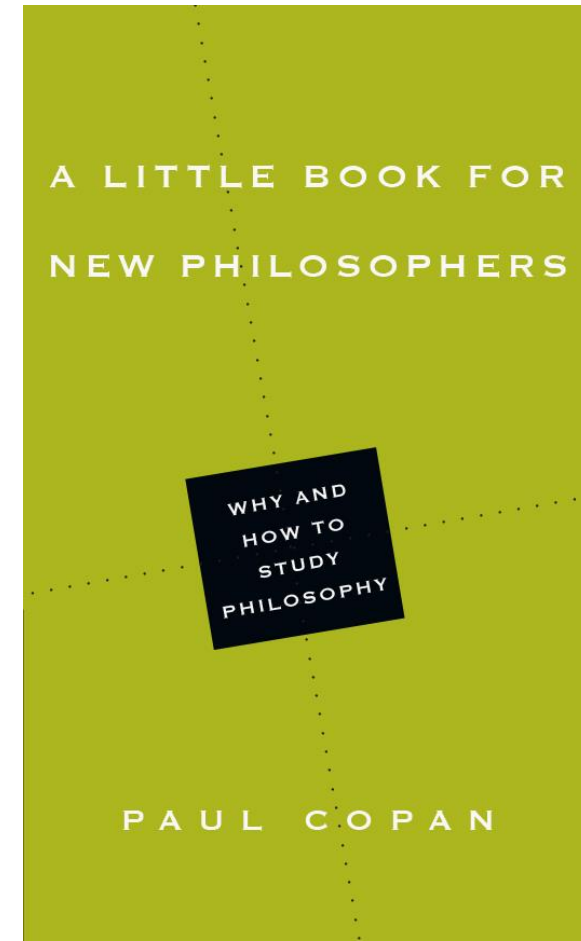
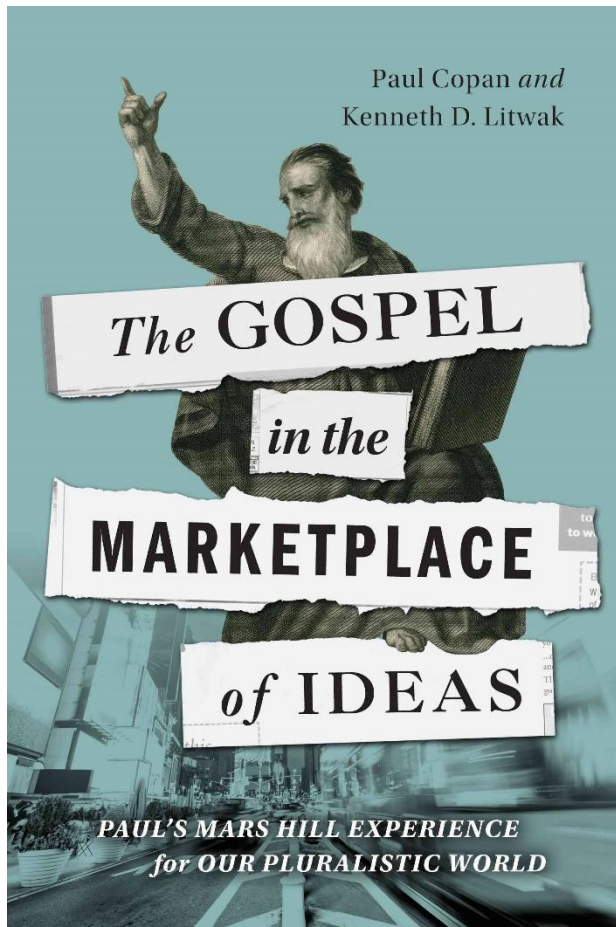


# Integrated Apologetics: Defending the Gospel in the Marketplace of Ideas

Paul Copan



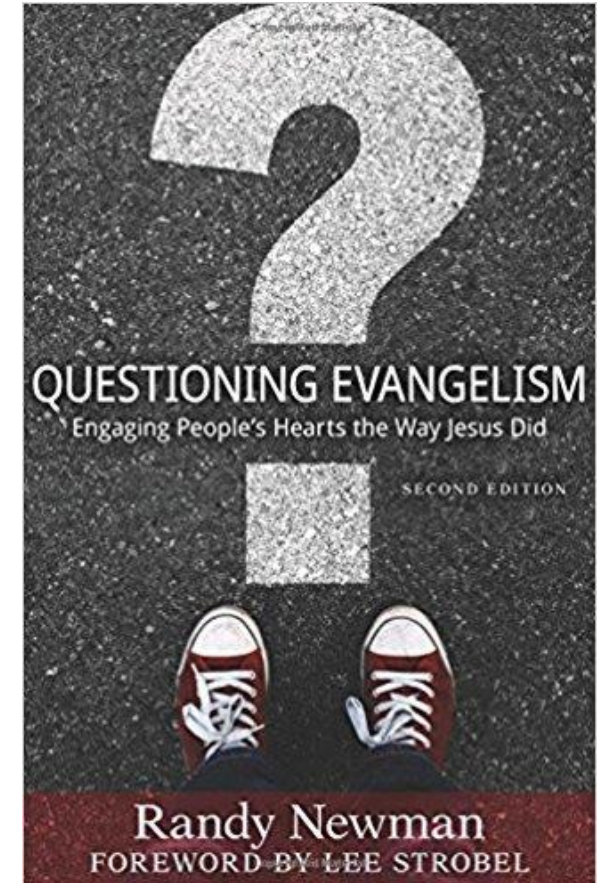
1. The Meaning of Apologetics
2. Some Misunderstandings about Apologetics
3. Some Muddles in Apologetics
4. The Methodology of Apologetics

# 1. The Meaning of Apologetics

“The art and science of defending  
the Christian faith.”

