



Way

Bibel- og troskritikken

15 utdrag fra romanen *Way* som ble påbegynt rundt millennieskiftet og ferdigstilt i 2007



Forfatter: Frank Benjamin Horn Hartvedt

Publisert oktober 2024 på frankbenjaminhartvedt.no

Introduksjon

One thing is certain, Benjamin didn't like the Bible any more. Mama prayed, but it didn't help much, and Benjamin Way didn't think that the God of Israel deserved any more attention. Fifteen years of flannel boards and biblical picture puzzles about the shepherd David was enough.

I 2007 ferdigstilte jeg og publiserte romanen *Way* på det daværende nettstedet world-wide-way.com. Tidligere versjoner av romanen bar titlene *Kristen gutt anno 1996* og *Klasserom 12*. Romanen adresserer en rekke temaer; menneskelige relasjoner, kjærlighetsforhold, skolesystem, fotballkunst, maksimal trivsel til enhver tid, ambisjoner, menneskesinnet, familiesamhold, vilje og en del annet. Men hovedsakelig handler romanen om en gymnasiast – hovedpersonen Terry – som har store problemer med sin kristne tro som han etter hvert ikke lenger klarer å forsvare. Spesielt ikke overfor sin verdslige bror, den raljerende og godlynte religionskritikeren Benjamin.

I det følgende kan du lese 15 utdrag fra *Way* som omhandler bibel- og troskritikk. Utdragene er hentet fra den engelske oversettelsen av romanen.

I første del av romanen er Terry fortellerstemmen. I andre del er Benjamin fortellerstemmen.

Del 1 - Way

It was a mystery to Benjamin Way why Adolf Hitler had been depicted as a genocidal murderer rather than a saint at the right hand of the Almighty.

Benjamin would often pay me a short visit in my room and look for the missing survivors of that tragic drowning accident in the Middle East. He thought it was so charming that sweet, little children sat on the edge of their beds with their Christian mamas, read about the boat builder, Noah, and looked at pictures of the ark with all the cool animals. He decided to publish a picture book himself – one that showed the sea bottom with all of the beautiful, dead bodies of the people that God had drowned because they were evil. Not to mention all of the evil animals and all of the evil one-year-old children that he had liquidated. What a fantastic God we have. It was a mystery to Benjamin Way why Adolf Hitler had been depicted as a genocidal murderer rather than a saint at the right hand of the Almighty. Of course, this wouldn't have threatened God's position in any way – Hitler only exterminated a few million jews and some gypsies after all. God, on the other hand, was responsible for a killing spree far more extensive, according to the census at least.

Benjamin thought that it was completely natural, not to mention consistent, for God to send some bears after them. It was even creative, far more exciting than a boring, old drowning.

Benjamin was a kind atheist. Elisha was an evil champion of God. Benjamin's favorite prophet, by the way. No one was as noble as Elisha from the Old Testament. «Listen, Terry,» he had said, «if some girls in your class had called you baldy, I'm sure that you would've asked God to command some big, nasty bears to go rip them to pieces, too.» Benjamin fully understood Elisha's reaction. «Imagine, this God-fearing man had wandered around there in the wilderness for months maybe, all alone. He naturally had time to be annoyed with his rather modest hair growth. Full of complexes and without a toupé, he went back to civilisation, and what was the first thing he heard? That's right. Some insolent neighbourhood kids had actually told him that he had a baldspot! Who did these cheeky kids think they were? Didn't they know that he was a man of God?» Benjamin thought that it was completely natural, not to mention consistent, for God to send some bears after them. It was even creative, far more exciting than a boring, old drowning. «What is it that

bothers us Christians so much? What happened to implementing the death penalty for shoplifting and going over the speed limit? When are the fine people going to uphold the letter of the Bible?»

What could excuse the people of Israel for turning away from Our Lord? How could they turn away from a god that had proven his omnipotence?

Her entire sermon was based upon God's mercy for a people who turned their backs on him in the desert. «Imagine, brothers and sisters. Even though the people of Israel worshipped other gods, He had mercy on them. He loved his people in spite of their disobedience,» said Irene, impressed with her Creator. It was irritatingly usual. We knew all about God's mercy already. Why couldn't she give an explanation instead as to why the people turned against God in the first place? They had endured scourge after scourge, a sea that had suddenly decided to part – what was it that troubled these people? They all must have been able to see ok, otherwise, they wouldn't have been able to make any progress as they staggered around in the desert. Surely, they must have observed that the sea suddenly looked a little strange. Maybe they were all blind, and being led by Moses as they hung on to a rope. At any rate, Moses must have had an unusually relaxed attitude towards the supernatural. «Well, look at that. The sea just parted. Guess I'll just lead them over. Nothing to make a fuss about. Nothing special about this sea really.» In the last several months, I had read a great deal of the Bible in a feverish hunt for something comforting, but I still didn't sleep well. What could excuse the people of Israel for turning away from Our Lord? How could they turn away from a god that had proven his omnipotence?

