

RELIGION

**A LIFELONG CON JOB
ON THE GULLIBLE MASSES**

By Andrew Kennedy

RELIGION: A LIFELONG CON JOB ON THE GULLIBLE MASSES

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Gratitude:

I want to express my deep gratitude for all other outspoken nonbelievers out there. Past, future, and present. I appreciate you for your bravery to speak up and for inspiring me to do the same after having a religious upbringing.

Book Dedication:

This book is dedicated to my children, their children's children, their children's children's children and so on and so on. Go posterity!

This book is dedicated to anyone who's not religious and never has been—I'm jealous of you, and I'm glad you're here.

This book is especially dedicated to anyone who grew up religious but is now asking hard questions and beginning the process of unraveling the lies you've been told.

This book is also dedicated to anyone who is die-hard religious and faithful and committed and/or curious—I've been there, and I hope this book helps you discover reality.

I don't want to leave anyone out, so this book is also dedicated to you. Yes, you! The reader. I think that about covers it.

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Prologue

I used to be religious. I was a Christian. Back then, if I had been given a book like this, I would have recognized it immediately as perhaps one of the worst books ever written. After all, what good could possibly come from such an arrogant, pride-filled, long-winded, disgusting, extremely boring, anti-religious rant? I would have suggested that you, dear reader, reject this book entirely and put it down (unless, of course, you want to go straight to a bad place with all the other bad people—especially those atheists). I would have hoped and prayed for nothing less than the abject failure of this book and its author.

And yet, here I am. Writing this book. Thinking about the kind of person I used to be. The kind of person who could have benefitted from a book like this.

I'm also thinking of you.

If I had to summarize my main goals, it would be this:

1. Nonreligious? Don't believe in the imaginary gods or afterlife fantasies of your religious parents, friends, or other community members? You are not alone. For me, letting others know they are not alone as a "nonbeliever" is my passion and my mission. This is my primary goal. If many of those

around you also say that they believe in some sort of religious stuff, it can feel a tad lonely living in a reality-based world view, whilst they are in a whimsical fantasyland. If this is you, read on. Again, you are not alone.

2. But not only are you not alone... You can be proud! And offensive even. Challenge others. Challenge me! Please. Let me have it! I love debating! Soft or harsh—I just love it. Debate me in your head while you read. No need to be nice even. Message me on my website at any time. Or just think to yourself what a dummy I am as you read if that is indeed what you think. I want to know when I'm wrong. Do you? Challenge yourself to think and be uncomfortable etc. I'll do the same. Like a bodybuilder, I think your brain and your critical thinking skills need to be worked out to grow stronger.

3. Regardless of who you are or what you believe, you can let the world feel and know the full weight of who you are and let them deal with it. Plus, I think it is fun to be fearless and fun to debate this stuff! It's fun to learn new things and to challenge the status quo to improve humanity. It's also very needed.

“Religion” and “god” are two entirely different concepts. The concept of god(s) was invented by primitive, pre-scientific man, to explain things they did not have the capacity to comprehend like thunder or where the sun went at night etc. The concept of religion was invented by people who saw the potential to harness this primitive superstitious belief, formalize it, and invent stories to give it a structure, by which they could manipulate and ultimately control the gullible and naive. God concepts are naive. Religion concepts are predatory.

To those brave believers that make it to the end of my book and still say, “Eh, my faith has not been shaken. I'm going to go ahead and continue to support my particular religion or deity belief anyway... etc.” Then, I say, “Cool. Have at it. I believe in freedom of religion as well as freedom from religion.” My goal is not to “convert” you. Again, see goals 1-3 above.

However, as long as I have breath in my body, I will search for what is true based on evidence and not what makes me feel good based on pretend. And I will not shut up either. I plan to be outspoken about what I think as long as I have breath in my body. I am so thankful for the men and women in our armed forces who fought for our ability to have free speech in this wonderful country of ours: The United States of America. Because of my experience of switching from religious to nonreligious, I now understand why the first amendment is so precious to all sides and why it's vitally needed to keep a healthy society in general. Honest conflict has more social value than dishonest harmony.

It's ok to not be religious. You can feel good about it. For some, who have been nonreligious most all their life, the first two sentences here might feel like no-brainers. However, for others, who were first brainwashed in a religion since childhood by family or friends and then needed to walk away, it can feel devastating at first. If that is the case for you, your religion really did a number on you. They can do that. A god that has to threaten you with hell, disease, and suffering for you to recognize him as a god is nothing but a manmade scarecrow.

For some of us, a religion starts being pounded in our heads very early. I think a lot of people, especially those who are on the fence, or who are new to the thought process of breaking free from religions and imaginary gods, may want some coaching through the deprogramming process. I wish I had a book like this when I was going through the deprogramming process, so I made this one for you. If you experience shame, dishonor, or shock for walking away from religion, you are not alone. You may also feel peace, joy and deep relief as well as a lot of other emotions.

Many religions might plant the seed of shame and dishonor if you leave your religion on purpose to keep you in fear from questioning too heavily or speaking out against the religion or cult.

By the way, "How dare the religious use that term 'born again.' That truly describes freethinkers who've thrown off the shackles of religion so much better." -Julia Sweeney.

As a doubter, have you ever heard the phrase “Just keep the faith”? (Or at least to just keep a little bit of faith the size of a “mustard seed”? - Matthew 13:31-32 or Mark 4:30-32.) I used to love that saying in a happy-clappy religious setting with others. It can be made to sound so cheery. But it is a manipulation tactic.

Over time, I grew skeptical when I heard it. Why is that phrase pounded at doubters? It starts sounding like a broken record after a while. Why do I need to keep it? What if I didn’t “keep the faith”? So, what then? Perhaps if you were raised as a Christian; does that mean ‘hell’ for eternity if you don’t? Really? Hmm... For not believing stories about a man-god savior? I am glad my BS radar kicked in. As the saying goes, no religion or cult can survive these words: prove it.

One day, after having read some of the gospels again in my living room, I remember slowly closing the Bible on my lap. I sat there for a moment and said out loud to myself, “Hey, I no longer believe...” My eyes darted around at my hands and around room. What did I just say?!

It was a little scary because of the brainwashing I had received. Was this the ultimate sin? Did I just condemn myself to an eternity of damnation while sitting here in my living room? I still worried about what others would think of me if I came out to them. Then a deep calm breath came over me.

The person who needs nothing is pretty well off. An alpha in a sense. The person who needs something is not. The person is a follower, or a beta. The person who needs nothing cannot be controlled.

If you want love, you will be controlled by the people you think can give you love. If you want money, you will be controlled by the people you think can give you money. If you want health, you’ll be controlled by the people you believe can give you health. If you want power, you will be controlled by the people you believe can give you power. If you want a utopia, you’ll be controlled by the politicians you believe can give you a utopia. And on and on...

And if you want to have some sort of imaginary spiritual enlightenment or if you want to live forever and ever etc., then you will be controlled by the religious con artists and gurus that you think can teach you how to get it.

Religious leaders use make-believe spirituality to con the gullible. Religious leaders want to control you in order to gain either money, influence, and/or power. You will hear this theme again and again by me. They are weirdos making shit up as they go to get what they want from you.

If you want nothing, guess what? You cannot be controlled by anybody. The power is in your hands now. You get to just show up and be yourself. If others don't like it, you can laugh. Because you do not need their validation. You are free.

It was refreshing when I realized: if I'm not sure about my faith, or even if I have no faith at all, I'll be ok. I will no longer be controlled. Wow-Yes! So, I tried that new life attitude on like you might try on a sweater. First agnosticism for a year so as I had my doubts about my own doubts too. And then, as I studied and thought some more and some more, I finally landed on atheism. I could be wrong. If so, then I'll change my mind. I'll leave it up to others (or a god) to convince me if they want to. I'll never stop seeking truth. "You better believe before it's too late" sounds like a bad sales technique that works only on suckers.

I found out that I was ok. I was more than ok. I was better! I felt like I had been cured from a contagious illness in a way. Atheism is not a religion. It is a personal relationship with reality.

I walked around with my new "sweater" inside the house. Glanced in the mirror a few times. Hmm—Okay... Then slowly, eventually, and very cautiously at first, I "stepped outside" with it so-to-speak. I showed just a few people at first. They expressed a wide range of opinions on my "new sweater". But I liked it. That's all that mattered. I felt less struggle. I felt more authentic. I felt more me. I didn't have to worry about pleasing anyone

or saying the “right” thing anymore. I could think and speak freely. I could... Be free.

I took off the “old sweater” that had been “given” to me as a child. And somewhere nearing 40-years-old now, finally, I put a different one on that I made for myself. I did away with my religion. I would encourage you to wear your own sweater too! No matter what it is. Yes, some around you may not like it. I may not too. So what? Tough for me and others, I guess. That’s ok. That doesn’t matter. Be you. Wonderful, beautiful you. I’ll do the same. I can change my sweater at any time too. I certainly am not loyal to this sweater or stupid ole ‘atheism’ in general. If it is revealed to me that I am wrong, and perhaps say, Thor, the god of thunder, is also our holy king of the universe in some new revelation, then viola, how about that! Praise Thor! Hammer, lightning, and sexy thighs in all!

Again, I could always be wrong. I have certainly been wrong before. But I am now comfortable saying what I think even if it hurts people’s feelings or their opinion of me. I suppose I was also comfortable saying what I thought as a Christian too for much of my life, but I would feel bad if I thought of something that hurt my religion, my friends, or my family. Or if I thought of something that might offend the imaginary Christian god in my head. Gasp!

“Asking: If there is no god, what is the purpose of life? Is like asking if there is no master, whose slave will I be?” – Dan Barker.

Being brainwashed in a religion, still didn’t keep me from having an opinion on many things, but it did make me really want to defend my religion because I thought of it as an extension of me. Opinions on small stuff is ok. However, when it came to religion? Well-as the song goes “Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war!” Don’t mess with my Jesus... Or my idea of him that I have been taught, gosh darn it!

“An atheist wonders why you aren’t an atheist and jokes about it. A Christian condemns you to eternal damnation in hell for not believing in their god. Atheism is a religion like not collecting stamps is a hobby.” -Unknown

My ego would be hurt if the religion or my Christian God was diminished by tough questions, thoughts, or ideas. I would defend my religion even if it was ridiculous to do so. I also realize it was just what I was taught to do. I was never taught it would be ok if I didn't believe the stories in the Bible etc. That would be, like, the worst thing ever! I had to figure that out for myself later.

I would actually defend something as if it was true, even though it might be untrue, or even ridiculous because – well, it's the Bible! It is the whole true word of God, right?! Many still do believe this – Fervently. However, I'm proud to say I broke free. So, I will keep speaking up about what I think and hold myself accountable if new evidence develops. I will keep fully accepting the lessons, the consequences, the new revelations (no pun intended) and the benefits of it along the way. Hooray!

I had been brought up in the Lutheran faith as a kid. One thing I actually admire about Martin Luther is that he stood up the religious leaders of his day. He called them out. (That's about the extent of my admiration for him though.) Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a German priest, theologian, author, hymnwriter, and professor. He is best known for kickstarting the Protestant Reformation and the namesake of Lutheranism.

Luther was ordained into the priesthood in 1507. He came to reject several teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. In particular, he disputed the view on indulgences. Indulgences, in the teaching of the Catholic Church, are a way to reduce the amount of punishment one has to undergo for sins, after death... Yeah. Baloney. The church got rich off of this. So, in theory, you can just buy your way to a mythological "heaven" if you give a bunch of money to the church. Eh-hem... Bo-lon-ey... Good people – but very gullible people, fell for this and lost a lot of their hard-earned money. Christians today might look back at that and turn their nose up at how gullible and stupid people were back then. The irony burns.

Others realized the scam that the church was putting on but didn't speak up. It's scary to do so and get push back from those that are in power and from many you love that are too excited to allow logic and reason to make its way into the mind. But the right thing to do is challenge. Luther proposed an academic discussion of the practice and efficacy of indulgences in his Ninety-five Theses of 1517. His refusal to renounce all of his writings at the demand of Pope Leo X in 1520 and the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms in 1521 resulted in his excommunication by the pope and condemnation as an outlaw by the Holy Roman Emperor. (...I would love that distinction... Ok Martin. Slight head nod for now.)

Good for him for taking on the Pope. But unfortunately, he was still an idiot and a con artist in his own way. An idiot for not going all the way and realizing that the very Bible itself is BS too. A con artist, because, well, he used make-believe spirituality to con the gullible just like the institution he challenged. Maybe he was truly this delusional. Or maybe he saw the chance at his own power play and he took it. Who knows. He still clung to stories, and like any cult leader, brought others along with him down some religious rabbit hole.

If he were a true hero, in my mind, he would have helped let as many people as he could become aware that it's ALL bull. Not just the indulgences. He would not have started his own cult which in-turn, led other generations to become brainwashed in yet another stupid religion. Luther taught that salvation, and consequently, eternal life is not earned by good deeds but are received only as the free gift of God's grace through the believer's 'faith' in Jesus Christ as redeemer from sin. Yes, he taught "Jesus died on the cross for our sins." That kind of phrase also describes the ancient pagan ritual of human sacrifice. Many primitive pagans also thought they could transfer all of their "sins" on a goat or a lamb. And if they killed the goat, the sin died along with it etc. That's where the term "scapegoat" comes from. Believing that a god was appeased when Mr. Jesus died, is no different than killing a virgin on top of a pyramid to appease the gods and make it rain. Yep, Christianity is based on the pagan ritual of human sacrifice. Equally as barbaric, disgusting, and plain idiotic. If DNA tests had existed 2000 years

ago, the gospel stories would not exist now. We would do a paternity test on the “virgin” Mary and broadcast the results like on Jerry Springer. (Jerry Springer is a former Cincinnati Mayor and former TV show host.)

Anyway, Luther’s theology challenged the authority and office of the pope by teaching that the collection of writings in the Bible is the only source of divinely revealed knowledge.

“That is why faith alone makes someone just and fulfills the law,” Luther writes. Hmm... really? By the way, in two of his later works, Luther expressed antisemitic views, calling for the expulsion of Jews and burning of synagogues. Yikes! Based upon his significant anti-Jewish teachings, the prevailing view among historians is that his rhetoric contributed significantly to the development of antisemitism in Germany and of the Nazi Party. Faith alone makes someone just, Mr. Martin Luther? I think not.

Luther then went on to say this famous quote of his: “What harm would it do, if a man told a good strong lie for the sake of the good and for the Christian church? [...] a lie out of necessity, a useful lie, a helpful lie, such lies would not be against God, he would accept them.” -Martin Luther

People that claim to know what a deity thinks or if the god would or would not accept something (aka many religious leaders) is just code for what THEY think. They want you to think that what they think is somehow sacred and divine because, well, they are con artists. They desire influence and power over others. They love themselves and their ego over the truth.

Simply debate people you disagree with. It’s fun and does not have to escalate beyond that. (Burning stuff is kinda bad.) Religions fighting against one another is like two kids fighting over who has the better imaginary friend. Both imaginary friends that they have suck... Because they are not real. Violence, bloodshed, burning, vandalism, or expulsion of groups is plain wrong. I will defend the Jewish people here of course in this way with all I have. Personally, I am 6% Ashkenazi Jewish. Hooray for my wonderful ancestry! However, mocking and debating one’s beliefs are fair game. I make

fun of all religious faiths. Not races. I make fun of what others believe. I believe that is important to do for us to see different angles and perspectives of belief systems. Mocking can help accomplish this. Others can disagree or do the same to me. It's fun. Try it. Bring it on. Truth does not mind being questioned. A lie does not like being challenged.

Theists can't even prove their Gods to each other. How do they expect to prove them to atheists?

To me, religious leaders are con artists that either make stuff up or "carry the torch" to stupefy the next generation. They do this to benefit the religion that benefits them. Sometimes gently adding on from the stuff others made up long ago. It's not personal. It's just what I think. Some may say: "You will be shunned by many that DO believe, or just wait until you're dead etc" ... Or "Respect my beliefs or else" ... Is that the best that many religions can do as a consequence of speaking out against it? Why can't I demand evidence? Oh, that's right. I can. And so can you.

In this book I am proudly sharing some of what I discovered about religions. Christianity, for example, is a business. Jesus is the product. Members are the customers. Pastors and other religious leaders are the beneficiaries. Many religions, like Christianity, will try to convince people that they have a problem and that their one true religion (or the particular ideas that they promote) are the only cure. By speaking up, along the way, I have found upset people challenging me or saying I'm not very nice for doing so as I anticipated. However, I personally think that honesty is very kind and very needed. If I and others keep our mouths shut, then religions can continue to con the gullible. Then, the madness and ideocracy can spread with no opposition. I am excited about continuing the conversation no matter what. This is so exciting! It is ok to judge and be judged despite what some others say. I want to encourage you to keep being you and believe what you wish. Yes, we can all do that. Go free speech and go USA!

Introduction

Words are amazing. Your mind can pluck words out of thin air! You can internalize them. Feel them. Think about them... Place them in your heart. And when the moment is just right... You can blast them out to the world!

Most might agree that free speech is great. Many people appreciate the ability to think and speak one's mind freely. But what about "hate speech"? Gasp! Yuck. Should hate speech be protected by the first amendment? For example, what if I accuse a religious group, or an individual of being hateful with their rhetoric? Should they be allowed to speak? Absolutely. I will defend religions in this regard and vice versa. Free speech should apply to all groups and individuals. By writing this book, some may inevitably accuse me of hate speech. However, I certainly don't hate anyone. I love all human beings despite my criticism of what some might believe and think. There's nothing I can do about being accused by some folks. So, I say "bring it on." Only weak ideas, individuals, or groups require excessive praise. There is only one way to avoid criticism: do nothing, say nothing, and be nothing." – Aristotle. How about "Bigotry"? In the end, bigotry is just a name for any opinion with which you happen to disagree.

All speech should be protected by the first amendment because I don't trust the government (or anyone else for that matter) to define the boundaries and limits of any speech. What do you think? Imagine being forced to stay quiet

on a topic you are passionate about. No particular topic, group, or individual is above being scrutinized. All speech needs to be protected so long as it does not threaten violence. Atheism and science most certainly deserve scrutiny too. Also, being challenged on one's beliefs or stances is not always persecution. The word "persecution" gets tossed around too much these days when an individual or group feels challenged. As the saying goes; to those that have become accustomed to privilege, equality can feel like oppression. I agree with this statement.

"If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear." -George Orwell.

All speech needs to be protected by the first amendment. I will not budge here. Do I sound like a broken record? So what? I don't care. Free speech and free thought are wonderful. After all the religious brainwashing I received in my youth, I still feel religions should be able to say whatever they want too. Personally, I think it feels refreshing to share what I have discovered with others. So, let's let er' rip some more, shall we?

Here's what I think: Religious leaders here in Cincinnati AND all around the world are con artists. They use make-believe spirituality as a business, tax-free here in the United States, in order to gain power, influence, and money. The reality is, there is no heaven or hell as some religions claim. There are no gods, no angels, no demons, or ghosts, or spirits, or supermen as some religions claim either. When you die, it will be just like it was before your life began. There is no eternal celebration or eternal torment.

The temporary celebration though is going on right now while you are alive. We can work together and love one another and set future generations up for success here in Cincinnati and around the world. Personally, I want to work to unite this city and country against the deceptional trappings of religion while still upholding the constitutional right for the religious to believe in whatever imaginary things it wishes.

I want to ignite the power of human reason and critical thinking skills in our city and country. I want us all to feel free to judge and scrutinize everything without fear, including me. I think it is time to speak up and out against religions of all kinds and the delusional thinking it creates with its adherents.

Religion is a lifelong con job on the gullible masses. These gullible masses, including some of those in my own family, my own community, and my own circle of friends, whom I love dearly, refuse to accept reality.

Please be aware. Many charismatic religious leaders like to promise ridiculous afterlife fantasies will come true if you believe them and try to do what they say including being generous with your money to their imaginary god. It's their scam. Much like, if you get a cellphone call from out of the blue telling you that you've just won an all-expense paid cruise. The scammer just wants to gain your trust. And just get a little financial information from you first too. This, to of course start the process of getting you your tickets to paradise! Should you believe them? The offer sure sounds heavenly. And they sure seem nice... Yeah, I wouldn't trust them.

For starters, the entire process of evangelizing or inviting others to church, for example, is more about manipulating the evangelizer deeper into the trappings of the religion more than converting. These evangelizers return from the so-called cruel faithless world after being painfully rejected most of the time and back at their congregations they are treated like returning heroes if they bagged a couple of new "fish".

This is a pain/reward cycle that is a common brainwashing technique. The participants become more and more reliant on the religious tribe because they know that others discard them. (A similar thing also happens with political parties, when people, as if by magic, all fall into alignment on so many issues; but that is a topic for another day.) Anyway, these religious folks will go back to what is comfortable for them. The drug of religion. And that is exactly what the religion wants. Congregants bond as they share their experiences of reaching out to the so-called godless people at home or abroad, and once again, they will learn that the only place they feel accepted

is with the people who think as they do. And thus, we have a dangerous chamber of echoes that dismisses reason and skepticism from the outside. Religions and cults here in Cincinnati and around the world thrive off of this.

The cold hard truth that people need to accept in order to grow is that when you die, that's it. Need a hug? It's ok if you do. I sure did when I came to the realization that I had been conned most all of my life by religion and that religions lie. I am not ashamed to admit that. I'm human.

As a youth, I would be taught in school about topics like dinosaurs and evolution. Which we have real evidence for, and where questioning and examination is encouraged. Only to then be taught on Sunday mornings questionable stories, as a so-called "fact", not to be questioned, from a book compiled by a bunch of dudes at the "Council of Nicaea" in the country of Turkey in about the year 325.

Personally, I grew up going to a small church here in Cincinnati, Ohio. As a kid, I would be told I would go to a to heaven if I believed what these manipulative and delusional Sunday school adults told me, or I would be sent to hell if I did not believe them or their version of what their imaginary super entities were. This, despite them having zero evidence to back up their claims. This is brainwashing and it is still happening today all across our city and all across our world.

The cycle of the religion of Christianity, for example, and other theistic religions has breed stupidity from generation to generation. And now these modern-day delusional religious leaders love to take advantage of the power they have over the impressionable children in front of them to con the next generation. I will take a stand against this.

You don't need to have a PHD or a background in theology to recognize that religion is complete baloney. It only takes being an adult and to stand up for what is right and having common sense. I'm so proud to be speaking up and out against all religions and their lies here in Cincinnati and around the world.

There is no “Word of God” or gods. There has never been. There have only been words of men and women pretending to speak for a god or gods, or who claim to have special access to a god and who make delusional claims that “you can too”, if you listen to them and do what they say. Some religions are very good at marketing and putting on an exciting show for anyone interested in their bait. This is manipulation of the gullible masses.

Prayer is talking to yourself. Claiming anything else is manipulation and an all-out lie on the gullible.

Evidence tells us that when you die, awareness fades away. It doesn't return. That's that. Simple stuff. Beyond that, religions like to play on a human being's natural fear of death, and a human being's wishful thinking to avoid death forever to con you. They'll ask you to rely on blind faith in their imaginary gods which is a lie to trick you and play on your fear.

Some religions use cunning tactics to keep a grip on their power like saying one day you will see your loved ones again if you believe in their god. It's a lie and a scam. Your loved ones that are dead are gone forever. I'm so sorry to put it so bluntly because many times there is a lot of pain there for many people. But that is the truth. And you only need you. You don't need to conform to the religious beliefs of those around you in order to be loved, to love others, be a champion for your community, or to feel complete and overwhelming peace and acceptance for yourself and others. It is all inside you. Religion cannot give that to you. An imaginary god in your head cannot give that to you. Not even money or the person of your dreams can give that to you. Only you can give that to yourself. Religions lie.

Many religions like to package up certain concepts of wisdom and morality that are simply ideas and market these certain concepts off as their religion's own divine knowledge, handed down from some particular imaginary super-being. Religions and their claims are not above scrutiny.

Many religions reject scientific evidence like evolution because it's at odds with their own made-up narratives about our origins. Right now, because of religions, groundless irrational dogmas are finding their way into our laws.

I am so proud to be thinking freely and I am so excited to be free from the nonsense of religion. Hey, again, I could be wrong. I have certainly been wrong before. People are welcome to try to convince me I am wrong if they want to. I invite it. I am not here to convince you, the reader, of anything. I don't really care about that to be honest. I want to say what I think and let other nonbelievers know they are not alone. Discussing and writing about this subject is fun for me. So, I do it.

And, just for example, if there is a hell... And if I end up there for the eternal crime of not believing in the imagery god of some religious person's mind, then to that religious person I would say: "If you might one day in eternity, find yourself sitting down on a couch... (Maybe with your arm around, say, a 'Jesus') Perhaps eating a bag of popcorn too; while watching me and others burn to a crisp over and over forever... Then I'll politely wave and forgive you and your deity for being so childish..." Ha. Just like I made up that scenario in my mind, your mind can make up gods, fantasies and other scenarios as you think of the future too. Hmm... The human mind has an imagination... How about that.

"Hell" is something of an imaginary fantasyland for some religious to carry out their vengeful thoughts of nonbelievers and religious critics in their minds. It's really a sick way for some of them to gather peace. However, many Christian religious folks in particular may try to convince themselves and others that their delusion is true. And that somehow, they are also so righteous to try to save you from a bad afterlife experience etc. They may want to bring you on their imaginary spiritual afterlife team because it feels good to them. Because of things like this the delusions and absurdity of all various kinds of religions and cults still spread in giant pockets around the globe today.

I recognize that religions take advantage of children especially like they tried to do with me when I was a kid. They find gullible parents and seek to indoctrinate each young and impressionable child of theirs. They look at each child as a brainwashing opportunity and I am calling religions out.

I want to invite you to stop giving money to your religious organizations. If you are giving a reoccurring gift, you are being conned like I was. I invite you to go online and cancel it now and stop giving to these con artists. You can break free if you want to. However, if you don't want to break free. Cool. You don't have to.

There is no expectation to be respectful of religion or other delusions. Non-believers can accept that religious folks hold a belief. We do not have to, nor should we, pretend that it is reasonable or sane. Offended? Some people like to think that there is some mystical power in saying that you're offended, but really, it's just whining. On any side.

Being offended is like saying that because you can't handle your emotions, you would like some people to keep quiet. Well guess what, that ain't gonna happen. I wish someone would have challenged my previously held religious beliefs much sooner.

Many religious people are terrified at the idea of no afterlife. Religious leaders will confidently lie to try to dispel doubts and keep their tight-knit tithing community of naive believers strong. Yes, it is accurate to say they are naive. It pains me tremendously to know how abused and manipulated religious believers are without them realizing it. And so, I have great empathy for them. We can and should love all of them despite their naivety. But that does not mean we should feel afraid to confront them rigorously on their delusions for fear of offending. Offend away.

Check it out, that deeply uncomfortable feeling many religious people have while reading this has a name. It's called cognitive dissonance. And it happens when someone's deeply held beliefs are challenged. It's what stops people from examining their beliefs logically. It's what keeps people from careful consideration of the opposing view. It's what keeps people from

asking questions and examining sources that can potentially lead them away from those “safe” beliefs. Protecting your world view is important to your subconscious because it’s easier to continue to believe a lie than it is to rebuild from the ground up.

Deconstructing religious beliefs can be uncomfortable and really hard work for some people. Many that have been raised in a particular religious faith since childhood cannot even stand to break a sweat to examine their own beliefs critically. I was just like that too. On the other side of that is truth and freedom.

I love all human beings and want to especially help people that want to break free of their religion. I want to encourage more debate and more education. I want to encourage everyone to actually read all religious texts. Educate yourself on the full “sacred” books. Not just the parts religious leaders want to tell you about. Read any and all books you can get your hands on. Make up your mind and come to a conclusion for yourself but always be ready to change when new evidence arises. Maybe you’ll find one particular religion is the one true religion for you. Ok, good for you if that’s the case. Or maybe, like me, you’ll discover otherwise. If so, it doesn’t matter if you’re a democrat or a republican or if you identify with a 3rd party or as an independent. It doesn’t matter what race you are, what nationality you are or what brand of a religious community you were born into. It is ok to speak out against religion and question religion. And not only is it ok, but it should also be encouraged. And it should be encouraged much more in a free society like we have here in the United States of America.

If you don’t want to participate in the religion of your parents, for example, because you also came to the realization that it is phony, no matter what age you are; (it doesn’t matter if you’re five or one-hundred-and-five) you do not have to participate anymore.

Religion sells gullible people fantasies and ignores reality. There is a way out of religion. I want to encourage you wherever you are on your journey through life, and let you know you can break free and set healthy boundaries

with the religious people you know. Their lack of comprehension of reality is not your problem, and you do not have to pretend their fantasies, or their imaginary gods are real for them anymore. Nor do you have to care if they get offended by you challenging all religions including theirs. You are not alone. You can give yourself permission to celebrate breaking free.

Our society is changing. People don't need religion. Religion needs people. Because we no longer need religion, in this book, I explore what we as a society can do about it and about this giant shift taking place among other things.

I want to be clear here. You do not need this book to walk away from religion. However, if you want to continue reading and/or this book helps you, it's here. All you need is inside you.

Finally, I don't know about you, but it makes me want to love every human being so much because we're in this together. What we have is right here and right now. We are riding this crazy exciting ball of a planet together in one small speck of time and space. This life we have is special and fragile. And all we have. Religion takes advantage of people's generosity, gullibility, kindness, compassion, and fear. And from those who seek comfort and protection from an illusion.

I think that wherever big decisions are being made, we need more nonbelievers to have a seat at the table to change the dynamic of power. I think we need more people in positions of power that realize the idiocracy of religion. We need people who love peace and who are nonviolent. We need people who are not afraid to tell the truth and who don't care if they offend others by telling the truth. We need people who have the capacity to genuinely love all humans and who can be trusted by the public to make the world a better place to live, work, learn, and play. Thanks for your time and for reading this book. And don't forget to eat your vegetables. Vegetables are delicious. Just a little shameless plug for veggies too because I love them. They are so healthy!

Chapter 1

Should We Tax Religious Organizations?

Should we tax religious organizations? These tax dollars can go to help fix our affordable housing problems, for example, help aid more youth programs, and care more for our elderly. Religions can look at paying taxes as a real act of kindness. Yes, I think we should tax religions.

I believe it is time for an enormous societal shift to take place. But to start this shift, elections at the local level need to reflect the people's will and resolve for positive major changes. I want to support the re-examination of tax exemptions for religions across our city and all of the US.

For these changes to take place, it will need to be done at state and federal level. However, I will be a voice for these changes at any level I am at and especially as proud citizen of this great country of ours.

