

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

50 Quotes from Former Atheists

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The quotes below come from thinkers and commentators who were atheists before accepting a Christian worldview. The purpose of these quotes is to facilitate discussion between those holding to Christian and atheist worldviews. The quotes certainly make reference to points being discussed and contested in the atheist-Christian debate. A follow up post will include thinkers who were formerly Christians before converting to a secular worldview.

James Warner Wallace (b. 1961), former cold-case homicide detective, assistant professor of apologetics at Biola University and once vocal atheist:

- *“In the end, I came to the conclusion that the gospels were reliable eyewitness accounts that delivered accurate information about Jesus, including His crucifixion and Resurrection. But that created a problem for me. If Jesus really was who He said He was, then Jesus was God Himself. If Jesus truly did what the gospel eyewitnesses recorded, then Jesus is still God Himself. As someone who used to reject anything supernatural, I had to make a decision about my naturalistic presuppositions” (1).*

Frank Tipler (b. 1947), mathematical physicist, cosmologist, joint appointment in the Departments of Mathematics and Physics at Tulane University:

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- *“When I began my career as a cosmologist some twenty years ago, I was a convinced atheist. I never in my wildest dreams imagined that one day I would be writing a book purporting to show that the central claims of Judeo-Christian theology are in fact true, that these claims are straightforward deductions of the laws of physics as we now understand them. I have been forced into these conclusions by the inexorable logic of my own special branch of physics” (2)*

Alister McGrath (b. 1953), theologian, scientist, and Anglican priest:

- *“Atheism, I began to realize, rested on a less-than-satisfactory evidential basis. The arguments that had once seemed bold, decisive, and conclusive increasingly turned out to be circular, tentative, and uncertain” (3).*
- *“Christianity offers a worldview that leads to the generation of moral values and ideals that are able to give moral meaning and dignity to our existence” (4).*

Lee Strobel (b. 1952), a former militant atheist and employee at the Chicago Tribune:

- *“It was the evidence from science and history that prompted me to abandon my atheism and become a Christian” (5).*
- *“To be honest, I didn’t want to believe that Christianity could radically transform someone’s character and values. It was much easier to raise doubts and manufacture outrageous objections than to consider the possibility that God actually could trigger a revolutionary turn-around in such a depraved and degenerate life” (6).*
- *“...the scientific data point powerfully toward the existence of a Creator and that the historical evidence for the resurrection establishes convincingly that Jesus is divine” (7).*

Rick Oliver, member California Science Teachers Association and New York Academy of Science:

- *“I remember how frustrated I became when, as a young atheist, I examined specimens under the microscope. I would often walk away and try to convince myself that I was not seeing examples of extraordinary design, but merely the product of some random, unexplained mutations” (8).*

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Sir William Mitchell Ramsay (d. 1939), Scottish archaeologist, New Testament scholar, foremost authority of his day on the history of Asia Minor:

- *“Christianity did not originate in a lie; and we can and ought to demonstrate this as well as believe it” (9).*
- *“Further study... showed that the book (Acts) could bear the most minute scrutiny as an authority for the facts of the Aegean world, and that it was written with such judgment, skill, art and perception of truth as to be a model of historical statement” (10).*

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C.S. Lewis (d. 1963), former atheist and widely read Christian apologetic author today and mind behind Narnia series:

- *“Atheism turns out to be too simple. If the whole universe has no meaning, we should never have found out that it has no meaning” (11).*
- *“Supposing there was no intelligence behind the universe, no creative mind. In that case, nobody designed my brain for the purpose of thinking. It is merely that when the atoms inside my skull happen, for physical or chemical reasons, to arrange themselves in a certain way, this gives me, as a by-product, the sensation I call thought. But, if so, how can I trust my own thinking to be true? It’s like upsetting a milk jug and hoping that the way it splashes itself will give you a map of London. But if I can’t trust my own thinking, of course I can’t trust the arguments leading to Atheism, and therefore have no reason to be an Atheist, or anything else. Unless I believe in God, I cannot believe in thought: so I can never use thought to disbelieve in God” (12).*
- *“A young man who wishes to remain a sound Atheist cannot be too careful of his reading. God is, if I may say it, very unscrupulous” (13).*

