20 Reasons to Abandon Christianity

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1. Christianity is based on fear.

While today there are liberal clergy who preach a gospel of love, they ignore the bulk of Christian teachings, not to mention the bulk of Christian history. Throughout almost its entire time on Earth, the motor driving Christianity has been—in addition to the fear of death—fear of the devil and fear of hell. One can only imagine how potent these threats seemed prior to the rise of science and rational thinking, which have largely robbed these bogeys of their power to inspire terror. But even today, the existence of the devil and hell are cardinal doctrinal tenets of almost all Christian creeds, and many fundamentalist preachers still openly resort to terrorizing their followers with lurid, sadistic portraits of the suffering of nonbelievers after death. This is not an attempt to convince through logic and reason; it is not an attempt to appeal to the better nature of individuals; rather, it is an attempt to whip the flock into line through threats, through appeals to a base part of human nature—fear and cowardice.

2. Christianity preys on the innocent.

If Christian fear-mongering were directed solely at adults, it would be bad enough, but Christians routinely terrorize helpless children through grisly depictions of the endless horrors and suffering they'll be subjected to if they don't live good Christian lives. Christianity has darkened the early years of generation after generation of children, who have lived in terror of dying while in mortal sin and going to endless torment as a result. All of these children were trusting of adults, and they did not have the ability to analyze what they were being told; they were simply helpless victims, who, ironically, victimized following generations in the same manner that they themselves had been victimized. The nearly 2000 years of Christian terrorizing of children ranks as one of its greatest crimes. And it's one that continues to this day.

As an example of Christianity's cruel brainwashing of the innocent, consider this quotation from an officially approved, 19th-century Catholic *children's* book (*Tracts for Spiritual Reading*, by Rev. J. Furniss, C.S.S.R.):

> Look into this little prison. In the middle of it there is a boy, a young man. He is silent; despair is on him . . . His eyes are burning like two burning coals. Two long flames come out of his ears. His breathing is difficult. Sometimes he opens his mouth and breath of blazing fire rolls out of it. But listen! There is a sound just like that of a kettle boiling. Is it really a kettle which is boiling? No; then what is it? Hear what it is. The blood is boiling in the scalding veins of that boy. The brain is boiling and bubbling in his head. The marrow is boiling in his bones. Ask him why he is thus tormented. His answer is that when he was alive, his blood boiled to do very wicked things.

There are many similar passages in this book. Commenting on it, William Meagher, Vicar-General of Dublin, states in his Approbation:

> "I have carefully read over this Little Volume for Children and have found nothing whatever in it contrary to the doctrines of the Holy Faith; but on the contrary, a great deal to charm, instruct and edify the youthful classes for whose benefit it has been written."

3. Christianity is based on dishonesty.

The Christian appeal to fear, to cowardice, is an admission that the evidence supporting Christian beliefs is far from compelling. If the evidence were such that Christianity's truth was immediately apparent to anyone who considered it, Christians—including those who wrote the Gospels—would feel no need to resort to the cheap tactic of using fear-inducing threats to inspire "belief." ("Lip service" is a more accurate term.) That the Christian clergy have been more than willing to accept such lip service (plus the dollars and obedience that go with it) in place of genuine belief, is an additional indictment of the basic dishonesty of Christianity.

How deep dishonesty runs in Christianity can be gauged by one of the most popular Christian arguments for belief in God: Pascal's wager. This "wager" holds that it's safer to "believe" in God (as if belief were *volitional!*) than not to believe, because God might exist, and if it does, it will save "believers" and condemn nonbelievers to hell after death. This is an appeal to pure cowardice. It has absolutely nothing to do with the search for truth. Instead, it's an appeal to abandon honesty and intellectual integrity, and to pretend that lip service is the same thing as actual belief. If the patriarchal God of Christianity really exists, one wonders how it would judge the cowards and hypocrites who advance and bow to this particularly craven "wager."

4. Christianity is extremely egocentric.

The deep egocentrism of Christianity is intimately tied to its reliance on fear. In addition to the fears of the devil and hell, Christianity plays on another of humankind's most basic fears: death, the dissolution of the individual ego. Perhaps Christianity's strongest appeal is its promise of eternal life. While there is absolutely no evidence to support this claim, most people are so terrified of death that they cling to this treacly promise insisting, like frightened children, that it *must* be true. Nietzsche put the matter well: "*salvation of the soul*—in plain words, the world revolves around *me*." It's difficult to see anything spiritual in this desperate grasping at straws—this desperate grasping at the illusion of personal immortality.

