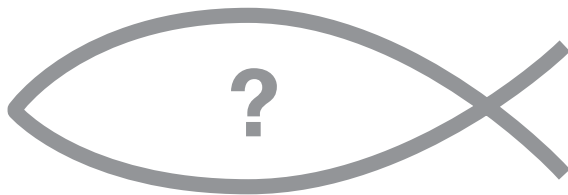


DINESH  
D'SOUZA



WHAT'S SO  
GREAT ABOUT  
CHRISTIANITY

STUDY GUIDE

Your Guide to  
Answering the New Atheists



TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC.,  
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*What's So Great about Christianity Study Guide*

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# QUESTIONS FOR A NOTE ON THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

1. Why does it seem necessary in a book of this sort to include a note on how Scripture should be read?

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2. What is your opinion about always reading the Bible in a literal way? Can you think of one or two Bible passages that should not be read literally?

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3. The Bible uses multiple literary techniques. Why do you think Scripture is written in this way? What are the benefits of metaphor, allegory, parable, and so on? Are there any challenges in taking a literary approach?

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4. Why is it dangerous to read the Bible through the lens of contemporary assumptions? Can you think of an example of how such a reading might distort the meaning of Scripture?

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5. Do you agree with the idea of reading Scripture in a “contextual” way? Why or why not? Explain briefly your approach to reading the Bible.

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QUESTIONS FOR PREFACE



**A CHALLENGE TO BELIEVERS—  
AND UNBELIEVERS**

1. Consider 1 Peter 3:15: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” Why should Christians always be prepared to do this? Give some examples of questions that might come up for which a Christian should have a ready answer.

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2. What advice would you give a Christian friend who wanted to be better prepared to talk to unbelievers about his or her faith?

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3. Can you think of a time when you felt well prepared to tell someone about your faith—or a time when you wish you had been better prepared? Describe your experience.

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4. Do you think that the biblical command to “be prepared to give an answer” is especially relevant to our time? If so, why do you think this advice might be even more important today than in the past? If not, why not?

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5. What does it mean to be “*in* the world” but not “*of* the world”? Do you think this phrase accurately describes the way you live your life? Why or why not?

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6. This preface describes the rise of a new atheism that belligerently assaults traditional Christianity. Why do you think this movement has arisen now? Have you personally encountered this new atheism? Have you ever been attacked for your faith? Describe your experience.

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7. “This is not a time for Christians to turn the other cheek.” Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer. In what circumstances should Christians turn the other cheek? What should Christians do to answer the atheists? How willing are you to do this?

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8. Do you agree or disagree that Christians should focus their defense on “traditional Christianity” rather than on fundamentalism? What would be the benefits or shortcomings of such an approach?

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9. “Nowhere in this book do I take Christianity for granted. My modus operandi is one of skepticism.” What do you think about this approach? What are its benefits and its limitations?

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10. What is the message of this chapter for atheists and unbelievers?

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11. As you read *What's So Great about Christianity*, what are you hoping to discover?

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# **PART I**



## **THE FUTURE OF CHRISTIANITY**

QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER ONE



# THE TWILIGHT OF ATHEISM: THE GLOBAL TRIUMPH OF CHRISTIANITY

1. This chapter is about the growth of religion, and especially Christianity, around the world. Have you noticed any signs or examples of a global religious revival? If so, where do you see this happening today?

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2. Would you describe yourself as *religious*? What does that term mean to you?

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3. What is meant by “practical atheism”? Can someone who claims to be a Christian also be a “practical atheist”? If you’re a Christian, have there been instances in your life where you’ve behaved as a practical atheist in spite of your belief? Is it possible to be a “practical Christian” in the same way one would be a practical atheist? What would that look like? Explain your response.

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4. What is “fundamentalism”? Why is this term inappropriate in describing Islam? Describe the difference between being a fundamentalist and being a radical.

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5. “By ‘traditional’ I mean religion as it has been understood and practiced over the centuries.” Is this your understanding of traditional religion? How does traditional religion differ from liberal religion?

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6. “Liberal Christians are distinguished by how much intellectual and moral ground they concede to the adversaries of Christianity.” Can you think of some recent examples of how liberal Christians have conceded to the secular world? Why do you suppose liberal Christianity rose in popularity for a time, and why is it now in decline?

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7. Do you think that, in general, the world is becoming more religious or more secular? Why?

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8. How has Christianity become a “universal religion” today? What is the new face of Christianity, and how will this affect the church as a whole?

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9. Why has Christianity spread fastest in Third World countries since the end of European colonialism?

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10. Do you agree that Third World Christianity is closer to the world described in the Bible? Give a few examples. As a Western believer, discuss how easy or difficult it is for you to identify personally with the problems and situations depicted in Scripture.

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11. What does Peter Berger mean by the “myth of secularization”? Do you think that this myth opens up a door of opportunity for Christians? Explain.

