

A Faith Worthy of our Questions

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West Side Church of Christ
Searcy, Arkansas
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Scripture Reading

“The next day Moses took his place to judge the people. People were standing before him all day long, from morning to night. When Moses’ father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, ‘What’s going on here? Why are you doing all this, and all by yourself, letting everybody line up before you from morning to night?’ Moses said to his father-in-law, ‘Because the people come to me with questions about God.’” (Exodus 18:13-15 MSG)

OUTLINING THE SERIES

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything *worthy of praise*, think about these things. (Philippians 4:8 ESV)

If anything is worthy of praise, surely God is. Trust in God is. The faith once for all delivered to the saints is. The God I have described from this pulpit for the last 9 weeks—the God who is good, holy, faithful, and true, self-sacrificing and life-transforming. The God I see in Jesus Christ who loved me, and gave himself for me. The one to whom the angels in Revelation declare “you alone are worthy.”

But why should I believe it in the first place? It sounds great. But how do I know it’s true? If you grew up surrounded by faith, it is quite common to go through a period of serious doubt, where you ask yourself “is what I was led to believe really what I *should* believe?” I won’t ask for a show of hands, but I imagine several in this audience can speak of their own wilderness wanderings at key points in their life. Or perhaps you have a child, a grandchild, a spouse, or a close personal friend who once seemed to be on the same page but have gone their own way. And it makes you wonder. Is what I believe really true? Why do people leave faith? It could be for a variety of reasons, just as there are a variety of reasons people come to faith in the first place. People come with hope to answer their lingering questions, seeking something to satisfy their longings, and to help them make sense of their world. People often leave because they

don't feel like they can ask their questions, or never quite see how faith connects to their longings, or people

Today we begin a new series: “A Worthy Faith.”

Next week when we will have so many of our guests with us, I plan to talk about how Jesus Christ answers our deepest longings—the things every human being really, really wants, in a sermon titled “A Faith worthy of our desires.” But this morning, to kick off our series, I want to acknowledge the hard questions. I want to invite serious challenge; I want to court great difficulty; the sermon this morning is titled “A Faith worthy of our questions.”

My favorite kind of apologetics is “negative.” That is, instead of offering 5 reasons why you should believe...most of the time I enjoy letting the gospel do its own work of convicting. But negative apologetics is moving the cobwebs and tumbleweeds, pushing back the barriers that we erect that keep us from hearing the gospel. Instead of offering reasons to have faith, this kind of approach says, “tell me again why faith is not an option for you?”

NO NEED FOR GOD

Reason #1 often given is simply this: “Isn't religion outdated?” Sure, there was a time back in the dark ages when we needed angels to push planets and we needed a sun god to shine down, and a water god to send rain. But now we have discovered the water cycle and Kepler's law of planetary motion. It's the silly, superstitious, unintelligent, backwards people who need a crutch to make sense of their sad, sorry lives that grow up into adulthood and still value ghost-believing. Right?

On the surface, there seems to be reasons to support that claim. The Pew Research conducted two massive research surveys—one in 2007 and another in 2014. The results of those studies shows that that the percentage of Americans “who say they believe in God, pray daily and regularly go to church” declined in all three categories. While those numbers declined, the “nones” (those checking the religious choice box labeled “none of the above”) became the fastest growing group of Americans listed on the survey. And this group is primarily made up of Millennials.¹ This study has been passed around Facebook and seems to be proof positive that belief is decline. And what about silly superstitions? We sure have blazed some might trails in the realms of science in the last 200 years, reaching unparalleled heights. And if you go on YouTube or check out the best-seller shelf, you'll find atheist philosophers, atheist neuroscientists, atheist

¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/>

biologists, and atheist historians saying “once we freed ourselves from the dark ages of religious superstition and embrace an Enlightened view of the world, we were able to finally make progress. We now know where water comes from, and how the planets move.

