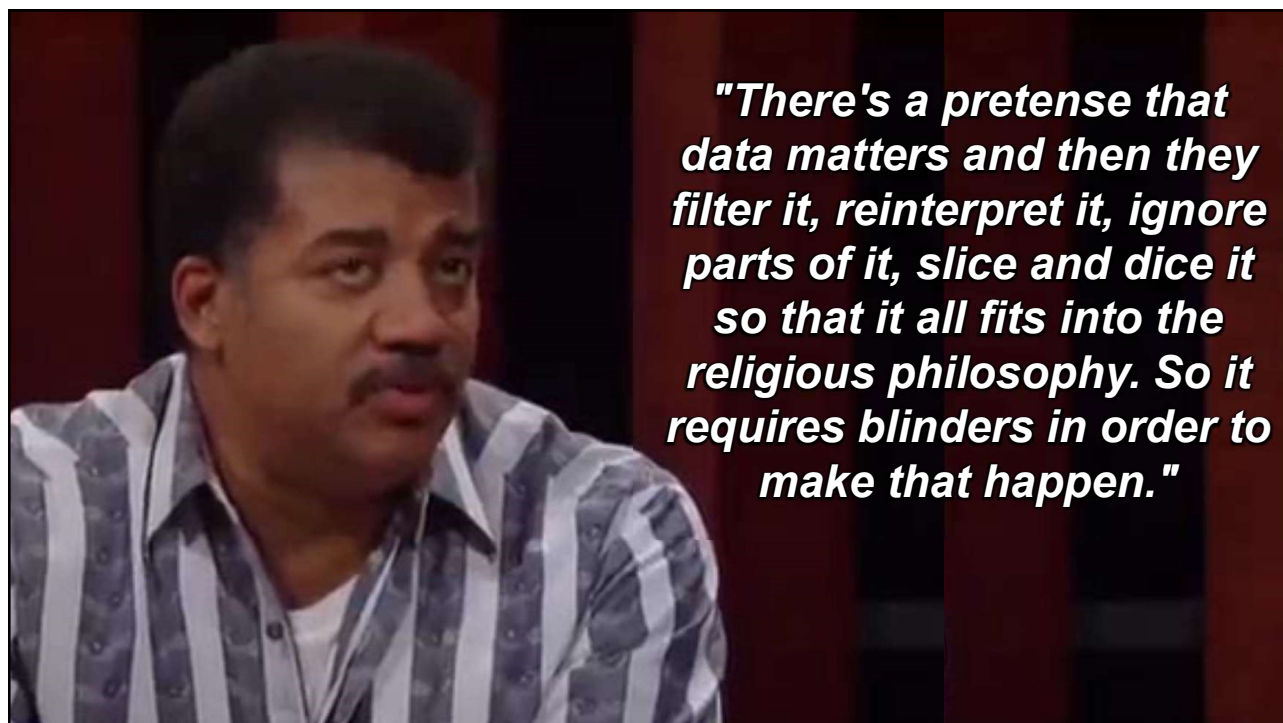
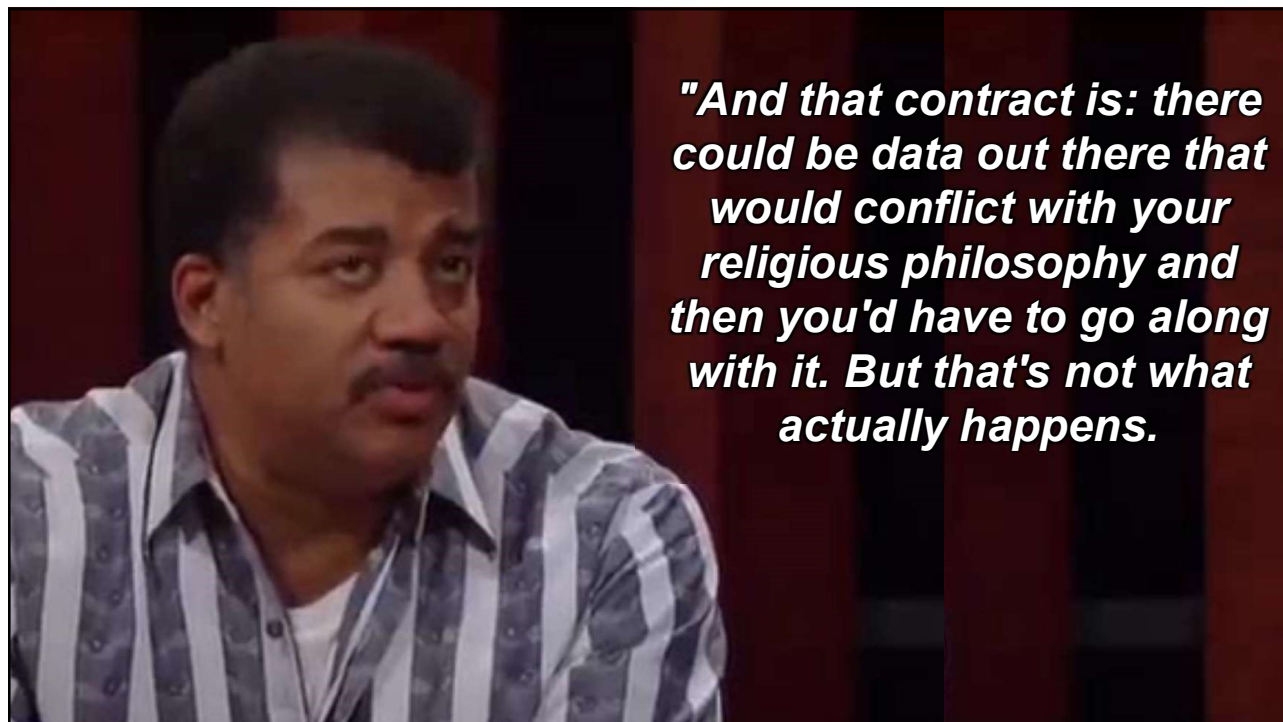




# Neil deGrasse Tyson on Religion and Faith





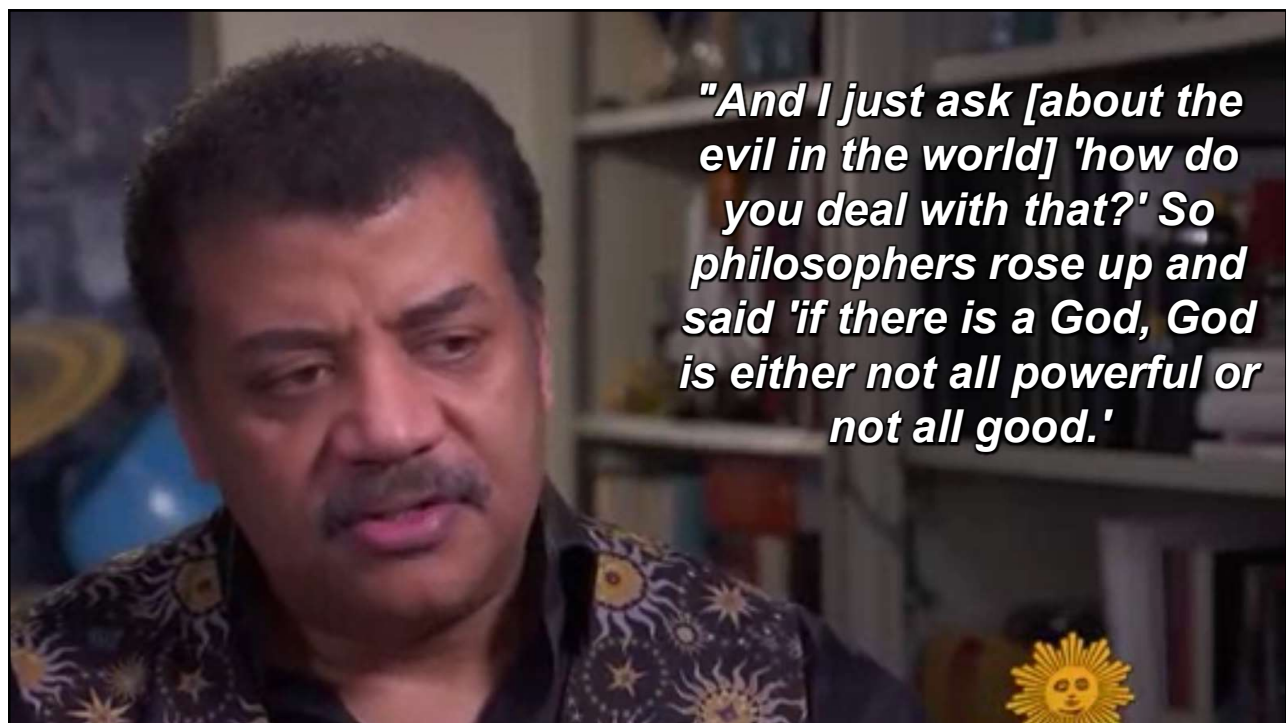
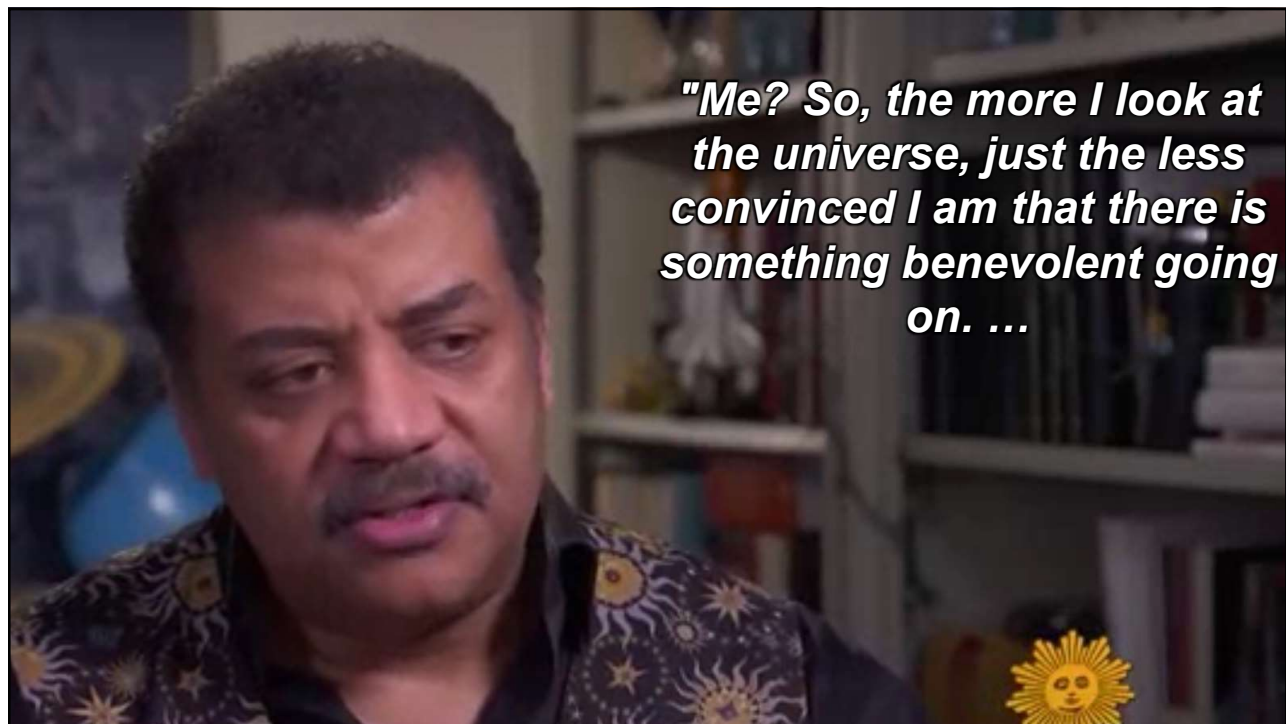


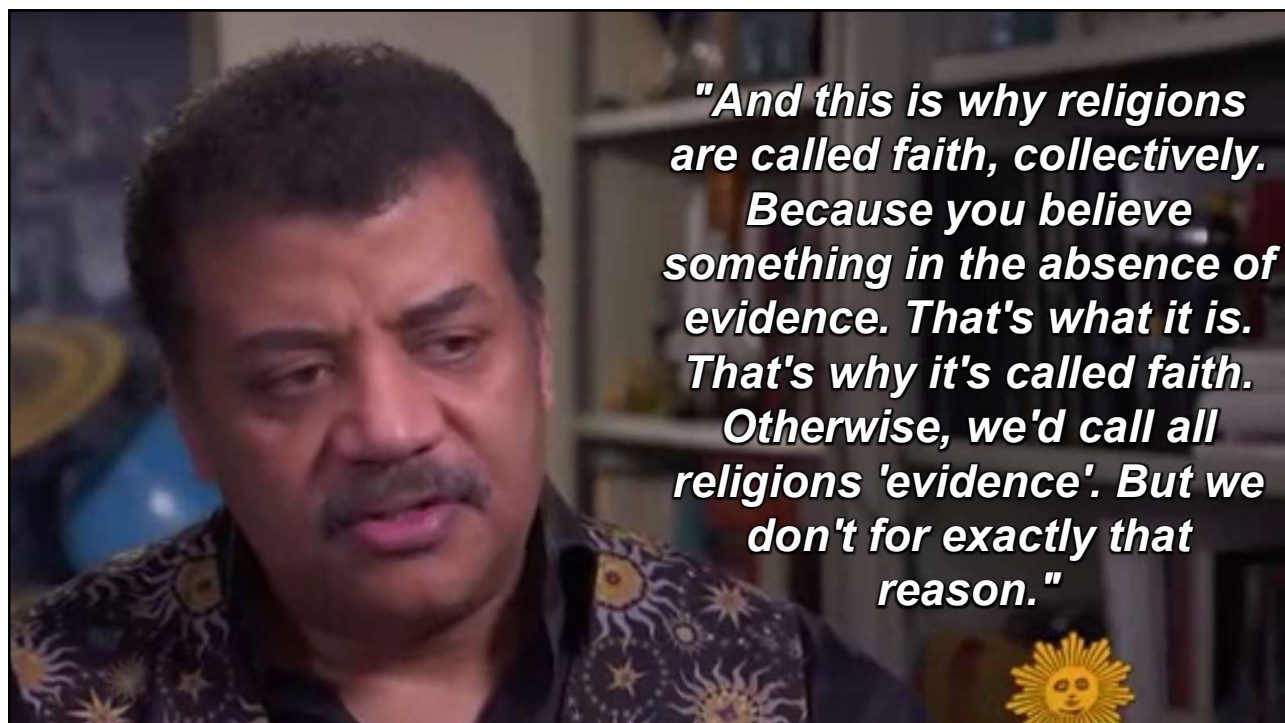
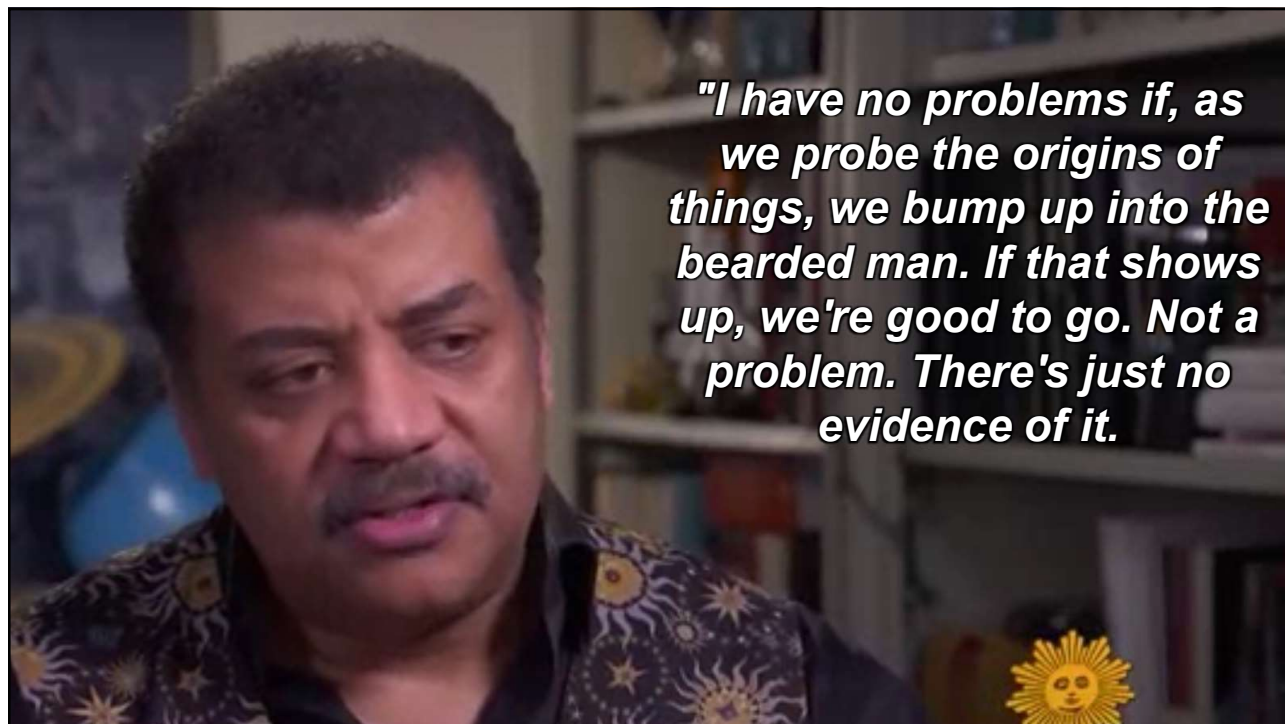
# Neil deGrasse Tyson on God

