

# Book-Review

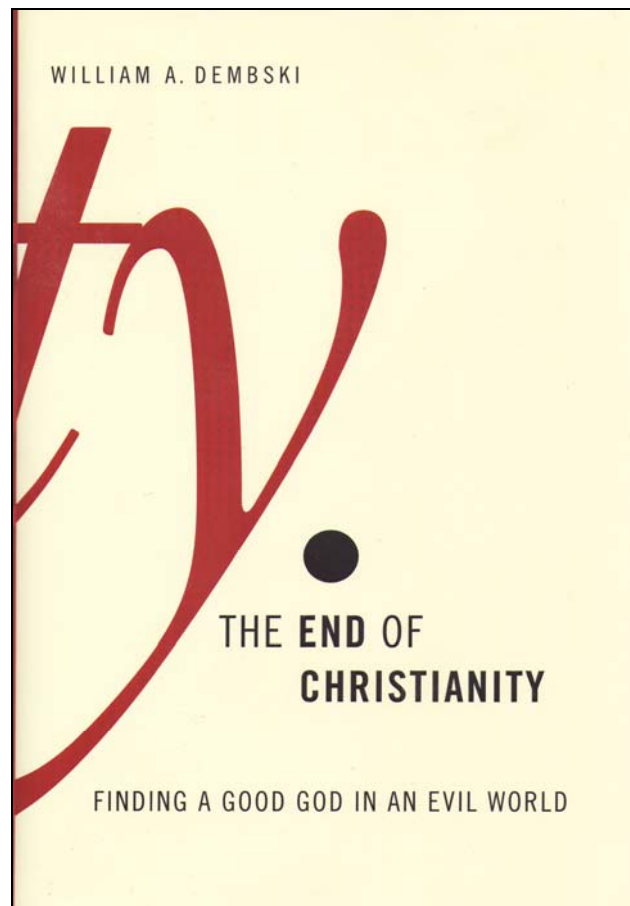
## William A. Dembski: *The End of Christianity – Finding a Good God in an Evil World*

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by Peter Zöller-Greer



According to legend during the American civil war, in which one side of the enemy soldiers wore blue, the other side red uniforms, a mediator pulled on red pants and a blue jacket and made his way to the front. His hope was probably that he can appease both sides and thus achieve a negotiated compromise. But when he arrived at the front he was shot from both sides. That's what sometimes happens if you try to achieve compromises...

What does this have to do with Dembski's book? Well, *The End of Christianity* is a work which seeks, among other things, to unite Christians, who believe that the earth is only 6000 years old (so-called Young Earth Creationists, YEC) with those who believe that the Earth is millions of years old (so-called Old Earth Creationists, OEC). In doing so, "along the way" it also explains why evil exists in the world, a world supposedly created by an all-loving and all-mighty God (theodicy problem).

To come straight to it: Dembski's latest work is brilliant! Some Critics rank it with the works of CS Lewis and Francis Schaeffer. And rightly so! One can already recognize that William A. Dembski is an exceptional scientist by looking to his academic training: He has university degrees in such different areas as mathematics, psychology, theology and philosophy. He earned his two doctoral degrees (in mathematics and in philosophy) at prestigious American universities. In addition he did post-doctoral work at MIT and Princeton University. He currently holds a research professorship at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. Last but surely not least, Dembski is also the bestselling author and co-founder of the intelligent design ID movement. Hence one might expect that Dembski has something profound to say in his books.

My old history teacher at school had warned us that often the worst fighting is not between entirely oppositional

groups, but of those that differ -viewed from the outside- rather little from each other. In my youth, for example, the DKP (German Communist Party), and the KPD (Communist Party of Germany) were in the biggest battle with each other. Both parties are now gone. As an outsider you may wonder: why did they fight so hard against each other while being philosophically so close? Well, I guess this has no rational reason but rather emotional ones. This takes us back to our topic: Some YEC find their greatest enemy not to be the atheist, but the OEC (and vice versa). There are actually YEC who think that OEC are lost because of their OEC-belief (so far I know of no OEC, who believes that YEC are lost because they are not OEC; but the reverse is unfortunately often the case).<sup>1</sup>

Well, these people are beyond hope of reasonable discussion, because it is blind fanaticism, and such people are closed to any rational arguments ("Don't confuse me with the facts ..."). The remaining "thinkers" among the readers, open to good arguments, are the ones approached by Dembski.

