

## With Minds of Children

I have often asked Christian apologists if they expect non-believers to accept their god-belief claims on their say so, as if their voice carried the cosmic authority they attribute to the god they enshrine in their imagination. I ask this question because religious believers who set out to defend their beliefs from the threat of non-belief offer precious little in clearly explaining why they believe what they claim to believe, and why others should believe what they claim. In my experience apologists typically seem to think this not a serious question, for few have offered a sincere answer. In encounters with apologists, even if their claims are given the attention they apparently think they deserve, questions about why they should be believed or why one should think they are true are either ignored or ridiculed, or effort is made to discredit the character of those who posed them in the first place. Such behavior simply indicates that those who would defend the religious view of the world have little or no confidence in any answers they might provide in response to questions posed about their beliefs and the claim that those beliefs are true.

But this no doubt does not put a stop to apologists seeking to rationalize their mystical beliefs (often by vilifying alternative positions) even while evading questions that sometimes strike at the very core of those beliefs or the motivation to carry on the pretense that they are true. And what is it that they are saying is true? Stories of magical personae and events, tales of conscious beings existing beyond our perception and beyond our ability to discover and know rationally, claims of an invisible magic being which created the universe by wishing it into existence and which "controls whatsoever comes to pass" (1), etc. All this strikes a reasonable thinker as legends and tales which are no more true than *Alice in Wonderland* or *The Wizard of Oz*.

Some apologists are quite open about the fact that it requires the mind of a child to take such stories seriously and accept them as truth. This is quite refreshing in fact, since it serves to confirm a basic point that I have observed in religious believers who on the whole otherwise seem at least somewhat intelligent. And that point is that god-belief will take its root best when the believer, like a naïve child, is philosophically defenseless against the false premises which lurk under theism's pre-packaged exterior of anecdotes, pretended authority, fake promises of vindication and the like. It is, in the case of Christianity for instance, the absurd and nonsensical which distinguish its teachings from other worldviews most dramatically, insisting that adults lower their minds to the level of a 6-year-old, prone to trusting persons in positions of authority and intellectually unable to recognize any abuse of that trust. It is the recognition of religion's predatory defrauding of the human mind and spirit that prompted Rand to point out to us that "faith in the supernatural always begins with faith in the superiority of others," that "A mystic is a man who surrendered his mind at its first encounter with the minds of others." (2)

Various passages in the bible make it clear that one must have the mind of a child rather than an adult to qualify as an approved believer. For instance, consider the following:

"Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:3-4)

"Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein." (Mark 10:15)

Presuppositional apologist John Frame tells us that

Scripture never rebukes childlike faith; indeed, Jesus makes such faith a model to be followed by adults (Luke 18:16). One who requires proof may be doing it out of ungodly arrogance, or he may thereby be admitting that he has not lived in a godly environment and has taken counsel from fools. God's norm for us is that we live and raise our children in such a way that proof will be unnecessary. (3)

Luke 18:16, which Frame cites above, says:

"But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God."

Christianity needs the believer to lower his mind to the level of a child because it can only survive by exploiting his ignorance, and exploiting an individual's ignorance will be more difficult if that individual thinks as an honest adult, is intellectually informed, does not indiscriminately give his trust to just anyone or automatically presume that other minds are superior to his. Apologists recognize that the only way to goad adult thinkers into renouncing their adult minds is by coaxing them into questioning their certainty. It is for this reason that the deployment of many apologetic

schemes are so unpersuasive: not only do they fail to draw on objectively verifiable facts which can be examined impartially by all viewers, they also fail to apply concepts in a self-consciously meaningful and consistent manner (which can work against a child's mind, but many adults tend to sense that their leg is being pulled).

