

# secularworld

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May 2019



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# Editorial

## We Smell!



I often get insulted, even on social media sites that claim to be places for genteel discussion with no ad hominem. I might spend a few minutes explaining evolution or what evidence really is, and then I'm called an immoral, purposeless godhater! Centuries of Christian propaganda in the West have demonized us. *We smell!*

I'm not complaining. I don't need your sympathy. I'm not offended by theists' name calling because I don't respect their opinions. What I *am* doing is drawing attention to the hatred that some believers have for us. It's no small matter in many parts of the world.

Atheists in some US Bible Belt cities have to stay in the closet or risk being unable to get work or accommodation and maybe losing the love of their family and friends. It's worse in Islamic theocracies where revealing that you're an atheist can mean getting stoned to death. So why all this hatred? The blame falls at the feet of faith itself.

Since beliefs cannot be justified evidentially, they can only be defended emotionally. This means that there's safety in numbers; the bigger the 'group hug' the better.

Hence the constant recruitment mission and the denial of contraception - unhindered breeding is a good way of expanding the

flock. They even adopt the nomenclature of the family: 'father priest', 'mother superior', 'sister nun', 'brother monk'. Loyalty counts a lot.

Of course when you have a strong internal allegiance to your group you have a correspondingly strong *external* enmity. The side effect of this bonding experience is that anyone who *doesn't* join you is *suspect*. George W Bush exemplified this polarizing attitude when he said, "You're either with us or against us."

The hatred and demonization of others leads, inevitably, to conflict. The actuality flies in the face of the message of peace and love that they proclaim! The clergy can spin the facts as well as any politician and tell you that black is white.

Organizations like Atheist Alliance International get a lot of correspondence from people who are sadly trapped in a country, society or family which doesn't tolerate their non-belief. We listen sympathetically to their pleas but, regrettably, there's not a great deal we can do. If true freedom of movement was permitted there would be a mass exodus from theocracies to the democratic secular countries, which would rapidly be swamped with a population size beyond the capability of their welfare and education services; the very things

that make them desirable destinations. Unrestricted immigration is not a vote winning policy, as Germany is finding out; all that happens is nationalism rears its ugly head again.

The best we can do is to help these victims to change their own country. This is not going to happen overnight, but we have to begin sometime. When our Secular Starter Packs are ready, anyone will be able to get going in their homeland.

To summarize, religions polarize society into 'us' and 'them' and cause much animosity, which is why I have decided to theme this edition of SW on that topic. You will find that four articles have been written by ex-clergy. The exodus from the cloth is so great these days that there is a desperate shortage of recruits and organizations have sprung up, like <http://clergyproject.org> that are dedicated to helping escapees recover their lives.

**John Richards**  
AAI Publications  
Director





# President's Letter

## Critical Thinking



Several years ago, I was involved in The Critical Thinking Project.

Our goal was to bring critical thinking to the world. We had a basic model of Critical Thinking and thought it was all set. Our first country was Guatemala. We went to two schools, one was Catholic, and they seemed to get the gist of Critical Thinking in that it involved a greater depth of thinking, but they had problems accepting bias as an influence in their decisions.

Guatemala is still very religious and some would not agree their faith was a bias. Then we did seminars in Rwanda and Ghana. One participant said there was no way to convince his fellow countrymen that information they got from their neighbors was not accurate.

In many developing countries a lot of information is passed along at markets and bus stops. To ask for evidence that the information is true is socially unacceptable. Teaching Critical Thinking was obviously not going to be as easy as we had

thought. We were promoting foreign ideas and many people regarded them as weird.

Yet most of us would agree that Critical Thinking skills would make the world a better place. Many secular organizations have rationality and reason as a fundamental principle. Without Critical Thinking, we are subject to rule by emotions, dogma and authoritarianism. This results in divisiveness, oppression, discrimination and, ultimately, terrorism and war.

So how do we bring Critical Thinking to the world? It takes time to learn these skills and practice them properly. It is a problem encouraging the adoption Critical Thinking. Many of us in developed countries moan about the lack of Critical Thinking.

Some argue that starting with science is the first step. The Scientific Method teaches us about evidence and logic. From there, we can expand to Critical Thinking.

Others say just by telling people to ask questions is a first step.

At AAI, we value Critical Thinking very highly. A world based on rationality and reason is our goal.

One of our projects this year is to create an interactive Critical Thinking learning module that will help to develop these skills. But more is needed. If you have ideas on how to expand Critical Thinking to the world, we want to hear from you.

Critical Thinking is a call to arms for the secular community. If nothing else, our legacy should be to leave the world with these essential thinking skills.

### **Gail Miller**

*President, Atheist  
Alliance  
International*



(Email me here:

[president@atheistalliance.org](mailto:president@atheistalliance.org))

### **Religious Villains on the Cover**

Jim Baker, Pope Urban II, Bal Thackeray, Cardinal Pell  
Klu Klux Klan, Ossam bin Laden, Mother Teresa, Tomás de Torquemada  
Om Swami Maharaj, Mohammed El Fazaz, Mohamed Atta, Nasser al-Wuhayshi  
Jimmy Swaggart, David Koresh, Maurice Tobin, Emperor Theoddosius  
Pope Alexander IV, Jim Jones, Pope Eugene III, Gilbert Deya

# Breaking the Chains



"Idiot", "fool", "brainless sheeple", "religitard"!

These are some of the epithets I see flung at believers everyday online. I have to admit that there may be a few instances where it seems warranted. But ultimately it betrays a lack of understanding of one the most important pieces of information in this argument. Why does the believer believe?

Years ago, when everyone still agreed that the Nazis were the bad guys, I remember being disturbed at the way people wrote them off as just evil. They were evil, of course, but they were also human. They had the same foibles as we did. Under the right set of circumstances with the right teaching, the right grievance, the right escalation, how many of us might be tricked into following something just as bad? The answer, it seems, is more than we like to think.

Those who have never been through religious indoctrination have a similar kind of privileged blindness. The mind that has always been free cannot imagine what it is like to be enslaved. They do not understand what it is to *have* to believe something.

Their position is an honest one. But those of use who bore the chains and wear the scars know that it's not that simple. The contortions

that mind-forged manacles will force you into can be strange indeed.

I don't remember when my own indoctrination started; I was too young. But I can remember certain things. I can remember learning that the most important decision I would ever make would be to let Jesus into my heart to save me from my sins. For comparison, the second most important was who I would marry.

