

Questions raised by Quora readers, related to Jewish beliefs, each followed by my response:

Does belief in demon possession exist in Orthodox Judaism?

Do evil spirits exist? If you're a monotheist, you have to say that evil spirits cannot exist because by definition they would be acting independently of God. However, it is much easier to believe that there are two forces in the world — a force for good and a force for evil — than to believe in monotheism. It fits our experience better and avoids the pesky question of why good people suffer.

It is not easy to be convinced that there is only one force in the world, and indeed once ancient idolatry had faded away, the main religion that Judaism struggled with was Zoroastrianism, which was a dualistic religion (and still is).

Once you are a monotheist, practices that are related to evil spirits must be considered superstitions. Yet there are many discussions in the Talmud of evil spirits, because it was hard to give up the belief in evil spirits. Subsequently, leading rabbis fought against such beliefs and practices, but were unable to eradicate them. In the not too recent past, it was believed that a person could be inhabited by a dybbuk, but that belief seems to have largely disappeared now, perhaps because we now have better explanations of why some people behave strangely.

However, many Jews still put a red ribbon in their baby carriages to protect the baby from evil spirits, and most practicing Jews cover up mirrors in a house of mourning, a practice based on the idea that the Angel of Death is lurking about and, acting independently of God, might capture your soul through your reflection in the mirror. It's not easy to be a full monotheist.

Does Judaism presuppose there are unanswerable questions like the suffering of the righteous?

One of the functions of every religion is to help us make sense of the world, particularly the challenging question of why bad things are happening to good people and, in particular to good people like me.

Such questions are particularly challenging if you believe in a just God, because a just God rewards people for their merits and punishes people for their sins. Abraham Lincoln, for example, came to believe that the terrible destruction and death caused by the Civil War was punishment for our society's sin of slavery.

Since religions cannot live with "unanswerable questions", they must have a response to the question of the suffering of the righteous and the success of the wicked. The response that (probably) all religions came up with is that all unjust outcomes will be corrected after death.

The variety of notions regarding life after death apparently arose about 2000+ years ago when people stopped seeing themselves as part of a clan, where the injustices could be corrected in future generations, and started seeing themselves as individuals.

Thus, for example, the Jewish Bible (which Christians refer to as the "Old Testament") has essentially no references to life after death, although the Talmud, developed in the 1000 years that followed, insisted that it did.

Thus, traditional Judaism, like traditional Christianity, and probably traditional Islam as well, solves the problem of "why do the righteous suffer" by insisting that they will be rewarded after death both for their righteousness and their suffering. This will happen because each religion's God is seen as just.

For many people, that eventual reward is sufficient. However, some people will not be satisfied with that solution, and will still want to know why a just God would let these bad things happen; they would be happy to do without the reward if God would only remove their undeserved misfortune.

The traditional response to that follow-up question, probably from all religions, is that God has a plan which we humans cannot understand, we just have to accept and submit to God's infinite wisdom.

For many people that response is sufficient. Since God, by whichever name we use for God, is infinitely wise and infinitely just, God must know and be following a wise and just plan.

However, some will not be satisfied with that response since, although it may make sense when referring to the life of an individual, it makes little sense in more global situations. Thus, every religious person, and in particular any religious Jew, should ask, "Why did God allow the Holocaust to happen?", and should not be satisfied with the traditional answers.

Yet, a religious person, has to find a way of answering that question for himself or herself. Why are thousands of people starving to death each day? Yes, we can give a political response that the world's resources are not fairly allocated. But a religious person should ask why God permits that to happen, and should be able to provide some response that he or she can live with.

As a religious Jew, I wrestled with these questions and ultimately wrote (mostly) traditional Jewish prayerbooks (see newsiddur.org) where the translation and commentary reflect how I resolved these issues for myself.

Is Satan necessary according to the Torah?

The Torah rejects the idea that there is an independent force of evil, whether it is called "satan" or "devil" or anything else. The statement that God is One insists that there is no independent force of evil, even though that idea made sense to our ancient ancestors ... and sometimes makes sense to us as well.

