Rapid Fire: Responding to Antitheist Memes **[1]**

Submitted by Wessel on Wednesday, 27 November 2019 - 22:42



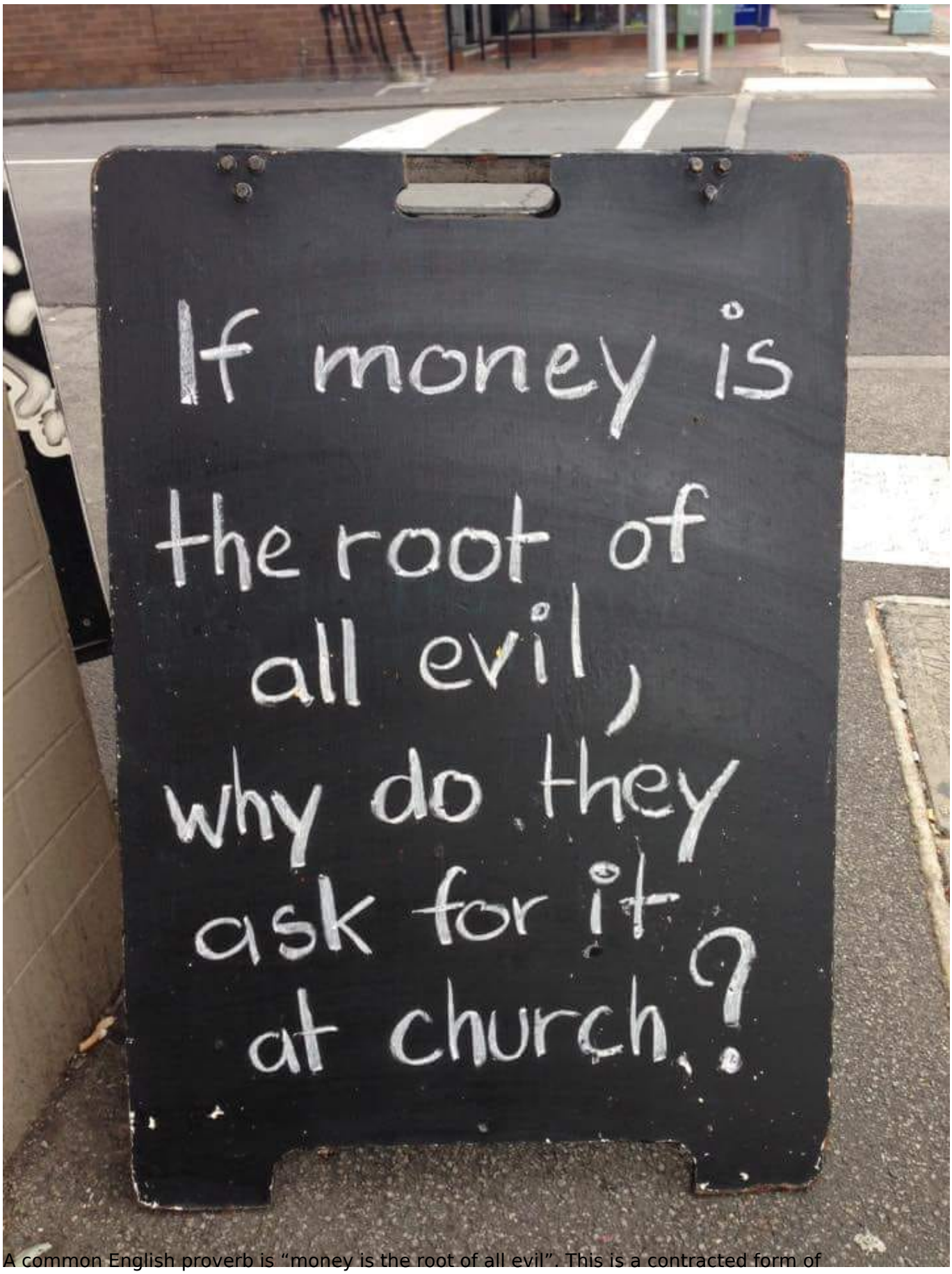
Read time: 13 minutes
I have written before about being thoughtful when reading and responding to satire [2]. I also showed that a picture with a silly caption can defame, perpetuate a falsehood, and oversimplify a complex issue, such as the cause of the Dark Ages [3].

