



WORKTALK WEEKLY

12 JANUARY 2009

WORKTALKweekly is not normally topical but we thought this might be helpful.

There's Probably No God?

This week sees the start of a poster campaign on the iconic red London busses proclaiming "There is probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life". The authors are to be congratulated for rarely have I seen so many flaws in one campaign slogan. The breathtaking absurdity of the campaign leaves me wondering whether these words speak for themselves in such a way that we do not need to speak against them. I may run out of space but here are a few thoughts for you to take with you to work when the poster campaign comes up for discussion (if it doesn't, I suggest you bring it up).

First, a few flippant responses. "If there's no God then we're in charge - God help us". "There's probably no bus. So stop waiting and enjoy your philosophy". "There probably is".

Second, a couple of initial reactions. Given our long track record of working out probabilities and getting the wrong answer, then this may not be a reliable statement. Take science, for example. Science is built on probabilities and approximations. The scientific method is all about getting a better and better approximation to the truth. Scientific laws are descriptions of probabilities and all include an element of faith. After years of observation, experiment and testing, we settle on a law. For example, if you combine hydrogen and oxygen you usually get water or, if you observe the sun, you predict it will rise and set. But faith comes into science because there is no guarantee that when you do your combination or observation next time you will get the same result - you trust that you will.

Real scientific progress is made when new information is uncovered which improves our approximations to the truth. To put it another way, science progresses by realizing it was wrong.

In that sense, the campaign is a sort of scientific statement in that it attempts to give an approximation to a guessed truth. But it is not to be trusted because it could well be very wrong. Here's why.

Given the infinitesimally small amount of knowledge we currently have about the vast and awesome universe, built on numbers we can't even conceive, it is utter arrogance to project a probability in this statement. If you know almost nothing compared to what can be known, it is a little unwise to presume that you know something about the existence of someone who could be the ultimate in the knowledge pool. Maybe this is why the psalmist says it is "the fool who says in his heart that there is no God".

You may want to have a look at the second part of the campaign - "Now stop worrying and enjoy your life". What, I wonder, has this got to do with anything? First, most people don't worry because they believe in God. Most research has shown that people who believe in God worry less. But suppose, just for a moment, there is no God - does this remove the credit crunch, global inequality, pain, death, abuse, injustice, loneliness, unrequited love, violence, robbery, betrayal, fraud, corruption, bullying, stress, oppression, infidelity, abandonment, lying, stealing, rape, murder, deception, torture, terrorism or malice?

What an utterly absurd statement to make as if throwing belief in God out of the window would clean-up the human home. Only middle-class embittered science professors and comfortable artisans could come up with such nonsense. Given the current global financial crisis, the irony of the statement is sharpened.

And who are these atheists to tell us what to do? By what authority do they command us to stop

anything or enjoy anything else? I thought the whole point of laid back atheism was not to preach or to tell people what to do yet here we are being told how to behave.

The campaign, therefore, is scientifically, philosophically, logically, socially and morally absurd.

But that is not its main foolishness. The reason to believe in God will, by definition, be related to whether He has shown His hand. If God is at all, He will be quite capable of hiding behind a star billions of light years away and keeping out of sight. There would be nothing we could do to find Him.

The reason to believe is that He hasn't kept out of sight. The light of the world is not light years away but showed up in a format we could decode - clothing His invisibility with the genes of a man and living the life that changed everything. No argument I raised before really matters when compared to this question - 'who is Jesus of Nazareth?' In the end He is the reason why we believe.

Today, in His name, millions of ordinary followers are alleviating suffering, bringing hope and improving the quality of life for others. They are giving people reasons, not slogans, to stop worrying and enjoying their lives.

What if God was one of us - not a slob like one of us - maybe God is on the bus after all?

Work Well
Geoff Shattock

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BIBLE SECTION

[Here is this week's Bible Section](#)

Psalm 14

1 The fool says in his heart,
"There is no God."
They are corrupt, their deeds are vile;
there is no one who does good.

2 The LORD looks down from heaven
on the sons of men
to see if there are any who understand,
any who seek God.

3 All have turned aside,
they have together become corrupt;
there is no one who does good,
not even one.

4 Will evildoers never learn?
those who devour my people as men eat bread
and who do not call on the LORD ?

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