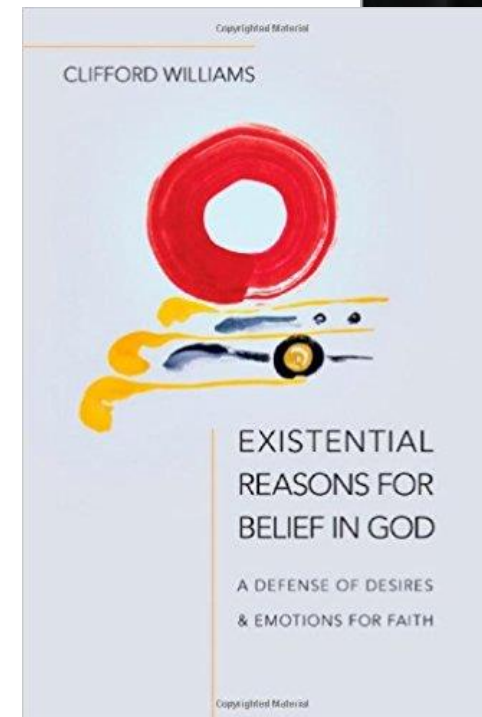
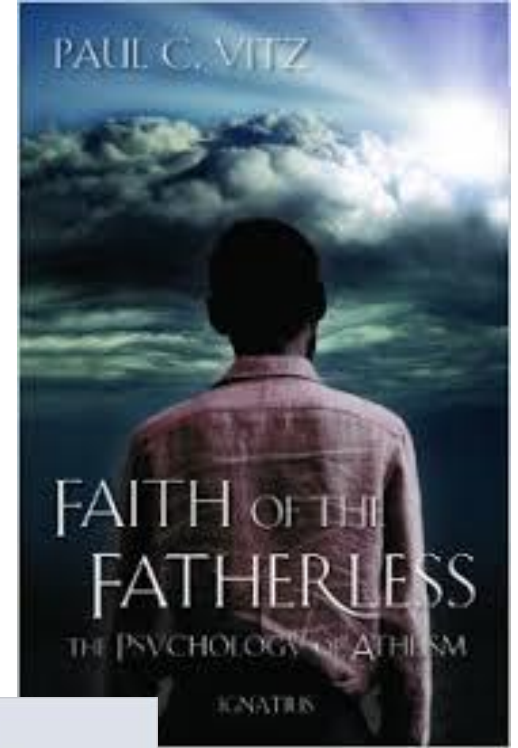
# Apologetics as an *Art*

- ❖ Dialogical Factor: Apologetics should *conversational*, not *confrontational*. (One can win an argument but lose the person.) Become skilled at asking questions—like Jesus did.
- ❖ Relational Factor—Apologetics involves *personal* relationship, not *depersonalized* argument: Wisdom, love, and tact; winsome character; caring community; learning together.



❖ Motivational Factor: People may resist God personal rather than rational reasons (the “question behind the question”). for a number of reasons shaped by their backgrounds—the baggage of a negative father/authority figure or traumas.

❖ Existential Factor: The gospel addresses our deepest longings, which includes freedom from guilt and shame (forgiveness); the need for security and significance; the desire for immortality).



**Blaise Pascal: “willing to appear openly to those who seek Him with all their heart, and to be hidden from those who flee from Him with all their heart ...There is enough light for those who only desire to see, and enough obscurity for those who have a contrary disposition.”**

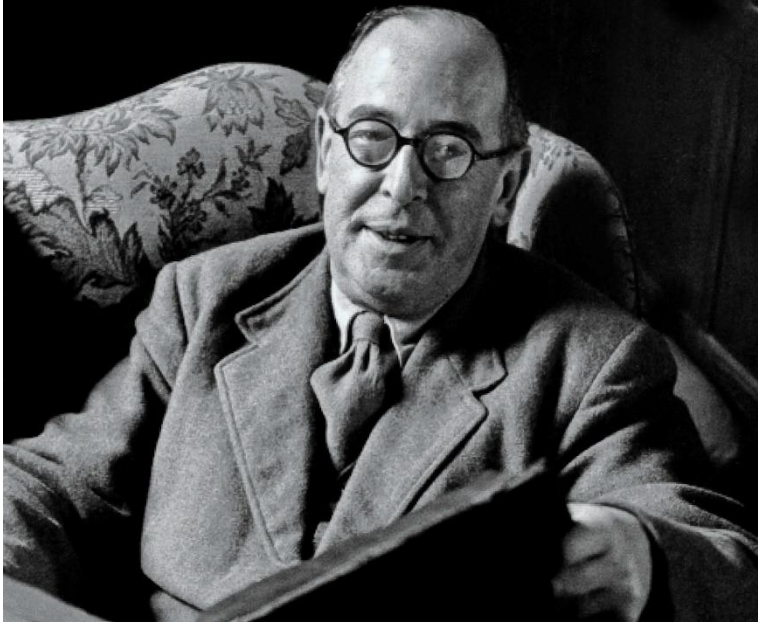
*Pensées , #430.*



# Apologetics as a *Science*

- **KNOWLEDGE:** The biblical faith is a knowledge (*scientia*) tradition.
- **PUBLIC:** It is publicly accessible for any to explore.
- **RATIONAL:** Rational/evidential reasons can be given for believing in Christ (e.g., Big Bang, evidence for Jesus' resurrection).





**C.S. Lewis: “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”**

**Alvin Plantinga: theism “offers suggestions for answers to a wide range of otherwise intractable questions.”**

C.S. Lewis, “Is Theology Poetry?” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 140.

Alvin Plantinga, “Natural Theology,” in *Companion to Metaphysics* (Oxford: Blackwell), 347.

## 2. Some Misunderstandings about Apologetics

## **a. “Apologetics is Anti-biblical.”**

- **Apologetics is “empty philosophy” (Col. 2:3).**
- **The gospel is “foolishness to those who are perishing” (1 Cor. 1:18); the “natural man” doesn’t understand spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:14).**
- **Those who “have not seen and still believe” are “blessed” (Jn. 20:29).**
- **You can’t “reason people into the kingdom of God.”**
- **We should just preach a message of grace and faith in Jesus Christ. Apologetics is a “work,” diminishing grace and faith.**

- Those who appeal to 1 Cor. 1-2 to “prove” that apologetics is unimportant should keep reading to chapter 15, which presents evidence for the resurrection.

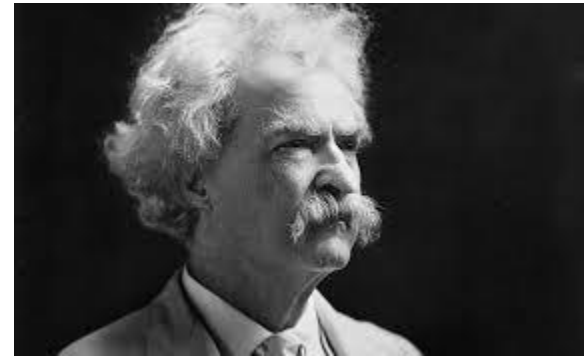
**“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet still believe” (John 20:29):**

- Read the very next verses: *“Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed....but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God” (20:30-31).*
- Cp. 1 John 1:1: *“...what we have heard...seen...looked at...touched with our hands concerning the Word of Life.”*
- The Bible is full of signs and wonders to encourage faith, but they don't coerce faith.

- **1 Peter 3:15:** “But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense [*apologian*] to every one who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.”
- The Scriptures emphasize signs and wonders as public evidence, the importance of eyewitnesses (e.g., John, Acts), making a defense, rejecting what is false.