«You're forgetting the New Jerusalem, Linus. Why do the Scriptures talk about a heavenly existence without sin or tears? Have we suddenly become robots?»

«Why did God give man a choice in the Garden of Eden?» I asked. The meeting was over and Linus and I walked home together. The youth pastor answered unhesitatingly, «That's easy.» He didn't have to concentrate on Jesus yet. We were created in God's image, and God certainly couldn't have seen himself as a robot, could he? It was a rhetorical question, and in bad taste. Obviously then, a person couldn't use such verbal finesse when the theory would shortly be laid to rest. «You're forgetting the New Jerusalem, Linus. Why do the Scriptures talk about a heavenly existence without sin or tears? Have we suddenly become robots?» I asked. Before I asked the

question, I remember that I said a prayer to Him I look forward to understanding. I didn't get an answer. Linus was suddenly a humble, lowly servant. There was so much we didn't understand. It was important to have blind confidence and faith, like a child. When I told him as we passed a lamppost that I just had decided to develop blind and child-like belief in the lamppost that we were passing, he laughed. He knew what I meant, he said, and that it was difficult, but what we must do was to focus on what was important – that is, Jesus Christ. He was what mattered.

Were we toy cars and dolls in God's playpen?

If one had a passionate love for the books of the Bible, one couldn't deny that God was the greatest of prophets who had foreseen everything. ... Were we pails and shovels in God's sandbox? Were we toy cars and dolls in God's playpen? Did our Lord like to eat popcorn watching the nosebleeds he knew would flow?

*Thomas had seen and doubted without good reason. We haven't seen, but still believe.
Without good reason.*

«So tell me, dear Terry, how could the disciple Thomas doubt? He had seen the lame walk and the blind see. He had even greeted the dead Lazarus, who had quite suddenly regained his breath, balance, motor and all other physical skills, just because Jesus had said that he could. Isn't it just a little suspicious that this Thomas constantly thought that everything was so difficult to buy, no matter how many supernatural things he experienced? Some might use the word 'unrealistic', Terry.» ... «I don't know, Rachel, and I admit that Thomas bothers me. I don't want to talk about him.» ... «Let us now say that I had painstakingly cut you up with a knife, Terry, preferably in a good number of little pieces. Just afterwards, a man with long, dark-blond hair and dressed in a long, white coat, had patched you up with a, 'stand up, your faith has saved you'. Then, Terry, I would have traded these comfortable jeans with a bag and some cinders, right on the spot. After that, I would've put myself under house arrest for life and locked myself in a storeroom, giving uninterrupted attention to the Bible instead, and focusing specifically on John the Baptist and the Proverbs of Solomon.» ... «Thomas had doubted, Terry. Thomas would have played soccer during the next recess or talked about a video game with Leo during the next class. Maybe he would have

mentioned that about that man in white, right after he gave a little critique on the graphics used in the newest game machine, but that's not absolutely certain.» We all knew what she had mercilessly used up a good deal of time to reveal. Thomas had seen and doubted – we don't see and believe. Thomas had seen and doubted without good reason. We haven't seen, but still believe. Without good reason.

How could that infallible fortune teller, he who had foreseen everything, create mankind when he knew that some years down the line, he would regret that he had done so?

In the first [article], he focused on the thought that God was perhaps the most absent-minded person in the whole world. How could that infallible fortune teller, he who had foreseen everything, create mankind when he knew that some years down the line, he would regret that he had done so? Did God, just before molding Adam, forget that he would regret having made his creation? Benjamin began the article by characterizing God's rather weak memory as charming. Imagine God being merely a little unfocused. It was so unbelievably sweet. Genesis 6:6, «The Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth....» Hmm. Maybe it was just a slight fault in his logic, Benjamin philosophized. Maybe those who wrote the Bible forgot that God had regretted his work in the books of Moses when they later – in the Proverbs, Psalms and all the others – stated that God had foreseen everything. Benjamin thought that God was, at best, just a little simple. The president of JJJ was convinced that God would have bet a huge sum on Blackblaze in the third race, even though he had seen beforehand that Pony Hoddle would stroll in with a clear victory, leaving Blackblaze in an unmentionable fourth place. God was quite simply not very good at doing the right things. Benjamin himself considered following Jesus and God so that he could finally justify his wish to carry out meaningless acts. «God saw that he would regret it, but he created him anyway.» What a wonderful, illogical sentence. It should be his motto. A person couldn't go to hell if they followed in the Almighty's footsteps.

So, if God told the truth when he said that he loved us, then how could he ask us not to use what he had given us, and threaten to burn us if we did? The brain was a pistol that God knew would go off in our hands.

