

How certain are your agnostic friends?¹

by *Philip Bell*



In their insightful short book, *Are You 100% Sure You Want to be an Agnostic?* Andrew Sach and Jonathan Gemmell probe the doubts about God that Christians frequently meet in society.² Not all agnostics are the same. When faced with challenges about the Bible and God, some say,

“I don’t know”, or

“We can’t know”, and still others,

“I don’t want to know, please leave me alone.”

Those who give the second and third answers are not being very agnostic about their agnosticism! Sach and Gemmell’s observations certainly resonate with me, and I’m sure with most of their readers too.

For well over 20 years, I have been privileged to speak to hundreds of audiences and congregations in countries all over the world. Everywhere I have been, I’ve met those who are trying to ‘sit on the fence’. In my presentations I have sometimes highlighted the **strong bias** (or prejudice) that all people have in regard to origins and the big questions of life. Everyone, it seems, is inclined to one opinion or another. Our mental tendency to (dis)believe something, to support or oppose a person or idea, depends upon our foundational beliefs. A point

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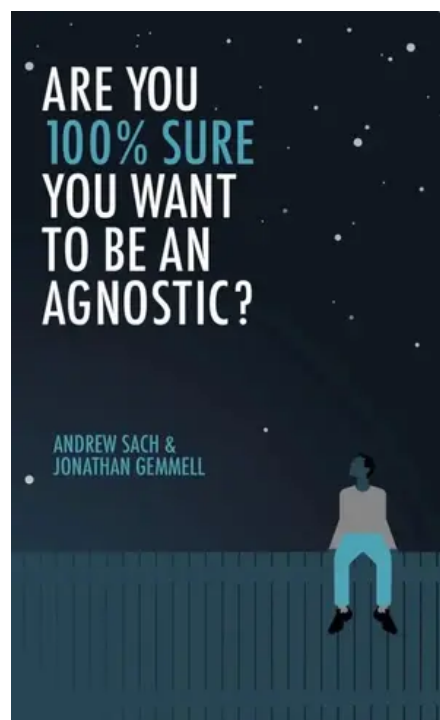
that apologists regularly drive home is that we are all governed by a [particular worldview](#), whether we realise it or not.

For instance, to say “there is no God” is to be 100% biased. The atheist’s mind is made up; he or she is closed to any possible evidence for the divine. Equally, a Christian who believes that [Genesis 1–11](#) records God’s activities in Creation, the Curse, the Flood, and Babel, is 100% biased. Believers cannot seriously allow the possibility that the universe made itself (i.e. without God). So, does this make agnosticism the reasonable middle ground? Not at all. Professed agnostics are also 100% biased. The moment they begin to climb down from the fence, on one side or the other, they cease to be agnostic. By definition, agnostics must embrace uncertainty!

Agnosticism and blindness

Is there a Creator God? Is the Bible His authentic revelation? Is it a trustworthy, reliable book upon which I can sensibly base my entire life and eternal destiny? We all have answers to these questions, even if they’re agnostic ones. We *all* have a particular bias or prejudiced outlook. What matters is to determine which worldview is the right one. Which is the correct bias to have?

In *Are You 100% Sure You Want to be an Agnostic?*, Sach and Gemmell justifiably state that, whether a person is a humble agnostic or an obstinate sceptic, “Our agnosticism is the sign of a deep internal blindness that we need God’s help to overcome.”³ Just so. An unbeliever’s greatest problem is [spiritual blindness](#) (2 Corinthians 4:4). This is something that wise Christians will keep in mind in their friendly conversations with unbelievers—spiritual blindness is the main issue, even if the person also has genuine intellectual barriers to faith. Needless to say, this biblical truth is not a comforting one for professed agnostics, not least because they generally consider themselves to be fair-minded individuals.



It’s unsafe to be unsure

In conversations where Christians are witnessing to non-believing friends, it is fair to say that both the “don’t know” and “can’t know” retorts are a cop out. They are poor excuses,

attempts to disguise the fact that people simply wish to avoid committing themselves. However, the truth really does matter because *people* matter! Biblically-informed Christians have the conviction that the eternal destiny of the people to whom they are speaking is of paramount importance. We ought to ask them, “**what are you going to do with your agnosticism? If you’re honest about wanting to reach the truth, you mustn’t let it go.**”⁴ Why should Christians press people (gently and respectfully of course) into thinking further? Because agnostics, like all unbelievers, are in grave danger.

