

INTRODUCTION: A SUCCESSFUL FAILURE?

The phrase “successful failure” has been used before, perhaps most recently and most popularly in the story about the Apollo 13 moon mission. If you have seen the movie/story, it is about NASA's attempt to land yet another manned space mission on the moon. As the story goes, there is a large failure with an oxygen tank on the way to the moon, which failure not only makes a landing on the moon impossible but getting the astronauts back to the earth improbable. With much effort, they manage to get those three astronauts back to earth safely. Thus, it was called NASA's most successful failure mission, meaning the mission to land on the moon was a failure, but getting the three men back safely was a success.

So, you might be wondering about what a "successful failure" is especially in the context of a major world religion. How can a world religion be a success or a failure? Let's refer back to the Apollo 13 mission. There were two perspectives which account for the two terms "successful" and "failure." From NASA's perspective, the mission was a failure—it did not accomplish its objective of landing on the moon. From the perspective of the wives and children and friends of the astronauts, the mission was a success — their loved one returned to them.

Now, what if there were a space exploration organization higher than NASA and with more knowledge and information than NASA, and who said, “we don't want you to send a mission to the moon, for that is largely a waste of time and resources.” What if NASA didn't listen and sent the moon mission anyway? Assuming it is true that the higher space organization knew what is best for NASA and told NASA that their planned mission would be a waste; in what way could it be considered a "success" even NASA accomplished the lower mission objectives? The people at NASA would be high-fiving one another yelling, "success," while the wiser ones who asked NASA not to send the mission at all would be despondent knowing the mission was a waste and failure.

It is about different perspectives and what is ultimately valuable.

The “Christianity mission” is a successful failure, but the success and failure aspects of it are due to the view of two different people with very different perspectives.

The two perspectives are Christian leadership versus Joshua of Nazareth.⁴

The term "successful" in the title, "Christianity: A Successful Failure," is being judged by normal world standards. The concept of "success" is normally defined by the vast majority of people of the earth as involving the gaining, possessing or controlling of money or wealth and having many people backing the work and the leaders exercising authority or power or control over those many people. Would you not agree? Entities judged as "successful" can range from individuals to organizations to businesses to governments, etc.

The term "failure" according to normal world standards would be the opposite of "successful." So, a person or entity who/which does not accumulate, possess nor control material wealth; nor does that person or entity exercise authority or control over others; would be judged as a "failure" or a "nobody." If the person or entity is exceptional or very capable of accomplishing "success," then their failure is considered all the worse.

From a pure principle standpoint, "failure" is defined as the lack of accomplishing stated goals or objectives.

Is the reader with me so far? The book deals with two different perspectives: the perspective of Christian leadership and Christians versus the perspective of the real, historical person of Joshua of Nazareth.

This book will, in part, explain why the real, historical person of Joshua of Nazareth would judge contemporary Christian and bible religion as a failure and those who practice it as failing.⁵

A "successful failure" means that two standards or authorities disagree on the outcome of the effort. One standard - the average person on the earth including Christian leaders and the vast majority of religious people - sees or judges something as "successful"; while another standard - the person of Joshua of Nazareth and those who agree with him - sees or judges the same thing as a "failure." That something, of course, is the religion of Christianity, or the religious efforts of people who claim to be some flavor of "Christian" or who claim to make up or be part of "the church."

Some will yell, "divisiveness" at the previous statements. I counter that some division is necessary while most division is unnecessary and destructive.

⁴ I will be referring to the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth as Joshua of Nazareth in this book for the following reasons. First, it is a better English transliteration of the Hebrew name of the historical person than "Jesus" - the name "Jesus" is the result of a Hebrew to Greek to English translation. The name "Joshua" is the result of a Hebrew to English translation. Second, because the term "Jesus" or phrase "Jesus Christ" carries with it an inordinate amount of erroneous religious baggage and I would prefer not to encourage that baggage to "download" into the minds of those who read this book. In other words, when I say the word "Jesus" to a religious person - depending upon which of the thousands of sects they belong to - they will bring to their mind the "jesus" that their denomination created and indoctrinated them into instead of the real and historical person of Joshua of Nazareth.

⁵ For the readers who don't believe it is possible to know what the perspective is of the real, historical person of Jesus of Nazareth; or that it is not likely that his deeds and words were accurately captured and preserved in the four small books called "the gospels," please see *Section 6, Objections to the Solution*.

