



How God Hijacked My Quest
to Disprove the Christian Faith

Confessions of a French Atheist



Guillaume Bignon
FOREWORD BY LEE STROBEL

“*Think God’s a joke?* Join former skeptic Guillaume Bignon on his journey so you can consider what he found. *Having doubts about your faith?* Let the answers Guillaume discovered bolster your beliefs. *Want to help family and friends find faith?* Give them a copy of *Confessions of a French Atheist* and let God use this compelling story to open their hearts and minds. There is something good for everyone in this powerful new book!”

MARK MITTELBERG, executive director of the Lee Strobel Center for Evangelism and Applied Apologetics at Colorado Christian University; author of *The Questions Christians Hope No One Will Ask (With Answers)* and *Contagious Faith: Discover Your Natural Style for Sharing Jesus with Others*

“In *Confessions of a French Atheist*, Guillaume Bignon tells of his conversion story, and it is not only honest but also winsomely vulnerable. Bignon’s book brings together the moral and rational, the existential and the philosophical, and it reveals how the gospel of Christ satisfies our deepest human longings while also addressing humanity’s most fundamental intellectual questions. Read this book and pass it on to others!”

PAUL COPAN, Pledger Family Chair of Philosophy and Ethics, Palm Beach Atlantic University; author of *Loving Wisdom: A Guide to Philosophy and Christian Faith*

“Philosopher Guillaume Bignon’s search for meaning took him from Paris to New York, from womanizing to marriage, and from a hedonistic brand of atheism to a thoughtful faith in Jesus. *Confessions of a French Atheist* is a gripping spiritual memoir and intellectual ‘apology’ that will engage the reader’s heart and mind.”

PETER S. WILLIAMS, assistant professor in communication and worldviews at Gimlekollen NLA University College, Kristiansand, Norway; author of *Outgrowing God? A Beginner’s Guide to Richard Dawkins and the God Debate*

“Guillaume Bignon’s story is simply incredible, just another example of a thoroughly committed atheist determined to discredit Jesus and Christianity who then gets turned upside down when forced to face the facts—the facts of Jesus’ life and the facts of his own life.”

GREGORY KOUKL, president of Stand to Reason; author of *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* and *The Story of Reality: How the World Began, How It Ends, and Everything Important that Happens in Between*

“A delightful and enchanting read—just try to put it down! This fast-paced and well-written volume recounts a search for meaning in a seemingly meaningless world, interspersed with philosophical tidbits. What happens when atheistic intellectualism meets sophisticated apologetic arguments? Read on . . .”

GARY R. HABERMAS, distinguished research professor at Liberty University

“*Confessions* is a captivating story of romance, betrayal, redemption, and a winsome presentation of a rational Christian faith. Guillaume’s journey, like so many, tells us of how wretched we are and yet how powerful God’s grace is. An inspiring book for all people.”

KURT JAROS, theologian at Veracity Hill; executive director of Defenders Media; affiliate faculty at Colorado Christian University

“As a brilliant, talented, and successful man, former atheist Guillaume Bignon had no need for God. In this transparent autobiography, he takes us along his unexpected journey into the question of belief and a closer exploration into his own life. Through earnest searching, honest wrestling, and reflection, he confronts his own false presumptions about atheism, Christianity, and even himself, and he finds life-changing truth in surprising ways.”

JANA HARMON, teaching fellow for the C. S. Lewis Institute; host of the *Side B Podcast*

“Guillaume has written an incredibly readable and searingly honest account of his journey from atheism to Christian faith, masterfully weaving together the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual aspects of his journey. Apologetics can often be a ‘dry’ subject. This book is the opposite. Yes, *Confessions of a French Atheist* is packed with rational arguments for the truth of Christianity, but it is also a no-holds-barred account of how God graciously shows up in the messiness of our personal lives. Read it and then give it to the next intellectual enquirer you meet.”

JUSTIN BRIERLEY, host of the *Unbelievable?* radio show and podcast; author of *Unbelievable?: Why, After Ten Years of Talking with Atheists, I’m Still Christian*

“My thoughts on *Confessions of a French Atheist* can be captured in one word: *fantastic*. It is captivating and insightful. I couldn’t put it down. It gets my highest recommendation for believers, seekers, and skeptics.”

SEAN MCDOWELL, apologetics professor at Biola University; coauthor of *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*

“I have long thought—from both my readings and friendships—that the French *do* atheism better than pretty much anyone else. But Guillaume Bignon’s *Confessions of a French Atheist* shows that the French can also make the best public advocates for the Christian faith. Here is a story full of culture, verve, thoughtfulness, emotion, and intelligence. Bignon is as comfortable discussing romance, sex, and beauty as he is science, history, and philosophy. The arguments here are strong and so are the aesthetics. If France has long represented the leading edge of a post-Christian society, a book like this shows there is a way back, not to Christendom but to Christ himself.”

