

# Mostly masterful defence of Christianity; pity it's slack on creation

A review of  
*What's So Great About Christianity?*  
by Dinesh D'Souza  
Regnery, Washington  
DC, 2007

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What's so great about Christianity? D'Souza gives this question a book-length answer, exploring Christianity's effect on government, science, philosophy and morality, while answering the objections of atheists along the way. He also gives a warning: most of the West is living on the inheritance of the Christian culture handed down to it by previous generations, but the secular worldview is slowly eating away at the best things Western culture offers. In a mostly masterful apologetic for Christianity, D'Souza shows that Christianity is intellectually reasonable and produces positive results in the cultures that adopt it, and that atheism is unreasonable and produces worse results than even Christianity gone wrong. However, D'Souza's position on creationism is a major flaw in an otherwise superb resource.

D'Souza begins with a rather promising introduction that states that he reads and interprets the Bible 'in a traditional way—that is, to discover what it actually states and means' (xi); i.e. the *grammatical-historical method*. He contends that 'Only by examining the text in relation to the whole can we figure out how a particular line or passage is best understood' (xii). He goes on to issue a challenge to believers to defend their faith (cf. 1 Peter 3:15, Jude 3, 2 Corinthians 10:4–5), especially in light of recent high-publicity attacks against Christianity by the likes of Richard

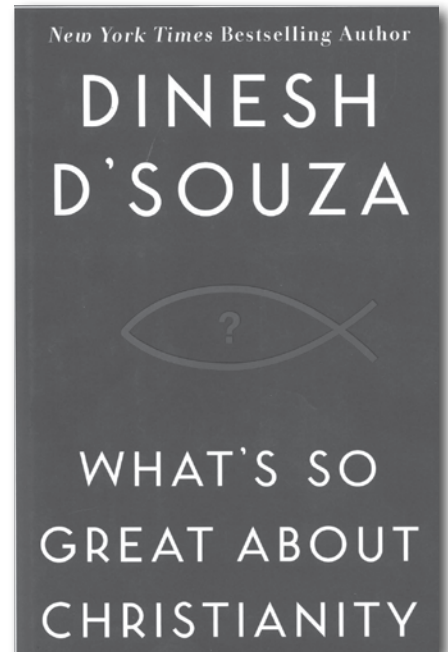
Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens in their respective best-selling books.

'The atheists no longer want to be tolerated. They want to monopolize the public square and to expel Christians from it ... In short, they want to make religion—and especially the Christian religion—disappear from the face of the earth' (xv).

## Is the world becoming more secular?

The secularization narrative predicts that as a civilization becomes more technologically advanced, it will become less religious. However, D'Souza shows that in fact, traditional religion (including, but not only, traditional Christianity) is becoming more popular, not less. The very existence of religion poses a problem to atheistic evolutionists: why would people evolve in such a way as to believe something that isn't true? In fact, D'Souza shows that religious couples tend to have more children, while secular couples tend to have one child or none, so atheism is also difficult to explain in Darwinism: why would a belief system endure which produces fewer offspring?

Non-religious people may have fewer children, but they are not dying out; they are simply setting their sights on the children of the religious. D'Souza demonstrates how the secularists set out to indoctrinate children with their own agenda through secular state schools and universities. They are not secretive about this goal; one went so far as to tell parents that 'we are going to go right on trying to discredit you in the eyes of your children, trying to strip your fundamentalist religious community of dignity, trying to make your views seem silly rather than discussable'



(p. 36). What's even worse, the atheists have even persuaded Christian parents to *pay* them to indoctrinate their children!

## The Christian foundation of Western civilization

This hostility to religion exists in spite of the fact that most of the rights that the secularists hold dear have their origin in Christianity. D'Souza shows that Western civilization owes its survival to Christianity, and that ideas such as limited government, religious tolerance, human dignity and equality, and individual freedom all have explicitly Christian origins. Western culture also owes much to Christianity; the great works of art, music and architecture were overwhelmingly influenced by Christian themes, even those created by people who rejected the Christian faith. Many secularists want to leave Christianity behind while keeping the benefits it has had on Western civilization, but D'Souza echoes Nietzsche's warning: Though some of the values built on Christianity seem to have taken on a life of their own, they are still inextricably tied to their Christian foundation; if that foundation is removed, the values that were built on that foundation will inevitably vanish as well.



