

*Laughing at the Devil:
A Cult Survivor's Religious Discoveries*

By David O'Neil

Cover art by Tim Jacobus

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*Out of pain comes Anger
And from Anger, Action
Action precedes Understanding
and finally comes Peace.*

*Pain turns to Pleasure,
Hate to Love
and Life to Joy!*

About the cover

The instrument superimposed with Leonardo Da Vinci's Vitruvian Man is a representation of an astrolabe created by Erasmus Habermel in about 1585 AD. Astrolabes are scientific instruments created and used over the past millennium to solve astronomical problems. You may see Habermel's beautiful creation, and learn more about it and many others on the Museum of the History of Science, Oxford's Epact website, at <http://www.mhs.ox.ac.uk/epact>. The image has been incorporated with their kind permission.

An additional fact that many readers may be unaware of is that da Vinci based his drawing upon the writings of Vitruvius, a Roman architect of the first century BC. In those writings, Vitruvius drew a parallel between the proportions of the human body and the proportions of ancient temples, giving that sketch an additional relevancy to the topics within these pages.

This book is dedicated to all of our ancestors who created our wonderful myths and kept them alive through the ages, and especially Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, for fanning the embers of that mythological fire so vigorously that I had to pay attention.

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When I was six my mother took my sisters and me to a Catholic cult. We were kept there for three months and brainwashed.

The years were filled with many painful events after that experience in 1974. My parents divorced because of the cult's programming, and I was torn between my mother, my father, my maternal grandmother, and the cult. In those times I heard things said in the name of religion that, quite frankly, should never have been said. The church, my mom, and my grandmother told me that my father was the son of satan (I won't capitalize that word anymore, because I don't respect it enough to give it that type of power—needless to say, they meant Big "S"). And being merely six, I believed them, because I trusted and relied on Mom, and she said it.

But Dad was stubborn and intelligent, and his actions taught me that he was a good person. He worked hard to put food on the table while he made us go to different churches and broaden our religious perspective. He also sued the cult that had done so much damage. Over time, he earned my respect.

Those old, hateful programs were still in me, though, and their painfulness slowly made me realize that I had to do something to stop hurting. I started by organizing my beliefs on paper. As I discarded the beliefs that didn't make sense I began a great integration.

I realized I had many religious ideas floating around in me as my beliefs flowed onto paper. Some were of damnation, others were of forgiveness, and they were fighting each other. I dug further into the history of religion in order to understand this contradiction, and eventually found that it stems from the deep ties between religion and politics in ancient times. When I realized the connection between damnation, salvation, religion, and politics, my writings stopped being just for me, and became the beginnings of this book.

The first major draft of this work was completed in 1999, errors and all, and afterward people around me noticed I had changed. I was somehow calmer and more confident than I had been, although I was not a model of perfect calm or confidence.

That was a big step, because previously I had been mad and confused and...did I say *Mad*? I had been hurting deep inside from witnessing the hypocrisy in the world around me.

Many interesting items revealed by my religious inquiries have been included in these pages. Perhaps the most profound of these is my discovery of what the biblical story of Samson was recording. Some sources hinted that Samson was connected to astronomy and the planet Mars, and when I followed those leads I uncovered the astronomical observations our ancestors used to create their story. Once I did that, I knew ancient religion was the science of its day, and science and religion were originally intimately connected.

With that insight, I understood that religion and science do not have to fight each other as they currently do. If religion was originally science, and science was originally religion, why should they now be at odds with each other?

By the time I made this connection, I had finished college and studied science. When I understood the scientific basis of religion, and the results of science's continued investigations, I knew that we have deeper ties to God, Nature, Reality, or whatever you choose to call It, than I previously thought. Therefore we are more closely connected to God (or whatever you want to call It) than most of us believe.

I understood that to truly know God we must go inside as well as outside. The religion of my past wouldn't allow its followers to truly go inside, for then that religion could no longer control them from the outside.

Once I started going inside and listening to my intuition and heart, a great transformation began to occur, and my world started slowly improving. I found that things I once thought were bad were not quite as bad as I had

thought. My prior hatred started dying to a dull anger, and sometimes, when I was least expecting it, I would intuit the humanity underlying those I had previously despised. It was then that I began to see that they were not really as bad as I had imagined.

In other words, I matured, just like everyone else does in their own way.

A bigger result is that I have reconciled religion and science, and they no longer fight within me. Many argue that they are not mixable, yet you hold in your hands a text that brings these subjects together in a harmonious manner, and shows how they are related.