In the second article to *Salvation*, the reader met an elated Benjamin Way who had a joyous message to all the residents of the sanatoriums, those who dreamed every night of seas of fire, the devil and third degree burns for all of eternity. There was no hell. The article just beamed with joy. Benjamin was a sincerely relieved teenager. He had seen in the Scriptures that God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit loved everyone on earth – he had been optimistic up to that point. After that, he had thought a little bit about how he had never seen God or Lazarus. Why should he believe in something he hadn't seen? He could certainly do it and be a fool, but the problem was that God had given him an instrument that advised against doing so. The brain. It was a fine gift. So, if God told the truth when he said that he loved us, then how could he ask us not to use what he had given us, and threaten to burn us if we did? The brain was a pistol that God knew would go off in our hands. Was God really just the world's most evil man? The flood backed up this idea, but all those cute birds and that blue sky dismissed it. There was no hell. God loved us. Even Judas would not have given his mother a defective pistol. Half-way through the article, Benjamin came across a problem. He had been generous for a second and ignored God's unpredictability. Of course God could burn those he loved. Of course he could pass out defective pistols. There was no rhyme or reason to God's actions. It wasn't a healthy pattern. God just did things. It was just like playing bingo, really. Maybe there could be a hell afterall. If he could create something he had seen he would regret creating, he could also beat to death all the male children of the Amalekites, as he did a few thousand years ago, and in a few years burn all of the reasonable people he loved. And not least, he could unashamedly line up seven hundred beautiful wives for King Solomon, and at the same time, precisely and carefully, kill another man who in a moment of bad luck, messed around with someone other than his one bride. And Abraham – God's closest friend among humans through all the ages – it wasn't the slightest problem that he exchanged intimate skin cells with women other than his Sarah.

Benjamin was so glad that God had given Solomon enough wisdom for him to be considered the wisest man in the world. This meant, in fact, that it was a good idea to have a lot of beautiful wives.

The third article was called, «Long Live the Monarchy», and was a tribute to Solomon. Benjamin was so glad that God had given Solomon enough wisdom for him to be considered the wisest man in the world. This meant, in fact, that it was a good idea to have a lot of beautiful wives. It was only a bit curious that some years later, Jesus and Paul maintained that it was a sin to even steal a glance at a girl other than one's wife, but pretty much in line with the earlier instability. Benjamin was of the opinion that it was alright to regularly sleep with different girls. It was wisdom – short and sweet.

Why did he burn men, women, children and animals – entire groups of people – only to a while later sacrifice his son for our sins?

I wondered about Elisha. The Flood was also difficult to defend and understand. And had God changed his mood during the story? Why did he burn men, women, children and animals – entire groups of people – only to a while later sacrifice his son for our sins?

Several of them had barely heard of Jericho, even though they had been fervent, young Christians during all of their twenty years.

«Unlike all of you, I haven't come here to get to know Jesus better. I just want to know that he exists. I want someone to tell me why I should believe that he exists, when the only thing I have to base my belief upon is some writings on an unstable God who burns little children in Jericho and tortures men who have intercourse with their menstruating wives.» Of course, they were captivated. Of course, they stared in open-mouthed amazement. Several of them had barely heard of Jericho, even though they had been fervent, young Christians during all of their twenty years. I knew that most of them were like me – maybe all had had a mother who had sung psalms to them at night from the edge of the bed since they were little. Naturally, the mother had left out the stories of torture and bizarre murders, staged by He whom she sang so beautifully about. 'Dear

God, I am happy. Thank you for all that I have received. You are good, you, my keeper. Dear God, never leave me. Look after my little...'. «Swoosh,» I said. «Mama was interrupted, dear bible class. God decided to set that evil little two-year-old baby of hers on fire. Horrific? Yes. It seems so much worse when it happens in a modern boy's room with toy cars and posters of angels who stroll over bridges, but it must not have been particularly nice to be a mother in Jericho either.»

Was it really true that they didn't know about Jericho, or did they hide their knowledge in fear of losing that comforting thought of heaven? Did they profess a belief in God, just in case he existed?

For close to twenty years, I had taken heaven for granted. There had never been any question of whether or not it existed. The element of excitement was in wondering how much the gates up there were made of gold or boring gold imitation. Little Terry made drawings of heaven that mama hung up on the refrigerator. It was comforting to know that mama would be waiting for me with Jesus. She would die one day, but that just meant that she took a long vacation from me and Benjamin. We would see her again soon, surrounded by palm trees and hymns of praise, dancing beautifully with our father. I looked around, looked at all the eyes that stared at me in wonder. Was it really true that they didn't know about Jericho, or did they hide their knowledge in fear of losing that comforting thought of heaven? Did they profess a belief in God, just in case he existed? Did they think, «Ok. Maybe we have to stay away from lying and stealing and other fun things, but we'll make that sacrifice in case God is where mama says he is»?

