

HOBBS COLLEGE LIBRARY



WHY BELIEVE

*Christian Apologetics
for a Skeptical Age*

TAWA J. ANDERSON

HEATH A. THOMAS, *Editor*



Why Believe: Christian Apologetics for a Skeptical Age

Copyright © 2021 by Tawa J. Anderson

Published by B&H Academic

Nashville, Tennessee

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-0877-1298-7

Dewey Decimal Classification: 239

Subject Heading: APOLOGETICS / CHRISTIANITY--
APOLOGETIC WORKS / BELIEF AND DOUBT

THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright
© 1984 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright
© 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman
Foundation. Used by permission.

Printed in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 • 26 25 24 23 22 21

BP



*Lovingly dedicated to our incredible
no-longer-little girl, Alethea Janae.*



Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xv
<i>About the Library</i>	xvii
<i>Introduction: What Is This Book All About, Anyway?</i>	1
Part I. Why Bother	9
1. <i>Who Cares?</i>	11
Why We Should <i>Want</i> and <i>Believe</i> Christianity to Be True	
2. <i>Why Apologeticize?</i>	27
Why Christians Must Provide Reasons for Faith	
What Is Apologetics?	
The Biblical Mandate for Apologetics	
Biblical Examples of Apologetics	
The Contemporary Need for Apologetics	
3. <i>Why Truth?</i>	45
The Existence and Nature of Truth	
The Postmodern Flight from Truth	
The Implications of Relativism	
Defeating Relativism	
What Is Truth?	
Part II. Why God?	65
4. <i>Science</i>	69
Evidence for God's Existence	
Cosmological Arguments	
Design Arguments	
5. <i>Reason</i>	105
Logical Arguments for God's Existence	
Ontological Arguments	
Moral Arguments	

6. <i>Humanity</i>	137
Anthropological Clues for God's Existence	
Religious Experience	
Religious Desire	
Free Will	
Reason	
Part III. Why Jesus?	159
7. <i>The Story</i>	163
Are the Gospels Textually and Historically Reliable?	
Can We Trust the Text? The Textual Reliability of the New Testament Gospels	
8. <i>The Man</i>	205
Who/What Is Jesus of Nazareth?	
Jesus's Titles	
Jesus's Actions	
9. <i>The Fulcrum</i>	239
Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?	
Does the Resurrection Matter?	
Did the Resurrection Happen?	
Part IV. What About . . . ?	261
10. <i>Cross-Examined</i>	263
Answering Common Objections	
The Question of Evil and Suffering	
The Hypocrisy of Many Christians	
The Injustices of the Christian Church	
The Conflict between Science and Faith	
The Exclusivity of Christian Beliefs	
<i>Conclusion: Why Believe?</i>	295
Why We Should Want and Believe Christianity to Be True	
The Heart: Why We Should Want Christianity to Be True	
The Head: Why We Should Believe Christianity to Be True	
<i>Name and Subject Index</i>	301
<i>Scripture Index</i>	311

Introduction: What Is This Book All About, Anyway?

I don't know whether you bought this book, received it as a gift, inherited it as assigned reading, or stumbled across it in a book store. Whichever way, thank you for reading (at least this far). I hope you will continue. To encourage you to do so, I thought it might help to introduce my purpose in writing and who I envision you (my reader) to be.

I hope this book will foster a fruitful conversation about reasons that exist to support religious (specifically Christian) faith. There is a widespread, usually unstated, understanding in Europe and North America that Christian faith is held without supporting reasons, evidence, or argumentation. Strangely, it is not just everyday people who think faith has no reasons. Christians often share that understanding. For everyday people, the apparent dissociation of faith and reason provides motivation to (continue to) avoid or reject religious beliefs. For Christians, that same dissociation can be a source of honor, shame, or mere confusion.

My goal is to draw the spheres of (Christian) faith and (everyday) reason back together. I suggest that Christianity is a reasonable faith—that there is a tremendous confluence of scientific, logical, and historical evidence that points toward the truth of the Christian worldview.

I envision six distinct people reading this book. You may not belong neatly to any of these “categories,” but knowing the types of people I have in mind should help you understand why I write what I do and how I do.

First, I see a *hardened skeptic*. You have never been a religious believer, certainly not a Christian. In your experience, Christians tend to be somewhat weak-minded. You have never encountered a good, let alone persuasive, argument for the existence of God. If this is you, then you probably think my purpose is futile—a chasing after the wind. Read on! I do not presume that you will be persuaded to adopt my beliefs, but I do hope to challenge your perception that Christianity is unreasonable. You are cordially invited to adjudicate my success (and please share your evaluation with me, at tawa.anderson@gmail.com).

