



The Dawkins Letters - 11. Final Letter to the Reader - Why Believe?

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If you have been reading the rest of *The Dawkins Letters*, you will be relieved to know that this is the final one. It is addressed not primarily to Dawkins but to you – and to anyone who asks – it's all very well your critiquing Dawkins but what are your reasons for believing? Actually this letter and all the others are about to be published by Christian Focus Publications in April 2007 entitled *The Dawkins Letters: Answering Atheist Myths*. My hope is that this book (which will retail for £4.99 or \$7.99) will be used to help present the Good News of Jesus, to people who, but for Dawkins, might never have considered the possibility. Anyway here is the final letter...

Dear Reader,

I have read over 100 books and articles relating to the subjects covered in these letters. It has been an exhausting but stimulating journey. Some material has stretched my mind until it hurt – especially the quantum physics! I take comfort in the fact that as Richard Feynman pointed out, 'if you think you understand quantum theory ... you don't understand quantum theory.' Perhaps the most helpful books have been the following. (Please note that 'helpful' does not necessarily

mean an endorsement of everything in every book. I am assuming that those of you who have managed to read this far are grown up enough to realise that we can sometimes learn a lot from people we disagree with. The books below are books I have interacted with – there is only one book I would regard to be absolutely trustworthy, the Bible!).

Obviously *The God Delusion* is the book I am interacting with. If you already have the book then you will know what I am referring to. If you don't, I cannot honestly recommend that you should get it. It really is as bad as I have tried to demonstrate and I would be reluctant to put any more money into it! If you are interested in science then Dawkins other books are much more palatable. In terms of the science / religion interaction I would recommend:

Alistair McGrath *Dawkins' God: Genes, Memes and the Meaning of Life The Twilight of Atheism and Science and Religion: An Introduction* (I have not yet read *The Dawkins Delusion* by Alistair McGrath and Joanna Collicutt McGrath as, at the time of writing it had not been published; however, I have little doubt that it will be up to McGrath's usual excellent standard.) Kirsten Birkett *Unnatural Enemies: An Introduction to Science and Christianity* is a beautiful little primer on the whole subject and her *The Essence of Psychology* is equally worthwhile. Stephen J. Gould's *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* is a mine of information as well. Malcolm A. Jeeves and R. J. Berry *Science, Life and Christian Belief* has been very helpful to me. For those interested in the history of science and religion then David N. Livingstone *Darwin's Forgotten Defenders: The Encounter Between Evangelical Theology and Evolutionary Thought* is fascinating. For a 19th century populist writer who is as good as Dawkins in communicating his message, but has the distinct advantage of being a Christian, have a look at Hugh Miller *The Footprints of the Creator: or, The Asterolepis of Stromness or The Testimony of the Rocks: or, Geology in its Bearings on the Two Theologies, Natural and Revealed*.

Some other populist science books that I have found helpful include Steve Jones *In the Blood: God, Genesis and Destiny*; Steven Hawking *A Brief History of Time*; Matt Ridley *Genome: The*

Autobiography of a Species in 23 Chapters and especially Paul Davies *The Mind of God: Science and the Search for Ultimate Meaning* and *The Goldilocks Enigma: Why is the Universe Just Right for Life?* Whilst Paul Davies is not a theist I have found him to be very fair and he does not dismiss theism – indeed he puts forward an excellent case for it. His books stretched my mind and in so doing reinforced my faith.

There are a number of scientists who are committed Christians and who have written about the interaction between their work and their faith. John Polkinghorne's *Quarks, Chaos and Christianity: Questions to Science and Religion* is stimulating and thought provoking as well. Owen Gingerich's *God's Universe* is a small but well worthwhile book from a senior Astronomer. R. J. Berry's *God and the Biologist* gives a theistic evolutionary viewpoint. My personal favourite (even though I do not agree with everything in it) is Francis Collins' *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*. It is one of the most interesting and faith affirming books I have ever read.

Although many scientists would not agree with the Intelligent Design Movement (including many who accept that there is evidence for intelligent design) no-one should comment on it without reading Michael Behe's *Darwin's Black Box: Biochemical Challenges to Evolution*. Likewise there are scientists and many Christians who adopt a young earth creationist position. The best defence I have read of this is Douglas F. Kelly *Creation and Change*.