Exemptions from property taxes, for example, represent an enormous benefit to religions that we ALL pay for — the total value of all property owned by religious groups in Cincinnati and throughout Hamilton County for that matter, easily runs into the tens of millions of dollars. And for the United States as a whole, it easily runs into the tens of billions. This creates a problem, because these tax exemptions amount to a substantial gift of

money to religions at, again, the expense of someone. The taxpayers... YOU.

For every dollar which the government cannot collect on religious property, it must make up for by collecting it from its citizens... As a consequence, all citizens are forced to indirectly support religious organizations, even those of us that recognize the crookedness of them.

Every time you pass a religious property, know that YOU are paying for it. And I think that's bull. Only the religious that congregate there should be paying for it. This is a violation of our constitution's establishment clause because it directly aids religion.

We need to reexamine exempting religious organizations from taxes as a society. That real and difficult conversation needs to begin now. And when our society finally decides it is time to tax the religions, and the three branches of our government reflect that in their decisions too, these religious organizations should then feel proud that they are actually helping society out with their tax dollars.

These are tax dollars that can go to do a lot of good in our communities. We cannot keep taxing our businesses and citizens into oblivion when there is so much wealth being tricked out of people by religions. Religions, who are using make-believe spirituality as a guise for a business of conning Cincinnatians and the rest of the American people. I think they should be taxed much like casinos. Religions and casinos offer similar highs to its users.

Separation of church and state would be fantastic. But let's stop pretending there is any kind of separation here anymore. If religions want to influence laws; they can pay taxes. And I think, a lot of taxes.

For centuries, religions have used spirituality as a tool for leveraging people's money. It's true of faith communities here in Cincinnati, and it's true of those same groups just about everywhere else in America as well.

A 2016 paper in the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* puts the country's "faith economy" at roughly \$1.2 trillion annually in the United States—more than Google and Apple combined. Every time you pass a religious property, know that YOU are subsidizing a business larger than

those companies. Google and Apple are launching humankind into the future. Religion? Well... You be the judge.

As mentioned earlier, the argument might even be made that religions offer their users a kind of emotional rush in worship similar to the extra shot of hope that comes when you make a wager or a bet at a casino. Ironically, many religions hold that gambling is a sin while encouraging their adherents to bet their entire lives on a heaven.

The point is that America's religious organizations reap a significant benefit from social services—services to which they do not meaningfully contribute with tax dollars.

If taxes are part of a social contract, then organizations and businesses that claim to exist for the benefit of the community should be the first to want to contribute.

Pay attention to the money. Christianity, as an example, sells the idea of an imaginary after-life in exchange for your “faith” and a “recommended” contribution of a tithe (usually calculated as 10 percent of your pre-tax income, though according to Nonprofits Source, less than a quarter of congregants tithe, and the average Christian gives less than 3 percent of their income). In exchange, the church promises to do good for the community it serves, but a well-known dirty secret of America's religions is that even the most generous denominations typically give no more than 5 percent of their total revenue to any cause outside their walls.

In a survey of 2,200 churches, the results reported by Christianity Today showed that the average church spends half of its budget on staff. Most of the remainder goes to property and grounds expenses (22 percent) and program costs (10 percent). Whatever good they do for the larger community is usually calculated to benefit the church through increased attendance or in public relations.

In the Bible, Jesus is recorded as teaching that his followers should “Beware of practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them, for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven” (Matthew 6:1, NRSV). It goes on to explain that if you give to people in need, you should do so in secret so that even your left hand doesn’t “know what your right hand is doing” (Matthew 6:3). This kind of secretive giving isn’t typical of most religious groups in America. Trumpeting their giving is a marketing tactic. Like a business. Religion is in the business of scamming people though.

They get people to give. They keep most of the money for themselves. They grow. They balance their tax-free balance sheets to reflect their non-profit religious status. And repeat.

Some churches honestly believe there is nothing wrong with the way things are. This is yet another example at how sneaky some religions can be. Even those in charge frequently come to actually believe the words they speak.

In our culture, ironically, we dislike con artists. But the reality is that we have disdain mainly for the unsuccessful con artists. Success is treated like a universal good (no matter how it was accomplished). So, we lift up and cheer on some of the largest cons of all time in our city of Cincinnati and around the world: rich religious leaders.

Don’t get me wrong. Religious leaders are human, too. I love them as people and as my neighbors. I’m not afraid of conflict and confrontation. And if someone I love is taking advantage of people, I feel a profound responsibility to say something.

Here’s what I want to say. Many religious leaders hide an awful lot of baloney behind a friendly and charismatic exterior. Maybe some are legitimately under the delusion of religion (as I was for much of my life). And maybe they are liars. Members of the first group might not realize the harm they cause, and these are people who, once confronted with the results of their work, are the most likely to change. But there are also people who know

what they're doing. These liars know they are conning people and do not care.

I believe big changes are necessary. We need to keep religion out of our government and yet, we also need to extract tax dollars from religious groups in exchange for the privilege of operating their con game within our communities.

Let me give you an example of a former religious leader who I respect: Carter Warden, a former longtime pastor in Gray, Tennessee. Carter bravely and admirably admitted that he was wrong, resigned his position, and left the church. He later founded the Freedom from Religion Foundation.

What about religious leaders who learn their religions just aren't true? Unfortunately, it's fairly easy for them to look the other way or stay quiet after the discovery. Many just keep up the lie. They've invested too much time. They may think that they don't have any way out. At least, without losing a steady income and the respect of their community. And besides, in many cases, they've already spent years schooling and shaping dozens if not hundreds of young and impressionable minds. They may feel that acknowledging the truth of their situation is too big a risk. While this upsets me, I have so much compassion for all people who no longer believe and see that they were abused by their religion or exploited as a cog in the machine. Please know that no matter whether you leave your religion, having left church myself, I feel your deep pain and understand your dilemma on many levels. Religion is a beast of a machine.

But let's get back to the money. Take a look at the churches in your own community and notice that some of these leaders preach at very expensive religious buildings. Religious buildings often have giant pillars, high ceilings, beautiful stained glass, and all kinds of luxurious objects. Some churches are very modern structures equipped with the latest and greatest sound systems, lighting, and tech that money can buy. They invest large sums in their multimedia platforms and video broadcast technology. Many of the shows and services are spectacular and much more like concerts than the average

person might imagine. Lights. Music. Fog machines. These polished religious productions are designed to inspire awe in the participants. Even the religious personalities are big. They have to be. After all, they are putting on a show.

In the meantime, and at the very least, we need to hold religions accountable. We need to hold religions to the same standards as other non-religious charities and non-profits. Churches, for example, receive special treatment from the IRS beyond what other non-profits receive, and such favoritism is unconstitutional.

While secular charities are compelled to report their income and financial structure to the IRS using Form 990, religious organizations are granted an automatic exemption from federal income tax without even having to file a tax return. At the very least, I think they should have to fill out that form.

Many of us are moving beyond religion for good. So, what does that look like for our ever-evolving society? One of the most common ways of dividing the world is into those who believe in something and those who don't. Granted, there have been some very vocal atheists who have pointed out not just that religion is wrong but that it's ridiculous. These people have argued that believing in gods is akin to believing in fairies. And that essentially the whole thing is a childish game. I think it is too easy to dismiss the whole of religion that way.

The reality for most people is that when you have been living as part of a faith community, stepping away can be scary. People stepping away from religion are losing a lot of social support many times. I have empathy for these people. However, I feel like they can gain so much more by becoming grounded in reality. "Religion will eventually become as offensive and unacceptable as racism."-Chris O'Dowd

The government must work to make sure religions stop getting away with dollars that should be going to our communities. The government must also maintain a secular objectivity when it comes to religion. Right now, the

reality is that because Christianity remains the dominant religion in America, many of our government workers (similarly to every single other field) are also Christian. But our government must act without any hint of special favor for this religion or any religion. It cannot appear to be mostly secular. It must appear to be completely secular. Why take such a strong stance and make such a bold statement you might ask? Read on.

In 1963, a political science book by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba hit the shelves. It was titled *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. The work was in response to the collapse of democracies in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s and in Africa in the 1950s. In both instances, democracies were established in former authoritarian states but survived for only a few years. According to the authors, a specific culture, which they titled, “the civic culture,” is the only kind of culture they recognized that can sustain democracy over time in a country. They believed that if they discovered a political culture that could sustain democracy, they could change other cultures to create this civic culture and then make sure democracy survived. In their research, they discovered the following five components of a civic culture, necessary to sustain a democracy:

1. A large middle class has to exist in a democracy, because it’s the class most likely to possess democratic values. If the middle class is small and other nondemocratic classes such as an aristocracy or a radicalized working class dominate society, there’s a good chance that an authoritarian regime can come to power.
2. A society has to be secular with no state religion in place. Religion has to be kept out of government because many religions hold nondemocratic values. If religion dominates society, democracy isn’t possible. (Wow—Let’s read that last finding of theirs again. If religion dominates society, democracy ISN’T possible.)
3. A democratic society has to allow for the creation of political parties and interest groups to represent the will of the people. In other words, people have to be able to organize and express their wishes to government.

4. A society has to agree on the major political issues shaping it. These include the forming of government and economic structures. Almost all Americans agree that democracy is the best form of government and that a form of capitalism is the best economic structure for a society.

5. Government and its people have to be willing to change over time. With societies and the world constantly changing, there has to be a willingness to accept change and adapt to it. Societies that don't change, for either political or religious reasons, will fall behind globally. In addition, they'll face constant battles at home between citizens ready for change and those who want to stick with the status quo.

Above is as close as we have to a blueprint for democracy, and I will work hard on all five for us and especially #2. I hope you do too. Here's some more on the study above to give it more weight. Almond and Verba researched human behavior through empirical testing. For this reason, they set out and interviewed 5,000 people. 1,000 in each one of the five countries they had selected for their research. The five countries were two successful democracies, the U.S. and Great Britain; two classical failures of democracy, West Germany and Italy; and one lesser developed country, Mexico. The attempt was to find a culture in these five countries that could sustain democracy in the long run. If that was possible, a blueprint for democracy could be created to bring this civic culture to other countries. This, in turn, would allow for democracy not only to be spread globally but to actually maintain it over time. Sounds like a good idea to me.

However, here is not a good idea: Theocracy. If a theocracy comes to power, (A government that has a dominant religion) they will try to take away the ability for secular folks to speak out against them with blasphemy or heresy laws. In a theocracy, one religion rules. Secularism is all religions are treated equally. That is why we needed to keep a firm separation of church and state, and yet, because that is failing in some ways, we need to take away the unnecessary lavish tax breaks that are obvious free gifts to religions today in our country.

When the government allows a religious group to hold onto a property tax-free, there is a kind of entanglement there between the church and the state because the state is, in effect, making a gift to the church. Taken to an extreme, some might even argue that it's the government's responsibility to bail out cash-strapped religious groups and that it's right to do so as long as we give money to all religious groups. I want to stop that idea in its tracks. Everything already swings too far in favor of aiding religions. We need to stomp this out now to ensure America never becomes a theocracy. Our democracy depends on it.

When religions don't pay taxes, they effectively steal from the rest of society. Or, put another way, when religions don't pay taxes, this is evidence that our government is subsidizing religions. Let me use consumerism as an example. Under consumerism, there is a mental and emotional disconnect between consumption and production. That is, we rarely link our consumption to its equal or correspondent need for production and the time it requires. This disconnect starts when we are still children. As toddlers, we are programmed to link consumption with positive emotions. We badger our parents for toys. Underneath our innocent and immature desires for new stuff, there is a connection building in our brain—The idea that stuff can induce positive emotions without consequence. And because our parents pay the tab, such mental connections carry a destructive payload. We grow up believing that there are no consequences for us, for our society, or for our environment when we buy new things. Of course, that's just not true. Everything is connected.

Similarly, most churches in America seem to operate as though what they do shouldn't matter to anyone who's not part of the congregation. Give them the toys they want and then leave them alone. I think the tax-free handout toying around needs to stop. I am not going to leave it alone.

I admit, it was very scary, but also refreshing when I opened up to the possibility, I was actually living a delusion when I was religious. This hurt my ego at first tremendously. I studied and thought and read some more and

thought and thought. Until I was ready to act and come out as a nonbeliever, secular activist, a humanist, a free thinker, and an atheist. I also realized this by conversing openly with other kinds of non-religious people. Before, I thought they might be heathens or bad people that I should either be avoiding or actively trying to bring to Christ.

Typically, religions like to grab ahold of you and have 1:1's with religious leaders if you begin to doubt. They want to get to you first if you are having real doubts. I would encourage you to talk to both a religious person and a non-religious person. See for yourself. Get different perspectives before making up your mind. See if you can pick out some of the cracks in either and see where truth is. For me, the answer became pretty clear after a lot of "soul-searching", only to realize the idea of a soul was a lie too. Isn't that ironic. Even more ironic perhaps, I still read the Bible. Some things in it are just plain silly. It's amusing still. I invite you to read the Bible for yourself.

In the 1950's, religious fever crept into our government and our country's motto. The original constitution of the United States that was ratified in 1789 had only one reference to religion. In article 6, it said, "No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States." Also, our original motto of the United States, adopted as part of our great seal by an Act of Congress in 1782, was: "E Pluribus Unum". (Its wonderful meaning is this: Out of many, one.) Congress changed it 174 years later in 1956 to "In God We Trust."

This supports religions that believe in fake deities. I strongly disagree with this move. Furthermore, the original Pledge of Allegiance, actually written in 1892 by a Baptist minister, did not include the words "under God." Those words were added by congress in 1954. I disagree with this added change too. I now do not say that part out loud ("under God") when I say the Pledge and I will work to have that part removed from our pledge and back to the way it was. (Every now and again it comes out by accident because it has been drilled so hard in my head.)

Religious groups may cry foul and say there are many other important things to work on than these items. This is bull. You can walk and chew gum at the same time. Likewise, we can work on lots of issues all at once. Everything is important. This is just another very important thing. But it needs to be dealt with to ensure our country is tipped back to the secular side. We cannot give an inch for reasons mentioned in the previous chapter. If we tax churches, the “god” who sustains the religion will be revealed. Money!

When one side says we need to work on “other things”, it just a guise as distraction from something they obviously don’t want changed. But change is coming and needed.

Religious folks recognize that if these changes occur, it is a direct reflection on their religion losing influence and power. And we all know why they don’t want that to happen. Money and pride. Religions are even audacious enough to push for prayer in our public schools to their make-believe super entities. This is wrong to do to our children on so many levels. We need to stop these religions in their tracks, we need to urgently speak out against these efforts, and we need to do it now.

“You are chocking. I have two choices. 1) I preform the Heimlich maneuver. 2) I pray for you. Which do you want me to do?” – Dr. Lawrence Krauss.

Until theists learn that they cannot force others into their belief system, there will always be a need to keep the arguments against religion sharp and to keep others informed.

The Center for Freethought Equality says: Across the country, there's a new surge of cities and states mandating that government buildings, public schools, license plates, and police cars display the words “In God We Trust.” This surge isn't a coincidence. Some Christian nationalists are using their power to legitimize their views.

Christian nationalists want “In God We Trust” to pervade all our public spaces, setting the foundation for their plan to convince voters that their

extremism is normal. This isn't hyperbole, and this isn't an overreaction: This is a very real warning about the toxic ideology that Christian nationalists have been able to infect our political discourse with.

They invaded the Capitol saying “Jesus is my savior. Trump is my president”.

On January 6th, the world watched as armed Christian Nationalists stormed Capitol Hill to stop Congress from formally certifying the Electoral College vote. Armed not just with guns but with Christian flags and signs bearing explicit religious references as well.

It should be stated without a doubt, the insurrection that took place in Washington, D.C, is inexplicably linked to the anti-democratic Christian Nationalism movement in this country.

The events of January 6 disturbed and grieved me. I consider myself a freethinking independent centrist. I think the best way to unify our city, state and country is to lean a little bit right-center on fiscal issues and a little bit left-center on social issues. I want to make sure readers know that have voted for republicans, democrats, 3rd parties, and independents before. We are all one nation.

It was painful to watch this event take place—people deciding to stop our democracy at work with violence. We are so fortunate to have the democracy we have. We need to work to keep it by letting the democratic process play out even when we don't like the result of an election. If you believe you are right, a long sustained democratic effort is much more admirable in a civilized nation than a short burst of anger through violence because you did not get your way.

Peacefully protest, get to work, and vote again. This was a painful lesson for some to learn that are behind bars now. I hope posterity takes note. For a couple hours those that broke into the capital probably felt very heroic and strong. However, after they stumbled out, reality set in. Now for the rest of

their lives, they are paying for it. If you want to be a real hero, get to work in your communities and be a champion for democracy.

If any good can come from it, (although I almost omitted this) perhaps the words of one former president will shed some light on how: “I hold it that a little rebellion, now and then, is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms are in the physical. Unsuccessful rebellions, indeed, generally establish the encroachments on the rights of the people, which have produced them. An observation of this truth should render honest republican governors so mild in their punishment of rebellions, as not to discourage them too much. It is medicine necessary for the sound health of government.” -Thomas Jefferson

Chapter 2

A Pandemic Heist

Re·li·gion /rə'lijən/

Noun

- (1) A particular system of belief and/or worship of an imaginary god, gods, or supernatural beings.
- (2) A lifelong con job on the gullible masses.
- (3) A “bubble” that is about to burst.

Gorgeous rays of sunlight are beginning to shine through the windows in the sunroom where I'm sitting in my home. Birds are chirping, and squirrels are making their way into a pear tree just on the other side of the pane of glass in front of me. (They gorge themselves there at the start of each day.) It's another beautiful summer morning in Cincinnati, Ohio.

I've made it no secret that I enjoy the challenge of running for political offices. I wish more people would too. The more diverse the options are for voters, the better, I think.

Although religion is my chief topic in this book, I want to acknowledge and emphasize that we have far more pressing issues facing our city, state and

country. To learn more about where I stand on these other important topics affecting our society, please visit the issues page at my website: www.voteforkennedy.org.

Some might say that my views on religion should be private or that they're off limits in the realm of politics. That's the kind of thinking I hope to help change. Because nothing should be off-limits. We should be able to discuss whatever we choose, openly and honestly.

Another thing: I want to acknowledge that sharing my status as "nonreligious" is usually not great for any campaign nowadays. Candidates who speak out against religion don't win elections often in the United States of America... Yet.

That's a shame. And it must change. According to some statistics: More than one in five adults now identify as nonreligious—one of the fastest growing segments in American society. These are human beings who care deeply about their communities. Human beings like you and me. Human beings who can and should run for office. But our representation in government does not yet reflect this growing trend.

No matter what, I will devote every effort to improving the lives of ALL people while also proudly and unapologetically advocating for the rapidly growing number of nonreligious people here and beyond. In the past, non-religious people kept quiet about their views or were ostracized. But change is coming. Non-religious people are showing up, standing up, and speaking up in greater numbers than ever before.

Religion rejects scientific fact. Consider how evolution is portrayed by many Christians as being at odds with their own made-up narratives about humanity's origins. As a result, Christianity's anti-science positions are finding their way into rules, ordinances, and laws discriminating against LGBTQIA+ people, limiting women's reproductive freedom, and restricting scientific research (just to name a few).

During the height of our recent and ongoing global pandemic, for instance, some religious folks had been in denial, leading to many needless deaths. However, the pandemic proved that, for some religious groups, having people show up for religious services mattered more than the people themselves. Why did this happen in church after church? Because collecting tithes and offerings—making money for the machine—is more important than actual people to some. How did they do it? How did some religious leaders persuade people to give up their lives while opening their wallets? Some, but not all, leaned hard on the language of freedom and rights. You have a right, some argued, to go where you want when you want, no matter the cost to your own health, let alone the cost for your community. People do have the right, protected by the constitution, to assemble freely. People do have the right to choose to harm themselves. But I also have the freedom of speech to call some religious leaders out for the harm they caused here.

Here's the thing about some religious leaders invoking the right to freely assemble: it's mainly about the money to them. They are running a business of scamming people. Many religious leaders and their followers feel the need to keep it going even during a pandemic. Some followers might actually believe that it is "essential". Those followers drink from the Kool-Aid hard. (By the way, the phrase "drinking the Kool-Aid" refers to followership of religion at its worse. It was coined after a delusional, pseudo-guru and religious leader named Jim Jones led his cult, the Peoples Temple, to mass suicide. Over 900 people, including 304 children, killed themselves by drinking from a vat of grape-flavored punch laced with cyanide.)

But there's a secondary reason for some religious leaders working so hard and shouting so loud about their right to hold large gatherings during the height of a pandemic. If people spend too much time away from the religious brainwashing rituals, there might be room for reason to start working and for doubts to creep in. A Barna report released in July 2020 found that one in three practicing Christians had stopped attending church during the pandemic. In June 2021, the Associated Press reported that in a survey of Christians who had attended church regularly pre-pandemic, nearly one in

ten had no plans to return even if all pandemic restrictions were lifted and all health risks resolved.

Maybe you're wondering why any of this matters. The problem is that bad religious behavior has costs for the rest of society. Here's just one example. The U.S. Roman Catholic Church was particularly busy during the pandemic. Not by being generous, but by taking. Catholics used a special and unprecedented exemption from federal rules to amass at least \$1.4 billion in taxpayer-backed coronavirus aid with many millions going to dioceses that had already paid huge settlements or sought bankruptcy protection because of clergy sexual abuse cover-ups. News outlets failed to provide this story the ongoing hard coverage it deserved. It was just a blip. Shame on the media. Many aspects of our society have been complicit in providing cover for religious institutions, including and especially the mainstream media outlets.

Here's where it gets even worse. According to an Associated Press analysis of federal data released in July 2020, the church's haul may have reached or even exceeded \$3.5 billion. That's right, a global religious institution was among one of the biggest winners in the U.S. government's pandemic relief efforts. Our government basically gave an enormous offering to the Catholic Church. Even if this doesn't violate our Constitution's establishment clause that forbids government from aiding a particular religion, it does set bad precedent. And it's a colossal waste of taxpayer money—funds that should be going to American workers and families.

The truth is that houses of worship and faith-based organizations that promote religious beliefs aren't usually eligible for money from the U.S. Small Business Administration. This money is intended to help businesses. But as the economy plummeted and jobless rates soared, Congress let faith groups tap into the Paycheck Protection Program. That \$659 billion fund was created to keep Main Street businesses solvent and American workers employed. It never should have gone to the Catholic Church. But by aggressively promoting the payroll program and marshaling resources to help affiliates navigate its shifting rules, Catholic dioceses, parishes (and many

other ministries) received approval for at least 3,500 forgivable loans. Take a moment to wrap your head around this. I was stunned. So many pastors and priests advise faith adherents to pray for God's help when encountering personal financial difficulties. But many of those same church leaders went straight to the government for money to solve their own problems. There's just something about this that seems not quite right and possibly fraudulent. But let's move on. There's a lot more to cover.

Chapter 3

Religions Make Bogus Claims

While our ancestors have been around for about six million years, the modern form of humans evolved about 200,000 years ago. But as far as we can tell, the “Christian God” has only shown up in human history for the last 6,000 years (give or take). I pick on the Christian religion a lot because it is the one that I grew up in. Also, it’s the one most people in my community can relate to because it’s the one most present in our culture here. However, all religions are scams. I am an equal opportunity religion basher but let’s continue with Christianity for now as an example. Genetics has proven the Adam and Eve story in genesis to be impossible.

“You believe that all humanity came from Adam and Eve, and humans have not evolved at all since. So, tell me; between the two of them, which was black, which was white, and which was Asian?” -Richard Dawkins.

Without the Adam and Eve story, there would be no “original sin”. Without original sin, there would be no need for a savior from it. Without the need for a savior, the Christian religion falls apart completely. The whole religion is based on and relies upon a story that could not be true. All evidence points to this fact.

“An amazing thing happens when people are exposed to information previously withheld to them. It’s called knowledge. I’m an atheist now because I’m not in kindergarten and I have an internet connection.” -Hans Kim.

The moment that you say that the bible needs to be “interpreted” you have already lost the debate. Is there an ultimate authority here on earth telling you how to interpret the bible? No. (If anyone tells you otherwise, they are trying to manipulate you.) This means that what the bible says depends on the whims of the person interpreting the bible. Religion uses fear driven theology. Hell is used as a fear tactic to keep you in church and Christian. Exploring other hell theology means you are denying ‘god’. “Agree with what we believe, or you can find another church etc.” Doctrine is pushed over love and acceptance. Your salvation can be lost and is dependent upon your strict obedience.

The story of Christianity also sounds funny. Take out your BS radar for a moment and let’s attempt to be skeptical of Christianity. It may be difficult for some. It certainly was for me for more than three-and-a-half decades. Cut yourself some slack if you were not skeptical before. Many of us are trained that faith is a virtue. Faith is comically pretending to know stuff you can’t possibly know. Eventually, if you keep studying the religion, you might finally raise an eyebrow. The entire basis of Christianity is a God impregnating a teenager without her consent at first for the actual purpose of killing his own child. Yep, Christianity is the popular belief that a celestial Jewish baby, who is also his own father, born from a virgin mother, died for three days so that he could ascend to heaven and then make you live forever. This, only if you accept him as your savior, lord, and master so he can remove an evil force from your spiritual being that is present in you. Bonus points if you symbolically eat his flesh, drink his blood, and telepathically tell him stuff. You need him because all of humanity is immoral. Again, because a woman, made from a man's rib, was hoodwinked by a talking reptile possessed by a malicious angel to secretly eat forbidden fruit from a magical tree. This actually sounds perfectly plausible if the repetition of the stories starts a young age or you are gullible. The entire basis of Christianity is that

you are broken, weak, sinful, and inherently bad. Then it tells you that you only Jesus can save you. Some other religions follow a similar blueprint.

Having faith in a thing does not make that thing true. Your faith doesn't even make it probably true. Having faith has no weight on truth at all. Having faith simply means you will believe in a thing if it's not true.

Some may say, "Well, I only believe in some parts of Christianity." Or, they might say, "I'm spiritual but not religious?" These are people who prefer to make up their own stuff, rather than believe stuff others have made up.

Think about it. If someone claiming to save you said to you: "I created man and woman with original sin. Then I destroyed most of them for sinning. Then, I impregnated a woman with myself as her child so that I could be born. Later I will kill myself as a sacrifice to myself to save all of you from the sin I gave you in the first place." And if you believed this person, both you and this person may be on an acid trip of some kind. Again, the entire basis of Christianity is God impregnating a teenager for the actual purpose of killing his own child. The whole thing is ludicrous.

Religious beliefs are not 'sacred', immune to criticism, or immune to poking fun of like I just did. They are beliefs in your head based on where you were born, how you were raised, and who influenced you. Simply having religious beliefs does not make them true or obligate others to respect them.

Education and critical thinking skills are the key to realizing this. How many times have you heard the story of Passover for example? If you were religious, it was probably read from the Bible and filtered through a religious leader to provide their version of the "context" you "needed" to know. However, actually apply critical thinking and the story changes from 'yay-for-god' story to—"Oh, yes! The story of Passover. Where an all-knowing god needed help to kill the right babies. Yeah, I know that one. Because lamb's blood helps a god kill the right kids." This is ridiculous folks.

If you read the Old Testament Saga of the Israeli return to Canaan, it is a chilling narrative. The only difference between them and other primitive tribal societies was that others had many gods. Technically, they did too. Most folks don't know this, but the 3rd commandment says, "Thou shall have no other gods before me." Basically, you can have as many as you want as long as I am on top, says the god of the Bible. Religious stupidity. Read for example, Psalm 82:1. "God has taken his place in the divine assembly; he judges among the gods." Who are the other gods?

Furthermore, imagine starting a war over who is better: Spiderman or Ironman. With religion and gods, people have started these kinds of wars before. Religion is when grown adults argue about who has the better invisible friend and can sometimes use physical violence to make their "point".

There are many religious beliefs to unlearn. Such as: 'I am nothing without my god', 'my desires are sinful', 'your spiritual self is all that matters', 'I am responsible for saving others', 'there is only one way to live', 'I am broken and need to be saved,' or 'I cannot trust myself or lean into my own understanding'.

Some even have obsession with 'spiritual gifts' and 'spiritual warfare'. It can be overwhelming for the mind of some to realize it's a learned delusion. They have been taught that if something happens to you, then it's probably "spiritual attack".

Some have been taught that watching or reading things like Harry Potter will invite the demonic into your life. Some are told speaking tongues and prophecy are for all-believers. And felt less-than for not experiencing that. Until they realize it's an act or role to play. Some have felt uncomfortable or pressured to worship in an outwardly expressive way. These are all brainwashing techniques some religions use. Religion is the practice of training your mind to ignore evidence, logic and reason, while being able to believe in fairytales based on faith alone... And being proud of it.

How about money and finances? Some preachers have a small sermon before and after the offering about tithing. Perhaps telling you God will honor your finances if you start giving more to the church. They may add in that the guilt you feel for not giving more is “god’s” indication to you telling you something. Telling you that maybe he wants you to give more. Because... He loves you and look at all the wonderful things he can do etc...

“Religion has actually convinced people that there's an invisible man living in the sky who watches everything you do, every minute of every day. And the invisible man has a special list of ten things he does not want you to do. And if you do any of these ten things, he has a special place, full of fire and smoke and burning and torture and anguish, where he will send you to live and suffer and burn and choke and scream and cry forever and ever 'til the end of time! But He loves you. He loves you, and He needs money! He always needs money! He's all-powerful, all-perfect, all-knowing, and all-wise, somehow just can't handle money!” — George Carlin

How about ‘service abuse’: Not given a fair wage if you are on staff, saying it’s a service to God. Guilting you into volunteering and that it’s your moral obligation to the church. Church staff only having relationship with you to ensure you keep serving. If you stop serving, that’s the only time they reach out relationally.

How about ‘sin’ watching: Told your sin was hindering you from experiencing God. Told it created a stronghold for the devil and demons to enter into your life. Felt guilt, shame, or self-hatred for sin because the church is hyper focused on it. Yep – “Religion is regarded by the common people as true, by the wise as false, and by the rulers as useful.”- Seneca.

Let’s talk about ‘salvation’: If the person/god offering you salvation is also the one threatening you with punishment, it’s not really salvation. It’s terrorism and extortion. Salman Rushdie once said, “Respect for religion has become a code phrase meaning ‘fear of religion.’ Religions, like all other ideas, deserve criticism, satire, and yes, our fearless disrespect.” Once you have freedom from religion there is no human-made story that the mind can

create that will be as compelling as your freedom from religion. Religions are always manufacturing scenarios and counterarguments to keep you trapped in the illusions they conjure up. Stay true to reality.

