

The Mountain That Would Not Move

A story of deconversion

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Introduction

I have lost my faith.

I might as well just say it early and get it over with. Whether you are learning this for the first time, finally having suspicions or rumors confirmed, or reading this with full prior knowledge, I want to present you with my story of deconversion from Catholicism. I have envisioned on many occasions the future self who would write this document, and the one who types this now is not him. Books to have been read gather dust, I remain ignorant of subjects I hoped to have mastered, and my persistent hunt for a definitive resolution to question of God's existence has left me empty handed.

Nevertheless, sufficient time has passed, and I suppose the proverb is true: there is no time like the present. It is here and now, then, that I tell of my journey from a man of faith in the Christian God to one who suspects there are no gods.

You will notice that other than my initial source of doubt, the following will contain no specifics about *why* I have been led away from belief in a god. Historically, it has proven highly tempting to inquire about details when someone first learns that I've had doubts. Once specifics enter the picture, it can be very difficult to refrain from offering books attempting to refute the issue, or to recite of all of the reasons why the doubts shouldn't be doubts at all. This document is intended to be one primarily of dissemination and disambiguation. I simply want others to know about my journey, how I went about it, the various effects it has had, and where I'm headed. If you want to read more, including specifics, feel free to peruse my blog.¹

In the Beginning

My doubt began completely out of the blue. My wife, Amanda, and I were in Florida visiting my parents for Christmas in 2009. During the course of the visit, my dad's complaints about Windows Vista led me to suggest him trying Linux. I happily volunteered to set it up for him, and while while fiddling with his newly installed system a question popped into my mind: *"I wonder if anyone other than the Gospel writers wrote about Jesus?"* I expected that the answer would be "Yes," and I opened up a browser to confirm.

To some degree, the answer *was* "Yes." Then again, it wasn't what I expected. Of the three primary sources mentioned, Josephus, Tacitus, and Pliny the Younger, what surprised me was just how *little* they said. Moreover, I learned that the most convincing testimony of the three, Josephus', was said to have been doctored up!²

¹<http://technogeekery.blogspot.com/>

²Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry. "Regarding the quotes from the historian Josephus about Jesus." Accessed September 03, 2011, <http://carm.org/apologetics/evidence-and-answers/regarding-quotes-historian-josephus-about-jesus>.

I was absolutely perplexed. On one hand, I had testimonies from those living at or around the time of Jesus' life:

Josephus, Antiquities, Book 18, Chapter 3, Paragraph 2; bracketed statements are suspect (93-94 CE):³

About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man [if indeed one ought to call him a man.] For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. [He was the Christ]. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. [On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvelous things about him.] And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.

Tacitus, Annals, 15.44 (116 CE):

Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.

Pliny the Younger, Pliny's Epistle to Trajan (97-109 CE):

They (the Christians) were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a God, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.

On the other hand, I had the Jesus of the gospels who I had come to love. Because of who he was and what he did, his fame had spread throughout the land (Mt. 4:24, Mk. 1:28) to the point where he was even a potential candidate for kingship (Jn. 6:15)! Why had such little ink been spilled to document Jesus? Those who knew him were captivated by him. News of his arrival in a new town brought droves to him for healing or to pepper him with questions about God and the meaning of life. Others were compelled to climb trees just to catch a glimpse of him, or to fight the crowds just to touch the fringe of his garment.

The God in my mind didn't square with what I was reading. The passages above said little more than that someone named Jesus existed, who perhaps did some things others found impressive, and who

³Scholars suggest that these statements are non-original insertions by Christian copyists. See Schlomo Pines, *An Arabic Version of the Testimonium Flavianum and Its Implications* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1971) and Louis H. Feldman's contribution in William Harbury et al., *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, Vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 911-912.

had a band of followers who named themselves after him.⁴ I couldn't fathom how contemporaries documenting events of the same time period could omit such a figure from their scope of interest. Not *anything* about *any* specific miracles (raising people from the dead, curing lepers, walking on water, commanding the weather)? Nothing about circumstances of his birth? No mention of the empty tomb, Pentecost, or the ascension?

These questions brought about a journey that would ultimately dissolve my faith.