Another manifestation of the extreme egotism of Christianity is the belief that God is intimately concerned with picayune aspects of, and directly intervenes in, the lives of individuals. If God, the creator and controller of the universe, is vitally concerned with your sex life, you must be pretty damned important. Many Christians take this particular form of egotism much further and actually imagine that God has a plan for them, or that God directly *talks to, directs*, or even *does favors* for them.[1] If one ignored the frequent and glaring contradictions in this supposed divine guidance, and the dead bodies sometimes left in its wake, one could almost believe that the individuals making such claims are guided by God. But one can't ignore the contradictions in and the oftentimes horrible results of following such "divine guidance." As "Agent Mulder" put it (perhaps paraphrasing Thomas Szasz) in a 1998 *X-Files* episode, "When you talk to God it's

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[1] A friend who read the first draft of this manuscript notes: "My moronic sister-in-law once told me that God found her parking spots near the front door at Walmart! Years later, when she developed a brain tumor, I concluded that God must have gotten tired of finding parking places for her and gave her the tumor so that she could get handicapped plates." As Nietzsche put it in The Anti-Christ: "that little hypocrites and half-crazed people dare to imagine that on their account the laws of nature are constantly broken-such an enhancement of every kind of selfishness to infinity, to impudence, cannot be branded with sufficient contempt. And yet Christianity owes its triumph to this pitiable flattery of personal vanity."

prayer, but when God talks to you it's schizophrenia. . . . God may have his reasons, but he sure seems to employ a lot of psychotics to carry out his job orders."

In less extreme cases, the insistence that one is receiving divine guidance or special treatment from God is usually the attempt of those who feel worthless—or helpless, adrift in an uncaring universe—to feel important or cared for. This less sinister form of egotism is commonly found in the expressions of disaster survivors that "God must have had a reason for saving me" (in contrast to their less-worthy-of-life fellow disaster victims, whom God—who controls all things—killed). Again, it's very difficult to see anything spiritual in such egocentricity.

5. Christianity breeds arrogance, a chosen-people mentality.

It's only natural that those who believe (or play act at believing) that they have a direct line to the Almighty would feel superior to others. This is so obvious that it needs little elaboration. A brief look at religious terminology confirms it. Christians have often called themselves "God's people," "the chosen people," "the elect," "the righteous," etc., while nonbelievers have been labeled "heathens," "infidels," and "atheistic Communists" (as if atheism and Communism are intimately connected). This sets up a two-tiered division of humanity, in which "God's people" feel superior to those who are not "God's people."

That many competing religions with contradictory beliefs make the same claim seems not to matter at all to the members of the various sects that claim to be the only carriers of "the true faith." The carnage that results when two competing sects of "God's people" collide—as in Ireland and Palestine—would be quite amusing but for the suffering it causes.

6. Christianity breeds authoritarianism.

Given that Christians claim to have the one true faith, to have a book that is the Word of God, and (in many cases) to receive guidance directly from God, they feel little or no compunction about using force and coercion to enforce "God's Will" (which they, of course, interpret and understand). Given that they believe (or pretend) that they're receiving orders from the Almighty (who would cast them into hell should they disobey), it's little wonder that they feel no reluctance, and in fact are eager, to intrude into the most personal aspects of the lives of nonbelievers. This is most obvious today in the area of sex, with Christians attempting to deny women the right to abortion and to mandate near-useless abstinence-only sex "education" in the public schools. It's also obvious in the area of education, with Christians attempting to force biology teachers to teach their creation myth (but not those of Hindus, Native Americans, et al.) in place of (or as being equally valid as) the very well established theory of evolution. But the authoritarian tendencies of Christianity reach much further than this.

Up until well into the 20th century in the United States and other Christian countries (notably Ireland), Christian churches pressured governments into passing laws forbidding the sale and distribution of birth control devices, and they also managed to enact laws forbidding even the description of birth control devices. This assault on free speech was part and parcel of Christianity's shameful history of attempting to suppress "indecent" and "subversive" materials (and to throw their producers in jail or burn them alive). This anti-free speech stance of Christianity dates back centuries, with the cases of Galileo Galilei and Giordano Bruno (who was burnt alive) being good

illustrations of it. Perhaps the most colorful example of this intrusive Christian tendency toward censorship is the Catholic Church's Index of Prohibited Books, which dates from the 16th century and which was abandoned only in the latter part of the 20th century—not because the church recognized it as a crime against human freedom, but because it could no longer be enforced (not that it was ever systematically enforced—that was too big a job even for the Inquisition).

Christian authoritarianism extends, however, far beyond attempts to suppress free speech; it extends even to attempts to suppress freedom of belief. In the 15th century, under Ferdinand and Isabella at about the time of Columbus's discovery of the New World, Spain's Jews were ordered either to convert to Christianity or to flee the country; about half chose exile, while those who remained, the "Conversos," were favorite targets of the Inquisition. A few years later, Spain's Muslims were forced to make a similar choice.

This Christian hatred of freedom of belief—and of individual freedom in general—extends to this day. Up until the late 19th century in England, atheists who had the temerity to openly advocate their beliefs were jailed. Even today in many parts of the United States laws still exist that forbid atheists from serving on juries or from holding public office. And it's no mystery what the driving force is behind laws against victimless "crimes" such as nudity, sodomy, fornication, cohabitation, and prostitution.

If your nonintrusive beliefs or actions are not in accord with Christian "morality," you can bet that Christians will feel completely justified—not to mention righteous—in poking their noses (often in the form of state police agencies) into your private life.