It is convenient for us to project bad things that happen onto evil powers (The devil made me do it!), thrusting the responsibility somewhere else, but that is not the Jewish way

Long before Christianity became our theological opponent, we had dealt for centuries with Zoroastrianism (which still exists today) that believed in a force for good and a force for evil. The Zoroastrian influence persisted even in Talmudic times, for the Talmud notes that if a service leader bows twice in the Amidah at "Modi'im anachnu lach — we give thanks to you", he must be removed immediately ... because he was obviously bowing to and thanking both gods.

Many religious Jews still engage in superstitious practices even though the great rabbis tried unsuccessfully to root them out. It is easy to believe that tying a red string on a baby carriage will protect a baby from evil spirits or that having a perfect mezuzah will guard your household from evil, (and even if it doesn't what can it hurt), but those are inconsistent with the concept that God is One and that therefore there are no evil spirits out there.

Where is Atonement mentioned in the Bible?

The word "atonement" does not occur at all in the Jewish Bible. The word comes from the King James Bible as a translation of the Hebrew word "kippur" (as in "Yom Kippur"). This word in the Jewish Bible means "cleansing" or "forgiveness," not "atonement." The idea is that on that day, on Yom Kippur, God wipes away and forgives the sins of all those who fast and abstain from work. This happens through divine grace, not requiring any atonement on the part of the Jewish people or of individual Jews. (Note that the sins that are forgiven are only sins against God; sins against other people are forgiven only when the offending party is forgiven by those who were offended.)

Once the Temple was destroyed in 70ce by the Romans, the forgiveness ritual that ended with the High Priest proclaiming to the multitude gathered in the Temple "in God's eyes you are cleansed" could no longer be performed, so over a period of time the expectation became that a person would have to do "t'shuvah," that is, turn back to God. Indeed, the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur eventually (in about the 12th century) became known as "the ten days of t'shuvah."

The notion that atonement is needed for sins against God reflected a Christian view of forgiveness, not a Jewish view. Indeed, it may be that the word atonement was originally at-one-ment, reflecting the Christian idea that through repentance a person becomes one with God, and was later condensed to atonement.

In any case, the Jewish idea that God forgives all our sins unconditionally could not coexist with the Christian idea that our sins are forgiven through Jesus. So those responsible for creating the King James Bible could not translate "Yom Kippur" as "day of forgiveness" and had to translate it as "day of atonement," even though that was not what "Yom Kippur" meant.

If math and logic are eternal, immutable and transcendent truths, where did they reside before the Big Bang?

They haven't moved! Wherever those immutable, eternal, and transcendent truths resided before, they are still there, and, since they are in the same place now as before, they were in the same place before as they are now. Big Bang theories come and go, but immutable truths live on ... although because of entropy the neighborhood sometimes deteriorates.

As being both a religious and an academic, when can your religion be proven by science and vice versa?

I have been a mathematician all my life and I have been a religious Jew all my life. I have written books related to both mathematics and Judaism, many of which you can learn about on the Internet. I have to add that for many years I have not been an Orthodox Jew, so many of those who follow Quora might reject my claim to be a religious Jew; that is unfortunate.

Having presented my "credentials," let me try to address the question.

Mathematics and science deal with evidence and proof. Although in the past, many religions and philosophers tried to present evidence and proof of religious convictions, I suspect that most scientists today have concluded that all such evidence and proof of religious beliefs (including negations of beliefs) are, and of necessity must be, non-scientific.

Science and religion deal with different dimensions of existence. This is a lesson that has not yet been learned, both by those who want science to affirm their beliefs and by those who want science to negate the beliefs of others.

I have no illusion that my religious beliefs will some day be "proved." They are beliefs that I have adopted, based on Jewish traditions and my own independent observations and thinking, and that provide meaning to my life. I don't worry about whether my beliefs are true or false from a scientific perspective.

I could stop here, but I don't want you to give you the idea that I think that all beliefs and practices are equally valid.

For example, I do worry about whether religious beliefs and practices are true or false from a religious perspective. For example, it is clear that many practices entered Judaism as a result of superstition, and that prominent rabbis argued against them at the time, to no avail — those practices are still with us.

I do apply a sense of economy to religious beliefs. For example, while belief in God adds meaning to my life, reminding me among other things that I am not in control (even of my own life, let alone that of others) and that I am continually blessed in so many ways, belief in a life after death does not add meaning to my life. Indeed, I take the statement in

Pirkei Avot 1:3 (usually translated as Ethics of the Fathers) to mean that the relationship of Jews to God should specifically not be modeled on the reward-seeking relationship of a servant to his master.

