

## My Testimony



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My name is Drew Eldridge. I was born in January 1989. I still vaguely remember the first time I asked my parents about God and whether He was real. Both of them were products of the sixties, and were no more anti-religious than they were religious. It was simply something that was never discussed. But when I pressed them on it, I remember being told the affirmative. “There probably is a God. I think there is.” That was it. I

remember I couldn’t get anymore out of them, beyond that. If I asked what God was like or who God was, they just shrugged their shoulders and said they didn’t know. There have been times when I’ve regretted not being raised a Christian and churchgoer, but when I reflect deeply on it, I can honestly say that I’m thankful my parents didn’t tell me more than they did. It made me curious, and prevented me from developing too many prejudices either way. I don’t think I ever thought about religion that deeply again until I was a few years older. I was pretty rough in a lot of ways, as a teenager. I started sneaking out, drinking and partying when I was way too young. I played a lot of full contact sports, like hockey and football. For a while, I was into martial arts. I never picked fights with anyone, but it wasn’t uncommon for me to get involved in them. When I was around sixteen or seventeen, I joined the army. I can’t say that I was a very deep person at the time. I was more interested in being strong. It was a combination of two things that changed that. One was falling in love for the first time (which was followed by my first experience of heartbreak), and the other was my discovery of

philosophy. It's funny how those things often tend to go together. I read a book called "Siddhartha," by Hermann Hesse. It was a story about a young man who felt as though he had learned everything he could from his parents and teachers, and who decided to go out on an adventure to discover things for himself. This resonated with me greatly, and I decided to do the same. I left the army, got rid of most of my possessions and became Buddhist. I went and lived for a few months in a Japanese mountain monastery. That's a whole story in itself. But in a nutshell, I returned to Canada dissatisfied with Buddhism's answers to life's big questions. I let it go and decided to keep on looking. This time, I sought for answers at The University of Winnipeg.

### **The Examined Life**

I primarily studied literature, education and philosophy. It was these pursuits that led me to discover the works of Plato, who I became more or less obsessed with. So much so, that I even recall writing a few platonic dialogues myself, and even trying to turn them in as essays. That didn't go over so well with the professors, so I stopped. But I must have read Plato's Republic at least twenty times during those years. It was my Bible. He taught me how to think. He also taught me what I was. I was a philosopher. Rousseau was my next big discovery. If the Buddha and love gave me my initial desire for truth, and if Plato taught me how to think, you could say that Rousseau taught me how to feel. He made me more honest with myself, and gave me a sense of brotherly comradery that kept me going every time Plato knocked me over the head. You may notice that I'm speaking of these authors as though I knew them. I suppose that's because I felt, while reading them (and still do to this day),

like they are my friends. I read many others, but these are the ones worth mentioning because it was them who had the most to do with turning me towards Christianity. They prepared my mind, heart and will. It happened one day when I was taking a class on Goethe's "Faust." That's the play where the phrase "making a deal with the devil" comes from. Dr. Faust sells his soul in exchange for youthfulness and love.

### **Truth, Beauty and Goodness**

I remember that, as I was reading it, I was sure that Goethe must have been inspired by Plato. I told this to my professor, and was immediately corrected. "No," I was told, "Goethe wasn't particularly influenced by Plato. At least not directly. He was inspired by The Bible. Well, after hearing this nonsense, I decided that I was going to prove my professor wrong by doing the research and writing a paper on it. I went to the library... I did the research... and, lo and behold, my professor turned out to be right. While it was true that Goethe had developed a taste for the ancients later in life, what inspired him for Faust was indeed The Bible. This really puzzled me. How could that be? How could The Bible contain the same wisdom I found in The Republic? Wasn't The Bible just a bunch of old stories and fairy tales? This all sent me in a very different direction. I even felt a little like the character Faust as I did so. "Alas, I have studied philosophy," these were the opening lines of the play "the law as well as medicine, and to my sorrow, theology; studied them well with ardent zeal, yet here I am, a wretched fool, no wiser than I was before." I'd been feeling lately like I didn't know much either. Reading Plato tends to do that. The difference was that I hadn't studied theology. And, yet, it was theology that supposedly

inspired this play I thought was so wise and beautiful. So, off I went in that direction. The next stop was John Milton.

### **Paradise Lost**

Milton wrote the epic poem *Paradise Lost*. I had already picked it up because, after reading *Faust*, I developed an interest in the character of Mephistopheles (or, plainly put, the devil). *Paradise Lost* was about the same amusing character. Only it was an epic take on him instead of a comedic one. It was about the rebellion and fall of Satan, followed by his revenge against God by the corruption of His precious creations, Adam and Eve. I'm still not entirely sure why, but as I was reading it, I found myself sympathizing with the character of Satan, and even cheering him on. There was something noble, I thought, about rebelling against this authoritarian father figure. Satan didn't want to just blindly obey and do as he was told, like a slave. He wanted to be free. He wanted to think for himself. He wanted to forge his own destiny and create his own meaning in life. In short, he didn't sound so different from me when I left my parents and teachers behind. I used to think it was silly how Adam and Eve fell. But when I read *Paradise Lost*, I realized that I wouldn't have done any better. Anyways, all of this horrified me. "You're cheering on the devil, Drew? Really?" Yes, I was. This question led me down the rabbit hole of C.S. Lewis, who had written a famous Preface to *Paradise Lost*. Lewis was the famous Christian author who wrote *The Chronicles of Narnia*. I'm embarrassed to say that the rest of the time between then, and the time I became a Christian is something of a blur -because after reading Lewis, I became so obsessed with Christianity, philosophy, theology and religious history that I don't think I spent my time doing anything

else. I read the ancients and medieval Christians. The biggest influences on me were Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Erasmus. I don't think Erasmus was ever declared a saint, but in my book he more than qualifies. He was my favorite. I also read many contemporary Christian philosophers and natural theologians, as well as the atheistic body of literature. My dear friend, Plato, insisted on that. A true philosopher will study both sides. I watched all of the debates on the internet. This was around the time when the new atheists like Richard Dawkins were very popular. I sought out the top thinkers on either side in academia and studied them closely. Long story short, I came to believe that the arguments for theism were far superior than those of atheism. I became a deist. That is to say, I believed in God, but still wasn't sure about which God I believed in or what God was like. I wasn't even sure he was a "person" exactly. But I knew that He, or it, was something.

