



## WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT CHRISTIANITY?

CMF began the New Year by exploring the subject of atheism with acclaimed author Dinesh D'Souza, considered to be one of America's most influential thinkers and one of the top young public policy makers in the country. Elaine Middendorf interviewed Dinesh on January 8, 2008 on CMF's radio program DANGERS OF APATHY. Below are excerpts from that interview.

Elaine: Your previous book was *What's So Great About America?* And it was on the New York Times Best seller list for many weeks. And now here you are with *What's So Great About Christianity?* Am I wrong in thinking those clever titles are a bit ambiguous?

Dinesh: Well, I wrote *What's So Great About America?* and I realized the title could be taken two ways. On the one hand, a positive statement *What's So Great About America*. On the other hand a bit of a question, *What's So Great about America?* It was a way of exploring America's role in the world right after 911. Today, the world is a little bit different, and we have seen this new atheism attacking Christianity, attacking religion, in fact creating a false equation between Islamic radicalism on the one side and Christianity on the other side in an attempt to discredit religion in general. So I wrote, *What's So Great About Christianity?* as an answer to the new atheism. Christianity today needs a moral and intellectual defense so that Christians are able to say why we believe the things that we do.

Elaine: Well, there certainly has been a proliferation of all of these atheist books and even movies.

Dinesh: Yes, we've seen a real attempt in the past by people who say take down the Christmas Crèche or don't post the Ten Commandments in the public square, but the new atheism goes a lot beyond that. Its goal is really to discredit, some ways to demolish Christianity, to drive it out of the public sphere, to make Christians feel like

fools for believing in God and for believing in an after life, for believing in a soul. The atheists say we have to go by the rules of science and if some thing can't be demonstrated scientifically, it really doesn't exist.

Elaine: How do you answer the charges that religion has caused most of history's wars, murders and violence?

Dinesh: I think that the crimes of religion have been hugely exaggerated. I am a student of history myself and if you read about the Inquisition which is one of the great crimes attributed to Christianity you discover that over a quite long period, 300 years in fact, the number of people killed in the Inquisition was about 2000. Now, I freely concede that is 2000 too many, but 2000 people over 300 years works out to about 6 guys a year. That is not a great world historical crime and you have seen in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century atheist regimes kill hundreds of thousands of people by the week. So you have 30 or 40 million killed by Mao in China, about the same number by Stalin in Russia, about 6 to 7 million put to death by the Nazi regime in Germany. We are not even counting 3 million by Pol Pot in Cambodia and then you have Kim Jong-il of N. Korea and Fidel Castro in Cuba, the list goes on. So my point is atheist regimes have created a mountain of bodies and an ocean of blood and it is atheism not religion that is responsible for the mass murders of history.

Elaine: Yet the myth goes on. What about the Crusades?

Dinesh: People think of the Crusades as a sort of a horrible battle that the Christians waged against Islam. It is important to remember that most of the region we now call Middle East, used to be Christian. The Muslims conquered it and then they went south into Africa, east into Asia, north into Europe. They had conquered parts of Italy, all of Spain, over-ran the Balkans, they were at the gates of Vienna. Even the historian Edward

Gibbon who is no friend of Christianity said that if the Christians hadn't fought back all of Western Civilization, which was then called Christendom, would have been overrun by Islam. So my point is atheists today and secular people, should be getting down on their knees and thanking God for the Crusades, because the Crusades were one of the things that blocked the Muslim invasion of Europe. If that had not been blocked then today we might all be living under the Sharia Law and teaching the Koran in our major schools and universities. So the atheist who doesn't want to have the burka and the Sharia Law should be grateful that the Crusades were able to prevent that from happening.

Elaine: Dinesh, aren't ideas like Democracy, Science, Human Rights, and Compassion all rooted in Christianity? Actually, isn't much of Western Civilization?

Dinesh: That is quite correct, Western Civilization is based on two major pillars; the first is Athens, which refers to classical reason, Greece and pre-Christian Rome. The other is Jerusalem, and that refers to Judaism and Judaism incorporated into Christianity. Most historians would say that without those two pillars we would not have the West, as we know it. Most of the ideas and institutions and values of the West come out of a creative interplay between Athens and Jerusalem. And of those two, certainly our morals and our values, ideas, come more from Jerusalem than from Athens. So I lay all of this out in *What's So Great About Christianity?* and my point is that even the atheist who is not a believer should have a certain degree of respect for Christianity, for forming the culture that we live in and for in a sense, of introducing even the secular values some people live by.

