

MARK
TWAIN

A CHRISTIAN
RESPONSE TO HIS
BATTLE WITH GOD

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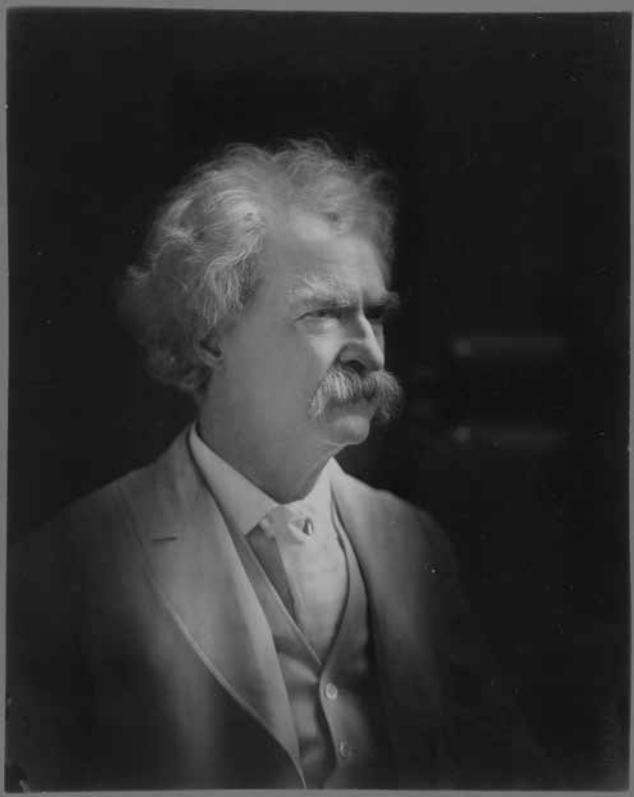
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INTRODUCTION

You are a famous writer and gifted speaker, living in the United States in the 19th century. You have written a book complaining that God has left the pleasures of sex out of His heaven, and that the deity in which you believe isn't the "malign thug" portrayed by the Bible.

But the society in which you live doesn't talk openly about sex, and such thoughts about God would be considered blasphemous. What are you to do? You have the book published one hundred years after your death, hoping that society would then be open-minded enough to listen.

Such was the foresight of inimitable and brilliant Mark Twain, whose philosophy about God and Christianity have sparked a revival of atheism and anti-Christian thinking across the world.



Mark Twain (1835–1910)
(Photo courtesy of Library of Congress)

CHAPTER ONE

THE NAKED COUPLE

It sounds surprising and almost heretical to say that the Bible opens its pages with a naked couple who were told by their Maker to have sex. But it's true. God made mankind naked as male and female, and He commanded them to be fruitful and multiply. And they happily complied. Ask a believer in evolution to explain the existence of male and female in elephants, horses, birds, fish, whales, giraffes, kangaroos, bears, fleas, flies, dogs, frogs, cats, bats, rats, and all 1.4 million different species of animals and they will be befuddled. As evidence of their befuddlement they will try to take you up a rabbit trail by pointing to a few snails and such that reproduce asexually. But the elephants are still in the room — both male and female.

If the entire universe is the result of nothing exploding into something, caused by nothing, why is it that almost every species has male and female, and they each reproduce after their own kind

. . . just as the Bible says? If you press skeptics, they will admit that they don't know. They will embrace intellectual insanity, hoping that someday someone will come up with a sane explanation — anything but that God created male and female and caused them to reproduce after their own kind. This is because every human being is born with a “carnal” mind that is in a state of “enmity” toward God.¹ That exists because shortly after Adam and Eve were created, sin entered the human race, and because we are human and are running the same race, we inherited a sinful, carnal, rebellious nature. The Bible says that we are “enemies of God” *in our minds* through wicked works (see Colossians 1:21).

This is never more evident than when blasphemy rolls off human lips. For millions, the prayer which says “hallowed be Thy name” has long been forgotten. Instead, “OMG” and “J---s Chr-st” are used to express disgust or said flippantly in a way that fails to give God's name due honor — from those in high public office, to celebrities in entertainment and music industries, to schoolchildren, to the man and woman on the street.

