

# **My Religious Evolution**

**from Being a Simple Catholic  
to a Conservative Preacher  
to an Agnostic Atheist**

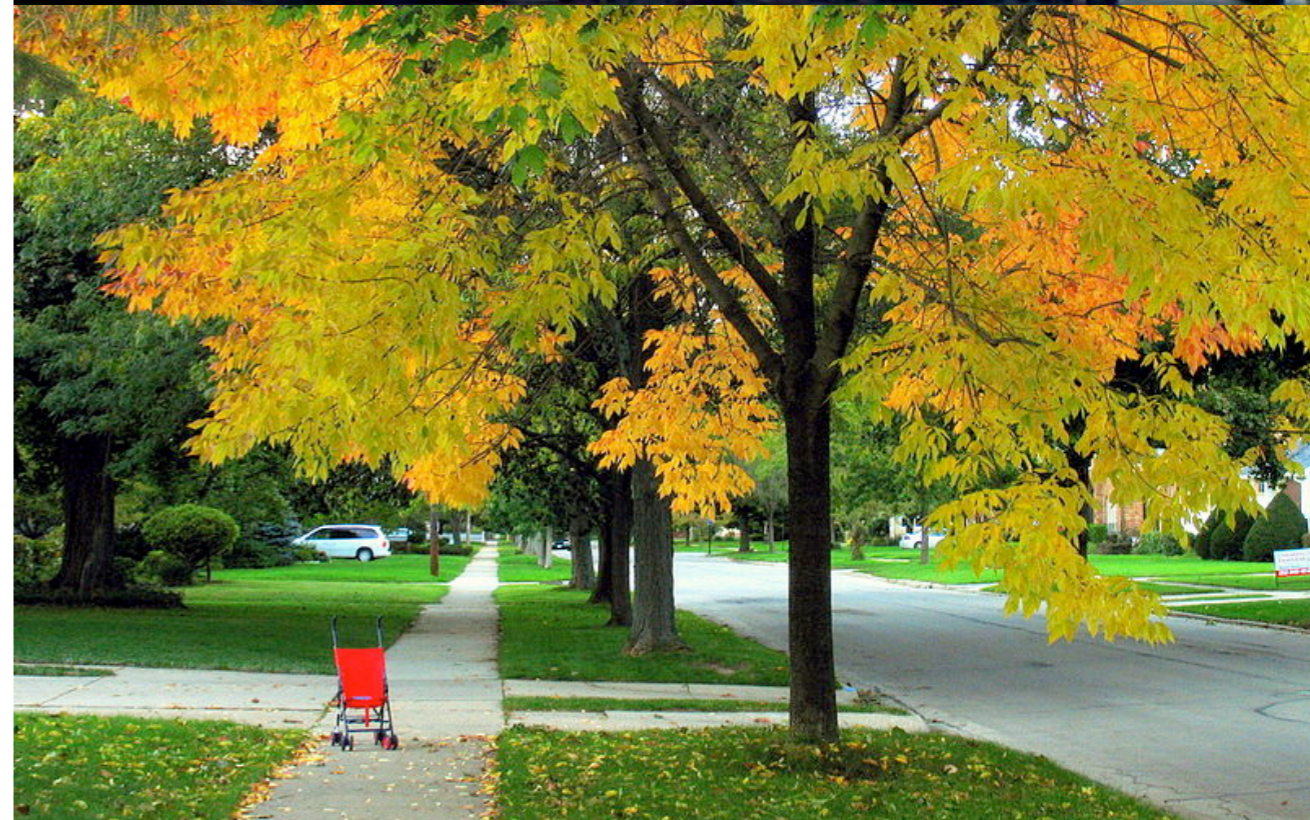
***by Tom Bergstrom***

# **My Religious Evolution**

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# *My Religious Evolution I. My Family Background*

- I grew up in a blue collar manufacturing town in Kenosha, WI
- Kenosha is famous for Daniel J. Travanti, AMC/NASH, Jockey Underwear, Modern Typewriter, and low cost of living.



