

Why I am a Christian:

in a scientific, humanistic and atheistic world

Introduction: *My Biases, The Beginning of a Faith Journey*

⁹To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' ¹³"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' ¹⁴"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Luke 18:9-14

About Biases:

Every one of us has biases that inform our world view and how we interpret information and understand the events that occur around us. We ought to be aware of our biases, and we ought to have our biases challenged. In challenging our biases, we find that some of them are wrong; but, some withstand the strains of the tests put upon them, and, therefore, become worthy lenses through which we may observe and understand the world. The biases below are those that are necessary for understanding my world view. We will not have time over the course of this series to examine them all, but many of the salient biases will be tested and challenged in the weeks to come.

My Biases About God

- I believe that there is a God though I do not know it, nor can I prove it. However, there are many things that I believe to be true, and for which I live my life, things that cannot be proven: love is one of them. I can point to circumstantial evidence of love, but love is not a substance that can be scientifically quantified. Even if it could, who would want to live in that world? Also, music transcends and defies scientific explanation. Science can explain the math of music, its sound waves, and the beat. It can even mimic the sound of music. However, it is the muses that inspire the arts, and this transcends any rational explanation. Therefore, I am comfortable living in a world in which the most important and inspiring of beliefs cannot be verified scientifically. Carl Jung said of science and humanism, we have become "dominated by the goddess Reason, who is our greatest and most tragic illusion."
- God is a God of love. This seems self-evident, but some of the most hateful people I have met are Christians. Did they miss that lesson? A God that relishes in damning people to hell because they did not fulfill a human made punch-list of "*Things to do before one can get into heaven,*" is not worthy of our worship and praise. At the risk of making some Christians squeamish, I spit on and reject the hating God that some Christians proclaim. I want nothing to do with it, and have no desire being in eternity with that type of God.
- God speaks love to and through people, most often through the least likely, and even through non-Christians (this is why so many reject the message: the source does not appear to be credible or respectable.) In the Bible, God spoke through a donkey, non-Jews and Christians, a rabble of Jews, and a teenage girl. I believe that God has spoken through Buddha, Gandhi, Einstein, Bach, Beethoven and

the Beatles (That's right, the Beatles. When they sang those immortal words, *all you need is love*, they were speaking a word of God). History is the story of God's love interacting with humanity.

My Biases About Religion

- There is a difference between religion and faith: Faith is a belief that transcends reason (sometimes sanity) and cannot be proven, but which transforms one's life. It is amazing what people can put their faith in: i.e., themselves (how many times have you let yourself down? If you haven't, you must have pretty low expectations for yourself, or you are blissfully ignorant and don't see yourself the way others see you), the government, the American dream, freedom, the military, alcohol, football, their families, Sam Harris (it is amazing how atheists have such a fervor and passion for their atheistic icons that certainly could be considered faith), C.S. Lewis (Mother Theresa, Pope John Paul II), all of which transcend reason. None would seem to be deserving of such faith, but each of us must muddle through and figure this out. My experience with each may limit the amount of faith I can place in each. Religion is the institutionalization of faith in order to pass that faith on.
- There is a difference between the church and the congregation. The church is the people of God. The congregation is the institutionalization of the church on a local level.
- Everything that is important to us we institutionalize; i.e.—brushing our teeth, changing our batteries in our smoke detectors, mom's and mother's day (how many are skeptical of every new holiday/institution that the card companies want to entrench into our culture?), the NFL, education.
- Institutions, including religion, are not inherently evil. It is only when the institution's survival, power and politics become more important than its purpose that it becomes a force of destruction and evil, at worst, or falls into a malaise at best. The latter is the story of what is happening to congregations in the US. By the year 2020, we will lose another 50% of the congregations that currently exist in the US. Surprisingly, I'm OK with that. When an institution falls into a malaise, it is difficult and almost impossible to revitalize it. It is sometimes better to reboot. Jesus was opposed to the rabbinical traditions and the temple institution that had grown up around Judaism and had led the people away from God. This is the story of the OT: one king after another leading God's people away from God. I think Jesus would say the same thing today about the church, whether catholic or evangelical or protestant or mainline: we have led people away from God by making our traditions more important than our purpose to love.
- Religious people who hate or kill in the name of their faith do not represent God. Ever! Even Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who participated in a plot to kill Adolph Hitler, did not try to justify his actions by claiming, *"It's what God wants me to do, therefore I am not responsible for my actions."* He took responsibility for his actions, and threw himself at the mercy of God, humanity and future historians to judge his actions as right or wrong.
- Christianity is political, but our politics are of the kingdom of heaven. I am against Right/Left wingers who collude with government to accomplish their ends. Government does not have Christ at the center, and therefore cannot be Christian. Only people can be Christian. Whenever Christianity colludes with power, it ceases to be Christian. Government institutes law, but Christianity only has one law: love. Love is a law that, by its very nature, cannot be demanded or institutionalized.