While it is easy to say that one should be thoughtful about such things, knowing how to analyse them is a skill which needs to be developed. I am still in the process of personally developing in this manner. One step is to identify a category within which the satire falls. Often objections or criticisms can fall into broad categories, and once a specific objection can be linked to such a broad category, it is easier to respond to the criticism with insight.

This article will present three examples of responding to antitheist “memes”.

I label these images as antitheist, because they go beyond the personal rejection of belief in God to actively promoting such a worldview [4]. This is done at all costs (such as rejecting truthfulness), similar to propaganda. I know atheists who are content for other people to believe in God and even affirm many of the same things Christians do (such as that church is good for society). But antitheists cannot abide religion, and seek to turn everyone against it.

Churches and Money



A common English proverb is “money is the root of all evil”. This is a contracted form of 1 Timothy 6:10: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some have been led astray from the faith in their greed, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

Knowing the full quotation already answers the question. Money itself is not (according to the Bible)

the root of evil: the *love* of money (insofar as it becomes a *means in itself*) is *a* kind of evil. This should be obvious to most people who have heard of stories of corruption, embezzlement, theft, murder, and such, all to gain money. But money itself is not evil: it is a *means to an end*; a tool. It can be used for good and selfless reasons, or for evil and selfish gain.

In a previous article I have argued that the root of all evil (in the Christian perspective) is actually pride [5].

In the Bible there are precedents for taking money for ministry and maintenance purposes. In the Old Testament, parts of food offerings were used to sustain the priests and Levites. In the New Testament, we read of a one shekel Temple tax, which was used for the upkeep of the Temple.

Of course, many churches have proven to be corrupt in taking an excess of money while making unbiblical promises of prosperity to those who give. This problem is especially rife in North America [6] and Africa. Even in the Bible such practices are condemned (e.g. Micah 3:11), and many Christians and churches also condemn them.