The enmity that finds expression through the mouth is deeply rooted in the human heart. The majority of Americans have some sort of belief in God, but until we find peace with Him we are offended by the God of the Bible — by His moral requirements and particularly by His judgments that are a consequence of those requirements. We don't want to be answerable to Him and will go to any lengths to shake off that uncomfortable yoke — like a wild steed that bucks in revolt when we are saddled with moral accountability. Anything that helps accomplish that is therefore highly prized by a sin-loving world.

Dirt on God

Mark Twain thought that he had found a lot of dirt on the God described in the Bible. If Mr. Twain could show that the God portrayed in Scripture was a morally bankrupt and merciless judge, then

1. “For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be” (Romans 8:6–7).

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the judgment spoken of so often in the Scriptures shouldn't take place. Humanity's case would be thrown out of court.

One example of his moral outrage was the pitiless judgments of God upon the Midianites. Although Twain doesn't give the source of the passage to which he refers (leaving no easy way for the thoughtful laymen to examine the legitimacy of his claims), he is clearly pointing to portions of the Book of Numbers:

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Harass the Midianites, and attack them; for they harassed you with their schemes by which they seduced you in the matter of Peor and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of a leader of Midian, their sister, who was killed in the day of the plague because of Peor" (Numbers 25:16–18).

God told Moses to declare war on the Midianites and to kill them. After the battle, Israel took the spoil:

And the children of Israel took the women of Midian captive, with their little ones, and took as spoil all their cattle, all their flocks, and all their goods. They also burned with fire all the cities where they dwelt, and all their forts. And they took all the spoil and all the booty — of man and beast.

Then they brought the captives, the booty, and the spoil to Moses, to Eleazar the priest, and to the congregation of the children of Israel, to the camp in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho. And Moses, Eleazar the priest, and all the leaders of the congregation, went to meet them outside the camp. But Moses was angry with the officers of the army, with the captains over thousands and captains over hundreds, who had come from the battle.

And Moses said to them: "Have you kept all the women alive? Look, these women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague

among the congregation of the LORD. Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known a man intimately. But keep alive for yourselves all the young girls who have not known a man intimately (Numbers 31:9–18).

Here is Mark Twain's exposition of the above passage:

Human history in all ages is red with blood, and bitter with hate, and stained with cruelties; but not since Biblical times have these features been without a limit of some kind. Even the Church, which is credited with having spilt more innocent blood, since the beginning of its supremacy, than all the political wars put together have spilt [this statement is no longer true, unless the First and Second World Wars could be considered religious and not political], has observed a limit. A sort of limit. But you notice that when the Lord God of Heaven and Earth, adored Father of Man, goes to war, there is no limit. He is totally without mercy — he, who is called the Fountain of Mercy. He slays, slays, slays! All the men, all the beasts, all the boys, all the babies; also all the women and all the girls, except those that have not been deflowered.

He makes no distinction between innocent and guilty. The babies were innocent, the beasts were innocent, many of the men, many of the women, many of the boys, many of the girls were innocent, yet they had to suffer with the guilty. What the insane Father required was blood and misery; he was indifferent as to who furnished it.²

Then he explains what he believes happened with the virgins:

The heaviest punishment of all was meted out to persons who could not by any possibility have deserved so horrible a fate — the 32,000 virgins. Their naked privacies

2. *Letters from the Earth*, "Letter XI," by Mark Twain, <http://www.classicreader.com/book/1930/12/>.

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were probed, to make sure that they still possessed the hymen unruptured; after this humiliation they were sent away from the land that had been their home, to be sold into slavery; the worst of slaveries and the shamefulest, the slavery of prostitution; bed-slavery, to excite lust, and satisfy it with their bodies; slavery to any buyer, be he gentleman or be he a coarse and filthy ruffian.³

If what he is alleging actually took place, there would be no justification for such terrible humiliation. However, there is no validation for his belief that more than 32,000 woman were subjected to a medical examination to determine that they were virgins. Eastern cultures often indicated a woman's status. For example, Indian women wear a red "bindi" (a dot) to indicate that they are married. In biblical times, women wore a veil or jewelry, or they had certain hairstyles which indicated that they were married. This was because virginity was associated with legal proof for blood-inheritance issues in biblical times. Other women, such as prostitutes, also wore indicative clothing or jewelry (see Proverbs 7:10; Hosea 2:4-5). So it wasn't difficult to see those who still had their virginity, without this presumed medical examination.

