

Review - Christianity is not Great, Posted 28 August 2016 on amazon.co.uk

I love this book so much!! It is so clear and it makes my head buzz as it prompts me to think for myself and develop the points it makes.

I wish in this review to highlight what I regard to be the most original and most important statements in the book and to indicate how they open the door to further insights that are implied by them.

I think the best way to summarise the book is as follows: "There are some things that we do not try to condone or justify full stop. If a God lets babies suffer or if a book claiming to be his word commands violence you don't even think about trying. You are degraded when anybody or a religion asks you to. You reject the darkness full stop. Any degree of acceptance is a degree of consent even if you feel terrible about the evils. No scripture should be considered to be God's word that endorses violence or harm or ignorance in the name of that God." The straightforwardness of this should not be robbed of its force by being called belief or opinion. It is fact. Period.

It is no excuse to say, "But we don't have to do those terrible things today?" That means if you had to you would.

The other problem is that even if there is a God, it does not follow that any believers really connect with him. They could still be adoring a God in their heads, their own invention - a psychological projection, an idol. Just because a myth hits the truth does not mean the myth cares about the truth. Probably, it is more important to ask what belief in a God who demands we justify his letting horrific evil happen says about the believer than to vilify this God though he deserves it.

A God who lets evil happen or who does evil, does more evil in asking us to excuse it. Religion says God permits evil. But it does not admit that faith in God permits it too. Passively permitting evil is evil.

The book says that religion kills out of fear, ignorance, love of money and love of power. The love of money and power themselves are founded on fear and ignorance. And often it is wilful ignorance for we all know that money and power do not guarantee your wellbeing.

If belief in God leads to more trouble than it is worth then it should not be encouraged especially in children. Or you might prefer to say that belief in the supernatural is more trouble than it is worth. It is broader. Some who professed to be atheists have allegedly done terrible things. People can believe in the supernatural and be in denial that they do, or not realise it. I believe that demagogues who sow death and destruction everywhere seem to have faith that their evil will triumph and they will enjoy the fruits. How atheist were the atheists?

"Religion breeds fundamentalism in those who are prone to it."

True - if a religion is doing that then good people will walk away from it in case it corrupts them or others. Fundamentalists can appear in anything but the religious motivation for fundamentalism gives them more staying power. If Islam was purely political the problems would have dissipated centuries ago but because it is a religion we still have Islamic terrorists with us. Fundamentalism will appear even if there is no religion but the reason religion needs to go is that at least there will be no religious fundamentalism. There is enough of fundamentalism without religion. We don't need religion to be an extra catalyst for it. And the Bible demands that we think like extremists. Those who preach the Bible as truly God's word must take responsibility for its evil.

If a Christian reads the Bible and approves of how God commanded people to be stoned to death and ripped to shreds in war the Christian is seeing all that as not just excusable but as just. To see it as excusable is bad and to see it as just is bad too. They are both equally bad. To excuse injustice is as evil as to make out it is just.

Those who say, "We are nice good people and the extremists in our religion do not speak for us." That is up to history and the scriptures to decide. If your holy word of God tells you to kill and you are not doing it then the extremists are not extremists but proper believers and they do speak for you! That people just say they do not speak for them without having studied the matter carefully is disgraceful.

The book tells us that "faith is an epistemology". Religion has to claim that faith is somehow and in some mysterious way not mere belief but mystical knowledge of the truth. It is like supernatural knowledge. Otherwise it cannot be taken seriously. The bigot whose bigotries are based on opinions can be brought to a wiser way of looking at things. But the bigot who gets his information from the word of man and does not see that it is masquerading as the word of a God who knows better than anybody else cannot. If he changes it is a miracle and in spite of his faith and not because of it. The believer

does not allow anything to count against faith in God and Christ. A person who protects his beliefs from being shown implausible or even wrong is anti-truth and it is about him not God no matter how much he prays. Belief in God can be an idol. God and belief in God are two different things. Preferring belief in God to God is idolatry.

Greta Christiani says that all religions harms boil down to one thing, making claims that cannot be tested. For example, a prophet hearing God's voice. "It is uniquely armoured against criticism, questioning and self-correction." There's "no reality check." Because of how lies and errors lead to more lies and errors, religion can spin into extreme and dangerous detachment from reality.

I love the following, "Religious faith would not be such a negative force in society if it were just about religion. However, the magical thinking that becomes deeply ingrained whenever faith rules over facts warps all areas of life. It produces a frame of mind in which concepts are formulated with deep passion but without the slightest attention paid to the evidence that bears on the subject." So basing big claims and beliefs on insufficient evidence and without regard for facts and truth is a cancer and it will spread from your religious practice into every nook and cranny of your life. Think about that in the light of the fact that when the religious person does something non-religious such as washing the doorstep, she or he must do it in a religious or godly spirit so it is in fact religious.