A Bit about Me

Critical to the Core

Very quickly after my initial shock, a new horror manifested itself: *I had never evaluated Christianity's truth*. I *believed in* and *lived* Christianity, but had never investigated *objective reasons for that belief*. You see, inquisitiveness and skepticism have always been driving forces in my life, perhaps even to a fault. When I realize my own ignorance, it often begets obsessive levels of research, inquiry, and thought. Should the fruit of my efforts be a resolution I am fairly confident in, my tendency is toward evangelism. For a silly example, note my response to the nth receipt of the infamous Microsoft "beta email test."⁵

I have debated and analyzed to death numerous decisions and topics in my life: whether I could afford a MacBook while in college, whether a 1984 Schwinn Prelude was a quality road bike, the best circular saw/jigsaw/router/digital SLR for the money, whether I was called to marriage, whether or not to date and eventually propose to my current wife, how much we could afford to spend on a house, whether I should enter industry or serve as a missionary following college graduation, whether there was anything to the "vaccine controversy" (ignorant/neutral → vehemently anti-vaccine in 2009 → pro-vaccine in 2010), the best software applications for accomplishing some given task, the efficacy of vitamins, the legitimacy of a multi-level-marketing scheme I was pitched... and the list could go on.⁶

While I may meet disagreement regarding the conclusions to a researched subject, I know that I can at least articulate *why and how* I came to my conclusions. This is what I realized was missing in terms of Christianity; my belief could not be tracked back to any foundation of objective data or reasons.

For better or for worse, once my gaze turned to religion in this manner, I treated it like everything else I'd looked into: something to be poked, prodded, examined, and explored.

⁴Concerning the actual name, "Jesus," only Josephus actually mentions it; the other two source only refer to Christ or Chr[i/e]stus, which are titles, not proper names.

⁵Background information: <http://www.snopes.com/inboxer/nothing/microsoft-aol.asp>. My response (enlarge or download the picture to read): <http://i.imgur.com/DiZim.png>

⁶For an example of the levels to which I sometimes go, see the paper that resulted from my desire to understand the mathematics behind a multi-level-marketing program (first edition; a second is in progress!): https://sites.google.com/site/jwhendytank/home/FHTM_Analysis_Aug-2010.pdf.

My Method

The approach I took toward quelling my curiosity was the one I took with most of the topics described above, one that still seems fantastically sensible to me. Confronted with a topic in need of assessment, I try to suspend belief in the status quo and establish its veracity or falsehood. I admit that alternative approaches exist, however I have found it particularly effective to “step outside of the bubble” and look around from a perspective other than that of my accustomed default.⁷ I found out later that someone has formalized this approach, naming it “The Outsider Test for Faith.”⁸

I have experienced relative ease in the past when suspending belief during a period of inquiry. I believe that this has to do with the [perhaps irrational] self-hounding that I experience when I choose hastily despite awareness of lacking justifying evidence. I can and have made these choices, but know that I behaved impulsively and foolishly. My memory is seared with at least a few occasions of this type when I’ve been burned due to a lack of patient, researched deliberation.

The above may read as though I experience a conscious decision to look at some *Hypothesis X* and suspend belief about it. Honestly, it’s not even that methodical most of the time. I reflexively find myself becoming very hesitant, critical, and challenging. I consider this as part of who my nature and how I approach inquiry and investigation. That said, I *want* to build this approach up as a skill in all areas, regardless of whether I find myself naturally compelled to take this route; I just wanted to illustrate that in many instances, the fires of curiosity ignite naturally.

Upon embarking upon this particular inquiry, I was edified by two corollary concepts:

- *Truth converges*: I held, and still do, that the angle and preliminary stance from which one inquires does not alter the trek’s destination. This can be muddled by pointing out unresolved issues (like religion) where this seems not to be the case. I would urge one to consider that these apparent counterexamples are such because of their complexity, not because of a true aberration from the principle.
- *If God is real, I will arrive back at him*: Similarly, when I set foot outside of the bubble to begin my quest, I was quite resolute that if God existed, I would absolutely find him. I was (and am) convinced that the evidence would support such a being, and that in his love he would *want* me to find him. I believe I demonstrated great *faith* in this aspect of my approach.

I wish to share one quote to end this discussion of my method, which I realize can be met with hesitancy or objection by many. Even amongst apologists, it seemed that the jury was out as to whether truth actually converges in the case of theism.⁹ I recall the day when I first ran across a small snippet of text known as the *Litany of Gendlin*:¹⁰

⁷One alternative, for example, would be that of St. Anselm’s suggestion of “faith seeking understanding.” See <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/anselm/#FaiSeeUndChaPurAnsThePro>.

