

Scathing Atheist 692:

The “A Ross to Bear” Edition

Players:

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Sponsor:

This week’s episode of the Scathing Atheist is brought to you by ... Mint Mobile ... And by ... the new ear buds for Christians that don’t wanna hear secular stuff, Pray-Cons. Pray-Cons: They’re just ear plugs.

And now, the Scathing Atheist.

Intro:

It's Thursday!

It's June 18th,

And it's Autistic Pride Day!

The other days are too...we're amazing every day...stupid holiday.

I'm Noah Lugeons,

I'm Eli Bosnick,

I'm Heath Enwright, and from Jalen Brunson's New Jersey; Ann Arbor, Michigan; and Waycross, Georgia ... this is the Scathing Atheist.

On this week’s episode,

- The Grand Canyon state creates an Arizona UNTRUTH
- We learn that God has an atheist sense of humor with his weather-based smiting,
- And we’ll finally get the juicy personal Ross Douthat details you’ve been waiting for.

But first, the Diatribe...

Diatrobe

You remember when you could just... change your mind?

It's one of those things that social media has stolen from us. Or maybe it's not that. Maybe that's just where I see it most because I spend so damn much time there. Maybe it's bigger than that. But one way or the other, the world puts a premium on changing your mind about shit. Like, there are a lot of people out there in the world right now that might find out one day that pineapple on pizza tastes awesome and they'll be like "It's a shame that I'll forever have to deprive myself of this delicacy since I took too hard a stance against it in an online blood feud."

And I can't help but project a younger Noah into this world. Y'all, at age 27, I was wrong about pretty much all the things you can be wrong about without just immediately getting yourself killed. I was a card carrying member of the Libertarian Party, I thought abortion was evil, I thought alien abduction stories were real, I thought the Illuminati was running the world, I thought I could see the future with Tarot cards, and I thought modern medicine was a scam.

And if we'd had today's social media back in 2003, I have to imagine I'd have a podcast about Tarot or alternative healing or "how they getcha." At the very least, I'd have been vocally opinionated online — I've always been vocally opinionated regardless of the merit of my opinions.

And at that point, how would I change my mind? I mean, to be honest, all the shit that I engaged in that eventually changed my mind on that stuff is stuff I probably just would have ignored or avoided. I would have thought of skeptics as "the enemy." I wouldn't have been as receptive to what they had to say. And I would've possibly had a financial interest in continuing to be wrong.

Now, as it happens, I got lucky. I had the good fortune to be right about everything *before* I started putting my opinions on the record. I was able to change my mind about a ton of shit over a gradual period without ever eating the buffet of crow I so richly deserved. I just realized I was wrong and stopped being wrong.

Of course, that's always been hard to do. It's never been easy to reinvent your worldview from the ground up. It was easier for me than most because I didn't have a hell of a lot invested in that worldview at the time I was reexamining it. But nowadays it's almost impossible to have an opinion without being invested in it. And that makes changing your mind harder than ever.

And it'll probably come as no surprise that I'm talking about this because at this point there actually are a lot of people changing their minds about their political commitments over the past few years. I mean, the polling shows it, right? Hard to keep arguing he's gonna fix the country when he can't even fix a reflecting pool. And that leaves us all in the awkward position of what exactly we do with all these people that are now flirting with that ever so difficult mind-change.

And it's tough, right? Because in so many ways they've shown us who they are. I mean, maybe their heart wasn't really in the hate. Maybe they got sucked in by promises of isolationism and naive mercantilism. But at a very minimum they showed that they were willing to abandon immigrants to torture camps, turn a blind eye to fascist armies gunning down American citizens in the streets, and overlook harassing trans people for sport. And even if they throw themselves on the mercy of the court, it's hard to want any of them back.

But we're also still stuck in the same damn country as them. They're here whether we welcome them back or not. And demonstrating a willingness to change one's mind now that there's so much riding on their obstinance should at least provide us with a flicker of hope.

This isn't a call to forgive our enemies or the people that wronged us. That's the other guy's thing. But we're all better served if we make it easier for people to change their minds. If the past decade has taught us anything, it's that American minds need a lot of change. And if we're standing in the way of that, we have to ask ourselves why.

Look, the main thing we learned about the Trump supporters in our lives might not be that they're bigots. In some instances it is, and I'm not asking anybody to overlook that. But in some instances what we learned is that they're easily led. Which means that, at least theoretically, we could lead them to something better.

Headlines

Joining me for headlines tonight are the Daryl and Daryl to my Larry, Heath Enwright and Eli Bosnick. Fellas, are you ready for a lard fight.

Yes.

Do the people who will get your bob newhart jokes GET podcasts on their victrola?

Well now I'm sad that Eli has deprived himself of the greatest series finale in the history of television, so while I recover, we'll pause for a word from this week's sponsor, Mint Mobile.

And now, back to the headlines.

