

## Why I'm a Catholic

by

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We want others to believe the same things we do. This is as true for atheists as it is for people of more organized religions. We all have a desire to bring other people to our faith, whatever it is or isn't. Part of it is our need for other people to agree with us just to make certain that we have made the correct decision. Some of it is simply our desire to have people follow us. Some of it is that we have an innate desire to save or help other people (whether it's to save their eternal souls or to save their ability to reason).

While a part of me is writing this for the reasons listed above, another part of me recognizes that I am not completely confident in my own beliefs. I continue to question my beliefs, my faith, and my religion. I don't believe that such questioning will keep me out of heaven (though I'm going to hell if I'm wrong on that one), but that questioning and exploring a faith is the only way to be certain that it truly is faith and not mindless dogma.

I'm a pretty rational person. I'm fairly well read and I informed. Why would I continue to follow what some people would call a superstition?

First, I don't always fully believe. Nor are my beliefs set in stone. I find that they often evolve as I age and as I become more informed about the world. I must admit that I don't trust people with unquestioning belief. If my faith cannot stand up under investigation, it's not much of a

faith. I am particularly disturbed by people who swing their faith about them like a club, who force their religion on people and who pass judgment on those who don't agree with them. The Christianity prevalent in the United States also disturbs me due to its emphasis on material wealth and blind devotion.

Part of why I believe in the things I believe is due Occam's Razor. An almighty creator is, to me, the simplest explanation for the complexity of our existence. More than that, I feel a deeper connection to the universe and the pieces within than can be explained by any set of chemical reactions within my body.

I believe that I am more than my physical form. When I clip my fingernails or cut my hair, I do not feel that I am less myself than before. Should I lose an arm, a leg, or an eye, I would still be me. I personally know a man who had half of his brain removed due to cancer. Though it took time for him to relearn how to react to and manipulate the forces within the physical world, he never lost his soul. There have been times when "I have not been myself," yet that even indicates a sense of self that is beyond our physical reality.

I believe that I am more than groups of atoms clustered into groups of molecules combined into groups of cells arranged into groups of tissue that make up my body. I am more than the firing of electric impulses through the variety of chemical mediums that make up my brain. I am part of a vaster whole, interconnected with the life and matter of all things around me, whether I can see those things or not.

The Hindu religion refers to this interconnectivity as the Brahman, with which my soul—or atman—is ultimately trying to reconnect. Ralph Waldo Emerson called it the Oversoul. In “Song of Myself,” Walt Whitman said, “for every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.” To me, it is the breath of God Himself, the Holy Spirit.

Is it possible that this feeling is a part of my imagination, a piece of some biological imperative to feel a connectedness to the people around me in an evolutionary drive to survive? Possibly, but even if it is a part of a genetic drive to survive, why would I deny it? If our emotional and mental well-being depends on our ability to socialize, it only makes sense to believe in something that connects us to other parts of our world. Personally, I believe that the feeling I have is something deeper than a desire born of my genes, but I have no proof. Regardless of the reason why, I have the need to believe in something greater than myself.

So, if I'm to believe in something, why choose Christianity? I believe that Christianity encompasses all that I believe to be true in the universe. I do not have the same feeling from other beliefs. True, I have an imperfect understanding of other faiths, and a complete lack of knowledge for a few of them. It's for that reason that I don't condemn other peoples' faiths as long as they do not bring about harm to other people (as some of them do, as even some “Christian” groups do). I do have some specific reasons for choosing the Christian faith over other major world religions.

While I believe in the interconnectivity between all aspects of creation in a similar form to the Hindu faith, my belief in destiny is different from the dharma of Hinduism. While I agree that things are predetermined in the sense that God, knowing all things, knows the future, I do not believe my destiny is determined by my caste or who my parents are. Nor do I believe that a person's soul goes through the same cyclical process that the atoms of our bodies do—being reabsorbed into the world and then turned transformed into another form, i.e. reincarnation.

The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism and its Eightfold Path both have interesting, and even appealing, aspects to them, but I do not believe that our purpose in this world is to be disconnected from it while we are here, nor do I believe that thought is the entirety of our beings. There is something to be said for the idea that our suffering in life comes from our selfish desires to satisfy ourselves. Something also can be said as for the idea that we should only do work which uplifts our being. Still, the attempt to end desire is a desire itself and wanting to do only uplifting work is itself a selfish act. Ultimately, the teachings of Jesus ask us to do many of the same things in an effort to purify our spirits, yet He still requests that we take part in our world.