7. Christianity is cruel.

Throughout its history, cruelty—both to self and others—has been one of the most prominent features of Christianity. From its very start, Christianity, with its bleak view of life, its emphasis upon sexual sin, and its almost impossible-to-meet demands for sexual "purity," encouraged guilt, penance, and self-torture. Today, this self-torture is primarily psychological, in the form of guilt arising from following (or denying, and thus obsessing over) one's natural sexual desires. In earlier centuries, it was often physical. W.E.H. Lecky relates:

> For about two centuries, the hideous maceration of the body was regarded as the highest proof of excellence. . . . The cleanliness of the body was regarded as a pollution of the soul, and the saints who were most admired had become one hideous mass of clotted filth. . . . But of all the evidences of the loathsome excesses to which this spirit was carried, the life of St. Simeon Stylites is probably the most remarkable. . . . He had bound a rope around him so that it became embedded in his flesh, which putrefied around it. A horrible stench, intolerable to the bystanders, exhaled from his body, and worms dropped from him whenever he moved, and they filled his bed. . . . For a whole year, we are told, St. Simeon stood upon one leg, the other being covered with hideous ulcers, while his biographer [St. Anthony] was commissioned to stand by his side, to pick up the worms that fell from his body, and to replace them in the sores, the saint saying to the worms, "Eat what God has given you." From every quarter pilgrims of every degree thronged to do him homage. A crowd of prelates followed him to the grave. A brilliant star is said to have shone miraculously over his pillar; the general voice of mankind pronounced him to be the

highest model of a Christian saint; and several other anchorites [Christian hermits] imitated or emulated his penances.

Given that the Bible nowhere condemns torture and sometimes prescribes shockingly cruel penalties (such as burning alive), and that Christians so wholeheartedly approved of self-torture, it's not surprising that they thought little of inflicting appallingly cruel treatment upon others. At the height of Christianity's power and influence, hundreds of thousands of "witches" were brutally tortured and burned alive under the auspices of ecclesiastical witch finders, and the Inquisition visited similarly cruel treatment upon those accused of heresy. Henry Charles Lea records:

> Two hundred wretches crowded the filthy gaol and it was requisite to forbid the rest of the Conversos [Jews intimidated into converting to Christianity] from leaving the city [Jaen, Spain] without a license. With Diego's assistance [Diego de Algeciras, a petty criminal and kept perjurer] and the free use of torture, on both accused and witnesses, it was not difficult to obtain whatever evidence was desired. The notary of the tribunal, Antonio de Barcena, was especially successful in this. On one occasion, he locked a young girl of fifteen in a room, stripped her naked and scourged her until she consented to bear testimony against her mother. A prisoner was carried in a chair to the auto da fe with his feet burnt to the bone; he and his wife were burnt alive . . . The cells in which the unfortunates were confined in heavy chains were narrow, dark, humid, filthy and overrun with vermin, while their sequestrated property was squandered by the officials, so that they nearly starved in prison while their helpless children starved outside.

While the torture and murder of heretics and "witches" is now largely a thing of the past, Christians can still be remarkably cruel. One current example is provided by the Westboro Baptist Church of Topeka, Kansas. Its members picket the funerals of victims of AIDS and gay bashings, brandishing signs reading, "God Hates Fags," "AIDS Cures Fags," and "Thank God for AIDS." The pastor of this church reportedly once sent a "condolence" card to the bereaved mother of an AIDS victim, reading "Another Dead Fag."[2] Christians are also at the forefront of those advocating vicious, life-destroying penalties for those who commit victimless "crimes," as well as being at the forefront of those who support the death penalty and those who want to make prison conditions even more barbaric than they are now.

But this should not be surprising coming from Christians, members of a religion that teaches that eternal torture is not only *justified*, but that the "saved" will *enjoy* seeing the torture of others. As St. Thomas Aquinas put it:

> In order that the happiness of the saints may be more delightful and that they may give to God more copious thanks for it, they are permitted perfectly to behold the sufferings of the damned . . . The saints will rejoice in the punishment of the damned.

Thus the vision of heaven of Christianity's greatest theologian is a vision of the sadistic enjoyment of endless torture.

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[2] The Westboro Baptist Church directly addresses the question of its hatefulness and cruelty on its web site:

8. Christianity is anti-intellectual, anti-scientific.

For over a millennium Christianity arrested the development of science and scientific thinking. In Christendom, from the time of Augustine until the Renaissance, systematic investigation of the natural world was restricted to theological investigation—the interpretation of biblical passages, the gleaning of clues from the lives of the saints, etc.; there was no direct observation and interpretation of natural processes, because that was considered a useless pursuit, as all knowledge resided in scripture. The results of this are well known: scientific knowledge advanced hardly an inch in the over 1000 years from the rise of orthodox Christianity in the fourth century to the 1500s, and the populace was mired in the deepest squalor and ignorance, living in dire fear of the supernatural—believing in paranormal explanations for the most ordinary natural events. This ignorance had tragic results: it made the populace more than ready to accept witchcraft as an explanation for everything from illness to thunderstorms, and hundreds of thousands of women paid for that ignorance with their lives. One of the commonest charges against witches was that they had raised hailstorms or other weather disturbances to cause misfortune to their neighbors. In an era when supernatural explanations were readily accepted, such charges held weight—and countless innocent people died horrible deaths as a result. Another result was that the fearful populace remained very dependent upon Christianity and its clerical wise men for protection against the supernatural evils which they believed surrounded and constantly menaced them. For men and women of the Middle Ages, the walls veritably crawled with demons and witches; and their only protection from those evils was the church.

