

WHY AM I NOT A CHRISTIAN?

A Critical Evaluation of Bertrand Russell's Reasons for Rejecting Christianity

By Nicholas Liguori

Introduction

In 1927, Bertrand Russell delivered a lecture to the National Secular Society at London, expounding his reasons for rejecting the Christian faith. This lecture and essay, simply titled "Why I Am Not a Christian," gains great historical and literary value when we consider it has its source in the brilliant mind of one of Britain's most famous philosophers. Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) spent most of his teaching career at Cambridge University, and made important contributions in fields like mathematical philosophy, epistemology and metaphysics. As a prolific writer on a diversity of subjects and a very active public figure in general, a complete picture of Russell's life would require one to look at, among others, "Bertie" the political and social activist, Bertie the pacifist, Bertie the educator, Bertie the ethicist, Bertie the scathing critic, and Bertie the heartbreaker. Our immediate interests will be confined to Bertie the atheist, as we want to examine whether his criticisms of what we will properly call Christian theism (the existence of the Christian God) are valid and justified.

"Why I Am Not a Christian" by Bertrand Russell

At the outset, we must recognize that Bertrand Russell's arguments against Christian theism *do not exhaust* the whole array of objections which other skeptics have brought forward over the centuries. A more thorough treatment of atheism and theism will be left to another discussion,¹ but for now we are concerned only with *his* arguments for atheism (more precisely, skepticism, but Russell was practically an atheist in that he presumed atheism in his arguments) as opposed to Christianity or Christian theism.

In fairness we should also say that because of that lecture's format, time prevented Russell from fully developing his points and extending his case as he might have liked to. Nevertheless, we find in his lecture no short supply of objections and arguments that demand a response, after which we believe they will be exposed as self-defeating or otherwise false.

First Cause and Quantum Physics

Russell begins by critiquing the Cosmological Argument for God's existence, or what he calls the "argument from the First Cause." Russell explains it as:

It is maintained that everything we see in this world has a cause, and as you go back in the chain of causes further and further you must come to a First Cause, and to that First Cause you give the name of God.²

Russell finds two faults with this argument. First, he asserts that the Cosmological Argument is unsound because quantum physics disproves causality. He cites modern science as showing that causality breaks down at the subatomic level,

¹ A work is currently being prepared on the subjects of atheism and theism. Whereas we believe the deity of Jesus Christ and the truth of the Bible can be confirmed with very high probability, the truth of theism and the falsity of atheism can actually be demonstrated with *absolute certainty*.

² Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957). All subsequent quotations from Russell, unless stated otherwise, are from the same lecture/essay.

perhaps referring to Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty. Therefore, he says, if causality does not apply at the very smallest scale of existence, why should it hold true at higher levels? Russell makes the same argument in a 1948 debate with theist Frederick Copleston:

I see no reason whatsoever to suppose that the total [universe] has any cause whatsoever. ... As for things not having a cause, the physicists assure us that individual quantum transitions in atoms have no cause.³

At first blush this seems like very defeating news from the field of modern quantum physics. However, upon further inspection we realize that Russell has committed a grievous logical fallacy, for he essentially argues that "There is no *reason* why things must have a *reason*." He contradicts himself because he tries to give you *cause* to believe that things do not need *causes*. If causality (that every effect needs a cause) is uncertain, then all deductive reasoning must be uncertain as well, for it is really nothing more than causes (premises) and effects (conclusions). But that would also include the *very statement* Russell just made about the implications of quantum physics, so his argument defeats itself. Causality is *undeniable*, for in the very attempt to *deny* it one is forced to *apply* it.

We should also recognize the fact that every science, including quantum physics, depends on causality for its very foundation. Norman Geisler, a Christian philosopher, so keenly writes:

How could it be that the only time science can be certain about its conclusions is during the experiments that confirm uncertainty? It seems to us that these scientists have misinterpreted and misapplied the uncertainty principle, which basically states that the position and momentum of a subatomic particle cannot be established simultaneously.⁴

Who Made God?

Equally fallacious is Russell's second objection to the argument from first cause:

Who made God? That very simple sentence showed me, as I still think, the fallacy in the argument of the First Cause. If everything must have a cause, then God must have a cause.

