

Chapter 3

WHAT FAMOUS ATHEISTS BELIEVE

Billy Joel: William Martin “Billy” Joel is a talented pianist, singer-songwriter, and a brilliant composer. His first hit was “Piano Man,” which hit the charts way back in 1973.

Newsmax said of him:

The singer publicly broached the topic early in his career, saying during an interview that he is an atheist and positing that religion is a source of many of the world’s problems. Then he told *Billboard* magazine in 1994, “I still feel very much like an atheist in the religious aspects of things,” but added, “There are spiritual planes I’m aware of that I don’t know anything about and that I can’t explain.”¹

Billy once said:

As an atheist you have to rationalize things. You decide first of all that you will not ask Daddy—meaning God in all of his imagined forms—for a helping hand when you’re in a jam. Then you have to try and make some sort of sense out of your problems. And if you try and find you can’t, you have no choice but to be good and scared—but that’s okay! When

animals are afraid, they don't pray, and we're just a higher order of primate. Mark Twain, a great atheist, said it best in *The Mysterious Stranger*, when he stated in not so many words, "Who are we to create a heaven and hell for ourselves, excluding animals and plants in the bargain, just because we have the power to rationalize?"²

If Billy likes to rationalize things, I would like him to tell me what he would think of my intellectual capacity if I said I thought he didn't compose "Piano Man," if I believed that it didn't have a composer. It just happened. It was a melodic accident. Such a thought is ludicrous. Every song has a composer, every book has an author, every car has a maker, every painting has a painter, and every building has a builder. So it isn't irrational to take this simple logic a little further and say that nature must have had a Maker. It would be irrational to believe that it made itself. It's more than irrational; it's scientifically impossible. For nature to make itself, it would have had to be preexistent before it made itself.

If I ever had the honor of having lunch with Billy, I would ask him two questions. The first isn't that important, but I would like to know the answer. How does he know that animals don't pray? Does he have some sort of unique access to animal thought-life? The second would be to correct a

misunderstanding that is common in atheist circles. Why would he believe that Mark Twain was a “great atheist,” when he clearly did believe in the existence of God (something we will look at in a future chapter)?

Brad Pitt: Brad Pitt’s faith that God doesn’t exist wavers a little. He said, “I oscillate between agnosticism and atheism.”³ Sometimes he’s an atheist; other times he’s not. He said, “I don’t think anyone really knows. You’ll either find out or not when you get there, until then there’s no point thinking about it.”⁴

What Brad says makes sense, if you don’t think about it. But if you *do* give some serious thought to his words, they are a little thoughtless. This is why. Billions of people think there *is* a point in thinking about it. They are Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, or a hundred and one offshoots of these religions. They think about it because they realize that there’s an elephant in the human room, and it holds its crushing foot above the heads of every one of us. It took a full twenty years before I noticed the shadow of its ugly foot.

So the point in thinking about it is that God is eternal and He is the source of all life. If there’s an answer to the biggest problem we all have, it is in God and God alone. Not believing that there was a Creator, as Sir Isaac Newton so aptly said, is “senseless.”⁵ But back to Brad Pitt.

According to *Extra*, Mr. Pitt said that he “got brought up being told things were God’s way, and when things didn’t work out it was called God’s plan.”⁶ He also said, “I grew up being told God is going to take care of everything and it doesn’t always work out that way. And then you’re told ‘Well, it’s God’s will.’ I got my issues. Man, you don’t want to get me started.”⁷

If I could have a meal with Brad Pitt, I would also ask him to let me take him through a few of the Ten Commandments to show him that he is in great danger. The applicable analogy would be a man who is standing at the door of a plane, ten thousand feet above the ground. He refuses to put on a parachute because he believes he will find out if he needs it *after* he jumps, and until that time there’s no point in thinking about it. To begin thinking about it is the seed that can grow into understanding the truth that Jesus Christ has “abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10 NKJV).

George Harrison: George Harrison was known as the quiet Beatle. Quiet people are often quiet because they are deep thinkers. Even though he professed to be an atheist back in 1966, George later wrote, “I want to find God. I’m not interested in material things, this world, fame—I’m going for the real goal.”⁸ The quiet Beatle had tasted fame and the false security that money brings, but it

wasn't the real goal in his life . . . God was. This is because thinkers know that God is the source of all life, and if we want to find everlasting life, we have to somehow get in contact with the Creator. So George became a Hare Krishna and spent much of his life chanting the name of his deity.