*"Do you  
believe in  
God;  
Creator:?"*

source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l0nXG02tpDw&t=13s>,  
accessed 02/09/22







Notice the ad hominem / straw man fallacy. The argument Christian apologists are making has nothing to do with the existence of any "bearded man."

Imagine how offended Tyson would be if a Christian tried to refute evolution with the silly argument "if humans evolved from monkeys, why are there still monkeys!?"

Christians no more contend for the existence of a "bearded man" than evolutionists contend that humans evolved from monkeys.

*"I have no problems if, as we probe the origins of things, we bump up into **the bearded man**. If that shows up, we're good to go. Not a problem. There's just no evidence of it."*

Unfortunately Tyson may very well have engaged Christians who have the view that the Christian notion of 'faith' means believing in something in the absence of evidence.

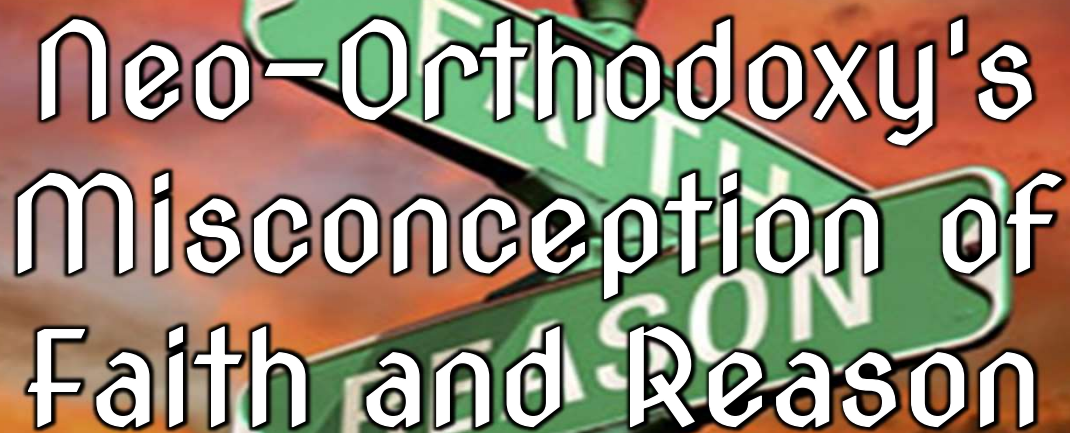
*"And this is why religions are called faith, collectively. Because **you believe something in the absence of evidence**. That's what it is. That's why it's called faith. Otherwise, we'd call all religions 'evidence'. But we don't for exactly that reason."*

Granted Tyson may very well have engaged Christians who have the view that the Christian notion of 'faith' means believing in something in the absence of evidence.

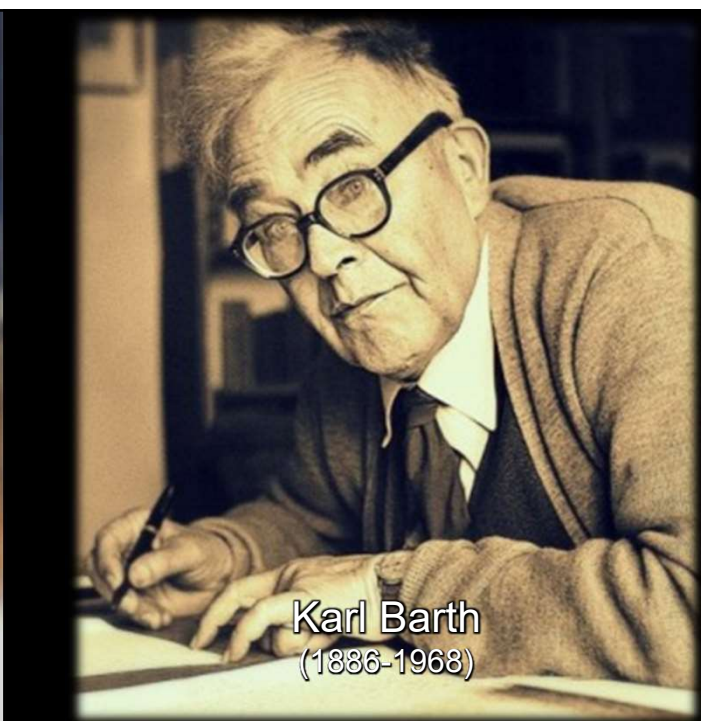
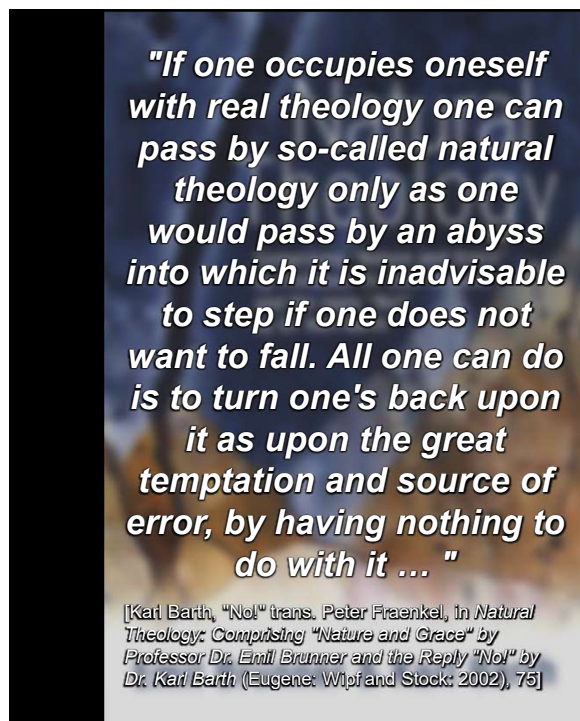
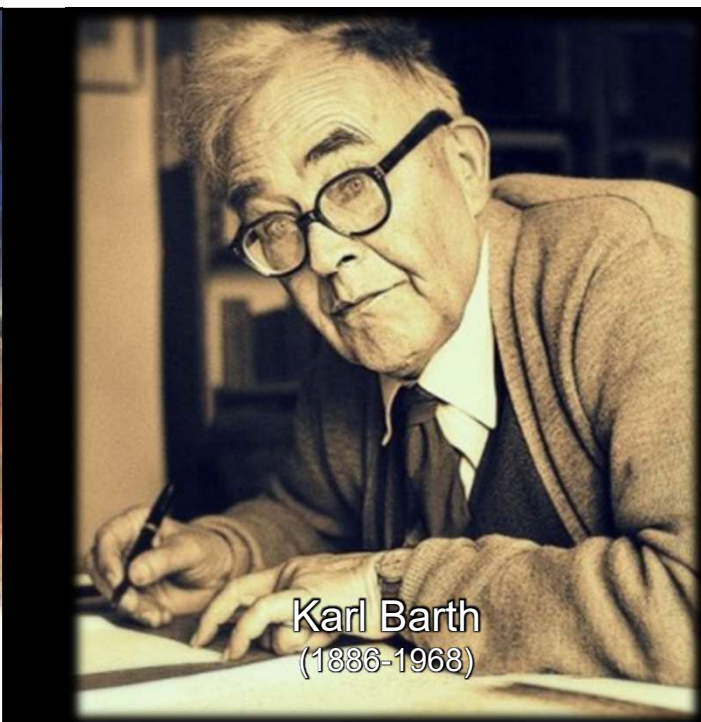
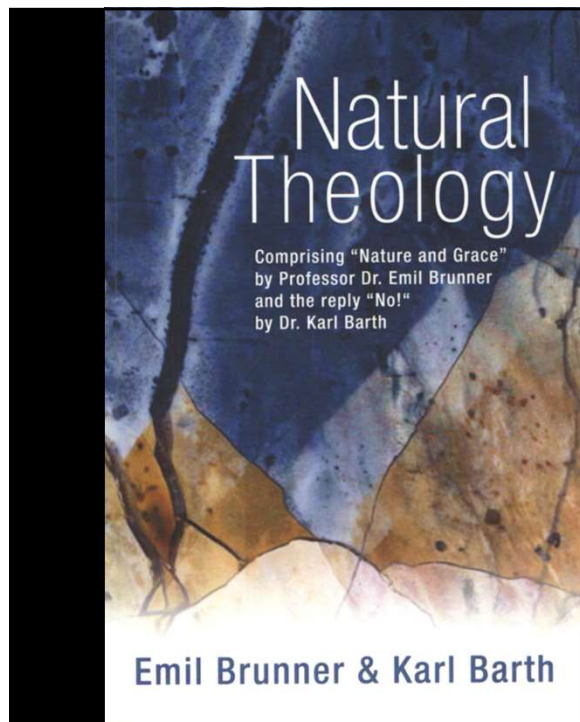
I hope to show that the classical / traditional view of faith says no such thing.

As a scholar, Tyson should have taken the time to try to understand the best and strongest version of the Christian notion of faith before he tried to give any critique.

*"And this is why religions are called faith, collectively. Because **you believe something in the absence of evidence**. That's what it is. That's why it's called faith. Otherwise, we'd call all religions 'evidence'. But we don't for exactly that reason."*



# Neo-Orthodoxy's Misconception of Faith and Reason



*"If one occupies oneself with real theology one can pass by so-called **natural theology** only as one would pass by an abyss into which it is inadvisable to step if one does not want to fall. All one can do is to turn one's back upon it as upon the great temptation and source of error, by having nothing to do with it ... "*

[Karl Barth, "No!" trans. Peter Fraenkel, in *Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace" by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the Reply "No!" by Dr. Karl Barth* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 76]

**Natural Theology arises from God's General Revelation.**

**General Revelation:** God's revelation of His existence and certain attributes to mankind through His creation.

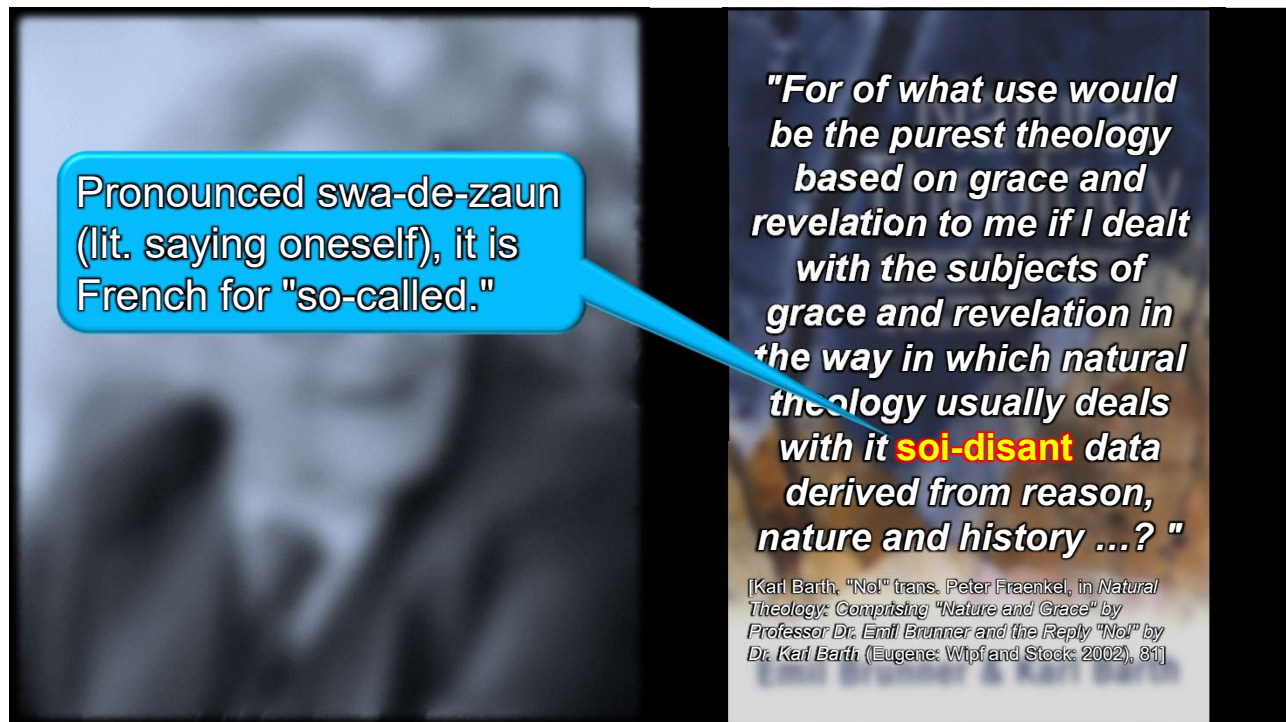
**Special Revelation:** God's revelation of Himself through His prophets and apostles and ultimate through His taking on human nature in the Incarnation in Jesus Christ.