This commonly held misunderstanding is easily resolved, as Geisler again explains:

It is likewise a mistake to view everything as needing a cause, for in this case there would be an infinity of causes and even God would need a cause. Only limited, changing, contingent things need causes. Once one arrives at an unlimited, unchanging, necessary being there no longer is a need for a cause. The finite must be caused, but the infinite being would be uncaused.⁵

Causality, properly understood, does not say that *everything* needs a cause. Rather, it says we need a *sufficient reason* to

³ Attached in Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian*.

⁴ Norman Geisler and Peter Bocchino, *Unshakable Foundations* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2001), p. 76.

⁵ Norman Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988), 26.

account for everything that exists. Thus defined, whatever *comes into existence* needs a cause. But God *did not come into existence*; therefore God does not need a cause. He is eternal, infinite, uncaused, which is sufficient reason for His existence.

Now one may alternatively posit, as Bertrand Russell does, that the *universe* (not God) is eternal and uncaused—that the universe never came into existence but always was.

There is no reason to suppose that the world had a beginning at all. The idea that all things must have a beginning is really due to the poverty of our imagination.

We hope to demonstrate elsewhere that this theory of an eternal universe theory is philosophically and scientifically untenable, but for now we will simply note that Russell's appeals to the *quantum theory* and questions like "Who made God?" fail to support his argument over against the theist's alternative.

Transcendental Truth: True or False?

After Russell asserts (unwisely) that atomic behavior is not subject to our previously held beliefs in causality, he goes on to say about the laws of atomic behavior that they are not really laws at all. Knowledge of atomic physics is "much less subject to law than people thought" and these "laws" are really just "statistical averages" which "emerge from chance." He then extends this to the discussion of the macro, saying that the same is true of "the laws of nature":

They are statistical averages such as would emerge from the laws of chance; and that makes this whole business of natural law much less impressive than it formerly was.

In Russell's atheistic, materialistic worldview there can be no such thing as *law*. But this affects even the most foundational laws: the laws of logic. For the atheist, the laws of logic are not really laws. After all, they're just movements that happen inside the brain of a sophisticated ape. Greg Bahnsen points out the resulting dilemma in a debate with atheist Gordon Stein:

You see, what happens inside your brain is not what happens inside my brain. Therefore, what happens inside your brain is not a law. It doesn't necessarily correspond to what happens in mine. In fact, it can't be identical with what is inside my mind or brain, because we don't have the same brain. As the laws of logic come down to being materialistic entities, they no longer have their law-like character.⁶

Bahnsen goes on to show that as the very prerequisite for truth and rational thought, the laws of logic must be *universal, immaterial and unchanging*; otherwise they lose their law-like character. But the atheist, who cannot allow for immaterial entities, has no way of obtaining such laws. Bahnsen continues in his Transcendental Argument for God's existence:

Some say the laws of logic are inferences comprised of judgments made up of concepts. Others say that they are arguments comprised of propositions made up of terms. Others say they are proofs comprised of sentences made up of names. Others have simply said they are electrochemical processes in the brain. In the end, what you think the laws of logic are will determine the nature of the evidence you will suggest for them.

Now in an atheist universe, what are the laws of logic? How can they be universal, abstract, invariant? And how does an atheist

justify the use of them? Are they merely conventions imposed on our experience, or are they something that looks like absolute truth?⁷

Russell can do no better, for his worldview reduces laws to "statistical averages." In this case there is no such thing as universally binding truth—only molecules and chance.

We cannot underestimate the significance of the Transcendental Argument as a disproof of atheism. We have briefly explained that the laws of logic cannot be accounted for in an atheistic or materialistic universe. The result of all this is that if there is no God, then not even the statement "There is no God" is ultimately true, for the word "true" would be a meaningless word. And while it is logically *possible* or *conceivable* that atheism could be correct, it is *actually* or *existentially* impossible, for in the very process of saying so (or thinking so) the atheist defeats himself. The assertion that "atheism is true" is therefore *unaffirmable*, for the statement cannot be made without resulting in internal contradiction.

