

## The Case for Christianity

I was born into a Christian family, so doubtless became a Christian on that account. However, this is about why I remain a Christian.

Christianity is profoundly unique among all the major world religions. This uniqueness is often obscured, even during the current season of Lent.

The originating figure in Christianity, Jesus of Nazareth, died at an early age, executed by the state, made an example to terrorize the subject population, tortured to death by crucifixion. There is nothing quite like this in any other major world religion, for example, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, or Taoism. Moses, Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius, and Lao-Tse each lived to a ripe old age.

Tragically, many Christians have reduced the cross to a symbol of personal salvation. Jesus died for our sins, it is said. Thus we are forgiven and our salvation is secure. Despite today's widespread acceptance of this sentimental and self-serving view, it is not exactly established Christian teaching. Christianity has never had a single, normative view of what was "accomplished" on the cross. There is no single orthodox doctrine of what is referred to as the atonement.

In my view, the cross does not affect my eternal destiny in some way not true for other religions. Rather, the cross helps mediate an understanding of the human condition that plumbs the depths like no other religion. Jesus was not executed because he was wicked or murderous or violent. He was executed because he gave powerful demonstration to a way of being in the world, and proclaimed an ultimate authority, that threatened the established powers and their wickedness, murderousness, and violence.

Here's what the cross says to me:

- 1) Human existence is fraught with tragedy;
- 2) Defeat, suffering, and death are not necessarily signs of spiritual weakness or unfaithfulness;
- 3) Everything will not necessarily turn out all right, at least not in our lifetimes;
- 4) Justice in human affairs is not guaranteed;
- 5) Count on the prevailing principalities and powers to resist and corrupt or destroy the powers of goodness and love.
- 6) Jesus died, not for our sins, but because of our sins (i.e., evil inherently arises within human existence).

Unless we understand this we really cannot fathom what Christians call Easter, which is quite simply the astounding conviction that, even in the depths of failure, loss, and death, God is ultimately able to make good on lives of compassion and faithfulness.

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