

# Nine billion names of god essay



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Renowned British writer and inventor, Arthur C. Clarke is most known for his thrilling stories that bring into play several of the scientific and technological advances of his day and those to come. Many of his stories would have the underlying theme of technology and its relationship with another factor. The *Nine Billion Names of God* published in 1953 demonstrates just this, in which the story's main characters are caught between their logic and that of another group.

Clarke's short story addresses the conflict between technology or science and religion. In addition to the struggle between these two systems, readers can also sense tension between the two groups of individuals, which is seen in several other works of sf. The key feature of this story is the clash of technology (science) and religion. While in many sf pieces both ends are in constant debates about which is better and more beneficial to mankind, this short story takes an ironic turn in which both unite to aid the monks in their search for God's names.

This brings many questions to the reader, in which the future of science and religion are measured as a whole. Technology helps the monks achieve their task much more quickly than manual work would with the same results. The readers must question if in the future both science and religion could learn to work together, side-by-side. Also I must ask how much different are the two, when both are searching for answers to where we come from and what our purpose might be.

As seen in this story both aid in the same search for answers, just through different methods. Compared to other sf pieces such as *The Time Machine* by

H. G Wells where God or religion is not mention expect for technology it acts as a contrast to Clarke's work. Perhaps Clarke envisioned a perfect future where both seamlessly merge together. Another critical question that arises as I read the story is the relationship between different groups of people, and why we are quick to dismiss and judge other if their thoughts and goals differ from ours.

Throughout the story there is a clear division between the worldly and almost cynical computer technicians, which seem to look down on the lamas, which are simpler. The monk's ways are seen as backwards as they are pursuing what seems a pointless quest. Quickly the technicians treat their findings as superstitious nonsense while they are men of logic and science. This same behavior is found in The Time Machine where the time traveler is confronted by the Morlocks and quickly labels them as barbaric ape-like creatures.

Yet oth stories share the irony in which the " primitive" group is the more advanced of the two. The Morlock happen to be much more advanced than the Eloi in every field possible, and lamas turn out to be correct as the stars start to vanish. This theme of judgment brings into question how our society values materialistic objects and appearances over spirituality and how this in effect creates social divisions. As a whole Clarke's short tale brings into perspective many controversial themes of the sf field with a added twist.