⁸See John Loftus’ *Why I Became an Atheist* and/or *The Christian Delusion* for book length coverage. For an overview, see his blog post on the concept: http://debunkingchristianity.blogspot.com/2009/03/outsider-test-for-faith_20.html.

⁹See the article on presuppositional apologetics at the Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry: <http://carm.org/presuppositional-apologetics>. The key quote: “This means that no matter how convincing the evidence or good the logic, an unbeliever cannot come to the faith because his fallen nature will distort how he perceives the truth.”

¹⁰http://wiki.lesswrong.com/wiki/Litany_of_Gendlin

What is true is already so.
Owning up to it doesn't make it worse.
Not being open about it doesn't make it go away.
And because it's true, it is what is there to be interacted with.
Anything untrue isn't there to be lived.
People can stand what is true,
for they are already enduring it.

—Eugene Gendlin

The last two lines were perhaps the most liberating set of words I had ever encountered. *"I can stand what is true, for I'm already enduring it."* How wonderful! If God wasn't real, *that was okay!* My life wouldn't suddenly turn into shambles and the world wouldn't end. Why? Because God would not have been real to begin with. My change in belief alters *nothing* about the world.

This may seem trivial in hindsight, however I think we often fear internal change due to contemplation of the implications. What the above brought to light is that there is no sense in worrying about scary implications. The map is not the territory, and therefore what has been in error all along was my *alignment* with reality, not whether or not reality was going to become less favorable due to a change in my beliefs.¹¹ God either is or he isn't. If he isn't, then I might as well just say, "Oops," and move on with my life.¹²

The Journey

Having described a bit about how I approach topics, I'd like to paint a picture of the subsequent two years that have elapsed.

In the Head

I was literally at square one. Any vague apologetics I could recall had been assumed to be true *a priori*; I received them from trusted teachers and never explored alternatives or challenges to the arguments. These apologetics simply got filed away, not internalized, like an index card matched to some particular mystery or challenge to Christianity. Should the challenge arise, I could pull out my index card and recount the answer I had been given.

To remedy the situation I started devouring information. I googled heavily, found debates and interviews and listened to them (my iPod contains over four straight days of apologetics material), looked for books on the topic, and talked to others. Without exaggeration, I would say that my mind was consumed with apologetics for the entire first six months. I walked the halls of work pondering arguments and questions. My car became an auditorium for listening to debates and interviews. My nights were devoted to reading and commenting on blogs and in forums (typically at the expense of sleep).

¹¹A nice summary of this concept: http://wiki.lesswrong.com/wiki/The_map_is_not_the_territory

¹²More on the liberation of "Oops": http://lesswrong.com/lw/i9/the_importance_of_saying_oops/

As I read, I encountered the same impression again and again: atheistic/naturalistic arguments consistently less convoluted and more believable than their theistic counterparts. Fairly rapidly, any amount of confidence I had in my prior position (belief in God, Catholicism, etc.) essentially vanished. As time passed, it became progressively harder and harder to imagine *ever* believing again. After two years, I still do not believe in God.

This makes a good point for a brief digression on a fascinating topic: belief. We cherish our beliefs, defend them, get upset over them, and the like. We are convinced that ours are the *right* beliefs. Unfortunately, beliefs seem to arise from all types of sources: research, life events, direct sensory data, testimonies from others, and so on. Throughout my journey, I have often wondered how beliefs actually arise; specifically, how much choice do we have in the matter?

My current conclusion is that we have little, if any, choice. Our past experiences, background knowledge, biases, surrounding environment (e.g. our social groups), and observed data serve as *inputs*, and a belief is the agglomerated *output*. My experience has aligned quite well with this interpretation. I didn't experience a sense of *rejecting* or *turning away from* God or religion – my belief simply *stopped being there*.

I add these thoughts, as I have often been met with pleas to simply “return to the faith” or to “choose to believe again.” Unfortunately, I don't think it works like that. On hot topics, there is a deep temptation to place beliefs into the category of choice, for it allows one to attribute blame in the face of conflicting views. I now see things differently: if you had the same inputs (biology, background knowledge, biases, etc.), you would have the same resultant output, the same *belief*.