For example, if you have one-hundred people and some believe that violence is acceptable to get their way; while others think that reason and non-violent means are the only right way to accomplish something; there needs to be a division among those people, and that division would be proper and necessary.

The "successful mission" of that which calls itself "the church" is to have larger, more powerful congregations of people and thus become a force (gaining wealth and controlling more people) in a community, society, culture or nation—voices proclaiming a religious, moral or political agenda that people adopt. While many if not most religious leaders will deny this claim and instead claim something like, "our main goal is to bring people to Christ," their actions and words betray their claim as false. As this book will demonstrate, they are not looking to the historical person of Joshua of Nazareth as their Leader. Instead, their "christs" are ever-changing talisman which Christians create and whose purpose is, in general, to give the people what they want, not what they need.

The "successful mission" of Joshua of Nazareth for his followers is to transform individual people's lives for the better, and thus we become the collective model for how human beings are supposed to live—together by love, for truth and rightness. Even at this early stage of the book, the reader should be able to see some contrast between the two goals or "missions" of Christianity versus Joshua of Nazareth.

There is no doubt that Christianity is successful from the perspective of what people, in general, consider success. It has about two and a quarter billion human beings (or about 31% of the earth's population) who somehow identify with it or take some Christian label or are a member in one of its thousands of divisions/sects. Those who call themselves Christians and who control the organizations and resources of "the church" have many billions of dollars at their disposal and hundreds of millions of people they control or heavily influence. From the world's perspective of money and control over people, "the church" is hugely successful. Furthermore, the United States of America - the most powerful and influential nation in the past century - was influenced by Christians and their beliefs as is also true with most European countries, including the U.K. Clearly the leaders of those nations are currently turning away from even Christian ethics let alone Christian existential beliefs.

The question, however, for those who care is, how does Joshua of Nazareth define "successful"?

This book will look at and contrast what the world (including the religious world) considers successful versus what Joshua of Nazareth considers successful. In doing this, we will support the proposition that Christianity (and by inference its adherents) is a successful failure.

Some would say it is impossible to evaluate a world religion objectively or from a perspective of successfulness or failure. My response is, why?

If we have a standard that we can agree on, then anything can be evaluated with conclusions drawn as to true or false, right or wrong, success or failure based on that standard. Whether it be a standard of measure (e.g., Metric or English), or standard of performance (e.g., a time for running a marathon), or the claims of a religion (e.g., God is in control), we can draw correct

conclusions by comparing things to the standard. We can successfully assess religious claims and practices because our tools of observation, reason, and logic enable this.

If Christianity claims that believing in its God will lead to something important like lives better lived or "blessed" lives, then all we need do is look at the Christians to see if their claims are valid. More fundamentally, if Christians claim that their God-beliefs are based on the person they call "Jesus Christ," then it is a relatively simple task to compare the Christian beliefs and practices against the teachings of Joshua of Nazareth as preserved in the four gospel books. This book will focus primarily on the latter evaluation although the former evaluation will be touched upon as well.

Some would seek to deny that Christian religion is successful. I would ask the reader to look at the wealth of the Roman Catholic Church and according to the world's definition of "successful" make the case that it is not. Look at the Vatican property with the Sistine Chapel etc. and the worldwide properties just the Roman Catholic religion controls, and then conclude, "oh, they don't control much wealth." I would ask the reader to look at the control and power the Roman Catholic wields over people and then find people who will conclude, "oh, that is not a successful organization." Look at the wealth and power the Roman Catholic religious system wields in the U.S. – the expensive religious buildings and the health systems they control and gain money from – and make a case it is not "successful."

Look at the wealth of all of the Eastern Orthodox or Anglican organizations. Look at the wealth of all of the other Bible-based Christian divisions sects on the earth and the money they have invested in their buildings (crystal cathedrals et al.) and property and programs and businesses and media empires (TBN for example). The Protestants in the U.S. also own their share of expensive health systems from which they gain many millions of dollars!

