

Confronting Christianity

Week One: Aren't We Better Off without Religion?

Pre-Group Reading Material: Introduction and Chapter 1 (Pages 11-31)

Questions:

- In her introduction, Rebecca McLaughlin begins by contrasting the perspective about religion found in John Lennon's song "Imagine" with Martin Luther King's perspective about religion. How would you describe these two different perspectives?
- Have you heard of the "New Atheists" the author describes (Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, and Christopher Hitchens)? How would you react to this quote?

"We keep on being told that religion, whatever its imperfections, at least instills morality. On every side, there is conclusive evidence that the contrary is the case and that faith causes people to be more mean, more selfish, and perhaps above all, more stupid." - Christopher Hitchens

- The author points to negative portrayals of religious belief found in shows such as *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Doctor Who*. What other negative depictions of religious belief have you seen in popular culture?
- McLaughlin describes the increasing population of "nones" – people who don't have any religious affiliation. Do you know people in this category? What do you make of the fact that *"Atheism in America is overrepresented by white men, while women and students of color are more likely to be religious."* (20)?
- Under the heading: The Benefits of Seven Biblical Principles (22), Rebecca lays out biblical principles that evidence suggests lead to human thriving:
 1. It Really is More Blessed to Give Than to Receive
 2. Love of Money Disappoints
 3. Work Works When It's a Calling
 4. We Really Can be Happy in All Circumstances
 5. Gratitude Is Good for Us
 6. Self-Control and Perseverance Help Us Thrive
 7. Forgiveness Is Foundational

Whether or not you would call yourself a Christian, do you think these are good principles to live by? If yes, how have you seen these principals to be helpful in your experience?

- In the conclusion to her chapter, the author is clear that the positive social effects of Christian belief do not necessarily prove that it is true, but she does suggest that these effects should lead us to honestly examine Christianity. She quotes Harvard Professor Tyler VanderWeele who says; *"any educated person should, at some point, have critically examined the claims for Christianity and should be able to explain why he or she does, or does not believe them."* (31) Does this statement seem reasonable? Why do you think many people don't "confront" Christianity?