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Blue Like Jazz Book Review

by Jeremy Cagle

In his book *Through the Looking-Glass*, Lewis Carroll describes a scene in which Alice meets Humpty Dumpty. During a brief argument, they discuss what the word “glory” means:

“I don’t know what you mean by ‘glory’” Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. “Of course you don’t – till I tell you. I meant ‘there’s a nice knock-down argument for you.’”

“But glory doesn’t mean a ‘nice knock-down argument,’” Alice objected.

“When *I* use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.”¹

In Carroll’s day, such a statement would have been considered utter nonsense; no one had the right to make a word mean whatever he chose. As a matter of fact, nonsense was Lewis Carroll’s goal in the stories of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*. Consider some of the following quotations from *Through the Looking Glass*:

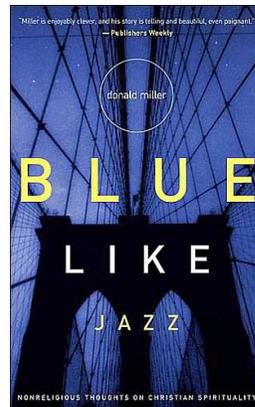
“It’s a poor sort of memory that only words backwards.”²

“They gave it to me – for an un-birthday present.”³

“You don’t know how to manage Looking-glass cakes,” the Unicorn remarked. “Hand it round first, and cut it afterwards.”⁴

What is unfortunate about Humpty Dumpty’s comment about being able to define words however he chooses is that many Christians today attempt to do the same when it comes to their faith. They think that it virtuous to be “uncertain” about biblical terms such as “faith,” “grace,” “belief,” and “church” and consider it a vice to be certain about anything the Bible teaches. In the words of G. K. Chesterton,

A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed. We are on the road to produce a race of men too mentally modest to believe in the multiplication table.⁵



This wrong thinking has led to a *redefining* of biblical terms or a *recreating* of them whenever it is convenient to posit or win an argument. And it is this thinking that has led to the recent popularity of Donald Miller’s book *Blue Like Jazz*.

Published in 2003 by Thomas Nelson, Inc., *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality*⁶ has received positive reviews from several people, including the following.

Brian McLaren, author and leader in the emerging church movement:

I can think of no better book than *Blue Like Jazz* to introduce Christian spirituality (a way of life) to people for whom Christianity (a system of beliefs) seems like a back math problem or a traffic jam.⁷

Ben Young, host of the radio show “The Single Connection”:

We need more people like Donald Miller, who are willing not only to interpret Scripture but the culture as well.

Paul Louis Metzger, Ph. D., Assistant Professor of Christian Theology & Theology of Culture at Multnomah Biblical Seminary:

Honest, passionate, raw . . . real. Like jazz music, Donald Miller's book is a song birthed out of freedom. As with good music, *Blue Like Jazz* is more than true – it's meaningful. It's about Jesus, His story, and the freedom He longs to bring to you.

Julie Ann Barnhill, author of *Scandalous Grace*:

Thank God for Jazz . . . just like the music, you don't so much read *Blue Like Jazz* as you *feel* it – feel it and find yourself changed by its haunting melodic voice.

While Miller may have intended his book to be nonreligious,⁸ that is impossible, since he writes on the subject of Christianity. Therefore, it is the purpose of this review to evaluate the author's "Christian thoughts" and determine whether they are biblical – and Christian – or not.

Content.

Blue Like Jazz is divided into 20 short chapters, each discussing an aspect of Christianity or of Miller's own personal life. Miller writes on the subjects of faith (5), redemption (6), grace (7), gods (8), belief (10), confession (11), church (12), community (15), worship (17), love (18-19), and Jesus (20). He even includes several pages of illustrations in a storybook format to aid in the explanation of his writings.⁹ Since it would be too time-consuming to relay the contents of every chapter in detail, the following is a brief summary of chapters 5 and 11.

Chapter 5 is entitled "Faith: Penguin Sex"¹⁰ and it describes the conversion¹¹ of Miller's friend Laura. When he first met Laura, Miller says she was,

an atheist, [who] would teach me a great deal about God. Her father, whom she loved and admired dearly, was a Methodist minister in Atlanta, and yet she was the only one in her family who could not embrace the idea of God.¹²

Miller relates later how Laura becomes a Christian. The process involved a conversation between the two of them. Here are some pieces of it:

"I am not good." She turned to face me. I could see in her eyes she had spent the morning crying.