Photo from &lt;Wikipedia.org&gt;

**Figure 1.** In his latest book, Dinesh D'Souza defends Christianity as the foundation of Western civilization, contrary to the claims of recent best-sellers by atheists such as Dawkins and Hitchens.

### Christianity and science

Having proved that Christianity has been a positive force in Western society that is worth defending, D'Souza goes on to argue that it can be logically defended in the scientific arena. More than that, the modern concept of empirical science rests upon a fundamentally Christian assumption—that the universe is built on predictable laws which enable empirical science to happen. The vast majority of the early scientists were Christians who viewed their work as a logical extension of their faith. D'Souza takes on the Galileo myth, showing that Galileo's case had nothing to do with a war against religion versus science; in fact, no one saw it as such until the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, D'Souza then takes a disappointing turn and argues that the big bang is a 'stunning confirmation of the book of Genesis' (p. 116), arguing that it proves a beginning around 15 billion years ago. He seems unaware of the huge problems with this theory.<sup>2,3</sup> And what happens if secularists reject the big bang? He will have to re-interpret his re-interpretation of Genesis!

He repeats the worn-out argument that 'day' in Genesis 1 could be legitimately interpreted to mean a long period of time, and that 'the leading church authorities from Irenaeus to Origen to Augustine gave a figurative interpretation to the "days" in the book of Genesis.' Moreover, 'Most

traditional Christians have no problem with a creation account that extends over millions, even billions, of years' (p. 122). However, D'Souza ignores the fact that when *yôm* is used with a number, evening and morning, it always means a solar day.<sup>4,5</sup>

He is wrong about Irenaeus, who accepted a literal interpretation of the days of Genesis 1. D'Souza may have misunderstood Irenaeus's view that the six (literal) days of creation were *types* of six thousand-year periods which made up the totality of human history. That is, each Day of Creation corresponded to (but was not equal to) one thousand years of subsequent Earth history, and the seventh day of rest corresponded to a future Millennium. For this to work, the days had to be *literal*—and Earth history had to be only a few thousand years.<sup>6,7</sup>

Augustine and Origen did not interpret the days of creation literally, but they also were against interpreting the days as long periods of time. Instead, they believed that the days must be *instants*, because God's commands would have been obeyed immediately; they did not think it could be as *long* as a literal day. Both of these explicitly stated that the Earth was only a few thousand years old at the time they wrote, and strongly denounced long-age ideas.<sup>3,4</sup>

D'Souza asserts that with such convoluted exegesis

'the Genesis enigma is solved, and its account of creation is vindicated not as some vague parable but as a strikingly accurate account of how the universe came to be' (p. 123).

Yet even he does not seem to be entirely convinced, for on the very next page he asserts

'the Bible is not a science textbook. It does not attempt ... to give a detailed account of how the universe and the earth were formed into their current shapes. But what it does say about creation—about the fact of creation and about the order of creation—turns out to be accurate' (p. 124).

He does not say how plants could survive millions of years before the sun was created, as would be the

case if the days were really periods of millions of years. Nor does he explain how it could be 'strikingly accurate' if long-ages were true, since the Bible says that God created whales and birds before land animals, contradicting the evolutionary/uniformitarian story. Also, informed creationists don't claim that Genesis is a book about science; rather it is a book about *history*.

D'Souza goes on to defend not just the evolutionary timeline, but evolution itself. He even repeats the disproved assertion that man shares 98% of his DNA with apes.<sup>8</sup> He argues that this is perfectly reconcilable with Scripture; since God's image that man is made in is not physical, but spiritual, there is no problem with the physical body being derived from an ape.

