

# THE CHRISTIAN STORY

## Why you should wish it was true

According to some statistics there are about 4300 different religions.<sup>1</sup> Around 84% of the world's population identifies currently with a religious group.<sup>2</sup> Thankfully, they and all other world views can be placed within five main categories of naturalism, pantheism, theism, spiritism/polytheism and postmodernism.<sup>3</sup> Once the right world view is established, everything else falls into place. How can we find out which belief is the correct one?

Here are two simple yet profound steps:

### 1. Pray

Ask God for the guidance he has promised to give everyone who searches for him sincerely:

*“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the LORD. (Torah, Old Testament Bible, Jeremiah 29:13-14)*

*God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. (Injeel, New Testament Bible, Acts 17:27)*

If you belong to the minority who believes there is no God, this author pleads with you to pray anyway, since there is at least a 50% chance your belief is wrong. You could pray something like, “God, if you are there guide me in my search . . .”

### 2. Research

You could read an article like, “Which Religion, if any, holds the truth?”<sup>4</sup> establishes a test for truth and applies it to the five main categories of world views. Then it zooms in to compare Christianity with Judaism and Islam, the only three theistic beliefs.

Alternatively, Philosopher and apologist Prof Greg Ganssle has developed a unique approach to finding the right faith in his book, “Our deepest desires.”<sup>5</sup> Looking at the bigger picture of what it means to be human, he states correctly that we are all in the same boat. We may have different beliefs, but beyond them everyone generally shares the same passionate craving, a love for a life of happiness but not at any cost, unlike animals.

Besides superficial wishes for a job, money, a car, etc. we strive intensely for **A) RELATIONSHIPS, B) GOODNESS, C) BEAUTY AND D) FREEDOM**. We often choose to live according to our fundamental desires, rather than our beliefs. To avoid tension and hypocrisy, both areas need to be brought into agreement with each other. Ganssle convincingly argues that the Christian story explains and fulfils our common human ambitions at the core of our existence far better than any other faith or none.

In other words, unlike the normal way of demonstrating by reason that Biblical<sup>6</sup> Christianity is true, his goal is for people to realise that they want it to be true because it totally resonates with their deepest longings. Here is how they are found in the Christian story and how they compare with other worldviews. This author has summarised Ganssle's arguments and expanded it below, to include a comparison with Islam:

## A) RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are imperative for many different emotional, physical, social and economic reasons. Their fundamental importance is especially shown in the fact that when tragedies occur, most people make last phone calls to loved ones, not to their work place.

### Explanation:

In **Christianity** God is revealed as One Being who has an intensely personal, somewhat mysterious relationship of mutual giving between Himself, His Word and His Spirit.<sup>7</sup> Humans are created in the image of God. This does not refer to appearance. It means that they alone have been given the same mental, moral and social qualities of God, although, of course, to a lesser degree of perfection. Since God is a deeply relational and purposeful Being at his very centre, we too place a primary importance on relationships and purpose.

**Islam** teaches Allah is described as being strictly One, on his own. Humans are made in the image (Arabic: soorah) of Allah but are only remotely and inexplicably similar. His attributes cannot be likened to those of created beings.<sup>8</sup> Relationships in Islam are important but they are primarily focused on other Muslims not unbelievers. They serve mostly as a measuring stick for Allah to reward or punish those who do not obey his laws concerning them. The same is true of goodness, beauty<sup>9</sup> and freedom.

**Atheism** holds the belief that People emerged accidentally, without a given purpose, very late in history. Richard Dawkins claims that they are just “throwaway survival machines” whose only purpose is to survive and replicate genes.<sup>10</sup> Once women’s fertility comes to an end, to care deeply about them or much else does not make logical sense.

**Pantheism** and **other worldviews** have a very similar understandings like atheism regarding the place of personhood. Humans are not made by a personal God for himself and for a purpose given by him. They may have originated from a divine spark, but ultimately their personal consciousness, living in a bad physical world will cease to be by being united with an impersonal universal spirit.<sup>11</sup> Relationships are mostly viewed to selfishly enable one’s own progress in the cycle of life. The same is true of goodness, beauty and freedom.

## B) GOODNESS

We learn from observations that people expect life to be good and generally it is. That is why we are shocked when it is not. Even though many seem to be attracted to evil. They like watching horror stories but only as long as it does not affect them personally. Have you ever come across anybody who says or thinks, “I want to be bad”? We think we are good people. We want to be heroes not villains. We want to have relationships that are marked by traditional moral standards like love, trust, care, patience. Nobody wants to be in manipulative relationships.

