

**WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT GOD?**  
**Dinesh D'Souza**  
**Faith and Reason: Believe Your Beliefs, Doubt Your Doubts**  
**2009 Saddleback Apologetics Conference**  
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I am delighted and thrilled to be here at Saddleback. I'm so grateful to Pastor Rick Warren for inviting me. I see my lovely wife Dixie and my daughter Danielle sitting in the front row. I want to acknowledge them. They're hoping I'll do well. You have a little bit of an unusual podium here. I'm relieved I remembered to wear pants!

We are called in Scripture to contend for our faith. I think that that means something different today than it would have meant a generation ago. Because today we are living to a degree not seen before in secular culture. That means that Christian assumptions, which used to be taken for granted in our society are now no longer shared.

Very interestingly we have seen in recent years, not just atheism, but a kind of new atheism. More militant, more suave, more effective than the atheism of the past. In fact if you thought of atheism twenty years ago you'd think of someone like the activist Madelyn Murray O'Hair. Or you might think of some kind of an ACLU lawyer. Not an atheism with mass appeal.

Today however the new atheists are a pretty suave bunch. I'm thinking of people like the Oxford biologist Richard Dawkins, the author of the book The God Delusion. A book that's sold, I believe, some two million copies.

There is the English writer Christopher Hitchens who writes every month in *Vanity Fair*. He's the author of the book God is Not Great. Of course Hitchens has the British accent, the Richard Burton voice, the artfully disheveled hair, the carefully crumpled pants. In other words, he makes a very suave appeal to young people. A kind of a rebel stance.

Then there's the philosopher Daniel Dennett, the writer Sam Harris who wrote the book The End of Faith. There's the bio-ethicist Peter Singer.

It's a long list. These new atheists have a very different agenda than the atheists of the past. In the past what the atheists wanted to do is police the boundaries of church and state. So let's take down the Ten Commandments from the Texas state capital. That was their agenda. If you want to practice your faith at home in private that was ok. But the new atheists are very different. They want to attack Christianity in the private sphere also. They really want to make every Christian feel like a total idiot for believing in Christianity.

So this is a different kind of challenge than I think we've had in the past.

This atheist threat comes at a time when I think we as Christians are perhaps not as well prepared as we should be. This is true of me as much as anyone else. I grew up in Bombay, India. My parents were Christian, part of a small Christian minority in India. So I learned my Christianity when I was five or six. But when I look back on it I say to myself, was that Christianity? I call it crayon Christianity. It's a Christianity simplified to my very young mind.

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But many of us don't outgrow that Christianity. That's the Christianity I brought to America when I came as an exchange student at the age of seventeen. That's the Christianity a year later I took to the Dartmouth college campus. Interestingly, Dartmouth like some of these Ivy League colleges was founded as a Christian institution. Dartmouth specifically was founded to educate and Christianize the Indians. Sometimes I wonder how I got there. I think I misread the catalog - the part about the Indians.

But what happens when you set foot on a secular campus is your beliefs come under attack, under scrutiny. "Dinesh? You believe someone was born of a virgin? Walked on the ocean? Brought dead people back to life? Are you out of your mind? We're living in the twentieth century!" Now the twenty first century. "Don't you believe the world has fixed laws? Do you think these laws can be suspended at somebody's whim or discretion?"

The point I want to make is that at that young age I didn't have the tools to defend my beliefs. I found myself backing off, pulling away from Christianity. Not because I didn't want to believe. But you could say my mind was getting in the way.

This is the strategy of the new atheists. To drive a wedge between the mind on the one side and, you may say, the heart on the other.

I think a second reason that as Christians we sometimes have difficulty with the new atheists is because we are accustomed when we are faced with a problem, a question, to turn to the Bible. If somebody says, "Hey Christian! Why do you believe this?" We say, "Well the book of Matthew says this or the book of Leviticus says that..." That's a pretty good approach if you are speaking to a fellow Christian. But if you are speaking to a secular guy or to an atheist, if I said this in a debate with Christopher Hitchens he'd say, "I don't care what the book of Matthew says. I reject the authority of the Bible to decide the matter."

Again as Christians we're kind of tongue-tied because that was our argument.

