

Conservative Evangelicals and Education

By Dan Jensen (2023; Revised and Updated 2024)

(In order to fully benefit from this essay, I recommend reading through my “works for beginners” first. They can be found on my website.)

One of the biggest objections that often comes from skeptics of the faith is the fact that many Conservative Evangelicals are not terribly educated. Even further, some apologists often make wrong, bad, or misleading arguments. Some Conservative Evangelical institutions of higher learning are not fully accredited, and others are not exactly known for their academic rigor. This fact is a very powerful comfort to many skeptics and Progressive Christians. I have repeatedly encountered it over the years. It is almost a tautology in those communities that they are the smart ones and we are the dumb Fundies. While there is regrettably some truth to this stereotype, to overly rely on it (as is so often the case) is logically fallacious in numerous ways.

First, the Scriptures are clear that God does not save intellectuals for the most part (1 Corinthians 1). You don't have to like that fact, but you are not God. And because of this fact, obviously, the church is mostly going to be made up of uneducated people, or at least often with people with minimal education depending on where the particular church is located. Thus, the reality of the situation should not actually surprise us. It is exactly what God has told us in His word. Now, I am a firm believer that more Christians should be better about self-educating as much as they possibly can, especially theologically speaking. Nevertheless, God has been pleased, for the most part, not to save those who are high on their own brains.

Second, it ultimately does not matter if the bulk of the church is not always fully capable of defending the faith against the toughest intellectual opponents. The enemies of the faith need to stop so often picking on the “little guy,” so to speak, and deal with the best

arguments the faith has to offer. Countless Christians, both today and in the past, have been some of the most educated people on the planet. I personally know believers with multiple fully accredited PhDs from some of the top institutions on earth. A number of the greatest philosophers of all time were orthodox Christians. Read any book on the history of philosophy, regardless of the worldview perspective of the author (or authors or editors), and they are constrained to deal with a number of Christian philosophers, especially Aquinas. I challenge you to read the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. You may not agree with everything Aquinas says, but if you come away from it believing he was not well-read or intelligent, you are not an honest person.

Third, in my own personal experience witnessing to skeptics of all stripes and Progressive Christians for a very, very long time now, I can say that intellectual arrogance pervades these movements. Many times I have to somewhat mock my opponent (which I don't like doing whether anyone believes that or not) or opponents, just to get them to stand down to some extent so that we can even begin to have a decent conversation. That usually works, but sometimes nothing works, the arrogance of some knows no bounds. And I have to say, that in the vast majority of my encounters with people from these two segments of the population, most are indeed more educated, or well-read, or knowledgeable, than your average person (including most Conservative Evangelicals), but are nonetheless terribly ignorant of most of the issues across the board. Many simply regurgitate and parrot the lines from their favorite author or YT personality. Sometimes this is so obvious it is sad.

With all of this in mind, it must be remembered that truth is not determined by discovering which group has the highest number of educated people within it, either by raw numbers or percentage. This is illogical in the extreme. And yet, this attitude is endemic within both of the communities referenced above. Truth is determined by reason, examination, deduction, and argumentation. Period. You may say, "That's exactly the point! You Christians only go by faith and not by logic and rationality!" With respect (and I wish I had a dollar for every time I have been told this), this only shows what a palpably ignorant person you are. The Christian church, taken on the whole, has

never ever defined faith in this manner. What you have just described is credulity and the overwhelming vast majority of revered theologians throughout the history of the church, from the earliest days until today, have repudiated credulity in the strongest terms. Please read my essay on faith and reason for more on this point. It can be found on my website.

So, please stop with all of the patronizing and emotive nonsense. Please get about the business of refuting our arguments. You can email me any time if you want to engage in an informal debate or challenge me to a formal one. My email can be found on my website.