And why did Jesus need to save me? Well that is a fun story. You see humans aren't perfect. The reason they aren't perfect is because the very first humans disobeyed their heavenly father. This was the first sin in the universe, and it was the worst. God had put Adam and Eve in charge of the earth and that meant that the sin that corrupted them, corrupted everything underneath them. That one act of disobedience caused all the suffering in the world, and corrupted every person who ever lived with sin. Everyone was corrupt. I was corrupt.

The only way to save me from my corruption, which would drag me to hell was to accept the saving power of the blood of Jesus.

There was a poem they taught us in sunday school that gave the whole doctrine. Usually paired with a color coded craft, like a bracelet of beads, to help us remember...

*My heart was **black** with sin  
'Till Jesus Christ came in  
His Precious **blood** I know  
Has washed me **white** as snow  
And in his world I'm told  
I'll walk on streets of **gold***

I wasn't even six when I understood that this is how the world works. That my heart was evil. That any sin was enough to be damned. That behind every action in the world there is a terrible evil and that if you align yourself with it, even accidentally, you will deserve to go to hell. Not just go to hell, *deserve* to go to hell.

Can you imagine being a young child, with no mental defenses, being told that this was reality? Can you imagine asking your mother if Jesus crucifixion hurt worse than skinning your knee because that was the only metric you had for pain? Can you imagine hearing from the pulpit the words of Isaiah 64:6 that "*all our righteousness is as filthy rags*" when you were just old enough to understand but not old enough to reject the ideas you were given?

If you can't, then I'm happy for you. You were fortunate. Many were not. A mind chained like that cannot imagine leaving. It has been made to surrender its identity and integrity so that it will truly feel that Christ is its only salvation. There is mercy for the

(continued on page 5)



(continued from page 4)  
 sinner, for the thief, for the murderer.  
 There is none for the disbeliever.

It is possible for the mind to free itself. Mine did, and I'm not alone. But it's not as simple as a logical argument. It's not as easy as an explanation of evidence. Until some part of the self finds a way to overcome some part of that fear they cannot hear you.

As a Christian I was told my life would be a witness to the power of god. Show them that it is better not to be afraid; that love and learning and friends are wonderful for their own sake; that personal responsibility is better than a scapegoat; that courage is better than obedience.

That the truth really can set us free.

Lileth Thompson



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**Dominic Omenai's design (pictured) was a Runner Up**

**Feel the Spin**  
 a novel  
 by Marshall Moskow



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# Fine-Tuning Debunked

(it's just a bad argument)

Argument	Evidence
Internally fabricated within a brain Conceptual	Externally observed in Nature Not Conceptual
Premises await Falsification	Repetition removes doubt
Involves an Interpretive Step Identifying an Association of Ideas	Repeatedly Observable by Anyone No Interpretation Required
Quality Depends on the Ability of the Arguer	Quality Independent of the Ability of the Observer
Remains Hypothetical until Confirmed by Observations	The Inspector that Distinguishes good arguments from bad
Delivers Inferences: deductions, inductions and abductions	Delivers Conclusions: predictions matched by Observations
Disputable	Indisputable

Apologists like William Lane Craig, Jonathan McClatchie and Zach Arden seek to justify their belief in the existence of their god. They would like there to be evidence. after all, they've seen how powerful evidence is in the field of science. They even use the products of scientific discoveries, such as computers and videos, to express their views!

I recently found a short video by Lane-Craig in which he claims to show 'How an Ordinary Christian Can Silence an Atheist' see here:

<https://youtu.be/QBPYuFhDy7g>

It's fun to watch because he starts out talking about providing evidence then, at 1:10, he begins referring to arguments. At 1:42 he actually says, "When people ask me, 'There's no **evidence** for god's existence' I say, 'Well sure there is', they say, 'Like what?' I typically just list about five **arguments**!" (my bold) He obviously thinks that 'argument' is a synonym for 'evidence'!

One of their favorite tactics is to invoke the fine-tuning argument for the existence of an Intelligent Designer. There's a whole list of constants and values that appear to be just right to permit the emergence of life and that, according to them, must mean Zeus

their God dunnit!

For example, if gravity was a tiny bit stronger the universe should still be a singularity and, if it was a tiny bit weaker the universe should have expanded to oblivion and no stars or planets could have formed. Therefore, they make a statistical argument, based on the *improbability* of the observed strength of gravity being uncannily suitable for life (and other things), claiming that it means a *being* must have created everything with the intention of ending up with his pet organisms – us! They then shoehorn in their own god as the Intelligent Designer, without bothering to produce any evidence.

There are a number of problems with this. Firstly, it's a mash-up between an argument from ignorance fallacy (we dunno, therefore godunnit) and a non-sequitur fallacy (since godunnit it must be *my* god). Statistical *improbability* is the opposite of evidence, what is needed is *positive* probability such as 90% likelihood in the Chi squared significance test, *and* it requires a mechanistic connection between the observations and the claim – not an explanation plucked out of the sky. *Also*, inferring that it's the *Christian* god who is responsible, rather than Shiva or Mbombo, is just a leap of

blind faith.

Secondly, the supposed fine tuning is amazingly poor – out of all of the approximately two hundred billion galaxies in the known universe, each with about two hundred billion stars and probably eight billion planets, not to mention all the very hostile space in between the cosmic bodies, we know of only one place where life has actually emerged: here on Earth. That doesn't sound like the work of a very Intelligent Designer. If he intended to facilitate our existence, he barely succeeded. A better description would be Bungling Idiot!

Thirdly, it's a misunderstanding of what statistical probability means: 'very unlikely' does not mean impossible. As an example, the chance of me winning the Euro millions is so remote I don't waste my money entering the lottery, but somebody *does* win it. Nor can you deduce any causal agent from the figures: they are just figures.

Fourthly, there is this notion of historic intention that simply cannot be applied retrospectively. It's strange that theists try retrospection because one of the questions they levy against the fossil evidence for evolution is, "Were you there?" It can only be hypocrisy that permits them to assume retrospection when it suits their presupposition and deny it

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when it doesn't. (Fossils are not evidence pointing to evolution, they are consistent with evolution being the explanation for their existence.)

We *do* use statistical arguments in science: to justify hypotheses and make a case for carrying out an investigation. We do *not* use *improbability* as evidence for drawing a conclusion; that would be like saying, "I've thrown this dice one hundred times and it hasn't come up six once so there can't be a six on it". Random rarity indicates nothing: why don't you examine the dice?

