

The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism

The introduction to this assignment is taken from Timothy Keller's book *The Reason for God* (xi-xiii). Keller is a American-born Lutheran pastor who has written extensively on the challenges of being a Christian in the 21st century.

Outcome: CR B 30.2

View, comprehend, and evaluate critically a variety of visual and multimedia texts by international, including indigenous, artists and authors from various cultural communities, and identify how the texts address **beliefs, values, and power**.

I was raised in a mainline Lutheran church in eastern Pennsylvania. When I reached my teens in the early 1960s, the time came for me to attend confirmation class, a two-year course that covered Christian beliefs, practices, and history. Its aim was to bring young people into a fuller understanding of the faith, so they could publicly commit to it. My teacher for the first year was a retired minister. He was quite traditional and conservative, speaking often of the danger of hell and the need for great faith. In the second year of the course, however, the instructor was a new, young cleric just out of seminary. He was a social activist and was filled with deep doubts about traditional Christian doctrine. It was almost like being instructed in two different religions. In the first year, we stood before a holy, just God whose wrath could only be turned aside at great effort and cost. In the second year, we heard of a spirit of love in the universe, who mainly required that we work for human rights and the liberation of the oppressed. The main question I wanted to ask our instructors was, "Which one of you is lying?" But fourteen-year-olds are not so bold, and I just kept my mouth shut.

I didn't know it at the time, but this spiritual "unreality" stemmed from three barriers that lay across my path. During my college years, these three barriers eroded and my faith became vital and life-affecting. The first barrier was an intellectual one. I was confronted with a host of tough questions about Christianity: "What about other religions? What about evil and suffering? How could a loving God judge and punish? Why believe in anything at all? I began to read books and arguments on both sides of these issues and slowly but surely, Christianity began to make more and more sense. The rest of this book lays out why I still think so.

The second barrier was an interior, personal one. As a child the plausibility of a faith can rest on the authority of others, but when we reach adulthood there is a need for personal, firsthand experience as well. While I had "said my prayers" for years, and while I sometimes had that inspirational, aesthetic sense of wonder at the sight of a sea or a mountain, I had never experienced God's presence personally. This required not so much knowledge of techniques to prayer, but a process in which I came to grips with my own needs, flaws, and problems. It was painful, and was, as is typical, triggered by disappointments and failures. It would take another, different kind of book to go into them. But it needs to be said that faith-journeys are never simply intellectual exercises.

The third barrier was a social one. I desperately need to find a "third camp," a group of Christians who had a concern for justice in the world but who grounded it in the nature of God

rather than in their own subjective feelings. When I found that “band of brothers”—and sisters (just as important!)—things began to change for me. These three barriers did not come down quickly or in any set order. Rather they were intertwined and dependent on one another. I did not work through them in any methodical way. It’s only in hindsight that I see how the three factors worked together. Because I was always looking for that third camp, I became interested in shaping and initiating new Christian communities. That meant ministry, so I entered it just a few years after college.

Procedure:

- 1). Read the *Reason for God* handout.

- 2). Identify and fully describe/explain two of Keller’s best arguments in support of the existence of God.

- 3). Identify two problems or weaknesses with Keller’s arguments. If you possess the knowledge, you could alternatively identify two formal logical fallacies instead. Then fully explain the significance of the problems with his arguments (or the fallacies) you’ve found.