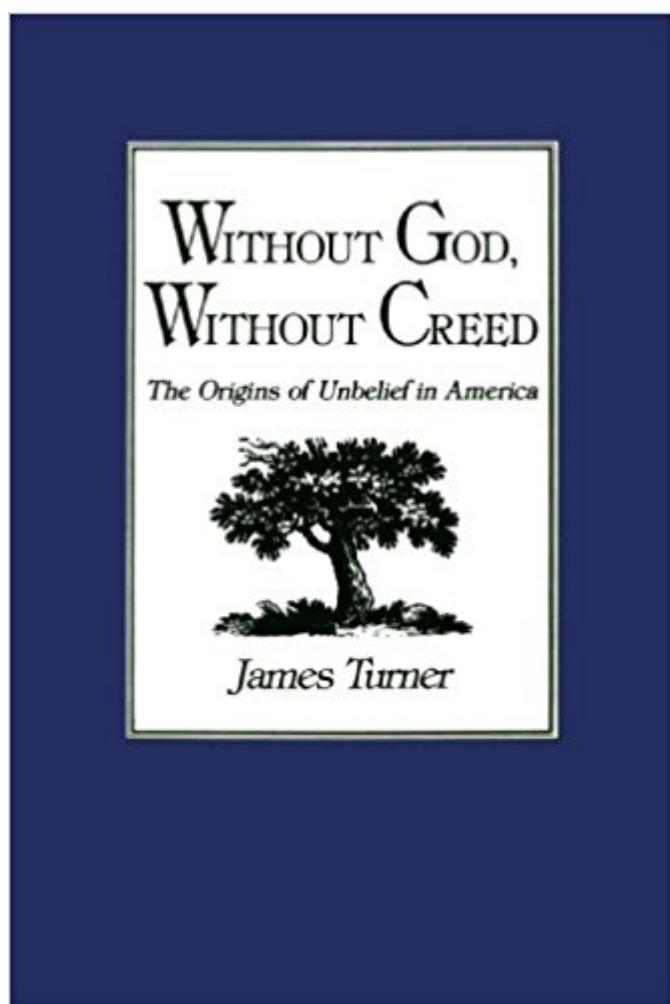


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# Without God, Without Creed: The Origins Of Unbelief In America (New Studies In American Intellectual And Cultural History)



## Synopsis

Until the 19th century, atheism and agnosticism were viewed as bizarre aberrations. But atheism emerged as a viable alternative to other ideologies. How and why it became possible is the subject of this cultural revolution.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Turner's treatment of the nineteenth century is excellent and often brilliantly perceptive." (Robert Nisbet The New York Times Book Review)"A crafted, intelligent book. The prose is remarkably clear, as is the argument. Turner offers us intellectual history in something like the grand manner." (David D. Hall Reviews in American History)

James Turner is the Cavanaugh Professor of Humanities at the University of Notre Dame and the director of the Erasmus Institute. His books include *Without God, Without Creed* and *Reckoning with the Beast* also available from Johns Hopkins.

"Religion caused unbelief in trying to adapt their religious beliefs to socioeconomic change, to new moral challenges, to novel problems of knowledge, to the tightening standards of society, the defenders of God slowly strangled him. If anyone is to be arraigned for decide, it is not Charles Darwin but his adversary Bishop Samuel Wilberforce."Turner provides compelling story to support this opinion.Part One: Modern Belief, 1500 - 18651. A New Age2. Enlightenment and Belief, 1690 -

