Shenvi, Neil. *Why Believe?: A Reasoned Approach to Christianity.* Wheaton: Crossway, 2022. 254pp. + 18pp. (back matter).

Does the Church need another book on Christian apologetics by a credentialed academician? Neil Shenvi is a graduate of Princeton University and the University of California, Berkeley, where he earned a PhD in theoretical chemistry. Formerly a professor at both Yale and Duke Universities, Shenvi has published more than thirty scientific papers on electronic structure theory, nonadiabatic dynamics, electron transfer, quantum computing, and high-dimensional model representation.

Despite the author's impressive resume, *Why Believe?: A Reasoned Approach to Christianity* is an engaging, accessible introduction to Christian apologetics. In a world where many apologetic texts purport to be written for "both the scholar and the laymen" and fail to engage either, Shenvi will likely appeal to both. In his introduction, Shenvi relates his curiosity over discovering his "quantum physics professor, a renowned cosmologist," sang in the choir at his local church. The church's pastor had a PhD from Cambridge. In fact, Shenvi's introduction to the church came from a fellow student, Shenvi's future wife, a freshman who received the highest grade in her organic chemistry class. Shenvi was surprised to discover "Christianity was not dry, archaic, boring, and irrelevant; it offered a compelling assessment of my own most pressing problems" (17).

Shenvi skillfully navigates the complexities of presenting Christianity as intellectually satisfactory, while nevertheless emphasizing the cross as a stumbling block to the Jew and folly to the Greek. Whereas many apologetic texts are content to argue for God's existence or the plausibility of the resurrection but stop short of articulating the gospel, Shenvi includes three substantial chapters explaining the gospel of grace to a world full of sinners. Whereas many contemporary apologists seem almost embarrassed by the topic of human sinfulness, Shenvi unashamedly articulates Christianity's unique emphasis: "Of all the major world religions, only Christianity insists that we are radically morally corrupt people who are consequently alienated from a perfectly good God." Further, "Only Christianity insists that what we primarily need is not moral improvement but rescue" (176).

After a brief introduction, Shenvi introduces his readers to the person of Jesus Christ—focusing initially on C. S. Lewis' famous "liar, lunatic or Lord" trilemma. Shenvi acknowledges that Lewis' writings made a significant contribution toward his own conversion (15). The validity of the trilemma depends on the historical reliability of the Gospels, a subject the Shenvi capably defends by emphasizing the reliability of manuscript transmission as well as corroboration from non-Christian writers, geography, archeology, Jewish culture, and onomastics (the study of the etymology of proper names). The frequency of proper names in the Gospels and Acts corresponds with historical evidence for name frequency drawn from ossuaries from the NT world.

In the following chapter on the historicity of the resurrection, Shenvi builds his case on four main facts: the death and burial of Jesus, the empty tomb, the belief of the apostles, and the conversion of Paul. Although his historical case is a bit slim, Shenvi identifies major scholars and salient features in the contemporary debate. Shenvi argues that a naturalistic denial of the resurrection is rooted in philosophical assumptions rather than scientific methodology. "There is no scientific experiment which demonstrates that nature is all that exists" (75). The advent of quantum mechanics has also

proscribed attempts to rule out supernatural explanations as violations of laws of nature. Any argument against the resurrection based on the inherent improbability of a miracle presumes to understand God's intentions and therefore raises the question of God's existence, a subject Shenvi turns to in the next two chapters.

In a chapter on general revelation, Shenvi argues for the knowability of God through nature—emphasizing especially mathematics and fine-tuning. He begins with a discussion of faith and insists, "The Bible never assumes or contends that faith and evidence are mutually exclusive" (82). One evidence concerns the "miraculous" concurrence between the mathematical structure of the universe and the human mind's capacity for perceiving that same structure. Further, the capacity of the human mind to express and communicate what it has discovered through mathematics is equally "miraculous." Evolutionary psychologists, including Noam Chomsky, admit "[there is] essentially no explanation of how and why our linguistic computations and representations evolved" (87). Physicists are likewise forced to admit that the impression of design, expressed through "fine-tuning," is equally difficult to explain in the absence of God. Shenvi argues that attempts to undermine design arguments through appeals to multiverses are not based on observation but are intentional attacks on the existence of God. According to cosmologist Bernard Carr, "If there is only one universe . . . you might have to have a fine-tuner. If you don't want God, you'd better have a multiverse" (102).

