
A Case for God and Christianity



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Why have the overwhelming majority of human societies believed in the existence of God? Why do rational people in a modern civilisation subscribe to the belief that God (the Creator of everything) took human nature in Jesus Christ?

As two Christians concerned to provide a reasoned defence for Christianity in a modern Western partly sceptical culture we recently conducted a belief survey initially among committed Christians from our own Chichester Diocese in Sussex, England and then from a wider circle. During 2007 we obtained 500 reasons for believing in God and Christianity which inform this pamphlet.



Our motivation is to present to open minded people what we thought from the survey and from some historical writings represented the best arguments for believing in God and the best arguments for believing in Christianity. We are writing this pamphlet because we believe that the message of God and Christianity needs to be available not only in the Churches but to everyone in society.

We hope that if you spend some time reading and thinking about these reasons you will be convinced about the existence of, and believe in, God and Jesus Christ. If you become convinced of the existence of God and Jesus Christ, we hope that your beliefs will inform your life, your actions, and your relationships. We hope that you may then share your beliefs so that the Good News reaches everyone in the world so that everyone can make an informed choice about their own beliefs. We also hope that if you live in the way that Jesus Christ told us to live, you will find more from such a way of life than any self help book ever published, or to be published.

We are all different. Some of you may have other, and better, reasons for belief. To some of you, all of these reasons may appeal. To others, some, but not all of the reasons may appeal to you. To others still, you may remain unconvinced. If, after reading this, you are not convinced, we hope that you will forgive our attempts to share our reasons for believing with you.

Why believe in God?

1. Ultimate source

In our incomplete and developing knowledge of the world in which we live it seems to be established that every effect has a cause. As Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) noted: (a) Whatever begins to exist has a cause; (b) the universe began to exist; and (c) therefore, the universe must have had a cause. We call that cause God.

Another way of putting the same point is this. If everything started with the Big Bang (as most scientists now claim) – and everything evolved from that event – who could have caused this event other than someone outside space, time and matter who created the space, time and matter, called God?

2. Order and purpose

The intricacies of the earth, set just about the right distance from the sun to sustain life, and the design of animals and human beings fit together in a remarkable way. They still fit together notwithstanding all efforts to destroy the fit. An example is the destructive chemicals held apart in the body of the Bombardier beetle which come together in a burning cloud to warn off a predator. All of these signs of order and complexity argue for purpose in the universe. If even a simple watch required a maker how much more must the entire world and all of us have required a maker? This is the so-called design

argument as set forth by William Paley (1743-1805) who likened the universe to a watch, with many ordered parts working in harmony for a purpose. The complexity, order, and purpose of a watch indicate intelligent design, he suggested. So too do the complexity, order, and purpose of the universe. G.K. Chesterton remarked in 1908 *So one elephant having a trunk was odd; but all elephants having trunks looked like a plot.*

A further way of looking at the same reason is to think of monkeys set in front of a typewriter randomly striking keys. What is the chance of them randomly typing a single Shakespeare play? Even if, by amazing chance after billions of years a monkey typed an accurate first and second act, there would undoubtedly be at least one mistyped and nonsensical word by the third act. Then compare the complexity of a Shakespeare play with the complexity of the world and all who live in it. That must prove the existence of a creator and not mere unsupervised random chance.

3. Right and wrong

If there is no God, what instinct tells us what is right and wrong? It is plain that human beings have the capacity to do both great good and much wrong. Why does humanity revolt against senseless killing? How are we able to recognise good behaviour by humans, like the help given to the stranger without expectation of reward? Or evil and wrong behaviour like genocide, the sexual abuse of children or the destruction of infants? Such instincts are further proof that there is a God and that we have been made in his image.

This is the moral argument as set forth by Kant (1724-1804) based on the voice of conscience. The existence of morality is a pointer to its author – God. This is sometimes expressed as the view that there could be no right and wrong unless God existed.

