"A delightful combination of straight talk, friendly challenge and a singular absence of bitter ax-grinding..."
- Dr. Robert M. Price, Professor of Theology and Scriptural Studies, Host of "The Bible Geek"

The Concept

A Critical and Honest Look at God and Religion

Bo Bennett

The Concept

A Critical and Honest Examination of God and Religion

Written By

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This book is dedicated to God. Without the concept of him, this book would be pointless.

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"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference."
— Robert Frost

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Book Description

Preface

Growing up, church was about as enjoyable as being thrown naked into a tub of red ants. The only time I enjoyed church was when we heard someone pass gas during the silent prayers. Or when I was hungry and got to eat that wafer thing. From high school on, I went to church only when necessary (weddings, funerals, exorcisms, etc.) and thought that anyone who believed what was being preached at church must have a few screws loose somewhere. It wasn't until about 25 years later that I would start to reevaluate my position.

My spiritual/intellectual journey began as a result of a lifetime of unanswered questions combined with a moment of reflection — I realized that many of my good friends, family members, and associates were Christian. These are intelligent and rational individuals, so how in the world, I asked myself, can they seriously believe in all the ancient myths, superstition, and supernatural events associated with the religion? Can Christianity be true? After all, I really never devoted much time to it and I never really read the Bible. Even if it were not true, who am I to take away a worldview that is apparently working for so many people? And the most important question, is humanity better off without Christianity? These are questions I had to seriously consider before "going public" with my views.

I devoted countless hours to studying religion — Christianity in particular, which included reading the entire Bible cover to cover (New International Version). I have listened to over 1000 hours of religious debate, read many books written by both atheists and Christians, and completed dozens of courses from the world's leading universities on Christianity, Catholicism, Theology, Biblical Studies, Argumentation, Historical Jesus, Cosmology, Neuroscience, Human Behavior, Biology, Classic, Quantum, and Particle Physics, Philosophy of Religion, and even Apologetics.

While I am far from an expert in all these fields of study, my area of expertise is in the arguments for and against the existence of God as well as the arguments for and against the truth of Christianity. It wasn't long before I became passionate about religion and had a whole new appreciation and respect for Christianity as well as for those who embrace Christianity — *but only for the right reasons*.

Studying the faith as an outsider has given me what I believe to be a unique perspective in which I am certain both the atheist and theist will find enlightening.

This isn't the first time I have become obsessed with a topic. In 8th grade I became obsessed with martial arts and achieved my black belt in *Kempo Karate* four years later, then my second-degree black belt in *Tae-Kwon-Do* several years after that. In 2001 I became obsessed with public speaking, joined *Toastmasters*, and completed all 40 speeches for their prestigious Distinguished Toastmasters Award in a record six months. Electric cars, computer programming, podcasting — all topics in which I became obsessed, as well as a recognized leading expert. I should also mention that my adolescent obsession with making money resulted in me selling my company for $20 million at age 29. Financial freedom is what has allowed me the opportunity to obsess full-time on the topic of religion and Christianity this last year.

Obsession, when properly directed, can be a great asset.

So what's my view on God and Christianity? Well, that is what this whole book is about. In short, I do not accept the supernatural beliefs commonly associated with Christianity as being true. I studied and read the Bible with an open mind and an open heart. I prayed as suggested by my Christian friends to allow the "Holy Spirit to enlighten me" (just to make sure I was following all the rules). I carefully evaluated arguments for and against Christianity and the evidence (and lack of evidence) has led me to the conclusion that God certainly does exist, but not as a being, but as a concept. While this idea may appear to invalidate all of religion, I

will argue that religion, specifically Christianity, still has quite a bit to offer the human race.

This is a subject about which I am extremely passionate, so while I might appear tough on some of the Christian beliefs, it needs to be made clear that it's the *belief* I have a problem with and not the practicing Christian.

This journey of mine began not by seeking God or Jesus, but by seeking *truth*. This does not mean I was searching for the "lack of Jesus" either. I was simply searching for a better understanding of the universe, my fellow humans, and the meaning of life. If truth led to God, so be it. If truth led to a world without God, so be it.

I am fortunate enough to live a wonderful life with a loving family. I don't have any spiritual voids that require filling and I do believe that if there is a God, he gave us everything we need to solve our own problems. My purpose for devoting this stage of my life to the study of God started out from personal curiosity alone and soon developed into a desire to share what I have found with others.