# *My Religious Evolution I. My Family Background*

- Mother was a nurse.
- Father was AMC factory worker for 41 years.
- We were raised Catholic.
- Parents instilled honesty.



*1964 Spiffy Rambler*

## *My Religious Evolution I. My Family Background*

- I was both athletic and intelligent.
- I was outgoing and played with many friends.
- I was an above average student at school.
- We watched too much TV and trusted the news.
- We were patriotic.
- Education was not promoted in blue collar culture.
- Overall, I was more concerned about riding my bike, then about world events.

- I was sprinkled a Catholic by the age of 2 months.
- We went to church every week.
- However, my dad only went to church on holidays.  
My dad was actually Lutheran.  
Lutheranism is the lite beer version of Catholicism.
- From the age of 6 to 14, I went to CCD classes on weekends and week nights.
- I did not take CCD seriously.

## **Getting to Church Experience**

For some reason my mother could not get to church on time.

We usually, drove as fast as my mom could to get to church 5 minutes late.

After swearing and speeding all the way to church, my mother took us to confession the next following Saturday.

## **General Confession Experience**

- Every church had small confessional boxes. The priest is on one side and you enter the other. A wall with many small holes separates you from view for privacy.
- After confessing your sins (venial or mortal) you have penance (5 Hail Mary's & 5 Our father).
- If you were extra naughty you prayed a big prayer called the Apostles Creed.



## **History Notes:**

1. I grew up during a movement called Vatican II which was a progressive movement.

2. Until 1500 AD, priests could marry, have children, and own property. Over time, priests became too powerful and the Vatican banned priests from marriage to keep power.

Most Catholics don't know this.

- I was never abused by any priest.  
Nuns usually ignored me, except for ONE.
- One nun treated me negatively from day one.  
I dared to be honest & stated that I did not want to be there.

- Overall, I had positive experiences from the Catholic churches I visited.
- Also, I did not take Catholicism too seriously.
- However, that changed.

- Life changes and that influences religious ideas.
- At 16 I got some bad news.

- For my 16th B-day I got a brain tumor.
- My mother tried faith healers (fake healers).
- I had big doses of radiation, but not much worked.

- My mother discovered Dr. Jossef Issels clinic in Bad Wiessee, Bavaria, West Germany.
- In 1984 I was 17 and went to see Dr. Issels who had a 89% cure rate for brain tumors.
- I went to Germany 4 years in a row. Their immuno-therapy cured me by 1989.

- German life also opened up my eyes.
- I started learning things that they did not teach in the USA.
- European life introduced me to skepticism.

- In 1984 my skepticism grew.  
My conservative christian friend jumped at the chance to finally convert, but in a negative way.
- In Dec. 1984 I joined a Church Of Christ in Southeast, WI out of fear.
- I joined the old fashion way.  
In a big tub of water on a cold winter day.



## ***About the Church of Christ***

### **Disclaimer**

The following is a general view of the Church of Christ, based on my experiences and incomplete memories.

I hope to avoid insulting anyone from the Churches of Christ.

Overall, they appear to be the best Christian bible studiers & debaters on the planet.

- The Churches of Christ are independent.  
Some churches are moderate to conservative.
- They meet three times a week.
- They are friendly people.
- They do NOT believe in holidays.  
Every day is holy.
- Though conservative they're against fundamentalism.
- Right-wing views were considered false preaching.

- They were a simple legalistic group.
- They believed most of the Bible as literal, except for the Book of Revelations.
- Our local preacher was very wise and won most if not all biblical arguments.
- They avoided political preaching, but in private promoted the separation of church and state.
- It is not a Christians responsibility to legislate sin.

## ***Wisconsin Cultural Note:***

In Wisconsin, people don't trust any one party and will vote both parties to balance political power.