It is my hope and prayer that if you are in the shoes I once inhabited, this book will help you become calmer and more confident in yourself. I hope it helps you get through your turmoil more rapidly than I went through mine, and that the gulf between damnation and salvation closes itself more quickly for you. And if you aren't in those shoes, I hope you glean a little insight from this book to make your life a bit more interesting, and expand your awareness of the Great Is, which is All of Us, and much more.

With Love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David". The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent loop at the end of the word.

Picture a time when dragons flapped ominously in the air, and a powerful wizard in dark robes could be around the next corner. Remember being six and in the first grade, when the whole world was magical. Pick up the easel, deftly stroke my face into the picture, sit back, and get ready for the canvas to explode.

As she drove down the hill, she reflected again on the ruins of the past years. All of her hopes and dreams for her family seemed to be dying, and with them her soul. The house leaked every time it rained, and even though the rent was cheap, because the house belonged to Jerry's mother, they did not have any money saved.

Jerry never seemed to be home anymore, and it felt like they no longer communicated. He managed his family's lumberyard sixty hours a week and was also going to the local community college. He had been drinking more lately, and talking with Doug, the disabled policeman, about bomb shelters and the end of the world. It would be great if their relationship magically worked, but "magic" was a word she had very little use for these days.

Her mind wandered back to the time they had housed foster kids. That was a bad time. The kids brought trials and tension into the home. They had smoked, and sniffed anything they could to get high: gas, aerosol, shoe polish... They had even painted a mural with blacklight effects on their wall, in order to enhance their trips. It was a wonder they hadn't blown the house up. There were many battles of will, and somehow she had always ended up in the middle—the worst place to be.

She remembered Steve, the boarder the welfare office sent them after the foster kids moved out. Jerry had been out drinking one night, and Steve had gotten hold of some alcohol himself. Alcoholics and alcohol don't mix, and Steve had spent three hours in a drunken rage, screaming about 'Fuck'n whores and sluts,' throwing things about the living room, and pounding on the walls while she had locked herself upstairs with the kids. She shivered, remembering the fear and the feeling that Jerry had deserted her. Even if sheltering homeless people did make the world a better place, she was glad to have no more of it.

Maria, who was only three months old, was in the child seat next to her. Wendy, Laura, and Sara were in the back seat playing a rough and tumble game of Cowboys and Indians. Hollering at them calmed the war temporarily: the lull lasted long enough to arrive at the school without hitting anything. There he is, she thought, as she located her son, David, playing in the field. There is something special about children—all that energy and enthusiasm for life, coupled with a beautiful innocence. She felt as if her innocence had been drained from her, and she was jealous.

She tapped on the horn to capture David's attention. He turned, recognized the station wagon, and was on his way in a mad dash. As he got in, she again went over in her mind the short list of items she had piled in the back of the car. There were a couple of changes of clothes for herself and each of the kids, and some chips and sandwiches for the road if anyone got hungry.

She thought about her decision to flee one more time as she pulled away from the curb, and pictured Jerry's reaction when he got home to a quiet house, without even a note telling him where they were. Her arms tingled from the mixture of anxiety and fright, but she knew that flight was the only option.

When we passed our house and continued westward, I asked my mom where we were heading. "Don't worry," she responded. "We are going to see Grandma in Coeur d'Alene, and we should be there before bedtime."

We were soon beyond any landmark I recognized. The further we went, the greater my excitement became, and

soon the window was putting a chill on my nose as I anxiously pressed against it. The trees were wrapped in their January snow blankets, and appeared gray and forbidding under the bleak sky.

We continued threading our way between ominous mountains, to what I was certain was the end of the world. This was the first time that I consciously remembered being outside the valley of my home, and I knew that we would reach the end of reality at any time. *Will we die?*, I asked myself.

The snowflakes shimmered with magic, and seemed to say, “You’re not going to die, little one. You’re too important for that. See? The world continues farther than you can possibly imagine.” They became ordinary snowflakes again, and the hum of the tires eventually pulled me away from my wide-eyed appraisal of the surroundings. *It feels nice to live*, I silently yawned to myself.

The sun was putting its head down early, and by the time we arrived in Coeur d’Alene most of us kids were napping. There was a mass revival when we pulled up at the A&W, though. A quick burger and we continued our journey for the remaining few miles to our new home, the Villa Maria.