In our lead story tonight, we have a proposed state law in Arizona to talk about — and I know we don't normally have an opening pun for the lead story, but Stormy suggested "In Don't Rain on my Charade news," and that's too good to just ignore. But yeah, the law in question is cloaked in the guise of protecting minority religions from bigots, but a quick look inside the trenchcoat yet again reveals three denominations of Christianity on each other's shoulders, trying to buy a ticket to the "oppressed minority" club.

What? Your saying christianity went looking for the oppressed and found itself again? Why thats only whats happened literally every single time

So yeah, so this is HB 4117 and it was originally introduced to deal with a rise in antisemitic bigots forcing their way into synagogues to denounce Israel. Or Jewish space lasers, or whatever. And if that's where it had stayed, we wouldn't be talking about it. But the first version, introduced by a Jewish lawmaker with firsthand experience with that issue, was written too ambiguously. So a Christian colleague helped her rewrite it into a monstrosity that would make it illegal to interfere with any religious *activity*, regardless of where that activity takes place.

I'd like to religiously interfere with this law existing and you can't interfere with me. Stupid magical impasse?...great...do your job.

Now, the bill's sponsors argue that this is necessary because antisemites might also interrupt, say, a religious celebration at a public park or a holiday event in some other location. But ... it's already illegal to harass people in public parks and shit. And — as numerous Arizona lawmakers have pointed out — protests in front of abortion clinics or outside dead soldiers' funerals could also be construed as "religious activity." And I'd go even further than that to say that literally any-goddamn-thing more than one Christian has ever done can be construed as "religious activity."

Yeah at this point in history 99% of the time a bad thing is happening its a religious acitivity

It's also worth noting that the law doesn't do a hell of a lot to limit what would be considered "interfering." Like, if I argue back at a street preacher, am I interfering with his religious practice? If I counterprotest the Westboro Baptist Church, am I interfering with their religious practice? If Heath and I dress as sexy squirrels and make out across the street from their Sunday school ... again ... are we interfering with their religious practice? Those are the kinds of questions you really need to answer before you start authorizing Christians to lock a motherfucker up for a year and a half over it.

These are NOT acorns...and I'm sincerely holding them in my mouth.

And you might think it odd that I'm leading off with a story about a house bill in Arizona that probably won't even pass. But we've learned over the last decade that any time new language is introduced anywhere in the country that would give Christians bonus-rights, the Alliance Defending Freedom isn't far behind. It may actually be that the major players in this fight really are trying to solve a real problem and not just enshrine ever more Christian privilege, but the theocrats are watching. And the only thing they love more than giving themselves extra immunities is pretending that the people who oppose them are antisemites. So look for this one coming soon to a state legislature near you.

AZ law goes too far to protect against religious harassment:

<https://azcapitoltimes.com/news/2026/06/10/critics-say-religious-service-protections-could-run-afoul-of-right-to-free-speech/>

And in “Pray the Bay Bay Away” news ... Podcast listener, when you talk about the harms of religion for a living, you get a lot of the same questions over and over again. What do you think happens when we die? How do YOU explain how the universe came to be? Why do you smell like that? Okay, I think that last one is more me than my cohosts, but you also hear about the good. What about the Christian soup kitchen? The Christian homeless shelters? The Christian...adoption agencies? And when you explain to them that those are just good things that add religious conditions to their goodness, they look at you funny...or maybe it's the smell...but that doesn't make me wrong. And we got further proof of that this week as Bethany Christian Services, the country's largest Protestant adoption and foster care agency, announced it will no longer allow LGBTQ couples to foster or adopt.

We're not hoarding orphans...we're only doing that SOMETIMES. You gotta balance the pros and cons of bigotry vs hoarding orphans.

As if we needed more good reasons to stop entrusting the orphans to religious organizations.

According to Religion News Service, in a press release posted on Wednesday, the Michigan-based agency announced that its board voted to “clarify and reinforce” its Christian faith commitments. Those changes require staff and board members to “personally agree and adhere to” a belief statement that includes the Apostles’ Creed, recognizes the authority of the Christian Bible, and affirms the image of God in every person. The belief statement also defines God’s design for marriage as “a covenant between one man and one woman.”

Is that the same god whose design includes children with no home?

I just wanna point out that refusing to give orphans to loving Muslim and atheist families is also disgusting.

Now you might be thinking, “Okay, Eli, that obviously sucks, but they’re called Bethany Christian Services. One might expect that they do...we totes magotes are Christian stuff. It doesn’t necessarily MEAN they’re bigots.” And first of all, pretty sure Matthew said something about staying in the closet with all that. But don’t worry—they clarified they ARE doing bigot stuff. In an email to RNS, a spokesperson confirmed that these changes will also impact the selection of foster and adoptive parents, saying, quote: “Beginning June 2027, Bethany will only license and re-license foster families whose Christian faith and beliefs align with our Statement of Faith and Belief.”

Just pause for a second and imagine the outrage if there was literally any organization anywhere in this country in charge of orphans that refused to adopt them to Christians.