However, he completely ignores the biblical account that asserts that humankind was derived not from other animals, but as a *special creation* distinct from animals (Genesis 1:26–28, 2:7, 21–24). He also ignores the genealogy of Jesus in Luke's Gospel, which traces Him back to a real Adam, then directly to God, not via a line of apes (Luke 3:38). And the apostle Paul treats Adam as a real first man and ancestor of all other humans (Romans 5:12–19,<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, 45); evolution teaches that a population of ape-like creatures evolved into a population of humans.

D'Souza also confuses speciation with evolution, asking, 'Is it such a stretch to believe that the lion and the tiger evolved from a common ancestor, even if there is no way to see this process occur?' (p. 145). He argues rightly that evolution cannot account for the beginning of life, and ridicules some evolutionists' attempts to get around the origin of life problem,<sup>10</sup> such as Crick's seeding from space aliens.<sup>11</sup> However, he does not seem to realize that tagging God onto an otherwise godless system to explain the gaps in evolution is just as unreasonable. So is asserting that God is somehow directing evolution, since this is no different *for all practical purposes*, from atheistic evolution, apart from a Christian's say-so.<sup>12</sup>

### The plausibility of miracles

Materialists argue that miracles are impossible because they violate the laws of nature. The strongest argument against miracles was advanced by David Hume and is widely used by atheists such as Dawkins and Hitchens to justify their rejection of the miraculous. Hume argued that since a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature which we know through experience, no rational person can believe in miracles. However, D'Souza shows how, *through Hume's own reasoning*, this argument does not hold up, since Hume himself argued that scientific laws are empirically unverifiable.<sup>13</sup> For example, the speed of light can be measured a million times at a certain value, but we cannot know with absolute certainty that it will not change in the next measurement, or that the speed of light was not different at some point in the past, or that somewhere else in the universe light travels at a different speed. This is the *problem of induction*.

Hume also argued that there is no logical connection between cause and effect; we can see event B following event A millions of times, but we can never be absolutely sure that event A was the cause of event B. D'Souza argues that this leaves room for miracles; exceptions where the natural laws of science (which we cannot know for sure anyway) do not hold up as we normally expect them to. It would be even more helpful to follow C.S. Lewis and call miracles *additions* to natural laws.<sup>14</sup> E.g. a helicopter supporting a man in the sea doesn't violate Archimedes' principle of buoyancy, but provides an *additional* force. Jesus' walking on water can be understood in the same way: as God Incarnate, He provided some extra forces to prevent sinking.

### The reasonableness of faith

Having argued for the plausibility of miracles, D'Souza goes on to argue that faith is rational. Indeed, we take many things by faith on a daily basis; if everyone were to insist on empirical verification of everything, 'modern life would become impossible' (p. 192).

Indeed, this position is self-refuting: *how can one empirically verify the principle of empirical verification?* Religious faith makes some claims of a different kind, claims which are outside the power of humans to test. We cannot empirically test the immortality of the soul, the existence of Heaven and Hell, or the existence of an omniscient God; these are claims which must be taken by faith. However, it is by no means unreasonable to believe claims which require faith.

### 'Crimes of religion'?

Many atheists point to the Crusades, Inquisition and witch hunts to argue that Christianity is an evil religion. D'Souza takes on these allegations one by one. He argues that the Muslims were the aggressors; conquering the previously predominately Christian Middle East. They went on to conquer parts of Africa, Asia, part of Italy and most of Spain. All the while, they forced conversions at sword-point. Finally, more than two hundred years later Christians attempted to take back the land that was conquered by the Muslims. The First Crusade was a success, resulting in Jerusalem being in Christian possession for nearly a century. Subsequent crusades failed, but without the crusades, D'Souza argues

'Western Civilization might have been completely overrun by the forces of Islam ... The Christians fought to defend themselves from foreign conquest, while the Muslims fought to continue conquering Christian lands' (p. 206).