JOHN DICKSON, historian, author, and host of *Undeceptions*; lecturer and research associate at University of Sydney; distinguished fellow at Ridley College

“A superb and engaging lesson in philosophy, theology, and crystal-clear Christian apologetics, all propelled by an honest and captivating personal narrative. What a perfect book to get into the hands of skeptics and also into the hands of believers who find themselves struggling with doubt. Guillaume Bignon strikes just the right balance of head and heart to make this a true faith-building experience for anyone who is blessed to read it.”

CRAIG J. HAZEN, founder and director of the graduate program in Christian apologetics at Biola University; author of *Five Sacred Crossings* and *Fearless Prayer*

“Guillaume Bignon weaves his own fascinating story with clear, persuasive explanations of the evidence that led him as a self-indulgent atheist to devote his life to serving the God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. Readers unfamiliar with the intellectual tradition of French unbelief are in for a treat as Bignon introduces such skeptical luminaries as Voltaire, Baron d’Holbach, Ernest Renan, and Prosper Alfaric and cogently engages their objections to Christianity. Colorful illustrations drawn from everything from volleyball to Disney movies make his answers fun and memorable. Yet it is the story of Bignon’s personal conversion, with the surprising twists and the highs, lows, and messiness of real life, that make it hard to put this book down.”

ROBERT M. BOWMAN JR., author of *Faith Thinkers: 30 Christian Apologists You Should Know*

“In *Confessions of a French Atheist*, Guillaume Bignon recounts his journey from a hedonistic lifestyle, in which he was scornful of those who believed in God, to experiencing the grace and forgiveness of Christ. Bignon tells of how he sought to fill the void of spiritual emptiness in his life with sexual indulgence, seducing women and using them for his own gratification,

sometimes at the expense of other friendships. Eventually, a relationship with a Christian woman led him to investigate the truth claims of the Bible and ultimately become a Christian. Bignon's writing style is extremely engaging, and the book is a gripping page-turner. In addition to recounting Bignon's journey from atheism to Christianity, the book offers a concise introduction to some of the key lines of evidence for the existence of God and the veracity of the gospel. The book also contains a compelling exposé of what the message of the gospel is and why we should care. I will definitely be recommending this book to friends interested in learning more about Jesus and how he can transform a person's life."

JONATHAN MCLATCHIE, assistant professor of biology at Sattler College;
fellow of the Discovery Institute

"In *Confessions of a French Atheist*, Guillaume Bignon says that he went into a church 'like someone would go to the zoo: to see exotic animals he had heard of but never actually seen.' In this book, you'll read about an exotic creature you've neither heard about nor seen: a ridiculously intelligent and witty French athlete questioning his way into the Kingdom of God."

DAVID WOOD, Acts 17 Apologetics

"More than sixteen centuries ago, Augustine told us why he had rehearsed his licentious past in the pages of his *Confessions*: 'The recalling of my wicked ways is bitter in my memory, but I do it so that you may be sweet to me.' Like Augustine's *Confessions*, Guillaume Bignon's *Confessions of a French Atheist* tells a story of loss—lost relationships, ambitions, and dreams—largely owed to a seared conscience and a skewed worldview. But it also tells a story of renewal—fresh faith, meaning, and purpose—brought

about by a quickened conscience and a quest for truth. For both Augustine and Bignon, hindsight of God's guiding hand through it all shows he is sweet. I can give these pages no higher praise than saying they caused me to revel in God's sovereignty and relish his sweetness. I pray they will do the same for every person who providentially partakes of them."

J. ED KOMOSZEWSKI, coauthor of *Reinventing Jesus and Putting Jesus in His Place*

"In *Confessions of a French Atheist*, the author weaves a chaotic piece of fabric, with frayed threads in a seemingly purposeless design. He is unafraid to reveal the twisted, ugly backside of his own story—both before and after his conversion. But the reader gradually, step by step, sees the cloth from the other side, a beautiful tapestry woven by the Master himself. Bignon's narrative is the embodiment of Romans 8:28, a very personal testimony that there are no coincidences in the story of redemption."

DANIEL B. WALLACE, senior research professor of New Testament Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary



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Some names have been changed for the privacy of individuals.

