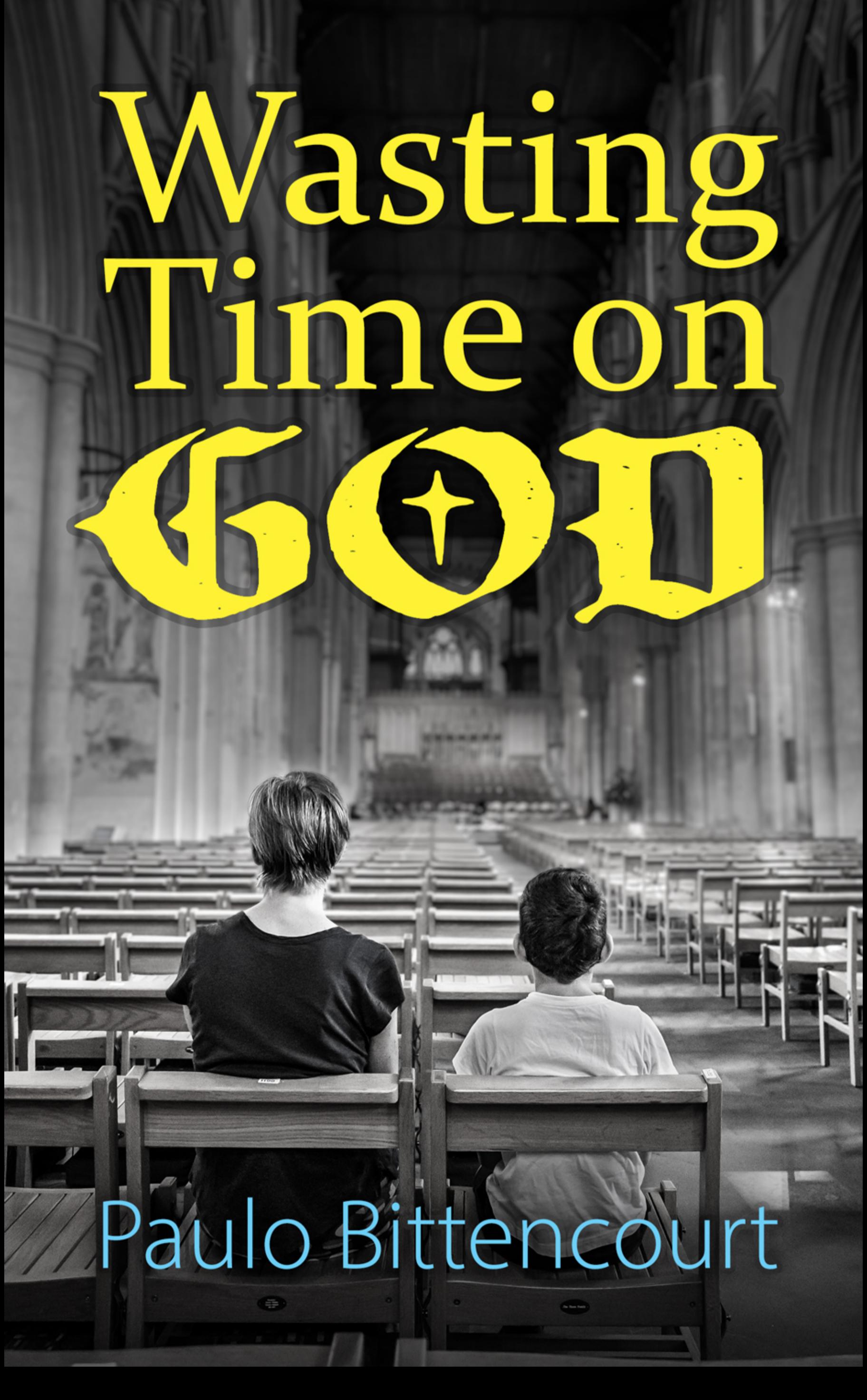


Wasting Time on **GOD**

A black and white photograph showing the back of two people sitting in wooden pews in a large, ornate church. They are facing the front of the church, where an altar and pulpit are visible. The church has tall, fluted columns and a high ceiling.

Paulo Bittencourt

Wasting Time on God

**Why I Am
an Atheist**

Paulo Bittencourt

Formatted for smartphones

Cover art: Paulo Bitencourt.

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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.

Table of Contents

Single Chapter Why I Am an Atheist 13	
Appendix 1 Thinking Made Me an Atheist 280	
Appendix 2 Hello, I'm God! 294	
Appendix 3 Detoxification 300	
Appendix 4 Freethought 315	

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*)

Single Chapter

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 improvised monologue, leaving my thoughts in the order they came to mind, sometimes going back to topics already discussed, which made dividing this book into chapters practically impossible. Much more important 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 fol-

lowed 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 wanted? To America, of

course. When you want someone's land, but he doesn't want to sell it, what do you do? What Christians did for centuries with the land of people who didn't worship the god who orders to give also the cloak to someone who only wants the tunic: take the land from him by force. By all appearances, worshiping the god of the Bible is rewarded by him with brilliance, because the Puritans had a brilliant idea to steal that land from its rightful owners: biological weapon. Exuding the love of Jesus from every pore, the invaders feigned friendship and presented the natives with handkerchiefs and blankets purposely infected with smallpox. In 1637, in Connecticut, these biblical literalists set fire to a village of the Pequot tribe. Those who tried to escape were shot dead. In this attack, about 700 Indians perished, including the elderly, women and children. Every time Americans celebrate Thanksgiving, they are thanking God also for genocides like this.