## b. “Apologetics is Anti-Faith.”

- **PROMOTING SELF AS THE PROBLEM, NOT REASON:** The Bible opposes pride, not rationality. The cross is an offense to human self-sufficiency. Repentance demands self-humbling and calling for outside assistance.
- **PLEDGING ALLEGIANCE, NOT MAKING A LEAP.** Mark Twain: faith is “believing what you know ain’t so”; Richard Dawkins: faith is “stubborn belief that is indifferent to evidence and immune to rational criticism.” Faith is personal trust, commitment, allegiance—not a blind leap.



- **PROMOTING AN EVIDENCE-SUPPORTED FAITH:** True faith isn't afraid of the facts and evidence. Both God's Word and God's Works (creation) are God's self-revelation, which do not contradict each other.

# Francis Bacon (1561-1626)

**“God has, in fact, written two books, not just one. Of course, we are all familiar with the first book he wrote, namely Scripture. But he has written a second book called creation”  
*(Advancement of Learning)***



- **PRAYING WHILE CHALLENGING FALSEHOODS: We don't engage in apologetics (or sharing the gospel) without prayer.**

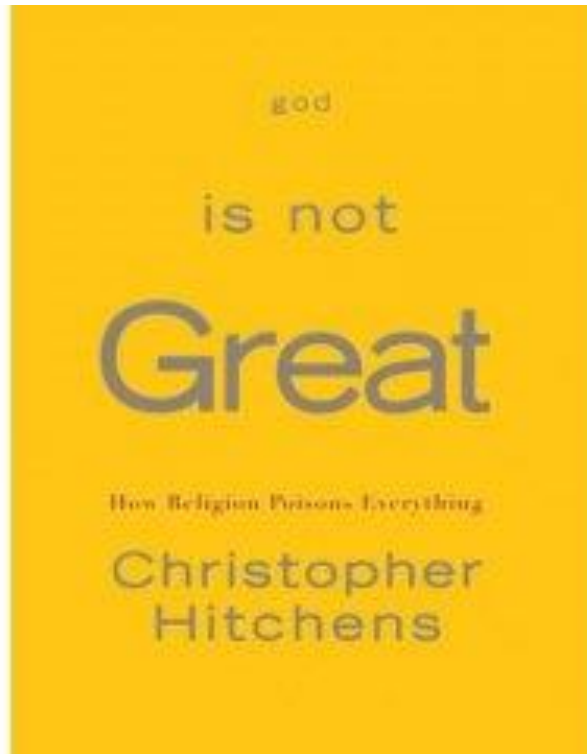
**2 Corinthians 10:3, 5:** *"...we do not war against the flesh.... We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ."*

### 3. Some Muddles in Apologetics

- a. “Religion” vs. “Worldview”
- b. “Atheism” (*Disbelief*) vs. “Agnosticism” (*Unbelief*)
- c. Culpable vs. Innocent Ignorance
- d. “Proof” vs. “Good Reasons”

## **a. “Religion” vs. “Worldview”**

# Atheist Christopher Hitchens: “Religion poisons everything”



**Martin Marty (U Chicago), an authority on religion: At least 17 distinct definitions of religion; scholars “will never agree on the definition of religion.”**

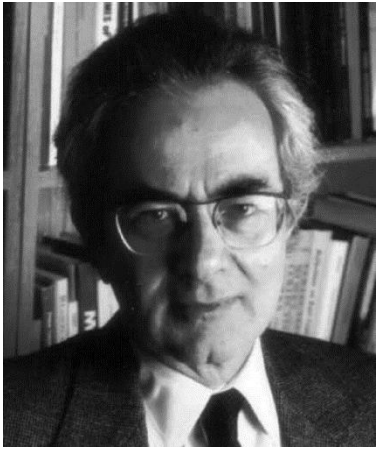
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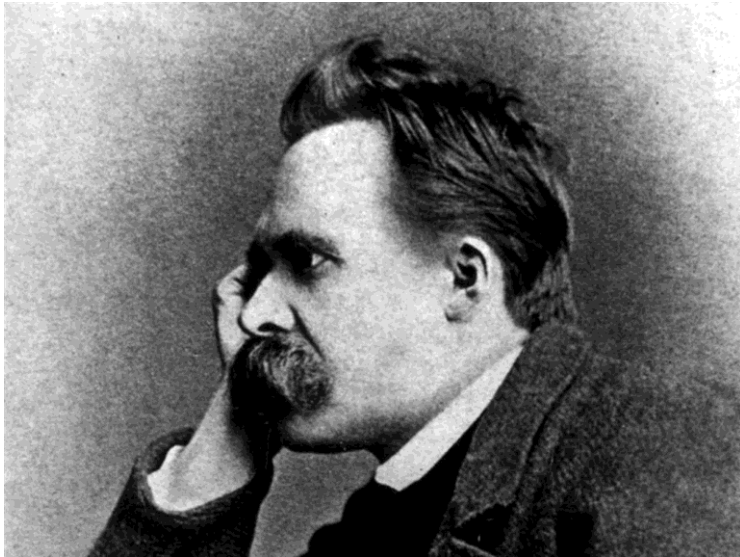
Cited in William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 28.

- Faulty assumption: atheism or secularism is the default position; “religion” bears the burden of proof.
- Not all traditional religions maintain belief in God (e.g., Buddhism).
- Everyone—atheist, theist, etc.—has a worldview. The atheist/secularist takes a stance about the nature of reality (metaphysics), right and wrong (ethics), and knowledge (epistemology).

- Whatever one's worldview, it should be *justified*—not simply *assumed*.
- Atheism has done a lot of “poisoning” (e.g., Stalin, Mao Tse-Tung, Pol Pot).
- Not all traditional “religions” are created equal (e.g., Jesus makes lofty claims not made by other world religious leaders like Muhammad, Buddha, Lao-Tzu).
- It is more illuminating to use “worldview”/“philosophy of life” than the confused, vague dichotomy of “religion vs. secularism/atheism.”



## b. “Atheism” (*Disbelief*) vs. “Agnosticism” (*Unbelief*)



**Atheism—*dis*belief, not simply lack of belief in God/gods. This would blur the historic distinction between agnostic and atheist.**

**Julian Baggini: Atheism is “extremely simple to define”: “it is the belief that there is no God or gods.”**

Julian Baggini, *Atheism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3.

- **The absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. It's possible that God exists even if arguments for God don't "work"; the atheist must show that God can't exist.**

**Agnosticism (a stance of unbelief), which would be the logical outcome of lack of evidence for God.**

**Distinguish between two types of agnostic:**

- **Traditional (“ordinary”) agnostic:** “I’d like to know whether or not God exists, but I can’t decide based on the evidence.”
- **Militant (“ornery”) agnostic :** “I don’t know whether or not God exists—and you can’t know either.” (This is a claim to knowledge: how does the agnostic know that no one can know God exists?)

