

# *How to be a Puritan Atheist*

Alec Ryrie

John Earle (c.  
1600-1665),  
poet, satirist  
and bishop of  
Salisbury



‘A sceptick in Religion.’

‘He would be wholly a Christian, but that he is something of an Atheist, and wholly an Atheist, but that he is partly a Christian ... His whole life is a question.

He finds doubts and scruples better then resolves them, and has always some argument to non-plus himself. The least reason is enough to perplex him, and the best will not satisfy him.

Whilst he fears to believe amiss, he believes nothing.’

John Earle, *Micro-cosmographie* (1628)

24 And straight way the father of the child crying with teares, said, Lord, I beleue: helpe my <sup>m</sup> vnbelief.



These two thoughts,  
*There is a God, and there is  
no God*, may be, and are,  
both in one and the  
same heart.

William Perkins, *A treatise of  
mans imaginations* (1607)



# The Spiritual Warfare.

**B**attle of the Strong and Weak.  
 The spiritual warfare is  
 a struggle between the  
 forces of good and evil.  
 It is a struggle for the  
 soul of every man.  
 It is a struggle for the  
 triumph of the Kingdom  
 of God on earth.

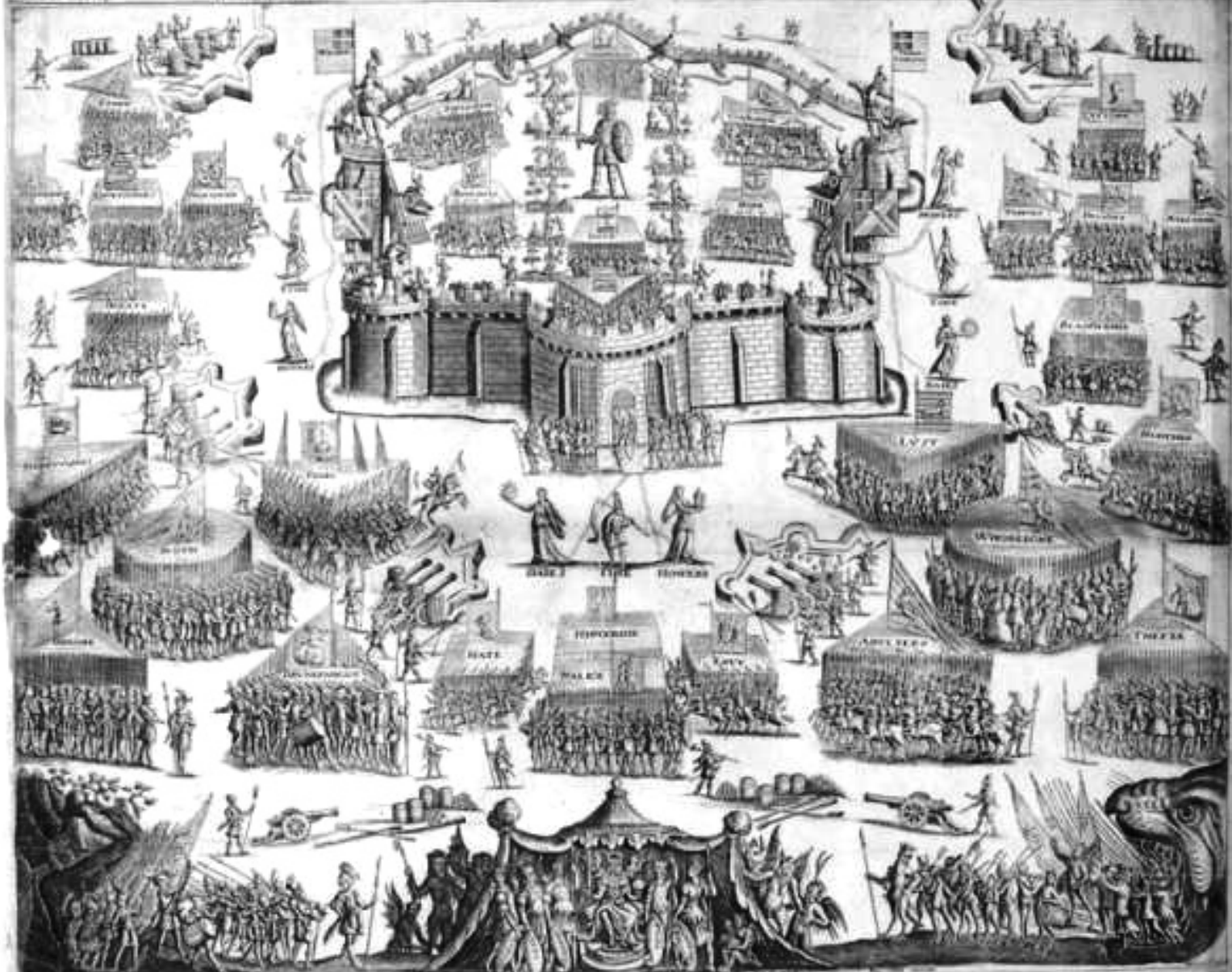
And the warfare is  
 a warfare of the spirit.  
 It is a warfare of the  
 mind and the heart.  
 It is a warfare of the  
 will and the conscience.  
 It is a warfare of the  
 soul and the body.