There are so many books that could be mentioned on Christianity, theology and morality. C. S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* and also his *Surprised by Joy* remain wonderful explanations of many aspects of the Christian faith. Lee Strobel's *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus* makes a good case. McGrath's *Christian Theology: An Introduction* is the most reliable standard text book, whilst if you want a really reliable and in depth systematic biblical theology it would be hard to beat Robert Duncan Culver's *Systematic Theology*. John Stott's *Issues Facing Christians Today* is a superb example of how to apply the Bible to modern life. On the other hand, *Godless Morality: Keeping Religion Out of*

Ethics by Richard Holloway is an example of how far the Church can wander away from the Christian faith; whilst Richard Bauckham's *God and the Crisis of Freedom: Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives* contains an excellent chapter dealing with Holloway's book. John Wenham's *The Enigma of Evil: Can We Believe in the Goodness of God?* is a tremendous discussion about some of the major issues as is Miroslav Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace: Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation*. And I have always enjoyed reading F. F. Bruce *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* and his *The Hard Sayings of Jesus*. Personally I have gained a lot from Augustine's *Confessions* and his *City of God*. Calvin's *Institutes* and anything by Jonathan Edwards will always repay the effort.

On the whole question of the 20th century being the failed century of atheism the best place to begin is Niall Ferguson *The War of the World: History's Age of Hatred*. Eric Hobsbawm's *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* is a standard work in the same vein. If you have any doubt about the atheism of Stalin or Mao then I would recommend Simon Sebag-Montefiore's *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* and Jung Chang's *Mao: The Unknown Story*. On the rise of Nazism and Hitler's atheism have a look at Daniel Jonah Goldhagen *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, Gitta Sereny *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth*, Ian Kershaw's *Hitler* and Traudl Junge's *Until the Final Hour: Hitler's Last Secretary*. To see how a Christian dealt with the evil of Nazism read Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Discipleship* and *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

Two other works mentioned are Patrick Sookhdeo's article *The Myth of Moderate Islam*, and Hans Rookmaaker's book *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture*.

However these letters have not just come out of science, theological, philosophical or history books. There are many other things that need to be added to the mix. I should also mention films that I have found to be stimulating and informative, *Schindler's List*, *Apocalypse Now*, *The Matrix* and *Downfall*. In terms of human nature and describing the problems that modern society faces *Crash* is thought provoking and disturbing. *The World at War* is the best TV / DVD

series made on the subject.

Music and poetry are two of the greatest gifts given to humans. Leonard Cohen, John Lennon, B. B. King, U2, Mozart, Emmylou Harris and Johnny Cash are the soundtrack of this book! Poems such as Leonard Cohen's *All There is to Know about Adolf Eichmann* says in a few words what I say in many!

In terms of novels I would recommend the following in particular: Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, the final part of C. S. Lewis' science fiction trilogy *That Hideous Strength* (which brilliantly warns us about the dangers of a godless scientific materialism), Nick Hornby's *About a Boy*, Albert Camus' *L'Étranger*, Douglas Coupland's *Girlfriend in a Coma* and Marilyn Robinson's beautifully written and wonderfully perceptive *Gilead*.

There are also numerous articles / reviews and booklets that I have read. One I would certainly want to recommend is a sermon published as a booklet by Alec MacDonald of Buccleuch and Greyfriars Free Church in Edinburgh – *Why I am not an Atheist*. Go to the Buccleuch website (www.buccleuchfreechurch.co.uk) in order to get a copy.

Speaking of which, the Web is an excellent source of information, although please be careful about using Wikipedia and Google as shortcuts to actually finding out and thinking about things for yourself. (I have lost track of the number of times I have read 'scholars' who prove that this part of the Bible is false or that part is wrongly translated, usually by people who have never read a word of Greek or Hebrew in their life but suddenly 'know' because of something they have read on the web!) Some of the other websites I have used are the Faraday Institute – (www.st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk/faraday/index.php, an excellent source of material from Cambridge on the faith/science interaction), Christians in Science (www.cis.org.uk), Cees Dekker (www.mb.tn.tudelft.nl/user/dekker/index.html), Redeemer PCA (www.redeemer.com) a constant source of stimulation and encouragement, as is John Piper (www.desiringgod.org). And of course I must not forget Richard Dawkins' own website (www.richarddawkins.net).

Prospect magazine, *Time*, *The Spectator*, *The Times*, *The Guardian* and *The New York Times* online often have excellent articles discussing many of the issues raised in these letters.

