

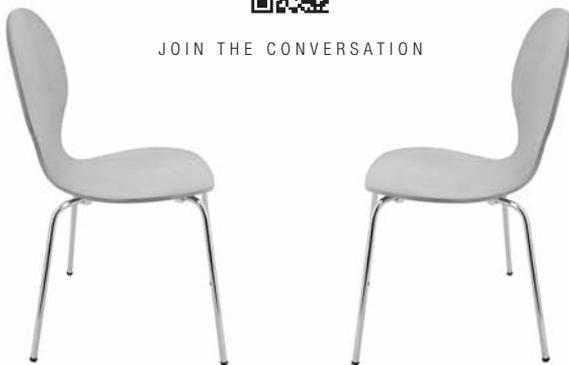
DANIELLE
D'SOUZA

y GOD

An Intelligent Discussion on the Relevance of Faith



JOIN THE CONVERSATION



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FOREWORD BY DINESH D'SOUZA



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For Tracy
My dear cousin and fellow traveler
on the road to truth

4 G O

JOIN THE CONVERSATION



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Foreword

by Dinesh D'Souza

My daughter Danielle is an unusual person, at least for her age. Recently she said to me, “I’ve been thinking about why some Christians make the sign of the cross.”

I was raised Catholic in India, and I confessed the question hadn’t really occurred to me. Danielle explained, “They touch their heads because God is the creator, the mind who made the universe. Then they touch their hearts because Jesus is the Savior, the one who removes sin from our hearts. And finally they touch each shoulder, because that’s the Spirit in us. We are God’s arms in the world, and it is our job to do God’s work while we are here.”

That’s the kind of daughter I’ve got. She says stuff that is totally unexpected for a kid her age—stuff that I’ve never thought of, and sometimes wish I did. While I regard myself as her teacher, or one of her teachers, occasionally she teaches me things I don’t know.

This book came about as a result of a thoughtful young Christian woman trying to live out her Christianity in a largely secular culture. Danielle attends The Bishop’s School in La Jolla, California. While the school has an Episcopal background, it now represents a very faded Christianity. Many students don’t go to church, and neither do their parents. There are students from China, Korea, India and Iran who come from different religious backgrounds. Like many young people today, Danielle lives out her faith in the middle of surrounding skepticism and in an environment where Christianity is by no means the only religious option.

This creates the need for apologetics—an old word meaning the defense of the faith. Apologetics is not about apologizing; it is about giving a reason for why you believe what you believe.

This is necessary for Christians to be able to communicate a message to others who don’t necessarily share Christian assumptions. In this situation, it makes no sense to say, “homosexuality is wrong because the book

of Leviticus says so,” because inevitably the other person will respond, “Who cares what the book of Leviticus says? Why should I accept the authority of the book of Leviticus?”

So before appealing to the Bible, it is important to show why the Bible is a reliable authority on such questions.

Apologetics is not just for the benefit of the doubter or seeker but also for the benefit of Christians. Many young people today who are raised in Christian homes don’t know there is good archeological, historical and scientific evidence that supports the things they believe. Christianity is not a faith held in stubborn resistance to evidence; it is a faith that is anchored in evidence, even though it ultimately goes beyond that evidence into the province of God’s revelation.

I especially love the spirit and tone of this book, which is open, inviting and conversational. It is just the right tone for discussion among young people, and also for discussion between parents and children—across the generations, if you will. It has the potential to generate a unique type of conversation, and I’m proud to have a daughter who has initiated this conversation.

Dinesh D’Souza

Introduction

There are plenty of good books out there that provide answers to the most pressing questions about God and faith. I've read a bunch of them and have come to appreciate the work of really smart Bible scholars and Christian apologists.

There are also some very thought-provoking books written by skeptics and atheists who challenge my beliefs, and I admire their commitment to views that are different than mine. Of course, I disagree with their conclusions, but it's not enough to "just say no" to anyone who doesn't agree with me. Whether I'm talking with my friends who wonder if God and this whole faith experience is real or I'm in a lively debate with someone who flat out denies the reality of God, I've found that having intelligent discussions on the relevance of faith is much more effective than trying to win with arguments.

In fact, I think it's all about having reasonable conversations about faith, where people who disagree on a particular topic can ask great questions and then do their best to provide relevant evidence and answers.

