

1-1-2008

Balancing Belief : The Resolution of Belief Dilemmas

Andrew J. Borders III

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Balancing Belief: The Resolution of Belief Dilemmas

Thesis Submitted to
The Graduate College of
Marshall University

In Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Sociology

by

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Marshall University

May 2008

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ABSTRACT

Balancing Belief: The Resolution of Belief Dilemmas

by Andrew J. Borders, III

Societies create their own worlds and, once created, these worlds have to be maintained. In particular, the plausibility of these worlds has to be legitimized for each new generation. The purpose of this thesis is to develop an instrument that will measure how Christians maintain the plausibility of their religious world. I have constructed a survey that will explore the social matrix encompassing a person's religious beliefs, the actual beliefs themselves, and the extent to which they are certain of these beliefs. To determine how Christians maintain the plausibility of their religious beliefs in an increasingly secularized world, I have borrowed the modes of belief dilemma resolution developed by Robert Abelson (Abelson 1959). These modes are: denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence. In addition, I have created "dilemmas of belief" with responses reflecting each of these modes of resolution.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Marty Laubach for his guidance throughout this entire project. Research always begins with a question in the mind of the researcher, and Dr. Laubach provided invaluable assistance in helping me to operationalize mine.

Appreciation also goes to the members of my thesis committee for their willingness to serve in this capacity. I am also grateful for a Summer Thesis Research Grant awarded through Marshall University that provided financial support needed to distribute my survey. Finally, I would like to thank my wife, who has provided steady support all throughout this journey.

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Balancing Belief: The Resolution of Belief Dilemmas

I. INTRODUCTION

As Peter Berger states, we create our own worlds (Berger 1967). Once created, however, these worlds have to be maintained. In particular, the plausibility of these worlds has to be legitimized for each new generation. The purpose of this thesis is to develop an instrument that will measure how Christians maintain the plausibility of their religious world. For many of these Christians, the Bible is the tool by which this worldview is legitimized and to which believers turn to reinforce its plausibility. Using questions adapted from the General Social Survey (GSS) and other regional and national surveys (see the American Religion Data Archive), I have constructed a survey that will explore the social matrix encompassing a person's religious beliefs, the actual beliefs themselves, and the extent to which they are certain of these beliefs.

This in itself would only provide a description of these religious belief systems. The purpose, however, of this instrument is to determine how people maintain the plausibility of these beliefs in an increasingly secularized world. In his article, "Modes of Resolution of Belief Dilemmas" (1959), Robert Abelson suggests four ways or *modes* that people use to resolve dilemmas of belief. These modes are: denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence. By utilizing his modes we have a convenient way of categorizing responses to dilemmas of belief. For this survey instrument, I have created "dilemmas of belief" with responses reflecting each of these modes of resolution (see Appendix A: Data Dictionary).

As stated above, many Christians, especially fundamentalist Christians, orient their entire worldview around the text of the Bible. The dilemmas of belief that I have created come directly from this ancient text and confront respondents with situations contrary to contemporary norms. I have created these dilemmas out of my many years as a participant, pastor, and hospital chaplain in the world of conservative Christianity.

This instrument has been developed as a survey tool (see Appendix B: Religious Survey), and will compare the religious environments, social support networks, and religious beliefs of respondents with the modes they utilize to resolve these dilemmas. This study will make an empirical contribution within the field of the sociology of knowledge and, in particular, to studies on the social construction of reality.

II. THEORY

Every individual is socialized into a world of meaning. This world has been created and is sustained by society, and it confronts the new member of society as a taken-for-granted reality. The effectiveness of socialization depends on the extent to which an individual successfully internalizes this objective, taken-for-granted reality. This socially constructed world is, according to Peter Berger, an ordering of experience, and this meaningful order he calls a *nomos* (1967: 19). *Nomos* stands in contrast to Durkheim's concept of *anomie*, a loss of meaning which threatens to plunge the individual into chaos. This socially constructed *nomos* is sustained by conversation with significant others and is a "shield against terror" (Berger 1967: 21-22). When this *nomos* is threatened, so is the individual's orientation in his or her "world".

The survey instrument I have developed seeks to understand how people respond to such "threats" to their socially constructed religious *nomoi*. Do these individuals feel free to explore alternatives to these religious *nomoi* or is the threat too great for such exploration? Who feels free to explore and who feels threatened and how do they resolve dilemmas of belief? This is what I will discover by using this instrument.

This instrument revolves around the modes of belief dilemma resolution developed by Robert Abelson (1959). Abelson analyzed dilemmas of belief in the context of belief dyads, which consist of two cognitive *elements* and the *relation* between them. These elements each have an affect value, positive if the value is liked and negative if the value is disliked, and an *associative* relation (indicated by such words as *is*, *has*, *includes*, *likes*, *helps*, *produces*, or *implies*) between the two elements if the relation is positive and *dissociative* (indicated by such words as *avoids*, *hates*, *hinders*, *defeats*, *destroys*, or *is incompatible with*) if the relation is negative (1959:343). In the diagrams below, an associative relation will be illustrated by an unbroken line and a dissociative relation by a broken line. According to Abelson, a dyad is in a state of *imbalance* if one of the elements is inconsistent with the other (1959:343). To eliminate or reduce this imbalance there is a "tendency, a pressure, toward the attainment of cognitive balance" (1959:344).

Dyadic beliefs can be either *balanced* or *imbalanced*. In a balanced belief structure, there can be (1) two positively valued objects, related associatively, (2) one positively and one negatively valued object, related dissociatively, or (3) two negatively valued objects, related associatively (1959:344). These are illustrated in the diagrams below (see Figures 1a-c):

Figure 1a: Two Positively Valued Objects Related Associatively

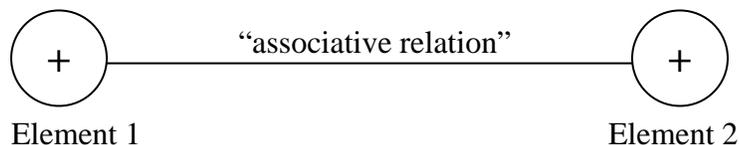


Figure 1b: One Positively and One Negatively Valued Object Related Dissociatively

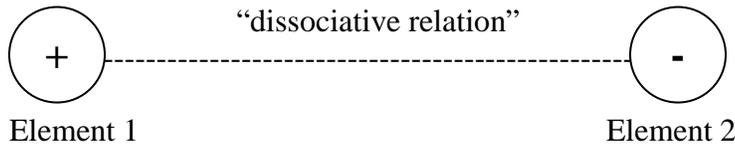
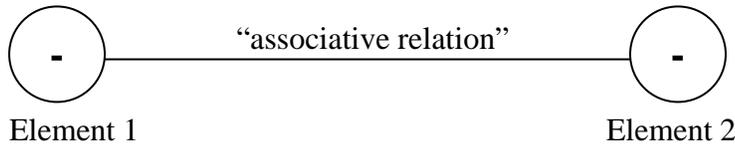


Figure 1c: Two Negatively Valued Objects Related Associatively



On the other hand, two beliefs can be imbalanced, in which case there are (1) two positively valued objects, related dissociatively, (2) one positively and one negatively valued object, related associatively, or (3) two negatively valued objects, related dissociatively (1959:344). In the diagrams to follow, associative relations will be identified by an unbroken line, whereas dissociative relations with a broken one. These are illustrated in the diagrams below (see Figures 2a-c):

Figure 2a: Two Positively Valued Objects Related Dissociatively

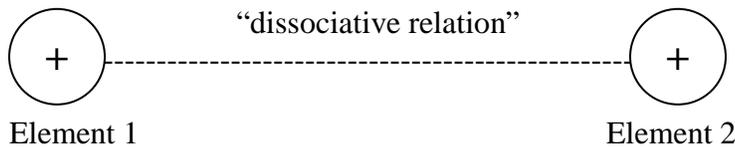


Figure 2b: One Positively and One Negatively Valued Object Related Associatively

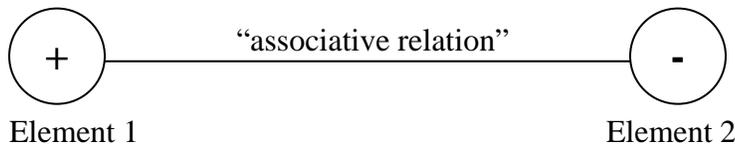
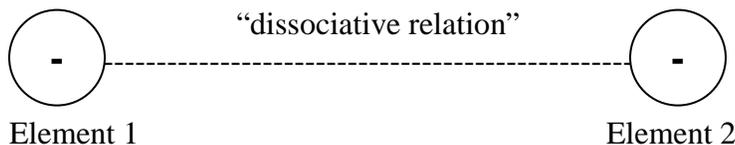


Figure 2c: Two Negatively Valued Objects Related Dissociatively

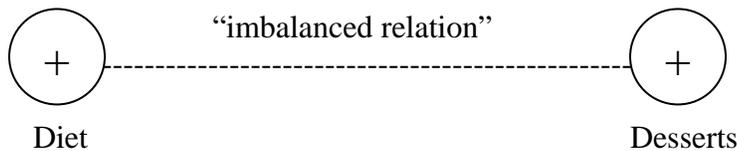


Abelson suggests four ways in which these dilemmas can be resolved. They are: (1) denial, (2) bolstering, (3) differentiation, and (4) transcendence (1959:344). The first mode is that of denial. Abelson describes this process as a “direct attack upon one or both of the cognitive elements or the relations between them” and is such that:

The value felt toward the object, whether positive or negative, is denied, or the opposite is asserted; or the sign of the relation between the elements is explained away, or the opposite is asserted (1959:344).

Two aspects of denial are present in this description. One is the denial of the element and the other, the denial of the relation. To illustrate these two aspects, let us take the example of a man on a diet confronted with the dilemma of eating a dessert after his low calorie meal (see Figure 3).¹

Figure 3: The Man on a Diet Dilemma



In this example, diet and desserts both have positive affect values. Dieting is good (positive) in that it helps people lose unwanted pounds, but desserts are good too, but not for those on a diet. So it seems that diets and desserts do not go together. Therefore, these two elements are joined together by a dissociative relation. This, however, results in an imbalanced relation (see above Figure 2a). To resolve this dilemma (i.e., restore balance), either the affect value of one of these elements must become negative or the relation between them become associative. These options are illustrated in the diagrams below (see Figures 4a and 4b):

Figure 4a: Denial of the Element and the Man on a Diet Dilemma

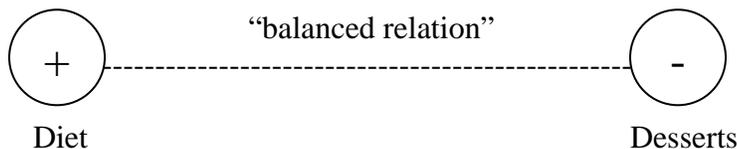
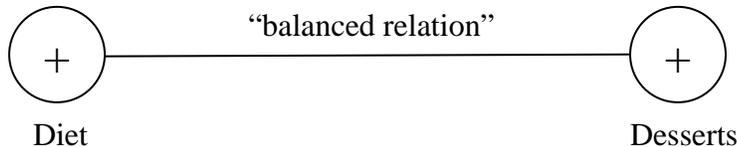


Figure 4b: Denial of the Relation and the Man on a Diet Dilemma



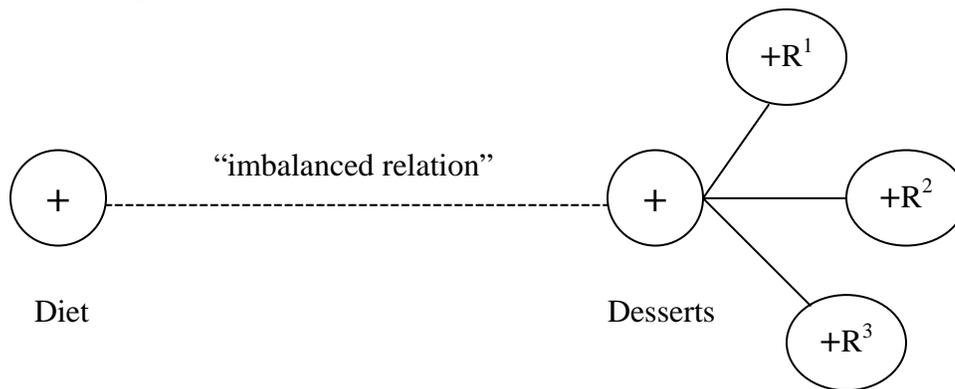
¹ This example is adapted from Abelson (1959: 344).

Using the denial of the element, the man in our example refuses the dessert, claiming that he never really liked desserts anyway. In this way the positive affect value of “desserts” becomes negative, thus balancing out the relation between the two elements (see Figure 8). The other option is replace the dissociative relation with an associative one (see Figure 9). This represents the denial of the relation. Rather than deny that he likes desserts, the man claims that desserts do not pose a dilemma for his diet as long as he eats them in moderation.

As opposed to Abelson’s one category of denial, I will utilize both the denial of the element and the denial of the relation in analyzing how individuals resolve dilemmas of belief. These will, therefore, become two modes to Abelson’s one.

Another way of resolving dilemmas of belief is that of bolstering. By utilizing this mode, the imbalance between the two elements is not eliminated but *drowned out* (see Abelson 1959:345). To continue with our example of the man on a diet, rather than trying to resolve the imbalance between being faithful to his diet and eating dessert (“having his cake and eating it too”), he bolsters the dessert element with comments such as: (1) “Eating just this one dessert will not hurt my diet,” (2) “It would be rude to my host to refuse dessert,” and (3) “If I eat a dessert every now and then, I will be able to control my craving.” This tactic of bolstering is illustrated in the following diagram, with these comments represented as R^1 , R^2 , and R^3 (see Figure 5):

Figure 5: Bolstering and the Man on a Diet Dilemma

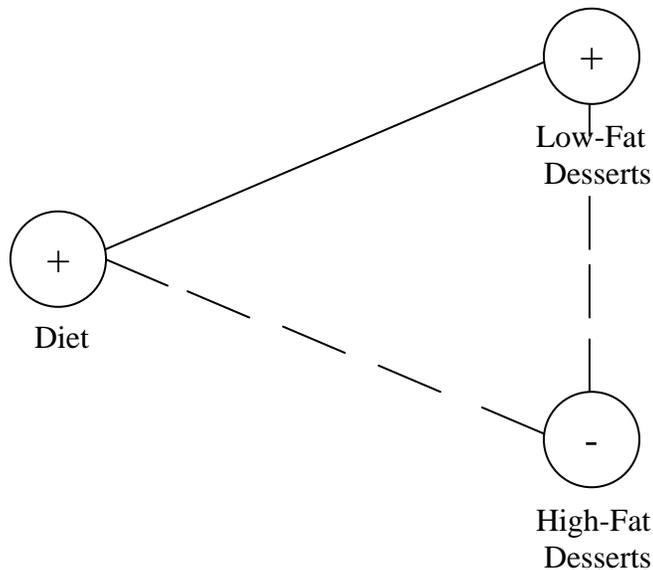


Yet another tactic for resolving dilemmas of belief is that of differentiation. Differentiation is the splitting of one element into a new and an old part with a strong dissociative relation between the two parts (Abelson 1959: 345). Abelson describes this process as follows:

The old part retains the relation with the other element in the structure, but the affect toward it is changed. The new part...retains the old affect toward the differentiated element, but the sign of the relation with the other element is changed” (1959:346).

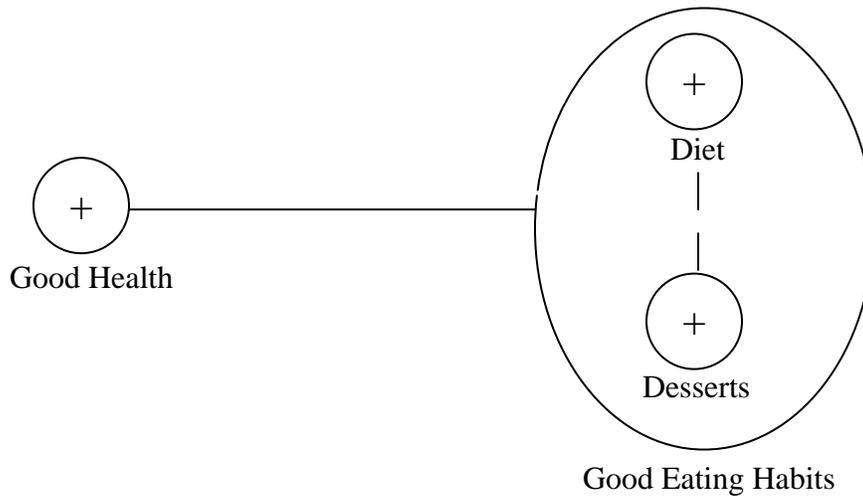
Let us return once again to our example of the man on a diet. To utilize this mode, the man would need to differentiate one of the elements (*diet* or *desserts*) into an old and a new element. Because this dilemma is occasioned by the presence of desserts, our man would probably choose to differentiate this element into a “high-fat desserts” element and a “low-fat desserts” element. Because eating low-fat desserts aligns best with his diet, this will be his *new* element and “high-fat desserts” his *old* element. As a result, this new “low-fat desserts” element retains the positive affect value of the original element (“desserts”), but the relation between it and the “diet” element is changed from dissociative to associative, thus resulting in a balanced relation. The old “high-fat desserts” element takes on a negative affect value, but maintains the dissociative relation between it and the positive “diet” element. This, too, results in a balanced relation. Finally, the two differentiated elements (“high-fat” and “low-fat” desserts) exist with a strong dissociative relation between them. This is illustrated in the diagram below (see Figure 6):

Figure 6: Differentiation and the Man on a Diet Dilemma



Abelson’s final mode is that of transcendence. In this process, rather than one of the dissonant elements being split apart as in differentiation, the two elements are combined to form an element that transcends the imbalance (see Abelson 1959:346). Again, our example of a man on a diet will suffice to illustrate this process. The two dissonant elements in this man on a diet dilemma are “diet” and “desserts”. To resolve this dilemma, our man would have to combine these two elements into one element that transcends them both. In a situation like this, he may decide that his health depends on good eating habits. If so, then “diet” and “desserts” would combine to become a positive “good eating habits” element related associatively to a new, positive, “good health” element, which, in turn, results in a balanced relation. This is illustrated in the diagram below (see Figure 7):

Figure 7: Transcendence and the Man on a Diet Dilemma



I have added one other category to Abelson’s modes, which is “no resolution offered”. In our example of the man on a diet, he may reply, “I know I do not need to eat desserts while I am on my diet, but I do love desserts. I really don’t know how to resolve my dilemma.” Rather than rationalizing eating desserts while on a diet, this man honestly acknowledges this is a dilemma that he cannot resolve. On the other hand, he may reply, “My diet and my love of desserts do not pose a dilemma for me.” I see a dilemma and you may see a dilemma, but apparently the man in our example somehow does not. In the responses to follow each dilemma posed below, some people may acknowledge, “This is an unresolved dilemma for me,” whereas others may claim, “This is not a dilemma for me.” The former response reflects discomfort at not being able to resolve the dilemma. The latter, that no dilemma exists, at least for the respondent. These are two different ways in which “no resolution (is) offered”.

In summary, Abelson’s model represents a way to operationalize the process of resolving belief dilemmas. By utilizing his modes we have a way of categorizing responses to dilemmas of belief, which can then be compared with a respondent’s religio-social matrix, his or her beliefs, and the extent to which he or she is certain of these beliefs. According to Abelson: “There will be a hierarchy of resolution attempts in general proceeding in the following order: denial, bolstering, denial, differentiation, and transcendence” (1959:346).² By this he suggests that individuals will use, for example, denial before trying to employ transcendence. With regard to this “hierarchy of resolution attempts,” Abelson states, “The presumption here is that denial and bolstering are simpler cognitive mechanisms than differentiation and transcendence” (1959:347-348), thus giving rise to their more prevalent use. Abelson comments on the modes of differentiation and transcendence saying,

² Abelson states, “The reason denial appears twice in the listing is that there are usually two points in the process at which denial may enter. If we consider the situation in which imbalance is introduced by forced or accidental exposure to propaganda or opinions seeking to establish new cognitive relations or to contradict previously held affect values, a first opportunity for denial may arise by a rejection of the relevance of the new material. If the initial denial fails, bolstering will be offered and then another attempt at denial, this time buttressed by further thought about the issue” (Abelson 1959:346-347).

Differentiation is difficult because it requires intellectual ability, flexibility, and because, when there is strong affect toward a cognitive object, it is not easily split apart. Transcendence is presumably still more difficult, for it requires the existence of a compelling superordinate structure in which a given imbalance may be imbedded (1959:348).

Following Abelson's lead, I have arranged the responses to the dilemmas posed in my survey in order from denial to transcendence, or from less difficult to more difficult.

III. METHOD

In 1991, as I was pastoring a small rural church just northeast of Columbia, South Carolina, I decided to take my congregation through a study of the Bible, beginning with Genesis 1 and continuing to the end, Revelation 22. I never got past Genesis 1, especially verses 1 and 2. Having graduated seminary³ with a love and working knowledge of Hebrew and Greek,⁴ I planned to translate these passages of scripture as we made our way through the text. As I worked with the text of Genesis 1:1-2, translating the verses and consulting commentaries on this passage, I began to encounter such questions as: (1) Why is there no definite article "the" present in the Hebrew? Should we translate, "In the beginning" as "In a beginning"? (2) Why is the name of God the plural for God (*elohim*) and not the singular (*el*)? And why is this name for God not Yahweh? (3) There are other words for "to create" (*barah*). Why is this one used and not one of the others? (4) Is verse one a prelude to Genesis 1, with the account of creation beginning in verse 2 or are they to be seen together? If so, verse two seems to point to an earth that was already present, but in a "formless and empty"⁵ state. (5) What connection does this passage have with ancient Near Eastern accounts of creation? My training in conservative biblical scholarship had ill-prepared me for this onslaught of questions, and this from a passage of only two verses! Beset by these questions and faced with a multiplicity of interpretative options, I abandoned the ambitious study I had planned for my congregation. But I did not abandon my study.

³ I graduated from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary with a Master of Divinity degree in 1989. Southwestern is a Southern Baptist seminary located in Ft. Worth, Texas.

⁴ Hebrew is the language of the Old Testament and *Koine* (or common) Greek the language of the New.

⁵ This phrase is taken from *The Holy Bible*, New International Version, 1973, 1978, and 1984 by the International Bible Society.

Later, after completing a residency in Clinical Pastoral Education,⁶ I accepted a position as a full-time hospital chaplain at St. Mary's Medical Center in Huntington, West Virginia. As a chaplain, each day is an exercise in helping people resolve their dilemmas. The task of the chaplain is not to introduce a novel discourse, but to work within the parameters of the religious discourse provided by the patient and/or his or her family. I worked primarily with cancer patients and their families where death and dying were ever-present. After the initial diagnosis, patients and families would most likely request prayer for healing. This prayer for healing would often endure to the very end. Even when the patient's death was inevitable, some family members and friends were still reluctant to let go of their hope. For others, however, their prayer evolved from one for healing in this life to one free of pain in the next. Once death arrived, family members and friends rejoiced in the midst of their grief that their loved one had gone "to be with Jesus" and was now reunited with their loved ones in heaven. It was during this time that I developed my "God Always Wins" theory. According to my theory God cannot lose. If the patient is healed, then God is praised for answering their prayers. If the patient is not healed, then God may be using this illness for a greater purpose. This is an intermediate response between dying and the actual death of the patient. If the patient dies, then it was God's time to call them home to heaven. Whether or not the individual is healed, God is always praised. God always wins. I found it perplexing that God was never held to account for not answering the heartfelt prayers of his people. In this and other dilemmas, people always turned to God for help and then rationalized the answer to match the outcome and preserve the integrity of God.

As a chaplain I struggled with not being able to challenge this version of reality. A teacher at heart, I constantly had to affirm the religious world-view of my patients and their family and friends in hopes of providing comfort and not more distress. I was raised to believe that the Bible was the "inspired" word of God, but my study of scripture led me to the conclusion that it was the work of men, not of God. In the course of my study I began to wonder why others would not also come to same conclusion. This was the genesis (pun intended) of my survey.

In the summer of 2006, I distributed a religious survey to 27 churches in the Huntington, West Virginia area, including denominations such as Baptist, Church of God, Disciples of Christ, Methodist, Nazarene, Non-Denominational, Presbyterian, and Wesleyan. Initially I selected some fifty churches from a list of Huntington area churches in the 25701 to 25705 zip code range from a list online. I then mailed the senior ministers of these congregations a packet of information, including a letter describing my research project, a letter of approval from Marshall University authenticating my research, and a copy of the survey. A week or so after this initial mailing, I contacted these ministers by phone to see if they would be willing to participate. Of the 50 churches initially selected, 27 agreed to participate.

⁶ I completed my residency in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) at St. Francis Hospital in Charleston, South Carolina in 2002. The residency program in CPE lasts for one year yielding four units of training. These four units are the required amount for most full-time positions in hospital chaplaincy and the minimum to be considered for certification as a Board Certified Chaplain. Crucial to this training are intense small group sessions and patient visitation. The small group sessions are facilitated by a CPE Supervisor who engages the other members in the group in intense self-reflection regarding the practice of ministry.

Once the pastor allowed his church to participate, I hand-delivered the surveys to his/her church. The surveys were placed inside a self-addressed stamped envelope, so all the respondent had to do was fill out the survey, put it back into the envelope, and place it in the mail. These surveys were distributed at the discretion of the pastor. Some made them available for their church members through an announcement in their church bulletin or newsletter; others hand-selected people to fill out the survey and mail it back in. Of more than 1,000 surveys delivered, just over 300 were completed and returned.

This was an exercise in instrument building. These churches were not selected from a random list, nor were the respondents selected at random from a master list of church members. The results, therefore, were unable to be subjected to critical statistical analysis. What emerges, however, is a preliminary idea of how individual Christian believers resolve dilemmas of belief. Respondents were asked a number of questions regarding, for example, paths to salvation, unanswered prayer, work on Sunday, etc., questions which posed dilemmas of belief. From my experience as a student in seminary and graduate school,⁷ a pastor, and as a hospital chaplain, I assumed some of these would be familiar, but there were others with which I assumed most people would have little or no familiarity. To these dilemmas I added responses from which respondents could choose which statement or statements best reflected how they would resolve the dilemma in question. From my experience in the world of conservative and moderate Christianity, I believe the responses included in my survey are reflective of those given by believers in resolving these dilemmas. Though I developed some responses on my own, I left an “other” category for respondents to record their own responses. This feature of my survey and the responses I received has been of immeasurable help in refining this survey instrument.