Second, I see a *former believer*. You grew up within the church, perhaps were baptized as a Christian, and certainly considered yourself a follower of Jesus. Later, however, possibly as an older teen or young adult, you began to question aspects of the Christian faith. In the midst of your questions and doubts, you found no answers that supported Christianity but much that prompted a move away from the church. Slowly or swiftly, you discarded your Christian beliefs and adopted a skeptical or naturalistic worldview. If this is you, then you probably think there cannot possibly be reasons for supporting Christianity that you would not have encountered before rejecting your faith. I hope that I will surprise you—that you will see that people who deal with questions and doubts like yours *can* find reasons to remain within their faith rather than making the move away. I do not expect to convince or (re-)convert you, but I do hope to present reasons for you to reconsider your deconversion!

Third, I see a *questioning seeker*. You are not a Christian, but you are curious about matters of faith. If good reasons exist to believe that Christianity is true, you would give them serious

consideration. If this is you, then you are probably highly motivated to read onward. Whether or not you come to share my beliefs, I hope my contribution is helpful in your search for truth.

Fourth, I see a *disinterested secularist*. You are not a Christian and do not consider yourself a particularly religious person. You have not really given much thought to questions about the existence of God, the basis of morality, or life after death. If this is you, then you are probably not very motivated to keep reading. Let me gently encourage you to at least consider Chapter 1, where I suggest that we should all care to seek out answers to the big questions of life and propose reasons for desiring Christianity to be true. If, after reading Chapter 1, you are still uninterested, then so be it.

Fifth, I see a *struggling follower*. You are a Christian and quite possibly have been for a very long time, but you sense increasing doubts about your faith. You believe that we should have reasons and evidence for significant beliefs, and you have not encountered any such reasons and evidence that support Christianity. You are not necessarily looking to ditch your faith. But if you cannot see good reasons for continuing to believe, you sense you might be on your way out of the church. If this is you, then I earnestly plead that you carefully read not only *this* book, but also many of the resources I will reference. I pray that you will find much encouragement and support for your faith in these pages.

Sixth, I see a *tentative apologist*. You are a Christian and thoroughly enjoy sharing your faith with friends and neighbors. In your conversations, however, you are often asked to provide evidence and arguments supporting your beliefs. Too frequently, you find yourself unable to articulate reasons, unable to answer specific questions, and unable to respond to particular objections. You are looking for tips and tools that can help you spread a winsome, reasonable Christian faith. If this is you, then I hope you find (at least some of) what

you are looking for in this book. If you do not, then I have failed spectacularly. (Again, please share your evaluation with me—I need to know!)

Whoever you are—you may resemble one of these six imaginary readers, or you may think yourself quite distinct from all of them—I will write, generally, as if you are a tentative apologist. I will seek to set forth reasons that support the faith that you hold dear and to provide resources to help you share those reasons with others.

I contend that the Christian faith is, in Doug Groothuis’s words, “objectively true, rationally compelling and existentially or subjectively engaging.”¹ In the coming pages, I will defend that contention, providing reasons, evidence, and arguments to that end. There are four stages to the cumulative argument that I build, corresponding to the four parts of this book.

First, in part 1 (“Why Bother?”), I argue that we should all be committed to the pursuit of finding true answers to the big questions of life. In particular, we should be motivated to discover whether or not Christianity is true. Chapter 1 (“Who Cares?”) addresses professed disinterest in the truthfulness of Christianity. Here I argue that, regardless of what we currently believe, we should all care deeply about the “big questions of life” and should be particularly motivated to discover whether Christianity provides true answers. Chapter 2 (“Why Apologeticize?”) outlines the nature of apologetics, provides the biblical mandate for giving reasons for Christian faith, and considers the desperate need for a reasoning and reasonable faith in contemporary Western society. In Chapter 3 (“Why Truth?”), I argue that truth exists and provide tools for testing various truth claims. There *are* answers to the big questions of life, even if they may be difficult to *find* and even more difficult to *agree* upon!

¹ Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 24.