So let's be clear for a moment about what that means. That means that, by their own admission, they might have children ready to go to loving homes and NOT send kids to those homes because they think what the two mommies do with their junk is icky. That's no longer a child welfare agency. That's a child harm agency. And both YouTube and iTunes would like me to INFER what should happen to those who harm children.

Don't worry, podcast listener...Eli's not deducing the risks of harming children for himself. He just doesn't know how to use IMPLY and INFER.

But he does know how to use a sock full of quarters, people who harm children. ...Okay, he doesn't and I would NEVER entrust Eli with something like a sock full of quarters. But you get the idea.

And to be clear, this is just the bigotry they're willing to admit to. Does this Christian pledge extend to conversion therapy and denying the identity of trans kids in their care? Not explicitly. But if a company has a "how to fuck the banana bread" policy in the bylaws, you can guess they're fucking the banana bread.

And if a company has "no fucking the banana bread" in the bylaws...they're DEFINITELY fucking the banana bread. If they mention anything adjacent to the concept of fucking the banana bread, they're doing it.

And if you're thinking "wait, didn't *Eli* just mention something adjacent to the concept of fucking the banana bread," you're starting to understand the dynamics of this show.

And if you're wondering why? Why now? Well, it's because they can get away with it. Quick reminder that Bethany only started working with LGBTQ people in 2021 when civil rights groups threatened to sue and cities stopped working with them. If that happened now, they are well aware that the only result would be a Supreme Court victory legally affirming their bigotry.

They actually might be "righteously hoarding orphans" as a test case. That might be part of a signal chat with Sam Alito.

And look, I point this out because in a couple of years, when it's our brief turn to have political power again, groups like these are gonna come slinking back to equality with their tails between their legs. "Oh, that wasn't US. That was the old CEO, and he retired last MONTH. We've changed." And as soon as they do, the people in your life will start asking you to think about the GOOD they do all over again.

The country's largest Protestant adoption agency is dropping LGBTQ couples — again:
<https://religionnews.com/2026/06/10/the-countrys-largest-protestant-adoption-agency-is-dropping-lgbtq-couples-again/>

<https://www.woodtv.com/news/grand-rapids/bethany-christian-services-tells-staff-foster-parents-to-sign-new-statement-of-faith/>

And in "OnlyKlans" news ... You might remember a story we covered last month about a real estate development in Arkansas that's trying to have a segregated community for white christian people. And they're being sued by a mixed-race family, because even in Arkansas...you're not allowed to do that. Mostly because Arkansas is part of the United States, and therefore it's governed by a variety of woke laws from the 1800s. Well...somebody's trying it out in Washington State this time. But they're removing any overt mention of skin color, so it's just a Christian Right millionaire taking over a town like an 80s movie villain...plus theocracy. And also definitely the racism thing, but more quietly.

Oh BAPTISTS you say...what...flavor...is your drink?

"Would you say you're more of a clap on 1 and 3 guy or..."

And a big thanks to Hemant Mehta for covering the story at The Friendly Atheist. So the battle ground for the creation of Theocracy-ville is a place called Battle Ground. And the Christian rich guy is Camden Spiller. So let's start with the most important detail...his physical appearance. He looks like a bridge troll with a podcast called MY RIDDLES THREE. And in every picture I found, he seems to be EXTREMELY proud of the riddle he just told.



Okay so podcast listener. He is trying a different version of the douche beard in EACH o the photos that heath has included in our notes and NONE of them have worked. Its impressive

It's also a montage of ever older photos that make it look like his face was run through a very slow audio compressor as he aged.

So Camden Spiller owns a company that's projected to make about a billion dollars in revenue this year, and the company started buying stuff all over Battle Ground. That went along with Spiller making creepy statements about establishing a christian town. So a local reporter named Erik Neumann noticed the strong odor of christian dominionism and did some investigating. And he found exactly what he was smelling. Lots of residents are unhappy with one rich guy buying all these properties, but many of them were afraid to speak on the record. Because running afoul of the 80s movie villain ends up getting people killed in Act 1 and Act 2. And here's one small example of the takeover from Neumann's reporting. Spiller bought a

building and opened a bakery that's "founded on Christian values." It's closed on Sundays...and when you order, you get a buzzer that shows a bible passage that says: "Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him."

So....no bagels then?

Well certainly no good ones.

Spiller also bought a bar on Main Street and now it's not a bar. And most importantly, he bought elections for his cronies. One of the managers at Spiller's company is the new mayor...the deputy mayor is married to another employee...and they just got a member of the crew on the school board as well. And of course they're building a big new church for a terrifying hate-pastor. That would be C.R. Wiley, who enjoys giving lectures with titles like "Building Culture in Hostile Territory." Wiley also hosts a podcast called "The Battle Ground Project", and recently talked about "governing unbelievers" and the project of "christian localism." That's their less aggressive-sounding term for christian dominionism, in which their god squad takes over all the spheres of influence. Well right after the report from Erik Neumann got published, those podcast episodes got mysteriously deleted for some reason.