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 soul and the body.



The Battle of the Strong and Weak. The spiritual warfare is a struggle between the forces of good and evil. It is a struggle for the soul of every man. It is a struggle for the triumph of the Kingdom of God on earth. And the warfare is a warfare of the spirit. It is a warfare of the mind and the heart. It is a warfare of the will and the conscience. It is a warfare of the soul and the body.

My condition is unparalleled; there was never such a one [as me] since God made any Creature, either Angels or Men, nor never will be to the end of the world. ...

My Sins are so great, that if all the Sins of all the Devils and Damned in Hell, and all the Reprobates on Earth were comprehended in one man, mine are greater. There is no word comes so near the comprehension of the dreadfulnes of my Condition; as that, I am the Monster of the Creation.

A  
NARRATIVE

OF

God's Gracious Dealings

With that Choice Christian

Mrs. *HANNAH ALLEN*,

(Afterwards Married to Mr. *Hatt*,)

RECITING

The great Advantages the Devil made of her deep Melancholy, and the Triumphant Victories, Rich and Sovereign Graces, God gave her over all his Stratagems and Devices.

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*O Lord! I am oppressed, undertake for me.* Esay  
XXX. 14.

*We are not ignorant of his Devices.* 2 Cor. ii. 11.

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London, Printed by *John Wallis*. 1683.



The exceeding Riches of  
**GRACE ADVANCED**

By the Spirit of Grace, in an  
*Empty Nothing Creature, viz.*

M<sup>rs</sup> **SARAH WIGHT**,  
Lately *hopeles and restless*, her soule  
*dwelling far from Peace or hopes thereof.*

Now *hopefull, and joyfull in the LORD*,  
that hath caused **LIGHT** to shine out of  
**DARKNES**; that in and by this Earthen  
Vessell, holds forth his *Own* eternall  
*Love*, and the Glorious *Grace* of  
*Jesus Christ*, to the **CHIEFEST** of **SINNERS**.

*Who desired that others might hear and know, what  
the LORD had done for her soul, (that was so ter-  
rified day and night: ) and might neither PRE-  
SUME, nor DESPAIR and murmur against  
God, as shee hath done.*

Published for the Refreshing of poor soules, by an  
*Eye and Ear-witnes of a good part thereof,*  
**HENRY JESSE**, a servant of  
**JESUS CHRIST**.

The second Edition, corrected, and Proofs added.

LONDON;

Printed by *Matthew Simmons* for *Henry Overton*,  
and *Hannah Allen*, and are to be sold at their  
Shops in *Popes-head Alley*, 1647.

I could see nothing but Hell, and  
wrath: I was as desperate, as ever was  
any. ... I felt myself, soul and body, in  
fire and brimstone already. ...

And I thought, there was no other  
Hell, but that which I felt. ...

I thought, if I made away myself,  
there was an end of my misery, and  
that there was no God, no Heaven;  
and no Hell, but what I had already.



Why dost thou thus trouble thy self? Take thy pleasure, do what thou likest. Thou shalt never be called to an account for anything; for as the wise man dyeth, so dyeth the fool, and both rest in the grave together. There is no God to save thee or to punish thee; all things were made by nature, and when thou dyest, there is an end of all thy good and bad deeds.

‘Experiences of M.K.’ in Vavasour Powell, *Spiritual Experiences, Of sundry Beleevers* (1653)

## Losing religion under pressure

- Mrs Drake ‘resolved to spend the remainder of her time in all jollity and merriment, denying herself of no wordly comforts’
- Luke Howard ‘sought to make Merry ... and to take my fill of the World, with all I could enjoy thereof’
- Richard Baxter’s childhood friend ‘could have no Relief or Ease but in ... disowning the Teachers and Doctrines which had restrained him’
- Hannah Allen experienced ‘dreadful Temptations to have hard thoughts of my dearest Lord’

Whole floods of blasphemies both against God, Christ and the Scriptures ... poured upon my spirit, to my great confusion and astonishment. These blasphemous thoughts were such as stirred up questions in me against the very Being of God, and of his only beloved Son: As, whether there were in truth, a God, or Christ? And whether the holy Scriptures were not rather a fable, and cunning story, than the holy and pure Word of God?