"What is wrong?"

"Everything."

"Boy stuff?" I asked.

"No."

"School stuff?" I asked.

"No."

"God stuff?"

Laura just looked at me. Her eyes were sore and moist. "I guess so, Don. I don't know."

"Can you explain any of it? The way you feel."

"I feel like my life is a mess. I can't explain it. It's just a mess."¹³

The conversation continues at a later point:

"Laura, why is it that you hang out with the Christians on campus?"

"I don't know. I guess I am just curious." She wiped her eye again. "You're not dumb, I don't think. I just don't understand how you can believe this stuff."

"I don't either, really," I told her. "But I believe in God, Laura. There is something inside me that causes me to believe."¹⁴

Then, in a separate conversation, the author explains to his friend Tony how he himself began to understand what it means to "believe in Jesus":

"You know what really helped me understand why I believe in Jesus, Tony?"

"What's that?"

"Penguins," I told him.

"Penguins," I clarified. "Do you know very much about penguins?"¹⁵

Miller then tells Tony how he was watching a television show where penguins were having sex and beginning to give birth. This served as an analogy to help him understand what it meant to have faith.

“Very interesting.” Tony clapped for me. “So what is the analogy here?”

“I don’t know, really. It’s just that I identified with them. I know it sounds crazy, but as I watched I felt like I was one of those penguins. They have this radar inside them that told them when and where to go and none of it made any sense, but they show up on the very day their babies are being born, and the radar always turns out to be right. I have a radar inside me that says to believe in Jesus. Somehow, penguin radar leads them perfectly well. Maybe it isn’t too foolish that I follow the radar that is inside of me.”

Tony smiled at my answer. He lifted his glass of beer. “Here’s to penguins,” he said.¹⁶

The chapter closes with Laura’s brief e-mail account of her conversion¹⁷:

Dearest Friend Don,

I read through the book of Matthew this evening. I was up all night. I couldn’t stop reading so I read through Mark. This Jesus of yours is either a madman or the Son of God. Somewhere in the middle of Mark I realized He was the Son of God. I suppose this makes me a Christian. I feel much better now. Come to campus tonight and let’s get coffee.

Much love,
Laura¹⁸

Chapter 11 is entitled “Confession: Coming out of the Closet.”¹⁹ Miller begins and ends in a story format dispersed with some of his views on various Christian subjects. (The entire book is written with this story – dispersion format.)

One event the author describes is a radio interview in which he was asked to defend Christianity.

In a recent radio interview I was sternly asked by the host, who did not consider himself a Christian, to defend Christianity. I told him that I couldn’t do it, and moreover, that I didn’t want to defend the term. He asked me if I was a Christian, and I told him yes. “Then why don’t you want to defend Christianity?” he asked, confused. I told him I no longer knew what the term meant . . . Stop ten people on the street and ask them what they

think of when they hear the word *Christianity*, and they will give you ten different answers. How can I defend a term that means ten different things to ten different people?²⁰

The event that takes up the majority of this chapter takes place on the college campus of Reed College near Portland, Oregon. Miller describes this campus as “exhilarating. It was better than high school. Reed had ashtrays, and everybody said cusswords.”²¹ On this secular campus, Miller writes,

The students were brilliant and engaged. I was fed there, of thoughts and ideas. And what’s more, I had more significant spiritual experiences at Reed College than I ever had at church.²²

Once a year, Reed College hosted a festival called “Ren Fayre.” During this extended party,

They shut down the campus so students can party. Security keeps the authorities away, and everybody gets pretty drunk and high, and some people get naked. Friday night is mostly about getting drunk, and Saturday night is about getting high. The school brings in White Bird, a medical unit that specializes in treating bad drug trips.²³

Miller then relates how he and some friends decided to “[let] everybody know there were a few Christians on campus.”²⁴ It was decided that this would be done with the construction of a confession booth.