My intent is not to harm Christianity in any way, but encourage more critical thinking using reason and logic. If I am "against" anything, it's the ignorance of basing one's life on a set of beliefs that he or she cannot even begin to justify. It's the accepting of ideas hammered into your head from childhood without critically examining those ideas with an adult mind. It's the idea of being so committed to something being true that one loses all ability to reason and think logically. And I am not just referring to those who are religious.

My goal for this book is to make you think about certain ideas harder than you ever did before. I want to make you question your own beliefs and think about how you came to hold those beliefs in the first place. I want you to challenge any of my ideas that do not make sense to you or ideas with which you disagree. Discuss these ideas with others, look up what others have to say on the Internet, evaluate the evidence and make your own decision based on your

own careful evaluation. Let your beliefs become YOURS, whatever they may be. I have come to certain conclusions and I will certainly make them known. I hope to convince you through logic, reason, and appealing to your conscience, that adoption of the ideas I lay out in this book will lead to a positive "reformation" in traditional Christian thinking. What this means to you personally, and society in general is described in detail throughout this book and summarized in the concluding chapters.

You might be saying to yourself, "Who do you think you are trying to change what God revealed?" As you will see throughout this book, Christianity is like one, big, 2,000-year-old game of telephone beginning with the actions and sayings of Jesus as interpreted by apostles, scribes, translators, popes, saints, and philosophers. I am simply going back to the very beginning (literally) and critically examining some of the more universally-accepted beliefs that we hold today.

As you follow me on this journey, it's my hope that you will see that the idea of divine revelation may just be a lot more human than divine.

PART I: WHAT AND WHY

Chapter 1: Science, Philosophy, and Religion: Do We Really Need All Three?

Since the beginning of recorded human history, we've seen that religion has played a large part in our development. Around 600 BCE, philosophy enters the scene and challenges us with important questions about the world and our place in it. Although some form of science has been around since humankind, in the 16th century the "Scientific Revolution" was born. Science builds and organizes knowledge in the form of testable explanations and predictions about the natural world, which, among other things, results in benefits to humankind that allows us to live longer, healthier, and happier lives. Given that we now have science, do we still need philosophy and religion? Even if we do keep them around, are they even compatible with science?

The answer to this question should be a no-brainer, however, as Americans, we have the unique ability to give multiple definitions to the same term, therefore, screwing up what was once a perfectly simple concept. Let me start off by sharing with you my overly simplistic definition that shows the relationship between these concepts; then we can expand from there. *Philosophy is what we think, religion is what we believe, and science is what is.* If this is the case, we can see that all three are vital to our way of life and all three *can be* compatible when what we think, what we believe, and what is, is all the same. But unfortunately, unlike the piano keys living side-by-side on Stevie Wonder's piano keyboard, this harmony won't work for everyone.

Many people might have a problem with the idea of "what is" being determined only scientifically. For example, religious "Truth" (did you know that if you capitalize the first letter of any word it becomes indisputable?) is seen as the ultimate "what is" although no science is involved. Some sects of Christianity actually hold that we cannot trust science because Satan prevents us from knowing the real truth or we are incapable of knowing truth because of sin. But how can we trust religious truth when

each religion has their own “Truths” that are incompatible with other religious “Truths”? Philosophy would also have a problem with my claim that only science can only determine *what is*. Philosophy holds that there are many truths we can uncover through philosophical thought that we could never prove scientifically; for example, the existence of God. But, of course, depending on the philosopher, philosophy can both “prove” and “disprove” the existence of God.

At the end of the day, science is the common denominator between all humans, of all faiths, who subscribe to any philosophy. Through mathematical and logical truth, most of us can agree on what actually is. Still, science falls short in providing answers that only philosophy and/or religion can answer. Why are we here? Why is there something versus nothing? Why do we ask so many “why” questions?

Expanding on philosophy and religion a bit more, philosophy essentially means *the love of wisdom usually derived from the contemplation of issues related to human existence*. However, in researching the definition of religion, I came across over 50 distinct definitions. The main reason for this, I would suggest, is that people like to define religion based on characteristics of their own belief systems. Despite the differences, the central theme to all these definitions is the same: *religion is how we understand our place in the universe and our relationship to others around us*.

There is an overlap with religion and philosophy, but religion tends to be associated with the worship of one or more deities, as well as ritualistic practices. But I would argue that these associations are not fundamental to religion and can, and often do, discourage people from appreciating what religion is really about.