With matters such as these, you don't wait until harm is done before you take action. Bad principles corrupt people and when action is taken it may be too late to stop the rot. If an irrational belief leads you to murder, the belief in itself is still no better or worse than a belief that the gnome in the garden is an incarnation of God. The consequences of a belief have nothing to do with the degree of rationality or irrationality. The bad results take place because the belief is irrational - how irrational it is or not has nothing to do with it. Believing that $2+2=3$ is just as irrational whether you kill over it or whether you keep your belief to yourself.

Christ said the greatest commandment was to love God wholly! He said that you love your neighbour not wholly but as yourself so there is a limit on the value put on your neighbour and none put on the value you must give to God. So you are to love your neighbour less than God. You love him less, just as yourself. The foundation of Christ's thinking is authority. You are not even allowed to love except in response to a divine command and a command that tells you that you must put a limit on the love you have for your neighbour - what if your neighbour is your baby? Such a "morality" only leads to people using religion as a weapon against "outsiders". It collapses as soon as people get the chance to do what they want. Nobody's heart is fully in a morality that is about control and commands. And even more so when the command given by Jesus is the essence of Christianity and what it is ultimately all about.

An atheist does not believe that hurting another person offends God or offends God's law. The atheist should worry about what the hurting of another says about her or him and what it does to the other person and maybe that person's friends and family. The atheist thinks in terms of hurting others but not in terms of sin - sin is breaking the moral law of God. If atheists hurt another person, they mean to hurt that person. But if believers in God hurt another person, it is not just about what they did to that person. It is about God too and God comes first. So belief makes the intention of the believer to hurt far stronger than the intention of the unbeliever. Faith in God and faith in religion lead to making evil intentions more worthy of condemnation and invent sins which do not exist. It is evil to accuse a person of sinning when we should accuse them of having done wrong - there is a difference that matters hugely. You need proof before you can accuse somebody of a crime against God and that means proving God and that the "sin" be it sex before marriage or whatever really is a sin. Belief in sin and God and religion amplify your wrongful intentions. They make you more evil inside if not outside than you would be if you were an atheist.

Ingersoll says in the book that, "Man had no right to prevent disease - diseases were sent by God as judgments." If an atheist does all he can to erase suffering in his village, he will not think, "Okay I have done all I can so that means I have no right to prevent the suffering I cannot stop." The believer will. The believer thinks that God decides how far you have the right to help. You may say it is silly to expect a person to say they have the right to stop suffering that they cannot stop. We are talking about principle here. So it is not silly. You can have the right to something you are unable to take. It is extremist to insist that there is no right to help others beyond the limits set by God.

Ingersoll is right. If God wants you to fight disease, you have to do it because he wants you to and it is not about your right but his. Christians will say that though God permits disease to exist, it does not mean he wants us to put up with it or let it thrive. His plan is that we fight it. But that is an admission that Christianity is essentially fanatical in outlook if not in action. It is saying, "God is right to send the diseases and cause people to suffer until his will lets us do something about it." The truly good person opposes evil and suffering and disease full stop. No ifs. No buts.

If it is true that we are all sinners and that we caused evil not God, then all suffering is ultimately our own fault. Even if God sends you cancer so that you might use it to grow in virtue, it is not punishment in one sense but it is in another. You are not given cancer because of anything you have done but it happens because of sin though not necessarily yours. Religion says the only difference between my sins and yours is the sins we choose to commit. If the sins that bring you

torment are not yours, the fact remains that you are a sinner. You deserve it in the sense that you would sin. So other people's sins say what you deserve.

Surely if you are good you would rather blame your own sins than somebody else's even if you are wrong? Christians detest the notion that the suffering of their loved ones is divine justice.

If God is really good, he is bigger than our errors or atheism. The only reason why you might need to believe there is a God so that he can benefit from the worship. If people get out of the habit of thinking that belief in God is supposed to benefit them the doctrine would soon become extinct.

Belief in religious doctrine is not really important if God loves us and cares for us. He should be bigger than our beliefs and errors. The real reason people believe is because they want God to judge others for them and punish people who slip through the nets of earthly justice. They also like to look down on those who do not believe.

God and belief in God are not the same thing. If your belief is right, it coincides with the truth. Belief helps us get at the truth but as belief is not certainty there is a lot of luck involved. Even when you believe the truth you are not fully certain it is the truth.

Belief in God is the real God for the believers not God. People like to have a sense of control over their lives and the universe. You get that by creating your beliefs about God. You tell yourself that when you alone survive a fire that God has a special place for you in his plan. How humble! If you cannot control God, you can do the next best thing - have beliefs about him that makes you feel you are in control for you are in line with his plan. You feel in control when you align with a person who is in control for you give them the control.

If God is an emotional and personal reality rather than a rational one as many say, then clearly those who condone the mercilessness they see in nature by calling it the will of God are being cruel. They are willing to feel good about the evil he does. That might make them feel better. That might even encourage them to help - it is easier to help people if you refuse to let yourself see the full seriousness of the terrible things they endure. That way you don't diagnose the problem correctly and that is to your advantage for you want to feel you have helped but you don't care if you have helped properly. It is selfish to make yourself think there is some good where there is not because real helping starts with recognising the extent of the evil. Are you doing the good in order that you might avoid having to suffer the effects of seeing the evil? Whatever is going on, it is clearly not good to suggest that evil is necessary under the circumstances for God has a plan especially when that God is largely or only a crutch for you.