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12. What does it mean to be both “countercultural” and “modern”? How does this particular vantage point influence the perspective taken in *What's So Great about Christianity*? Would you describe yourself as countercultural, modern, both, or neither? Discuss your response.

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QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER TWO



**SURVIVAL OF THE SACRED:  
WHY RELIGION IS WINNING**

1. Discuss why religion is a puzzle from an evolutionary point of view. How does religion present an intellectual stumbling block for proponents of evolutionism?

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2. How does biologist E. O. Wilson hope to finally discredit traditional religion? Do you think he will succeed? Why or why not?

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3. Why does it not make evolutionary sense for Christianity to have developed as a form of “wishful thinking”? Discuss Steven Pinker’s quote: “A freezing person finds no comfort in believing he is warm. A person face to face with a lion is not put at ease by the conviction that he is a rabbit.”<sup>1</sup>

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4. Do you agree with the “natural and evolutionary explanation” for the universality and persistence of religious belief described in this chapter? Why or why not?

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5. Discuss Randy Alcorn’s two creation stories and the two groups of people—the secular tribe and the religious tribe—that subscribe to these stories. Which of the two tribes is more likely to survive, prosper, and multiply? Explain your answer.

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6. What evidence is there to show that secular nations are not reproducing themselves? Discuss how the trend toward smaller families in secular nations undermines a Darwinist worldview.

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7. What is the economic explanation that scholars have given in the past to explain large families? Why is this explanation inadequate? What are some alternative explanations?

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8. Discuss how the influx of immigrants from the Third World to Western countries might affect the religious direction of those countries—particularly yours. What changes might you look for in the way Christianity is practiced?

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9. In his book *Darwin's Cathedral*, David Sloan Wilson makes the point that religion offers people hope and the incentive to be moral and charitable, resulting in a more adaptive and cohesive community. How does this observation relate to the theme of this chapter—that religion is winning out over secularism?

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10. What is meant by the statement, “It is not religion but atheism that requires a Darwinian explanation”?

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QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER THREE



**GOD IS NOT GREAT: THE ATHEIST  
ASSAULT ON RELIGION**

1. Explain your understanding of the term “atheist backlash.”  
Have you seen evidence of this backlash in your community  
or country? Explain.

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2. What differences, if any, do you see between agnostics and  
atheists? Do these differences matter? Why or why not?

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3. What is a “bright,” according to Richard Dawkins? Why are brights and other unbelievers unimpressed by the growth of religion worldwide? What does the term *bright* imply about those who disagree with the brights’ perspective?

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4. Do you personally know any brights or other atheists or agnostics? If so, have you ever had a conversation with them about the existence of God? How did it go?

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5. Do you agree that atheism today marches behind the banner of science? Explain. Does this make atheism more threatening or less threatening to Christians? Why?

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6. Why does it seem that a majority of scientists are atheists? How do scientists who are Christian reconcile science and faith?

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7. Discuss what Richard Dawkins means by the statement, “Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist.” Do you think it’s possible to be an intellectually fulfilled Christian? Discuss your response.

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8. What is “the God of the Gaps”? Explain why this approach is often a weak argument to make in defense of God. As a believer, how would you refute this argument?

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9. What is the “ghost in the machine”? What term might Christians use instead of *ghost*? How has modern science made it difficult for many people to believe in such a “ghost”?

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10. Discuss the Enlightenment doctrines of materialism (that matter is the only reality) and naturalism (that there are no supernatural influences in nature), which form the intellectual foundation of modern atheism. What evidence of these doctrines do you see in the world today? What do these doctrines say about God?

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11. Discuss Nietzsche's "moral" critique of religion. For what purpose does he think religion was "invented"? What does he mean by "slave morality"? Do you think any of Nietzsche's ideas are still active in society today? Explain.

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12. Atheists today like to focus on the historical and contemporary crimes of religion. Are you embarrassed by the violent actions that have been taken in the name of God? Make a list of such crimes and discuss whether Christianity should take responsibility for them. What response would you give to someone who denounced Christianity based on, say, the Crusades or the Inquisition?

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13. "The War on Terror is commonly portrayed as a clash of competing extremisms, with Islamic fanaticism on one side and Christian fanaticism on the other." Do you believe this is an accurate portrayal? Why or why not? Discuss how events such as the September 11 attacks, which columnist Wendy Kaminer described as a "faith-based initiative,"<sup>2</sup> bolster the atheists' determination to eliminate religion altogether.

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14. What are some common themes of modern atheism? Have you seen these themes in today's world? In what way has a character such as Milton's Satan now become a so-called atheist hero? What are the goals and aspirations of the vocal contingent known as the new atheists?

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15. What answer would you give to someone who says that believing in Christianity requires checking your brain at the door?

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