As represented in Judaism and Islam, God is too vengeful of a being to be a loving creator. Jesus' method of redemption, in building a spiritual kingdom rather than a physical one, sets it well above these religions that try to establish a holy empire on Earth. Nor do I believe that God's desire is for our obedience, but for our willingness to better ourselves and the rest of His creation. The Jewish and Islamic reliance on complicated laws and rituals for purification and salvation seem too much like the desires of humans to control other humans than like the help of

a loving God. In contrast, Christ asks two things of us: Love your God with all your heart, all your mind, and all your soul; and love your neighbor as yourself.

Christ asked nothing of us that does not feel right to me. He asks that we care for those in need, that we care for ourselves and one another, that we not increase the violence in the world, that we respect the promises that we make to one another, that we avoid judging our fellow humans, and that we seek forgiveness for our sins (both the things that we do that we shouldn't and the things that we don't do that we should). Rather than ask for us to sacrifice, He sacrificed Himself for us. Rather than create a royal line to rule on Earth, He made it so all of us would have part of His body, that all of us would have His blood within us.

I believe in life after death, that our souls move on after our physical bodies die. I believe that such freedom can only occur if the soul is unfettered by the burdens of sinfulness and that sinfulness can only be expunged with the help of something beyond us. While I do not believe in hell as a physical, fiery place, I do believe that it is possible to be separated from God for eternity and that, in itself, would be torment. However, I also believe that, since God is a loving God, no one would ever be subjected to that punishment. God, as our ultimate parent, cares for us more deeply than any Earthly parent ever could. This is the God offered by Christianity.

So, I've chosen Christianity, why choose Catholicism? Part of the reason I am Catholic is simply because I was born into a Catholic family and baptized in the Catholic faith soon after I was

born. While this isn't the entire reason why I remain Catholic, it is a part of it. We tend to follow the faith of our parents if for no other reason than because it's what's familiar.

The fact that Catholicism is the branch of Christianity originally set by Peter also lends it some weight in my mind. For me, my belief goes beyond that. I agree with many of the doctrines that the Catholic faith has that other sects of Christianity do not.

I have been presented with questions that people often have about Catholicism. Some are misconceptions; some simply require explanation; some even cause me problems. I believe that understanding my decision to be Catholic is easier if my answers to these questions are first understood. These are not in any particular order.

*Don't Catholics worship the saints?*

No, or at least, that's not the allowed doctrine. Catholics do ask saints (and often deceased friends and family members) to intercede for them. While this might have the appearance of prayer since the person doing this is talking to the air, it is a very different sort of thing. Think of it this way: it's OK and even encouraged to ask people to pray for us. Holy women and men are supposed to be granted eternal life. Thus, as long as we believe those two things (as most Christians do) we should be able to ask those who have passed before us to pray for us and with us (intercession). I believe that my Grandma Marks, who wanted me to be a priest, still looks after me and prays for me even though she has passed on to the next life. I do not, however, worship her, the other saints, or the named angels as separate gods.

*If Christians aren't supposed to worship idols, why do they have all of those statues and pictures in their churches?*

While I do have issue with the amount of wealth that was taken from people to build some of the churches throughout history, I firmly believe that art should be used to express faith. People do not (or are not supposed to) worship these pieces of art, but are supposed to use them as reminders of people, places, and events in Church history. They are teaching tools and monuments to great deeds.

*Don't Catholics believe they can buy their way to heaven?*

No. The sale of indulgences was banned hundreds of years ago. Catholics DO believe that faith alone is not enough to get a person to heaven, but that the actions of the person in life need to be correct as well. I believe this not just in a religious sense, but in a worldly sense as well. Simply believing in something means nothing unless some action is taken to support that belief. What good is the belief that people should be treated fairly, if I'm not going to treat people fairly or take steps to insure that people are treated fairly?