Okay look this is bad...its also EXACTLY what I would plan to do when we start the cult of the scathing atheist so its nice to have a model at least right?

Yeah, I checked the map, and there's a smaller town called "Dollars Corner" right next to Battle Ground, and that sounds pretty secular. I say we take that one over and humiliate them at a bowling tournament or something.

One other detail: You will NOT be surprised to learn that C.R. Wiley — the new John Lithgow in Footloose...the pastor of Battle Ground — has connections to Doug Wilson. That's the guy who took over a town in Idaho, and he's also spreading his ultra-conservative congregation to places like Washington DC, where Pete Hegseth is a parishioner. When Wilson got interviewed earlier this year by CNN, he said: "I'd like to see the town be a Christian town. I'd like to see the state be a Christian state. I'd like to see the nation be a Christian nation. I'd like to see the world be a Christian world." Wilson also believes that women shouldn't be allowed to vote. He believes that sodomy is worse than slavery. He believes that abortion is tied with slavery in terms of evil. And he believes slavery was a net positive. The last thing actually moderates the first two positions, but that's...a crazy thought I just had. Anyway, THAT GUY is clearly connected to this thing in Battle Ground, and it's time for one battle ground after another. These people are terrifying, and they're knocking down teen centers to build christian teen centers. When we do our atheist dominionism plan, we're NOT gonna be cool about it.

A billion-dollar company is remaking a Washington town in Christianity's image:

<https://www.friendlyatheist.com/p/a-billion-dollar-company-is-remaking>

And in “Everything’s Bigot in Texas” news tonight, it’s gotten to where bigots of color just don’t have a political home any more in this country. And we were reminded of that by a long, sympathetic piece in *The Texas Tribune* that highlighted all the bigotry Muslims faced when they tried to attend the Texas GOP convention. And were told not just to leave the convention, but to leave the country.

Walking all sad through the rain...everybody huuuuuuuuurts. Sometiiiiime.

So yeah, so first of all a quick thanks to Danielle for sending this story to Scathing News at Gmail dot com. Danielle, for your vigilance, we shall ride with you when the time comes. Anyway, this piece follows around all the attendees at the GOP convention representing the Council on American Islamic Relations (or CAIR), which you’ll recall their state’s governor recently declared a terrorist organization. Because (and this is the actual logic) how can you be pro-Muslim and not be a terrorist? So to counteract this prejudice — or at least to help the Texas Tribune write about it — a few conservative Muslims attended as delegates.

Whats all this coming around business? We were told it would only GO around

And what's their whole deal with jewish people? I don't get Republicans. They're pro-judaism...sort of?...and also neo-nazis? I don't even know what direction they want us to hate stuff.

And look, normally I’m sympathetic to religious minorities being mistreated in this country. Which is a fucked up sentence to have to put a “but” after. But throughout this story, all the Muslims they talk to are like “Look, we *also* hate gay people and trans people and female autonomy! Can’t we be united in our division?” And when they’re told “you are evil and must not participate in society,” they don’t think to themselves, “Oh, I bet that’s how the people WE push to the margins of our culture feel.” They think “these assholes need to learn how to bigot better.”

I don't get it...we're SO conservative. They can fly us in, set up GOP sanctuary cities, we'll help em rig elections...what's the problem? Log Cabin Republicans?...any idea what the problem is?

Right and to be clear a bunch of cancelled atheists tried this exact same thing with the exact same result and we were equally joyful at their downfall. Its a happy jerks are sad thing. Not a muslim thing.

And look, obviously this is a “face eating leopards ate my face” story and we can kind of revel in that. But it’s worth reading the article just to see how blatant and unapologetic their anti-Islamic rhetoric has gotten. And I say that knowing full well how bad it already was. Kind of what I do for a living, and I was still shocked by some of it. In fact, opposition to Sharia law in Texas was one of the two main themes of their convention, despite the fact that literally not one single goddamn person anywhere on Earth is trying to promote Sharia law in Texas. The other main theme, in case you’re curious, was “unity.”

Muslims feel unwelcome in the bigot party:

<https://www.texastribune.org/2026/06/15/texas-republican-party-convention-muslims-sharia-law/>

And in “Hill of Beans” news ... From time to time we like to get a little retro here at Puzzle in a Thunderstorm. Noah will toss in the occasional reference to a bygone sitcom, Heath'll toss out some turn-of-the-century economic theory, and I remember when The Hill wasn't entirely right-wing propaganda. Well, MY memory becomes more distant by the second, and we got further proof of that this week as they put out a panic piece titled “Supreme Court should weigh government barriers to praying at home — yes, at home.”

The headline repeats the same word again...sounds legit. YOU HEARD ME...AT HOME.

Headline's like “I'll reread that for you.”