**Karl Barth**  
(1886-1968)

*"For of what use would be the purest theology based on grace and revelation to me if I dealt with the subjects of grace and revelation in the way in which natural theology usually deals with it soi-disant data derived from reason, nature and history ...? "*

[Karl Barth, "No!" trans. Peter Fraenkel, in *Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace" by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the Reply "No!" by Dr. Karl Barth* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 77]

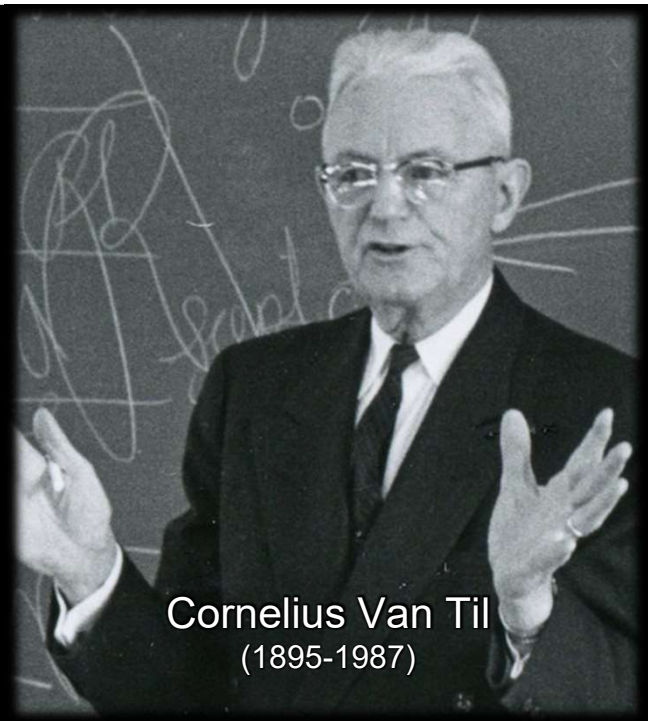
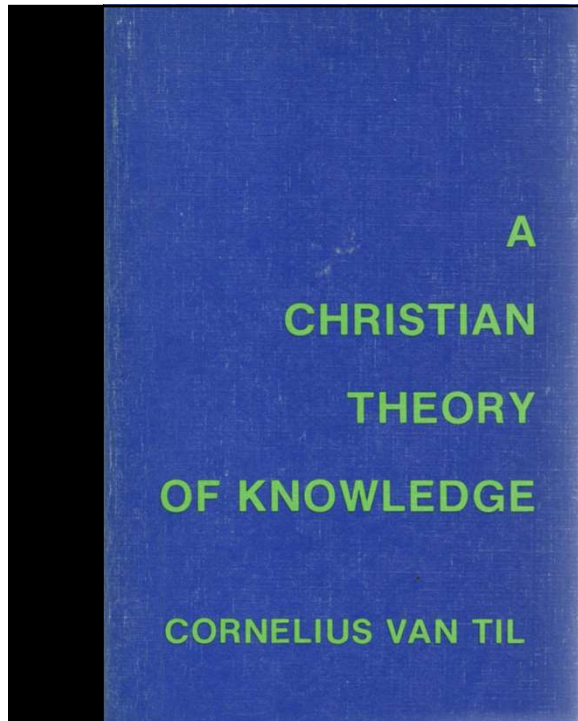


Pronounced swa-de-zaun (lit. saying oneself), it is French for "so-called."

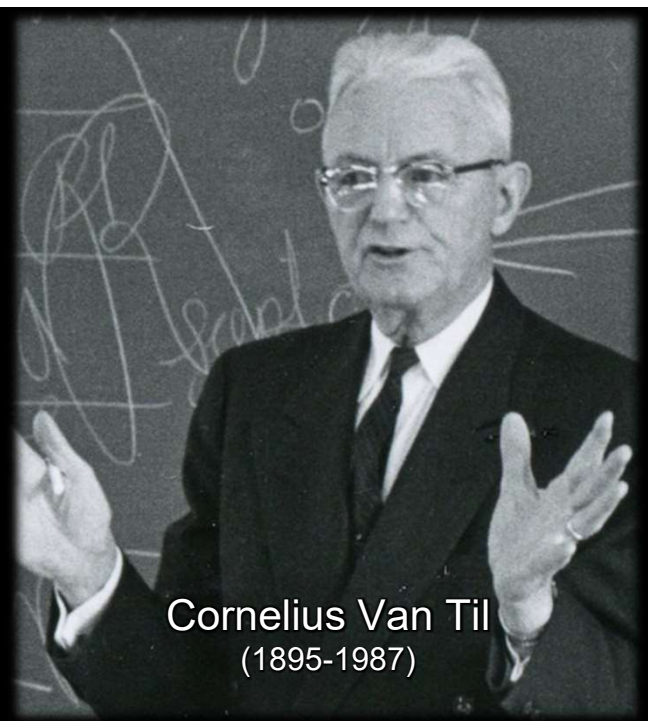
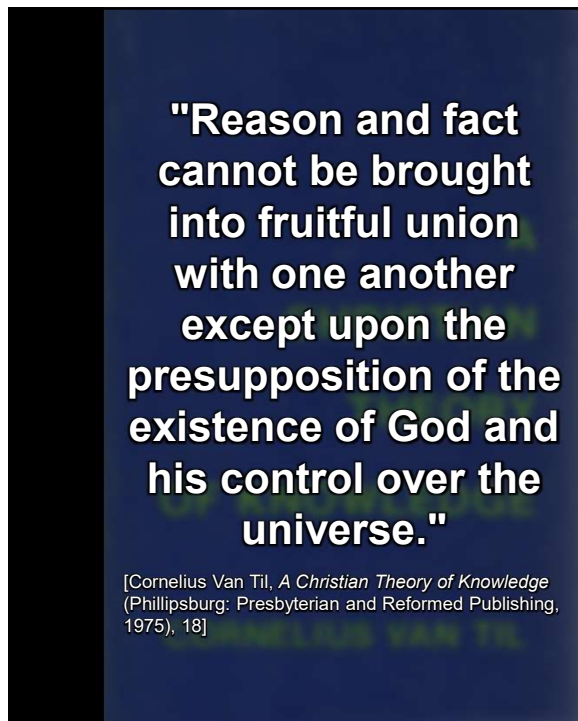
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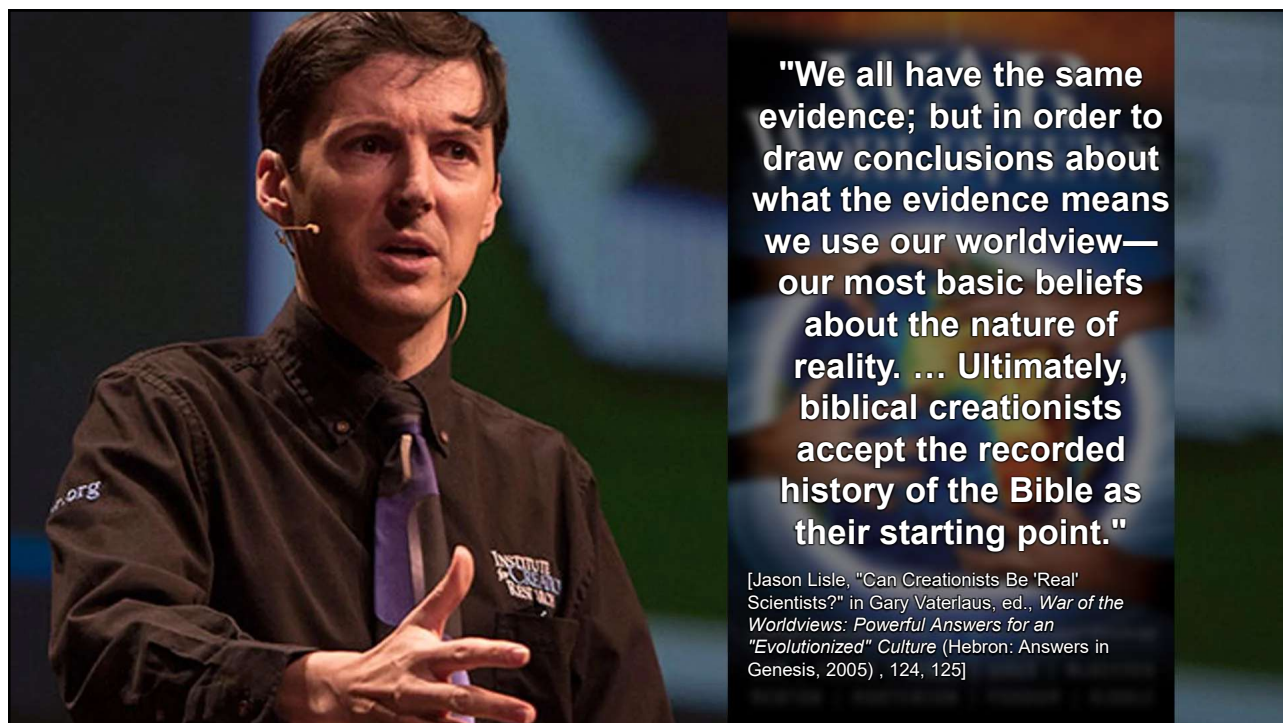
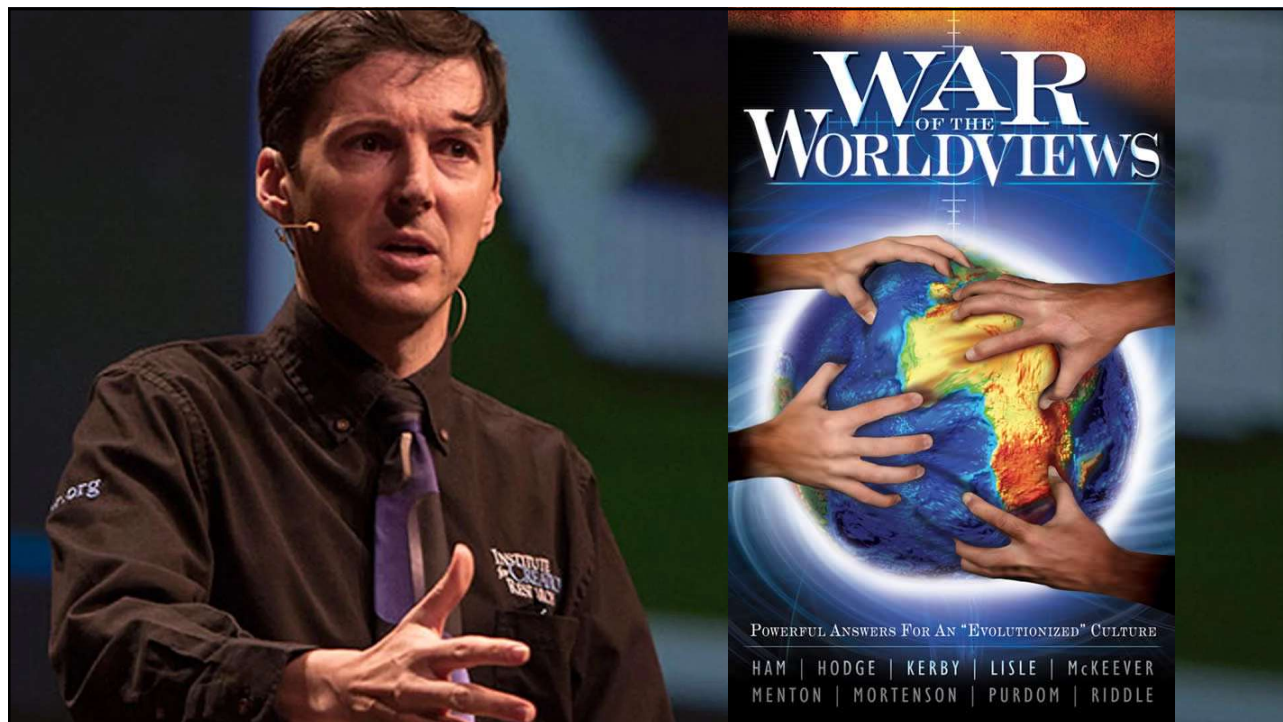


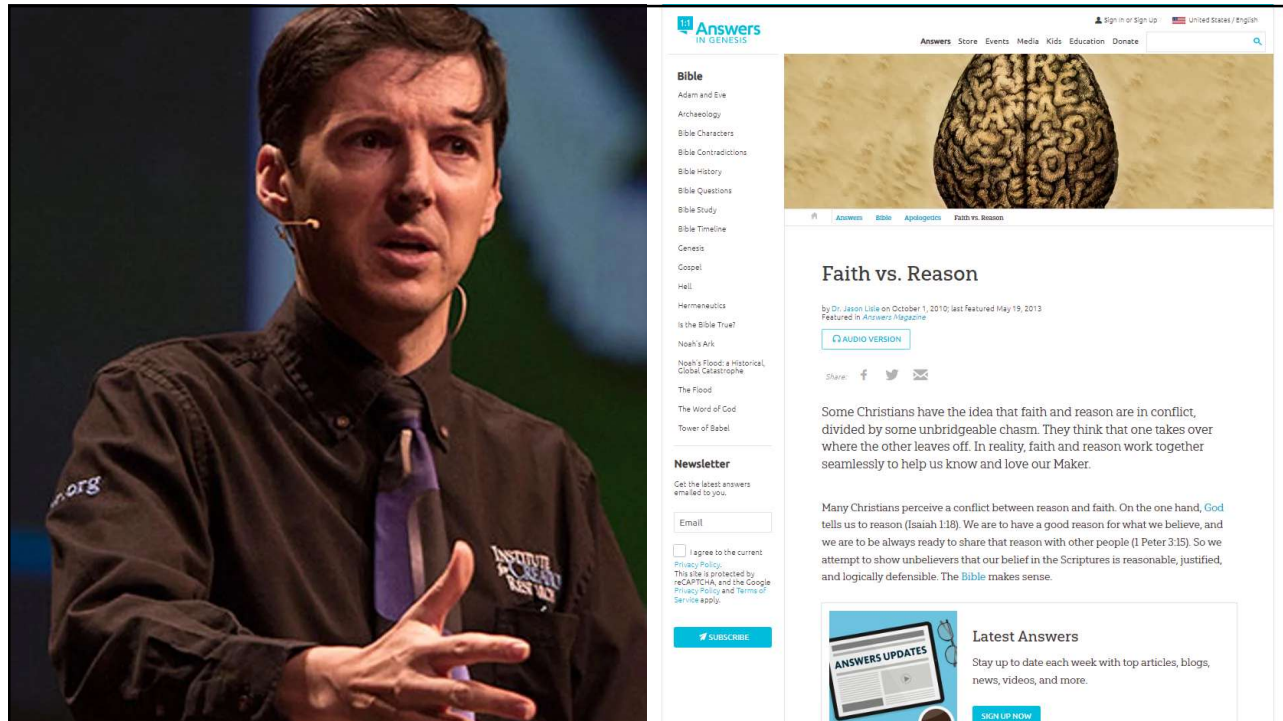
Cornelius Van Til  
(1895-1987)