So what I want to suggest this afternoon is I think as Christians we would do better, you might say, to be a little more bi-lingual. And by bi-lingual what I mean is to speak one language in church but to learn a little bit of a different language when we step out into secular culture. Because we're often going to be dealing with people and our children are going to be dealing with people who don't share our assumptions.

The new atheists are particularly targeting young people. Their point is, "We are going to let the Christian parent breed them. But at some point these parents are going to have to send their kids into the world. That's when we'll get them. Why? Because we, the atheists, are influentially ensconced in the media and the universities and education. So we're going to use the tools of skepticism and inquiry to challenge these young Christians and, you might say, torpedo their beliefs.

What I'd like to do this afternoon is to take a couple of the strongest arguments of the new atheism and analyze them - answer them. By the way, as Pastor Rick mentioned I've been debating a bunch of these guys. It's a very interesting challenge. In a debate you try to find the

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weak point of your opponent. You try to find the historical error or the logical fallacy. Some people say, "How do you know if you're doing well?" I say, "I just kind of look over and if I see a slight look of panic in my opponent's eye I feel good. I feel like I'm getting through."

But that's not what I wanted to hear. I'm not going to focus on the weak points of the new atheism. I'm going to focus more on its strong points.

What the new atheists have become very good at is surfing on the wave of current events. That's one reason they get a lot of media coverage.

I was recently reading an article by one of these guys. He was talking about the war on terror. He said the war against terrorism, that's a flash of competing fundamentalisms. Over here is Islamic fundamentalism, over *here* Christian fundamentalism. What do the two groups have in common? They're both fueling their fanaticism at the same holy gas station. In short, religion is the problem.

He went on to write that 911 was "a faith based initiative." He said, "If you look around the world, why are people fighting? The Shia and the Sunni in Iraq. They're fighting over religion. The Israelis and the Palestinians. They're fighting over religion. What about in Northern Ireland? They're fighting over religion. How about the Hindus and the Muslims. They're fighting over religion."

Religion appears to be the reason why people are at each other's throats in today's world. Then he said if you look at history it's the same story. The crusades, the inquisitions, the religious wars, the Salem witch trials. Any rational person has to conclude that God is a menace in the world. If we could get rid of God and have a secular society not only would it be more scientific, more rational. It would also be more peaceful, a more decent society."

So this is the voice of the new atheism.

The new atheists have also gotten very cunning about corralling our young people and pushing them up, if you will, against the wall. "Hey Christian! You call yourself a Christian but have you done a comparative survey of all of the religions of the world? No? How do you know if your religion is true and everybody else's is false? What is the reason that you are a Christian? Is it that your parents are Christian? You're a Christian because you were born in San Diego or Tulsa, Oklahoma. Had you been born in Afghanistan you'd be a Muslim. If you were born in Thailand you'd most likely be a Buddhist. So your Christianity is not the result of a quest for truth. It's the result of the accident of geography."

I was in a debate not long ago with a prominent atheist and he said, "Dinesh, you're an atheist!" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "There have been a lot of gods that have been advanced in the great sweep of human history. You don't believe in most of them do you? Do you believe in Krishna?" I said no. "Do you believe in Allah?" No. "Do you believe in Thor or Baal or Poseidon or Diana or Jupiter?" No, no, no, no. He said, "Then when it comes to ninety-nine percent of all of the gods you're an atheist. The only difference between me and you is I take your God and add him to this long list."

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How are we as Christians to tackle the new atheism?

I want to begin by saying a word about science. Partly because I think the new atheism today marches behind the banner of science. The new atheists essentially say, "Look science is a better way of knowing than Christianity. Why? Because science is based on reason. Christianity is based on faith."

As the atheists describe it, science is advancing and religion is retreating. Why? Because the atheists say that from the dawn of mankind when people were ignorant and didn't know what caused things they would attribute it to God. So ancient man looks out of his cave window, he sees lightning. He doesn't know what caused it. And he goes, that must be the lightning god. Or he hears thunder and doesn't know where that came from. That must be the thunder god.

Atheists say, "But today we know that lightning is an electrical discharge. You don't need God to explain it. Science has explained it."