Then, in part 2 (“Why God?”), I argue that there are strong reasons to believe that God exists. Everyday people, even Christians, frequently assert that belief in God is at best based on personal experience; at worst it flies in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. I show that this popular perception is woefully ill-informed and that the preponderance of reason and evidence strongly supports the existence of a transcendent, powerful, creative, personal God. In Chapter 4 (“Science”), I articulate a wealth of contemporary scientific evidence that points to a creator who brought the universe into being (the cosmological argument) and fine-tuned it to support the existence and flourishing of living creatures, including humanity, on earth (the teleological or fine-tuning argument). In Chapter 5 (“Reason”), I outline two rational arguments that point to the existence of God. First, I discuss the ontological (ontology = the study of being/existence) argument, which suggests that, given the universally understood conception of God, such a God logically must exist in reality. Second, I identify what I consider to be the most persuasive contemporary clue for God—the moral argument, which shows that human understandings of morality demonstrate the necessity of God. In Chapter 6 (“Humanity”), I suggest that several universal aspects of the human experience (religious experience, transcendent desire, appreciation of beauty, consciousness and free will, and rationality) point strongly toward a divine creator.

Given the existence of objective truth, and the strong reasons to believe that there is a God, we can then move on to ask whether there is good reason to believe that Christianity specifically is true—for that, we need primarily to examine the question of Jesus of Nazareth.

Then in part 3 (“Why Jesus?”), I argue that there is good evidence supporting the Christian belief that Jesus of Nazareth was a divine being—a unique God-man—who died to provide humanity

a means to return to right relationship with God and rose from the dead both to demonstrate his identity as the divine Son of God *and* to confer the gift of eternal life to those who trust in and follow him. Chapter 7 (“The Story”) examines the nature of the New Testament Gospels. Most of what we know or think about Jesus is based on these four books; thus, it is essential to see that we have good reason to trust these accounts. Chapter 8 (“The Man”) shows that Jesus of Nazareth was a unique figure who believed himself to be divine and confirmed his identity through both words and deeds. Chapter 9 (“The Fulcrum”) outlines the crucial events of Easter Sunday. Here I outline the historical evidence (biblical and nonbiblical) that supports the central miracle claim of Christianity: Jesus’s resurrection from the dead. I will argue that the traditional belief that God raised Jesus from the dead is the only satisfactory explanation for the data; it is more reasonable to embrace the risen Jesus than to reject him.

Finally, in part 4 (“What About?”), I respond briefly to some of the most frequently stated objections to Christian faith. Even if one grants the relative strength of the arguments I have made in the first nine chapters, many will insist that there are compelling objections and counterarguments. Chapter 10 (“Cross-Examined”) looks at five reasons often given for *not* believing that Christianity is true: (1) the problem of evil and suffering, (2) the hypocrisy of many Christians (3) injustices perpetrated by the church, (4) the conflict between contemporary science and Christian faith, and (5) the exclusive (narrow) nature of Christian salvation. I will argue that although these objections may involve important insights, they ultimately do not provide a reason to reject Christianity.

In the conclusion (“Why Believe?”), I briefly retrace our steps and suggest that there are good reasons for our *hearts* to *desire* Christianity to be true and for our *heads* to *believe* Christianity to be true.

Introduction: What Is This Book All About, Anyway?

That, in a nutshell, is what I seek to show in these pages. I hope you will take this journey with me, and I trust it will be rewarding and worthwhile. I do not expect to present anything revolutionary; I do not presume to alter your entire worldview; I do not assume you will be persuaded that my arguments are accurate. I do, however, hope that as you engage this little book, whatever your starting point, you will find food for thought and be stimulated to think about reasons for Christian faith that you had not previously acknowledged. Thank you for coming this far with me. I invite you to hop aboard and take the next stage of our journey together.

PART 1

WHY BOTHER

As noted in the introduction, my goal in this book is to suggest that there are good reasons for accepting Christianity as the way, the truth, and the life. But why bother with this kind of a project at all? After all, some people do not care whether Christianity is true; others think it is either impossible and/or unnecessary to present reasons for Christian belief; still others think there is no such thing as “truth” in religion or worldview. So why bother with the task of trying to show that Christianity is true and worth believing?

First, in Chapter 1, I propose that we should *all* care to learn whether Christianity is true. Furthermore, I argue that we should *want Christianity to be true*—that is, the nature of Christianity is such that we should deeply desire its truth. What’s more, I think Christians have a responsibility to provide others with *reasons to think that Christianity is true*. Christian apologetics involves “the rational defense of the Christian worldview as objectively true, rationally compelling and existentially or subjectively engaging.”¹ Chapter 2 is addressed to fellow Christians: feel free to skip this chapter altogether if you are not in that camp! For my Jesus-following friends, I will unpack our apologetic mandate from biblical commands and examples along with insights from our contemporary context.

¹ Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 24. (see intro., n. 1).

