

**GOD AND THE FUTURE  
LIFE: THE  
REASONABLENESS  
OF CHRISTIANITY**

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God and the future life: the reasonableness of christianity by Charles Nordhoff

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**CHARLES NORDHOFF**

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# GOD AND THE FUTURE LIFE

THE  
REASONABLENESS OF CHRISTIANITY

By CHARLES NORDHOFF

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"POLITICS FOR YOUNG AMERICANS" "CAPE COD AND ALL ALONG SHORE"  
"THE COMMUNISTIC SOCIETIES OF THE UNITED STATES" ETC.



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## TO PARENTS AND TEACHERS.

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"NATURAL THEOLOGY" has been defined as that department of study which treats of the existence and attributes of God as these are revealed to us in the world of nature.

Many eminent men—not only theologians but scientists—have written treatises of natural theology, and the work of Paley, the most famous of this kind, was for a long period one of the books which young people were expected to read; it was commonly used as a text-book in my own school-days. It is now thought to be out of date, and is no longer seen in schools, and not often in households; but it remains, in my belief, a valuable, as it is certainly an interesting book, not only for youth, but for mature men and women.

If I venture to offer here another book on Natural Religion, this is because I have seen that Paley's and other well-known works, written before recent and very important discoveries and new theories in science, do not entirely meet the questions which not only our young people, but many of their thoughtful elders, nowadays ask.

But I have also another reason for venturing upon this field, and it seems to me a very important one. Those whose thoughts are already interested in these questions—of God and a Future Life—form but a part of the community. There is another, and not a small part, which takes little or no interest in such thoughts. The burden and pressure of life are so great, the temptations to merely worldly living are so increasingly powerful, in our days, that, among young people particularly, we see too many who refuse to take any account of the future life, but become absorbed in the ambitions and pleasures of the present.

I confess that a main stimulus to the writing of the present work was my hope that it might attract the attention of such persons, whether young or old, and turn their eyes upon a larger, broader, and juster view of life.

It remains true, also, that, whether we wish it or not, young people, and many older ones too, are worried with doubts and fears which did not trouble the Christian world half a century ago. Science—the inquiry into natural phenomena and their “laws”—has been “popularized,” as the phrase goes, and some men assert, and many ignorantly believe, that there has arisen a “conflict between science and religion;” which is as though one should assert that there is a conflict between the multiplication table and the higher geometry. Still, this supposed “conflict” is



undoubtedly a terror to many good men and women, who imagine that religion is in danger from the advance of science; and who close their eyes and refuse to reason about the existence of God and the Future Life, because they fear that that way lies loss of Faith. So strong and wide-spread is this fear, that I have been warned by friends who approve entirely of the objects and are kind enough also to praise the execution of my little book, that it will be kept out of some Christian households, because "the parents do not wish their young people to consider such matters."

One ought not to treat disrespectfully such fears, although they are needless. Mistaken as they are, they have their origin in an anxious solicitude for the moral and spiritual welfare of their children, which conscientious parents are bound to feel. But to those who are subject to such alarms it is proper to say here that I would rather burn my book than place even a slight stumbling-block in the way of a single human being's religious faith. The main object of my writing has been, on the contrary, to revive and strengthen this faith; and the book has grown largely out of an earnest wish to maintain and invigorate in my own young people, and the children of dear friends, that hope and confident Christian faith in God and immortality which is, in my belief, the chief and only true solace for the trouble of living here.

We cannot, if we would, prevent our young people from discussing these questions. But surely no thoughtful father or mother would like to see son or daughter grow up without thought of them. The more intelligent youth are, the wider their reading and study, the more certain they are to ask and discuss. It seems to me of great importance that their questions should have answer; that their discussions should be reasonable and well-informed. In that way, at least, they are the more certain to maintain a living interest in these profoundly important matters, which otherwise they may, as many do, put aside and out of their minds, as things which they "may leave to the clergy," or which "do not concern them." The way to inspire our youth with the Christian faith in God and immortality is, it seems to me, to meet their inquiries frankly, to welcome them as reasonable, proper, and tending, if pursued in an honest and respectful spirit, only to the firmer establishment of that right thinking out of which alone can grow right living: "for he that cometh to God must believe that He is; and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

I believe, then, that he who asks, as so many are doing in these days—secretly oftener than openly—whether or no there is really a God who not only created but who also continues to care for the affairs and inhabitants of this world, has at least taken a first important step. He shows that he thinks the

matter worth an inquiry, and he deserves an answer from those who believe.

He who asks whether there is a Future Life shows by his question at least some interest in what is a supremely important matter to us all. He ought to be encouraged and not reproved for his curiosity. It would be a pity to have him come to a wrong conclusion; but in my belief it would be very much worse if he took no interest in the question at all—if he thought it a matter of no concern or no importance to him.

“What is Life?” is a question now, more than ever before, engaging the attention of thoughtful men and women. In this problem  $x$  may represent that unknown quantity, lying outside of our knowledge and experience, which is the subject of this speculation and inquiry.

There are those who assert that  $x=0$ .

So far it is absolutely certain that no one has proved this proposition. No one has been able to demonstrate that  $x$  is equal to zero.

Neither (aside from Revelation), it must be granted, has any one been able to scientifically prove the converse—that  $x$  = a continuous and conscious prolongation of our lives after the death of the body.

In fact,  $x$  is in this case not only an unknown but an unknowable quantity.

There are many such in physics; but that does not prevent science from dealing with them. No