

Bad Atheist

*Written by Max Vale, Phillips Academy Andover Panel Member
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My family was never that religious. We went to church on a few Sundays here and there when I was younger, but that stopped when my little sister was born. We celebrated and continued to celebrate Christmas, but always try to emphasize that we celebrate the non-religious version of the holiday (i.e. purchasing gifts for friends and family and receiving some in return, rather than celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ). Though I attended a Catholic preschool, the notion of God never truly entered my young mind. So, when I was told at a young age that I would have religious freedom in my family, I chose to continue on my path of no religion.

This continued for years. I seldom went to religious services, as I didn't really see the point in praying to someone I believed wasn't there to hear us. "Why should I believe?" I thought. "Science explains pretty much everything." Every time someone asked me what my beliefs were, I would respond with the simple phrase, "I'm not religious". I thought that if I told others I had no religion, it would make people less mad than saying, "I'm an Atheist," as Atheism is defined as the belief that there is no God.

However, my non-religious journey was cut short this year when I listened to Chance the Rapper's most recent album, "Coloring Book", for the first time. The album is filled with many different songs confirming his religious beliefs. However, one song specifically, Finish Line / Drown, catalyzed my new way of thinking. In the first half of the song, Finish Line, Chance the Rapper sings about approaching Heaven, or the Finish Line, after a life of dedication to God. In the chorus, T-Pain sings, "All my days, I prayed and prayed, and I see the finish line. I'm gonna finish mine." But, the other half of the song, Drown, had a much more profound impact on me than any other part of the song. In this half, Noname highlights her relationship with God through a rap verse that rivals those of the esteemed Kendrick Lamar. The verse opens with her stating "Lord rain down on me so I can move on water like children at the altar like God inside my house" as she takes the listener on a journey through Christ. She ends with stating "And all that was left was his love". The song's catchy background music and alluring voices, as well as well-written lyrics in both halves, make it an easy song to sing along to.

After listening to the song many times and analyzing the words being said, I felt strange; I felt something I had never felt before. After singing along to Finish Line / Drown multiple times, I realized that I started to believe the words that were coming out of my mouth. It makes sense as to why I began to think this way. Once you start singing the lyrics "I know my God, seen His grace and His edges," multiple times a day, you start to believe what you say.

I felt as if this song, specifically, caused my thinking to shift from non-religious to religious. I was confused as to what this meant for my faith. Could this song have been my individual epiphany? Did it confirm my beliefs that I had been questioning for years? Should I consider

myself a “born-again Christian” and start going to Church regularly? Should I ignore this possibly life-changing course of events and continue on the non-religious path that I have been traveling for years? I was even confused as to what it meant for me as a person. If this part of my identity could be so easily altered, what other aspects could be changed with a catchy tune?

I chose to not act upon it, but also to not ignore it. I don’t want to put all of my faith in something that I can’t prove is there, but part of me wants to believe. So, I settled with being a believing non-believer. A faithful pagan. A bad atheist.

“@noname Verse on finish line almost made me Christian” – Mick (@_Mithki)