Christians who are not part of these larger organizations will object saying, "we are not like them, and we are just a small local church." Well, the fact is that the small religious organizations are just like the large ones with few significant differences. The beliefs, routines, rituals, and most importantly, people's lifestyles are the same. The only difference is the size of the organization. It is much the same as Lowes or Home Depot versus the local Ace Hardware. The operation and purpose are the same no matter if you are Lowes or Ace Hardware, with just a few minor differences separating the two.

Collectively, large or small, look at the power that the leaders of the Bible-based Christian sects wield over hundreds of millions of people—can you look at them and then conclude, "oh no, they are not successful organizations" according to how the world defines successful? There are Christian religious organizations (what people call "churches") near this author who take in millions of dollars of people's money each *month* with an income of over \$50 million per year. You may not like what they stand for, but not liking what they stand for does not nullify the objective truth that they are successful according to the world's definition of success. The vast majority of small businesses and

some middle-sized companies in the U.S. do not generate millions of dollars of revenue like many hundreds of Christian religious organizations in the U.S. do, and that statement excludes the U.S. Roman Catholic system! The simple fact is “the church” is powerful and successful according to the world's standards.

In great contrast, look at the Man who, some two thousand years ago, walked the earth and accumulated no material wealth and did not hold any positions of earthly power or earthly authority. This Man did not seek to control material wealth nor to take from people, but only to give to them and help them in the deepest most meaningful ways possible. For doing that publically for about three years, he was rejected and killed by the people. That is his success story which most people would call a failure.

The contrast could not be any sharper.

This book will clarify that simple contrast.

Religion-Based Morality Versus Existential Truth

History has reached a point in the U.S. where there are no obvious group-related moral injustices against distinct groups of people. That makes it hard to find good fights to join like the civil rights movement in the sixties. The enemy is no longer primarily in the seats of government power, or even in the corporate offices. Rather, the enemy is the individual and the turning away from a common ethic to irrational, selfish emotionalism instead—turning away from an accurate absolute view of reality to an erroneous relativistic view of reality.

Please understand that this book does not condemn Christians or Biblians. Instead, it seeks to correct them using the best standard possible. This author is well aware of the following simple truth and hopes others will come to this awareness as well—*that God condemns no one, instead, we condemn ourselves*. Please read that again and understand the truth it conveys. Our heavenly Father *condemns no one, instead, we condemn ourselves*. God merely created the organisms/beings and the system/rules to allow us to choose our after death destiny.

A significant weakness of the non-theistic existential worldview is the lack of ultimate justice. For example, it should be offensive to the reader that Hitler and Mother Teresa would have the same after death experience, even if that experience is merely the annihilation of their soul. Our conscience should be repulsed at the thought that Adolf Hitler and Mother Teresa would have the same ultimate destiny—our conscience should choke at that possibility. Why is that? Is there some physical aspect of human nature that accounts for that?

The concept of condemning ourselves is much like the U.S. legal system, at least how it is supposed to be. Legislators create the laws that people are to obey. A judge's role is to determine whether an individual broke the law or not. If the judge finds that the person broke the law, the punishment is often also prescribed by rules, regulation or guidelines.

Therefore, in a perfect system, the only people receiving a consequence/ramification/punishment for their wrong behaviors are those who did something wrong...they broke a law, rule, policy, etc. The person is not before the judge because the judge didn't like them and wanted them to be there; instead, the person who committed the wrong called for the consequence. As an example, the person who murdered another person deserves a consequence including being accountable for the life they wrongly took.

And so it is with God and the system He created for we human beings.

God does not "look down" and say, "I don't like you, you are going to be punished" – in fact, it is just the opposite. He looks down and says, "Please stop destroying yourselves – don't you know I love you?!" When a person rejects trying to live by love and thus practices wrong, the person who committed the wrong will stand before The Judge, and God will merely validate the facts surrounding the choices made and the wrongs committed. We will address further aspects of this line of thought later in the book.

Many good, decent, moral people are Christians. However, many good, fair, moral people are agnostics or non-theists or Muslims or Jews or Buddhists, etc. In fact, my experience has been that in general religious people, including Christians, want what is good and right according to some religious moral standard. Having some moral standard is better than having no moral standard (unless of course you ignore it or use it to benefit one's self) since human beings are not naturally predisposed to exemplary behavior and in fact, are naturally predisposed to selfish and destructive behavior. Thus, having a moral standard does help restrain and constrain bad behavior. To deny this is irrational.