Because of the way religion draws people together, organizes their thinking and living, and motivates them in the world, whoever leads a religious movement has massive influence over people. They also have the power to derive wealth from that same religious movement. To con another human in this way is immoral, no matter the reason. It doesn't excuse the religious leader if they are outright lying or if they are simply delusional. I hold them accountable for their actions and claims.

Many have claimed that Christianity is a religion of kindness, of love, and of care for fellow human beings. But the reality is that kindness belongs to all of humanity. Being kind to someone is great, but religions like Christianity didn't create kindness nor did their imaginary tri-god. It was there all along with the first evolved humans nearly 200,000 years ago. A mother's comfort, a warm hug, or a smile are examples of kind things beyond religions and creative man-made gods. Religions don't get to copyright, trademark, or brand kindness because they didn't create it. Humans did. By being, well, human. It is in us and in our nature along with other things. Non-religious people and religious people both know how to be kind and the opposite.

Maybe you're following me so far, but just in case you aren't, I'd like to break down some of the "logic" of Christianity to demonstrate what I mean by taking a close look at the "free will" preached in American Christianity.

According to the Bible, the Christian God says he gives us "free will" to choose to follow him. But what does that mean exactly? Easy enough. Let's compare the American style "free will" with what perhaps Christians mean when they use the term to talk about their religion.

America's Constitution and laws give us, its citizens, a "free will" system, empowering us with the freedom to join or practice any religion we wish, or none at all. That's right, the government protects our right to religious

freedom as well as the right to reject the notion of gods and religion altogether. We have free choice in these matters. We have the right to pursue happiness. However, in certain cases, our religious rights may be curtailed by other legal restrictions. For instance, we have clear laws that prohibit us from hurting other people or their property. We cannot be a hazard to society or a danger to ourselves. As for those who violate the law, we have an imperfect justice system that applies punishments intended to fit the severity of the crime.

In Christianity, you are not permitted to believe anything you want. You must choose Jesus or risk receiving the harshest punishment, eternal torment in hell. And it's not enough to just be a good or virtuous person. You have to make a specific commitment. Otherwise, your virtue doesn't count. It's almost like a kind of game. Free will is offered, but there are levers involved here: fear, threat of punishment, guilt, and shame. This is why some argue that Christianity is authoritarian in nature.

Christians believe that their god knows our thoughts and that the god created us to think. But we are required not to think for ourselves; we must follow Christian doctrine and teachings without questioning too much, doubting, or "rebellious against God." The Christian god knows who you were even before you were born and if your name is written in the "book of life" (Revelation 13:8). This means according to the Bible that before your birth, the Christian god already knew whether you would be spending eternity in hell, yet he allowed you to be born. I'm not exaggerating: "This is the second death, the lake of fire, and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:14–15, NRSV). There is nothing quite like backing an empty promise... with an empty threat... Hell. So dead humans get to take their nervous systems along with them when their invisible souls and float off? Wow. Unbelievable.

Let's break it down by considering the classic "omni" traits that Christians associate with their god: The first is omnipotence, meaning all-powerful. Christians hold that their god has the power to do anything, but there's an interesting twist to how they talk about the god's omnipotence. Some

Christians might hold that this god has the power to create rules that even its own self is subject to. Is the Christian god powerful enough to make something even more powerful than he is? Hmm... Can this god make a boulder too heavy for him to lift? How do they know their god is a “him” anyway? Did their god throw a gender reveal party? Or, if not, have they seen god’s penis? If not, how can they know for sure this god is a he? Maybe their god is actually a woman? If so, have they seen god’s vagina for proof? Maybe black holes are just one of many of the Christian god’s vaginas. Or maybe their god has both parts. Or no parts? Maybe their god is actually trans. But I digress. Some may laugh at questions like this, as it’s obviously tautology. But these questions are not off limits. If there are bold claims, we can all ask bold questions. And silly ones too. Polite questions get boring after a while. Again, nothing is too “sacred” not to be mocked.

But then they claim that a ‘third’ of god, in the form of Jesus, had to die on the cross (and had to let humans kill him) in order to satisfy the law of blood atonement that this god established. What Christians argue is essentially that their god somehow ended up giving humans the power to kill him because there was no other way for God to save humanity. It’s enough to make your head spin: “I am God. I had a son. He was also me. He was a man, though. I had him killed. He came back. I did it to save you from how I made you etc.” All this nonsense, came from a period in human history when sacrifice of animals and people for crazy ideas, for power, for plain stupidity or other various reasons was mainstream. So, the father condemned me? But the son wants to save me... And they’re the same dude?

Next is omnibenevolence, meaning all-good. I want to show you how this trait comes into conflict with the prior trait, a Christian god’s omnipotence. If a god was powerful enough to create all things, then it seems this god is responsible for everything—good and evil. Again, note the inconsistency. This god cannot be all-good and also be the architect of evil. And I’m not twisting Christian theology, either, to make this point. St. Augustine, the bishop of Hippo (in modern-day Algeria) from 396 to 430 CE, argued that his god created everything that is—the universe and everything in it—out of

nothing or ex nihilo. This god not only allows evil to exist, but this god created a universe that allows for the existence of horrendous evil.

The third is omniscience, meaning all-knowing. But think about it. If a god were all-knowing, this means the god knew before he began the creation of the world that he would one day become so disgusted by what he had made that he would destroy it all, as told in the story of Noah (Genesis 6–10). And if this god were all-knowing, then god knew before he began the creation of the world that he would one day be required to send his own son (John 3:16), condemn his own son to death (Luke 22:42), and look away while his son was crucified on a cross (Matthew 27:46), just to save humanity from the problems god had already let into the world (John 3:17). Couldn't an all-knowing god and all-powerful god have planned to avoid having to sacrifice his own son?

The stupidity of Christianity is heavy. So, let's go back to something lighter for a moment. Penises. (Something so light, just a thought can raise it.) Did you know one night the Christian God showed up to kill his buddy Moses. Moses's wife cut a part of their son's penis off and rubbed it on Moses' feet. This act of mutilation pleased the god so much, he decided not to kill Moses. Read all about it in Exodus 4:24-26. (By the way, if you you're having to spend the first weeks of your son's life caring for a wound on his penis, you're doing parenting wrong. We'll talk about why circumcision is child abuse and a human right violation later. That's a bit heavier.)

The Bible shows that this god reacts to events and reacts to human deeds, such as "sin". The character (And it is a created character by humans) of this particular fictional god is reactive. This god becomes angry, regretful, and delivers wrath when he is displeased. This effectively highlights a significant problem with a belief in omniscience because an all-powerful god would have no need for these actions and childish emotions if he knew the outcome of all future events. The god would know that his creations only do what is in their nature to do.

If this god were omniscient, having all knowledge, this would mean that he created the angel Lucifer, knowing that Lucifer would one day become the Christian God's evil adversary. This, causing humans to be damned for eternity starting with Adam and Eve. (Which, at the beginning of the chapter, we discussed the impossibility of that story due to genetics.) It would mean this god created hell itself, fully knowing humans would wind up there. It would mean this god created humans, knowing they would endure enormous suffering in life on Earth and in the afterlife.

Think about how so many of these traits, when combined, become impossible to sustain logically. All-knowing eliminates all-powerful because this combination takes away the god's ability to choose. If this god were omniscient, it would mean that all future events are known. Events are therefore unchangeable because the god knows the outcome of the future. The Christian god's own actions would therefore be predetermined; the god would not have the power to make a new decision, or to choose.

All-good eliminates all-knowing because this combination suggests that the god is incompetent. Evil, appearing sometime shortly after or at the beginning of creation, is responsible for the injustice and suffering of humanity. If this god created everything and is all-good, either this god made horrendous mistakes with his creation and is incompetent, or god is all-good but cannot see future events, which would mean that the god is not all-knowing.

All-good eliminates all-powerful and vice versa because what we currently have, apparently, is a god that continues to allow evil to exist. An all-good god would wish to prevent human suffering; therefore, the god is either not powerful enough to stop it, or the god is powerful enough but does not do so, making the god not all-good.

Why does the god fail to help? Or why does the god choose not to help? Because of another man-made concept of 'sin' entering the world that through this god's plan into chaos? Nope. Because the god is a character

made up by humankind to help those that buy into the nonsense most accumulate power, influence over others, and money? Yes.

If a super-entity is ALL knowing, and I pass gas... Then this super-being thing HAS to know what it smells like, right? So, this god of MUST know what it smells like down to every last detail and atom — Whether it be rotten eggs or the nasty ‘tire-on-fire’ kind... Hmm. Think about that next time you let one loose. You are basically farting in the lord’s face! So, you might want to squeeze those cheeks and hold it in if you are trying to get to an imaginary heaven. Unless you want your super entity to gag! As for me, religion all smells fake... So, pass the beans! And the gas! The bible even brags that god is strong like a unicorn (Numbers 23:22KJV) Which actually kinda makes sense, since unicorns don’t exist either. Ok, enough about unicorns and farts.

Humans made up an imaginary Christian god. These humans did it the same way other humans have always created gods and stories. In their minds. Their reasons may also include the want for comfort, to the want to explain things they don’t really know, and the want for a sense of security. Want to explain something you cannot understand? Simply fill it in with “god” like a caulk-gun ‘fills in the gaps.’ It simplifies everything! This tactic is useful for an authority who ironically always uses a god to back up their own ideas about how the world works.

When is it finally appropriate to suggest that maybe... Just maybe... Any and all “gods”—simply do not exist and that it’s time to blow the whistle? According to some, never. According to some others, very frequently. What do you think?

Chapter 4

Fear

I'm increasingly convinced that an important moment in history took place when people first discovered the power of a religious story framed to capitalize on human fears. Almost nothing captures our attention like fear. It's an emotion we find hard to resist or control, and an effective religious leader is an expert at using fear disguised as positivity and loving others to capture and direct our attention. This is a tactic. You can resist this tactic by remembering you have the power to find your own personal peace and love without religion or gods etc.

Consider the full-length animated feature released by Disney in 1941, *Dumbo*. The little elephant at the center of this story has ears so big that he can use them to fly, but he only believes flight is possible when he is holding a magic feather in his trunk. That feather is a source of confidence and comfort for Dumbo. But Dumbo doesn't need the feather. One day while flying, the feather slips, and although Dumbo initially falters, he soon finds himself soaring spectacularly and realizes for the first time in his life that he never needed the feather. He had the strength he needed all along.

Religion and imaginary gods are like that feather. Many religious people find confidence and comfort from believing that some mysterious and invisible

divine being holds them up and helps them “fly” as long as they have faith “as small as a mustard seed” (Matthew 17:20 and Luke 17:6). In times of prosperity, this belief or faith is never challenged. In times of struggle, however, like Dumbo, a Christian might find their faith slipping. They might falter in their faith. Maybe this is why those who have survived great suffering in life are some of the wisest and most compassionate among us. Some people, like Dumbo, find that the feather has no power. Instead, the power to “fly” has always been within them.

Many religious people think their strength comes from an imaginary source of energy. Religion is toothless paper tiger. If you can ditch religion—you place your faith not in some imaginary force. Instead, you place hope and trust in yourself. I understand the power of the feather. A religion framed in fear is designed to break you down, to create dependence, to erase your agency while simultaneously claiming that you are always actively being taken care of by a supreme being. It sounds lovely, doesn't it? Taking care of your own ugly-ass self is anything but glamorous. But who you are is enough. You are enough. Not because a god does or doesn't decide you are. Because you get to decide if you are. I hope you decide you are good, and you are enough.

In times of prosperity, when everything is going right, that feather of religion seems to be working. That's why it's in times of trouble, when everything is falling apart, the effective religious leader can strike. You can ditch the feather. Or you can allow a religious leader to convince you that you need it. They know that Christians are most susceptible to fear when life is falling apart, when things are breaking down, when the world isn't working in their favor, and nothing makes sense anymore. Religious leaders know that this bleak place in life is an opportunity for them to divert your attention away from what you can do and toward the promise of some far-off imaginary heaven where “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. [and] There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain” (Revelation 21:4, NIV). In life's hardest moments, we can't afford to get stuck. Pay attention to what you can do. Deal with reality. Find a way to move forward. Remember that fear is a call to retreat and retrench, when what we need in such times is to find one small thing we can do. And then do it.

Religion is a bubble that is about to burst because the foundation of fear on which it's built isn't sustainable. You will face hardship. You may flounder or falter in flight. Fear will be a factor in your life, but you get to decide how to respond.

Think about it this way. You could spend your whole life imagining your power comes from the ghost of religion, or you could get to know yourself better than you ever have before, take stock of what limited resources you have available to you, and find a way—some way—forward.

Old Greek and Norse religions for example are now reclassified as mythology. The religions of today will be no different to our distant posterity. Are you religious? Do you think your religion is different? If yes, I would encourage you to think again with more reason and skepticism. By the way, if someone said to me: "Prove that Allah or the Spaghetti Monster God, or the Abrahamic god of the bible does not exist." I'd reply: "Ok, show me how it's done by proving Apollo don't exist either, and I'll use your method then." Or "prove to me that the invisible toy train hovering between these words on this page and your eyes balls does not exist" ... That is similar to the theistic religious saying "Prove that God does not exist."

The bible says not to test the lord your god. They do this and use fear to keep you from "testing". Test away. There is nothing there... In the civilized world what practical steps can we take to progress Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism and many others to the classification of mythology?

Like the Toy train. If you ever watch actors get an imaginary drink of water during an improv session, they are quite good. The best actor can really "see" and "feel" the water. Some actors report becoming lost in their part or role they play. Religion hopes to have this same effect on your mind. Where your role they want you to act, you actually become. If this happens, you have no idea of the real you anymore, just a brainwashed mold. Imagine what you could become if you released your religion "feather". Once you accept the truth fully, you then have nothing to lose, and everything becomes less scary.

If you silenced societal expectations to the point you could hear your true inner voice, how would it feel to embrace you at your core and to express who you are in the freest most genuine way possible? Everything that happens in life can be affected by the decisions you make in each moment. Those decisions can be based on fear. But they can also come from love—self-love; and love for humanity. You can make the world better by choosing better and by being better. You don't need religion for that. Feel free to laugh at the silliness of religion and imaginary gods if you want to.

So many of us follow a path mapped out by our fears because we want to fit in or because we're trying to be "practical" or "safe" or something else. What we really want in life seems illogical, irresponsible, or so impossibly out of reach and ridiculous that it would be foolish to seek after it. We never dare. Instead, like a dream deferred, our hopes when set aside can crush our spirits by their heaviness. But also, as the poet Langston Hughes writes in "Harlem," those dreams deferred can boil over and explode. Religion doesn't stand a chance against the pent-up human desire for a better world. Pay attention, not to your fears, but to those secret dreams and unspoken hopes. These are the source of that power you already carry within.

Of course, anyone can fail at what they don't want, but why would anyone choose to live that way? Take a chance. Do what you love. Pay attention to your dreams. Let go of the feather. And figure out how to live out hope one decision at a time, one step at a time, through your own actions. Working to free humanity from religion and imaginary god figures is this for me. I want people to know how powerful they are without religion and imaginary deities. This is my passion, and I believe the best thing for us as a human race is to peacefully and patiently sluff off religion. Let it slowly waste away and trust that someday religion might be little more than a chapter in our history books, something we can look back on with relief, knowing how far we've come since then. And we'll get there by continuing to invest in education and science and human potential, not religion, not lies, not fear. By the way, "Trust the science" is the most anti science statement ever. Questioning science is how you do science. Science also needs to welcome

those that say, “prove it”. For the most part, I think science does this better than religion. I could be wrong though. What do you think?

Some religions threaten you with eternal punishment because they cannot survive without your fear. Fear is the currency of control. Consider this: everything you gain in life will fall apart someday. Nothing is permanent. In a way, at the end of your life, all that’s left of you is what’s in your heart and all the ways your heart touched the hearts of others. That’s why I want to pour out my heart to all of humanity with everything I have before my life is spent. I want to free others from the nonsense of religion, so humans can go back to being human and look to a bright future for all of humanity. Maybe we can inhabit another earth-like planet out there like Kepler 442-b. We don’t have to be mindless faith machines eager for the world to end so that we can go to an imaginary fantasyland. Let’s make the world (and maybe even other worlds) a place worth living. We are real. I believe in us. Go humanity.

Chapter 5

Freedom of Speech

Let's go back to some of what I mentioned in the beginning of the book. I want to change the status quo and normalize politicians speaking out against religion. Why call it freedom of speech if you can't really say what you think these days? This is a question that comes to my mind whenever the topic of freedom of speech and religion is raised. It seems logical to some people that religion should be spared from public critique. But nothing is too hallowed to be examined or questioned. And if anything is labeled as such by a society, alarm bells should be going off in your mind because manipulation is likely involved. Religion is subjective. People are free to choose their belief system. People should also have the right of free speech in regard to religion.

Do you remember the controversial pictures of the prophet Muhammed made in Denmark. The Jyllands-Posten Muhammad cartoons controversy (or Muhammad cartoons crisis) began after the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten published twelve editorial cartoons in September 2005, most of which depicted Muhammad, a principal figure of the religion of Islam. The newspaper announced that this was an attempt to contribute to the debate about the criticism of Islam and self-censorship. Muslim groups in Denmark complained, and the issue eventually led to protests around the world, including violent demonstrations and riots in some countries.

Islam has a strong tradition of aniconism, opposing the use of idols, and it is considered highly blasphemous in much of Islamic tradition to visually depict Muhammad. This, compounded with a sense that the cartoons insulted Muhammad and Islam, offended many. Some Muslims may argue that you can't criticize Islam if you haven't read the Quran. That same argument, applied to Christianity, would prohibit a critique of Christianity by anyone who hasn't read the whole Bible. The Pew Research Foundation reported in 2021 that 63 percent of Americans are Christian. The Barna Group finds that only one in five Americans has actually read the Bible. Although it's nearly impossible to identify from these two studies exactly how many Christians have actually read the Bible, even if every single Bible-reading American were Christian, that would still mean that less than one in three Christians has earned the right to critique their own religion.

What people are actually claiming when they require familiarity with THEIR holy texts is a kind of religious exclusivity. But if they're right, and Islam is the only true religion, then based on today's world population about 2.2 billion Christians will perish in hell for eternity. Or if *they're* right, and Christianity is the only true religion, then 1.5 billion Muslims will perish in hell for eternity. Here's the thing: What if I don't believe either religion is true? What do you believe?

What is your opinion on headscarves or hijabs? By the way, here is a quote for you to think about: "Every woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled shames her head—it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved." Some Christians may try to point out that the Bible doesn't oppress women like the Quran does. But that quotation above is from 1 Corinthians 11:5 (in the Bible). Or how about: "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet." (1 Timothy 2:11-12) That passage from the Bible is just ridiculous too. Honestly, buy any religion's so-called holy book, read what suits you, and you're likely to become a theist. But buy any religion's so-called holy book, study it, and the religion, and you just might become an atheist instead. For example, why would anyone take moral direction from a book or a deity that ordered innocent children to be killed

and young virgin girls taken as sex slaves? It's in the Bible! (Numbers 31:17-18) Women have had an especially hard time because of religion. Why a woman would want to be religious is beyond my understanding. Many women cannot be leaders in certain religions. They have to be subservient. It can be argued that not only was religion man-made, but it was man-made for men. Take, for example, these passages below. How can anyone from any of the religions they originate from defend these lines?

Exodus 21 – 7-10: You can sell you daughter into slavery and allow her master to rape her.

Leviticus 19-20-22: You can rape your female slave and be forgiven but the slave must be punished.

Exodus 22-16-17: You can rape a virgin, but you must marry her and pay her father a dowry of virgins.

Quran 11/223: Women are yours to do what you please with.

Quran IV/34: Allah created women for men's enjoyment. Punish any who rebel against your desires.

Quran IV/15: If a woman is lewd, confine her until death.

Buddhism: If a man leads an evil life, his punishment will be reincarnation as a woman.

Jainism: If a woman is subservient enough to her man, she may be lucky enough to be reincarnated as a man in her next life.

Theravada Buddhism: Women cannot reach spiritual enlightenment.

A woman who bears a female child is twice as filthy as one who gives birth to a male... Leviticus 12:1-5

Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.
Psalms 137:9

Religious groups can get very angry when confronted, critiqued, called out for what their holy books say. They can get angry when their beliefs and lies are challenged. I will challenge them. Will you? I invite challenges back. Any religion can do its worst to me. I'll stand firm in what I say as long as I'm alive or until I am proven wrong. Too much of religion is motivated by fear and supported by ignorance.

“Jews, Christians, and Muslims believe that their holy books are so profound, so prescient of humanity’s needs that they could only have been written under the direction of an omniscient deity. An atheist is simply someone who has considered this claim, read the books, and found the claim to be ridiculous.” – Sam Harris.

Some religious folks may say: “You’ll find out when you stand before God on the final day of judgment.” Here’s what they’re actually saying: “I don’t have a reasonable rebuttal to your argument, so I am comforting myself with the image me being right and of you burning in hell for all eternity for not agreeing to share in my delusions.” That’s the thing: It’s called faith because it’s not knowledge. Faith, by its very definition, function, and character, can’t prove anything. It doesn’t work that way. The only way a theist’s explanations of reality work is if you pretend they do.

Getting back to the cartoon crisis, Danish Prime Minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, described the controversy as Denmark’s worst international relations incident since World War II. The incident came at a time of heightened political and social tensions between Muslim majority countries and countries in the West, following several, high-profile attacks, including the September 11 attacks, not to mention military intervention by the U.S. and others in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

Think about this: on any given day, there are likely more than 5,000 various “gods” being worshiped by humanity. But don’t worry, only yours is right.

I'd bet plenty of Quran/Bible thumpers might think of me as some kind of atheist fool (if they think of me at all). But pay attention to how they describe their gods—"spaceless, timeless, immaterial, and unprovable". Doesn't that sound at least a little bit like the definition of "nothing" as well? Don't ya think? An expression that has been helpful for me to remember is that a human without a god is still a human. But a god without humans is nothing.

"Is god willing to prevent evil, but not able?

Then he is not omnipotent.

Is he able but not willing?

Then he is malevolent.

Is he both able and willing?

Then whence cometh evil?

Is he neither able nor willing?

Then why call that god." – Epicurus.

The publication of the cartoons was a legitimate exercise in free speech, regardless of the content of the expression. It was important to openly discuss Islam without fear of terror, and the cartoons made important points about critical issues. The Danish tradition of relatively high tolerance for freedom of speech became the focus of debate. The ensuing controversy ignited a debate about the limits of freedom of expression in all societies, religious tolerance, the relationship of Muslim minorities with societies in the West, and relations between Islam in general and other religious groups, especially in the West. It seems to me that saying you are offended by someone else's free speech is like saying that "because I cannot handle my emotions, I need you to stop saying what you are saying." Some religious groups seem to have a hard time dealing with their emotions. Some religions more so than others.

Think about this: much of what is deemed "hatred" today is in fact the giving of offense. And shouldn't the giving of offense be viewed as a normal and acceptable part of a pluralistic society? Why should it be any different when it comes to religion? Yet governments and intellectuals in liberal democracies have often given only reluctant support to the value of freedom of

expression. In addition, they often employ language that obfuscates and relativizes the difference between words that wound and actions that kill. By their logic, those who insult religious feelings are extremists, no different from those who respond to insults with violence. Granted, insulting religion may not be a polite thing to do, but it certainly should not be something you put in the criminal code. That's censorship.

As we know, the act of insulting or showing contempt or lack of reverence for a religious deity or irreverence toward religious or holy persons or things is called blasphemy, and many countries have laws to punish blasphemy. This should not be a thing, but in recent years, we have seen increasing demands from religion that free speech should be limited. I think this is because religious groups like Christianity, Islam, and Judaism especially in the United States, have noticed that they are losing power. They petition governments in order to protect their religious sensitivities, but it should be remembered that my freedom to criticize religion is tied to the right of the religious believer to practice their faith free from fear of real persecution. So, whenever a religious person hears a criticism of their faith, they should be glad to hear it. It is a reminder that they are free to believe. In addition, whenever I'm challenged, I also feel proud, because their freedom also means I have mine. Challenges should be welcomed and accepted.

Ah, freedom of speech. It is so wonderful. I want to take a moment to bask in it and point out how wonderful it is. I'm also inspired in the moment by one of Blink 182's lesser-known songs too. "Shit, piss, fuck, cunt, cocksucker, motherfucker, tits, fart, turd and twat". It's actually quite a catchy song. I invite you to look it up. By the way, yes, as a reminder, I want to serve you in office one day.

I have high standards in regard to tolerance of freedom of speech. I will not censor what I say. So, no apologies for that curse word outburst I used above to make the point. I may or may not cuss anywhere else in this book, though. I have the freedom to cuss all I want and not to cuss all I want, and you do too. That is a beautiful thing. Ha.

All kinds of speech from “love” to “hate” needs to be protected. Because everyone’s definition of both might be slightly different to each individual person. I’ll never trust a government to define the boundaries of speech. However, any speech that threatens violence actually steals the freedom of speech from its intended victim. Violence silences. Ensuring the freedom of speech isn’t so much about what is said as it is about which people aren’t allowed to speak. If, in your community, certain institutions (like the church, synagogue, or mosque, for example) cannot be safely critiqued, that tells you something about who in that community isn’t enjoying freedom of speech.

By the way, if you haven’t figured out already, I am not writing this book to coddle and protect the status quo. There are way too many other do-nothing politicians ready for that task. Disruptive change doesn’t come from some mental jerking-off that sparks a fire one day and then is extinguished the next. I don’t even want to lead or have power. I would rather someone else do all that crap. I long for change. Big change. And unfortunately, change doesn’t just happen by wishing it. You have to go after it with everything you’ve got. Disruptive change comes from your heart every day of your life. Change like ensuring we actually have a secular government, change like taxing religions, change like outlawing circumcision for infant babies of both genders (which is barbaric and obviously child abuse), and much more.

So, if I haven’t been clear yet, let me be so now. If you are open to breaking free from your religion, this book aims to provide you a small disclosure that everything you’ve been taught, told, programmed, and brainwashed to believe in regard to your “one true religion” or “one true god” is quite possibly bull. Legendary bull. We’re talking about things that would make Ponzi feel way out-scammed. Uncomfortable truths, challenges to belief and possibly ego-shattering revelations are proudly on display in here. But hey, I could always be wrong. You be the judge.

Some may assign this book’s blunt language and potentially (but not intentionally) insulting tone to themselves and miss the point entirely. It has nothing to do with you. It’s not personal. It has to do with the fact that religion is a lie.

For many in the Christian religion, it's every Sunday. The lie is a ritual performed by religious leaders. The repetition causes a consensus fallacy: the idea that if many people believe something, it must be true. Consensus fallacies are how some ideas escape critical thinking and become acceptable to the masses, even in the face of opposing facts.

Religions like to attempt to cancel, isolate, and expel people that speak up. I will speak up and out against religion. I want to invite you to do the same. Or don't. Sit back and watch while others have the debate. There is nothing wrong with whatever you choose.

Personally, I think that not only is it great for humanity to speak out against religion, it's also fun. Some religious folks squirm with nervousness when called out for their beliefs. I know. I used to be a Christian, and I didn't like being criticized or critiqued for how I thought. It was uncomfortable, and I hated it at first. I wanted to say, "that's not kind, nice, or respectful gosh darn it!" But it was necessary for me to confront the truth and to grow up. In the words of Flemming Rose, "If a believer demands that I, as a nonbeliever, observe his or her taboos in the public domain, they're not asking for my respect, but for my submission."

I am thankful for all of the atheist authors and secular activists out there. You are my inspiration, and you are my heroes! There are too many to name here. And that is a good and encouraging thing.

Religion is a projector screen running a second story over your eyes. Religion wants us in front of that projector all the time. And the script for the movie running on that projector is: FEAR. Religion's script is full of fear under the guise of love. And the working title of the projection that they play is, "I'll never be enough. I'll never be good enough without this religion or imaginary deity of some kind." Stand up and kick down the projector. Walk out of the theater. Throw your arms up in the air. Live your life fully instead of just accepting and believing the projection religion has been playing for

you. Religion attempts to repackage and sell us something we already possess—freedom.

“Praying is like a rocking chair – it’ll give you something to do but it won’t get you anywhere.” – Gypsy Rose Lee

Dream up a good life and work toward that goal. Let go of how it comes to pass. Praying for rain won’t make it rain. It’s going to rain anyway or not for a while. Likewise, praying to a glass of milk will yield the same results as praying to a deity of some kind. Praying for your goals without doing anything is futile. You have to open the door and walk through it. If you are religious, that door may have been shut in your mind for a long time, and it can be scary to open that door and leave religion behind for the first time. It’s worth it.

Let’s talk about altruism: The belief in (or practice of) disinterested and selfless concern for the well-being of others.

“Altruism holds that man has no right to exist for his own sake, that service to others is the only moral justification of his existence, and that self-sacrifice is his highest moral duty. The political expression of altruism is collectivism or statism, which holds that man's life and work belong to the state - to society, to the group, the gang, the race, the nation - and that the state may dispose of him in any way it pleases for the sake of whatever it deems to be its own tribal, collective good.” -Ayn Rand

If you cannot leave a religion and speak out against it without being disowned by family and friends, then you are in a cult. Altruism is the principle and moral practice of concern for the welfare and/or happiness of other human beings or animals, resulting in a quality of life both material and spiritual. It is a traditional virtue in many cultures and a core aspect of various religious and secular worldviews. But, put the mask on yourself first.

The primary goal of your life is not to make others happy. You were not born with original sin. You are not a sinner. You did not inherit sin from

two ancestors named Adam and Eve. There was no Garden of Eden where a talking snake tricked Adam and Eve into sinning. You do not need to be saved from sin by a magic blood sacrifice from an ancient messiah who was sent to fix a problem your god supposedly created in the first place. Your laws do not need to come from a poorly written ancient holy book. There is no such thing as a god's will. You are not a 'child' of a god or deity. You are a person. You are a human being you are good enough as you.