“Okay, you guys.” Tony gathered everybody’s attention. “Here’s the catch.” He leaned in a little and collected his thoughts. “We are not actually going to accept confessions.” We all looked at him in confusion. He continued, “We are going to confess to them. We are going to confess that, as followers of Jesus, we have not been very loving; we have been bitter, and for that we are very sorry. We will apologize for the Crusades, we will apologize for televangelists, we will apologize for neglecting the poor and the lonely, we will ask them to forgive us, and we will tell them that in our selfishness, we have misrepresented Jesus on this campus. We will tell people who come into the booth that Jesus loves them.”²⁵

In preparation for this event,

Tony and I dressed like monks and smoked pipes and walked among the anarchy, becoming soaked in all the alcohol spewing from within the crowds. People would come up to us and ask what we were doing, and we told them that the next day we would be on campus to take confessions.²⁶

The author then explains what happened after several students had entered the booths and heard the “reversed confession”:

Iven started taking a group to a local homeless shelter to feed the poor, and he often had to turn students away because the van wouldn't hold more than twenty or so. We held an event called Poverty Day where we asked students to live on less than three dollars a day to practice solidarity with the poor. More than one hundred students participated . . .²⁷

We hosted an evening where we asked students to come and voice their hostility against Christians. We answered questions about what we believed and explained our love for people, for the hurting, and we apologized again for our wrongs against humanity and asked for forgiveness from the Reed community. . . We watched a lot of students take a second look at Christ. But mostly, we as Christians felt right with the people around us. Mostly we felt forgiven and grateful.²⁸

Evaluation of Content.

On a positive note, *Blue Like Jazz* is an interesting read. Miller keeps the reader occupied with his keen wit and culturally engaging expressions. Consider some of the following excerpts:

The goofy thing about Christian faith is that you believe it and don't believe it at the same time. It isn't unlike having an imaginary friend.²⁹

The whole idea of everybody wanting to be somebody new was an important insight in terms of liking God. God was selling something I wanted. Still, God was in the same boat as the guy selling the knives and Juliet promising to make Romeo new. Everybody exaggerates when they are selling something. Everybody says their product works like magic.³⁰

I hate not having money. I hate not being able to go to a movie or out for coffee. I hate that feeling at the ATM when, after getting cash, the little receipt spits out, the one with the number on it, the telling number, the ever low number that translates into how many days I have left to feel comfortable. The ATM to me, often feels like a slot machine. I walk up to it hoping to get lucky.³¹

Another positive about this book is its interest in secular culture. Donald Miller's description of his interest in the drug-users and the drunkards at Reed College is an example.

Unfortunately, however, the book has more negative elements than positive. For instance, Miller writes about many Christian terms in a way that is unbiblical, though perhaps politically correct. In his chapter on love, he describes his interaction with hippies and says that they taught him more about love than any church or group of Christians that he ever encountered.

I have never experienced a group of people who loved each other more than my hippies in the woods . . . So much of what I know about getting along with people I learned from the hippies. They were magical in community. . . I cannot tell you how quickly these people, these pot-smoking hippies disarmed me. . . And yet my hippie friends were not at all close to believing that Christ was the Son of God. This did not confuse me so much as it surprised me . . . I was even more amazed when I realized I preferred, in fact, the company of the hippies to the company of Christians.³²

In John 14:15, Jesus says, “If you love Me, you will keep my commandments.” First John 4:16 says, “We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.” Someone cannot love in a Christian sense without loving God and His Son. Someone cannot love the Son and love God without keeping His Son's commandments. Yet *Blue Like Jazz* makes the assertion that it is possible for a group of “pot-smoking hippies”³³ who “were not at all close to believing that Christ was the Son of God”³⁴ to teach a “Christian” how to love others!

Miller makes a similar error when he describes his actions at Reed College (see page 3). James 5:16 says, “Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed.” Christians are commanded to confess their sins to each other but not to unbelievers. Furthermore, Miller and his friends confessed the sins of other “Christians,” instead of exclusively confessing their own - “We will apologize for the Crusades, we will apologize for televangelists . . .”³⁵

To take this a step further, the actions of this group during the festivals at Reed College told the students only part of Who the biblical Jesus is and what He commands His followers. Consider the following conversation between Miller and another student in the “confession booth”:

I was going to tell Tony that I didn't want to do it when he opened the curtain and said we had our first customer.