## c. Culpable vs. Innocent Ignorance

- Distinguish between two types of ignorance - innocent and blameworthy/culpable.
- To say “I don’t know if God exists” may reveal a failure in my responsibility to seek God (“I don’t want to know”). Ignoring the relevant evidence is not an innocent ignorance.
- A driver is still culpable though ignorant of the speed limit.



## d. “Proof” vs. “Good Reasons”

- “Proof” suggests mathematical certainty. The demand of “proof” can be misleading. (Do atheists have the same level of proof for their beliefs that they demand of theists?)
- “Good reasons” suggests greater plausibility and confident knowledge.
- One can’t “prove” with 100% certainty that the earth is older than fifteen minutes or that other minds exist. Yet we have good reasons to know this with confidence.

- **Knowledge doesn't require 100% certainty. We know many things confidently--though without 100% certainty. (Do I really know with 100% certainty that knowledge requires 100% certainty?)**

## 4. The Methodology of Apologetics

### **Drawing on**

- a. Naturalistic Sources
- b. Aesthetic/Literary Sources
- c. Scientific Sources
- d. Historical Sources
- e. Autobiographical Sources

## **a. Naturalistic Sources**

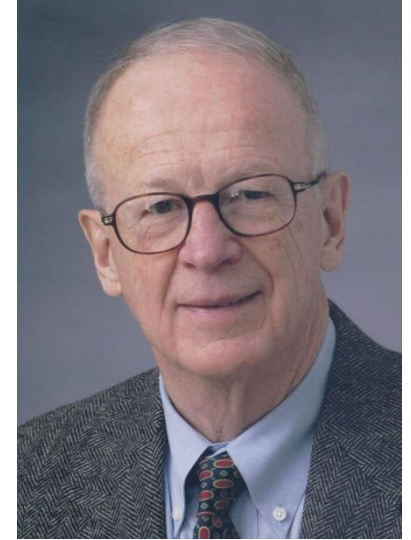
**Using the words of naturalists (or adherents of other worldviews) to help make the case for theism/the Christian faith.**

## **Why God Makes More Sense...**

**The existence of consciousness, beauty, free will, personhood, rationality, duties, and human dignity, moral values (e.g., guilt, shame, the need for forgiveness)—not to mention the beginning and fine-tuning of the universe—are hardly surprising and highly probable if a good, personal, rational, creative, powerful, and wise God exists.**

**However, these phenomena are quite startling and highly improbable if they are the result of deterministic, valueless, non-conscious, non-rational material processes.**

# William Rowe (philosopher)

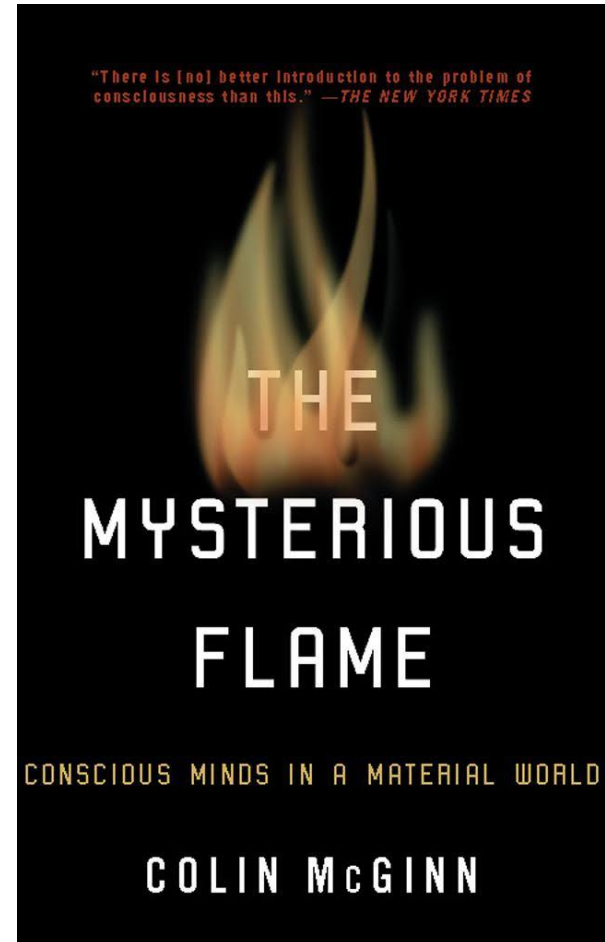


**“It must be acknowledged that the emergence of the Big Bang theory of the origin of the universe has given new weight to an argument for the existence of some sort of creator.”**

“Cosmological Argument,” in *William L. Rowe on Philosophy of Religion: Selected Writings*, ed. Nick Trakakis (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 349.

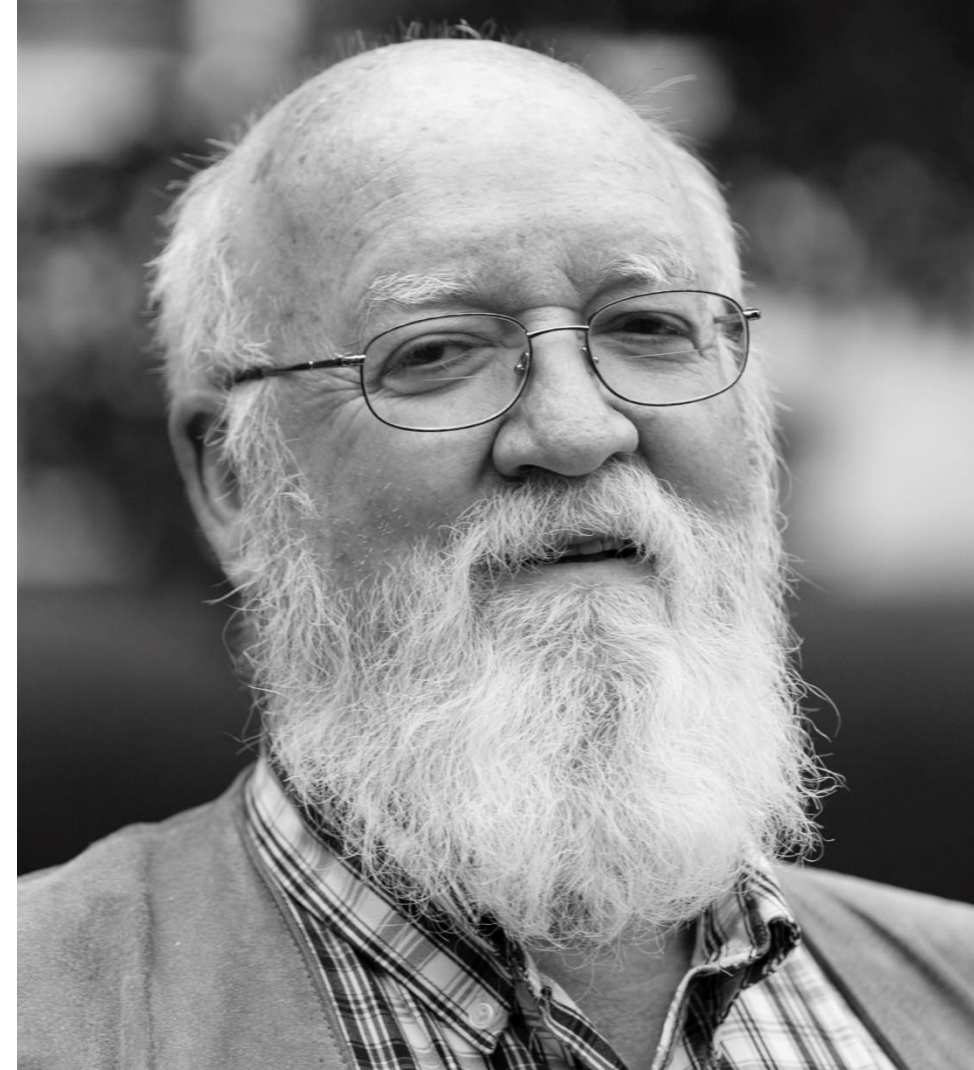
**Colin McGinn (philosopher): “How can mere matter originate consciousness? How did evolution convert the water of biological tissue into the wine of consciousness? Consciousness seems like a radical novelty in the universe, not prefigured by the after-effects of the Big Bang; so how did it contrive to spring into being from what preceded it?”**