I did not discover Abelson’s modes of belief dilemma resolution until after I had distributed my survey. I found in these modes, however, a way of categorizing the responses to each of these dilemmas, which would make them easier to analyze. Because of this, the responses I provided to each dilemma did not reflect each of his modes. I have corrected this imbalance in my revised survey (see Appendix A: Data Dictionary and Appendix B: Religious Survey).

In addition to Abelson’s four modes of resolution, I have expanded one and added one other category. Because of the distinctiveness of denial, I have expanded this category into the denial of the *element* and the denial of the *relation*, yielding two modes to Abelson’s one. I have also added the category “no resolution offered”. This category contains some specific responses, but also two generic ones. These two generic responses are: “This is an unresolved dilemma for me” and “This is not a dilemma for me”. As mentioned above in the “theory” section, the first “no resolution offered” response indicates that the respondent recognizes the problem posed in the question as a dilemma, but can offer no resolution. The second response, however, indicates either that the respondent is not bothered by the dilemma in question or that he or she sees no dilemma present.

⁷ I pursued a graduate degree in Hebrew Bible from 1996-1999 at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

IV. DATA

This section presents each of the dilemmas in my earlier survey and describes how they were resolved using Abelson's modes.

A. Resolving the Inspiration of the Pentateuch Dilemma

Who wrote the Pentateuch? For those outside the church, this would seem a trifling problem at best, but for Christian believers it is at the heart of the inspiration of scripture. Ever since the nineteenth-century German biblical scholar Julius Wellhausen proposed that the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible) consisted of separate documents woven together by a process of redaction centuries after the death of Moses, conservative scholars have struggled to defend the claim of Mosaic authorship. In his book, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, Wellhausen suggested that there were four sources that were eventually woven together to form the Pentateuch. This theory is known as the JEDP Theory.⁸ With this in mind, respondents were posed with the following dilemma:

In the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament), biblical scholars generally agree that various sources (oral and written), with vastly different theological perspectives, were joined together by a group of priests during the Babylonian Exile around 450 B.C.E. Most people assume Moses wrote these books in their entirety (except for the account of his death in Deuteronomy). If this is true, then how do you explain the inspiration of scripture in the midst of such diverse theological perspectives?

Individuals were asked to choose from the following responses the statement or statements best reflecting how they would resolve this dilemma. Table 1 shows the frequency with which each response was chosen:

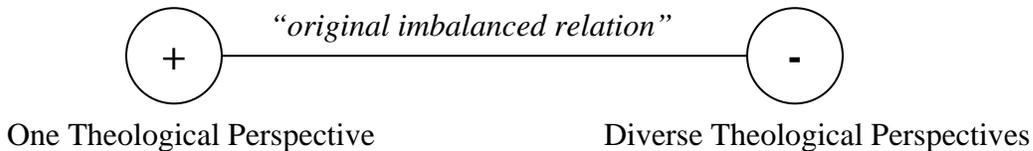
⁸ The JEDP Theory was first developed by Julius Wellhausen in his *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, first published as the *History of Israel (Geschichte Israels)* in 1878. Each of these letters represents a source of oral and written tradition that emanated from the earliest history of the Israelite people. The "J" source is part of the Southern tradition. After the reign of Solomon, the nation of Israel split into a Northern and a Southern kingdom. The Northern kingdom consisted of ten tribes of Israel, while the Southern kingdom retained only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. The "J" source achieved written form around 950 B.C.E., though it is important to remember that these sources remained "fluid," that is they were subject to redaction and change, until they received their final form during the time of Ezra (around 450 B.C.E.). The "J" stands for "Jehovah," which is the transliterated form of Yahweh, the sacred name of God. Because of the predominance of this name in this source, it is designated the "J" source. In the same way, the "E" source is so named because of the predominance of the name "Elohim," which is a transliteration of the word "God," but in its plural form (*EI* is singular). The "E" source is part of the Northern tradition and first received written form around 750 B.C.E. or perhaps even earlier. These two strands of tradition were combined sometime after the fall of the Northern kingdom to the Assyrians in 721 B.C.E. It, thus, became the "JE" source. Another source that was part of the Northern tradition was the Deuteronomistic history, so named because of the reform movement instituted under King Josiah in 621 B.C.E. King Josiah is said to have found the book of Deuteronomy as he was helping cleanse the Jerusalem Temple from any form of pagan influence. Having discovered this divine mandate for the people of God, Josiah had a text upon which he could carry out his reform. This is the "D" source, which achieved its final form around 550 B.C.E. and was then combined with the "JE" source. The final source is the "Priestly" or "P" source. This source was part of the Southern tradition and the influence of these priestly scribes determined the final form of the Pentateuch.

Table 1: The Inspiration of the Pentateuch Dilemma: Frequency of Responses

| Mode | No. | Responses | Freq. | Percent |
|--|-----|--|-------|---------|
| dne | 1 | God inspired these men despite their diverse theological perspectives. | 165 | 50.3 |
| dne | 2 | God inspired those who joined together these diverse theological perspectives. | 67 | 20.4 |
| nro | 3 | God did not inspire the Pentateuch. It was the work of men. | 11 | 3.4 |
| dk | 4 | Don't Know | 75 | 22.9 |
| "Other" Responses | | | | |
| dnr | 5 | Moses was the author of the Pentateuch. | 5 | 1.5 |
| bol | 6 | All scripture is inspired by God. | 5 | 1.5 |
| Total Number of Responses | | | 328 | |
| Key to Modes: dne = denial of the element; dnr = denial of the relation; | | | | |
| bol = bolstering; nro = no resolution offered; dk = don't know | | | | |

The inspiration of the Bible implies that one theological perspective is the guiding force through the process of inspiration. This one theological perspective is that of God and it is supposed that he inspires his authors with words reflecting this perspective. Therefore, if an individual believes in the inspiration of the Bible, then he or she must reject the presence of multiple or diverse theological perspectives. How, then, can a person maintain his or her belief the inspiration of the Bible if diverse theological perspectives do, in fact, exist within the text of scripture? This is the dilemma posed to respondents. This cognitive dilemma can be illustrated by the following diagram (see Figure 8):

Figure 8: The Inspiration of the Pentateuch Dilemma



It is important to note that this dilemma is unlikely to be addressed by pastors or church leaders. This question relates to the historical source criticism of the Bible, a topic touched upon in a pastor's seminary education, but often considered of little relevance for the laity. In some cases it is rejected as a "liberal" attack upon the unity of scripture. The failure to address this dilemma will, no doubt, influence not only the choice of responses, but also the depth to which individual respondents measure the implications of their selection. With this said, we are in a position to examine these individual responses more closely.

The first element of this cognitive dyad, “one theological perspective,” is represented by a positive affect value, indicating the belief most Christians share that the Bible is the “inspired” word of God. The other element of this dyad, “diverse theological perspectives,” is represented by a negative affect value, indicating the aversion many believers have to the idea that more than one theological perspective is reflected in the Bible. These two elements are joined together by an unbroken line representing an associative relation between them. But how can these two elements be joined together associatively? Both are these elements are inconsistent with one another. If you have one, you cannot have the other. Therefore, this associative relation represents an imbalanced relation. How, then, do believers restore balance and, thus, resolve this dilemma?

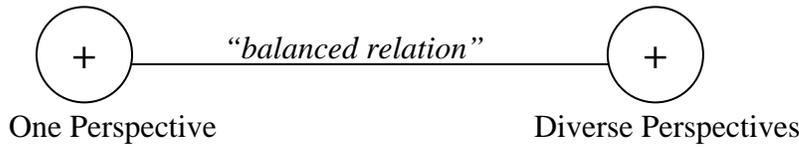
1. Denial of the Element and the Inspiration of the Pentateuch Dilemma

Two responses were offered to help respondents resolve this dilemma, both of which reflect the denial of the element. Response 1, “God inspired these men despite their diverse theological perspectives,” implies that God inspired individual authors to record the words found in the Bible. It also, affirms, however, that God inspired these individuals with more than one theological perspective. In other words, this one God shared different and conflicting words and ideas with a variety of human authors, resulting in the multiplicity of theological perspectives found within the Bible. This would imply an inconsistency on the part of God in communicating his perspective through these human conduits. Though the majority of respondents (see Table 1 above) selected this response, I doubt many of them realize the implications of their choice. They are, in fact, agreeing that diverse theological perspectives do exist in the Bible, which, in turn, undermines the concept of inspiration.

Response 2, “God inspired those who joined together these diverse theological perspectives,” is similar to the first, but attributes the inspiration of God to a group of priests who joined these diverse perspectives into the canon of scripture around 450 B.C.E. This process does not necessarily imply the inspiration of God of individual books of the Bible. What it does imply, however, is that God inspired these priests in joining together these diverse theological perspectives into a canon of inspired scripture. It is important to keep in mind that the process of scripture formation was a fluid process up until the Babylonian exile, when a need was felt to demarcate what was and was not scripture. Up until that time, scripture was subject to reinterpretation by various priestly groups, whose reinterpretations appear as interpolations within the text. It was the discovery of these interpolations that gave rise to historical source criticism. What this second response suggests is that God inspired this group of priests to select which books of the Bible (the Christian Old Testament) were to be considered scripture and thus closed the canon to any new reinterpretation. Even so, the presence of diverse theological perspectives is still affirmed. As with Response 1, I doubt if respondents recognize the implication of this second response. For both of these responses, respondents probably stopped at “God inspired,” rather than considering the full implications of their choice.

The mode reflected in these responses is the denial of the element. The tactic employed is, very simply, to change the negative affect value of “diverse theological perspectives” to positive. This is illustrated in Figure 9 below:

Figure 9: Denial of the Element and the Inspiration of the Pentateuch



God inspired these men despite their diverse theological perspectives.

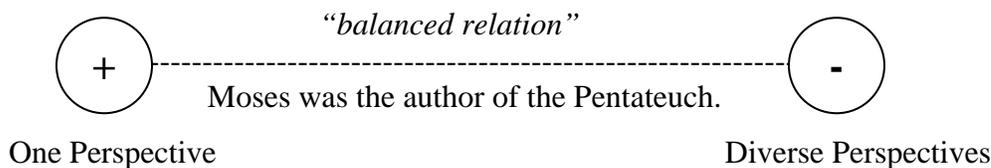
God inspired those who joined together these diverse theological perspectives.

With the change in the affect value the relation between these two elements is brought into balance. What this resolution does, however, is affirm that there is *no* inconsistency between “one” theological perspective and “diverse” theological perspectives, a claim, I believe, few believers would be willing to make.

2. Denial of the Relation and the Inspiration of the Pentateuch Dilemma

Another way respondents chose to resolve this dilemma was through the denial of the relation. This is reflected in Response 5, “Moses was the author of the Pentateuch,” an “other” response. In utilizing this mode of denial, respondents denied that an associative relation exists between the two elements of this dyad, and affirmed that the relation between the two is a dissociative one. In other words, there is only one theological perspective guiding the inspiration of the Pentateuch. Whether Moses or multiple authors, God inspired all these conduits of his word with one, consistent message. This resolution attempt can be illustrated in the following diagram (see Figure 10):

Figure 10: Denial of the Relation and the Inspiration of the Pentateuch



In this diagram, a broken line (representing a dissociative relation) replaces the unbroken line (representing an associative relation), thus resolving the imbalanced relation. These respondents refuse to affirm that there are “diverse theological perspectives” and, thus, change the relation from an associative relation to a dissociative one. In effect they declare that one God with one message inspired the author or authors of the Pentateuch. With regard to the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, respondents commented:

Moses wrote these – “the biblical scholars that generally agree” were not biblical but liberal scholars.

Moses wrote these books. J, E, D, P has been effectively refuted by most conservative scholars.

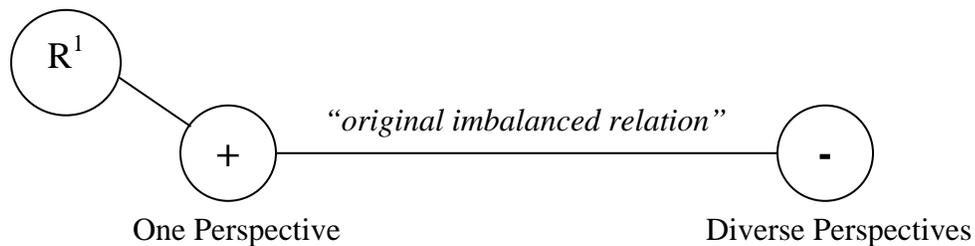
Disagree with “biblical scholars.” Pentateuch written by Moses (inspired by God) except for account of his death.

Your question is wrong information. Jesus reported Moses as the Author – Jesus, He as God knows the real story.

3. Bolstering and the Inspiration of the Pentateuch Dilemma

One person commented, “It’s not our job as Christians to look for or find fault with *how*,” which implies that we should be more concerned with what is in God’s word than with *how* it got there. This appears to bolster the claim that there is only one theological perspective and that this perspective belongs to God alone. Another way of diverting attention from this dilemma is the response, “All scripture is inspired by God” (R^1 in the diagram below). This response does not address the problem of how diverse theological perspectives can be reconciled with one, but rather tries to drown out the dilemma by making this claim. This is illustrated in the following diagram (see Figure 11):

Figure 11: Bolstering and the Inspiration of the Pentateuch Dilemma



Consistent with the tactic of bolstering, the original imbalance is left unresolved, but by diverting attention from the dilemma itself, the dissonance is “drowned out”.

4. No Resolution Offered and the Inspiration of the Pentateuch Dilemma

The response, “God did not inspire the Pentateuch. It was the work of men,” represents no attempt at resolution. For these respondents, there is no dilemma between inspiration and the presence of diverse theological perspectives because God did not inspire it to begin with. Furthermore, because they accept that the Pentateuch was a work produced by men, it is no wonder that there are multiple and diverse perspectives. For these respondents there is no dilemma to resolve. Some respondents commented:

These men were writing from their own religious experiences, recognizing how the traditions had been orally transmitted to them and trying to remain faithful to the task of compiling the tradition.

The communities creating what became our texts were influenced by their “global politics,” as much as faith.

I don’t believe Moses was the author of the Pentateuch. The JEDP line of thought makes more sense.

B. Resolving the Genesis 1 vs. Modern Science Dilemma

One of the greatest battles of the twentieth century has been between modern science’s theory of evolution and the Genesis 1 account of creation. From the Scopes “Monkey” Trial to present-day advocates of creationism (or “intelligent design”), people have sought to defend one perspective against the other. To examine how people seek to resolve the inconsistency between modern science’s theory of evolution and the biblical account of creation, respondents were asked:

Modern science claims that the earth is billions of years old and evolved over time. How do you reconcile this with the account in Genesis 1?

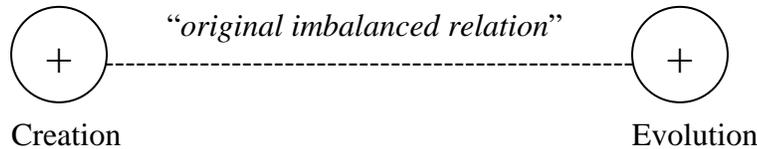
Individuals were asked to choose from the following responses the statement or statements best reflecting how they would resolve this dilemma. Table 2 shows the frequency with which each response was chosen:

Table 2: The Genesis 1 vs. Modern Science Dilemma: Frequency of Responses

| Mode | No. | Responses | Freq. | Percent |
|--|-----|--|-------|---------|
| dne | 1 | Modern science is wrong. God created the earth in six literal days. | 64 | 21.3 |
| tr | 2 | The "days" can be interpreted as eras of time in which God created the earth. | 103 | 34.3 |
| df | 3 | God created the earth, but the account in Genesis 1 can be interpreted metaphorically. | 75 | 25.0 |
| nro | 4 | The "Big Bang" Theory and the Theory of Human Evolution cannot be reconciled with the Genesis account. | 23 | 7.7 |
| dk | 5 | Don't Know | 16 | 5.3 |
| "Other" Responses | | | | |
| bol | 6 | God created everything and everyone. | 9 | 3.0 |
| df | 7 | God created man and the earth with "age". | 4 | 1.3 |
| dnr | 8 | God created the world using evolution as his method. | 5 | 1.7 |
| nar | 9 | The Bible is a book of faith and theology, not a science textbook. | 1 | 0.3 |
| Total Number of Responses | | | 300 | |
| Key to Modes: dne = denial of the element; dnr = denial of the relation; bol = bolstering; df = differentiation; tr = transcendence nro = no resolution offered; dk = don't know | | | | |

The relation of creation to evolution is illustrated in the diagram below (see Figure 12). Both creation and evolution are assigned positive values. Individuals value both the views of the Bible and the insights of modern science, but these two objects are in a dissociative relation with one another, represented by the broken line joining the two elements. This dissociative relation can be translated, “The biblical account of creation is *incompatible* with modern science’s theory of evolution.”

Figure 12: The Genesis 1 vs. Modern Science Dilemma



1. Denial of the Element and the Genesis 1 vs. Modern Science Dilemma

Respondents utilizing this mode of resolution selected the response, “Modern science is wrong. God created the earth in six literal days.” This is an attempt to change the affect value of the evolution *element*, thus balancing an imbalanced relation. Note also that the relation between the two elements remains the same; only the affect value of evolution is changed (see Figure 13). In other words, the truth value of modern science’s theory of evolution is denied, and the absolute truth value of the biblical account in Genesis 1 is affirmed. An “other” response, “God created man and the earth with *age*,” is also reflective of the denial of the element. Both of these responses deny evolution’s positive affect value, with this latter response nullifying the evolutionist’s claim that the earth evolved over billions of years. An example of this is the claim that God created Adam and Eve as adults rather than as children. Comments reflecting this second response are:

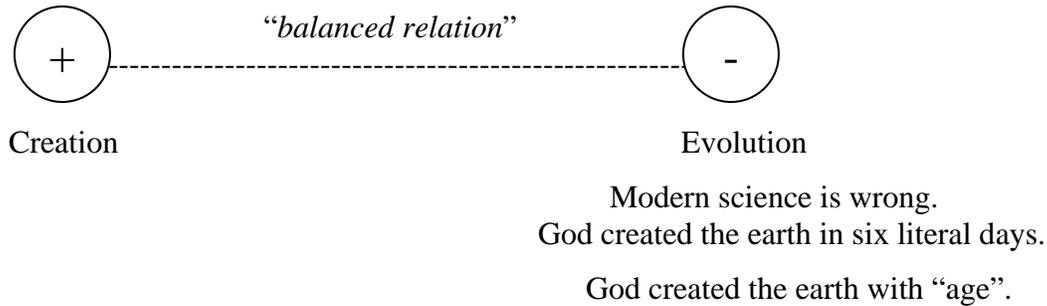
God created the earth with an “age,” as He did Adam “an adult”.

God created the world in 6 days. It dates older because God created it already matured. Just like when Adam was created, he was a man, not a baby.

Just as man can create things that appear old – so even more can God create the earth to appear old.

These two responses and the mode of the denial of the element are illustrated in the following diagram (see Figure 13):

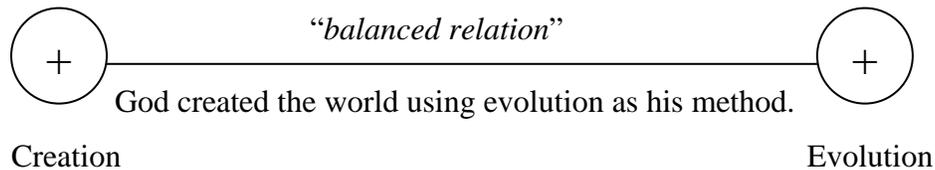
Figure 13: Denial of the Element and the Genesis 1 vs. Modern Science Dilemma



2. Denial of the Relation and the Genesis 1 vs. Modern Science Dilemma

On the reverse side, there were those who believed that the biblical account of creation could be reconciled with the theory of evolution. In this scenario, God created the earth, with evolution as his method of bringing it into being. One individual commented, “My mother, when I asked this question as a child, told me that the Bible says God created the world but not how. Evolution was his method and isn’t it amazing. I still agree.” Yet another said, “Genesis recounts God’s hand in creation; evolution is the best scientific explanation.” Utilizing this mode, these individuals denied that the relation between these two elements was a dissociative one. In essence what they did was to replace the dissociative relation with an associative one, represented by an unbroken line (see Figure 14).

Figure 14: Denial of the Relation and the Genesis 1 vs. Modern Science Dilemma



3. Bolstering and the Genesis 1 vs. Modern Science Dilemma

Some people preferred just to “bolster” God’s claim to creation. As mentioned before, bolstering does not eliminate the imbalance, but serves to help “drown it out”. As illustrated by the following comments, the “creation” element is bolstered by recourse to God’s act of creation. No attempt is made to reconcile this element with evolution. By focusing on the omnipotence of God and the accepted truth of the Bible, believers are able to sufficiently drown out the competing claims from the theory of evolution. Individuals choosing this mode of resolution commented:

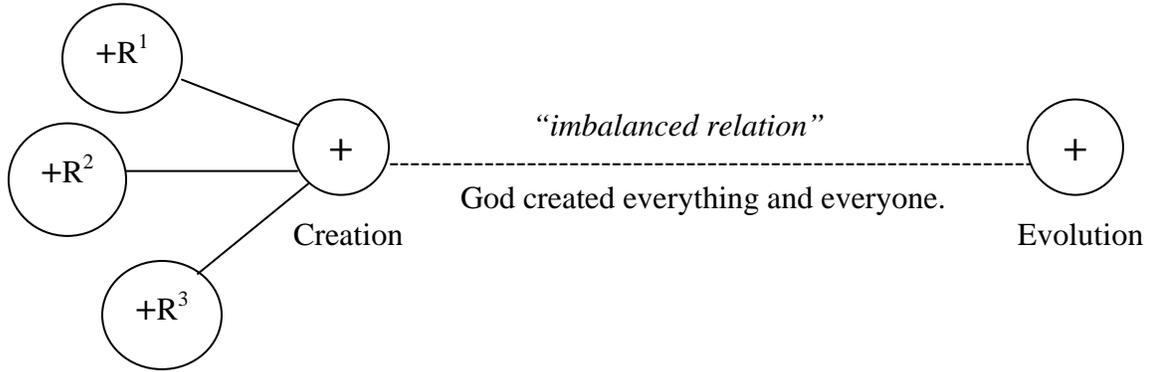
God is the creator of everything and everyone. He is capable of doing whatever and however He pleases (R¹).

I believe whatever the word of God says – the Bible (R²).

If God wanted me to know, Genesis would contain more details (R^3).

This mode of bolstering is illustrated by the following diagram (see Figure 15):

Figure 15: Bolstering and the Genesis 1 vs. Modern Science Dilemma

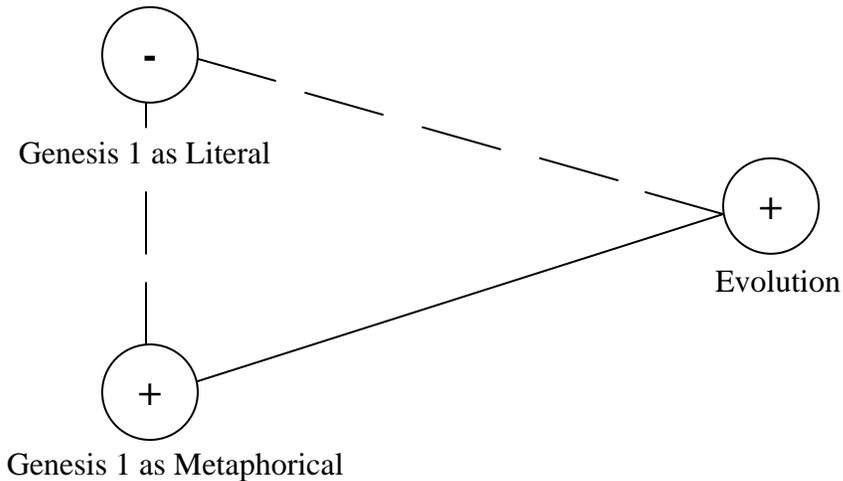


In this diagram, the relation between "creation" and "evolution" continues to be dissociative, but this imbalance is "drowned out" by the comments listed above, represented by R^1 , R^2 , and R^3 in Figure 15.

4. Differentiation and the Genesis 1 vs. Modern Science Dilemma

Differentiation is reflected in the response, "God created the earth, but the account in Genesis 1 can be interpreted metaphorically." This mode can be illustrated by the following diagram (see Figure 16):

Figure 16: Differentiation and the Genesis 1 vs. Modern Science Dilemma

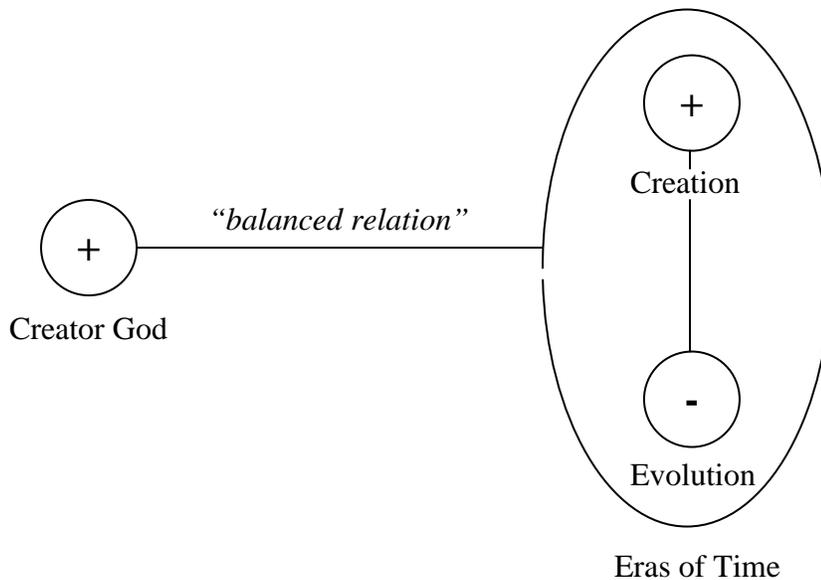


In this case neither the biblical account of creation is denied or modern science’s theory of evolution. Rather, the biblical account of creation is differentiated into a literal and metaphorical account. The metaphorical account maintains the positive affect value, whereas the literal account takes on a negative affect value. The relation between these two differentiated elements is of a strong dissociative nature. The literal element maintains the dissociative (negative) relation with the theory of evolution, whereas the new positive metaphorical element is associatively related (positively) to evolution. Therefore, the entire cognitive structure achieves cognitive balance.

