



DOUBT:

Reason for
God?

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Liberalism, Conservatism, & Faith

There is a great gulf today between what is popularly known as liberalism and conservatism. Each side demands that you not only disagree with but disdain the other as (at best) crazy or (at worst) evil. This is particularly true when religion is the point at issue. Progressives cry out that fundamentalism is growing rapidly and nonbelief is stigmatized. They point out that politics has turned toward the right, supported by mega-churches and mobilized orthodox believers. Conservatives endlessly denounce what they see as an increasingly skeptical and relativistic society.

Skepticism & Faith

Major universities, media companies, and elite institutions are heavily secular, they say, and they control the culture.

Which is it? Is skepticism or faith on the ascendancy in the world today? The answer is Yes. The enemies are both right. Skepticism, fear, and anger toward traditional religion are growing in power and influence. But at the same time, robust, orthodox belief in the traditional faiths is growing as well.

Growth of Non-Church Goers

The non-churchgoing population in the United States and Europe is steadily increasing.¹ The number of Americans answering “no religious preference” to poll questions has skyrocketed, having doubled or even tripled in the last decade.²

The Secular Shift in Higher Education

A century ago most U.S. universities shifted from a formally Christian foundation to an overtly secular one.³ As a result, those with traditional religious beliefs have little foothold in any of the institutions of cultural power. But even as more and more people identify themselves as having “no religious preference,” certain churches with supposedly obsolete beliefs in an infallible Bible and miracles are growing in the United States and exploding in Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

Polarization Over Religion

In short, the world is polarizing over religion. It is getting both more religious and less religious at the same time. There was once a confident belief that secular European countries were the harbingers for the rest of the world. Religion, it was thought, would thin out from its more robust, supernaturalist forms or die out altogether. But the theory that technological advancement brings inevitable secularization is now being scrapped or radically rethought.⁷ Even Europe may not face a secular future, with Christianity growing modestly and Islam growing exponentially.

Influence of Cultural Marxism

The history and philosophy departments were socially radicalized and were heavily influenced by the neo-Marxist critical theory of the Frankfurt School. In 1968, this was heady stuff. The social activism was particularly attractive, and the critique of American bourgeoisie society was compelling, but its philosophical underpinnings were confusing to me. I seemed to see two camps before me, and there was something radically wrong with both of them. The people most passionate about social justice were moral relativists, while the morally upright didn't seem to care about the oppression going on all over the world.

Three Barriers to Belief: Intellectual

I didn't know it at the time, but this spiritual "unreality" stemmed from three barriers that lay across my path. During my college years, these three barriers eroded and my faith became vital and life-affecting. The first barrier was an intellectual one. I was confronted with a host of tough questions about Christianity: "What about other religions? What about evil and suffering? How could a loving God judge and punish? Why believe anything at all?" I began to read books and arguments on both sides of these issues and slowly but surely, Christianity began to make more and more sense. The rest of this book lays out why I still think so.

Three Barriers to Belief: Personal

The second barrier was an interior, personal one. As a child, the plausibility of a faith can rest on the authority of others, but when we reach adulthood there is a need for personal, firsthand experience as well. While I had “said my prayers” for years, and while I sometimes had that inspirational, aesthetic sense of wonder at the sight of a sea or mountain, I had never experienced God’s presence personally. This required not so much knowledge of techniques for prayer, but a process in which I came to grips with my own needs, flaws, and problems. It was painful, and

Three Barriers to Belief: Social

The third barrier was a social one. I desperately needed to find a “third camp,” a group of Christians who had a concern for justice in the world but who grounded it in the nature of God rather than in their own subjective feelings. When I found that “band of brothers”—and sisters (just as important!)—things began to change for me. These three barriers did not come down quickly or in any set order. Rather they were intertwined and dependent on one another. I did not work through them in any methodical way. It’s only in hindsight that I see how the three factors worked together.