

IS CHRISTIANITY ALONE FULLY TRUE AND IS JESUS CHRIST REALLY THE ONLY WAY TO GOD?—Part 4

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The Innate Knowledge of God in Atheists, Skeptics and Other Opponents of Christianity (con't)

The Bible is clear that all men know of God and that all men are “close” to God. In reference to the incarnation of Jesus Christ it says, “The true light that gives light to *every man* was coming into the world” (John 1:9, emphasis added). In Romans 1 we read,

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since *what may be known about God is plain* to them, because *GOD has made it plain* to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been *clearly seen*, being *understood* from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Romans 1:18-21, emphasis added)

The term “since the creation of the world” covers all men and women who have ever lived. So Romans 1 must also be true for all atheists and skeptics. God doesn’t say He has placed a knowledge of Himself in every one except atheists and skeptics. To illustrate, even the most famous atheist of the 20th century, Jean-Paul Sartre, confessed the following in an interview published in *Harper’s* magazine for February 1984: “Even if one does not believe in God, there are elements of the idea of God that remain in us....”²⁵ Sartre goes on to state, even though he had supposedly been a convinced atheist from the age of 8 or 9, that the structure of consciousness²⁶ and his own intuitive awareness and experience in life almost compelled him to accept the existence of God:

As for me, I don’t see myself as so much dust that has appeared in the world but as a being that was expected, prefigured, called forth. In short, as a being that could, it seems, come only from a creator; and this idea of a creating hand that created me refers me back to God. Naturally this is not a clear, exact idea that I set in motion every time I think of myself. It contradicts many of my other ideas; but it is there, floating vaguely. And when I think of myself I *often* think rather in this way, for wont of *being able to think otherwise*.²⁷

Even as a leading atheist, Sartre could never escape God because he had not only been *created*, he had been created “in God’s image” (Gen. 1:26-27). God had placed the knowledge of Himself directly into the being of Sartre. So, even though Sartre further stated, “This life owes nothing to God,” he knew that his atheism was a personal choice to ignore God, not proof that God didn’t exist.

And whether or not a person admits it, virtually everyone, at some point in life, searches *for* God or some concept beyond themselves that will give meaning to life. Again, Sartre himself noted, “God is silent and that I cannot deny; everything in myself calls for God and that I cannot forget.”²⁸ Thus, “in his philosophical writings, in his biographies, and in his plays, Sartre is definitely concerned with man’s relationship to God and to the realm of the

holy.”²⁹

Sartre thought God was “silent,” but of course, God isn’t silent at all. Paul told the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers at the Areopagus in Athens, Greece:

[God] “himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the *times set for them* and the *exact places* where they should live. God *did this* so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is *not far* from each one of us. ‘*For in him we live and move and have our being.*’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’” (Acts 17:25-28, emphasis added)

If everyone is the offspring of God, if God is not far from us, if we have our being in Him, if everyone is made in His image, and if God has “enlightened,” “clearly revealed” and “made Himself known” to every person who ever lived, then God has hardly been “silent,” even apart from His personal revelation in the Bible.

In *Eternity in Their Hearts*, Don Richardson provides many examples showing how the concept of one true supreme God has existed throughout history in hundreds of cultures around the world. For example, concerning the “Sky-god” he writes:

In hundreds of instances attested to by literally millions of folk religionists worldwide, the Sky-god does exactly what El Elyon [the biblical God] did through Melchizedek [to Abraham, Gen. 14]. He cheerfully acknowledges the approaching messengers of Yahweh as *His* messengers! He takes pains to make it very clear—He Himself is none other than the very God those particular foreigners proclaim!... This is surely a powerful extra-biblical evidence for the authenticity of the Bible as revelation from the one true and universal God! It is also, as we shall see later, the prime reason on the human level for the phenomenal acceptance Christianity has found among people of so many folk religions on this planet. In addition, Scripture after Scripture has testified down through the centuries that our God has not left Himself without witness—even apart from the preaching of the gospel (see Acts 14:16, 17). That witness—though different in kind and quality from the biblical witness itself—is still a witness to Him!... If you belong to a tradition which has been teaching Christians for centuries that the rest of the world sits in total darkness and knows zilch about God, it becomes a little embarrassing to have to say, “We have been wrong. In actual fact, more than 90 percent of this world’s folk religions acknowledge at least the existence of God. Some even anticipate His redeeming concern for mankind.”

The Apostle John’s statement that the world lies in spiritual wickedness (see 1 John 5:19) needs to be coupled with the Apostle Paul’s acknowledgment that God has not left Himself without witness. For that witness has penetrated the wickedness to some degree almost everywhere!

As the Apostle John put it, “The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overpowered it” (John 1:5, footnote). John further specified the “light” he describes is the “true light that gives light to every man” (1:9).^{29a}

If all this is true, then everyone *does* know there is a God and they also know certain things about Him. Since God Himself has been their teacher, there is no possibility of failure. There are no atheists finally, in foxholes, operating rooms, or anywhere else.

Indeed, to suppress the truth that God has placed within each man only leads to varying degrees of neurosis. As the noted psychologist Rollo May wrote in *The Art of Counseling*, “I

have been startled by the fact that practically every genuine atheist with whom I have dealt has exhibited unmistakable neurotic tendencies. How [do we] account for this curious fact?"³⁰ And, perhaps even more suggestive, according to Senior Pastor Jess Moody of the First Baptist Church of Van Nuys, California, "Lie detector tests were administered to more than 25,000 people. One of the questions was, 'Do you believe in God?' In every case, when a person answered no, the lie detector said he was lying."³¹

Man's biggest folly is to ignore the God who is there, the God who we all know is there and to live our life as if He were irrelevant. It is folly because it is a kind of intuitive and intellectual madness, not to mention something dangerous. It's like a man in a boat in the middle of the ocean saying, "there are no sharks" when he sees fins all around him. Because he is lost at sea, he has radioed for help and he sees a rescue boat on the horizon. His salvation is only a few hours away and yet he decides to go swimming.

Terrance Sweeney concluded his book with the following comment, "The overwhelming conclusion from the sum of the interviews is that God, or the One people refer to as God, is very much a part of human experience and consciousness."³² So, everyone believes in God. But if God exists and there is only one true God, then how do we find Him? We will begin to answer that question next time.

Notes:

25. Simone de Beauvoir, "A Conversation About Death and God," *Harper's* magazine, February 1984, p. 39.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 39. emphasis added

28. Clark H. Pinnock, "Cultural Apologetics: An Evangelical Standpoint," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, January-March, 1970, 61, citing Charles L. Glicksberg, *Literature and Religion*, p. 221.

29. Haim Gordon, "Sartre's Struggle Against the Holy," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* (NY: Abingdon 1967) Vol. 19 (1986), p. 95.

29a. Don Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1981), pp. 53-54.

30. Rollo May, *The Art of Counseling*, (NY Abingdon 1967), p. 215.

31. Cited in *Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 1986. We could not confirm this research. Convinced philosophical atheists clearly could pass lie detector tests since these measure conviction of belief. But such results, if valid, clearly show that the more garden-variety practical, as opposed to philosophical, atheists really aren't so sure of their views.

32. Terrance A. Sweeney, *God And...* (Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press 1985), p. 203.