17903. A God of Mind and Heart, 1790 - 18504. Belief and Social Change5. Christianity ConfusedPart Two: Modern Unbelief, 1865 - 18906. The Intellectual Crisis of Belief7. The Immorality of Belief8. A More Excellent Way9. Sanctity Without GodlinessTurner presents his theme in the preface. "Religion caused unbelief in trying to adapt their religious beliefs to socioeconomic change, to new moral challenges, to novel problems of knowledge, to the tightening standards of society, the defenders of God slowly strangled him. If anyone is to be arraigned for decide, it is not Charles Darwin but his adversary Bishop Samuel Wilberforce." (xiii)The balance of the work starts with the end of the Middle Ages and moves forward to the nineteenth century to present a basis for this idea.Mentions when Pascal "on the night of 23 November 1654, gave up the God of the philosophers for the God of Abraham and Isaac, he personified the key religious problem of his age." (28)This choice of between the Scientific God and the Biblical God creates tension that did not exist earlier. This book narrates a description of the outworking that is still with us.Turner includes an Epilogue. "Thinking about God had moved away from the nonhuman and transcendent, toward the human and worldly. And it is this new posture toward God, the growing worldliness of belief, that crop up more often than anything else when one tries to explain unbelief." (266)He thinks that by shrinking God to fit human minds, he became too small to inspire belief.He concludes with two lessons. "Those who wish to believe in God ought to realize that, if belief is to remain plausible over the long haul, they cannot regard God as if human, sharing human interests and purposes, accessible to human comprehension. And both believers and unbelievers ought to keep in mind that no one way of knowing reality is the last, best form of human knowledge." (269)Science is now facing this problem of the loss of certainty. Think quantum physics, Goedel, noneuclidian geometry.The last sentence: "Yet perhaps, after all, there is really only one lesson here. The universe is not tailored to our measurements. Forgetting that, many believers lost their God. So may we all run into trouble." (269)Humility is painful.Over five hundred footnotes, ten page index, no photographs. Writing for scholars or academics, nevertheless accessible to the general reader. This is history of ideas, not argument in favor of one side - belief or unbelief. Changed my opinion. Fascinating and compelling. Plan to reread in years to come.

"Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America" was recommended to me by the late Charles Colson while mentoring under him at Breakpoints-The Centurion Program. I will forever be grateful as the book is truly a history of why and where we have gone wrong. Early on in the book James Turner points out; "With the church disunited and each sect denouncing the others, might not skeptics begin to doubt the validity of any belief whatsoever?" I left a church for just this

reason. I love authors that take on the big picture and deal with the core issues up front and personal. James Turner is a professor of history and it shows in this fascinating and educational read.

If you want a concise and well put together articulation of how atheism and agnosticism developed as acceptable world views, then you must read this book.

It's unfortunate that the history of modern atheism and naturalism and its developments over time have been so understudied by historians. This book, however, is a great start to what I hope is a bright future for that area of historical study. Turner masterfully discusses the cultural, religious, philosophical, and economic factors that developed in America after (and often as a result of) the Enlightenment and which led directly to the "coming of age" of unbelief as a viable option in modern America. He also, importantly, reports on the reactions of Christians to these changing socioeconomic factors and how these reactions often led to further unbelief. Very importantly, for a topic like this, which is still developing historically even as historians begin to examine its roots, I put down this book unable, in spite of my best attempts, to decipher whether the author was a "believer" or an "unbeliever" -- a true testimony to good, impartial, unbiased, and thorough historical research.

This book is excellently written and very illuminating on the subject of how it came to be possible that a person could say 'I don't believe in God.' Turner takes the reader through history from the Renaissance to the mid-19th century to show the progress of unbelief. Interestingly, his thesis, which is very well argued, is that it was the Church herself who let in the demons of unbelief, which usually came in the form of scientific discovery. In brief, the Church shot herself in the foot. This is not a tract against the Church, though. It is very clearly written to show how those events and beliefs which undermined the legitimacy of the Church were not necessarily bad; it was the Church who made them so. For example, scientific discovery in itself was not bad, but the Church before the scientific revolution had based its legitimacy so strongly on the literal account of Creation, for example, that when there was doubt thrown on that theory, everything began to crumble. Turner is pretty much done with his story by the mid 1800s, before Darwin's *Origin of Species* was published. Contrary to popular imagination, Darwin's theory was not particularly groundbreaking in the case for atheism; the groundwork had already been set. This book is not difficult to read at all, yet it tackles some tough subject material. Highly recommended for readers of all scientific and religious backgrounds.

Had to read this for a class at a Christian college, and it was probably the best book of the semester. It was very informative and fun to read. I finished the book with a much greater understanding not only of the history of atheism and agnosticism, but with Christianity, science, and the Western world. Highly recommend this book.

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