The book argues that morality depends on atheism not on belief in God.

Suppose morality, protecting people from harm where possible, is true whether there is a God or not. Suppose it is a standard that is independent of God. Imagine if God blocked our minds from seeing this. We would then think that morality is whatever he commands even if it is reprehensible. What if for example he commanded us to dismember babies alive for no reason? If God is to be loved with all our hearts as Christ commanded then clearly he is to be loved in preference to morality. So we are to dismember the babies for him. That this is hypothetical doesn't matter. It is still about what we are suggesting when we adopt belief in God. It is no comfort to reason, "God would never ask me to kill the babies" when you think it is okay if he does.

Christians are usually virtue ethicists. The book says the virtue ethicist thinks more about what an action says about a person as a person than the action itself. For example, a person is cruel if he thumps a baby. I just wanted to mention that for it refutes the Christian lie that they love the sinners and hate the sins. This is impossible for if you hate the sin you must hate the person for the person is the sin in the sense that it their bad character that is the problem. The sinner has good points. It is hypocritical to say, "I don't hate that murdering individual because he is not all bad." It denies that evil people need to mask their evil intentions and carry them out by feigning good. And if we really believe the person is not all bad that is WHY we hate him. We think a person is hateful for he could do better and doesn't. And Christianity teaches we are not sinners because we sin but we sin because we are sinners. Christianity is a religion of - usually polite and passive aggressive - hate.

The book mentions consequentialist ethics in which the act that brings about the best consequences is the right act. What if a consequentialist worked out that a war was the best option and started one? Because this is a human assessment, nobody involved in the war will suffer an emotional disconnect from the suffering that will result. You will suffer the pain of feeling that man might be wrong and this war might be so wrong. But if you think God wants the war it is a different story. Religion will say that if the war is right, God will use it for good even if the war fails. So a war is always won in a sense if there is a God.

The book says that if a priest abuses a boy, believers have to think that God must let it happen because there is something in

it for the boy. That would be exactly what a child molester or child rapist would want to hear! And it insults those whose lives are hell because of the abuse.

Some say there is nothing in it for the boy but it is part of a complicated plan that benefits others.

If it is about helping others then that would mean God is using the boy as a means and not as an end. Some would say that if God is forced to treat the boy as an end, it is a necessary evil if it is the only way to give good the best chance. No believer wants to see themselves as a means to accomplish the divine plan even if it is unavoidable! Nobody can deny that if there is a God and God is forced to tolerate evil then that means being forced to treat some people as a means to a good end.

A belief that even suggests that God might be allowing the abuse to happen to benefit the boy should be discarded like excrement. A belief that raises the question is disgusting.

Do not forget that believers in God argue that though it is great to be happy that is not what life is about. Life is about loving God even if - this is hypothetical - it brings you nothing but 100% agony. Religion says that if God is forced to choose between making you happy or unhappy but moral he must choose the latter.

The atheist who helps another cannot be accused of thinking there could be a magic reward for it. The believer can. Who can be or is the better person?

Most Christians say that if there is a God, he is going to bring good out of evil and lets evil happen for a sufficient reason. So there is a God to fix the damage if we omit to help others or fail to. That in a sense leads the believer to think that if you sin that is bad but in time the sin will bring about benefits! So you sort of get a reward or somebody does for your sin! The atheist is the better person for he knows that his evil is not part of a plan and should not happen and will not be semi-rewarded.

I love James A Lindsay's chapter which reminds us that if there is no God to help others we have to be like god to others and help them. If atheists did that better, religion would be widely flushed down the toilet. I would like to end this review by quoting the words of "At the end of the day, it's not what you say; it's what you do."

We need more books like this. It is disturbing to know that the crusaders for the Catholic Church had far more hatred for Muslims than Muslims do for Christians today. Nobody in the Christian world at the time objected to the violence against the Muslims. (See Good and Bad Religion by Peter Vardy). A religion that succeeded to that degree in fomenting evil and hate has no right to exist. The big picture shows that it has been overall more bad than good. The harm done then still has direct and indirect effects today as well. The past proves that it has no intrinsic power to prevent violence and hate and could turn bad again.

I think the book is well aware of the fact that one thing that makes Christianity so bad is the fact that it acts deaf when it gets evidences and proofs that it is wrong. That is an insult to the good work of good men and to religions that are wiser than it. It leads to Christians shouting down the people who have the truth to bully them into silence. It has led to much bloodshed of "heretics". And we must not forget that if the doctrine that Jesus supernaturally directed the composition of the gospels is true then Jesus is to blame for the terrible scourge of anti-semitism. Without the Jews being blamed for killing Jesus and without the New Testament there would have been no persecution of the Jews.