The last thing I wish to discuss is my own experience in trying to witness to people in these communities. I would say (and this is genuinely not an exaggeration or me just trying to make the point in an overly aggressive fashion) that about 95% of the responses that I have received from these communities are inane. Now, that remaining 5% is still important and I don't want to discount them. Some have indeed been very polite, knowledgeable, and capable of debating with me well. I am grateful for them, but I do have to say that even they usually end up slowly disappearing on me after a while when they cannot fully answer certain things. If these communities are so much more knowledgeable than Conservative Evangelicals across the board, why do I consistently receive such a high percentage of responses that are of the nature described above?

You may say, "You're just picking on the little guys!" No, I am not. Most of the time I am only responding to what a given leader has said. The leader rarely interacts with me directly, and then others respond with the inane responses. Granted, many of them are indeed more knowledgeable on certain matters than most in other worldviews. But, most in other worldviews are honest and humble about the fact that they are not very well-versed in many of the pertinent subjects. I almost never get this from these communities. These self-proclaimed lay experts almost always turn out to be woefully ignorant when it comes to a number of the more intricate topics that are at play in these debates.

And on the rare occasions when the leaders do respond, it isn't pretty. This is not to brag. I have had leaders respond in very incisive ways and they have challenged me. I appreciate that very much. But, I would absolutely be lying if I said that was the norm. Rachel Held Evans never ever gave me a substantive response. She only told me that I was upsetting people. She eventually banned me from her blog even though I never at any time said anything disrespectful. Zack Hunt also never gave me a substantive response, but banned me from his blog as well when I merely exposed his shoddy scholarship in regard to Arius. I have challenged countless Progressive Christian and Atheist leaders to formally debate, and only Tony Jones took me up on the offer.

Randal Rauser went all over the internet crying about how no Conservative Evangelical would debate him about Alisa Childers' book. I wrote an entire book response to his book and then commented on his YT channel that I would be happy to debate him on that very topic and that I had the credentials to do so. He then banned me. But, he continued to decry the fact that no one would debate him. Eventually David Wolcott did debate him and did an excellent job, but Rauser was/is still lying on this front.

I have spent a lot of time on the MythVision YT channel the past couple years. I have informally debated with Pearce, Davis, and Miller. The latter two are both highly credentialed scholars. Pearce responded to my initial comment that was directed at Derek (the Atheist that runs the channel), and he challenged me to respond to any one of his 30 arguments in his book. I did so, he promised me he would respond, and then... silence. I told Davis that I appreciate his historical arguments and that I take them seriously. But, I also told him (something I tell folks on MythVision all of the time, and I have *never* received a response to it from anyone) that he argues as an Empiricist without ever making any attempt to defend that philosophy or answer the very severe problems inherent within it. He really didn't like that. He basically told me that philosophy is stupid and is just a bunch of word games, and that we should go by the data alone. Hmmm, I thought that it was only Fundies that dismiss entire fields of

academic inquiry. Weird.... I responded by telling him that everything he just said was philosophical in nature, and had nothing to do with data. Silence.

Miller responded to me and I responded to him in a very civil manner. I told him that he was misunderstanding my comment, and that I actually basically agreed with him over the point he was trying to make in his comment to me, and that I was happy to debate him on any topic he wanted. Silence. Later, he and I did go back and forth on other topics, and he almost always changes the subject and won't answer my direct questions. At one point, he really started to do poorly and I later found out that Derek shadow banned his last comment to me so that I would not see it and think he had not responded. It was clear that Derek did not want our little informal debate to continue to be seen by his audience.

Recently, I made a joke about one of Derek's videos (which I admit I am prone to do), and someone said that I needed to make a substantive argument. I told him that I do so all of the time and pointed out everything I said in the two paragraphs above, and Derek deleted my comment. Noticing a pattern here folks? For all of the talk about desiring dialogue, these leaders don't want dialogue. They just want to be able to bloviate and not be challenged.

One can also take a look at some of the reviews for one of my books (*A False Kind of Christianity*). On Amazon, most are positive, but the negative ones either don't say why they did not like the book, or show that they did not even read it. One said that it is mere clickbait, probably because of my title. One can read the book to see how much time I spend passionately refuting Progressive Christianity. It is hardly clickbait. The other one says that I preach an alt-right gospel. I hate that movement and there is not a shred of evidence in my book that would say otherwise. I have repeatedly spoken out against Trump in spite of the fact that this makes me very unpopular with large segments of the true American church. But, this person didn't care. He didn't read the book and he was obviously just trying to deter waffling Progressive Christians from reading it. We all know what is going on here.