*Why are only men allowed to be priests?*

Of all of the aspects of my religion, this one causes me the greatest trouble. Jesus, himself, had female disciples. I believe that women are just as capable of running a church or leading a group in faith as men are. I will point out that people, in general, are more willing to have men lead

than women. This is true in secular as well as religious life. I hope that, as we grow as a society, this will change in all aspects of our lives.

*Why aren't priests allowed to get married?*

I would also like to see this idea change, but I understand it better. Priests are married to the Church in a sacrament called Ordination. I know that my family takes a great portion of my energy and time. Priests are able to focus that energy to their congregations and their relationships with God.

*Doesn't the fact that priests abstain from sex push them to sexually abuse children?*

First, priests are less likely than nearly any other profession to sexually abuse anyone. The scandal of the church is that when abuse was reported, the priest involved was simply shipped to another job (this, too, happens in other professions as well). As I myself was once falsely accused of sexually harassing one of my students, I can understand the hesitancy of the church leaders to take an accuser's word at face value. How do we tell the difference between those who have actually been abused and those who are simply seeking attention, or are deliberately trying to harm the accused? I'm not condoning what was done. I believe that priests (and other people) found guilty of committing these sort of crimes should be punished. However, I find it ... interesting ... that the Catholic Church gets this sort of press when other religions and secular jobs have even higher instances of sexual abuse.

*Don't Catholics believe they eat the body and drink the blood of Jesus?*



Yes. This historically made the Catholic faith very hard to sell to native tribes that performed cannibalism. “No, you can’t eat other people. Yes, this is the body and blood of Jesus.” In my belief, the Last Supper was not a symbolic gesture, but a means for all of us to have a physical piece of divinity within us. Jesus established a kingdom on Earth, but knew that leaving a physical heir would cause confusion and dissension (not to mention that any heir would probably have been executed as well). Instead of having a child (or children) that carried His blood and parts of His body, He made it so ALL people would become His heirs. This is one reason that I do not approve of the Catholic Church’s earlier practice of only allowing the priests to have communion. Catholics take the Eucharist at every mass to reinforce their connection to Christ.

*How could that possibly be Jesus’ actual body and blood?*

This is something that I take on faith, but if you need a more scientific possibility, think of it this way. Jesus’ body was comprised of trillions of molecules that were lost to the ground and atmosphere throughout His life (just as all of us do). Those molecules have scattered throughout the world since then. In the moment that the priest transmutes the offering of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, those molecules bond together. It’s a mundane sort of miracle, but pretty impressive if you think about the scope of it, especially when considering the number of people receiving communion at any given time around the world.

*Why do they still taste like bread and wine?*

...You WANT it to taste like flesh and blood?! Perhaps the molecules have formed in such a way to maintain the taste. Perhaps there are not enough of His molecules present to change the

taste. Or perhaps, as one visiting priest put it, the miracle isn't so much that the bread and wine turn into the body and blood of Christ, but that body and blood still taste like bread and wine.

*Wasn't the Catholic Church behind some of the greatest atrocities in history?*

Yes. So was the United States, but I still am proud to be an American. Seriously, I am ... even with that song running through my head now.

*Aren't most Catholic holidays based on pagan holidays?*

Yes, so? I put up a Christmas tree because it's a special decoration for the time of year, not because I worship trees. Christianity in general, and Catholicism in particular, has always been good at bringing in the traditions and beliefs of a group of people and using them as means of teaching people more about the religion. I'm an educator, thus I understand the importance of using any means possible in an effort to teach people. Besides, any excuse to celebrate is good for me (well, almost).

*Why do Catholics have to tell priests their sins instead of just telling them directly to God?*

Catholics are free to confess to God at any time and in any place. Such a confession, however, is largely spiritual. It resides in our thoughts. The sacrament of Reconciliation makes the act a physical one. While we are spiritual beings, our bodies are still a part of us. Again, Catholics believe in actions as well as faith. Confessing our sins to a priest is a sign of commitment. Besides, people are less likely to do something wrong if they know they're going to have to tell someone about it later.

Personally, I believe the Church was way ahead of its time with the idea of confession. It wasn't until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that we started to understand the psychological reasons behind our need to speak with others about our problems. In a sense, Reconciliation is a form of therapy; one that relieves many of the psychological pressures we face.

