

The History of Christian Thought as an Apologetic

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Though Greek philosophy has undeniably (and at times quite profoundly) influenced Christian thought since the church's inception, Christianity's core doctrines cannot be said to be the product of mere abstract philosophical speculation. Nor is Christianity reducible to a system of laws, ordinances, or moral precepts. Rather, Christianity's central, foundational doctrine is the *historical* claim that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2 Corinthians 5:19). The great apostle Paul, arguably the greatest theologian and missionary the world has ever known, constantly drew his readers back to the historical basis for their faith. To the believers at Corinth he wrote:

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time (1 Corinthians 15:3-8).¹

Paul goes on to argue that if Christ's death was not the sufficient payment for the world's sin debt, as evidenced by his resurrection from the dead, then people are still estranged from God. Their sin debt remains, judgment looms ahead, and those that have gone to their graves hoping in Christ are lost forever. Paul reached the solemn conclusion that "if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Corinthians 15:19). It is little wonder then that those antagonistic to Christ and his claims have sought to discredit Christianity on historical grounds. Such historical attacks on Christianity are nothing new. At the time of Christ himself, there were false claims about what he taught

¹All Scripture from the *King James Version* of the Holy Bible.

(Mark 14:56, 58), what he did (John 4:1-3), and what became of his body (Matthew 28:12-15). Though most scholars today reject the radical claim that Christ is a legendary figure who never actually existed,² this notion has nonetheless found growing acceptance at a popular level amongst Christianity's antagonists.³

The skeptical attack on Christianity is always aimed at the church's founding document, the Bible. A multi-front attack has become standard, the first of which being the claim that the biblical text itself is unreliable. Since the original documents are no longer extant, so the argument goes, one is justified in being skeptical of the fidelity of the extant copies. This claim is bolstered by the fact that hundreds of thousands of variant readings have been collated between the ancient copies of the New Testament.⁴ The second front is the outright denial of the Bible's historical accuracy. This two-pronged attack focuses on alleged contradictions between the biblical authors themselves, and those between the biblical authors and their secular counterparts. The alleged inconsistencies amongst the resurrection accounts (Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20) are classic examples of the former,⁵ while Luke's claimed historical blunder regarding the Roman census (Luke 2:1-2) is a common example of the latter.⁶

²F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 1964), p. 119.

³For instance, Kenneth Humphreys, *Jesus Never Existed* (Historical Review Press, Carshalton, United Kingdom, 2005).

⁴Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 2005), pp. 10, 90.

⁵Charles Templeton, *Farewell to God: My Reasons for Rejecting the Christian Faith* (Toronto, ON: McClelland & Stewart, 1996), pp. 118-121.

⁶Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), p. 119.

Additionally, Christianity's detractors often claim that the Bible is abominable morally, and ought not to be consulted for ethical instruction. The fact that the Bible does not condemn outright moral obscenities such as slavery, but actually provides regulation and practical instruction on it, is one of the most common moral arguments urged against Christianity.⁷ From there it is a short step to blame Christianity for not only the slave trade, but for a plethora of social evils. Most commonly these include the mistreatment of women,⁸ and the retardation of scientific progress.⁹ Lastly, Christianity's detractors will often point to the church's long divisive history of bitter doctrinal debates, which sometimes culminated in bloodshed and even outright war. They rightly ask how the Bible can be the revelation of an omnibenevolent God when it has gendered such a titanic amount of bitterness and violence.¹⁰ These historical, moral, and societal objections to Christianity can and must be countered (Titus 1:9).

With respect to the detractor's historical arguments, it must be pointed out first of all that, generally speaking, scholars utilize widely agreed upon methods and standards for normal historical investigation and evaluation.¹¹ In fact, the detractors themselves claim that the use of just these standards necessarily brings down the conclusion that the

⁷Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, (Toronto, ON: McClelland & Stewart, 2008), p. 100, 102.

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A. C. Grayling, *The GOD Argument: The Case Against Religion and for Humanism* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp.2, 14, 238.

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Dawkins, pp. 319-323.

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John Loftus in debate with Dinesh D'Sousa, *Does the Christian God Exist?* (2010), mp3 available at <http://www.biblicalcatholic.com/apologetics/audio.htm#Dinesh> [Accessed December 18, 2015].

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C. Behan McCullah, *Justifying Historical Descriptions* (Cambridge University Press, 1984).