On Goodreads, most of the reviews are also positive and I am grateful for this. But, one guy gave me a 3 and said that some of my arguments were underwhelming. I genuinely did not take that personally. There were places where I really had to short circuit things for the sake of space. It really bummed me out and is why at the end of the book I told the readers this and begged people to email me if they needed me to hash anything out for them further. Many people did this and I am so appreciative of them. At first, I honestly thought this was a fellow believer giving his true thoughts. So, I nicely commented on his review saying that I appreciated his assessment and was wondering if he could tell me which arguments he specifically found underwhelming so that I could address them on my website. In case this just sounds really defensive, I really didn't feel that way in my heart, and I was sincerely asking and planned to address them based on what he said in a friendly manner. You can go look at my comment to see that I was not at all being combative.

Silence. So frustrating. Based on years of experience, I strongly suspect that he is actually a Progressive Christian that was also trying to deter people from reading the book. After all, if people think it does not offer all that strong of a rebuttal, why waste the time and money on it. Like it or not, this has been my consistent experience with these two communities. They are a lot of big talk, but cower in silence and seek to push us away however they can when we firmly call out their hypocrisy.

And as far as my debate with Tony goes, I have written about it extensively on my website. He was unbelievably unethical during and after the debate. He said numerous things that were demonstrably false during the debate, he threatened to stop the debate in the middle of the debate even though I had done nothing wrong, and he embarrassed himself at the end of the debate when it became clear that he did not even know what the *Textus Receptus* is. I'm sorry, I'm so not trying to be overly harsh in my assessment, but he's a phony. And then after the debate he canceled our scheduled and contracted appearance on the Justin Brierley podcast. We all know why he did this as I would have

been able to go after him even more sharply in that context. Again, noticing a pattern of cancellation or banishment much here??

I don't say any of this to sound arrogant even though I know I will inevitably sound that way to some people. I think a lot of Christian apologists are often way too soft for this very reason. But, when the sheep are being attacked, I am not going to hesitate to fight back and fight back hard. Therefore, I will not for one second flinch from pointing all of this out to people. If the cases of the skeptics and the Progressive Christians are so strong, why is it that so many of them are unwilling to confront us directly? And why are they so reliant on such underhanded tactics?

You may say, "I've seen tons of Atheists debate Christian apologists!" It is true that there are a handful that are indeed willing to do so. And far, far more so than Progressive Christians, I will absolutely grant you that. They deserve credit for this. But, the vast majority are very careful to only debate Christian apologists who are basically Empiricists themselves. That is a strategic move as they can do much better against those apologists. And these few Atheists aside, this is not true of the broader Atheist world, especially most of the YT channel pop-Atheist apologists. Most of them want nothing to do with a formal debate. Suffice it to say, and this is coming from someone who did not enjoy the experience of formal debating, I am more than willing to formally or informally debate with any of them. I have already done so informally countless times over the past 2 decades.

Appendix

Dr. Miller, whom I mentioned in the body of this essay, got wind of this essay and sent me a very "pleasant" email regarding it. I then responded to him, to which he gave no further response. Below is our email exchange. I think it highlights *exactly* what I detail in the body of this essay. I was not exaggerating for effect in even the slightest degree. This is the nonsense that even little known Christian apologists like myself routinely have to deal with unfortunately.

Notice that he does not make a substantive argument or point at any juncture of his email. It should also be noted how incorrect he is about certain details, how many assumptions he makes, and how patronizing and condescending he is. While his tone was far more genteel in our dialogues over at MythVision, at a number of points over there he was still very condescending. At one point when it became quite clear he could not answer the moral argument, he basically said to me something along the lines of, "I understand these things you are saying make sense to you, but you're not really very convincing." The implication was that he is the scholar and so who am I to even try to challenge him. I didn't take the bait. I was not going to get upset. I just kept telling him to answer my core question: How can the Atheistic paradigm account for objective morality? He continued to obfuscate and not answer me. I again pose that question to Derek and to Dr. Miller here. Stop beating around the bush and just answer the question. If you don't believe in objective morality, just say so.