Taking a hypothetical example, let's look at William Lane Craig's arrival on this planet. Early Homo sapiens are thought to have emerged about 300,000 years ago. To make the maths easy let's take 20 years as the generation interval. That means we've had 15,000 generations leading up to the birth of William. Once again, to make the maths easy, let's assume that every ejaculation contains about 100 million sperms (it's usually more than that). Using the fine-tuning statistical style of reasoning, there

was a 1 in 100,000,000 chance of William being the specific result of that particular one of his father's sperms fertilizing his mother's egg. Rolling those odds back over his ancestors, there's only a 1 in 1,500,000,000,000 (15 times 10 to the 11th power) chance of William existing at all. But we know he does exist! Do we argue that, with those odds, nature could not have produced him then, and God must'a'dunnit? No! So, how do we know he exists? Not by argument but by evidence – we can observe him. Then, can we deduce that Og and Ug had sex together with the express intention of producing William many millennia in the future? No! It is unreasonable to assume retrospective intentionality.

Here's an example of how we *do* use statistics in science: The Drake Equation. Francis Drake (not the sailor) calculated that using the numbers from above (approximately two hundred billion galaxies in the known universe, each with about two hundred billion stars and probably eight billion planets) and

putting it together with the information that the cosmos began 13.8 billion years ago, it is extremely likely that some other intelligent life has appeared elsewhere in the universe.

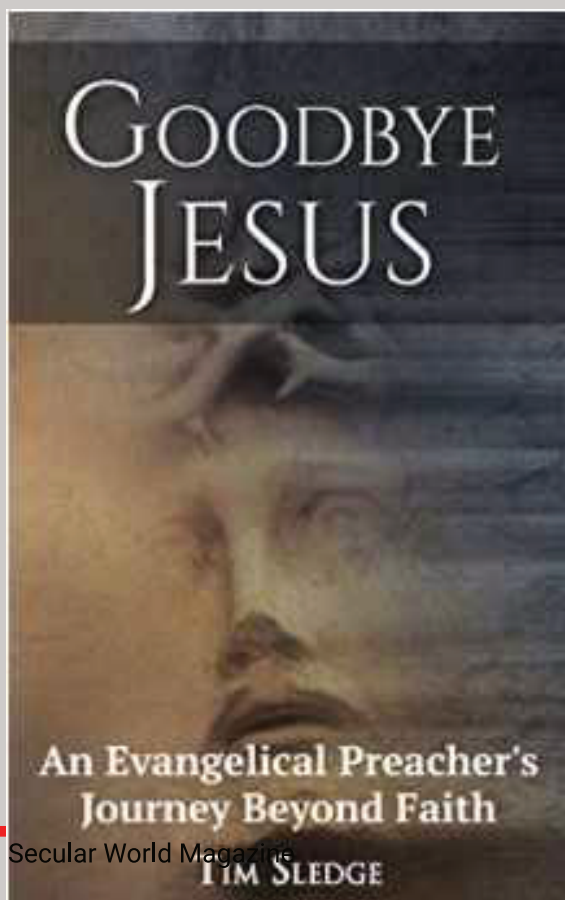
Do we take that argument as a closed case? No! We take it as a hypothesis worthy of investigation. That's why we've been listening for signals in the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence (SETI) since the 1960s.

Why are we carrying out that investigation? Because the statistical argument supports a hypothesis that can and should be examined for evidence. It's a question we would like answered.

Even if the arguments for the Christian God are sound (I'm not addressing that here), His possible existence is uninvestigable and therefore can collect no evidence, so his proposed existence is not even a scientific hypothesis. It's just a claim.

*An argument is not evidence.*

**John Richards**



## ***Goodbye Jesus***

### **An Evangelical Preacher's Journey Beyond Faith**

Tim Sledge is a humanist writer and speaker whose mission is discovering and sharing insights for personal growth.

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At the peak of his ministerial career, a 10-year series of events led to a growing awareness that faith was no longer working for him.

His journey into and out of faith is described in his book, *Goodbye Jesus*.

He explores, articulates, and shares a new kind of "spiritual" secular life in his book *A Meta-Spiritual Handbook*.

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**<https://tinyurl.com/y2pqbqsr>**

# The Life of an Apostate Muslim



I was born in 1995 in a small town in Northern Kenya called Moyale. My parents separated when I was 6 months old and I was raised by a single mother. In 1997, when I was 2 years old, because of the financial difficulties my mother was facing, we moved to Dadaab Refugee Camp. My mother hustled to make sure we had enough to live on until 2008 when she became mentally ill. Throughout the time we were in the refugee camp my father was in Nairobi raising another family and he became a successful businessman. Me and my elder sister used to call him and he used to deceive us and ridicule us.

I used to pray to 'God' to help us get our rights. I started having doubts when our financial condition worsened and we had yet to get our father to own up. That is when I began to question 'God'. At first I used to ask Him how He could just watch while my father was denying us our rights and even ridiculing us. This continued for some time until 2012 when I was now in high school. That's when I renounced Islam. I did it privately. I started pretending that I would be fasting then I would be drinking water during the day. I would pretend to be praying Salat then I would mock God in my prayer. I'd

even insult Him.

By 2017, I was no longer a Muslim; I had long ago realized that there was actually no God and that Muslims were wasting their time. I started abandoning Salat, prayer and fasting. I also started to oppose Islam publically for the first time. I told my sister and mother to stop wasting their time praying to Allah. That's when I also started receiving threats and get harassed at night. I used I used to get harassed if I go out at night and when I stopped going out, they'd come to my house and throw stones. I got tired of reporting them to the police because they were not keen on helping me unless I bribed them.

Around that time my father found out about my disbelief and disowned me. I really didn't care about being disowned by my father because I had long ago given up on him. In the middle of 2018, I was assaulted at night and sustained a broken nose, a fractured forearm and a concussion. I also started receiving death threats from Alshabab, the Somali terror group. That's when I decided to reach out to Atheist Alliance International.

By then, my life had gotten very hard and I couldn't even go to school

because I feared being attacked or worse still murdered. Around mid November, I was brazenly attacked during the day and suffered an injury on the head. I had to get stitches to close the wound. That's when I realized my life was in great danger and my tormentors feared no repercussions. All along, I was in communication with the UNHCR Protection Unit.

Luckily in December I received a scholarship by Windle International Kenya to study Bachelor Of Commerce at Jomo Kenyatta University Of Agriculture And Technology near Nairobi, Kenya. Although I feel somewhat safer now because most of the residents of the town are non-Muslims, there are still Muslims here and I cannot risk getting found out again. I cannot go back to Dadaab after I graduate so I hope UNHCR and other NGOs will get me to somewhere where I can express my disbelief without fearing repercussions.