You do know that the discoverer of the modern theory of the water cycle—Bernard Palissy was a Christian—even imprisoned for his beliefs? And the Kepler of Kepler’s law of planetary motion? Well, just read his biography: “Throughout his life, Kepler was a profoundly religious man. All his writings contain numerous references to God, and he saw his work as a fulfillment of his Christian duty to understand the works of God.”² And what about that notion that we have advanced by freeing ourselves of religious notions? In the last 60 years, there has been a renaissance in ivy-league philosophy departments where not only did they come to have philosophy of religion professors, and majors, but the heads of these departments were dedicated Christians. This was in large part due to a wave of brilliant philosophers such as Alvin Plantinga & Richard Swinburne. You can find some of the most-cited, world-class professors and authors in a wide variety of fields, holding the most prestigious chairs at the most renown universities in the world who are men and women of deep and abiding faith. In Mathematics, consider John Polkinghorne or John Lennox; in history and the social sciences, consider Charles Taylor. When I studied at Cambridge, my professor Janet Soskice was herself a college convert. She attended Cornell and had thought Christians were the befuddled masses who couldn’t read a book to save their life. But she was dumbfounded to discover that—hands-down—her classmates told her the smartest teacher on the faculty, with the brightest mind, was Norman Malcolm, the philosopher who was also a dedicated Christian. In his book, *The Last Word*, Thomas Nagel wrote, “I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers.”³ But the real genius of religion is that it speaks to the brightest minds in the highest echelons, and to the common man who just wants to live a good life and be a good person. It offers hope to every strata in every generation in every era in every nation.

Those American survey numbers can be misleading. “A modest decline” of those believing in God, saying prayers, or going to church, and “a rapid rise” of those with no connection to any organized religious faith hides some information. Such as the fact that the number of Americans claiming to believe in God dropped by only 3 percentage points in the 7-year gap between studies, from 93% to 89% (still a dramatically high number). And a follow up asked if they were “absolutely certain” God exists, and the

² <https://mathshistory.st-andrews.ac.uk/Biographies/Kepler/#:~:text=Throughout%20his%20life%2C%20Kepler%20was,understand%20the%20works%20of%20God.>

³ Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 130.

numbers were 8% lower than before—which is as much a comment on the problem of certainty and how we talk about knowing things as it is about one’s religious makeup. And those who pray every day and attend religious services regularly? Those numbers dropped by “statistically insignificant margins.”⁴ And what about that 25% of the American adult population that is unaffiliated with organized religion? For reasons I’ll get to in this series, that tells me a lot about a modern cultural critique of a la-ze-faire culturally inherited religious background. But in almost all of these cases, we are talking about *inherited* religious views that are questioned, jettisoned, or held at bay as much as anything else inherited by a generation that doesn’t want to rush into being just like their parents. But when you turn your sites away from inherited religion to *chosen* religion, the data is astounding. And it helps to look outside our country to see it.

This morning there are more Jesus believers attending church in China than in all of the Christianized nations of Europe combined. When you zoom out a bit further to include all of East Asia (such as China, Korea, and Japan), look at the meteoric rise of Christian faith. In 1970, there were just over 11 million professed believers in Christ making up just 1% of the population. Now, there are over 170 million professed believers in Christ, which is over 10% of the population. Let’s move to Africa. A century ago there were 12 million believers on the whole continent; today there are 630 million of them, or almost 50% of the continent!⁵ And that’s just Christianity. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks said that “the twenty-first century will be more religious than the twentieth.”⁶ It will look different at the end of the century than it does now. Islam will continue its rapid rise, and there will be far more Christians in sub-Saharan Africa than anywhere else in the world.⁷ But religion is not and will not be going away any time soon.

But why? Well, there are all sorts of reasons. In terms of pure numbers, religious people have more kids. And that’s actually a deeply important point: religious people have a greater trend of respecting life-long relationships in which children are desired and raised with a sense of inherent value greater than the many things that keep people from seeing family as a primary good. But in any respect, religious people will continue to breed more and more people raised in religious homes, while secularism with its emphasis on individuality will lead to lower birth rates. But that’s a minor point.⁸

⁴ <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/>

⁵ Mark Noll, *From Every Tribe and Nation: A Historian’s Discovery of the Global Christian Story* (Baker Academic, 2014), pp. 22 & 130. Cited in Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God*, p. 26.