Yeah, there were suspiciously many «invisible» healings. A kidney that healed itself, a lung that suddenly began to work. Never a missing hand that suddenly grew again, or a torn-off nose that was put back on again in front of everyone.

«What about all of the healings that take place at today's revival meetings? Doesn't that mean anything to you?» a nimble girl in the middle of the classroom cautiously said. «You mean, does it give me strength that a sixty-year-old lady can suddenly hear a little better in her right ear, or that a young man is miraculously cured of a stiff neck?» I replied. She looked at me. A few people giggled. Yeah, there were suspiciously many «invisible» healings. A kidney that healed itself, a lung that suddenly began to work. Never a missing hand that suddenly grew again, or a torn-off nose

that was put back on again in front of everyone. The healings were depressingly lame. The total lack of «visible» healings made it tempting to disregard healing as such.

Second Corinthians 12:9 – «My grace is sufficient for you...» But God couldn't place conditions on that. God had to be merciful. If he was fair. Mona said.

I became more and more aware that people believed in Jesus just because their mothers and fathers did. Ever since they were small, they had experienced warmth from and looked up to their providers. Of course their parents wouldn't believe in what was in the Bible if it wasn't true. They were too smart for that. And what about all of those millions of other Christians around the world? No one could really mean that all of these people were wrong. I understood then that it is tradition that is the saviour. A hundred years ago, there were people in our country who thought about the thousands of Christians in the world, and thought that so many couldn't be wrong. That's how our numbers increased, we Christians. It was my secret. The snowball effect. I didn't tell anyone – except Mona. «We believe because the others believe,» I said. ... «I don't like people who ruin a cheerful atmosphere,» she said. I was surprised. Mona had given up. «What you say isn't news, Terry,» she continued nonchalantly. She knew that God was strange. He was just as vague as her crazy uncle, she said. That's why he had to be merciful. It was really not very exciting. She thought I was foolish because I had to confirm that he existed. It was well-known that thinking people believed in God because it was the best alternative out there. She firmly believed that flowers and bloodveins were too fascinating for the whole thing to just be about a big bang a few billion years ago. «God just has to tolerate that we believe because there aren't any better alternatives. Be satisfied with that thought,» she said dryly, then added, «And be a little kind to those who live happy lives without knowing. Don't ruin the mood!» ... Second Corinthians 12:9 – «My grace is sufficient for you...» But God couldn't place conditions on that. God had to be merciful. If he was fair. Mona said.

Del 2 - Way

What is it I want? Maybe I want to talk to my little brother about Helene Way.

Terry didn't write a word about our sister. That's so strange. No one looked up to Helene more than Terry. He often dropped in on her at her apartment downtown after school. Maybe it was an unusual relationship. He was a lot younger than her. They often talked for hours, just the two of them. Helene was proud of her brother. I think she liked to show him off to her friends. Her little big thinker. He said when he was twelve that they would get married some day. He and Helene. He was completely taken by his sister. And that was perhaps not so strange. Helene was like Ruth in the Bible. Gentle. Happy. Smart. She was like dad. Strong. And that's why she died. She was eight years older than me, and died a year before my father of leukemia. She was twenty-seven when she died. She had faith enough to move mountains, Helene. That was our sister's goal. In all situations, no matter what she did. She had decided that she should take God at his word. She should put her trust in him, and go in faith. Without fear. Without blood transfusions. That was her own choice. It was only the Jehovah's Witnesses and gloomy sects that were capable of doing something like that. Plus Helene Way. The doctors gave up. I gave up. Mama and father just looked at her. What could they say? Yes, what in the hell could they say? They were gagged. By the Word. «Ask, and you shall receive». «Cast all your troubles before him». «The Lord your God goes before you, and he will fight for you». «Ye of so little faith». And yes, she had received her prophecies. She wasn't going to die. God had a plan for her. She had received a Bible passage. In her heart. While she dreamed one night, God had spoken to her. Judges 6:23 – «Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.» When she woke up, she found the passage in the Bible at once. She wasn't going to die. Amen. No! She died. What happened to that little boy who was going to marry her? What happened to the teenager who looked up to her and loved being with her after school? His sister had sought the kingdom of God first. Terry took second place. That's just what happened, and there was certainly no shame in it. She was a model Christian, a flagship God could only dream about. She almost became a status symbol for mama and dad in the Corinthian Pentecostal church. Naturally, no one would have faulted her if she had put herself in the doctor's hands and given them control. God used doctors to serve him also, after all. But she had shown a faith that no one had ever seen since Joshua and the walls of Jericho. It didn't matter that it crushed my little brother. What is it I want? Maybe I want to talk to my little brother about Helene Way.