This becomes clearer in unambiguous areas. Imagine choosing, right now, to *believe* in a green sky, that the earth is flat, or that the first religion you can think of (other than your own) is the one that is *actually true*. Don't simply imagine performing *actions* that would logically follow from these beliefs (not traveling by boat if the world were flat); imagine literally *choosing* to be convinced of their truth-hood instantaneously. I suspect that this is a difficult or impossible exercise. To imagine yourself believing in the face of some contradictory evidence, say *believing* that the sky is green despite *knowing* that your eyes see blue, doesn't even compute as a possibility. Well, that, or you are able to brainwash yourself on command.

Having made this point, consider that ambiguous cases (like religion) are of the same *nature*, however their complexity makes it more difficult to see them in that light. Beliefs are either chosen or they are not. If they are not, then we must strive to withhold judgment and blame from those who hold different ones. Changing beliefs involves changing the inputs, not chastising the belief holder. My situation is simply one in which the inputs have not brought about the manifestation of theistic belief.

In the Heart

While my mind was obsessed with attempting to answer this difficult question, my heart was plagued with sadness, feelings of alienation, loneliness, and anger. It's difficult to even begin painting an accurate picture of this experience. My entire life was rattled. I felt embarrassed, like something was wrong with me (or at least that others might think so). I was scared not to pray or sing praise and worship songs around others for fear that they would find out, but it seemed equally dishonest carrying out those actions without the underlying beliefs that are supposed to fuel them.

I felt especially lonely in that this area of interest on which I was expending immense quantities of energy failed to resonate even slightly with others. My doubts were met with blank looks, shrugs, and/or immediate explanations of why they shouldn't be doubts at all. I was alone in my difficulties. I was alone in understanding why there might even *be* difficulties.

Many acquaintances simply fell away; communication ceased except when we physically crossed paths, or upon receipt of a mass email requesting assistance with a manual labor task. I've been told I am crazy for doubting the authenticity of the Gospels (this was later retracted), asked whether my relationship with my father was the source of my doubt, and told that a part of me had become missing/lost.¹³ Most social events with those in my circles featured a prelude of prayer or praise and worship, and thus even activities which should have been enjoyable were a source of anxiety and awkwardness.

I have found it very saddening to not to share what used to be a core part of most relationships. There are some exceptions, and I have immense gratitude for the handful of close friends who persisted in relationship with me. Perhaps those which remain stood upon a deeper commonality than mere shared religious views. Sharing of human joys and sorrows, common interests, and genuine respect for one another have managed to preserve a number of wonderful bonds, and my life is better for having them.

As would be expected, marriage during the past two years has been... rocky. Our relationship and joining together was founded on a common vision. Life was for serving God, raising future saints, and growing in holiness. Our lives revolved around the Church and religious activities – personal prayer, praise and worship, meal time prayer, prayer together, religious talks, spending time with other religious people, and so on. This was no longer the case. Sometime in late 2010 I stopped attending weekly Mass. Shortly after, I stopped attending gatherings with the Community of Christ the Redeemer, and was directed to depart from my regularly meeting small group of Catholic married couples.¹⁴ Becoming a non-theist brought about immense frustration and sadness for us both. Neither of us had signed up for this on our wedding day two years before. Any discussion about religion typically brought me to defensiveness and debate, and her to sadness and tears.

Thankfully, we received suggestions to attend marriage counseling and took the advice. I was tentative initially, however the results have been incredible. Though far from perfect, healed, and in unanimous agreement, we have begun to rebuild our foundations on a love that is more tangibly chosen than it ever has been. This came on the heels of a very difficult period for me. I experienced tremendous feelings of being helplessly trapped in a life I never would have chosen had I been able to see it coming. In fact, we both agree we would never have chosen each other had I deconverted prior to marriage. There was a long period of "If only's" and "Why couldn't I have's?" I felt as though I was stuck on a path in which the cost of turning back was now too great – my choices seemed to be between one type of suffering and another, between breaking hearts or slowly dying inside.