⁶ Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Not In God’s Name: Confronting Religious Violence* (New York: Schocken Books, 2015), p. 18. Cited in Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God*, p. 27.

⁷ Sarah Pulliam Bailey, “The World Is Expected to Become More Religious—Not Less,” *Washington Post*, April 24, 2015.

⁸ See Jonathan Sacks & Timothy Keller.

We are the most advanced civilization in the history of the world. Did you know the chief mode of transportation 200 years ago was the chief mode of transportation 2000 years ago. And we went from the horse to the rocket ship in just two centuries. We have more information at our disposal and greater technology at our fingertips than ever before. The average person understands the basics of chemistry and genetics better than experts who lived not that long ago, and thus we have no need for any further explanation or any overarching system to make sense of it all. And what is the result? We are sick, scared, emotionally drained, in broken after broken after broken relationships, in a society that appears to be coming apart at the seams. We still stand in need of hope, purpose, moral guidance, the fulfillment of justice or even agreement on what in the world that is. The limits of secular reason, the lack of secular fulfillment, and our everyday experiences that cry out for a meaning secularism simply doesn't offer are just some of the reasons why religion will continue to grow. It offers what secularism hasn't and can't possibly provide.

Perhaps that's why the *Washington Post* ran an article in 2015 titled “The world is expected to be more religious—not less.” And in this work, Jack Goldstone, a professor of public policy at George Mason University remarked, “Sociologists jumped the gun when they said the growth of modernization would bring a growth of secularization and unbelief.” “That is not what we're seeing,” said Goldstone; “People want and need religion.”⁹

And even if all of that weren't true—why would that be a reason to reject it? I take it that people who point to the rise of atheistic humanism out of what they call the “dark ages” where everybody believed in God is considered a badge of honor and something good? If you so value the idea of the righteous minority, why should it matter to you at all whether religious belief has numbers behind it?

I NEED FACTS, NOT FAITH

Reason #2 often given is simply this: “Aren't believers more interested in faith than facts?” I'd like to answer this in three ways. First, I want to say no; then I want to say, well, maybe. Then I want to say yes, and so do you.

First, the no. In my experience, Christianity seems to be one of the most open games in town! The gathered church—the people of God—include people with dramatically different views on a wide range of issues, topics, and ideas; but we are united in our

⁹ Sarah Pulliam Bailey, “The World Is Expected to Become More Religious—Not Less,” *Washington Post*, April 24, 2015. Accessed October 18, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/04/24/the-world-is-expected-to-become-more-religious-not-less/>

loving surrender to Jesus Christ as the purpose-maker for our lives. There are absolutely some things you can't disagree about to be in the faith. But that's true in any organization, any system, or any relationship. “Ok, honey, let's get married. And lets not be old fuddy duddies who think you have to agree on every little thing!” “Oh I know, lets love each other even when we don't see eye to eye.” Absolutely! So, I don't really believe in this idea of “marriage fidelity” or “not stabbing my neighbor if I'm upset with him.” Relationship over.

Everyone has fundamentals. So do we. And I think if you look at any dictionary entry for “Christianity”, or the table of contents for just about any standard textbook on what Christians believe, you'll find the 7 ones of Ephesians 4: that we believe in one God, one Lord Jesus, one Spirit, we believe in the church and the forgiveness of sins, including the church practices of baptism and the Lords Supper, the shared faith of his vicarious death and powerful resurrection, and the shared hope of his glorious return and life with him forever. Those are the central truths of the Christian faith. It's what it means to believe “what Christians believe.”