Elaine: Would you say then we can use logic, science and reason to prove the existence of faith and the soul?

Dinesh: Prove may be too strong a word, because I think that science has a very powerful way of discovering truth, but is not the only way. Science functions ultimately through experimentation, laboratory testing, criticism and so on. But if someone were to ask you if there is life after death, there is no possible sign or experiment that we could perform, that would help decide that question one way or the other. So, yes I do think there is scientific evidence for a Creator, for the idea that the universe had a beginning, for the notion that you may

say something came out of nothing. There is scientific evidence that points to a transcendent and even spiritual source for the world and even for morality, I wouldn't say we're trying to prove God in a scientific sense. I think that the people who think science somehow undermined or refuted God has made it impossible for an intelligent person to be a Christian today. That is the sort of propaganda that we get from the new atheism, it is complete nonsense.

Elaine: Considering what is going on in our classrooms today, have Christian ideas captured the idealism of young people?

Dinesh: There is a real assault against Christianity particularly in the schools and the universities. For many years I have been a political writer and I used to think, and I do think, there is a liberal /left wing political bias on the campus. But I now discover there is a secular bias that is just as strong, perhaps even stronger, and the idea here is that no thinking person can be a believer or that there is some kind of conflict between what the atheist call reason on the one hand and skepticism on the other hand called blind faith. This attempt to contrast science and reason on one side and faith on the other is wrong headed. In fact most of the great scientists of the past 300 years were religious, specifically Christian. This would be true of Copernicus, Newton, Galileo, Faraday, Maxwell, Newton and so on. So Christians need to be aware that Christianity, ultimately, and the churches founded universities, it was the churches that sponsored the observatories. Christianity has been a great friend to science over the centuries.

Elaine: It strikes me that if the young people are allowed to read history, real history, it would resonate with them and they would say this is what happened, the churches were involved. It seems that would be something that they would respond to.

Dinesh: Well, the atheists have been having a free ride. Christopher Hitchens book is sub-titled *How Religion Poisoned Everything*. Now on the face of it it is nonsensical, because so much of the great literature, art, music and culture of Western Civilization was inspired by Christianity. So clearly religion did not poison Milton, Dante, Shakespeare, Bach, Handel or Michelangelo. And yet the atheists have been given a free ride in the media. So what I am trying to do, I do it through *What's So Great About Christianity?* but

I also do it in person as I am debating these leading atheists not just in church settings but also on the secular campus. These debates are available on line. Your listeners can go to my website Dinesh D'Souza.com and see that these atheist arguments don't hold up once they are challenged in public.

Elaine: Are they willing to debate you? I am surprised!

Dinesh: They are willing to debate, but remember for years they have been going around saying "we are the party of reason and the Christians are the party of blind faith." So they feel they should win every debate and it has been rather shocking to some atheists to see that when they do appear in public they get a bit of a public whipping. So if you go on the atheist website you see them now complaining that their spokesmen aren't doing so well on debates against me and they are baffled because how could a religious or "superstious guy" be able to make better arguments than we who base our arguments on evidence and skepticism. They believe their own propaganda and that is part of the problem.

Elaine: We hear phrases again and again: love yourself, have self-esteem, make a difference. Do you think these are really Christian concepts?

Dinesh: I think there is an effort here, in America in the past generation or so to create, you might say an alternative morality. By that I mean a morality that is in some ways different from traditional morality which is embodied in the Ten Commandments. The traditional morality was based on the idea not that you should hate yourself, obviously Christ said, "Love your neighbor as yourself" and you assume you do love yourself. But the idea of traditional morality is based on our obligations to others, our duty as a parent or as a child or in a community or as a citizen or in a family, but the new morality ultimately makes very few demands. It just

says things like be true to yourself, care about yourself, be yourself, fulfill your dreams and so on. Generally, you don't need to tell people to do those things; they are going to do them out of self-interest anyway. What you need to tell people is they need to go beyond self-interest. So I see Christianity as much needed in a society where there is a lot of focus on the self. Christianity complements that and strives to make sure that we don't become narcissists and live only in a world of our own making.

Elaine: Seems like the atheist way is the easy way, no rules, no authority, and no eternal damnation!

Dinesh: This is the great appeal of atheism. Sometimes you can listen to the atheist and see how people got the idea that these are apostles of reason. They are following the pathways of evidence. The only reason they don't believe in God is they haven't yet found adequate evidence to satisfy their great and towering intellect and I think this is complete nonsense. Yes, there is an intellectual quest for God, but many times the atheist rejects God not because of intellectual inability to believe, but because of a sort of revolt against the moral scriptures of Christianity. The atheist wants to live in a world as Dostoevsky says in his novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, "If God is not, everything is permitted" so the atheist thinks, wow, that's really good. If we can get rid of this idea of God we can live as we wish.