Below is our exchange. I have not edited his email to me or my response to him in any fashion below. I received this email from Dr. Miller on Jan 1 of this year (2024). I responded to him the next day.

From Dr. Miller:

Hi Dan,

I came across some odd blog-style essay or rant you had written. I just want to be clear, we have never "debated." I am an academic. In academia, we have discourse toward truth, not public rhetorical wrestling matches. Here is what you wrote, none of which comports with anything Derek or I recall ever transpiring:

"Miller responded to me and I responded to him in a very civil manner. I told him that he was misunderstanding my comment, and that I actually basically agreed with him over the point he was trying to make in his comment to me, and that I was happy to debate him on any

topic he wanted. Silence. Later, he and I did go back and forth on other topics, and he almost always changes the subject and won't answer my direct questions. At one point, he really started to do poorly and I later found out that Derek shadow banned his last comment to me so that I would not see it and think he had not responded. It was clear that Derek did not want our little informal debate to continue to be seen by his audience"

I am a historian and credentialed expert in ancient literature. Like a JBL rocket engineer, someone untrained in my domain would not even be able or qualified to rise to the conversation, let alone imagine a "debate" is happening. You are a faith-motivated defender of your confessional belief system. We have no objective ground for fruitful discussion, unless you wish to learn about antiquity or I want to learn about popular faith rhetoric.

As a fellow human being who was once a "conservative reformed evangelical apologist" of sorts myself, may I give you a bit of genuine advice? First, I am not your rhetorical foe. I am a highly rational academic who has gone through untold rigor in training in ancient texts, languages, cultures, and historical-literary methodologies. At most, my observations regarding ancient texts may threaten to upset some rhetorical ground you find dear or necessary to your confessional dedication. That is not my desire, but alas, that sort of thing is bound to happen when our history work ventures into what others deem "sacred history." You indicate that I was "doing poorly".. How could you possibly know? Was I doing poorly at public skeptical rhetoric? What if I am not attempting that? I am a research scholar into antiquity, not a "skeptic" assaulting your holy castle. Most of what I may write to you, you have no real basis even to weigh. For instance, if I tell you that the Gospel of Marcion appears to show source critical priority, a statement that in my field makes perfect sense as a topic, you would not know where to begin even to evaluate such a statement (nor should I expect you to). You see, the above paragraph, while it may strike you as meaningful on some level, from where I look, seems delusive. It would be like a member of the Mother Goose Society writing a blog rant about how NASA's JPL ignored his critique of the 2024 Lunar Mission plan, insisting the Moon is made of cheese. My advice.. If you are eager to engage me and my field, then study deeply into antiquity under a qualified program (not a seminary or faith-motivated apologetics school) and gain mastery of ancient history and

literature. I mean not the slightest disrespect, but only advise the obvious. You appear to hunger to have relevant compelling communications with field experts. The best (and only) way to achieve that is to become yourself a field expert. I would be happy to assist you in finding or considering a qualified training program. This side of that, you see, your comments about me avoiding you or you somehow besting me, or you challenging people to "debates," all of that seems pointless. The entire point of academic discourse is mutual benefit and learning, not "beating" one another in some public blood sport. After all, who would even be able to judge the correctness of one insight into antiquity over another except those who also study deeply into the same?? This is why public debate in my field is farcical or obscurant, not genuinely enlightening.

I hope what I have sincerely written here proves helpful for you on your journey.