Cornelius Van Til  
(1895-1987)







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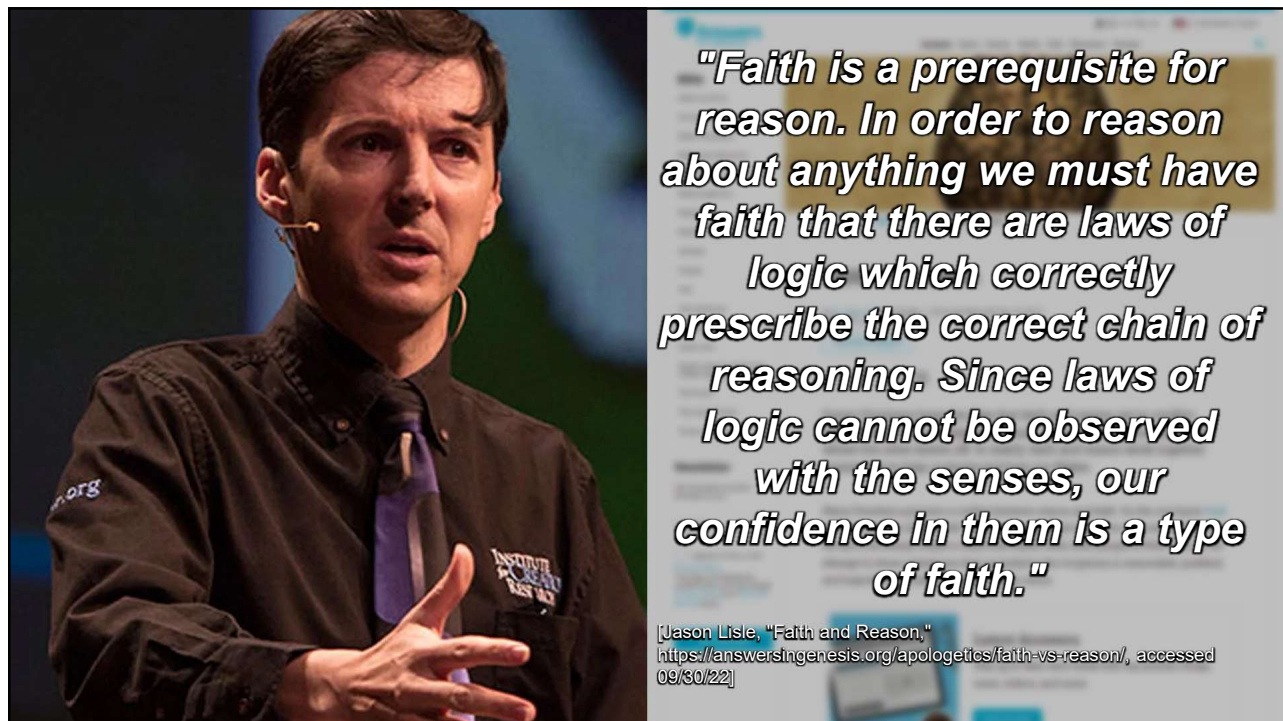
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**Faith vs. Reason**  
by Dr. Jason Lisle on October 1, 2010; last featured May 19, 2013  
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Some Christians have the idea that faith and reason are in conflict, divided by some unbridgeable chasm. They think that one takes over where the other leaves off. In reality, faith and reason work together seamlessly to help us know and love our Maker.

Many Christians perceive a conflict between reason and faith. On the one hand, God tells us to reason (Isaiah 1:18). We are to have a good reason for what we believe, and we are to be always ready to share that reason with other people (1 Peter 3:15). So we attempt to show unbelievers that our belief in the Scriptures is reasonable, justified, and logically defensible. The Bible makes sense.

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***"Faith is a prerequisite for reason. In order to reason about anything we must have faith that there are laws of logic which correctly prescribe the correct chain of reasoning. Since laws of logic cannot be observed with the senses, our confidence in them is a type of faith."***

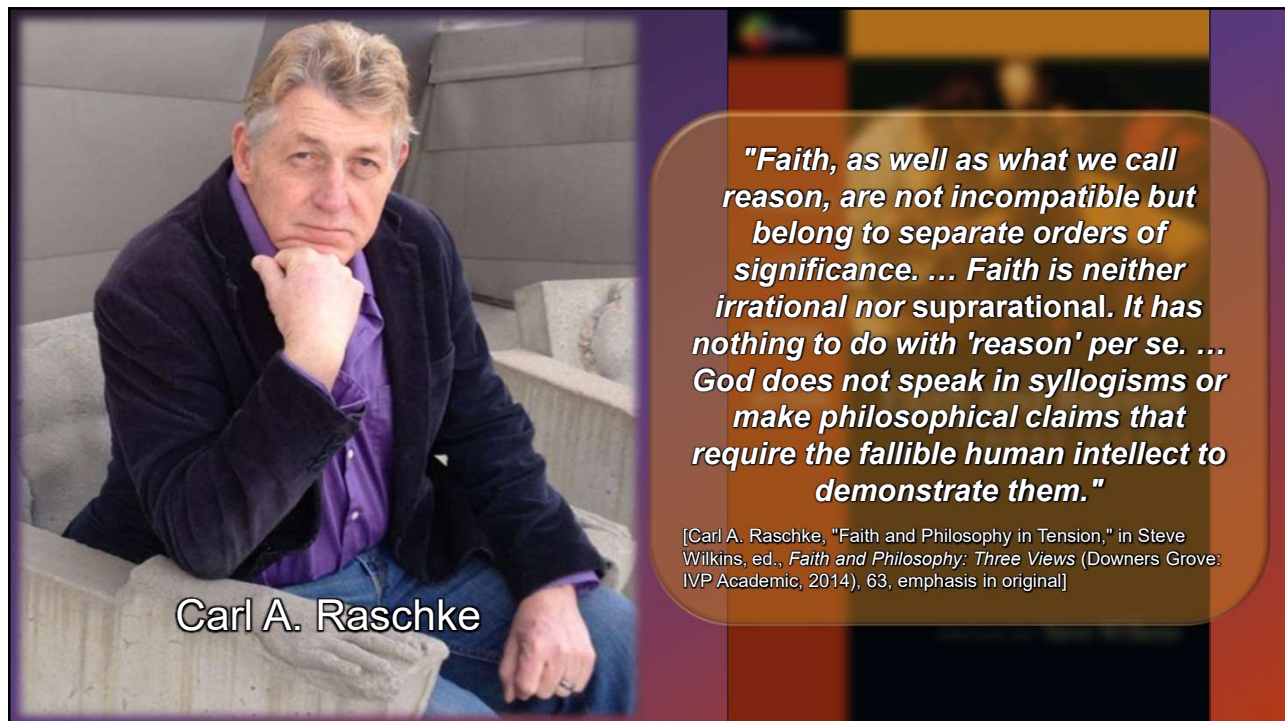
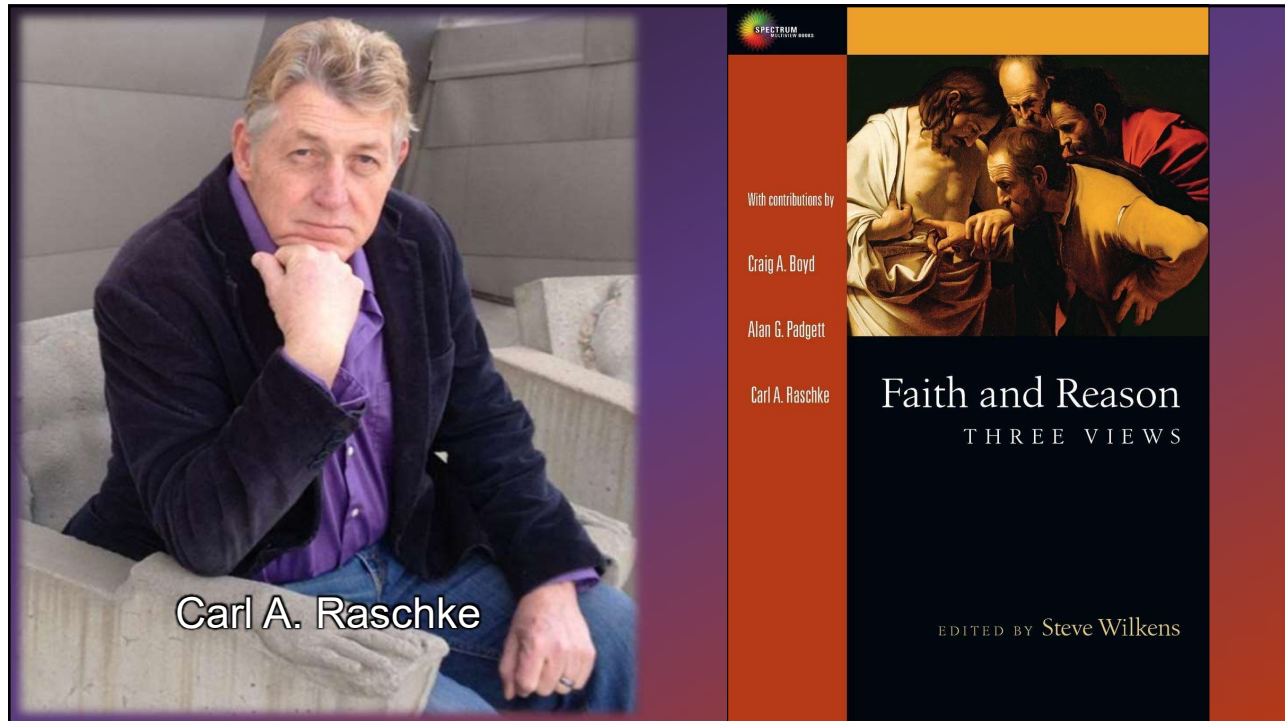
[Jason Lisle, "Faith and Reason," <https://answersingenesis.org/apologetics/faith-vs-reason/>, accessed 09/30/22]


Lisle is confusing having faith that X is true with X being self-evidently or undeniably true.

*"Faith is a prerequisite for reason. In order to reason about anything we must have **faith that there are laws of logic** which correctly prescribe the correct chain of reasoning. **Since laws of logic cannot be observed with the senses, our confidence in them is a type of faith.**"*

[Jason Lisle, "Faith and Reason," <https://answersingenesis.org/apologetics/faith-vs-reason/>, accessed 08/13/22]

Postmodernism's  
Misconception of  
Faith and Reason






Carl A. Raschke

***"Meaning is ultimately determined by how the intricate structures of communication work together in an overarching manner, and it is up to the interpreter to provide a new framework of discourse in which what was first written or spoken can be fleshed out. The 'truth' of a text can be discerned in its deployability within a particular set of life circumstances."***

[Carl A. Raschke, "Faith and Philosophy in Tension," in Steve Wilkins, ed., *Faith and Philosophy: Three Views* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014), 61, emphasis in original]




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***If "meaning is ultimately determined by now intricate structures of communication work together in an overarching manner" and that "it is up to the interpreter to provide a new framework of discourse," then how are we to take the meaning you were seeking to communicate through your statement here?***


***If the interpreter provides a new framework, then why should we take your statement to be objectively true?***



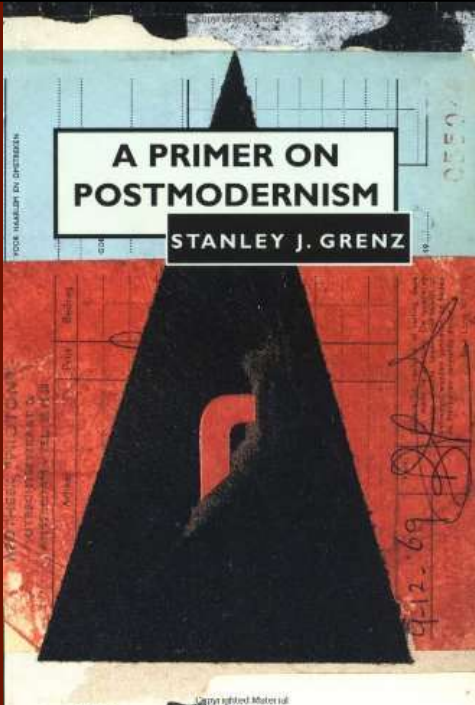
Carl A. Raschke

***"Propositional logic, whether exercised for the clarification of terms in a formal argument or to prove the validity of some simple assertion, is inadequate to make sense out of the 'revealed' truth of Scripture for one compelling reason: it speaks to the disinterested intellect, whereas God through his Word speaks to the whole person, including the human heart and what in both ancient Greek and later Christian philosophy is known as synderesis, or 'conscience.'"***

[Carl A. Raschke, "Faith and Philosophy in Tension," in Steve Wilkins, ed., *Faith and Philosophy: Three Views* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014), 61, emphasis in original]



Stanley J. Grenz  
(1950-2005)



**A PRIMER ON POSTMODERNISM**  
STANLEY J. GRENZ


9-12-69

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Stanley J. Grenz  
(1950-2005)

*"In contrast to the modern ideal of the dispassionate observer, we affirm the postmodern discovery that no observer can stand outside the historical process. Nor can we gain universal, culturally neutral knowledge as unconditioned specialists."*



Stanley J. Grenz  
(1950-2005)

*"In contrast to the modern ideal of the dispassionate observer, we affirm the postmodern discovery that no observer can stand outside the historical process. Nor can we gain universal, culturally neutral knowledge as unconditioned specialists."*

*If what Grenz says is true, then his own statement itself does not come from an observer who stands "outside the historical process" and, thus, the statement is not itself "neutral knowledge" coming from an "unconditioned specialist."*


*Since this is the case, why should we believe that it is objectively true?*



Stanley J. Grenz  
(1950-2005)

**"On the contrary, we are participants in our historical and cultural context, and *all our intellectual endeavors* are unavoidably conditioned by that participation."**

[Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 166]



Stanley J. Grenz  
(1950-2005)

**"On the contrary, we are participants in our historical and cultural context, and *all our intellectual endeavors* are unavoidably conditioned by that participation."**

[Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 166]

**If "all our intellectual endeavors" are "unavoidably conditioned" then Grenz's own statement is itself "unavoidably conditioned."**

**But if his statement is "unavoidably conditioned," they why should we take it as objectively true?**





*"Postmodernism stresses the distinction between objectivity of facts, versus objectivity of knowledge or people. It accepts the possible existence of facts outside human context, but argues that **all knowledge is mediated** by an individual and that the experiences, **biases**, beliefs, and identity of that individual **necessarily influence how they mediate any knowledge.**"*