A Relevant Question

Mark Twain clearly had a belief in God, despite claims to the contrary. He believed in a Creator. He said, "God puts something good and something lovable in every man His hands create."⁴ But he qualified his belief in God. He said of the God of the Bible:

I am plenty safe enough in his hands; I am not in any danger from that kind of a Diety. The one that I want to keep out of the reach of, is the caricature of him which one finds in the Bible. We (that one and I) could never respect each other, never get along together. I have met his superior

3. Ibid.

4. Albert Bigelow Paine, ed. *Mark Twain's Speeches*, "The American Vandal," 1868 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1910), p. 29, <http://twain.lib.virginia.edu/innocent/vandtext.html>.

a hundred times — in fact I amount to that myself.⁵ He also said, “Man proposes, but God blocks the game.”⁶

So Mr. Twain was a theist. He believed in the existence of a Creator. Let me indulge time-travel for a moment and speak to him to make an important point:

Mr. Twain, I know from your writings that you were not an atheist. You had a belief in God and this Deity is which you believe was different from the God of the Bible. That One is an offense to you. So here is my important question. Do you believe that the Bible is speaking the truth when it says, “The Lord said to Moses, treat the Midianites as enemies and kill them”? Did Almighty God actually *speak* to Moses? If you say you believe that He did, you have a problem. You are saying that the God — the Creator of the universe — your Creator and mine, supernaturally spoke from the heavens to Moses and told him to kill the Midianites. If that took place, you are admitting that the God revealed in the Old Testament is the one true God. He supernaturally spoke to Moses.

On the other hand, if you are saying that the Old Testament is merely mythology, then why are you so indignant? Why are you irate about something that never happened? Again, either God spoke to Moses or He didn't. If He did, you have a problem, because He is therefore the true God and the Bible is the Word of God. If He didn't, you are outraged about something that never happened. That's like being angry at Cinderella's fairy godmother because she turned the carriage back into a pumpkin at midnight.

Or do you think that the Bible is a myth and you are indignant because other people have a belief that's different from yours? Are you *that* intolerant of what others believe?

5. Caroline Thomas Harnesberger, ed. *Mark Twain at Your Fingertips*, Letter to Olivia Clemens, July 17, 1889 (New York: Beechurst Press, 1948), <http://www.twainquotes.com/God.html>.

6. *Ibid.*

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Or perhaps you see yourself as the moral and intellectual savior of humanity and it's your job to tell them that their unthinking beliefs are inconsistent with good morals; morals such as yours. But who are you to say what is right and wrong? From where do you get your ethical standards? I would suggest that they trace themselves back to the Book you despise. The basis of your moral indignation is rooted in "Thou shalt not kill."

If you concede that God indeed spoke to Moses, then it's simply a matter of you standing in moral judgment over Almighty God. You think that God did something detestable, and you are pointing out the clear inconsistencies in His character. These are delusions of grandeur indeed for one sinful man, but they are not at all unusual thoughts for any human being, because our carnal minds are at enmity to God.

My questions to Mr. Twain are a little unfair because he cannot answer them. He went to meet his Maker way back in 1910. Nevertheless, before his demise he continued his tirade against the character of his Maker:

It was the Father that inflicted this ferocious and undeserved punishment upon those bereaved and friendless virgins, whose parents and kindred he had slaughtered before their eyes. And were they praying to him for pity and rescue, meantime? Without a doubt of it.

These virgins were "spoil" plunder, booty. He claimed his share and got it. What use had *he* for virgins? Examine his later history and you will know.