In the atheist narrative what happened is that the Christians are always being proved wrong and science has been proved right. They'll say, "For a thousand years the medieval Christians believed the earth was flat. Then the brilliant scientist showed up and they revealed that the earth is round. The Christians used to believe that the earth was the center of the universe. The sun goes around the earth. But Copernicus and Galileo showed up and said, no it's really the other way round. The earth goes around the sun.

Then Darwin who's become kind of the patron saint of modern atheism came long to show that you don't need God. You can use chants and natural selection to try to explain the presence and the diversity of life on the planet.

This atheist notion of science is creeping its way into our textbooks. I have a teenage daughter. If I peek into her science books you begin to see a little bit of this narrative beginning to make itself present.

So what can we say about it? To me what's very, very interesting is that this narrative of scientific advance and Christian retreat is based on about three crucial examples. When you begin to look into those examples more closely you see that they're actually quite fragile. In fact largely bogus.

I'll give you a simple illustration of this. I did a little bit of historical investigation into the so-called flat earth theory. I realized that educated people throughout the Middle Ages knew perfectly well that the earth is round. In fact educated people at the time of Christ knew that the earth is round. In fact the ancient Greeks who lived five hundred years before Christ knew perfectly well that the earth is round.

Why? Because actually you don't need Galileo's telescopes to figure it out. All you have to do is watch an eclipse. You can see the shadow of the earth on the moon. It's round. Aristotle knew that the earth is round.

The point I'm making is that the flat earth story is a complete legend. It's a complete myth.

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The other point I want to make that I think is interesting is that this whole notion of scientific advance and Christian retreat is a story that kind of happily goes along but you'll notice it comes to a screeching halt in 1859. That's exactly a hundred fifty years ago when Darwin published The Origin of Species. You might say that's odd. Hasn't there been any science since then?

There's actually been a lot. But interestingly the science of the last hundred fifty years far from undermining Christianity supports it in important and interesting ways. This is why we never hear about it.

I'd like to give you just a couple of brief examples. Very eye-opening examples of what I mean.

Several hundred years ago somebody posed a question to the church father Augustine. This is the Augustine who wrote Augustine's Confessions. The question goes sort of like this: If you think about time, time goes back. But really no matter how far back you go you can always go further back, can't you? If somebody says two thousand years ago. Before that is two thousand and one years ago. One million years ago. Before that was one million and one year ago.

So time seems to stretch in a kind of elastic indefinite way both into the past and into the future. So the question that was posed to Augustine was, when did God make the universe? Did God actually create the universe? And if he did, what was he doing before that?

In other words how did God occupy his time, which he evidently had a lot of prior to creating the universe? Augustine gave a reply that is actually one of the most astounding replies ever given in the history of thought. He said, based on a meditation on the book of Genesis, he said, "God created time along with the universe." In other words "before" the universe, there was no time. Once upon a time, time did not exist.

This is a little bit of a mind bender. And really for many centuries if you said it, it would be hard to explain. What do you mean that time had a beginning? But interestingly today if you send your son or daughter right down the road to a Physics 101 course at UC Irvine or UC Berkeley they will find out in the first three months that as a direct consequence of the so-called Big Bang not only did the universe have a beginning, which is to say not only did all matter have a beginning, but very interestingly, space and time also had a beginning. In other words space and time are properties of our universe. Outside our universe - no space, no time.

The reason this is very interesting is that for two thousand years Christians have been saying two things.

One, God is eternal. Eternal not meaning living forever on and on and on. Eternal in the sense of outside of time. This concept of eternity, which seemed from a scientific point of view incoherent now makes complete sense. If God is outside the universe he's outside of time.

Second, the ancient Hebrews said that there was nothing and then there was a universe. By the way, this is very different than what any other religion says. In many other religions you have God or gods that in a sense fashioned the universe. But they don't make it out of nothing. They

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take some other pre-existing stuff and they basically sculpt the universe. But the ancient Hebrews said No, there was nothing and then we got a universe.

And by the way, the ancient Hebrews as far as I know conducted no experiments. How did they find out? They basically said, "God told us." And two thousand years later what I'm saying is that their description of what happened is pretty much right on.

So this is an interesting way in which science is corroborating some very ancient claims that most of us have believed on faith. But the faith is now being buttressed by reason.