When scientific investigation into the natural world resumed in the Renaissance—after a 1000-year-plus hiatus—organized Christianity did everything it could to stamp it out. The cases of Copernicus and Galileo are particularly relevant here, because when the Catholic Church banned the Copernican theory (that the Earth revolves around the sun) and banned Galileo from teaching it, it did not consider the evidence for that theory: it was enough that it contradicted scripture. Given that the Copernican theory directly contradicted the Word of God, the Catholic hierarchy reasoned that it *must* be false. Protestants shared this view. John Calvin rhetorically asked, "Who will venture to place the authority of Copernicus above that of the Holy Spirit?"

More lately, the Catholic Church and the more liberal Protestant congregations have realized that fighting against science is a losing battle, and they've taken to claiming that there is no contradiction between science and religion. This is disingenuous at best. As long as Christian sects continue to claim as fact—without offering a shred of evidence beyond the anecdotal—that physically impossible events occurred (or are still occurring), the conflict between science and religion will remain. That many churchmen and many scientists seem content to let this conflict lie doesn't mean that it doesn't exist.

Today, however, the conflict between religion and science is largely being played out in the area of public school biology education, with Christian fundamentalists demanding that their creation myth be taught in place of (or along with) the theory of evolution in the public schools. Their tactics rely heavily on public misunderstanding of science. They nitpick the fossil record for its gaps (hardly surprising given that we inhabit a geologically and meteorologically very active planet), while offering absurd interpretations of their own which we're supposed to accept at face

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"Why do you preach hate? Because the Bible preaches hate. For every one verse about God's mercy, love, compassion, etc., there are two verses about His vengeance, hatred, wrath, etc."

value—such as that dinosaur fossils were placed in the earth by Satan to confuse humankind, or that Noah took baby dinosaurs on the ark.

They also attempt to take advantage of public ignorance of the nature of scientific theories. In popular use, "theory" is employed as a synonym for "hypothesis," "conjecture," or even "wild guess," that is, it signifies an idea with no special merit or backing. The use of the term in science is quite different. There, "theory" refers to a well-developed, logically consistent explanation of a phenomenon, and an explanation that is consistent with observed facts. This is very different than a wild guess. But fundamentalists deliberately confuse the two uses of the term in an attempt to make their religious myth appear as valid as a well-supported scientific theory.

They also attempt to confuse the issue by claiming that those nonspecialists who accept the theory of evolution have no more reason to do so than they have in accepting their religious creation myth, or even that those who accept evolution do so on "faith." Again, this is more than a bit dishonest.

Thanks to scientific investigation, human knowledge has advanced to the point where no one can know more than a tiny fraction of the whole. Even the most knowledgeable scientists often know little beyond their specialty areas. But because of the structure of science, they (and everyone else) can feel reasonably secure in accepting the theories developed by scientists in other disciplines as the best possible current explanations of the areas of nature those disciplines cover. They (and we) can feel secure doing this because of the structure of science, and more particularly, because of the scientific method. That method basically consists of gathering as much information about a phenomenon (both in nature and in the laboratory) as possible, then developing explanations for it (hypotheses), and then testing the hypotheses to see how well they explain the observed facts, and whether or not any of those observed facts are inconsistent with the hypotheses. Those hypotheses that are inconsistent with observed facts are discarded or modified, while those that are consistent are retained, and those that survive repeated testing are often labeled "theories," as in "the theory of relativity" and "the theory of evolution."

This is the reason that nonspecialists are justified in accepting scientific theories outside their disciplines as the best current explanations of observed phenomena: those who developed the theories were following standard scientific practice and reasoning—and if they deviate from that, other scientists will quickly call them to task.

No matter how much fundamentalists might protest to the contrary, there is a world of difference between "faith" in scientific theories (produced using the scientific method, and subject to near-continual testing and scrutiny) and faith in the entirely unsupported myths recorded 3000 years ago by slave-holding goat herders.

Nearly 500 years ago Martin Luther, in his *Table Talk*, stated: "Reason is the greatest enemy that faith has." The opposite is also true.

9. Christianity has a morbid, unhealthy preoccupation with sex.

For centuries, Christianity has had an exceptionally unhealthy fixation on sex, to the exclusion of almost everything else (except power, money, and the infliction of cruelty). This stems from the numerous "thou shalt nots" relating to sex in the Bible. That the Ten Commandments contain a commandment forbidding the coveting of one's neighbor's wife, but do not even mention slav-

ery, torture, or cruelty—which were abundantly common in the time the Commandments were written— speaks volumes about their writer's preoccupation with sex (and women as property).

Today, judging from the pronouncements of many Christian leaders, one would think that "morality" consists solely of what one does in one's bedroom. The Catholic Church is the prime example here, with its moral pronouncements rarely going beyond the matters of birth control and abortion (and with its moral emphasis seemingly entirely on those matters). Also note that the official Catholic view of sex—that it's for the purpose of procreation only—reduces human sexual relations to those of brood animals. For more than a century the Catholic Church has also been the driving force behind efforts to prohibit access to birth control devices and information—to everyone, not just Catholics.