His priests got a share of the virgins, too. What use could priests make of virgins? The private history of the Roman Catholic confessional can answer that question for you. The confessional's chief amusement has been seduction — in all the ages of the Church. Père Hyacinth testifies that of a hundred priests confessed by him, ninety-nine had used the confessional effectively for the seduction of

married women and young girls. One priest confessed that of nine hundred girls and women whom he had served as father and confessor in his time, none had escaped his lecherous embrace but the elderly and the homely. The official list of questions which the priest is required to ask will overmasteringly excite any woman who is not a paralytic.⁷

Mark Twain's contention for some reason moves away from God, and to the hypocrisy within the Roman Catholic Church, who he believed represented Him. Before I address this contention, I must say that the Protestant church also supposedly represents God, but that part of Christendom certainly isn't without sin either — with its many professed pastors who have been caught in sexual sin and the many slick preachers who have fleeced the flock through televangelism. But if Twain was offended by the Roman Catholic priests of his day, he would be horrified at what was uncovered in contemporary Catholicism. In recent years in the United States there have been more than 10,000 allegations of *pedophilia* among Catholic priests. Of these, 6,700 were investigated, and 1,872 priests were found guilty of molesting children.⁸

Thousands more cases were not investigated because those who were accused of pedophilia had died. Many other cases were reported in Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Europe, Latin America, and Asia. These are commonly known and widely publicized facts.

Like Mark Twain, most people believe that Roman Catholicism is synonymous with biblical Christianity, and you can't blame them. Every Christmas and Easter the secular media parade the pope as being the leader of "the Christian Church." But ask most Catholics if they think that they are Christian, and they will answer, "No, I'm Roman Catholic." They know the difference between the two. For

7. *Letters from the Earth*, "Letter XI," by Mark Twain <http://www.classicreader.com/book/1930/12/>.

8. "Executive Summary of 'The Nature and Scope of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States 1950–2002,'" *John Jay College of Criminal Justice* (Washington: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004).

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example, Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's minister of propaganda, noted in his diary in 1939:

The Fuehrer is deeply religious, but deeply anti-Christian. He regards Christianity as a symptom of decay. Rightly so. . . .⁹

Hitler told General Gerhart Engel:

I am now as before a Catholic and will always remain so.¹⁰

Those who don't see the difference between Roman Catholic and Christian will often say that Adolf Hitler was a Christian, and those who don't know their Bibles (like Mark Twain) will often see hypocrisy in both Catholic and Protestant churches and blame God for the sins of man. They will blame the blood shed by the Roman Catholic Crusades and the Catholic Inquisitions upon the Christian Church.

Mark Twain then adds what he considers fuel to the fire in his case against God. He tells of an unsourced incident that is so horrific, so terribly cruel, it is hard contemplate:

There is nothing in either savage or civilized history that is more utterly complete, more remorselessly sweeping than the Father of Mercy's campaign among the Midianites. The official report does not furnish the incidents, episodes, and minor details, it deals only in information in masses: *all* the virgins, *all* the men, *all* the babies, *all* "creatures *that breathe*," *all* houses, *all* cities; it gives you just one vast picture, spread abroad here and there and yonder, as far as eye can reach, of charred ruin and storm-swept desolation; your imagination adds a brooding stillness, an awful hush — the hush of death. But of course there were incidents. Where shall we get them?

Out of history of yesterday's date. Out of history made by the Red Indian of America. He has duplicated God's

9. *Goebbels Diaries, 1939–1941*, 29 December 1939 (New York: Putnam, 1983).

10. John Toland, *Adolf Hitler* (New York: Anchor Publishing, 1992), p. 507.

work, and done it in the very spirit of God. In 1862 the Indians in Minnesota, having been deeply wronged and treacherously treated by the government of the United States, rose against the white settlers and massacred them; massacred all they could lay their hands upon, sparing neither age nor sex. Consider this incident:

Twelve Indians broke into a farmhouse at daybreak and captured the family. It consisted of the farmer and his wife and four daughters, the youngest aged fourteen and the eldest eighteen. They crucified the parents; that is to say, they stood them stark naked against the wall of the living room and nailed their hands to the wall. Then they stripped the daughters bare, stretched them upon the floor in front of their parents, and repeatedly ravished them. Finally they crucified the girls against the wall opposite their parents, and cut off their noses and their breasts. They also — but I will not go into that. There is a limit. There are indignities so atrocious that the pen cannot write them. One member of that poor crucified family — the father — was still alive when help came two days later.

Now you have one incident of the Minnesota massacre. I could give you fifty. They would cover all the different kinds of cruelty the brutal human talent has ever invented.¹¹

This is why Twain said, “I have met his superior a hundred times — in fact I amount to that myself.”¹² He considered himself to be morally superior to the cruel God portrayed in Scripture. His own image of the Creator (as opposed to the biblical portrayal) was more of a benevolent and lofty deity. This is what he said of this image in 1906:

11. *Letters from the Earth*, “Letter XI,” by Mark Twain, <http://www.classicreader.com/book/1930/12/>.