"What's up, man?" Duder sat himself on the chair with a smile on his face. He told me my pipe smelled good.

"Thanks," I said. I asked him his name, and he said his name was Jake. I shook his hand because I didn't know what to do, really.

"So, what is this? I'm supposed to tell you all of the juicy gossip I did at Ren Fayre, right?" Jake asked.

"No."

"Okay, then what? What's the game?" He asked.

"Not really a game. More of a confession thing."

"You want me to confess my sins, right?"

"No, that's not what we're doing, really."

"What's the deal, man? What's with the monk outfit?"

"Well, we are, well a group of Christians here on campus, you know."

"I see. Strange place for Christians, but I am listening."

"Thanks," I told him. He was being very patient and gracious. "Anyway, there is this group of us, just a few of us who were thinking about the way Christians have sort of wronged people over time. You know, the Crusades, all that stuff . . ."

"Well, I doubt that you personally were involved in any of that, man."³⁶

After this, Miller tells Jake how to become a Christian.

"You really believe in Jesus, don't you?" he asked me.

"Yes, I think I do. Most often I do. I have doubts at times, but mostly I believe in Him. It's like there is something in me that causes me to believe, and I can't explain it."

"You said earlier that there was a central message of Christ. I don't really want to become a Christian, you know, but what is that message?"

"The message is that man sinned against God and God gave the world over to man, and that if somebody wanted to be rescued out of that, if somebody for instance finds it all very empty, that Christ will rescue them if they want; that if they ask forgiveness for being a part of that rebellion then God will forgive them."

"What is the deal with the cross?"

"God says the wages of sin is death," I told him. "And Jesus died so that none of us would have to. If we have faith in that then we are Christians."

"That is why people wear crosses?" he asked.

"I guess. I think it is sort of fashionable. Some people believe that if they have a cross around their neck or tattooed on them or something, it has some sort of mystical power."

"Do you believe that?" Jake asked.

"No," I answered. I told him that I thought mystical power came through faith in Jesus.³⁷

All Jake has to do, according to Miller, is admit that he has sinned against God and confess that Jesus is God and died for his sins – and then continue living however and believing whatever else he wants. This is a gospel³⁸ that leaves a lot out. While Miller could have accidentally left out some elements of the gospel in his conversation with Jake, it is no accident that he left them out of the 20 chapters of his book. In fact, in this book on "Christian Spirituality," the topic of sin is mentioned only briefly (and not explained in much detail), and the word "repentance" is not mentioned at all. According to *Blue Like Jazz*, all one has to do to be a Christian is believe that Jesus died for his sins and a few other things. To be saved, the characters of this book are never told to *do* anything – pursue holiness, spread the Gospel, serve Jesus as Lord, etc.

Biblical Accuracy.

It would be almost impossible to discuss Donald Miller's treatment of biblical texts, since the Bible is seldom quoted in this 243-page book. Nevertheless, Miller does make one major assertion that is biblically inaccurate.

Blue Like Jazz is written in a way that makes the world look attractive to Christians. This is probably the reason it is such an attractive book to many church-goers. It is very subtle in discussing how Christianity should "reach" the world by becoming more like the world. Consider some of the following quotations.

In Chapter 16, entitled “Money: Thoughts on Paying Rent,” Miller describes a lecture he received from a close friend regarding the importance of paying his tithes:

One of my good friends, Curt Heidschmidt, gave me a lecture about tithing not very long ago. It was strange to get a lecture about tithing from Curt because Curt is not even a church sort of guy. He goes and all, but he hates it . . . Curt works at a cabinet shop and cusses all the time and tells dirty jokes. But he tithes, sort of.³⁹

This “good friend,” who “cusses all the time and tells dirty jokes” and hates going to church, gives the author advice about tithing to the church (which the author gladly accepts). And this advice is so valuable, that it is recorded in Miller’s book on “Christian Spirituality.”