Furthermore and by definition, a religious moral standard includes the concept that God is the Giver of the moral standard and that God will hold people accountable to that moral standard. Stated another way, people who hold to a religious moral standard believe that there will be after-physical-life consequences for our behavior and that God will be the Judge helping us see the effects of our choices.

The conclusion is that some religious moral standards *within the group that holds to them* have played an important role in constraining harmful, destructive or evil behavior. Some rules of conduct (ethics) are necessary, and religion in no small measure has provided them. Religion becomes particularly destructive – and religious moral standards are tossed aside, or negatively modified to conform to the desire of the group - when separate groups with competing or different God-claims enter into conflict with one another. This conflict happens because the one people group says to the other, "God is on OUR side, and so it is right to use any means necessary to make you guys submit to our true God." In other words, the God-rules only apply to "us," not "them" because "they don't believe in our god."

Some examples of inter-religious conflict would include the Crusades between Christians and Muslims or the current conflict between Buddhists and Muslims in Indonesia. A recent case of intra-religious strife would be the deadly conflict between the Protestants and Catholics in Ireland or between the Shite and Sunni Muslims. However, one does not have to reach the point of violence to lack true peace—we humans are only too good at hating one another long before we raise our fist.

For example, the thousands of bible-Christian sects who excommunicated each other and thus account for many of those thousands of sects/divisions/denominations are hardly at peace and unity! While it is true that they no longer kill each other regularly as "heretics" in most places, that hardly amounts to unity. And while there no longer is large scale open animosity between the sects, it is equally valid that they are *not* unified and certainly their members *do not love one another* (unless you wrongly re-define love as mere civility or cold politeness, as we shall see later).

If it is true that human beings are predisposed to harmful beliefs and behavior – and taking into consideration the facts of history, it is the most reasonable belief – then how do you think people are going to do with *no* higher moral standard and no concept of accountability for one's behavior in this life? All one has to do is to look at the people of the United States here in the early twenty-first century, for example, and the conclusion should be obvious. As the people of the U.S. move away from a belief that God exists and will hold people accountable for how they live their lives, the following is happening:

- Expanding racial conflict;
- Political tension, conflict, and violence;
- Harmful drug usage increasing every year;
- Suicide increasing every year;
- Government corruption and waste increasing each year;
- The wealthy becoming more wealthy and powerful and the common man's wealth and power diminishing;
- Corporate greed is rising each year...

And the list goes on and on. Those things are the fruit of a people group – in this example, the U.S. citizens – throwing away a universal moral standard upon which they agreed to live by or respect to some degree in times past (which standard was derived from religion).

Is there a correlation between the increase in immorality in the United States and the passing away of a religious derived or absolute moral standard? Of course, there is, and it does not take some million dollar government study or some think tank research to judge that rightly. Most of the animosity between the two primary political ideologies of "liberal" and "conservative" is

due to ethics based differences or what they label as "social" issues, code language for ethical or moral differences.

However, this book is not going to make a case for why nations or societies need some religiously based moral standard or order to function well! For a religious person or a primarily morally concerned person, that is probably a sacrilegious statement, but therein lays a fundamental error of religious people! The simple fact is that a moral standard – including religious-based ones (like Mosaic) – *only works to constrain evil, it does not produce love and the critically important things associated with love.* Nor does a moral standard deliver hope or a good reason or purpose for living one's life. Those things require something else—something higher.

The people of the U.S. desperately need some universal moral or ethical standard to reduce conflict and find unity again. I will address in this book the fact that the root problems of conflict in this nation are not political ideologies but something more profound—a changing existential view of human existence.

Christianity and by extension Christians are significantly wrong about many things about God, but that does not mean that Christians are going to hell because of their false beliefs! Let's get that out right at the beginning. Sadly, for many Christians, a person having wrong ideas about God is generally considered to be worthy of hell, *but that "heaven or hell based on merely religious beliefs" thinking is one of THE MOST harmful and wrong beliefs that Christian's teach and hold!* In fact, it has been one of the most powerful fear motivating beliefs in all of history, capturing billions of souls to do the will of the religious leadership. Today, it still serves as a powerful fear motivator to dissuade or prevent discussing different views of God or our soul's destiny or the purpose of one's life.

Neither this author nor this book condemns anyone! Instead, we often condemn ourselves and then often wrongly!