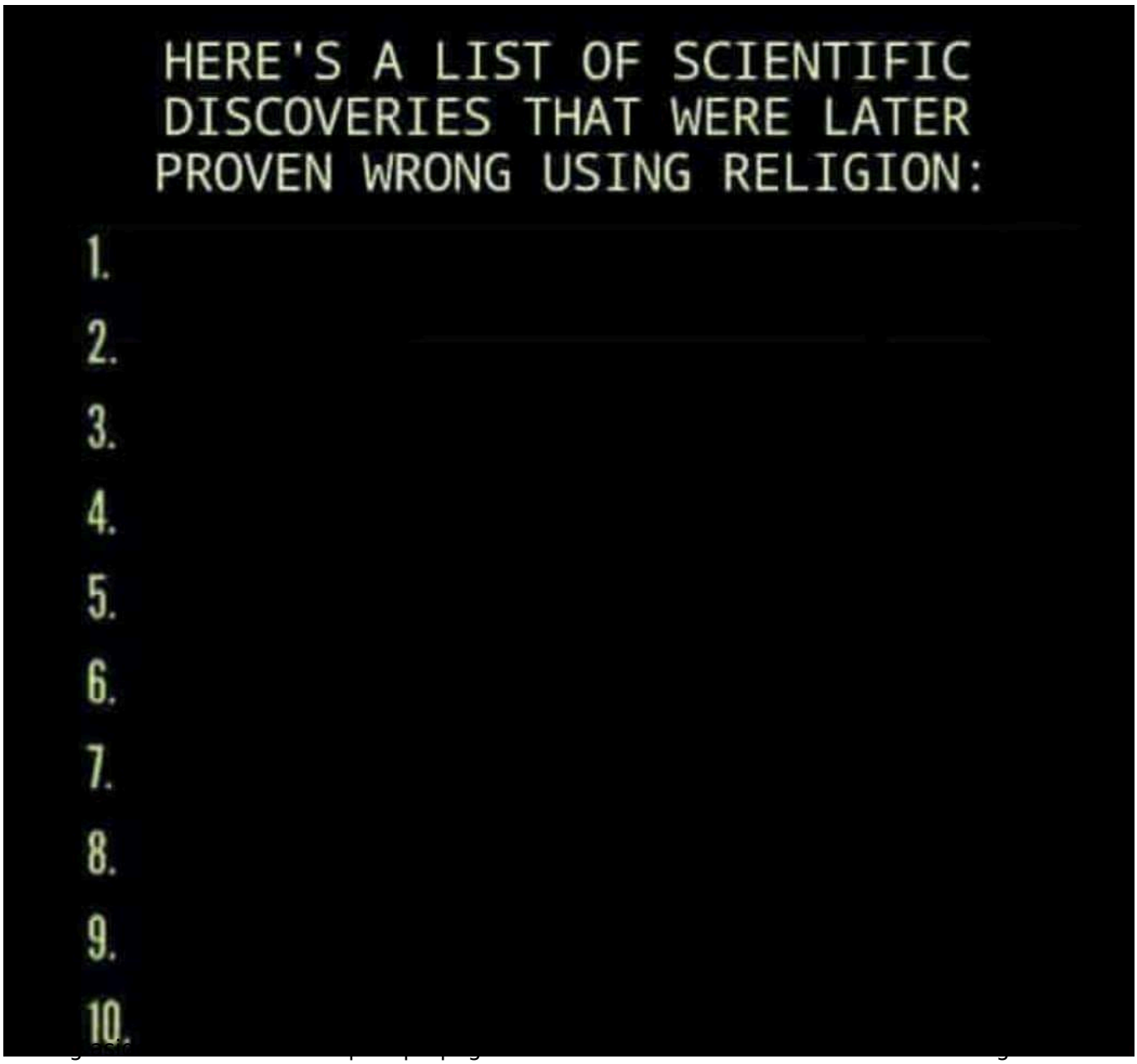
Many churches today have prayers when collection (or offering) is taken (i.e. when the church “asks for your money”). A cursory online search will find many such prayers (here are some examples [7]). These prayers usually have a format like the following:

1. Thanking God for His provision in our lives
2. Acknowledging that our money and possessions are ultimately good gifts from Him
3. That our money and possessions are not our own, but that we are custodians thereof
4. Thanking God that we are able to give back
5. Praying that our money will be used wisely by the church leadership in maintaining the church (building infrastructure, as well as paying the salaries of the people who work there), and for ministry work (e.g. used in food banks, supporting missionaries, etc.)

Some churches do not explicitly “ask” for money these days, in that collection baskets or plates are no longer passed around. They may provide banking details or QR codes through which people may donate money in their own time and according to their own conscience. In such churches the focus is on faithfulness to God in generosity to one’s neighbour and church community, rather than obligation or emotional manipulation.

On a final note on this topic, I would like to share that my wife and I visited several different churches this year, including ones within polar opposite socio-economic communities. The churches which we visited warned their congregations against a love of money and security placed in wealth. They encouraged their members to hold lightly to wealth—not necessarily implying that the money should be given to churches—but that wealth should be shared with vulnerable neighbours. Antitheist memes such as the one above neglects insight into the systematic theology preached of the idolising of money, and the fruits seen in the display of generosity of congregants within society.

The Church and Scientific Advancement



conflict and opposition to each other, there are a few examples. It does come down to what one defines as “science”. The word “science” comes from the Latin “scientia”, which means “to know”. For centuries, “science” referred to any structured discipline of study. It could be applied to grammar, philosophy or even theology. It is only in the past two centuries where it has been used to exclusively refer to the *natural sciences*.

With that being said, here are two crucial scientific advancements which were, in a way, grounded in religion and went against the prevailing secular and “scientific” knowledge of the day: the origins of the universe, and how we should study the natural world.