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (d. 2008), Russian writer and winner of 1970 Nobel Prize in literature speaks about life under the the [state atheism and communism](#) of the Soviet Union:

- *“Over a half century ago, while I was still a child, I recall hearing a number of old people offer the following explanation for the great disasters that had befallen Russia: “Men have forgotten God; that’s why all this has happened.” Since then I have spent well-nigh 50 years working on the history of our revolution; in the process I have read hundreds of books, collected hundreds of personal testimonies, and have already contributed eight volumes of*

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my own toward the effort of clearing away the rubble left by that upheaval. But if I were asked today to formulate as concisely as possible the main cause of the ruinous revolution that swallowed up some 60 million of our people, I could not put it more accurately than to repeat: "Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened" (14).

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Antony Flew (d. 2010) was once leading atheist philosopher and member of analytic and evidentialist schools of thought. As a strong advocate of atheism, Flew criticized the idea of life after death, free will, and the concept of God. Flew converted to deism in 2004 and held to an Aristotelian notion of God:

- *"It now seems to me that the findings of more than fifty years of DNA research have provided materials for a new and enormously powerful argument to design" (15).*
- *"I now believe there is a God... I now think it [the evidence] does point to a creative Intelligence almost entirely because of the DNA investigations. What I think the DNA material has done is that it has shown, by the almost unbelievable complexity of the arrangements which which are needed to produce life, that intelligence must have been involved in getting these extraordinarily diverse elements to work together" (16).*
- *"...we have all the evidence we need in our immediate experience and that only a deliberate refusal to "look" is responsible for atheism of any variety" (17).*

Francis Collins (b. 1950) is a geneticist respected for the discoveries of disease genes and his leadership of the Human Genome Project. He is the Director of the National Institutes of Health and author of numerous books on science, medicine, and spirituality:

- *"I believe God did intend, in giving us intelligence, to give us the opportunity to investigate and appreciate the wonders of His creation. He is not threatened by our scientific adventures" (18).*
- *"The God of the Bible is also the God of the genome. He can be worshipped in the cathedral or in the laboratory. His creation is majestic, awesome, intricate and beautiful – and it cannot be at war with itself. Only we imperfect humans can start such battles. And only we can end them" (19).*

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Peter Hitchens (b. 1951), well-known English journalist, author, and brother of anti-theist Christopher Hitchens:

- *“I thought this gesture [burning his Bible] was a way of showing that I had finally rejected all the things that I had been brought up to believe, and I went on to behave for the next 20 years of my life exactly as if I didn’t believe in him [God], and that’s how I discovered in the end that what I had rejected was right” (20).*
- *“The current intellectual assault on God in Europe and North America is in fact a specific attack on Christianity – the faith that stubbornly persists in the morality, laws, and government of the major Western countries... The God they fight is the Christian God, because he is their own God... God is the leftists’ chief rival. Christian belief, by subjecting all men to divine authority and by asserting in the words ‘My kingdom is not of this world’ that the ideal society does not exist in this life, is the most coherent and potent obstacle to secular utopianism... the Bible angers and frustrates those who believe that the pursuit of a perfect society justifies the quest for absolute power” (21).*
- *“... when it comes to the millions of small and tedious good deeds that are needed for a society to function with charity, honesty, and kindness, a shortage of believing Christians will lead to that society’s decay” (22).*

Richard Morga was a Mormon convert to atheism and then to Christianity. His conversion was the result of participating in debates and online discussions, notably on Richard Dawkins’s official website:

- *“Science and philosophy do not have the answer to everything. If you are willing to listen with an open mind and an open heart and just say ‘perhaps I do not possess all the truth,’ that is an act of humility and I know that God never rejects or ignores acts of humility” (23).*

Philip Vander Elst (b. 1951) is freelance writer and was lecturer for over thirty years in politics and journalism:

- *“Since my own father had died when I was only 17, I found what Lewis had to say about the problem of evil particularly pertinent. As he rightly points out, we cannot complain about the existence of evil and suffering, and use that as an argument against the existence and goodness of God, unless we first believe that the standard of right and wrong by which we judge and condemn our world is an objective one. Our sense of justice and fairness has*

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to be a true insight into reality, before we can we be justified in getting angry and indignant about all the pain and injustice we see around us. But if this is the case, what explains the existence within us of this inner moral code or compass? According to atheism, human beings and all their thinking processes are simply the accidental by-products of the mindless movement of atoms within an undesigned, random, and purposeless universe. How then can we attach any ultimate meaning or truth to our thoughts and feelings, including our sense of justice? They have, on this view, no more validity or significance than the sound of the wind in the trees" (24).

- *"So, confronted by all these facts and arguments – philosophical, scientific, and historical – I surrendered my sword of unbelief to God, and asked Jesus to forgive my sins and come into my life during the hot, dry summer of 1976. In the years that have followed, I have never regretted that decision, despite many ups and downs and trials of my faith" (25).*

A.S.A. Jones was self-claimed devout atheist before accepting biblical truths:

- *"My atheistic philosophy had allowed me to lose my compassion for others. I no longer had the ability to love anyone, not even myself. I had become apathetic to life itself. For years, I had been dead, but because I continued to walk and talk, I didn't know it. But now, I was born again and the spirit that was in me, which had allowed me to understand spiritual things, connected with the glorious and perfect higher consciousness of Jesus Christ" (26).*

Craig Keener (b. 1960) is a leading scholar and Professor of New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary:

- *"I thought that atheism was "smart." When my grandmother argued for a first cause, I replied by postulating an infinite regression of causes (my arrogance left me unaware that my response violated modern physics!) Yet unknown to me, my father's mother, sister, and the sister's family were praying for our family. When I was 13, reading Plato raised for me the question of life after death, but Plato's answers did not seem adequate. I began to realize that only an infinite Being could guarantee the hope of eternal life. Yet if such a Being existed, there seemed no reason why that Being would care about me, even if that Being were perfectly loving enough to give life to some. I was incurably selfish and undeserving of a loving Being's attention; it seemed to me that if I pretended to love, it was only for the self-serving purpose of getting that Being's attention. Yet shortly before I turned 15, I began to secretly cry out, "God, if You are there – please show me" (27).*

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Jennifer Fulwiler is an atheist turned Catholic, columnist for Envoy magazine, a regular guest on radio networks, and a standup comedian:

- *“One thing I could never get on the same page with my fellow atheists about was the idea of meaning. The other atheists I knew seemed to feel like life was full of purpose despite the fact that we’re all nothing more than chemical reactions. I could never get there. In fact, I thought that whole line of thinking was unscientific, and more than a little intellectually dishonest. If everything that we call heroism and glory, and all the significance of all great human achievements, can be reduced to some neurons firing in the human brain, then it’s all destined to be extinguished at death” (28).*
- *“I found that the rules of the Church, that I had once perceived to be a set of confining laws, were rules of love; they defined the boundaries between what is love and what is not. It had changed me, my life, and my marriage for the better. I may not have experienced God, but, by following the teachings of the Church that was supposedly founded by him, I had experienced real love” (29).*

Sarah Salviander is a research scientist in astronomy and astrophysics at the University of Texas:

- *“In fact, it seems that every question we have about the universe is answerable. There’s no reason it has to be this way, and it made me think of Einstein’s observation that the most incomprehensible thing about the world is that it’s comprehensible. I started to sense an underlying order to the universe. Without knowing it, I was awakening to what Psalm 19 tells us so clearly, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (30).*

Darrin Rasberry is a former anti-theist and former writer at John Loftus’s blog **Debunking Christianity**:

- *“Some time last week, I realized that I could no longer call myself a skeptic. After fifteen years away from Christianity, most of which was spent as an atheist with an active, busy intent on destroying the faith, I returned to a church (with a real intention of going for worship) last Sunday. Although I know I may struggle with doubt for the rest of my life, my life as an atheist is over” (3§).*
- *“After considering Deism (the belief in a God who abandons His creation), Islam, Hinduism (yes, Krishna, don’t laugh), Baha’i, and even Jainism briefly, I have decided to*