5. Transcendence and the Genesis 1 vs. Modern Science Dilemma

The mode of transcendence, reflected in the response, “The days can be interpreted as “eras” of time in which God created the earth,” envelops the tension between these two elements in the dissociative relation. God is still the creator of the universe, but the creation event and evolution are now reinterpreted as eras of time, rather than as mutually antagonistic elements. This can be illustrated by the following diagram (see Figure 17):

Figure 17: Transcendence and the Genesis 1 vs. Modern Science Dilemma



6. No Resolution Offered

The response, “The “Big Bang” Theory and the Theory of Human Evolution cannot be reconciled with the Genesis account,” represents no attempt at resolution. Rather than seeking to resolve this dilemma, respondents simply acknowledge that the biblical account of creation and the theory of evolution cannot be reconciled.

C. Resolving the God and Genocide Dilemma

Murder is such a heinous act that the severest of penalties accompany its act. Commit murder and you are likely to lose your own life or to spend the rest of it in prison. What is even more unsettling, however, is the “multiplication of murder,” mass genocide. The extermination of thousands of Jews in concentration camps during Hitler’s reign of terror, the “ethnic cleansings” in what was formerly Yugoslavia, and the massacre of thousands in parts of Africa today force us to avert our eyes from this unimaginable human cruelty.

So great is this crime that “God” included this as the sixth of his Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17). We can readily agree with its placement there. What is disturbing is that this same “God” commanded the extermination of every one of the inhabitants of Canaan. This was God’s promise to Moses, a promise to give Canaan to the Israelites by wiping out all the inhabitants of the land. This is disturbing. How can this same “God” both prohibit murder and then command genocide? This was the question posed to respondents. Individuals were asked:

The sixth of the Ten Commandments states, “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17), yet the same god who uttered this command assures Moses that he “will wipe them (the inhabitants of the land of Canaan) out” (Exodus 23:23). How can a god prohibit murder and then commit genocide?

Individuals were asked to choose from the following responses the statement or statements best reflecting how they would resolve this dilemma. Table 3 shows the frequency with which each response was chosen:

Table 3: The God and Genocide Dilemma: Frequency of Responses

| Mode | No. | Responses | Freq. | Percent |
|------|-----|---|-------|---------|
| bol | 1 | God is God. His ways are not our ways. | 166 | 39.0 |
| bol | 2 | God is God. He can do what he wants to do. | 75 | 17.6 |
| dne | 3 | If left alive, these pagan people would have seduced the Israelites away from the worship of their God. Therefore, they had to be killed. | 59 | 13.8 |
| nro | 4 | I cannot understand why God would do such a thing. | 24 | 5.6 |
| nro | 5 | I can see no justification for God-ordained (or any other kind of) genocide. | 26 | 6.1 |
| dk | 6 | Don't Know | 32 | 7.5 |

"Other" Responses

| | | | | |
|-----|---|--|----|-----|
| df | 7 | Killing in warfare is acceptable | 6 | 1.4 |
| dnr | 8 | This is man's will projected upon God. | 12 | 2.8 |
| bol | 9 | God's timing, ways, and judgments are perfect. | 26 | 6.1 |

Total Number of Responses

426

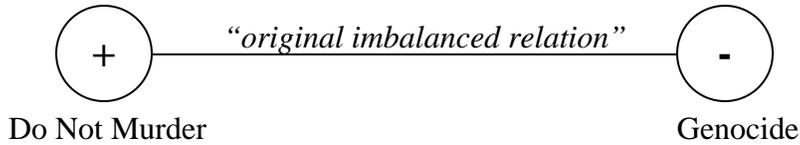
Key to Modes: dne = denial of the element; dnr = denial of the relation;

bol = bolstering; df = differentiation;

nar = no attempt at resolution; dk = don't know

The cognitive structure of this belief dilemma can be illustrated by the following diagram (see Figure 18):

Figure 18: The God and Genocide Dilemma



In this diagram, the command “do not murder” is given a positive affect value, but is related associatively with “genocide,” which has a negative affect value. We would expect a broken line, representing a dissociative relation, to join these two elements. But because the same God issued both of these commands, these two elements are joined together, thus creating the belief dilemma respondents were asked to resolve.

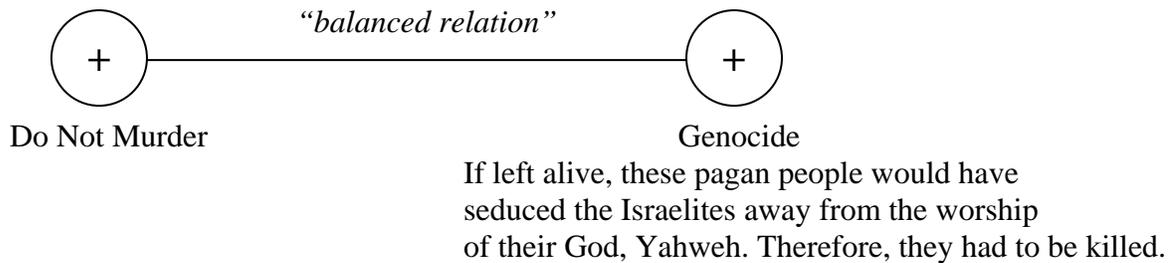
1. Denial of the Element and the God and Genocide Dilemma

Those who utilized this mode of denial selected the response, “If left alive, these pagan people would have seduced the Israelites away from the worship of their God, Yahweh. Therefore, they had to be killed.” By denying that God’s act of genocide is inherently wrong, the affect value of “genocide” is changed from negative to positive, thus creating a balanced relation with the sixth commandment, which states, “You shall not murder.” In other words, genocide is acceptable if it succeeds in keeping a people faithful to their God. If this rationale were applied in our modern world, it would have disastrous consequences, not to mention the agony suffered by the ancient inhabitants of Canaan. One individual commented:

Israel was only an instrument of God like fire from the sky on Sodom. Jericho, Agag and the Amalekites were wicked, had incest, AIDS, and other diseases that would wipe out the Israel nation.

This mode of resolution is illustrated in the diagram below (see Figure 19):

Figure 19: Denial of the Element and the God and Genocide Dilemma



2. Denial of the Relation and the God and Genocide Dilemma

A response reflecting the denial of the relation was not provided in my original survey, but appeared as an “other” response. This can be summarized as, “This is man's will projected upon God.” Some of the responses reflecting this mode were:

Not sure God told the Israelites he would wipe out the Canaanites. In those tribal times they probably interpreted His will that way. “Thou shalt not kill” sounds more like the God Jesus embodied.

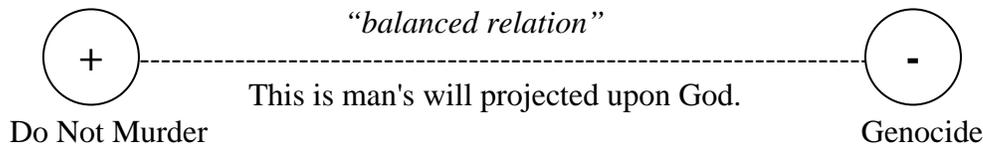
That was the people’s understanding of God’s will in those days but it may not have been God’s will. People learned better.

This Deuteronomistic history shows how easy it is for people to do what is beneficial for themselves, then call it “the will of God”.

The Scripture is written in a culturally relative environment and reflects the culture of the day as well as human nature. The issue of genocide reflects the depravity of humanity, not God.

This dilemma can be illustrated by the following diagram (see Figure 20):

Figure 20: Denial of the Relation and the God and Genocide Dilemma

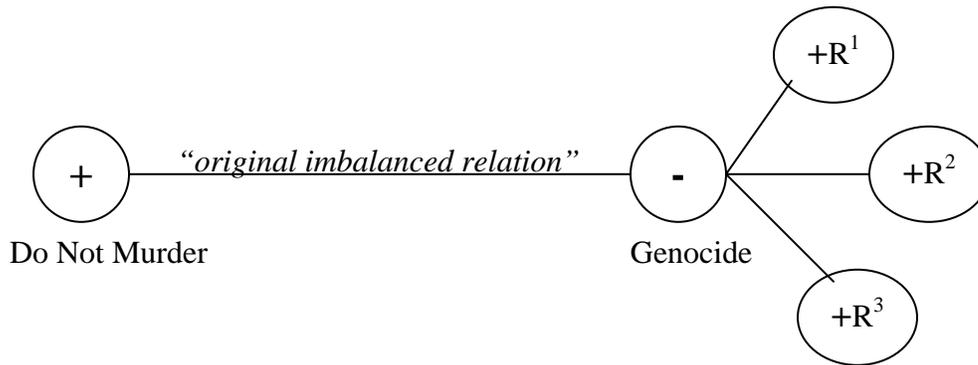


By utilizing this mode, respondents deny the associative relation between the command not to commit murder and genocide by claiming that the command to kill all the inhabitants of Canaan (genocide) was not God’s will, but man’s. In other words, they claim that this relation is man-made, not God-inspired. Thus, the tactic here is to change the associative relation (unbroken line) to a dissociative (broken line) one. In doing so, however, one is also denying the inspiration of all scripture. If someone with a conservative religious orientation adopted such a perspective, then it could have devastating consequences with regard to his or her view of the Bible.

3. Bolstering and the God and Genocide Dilemma

Given what we know about God (loving, compassionate, a shepherd for his sheep, etc.), the fact that he would command the genocide of any group of people strikes at the heart of the character of God. In response to such an unimaginable dilemma, believers most frequently resorted to bolstering as their mode of resolving this dilemma of belief. In this case, the horrific act of genocide is “drowned out” by recourse to the supposed omniscient will of God. In essence, these respondents have justified God’s act of genocide. This has some frightening implications for our world if genocide can be justified in the name of religion. The use of bolstering to resolve this belief dilemma is illustrated in the following diagram (see Figure 21):

Figure 21: Bolstering and the God and Genocide Dilemma



In this diagram, the original imbalanced relation remains intact, but the negative element “genocide” is *bolstered*, absolving God of any wrongdoing associated with this act. God, the tribal warlord accused of war crimes, is acquitted. Two responses reflecting this mode were provided for respondents. The first response declares, “God is God. His ways are not our ways” (represented in the diagram above as R¹), with similar sentiments expressed in the second response, “God is God. He can do what he wants to do” (represented in the diagram above as R²). Other attempts at bolstering were reflected in such comments as (represented in the diagram above as R³):

The vessel has no authority to ask the maker why it is made or used in a certain fashion (R³).

God is God. His ways are always right (R³).

God had to make His point known and understood. Sometimes it took drastic measures (R³).

4. Differentiation and the God and Genocide Dilemma

Differentiation was another mode not reflected in my earlier survey. Nevertheless, it can be summarized as, “Killing in warfare is acceptable,” derived from responses provided as an “other” response. Respondents commented:

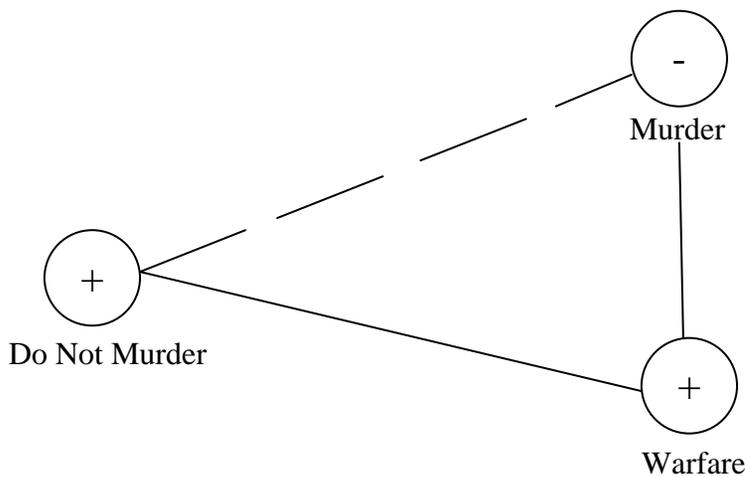
The Hebrew language had separate words to differentiate between murder and killing to defend home and country.

“You shall not murder” does not apply to warfare.

Through a thorough study of scripture we can understand why God would take this action and how it differs from the commandment, “You shall not murder”.

This mode of resolution is illustrated below (see Figure 22):

Figure 22: Differentiation and the God and Genocide Dilemma



In this arrangement, “genocide” has taken on a positive affect value with regard to “warfare,” but “murder” still maintains the original negative affect value. The unbroken line joining the warfare element with the commandment not to murder represents the belief that killing in warfare is acceptable. “Murder,” however, still is unacceptable and is represented by the broken line joining this with the command prohibiting its act. It also stands in a strong dissociative relation with the “warfare” element. Therefore, by this act of differentiation, the original cognitive imbalance is resolved.

5. No Resolution Offered and the God and Genocide Dilemma

Respondents who made no attempt at resolution chose the response, “I can see no justification for God-ordained (or any other kind of) genocide.” For these individuals, the fact that the Bible condones the annihilation the Canaanites in the name of God cannot be denied or explained away. In their mind this act cannot be justified. No adjustment is made to the imbalanced relation. It is allowed to stand just as it is, the glaring atrocity of the act and the actor clear for all courageous enough to see.

One other response, “I cannot understand why God would do such a thing,” is reflective of no resolution being offered. This response reflects bewilderment as to why God would allow such a heinous act in his name, but offers no solution to this dilemma.

D. Resolving the Brutality in the Psalms Dilemma

This dilemma is an unfamiliar one for most Christians, due to the paucity of references to it in their church settings or Bible study groups. When believers turn to the Psalms, they do so for comfort, not disturbing images. Though the brutality expressed in Psalm 137 is particularly disturbing (“dashing infants against the rocks”), many other passages in the Psalms are just as “soaked in blood” as this one. Take for example Psalm 35:1-6, in which the Psalmist asks God to “fight against those who fight against me...Brandish spear and javelin against those who pursue me...May those who seek my life be disgraced and put to shame.” Or take for example Psalm 83:9-18, in which the Psalmist asks God to “pursue them [the enemies of God] with your tempest and terrify them with your storm. Cover their faces with shame...May they ever be ashamed and dismayed; may they perish in disgrace.” Or take Psalm 149:5-9 that declares, “Let the saints rejoice...May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands, to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples...This is the glory of all his saints.”⁹ None of these passages is very comforting, unless you take pleasure in vengeance. Multiple examples could be cited throughout the Psalms, but these will suffice as representative of the brutality expressed therein.

Some, however, accused me of taking this passage out of context. Several commented:

We have to look to the scripture in its total context, not just pull out a verse. We need to try to understand the culture and influences on the passage.

This verse above is taken out of context and is not appropriate in this survey. It could be very misleading!

I think you have taken these verses out of context.

[You] need to look at the context and not pull out only a fragment to examine.

⁹ These biblical passages are taken from *The Holy Bible*, New International Version, 1973, 1978, and 1984 by the International Bible Society.

Plucking verses from the Bible, out of context, absent [of] historical perspective, defeats any chance of understanding.

I will address this accusation in the “Discussion” section.

To measure how believers would resolve this dilemma, respondents were asked to respond to the following question:

The Psalms are some of the most loved and comforting passages in the Bible. How then do you make sense of a passage such as, “happy is he who...seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks”¹⁰ (Psalm 137:8-9)?

Individuals were asked to choose from the following responses the statement or statements best reflecting how they would resolve this dilemma. Table 4 shows the frequency with which each response was chosen:

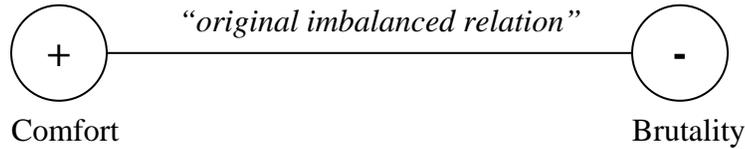
Table 4: The Brutality in the Psalms Dilemma: Frequency of Responses

| Mode | No. | Responses | Freq. | Percent |
|--|-----|---|-------|---------|
| dne | 1 | “Evil” people need to pay for their cruelty to others, even if it means killing their children. | 48 | 15.8 |
| nro | 2 | I tend to overlook passages like this. | 40 | 13.2 |
| nro | 3 | This cannot be inspired scripture. | 23 | 7.6 |
| dk | 4 | Don't Know | 119 | 39.1 |
| "Other" Responses | | | | |
| dnr | 5 | This is the psalmist's expression of anger. | 28 | 9.2 |
| bol | 6 | This passage must be interpreted within its context. | 28 | 9.2 |
| dne | 7 | This was the judgment of God. | 15 | 4.9 |
| df | 8 | This was before the dispensation of grace brought by the life and death of Jesus Christ. | 3 | 1.0 |
| Total Number of Responses | | | 304 | |
| Key to Modes: dne = denial of the element; dnr = denial of the relation; | | | | |
| bol = bolstering; df = differentiation; | | | | |
| nro = no resolution offered; dk = don't know | | | | |

This cognitive dilemma is composed of two opposing elements that are found within the Psalms. The first is the element of comfort, given a positive affect value, and the second is the element of brutality, given a negative affect value. An unbroken line joins these two elements, revealing that each is found in this collection of texts. Because people look to the Psalms to comfort, not disturb, these two elements result in an imbalanced relation. This is illustrated by the following diagram (see Figure 23):

¹⁰ This biblical passage is taken from *The Holy Bible*, New International Version, 1973, 1978, and 1984 by the International Bible Society.

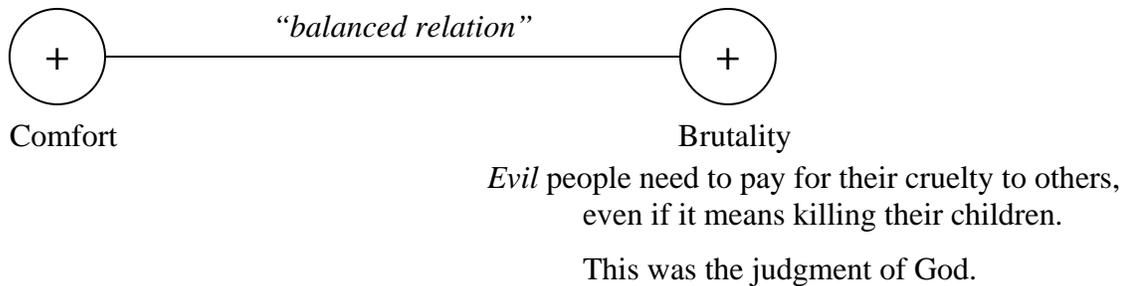
Figure 23: The Brutality in the Psalms Dilemma



1. Denial of the Element and the Brutality in the Psalms Dilemma

One way respondents sought to resolve this dilemma was through the use of the denial of the element. The responses, “Evil people need to pay for their cruelty to others, even if it means killing their children,” and “This was the judgment of God,” are reflective of this mode. This involves changing the negative affect value of “brutality” to a positive affect value, resulting in a balanced associative relation between the two elements. This can be illustrated in the following diagram (see Figure 24):

Figure 24: Denial of the Element and the Brutality in the Psalms Dilemma



By utilizing this tactic of denial, respondents, in effect, condone this unthinkable act of brutality as the necessary judgment of God. This is reminiscent of the response to the God and genocide dilemma that justified God’s act of genocide (“If left alive, these pagan people would have seduced the Israelites away from the worship of their God, Yahweh. *Therefore, they had to be killed*”). Though few people, even extreme fundamentalists, would take pleasure in dashing an infant’s head against the rocks, this is the logical end result for someone who holds to the view that the Bible is the “actual” word of God. For such a person, God’s judgment is absolute, no matter how disturbing it may be to our modern sensibilities. Some of the “other” responses reflecting this mode were:

Joshua had been instructed by God to kill all the people in Ai and other cities he took. What God commands, we do. It is not a decision left up to us individually.

God is a sovereign God...We cannot question His choice or His commandments.

His ways are not our ways. The God of the universe will do what is right.

God is the Righteous Judge of all evil who understands the motives and actions of all and judges accordingly.

2. Denial of the Relation and the Brutality in the Psalms Dilemma

A response reflecting this mode of denial was not provided for respondents. A summary of “other” responses reflecting this mode, however, provides us with a response. This response claims, “This is the psalmist’s expression of anger.” Rather than the words of God himself, these are the words of the Psalmist. God didn’t say this, nor did he command that the children of the Babylonians be dashed against the rocks. These are the expressed feelings of the Psalmist himself. Respondents commented:

They were expressing their hatred of the people they considered God’s enemies.
The Psalmist’s view, not God’s.

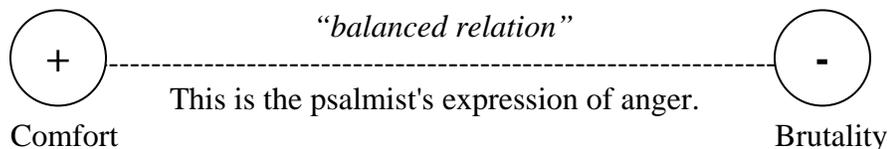
The Psalm is an honest expression of the way the writer felt.

This is a song/poem of one expressing his emotions. This is the author’s personal feelings of vindictiveness.

Imprecatory psalm which guards the holiness and righteousness of God by viewing Israel’s enemies as God’s enemies!

This, however, leaves an unresolved dilemma regarding the inspiration of scripture. If scripture is the inspired word of God and the Psalms are a part of scripture, then it would appear inconsistent for the words of the Psalmist to be considered inspired and thus a part of scripture. This is the logical implication of this response. If *inspired* means the words of God, then the Psalms as a whole cannot be regarded as scripture. This resolution attempt can be illustrated in the following diagram (see Figure 25):

Figure 25: Denial of the Relation and the Brutality in the Psalms Dilemma



In contrast to the denial of the element, the denial of relation leaves the negative affect value of the element “brutality” intact, but changes the relation from an associative one (an unbroken line) to a dissociative one (a broken line). Therefore, those choosing this response avoid justifying or condoning this act of brutality by claiming that this is the psalmist’s expression of anger and not God’s will. The implication of this, as noted above, is that this passage and others like it are downgraded from the status of “inspired”. This passage and most of the Psalms, therefore, become the work of men, not the “inspired” works of God.

3. Bolstering and the Brutality in the Psalms Dilemma

The response, “This passage must be interpreted within its context” (represented by R¹ in the diagram below), bolsters the “brutality” element, insisting that this disturbing element can be understood if we just understand its context. This being an “other” response, individuals commented:

I would study the context of the passage and discuss it with someone knowledgeable in Scripture to determine the correct understanding of this passage. Look Deeper.

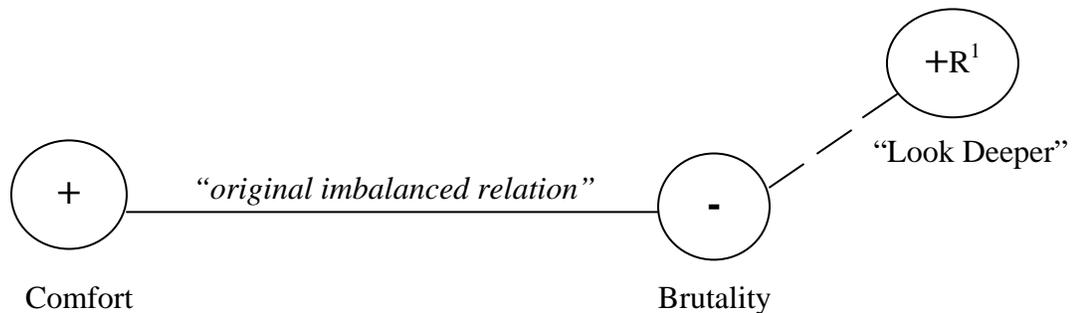
We must understand the context of the scripture...Put it in context of all of scripture...What is the whole scripture and its context?

I don't fully know the context of the scripture so I cannot answer accurately.

These responses say, in effect, “There must be something more about this passage that I do not understand.” The comment, “Look Deeper” (see R¹ in the diagram below), implies that somehow this passage is not as brutal as it first appears. Again, this mode *bolsters* the brutality element while holding out for some better explanation.

This mode of bolstering is illustrated in the following diagram (see Figure 26):

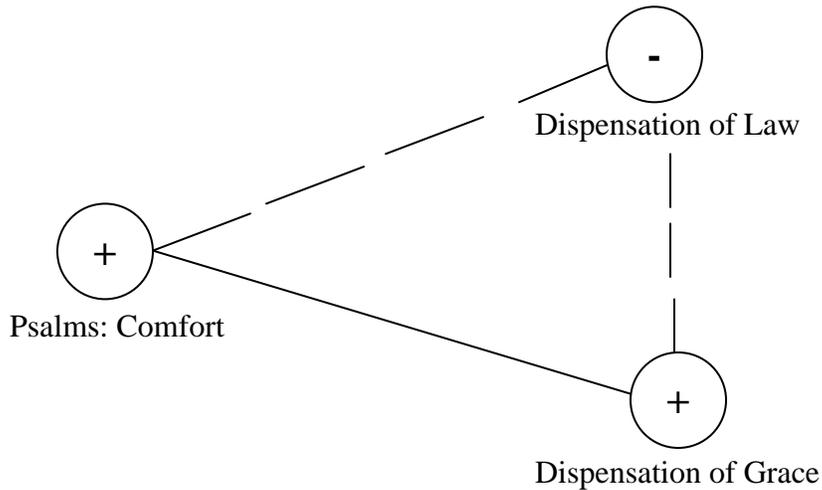
Figure 26: Bolstering and the Brutality in the Psalms Dilemma



4. Differentiation and the Brutality in the Psalms Dilemma

A few people utilized differentiation in resolving this dilemma. The comment best reflecting this category of responses claimed, “This was before the dispensation of Grace brought by the life and death of Jesus Christ.” In utilizing this mode, believers differentiated between the old dispensation of law between God and Israel and the new dispensation of grace instituted by Jesus’ death and resurrection. This can be illustrated in the following diagram (see Figure 27):

Figure 27: Differentiation and the Brutality in the Psalms Dilemma



In this arrangement, “brutality” under the old dispensation retains the negative affect value, but the relation with the “comfort” element becomes dissociative, thus producing a balanced relation between these two elements. The differentiated element, “Dispensation of Grace,” takes on a positive affect value, but the relation between it and the “comfort” element remains the same. With a change in the affect value of this differentiated element, balance is restored. The two differentiated elements, however, stand in a strong dissociative relation with one another.

5. No Resolution Offered and the Brutality in the Psalms Dilemma

The response, “I tend to overlook passages like this,” represents no attempt to resolve this dilemma. Respondents who selected this response failed to grapple with the dilemma posed by this question by choosing to ignore it. This approach provides a shield against any disturbing material in scripture. It also reveals a “selective” approach to scripture that focuses on passages that are consonant with one’s belief system and overlooks those that are not.