A precondition for defending Christianity as “objectively true” is establishing the existence of objective truth. Once upon a time, you could take for granted that virtually everyone you met would acknowledge that truth exists and that we have at least a strong fighting chance of obtaining truth through vigorous effort. In our contemporary culture, that is no longer true (pardon me, that is no longer the case). The concept of truth has fallen on hard times.

So, in Chapter 3, I outline the postmodern flight from truth and provide illustrations of the relativism that increasingly marks Western society. After highlighting some of the implications of relativism, I show why relativism is necessarily false and not worth holding. I close with a discussion of the nature of truth.

Chapter 1. Who Cares? Why We Should *Want* and *Believe* Christianity to Be True

Chapter 2. Why Apologeticize? Why Christians Must Provide Reasons for Faith

Chapter 3. Why Truth? The Existence and Nature of Truth

CHAPTER 1

Who Cares?

Why We Should *Want* and *Believe* Christianity to Be True

I think *all* of us should care to know whether Christianity is true. By *all*, I mean those who live in the contemporary Western world—roughly encompassing Western Europe, North America, and Australasia. Yes, I think people in other parts of the world should care, too, but we in the West have a particularly vested interest in knowing whether Christianity is true. Why? Because much of our legal, political, economic, scientific, and social structure is built upon the foundation of a Christian worldview. Have we built our society upon secure philosophical foundations? Or have we built social castles in the clouds—appealing structures that do not rest on a solid foundation and therefore are susceptible to sudden collapse or disintegration? Have we built our house upon solid rock or shifting sand? We should care to know.

But many, perhaps most, contemporary Westerners are singularly uninterested in knowing whether Christianity is true—indeed, you may be disinterested yourself! The attitude of general disinterest in such religious questions is known as *apathy*.

The Challenge: Atheism

Why are we here? What is the meaning of life? Does God exist? If not, what does his nonexistence mean for us? If yes, can we know God, and what does his existence entail? What is right? What is wrong? How can we live a good (moral) life? How can we live a good (fulfilled, contented) life? What are human beings? Where did we come from? Are we responsible for how we live? Do we have free will? What happens after we die? Why are we so smitten with beauty? Can we know the answers to such questions? Can we know anything at all?

Philosophy, I often argue, is seeking consistent, reasonable answers to the “big questions of life, the universe, and everything.” Central among those big questions of life are existence questions—questions related to the existence (or nonexistence) of God and the implications of religious beliefs for human existence.

Apatheism is a disinclination to care much about religious matters. For an atheist, the big questions of life are relatively unimportant. It is not necessarily that atheists actively disbelieve in God; they simply do not care about the questions related to God’s existence or lack thereof.

Apatheism burst into the public intellectual sphere through Jonathan Rauch’s iconic 2003 essay in *The Atlantic* titled “Let It Be.” In his article, Rauch self-identifies as an apatheist, acknowledging, “I used to call myself an atheist . . . but the larger truth is that it has been years since I really cared one way or another. I’m . . . an apatheist.”¹ Rauch, it seems to me, speaks for a large segment of the North American population that does not care to think about, discuss, or come to conclusions regarding existence questions.

¹ Jonathan Rauch, “Let It Be,” *The Atlantic*, May 2003. Rauch’s article can be read in full at <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2003/05/let-it-be/302726/>.

The obstacle for Christian faith should be obvious. If people do not care about the question to begin with, it is pretty difficult to convince them that *this particular answer* is true and compelling. Consider an analogy. I do not much care about the identity of the greatest baseball player of all time. Imagine that I am at a dinner party with a few people who are passionately debating the relative merits of Babe Ruth, Roger Clemens, Ted Williams, Lou Gehrig, and Cy Young. Someone asks me what I think: which of them is the GOAT (greatest of all time)? I would be hard pressed to answer. Why? Because I simply do not care. My friends can debate and discuss until they're blue in the face; I will probably sit and drink my lemonade with a bemused smirk, wondering at the misplaced passion of these baseball fanatics.

At times, I think this is how Christians are perceived when asking someone in contemporary culture to embrace the truthfulness of Christianity. It's as if you are being asked, Which is the greatest religion in the world? Don't you agree that it's Christianity? Shouldn't you embrace Christian beliefs and practice as your own? Those questions are heard like I hear the baseball questions, Who is the greatest baseball player of all time? Don't you agree that it's Cy Young? Shouldn't you embrace Young as your favorite too? The short answer is, I simply do not care.

So if I present to an atheist chapters 4–6 of this book (arguments for the existence of God) and/or chapters 7–9 (arguments for the deity and resurrection of Jesus), the atheist may sit with a bemused smirk, wondering at the misplaced passion of this religious fanatic. The short answer is, they simply do not care.