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Sach and Gemmel point out that it is dangerous to remain ambivalent about expert medical advice, perhaps a life-threatening brain tumour (see [Sickness in the Church!](#)). The patient chooses either to put faith in the clinician’s diagnosis, dismiss it and try to enjoy life, or else their philosophy will be: “Be agnostic. Delay hospital appointments. Reserve

judgement.”⁵ In spiritual language, our agnostic friends can choose, either to continue living in the darkness of unbelief and uncertainty, or to come into the light (1 John 1:6–9). To insist upon **agnosticism is a form of denial**. Whether they realise it or not, agnostics are actually lying to themselves; worse, they are denying God’s own testimony (see [Hebrews 3:18–19](#)).

There can be no fence-sitting when it comes to the Bible’s claims about Jesus. He contrasted the narrow gate and the narrow road with the wide gate and the broad road. These two ways are headed for life and destruction respectively ([Matthew 7:13–14](#)). “**The stakes are high. ... The options are binary. There isn’t a middle option. It’s dangerous to remain agnostic.**”⁶ Often, a person’s claim to be an open-minded seeker after truth is merely a mask for their *suppression* of the truth as it is to be found in Christ Jesus.⁷

Creation apologetics

Many a person, engaged in discussion with a Christian who is knowledgeable about biblical Creation, will profess to be open-minded. This is true for ‘the man and woman on the street’ as well as for university academics. However, the fact is that they are often guilty of trying to bury factual scientific evidence that makes them uncomfortable. In his insightful, bestselling book *Dominion*, esteemed British historian Tom Holland relates how, as a youngster, he puzzled over seeming contradictions between what he was learning about origins in school science lessons and the Christian ideals with which he was raised:

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“Why should *Homo sapiens* be granted a status denied ammonites? Why, if God existed, had he allowed so many species to evolve, to flourish, and then utterly to disappear? Why, if he were merciful and good, had he permitted an asteroid to smash into the side of the planet, making the flesh on the bones of dinosaurs burst into flame, the Mesozoic seas to boil, and darkness to cover the face of the earth?”⁸

CMI speakers frequently encounter questions like these, and this is not the place to unpack how Holland’s misunderstandings as a young man were partly based upon his belief in a false history of the planet. However, he immediately adds:

“I did not spend my whole time worrying about these questions; but sometimes, in the dead of night, I would. The hope offered by the Christian story, that there was an order and a purpose to humanity’s existence, felt like something that had forever slipped my grasp.”⁸

What a sad confession of agnosticism from this erudite and congenial man. Tom Holland recognises that Christianity is a message of hope. Nevertheless, having embraced the evolutionary view of origins as a youngster, he himself lost faith in the truth claims of God’s Word, and of the Lord Jesus Christ. And notwithstanding Holland’s warm commendation of *The Air We Breathe* (2022) by evangelical minister and author Glen Scrivener, Holland sadly related that, “[A shadow of disbelief is still thick over me](#)” in an interview with Premier Christian Radio (UK) as recently as 2016.

This helps exhibit a stark reality: there is [no such thing as neutrality](#) where ultimate truth claims are concerned. Jesus said, “Whoever is not with me is against me” ([Luke 11:23](#)). In fact, there is often little to separate the arguments of agnostics and atheists.

The Bible is clear that the opposite of faith is doubt and unbelief, whether or not such a person expresses that doubt in outright denial (atheism) or agnosticism. May God help those of us who are Christians to be persistent, prayerful, and winsome in seeking to reach our agnostic friends and acquaintances with the Truth.

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References and notes

1. First published in *Prayer News*, CMI-UK/Europe, July 2022; moderately adapted here. [Return to text.](#)
2. Sach, A. and Gemmell, J., *Are You 100% Sure You Want to be an Agnostic?* 10 Publishing, 2022; available in UK/Europe from [creation.com/store](#) or [10ofthose.com](#). [Return to text.](#)
3. Ref. 2, pp. 44–45. [Return to text.](#)

4. Ref. 2, p. 59. [Return to text.](#)

5. Ref. 2, p. 74. [Return to text.](#)

6. Ref. 2, p. 83. [Return to text.](#)

7. [Romans 1:18](#), c.f. [Ephesians 4:20–21](#). See also [John 14:6](#). [Return to text.](#)

8. Holland, T., *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind*, Little, Brown, London, p. 520, 2019. [Return to text.](#)

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