The Catholic Church, however, is far from alone in its sick obsession with sex. The current Christian hate campaign against homosexuals is another prominent manifestation of this perverse preoccupation. Even at this writing, condemnation of "sodomites" from church pulpits is still very, very common—with Christian clergymen wringing their hands as they piously proclaim that their words of hate have nothing to do with gay bashings and the murder of gays.

10. Christianity produces sexual misery.

In addition to the misery produced by authoritarian Christian intrusions into the sex lives of non-Christians, Christianity produces great misery among its own adherents through its insistence that sex (except the very narrow variety it sanctions) is evil, against God's law. Christianity proscribes sex between unmarried people, sex outside of marriage, homosexual relations, bestiality,[3] and even "impure" sexual thoughts. Indulging in such things can and will, in the conventional Christian view, lead straight to hell.

Given that human beings are by nature highly sexual beings, and that their urges very often do not fit into the only officially sanctioned Christian form of sexuality (monogamous, heterosexual marriage), it's inevitable that those who attempt to follow Christian "morality" in this area are often miserable, as their strongest urges run smack dab into the wall of religious belief. This is inevitable in Christian adolescents and unmarried young people in that the only "pure" way for them to behave is celibately—in the strict Christian view, even masturbation is prohibited. Phillip Roth has well described the dilemma of the religiously/sexually repressed young in *Portnoy's Complaint* as "being torn between desires that are repugnant to my conscience and a conscience repugnant to my desires." Thus the years of adolescence and young adulthood for many Christians are poisoned by "sinful" urges, unfulfilled longings, and intense guilt (after the urges become too much to bear and are acted upon).

Even after Christian young people receive a license from church and state to have sex, they often discover that the sexual release promised by marriage is not all that it's cracked up to be. One gathers that in marriages between those who have followed Christian rules up until marriage—that is, no sex at all—sexual ineptitude and lack of fulfillment are all too common. Even when Christian married people do have good sexual relations, the problems do not end. Sexual attrac-

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[3] The repeated mention of this sin in medieval ecclesiastical writings leads one to wonder how widespread this practice was among the Christian faithful, including the Christian clergy. One 8th-century penitential (list of sins and punishments) quoted in A.A. Hadden's *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents* states: "If a cleric has fornicated with a quadruped let him do penance for, if he is a simple cleric, two years, if a deacon, three years, if a priest, seven years, if a bishop ten years."

tions ebb and flow, and new attractions inevitably arise. In conventional Christian relationships, one is not allowed to act on these new attractions. One is often not even permitted to admit that such attractions exist. As Sten Linnander puts it, "with traditional [Christian] morality, you have to choose between being unfaithful to yourself or to another."

The dilemma is even worse for gay teens and young people in that Christianity *never* offers them release from their unrequited urges. They are simply condemned to lifelong celibacy. If they indulge their natural desires, they become "sodomites" subject not only to Earthly persecution (due to Christian-inspired laws), but to being roasted alive forever in the pit. Given the internalized homophobia Christian teachings inspire, not to mention the very real discrimination gay people face, it's not surprising that a great many homosexually oriented Christians choose to live a lie. In most cases, this leads to lifelong personal torture, but it can have even more tragic results.

A prime example is Marshall Applewhite, "John Do," the guru of the Heaven's Gate religious cult. Applewhite grew up in the South in a repressive Christian fundamentalist family. Horrified by his homosexual urges, he began to think of sexuality itself as evil, and eventually underwent castration to curb his sexual urges.[4] Several of his followers took his anti-sexual teachings to heart and likewise underwent castration before, at Do's direction, killing themselves.

11. Christianity has an exceedingly narrow, legalistic view of morality.

Christianity not only reduces, for all practical purposes, the question of morality to that of sexual behavior, but by listing its prohibitions, it encourages an "everything not prohibited is permitted" mentality. So, for instance, medieval inquisitors tortured their victims, while at the same time they went to lengths to avoid spilling the blood of those they tortured—though they thought nothing of burning them alive. Another very relevant example is that until the latter part of the 19th century Christians engaged in the slave trade, and Christian preachers defended it, citing biblical passages, from the pulpit. Today, with the exception of a relatively few liberal churchgoers, Christians ignore the very real evils plaguing our society—poverty; homelessness; hunger; militarism; a grossly unfair distribution of wealth and income; ecological despoliation exacerbated by corporate greed; overpopulation; sexism; racism; homophobia; freedom-denying, invasive drug laws; an inadequate educational system; etc., etc.—unless they're actively working to *worsen* those evils in the name of Christian morality or "family values."

12. Christianity encourages acceptance of real evils while focusing on imaginary evils.

Organized Christianity is a skillful apologist for the status quo and all the evils that go along with it. It diverts attention from real problems by focusing attention on sexual issues, and when

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[4] Given his religious background, and that his cult mixed Christianity with UFO beliefs, Applewhite was quite probably aware of the divine approbation of self-castration in Matthew 19:12: "For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs , which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it."

confronted with social evils such as poverty glibly dismisses them with platitudes such as, "The poor ye have always with you." When confronted with the problems of militarism and war, most Christians shrug and say, "That's human nature. It's always been that way, and it always will." One suspects that 200 years ago their forebears would have said exactly the same thing about slavery.

