

# Wasting Time on GOD

Paulo Bittencourt

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Why I Am  
an Atheist

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Formatted for smartphones

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Except when referring to a particular person, all gender-specific terms are to be considered to refer to both the feminine and the masculine form.



Universe, Pisces-Cetus Supercluster Complex,  
Laniakea Supercluster, Virgo Supercluster, Local Group,  
Milky Way, Orion Arm, Radcliffe Wave, Local Bubble,  
Local Interstellar Cloud, Solar System, Earth

**FREETHOUGHT**



## Paulo Bitten who?

I was born in the state of Paraná, Brazil, in 1966, but spent my childhood in the city of Rio de Janeiro, at a time when Brazilians still said God was Brazilian. My mother took me and my three brothers to the Evangelical church to which her father had taken her and her eight brothers and sisters and my three brothers had taken their sons and daughters. When I became an adult, my father, who was Catholic, converted to the Evangelical church to which the father of my mother had taken her and her eight brothers and sisters and she had taken me and my three brothers and my three brothers had taken their sons and daughters.

I didn't take my son to any church.

I'm not just anyone. After all, I have the same family name as the disheveled composer of “da, da, da, daaaaa...”. Bittencourt is the French version of the Dutch surname Beethoven, of most noble meaning: beet garden.

I dreamed of being a comic book artist and cartoonist, but a voice in my head commanded me to attend a Theology col-



lege and work for an invisible and angry superman. Instead of making me a man of God, studying Theology made me have doubts. At the end of the fifth semester, I abandoned my studies and moved to Europe. I only didn't get swallowed by a whale because I went by plane. After a short stay in several countries, in 1990 I settled in the Austrian city in which Ludwig van Beethoven became worm food: Vienna, where I graduated in Opera Singing.

I'm the author also of the books *Liberated from Religion: The Inestimable Pleasure of Being a Freethinker* and (only in Portuguese) *Zeus Is Not to Be Played With: Madnesses of the Belief in God*.

On my [website](#), you can read more of my reflections on religion and Freethought.

To my son Evgeny

May you live in a world ever more free of  
superstitions and irrationalities.

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# Preface

When the dear reader has finished reading this sentence, close your eyes and slowly say three times: “Know”.

Incredible as it may seem, believers in God consider atheists arrogant. Incredible because it doesn't take a genius to realize that the truth is the opposite. Atheists supposedly are arrogant because they supposedly deny the existence of God, even though they know he exists. Well, it's impossible to deny the existence of what one knows exists. Therefore, atheists don't deny the existence of God. Atheists just don't believe in God. After all, why should they? Believing is not knowing. Believing may be satisfying for some, but it's not for others. When searching for God, atheists not only find no evidence of his existence but even find evidence of his nonexistence. And when they analyze the arguments of those who claim to have found God, atheists perceive their flaws, incoherences, discrepancies and illogicalities.

Believers don't know if God exists. That is why they have belief. That is why they



have faith. That is why they have hope. Yet, they say they know. They build temples, knock on doors, write books and magazines, talk on the radio, television and internet, evangelize in other countries, promise protection, cure, prosperity, eternal life and a mansion of gold. Some even threaten with torture in a lake of fire and brimstone those who don't believe in God, or believe in a different version. Others go so far as to blow themselves up near those who don't believe in God, or believe in a different version.

Who, then, is arrogant: those who don't know if God exists or those who don't know if God exists and nevertheless say they know?

As one can see, not believing in God is the purest humility.

Since being an atheist is nothing more than having no reasons to believe in God, it's impossible for an atheist to convert a believer to Atheism. Disbelief has no content. If it has no content, it has no doctrines. If it has no doctrines, it has no teachings. If it has no teachings, Atheism is not a philosophy, nor an ideology and much

less a religion. Replace “Atheism” with “lack of belief in God” and it becomes evident that calling Atheism a religion is ridiculous. Atheism is only a “thing” because Theism is common and many people find it disturbing not to believe in God. No one considers not believing in Santa Claus a philosophy, ideology or religion, since not believing in Santa Claus is the standard attitude of all people over five years old. Consequently, there is no need for a word like Asantaclausism, since there is no Santaclausism to contrast. Atheists simply explain why they don’t believe in God, and these explanations lead some believers to reflect. At most, what occurs is a self-conversion to logic, reason and coherence: the believer acknowledges that there are no reasons to believe in God.

If the dear reader is a believer, my objective is not to convince you to stop believing in God. It’s as if someone had asked me: “Paulo, why don’t you believe in God?” or “Do you have something against the belief in God?”. The answer is this book.

Paulo Bittencourt

“I don’t want to believe, I want to know.”

— Paulo Bittencourt

— Do you believe in God, Alan?

— Yes.

— What is he?

— God is... uh... a gas.

— What does that mean?

— Well, he's not a small gas, like bottled gas. He's a big gas, like oxygen. Or carbon dioxide. No, that's bad, isn't it? That's the Devil.

