



NAKED  
GOD

*The truth about  
God exposed*

MARTIN AYERS

# NAKED GOD

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MARTIN AYERS



matthiasmedia

*To Cathy, my wife*

*Naked God*

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PART I



# NAKED TRUTH







## CHAPTER 1

# WHY WE NEED THIS BOOK

**T**HE WORLD HAS CHANGED SINCE YOU WOKE UP this morning.

That was how CNN used to advertise their network. It was a fitting slogan for a news channel. If the world hasn't changed, then there's no need to tune in. And CNN had it right. The world is changing. Where do you most notice the change?

When I used to watch CNN, I was living in Beijing. As China prepared to host the Olympics, Beijing was transformed before my eyes. Traditional Chinese single-storey homes were being demolished to make way for skyscrapers. A city that had once been known for its bicycles was struggling with the congestion and exhaust fumes from over three million cars. My colleague recommended I try

her favourite restaurant, but within weeks it had been replaced by a new park.

Yet it's not just in China that things are changing. I went to university in 1997. When I visited for my interview, a student there showed me the internet. I'd barely heard of it at the time. In my first year, I queued up with other students at the old red telephone boxes in the market square. Mobile phones were a luxury that few of us could afford. I managed to complete a degree without needing a computer. We still listened to music on cassettes. Technological change can leave you looking dated very quickly.

Our world is changing in other ways too. Let's talk about sex. Do you remember that song? Maybe it was before your time, or maybe it was after your time, but 'Let's talk about sex' hit the charts on my 12th birthday. I remember it well because it was the first time I'd seen a song reported on the national news. Rappers Cheryl 'Salt' James and Sandra 'Pepa' Denton released a song that did something you weren't supposed to do—it talked about sex. Even in the title. It was newsworthy because it seemed so scandalous. Was this allowed? What were the censors thinking?

The strange thing is that looking back now, you wonder what all the fuss was about. If you listen to the music charts today, sex is everywhere. It seems as though almost everyone's singing about it, rapping about it and talking about it. Sex is used to advertise almost anything. Why would a song about sex make it onto the evening news?

But Salt-n-Pepa's song only hit the charts as recently as 1991. The controversy at the time shows us that things

are different now. In just a few years, we've grown a lot more relaxed in talking about sex. You might think that's a good thing or you might think it's a bad thing, but either way it's a change.

Change is all around us. It's in the clothes you buy and the music you listen to—if you move with the times. Even the climate is changing, and many scientists warn that our carbon footprints are leading us to a point of irreversible decline.

President Barack Obama ran his 2008 election campaign under the slogan 'Change we need'. In his victory speech at Grant Park, Illinois, he spoke of the change that had taken place in the lifetime of one voter, 106-year-old Ann Nixon Cooper of Atlanta, as part of his rallying cry to the American people to embrace change for the better. He began, "She was born just a generation past slavery; a time when there were no cars on the road or planes in the sky; when someone like her couldn't vote for two reasons—because she was a woman and because of the colour of her skin".

Obama picked out just a few of the landmark changes that had taken place in one lady's lifetime: votes for women, the Great Depression, the Second World War and the African-American Civil Rights Movement. Obama went on, "A man touched down on the moon, a wall came down in Berlin, a world was connected by our own science and imagination. And this year, in this election, she touched her finger to a screen and cast her vote, because after 106 years in America, through the best of times and the darkest of hours, she knows how America can change."<sup>1</sup>

Inspiring words for a changing world. So how do you react to the change that is all around us?

One crucial factor that affects how we feel about change is whether or not we think there is a God. If there is no God, you might think that's a positive thing. You might feel it liberates us, that we're making progress as human beings and changing the world for the better. But on the other hand, it might make you nervous about how the world is changing. Do you worry that the world is spiralling out of control, heading for oblivion as human beings destroy each other and wreck the planet?

If there is a God, it should make us view lots of things differently, including the changing world around us. A greater power than humanity is watching over things. God might still be interested in what happens to the world, and might even be guiding the change we see.

So is there a God or not? Well, here's the problem. That is changing too. Not that the facts themselves are changing, obviously. God doesn't disappear and re-appear again—either there is a God, or there isn't one.

But something is changing. When it comes to the God question, people keep changing their minds. In the 1940s and 1950s, American philosophers developed a growing conviction that there could not be a God. On 8 April 1966, *Time* magazine reported on this by running a cover page that was completely black except for three words in red print: "Is God Dead?" But in the years that followed there was a revolution in the university philosophy departments. So much so that, on 26 December 1969, *Time* magazine

ran another question on its front cover: “Is God coming back to life?”

The debate is still going on, and people have been changing what they think. Professor Antony Flew made his name as a committed atheist. He debated against Christians and published books that criticized belief in God. In some ways, he was the Richard Dawkins of his generation. But deep into his retirement, Professor Flew changed his mind. In November 2007, with the help of a co-writer, Professor Flew published a new book entitled *There is a God: How the world’s most notorious atheist changed his mind*.

Professor Flew didn’t become a Christian, but he stopped being an atheist. His approach was to evaluate the evidence, and on that basis he changed. He decided that the evidence pointed to an intelligent, powerful creator God. Some atheists were so troubled by the news that they suspected Antony Flew had been manipulated or misrepresented in his old age. Flew responded by saying that “My name is on the book and it represents exactly my opinions. I would not have a book issued in my name that I do not 100 per cent agree with.”<sup>2</sup> We might not think he’s right, but Professor Flew had clearly changed his position.