For instance, when apologists say things like "[t]he ground of rationality must be the living and triune God" (4), it is entirely unclear what they might be trying to say since the term 'rationality' is not a Christian concept. And we know that 'rationality' is not a Christian concept because a) it is not a biblical concept, and b) the very basis of the concept of rationality, which is the primacy of existence principle, is wholly antithetical to the fundamental metaphysical orientation underpinning Christianity (which is the primacy of consciousness view of reality). Moreover, apologists tend to use such terms while ignoring the need to clarify any working definitions they may assume in the context of their claims and characterizations.

In the interest of undermining the non-believer's certainty (which is rightly perceived as an obstacle that must be removed for there to be any hope of vindicating Christianity from criticism), a favorite tactic of Christian apologists is to barrage a non-believer with numerous questions, questions which they apparently picked up in an introduction to philosophy course or from some apologetics primer. The immediate aim is to uncover some area of ignorance on the non-believer's part while the underlying strategy is to focus on any hint of ignorance on virtually any issue and exaggerate its proportions by driving a wedge of uncertainty deep into its core. This uncertainty is then used to manipulate the non-believer into doubting the efficacy of his mind and the truth of his verdicts, and Christianity - like a bully who takes pleasure in kicking a guy when he's down - waits in the wings to fill the void.

This tactic can be seen in action in these illustrative examples of questions posed by Christian apologists:

"how does the atheist account for non-material logical laws?" (5)

"Now, how does the atheistic worldview account for morality? ...how can one account for laws of logic? How can the atheist account for any abstract, universal law?" (6)

"assuming that non-theism were true, on what basis could we assume the validity of the inductive principle (or, in simple terms, the continual uniformity of nature)?" (7)

Such questions are supposed by apologists to have no "cogent" answer on the basis of "the atheist worldview," an expression which implies a uniformity in the thinking of atheists which does not exist.

Statements from apologists repeating the affirmation that "the atheist worldview" or non-believers in general "cannot account for" some feature of cognition read like indistinct widgets rolling off an assembly line, as if those making the affirmations were as robotic as the machines manufacturing the widgets. The uniformity of mindlessly repeated utterances indicates uniform mindlessness on the part of those who make them. Some choice examples include the following:

The atheist world view is irrational and cannot consistently provide the preconditions of intelligible experience, science, logic, or morality. The atheist world view cannot allow for laws of logic, the uniformity of nature, the ability for the mind to understand the world, and moral absolutes. In that sense the atheist world view cannot account for our debate tonight. (8)

The atheistic world view is inadequate... [it] cannot adequately explain the existence of the world... is unable to provide the necessary preconditions to account for the laws of science, the universal laws of logic – and, of course, absolute moral standards... cannot account for the meaningful realities of life. (9)

The atheistic worldview is irrational and cannot provide an adequate basis for intelligible experience. An atheistic world is ultimately random, disorderly, transitory, and volatile. It is therefore incapable of providing the necessary preconditions to account for the laws of science and the universal laws of logic. In short, it cannot account for the meaningful realities people encounter in life. (10)

On an unbelieving basis, however, there is no particular reason to believe that there are laws that actually describe facts. Who is to know that reality is regular at all? If the world is ultimately the result of chance (or 'ultimate matter', which is the same thing), surely it is equally likely that the world will become random or chaotic; and if our senses and reason seem to be telling us differently, why should we believe that in a world of chaos they would be telling us the truth? And if chance is king, where do laws come from? They do not exist in the objective world, because that world is the result of chance, not the product of a designer who gives it a structure of regularity. (11)

In the atheist worldview, rationality and ethics are the anomalies that require explanation. In the Christian worldview, irrationalism and evil are the anomalies. At the very least, atheism, not Christianity, has the up-hill battle in explaining how the existence of human rationality makes sense in their worldview. But the atheist's ultimate explanation for anything can be only one thing, the irrational. Therefore, in terms of the atheist worldview there can never really be a rational explanation for anything." (12)

The anti-theist worldview can not account for the uniformity of nature on which to base the scientific process. (13)

The non-Christian's presuppositions cannot account for any area of human experience. (14)