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Foreword



AS AN AUTHOR, I LOVE STORIES. As a journalist, I especially appreciate *true* stories—unflinchingly honest accounts that trace a person’s circuitous route as they seek to resolve personal challenges. That’s what Guillaume Bignon provides in this compelling spiritual memoir, tracing his fascinating quest for answers to life’s most profound questions while deftly weaving in arguments and evidence for Christianity that helped him along the way.

Actually, I see much of myself in Guillaume’s book. Both of us started as atheists who endured forced church attendance when we were younger. We were each prompted to investigate the claims of Christianity because of a relationship with a woman who was a believer. I employed my training in journalism and law; Guillaume drew upon the highly disciplined mind that led him into a successful career as a software engineer.

Both of us critically examined historical data, scientific findings, and philosophical reasoning. In the end, we reached

our verdicts—but don't let me spoil the climax of Guillaume's story. There's much that differs from my own life experience.

Through it all, Guillaume candidly describes his life as an accomplished athlete with a Frenchman's eye for romance. He doesn't shy away from admitting his mistakes and shortcomings. Clearly, he's conversant with historic and contemporary atheistic writings; indeed, he gives due consideration to their claims.

What I like the most, though, is the way he evaluates the evidence in much the same way that a referee judges one of his championship volleyball matches. Setting aside prejudices and preconceived notions, he lets the case for Christianity unfold regardless of his own preferences. In other words, he allows the facts to speak for themselves and the arguments to point him toward conclusions he had not anticipated—and which, in some cases, ran contrary to his preferences.

As a baseball fan, I liken it to allowing the umpire to call a ball a ball and a strike a strike. Let the scoreboard tally the results. This, in short, can be a model for other spiritual seekers as they embark on their own pursuit for answers.

Along the way, Guillaume finds resolution to some of the vexing questions that had haunted him as a young man who had achieved much. What is success? What defines happiness? Where do we find a reliable framework for morality? All of us wrestle with these issues at some point—and I believe you will resonate with how Guillaume chases the answers.

So turn the page and read on. Let Guillaume's personal story draw you in as he jets from Paris to an exotic Caribbean

FOREWORD

island to New York City. Then allow his insightful evaluation of philosophy, history, and science to challenge your notions of reality. Call a ball a ball and a strike a strike—and see how your conclusions might change your life and even your eternity.

I'll tell you what: You'd be hard pressed to find a more amiable and engaging companion on your journey than my friend Guillaume Bignon.

Lee Strobel

Author of *The Case for Christ* and *The Case for Heaven*

Hooked in the Caribbean



*Destiny is written concurrently with
the event, not prior to it.*

JACQUES MONOD

I DIDN'T EXPECT A VACATION in the Caribbean to change my life forever. Somehow, it did.

Around the time I graduated from college, my uncle Jean-Jacques took a job that required a move to the island of Saint Martin, about twelve hundred miles southeast of Miami. I had never heard of the place and had no idea how breathtakingly beautiful it was.

Shortly after their move, my aunt and uncle sent us some photos of their new life in paradise—various shots of my cousins with big smiles on their faces, sitting on the trunk of a twisted palm tree or reclining on a beach whose colors were so pure and dazzling it seemed they had to have been

Photoshopped. The sand was perfectly white, the water a hypnotizing turquoise blue, and the sun so bright that the colors fairly jumped off the page.

They seem to be enjoying their new life, I thought, but the idea of crossing the Atlantic from Paris to visit them never entered my mind, even when my parents bought themselves tickets for a short vacation there. But when they returned home, looking tanned and healthy, they began touting the island with a missionary zeal.

“Nicolas, Guillaume, Estelle,” they said to my siblings and me, “at least once in your life, you’ve got to see it! In fact, whenever you want to go—all three of you—we’ll buy you each a ticket to Saint Martin. And you should go as soon as possible.”

What an offer!

Nicolas was the first to take them up on it. I would have gone with him, but I had just started a job as a software engineering consultant in the finance industry and hadn’t yet accrued enough vacation time. Nicolas soon returned, suntanned, relaxed, and just as excited about the island as our parents had been. So much so that when I took my vacation in Saint Martin the following July, he decided to go back with me.

Paradise found

Aunt Irene picked us up at Princess Juliana International Airport, in the Dutch territory on the south end of the

tropical island. As soon as I stepped off the airplane, I was enveloped in a thick blanket of heat and humidity—just as everyone had warned. I quickly decided that I'd rather be at the beach than in a hot car, and that's immediately where we went. In fact, we had scarcely pulled out of the parking lot before my aunt stopped the car at Maho Beach, a tiny stretch of pure white sand just off the end of the airport runway. You really need to see it to believe it. The only thing separating the beach from the landing strip is a narrow road and a chain-link fence. Pilots on approach fly very low over Maho Beach so they can touch down just a few dozen meters beyond. Enormous airplanes zoom so close over the sunbathers that I felt I could bounce a soccer ball off one of them if I gave it a good kick. I had never seen anything like it. My exotic vacation was off to an amazing start.