## ***Back to the C of C:***

- They kept a separate life from non-Christians.  
“Be in the world, but not of the world.”
- Views on Hell:  
Hell was NOT fire/brimstone, but isolation from god.
- Attitudes: Modesty is their motto.  
They have the plainest building on the planet.
- No religious symbols in the building.
- No religious music in the building.

- Don't go beyond what is written view of the Bible.
- They did not usually go door to door, but some occasionally did it.
- They did occasionally advertised.
- We had quarterly gospel meetings, and we were compelled to hand out fliers to get the word out.

## ***My Life in the Church***

- From 1984 thru 1995 I devoured the Old King James Bible & the New KJ.
- I was active and enjoyed meeting C of C Christians locally and from other cities.
- I participated in most every church activity.
- I met my wife there.
- I thought I was doing the right thing there.
- I still like the people, but my current views are far too different.

- Over time, I became very knowledgeable on the Bible.
- My old beat up bible (view)
- I forgot more about the Bible than most people in the US every learned.



## **Disclaimer 2:**

I have no ill-will to any of the Churches of Christ. I wish them well.

However, I do have a few criticisms which helped me to leave this group.

## **I st, Criticize Myself:**

- I became the annoying church dude at work.  
Don't you want a bible study? (no)
- Based on my studies. I felt Jesus was a positive out going man, with values similar to hippy peace movements in the 1960s.  
(They did not.)

## General Criticisms Which Helped Me to Leave

- Too legalistic without room for gray areas
- Took the Bible too literally
  - the great flood = first rain
  - after flood = first rainbow
  - ignored evolution & climate change
- Negative preaching & fear pushed people away

# My Religious Evolution 5. My Turn to Preach



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- In June 1992 a church elder told me that a church near Sheboygan needed a part time preacher.
- Thus, my first professional preaching gig begins and it lasted 6 months.
- My first lesson was controversial because I promoted a positive loving message. This upset the leader of this small church and I was rebuked.

- The next month I preached the Apostle Paul's & James' message that without love all your deeds are in vain.  
This quieted the negative rebuking leader.
- He became my grumpy friend.
- I had a good time traveling 100 miles to my gig.
- By January 1993 my part time preaching gig ended.  
The church leader decided to retire.

- After that, I never got another regular preaching gig.
- I did get a few opportunities here and there, but nothing long term.
- Over my brief preaching career, I was paid \$50 to \$100 per sermon.
- Looking back:
  - I enjoyed preaching.
  - I made some people smile.
  - I gave a positive message that was greatly needed.





- In the mid-1990's things changed.
- By 1996 marriage troubles grew.
- I was tired of negative preaching.
- In 1997, I took a new job 61 miles away from home.
- By 1998 I moved out, separated, and looked elsewhere for spiritual answers.