(From the TV episode *Knowing Me  
Knowing Yule With Alan Partridge*)

## Why I Am an Atheist

“Make your own god, paint him bloody red  
and, in his name, strike your enemies dead.  
Make religion a sword, don’t tolerate any  
questions.

Everyone who thinks differently gets struck by  
the cross.

My god is not your god, but which god is God?  
Therefore, in his name we strike each other  
dead.”

(From the song *Mein Gott*, by Erste Allgemeine  
Verunsicherung, an Austrian rock band)

HAS THE DEAR reader ever read a book  
whose main content is not divided into  
chapters? I bet you haven’t. You are, then,  
enjoying the rare privilege of holding a  
book with a single (long) chapter. That’s  
because I wrote it in a fluid way, without  
planning its topics, more or less like an im-  
provised monologue, leaving my thoughts  
in the order they came to mind, sometimes  
going back to topics already discussed,  
which made dividing this book into chap-  
ters practically impossible. Much more im-  
portant than the structure are the argu-

ments — and there is no shortage of arguments in this book!

Just one more little thing: If the dear reader finds that some of my thoughts are formulated in a somewhat unusual way, I hope you will forgive me and, nonetheless, appreciate my effort to write in English, despite it not being my native language.

I was born on December 20, 1966. At least, that is what a sheet of paper says. Looking in the mirror, I see no reason to doubt it. Although, on days when I'm in a good mood, I look a year younger.

My parents have four children: The Eldest, The Second-Eldest, me and The Youngest. My hometown is called Castro and is in Paraná, the Brazilian state from which also my parents are and where boys call each other “dunce” and “dung-boy”. I swear to God: I'm an atheist who was born in a hospital called Good Jesus, in a neighborhood called Holy Cross. Those who are born in Castro are *Castrenses*, just not for the residents of the neighboring cities. They like to call *Castrenses* castrated and, when they feel like having a guffaw, they recite this touching poem, whose author the cas-



trated, pardon, *Castrense* police still don't know who it is:

Castro, blessed city.

It's not rainy, it's not windy.

It's not cold, it's not hot.

It doesn't grow, it doesn't shrink.

What a pretty shitty city!

In Portuguese, these lines rhyme.

Castro was known as the land of frogs, the animal at which my mother is most disgusted, after alligator and snake (Jesus said his followers can catch snakes with their hands, but my mother can't look at them even on TV).

I'm not familiar with Castro's history, but to my knowledge nothing really important happened there, apart from my birth. My hometown's greatest pride is a butter dish, which supposedly was used by Pedro II. Believe it or not, the emperor of Brazil really did go to Castro. Does the dear reader want to know why?

— I cannot stand this interesting life anymore!

— Your Majesty is in need of boredom.

- What do you suggest, o royal advisor?
- Watching frogs in Castro.
- Where the hell is that?
- In Paraná.
- Is there a danger of me dying of boredom?
- No, if Your Majesty stays there for only a few hours.
- Perfect! Arrange right now for my suitcase to be packed. And do not forget the royal butter dish!

If it hasn't been stolen by an international gang and sold to a collector in Marrakech, said thing is on display in the Museu do Tropeiro (Drover Museum), which is the size of the British Museum's bathroom.

In winter, Castro can be quite chilly, a characteristic that earned it its second greatest pride: having been mentioned in the *Jornal Nacional* (Brazil's most-watched television newscast) as the coldest city in Brazil — for one night.

When I was one year old, my family moved to the city of Rio de Janeiro. As everyone knows, the rich live in the South

Zone (where, for example, Copacabana beach is). Guess, dear reader, where we lived? Exactly: in the North Zone. For about nine years, we resided in the Quintino Bocaiúva neighborhood. We lived in front of a Catholic church flanked by a spiritist center. At the nearest crossroads, it was common for us to come across black chickens, bottles of *cachaça* (sugar cane white rum), cigars and coins, offered to some Afro-Brazilian god. We kids didn't touch the chickens, the *cachaça* and the cigars, but we weren't fools to leave there the coins: we took them to buy candy.

Thank you, Umbanda (an Afro-Brazilian religion)! Oh, and thanks also for the sweets on the Saints Cosmas and Damian Day.

My father was an auto body mechanic: he repaired the bodies of cars. The owner of the body shop at which my father worked was a brother of my mother's. The year I turned ten, my uncle decided to close the body shop and open a new one in Brasília, for which reason we moved there.

In the federal capital, my parents couldn't find an apartment, which forced us to live with another brother of my mother's,

who was an Army sergeant. It was a difficult situation, as he had a small child. This uncle and his wife were Evangelicals. My uncle's wife made us feel that we weren't what one would call welcome.

The Eldest went to live with a sister of my mother's in the interior of São Paulo state. Equally Evangelical, this aunt too wasn't what one would call a well of affection.