### Explanation:

Islam presents a mixed picture when it answers the question, “does Allah create both, good and evil?”<sup>12</sup> in **Biblical Christianity** God reveals Himself as good.<sup>13</sup> He originally created a good world and made humans with a good nature, unlike **Islam** where they were created weak from the beginning. We flourish when we live being good. Therefore, morality is to be welcomed not resented.

However, there is a tension between our love for being good and our hatred for being told by others when we have failed to achieve goodness. We are suspicious of their definition of goodness because it may be subjective, serving their own agenda. Biblical Christianity gives the reason for this cognitive dissonance by pointing to what theologians call “the fall.” Humans disobeyed God who is holy and

just. It results in our tendency to put ourselves before others. As a result, the whole creation got affected and people were unable to be in his presence anymore. Along with our ancestors we too miss the best and settled for less ever since. This lifestyle caused an ultimate addiction to ourselves. We all need a rehab of the heart. God who is also loving is the only one who offers this radical treatment. In Jesus he died on the cross to take our punishment. He rose again to life on the third day.

Along with him everyone who turns around from their selfish ways and trusts in Jesus will get a new life, a new heart. God will live in them and enable a fulfilled life here and now, lasting forever. Those who accept the Christian worldview where God describes what is good and what is bad, will be more willing to listen to the corrections of others according to His standards.

In **Atheism** good, loving behaviour evolved accidentally. It does not need to be like this but it feels right when it serves our own wellbeing for a certain period of time to survive and thrive. Once that has been achieved there is no reason to continue with what is thought to be subjective moral obligations that have no intrinsic value. We also find main proponents like Friedrich Nietzsche portraying traditional morality as hindering progress. It needs to be disliked and broken away from, to experience freedom and to reach our potential.<sup>14</sup>

## C) BEAUTY

We all love beauty. It is there but sometimes we cannot see it. Once we recognise it, or after an artist's explanation, we universally define beauty in the same way. Only the subjective response to beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder, not the actual beauty itself. Like with the other components that make up happiness, beauty is in danger to be manipulated and exploited these days.

### **Explanation:**

**Christianity** teaches that God is a most beautiful Master artist who makes artists in His own image and is at work in our world.<sup>15</sup> The extraordinary variety and stunning abundance found in his creation, from the countless galaxies to the estimated seven million species of plants and animals, are a magnificent witness to this.<sup>16</sup> God wants us to enjoy beauty, to look after life and make it delightful.<sup>17</sup> The Christian story shows that we are at home in this world, but at the same time we are restless and long for a better world. Life is designed to have its desires for food, water, etc satisfied. Our desires for a better world and for something that cannot be satisfied here, are strong indicators that we are ultimately made for another world.

In **Atheism** the main goal is to survive. Beauty as found in art and elsewhere is not really necessary. It presents a real danger to be abused and get addicted to it. Beauty can instil a desire that often cannot be met in this life. For atheists such longings fulfil no purpose and therefore should not be there.

## D) FREEDOM

Freedom is more than a political or a philosophical<sup>18</sup> concept. It involves a personal freedom to focus on things that are really important to us beyond superficial wishes for comfort. They are determined by how we define the nature of human beings, what we think it means to be a person. Post-modernism claims that such a definition is self-serving and not possible, since truth is just a mental construct limited to a cultural model.

This view is wrong for three main reasons: 1. It is a contradiction because an absolute truth statement is made, in spite of the claim that they do not exist. 2. Many academic fields, like analytic philosophy, hard sciences, such as mathematics still largely hold to the traditional view that truth is objective. 3. Humans deeply care to know, speak and live by what is true, even though they may not have experienced it personally.

## Explanation:

**Christianity** states that there are universal truths that will set people free from living wrongly. This kind of freedom increases as we live more and more according to that description. It is largely internal, not depending on circumstances. However, various kinds of suffering caused by external oppression, poverty, loneliness and sickness can disrupt our stability a lot. The Christian story begins now and offers hope that goes beyond wishful thinking. It promises victory, a never-ending future which includes all of the things that make human life rich and rewarding now.<sup>19</sup>

In stark contrast **atheism** does not offer a continuation but rather a story that ends in despair and death. Most of the hard-earned achievements will be forgotten within a few generations. **Islam** describes the future of those who are good enough consisting only of sensual pleasures.