But Christians can and do disagree about a whole host of other things. We believe in God's Spirit, but we don't all agree on precisely how he works in the world. Great Christian thinkers have written great Christian works arguing multiple views on that. We believe in the supper of the Lamb but aren't all on the same page about how exactly Christ is represented in the elements. I've seen some powerful cases for multiple views that are not easily dismissed. We believe God is the creator of all things—that is fundamental, since everything ultimately derives its existence from God; but how and when he made the world has never been a topic of agreement by every believer; the Christian is free to search for the best possible answer—reading the best stuff out there; and finding the best answer you can on all these interesting questions only helps us understand the works of God better. We believe the Bible imparts to us a word from the Living God, but there are diverse viewpoints on how to read and apply its teachings, and I find something new and interesting—a viewpoint I had not considered before—almost every day; and chasing after truth may make me change my mind on a given passage, but that doesn't make me an unfaithful Christian, but a better one! Christians are not afraid of discovery. When I hear people say Christians won't ask the hard questions, I wonder who they are talking about? Ironically, when it comes to atheism, on some of these questions, there's only one acceptable answer! To give any credence to the mystical in the Lord's Supper, or the presence of any spirits, or the possibility that God has revealed his will through Scripture or any means, or to question the reigning scientific theories in any respect can get you banned from ever writing in a journal again. But I know believers on virtually every side of virtually every issue outside of those core beliefs that define the essence of the Christian faith. They aren't all right—they can't all be right. And I want to study every one of those and I want to be as

accurate as I can be because I value truth and knowledge. But can atheists say that? Can agnostics say that? That they have members of their group expressing thoughts all along the spectrum on such a variety of issues?

I told you my first answer is “no”, but my second answer is “maybe.” Facts by themselves are meaningless. If you find a coin or a broken piece of pottery deep in the ground, what you are holding in your hand is an arti-fact. But it’s not really the gathered matter of copper or clay that matters; it’s the story behind them that gives them significance. When people go to war and die for their flag, I promise you nobody ever dies for a piece of cloth; they fight and die for what that piece of cloth represents to them, for the story they live by represented by that piece of cloth. We don’t live by or die for facts; we live and die for stories—narratives that make facts and artifacts meaningful. Christians believe three men died on Golgotha one fateful afternoon. That’s three facts. But what was happening to the cosmos through God’s actions involving the one in the middle is described by Paul not as “a guy got killed” but as “God was reconciling the cosmos to himself, breaking down the middle wall of partition that separates people from one another and that separated heaven and earth. God was ripping a hole in the skies that will never be mended because of what happened that afternoon.”

You might think that to be silly language. But don’t you see—there is a reason the creative genius J. R. R. Tolkein’s was also a dedicated Christ-follower: the grander the truth, the grander the language and grander our need for options to speak of, relate to, and understand that truth. C. S. Lewis was not yet a believer when he told Tolkein, “how can you believe the Bible stories of God reconciling the world in the death of Jesus—that is the language of myth!” And Tolkein replied, “Of course it is! The greatest truths can only be described in language like that. To think religious not to think less or more simply; it’s to think more grand.

My first answer was no. My second was maybe. My third answer is, well, yes—we desire and value faith, and so do you.

In 1998, Christian philosopher and apologist William Lane Craig met Oxford chemist and atheist Peter Atkins in debate. Atkins said, “Science is omnipotent” (which means, science contains all that we know, all that we can know, all that we will ever know). He then turned to Dr. Craig and said, “Do you deny that science can account for everything?” And William Lane Craig said this:

Yes, I do deny that science can account for everything. I think there are a good number of things that can’t be scientifically proven but we are all rational to accept. Let me list 5:

Logic and mathematical truths cannot be proven by science. Science presupposes logic and math; so to try to prove them by science would be arguing in a circle.

Metaphysical truths like “there are other minds other than my own,” or that the external world is real, or that the past was not created 5 minutes ago with an appearance of age are rational beliefs that cannot be scientifically proven.

Ethical beliefs about statements of value are not accessible by the scientific method. You can’t show by science whether the Nazi scientists in the camps did anything evil as opposed to the scientists in Western democracies.

Aesthetic judgments, number 4, cannot be accessed by the scientific method because the beautiful, like the good, cannot be scientifically proven.

And finally, most remarkably, would be science itself. Science cannot be justified by the scientific methods. Science is permeated with unproveable assumptions. For example, in the special theory of relativity, the whole theory hinges on the assumption that the speed of light is constant in a one-way direction between any two points A and B. But that strictly cannot be proven. We simply have to assume that in order to hold to the theory.