I'll give a second example that's worth thinking about. This example has only come up in the last thirty or forty years. Some leading scientists have looked at our universe and they've noticed that it has a whole bunch of numerical values. Think about it. If I were to take this bottle of water and drop it, it will accelerate to the ground at a known rate - gravity. So in our universe there are all these constants and forces, the electromagnetic force that happens to also be the speed of light. There's the strong nuclear force. There's something called the electroweak force. There's all these numbers.

One physicist Lee Smolin said, it's sort of like God is sitting at a big desk. On the desk he has a hundred different dials. Every dial is calibrated to a very specific number. Here's the question that the scientists are asking: What if we sneak into the room and when God isn't looking we fool with the dials? We just change them around a little bit. What would happen?

The scientists who look at this question say that what would happen is if you touch one of the dials and you move it not ten percent, not one percent, but one part in a hundred thousand million billion you would have no universe. You would have no life.

This by the way is a topic described by the physicist Stephen Hawking in his book [A Brief History of Time](#). If you look in there you'll find the example I just gave. The whole idea is that the entire universe appears to be a kind of gigantic plot to make possible ... us! This idea, which is sometimes called the anthropic principle, or in a more colloquial way the fine tuned universe, has put modern atheism totally on the defensive.

Why? First of all it's an argument utterly immune to Darwinian attack. We're not talking about whether the dog and the wolf had a common ancestor. We're talking about how we got a universe in the first place and why the constants of the universe... how did they get so calibrated for life?

I was in a debate some months ago against a physicist and he was clearly very shaken by this idea of the fine tuned universe. He said, "I think I can account for it." I said, "How?" He goes "Maybe there are multiple universes." I said, "Really? How many?" He said, "Frankly I don't know but I think there probably are an infinity of universes out there. If there are an infinity of universes, it's not that surprising that one of them, unlikely though it may seem, happens to be suited for life. That happens to be the one we're in." I said, "This is really a far out fantastic and really a thrilling idea that you've got all these universes. What is the scientific or empirical evidence for it?" He said, "There is none." I said, "That's o.k., but you're at the frontiers of scientific research. Do you expect that evidence will be coming in in the next twenty or fifty or

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maybe a hundred years to give some empirical support for this really exciting theory?" He goes, "Oh no. Not only is there no evidence, there never will be."

Now I'm genuinely curious I said, "Why not?" He said, "If there are other universes they would operate according to other laws. In other words, they would be permanently cut off from our universe. We could never find out about them." I said to him, "I would like to believe that. But I just don't think I have that much faith." In other words you have very intelligent people no doubt to get around the idea of God. They are now forced to posit things like... To abolish one invisible God they've got to manufacture an infinity of invisible universes.

All of this tells me that as Christians this is not a road, science, that we should be afraid of. This is a road we should be heading down with our magnifying glasses because there's a lot of good stuff to be found.

I could go on and on about science but I'm watching a clock in the back of the room. For reasons of time I need to adopt the motto that King Henry the Eighth used with one of his wives: He said I can't give you too long. So I need to fast forward a little bit and talk about morality.

I want to address head on the question I raised earlier. Namely is it true that Christianity is responsible for violence, terrorism, war, conflict? This is actually one of the magic bullets in the holster of modern atheism. It's very important that we be able to meet it head on.

Like a lot of arguments that are in the end bogus, the argument does contain a molecule of truth. Often when I speak on the campus I tell students, when you hear an argument that sounds fishy always ask what is the grain of truth in it. Because if it didn't have a grain of truth, no one would believe it.

So what's the grain of truth here? The grain of truth is that the Islamic radicals do do some bad things in the name of God. That's true. But the point is there is really nothing equivalent in any other religion. In fact where are the Buddhist suicide bombers? I'm still waiting for them to show up. Where is the Christian bin Laden? Where is the Christian Hamas or Hezbollah? Where is the Christian country today that's run along the lines of post Khomeini-Iran? It really doesn't exist.

In a sense what the atheists are trying to do is take Islamic radicalism and use that to smear God in general or all the other religions.

But let's explore this argument a little bit further and ask this a question: Why are the Israelis fighting the Palestinians? Are they fighting about religion? Are they saying, "We as Jews think Moses was the greater prophet." The Muslims believe it was Mohammed and they come to blows. Is that what they're fighting about? No.