[Dan McGee, "Truth and Postmodernism" downloaded from <https://medium.com/@danmcgee/truth-and-postmodernism-816ea9b3007a>, 05/09/22]

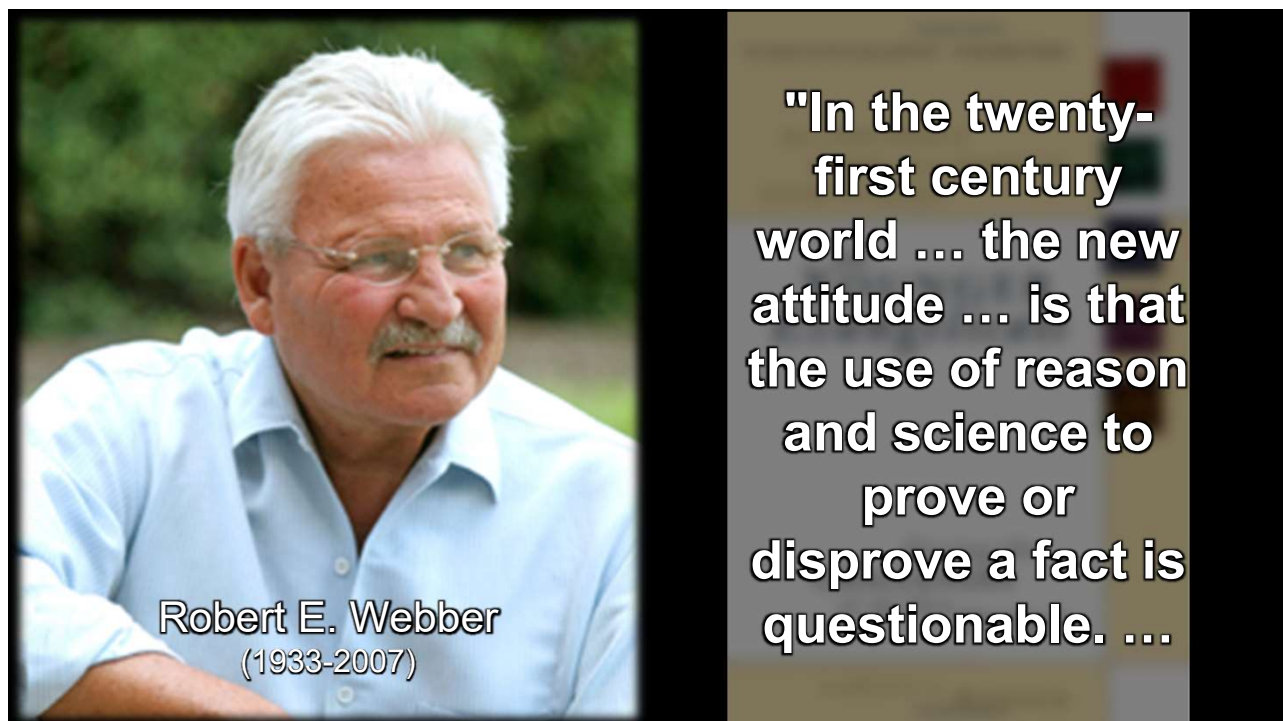
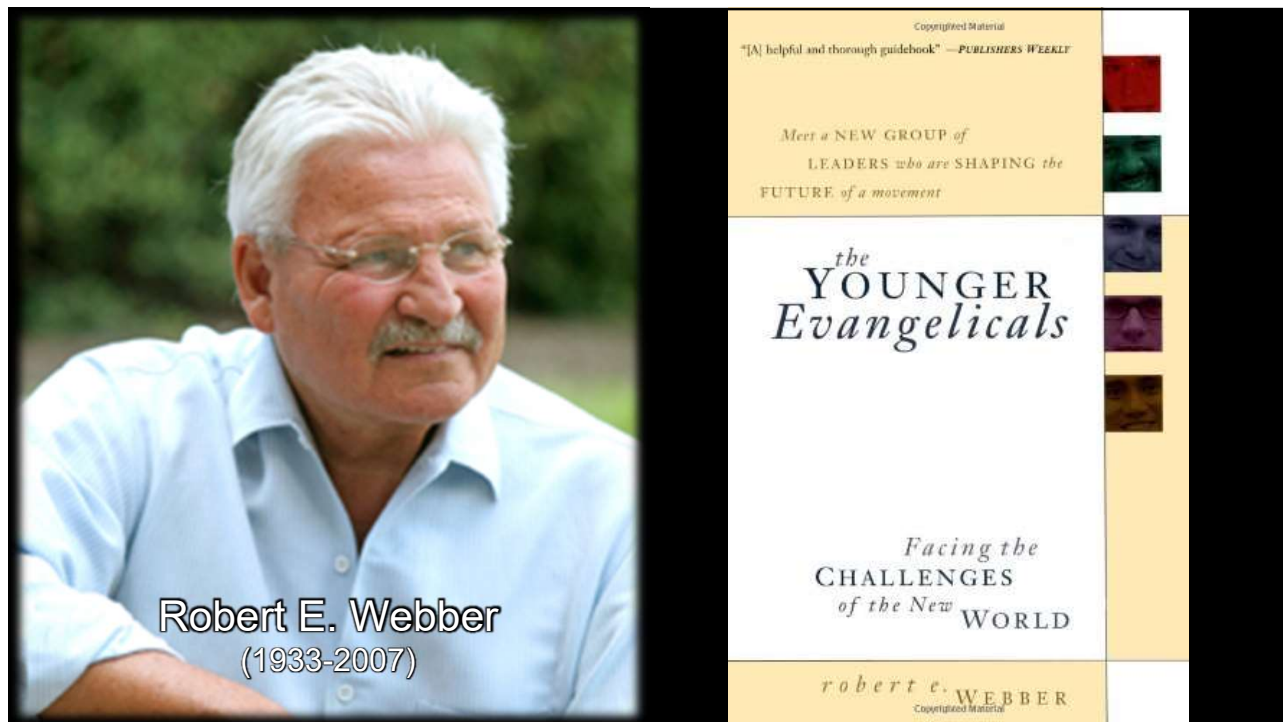


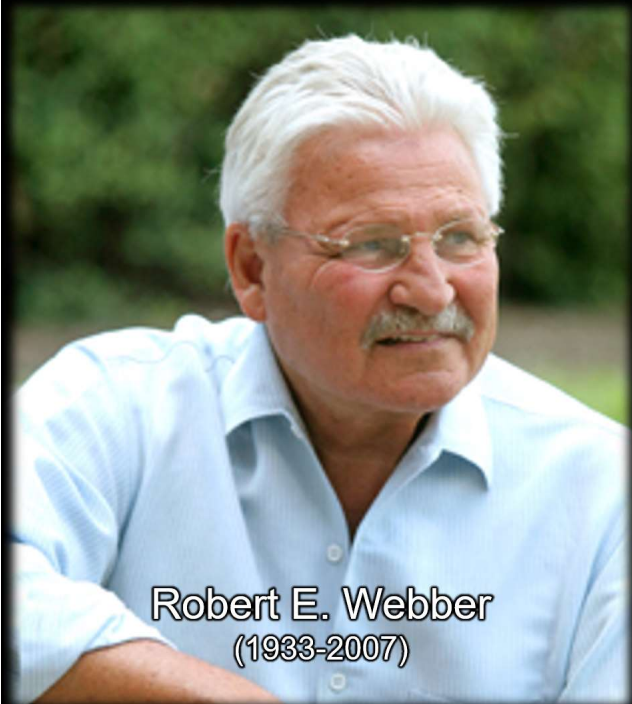
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[Dan McGee, "Truth and Postmodernism" downloaded from <https://medium.com/@danmcgee/truth-and-postmodernism-816ea9b3007a>, 05/09/22]

*If "all knowledge is mediated" and the individual has "biases" that "necessarily influence how they mediate ANY knowledge" (emphasis added), then this would be true of Dan McGee and the knowledge claim he is making right here.*

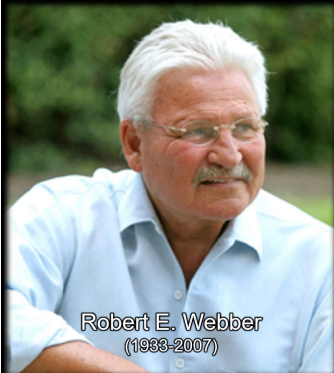
*But if this is true of Dan McGee's claim here, why should we take his claim to be objectively true?*





Robert E. Webber  
(1933-2007)

"This ... points  
... to the  
postmodern  
conclusion that  
we deal with  
'interpreted  
facts.' ...



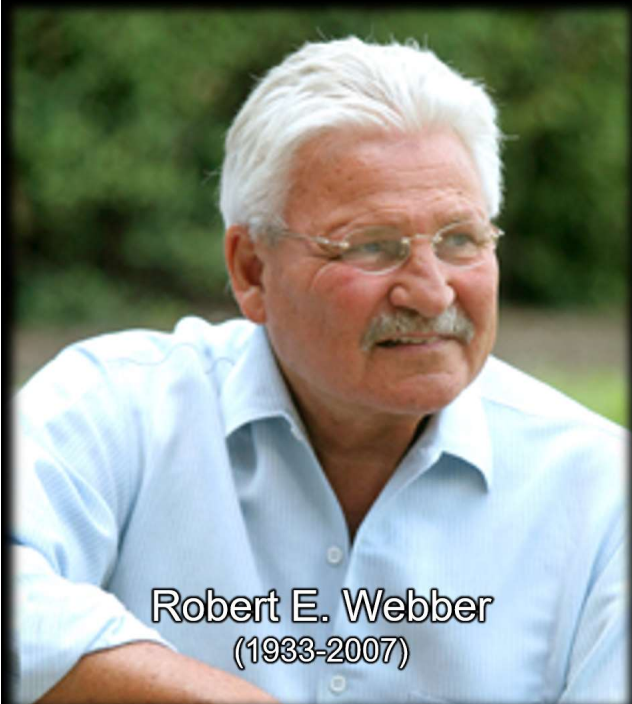
Robert E. Webber  
(1933-2007)

"This ... points  
... to the  
postmodern  
conclusion that  
we deal with  
'interpreted  
facts.' ...

***Again, if we deal with  
"interpreted facts," then  
what does that say about  
Webber's statement  
itself?***

***Is his claim here merely  
an "interpreted fact?"***

***If so, they why should we  
take it as objectively  
true?***

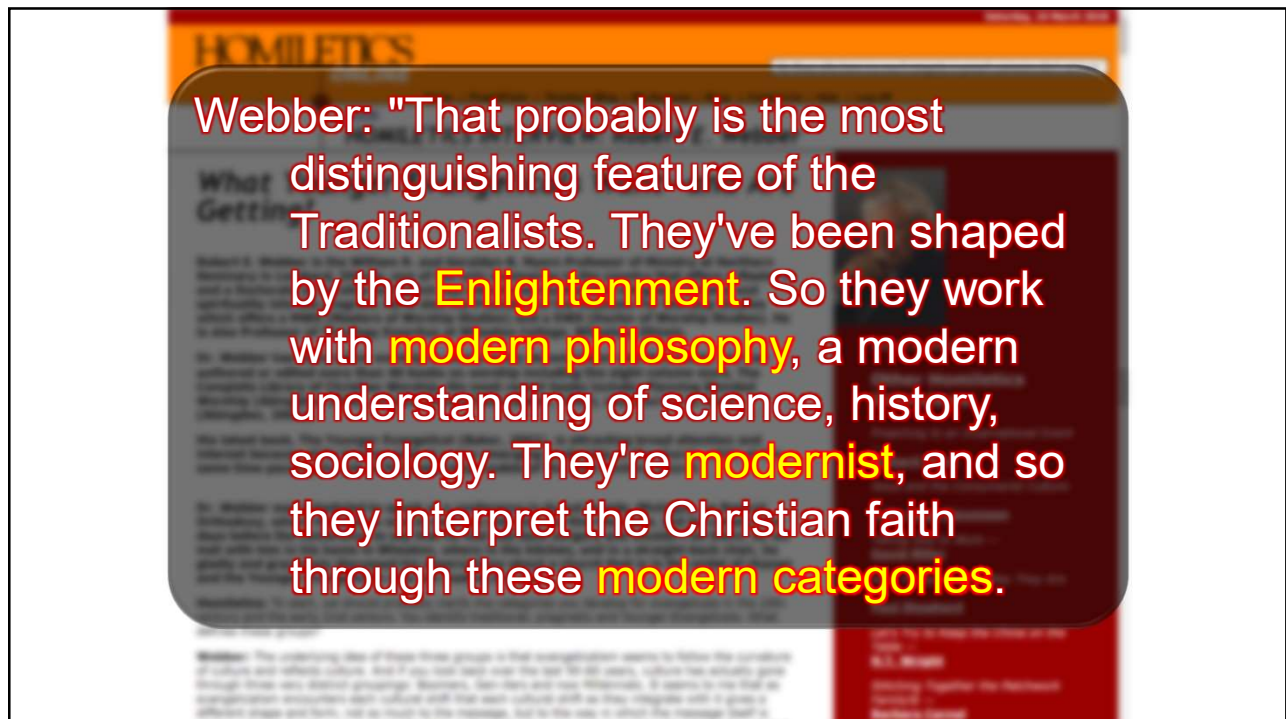
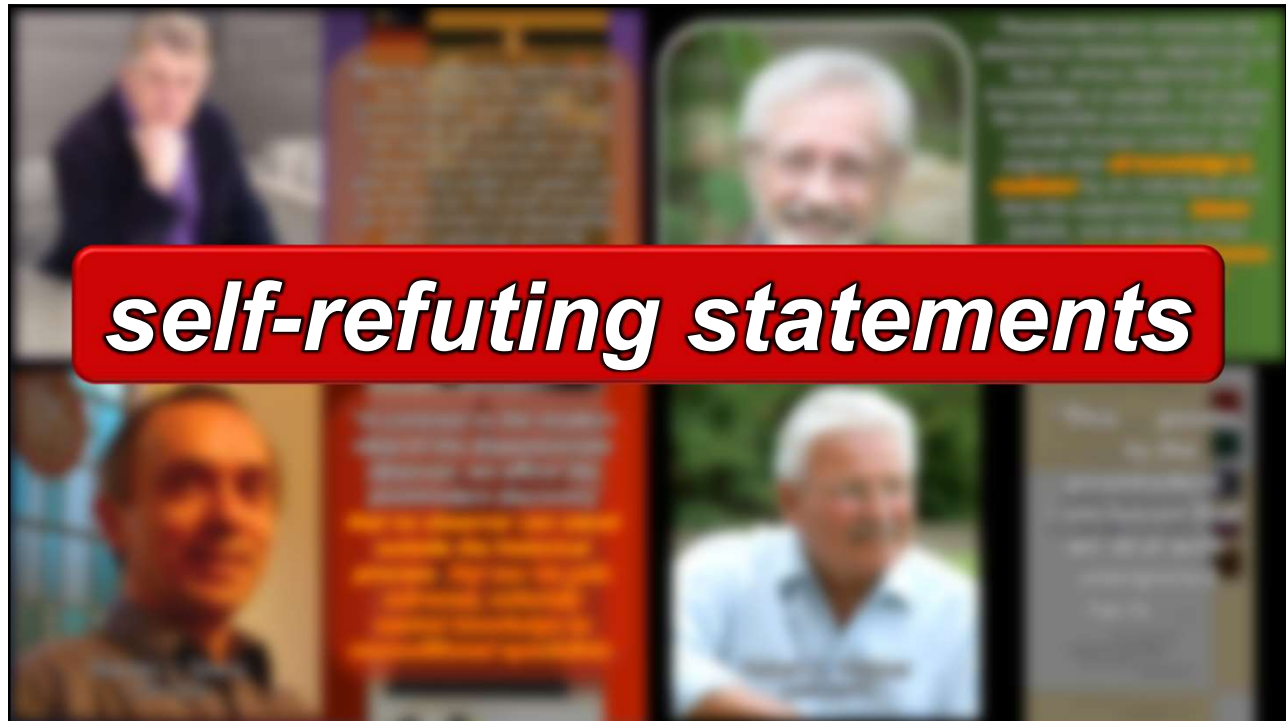


