

# 1

## THE EVIDENCE OF REALITY

*If a belief system doesn't claim  
to correspond to reality, head  
for the nearest exit!*



**W**e don't mean to discourage you from reading the rest of this book; but in the interest of full disclosure, we should tell you that, in a sense, there is only one good reason to believe that God exists: *because it's true.*

Throughout this book, we will be presenting evidence for the existence of the God of the Bible. There are many such evidences, but they all have value because they help us see that the God of the Bible is *real*.

The moment we bring reality or truth into the discussion about God, though, many people get uncomfortable. Ask who won the World Series in 1961 or what percentage of the American population is sixty-five years of age or older or how to get a rocket to the moon, and everybody expects sober answers that relate to the real world. Gasoline, not lemonade, goes in the fuel tank of your car; we would all view a person as crazy who thought that it was a "personal lifestyle choice" to put lemonade in his car and drink gasoline. In most matters, most people speak and act as if reality matters. But not when it comes to God. Somehow, in matters of religion, spirituality, faith, or God, people have this idea that it doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you're sincere and don't hurt people. In fact, many people are troubled by claims

that a particular religious belief is actually true—that it corresponds to reality—and is not merely the subjective feeling or point of view of those who believe it.

What could be behind this notion? Here is one possibility: The idea that no religious belief can claim to express reality could presuppose that there is no religious reality to know. For example, the idea that religious beliefs about God cannot claim to correspond to reality might presuppose that there is no real God at all. If this were true, then God would not really exist. Rather, God would be a myth or symbol, the ultimate Imaginary Friend. When people pray to God, they would in actuality be talking to themselves. God would be at best a comforting lie, something people believe in because it helps them escape from reality.

Frankly, if we thought there was any truth to this view of God, we wouldn't bother you with evidences supporting belief in Him. For that matter, we wouldn't bother believing in God ourselves. We have absolutely no use for escapist religion. If God doesn't really exist, we should close up all of the churches and turn them into cinemas or bowling alleys or libraries. Our only interest in Christianity is in whether it can deliver on its promises—and what Christianity promises cannot happen unless Christianity is true. As C. S. Lewis put it:

*Christianity is not a patent medicine. Christianity claims to give an account of facts—to tell you what the real universe is like. Its account of the universe may be true, or it may not, and once the question is really before you, then your natural inquisitiveness must make you want to know the answer. If Christianity is untrue, then no honest man will want to believe it, however helpful it might be: if it is true, every honest man will want to believe it, even if it gives him no help at all.<sup>1</sup>*

You might be wondering why Lewis would say something like this. Can't Christianity be a positive, helpful religion even if it's not literally true? And why believe in it if it isn't helpful? The answer is that Christianity ultimately claims one thing: to tell us what the real, living God has done to bring us back into a relationship with Him that will last beyond the grave for all eternity. If this God doesn't even exist,

obviously, the whole thing is just a sham. Yes, some people might find some “help” in believing a lie, but that isn’t the right way to live. On the other hand, if this God does exist and you believe in Him, you are not guaranteed immediate entrance into a thornless rose garden. So, the only things that really matter here are whether Christianity is true and whether the God of the Christian faith really exists.

### THERE’S NO ESCAPE



I refuse to be intimidated by reality anymore.... My space chums think reality was once a primitive method of crowd control that got out of hand.... I made some studies, and reality is the leading cause of stress among those in touch with it. I can take it in small doses, but as a lifestyle I found it too confining.

—LILY TOMLIN AS TRUDY IN *THE SEARCH FOR SIGNS OF INTELLIGENT LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE*<sup>2</sup>

In the popular science-fiction movie *The Matrix*, Keanu Reeves plays an ordinary man who is not ordinary at all. But then, everything that *seems* ordinary turns out not to be real. Reeves’ character, called Neo—a tip-off that he is the first of a new kind of man—learns that his whole world is actually a virtual reality illusion called “the Matrix” that was created by alien machines that have taken over the Earth. He and the rest of humanity have been living a lie. At first the truth is very hard to accept, and Neo finds it difficult to make the transition from the virtual world to the real world.

*The Matrix* is an enjoyable and thought-provoking film on many levels. There is, however, one way to ruin it entirely, and that is to take it too seriously. Like much science fiction, *The Matrix* is best understood as a parable.<sup>3</sup> Its point is not that alien machines might exist or that virtual reality might one day supplant living in the real world (although

many people take both speculations seriously today). At its heart, the film provokes the viewer to consider the possibility that reality is larger than the familiar material world that we experience through our five senses. But it would be a big mistake to take the scenario depicted in the film literally.