Bible is wanting textually, historically, and morally. Other able scholars, however, many of whom began their investigative work as skeptics themselves, have utilized the very same standards but have reached very different conclusions.¹²

In order to adjudicate between these two views, it is helpful to consider what conditions must obtain in order to justify the normal procedures of historical inquiry and moral evaluation in the first place. For instance, the world cannot be a place where chance or contingency is ultimate; it cannot be a place where literally anything can happen with equal probability. For rational inquiry to proceed profitably, the world must be one in which there is a guaranteed general uniformity to the ordinary processes of nature. Without such a guarantee, all predication and induction, which comprise the very heart of the investigative enterprise, would be rendered arbitrary and therefore useless in the quest for genuine knowledge acquisition. Furthermore, the world must be a place where human minds are not only capable of generating thought that corresponds to reality, but that they generally do so. Without these crucial conditions, there is no reason to think that evidence is tied to fact in the way people commonly suppose. Lastly, particularly with respect to the moral complaints against the Bible, the world must be a place in which an objective and prescriptive moral standard exists.

Though everyone engaged in rational and moral inquiry must act as though these conditions actually obtain, it is the Bible-believing Christian alone who has rational warrant for doing so. In other words, the world must be the kind of place God says it is in order to justify any rational, historical, or moral inquiry. The Bible guarantees a general

¹²John McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999), pp. xxiii-xxvii; Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), p 16; Frank Morrison, *Who Moved the Stone* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), pp. 9-12.

uniformity to natural process (Genesis 8:22; Luke 12:54-55) and the general reliability of human rational and cognitive faculties (Psalm 94:10; Proverbs 20:12; John 1:9).

Furthermore, as the very locus and paradigm of moral goodness, God alone can account for the existence of objective moral values and duties (Isaiah 5:16; 1 John 1:5). By assuming that which only Christianity can account for, the critic has effectively neutralized his own assaults upon the Bible. Ironically, the harder he tries to show the principles upon which his assault is based are objectively true, the more he strengthens the case for Christian theism. In this way the critic's own assault upon the Bible is its own best refutation.

Even if one sets aside such transcendental argumentation, an examination of the history of Christian thought itself can provide a strong inductive case for credibility of the biblical record. To begin with, the sheer amount of material that falls into this category is staggering. This fact alone cries out for explanation. A person standing where the mighty Amazon enters the Atlantic might rightly conclude that the gigantic river before him drains an entire continent. So too, the historian faced with the mighty current of Christian thought might justly conclude that such a current has an extraordinary—even supernatural—source.

With respect to the claim of textual corruption, the study of the history of Christian thought is very helpful. The earliest Christians, taking their cues from the Bible itself, saw unparalleled value in the written word of God. Their carefulness in transcribing the holy text is attested to by the more than 5,000 ancient copies of the Greek New Testament alone.¹³ Furthermore, even if such abundant manuscript evidence were

¹³McDowell, p. 34.

not extant, virtually the entire New Testament text could be reconstructed from the quotations from it found in the letters, treatises, and apologies of the early church.¹⁴ Their writings may it clear that what is regarded as the New Testament today is a faithful reproduction of what the early church had.

A study of the history of Christian thought also speaks to the alleged contradictions and historical blunders in the Bible. To begin with, it is difficult to believe that the early church, had it been in the habit of revising the Bible in order to conform to some standard, would leave un-amended what appear to be obvious internal and external inconsistencies.¹⁵ In other words, the very existence of apparent contradictions in the Bible speak to the fidelity of the text. Christian thinkers have long been aware of these difficult passages and have suggested a number of plausible solutions.¹⁶ It must be remembered that the first recipients of the Scriptures were obviously much closer to the writing of the text and the events they describe than the modern day critic. This is not only the case chronologically, but linguistically and culturally as well. All things considered, it makes much more sense to suppose that the critic is ignorant of the biblical author's knowledge than that the critic is knowledgeable of the biblical author's ignorance.

Concerning the charge that the Bible is immoral for its approval of slavery, it must pointed out that there is no agreement between the modern conception of slavery

¹⁴Ibid, 43.

¹⁵ John W. Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1973), p. 178.

