



AREOPAGUS PROCLAMATION

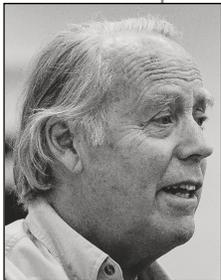
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Hardball Skepticism

Richard B. Keyes responds to objections from three seasoned skeptics.

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SKEPTIC #1 TO KEYES

I am perfectly content as a non-Christian. I do not believe in an afterlife and even if I did I would never consider a religion as restrictive and exclusivist as Christianity.

KEYES TO SKEPTIC #1

You are content as you are — fair enough. If contentment is what you are after, the Christian faith may not have much to say to you for a while. But lots of things that bring contentment are not true. Would you be willing to consider something if it disturbed your contentment, but might actually be true?

How do you know that there is no conscious existence after death? The main reason that people claim to *not* believe in an afterlife is that they think that the idea is a naive wish-fulfillment in the face of the fear of death. But disbelief in an afterlife could have the same intellectual status. It could be the hopeful wish that there might be no accountability

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to anyone after we die, and the hope that there is no intrusive authority in our lives before that time. Christian exclusiveness starts with the idea that the Gospel of Christ is true in

a way that will exclude some other claims to truth. Is this so arrogant? Everybody in the world who has any religious or metaphysical convictions believes that the majority of people in the world are wrong about their religious and metaphysical convictions.

For example, you exclude *my* convictions. But that's okay. We can talk about it much better knowing where we both stand — two absolutists having a civil discussion.

SKEPTIC #2 TO KEYES

I have a real problem with an alleged omnipotent god using fallible old men to tell people who he is. Why should any one have to accept ancient hearsay as evidence for the existence of a god? If Jesus is who he said he was, then he shouldn't have any problem directly convincing me of that fact, especially considering the penalty with which he is supposedly going to zap anyone who doesn't believe. In fact, I'd say, all things considered, that he is actually a twisted monster for *not* providing such direct evidence.

KEYES SKEPTIC #2

You are right to be suspicious about fallible men. But if God really *is* omnipotent, there is no reason why He cannot use fallible people to carry out His plans — including plans to reveal Himself and get it right. God does not promise to prove Himself unequivocally to those who believe that He is a "twisted monster," but to those who approach Him in humility. It may be a good idea to think about your own fallibility as a judge in these things.

The apostle Paul, writing to people in Rome, did not appeal to "ancient hearsay" at all, but to their own present experience. He pointed to their awareness of the fingerprints of the

Creator in the grandeur of creation. He also pointed them to their need for salvation because they all fell short of the moral judgments they made of others. They (we) are *all* hypocrites and in need of mercy.

SKEPTIC #3 TO KEYES

The bible makes a lot of claims about Jesus' great feats. But if it all really happened, why didn't some secular scholars at the time report it? You'd think that really amazing stuff like a great darkness at Noon (crucifixion) and stars moving across the sky toward Bethlehem (Christmas), would have been headline stories. But all we have are the biased claims of Christ's own diehard supporters.

KEYES TO SKEPTIC #3

The reporting of the events around the life and death of Jesus are just about what you would expect in the first century, given that Jesus' following was so small during His lifetime, that He lived in such a remote corner of the Roman Empire, and given the state of astronomy at that time. Despite these limitations, Josephus (the first century Jewish historian), and Tacitus (an early second century Roman historian) make significant reference to Him. And actually, the very thing that you call for *does* exist. The mid-first century Roman historian Thallus makes reference to the darkness of the sun at the time of the crucifixion as he tries to refute the apostles' claim. He argues that the crucifixion had, by chance, taken place during a solar eclipse.

Your position discounts the experience and witness of those who were "biased" — presumably referring to the New Testament writers, biased because they believed in Jesus. But who was unbiased? Can we count on those who rejected Jesus to have been unbiased? Why? Those closest to the events had high stakes in trying to protect their power base. The reports of Jesus' followers [actually] gain a certain authority because of their willingness to die for their witness to the resurrection.

More Evidence in Defense and Confirmation of the Christian Faith