No sooner had my aunt stopped the car than Nicolas leapt out, ripped off his shorts and T-shirt, and immediately dove into the water as if his life depended on it. All I could do was laugh. He had endured an eight-hour flight with his bathing suit on under his clothes just so he could pull that stunt for me. But when I entered the water a few minutes later, I understood his urgency. The waters of the Caribbean were just as beautiful as the photos suggested and so warm that I didn't feel even a hint of a chill upon entering. Saint Martin seriously ruined every other beach for me.

We spent our time on the island sunbathing, sipping cocktails, swimming, and even playing a little bit of beach volleyball. There was a court set up next to the most

beautiful beach on Orient Bay. My uncle's house was located just behind this heavenly spot. While we were there, I often woke up early to run on the beach in preparation for my first season playing in the nationals in volleyball, which would start in September. It took us only about two minutes to get to Orient Bay by foot, but we often took my aunt's car so we could visit the rest of the island and see other beaches as well. Life was good.

With all these exotic distractions, I had almost forgotten about running after girls. This was somewhat surprising, given the focus of my life over the past several years. But because Nicolas and I didn't really go out in the evening—at least not to clubs or bars—we didn't often find ourselves in places where we would meet eligible young ladies.

Until one day they came to *us*.

Hitchhiking and the American girls

Nicolas and I had spent a day at the beach with our younger cousin, Alexandre. We were on the Dutch end of the island, pretty far from Orient Bay. I don't remember how we got down there, but I know we didn't have a car and would have to improvise on how to get back. When it was time to pack up and leave, I figured our only choice was to walk home, maybe an hour's trek on foot. But Nicolas had another idea: "Why don't we hitchhike?"

I had never hitchhiked before and wasn't sure how I felt about it. It seemed strange to stick out your thumb

and expect someone to give you a ride. But Nicolas was undeterred. With a big smile on his face, he put his thumb in the air, and less than two minutes later, a little purple car stopped on the side of the road. When we walked over, we saw two young ladies inside. The slightly embarrassed driver rolled down her window and spoke to us in English with an American accent.

“Can you please help us?”

They hadn't stopped to pick us up; they needed directions!

“We just arrived this afternoon, and now we're lost somewhere between the airport and our hotel.”

Just our luck. But we were well-mannered young men who were certainly willing to assist two young ladies. (Especially two *attractive* young ladies.)

“Where are you going?” my brother asked.

“Esmeralda Resort.”

Magnifique! Esmeralda Resort is right on Orient Bay, which made us all neighbors.

Nicolas grinned and said, “Take us with you, and we'll show you right where it is.”

The driver looked a little hesitant, but her passenger seemed pretty excited about picking up three good-looking Frenchmen in swimsuits. She finally convinced her friend, and Nicolas, Alexandre, and I squeezed into the back seat of their little rental car.

The driver's name was Vanessa, and she was from New York. Her friend, Tasha, was from Miami. They were both gorgeous. Tasha was a platinum blonde with big blue eyes and

the features of a model. Vanessa had long, perfectly curled brown hair, blue-green eyes, and a captivating smile. Though she now had a job in finance, she had formerly worked as an actress and model.

I felt we had hit the jackpot! On the way to the hotel, Nicolas and I made good use of our French accents to flirt with the two ladies. I knew we had to try to see them again. Our Gallic charm must have worked because, when we arrived at the Esmeralda Resort, they gave us their room number and agreed to get together with us later that day.

In the meantime, Nicolas and I had two things to discuss: which girl did we each prefer, and where could we take them on the island to show them a good time?

The answer to the first question was easy enough: I liked the girl with the curly hair and Nicolas was interested in the blonde. As for where we would go, Nicolas told me to leave it up to him. This was not his first trip to the island, and he had a plan.

When we stopped by later that day, Vanessa answered the door. Tasha was just awakening from a nap, so we stayed outside to give her time to gather herself. Vanessa stepped out onto the patio with us, and we chatted for a few minutes while waiting for her friend.

Inevitably, the question of what we did for a living came up, and I managed to wrap my reply in a thin veil of false modesty as I explained that I worked as a software engineer, played keyboards in a rock band, and was also a championship volleyball player—all true, but also couched in a way

meant to impress this young woman and make sure she'd want to see me again. But when Tasha finally joined us, it was Nicolas who played our best card.