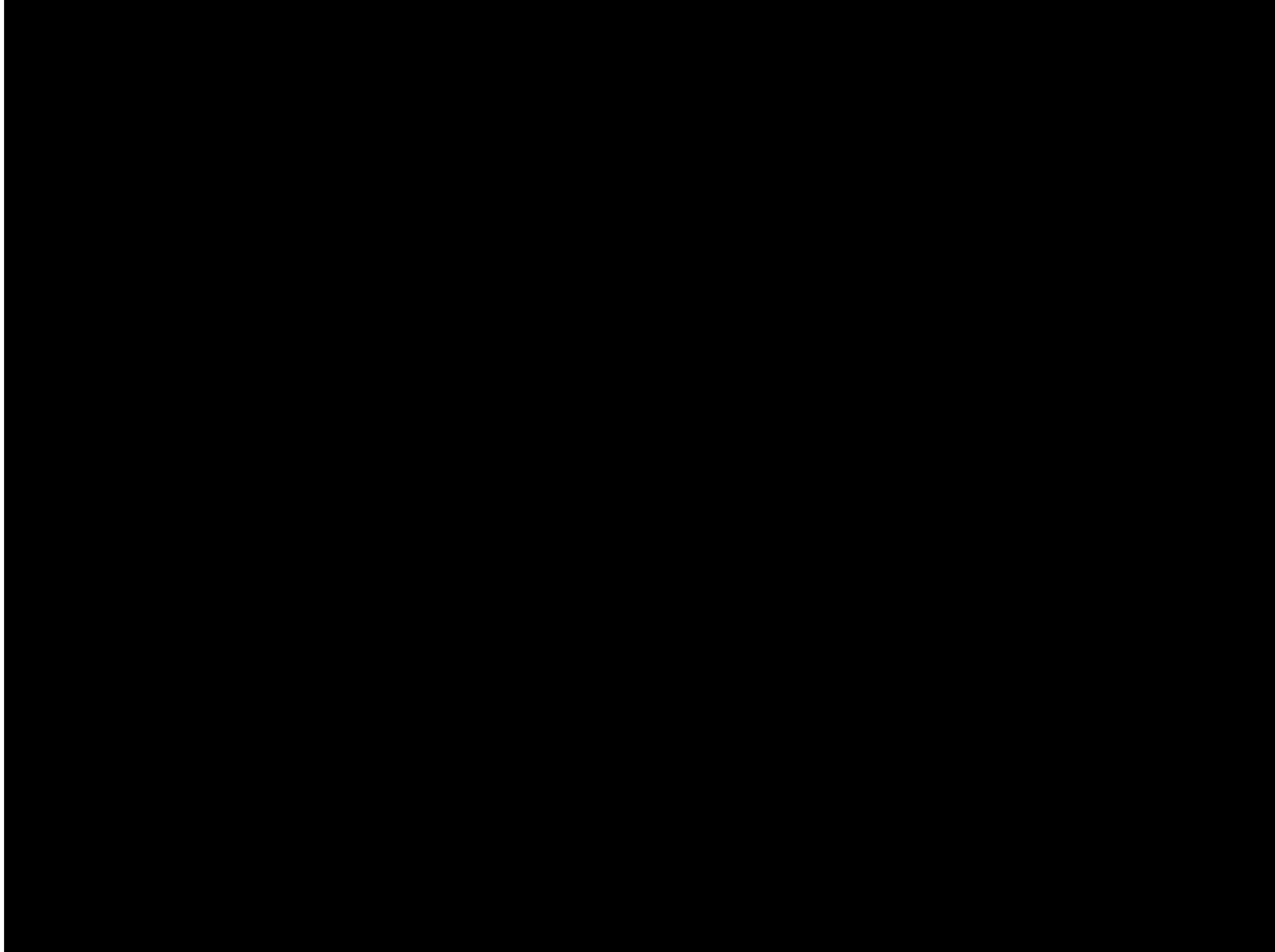
Opening the

Door

of

Doubt





- To find answers I read Greek Philosophy, Buddhism, The Tao Te Jing, and more.
- Eastern philosophy clicked in my mind.
- The old TV show KungFu taught me about meditation in my youth.
- Meditation replaced praying.
- Things got better.

- I realized unprovable religion was holding me back.
- I took responsibility for my own values.
- I re-educated myself in science & evolution.
- My childhood adventurousness came back to me in the form of traveled.

- In 2002, I went to a film festival in Madison, WI which inspired my creativity.

Note: Since childhood, I was a very good sketch artist. By leaving negative religion, I was back in touch with my creative passions.

- I went to the Art Institute of Illinois and studied 3D animation.
- In 2003, I moved to the SF Bay Area.