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Augustine of Hippo, *Harmony of the Gospels*, available at www.basilica.org/pages/ebooks/St.%20Augustine-%20The%20Harmony%20of%20the%20Gospels.pdf [Accessed December 21, 2015].

and what God permitted and regulated in Israel. What God regulated in Israel was *servanthood*, not slavery. The former was a social convention not that different from paid employment in a cash economy such as exists in modern North America.”¹⁷ Slavery amongst the pagans included the systematic terrorizing of slaves,¹⁸ as well as their routine sexual use and abuse.¹⁹ In Athens the courtroom testimony of a slave was admitted only under torture.²⁰ The Bible strictly condemns these and other nightmarish practises normally associated with slavery. These include kidnapping (Exodus 21:16; Deuteronomy 24:7; 1 Timothy 1:8-11) and abuse (Exodus 21:2-21, 26-27; Deuteronomy 24:7, 14-15). The Bible clearly teaches the intrinsic value and equality of all human beings (Genesis 1:26-27; 9:6), servants included (Job 31:13-15). It is important to note that in Bible times, poverty was the reason for selling oneself or a family member into servitude (Leviticus 25:39, 47). Nevertheless, servanthood was not the only option. In its gleanings and tithing commandments, the Moasic Law instructed Israel to provide for the poor and needy (Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:32; Deuteronomy 24:18-19, 21-22; 26:12-13). It is also important to note that poverty in Israel was result of disobedience (Leviticus 25:18-19; 26:3-5; Deuteronomy 28:1-2, 13-46). Had Israel remained obedient to God, there would have been no poor and needy among her people. It is not God’s will that his people be in want (Deuteronomy 15:4).

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Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), p. 125.

¹⁸D. James Kennedy, *What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1994), p. 19.

¹⁹Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*, (New York, NY: Random House, 1988), p. xvii

²⁰Kennedy, p. 18.

Whatever the case, the Genesis account of creation clearly teaches that all humans are equal in value and dignity. This doctrine was not peripheral in early Christian thought; the church's most outstanding theologian and missionary used it as the very foundation for his gospel proclamation to the gentiles (Acts 17:26). Elaine Pagels notes how others followed this lead, eventually giving political application to the biblical doctrine of human equality. She writes,

“...Clement of Alexandria took the statement that God had created humanity in his image as evidence of human equality—and as an indictment of the imperial cult. From such beginning, in open defiance of the totalitarian Roman state, and often met with brutal violence, Christians forged what would become, centuries later, the western ideas of freedom and of the infinite value of each human life.”²¹

This was the thought of Francisco Vitoria (1492-1546), and William Wilberforce (1759-1833). The former argued strenuously against the dispossessing of the North American Natives from their lands,²² whilst the latter spent decades battling against the slave trade in British territories. Due to his efforts, more than 700,000 British slaves were set free in 1833.²³

Concerning both the Inquisition and Crusades, it is true that *professing* Christians were largely responsible for the atrocities that attended these programs. Nevertheless, a fair reading of the Bible shows that these were certainly not the products of *Christian* thought.²⁴ The Bible clearly prescribes against the use of physical violence for the

²¹Pagels, p. xxiv.

²²Justo Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, Revised Ed. Vol. 3, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1987), pp. 210-213.

²³Kennedy p. 21.

²⁴Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions*, 2nd Ed., (InterVarsity Press, 2012), p. 144.

defence and advancement of the kingdom of God (John18:36; 2 Corinthians 10:4). Even as these and other such programs were wreaking havoc, however, there were Christians who stood against what was happening, and, at enormous risk to their own lives, sought to call the church back to its biblical ideals. Both Protestants²⁵ and Anabaptists²⁶ suffered terribly at the hands of the Roman Catholic Church. The fact that the state church violently suppressed such people ought to be evidence enough that, for the most part, church leadership had become utterly apostate.

It is interesting to note that those opposed to Christianity on moral grounds owe their very moral sensitivities to the action of Christ (Romans 2:14-15) and his church. It was the church that so saturated the western world with instruction on God's moral values and duties that even Christianity's detractors use them as a standard according to which they expect others to conform. Pagels notes that it was the biblical doctrine of creation that introduced to the Graeco-Roman culture values such as,

the intrinsic worth of every human being, made in God's image (Genesis 1:26). Often these other values would prove immensely influential. . . . Christians living more than fifteen hundred years later would invoke this idea to help transform the laws, ethics, and political institutions of the west. In 1776, the authors of the Declaration of Independence invoked the biblical account of creation to declare that, "we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal . . ."—an idea so familiar that we may have difficulty seeing that it is empirically unprovable; Aristotle, among others, would have considered it absurd."²⁷

Many of today's most ardent anti-theists equate parental religious instruction with outright child abuse.²⁸ This concern for the welfare of children, though commendable,

²⁵Cecil Roth, *The Spanish Inquisition*, (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), pp. 163-183.

²⁶Gonzalez, pp. 89-93.

²⁷Pagels, p. xx.