That's what ¶GOD is all about. It's not about trying to prove anything beyond a shadow of a doubt; it's about working through 32 of the most bothersome (and, I think, interesting) questions both believers and skeptics have about God and faith. Yes, I have a definite worldview rooted in the reality of God, but I'm not here to try to convince you to think a certain way. Instead, I want to stimulate your thoughts so you can come to your own conclusions as we go through these questions together.

There's so much more I could have said, but there just wasn't room in this book. So, with the help of some friends, I've set up a website where you can find additional resources and links related to the topic of each chapter. In addition, I have a Twitter account and an email address so the conversation can continue. Here are the addresses we've set up just for you:

Website:	www.YGod.apologetics.com
Twitter:	@YGodDanielle
Email:	Danielle@danielledsouza.com

I'm so glad you decided to experience 4GOD. Together, I am confident we are going to make a lot of progress in the most important journey any one of us can take in this life: the journey of faith.

Is Faith Reasonable?



@YGodDanielle

11/05 7:00 a.m.

We all have faith, just in different things. To believe in nothing at all, actually, is unreasonable. Would you want a rock-climbing instructor who doesn't have "faith" in gravity?



Faith seems to be a very positive word, except in the context of religion.

“Have faith in yourself!” Doesn’t that sound like good advice? We regularly have faith in people we know and trust. We are more likely to work hard, and maintain a positive attitude, if we have faith in the future. Our projects are more likely to succeed if we have faith in them. Faith seems, in most cases, to be a good thing.

Yet somehow when it comes to God and religion, faith acquires a negative connotation. Suddenly we hear skeptics scorning “blind faith” or ridiculing Christians for a “leap of faith,” which to them sounds like someone “jumping to a conclusion” (and without a parachute).

I don’t think faith is blind. I think it’s the thing that helps me to see even better—you know, like the song “Amazing Grace” says: “I *was* blind, but *now* I see.” Faith, for me, is not closing my eyes; it’s not leaping off a cliff in the perverse belief that Christians float in the air, or that they don’t get hurt when they hit the ground. It’s a dynamic thing—a lively thing. It’s a matter of asking questions and finding answers, and being amazed at how consistently I find that what Christianity tells me is, well, even “righter” than I thought it was. I just love this quote from 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.”

Okay, I know. If God were as obvious as the sun, that’d make things pretty easy for the faithful! But he isn’t that obvious. In fact, he’s invisible. So, what sense does that make—having to have faith in—being commanded to have faith in—something you can’t see?

Why don’t you ask a scientist? They’ve got “faith” in all kinds of things they can’t see, and they use that faith every day. Take sub-atomic particles—just trying to think about them in class makes my head spin, but I have “faith” that they exist, much like my teacher and every other scientist. You can’t see these particles. You can infer them from the behavior of other things; you can view traces of them, or their behavior, through

an electron microscope, or some future device, perhaps. You can't, however, directly experience them, which means, at some point in the logical chain, you are believing in a device, or an expert, or some combination of things, that you can't directly verify yourself. But that's not a bad thing. That's the kind of faith that makes science happen, and that allows it to be taught to kids like me.

A lot of times the things scientists can't see (the things they only know exist because of their effects) are things we've got to rely on every day. Now, I have never seen gravity. I'm not even sure scientists know what it "is." Well, they know it's a "force," but what is that? A form of energy? No. A form of matter? No. Are there little invisible "waves" that attract bodies together? Something else?

I believe in gravity, however, even if I don't understand it—even if no one understands it or sees it. I have faith in it, and I act on that faith every minute of my life. It would be absurd not to. I don't know what it is, but I'd be a real nut case if every time I stepped off a sidewalk I didn't believe that I would step down rather than go flying off into space.

But that's not the only kind of faith scientists have. They've got a deep faith in scientific "laws" themselves, and in the possibility of understanding the universe. You can't demonstrate that you can understand the universe without actually *trying to understand the universe*. If you didn't have faith that it was possible, well, then you'd never even try. You'd give up on science completely.

Faith in the universe being understandable is the *foundation* on which we build scientific knowledge, not something proven by it. That faith—just like Christian faith—helps us see.

Now, a faith in God—in Christianity—is still only "like" these things. It's not identical; it's not these things themselves.

Christians believe that everyone (except Christ) has been guilty of committing sin. Does that mean they have scientific proof that Adam and Eve existed, that there is some weird substance way deep inside us called "original sin" that you could put under a microscope, or that we really understand fully what original sin is—or even what evil is?

