

Destroying arguments raised against the knowledge of God

The Deconstruction of Christianity: What it is, why it's destructive, and how to respond

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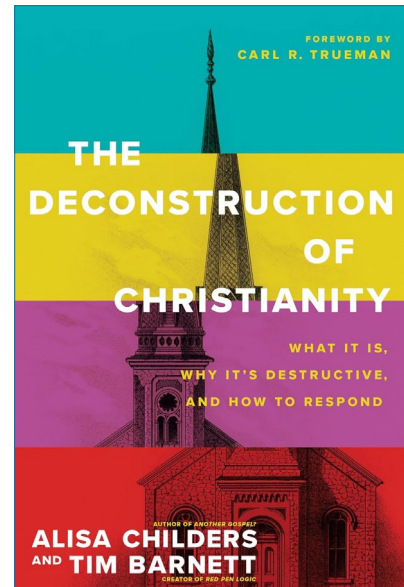
Lucien Tuinstra

Alisa Childers and Tim Barnett have joined forces to produce this accessible and timely book on the topic of so-called ‘deconstruction’ of the Christian faith: what it is, why it’s destructive, and how to respond. These three subtitle topics correspond to, and are unpacked in, the book’s three parts. Childers was formerly a singer with the Christian pop group ZOEgirl (1999–2006), while Barnett is a speaker/apologist from the ministry Stand to Reason.

Exvangelicals

Increasingly, young people who are leaving evangelical churches (especially in the US) are being dubbed ‘exvangelicals’. “It’s a battle of ideas”, state the authors in the opening pages, talking about this social movement. They are not discussing biblical (young-earth) creationism here—a secondary doctrine, according to them—but the deconstruction of Christian doctrines generally. And that this book is about a spiritual battle is clear from their definition of deconstruction:

“Faith deconstruction is a post-modern process of rethinking your faith without regarding Scripture as a standard” (p. 26).



This is appropriate wording considering the rhetoric of some of these professed former Christians; for instance, in a TikTok video, exvangelical Abraham Piper says:

“I’m not going to derive my cosmology from four-thousand-year-old legends of a jealous, bloodthirsty demigod” (p. 29).

He continues, “I want more freedom in the little stories I tell myself”.¹ Questioning one’s beliefs can be good, but not all questions are honest questions. Some people don’t seek answers. They seek exits (p. 44), like the exvangelical above who wants more ‘freedom’. Childers and Barnett also realize that the word ‘evangelical’ carries a lot of baggage. Therefore, someone being an evangelical suggests *that* someone left, but not *what* they left (p. 33). Claiming an ‘evangelical’ label which does not apply is akin to saying that wearing a cross makes someone a Christian. Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in 1971, taught that being an evangelical

involves certain foundational beliefs. Among other things, he asserted that, “... we must underline the fact of the historical fall of the first man, and that it happened in the way described in the third chapter of Genesis”.²

The authors portray the Fall (figure 1) as follows: Adam and Eve ‘left’ God only after their own deconstruction, through succumbing to the temptation of Satan; after that, their sin was a *fait accompli*. Rather than listening to the primary source of truth—the Word of God—they rejected it and heeded the father of faith-deconstruction (aka the father of lies, John 8:44).

Childers and Barnett further recognize that exvangelicals prefer a god in their own image and draw parallels with the account of the Israelites’ idolatry regarding the golden calf (Exodus 32; figure 2). As already stated, some people prefer ‘their truth’, but for others their loss of faith stems from a lack of knowledge of God and Scripture (p. 52).

Examining deconstruction

The authors make certain distinctions. Not every faith crisis results in deconstruction. It depends on your foundation (p. 80).

“When Christians find themselves struggling with questions about their faith, a better practice is *reformation*, not deconstruction [emphasis in original]” (p. 125).

When it comes to ‘true truth’, a quote by former atheist J. Warner Wallace is helpful:

“I’m not a Christian because it ‘works’ for me. I had a life prior to Christianity that seemed to be working just fine, and my life as a Christian hasn’t always been easy. I’m a Christian because it is true. I’m a Christian because I want to live in a way that reflects truth. I’m a Christian because my high regard for the truth leaves me no alternative” (p. 106).³



Image: Author Unknown, Door43 / CC BY-SA 4.0

Figure 1. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden responding to God after sinning.

How true—the Christian life is not always easy. Undoubtedly, there are many reasons why deconstructionists ‘divorce’ themselves from the Jesus they once professed to follow. Perhaps they were hurt, which may even have been caused by one of His followers. The authors reason that there can be a lot of anger and bitterness towards their ‘ex’ (i.e. the Jesus whom they formerly professed to love) as their beliefs about Him change at the same time the relationship changes (p. 168).

People seeking to deconstruct do not have to journey alone, there are coaches to assist them!⁴ Deconstruction coaches in a postmodern world are not to tell their pupils what ‘their truth’ should now be, just that it isn’t evangelical Christianity. Childers and Barnett pick up the irony: if indeed ‘truth’ is personal, then why bother with a guide to help find the way (p. 113)?