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nonetheless demands explanation. From a Christian perspective, this concern reflects not only a God-given sensitivity to his moral standards (Romans 2:14-15), but the transformative influence of Christian thought on Western society. With its doctrines of the virgin birth and of little children being “the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:4), Christianity brought objective value to the lives of infants and small children. Before that time, the lives of infants were generally held in low esteem.²⁹ This is illustrated in the second century *Epistle of Matthes to Diognetus*, where the writer, attempting to describe the beliefs and practices of Christians, states that Christians “marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; *but they do not destroy their offspring.*”³⁰ It was Christian thought that made infanticide abhorrent to the Western mind. The sixth century Christian Emperor Justinian decreed that,

Those who expose children, possibly hoping they would die, and those who use the potions of the abortionist, are subject to the full penalty of the law—both civil and ecclesiastical—for murder. Should exposure occur, the finder of the child is to see that he is baptized and that he is treated with Christian care and compassion. They may be adopted as *ad scriptorium*—even as we ourselves have been adopted into the kingdom of grace.³¹

Phil Fernandes, *The Atheist Delusion: A Christian Response to Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins* (Xulon Press, 2009), pp. 6-7.

²⁹ Henry Halley, *Halley's Bible Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), p. 141.

³⁰ *The Epistle of Matthes to Diognetus*, Chapter V “Manners of the Christians,” (ANF, 1:26).

³¹ As quoted by Kennedy, p.13.

Ironically, those who complain the loudest about the Bible's alleged moral deficiencies also applaud the government sanctioned murder of unborn babies.³² This marks another in a long list of systemic contradictions in unbelieving thought.³³

The Lord Jesus taught that the first and greatest of all God's moral imperatives is the command to love God "with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength" (Mark 12:20). The second greatest command is like the first, namely, "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." According to the Lord, "There is none other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:31). The great apostle Paul instructed believers to "owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8). God's command to love others is not arbitrary. On the contrary, it flows from the very character of God himself. The apostle John explained that "love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; *for God is love*" (1 John 4:7-8, emphasis added). Christian obedience to God's command to love found practical expression in the form of Christian charity, which as Kenneth Scott Latourette explains, introduced important changes to existing charitable programs:

[I]n the use of money for the general welfare, Christianity brought five significant innovations. It made giving the obligation of its adherents, poor as well as rich, for it was held that all should contribute, each according to his ability . . . The motive that was stressed was also new: it was love in grateful response to the love of Christ, who, though he was rich, yet for the sake of those who were to follow him became poor, that they through his poverty might become rich. The objects of beneficence were also changed, at least in part. The Christian community stressed

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Grayling, pp. 235-236.

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John Feakes, *Atheism, Christianity: An Uncommon Dialogue*, debate with Luke Thiessen, June 6, 2015; mp3 available at www.newlifesanctuarychurch.com/audio/debates/ [Accessed December 21, 2015].

the support of its widows, orphans, sick, and disabled, and of those who because of their faith were thrown out of employment or were imprisoned. . . . Christian love and service were not restricted to members of the Church. They were also extended to non-Christians. The command to love one's neighbour was not forgotten . . . [W]hen pestilence swept great cities such as Carthage and Alexandria, and when the pagans had fled to escape it, Christians remained and cared for the sick and dying. After persecutions ceased, wealthy Christians founded hospitals. We must note that, as a fifth innovation, Christian giving was personalized. Springing as it did from love, it was not impersonal service to masses of men . . . but it poured itself out to individuals, valuing each as having distinct worth in the sight of God, one "for whom Christ died."³⁴

The second century apologist Justin Martyr described the radical moral change that he observed in Christian converts. He declared that,

"[W]e who formerly delighted in fornication, now embrace charity alone. . . . we who valued above all things the acquisition of wealth and possessions, now bring what we have into common stock, and communicate to every one in need; we who hated and destroyed one another, and on account of their different manners would not sit by the same hearth or fire with men of a different tribe, now, since the coming of Christ, live familiarly with them, and pray for our enemies, and endeavor to persuade those who hate us unjustly to live conformably to the good precepts of Christ..."³⁵

It was the church's faith commitment to Christ, and obedience to his moral commands that, in large measure, made love, equality, and charity commendable to the Western mind.