Right, here's how the article begins, quote: “Perhaps yours is one of the many families in our country that pauses to pray before plunging into a sumptuous dinner. Like your parents and grandparents, you choose to ‘say grace’ or ‘ask the blessing’ before meals. But have you ever considered asking your government's permission first? Neither did Daniel Grand, an Orthodox Jew who lives in University Heights, Ohio. A few years ago, he invited around 12 friends to join him in his home to pray. The number is important: Grand's faith requires him to pray three times a day with a ‘minyan’ of at least 10 Jewish men...Someone shared Grand's intention with the wrong somebody, and suddenly, he received a letter from the city directing him to ‘immediately cease and desist any and all’ uses of his home as a ‘place of religious assembly.’ If Grand wanted to pray with friends, he'd have to apply for a special-use permit, which the city requires for houses of worship in residential districts.”

Oh I see the problem...it's a rule about a thing.

“Oh, so just because I serve meals off a menu to the public for money with wait staff, suddenly my *private residence* is a restaurant!?”

So, a couple things about this. ONE: if you had a Fourth of July party three times a day, EVERY DAY, with 12 of your closest friends, it would be a dick move. And TWO: a building where a dozen people gather for religious services three times a day IS a house of worship. Hell, it's more of a house of worship than most churches.

Get a minyan going on zoom. You can even do it on Saturday if you trick the omniscient god of the universe by always leaving it on.

It continues, quote: “Grand wasn't looking to build a temple; he just wanted to pray. Still, trying to cooperate, he applied for the permit. City officials received letters of protest. ‘I do not want our neighborhood labeled as Jewish,’ one read. At a public zoning-commission hearing, Grand was

heckled by many and stonewalled by commission members. They directed him to return for a second hearing. Grand declined and quietly withdrew his application.”

Weird way of saying “didn’t show up,” but okay.

But there’s more, quote: “The kicker: Grand realized that a permit, even if approved, would require him to convert his home into an official synagogue — and zoning requirements forbade anyone residing in a commercial house of worship. It was a perfect Catch-22: Grand couldn’t pray in his home if he lived there, and he couldn’t live in his house if he prayed there.”

I had the same problem when I wanted my apartment to be a soccer stadium. Also, it's not a catch-22 when you CAN pray in your house. You just can't have a flash mob 3 times a day.

Yeah, this same writer did a piece on a mass shooting called “oh, so we’re not allowed to make loud noises anymore?”

Right, so here’s the lawsuit we’re all waiting for, quote: “Seeing the First Amendment violation here, Grand filed suit and asked the federal courts for help. But the courts told him he would have to wait until he finished the city’s permit application process — which is a little like telling a homeowner to wait until his house finishes burning down before calling the fire department.”

And if he wants to make his house into a fire department, that's another permit he has to get...WHILE HE'S ON FIRE. It's a catch-451.

Yeah, real catch 22 that you can’t sue somebody for denying you a permit until they deny you the permit. Railroaded, I say.

The article goes on to whine about how it’s not fair that Trump hasn’t gotten to ruin ALL the federal courts yet, so the lawsuit would have to go all the way to the Supreme Court to get justice. It concludes, quote: “When this many federal circuits cannot agree on when you can go to court, the case is ripe for Supreme Court review. God willing, the justices are willing to have a look. Unless they do, Grand — and many of us — may not have a prayer.”

If you don't have 10 friends for your magic spell, that's a you problem.

If only they could pray for success!

One last thing about this story: it was written by John Bursch, senior counsel and vice president of appellate advocacy at Alliance Defending Freedom, the registered hate group that is taking on this case. So in case you thought this one was unclear about who the bad guys are...it’s the one with the hate group.

The Hill pretends Jewish services are just hanging out for a pray with your bros:
<https://thehill.com/opinion/civil-rights/5921285-religious-assembly-permit-lawsuit/>

And finally tonight, in "Fun facts don't care about your feelings" news ... We have a very important story from *The Christian Post* about the rich history of their amazing religion. And they did very badly. The article is entitled: "This Week in Christian history — Touchdown Jesus destroyed, Howell Harris' born-again experience." There's gonna be a third one, but they couldn't fit that in the...website. They have a publication dedicated to Christianity, with over 2000 years of stuff to pull from, and they landed on a church that got shut down and reopened that one time, some guy becoming Christian in the 1700s, and a tragically stupid statue of Jesus on I-75 in Ohio that got destroyed during a thunderstorm. But then they rebuilt it.

If they didn't rebuild it by the third day it doesn't count.

Also this week in christian history is a TERRIBLE idea for a segment ya'll do NOT go down that road

Yeah... maybe a good segment for *us*.