Unlike philosophy, religion is more feeling-based than thought-based. When we have those moments of deep connections with the universe or other people, we are having *religious experiences*; not “philosophical experiences” or “scientific experiences.” Although these types of feelings can be explained scientifically as chemical

reactions in the brain, these feelings often lead to what many would consider "irrational" conclusions that are not based on logic or reason. For example, the unconditional lifelong love a father feels for his daughter when holding her for the first time, the overwhelming sense of oneness with the universe when viewing the world from the top of the Italian Alps, or gazing up at the stars and knowing that we are not alone in the universe. To claim any knowledge of "Truth" — or the existence of a supernatural being — from these kinds of experiences is to pervert the essence of religion.

What about the more widely-accepted view of religion that involves the supernatural? For many well-adjusted adults who pride themselves in critical thinking, there is no place for this kind of superstition in their worldview. But this doesn't mean that humanity would be better off without it nor does it mean that you would be a better human being by not embracing some form of it. The promise of immortality in paradise, a divine purpose, and being looked after by a heavenly father, gives hope to those who cannot find hope elsewhere, and those who may not be as emotionally strong to accept less desirable possibilities. This hope allows people to live better lives, even if the hope is grounded in fantasy.

While it's easy for the nontheist to dismiss this as "false hope" the fact is that the promises are known to be impossible — no matter how improbable — and that's what hope is all about.

So we need science, philosophy, and religion — the human experience would be lacking without any one of them. However, making all three compatible with each other is not easy, but possible. As Albert Einstein said, *"Science without religion is lame. Religion without science is blind."*

I think what he really meant to say was, "*Science without religion is lame. Religion without science is blind. Science without philosophy is unsatisfactory. Philosophy without science is*

visionless. Philosophy without religion is subpar. Religion without philosophy sucks big time."

But that just didn't sound as catchy.

Chapter 2: Theists, Atheists, and Agnostics, Oh My!

So what are you? A theist, an atheist, an agnostic, or something else entirely? These definitions are subjective, commonly misunderstood, and often misused. Although it's more important to fully understand your beliefs rather than the term that is used to label you, it's generally considered a good idea to "pick a team", have good reasons to be on that team, and defend that team when necessary.

A "theist" is someone who believes in a god or many gods. These days, in most cultures, theists believe in the God of Abraham, — Christians, Jews, and Muslims. "The" God is believed to have many attributes such as omniscience, omnipotence, omnibenevolence, and other "omnis." Within the theist category, there are many subcategories based on your degree of certainty, attributes you assign to God, etc. But in general, as a theist, you are either a believer of this commonly accepted definition of the Abrahamic God or a believer in many gods.

An "atheist" is the opposite of a theist (thus the "a" before "theist"). This simply means you don't believe in a God or gods. Unfortunately for atheists, this term has become synonymous with militant pagans determined to destroy all that is good in the world.

Many see the atheist as one who is *certain* there is no God. The idea that anyone can have complete knowledge of the universe (and beyond) to assert that there is no God is foolish. However, philosophically one can argue that the theistic God *certainly* cannot *logically* exist based on supposed conflicting attributes. This argument is only true if this God is bound to the laws of logic. If you do adopt the label "atheist" be prepared to clarify your position and accept the many negative connotations and dirty looks that go along for the ride. While there are many different degrees of atheism, most atheists are pretty darn confident the Abrahamic God does not exist. The term "nontheism" is synonymous with

atheism but avoids the many negative connotations that accompany it.

An “agnostic” is someone who claims they do not know — or cannot know — if God exists or not. I would suggest that everyone is agnostic, even those who think they know for certain that God exists. Even if someone were to claim God spoke to him or her directly and asserted it was God, it’s possible that it could have been Satan, an advanced alien being capable of mind manipulation and control, or that person’s dead great Aunt Edna playing a practical joke. Certainty about the non-existence or existence of God is something we simply cannot have.

Some claim that agnosticism is a “cop out” since it does not really choose a side. I can see that. Despite the fact that we may all be agnostic in one sense, agnosticism is usually seen as a more politically correct form of atheism where non-belief in God is implied unless otherwise stated. Like atheists, agnostics have varying degrees of belief but are generally closer to belief than the atheist.

So what are you? Keep in mind that the label is not really as important as thought and fair evaluation that go into adopting the belief system, which the label represents. Equally important is your ability to speak eloquently, diplomatically, and convincingly about your belief system. This effort will encourage religious understanding and tolerance, which is something this world certainly needs.

PART II: ARGUMENTS

Chapter 3: The Meaning of Life

I've heard it said that if there is no God, then life has no meaning. This is a gross misrepresentation of the word "meaning" and belittles human existence to the billions of people who don't believe in a creator. God or no God, it's YOU that gives your life meaning.