*Aren't Catholic services boring?*

Catholic services walk the delicate line of providing people with a sort of private link to God and creating a social gathering. Some churches do this better than others. I find services less and less "boring" the more I understand the reasons behind the different parts of the mass. Just as many people find Shakespeare boring, a better understanding of what's going on and the symbolism behind it makes the mass easier to enjoy.

*What's with the Catholic "calisthenics" during their church services?*

Catholics are asked to stand, sit, and kneel at different portions of the service. Our bodies, minds, and souls are linked together. It only makes sense to me that my religion would find ways to bring my body into the service as well as my mind and soul.

*Aren't Catholics only able to say certain prayers?*

No. Catholics do have many standard prayers, but we are in no way limited to them. I like having the standard prayers ready when I'm having difficulty coming up with anything unique to say. The standard prayers also allow an entire church to pray as a single group (people unused to

this are often creeped out by it). This unity connects me to all Catholics around the world (especially when the prayers are said in the Church's universal language of Latin).

*Why do Catholics baptize babies instead of making baptism a decision for people when they're older?*

I'm all for children eventually choosing their own faith as they grow older, but I also believe that it's irresponsible to divorce members of my family from such an important part of my life. I don't believe that children should decide whether they should learn reading, writing, math, etc. either. Baptizing children soon after birth demonstrates the parents' determination to raise their children in a Christian manner and to teach them the Catholic faith. In Catholicism, children later get the opportunity to confirm their faith when they're old enough to make their own decisions. This sacrament of Confirmation usually takes place when the child is around 14 years old (when many other Christian faiths baptize their followers).

*Aren't Catholics against divorce?*

I'm against divorce, so it's a good fit. As a teacher, I have frequently been exposed to the damages that divorce causes. To clarify, the Catholic Church is not against getting a divorce to avoid a terrible situation, but it is against having a sexual relationship with a second partner as long as the first one, to whom you promised to be always faithful, is still around.

In order to avoid situations where divorce might be required, Catholics are supposed to be in pre-marriage counseling for the six months prior to their marriage. During that time, the couple is

not to live together (and as they are not married, they are certainly not supposed to have sex).

This allows the decision to be based on rational foundations rather than hormonal impulses.

*Aren't Catholics against abortion?*

Absolutely. Unlike some other religions, Catholics believe in the sanctity of ALL human life.

The Catholic Church clearly states that human life begins at conception, and that other human's should not try to end any such life from that moment on. This means that Catholics are against the death penalty, torture, euthanasia, cloning and stem cell research (as long as they involve the destruction of human embryos), in vitro fertilization (if it includes destroying or freezing human embryos), and anything else that threatens human life. Granted, the Church has in the past supported war (the Crusades) and torture (the Inquisition), but the modern Church has taken strong stances against both. Again, humans and human institutions make mistakes and God has been generous to forgive us for those mistakes.

The Church's stance on the side of life does NOT mean that Catholics are for abusing women, doctors, or politicians who are involved in the abortion process. Catholicism is about forgiveness. We believe that God will forgive anything. We do not, however, have to agree or even tolerate people's continuing abuses of others.

I've been asked, "What about in the cases of rape?" As I know a person whose mother chose not to have an abortion after being impregnated during a rape, I believe that the evil of one deed does not condone the evil of another. I believe that children of rape have the right to exist. I am

amazed at the number of enlightened people who claim that some people don't have the right to exist simply due to the circumstances of their conception.

*Aren't Catholics against homosexuality?*

Catholicism believes that sexuality should be expressed only between a husband and wife. It believes that any other act of sexuality is detrimental to both the physical and mental health of the people who take part in it. The Church believes that love does not have to become sexual and that people who truly love each other would not want to bring the aforementioned problems to the physical or mental health of either person in the relationship.

That said, Christ also tells us not to judge one another lest we also be judged. As with other aspects of sin, God forgives us for anything should we ask for such forgiveness.

*Aren't Catholics against condoms?*

Yes, but this goes back to the previous question. The Church is against ANY sex that occurs outside of the union of marriage. If everyone followed this, there would be no reason to have condoms. There would be no fear of the transmission of STDs and STIs.

To be clear, it is a sin to have unprotected sex outside of marriage. Not only are those people committing sin by having sex outside of marriage, but they are committing a second sin by endangering each other.