Colin McGinn, *The Mysterious Flame: Consciousness Minds in a Material World* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 13-14.



**Daniel Dennett (philosopher, Tufts):** “Like other animals, we have built-in desires to reproduce and to do pretty much whatever it takes to achieve this goal.... But we also have creeds, and the ability to transcend our genetic imperatives. This fact makes us different.”

Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Viking, 2006), 4.



## **b. Aesthetic/Literary Sources**

**Presenting the place of beauty and enchantment and imagination as in art and literature as a pointer toward the transcendent and a way to recapture our humanity, which has been stripped away by mechanistic, reductionistic scientism.**



**Holly Ordway: “I found that my favorite authors were men and women of deep Christian faith. C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien above all; and then the poets: Gerard Manley Hopkins, George Herbert, John Donne, and others. Their work was unsettling to my atheist convictions...”**



**C.S. Lewis: “In reading Chesterton, as in reading MacDonald, I did not know what I was letting myself in for... A young man who wishes to remain a sound Atheist cannot be too careful of his reading. There are traps everywhere.... God is, if I may say it, very unscrupulous.”**

“From Atheist Professor to Catholic”: <https://www.wordonfire.org/resources/blog/from-atheist-professor-to-catholic-an-interview-with-dr-holly-ordway/4537/>

Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, p. 181.

# Louise Cowan (1916-2015): Literature professor, University of Dallas



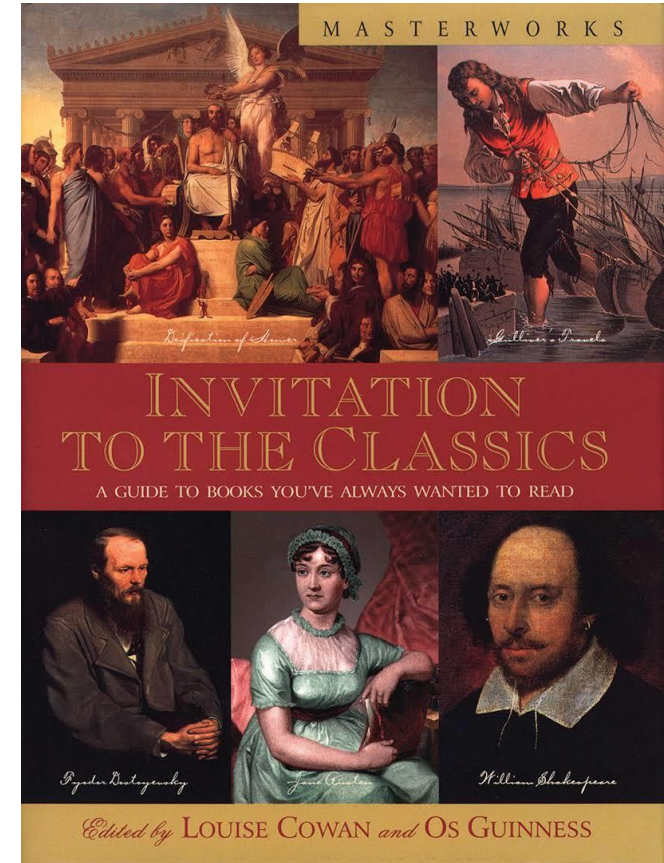
**Departure from faith: “At this moment I was standing at a crossroads. The Christian belief in which I had been reared had been seriously damaged during my college years and finally demolished ironically by a required course in religion that had brought about my complete capitulation. None of the biblical sources could be considered reliable, the experts of the day argued. And for me, once the seeds of doubt had been sown, the entire gospel was called in question.**

**Return to faith:** *“Before literature came to my aid, I had perused theology in vain. Even the Bible was unconvincing. Not until a literary work of art awakened my imaginative faculties could the possibility of a larger context than reason alone engage my mind. I had been expecting logical proof of something one was intended to recognize. What was needed was a way of seeing. I had to be transformed in the way that literature transforms by story, image, symbol before I could see the simple truths of the gospel.”*

Louise Cowan, “The Importance of the Classics,” in *Invitation to the Classics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 19-24.

***“Above all else this seems to me the chief value of what we call the classics: they summon us to belief. They seize our imaginations and make us commit ourselves to the self-evident, which we have forgotten how to recognize.... Even for the things ordinarily considered certain, we moderns require proof. In this state of abstraction, we are cut off from the fullness of reality. Something has to reach into our hearts and impel us toward recognition.”***

Louise Cowan, “The Importance of the Classics,” in *Invitation to the Classics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 19-24.