The essence of the presuppositional strategy is to lampoon non-belief as such, typically by charging it with crippling intellectual disabilities through a variety of vilifying caricatures, presumptuous generalizations and uncharitable translations of certain positions affirmed by certain individuals, thereby making Christian god-belief somehow seem superior, more empowering, more philosophically informed. This tactic and other trademark elements of typical apologetic maneuvers suggest that apologists are really hoping that non-believers respond to their line of interrogation by throwing up their arms and saying "*I donno, must be God did it!*" After all, apologists give us nothing to suppose that this is not what they did themselves when it came to the task of using their minds.

In such a way, this interrogative style of apologetics is intended to get the heat off the believer and his task of providing reasons for believing what he claims while trying to undermine the non-believer's confidence in reason and his own mind (ironically characterized as a fault-ridden faculty which was allegedly created by a perfect creator). Since the apologist likely knows deep down that his god-belief claims have no rational defense, his concern is to hide them behind a blanket of challenges posed to those who have not surrendered their minds in similar fashion, not because their philosophical orientation is truly faulty, but because they are perceived to be a threat. All the while, the apologist seems completely oblivious to the need to provide a reason for believing the claims he apparently wants us to accept.

This whole approach to apologetics smacks of the behavior of an incorrigible child hoping to entrap adults in his midst whom he resents for being right. Children are not only often overly trusting, suggestible, imprudently credulous and intellectually vulnerable, they are also often prone to lacking self-restraint, social crudeness, and depth of intellect. And it is common knowledge that a child who is reluctant to grow up is sometimes given to petty nitpicking, emotional outbursts, temper tantrums. Non-believers who are willing to engage Christian apologists should not be surprised that such tendencies may show in their opponents since, as we saw above, this childishness is actually encouraged by the Christian worldview. As Van Til confessed unabashedly,

My whole point [is] that there is perfect harmony between my belief as a child and my belief as a man... My unity is that of a child who walks with its father through the woods. (15)

And of course, this is because Van Til never grew up. Which just underscores the \$64,000.00 question:

*Why be born again when you can just grow up?*

by Dawson Bethrick

*References:*

- (1) Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, p. 160.
- (2) *Atlas Shrugged*
- (3) John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, p. 66.
- (4) Douglas Wilson, [Second Rebuttal to Theodore Drange](#)
- (5) Michael Butler, [TAG vs. TANG](#)
- (6) Dennis Nenadov, [The Existence of the Triune God](#)
- (7) Sycamore, [Reply to An Atheists perspective of God](#)
- (8) Greg Bahnsen, [Opening Statement](#)
- (9) Hank Hanegraaff, [Is Atheism Logical?](#)

(10) Rolaant McKenzie, [Why Christianity?](#)

(11) John Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought*, p. 77.

(12) Mike Warren, [Christian Civilization Is the Only Civilization](#)

(13) Justin S. Holcomb, [Knowledge Falsely So-Called: The Theological Case Against Scientific Realism](#)

(14) Harry Callahan, [Opening Statement](#)

(15) Van Til, [Why I Believe in God](#)

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [6:36 AM](#)

## 12 Comments:

[Francois Tremblay](#) said...

Excellent article, as usual. This fits perfectly with my own position that Christian morality is authoritarian and regressive. If the Christian must have child-like faith, then he must also be imposed a child-like morality. Both go hand in hand, since faith is after all a moral choice, and morality is a corollary of your epistemic position.

[December 30, 2005 11:57 AM](#)

[Aethlos](#) said...

HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!!!!!  
HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!

[December 30, 2005 10:23 PM](#)

[Jeff Downs](#) said...

I don't know how anyone can take you serious. Your misuse of Christian material is sad.

[January 03, 2006 11:16 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Jeff Downs: "I don't know how anyone can take you serious."

There are many things you do not know, Jeff. But recognizing that you are, contrary to religious pretensions, not omniscient is an important departure point for discovery.