With no prospect of improvement, my mother took The Second-Eldest, me and The Youngest and returned to Castro. My father stayed in Brasilia. Once again depending on relatives, we went to live in a room of an old hotel that belonged to another sister of my mother's. Equally Evangelical, this aunt too wasn't what one would call a fountain of tenderness.

To support us, my mother washed and ironed guests' clothes and made *sonhos* (Berliners), which were sold in the bakery that belonged to one of this aunt's daughters and at which The Second-Eldest, aged 14, worked.

Some time after that, my mother managed to rent a house. In a state that many

*paranaenses* (people from Paraná) consider more advanced than the rest of Brazil, the toilet was in the backyard. Months later, my father joined us and we moved to a better house: with a toilet inside.

When I set out to write my first book, *Liberated from Religion*, I decided not to reveal the name of the church to which I was induced to belong. I didn't want to give believers the pleasure of accusing me of having become an atheist out of mere disappointment. Disappointment may lead someone to turn his back on a church, but it rarely turns him into an atheist. In general, those who leave a church join another. If not, they become churchless believers. After a certain period of revolt, many unchurched people return to the church they left. When it's not because of disappointment with the church, it's because they want to get rid of its restrictions. Many of the rules imposed by Puritanical Protestantism, which, imported from the United States, is the one that reigns in Brazil, don't even have a biblical basis, such as the prohibitions of smoking, drinking alcohol and coffee, wearing make-up and jewelry, going

to theaters, listening to secular music and dancing. Unlike many, I didn't leave the church out of disappointment, nor to get rid of its restrictions. Actually, I didn't leave (only) the church, but religion, and that for theological-philosophical reasons, the principal ones of which I expound in this book.

Here, then, the long-awaited revelation of the great mystery: I was... [suspenseful music] an Adventist.

At a time when Adventism was relatively new in Brazil, my maternal grandfather was converted to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As it couldn't be otherwise, he indoctrinated his offspring into this religious organization. However, he ended up leaving the church. Some of his children followed him and also left. My mother stayed. Lucky me (not)! Some fifteen years later, she would give birth to me and, as it couldn't be otherwise, indoctrinate me into this religious organization.

Religion separates people. In 1989, I was attending the Faculty of Theology of the Instituto Adventista de Ensino (Adventist Teaching Institute), in São Paulo, at which I was programmed to be a man of God. Nev-



ertheless, some of my brain's neurons, miraculously unaffected by the religious brainwashing, made me think, and thinking made me doubt, and doubting made me quit college and move to Europe, where, two years later, I stopped going to the church. At that time, only The Youngest still lived with my parents. When I visited them, between him and me there was no harmony. We lived in different worlds: I was the one outside the church. Worse: the one outside the church who lived in a depraved continent (Europe). Even worse: the one outside the church who lived in a depraved continent that had turned me into a bighead.

A few years after I left the church, The Youngest also left. Yet, unlike me, solely so he could do many of the things it forbids. Once, my mother asked him: "What are those stains in your car?". It was vomit of one of the friends with whom my brother had spent the weekend drinking. As soon as my brother left the church, our relationship went back to being good, that is, normal. We were able, for example, to go together to bars to play pool and drink beer. He even

had some copies of *Playboy* magazine hidden in the closet, under a pile of clothes. Another “satanic” thing he had: rock records.

When he got tired of this kind of freedom, he went back to the church, re-erecting the wall that separated the brother inside the church from the one outside and, thus, catapulting our good relationship back to a state of disharmony. Actually, it became worse, because those who go back to the church usually go back more devout, sometimes fanaticized. Before leaving, The Youngest was a simple benchwarmer. After going back, he started preaching and even was elected elder of the church, a position that in some denominations is called presbyter, the highest lay authority in a Protestant congregation. My brother is one of those who decide if a member should be expelled from the church, for example for drinking beer, a liquid that he, while outside the church, ingested by the gallon. In one of my visits to Castro, I mentioned, at the table, the black holes. The Youngest retorted: “Black hole is mad scientist stuff!”. This is how I, surprised, found out that he

had gone back to the church. Every week, for 24 hours, my brother forbade me to use the internet, which he, from the height of his legalism and (false) moralism, turned off before sunset on Friday and turned on after sunset on Saturday, the Adventists' weird holy "day", based on the Jewish *Shabbat*.

Like the majority of those that were founded in the United States, the Adventist Church is a denomination of Puritan lineage. The Puritans were Christians whose objective was to achieve purity (as if that were natural) by following the Bible to the letter (as if that were possible). The problem with fanatics is that they hate to see people enjoying life. Conscious that being a fundamentalist is the most unbearable thing there is (for the Puritans, everything was sin), they never tire of trying to shove their fundamentalism down everyone's throats. The more people are fundamentalists, the less unbearable fundamentalism will seem. Fed up with Puritanism, in the 17th century England expelled the Puritans. And where would the pesky people go whom no one...

Read the **rest** of the book.