A hundred years ago, the scientific community held to an eternal universe. The notion of the universe having a beginning was simply “too religious” to be entertained seriously. What is more, scientific theories and data which were available at the time lent credibility to the idea of an eternal universe. Thus it was the prevailing view of the secular learned. Then the Roman Catholic priest and scientist Georges Lemaître came up with the theory which would eventually become the “Big Bang theory” (itself a derogatory name given by the scientific elite opponents of Lemaître). He did not do this as a religious polemic, but his theory was the result of his work in scientific theorising and analysing of data. Even Einstein derided his theory, and famously “fudged” his own general theory of relativity by adding an invented cosmological constant, because he could not accept the idea of an expanding universe (and its implications). Lemaître's theory would contend with the prevailing view until his “Big Bang” theory came to be widely accepted in 1960s following the discovery of cosmic

microwave background radiation (CMBR). CMBR was predicted to have to exist if the Big Bang theory was true, thus the Big Bang theory was shown to have greater explanatory power than the eternal universe (“Steady State”) model. Lemaître's theory succeeded, because he did not allow himself to be biased against theories or discoveries which could have “religious” implications[1].

The second example is that the scientific method [8] itself was derived by Christians. Prior to this, the prevailing thought (from Greek philosophy), was that humans could understand the universe (and what exists beyond the universe) through pure intellectual reasoning alone. If a person could purge themselves from erroneous thinking, then a person could fully grasp the universe. This way of thinking prevailed in the West for nearly a millennium, and seriously inhibited mankind's understanding of nature. But then people such as Francis Bacon—who was a Christian and is generally considered to be a founder of the modern scientific method—started to question the effectiveness of human cognitive faculties. Their reason for doing so was rooted in the notion of the fallen human state: our sinfulness [9]. Because, they reasoned, humans are fallen, our thinking and reasoning is corrupted, therefore we need to *test* our assertions empirically. This gave rise to the modern scientific method. And so, in a way, we can say that Christianity overturned a whole slew of false beliefs by introducing the notion that whatever notions we have about the natural world needs to be *tested*[2].

There is a persistent notion that science is at odds with Christian belief, and that intellectuals cannot be so gullible as to believe in the supernatural. But the mere existence of prominent, living, and well-respected Christian scientists should dispel that notion. People such as:

- Francis Collins [10] (physician-geneticist; Director of the NIH and the Human Genome project)
- Sy Garte [11] (biologist and biochemist)
- John Lennox [12] (emeritus Professor of Mathematics at Oxford University, with an MA in Bioethics)
- Ard Louis [13] (Professor of Theoretical Physics at Oxford University)
- Alister McGrath [14] (molecular biophysicist)
- Rosalind Picard [15] (Professor of Media Arts and Sciences at MIT)
- Sarah Salviander [16] (astrophysicist)

Some of these individuals (Rosalind Picard, Sarah Salviander and Sy Garte) transitioned from atheism to Christianity after they began their careers as scientists.

Yet the notion of scientists and intellectuals shunning primitive religious belief persists. The only explanation of this is either ignorance, or a wilful, malicious and stubborn persistence in the belief in the contrary falsehood (both of which should give us pause about their credibility in speaking against religion).

Christian Supremacy and Religious Imperialism



niamhuncensored

I say this as a former Christian

Christians will deadass claim to be oppressed but feel comfortable and safe enough to:

- Force non-Christians to pray to the Christian God in their own fucking homes
- Go door-to-door to proselytize
- Call people to proselytize
- Take classes to proselytize (my mythology teacher actually dealt with this, and now has to include a warning on the first day of class)
- Cross the fucking ocean to proselytize
- Openly tell people they think they are going to Hell
- Insist that their beliefs should influence the law
- Get all pissy if someone says this isn't a Christian nation, but a beautifully mixed one.
- Have radio stations built around their religion
- Have movies based on their religion
- And fucking everything else

In short, Christian Supremacy needs to be addressed and religious imperialism stopped.

Proselytes can be valuable allies for your cause. In this case, the antitheists amplify the voice of a proselyte to their own cause. But proselytes may not necessarily know everything or speak with insightful wisdom.