And if individuals do not care about the subject or issue being discussed, it will be exceedingly difficult for them to seriously consider the truth claims that others raise.

The atheistic disinterest in religious questions could be the result of mere laziness, or a conviction that religious beliefs are irrelevant and just cause conflict, or some other cause(s) altogether. Although I am interested in understanding and addressing the causes of atheism, for my purposes here, it is more necessary to respond to the atheistic position.

Contra Apatheism: Why We Should Care to Know Whether Christianity Is True

Chances are, if you opened this book in the first place, you already care about the big questions of life. If you do not, you will not likely hang in there for long! But, at the risk of “preaching to the choir,” let me suggest that we should all—Christians and everyday people alike—*care to know whether* Christianity is true. That is, we should give attention to learning what the claims of Christianity are, understanding why people argue that it is true, and discerning whether its claims are actually true. Why should we care about the truthfulness (or lack thereof) of the Christian faith? I see two broad reasons.

The Essential Nature of Existence Questions

The first broad reason has less to do with Christianity specifically and more to do with the importance of a philosophical/religious quest for answers to the big questions of life. The questions introduced above—the meaning of life, the existence of God, life after death, moral questions, the possibility of knowledge, the nature of human beings, among others—are the most central and significant questions we can ask. Insofar as atheism represents an avoidance of these significant questions, atheism is avoiding a critically important aspect of our human nature and existence! We can and should encourage one another to think deeply about the big questions of life—in other words, *not* to be atheists.

The seventeenth-century French mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal had powerful thoughts in this respect. Pascal, born in 1623, was religiously apathetic in his teens and early twenties. He self-identified throughout as a Catholic Christian, but his faith had little to no impact on his life, and he was unconcerned with matters of religious truth. In November 1654, however, Pascal experienced a radical conversion to Christ, which he recorded in “The Memorial,” a piece of parchment sewn into his overcoat and carried with him until his death in 1662.² After his conversion, Pascal embarked on a twofold mission: (1) to compose a great treatise explaining and defending the reasonability and winsomeness of the Christian faith; and (2) to demonstrate to his upper-class French peers that their apatheism was not a virtue but a vice of the gravest order.

One of the oldest religious questions, and certainly one of the central existence questions (EQs), is, What happens when we die?³ Apatheism, remember, is an indifference and lack of concern for such EQs. So apatheists, as a general rule, will not care much about how they (or anyone else) answer the question of humanity’s post-mortem faith. Pascal has incisive and insightful words for someone who is apathetic about what will happen to him when he dies. It is worth quoting Pascal at some length:

² Blaise Pascal, “The Memorial,” in *The Mind on Fire: An Anthology of the Writings of Blaise Pascal*, ed. James M. Houston (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1989), 41–42.

³ The question of life after death is the first philosophical question I remember asking in my childhood. After my great-grandma Ross’s death in 1983, I asked my mother on the way home from violin lessons, “Where is Great-Grandma now?” After a short pause, my mother answered, “Nowhere. When we die, that’s it.” (Or something to that general effect.) I recall thinking, as an eight-year-old twerp, “Well, that sucks, doesn’t it?” Thus was born a promising career in philosophy.

The immortality of the soul is something of such vital importance to us, affecting us so deeply, that one must have lost all feeling not to care about knowing the facts of the matter. All our actions and thoughts must follow such different paths, according to whether there is hope of eternal blessings or not, that the only possible way of acting with sense and judgment is to decide our course in the light of this point, which ought to be our ultimate objective.

. . . And that is why, amongst those who are not convinced [that there is life after death], I make an absolute distinction between those who strive with all their might to learn and those who live without troubling themselves or thinking about it.

I can feel nothing but compassion for those who sincerely lament their doubt . . . and who . . . make their search their principal and most serious business.

But as for those who spend their lives without a thought for this final end of life . . . I view them very differently.

This negligence in a matter where they themselves, their eternity, their all are at stake, fills me more with irritation than pity; it astounds and appalls me; it seems quite monstrous to me. . . . We ought to have this [passion to know the answer] from principles of human interest and self-esteem. . . .

Nothing is so important to man as his state: nothing more fearful than eternity. Thus the fact that there exist men who are indifferent to the loss of their being and the peril of an eternity of wretchedness is against nature. With everything else they are quite different; they fear the most trifling things, foresee and feel them; and the same man who spends so many days and nights in fury and despair at losing some office or at some imaginary affront to his honour is the very one who knows that he is going to lose everything through death but feels neither anxiety nor emotion. It is a monstrous thing to see one and the same heart at once so sensitive to minor things and so strangely insensitive to the greatest. It is an incomprehensible spell, a supernatural torpor.⁴

The question of life after death is among the most significant of all EQs and is a central question in all worldviews (religious and nonreligious alike). The atheist does not care to consider the content or the manner of afterlife belief—and that, I propose, is a grave (pardon the pun) mistake.