**G R A C E.**

**Abounding to the chief of Sinners :**

O R,

**A Brief and Faithful**

**R E L A T I O N**

**Of the Exceeding Mercy of God in Christ;  
to his poor Servant**

**J O H N B U N Y A N.**

Wherein is particularly shewed, The manner of his Conversion, his fight and trouble for Sin, his Dreadful Temptations, also how he despaired of Gods mercy, and how the Lord at length thorow Christ did deliver him from all the guilt and terrour that lay upon him.

Whereunto is added,

**A brief Relation of his Call to the Work of the Ministry, of his Temprations therein, as also what he hath met with in Prison.**

**All which was written by his own hand there, and now published for the support of the weak and tempted People of God.**

*Come and hear, all ye that fear God; and I will declare what he hath done for my soul, Psal. 66. 16.*

**L O N D O N :**

**Printed by George Larkin. 1666.**

‘risings of Atheistic thoughts’

‘temptations that there was not a God’

‘this horrid temptation, to question the Being of God’

‘It came questioning into my mind of the truth of God, seeing many would show a reason in nature for almost everything.

This temptation came many times unto me.’

‘The Tempter strongly assaulted my Faith ... especially to question the certain Truth of the Sacred Scriptures; and also the Life to come, and Immortality of the Soul.’

# Doubting the Bible

- ‘I was sadly assaulted after noon ... with doubting whether ever word of the scripture were infallible because of possibility of mistakes in the writings ... and various readings in the text.’ *Michael Wigglesworth, 1653*
- ‘When I had read the word of God, he [the devil] tempted me with doubts and questions touching some things therein, whether it was truth or not.’ *M.W., 1653*



# The problem of suffering

- John Bunyan: 'I was ... so overcome with despair of Life and Heaven, that I should often wish... that there had been no Hell.'

I was in good Hope at that time, that there was nothing after Death. ...

I thought, if I could but lie still in the earth for ever, it would be as well with me, as it would be if I were in eternal happiness. ... I cared not for Heaven so I might not go to Hell. ...

God may forget me, and not raise me again, then shall I lie still and be quiet.

Lodowick Muggleton, *The acts of the witnesses of the spirit* (1699)



If there be a God, certainly He must be infinite in Goodness. ... How comes it to pass therefore that I am so poor? of so scanty and narrow a fortune, enjoying few and obscure comforts? I thought I could not believe Him a God to me, unless all His power were employed to glorify me.

Thomas Traherne, *Centuries* III.16

They made me little answer ... but seemed rather to smile at my childishness. Upon which and the like occasions I often doubted whether things were really so as I conceived them or whether elder people did not know them to be otherwise, only they were willing that we children should be so persuaded of them, that we might follow our books the better and be kept in from play. And thus did atheism show.

*Richard Norwood, 'Confessions', 1639*

# THE SEAMANS PRACTICE,

*Contayning*  
A FVNDAMENTALL  
PROBLEME in Navigation,  
experimentally verified:

Namely,  
*Touching the Compasse of the Earth and Sea, and the quantity of a Degree in our English measures.*

Also an exact method or forme of keeping a Reckoning at Sea, in any kinde or manner of sayling.

With certayne Tables and other Rules usefull in Navigation, As also in the Plotting and Surveying of places.

The Latitude of the principall places in *England*.

The finding of Currents at Sea; and what allowance is to bee given in respect of them.

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By RICHARD NORWOOD, Reader  
of the *Mathematicks*.

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LONDON,  
Printed for *George Hurlock*, and are to be sold at his  
Shop at *Saint Magnus* Corner, 1637.

# ATHEOMASTIX:

## Clearing foure Truthes,

Against Atheists and Infidels:

1. *That, There is a God.*
2. *That, There is but one God.*
3. *That, Jehouah, our God, is that one God.*
4. *That, The Holy Scripture is the Word of that God.*

of them proued, by Naturall Reasons, and Secular  
*Authorities; for the reducing of Infidels: and, by Scriptures, and  
Fathers, for the confirming of Christians.*

By the R. Reuerend Father in God, MARTIN FOTHERBY,  
*late Bishop of Salisbury.*



Sometime I have endeavoured to argue against these suggestions ... but alas! I quickly felt, when I thus did, such arguings ... would return again upon me.

**G R A C E.**  
Abounding to the chief of Sinners :

O R,  
A Brief and Faithful  
**R E L A T I O N**  
Of the Exceeding Mercy of God in Christ,  
to his poor Servant  
**J O H N B U N Y A N.**

Wherein is particularly shewed, The manner of his Conversion, his fight and trouble for Sin, his Dreadful Temptations, also how he despaired of Gods mercy, and how the Lord at length thorow Christ did deliver him from all the guilt and terrour that lay upon him.