Elaine: We've been talking to the author of *What's So Great About Christianity?*, Dinesh D'Souza. Your book certainly provides a tool kit for Christians to meet the challenge of modern atheism and secularism. Thank you so much for being our guest, Dinesh.

Dinesh: My pleasure.

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The Mindszenty Report is published monthly by the  
Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation,  
7800 Bonhomme Ave.  
P. O. Box 11321  
St. Louis, MO 63105  
314-727-6279  
Fax 314-727-5897

Subscription rate: \$20.00/year, \$36.00/two years.  
Outside the U.S.A. \$28.00

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their local newspapers.

Contributions to the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation  
are tax deductible as allowed by law.

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## AN ASTONISHING ENCYCLICAL

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This was the editorial heading in the December 2007 issue of *Inside The Vatican* magazine. It identified Pope Benedict XVI's newest encyclical "Spe Salvi" on Christian Hope. We urge you and everyone to get a copy of this inspiring practical message from His Holiness. Meditate on it, enjoy it, and follow its 56 pages to lead you to a fuller life and eternal life that will never end.

The Holy Father tells us of two remarkable persons who exemplify the virtue of Hope when their lives appeared hopeless. One is African-born Josephine Bakhita who was raised in Darfur, Sudan, kidnapped by slave-traders at age 9 and sold five times into slave-markets. Finally, in 1882, she was bought by an Italian merchant, learned of Christ the Lord who is good, who created her, loved her and gave her hope! She was baptized a Catholic, entered the Canossian Daughters of Charity and lived her remaining days in prayer and service to God and neighbor.

The second example of a witness to Hope is the Vietnamese Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan, who was a prisoner of the Communists in Vietnam for 13 years, 9 years spent in solitary confinement. His life seemed utterly hopeless, yet he could listen and speak to God. He was full of faith and was able by example to convert many of the guards who watched over him. In fact, the Communists had to repeatedly replace his guards because of their conversions to the truths of the Catholic faith! When released, Cardinal Nguyen spent his last years at the Vatican giving retreats and spiritual counseling to the Papal family.

To order a copy of St. Bakhita's biography, contact New Hope Publications, 3050 Gap Knob Road, New Hope, KY 40052, tel. 270-325-3061.

To order Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan's book entitled: "Five Loaves and Two Fish", contact Morley Books, 1814 1/2 N. Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

## DID YOU KNOW...

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That when the U.S. Mint began producing presidential one-dollar coins in 2007, the words "In God We Trust", our national motto, were placed along the edge of the coins (barely discernible), as instructed by Congress. As a result of public outcry, "In God We Trust" will be moved from the edge of the coins to the front or back of the currency, starting in 2009. There has been concern that moving the motto off the face of the coins was one step toward removing it altogether.

—*Reuter News Service*

## RADIO NEWS

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We are pleased to announce the association of CMF's radio program DANGERS OF APATHY with Radio Maria Network in Alexandria, Louisiana. This adds SIX NEW STATIONS as follows:

KJMJ	(580 AM)	Alexandria, LA
KOJO	(91.1 AM)	Lake Charles, LA
KBIO	(89.7 FM)	Natchitoches, LA
KNIR	(1360 AM)	New Iberia, LA
WHJM	(88.7 AM)	Anna, OH
KDEI	(1250 AM)	Port Arthur, TX

If you would like a complete list of the radio stations carrying DANGERS OF APATHY, please contact us or visit our website at [www.mindszenty.org](http://www.mindszenty.org).

### ST. PAUL TO THE ROMANS 5:5

"And hope does not disappoint, because the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

## Mindszenty Report Reprints

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**A CUBE OF CONFLICT: IRAN, RUSSIA & THE MIDDLE EAST PUZZLE**—Recaps the turbulent history of Iran, its present leadership, and the blend of Marxism & Islam among militant groups. Russia supplies weapons and nuclear missiles, and plans to turn the Muslim world against Israel and the U.S. Ask for 01/08

**THE INTERIOR CROSS: MOTHER TERESA AND HER DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL**—takes a realistic, theological view of what it means to be saintly, or a saint. Mother Teresa's much discussed book, *Come Be My Light* puts into perspective her life, suffering and torments of the soul and shows that her spiritual darkness was the supreme test of faith. Ask for 12/07

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