Individuals who selected the response, “This cannot be inspired scripture,” also made no attempt to resolve this dilemma. These respondents appear to be comfortable with the ambiguity that exists between this passage and the inspiration of scripture. By their refusal to reconcile these two opposing poles, they acknowledge that this is not inspired scripture, but rather the psalmist’s bitter cry for vengeance. Two “other” responses also reflect this category. The responses, “Psalms are songs written by men – this is a lament” and “Reflects the writer’s (or people’s) personal tragedy and grief, as Psalms are songs/prayers of men,” will be dealt with in the “Discussion” section.

6. “Don’t Know” and the Brutality in the Psalms Dilemma

Though I have not included this category in my subsequent survey, “don’t know” occurred most frequently with regard to this dilemma (see Table 4 above). As I stated above in the introduction to this dilemma, this is an unfamiliar passage for most Christians and one that is not addressed by their leaders. The Psalms as a whole represent the prayers of the people of Israel to their God, Yahweh, and due to their place in the Old Testament canon, are accepted without much thought given to their human origins. A passage such as this, because it is ensconced within the Hebrew Bible, is considered “inspired” without regard for its brutal and violent content. With regard to this passage, it is much easier to claim ignorance than it is to wrestle with its resolution. Compared with the paths to salvation dilemma, this problem is perceived to have little relevance to one’s actual faith and practice.

E. Resolving the Paths to Salvation Dilemma

No other claim strikes at the heart of fundamentalist Christianity like the claim that people of other faiths can attain salvation and go to heaven when they die. While most fundamentalist Christians try to avoid the question of who is going to hell, the logical consistency of their belief structure states that anyone who has not professed Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord is destined to an eternity in that damnable domain. To assess how respondents resolve this potent belief dilemma, they were asked the following question:

The New Testament is very clear that Jesus is the only way to salvation (i.e., John 14:6). Other religions, however, propose “ways” to salvation other than through Jesus. How do you reconcile these multiple paths?

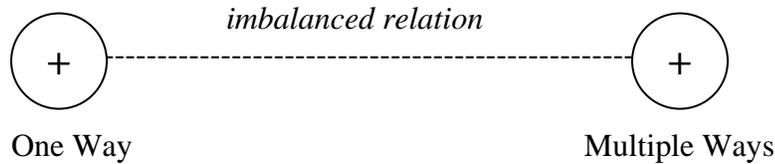
Individuals were asked to choose from the following responses the statement or statements best reflecting how they would resolve this dilemma. Table 5 shows the frequency with which each response was chosen:

Table 5: Paths to Salvation: Frequency of Response

| Mode | No. | Response | Freq. | Percent |
|--|-----|--|-------|---------|
| dne | 1 | There are not multiple paths. Religions other than Christianity are false. The only way to salvation is through Jesus Christ. | 119 | 39.2 |
| df | 2 | Other religions possess only partial truth. The full revelation of God came through Jesus Christ, and it is through Him alone that we are saved. | 109 | 38.5 |
| dnr | 3 | God has chosen to reveal himself to people in different ways. God has been revealed to me through Jesus Christ. | 102 | 36.0 |
| tr | 4 | Each of the major world religions proposes a valid path to salvation. | 22 | 6.0 |
| dk | 5 | Can't Choose | 4 | 1.4 |
| dk | 6 | Don't Know | 3 | 0.7 |
| Total | | | 359 | |
| Key to Modes: dne = denial of the element; dnr = denial of the relation; df = differentiation; tr = transcendence; dk = don't know | | | | |

The basic dilemma is whether there is more than one way or only one way to attain salvation. This is illustrated in the following diagram (see Figure 28):

Figure 28: The Paths to Salvation Dilemma

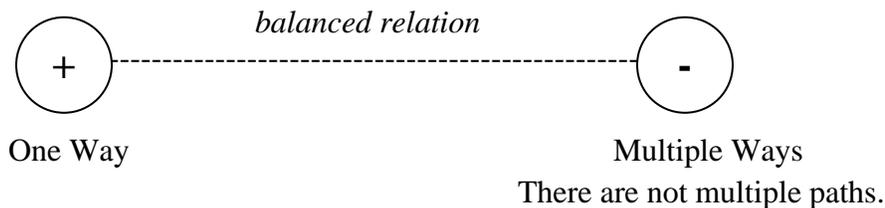


These two elements (“one way” and “multiple ways”) are linked together by a dissociative relation. How can salvation be both through Jesus Christ alone and through avenues of salvation proposed by other religions?

1. Denial of the Element and the Paths to Salvation Dilemma

The first response, “There are not multiple paths. Religions other than Christianity are false. The only way to salvation is through Jesus Christ,” is the most absolute of all four responses. The logical implication of this statement is that no one, apart from a personal faith in Jesus Christ as his or her Savior and Lord, can enter heaven or attain salvation. To resolve this dilemma, respondents “denied” that there were multiple paths leading to salvation, thus changing the positive affect value of “multiple paths” to negative (see Figure 29):

Figure 29: Denial of the Element and the Paths to Salvation Dilemma



2. Denial of the Relation and the Paths to Salvation Dilemma

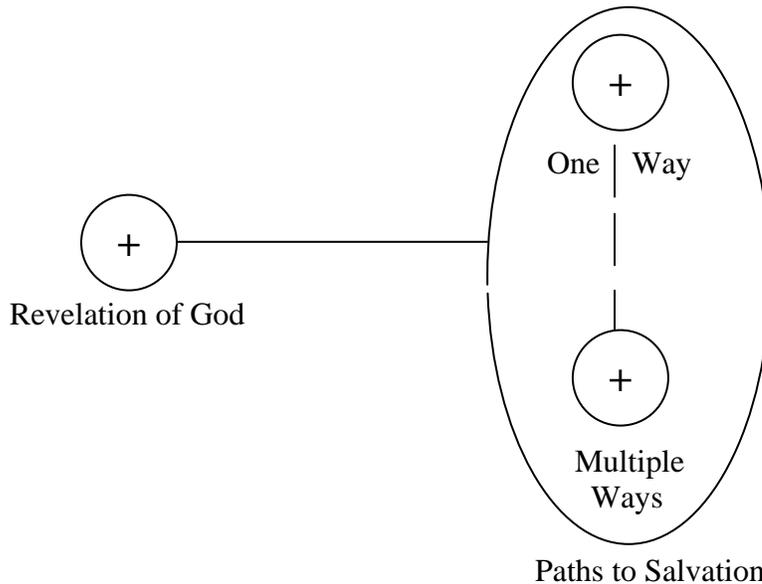
The response, “God has chosen to reveal himself to people in different ways. God has been revealed to me through Jesus Christ,” reflects this mode of denial. Respondents selecting this response *deny* that the relation between the “one way” element and the “multiple ways” element is dissociative (broken line) and claim that these two elements are related associatively (unbroken line). These believers claim to have received their revelation of God through Jesus Christ, but do not deny that there are other ways that God can and has revealed himself. Thus, these two poles are not opposed to, but rather can complement one another. One person commented, “He [Jesus] also said “I have others who are not of this fold.” Perhaps he was referring to those of other faiths whose actions follow his teachings.” This new balanced relation is illustrated in the following diagram (see Figure 30):

By utilizing the tactic of differentiation, the “multiple ways” element is differentiated into a “partial truth” and a “full revelation” element. The “partial truth” element takes on a negative effect value, whereas the “full revelation” element maintains the positive affect value of the original element. The dissociative relation between these two elements maintains the tension between them, but also serves to balance this relation. The original dissociative relation is maintained between the “one way” element and the new differentiated element, “partial truth,” but because of the negative affect value associated with this element, the two elements are in a balanced relation with one another. The relation between the old “full revelation” element” and the “one way” element, however, becomes an associative relation. Because both of their affect values are positive, this too results in a balanced relation. This dilemma, therefore, has been effectively reconciled in the mind of the believer.

4. Transcendence and the Paths to Salvation Dilemma

The response, “Each of the major world religions proposes a valid path to salvation,” reflects the mode of transcendence. In this attempt at resolution, believers transcend the dissonance between the two opposing elements by gathering all these *ways* together valid paths to salvation. This is an act affirming the revelation of God to all peoples of all faiths. This is illustrated in the diagram below (see Figure 32):

Figure 32: Transcendence and the Paths to Salvation Dilemma



5. No Resolution Offered and the Paths to Salvation Dilemma

A response reflecting this category of response was not included in my previous survey. Some respondents, however, commented that the path to salvation was through the path of love as follows. These “other” responses are as follows:

Jesus seems to me to be the highest human expression of love – which is what God’s nature and God’s way is, i.e., the path of love – a Hindu or Muslim may dwell in love and not worship Christ, but Christ’s nature dwells in him.

Jesus’ teaching of love and forgiveness is the point God wants to make.

One who loves God and loves others but does not profess to be a Christian is more of a Christian and a believer in Jesus, than one who professes to be a Christian but does not abide by Christ’s teachings.

These will be addressed in the “Discussion” section.

F. Resolving the Dilemma of Unanswered Prayer

The issue of unanswered prayer is a conundrum especially when contrasted with a passage such as Mark 11:24 in which Jesus tells his disciples, “whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” (see the broader context in verses 20-25). As a result, a cognitive imbalance would be expected to occur between one’s prayer and no apparent healing. To examine how this inconsistency is reconciled, respondents were asked:

In Mark 11:24 Jesus tells his disciples, “whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” (see the broader context in verses 20-25). On the basis of this passage, how do you explain to someone why their prayer for healing has not been answered?

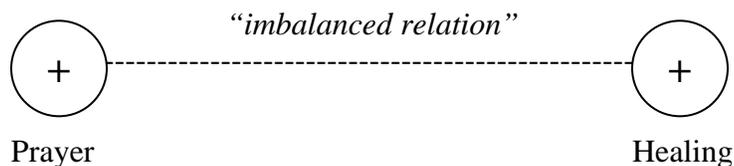
Individuals were asked to choose from the following responses the statement or statements best reflecting how they would resolve this dilemma. Table 6 shows the frequency with which each response was chosen:

Table 6: Unanswered Prayer: Frequency of Responses

| Mode | No. | Response | Freq. | Percent |
|---|-----|---|-------|---------|
| dnr | 1 | They need more faith. | 15 | 3.0 |
| dnr | 2 | It is not God's time. | 111 | 22.2 |
| tr | 3 | God may be using this illness for a greater purpose. | 196 | 39.2 |
| nro | 4 | This is not how prayer works. | 83 | 16.6 |
| dk | 5 | I don't why God hasn't answered their prayer. | 49 | 9.8 |
| "Other" Responses | | | | |
| dne | 6 | Sometimes God's answer is "No". | 7 | 1.4 |
| bol | 7 | God always answers our prayers. | 7 | 1.4 |
| dnr | 9 | There is a problem in a person's relationship with God. | 4 | 0.8 |
| dnr | 10 | You must believe that you have received God's blessing. | 3 | 0.6 |
| df | 11 | Death is the ultimate form of healing. | 9 | 1.8 |
| df | 12 | There are types of non-physical healing. | 5 | 1.0 |
| bol | 13 | God's ways are not our ways. Only He knows. | 11 | 2.2 |
| Total | | | 500 | |
| Key to Modes: dne = denial of the element; dnr = denial of the relation; bol = bolstering; df = differentiation; tr = transcendence; nro = no resolution offered; dk = don't know | | | | |

The cognitive structure of this dilemma is illustrated in the following diagram (see Figure 33):

Figure 33: The Dilemma of Unanswered Prayer



In this cognitive dyad, both prayer and healing have positive affect values, but the relation between them is a dissociative one (broken line). An associative relation (unbroken line) is expected here by many Christians, affirming the fact that God does answer prayers for healing with healing.¹¹ If a person believes that prayer can heal someone who is sick, then this statement should create within him/her a significant amount of dissonance. How then does he/she reconcile this dilemma?

¹¹ James 5:14-16 is often used in support of this claim. The passage is as follows: "Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well...pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (*The Holy Bible*, New International Version, 1973, 1978, and 1984 by the International Bible Society).

A number of responses from my previous survey just addressed the issue of unanswered prayer and not the issue of an unanswered prayer for healing. Therefore, I felt to need to make this explicit. I address this in the “discussion” section. Some of these respondents commented:

He may answer in a way we do not recognize as the answer.

I believe God answers prayer but we do not always know how.

God always answers our prayers but we may refuse the answer.

He does answer prayers. Sometimes it is not how we want them answered.

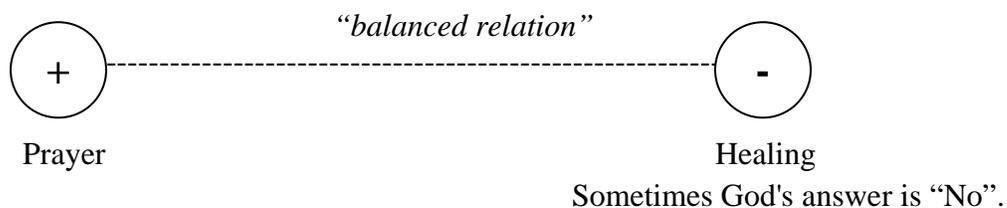
1. Denial of the Element and the Dilemma of Unanswered Prayer

The response, “Sometimes God's answer is *No*,” reflects this mode of denial. This response changes the positive affect value of the “healing” element from positive to negative, representing the fact that the individual’s prayer for physical healing has not been answered. One respondent commented:

We don’t necessarily receive what we ask for in prayer. We may receive an answer and “it” is “no.” You receive what you ask for in “Christ’s name” i.e., in the name of love and of obedience to the perfect will of God.

This mode of denial is illustrated in the following diagram (see Figure 34):

Figure 34: Denial of the Element and the Dilemma of Unanswered Prayer



2. Denial of the Relation and the Dilemma of Unanswered Prayer

Two responses were provided for respondents reflecting this mode of denial. These were: “They need more faith” and “It is not God’s time”. One respondent replied:

There are many reasons for not getting healed. Many times we don’t know why, but sometimes it can be a lack of faith, wrong motives, or personal sin that has not been repented of.

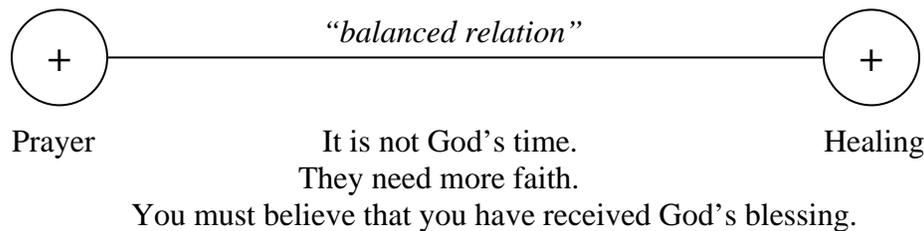
A few claimed, “You must believe that you have received God’s blessing.” In other words, you must *believe* that you have been healed. Characteristic of this response were comments such as:

When you pray, you ask God’s will, not your own. God’s will will always be true. This verse is teaching you to have true faith. It works. I have prayed for God’s will on something I wanted. [I] know God has taken care of it (“received it”) and it has been mine.”

Believing is the key – not whether they are healed or not. Believe that you have received God’s blessing and live out your life in peace. We will all die someday. The person who can accept this and still believe is a religious person.

Attempts to resolve this dilemma of belief are illustrated in the figure below (see Figure 35):

Figure 35: Denial of the Relation and the Dilemma of Unanswered Prayer

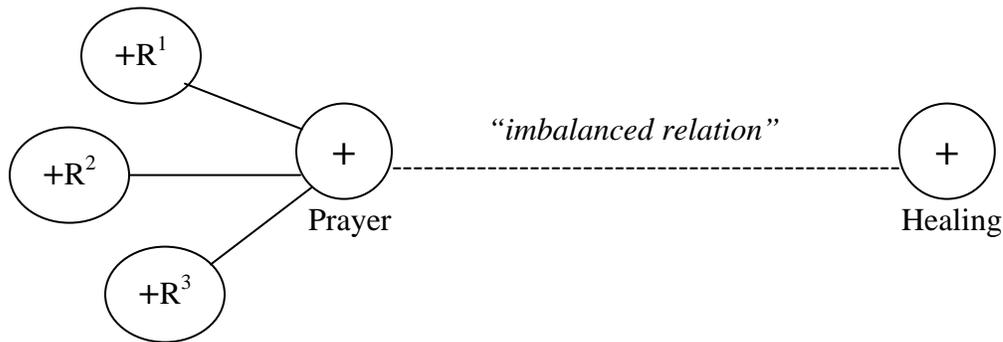


All these attempts at resolution assume that prayer can lead to healing, but there is a reason why healing has not occurred. “It is not God’s time. If it were, then you would be healed”...“If you had more faith, then your prayer for healing would be answered”...“If you believe that you have been healed, then you will be healed.” All of these attempts at resolution are contingent on some condition (timing, faith, believing) being met. If these conditions are met, then one’s prayer for healing will be answered. God, however, is absolved of all blame. The denial of the relation, in this case and in the other cases mentioned in this section, is, therefore, a defense of the efficacy of prayer and, therefore, also a defense of God.

3. Bolstering and the Dilemma of Unanswered Prayer

A response reflecting the mode of bolstering was not provided for respondents in this survey. Comments, however, such as, “Only God knows (R¹)...God’s ways are not our ways (R²)...God sees the *big picture* – we do not” (R³), were given as “other” responses. This tactic of bolstering is illustrated in the following diagram (see Figure 36):

Figure 36: Bolstering and the Dilemma of Unanswered Prayer

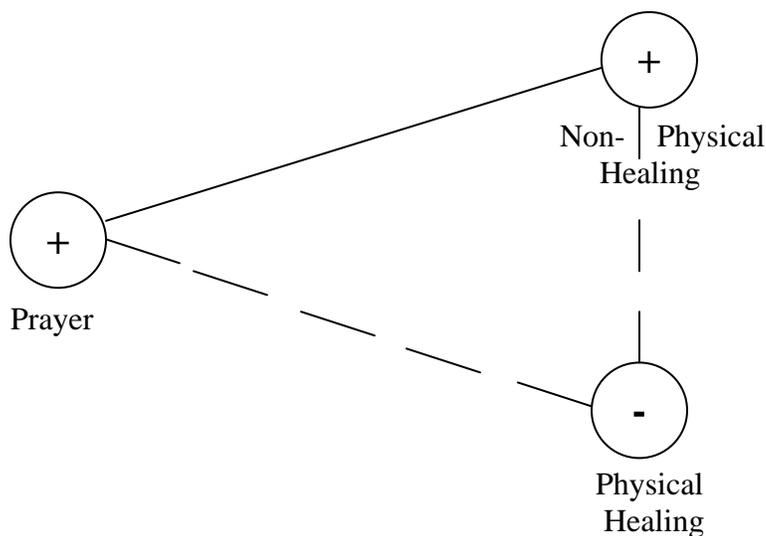


In this diagram, the relation between “prayer” and “healing” continues to be dissociative, but this imbalance is “drowned out” by these *bolstering* responses.

4. Differentiation and the Dilemma of Unanswered Prayer

No response was offered for the mode of transcendence in this survey. Some, however, differentiated between physical and non-physical healing, such as emotional healing, spiritual healing, or even death. This dilemma, therefore, is reconciled by differentiating the positive *healing* element into a *physical* healing element and a *non-physical* healing element. The *old* physical healing element takes on a negative affect value (physical healing is downgraded in importance) and the *new* non-physical healing element takes on the original positive affect value. The relation between these two elements remains the same, but now, rather than an imbalanced relation between them, a balanced one exists. The original dissociative relation is preserved between the old element and the positive prayer element, but now that relation is balanced. As a result, the new non-physical healing element takes on an associative relation with the positive prayer element, thus resulting in a completely balanced cognitive structure. This is illustrated in the following diagram (see Figure 37):

Figure 37: Differentiation and the Dilemma of Unanswered Prayer



An interesting aspect of this mode of belief dilemma resolution is its tactic of redefinition or reinterpretation. To maintain cognitive consistency, believers redefine their situations to fit within their existing cognitive frameworks. The implicit assumption in a prayer for healing is that *physical* healing, not spiritual healing, emotional healing, and definitely not death, will occur. When physical healing does not take place, however, believers begin to rationalize or redefine the situation in an attempt to resolve this inconsistency. Some respondents redefined healing by saying:

I believe God's concern is for our spiritual health and will always strengthen anyone who seeks His aid to be healed spiritually.

What we consider healing may be limiting – difference also in type" physical vs. emotional.

God responds to prayer, but not in a prescriptive way, according to our expectation or direction. My prayers in illness were answered with spiritual healing –this changed my life and brought me closer to God's will for my life.

With regard to death as the ultimate form of healing, respondents commented:

God's perfect healing is given to every believer in afterlife.

We tend to think within the constraints of the physical world, rather than beyond this temporal realm. Life in this world is transitory; therefore, any physical healing that takes place is only temporary. We must all eventually die (i.e., a physical death) – and death itself might be seen as the ultimate form of healing, as one is released from one's earthly prison (body).

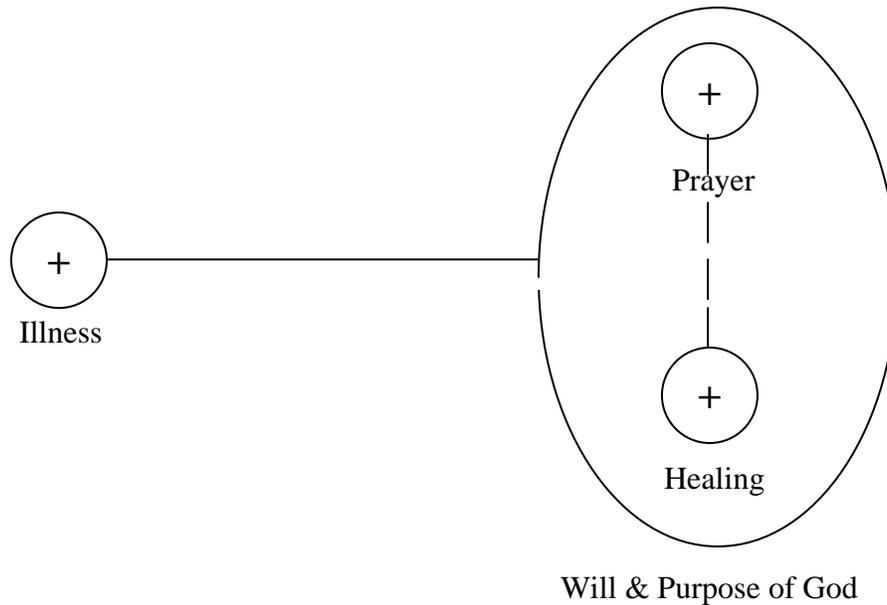
Healing here is temporary. In death a Christian is healed for eternity.

The conundrum still exists if these respondents believe that God answers prayer (as asked in Question 32) and that prayer can heal someone who is sick (as asked in Question 86). If so, then this denial opens wide the door for any number of possible interpretations as to how God may be answering one's prayer. God, therefore, cannot be held accountable for financial loss, premature death, or failure to relieve suffering. God, therefore, is absolved of all wrongdoing. These modes of resolution (denial, bolstering, and differentiation) find shelter in the shady canopy of God's will and purpose.

5. Transcendence and the Dilemma of Unanswered Prayer

The response, "God may be using this illness for a greater purpose," reflects the mode of transcendence. This statement transcends the dilemma of unanswered prayer for healing by enveloping it within the larger will and purpose of God. This illustrated by the following diagram (see Figure 38):

Figure 38: Transcendence and the Dilemma of Unanswered Prayer



This response affirms that God’s purpose is being fulfilled, despite the individual’s prayer for healing not being answered. For many believers, to accept that God is fulfilling his purpose through them is adequate compensation for His refusal to make them well. This relates well to a familiar passage in the New Testament book of Romans that says, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).¹² This is a familiar verse to many Christians, often used to comfort those in the midst of suffering (see the broader context in verses 18-39). Rather than explaining why someone’s prayer for healing has not been answered, this response encourages one to see their suffering in light of God’s broader plan and purpose.

6. No Resolution Offered and the Dilemma of Unanswered Prayer

The response, “This is not how prayer works,” reflects no attempt at resolving this dilemma. It disputes the validity of the claim that prayer should necessarily lead to the answer for which we are looking or to the healing for which we are hoping. Individual responses included:

Prayer is to bring us more fully into God’s presence.

Prayer should reconcile us to God, not God to us.

Prayer is not getting my will done in heaven but rather God’s will done on earth.

¹² This biblical passage is taken from *The Holy Bible*, New International Version, 1973, 1978, and 1984 by the International Bible Society.

G. Resolving the Relief of Suffering Dilemma

How can a good God allow evil and suffering in the world? If God is all-powerful, then why does he not eliminate all the pain and heartache that we, as humans, experience during the course of our lives? Heaven, thus, becomes the utopia for which many strive, a place devoid of “death or mourning or crying or pain” (see Revelation 21:4). This is the dilemma posed to respondents. Individuals were asked:

In Revelation 21:4 a loud voice from the throne of God cries out saying, “He (God) will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”¹³ If God is able to do this in the future, why isn’t he doing it now, in the present?

