

Christian Apologetics Foundations - Unit 316



Week 2 – What are We Defending?

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Last week we made the point that we need to keep apologetics relevant and so we need to say;

We must also be sure that it is genuine Christian faith we are defending.

In order to defend the Christian faith it is important to have a clear view of what the faith actually says.

But what is a worldview?

Ravi's ideas include;

The lens or ideas or beliefs through which you ultimately look at reality.

A worldview will answer the following questions;

- What is the origin of all things?
- Where does meaning lie?
- What determines morality?
- What is humanity's destiny?

Everyone has a worldview. You test a worldview by exploring the following aspects of the worldview;

- Logical consistency – are the claims of the worldview logical and consistent?
- Empirical adequacy – are the claims able to be verified adequately?
- Experiential relevance – is the worldview relevant to your life?

How Does the Christian Faith Answer these Questions?

What is the origin of all things?

“A central theme of the Christian faith is that God created all things from nothing.”¹

For the Christian faith then an act of creation by a God who is capable of choosing to create is the answer to this question.

Where does meaning lie?

“Human beings can know both the world around them and God himself because God has built into them the capacity

¹ Alister E. McGrath, *Mere Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2012), 96.

to do so and because he takes an active role in communicating with them.”²

John 1:1-4 suggests that logic, intelligence, rationality and meaning are all inherent in God. Because of this source the universe has structure, order and meaning.

And because it has structure, order and meaning we can know it.

God takes the initiative in knowing us in terms of revelation. God reveals himself to us in 2 main ways;

- General Revelation
- Special Revelation

What determines morality?

The area of meaning leads to the area of ethics and morals. For the Christian faith morals and ethics are part of the revelation of God to humanity. We are not the measure of morality, God is.

However it is obvious that while there is a moral standard within the Christian faith that standard is often not reached by Christians or anyone else. Dr. Brian Harris puts it this way;

A Christian worldview is quickly confronted by the puzzle of our humanity. On the one hand we are, to cite the Psalmist, made a little lower than the angels. On the other hand “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” to quote Paul.³

What is humanity’s destiny?

That there is life beyond death is a fundamental Christian teaching. While within the faith community the details of this idea differ at times, the one consistent is that this life will not be always as it is now and that there is something better coming in the future for humanity, and for the whole of the cosmos.

It is obvious that this return and the subsequent resurrection of people could not take place unless Jesus himself was first raised, so that the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus becomes a vital aspect of the Christian faith – even perhaps the most vital aspect.

² James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door 3rd Edition* (Dowers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 30.

³ Brian Harris, *The Big Picture: Building Blocks of a Christian Worldview* (Milton Keys, UK: Paternoster, 2015), electronic edition.

And as Tom Wright points out the resurrection of Jesus and the hope that the Christian faith has in a future resurrection of believers, has implications for the world today.

The whole point of what Jesus was up to was, that he was doing, close up, in the present, what he was promising long-term, in the future. And what he was promising for that future, and doing in that present, was not about saving souls for a disembodied eternity, but rescuing people from the corruption and decay of the way the world presently is so that they could enjoy, already in the present, that renewal of creation which is God's ultimate purpose—and so that they could thus become colleagues and partners in that larger project itself.⁴

Objections to the Christian Faith

Our Culture

Olive Tree Media in association with McCrindle Research, produced a report in 2012 entitled [“Australian Communities Report”](#). This survey was a quantitative research project into attitudes and key belief blockers and questions about the Christian faith. There were 1094 completed surveys.

The following shows the results of the report in regards to the 10 main blockers to non-Christians considering the Christian faith;

A Few Things to Consider

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- 50% of Australians in the 21st century do not identify with a religion, though of that group 40% say they are spiritual
- Of those that identify as religious 34% only have a regular involvement
- Of those that identify as Protestant/Evangelical 61% have little or no active involvement with a church

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- By far the most influential people in a person's life in regards to faith are parents
- Half of those surveyed were not open to religion at all, but half were open to a greater or lesser extent

⁴ Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2007), 204.

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- Conversation and discussion were the best methods of engagement in regards to religious topics
- Consider each of the Belief Blockers. What aspect of the 4 worldview questions might each of the blockers fit into?
 - Church Abuse – morality
 - Hypocrisy – morality
 - Judging others – morality
 - Religious wars – morality
 - Suffering – meaning
 - Issues about money – meaning and morality
 - Outdated – origins and destiny
 - Hell and condemnation – morality and destiny
 - Homosexuality – morality
 - Exclusivity - meaning⁵

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Consider the results regarding ‘Was Jesus a real person?’ and ‘what about miracles?’

The Problem of “Not Christian Enough”

The first 4 blockers to a consideration of the Christian faith in the Olive Tree survey have to do with the way in which Christians act.

So we have to address the behavior of Christians, both individually and corporately, that has undermined the plausibility of Christianity for people.

This can be addressed through three main issues;

1. The issue of Christians’ glaring character flaws
2. The issue of war and violence
3. The issue of fanaticism

Character Flaws

If Christianity is all it claims to be, shouldn’t Christians be, on the whole, much better people than everyone else? This is both the question and the expectation behind the moral blockers to faith shown in the survey.

This idea is based upon a number of incorrect beliefs about what the Christian faith actually teaches. Christianity does not teach that all are

⁵ http://mccrindle.com.au/resources/Australian-Communities-Report_McCrimdle-Research.pdf

good, in fact the very opposite. But it does teach that there is opportunity for change. Here is what Christianity does teach:

1. All good comes from God:

James 1:17

The point James is making is that all good actions, no matter who does them, are gifts from God.

He (God) casts them across *all* humanity, regardless of religious conviction, race, gender or any other attribute to enrich, brighten and preserve the world.⁶

2. What is a Human Being?

When people decry the way in which Christians act, saying they should act better, they are correct but may still be working on a misunderstanding of the Christian story.

The reason for evil, according to Genesis 3, is that at some time in the past humanity rebelled against the sovereignty of God and chose to live life under their own authority.

However, in the act of becoming a follower of Jesus a person changes their allegiance from themselves to Jesus, from rebellion to being a subject of God's. This is called repentance, turning through 180 degrees to face and travel the opposite way.

Eph. 4:13-15

3. From whence comes the idea of 'good'?

In today's world we take for granted the ideas we have for what is right and what is wrong behaviour. What many have forgotten is that these ideas are, by and large, based on the Jewish/Christian worldview.

When people object to the wrong behaviour of both individuals and the Church, they are in fact appealing to a Christian way of living.

War and Violence:

Throughout history people of faith have used that faith to transcend cultural differences so that parties feel they are in a cosmic battle

⁶ Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* (Great Britain: Hodder and Stoughton, 2008), 53.

between good and evil. This has indeed lead to wars and violence in the name of religion, including Christianity.

The Christian story would say that violence and war are a result of the rebellion of humanity from the sovereignty of God. When people believe that they are their own boss then they will use any excuse to obtain and hold on to power.

Fanaticism:

Many people try to understand Christians along a spectrum from 'nominalism' at one end to 'fanaticism' at the other.

The problem with this approach is that it assumes the Christian faith is some form of moral improvement scheme.

But the Christian faith is about salvation by grace.

The problem with anywhere on the continuum is that they are not Christian enough.

Tim Keller:

“The typical criticisms by secular people about the oppressiveness and injustices of the Christina church actually comes from Christianity’s own resources for critique of itself.”⁷

“The answer is *not* to abandon the Christian faith, because that would leave us with neither the standards nor the resources to make correction. Instead we should move to a fuller and deeper grasp of what Christianity is.”⁸

⁷ Keller, 61

⁸ Keller, 62