CHAPTER 1

When Atheists Would Be Angry

On May 15, 2007, Jerry Falwell, one of our generation’s leading Evangelicals, died. That same day, CNN anchor Anderson Cooper asked the outspoken atheist Christopher Hitchens for his reaction:
Cooper: I’m not sure if you believe in heaven, but, if you do, do you think Jerry Falwell is in it?
Hitchens: No. And I think it’s a pity there isn’t a hell for him to go to.
Cooper: What is it about him that brings up such vitriol?
Hitchens: The empty life of this ugly little charlatan proves only one thing, that you can get away with the most extraordinary offenses to morality and to truth in this country if you will just get yourself called reverend.
Cooper: Whether you agree or not with his reading of the Bible, you don’t think he was sincere in what he spoke?
Hitchens: No. I think he was a conscious charlatan and bully and fraud. And I think, if he read the Bible at all—and I would doubt that he could actually read any long book . . . that he did so only in the most hucksterish, as we say, Bible-pounding way.¹

Because Jerry Falwell and his family have been personal friends of mine for more than thirty years, I found Hitchens’s words to be cruel and insensitive, and most of all inaccurate. But I am sure Hitchens would argue that he was not singling out Falwell for any special treatment. He and his atheist friends have mounted an aggressive offensive against all Evangelicals. As Christian apologist Dinesh D’Souza has written, “A group of prominent atheists—many of them evolutionary biologists—has launched a public attack on religion in general and Christianity in particular; they have no interest in being nice.”²

It’s not hard to find evidence to support D’Souza’s assertion. Richard Dawkins, in his book *The God Delusion*, spews out his anger at God: “The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.”³

Dawkins is no longer content to argue about God—he’s angry at God. A *Christianity Today* editorial attempts to explain this new level of vitriol:

You can also tell that atheism is in trouble because it is becoming increasingly intolerant. In the past, atheists . . . were often condescendingly tolerant of their less-enlightened fellow citizens. While they disdained religion, they treated their religious neighbors as good-hearted, if misguided. But now key activists are urging a less civil approach. At a recent forum sponsored by the Science Network at the Salk Institute in La Jolla, California, the tone of intolerance reached such a peak that anthropologist Melvin J. Konner commented: “The viewpoints have run the gamut from A to B. Should we bash religion with a crowbar or only with a baseball
One former atheist, Antony Flew, called this a “look-back-in-anger, take-no-prisoners type of atheism.” The irony of the New Atheists’ anger is captured in editor/professor Joe Carter’s article “When Atheists Are Angry at God”:

I’ve shaken my fist in anger at stalled cars, storm clouds, and incompetent meteorologists. I’ve even, on one terrible day that included a dead alternator, a blaring tornado-warning siren, and a horribly wrong weather forecast, cursed all three at once. I’ve fumed at furniture, cursed at crossing guards, and held a grudge against Gun Barrel City, Texas. I’ve been mad at just about anything you can imagine. Except unicorns. I’ve never been angry at unicorns.

It’s unlikely you’ve ever been angry at unicorns either. We can become incensed by objects and creations both animate and inanimate. We can even, in a limited sense, be bothered by the fanciful characters in books and dreams. But creatures like unicorns that don’t exist—that we truly believe not to exist—tend not to raise our ire. We certainly don’t blame the one-horned creatures for our problems.

The one social group that takes exception to this rule is atheists. They claim to believe that God does not exist and yet, according to empirical studies, tend to be the people most angry at him.

When I write of the anger of the atheists, I am not primarily referring to the classic atheists such as Bertrand Russell, Jean-Paul Sartre, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud. The atheists I am writing about are the “New Atheists.” The term “new atheism” was first used by Wired magazine in November 2006 to describe the atheism espoused in books like Daniel Dennett’s Breaking the Spell, Richard Dawkins’s The God Delusion, Lewis Wolpert’s Six Impossible Things Before Breakfast, Victor Stenger’s The Comprehensible Cosmos, Sam Harris’s The End of Faith, and Christopher Hitchens’s God Is Not Great.

As Antony Flew observed,

What was significant about these books was not their level of argument—which was modest, to put it mildly—but the level of visibility they received both as best sellers and as a “new” story discovered by the media.

The chief target of these books is, without question, organized religion of any kind, time, or place. Paradoxically, the books themselves read like fundamentalist sermons. The authors, for the most part, sound like hellfire-and-brimstone preachers warning us of dire retribution, even of apocalypse, if we do not repent of our wayward beliefs and associated practices.
Why such anger? How can people be so angry with God if they do not even believe in His existence? And why would the most angry among them feel so compelled to preach their anti-God religion with such evangelistic zeal?

It would be presumptuous, if not impossible, to state categorically why the New Atheists are angry at God. Is it because the number of Christians is increasing while the number of atheists is decreasing? Is it because they are not swaying the mainstream with their arguments? Is it an example of Santayana’s definition of fanaticism: “redoubling your effort when you have forgotten your aim”? Is it the anger of rebellion that often comes from the conviction of sin—sin that one does not want to give up (John 16:8)?