All best wishes,

Richard

From Me:

Hey Dr. Miller, thank you for this email. Let me begin by saying that I actually do have a ton of respect for you when it comes to expertise on the basic facts of your area of academic study. And in case that at all sounds like me kissing up because you were successful in intimidating me with this email, I think the rest of my response here will be more than sufficient to prove that is far from the case. That is just me being honest. I would not say that of MANY of Derek's guests and I certainly would not say that of Derek himself. I of course do not find you very convincing regarding your overarching interpretations of the data, and I find your tactics in dialogue to come off as quite immature for a scholar of your stature. I believe this immaturity is on full display with this email you sent me, which is an actual rant in every sense of the word, unlike my calm essay where I merely stated the facts.

I never ever said that we engaged in a formal debate. I was quite careful, on more than one occasion, in my essay to make clear that we have only informally debated on Derek's channel in the comment section. While I never use the exact words, "comment section," it is plainly implied by the essay in a number of places. What else could be meant by the fact that I talked about how Derek often deletes and shadow bans my comments or the comments of others towards me? And yes, sir, we have indeed informally debated on his channel a few times. I can remember at least three separate dialogues between us that could be described as nothing other than informal debates. You can quibble over the term "informal debate" all you want, but I never use it in my essay in a manner that is remotely out of step without how that term is often used in our culture. We were plainly arguing over certain important points and that is an informal debate in my book. So, no, I do not apologize for saying that and I did not say anything that was inaccurate in the slightest. Let ME be very clear about that.

I am not even going to grace the vast majority of your childish diatribe with a response. It is far too undignified to warrant it. The vast majority of it amounts to nothing more than *ad hominem* and the *comparative circumstantial ad hominem* fallacy. It is rather beneath you, my friend. The fact that you and so many Atheists are so reliant on such tactics only serves to prove the exact point I was making throughout my essay. With that made clear, I will make a few brief remarks.

First of all, my degrees do not solely come from faith-based institutions. My second Master's comes from the University of Aberdeen. Yes, I earned it from the theology department, but so what? Is the fact that Aberdeen has a theology department reflective of its academic weakness? If so, is that also true of Harvard and Princeton? If not, why not? And if not, that puts you in the odd position of saying that Aberdeen has a weak theology program when many of my professors had degrees from those institutions. If I sat under such professors, how is my degree that was earned under them less than first rate? I was accepted into the PhD program and was only not able to finish that goal because of some very serious family issues. But I have continued to study on my own every bit as hard as I would have had I completed that endeavor. I have become

extremely well-versed in all areas of theological and apologetic inquiry, especially historical theology. I am happy to have you challenge that assertion. Thus, the idea that I have no idea what you are talking about when you refer to many topics is simply false.

For instance, your analysis of the biblical doctrine of faith basically being nothing more than credulity is demonstrably wrong. I am actually writing an essay on that very subject for my website. I am about halfway through it, and you can interact with it if you like. This was one of the topics we did indeed informally debate over and yes, you did come off rather poorly. At one point I made the case for the fact that no one in the early church would have read Heb 11 the way you were exegeting it. I pointed out how all of the heroes of the faith were, according to the Old Testament, given a great deal of objective evidence for their faith. I said that if you want to attack the veracity of the OT or the convincing nature of the evidence given to them, I was happy to have that discussion with you, but that this was not the issue at hand. The issue at hand was that those who believe in the OT, as was the case with the earliest Christians, would not have interpreted faith in Heb 11 the way you were doing. And in typical Miller fashion, you did not stay on topic but went on a blabbering tangent about how if the record of Abraham as recorded in the OT were true, this would prove he was basically insane. You can never stay on topic in our informal debates (and yes, they are informal debates). I had just specifically told you that I was more than happy to discuss that separate question, but that we needed to first hash out the more basic issue of interpretation at hand, and you were incapable of doing that.

As far as doing poorly, I have already given you the example above. And I would add to that our discussion that took place on where objective morality comes from if the Atheist paradigm is true. I kept asking and asking and asking for you to answer that, and you never did, because you can't. You just incessantly obfuscated, which is your normal pattern. You kept bragging about your credentials, pointing me to sources that do not answer this question, and traveling over to tangents. You have still not answered the basic question I was repeatedly asking you: Where does objective morality come from if Atheism is correct? In my book, both of these instances saw you look extremely poorly.