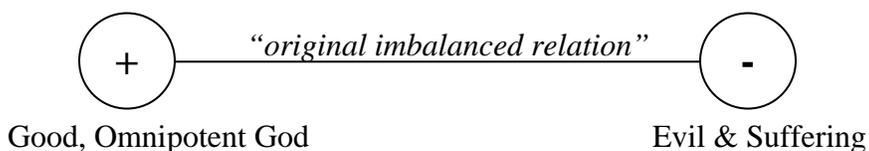
Individuals were asked to choose from the following responses the statement or statements best reflecting how they would resolve this dilemma. Table 7 shows the frequency with which each response was chosen:

Table 7: The Relief of Suffering Dilemma: Frequency of Responses

| Mode | No. | Responses | Freq. | Percent |
|---|-----|--|-------|---------|
| dne | 1 | Life on earth is a place of testing, a preparation for Heaven. | 147 | 40.4 |
| dnr | 2 | This universe is part of a larger plan than just our life here on Earth. | 163 | 44.8 |
| nro | 3 | God should do more to eliminate pain and suffering in the here and now. | 6 | 1.6 |
| dk | 4 | Don't Know | 27 | 7.4 |
| "Other" Responses | | | | |
| df | 5 | Man is to blame for sin & suffering. | 15 | 4.1 |
| bol | 6 | Our hope and comfort is in God. | 6 | 1.6 |
| Total Number of Responses | | | 364 | |
| Key to Modes: dne = denial of the element; dnr = denial of the relation; bol = bolstering; df = differentiation; nro = no resolution offered; dk = don't know | | | | |

The basic assumption underlying this dilemma is that God, as a good and omnipotent deity, should eliminate evil and suffering in the world. The challenge facing respondents is why he does not. The cognitive structure of this belief dilemma can be illustrated by the following diagram (see Figure 39):

Figure 39: The Relief of Suffering Dilemma



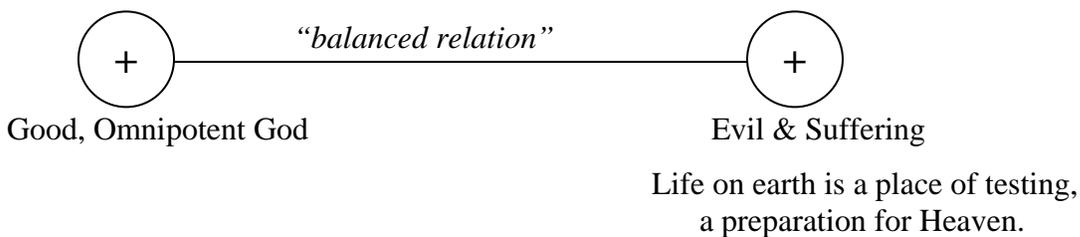
¹³ This biblical passage is taken from *The Holy Bible*, New International Version, 1973, 1978, and 1984 by the International Bible Society.

In this diagram, the character of God as a good and omnipotent deity is represented with a positive affect value and evil and suffering with a negative affect value. These two elements, however, are joined together by an unbroken line, representing an associative relation between them. How can a good and omnipotent God be positively related to evil and suffering? This is the dilemma.

1. Denial of the Element and the Relief of Suffering Dilemma

The response, “Life on earth is a place of testing, a preparation for Heaven,” reflects this mode of denial. This tactic involves changing the negative affect value of the “evil and suffering” element to positive. By doing so, respondents affirm that evil and suffering is a necessary part of the human condition. This response implies that God allows evil and suffering to prepare us for our future life with him in heaven. Life, therefore, is an arena of testing. If we turn to God rather than relying on ourselves, we pass the test. If not, we fail. This is illustrated in the following diagram (see Figure 40):

Figure 40: Denial of the Element and the Relief of Suffering Dilemma



Some individuals felt compelled to rely:

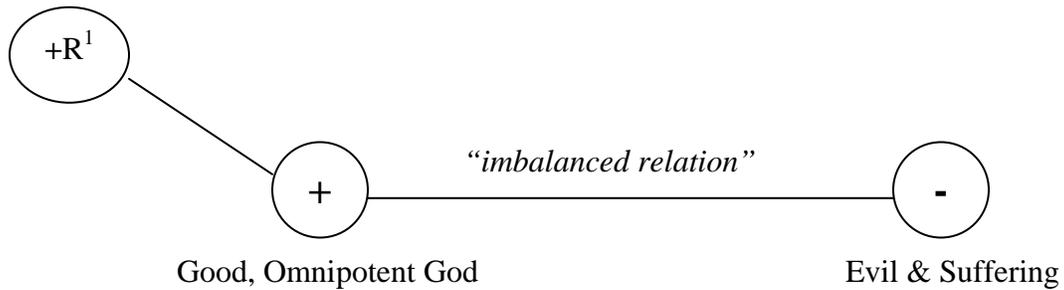
We need to suffer to show our reliance on God. Faith is not there when everything is easy.

If God cannot observe how we react to struggles, suffering, and great challenges – then how are we to be judged?

Sometimes suffering draws us closer to Christ.

Others built upon this basic response insisting that God “wants us to choose Him and witness to others.” This implies that God allows evil and suffering as a prompt to draw people to himself so that they may be saved. Evil and suffering, therefore, becomes a good thing, for without it (according to this logic) none of us would turn to God. Having turned to God, the task is now to share our experiences of God’s deliverance with others so that they, too, may be saved. This becomes the believer’s mission, with evil and suffering as the tools of his trade. With this mindset, alleviation of suffering comes through the acceptance of Jesus Christ, and not through the alleviation of physical, social, or emotional suffering.

Figure 42: Bolstering and the Relief of Suffering Dilemma



Those who selected this “other” response replied:

God is strength for us and our guide.

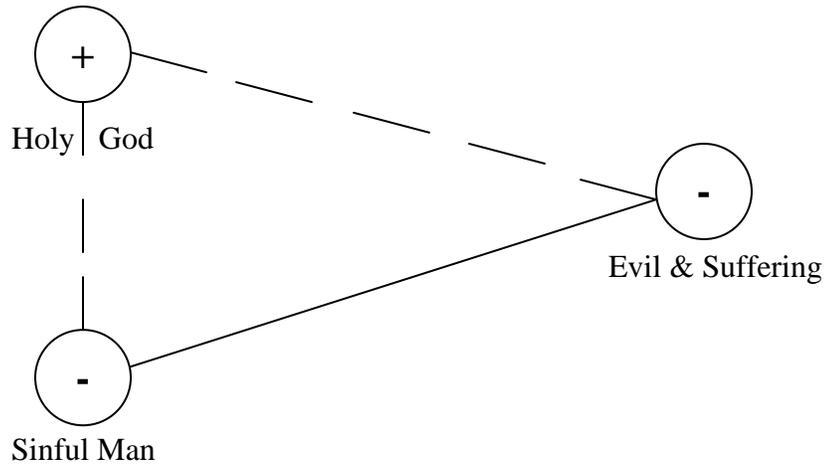
I do not presume to know God’s plan but I will be faithful to believe in Him.

The purpose of apocalyptic literature is to instill hope in a hopeless situation...It says in effect “God is still God despite the way things look now!”

4. Differentiation and the Relief of Suffering Dilemma

If there is a God who is all-loving and all-powerful, then man must have done something to allow evil and suffering into the world. A theodicy addresses why a good god would allow evil and suffering, whereas an anthropodicy, puts the blame back on man (see Berger 1967: 78). Such is the case in the story of the Garden of Eden found in Genesis 2-3. The Garden of Eden represents the unsoiled creation of God in which God placed man. He gave the man and the woman free reign of the garden, but prohibited them from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This prohibition provided the man and the woman with a choice: obey God and live or disobey God and die. When they chose to eat from the tree, sin entered the world, thus bringing in its wake evil and suffering. This is the logic behind the “other” response, “Man is to blame for sin & suffering,” which reflects the mode of differentiation. This is illustrated in the following diagram (see Figure 43):

Figure 43: Differentiation and the Relief of Suffering Dilemma



In this diagram, the “Good, Omnipotent God” element is differentiated into a *new* “Holy God” element and an *old* “Sinful Man” element. Strictly speaking, according to Abelson’s model, the “Good, Omnipotent God” element would be differentiated into a “Good God” and a “Bad God” element. Believers, however, clearly do not view God in such dualistic terms. The *old* “sinful Man” element retains the original dissociative relation with the “evil and suffering” element, but its affect value is changed from positive to negative. This balances these two elements. The *new* “Holy God” element, however, retains the old positive affect value, but the relation it shares with the negative “evil and suffering” element becomes dissociative. This balances these two elements, whereas a strong dissociative relation exists between the two differentiated elements. As a result, this entire differentiated structure achieves balance. Those who selected this “other” response commented:

Because of man’s sin (Adam), there is suffering.

Because we live in a world of sin and mankind has determined to follow evil instead of good.

Sadness, sickness, suffering, etc. are all indirect results of sin in the world. In God’s new creation the former things will pass away.

God is allowing His creation to exercise their free will – suffering is caused by years of selfish choices by mankind – But one day God will intervene.

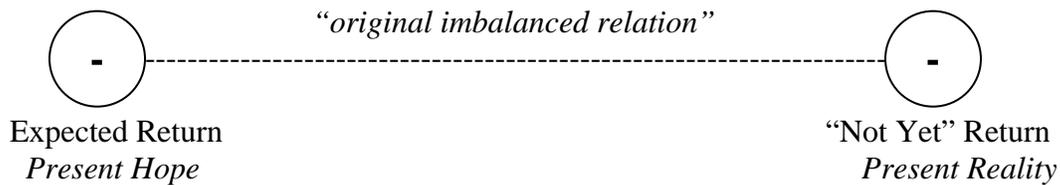
The earth is cursed with sin of mankind. In God’s time, His kingdom will take over.

Table 8: The Return of Jesus Dilemma: Frequency of Responses

| MODE | No. | Responses | Freq. | Percent |
|---|-----|--|-------|---------|
| dnr | 1 | A thousand years is like a day in the eyes of God. | 181 | 46.4 |
| dnr | 2 | God is waiting until all people have heard the Gospel. | 112 | 28.7 |
| nro | 3 | Jesus is not going to return. The disciples misinterpreted Jesus' message. | 8 | 2.1 |
| dk | 4 | Don't Know | 50 | 12.8 |
| "Other" Responses | | | | |
| df | 5 | Jesus has returned. | 6 | 1.5 |
| dnr | 6 | Jesus will return when God's purpose is fulfilled. | 9 | 2.3 |
| dne | 7 | God only knows when Jesus will return. | 24 | 6.2 |
| Total Number of Responses | | | 390 | |
| Key to Modes: dnr = denial of the relation; df = differentiation; nro = no resolution offered; dk = don't know | | | | |

Why is it that Jesus has not returned? Why has God waited so long? The cognitive structure of this dilemma is illustrated in the following diagram (see Figure 45):

Figure 45: The Return of Jesus Dilemma

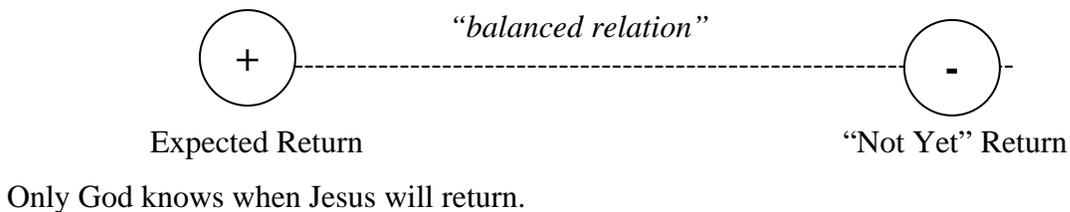


The first element of this cognitive dyad is the expected return of Jesus, the present hope of most believers, which failed to occur according to the expectation of the disciples and Paul, and which has failed to occur over the past two thousand years. Because of these failed expectations, it is given a negative affect value. The second element of this cognitive dyad is the “not yet” return of Jesus. It is this reality that believers live with in the present. Because this hope has yet to be fulfilled, it, too, has been given a negative affect value. In between these two elements is the immense span of 2,000 years. A broken line, signifying a dissociative relation, represents this long period of time. This broken line joins these two elements together and creates the imbalanced relation respondents are asked to resolve.

1. Denial of the Element and the Return of Jesus Dilemma

The response, “Only God knows when Jesus will return,” is reflective of this mode of denial. This was not one of the responses made available to respondents, but a summary of comments such as: “We are charged to wait, watch, and prepare...No one but God knows when Jesus will return...Of that day no one will know...Not for us to worry about – we just need to be prepared.” This response denies that anyone but God knows the time when Jesus will return and, thus, the disciples must have been mistaken. As a result, these respondents change the affect value of the “Expected Return” element to positive, thus balancing the cognitive dyad. This attempt at resolution is illustrated in the following diagram (see Figure 46):

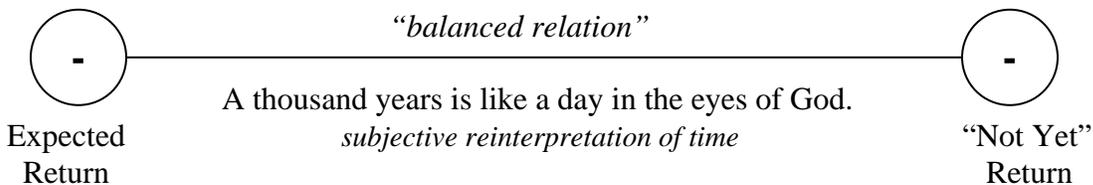
Figure 46: Denial of the Element and the Return of Jesus Dilemma



2. Denial of the Relation and the Return of Jesus Dilemma

Two responses, “A thousand years is like a day in the eyes of God” and “God is waiting until all people have heard the Gospel,” reflected this mode of denial in my earlier survey. One other, “Jesus will return when God’s purpose is fulfilled,” was an “other” response and is very similar in nature to the second response just mentioned. All of these responses involve a *reinterpretation* of time. This reinterpretation consists of both a subjective and objective interpretation. For some, time is reinterpreted subjectively as being different for human beings than it is for God. This is reflected in the response, “A thousand years is like a day in the eyes of God.” This is illustrated in the following diagram (see Figure 47a):

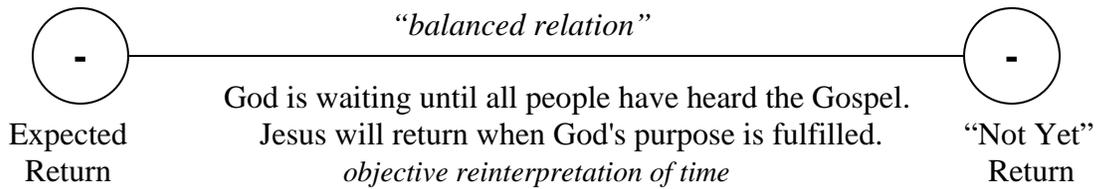
Figure 47a: The Denial of the Relation and the Return of Jesus Dilemma



In addition to this response, some individuals replied with such comments as: “God’s time is not our time...God is not a captive of time and space...God is in total control. Time is a human concept...God is above time.”

For others, the time of Jesus' return is more objective. This objective time is reflected in the responses, "God is waiting until all people have heard the Gospel" and "Jesus will return when God's purpose is fulfilled." As one person commented, "When the last member of the Bride of Christ is saved, Jesus will return for His Bride (church)." The resolution of this belief dilemma is illustrated in the following diagram (see Figure 47b):

Figure 47b: The Denial of the Relation and the Return of Jesus Dilemma



All these responses deny the dissociative relation between these two elements by replacing it with an associative relation, represented by an unbroken line. Balance is thus restored. The relation between the "expected" return of Jesus and his "not yet" return is explained away either by a subjective or objective reinterpretation of time. By this use of denial, individuals claim that there is no inconsistency between these two elements. In other words, there is no inconsistency between Jesus' *expected* return and his *not yet* return and the two thousand years since he left, either because "one day is like a thousand in the eyes of God" or because "not everyone has heard the gospel." The inconsistency is removed, balance is restored, and the threat to one's faith is eliminated.

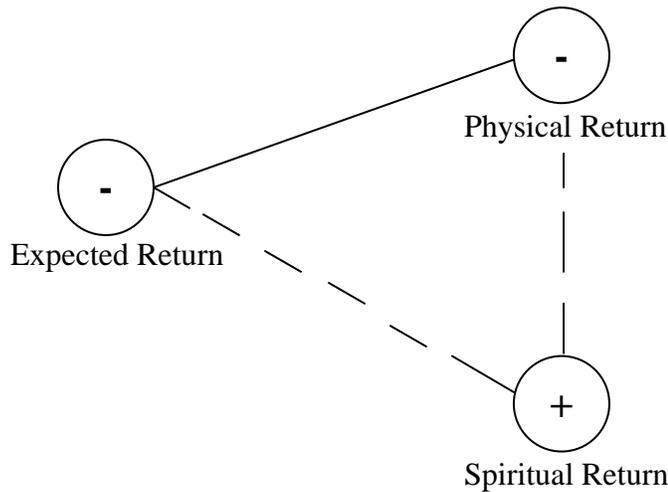
3. Differentiation and the Return of Jesus Dilemma

A few people claimed that Jesus has returned, but not physically. Some of these "other" responses were:

Jesus is not going to return *physically*. Jesus returns in spirit for those who believe in Him...Hasn't? – Christ is among us everyday...Everytime someone comes to know the love of God in their life that is a time when Christ has returned. Christ is always returning...His message lives on. He in effect has never left.

These responses are representative of differentiation and are illustrated by the following diagram (Figure 48):

Figure 48: Differentiation and the Return of Jesus Dilemma

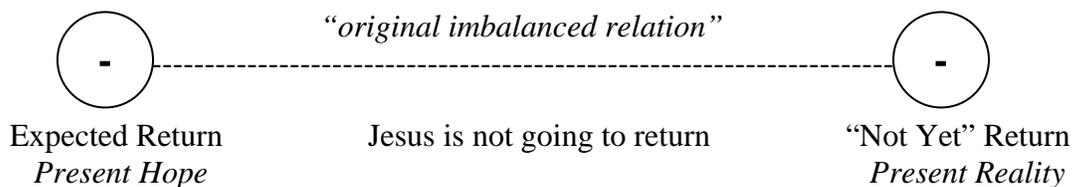


By this act of differentiation, the “not yet” return of Jesus has been divided into a “physical” return and a “spiritual” return. The “physical” return element retains the old negative affect value, but the relation with the other “expected” return element is changed from an imbalanced dissociative relation to an associative one. The new element, the “spiritual” return, takes on a positive affect value, but the relation between it and the other element remains the same. Both of these differentiated elements are related dissociatively.

4. No Resolution Offered and the Return of Jesus Dilemma

The response, “Jesus is not going to return. The disciples misinterpreted Jesus’ message,” is representative of no attempt being made to resolve this dilemma. Individuals who selected this response made no attempt to right the imbalance between the “Expected Return” and the “Not Yet Return” elements in their claim that Jesus was, in fact, not going to return. This is illustrated in the following diagram (see Figure 49):

Figure 49: No Resolution Offered and the Return of Jesus Dilemma



This response can actually be seen as two separate responses: (1) “Jesus is not going to return” and (2) “The disciples misinterpreted Jesus’ message.” With regard to this second response, it is possible to believe that Jesus will return even if the disciples were wrong about the time.

V. DISCUSSION

This section discusses the changes made to my earlier survey that appear in my revised religious survey.

A. The Inspiration of the Pentateuch Dilemma

Based on the data above, there are several changes that I will make with regard to the dilemma of the inspiration of the Pentateuch. To begin with, I will modify the question itself to read:

Biblical scholars generally agree that various sources (oral and written), with vastly different theological perspectives, were joined together into the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) by a group of priests ~~during the Babylonian Exile~~ around 450 B.C.E. Most people, however, assume that Moses wrote these books in their entirety (except for the account of his death in Deuteronomy). If these biblical scholars are correct, then how do you explain the inspiration of scripture (*one theological perspective*) in the midst of such diverse theological perspectives?

The first change is the deletion of “during the Babylonian Exile”. The Babylonian Exile lasted from 597 through 538 B.C.E., a period of 70 years. A group of priests did join together various sources into what is now known as the Pentateuch around 450 B.C.E., but this period falls considerably beyond the time of the Babylonian Exile.

The second change is the addition of “one theological perspective” (see italics above) following the “inspiration of scripture”. This is done to clarify for the respondent the nature of this cognitive dilemma. The inspiration of scripture implies that God transmitted *one*, consistent, theological perspective to those who recorded his words, rather than *diverse* theological perspectives. This may have not been clear in the original question.

I have also made changes in the responses themselves. Rather than the two responses offered above, which reflect the denial of the element, I have chosen just one to implement in my subsequent survey. This new response embraces the idea of diverse theological perspectives, but not in rejection of the inspiration of scripture. What it says, in fact, is that diverse theological perspectives are just different ways of viewing the incomprehensibility of God’s perspective:

Many different perspectives are needed to comprehend God’s one perspective.
What may appear to be diverse theological perspectives are just different ways of viewing the one perspective of God.

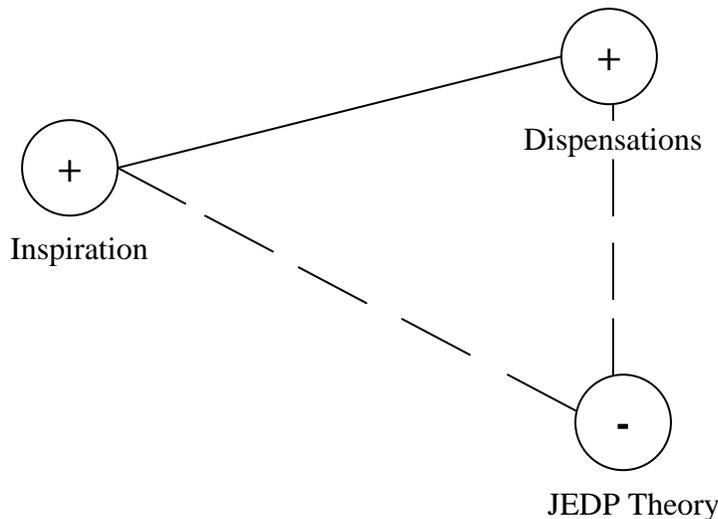
This response also removes any hidden implications posed by the original two responses. Individuals selecting this response should know exactly what is implied by this proposition. The tactic employed in resolving this dilemma is the same, which is to change the negative affect value of “diverse theological perspectives” to positive.

The denial of the relation is now represented by the response, “These biblical scholars are wrong. Moses was the author of the Pentateuch.” This mode was not represented in my previous survey and is important, not only for what it says, but also because all modes need to be represented.

Bolstering was also not present in my earlier survey, but will be represented by the response, “All scripture is inspired by God.”

Differentiation was another mode not represented in my survey, nor was it offered as a response. I have chosen, “These diverse theological perspectives represent different dispensations in God’s dealings with mankind,” as the response reflecting this mode. In this, the element “different dispensations” is differentiated from “diverse theological perspectives”. This is illustrated below in Figure 50:

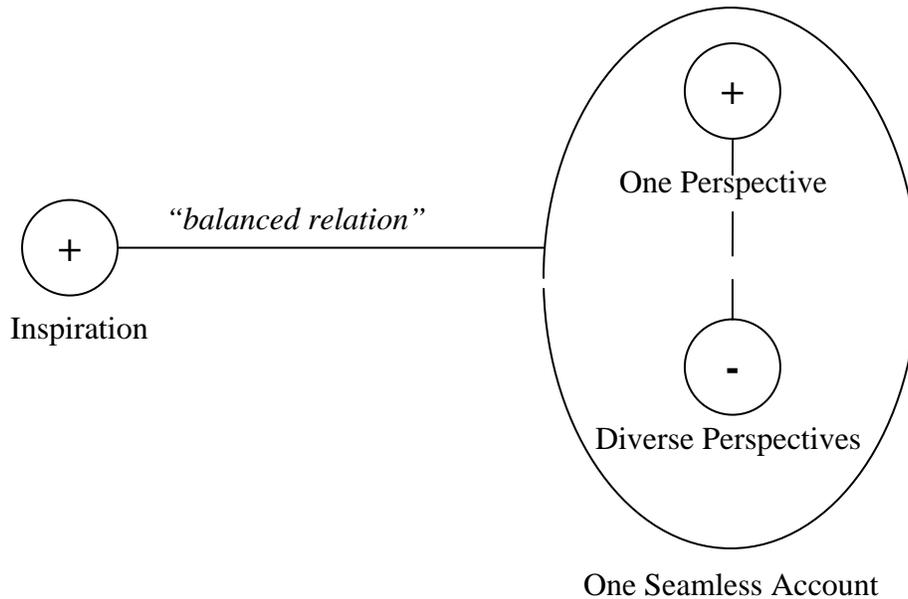
Figure 50: Differentiation and the Inspiration of the Pentateuch Dilemma



In resolving this dilemma, these “diverse theological perspectives” are differentiated into different “dispensations,” which takes on a positive affect value, and the “JEDP Theory from historical source criticism, which retains the original negative affect value. The original associative relation between the “inspiration” of scripture and “diverse perspectives,” which resulted in an imbalanced relation, now is an associative relation with different “dispensations, which results in a balanced relation. The relation between the “inspiration” of scripture and the *new* “JEDP Theory” element becomes a dissociative one, as is the relation between it and the *old* element. Thus, by differentiating the “diverse theological perspectives” element, the cognitive imbalance is resolved.

Transcendence is another mode that was not represented in my earlier survey. To correct this omission I have added the response, “God inspired those who joined together these diverse theological perspectives, weaving them into one seamless account.” This is illustrated in Figure 51 below:

Figure 51: Transcendence and the Inspiration of the Pentateuch Dilemma



This strategy transcends the initial dilemma (the area enclosed within the large oval) by encompassing it within the power of God to weave one seamless account out the midst of seemingly diverse perspectives. The response above, “Many different perspectives are needed to comprehend God’s one perspective. What may appear to be diverse theological perspectives are just different ways of viewing the one perspective of God,” designed to reflect the mode of the denial of the element, is similar to this response. It differs, however, in that it assumes that God is able to mold all these perspectives into one seamless account. This *seamlessness* may not be apparent to us, but it is there nevertheless, a testimony to God’s infinite wisdom.

The response, “God did not inspire the Pentateuch. It was the work of men,” reflecting the category “no resolution offered,” will remain the same.

B. The Genesis 1 vs. Modern Science Dilemma

The response for the denial of the element, “Modern science is wrong. God created the earth in six literal days,” will remain the same, with another response, “God created man and the earth with *age*,” added to this category. Both of these responses deny evolution’s positive affect value.

A response reflecting the denial of the relation was not included in my earlier survey for this question. Therefore, I have adopted the response discussed above, “God created the world using evolution as his method,” as reflective of this mode. Bolstering also was not reflected in the responses for this question. This omission has been filled by the addition of the response, “God created everything and everyone.” The response for transcendence, “The *days* can be interpreted as eras of time in which God created the earth,” will remain the same.

Finally, the response reflecting “no resolution offered” will be replaced by, “The Bible is a book of faith & theology, not a science textbook.” Persons selecting this response see no need for reconciling these two accounts. For these respondents, creation as recorded in the Bible and evolution as a scientific theory reflect two different realms of knowledge, one guided by faith and the other guided by the scientific method.

C. The God and Genocide Dilemma

The first change to this dilemma is a revision of the question itself. In this new revised version, the word “command” will take the place of “commit” (see below). The reason for this change is to better reflect the reality of the situation. God does not commit genocide, he commands it.

The sixth of the Ten Commandments states, “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17), yet the same god who uttered this command assures Moses that he “will wipe them (the inhabitants of the land of Canaan) out” (Exodus 23:23). How can a god prohibit murder and then ~~commit~~ *command* genocide? (select only one)

The response reflecting the denial of the element, “If left alive, these pagan people would have seduced the Israelites away from the worship of their God, Yahweh. Therefore, they had to be killed,” will remain the same. Though a response reflecting the denial of the relation was not provided in my earlier survey, I plan to adopt the response discussed above, “This is man's will projected upon God.”