**Robert E. Webber**  
(1933-2007)

**"In the postmodern world, both believers and nonbelievers are people of faith."**

[Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 84]

 <p data-bbox="256 1436 412 1461"><b>Carl A. Raschke</b></p>	<p data-bbox="516 1205 781 1409"><i>"Meaning is ultimately determined by how the intricate structures of communication work together in an overarching manner, and it is up to the interpreter to provide a new framework of discourse in which what was first written or spoken can be fleshed out. The 'truth' of a text can be discerned in its deployability within a particular set of life circumstances."</i></p> <p data-bbox="509 1415 781 1451"><small>[Carl A. Raschke, "Faith and Philosophy in Tension," in Steve Wilkins, ed., <i>Faith and Philosophy: Three Views</i> (Downers Grove, IL: Academon, 2014), 61, emphases in original]</small></p>	 <p data-bbox="922 1430 1036 1455"><b>Dan McGee</b></p> <p data-bbox="1143 1163 1438 1451"><i>"Postmodernism stresses the distinction between objectivity of facts, versus objectivity of knowledge or people. It accepts the possible existence of facts outside human context, but argues that <b>all knowledge is mediated</b> by an individual and that the experiences, <b>biases</b>, beliefs, and identity of that individual <b>necessarily influence how they mediate any knowledge.</b>"</i></p> <p data-bbox="1138 1461 1386 1493"><small>[Dan McGee, "Truth and Postmodernism" downloaded from <a href="https://medium.com/@danmcgee/truth-and-postmodernism-816ea9b3007a">https://medium.com/@danmcgee/truth-and-postmodernism-816ea9b3007a</a>, 05/09/22]</small></p>
 <p data-bbox="256 1793 412 1839"><b>Stanley J. Grenz</b> (1950-2005)</p>	<p data-bbox="516 1549 781 1801"><i>"In contrast to the modern ideal of the dispassionate observer, we affirm the postmodern discovery that <b>no observer can stand outside the historical process. Nor can we gain universal, culturally neutral knowledge as unconditioned specialists.</b>"</i></p>	 <p data-bbox="906 1793 1078 1839"><b>Robert E. Webber</b> (1933-2007)</p> <p data-bbox="1208 1541 1406 1766"><i>"This ... points ... to the postmodern conclusion that we deal with 'interpreted facts.' ..."</i></p>



Webber: "And what's very interesting about Traditional Evangelicals is that the categories through which they interpret the Christian faith are almost regarded as sacred, almost as sacred as the Christian faith itself. So if you say, 'Well, I don't believe in evidential apologetics,' there's something wrong with you."

[<http://www.homileticsonline.com/subscriber/interviews/webber.asp>, accessed 09/05/20]



# The Classical View of Faith and Reason

## Classical View of Faith and Reason

### Reason

*Believing something on the basis of demonstration.*

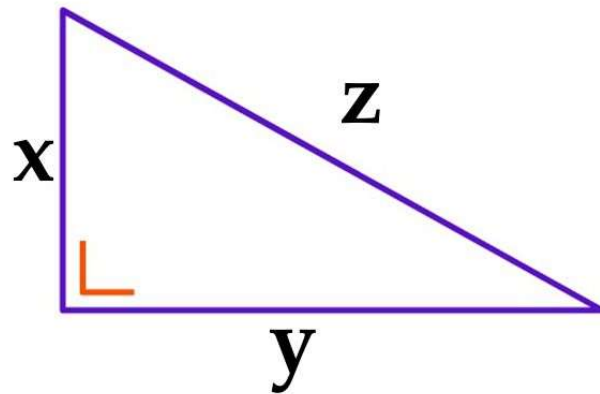
### Faith

*Believing something on the basis of authority.*

***Consider  
Fermat's  
Last Theorem.***

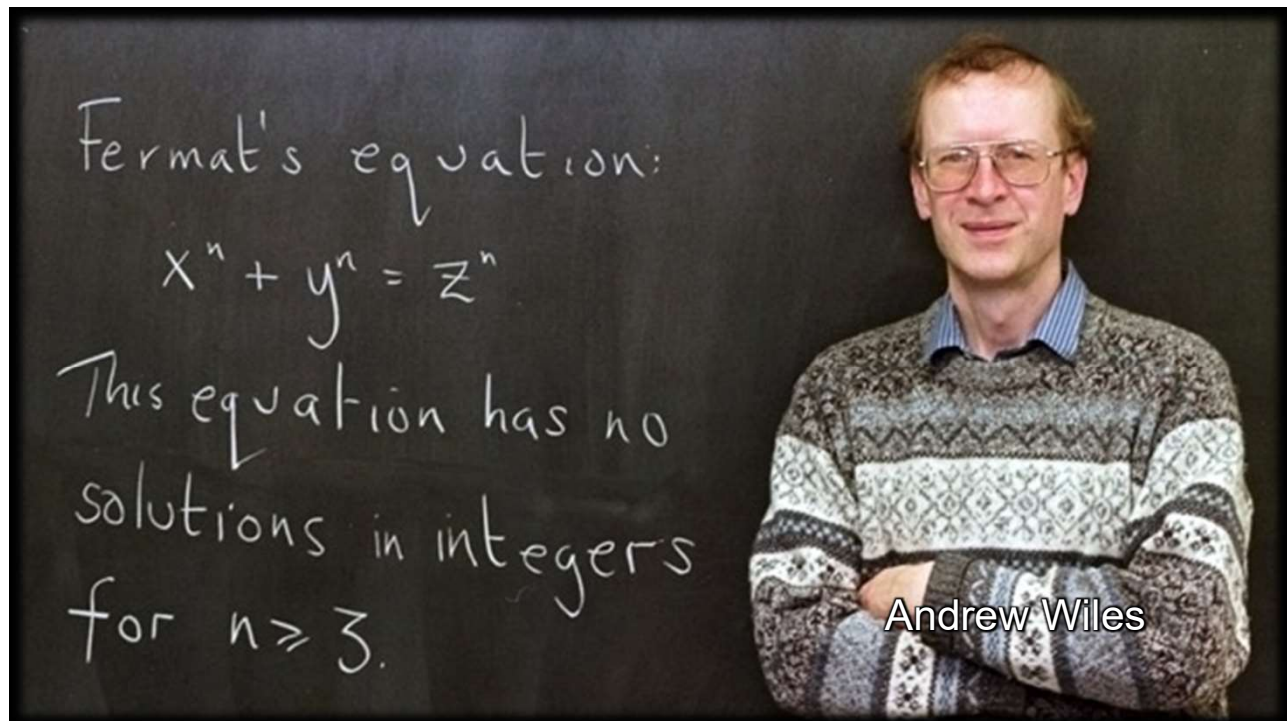


**Pierre de Fermat**  
(1601-1665)

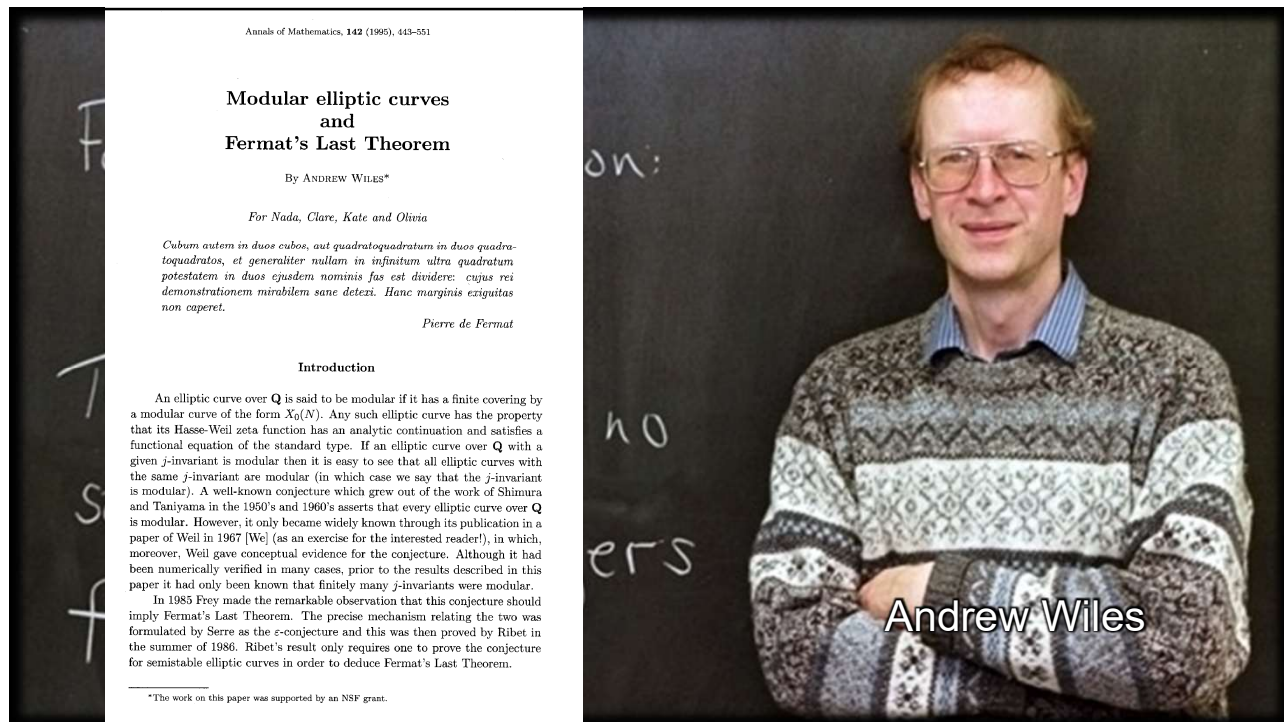


Pythagorean Theorem

$$x^2 + y^2 = z^2$$







## Classical View of Faith and Reason

### Reason

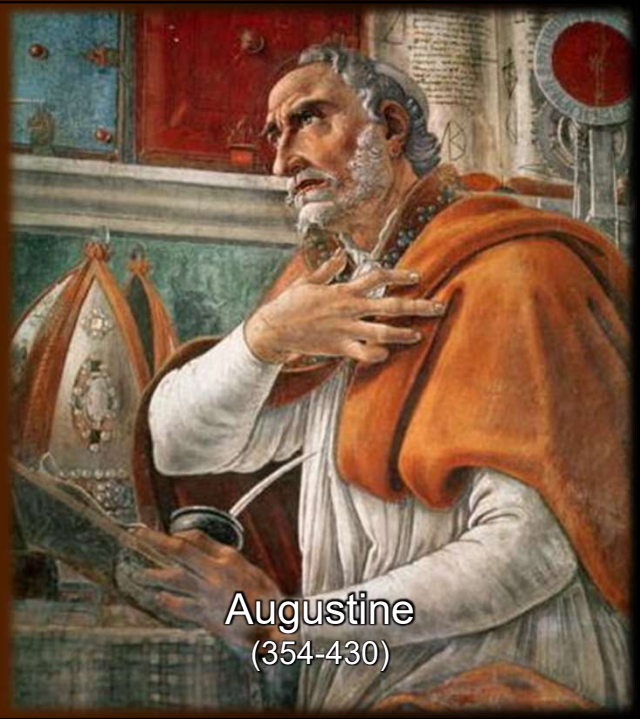
*Believing something on the basis of demonstration.*

### Faith

*Believing something on the basis of Divine authority.*

***"For who cannot see that thinking [reason] is prior to believing [faith]? For no one believes anything unless he has first thought that it is to be believed."***

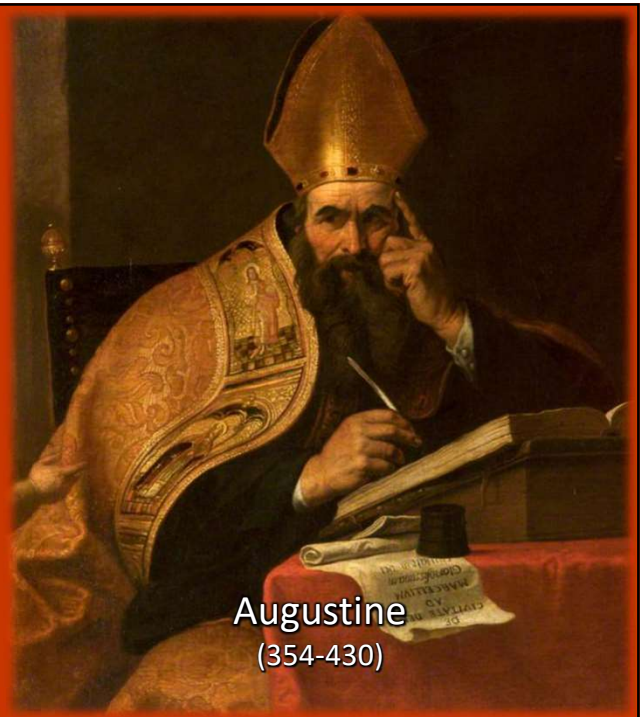
[A *Treatise on the Predestination of the Saints*, 5: "To Believe is to Think with Assent" <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf105.xxi.ii.v.html>, accessed 09/30/22]



Augustine  
(354-430)

***"Heaven forbid, after all, that God should hate in us that by which he made us more excellent than the other animals. Heaven forbid, I say, that we should believe in such a way that we do not accept or seek a rational account, since we could not even believe if we did not have rational souls."***

[Letter 120, in *Letters 100-155* (Vol. II/2), trans. Roland Teske (Hyde Park: New City Press), p. 131]



Augustine  
(354-430)