I cannot answer these questions because I cannot know the hearts of these angry atheists. But I do know this: Today’s vocal crop of atheists has ramped up the volume, if not the substance, of the modern attack on religion that we see going on in several quarters. We’ve always had atheists, and we always will until the Lord comes again. But the shrill scream of today’s atheists is nothing like the more respectful opposition to belief we’ve seen in the past. I never thought I’d see the day when atheists would so openly and viciously attack us, abandoning rational argument and descending into toxic vitriol and groundless accusation. But that day has come, and in this chapter we will explore this new atheism, what it means, and how we can respond.

What’s So New about “New Atheism”?

While the proactivism, “evangelistic” fervor, and militant spirit of the New Atheists are new, atheism itself is not. The English words atheist and atheism do not appear in modern translations of the Bible. But the ideas they represent certainly do. Our English word atheist is derived from the Greek word atheos, which occurs once in the New Testament (Ephesians 2:12). In the Greek the prefix a— is a negative, meaning “no,” while theos is the word for God. So a + theos = atheos, which means, literally, “no god.” It could also mean “without God,” which is how Paul used it in Ephesians 2:12: “having no hope and without God in the world.”

Atheos can be understood in at least three ways:

First, people can be without God due to circumstance. In Ephesians 2:12, Paul describes Gentiles as being “without God” because they were “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise.” It wasn’t that Gentiles were opposed to the existence of God (Acts 17:22–23), yet they were without God because they had not received specific information about Him—information Paul was delivering to them through his evangelistic efforts. There are unreached
peoples in the world today who are without God because the biblical Gospel has not yet reached them. But they are not atheists in the sense we use the word today. People who have not heard of God cannot be characterized as rejecting Him by choice.

The second way *atheos* can be used is to designate people who are without God by choice. This is the sense in which *atheos* is used today, incorporating both meanings of the word: “no God” and “without God.” Modern atheists are “without God” because they believe there is “no God.” They have the same evidence for God that theists have— in nature and in the Bible—but they have chosen to reject it and are therefore *atheists*. They do not believe God exists. This is likely what is described in Psalms 14:1 and 53:1: “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ ” In the Old Testament, especially in the book of Proverbs, a fool is someone who rejects counsel, wisdom, and evidence and goes his own way. The fool is often contrasted with the wise or prudent person, who receives counsel and correction and adjusts his way accordingly (Proverbs 10:8; 12:15; 15:5). There is even a hint of “New Atheism” in Proverbs 14:16: “A fool rages and is self-confident.”

A third way to understand *atheos* is “without God by callousness.” This is sometimes referred to as “practical atheism”: being a *theist* in mind but an *atheist* in heart and action. I’ll have more to say on this later.

Obviously, in this chapter I am focusing on number two in the list above: atheists by choice. In spite of their energy and marketing efforts, we can be thankful that their aggressiveness is not serving their cause very well. Let’s explore the several ways in which atheists are hurting themselves.

**Their Arrogance Is Disgracing Them**

At the launch in 2010 of her satirical book *The Loser Letters*, Hoover Institution fellow Mary Eberstadt explained why she takes on the New Atheists: “Their movement has repeatedly assailed religious people as self-righteous, ignorant of history, and humorless, all the while remaining self-righteous, ignorant of history, and humorless itself to a quite remarkable degree.”

It’s hard to read their books or watch their interviews without concluding that the New Atheists think they are a lot smarter than the rest of us, and especially the rest of us who happen to be Christians. In the past, atheists attempted to mask this arrogance; now it is flaunted. The change occurred in 2003 when Daniel Dennett and Richard Dawkins decided that atheists needed a less offensive name. The term chosen to spruce up atheism was “bright.” A “Bright” was defined as someone who holds “a naturalistic worldview,” which is “free of supernatural and mystical elements.”

In a 2003 article in England’s the *Guardian*, Richard Dawkins explains why a new word was
needed to raise consciousness about atheism: “Those of us who subscribe to no religion; those of us
whose view of the universe is natural rather than supernatural; those of us who rejoice in the real and
scorn the false comfort of the unreal, we need a word of our own, a word like ‘gay.’ You can say ‘I
am an atheist’ but at best it sounds stuffy (like ‘I am a homosexual’) and at worst it inflames
prejudice (like ‘I am a homosexual’).”

Shortly after the term “Brights” was introduced, Steven Waldman responded with an NPR
commentary:

I’m not sure what the image buffers were aiming for, but the name “The Brights” succinctly
conveys the sense that this group thinks it’s more intelligent than everyone else. The rest of us
would be “The Dims,” I suppose. Daniel C. Dennett wrote, in a recent New York Times op-ed,
“We Brights don’t believe in ghosts, or elves, or the Easter Bunny, or God.”