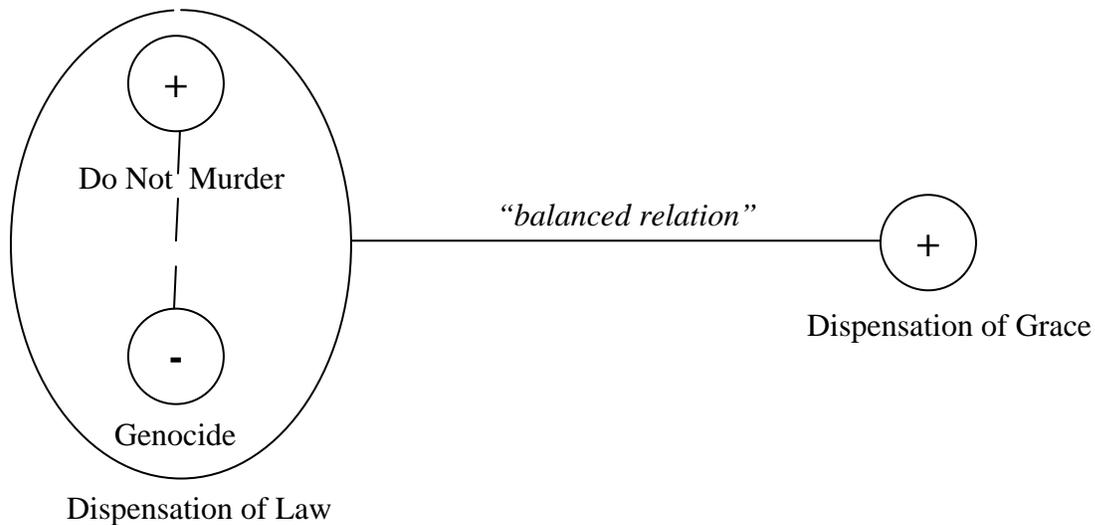
In my subsequent survey, I plan to utilize the first of these responses, “God is God. His ways are not our ways,” but replace the second with, “We are to accept what God did without question.” The two responses used to express this mode of bolstering in my earlier survey were very similar. Whereas both responses begin with the affirmation that “God is God,” one claims that God’s ways are different from our ways, perhaps in both wisdom and purpose, and the other that, because God is God, he can do what he wants to do. In other words, God is not bound by our rules and it is his creation anyway (so the logic goes).

I have retained the response, “God is God. His ways are not our ways,” because it places God in a more positive light, emphasizing his incomprehensible wisdom and unfathomable purpose. “God is God. He can do what he wants to do” sounds more like a bullying God than a wise, purposeful, and loving one. The response that I have substituted for this latter one places the emphasis on blind obedience to the perceived will of God. Within my revised survey there are two questions, one which asks what makes a person a good Christian (Question 37) and the other which asks respondents what they think is more important in preparing children for life (Question 38). “To believe in God without question or doubt” is one possible response to the question of what makes a person a good Christian, whereas respondents are asked to choose between “to be obedient” or “to think for themselves” as to which of these is most important in preparing children for life. I am interested in seeing how many people put their intellect on hold for what they believe to be the will of God, no matter how horrendous.

With regard to the mode of differentiation, I will adopt, “Killing in warfare is acceptable,” as the response reflective of this mode.

Transcendence was not represented in my earlier survey, but will be included in my subsequent survey with the response, “This is reflective of the Dispensation of Law, rather the Dispensation of Grace, inaugurated by Jesus.” By this tactic of transcendence, respondents can justify an act as horrendous as genocide by claiming that it was part of an earlier dispensation of God. This is illustrated by the following diagram (see Figure 52):

Figure 52: Transcendence and the God & Genocide Dilemma



The response reflecting “no resolution offered, “I can see no justification for God-ordained (or any other kind of) genocide,” will remain. The last response discussed in this section on god and genocide, “I cannot understand why God would do such a thing,” will be omitted in my subsequent survey. This response is similar to the bolstering response, “God is God. His ways are not our ways,” in that it holds out hope that this act is somehow part of God’s unfathomable will and purpose, and thus is holy and righteous. Because of their similarity, this particular response, with its *bolstering* quality will be omitted.

D. The Brutality in the Psalms Dilemma

The first change to this dilemma will be a revision in the question itself. In an attempt to help respondents better understand this question and the passage encased within it, I have included the entire passage from Psalm 137:8-9, rather than just the most brutal part. Some respondents, however, accused me of taking this passage out of context. To guard against this accusation, I have provided the broader context from which the passage, “happy is he who...seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks,” is drawn.

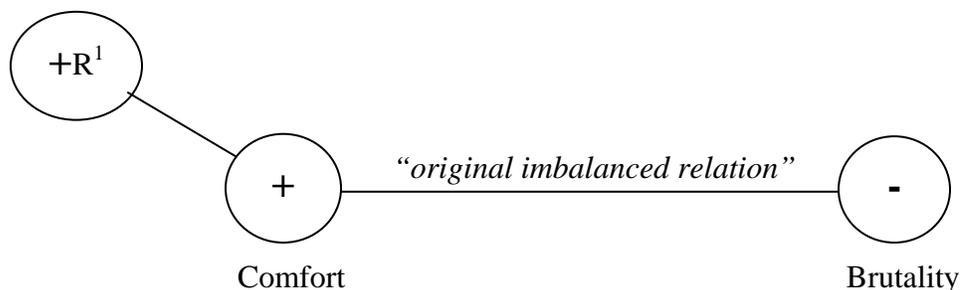
I have also tried to highlight more effectively the vengeful and violent nature of this passage by adding “revengeful and brutal” as modifiers in this question. The new question now reads (revised portions are in italics):

The Psalms are some of the most loved and comforting passages in the Bible. How then do you make sense of *such a revengeful and brutal* passage as, “*O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us – he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks*” (Psalm 137:8-9)? (select only one)

The response, “Evil people need to pay for their cruelty to others, even if it means killing their children,” as reflective of the denial of the element will remain.

Regarding the denial of the relation, I have adopted the response discussed above, “This is the psalmist’s expression of anger.” To reflect the mode of bolstering, I have selected the response, “For me, the Psalms are a source of comfort” (represented by R^1 in the diagram below). This response drowns out the harshness of the passage in Psalm 137 by strengthening the “comfort” element. This is represented by the following diagram (see Figure 53):

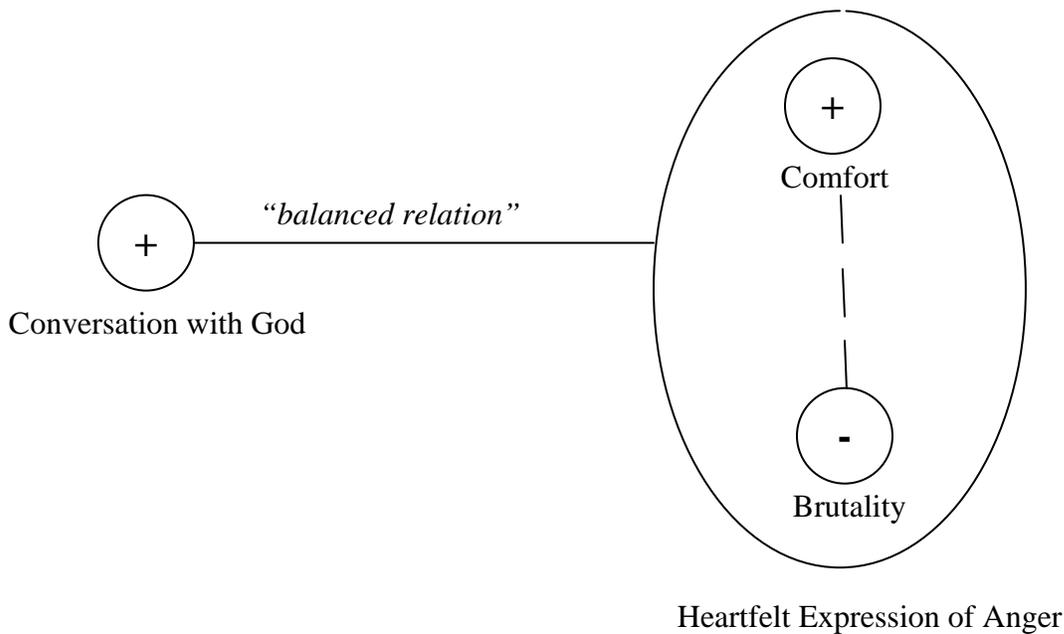
Figure 53: Bolstering and the Brutality in the Psalms Dilemma



Though a response reflecting the mode of differentiation was not included for this dilemma, I have adopted the “other” response, “This was before the dispensation of Grace brought by the life and death of Jesus Christ,” for use in my subsequent survey (see the discussion and diagram above).

Transcendence was also a mode not represented in my earlier survey, nor did any “other” responses help fill this gap. As a result, I have created the response, “As inspired scripture, the Psalms provide a way for us to express our feelings to God, even if those feelings are as full of rage as those in this passage.” This response transcends the imbalance between the “comfort” and “brutality” elements in this dilemma by recognizing the need people have for expressing their true heartfelt emotions regardless of how bitter they may be. One person commented, “In many ways God’s inspiration can even come through people speaking honestly about their lives, opinions, feelings. This was a conversation between a person and God.” Such heartfelt expression has a cathartic effect, resulting in a sense of peace and comfort. Without such an outlet for emotions, the anger we feel can build up inside, perhaps leading us to violent actions of the sort described in this passage. The Psalms, therefore, are a book of these impassioned pleas to God that believers can utilize in expressing to God their own pain and anger. The resolution of this dilemma utilizing transcendence is illustrated by the following diagram (see Figure 54):

Figure 54: Transcendence and Brutality in the Psalms Dilemma



To reflect “no resolution offered,” I have chosen to replace the responses discussed above, “I tend to overlook passages like this” and “This cannot be inspired scripture,” with “The Psalms are not inspired by God. They are a collection of songs written by men. This Psalm is a lament.” This actually combines two “other” responses, which are as follows:

Psalms are songs written by men – this is a lament.

Reflects the writer’s (or people’s) personal tragedy and grief, as Psalms are songs/prayers of men.

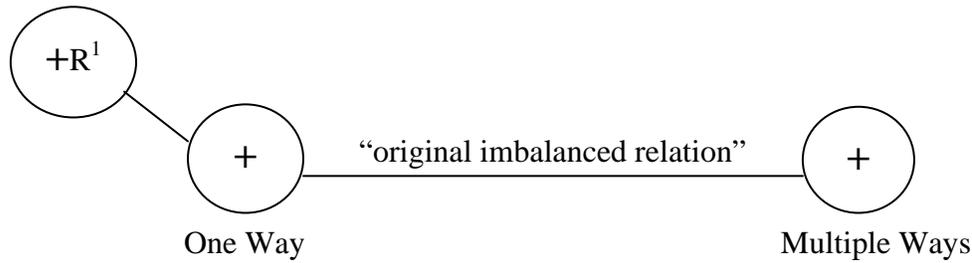
This response further elaborates on the previous one, making clear that the Psalms are a production of men, not God.

E. The Paths to Salvation Dilemma

Of all the dilemmas posed to respondents, the “paths to salvation” dilemma is the one that strikes at the heart of Christianity. For fundamentalist Christians there is no other way to attain salvation except through Jesus Christ, and they have strong support from the text of the New Testament. More moderate Christians are not willing to follow the text to its logical implications, leaving a caveat for God to intervene on the part of non-Christians. Liberal Christians, on the other hand, refute the very fact that one has to be a Christian to attain salvation and go to heaven. They may even dispute the very existence of heaven itself. Nevertheless, it is my hypothesis that it is this issue that most divides Christians. In light of this, there are several questions in my revised survey that measure what one believes regarding this issue. Question 25 asks respondents what they think is most important for their church to do: convert people to Christianity so that they can receive the grace of God through Jesus Christ and go to heaven when they die or foster understanding and develop relationships among people other faiths in order to make our world a more compassionate place in which to live. Question 31 asks respondents if they think that someone like Gandhi, who is not a Christian, will get into heaven (see also Question 30). Question 44 asks whether or not a good person who isn’t a Christian go to heaven or attain salvation (see also Questions 45, 85 (first pair) and 92 (third pair)).

All the responses discussed above will remain the same. The mode of bolstering and a response reflecting “no resolution offered,” however were not represented in this survey. For the mode of bolstering I will use the response, “God is the fair and righteous judge.” This response fails to address the question of whether or not people of other faiths can attain salvation and go to heaven when they die. This is illustrated by the following diagram, with R¹ representing this response (see Figure 55):

Figure 55: Bolstering and the Paths to Salvation Dilemma



Many Christians believe that salvation only comes through accepting Jesus Christ as one’s Savior and Lord. The logical implication of this belief is that those who do not “accept” Jesus Christ are doomed to Hell. Rather than follow this belief to its logical end, believers who select this response choose to suspend their judgment and leave the matter to God.

The final gap to be filled is that for “no resolution offered”. This gap will be filled by the response, “The way of salvation is the way of compassion.” Some individuals commented that the path to salvation was through the path of love as follows:

Jesus seems to me to be the highest human expression of love – which is what God’s nature and God’s way is, i.e., the path of love – a Hindu or Muslim may dwell in love and not worship Christ, but Christ’s nature dwells in him.

Jesus’ teaching of love and forgiveness is the point God wants to make.

One who loves God and loves others but does not profess to be a Christian is more of a Christian and a believer in Jesus, than one who professes to be a Christian but does not abide by Christ’s teachings.

These responses all emphasize love as the true requirement of salvation. Rather than use the word “love,” I have chosen to use the word “compassion”. Compassion is the ability to empathize with others, to feel their pain, and to actively seek to relieve that pain as if it were one’s own. It is the love portrayed in the story of what we call today the parable of the Good Samaritan (see Luke 10:25-37). I have included questions in my survey that ask respondents to choose between a view of salvation based on accepting Jesus versus living a life of compassion (see Question 45 and the first pair in Question 92).

F. The Dilemma of Unanswered Prayer

The first change with regard to this dilemma is a slight modification of the question itself. The original question just asked why someone’s prayer for *healing* had not been answered. I have added the modifier *physical* to the noun healing (*physical* healing) to emphasize that this dilemma involves not just unanswered prayer, but unanswered prayer for healing. I have also changed the word *ill* to *sick*. The reason for this change is that *sick* seems to be more common in everyday usage than *ill*.

The responses reflecting the denial of the element, “God may be using this illness for a greater purpose” and “Sometimes God's answer is *No*” will remain the same. I plan, however, to use only one response, “It is not God’s time,” to reflect the denial of the relation. This was one of the most popular responses to this dilemma (see Table 6) and is less crass than, “They need more faith,” and more rational than, “You must believe that you have received God’s blessing”.

Regarding the mode of differentiation, I plan to use the response, “There are other forms of healing (emotional, spiritual, and even death),” as discussed above, to reflect this particular mode.

The modes responses reflecting bolstering, “God’s ways are not our ways. Only He knows,” and transcendence, “God may be using this illness for a greater purpose,” will both remain.

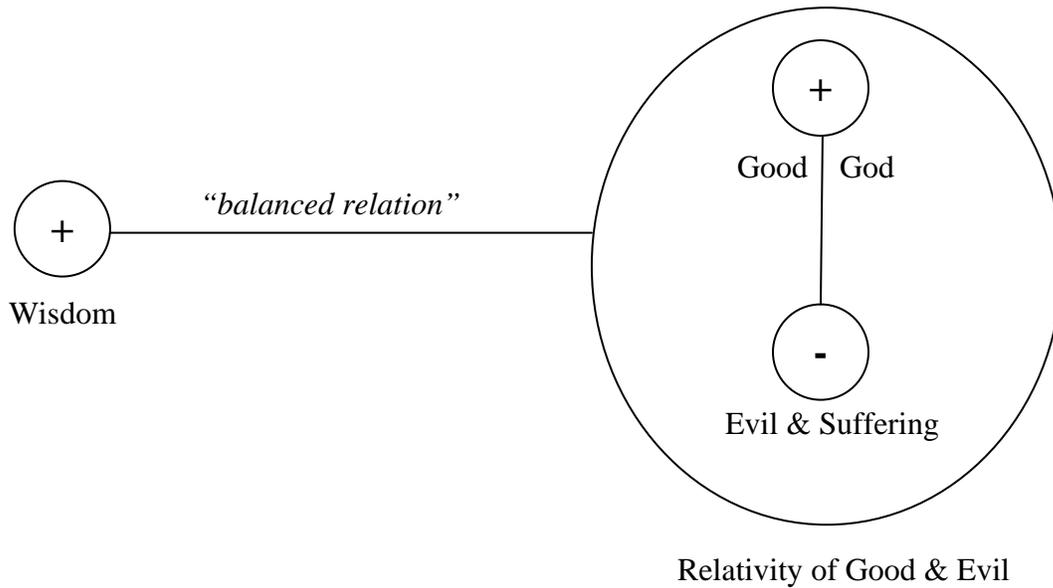
I have chosen, “Prayer is to be communion with God, not an attempt to secure an answer to our requests,” as the response reflecting “no resolution offered”. This is a positive alternative to the more negative, “This is not how prayer works,” and provides a more adequate description of what these respondents may believe the purpose of prayer to be.

G. The Relief of Suffering Dilemma

The responses reflecting both modes of denial will remain the same. I have adopted the response, “Our hope and comfort is in God,” as reflective of the bolstering, and the response, “Man is to blame for sin and suffering,” as reflective of the mode of differentiation. The response, “God should do more to eliminate pain and suffering in the here and now,” reflecting “no resolution offered” will remain, along with the standard, “I don’t know how to resolve this dilemma, nor does it make any difference to me whether it is resolved or not,” response.

The mode of transcendence is not reflected in any of the responses for this dilemma. Therefore, I have selected the response, “The wise are able to see beyond good and evil,” as reflective of this mode. This response implies that “good” and “evil” are both highly relative concepts. In other words, what may appear as “good” to one person may appear as “evil” to another. The tension between the “Good, Omnipotent God” element and the “Evil and Suffering” element remains intact, but it is transcended by the relativity of “good” and “evil”. This is illustrated in the following diagram (see Figure 56):

Figure 56: Transcendence and the Relief of Suffering Dilemma

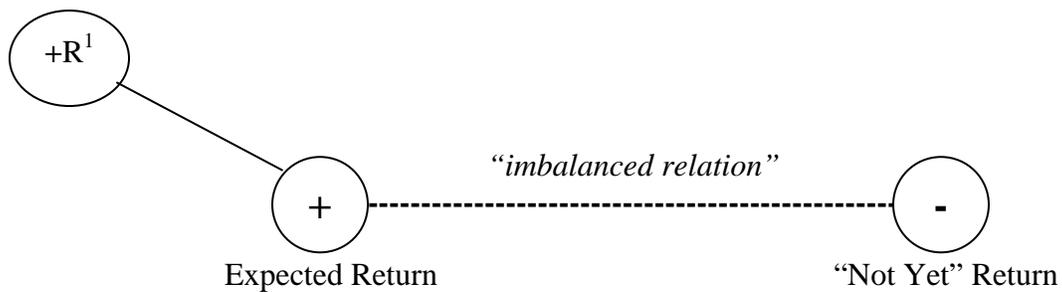


H. The Return of Jesus Dilemma

I have adopted the response, “Only God knows when Jesus will return,” as reflective of the mode of the denial of the element. The two responses used in my earlier survey, “A thousand years is like a day in the eyes of God” and “God is waiting until all people have heard the Gospel,” will remain as reflective of the mode of the denial of the relation.

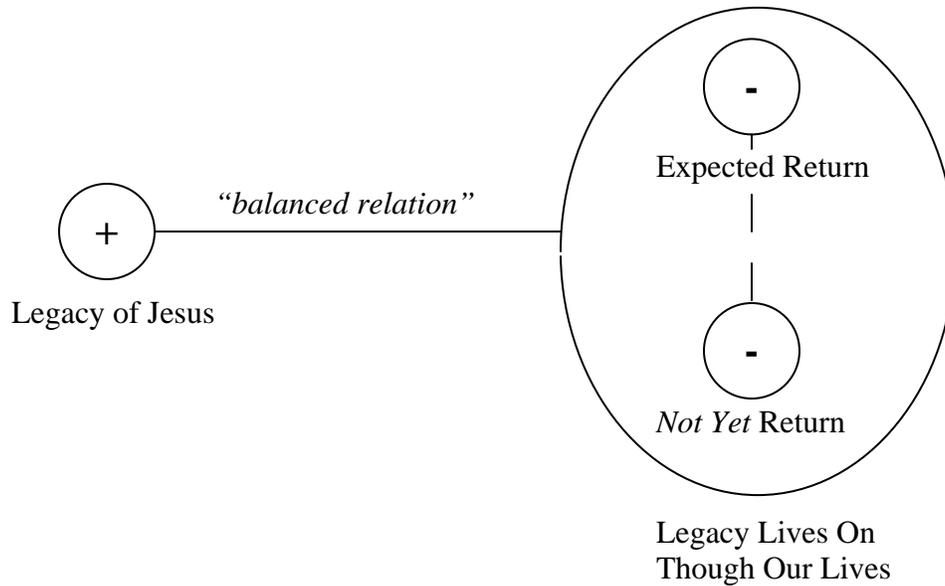
A response reflecting the mode of bolstering was not included in my original survey. This omission is filled by the addition of the response, “Jesus will return.” All this response does is to affirm the fact that Jesus will return, but it does not answer why he has yet to return. Thus, it *bolsters* the “Expected Return” element, while refusing to address why God has waited so long. This is illustrated in the following diagram with R^1 representing this response (see Figure 57):

Figure 57: Bolstering and the Return of Jesus Dilemma



The mode of differentiation was also not represented in my earlier survey, but I have captured the essence of these “other” responses in the response, “The spiritual presence of Jesus has returned and is among us every day.” For the mode of transcendence, also not represented in my earlier survey, I have selected the response, “Jesus is not going to return. His legacy lives on in us as we follow the example of his life,” to reflect this mode. This response denies that Jesus will return physically or spiritually. Its focus, however, is on his legacy that we continue as we follow the example of his life. This is illustrated in the following diagram (see Figure 58):

Figure 58: Transcendence and the Return of Jesus Dilemma



I have chosen to adopt the more generic responses, “This is an unresolved dilemma for me” and “This is not a dilemma for me” as representative of “no resolution offered,” rather than the response utilized in my earlier survey. As stated above (see “No Resolution Offered and the Return of Jesus Dilemma”), the original response contained two statements, one reflective of “no resolution offered” (“Jesus is not going to return”), and a response reflecting the denial of the element (“The disciples misinterpreted Jesus’ message”).

I. Summary of Theory

It is my hypothesis that the extent to which socialization has been successful (i.e., the extent to which an individual has internalized the objective and subjective meanings of his or her culture), is the extent to which that individual will remain within that meaning world. In my revised survey, these meaning worlds are represented along a conservative/liberal continuum. Individuals can be socialized into a conservative *nomos*, into a liberal *nomos*, or into a *nomos* somewhere in between. Questions are included in my survey that not only measure the extent to which socialization has been successful,¹⁴ but also what beliefs constitute these meaning worlds.¹⁵

It is also my hypothesis that the closer a person is to the conservative pole of the conservative/liberal continuum, the more likely he or she is to utilize the modes of denial, bolstering, and differentiation. On the other hand, the closer a person is to the liberal pole of the fundamentalist/liberal continuum, the more likely he or she is to utilize the mode of transcendence or to make no attempt at resolution. I believe this is due, in part, to the belief on the part of conservative Christians in absolute truth and the need felt by these believers to defend this truth against any attack. Because of this, I anticipate the greatest obstacle to my study being to persuade pastors of conservative churches to participate. On the other hand, liberal believers tend to view truth in more relative terms and, thus, are more open to other points of view without threat to their own. The modes of denial, bolstering, and differentiation represent modes of defense. The mode of transcendence and the category of “no resolution offered” represent no fear or threat. There are instances, however, where the denial of the relation comes closer to that of transcendence than to the modes I associate with conservatism. The response reflecting the denial of the relation for the Genesis 1 vs. Modern Science Dilemma, “God created the world using evolution as his method,” does not reject the theory of evolution, a theory anathema to fundamentalist and conservative Christians. Another example is the God and Genocide Dilemma where the response, “This is man's will projected upon God,” rejects God's hand in this tragedy. This is also true for the Brutality in the Psalms Dilemma, where the response, “This is the psalmist's expression of anger,” recognizes that this is not God's judgment on the Babylonians. Finally, the Paths to Salvation Dilemma with the response, “God has chosen to reveal himself to people in different ways. God has been revealed to me through Jesus Christ,” is much more inclusive than what would be expected from a conservative Christian. This is due to the nature of these particular cognitive dyads, which must remain consistent.

¹⁴ See Questions 10-13, 15, 17-21, 23, 25, 27-32, 36-37, and 40 for questions regarding the extent to which socialization has been successful.

¹⁵ See Questions 20, 26, 33-35, 41-42, 44-51, 53-54, 88-90, and 93-95 for questions indicating the beliefs that constitute these meaning worlds.

J. Summary of Methodology

To this survey I have added a question after each dilemma to determine who or what has been most helpful to the respondent in resolving the aforementioned dilemma. I anticipate that respondents will have received help from their pastors, church leaders, parents, and possibly others in resolving dilemmas such as creation versus evolution, paths to salvation, unanswered prayer, the return of Jesus, and/or the relief of suffering. This help can, in turn, provide believers with ready responses to these dilemmas. Other dilemmas may never have been encountered, such as the inspiration of the Pentateuch, God and genocide, and/or brutality in the Psalms.

According to Abelson, “denial and bolstering are simpler cognitive mechanisms than differentiation and transcendence” (Abelson 1959:347-348). A believer with limited cognitive ability may be able to employ a more difficult mode in resolving a dilemma of belief if this dilemma has already been resolved by the person’s pastor or church leader. However, if this believer has not been exposed to a particular dilemma of belief, such as the god and genocide dilemma or the dilemma of brutality in the Psalms, then this individual could be expected to employ a non-reflective mode such as denial or bolstering. Respondents are provided with a total of ten points and asked to distribute these points according to who and/or what has been most helpful to them in resolving these dilemmas.

As mentioned above, I have added the category “no resolution offered” to Abelson’s modes. Along with some specific responses related to this category, I have chosen to adopt two generic responses, “This is an unresolved dilemma for me” and “This is not a dilemma for me.”