Russell's statement was slightly different in form, but it is subject to the same criticism. That is, we may inquire of his statement that all so-called laws are merely statistical averages of random, lawless natural behavior in a chaotic materialistic universe: Is *that* absolutely true or is it merely another statistical fit on reality? If Russell replies that his statement is *true*, then he refutes himself, for in that case there is at least one statement which holds universal truth, namely, the assertion that nothing is universally true. If, on the other hand, Russell's denial of laws is merely another statistical approximation to reality, then it remains *possible* that there are in fact universal laws out there. Russell's claim, then, is either self-defeating or it is meaningless and not an assertion at all. Geisler likewise concludes:

Finally, if materialism is true, then reason itself is impossible. For if mental processes are nothing but chemical reactions in the brain, then there is no reason to believe that *anything* is true (including the theory of materialism). Chemicals can't evaluate whether or not a theory is true. Chemicals don't reason, they react.⁸

⁶ From the compact disc "The Great Debate: Does God Exist?", a formal debate held at the University of California Irvine in 1985. Tape ASST-MM. Transcript can be accessed from <http://veritasdomain.wordpress.com/>

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), p. 129.

Moral Disproof of God

Later in his lecture, Bertrand Russell sets up an argument to traps the theist between a hard and a hard place:

If you are quite sure there is a difference between right and wrong, then you are in this situation: Is that difference due to God's fiat [a choice or decree] or is it not? If it is due to God's fiat, then for God himself there is no difference between right and wrong, and it is no longer a significant statement to say that God is good. ... [Or if you say that right and wrong have some meaning independent of God's fiat] you will then have to say that it is not only through God that right and wrong came into being, but that they are in their essence logically anterior to God. You could, of course, if you liked, say that there was a superior deity who gave orders to the God who made this world.

Russell argues that if there is a moral law of right and wrong, it is either arbitrary or superior to God. However, this is really a *false dilemma*, for there is a third option he fails to see:

The moral law may be seen as rooted in God's unchangeably good and loving nature. If morality is based ultimately on God's nature and not on arbitrary will, then the apparent dilemma is resolved. In this case there is no ultimate *beyond* God to which he is subject; he is subject only to the ultimacy of the good *within* his own nature. God cannot be less than absolutely good; his nature demands that he be absolutely good. And in this event, it cannot be said that God is arbitrary, for he cannot will contrary to his nature. God cannot decide to be unloving, nor can he desire that cruelty and injustice be performed. God's will must perform in accordance with his unchangeably good nature.⁹

Thus, while God is not accountable to mankind or anyone else to decide what's right or wrong, nevertheless He is obligated by His *own nature* to act and judge rightly.

The Historicity of Jesus Christ

Historically it is quite doubtful whether Christ ever existed at all, and if He did we do not know anything about him.

This is an incredible claim for someone of such high academic stature, for even liberal non-Christian scholars will admit that Jesus existed! One preeminent Christian scholar, F. F. Bruce, insightfully explains:

Some writers may toy with the fancy of a 'Christ-myth,' but they do not do so on the ground of historical evidence. The historicity of Christ is as axiomatic for an unbiased historian as the historicity of Julius Caesar. It is not historians who propagate the 'Christ-myth' theories.¹⁰

In fact, we can give you *10* non-Christian sources who mention Jesus within 150 years of his death! And there are an additional 30+ Christian authors that refer to Jesus during the same period.¹¹ If the skeptic applied the same standard to all ancient literature, he would need to be an agnostic regarding all of antiquity! Russell's extreme skepticism, historically unfounded as it is, reveals an anti-Christian prejudice unfitting a scholar.

The Fig Tree Account

Russell has some serious questions about the Jesus offered in the Gospels. We believe, however, that there are good answers

⁹ Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, p. 226.

¹⁰ Frederick Fyvie Bruce. *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1972), p. 119.

¹¹ They are Josephus, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, Plegon, Thallus, Seutonius, Lucian, Celsus, Mara Bar-Serapion, and the Jewish Talmud. For more information see Geisler and Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, p. 222; also Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2004).

which may be found upon further study. Russell mentions the account of Jesus cursing the fig tree:

Then there is the curious story of the fig tree, which always rather puzzled me ... because it was not the right time of year for figs, and you really could not blame the tree. I cannot myself feel that either in the matter of wisdom or in the matter of virtue Christ stands quite as high as some other people known in history. I think I should put Buddha and Socrates above Him in those respects.

