

We now know the earth is neither flat nor the center of the universe, blood eclipses of the moon do not signal the end of the earth, Bubonic Plague is not caused by miasmas (invisible vapors that emanated from swamps), and bloodletting is no longer a recommended medical remedy. Yet, with minimal available evidence, we cling tenaciously to belief in an unknowable, transcendent, unexplained, mysterious, invisible entity we call God.

I believe this fascination with the God concept is difficult to relinquish for eight reasons:

We are awestruck by the majesty of the universe, its diversity, and the assumed elevated stature of the human species.

Since the dawn of time, mankind has existed in a state of wonderment. For many, religion answers the hard questions and fills a void where science leaves us perplexed. Unfamiliar with science, we find it difficult to believe the universe is accidental and therefore must have been created by a complex, supernatural force. In the *Atheists Guide to Reality* (2011), Alex Rosenberg humorously points out: “There isn’t any rhyme or reason to the universe. It’s just one damn thing after another.”

Fear of eternal punishment for immoral and unethical behavior.

The God of the Old Testament regularly punished his constituents and the God of the New Testament wasn’t much better. We are continually reminded from the pulpit of our incorrigibility and sinfulness and the likelihood of some form of punishment for those transgressions. The ominous possibility of burning in the fires of Hell for all eternity instead of a comfortable lodging in Heaven is a powerful and compelling motivation to maintain a religious affiliation with some church. Religion offers a path to repentance, forgiveness, and opportunity to improve our behavior and attain salvation.

Religion has an irresistible attraction.

It assuages fear and anxiety of death and nourishes man’s insatiable desire to live forever. The promise of immortality gives religion a magical allure. No one wants to die and the promise of a jolly life in heaven has an enchanting

ALL FISH HAVE BONES

appeal. There, we are told, we will join all our loved ones who died before us and live happy and worry free for eternity. Without the promise of an afterlife, religion has little to offer to attract followers.

Each of us desires that someone genuinely and unequivocally loves and cares for us.

God fulfills that requirement. For many, religion is an incandescent beacon of hope, offering solace to those living a bleak existence. Religion offers a framework for life and support to those who might otherwise be marginalized in society.

The religious culture of our birth environment affects our early learning experience and indoctrination.

As children, we are respectful of authority figures and also gullible; a fertile environment for developing religious belief. As we grow up we are exposed to church liturgy, music, art, and sacraments. We associate with priests, clerics, pastors, and bishops who are ever present at major events in our lives. They preside at christenings, marriage and funerals — “hatching, matching and dispatching.” They console and comfort. We participate in church rituals using vestments, holy water, miters, staffs, robes, music, incense, and candles. As altar boys, we referred to the pageantry that accompanied church services as “bells and smells.”

We pray to saints, we pray to our dead relatives, we receive sacraments, we observe Holy Days of Obligation, obey rules of fasting and abstinence. We pray privately and publicly when tragedy and misfortune strikes.

This legacy of religious tradition is a pervasive influence, particularly during our youth, but traditions tend to calcify with age. As we grow into adulthood, our childhood perspectives travel with us. It is easy to become imprisoned in the lore and rubrics of childhood religious culture.

Churches are often central to social activities, including those that assist the less fortunate.

Affiliation with a church offers an opportunity to serve in soup kitchens, clothing outlets, and charitable activities, instilling feelings of

accomplishment and an identity as a contributing member of the community. Additionally, churches offer opportunity for members to associate with each other during social and charitable functions. People with similar interests tend to gather together and religious organizations offer that opportunity. Cultural anthropologists tell us our evolution as a species conditions us to be attracted to “tribes,” or groups of people with whom we share similar interests and beliefs. The church calendar becomes an indispensable part of life. In addition to Sunday services and baptisms there are rituals and processions associated with Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and always the May Procession.

Divine justice and punishment for bad people has a visceral appeal.

We want inhuman acts, such as immoral crimes against children, punished.

When a concept (belief in God) becomes institutionalized, the organizational bureaucracy acquires a self-serving life of its own, establishing complex rules and regulations, recruiting members, defining doctrine, and developing a mission.

Christianity became a clever fusion of spirituality and statecraft; the promise of the Second Coming of the Kingdom of God and a political infrastructure forming alliances with monarchs and civic institutions. This blending of religion and politics allowed the Christian Church to flourish and become politically influential in the civic and spiritual life of Europe while continuing its obligation to address and serve the religious interests of its membership. An institutionalized idea is adroit at nourishing itself.

Seeking God or an explanation for God is frustrating because of the “unknowability” factor. Theories of God continue to disappoint due to the intangible nature of the deity. Rejecting religious beliefs is a sensitive societal topic, particularly in the United States at this time, yet the more closely you examine Christianity the less clearly defined it becomes. Flaws become more visible. Historically, human civilizations have advanced by incorporating

ALL FISH HAVE BONES

discoveries and innovations into their cultures enabling beneficial change. Religion, however, is essentially unchanged since polytheism was supplanted by monotheism thousands of years ago.

This book concentrates on Christianity with anecdotes from Catholicism since that is my background and experience, however, the material presented herein can be utilized by anyone in any religious setting.

In chapters that follow, we will unpack the trappings and traditions of religion and critically examine the core concept of Christianity and why people continue to believe. There are substantial deviations from the commonly accepted tradition of peace and love preached by Jesus. Christianity is surprisingly hostile toward science, nature, and women.

During research for this book, I was surprised to discover the pervasive anti-feminine (misogynistic) bias still existent in the Catholic Church, had its roots in early Christianity among just a small group of Christian writers. We will explore this important topic in depth in Chapter Eight. 