

PREFACE

This book is first and foremost an existential adventure and challenge, meaning it will encourage and enable the reader to question basic life-views that we all hold and that most of us have been taught to believe, or assume, are true. *Trying to find the best answers to life's most important questions is required if you want to live a complete life and find deeper meaning and truth in this life.* Seeking answers to questions like:

- Is it reasonable to believe I evolved from hydrogen gas which is what naturalistic evolution teaches?
- Can mere physical chemicals reasonably account for my ability to know right from wrong, or to know and experience forgiveness?
- Is love merely an emotion?
- What is the purpose of human life?
- What is the purpose of my life?
- What is truly important in life?
- What am I as a human being?
- How do I value things and why?
- What am I truly living for and is it valuable?
- Is there is a higher form of love and can I experience a life where I give and receive that love with others on a daily basis?
- Does Christianity genuinely represent God well?
- If Christianity is wrong, what do I do about my guilt?

In sum, this book is about answering the question, "what view makes the best sense of the reality that I experience and answers best the question about what I am and what is truly valuable?" You might ask why I need to address Christianity to answer that question, and the book will make that clear. In short, Christianity claims to provide the best answer to that essential question.

The simple truth is that the vast majorities of people merely go along with "the program" given to them by others (parents, religious leaders, etc.) and complain when it doesn't go their way. Sadly, they never ask those questions, or if they do, they give up quickly and never diligently pursue satisfying answers—answers that pass the test of reason and logic—answers that lead to good and positive change.

As one might be able to tell from the title I am not a Christian, although I was one for years. If you have not been exposed to Christian concepts, you are fortunate, although you would be very unusual indeed since Christians and their God beliefs have been spread all over the earth. This book is not coming from, nor defending, a Christian worldview. In fact, it is challenging many of the beliefs that Christians say are true—it is challenging Christianity itself as its contemporary religious leaders and authorities define Christianity.

The book could be entitled, "Religion: A Successful Failure," since Christianity is not unique in its failures but mirrors the other major world religions like Islam or Judaism, etc. However, since I was both raised as a Christian and then after a genuine conversion experience as an adult spent many years involved in and committed to the Christian religious system, it is appropriate I focus specifically on the Christian religion. In other words, the criticism of, "oh, well, he doesn't have any practical knowledge or experience with Christianity" would be false. (As we shall see, that criticism is fallacious anyway since I don't need experience to judge whether most non-experiential things are true or false.)

Reading this book will take some courage *if* you do so sincerely with a willingness to learn or change. If you read this book with a defensive shield on, then no courage is required, and you are wasting your time.

If you are a Christian, this book will be very challenging. I hope you will discover that I am not unfair or mean-spirited in my corrections and in identifying the things that are wrong with Christianity. My approach in this respect should remove the temptation to make the unfair accusation that it is my bitterness or bad experiences with Christians or "the church," or some other such incorrect thing that is the motivation for this book. *The fact is that the motivation for this book is to bring desperately needed and beneficial change to many people, including Christians who see their need.*

There are many excellent and well-intentioned Christians who spend time sincerely helping people. This book takes nothing away from their efforts to help other people, unless, of course, the primary way they view helping others is to get them to believe wrong Christian doctrine or participate in religious rituals or the foolish expenditure of resources.

If you are an atheist, non-theist or agnostic, this book should be of particular interest to you. Many non-theists and agnostics have legitimate gripes against Christianity and Christians and have correctly identified wrong beliefs and practices. However, if you are going to try and use this book as fodder for your cannon against the existence of God, you should be surprised how that will not work *if* you use reason and observation well, the tools you properly extol. I urge you to evaluate all possibilities of what can be true about human life and not filter out possibilities that you don't like or don't currently fit your life or worldview.

Hopefully, we can agree that one characteristic of a good person is one who will try and be fair and as objective as possible. The critical term "objective" is defined as follows:

- "Expressing or dealing with facts or conditions as perceived without distortion by personal feelings, prejudices, or interpretations" ¹;
- "Not influenced by personal beliefs or feelings; fair or real" ²; or,
- "Of a person or their judgment; not influenced by personal feelings or opinions in considering and representing facts." ³

Being as objective as possible is extremely important in evaluating anything. If the reader has noticed, people's concern with being objective is becoming an increasingly rare thing so you will have to be different and thus be concerned about being objective.

Equally crucial to trying to be as objective as possible is that we acknowledge that *we all have a world or existential view that has components of personal beliefs, feelings, bias, prejudices, opinions, etc.*; and that world or existential view will usually cause us to have a bias against other views. Part of this author's job in writing this book is to attempt to put aside my personal bias, feelings, etc. in as much as that is possible, and thus to be as objective and fair as possible.