Lights, faces, and happy smiles! Bubbling enthusiasm burst upon us from the dozen girls who were boarding at the Villa. My maternal grandmother was there, and so were my aunts; Sister Jessica and Sister Bernadette. Funny names for people who weren’t my sisters. “They have grown so much.” “It’s hard to believe that just last year they were only so big.” “Aren’t they adorable...” Everyone could tell that we were tired, so the banter quickly subsided. Soon we were kneeling and praying a rosary and saying night prayers. I yawned my way through the last “Amen.”

Grandma found one of my grandfather’s tee shirts for me to sleep in, and my sisters got some nightgowns from the girls. Everybody laughed because the tee shirt went down to my shins. Then we were up the stairs to our new quarters. I hardly noticed anything before I was asleep.

The next morning I did, as I almost knocked myself out on the bedroom’s slanting wall. The room was just big enough to put our luggage in a corner, and to lay out our sleeping bags. The slanting wall made the room seem crowded. Later, I would think it had an air of mystery: were there panels hidden in it that led to foreign worlds?

We got dressed and went downstairs. Grandma was already up and cooking breakfast. Sr. Bernadette led the rest of us in morning prayers. After fifteen minutes I started to think there were a lot of saints to pray to. A few more Hail Mary’s and we finally finished. Everybody washed up and went to the table. It took way too long to say Grace, but eventually we dug in. Mmmmm, delicious!

For the first few weeks my daily routine included helping Grandma with the dishes and cleaning. Around ten in the morning we prayed a rosary. Afterwards we could play with the boarders who weren’t taking vows of silence, and sometimes we would go to the city park. The Angelus, a short prayer consisting of three Hail Mary’s, was prayed at noon and six o’clock. In addition, there was often an evening mass at seven, before the regular evening prayers and bed around nine.

The schedule shifted many times. After two weeks, Mom and Grandma decided that I was ready to go back to school, so at eight o’clock in the morning the three of us walked four blocks to the house where first grade was taught. There were boys my age, but I never made any friends because of my nervousness at being a newcomer, as well as the fact that I didn’t stay at this school very long. I also don’t recall the school having any time set aside for playing with the other children—it seemed that we were always studying, praying, or eating lunch.

A couple of weeks later our morning walk took us to a shop that sold religious items: rosaries, statues, bibles, and other stuff. The shop was also a bus stop. I was changing schools.

Mom pointed me toward the door to the bus when it arrived, but instead of going, I clung to her arm, bawled, and stomped my feet. I wanted my mom, and I didn’t care who knew it.

I got my way that morning and skipped school. Something in me changed, though, and that first morning at the bus stop stands out to me as my last real childhood memory. Oddly enough, that tantrum is the only one I consciously recall throwing in my life, although I am certain I had my share before that.

Life went on, and the next day I got on the bus. I didn’t enjoy the new location any more than I had the previous one. Still no friends, and I was lonely.

One morning as I was getting on the bus, they decided I was smart enough to be a second grader. Their instructions were simple: “Get off at the second grade. Follow Kent.” The bus made several stops before Kent got off. Kent and I entered a dimly lit room filled with kneeling children. I did not like the room, and I did not want to start praying that early because that meant I might have to pray all day. Somehow, I was soon back in the first grade.

School changed places again. This time it was located in the basement of a parishioner’s house in the hills out-

side Coeur d'Alene. Two of my sisters came to this location with me, because the other half of the basement was used as a kindergarten and preschool.

I learned much more at this school than at the previous ones. One lesson was that if a kid in class steals something, and nobody tells who stole it, everybody gets spanked hard with a paddle.

Another piece of knowledge that was beaten into me with that paddle is that school and extracurricular activities were intimately intertwined. The church made me go to 'cell meetings.' At these, a group of boys and girls about my age got together and discussed religion, and how we understood our relationship to God. (Cell meetings are for adults in most religions.) At one of these events I was told to draw a picture of Jesus and Joseph for the next meeting. I never made the drawing, and never had another cell meeting, but over a week later they asked for the picture in class. As a result, I met 'the enforcer' for the second time.

I also learned that if you need to pee during a prayer, they won't let you. If you pee in your pants during the same prayer, you get lots of attention, and they will even get your mother to bring you dry clothes. They will also tell you that you can interrupt future prayers if necessary. Their words didn't make up for the humiliation I felt as Mom left.

Looking back, I see how intimidated I had become because of all the changes that had occurred. I avoided raising my hand to give answers, and always waited until the last minute to go to the bathroom.

I got over that embarrassment, but the swift cycle of change continued. A few weeks later my sisters and I got off the bus to enter school, and a church lady and a priest were waiting for us. The priest told us to go with the lady, so we got in her car and she drove to another church member's house. My mother, Sara, and Maria were already there. We did not go to their schools any more after that.