The originals of these letters and some of the responses to them can be found on the Free Church website (www.freechurch.org). The initial letter was posted on the Dawkins' website and got such a vitriolic response that none of the others was posted there. I have however enjoyed corresponding with a number of atheist thinkers who in general have been a great deal more gracious and helpful. Most of our discussions tend to get bogged down in presuppositions. Atheists presuppose there is nothing outside matter. They tend to be logical positivists who demand proof but then set unreasonable limits as to what they will accept as proof. They reject totally the concept of revelation. Like atheists, I too presuppose that matter is real but I do not presuppose that matter is the only reality and I cannot *de facto* reject the concept of revelation out of hand. Indeed, that is one thing I have become more certain of – that despite the testimony of God in the creation ('For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made' Romans 1:20) it is all the more necessary for the Spirit of God to work in our lives so that we may see. After all, did Jesus not say that unless a man was born of the Spirit then he could not even see, never mind enter, the kingdom of God (John 3)?

In a sense I am grateful to Richard Dawkins for writing his book. It has made me think and has stretched my mind. Occasionally the book has angered me, and I am sorry if that sometimes has come across in these letters. (Perhaps I should point out that no atheists were harmed in the making of this book!) More often than not it has saddened me – I thought that Bertrand Russell was the most depressing atheist I had ever read but Dawkins beats him hands down – take for example this from *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life*:

We are survival machines – robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes. Our genes made us. We animals exist for their preservation and are

nothing more than throwaway survival machines. The world of the selfish gene is one of savage competition, ruthless exploitation, and deceit.

What a desperate, sad and ugly world.

I am not surprised that Dawkins was 'mortified' by the fact that *The Selfish Gene* is the favourite book of Jeff Skilling, the disgraced CEO of the Enron Corporation and of course I realise that Dawkins is not a Social Darwinist. However, I do not see how his social and political position is logically consistent with his philosophical position. My passion against what Dawkins is teaching is not driven out of some desire to protect or defend God. If God was a human construct then he would not be worth defending. If he is for real then he can defend himself. I am reminded of the famous Baptist minister C. H. Spurgeon who once retorted to a comment about him defending the Bible: "Defend the Bible? I would as soon defend a lion!" No, my passion is simply that I have no doubt that if atheist philosophy gets an ever increasing grip on Europe or the USA then we are really heading for another Dark Age.

For those American readers who think this may be true of Europe but can hardly apply to the USA let me remind you that the Church is only ever one generation away from extinction in any one area. I am not convinced that the USA Church is as strong as people suppose. Certainly, it looks as though the numbers are there but I suspect that much of it is very fragile and just as the European church was largely unable to stand up to the assaults on the Bible that took place at the end of the 19th century, so the American Church, unless it wakes up and really does get back to the Bible, will soon find itself collapsing like a house of cards in face of the onslaught of New Age spirituality, the cults, materialism and the newly confident militant atheism of Dawkins *et al.*

When I began this series of letters I had no idea where it was going to lead. I approached *The God Delusion* with a certain fear. Partly this was because, whilst at University, I spent one year studying the English Civil War. I remember one black week when, in reading the brilliant Marxist historian Christopher Hill, I came across a statement to the effect that the English Puritans had engaged in the biggest brainwashing exercise in history. The thought crossed my mind:

'What if that is true? What if I too have been brainwashed? What if belief in God is just a delusion?' 25 years later I sat down to read Dawkins' book. I tried to be as open minded as possible. I approached it with 25 years more knowledge, knowledge of things that would strengthen my belief, and knowledge of things that would cause me to question my belief. Believe it or not the top three things that have caused me the most doubt have been some of the more difficult passages in the Bible, the Church and the God Channel. I have never really had any problem with the God vs. science dichotomy, which has always struck me as a false dichotomy – something that Dawkins illustrates almost more than anybody. And I still believe. Indeed I believe more than ever. If anything Dawkins' book has not only confirmed to me the barrenness of the wastelands of atheism but has caused me to be even more thankful to God for his glory, his truth, his universe, his word and, most of all, his Son.

I have been challenged myself many times by atheists as I have been writing these letters: 'Prove it. Prove that God exists'. And I have told each of them that when I came to the end I would attempt to answer the question. I do so in the knowledge that it is impossible to prove God, not because he is unprovable, but because of our presuppositions. For example, if you believe that miracles don't happen then miracles will never be accepted by you as proof. When I went through that period of doubt 25 years ago it was the blackest period of my life, not because I could not see the attraction in not believing, but rather because I could. But what I knew then and what I know now will not allow me to turn away from God. It may be comforting to be an unbeliever (especially if you have been traumatised or let down by some religion or religious group) but what good does that do if your unbelief is not true? What if it is not the Christians who are deluded but the non-believers?

What then do I know? Why believe that Christianity is true? I can only list the following – all of which have been mentioned and discussed in the ten letters.