“How would you like to go to Pinel Island?”

Pinel Island is an uninhabited islet at the north end of Orient Bay. Accessible only by boat, it has beautiful beaches, trails for hiking, reefs for snorkeling, and two beachfront restaurants. What more could you ask for?

“Pinel is even better than Saint Martin,” Nicolas assured everyone. “You’ll be blown away!”

After some discussion of the island’s merits, we agreed to meet the next morning for a day trip.

Budding romance and a bombshell

Tasha and Vanessa arrived at the boat landing in beachwear, and we prepared to embark. While we were getting into the boat, Nicolas and I both noticed something we hadn’t seen before: Tasha had a ring on her left hand. Too bad for Nicolas. I had already called dibs on Vanessa, and what’s more, I was starting to think she was interested in me, as well.

When we arrived on Pinel, we naturally paired off into couples, and Vanessa and I soon found ourselves swimming alone together in the lagoon. After talking for a while and gazing into each other’s eyes, we began to kiss, and I was over the moon.

Nicolas and Tasha eventually reappeared, and we found a table—just lounging chairs, really—at one of the two

restaurants on the island. The waiter, a young French guy inspired by the presence of the two American women, kept stopping by in his bathing suit to serve us unlimited artisanal, infused rum cocktails. Soaking in the beauty of my companion and the heavenly setting, I soon was intoxicated—both figuratively and literally. By the end of the afternoon, with the combination of sun and alcohol, I was feeling pretty woozy.

What a waste, I thought. I had used all my powers of seduction, only to have the day ruined by cocktails I didn't even enjoy.

If I get sick in front of everyone, this relationship is over. Please, please, please don't let that happen!

I wasn't praying to anyone in particular, but my prayer was answered. Though the trip back to Saint Martin was rough on my stomach, I didn't lose my lunch. My budding romance with Vanessa still had a chance.

The rest of the week that the women were on Saint Martin, the four of us got together several times, mostly on the beach at Orient Bay. I remember being flabbergasted when Vanessa told me that she and Tasha were staying for only ten days because that was all the vacation time they had. In France, the legal minimum for paid vacation is five weeks, and the average is more like seven. I met Vanessa midway through my three-and-a-half weeks on the island, and I was quite annoyed at how little time she and I would have together before she had to leave.

One afternoon, while Vanessa and I were lounging on beach chairs and drinking piña colodas, she dropped a

bombshell on me. I don't remember exactly how it came up in conversation, but she told me she believed in God.

What! . . . Seriously? . . . In the twenty-first century? To me, this was the equivalent of intellectual suicide. I had been raised going to Catholic Mass on Sundays, but I had long since put behind me any thoughts of faith, choosing instead to seek knowledge of the world through valid and rational pursuits such as math and physics. From my perspective, people who believed in God were either steeped in tradition or simply refused to think logically.

"Why?" I asked Vanessa.

"With everything I've seen," she replied, "I can't help but believe."

Her response seemed kind of elusive, but it was clear that there was more to the story. I wasn't inclined to probe any deeper at the time, so I made a mental note to bring it up again later. Surely she could be persuaded to change her thinking if I challenged her beliefs with a minimal dose of reason and common sense.

The second—and more devastating—piece of news she shared was that she believed in abstinence from sex before marriage. This was not at all what I believed—and certainly not what I wanted. I had a history of conquests and intimate relationships, and though I wouldn't say it was the *only* thing I was thinking about with Vanessa, it was certainly *part* of what I had in mind.

At the same time, I knew that Nicolas wasn't having any greater success with Tasha. I don't know exactly what went

on between the two of them, but I know they didn't sleep together. I also know I would not have been happy if I were Tasha's husband. That being said, she clearly wasn't available, and their relationship didn't go very far. I, on the other hand, was moving toward a serious relationship with Vanessa, and it looked as if we might have a future even after we left Saint Martin.

Normally, for me at the time, Vanessa's beliefs about sex and God would have been enough to make me turn and run. But I think the combination of her beauty; the romantic notion of falling in love with a foreigner; the fact that she was from New York, which seemed exotic to me in the same way that many Americans think of Paris; and the serendipitous way in which we had met on this paradise island—it all felt like a Hollywood movie in so many ways. So I didn't break up with her when she left for home. I just told myself that the obstacles would take care of themselves in time.

When my vacation ended in Saint Martin, I returned to Paris, and Vanessa and I began a long-distance relationship—which proved to be a bit more complicated than our island romance.

But let's not get ahead of the story.