Admittedly, this passage in Matthew chapter 21 is rather puzzling at first read, but we appreciate James Coffman's rigorous commentary:

It is affirmed that Christ had no right to expect fruit of that tree because "it was not the time of figs" (Mark 11:13). This objection disappears in the light of the fact that, of the variety of tree indicated here, the fruit always appeared before the leaves; and that, in view of the leaves, Christ had every reason to expect fruit also. (2) A second objection is that Christ pretended to look for fruit when he knew there was none. That too is false, because Christ, seeing the tree decked out in full foliage, recognized it instantly as a perfect example of the Jewish religious economy, which, though it was not the time of fruit (the Saviour having not yet made the sacrifice), nevertheless professed true righteousness the profound lessons applicable to the Jewish nation. (3) The objection that Christ vented anger on a tree overlooks the fact that the incident was a warning of the true anger that would eventually fall upon the disobedient.¹²

The Second Coming

Another one of Russell's arguments, that Jesus thought his second coming would happen before his disciples died, is likewise unimpressive. Russell quotes three passages and tells that there are others which teach the same, but we believe he is mistaken in his interpretation.

Now any matter of Biblical interpretation is best settled by beginning with the passages which are most clear and direct on the matter, then working toward the less clear passages. We suggest that the clearest statements on Jesus' second coming and "end times" prophecy are found in Paul's second epistle to the believers in Thessalonica:

*"Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you **not be quickly shaken** from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. **Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction.**" (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3)*

This message sounds awfully similar to Jesus' own words in the Gospel of Matthew, another very relevant passage for us:

*"As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the **sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?**" And Jesus answered and said to them, "**See to it that no one misleads you.**" ... "At that time **many will fall away** and will betray one another and hate one another. **Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.**" (Matthew 24:3-4, 10-14)*

¹² James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Matthew, ad loc.* Available online at <http://www.searchgodsword.org>

Returning to 2 Thessalonians, Paul goes on to write:

“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. ... If anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies.” (2 Thessalonians 3:6, 3:10-11)

So yes, in fact, Russell is correct that *some* believers mistakenly thought Christ would be returning shortly. So convinced were some of them that they had ceased working and were actually waiting around for Jesus to return. *But* Paul makes it clear that they were *mistaken*, as he cites the Lord’s words and strongly admonishes everyone to return to their work. Coffman similarly writes on 2 Thessalonians 3:2,

This is Paul’s denial that he ever taught that the judgment day was “at hand” in his lifetime. True, some of the Thessalonians had mistakenly understood it that way, but it was their fault by doing so, not Paul’s; and in the same manner, the exegetes of our own times who are always prattling about Christ and the apostles being mistaken in their assumption that the Second Advent was soon to arrive have mistakenly read the New Testament, and it is their fault, not the fault of the New Testament.¹³

Now for one to say, as Russell does, that Jesus thought his second coming would occur within, perhaps, a few decades, he must not only pit Paul against Jesus, he must also pit Jesus against Jesus. We believe the passages he refers to may be reconciled with these in Matthew 24 and other passages by distinguishing between references to Jesus’ second coming and such things as his ascension to heaven and the arrival of the kingdom of God on the day of Pentecost.

The Moral Character of Jesus Christ

Bertrand Russell admits Jesus was a good man, but not a great one. “The most serious defect to my mind in Christ’s moral character ... [is] that He believed in *hell*,” what he calls “a doctrine of cruelty.” Russell also objects, as we’ve seen, to the “curious” events of the fig tree, and he also feels that Jesus was “not very kind to the pigs to put the devils into them and make them rush down the hill into the sea.” In general, he finds Jesus guilty of a “vindictive fury against those people who would not listen to His preaching,” quite inferior to the manner of Socrates, Buddha and many other great men of the past.

Yet he saves his most indignant rebuke for the Christ’s followers, pointing to all the atrocities committed by the Church in the name of God. He says that most Christians have been “extremely wicked” and that the Church has never ceased to make crooked the straight paths of civil and moral progress:

“You find this curious fact, that the more intense has been the religion of any period and the more profound has been the dogmatic belief, the greater has been the cruelty and the worse has been the state of affairs. ... I say quite deliberately that the Christian religion, as organized in its churches, has been and still is the principal enemy of moral progress in the world.”