Isack Ahmed Mohamed. (picture shows head injury)





## Poetry Page



It's 160 years since **Arthur Hugh Clough** wrote this:

*The foul engendered worm  
Feeds on the flesh of the life-giving form  
Of our most Holy and Anointed One.*

*He is not risen, no,  
He lies and moulders low;  
Christ is not risen.*

*Ashes to ashes, dust to dust;  
As of the unjust, also of the just –  
Christ is not risen.*

...

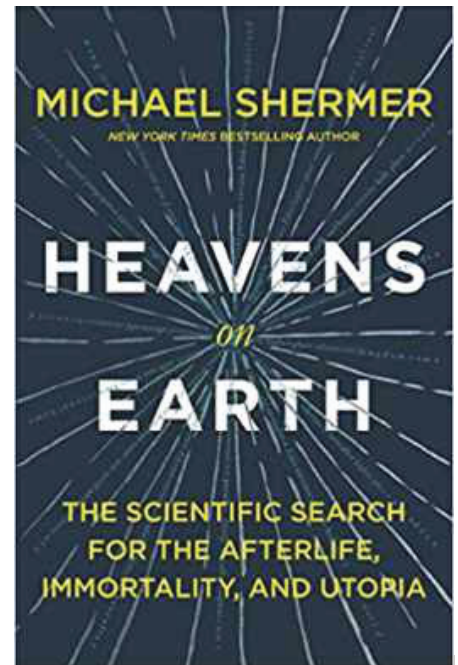
*Is He not risen, and shall we not rise?  
Oh, we unwise!*

*What did we dream, what wake we to discover? Ye hills,  
fall on us, and ye mountains, cover!*

*In darkness and great gloom  
Come ere we thought it is our day of doom,  
From the cursed world which is one tomb,  
Christ is not risen!*

*Eat, drink, and die, for we are men deceived,  
Of all the creatures under heaven's wide cope  
We are most hopeless who had once most hope,  
We are most wretched that had most believed.  
Christ is not risen.*

*Eat, drink, and play, and think that this is bliss!  
There is no Heaven but this!*



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**Michael Brant Shermer** is an American science writer, historian of science, founder of [The Skeptics Society](#), and editor-in-chief of its magazine [Skeptic](#),

# Applying Logic to the God Proposition

The sixth article in the series

MIRACLES	EXPECTATION According to Theism	EXPECTATION According to Atheism
FREQUENCY?	Commonplace	Rare
SCRUTINY?	Survive Scrutiny	Fail Scrutiny
EXPLICABLE?	Physically Inexplicable	Physically Explicable
MATCHING with observations?	X	✓

## Argument from Miracles

Atheism predicts random good luck and bad luck will be observed, and, therefore, anything we can confirm that really happened that seems miraculous will be physically explicable (because it's not really miraculous) and rare (because it's just random).

While, without a parade of excuses, theism predicts miracles will be commonplace and physically inexplicable (e.g. Christian healing wings in hospitals would exist where amputees have their limbs restored by prayer, or anything like that; yet we observe not a single example of that).

Similarly, atheism predicts the only miracle claims that will "survive scrutiny," are claims that are never reliably investigated; and that every time a miracle claim gets proper scrutiny, it dissolves. Lo and behold, that is also what we see.

Thus, again, what we observe is exactly what is expected through atheism, not at all what we expect according to theism. So even the evidence of miracles refutes theism and confirms atheism.

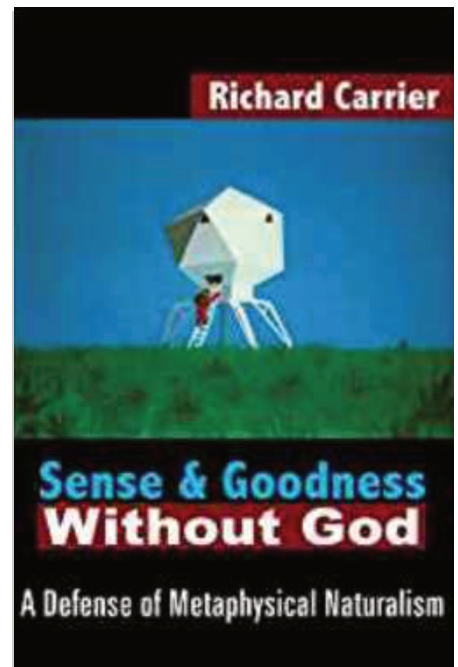
Dr Carrier has written many books, the one we feature in this edition of SW is:

### *Sense and Goodness without God*

Here is the publisher's description:

If God does not exist, then what does? Is there good and evil, and should we care? How do we know what's true anyway? And can we make any sense of this universe, or our own lives? *Sense and Goodness without God* answers all these questions in lavish detail, without complex jargon. A complete worldview is presented and defended, covering every subject from knowledge to art, from metaphysics to morality, from theology to politics. Topics include free will, the nature of the universe, the meaning of life, and much more, arguing from scientific evidence that there is only a physical, natural world without gods or spirits, but that we can still live a life of love, meaning, and joy.

Dr. Richard Carrier  
Ancient Historian



Buy the book by clicking [here](#).

"This book teaches you step by step how to think and process information with reason and the scientific method as your guide to determining what is and what is not reliable information. Makes a great case that fearing judgment day is not the only reason for living a decent and moral life. I couldn't put this book down and found it quite moving. One of my all time favorite books."

Mitchell D Benjamin



# What is Humanism?

(from [Stephen Law's blog](#) 07 01 2014)

Number one in a series of three articles explaining the difference between atheism and humanism



"Humanism" is a word that has had and continues to have a number of meanings. The focus here is on kind of atheistic world-view espoused by those who organize and campaign under that banner in the UK and abroad.

We should acknowledge that there remain other uses of term. In one of the loosest senses of the expression, a "Humanist" is someone whose world-view gives special importance to human concerns, values and dignity. If that is what a Humanist is, then of course most of us qualify as Humanists, including many religious theists. But the fact remains that, around the world, those who organize under the label "Humanism" tend to sign up to a narrower, atheistic view.

What does Humanism, understood in this narrower way, involve? The boundaries of the concept remain somewhat vague and ambiguous. However, most of those who organize under the banner of Humanism would accept the following minimal seven-point characterization of their world-view.