So I'll start with the one that couldn't fit in the subtitle. During THIS WEEK in 1990, a church in Russia got reopened. That would be the Cathedral of St. Isaac in St. Petersburg. It was originally consecrated in 1858, and it was the BEST CHURCH IN THE CITY. Well...one of the good ones...for a little while. But following the Russian Revolution, the godless communists took over and made the cathedral into a museum. But then in 1987, a hero emerged. RONALD REAGAN. And he said: "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" And then two and a half years later, it got torn down. And on June 17th, 1990...the god of the universe was welcomed back into the building, thanks to some help from a B-actor in America and all the atheism that led to the failure of Soviet communism.

God's like an ADD kid with 11 pieces of homework spread over the kitchen table "IM GETTING TO IT"

Things sure have gone great for Russia since they let God back in, huh?

Next up, we have the born-again experience of Howell Harris. Yes, THE Howell Harris. For those of you who aren't paying attention, that's the legendary schoolmaster in Wales who got excited to become a christian in 1735. End of story. And that brings us to TOUCHDOWN JESUS. Quick side note about this title. There's a big mosaic mural at Notre Dame University called "Word of Life", and people call it "Touchdown Jesus" because the son of god is holding his arms out like a football referee signaling a touchdown. But that's not the Touchdown Jesus we're talking about. We're talking about a giant statue next to a church in Ohio. And there's a BLOOD FEUD about who gets to use the nickname.

Honestly we're only a couple hundred years from that being an ACTUAL blood feud so...progress

Well... couple hundred years from it *in the past*. No idea what the 2030s hold.

So the official title for the Touchdown Jesus in Ohio is "King of Kings." It was a 62-foot tall statue of Jesus next to a megachurch in Monroe that everyone can see from the highway. And Jesus has the same football touchdown arms. It was completed in 2004 and it cost about \$250,000 dollars to build. And it was insured with a value of \$500,000 dollars. Pin in that. The statue was constructed with mostly styrofoam over a metal frame, and covered with a thin skin of fiberglass. Not the best choice for the materials as it turns out. Because during THIS WEEK in 2010...taking out the pin...God hit Touchdown Jesus with a lightning bolt. As he is wont to do with very tall objects that contain metal. And when metal gets hit with 200 million volts of electricity, and it's touching a bunch of styrofoam, that often leads to a giant fire. And that's exactly what happened here. The fire ended up doing about \$700,000 dollars in damage between the statue itself and the church building.

When your a christian fireman and you pull up to a flaming styrofoam statue of jesus you probably don't feel AWESOME about your religion right? Not AWESOME

At least one of the firefighters pulled up and went "So... Islam maybe?"

So a church built a gaudy monstrosity that was a giant safety hazard and it got destroyed. Well naturally, it was time to rebuild it. Or in the words of *The Christian Post*: "Nevertheless, the church persisted, and in 2012 they finished construction on a new, over 60-foot-tall, full body statue of Jesus, known as the Lux Mundi, or 'Light of the World.'"

Get it? It's like when the brave women of congress stood up to our rapist president?

I just want you to stop and consider how fucking big that is. Sixty feet is a *bowling lane*. And it looks like if you pull the cord in the back the arms will clap.

And just in case *The Christian Post* needs some help for next year, I had an idea. On June 15th of 1520, Pope Leo X issued a papal bull condemning the 95 Theses, and it was basically putting out a hit on Martin Luther. And then the Holy Roman Emperor literally put out a hit on Martin Luther. Remember him? He's the guy who started your whole Protestant thing...which says "doing good stuff" isn't required for getting into heaven. Anyway, just a thought. And lemme know anytime if you need some more help with your newspaper.

This week in Christian history:

<https://www.christianpost.com/news/this-week-in-christian-history-touchdown-jesus-destroyed.html>

And with a new C segment idea on the white board, we'll wrap up the headlines for the night. Heath, Eli, thanks as always.

And when we come back, Ross Douthat will finally shut the fuck up.

GABooks

One of the coolest things about my job is that I often get advance readers copies of upcoming atheism books and then get paid to read them. But, as though to pay penance for that, another part of my job requires reading shit like Ross Douthat's *Believe: Why Everyone Should be Religious*, which we're finally gonna finish off in this installment of *God Awful Books*.

Optional Interjection

Optional Interjection

So at this point Ross has convinced himself that he's convinced his reader that Christianity is probably true. And now Ross assumes that we really wanna learn more about him as a person, so we close off with Chapter Eight: "A Case Study: Why I Am a Christian."

I was wondering SO many thing about ross at this point and NONE of them were why he's a christian

- "I'm a Christian, a practicing member of the Roman Catholic Church, a conservative by the world's standards" ← Sorry ladies, he's taken. <sploosh>
- He's (quote) "a bit weirder in some of my ideas about the cosmos compared to most of my secular friends" (end quote) — that's another way of saying "I'm actively wrong about how the universe works, despite knowing experts in that field."
- I'm friends with Ezra. He usually goes on trips with Cecil and Heath, but we're friends.
- But when they chose central jersey for their next spot we are gonna LIVE it up.
- "I'll start with my biography..." ← My cup runneth over.
- "I was born to upper-middle class Protestant parents in Connecticut." Queef-sploosh.
- He was raised Episcopalean, so what are the odds he'd wind up CATHOLIC of all things?
- He did his own research...heterodox thinker.
- Also I'd like to remind those of you who have been following along with us that ross already told us this part. He FORGOT we already got treated to I'm a white guy who somehow became LESS bearable
- But then his family joined one of those "all the way crazy" churches, so a kid he saw a lot of people have religious experiences. So either they're real or some adults lie. He lands on the former, to be clear.
- I was an "accidental pilgrim." And now I really love wearing lots of buckles. And those buckles?...that's GOD.