In a second chapter on general revelation, Shenvi emphasizes the knowability of God through the moral law. In a tacit acknowledgement of Hume's guillotine, Shenvi states, "Physical facts describe the universe as it is, but moral duties prescribe the way we humans ought to behave" (113). If moral norms are part of the inventory of the universe, on what basis do they exist? Shenvi considers atheist and naturalistic answers and finds them inadequate. He then turns to what he calls the "transcendental moral argument for God's existence" (131), arguing that there are specific (moral) truths humans are morally obligated to seek. However, a moral obligation to seek truth cannot exist if God does not exist.

After arguing for God's existence, Shenvi considers three major objections to God's existence: the problem of evil, evolution, and the hiddenness of God. The problem of evil, Shenvi suggests, is actually a larger problem for atheism than Christianity. "To assert the world is full of evil is to admit that there are, after all, objective moral facts about the pervasiveness of evil in the world" (148). Shenvi briefly explores both the "free-will theodicy" and the "soul-building" theodicy. The latter theodicy suggests that good virtues like patience, courage, forgiveness, and self-sacrifice seem hard to achieve in a world with no evil. Why should we assume, Shenvi asks, "that God's primary role in the universe is to maximize our temporal comfort and enjoyment?" (152). Further, the interconnectedness of events inextricably links good and evil. For example, the death of a child often provokes the birth of another child.

Whatever the solution, the biblical doctrine of eternity mitigates the problem of evil by providing a place of eternal bliss to offset temporary suffering. Added to the doctrine of eternity is the biblical insistence on the incarnation of God. God enters our world of suffering, experiences it himself, and resurrects to permanently defeat evil.

A second objection to God's existence concerns the modern evolutionary worldview, which denies the need for a creator on the assumption of universal common descent. Shenvi does not take a position on young-earth creationism, old-earth creationism, intelligent design, or theistic evolution. Instead, he argues against atheistic evolutionism, insisting that random mutation and natural selection cannot account for the biodiversity of the planet. Random mutation, Shenvi, argues, is not an adaptive response to an evolving environment and consequently cannot drive beneficial evolutionary development. Further, Shenvi insists that macroevolutionary change through random mutation is essentially non-scientific since it would occur so slowly as to be generally unobservable.

A third objection is the hiddenness of God. If God exists, why has he not made himself known? Shenvi's answer is that perhaps God is not so hidden as we suppose, but human sinfulness prevents us from seeing his goodness. The problem is ours, not God's. Admittedly, God could provide greater evidence of his existence, but on what basis should we assume that sinners who loathe God actually want more evidence?

Having presented a case for Christianity, Shenvi devotes three chapters to the gospel. He emphasizes the uniqueness of Christianity (as contrasted with Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism), the reality of human sin, and the necessity and gift of salvation.

The development of Shenvi's argument through his book mirrors his own journey into Christianity. As a student at Princeton, he had taken a course on the historical origins of Christianity known as the "faith buster." The course drew upon the work of critical scholars like Bart Ehrman, Elaine Pagels, and the Jesus Seminar. At the conclusion of the course, Shenvi became a disciple of Jesus Christ. Yet he acknowledges his faith was not the outcome of a "careful intellectual argument" (174). Rather, he recognized that people dismissed Christianity only because they presupposed that people's experiences of Christianity were inherently false. Why not grant that people's experiences might be true? Further, among all the world religions, Christianity is unique in its insistence on the radical moral corruption of all people. People's experiences of Christianity involve a deep personal awareness of their sinful condition and their need for a Savior. Why should such testimonies be dismissed out of hand when in fact the evidence for human sinfulness is universal?

Does the Church need another book on Christian apologetics by a credentialed academician? Certainly, but only when he's willing—like Shenvi—to acknowledge human sinfulness and articulate the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Brent Cook
Professor, Division of Biblical Studies and Theology | Bob Jones University