1. Humanists place particular emphasis on the role of *science and reason*. They believe that, if we want to know what is true, reason and science are invaluable tools – tools we should apply without limit. No beliefs should be placed beyond

rational, critical scrutiny.

2. Humanists are *atheists*. That is not to say that they must be atheists in the positive sense, however. Humanists need not deny there is a god or gods. But they do not sign up to belief in a god or gods. Humanists tend to be similarly sceptical about the existence of other supernatural agents of the sort that many religions suppose exist, such as angels and demons.

3. Humanists suppose that this is very probably *the only life we have*. There is no heaven or hell awaiting us. Nor are we reincarnated.

4. Humanists usually believe in the *existence and importance of moral value*. Humanists tend to have a particular interest and concern with moral and ethical issues. Most Humanists believe that actions can be objectively morally right or wrong. They therefore deny that the existence of objective moral values entails the existence of God. So far as knowledge of right and wrong is concerned, Humanists place strong emphasis on the role of science and/or reason. In particular, they usually suppose that our ethical framework should be strongly informed and shaped by an empirically grounded understanding of what human beings are actually

like, and of what enables them to flourish. Obviously, when a Humanist offers moral justifications, they will justifications rooted in something other than religious authority and scripture. 5. Humanists emphasize our *individual moral autonomy and responsibility*. They insist each individual must ultimately take responsibility for making moral judgements, even if that judgement is that that individual *ought* to stick with the moral framework handed to them by a tradition or community. They suppose that, convenient though it might be if we could each could hand over responsibility for making tough moral decisions to some external religious, political or other leader or authority, that cannot be done (except perhaps in some very special cases). A good moral education will be one that avoids encouraging passive, uncritical acceptance of a particular moral and religious or other world view (including Humanism itself), and will instead focuses on developing the intellectual, emotional and other skills individuals will need to discharge that responsibility properly.

6. Humanists are *secularists* in the sense that they favour an open, democratic society and believe the State should take *neutral* stance on religion.

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The State should not privilege religious over atheist views, but neither should it privilege atheist views of those of the religious. Humanists believe the State should protect equally the freedom of individuals to hold and promote both religious and atheist points of view. A Humanist would obviously be profoundly opposed to the kind of theocracies that coerce people into accepting a particular religious belief, but they are no less opposed to totalitarian states in which citizens are obliged to accept atheism. Humanists want a level playing field so far as religion and non-religion are concerned. This is not the case in, for example, the United Kingdom, where for example twenty-six Bishops are automatically allocated seats in the House of Lords and where the State funds increasing numbers of various religious, but not Humanist, schools. These are two important campaign issues for the British Humanist Association.

7. Humanists believe that we can enjoy significant, meaningful lives even if there is no God, and whether or not we happen to be religious. Many Humanists would go further and insist that, in some respects, our lives may become rather more meaningful in the absence of gods and/or religion. Some argue that religions can sometimes act as an impediment to our leading meaningful lives by, for example, leading us *not* to think hard about the Big Questions; forcing us to live a certain way out of fear of cosmic punishment; and/or wasting our lives promoting false beliefs because of a mistaken expectation of a life to come.

**Stephen Law**

*Reader in  
Philosophy  
Heythrop College  
London University*



## We held a T-shirt Slogan Competition

### First Prize was \$250

William Murdick's design (pictured) was a Runner Up



Buy it, and our other Merchandise at our Zazzle store:

<https://www.zazzle.com/s/atheist+alliance>

# Stone the Gays!

## Religious barbarism returns to Asia

The tiny Sultanate of Brunei has become the first country in Asia to make homosexuality a crime punishable by death. This is part of a nationwide implementation of Sharia law that was first announced in 2014. Back then, Sultan Hassanah Bolkiah said: "The decision to implement the (penal code) is not for fun but to obey Allah's command as written in the Quran."

The Sultan, who is also Brunei's prime minister, then declared that the legal changes would be gradually implemented in three phases. The first phase of the law was implemented in May 2014, when it stipulated that individuals who have committed the "crimes" of having a child out of wedlock, failing to attend Friday prayer, or seen to be promoting any form of belief other than Islam, should be hauled before an Islamic court and could face imprisonment or fines. Brunei was supposed to implement the second phase, that includes whipping and mutilations for Muslims found guilty of alcohol consumption and amputations of hands and feet for robbery, in 2015 and the final phase in 2016. However, following massive global backlash to the decision, Sultan Bolkiah decided to delay the implementation of the remaining two phases.

Now, five years later, the Sultanate plans to proceed with these barbaric changes. From April 3 2019, those found guilty of same-sex relations, adultery, sodomy, rape, and blasphemy, will be whipped and stoned to death.

Out of Brunei's total population of 430,000, about 67 percent are Muslim and therefore subject to the Sharia law. But since the first phase of Sharia law applied to both Muslims and non-Muslims, it looks likely that no one will be exempt from the new rule. This is a major violation of international human rights and, although Brunei signed the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment, it was never ratified.

Recently, Indonesia has *also* come under scrutiny for the cruel treatment of its LGBTQ members. Its province of Aceh is the only place in the country that can legally enforce Sharia law, and on multiple accounts, it has been used to publicly cane gay men in front of cheering crowds. Members of the LGBTQ community were also arrested in a series of raids including nightlife spots, hotels and private residences.

But there is something we can do! Brunei has an investment agency

which owns a collection of nine top class hotels including The Dorchester in London, Cosworth Park in Berkshire, and The Bel-Air and The Beverley Hills in Hollywood, California. Some of our A-list celebrities, including Sir Elton John, are campaigning for these famous hotels to be boycotted.

George Clooney and his wife, Human Rights lawyer, Amal, have resuscitated an earlier boycott that activists implemented in 2014, when a fundraising event usually held at the Beverley Hills Hotel was cancelled. Clooney said that boycott lost steam. "Like all good intentions when the white heat of outrage moves on to the hundred other reasons to be outraged, the focus is down and slowly these hotels get back to the business of business".

Writing for news website, Deadline, George said, "Every single time we stay at, or take meetings at, or dine at any of these nine hotels we are putting money directly into the pockets of men who choose to stone and whip to death their own citizens for being gay or accused of adultery."

