

**IN
DEFENCE
OF THE
CHRISTIAN
LIFE**

by Russell Collins

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Introduction

It is inherent in human nature to behave according to rules of conduct, usually devised by a society to suit the majority of its members, and often derived from the religion of that society, since religions are purported to come from a higher authority than that within the society itself. The rules require some degree of constraint in the behaviour of the individuals of society, and where that constraint is not accepted, the rules are rejected and anarchy flourishes.

Since there are many different nations around the world, there have arisen many different societies, each giving rise to different codes of conduct, many of them based upon different religions. All social codes require obedience to their rules, and there is a spectrum of obedience, from total conformity of the strictest religious sects down to the social renegade. From the former to the latter the purpose and direction of life become degraded, and are eventually lost in the increasing self-centredness and anti-social behaviour. This failure of obedience on the part of the individual is to be found in all societies, yet each defends the correctness and value of its rules, sometimes claiming superiority over other systems and creeds. The defence of a belief of any kind is by argument, and mankind has the capacity to use argument in a rational manner. However, some of men's thoughts are irrational, and argument then proceeds to have an emotional content and dependence, which often leads from verbal contention to physical conflict, and even war.

The most widespread religion is Christianity, and much of the earth's population behaves, to a greater or lesser degree, in conformity to Christian principles and standards of conduct. Personal behaviour is profoundly affected by what a person believes or does not believe about God's law as revealed in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, recorded in the Holy Bible.

During the centuries since 1600 BC, when the first books of the Bible were written, the Scriptures have been maintained in remarkable purity, in spite of continual attempts to discredit, pervert or even destroy them. It would seem from this that the defence of Christianity is not confined only to argument, but that the preservation of the basis of Christian beliefs contained in the Bible has included also its physical defence.

Comments by Philosophers

Many philosophers have put forward ideas to explain the existence of the universe and man's place in it. These ideas are homo-centric, and their conclusion is that all religions and enthusiasms are good for those who believe in them. According to them it does not really matter what one believes as long as one is sincere and conducts oneself honourably.

Philosophers also contend that wise persons worship truth, goodness and beauty for their own sakes; and take the best out of all philosophies and religions, past and present, to form a set of rules by which to conduct their lives.

Reply to Philosophers

Although the contention mentioned above would seem to be self-evident, except to the social renegade, the wisdom to decide what is best in all philosophies and religions is beyond the capabilities of man's judgement. It is only Christianity that provides the criteria for discernment of what is best and, in so doing, makes other philosophies and religions redundant.

Only of religion is it ever said that it does not matter what we believe as long as we are sincere. It is then expected that one will conduct oneself honourably. However, honourable conduct in one society may be dishonourable conduct in a different society. Without an absolute reference standard for honourable conduct, there can be only disagreement and conflict among people.

Once doctors believed that bleeding was the best treatment for fever, and many, many lives were lost as a result. Numerous examples of social experiments and even of man's inventions could be given to show that man's judgements have fallen short of the desired result.

There is no absolute standard of goodness, no measure of right and wrong, no criteria of truth and falsehood without God's word. God's word gives us standards of truth and righteousness which lead to correct conduct.

Christianity provides an absolute standard for the conduct of our lives. This standard is the law of love stated by Jesus Christ:

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;" (Matthew 5: 43 and 44)

Comments by Some Sports People, and People With No Particular Philosophy of Life

Many great performers of contemporary sporting activities claim that Christians waste their efforts conforming to an imaginary ethic of holiness that cramps their style and narrows their lives severely. They say that to live life to the full one has to focus totally on one thing, particularly in work or sport, and take every opportunity to gain the advantage over others with similar aims; that life is not long enough for theories about another world or another life.

It takes most of us all our time to gain qualifications, earn a living, and perhaps engage in some sporting activity to make life better. They contend that to have enough to eat and drink, to have a decent home with a partner to share it, a child or two, and to indulge in a certain amount of relaxation and pleasure, is all we need to expect of life. They expect to be allowed to live the life they choose and then they will let others choose their way of living.