Let’s put aside the questionable intelligence of trying to improve your image by choosing a
title that makes everyone hate you; they might as well have chosen “The Smugs” or “The
Smartypants.” Let’s instead, examine the substance of their platform . . .

What about their bolder assertion, or implication, that people who believe in god [sic] or
the supernatural are just not as, well, bright. In fact, two surveys earlier this year—one from
Harris, and one from Gallup—indicate that even supernatural religious beliefs are held not
only by most Americans, but by the majority of well-educated Americans.

Listen to these numbers—55% of people with post-graduate degrees (lawyers, doctors,
dentists, and the like) believe in the Devil. 53% believe in Hell. 72% believe in miracles.
Remember these are people with post-graduate educations. 78% of them believe in the
survival of the soul after death. 60% believe in the virgin birth. And 64% believe in the
resurrection of Christ.

While the Brights themselves vigorously assert that “bright” carries no connotation of superior
intelligence, it’s hard to deny the conclusion reached by Waldman—that within their own circles,
they surely view their intellects as capable of more rational and realistic conclusions, which makes
them superior to those who believe in supposedly nonrational spiritual truths.

It is important to note in this connection that, from a biblical perspective, “irrational” is not the
only alternative to “rational.” There is a third category called transrational—a level of thinking that
is not irrational though it is beyond human rationality. For example, God says, “My thoughts are not
your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways . . . For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are
My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8–9). This passage
refers to thoughts and ways that are beyond \((trans-)\) human thoughts and ways, beyond human comprehension. Therefore, while belief in an unseen God may appear humanly irrational because it is beyond the limited reach of the human mind, it is perfectly rational from God’s perspective, which we embrace as Christians.

Peter expresses this transrational perspective when he writes, “Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:7–8). The Brights find such belief irrational; but Christians find no conflict in believing and loving beyond what human rationality would confirm.

Dinesh D’Souza agrees with this perspective: “While the atheist arrogantly persists in the delusion that his reason is fully capable of figuring out all that there is, the religious believer lives in the humble acknowledgment of the limits of human knowledge, knowing that there is a reality greater than, and beyond, that which our senses and minds can ever apprehend.”\(^{15}\)

While we rightly place great emphasis on faith in our approach to the transrational, I don’t want to leave readers with the impression that it’s a blind faith devoid of rational thinking or empirical evidence. The existence of matter, life, and reason demands an explanation that cannot be satisfied rationally by the Brights’ subrational claim that everything sprang from nothing or is self-existent.

One of the clear messages of the Bible is the danger of pride. We see pride exhibited when men place their own reasoning powers above the revelation of God and depend on their own finite minds to determine infinite truths. Pride was the original sin and has its place on God’s hate list (Proverbs 6:16–19). King Solomon warns, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18). Indeed, God resists the proud in all their endeavors (James 4:6).

**Their Advocates Are Deserting Them**

One hardly ever hears of a leading Evangelical denouncing his Evangelical faith so that he can become an atheist. But throughout history many prominent atheists have found their way to belief in God. Here are a few examples:

**Antony Flew**

Philosopher and former atheist Antony Flew set the agenda for modern atheism with his 1950 essay, “Theology and Falsification,” which became the most widely reprinted philosophical publication of the last half-century. Flew has published more than thirty books, including *God and Philosophy*, *The Presumption of Atheism*, and *How to Think Straight*. 

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A 2004 Associated Press story describing Flew’s transformation carried this headline: “Famous Atheist Now Believes in God.” The story went on to say, “A British philosophy professor who has been a leading champion of atheism for more than a half-century has changed his mind. He now believes in God.” Flew was adamant in maintaining that he had not become a Christian, but rather a “deist like Thomas Jefferson.” But simply changing from “no God” to “God” was enough to send shock waves through atheist camps.

In his 2007 book, There Is a God, Flew discloses how his commitment to “follow the argument wherever it leads” led him to a belief in God as Creator. One reviewer described the book as “a most uncomfortable jolt to those who were once his fellow atheists.”

The cover of Flew’s book tells the whole story. The title, There Is No God, has the word No crossed out and the word A inserted. While Flew did not come to believe in the God of the Bible, he concluded that atheism is not logically sustainable.

A. N. Wilson

Once thought to be the next C. S. Lewis, A. N. Wilson renounced his faith and spent years mocking Christianity. He recently returned to faith. The reason, he said in an interview with the British magazine New Statesman, was that atheists “are missing out on some very basic experiences of life.”

While writing his biography of C. S. Lewis, he noticed similarities between himself and his subject, such as a happy childhood shading into miserable boarding-school years and a rejection of boyhood faith on reaching maturity. But another parallel slowly dawned on him: Just as Lewis gradually became aware that his favorite authors were Christians, Wilson noticed a difference between the skeptical and the devout. Attractive and amusing as David Hume was, did he confront the complexities of human existence as deeply as his contemporary Samuel Johnson? The perception of his atheist friends seemed rather “parochial and flat.” Listening to Bach and reading the works of religious authors, he realized that their “perception of life was deeper, wiser, and more rounded than my own.”