“400 trillion to one. Those are the odds of becoming a human being. You are more likely to win the lottery 10 times in your life, than actually having a life. So can we please make this moment when you decide to stop dwelling and stop crying. Don't tell me how you blew your knee out in high school. It is time to take control. What, are you going to be sitting at 80-90 years old in a retirement home regretting all the things you didn't do? Take life by the throat and go out and execute. Everything that happened has happened. No more dwelling, no more complaining. So, right now. Wrap your head around this ridiculous gift that you were given. It's called life. Go step out and do your thing. The one thing you've always wanted to do or the 10, 50, 100 things you've always tried to do. Because the only thing that's keeping you back is the other people that are judging you. And who gives a fuck about them.” -Gary Vaynerchuk

Chapter 6

A Chance to Debate

I have a friend, who is arguably the most successful pastor in Cincinnati, Ohio. His name is Brian Tome. I challenged him to a debate about what he believes. For context, I attended his church, Crossroads, for more than a decade, so I heard him preach a lot. During this time, we met a couple times—once briefly at an event called Man Camp (a massive retreat for men on some land Crossroads owns) and another time when my four-person team won a light-hearted ‘Minute-to-Win-It’ style competition during Super Bowl Weekend. At Crossroads, Super Bowl Weekend is a big deal, and members of the church celebrate the unofficial American tradition of being excited for the big game with a “Super Bowl of Preaching”. Arguably, it is their most extravagant preaching event of the year, and to their credit, what is the least-attended weekend of the year for many churches here in the U.S., has become a top weekend of attendance for Crossroads Church.

Crossroad’s “Super Bowl of Preaching.” People eat it up. Literally. There’s free food, a massive gridiron-like display on stage, and goofy commercials during a preach-off between Brian and other well-liked preachers. (Sometimes, well-known Cincinnati broadcasters show up as surprise celebrity guests, making an appearance up on stage or the big screen.) Back to the preach-off.

One other notable preach-off counterpart, Chuck Mingo, is an energetic speaker. He is wildly good and talented—something he uses to his advantage. I met Chuck briefly during an orientation years ago, when I was a volunteer for Crossroad’s Kids Club, and he came and talked to the group of us volunteers. (‘Kids Club’ is their version of Sunday school for kids). Had Chuck been a sports coach, I would have played my heart out for him. As an aside, it strikes me as unfortunate that so many gifted orators turn to religion as a place to play out their talents, when there are so many other places where they could be making a difference in the world—not conning people. Thankfully, now Chuck devotes the majority of his time to UNDIVIDED, a program he founded that takes participants through life changing moment of racial healing. Much better... So long as religion hopefully stays out of it.

Oratory. I don’t always do a very good job of public speaking. Though, I work pretty hard at figuring out how to say what I need to say in a way that’s compelling and clear. In the religious arena, oratory is absolutely essential. In most jobs, you can come through the university system and be a lousy public speaker and still get a good job and have a great career. But the religious world doesn’t work that way. You have to be convincing. Good preachers are spoken-word poets, skilled salesman, storytellers, humorists, and actors all rolled up into one. To the credit of many religious leaders, they work very hard at honing their craft and getting better at public speaking every week.

Back to that Super Bowl Sunday, though. Because my team won the competition, we had the privilege of helping introduce Brian and Chuck for the 2016 preach-off as their top fans for the service. It was a huge production. There were lights swiveling around the church-arena, and the state-of-the-art sound system’s speakers made the announcer’s voice boom over the top of upbeat background music. My team-members and I got to run up and down the aisles high-fiving and jumping up and down like we had truly lost it for our preaching heroes.

I was still a mostly naive believer then. I'd grown up in the church, studied the bible, and felt Jesus deeply in my heart... Dopamine. But I knew next to nothing about truth behind religion back then. They say ignorance is bliss, and in some ways, it's true. I was oblivious to what I was participating in, and it was tons of fun. I was having a blast! Religion was my drug back then, which is how I think it is for lots of people. To be up on stage with these preachers for a moment during the introduction, was like rubbing elbows with greatness to me. I had watched them every week for years and had never met them before this day. They were then, and still are, Cincinnati celebrities. The show went on and it was absolutely amazing. Just like it is every year.

Anyway, fast-forward to 2021, and now a nonbeliever. This whole thing started to give me an idea years later. What if I could debate a religious leader in front of their congregation. Would anyone do it if I offered? Would they have enough bravery or guts to debate with me? Would I with them? How might Brian react if I ran the idea by him? Instead of preach-off with two people who believe virtually the same thing, why not an actual debate between two people that believe different things. After all, if someone feels they are right, why should they be afraid to?

I reached out to Brian. I told him I had an idea. I was a candidate for Cincinnati City Council at the time. I love our amazing city, and I want to have a positive impact on the city with my life. I want to use my life to make things better.

I also shared with Brian that because I'm now an atheist and currently an independent, I might be considered by some to be "the candidate without a prayer." Ha! I told Brian about some statistics indicating that when it comes to religion, one of the fastest growing groups in the U.S. were the "nones" or those that identify as nonreligious. And that because of this, I felt it would be important for religious folks and non-religious folks to find common ground. After all, how else are we going to get anything done as religions decline and people start to wake from their religious delusions?

Long story short, I challenged Brian to a debate around October 2021, close to election time. We could call it “Debate Sunday,” and really play up ‘Tome vs. The Atheist’. Or something like that. Maybe even he’d get more offerings during collection time. Or more nonbelievers would show up and he’d have a chance to convert them. Who knows? It would be a win for him in that sense and a win for me because I’d be letting other nonbelievers know they are not alone just by the simple act of debating someone. A win-win.

I told Brian that if he’d ever wanted to lay into an atheist in a debate, I could take the “punches” and that now was his chance (just as long as he could take some verbal “punches,” too). I was convinced we could find some common ground as a result, and I knew it would be great for our city while also making for a pretty exciting service at my old church!

In addition, a service like this would show people that Crossroads can accept some of the criticism it deserves as a religious organization and that its attendees had the ability to hang out with members of the non-religious or even anti-religious crowd. Pretty cool, I thought. I don’t think the two sides hate each other. I certainly don’t hate anyone even though I happen to be a critic of religion and religious leaders in general. We simply disagree on some things.

I’m always excited at the chance to ignite some skepticism which I think is healthy (and hopefully, perhaps, he might too). The end result would be a little more unity as we worked together to keep our city from becoming even more divided. Just like two football teams that rib on each other, in the end, we are all on the same team. Go USA!

I joked that I would not like for Crossroads to lose his tax-exempt status over an event like this, and I clarified that even though I don’t believe in super-entities or heaven or hell etc., I sure do support freedom of religion and that I want to be friends with Brian, regardless. I still do and that goes the same for any religious leader despite all my criticism. I had no idea how such a thing might affect the church or its status. I just wanted to know if Brian might be open to even considering something like what I had

envisioned. I was open to his thoughts and that whatever happened, I was rooting for him as a fellow human and for all the people of his church etc. (Perhaps just not the part where he lies anymore about imaginary deities for money as he does. That part about him, I simply don't root for.)

Brian's secretary, Molly, wrote back. She thanked me for the offer, told me Brian would read it, and that as far as politics go, this event I had in mind was likely something that Crossroads would steer clear of. So, I followed up with another note, making it clear that I'd love to put together some kind of collaboration in the future. I did not get a response back after that.

You never know, though. My offer to a debate with Brian on religion still stands. At any place of his choosing. I would want to make sure we both come out of the conversation stronger as two human beings who both love our city. I recently challenged him again more publicly with some videos and light jabs. Still nothing. (The videos are on Facebook and YouTube if you search for it on my pages.)

Since I think religious leaders are con artists, I find it my responsibility to call out the most successful ones in my area that I can. After not hearing anything for a while, I decided to make the challenge to any and all religious leaders in Cincinnati. I still have a challenge to any religious leader to a debate in front of their congregation. (Are there any local religious leaders that would enjoy debating/questioning a non-believer in front of your congregation? If so, message me.)

Only one Cincinnati religious leader has engaged with me about the prospect of debating in front of their congregation as I write this book. Who? David Smith, from Northstar Community Church in Loveland, Ohio. On their website it says the church exists to experience Jesus and equip others to do the same. Okay. He and I have met up at a local Starbucks and we go bowling on occasion now. Yes, he knows my thoughts about religious leaders, and yes, we are still friends! We debate, ponder stuff going on in our lives, laugh, and just hang. It's refreshing. So far, no debate in front of his congregation, but at least we've developed a friendship. Yes, you can firmly and deeply

challenge one another and still be great friends! David and I are proof of this.

If you have the capacity for friendship with someone you highly disagree with, I would highly recommend it. Most don't, I think. I know lots of people who are religious, and I'll challenge anyone to a religious debate. I'm not sure that's something most people want or need. They just need to know they belong as a human being to all of society no matter what they believe or don't believe. But I do want to challenge people in the way that makes them think. I want to open their eyes to their vulnerability and over-trusting nature. I think love is different to everyone. If someone puts a hard definition on love, that to me is manipulating. To say someone is incapable of love because of X, is stupid. You have the right to think and define what love means only to you. Others get to decide what love means to themselves. To me, love involves telling people the cold hard truth. Honesty. In this regard, religion (the way I see it) seems to act as an excuse for not thinking or questioning. It's a delusion. I don't think that's good. But regardless of your religion, just like with David, Chuck, or Brian, I would still like to be your friend. Could you stomach me as your friend? I'd be a friend with me. But I'm biased there. I can for you, no matter who you are, as long as you're alive. (Dead people or made-up holy book characters or deities can only be your friend if you have a delusional mindset.) Saying one has a "good" imagination when it comes to religion, is way too kind and undeserved in my opinion. It is an imagination of the detrimental kind. What do you think?

I think it is important for nonbelievers to challenge their local religious leaders and religious institutions publicly. If you feel the urge. I'd encourage you to go for it. Hey, supposedly even Jesus took on the religious leaders of his day according to one fantasy book I know. By the way, just because the Bible story mentions some real locations, does not make the Bible real. Take for example, Captain America. Just because the Marvel story mentions some real locations like the US and Germany, while the recipient of the "Super Soldier serum", Steve Rogers fights for American ideals as one of the world's mightiest heroes and the leader of the Avengers; does not make the that story

real either. Can you imagine if 2000 years from now, people rediscovered the Marvel series and started worshipping Captain America?

So, whether you are religious or not, I'd encourage you to not put religious leaders on a pedestal or anyone else for that matter. I remember when I was a believer, I'd look up to so many of them simply because they were supposedly men or women speaking a god almighty. Scammers. They are people playing pretend. I do not look up to them anymore. They are just other human beings. Albeit, delusional and salesy.

Speaking of one person's cold hard truth, another Cincinnati, Art Newton, had this to say about Brian and Crossroad's:

“Crossroad's Pastor Brian Tome's Prosperity Gospel profit center, Crossroads is a Lindner Family Property Development, period. A property development modeled after P&G products and designed and built by Procter & Gamble executives and Billionaire Carl Lindner Family Oligarchy.

Because it is a P&G product, Crossroad's multiple sites is designed to make a profit and be consumed by consumers willing to pay for it. Much like Cheer, Tide, and Gain, compete etc. They compete against each other similarly.

Brian Tome is simply the snake-oil salesman or front man for a profit center known as Crossroads, designed for Suckers. Prosperity Gospel dictates that you may prosper from the work and property of the less fortunate and it's okay because your prosperity comes first above all others. Crossroads is a cult of the prosperous.

Crossroads is con-artistry perfected and marketed, like all Procter and Gamble products are designed to make a Profit. Consumers have brand loyalty and the comments on social media about Crossroads prove it. It's brand loyalty is built in. It's a profit center's dream come true. Suckers.

Brian Tome's history as a failed property developer on Lower Klotter and throughout the West End of Cincinnati is rather interesting as well. It exposes the social security fraud scams ran by landlords and lawyers alike, Prosperity profiting off the back and property of others.

Brian Tome is simply a property developer for profit, as named in Federal Trial of P.G. Sittenfeld, the corrupt Cincinnati City Councilman on trial. Think about it: Why would a Crossroads "Church" pastor be named in a Federal Criminal property developer Trial?" -Art Newton.

Hmm... Interesting.

Many are brainwashed from a young age to think our religious leaders are great. As mentioned earlier, like "Sunday School", Crossroads has "Kid's Club". It's a gigantic brainwashing curriculum for young children that, I'm embarrassed to say, I personally volunteered for and took part in. I also did voiceover work for one of their young ministry videos. I wonder if it is still being used. I cringe if it is. I volunteered many Sundays to help "teach." However, I can forgive myself for being so delusional at one time. I hope you can too if you discover for yourself the lie of religion. I also hope you can move on with excitement about your newfound freedom and discovery if you find yourself skeptical and a nonbeliever like me. It has helped me be more skeptical in other areas too.

In politics today, religion is powerful. One of the ways we see religion working in U.S. politics is in the way that Christianity, in particular, seeks to control the narrative about what's moral, about what's right and wrong, and about what people should be allowed to do. Some of these "moral" arguments clearly cause harm and seems specially designed to protect privilege and status. This is something we need to push back against. If we care about democracy and democratic freedoms, then it's important to make sure these kinds of arguments aren't left unchallenged. Faith is unrestrained confidence to believe anything you want.

“Why does it not say anywhere in the bible that slavery is wrong? How is it possible that it is not immoral to own another person? Why isn’t that one of the ten commandments? ‘Thou shalt not own another person.’ You want to sit here and tell me that fornication is worse than owning someone? - Mira Sorvino

I believe we are about to see a major shift in the way everyday citizens feel about religion. I believe more and more people are going to push back against the narrative of America as a “Christian nation”. This will increase some of the social and cultural tensions we’re already facing, and I think this tension is a good thing at this level. We grow as a nation through tension. No one side is ever going to fully win. There will always be religious and non-religious alike. This is the genius of our American system.

We have checks and balances in and between our three branches of government. But we too, as individuals, join our voices. We become a collective. We speak up. We are checks and balances for one another. We also provide a powerful form of balance for our government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

There are inefficiencies. Some problems never get completely resolved because it takes so long for us to agree. It can be excruciatingly frustrating to wait for change. Some people can’t afford to wait for change. While others do everything in their power to stop progress, to prevent change, to keep things the way they’ve been for a while.

I’ll say this: America is not a place for certainty. Change is universal and pervasive. If you can live with this kind of tension—if you love the tension—then the United States is the place for you. I, for one, love the tension, and this is my home. There is creative potential in conflict, and that is our great strength! It is good!

There is also a need for unity but not a forced sameness. There is also a need for inclusion but not a forced assimilation. In true unity and inclusion, I think

we can find what love and acceptance means to ourselves. We relish the tension and can both love and challenge our neighbors as they are.

I accept that since religious leaders are among us as our family, friends, and community members whom we love, they are also delusional con artists. Again, I find it my responsibility to call out the most successful con artists around me. I still have an open challenge to debate any religious leader in front of their congregation in Cincinnati or within a reasonable travel distance.

“When one person suffers from a delusion, it is called insanity. When many people suffer from a delusion, it is called a religion.” -Robert Pirsig. Disagree with this quote? Are there any local religious leaders that would enjoy debating/questioning a non-believer in front of a congregation? If so, please, “have some faith” and message me.

The main point of this chapter is to show no matter where you live or your situation, you can challenge religious leaders boldly and confidently. You can set an example for other nonbelievers and further spread the idea that nonbelievers are not alone. So many may warn you not to poke the sleeping giant bear. I'll happily smack that bear in the face so to speak. It is a toothless paper bear, yet anything but cute. It is a bully and likes to threaten people with lies. I'd invite you to throw down a challenge to local religious leaders and have no fear as politely as you can. However, yes, sometimes there is no nice way to tell people what you honestly think and that is ok. Be honest anyway. Religions is the original big bully no matter how much they cry that you are being mean or not nice for pointing out the obvious lies they tell. If they warn of ‘wolves in sheep’s clothing’. They are talking about themselves.

“I distrust those people who know so well what God wants them to do, because I notice it always coincides with their own desires.” – Susan B Anthony.

It's ok to reject bullshit and call it bullshit, even when that bullshit is important to people. Even when that bullshit is religion.

“You gotta respect everyone’s beliefs.” No, you don’t. That’s what gets us into trouble. You have to acknowledge everyone’s beliefs and then you have to reserve the right to go “That’s fucking stupid, are you kidding me? -Patton Oswalt

Chapter 7

How to Create a Religion of Your Own

Eh, let's flip to the other side of the coin and stop banging the nonbeliever's drum for a bit. It's time to throw those nonbelievers of YOUR new religion under the bus in this chapter. So, let's start a religion! Anyone can start their own religion or cult, attract followers, and become powerful beyond measure. So why can't you? You can!

Let's say you want to disregard everything you've read so far and just start your own religion! Here, I'll show you how to become a religious leader, yourself. First, all you need to do is create a belief system. Just fill in the blank on a couple of sentences and you should have the basic jumpstart to your religion. Such as: The best way to live your life is: _____.
When you die you go to: _____. The one true God (or several true Gods) is: _____. Simply insert your religious baloney in the blanks and your off to the races! Sure, those are some big blanks to fill, and you probably don't have a definite answer, but that's the secret... NO ONE DOES! But shhhh. Don't tell anyone, ok? Especially kids. They'll believe anything. And within a few years of brainwashing them, you've began to create the next generation of leaders to carry the torch of your religion or

cult and hold you in high regard long after you are gone. Why? Because you've helped "save" them and bring them "freedom" of course! In the words of Paul Hampton: "Religion creates the most useful of slaves; those who think they are free." Now get to work. Chop chop.

Or why not piggyback off of an existing religious faith. It's hard to compete with their 1000's of years of brand recognition. Almost all of the successful religious movements from the last few hundred years have been from offshoots of existing religions. And most of those new religious movements have sprung forth from Christianity. Take Mormonism, which is pretty much just Christianity but with Joseph Smith at the helm. Be the next Joseph Smith! Ok, now that you have made up some stuff to go in the blanks above, it's time to really commit. Take the Catholic Church for example. They hold out all the time on admitting fault. Just blame something or someone else. Make up stories and be VERY confident. That is the key to a successful religion. Whoever talks bad about you, listen to them, but then gently and yet confidently warn them that very bad things are going to happen to them and that they are doomed, unless (and here's where you change to a big warm smile) they become receptive to following you and your religion or cult. Or at least until they stop talking bad about you and your religion or cult.

Back in 1926, a New York court convicted 21-year-old Joseph Smith for being a disorderly person and con artist who tricked folks out of their money by claiming to find lost treasures with his magic seer stones... And then a bit later he founded Mormonism by discovering some gold tablets out west that only he could read with his magic seer stones. In his hat... Imagine that.

So now that you have your religion and you've begun to shoo away all those who possess skepticism and doubt, (Sms... those terrible non-believers of your one true religion... How dare they?!?!?) it's now time to really kick it into gear and gain a mega following from the gullible masses. And the good news is that gullible people are EVERYWHERE. Many Americans who embrace new religions are between the ages of 18 and 25. However, it might help to hang around hospitals and try to get a good death bed conversion story to YOUR religion. This, so that you can tell your congregation about that

person who has been “saved” just before they died and wished they had found (insert your religion here) sooner. Or just make up a good story. Who cares? It’s your religion and others do it all the time. You can do whatever you want! Find people who are stressed, unfulfilled or just plain unhappy. Those are the most vulnerable. Tell them they will inherit the earth or something. Give them some attention and some nonsense to believe in and they will be hooked.

Tell them to do something called “praying”. And tell them to do it daily or even all the time; like life is just one endless connection with your particular made-up one true almighty super-god creation! Even though prayer is just another common brainwashing technique for your particular religion to further creep into the minds of your believers when you are not around, they don’t know that. Tell them they can telepathically communicate to your deity or deities through just thinking words or “praying” wherever they are. No, they’re not having a conversation in their head with themselves... They are communicating with the divine one. Tell them to do it often and to ask for something or to help others. It will make them feel good with all that wishing for themselves or well-wishing of others through their warm “thoughts, feelings, and prayers”. Even though you know it is just delusional wishful thinking that will have the same outcome as praying to a brown bag filled with dog shit, they won’t know that unless you tell them. They will follow your lead. Make sure you show them how to pray to your entity with whatever baloney you want to make up. People cannot live on food or water alone etc; they really only need your religion and your entity! Make an effort to “believe it with all your heart,” and with your emotions, and watch as the people will flock to you.

Make sure your religion provides salvation from the tired and overworked. Everyday there are people that are anxious and filled with desperation. They are often easy prey for belief systems that promise happiness and spiritual fulfillment... Like YOURS! Remember, YOUR god is real. All those other gods are ridiculous, made-up nonsense. But not yours. Your god is real. Repeat it. Whichever one that is! All those other religions are stupid. But not yours! Ensure your religion lasts well after your gone too by focusing on the

“education” and your religion’s “teachers”. Generations will look to you as a great leader! Gosh that feels great, doesn’t it. Maybe you can hang your picture on the wall of your worship center for all the ages to see. But as mentioned earlier while you can, don’t forget the best part of having your own religion: The tax benefits! File your own 501(c)(3) to get tax exempt status, meaning your religion doesn’t have to pay taxes. Any money donated to your religion is yours to keep. The only catch is the money cannot go to one individual and cannot be used to influence politicians. But because there are so many religions to monitor, as long as you don’t become too obvious, you should be alright if you do this anyways.

Phew! Well, that was fun. Now that you started your own religion, let’s try a fun exercise that will help you lead others. Consider this, some owls actually bob their heads up and down and back and forth to maximize their depth perception when focusing on an object to improve their perspective of it. Try it right now. Focus on an object across the room from you. Bob your left to right. Back and forth. Up and down and all around. Do you see how your perception of the object improves? I’ll wait. Nice work!

That’s right keep bobbing your head while focusing on the object. If it doesn’t work the first time, try again. Now, try it another time on a different object a bit farther away. Up and down and all around. That’s right... It doesn’t work for humans, but you sure do look like an idiot... The lesson: Ask your congregation to do things after you’ve gained their trust and they will blindly do it. You will be able to tell who is the most brainwashed by how eagerly they do what you ask. Tell them when to stand up, sit down, when to pray and when to sing. Tell them to give money. Then tell them to have faith and to believe in your imaginary entity. Many will do it!

Now that you are an expert head-bobber, let’s move on. Create a cult-like following by preying on people’s need to believe. People want to believe in something. By inventing yourself as this cult-like entity, they will follow you and give you untold amounts of power. To become such a figure, you need to follow these steps. Keep your words vague and simple but full of promise. Emphasize enthusiasm rather than the intellectual and the rational. Structure

your group in accordance with your formations of your organized religion. Disguise your sources of income. Create an us-versus-them dynamic. And play into people's fantasies. As the truth is often ugly, if you appeal to it, you risk being bombarded with the anger of disenchantment. Instead, by tapping into the fantasies of the masses, people will flock to you as you offer an alternative to the disillusionment of reality. By observing which aspects of everyday life are most abhorred, you can conjure up fantasies that promise the opposite of peoples' current realities like a paradise afterlife. It is very important to fill that void of their insecurity with 'heaven and hell' delusions to increase your religious power. Encourage surpassing their uncontrollable emotion, as they won't be able to control themselves, and you can do the controlling for them.

Say the deity is "testing" your followers when your followers fall on hard times. (Theists may say that doubt is a god 'testing you' if you doubt... No, I'm pretty sure that's just my rational thought screaming bullshit. Don't tell them that though.)

Oh boy! You may discover a religious person from another belief or faith that wants to argue about god(s)! I hope they use ancient fairy tales as 'evidence.' That's baloney. But yes, you can use ancient fairy tales as evidence anyway too! You just have to sound more convincing. Practice in the mirror at home. It will drive any nonbelievers crazy with all your faith. After all, why can't you checkmate a Christian, for example? Because they are all pawns, and their king doesn't exist. But today Christians running around with the bible don't know that what they are believing in was purposely planned out for them to believe in by people. You can be one of those people too of your own religion!

Ignore the unbelievers of your one true religion. Ignoring them is the best revenge. The less interest you take in things that irritate you (Like the truth that your religion is a lie), the more superior you seem. By acknowledging others skepticism, you give their existence credibility and, therefore, power. The best religions can stay calm while infuriating people who recognize their boloney. If you do this, you can gain an advantage. By finding their

weaknesses, you can disturb them and play with them at will. The angrier they become that you are a liar and cannot disprove that your made-up super-entity exists, the more ridiculous they will appear. This will reduce their power and increase your false religion's strength! Robes may help to look ultra-wise too. Or be a man or woman of the people and dress like them! Either way, you got this! It's all a part of your game. Create compelling spectacles. By generating grand, spectacular gestures, you will heighten your presence and your power as a religious leader. People will be too dazzled by appearances to uncover what you're really up to. Scamming them. Muah-haha!

Where words divide, images unite. Find a good logo for your religion. And plaster it everywhere. Make hand signals across your chest to mirror your religion's logo or something like a cross, square or circle. Other people will instinctively do it to after they see you do it. It's as easy as bobbing your head like an owl.

For you, never trust anything that comes for free. But your followers don't know this. Give them free coffee. A place to hang out at your tax-free worship center. Anything of worth is worth paying for but you will provide it for free with the money you get from all those other gullible donators and tax breaks. Most things that come for free come with a burdensome psychological price to the user. Use this to your advantage to suck them in. Give them something for free and make them owe you for life psychologically. Perhaps, if you are salesy enough, they will eventually feel like they owe you so much and you can suggest a tithe. Or more! Your "god" will be so please with their generosity. After all, your entity has been so kind to you and to them, right?! Remind them of that. All the time. Generosity softens up potential congregants into being deceived by your religion deeper and deeper.

Don't forget to work on the hearts and minds. If people feel coerced into acting in a specific way, they will resent you. Instead, you must seduce others so that they act how you want without you having to ask them. By understanding the psychology of your congregation, you can play with their

emotions and conquer their hearts and minds so that they are loyal to you. By softening them up, you can slowly bend people towards your will without them realizing. Then ask them to evangelize for you to bring in more “fish”. Preach the need for change, but never reform too much at once. With your religion you must respect the way people have been living up until this point. Too much change will engender a revolt against your religion. To introduce change, make it seem like a gradual and perhaps a gentle improvement on an older stupider past religion. Be like Martin Luther!

Here’s a good one. Never appear too perfect. Leave that one up to your imaginary god. While appearing superior to others is dangerous, to appear faultless and without weakness is even more perilous. By displaying harmless vices, you prevent envy from developing, and you make yourself appear more approachable. Don’t go past the mark you aimed for: In victory, learn when to stop.

Ok, so maybe your making it big now! Don’t let success go to your head. The moment you achieve victory is often when you’re at your most vulnerable. Try building into other leaders in your religion. Have them start another congregation and spread further out to all the reaches of the world! You’ll have places popping up all over. And you can reap the rewards as the mighty founder of it all!

Once upon a time... No one knew what happened... So, they just made some shit up. You finally cashed in this old idea too. Nice work. Now that all of that fantasizing about your religion is over with, let’s get back to reality, shall we? Take a moment and burst that bubble of religion you just had in your head.

Pop!

Ok. Some may say that it is ok to lie to the gullible masses and push fantasy ideas about super-entities and imaginary afterlife illusions in order to teach humans morals for the overall good of society. These people may think that without “this belief?” humanity would erupt into chaos. What do you think?

Religion is a smart business idea. You can sell an invisible product and if it doesn't work, you can blame it on the customer. How did we actually get the bible? Again, the Council of Nicaea. Constantine (more on him later) and his bishops voted a bunch of books as the word of 'God'. (325 AD.) They picked and chose what they wanted in the bible. Then burned all other pre-Christian documents that was evidence that the religion was fictitious. (391 AD.)

In some eras, in order to make a religion popular, the powerful would kill everyone who didn't agree with the new religion and made laws prohibiting any public talk about other ideas. It was illegal to disagree with the church in some times and places.

“Religious apologists complain bitterly that atheists and secularists are aggressive and hostile in their criticism of them. I always say: “look, when you guys were in charge, you didn't argue with us, you just burnt us at the stake. Now what we're doing is, we're presenting you with some arguments and some challenging questions, and you complain.” – A. Grayling. If you repeat a lie often enough. Does it become truth? Nope, it becomes religion.

“Religion. It's given people hope. In a world torn apart by religion.” -Jon Stewart.

Religions simply want to keep their power, influence, and money. If you are offended by this statement, then you may have attached your ego to one of the many ridiculous religions and are part of these gullible masses. I do not apologize for saying this. However, I do love you and have empathy for you. I was once a part of that gullible mass of people trusting a particular religion too.

Some may ask, “What stopped you from believing?” Well, I started to ask myself, why do I believe what I believe? I realized it was just what I was taught. When I broke it all down and actually thought for myself, I realized I had been conned. It was all make-believe. You cannot argue with religious

psychotics. Sometimes, you cannot argue with crazy or pathological liars like religions are full of. You might as well talk to a brick wall or just nod and leave it alone when it comes to some. However, you can talk to other non-believers and let them know they are not alone.

Morals can and should be taught without being coupled with the lies. Gods and angels are manmade. They are conjured up and invented in the minds of human beings. Religions fabricate and warp historical events and stories (that none of us were even there to observe with our own eyes) in order to fit their false narratives.

An imaginary god (or gods) are constructs of human brains just like making up imaginary super-heroes that can fly or go invisible in comic books. Being enveloped within an exciting superhero story can be fun for an hour or two at the movie theater. Then, it ends, and we go back to our reality. Religions attempt to keep this fantasy going for the life of the believer, sometimes with dangerous psychological consequences.

You were born with the greatest defense in all of nature: The rational conscience mind. It has the power to expand how you look at things far and wide. It gives you the unique capacity to distinguish patterns and events and learn. Religions conspire to dull that weapon and render it useless. Religion, as I said earlier, is a drug. Instead, make reality your drug. Become a keen observer. Religious fantasies and fanatics that are all around you. They could be in your family, within your circle of friends, or your community. Seek clarity, evidence, and reason. Not escape from the truth. Those that turn their back on reality and seek religion for comfort, are only hurting themselves and any children they might have in the end by giving into the lies of religion.

There is a religious war for your mind, and your money, and your submission. If left unchecked and unaware, your brain laps it up like a thirsty dog. Once hooked, it lays the groundwork for responses that border on the insane. Bowing to a rock wall in Jerusalem or talking to yourself anywhere while you communicate with unseen “deity” become commonplace. People

give away their money to religion and/or let it become the most important thing in their life. The religion and its leaders would love have this happen to you. After all, wouldn't it be great to be powerful beyond measure and influence others? Oh, that's right, you already know this because you just read this chapter on how to start your own religion and become a powerful religious leader.

“What is god? I think that “God” is the opinions that you can't otherwise justify. God is your intellectual laziness. God is your ego. God is that which you need God to be. God is X. God is the sum of all your willful ignorance. God is a convenience. God is a social adhesive. God is exclusionary. God is your bigotry. God is an excuse. God is your clever ploy to avoid thinking, responsibility, and the need to develop a sense of social justice. God is your lie. What is God? God isn't real. Our ignorance is ‘God’; what we know is ‘science.’ – Robert Ingersoil.

Imagine the news headline: Scientists just released a study that shows that all supernatural beliefs are true... Silly, right?