Regarding the claim that Christianity is responsible for the mistreatment of women, one must distinguish between what certain professing Christians have done, and what the Bible clearly teaches. The Genesis account of creation, from which all Christian doctrine flows, clearly states that God created both man and woman in his own image and

³⁴Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, (San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 1975) Revised edition vol. 1, PDF of selected chapters available at <http://www.roacusa.org/htdocs/A%20History%20of%20Christianity,%20I,%20K.S.Latourette.pdf> [Accessed Dec 19, 2015].

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Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, I.14 (ANF. 1:167).

likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). Both enjoy equal value and dignity in the eyes of God. Paul brings this out clearly when he states that, though there are functional distinctions in home and family and in the church³⁶ (1 Corinthians 11:3; 14:34-37; Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Timothy 2:11-12), nevertheless, when it comes to intrinsic worth, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26-28).

It is important to note that the first gospel proclamation at the dawn of human history contains not only the promise of a conquering saviour who would crush mankind’s most dreadful enemy, but also draws attention to the woman through whom he would come. The LORD declared to Satan, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15). This theme, namely, that salvation and the deliverance from enemies come through a woman, appears repeatedly throughout the Bible (Zipporah, Exodus 4:24-26; Rahab, Joshua 2; Jael, Judges 4-5; and Mary, Matthew 2; Luke 2). The value and significance of women in Christian thought came to expression in marked societal change. Whereas the killing of infant girls was widespread amongst the pagans, the Church utterly forbade the practise. Furthermore, the church, recognizing the sanctity of marriage as a depiction of the relationship between the believer and Christ, condemned divorce, incest, polygamy, and marital infidelity. Whereas her pagan neighbors condemned only infidelity on the part of the wife, the church held no such double standard; men as well as women were to be virgins before marriage and were to remain faithful to their spouses.³⁷

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Mangalwadi, p. 296.

³⁷Ibid, p. 283.

In Rome great pressure was placed on widows to remarry. “Augustus Caesar, for example, fined widows who failed to remarry within two years.”³⁸ When they did so their inheritance became the property of their new husbands. This was not so among Christians. As noted earlier, following the New Testament imperative (James 1:27), Christians cared for their widows and gave them the option to marry (1 Corinthians 7:8-9). Whatever the case, they were allowed to keep their former husband’s estates.³⁹ Furthermore, Christians protected women by raising the age of marriage. In the early centuries of the Christian era, pagan girls were most commonly married before they were in their teens, a practice recognized by Plutarch as “cruel and contrary to nature because it filled girls with hatred and fear.”⁴⁰ Christian girls, on the other hand, were well into their teens before being married. About half the number of Christian girls did not marry before they were eighteen.⁴¹ Vishal Mangalwadi explains that, “Christians, in contrast, could delay their daughters’ marriages because the New Testament gave them different moral standards—the same standard for men and women. The Bible’s sexual ethic gave Christian girls the time to grow up and become better wives and mothers.”⁴² Christian thought recognizes men and women as equals in value and dignity, and therefore has, above all else, contributed to the fair treatment of women. Phil Fernandes noted that, “the whole women’s rights movement, just as the abolitionist movement, was founded by

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Ibid, p. 284.

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Ibid.

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Ibid.

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Ibid.

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Ibid.

Christians because they saw in the Bible that women were created in the image of God as well.”⁴³

Like the claim that Christianity devalues women, the claim that “Christianity especially has injured the development of science”⁴⁴ is a prevalent myth of modern times. What makes this latter phenomenon so remarkable is the fact that it is so easily shown to be a myth. Any investigation into the history of science reveals that almost every founder of every major branch of science was a theist; most were *Christian* theists.⁴⁵ Furthermore, as even many of Christianity’s detractors will admit, it was not in spite of their faith commitment to Christ that they were able to make significant scientific discoveries, but precisely *because* of it. Loren Eiseley explains:

[I]t is the Christian world that finally gave birth in a clear articulate fashion to the experimental method of science itself. . . . [T]he philosophy of experimental science . . . began its discoveries and made use of its methods in the faith, not the knowledge, that it was dealing with a rational universe controlled by a creator who did not act upon whim nor interfere with the forces He had set in operation. The experimental method succeeded beyond men’s wildest dreams but the faith that brought it into being owes something to the Christian conception of the nature of God. It is surely one of the curious paradoxes of history that science, which professionally has little to do with faith, owes its origins to an act of faith that the universe can be rationally interpreted, and that science today is sustained by that assumption.⁴⁶

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Phil Fernandes, *Acts Part 20: No Power Can Stop the Preaching of God’s Word*, audio lecture, November 30, 2015, mp3 available at www.sermonaudio.com [Accessed December 22, 2015].