No, like gravity, original sin is something we see the effects of every day. It makes sense of how people act—whether way back in history or in

my own classroom. People (yeah, I include myself!) seem to be kinda “bent.” If I act like we humans are not somehow bent, then I’m in for a crash—like I would be if I ignored the “law of gravity.” I think that was the “crash” of communism—people tried to act as if there wasn’t any sin, and it worked about as well as if they had tried to act as if there wasn’t a law of gravity.

On the positive side of things, aspects of Christian faith like loving your neighbor, loving the outcast, and even loving your enemy can also be “seen” through the actions they cause. I’m not very good at these things, believe me (especially the last two), but I can see the enormous effect that following Jesus in faith, and doing these things, has—it’s like a miracle. I think of all the Christians who helped smuggle Jews out from under the Nazis, and I think about Mother Teresa.

Similarly, I can’t see or put under a microscope what a “conversion” is, but I know that it’s real because it causes things to change. Down in the gutter, drunks accept Jesus, and they become, like overnight, different people.

Sure, there are things I don’t get about Christianity. But since I’ve experienced how true some of it is . . . how true it proves to be, when you think and act like it’s true . . . how much it makes clear every day, even little things . . . well, then, I accept on faith the parts I don’t get yet. I mean, I certainly did the same kind of thing the first week of my chemistry class! It makes sense to rely on my minister, my religious ed teachers and the Bible itself in the same way—to have faith in them because they keep helping me understand things even better.

This kind of faith works against someone who’s trying to tear down my belief. It doesn’t mean I won’t put my brain to work and think about what that person is saying. But in my experience, just because some skeptical teacher or some wise guy in my AP physics course thinks of a clever argument or snappy question that I can’t answer right off the bat, that doesn’t mean they’re right. In fact, they’re usually wrong, even if how they are wrong isn’t immediately apparent to me.

I guess the thing I should say at this point is that Christian faith is more than anything else a faith in an historical event, or a story, and that story sheds light on everything else. Real light.

I have faith in the resurrection. I think, just like Paul did, that if there was no resurrection, then the whole Christian thing is pointless—a sham. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is *the* central thing we Christians have faith in.

I didn't start out with "faith." So how did I get it? Well, first I heard the story from my parents, or in Sunday School, and I accepted it. It sounded wonderful! But that didn't stop my reasoning, even as a little kid. It started it!

So, I didn't just stop with believing something I had heard. I turned it over in my mind, thought about it, and wondered, *How on earth did that happen?* I couldn't answer that one.

I talked to friends and family. "We don't know; it's a mystery; it was a miracle."

Even though I didn't have all the answers, I started trying to live like a Christian, and I found, even as a kid, that doing that made my life better. It made more sense of things.

But I hadn't "proved" that the resurrection had happened. I held it by faith.

Later, I would run into the kid in class who mocks all this, saying it's unreasonable and scientifically impossible for God to raise somebody from the dead after three days. Well, I reasoned about it and thought, *I believe that it is possible for God to do things that are "scientifically impossible" to do. What sense does it make to say that an all-powerful God is somehow limited by his creation—by his own laws?* I was reasoning about my faith.

Still, I kinda had some doubts. But then later, I found out that the laws of nature, the things that are supposed to make miracles impossible, weren't around from all eternity, but "popped" into existence at the Big Bang—from nothing! Sounds a lot like Genesis. Seems to me we need a God to create the laws out of nothing—to give us a universe we can live in and understand. Now, science, instead of contradicting my faith, was supporting it. The laws of nature can't make the resurrection impossible if you need God to explain how we got the laws of nature to begin with!

That's faith using logical reasoning and scientific reason to support it—to clear away the places where doubt attacks faith.

But now that I have thought more about it, my faith is not in the resurrection itself, but in the one who was resurrected: Jesus. I have faith in

him—a real live person and a personal God. Part of my faith in Jesus, and his Christian religion, is based on a personal relationship with him—an interactive back-and-forth that I have with him, and that I have enjoyed since I was old enough to pray.

No, I must report, I've never gotten an actual out-loud answer back—no emails, no phone messages, not even one of those annoying “no reply” bounce-back messages sent out by big, impersonal companies. Nor did I get the pony I prayed for in third grade (though my family does live in horse country now), or the cancellation of a quiz I was fearing in calculus last year (though I pulled out a B+ on it anyway). On a sadder note, one of my dad's friends died even though I asked over and over for him to go on living.