The reason for the unexpected move was that Dad had found out where we were and insisted upon seeing us. Somebody thought Dad was going to steal us from the schoolyard, so they decided to hide us.

Our stay at the Kosh's was good for me because it allowed me to just be a child for a brief time.

The small things a person remembers are interesting. One of my brightest memories at the Kosh's was brushing with Pepsodent. I never had Pepsodent before, because Dad never let us buy it. I had seen ads for it on TV, and being impressionable at that young age, I wanted to try the "sparkly, minty freshness" of it. It tasted tingly and minty, and I liked it.

Some other neat things happened at the Kosh's. I learned how to spray myself with cow's milk right out of the teat. After that they never let me milk a cow again! Wendy learned how to ride Mr. Kosh's home-built bicycle, which was like those old bikes with the huge front tires. I don't believe my other two sisters had any fun there. Part of me seems to remember them getting in trouble, but I can't recall why. Mom was involved with cell meetings, and these were definitely the type where kids were not to be heard if they were seen.

After being at the Kosh's about three weeks, the Universe decided it was time for another major change: our dog Trampus ran away. The neighbors found him, and because he had tags, they called the veterinarian's number on it, who in turn called my paternal grandmother in Kalispell, who was worried sick over our disappearance. She quickly relayed the message to Dad, and that is how he discovered our approximate location. He started searching where Trampus was picked up and he got lucky.

For some reason the church sent us back to the Villa after he found us. Maybe Mom and the church figured that Dad had used his satanic powers to track us down, and we wouldn't be safe anywhere in the world.

Even though it sounds unbelievable, my statement stems from the truth. I remember being told several times by Mom and other church members that Dad's power came from the devil, and even that he was the son of the devil. Dad recalls that their church bulletin also stated he was the son of the devil on at least one occasion.

Going back to the Villa was the beginning of the end. Dad again knew where we were, and insistently tried to make the relationship work. The church made sure that it wouldn't.

According to the church, the marriage wasn't valid because the church did not approve it. In their eyes, they had the only lineage to the last true pope prior to Vatican II, and were therefore the only real church remaining in the world. They believed that all popes since then were false popes, and were controlled by the devil.

The church told Dad that he would have to join them in order for the marriage to be valid. In order to do so, he would have to accept all of their beliefs. At the same time, they told Mom that she and Dad could live as brother and sister, in order to take care of us. Dad refused to accept everything they professed, partly because their teachings were contradictory. He remembers that the study guide they gave him said that they believed the Pope was the head of the Church, but when they talked to him, they said that the Pope was no longer their leader. As a result of his refusal, he was unable to join, and his visits with Mom were chaperoned.

We usually went to the city park during these visits. My sisters and I got to slide on the helical slide and bounce on the horses with big springs under them, and spin around on the merry-go-round.

In my memory of these events, we did not have a lot of fun. The church had us convinced that Dad was con-

trolled by the devil, and his presence scared us. We avoided him, and answered his questions noncommittally, and told him we were praying for his soul to be saved.

When I asked him about his recollection of our park trips, he didn't remember us stating we were praying for him. He recalls pushing the merry-go-round for us, and he thought that everything was OK in his relationship with us children. He was rather preoccupied at the time, though, as he was trying to understand my mother and grandmother's points of view. They weren't making sense to him, and he couldn't figure out what it would take to have Mom move back in with him.

I am the oldest child in our family, and when I asked my next younger sister, who was almost six at the time, about these trips, she recalled being scared of Dad. She didn't remember having a lot of fun on these outings.

My Dad's, my sister's, and my own recollections of these park visits are interesting to me because they tell me two things. The first of these is that my memories of telling Dad we were praying for him were probably false memories that my mind inserted after everything else we went through. The second point is that my sister's agreement about being scared of Dad indicates that we probably did avoid him at that time, and Dad was too preoccupied to notice.

As time went on, Dad's relationship with the church worsened. The church continued trying to recruit him and telling him he could join if he would just accept their beliefs, and he continued to be unable to accept the hypocrisy of their teachings. He eventually staked out the Villa single-handedly, so they wouldn't hide us again, and he started getting very little sleep.

One morning at breakfast he knocked on the front door of the Villa. A nun peered through the curtains, and saw that it was Dad. He hadn't seen her, so she quietly hissed to everyone that it was him.

An air of silent pandemonium took over, and my mom, my sisters, and I were rushed to the basement.