They are fighting about land. And similarly the Hindus and the Muslims are fighting about Kashmir. And if you go to Northern Ireland, they're not fighting about the Eucharist or transubstantiation. They're fighting about which bunch of guys gets to rule that country. Self-determination and not religion is the motor of that conflict.

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There's a story about a guy who's walking on the street in Belfast and a man jumps behind him, puts a gun at his head and goes, Catholic or Protestant? The man is understandably kind of nervous. He goes "Actually I'm an atheist." The voice behind him says, "Catholic atheist or Protestant atheist?"

If you take a backward glance at history, if you were to ask me a few years ago, "How many people were killed in the Salem witch trials?" I would have said, "I don't know but it's a big blot on America history." In college we read Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible* which is based on McCarthyism and the Salem witch trials. I'd say, hundreds, maybe thousands.

"How many people were killed in the Inquisition?" That was a biggie. The Spanish Inquisition lasted for three hundred fifty years. Hundreds of thousands... maybe millions.

Today there's a very interesting body of knowledge about all this. If you look at it you're in for a little bit of a surprise. There's a multi volume study of the inquisition by an historian named Henry Kamen. He points out that the Spanish Inquisition which was the worst over a period of almost four centuries killed approximately two thousand people. Two thousand people, four hundred years. I have to consult my daughter on the math but it works out to about five guys a year, which is not normally considered a world historical crime.

Or if you look at the Salem witch trials. My wife Dixie and I were in Salem, Massachusetts a few years ago. I do want to tell you that the witches are doing really well. A lot of them are tourist guides. If you take one of their brochures and look at the number of people killed in the Salem witch trials it says right there - nineteen.

Is that nineteen too many? Or two thousand nineteen too many? Of course. But here's the point I want to make. While the atheists are crying major inconsolable crocodile tears over the crimes of Christianity, crimes often committed two hundred or five hundred or as in the case of the crusades, a thousand years ago, they are often ignoring and downplaying the much greater crimes of atheism, which are not ancient but have occurred recently in our lifetime. In the last century. And they're still going on today.

People say, Dinesh, are you talking about Stalin in Russia or Mao in China or the Nazi regime?" I say, "Yeah, but only in part. That's only the tip of the iceberg. It's true that those regimes alone, those three, in the space of about seven decades managed to kill close to a hundred million people. That's true. But that doesn't even count a procession of dictators beginning with Lenin and continuing through Brezhnev and Andropov and Chernenko. It doesn't count Enver Hoxha, Kim Jong-Il, Fidel Castro, Pol Pot. You take a junior league atheist like Pol Pot. Most people don't even name him. Yet in Indo China following the Vietnam War his Khmar Rouge regime in the space of about three years killed about two million people. Two million!

Even bin Laden in his wildest dreams doesn't even come close.

So who should parachute into the discussion at this moment but Richard Dawkins, author of [The God Delusion](#) who cries out, "Wait a minute! We have to make a critical distinction. The Christians killed in the name of Christianity. You might have had some tyrants who happened to be atheists but they didn't kill in the name of atheism." Dawkins is actually a noted biologist.

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Here I think you see the problem- when the biologist is allowed to leave the lab. Why? Because evidently the poor man knows no history. You don't have to be an historian. You just have to crack open the collected works of Karl Marx and you'll find out that the atheism is not accidental. It's absolutely essential to the whole communist scheme. Marx says religion is the opiate of the people [a kind of drug] that blinds you to social injustice and you need to get rid of it before you can create the new man and the new utopia, freed from the shackles of God and religion.

So my conclusion is that it is atheism and not religion that is responsible for the mass murders of history.

Now I want to turn to my third and final theme. I want to explore for a moment the motives of the new atheism and what we as Christians can do about it.

This is an interesting subject because if you ask the atheist about his motive or her motive you get a very lofty answer. The philosopher Bertrand Russell many years ago, he had written a book Why I am not a Christian. Somebody asked him "If you die and find yourself right in front of God, what would you say to him?" Russell said, "I would say to him, "Sir, you have failed to provide me with adequate evidence." This is kind of the mentality of modern atheism. It's sort of... I am an apostle of the data; I am a champion of reason following the pathways of knowledge. If I don't believe it's just because I don't see any proof.

