

Topic Proposal

of

God is Dead Theology: Bible as Myth Debunked

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Thesis Statement

In an age of science for many the Bible is unbelievable, while not new the myth concept gives the skeptic a way to reconcile their heart with their head, this paper will show that the Bible is not a myth and thereby its author God is not dead.

Introduction

The backbone of the “God is dead” theology will always include some version of the Bible as Myth. Upon this cracked foundation the philosopher can begin to dispel the passionate religious beliefs of the masses. The Bible is a reality in our culture and throughout history and must be reckoned with by the liberal philosopher in order to gain acceptance for the view point that God is now dead. Taking this non-direct approach allows one to acknowledge what the heavens declare that there was a Creator while also giving a reasonable explanation on why it has changed. Using the myth strategy also gives an answer to those whose lives have been directly impacted by the Bible without having to reject it summarily.

Through repeated exposure to the myth concept combined with a mountain of scientific data it is natural for the laymen to see their belief begin to waiver. This is the rationale and purpose of the Bible is myth strategy. Instead of having to dismantle God wholesale, they can accept a little but at the end of the day walk away from religion as nothing more than an old wives tale. It is for this purpose that scripture must be defended as truth and not myth.

BODY

Key Players: The Problem

Bonhoeffer, Bultmann & Nietzsche.

If one were to write a book or movie script on the topic “God is Dead”, the usual suspects of characters needed would be easy to spot. They are Bonhoeffer, Bultmann & Nietzsche. During

the late nineteenth century Nietzsche put forth the premise that God at some point fell prey to self-annihilation and to be autonomous beings man must abolish God and become responsible for the world and creators of moral values.¹ Nietzsche a proclaimed atheist is credited with the term “God is dead” which the rest of this group and ultimately the entire movement capitalized on years later. But the Bible is myth problem does not just come from outside the church from the atheist and agnostic camp, surprisingly the theological world brings the lion’s share of the criticism.

Rudolf Bultmann believed that a historical view of the New Testament was futile and authored *New Testament & Mythology*. Given only the first set of information on Bultmann, the average laymen would be surprised to learn, he was a theology professor of New Testament at the University of Marburg. Bultmann proposed that the Crucifixion and Resurrection are not verifiable and factual history. Duffield sums up his theological defense as, “the Bible becomes a revelation when, by demythological interpretation, one is confronted with absolute Love as set forth in the “myth” of God’s self-less love in Christ.”² This is an attempt to introduce myth into Christian terminology as something of positive value. Kittel states it best when he said, “With Bultmann, there is within it an inherent antithesis to truth and reality which is quite intolerable.”³ However, he was not alone in providing ammunition for the Bible is myth camp.

Bonhoeffer, on the other hand, is a bit of an enigma. To read his writings you would see a fervent believer in God. An eye witness to his death by hanging in a Nazi camp stated, “I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God”.⁴ Unfortunately, liberal

¹ Cross, F. L., & Livingstone, E. A. (Eds.). (2005). In *The Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church* (3rd ed. rev., p. 462). Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

² Duffield, G. P., & Van Cleave, N. M. (1983). *Foundations of Pentecostal theology* (p. 23). Los Angeles, CA: L.I.F.E. Bible College.

³ Kittel, G., Bromiley, G. W., & Friedrich, G. (Eds.). (1964–). *Theological dictionary of the New Testament* (electronic ed., Vol. 4, p. 794). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

⁴ "Dietrich Bonhoeffer German Theologian and Resister." *Christianity Today*, August 8, 2010.

theologians from Bonhoeffer's writings conclude man must learn to live without God.⁵ Dallas Roark states it best in his writing on Bonhoeffer, "Whatever the ultimate outcome for Bonhoeffer in the history of doctrine and the history of the modern church, his name is certainly one of influence. Because of his ability to say things in a new and pungent way there has been ignited an exciting exchange of ideas in theological literature."⁶ Unfortunately due to his early death in a Nazi camp we won't find out what he really meant in his writings.