Prior to distributing this survey, I plan to evaluate these responses as to their validity in measuring the modes that they are designed to measure. Outside sources will be consulted for this task of validation testing.

Finally, respondents are asked to weight their responses to each dilemma. In my previous survey, I allowed respondents to check all the responses they felt applied to the resolution of these dilemmas. In this survey, however, respondents are given ten points and asked to distribute them among the responses, indicating how important, to them, each response is in resolving the dilemma. This “weighting” will allow respondents to communicate how important each response is to them in resolving each of these dilemmas. This allows the respondent more of a “voice” that translates into a more accurate interpretation of the data. This is a major methodological change with regard to my earlier survey. In addition, I have replaced the “other” category with a “comments” section where respondents can record their own thoughts about the dilemma just encountered. This will eliminate “other” as a possible response, thus enabling me to focus on the responses themselves, while at the same time having the benefit of comments people may make.

VI. CONCLUSION

This thesis is a prelude to my dissertation. As a part of my doctoral work, I plan to distribute this survey within a city of approximately 175,000 or more inhabitants. My population will be all the Christian churches in the city from which I will draw a representative sample based on the number of churches in this area. I will then mail the senior ministers of these congregations a packet of information, including a letter describing my research project, a letter of approval from the university authenticating my research, and a copy of the survey. I intend to survey all the pastors participating in this study in order to determine their modes of resolving dilemmas of belief. I will ask that they take the survey prior to its distribution, but to refrain from discussing it with their church members so as not to bias the results. Pastors, ministers, and priests have considerable influence over their congregants when it comes to resolving dilemmas of belief. Knowing how these leaders resolve the dilemmas posed by my survey will provide me insight into the extent of this influence.

A week after this initial mailing, I will contact these ministers by phone to recruit their participation. From those who agree to participate, I will request a list of names and addresses of all their church members. From this list I will select a random sample of names. To these individuals I will mail a cover letter describing my project, a letter of approval from the university authenticating my research, a copy of the survey, and instructions on completing the survey. Enclosed in the mailing envelope will also be a self-addressed return envelope with a self-adhesive flap. I will ask that they return the survey in the self-addressed envelope within two weeks.

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Appendix A: Data Dictionary

Dependent variables: The modes of belief dilemma resolution are as follows:

| | |
|-----|------------------------|
| dne | Denial of the Element |
| dnr | Denial of the Relation |
| bol | Bolstering |
| df | Differentiation |
| tr | Transcendence |
| nro | No Resolution Offered |

Religious Survey Questions and Responses

The following questions asked of respondents form the basis of this study. They consist of contradictions that can only be resolved by one of the above modes of belief dilemma resolution.

1. The Inspiration of the Pentateuch Dilemma

Biblical scholars generally agree that various sources (oral and written), with vastly different theological perspectives, were joined together into the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) by a group of priests around 450 B.C.E. Most people, however, assume that Moses wrote these books in their entirety (except for the account of his death in Deuteronomy). If these biblical scholars are correct, then how do you explain the inspiration of scripture (one theological perspective) in the midst of such diverse theological perspectives?

Denial of the Element

Response 3 Many different perspectives are needed to comprehend God's one perspective. What may appear to be diverse theological perspectives are just different ways of viewing the one perspective of God.

Denial of the Relation

Response 1 These biblical scholars are wrong. Moses was the author of the Pentateuch.

Bolstering

Response 2 All scripture is inspired by God.

Differentiation

Response 4 These diverse theological perspectives reflect different dispensations (stages) in God's covenant with Israel.

Transcendence

Response 5 God inspired those who joined together these diverse theological perspectives, weaving them into one seamless account.

No Resolution Offered

Response 6 God did not inspire the Pentateuch. It was the work of men.

Response 7 This is an unresolved dilemma for me.

Response 8 This is not a dilemma for me.

2. The Genesis 1 vs. Modern Science Dilemma

Modern science claims that the earth is billions of years old and evolved over time. How do you reconcile this with the account in Genesis 1?

Denial of the Element

Response 1 Modern science is wrong. God created the earth in six literal days.

Response 2 God created man and the earth with "age".

Denial of the Relation

Response 3 God created the world using evolution as his method.

Bolstering

Response 4 God created everything and everyone.

Differentiation

Response 5 God created the earth, but the account in Genesis 1 can be interpreted metaphorically.

Transcendence

Response 6 The "days" can be interpreted as eras of time in which God created the earth.

No Resolution Offered

Response 7 The Bible is a book of faith & theology, not a science textbook.

Response 8 This is an unresolved dilemma for me.

Response 9 This is not a dilemma for me.

3. The God and Genocide Dilemma

The sixth of the Ten Commandments states, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17), yet the same god who uttered this command assures Moses that he "will wipe them (the inhabitants of the land of Canaan) out" (Exodus 23:23). How can a god prohibit murder and then command genocide?

Denial of the Element

Response 1 If left alive, these pagan people would have seduced the Israelites away from the worship of their God, Yahweh. Therefore, they had to be killed.

Denial of the Relation

Response 6 This is man's will projected upon God.

Bolstering

Response 2 God is God. His ways are not our ways.

Response 3 We are to accept what God did without question.

Differentiation

Response 4 Killing in warfare is acceptable.

Transcendence

Response 5 This is reflective of the Dispensation of Law, rather the Dispensation of Grace, inaugurated by Jesus

No Resolution Offered

Response 7 I can see no justification for God-ordained (or any other kind of) genocide.

Response 8 This is an unresolved dilemma for me.

Response 9 This is not a dilemma for me.

4. The Brutality in the Psalms Dilemma

The Psalms are some of the most loved and comforting passages in the Bible. How then do you make sense of such a revengeful and brutal passage as, “O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us – *he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks*” (Psalm 137:8-9; italics added for emphasis)?

Denial of the Element

Response 1 Evil people need to pay for their cruelty to others, even if it means killing their children.

Denial of the Relation

Response 4 This is the psalmist's expression of anger.

Bolstering

Response 2 I find comfort in the Psalms.

Differentiation

Response 3 This was before the dispensation of Grace brought by the life and death of Jesus Christ

Transcendence

Response 5 As inspired scripture, the Psalms provide a way for us to express our feelings to God, even if those feelings are as full of rage as those in this passage.

No Resolution Offered

Response 6 The Psalms are not inspired by God. They are a collection of songs written by men. This Psalm is a lament.

Response 7 This is an unresolved dilemma for me.

Response 8 This is not a dilemma for me.

5. The Paths to Salvation Dilemma

The New Testament is very clear that Jesus is the only way to salvation (i.e., John 14:6). Other religions, however, propose “ways” to salvation other than through Jesus. How do you reconcile these multiple paths?

Denial of the Element

Response 1 There are not multiple paths. Religions other than Christianity are false.
The only way to salvation is through Jesus Christ.

Denial of the Relation

Response 4 God has chosen to reveal himself to people in different ways. God has been revealed to me through Jesus Christ.

Bolstering

Response 3 God is the Fair and Righteous Judge.

Differentiation

Response 2 Other religions possess only partial truth. The full revelation of God came through Jesus Christ, and it is through Him alone that we are saved.

Transcendence

Response 5 Each of the major world religions proposes a valid path to salvation.

No Resolution Offered

Response 6 The way of salvation is the way of compassion.

Response 7 This is an unresolved dilemma for me.

Response 8 This is not a dilemma for me.

6. The Dilemma of Unanswered Prayer

In Mark 11:24 Jesus tells his disciples, “whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” (see the broader context in verses 20-25). On the basis of this passage, how do you explain to someone why their prayer for physical healing has not been answered?

Denial of the Element

Response 1 Sometimes God's answer is "No".

Denial of the Relation

Response 2 It is not God's time.

Bolstering

Response 3 God's ways are not our ways. Only He knows.

Differentiation

Response 4 There are other forms of healing (emotional, spiritual, and even death).

Transcendence

Response 5 God may be using this illness for a greater purpose.

No Resolution Offered

Response 6 Prayer is to be communion with God, not an attempt to secure an answer to our requests.

Response 7 This is an unresolved dilemma for me.

Response 8 This is not a dilemma for me.

7. The Relief of Suffering Dilemma

In Revelation 21:4 a loud voice from the throne of God cries out saying, “He (God) will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” If God is able to do this in the future, why isn’t he doing it now, in the present?

Denial of the Element

Response 1 Life on earth is a place of testing, a preparation for Heaven.

Denial of the Relation

Response 2 This universe is part of a larger plan than just our life here on Earth.

Bolstering

Response 3 Our hope and comfort is in God.

Differentiation

Response 4 Man is to blame for sin and suffering.

Transcendence

Response 5 The wise are able to see beyond good and evil.

No Resolution Offered

Response 6 God should do more to eliminate pain and suffering in the here and now.

Response 7 This is an unresolved dilemma for me.

Response 8 This is not a dilemma for me.

8. The Return of Jesus Dilemma

It is widely agreed by biblical scholars that the disciples and Paul expected the return of Jesus within their lifetimes. Over 2,000 years have passed and still Jesus has yet to return. Why do you think God has waited so long?

Denial of the Element

Response 1 Only God knows when Jesus will return.

Denial of the Relation

Response 2 God is waiting until all people have heard the Gospel.

Response 3 A thousand years is like a day in the eyes of God.

Bolstering

Response 4 Jesus will return.

Differentiation

Response 5 The spiritual presence of Jesus has returned and is among us every day.

Transcendence

Response 6 Jesus is not going to return. His legacy lives on in us as we follow the example of his life.

No Resolution Offered

Response 7 This is an unresolved dilemma for me.

Response 8 This is not a dilemma for me.

RELIGIOUS SURVEY

DATE: _____

1. AGE: _____ (indicate age and then select age category below)¹

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 18-22 | <input type="checkbox"/> 45-55 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 23-33 | <input type="checkbox"/> 56-60 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 34-40 | <input type="checkbox"/> 61-65 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 41-44 | <input type="checkbox"/> 66 or Over |

2. SEX

- MALE
- FEMALE

3. RACE/ETHNICITY (check all that apply)

- WHITE
- AFRICAN-AMERICAN
- HISPANIC
- ASIAN
- OTHER: _____

4. MARITAL STATUS²

- SINGLE, NEVER MARRIED
- NOT MARRIED, BUT LIVING TOGETHER
- MARRIED, FIRST MARRIAGE
- SEPARATED
- DIVORCED
- REMARRIED AFTER DIVORCE
- WIDOWED
- REMARRIED AFTER WIDOWHOOD

*Endnotes are used here in place of footnotes to preserve the nature of the survey format.

5. EDUCATION (What is your highest level of formal education?)

- DOCTORAL DEGREE³
 - PhD
 - EdD
 - M.D.
 - J.D.
 - DMin
 - Other: _____
- MASTERS DEGREE
 - MA
 - MS
 - MDiv
 - MBA
 - Other: _____
- SOME GRADUATE EDUCATION, BUT NO DEGREE
- BACHELORS DEGREE
- ASSOCIATES DEGREE
- SOME COLLEGE
- HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE
- LESS THAN HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE

6. OCCUPATION (What is your current occupation or what was it before you retired?)⁴

- PROFESSIONAL (teacher, doctor, accountant, architect, artist, nurse, lawyer, etc.)
- MANAGER (public service, credit officer, buyer, floor manager, etc.)
- TECHNICIAN/CRAFTSMAN (carpenter, mason, electrician, machinist, baker, chef, etc.)
- SALES (salesperson, insurance or real estate agent, broker, etc.)
- FARMER
- SERVICE WORKER (policeman, barber, janitor, beautician, fireman waiter, usher, etc.)
- CLERICAL WORKER (bookkeeper, secretary, mail carrier, telephone operator, etc.)
- LABORER (construction, agriculture, manufacturing, transportation, etc.)

7. Are you a student? Yes No

If you answered *yes*, are you a full-time or part-time student? Full-Time Part-Time

8. FAMILY INCOME

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> UNDER \$1,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$10,000 to 12,499 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$35,000 to 39,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000 to 2,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$12,500 to 14,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$40,000 to 49,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$3,000 to 3,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$15,000 to 17,499 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$50,000 to 59,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$4,000 to 4,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$17,500 to 19,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$60,000 to 74,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$5,000 to 5,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$20,000 to 22,499 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$75,000 to 89,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$6,000 to 6,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$22,500 to 24,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$90,000 to 109,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$7,000 to 7,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$25,000 to 29,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$110,000 or Over |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$8,000 to 9,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$30,000 to 34,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> REFUSED |

9. CHURCH AFFILIATION: _____
(name of the church you attend)

10. With what denomination is this church affiliated? _____

11. Is this the same church in which you were raised?

- SAME
- NOT SAME
- NOT RAISED IN CHURCH

12. If not, is your present church affiliation with the same denomination in which you were raised?

- SAME
- NOT RAISED IN CHURCH
- OTHER: _____
(please indicate denomination in which you were raised)

13. How long have you been a member of this church?⁵

- NOT A MEMBER
- ONE YEAR OR LESS
- 2-4 YEARS
- 5-9 YEARS
- 10-19 YEARS
- 20 OR MORE YEARS

14. Is your spouse's present church affiliation the same as yours?

- SAME
- NOT SAME
- NOT APPLICABLE

15. In how many church organizations, committees, and groups are you involved?⁶

- NONE
- ONE
- TWO
- THREE
- FOUR OR MORE

16. How often do you attend Sunday School (or its equivalent), worship services, and/or the other activities at your church?

- SEVERAL TIMES A WEEK
- ONCE A WEEK
- 2-3 TIMES A MONTH
- ONCE A MONTH
- SEVERAL TIMES A YEAR
- ONCE OR TWICE A YEAR
- NEVER

17. Approximately how much does your *family household* contribute to your church per year (if single or widowed, how much do you contribute to your church per year)?⁷

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> UNDER \$200 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000-1,499 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$200-399 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,500-2,499 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$400-599 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$2,500-3,499 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$600-799 | <input type="checkbox"/> OVER \$3,500 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$800-999 | <input type="checkbox"/> REFUSED |

18. When you were growing up, how often did you attend Sunday School (or its equivalent), worship services, and/or the other activities at your church?⁸

- SEVERAL TIMES A WEEK
- ONCE A WEEK
- 2-3 TIMES A MONTH
- ONCE A MONTH
- SEVERAL TIMES A YEAR
- ONCE OR TWICE A YEAR
- NEVER

19. To whom or what do you credit your current religious beliefs? To answer this question, you have been provided a total of ten (10) points. Distribute these points among the responses below according to the extent to which they have influenced your current religious beliefs. For example, you could: (1) apply all 10 points to just one response; (2) apply 5 points to one, 3 points to another, and 2 points to yet another response; or (3) distribute your points more evenly among all the responses. Please use all ten points.

_____ PARENTS

_____ SPOUSE

_____ PASTOR, MENTOR, OR OTHER INFLUENTIAL FIGURE

_____ PERSONAL SEARCH FOR TRUTH

_____ LIFE EXPERIENCES

_____ OTHER: _____

20. On a scale⁹ of 1 to 7, with 1 being very conservative and 7 being very liberal, how conservative/liberal was the religious environment in which you were raised?

- 1: VERY CONSERVATIVE
- 2: CONSERVATIVE
- 3: CONSERVATIVE TO MODERATE
- 4: MODERATE
- 5: MODERATE TO LIBERAL
- 6: LIBERAL
- 7: VERY LIBERAL
- WAS NOT RAISED IN A RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENT

21. On a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being very conservative and 7 being very liberal, how religiously conservative/liberal do you consider yourself?

- 1: VERY CONSERVATIVE
- 2: CONSERVATIVE
- 3: CONSERVATIVE TO MODERATE
- 4: MODERATE
- 5: MODERATE TO LIBERAL
- 6: LIBERAL
- 7: VERY LIBERAL

22. Is your place on this scale the same as that in which you were raised?

- SAME
- NOT SAME
- NOT APPLICABLE

23. On a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being very conservative and 7 being very liberal, how religiously conservative/liberal do you consider your spouse?

- 1: VERY CONSERVATIVE
- 2: CONSERVATIVE
- 3: CONSERVATIVE TO MODERATE
- 4: MODERATE
- 5: MODERATE TO LIBERAL
- 6: LIBERAL
- 7: VERY LIBERAL
- NOT APPLICABLE

24. Is your place on this scale the same as that of your spouse?

- SAME
- NOT SAME
- NOT APPLICABLE

25. On a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being very conservative and 7 being very liberal, how religiously conservative/liberal is your church (or the church you attend)?
- 1: VERY CONSERVATIVE
 - 2: CONSERVATIVE
 - 3: CONSERVATIVE TO MODERATE
 - 4: MODERATE
 - 5: MODERATE TO LIBERAL
 - 6: LIBERAL
 - 7: VERY LIBERAL
26. Is your place on this scale the same as that of your church?
- SAME
 - NOT SAME
27. Which of the following comes closest to what you believe is most important for your church to do?¹⁰
- To convert people to Christianity so that they can receive the grace of God through Jesus Christ and go to heaven when they die.
 - To foster understanding and develop relationships among people of other faiths in order to make our world a more compassionate place in which to live.
28. How many members of your extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.) regularly attend the same church as you do? _____.¹¹
29. How active are you at your church and/or in other religious organizations?
- VERY ACTIVE
 - SOMEWHAT ACTIVE
 - NOT VERY ACTIVE
 - NOT ACTIVE AT ALL
30. How important is religion and/or spirituality to you?
- VERY IMPORTANT
 - SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT
 - NOT VERY IMPORTANT

31. Who are some of your good friends? Just list their first names in the boxes below and indicate (circle the number) whether or not they attend the same church as you do:¹²

| | GOOD FRIENDS | SAME | NOT SAME |
|----------|--------------|------|----------|
| FRIEND 1 | | 1 | 2 |
| FRIEND 2 | | 1 | 2 |
| FRIEND 3 | | 1 | 2 |

32. Based on the conservative/liberal scale above, are you and your friends the same or different? (circle your response)¹³

| GOOD FRIENDS | SAME | NOT SAME |
|--------------|------|----------|
| FRIEND 1 | 1 | 2 |
| FRIEND 2 | 1 | 2 |
| FRIEND 3 | 1 | 2 |

33. Do you have friends of other faiths? If so, circle the number of friends you have for each faith listed below.¹⁴

| Friends of Other Faiths | Number of Friends | | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| Protestant Denominations | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 or More |
| Catholicism | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 or More |
| Judaism | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 or More |
| Islam | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 or More |
| Buddhism | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 or More |
| Hinduism | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 or More |
| New Age | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 or More |
| Other Religions | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 or More |
| Agnosticism | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 or More |
| Atheism | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 or More |

34. Do you believe in heaven?¹⁵

- YES, DEFINITELY
- YES, PROBABLY
- NO, PROBABLY NOT
- NO, DEFINITELY NOT

35. If you answered “absolutely” or “probably” to the preceding question, do you believe that someone like Gandhi, who is not a Christian, will get into heaven?¹⁶

- YES, DEFINITELY
- YES, PROBABLY
- NO, PROBABLY NOT
- NO, DEFINITELY NOT

36. Do you believe that God answers prayer?¹⁷

- YES, DEFINITELY
- YES, PROBABLY
- NO, PROBABLY NOT
- NO, DEFINITELY NOT

37. Some people say that such things as having been born in America, being able to speak English, and respecting America’s political institutions and laws are important for being truly American. How important do you think being a Christian is for being truly American?¹⁸

- VERY IMPORTANT
- FAIRLY IMPORTANT
- NOT VERY IMPORTANT
- NOT IMPORTANT AT ALL

38. For the sake of this survey, let’s define a “religious” person as one who is primarily concerned with fact (i.e., doctrine) and the external dimensions of religious faith (the importance of attending and giving financially to the church, saying grace before meals, etc.), and a “spiritual” person as one who is primarily concerned with feeling (i.e., intuitive awareness of the truth) and the internal dimensions of religious faith (i.e., feelings of closeness with God, religious experiences, meditative practices, etc.).

With these definitions in mind, how would you describe yourself?¹⁹

- NOT RELIGIOUS/NOT SPIRITUAL
- RELIGIOUS, but not spiritual
- RELIGIOUS & SPIRITUAL
- SPIRITUAL, but not religious

39. On the basis of your answer above, to what extent do you consider yourself to be a religious/spiritual person?²⁰

- VERY
- MODERATELY
- SLIGHTLY
- NOT AT ALL

40. From the list below, circle the response that most accurately reflects how often you perform the following religious practices:

| Religious Practices | Daily | Frequently | Seldom | Never |
|--|-------|------------|--------|-------|
| Pray | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Read Your Bible | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Attend Worship Services | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Participate in Bible Study Groups (including Sunday School) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Share Your Faith with Others | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

41. People have many differing views about what makes a person a good Christian. Distribute your total of ten (10) points among the following responses according to what you think makes a person a good Christian. Please use all ten points.²¹

- _____ To believe in God without question or doubt.
- _____ To attend religious services at my church regularly.
- _____ To follow faithfully the teaching of my church.
- _____ To follow my conscience even if it means going against what my church says and does.

42. Which of these would you say is more important in preparing children for life, to be obedient or to think for themselves?²²

- TO BE OBEDIENT
- TO THINK FOR THEMSELVES

43. Do you believe that prayer can help heal someone who is sick?²³

- YES, DEFINITELY
- YES, PROBABLY
- NO, PROBABLY NOT
- NO, DEFINITELY NOT

44. What do you hope to experience from your faith? (Distribute your total of ten (10) points among the following responses according to their importance to you. Please use all ten points.)²⁴

- _____ To Connect with Something Larger than Myself
- _____ To Find Happiness and Peace of Mind
- _____ To Forge a Personal Relationship with God
- _____ To Give My Life Meaning and Purpose
- _____ To Be a Part of a Community
- _____ To Help Me Be a Better Person and Live a Moral Life
- _____ To Discover Truth as Revealed in the Bible

45. Which best describes your beliefs about God?²⁵

- I don't believe in God now and I never have.
- I don't believe in God now, but I used to.
- I believe in God now, but I didn't use to.
- I believe in God now, and I always have.

46. If you believe in God, how certain would you say this belief is?²⁶

- ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN
- FAIRLY SURE
- NOT QUITE SURE
- NOT AT ALL SURE
- DO NOT BELIEVE IN GOD

47. Can a good person who isn't a Christian go to heaven?²⁷

- YES, DEFINITELY
- YES, PROBABLY
- NO, PROBABLY NOT
- NO, DEFINITELY NOT

48. Which of the following two statements comes closest to what you believe determines who goes to heaven and attains salvation?

- "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink...I needed clothes and you clothed me..."²⁸
- "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."²⁹

49. Which of these statements comes closest to what you believe about the Bible?³⁰

- The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word.
- The Bible is the inspired word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally, word for word.
- The Bible is an ancient book of fables, legends, history, and moral precepts recorded by men.

50. Do you favor or oppose women as pastors, ministers, or priests in your church or denomination?³¹

- FAVOR
- OPPOSE

51. To what extent do you agree with the statement, "Human beings developed from earlier species of animals"?³²

- DEFINITELY TRUE
- PROBABLY TRUE
- PROBABLY NOT TRUE
- DEFINITELY NOT TRUE

52. Tragic events in the world, crises in our lives, and the encroachment of science upon faith can often cause us to begin to doubt what we hold dear. In the table below, circle the response that most accurately reflects how often the following problems have caused you to doubt your faith.³³

| Reasons for Doubting One's Faith | Often | Sometimes | Never |
|--|-------|-----------|-------|
| Evil in the World | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Personal Suffering | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Conflict of Faith & Science | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Feeling that life really has no meaning. | 1 | 2 | 3 |

53. To what extent do you agree that your faith must be able to stand up to the test of logic and reason?³⁴

- STRONGLY AGREE
- AGREE
- NOT SURE
- DISAGREE
- STRONGLY DISAGREE

54. Which one of the following statements comes closest to your own views (select only one).³⁵

- Right and wrong should be based on God's laws.
- Right and wrong should be decided by society.
- Right and wrong should be a matter of personal conscience.

55. Which one of the following do you find most important in helping you to make decisions about your life? Distribute your total of ten (10) points among the following responses according to their importance to you. Please use all ten points.³⁶

- _____ The Bible
- _____ Prayer
- _____ Your Family and Friends
- _____ The Teachings of Your Church
- _____ Your Own Personal Judgment

56. Biblical scholars generally agree that various sources (oral and written), with vastly different theological perspectives, were joined together into the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) by a group of priests around 450 B.C.E. Most people, however, assume that Moses wrote these books in their entirety (except for the account of his death in Deuteronomy). If these biblical scholars are correct, then how do you explain the inspiration of scripture in the midst of such diverse theological perspectives?
(Distribute your total of ten (10) points among the following responses according to their importance to you. Please us all ten points.)

- _____ These biblical scholars are wrong. Moses was the author of the Pentateuch.
- _____ All scripture is inspired by God.
- _____ Many different perspectives are needed to comprehend God's one perspective. What may appear to be diverse theological perspectives are just different ways of viewing the one perspective of God.
- _____ These diverse theological perspectives reflect different dispensations (stages) in God's covenant with Israel.
- _____ God inspired those who joined together these diverse theological perspectives, weaving them into one seamless account.
- _____ God did not inspire the Pentateuch. It was the work of men.
- _____ This is an unresolved dilemma for me.
- _____ This is not a dilemma for me.

COMMENTS: _____

57. Who or what has helped you the most in resolving this dilemma?
(Distribute your total of ten (10) points among the following responses according to their importance to you. Please us all ten points.)

- _____ Pastor, Minister, or Priest
- _____ Parents
- _____ Sunday School Teacher or Bible Study Leader
- _____ Spouse
- _____ Personal Study
- _____ Other: _____
- _____ I have never encountered this dilemma.
- _____ This is not a dilemma for me.

58. Modern science claims that the earth is billions of years old and evolved over time. How do you reconcile this with the account in Genesis 1? (Distribute your 10 points among these responses according to their importance to you. Please us all ten points.)

- _____ Modern science is wrong. God created the earth in six literal days.
- _____ God created man and the earth with "age" (i.e., Adam as an adult, the fossil record, etc.)
- _____ God created the world using evolution as his method.
- _____ God created everything & everyone.
- _____ God created the earth, but the account in Genesis 1 can be interpreted metaphorically.
- _____ The "days" can be interpreted as eras of time in which God created the earth.
- _____ The Bible is a book of faith & theology, not a science textbook.
- _____ This is an unresolved dilemma for me.
- _____ This is not a dilemma for me.