Ultimate or absolute reality does exist and the more objective we are, the more we will not be afraid to apply the valuable tools of observation, reason, and logic to the worthwhile pursuit of finding, discovering, clarifying and understanding that reality.

A word about science - many believe that "science" is the sure and sole realm of truth and that it provides the best worldview and that it that will solve humankind's problems. That perspective is an erroneous view as we shall see. Science – empirical science – deals with the physical realm and is practiced in the present. Some of the most important concepts regarding human existence are outside the physical realm, namely love, forgiveness, compassion, justice, etc. Science is a valuable tool/practice and practicing science well can solve many human problems. However, it is inadequate and impotent to address the most critical human issues that exist, which problems cause human conflict, abuse and neglect and all the evils associated with those things.

I will close the preface with a few comments about the book format and style.

I have endeavored to keep the content of this book as simple as possible. I have concluded that simplicity conveys truth in the fullest and clearest manner possible. To help the reader get what I am trying to convey, I have included both *Opening Chapter Questions* as well as *Chapter Summaries*. The purpose of the *Opening Chapter Questions* is to help the reader begin considering what the Chapter addresses and to bring their attention and focus to those ideas. The purpose of the *Chapter Summaries* is to repeat in a clear and concise way the central concepts conveyed in the chapters. One of the benefits of having these

¹ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, www.merriam-webster.com, April 2018

² Cambridge Dictionary, www.dictionary.cambridge.org, April 2018

³ Oxford Living Dictionary, www.en.oxforddictionaries.com, April 2018

Opening Questions and *Chapter Summaries* is if a particular chapter does not interest you, you can still follow the flow of the book by just reading the *Opening Questions* and *Chapter Summary*.

The Purpose of this Book

I hope the reader likes illustrations because I am going to use quite a few of them.

The purpose of my previous book was to take the lamp out of the closet and put the lamp on the table in the room so people could see by it. However, people are not making it into the room to see the lamp and the things in the room, but instead, are being kept in or led into the house next door because the house next door has a cool light that is very attractive. The lamp in the first house – the life-giving one that can help people see clearly – is a pure, bright, clear, warm light. Also, the first house has many mirrors in it, and the bright clear light helps people see what is in the mirrors. It can be a bit disconcerting since it shows things in the room – including the people – as we are. People who stay in this house get pruned, grow and blossom just like plants and flowers exposed to care and the sun.

The light in the house next door, however, is made of many colors and flashes and pulses—a lot like the lights in Las Vegas! The house was built on purpose right next to the house with the bright, clear light. People who are in this house get little attention, stagnate, don't grow and slowly wither, just like plants that don't get any care or enough sun.

Next to both houses is a lot of darkness— cold, chilling darkness. Many are standing in that cold dark lot because they went into the house with multi-colored lights and experienced the hypocrisy and lovelessness of those who dwell there, and they rightfully ran out. Now they are understandably frightened of houses with lights and so they are not willing to go into the house with the pure, bright, clear, warm light. So, they stay in the dark, cold lot which causes their spirits and hearts to get cold as well.

The purpose of the house with the many colored lights is to draw people away from the house with the bright clear, warm light. The lights in the Las Vegas house distorts things and makes things in the room somewhat difficult to see – fuzzy and unclear. There are very few mirrors in this house, and the ones that are there distort favorably the image of the people looking into it. This favorable distortion is desirable to people so as they journey towards the house with the bright clear light – which light can really help them but which light shows them things they don't or may not want to see – they are easily distracted and drawn by the cool, multi-colored, entertainment luring alternative. The vast majority end up on the house with the flashy lights and stay there. Unfortunately, one of the effects of staying in this house is that people's spirits wither and die there.

This book is about the house with the flashy, cold lights and how it is different than the house with the bright, clear, warm Light. Thus, the purpose

of the book is to describe the flashy-lighted house fairly fully and to expose its true nature; and by revealing its nature and purpose, to encourage people to go over to the house with the bright clear, warm light.

This author spent many years in the flashy-lighted house before I made my way out and so is very familiar with it. This author hopes that as people use reason well to understand and acknowledge the nature of the flashy-lighted house, that they might leave the house with the flashy, cold, radioactive, disorienting light and enter the house with the pure, bright, warm, clear, Life-giving light.

In addition to drawing people away from the multi-colored lights house, this book is intended to bring people out of the dark, cold, empty lot that many are standing in next to the two houses. You will find every precious thing you are looking for if you are willing to step inside the house with the pure, bright, warm, clear, Life-giving light. In other words, we don't have to wander about life like Bono's song which proclaims, "But I still haven't found, what I "m looking for."