*Aren't Catholics against any type of birth control?*

Any form of artificial birth control, yes. The Church encourages married couples to plan their sexual relations around the woman's ovulation even though those couples are technically trying to control conception. Artificial means of blocking conception with barriers or chemicals is frowned upon, but the Church openly protests types of birth control that are actually a form of abortion. Many birth control pills make the woman's uterus a hostile environment, destroying the embryo.

There are many problems caused by the modern push for medicated birth control. The long term damage done to women and their reproductive systems, the spread of STDs and STIs due to a feeling of false security, and the problems that have grown in relationships due to the "free sex" movement these drugs allowed are some of the more obvious issues. Not as talked about is the fact that this sort of birth control will lead to an economic unbalance due to the ratio of workers and non-workers. We've already seen the shadow of that problem.

*Aren't Catholics against masturbation?*

Yes. Like any addiction, sexual addiction increases with frequency, with greater amounts of stimulation necessary to achieve the "high" after each time. People in a loving marriage learn more about each other and use this drive to become closer together. Sexually pleasing oneself separate from this union only increases the amount of stimulation required and frequency that stimulation is needed. The sexual energy used in pleasing oneself could be better spent in growing relationships (and not necessarily sexual relationships) with others.

Considering these questions then, what do I believe? One nice thing about Catholicism is that it gives some straightforward prayers that answer many questions one could have. For example, the Nicene Creed:

*We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen.*

I do believe in a grand architect for our universe and I believe that architect is all-powerful. The intricacy and detail of the smallest blade of grass is enough to convince me. From the interaction of subatomic particles to the formation of celestial bodies, the universe operates in levels of complexity that, for me, defy the idea that they could be created by random coincidences.

Another piece of this section of the prayer that is important to me is the idea that God is the creator of things “unseen.” As much as we try to understand our universe, our understanding of it will always be imperfect. Even in well-established sciences, completely unexplained variations can occur in the place of expected events.

I also believe that there is more to our world than what we can prove empirically. I believe in the existence of angels and demons, in spirits and magic, and in dimensions and realms that are beyond most powers of observation. I believe that all of these things interact with our reality at some level, and that God created all of these things as well.



*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in being with the Father.*

As a teenager, I actually refused to say this and the following sections about Jesus. I would simply stand silent as the rest of my church said the words, and I would only pick up the prayer again at the portion dealing with the Holy Spirit. I wasn't convinced in the divinity of Christ. His miracles were too pedestrian: i.e. walking on water instead of quelling the storm, providing a big lunch for a crowd, turning a few jugs of water into wine, curing illnesses of the poor and abandoned. Not only do these pale in comparison to the interference of other "gods," they also took place in isolation. Only a few people ever saw Jesus' displays of divine power.

This is especially true of the resurrection. The biblical accounts of the burying of His body and His later appearances to His disciples are sketchy and suspiciously lacking witnesses. I felt that even if Jesus had been a real person, that His "resurrection" could have easily been a fraud perpetrated by His disciples.

Add to that the fact that not all of the gospels match up. In one Lazarus is a beggar who feeds from the scraps left by a rich man. He later goes to heaven and refuses to return to the world of the living at the rich man's request to warn his sons that their lifestyles will lead them to hell. In another gospel, Lazarus is Jesus' friend who died before Jesus could heal him, so Jesus resurrects him from the grave (I have two thoughts on this second account. One, if true, did Lazarus ever die again, or is he still walking the Earth waiting for the final judgment day [wow, that could

make a great novel!]? Two, Jesus' miracle could simply be recognizing that Lazarus was in a coma and bringing him out of it). While these accounts may be of two separate people who happen to have the same name, neither book mentions the other book's Lazarus.

I have since changed my mind, and I now say this portion of the prayer. Why the change? Jesus' actual teachings are the key. Every request He makes of us makes sense to me. His life also shows that Jesus practiced what He preached, an impressive feat itself. The fact that His miracles were not a big disruption to the world also speaks in His favor. Were these creations of fiction, one would expect miracles on a grander scale (like those of gods in other religions). The fact that Jesus tried keeping them quiet also spoke to His overall plan to deliver salvation in the next world, not this one. The various accounts are due to the distance in time between the events and when they were written. Even writing my own history a little over a decade after the events shows how easy it is for facts to be forgotten or to be misremembered.