None of these beliefs can be scientifically proven and yet they are accepted by all of us!¹⁰

Some of that sounded academic and technical. But don’t we sense this is true in our everyday, ordinary experiences? In 2015, the New York Times ran an op-ed column titled “The Enduring Hunt for Personal Value.” The entire reading audience was encouraged to comment online. Someone named “Casey K” did just that, and wrote this:

When the Hubble space telescope pointed to a black spot in the sky about the size of an eraser head for a week it found 30,000 galaxies over 13 billion years old with many trillions of stars and many many more trillions of infrared planets. So how significant are you? . . . You are not a unique snowflake, you are not special, you are just another piece of decaying matter on the compost pile of this world. Nothing of who you are and what you will do in the short time you are

¹⁰ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vnjNbe5lyE&ab_channel=UniversityofNotreDame

here will matter. Everything short of that realization is vanity. So celebrate life in every moment, admire its wonders, and love without reservation.¹¹

For the first 90% of that quote, Casey K gives a thoroughly materialistic viewpoint. You are nothing. Your objective value is nothing. And the meaning you contribute to the world is nothing. But then he adds a final sentence that says life is worth celebrating, things like beauty should be admired, and love is real, meaningful, and ought to be pursued. But nothing—none of those facts as he presents them gives any reason at all to accept the last sentence. Why would life be something to celebrate? Why should “wonders” be admired? Why should love be considered something of value? And can how can you tell others what they ought to do in a world that gives us no oughts and certainly gives you no right to demand any oughts from me?

It doesn't work. Every one—every one—operates with a system of beliefs—a “faith” if you will—in something that comes before all facts. We all use some system of belief to interpret facts, to weigh them, and to apply them. We all are people of faith. It's a question of which faith we will adopt.

SUFFERING IS AN OBVIOUS PROBLEM FOR GOD

Reason #3 often given is simply this: “Isn't the existence of pain, evil, and suffering a slam dunk case against the existence of an all-powerful loving God?”

Actually, no. In the world of philosophy, the idea that the existence of suffering can be reconciled with the existence of God is almost universally acknowledged. We have a Christian philosopher to thank for that, a man by the name of Alvin Plantinga. He offered his case almost a half-century ago and it has overwhelmingly been accepted by philosophers of religion. It basically said this: if you look in your tent and don't see a St. Bernard, its reasonable to assume there is no St. Bernard in your tent. They are big, obvious, and can't be missed. But if you look in your tent for a tiny, tiny insect that is virtually unseeable with the naked eye, and can't see it, that is no good reason to conclude there can't be one in your tent. And the possibility that some presence of evil, or pain, or suffering might possibly be used for good, or to bring about good, or as part of an overarching plan which (when seen from the grandest perspective) is good, is enough to conclude that it is at least possible for a good God to allow evil, pain, or suffering in the world. That's hardly even up for debate in the academic study of religious philosophy these days.

¹¹ “Casey K.,” commenting on Tony Schwartz, “The Enduring Hunt for Personal Value,” New York Times, May 1, 2015, www.nytimes.com/2015/05/02/business/dealbook/the-enduring-hunt-for-personal-value.html?_r=0. Quoted in Keller, Making Sense of God, p. 42.

But what about in our everyday life? You’ve heard it. Maybe you’ve felt it. If I saw someone hurting and had the power to stop the hurting, I’d do it. “If God doesn’t do that, then he must not exist, or he must be the kind of God I wish didn’t.”

I beg to differ. We could start with the dentist. If someone says “no one who wishes my good could possibly encourage, endorse, or take part in my pain, you could respond as C. S. Lewis does when he said, “then you’ve obviously never been to the dentist.” Sometimes pain—even great pain—is on the path to healing. And we seek it for the good that will come after it. But even more than that, the pain itself is sometimes necessary for the good to result. It is my ability to feel the pain on my fingertips when I touch a hot stove that keeps me from burning off my hand. And some of the greatest successes in your life, some of the most profound and meaningful moments for you, have come through significant trials, challenges, and difficulties.