I also think that religious values have to promote justness, kindness and generosity to other people, to the members of one's own community and to those in other communities, as the rabbis of old said, *mipnei darkei shalom*, for the sake of peace and harmony. As the prophet Micah said so eloquently: "You have been told, human, what is good and what God expects of you: Act justly, love kindness, and walk humbly with God."

If God created the universe, then who created God? And who created the creator of God?

Who created God? I did!

Who created the creator of God? That is, who created me? That was God, of course.

And who created the creator of the creator of God? Me again.

And who created the creator of the creator of God. That again was God.

Shall we go around again?

Not necessary, you get the pattern.

Which came first, God or me, in this infinite regression?

There's no answer, but we both came before the chicken and the egg.

I think, therefore I am God.

God thinks, therefore I am me, methinks.

Don't take this too seriously since I didn't put it in the Bible, I mean God didn't put it in the Bible.

Why doesn't the Talmud provide a list of the 613 commandments?

The rabbis of the Talmud did not hesitate to make lists when's they thought it was necessary, for example, they made a list of the 39 categories of activities that were prohibited on Shabbat. So you might conclude that they didn't that such a list would be valuable. After all, they all already appear in the Talmud.

You might also conclude that the number 613 was considered an approximation, that they decided that the positive commandments and the negative commandments correspond to the number of days in the year (365) and the number of parts in the human body (248), which add up to 613. So 613 was the sum of two approximations.

So it is not surprising that when prominent rabbis of the Middle Ages, including the Rambam, compiled lists of the 613 commandments, their lists were not exactly the same; they were close, but they were not identical.

A third possibility is that the rabbis not want the teachings of Judaism to be readily available to everybody — because that would diminish the authoritative role of the rabbis. One of the Rambam's rationales in writing the Mishnah Torah was explicitly to make it

possible for an ordinary scholar to find all the conclusions of the Talmud without having to learn the whole Talmud or consult with the leading scholars of his generation. For compiling this summary, and writing other controversial books, the Rambam was denounced, and even excommunicated, by some of his contemporaries, and his books were often burned.

So you have three possible reasons why there's no list of the 613 commandments in the Talmud — there was no interest in a list, the number 613 was a convenient approximation, or there was a desire to retain the Torah's secrets for the initiates. Perhaps the actual answer is a combination of these three reasons.

Is there anything written in the Torah that was "proven" to be false?

The Bible's one attempt to provide a scientific explanation for the world around us was ingenious ... but wrong. It's right there at the beginning of the Bible, Genesis 1:6–7, and no one notices it.

The question that needed to be answered in Chapter 1 of Genesis was, "Where does the rain come from?" Now it was obvious that the rain came down from the sky, but what was not obvious was, first, how the water got up there and, second, how it stayed up there.

The solution presented in the Bible was that there is a dome above the earth ("rakia" in Hebrew and "firmament" in English) that "separates the waters below the heaven from the waters above the heaven."

It is this pool of water above the dome that is used for rain; when God so wishes, small openings in the dome provide us with rain and, when God so wishes, large openings appear in the dome and we have a massive flood.

Now we know that there is no such dome, that water is not stored up in the skies, and that rain comes from water that evaporates. The Biblical account, while ingenious, is simply false.

So, if you want to see the Bible as a source of Truth, as I do, then you cannot take it literally.

Why don't the fundamentalists, who claim to believe that the Bible is literally the word of God, fight against the theory of evaporation as they fight against the theory of evolution?

That's because the theory of evaporation was formulated and became widely recognized as the correct explanation of rain long before there were any fundamentalists. By the time fundamentalists came into existence, the case for fundamentalism was lost.

Note: I have posted on this issue several times already, but this is a point that it is important to repeat.

Are there any contradictions or inconsistencies between laws in the Torah and laws in the Talmud?

The answer to your question, whether there are "contradictions or inconsistencies between laws in the Torah and laws in the Talmud," depends on how you define "the Torah." If by "the Torah" you mean what is written in the scroll that contains the Five Books of Moses, then there certainly are such problems. For example, the Torah tells us several times that "thou shalt not cook a kid in its mother's milk." However, by early Talmudic times, this was understood as a prohibition of eating meat together with milk and a host of other prohibitions (for example, separate dishes for meat and milk), prohibitions that are adhered to today by all Orthodox Jews and many non-Orthodox Jews.