The most fraudulent fantasy running rampant in this world is religion. The perception is that we come into this world as a bad person (because of imaginary sin) and need an imaginary deity (insert one here) to save us from our terribleness. For many, leaving religion was the snip that cut the puppet master's stings from a belief system pulled over their eyes to replace reality. Science, for example, doesn't claim to know everything. However, it can provide evidence for everything it claims to know. Religion, on the other hand, claims to know everything. However, it can't provide any evidence for anything it claims to know. Because religion is baloney. However, you can go start one now if you would like.

Chapter 8

Death

Here's a question: But what if some particular religion isn't a delusion? Either way, you are better off forever and ever if you just believe it, right?

My Answer: This is a wonderful question to ask! So many people wrestle with this. However, this rationale is just a tool many religions and cults use. But not all of them. For the ones that do, like Christianity, it's the "believe me or else you're doomed etc. argument." It works primarily on the gullible or fearful. It doesn't work on those who investigate, study and rise above this fear tactic. Does it make you feel safe to believe in your religion? Like your eternity is wrapped up in sunshine and rainbows? Like you will bask in the light of "your creator" forever if you only just believe and go along? Seems justifiable, right? It is better to follow them, right? That is what your religion wants you to think: That you **NEED** them for a divine insurance policy. Or, that you need this particular cult or religion to feel safe or peaceful in this way. You are safer, more at peace, and freer as you break through the fear and explode out by being 100% you without being manipulated by religion.

Saying you should worship Jesus just in case when you die, he does exist, is like saying you shouldn't go to sleep in case Freddy Krueger exists. Most

people have an attitude toward death that's pretty straightforward. They're opposed to it. Ha. Where some people and I part ways is regarding what they think happens after you die. I'd like to break this down just a bit.

For some, the greatest challenge of being alive is knowing that won't always be the case—that everything you care about will one day come to an end. That applies to people you love, too, and this is what makes it so hard for most folks. You're not immortal, and neither are the people you love. Two thumbs way down for that.

This is where religion comes in, particularly Christianity. It projects a fantasy (or delusion) of heaven, leveraging people's fear of death. And maybe that's okay. After all, people need to have hope. But what Christianity does—capitalizing on the widespread fear of death to leverage trust of congregants in order to get them to give money to the institution—that's not okay.

In the introduction to the book: *The 50th Law*, a man who has had is fair share of adversity, 50 Cent, talks about fear and what it means for humanity: “In the beginning, fear was a basic simple emotion for the human animal. We confronted something overwhelming, the imminent threat of death in the form of wars, plagues and natural disasters. And we felt fear. As for any animal, this emotion had a protective function. It allowed us to take notice of the danger and retreat in time.

For us humans, it served an additional positive purpose. We could remember the source of the threat and protect ourselves better the next time. Civilization depended on this ability to foresee and forestall dangers from the environment.” Out of fear, we also developed religion and various belief systems to comfort us. Fear is the oldest and strongest emotion known to mankind. Something deeply inscribed in our nervous system and subconscious.”

“Over time however, something strange began to happen. The actual terrors that we faced began to lessen in intensity as we gained increasing control over our environment, but instead of our fears lessening as well, they began

to multiply in number. We started to worry about our status in society, whether people liked us or how we fit into the group. We became anxious for our livelihoods. The future of our families and children. Our personal health and the aging process. Instead of simple and intense fear of something powerful and real, we developed a kind of generalized anxiety.”

Religions thrive off this generalized anxiety. But what’s wrong with that? In an interview with a well know nonbeliever named, Christopher Hitchens, someone asked him: “If a belief in the afterlife helps someone deal with the inevitability of death, could this be a good thing?”

But Hitchens thought: no way: “Well then anything that made you feel better would be okay, which I’m sorry to say, I think, is a contemptible viewpoint. Here’s the problem with the afterlife fantasy—it’s the same as religion in general. Religion and the afterlife fantasy have these things in common. First, they’re man-made. That’s very important... Leading to my second point: religion is totalitarian in its practice and its theory. It claims to know things it can’t know, and it claims to have powers it cannot have. It says if you make the right propitiations and the right donations, you may get to paradise, and if you don’t, you may get an eternity of pain. Then, there’s also the argument of fraud. St Peter’s in Rome was built on the sale of indulgences. That’s to say, in return for cash, the promise of a remission of sin, and a good time in hell or purgatory.”

So, what do we do if we want to be free of this kind of religious leverage? We have to deal with this fear of death, this fear of the unknown, this fear of nonexistence. The Greek philosopher Epicurus said people are mostly afraid of death because they don’t really grasp nonexistence. People have to really grasp that death is the end of experience. Here’s what Epicurus said: “As long as I exist, death does not. Once death exists, I will not. Why should I fear something I will never experience?”

Interestingly enough, death just might make you closer to a god. Because gods don’t exist and once we die, neither do we. Ha. But let me make another point here about Epicurus’s work. Everything comes to an end, and once it

ends, it's done. Once my life is done, I won't have anything to fear because even the fear I once held will be done as well. Everything about us (except maybe the memories people have or a finite legacy) we leave behind. The cool thing about this is that it focuses the mind on what matters and reality.

If the fear of death will be done when we die, how can we find a way to let that fear die now, so we can enjoy the life we have left? And are there any other things I can end early, lightening the load, so to speak, and learning to fully experience what I have instead of worrying about what can't be?

Epicurus also offered the symmetry argument. He claimed that each of us is living between two bookends of nonexistence. And Mark Twain touched on this point too: "I do not fear death. I had been dead for billions and billions of years before I was born and had not suffered the slightest inconvenience from it. So, if my nonexistence before birth wasn't such a terrible thing, my future nonexistence won't be, either."

Notice how the symmetry works here. Nonexistence before and nonexistence after—it's the same. And I want to add this: if you enjoy your life and work to help others, you'll be remembered by those whose lives you touched and, in your accomplishments, especially the ways you made the world better than you found it!

My hope in this section is to help people think more clearly, to face the fear of death and accept reality. Don't let the empty promises of religious institutions keep you from doing the hard mental and emotional work of facing what's difficult and doing what's needed in your life and for the world. This is the beautiful thing about thinking critically. When a human being finally clears their head of the idea of heavens etc., hells and bad places go away with it. Nonexistence means the end of worry and pain. That is the real promise. That is where you find the reality of inner peace.

Let me put this another way. Grief experts will tell you that experiencing grief is much healthier than denial. Anything you try to stuff down is going to find its way to the surface, and the longer it simmers, the bigger it boils

over. As long as an afterlife fantasy has a toehold in someone's mind, they will avoid doing the important internal work of confronting their fears and learning to live in reality. Recognizing the finality of death can really lend an urgency and preciousness to life itself. After all, death is not nearly as scary as an un-lived life.

I want to return to some wisdom from 'The 50th Law': "It is not some outside event that ends our days but something within us. We have only so many days to live. This amount of time is something unique to us; it is ours alone, our only true possession. If we run away from this reality by avoiding the thought of death, we are really running away from ourselves. We are denying the one thing that cannot be denied; we are living a lie. The fearless approach requires that you accept the fact that you have only so much time to live, and that life itself inevitably involves levels of pain and separation. By embracing this, you embrace life itself and accept everything about it."

"Depending on a belief in an afterlife or drowning yourself in the moment to avoid pain is to despise reality, which is to despise life itself. When you choose to affirm life by confronting your mortality, everything changes. What matters to you now is to live your days well. As fully as possible. You could choose to do this by pursuing endless pleasures. But nothing becomes boring more quickly than having to search for new distractions. If attaining certain goals becomes your greatest source of pleasure. Then your days are filled with purpose. And direction. And whenever death comes you have no regrets. You do not fall into nihilistic thinking about the futility of it all because that is a supreme waste of the brief time you have been given. You now have a way of measuring what matters in life. Compared to the shortness of your days, petty battles, and anxieties have no weight. You have a sense of urgency and commitment."

What you do, you must do well. With all of your energy, not with a mind shooting off in 100 different directions. To accomplish this is remarkably simple. It is a matter of looking inward and seeing that death is something that you carry within. It is a part of you that cannot be repressed. It does not

mean that you brood about it, but that you have continual awareness of a reality that you come to embrace.”

Quit buying into the fantasy about living forever, and just live now. Remember your existence itself is a profoundly lucky confluence of overlapping coincidences. You’ve also got nearly 4 billion years of reproductive good fortune behind you.

Think of all that wonderfully complex cell growth, cell reproduction, and great sex that took place over a millennium to eventually create you! Trillions of atoms had to come together every moment for an epoch to create you!

Let that reality remind you that every single moment you have here on earth is incredibly precious. Wake up every morning and take time to delight in the fact that you’re here at all. It won’t last forever. That is a painful truth. It is also a profound promise.

I like how Bill Bryson puts it, “Consider the fact that for you to be here now, every one of your ancestors on both sides since the dawn of time has been attractive enough to find a mate, robust enough to reproduce and sufficiently blessed by fate and circumstance to live long enough to do so. In nearly four billion years not one of your forebearers on either side was squashed, devoured, stranded, starved, stuck, picked by a more glamorous suitor spurned or otherwise deflected from its life’s quest of delivering the tiny charge of genetic material to the right partner at the right moment to perpetuate the only possible sequence of hereditary combinations that could result—eventually, astoundingly, and all too briefly—in you. Life is a damned lucky thing.”

So, no matter who you are or what you like, enjoy it! From the beginning of time, each of your ancestors has been able to live long enough and stay healthy enough and be attractive enough to find another mate who has done the same. This is truly something to celebrate. You don’t need religion or its belief systems to achieve this. You have you.

“I would rather have questions that can’t be answered than answers that can’t be questioned.” - Richard Feynman

Proof your god doesn’t exist:

1. Think of a god you don’t believe in
2. Determine which standard/s of proof this god does not meet.
3. Apply that/those standard/s of proof to your own god.
4. Wonder why you didn’t see it sooner

“We are all on a rock traveling around 1 of 100 billion stars. Our species is 1 of over half a billion that have ever existed. Our chances of being born are about 1 in 400 trillion. You’re not special, but you are fucking lucky. Enjoy your amazing life. You’ll never exist again.” -Ricky Gervais

Finally, here is a good exchange in conversation I once saw:

Steven Colbert: “What do you think happens when we die?”

Keanu Reeves: “I know the ones who love us will miss us.”

That’s accurate, I think.

Chapter 9

Circumcision and Other Religious Abuses

Let's talk about religious liberty. First, religious liberty isn't more sacred than other rights. In an issue of *The Humanist*, Roy Speckhardt, executive director of the American Humanist Association, and Kate Uesugi, communications coordinator at the American Humanist Association, point out that although the courts once sought a balance between peoples' right to freely exercise their faith or philosophy, and the right to be free from government-sponsored indoctrination – now judges are abandoning their responsibility to keep government secular. Let's dive into some of the good points they make.

Instead of recognizing that government support of religion violates our Constitution's First Amendment Establishment Clause, the courts are changing to assert that any hesitancy to provide government support for religion amounts to illegal discrimination against religion. That's opening the doors to taxpayer-funded vouchers for religious schools and other kinds of direct state support by funding proselytization.

Should the government offer students a voucher that they can use to attend private schools? No, we should focus on improving our public schools instead. Furthermore, in 2002, in a 5-4 split, when the supreme court ruled that school vouchers were constitutional, I believe the supreme court got it very wrong. Well, 4 got it right, but 5 got it wrong. School vouchers ARE unconstitutional unless it is for students with disabilities or on the autism spectrum. Otherwise, it just diverts public funds to private schools and private religious schools. Bad idea for the overall good of our society in my opinion. It also violates the constitution's establishment clause. Ohio needs a Blaine amendment like many other states have that specifically prohibits the use of public dollars in private religious schools. In some programs private schools are actually allowed to cherry-pick students, turning away low-performers and even those with disabilities. Some studies have even shown voucher students actually losing ground, in some cases significantly. I am not for vouchers at all, unless, again, it is for students with disabilities or on the autism spectrum.

The original intent of religious liberty was to support freedom for all, which is different from the weaponized version that's skewed toward Christian conservatism that we see today. The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution claims that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." In theory, the intent is straightforward. Americans are entitled to the right to religious belief and expression, as well as the guarantee that the government won't favor one religion over another. Inherent in that right is the freedom from religious imposition from the government of any kind. That means Jews, Muslims, and others who adhere to minority religious beliefs should not feel pressured by the government to accept majority Christian values or practices. And in the same way, nontheists and the nonreligious people should not be exposed to government favoritism of theism and religion itself.

Only recently, within the past thirty years or so, has the concept of religious liberty become politicized and largely misused as a defense for prejudice. Religious freedom, especially with the rise in Christian nationalism, has

developed a false sense that it should have absolute primacy in the United States. This is dangerous.

As our social norms change and grow over time, equal rights seem to increasingly clash with this skewed idea of religious liberty. The limitations of any right are hotly debated, but religious freedom, especially with the rise in Christian nationalism, has developed a false sense of its power and position, as if it is the only faith that matters. The government must ensure that the rights of some, no matter how deeply valued, do not infringe on the rights of others. And although it is important to protect our religious freedoms, religion cannot trump all other inherent rights or can be allowed to harm others. Harming others like with, for example, circumcision. Yes, let's talk about circumcision.

Should boys and girls under 18 years old be protected from the irreversible life decision of circumcision from parents, religious leaders, hospitals, and doctors? Yes. They should absolutely be protected. While it is somewhat socially acceptable today under the guise of religious freedom, circumcision is actually an appalling human rights violation and should be considered infant torture and genital mutilation. When a child is born, that child should be protected by the state from unnecessary surgeries on their genitals like circumcision. Parents, doctors, religious enthusiasts, and hospitals who do this to innocent children should be held accountable and punished by a law here in Cincinnati and beyond.

We need to take steps to protect the defenseless children being subjected to this barbaric child abuse and disturbing nonsense. If religious dogmas are finding their way into our laws nowadays and stripping women of their right to have an abortion, well then, the gloves are off. We need to fight back, and we need to fight back hard. Outlawing circumcision is one way to do this.

I will work with religious leaders, parents, hospitals, and doctors in the medical community to unify and educate people on the issue of circumcision. I understand the profound religious and cultural norms these changes will challenge, and I will do it anyway because it is the right thing to do. A law

making circumcision illegal needs to put in place. It is long overdue. Now is the time to challenge.

How appalling would it be for parents of a certain religion or cult to say they need to chop off their baby's ears because a "super-entity" told them to do it? Or, because that is just their particular culture's tradition? It would be very ridiculous and appalling to chop of ears. Circumcision is equally if not more so ridiculous and appalling.

Circumcision is terrible and NEEDS to be stopped. There are puppets in the medical community also going along with the status quo because it is easy and because they have no backbone. There are journalists and news outlets right here in our city like the Cincinnati Enquirer that are in bed with religion and refuse to confront religion's abuses on this topic because of their bias for religion and their fear.

Doing a story on how a local priest sexually molested little children is common nowadays and the news outlets think they are doing a good job being balanced. It's sick how commonplace this has become. The children that have suffered will be scarred for life because of the religious leaders they and their parents trusted. No, the news is not balanced just because they cover a story like this. It is actually time for them to do a little bit more digging and real work instead.

If you're having to spend the first weeks of your son's life caring for a wound on his penis, you're doing it wrong. I do not apologize for saying so. Nobody and no baby wants less penis.

On a lighter note, maybe God was like: 'Take the skin off your peanuts man'. But Moses totally misheard him. Ha. I am personally proud to stand with the people who are part of the group: "Jews Against Circumcision". Good people like for Example: Michael Watts, Jerrold Greenberg, David Azoulay, and more. We can speak out against religion and the actions they take and still love the religious people who do these terrible things.

I am 6% Ashkenazi Jewish. It's in my blood. However, I was raised Christian. Now, I am proudly non-religious. Again, I speak out against religions. It is ok to do so and should be encouraged, especially in a free society like we have here in the United States of America. It is also more than ok to speak out against me or anything I say. I welcome it and encourage it too. Bring it on.

I am excited for the opportunity to devote my life in whatever way I can to stand against all the religious nonsense that is out there and make Cincinnati a better place for people to live, work and play. Making a law against Circumcision is one way to do this.

Furthermore, let's also talk about religion in general some more. Because there is so much abuse going on and because religions lie and make things up they don't know, there is no expectation to be respectful of any religion or other delusions. Non-believers can accept that religious folks hold a belief. Again, we do not have to, nor should we, pretend that it is reasonable or sane.

For those of you who are also skeptical and who are being dragged along by your delusional friends and family to check places of worship to imaginary gods and so forth, my message to you is this: You are not alone. I go to religious places with my friends and family too sometimes. I love them despite what they believe.

I'd encourage you to go and really listen to what to what they have say (but also, feel free to stay and challenge the Kool-Aid drinkers if you want). It's kind of like going back in time to 1692 and seeing Salem, Massachusetts. When you watch these religious people act out their imaginary god or imaginary spirit thing today or back then, it's still insane.

We now know that the people put to death back then during the Salem Witch Trials were innocent people. Back then, the religious taught folks to fear "witches", instead of the ones burning them, crushing them, and killing them. Have we learned nothing since then? There are no gods, or witches,

or ghosts, or goblins. There are just religious weirdos playing pretend. And these religious weirdos are insane today just like back then.

Back to circumcision, here is what I think: Anyone that is circumcised is a victim of child abuse whether or not their ego chooses to admit it. Similarly, those who commit the child abuse. (The parents, the doctors, and some religious folks.) They are perpetrators whether or not their ego chooses to admit it.

Genitals are a touchy subject, and no one wants to be looked at as less-than down there. Men will posture and say “I’m fine and happy I got circumcised etc. And I will do it to my son etc.”

However, if you are circumcised, you have less penis than nature intended. Circumcision is a human rights violation and genital mutilation. Our culture looks the other way and under the guise of religious freedom or “that’s just the way it is” by some medical professionals who sometimes get money from the act. Many in our culture look the other way. Still some others scoff or laugh at the subject. The subject can be silly and make people giggle. However, there is a real serious side to the stupidity of circumcision.

Some religious fanatics, defend it because it hurts their ego and the idea that perhaps their imaginary god they hold up and devote their lives to is bogus and/or not real or diminished in some way if people stop circumcising. If our culture really discovers how stupid it actually is and starts asking more questions, certain religions are damaged and certain people within those religions may lose power, influence and money.

How can I forgive my parents? Simple. My choice. I simply decided to. I enable myself to forgive or not forgive. I could easily choose not to forgive too. I love my parents and regardless of that terrible moment in time, they’ve been very cool since and expressed that they didn’t see it that way before and apologized. If they didn’t not see their stupidity, I would simply forgive them and move on anyway. Regardless, I take the energy and pain and turn it into action for change. I recognize that our culture back then made it OK. This

helped my parents make that mistake. We need to change that. Religions that preach only to forgive is manipulative. People can set healthy boundaries and choose not to forgive sometimes and move on just fine too.

A congregation that is very kind and forgiving is much easier to control, manipulate, abuse and extract money from. Same with family members and so on.

I'll work for positive change and to end this child abuse. I hope you can start to speak out against it with me. What do you think? Religious Persecution is when you are prevented from exercising your beliefs, NOT when you are prevented from imposing your beliefs. If you impose your beliefs on little children, then you need to be held accountable.

Lloyd Schofield from West Hartford (USA) is an 'intactivist' in San Francisco who engages at the Bay Area Intactivists. He is my hero. I have had the privilege of speaking to him on occasion via text, Facebook and over the phone to gather incite for this fight in Ohio and beyond.

He and his fellow organizers have created an initiative known as the "Prohibition of Genital Cutting of Male Minors". In 2019, he spoke at the Worldwide Day of Genital Autonomy (aka WWDOGA) in Cologne, Germany.

In 2011, Schofield and his initiative designed a proposal to ban the circumcision practice in the city and county around San Francisco. The proposal would make it illegal to "circumcise, excise, cut, or mutilate the whole or any part of the foreskin, testicles, or penis of another person who has not attained the age of 18 years".

Doctors, mohels and any other person who performs the procedure would face up to a \$1,000 fine or a year of jail time. They collected more than 12,000 valid signatures (7,300 signatures were required) to put the proposal on the city ballot in November 2011. In July 2011, a California State Superior Court judge struck the proposed male circumcision ban from the November ballot,

ruling that the city cannot regulate medical procedure and citing religious freedom protections. "We will not stop until all men are protected from this damaging and harmful surgery"; Schofield told the Associated Press. We need more people like Schofield.

Chapter 10

Religion is Society's Accepted Mental Illness

The thought of no afterlife and no heaven is terrifying to many that are religious, especially Christians. And so, they wish it into existence in their minds and fantasize about it. They write songs about it and so on. All in the pursuit of a delusional collective fantasy they have together. The more they believe together the truer they make it in their minds.

Take a hypothetical person with a delusion at a mental hospital for example. What if we all said, “oh yes, you are correct” to him or her? What if we molded our world to this person's delusional fantasy? That is what we are doing with religion. Religion is an antique, a remnant, an artifact (or whatever you want to call it) from earlier humans. Religion is a relic from humanity's past that has run amuck for too long a time. I am not afraid to call it out for what it is. Thousands of mentally ill ideas and myths have turned into religions, and they are crawling all over this earth. It is a religious madhouse, and we are all living in it. The mad are not confined to hospitals. The people living in religious delusions are living all around us (so long as they do not become violent. Because then, thankfully, they go to jail).

Here in the United States, you are allowed to be as stupid and delusional in your religion as you want to be. I don't want to take away the freedom of religion for anyone. Again, that is their choice to be as stupid as they want, and it is their loss. I simply want to burst the conversation wide open about religion's quest for power, influence, and money. I want for Cincinnatians and for all of humanity to consider it on a wider scale. This is long overdue for us to consider. I want to cast doubt on all religions and their bogus beliefs on afterlife and deities. They get away with lying too much.

I feel I have a responsibility as a human being to speak up in this regard. And to run for political office so that other secular humanists, atheists, agnostics, freethinkers, skeptics and non-religious in general know that they can do wonderful things for the people in the cities and countries they love, and they do not have to be afraid anymore. I believe now is the time.

The world is changing, and religion and the idea of imaginary gods are on the way out. If I can help just one reader by letting that person know they are not alone in their unbelief, then speaking up despite the social consequences is worth it to me.

Religions are growing weaker, and I think this is good thing for all of humanity. The more we can peacefully shed ourselves from religion, the better. The more we can focus on education, science, and truly loving one another as human beings, the better. I believe a secular government, in-turn must always tolerate and allow religious freedom even though it's mentally ill.

Here are some reasons on why identifying with a religion can cause mental illness:

1. Hallucinations - the person has an invisible god/friends who he or she insists are real, and to whom he or she may even "speak" daily too, even though nobody can actually see or hear these entities.

2. Delusions - the patient believes that the invisible person or deity has magical powers to make them wealthier, cure cancer, bring about world peace, or help others or themselves. They may believe the deity or god-man will do so eventually if asked and is believed in. Faith is belief without evidence and reason. Coincidentally that's also the definition of delusion. We only speak of faith when we want to substitute emotion for evidence.
3. Denial/Inability to learn - though the requests for world peace remain unanswered, even after hundreds of years, the patients persist with the praying behavior, each time expecting different results.
4. Inability to distinguish fantasy from reality - the beliefs are contingent upon ancient mythology being accepted as historical fact.
5. Paranoia - the belief that anyone who does not share their supernatural concept of reality is "evil," "the devil," or "an agent of Satan".
6. Emotional abuse - religious concepts such as sin, and/or hell, cause feelings of guilt, shame, fear, and other types of emotional "baggage" which can scar the psyche for life.
7. Violence - many patients insist that others should share in their delusions, even to the extent of using harassment, manipulation, and/or violence.

Religion still seems to be the one kind of crazy that is commended, applauded and not treated. Religion is society's accepted mental illness.

Some religious may say: "Why spend time fighting for your point of view? You know it's funny how so many atheists say they don't believe in God but spend so much time hating and fighting him." I sincerely believe we are fighting the religions and it is the right thing to do. We are fighting religious delusions. We are not fighting a god. We are fighting mental illness and delusional thinking. It's nothing personal but I think religion is, again, basically make-believe spirituality as a business to con the gullible masses in order to gain power, influence, and money. We need to stop people who say

their god is the answer or their religion is the answer. We each get to figure out for ourselves what the answer is, and I will promote free-thought and free-speech. Not one religion or one deity is the answer to everything. If someone claims that, I'd encourage anyone that will listen to be skeptical. We need to do this to stop people like this from furthering the delusions. We need to fight in order to set humanity back on track.

“It is time to refuse to tiptoe around people who claim respect, consideration, special treatment, on the grounds that they have a religious faith, as if having faith were, a privilege endowing virtue, as if it were noble to believe in unsupported claims and ancient superstitions.” -A C Grayling

The Quran says: slay the unbelievers wherever you find them. - Quran (2:191) You have your religion. I'll have mine. - Quran (109:6)

It can be difficult to trust someone who associates their humanity based on religious texts. They could potentially justify any violence or delusions with another text. The Bible also says to kill nonbelievers.

2 Chronicles 15:12-13 ESV

“And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul, but that whoever would not seek the Lord, the God of Israel, should be put to death, whether young or old, man or woman.”

Both “holy” books actually instruct followers to murder unbelievers to ensure the religions survival and so that power stays in the hands of the leaders. The attempt is to strike fear.

Quran:

Fight everyone in the way of Allah and kill those who disbelieve in Allah” - Muhammad (IBN ISHAQ 992)

Bible:

The bible commands us to:

Kill adulterers (Lev 20:10)

Kill all witches (Ex 22:18)

Kill blasphemers (Lev 24:14)

Kill false prophets (Zech 13:3)

Kill fortune-tellers (Lev 20:27)

Kill anyone who sins (Ezek 18:4)

Kill the curious (1 Sam 6:19-20)

Kill gays (Lev 20:13, Rom 1:21-32)

Kill all non-Hebrews (Dt. 20:16-17)

Kill sons of sinners (Isaiah 14:21)

Kill anyone who curses God (Lev 24:16)

Kill any child who hits a parent (Ex 21:15)

Kill children who disobey parents (Dt 21:20)

Kill those who work on the Sabbath (Ex 31:15)

Kill disobedient children (Ex 21:17, Mk 7:10)

Kill strangers close to a church (Num 1:48-51)

“...kill every woman who has known a man by sleeping with him. But all the young girls who have not known a man... keep them alive for yourselves.”

-Moses (Numbers 31:17)

Kill all males after winning battles (Dt. 20:13)

Kill those who curse father or mother (Lev 20:9)

Kill men who have sex with other men (Lev 20:13)

Kill any bride discovered not a virgin (Dt 22:21)

Kill those who worship the wrong god (Num 25:1-9)

Kill anyone who does not observe the Sabbath (Ex 31:14)

Kill everybody in a town that worships the wrong god (Dt 13:13-16)

And:

Kill anyone who kills anyone (Lev 24:17)

In 1980, John Lennon was assassinated in New Your City by one of his “fans” named Mark David Chapman, a Christian fanatic. Lennon, a singer-songwriter and a peace advocate, had died at the age of 40 due to his gunshot wounds. At his trial, the 25-year-old Chapman proclaimed his own guilt for the crime, stating it was “God’s will” to kill John Lennon because he blasphemed Jesus for declaring he and his fellow members of The Beatles

were far more popular than Jesus Christ, and for his popular son “Imagine” which has “atheistic” and anti-religious messages. Here and now, many years after Lennon died, this crime is still a reminder to all of us, religion breeds mental illness. Not just if it is taken “too far” but at the very consideration of a religion, thought and reason starts to go out the window, and mental illness makes it way in the head instead. There are far too many examples. This is just one.

Being honest may not get you a lot of friends but it’ll always get you the right ones. -John Lennon.

“It’s very easy to blame radicalization, but radicalization is very easy if people are brought up in the first place to believe that faith is a virtue. If you bring up children and tell them that believing without evidence, (which is what faith is), is a virtue, only a tiny majority might become radicalized, but the ground has been fertilized for radicalization.” - Richard Dawkins

Creationist, Ken Ham, is another example of who I think is a mentally ill religious person. Ken Ham, who built a giant Noah’s Ark-themed attraction in Kentucky, said he doesn’t think there’s life beyond earth in space. And if such life existed, they shouldn’t expect any form of salvation from Jesus Christ.

“Jesus came to save us, not to another planet to save another race of beings,” Ham wrote on Twitter, adding that it’s clear “salvation through Christ is only for the Adamic race,” aka human earthlings.

Such speak is just strange. But should we be surprised? This delusional religious person takes the mainstream rhetoric of the masses and goes a step further outside the box with his delusions and claims. So, perhaps my fluffy dog can go to heaven with me because ‘all dogs go to heaven’ is repeated enough? Let’s ask Mr. Ham. I bet he knows what does and what does not go to heaven... But aliens? Aliens surely cannot? Got it, Mr. Ham. Thanks for explaining that to us. Such ridiculous kind of talk is somewhat humorous and amusing to some of us yet is also somewhat alarming and disturbing. It

raises a red flag on mental status of the person making these claims to know what their imaginary deity is thinking.

Religious delusions like this are not only disconcerting, but they take us backwards as a species and it pulls other gullible and less intelligent human beings down a rabbit hole. This is a conversation that is on par with how best to light your farts on fire.

On the bright side, however, Ham said they won't need redemption anyway ... Since they don't exist. He knows... (Eye roll). The Bible, according to his strict interpretation, on twitter says only Earth was made to be inhabited, "and the other celestial bodies were created for signs, seasons, days, and years."

Ham was responding to a recent poll that found deeply religious Americans are less likely to believe in intelligent life outside of Earth. He has made similar comments before, writing in 2014, "Jesus did not become the 'God-Klingon' or the 'God-Martian'! Only descendants of Adam can be saved." Not all Christians agree with Ham either.

Furthermore, Pope Francis, for example, has said that he would baptize Martians if they came to Earth if he was asked, as reported by Time Magazine. Really Pope? "Who are we to close the door?" said the Pope in 2014. There are varying degrees of delusion in all types of religions.

I would like to say (in vain) Jesus-tap-dancing-Christ-Almighty, what is this world coming to? Ken Ham and the Pope are opening up a debate about whether aliens can be saved into an imaginary afterlife with us and whether or not they should be baptized. All we can do is laugh and speak out against their amusing delusions, I guess.

Have you ever seen the movie 'Dinner with Schmucks'? I think we may be able to top that movie in real life by inviting these two to dinner with, Brian Tome, and watching the beautiful stupidity sparks fly. Wish we could add Henry the VIII to the mix at this dinner too. When the pope told him he

couldn't divorce his wife, he separated from the Catholic Church and made his own religion. Remember, you can too. (Refer to Chapter 7.) For power, influence, money... And to make a point like Henry the VIII.