Before I address the problems with this tirade, we need to acknowledge what is truthful in it. Many Western Christians perceive themselves as being persecuted and oppressed, but in general that is not true. Christians in the West live in peace and, for the most part, can practice their religion without fear of imprisonment, punishment, or being put to death. This is vastly different from the daily realities of Christians in ancient Rome or modern communist countries. Sometimes these Christians speak from a position of entitlement which is not befitting of followers of Christ (John 15:18). And so “forcing“ anyone to pray is not acceptable for a Christian (although I am not sure how widespread this practice actually is and what examples the author has in mind). I would also agree that no nation (whether the USA or South Africa) are actually truly “Christian nations” (and I sincerely doubt whether such a thing does or can exist).

Now to respond. Even if a nation is not “Christian”, it may have a Christian heritage or influences on its culture. Christianity has had a profound impact on the West, and many (even secular people) would argue that it has been largely positive. This is because it has changed Western culture from a shame/honour culture into a right/wrong culture, that Christianity's pro-family focus is healthy for society, and other reasons. For more on these, I recommend the film For the Love of God: How the Church Is Better and Worse Than You Ever Imagined [17], as well as a recent episode [18] of the Undeceptions podcast [19], which features the atheist Australian politician Andrew Leigh on Christianity's social capital.

Regarding her complaints against Christians seeking converts, I'll let an atheist, Penn Jillette provide an answer [20]:

> I don’t respect people who don’t proselytise. I don’t respect that at all. If you believe there is a heaven and hell, and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life or whatever, and you think it’s not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward.
>
> How much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytise? How much do you have to hate someone to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?
>
> Penn Jillette

The visceral reaction from the author of the meme against Christians who proselytise is a clear indication that she is absolutely certain that religious worldviews are wrong. She is entitled to that belief, but it is myopic in that whatever her own worldview is, it can not be known with any more certainty than another (religious) worldview.

As for insisting that Christian belief should not be able to influence laws, that is another worldview error. As I have previously written [21], if someone sincerely holds to a particular worldview, they should absolutely strive to promote that worldview, including in what the laws of the land should be. Telling people that that is not allowed and that only secular laws are acceptable *is actually* forcing a particular worldview unto others and discriminating against their worldview. If someone believes that governments should only be secular, then that person has the imperialistic view.

As for radio stations and movies, in a free market economy this is a weak complaint. It is surprising that the author of the meme stopped short of complaining about Christian books. If ideas are worth spreading through the written medium, then why not other media?

Conclusion

Christianity is not an easy target. If it was, it would have been taken down a long time ago, and it

would not, throughout its history, have had intellectual juggernauts as adherents. For the most part, objections are driven either by ignorance or emotion. Whatever the case may be, our response needs to continue to be humility and love. We must fight the temptation of exasperation. May our words be seasoned with grace, our patience be supernaturally provided, and our love sincere.

- 1. For more information, see Singh, Simon. Big Bang *[22]*. London: Fourth Estate, 2004.
- 2. For more information, see Harrison, Peter. The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science *[23]*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- . Photo credit: xpgomes2 [24]. Edited.

Categories:

- In the Media [25]

Source URL: https://siyach.org/node/1217

Links
[1] https://siyach.org/node/1217
[2] https://siyach.org/node/1168
[3] https://siyach.org/node/1180
[4] https://siyach.org/node/1142
[5] https://siyach.org/node/1117
[6] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQz3HBZEUEQ
[7] https://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/7-offering-prayers-for-a-church-service/
[8] https://siyach.org/node/1144
[9] https://siyach.org/node/1115
[10] https://www.nih.gov/about-nih/who-we-are/nih-director/biographical-sketch-francis-s-collins-md-phd
[11] https://theworksofhishands.com
[12] https://www.johnlennox.org
[13] https://biologos.org/people/ard-louis
[14] http://alistermcgrath.weebly.com/
[15] http://www.veritas.org/person/rosalind-picard/
[16] https://sarahsalviander.com/
[17] https://fortheloveofgodproject.com
[18] https://undeceptions.com/podcast/social-capital
[19] https://undeceptions.com/
[20] https://youtu.be/6md638smQd8
[21] https://siyach.org/node/1207
[22] https://siyach.org/node/167
[23] https://siyach.org/node/1216
[24] https://tinyurl.com/tbchzvx
[25] https://siyach.org/taxonomy/term/17