Jeff: "Your misuse of Christian material is sad."

Thank you for your opinion, Jeff. When you have more than emotionalism to offer, please submit your thoughts.

Best regards,  
Dawson Bethrick

[January 03, 2006 5:26 PM](#)

[Master Zap](#) said...

Perfect as Always, Dawson!

Jeff: Not taken seriously? HAHAHA. Right. You expectme to take someone who believes in a invisible man in the sky seriously? Rethink.

[January 04, 2006 4:49 AM](#)

[Jeff Downs](#) said...

Believe in God or not, this is not that issue.

Misrepresenting Christianity and others positions is just poor scholarship. Therefore, I for one, would not take Dawson serious.

Can you not actually represent Van Til and others correctly and then defeat their position? Why must you distort their true positions.

[January 04, 2006 5:30 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Jeff,

It is good that you continue to come back to me. As you pointed out before, there is much you do not yet know, and now that you've found a resource which exposes and corrects the fundamental errors of religious god-belief, you now have the opportunity to discover a truly rational worldview. So I encourage you to continue visiting when you can.

You said: "Believe in God or not, this is not that issue."

I understand that this is how you want to characterize our antithesis, but it is quite superficial and ignores a more fundamental division between the religious worldview in general (whether Christian or otherwise) and my worldview. One of the goals of my writing on my blog is to bring this point out. Since you probably do not understand these matters very clearly yet, you likely do not see the debate as I see it.

You said: "Misrepresenting Christianity and others positions is just poor scholarship. Therefore, I for one, would not take Dawson serious."

I do not think I've misrepresented either Christianity or its mouthpieces, Jeff. On the contrary, I've been very careful to back up my verdicts with citations of sources fundamental (in the case of the bible) and sympathetic (in the case of its defenders) to Christianity expressly to avoid mischaracterizing what Christianity teaches. My present blog simply focuses on one of the New Testament's teachings which believers are expected to take to heart, namely the adoption of a child-like orientation to the teachings of the bible. I've pointed out that this is appropriate for a worldview which is false and whose promulgators do not want their flocks to know any better. I've supported this with quotations not only from the bible which make this teaching explicit, but also from claims made by Christianity's defenders, some of which openly advocate such an orientation and others candidly admitting their own adoption of it. Notice the opening statement of my blog, Jeff. I wrote: "I have often asked Christian apologists if they expect non-believers to accept their god-belief claims on their say so..." I've been trying to dialogue with believers for many years now, and I still have the impression that they expect me to accept their claims on their say so, just as I mention in my blog. Even when given a chance to present arguments which are intended to support their religious claims, apologists seem to do nothing more than assert their position as if it were self-evidently true, which of it is not, or as if (as I surmise) they expected people simply to believe their claims on their say so.

My [analysis of Bahnsen's opening statement](#) in his debate with Gordon Stein is a prime example of this. Where's the argument there, Jeff? Show me how he infers his way to the conclusion "therefore God exists." I don't see it. I've combed through his "argument," and I've found no argument there. Bahnsen is far more concerned with showing that Stein is somehow mistaken or that his particular worldview is somehow deficient (since it supposedly "cannot account for" whatever Bahnsen wants to say it "cannot account for") than he is with presenting positive reasons for believing his claim that a god exists. Even if Bahnsen were successful in uncovering a problem in Gordon Stein's worldview, this would not imply that other non-believing positions have the same flaws (that would be a clear non sequitur ignoring significant distinctions), nor would it in any way support the claim that the Christian god truly exists. Contrary to the apparent supposition driving Bahnsen's performance, I find myself in agreement with apologist Greg Welty, [who points out](#) that "The demand that the Christian defend the coherence of his own views does not require any premises from the atheist side of things." To make this point stronger, I would point out that the apologist has a very shaky case indeed if the alleged "truth" of his worldview rests on the supposed "falseness" of a rival worldview, as if "God exists" follows logically from the vilification of non-belief as such.