Back to aliens. The late evangelist Billy Graham also felt the need to weigh in with his thoughts on the matter. "I firmly believe there are intelligent beings like us far away in space who worship God," he once said, adding that there's no need to fear such beings since they're also part of creation.

In 2008, Jesuit Father, José Funes — who, at the time, was the director of the Vatican Observatory — said space aliens would not be inconsistent with the Bible.

"This is not in contrast with the faith, because we cannot place limits on the creative freedom of God," he told the Catholic Review. "To use St. Francis' words, if we consider earthly creatures as 'brothers' and 'sisters,' why can't we also speak of an 'extraterrestrial brother?'" Funes added that such aliens may not even need redemption from Jesus, who may have come to Earth only because humans are the "lost sheep" of creation.

Any factual claim about the structure of reality should be held to scientific standards of evidence. Religious claims that cannot be proven or unproven isn't the fault of science and isn't grounds to accept them on lower standards. It's grounds for outright dismissal.

"God became man in Jesus in order to save us. So, if there are also other intelligent beings, it's not a given that they need redemption," Funes said. "They might have remained in full friendship with their creator."

Aside from this ridiculous rabbit whole of a thought, let's provide some scientific perspective. Of course, the evidence on life elsewhere isn't all in yet.

Bill Bryson sums it up the best in my opinion. "So far astronomers have found only a few dozen or so potentially inhabitable planets beyond our solar

system out of the 10 billion trillion or so that are thought to exist. So, we can hardly claim to have scoured every corner of the universe. But it is certainly the case that the only life that has turned up or been discovered so far and very possibly ever will certainly in our lifetime is found on this one planet we call earth in a nameless solar system two-thirds out from the center of the milky way. And all that life is found within a frail whisp of atmosphere on the surface of our planet.” – Bill Bryson

Ham’s fundamentalist view of the Bible has led to odd exhibitions at his Noah’s Ark-themed attraction, including dinosaurs, which he believes lived alongside humans.

By the way, sometimes name-calling by politicians is a good thing. It allows voters to really know how a politician feels about someone or something. Isn’t that what voters want to know? What a politician is thinking? Some people think it is a candidate’s job to get votes. The candidates that use the buttoned-mouth strategy may go far. But they are attempting to conceal how they feel. I will not. A candidate’s job is to be open and honest to the voting public about how they think and feel about all things under the sun. I care about kindness. But I care about the truth and honesty more. That wins out. The truth, which may hurt at times, is most kind because it is not a lie.

I am not afraid to call Mr. Ham or people like him out for their ignorance. Most intelligent life on earth and scientists believe Earth is about 4.5 billion years old, and nearly all agree that dinosaurs were wiped out somewhere around 65 million years ago, long before the first humans appeared. Not only does science support evidence for evolution, the closest human ancestor of ours to live during the time of the dinosaurs would have been similar to the modern lemur. Many scientists agree that by the time dinosaurs died out, mammals were already a very diverse group, but this was still 10 million years before the first primates and 30 million years before the first apes. That is cool stuff. That is science. And we will evolve the story of our past as evidence and reason provides. We should not be afraid to change how we see the world when facts are presented that reflect our actual reality.

People make mistakes. That is what makes us all human.

There are thousands of religions and imaginary deities that have taken hold in the minds of the masses out there around the world. Many scientific or technological advancements in our society and all throughout human history have been an insult to some religion's imaginary deity somewhere. This makes me shake my head.

Religion is a collective mental delusion. If I say I believe in an all-powerful flying spaghetti monster deity that controls the universe, then I have a mental delusion and I am the only one that believes that. However, if I believe it, and I get a host of others to believe in this deity, then it turns into a collective mental delusion. This can turn into a cult, or if large enough masses of people progress into the same delusion, it then becomes a religion. Religions have to be very welcoming and cunning to pull this off, and they are.

“Teaching creationism is child abuse. Allowing the notion that the earth is 6000 years old to be promulgated in schools, is like teaching kids that the distance across the United States is 17 feet. That’s how big of an error it is.”
-Lawrence Krauss.

Some may say religion is benign or even a force for good, but because it lies from the outset about claiming to know things it can't possibly know, religions are not good, and they are not benign either. Religions are an embarrassment to humankind. I think one day humans will look back at this time period and shake their heads at the religions of today much the same way that we shake our heads at the other religions of the past.

Chapter 11

Love, Sex, and Marriage

Consider the following three statements by Mark D. White Ph.D. of Psychology Today.

1. People in relationships may have sexual needs.
2. They are restricted from satisfying those needs outside of their relationship.
3. Their partners have no obligation to satisfy these needs for them within the relationship.

These three statements are mutually inconsistent, and one of them may or may not have to cause a break in your relationship for you to be your full healthy self that you picture. The beginning of this chapter covers a specialize situation that depending on your situation you may or may not ever encounter. I feel it is worth discussing.

The “Christian deity” hates divorce. It says so in the Bible. (Malachi 2:16) So, let’s talk about the subject of considering a divorce based on sexual compatibility, for example. A spouse not wanting or not able to satisfy sexual fulfillment of the other spouse is perfectly normal unfortunately and happens all the time. This can cause compatibility issues.

There is a lot of shame in divorce. Religion puts a lot of that on the people considering one too. A common question might be: “What will people at your church think if you get a divorce based on sexual incompatibility (or anything for that matter)?”

What does one spouse do when the other spouse doesn’t want to engage in certain sexual activities anymore with him or her? I have no real advice but some things to consider.

It certainly is a conundrum and poses a gigantic conflict for some people. For some men and women that are not being sexually satisfied in a marriage by their partner, that perhaps couldn’t care less about the partner’s sexual needs, it can feel like giant betrayal to them. Consider after all, they may have given their youth and whole life to this person through marriage believing that, as long as you are both able, romance would be cultivated and worked on.

Similarly, the other person might think they may have given their youth and whole life to this person through marriage believing no matter what, with romance or not, they will work on staying together. Sure, there would be peaks and valleys, but your situation might be a valley that is beyond repair in some minds out of neglect of one kind or another. Some others may disagree. If you do disagree, both sides can end up saying to the other: “So what. Tough for you, I guess.”

With mutual understanding and loving responses (hopefully), you may have a tough decision to make. Should I leave or should I go? Do what is best for you. For the spouse that wants it and is not getting it – is being in a loveless and sexually unsatisfying marriage from your point of view worth it? For the one that doesn’t want it and dislikes the advances, is being sought after much to your chagrin and sticking with the marriage anyway worth it from your point of view?

Some that are not as sexual may say that would be no big deal. They may say to the other partner “Get over it. The fact that sex found its way out of our marriage or relationship is your problem. Go work on not being as horny. I don’t have to engage with you etc.”

Others might say that would be straight up fucking hell and to run for the hills asap and get a divorce if you are in a loveless and/or sexless marriage that you are not fulfilled with.

Or if a spouse is wanting sex from you all the time and you don’t want it, it can equally be straight up hell and you might want to run too. As a human being, the choice is yours. There are benefits and consequences to both staying and going.

There is no right or wrong answer although others might try to manipulate you and tell you there is a right answer and point to what they want you to do. They might try to (or unintentionally) hurt your feelings. They might reference their imaginary gods even to get you do something or not do something on either side of the argument. Manipulation on one or both sides can come into play.

However, there is only your answer and decision. Your voice. Your choice. You are allowed to set up boundaries for what you think a healthy relationship might be for you. Pursue your happiness. If others don’t like that, or if they shame you for moving on, they can buzz off. Take care of yourself and once you heal, perhaps you can find another partner that you are compatible with or remain happily single. It could be obvious that a spouse couldn’t care less at this point about your sexual needs or non-sexual needs, and that is totally their decision and their boundary. If this is a situation you are in, on either side, you have my deepest empathy. Some people unfortunately lose their lives over such a relationship challenge. Not you though. Not your relationship. Find a way to press through the pain and end up on the other side where there is a healthy win-win for everyone.

In his book, *Atheism for Dummies*, Dale McGowan talks about rethinking sex and sexuality. “When it comes to sex and gender, the Bronze Age wasn’t the most enlightening time. Religions born in this period have conserved and transmitted these ideas up to the present day. As a result, sex itself is often wrapped up in a confusion of mixed messages. To paraphrase country singer Butch Hancock, religions with Bronze aged roots often call sex a dirty, nasty thing... That I should save for someone I love. Though many religious people have moved beyond these fearful notions, many others keep following their scriptures regarding sex and gender. Even though the rest of society has long since outgrown them.”

Imagine worshipping a god who, despite creating 100 billion galaxies in the observable universe, is really mad about your dildos. So, God has the power to end world hunger, but watches you masturbate instead?

“Being free of ancient scriptures and unchangeable ideas means the nonreligious can easily adapt and change their attitudes as culture and ethics mature. No area of human life is in greater need of an update. Atheists and humanists don’t have a separate set of ethics related to sex. The same questions of responsibility and consequences apply as with everything else. Does a particular sexual practice harm anyone? Has everybody involved given informed consent? If so, then have a blast. Sex is a natural part of being human, and evolution, not Satan has made it enjoyable. That’s why every one of your ancestors had sex. And a good thing, or this book would have one less reader.” - Dale McGowan

“Sin” is made up to shackle you to a religion. Sin is made up by a religion to ensnare you in its psychological grip of fear and dependency on it for safety from an imaginary threat. Religion declares psychological warfare on the human mind to achieve its goal of becoming the most powerful religion for those at the top steering the ship. The religious leadership are conniving and scheming for your obedience. This, to turn you into a blind follower and money machine, a recruitment machine, and free worker/volunteer machine as much as it can extract from you. Obedient enough, and it will make you feel you get more out than what you put in. However, you are putting in so

much more. All that time, energy, and money for a lie they tell you. They may be convinced that you and anyone who doesn't believe them is not "saved". People actually believe it. Then if you find yourself at the top, you benefit from more believers.

Let's also talk about abortion. I am Pro-Choice. Providing birth control, sex education and more social services will help reduce the number of abortions. Only at the moment of birth should the child receive the full protection of the state. Before that moment, I believe the fetus's survival is entirely reliant on its mother's decisions, her will to carry the child, and nature taking its course. It should be entirely the mother's choice to carry a baby to full term. Life begins at conception. However, citizenship should only begin at birth. However, I fully respect all views on this topic and will continue to listen to all opposing viewpoints to confirm or adjust my opinion. This is a tough subject. Life is beautiful and I want to encourage life but not in any way force it. I want to encourage women in whatever decision they want to make for themselves. Just a quick point on citizenship - Section 1 of the 14th amendment states that persons born here or naturalized are U.S. citizens. By those criteria, the unborn cannot be U.S. citizens.

*Furthermore, on this special topic, I like these thoughts and opinions from two other folks:

"The unborn are a convenient group of people to advocate for. They never make demands of you; they are morally uncomplicated, unlike the incarcerated, addicted, or the chronically poor; they don't resent your condescension or complain that you are not politically correct; unlike widows, they don't ask you to question patriarchy; unlike orphans, they don't need money, education, or childcare; unlike aliens, they don't bring all that racial, cultural, and religious baggage that you dislike; they allow you to feel good about yourself without any work at creating or maintaining relationships; and when they are born, you can forget about them, because they cease to be unborn. You can love the unborn and advocate for them without substantially challenging your own wealth, power, or privilege, without re-imagining social structures, apologizing, or making reparations to

anyone. They are, in short, the perfect people to love if you want to claim you love Jesus, but actually dislike people who breathe. Prisoners? Immigrants? The sick? The poor? Widows? Orphans? All the groups that are specifically mentioned in the Bible? They all get thrown under the bus for the unborn.” -Methodist Pastor David Barnhart

“Last night, I was in a debate about these new abortion laws being passed in red states. My son stepped in with this comment which was a showstopper. One of the best explanations I have read: ‘Reasonable people can disagree about when a zygote becomes a “human life” – that’s not a philosophical question. However, regardless of whether or not one believes a fetus is ethically equivalent to an adult, it doesn’t obligate a mother to sacrifice her body autonomy for another, innocent or not. Body autonomy is a critical component of the right to privacy protected by the Constitution, as decided in *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965), *McFall v. Shrimp* (1978), and of course *Roe v. Wade* (1973).

Consider a scenario where you are a perfect bone marrow match for a child with severe aplastic anemia; no other person on earth is a close enough match to save the child’s life, and the child will certainly die without a bone marrow transplant from you. If you decided that you did not want to donate your marrow to save the child, for whatever reason, the state cannot demand the use of any part of your body for something to which you do not consent. It doesn’t matter if the procedure required to complete the donation is trivial, or if the rationale for refusing is flimsy and arbitrary, or if the procedure is the only hope the child has to survive, or if the child is a genius or a saint of anything else – the decision to donate must be voluntary to be constitutional. This right is even extended to a person’s body after they die; if they did not voluntarily commit to donate their organs while alive, their organs cannot be harvested after death, regardless of how useless those organs are to the deceased or how many lives they would save. That’s the law.

Use of a woman’s uterus to save a life is no different from the use of her bone marrow to save a life – it must be offered voluntarily. By all means, profess your belief that providing one’s uterus to save the child is morally just, and refusing is morally wrong. That is a defensible philosophical

position, regardless of who agrees and who disagrees. But legally, it must be the woman's choice to carry out the pregnancy. She may choose to carry the baby to term. She may choose not to. Either decision could be made for all the right reasons, all the wrong reasons, or anything in between. But it must be her choice and protecting the right of body autonomy means the law is on her side. Supporting that precedent is what being pro-choice means." - Author Unknown

Many Christian Nationalists are really trying to convince us that the god who murdered Bathsheba's newborn, killed the firstborn sons of Egypt, sent bears to murder little children, commanded Joshua to kill all the children in Jericho, now suddenly cares about unborn babies. Baloney.

"Religion: So pathetically absurd and infantile that it is humiliating and embarrassing to think that the majority of people will never rise above it." – Sigmund Freud. 'Jesus is coming soon' This statement has been used to delude and mentally enslave different generations for the past 2000 years. Something that probably pushed me to atheism. If a god made us, who made this god? The answer is that we did in our minds. People may get upset when their beliefs are challenged. A mental conflict occurs when beliefs are contradicted by new information. This conflict activates areas of the brain involved in personal identity and emotional response to threats. The brain's alarms go off when a person feels threatened on a deeply personal and emotional level causing them to shut down and disregard any rational evidence that contradicts what they previously regarded as truth.

The Bible is a fun book to read. I still read it as an atheist. It is a book with some wonderful passages, but it also has ghost sex, and giants, and super babies, and demons. It's why we don't make laws based on Game of Thrones, My Little Pony, or the Legend of Zelda.

Chapter 12

Going to Church

Have you considered how much of a typical religious service functions as a kind of brainwashing ritual? Maybe this feels offensive or like I'm crossing a line but consider how the various aspects of a church service are intended to reinforce the sense of group identity that comes from aligning your values with those espoused by your community. I suppose the effectiveness of the rituals may depend on who you are and why you're there. For example, I used to be a true believer, but now, I can usually sit in a religious service and observe the various movements, rituals, and segments almost as a form of entertainment. When you remove yourself enough to see what's happening "behind the veil" or just beneath the surface, it can even be fun. Try it.

On the other hand, this particular exercise might not be for you. After all, I can sometimes feel overcome by hopelessness because I want to help everyone present to see what I see. I want them to snap out of it, and yet I see so many slipping deeper into religion or falling under the control of whoever is leading the service. I try not to worry about that too much. It's a lot. So, I focus my goal on making sure nonbelievers simply know that they are not alone.

Most of the time, I'm just glad I made it out and that I can now observe Christianity and other religions for what they are. I have lived in that religious mindset. Comfortable, accepting, and blissfully unaware. I sometimes look back on that period of my life. I miss some and cringe at others. Thinking about one's youth can have that effect. It's hard to believe I was once that person. Actually believing. Once I began to see religion for what it really is, that comfort dissipated. I felt manipulated. Once you see a thing, it's nearly impossible to stop seeing it. It is what it is.

There are enormous cracks in religion—gaps between what's true and what's presented as true. You only have to look for them. Most people probably don't want to look too closely at the cracks or consider the gaps. It's disorienting. Much easier for some to ignore the problems, push down your doubts, and live the undisturbed life.

But a delusion can't last. It has no foundation, and it's not sustainable for humankind. Faith today is called religion. Religion tomorrow will be called mythology. People who can't see the cracks are far more likely to fall in and to get hurt by religion. That's why I'm working so hard to tell the truth in my life and in this book. I want to help people to start seeing the cracks. I want to help people learn to see those cracks for themselves. I want to help people learn how to see religion for what it is so they can crawl out of it or so they can avoid being swallowed up in it in the first place.

Let's take, for example, the assumption of biblical morality. In the Bible, various things are listed as impure, unnatural, and wrong. Here's a list: eating pork (Leviticus 11:7, "And the pig ... is unclean for you"), eating shellfish (Leviticus 11:9-12, "to be regarded as unclean by you"), gay marriage (Leviticus 18:22, "Do not have sexual relations with a man"), wearing clothes made of mixed fabrics (Leviticus 19:19, "Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material"), and trimming your beard (Leviticus 19:27, "Do not ... clip off the edges of your beard"). Maybe you agree with all these things or see them as mostly noncontroversial, so now I want you to take a look at a different list of just a few of the things the Bible describes as allowable or even honorable. Here's a list: human trafficking (Exodus 21:7, "If a man sells

his daughter as a servant, she is not to go free”), rape (Deuteronomy 22:28-29, “If a man happens to meet a virgin who is pledged to be married and rapes her.... He must marry the young woman”), child beating (Proverbs 22:15, “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod ... will drive it far away”), and misogyny (1 Timothy 2:12, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority”). There are too many other examples. I could go on and on. But I encourage you to actually read the Bible for yourself. Pay attention and you will start to see what I mean.

Some people may read my book and agree with every word I’ve written. Others may consider the challenges I propose as a test of their faith. They might even argue that God is allowing them to see these problems with the Bible, now, as a way of finding out how loyal they really are. That kind of thinking used to make sense to me. But if I find out someone has misled me about their true character or about what they value, that doesn’t generally make our relationship stronger. If anything, it should make me cautious, and it would make sense for me to feel at least an inkling of doubt the next time they promise me something or try to convince me how much they love me. This is a normal response. Most humans have a built-in sensitivity to BS. Pay attention to that. Listen to it.

Unfortunately, doubt can be frightening. Because if what you’ve always believed is intertwined with your identity, facing the truth about the possibility that it’s all fantasy is to face the possible destruction of the you you’ve always known. I had to face it too. I had to consider what I would be without religion. It was scary. Would some of the people that I love and care about stop talking to me? Would I feel isolated and alone? Ultimately, though, truth was more important to me than being liked. I could no longer ignore all the red flags in religion. Being silent or trying to stay neutral about religion wasn’t an option for me because I couldn’t live untrue to myself.

This one life is all you and I have. Truth is freedom. With the truth, you can choose, and you are free to choose. With religion, you get stuck in a rigid belief system. You dull your senses, and in exchange, you receive a drug that, at first, provides the illusion of a certain kind of world. Religion makes some

feel as though they are surrounded by “loving” people. Question or criticize that person’s religion and you may lose that community but gain truth and find out who your friends are.

Religion gives the illusion of clarity about who you are, about why you exist, and about how you ought to live. This is the power of the lie of religion. It is a “meaning-making” social network, and it does what it does better than just about any other social system we know of by unfortunately perfecting a lie. It’s a trap. The story of a religion may make you feel like you have purpose and direction. You had that all along and alone inside you. You don’t need religion to have purpose and direction. The religion wants you to think that you need it to have those things.

Remaining skeptical and losing the gullibility you may have had in the past can require some straight-up discipline. You have to learn to face into and accept reality (and hopefully enjoy it). You have to work at loving other people your way. Not by being manipulated into thinking there is only one way. A particular religious way. We can work to further humanity and to build a beautiful future together without religions.

As for religion, it’s built by humans for human purposes. That’s why “Gods”—in most religions—appears to be little more than an exalted human with human characteristics. What this means is that both gods and religions are constructs. Some would call them illusions.

Welcome to humanity. Welcome to reality. No matter what you believe, you are on this planet with me. With us. With all of us. All other human beings. We’re in this together no matter what our social, political, and religious barriers and boundaries may suggest. We’re connected to the earth and to one another. We can make beautiful connections with each other on purpose. We can build community. We can build something better. For everyone.

Back when I first opened myself to the possibility that I was living a religious delusion, I was scared. I studied and thought and read some more and

thought even more. Eventually, though, I was ready to act and to identify myself as a nonbeliever, a secular activist, a humanist, a free thinker, and/or an atheist. Again, I am not loyal to any movement or belief. I could change based on evidence. But I will watch and stay alert and say what I think.

Typically, in a lot of churches, the minute you express a serious question or anything akin to doubt, a religious leader gets you one-on-one or takes you to coffee or calls you in for a meeting (if your family is giving especially). They want to get to you first, and they want to get you to shut down the doubts and the best way to do this is to say it is ok to have doubts, but to just keep a little faith etc. I think it's a kind of damage control, and that's why I would encourage you to talk to both a religious person and a non-religious person. An agnostic person too. See for yourself. Get different perspectives before making up your mind about what's real. Or, never make up your mind. See if you can pick out some of the cracks in any of the people you talk to and see where the truth shakes out.

As an agnostic for quite a while, I eventually found myself saying, "Well, maybe their religious delusions are correct." Key word "delusions". That finally pushed from a Christian at the start – to agnosticism – to atheism.

For me, the answer became pretty clear after a lot of... Ha "soul-searching," and then, ironically, I realized that even the idea of a "soul" was a delusion as well. But I kept reading my Bible and having conversations and thinking and doubting and discovering. Along the way, I also met a lot of really good people—people who weren't afraid of my questions. I came to realize that I wanted to be that kind of person as well—someone who wasn't afraid of what the truth might be, someone who didn't need any kind of brainwashing ritual to feel okay again.

As long as humans are around, religion will follow us and pop up here and there by people who want to take advantage of others. I think it is up to many of us to warn the youth of the world about the trappings of religion so they can identify it and not fall victim to it. No amount of belief makes something a fact. By the way, if you saw a sign that said, "Jesus matters",

would you be tempted to put a sign up next to it that says all imaginary gods matter? Ha.

Imagine a caulk gun. Now place the word 'god' on it) Science hasn't fixed that yet? Are there gaps in your understanding of the universe? Fill them with your imaginary caulk gun. There! God of the gaps. "I don't know, therefore GOD". Everyone is born an atheist. Some of us find our way back. I think humans really have a deep desire for meaning. And it is something that is really hardwired into us. You get to discover what your meaning is for yourself.

Chapter 13

The Bible

“Buy a bible, never read it and you might be a good Christian. Buy a bible, read parts of it and you might become a pious sonofabitch. Buy a bible, study it thoroughly, and you just might become an atheist, disliked by many religious.” —Hellbroke Lucy

The Bible presents problems for contemporary readers—problems that Christians slide right past. As discussed, according to Genesis, we all come from Adam and Eve, who had two sons. Take some time to consider what this claim suggests, what questions it raises. The fact is that many stories we find in the Bible seem improbable; some seem outright impossible—or even foolish. Adam and Eve eat an apple and gain knowledge. Snow White eats a poisoned apple and falls into a sleep-like trance. Both stories are impossible sounding and equally unbelievable.

Are the Bible stories fables? Greek and Roman myths had their stories of gods, god-men, human heroes, and miracles, just like those we find in the Bible. This is actually a function of religion. Many of the world’s religions have tall tales and fantasy stories: Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. Let’s start back at the beginning of the Bible.

The Bible conflicts with reality. God creates the universe in six days and then rests for a day. He creates light and all the various natural objects by speaking them into existence: “God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (Genesis 1:3). That was the first day. The second and third days, God forms the earth, separates the sky from the seas and the waters from the land, and fills up the land with “plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind” (Genesis 1:11). On the fourth day, the sun, moon, planets, and stars appear “to give light upon the earth” (Genesis 1:17). On day five, God makes sea animals and birds. On the sixth day, land animals and humans. God forms the first man, Adam, from the dirt.

It’s a fairly orderly account, and taken literally, one might count up all the days and years accounted for in the early books of the Bible and come to the conclusion that the entire universe has been around for roughly 6,000-10,000 years from start to finish (or something like that). But something Christians largely ignore is that the book of Genesis contains two conflicting accounts of the creation story. The Bible doesn’t even seem to agree with itself about how everything went down back in the beginning.

The second story, starting in Genesis 2:5, has humans showing up “when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and here was no one to till the ground.”

I could go into more detail here, but the point I want to make is that we can absolutely know these creation stories are not factually true because of our modern knowledge of the sciences of astronomy, geology, biology, physics, paleontology, etc. The sun was not formed after the Earth. Plant life didn’t show up before there was a sun and the universe is at least 13 billion years old. The Earth is roughly 4.5 billion years old, and the first life forms were single-celled organisms from around three billion years ago. It is pure silliness to believe the Earth was created only six to ten thousand years ago, after the domestication of the dog for example!

God punishes humanity. Getting back to humans—God creates Adam out of dust, puts him in a garden paradise, and tells him to “freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat” (Genesis 2:16–17). Adam is lonely, so God makes all kinds of animals “and every bird of the air ... but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner” (Genesis 2:20). God goes back to the drawing board, and then, while Adam is sleeping, God takes one of Adam’s ribs (or his side, depending on the Bible version you’re reading) and creates the woman, Eve: “And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed” (Genesis 2:25).

The plot thickens. A talking serpent—“more crafty than any other wild animal” (Genesis 3:1)—approaches Eve and tempts her to eat the forbidden fruit. Eve tells the serpent that she could die from eating the fruit or even from touching the tree. At least that’s what God told her. The serpent reassures Eve that God lied to her, “for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened” (Genesis 3:5). Eve eats the fruit, “and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate” (Genesis 3:6). After eating the fruit, Adam and Eve hide because they are aware and ashamed that they are naked. God finds Adam and Eve, and he banishes them from the garden, punishing them with hard labor. God curses all women forever with pain during childbirth, and he curses the serpent forever to crawl on its belly.

That is how humans were created, according to the Bible. It is how the snake “lost” its legs, and it answers the question as to why women experience pain when giving birth. This is also supposed to explain why people wear clothes. Does this seem ridiculous? Simplistic? Far-fetched? And what kind of justice is it to punish all of humanity when only two people broke the rule? And what was the sin? Is it disobedience? This God seems a bit fragile. Good parents don’t generally punish their children for wanting to be wise.

When religious holidays are around, there’s always a great opportunity for those of us who live with a more reality-based worldview to stand up and speak out. It is wonderful and healthy to provide an alternative perspective

to religious delusions. Facebook and social media provide a convenient opportunity to tell the world that you are who you are. If you haven't already done so, a holiday weekend is a perfect time to tell your family that you are not a Christian, Jew, Muslim, or whatever etc... In my opinion, coming out as a non-believer is a very healthy, mature, and freeing experience. Yours is a message which others should hear.

Religions love to get ahold of young people. They hope to hide the lie for as long as possible by making it fun for the children of the delusional adult parents. Religions manipulate kids into believing in their particular imaginary supernatural beings. Religions also work their way into certain holiday nostalgia. Religious institutions have learned that a connection with the holidays makes it more likely that adults, in a moment of reminiscence, will "come back to the faith" or "believe again," especially if they were once caught up in the net of religion as children. It's all part of religion's lifelong con game on the gullible masses.

Think about our own nation's traditions. There are pieces of manipulation there, especially during the winter holidays, all of which lead to religion. Christmas started out as a politically motivated move by one man. By Constantine. When the emperor who preceded him died there were three people competing for the throne. Constantine abolished the Sun God religion as he consolidated his authority and declared the Sun God's birthday (a spectacular holiday) December 25 to be Jesus's birth date. He chaired the Council of Nicaea, and it was obviously to his political advantage that it came to an end with one single interpretation of Christianity with administrative authority vested in the Bishop of Rome... The pope. (Religion. For power, influence, and money.)

Long ago, before the Council of Nicaea on December 25th, under the light of a star, a savior was born unto mankind of a gentle virgin mother. Shepherds from nearby fields attended the miracle. As an adult he acquired twelve disciples and people called him "The good Shepherd." His name was Mithra of Persia, and he lived hundreds of years before Jesus, but I could have also easily meant Osiris. Or Krishna. Or Zoroaster. Or I could say

Happy Saturnalia. Saturnalia, held in mid-December, is an ancient Roman pagan festival honoring the agricultural god, Saturn. Saturnalia celebrations can be one the source of many for the traditions we now associate with Christmas.

All the major religions give us calendars. Religions are clever at arranging time for their followers to further delude them. A calendar is a way of making sure that throughout the year you will bump into certain ideas that a particular religion wants to drill home in your head. You won't bump into it by accident. You will do that because you are guided to do that. Manipulation. In a Christian calendar, each spring you eventually run into Easter, for example. This, so that you will think about a particular story from the religion about a man-god being raised from the dead and supposedly saving the world. Again, they believe that their imaginary god sacrificed himself, to himself, (there are three gods in one) to save humanity, from himself (and from another imaginary super-bad entity that the first super-entity created long ago). Hey – Religions repeat themselves every Sunday. Why can't I? Anyway, the man-god (one third of a full trinity god) was tortured to death as a scapegoat to save people from a bad afterlife. This is no problem for the shrewd manipulation of the religion. Their excitable, yet intricate explanations are convincing to the gullible, but in reality, are a web of lies and trickery. According to the lie of the religion, all you have to do is believe in the story that this “one true” man-god is your savior, and presto, you are saved. Now, to further delude yourself, go tell everyone you know and save them too. Okay? As with anything, if sounds like BS and is made up, that's because it probably is.

Religion may have once been useful; it probably served a survival purpose for early humanity. But now, we need to tell the truth about the world and about us if we want future generations to question what is being taught by those religions they encounter. This, so that they can think creatively, ask questions, decide critically, and act in ways that make the world a better place for all of us. Teaching and learning the “best ways to live” should be part of that discussion. But everyone ultimately gets to decide the best way to live for themselves.

The general view regarding Genesis is that it was written by Moses about 1300 B.C. But no one is sure. The first 11 chapters are stories of legends, some of which originated in earlier civilizations. For example, the Great Flood story first appeared in the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh around 2,000 B.C. The Bible God, up through the Tower of Babel legend, is presented as somewhat of a normal guy in his interactions with people. He is the one who “shut” the door on Noah’s ark as the flooding began. In the second half, which begins the story of Moses, this god takes on a different persona. A mysterious power “up there” somewhere.