In Chapter 12, interestingly named “Church: How I Go Without Getting Angry,” the book gives two examples of local pastors who are serving in churches in the pacific northwest:

Mark had written several articles for secular magazines and had been interviewed a few times on the radio and had gotten this reputation as a pastor who said cusswords. It is true that Mark said a lot of cusswords . . . I think some of my friends believed that it was the goal of the devil to get people to say cusswords, so they thought Mark was possessed or something, and they told me I should not really get into anything he was a part of. Because of the cusswords. But like I said, I was dying inside, and even though Mark said cusswords, he was telling a lot of people about Jesus.⁴⁰

. . . I got a call from Mark the Cussing Pastor, and he said he had a close friend who was moving to Portland to start a church and that I should join him. Rick and I got together over coffee, and I thought he was hilarious. He was big, a football player out of Chico State. At the time we both chewed tobacco, so we had that in common. He could do a great Tony Soprano voice, sort of a Mafia thing. He would do this routine where he pretended to be a Mafia boss who was planting a church. He said a few cusswords but not as bad as Mark.⁴¹

Toward the beginning of the book, in chapter 2, “What I Learned on Television,” Miller goes so far as to say that the reason he bought a television was because he heard a sermon against it:

A couple of years ago, however, I visited a church in the suburbs, and there was this blowhard preacher talking about how television rots your brain. He said that when we are watching television our minds are working no harder than when we are

sleeping. I thought that sounded heavenly. I bought one that afternoon.⁴²

In this book on “Christian Spirituality,” Donald Miller explains spiritual truths by using worldly examples. He discusses the value of tithing, as he learned from a good friend who cusses, tells dirty jokes, and hates going to church. He then relates how his pastors use profanity and do impressions of HBO programs (“The Sopranos”). All this is preceded by the story of how he refused to take the advice of a “blowhard preacher” regarding the purchase of a television and how that television helped influence his thinking.⁴³

This book does not seek to keep Christians “unstained by the world.”⁴⁴ Instead, it makes the world look safe and appealing. In fact, *Blue Like Jazz* is a book where the world defines the church instead of the other way around. This book fits in perfectly with a world where objective truth is ridiculed⁴⁵ and church is viewed as something that can be chosen willy-nilly. For example, here is Miller’s description of how he chooses a church to attend:

I like attending a Catholic service every once in a while, but I think that is because it feels different to me . . . Some of my friends have left their churches and gone Greek Orthodox. I think that sounds cool. Greek Orthodox. Unless you are Greek. Then it sounds like that is where you are supposed to go, as though you are a conformist. If I were Greek, I would never go to a Greek Orthodox church. If I were Greek, I would go to a Baptist church. Everybody there would think I was exotic and cool.⁴⁶

Doctrine or the authority of the Bible is never even mentioned in this process of choosing. This kind of advice would be no different if it were coming from a lost man (except that he might advise to “pick whichever religion you want” instead of “whichever denomination you want”).

Romans 12:2 states, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” James 1:27 says, “Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” First John 2:15 also declares, “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

Such biblical commands are unheeded, and in fact if not practically ridiculed, in this book. Because of this, *Blue Like Jazz* is not a biblically accurate book.

Consistency.

Blue Like Jazz is consistently inconsistent. In fact, it appears that this was something the author was striving for. Consider some of the following quotes:

For me, the beginning of sharing my faith with people began by throwing out Christianity and embracing Christian spirituality, a nonpolitical mysterious system that can be experienced but not explained.⁴⁷

Explaining his *Nonreligious Thoughts on Christianity Spirituality*, Miller asserts that Christian Spirituality “can be experienced but not explained.”

I read a book a long time ago about Mother Teresa. Somebody in the book asked her how she summoned the strength to love so many people. She said she loved people because they are Jesus, each one of them is Jesus, and this is true because it says so in the Bible. And it is also true that this idea contradicts the facts of reality: Everybody can't be Jesus. There are many ideas within Christian spirituality that contradict the facts of reality as I understand them.⁴⁸

Nothing that can be “true” and “contradict the facts of reality” at the same time.⁴⁹ To make that assertion is to be tremendously inconsistent.

In his chapter on church, entitled “How I Go Without Getting Angry,” Miller begins by saying that he does not like institutions.