12. Harnesberger, *Mark Twain at Your Fingertips*, Letter to Olivia Clemens, July 17, 1889, <http://www.twainquotes.com/God.html>.

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Let us now consider the real God, the genuine God, the great God, the sublime and supreme God, the authentic Creator of the real universe, whose remotenesses are visited by comets only — comets unto which incredible distant Neptune is merely an outpost, a Sandy Hook to homeward-bound specters of the deeps of space that have not glimpsed it before for generations — a universe not made with hands and suited to an astronomical nursery, but spread abroad through illimitable reaches of space by the fiat of the real God just mentioned by comparison with whom the gods whose myriads infest the feeble imaginations of men are as a swarm of gnats scattered and lost in the infinitudes of the empty sky.¹³

His god was beyond human imagination, and was so remote that he didn't bother himself with the petty goings-on of humanity. Twain also said of his god:

I believe in God the Almighty.

I do not believe He has ever sent a message to man by anybody, or delivered one to him by word of mouth, or made Himself visible to mortal eyes at any time in any place.

I believe that the Old and New Testaments were imagined and written by man, and that no line in them was authorized by God, much less inspired by Him.

I think the goodness, the justice, and the mercy of God are manifested in His works: I perceive that they are manifested toward me in this life; the logical conclusion is that they will be manifested toward me in the life to come, if there should be one.

I do not believe in special providences. I believe that the universe is governed by strict and immutable laws. If one man's family is swept away by a pestilence and another

13. Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain, a Biography: The Personal and Literary Life of Samuel Langhorne Clemens*, Volume IV (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1912), p. 1582.

man's spared, it is only the law working: God is not interfering in that small matter, either against the one man or in favor of the other.¹⁴

Mark Twain believed in another god other than the One who revealed Himself to Moses, and said, "I am the LORD your God. . . . You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:2–3).

Yet there is a serious inconsistency when it comes to his deity, when it comes to the subject of human suffering. Twain was morally outraged that the God of the Bible was merciless, but his lofty god also let that family suffer at the hands of those cruel Indians. Why didn't his god show pity on them? He could have rescued them, but he didn't bother. This is because he didn't interfere in such small matters, "either against the one man or in favor of the other." Besides being distant and heartless, his god created earthquakes that crush families. He also created killer tornados and terrifying hurricanes. He made poisonous spiders that bite, venomous vicious snakes, disease-carrying mosquitoes, man-eating lions and sharks, fleas that bite dogs, dogs that bite cats, cats that bite mice, and mice that spread plagues. Mark Twain's god created brain cancer, lung cancer, throat cancer, cancer in kids, and the bacteria that cause the horrific "flesh-eating" disease. He created heart disease, blindness, insanity, insomnia, depression, fear, thousands of killer diseases, aging, and death. And then he coldly sits back on some distant throne and has no interest in humanity.

Perhaps Mr. Twain should have thought a little deeper about his own god's morality. On top of all the pain and suffering he created, he is so remote that he has no sense of truth or justice. He is devoid of a sense of morality. This god sees all the evil in the world, and like a corrupt judge, he turns a blind eye. Joseph Stalin was responsible for the death of up to ten million people, and Twain's god couldn't care less. Neither will Adolf Hitler be punished for the genocide of six million Jews. The precious lives of all the Jewish families mean nothing to him. When 49 headless bodies, including 6 women, were found on a highway in Mexico with their hands and feet cut off, reportedly by the Mexican mafia, it was nothing

14. *Ibid.*, p. 1583, <http://twain.lib.virginia.edu/innocent/vandtext.html>.

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to the Twain-god. Women are raped, children are beaten and murdered, and it's no big deal because there is no Judgment Day nor heaven or hell.

The irony is that Twain once reiterated this oft-quoted phrase: "God created man in his own image and man, being a gentleman, returned the favor." Mark Twain's fertile imagination (his place of imagery) created his own immoral and heartless monster because the God of the Bible was offensive to him. And he did it for good reason.