And really, when it comes to really big problems of evil—like massacres, genocides, and the like, what Christian philosopher Marilyn McCord Adams called “horrendous evils”—we need to offer three replies:

The first answer a Christian might give is that only someone who can see the whole picture is in an adequate position to judge the reasonableness of the particulars. If I see someone getting cut open on a table, I will want to rush in and stop it. But when it’s explained to me that he’s in surgery, and this will help him, it changes my frame of reference. I’m not in a position to say with certainty that I know or even understand some of the most devastating stories of loss in the world; but I am also unable to say conclusively that there is no justifiable reason to allow it.

The second is that the Christian offers a story of pain and redemption in the person of Jesus Christ. If God cannot fully explain why he allows some pains that seem to great in our minds to make any sense, the only other option for a good God is to come into our world and suffer with us...or even for us. Which is what the Christian story tells. And we tell a story of his return in which he will right every wrong, and will make sense of it all; and that in suffering we now find purpose and meaning.

But the third response is to the non-believer to look in the mirror. The problem of evil is a problem not just for Christians...it’s a problem for everybody. This is why for some people, evil pain and suffering is not an argument against God, but FOR God. You see, I want to agree that the Holocaust was a horrendous evil. The Rwandan massacre. Genocide. Terrible wrongs. But what makes these terrible wrongs? What provides the basis for any civilization to tell another civilization “you must never do this and must always do that, because this is what it means to be loving and to be human?” What

about Tsunami’s and nature’s rage? These often leaves terror in their wake. But why should we care? If evil is real, then goodness is real. If evil is wrong, then justice has an objective reality and truth isn’t just something we vote on in a society. But how in the world can you explain that from a secular point of view? The problem evil cries out for an explanation for which naturalism can’t provide a solution because nature is part of the problem.

THE CHURCH IS A FORCE FOR EVIL

Reason #4 often given is simply this: “Doesn’t religion do far more bad than good in the world? Especially Christianity. I mean, look at the crusades. Or the massacre in Rwanda which was the most Christian nation in Africa at the time. I want to be a part of something that is a force for good, and that is why I’m not interested in Christianity.”

A force for good? Lots of groups now days talk about the value of caring for the injured. It’s common knowledge—we are told—that love for your fellow man, another obvious ethical truth—requires us to show mercy and compassion on hurting people. But that hasn’t always been the case.

The closest thing we can find that remotely resembles our modern notion of widespread care for the hurting was the Roman practice of helping injured soldiers recuperate so they could get back on the battlefield. But what we now take for granted is “a tradition that had no real precedent in pagan society.”¹² In fact, it has a Christian background. The first hospitals open to all in need can be traced to St. Ephraim the Syrian (AD 306-373) who set up one in the plague-ravaged city of Edessa. You see it again in Cappadocia, where Basil the Great set up a hospital with a specialty unit for lepers, whom he cared for with his own hands.¹³ The first public hospital in Western Europe was started in Rome by a rich lady who scorned her riches and status to roam the streets in search of hurting people. All of these started in the 4th century, right after the Council of Nicea met and, in that council, all the bishops were challenged to go out and start hospitals. And they did! It would be 4 more centuries before another group began to establish hospitals for all in need—the Arab Muslims, also people of faith. During the Middle Ages—in the middle of the 1500’s—there was one source for nearly 2,000 hospitals: the Benedictine monks, working from their 37,000 monasteries. The tradition is still obvious. From the Salvation Army and the Red Cross to the YMCA, from St. Francis of Assisi to Mother Theresa, from Florence Nightingale to Louis Pasteur—the history of modern medicine and the care for all hurting people in need pays its debt to

¹² David Bentley Hart, p.30.