Thomas Merton (1915-68) saw purposive decisions for unselfish action as evidence for God's ordering and directing of the universe. If human beings bear God's image our unselfish actions are explained by our serving a greater purpose, that which reflects an unselfish, ultimate Designer.

4. Historical belief

The recognition of the existence of God is common to almost every human society. From ancient Egypt to modern contemporary society the overwhelming majority of humans have believed in the existence of a God or gods. There is a consistent historical record of instinctive belief in a being who ranks above the hierarchy of human, animal, vegetable and mineral existence. Are all these peoples and societies, in recognising a power beyond that which is human, wrong? Or is it those who say that there is no God, who lean only on their own understanding, who are misguided?

A variation of this argument is to say that if we can think of a supreme being, it is logical to assume that it exists, as set forth by St Anselm (1033-1109) and Descartes (1596-1650). A difficulty with this variation of the argument is that just because we can think of something does not mean that it exists – to take a silly example the cyber men do not exist just because someone thought of them for a Dr Who production. St Augustine (354-430) approached matters from a different angle. He identified that there is a hierarchy of existence, starting with a rock, up to a tree, then to a dog, and then to human life and human reason. St Augustine argued that there must be something more than human reason (proved by the fact that some things can be shown to be true and some things can be shown to be false – whatever the reasoning in relation to them) and that something more than human reason, is God.

5. Personal witness

People who believe in God testify to: being changed; having helpful encounters with others at the right times and places in answer to prayer; being healed. This is consistent testimony, from different persons from different communities and different countries, over the course of thousands of years. It would be ridiculous to think that all were deceiving themselves or others. Some believers claim God's existence cannot be demonstrated rationally but only through your own experience. This is the so-called personal experience argument as promoted by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). If people believe that prayers to God have been answered, is this all just random chance and self-delusion? People and communities who are blessed from such encounters are pointers to the reality of God.

6. Surprising gifts

Holy people have about them a force from beyond themselves that has the capacity to change other people's lives as they encounter them. This is why Pascal wrote that *holiness is the church's greatest influence*. Similarly people who are changed by encounters with the beauty of the natural order, great works of art or music or by the receiving of unmerited forgiveness often attribute their transformative experience as evidence for a God at work behind surprises and coincidences.

7. Personal dignity

Relationships are among the most important things on earth. They point to belief in a personal God. Belief in God is conversely the ultimate statement concerning the dignity and calling of human beings created with a purpose and destiny. Faith in a personal God takes people out of themselves, affirming and empowering them to build better human relationships. When belief in God fails so can faith in humanity. (It might be thought that the 'personal dignity' reason is really a variation of reason 3 above 'right and wrong' but we are aware of someone who became a believer through interpreting his very strong aversion to racist bullying as an instinct implanted in him, a God-given absolute relating to human beings as beings in God's image worthy of honour, made for fellowship and not enmity. We have included this as a separate reason in case it appeals to you).

Why believe in Christianity?

If you believe in God you share your beliefs with the overwhelming majority of humanity (which we think is a comforting thought). However in which God should you believe? What we set out below are reasons for believing in Jesus Christ as the unique revelation of God. But we emphasise this: we do not believe that it is for humans at all (let alone us) to judge the beliefs of others – indeed many of the world's worst problems have been caused by human attempts to do this. But we do believe that you can make your own decisions on what to believe based on the teachings and actions of others. If certain beliefs produce bad actions it is an indication that the beliefs as practised are not sound. Jesus himself said that there would be persons pretending to come in his name but whose actions would demonstrate that they were not. We believe that, properly applied, the teachings of Jesus Christ prove that he is the Son of God.

1. Jesus

The unique warmth, simplicity and humanity of Jesus challenge anyone who picks up the gospels in the New Testament. Is there any figure in history that rivals him? Dostoyevsky wrote that *there has never been anyone lovelier, deeper or more sympathetic than Jesus*. We do not believe that the most sceptical atheist will deny Jesus Christ a place in history. Even Rousseau said: *it would have been a greater miracle to invent such a life as Christ's than to be it*.