## **c. Scientific Sources**

**Appealing to recognized scientific voices who offer strong support for the mutual illumination the God-science relationship.**

# *The beginning of the universe*

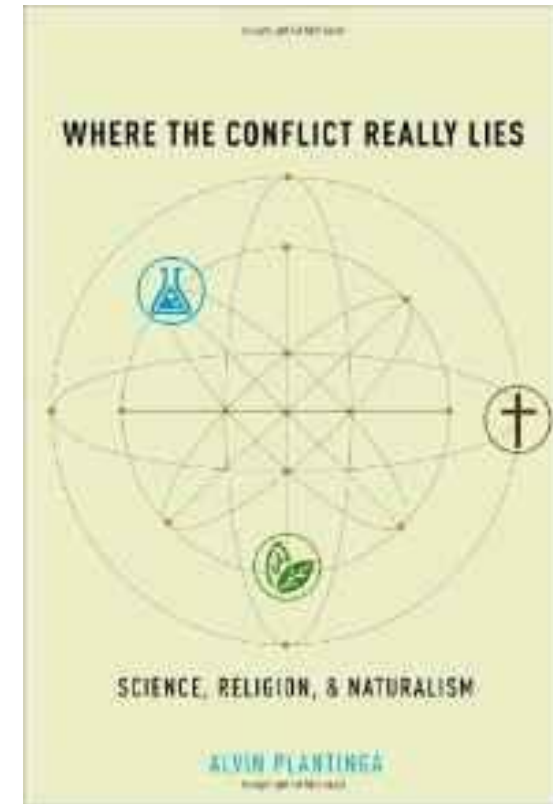


**John Barrow/Joseph Silk (astrophysicists): “Our new picture is more akin to the traditional metaphysical picture of creation out of nothing, for it predicts a definite beginning to events in time, indeed a definite beginning to time itself.”**

**They ask: “what preceded the event called the ‘big bang’? . . . the answer to our question is simple: nothing.”**

# *The fine-tuning/biofriendliness of the universe*

Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga:  
“The basic idea is that such fine-tuning is not at all surprising or improbable on theism: God presumably would want there to be life, and indeed intelligent life with which (whom) to communicate and share love; given atheism it is [surprising]; therefore theism is to be preferred to atheism.”



***Biology's apparent teleology/purposiveness***

# Francis Crick:

**“An honest man, armed with all the knowledge available to us now, could only state that in some sense, the origin of life appears at the moment to be almost a miracle, so many are the conditions which had to have been satisfied to get it going.”**

Francis Crick, *Life Itself: Its Nature and Origin* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981), 88.

NOTE: Simon Conway Morris (theist/biologist): “Many of the experiments designed to explain one or [an]other step in the origin of life are either of tenuous relevance to any believable prebiotic setting or involve an experimental rig in which the hand of the researcher becomes for all intents and purposes the hand of God.” *Life’s Solution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 41.

**Alfonso Ricardo and Jack W. Szostak  
(biologists) in *Scientific American*:**

**“Every living cell, even the simplest bacterium teems with molecular contraptions that would be the envy of any nanotechnologist....It’s virtually impossible to imagine how a cell’s machines could have formed spontaneously as life first arose.”**

Alfonso Ricardo and Jack W. Szostak, “Life on Earth,” *Scientific American* (September 2009): 54.

# Timothy Lenoir (philosopher of science, Stanford University):

**“Teleological [design/purposive] thinking has been steadfastly resisted by modern biology. And yet, in nearly every area of research biologists are hard pressed to find language that does not impute purposiveness to living forms.”**

Timothy Lenoir, *The Strategy of Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), ix.



*Beauty*

**Steven Weinberg (Nobel Prize-winning physicist): “sometimes nature seems more beautiful than strictly necessary.”**

Steven Weinberg, *Dreams of a Final Theory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 250.



## d. Historical Sources

**Showing how the gospel isn't simply a coherent, intellectually-sound, historically-grounded belief system but that it has made a profound impact where Christians faithfully live out the gospel message.**

**FOCUS HERE: Democracy, human rights, moral reforms, founding of modern science**



Atheist philosopher Jürgen Habermas:

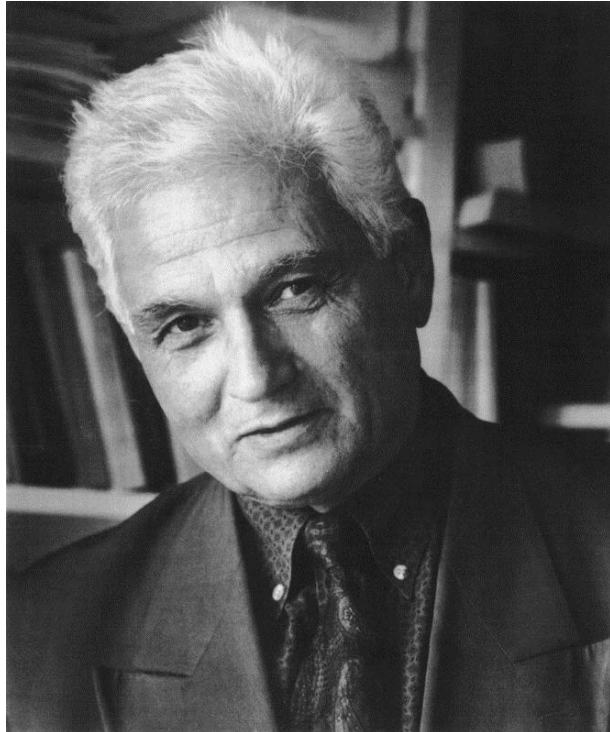
**“Christianity has functioned for the normative self-understanding of modernity as more than just a precursor or a catalyst. Egalitarian universalism, from which sprang the ideas of freedom and a social solidarity, of an autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights, and democracy, is the direct heir to the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love....**

## Habermas (cont'd)

**....This legacy, substantially unchanged, has been the object of continual critical appropriation and reinterpretation. To this day, there is no alternative to it. And in light of current challenges of a postnational constellation, we continue to draw on the substance of this heritage. Everything else is just idle postmodern talk.”**

Jürgen Habermas, *Time of Transitions*, ed. and trans. Ciaran Cronin and Max Pensky (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), 150-1.

Atheist thinker  
Jacques Derrida



**“Today the cornerstone of international law is the sacred, what is sacred in humanity. You should not kill. You should not be responsible for a crime against the sacredness, this sacredness of man as your neighbor... made by God or by God made man....**

## Derrida (cont'd)

**....In that sense, the concept of crime against humanity is a Christian concept and I think there would be no such thing in the law today without the Christian heritage, the Abrahamic heritage, the biblical heritage.”**

Jacques Derrida, "To Forgive: The Unforgivable and Imprescriptable," in *Questioning God*, ed. John D. Caupito, et al. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 70.