What was your childhood development like? I was so indoctrinated as a child, that it took me almost four decades to finally be able to think for myself. What we teach children has a profound impact on them, and the stories we tell set the tone—and a baseline standard—for the rest of their lives. Religions know this and take this part of their con very seriously. I had to unlearn and re-verify everything I thought was true. Question everything instead of the alternative. Not everyone breaks free unfortunately.

Jesus, as a Hebrew apocalypticist taught when God sent his Messiah those who were righteous would live forever (and the dead would be resurrected) but everyone else would just be dead. He, like those who shared his view, believed the Messiah would be showing up in the immediate future and even told his followers some of them would still be alive when it happened. As the 2nd century progressed and it did not happen is when the heaven and hell thing developed in the church.

But here’s the thing: human beings no longer need to be scared into good behavior by religion. We have evolved past that. We need to focus, instead, on what’s true. Far too often, religion gets away with deception. Now that I’ve discovered how it all works, I won’t ever forget. Instead of checking off a list of “right beliefs,” our children have to learn how to think for themselves and question. I want our future generations to have the tools they need to live alongside the wart of religion and see the truth for what it is. I want them to see clearly and live courageously. Children need to be taught

how to think and question, not what to think, and certainly not simply to accept the status quo.

Churches scare children with “hell”. I remember once I used God’s name in vain as a child accidentally, and I was scared for days that I might burn in hell forever for it. It really messed me up. I needed to believe in Jesus, or I was doomed. Now, I admit I have some repulsion for people who fill the heads of children with fear of religion and/or hell—an imaginary place of torment for anyone who upsets an imaginary god with their behavior.

The problem is that Christians preach about how much God loves everyone but especially children: “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is too such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs” (Matthew 19:14). With this in mind, using the threat of eternal damnation to frighten children or adults into behaving a certain way is inconsistent and abusive. It is manipulation designed to control children’s bodies and brains. And it’s part of the lifelong con job, where religious leaders work to control the wallets, purses, and checkbooks of the faithful. That work starts when we are young. Eventually the subject of hell will come up. Then the manipulation is immediate. Believe and ask for forgiveness or go to hell.

Consider this: youth pastors, youth clergy, and youth religious teachers of all kinds are a tool for the mechanism of religion. Pastors and preachers get a lot of the blame (as well they should), but there are plenty of religious workers, relatively unknown outside their own churches, who are doing the day-to-day work of child control. It wasn’t until I grew up that I realized the damage done to me in the name of religion. Admittedly, some youth leaders do this unknowingly. They’re as much a product of the system as they are the problem.

As I attended Crossroads Church for more than a decade, I remember defending it from people who called it a cult. At the time, the church had a quote on its website, and I loved that quote: “Fine, we’re a cult,” they say. “But we’re rubber and your glue.” I thought it was in-your-face honest and

clever, but I now realize it was just plain ignorance. I was wrong to defend it.

I still have family and friends at Crossroads, but I'm not afraid to call it out for what it is. Crossroads is a cult. All churches are. The efficient way it deludes children as well as the rest of the people that call that place home makes it particularly disgusting. Don't get me wrong: the people are great. But the nonsense that place churns out is what is significant.

We have to offer those who escape a welcoming embrace that have found freedom from religion. We have to remember we're fighting systems, not people.

Some Christians say if you don't believe in God, you're going to suffer and burn for all eternity in hell. This is where group think starts: with fear. You subscribe to group think in order to resolve or push down the fear. That's one of the primary mechanisms of control employed by Christianity in the U.S. today.

What happens, though, when people subscribe to group think, is that they first put away their questions, and then they lose their ability to question entirely. In this way, religions are brainwashing clinics for scripted group think. The adult members of a religious group, over time, lose their ability—let alone the courage—to question their puppet master religious leaders. Bottom line, this script isn't just for the adults. As I've written before, it starts much earlier than that. This script teaches our kids to think inside the box, conform completely to religion.

This same script teaches children that their acceptance in the group—something every child needs to feel secure—is dependent on thinking the way the group does. “Success” is tied to believing the right things. The penalties for failing to follow the “righteous” path is social exclusion—a kind of death by isolation—and the potential of a future death tied to eternal torment. Children learn early on that if they don't toe the religious line, they will lose everything. Child abuse isn't always physical.

A child's mind is a vulnerable, beautiful, precious thing. We destroy it by teaching fairytales as facts. Atheist 'temples' are libraries. More than one book on more than one main subject is available.

When I was a child, there were times when I would look around after the preacher said something ridiculous, just to see if other people heard what I heard. I was surrounded by blank faces. Except some people were smiling—nodding, even. They agreed! What about those adults who knew the preacher was wrong? I now know they existed then, but they never spoke up. Either they nodded along with everyone else. Or if the disagreement was serious enough, they'd leave the church altogether. Those folks who left, I never saw them again. But I do know this. Adults who didn't challenge religious leaders may have had good reasons for not doing so. Children like me, however, were left to the machine of religion. I needed someone to stand up and say this isn't right. We all needed that.

Very few adults have the courage speak up and out against such a powerful brainwashing machine as the church, for example. It's a frightening proposition, for sure. I don't blame them. Speaking up in that kind of environment can be far more risk than reward. They risked loss of reputation, loss of community, and even loss of family relationships. Much later, I was able to finally think for myself, identify religion for the lie it is, and pull myself out of it. Today, I strive to be the adult that I wish I had in my life growing up—someone brave enough to speak out against that baloney that religion dishes out.

If you are a teen, about the age I was when I was confirmed, and you are reading this, and you recognize that your parents are delusional because of their religion, and if you don't want to go to church, synagogue, mosque, temple or wherever; you can challenge them with tough questions. I applaud you for it if you do. Never follow anyone or anything just because. Especially me too. Think for yourself! Don't check your brain at the door.

Change comes from the outside and from within. I'll still go to religious places from time to time. My intention, however, is to be a beacon of truth and a model of opposition. I'll respectfully and proudly sit in any religious service to both offer my support for their right to worship as they wish and to offer myself up to any congregants interested in conversation. Dialogue is one of the many ways we help each other to grow, and I know from experience that there are people working for change, like I am, from the outside (Street epistemology is one example). But there are also people doing that work from within religious organizations. Plant the seed of reason and skepticism where you can.

Eventually, we might even be able to change and mature religion beyond what it is today. We hang around. We show up. We share our true and authentic selves. We may get kicked out etc. But eventually we can challenge and change the status quo. My hope is that one day, many religious buildings might become transformed into community centers where we can invest in one another and especially in our children without lying to them or frightening them in our efforts to control them. We can share the truth, offer education, promote the sciences, and facilitate life-long learning for everyone in our communities. In addition, we can remain skeptical of everything!

That's who I am: a skeptic. But I can still show up to religious places, and if you see me in a worship service, know that I am thinking, "This is absolutely baloney, but I love and support my community, and I love my fellow human beings." Come up and say hello. I'd love to meet you! And if you want help getting out of the web of your religion but don't know where to turn, you are not alone.

"I am an atheist, and here's why. Our substitute teacher asked me if I had Jesus in my heart. I didn't try to explain to him the separation of church and state considering he couldn't even understand the separation of fact from fiction."—Saffron Herdon

I still enjoy Christmas carols. I just can't help experiencing that warm fuzzy feeling when I hear "Joy to the World" or "Silent Night." Some people I

know really like old churches or turning the pages of an old Bible. It's familiar and comforting even. These are special places and practices they've been doing their whole lives. Rituals are embedded into our identities. You might even argue that people need ritual but doing a thing religiously—like lighting a candle or sitting in the early-morning dark with a rich cup of coffee—is different from pushing a moralistic view or attempted forcing of acceptance of a particular doctrine.

The world is changing. In the past, people who didn't accept religion were often rejected by family and community. Today this can still happen but in the future, I hope we don't have to make that choice. There is nothing wrong with being in a religious place or taking part in a religious practice while also openly admitting that you don't believe as others around you may do. Remain annoyingly around and speak up. Don't isolate.

By me being an outspoken nonbeliever, this remains a problem for many Christians. They will say that I have a right to my beliefs (or unbelief). The only thing that bothers them, some may say, is that I'm "pushing" atheism. This, by being an atheist and talking about it. Many are the same people who push religion on their children. The greatest liability of humanity is to believe in something that has no evidence and make children have faith in the same nonsense.

Let's try a comparison with alcohol consumption. (Something that is legally prohibited for children in the United States):

1. The brain has not yet fully developed, and alcohol hinders brain growth.
2. The child does not have a full grasp on the responsibility of alcohol consumption.
3. Alcohol can be addictive, and it impairs judgment.
4. Alcohol is a health hazard.

Now, I ask you, why isn't there an age restriction on teaching a religion for the same reasons?

Some people might think I've gone too far. After all, why can't I just keep my atheism to myself? Because there are people who think their doctrines make it okay to trample on the basic human rights of others. There are people who believe children should be taught fairy tales as truth in school instead of facts. There are people who think it's okay to try healing their child with prayer instead of seeking medical attention. Children have died as a result.

There are people who believe they have the right to impose their religion's "values" on everyone else. There are public stonings and floggings, brutal honor killings, battery acid attacks, and many other atrocities and indecencies carried out each and every year around the world by religious people in the name of their imaginary God.

Prayers are a way for people to convince themselves they've done something, when they've actually done nothing. Prayers seem to absolve people of taking on the responsibility of demanding change. Prayers pass the buck to an imaginary being. Prayers ensure that the problem will persist.

This is why I actively speak out against religion. "I'll pray for you basically means I want some credit for caring, without actually having to do anything that takes any effort or that actually works." -Ricky Gervais

Consider the following hypothetical conversation:

Christian: Hate the sin, but love the sinner...

Me: Eh, I strongly dislike religion, but still do honestly LOVE the religious PEOPLE... I don't hate anything...

Christian: Well, it sure doesn't sound like you love me! (boo-hoo etc...)

Me: Ok.

Or how about this conversation:

Me: I believe that beliefs can and should be scrutinized. Mine too.

Some religious people: No way, I believe that beliefs should not be scrutinized. That's just plain mean and anti-religious...

Me: Are you scrutinizing my beliefs?

Some religious people: Yes... I mean, no. I do not like what you are doing!

Me: Ok. So what? Tough. I can take it.

Some religious people: I will show you by cutting you out. Everyone you love will leave you if you don't apologize and then stay quiet.

Me: I understand. Do your worst, or whatever it is you need to do. Set your boundary. I love you regardless.

Some religious people: That's not love. What you are doing by criticizing me, criticizing my religion, and criticizing my beliefs is not love!

Me: You get to decide what love is for you. I get to decide what love is for me. Nobody gets to decide what love is for anyone else. For me, it is challenging the status quo and honestly telling people what I think. You get to do the same based on whatever it is that you think. Isn't that wonderful? And by the way, I love you! No matter who you are or what you believe. If I challenge you, well then, I especially love you.

Science simplified:

Person 1: I can fly.

Person 2: Prove it.

Person 1: (Flies around like superman.)

Person 2: Wow! You're right.

Religion simplified:

Person 1: I can fly

Person 2: Prove it

Person 1: You prove that I can't fly!

“It would take only 1 piece of verifiable evidence to destroy atheism. When I was a Christian, I would have said: I am a Christian. You can ridicule me. You can torture me. You can kill me. But you cannot change my mind. Now that I am an atheist, I say: I am an atheist. You can ridicule me. You can torture me. You can kill me. But you don't have to! Because you can change my mind. With evidence. I'm an atheist, and I don't have any belief in an afterlife. Those who believe without reason cannot be convinced by reason.” - James Randi

Principles of new atheism:

1. All faith is folly including moderate faiths
2. Stop giving religion special treatment
3. Bible offers no answers to suffering
4. Religion is not the source of morality.
5. The universe is matter and nothing more.
6. Atheism is a positive philosophy.
7. Atheism is growing and coming out of the closet
8. Secular “Godless” societies are happier and healthier

“I have examined all of the known superstitions of the world and I do not find our superstitions of Christianity one redeeming feature. They are all founded on fables and mythology. Christianity has made one-half of the world fools and the other half hypocrites.” –Thomas Jefferson

Richard Dawkins likes to put it this way. “Because a god sending himself to sacrifice himself to himself to save us from himself is a bit much for any logical person.”

Imagine saying: “Love me or burn in hell... Just remember that I love you unconditionally, but seriously, if you don’t love me back. Ill burn you in hell forever.” Doesn’t this sound a lot like religion? It also sounds like a mentally ill jealous human too. Thus, humans create many imaginary mental ill jealous gods. Let’s worship them! Or maybe not...

Man: Love me or I will torture you forever. Society: What a monster!

God: Love me or I will torture you forever. Society: What a loving God!

Consider this:

1 John 4:8 (God is love.)

1 Corinthians 13:5 (Love doesn’t keep a record of wrongs.)

Revelation 20:12 (God keeps a record of wrongs.)

The bible is full of baloney. It is all made up stuff that contradicts itself.

Matthew 5:22 (Anger is a sin.)

1 John 3:5 (Jesus was sinless.)

Mark 1:41 / Mark 3:5 / Mark 10:14 / John 11:38 (Jesus gets angry.)

How about some more...

Matthew 9:50-53 (Many of the dead were raised when Jesus died.)

Acts 26:23 (Jesus was the first to rise from the dead.)

Matthew 9:18-25 / Mark 5:35-42 / Luke 7:12-15 / Luke 8:49-55 / John 11:1-45 (Jesus raised people from the dead during his lifetime.)

So, Jesus was the first, but he wasn’t? Hmm...

John 16:33 (Jesus came to bring peace.)

Matthew 10:34 (Jesus came not to bring peace, but a sword!)

Matthew 26:52 (Put away your sword, or else you’ll perish by it.)

Luke (22:36) (Sell your shirt so you can buy a sword.)

Matthew 5:9 (Blessed are the peacemakers.)

Or how about:

Matthew 5:22 (Whosoever calls somebody a fool will enter hell fire.)

Hmm... According to The Bible, Jesus said:

Luke 11:40 "You fools."

Matthew 23:17 "You blind fools."

Luke 24:25 "How foolish you are."

Confused? You must have actually read the bible too...

Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Acts2:21

Not everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Matthew 7:21

God gets tired and rests. Exodus 31:17 and Jeremiah 15:6

God never tires or rests. Isaiah 40:28 and Psalm 121:3,4

It's hard to keep your story straight when you are lying and making up stuff. The Bible is not truth. Again, it was made up and compiled by men at the Council of Nicaea.

Chapter 14

The Matrix

Wake yourself up and get out of the religion matrix. Take the red pill. (The terms “red pill” and “blue pill” refer to a choice between the willingness to learn a potentially unsettling or life-changing truth by taking the red pill or taking the blue pill and remaining in comfortable ignorance. The terms refer to a scene in the 1999 film *The Matrix*.) Remember the scene where Neo wakes up and realizes he was living in an illusion before? That is sort of the feeling many new atheists describe when they first wake up from religion.

Here is a quote from the movie soon after Neo takes the red pill. Do you see any parallels? “The matrix is a system, Neo.... But when you’re inside, you look around, what do you see? Businessmen, teachers, lawyers, carpenters. The very minds of the people we are trying to save. But until we do, these people are still a part of that system....”

Doubt in religion is like an alarm going off in your mind. It is telling you to wake up. Instead, you might keep wanting to hit the snooze alarm and keep rolling over (or take the blue pill). Waking up to reality is not as nice as dreaming for some. However, once you accept the doubt is there, it is like blinking your eyes and opening them for the first time for some. The doubt is there because nature gave you a BS monitor to set yourself free to the

truth. As you are beginning to wake up, it may even hurt a little (or a lot). But that is because you're beginning to accept reality for the first time, especially if you've been indoctrinated into a religion since birth. It can hurt, but it is better, healthier, and more exciting than living a delusion. Some may say religion is a nice protection from nihilism for those that might not otherwise be able to handle the truth. That's baloney.

Again, if you are open to the red pill. I have your escape. In this 1999 hit movie the matrix, neo is given a choice. Swallow the blue pill and continue living a mediocre ignorance. Or swallow the red pill and jolt awake to a free but inconvenient and imperfect cold hard truth.

Within the film's dark dystopia, the matrix represents the default operating system for the human species. A virtual reality enslaving us to parasitic machine race. While comatose and imprisoned, the machines feed our minds with a simulation designed to keep us oblivious, distracted, and obedient to the system draining our humanity. Well, what if I told you our world suffers from a similar deception. A deception orchestrated not by artificial intelligence but by conventional intelligence. A deception of unchallenged and outdated wisdom. A dream killing dogma. Tyrannized, oppressed, bullied, and domineered by stale traditions, narrow beliefs and cultural conformity. A deception that represents the greatest con of the civilized world. A rouse under the guise freedom and comfort. When in truth, its sole purpose is economic slavery and human uniformity towards its dogma. A servitude system where you become an instrument. Not of inspiration or aspiration. But of perspiration. And desperation.

What if I told you that this deception has infiltrated your mind and embedded itself in you as your default operating-system. An autonomous program shadowing your entire life from cradle to grave for some. From career to companionship. A presumptuous yet unwritten rule book which all decisions are weighed regardless of consequence to you as a human. What if I told you that this operating system has granted you an inauthentic life of someone else's design. A life you did not choose. A life meticulously preplanned and preordained to follow a particular blueprint of mediocrity by

religious leaders long ago to keep their particular religious machine churning as they gained power in their lifetime and while alive, pass the power to the ones that are most loyal to them after they are gone. Mentally ill religious leaders value loyalty to their beliefs above all else. Above truth itself. Or else, they will shun and use their loud voice to try to inflict guilt to you and those who give you the time of day to listen.

Decreed by authority and sanctified by a Sunday morning “education” that is brainwashing future generations of kids. Certified by a pacified media that is too scared to call religion out for what it really is. Religion looks to pacify the government and the people, by saying, hey, we’re not that bad. We do some good stuff.

I was issued into an educational system on Sunday mornings that was meant to further disseminate the lie, delude and ensure the religions survival to the next generation. Sorry religion. I unplugged myself.

The ones disseminating the most lies for the religion are authority figures. Usually, a parent or a Sunday School teacher who merely parrots what they learned or lived for the religion. These people are responsible (at times innocently or unknowingly) for getting the software into your head.

Whenever scripted doctrine risks exposure or faces scrutiny, it is one of these people’s jobs to “reeducate” or worse, shut down the debate entirely. Such reeducation could be a flawed study, an article or an anecdotal item pushed by a religious bias party using one of many logical fallacies. Religion uses arguments based many times on emotion or feelings rather than facts. In many cases, the person questioning convention is branded a quack or an extremist.

For instance, if you lived in 1600’s Italy, you would have been taught the world was flat. The church then disseminates the lie. It is passed from one generation to the next. The church says, “I learned it this way, so you will learn it this way too.” Sometimes, I understand from Sunday school teachers, there is not malicious intent. The afflicted party is unknowingly miseducating

you so that you fit in and are “normal” in the eyes of the religion. In another case the preemption party knows the presumption is a lie yet profits from its ongoing falsehood. It is time to break this echo chamber open.

It takes people like Galileo Galilei, standing up and saying no so that eventually the entire next generation can recognize the lie too and it can unravel. Religion is finally disentangling. Back then, people decided, for one example, how involved they wanted to be in pointing out to people that the earth is round, not flat, to help the next generation. What will you do with your time now? Religion propagates itself through the most dishonest and underhanded means possible: childhood indoctrination. It exploits vulnerable and impressionable children for its own selfish gains. Rather than teaching children how to think for themselves, religion teaches children what to think. On top of that, there’s the added threat that if they do not believe what they are taught in a particular religion, there will be some form of punishment – either a scolding, or a threat of an eternal Hell – awaiting them after death. What kind of monster forces that burden onto children? It’s child abuse, plain and simple. Again, although some people realized Earth was a sphere (it’s actually an oblate spheroid to be more precise) as early as the 3rd century BC thanks to Hellenistic astronomy, it took us a lot longer to accept that our planet orbits the sun and not the other way around.

For centuries, the Roman Catholic Church preached that all the planets, moons, and stars in the heavens orbited Earth, which sat motionless at the center of all creation. In 1543, Polish mathematician Nicolaus Copernicus figured out that Earth and its fellow planets actually orbit the sun. Fearful of contradicting the church, he didn’t publish his big idea until his final days. Then, in the late 16th century, the Italian scholar named Galileo Galilei peered through a telescope he helped tune and saw that the church was wrong, and that Copernicus was right. When Galileo spoke up about his findings, the church arrested him for his beliefs. But he continued to experiment, write, and study the heavens. He pioneered the process of testing theories through observations and experiments (known as the scientific method) and established the basis of modern physics. It was Albert Einstein who called Galileo the father of modern science.

If children were taught how to think for themselves, rather than what to think, until they were old enough to come to their own conclusions, it's clear that most Bible stories wouldn't hold up under unbiased, critical examination. Seriously, what kind of rational person, without being indoctrinated, would believe in dirt men and rib women, talking animals, people living to 900 years old, a worldwide flood within the last 10,000 years, a zoo boat containing two of every animal on earth, divine plagues and genocides, resurrections, and miracles, after a critical examination of the evidence and arguments for and against these claims.

It's clear that religion needs to sink its hooks into kids early for these wild beliefs to stick into adulthood. It's no wonder that churches have always had ways of softening or minimizing the impact of the true horrors of the Bible and Christian history in order to relay the stories in a way that endears children to the religion. That's why we always heard the same old stories and songs over and over, rather than reading the entire Bible. Christianity knows that, for children to actually like going to church, they can't talk about how the Bible codified slavery and commanded genocide, or how the ancient Israelites took virgin sex slaves and slaughtered men, woman, and children.

Religion strategically targets children because it knows that their minds are malleable and easily manipulated, and it needs to stop. Compulsory religious grooming is child abuse.

If you have family that is emotionally involved in their religion, you could have parents become upset and depressed that you are leaving the religion. You will be crumbling their whole world perhaps. They may try to guilt you, perhaps, get angry or threaten. "What will your friends think at church?" "Look what you're doing to your mom?" etc... I'd encourage you to do be you. If religion is not for you, you can leave.

Now you are this horrible deadbeat son or daughter. To some, it's fall in line with religion, or be a lost loser in their eyes. That's why not caring what others think is so important. You may in fact be a loser in their eyes.

Continue to love their delusional asses anyway and be proud you are bright enough to realize their delusion.

Yep, it's said by some that going off the scripted dogma of the day and noncompliance means being labeled bad to some religious people and their narrow-minded template for how to live. Some parents would rather their son or daughter be a miserable religious leader, ready to juggle all the lies he or she tells a congregation, than be a questioning human being living in reality. If the people in your family or peer group are not happy with you living a life you would like to lead, then their life advice, (that they may say is meant to help you and is really to keep you in line with their version of what they want for you) should be considered cautiously.

If friends and family are a scripted religious corruption. Sunday school is the crank that keeps the wheel churning. As the crank screws tighter so does the scripts mental machinery of religion. The truth is, there, you are being indoctrinated and manipulated by fear as opposed to being educated.

As soon as you are old enough to hold a crayon, if your family is religious, they will toss you into their delusion too. Your beautiful blank slate of a mind is theirs to fill with whatever religious bs they want. If from the time you were 5 years old to 18 years old you attended Sunday school for an hour every Sunday, you would have received 676 hours of manipulation. Not to mention actual church services, retreats or nightly youth group bible studies.

If each one of those are also an hour, that's 2,704 hours of telling you what the religion would like for you to believe and how the religion would like you think all before you graduate high school.

If your friends and family believe, that makes it even harder for you to realize religion is a lie and you do not have to believe to be a good person. Religion will simply say, eh we're just giving you the option to believe. We're not making you. Try suggesting they might be wrong, and you may see your social network that you rely on for human connection slowly turn away from you and plainly say that you "turned away from the lord" or "the devil got

him/her.” This to ensure the complete humiliation of the person so that others will think twice before doing the same and turning away from the religion, stifling differing thought.

The religious system will say it is an intellectual crossroad for ideas but is actually the largest confirmation bias system on the planet. “We won’t ask you to leave your brain at the door they say”, but that is exactly what they’ll hope you do. Where mass casted religious opinions are sheathed in so called safe spaces as undebatable truths.

You don’t need to think or achieve in religion. You get an A for showing up and conforming. It feels great to be accepted. So, conformists people trying a religion for the first time “yes” and agree their way into social acceptance by the religious doctrine being feed to them. All the fake love is intoxicating. Especially if they have never received that kind of attention. But say, you don’t believe and explain it’s nonsense, and you will lose all that love from the group. This is Manipulation 101. Do this and I will love you, don’t do it, and you will be cast into a fiery torment of hell, and of our disapproval and our super entities disapproval we be great... Forever. Religion is madness.

Simply Christmas and Easter attendees are looked down upon by the high and mighty most moral and regular attendees. Toss your nose up high if you’ve attended every service of the year, even during the pandemic. Those pesky scientists don’t want to save your life or your grandparents life, right? They just want to stifle and suppress your religious freedom, don’t they...? Perhaps this is what some religious think.

Do as you are told. Stay in a single file line. And don’t talk unless asked. Follow instruction from guided lessons. Do as your told again. Nod and smile. Unplanned absences are frowned upon. Any Sunday freedom requires permission. The scripted religious view targets its primary nemesis: Critical thinking. Instead of exposing our kids to free thought. Religion and its full-fledged indoctrination camps. Pushing ideological agendas from ideological religious leaders. Critical thinking is being systematically destroyed.

Fake kumbaya. This happens when people say, “can’t we all just get along too?”. And the answer is no, no we can’t always. Sorry. This is life. I will not comply with your moronic way of thinking. Shun, cry, guilt or cancel those of us that do not comply with your religion all you want. You are fakers. That is the truth.

Some Religious hyperventilate and get “triggered” by the slightest criticism or the slightest divergent opinions that intrude on their preselected and prescreened religious world view. Opposing viewpoints are no longer debated. Collectivism over individualism stifles divergent thought.

And if religion is not granted entitlement to be the con business that it sets out to be, then it is the victim as they see it. Pouting that others are making it harder for them to delude the masses. Religions can thrive in both environments because the gullible masses are everywhere to be fooled with this rationale. The antidote: Education.

Just like a parent saying a child’s competitive drive must be stifled because we need to keep the other kids feeling protected, many in society will cancel this book altogether. The idea that we should just go ahead and get together and act cooperatively would be great for religions. Since we believe that all our children are winners let’s just hold hands and not speak bad about each other. Nonsense. Religion needs to be criticized just as nothing else in this world is above scrutiny either.

Noam Chomsky said, the smart way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion but allow very lively debate within that spectrum. No words better the describe the scripts mouthpiece. Some people argue you should be baptized this way or that. “Be fully submerged or it doesn’t count.” It does matter. It’s all bull.

Unlike family the medias complicity in the grand scheme is prejudicial. There is little money in hard truths but in the fantasy world of religion, it buys eyeballs, votes, books, CDs, seminars, retreats, (The scripted narrative is profitable to everyone in the chain.) and the best, the offering. Free money

for the church just because they believe the lie you created, ah, now sit back and enjoy that. Take some for yourself and then act like Santa Clause and give the rest away to earn favors in your community and likes. You will be the most well-liked guy or gal in town.

As in the movie the matrix, your scripted life is integral to the religion machine's survival. By going to accept that free cup of coffee and hear what that preacher has to say, you intravenously tap yourself into the belly of the beast.

Awareness holds the key from transforming subconsciousness to reality. The scripts illusions flow through the delusional people. Media, family, Sunday School, youth group, bible study, etc.

And because your brain is uber lazy and unaware of the falsities, you become complicit in the scheme. Yes, your brain in its glorious attempt at efficiency is largely undermining your ability to live an extraordinary life. Because your brain deficiently perceives reality what follows is a great cascade of false conclusions causing misguided beliefs. Misguided beliefs cause misguided actions. Misguided actions produce unwanted results and unwanted results create dissatisfaction. A dramatic life shift requires a dramatic mind shift. Right now, your lazy brain is scripted ally. Once your doubt is nudged, the blindfold drops. That is why some families will tell you to marry or stay away from people that don't believe in your religion. They are afraid of you losing the delusion with them. Once scripted doctrine lifts from your mind and suddenly actual reality becomes clear. Once your brain is exposed the secrets behind a magician's tricks the appearance of magic disappears. As does the magicians power to deceive.

Those who are able to see beyond the shadows and lies of their culture will never be understood, let alone believed by the masses. -Plato (Philosopher)
You have the freedom to tear up the unwritten social contract you've be force fed to subscribe to perhaps since you were a kid that your religion is the one true one. No religion is true. Religion is a lie to make you a brick in their wall.

Swivel your head around from the cave wall you are in, expose the reality behind the shadowed projects your religion casts and wants you to see and activate your brain with thought, reason, evidence and skepticism.

They entice you with coffee and warm smiles so they can pour lies into you.

If you don't know an answer you can say I don't know, or I will work to on finding the answer. Religion on the other hand just makes it up.

I realize by writing this book I am setting myself up to be ridiculed in some quarters. You can get ridiculed from all sides. You can get ridiculed from the hard-headed atheists, from fence-riders who take no stance, or from the religious devout. The most important thing, I've learned is to be yourself. Again, let the world feel the full weight of who you are and let them deal with it. Because you will always have to do the same with everyone else.

One other thing atheists are often criticized for is needing some kind of connection much larger than themselves. Something that is bigger than you are. Is there any room for that in atheism 2.0? Yes, absolutely. Some might say something like, "but isn't there something bigger than us?" Something bigger than just ourselves. I would say, "of course". And others might say, "well then aren't you sort of religious." I would say no. Why does that sense of mystery and that sense of a dizzying scale of the universe need to be accompanied by a mystical feeling? Science and observation give us that feeling without it. And if we give into religion to explain that for us, we are being conned by some really smart people who have figured out over the ages to exploit our lust for explanation of the unexplainable in many ways. I don't feel the need for more religious super structure. The universe is large. We are so tiny. One can have a sense of awe and wonder without giving into the great con artist of religion or the lie of some simulated spiritual layer behind it all. For people who are still reading this and believe that religion is still important to them. I would say there is still a sort of equivalent process or bridge between what I am talking about and them. I would say there are

many gaps in secular life. Some things the scientific processes cannot answer yet.

Praying and working on a personal relationship with an imaginary entity is like talking into a hose... While the other end is in your ear.

To your religious leaders, don't just listen to their words, but also listen to their use of words, their tone, their body movement, their eyes, their subtle facial expressions, and realize it is all a show to con you into their delusion that they might also be unaware of because they are so delusional. Interpret your silences. And everything they don't say.