The presuppositional apologetic, with its dependence on the rapid-fire discharge of superficial questions like "how do you account for rationality in an irrational universe?" or "how does personality arise from an impersonal universe?", is a case in point: such a strategy expects us to accept the questions' hidden assumptions and throw up our hands saying "I donno! Must be God did it!" just as a child might if given the opportunity. This is ultimately nothing more than a

confession of ignorance, Jeff. It is not a path to knowledge.

So I ask you, Jeff Downs, do you expect me to accept your worldview's claims on your say so? Is your worldview so weak that it cannot be substantiated by evidence, on rational inference, even compatibly with the preconditions of truth as such (i.e., the primacy of existence metaphysics)? Can you think as an adult just for a while, and be willing to see the folly of the Christian worldview? Can you allow yourself to be honest just long enough to see how fake the Christian worldview is and how deceitful its defenses are? Or will you continue to dig in your heels at the expense of your own mind, clinging to canned slogans and pat denunciations of rival worldviews which are thought to be wrong simply because they do not affirm belief in your preferred invisible magic beings? What's it going to be, Jeff? I'm not asking you to take *me* seriously. *I'm suggesting that you take yourself seriously for once.*

You said: "Can you not actually represent Van Til and others correctly and then defeat their position? Why must you distort their true positions."

I do not think I've distorted anyone's views, Jeff. And you've not shown that I have distorted anyone's views, either. In fact, I found multiple testimonies which uniformly affirm the same view, so I think I'm in good standing here. I realize that you might find my conclusions unsatisfactory or distasteful, but this is really due to your confessional investment in a mystical view of the world. The alternative to Objectivism is any form of subjectivism, Jeff. The choice is yours to make.

Best regards,  
Dawson Bethrick

[January 04, 2006 7:18 AM](#)

[Jeff Downs](#) said...

*I do not think I've misrepresented either Christianity or its mouthpieces, Jeff.*

Dawson,

You have. I'm sorry I don't have time to get into this with you and frankly, no interest, after what I saw in this post. You are a dishonest man, twisting the text and writings of others.

Most of our time would be spent on correcting your misunderstanding (or outright twisting) of Christianity, Van Til and others.

No thank you!

I hope no one will "take your word for it" that you have not misrepresented/twisted Christianity and its teachers.

[January 04, 2006 10:01 AM](#)

[Not Reformed](#) said...

Good piece of prose, Dawson.

I'm a little confused though...

In the past I've read accusations that you are 'misrepresenting' the Christian worldview.

So, to make things crystal clear, you include biblical references, and multiple quotes/texts from actual apologists.

You then are accused of the same thing, again.

You ask for an example of this, and then your accusers run.

What do they want? If a person can't understand christian theology/worldviews from reading the Bible and its proponents, how can they get it?

Oh yeah, I forgot. You're supposed to just \*believe\*.

And you get that from the Holy Ghost before any of this makes sense.

[January 04, 2006 11:53 AM](#)

[Francois Tremblay](#) said...

This Jeff Downs fellow is plainly a troll.

[January 04, 2006 12:21 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

NR's overview of what has transpired seems accurate to me. I have been quite careful not to put words into other people's mouths, and have sought to supply my writings with ample quotations from proponents of the views that I criticize so that I am interacting with those views as they are laid down by those who promote them. And in spite of this, I am still accused of dishonesty. When my accuser is asked to substantiate his accusation, he says "I'm sorry I don't have time to get into this with you and frankly, no interest." Then, in addition to being accused of dishonesty, I am then told that I either misunderstand or deliberately distort Christianity, Van Til and other spokesmen. So Jeff has had enough time and interest to level two charges against me, but he has neither the time nor the interest to back them up. I've pointed out that presuppositionalist apologists in particular have a habit of multiplying their burdens without meeting any of them when it comes to defending their worldview claims, but for some this habit seems to have spilled over into the realm of interpersonal relations.