## CONCLUSION

Human beings generally desire to live a life of happiness. We all usually agree that it consists of relationships, goodness, beauty and freedom. Various explanations for these deepest human desires are given by world views such as Islam, Atheism, and Pantheism. A comparison with the Christian story defined by the Bible, has made it come on top of all the others. This author would love to find out from you whether or not you agree with his assessment. He can be contacted via:

[info@christianityexplained.net](mailto:info@christianityexplained.net)

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.theregister.com/2006/10/06/the\\_odd\\_body\\_religion/](https://www.theregister.com/2006/10/06/the_odd_body_religion/)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/aug/27/religion-why-is-faith-growing-and-what-happens-next>

<sup>3</sup> For a very helpful description of the main categories within worldviews (belief systems), naturalism, pantheism, theism, spiritism and polytheism, postmodernism, see: <https://www.xenos.org/essays/five-worldviews>

<sup>4</sup> <https://christianityexplained.net/to/atheists/religion-holds-truth-2/>

<sup>5</sup> This author highly recommends that you buy that book. Among many places it can be ordered here: [https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/0830851828/ref=dbs\\_a\\_def\\_rwt\\_hsch\\_vapi\\_taft\\_p1\\_i0](https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/0830851828/ref=dbs_a_def_rwt_hsch_vapi_taft_p1_i0)

<sup>6</sup> We are not talking about liberal “Christianity.” It is defined by scholars who often do not believe in miracles. Some even doubt the existence of God. Liberal “Christians” generally pick and choose from what they believe is God’s Word. In that way they seek to make it fit their chosen life-style.

<sup>7</sup> This is known as the doctrine of the Trinity: One God in three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in a spiritual not physical sense. For more details watch: Trinity in three minutes: <https://youtu.be/KHF-y84rgI> In Islam we have Allah, Spirit of Allah and the word of Allah. All three are eternal. Yet there is only one God.

<sup>8</sup> For more details of the mainstream Sunni Muslim view see: <https://islamqa.info/en/answers/20652/commentary-on-the-hadeeth-allaah-created-adam-in-his-image>

<sup>9</sup> While not found in the Quran, the hadith states that Allah is beautiful and loves beauty: <https://islamexplained.info/2020/01/21/allah-is-beautiful-and-he-loves-beauty/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://crev.info/2020/01/can-atheists-answer-the-meaning-of-life/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/introduction-cultures-religions-apah/hinduism-apah/a/hinduism-and-buddhism-an-introduction>

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<sup>12</sup> <https://questionsonislam.com/article/it-allah-swt-who-creates-evil-too> but see also <https://islamqa.info/en/answers/124504/evil-is-part-of-the-creation-of-allaah-and-not-attributing-it-to-allaah-is-part-of-proper-verbal-etiquette> This view says Allah only creates purposeful, not absolute evil: <https://www.ask-a-muslim.com/en/why-did-allah-create-evil/> The Muztariyah believe that both good and evil are entirely from God: <https://www.juancole.com/library/dictionary-of-islam-hughes/sects-of-islam> See also : <https://www.ahmedhulusi.org/en/article/the-good-and-the-bad-are-from-allah> One of the 99 beautiful names of Allah is “El-Muthill – the One who leads astray (Surah 4:90, 142; 17:98; 18:8). “. . .Allah has fixed the very portion of adultery which a man will indulge in, and which he of necessity must commit.” Sahih Muslim 2657b <https://sunnah.com/muslim:2657b>

<sup>13</sup> Psalm 136:1-3, Luke 18:19. “God (is good in his very essence and) did not create evil, but He does allow evil. If God had not allowed for the possibility of evil, both mankind and angels would be serving God out of obligation, not choice.” <https://www.gotquestions.org/did-God-create-evil.html> In Isaiah 45:7 God brings disaster on those who continue in hard-hearted rebellion against Him: <https://www.gotquestions.org/Isaiah-45-7.html>

<sup>14</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), preface, section 3. This is elaborated on in Ganssle, Gregory E.. *Our Deepest Desires* (p. 138). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

<sup>15</sup> Psalm 19:1-4; 27:4, Isaiah 28:5

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.currentresults.com/Environment-Facts/Plants-Animals/estimate-of-worlds-total-number-of-species.php>

<sup>17</sup> Genesis 1:28

<sup>18</sup> Are we free to do what we choose or are our actions caused by previous actions?

<sup>19</sup> Revelations 21- 22 describe a new earth with God and a new city at its centre.