

Where can I buy a copy of [the book] *In Our Poverty*?

I wish you could. Currently, as discussed in the 'Projects' pages, the manuscript is unpublished. But I am trying to remedy the situation. :O)

Do you have a mailing list?

No, I don't. But you can keep up with some of what is happening at Right Here, Right Now by taking a look at the site's blog.

Who do you think is right? The liberals or the conservatives?

It's important to note that most of us, myself included, throw those two words around rather carelessly, without having a good definition of what we mean by them. It seems to me we call somebody a conservative when they disallow something we allow, and we call them a liberal when they allow something we disallow. But, the fact is that it does not matter if one is liberal or conservative—either can be 'right' and either can be 'wrong.' In fact, they can both be wrong or right at the same time—even when they disagree. What matters most is that regardless of your belief concerning a particular thing, you hold that belief in abject humility before God. It is humility or pride which makes a person right or wrong; not necessarily his or her intellectual belief. The way I like to say it is that our faiths and beliefs are like articles of clothing, and our humility and pride are the materials from which they are sewn. It is the fabric and thread, not the style or cut, which ultimately determine the integrity of a garment. We all need to stop labeling people, and start loving them.

Are you a moral relativist?

Well, this is another phrase that is often tossed about, without ever being well defined. Having said that, I will try to answer. In terms of moral philosophy, specifically metaethics, I'm inclined to answer "no." I believe there are certain absolute and universal truths, standards, etc. which exist in God's nature, and to which, by being part of creation, we are called to follow and abide by. But, outside of this, I would answer "yes," because in terms of applied ethics I believe things are very relative—at least, very situational. From this point onward, things become complicated because they become a matter of how you pick your subjects. For example, "Is it wrong to steal?" is a common question with respect to morality, but in my opinion is a poor question that can't be answered absolutely. Robbing a bank because you're lazy and greedy is much different than taking a loaf of bread because your child is starving, yet they are both stealing. Dealing with the top-level question puts you in the position of being a relativist (or

situationalist), while painstakingly forming enough very specific questions can (theoretically) allow you to be an absolutist. But the problem is, how do you ever get those questions exactly, precisely accurate enough that you can answer them absolutely? To my mind, you never can. In regard to what could be a personal dilemma of believing in absolute metaethical standards while having a relativistic view of applied ethics, I have come to the intellectual belief that absolute metaethics are concerned not with what we do in this life, but why we do what we do, and from what “place,” relationship-wise to God, we do them. In other words, (relative) applied ethics are a matter of what we do, and (absolute) metaethics involve our state of being. This is, in a tiny little nutshell, the philosophical explanation of why my personal experience has been that Christianity is about pride and humility; not about rules and regulations.

What’s with the little turtle?

I find a lot of meaning, personally, in the life of the ocean and seashore, and in particular the life cycle of sea turtles. I believe the struggle of the hatchlings, in their instinct and innocence (and, at times, ineptitude) to reach an unfathomable depth which is their true home, is somewhat analogous to our human struggle. Some of them make it, some of them do not, but they all have to try, by nature, in order to be collectively successful. These ideas and others are what drive me to love sea turtle hatchlings. And besides... they’re just plain adorable.

If you had to define what a “fundamentalist” is, what would your definition be?

To keep things at a high level and avoid citing specific beliefs as examples, I would refer to a couple of good explanations. Karen Armstrong talks about fundamentalism a lot, especially in her book *The Battle for God*. I like her definition because she takes pains not to judge fundamentalism per se, and because she explains it as part of her very large and quite intelligent landscape. However, for my own purposes and understanding, which are less sublime, I borrow Paul Tillich’s definition from volume one of his *Systematic Theology*. According to him, the purpose of theology is (1) to preserve eternal truths and (2) to make them relevant for each generation. Tillich understood, quite rightly, that while there are indeed certain eternal unchanging truths (even if only one or a few), the explanation, understanding and expression of them must change with each passing generation. A fundamentalist on the other hand, he would say, “...elevates something finite and transitory to infinite and eternal validity.” In other words, a fundamentalist is a person who mistakes the temporary views of a generation (or age) for the eternal truths of God and, I would add, preaches and protects them accordingly.

What is man's biggest problem today?

This is very simple, but it requires thinking about it deeply before it begins to sink into our hearts so that we may understand it. The short version of the situation of man is this: He suffers from a profound loneliness, he possesses an instinct which wants to end this loneliness, and he has a horrific pride which convinces him that he has the right to try to do so no matter what the cost. In my opinion, the loneliness is in actuality a longing for God, which is not a problem. The instinct to end the loneliness is not a bad thing, for this instinct and our loneliness are what drive us to God. But when our pride steps in, telling us we know how to best and most easily end the loneliness, our problems begin. Truly solving the loneliness is traded for anything which temporarily anesthetizes the loneliness, and these temporary fixes (drugs, sex, entertainment, hobbies, other people, shopping, pick your favorite thing) become idols. Furthermore, pride tells us that it does not matter whom or what we destroy on our path to getting rid of our loneliness, and our actions become selfish. To me, this is how the three traditional views of "sin" (all sin is a form of idolatry, or all sin is a form of selfishness, or the root of all sin is pride) fit together in one cohesive view. But still, my conclusion is that pride is the problem.

Do you think it is okay for a Christian to be pro-choice?

Well, first of all I want to say that labels are problematic. We need to stop allowing other people to *package* what we think. We must avoid labels which demand that we accept or reject certain beliefs and actions in order to accept or reject certain others; we need to stop thinking in predefined collections of ideas which other people claim to be inseparable. They (i.e., the packages) close our minds and we end up allowing their labels to control what we think and who we become; which is detrimental to developing a faith which is our own. What is "okay" or "not okay" for a Christian involves *where and how she or he stands in her or his faith in relationship to God*, regardless of whether or not her or his faith contains particular aspects of particular groups' agendas. Personally, I believe that life is beautiful and precious, and should be protected. I think that terminating a pregnancy because it gets in the way of plans or is simply inconvenient or "unwanted" is, at the least, highly questionable. In this sense, I am pro-life. On the other hand, if I can imagine at least one scenario under which I would want a person to have the option of having an abortion legally, then I must necessarily say I am in some way pro-choice. And I can, so in this sense, I am pro-choice. I am a Christian, but I am in some ways both pro-life *and* pro-choice, and in some ways neither of the two. I do not think we should worry about asking which is "okay," as if they are completely mutually exclusive. We should worry instead about

working out our own beliefs humbly and honestly in the presence of God.

I think I can guess this already but do you support the death penalty?

No. I believe capital punishment should be abolished.

Is God a creation of Man?

Well, this is a fair and challenging question, but if asked rhetorically, I don't see much point in it. If I were to say, "Yes, of course," then there isn't much point to any of my writing. If I were to say, "No, of course not," then to prove my point I'd have to prove the existence of God, which I can't do. The common concepts behind this question, as I've encountered them, are of two basic flavors which may or may not be combined: One, whenever Man can't understand and/or explain something, he attributes it to gods or a God. Two, whenever Man doesn't have the ability to get what he wants, he appeals to the gods or a God. In either case, the existence of gods or a God can be argued to be a convenience to help keep us sane and functioning. I can appreciate these concepts and I can appreciate the question, but I'm on the side that God exists. I have what I consider pretty sound reasons for believing so, but ultimately it comes down to the fact that I believe it in faith. Incidentally, there's a chapter in the manuscript for *In Our Poverty* which deals with begins with this very question. I've placed a [copy](#) of it on this site, so you can take a look at it.