These three men, used their lives along with their writings to set the foundation and inspired four theologians from the twentieth century who espoused the "God-is-dead" theology.

Gabriel Vahanian.

The first of these theologians is Gabriel Vahanian. Professor at both Princeton and Syracuse University and author of *The Death of God: The Culture of Our Post-Christian Era*. His myth concept was that the age of science has taken us past the age of Christianity and was no longer a factor to be considered.⁷ His view reveals an iconic picture of secular Christianity through his teachings. One item of note on Vahanian was that unlike others in the "God is dead" movement, he was a lifelong church goer.⁸

Paul Van Buren.

Paul Van Buren served on the faculties of Episcopal Theological Seminary in Austin, Texas, and Temple University, Philadelphia. "Van Buren wrote *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel and Post Mortem Dei*, in which he suggests that because the Bible is myth, it is impossible and meaningless to speak of God. Secular man must instead find meaning in Jesus

⁵ Enns, P. P. (1989). *The Moody handbook of theology* (p. 579). Chicago, IL: Moody Press.

⁶ Roark, Dallas. "The Significance of Bonhoeffer." www.religion-online.org. January 1, 1972. Accessed March 19, 2015.

⁷ Ibid Cross, F. L., & Livingstone, E. A. (Eds.). (2005). In *The Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church* (3rd ed. rev., p. 462). Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

⁸ Woo, Elaine. "Key 'God Is Dead' Figure." *Los Angeles Times*, September 16, 2012, Religion sec.

and the “Easter event,” which event does not mean the resurrection, but rather a new, contagious freedom to love.”⁹ This thinking seems to be contradictory but is common among liberals and specifically those from the “God is dead” camp. They reject the Bible as God’s inspired Word but still want to partake in the religion of Christianity.

William Hamilton.

William Hamilton relished in being a part of the radical theology group. He believed that theology has neither the power nor the ability to serve the Protestant Church in most of its present institutional forms.¹⁰ He was not a fan of preaching, worship, prayer, ordination, the sacraments believing that they cannot be taken seriously by the radical theologian. His theory was simple, “If theology is tested by its ability to shape new kinds of personal and corporate existence in the times in which it lives, then it would seem that radical theology may be able to pass such a test.”¹¹ His view was one of disenchantment with an active intervening God, believing that today’s Christian claims only to be able to work out a way of "making it."¹²

Thomas J.J. Altizer.

Thomas J.J. Altizer was an interesting theological thinker of the twentieth century. Raised in the Episcopal Church he completed his entire tertiary education at the University of Chicago. What he learned at Chicago on modern historical consciousness to religious ‘objects’ profoundly shaped his viewpoint. Additionally, he was influenced by Buddhist thought. The "death of God" theology debate became heated while he was on the faculty at Emory. He

⁹ Enns, P. P. (1989). *The Moody handbook of theology* (p. 579). Chicago, IL: Moody Press.

¹⁰ Hamilton, William. "American Theology, Radicalism and the Death of God." Religion Online. Accessed March 4, 2015. <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=537&C=585>.

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

contributed the viewpoint that the death of God is an historical event, that God has died in our cosmos, in our history, in our existence."¹³

Bible is Myth: The Dilemma

Evangelicals, through the help of liberal theologians, over the past 50 years have been known to teach there are historical and scientific errors in the Bible. The problem comes in, when they assure the layperson, that regarding doctrinal issues affecting salvation the Bible is inerrant. In response to this, Gray correctly asks the question, "How can one be so certain that the Bible is correct in soteriological matters when it is in error in historical and scientific facts?"

¹⁴ Kittle points out that, "the believer must acknowledge that if the Bible is not inerrant, fully infallible, then there it loses its standing as the final authority."¹⁵ This is the premise the "God is dead" theologians create that spreads throughout the church. They start with seemingly hard issues like creation and the flood and ultimately impact the resurrection despite their best assurances.

Creation.