This regressive, conservative tendency of Christianity has been present from its very start. The Bible is quite explicit in its instructions to accept the status quo: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." (Romans 13:1-2)

13. Christianity depreciates the natural world.

In addition to its morbid preoccupation with sex, Christianity creates social myopia through its emphasis on the supposed afterlife—encouraging Christians not to be concerned with "the things of this world" (except, of course, their neighbors' sexual practices). In the conventional Christian view, life in this "vale of tears" is not important—what matters is preparing for the *next* life. (Of course it follows from this that the "vale of tears" itself is quite unimportant—it's merely the backdrop to the testing of the faithful.)

The Christian belief in the unimportance of happiness and well-being in this world is well illustrated by a statement by St. Alphonsus:

> It would be a great advantage to suffer during all our lives all the torments of the martyrs in exchange for one moment of heaven. Sufferings in this world are a sign that God loves us and intends to save us.

This focus on the afterlife often leads to a distinct lack of concern for the natural world, and sometimes to outright anti-ecological attitudes. Ronald Reagan's fundamentalist Secretary of the Interior, James Watt, went so far as to actively encourage the strip mining and clear cutting of the American West, reasoning that ecological damage didn't matter because the "rapture" was at hand.

14. Christianity models hierarchical, authoritarian organization.

Christianity is perhaps the ultimate top-down enterprise. In its simplest form, it consists of God on top, its "servants," the clergy, next down, and the great unwashed masses at the bottom, with those above issuing, in turn, thou-shalts and thou-shalt-nots backed by the threat of eternal damnation. But a great many Christian sects go far beyond this, having several layers of management and bureaucracy. Catholicism is perhaps the most extreme example of this with its laity, monks, nuns, priests, monsignors, bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and popes, all giving and taking orders in an almost military manner. This type of organization cannot but accustom those in its sway—especially those who have been indoctrinated and attending its ceremonies since birth—into accepting hierarchical, authoritarian organization as the natural, if not the only, form of organization. Those who find such organization natural will see nothing wrong with hierarchical, authoritarian organization in other forms, be they corporations, with their multiple

layers of brown-nosing management, or governments, with their judges, legislators, presidents, and politburos. The indoctrination by example that Christianity provides in the area of organization is almost surely a powerful influence against social change toward freer, more egalitarian forms of organization.

15. Christianity sanctions slavery.

The African slave trade was almost entirely conducted by Christians. They transported their victims to the New World in slave ships with names such as "Mercy" and "Jesus," where they were bought by Christians, both Catholic and Protestant. Organized Christianity was not silent on this horror: it actively encouraged it and engaged in it. From the friars who enslaved Native Americans in the Southwest and Mexico to the Protestant preachers who defended slavery from the pulpit in Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia, the record of Christianity as regards slavery is quite shameful. While many abolitionists were Christians, they were a very small group, well hated by most of their fellow Christians.

The Christians who supported and engaged in slavery were amply supported by the Bible, in which slavery is accepted as a given, as simply a part of the social landscape. There are numerous biblical passages that implicitly or explicitly endorse slavery, such as Exodus 21:20-21: "And if a man smite his servant, or his maid with a rod, and he die under his hand; he shall be surely punished. Notwithstanding, if he continue a day or two, he shall not be punished: for he is his money." Other passages that support slavery include Ephesians 6:5, Colossians 3:22, Titus 2:9-10, Exodus 21:2-6, Leviticus 25:44-46, 1 Peter 2:18, and 1 Timothy 6:1. Christian slave owners in colonial America were well acquainted with these passages.

16. Christianity is misogynistic.

Misogyny is fundamental to the basic writings of Christianity. In passage after passage, women are encouraged—no, commanded—to accept an inferior role, and to be ashamed of themselves for the simple fact that they are women. Misogynistic biblical passages are so common that it's difficult to know which to cite. From the New Testament we find "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church. . . ." (Ephesians 5:22-23) and "These [redeemed] are they which were not defiled with women; . . ." (Revelation 14:4); and from the Old Testament we find "How then can man be justified with God? Or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?" (Job 25:4) Other relevant New Testament passages include Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:7; 1 Corinthians 11:3, 11:9, and 14:34; and 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and 5:5-6. Other Old Testament passages include Numbers 5:20-22 and Leviticus 12:2-5 and 15:17-33.

Later Christian writers extended the misogynistic themes in the Bible with a vengeance. Tertullian, one of the early church fathers, wrote:

> In pain shall you bring forth children, woman, and you shall turn to your husband and he shall rule over you. And do you not know that you are Eve? God's sentence hangs still over all your sex and His punishment weighs down upon you. You are the devil's gateway; you are she who first violated the forbidden tree and broke the

law of God. It was you who coaxed your way around him whom the devil had not the force to attack. With what ease you shattered that image of God: Man! Because of the death you merited, even the Son of God had to die. . . . Woman, you are the gate to hell.