Before we answer these charges against Jesus Christ and the Christian religion, we should note something very curious about Russell’s moral objections. They are coming from a man who

¹³ Coffman, *Commentary on Matthew*, ad loc.

presupposes there are *no absolute moral laws*. Ravi Zacharias recalls the predicament Russell faced in the debate with Copleston:

At one point in the debate, Copleston said, “Mr. Russell, you do believe in good and bad, don’t you?” Russell answered, “Yes, I do.” “How do you differentiate between them?” challenged Copleston. Russell shrugged his shoulders as he was wont to do in philosophical dead ends for him and said, “The same way I differentiate between yellow and blue.” Copleston graciously responded and said, “But Mr. Russell, you differentiate between yellow and blue by seeing, don’t you? How do you differentiate between good and bad?” Russell, with all of his genius still within reach, gave the most vapid answer he could have given: “On the basis of feeling—what else?” I must confess, Mr. Copleston was a kindlier gentleman than many others. The appropriate “logical kill” for the moment would have been, “Mr. Russell, in some cultures they love their neighbors; in other cultures they eat them, both on the basis of feeling. Do you have any preference?”¹⁴

You see, the skeptic is being *inconsistent* when he *denies* God but *affirms* evil. If atheism were true, there would be no such thing as moral law, by which behavior could be assessed as right or wrong. Inquisitions, crusades and slavery might be unpleasant, but not morally wrong. Furthermore, all talk of “progress” in society becomes meaningless, for progress implies some knowledge of what “better” means. But without a moral standard to measure good or bad, there can be no *progress* but only *change*. The former atheist C. S. Lewis said this about the problem of evil:

“My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of *just* and *unjust*? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust? ... Of course I could have given up my idea of justice by saying it was nothing but a private idea of my own. But if I did that, then my argument against God collapsed too—for the argument depended on saying that the world was really unjust, not simply that it did not happen to please my fancies. Thus in the very act of trying to prove that God did not exist—in other words, that the whole of reality was senseless—I found I was forced to assume that one part of reality—namely my idea of justice—was full of sense. Consequently atheism turns out to be too simple. If the whole universe has no meaning, we should never have found out that it has no meaning; just as, if there were no light in the universe and therefore no creatures with eyes, we should never know it was dark. *Dark* would be a word without meaning.”¹⁵

So if Russell wishes to maintain that Christians are *really* immoral, then he must admit the existence of a moral Lawgiver (God), which he does not want to do. If, on the other hand, Russell’s objections against the Church reflect merely his personal feelings, then his argument collapses. Bahnsen writes:

In terms of what view of reality and knowledge did he assume that there was anything like an objective criterion of morality by which to find Christ, Christians, and the church lacking? ... By assuming the prerogative to pass moral judgment, Russell evidenced that his own presuppositions fail to comport with each other. In offering a condemning value-judgment against Christianity, Russell engaged in behavior which betrayed his professed beliefs elsewhere.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God?* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1994), p. 182.

¹⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Harper San Francisco, 2001), pp. 38-39.

¹⁶ Greg L. Bahnsen, *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith*, ed. Robert R. Booth (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Press, 1996), p. 156.

To be sure, the theist has to answer the problem of evil as well. And we could respond by asserting that there is a sufficient reason for the evil that is in the world—at least known by God in his infinite wisdom. We might also go on to argue that Jesus was justified in casting the demons out of that fellow and into the herd of swine. We might further offer a philosophically satisfying and biblical answer for the reality of eternal judgment. Yes, we would even join with Russell in denouncing the evil done by counterfeit Christians of centuries past, for the Bible itself condemns their actions. Jesus even said that “My Kingdom is not of this world, otherwise my servants would fight” (John 18:36). Conversion by the sword, inquisitions, torture and slavery, malice and greed, violence and abuse of power—those who practice these things are condemned by the Lord they claim to believe in. We do, after all, have some common ground with Russell and others put off by the Church, and we hope to talk peaceably about these things with other skeptics living today. In fact, we not only want atheists come to know the Lord, we are actively trying to evangelize *so-called Christians* in mainstream Christendom.

But our main point is this: In rejecting Christian theism, did Russell really resolve his problem by assuming atheism as an alternative? His arguments self-destruct, for he presumes a materialistic universe which renders unintelligible his objections against Christianity. In fact, the very posing of the argument raises suspicion that in his heart of hearts, Bertrand Russell is not really a skeptic after all. Indeed, the Bible says that God has written His law on the hearts and consciences of all mankind, and that He reveals himself through creation—adding however, that men have *suppressed* that truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18-20, 2:13-15).