There are also many examples going the other way, including Christian ministers who have ‘lost their faith’. The point is that people’s opinions are changing.

When it comes to us deciding whether or not we think there’s a God, we can’t simply rely on the opinions of ‘experts’. We can’t let our beliefs be governed by those of a

university professor, or our parents, or our peers. We need to examine the evidence about God ourselves, and make up our own minds.

That's what this book is about. It looks at the evidence about God to see what we can uncover. It's about seeing whether we change our minds.

When my mother first told me that she had been enjoying watching *The Naked Chef*, I was a bit alarmed. But I quickly found out that it was a play on words. It wasn't the chef who was naked; it was the food. In his cooking, Jamie Oliver was stripping down the food to its bare essentials.

And that's what we need to do with God. We need to look at the evidence and find out what it uncovers. We need to strip away any false ideas we've developed from our culture or background, and find the truth. This is the truth about God exposed. This is *Naked God*.

### **Does it really matter?**

But maybe you still think this is a waste of time. Even if you have the option of looking at the evidence and working out whether or not God exists, you might still need persuading that this really matters.

I recently met a guy called Simon at a friend's party, and he asked me what I did for a living. At the time I'd stopped being a lawyer and I was working for a church, and he was interested in that. He told me he'd never met anybody at a party before who worked for a church. Simon had just read *The God Delusion*, and he asked me what I thought of it. He

said he'd been quite persuaded by some of the arguments Richard Dawkins makes.

It wasn't really the right time to deal with all of the issues in *The God Delusion*, so instead I just picked up on a couple of the major problems others have raised with the book. We had a good discussion, and Simon said he realized that he needed to read *The Dawkins Delusion?* by Alister McGrath, and look into things in a bit more detail.

But then Simon rounded off the conversation with something I found a bit disturbing. He said, "The way I see it now, is that it doesn't really matter whether or not there's a God. If there is a God, then life is amazing because I've been designed and made—and this whole universe has been designed and made—by a master planner. So that's all good. But if there isn't a God, then life is still amazing, because it's just come about by itself. We can't marvel at God anymore, but we can marvel at natural selection and the way that we ourselves and the whole universe have come into existence just by the process of evolution."

I don't know what you think about that. You might just be thinking that this was a pretty full-on conversation to have at a party. I happen to think so too. It seems to come with the job when you work for a church.

But Simon was summarizing a view of life without God that Richard Dawkins argues for in his book. Instead of seeing the universe as something created by God, and standing in awe of its maker, Dawkins says that the universe wasn't created, but that we should stand in awe of its natural causes. He writes that "a quasi-mystical

response to nature and the universe is common among scientists and rationalists”, and declares that the aspiration of his books is to “touch the nerve-endings of transcendent wonder that religion monopolized in past centuries”.<sup>3</sup>

That’s where Dawkins hopes his atheism can lead you, and it’s where Simon seemed to have followed. People used to think there was a God, and that gave them both a sense of wonder and a sense that they were wonderfully made. But now we’ve found out that God doesn’t really exist. Dawkins proposes a solution to the problem. Behold how amazing science has shown the universe to be. If you can wonder at the universe, why do you need God?

So for Simon, there was no longer any need to work out whether or not God exists. You don’t need God to make you feel special. You don’t need God to give you a sense of wonder. Therefore, you just don’t need God. And if you don’t need God, then why do you need to read *Naked God*?

This might be how you think about it too. You might be somebody who doesn’t think God exists, and you’re getting along fine. Or, more likely if my friends are anything to go by, you might be somebody who isn’t sure either way whether or not there’s a God, but you don’t see what difference it would make anyway.

So the first task of this book is to show why the God question really matters. Before we uncover the truth about God, we need to investigate what life is really like if God does not exist. If things are fine without God, then why bother looking for him?

That’s what Part I of this book (‘Naked Truth’) is about.



In a few short chapters, we're going to look at what it really means for you and me if there is no God. Philosophers have been writing about this for hundreds of years, but we're going to break things down and think about the difference it makes to our everyday lives. What does it mean for our purpose and meaning? What does it mean for freedom? How do we work out what's good and bad? What does it mean for how we approach life and death?

This first section then, is not about whether atheism is true or not. It's an honest look at where atheism leads.

We'll begin by asking the question, "Why are we here?"

# Is there a God?

And perhaps more to the point, if there is a God, what real difference will it make to my life?

These are the most basic and universal of questions, and yet we don't usually take much time to think about them.

In *Naked God*, former lawyer Martin Ayers provides an opportunity for the reader to do just that: to ask the awkward questions, to sift through the evidence, and to get to the truth about God. He writes:

“ In his famous book and TV series, *The Naked Chef*, it wasn't Jamie Oliver who was naked; it was the food. Jamie Oliver succeeded in stripping down the food to its bare but glorious essentials.

And that's what we need to do with God. We need to look at the evidence and find out what it uncovers. We need to strip away any false ideas we've developed from our culture or background, and reveal the truth. This is the truth about God, exposed. This is *Naked God*. ”



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Martin Ayers studied Law with Economics at Cambridge University before working as a commercial lawyer for Freshfields. He now works in Christian ministry and lives in north London with his wife, Cathy.

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