### **Taking “The Jesus Challenge”**

I also didn't want to rule out other monotheistic religions, like Judaism or Islam. So, to the best of my ability, I studied their history and theology as well. I was especially impressed by Maimonides and Averroes. But it seemed to me that both religions fell short. There didn't seem to be anything in Judaism and Islam that wasn't already in Christianity, and there seemed to be things in Christianity that were lacking in both of the others. The day eventually came when I decided that there was more than enough evidence in support of the truth claims of Christianity -especially when I compared it to alternative worldviews. It was a rational and intellectually fulfilling religion. I came to believe this before converting. But there was still something missing. The Bible made certain claims about Jesus, and

how certain things would happen if one invited Jesus into his or her life. And that hadn't happened to me. So, I decided to give it an honest and wholehearted try. I decided to put The Bible and Jesus to the test, and I promised myself that I would follow the evidence wherever it led. Up until then, I'd treated Jesus merely as a philosopher. Now I was going to treat Him as the person who He claimed to be. I decided that I would do everything He said to the best of my ability. If He truly was the son of God, then if I put my faith and trust in Him, His claim would come true. God would come into my life and make Himself personally known to me. This supposedly "Holy Spirit" would "fill" my heart. If it worked, then I'd know it was true and I would become a Christian. And if it didn't work, then I'd know it wasn't. But it had to be done honestly, and with me truly and earnestly seeking, with all of my heart, and not just my mind. "Seek," said Jesus, "and ye shall find." That was my plan. Looking back, I've come to call it 'taking the Jesus challenge.'

Well, the next two weeks of my life were spent doing this. And for those two weeks, I was basically Ned Flanders from that TV show, *The Simpsons*. I was extremely, and even suspiciously, nice to everyone I met. Even complete strangers on the street. I treated them like they were as important as Jesus claimed they were. And I treated my treatment of them as seriously as Jesus taught that we should. I was scrupulous in my kindness, patience and hospitality. When someone wronged me, I acted and treated them as though they had done me a favor. "No problem," I'd say, "I like it when people make mistakes. It gives me a chance to forgive them." Alright, maybe I went a little overboard in some ways. I did get some strange looks over those few weeks. But, in my defense, I genuinely was doing my best to follow exactly what Jesus seemed to teach in

The New Testament. I made peace with people I held grudges against. I helped anyone who asked me for help. I treated people the way Jesus taught in Matthew 25:40. “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” I treated people like they were the brother, sister, son or daughter of The God of the Universe. I listened closely and treated people’s problems and concerns as seriously as if they were my own problems. I gave away way, way more than I was comfortable with. I even gave prayer a try. I really think this is what sold me.

### **Liar, Lunatic or Lord?**

I got down on my knees and prayed the way Jesus says to pray in his sermon on the mount (Matthew 6). I didn’t pray for “stuff” or anything in particular for myself. Jesus taught that God already knew what I wanted. What I prayed for was “for God’s will to be done as it is in Heaven, and for the strength to face whatever that was.” I trusted that he’d take care of me as that happened. I think that’s what it means to ask God to “Give us today, our daily bread.” I don’t think it has anything to do with getting bread. I think it’s about trusting that our needs will be met as we put God first, above our own needs. I asked for forgiveness, and for the strength to forgive others. Last, I asked for protection against “the evil one.” I didn’t really feel anything as I prayed. What I was doing was reaching out. Aloud and boldly, I invited Jesus and The Holy Spirit into my life. And, to my utter astonishment, my prayer was answered. I felt God’s presence with me that day, and throughout the time I was doing my best to follow His teachings. I got the strength I asked for. This combination of praying and walking with Jesus had a transforming effect on me, and I began to understand

what Christians meant by the phrase “being born again.” It was no longer a mystery to me. Everything in my life got immediately better. My relationships with people improved dramatically. I became more productive. I experienced more joy. And perhaps most remarkably, even when things went wrong in life, I found that it didn’t affect me or my mood. I was always fine. Near the end of my experiment, I returned to C.S. Lewis and his “liar, lunatic or Lord” argument for Christianity:

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to... Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God.”



This was an argument that didn't really impress me much when I first encountered it. But that was because I had only thought about Christianity. I hadn't actually tried it. The words "it seemed to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor fiend" didn't resonate with me because I hadn't yet had the undeniable, personal and mystical transformative experience that would make something like that "obvious." But the fact was that now, whether I wanted to admit it or not, I truly did have a conviction that Jesus was not a liar or a lunatic. He couldn't have been. It didn't make sense in light of the evidence. The only conclusion I could draw then, if I was to be honest with myself, was that Jesus was who he claimed to be. It's for this reason that I often say "I realized I was a Christian" instead of "I decided to become a Christian." It wasn't a decision at all. The only decision I had to make was whether to live authentically. And I had decided long ago, since my days of reading Rousseau, that I would always do that. Besides, what was I going to do -go back to how I was before? From then on, I called myself a Christian.

More Coming Soon!