- He just admits up front that he started from the unevidenced assumption that religious experiences represented a real, supernatural phenomenon *even though he didn't experience one*.
- Maybe god just doesn't like me...like everyone else
- And as a 12-year-old "professor of religious studies", he approached it "analytically rather than mystically", and he landed on the god of the bible. Using science.
- I approached it with superstition and evidence. With careful carelessness. Giant shrimp.
- But naturally he wound up with Catholicism, what with them being the most logical.
- These other religions have WAY too few Not swinging smokey balls.
- There's a kind of "Catholics can be every bit as hip as those Charismatics" feel to this subchapter.
- Catholics actually rock pretty hard...but they keep it safe.
- It doesn't say how HARD you can wing those smokey things
- If you think about it, the fact that Catholics can't agree on even the most basic shit is evidence of how RIGHT they are.
- Or in the words of Ross Douthat, Catholicism is "sensible, balanced, and intuitively plausible."
- Yeah you know how somehow your looking at a nilla wafer and your gut says...this could be a guy
- And he mentions the "coherent responses" they had for questions in chapter 5. Because we all remember chapter 5. And then right after praising all the amazing coherence, he accidentally mentions a triune god that has a mysterious relationship with itself. And he has to do a smash cut in his book. He cuts to genocide, by the way...so he can change the subject.
- He refers to the crusades, the Inquisition, and the child rape cover up scandal as "entanglements that Catholicism has accumulated."
- There have been dalliances sure. Longing glances across the world stage with...hitler
- His counterargument to "but the Crusades though," seems to be "c'mooooooooooooon."
- And his counterargument to all the kid-fucking is the "but the Crusades though...lots of converts." He actually argues that pedophiles and cover-ups are bad...HOWEVER...Already stop. But he keeps going, and he says that Catholicism is a big deal for billions of people so...net net it's good. You gotta fuck some child eggs. I'm paraphrasing, but that's the actual argument.
- And catholicism is still big for the kids it molests. BIGGER even.
- He admits that he's never seen or experienced anything that would convince anyone who didn't come pre-convinced.
- "At least I'm not going wildly wrong." ...He said about his religion that he wrote a book about. He saw enough card tricks to feel medium good that Eli's *actually* a warlock. That's not WILDLY wrong.
- And then, five pages into the chapter he finally gets around to the pesky "is it true though" question.

- 189 pages into the book. Hold on lemme check something...are we sure my God impregnated a 12-year-old, torture-murdered his kid, and then the ghost of the kid photocopied himself onto a blanket, phased through the wall of a cave, and then resurrected 3 days later? Do I even WANT that to be true? Whatever it's true.
- He claims that throughout the book he's stressed an empirical approach to religion. But... no the fuck he hasn't. We've been constantly asked to set aside empiricism in the service of his claims.
- Before we discuss whether I'm lying lets suppose i'm not
- He could totally prove Catholicism if he wanted to, but this isn't a book about proving Catholicism.
- I'm not gonna prove all our stuff...you have to ask me first. I'll do all the best questions I got from my atheist shower doll that I argue with.
- That doll looks a LOT like Ezra Klein man. Does he know you have that?
- He thinks there are MANY miracles that prove Christianity. So many he can't even mention them. There wouldn't be room! For any of them!
- This must be that empirical approach to religion he told us so much about
- Catholicism is way better at fighting demons than other religions, so it's clearly the truest one.
- For example, Tucker Carlson is Episcopalian, and he got scratched by demons while he was sleeping next to his german shepherds. Catholic people would've easily blocked it with their carapace of righteousness.
- He says "I can't prove that Catholicism gets you more miracles than other religions" as though that's how far along we are. Dude, you can't prove anything gets any miracles at all.
 - Also, to be clear, if Catholicism had more miracles but non-Christian religions still had miracles, that would prove Catholicism wrong.
 - And to answer your question, Ezra Klein shower doll..."I do NOT have a complex regression analysis to prove that Christianity gets you more miracles." So many paragraphs in this book start with nobody nothing.
 - I see our sudsy bodies have intertwined again shower ezra....it seems we always end up here dont we...after our little spats?
- And at this point he's like "Christianity also gets ghosts, aliens, and other religion's miracle claims. Those all count on our tally."
 - You know how sometimes someone will believe something stupid so you try to find common ground on a stupid thing they DONT believe and they just double down? Ross is doing that...to himself.
- He casually tosses out "How do we know NDEs aren't demons tricking us into thinking that's what death is like?"
- Mostly tricking hindu people. The demons don't fuck with white christian people...you just don't do that.
- The argument from holy code-switching: "Catholic God pretends to be Hindu sometimes when he's hanging out with Hindus."
- HEY...Rohit...I was just holding my other arms behind my back...there they are...anyway you're alive again starting...now.