A common defense of Christianity against criticism that I have seen over the years is to dismiss the criticism on the charge that its author does not understand Christianity. I often wonder if apologists who retreat to this kind of defense believe that only those who believe Christianity as affirming Christians are the only ones who truly understand it. This would make things pretty safe for apologists, for it would allow them to dismiss all "non-believing criticism" universally, in one fell swoop, just by rejecting the source (rather than interacting with the substance of the criticism itself). An untenable worldview would need to rely on such evasive tactics.

And as if there were no shortage of evidence to support any charge of my misunderstanding of either Christianity or its defenders, my own writings on the topic seem to be ignored, as if my accusers didn't even bother to read or try to understand what I have argued. A common criticism of Van Til's apologetic, for instance, is that his position entails the view that non-believers cannot know anything, and thus it is clearly a falsely premised apologetic approach since it's indisputable that non-believers in fact know things. This is one of the criticisms that Kelly James Clark raises in response to John Frame's exposition of presuppositional apologetics in the book *Five Views on Apologetics* (cf. pp. 255-259). I would think that Jeff would appreciatively take note that I never raise this criticism against presuppositionalism, simply because I *do* in fact understand what it is that the presuppositionalists are trying to argue. And I don't think it's all that difficult to understand to begin with. And if it were so insurmountably difficult to understand, then Jeff should take this into account before he lobs the charge of dishonestly misconstruing what presuppositionalism affirms, and he should also accept the possibility that he himself may in fact have misunderstood presuppositionalism, perhaps also my criticism of it. But Jeff does not appear to have made such considerations. To solve the matter, I invite Jeff to present his understanding of presuppositionalism, hopefully laying down an argument for the truth of Christianity or some element in it in some concise and readily discernable form that isolates any inference(s) he may think supports the case for Christianity, and then I can proceed to interact with that (as time allows, of course), noting any differences there might be between his understanding and mine. I'm worried however, that Jeff will say that he just doesn't have the time to do this.

Anyway, if it is in fact the case that I do not understand Christianity, Van Til and other defenders of the Christian faith, then I am right not to call any of it true, for calling something I do not understand "true" is untenable. If one does not understand something, then on what basis could he confidently say it's true? He wouldn't understand what he is calling true! So when apologists tell me that, after all the effort I've made to research their claims, I simply don't understand, then they are essentially handing me an excuse which their own worldview wants them to deny me. In this as well as other ways, they performatively betray their own worldview presuppositions.

I'm glad these aren't my problems.

Jeff also said that he "hope[s] no one will 'take your word for it' that you have not misrepresented/twisted Christianity and its teachers."

I hope so too, Jeff. I invite all my readers to come look at the evidence and make their own independent judgment. I'm inclined to suspect that hunkered down Christians will parrot the charge that I do not understand Christianity or that I have somehow misrepresented it, simply because they have a confessional investment to protect. Consider a believer who has put himself through years of schooling in apologetics at a seminary or bible college. Does anyone think it would be easy for such an individual to recognize that he's been in error all those years, and that what he has tried to believe and eagerly defended is actually untrue? I sure don't. After making such a huge personal investment in something like this, it is very difficult for someone to sober up and admit that he's been wrong all this time. So instead of facing the issues head on, he will likely dig in his heels even further, recite his apologetic slogans as incantations intended to dispell doubts and thwart criticism, chastizing those who dare not to believe the ancient "wisdom" of long-dead mystics who allegedly possessed the secrets of knowledge that he so desperately wishes he had.

Best regards,  
Dawson Bethrick

[January 05, 2006 7:20 AM](#)

[Sal\\_et\\_lucis](#) said...

I Have one question for Dawson, Just how much of Van Til and Bahnsen have you actually sat down and read? You either are a poor reader, have a short term memory, or you haven't read them at all.

[January 09, 2006 1:35 PM](#)