

David Hamstra :: God Questions? :: Christian Perspective :: November 23

We find ourselves living in a time where instead of our society growing closer together we are become more polarized than ever.

I took a Physical Anthropology class in college. Studies human evolutionary biology. I found myself and anyone that had questions or opinions that differed from the professors philosophy would be ridiculed, bullied, and embarrassed.

Difficulties living in a society that is polarized by belief and skepticism. The world seems to be both more religious and less religious at the same time.

1. Non-church going population has been steadily increasing in US and Europe.
2. Most US universities have shifted from a Christian foundation to a secular one in the last century.
3. Americans surveyed have answered “no religious preference” skyrocketed.

And yet at the same time churches with supposedly obsolete beliefs in an infallible Bible and miracles is growing in the US and exploding in Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

1. Religious faith is growing in different corners of Academia.
2. 10-25% of teachers and professors of philosophy are orthodox Christians up from less than 1% 30 years ago.

Christianity can be defined as a belief that the triune God created the world, that humanity has fallen into sin and evil, that God has returned to rescue us in Jesus Christ, that in his death and resurrection Jesus accomplished our salvation for us so we can be received by grace, that he established the church, his people, as the vehicle through which he continues his mission of rescue, reconciliation, and salvation, and at the end of time Jesus will return to renew the heavens and the earth, removing all evil, injustice, sin, and death from the world.

Recognize several barriers to faith in the God of orthodox Christianity.

Several barriers to belief in God stem from Intellectual barriers, Personal Barriers, and Social Barriers.

At times we both skeptic and believer alike feel the other's existence threatens us because secular skepticism and religious faith are on the rise.

I hope that each side can look at doubt in a radically new way. My purpose for participating in this forum.

This isn't a political rally with a bunch of undecided's. Most people here today have come to a real conviction on where they stand regarding belief in God.

Believers

Faith without some doubts is like a human body without antibodies in it. If you go through life too busy or indifferent to ask hard questions about why you believe as you do you will find yourselves defenseless against either the experience of tragedy or the probing questions of a smart skeptic. No longer can pass with just holding on to beliefs inherited from our parents, if we struggle long and hard with objections you will find yourself able to provide grounds for faith that are plausible not offensive. Example of Philosophy class.

Skeptics

It would be inconsistent to require more justification for Christian belief than you do for your own. In fairness you must doubt your doubts. All doubts, however skeptical and cynical they may seem, are really a set of alternate beliefs. Example of “There can’t be just one true religion,” you cannot doubt Belief A except from a position of faith in Belief B.

Quote by Tim Keller, “If you come to recognize the beliefs on which your doubts about Christianity are based, and if you seek as much proof for those beliefs as you seek from Christians for theirs – you will discover that your doubts are not as solid as they first appeared.”

When we do this we will approach the other side with greater respect, sympathy, and humility that did not exist before.

“Is There a God” by Oxford philosopher Richard Swinburne argues that belief in God can be tested and justified (but not proven) “The view that there is a God, he says, leads us to expect the things we observe – that there is a universe at all, that scientific laws operate within it, that it contains human beings with consciousness and with an indelible moral sense.”

Strong Rationalism

Using verification principle namely,

How could you empirically prove that no one should believe something without empirical proof? You can’t, and that reveals it to be, ultimately, a belief.

“View from nowhere” Complete objectivity, virtually all philosophers today agree that is impossible.

Thomas Nagel – Atheist wrote in his book “The Last Word”

“I am talking of...the fear of religion itself. I speak from experience, being strongly subject to this fear myself: I want atheism to be true... It isn’t just that I don’t believe in God and, naturally, hope that I’m right in my belief. It’s that I hope there is no God! I don’t want there to be a God: I don’t want the universe to be like that... I am curious whether there is anyone who is genuinely indifferent as to whether there is a God – anyone who, whatever his actual belief about the matter, doesn’t particularly want either one of the answers to be correct.”

Belief in God offers a better empirical fit, it explains and accounts for what we see better than the alternative account of things.

Science has disproved Christianity

2 Famous Studies. 1916 James Leuba conducted first survey of scientists. “Do you believe in a God who actively communicates with humanity, at least through prayer. 40% did, 40% did not, 20% weren’t sure. Edward Larson and Larry Witham asked very same question in 1997 in Scientific journal “Nature” number haven’t changed significantly

Alister McGrath (Oxford doctorate in biophysics) Most colleagues brought their assumptions about God to their science rather than basing them on their science.

Stephen Jay Gould (Harvard Scientist and evolutionist) Either half of my colleagues are enormously stupid, or else the science of Darwinism is full compatible with conventional religious beliefs – and equally compatible with atheism.

Morality

‘If God does not exist, everything is permissible.’ – Dostoyevsky

“The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference.”

— Richard Dawkins

Religion and Violence

“God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything. Chapter on “Religion Kills” gives personal accounts of religion fueled violence in Belfast, Beirut, Belgrade, Bethlehem, and Baghdad.

Problem with that is the Communist Russian, Chinese, Cambodian regimes of the 20th century rejected all organized religion and belief in God. Forerunner was the French Revolution that rejected traditional religion for human reason.

When the idea of God is gone a society will “transcendentalize” something else, (The State or race and blood). Conclusion there is some violent impulse so deeply rooted in the human heart that it expresses itself regardless of what the beliefs of the society might be.

Regarding the poor. The Bible teaches us that our treatment of them equals our treatment of God.

Communist Poland – Priest Jerzy Popieluszko through preaching and activism led to a free trade union. Was killed by secret police, 250,000 attended the funeral many who marched past police headquarters with a banner that read, “We Forgive”.

Loving God Send People to Hell

Must consider our cultural location. Are you offended by the idea of a forgiving God? Someone from a very different culture “turning the other cheek” makes no sense. It offends their deepest instincts about what is right. That society is repulsed by aspects of Christianity that we Westerners enjoy and are attracted by aspects we can’t stand.

Why should Western cultural sensibilities be the final court in which to judge whether Christianity is valid? Is our culture superior to non-Western ones?

Why should our objections trump theirs?

God of Judgment can’t be Loving

If I don’t believe that there is a God who will eventually put all things right, I will take up the sword, and will be sucked into the endless vortex of retaliation.

Loss of belief in a God of judgment can lead to brutality in both Nazism and Communism.