All that said, though, I have been praying for years. This praying isn't necessarily formal; it's talking to God—asking for things or for understanding. My interactions with God also involve going to church and reading and always thinking that I gain something from it—intellectually and spiritually.

At times, I've even felt like Jesus was with me, or that he or God was answering me in some indirect way—teaching me, the way God teaches Jim Carrey's character in *Bruce Almighty*, that maybe God wants me to just do this for myself, or that if he gives me and everyone else who wants one a winning lottery ticket, we'll wind up winning practically nothing.

At the end of the day, I feel a certain faith in him. It's like those exercises they have couples do (I saw this in some movie), where one person closes their eyes and falls backwards—trusting their partner to catch them.

I have faith that Jesus and God are there to catch me—sometimes in ways I couldn't even have thought of before, sometimes indirectly, and sometimes, or so it feels, with an almost direct, pinpoint response. This faith is more intuitive than logical, but it is not illogical, or anti-reasonable. Is it illogical to trust your mother, love your sister, or believe in your father? I don't think so.

So this faith is not a leap, it's not going against logic, and it's not blind.

Here's a challenge I have for anyone who disbelieves, isn't sure whether to believe, or sort of believes but has some doubts: Whether you believe me or not—whether you've had the same experience or not—if you are

really a person who believes in evidence and experiments and seeing what happens . . . *why not try?*

I invite anyone who is skeptical, doubtful, or even downright angry with God (or the idea that there is a God) to pray to him. Talk to him. “Listen” to him, by which I mean, just quietly sit and open up your mind to whatever ideas Jesus or the Holy Spirit might put in there. See how it works. Give it a shot.

There is no “down-side risk.” Talking and listening to Jesus costs you nothing. At worst, you’ll gain more evidence supporting the case that all you already thought about the absurdity of the Christian religion is true.

If your pride is such that you don’t want to carry on such an experiment in front of others—you don’t even want to “give God the time of day” in public—I would just say, you can pray in private. You can even tell God you don’t believe in him. If you’re so certain there’s nothing to all this religious mumbo jumbo, what is there to fear? You cannot help but get a positive result, and you can tell all your friends that you really tried it, and it just didn’t work for you.

You believe in reason, in science, in experimentation—right? If you have such faith, if I may call it that, that there is nothing to the story of Jesus and that there is no God, why are you unwilling to test your non-faith, or your faith in non-Christianity? Just pray to him: “Jesus, if you’re there, then show me that you are the light. Show me that I can see everything better by you.”

Is Science at War with Religion?

11/05 7:35 a.m.



@YGodDanielle

No, and vice versa. In fact, when their proper relationship is understood, they go together like peanut butter and jelly.



There isn't any real conflict between science and Christianity—not if you understand them in the right way.

Science is an attempt to understand the material universe: the general ways in which energy and matter, and even their sub-components, behave; the way flowers grow and how photosynthesis works; how various elements make up chemical compounds; the life and history of stars; the way the earth spins, the tides work, and so on. It deals with nature.

Religion deals with things that are before, after, above and beyond all of this. Religion deals with who (if anyone) created all this stuff and all these laws that we are able to observe and infer. It deals with human beings—how they should act and what they should believe about life and death—the here and the hereafter.

Christianity, a “revealed religion,” is a story of how God has occasionally made appearances in the world—how he has made his voice heard directly to us (as with Moses), made himself a part of the world and a person in it (the birth of Jesus), told us how he wants us to behave (the teachings of Jesus in his ministry), and even made it possible for us to be saved and spend eternity with him (the death and resurrection of Jesus.)

Now and then—indeed, all too frequently—someone trying to prove that religion in general, or the Christian account of God's self-revelation in particular, is false will attempt to put science to work on behalf of their argument. This usually takes one of two forms.

One possibility is that someone will apply the laws of science—at least, the ones they think are true at the time—to some reported miraculous event and argue that there is a contradiction between them. So they say something like, “Science shows that this miracle couldn't have happened; therefore, the religion that believes in this is false.”

For example: “The Bible says that God stopped the sun in the sky to help Joshua win a battle. But we now know that for the sun to ‘stop in the sky’ would really mean that the earth stopped rotating. If this happened,

there would be earthquakes, the planet would split apart, and people would go flying off into space. None of those things happened, so the Bible cannot be true.”

