

Reasons Young People Leave their Faith

(March 30 Generations of Faith presentation at St. Mary of the Valley – with illustrations from *Monroe High School course on World Civilizations*)

1- **Our young people are poorly catechized and are unable to respond to challenges to their faith,** for example:

- **All Religions are basically the same.** As Pastor Steve pointed out in our meeting with Principal Lombardi, the text has the underlying assumption that all religions are man-made inventions. **Response:** Depends on what you mean by “basic.” Ask a serious Christian, Moslem, Jew or Buddhist. Those who make this claim are usually referring to the fact that all “religions” contain parts of the moral law (“law written on the human heart”– Rom 2:15).
- **Buddhism and Christianity are the same.** These are the two main religious options a young American would consider. The text leads a student to conclude that they are the same: “*guidance of saints*” and Buddha as “*divine savior*” who “*became a god.*” Jesus also made into a god. **Response:** New Testament shows that Jesus knew he is God. Jn 8:38 “*Before Abraham came to be, I AM.*” (v. 39 – they picked up stones...) Also Mark 2: forgets sins (v. 5), bridegroom (v.19), Lord of the Sabbath (v.28), etc. Such claims of authority, together with the “I AM” statements in John give ample evidence that Jesus knew exactly who he is.
- **St. Paul is true founder of Christianity.** **Response:** Gal 2:2, ICor 15:3, etc.
- **Christianity is “exclusive” and “intolerant.”** **Response:** Astronomy excludes astrology; psychology is intolerant of phrenology. It is true that Christianity has “zero tolerance” for certain practices. An early Christian writing called *The Didache or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* states: “*You shall not murder, commit adultery, fornication, pederasty, murder a child by abortion or expose a child after birth.*” Christianity does exclude certain teachings, for example, Marcion who taught that the “Old Testament God” was bad while the “New Testament God” is good.
- **Christianity is syncretistic** (absorbed by pagan practices). **Response:** Make up your mind – are we exclusive or inclusive? The answer of course is that we have excluded teachings and practices contrary to the faith of the apostles and have embraced those things which can be included within the “regula fidei” (rule of faith). Christianity includes Judaism and all that is good in ancient paganism. We share monotheistic faith with Islam. Together with Buddhists we recognize that this world does not offer salvation. We share basic moral teachings with Confucius, Shinto, native religions, etc.
- **Christianity is too complex.** Text refers, for example, to “complex doctrine of Trinity” which it proceeds to incorrectly state. **Response:** Christianity contains mysteries, which we will need eternity to explore. Nevertheless, it is possible to state them accurately. For example, *Wikipedia* gives an accurate one-sentence statement of doctrine of the Trinity.

Also *Wikipedia* gives a basically accurate presentation of Christian origins and teachings. The World Civilization course does not. It contains fuzzy statements: Christians believe Jesus came to “redeem sin” (!), he had “no intention of founding a new religion.” (But, did he found the Church?)

- **Christianity has changed over the centuries. Response:** Yes, but is the change organic, like an acorn changing into an oak? Or is it a deformity, like an oak tree sprouting vines? The Church is a living organism planted in many cultures. (With Bible, *regula fidei*, *magisterium* – and above all and in all, Holy Spirit – to guide development.)

2. **Deeper reason for leaving the faith: Incoherence of moral life, especially in the area of sexuality.**

- **Materialistic world view gives an easy way of dealing with guilt:** “Science” seems to excuse immoral behavior by claiming that there is very little difference between us and higher animals. We don’t blame a dog or an ape, so why should we feel any guilt? And when you get down to it, humans and amoebas both follow the same impulses – to survive and reproduce. So what’s the big deal if two young people do “what comes naturally”?
- **Response:** It is hard to refute materialism, because it “explains everything.” However, as Chesterton pointed out, *materialism explains everything only by leaving out everything we most prize: freedom, goodness, truth, even beauty.* Furthermore, materialism is ultimately ineffective in dealing with guilt. It does not face the reason for guilt, but only denies it by saying that guilt is a neurosis caused by the imposition of morality. (“By people who themselves don’t live up to the morality they proclaim” – a fact we admit.)
- **A current illustration is the push for “gay marriage.”** Those who follow the gay lifestyle have higher rates of drug abuse, alcoholism, promiscuity and suicide. They say that would not be the case if society accepted - and celebrated - sodomy and pederasty as normal practices. The ancient Greeks, however, did do that - with dubious results. A materialist philosophy does not face the real cause of guilt and leads to rage and despair. Jesus gives the only true solution to guilt by enabling us to face sin and receive mercy.

Conclusion: As pastors we need to help our young people respond to the common challenges to their faith. We also need to help them live the Christian life, especially in the area of sexuality - why God made us male and female. And we must help them understand that when we fall in any area of Christian living, (that) Jesus is ready to pick us up, forgive us and get us back on the right track.

-Fr. Phil Bloom
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