Matthew Parris

Parris, a well-known British atheist, made the mistake of visiting Christian aid workers in Malawi, where he saw the power of the Gospel transforming them and others. Concerned with what he saw,
he wrote that it “confounds my ideological beliefs, stubbornly refuses to fit my worldview, and has embarrassed my growing belief that there is no God.” Parris went on to pay Christian evangelism a glowing compliment that utterly confounds and contradicts the ragings against faith spewed by the New Atheists: “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.”

While Parris is unwilling to follow spiritually where his observations lead intellectually, he is obviously wrestling with how Christianity makes better sense of the world than other worldviews, and he has the honesty to say it openly.

Peter Hitchens
While Peter Hitchens was never an outspoken advocate for the New Atheists, he was formerly an atheist and is the brother of the outspoken New Atheist Christopher Hitchens. Peter Hitchens is a British journalist and author of the 2010 book *The Rage Against God*. At the age of fifteen, he set fire to his Bible on the playing field of his Cambridge boarding school and set out on a life of denying the existence of God.

He attributes his return to faith to seeing socialism in practice during his years as a correspondent in Eastern Europe and in Moscow during the collapse of the Soviet Union. In his book, he describes what it was like for the Russian people who were living under the tyranny of godless Communism:

Soviet citizens . . . knew the daily drudgery of finding anything decent to eat. They knew all the sugar had disappeared from the shops because the official anti-alcohol campaign had impelled millions to make their own vodka in the bathtub. They knew that if they wanted anesthetics at the dentist, or antibiotics at the hospital, or co-operation from their child’s teacher, or a holiday by the sea, they would need to bribe someone to get them. Even in Moscow, the show city of the Evil Empire, they knew that they dwelt in the suburbs of hell, that in mile after mile of mass-produced housing you would be hard put to find a single family untouched by divorce, that no mother reared her own children, that the schools taught lies, that secret government establishments leaked radiation into air and water. Fresh eggs were an event. “No” meant “How much will you pay me?” Rats were commonplace and played merrily among the trash-cans of apartment blocks and in the entrances of railway terminals. Windows were filthy as a matter of course; I never saw a clean one.

While most struggled to survive, a secret elite enjoyed great privileges—special living spaces,
special hospitals with Western drugs and equipment, special schools in which their children were well taught in English, special waiting rooms in stations and airports, and special lanes (one ran down the middle of the street on which I lived) along which the Politburo’s giant armored limousines roared at 90 miles an hour, shouldering aside anyone who dared get in the way. The elite had privileged access to good food, foreign travel and books, and the groveling servility of the organs of the state, which oppressed the common people and extorted money from them. This society, promoted by its leaders as an egalitarian utopia, was in truth one of the most unequal societies on earth. 24

Peter Hitchens describes life in Russia in the early nineties as harsh and dangerous. In 1990 there were 6.46 million abortions in the USSR and only 4.85 million live births. For the average citizen, life was “lived at a dismally low level materially, ethically, and culturally.” 25

This Russia of the 1990s was simply the result of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution that led to the formation of the Soviet Union. Alister McGrath describes it this way:

When the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917, the elimination of religious belief was a core element of their revolutionary program. This was not accidental or incidental; it was seen as an essential aspect of the new state that was to come into being . . . Churches were closed; priests were imprisoned, exiled or executed. On the eve of the Second World War there were only 6,376 clergy remaining in the Russian Orthodox Church, compared with the prerevolutionary figure of 66,140 . . . In 1917, there were 39,500 churches in Russia; in 1940, only 950 remained functional. The remainder had been closed, converted for secular use or destroyed. 26

Peter Hitchens describes the final experience that brought him back to belief in God. He was in Dallas, Texas, with a few hours to spare before catching his plane back to Washington, DC, and he decided to visit the city’s Museum of Art. He found himself standing speechless in front of a painting called *The Prodigal Son* by American painter Thomas Hart Benton. Benton’s portrayal of the story told a far more bitter ending than the joyful reunion of father and son in Jesus’ version (Luke 15:11–32):

[The son] has come home too late. Nobody has seen him from afar off and run joyfully to meet him. There will be no forgiveness, no best robe, no ring, no “music and dancing.” He stands in his shabby clothes with his poor, roped suitcase. A beaten-up car—the last trace of his squandered wealth—is parked in the background. He is gaping, with his hand to his mouth, at the ruin of the family homestead, ruin caused by his own greed and wastefulness. He looks as if it is just dawning on him that he is stupid and cruel and without hope. The light is failing in
a chilly sky beneath wind-ripped, twisted clouds. Instead of a fatted calf, there is a stark, white animal skeleton, the skull horned, lying in the untended grass. We can guess at the grief, resignation, and failure that have overtaken the family and its home during his heedless absence. Who can he blame for it but himself? The desolation is infinite. And as I surveyed the melancholy remnants of my own church, out of which I had reluctantly stomped, I felt the same. It was terrible and wrong, but what was I to say? Where had I been when I was needed?