It should be said I am an independent person. I don't like institutionalized anything. I don't like corporations . . . Some people don't like classical music, some people don't like pizza, I don't like institutions . . . My dislike for institutions is mostly a feeling, though, not something that can be explained.⁵⁰

What is amazing about such a statement is that the church is an institution and his chapter was written to explain why he attends such an institution!

One last quote will suffice to demonstrate the inconsistency of this book. In his closing chapter, Miller writes,

I think Christian spirituality is like jazz music. I think loving Jesus is something you feel. I think it is something very difficult to get on paper. But it is no less real, no less meaningful, no less beautiful. The first generation out of slavery invented jazz music. It is a music birthed out of freedom. And that is the closest thing I know to Christian spirituality. A music birthed out of freedom. Everybody sings their song the way they feel it, everybody closes their eyes and lefts up their hands.⁵¹

The closest thing to “Christian Spirituality” is jazz music because everybody “sings their song the way they feel it.” Yet, if this were what the author truly believed, why did he write a 243-page book explaining this thought? Why bother writing anything at all?

Telling people that they have the right to feel and think whatever they want to feel and think does not need to be explained because; if left alone, that is exactly what they will do.

Scholarship.

With respect to scholarship, Miller's subtitle requires further examination. *Blue Like Jazz* is subtitled *Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality*. The author elaborates on what he means by “Christian Spirituality” by saying,

For me, the beginning of sharing my faith with people began by throwing out Christianity and embracing Christian spirituality, a nonpolitical mysterious system that can be experienced but not explained. *Christianity*, unlike *Christian spirituality*, was not a term that excited me. And I could not in good conscious tell a friend about a faith that didn't excite me. I couldn't share something I wasn't experiencing. And I wasn't experiencing Christianity.

It didn't do anything for me at all. It felt like math, like a system of rights and wrongs and political beliefs, but it wasn't mysterious; it wasn't God reaching out of heaven to do wonderful things in my life. And if I would have shared Christianity with somebody, it would have felt most like I was trying to get somebody to agree with me rather than meet God. I could no longer share anything about Christianity, but I loved talking about Jesus and the spirituality that goes along with a relationship with Him.⁵²

In other words, Miller did not like the idea of a Christianity that is defined and authoritative. He did not think that the God Who was “reaching out of heaven to do wonderful things in my life” was the same God Who

held to “a system of rights and wrongs.” He either did not like a Christianity that told him what to do or that disagreed with what he already thought was right or wrong. Because of this, he made up his own religion and called it “Christian Spirituality.” And he did this, because “Christianity, unlike *Christian spirituality*, was not a term that excited me . . . I wasn’t experiencing Christianity.”

This kind of thinking is what is commonly called “mysticism.” In his book, *Faith Misguided: Exposing the Dangers of Mysticism*, Arthur L. Johnson describes mysticism by saying that,

When we speak of a mystical experience we refer to an event that is completely within the person. It is totally subjective . . . Although the mystic may experience it as having been triggered by occurrences or objects outside himself (like a sunset, a piece of music, a religious ceremony, or even a sex act), the mystical experience is a totally inner event.⁵³

While not all mystics claim that their experiences are authoritative, some do. Miller’s “nonreligious thoughts” fall into this second group. Johnson describes this aspect of mysticism as mysticism with a “psychological dimension.”

The psychological dimensions involve assigning primary significance to inward, subjective, nonrational impressions. It involves seeing intense, noncognitive, subjective experiences as having such deep significance that they should be sought. One’s life should be directed by them.⁵⁴

Christianity defines subjective feelings by objective truth, instead of vice versa.⁵⁵ A mystic makes truth whatever he wants it to be. This is what Donald Miller has done.

In fact, Miller inaccurately asserts that, “you cannot be a Christian without being a mystic.”⁵⁶

Miller relates one of his mystical experiences in chapter 5, where he discusses penguin sex (see above). In talking of this event, he says,

I know it sounds crazy, but as I watched I felt like I was one of those penguins. They have this radar inside them that told them when and where to go and none of it made any sense, but they show up on the very day their babies are being born, and the radar always turns out to be right. I have a radar inside me that says to believe in Jesus.⁵⁷

He writes that this penguin sex “help[s] me understand why I believe in Jesus.”⁵⁸ This is mysticism. Penguin sex might help one appreciate or enjoy God’s creation (although that is, at best, doubtful), but it has nothing specifically to do with Jesus Christ. The only way to make any connection – without outside assistance – would be through a mystical experience, and this is exactly what Miller does.