Stories explaining creation were known to originate in the earliest Mesopotamian civilizations. Reciting these stories at religious festivals was believed to have magical power to in nature and society. The creation stories assured worshipers that the original state of order created by the gods would continue to overcome the forces of chaos that threatened illness, ruin, sterility, and death.¹⁶ The fact that they were similar to the Biblical account gives question to which came first. More importantly, is the Bible account just another version, or is it the original

¹³ Gray, Patrick. "'God Is Dead' Controversy." *New Georgia Encyclopedia*. 06 August 2013. Web. 23 March 2015.

¹⁴ Duffield, G. P., & Van Cleave, N. M. (1983). *Foundations of Pentecostal theology* (p. 23). Los Angeles, CA: L.I.F.E. Bible College.

¹⁵ Kittel, G., Bromiley, G. W., & Friedrich, G. (Eds.). (1964–). *Theological dictionary of the New Testament* (electronic ed., Vol. 4, p. 793). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

¹⁶ Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). In *Tyndale Bible dictionary* (p. 330). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

version. Two of the biggest stories in the Bible liberals quote scientific speculation on are the Genesis account of creation and the Noahic flood.

Worldwide Flood.

Parallels from both creation and flood myths prompt the concern that the Biblical account is a Hebrew version of myths about beginnings? Lowery points out that, “the flood story of the Babylonian *Gilgamesh Epic* is incidental to the main idea of telling how Gilgamesh sought immortality. In the Bible, by contrast, the flood narrative is central to the development of the theme.”¹⁷ If you are a skeptic this certainly gives cause for concern

People who don’t take the Bible literally assume that it is not true undermining it. In *Defending Your Faith*, Story writes, “The ancients had a more primitive view of the world. They readily accepted the unusual and fantastic because they were not as scientifically astute and highly educated as we are.”¹⁸ Fast forward to modern times and we know that what many ancient people groups believed were myths. Instead of a world consuming flood the legend is that it was a local flood of epic proportion. For every Bible story in Genesis there is an answer provided that cast doubt on it.

Resurrection.

Willhelm De Wette put forth claims that cast doubt on the bible miracles by making out the stories of the birth, resurrection, and ascension to mere myths.¹⁹ The employment of myths was De Wette’s attempt to explain how metaphor and allegory were turned into fact as the Bible

¹⁷ Lowery, K. (2007). The Chronology of the Kings of Israel and Judah. In T. Cabal, C. O. Brand, E. R. Clendenen, P. Copan, & J. P. Moreland (Eds.), *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (p. 2). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

¹⁸ Story, D. (1997). *Defending your faith* (p. 50). Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications.

¹⁹ Geisler, N. L., & Nix, W. E. (1986). *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Rev. and expanded., pp. 158–159). Chicago: Moody Press.

was penned. Coming from a scholar one can understand how this can make sense to the layperson which further perpetuates the questioning of Biblical accounts.

On another front Pannenberg emphasized the need to accept the resurrection of Christ however defects in his theology are noted. He rejects Barth's claim that "the truth of Christianity enters into the hearts of Christians only by a miracle of grace."¹⁵ Falling in line with historical criticism, Pannenberg does not identify the Bible as being revealed from God. Instead he finds error in the Bible, suggesting too that the resurrection accounts are not accurate. Ultimately Pannenberg makes history the authority instead of Scripture.²⁰ The Christian should embrace rather than run from what history has to offer regarding proving the scripture to be truthful and accurate.

Bible is Historically Reliable: The Facts

That Christ lived, died, and rose again is not a clever myth made up by men. Easley points out that Peter claimed to be an eyewitness of Christ's glory on the mount of transfiguration when he, James, and John heard the voice of the Father say, "This is My beloved Son. I take delight in Him!"²¹ Philo of Alexandria, a first century philosopher, believed that the essential distinction between the Bible and religion, rested in the fact that religion relies largely on myths whereas the Bible contains history.²² He refuted other Jewish apologists before him who devalued the biblical stories by explaining them as myths.