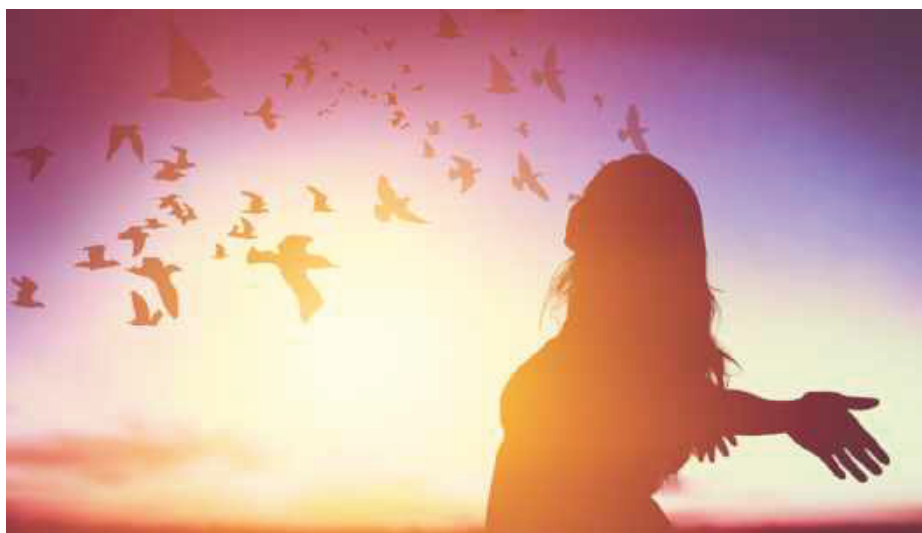
Let's hit them where it hurts - in the pocket.

John Richards  
Editor



# Escape from Faith

## by a teacher from a Canadian Catholic school



I couldn't exactly say why I'd accepted my first teaching position in a Catholic board. I couldn't exactly say whether Catholicism had anything to do with it. It was most likely a combination of both politics and religion. As a young teacher I certainly hadn't yet experienced enough of that traditionally oppressive alliance of church and education to feel just how duped I'd been and how insipid and vacuous that religious education thing would become.

The Ontario government's decision to fully fund Catholic schools in 1984 may have most likely tapped into a sentimentalism that's always attached to religious belief. I'd certainly felt it. But in any event the Catholic school supporters, embittered by years of fighting with the Conservatives under Premier Bill Davis, had managed to secure the right, as guaranteed under The Constitution Act of 1867, to allocate their residential property taxes to Catholic schools from kindergarten to Grade Thirteen. Some thirty-five years later I can't imagine why I hadn't advocated more strongly or bravely for a one non-denominational two-language public school system. It was just a matter, of course, of

choosing a pay check over principle.

The politics of religious education soon reared its ugly head. The inequalities that full funding had been enacted to remedy had taken another form; it was the public boards that had now to suffer their own inequalities. After full funding, the public schools had experienced a decrease in student enrolment, which meant staff surpluses and an increase in operational costs for, mostly empty, school buildings.

The religious side of the issue was, in my view, just as bad. No one religion should ever receive government funding and yet Ontario now had legally sanctioned religious discrimination. It's bad enough that most of the operational and capital funding comes from general provincial revenues: the tax-paying public. It is even more intolerable that undemocratic Catholic school boards discriminate against non-Catholics in hiring practices, and advocate for moral positions with which a tax-paying public may strongly disagree.

I was recently appalled at the decision of local Catholic school board trustees to halt fund-raising in their area for organizations that, in their view, violate the Church's teaching on "the sanctity of life from

conception to natural death". Some of those organizations have raised millions of dollars for cancer research, homeless shelters and other humanitarian causes.

If history is any guide it should be obvious that religion, and schools run under its auspices, have always been the twin pillars of oppression and mindless indoctrination. Any type of government claiming to rule under divine authority will never be exempt from violations of rational conduct. And religious institutions that sanction prevailing political orthodoxy soon appear as agents of temporal power.

The panoply of ritual, robes and hierarchy visible in the church or in any religious body is ample proof of that disguised tyranny. India's Supreme Court has, for example, just recently overturned a ban on women of menstruating age from entering their own temple complex. There are examples of gay teachers who've been forced to end their careers in Catholic boards. Among the citizenry a narrowing of the mind and failure to think critically soon ensue and an unscrupulous sort of educator, administrator and church official will always see this religion-government collusion as quick entry to promotion and power.

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I've seen firsthand how vindictive and self-serving Catholic educators can become. Biblical teachings be damned! The Catholic board becomes a microcosm of the tyranny of any state-financed institution with the sanction of religious dogma. Bureaucracy replaces merit and human decency. Government may be a necessary evil but there's always an "escape from faith" option that regrettably I'd been too obtuse to exercise.

It's a system worth escaping from. In any educational institution where religion has been stripped of significance, reduced to a meaningless artifact hung in every classroom, administrative abuses, inefficiency and incompetence will quickly replace the much vaunted stewardship model of leadership and service; and the daily display of school liturgy, prayer and chaplaincy soon sour on students and staff alike some of whom will tell you, only in private moments, what a joke it all really is. I've grown to loathe the infamy and abuses of education guided by scriptural authority rather than human reason.

**Conrad DiDiodato**  
(and cat)



**We held a T-shirt Slogan Competition**  
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Jason Gregory's winning design is pictured below



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# A Welsh Preacher Leaves the Flock



Until a few years ago I stood at lecterns with a Bible in my hand at churches across the UK. With the passion of the Welsh Valleys and an unquestioning commitment to biblical rhetoric, my sermons were popular within the peculiar pond of evangelical Christianity, but **I'll never preach again.**

I recorded podcasts that reached number one in iTunes for Spirituality and Religion and was twice asked to apply for ordination training in two different denominations. Looking back on my 14 years as an evangelical Christian, I am met with an array of feelings – shame being most prominent.

To think that I spent a decade and a half entrenched in an ideology as provable as fairies at the bottom of the garden, with more historical flaws than the flat earth theory, and countless rigid cultural expectations and harmful rules - is truly humbling. I was convinced that despite there being tens of thousands of religions and 'gods' out there, evangelical Christianity just happened to be the right one. Hallelujah.

It was somewhere between hearing church leaders describe how 'God speaks to them' and being told that questioning God 'leads to blasphemy against the holy spirit', that I refused to paper over the

ever-present crack in my religious beliefs. Like many back-sliders before me, when I looked at the actual evidence for the New Testament and the real make-up of the cosmos, the crack in my understanding created a sinkhole.

Evangelical Christianity is harmful. It harmed many of my friends and left its mark on my mind. Moving on from it is like trying to pull yourself from an overturned canoe in a current. It hurts, and you're not sure you'll be alright.