I'd like to suggest to you why to me this is not a very believable explanation for the new atheism.

Normally if you don't believe in something because there's no proof of it, what do you do? You ignore it. You go about your everyday life as if the something you don't believe in, for which you have no evidence, does not exist.

Case in point: I don't believe in unicorns. But you'll notice I have not written in books - *The Unicorn Delusion, The End of Unicorns, Unicorns are Not Great*. You won't see me debating the issue of unicorns. I just kind of go about life as if there aren't any unicorns.

So something more is going on. I want to leave you with my thought about what that is.

If you think about life, it's a little unfair. We don't want it to be. We believe in justice. One of the first things I learned in America was "what goes around comes around." I'd like it to be true, but it isn't. Many times the bad guy comes out on top. Many times the good guy comes to grief. It is the shared premise of all the religions of the world, certainly all the major ones, that even though there isn't terrestrial justice or justice in this life, there is what can be called cosmic justice. Meaning, in final accounting what goes around does come around.

Consider Hinduism. You are a jerk in this life; we're going to be seeing you as a cockroach in the next one. Cosmic justice.

In Christianity, it's the last judgment. The last judgment is the idea that your actions in life, even your thoughts and even the things you do in private are noted. They're observed. Perhaps they are in some sense recorded. Kind of an unnerving idea. Not only for the atheists, I think even for

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the Christians. I think of Augustine in the Confessions. He said, "I kept postponing my conversion to Christianity. I kept praying to God, 'Lord make me chaste, but not yet.'" Even Augustine is in a way nervous about putting himself into this unremitting shadow of moral accountability and unending scrutiny.

What I want to suggest to you is that today's atheists have found a beautiful solution to this problem. How do you get out from the shadow of moral judgment? It's really simple. Abolish the judge. If you can get rid of God, the commandments, the edicts, the laws, the rules become optional.

So what I'm trying to suggest is that the new atheism of today is not just marching behind the banner of reason. It is also promising young people, you might say, moral liberation. Liberation from those strict rules of Christianity.

So where does that leave us? I must say as Christians sometimes after I speak in a church people come to me and say, "Dinesh that was a very depressing talk. What are you asking us to do? You want me to be a physicist and a biologist and an historian and a philosopher all at the same time?" I say, no, I'm not asking you to do that. In fact the new atheists don't do that.

What do they do? Basically they put on a nice big holster with a couple of massive six guns. They've got some magic bullets in there and they walk out... "Hey Christian! Christianity is responsible for most of the violence and suffering in the world." *Bam!* Or "How do you know that your religion is true and everybody else's is false?" *Bam.* Often as Christians we're a little taken aback. We're unprepared.

So I think at the very least we need a bit of a bulletproof vest. True some of you are going to say to me, "I don't want a six gun. I don't want a holster." Ok. But maybe you'll be open to a few arrows for your quiver. Or perhaps a few pellets for your blowpipe. So when the atheist comes into the arena and says, "Hello Christian! I've got something for you." *Bam!* You can reply, "Missed me! And I've got something for you." *Ping!*

Apologetics, which is the defense of the faith, has become a practical necessity in our time. I think that as Christians in some sense as we can turn the challenge of the new atheism into an opportunity for evangelism. The atheists have put the issue on the public agenda. The only question now is are we going to let them monopolize it or are we going to, in our own way and in our own context, step into the arena maybe one step at a time and try to equip ourselves. Not just what I believe but why I believe it. We should be able to answer these questions. And if we do then I think we're going to unnerve modern atheism. We're going to see a kind of Christianity that is on the offense, not always up against the wall. Not always backing off. One that ultimately is not only going to endure but I think with Christ's help will also prevail.

Let us pray:

Lord, you teach us in Scripture to love you. You ask us to love you not only with our hearts and with our souls but also with our minds. You command us to go out there and contend for our faith. To give a reason for the hope that is within us. So we ask you to bless us and illumine our minds and our hearts. And to give us not only wisdom but also courage to be

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able to step up when the time demands and be your soldiers and be your ambassadors; allow you to use us as your instruments in the world. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.