

**TOPIC 2.1****GOD'S EXISTENCE CAN BE PROVEN. FACT OR FICTION?****Conversation Points**

- ★ Someone's religious beliefs should be a private matter.  
**AGREE or DISAGREE?**
- ★ Governments should not legislate morality.  
**AGREE or DISAGREE?**
- ★ No-one knows what happens to any person after they die.  
**AGREE or DISAGREE?**

**Reflection**

William Hayden AC ('Companion of Australia') was born in Brisbane, Queensland in 1933. His parents, Violet and George, married two few weeks after he was born. His working-class dad had an unusual dislike for religion - particularly Christianity. "My father was a very bitter anti-religionist. I think that got to me" he told the ABC's 7.30 Report. After William finished High School he joined the Police Force, but continued to study part-time at university to earn a degree in economics. This would prove to be handy later in his life when he was made Treasurer of Australia. In 1960 he married Dallas and would go on to have three daughters and a son. In 1961 he stood for federal Parliament as a member of the Labor Party and was elected to the House of Representatives. Tragedy struck in 1966 when their 5-year old daughter, Michaela, was struck by a car and killed. This event had a deep and negative effect upon William and added to theseeds of hatred for God that his dad sown into him. In 1972 the Labor Party won the Federal election and in 1975 William ("Bill") was appointed as Treasurer. After Labor's defeat in the 1977 election, Bill was elected as the Opposition Leader in the Federal Parliament and narrowly lost the next election and was then replaced as leader by Bob Hawke. From 1983 he served in the Hawke Government as the Foreign Affairs and Trade Minister. Throughout his public life in politics he was an ardent and very vocal atheist, mocking Christianity. His political career ended with his retirement in 1988.

Bill was appointed as Governor General of Australia in 1989. The ABC reported that he was “the first Governor-General to make an *affirmation*, rather than an *oath on the Bible*” at his swearing in. The next Australian Prime Minister, John Howard said appointing Mr Hayden as Governor-General was “*a bit like appointing an atheist as Archbishop of Canterbury.*” This position also came with an appointment as “Chief Scout of Australia” - a position he declined *because* he was an atheist and this was “*incompatible with the scout promise*”. In 1996 he was recognised as “*Humanist of the Year*” by the *Council of Australian Humanist Societies*.

Yet in the background of when “*Mr Hayden used to be ‘straight out opposed to religion’*”, something, or, *someone*, was privately deeply challenging Bill Hayden’s atheism. Back in 1973, Bill was instrumental in the introduction of the Whitlam Government’s *Medicare Bill*. The promotion of this Bill led him to visit various hospitals. This was when he met Sister Angela Mary Doyle, a Brisbane nun and the administrator of the *Mater Hospital* in Brisbane where she had served for 23 years. Sister Angela maintained their friendship over the decades. Years later he heard that Sister Angela had had a heart attack and Bill went to visit her in hospital. “*The next morning I woke with the strong sense that I had been in the presence of a holy woman,*” Mr Hayden told *The Catholic Leader* newspaper.

This journey from atheism to belief in the God of the Bible was a long one for Bill Hayden but then in 2014 he suffered a stroke and had seven months to contemplate things as he recuperated. “*There’s been a gnawing pain in my heart and soul about what is the meaning of life. What’s my role in it?*” he told reporter Greg Sheridan. “*So after dwelling on those things I found my way back to the core of those beliefs – the church.*”



Bill Hayden broke his shoulder as he was preparing to be baptised, and was wheeled into his baptism in a wheelchair.

In 2018, at the age of 85, he publicly announced that he had abandoned atheism and had now embraced Catholic Christianity. “*There’s been a gnawing pain in my heart and soul about what is the meaning of life*” he also wrote in a letter to friends. “*This took too long, and now I am going to be devoted. From this day forward I’m going to vouch for God*” he said.

At the time of his daughter’s death, many Christians wrote to Bill telling him that *God must have thought this was for the best*.  
**When someone is processing tragedy, how does what we say and do impact their understanding of God? Discuss.**

## The Unseen Influence of a Believer's Life on an Atheist

Bill Hayden was deeply hurt and a man 'angry-at-God' after the tragic death of his oldest child who was just 5-years old when she was killed, so he threw himself into public service so that he could help as many people as possible - especially since *God* wasn't any help to them! But it was the patient, prayerful, persistent friendship of Sister Angela Mary that challenged Bill's concept of Christianity and opened his heart to accept God. As Bill prepared to be baptised, he wrote to friends, "I still have questions" but he came to the point where Christianity and evidence for God was enough for him to convert.

The authentic life of a genuine believer can have a profound impact on an atheist. In Bill Hayden's story it was when he saw how Sister Angela handled life when she was confronted with potential death (her heart attack). It seems that God allows His people to sometimes go through hardship, difficulties, pain, or even tragedy, to show the world the difference between how the world deals with such things compared with how a believer who trusts in God handles them.

While for many unbelievers it is the opportunity to get to know a believer and observe their life, particularly when they observe the believer under pressure, that becomes a *p* \_\_\_\_\_ of God's existence to them, for other unbelievers this is not enough. **What do you think it *also* takes for some other unbelievers to accept that the truthfulness of the God of the Bible?**

## Faith, Proofs, Evidence, Belief, Truth

*Faith* is sometimes presented as "believing something where there is no supporting evidence". But this is not what *we* mean by the term *faith*. Rather, *faith* is trusting the *e* \_\_\_\_\_ *e* for the *t* \_\_\_\_\_ *s* of a claim.

A *proof* must *c* \_\_\_\_\_ *d* to the claim being made. A mathematical proof is a different kind of proof to a historical proof which is different to the proof that a new world and Olympic record had just been set for the 100-metre sprint. Thus, proofs for the existence of God can reasonably be both *personal* (subjective), and *verifiable* (objective). These include:

1. The universe had a beginning that must have had an uncaused first cause.
2. The universe displays exquisite design pointing to a designer with a mind.
3. All people universally have an awareness of the 'moral law'.
4. God sent His only eternal Son into the world who died for sins and was *then physically resurrected*.
5. The claims of Christ about 'new birth', 'spiritual cleansing', 'forgiveness of sins', 'peace', can be personally tested and experienced.

*Has there been some new discovery that disproves the existence of a deity? Have the claims of the supernatural been conclusively refuted to the point that we can now deduce that there is a no God? To the contrary, the evidence for God is growing day by day as thinking people—including scientists, historians, archeologists, philosophers, and others, many of whom were former skeptics—find more and more support for the existence of God and for the claims of Christianity in particular.*

MARK MITTELBERG

The Reason Why Faith Makes Sense, p.8

### From the Bible

1. What does the Psalmist say people should consider as evidence for God? (Psalm 8:3; 19:1). How does compare with what the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 1:19-20?  

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2. One of the proofs for God's existence is 'a law' referred to Romans 2:15. Which law is referred to?  

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3. In what way is what is described in John 20:1-18 the greatest proof for God?  

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4. In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus gave anyone who would follow Him a promise. The Apostle Peter reworded this *testable* promise in First Peter 5:6-7. What is this testable promise?  

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### Additional References

Mittelberg, Mark. 2011. *The Reason Why. Faith Makes Sense*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.