

# HOLLOW AND DECEPTIVE PHILOSOPHY— OR A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LIVING GOD?

The first year Karen and I were married we lived in Ponce, Puerto Rico, where we both taught at the Catholic University of Puerto Rico. One of the famous landmarks in Puerto Rico was a giant radio-telescope located at Arecibo on the north coast of the island. This radio-telescope was the first of its kind in the world and it was built to probe the depths of outer space and continually listen for signals that might indicate the existence of intelligent life somewhere else in the universe. It was part of something called “Project SETI”—the search for extra-terrestrial life. It was enthusiastically supported by the popular scientist Carl Sagan, who passed away several years ago. Sagan was a prominent TV personality who had a great talent for making science interesting and exciting to the general public. He was also an outspoken atheist and evolutionist who saw no evidence in nature for the existence of a Creator God.

When the Arecibo radio-telescope was first activated, Sagan was confident that it would soon begin receiving intelligible messages from outer space. He reasoned that since there were billions of galaxies, and each galaxy contained billions of stars, and there had been billions of years for evolution to work on planets orbiting those stars, the odds heavily favored the existence of intelligent life on one or more of them. Sagan personally thought that there might be as many as a million advanced civilizations out there. He also thought it was reasonable to assume that some of them would be attempting to communicate with other forms of intelligent life elsewhere in the universe. He wrote: *“The receipt of a single message from space would be enough to prove that there’s an intelligence out there.”*

The operators of the radio-telescope decided to honor Sagan by inviting him to be the first person to listen when they activated it. He was so sure

that there would be intelligible messages he and a few colleagues celebrated the night before with a bottle of champagne. To his huge disappointment, however, there were no messages—only cosmic static. Weeks and months and years passed and there were still no messages—only random noise. Toward the end of his life Sagan actually fell into something of a depression over the lack of evidence of any extra-terrestrial life. On the contrary, the silence of the heavens seemed to indicate just the opposite: that the only form of intelligent life in the universe was in fact mankind.

The tragedy is that Carl Sagan's search for a message from heaven that would furnish evidence of an intelligence out there need not have ended in failure. The message was right in front of his eyes, but he couldn't see it. In his novel *Contact*, which was made into a movie starring Jodie Foster, he indicated that all it would take to qualify a signal as coming from an intelligent source would be something highly improbable like a sequence of four prime numbers—numbers divisible only by themselves. Now if he considered a sequence of four prime numbers to be improbable enough to indicate an intelligent source, you would think that he might have considered something as improbable and incredibly complex as a single living cell to indicate an intelligent source. But you would be wrong: Sagan was too emotionally attached to evolutionary theory to entertain that possibility. To an orthodox evolutionist, the idea that life might have an intelligent origin is literally unthinkable. And so Sagan believed until the day he died that the extraordinary complexity and design of living organisms was simply the random result of unguided forces. He was so captivated by a theory that he sacrificed what should have been more important to him than anything else: his scientific objectivity. Instead of following the data to where it led—from evidence of design to the existence of a Designer—he bowed to a theory and worshipped a lie.

Carl Sagan was a prisoner of what Paul calls “hollow and deceptive philosophy.” Ever since the Garden of Eden, our enemy, Satan, has been urging us to reject God's word and come up with our own explanations for the origin and meaning of life. We call these explanations “philosophies” and they address questions like, What is the nature of man? Can God's

existence be proven or disproven? What is justice? What is truth? What is morality? God has given us clear answers to these questions in the Holy Scriptures, but philosophers like Aristotle and Descartes and Kant and Hegel have preferred to answer them by using reason rather than accepting them through divine revelation. They are more interested in discoverable truth than in revealed truth.

This may sound harmless, but how we think has consequences. When we stop placing our confidence in God we end up placing our confidence in something else. And whatever that something else is will be what the Scriptures call an idol. Idols come in many different forms: money, pleasure, beauty, fame, status, power—all these are idols people place their confidence in to keep them safe and make them happy. Hollow and deceptive philosophy can also become an idol. There is a place for intellectual inquiry and there is a place for divine revelation—and neither should try to do the work of the other. When hollow and deceptive philosophies replace divine revelation in people's thinking, they have the power to do great evil. Consider, for example, how some political philosophies have captured people's minds in the modern age—and what the result has been. Facism gave us Adolf Hitler, the Nazis and the Holocaust. Socialism gave us Josef Stalin, the slavery of the Gulags and twenty million dead in the Ukranian genocide. Communism gave us Mao Zedung and the starvation of over forty million people in what he called "the great leap forward." These political philosophies---all of which were atheistic and excluded the idea of divine revelation—promised to produce perfect societies and instead produced the very opposite. Yet in the last century and a half more people have died fighting over these "isms" than died fighting for all the kings and emperors who ever lived. Such is the power of hollow and deceptive philosophies to enslave people's minds.

Our choice—and it's the most important choice we will ever make in—is whether we will worship one of these hollow and deceptive philosophies or worship the Creator and Redeemer of the universe. Paul says that philosophy depends upon human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than upon Christ. The question is, will we be ruled by human traditions and the basic principles of this world, or will we be ruled by

Christ, who is the wisdom of God? The former come to us in a variety of appealing forms, like merchandise spread out in a supermarket where we can browse and shop to our heart's content. If we are into politics, we can worship a political leader who promises to lead us to utopia. If we are into new age philosophy we can pick up a book by Shirley McClaine. If we're into self-improvement there are as many books on self-improvement as there are authors who feel that they have improved themselves. All of them are attractive and every one of them is guaranteed to produce impressive results. They all have two things in common: they're appealing and they're worthless.

What God offers us is not self-improvement or intellectual sophistication or the perfect society. God simply offers us the truth. The truth that apart from Him we are slaves of sin, death and Satan. The truth that Jesus Christ came to set us free from that deadly trinity and open the door to eternal life. The truth that there is a loving God in heaven who calls Himself our Father. No frills, no special deals, no hoopla, no hollow and deceptive philosophy. Just the truth.

Carl Sagan longed for a message from heaven that would confirm his belief that life was a statistical accident produced by uncaring forces of nature. He was blind to a message from heaven that God had encoded in the cells of his own body and revealed in the truth of His word. Like so many others, he lacked eyes to see and ears to hear. The beautiful hymn we sang before the sermon—"Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken,"—ends with the following verse:

*"Savior, since of Zion's city, I through faith a member am;  
Let the world deride or pity, I will glory in Thy Name;  
Fading are the worldling's pleasures—all his boasted pomp and show:  
Solid joys and lasting treasures none but Zion's children know."*

The peace that surpasses all our understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.