"So what's the big deal," you might say, "what's the problem with adding a whole array of prohibitions to the simple one that's in the written Torah."

Actually, that is a big deal, because in the Torah, God states explicitly that "you shall not add to, or subtract from the instructions that I am giving you" (Deuteronomy 4:2). "Don't eat milk and meat together" sounds like a rather large addition to "Don't cook a kid in its mother's milk."

Some commentators argue that the threefold repetition of "Don't cook a kid in its mother's milk" somehow implies "Don't eat milk and meat together." That doesn't make much sense, since if God really wanted the stronger prohibition, why wasn't that written explicitly in the Torah.

In order to resolve the inconsistency between Deuteronomy and their current practices, the pre-Talmud sages developed the notion of an "oral Torah" that was given by God to Moses as well as the written Torah and that contained the additional details that conformed with their current practices.

The transmission of the oral Torah from generation to generation is described in detail in the first chapter of Pirkei Avot, usually translated as Ethics of the Fathers. So, getting back to the initial question, if you define "the Torah" as including both the written Torah and the oral Torah, then the laws of the Torah fit together seamlessly with the laws of the Talmud.

Which is the correct definition of "the Torah"? For those who are Orthodox, the latter definition is correct because that is the definition given in the Talmud, and its precursor, the Mishnah, which includes Pirkei Avot. And all of the other responders to this question adhere faithfully to this definition of "the Torah."

For those who are not Orthodox, the narrative of the oral Torah is as problematic now as it was to mainstream Jews in the third century BCE, who were called Sadducees, and who were the ruling class, including those who conducted the affairs of the Temple. The rabbis who accepted the oral Torah were called Pharisees, and when the Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE, that was in effect the end of the Sadducees. So mainstream Judaism since the destruction of the Temple has been based on the truth of the Pharisees' narrative about the oral Torah.

One could then argue that non-Orthodox Jews should reject the oral Torah and all its implications, and indeed that was the position taken by the classical Reform movement in the 19th century.

But that perspective is no longer in favor, since there is a recognition that it was the ideas and practices of the Pharisees and their followers — our traditions — that are responsible for the survival of our people over the past two thousand years despite the hardships that we endured at the hands of our sister religions.

Despite the problems that many Jews have with the narrative of the oral Torah, its consequences are part of our tradition and, even if we are not Orthodox, that tradition remains meaningful to us.

What do Orthodox Jews think about Biblical criticisms such as the Documentary Hypothesis?

By definition, an Orthodox Jew cannot even consider anything that would suggest that the Torah was not written in its entirety by God. That is a fundamental tenet of Orthodox Judaism, and admitting the slightest possibility that any part of the Torah was not written by God could lead one to question whether any part of the Torah was written by God. Hence, by definition ...

So this question should be addressed not to Orthodox Jews, but to committed Jews who are not Orthodox.

I am not a Biblical scholar, so I can't respond to the documentary hypothesis, which consists of many complex claims, but it seems pretty clear to me that there are two different accounts of creation in Genesis and there are clearly phrases that were added later, so somebody was tinkering with the text.

How many Jews actually believe that J Street is pro-Zionist, in the sense that they support the right of the Israelis to control their own destiny? What would old Hillel say about J Street trying to subvert Israel's democracy?

I am a life-long Zionist and I support the organization called "J Street." J Street believes that the most likely path to peace is to work for a two state solution, where there would be a state for Palestinians adjacent to Israel.

Zionism is the belief that Jews should have a homeland in the land that we have lived in for thousands of years, and out of which we were driven by the ancient Romans. We were exiled from Zion almost 2000 years ago, and we have now returned to Zion and built the modern state of Israel.

But for its entire existence, Israel and its neighbors have been engaged in fruitless hostilities. Pointing fingers and assigning blame has not helped end those hostilities. Instead what is needed is an agreed-upon goal, and cooperative efforts to reach that goal. Such a goal is the two-state solution that J Street advocates.

Of course the people of each state have the right to control its own destiny. That has nothing to do with Zionism. That is the essence of the modern democratic state.

On the other hand, all those who identify as Jews have a stake in Israel's existence and well-being, and have a right to support those segments of the Israeli society that they think best promote Israel's interests.