Some of the bat shit that gets spouted within evangelical Christianity belongs in a secure facility where psychologists are on hand to guide the god-people to reality. But there I was; mumbling 'amen' like I knew what the f\*ck I was on about. 'Yes Lord, move this generation into revival' I muttered – like someone had slipped high potency acid into my juice. The worship songs that promise the 'days of Elijah' began to provide a soundtrack for my days.

And then the hound inside turned on its master. So I stuffed my brain with the messages I once believed, to try to feel 'saved' again. Friend, replace that soundtrack. Give your brain something better to feed on. Dr Richard Carrier's 'Why I'm not a Christian' was my first meal.

In all my time as a Christian, I believed the lies of strangers. All we are is a conscious awareness wrapped in matter that barely even registers on a quantum level. That's all you are. But don't be afraid, it's a cosmic miracle that you're aware and reading this at all. Breathe in the awareness and let that be your truth. Don't clamber for fables and doctrines, tampered manuscripts and untested claims.

The instructions for life are simple in evangelicalism, and it's one of the very few things I missed most after I escaped. Unless I felt that 'God' had endorsed my next step, I wouldn't move forward at all. And if my leaders told me something was not 'God's plan', I wouldn't go near it. How insane is that? Adult men and women trapped in an eternal uncertainty, awaiting a stranger's voice to give them the green light to live.

You don't need to feel something is worth doing to do something. And the mumbled assurance of religious strangers is the last endorsement you need to do something.

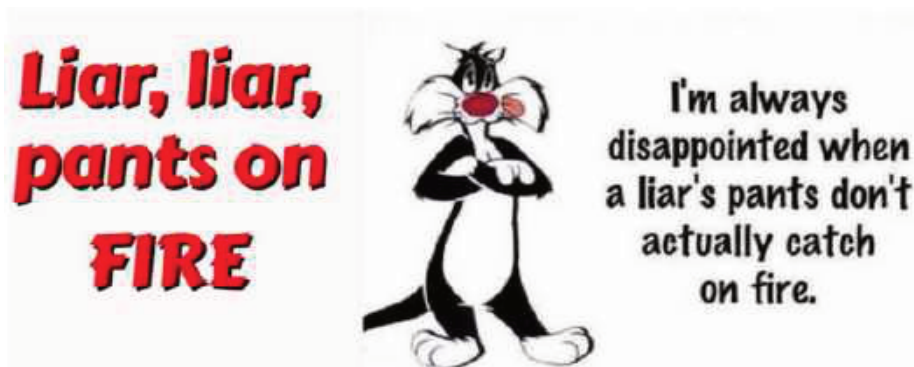
**Alex Willmott**  
Author and  
Activist





# Mendacious Preachers

by Ex-Evangelical Preacher  
Bruce Gerencser



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I have known a number of Evangelical pastors, evangelists, missionaries, and professors in my lifetime. Without exception, these men of God, at one time or another lied to their congregants or ministerial colleagues. Now, this doesn't mean that they set out to deliberately obfuscate or deceive — though some did — but the fact remains these so-called men of God played loose with the truth.

On Sundays, pastors stand in pulpits and preach their sermons, giving congregants a version of truth, but not *the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth*. Evangelical preachers enter their pulpits with an agenda, an objective.

The Bible becomes a means to an end, be it saving the lost, calling congregants to repentance, raising money, or advancing pet projects. Instead of letting the Bible speak for itself, the text is manipulated and massaged in the hope that congregants will buy what their pastors are selling. And make no mistake about it, preachers are salesmen. Their goal is to get hearers to sign on the dotted line.

Another way preachers lie is by giving the appearance that their sermons are God's opinion on a matter. *God speaks through God's man as he preaches God's infallible Word*, or so the thinking goes. Every

preacher's thinking is colored by his past religious experiences, education, and culture. Pastors regurgitate what they heard their pastors preach while growing up, what their professors taught them in college, and what they read in theological books.

Christianity consists of thousands of sects, each with its own peculiar spin on the Bible. Countless internecine wars are fought over minute points of doctrine and practice. Only within the Christian bubble do these things matter, but boy, oh boy do they matter there! Evangelicals, in particular, are known for their bickering over theology and how followers of Jesus should live. This fact is a sure sign, at least to me, that Christianity is not what Evangelicals say it is.

If there is one God, one Jesus, and one Holy Spirit who lives inside every believer, it stands to reason that Christians should all have the same beliefs. That they don't, suggests that there are cultural, sociological, and geographical issues at work. How else can we explain the theological differences between sects, churches, and individual Christians? They can't even agree on the basics: salvation, baptism, and communion, Eucharist or Lord's supper!

Most preachers know about the diversity of theology and belief among Christians, yet they rarely let it be known to their congregations except to call other beliefs false or heretical. It is clear, at least to me, that the Bible teaches a number of "plans of salvation"; that both the Arminians and Calvinists are right; that both salvation by grace and salvation by works are true. Why don't preachers tell the truth about these things? Is it not a lie to omit them — the sin of omission?

If Christianity is all that Evangelicals say it is and Jesus is all-powerful, surely Christians can handle being given the truth about the Biblical text, church history, and the varied theological beliefs and practices found with Christianity. If pastors want to be truth-tellers, they must be willing to tell followers everything, including the stuff that doesn't fit the doctrine of their sect.

Imagine how differently Evangelicals might act if they were required to study world religions and read books by authors such as Bart Ehrman. That will never happen, of course, because it would result in most preachers losing their jobs due to attendance decline and loss of income. Truth is the enemy of faith.

Atheists like me know the value of wide exposure to contrary beliefs. After all, our deconversions often

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followed a path of intense and painful intellectual inquiry. In my case, it took years for me to slide down the slippery slope of unbelief. Along the way, I made numerous stops, hoping that I would find a way to hang on to my belief in God. I found none of these resting places intellectually satisfying. I wanted them to be, but my commitment to truth wouldn't let me.

In the years since, I have encouraged doubters to follow their paths wherever they lead. Meet truth in the middle of the road. Don't back up or try to go around. Do business with truth before moving forward.

This is, of course, hard to do, because it requires abandoning previously held beliefs when new evidence is presented. It requires admitting you were wrong. And therein is the rub for many Evangelical preachers: they have spent their lifetimes being "right" and preaching their *righteousness* to their church congregations. To admit they were wrong would cause their metaphorical houses to tumble. So instead of telling the truth, Evangelical preachers lie. They lie because they have careers, congregations, and denominations to protect.