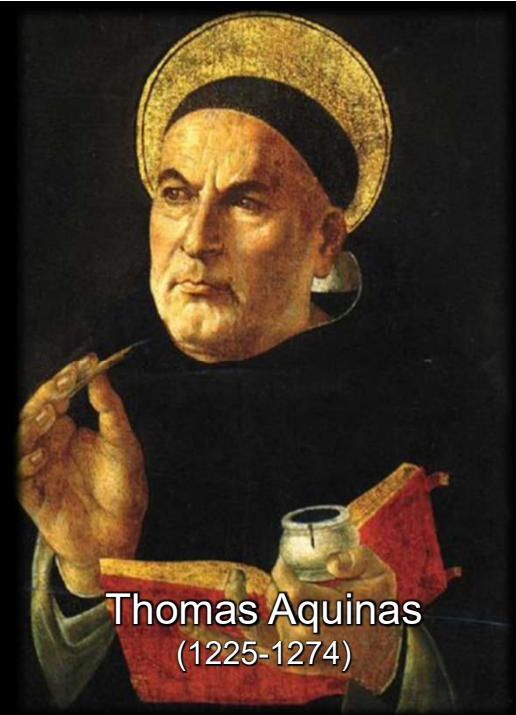
***"In certain matters, therefore, pertaining to the teaching of salvation, which we cannot grasp by reason, but which we will be able to at some point, faith precedes reason so that the heart may be purified in order that it may receive and sustain the light of the great reason, which is, of course, a demand of reason!"***

[Letter 120, Teske, p. 131]



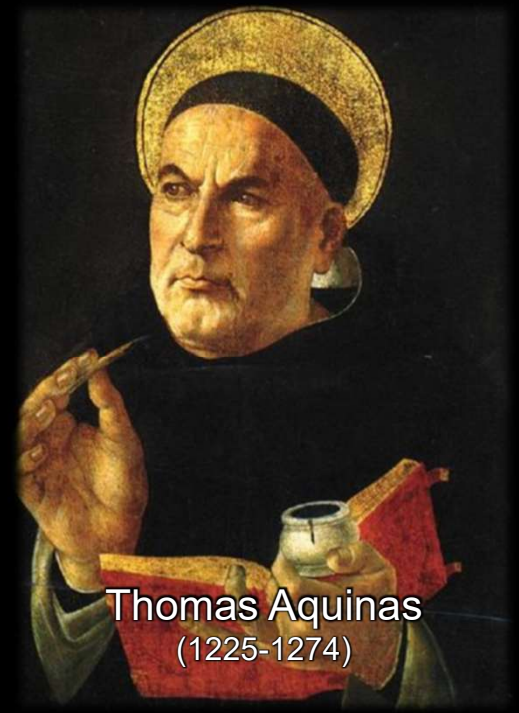
Augustine  
(354-430)

***"Those things are said to be present to the understanding which do not exceed its capacity so that the gaze of understanding may be fixed on them. For a person gives assent to such things because of the witness of his own understanding and not because of someone else's testimony."***



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

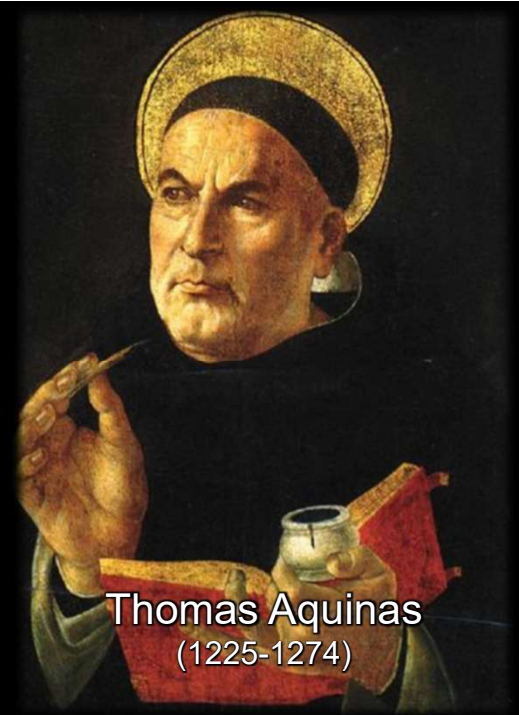
***"Those things, however, which are beyond the power of our understanding are said to be absent from the senses of the mind. Hence, our understanding cannot be fixed on them."***



**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)

***"As a result, we cannot assent to them on our own witness, but on that of someone else. These things are properly called the objects of faith."***

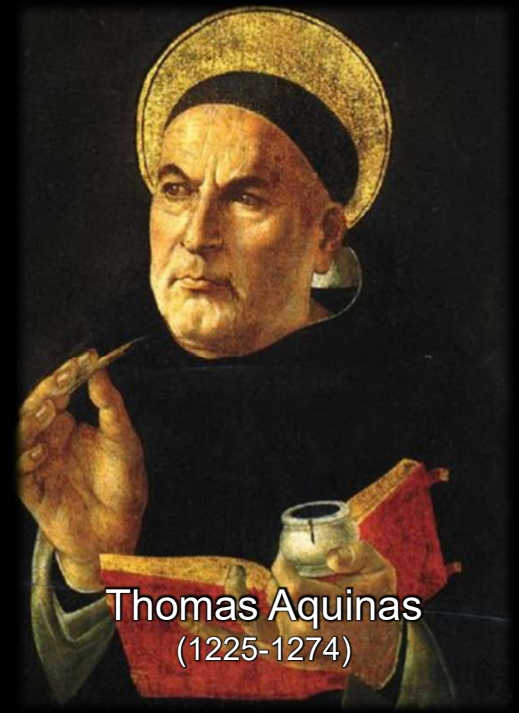
[*Truth*, QXIV, Art. 9, reply, trans. James V. McGlynn (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 249-250]



**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)

***"One who believes [i.e., has faith] gives assent to things that are proposed to him by another person, and which he himself does not see."***

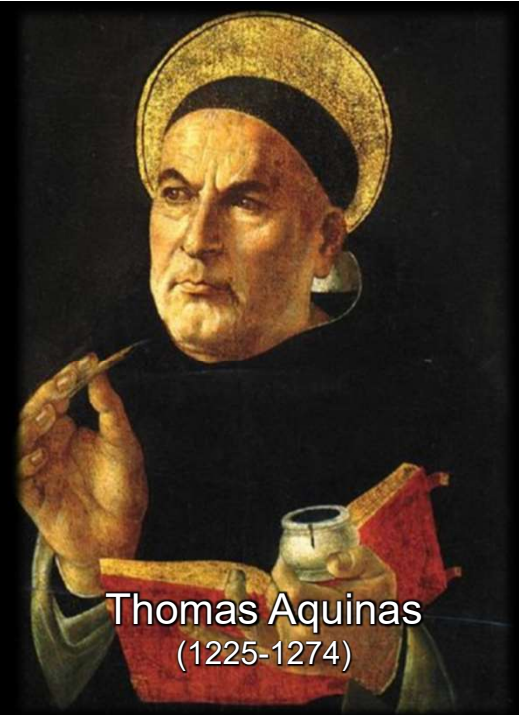
[*Truth*, QXIV, Art. 9, reply, trans. James V. McGlynn (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 249-250]



**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)

***"Since man can only know the things that he does not see himself by taking them from another who does see them, and since faith is among the things we do not see, the knowledge of the objects of faith must be handed on by one who sees them himself. Now, this one is God, Who perfectly comprehends Himself, and naturally sees His essence."***

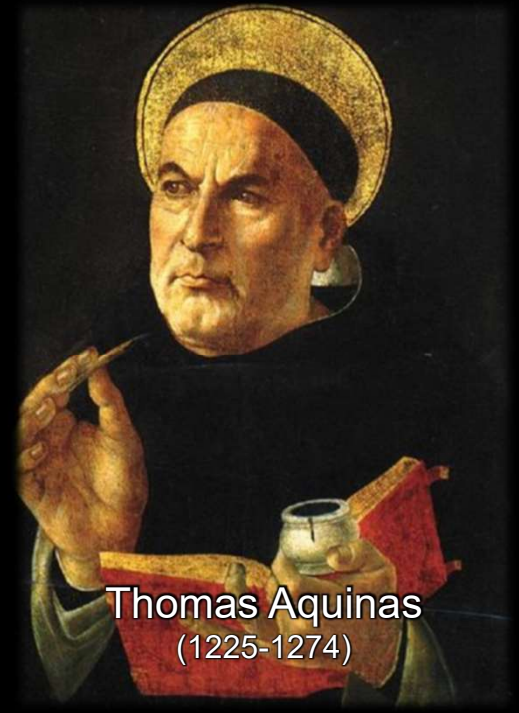
[SCG, 3, 154 [1], trans. Vernon J. Bourke, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press), 239]



**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)

*"There are some intelligible truths to which the efficacy of the agent intellect extends, like the principles we naturally know and the conclusions we deduce from them. In order to know them we do not need a new intellectual light; the light endowed by nature suffices. There are some truths, however, which do not come within the range of these principles, like the truths of faith, which transcend the faculty of reason, also future contingents and other matters of this sort. The human mind cannot know these without being divinely illumined by a new light supplementing the natural light."*

[*Faith, Reason and Theology: Questions I-IV of His Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1987), 17]

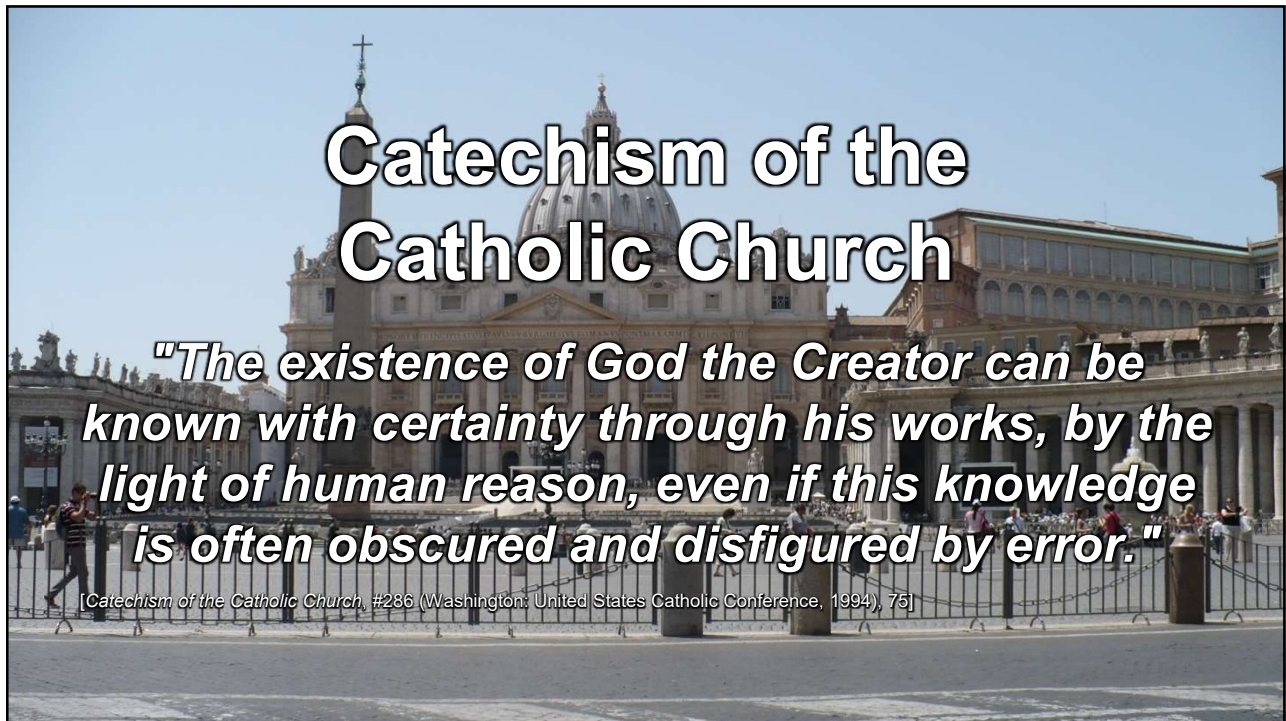


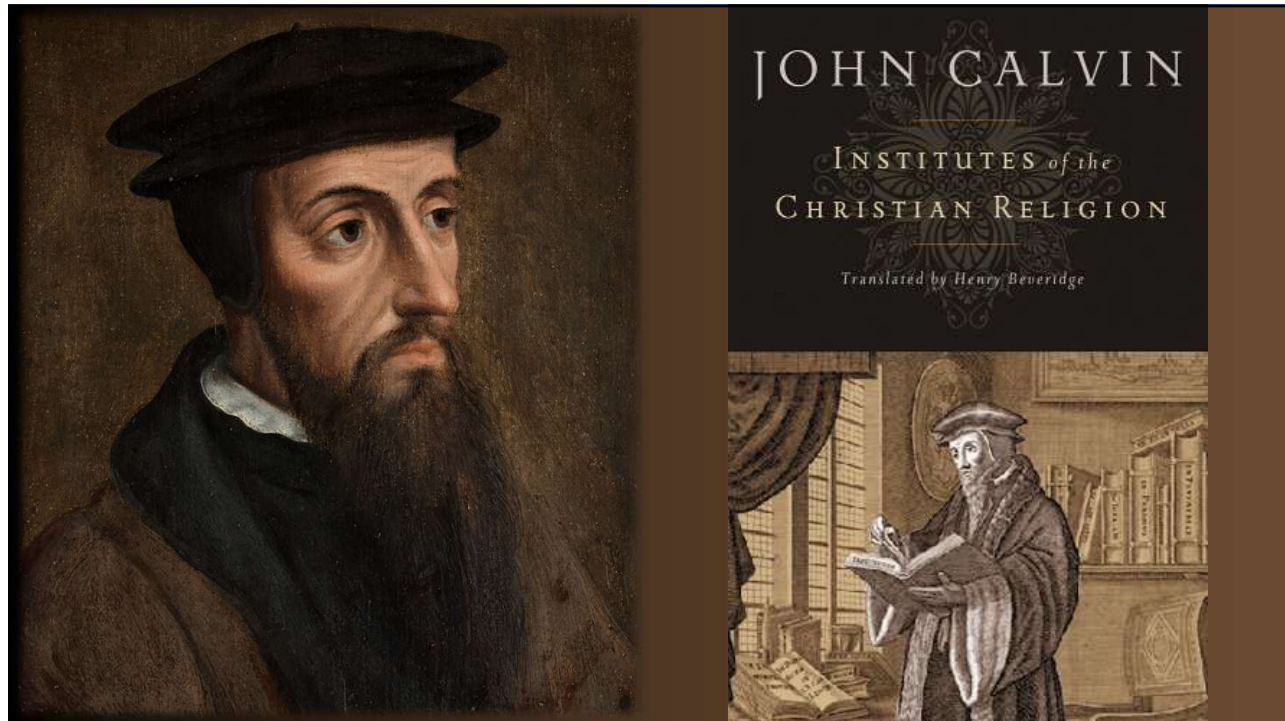
Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

## Catechism of the Catholic Church

*"The existence of God the Creator can be known with certainty through his works, by the light of human reason, even if this knowledge is often obscured and disfigured by error."*