Why People Believe in God

What really moves people to believe in God is not any intellectual argument at all. Most people believe in God because they have been taught from early infancy to do it, and that is the main reason. Then I think that the next most powerful reason is the wish for safety, a sort of feeling that there is a big brother who will look after you. That plays a very profound part in influencing people’s desire for a belief in God....

Religion is based, I think, primarily and mainly upon fear. It is partly the terror of the unknown and partly, as I have said, the wish to feel that you have a kind of elder brother who will stand by you in all your troubles and disputes. Fear is the basis of the whole thing—fear of the mysterious, fear of defeat, fear of death. Fear is the parent of cruelty, and therefore it is no wonder if cruelty and religion have gone hand in hand.

Why do people believe in God? Russell offers a psychological explanation for the phenomenon. It is not because of solid intellectual reasons or truly miraculous encounters with God, but merely because of unreliable psychological or emotional motivations.

Russell’s assertion, if correct, would prove to be a devastating blow against all religious belief. However, we may not automatically conclude that this is so, for his is merely one of many possibilities. Russell does, of course, offer reasons to believe his theory as opposed to the Christian’s, but have we not found them to be entirely inadequate? None of Russell’s arguments succeed in eradicating, or even casting doubt upon, the existence of God or the deity of Jesus Christ.

We strongly recommend to the reader the book titled *Death of a Guru*, written by Rabindranath Maharaj, a former Hindu from a high-caste priestly family. Growing up on the Caribbean island of Trinidad, Maharaj records how he came to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ through a series of miraculous events. He resisted the gospel, however, and tried to convince himself that Christianity wasn’t true:

“*Why I Am Not a Christian*” had turned out to be a disappointment. I had gotten it from the school library, hoping it would help me to remain a Hindu. But Russell’s arguments were weak and contrived, and the more I read of why he had not become a Christian, the more convinced I became that I *must* become one—the evidence demanded it.¹⁷

Certainly Russell’s explanation did not prove accurate in this case! Maharaj actually wanted intellectual reasons *not* to believe Christianity, and he came with emotional *aversions*, not affections, for the Christian God. But *in spite* of these things, and in light of the miracles he saw and the reasonableness of the Christian faith, he later surrendered to Christ and has since lived a joyful and blessed Christian life in fellowship with God! Thousands of people have come to Christ through the prayerful ministry of Maharaj, not only in Trinidad, but also in Europe, North America and India. Many of these conversions have come as a result of convincing miraculous events and answers to prayer, as well as intellectually sound reasons to believe. Russell’s explanation cannot account for the conversions of Maharaj or those who believed through him, without even beginning to discuss the testimonies from Charles Finney, Rees Howell, George Mueller and multitudes of others recorded in Christian biographies (which we encourage the reader to explore), or even the testimonies from our church, all of which seem to militate against Russell’s psychological explanation.

We do acknowledge, however, that Russell is correct in the cases of a great many nominal Christians. But as an explanation of *all* belief in God, in diverse cultures and from centuries past, his explanation is very inadequate, not to mention presumptuous and condescending. We’ve also shown that atheism as a worldview is untenable, and we’ve suggested to the reader that philosophy can *prove* theism—the belief in an infinite, personal Creator God. Why then should we deny the possibility that people could come to believe in Him through intellectually sound reasons and even miraculous events or encounters?

¹⁷ Rabi R. Maharaj and Dave Hunt, *Death of a Guru* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1984), p. 122.

Conclusion

Let us also identify Russell's last argument for what it is, as he shifts from examining the Christian faith to criticizing its adherents, pointing to their moral flaws and explaining away their reasons as "emotional" and psychological. This is actually the *ad hominem* fallacy, as Bahnsen observes:

Even if what Russell had to say in these matters was fair-minded and accurate (it is not), the fact would remain that Russell had descended to the level of arguing against a truth-claim on the basis of his personal dislike and psychologizing of those who personally profess that claim. In other settings, Russell the philosopher would have been the first to criticize a student for pulling such a thing.¹⁸

If Russell had simply said he could never join the Church because of all the hypocritical Christians, his criticism would have been valid and acceptable. But since he is in fact attempting to disprove *Christianity*, not merely "Churchianity," it is important to remember that the validity of the Christian faith does not rise or fall on the moral character of those who profess to believe it—just like one cannot legitimately reject *art* because he or she dislikes *artists*. That would be like throwing the baby out with the bathwater!