1. The Creation. By that I mean the heavens and the earth, from the smallest atom to the vastest galaxy. It all shouts to me of the glory of God. As I

write I am sitting in my parent's home in the Scottish Highlands overlooking the Dornoch Firth. The night is still and clear and in a moment I will go and clear my head and gaze up at the stars.

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun. (Psalm 19:1–4)

I include science in this category. I think it is very foolish for Christians or others to seek to prove or disprove God on the basis of a current scientific theory or on empirical evidence alone. But science within its own constraints as the observation of what God has made is a marvellous and often faith-affirming thing.

2. The Human mind and spirit. Why are we conscious? Why are we special? And life. Where does it come from? How can we get life from non-life?

3. The Moral Law. How do we know what good and evil is? Why do we have a sense of that at all?

4. Evil. Unlike Dawkins I cannot believe in the innate goodness of human beings. I see too much evil and no explanation fits what I observe as neatly and realistically as the teaching of the Bible. More than that I find that the Bible also brings us the answer to evil – and I have never yet come across any philosophy which does so.

5. Religion. Yes there is so much in religion that is wrong and in many ways I hate religion. Generally I think it is a human imitation that more often than not blocks the way to God rather than opens it. And yet it is an imitation of something that is real. As Augustine said, 'Our hearts were made for you, O God, and they are restless until they find their rest in you.'

6. Experience. I believe because I have tasted that God is good. Of course we can be deluded in our experience (that is why we need to reflect). And we can be wrong in our knowledge. But it would be a strange kind of person who did not take into account their experiences as part of the

whole package. Not long after I became a Christian I was visiting a 'hippy' home where amidst all the music and drugs paraphernalia there was a poster stuck on the wall. Its words have remained with me ever since: 'All I have seen teaches me to trust the Creator for all that I have not seen'. Sure – answered prayer, that sense of God's presence and that joy in worship may all have been illusory. But then again it may all have been real.

7. History. Again as I have continued to read and study history it has broadened my horizons and enables me to see in the words of the old cliché that it is 'His Story'. The history of mankind makes a whole lot more sense when it is set in the context of the history of God.

8. The Church. I mentioned earlier that there are things in the Church that more than anything else have caused me to doubt. When you see Christians behaving in a way which would shame Satanists, when you see preachers being pompous, hypocritical, money and glory-grabbers, then it is enough to put you off Christianity for life. But I have also seen the other side. I have seen the most beautiful people (some of whom had been quite frankly ugly before their conversion) behave in the most wonderful, inexplicable ways. Inexplicable that is except for the grace and love of God. The Church at its best is glorious, beautiful and one of the best reasons to believe.

9. The Bible. Again I mentioned problems that I have had and occasionally still have. But I can truthfully say this – that every year I read the Bible through at least once, that every day I try to read it and every week I study it in order to proclaim it. It has been a source of challenge, comfort, truth and renewal. I have no doubt that God speaks to me through it (and I don't mean the kind of loopy ignoring of context or more esoteric interpretations). In fact, I am so assured of this, experiencing it continually, that I have very little time for Christians who are always looking for 'extra words' – as though the Bible were not enough. For me the thrill is still there.

10. Jesus. I guess that any one of the above nine reasons would not be enough on their own – although I think their cumulative effect is overwhelming. But this is the icing on the cake. Actually no ... this is the cake. Jesus is the reason

I believe and will continue to believe:

'In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word' (Hebrews 1:1–3). All things were created by Christ, and for Christ. In him all things hold together (Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3). It is in Christ that 'are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Colossians 2:3). We hear about Jesus. We believe him. We receive him as Lord. We continue to live in him, 'rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness' (Colossians 2:7). We are warned: 'See to it that no-one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ' (Colossians 2:8). Would I really want to trade Jesus Christ for the *Selfish Gene*? No thanks. 'For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ.' Why would I swap the fullness of Jesus Christ for the emptiness of a universe and life without God?

And why should you? The wonderful thing about Jesus Christ is that you cannot inherit him, he cannot be bought and you cannot earn him. He simply comes as a free gift to all who would receive him. I leave you with some words from another man who had his life changed by Jesus and I pray that you too will see, believe and be changed.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it ... The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of

God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. (John 1:1–5 and 9–13)

If you want to know more, just ask. Pray to God, seek his face and his forgiveness and he will never turn you away.

This book has been part of a conversation. One that is ongoing. It's not just about talk; it's about truth, life, meaning, beauty, justice and eternal love. And You. Join in.

Yours, etc.

David

Read Part 1.

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