And finally, some Evangelical preachers lie in their sermons, stories and testimonies because they never let the truth get in to way of telling a good story. I have heard countless testimonies and sermon illustrations, and the vast majority of them were embellished at some point or the other. Not that this is a great evil. We all do it, Christian or not. My problem with Evangelical preachers doing it is that they represent themselves as pillars of moral virtue and arbiters of truth. When you ride your horse on the moral high road, you should expect attempts will be made to push you down the ravine to where the unwashed, uncircumcised Philistines of the world live.

Preachers know that there's nothing like a good story to seal the deal with people listening to their sermons. Believing that "the end

justifies the means," preachers shape and mold their stories and testimonies in ways that best lead to desired outcomes. For those of you who were raised in Evangelical churches, think about some of the salvation testimonies you heard on Sundays. Fantastical stories, right? Almost unbelievable! And in fact, they *aren't* believable.

All of us love a good story, but when trying to convince people that a particular sect/church/belief is truth, surely it behaves storytellers to tell the truth. Instead, preachers color their stories in ways that people will be drawn into them. Every story and every sermon is meant to bring people to a place of decision. A preacher has wasted his time if his sermon hasn't elicited some sort of emotional response.

Politicians, sportscasters, and preachers — to name a few — also use the power of stories to draw people in and get them to make a decision — be it to get saved or to get your vote. Any preacher worth his salt knows how to manipulate people through their use of stories. A boring sermon is one that is little more than a dry, listless lecture. Give me someone who speaks with passion and uses the power of words to drive home his message. As a pastor, my goal was to inspire people, not to put them to sleep.

Sometime during my early ministerial years, I stopped expecting preachers to be bold truth tellers. I listened to Independent Fundamental Baptist (IFB) conference speakers Jack Hyles, Curtis Hutson, Tom Malone, and others tell stories that were embellished or outright lies. Hyles, in particular, lied more often than he told the truth. He is famous for telling how many people he counseled every week. Much like President Trump, Hyles' statistics didn't hold up under scrutiny. Hyles could have told conference attendees that he counseled a number of people each week, but instead he led conference attendees to believe that he counseled hundreds and hundreds of people every week. He wanted people to

see him as some sort of super hero; an Evangelical Superman. The same goes for his soul-winning stories. While there may have been an element of truth in his stories, they were so embellished that only Kool-Aid-drinking Hyleites believed them to be true.

Such is the nature of preaching. Does this mean that preachers are bad people who can't tell the truth? Certainly, some of them are. More than a few Evangelical churches are pastored by con artists who want to scam their congregations, troll for children to molest, or seduce naïve church women. Most preachers, however, are decent, thoughtful people who genuinely believe in what they are selling. They want to save souls and help people live better lives. Often raised in religious environments where embellishing the truth or outright lying was acceptable, they preach in the ways that were modeled to them.

Isn't that what we humans are wont to do? We tend to follow in the footsteps of our parents and teachers. There is nothing I have said in this post that will change this fact. All I hope to do is warn people about what they hear preachers saying during their sermons. Tom Malone, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Pontiac, Michigan said, during a sermon, "I'm not preaching now, I'm telling the truth!" Dr. Malone meant to be funny, but what he really did, at least for me, is reveal that what preachers preach may not always be the truth. Judicious hearers should keep this mind the next time they listen to this or that preacher regale people with their fantastical stories. Remember, it's just a story, an admixture of truth, embellishment, and lie. In other words, good preaching. Amen?

**Bruce Gerencser**  
Occasional Contributor



ATHEIST ALLIANCE INTERNATIONAL'S

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# The Late Theologian Thomas Jonathan Jackson Altizer



Secular World doesn't normally honor Christian theologians but Thomas Altizer is an unusual case. Picking up where Nietzsche left off, he considered god to have died and his 'Holy Spirit' to have spread throughout humanity! So, we commemorate him as an unusual freethinking hero who advocated 'Godless Christianity'! Is that any more insane than the mainstream?

Theologian Thomas Jonathan Jackson Altizer was so controversial in his heyday that he received numerous death threats and hate letters. When he appeared on the Merv Griffin Show, the audience erupted in such anger that a curtain was lowered, the band played loudly to drown out shouts, and Dr. Altizer was smuggled out through a back door to safety.

The West Virginian led the radical "Death of God" movement after World War II. He contended – oddly, I think – that God created the universe, then poured himself totally into Jesus and died at the Crucifixion. God's spirit diffused throughout humanity, and He no longer exists as a deity.

"Every man today who is open to experience knows that God is absent," Altizer wrote in one of his books, "The Gospel of Christian Atheism." In another book, he said:

"We must recognize that the death of God is a historical event: God has died in our time, in our history, in our existence."

Son of a Charleston lawyer, Altizer graduated in 1944 from Stonewall Jackson High School – named for his celebrated ancestor who fought for slavery in the Civil War. He earned a doctorate in the history of religions at the University of Chicago then became a professor at Emory University at Atlanta.

While at Emory, his lectures, writings and books triggered such hostility that demands flared for his dismissal. But Emory refused, saying he had academic freedom to express his conclusions. Time magazine wrote a cover issue about him, emblazoned "Is God Dead?" Altizer was called "the bad boy of theology." He advocated "Godless Christianity" and wrote: "The Christian today is called upon to say no to God because God himself has ceased to be present in history."

During that period, Dr. Robert Emery was chairman of religion and philosophy at the University of Charleston (then Morris Harvey College). In a Charleston Gazette interview, Dr Emery agreed with some of the controversial ideas then being advocated in what was called "the new theology" – partly

overlapping with Altizer's views. The professor expressed doubts about the Virgin Birth, Resurrection, Heaven, Hell and other supernatural dogmas. Public uproar and angry letters to the editor followed the interview. Baptists held a statewide meeting to denounce Dr. Emery. The Charleston college – which then pledged to help students "attain Christian maturity" with "a firm faith in God" – ousted the professor. Charleston Unitarians formed a committee seeking his reinstatement, to no avail.

Dr. Altizer later went to the State University of New York. After retirement, he lived at Stroudsburg, Pa., where he died on Nov. 28 2018, of a stroke, at age 91.

Upon his death, fellow theologian Jordan Miller commented: "By some accounts, he was the most hated man in America for a year or so." Dr. Miller said Altizer "believed that God became a human being and died."

In the 1960s, I was the Gazette's religion reporter, covering such upheavals. Those were stormy times.

**James A Haught**  
USA Correspondent







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