Standing before the painting, Hitchens knew he was the prodigal, knew the Christian church in his homeland of England was the run-down, decrepit homeplace in Benton’s picture. Where had he been when he was needed? Running from God, pursuing his own intellectual pleasures. The experience was a turning point for him—he “threw [himself] . . . into an effort to halt or reverse the destruction” that had occurred in his absence from Christianity.

Many influential Christians have turned from atheism to belief, such as C. S. Lewis, Malcolm Muggeridge, Josh McDowell, Francis Collins, Alister McGrath, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and Lee Strobel, to name a few. As Jesus promised, those who honestly search for truth will find it: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Luke 11:9).

Their Arguments Are Dividing Them

One of the New Atheists’ favorite arguments against Christianity is that religion is responsible for the majority of the evil and pain in the world. That argument was popularized by Christopher Hitchens’s book God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything. Alister McGrath summarizes the argument: “The faults of the world are to be laid at the door of backward-looking superstitions, which hold the world back from its rational and scientific destiny. Eliminate religion and the world will be a better place. Religion has led only to violence, intellectual dishonesty, oppression and social division.”

In his book How the Mind Works, Steven Pinker echoes Hitchens: “Religions have given us stonings, witch-burnings, crusades, inquisitions, jihads, fatwas, suicide bombers, abortion-clinic gunmen, and mothers who drown their sons so they can be happily reunited in heaven. As Blaise Pascal wrote, ‘Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction.’”

While there can be no doubt that some horrible things have been done in the name of religion—and one death that arises from a religious motivation is one death too many—the atheist argument
that religion poisons everything is nothing less than revisionist history. In his book *What’s So Great About Christianity*, Dinesh D’Souza cites real facts to counter the atheists’ accusations. He concentrates specifically on the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the Salem witch trials.

D’Souza’s voluminous research begins with the Crusades, which, according to the atheists, were supposedly responsible for the massacre of thousands. D’Souza reminds his readers that the Crusades were an attempt on the part of Christians to recover territory that had been taken from them by Islamic armies. “In the context of the history of warfare, there is no warrant for considering the Crusades a world historical crime of any sort. The Christians fought to defend themselves from foreign conquest, while the Muslims fought to continue conquering Christian lands.” European Christians had good reason to be concerned about foreign conquest. Islamic armies had been turned back from conquering what is now modern France in AD 732 at the Battle of Tours. Had Islamic armies won that battle, the entire history of Western civilization would have been radically altered.

When it comes to the Spanish Inquisition, D’Souza discovered that “the horrific images of the Inquisition are largely a myth concocted first by the political enemies of Spain—mainly English writers who shaped our American understanding of that event—and later by the political enemies of religion.” Citing Henry Kamen’s book *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision*, D’Souza points out that the total number of people who were executed by Roman Catholic inquisitors for heresy was approximately two thousand. While this is not an insignificant number, it is important to remember that these deaths occurred over a period of 350 years.

The Salem witch trials are the New Atheists’ best example of religiously motivated violence in America. Again, D’Souza’s research provides correctives to the accepted critical view: “How many people were killed in those trials? Thousands? Hundreds? Actually, fewer than twenty-five. Nineteen were sentenced to death, and a few others died in captivity.”

In a written debate on the subject, “Is Christianity Good for the World?” Christopher Hitchens sets forth the claim that religion in general and Christianity in particular are responsible for most of the evils of the world. And theist Douglas Wilson responds:

You say that if “Christianity is to claim credit for the work of outstanding Christians or for the labors of famous charities, then it must in all honesty accept responsibility for the opposite.” In short, if we point to our saints, you are going to demand that we point also to our charlatans, persecutors, shysters, slave-traders, inquisitors, hucksters, televangelists, and so on. Now allow me the privilege of pointing out the structure of your argument here. If a professor takes credit for the student who mastered the material, aced his finals, and went on to a career that was a benefit
to himself and the university he graduated from, the professor must (fairness dictates) be upbraided for the dope-smoking slacker that he kicked out of class in the second week. They were both formally enrolled, is that not correct? They were both students, were they not?

What you are doing is saying that Christianity must be judged not only on the basis of those who believe the gospel in truth and live accordingly but also on the basis of those baptized Christians who cannot listen to the Sermon on the Mount without a horse laugh and a life to match. You are saying that those who excel in the course and those who flunk out of it are all the same. This seems to me to be a curious way of proceeding.

So the New Atheists’ characterizations of Christian evils err in two significant ways: The first is an error of proportion in claiming that the historical deaths inflicted in the name of Christianity come anywhere close to matching the massive deaths of scores of millions inflicted by godless regimes headed by men such as Hitler, Stalin, and Mao. The atheists’ second error is in even attributing those deaths to the practice of valid Christianity. They were inflicted in the name of Christianity, but by people who had departed from Christian principles and teachings.