This doesn't really make sense. Think about it. This assertion depends on this assumption: God could stop the earth, but he couldn't deal with all of the things that would happen because he stopped the earth.

I mean, duh, if he can stop the earth, he can certainly deal with the effects. What the skeptic must really be saying—the only thing he can be saying—is that no such God exists, because if such a God did exist, and he was powerful enough to stop the world, he could deal with the rest of it. If he can get around the laws of nature in one instance, he can do it all the time.

Besides, God could just have made the sun *appear* not to move, right? He could alter human perception so that that's what Joshua and everybody else experienced. Or he could have made time slow down, but allow Joshua and the Israelites to act as if they were in “normal” time. I've read of weirder stuff in popular science magazines!

In short, if you don't believe that miracles—events that are beyond normal, natural laws—are possible, then this particular miracle is impossible. The proof, however, is circular: It proves that a miracle couldn't have happened by assuming that the laws of science can never be overridden, i.e., miracles are impossible.

Now to the second possibility (I didn't forget). Here's the other way that people try to use science against religion. Sometimes people will argue, particularly in light of a new scientific advance, that science has explained how something could have occurred naturally—and therefore, the biblical account must be wrong in saying that it occurred *supernaturally*. Like with the formation of the stars or the creation of animals.

This type of argument often intimidates people. No one wants to seem stupid or out of date. So Christians, even smart ones, will sometimes rush in and try to refute the newly proven scientific theory, even though there is, in fact, no need to do so.

After all, when God causes something to happen, there's no rule (that I know of) that says he can't use natural laws to make it so. I mean, he's the creator and the miracle worker—it's the same God doing both. If there

is a God, he created those laws. To say he can't use them would be like accusing someone of plagiarism for using their own work! Silly.

It may well be that when "God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1), he did so by setting off a Big Bang—or that when he created the animals, he did so by initiating a process of evolution. Think about it this way—nature itself is really miraculous. Using nature can't be bad. Creation declares the glory of God, no matter how fast or slow God actually created it.

When you add these two types of arguments together, you see that, according to people who use science as a kind of blunt instrument to argue against religion, religion can never win. The way they see it is like this: If something happened naturally, that's a sign that God had nothing to do with it. If it happened supernaturally, that's a sign that it couldn't have happened at all.

Either an event conforms to nature, and so is no big deal, or it doesn't, and so it can't be true—even if 3,000 people saw it happen.

But this is not a war between science and religion. It's a war carried out through a particular misuse of science against religion.

If science and religion conflict, it would certainly be news to many scientists who are also believers. Consider the fact that a majority of scientists believe in God—by about a 5 to 4 margin, according to a Pew Research survey.¹ Now, it could be that the minority is right. The point of citing the poll is just to show that, at the very least, there is no necessary war between science and religion . . . not according to scientists, anyway. There are scientists who are believers.

This includes some of the greatest scientists historically, including Sir Francis Bacon, Galileo, Sir Isaac Newton, Robert Boyle, Blaise Pascal, Michael Faraday, Johannes Kepler, Gregor Mendel, Max Planck, William Thomson Kelvin and Francis Collins, to name just a few.²

At the end of the day, religion has no conflict with true science—the science of humility, of restraint in making claims, of careful testing and rigorous analysis.³ If anything, these two "worlds" are friendly allies and have a complementary relationship. How could it be any other way? Isn't the creator God, the one who made nature, the same God who reveals himself in the Bible?

Notes

1. David Masci, "What Do Scientists Think About Religion?" *Los Angeles Times*, November 24, 2009. <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/nov/24/opinion/la-oe-masci24-2009nov24>.
2. "Famous Scientists Who Believed in God," Evidence for God, GodandScience.org, <http://www.godandscience.org/apologetics/sciencefaith.html#.UE5XDUS2I7A>; Dr. Francis Collins, "Collins: Why This Scientist Believes in God," CNN, April 3, 2007, http://articles.cnn.com/2007-04-03/us/collins.commentary_1_god-dna-revelation?_s=PM:US.
3. There's a very cool chart at GodandScience.org that compares various scientific laws and hypotheses with Scripture. I could reprint some of it here, or adapt it, but they've already done a good job. You really should just look it up: <http://www.godandscience.org/apologetics/sciencebible.htm>.