People who have wrong beliefs about things, including about God, are not sent to hell for that. Instead, beliefs are only one factor in determining one's destiny. Some views are more important than others because they either guide or drive our behavior and lifestyle. Some ideas do not affect our daily conduct much at all. Beliefs about the extent of universe or opinions about the soil composition of Mars or how many angels can fit on the head of a pin have little to no power to shape our behavior. The same is true for many God beliefs. Many God beliefs have no bearing on how we live our lives, such as where God exists or the exact process of our soul's journey from our body to God or how many angels attend God, etc.

However, some God beliefs *do* have a bearing on how we conduct ourselves each day and have a more significant impact on our eternal destiny.

The most basic God belief is to answer the question, does God exist? If that question is answered "yes" by an individual, perhaps the next most important God-related questions are *who is God and what is God like and what does he want of me/us.* Other important questions are *how am I to live my life and will I be*

accountable for how I live my life? Is there something better than fear to lift me above the accountability concern? Aside from whether God exists or not - which is a more fundamental level question - if we believe God does exist, then certainly what God is like and what he wants of us are paramount especially if God has set up a system that allows us to determine our after physical-death destiny. (Beliefs, faith, and religion are not the same, and we shall cover that important distinction later.)

People of all time and all races and cultures and religions have asked the reasonable questions, "who created me; what is he/she like and what does he/she want of me." Religious leaders then race in to try and answer those questions, and the average person is only too quick to listen to them and even pay them for their opinions. The religious leaders and their followers then build impressive institutions or organizations to hide the fact that many of their God beliefs are often merely opinions that do not stand the test of reason, logic or observation.

And what is the typical reason given as to why the people should consider the religious leader as an authority about God? They include, "he/she is called of God"; or "they have a degree from seminary"; or "they are anointed of God"; or "he/she graduated Magna Cum Laude from Best Theological college"; or "the Holy Spirit called them"; or "he is a really good, godly man"; or "he/she is so-and-so religious leaders son/daughter"; or other such things. A critical question in this regard is, *are these valid reasons to believe that religious leaders know God?* This point about qualifications of religious leaders is, and we shall look at that later.

Given the division among the bible-Christian religious sects - by some estimates, tens of thousands of divisions/sects - I would suggest that those leaders are not doing a good job. "But," you should ask, "what is your standard for making that judgment?" Good question!

In my "Finding Life" video series, I make the case that the best person in history to tell us about God is the one who defeated death to prove that all he said was true

(<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCG4n6QnuLUsvImWjG9fAhQ>).

That person is Joshua of Nazareth, and you can read his story and teachings in my book "The Light of the World: The Life and Teachings of Jesus of Nazareth" (<http://www.amazon.com/Light-World-Teachings-Jesus-Nazareth/dp/0692300481>); or in the four gospels in any bible.

That historical person, Jesus (Joshua) of Nazareth says regarding his follower's unity, "Father, I pray that they may be one as we are one" (John 17). The will of Joshua and the one he calls "Father" is for his followers to be unified, "as one." Equally clear is the fact that the thousands of divided, largely loveless, divided, bickering, utterly unconnected groups of people who do not live significantly different than those they judge as "unsaved" or "un-churched" does not represent Joshua's teaching on unity. And yet this is precisely what exists on the earth today representing Christianity.

So, there you have it. This author's standard to be able to make a correct judgment about the state of Christianity's unity is the one whom all Christian sects point to as their supposed god and expert about God. I will use that same standard to reveal how Christianity is a successful failure.

There is another teaching of Joshua of Nazareth that serves to prove the claim of this book is true. In fact, of all the instructions he gave, he only gave one he labeled as a "command," meaning it is of paramount importance. As we shall see, that command plays a significant role in the successful failure that is Christianity.

Again, this book is not about condemning anyone—we do that to ourselves well enough. This book is about people finding truth and thus hope, and becoming change agents in this sad, dark world which desperately needs positive change. Therefore, this book will not be a scary experience for those who can overcome their fear or self-pride regarding exploring God beliefs or fundamental existential beliefs. If you don't have self-pride or fear as your shield against truth – that is you are willing to go where reason and logic take you - then this book can provide an extremely beneficial and possibly life-changing experience.

Let us begin this journey with getting a grip on reality.