Some Christians may have blind faith, but the Bible does not advocate that (p. 176). Christianity may be questioned; the Bible encourages us to “test everything; hold fast what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). “Every Christian should know what they believe and why they believe it” (p. 120). Indeed, C.S. Lewis wrote: “You must show *that* a man is wrong before you start explaining *why* he

is wrong [emphasis in original]” (p. 143).⁵ However, Childers and Barnett point out that for deconstructionists it is not necessarily about falsifying the truth (p. 146). In a similar fashion to textual critics of the Bible, they want the text to mean what they want it to mean. They quote American ethicist and theologian Andrew T. Walker:

“If a theological position is wrong, demonstrate the error exegetically, and not why it *must* be wrong because of the critic’s precommitment to their own sociological constraints, or dare I say, ‘worldview’ [emphasis in original]” (p. 151).⁶

It is not that there is a lack of biblical evidence, rather it is about people refusing to accept that evidence. “A sinner searching for God is like a fugitive searching for the police” (p. 185).

Of course, throughout the ages, people have had wrong ideas about God due to their misunderstanding of Scripture. But, the authors stress, that is completely different from suggesting that the Bible teaches such erroneous ideas (p. 156). If the meaning of the biblical text can be deconstructed according to one’s worldview, why should people read (or heed) the words penned by philosophers—or deconstruction coaches—who



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Figure 2. Israel's idolatry before the 'golden calf'

suggest doing so? Why trust *those* words? Unless, of course, their readers already have a propensity to comply. An example given is that some people, in line with 'their truth', "believe that God would never send anyone to hell" (p. 163), contradicting Scripture (e.g., Matthew 13:42; Luke 13:28; Mark 9:47–48).

Hope

The existence/doctrine of Hell is also questioned by controversial American author, former pastor, and heretic Rob Bell, whose books were read by Dave Stovall, known from the rock-band Audio Adrenaline (among others). Stoval was taught

"... that if you didn't believe God created the universe in seven [*sic*; six] consecutive twenty-four-hour days ... you probably weren't truly saved" (p. 199).

Despite the obvious errors Stovall swallowed that contributed to his faith crisis, he later came under the discipleship of a pastor who led him back to a correct view of Scripture. This pastor allowed him time for conversation and questioning, in accordance with 1 Peter 3:15. In relation to this, the authors quote a study by Kara Powell and Steven Argue of the

Fuller Youth Institute, which is worth repeating at length:

"... over 70 percent of churchgoing high schoolers report having serious doubts about faith. Sadly, less than half of those young people shared their doubts and struggles with an adult or friend. Yet these students' opportunities to express and explore their doubts were actually correlated with greater faith maturity. In other words, it's not doubt that's toxic to faith; it's silence" (pp. 208–209).⁷

However, when answers *are* given, it does not necessarily mean the questioner will accept the reply,⁸ perhaps claiming that the query has not been answered to his/her satisfaction. This may mean that he/she not only rejects the response, but also the person who provided it. Although you would want to keep the lines of communication open, and answer with gentleness and respect, it may be that the questioner turns away, "because your beliefs are morally repugnant to them" (p. 232). This is the dilemma for the believer. Either way, the Christian must not compromise. A case in point, addressed in the penultimate chapter of the book, is the use of unsuitable pronouns. Just as you cannot force someone to live a certain way, gender confused people in turn cannot demand that you pander

to their worldview. You don't have to affirm something you do not believe in.⁹

A timely book

The deconstruction of Christianity by Childers and Barnett is a master class in bringing this controversial topic to a level so that the average person can understand what deconstruction is, why it is so destructive, and how to respond. The book uses real-life anecdotes as well as biblical analogies that connect this theme to the Bible—something that deconstructionists completely fail to do.

If you are a believer who wants to stay abreast of what is going on in the world and in the church, this book is well worth reading. If you know somebody who has deconstructed his/her Christian faith, or is thinking about it, this book is a must read.

References

1. Piper, A., This whole video is pure hypocrisy, tiktok.com, 14 Oct 2022.
2. D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *What is an Evangelical?* Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1992; see also Famous preacher: 'Creation, not evolution' Martin Lloyd-Jones.
3. Wallace, J.W., I'm not a Christian because it works for me, coldcasechristianity.com, 10 May 2019.
4. See, for example, Andersen, E., *Deconstructing? There's a coach for that*, religionnews.com, 12 May 2022.
5. Lewis, C.S., 'Bulverism', quoted in Hooper, W., *God in the Dock*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, p. 273, 1970.
6. Walker, A.T., @andrewtwalk, twitter.com, 12 Oct 2021.
7. Powell, K. and Argue, S., *The biggest hindrance to your kids' faith isn't doubt. It's silence*, christianitytoday.com, 21 Feb 2019.
8. CMI is only too aware of that. For instance, when the questioner does not really want an answer, or when the answer is a let-down for the questioner: Tuinstra, L., Five questions with 'let-down' answers, *Creation* 46(2):36–38, 2024.
9. Affirming something you don't believe in seems akin to lying—or at least betraying your conscience—but some may disagree.