As for the Inquisition, much of the modern stereotype was largely made up by Spain's political enemies, and later by anti-Christians. The Inquisition only had authority over professing Christians, and the Inquisition trials were often fairer and more lenient than their secular counterparts. Often the only penalty given was some sort of penance such as fasting. Over a period of 350 years, historians such as Henry Kamen<sup>15</sup> estimate only between 1,500 and 4,000 people were executed for heresy.

The Salem witch trials constitute the best-known example of religiously

motivated violence. However, fewer than 25 people were killed in the trials, falling far short of the 'perhaps hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions' (p. 207) that the late atheist Carl Sagan wrote about.

Having shown that Christianity's 'religious crimes' are far less horrendous than atheists would argue; he goes on to show that atheism, not religion, is responsible for mass murders. In fact, 'atheist regimes have in a single century murdered more than one hundred million people' (p. 214). Even adjusting for changes in population size, atheist regimes are responsible for 100 times more death in *one* century than Christian rulers inflicted over *five* centuries. However, while it can easily be shown that crimes committed in the name of Christianity are not sanctioned by its teaching, the bloodbaths of the atheist regimes are *consistent with* an atheist, evolutionary outlook. Indeed, atheists have no moral basis to say that anything is right or wrong.

### 'The ghost in the machine'

Materialists vigorously oppose the idea of the existence of an immaterial soul, for some, 'the existence of the soul jeopardizes the very nature of modern science' (p. 240). If man is nothing more than a physical being subject to physical laws, then there can be no free will. However, the likes of Dawkins and Steven Pinker assert that it is possible for humans to act against what our genes tell us to do. However, this makes no sense if all we are is a machine; a computer cannot rebel against its programming. D'Souza reasons that human behaviour makes no sense without free will, and free will cannot exist without a soul.<sup>16</sup>

### 'The opiate of the morally corrupt'

Many atheists claim that they do not believe in God because of the lack of evidence for His existence. However, some admit a different motive. H.L. Mencken wrote of life after death, 'My private inclination is to hope that it is not so,' and Thomas Nagel confessed, 'I want atheism to be true ... it isn't just that I don't believe in God ... I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that'



From <Wikipedia.org>

**Figure 2.** Though atheists accuse religion of producing wars and atrocities throughout history, atheistic Communist regimes were responsible for over 100 million deaths in the 20<sup>th</sup> century alone.

(p. 263). It may seem counterintuitive for atheists to revel in such a dismal ideology, but Gould explains that the atheist ideology, ‘though superficially troubling if not terrifying, is ultimately liberating and exhilarating’ (p. 264). D’Souza argues that the real motivation behind atheism is ‘to avoid having to answer in the next life for their lack of moral restraint in this one’ (p. 266).

### Why do bad things happen?

D’Souza tackles the question of why evil exists, but his view is predictably flawed by his view of origins. He argues weakly that evil things happen because humans have free will. But what about *natural* evil? The biblical view is that death and suffering originated in the Fall of mankind when Adam sinned by eating the forbidden fruit. Death and all the other evil things we experience in this life result from a corruption of the original creation that God called ‘very good’. Romans 8 is clear that the *whole creation* was cursed at the Fall.<sup>17,18</sup>

### Conclusion

D’Souza ends the book with a few chapters on how the Christian’s life changes after conversion.

In the areas in which D’Souza’s expertise informs his arguments,

*What’s so Great About Christianity* is full of good arguments and can be an excellent source for those seeking a refutation of the modern atheist attacks on Christianity. Indeed, the leading sceptic Michael Shermer wrote a blurb for the dust jacket:

‘As an unbeliever I passionately disagree with Dinesh D’Souza on some of his positions. But he is a first-rate scholar whom I feel absolutely compelled to read. His thorough research and elegant prose have elevated him into the top ranks of those who champion liberty and individual responsibility. Now he adds Christianity to his formula for a good society, and although non-Christians and non-theists may disagree with some of his arguments, we ignore him at our peril. D’Souza’s book takes the debate to a new level. Read it.’

However, D’Souza’s embrace of theistic evolution is a serious flaw, and history shows that compromise on Genesis undermines apologetics.<sup>19</sup>

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