¹³ David Bentley Hart, p. 30.

the Christian story. In Paris, France, there is a hospital still standing from the 6th century, and etched in stone at the top is “hotel-Dieu” (house of God). Just think of the closest hospital to where you grew up and tell me if the name Baptist or Methodist, St. Vincent’s, St. Luke’s or something similar is attached.¹⁴

And I’m just touching the tip of the iceberg. In books like David Bentley Hart’s *Atheist Delusions*, or Jonathan Hill’s *What Has Christianity Ever Done For Us?*, you’ll find the range of modern absolute necessities are rooted in Christian ideals. You can thank Christian operating out of the ethical demands of their faith for the end of gladiator combat, the rise of the Abolition movement in England, the liberation of women in western culture, the grounding of for crucial arguments for human equality and religious liberty in western democracy, and the West’s high regard for the value of children. Which is why Christianity is responsible for starting homes for the care of children without parents, aging parents without homes, and organized charities to serve the needs of the poor.

Then you have stories of Christians acting most unchristian. There are many Christians who would argue the way the Inquisition was carried out or the way the devastation involved in the Crusades were acting not in accordance with the actual stated mission and methods of Jesus. And all believers would agree that the Rwandan tribal massacre is the exact opposite of the Christian teaching to love your neighbor and your enemy, and to turn the other cheek rather than to react in kind.

But surely every group of people can point to stories large and small of those acting out of step with the basic philosophy of their group. The great irony here is that the bloodiest records do not lie at the feet of Christian history, but rather in the cold hands of secularism. Chairman Mao’s cultural revolution and Lennin’s atheism account for millions upon millions of deaths in the 20th century, only this time rooted in a philosophy of life that gives no justification for thinking human lives are sacred at all! When you compare the number of people killed in events involving theism with the number killed under orders of those operating out of express militant atheism, the difference is staggering.¹⁵

¹⁴ See Charles Rosenberg, *The Care of Strangers: The Rise of America’s Hospital System* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), esp. chap 4; Albert R. Jonsen, *A Short History of Medical Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); C. Ben Mitchell, “The Christian Origins of Hospitals,” *The Bible + Culture*, Fe 6, 2012

(<https://biblemesh.com/blog/the-christian-origins-of-hospitals/>); D. James Kennedy & Jerry Newcombe, *What If Jesus Had Never Been Born?* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1994)

¹⁵ Greg Koukl, “The Real Murderers: Atheism or Christianity?” *Stand to Reason* (2/20/13).

https://www.str.org/w/the-real-murderers-atheism-or-christianity-?p=1&back_url=%2Fsearch%3Fpage%3DNewsArticle%26id%3D5527%26q%3DKoukl%2Breal%2Bmurderers%26userName%3Dgreg%2520koukl

EXTRAS

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Philippians 4:8 ESV)

“After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.” (Luke 2:46 ESV)

“God addressed Job next from the eye of the storm, and this is what he said: ‘I have some more questions for you, and I want straight answers.’ (Job 40:6-7 MSG)

“His disciples said, ‘Finally! You’re giving it to us straight, in plain talk—no more figures of speech. Now we know that you know everything—it all comes together in you. You won’t have to put up with our questions anymore. We’re convinced you came from God.’” (John 16:29-30 MSG)

“Instead of claiming to know what God says, ask questions of one another, such as ‘How do we understand God in this?’ But don’t go around pretending to know it all, saying ‘God told me this . . . God told me that. . . .’ I don’t want to hear it anymore. Only the person I authorize speaks for me. Otherwise, my Message gets twisted, the Message of the living God-of-the-Angel-Armies.” (Jeremiah 23:5-6 MSG)

“You are right, O God, and you set things right. I can’t argue with that. But I do have some questions: Why do bad people have it so good? Why do con artists make it big?” (Jeremiah 12:1-2)

“God, your God, is above all a compassionate God. In the end he will not abandon you, he won’t bring you to ruin, he won’t forget the covenant with your ancestors which he swore to them.

Ask questions. Find out what has been going on all these years before you were born. From the day God created man and woman on this Earth, and from the horizon in the east to the horizon in the west—as far back as you can imagine and as far away as you can imagine—has as great a thing as this ever happened? Has anyone ever heard of such a thing? Has a people ever heard, as you did, a god speaking out of the middle of the fire and lived to tell the story?” (Deuteronomy 4:31-33 MSG)