One can find similarly misogynistic—though sometimes less venomous—statements in the writings of many other church fathers and theologians, including St. Ambrose, St. Anthony, Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine, St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory of Nazianzum, and St. Jerome.

This misogynistic bias in Christianity's basic texts has long been translated into misogyny in practice. Throughout almost the entire time that Christianity had Europe and America in its lock grip, women were treated as chattel—they had essentially no political rights, and their right to own property was severely restricted. Perhaps the clearest illustration of the status of women in the ages when Christianity was at its most powerful is the prevalence of wife beating. This degrading, disgusting practice was very common throughout Christendom well up into the 19th century, and under English Common Law husbands who beat their wives were specifically exempted from prosecution. (While wife beating is still common in Christian lands, at least in some countries abusers are at least sometimes prosecuted.)

At about the same time that English Common Law (with its wife-beating exemption) was being formulated and codified, Christians all across Europe were engaging in a half-millennium-long orgy of torture and murder of "witches"—at the direct behest and under the direction of the highest church authorities. The watchword of the time was Exodus 22:18, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," and at the very minimum hundreds of thousands of women were brutally murdered as a result of this divine injunction, and the papal bulls amplifying it (e.g., *Spondit Pariter*, by John XXII, and *Summis Desiderantes*, by Innocent VIII). Andrew Dickson White notes:

> On the 7th of December, 1484, Pope Innocent VIII sent forth the bull Summis Desiderantes. Of all documents ever issued from Rome, imperial or papal, this has doubtless, first and last, cost the greatest shedding of innocent blood. Yet no document was ever more clearly dictated by conscience. Inspired by the scriptural command, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," Pope Innocent exhorted the clergy of Germany to leave no means untried to detect sorcerers . . . [W]itch-finding inquisitors were authorized by the Pope to scour Europe, especially Germany, and a manual was prepared for their use [by the Dominicans Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger]—"The Witch Hammer", *Malleus Maleficarum*. . . . With the application of torture to thousands of women, in accordance with the precepts laid down in the *Malleus*, it was not difficult to extract masses of proof . . . The poor creatures writhing on the rack, held in horror by those who had been nearest and dearest to them, anxious only for death to relieve their sufferings, confessed to anything and everything that would satisfy the inquisitors and judges. . . . Under the doctrine of "excepted cases," there was no limit to torture for persons accused of heresy or witchcraft.

Given this bloody, hateful history, it's not surprising that women have always held very subservient positions in Christian churches. In fact, there appear to have been no female clergy in any Christian church prior to the 20th century (with the exception of those who posed as men, such as Pope Joan), and even today a great many Christian sects (most notably the Catholic

Church) continue to resist ordaining female clergy. While a few liberal Protestant churches have ordained women in recent years, it's difficult to see this as a great step forward for women; it's easier to see it as analogous to the Ku Klux Klan's appointing a few token blacks as Klaxons.

As for the improvements in the status of women over the last two centuries, the Christian churches either did nothing to support them or actively opposed them. This is most obvious as regards women's control over their own bodies. Organized Christianity has opposed this from the start, and as late as the 1960s the Catholic Church was still putting its energies into the imposition of laws prohibiting access to contraceptives. Having lost that battle, Christianity has more recently put its energies into attempts to outlaw the right of women to abortion.

Many of those leading the fight for women's rights have had no illusions about the misogynistic nature of Christianity. These women included Mary Wollstonecraft, Victoria Woodhull, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Margaret Sanger (whose slogan, "No God. No master," remains relevant to this day).

17. Christianity is homophobic.

Christianity from its beginnings has been markedly homophobic. The biblical basis for this homophobia lies in the story of Sodom in Genesis, and in Leviticus. Leviticus 18:22 reads: "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination," and Leviticus 20:13 reads: "If a man lie with mankind as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them."

This sounds remarkably harsh, yet Leviticus proscribes a great many other things, declares many of them "abominations," and prescribes the death penalty for several other acts, some of which are shockingly picayune. Leviticus 17:10-13 prohibits the eating of blood sausage; Leviticus 11:6-7 prohibits the eating of "unclean" hares and swine; Leviticus 11:10 declares shellfish "abominations"; Leviticus 20:9 prescribes the death penalty for cursing one's father or mother; Leviticus 20:10 prescribes the death penalty for adultery; Leviticus 20:14 prescribes the penalty of being burnt alive for having a three-way with one's wife and mother-in-law; and Leviticus 20:15 declares, "And if a man lie with a beast, he shall surely be put to death: and ye shall slay the beast" (which seems rather unfair to the poor beast). (One suspects that American Christians have never attempted to pass laws enforcing Leviticus 20:15, because if passed and enforced such laws would decimate both the rural, Bible-Belt population and the cattle industry.)

Curiously, given the multitude of prohibitions in Leviticus, the vast majority of present-day Christians have chosen to focus only upon Leviticus 20:13, the verse calling for the death penalty for homosexual acts. And at least some of them haven't been averse to acting on it. (To be fair, some Christian "reconstructionists" are currently calling for institution of the death penalty for adultery and atheism as well as for "sodomy.")