We should *care* whether or not Christianity is true, because Christianity offers a unique and powerful answer to the age-old question of life after death. If Christianity is true, then this life is the gateway to eternity, and how we relate to God in this life determines how and where we will spend eternal life. If Christianity is not true, then what happens after we die (heaven, hell, or something else) is irrelevant. But what Christianity is not and cannot be is irrelevant in this regard! Either there is heaven and hell, or there is not! Either eternity is predicated upon our relationship to Jesus Christ, or

⁴ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. A. J. Krailsheimer, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin, 1995), Pensée 427.

it is not! The answer to the questions matters. Indeed it is (as Pascal argued) of the utmost importance!

So one ought to care to know if Christianity is true, because the answers to the fundamental questions of “life, the universe, and everything” matter supremely. But there is a second broad reason we ought to care to know if Christianity is true: the foundations of our society are built upon a Christian view of reality.

Western Civilization Is Built upon the Foundations of a Christian Worldview

There are seven elements of typical Western societies (known collectively as Western civilization) that are built upon the philosophical and theological foundations of a biblical Christian worldview. That fact does not make Christianity true, not by any stretch! But it should provide motivation to care about the truth value of those foundations. If the foundations are found to be false, then perhaps we need to question the elements of society built upon those foundations—if not, at the very least, we need to find an alternative means of grounding or justifying these elements of society. So here are seven elements of modern Western civilization that are dependent (historically and/or ideologically) upon the theological and philosophical foundations provided by Christianity.⁵

⁵ I hasten to add, in the seven elements of society that follow, that I am not pretending that everyone agrees with me! I am presenting these elements of Western society in fairly short order and not interacting with scholars who might dispute their basis in a Christian worldview. Please understand, first, that there is a lot of debate about these matters and, second, that I am aware of that debate but remain convinced that these elements of our society did grow out of a Christian worldview.

Some of the philosophical foundations of Western civilization (e.g., democracy, capitalism) could potentially be supported or justified by other worldviews; in those cases, Christianity serves only as the historical source of our civilizational structure. Other elements of our society (e.g., recognition of universal human rights, modern science), it seems to me, can be adequately grounded only by a Christian worldview;

First, Christianity teaches that the natural order is created by a rational God and is both regular (ordered, lawlike) and knowable. These theological foundations are necessary for the development of modern science.⁶

Second, Christianity teaches that the physical world (the natural order) is created by God and is created with intrinsic goodness and objective reality. As such, the natural world is seen by Christians as both beautiful and morally good and therefore worthy of being protected and nurtured.⁷

Third, Christianity teaches that all human beings are created in the image of God, a doctrine that has several significant implications.

- a. Because God is a rational being, human beings are also created with trustworthy reason. As such, we can use our reasoning capacities (and sensory perception) to learn about the world around us, and we can trust the deliverances of our reason.
- b. Accordingly, we can come to know things truly about the world (and the world's Creator, incidentally), *and* we can teach those things accurately to others. That is, education is both possible and worthwhile.
- c. More significantly, if all human beings are created in the image of God, then all human persons are, as the United

in those cases, Christianity is both the historical source of and the necessary philosophical foundation for modern social structures.

⁶ See, e.g., Nancy R. Pearcey and Charles B. Thaxton, *The Soul of Science: Christian Faith and Natural Philosophy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), esp. chaps. 1–5; Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), chap. 2: “God’s Handiwork: The Religious Origins of Science.”

⁷ See, e.g., Mitch Hescoc and Paul Douglas, *Caring for Creation: The Evangelical’s Guide to Climate Change and a Healthy Environment* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2016).

States' Declaration of Independence puts it, "created equal, [and] endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights." Christianity therefore provides the necessary philosophical and theological foundation for the development of universal human rights.⁸ Although Christians have certainly not always lived as if this were true, it is worth noting that the Christian worldview alone provides a sufficient ground upon which universal human rights can be articulated.