Their Adversaries Are Defeating Them

In his book *There Is a God*, Antony Flew tells how impressed he was with Israeli scientist Gerald Schroeder’s point-by-point refutation of what Flew called the “monkey theorem.” This theorem asserts that life could have arisen by chance, using the analogy of a multitude of monkeys banging away on computer keyboards until they eventually write a Shakespearean sonnet. Schroeder cites an experiment conducted by the British National Council of Arts: “A computer was placed in a cage with six monkeys. After one month of hammering away at it . . . the monkeys produced fifty typed pages—but not a single word . . . even though the shortest word in the English language is one letter (a or I). A is a word only if there is a space on either side of it.”

So what are the chances of getting a Shakespearean sonnet? Schroeder answered conclusively: If you took the entire universe and converted it to computer chips—forget the monkeys—each one weighing a millionth of a gram and had each computer chip able to spin out 488 trials at, say, a million times a second; if you turn the entire universe into these microcomputer chips and these chips were spinning a million times a second [producing] random letters . . . You will never get a sonnet by chance . . . Yet the world just thinks the monkeys can do it every time.
This is but one example of how the New Atheists must rely on unproven or unprovable theorems to buttress their claim that the universe, life, matter, and intelligence arose from nothing. As C. S. Lewis wrote, any assertion that the universe came about without the agency of an intelligent first cause is flawed at its base. He calls it a myth and marvels at the credulity and denial of common sense on the part of those who believe it: “To those brought up on the Myth nothing seems more normal, more natural, more plausible, than that chaos should turn into order, death into life, ignorance into knowledge.”

Surprisingly, this denial of common sense is frankly acknowledged by no less than atheist and famed evolutionary biologist Richard Lewontin, who wrote,

Our willingness to accept scientific claims that are against common sense is the key to an understanding of the real struggle between science and the supernatural. We take the side of science in spite of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, in spite of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, in spite of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism. It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our a priori adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counter-intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.

And it’s people who think like this who are claiming we are the ones who are irrational! It’s easy to see why the New Atheists’ claims are being so readily refuted.

**Their Amnesia Is Discrediting Them**

In his book *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins writes, “There is not the smallest evidence . . . that atheism systematically influences people to do bad things . . . Individual atheists may do evil things but they don’t do evil things in the name of atheism.”

Can a man of Dawkins’s intelligence really believe what he has written? Somewhere in the core of his being he has to know that history will not support his assertions. Alister McGrath puts my question in a different way when he writes, “What rational soul would sign up to such a secular myth, which is obliged to treat such human-created catastrophes as Hiroshima, Auschwitz and apartheid as ‘a few local hiccups’ which in no way discredit or disrupt the steady upward progress of
Once again, I appeal to the research of Dinesh D’Souza, who gives an excellent analysis of the evils of atheism:

In the past hundred years or so, the most powerful atheist regimes—Communist Russia, Communist China, and Nazi Germany—have wiped out people in astronomical numbers. Stalin was responsible for around twenty million deaths . . . Mao Zedong’s regime a staggering seventy million deaths . . . Hitler comes in a distant third with around ten million murders, six million of them Jews . . . We have to realize that atheist regimes have in a single century murdered more than one hundred million people . . .

Whatever the cause for why atheist regimes do what they do, the indisputable fact is that the religions of the world put together have in three thousand years not managed to kill anywhere near the number of people killed in the name of atheism in the past few decades. It’s time to abandon the mindlessly repeated mantra that religious belief has been the main source of human conflict and violence. Atheism, not religion, is responsible for the worst mass murders in history.

Alistair McGrath says the idea that religion poisons everything is “simply childish. Of course religion can lead to violence and evil. But so can politics, race and ethnicity—and an aggressive and dismissive atheist worldview.”

Their Attrition Is Diminishing Them

Lest one think that British universities are a stronghold solely of atheistic scholars (for example, Richard Dawkins), it should be noted that equally proficient British scholars are firm defenders of theism and, more specifically, of Christianity. One of the most capable and prolific is Alister McGrath, who holds earned doctorates from Oxford in molecular biophysics and divinity and who has authored more than two dozen books on scientific and theological subjects. As a former atheist, McGrath is “respectful yet critical of the movement.”

According to McGrath, “Atheism is in trouble. Its future seems increasingly to lie in the private beliefs of individuals rather than in the great public domain it once regarded as its natural habitat . . . Atheist thinkers are more than happy to appear on the nation’s chat shows to promote their latest book. But they have failed to communicate a compelling vision of atheism that is capable of drawing and holding large numbers of people.”

A Christianity Today magazine editorial, written two years after McGrath’s observations, noted
that the “trouble” in atheism continues: “The new atheistic rhetoric betrays panic, another sign of weakness. Atheism knows that it is losing both arguments and the global tide. Stories of the global vibrancy of religion are everywhere trumping the grand narrative of evolutionary progress. And the best philosophers are still taking the God-hypothesis seriously.”

