

Epilogue



As we have seen, scriptures that claim to record only truth—the Bible and the Islamic canon—merely set down what could be imagined within the rudimentary bounds of knowledge available to people of their time. Even after later science uncovered the laws of nature and countless scholars exposed many errors, to insist on the texts’ sanctity and attempt to conceal those errors is wrong.

The Old Testament exalted the superiority of the Jewish people and, by putting Yahweh out front, legitimized a logic that other nations could be wiped out root and branch. The result has been a history long marked by suffering and conflict. That such wrongful practices show no sign of stopping, I believe, is because certain groups—very powerful ones—feel the need for them and deploy craft to sustain them.

Because many Old Testament passages and New Testament distortions of Jesus’ teaching have been misunderstood or misinterpreted, innumerable people from the Middle Ages to the present have been branded devils, witches, or Satan and put to senseless, unjust deaths; wars between nations have been unending, mass slaughter has recurred, and precious resources have been wasted. Even now, such

irrational practices continue.

Religion tells adherents not to question its doctrines, not even to harbor doubts, but to accept them as given. Testing their truth, reasonableness, or justice is called impiety—and one is threatened with exclusion from heaven after death. Yet to refuse to correct manifest doctrinal errors while demanding uncritical assent hinders any approach to truth.

Must the Sabbath be kept? Must one never kill? Can slavery be justified? Is it right to regard women as property? Search your scriptures to see whether they truly supply rational, consistent answers. The limitations of an age that absolutized "God"—its constricted knowledge and horizons—are now manifest in errors of delusion, exaggeration, deceit, and irrational claim. It is wrong to insist on the texts' absoluteness despite this.

"It is no surprise that defenders of the gods of established religion have colluded with political authorities to eliminate threats to law and order—and, above all, to their own ecclesial power. Church and state always seek the power to impose order on a corrupt and uncontrollable world. By contrast, Jesus seems to have believed that using religious law to regulate life merely perpetuates the broken human condition. ... He called people to transcend discipline, defenses, tribal boundaries, prejudice, and even religion in order to enjoy an abundant life. This was a distinctive approach to life and to religion. Precisely for this reason Jesus seemed qualitatively different, as if he belonged to another plane of humanity; his followers came to regard God as part of his identity." 1)

"The ideal religion Jesus envisioned was pure religion without ritual, temple, or

clergy—moral judgment in worldly affairs grounded in a just conscience and human strength. We are made to live this way, and this is the path we must take.” 2)

If clergy are truly intellectuals, they will know the emptiness of the afterlife and acknowledge that the deity they venerate does not exist. If they speak otherwise, they can only be hypocrites.

Not only clergy who persist in such acts are culpable; so too are the devotees who venerate such clerics as if they were God’s spokesmen and endure every sacrifice they demand—at times even including the donation of all property, unpaid labor “for the sake of religion,” and the satisfaction of a pastor’s sexual desires.

Clergy who serve believers, and political leaders who serve citizens, should engrave the following on their hearts: “Greed is a grave sin. The greed Jesus vehemently opposed is the attachment of the heart to possessions—this must be clear. The first requirement to be his disciple was to reckon one’s property, sell it, and give to the poor. Those who shrank from this severe condition could not enter his fellowship (Matt 19:21–22; Mark 10:21–22; Luke 18:22–23, 28).” 3) Scripture says: “You still lack one thing. Sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” But “because he had great wealth,” the man “went away sad” (Mark 10:21–22).

Those who would adhere to religions grounded in the Old Testament must clearly grasp that text’s limits and make wise decisions. Before handing the Old Testament to your children or acquaintances under the banner of “birthright faith,” please reconsider its truth-claims and contradictions.

If you feel culpable for the long-standing practice of denying people their rightful due in God's name, then clergy should admit the limits of texts written by people of limited knowledge who claimed to speak God's words. Acknowledge that the supposedly sacred words are not God's words; seek out and replace them with right teaching. Without fundamental change, clinging to scriptures stuffed with tales fit for ancient fable will only perpetuate wrongdoing.

Admit that the depth and breadth of knowledge then available were narrow and shallow. Present new theories grounded in the facts newly uncovered by modern science and advanced technology. No matter how you try to cover content based on distorted theories of the past, it cannot be hidden; worse, it drives many further from truth and makes it harder to approach whatever "God" might be. Be honest.

The God who exists within the laws of nature is a being we can draw near to through understanding. The God who governs those laws beckons us: be no longer deceived by myth and miracle; come quickly and find me.

The religious world must seize this opportunity to repent sincerely, offer coherent answers, and become a place that performs a positive social function. I pray that my book *Conversation with God* and this serialized column in the pages of *Maeil Religion Newspaper* may be a small seed and spark for a genuine reformation of religion.

As the disciplines of natural science converge to create new products and services that enrich our lives, we must now pursue *consilience* between the social and natural sciences to seek answers to the many topics and questions humanity has long pursued. On that basis, we must build theory and knowledge grounded in

truth and fact, share it, and raise its completeness together.

One day we will discover the “Theory of Everything” sought by Stephen Hawking and so many scientists. Artificial intelligence and other advanced technologies will help. If all of us join forces to analyze and combine all the knowledge, discoveries, and inventions to date, we will find answers to the origin of the universe, the essence and value of existence, and the right way to live; we will communicate with the true God; ultimately we will awaken to the truth that all beings are *One*, amplify the *centrifugal force of love*, and enjoy a happy life here on earth.

I firmly believe that the day Jesus sought to realize—*heaven realized on earth*—will arrive before long. Critics of the Old Testament are growing in number, and their voices will only grow louder. To hasten this, conscientious clergy within Protestantism, Catholicism, and Islam—traditions built upon the Old Testament—should acknowledge its harms, recognize that it cannot stand as doctrine alongside the New Testament or the Qur’an, and courageously declare a parting of ways. Believers, too, must act rightly and rationally: point out what is wrong, and raise your voices to change it together.

Let us all join in developing reasoning that accords with objective fact and the laws of nature; let us work together to build heaven on earth, and bequeath a happy future to our precious, beloved descendants.

Sources

1. *Jesus for the Non-Religious* (Korean ed. *만들어진 예수 참 사람 예수*), John Shelby Spong, Korean Christian Research Institute, 2009: 384

2. *The Life of Jesus*, Ernest Renan, BiblioLife, 1863: 250
3. *The Life of Jesus*, Ernest Renan, BiblioLife, 1863: 172