- d. Along these lines, it is Christianity's doctrine of the *imago Dei* (image of God) that provided the required philosophical and theological basis for the antislavery movement, both in the ancient world (the first–fifth centuries, Roman Empire) and in the modern European and American contexts.⁹
- e. Similarly, the brotherhood of humanity—the understanding that we are all created in the image of God—provides the foundation for social welfare and charity, cornerstones of modern liberal democratic states.
- f. Finally, more broadly, our creation in the image of God establishes a responsibility within Christian theology to have a special concern and care for the most vulnerable members of society, including prisoners, the poor, widows, orphans, the mentally and physically disabled, the unborn, and the aged.

Fourth, Christendom gives birth to modern democracy. If God is the supreme sovereign, then human rulers have only derivative legitimacy and authority. Given the correlative doctrine of creation in the

⁸ See, e.g., Jacques Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy & The Rights of Man and the Natural Law* (1944; repr., San Francisco: Ignatius, 2011), 65–138.

⁹ See, e.g., Stark, *For the Glory of God*, chap. 4: "God's Justice: The Sin of Slavery."

image of God, rulers then have limited power and are required biblically to exercise that power in the best interests of their subjects.¹⁰

Fifth, Christianity provides a foundation for private property, with the balance of God's ultimate ownership of all things. As such, Western society recognizes the rights of private citizens to own property and accumulate wealth, while rejecting our absolute or final ownership of anything.¹¹

Sixth, Christianity historically gives birth to modern capitalism, which, despite its abuses, provides the engine for economic growth and prosperity that has raised billions of humans out of poverty.¹²

Seventh, Christianity teaches that there is a transcendent moral lawgiver—a personal, divine moral being—who alone can serve as a sufficient foundation for both objective morality and the legitimate rule of law. On the one hand, objective moral values and duties require a transcendent moral standard, something beyond human beings, that serves as the “rule” or example by which our moral beliefs and actions can and should be judged. On the other hand, the legitimate rule of law requires the existence of a divine being who rightly serves as the transcendent moral authority *and* judge, such that the rule of law is right not just because of the governmental might behind it but because it adheres to the transcendent moral law.

Western civilization as we know it is based on all seven of these foundational pillars. Perhaps you think one or more of these pillars counts against Western civilization; that is, perhaps you think private property is a bad idea. So be it. Nonetheless, Western society is (historically and/or philosophically) built upon these pillars; if you

¹⁰ See, e.g., Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy*, 3–64.

¹¹ See, e.g., Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: Moving from Affluence to Generosity*, rev. and updated ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 97–101.

¹² See, e.g., Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (New York: Touchstone, 1982), esp. 13–186; 333–60.

live in Western society, I suggest you at least care whether or not the philosophical foundations for these pillars are true. As such, we all ought to care to know if Christianity is true.

Heart: Why We Should Want Christianity to Be True

Atheists contend that it is appropriate not to care about the answers to the big questions of life. I have suggested that we have two broadly compelling reasons to care deeply about such questions. First, these questions lie at the very core of human existence. To fail to care about fundamental philosophical questions is to fail to be fully human. Second, our Western civilization is built upon Christian answers to many of these significant questions of life: as such, we should care whether the philosophical foundations of our society are true.

But we can and should go further. I also suggest that we should *want* Christianity to *be true*. That is, regardless of what we actually believe right now, we should personally desire that Christianity be found to provide true answers to the big questions of life. Why? Simply put, Christianity provides a thoroughly satisfying and desirable worldview.

In seven areas we can see the winsomeness of a Christian worldview that prompts us to desire its truth. I am not arguing that Christianity is the only worldview that can support *each* of these seven areas. But I think Christianity alone can support *all seven*.

First, Christianity provides objective and knowable moral values and duties. As we will see in Chapter 5, we all tend to live as if there are objective moral values and duties, even if our worldview explicitly or implicitly rules out the existence of objective morality. There is, then, a deep-seated intuition that objective moral values exist; Christianity provides us with a foundation for such objective morality. Furthermore, Christianity provides the foundation for

those moral values and duties to be *known*. On one hand, we can discover significant moral truths through our investigation of God's natural created order—a discipline known as natural law ethics. On the other hand, we can discover significant moral truths by studying God's divine self-revelation in Scripture. From these combined sources, we can develop a holistic and robust moral system of objective moral values and duties.

Second, Christianity provides the platform for an objective and knowable physical reality. We all, I submit, desire to know reality; if Christianity is true, then there is an objective reality that exists, and God has created us with trustworthy sensory and cognitive faculties that can come to know truths about that objective physical reality. Some worldviews deny either the objectivity (extreme post-modernism) or knowability (much of Hinduism and Buddhism) of objective reality; other worldviews are incapable of grounding the trustworthiness of our senses and reason in rightly knowing reality (atheism).