J Street is no more subverting Israel's democracy than the thousands of religious American Jews who will fly to Israel in September just to vote for the religious parties, or the wealthy American Jews who have enabled Netanyahu to continue as Prime Minister for far too long.

I don't know what Hillel would say about all of this, but he would certainly be surprised that his name was gratuitously invoked in this controversy more than 2000 years after his death.

With friends like J Street, do you think Israel needs enemies?

This is, I think, the fourth "question" that I've seen tonight that is not a question, but simply an attack on the organization called J Street, which advocates a two-state solution as the best method for resolving the terrible problems that continue between Israel and its neighbors.

If you want to initiate a discussion about the two-state solution, please do so, but please stop making a fool of yourself by pretending that you're asking legitimate questions when all you're doing is making unsubstantiated attacks.

Why hasn't any theist ever scientifically proven that a god exists?

The parallel question to
"Why hasn't any theist scientifically proven that a god exists?"
is

"Why hasn't any atheist scientifically proven that no god exists?"

Actually, the two questions are not completely parallel because the theist has a much easier task than the atheist because the first task only requires one to produce a god, which is in theory much easier to do than to prove that no god exists.

Nevertheless, no theist has yet taken advantage of the relative ease of his task, compared to that of the atheist.

But atheists have no reason to gloat because they have been working on a proof that no god exists for several thousand years and haven't come up with one that is convincing. Perhaps the theists or the atheists will come up with a proof in our lifetime, but I wouldn't bet on it.

So the statements that "a god exists" and "no god exists" are statements of faith not statements of fact, statements that one believes or doesn't believe and not statements that are proven or disproven. Since there are no proofs available, anyone who states that "a god exists" or that "no god exists" is a believer.

Each person for whom this is an important issue should examine for himself the life-consequences of believing in God and the life-consequences of not believing in God, and choose for herself or himself which kind of life they want to lead.

Personally, I came to understand that if you do not believe that there is something larger than yourself, it is too easy to come to the conclusion that you are the center of the universe and that the world revolves around you. Believing in God makes it more likely that you will have a healthy measure of humility. That is one of the reasons why I chose to believe in God and choose every day to believe in God ... although I can't really prove, from a scientific perspective, that the God in whom I believe really exists.

That doesn't bother me. What is important is that I live my life as if the God in whom I believe really exists.

What is the background to, and meaning of Psalm 23:1-3?

Here is how I translated Psalm 23:1–3 in my traditional but unconventional prayerbook, Siddur Eit Ratzon (newsiddur.org):

A song of David. With You as my shepherd, Adonai, I have everything I need. You provide me food from lush pastures, You lead me to drink from peaceful waters, You restore my soul when I am in distress, You provide me guidance and direction, because that's what a shepherd does.

The phrase "I shall not want" in the King James Bible doesn't mean what it meant 400 years ago, and the phrase "for his name's sake" was a hyper-literal translation from the Hebrew. Those two English phrases obscure the clear meaning of these verses.

The author of these lines has decided, as it were, to be a sheep in God's flock, to accept the benefits of God's protection and to accept and acknowledge the blessings that flow from that decision. We too can make such a decision.

Our understanding of a sheep as one that passively follows orders is not relevant to the metaphor presented in Psalm 23. Certainly, David's relation to God was not like a helpless sheep.

How do you become a good person according to God?

The prophet Micah gave a very concise answer, written over 2500 years ago, but written specifically for the person who asked this question: "You have been told, human, what it means to be good person and what God expects of you — to carry out justice, to have a passion for loving kindness, and to walk humbly with God," (Micah 6:8)

Why does the Talmud state "Nittai Ha'Arbeli says: distance yourself from an evil neighbor, and do not befriend the wicked one"?

We can all agree that if you hang out with a group of “bad” people, then they will influence you in their direction, and that if you hang out with a group of “good” people, then they will influence you in their direction. Indeed, if you hang out with a group of X people, then they will influence you in their direction, whatever X is.

But is the same true when it’s a one-on-one situation? That is, if you put together one “bad” person with one “good” person, will the bad person always influence the good person to become bad? Is that claim at the heart of Nittai’s statement?

We know that that claim isn’t true. There have been a number of cases where, for example, white nationalists have abandoned their bigotry because someone treated them like a human being. Good people can have a positive influence on bad people; it’s not always the other way around.