Reply to Sports People, and People With No Particular Philosophy of Life

Such things as food and drink, a home, a partner, offspring, and some time to rest are all that are desired by animals that live by instinct and do not reason, and their lives are centred around their needs, which they satisfy as well as their circumstances allow. But man has also an enquiring mind that needs satisfaction, and to desire only the temporal things of life is a purely selfish and self-centred attitude. The nobility of France and Russia behaved in this

way and suffered horribly in the French and Russian Revolutions. Missing in this constricted expectation of life are purpose and direction. People with this self-centred attitude and expectation just drift along, their lives influenced by fortune good and bad, and often by poor decision-making. What will be their position in the last hours of life? How will people with this attitude face their last hours knowing they have had no worthwhile program, no serious purpose, and have done no particular good?

Christians have a serious purpose in their attitude to life, and it gives an unfailing direction in the manner of all their conduct. Christians believe in God through Jesus Christ, and strive to obey Christ's commandment to love God and our fellow human beings: *"Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."* (Matthew 22:35 to 40)

Christians strive continually to be good like Christ and thus to give witness to their faith in the promises of God. Christians accept the constraints of their beliefs because of God's promise of the reward for repentance and faith, and that is the promise of eternal life, guaranteed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Faith in Christ to bring those promises to completion brings power into Christians' lives to fight against temptation and wrongdoing, to improve their attitude and behaviour, and to witness to their belief in the Kingdom of God.

Christians' lives are guided lives. They will be saved by maintaining faithfulness, and they have an inner peace and contentment, knowing that all things work together for good for the believer (Romans 8:28), and that God has a plan for the whole human race - *"According to a Plan of the Ages, which he formed for the Anointed Jesus our Lord"* (Ephesians 3:11; Diaglott).

At the last hour Christians know that they will be resurrected and, in God's appointed time, will stand before their Creator and receive perfect justice for their life and faith.

Comments by Socialists and Politically-Orientated People

Those who believe that social arrangements are devised and controlled by men claim that Christianity is a red herring drawn across the path of life to divert well-meaning people from the real business of life, which is to change society to give everybody a fair share of the good things held by a fortunate few. Since this aim has not been achieved by any society recorded in history, some make the opposite claim that Christianity is a fantasy, an opiate to keep the poor quiet.

Although some suppose that Jesus Christ was a good revolutionary, they regard those who profess to follow Him to have always stood in the way of all progress.

Others who have no more than a superficial understanding say that all Christianity has to offer are a few Biblical texts and some vague promises of a better life. They propose that people should unite and find a cure for the world's troubles, and in their view it can be done, but it means revolution with the use of force.

Some who have been more observant have decided that Christianity is faulty in that it has high ideals but produces some poor specimens of humanity.

Yet others consider that Jesus Christ was the greatest socialist who ever lived.

Reply to Socialists and Politically-Orientated People

The political revolutionary is wrong in fact about Christianity, and wrong in the proposing of a program of action for governments and political parties. Viscount Bryce, the British Ambassador in Washington at the beginning of the First World War, wrote:

"Christianity - a far more powerful force than any political ideas or political institutions since it works on the innermost heart of the man - has produced nearly all the moral progress that has been

achieved since it first appeared, and can in individual minds transmute lead into gold, yet Christianity has not done these things for people because, checked or perverted by the worst propensities of human nature, it has never been applied in practice".

Christian teaching broke slavery in the Roman Empire, yet Christ and His apostles did not preach revolution with the use of force. Christ was not a revolutionary in the martial sense. Although the Jews expected the Messiah to restore their earthly kingdom, He answered their challenge to do so with, *"My Kingdom is not of this world: if my Kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my Kingdom not from hence"* (John 18:36).

Complementary to the comment by Viscount Bryce, social progress was made with the introduction of the care of the sick, which was a Christian service. Neither the Romans nor the Jews, nor for that matter any other society, cared much about the sick. The great medieval hospitals were nearly all founded by Christians.

Furthermore, it may be observed from historical records that the great advances in scientific knowledge were made in countries which had a Christian outlook. It seems that the Christian gospel freed men's minds from superstition and thus enabled objectivity and rational thinking to gain some ascendancy.

Christian reformers such as the Wesleys, Wilberforce and Lord Shaftesbury were the ones who brought about abolition of the worst abuses of slavery in the "dark Satanic mills" and harsh working conditions for men, but particularly women and children, that resulted from the industrial revolution.