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*select Christianity due to its superior model for human evil and its reconciliation, coupled with the belief that God interacted with man directly and face-to-face and had *the* crucial role in this reconciliation” (32).*

Michael Bird (b. 1974) is prominent Australian New Testament historian and theologian who lectures at Ridley College and teaches in the areas of the Synoptic Gospels, Paul’s Letters, and Systematic Theology:

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- *“Many years later, however, I read the New Testament for myself. The Jesus I encountered was far different from the deluded radical, even mythical character described to me. This Jesus—the Jesus of history—was real. He touched upon things that cut close to my heart, especially as I pondered the meaning of human existence. I was struck by the early church’s testimony to Jesus: In Christ’s death God has vanquished evil, and by his resurrection he has brought life and hope to all” (33).*
- *“My faith and studies have led me to believe otherwise. First-century Jews and early Christians clearly demarcated God from all other reality, thus leading them to hold to a very strict monotheism. That said, Jesus was not seen as a Greek god like Zeus who trotted about earth or a human being who morphed into an angel at death. Rather, the first Christians redefined the concept of “one God” around the person and work of Jesus Christ. Not to mention the New Testament writers, especially Luke and Paul, consistently identify Jesus with the God of Israel” (34).*

Ravi Zacharias (d. 2020) was an evangelist and the founder and chairman of the board of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries:

- *“I very seldom like to mention the turning point of my own life, for it is a very private matter and sometimes still hurts to think of it, to say nothing of the embarrassment it must bring my family. But I cannot resist thinking of that most poignant moment of my past. I was seventeen years old when, with neither great intensity or great anguish, I came to the recognition that life had very little meaning. The more I pondered its harsh implication the closer I drew to a decision. That decision was to choose the way of suicide” (35).*
- *“I found myself after that attempt lying in a hospital bed, having expelled all the poison that I had taken but unsure if I would recover. There on that bed, with a dehydrated body, the Scriptures were read to me. The flooding of my heart with the news that Jesus Christ could come into my life and that I could know God personally defies the depths to which the truth overwhelmed me. In that moment with a simple prayer of trust, the change*

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from a desperate heart to one that found the fullness of meaning became a reality for me. God reached down to a teenager in a hospital bed in the city of New Delhi, a megacity of teeming millions. Imagine! God cared enough to hear my cry. How incredible, that He has a personal interest in the struggles of our lives. I cannot express it better than to say that His self-sufficiency and greatness do not deny us the wonderful joy of being affirmed in our individuality and of knowing that we are of unique value to Him. That was the point of the parable Jesus told about the shepherd who left the ninety-nine sheep in the fold and went looking for the one” (36).

Nick Watts is the music minister at Bacon Heights Baptist Church who attempted to disprove God’s existence after the suicide of his son:

- *“I tried to disprove the existence of God, immediately after finding my 19-year-old son dead in his bedroom from suicide” (37).*
- *“But atheism failed me. The words of the best, most intelligent atheists rang hollow. Their rebuttals and refutations against the existence of God were, in my opinion, incomplete, short-sighted, and at times, ludicrous. While the atheists scream loudly trying to speak for their evidence, the theists, in my opinion, simply step back and allow the evidence to speak for itself. For the arguments of theists were akin to the familiar statement: “You don’t need to defend a lion; you simply open the cage and allow him to defend himself” (38).*

Jordan Monge is a contributor to the magazine *Fare Forward*, a writer, and a blogger:

- *“I tried to face down an overwhelming body of evidence, as well as the living God” (39).*
- *“At the same time, I had begun to read through the Bible and was confronted by my sin. I was painfully arrogant and prone to fits of rage. I was unforgiving and unwaveringly selfish. I passed sexual boundaries that I’d promised I wouldn’t. The fact that I had failed to adhere to my own ethical standards filled me with deep regret. Yet I could do nothing to right these wrongs. The Cross no longer looked merely like a symbol of love, but like the answer to an incurable need. When I read the Crucifixion scene in the Book of John for the first time, I wept” (40).*

