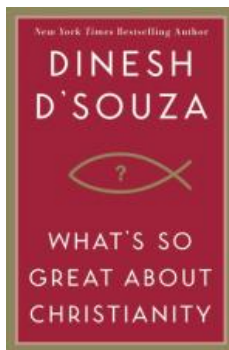


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An Argument Against the Atheists — Dinesh D’Souza on Christianity

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“Today’s Christians know that they do not, as their ancestors did, live in a society where God’s presence was unavoidable. No longer does Christianity form the moral basis of society. Many of us now reside in secular communities, where arguments drawn from the Bible or Christian revelation carry no weight, and where we hear a different language from that spoken in church.” That is the opening salvo from author Dinesh D’Souza in his new book, *What’s So Great About Christianity*.

D’Souza’s book is written, at least in part, as a response to the frontal attacks on Christianity launched by figures such as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris. He writes with a clear and uncluttered style and his arguments should attract considerable attention.

D’Souza chides believers for taking “the easy way out,” sheltering themselves in Christian intellectual enclaves rather than engaging the issues. They live separate secular and sacred lives without recognizing that this is incompatible with the Gospel.

Here is how he sees the challenge:

This is not a time for Christians to turn the other cheek. Rather, it is a time to drive the moneychangers out of the temple. The atheists no longer want to be tolerated. They want to monopolize the public square and to expel Christians from it. They want political questions like abortion to be divorced from religious and moral claims. They want to control school curricula so they can promote a secular ideology and undermine Christianity. They want to discredit the factual claims of religion, and they want to convince the rest of society that Christianity is not only mistaken but also evil. They blame religion for the crimes of history and for the ongoing conflicts in the world today. In short, they want to make religion – and especially the Christian religion – disappear from the face of the earth.

In fact, the new atheists are frustrated that belief in God has not passed away. They had great confidence that the theory of secularization would promise a new secular age, with belief in God relegated to humanity’s past. Nevertheless, this isn’t happening. Europe may be overwhelmingly secular, but Americans are still a deeply religious people — even if this does not represent an embrace of authentic Christianity.

Meanwhile, traditional religion is growing all over the world. The world is not becoming more secular, but more religious in a myriad of forms.

D’Souza sees this in his own personal story:

I have found this to be true in my own life. I am a native of India, and my ancestors were converted to Christianity by Portuguese missionaries. As this was the era of the Portuguese Inquisition, some force and bludgeoning may also have been involved. When I came to America as a student in 1978, my Christianity was largely a matter of birth and habit. But even as I plunged myself into modern life in the United States, my faith slowly deepened. G.K Chesterton calls this the “revolt into orthodoxy.” Like Chesterton, I find myself rebelling against extreme secularism and finding in Christianity

some remarkable answers to both intellectual and practical concerns. So I am grateful to those stern inquisitors for bringing me into the orbit of Christianity, even though I am sure my ancestors would not have shared my enthusiasm. Mine is a Christianity that is countercultural in the sense that it opposes powerful trends in modern Western culture. Yet it is thoroughly modern in that it addresses questions and needs raised by life in that culture. I don't know how I could live well without it.

The continent of Europe is now the great exception — the secular continent. D'Souza explains:

Then there is Europe. The most secular continent on the globe is decadent in the quite literal sense that its population is rapidly shrinking. Birth rates are abysmally low in France, Italy, Spain, the Czech Republic, and Sweden. The nations of Western Europe today show some of the lowest birth rates ever recorded, and Eastern European birth rates are comparably low. Historians have noted that Europe is suffering the most sustained reduction in its population since the Black Death in the fourteenth century, when one in three Europeans succumbed to the plague. Lacking the strong religious identity that once characterized Christendom, atheist Europe seems to be a civilization on its way out. Nietzsche predicted that European decadence would produce a miserable "last man" devoid of any purpose beyond making life comfortable and making provision for regular fornication. Well, Nietzsche's "last man" is finally here, and his name is Sven.

D'Souza's strongest analysis comes when he considers the true character of the new atheism. It is, he suggests, a "pelvic revolt against God." In other words, it is a revolt against Christian morality — especially sexual morality. This is not a new observation or argument, but D'Souza makes it exceptionally well:

My conclusion is that contrary to popular belief, atheism is not primarily an intellectual revolt, it is a moral revolt. Atheists don't find God invisible so much as objectionable. They aren't adjusting their desires to the truth, but rather the truth to fit their desires. This is something we can all identify with. It is a temptation even for believers. We want to be saved as long as we are not saved from our sins. We are quite willing to be saved from a whole host of social evils, from poverty to disease to war. But we want to leave untouched the personal evils, such as selfishness and lechery and pride. We need spiritual healing, but we do not want it. Like a supervisory parent, God gets in our way. This is the perennial appeal of atheism: it gets rid of the stern fellow with the long beard and liberates us for the pleasures of sin and depravity. The atheist seeks to get rid of moral judgment by getting rid of the judge.

D'Souza's argument here is very insightful. These atheists are not so much struggling with intellectual doubts but feel limited by moral constraints. They are repulsed by the very idea of divine judgment, so they get rid of the Judge.

Christians will find Dinesh D'Souza's latest book to be both interesting and helpful. His apologetic model is G. K. Chesterton, and he writes with a similar style and verve. I found his argument that Christians should embrace evolution while rejecting Darwinism to be unconvincing and unhelpful. The dominant model of evolutionary theory is just as atheistic and incompatible with Christianity as classical Darwinism.

Nevertheless, the book is filled with interesting and helpful arguments offered by a Christian intellectual who is heavily engaged in the great battle of ideas. *What's So Great About Christianity* is a helpful addition to our public debate.

