

## What's So Great About Christianity? By Dinesh D'Souza

### Book summary by Jeff Stauffer

#### **Chapter 1: The Twilight of Atheism: The Global Triumph of Christianity**

D'Souza begins his book with some statistics concerning the state of religion in the world today which show that "traditional" versions of religions are on the rise (such as Hinduism, Islam, Christianity), whereas liberal branches of the same are in decline. These traditional models involve those who practice and understand their religion as it has been taught over the centuries. "Liberal" religions (D'Souza cites the Presbyterians and Episcopalians as examples) are in drastic decline as, in his opinion, their messages have become indistinguishable from secular organizations such as the ACLU or NOW. Whereas Christianity is experiencing a shift and growth from the West to third world nations and is still by and large the only truly global religion.

#### **Chapter 2: Survival of the Sacred: Why Religion is Winning**

Darwinists are puzzled as to why evolution would produce so many people in society who hold religious beliefs when they provide no reproductive benefit. They build cathedrals, give away their income, and sacrifice their time all for something that, in their view, is not true. D'Souza counters that religion is flourishing because: 1) Its ability to provide purpose and direction to people's lives, and 2) Religious families have vastly greater birth rates, viewing children as gifts from God and part of their calling.

#### **Chapter 3: God is not Great: The Atheist assault on Religion**

D'Souza divides the modern atheist movement into two main fronts.

1. The success of science: In their view, science is progressively replacing religious belief with scientific evidence, providing a materialist explanation for the world around us.
2. The historical crimes of religion: From the Crusades to 9/11, they view religion as something to be eradicated, thus leading to a safer world.

#### **Chapter 4: Miseducating the Young: Saving Children from their Parents**

The atheist agenda in education is to raise children to forego their parent's belief system through the power of science. This, according to D'Souza, undermines much of the philosophy in education in America today. This is more than mere instruction in the sciences, but a metaphysical assumption that science is all one needs. Many in this movement see religious education by parents to be tantamount to child abuse.

#### **Chapter 5: Render unto Caesar: The Spiritual Basis of Limited Government**

In the next few chapters, D'Souza argues that "Christianity is responsible for many of the values and institutions secular people cherish most." He provides examples from diverse areas such as economics, law, art, and our cultural/moral priorities that all have roots in a Christian worldview. As one example, he cites our American idea of limited government and separation of church and state which has ties to St. Augustine's work *The City of God*, where Christians inhabit two realms, the earthly city and the heavenly city. Within each we have our duties, and their purposes are considerably different. While not

mutually exclusive, there is a sense here of separation of church and state functions. D'Souza says this creates a "sanctuary of conscience inside every person, protected from political control."

### **Chapter 6: The Evil that I would not: Christianity and Human Fallibility**

In this chapter, D'Souza contrasts the cultural influences of ancient Rome and Greece on American culture to those of the Christian worldview. We see vast differences in how these societies view the role of the family, marriage, and love, with that of the Bible. For example, Plato thought that lack of education was the primary explanation for evil in the world, whereas the Christian faith recognized this as a flawed human nature. D'Souza also contends that Roman political leaders would not have dreamed of the "servant leadership" model that Jesus displayed.

### **Chapter 7: Created Equal: The Origin of Human Dignity**

Following on the previous chapter, D'Souza shows how the Christian faith was inherent in the development of anti-slavery policies, our rule of self-government, and finally an international recognition of human rights. Each of these is again contrasted with Greek and Roman time periods, showing their lack of concern in these areas.

### **Chapter 8: Christianity and Reason: The Theological roots of Science**

Referring to a recent speech by Pope Benedict XVI, D'Souza concurs in the centrality of reason to the Christian faith. Reason is inseparable from theology, and he points out there are no theologians in Buddhism or Hinduism because it is not their focus to know God in such a deep way. Christianity has a foundational assumption that the world is rational, and therefore can be studied and questioned.