Christian organisations are quietly persevering with a vast amount of helpful work in society, both in Christian countries and also those where other religions hold sway, often against severe antagonism. Many improvements have been made in society, in health, education and justice, and we are thankful for them.

But they were not all brought about by strikes and revolutions. The improvements arose, to a significant extent, from Christian

teaching, especially *"love thy neighbour as thyself"* (Matthew 19:19, 22:39; Mark 12:31 and Luke 10:27).

Lasting improvement will not and cannot come without a change of heart and mind within every individual. In other words, lasting improvement cannot come until sin in all its manifestations is removed from the minds and hearts of all people. This will come to pass only when God's Kingdom is established on earth. Therefore the promise of God's Kingdom on earth is the only sure hope for the world.

In any system of belief the teachings and the program are fundamentally important. In Christianity the individual is important to God, *"Who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth,"* as Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2: 4 and 5.

The individual must believe that God exists, and must come to Him through Jesus Christ, the mediator between God and all people (Hebrews 11:6, Acts 4:12). There is no other way to be accepted by God as His child. Only Christianity has God's teachings and God's program; His plan for the restitution of all things, that will be fulfilled at a time of His choosing, not when men decide it is time for revolution. Good things and bad things happen to good people and to bad people. It is unreasonable to decide for or against Christianity because there are good and bad Christians.

Jesus Christ was not a socialist. He was raised from death to receive all power from God for the purpose of establishing God's kingdom on earth, at a future time, and reigning as its King during the age to come, as we are told in the following Scriptures:

"That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in his times he shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Timothy 6: 14 and 15).

"These shall make war with the Lamb, And the Lamb shall overcome them: For he is Lord of lords, and King of Kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful." (Revelation 17:14).

“And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.” (Revelation 19:16).

Doctrine

In this connection we should note the importance of doctrine. The word ‘doctrine’ means teaching, and it is the teaching of Jesus Christ and His apostles that is so important to Christian believing people.

The doctrine (or teaching) of Jesus Christ is mentioned at least eleven times in the gospels, and at least thirty times in the epistles. *“Sound doctrine”* is mentioned four times (1 Timothy 1:10; 2 Timothy 4:3; Titus 1:9 and 2:1) while *“good doctrine”* is mentioned in 1 Timothy 4:6. Sound doctrine begins with Solomon’s exhortation to *“Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.”* (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

It is the commands of Jesus Christ that cause Christians to separate themselves from the world. It is sometimes said that doctrine is not important. It is also sometimes said that doctrine divides, therefore Christians should concentrate on fellowship and unity and not concern themselves much with doctrine. But doctrine of itself does not divide; it is people’s prejudices and misunderstanding of doctrine that divide.

All teachings must be brought to the test of Scripture and must be in accordance with the fact of the ransom given by Jesus Christ. Christians must be convinced from Scripture that belief in Jesus Christ and obedience to His commands remove the burden and barrier of sin, and bring about acceptance by God and membership of the Divine family as His children. That is the basis of the Christian life.

The behaviour of people brought up under Christian influence contrasts markedly with that of those brought up in an environment where Christian influence is absent. If Christian faith is removed or ignored, there may follow a serious lapse in morality. Note the apostle Paul’s warning in Colossians 2:8 *“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”*

Summary

Having considered the arguments of philosophers, sportsmen and socialists, having recognised the importance of doctrine and having acknowledged the influence for good of Christian teachings, each individual then has an obligation to test the foundations of Christianity; to accept, or reject, that there is a Supreme Being who has a claim on the life of every human being who has ever lived, and whose Son set the perfect example of how we should conduct our lives for the benefit of ourselves and all those around us.

The rewards for responding to that claim go as far as the offer of eternal life for those who believe into Jesus Christ, Who is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. The foundations of Christianity are discussed in the booklets "Why Believe in God?", "Why Believe in the Bible?" and "Why Believe in Jesus Christ?"

The defence of the Christian life is soundly based in the word of God, not in the arguments of men. The Christian life has been circumscribed by every word that has come from God and is recorded in the Bible. It is in God that we move and live and have our very being: *"For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring."* (Acts 17:28).

The conduct of our lives should be a credit to us and be a reflection of the goodness of the Creator.



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