Some churches are worse than others, but all are bad, because all are founded on absurdities, perversities and hypocrisy. Take a church, any church, and study its

history, starting with the life of its founders. You'll soon discover that it has skeletons in its closet, meaning that there are things in its past that it, because they cause embarrassment, prefers to hide. Perhaps one or more of its pioneers were polygamists, or pedophiles, or racists, or supported dictators, or wrote imbecilities or were arrested for trying to enter the United States with thousands of dollars hidden between the pages of a Bible, like apostle Estevam and bishop Sonia, from the Igreja Apostólica Renascer em Cristo (Reborn in Christ Church).

The Adventist Church is a result of the Millerite Movement, led by American peasant, later sheriff, later military man, later Baptist preacher William Miller. In his youth, Miller read Voltaire, David Hume and Thomas Paine, who made him drop Christianity and embrace Deism: the belief in a god who doesn't give a damn about his creation. In 1812, Miller went to war against the British. The fort in which he was is said to have been cruelly shot at by the enemy. A bomb supposedly exploded about two feet away from Miller, wounding

three soldiers and killing one. Miller, however, supposedly didn't suffer a single scratch.

If an airplane with 300 passengers crashes, 299 die and the survivor is a believer, he'll say: "Thank God!". If he is a Pentecostal, he'll exclaim: "Hallelujah!". If he is a neo-Pentecostal, he'll add "Shandalhai!", spin around and throw himself on the floor. In his survival, the believer sees the proof of God's existence. However, if God exists and acts in this way, he is sadistic, and worshiping him makes people not only insensitive but also egocentric, because those who survive a fatality believe God loves them more than others. Furthermore, if one survivor is one proof that God exists, shouldn't 299 victims be 299 proofs that God doesn't exist? William Miller too committed this fallacy, going back to worshiping a god who, just to prove his existence and demonstrate his love to a few, sends a bunch of people to their deaths.

As I said, those who go back to the church usually go back more devout, sometimes fanaticized. With Miller, it was no

different. Dying to meet the god who had protected him from the bomb that tore apart one of his comrades, Miller opened the Bible and stumbled upon a prophecy that he interpreted as revealing the year of Jesus' comeback. According to his calculations, the Nazarene would return between March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844. Happy as a clam, Miller preached his fantastic discovery to the four corners of the Northeast of the United States. Thousands of church members of the most varied churches fell for the preacher's tale. Many of them donated everything they owned or left to their fate the crops on their farms. Certain that they would soon live in mansions of gold, there were those who broke all the furniture in the house. In white robes, some went to wait for Jesus on mountaintops; others, on treetops. Since the Nazarene obviously didn't come back and some people love to smash themselves on the floor, Miller had the magnificent idea of setting a new date: April 18, 1844. From that fall the preacher never got up. And there are those who love to embarrass themselves. This was the case of Samuel Snow, a former

atheist converted by Miller, who set yet another date: October 22, 1844. I have the impression he didn't know that Jesus is a no-show. Incredible as it may seem, Snow continued to set new dates. Demoralized, he died swearing to God that he was the reincarnation of prophet Elijah.

There are so many religious beliefs because, unfortunately, the world is full of people willing not only to believe in lunatics but also to continue to believe in them even if what they preach is proven to be lunacy. This is notorious in religions whose focus is on prophecies about the end of the world. When disappointed, instead of sending their belief to Hell, which would be equal to admitting to having let themselves be made fools of, the most devout believers give new, sometimes even more harebrained, interpretations to the failed prophecies. The card-carrying Adventists, for example, then started to say the year 1844 was correctly predicted, but that the mistake was to think Jesus would come back, when, in fact, in that year he began to cleanse the heavenly temple of the sins of Christians. Note that, by transferring the prophecy to an in-

visible event, Adventists ingeniously got out of the snooker into which they had gotten themselves and on top of that inhibited criticism, since the fulfillment of this prophecy can neither be proved nor disproved. It was from this interpretive distortionism that, a few years later, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was founded.

This phenomenon is exemplified in the book *When Prophecy Fails*, by American social psychologist Leon Festinger, creator of the Theory of Cognitive Dissonance. When a person believes, body and soul, that, on a certain day, the world will end, but the world doesn't end, in him occurs dissonance: believing that the world will end and knowing that it didn't end come into disharmony and, therefore, conflict. Since living with internal conflicts is distressing, the person then seeks to harmonize belief and reality. If his belief is superficial, the believer can restore consonance by ceasing to believe in the end of the world. If, however, it's deep, he restores balance by making adjustments to his belief. In 1954, Festinger and some of his colleagues infiltrated an American sect called

The Brotherhood of the Seven Rays, led by Dorothy Martin, who supposedly received a message from the guardians of a planet called Clarion saying that, on December 21 of that year, Earth would be flooded and destroyed. Those who believed this prophecy would be picked up by a flying saucer and taken to Clarion. Since the flying saucer obviously didn't come, the members of the brotherhood began to cry. Martin then had the fantastic idea to receive a new message from the aliens, revealing that the group's faith had been such that it had moved God to cancel the cataclysm. Earth had been saved by none other than The Brotherhood of the Seven Rays. Thank you, Brotherhood of the Seven Rays!

If God exists and, as believers never tire of affirming, believing in him is logical, why this mess of beliefs? Throughout History, Humanity has worshiped innumerable gods, and it's estimated that today there are 4,200 religions. All the major religions are subdivided into branches, Christianity being the champion, with thousands of denominations, although the Bible makes a point of stressing that "God is not...

Read the **rest** of the book.