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Do You Feel That Organized Religion Hinders a Society? Survey results available at www.debate.org/opinions/do-you-feel-that-organized-religion-hinders-a-society [Accessed December 24, 2015].

⁴⁵Vishal Mangalwadi, *The Book That Changed Your World: How the Bible Created the Soul of Western Civilization* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2011), p. 245.

⁴⁶Loren Eiseley, *Darwin’s Century: Evolution and the Men who Discovered It* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1961), p. 62.

Not only did the pioneers of modern scientist believe that God created and sustained an orderly universe, but that the human mind itself was designed by God for the express purpose of apprehending truth. For the founders of modern science, it was these presuppositions that provided the rational justification for what they were doing. It is ironic that, though Christian theism alone that can account not only for the advent of modern science, but its continued success-generating quality, many non-theists claim science as their great ally.⁴⁷

It is true that Christian history is replete with internal conflict, sometimes to the point of bloodshed and even outright war. As noted earlier, however, hateful opposition between people of differing opinions, especially when it results in bloodshed, is not the fruit of *Christian* thought. Whatever the case, it is clearly fallacious to argue that since church history is tainted with internal strife and debate, the New Testament is therefore untrustworthy. Generally speaking, the church debated fine points of doctrine that did nothing to cast doubt on the historical reliability of the Bible. To a man, the early church saw the Scriptures as the infallible word of God. Though disagreement frequently arose over how best to *interpret* God's revelation, its historical accuracy was never questioned. Cause for debate increased by orders of magnitude, however, as the church sought to share the gospel with those accustomed to Greek modes of thinking. As it did so, it became necessary to examine and communicate Christian doctrine in precise philosophical terms, terms that are foreign to the Bible itself. This process took centuries and, as might be expected, generated a good deal of debate amongst Christians.

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Alister McGrath and Joanna Colicutt McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion? Atheist Fundamentalism and the Denial of the Divine* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), pp. 41-42.

For instance, the church entered into countless debates concerning Christ. At no point, however, did Christians cease to see him as divine; this they affirmed since New Testament times (John 1:1-14; 20:28; Romans 9:5; 1 Timothy 3:16; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:1-12), but they strove to understand *how* he was divine. More broadly, Christians sought to understand how God exists as a Trinity, how the Second Person of the Trinity became a man, what his death on the cross actually accomplished, and how and to what extent Christ was present in the Eucharist. In addition, the church hotly debated topics as the nature of universals, the relationship between faith and reason, the consequences of Adam's fall, and the question of human freewill and responsibility.⁴⁸ Again, none of these debates cast the slightest doubt on the historical accuracy of the Bible.

Though the negative, though unnecessary, results of these debates is undeniable, they did make several helpful contributions. First, since what was being debated was *biblical* doctrine, these debates forced people into serious study of the Bible. This resulted in greater biblical literacy, which, from a Christian perspective, can only be seen as positive. Second, as theologians debated extremely fine points of doctrine, they necessarily became better philosophers. They learned to argue cogently using precise theological and philosophical terminology. At the same time, they became proficient at recognizing logical fallacies in their opponents' argumentation. Many of the world's greatest philosophers were, and are, *Christian* philosophers. In fact, even in the modern Western secularist world, philosophy is still a formal area of study in which it is still respectable to be a theist.⁴⁹ Lastly, since Christianity is based on the *historical* truth of

⁴⁸Justo Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, (3 volumes) provides an overview of these and other debates in the early church.

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"Modernizing the Case for God," *Time*, April 7, 1980, pp. 65-66.

what God in Christ did in terms of securing redemption for mankind and establishing his church, Christians were forced to become better historians in order to defend their faith. This was true not only when Christians were defending their faith against their pagan antagonists, but also when Roman Catholics and Protestants attempted to show one other that their own beliefs and practices could be traced back to the time of the apostles. Justo Gonzalez notes that this latter debate “forced the attention of Christianity upon its own history. As the debate continued, both sides were obliged to develop scientific methods of research that could not be easily refuted by the opponents, and thus modern critical historiography took its first steps.”⁵⁰

In conclusion, the Christian apologist has many powerful tools at his disposal with which to defend his faith. He can argue that Christian theism must be presupposed in order to justify any rational inquiry whatever. In this way Christianity is shown to be a rational necessity. On the other hand, the apologist can argue for the truth of Christian theism by pointing out that only the God of the Bible, and the Christ who reveals him, can account for the remarkable content and influence of Christian thought itself.

⁵⁰Justo Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol. 3, p. 207.

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