I recently spoke with a Hare Krishna who told me that I had to chant God's name if I wanted everlasting life. I told him that as a Christian I already had everlasting life and didn't need to *do* anything. It was a free gift of God. To explain what I meant, I told him that all the great religions outside of Christianity have one thing in common. They are "works righteousness" based; that is, they all maintain that we have to *do* something to find salvation (everlasting life)—we must pray, fast, do good deeds, lie on beds of nails or sit on hard pews, face a certain direction, or eat certain foods.

But here is an eye-opener: *none of that will work*. The Bible tells us that if we lust, we commit adultery in our hearts. If we lie or steal or blaspheme or even just hate someone (the same as committing murder), we are criminals in God's eyes—having violated His moral Law, and are on our way to His prison—a terrible place call hell, and there will be no parole. That means that any "good" works we offer God aren't good works at all. They are an attempt to bribe God, and the One the Bible calls the Judge of the Universe will not be bribed. The only thing that can save us from the wrath of

eternal justice is God's mercy.

George Harrison said, "Once I chanted the Hare Krishna mantra all the way from France to Portugal nonstop. I drove for about twenty-three hours and chanted all the way."⁹ But to think that we can be forgiven by chanting God's name is like a guilty and deluded criminal repeating, "Judge, judge, judge, judge," and thinking that the judge will somehow be impressed and therefore dismiss his case. No, the only way we can be saved is to have a Savior.

Two thousand years ago, the Creator came to this earth in the form of a Man, suffered for our sins on a wooden cross, and then defeated death. So if a Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, or Jew (or whoever) wants everlasting life as a free gift from God, all he or she needs to do is repent and trust in the Savior—Jesus Christ. That's the best news this dying world could ever hope to hear.

George Carlin: It takes both courage and talent to stand up in front of fellow human beings and make them crack a smile, and at the same time keep it clean. George Carlin was well-known and loved for what is often known as "black humor," as well as his routines on politics, religion, and various other taboo subjects.

George was a devout atheist. However, like almost every atheist, his concept of God was unbiblical. He said, "Religion easily has the best

b***sh** story of all time. Think about it. Religion has convinced people that there's an invisible man . . . living in the sky."¹⁰ I don't know any Christians who believe that God is "an invisible man living in the sky." God is nothing like a man.

Perhaps Carlin had that thought because the Bible says that God made man "in His own image" (Genesis 1:27 NKJV). However, that simply means that God created us with the attributes of His own character. Man is unique in creation because he has a sense of justice and truth. We spend billions of dollars each year to set up court systems to see that justice is done, and we build prisons for those who transgress the laws we enact.

We have other unique attributes that separate us from the animal kingdom. A dog may wag his tail, but he has no evident sense of humor. If you disagree, tell him a funny joke and see if he cracks a smile. Neither does he of his own volition tap his foot to music, or appreciate the splendor of a sunrise or the beauty of a flower. He thinks, reasons, plays, and communicates, but he isn't aware of his "being," as we humans are. "To be, or not to be?" isn't the big question for a dog. But for a human being, to be (to live) or not to be (to die)? is the biggest of all questions.

After creating his nonexistent man in the sky, Mr. Carlin said that this man "watches everything you do every minute of every day. And the invisible man has a list of 10 specific things he doesn't want

you to do. And if you do any of these things, he will send you to a special place, of burning and fire and smoke and torture and anguish for you to live forever, and suffer, and burn, and scream, until the end of time. But he loves you. He loves you. He loves you and he needs money.”¹¹

No doubt that routine produced the desired laughter, but it was just a routine. It wasn't based on truth. The Bible does say that there are things God does not want us to do (the Ten Commandments), and that those who murder, rape, and otherwise transgress His perfect Law will suffer punishment in a terrible place called hell. (See Exodus 20:1–17; Revelation 21:8.) To say that there is no ultimate justice is to say that Hitler and every other mass murderer got away with murder. Such a thought makes God unjust, when He is both just and merciful to all who call upon Him for mercy. So I guess atheism, in the minds of some, deals with that whole dilemma.

Penn Jillette: It was Penn Jillette who said, “Believing there’s no God stops me from being solipsistic.”¹² A solipsistic person is an extreme skeptic. F.H. Bradley explained the solipsistic view when he said, “I cannot transcend experience, and experience is my experience. From this it follows that nothing beyond myself exists.”¹³ So according to Mr. Jillette, atheism has stopped him from being closed-minded—no doubt like those who have a