*Through Him all things were made.*

This sentence is in connection with the portion above. Christ is one aspect of the Trinity, the three aspects of God. Jesus was born at a particular point in our history, but time has no meaning to God. Thus He was born, is born, will be born. He understands humans because He created us AND is one of us.

*For us men and our salvation, He came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit, He was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man.*

I continue to skip a portion of this prayer, in this case the word “men.” While I understand that the word “men” used to be a universal term for all humans (the term for married males was “husmen”), that is no longer the case.

This statement is the beginning of the Christian faith. Due to our own sinful natures, God became human in an effort to understand, forgive, instruct, and save us. The questions of whether we need saving and what the nature of sin are matters of debate that take entire treatises to explain.

A large contention in this section is the mention of the Virgin Mary. The idea of the Eternal Virgin is the focus of a great deal of debate between various branches of Christianity. For Mary to remain a virgin would require a great deal of self-restraint on the part of her husband, Joseph (a man who receives very little mention in the Bible and a great deal of sympathy in my mind). Mary's virginity also runs contrary to the idea that Jesus may have had siblings, as some people believe. Again, the virgin birth is for me a confirmation of the holiness of Mary and has had entire books written on the debate.

*For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate; He suffered, died, and was buried.*

All religions require sacrifice of some sort. In Christianity, Jesus took the place of the sacrifices that we might otherwise give. God grants us life and eternal life; He does not require it of us despite the fact that we deserve death or at least punishment.

*On the third day He rose again in fulfillment of the scriptures: He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.*

Christ's resurrection ultimately defeats the power of death. While I was a young man, Jesus' battle in hell took on epic proportions in my mind. Now, I understand that the simple fact that the creator of life entered the realm of the dead is enough to create for means for all of us to live eternally. Jesus warns in His teachings that our life after our death will be different than what we are used to, and He demonstrates that in His appearances to His disciples where He can appear in rooms that are locked and can be lifted into the heavens.

*He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will have no end.*

We will be held accountable for our actions or lack of action in our lives. I believe that our existence in this world is a stage that leads to another, that we will transcend our need for physical desires, and that achieving that will allow us to continue existing without regret forever.

*We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.*

The third aspect of the Trinity is the source of inspiration. The Holy Spirit is the power of God made manifest in our realm of existence. The word spirit is derived from the word breath. The Holy Spirit is the energy that connects us to each other and our world, "The Force," if you will (minus the midichlorians).

*With the Father and the Son, He is worshiped and glorified.*

The concept of the Trinity took a little bit to wrap my head around. A Christian comedian said to think of it as homemade cherry pie, the kind with liquid filling. On the surface it can be cut into three slices, but within it's still the same pie. God is God, but to help our understanding, He is represented to us in various forms.

*He has spoken through the Prophets.*

The Bible is the Word of God even if it was written by humans. Even its contradictions lead to growth. That scholars still find intricate connectivity between the stories of the Bible demonstrates a complexity beyond the capabilities of the numerous writers who composed, and translated, its pages. More so, the Holy Spirit still delivers messages to us. Christ's death and resurrection made all of us disciples, saints, and prophets. The Holy Spirit continues to speak through all of us.

*We believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.*

I believe that people are better when united rather than segregated. I believe that a unified faith is in our best interests as a species, that even if we don't fully agree on the details of religion, we should not use our differences as reasons to harm each other.

*We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.*

Baptism is a sign that we will endeavor to do what God asks of us. When this sacrament is given to an infant, that child's parents agree to show the child what that commitment means. Later, Catholics are given another sacrament that confirms their agreement to their parents' decision.

The pouring of water represents our rebirth into a life that never ends, a life that cannot exist with the weight of sin holding us back.

*We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.*

We believe that the dead will rise again, living lives in a world without corruption.

Once again, I wrote this to explain why I believe what I believe. I know that I've missed some things and that my views of others might change, but most of this is an accurate reflection of what I think, feel, and believe. I wanted to show that my faith is not something that I follow without a great deal of thought and some amount of prayer. Faith is not something to be taken lightly.