## Various Democratizing Gains for Humanity (“Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy,” *APSR*)

**Political scientist Robert Woodberry (National University of Singapore): “conversionary Protestant” (missionary) Christians in particular were responsible for these remarkable gains:**

***“the development and spread of religious liberty, mass education, mass printing, volunteer organizations, most major colonial reforms [abolishing slavery, widow-burning, foot binding, female circumcision, pre-pubescent marriage of girls, etc.], and the codification of legal protections for nonwhites in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.”***

**“Areas where Protestant missionaries had a significant presence in the past are on average more economically developed today, with comparatively better health, lower infant mortality, lower corruption, greater literacy, higher educational attainment (especially for women), and more robust membership in nongovernmental associations.”**

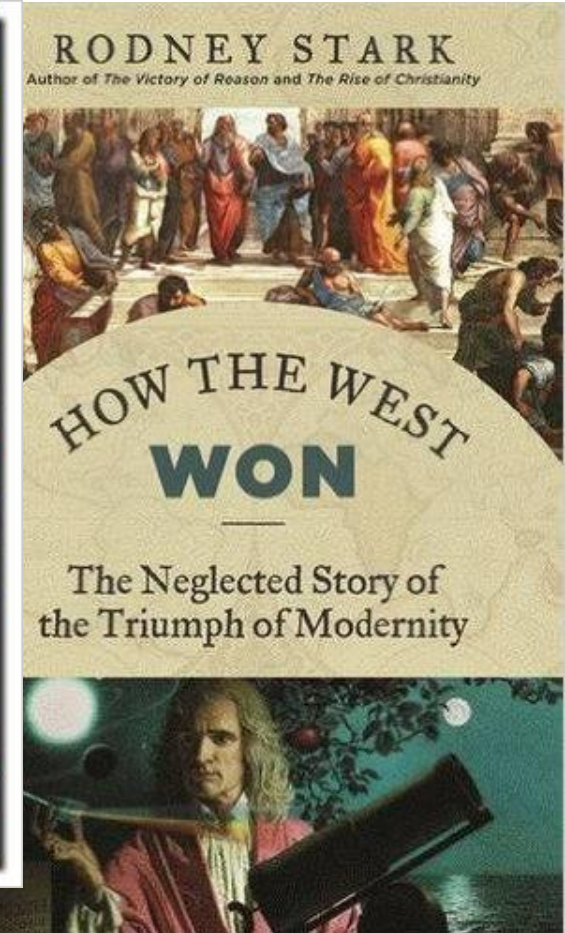
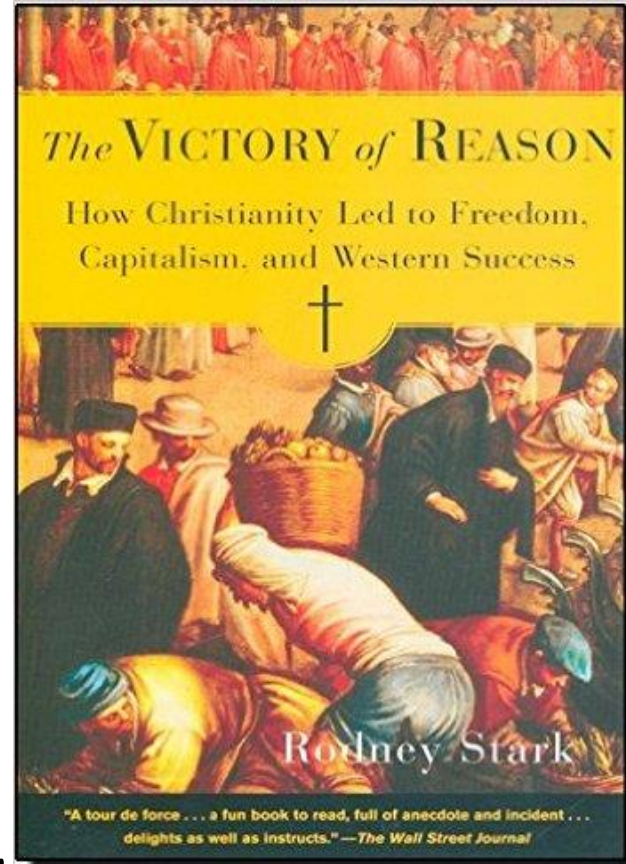
Andrea P. Dilley, “The world the missionaries made,” *Christianity Today* (January/February 2014), 39.

**Rodney Stark (sociologist, Baylor U.): The roots of science have “rested entirely on religious foundations, and the people who brought it about were devout Christians.”**

Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason* (New York: Random House, 2005), xi.

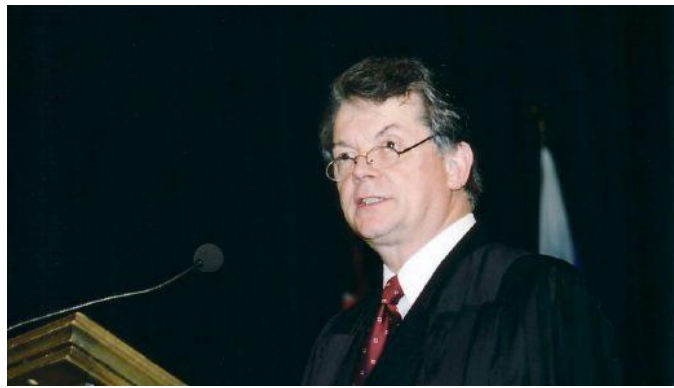
# Sociologist Rodney Stark (Baylor University)

**“I basically wrote  
myself into the  
Christian faith.”**



## **e. Autobiographical Sources**

**Telling the stories of those who have seen the intellectual impact and transformative power of the Christian faith in their own lives.**



Canadian Broadcasting  
Corporation journalist  
Brian Stewart

***I've found there is no movement, or force,  
closer to the raw truth of war, famines,  
crises and the vast human predicament,  
than organized Christianity in action. And  
there is no alliance more determined and  
dogged in action than church workers,  
ordained and lay members, when mobilized  
for a common good. It is these Christians  
who are right 'on the front lines' of  
committed humanity today and when I  
want to find that front, I follow their trail....***

## Stewart (cont'd)

***It is a vast front, stretching from the most impoverished reaches of the developing world to the hectic struggle to preserve caring values in our own towns and cities. I have never been able to reach these front lines without finding Christian volunteers already in the thick of it, mobilizing congregations that care, and being a faithful witness to truth, the primary light in the darkness, and so often the only light.***

## Stewart (cont'd)

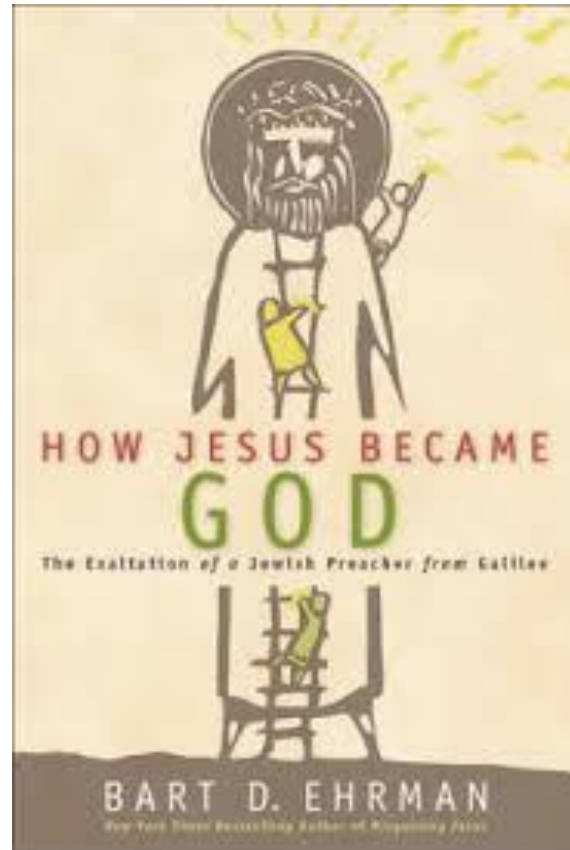
***Now I came to this admiring view slowly and reluctantly. At the start of my career, I'd largely abandoned religion for I, too, regarded the church as a rather tiresome irrelevance.***