Slowly, a third option emerged. Perhaps life didn't have to simply "happen to me." Perhaps I could build life as I wanted it. I wasn't helplessly trapped in life; I was the one living it out! Feeling less than desirable *now* didn't mean I couldn't create a better future, and so I began to do so. Amanda noticed

¹³It is challenging to hear that a piece of me is missing, especially given that it seems I've only applied my historical curiosity to a new area which happens to be a very sensitive one. For more on this train of thought, see: <http://technogeekery.blogspot.com/2010/08/fhtn-and-little-about-me-reflections-3.html>

¹⁴The Community of Christ the Redeemer is a large group of Catholic lay people who gather together to pray and listen to talks bi-weekly. Amanda and I professed a life-long commitment to be faithful members of the community. For more information, see: <http://www.ccredeemer.org/>.

immediately. I chose to be more romantic, tender, reassuring, and quick to seek forgiveness. Things improved drastically and our baseline condition is now significantly higher than at any other time in the last two years.

I credit two timely sources for my transformation. One was a TED talk by Ric Elias, a passenger on the flight that landed in the Hudson River in 2009.¹⁵ He decided after that day to eliminate negativity from his life. It dawned on me that negative emotions added *nothing* to my life. I recognize things I need to change with or without self loathing. Children need to be taken care of, regardless of whether I'm frustrated with them. A difficult issue requires discussion and resolution, whether or not that interaction is filled with anger. I decided to stop being negative... and I have failed miserably at that decision. Nevertheless, it brought about a newfound awareness of myself that has increased my ability to withhold negativity from situations. Simply being cognizant of this intention has improved the chances I will actualize it.

The second source for this turnaround was due to a visit from my brother and his fiancée. Their relationship was so bubbly with love and blatant affection that it had the unintended effect of forcing me to stare at my own marriage and realize that I had nothing of the sort. Initially, this was fairly depressing, however witnessing their relationship had the secondary effect of calling to mind the aspect of *choice*. Why did I have to allow life to simply *happen*? Why couldn't I *choose* to have what I saw in them? Not finding any good answers, I did.

What Now?

I think about this a lot. Is my life to be defined solely in terms of something I used to believe? I'd like to think the answer is, "No," though to date the definition probably fits. The above is fairly morose. I assure you that my life is not filled only with sadness and difficulty. My journey has opened me up to a whole new world of endeavors, interests, and viewpoints.

I have improved my situation greatly by finding like minded individuals. Simply googling "atheists in mn" (which I did ~1.5 years ago) returns hits for the Minnesota Atheists meetup group.¹⁶ I started attending some of their events and felt instant relief in simply being able to express my feelings and experience with those who understood. As time passed, I found similar meetup groups, such as the Minneapolis Skeptics and Former Fundamentalists.^{17, 18} The Former Fundamentalists have been especially wonderful; many of the members have left a fairly extreme religious environment for something more moderate or due to religious deconversion like me. They have experienced grief in dealing with the loss of friendships and even family due to their shift in beliefs. I have found quite a home with the group in terms of others understanding the difficulties associated with my plight and being able to offer compassion and a listening ear to others with related troubles.

I'm also in the progress of trying to move away from my obsession with religion and apologetics in general. I have invested two years of my life heavily into the study of religion and apologetics. I'd like

¹⁵http://www.ted.com/talks/ric_elias.html

¹⁶Website: <http://mnatheists.org/>; meetup group: <http://www.meetup.com/minnesota-atheists/>.

¹⁷<http://www.minnesotaskeptics.org/>

¹⁸<http://www.minnesotaskeptics.org/>

to use my energy for something more beneficial, rewarding, and fruitful. I hope to learn more about how the world works by studying physics, biology, behavioral psychology, cosmology, and so on. I've been gravitating toward analyzing data and finding ways to visualize it. To that end I've begun learning R, found a local R users meetup group, and subscribed to the Flowing Data membership.^{19, 20, 21} I want to improve my methods for developing valid beliefs in *all* areas of life by honing my rationality and probability skills.²²

My last round of marriage difficulty also had the side effect of bringing about a desire to dive into research on relationships. After a long period of sadness and hopelessness, I realized that my model may have been flawed all along. Perhaps the major revelation was that I even *had* a model: "Religious differences cause unhappiness; religious differences are unlikely to change; therefore, unhappiness is unlikely to change." In becoming cognizant of my actual line of thinking, I began wondering if it was correct. I used Google Scholar to try and find variables correlated to relationship [dis]satisfaction and marital success/failure.²³ I haven't digested all 43 papers I ended up downloading, but my preliminary scan revealed that my model is probably wrong. Religious similarity seemed a bit too focused, so I settled on common interests as a predictor of relationship satisfaction. As it turns out, it doesn't seem to be highly correlated. While that *feels* wrong (intuitively, it would seem to matter a lot), I choose to trust the research. Then again, this is quite a relief! My former model left *very* little room for hope; the alternative hypothesis suggests that my discomfort is *my problem*, not the marriage's. While this is difficult to accept and implies I have a lot of interior work to do, at least there's nothing fundamentally wrong with the relationship!

