

The Evidence That Is The Church

What does that mean, "the evidence that is the church"?

We may frequently encounter those who profess to be atheists, or agnostics, or "scientific", who object to one or more claims of Christianity along the lines of statements like these.

- "You can't prove the existence of God."
- "Evolution is a scientific fact. Therefore no god is necessary."
- "Evolution is a scientific fact. Therefore a good deal of the Bible can't be literally true, especially as relates to claims about creation. Therefore we need not assume its literal truth about, well, anything."
- "The universe is so vastly large. We are insignificant within it."
- "There could be (are) an infinite number of universes, each corresponding to a possible history (and consequent current state) of our own."
- "How can you claim absolute truth? Everything, after all, is relative."
- "Why believe in anything Christians claim? Their behaviors are as bad as the rest of ours, and sometimes worse."

And some who identify themselves as born-again Christians may say,

- "Evolution is a scientific fact. Therefore we must interpret Scripture in some way that squares with that fact."

There exist a few one-shot responses to these notions that quickly re-frame the issue.

- "You can't prove that God doesn't exist."
- "Evolution is NOT a scientific fact. At most, it attains to the status of a set of hypotheses, and, worse, a set of hypotheses that do not admit of experiment by the scientific method. Therefore, these hypotheses must be tested by the available evidence - the model is not that of a laboratory, but of a courtroom. And no convincing showing has been made; moreover, scientists who claim that it has may often find their conclusions to have been reached in a remarkably unscientific manner."
- "The size of the universe signifies in some measure God's power and extent. But it no more signifies His concerns of importance than the size of a rancher's spread signifies the relative importance to him of his cancer-ridden wife's survival. God, by being God, can assign significance and importance according to His will without regard for appearances to us."
- "However many universes you wish to imagine, you are demonstrably in this one and have no means of verifying the existence of any other."
- "If all truth is relative, how, then, can you claim that statement as a truth I must accept? Clearly you contradict yourself."
- "Of course Christians sometimes behave badly. This demonstrates the need of a Savior. We are sinners (so are you), forgiven, saved by grace. The only salvation available is by grace, and it is offered freely by the choice to believe into Christ. We are the evidence that it works. You should make that choice, for your own benefit and that of others."

Now, we know that, cogent as these responses are, they avail nothing when taken as argument only. Arguments, by themselves, do not persuade men to open their hearts to Christ. Rather, a reasonable response to an objection held in another's mind may open a door for the subject to abandon a point of resistance his heart desires less than he thought - or to foster, over time, a reconsideration of his premises. That is, an argument might be used by the Holy Spirit in some way to convict a person.

Now, though, can we prove the existence of God? I think that it's possible to show by the available scientific evidence that, of the several models regarding the existence of God, the model best supported is the very model given in the Bible. There are some who may be convinced thereby. But for many more, the best presentation of scientific evidence will at most leave them saying, "Well, it depends on what you believe to begin with. We didn't see any resurrection."

But there is an evidence that can't be denied. It is present this day, and has been continually since Christ's time on the earth in the flesh. It is the Church. By that, I do not mean the Roman Catholic Church (a bit of an oxymoron, that title), but the church universal, the collection of all people who have genuinely believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 6:16, John 6:69). We are told in John 1 that this set includes "them that believe on his name", signifying (among other things) that a genuine belief in Christ as Savior need not require any great freight of theological knowledge, but a trust and reliance on Him. These are those who believe that Jesus was crucified, making substitutionary payment for our sins, and rose again, demonstrating the efficacy thereof, and, indeed, His deity, and accept Him as Savior for each his own sin.

And what is the evidence of the church? That ever so many people can testify, each in his own way, to the effect of the living Christ upon his own life. The poorest, the worst, the worst-behaved of Christians can give some semblance of utterance about how he came to believe in Christ. Admittedly, some have failed badly in their lives since that day. This itself (in a rather left-handed way) is testimony to the glory of God, for He may say, "and I can save and keep such as this. Do you think I can't save and keep you?" But the truth to which all Christians will agree is that, whatever our apparent state, we are by no means fully perfected in this life, and it is unknown just how bad we might be without Christ.

The church universal includes any number of different stripes, from (by example) Baptists to Roman Catholics, to Methodists, to Nazarenes, to Pentecostals, to Anglicans and Episcopalians, to those in Bible and other independent churches, to Presbyterians, to those in any number of different missionary churches, to believers who (unscripturally) attend nowhere at all - any who actually have believed into Christ. Yes, there are those in all of these fellowships who are not, or not yet, genuine believers. But for all that, the church exists, and often flourishes where the persecution against it (there are always some elements of persecution, even in free societies) is worst. I was about to say that the church stubbornly exists, but it is more correct to say that it can't HELP but to exist and to continue.

OK, one might say - but other religions continue and prosper. Well, true, some do. But the continuing existence of any would refute any claims of God's nonexistence to at least some degree. In fact, the evidence is clear that man is a worshiping being, and, in general, will find something to worship. Atheism is a fairly recent construct. And even atheists rather frequently give evidence of worshipping something, even if it is the abstraction of Reason. Moreover, we have seen the organization of secular humanists into a formalized religion. The point is that man is sewed together this way - and of what does that fact itself give evidence? It wouldn't be reasonable to assume he made this up for his survival as a species. When we observe evidences of intelligence in animals, we really don't see anything like it.

But among religions, none but Christianity has these characteristics.

- An historical record with times, dates, and places: the Bible is by orders of magnitude the best-attested set of documents of anything like comparable antiquity - and its historical content is specific, open to verification.
- A God Who is worthy of worship not only by position and power, but by moral excellence
- A set of propositions which, if true, are of unparalleled value
 - Direct revelation by the Creator
 - Claim of the Creator to be all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfectly just, and perfectly loving as well
 - Statement of man's fallen condition immediately credible upon hearing - we almost instinctively know it is true.
 - The life of Jesus
 - The death and resurrection of Jesus
 - The position of Jesus as God, and man, and Savior
 - The availability of salvation, eternal life
- A record of fulfilled prophecy
- The utter failure of contemporary opponents to discredit the claims of Christianity
 - Christ's miracles
 - A number of resurrections attendant
 - Christ's own resurrection, and subsequent viewing by above 500

As Paul said, ". . . for this thing was not done in a corner," (Acts 26:26) which "thing" King Agrippa, being present, did not attempt to gainsay - he himself knew what had transpired.

And for 2,000 years, reasonable people have found these claims credible. Rather than suspending reason in matters of spiritual belief, they have concluded that the record of Christianity is exactly consistent with reason, with truth. Of all religions, none other is as founded upon propositional truth. Do all Christians equally exercise reason to believe? No, of course not; some take a much more emotional approach. We are not all made the same way. But Christianity, as no other belief system, is consistent with reasonable thought.

And the church is the collection of witnesses who account this belief system, and, more significantly, its Author, true. The testimony is unbroken, it is consistent, and immune to refutation: no attempted refutation makes the church go away. It exists, and it confounds its opponents by its very existence. Satan hates the church, but can't get rid of it; it must for him be like Job millions of times over. (Were I Satan, I think I would go before God, bow down and lay down my arms in full surrender, and ask for whatever mercy could be to me. It would be less of a losing proposition.)