Was Nittai aware of this possibility? That’s possible, in which he may be telling us, “if you think there’s a chance that, given who are and given who your neighbor is, you might bring about a positive change in your neighbor’s life, then go for it, but understand that that doesn’t happen too often, so it may be better for you to leave what will likely be a toxic situation.”

Is the “Null Set” an imaginary concept promoted by atheists?

What a wonderful question! Is the null set an imaginary concept promoted by atheists?

Actually, I think you’ve got it backwards! I will argue that the null set is a real concept promoted by non-atheists!

And in doing so, I will probably freak out both the people who follow me for my mathematical answers and the people who follow me for my theological answers.

I have noticed, from my years of teaching, as well as from observing Quora questions that people have a real problem grasping the existence and the uniqueness of the empty set. Evidently it is very hard for many people to understand that there can be a set with no elements, that the empty set exists, and it is also very difficult for many people to understand that there is only one set with no elements, that the empty set is unique — that the set of apples on my table (there aren’t any) is the same as the set of even primes greater than 2 and that is the same as the set of remaining survivors of the Civil War in the United States.

The existence and uniqueness of the empty set is puzzling, except to mathematicians. Similarly, the existence and uniqueness of the higher power that many call God is puzzling, except to those who grasp that the world, despite its randomness, has a certain fundamental coherence.

Moreover, mathematicians know that all of mathematics can be based on this mysterious empty set. The empty set itself can be defined to be 0, the set whose only element is the empty set can be defined to be 1, the set whose only elements are 0 (the empty set) and 1 (the set whose only element is the empty set) can be defined to be 2, etc.

Then the set whose only elements are 0, 1, 2, 3, ... can be defined to be \mathbb{N} , the set of natural numbers, and the set whose elements are all subsets of \mathbb{N} can be defined to be the real numbers, and so on. Thus all of mathematics can be built out of this mysterious null set — all of mathematics comes from ... nothing.

This parallels the notion in Judaism (and in other religions) of "yesh mei-ayin — all that exists emerges from nothing" — that somehow the entire world was created out of nothingness, just as all of mathematics is created out of the empty set. The term used in Latin is "creatio ex nihilo."

We take this a step further. The Hebrew word "ayin — nothingness" is, from the Kabbalistic perspective, a name of God. Most people find it difficult to conceive of a god that is not like ourselves, that is not in our own image; so we imagine super beings that are somehow like us, but also have super powers.

Most people need physical representations of their God or gods. Most religions, although they may have images of the divine, insist that God is beyond any such images. The solution of Christianity, particularly Catholicism, is to have a God that has a human component. Maimonides, the prominent 12th century Jewish philosopher, insisted that all the anthropomorphisms of the Bible — all of the verses that spoke of God in human terms — must be understood as metaphors, since God must encompass and yet be beyond all those metaphors. Thus, when a modern rabbi was told by a visitor that he doesn't believe in God, he responded that, "the God that you don't believe in, I don't believe in either." The most radical position of denying that God is somehow like us is that God is "ayin — nothing," that is, God is "no thing", that God is beyond thing-ness.

The difficulty that many have in grasping that God is no thing is parallel to the difficulty that people have in grasping the null set, a set that has no thing in it.

So, the notion of the empty set is real and it seems to be parallel to theistic notions of creation.

That is the end of my response, but for those who are into this notion of "ayin," I will offer the following interpretation of the familiar Biblical verse from Psalms 121:1, "I raise my eyes to the mountains, mei-ayin will my help come. My help will come from Adonai, creator of heaven and earth." The word "mei-ayin" has two meanings — "from where" and "from no-thing." The usual translation of "mei-ayin" in this verse is "from where," but the traditional translation is problematic because it implies that to receive God's help one needs to look to the heavens. The idea that God's residence is in the heavens is a bit problematic, since God is everywhere. So some use the alternate translation, "from no-thing," since, as noted above, "ayin" is one of the names of God, at least it is in Kabbalistic writings. God is a concept that we cannot fully grasp, an elusive reality that is beyond our reach, a no-thing that encompasses every-thing. From this perspective, "mei'ayin yavo ezri" is not a question "From where will my help come?," but an assertion "my help will come from no-thing, but from the unseen God, the creator of heaven and earth."