Third, Christianity provides for an objective and transcendent value to human life (and other aspects of creation). If Christianity is true, then each and every human person has innate value, dignity, and worth. No person is insignificant, regardless of how young or old, powerful or powerless, rich or poor, famous or unknown, healthy or sick. Some worldviews elevate some human persons over others (textbook Hinduism) or implicitly label all persons as equally insignificant (atheism).

Fourth, Christianity provides for an objective and transcendent purpose and meaning in human life. Other worldviews might enable us to construct proximate meaning in our lives and chart our own paths that create purpose for ourselves. Christianity, however, declares that there is a meaning and purpose for all human life and invites us to discover that purpose in Christ.

Fifth, Christianity provides a basis for the possibility of temporal and eternal forgiveness for wrongdoing. On the one hand, given the grace and forgiveness of God, most radically expressed through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, Christianity provides the offer of eternal forgiveness for one's own wrongdoing. On the other hand, the reality and depth of divine forgiveness supplies both motivation and mandate for temporal forgiveness. We can forgive others as God has forgiven us, and we can ask others to forgive us as we seek to make things right with them. Christianity, then, provides a way out of the human drive for vengeance as well as an escape from self-loathing for wrongdoing.

Sixth, Christianity guarantees the reality of life after death, with three significant implications.

- a. We are invited to enjoy eternal life in heaven, an unending existence of paradise, exploration, joy, and worship. Even archskeptical Michael Shermer, in a 2012 dialogue with Gary Habermas about life after death, acknowledged (and I paraphrase), "Well of course I want the Christian vision of life after death to be true! Eternal bliss, peace, and unending life! Who wouldn't want that?"¹³
- b. The Christian afterlife offers a lastingness to earthly relationships. It is not that our relationships will continue in heaven precisely as they are on earth, but we are promised a familiarity and continuity in the afterlife that makes earthly relationships even more meaningful.

¹³ Michael Shermer, "There Is No Life after Death." *Is There Life after Death?* The 2012 Greer-Heard Point-Counterpoint Forum. April 13–14, 2012 at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. See Shermer's "Opening Speech," 0:55–1:10. Shermer goes on to insist (correctly) that his desire for something to be true does not make that something true.

- c. Christianity also offers the means for postmortem justice, the righting of earthly wrongs after this life is over. Accordingly, those who suffer wrongs in this life can have those wrongs righted by God; those who have callously perpetrated wrongs upon others in this life will pay for their wrongdoing. A naturalistic worldview spectacularly fails to establish any semblance of eternal or transcendent justice: those who suffer in this life have no hope for anything better or further. As such, we should desire for the Christian picture of life after death to be true.

Seventh, Christianity offers the fulfillment of a core human desire: to know and to be known by God in an ultimate divine/human relationship.

Christianity offers a vision of life that satisfies the deepest yearnings of the human heart.¹⁴ We can embrace and know objective morality and physical reality; we can embrace and find objective and transcendent value, meaning, and purpose in human life; we can experience divine and temporal forgiveness for wrongdoing; we can receive eternal life; and we can know and be known by the majestic creator and Lord of all that is. Indeed, it seems to me that we should all deeply desire for Christianity to be true.

Head: Why We Should Believe Christianity to Be True

But facts do not care about our feelings. Perhaps you agree that you should (and perhaps do) *want* Christianity to be true, but a desire for Christianity to be true does not *make* Christianity *be* true. I might

¹⁴ For more on this front, see Clifford Williams, *Existential Reasons for Belief in God: A Defense of Desires & Emotions for Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), esp. chaps. 1–3, 8–9; and Gregory E. Ganssle, *Our Deepest Desires*:

desperately want it to be true that I am a world-famous hockey player; but no matter how zealously I desire that to be true, it simply is not going to be true! Passion and fanaticism do not create truth.

Perhaps our hearts should *want* Christianity to be true. But is there reason for the head to follow the heart and *believe* Christianity to be true? In a nutshell, yes: logic, evidence, and rational arguments point to the truth of the Christian worldview. I will endeavor to provide some of those reasons in chapters 4–9. Read on!

Recommended Resources for Further Exploration

Ganssle, Gregory E. *Our Deepest Desires: How the Christian Story Fulfills Human Aspirations*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017.

Maritain, Jacques. *Christianity and Democracy & The Rights of Man and the Natural Law*. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2011.

Pascal, Blaise. *Pensées*. Translated by A. J. Krailsheimer. New York: Penguin, 1995.

Stark, Rodney. *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003.

How the Christian Story Fulfills Human Aspirations (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017).