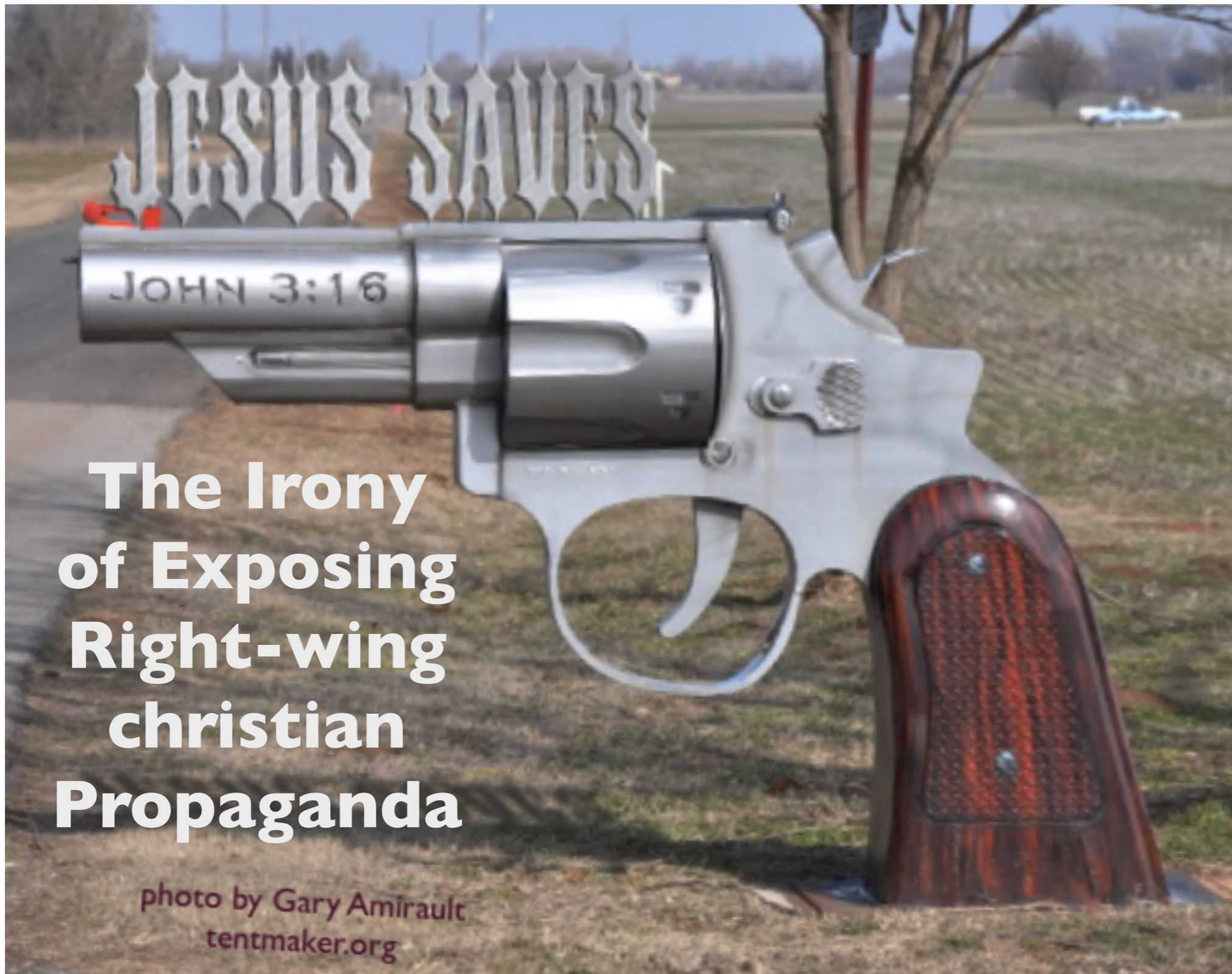
## **SF Bay Area Life**

- I went into film production and visual effects.
  - Worked on 5 independent feature films.
  - Dozens of short films.
  - Enjoyed being an assistant director.
- I became a San Francisco Socialist.
- I protested the Iraqi War.

## **Political Research**

- Strangely, my political protesting and discoveries lead me back to the bible.
- Thus, something good came out of all my legalistic bible studies.
- I knew that right-wing political christians promoted lies and I could prove it.