As a truth claim, Christianity does not depend on Christians for its validity. If the theological message of the Bible is true, then we are obligated to seek and follow God regardless of the hypocrisy of the professing Christians at the local church. Interestingly, Jesus himself said that there will be *many* people who profess his name but who deny him in their actions (Matthew 7:21-23). Therefore, Russell would do well to direct his criticisms back toward God, the Bible and Jesus Christ and refrain from defining Christianity according to professing Christians, the Roman Catholic Church, Parliament or anyone else. His misdirected arguments, instead of calling attention to philosophical or theological inadequacies of the Christian faith, actually betray a deep-seated, emotional aversion to the adherents of Christianity, hidden under a pretentious display of intellectualism. We agree with Bahnsen who poignantly concludes:

Russell's essay "Why I Am Not a Christian" reveals to us that even the intellectually elite of this world are refuted by their own errors in opposing the truth of the Christian faith. There is no credibility to a challenge to Christianity which evidences prejudicial conjecture, logical fallacies, unargued philosophical bias, behavior which betrays professed beliefs, and presuppositions which do not comport with each other. Why wasn't Russell a Christian? Given his weak effort at criticism, one would have to conclude that it was not for intellectual reasons.¹⁹

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

Moreland, James Porter and William Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*.

Geisler, Norman. *Christian Apologetics*.

——— and Turek. *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*.

——— and Bocchino. *Unshakeable Foundations*.

Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity*.

Zacharias, Ravi. *Can Man Live Without God?*

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF BERTRAND RUSSELL

So what was Bertrand Russell really like? The following is an insightful biographical sketch of Russell, found in Ravi Zacharias' *Can Man Live Without God?* Our intent here is certainly not to attack him personally, but to help the reader gain a more complete picture of the man behind the metaphysics:

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Called Bertie by those in his inner circle, Bertrand Russell is one of the more colorful personalities in philosophy. Toward Russell one would find it very hard to remain neutral. Having lived to the ripe old age of ninety-eight, his life spanned a very critical period of political, social, philosophical, and religious upheaval. And in keeping with his affinity for controversy, he strode into all four arenas with fists flailing.

Russell was a prolific writer for whom writing came very easily. He wrote approximately seventy books on themes as varied as China, morals, mysticism, logic, Bolshevism, marriage, education, geometry, science, philosophy, mathematics, social reconstruction, nuclear disarmament, communism, capitalism, religion, and scores of others. Some of his magazine articles included his views on the use of lipstick, choosing cigars, and wife-beating. Russell had a broad reach of ideas and a penetrating mind in argumentation. He was merciless in his criticism of views he abhorred, and his personal attacks were scathing. Historian Paul Johnson says that no intellectual in history offered advice to humanity over so long a period as Bertrand Russell. He was far better at relating to ideas than he was at relating to people: "I like mathematics because it is not human," he said.

Russell's whole life can best be summarized by the word *contradiction*. Publicly, he fought for peace in the world, yet privately he fomented hatred toward people he disliked. In his speeches, he argued for disarmament and was a pacifist, but on numerous occasions he expressed the wish that America would militarily preempt the burgeoning power of the Soviet Union. He wrote some of the most vilifying articles against Marxism but later in life wrote with equal anger against the United States and capitalism. In one instance, he branded John Kennedy and Harold Macmillan as possibly more evil than Hitler. He delivered papers on the rights of women yet privately belittled their intellectual capacities. He berated his brother for leaving his wife yet his four marriages were marred by infidelities. He would get incensed when he was lied to but was often trapped in his own deceit.

Not only was there such contradiction and duplicity in his life, he changed his philosophical views on numerous occasions. The philosopher Charlie Broad, professor of moral philosophy at Cambridge from 1933 to 1953, remarked that Russell produced a brand new philosophy every few years. All this notwithstanding, Bertrand Russell was a genius, and it is terribly unfortunate that a mind as capable as his sank into frivolous arguments revealing more his prejudices than his intellect.²⁰

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¹⁸ Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, p. 159.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

²⁰ Zacharias, *op. cit.*, pp. 208-209.