After Dad had been knocking for a couple minutes, someone eventually opened the door, and told him that we weren't there. He was furious, and we heard him through the floor, demanding to see us. It was surprising that he couldn't hear our stifled cries below him.

A week later we decided to go to a potluck supper. It was for a St. Patrick's Day celebration. Grandma, Mom, and us kids were walking the few blocks to the building it was in, and when we were halfway there we saw Dad behind us. "Come on, Pewee, Please! Let's talk this over. I love you, and we can make this work," he begged. Mom shrugged him off, and kept walking forward, while trying to keep us close to her. As she caught my sister Wendy's hand, my father reached the end of his patience. The constant surveillance to make sure that we weren't pirated away, the chaperoned visits that were efforts in futility, and having to take the church's hypocrisy made him desperate. He grabbed Wendy's other hand, started pulling, and won.

Interestingly, this is another place where memories do not entirely mesh. My sister and I both recall her being yanked by my mother and father, who each had one of her arms. My father simply remembers picking her up.

After he got Wendy, he followed us into the potluck building. He didn't stop in the building, though—he kept walking right out the back door. Mom followed him and tried to stop him, but she was too slow. He got in his car, and by the time she caught him, he was starting to pull away.

We were all in shock. Mom was yelling at Dad as he left, and the rest of us were crying. Everything happened so fast that none of the priests and parishioners in the gathering had time to do anything.

For some reason, they just took us back to the Villa and conducted an experiment in power praying with us. It didn't do any good because a week later Dad showed up with a bunch of cops about six o'clock in the evening. They surrounded the house, and took my sisters and me.

And that is the way our childhood ended.

We stayed at an attorney's house in Coeur d'Alene that night, and went to Kalispell the following day. About a month later, Dad went back and persuaded Mom to return to Montana with us. Before she would, she insisted on getting permission from Bishop Schuckardt, who told her it would be a sin to act as Dad's wife, and that she must maintain a "brother/sister" relationship with Dad.

It was a miserable experiment, and they always fought. A large source of the friction came from Mom's insistence on praying with us. She often locked us kids in the bathroom with her, so we could say a rosary or a novena. We didn't have regular locks—a table knife jammed in the door trim sufficed. (The bathroom was one of the few rooms with strong enough moldings to do this.) Dad always found out we were praying in there, and would pound away on the other side. As a testimony to either the strength of our molding or the cheapness of our utensils, I remember a couple of broken knives.

After three years of battle, Dad gave up waiting for Mom to reach an agreement on how to live together. During those years he had been working on the divorce with the attorney whose house we had stayed in, and it was

finally approved by the courts. (He initiated the divorce proceedings after he got Wendy, because the Idaho courts said there was no way for him to force Mom and the church to let him see us without divorce proceedings underway. It was after he did so that the police surrounded the Villa.) The Idaho court almost didn't allow the divorce because Mom and Dad were living in the same house.

Mom got custody of us every other weekend, and Dad was our guardian the rest of the time. Even though Dad had a court order that was supposed to prevent Mom from indoctrinating us or taking us out of state, she often took us to churches in Idaho, and, when the church moved to Spokane, Washington, she took us there, as well. She even took us to sites within Montana, including historic mission churches that the church somehow temporarily obtained for their use. (The church and its priests knew about Dad's court order.)

In the summers, a group of priests and nuns was often sent to my grandmother's farm outside of town. They claimed it was a retreat, but their visit was used to keep Mom and us indoctrinated, as well as to preach to their extended congregation in the area, and find new followers.

My sisters and I got scapulars and medallions of the saints at these gatherings, to wear under our shirts. These items were supposed to keep us from sinning when we got back to Dad's house. The priests, nuns, my mother, and my grandmother also told us that if we died with them on, we went straight to heaven. In addition, they said that the mere presence of these items around Dad might miraculously convert him. Of course, he did not take it too well when he found the religious paraphernalia on us. He started refusing to let Mom have us on her weekends, and more fights broke out between them.

These visits by the church continued over about the next four years. I changed during that time.

When Dad first got us back, I believed the church was right and that he was the son of the devil. But by the time of the divorce I wasn't so sure. As part of the divorce proceedings, the judge asked each of us children who we wanted to stay with. I felt guilty when I responded, "Dad." It felt like I had accepted a bribe, because Dad had been giving us candy prior to the court proceedings, and I only said I wanted to live with him in order to get more.