**The Irony  
of Exposing  
Right-wing  
christian  
Propaganda**

photo by Gary Amirault  
tentmaker.org

## **Basic, Right-wing christian Propaganda 101**

- State, the Free Market will fix all social problems, then outsource jobs, thus causing more social problems.
- Make money off the sick and dying, then blame problems on lack of market choice.

- Demonize the poor,  
then cause more poverty.
- Dumb down public education,  
by remove non-believers from history books.  
(Deists Jefferson)

- Demonize social programs as works of evil pinko communists, then ask the government for corporate welfare.
- Demonize abortion (Pro Life Hypocrisy):  
“Conservatives want live babies so they can raise them to be dead soldiers.”  
(src: George Carlin).

- **Distract the masses by demonizing all gays, and by demonizing purple fictional characters.**
- **Blame mass media for social problems, then make money off mass media.**

- Demonize intellectuals and science, then make-up your own fake science
- Profit off wars created with false evidence, then say your savior is the prince of peace.
- Where religion like a badge, but don't read it and don't follow it.

- Publicly, be against adultery and gay sex, but privately have adultery and gay sex.
- Demonize secularists, while ignoring the fact that secularism protects your religious freedom.
- Do the opposite thing Jesus would do the say you did it in his name.

**So, what would  
their Jesus do?**



- **...love your neighbor...**  
**Matt. 19:19, Mark 12:31**
  
- **...do not bear false witness,**  
**...do not defraud**  
**Mark 10:19**

- **love your enemies...**  
**Luke 6:27**
  
- **share your wealth and resources**  
**Luke 19: 1-9,**  
**Acts 2:44-46**

- Did you notice how completely different the two doctrines are?
- This gave me an idea.  
Why not expose right-wing christian propaganda with their own book of rules they call the bible?

See how easy it is to use the bible against them!

1. Find a evil thing they promote (propaganda).
2. Cross reference their lies with an e-bible.
3. Take the New Testament verses they violate, and shove these verses up their noses.

## **Example I:**

Right-wing christians use the Old testament to justify their wars, their hate, their prejudices, and their greed. Their biggest example of hypocrisy is King David.

However, the New Testament says NO to christian imperialism.

...the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but spiritual  
II Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 6:11-18

...the old law must diminish... Hebrews 8

...blessed are the peacemakers... Matthew 5:9

## **Ex 2: Remember for-profit Health Care**

In the story of the Good Samaritan, he did not charge for health care services.

**Luke 10:25-37**

**The New Testament claims that Jesus performs 27 acts of healing without accepting money.**

link <http://christianity.about.com/od/biblefactsandlists/a/Miracles-Of-Jesus.htm>

### **Example 3:**

It's OK to mix capitalism and religion, thus making money off religion is got to be right.

Wrong! JC hated people who made money off his religion. According to John 2:15,16, Jesus whipped marketers at the temple.

“Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!”

Conclusion: Selling prayers on TV (700 Club) is evil.

## **Example 4:**

Right-wingers demonize socialists as evil pinko godless commies. Sharing resources is wrong!

But according to Luke 19: 1-9 and Acts 2:44-46, it is a christians duty to share their wealth.



## **Example 5:**

Right-wingers demonize political enemies who don't pray in public or who don't mention god a 1000 times at public appearance.

But Matthew 6, says show-boating for god is wrong. "do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray... to be seen by men."

## **Final Notes:**

As you can see it is easy to debunk right-wing propaganda.

However, in reality, it is up to the listener to take action and to stop voting against their own self interests.

## **Conclusions Part I:**

Over time, I found most religion caused me stress based on things I could not prove nor see.

I had to evolve my value system to be at peace.

My new adventures in life lead me on a strange but interesting journeys for knowledge and answers.

This eventually lead me to agnosticism & atheism...

## **Conclusions Part 2:**

That being said, I'm still glad for my bible knowledge which I now use to expose right-wing religious propaganda.

I'm also glad for my up-bringing that respected honesty.

Thus, it's my mom and dad's fault for teaching honesty which lead me out of religious mysticism and into rational based secular humanism.

**Any questions  
or  
comments?**