Once I wrap up my few last apologetics-focused endeavors, I plan to look into this and share the results. I have a great desire to help others in situations similar to mine; I have been blogging about my "unequally yoked" marriage for some time, particularly since I personally found the state of the internet to be abysmal when looking for support. Extreme Christians paint the picture of an ultimatum: choose a Christian spouse or risk hell. Forums are filled with advice to "get out while you can if there aren't any children involved." Still others seemed to self-identify as Christian or atheist, but have little interest in how their children were raised; thus, mismatched beliefs were a non-issue for them. There was very little having to do specifically with those who wanted to stay married [happily] in the face of a [de]conversion. I'd like to change that for the better.

Lastly, there are definitely aspects of my former religion that I'm working on reimplementing into my life. I'd like to participate in recurring opportunities for non-trivial sharing and discussions aimed at personal improvement, for one. While I'm not interested in small groups for the purpose of "growing in holiness" or "deepening my life in Christ," I *do* think there is tremendous value in committed, deeper relationships that foster character development and accountability. A few select friends are willing to help me with this aspect. I'd also like to reintegrate an analog of prayer (i.e. reflection/meditation) into my life, albeit not to give praise to a god or to induce its intervention. There are benefits to meditation, and taking stock of my ideal future self and how I'm doing on achieving that vision is a valuable exercise.²⁴

¹⁹<http://www.r-project.org/>

²⁰<http://www.meetup.com/twincitiesrug/>

²¹<http://flowingdata.com/membership/>

²²Surely it's become apparent that I am in love with LessWrong: <http://lesswrong.com/>. I have the goal of reading their foundational sequences (<http://wiki.lesswrong.com/wiki/Sequences>) as well as completing my initiation into the Bayesian Conspiracy (<http://yudkowsky.net/rational/bayes>)

²³Google Scholar is a fantastic resource: <http://scholar.google.com/>

²⁴http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Research_on_meditation

I've got some books on my list and found a some meetup groups I think will be beneficial.²⁵

This wraps up my vision of where I'm headed in the near future. Obviously much can change about the above, however I felt it was important to intentionally state that my life is far from over. In many ways, the road in front of me has never been brighter. I consider the woes described in previous sections to be symptomatic primarily of my radical change and adjustment socially and environmentally, not due to the actual shift away from religious faith. In many ways, the shift has been for the better.

Conclusion

To conclude, this document is a part of the emotional aspect of my journey. I'm coming to what I hope is the end of a chapter of my life spent thinking incessantly about religion and apologetics. After two years, many still have not heard this story; I am informing others en masse so that I can be free and move on.

There are so many things I want to discover. I have uncovered a renewed sense of childlike curiosity – a fascination with the world and subject areas that attempt to describe it. Mineral deposits of bitterness and stifled enthusiasm have collected upon me over the past two years, and I will not live such a life. I have a reasonable (and growing) sense of what goods I bring to others when I am most alive: a synthesizing of knowledge that spreads excitement and understanding, a contagious humor, a receptivity and attentiveness that invites deep personal sharing, a habit of confiding in others to kindle a sense of our common humanness, and a generosity toward those in need.

The time has come to emerge from the shadows and begin anew. Regardless of your metaphysics or ontology, we agree that there is only one life on *this earth*. I will not squander it in misery or a perpetual query concerning why I cannot seem to manifest belief in God. I have read, listened, exercised my mind, yelled, debated, and wept. If God exists, I want to believe that God exists; if God does not exist, I want to believe that God does not exist.²⁶ That is all.

| *That which can be destroyed by the truth should be* – P.C. Hodgell

²⁵For example, the Minneapolis Buddhism Meetup: <http://www.meetup.com/MinneapolisBuddhism/>

²⁶I wholeheartedly endorse the Litany of Tarski as the ideal: http://wiki.lesswrong.com/wiki/Litany_of_Tarski