

Matthew Parris is a newspaper columnist for *The Times* of London and a self-described atheist. Surprisingly, though, in a December 27, 2008 column he wrote an article titled "[As an atheist, I truly believe Africa needs God.](#)" Parris admits that saying this runs counter to his beliefs, but he cannot ignore **the difference that he sees in African Christians**. Parris, who grew up in Africa, writes:

*"Before Christmas I returned, after 45 years, to the country that as a boy I knew as Nyasaland. Today it's Malawi, and The Times Christmas Appeal includes a small British charity working there.... It inspired me, renewing my flagging faith in development charities. But traveling in Malawi refreshed another belief, too—one I've been trying to banish all my life, but an observation I've been unable to avoid since my African childhood. **It confounds my ideological beliefs, stubbornly refuses to fit my world view, and has embarrassed my growing belief that there is no God.***

"Now a confirmed atheist, I've become convinced of the enormous contribution that Christian evangelism makes in Africa: sharply distinct from the work of secular NGOs, government projects, and international aid efforts. These alone will not do. Education and training alone will not do. In Africa Christianity changes people's hearts. It brings a spiritual transformation. The rebirth is real. The change is good....

*"[When I lived in Africa] we had working for us Africans who had converted and were strong believers. The Christians were always different. Far from having cowed or confined its converts, **their faith appeared to have liberated and relaxed them. There was a liveliness, a curiosity, an engagement with the world—a directness in their dealings with others—that seemed to be missing in traditional African life. They stood tall.**"*