Now Dembski tries not to convert YEC to OEC or vice versa but he rather tries to point out advantages and disadvantages of both viewpoints and one can hope that their different ways of thinking can be understood a little more open-minded on both sides. Dembski believes that the greatest obstacle to YEC concerning OEC is that according to OEC there must have been suffering and pain *before* the fall if the earth is much older than humanity. The fossils from this early period seem to show that animals must have perished in a terrible manner, and this happened long before Adam and Eve entered the scene. But YEC believe that pain and suffering entered the world *because of* the fall. And the fall happened of course after men came into existence. Thus, the YEC/OEC problem becomes the problem of the existence of evil in the world.

But Dembski demonstrates clearly that -contrary to the opinion of YEC-, OEC also believe that the existence of evil and suffering in the world can be traced back to the sins of Adam and the entire human race! Ideas of old church fathers like Saint Augustine are considered, who assume God stands outside of space and time, and therefore such categories as "before" and "after" (in this example: the fall) do not exist in ultimate reality (namely, God's reality). Even Einstein has remarked shortly before his death that the categories of past and future are illusory (though persistent), and quantum physics seems to confirm this experimentally, too<sup>2</sup>.

Thus, at least those YEC arguments which reject OEC mainly because of theological reasons concerning the fall can be put aside. Admittedly, Dembski's *theological* explanation demands some ability to abstract, but is therefore even *theologically* more consistent with an inerrant view and literal interpretation of the Bible than a YEC-interpretation.

When YEC attack OEC or vice versa, I personally believe that often some misunderstanding of the other position is a significant source for false accusations. Take for example the (false) accusation of some evangelicals targeted at Catholics that Jesus died only *once* and therefore there is no necessity to let him die over and over again in every Eucharistic mass. Here great Church Fathers like Saint Augustine -by the way a great venerator of Mary and a defender of the thesis that the bread of the Eucharist is really physically transformed into the flesh of Jesus- recognized the time-space transcendence of God; therefore Catholics of course *don't* believe that Jesus dies again every Sunday, rather they believe in accordance with official catholic teaching (see the Catholic Catechism) that Jesus in fact only died *once* and during the Eucharist the faithful *participate* in this *single* but *time-transcending* event in every mass.

Dembski thus shows how the fall -viewed by a more abstract, but "closer-to-God" perspective (transcending space and time)- is still responsible for all pain and suffering in the world even before men walked the earth. This is possible because the fall affects the world in a "retrospective manner" so to speak.

This doesn't mean that all YEC-problems are solved, but at least it shows that there is no need to be YEC on theological grounds. A literal, error-free biblical interpretation is therefore possible for OEC, too. For these very reasons there are lots of highly respected evangelical theologians, who are OEC like Norman Geisler, Walter Kaiser, Gleason Archer and others. They even believe that OEC in addition to inerrancy is the most consistent way to interpret the Bible literally.

There remain of course many YEC arguments which are derived from a corresponding interpretation of the physical data of the world (although I know of no non-believer who is YEC). Therefore, after reading Dembski's book, YEC must actually deal only with the relevant scientific arguments. OEC of course hold the opinion that the traditional interpretation of the scientific data ("old earth") is far more obvious (Occam's Razor) and that YEC have to dig deep into the pot of speculation to adjust the observable data in the universe to their worldview.

But what Dembski has done in his book goes far beyond the YEC/OEC debate: It provides a consistent solution to the theodicy problem and shows once again that this is no problem after all.

The three statements (1) *God is omnipotent* and (2) *God is all-good* and (3) *there is evil in the world* can be formally harmonized in a very simply manner (I put this problem as an exercise in my logic classes): It is sufficient to add the following assumption: (4) *God has good moral reasons to permit evil in the world*. With this additional assumption all four statements are logically consistent.

But most people quarrel not necessarily with the logical consistency of these statements, but rather they want to know what are God's moral motives concerning statement (4) for allowing evil. But this has nothing to do with logic but rather with theology. And here Dembski gives excellent responses, which classify him rightly in the rank of famous Christian apologists.

<sup>1</sup> A good example could be found in the TV-Debate "Are the Universe and Earth Billions of Years Old or Thousands of Years Old" with Dr. Hugh Ross and Dr. Kent Hovind (John Ankerberg Show). Hovind (YEC) attacks Ross (OEC) lots of times an even accuses him of heresy... It must be remarked that Ross is a bold evangelical who claims to interpret the Bible literally and holds it to be free of errors.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Zöllner-Greer, P.: *Logic, Quantum Physics, Reality and Infinity*, in: „Tough-Minded Christianity“, B&H, 2008

Let's hope that Dembski will not experience the same fate as our mediator did during the American Civil War.

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