On one level, *The Matrix* and countless films like it are tools of escapism. They provide for their viewers an opportunity to escape from the real world into a cinematic virtual reality where life is more exciting, more romantic, or in some other way more enjoyable than their ordinary lives. Good escapist films give us an emotional boost that helps us get back to our daily routines with more enthusiasm. In that way, escapism in the movies (or in books or television) is not really about escaping reality but about strengthening us to deal with reality.

While escapism in the movies is fun and generally harmless, escapism in worldviews, philosophies, or religions is foolish and can be very harmful indeed. There's no point in trying to avoid the truth about who and what we are or why we're here in this world. If there is a God who made us and who expects something of us, we need to know. If God is nothing more than make-believe, on the level of Santa Claus or the tooth fairy, we need to know that, too.

That reality exists and is inescapable can be illustrated using *The Matrix*. In the story line, the reality is that the machines have taken over the planet and the lives that Neo and his human friends have been living are virtual-reality fiction. When Neo learns this is the reality of his world, he does not conclude that *nothing* is real but that what he had thought was real was merely an illusion. The very concept of an illusion presupposes a reality, since an illusion is a distortion or deception that hides the way things really are. At some point one must reach a bottom line, a place where the illusion ends and nothing but reality remains. Thus, reality must exist, and ultimately we cannot escape it.

### FAITH FOUNDED ON FACT

There are many religions in the marketplace of ideas. Why believe in one rather than another? Let us begin by narrowing the field down to those we can take seriously. Here's a suggestion: Start by eliminating all religions that show a disregard for facts in the real world. Suppose we

were to invite you to believe in the Great Pumpkin.<sup>4</sup> Naturally, you would begin asking questions about matters of fact: Has anyone ever seen the Great Pumpkin? Did he ever leave you candy? Suppose that we not only had no facts about the Great Pumpkin to offer you, but we dismissed your questions as irrelevant and irreverent. If we told you, “The Great Pumpkin comes only to those who ask no questions,” would you take Pumpkinism seriously? Of course not. But for some odd reason, people often accept this sort of contempt for reality in religion. Many religions encourage their members to base their beliefs on their *feeling* that it is true. Other religions base their claims on tradition—“We’ve passed these stories down for centuries,” they say, “and they’re part of our heritage.”

Please understand: we’re not knocking feelings or tradition. They are both important elements of human existence, and we can’t function well without them. Our point is that it is the job of neither feelings nor tradition to serve as the basis for accepting a belief. A belief should be embraced because it’s true—because it’s based on reality.

Christianity is one of the few religions that even professes to be grounded on facts in the real world—factual claims that you can read about, investigate, and that are well supported by evidence. It is also a religion that believes it is possible for humans to know these facts and to be held accountable for their response to them. As John Warwick Montgomery put it, Christianity is a “faith founded on fact.”<sup>5</sup>

The simple believes every word, But the prudent  
considers well his steps.

—PROVERBS 14:15 NKJV

Many people are surprised to hear that Christianity puts so much stock in fact. The Bible, however, is very clear on the matter. The book of Proverbs warns repeatedly against naïveté (Proverbs 1:22; 8:5; 14:15, 18; 22:3) and urges its readers to acquire knowledge (Proverbs 2:10; 8:9; 10:14; 12:1). “The truth,” Jesus said, “shall make you free” (John 8:32 *KJV*). Luke and John both insisted that what they reported about Jesus was historical fact (Luke 1:1–4; John 19:35; 21:24). The apostles warned against believing fables or myths (1 Timothy 1:4; 4:7; 2 Timothy 4:3–4;

Titus 1:14) and stated confidently that their message was based on fact (Acts 26:25–26; 2 Peter 1:16).

Christianity, then, unlike many religions, encourages critical questions, discourages naïveté, and offers factual reasons or evidences to believe its astounding claims. The very nature of these claims—that God entered our physical reality and left concrete footprints in history—is a basic, fundamental reason to take those claims seriously. This first evidence—that Christianity takes reality seriously—does not prove that Christianity alone is true, but it does put it in the realm of options for serious truth seekers. Whether it is true or not must be determined by considering more specific evidences. If those evidences hold up, the only reasonable thing to do is to believe in the God of the Bible.

But wait a minute! Even if there is such a thing as reality, is it possible for us to know what that reality truly is? Is knowledge of truth possible? That's the question that will occupy our attention next.

### FOR FURTHER READING

Boa, Kenneth D., and Robert M. Bowman Jr. *Faith Has Its Reasons: An Integrative Approach to Defending Christianity*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001. In this book we explain the different ways Christians for the past two millennia have gone about showing that Christianity is reasonable, and we explain how those different approaches complement one another.

Moreland, J. P. *Love God with All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001. Why the Christian faith encourages the cultivation of critical thinking skills.