Even without being bribed, I was slowly starting to realize that the church's programs did not work for me. Maybe this was due to Dad's deprogramming methods—including forcing us to go to Presbyterian church services. I was the stubborn one, and refused to go, so he pinched my ear, twisted it, and dragged me half a block towards the church, at which point I had enough pain and crying, and obediently walked the other half a block. (Yes, it was only a block away from where we lived.)

Maybe another reason the church's programs were losing their hold on me was the fact that Mom's programming couldn't keep up. She had to concentrate more and more on making enough money to live, and our weekends together were not enough reinforcement to keep us indoctrinated. Or maybe it was the fact that at school I was among kids my own age, and I was learning about life for myself.

When I was in the eighth grade, I knew for certain that I could no longer believe the church's beliefs. This was not a comforting thought, though, because Grandma was still pressuring me to remain part of the church. She had always wanted me to become a priest; so much so that her nickname for me was "my little priest." I got to the point where I was unable to look Grandma in the eyes when she called me that nickname. I couldn't take it anymore. I wanted to be free from the pressures and the lies, so I did the hardest thing I have ever done: I told the truth.

The safety of the telephone allowed me to tell Grandma that I no longer wanted to be her priest. Even with that safety, my palms sweated, my heart rate rose, and my throat became dry. My effort accomplished nothing, as she refused to believe me. "Your father is making you say this. I know you. You are God's chosen one. Tell your Dad that he is going to burn in hell!"

The next week she used her favorite nickname again, and pushed me to my limit. Once again I lacked the nerve to tell her face-to-face, and used the phone. Once again, my palms sweated, my throat became dry, and my heart rate rose.

"Grandma, I can't take it anymore. I have to say something, and don't know how to say it. Dad is not forcing me to say anything. In fact he isn't even here! Grandma, I do not believe in your religion anymore."

"Oh David, you don't mean that. I know your father is forcing you to say this. He is on another line listening, isn't he?"

"No, he isn't listening. I don't want to be a part of your religion anymore!"

"Oh David, you are just saying that."

"No, I'm not. I love you, but I can't go on like this. I don't want to be your 'little priest,' or a priest, period! And I don't want to be part of the religion."

"If you loved me, you wouldn't be saying this."

"I do love you, but I can't be part of the religion anymore."

My hands were shaking. Oddly, I started crying. Maybe it wasn't so odd, as she started crying, too. It took twenty-five minutes to convince her. And then it was over. No more chocolate chip cookies. No more prayers. It felt like there was no more Grandma, and for many years I did not see much of her, or go out of my way to call her. Avoidance was my policy.

So I was free to start living my life however I wanted. I finished high school, went to college, and took mechanical engineering. I moved to Dallas and worked. And during this process I started healing my internal wounds.

One of my most powerful healing experiences occurred in college. I had been acting cold and aloof to my girlfriend for a week. She got tired of it, and came over to discuss my actions with me. I could not tell her why I was being so standoffish, because I did not know, but as we talked, something snapped inside me. An old, forgotten memory came up, and I started shaking. I remembered that Mom was trying to pick us up for her visitation one Friday, and Dad was convinced she was going to take us to Idaho again. He refused to let her have us, and hell broke loose.

Dad was only one hundred and sixty-five pounds, but he may as well have been a mountain to a child of forty-five pounds. Mom screamed. Dad screamed back. Then something terrible happened: Dad struck Mom. He started pushing her. Rage flowed through me, and I wrapped my arms and legs around his leg, trying to bring him down. I wanted to kill him. Wendy was on the other leg with the same goal. It didn't work. Mom was thrown out the back door, and landed on the concrete porch. Dad somehow calmed us down, and I forgot about the hatred.

When I remembered that, I also remembered how Mom, Dad, Grandma, and the priests pressured me to stay on their sides. My logical mind understood it also, and I hated them all for a while. It was a good hate, as I also understood them and loved them and pitied them, if that makes sense. I understood that they were only doing the best they were capable of with what they believed. Each of them honestly thought they were making the world a better place.

My girlfriend sat on my bed as I knelt on the floor telling her this, my head buried in her lap, heaving great sobs. The wave of tears lasted forty-five minutes.

I invite you to [continue reading](#), and see the deep ties between science and religion that my childhood experience led me to discover. The upcoming chapters shine a fresh light on the events of the past ten-thousand years, and contain the answers I found for questions such as, "Was Christianity influenced by Paganism?," and, "Is the story of Jesus a literal account of the events that occurred two-thousand years ago?" Maybe you will find the answers to some of your own questions within the pages of *Laughing at the Devil*.