2. Historical evidence

The evidence proving the physical existence of Jesus Christ is overwhelming. The witness of the New Testament of the Bible and from contemporary writings is clear and uncontested. The coming of Jesus also fulfilled many of the prophecies in the Old Testament, evidence that his historical birth, life and death were part of a wider scheme of salvation. The teachings of Jesus about justice and concern for the dispossessed reflect God's messages to his people in the Old Testament. The trustworthiness of the bible and Christian creeds has survived years of rigorous historical analysis.

3. Originality of the teachings

The teachings of Jesus and their originality astounded those who first heard them and still astound today (please at least read the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel, Chapters 5 to 8 if you have never done so). If such original teachings did not come from God, who could they have come from? He commanded us to love God, and our neighbours as ourselves and blessed the peacemakers, the meek and lowly. He knew that, being human, we would fail, and need forgiveness and grace to achieve anything. To this day people experience grace for living that transforms them.

4. Jesus' death

Jesus did not come only to give great teachings – he came to give his life. Christianity is totally realistic about human sin and frailty. It does not deny the powerful reality of sin, sickness, suffering and death but offers a more powerful antidote in welcoming the forgiveness and healing brought through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. Human beings do not just need telling how to be holy, we need to be made holy. In the Christian vision we are all sinners, beings who live in separation from God in his holiness, and Jesus took our sins upon himself so that we can be free of them and be in relationship with God. Whereas many world religions tell you how you can earn salvation, Jesus did all the work for us. His sufferings have helped millions know that God is with them in all circumstances and expects nothing of them that he has not been through himself.

5. The resurrection

Jesus Christ is the only founder of a world religion without a grave. His resurrection is as well attested as any event in history. The enigmatic tone of the accounts of Easter in the four gospels would be absent in any made-up tale. The, what was then, remarkable and controversial role of women as witnesses would not have been included in any fabricated story. The new confidence found among frightened disciples confirms this founding truth of Christianity. In human terms the transformation from a dejected, defeated group to the powerful witnesses to the Resurrection of Jesus would be inexplicable without what they say (namely that Jesus had risen from the dead) being true. On account of the resurrection Christianity is future orientated, looking with hope to Christ's return and the promise of glory to come.

6. Universality

Jesus declared he was for all people – whatever nation or continent we come from, whatever religion we have been brought up in, however good or bad we have been, however much or little we have. Christianity is inclusive. All peoples of all nations are equal before God, newcomers and old hands, women and men, clergy and lay people. The God of Christians is one who came *not for the righteous but sinners*. Jesus did teach us how we ought to attempt to live our lives – but he knew that we, whoever we are being human, would fail. And when we fail, he taught that there is grace. His was a message for all people – not only to some appointed or selected group.

7. Personal witness

The personal witness of people who have been changed by their belief in Jesus Christ is overwhelming. There are numerous published books of things that have happened (and continue to happen) to us ordinary men and women, including miraculous cures, that can only be explained by the fact that prayers to Jesus Christ are answered. At high days and holidays, and low days and at the end, we all know that there is something more to life than life itself.

An invitation

We hope that you have found this pamphlet helpful and thought provoking. More than that, we pray that you find belief – and that your good actions, inspired by your belief, will be a light to the world.

If you want more information about Christianity we suggest contacting the Christian Enquiry Agency at www.christianity.org.uk or 020 81444 47177. For a well researched resource on the life of Jesus try www.rejesus.co.uk. To obtain details about churches in your area try www.achurchnearyou.com or www.findachurch.co.uk.

If you have some better reasons for believing in God or Christianity we would be grateful to receive them at jennie.davies@diochi.org.uk or addressed to Jennie Davies, Chichester Diocesan Office, Church House, 211 New Church Road, Hove, East Sussex BN3 4ED.

John Twisleton and James Dingemans in association with the Mission & Renewal department of Chichester Diocese in Sussex and Premier Christian Radio in London.

To view a television interview on the findings of this report, please go to www.premier.tv and search for Belief Survey.