- Get back up to heaven...wait why did I do that whole thing just so rohit would go to hell? I am fucking MYSTERIOUS
- He was almost done with his book when Ezra told him about “perennialism.” He was just like “So you’re arguing for perennialism?” And Ross had to be like “totally know what that means. And no. I think.”
- Also kinda yes if that's helpful. I lost count on my conditioner time...stop bothering me.
- And then we get to his conclusion, which is literally just: “But in the end, I think I’m right.”
 - Actual quote: “but in the end I think that God has acted in history through Jesus of Nazareth in a way that differs from every other tradition and experience and revelation, and the Gospels should therefore exert a kind of general interpretive control over how we read all the other religious data” ← Which reduces to “my religion is different from all the other religions, so it’s the rightest.”
 - I think we all see the world through the lens of my religion don't we?
- He literally argues that Jesus and the gospels (quote) “seem God-touched to a degree unmatched by any of their rivals” (end quote).
- This is the final chapter of the book...the big finale...and he goes with "Jesus could totally beat up Gandalf and Muhammed Ali. They fought in different eras, and the game was different, but I'm taking JC on FanDuel."
- It turns out that the overwhelming majority of Biblical scholarship is wrong, because Ross... disagrees with it. No such thing as a “historical Jesus,” dammit.
- What I like about this section is that its obvious he wanted to close out this chapter with a big haymaker of historical evidence that his religion is true but then even HE couldn’t find the bullshit he was looking for so he’s wrapping up with...so its bullshit...who cares
- He’s like “Pretty convincing that the gospels seem to know all about the local geography and topography and culture of their time.” ← HOW COULD THEY NOT? Nobody’s arguing that the gospels *weren’t written*.
- If they’re fake how come they never say that israel was covered in snow?
- You ever notice that Gotham seems to have lots of correct details about New York City...BATMAN IS THE SON OF GOD.
- He’s like “They sure don’t feel like myths to me!” ← THEY’RE YOUR RELIGION THOUGH. They seem like myths to everybody else.
- EZRA ARE YOU TYPING INTO MY BOOK AGAIN?
- You're kinda sweaty, bud...maybe a quick shower?...and I wanna see what you have in your locker.
- Now he’s descended all the way to “Buddha didn’t come back from the dead!”
- He fucking did man. Its like a WHOLE thing in their religion
- He also claims that Christianization brought an awesome civilizing effect to the world, so he’s gone full Rudyard Kipling at this point.
- The white and delightful man’s burden
- And Ross closes out the section by arguing that Christianity is the best religion because the central figure lost the game SO HARD that it actually circles back around to winning, if you think about it. This is what the guy in the Denny’s parking lot says after losing the

fight. I shat myself and got a visible erection...as a LESSON...for YOU ALL. I shat for your sins.

- (quote) “[A]t the very least, [...] the origin of Christianity looms as a supreme fear of human religious creativity, [and] a bold leap in morality and philosophy and aesthetics.”
← At the very least, huh?
- I mean...technically a shit-death savior IS avant-garde.
- “Obviously some religion had to become the dominant one, but what are the odds that it would be the dominant one?”
- Your telling me the horse that won the race isn’t god? Listen to yourself
- “But if you start with the broad conclusions that this book urges on its readers — that the universe looks both made and made for us...” ← No worries about that eventuality, bro.
- But I'll play for fun. The universe is made for us. I still think the resurrection story is a Bill Brasky.
- He’s like “Some people might say I’m just comforting myself with delusions. But if that’s the case, why am I always so uncomfortable?”
- Propbaby your posture man you look AWFUL
- I think he's my favorite person to hate-watch or hate-listen. And last week, he interviewed the German billionaire who's doing all this work on human enhancement and co-founded the Steroid Olympics, Christian Angermayer. And the whole time, Angermayer is just pointing at different places on Ross Douthat's body, and describing a way to fix it.
- He seems to think “I’d rather my religion was different” is proof that it’s not just delusional comfort. As though the institutionality of it doesn’t even factor in.
- In conclusion...I hate this. I live in fear. You should do the same.

The End. We made it! Only took us a year and a half or so.

And Heath, since it was your *emphatic* suggestion, would you like to tell the listeners what’s up next in this Book Club from Hell?

Communion: Finding My Way Back to Faith — by JD Vance

Well I think I can speak for everybody who committed to reading along at home when I say “fuck.” But we’ll have to wait to get to that fuck until the next installment of *God Awful Books*.