Edward Feser (b. 1968) is a philosophy Professor at Pasadena City College in California:

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- *“Secular theorists often assume they know what a religious argument is like: they present it as a crude prescription from God, backed up with threat of hellfire, derived from general or particular revelation, and they contrast it with the elegant complexity of a philosophical argument by Rawls (say) or Dworkin. With this image in mind, they think it obvious that religious argument should be excluded from public life... But those who have bothered to make themselves familiar with existing religious-based arguments in modern political theory know that this is mostly a travesty” (41).*
- *“Dawkins, as I have said, tells us that there is “absolutely no reason” to think that the Unmoved Mover, First Cause, etc. is omnipotent, omniscient, good, and so forth. Perhaps what he meant to say was “absolutely no reason, apart from the many thousands of pages of detailed philosophical argumentation for this conclusion that have been produced over the centuries by thinkers of genius, and which I am not going to bother trying to answer.” So, a slip of the pen, perhaps” (42)*

John Clayton was anti-Christian and wrote *All the Stupidity of the Bible*:

- *“I had a lot to overcome. I could not talk without swearing. You could not go to the preacher’s house and say pass the @\$%& potatoes. I had to learn a new way of talking, a new way of living, a new set of values, and a new morality, because I had lived in opposition to God. I asked God’s help in these things and I found I was able to overcome things I had never been able to overcome before. I have a whole new set of problems — a whole new set of things that I have to work on — but the problems I have today are nothing like the problems I had in the past. If anyone had told me twenty years ago that I would be openly using my limited abilities to publicly convict disbelievers of God’s reality, I would have thought they were insane. Nonetheless, God has blessed my feeble efforts in spectacular ways — totally beyond anything I could have ever done” (43).*

Darren Gedye grew up as an atheist in a non-Christian home:

- *“I grew up in a non-Christian home. My father is an atheist and my mother was a backslidden Christian, due mostly to marrying my father I suspect. Anyway, I grew up an atheist. I never went to Church or Sunday school, stayed in bed till lunch-time on Sundays, and hated Christians who I thought were all stupid... [But] I realized that a lot of what I had been told about Christians when I was growing up was not true” (44).*
- *“After a couple of years of this I realized that his worldview made more sense than mine did. I started reading a Bible he gave me and one night alone in my room it dawned on me*

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that it was all true and I was the world's prize idiot. I hit the floor and asked Jesus to take control of my life" (45).

- "Becoming a Christian didn't solve my problems, but it helped me to understand them and it opened the way for God to start healing me from my past" (46).

Dana Oleskiewicz is self-employed in the environmental field, supporter of non-profit environmental education and of lake ecosystems:

- "I was again confronted with the science/faith dichotomy when recently given the gift of Jesus. This time, the Holy Spirit would not let me reject my salvation, but what awful anguish I experienced as I assumed I had to reject my beloved science instead. I was thrilled to learn that I could believe in both! As I investigate my newfound faith alongside my scientific knowledge, the Lord continues to reveal to me that scientific findings and the use of the scientific method are very good, just as his Word is also good" (47)

Josh Rasmussen is a Professor in the Department of Philosophy who specializes in analytic metaphysics:

- "I was dissatisfied with the evidence presented to me by the Church, so for a while, I stopped believing. But that led me to begin a search for truth where I discovered my love for philosophy and reclaimed my belief in God" (48).
- "I think of my journey back to God as clues that led me to more clues. I discovered recent scientific breakthroughs about the fine-tuning of the universe, the developing of virtue, the value of natural irregularities, soul-making, and more. These things, along with my questions, helped me shake off my limited view of God" (49).
- "Francis Bacon once said, "A little bit of philosophy leads you to atheism, but depth in the philosophy leads you back to religion," and that's certainly been my story. The more that I study philosophy, the more I see that points to God. Often I wonder, why don't all philosophers believe in God? The evidence is so powerful" (50).

NOTE: References are forthcoming.

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<https://jamesbishopblog.com/2015/07/06/former-atheists-speak-44-quotes/>