Throughout history, homosexuality has been illegal in Christian lands, and the penalties have been severe. In the Middle Ages, strangled gay men were sometimes placed on the wood piles at the burning of witches (hence the term "faggot"). One member of the British royalty caught having homosexual relations suffered an even more grisly fate: Edward II's penalty was being held down while a red hot poker was jammed through his rectum and intestines. In more modern times, countless gay people have been jailed for years for the victimless "crime" of having consensual sex. It was only in 2003 that the Supreme Court struck down the felony laws on the

books in many American states prescribing lengthy prison terms for consensual "sodomy." And many Christians would love to reinstate those laws.

Thus the current wave of gay bashings and murders of gay people should come as no surprise. Christians can find justification for such violence in the Bible and also in the hate-filled sermons issuing from all too many pulpits in this country. If history is any indication, the homophobic messages in those sermons will continue to be issued for many years to come.

18. The Bible is not a reliable guide to Christ's teachings.

Mark, the oldest of the Gospels, was written at least 30 years after Christ's death, and the newest of them might have been written more than 200 years after his death. These texts have been amended, translated, and re-translated so often that it's extremely difficult to gauge the accuracy of current editions—even aside from the matter of the accuracy of texts written decades or centuries after the death of their subject. This is such a problem that the Jesus Seminar, a colloquium of over 200 Protestant Gospel scholars mostly employed at religious colleges and seminaries, undertook in 1985 a multi-year investigation into the historicity of the statements and deeds attributed to Jesus in the New Testament. They concluded that only 18% of the statements and 16% of the deeds attributed to Jesus had a high likelihood of being historically accurate. So, in a very real sense fundamentalists—who claim to believe in the literal truth of the Bible—are not followers of Jesus Christ; rather, they are followers of those who, decades or centuries later, put words in his mouth.

19. The Bible, Christianity's basic text, is riddled with contradictions.

There are a number of glaring contradictions in the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, and including some within the same books. A few examples:

> ". . . God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man."
> (James:1:13)
> "And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham."
> (Genesis 22:1)

> ". . . for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger forever."
> (Jeremiah 3:12)
> "Ye have kindled a fire in mine anger, which shall burn forever. Thus saith the Lord."
>
> (Jeremiah 17:4)

> "If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true."
> (John 5:31, J.C. speaking)
> "I am one that bear witness of myself . . ."
> (John 8:18, J.C. speaking)

and last but not least:

"I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."
(Genesis 32:30)
"No man hath seen God at any time."
(John 1:18)
"And I [God] will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts . . ."
(Exodus 33:23)

Christian apologists typically attempt to explain away such contradictions by claiming that the fault lies in the translation, and that there were no contradictions in the original text. It's difficult to see how this could be so, given how direct many biblical contradictions are; but even if these Christian apologetics held water, it would follow that *every* part of the Bible should be as suspect as the contradictory sections, thus reinforcing the previous point: that the Bible is *not* a reliable guide to Christ's words.

20. Christianity borrowed its central myths and ceremonies from other ancient religions.

The ancient world was rife with tales of virgin births, miracle-working saviors, tripartite gods, gods taking human form, gods arising from the dead, heavens and hells, and days of judgment. In addition to the myths, many of the ceremonies of ancient religions also match those of that syncretic latecomer, Christianity. To cite but one example (there are many others), consider Mithraism, a Persian religion predating Christianity by centuries. Mithra, the savior of the Mithraic religion and a god who took human form, was born of a virgin; he belonged to the holy trinity and was a link between heaven and Earth; and he ascended into heaven after his death. His followers believed in heaven and hell, looked forward to a day of judgment, and referred to Mithra as "the Light of the World." They also practiced baptism (for purification purposes) and ritual cannibalism—the eating of bread and the drinking of wine to symbolize the eating and drinking of the god's body and blood. Given all this, Mithra's birthday should come as no surprise: December 25th; this event was, of course, celebrated by Mithra's followers at midnight.

Mithraism is but the most striking example of the appearance of these myths and ceremonies prior to the advent of Christianity. They appear—in more scattered form—in many other pre-Christian religions.

A Final Word: These are but some of the major problems attending Christianity, and they provide overwhelming reasons for its abandonment. (Even if you discount half, two-thirds, or even three-quarters of these arguments, the conclusion is still irresistible.) For further discussion of these issues, and for consideration of many others not even mentioned here, please see the following books and pamphlets:

Chaz Bufe
20 Reasons to Abandon Christianity
2000

This pamphlet briefly looks at many of the reasons that Christianity is undesirable from both a personal and a social point of view. All of the matters discussed here have been dealt with elsewhere at greater length, but that's beside the point: the purpose of *20 Reasons to Abandon Christianity* is to list the most outstanding misery-producing and socially destructive qualities of Christianity in one place. When considered in toto, they lead to an irresistible conclusion: that Christianity must be abandoned, for the sake of both personal happiness and social progress. As regards the title, "abandon"—rather than "suppress" or "do away with"—was chosen deliberately. Attempts to coercively suppress beliefs are not only ethically wrong, but in the long run they are often ineffective—as the recent resurgence of religion in the former Soviet Union demonstrates. If Christianity is ever to disappear, it will be because individual human beings wake up, abandon their destructive, repressive beliefs, and choose life, choose to be here now.