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A brief Relation of his Call to the Work of the Ministry, of his Temprations therein, as also what he hath met with in Prison.

All which was written by his own hand there, and now published for the support of the weak and tempted People of God.

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**L O N D O N :**  
Printed by *George Larkin.* 1666.

# FREE-GRACE:

OR,

## THE FLOWINGS

OF

CHRISTS Blood freely  
to Sinners.

Being an Experiment of *Jesus Christ* upon one who hath been in the bondage of a troubled Conscience at times, for the space of about twelve yeers, till now upon a clearer discovery of *Jesus Christ*, and the *Gospel*:

Wherein divers secrets of the soul, of sin and temptations, are experimentally opened, and by way of Observation, concerning a *natural condition*, and a *mixed condition* of *Law* and *Gospel*:

With a further revealing of the *Gospel* in its glory, liberty, freeness, and simplicity for Salvation.

By *John Saltmarsh* Preacher of the Gospel at *Braſteed* in *Kent*.

London, Printed for *Giles Calvert*, dwelling at the black *Spred-Eagle* at the West-end of *Pauls*. 1645.

The way to be warm, is not only to ask for a fire, or whether there be a fire or no, or to ... wish for a greater; but to stand close to that fire there is, and to gather heat.

After I had received ... I sat pondering of it in my heart, and waited in expectation in myself, to receive some divine operation, and spiritual change, and to receive assurance of the pardon of sin; but none came in.

I saw ... that it was not the body and blood of Christ, but a carnal invention.

Richard Farnworth, *The Heart  
Opened by Christ* (1654)

THE

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# Heart Opened by Christ;

OR,

The Conditions of a troubled Soul that could find no true Rest, Peace, Comfort, nor satisfaction in any thing below the Divine Power and Glory of God, breaking forth and appearing in several operations and manifestations, by the blessed Spirit of the Lord Jesus, the Saviour of the soul, God manifesting himself in flesh, that he may glorified in Spirit.

With,

A word to those that are for the Approbation of Ministers; and something to those that scruple about the Receiving or not Receiving that which they call a Sacrament and Communion of Saints, at *Easter, Pentecost, Christmas*, so called, and other Festival and set daies, or any other time when it is to be administred by those Priests that profess themselves to be Ministers of Christ.



By Richard Farnworth the  
a Quaker June 30

Written in the year 1654. in the third Moneth,  
commonly called *May*, by R. F.

God has imprinted so many clear signs of himself in the human mind, and so many traces of himself throughout all nature, that no sane person can be unaware of God's existence.

John Milton, *De doctrina Christiana*





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I beheld the Trees to grow, the Birds to fly,  
the Heavens how they were hanged, and all  
things that were before me; then I thought *they*  
*could not make themselves.*

‘Experiences of M.K.’ in Vavasour Powell, *Spiritual  
Experiences, Of sundry Beleevers* (1653)

# Thomas Traherne and the ends of the earth

Little did I think that the Earth was Round. ...

I knew by the perfection of the work there was a God, and was satisfied, and rejoiced. People underneath, and fields and flowers, with another Sun and another day, pleased me mightily: but more when I knew it was the same Sun that served them by night, that served us by day.

*Centuries, III.17*

A  
TREATISE  
CONTAINING  
THE ORIGINALL

*of vnbeliefe, Misbeliefe, or Mis-*  
*perswasions concerning the Veritie,*  
*Vnitie, and Attributes of the Deitie:*  
with Directions for rectifying our  
beliefe or knowledge in the  
*fore-mentioned points.*

By THOMAS JACKSON Dr. in  
Divinitie, Vicar of Saint Nicholas Church  
in the famous Towne of *New-castle vpon Tine,*  
and late Fellow of *Corpus Christi* Colledge  
in OXFORD.

IOHN. 17. 3.

*This is life eternall to know thee the onely true God  
and Iesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*

LONDON

Printed by I. D. for *John Clarke*, and are to be  
sold at his Shop vnder *St Peters Church* in *Cornehill.*

1625.

God has imprinted so many clear signs of himself in the human mind, and so many traces of himself throughout all nature, that no sane person can be unaware of God's existence.

John Milton, *De doctrina Christiana*



‘It is engraven in all hearts, that there is a Deity.’

‘God is to be felt ... in every man’s conscience.’

‘The Being and Attributes of God were so clear to me, that he was to my Intellect what the Sun is to my Eye.’

*and yet ...*

‘I find that the clearest Arguments that can be cannot persuade my heart of belief [in] the being of a God, if God do not let the beams of his glory shine into it.’



# *How to be a Puritan Atheist*

Alec Ryrie