### **Chapter 9: From Logos to Cosmos: Christianity and the Invention of Invention**

D'Souza takes a quick stroll from the 13<sup>th</sup> through the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries pointing out great scientists and discoverers who yearned to learn more about God's creation. Often, an unrealized assumption in this mindset is a non-scientifically based faith in the world around us and its uncanny ability to remain predictable. The laws of nature, for no apparent reason, remain stable and allow us to discover its inner workings. He says the Christian worldview provides an explanation for this, and is largely responsible for the great inventions of science.

### **Chapter 10: An Atheist Fable: Reopening the Galileo Case**

Probably the best known case of alleged "science vs. religion," according to D'Souza, is the case of Galileo. Despite the myths and stories surrounding this piece of history, D'Souza provides evidence that the vast majority of historians agree this to be a "nineteenth-century fabrication." It turns out this was not a simple case of a dogmatic Church ignoring the scientific establishment. Galileo's evidence for his position was quite weak at the time, and the available data actually backed the church's position. D'Souza reminds us that even though Galileo was eventually put under house arrest "in a magnificent palace," he was never charged with heresy or placed in a dungeon or tortured for his beliefs.

### **Chapter 11: A Universe with a Beginning: God and the Astronomers**

D'Souza shares with the reader the story of how the scientific community came up with the "Big Bang" theory, and how it supports a Christian worldview. This idea was initially doubted, but now is accepted and provides strong evidence for a Creator.

### **Chapter 12: A Designer Planet: Man's Special Place in Creation**

A heated debate in modern physics and astronomy deals with the "anthropic principle." This is the notion that the universe seems extremely "fine-tuned" to support life. Here, D'Souza walks through the mental wrestling going on by both sides of the debate to support or refute this claim.

### **Chapter 13: Paley was Right: Evolution and the Argument from Design**

No book would be complete on a defense of Christianity without a chapter discussing the ramifications of evolution. Here, D'Souza lays out his position by first admitting he's not a biologist. And since the world's scientific community seems to generally accept evolutionary theory, he's willing to trust their findings. However, he makes an important distinction by separating Darwinian metaphysical claims from the mere science of evolution. He believes in evolution as the process, but rejects the materialist Darwinian position behind it. There is plenty of room for a designer, he says, given the monumental hurdles such as the origins of life, the sources of rationality and morality, and the problem of consciousness. These clearly point to a designer, something that Paley's 200-year old argument defends.

### **Chapter 14: The Genesis Problem: The Methodological Atheism of Science**

D'Souza strongly criticizes the scientific community for its tight grip on a philosophical (one that is not backed up by science) assumption that science is the only way of knowing anything. It ceases to be an open search for truth at this point, and instead becomes dogmatic about finding answers that fit previously held materialist assumptions.

### **Chapter 15: The World beyond our Senses: Kant and the Limits of Reason**

Largely philosophical, this chapter discusses the writings of Immanuel Kant. To summarize, Kant argued that we cannot truly experience the world as it is "out there," because we are limited by our five senses. They act as a "filter" to the "real" world. While at first we tend to rebuke this position, wanting to take a more common sense approach to our experiences, D'Souza turns this around to show how it supports a religious worldview, where this world is transient, incomplete. He uses this to show the atheist to be arrogant and dogmatic about what they know.

### **Chapter 16: In the Belly of the Whale: Why Miracles are Possible**

Often people proclaim that miracles are impossible because they violate the laws of nature. Skeptics of miracles, D'Souza points out, have difficulty backing their own claim when confronted by a skeptical view of science. D'Souza uses the writings of the famous skeptic David Hume in this chapter, pointing out that just as Hume argues against any knowledge of scientific laws, in a similar manner we can't rule out the miraculous. Hume's writings are often conjured up in defense of a materialist view; however, Hume was no friend of the scientific method. His arguments can be used to refute both scientific and supernatural knowledge alike. Miracles are only discounted because they don't fit a "scientific" worldview.

### **Chapter 17: A Skeptic's Wager: Pascal and the Reasonableness of Faith**

“Reason is aristocratic, but faith is democratic,” says D’Souza. He draws from the philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal in this chapter. Pascal believed that God was hidden from those who did not seek Him, yet was accessible for those who did. No amount of empirical evidence could ever conclusively prove something that is beyond the senses to prove. So in this sense, all can come to faith even if you are not well-learned. He also recounts Pascal’s famous wager, where Pascal says we all must make a decision based on what we know, either to choose agnosticism or choose God.