COMMENTS: _____

59. Who or what has helped you the most in resolving this dilemma? (Distribute your total of ten (10) points among the following responses according to their importance to you. Please us all ten points.)

- _____ Pastor, Minister, or Priest
- _____ Parents
- _____ Sunday School Teacher or Bible Study Leader
- _____ Spouse
- _____ Personal Study
- _____ Other: _____
- _____ I have never encountered this dilemma.
- _____ This is not a dilemma for me.

60. As you read the following pairs of statements, please indicate whether the first or second statement comes closest to your own views, even if neither is exactly right:

First Pair (select only one)³⁷

- Many religions can lead to eternal life.
- My religion is the one, true faith leading to eternal life.

Second Pair (select only one)³⁸

- Human nature is basically good.
- Human nature is fundamentally perverse and corrupt.

Third Pair (select only one)³⁹

- We determine the course of our lives.
- God determines the course of our lives.

61. The sixth of the Ten Commandments states, “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17), yet the same god who uttered this command assures Moses that he “will wipe them (the inhabitants of the land of Canaan) out” (Exodus 23:23). How could God prohibit murder and then command genocide? (Distribute your 10 points among these responses according to their importance to you. Please us all ten points.)

_____ If left alive, these pagan people would have seduced the Israelites away from the worship of their God, Yahweh. Therefore, they had to be killed.

_____ God is God. His ways are not our ways.

_____ We are to accept what God did without question.

_____ Killing in warfare is acceptable.

_____ This is reflective of the Dispensation of Law, rather the Dispensation of Grace, inaugurated by Jesus.

_____ This is man's will projected upon God.

_____ I can see no justification for God-ordained (or any other kind of) genocide.

_____ This is an unresolved dilemma for me.

_____ This is not a dilemma for me.

COMMENTS: _____

62. Who or what has helped you the most in resolving this dilemma?

(Distribute your total of ten (10) points among the following responses according to their importance to you. Please us all ten points.)

_____ Pastor, Minister, or Priest

_____ Parents

_____ Sunday School Teacher or Bible Study Leader

_____ Spouse

_____ Personal Study

_____ Other: _____

_____ I have never encountered this dilemma.

_____ This is not a dilemma for me.

63. Which of these statements best describes your views about what happens when someone dies?⁴⁰

- It's all over; there is no soul.
- The soul is reincarnated into another being.
- There is no Heaven or Hell, but the soul lives on in a spiritual realm.
- The soul goes to Heaven or Hell.
- I don't know.

64. How often do you explore the spiritual ideas and/or practices of other religions in addition to your own?⁴¹

- OFTEN
- SOMETIMES
- HARDLY EVER
- NEVER

65. Which of the following statements comes closest to expressing what you believe about God? (select only one)⁴²

- I don't believe in God.
- I don't know whether there is a God and I don't believe there is any way to find out.
- I don't believe in a personal God, but I do believe in a Higher Power of some kind.
- I find myself believing in God some of the time, but not at others.
- While I have doubts, I feel that I do believe in God.
- I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it.

66. The Psalms are some of the most loved and comforting passages in the Bible. How then can such a revengeful and brutal passage as “O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us – *he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks*” in Psalm 137:8-9 be inspired scripture?⁴³ (Distribute your 10 points among these responses according to their importance to you. Please us all ten points.)

_____ Evil people need to pay for their cruelty to others, even if it means killing their children.

_____ I find comfort in the Psalms.

_____ This was before the Dispensation of Grace brought by the life and death of Jesus Christ.

_____ This is the psalmist's expression of anger.

_____ As inspired scripture, the Psalms provide a way for us to express our feelings to God, even if those feelings are as full of rage as those in this passage.

_____ The Psalms are not inspired by God. They are a collection of songs written by men. This Psalm is a lament.

_____ This is an unresolved dilemma for me.

_____ This is not a dilemma for me.

COMMENTS: _____

67. Who or what has helped you the most in resolving this dilemma?

(Distribute your total of ten (10) points among the following responses according to their importance to you. Please us all ten points.)

_____ Pastor, Minister, or Priest

_____ Parents

_____ Sunday School Teacher or Bible Study Leader

_____ Spouse

_____ Personal Study

_____ Other: _____

_____ I have never encountered this dilemma.

_____ This is not a dilemma for me.

68. The New Testament is very clear that Jesus is the only way to salvation (i.e., John 14:6). Other religions, however, propose “ways” to salvation other than through Jesus. How do you reconcile these multiple paths? (Distribute your 10 points among these responses according to their importance to you. Please us all ten points.)

- _____ There are not multiple paths. Religions other than Christianity are false. The only way to salvation is through Jesus Christ.
- _____ Other religions possess only partial truth. The full revelation of God came through Jesus Christ, and it is through Him alone that we are saved.
- _____ God is the Fair and Righteous Judge.
- _____ God has chosen to reveal himself to people in different ways. God has been revealed to me through Jesus Christ.
- _____ Each of the major world religions proposes a valid path to salvation.
- _____ The way of salvation is the way of compassion.
- _____ This is an unresolved dilemma for me.
- _____ This is not a dilemma for me.

COMMENTS: _____

69. Who or what has helped you the most in resolving this dilemma?
(Distribute your total of ten (10) points among the following responses according to their importance to you. Please us all ten points.)

- _____ Pastor, Minister, or Priest
- _____ Parents
- _____ Sunday School Teacher or Bible Study Leader
- _____ Spouse
- _____ Personal Study
- _____ Other: _____
- _____ I have never encountered this dilemma.
- _____ This is not a dilemma for me.

70. Do you ever have doubts about your faith?⁴⁴

- My faith is completely free of doubts.
- I occasionally have doubts about my faith.
- I often have doubts about my faith.
- I constantly have doubts about my faith.

71. Which of the following statements comes closest to expressing what you believe about the origin of man? (select only one)⁴⁵

- God created man pretty much in his present form at one time within the last 10,000 years.
- Man has developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life, but God guided this process, including man's creation.
- Man has developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life. God had no part in this process

72. In Mark 11:24 Jesus tells his disciples, “whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours”⁴⁶ (see the broader context in verses 20-25). On the basis of this passage, how do you explain to someone why their prayer for physical healing has not been answered? (Distribute your 10 points among these responses according to their importance to you. Please us all ten points.)

- _____ Sometimes God's answer is "No".
- _____ It is not God's time.
- _____ God's ways are not our ways. Only He knows.
- _____ There are other forms of healing (emotional, spiritual, and even death).
- _____ God may be using this illness for a greater purpose.
- _____ Prayer is to be communion with God, not an attempt to secure an answer to our requests.
- _____ This is an unresolved dilemma for me.
- _____ This is not a dilemma for me.

COMMENTS: _____

73. Who or what has helped you the most in resolving this dilemma?
(Distribute your total of ten (10) points among the following responses according to their importance to you. Please us all ten points.)

- _____ Pastor, Minister, or Priest
- _____ Parents
- _____ Sunday School Teacher or Bible Study Leader
- _____ Spouse
- _____ Personal Study
- _____ Other: _____
- _____ I have never encountered this dilemma.
- _____ This is not a dilemma for me.

74. As you read the following pairs of statements, please indicate whether the first or second statement comes closest to your own views, even if neither is exactly right:

First Pair (select only one)⁴⁷

- The good person must be deeply involved in the problems and activities in the world.
- The good person must avoid contamination by the corruption of the world.

Second Pair (select only one)⁴⁸

- Life is only meaningful if you provide the meaning yourself.
- Life is only meaningful because God provides meaning and purpose for my life.

Third Pair (select only one)

- There are many paths leading to God.
- There is only one path leading to God.

75. In Revelation 21:4 a loud voice from the throne of God cries out saying, “He (God) will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”⁴⁹ If God is able to do this in the future, why isn’t he doing it now, in the present? (Distribute your 10 points among these responses according to their importance to you. Please us all ten points.)

_____ Life on earth is a place of testing, a preparation for Heaven.

_____ This universe is part of a larger plan than just our life here on Earth.

_____ Our hope and comfort is in God.

_____ Man is to blame for sin and suffering.

_____ The wise are able to see beyond good and evil.

_____ God should do more to eliminate pain and suffering in the here and now.

_____ This is an unresolved dilemma for me.

_____ This is not a dilemma for me.

COMMENTS: _____

76. Who or what has helped you the most in resolving this dilemma?

(Distribute your total of ten (10) points among the following responses according to their importance to you. Please us all ten points.)

- _____ Pastor, Minister, or Priest
- _____ Parents
- _____ Sunday School Teacher or Bible Study Leader
- _____ Spouse
- _____ Personal Study
- _____ Other: _____
- _____ I have never encountered this dilemma.
- _____ This is not a dilemma for me.

77. It is widely agreed by biblical scholars that the disciples and Paul expected the return of Jesus within their lifetimes. Over 2,000 years have passed and still Jesus has yet to return. Why do you think God has waited so long? (Distribute your 10 points among these responses according to their importance to you. Please us all ten points.)

- _____ Only God knows when Jesus will return.
- _____ God is waiting until all people have heard the Gospel.
- _____ A thousand years is like a day in the eyes of God.
- _____ Jesus will return.
- _____ The spiritual presence of Jesus has returned and is among us every day.
- _____ Jesus is not going to return. His legacy lives on in us as we follow the example of his life.
- _____ This is an unresolved dilemma for me.
- _____ This is not a dilemma for me.

COMMENTS: _____

78. Who or what has helped you the most in resolving this dilemma?

(Distribute your total of ten (10) points among the following responses according to their importance to you. Please use all ten points.)

- _____ Pastor, Minister, or Priest
- _____ Parents
- _____ Sunday School Teacher or Bible Study Leader
- _____ Spouse
- _____ Personal Study
- _____ Other: _____
- _____ I have never encountered this dilemma.
- _____ This is not a dilemma for me.

Would you be willing to be interviewed further regarding your religious beliefs? Yes No

If you answered yes, please provide the following information:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: () _____

E-Mail Address: _____

THANK-YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS SURVEY

ENDNOTES

¹These age categories are based on the life stages proposed by Daniel J. Levinson in his book, *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (see Daniel J. Levinson, 1978, *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.).

²These categories for marital status are adapted from Nancy T. Ammerman, et. al., *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, 1998, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, p. 250.

³The division into multiple categories of doctoral and master degrees is to distinguish between academic and professional degrees.

⁴These occupational categories and their descriptions are adapted from Nancy T. Ammerman, et. al., *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, 1998, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, p. 249, 251.

⁵This question about length of church membership is taken from Nancy T. Ammerman, et. al., *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, 1998, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, p. 248. The longer an individual has been a member of his or her congregation, the more committed he or she will be to its religious world-view.

⁶This question about church involvement is taken from Nancy T. Ammerman, et. al., *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, 1998, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, p. 248. The greater one's involvement is with his or her church, the more immersed that individual will be in the *religious life-world* of that congregation. By *religious life-world* I mean the values, norms, and beliefs that community of believers holds dear.

⁷This question about a family's yearly financial contribution to their church is taken from Nancy T. Ammerman, et. al., *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, 1998, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, p. 248. Annual giving is a measure of a respondent's commitment to his or her church.

⁸This question is similar to that asked on the 1991 and 1998 General Social Surveys which asked, "And what about when you were around 11 or 12, how often did you attend religious services then?" (ATTEND12: Question 1392). The categories were never, less than once a year, about once or twice a year, several times a year, about once a month, two to three times a month, nearly every week, every week, several times a week, no father-mother present, can't say or can't remember. My intent with regard to this question is to measure the extent of one's socialization into a religious environment. The greater the regularity of attendance (e.g., "once a week") during one's childhood, the greater the degree of socialization into that particular religious tradition.

⁹This is an expanded version of the fundamentalism-liberal continuum. In the GSS respondents are given only three categories from which to choose: (1) Fundamentalist, (2) Moderate, and (3) Liberal. I felt the need to broaden the categories to allow for greater precision in identifying the religious identities of these respondents. The questions to follow are adapted from two questions. The first is the question asked of respondents in the 1973-2006 General Social Surveys (FUND16: Question 115c), which asked for the fundamentalism/liberalism of the religion in which the respondent was raised. The second is the question asked of respondents in the 1972-2006 General Social Surveys (FUND: Question 104c), which asked respondents to indicate the fundamentalism/liberalism of their current religion. I have substituted “conservative” for “fundamentalist” due to its less pejorative tone.

¹⁰This question is adapted from the 1996 Religion and Politics Survey, Question 92 (CHRCHGL), which asked: “Which do you think is most important for the church to do: to convert people to a spiritual belief so that they can earn a happy life after death, or to teach people how to live better every day with all other people?” This question added the categories “both,” “neither,” and “undecided”. I have adapted the first response to read: “To convert people to Christianity so that they can receive the grace of God through Jesus Christ and go to heaven when they die.” This is a survey for Protestant Christians, so the vagueness of the term “faith” can easily be replaced with the much more specific term “Christianity”. Furthermore, the term “earn” is anathema in Christianity, because salvation is not earned, it is a gift from God. The “go to heaven when they die” is how Christians would express this as opposed to “a happy life after death”.

I have changed the second response to read: “To foster understanding and develop relationships among people other faiths in order to make our world a more compassionate place in which to live.” Again, the phrase, “to teach people how to live better every day with all other people,” is very vague. I am interested in seeing who among my respondents is more concerned with converting people to Christianity so that they can go to heaven when they die as opposed to those who are more concerned with interfaith understanding to make the world in which we live a better place. My guess would be that these two responses reflect the two poles of the fundamentalist/liberal continuum, thus yielding some valuable insights.

¹¹This question asking how many of the respondent’s extended family attends the same church as the respondent is taken from Nancy T. Ammerman, et. al., *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, 1998, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, p. 252. This question attempts to measure the extent to which a respondent’s family ties influence his or her religious faith.

¹²This question, asking the respondent to name his or her closest friends and to indicate whether or not they attend the same church as the respondent, is intended to measure the social network of the respondent with regard to his or her religious identity. Is this individual immersed in a network of like-minded people or does he or she have friends in other churches. If the respondent's closest friends are members of his or her own church, then this may indicate a degree of isolation (or insulation) from the viewpoints of people from other Christian perspectives. This question is adapted from the 1988 and 1998 General Social Surveys, Question 380 1-3 (FRNDCON1-3), which asks respondents: "Many people have some good friends they feel close to. Who are your good friends (other than your spouse)? Is [NAME] a member of your congregation?"

¹³The purpose of this question, which follows from the one preceding it, is to measure whether or not the respondent has friends who differ from his or her place on the fundamentalism/liberal continuum. If so, then the respondent may be one who is more open to the views of others and less insulated among others of the same mind. This question is adapted from the 1988 and 1998 General Social Surveys, Question 384 1-3 (FRNDFND1-3), which asked respondents for the fundamentalism/liberalism of their friends.

¹⁴This question expands on the two preceding it by asking if the respondent has any close friends of other faiths. If so, then the respondent is more likely to be accepting of other religious perspectives than one who is not. An important distinction being made throughout this survey is whether an individual is exclusivist, inclusivist, or pluralist with regard to his or her faith. Someone who is exclusivist believes that his or her religious perspective is the only way to God and resists outside attempts to compromise his or her faith. These people are likely to insulate themselves from the religious marketplace and secular world for fear of this temptation to compromise. Inclusivists tend to believe that their religion is the right and only way for them, but are open to the fact that there may be other ways to God. Pluralists see God at the center of the spiritual universe, with all the other religions and philosophies orbiting around this center. Unlike inclusivists, whose own faith is at the center of their religious universe, pluralists draw from a variety of perspectives and remain open to new insights that may present themselves. With regard to the modes of belief resolution, I would expect exclusivists to utilize modes such as denial and bolstering that refuse to allow for individual questioning and exploration. I would expect pluralists, however, to utilize the modes of acceptance or don't know which recognize and welcome the uncertainties inherent in belief.

¹⁵This question is adapted from the 1991 and 1998 General Social Surveys, Question 1382c, which asks: "Do you believe in [heaven]?" I have employed the same categories, omitting "don't know".

¹⁶This question is adapted from the 2005 Baylor Religious Survey, Question 27f, which asks: “If you believe in Heaven, how many of the following people [Non-Christians] do you think will get into Heaven?” The categories employed were (1) All, (2) Most, (3) About Half, (4) A Few, (5) None, (6) Don’t Know, and (7) No Opinion. These categories, however, do not reveal the criteria respondents use to determine who gets into heaven and who does not. Gandhi is a paradigmatic example of a non-Christian who best exemplifies the character of Jesus himself. To declare that a person like Gandhi will not get into heaven because he is a non-Christian is to indicate a strict exclusivist view of one’s faith, in this case Christianity.

¹⁷This question is adapted from the Southern Focus Poll, Combined Sample, Spring 1998, Question 18 (BLFPRAY), which asks: “Do you believe that God answers prayers?” (see the American Religious Data Archive at <http://www.thearda.com>). The two categories from this poll, (1) Believe, and (2) “Don’t Believe,” are replaced with (1) Yes, Definitely, (2) Yes, Probably, (3) No, Probably Not, and (4) No, Definitely Not, which correspond to those in Question 30 above.

¹⁸This question is adapted from the 1996 and 2004 General Social Surveys, Question 1439e, which asks: “Some people say the following things are important for being truly American. Others say they are not important. How important do you think each of the following is: e. To be a Christian?” I have retained the original categories.

¹⁹This question is taken from the Newsweek/Beliefnet Poll taken in August 2005 of 1,004 Americans. It is found under the heading, “Are you spiritual or religious?” www.beliefnet.com/story/173/story_17353.html. My hypothesis is that people who consider themselves to be *religious* would be less accepting of other religious viewpoints, whereas those who consider themselves to be *spiritual* would be more accepting.

²⁰This question is adapted from the 1998 and 2006 General Social Surveys, Question 683 (RELPERSN): “To what extent do you consider yourself a religious person? Are you (1) very religious, (2) moderately religious, (3) slightly religious, (4) not religious, or (5) don’t know,” and Question 684 (SPRTPRSN): “To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person? Are you (1) very spiritual, (2) moderately spiritual, (3) slightly spiritual, (4) not spiritual, or (5) don’t know?”

²¹This question is adapted from the 1998 General Social Survey, Question 376a-d, which read: “People have many differing views about what makes a person a good Christian or Jew. Please tell me how important is each of the following to you. Once again, please indicate where you would place your feelings on a scale from 1 to 5.” The responses were: (a) to attend religious services at my church regularly (GOCHURCH), (b) to believe in God without question or doubt (BELIEVE), (c) to follow faithfully the teaching of my church (FOLLOW), (d) to follow my conscience even if it means going against what my church says and does (GOOWNWAY).

²²This question is taken from the 1994 and 1996 General Social Surveys, Question 1406 (OBEYTHNK), which asks, “Which of these would you say is more important in preparing children for life, to be obedient or to think for themselves?”

²³This question is adapted from *Spirituality and the Elderly: Survey of Staff and Residents from Long-Term Care Facilities*, 1998, Question 33 (PRAYER), which asked: “How strongly do you believe that prayer can help someone who is ill?” The categories were: (1) Very Strongly, (2) Strongly, (3) Sometimes Strongly, sometimes Less Strongly, (4) Not Strongly, (5) Not At All. I have added the word *heal* after *help* to clarify what *help* is being requested. *Help* can mean any number of things. Studies show that prayer *helps* individuals in coping with difficult situations, but do individuals believe that prayer can *help heal* someone who is ill? I have also changed the word *ill* to *sick*. The reason for this change is that *sick* seems to be more common in everyday usage than *ill*.

²⁴This question is adapted from the August 2005 Newsweek/Beliefnet Poll in which respondents were asked, “How important are the following reasons for practicing your religion today?” They were not asked to rank these statements, but to indicate whether they were (1) very important, (2) somewhat important, (3) not too important, (4) not at all important, and (5) don’t know. I added the final statement, “To discover truth as revealed in the Bible” and asked respondents to indicate which ONE of these was most important to them.

²⁵This question is borrowed from the 1991, 1998, and 2004 General Social Surveys, Question 1381 (GODCHNGE), which asks: “Which best describes your beliefs about God?” I have retained the same categories.

²⁶This question is adapted from the 1996 Religion and Politics Survey, Question 87 (BLVINGOD), which asked: “Do you believe in a God? If yes, how strong would you say this belief is?” I have changed the word “strong” to “certain” to more directly measure respondents’ certainty of belief.

²⁷This question is taken from the 1998 General Social Survey, Question 1404 (RELTRUTH). The original question asked, “Can a good person who isn’t of your *religious faith* go to heaven or attain salvation?” I have changed *religious faith* to *Christianity* for the purposes of this survey. This survey is directed o Christians. Changing this wording allows a better determination as to the exclusivist-inclusivist-pluralist orientation of the respondent. I have also eliminated “or attain salvation” because salvation for many Christians is “going to heaven”. The two are functional equivalents.

²⁸This biblical passage is taken from Matthew 25:35-36, *The Holy Bible*, New International Version, 1973, 1978, and 1984 by the International Bible Society.

²⁹This biblical passage is taken from John 14:6, *The Holy Bible*, New International Version, 1973, 1978, and 1984 by the International Bible Society.

³⁰This question is adapted from the 1984-85 and 1987-2006 General Social Surveys, Question 120a (BIBLE).

³¹This question is taken from the 1986 General Social Survey, Question 123b for non-Catholic respondents (FECLERGY), which asked: “Do you favor or oppose women as pastors, ministers, priests, or rabbis in your own faith or denomination?”

³²This question is based on the 1993, 1994, and 2000 General Social Surveys, Question 1415d (SCITEST4), which sought to determine the extent to which respondents believed certain statements were true. This particular statement sought to determine whether or not respondents believed that human beings developed from earlier species of animals.

³³This question and the related responses are based on the 1988 General Social Survey, Questions 138a-d. “Evil in the World” is represented by the variable DOUBTS1, “Personal Suffering” by DOUBTS2, “Conflict of Faith and Science” by DOUBTS3, and “Feeling that life really has no meaning” by DOUBTS4.

³⁴This question is adapted from the 1989 Mennonite Church Member Profile, Question 402 (MORALOGIC), which asked: “Religious belief and moral conviction are plausible and justifiable only if they stand up to the rigors of logic and reason.”

³⁵This question is adapted from the 1991 General Social Survey, Question 1397 A-C: (a) “Right and wrong should be based on God’s laws” (GODRIGHT), (b) “Right and wrong should be decided by society” (SOCRIGHT), and (c) “Right and wrong should be a matter of personal conscience” (PERRIGHT). These questions were asked individually with the following categories as possible responses: (1) Strongly Agree, (2) Agree, (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree, (4) Disagree, (5) Strongly Disagree, and (6) Don’t Know.

³⁶This question is adapted from the 1988 General Social Survey, Question 375 a-d, which asked: “Can you tell me how important is each of the following in helping you to make decisions about your life?”: (a) The Bible (DECBIBLE), (b) Your Family and Friends (DECOTHS), (c) The Teachings of Your Church (DECCHURH), and (d) Your Own Personal Judgment (DECSELF). Each of these questions was asked separately with a continuum ranging from 1 (Very Important) to 5 (Not Very Important).

³⁷This question is adapted from the 2002 Religion and Public Life Survey, Question 55 (PRRELONE). See the American Religious Data Archive at <http://www.thearda.com>.

³⁸This question is based on the 1985, 1987, and 1994-2004 General Social Surveys, Question 121d (WORLD4), whose text reads, “People have different images of the world and human nature. We’d like to know the kinds of images you have. Here is a card with sets of contrasting images. On a scale of 1-7 where would you place your image of the world and human nature between the two contrasting images? 1. Human nature is basically good. 7. Human nature is fundamentally perverse and corrupt.”

³⁹This pair is adapted from the 1991 and 1998 General Social Surveys, Question 1384 g and e, which asks: “Do you agree or disagree with the following?”: (g) We each make our own fate (OWNFATE) and (e) The course of our lives is determined by God (PREDETER). These questions were asked separately with the following possible responses: (1) Strongly Agree, (2) Agree, (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree, (4) Disagree, (5) Strongly Disagree, and (6) Don’t Know.

⁴⁰This question is borrowed from the August 2005 Newsweek/Beliefnet Poll (see www.beliefnet.com).

⁴¹This question is adapted from the August 2005 Newsweek/Beliefnet Poll (see www.beliefnet.com).

⁴²This question is borrowed from the 1988, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1998, 2000, and 2006 General Social Surveys, Question 369 (GOD).

⁴³This biblical passage is taken from *The Holy Bible*, New International Version, 1973, 1978, and 1984 by the International Bible Society.

⁴⁴This question is based on the 1988 General Social Survey, Question 377 (MYFAITH). The text of this question is as follows:

Here is another card with contrasting ideas. If you feel that "my faith is completely free of doubts," you would place yourself at 1. If you feel "my faith is mixed with doubts," you would place yourself at 7. If you feel somewhere between these two, you would place yourself at 2,3,4,5 or 6. Where would you place your feelings about your faith?

⁴⁵This question is adapted from the 2004 General Social Survey (GSS). I discovered this question in the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA), but could not find it in the GSS. In its original form, the question asked of respondents was: "After I read off three statements, please tell me which one comes closest to your views about the origin and development of man. 1. God created man pretty much in his present form at one time within the last 10,000 years, 2. Man has developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life. God had no part in this process, 3. Man has developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life, but God guided this process, including man's creation, and 4. Other/Don't Know" (see <http://www.thearda.com/quickstats> under "Origin of Man").

⁴⁶This biblical passage is taken from *The Holy Bible*, New International Version, 1973, 1978, and 1984 by the International Bible Society.

⁴⁷This question is based on the 1985 General Social Survey, Question 121d (WORLD2), whose text reads, "People have different images of the world and human nature. We'd like to know the kinds of images you have. Here is a card with sets of contrasting images. On a scale of 1-7 where would you place your image of the world and human nature between the two contrasting images? 1. The good person must be deeply involved in the problems and activities in the world. 7. The good person must avoid contamination by the corruption of the world."

⁴⁸This pair is adapted from the 1991 and 1998 General Social Surveys, Question 1384 f and c and a, which asks: “Do you agree or disagree with the following?”: (f) Life is only meaningful if you provide the meaning yourself (EGOMEANS), and (c) To me, life is meaningful only because God exists (GODMEANS) and (a) There is a God who concerns Himself with every human being personally (THEISM). These questions were asked separately with the following possible responses: (1) Strongly Agree, (2) Agree, (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree, (4) Disagree, (5) Strongly Disagree, and (6) Don’t Know.

⁴⁹This biblical passage is taken from *The Holy Bible*, New International Version, 1973, 1978, and 1984 by the International Bible Society.