***What ultimately persuaded me otherwise – and I took a lot of persuading – was the reality of Christianity's mission, physically and in spirit, before my very eyes.***

***I'm often asked if I lost belief in God covering events like Ethiopia, then called 'the worst hell on earth.' Actually, like others before me, it was precisely in such hells that I rediscovered religion. I saw so many countless acts of human love and charity, total respect for the most forsaken, for all life.***

Brian Stewart, "Christians Are on the Front Lines of Compassion," *Canadian Christianity*. Available at: <http://canadianchristianity.com/bc/bccn/0607/01faith.html> (my italics).

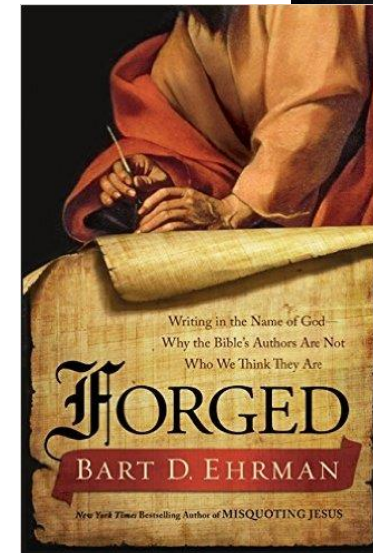
# Agnostic New Testament textual critic Bart Ehrman vs. New Testament scholar Michael Bird



# Bart Ehrman, agnostic NT scholar, textual critic

Attended Moody, Wheaton, and then Princeton, where studied under noted textual scholar Bruce Metzger.

Abandoned the Christian faith for a number of reasons

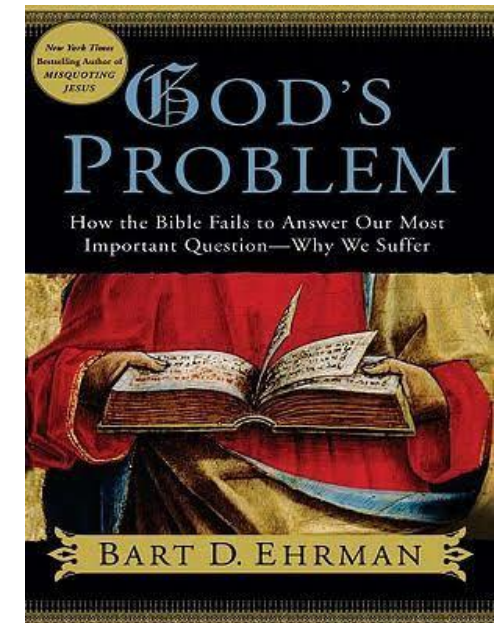
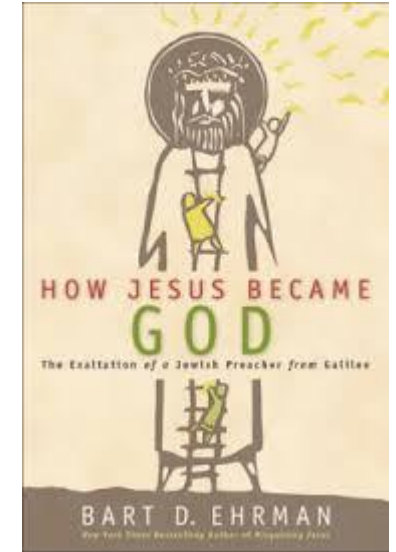


**\*FORGERY:** Some NT books forged (written pseudonymously in the name of various apostles);

**\*FALSIFICATION:** Textual variants: more manuscript variants than words in the New Testament (138,000 vs. 400,000); words changed by scribes from original wording (intentional or mistaken).

**\*FABRICATION:** “Jesus became God”—an invention of his followers.

**\*FAILURE:** The Bible fails to answer the problem of evil.



**Michael Bird (New Testament scholar, Ridley College, Australia): “Bart Ehrman’s narrative suggests the more educated you are, the less likely you are to believe. My life proves otherwise....I've got my own de-conversion story to match his.”**



He continues, in apostle Paul style:

**“Some have great confidence in skeptical scholarship, and I once did, perhaps more than anyone else. If anyone thinks they are assured in their unbelief, I was more committed: born of unbelieving parents, never baptized or dedicated; on scholarly credentials, a PhD from a secular university; as to zeal, mocking the church; as to ideological righteousness, totally radicalized.**

**But whatever intellectual superiority I thought I had over Christians, I now count it as sheer ignorance. Indeed, I count everything in my former life as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing the historical Jesus who is also the risen Lord. For his sake, I have given up trying to be a hipster atheist. I consider that old chestnut pure filth, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a CV that will gain me tenure at an Ivy League school, but knowing that I've bound myself to Jesus—and where he is, there I shall also be....**

Michael Bird continues:

**“Many years later, however, I read the New Testament for myself. The Jesus I encountered was far different from the deluded radical, even mythical character described to me. This Jesus—the Jesus of history—was real. He touched upon things that cut close to my heart, especially as I pondered the meaning of human existence. I was struck by the early church's testimony to Jesus: In Christ's death God has vanquished evil, and by his resurrection he has brought life and hope to all.**

**“When I crossed from unbelief to belief, all the pieces suddenly began to fit together. I had always felt a strange unease about my disbelief. I had an acute suspicion that there might be something more, something transcendent, but I also knew that I was told not to think that. I ‘knew’ that ethics were [*sic*] nothing more than aesthetics, a mere word game for things I liked and disliked. I felt conflicted when my heart ached over the injustice and cruelty in the world.**

Faith grew from seeds of doubt, and I came upon a whole new world that, for the first time, actually made sense to me. To this day, I do not find faith stifling or constricting. Rather, faith has been liberating and transformative for me. It has opened a constellation of meaning, beauty, hope, and life that I had been indoctrinated to deny. And so began a lifelong quest to know, study, and teach about the one whom Christians called Lord."

Michael F. Bird, "How God Became Jesus—and How I Came to Faith in Him" April 16, 2014;  
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/april-web-only/how-god-became-jesus-and-how-i-came-to-faith-in-him.html> (my underlining).

# Review

1. The Meaning of Apologetics
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