When one refers to the meaning of life, he or she refers to the purpose of us being here. Are we on this earth for a reason and if so what is that reason? It's reasonable to assume that if we were created, the creator created us for a reason. But that doesn't necessarily have to be the case. For example, I created a sandwich the other day so I could eat it. But while creating the sandwich, I also created a mess. I had no purpose for the mess. The mess was simply a byproduct of the sandwich creation.

Is it possible that we, along with all other forms of life, are simply a byproduct of the universe?

And what about animals and other life forms? Some insist that humans were created for a reason, while other life forms are nothing more than collections of amoral organic blob at our disposal. However, those who hold this view overlook the fact that at the DNA level, many life forms are very much the same as we are. If we have a purpose, it's very likely that everything else does as well. Conversely, if they don't have a purpose, we most likely don't either.

Now is a good time to make clear the difference between purpose and *divine purpose* — or, as some have called it, *intrinsic meaning*. A divine purpose is the idea that God created us for a reason. Some say this reason is to serve, worship, and glorify him. Some translate this as to "know" him or have a "relationship" with him. In fact, the reasons are all over the board as to why God might have created us. Once again, you'll find a dozen theists with a dozen different reasons as to why. But what if there were no divine

purpose and we are simply a byproduct of the universe? Does this mean we can have no purpose to our lives? Of course not.

Without divine purpose or intrinsic meaning, **we** are free to give our lives meaning. We are even free to live meaningless lives! Perhaps this *is* the work of God giving us the gift of ultimate freedom; freedom from divine purpose as well as freedom from divine consequences for our choice.

What you do with your life is your choice. Release yourself from this idea of divine dictatorship and embrace an even more perfect idea of God: one that does not require, desire, or want anything from you. You can believe in a God who has given you the power to define meaning in your own life or believe in a life void of any God.

The end result is the same: your life, your choice, your meaning.

Chapter 4: Where Does Logic Come From?

Before one tries to use logic to evaluate the evidence for and against the existence of God and/or other religious claims, one must contemplate the nature of logic. Christian apologist (one who defends the faith) Matt Slick has asked, “How can absolute, conceptual, abstract laws be derived from a universe of matter, energy, and motion?” That’s a good question.

The rational Christian answer is simple: God did it. End of story.

So, in the immortal words of Ricky Ricardo, atheists “got some splainin’ to do!”

The assumption embedded in the question is that the atheist is also a *materialist* or someone who believes that only matter (including energy) exists and even consciousness is a result of material interactions. So it’s often asked, “so what then is logic made out of?” To that stupid question, I give the equally stupid answer, “one part wisdom, and two parts fact.”

But back to the traditional Christian worldview that states that God is absolute and the standard of truth. Therefore, absolute laws of logic exist because they reflect the nature of an absolute God.

My worldview states that the cosmos has intrinsic objective laws. Therefore the objective laws of logic exist because they reflect the nature of an objective cosmos. Both worldviews presuppose, but my worldview presupposes a cosmos that unquestionably exists; the traditional Christian worldview presupposes God that is the “absolute and the standard of truth”, which, of course, is highly debatable.

What about the idea that using logic to justify logic is “circular”? Or put another way, if asked for justification for using reason, you give a reason, then you’re using a circular argument. The traditional Christian world-view uses God to justify logic, thus avoiding the circle. Or does it?

Logic comes from God —> who Christians justify the existence of using either logic or faith —> which both come from God

Also, the idea of an atheist "borrowing" Christian logic is like borrowing your cousin's 1972 Chevy Nova when you have a perfectly good Lexus. Any logic that insists 1+1+1=1 (as in the Trinity), that Jesus can be 100% human and 100% God at the same time, or God can be omnipotent (create an unmovable stone) is not the kind of logic one should seek to embrace.

If we accept logic as an intrinsic objective law of the cosmos, there is no need for justification; it's simply a core understanding in which we build our worldview. Any materialist will acknowledge the existence of the intangible such as time, emotions, concepts, ideas, and logic. There is nothing spiritual, supernatural or miraculous about the intangible. Intangibles such as time and logic are intrinsic properties of our universe where others like emotions, concepts, and ideas are human-created labels for processes of the mind.

Both the cosmos and the mind are amazing things to which we do not have all the answers. As long as we admit that, we won't give up looking.

End of the free sample

You have just read the preface and the first four chapters of *The Concept* by Bo Bennett, PhD.

The complete ebook (EPUB and PDF) is available direct from the author at

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