

EXPLANATION

Dear Christian,

You're probably a great person. If you're like most Christians I know, you're charitable, moral, dedicated to your family. You care about people. You recognize that none of us is perfect, but you try to be as good as you can every day. It's likely that you're quite intelligent and curious about a variety of subjects. You're the kind of person anyone might want to talk to, if the opportunity arose.

So why do I refuse to engage you in a conversation about your religion? Allow me to explain.

Imagine that a man approaches you and requests a conversation. With great urgency, he tells you that aliens are communicating with him via secret messages encoded in the daily newspaper. Concerned for this man's well-being, you try your best to convince him that these aliens are in his imagination only, and that the daily newspaper shows no real sign of containing encoded messages. But it doesn't matter. The schizophrenic man has an answer for everything. After several hours of speaking with him, you naturally conclude that reason and common sense are useless. The schizophrenic believes what he believes, and is essentially unreachable. Your time with him has been entirely wasted.

You are that schizophrenic man.

You start with the premise that the Bible is the inerrant word of God. Or something close to that. Perhaps you use the word "inspired" instead. It doesn't matter, any more than it matters what particular kind of code the aliens use to communicate with the schizophrenic man in the example above. The problem is, you start with this astounding premise, and it pollutes every one of your conclusions. That's why it is futile for us to have a conversation. The tools I would use, evidence and reason, would be as useless with you as they would be with the alien-believer.

Which is not to say that you do not gather evidence and employ reason when it doesn't get in the way. You may even have developed considerable skill at making certain of your conclusions appear as if they are not the product of your central delusion. But so has the alien-obsessed schizophrenic man; this skill only means that the pointless conversation takes longer.

To understand what it feels like to be me, faced with a request to engage you in a dialogue, imagine that someone wanted to talk to you about a topic such as, say, avian flu. Now imagine this person asserted that demons – not germs or viruses – caused all disease. Would you have a desire to continue the conversation? Even after the tenth such person approached you with this bizarre claim? It is no different when you approach me with conclusions stemming from a Bronze Age belief in a supernaturally inspired and perfect book.

Mainstream biblical scholarship, dominated by Christians, has accommodated your delusion. I will not. Just like a person who refuses to engage the demon theory of disease, I refuse to engage those who believe that the Bible has any supernatural qualities whatsoever. This is a completely settled matter: It's just a book. If you believe otherwise, you do not deserve to be taken seriously.

The Statement of Belief attached contains propositions that are just as obvious as "demons do not cause disease" or "space aliens are not manipulating our newspapers." And, yes – the notion that disciples of Jesus wrote any of the Gospel accounts is based on faith, not on evidence. If you were not aware of this fact until now, you are among the vast majority of Christians who are remarkably

ignorant about which beliefs in Christian tradition are based on evidence and which are based on faith. (Hint: It's not just the miracles and resurrection that require faith.)

I will not continue a conversation with you until you sign the Statement of Belief. I do not expect that you will. I know that it contradicts the central delusion that rules your life. But I hope that reading the Statement will give you a better idea of what you would believe if that central delusion were absent.

In any case, please understand that my refusal to engage you at all does not mean that I don't like you. My blunt tone is tough love, and I mean that sincerely. I honestly hope that someday you will let go of the delusions that may be causing you to make less of this life -- the only life you have -- in preparation for one that will never come.

It takes courage to see the world as it is. I hope you find that courage.

Best Regards,
Brian Flemming

STATEMENT OF BELIEF

By agreeing to the following statements, you are not agreeing that they settle any additional questions. You are only acknowledging that you understand the difference between evidence and faith. If you cannot sign this statement, you do not deserve to be taken seriously.

I acknowledge that the Bible is not infallible. It was created entirely by humans and may contain significant flaws.

I acknowledge that a claim can be part of Christian tradition and also be false.

I acknowledge that there is no known evidence for the existence of Jesus Christ that dates to the period of his alleged life.

I acknowledge that the names of the Gospels were most likely added well after their composition, and there is insufficient evidence to believe that these names correspond to the original writers.

I acknowledge that there is insufficient evidence to believe that any of the Gospels were written by disciples of Jesus Christ.

I acknowledge that it is common for religious cults to make things up.

I acknowledge that it is common for religions to influence each other, and for young religions to be derived from older religions.

I acknowledge that no figures such as "God" or "The Holy Spirit" or "Satan" performed any supernatural actions that had any effect upon the formation of early Christianity.

I swear, under penalty of perjury, that the foregoing is true and correct.

SIGNATURE OF BELIEVER

SIGNATURE OF NOTARY