What could possibly go wrong with living your life by following ancient laws written in dead languages by racist, sexist, superstitious barbarians who believed everything they couldn't explain in the world was from an imaginary god.

Funny how people who believe that abstinence is the only allowable form of birth control also believe a virgin got pregnant. Hmm...

Now for some quick hitting one liners and quotes:

“Religion is an advertising campaign for a product that doesn't exist.” -Clive James.

A religious person is someone who can't deal with the harsh reality of life and turns to his invisible sky daddy or imaginary friend like children do.

“True knowledge exists in knowing you know nothing.” -Socrates.

“I cannot teach anybody anything, I can only make them think.” – Socrates.

“If you are willing to look at another person's behavior toward you as a reflection of the state of their relationship with themselves rather than a

statement about your value as a person, then you will, over a period of time cease to react at all.” -Yogi Bhajan

“Christianity is the depraved idea that you will be forgiven for something you didn’t do because we killed someone else do didn’t do it either.” - Unknown.

“A man with without god is a man. A god without man is nothing.” - Unknown.

“Great minds think alone.” -Unknown.

“Money is numbers and numbers never end. If it takes money to be satisfied for a religion. Its search for money will never end.” -Unknown.

“How thoughtful of God to arrange matters so that, wherever you happen to be born, the local religion always turns out to be the true one.” -Richard Dawkins.

“It is absolutely safe to say that if you meet somebody who claims not to believe in evolution, that person is ignorant, stupid, or insane.” -Richard Dawkins.

Religion is a lie. A lie is a lie, even if everyone believes it. “A lie doesn’t become truth, wrong doesn’t become right, and evil doesn’t become good, just because it is accepted by a majority.” -Booker T Washington

A new book claims Jesus was married with two kids. No joke a new book by the pope claimed there were none of the animals at the nativity that are typically there. Upset Christians dismissed it because there’s no evidence. The irony burns so hard.

Horus: Egyptian God worshipped since 2,200BC. Born a virgin. Had 12 disciples. Healed the sick and injured. Resurrected from the dead. (“Asar” translates to “Lazarus”) Crucified then resurrected after three days. Known

as “the lamb”, “the way” and “the light”. Others like this story don’t seem so special and unique after you know the truth about world history. By hey, you only need to read one holy book that has all the answers, right?

“You can’t say something is real and then claim it exhibits none of the properties of any other real objects and can’t ever be examined or analyzed empirically. That’s pretty much the definition of “Not Real”.” -PZ Myers.

Every religion agrees that other religions are false, and we agree with 100% of them. All religions are false.

“I listen to all these complaints about rudeness and intemperateness, and the opinion that I come to is that there is no polite way of asking somebody: have you considered the possibility that your entire life has been devoted to a delusion? But that’s a good question to ask. Of course, we should ask that question and of course it’s going to offend people. Tough.”

— Daniel C. Dennett

Arguments for the other side:

“I think asking who created god is like asking what is north of the north pole”... Best argument I’ve heard from the other side, yet it is still terrible. Or, if you want the philosophic mumbo jumbo, here it is. This approach is classically called the moral argument for God’s existence. Stated as a syllogism, it looks like this:

If there is no God, then there is no objective morality (no lawmaker, then no laws). But there is objective morality (evidenced by the problem of evil). Therefore, there is a God etc..

If as an atheist, you claim there is no evil, you are looked at as an asshole. There are bad things in this world that happen and if you do not agree that such a thing is evil, you will not gain many friends and therefore it is better to agree there is a god with others to gain their approval and not look so mean even if religions lie and manipulate to try to get you to submit to their

delusions. (Atheists get labeled as assholes quite a bit. Eh, I'll brush it off and love others with truth anyways.)

And another...Here's the basic idea.

First, for anything that came into existence, there must have been something that caused it to come into existence. Clearly, effects have causes. Pretty basic, and entirely consistent with our common-sense experience of the world.

Second, the material universe (the cosmos) came into existence sometime in the past. Virtually everyone affirms this point because of the widespread and, I think, justified belief in the Big Bang. Therefore, the material universe must have had a cause. Put most simply, "a Big Bang needs a big Banger." The bang didn't bang itself, right? But then who created the creator. It is a circle argument.

Chapter 15

Delusions

Religion:

1. It tries to sell you their delusions
2. Says you can't have morals without religion
3. They've killed and hated for their imaginary gods.
4. They tell you need an invisible friend to be complete.
5. They refuse to see the flaws in a book that condones murder rape slavery and genocide.
6. Actively choose not to live in reality but in delusion.
7. They make harmful laws that control everyone based on their religion.
8. They refuse to understand why faith is harmful.

Morality is doing what is right regardless of what you are told. Religion is doing what you are told regardless of what is right.

Just like you cannot bench press 10,000 pounds no matter how much you believe you can, beliefs psychological impact doesn't correlate to truth or effective action. A falsely held belief is equally as powerful as one that is true. The difference however is what follows. A response viewed with a true belief is actionable knowledge. A response compelled by a false belief manifests as

a mistake, illusion, or an inaction. Sure, I can believe in and ultimately bench press perhaps 225 pounds, but my joints would ultimately expose the truth. Exposing our beliefs as either truths or falsities clarifies whether our actions are based upon actions, or actionable knowledge, or perceived delusion.

Validated beliefs unveil truth and truth is the best basis for decision making. On the flip side false beliefs do the opposite. They produce inaction or wayward action. These limiting beliefs. Under psychiatric diagnosis criteria they aren't so kind. They're called delusions. For example, if you believe in Santa like I did, you might leave him cookies on Christmas eve and hope your name isn't on the naughty list. Believe that suicide is the alien doorway into a spacecraft tailing comet hail bop and you might kill yourself like the 39 believers of the heaven's gate cult did in 1997. As you can see delusional beliefs cause erroneous actions, but their consequences don't end there. Delusional beliefs also cause erroneous inactions. For example, if you believe entrepreneurship is too risky, you'll avoid starting a business.

Delusional beliefs cause both flawed action and inaction spinning out undesirable consequences. And sorry, because life isn't a book, turning the page isn't a option. You suffer the consequences. Unfortunately, on your scripted quest, you'll battle many conspirators confirming delusions you've held for a long time with your religion pulling you back at times. The road to freedom comes from unplugging your mind from the religion. Not from people that believe. You just don't believe the crap they say anymore. You are like Neo in the Matrix. The bullets fly at you and you can put up your hand and stop the bullets that religion can toss at you now like its nothing.

Anytime you allow a group to write your thoughts you slowly poison freethought.

Beliefs are merely concepts, ideas or thoughts that we regard as truth. And no matter what your belief is, there is an identical group that believes the same. Consider what some say is true. Was 9/11 a government conspiracy? Because you can fold a \$20 bill to look like the twin towers when they were hit by planes? Are aliens living among us? You've got a group you can

connect with. While we are free to question and investigate our beliefs, few do. Instead, we look to ratify them through a collective group think. And as a result, they escape critique and transcend year after year. Producing the same old results. Many times, these beliefs aren't our original thoughts but carbon copy doctrine planted by religious leaders and whipped up by the crowd we identify with. In other cases, they are generational. Passed from ancestry.

Or thank your parents for some if not all of your crowd sourced beliefs. As children we internalize the beliefs of those around us. If you come from a 3rd generation Southern Baptist family, you probably adopted a Baptist mindset at first. If your parents or guardians believed a certain religion, more than likely so do you. You can break free.

Crowd sourced beliefs also come from your usual gang of influence. Authority figures and communal associations such as political parties and advocacy organizations. If your favorite actor endorses a particular politician, or undertakes a noble crusade to save the dolphins, you'll likely adopt a similar belief. The worst is the media.

The American media is mostly controlled by 6 large corporations, whereas 30 years ago it was diversified among several dozen. Thus, a handful of powerful executives control the media narrative for millions of people and they are doing next to nothing to go after the biggest lie there ever was. Religion. I was a news reporter. I remember pitching a doing a story on circumcision but was quickly turned down. The community is important and angering a community and suggesting to a community another viewpoint that thinks it's ok, could cause ratings to drop which means less money. So, truth is kicked under the rug to appease the masses.

“Your religious beliefs are not sacred or immune to criticism. They are beliefs in your head based on where you were born, how you were raised, and who influenced you. Simply having religious beliefs does not make them true or obligate others to respect them. So please, for everyone's sake: wake up and educate yourself.” – Unknown.

“The only thing that makes conversation possible is an openness to evidence and argument – a willingness to update one’s view of the world when better reasons are given, and that is an ongoing process, not a place we ever finally arrive.” – Unknown.

“Your position is so weak that in order for you to be right is for reality to be wrong.” - Aron Ra

HA! George Carlin said “Religion easily has the greatest bullshit story ever told. Think about it. Religion has actually convinced people that there’s an invisible man living in the sky who watches everything you do, every minute of every day. And the invisible man has a special list of ten things he does not want you to do. And if you do any of these ten things, he has a special place, full of fire and smoke and burning and torture and anguish, where he will send you to live and suffer and burn and choke and scream and cry forever and ever ‘til the end of time!’ but he loves you. He loves you and he needs money!”

Sometimes a person can deceive themselves so much, that they really believed what they experience. That is how minds can work. It doesn’t take much effort to find out information from people. The best cons know the tells of body language the more they practice their art. Also, they generalize everything. So, they will eventually get some things right and focus on that. Also, people are wanting a connection to their loved ones. They naturally fill in the blanks and automatically dismiss what isn’t exactly true or does not pertain to them. These people play on the grieving person and give them a sense of hope that their loved one exists and is in a better place. But for me this is false hope nothing really good comes from deception.

As soon as you are born, you’re given a name, a religion, a nationality and a race. You spend the rest of your life defending a fictional identity.

“Once upon a time, people identified the god Neptune as the source of storms at the sea. Today we call these storms hurricanes... The only people

who still call hurricanes acts of god are the people who write insurance forms.” – Neil DeGrass Tyson

“God is, to me, pretty much a myth created over time to deny the idea that were responsible for our own actions” -Seth Green.

Some theists see their entity as a lamp post on a hill. They may argue that all the different religions may see their god a little differently. One might be directly under it and see it from that angle, the other might be across the field and still see the light. Another might be on top of a mountain and see it from there. Theists may argue that the true god takes on all forms for each individual. All theists are delusional. Like the invisible toy train that does not exist, neither does the lamp post and neither does the super entity. It is once again another nice analogy that is a smokescreen to trick you in to having some level of faith from the delusional. I don't buy it. Even agnostics keep an open mind to be delusional. So your saying there's a chance? Prove it.

Ricky Gervais: “Why don't I believe in God?” No, no, no... Why do YOU believe in a God? Surely the burden of proof lies on the believer...You started all this. If I came up to you and said, ‘why don't you believe I can fly? You'd say, “Why would I?” I'd reply. ‘Because it's a matter of faith.” If then I said, “Prove I can't fly... Go on prove I can't fly... See? You can't, you can't.” – you'd probably either walk away, call security, or throw me out the window and shout, “Fucking fly then, you lunatic.”

Why don't faith healers work in hospitals and why aren't police trained by priests of the true religion to do jedi mind tricks to diffuse dangerous situations?

“I thought I was an atheist until I realized I'm a God.” - Watsky (Disprove that.)

There is no need to try to prove there is no god. It is not possible to prove a negative, nor is it in any way sensible or logical to try because it IS IMPOSSIBLE. That being said, it is up to people making positive claims to

prove those claims. It is up to believers to prove that what they are saying is true. Repeat: It is up to them to prove there is a god. They cannot. Therefore, anything they claim about said “god” is boloney, is also wrong, and is a lie. Lying is bad. we can radically simplify our lives and improve society by merely telling the truth in situations where others often lie like with religion. Most forms of private vice and public evil are kindled and sustained by lies. Acts of adultery and other personal betrayals, financial fraud, government corruption—even murder and genocide—generally require an additional moral defect: a willingness to lie.

In the book, *Lying*, bestselling author and neuroscientist Sam Harris argues that we can radically simplify our lives and improve society by merely telling the truth in situations where others often lie. He focuses on “white” lies—those lies we tell for the purpose of sparing people discomfort—for these are the lies that most often tempt us. And they tend to be the only lies that ‘good’ people tell while imagining that they are being good in the process.

“The world holds two classes of men – intelligent men without religion, and religious men without intelligence.” – Abul al-Ala al-Ma arri

Faith: “Where there is evidence, no one speaks of faith. We do not speak of faith that two and two are four or that the earth is round. We only speak of faith when we wish to substitute emotion for evidence.” – Bertrand Russel.

If your imaginary god were real, he/she/it would not need you to defend his existence on social media or anywhere.

If you go to a spiritual counselor, even if they have a seminary degree, (they then have a degree in bullshit). Go to a real doctor backed by science and even then, be skeptical and get a second opinion.

Take what you need to get better and get out of that pseudoscience system too. Sometimes selling you the lie you need that quack over and over again is as bad as religion. If you become dependent on a certain doctor, get a second opinion, eat vegetables, and exercise, and drink water. Do the boring

shit and ignore the hype products. Lose your dependence on them and become dependent on yourself. Never let being lonely be a reason to accept religion or a doctor's help. We are all lonely. Sometimes lonely in partnerships. Lonely in groups. Suck it up and make a hard change for yourself or suck up the fact you are too much of a wuss to change anything and stop complaining. Complaining is terrible for you. But pain can be a good teacher. Enough pain will cause you to act, and enough action will pull you out of the shit in life making you anxious or depressed in the first place. Plus, if any step to any "self-help" book you read is to lean into your higher power, tell them to fuck off. Higher power is BS. That higher power nonsense is BS. You are your own higher power.

It took me a while to fully grasp this. God didn't create man in his own image, but mankind creates god in their own image instead.

"If your religious beliefs conflict with scientific facts, too bad for your religious beliefs. The universe is not going to rearrange itself to comfort your ignorance." – Unknown.

"It's crazy how crazy religions think other crazy religions are crazy and that their crazy is the right crazy." – Unknown.

"Blasphemy... It hurts a god's all-powerful feelings." – Unknown.

People of a different religion talking: "My religion is the true religion of God." "No, my religion is the true religion of god." | Atheists talking: "My religion was stupid." "I'll bet you mine is worse than yours."

Gods only exist as a strange fantasy in the minds of the religious. Every religion says, "but my God(s) is/are the real God(s)." It's a delusion. I hope you can break free.

"I cannot believe in a god that wants to be praised all the time." – Fredrick Nietzsche.

What if I told you that you can be an atheist and not bash religion? Then what if I told you that you can be a doctor and not treat illnesses. That you can be a mechanic and not fix a problem. That you can be wise and not teach others. You can, but the point is that as atheists we may recognize a problem and will want to fix it because we are better equipped to do so.

Chapter 16

Social Pressure

Every preacher is kinda slimy, but the most effective preachers aren't just trying to persuade their individual congregants. The point of a strong sermon isn't just to sway the individual but to control the collective. This is why it's so important to be aware and beware. Pay attention to how the group is moving and thinking. Don't let yourself feel pressured to go along.

Consider this example. You're on the jury in a trial for a defendant you feel is innocent, but everyone else in the room says the accused is guilty. The other jurors want to go home, and you are the last holdout for a verdict of not guilty.

"Come on, this guy is guilty!" someone says to you. "Just agree, so we can go home. We're getting tired and angry in here!"

This is pressure and depending on what's said and the tactics at play, it could also qualify as bullying. How can you concentrate? How can you think about the facts when the whole room is focused on making you feel inadequate? Like you're wasting their time. After all, if you simply choose to go along and vote for guilty, you know you will be cheered, pleasing everyone in the room.

How did you get to this point? In plenty of human groupings, it only takes one person—the first or the loudest or the most charismatic—to announce their decision, make a speech, assert an idea or ideology, and the whole group seems to stop thinking, choosing instead to simply go along. Like a chain reaction, people fall in line. After all, there’s relative safety in numbers, and it usually works to get behind someone who’s already stuck their neck out. “I’m going with what he/she/they said. After all, everyone else is.”

Think of how many people went along with the Nazi party, its ideas, and its activities during World War 2. The act of joining gives us a sense of acceptance, camaraderie, solidarity, and most importantly, security. It is extremely powerful. Followers of charismatic pastor Jim Jones gave up their jobs, separated from friends and family, and upended their lives to follow their leader to the “promised land” in Guyana. The end of that story was mass death by suicide and by murder.

Another example can be seen in the proliferation of bystander intervention trainings. We know that in many instances of someone being victimized in front of bystanders, it’s difficult to know what to do. Too often, no one steps in to help. People look away, keep their mouths shut, and get out of the situation as fast as they can without drawing the attention of the aggressor.

On the other hand, all it may take to make a difference is for one person to have the courage to speak up. One person standing up and speaking out can turn a crowd toward justice.

Remember that group pressure—among friends, in a jury room, or from a large group—is a social tactic that is used to control. It’s a tactic that can easily lead to bullying and other forms of violence. Once you realize this, it’s easier to keep your wits about you.

Here are a few things to remember. First, stay objective. Any time you find yourself in a large group of like-minded people who are behaving in a “cult-like” manner, for example, you must immediately acknowledge there is likely an influence in the room, and that biased pressure is not the result of people

thinking rationally. The people won't be questioning. Instead, they are going with the flow. This is sometimes called a mob mentality, and it can appear, from the outside, that the people involved have lost their minds or that they are somehow thinking together. There may be strong emotions moving through the group. The individuals, to a certain extent, have—at least in the moment—lost their individuality. They've "drunk the Kool-Aid," so to speak. They've assimilated. Their actions make it clear that you are not allowed to question or think about what's right for you. And this situation is more common than you think.

The irony is that people are smart enough but simply forgot to consider the possibility the whole thing could be a sham. They want it to be true. Highly intelligent people can get "suckered" by ridiculously obvious schemes, sales tactics, cults, superstitions, and religions simply because they weren't thinking critically (or couldn't think critically in the moment). I should add as well that some people will also go along with the flow because they are "polite" or "nice" or simply don't want to put up a fight. And unfortunately, the reality is that it might not be safe for them to make any other choice in that context.

When observing groups, remain an outsider if you can. Put on the mindset that you're watching a documentary or otherwise observing dispassionately. Be skeptical. Stay in touch with your thoughts and especially your questions.

Second, remember that large groups can be wrong. "If all of your friends jumped off a bridge, would you?" is the classic question almost every parent asks their child at one point or another, and it highlights this point. The more people thinking or doing a thing doesn't make it any more true! The number of people involved doesn't mean anything except that lots of people are involved. Let me put this another way. The size of the crowd isn't evidence for truth.

There are 2 billion Christians on the planet, and the vast majority don't even agree about what kind of Christianity to practice. Some Protestant Christians, for example, believe Catholics are going to hell. And vice versa.

Other major religions have similar splits. Billions of people in large groups are wrong. They cannot all be right. However, they can all be wrong. What a person thinks or what a million people think cannot turn a lie into the truth.

Finally, let's take a look at the evangelical church. Evangelical preachers give a very common speech at many church services to capitalize on the "herd mentality" and assert pressure by the power of the group. Let me set the scene. The sermon is done, and the congregation has entered into musical worship. The band onstage continues to slowly play the same several musical chords repeatedly, creating a trance-like mood. Many in the congregation will have their hands raised with eyes closed, in a worshipping trance-like state. The preacher will then begin speaking in the most sincere and serious voice he can muster:

“I feel the Holy Spirit is speaking to me right now. There are some of you here today who do not know Jesus as your personal savior. I want you to know that now is the time. Jesus loves you and is calling you to give your life over to him. Stand up and walk down to the front of the stage and accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior. Come down and be saved. There are several elders of the church who will meet you and pray with you down front. Stand up now and walk to the stage and accept Jesus.”

The band plays as people remain mostly quiet. You can feel a pressure building in the room. And sure enough, people stand and walk. Many who walk down are choosing, at this moment, to completely change their worldview and current belief system – at least until reason creeps in again. It can be a serious decision to join a religion.

Why do some do it? Perhaps some want to belong, or they think this will bring about a positive change in their life. I can see that. Religion can be intoxicating. Or perhaps they are tired of asking questions. Perhaps a belief system with rules that requires some buy-in is good to hold them accountable to something. They may know they want change, and a religion is easier than figuring it out on their own. It is blissful acceptance of whatever someone else says or the religion says.

Then again, perhaps there is some pressure from the group. To either stay quiet if you do not believe or join if you are unsure. Or perhaps others know their loved ones will be overjoyed with their decision to join. Thinking of their loved ones being happy is more important than whatever the truth is to them.

Perhaps someone falls in love and the only way to be loved back is to support the loved one's religion or delusions. Perhaps the simple truth is they want to make someone they love happy, and they discovered the only way to do this is to ignore doubts as best as possible and press into the faith of the group. The more they defend it, the more liked and more leader-like they may become. This respect from the core group can be intoxicating. They may drive deeper into their faith because their ego is wrapped in it now. They have publicly said they believe etc. They will now defend the religion at all costs to defend their precious ego.

Matthew 12:25: And Jesus knew their [the Pharisees'] thoughts, and said unto them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand." Some families may take this as 'any beliefs that are not of the core group, need to be cut off'. This kind of thinking further creates echo chambers. That which should not be questioned is exactly the kind of thing we need to question.

The family that pressures some to stay quiet if they don't believe is very sad. Debate should be encouraged. They may say: "You are one of us or you are not." If the group thinks you cannot be "saved" or controlled and you obviously do not believe it, or if they think you will openly "criticize" (which true truth seekers should invite), they may kick you out.

Preachers understand this aspect of human nature and know it is reasonable to expect people to follow the crowd, assimilate, and join the group with no questions asked. The preacher promises relief, a relationship with the creator and with other believers that will care about you perhaps. They may suggest

through a series of sermons that if you want to go to heaven... You know what to do etc. Believe!

And the preacher suggests that coming forward, you will also find acceptance... A tribe. Love. Everyone will accept you. If not, enough people come forward, the preacher may try another tactic, beginning to talk about the unbelievers. "Maybe this is you!" The preacher may shout with intent to make you feel uncomfortable. The psychological pressure can be intense, and it works. Undeniably, that's why these tactics show up in so many evangelical churches. "The Lord is tapping you on the shoulder saying he loves you. Do you feel that yet?"

Christian religious leaders in particular should really be saying: "I am the con, I am the hoax, I am the lie. Whosoever believes shall waste their lives and lose their money to crooks every Sunday."

Remember to be aware. Pay attention. Don't let yourself be pressured into going along. And don't ever forget that all it may take to make a difference is for one person—you—to have the courage to speak up because one person standing up and speaking out can make a difference.

Epilogue

Off We Go

No one is certain when Genesis was written. The post-creation stories in the 2nd half of the book about Moses are suggested to date back to 1,400 B.C. but some scholars believe it was actually put in writing sometime between the 6th and 5th century B.C. The author(s) of Genesis and of the New Testament knew nothing of the ‘souls’ from prior to that time as that concept developed later.

There are four regional lobes of our cerebral cortex. It is also known as ‘gray matter’. This thin coating (1 to 4.5 millimeters thick) contains the endings of the neuron axons from our inner, functional brain components and is where the cognitive processes humankind originally assumed our ‘soul’ could occur in thought.

The frontal lobe is responsible for thinking, planning, performing actions, voluntary movements, speech production, and emotional control. This is where the highest forms of thought, emotion, and perception of oneself and the social environment take place.

Again, Constantine was the first Christian Roman Emperor. In the time of Christ and for many centuries beyond most people were illiterate. There were

few books or scrolls. For the most part Christianity spread by word of mouth. The “Apostle Paul” started writing his letters 20 years after “Jesus’ death”. He had never met Jesus or heard him preach. Christianity? Perhaps it should be called “Paulianity”

The four gospels were written between about the year’s 75 to 95. As Christianity spread there were vast differences in beliefs and theology. The emperor convened the Council of Nicaea in Turkey in 325 A.D. Which created the present baseline version of Christianity.

There is much on the internet about it though. I think Wikipedia is the best place to start for new seekers of truth since many of the links out there surrounding the topic of the Council of Nicaea are by Christian organizations with a message to sell.

I’m not an expert on the entire history of the Council, but I believe in part it was a political move. This book aims to steer you into questioning. Keep searching for your own answers and research this more. There are many sources to choose from. In 1st Timothy Chapter 2 Verse 5 Paul declares: “For there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.” By standardizing Christianity and outlawing all other interpretations, Constantine solidified his power through his partnership with an all-powerful pope and priesthood who became substitutes for Jesus as mediator between God and man.

You may not have understood the Latin mass, but you sure knew to avoid “hell” if you confessed your sins to your priest (revealing your inner most secrets which gave him power over you for life) and obeyed him and the pope in order not to be excommunicated.

Popes back then knew their power came more from the emperor than from imaginary gods. It was a terrific way to control the diverse societies within the empire.

In the past few centuries, physics has transformed both daily life and world history with novelties ranging from electricity to nuclear bombs. Physicists have also broadened humanity's horizons, literally and metaphorically. Time and again, they have overturned notions of reality previously held—often by well... other physicists—to be fundamental. They could be about to do so once more.

On a cosmic scale, a universe that was once thought to be a few thousand years old, and to consist of a handful of orbs circling Earth against a fixed backdrop of stars, has been shown to have an age of 13.77 billion years—a value believed to be known to within a precision of three parts in a thousand.

The universe may also be infinite in size. Certainly, it stretches at least as far as the distance that light can travel in the period since its birth. What can be seen of it with telescopes has no boundary. Physics has also revealed what everything is made of, up to a point. It has turned the atom, once a figment of philosophy, into a quotidian object to be trapped, observed, put to work and split—sometimes to produce energy, sometimes to produce knowledge.

It has now assembled a plausible catalogue of the components of these atoms and of the components of some of those components, together with a list of the forces that hold everything together. But progress in this area has come to an unexpected halt. Physicists have got used to the idea that mathematical theories can be turned into reliable representations of reality, thus producing understanding. And one discovery based on math that physicists were pretty confident of making was of a phenomenon called Supersymmetry, which gives coherence to the current, rather ad hoc explanation of the menagerie of fundamental particles that has been collected since the 1890s.

Supersymmetry is a stalking horse for a yet-deeper idea, string theory, which posits that everything is ultimately made of infinitesimally small objects that are most easily conceptualized by those without the math to understand them properly, as taut, vibrating strings. So sure and convinced were most physicists that these ideas would turn out to be true that they were prepared

to move hubristically forward with their theorizing without experimental backup—because, for the first decades of Supersymmetry’s existence, no machine powerful enough to test its predictions existed. But now, in the form of the Large Hadron Collider, near Geneva, one does. And hubris is turning rapidly to nemesis, for of the particles predicted by Supersymmetry there is no sign.

Suddenly, the subject looks wide open again. The supersymmetric field experts have their tails between their legs as new theories of everything to fill the vacuum left by string theory’s implosion are coming in left, right and center. All of these are mind-bending. One modestly seeks to overturn the principle of causality. Another suggests that everything in the universe really is connected to everything else, and that it is from this simultaneous connection of all with all that the fabric of reality emerges.

Time and space are, on this view, not fundamentals of nature, but merely the effects of deeper processes. Such ideas are in the grand tradition of physics upsetting what seems, to the limited outlook of the human intellect, to be common sense. Science should enjoy being questioned and enjoy being proven wrong whenever it is. Always. If not, there is a problem.

The theories of relativity promulgated a century ago by Albert Einstein, with their trade-offs between space and time, and their warping of both of these by the presence of massive objects to produce the effect dubbed “gravity” by Sir Isaac Newton, are not common sense. They had to be discovered. Same with god(s) if they are to be discovered to be real.

The perception that the body and the soul are distinct entities is a Western civilization phenomenon. Just so you know, the original Judaism was not dualistic...body/mind were a single entity. There is zero talk about eternal life in the majority of the Old Testament books and only passing reference on a few occasions near its end.

As for quantum theory, coeval with relativity, which claims that impossibly distant happenings can be related to one another and knowing some things

precludes you from knowing others, the less said about common sense, the better.

That the human intellect struggles with all this should not be surprising. It evolved so that a social primate could find food and mates and keep safe by interpreting a world halfway between the submicroscopic realm of the quantum and the cosmic vastness of relativity. It has become a commonplace that human brains are lumbered with these limitations— cognitively, socially and politically. How surprising and gratifying, then, that humanity occasionally manages to use mathematics, observation and experiment to transcend its own limits so spectacularly.

Many people can't handle it when you spit irrefutable facts. But truth is truth. You are worth it, and worthy of living your life as you see fit. By challenging religion and whoever you want (or whatever you want), you are hurting no one. The only thing you are hurting is other people's inflated pride and ego. They are not hurting you either by believing whatever they want. The only way anyone can hurt you with their words is if you let them.

Best wishes. Stay strong as the amazing human being you are no matter what. I love you.

About the Author



Andrew is passionate about his community and enjoys following Cincinnati news, politics, events, and local sports. Before the pandemic, Andrew enjoyed being a volunteer at Cincinnati Children's Hospital. He also enjoys capturing local running events on video for runners to see themselves via his first start-up business AKRC™ (Andrew Kennedy Race Capturing).

He loves being a father, running, lifting weights, writing, bowling, beekeeping, and helping his daughters raise their two rabbits, Thumper and Bumper. Andrew is the owner of FREE PASS® LLC. He enjoys selling the books and novelty bookmark cards he creates online as a part-time small business venture. Andrew is also a member of the Cincinnati Metro Chapter of the Freedom from Religion Foundation.

After a college internship at WCPO in Cincinnati, OH, Andrew became a news reporter. He worked at KNDO News in Yakima, WA and WEHT News in Evansville, IN. From 2007-2021, Andrew was an employee of Total

Quality Logistics in Cincinnati, OH specializing in sales and marketing. He is also a professional truck driver.

In addition to having a commercial driver's license, Andrew has a license to operate motorcycles. Andrew also proudly has a license to carry concealed handguns and loves to practice shooting at the range with friends.

Andrew is the author of the book: Religion | A Lifelong Con Job on the Gullible Masses. In 2021, Andrew ran for Cincinnati City Council as an independent. Although he lost, he plans to run for an office again in the future.

If you want help getting out of your religion but don't know where to turn, you can reach out to me or research a number of other organizations that can help you.

*Some include:

1. The Freedom from Religion Foundation. <https://ffrf.org/>
2. The Secular Coalition of America. <https://secular.org/>
3. The Center for Freethought Equality. www.cfequality.org/
4. American Humanist Association. <https://americanhumanist.org/>
5. The Center for Inquiry. <https://centerforinquiry.org/>