If Philo were a modern day theologian or philosopher he would seek to demonstrate that the Bible is historically reliable using three lines of defense. First, he would use manuscript

²⁰ Enns, P. P. (1989). *The Moody handbook of theology* (p. 589). Chicago, IL: Moody Press.

²¹ Easley, K. H. (2002). *Holman QuickSource guide to understanding the Bible* (p. 371). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

²² Kittel, G., Bromiley, G. W., & Friedrich, G. (Eds.). (1964–). *Theological dictionary of the New Testament* (electronic ed., Vol. 4, p. 790). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

origin, followed by internal and external evidence to support this position. While Philo is not with us we can still use these same methods to prove the historical reliability of scripture.

Manuscript Origin.

F.F. Bruce stated that: "There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament."²³ Ernest O'Neil believed that, "No piece of ancient history is so certain and assured as the history recorded in the New Testament; no similar history is attested to by so many manuscripts of such an age. No other history has been subjected to such intense literary, textual, historical, legal, and theological examination and remained so unscathed."²⁴ Compare the more than 30,000 manuscript copies of the New Testament to the mere 650 copies of Homer's Iliad and one cannot help but recognize that no ancient history can be trusted if we say the New Testament cannot be trusted based on manuscript evidence. The Iliad is accepted as reliable without coming anywhere near the threshold the Bible manuscripts meet.

Internal Evidence.

Aristotle's dictum is the gold standard in cases of internal criticisms: "The benefit of the doubt is to be given to the document itself, and not arrogated by the critic to himself."²⁵ Ancient documents enjoyed this benefit of the doubt unless it proved otherwise as Story clarified: "In evaluating ancient documents, it is customary to assume that a document is truthful unless the author disqualifies himself by contradictions or by provable inaccuracies, unless, of course, there is internal evidence of text tampering."²⁶ The manuscripts of both the New and Old Testaments

²³ F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1963), p. 78.

²⁴ O'Neil, Ernest. "Is The Bible History or Myth?" <http://www.worldinvisible.com/apologet/bible.htm>.

²⁵ John Warwick Montgomery. *History and Christianity* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1971) [summarizing Aristotle, *Art of Poetry*], p. 29.

²⁶ Story, D. (1997). *Defending your faith* (p. 42). Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications.

have far exceeded this standard as Norman Geisler points out stating “the total textual corruption of the Iliad is 5.0% as compared to only 0.5% for the New Testament! And yet, in light of these facts, "scholars" still doubt the historical reliability of the New Testament!”²⁷ At this point one may wonder if scholars are looking at the evidence or holding onto a philosophy. While the internal evidence is overwhelming historical reliability increases when the third area of external evidence is considered.

External Evidence.

The twentieth century was supposed to have the fields of science dispelling the Bible through discoveries made in the field of Archaeology. The reverse happened. Even though there were lots of discoveries, the facts remain that they ultimately corroborate biblical evidence. Unfortunately, archaeological finds that confirm the biblical record barely receives any media notice.²⁸ Just over twenty years ago the ossuary box containing the bones of Caiaphas, the high priest who led the trial of Jesus, was discovered giving strong external evidence to the gospel accounts. Not only do we find archaeology evidence supporting Biblical claims, secular sources from the first century corroborate the Bible as well.

First century historian Flavius Josephus mentions more than a dozen people spoken about in the Bible including Jesus. The Jewish Talmud mentions Jesus going so far as to include his crucifixion. Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus also mentioned Jesus in his writings. Charlie Campbell concludes: “These references outside the Bible have led historians to a consensus—Jesus was a real person. Even Bart Ehrman, one of the most zealous critics of the Bible alive

²⁷ Norman L. Geisler and Ronald M. Brooks. *When Skeptics Ask* (Wheaton, IL: SP Publications, Inc.), p.361

²⁸ Maier, Paul. "Christian Research Journal, Volume 27, Number 2 (2004)." *Christian Research Journal* 27, no. 2 (2004). <http://www.equip.org/article/biblical-archaeology-factual-evidence-to-support-the-historicity-of-the-bible/#christian-books-2>.

today, acknowledges Jesus lived. He wrote:"²⁹ Both archaeology and first century historians bring us to the same conclusion that the Bible is historically reliable.

