

Dinesh D'Souza, *What's so great about Christianity*, Tyndale House, 2007, 308 pp plus notes and index.

This is an amazing book which expounds Christianity in the context of human thought including science and philosophy. The author gives particular attention to atheist writings and deals with their objections on their own terms, in the process showing how Christianity makes sense of science by answering the key metaphysical questions associated with it.

The book has been called a masterpiece of apologetics, and that is certainly how it struck me. Not only does the author expound the congruence of science and biblical revelation in a way which is very exciting, but he turns the tables on atheist critics to show that their position is manifestly unreasonable. Furthermore he accuses them of committing cultural suicide and wanting to take our children with them by teaching science as an ideology which excludes and denies anything beyond itself.

Before this he remarks on the resurgence of traditional orthodox religious, and specifically Christian, belief and the challenge this poses to atheists, particularly Darwinists. But there are good logical reasons why this resurgence is occurring, hence he concludes that it is not religion but atheism which requires a Darwinian explanation. "Atheism is a bit like homosexuality: one is not sure where it fits into a doctrine of natural selection."

Having got on to the front foot by the end of chapter 2, he continues thus, counterattacking the militant atheist rhetoric and moral self-confidence of recent years, which he sees as based in science, but extended into post-Enlightenment ideology. It is the atheists' moral critique of Christianity which provides the most sport for D'Souza.

In part II of the book the author outlines very comprehensively the Christian basis of western civilization, which is at risk because of religious and cultural illiteracy. There is a very insightful discussion of fallen human nature and how a proper understanding of that, plus the notion that ordinary people matter, gives rise to important ideas and institutions that we take for granted. These include particularly the nuclear family based on a union of mutual consent, limited government, the rule of law, and an ethic of compassion, helping the needy. The Christian legacy of the moral equality of all humans is more widely supported today than some of these, but both it and the idea of individual freedom are endangered by any erosion of that legacy.

The section of the book on the theological basis of science, and its origin in medieval Christianity, is covered well. He shows that while there is now wide agreement about the origins of everything that exists in the universe, including time, "in a primordial explosion of energy and light" some 15 billion years ago, and agreement that there must be a cause for this, atheist scientists refuse to concede the most plausible cause, nor credibly suggest any other. The biblical account is shown to be substantially correct if read as it traditionally has been. In recent years science has removed a plank of the traditional atheist platform. More fundamentally, the rationality of the universe enables science, and though the notion predates Christianity, it was reinvigorated by perception of God's *logos*. Thus "the overwhelming majority of [scientists] have not only been Christians, but have also viewed their work as a fulfillment of Christian objectives."

This section shows up the sheer folly of those who are determined to drive a wedge between science and revelation, between our understanding of God's creation and our understanding of his Word, between the power of God's Word and the potential of science and technology. In this way a properly Christian worldview is compromised, Christian witness is brought into serious intellectual disrepute, and young Christians are conditioned to distrust "atheist" science. This is so awful!

Today those who disparage science by pushing Young Earth Creationism subvert God's provision for the Earth's population through the abundance of his creation, which requires heaps of technology to make available. Due to the sheer numbers, never before has science and technology been so vital to providing for the Earth's inhabitants - whether harnessing wind and sunshine more effectively, or finding substitutes for oil, or developing high-yield crops, or providing inorganic fertilizer for those from the air and water. For YEC churches to demand that young people choose between faith and truth, or simply park their brains at the door while they stigmatise science, is disastrous for the church's young generation and for the demands of the day.

Mankind's special place in creation and the anthropic principle "stumbled upon" by physicists are discussed and the multiverse alternative to acknowledging a wise creator is explored. This leads to revisiting the argument from design and showing that biological evolution is fully compatible with it. But it doesn't have anything credible to put forward about the beginning of life, and again Christians have something to say on that matter, while science as yet does not. Evolution also fails to explain consciousness, human rationality and morality. D'Souza looks at how atheists attempt to explain morality in Darwinian terms, ending up with Darwinism in its philosophical and metaphysical aspects as well as its expression as a political ideology. The limits of science are explained, and ignoring these, many atheists have become "an embarrassment to science"! While science is atheistic in a procedural sense, it cannot be so philosophically.

Part V of the book turns to philosophy, and there is much to cover, reason being a proper complement to faith. In respect to skepticism, a very helpful statement: "The Christian has faith even though he is not sure, while the unbeliever refuses to believe because he is not sure. But they agree in being unsure. The skeptical habit of mind is as natural to Christianity as it is to unbelief." Pascal's wager leads to the statement that "the atheist position becomes a kind of intransigence, a reckless man's decision to play Russian roulette with his soul."

Two chapters deal with suffering, the Inquisition, and the exaggerated sins of Christianity set alongside those of atheists such as Hitler, Stalin and Pol Pot.

The lack of moral restraint takes us to the foundations of morality. Traditional objective morality is shown to be a feature of all religions and is contrasted with secular morality, which breaks with Christianity by implying an inner autonomous moral source which is reliably good rather than sinful. "Secular morality is based on an inadequate anthropology," and is most credibly seen (from the words of its exponents) as a way to break free of the confines of traditional morality. "The reason many atheists are drawn to deny God is to avoid having to answer in the next life for their lack of moral restraint in this one." It's not that atheists do more evil than others, but that atheism provides a hiding place for the unrepentant. So rather than Marx's assertion that religion is the opiate of the masses, D'Souza reaches the conclusion that "atheism is the opiate of the morally corrupt"! The sacraments of atheism are the orgasm and abortion. "Atheism is not primarily an intellectual revolt; it is a moral revolt. Atheists don't find God invisible so much as objectionable."

A chapter on suffering addresses the question of sincere unbelief. "I agree that evil and suffering pose a serious intellectual and moral challenge for Christians" more than for atheists, but atheism provides no basis for coping with them. Job's questions were never answered, they were put into context so that Job became "a biblical hero not of understanding, but of faith." God uses evil to bring forth good, and Christians endure evil and suffering as somehow sharing the passion of Christ.

The final chapters set out the uniqueness of Christianity and why the reader should embrace it. D'Souza sees God's incredible sacrifice not simply in the cross as in the incarnation: "No other religion can even conceive this." Instead of men being sacrificed to the gods, God is sacrificed for man.

Christianity makes sense of who we are in the world, and it infuses life with a powerful and exhilarating sense of purpose. It means we live in conscious anticipation of eternity, it "offers a solution to the cosmic loneliness we all feel" and infuses a sense of the sublime. Finally it enables us to become the better persons we want to be.

The book is intellectual rather than 'spiritual' or exhortationary, but it gives one a strong sense of needing to get out there and tell the gospel story.

Ian Hore-Lacy

5/12/09