Dinesh D’Souza begins the first chapter of his book What’s So Great About Christianity by announcing that “God has come back to life.” And he concludes the chapter by saying that “Christianity is winning, and secularism is losing. The future is always unpredictable, but one trend seems clear. God is the future, and atheism is on its way out.” The late Tony Snow, broadcast journalist and former press secretary to President George W. Bush, agreed: “Atheists may be selling books, but they’re not making converts. Christianity is [making converts], especially in places and congregations that take Scripture seriously—and joyously.”

For the last twenty-seven years, the International Bulletin of Missionary Research has issued a “Status of Global Mission” report that presents the state of Christianity worldwide compared to other major religions. Commenting on the 2011 report, author and social activist George Weigel writes,

Compared to the world’s 2.3 billion Christians, there are 1.6 billion Muslims, 951 million Hindus, 486 million Buddhists, 458 million Chinese folk-religionists, and 137 million atheists, whose numbers have actually dropped over the past decade, despite the caterwauling of Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Co. One cluster of comparative growth statistics is striking: As of mid-2011, there will be an average of 80,000 new Christians per day (of whom 31,000 will be Catholics) and 79,000 new Muslims per day, but 300 fewer atheists every 24 hours [italics added].

The big lesson of the 2011 Status of Global Mission report can be borrowed from Mark Twain’s famous crack about his alleged death: Reports of Christianity’s demise have been greatly exaggerated. Christianity may be waning in Western Europe, but it’s on an impressive growth curve in other parts of the world, including that toughest of regions for Christian evangelism, Asia. Indeed, the continuing growth of Christianity as compared to the decline of atheism (in absolute numbers, and considering atheists as a percentage of total world population) suggests the possibility that the vitriolic character of the New Atheism—displayed in all its crudity prior to Pope Benedict’s September 2010 visit to Great Britain—may have something to do with the shrewder atheists’ fear that they’re losing, and the clock is running. That’s something you’re unlikely to hear reported in the mainstream media. The numbers are there, however, and the
numbers are suggestive.  

**Their Aggressiveness Is Defining Them**

Timothy Larsen is a professor of Christian thought at Wheaton College and author of *Crisis of Doubt: Honest Faith in Nineteenth-Century England*—a study of leading intellectuals in Victorian England who abandoned their Christian faith and then rediscovered it. Their “crisis of faith” was followed by a “crisis of doubt” in which their atheism was abandoned and faith again embraced. This shows us it’s a mistake to think that atheism is necessarily a permanently settled belief. In fact, one factor driving C. S. Lewis out of atheism was the discovery that an unbelieving friend, whom Lewis described as “the hardest boiled of all the atheists I ever knew,” was assailed by fears that the evidence for God was so good that He might actually exist. Lewis wrote that if this man, “the cynic of cynics, the toughest of toughs, were not—as I would still have put it—‘safe,’ where could I turn? Was there no escape?”

Larsen suggests that the screaming voice of the New Atheists may indicate the presence of a conflict within themselves between an untenable belief and real truth: “Some actually are really trying to answer questions. That’s why they sound so angry . . . They’re in a struggle for their own soul.”

There is probably a lot more soul-searching going on among atheists than they would like us to know about. The daughter of one of the most famous modern atheists, Bertrand Russell, wrote openly about her father in her 1975 book, *My Father, Bertrand Russell*:

I could not even talk to him about religion...I would have liked to convince my father that I had found what he had been looking for, the ineffable something he had longed for all his life. I would have liked to persuade him that the search for God does not have to be vain. But it was hopeless. He had known too many blind Christians, bleak moralists who sucked the joy from life and persecuted their opponents; he would never have been able to see the truth they were hiding . . . I believe myself that his whole life was a search for God . . . Somewhere at the back of my father’s mind, at the bottom of his heart, in the depths of his soul, there was an empty space that had once been filled by God, and he never found anything else to put in it . . . Nevertheless, I picked up the yearning from him, together with his ghostlike feeling of not belonging, of having no home in this world.  

Bertrand Russell himself is reported to have said, “Nothing can penetrate the loneliness of the human heart except the highest intensity of the sort of love the religious teachers have preached.”
His heart recognized the kind of love he needed and wanted, yet he could not bring himself to receive it. A more intellectually honest atheist, John D. Steinrucken, wrote a 2010 article for *American Thinker* titled, “Secularism’s Ongoing Debt to Christianity.” In his article he made this remarkable admission:

> It is rational to conclude that religious faith has made possible the advancement of Western civilization. That is, the glue that has held Western civilization together over the centuries is the Judeo-Christian tradition. To the extent that the West loses its religious faith in favor of non-judgmental secularism, then to the same extent, it loses that which holds all else together.

> Although I am a secularist (atheist, if you will), I accept that the great majority of people would be morally and spiritually lost without religion. Can anyone seriously argue that crime and debauchery are not held in check by religion? Is it not comforting to live in a community where the rule of law and fairness are respected? Would such be likely if Christianity were not there to provide a moral compass to the great majority? Do we secularists not benefit out of all proportion from a morally responsible society?