If you don't agree, that's your opinion. But the idea that I was just making things up out of whole cloth in my essay is not the case at all.

As far as Derek goes, why you would believe anything that dude says is utterly beyond me. He routinely deletes my comments, shadow bans my comments, and shadow bans the comments of others (including yourself) that are responding to me. I never ever use profanity or say anything vulgar or inappropriate. If Derek is all about dialogue and seeking the truth wherever it lands, why on earth does he need to play these games? I have in fact gotten so wearied by them that I no longer even try over there anymore. What does that say about him? Derek almost always ignores me despite the fact that his games plainly demonstrate he notices me, but on one rare occasion he did respond to me. I had been saying that Derek never makes philosophically sound arguments, but always only assumes his Empiricism, which he never seeks to prove or defend against the very real philosophical problems that beset it. He responded to me by challenging me to explain the strongest philosophical argument I have in favor of my position and I did so. He never responded. My essay could not have been more on point.

For the longest time I gave him the benefit of the doubt. I legit thought differently of him. I thought it was YT for some reason. But, after a while that just no longer seemed plausible. So, I checked his channel on my son's phone and sure enough he was playing games. One of my comments was still on the channel, but was not on my end. And one response to me was still on his channel, but I could not see it on my end. After this, it was not hard for me to tell and check when this was happening and it continued to happen. If he tells you differently, he is lying.

Next, Marcion priority is the best you can do to try to intimidate me and prove that I'm just a scrub? Are you actually serious? Like that is it? Give me a break Dr. Miller. I understand source criticism perfectly fine and the arguments that are used for and against Marcion priority. Most scholars are against it, and even if the evidence in favor it is as strong as you allege, all this proves is that this is one area where the empirical data as it stands now is against me. I have made it very clear throughout my writings

and years of teaching that I have never been dishonest about the fact that a great deal of empirical data is against us as orthodox Christians. I would wholeheartedly agree with you that it is rather annoying when many Evangelical apologists act otherwise. This reflects either ignorance or dishonesty on their part and I don't like it. But I am not an Empiricist. My apologetic is therefore not grounded in that philosophical framework. Thus, your arguments on this front, even if as compelling as you say, do not deter me one iota.

Finally, I am more than fine to engage with you on a purely academic level. My faith is in no way dependent upon the extra-biblical evidence. You can say that this only proves that our faith is indeed nothing more than credulity all you want, but that would only highlight your ignorance of historical theology. I know beyond doubt that the Bible is the word of God through the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, and this has always been the doctrine of the church. Yes, the fully defined doctrine was not developed until Calvin, but it was always present in some fashion from the earliest days of Christianity. You can mock or seek to intellectually attack that doctrine all you want; I am happy to have that argument with you. That doesn't change the fact that I reject any notion of a blind faith. You can say that my notion of the testimony is deluded. Ok fine. That still doesn't change the fact that I do not define faith as mere naked belief. I am honest about my faith stance.

With that made clear, your assertion that this renders any dialogue between us foundationally impossible is not so. Whether you believe me or not, the extra-biblical arguments and data that are in favor of my faith only strengthens my faith, just as would have been the case for the heroes of old mentioned in Heb 11. I do not actually need them, though. Hence, we can have a dialogue over those arguments. And if convinced that I am wrong about any point, you have my word that I would concede that. Further, if convinced that my overall apologetic is wrong, you have my word that I would concede that as well. Now, you are never going to deconvert me. If that is your goal, I agree that you would be better served putting your efforts elsewhere. Again though, this does not mean that we cannot have a robust academic debate between us. I am more than

willing to change my mind about many, many things. I don't get the feeling that is the case for you in spite of all of your talk to the contrary.

So, if you can be respectful moving forward, I am happy to have that dialogue with you. I am happy to have it over email or in a formal debate if you would like. I am not challenging you to that, I am merely saying that I am not afraid of that. If you wish to challenge me, and the terms are fair, I would agree to it. Just let me know. Fail to be respectful in any venue moving forward, and you will be ignored by me.

Dan