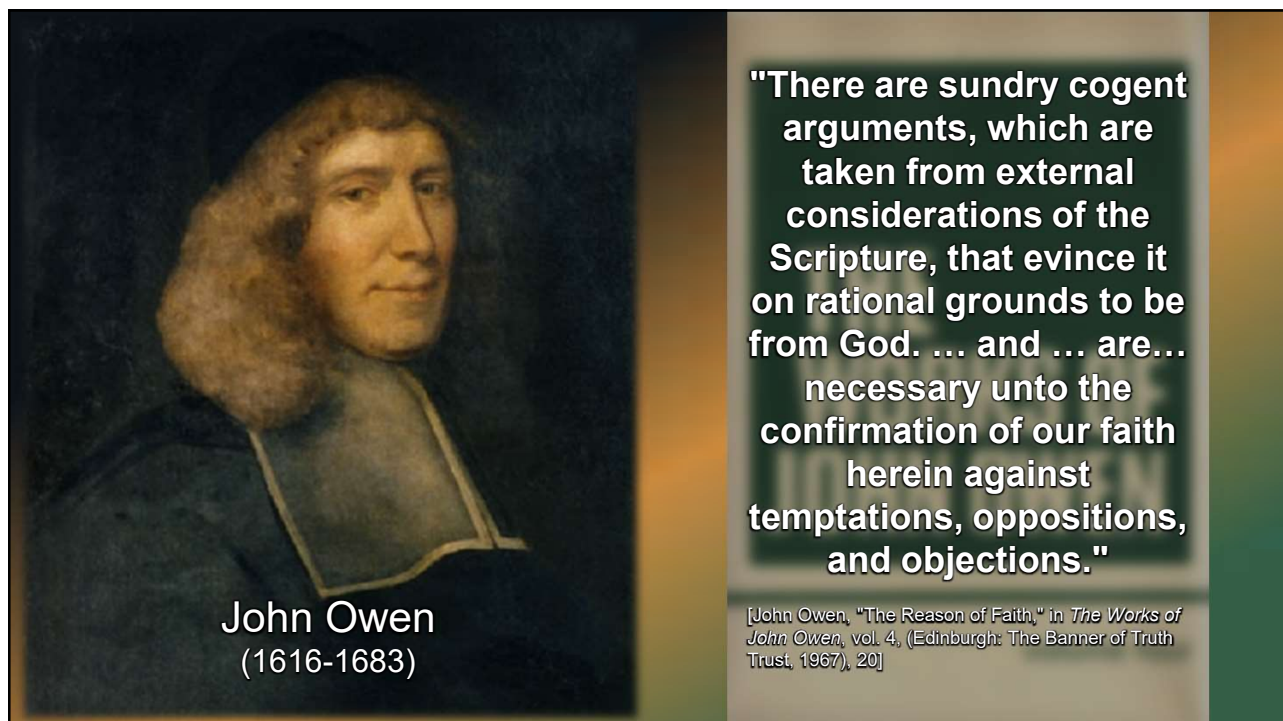
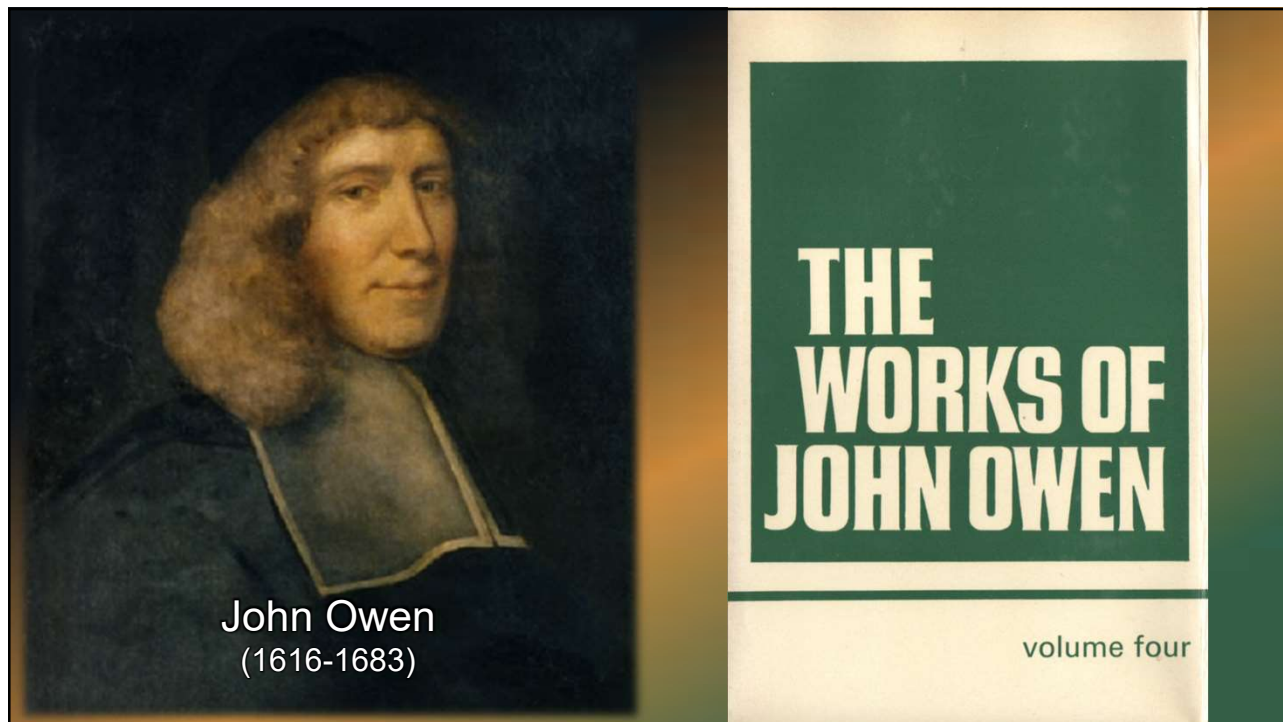
[*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #286 (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1994), 75]



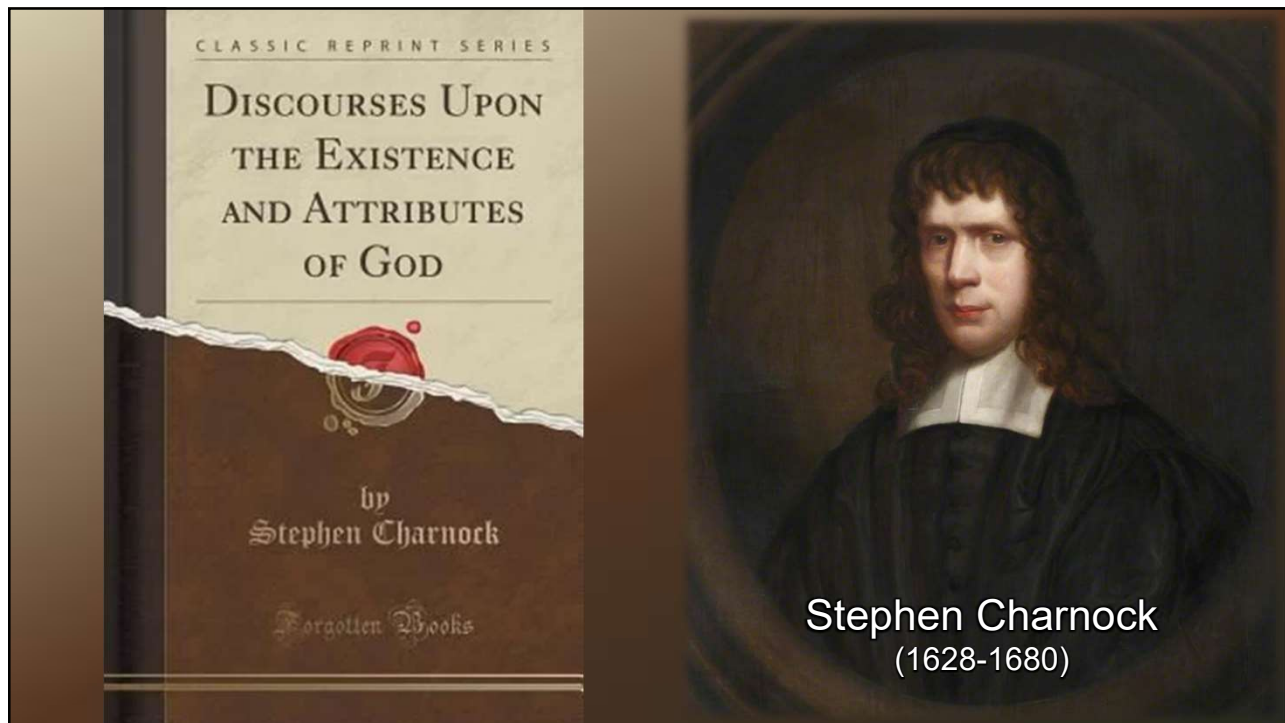


John Calvin  
(1509-1564)

[*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.2.15, trans. Henry Beveridge, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans), 236]

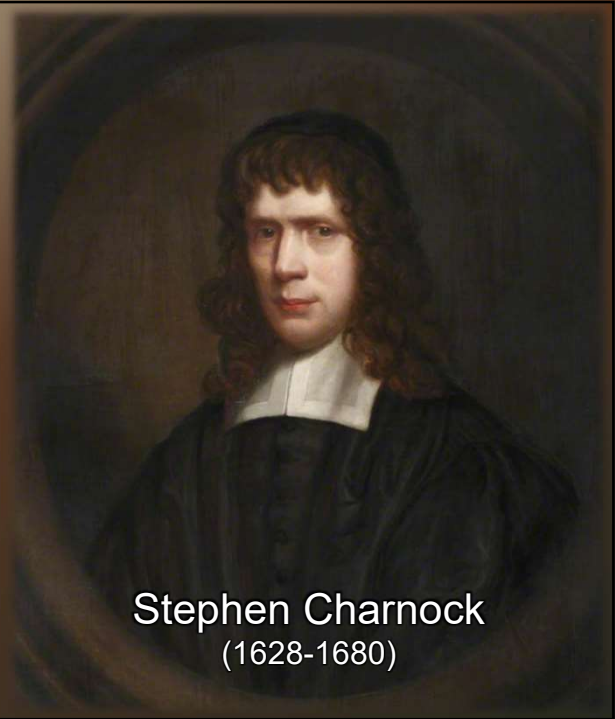






**"Men that will not listen to Scripture ... cannot easily deny natural reason .... There is a natural as well as a revealed knowledge, and the book of the creatures is legible in declaring the being of a God ...."**

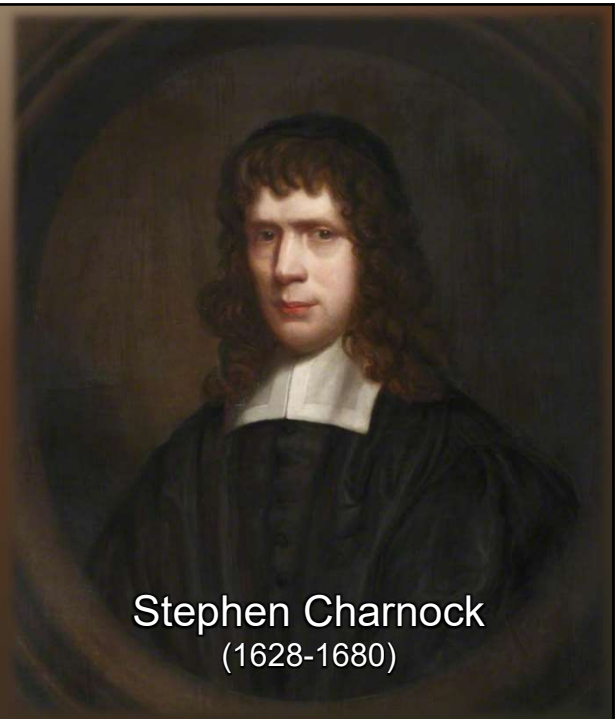
[Stephen Charnock, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 27.]



**Stephen Charnock**  
(1628-1680)

**"God in regard of his existence is not only the discovery of faith, but of reason. God hath revealed not only his being, but some sparks of his eternal power and godhead in his works, as well as in his word. ... It is a discovery of our reason ... and an object of our faith ... it is an article of our faith and an article of our reason."**

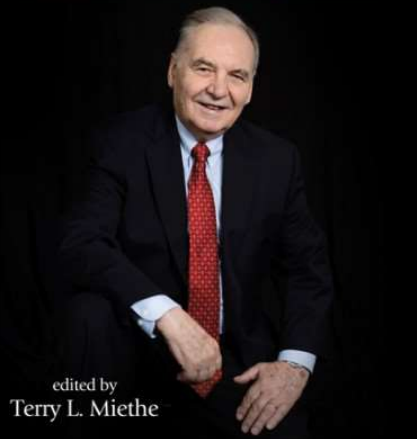
[Stephen Charnock, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 27.]



**Stephen Charnock**  
(1628-1680)

# I Am Put Here for the Defense of the Gospel

*Dr. Norman L. Geisler: A Festschrift in His Honor*



edited by  
Terry L. Miethe

## CHAPTER 12

### Defending the Handmaid

How Theology Needs Philosophy

*by Richard G. Howe*

#### Prolegomena

How Norman Geisler Helped Me in the Direction of My Life

I WAS LED TO Christ in high school by Christian friends of mine. I grew spiritually about as much as one might expect a teenager to grow, becoming involved with my youth group at church and pursuing my interesting in drumming. After graduation, I headed to the community college to study music. I tell people that I learned enough music to annoy everyone around me. When it came time to consider senior college, Christian friends of mine told me that one could go to college and study the Bible. This sounded like a tremendous prospect to me, so off I went. I attended my denomination's flagship Christian college in my state. It was my first encounter with theological liberalism. My church had not prepared me to wrestle with issues like Higher Criticism. As a result, I intellectually lost my faith in college. Looking back on that experience, I saw a range of responses among my friends who were confronted with the same intellectual challenges. Some of my friends with whom I had prayed in high school mockingly "asked Jesus to come out of their hearts" and repudiated their Christianity altogether. Others embraced the skepticism of the critical methods and settled for a more mainstream liberal Christianity. Neither of these options seemed possible for me. I was not capable of completely abandoning my faith, as shipwrecked as it was. But neither was I comfortable with any sort of liberal theology. Others of my friends tried to amputate their intellect from their faith and reject any attempt to come to terms with the challenges and questions posed by critical thinking. That, too, was not appealing to me. I knew that I could not embrace a faith that would not stand up to reason. With this, I lived in dissonance for over a year.

The short version of the story has me being intellectually rescued by a handful of apologists. Through their books and lectures, God brought into my life people like Josh McDowell, R. C. Sproul, and Norman Geisler. To this mix were added the insights and maturity of older brothers who had since come to the Lord. Being back on track, I began to consider the continued direction of my education. A short stint at a local