My Biases About People

- Life is a gift of God, not an entitlement which is owed to us. We are not owed anything. Whenever we say, “*Why me?*” we are buying into the entitlement philosophy. The truth is, we all ask “*Why me?*” at some point in our lives, but that is part of the struggle of life: moving from seeing life as entitlement to seeing it as gift.
- Doubting is a necessary prequel to spiritual growth. In athletics, if one intends to get better, one must venture beyond what is comfortable. No pain, no gain. The only way to grow in physical prowess is to test oneself and risk failure. Test your faith. Question it. Turn it upside down. The people who possess the deepest faith are the ones who experienced the deepest doubts: Martin Luther, Mother Theresa, Corrie Ten Boom. We respect them because their faith was tested by tumultuous seasons of doubt.
- Life is a journey of faith. This is why God allows this world to go on. God gives everyone of us the opportunity and privilege of life and the opportunity for this journey. God is a God of the future: always looking to the next generation. God saw you and said, this world should go on to give you the opportunity of life.
- Our purpose during this journey is to learn how to love God, love others, and care for God’s creation, all of which, we pretty much stink at; hence, the reason for the journey.
- People have been patient with me during my journey, so I need to be patient with them during their journey.
- It is not our responsibility to change people or to brow-beat them into believing (after all, it is their journey, not mine): I am only responsible to love people and tell them the stories of love, and let God be the one who transforms them. When we insist upon change, we demonstrate our lack of trust in the gift of the Holy Spirit. If God truly exists, it is God who convicts and brings people to Christ. The more dogmatic and/or violent one is in their faith, the more one demonstrates their lack of belief.
- About the only people who go to hell are religious people who use faith for their own personal gain, hence, the blaspheming of the Spirit (Mark 3). My apologies to those atheists who continue to try to find ways to blaspheme the Holy Spirit (*The Blasphemy Challenge: Do you have a Soul You’re not Using?*). They will be disappointed that it requires a person to have faith. Jesus never condemns those outside of Judaism, only the religious leaders of Israel.
- No-one is as intelligent as they think they are, and the faults of the perspectives to which we hold are blatantly obvious to those who hold the opposing view. Atheists will boast that any 6th grade atheist can pick apart CS Lewis’ “*Mere Christianity.*” Really? I don’t think so. They may be able to regurgitate Sam Harris or Christopher Hitchens, but that does not mean they understand it. Regurgitating the talking points of others is not a sign of intelligence. In all fairness, Christians do the same thing. We do need to think our faith through, ultimately taking responsibility for own opinions. Therefore, we people of faith should have some humility: We are not as bright as we think we are, nor are our literary heroes. Of course, atheists and their literary heroes are not as bright as they think they are, either. We are all fumbling through this life, trying to figure it out. Therefore, we need to be more respectful of each other’s journey. This doesn’t mean that we must respect the other person’s opinion. We respect each other and each other’s journey. That is the story of faith interacting with life.

- We are all hypocrites: therefore, we should be more concerned about our own hypocrisy than someone else's.
- One must ALWAYS take responsibility for one's faith and one's decision. We can never use the God defense. The God defense, i.e., "*I'm only doing what God asked me (so I am not responsible for my actions)*" rightly drives atheists and agnostics crazy. It is an immoral defense. I may believe that God would prefer me to make a certain choice, but I am the one responsible for making said choice and I must be the one to pay for and suffer the consequences of my decisions.

My Biases About the World

- I am NOT a humanist: I do not believe that humanity is the center of creation, nor that we have, over the millennia, grown and matured significantly. We have more powerful weapons and tools, but not the maturity to handle them. Humans have the propensity for greatness and amazing generosity. Humans have the propensity for evil and destruction. The faith history of humanity shows us the good, the bad, and the ugly of how we have responded to the moral dilemmas of the world; and, it is our collected wisdom gathered through experience over millennia. Since humans have not changed significantly, despite what humanists may think, this wisdom is still normative and necessary.
- Humanism has created more chaos and destruction in the last 100 years than religion has since the beginning of time. All of the great wars of the 20th century, all of the advancements in the tools of destruction, and most of the political oppression has taken place under the watch of humanism, and secular political isms. People will use the most powerful ism and tools of the day to satiate their desire for power. I do not buy Christopher Hitchens' "excuse" of humanism and atheism for the destruction created in their name: that this was actually "religious" destruction, therefore humanism and atheism are absolved of responsibility.(i.e., Stalin, Pol-Pot, Hitler, Mao Tse-Tung were religious figures, even though they were atheists; therefore, once again, religion is to blame for the destruction they caused). The truth is, many humanists and atheists have the same hunger for control and power as many religious leaders have had; and, they will use whatever tools are available to gain that power. The tools that Hitchens labels as "religious" are not inherently unique to "religion," and never were. They are simply tools of oppression that will always be used by those who want power. Religion that is faithful to its purpose will not use these tools of manipulation and destruction. Atheists and humanists, however, who do have a vision of what they would like the world to be, will often use these tools of manipulation and destruction to implement their vision for this world. That does not make them religious, as Hitchens claims. To dismiss an atheistic leader who uses the tools of oppression to murder and enslave others as "religious" is to condemn the world to keep making the same mistakes over and over. For Hitchens to deny culpability and responsibility, and to blame the destruction wrought on the world by humanists and atheists as "religious," is an immoral and dangerous self-deception that guarantees that humanists and atheists will continue to oppress and murder people in the name of their ism.
- 95% of the world's problems are created by humans, and for the 5% that are not, humans have been given the resources necessary to resolve them. God has given us all of the resources to resolve our problems. The fact that people go to bed hungry at night is an indictment of humanity, not of God.