> An orderly society is dependent on a generally accepted morality. There can be no such morality without religion. Has there ever been a more perfect and concise moral code than the one Moses brought down from the mountain?

> Those who doubt the effect of religion on morality should seriously ask the question: Just what are the immutable moral laws of secularism? Be prepared to answer, if you are honest, that such laws simply do not exist! The best answer we can ever hear from secularists to this question is a hodgepodge of strained relativist talk of situational ethics. They can cite no overriding authority other than that of fashion. For the great majority in the West, it is the Judeo-Christian tradition which offers a template assuring a life of inner peace toward the world at large—a peace which translates to a workable liberal society.

> In spite of his belief that “most men do have a need for God,” Steinrucken doesn’t count himself among them. But he issues a warning to his fellow nonbelieving “elitists”: If the elitists of our Western civilization want to survive, then it is incumbent upon them to see to the preservation of the hoary, time-honored faith of the great majority of the people. This means that our elitists should see that their most valued vested interest is the preservation within our culture of Christianity and Judaism. It is not critical that they themselves believe, only that they should publicly hold in high esteem the institutions of Christianity and Judaism, and to respect those who do believe and to encourage and to give leeway to those who, in truth, will be foremost in the
One has to admire John Steinrucken’s powers of honest observation. He does not have a negative opinion of religion—indeed, he is a firm believer in the power of religion to build and preserve stable societies in which the irreligious can safely function. Yet he is atheistic about God. While I appreciate his honesty and his generous analysis, I am baffled by the inconsistency of his thinking: How could a religion that he believes to have at its center a fundamental flaw (belief in the existence of God) have the power to serve as the foundation for Western civilization? It was Jesus who said that houses built on unbelief will eventually crumble (Matthew 7:24–27). If there really is no God, could a religion built on a lie sustain Western civilization as Christianity has done for a thousand years without being exposed as a sham?

**A Challenge to Practicing and Practical Atheists**

Earlier I noted that some people declare themselves to be theists (believers in God), even Christian theists (believers in the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ), yet they live as if they don’t believe. They live as practical atheists. Practical atheists run the gamut from people who believe they will somehow escape God’s notice and their accountability to Him (Psalm 10:4, 6, 11, 13) to people who profess to be followers of Christ yet do not honor Him in their lives. Any time we callously fail to live up to what we believe, we declare ourselves to be practical atheists. By living as if God does not care about what we think and choose is, by our actions, to deny ample evidence to the contrary.

Which brings me to my challenge for atheists of any stripe. Whether an atheist by choice (practicing) or by callousness (practical), it takes a lot of energy to maintain atheism. It takes energy to suppress evidence that is abundantly available—energy that might be used in far more fruitful and satisfying ways. In Romans 1 the apostle Paul writes about people who “suppress the truth” about God (v. 18). They have to continually work to suppress the truth “because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” (vv. 19–20).

Anyone who has ever told a lie knows the spiritual, emotional, and intellectual energy required to suppress the truth initially and to keep it suppressed continually. Truth about God is everywhere—even the heavens declare it (Psalm 19:1–6). It’s one thing to lie (“There is no God; God doesn’t care what I do”), but it’s another thing to actively suppress the truth—to deny God’s existence and role in
the face of overwhelming evidence. As I have already noted, the Bible labels that person a fool.

My challenge to you is to accept the same challenge as the one given by Jesus to some who doubted who He was: “If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority” (John 7:17). Whether you are an atheist or a Christian living as if you don’t believe, apply your spiritual energy in a different direction. I challenge you to make a daring experiment: Instead of suppressing the truth, try opening yourself to it. If, in spite of all the evidence, you have trouble believing, act as if it is true. The stakes are high enough that it’s worth the effort to set aside your tendency to disbelieve and try living like a Christian for a while.

In the George MacDonald story “The Golden Key,” the young heroine Tangle is on a quest to find the country from whence the shadows fall. Her long journey has been filled with signposts and directions, and it finally leads her to the Old Man of the Earth. When she asks him the way, he points to a black hole in the ground. “That is the way,” he says. “But there are no stairs,” Tangle replies. “You must throw yourself in,” the Old Man answers. “There is no other way.”

We have overwhelming evidence for the existence of God, the veracity of the Bible, and the historical life of Jesus on earth. Yet all this evidence leaves in our hearts a place that requires faith in order to come to full belief. The evidence will lead us on a long journey toward belief, but we will come to the place where the evidence points to a mystery into which we must plunge. Often people stop at the edge and insist on yet another piece of evidence as a stairway into the unknown. That is the point at which we must exercise the step of faith that forces us to trust in God and throw ourselves in. As George MacDonald said, “There is no other way.”

Use your spiritual energy to seek after God, and then watch as God’s will becomes clear to you. “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

This is an excerpt from I NEVER THOUGHT I'D SEE THE DAY by Dr. David Jeremiah.
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