### **Chapter 18: Rethinking the Inquisition: The Exaggerated crimes of Religion**

D’Souza recalls a few common critiques of organized religion and tries to put a more truthful perspective on the myths:

- The Crusades (We forget these were Christian lands before Muslim imperial rule invaded)
- The Spanish Inquisition (Largely a myth devised from political enemies of Spain, such as England)
- Salem Witch Trials (The alleged number of deaths is grossly inflated: fewer than 30 documented cases)

### **Chapter 19: A License to Kill: Atheism and the Mass Murders of History**

Those that kill in the name of religion are not sole perpetrators of evils in this world. D’Souza reminds us of modern examples where secular rulers commit even greater atrocities against humankind: Stalin, Pol Pot, Hitler, Mao... the numbers of deaths brought about by these leaders are in the millions. D’Souza points out there are plenty of examples of evil from all walks of life, not just religious figures.

### **Chapter 20: Natural Law and Divine Law: The Objective Foundations of Morality**

In this chapter, D’Souza argues for a universal morality, providing evidence of its existence across all cultures. He also rebukes the Darwinian claim that this mostly involves “Selfish Genes” that simply want to promote the safety of one’s offspring and close genetic relatives. He provides examples of altruism (simple things like giving up a seat on a bus) that have no benefit to one’s self or family.

### **Chapter 21: The Ghost in the Machine: Why Man is more than Matter**

While some may want to reduce all of life to physics and chemistry, D’Souza points out that there is more to life than that. He quotes physicist Paul Davies in saying that, “Calling humans a collection of atoms is like calling Shakespeare a collection of words.” There are some tremendous challenges to a materialist view when one considers things like free will, morality, and consciousness.

### **Chapter 22: The Imperial “I”: When the Self Becomes the Arbiter of Morality**

As a society we have largely moved beyond a universal morality to one that is individual. Being “true to one’s self” is what matters. D’Souza points out that a fundamental assumption in this thinking is that the inner self is good. This is contrasted with the Christian worldview that contends human nature as fallen, and in need of an external, objective basis for morality.

### **Chapter 23: Opiate of the Morally Corrupt: Why Unbelief is so Appealing**

One quote sums up this chapter rather nicely: “Atheists don’t find God invisible so much as objectionable.” Here D’Souza pulls off the covers to expose what he feels are the roots of an atheist mindset. Our quest for autonomy, sex, and a guilt-free existence naturally to some degree repel against the notion of an omniscient God. He concludes by saying “we get rid of moral judgment by getting rid of the judge.”

#### **Chapter 24: The Problem of Evil: Where is Atheism when bad things happen?**

Probably the most difficult question for Christians deals with explaining evil and suffering, according to D’Souza. While there are no easy answers given to this question, D’Souza counters by stating that even the categories of good/evil require some sort of moral standard, which atheism is unable to provide. He also questions where the atheist groups are when tragedy strikes like at Virginia Tech school shootings in 2007. He further questions what solace or meaning can the atheist provide during tragedy?

#### **Chapter 25: Jesus Among other Gods: The Uniqueness of Christianity**

In this first of the last two chapters, D’Souza begins to focus on the details of the Christian faith and what separates it from other worldviews. Some of his observations include:

- Christianity makes exclusive claims, unlike Hinduism where all roads lead to God
- Christian concept of grace is unique, as opposed to religions of law such as Islam or Judaism, or religions that actively purport to “empty” themselves such as Buddhism or Hinduism
- The concept of God becoming man is unique to the Christian story

#### **Chapter 26: A Foretaste of Eternity: How Christianity can Change your Life**

Here D’Souza wraps things up with an encouraging word concerning both the truthfulness of the claims of Jesus, as well as the practical benefits one will experience with choosing to follow Him. He first provides a brief account of the historical reliability of the gospels. Secondly, he shows how the Christian walk provides an incredible sense of purpose in the universe, confidence in our ability to live up to our potential, and last but not least, the everlasting joy one can obtain in a relationship with our Creator.