He calls his thoughts “nonreligious” in an attempt to avoid submitting them to religious investigation. In doing so, he repeats a heresy that has attempted to influence Christian doctrine for hundreds of years.⁵⁹ Apparently, this kind of deception is nothing new.

One of the most interesting things about studying the history of philosophy is the discovery of how many ideas which are dressed up as modern have been tried out (and answered) generations ago.⁶⁰

Doctrinal Scale. 1.5 (out of 5)

End Notes

¹ *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004) 219. For this illustration, I am indebted to D. A. Carson’s *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005) 84.

² Carroll, 204.

³ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 235.

⁵ *Orthodoxy* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1957) 31–32.

⁶ Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2003).

⁷ The following quotations in this section are taken from the inside cover of *Blue Like Jazz*.

⁸ The subtitle of *Blue Like Jazz* is *Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality*. Donald Miller may call his thoughts “nonreligious” but he contradicts himself by choosing to write about a “religion”: Christianity. His phrase, “Christian Spirituality” is something he himself invented to try to get out of this dilemma, as will be shown below. His view of “Christian Spirituality” is, in fact, nothing more than mysticism.

⁹ See pages 64–76 and 159–170.

¹⁰ Miller, 51–58.

¹¹ Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki, & Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999). Conversion is defined as:

A general term referring to an individual’s initial encounter with God in Christ resulting in the reception of God’s gracious provision of salvation. Some of the changes brought about in conversion include a change in heart from being dead in sin to being alive in Christ, a change in status from being guilty before God to being not guilty, a change in relationship from being an outcast and enemy to being a friend of God (30).

¹² Miller, 39.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁷ For a definition of the word “conversion,” see footnote 11.

¹⁸ Miller, 58.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 113–127.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 115.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

²² *Ibid.*, 42.

²³ *Ibid.*, 116.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 126.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 187.

³² *Ibid.*, 208–210.

³³ *Ibid.*, 209.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 122.

³⁷ Ibid., 124–125.

³⁸ Millard J. Erickson, *The Concise Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2001). The gospel is “The message of salvation offered by God to all who believe” (81).

³⁹ Ibid., 194.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 133.

⁴¹ Ibid., 134.

⁴² Ibid., 15.

⁴³ While the Bible does not say anything against the purchasing of a television set, it does tell believers to, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls” (Heb 13:17). Not only does Miller ignore this biblical command, but he also ridicules it by *immediately* doing what his leader has told him *not* to do.

⁴⁴ See James 1:27.

⁴⁵ Antony Flew, *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Gramercy Books, 1979). Objective truth or “objectivism” is defined as, “the belief that there are certain moral truths that would remain true whatever anyone or everyone thought or desired” (343). It requires no further explanation to state that such a view of truth is unpopular in our post-modern culture.

⁴⁶ Miller, 130.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 115.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 201.

⁴⁹ Erickson, 126. Granted, there are things in the Bible that *seem* to contradict the facts of reality: Jesus’ being born of a virgin, His being God and man, His resurrection, etc. These things, however, are defined as *miracles*. A miracle is “an observable occurrence that, though it does not break the laws of nature, is remarkable in that the laws of nature, if fully understood, could not account for it.” When miracles are recorded in Scripture, we trust the Word of God and embrace its authority and its ability to inform us of the “facts of reality.” But we do not make a distinction between facts of reality and truth. To say that something can be true and contradict the facts of reality at the same time is to embrace nonsense.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 129.

⁵¹ Ibid., 239.

⁵² Ibid., 115–116.

⁵³ *Faith Misguided: Exposing the Dangers of Mysticism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988) 20.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁵⁵ Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” It is for this reason that Christians do not rely on their heart as a source of authority. They submit to an authority outside of themselves: the Bible.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 202.

⁵⁷ Miller, 57.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 55.

⁵⁹ For a book on mystical writings from the past, see R. A. Vaughan’s *Hours with the Mystics* (London: Gibbings & Company, 1893).

⁶⁰ Colin Brown, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1968) 11.