Conclusion

How did we here from there? It is understandable to see men like Nietzsche say all manner of derogatory things about the Bible, Christianity and ultimately God. To hear it come from within the church and from learned theologians on top of that is hard to fathom. That is the position we find ourselves in in the twenty first century. We must wonder where they went wrong but rather prove that they are wrong. We cannot do this through theological and philosophical arguments. These provide too much room within which the argument can oscillate.

Instead we should take up the charge to prove what is written in the Bible. We do this through the historical record of Biblical manuscripts. They set the gold standard for reliability and the believer should proclaim this victory because the secular philosopher will not raise this evidence. Boldly rush into the internal evidence we find within scripture. Place it on trial and see where the blind scales of truth point. A God who can speak the world into creation can certainly defend Himself through his own inspired words. When the critic tires of where this leads him take to the external evidence where once again the open minded individual will see that there is far too much evidence to continue to keep ones head in the sand refusing to acknowledge its existence.

The theologian Paul stated "let God be true and every man a liar". (Romans 3:4) The stakes are far too high to allow His word to be questioned from within or denied from without. It

²⁹ Campbell, Charlie. "[Http://www.alwaysbeready.com/extrabiblical-historical-sources-corroborate-the-bible.](http://www.alwaysbeready.com/extrabiblical-historical-sources-corroborate-the-bible)" [Http://www.alwaysbeready.com/](http://www.alwaysbeready.com/). January 1, 2014. Accessed March 28, 2015.

is much more important than where dinosaurs came from and what do you mean by a world wide flood. Men and women's souls are at stake and we cannot hide in this age of science just because the majority find the Bible to be unbelievable. It is incumbent upon each believer to rise up and dispute myth concept refusing to allow the skeptic a way to reconcile their heart with their head. The Bible is not a myth and its author God is not dead.

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of From Gods to God ."-Rabbi Rachel Esserman, Reporter, "Shinan and Zakovitch approach 30 specific Bible stories (e.g., Was Goliath really slain by a young boy named David?) as literary archaeologists. . . . Their thoughtful and sympathetic exegesis uncovers possible explanations why the biblical authors saw their interpretations of these stories as best suited to instruct a nation.Â Gary A. Anderson, Hesburgh Professor of Catholic Theology, University of Notre Dame. Lccn. 2012-020072. "God is Dead" (German: Gott ist tot ; also known as The Death of God) is a widely quoted statement made by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche used the phrase to express his idea that the Enlightenment had eliminated the possibility of the existence of God. However, proponents of the strongest form of the Death of God theology have used the phrase in a literal sense, meaning that the Christian God, who had existed at one point, has ceased to exist. Nietzsche's complete statement is "God is dead and we have killed him. Next we must kill Man."™ All the protestations of following God™s will have, over the generations, caused many a bloody conflict, and all too often over a minor disagreement, an iota, if you will (google this one, it™s a fascinating history). But the, "œ..the so-called Kingdom of Heaven is neither here nor there, it is nowhere"it is a condition of the heart." So he had a very nuanced understanding, to my view, of the human condition, even if he was jaundiced at times. Nowhere near as grumpy as Schopenhauer, by the way. But I digress. Pexels.com. The Bible is an ancient book. The text tells stories of what happened thousands of years ago, and many of the most miraculous events that occurred happened with only a few witnesses. As such, it is no surprise to many of the faithful that there is somewhat limited physical evidence to back up the claims of the Bible. Biblical skeptics, however, love to pounce on stories that have limited hard, physical evidence as proof that the Bible is filled with nonsense. It is such attitudes that led many skeptical scholars to conclude that much of the Old Testament was little more than fantas