

FROM THE PASTOR'S PEN



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THE NEW ATHEISM

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I have been watching and reading with interest a renewed vigor and enthusiasm for atheism, at least in the public arena. Intelligent and articulate proponents for atheism have been appearing with increased frequency lately in the midst of a time when interest in that catch-all word “spirituality” is tremendously high. Their concern, of course, is that religiously motivated people are a tremendous danger to the peace and prosperity of the world. They also believe that religious people are intellectually stupid.

I watched with debate between Christopher Hitchens’s (author of the book “God Is Not Great”) and Alister McGrath (more later on him). In the midst of this debate Christopher Hitchens lays out a case for why religion in general leads to the world’s ills and therefore the “enlightened” and educated man ought to not only reject but strive to eliminate religion.

At the end of the debate, though, Hitchens plays his cards with regard to Christianity. Hitchens, after spending much of the debate talking about how religious people have caused great damage and destruction in human history, then ridicules Jesus’ command to love your enemies because, in fact, societies ought to “eliminate” their enemies. And, in his view, religious people especially should be eliminated.

Alister deftly pointed out that atheist and communist Russia and China were largely responsible for the loss of millions upon millions lives, and that Hitler’s Germany was hardly “religious” in any proper sense of the term. So, Alister concluded that in many ways, this “new atheism” was, in fact, just as intolerant and potentially violent as religious extremism. All belief systems have their fanatics. The right question to be asked, is whether or not God exists and is Christianity true. And he points to the great benefits Christians have brought to the world.

Thankfully, we have a number of new books written by solid Christian scholars, hoping to address the articulate

concerns of religion from these group of popular atheists. All three of these authors have been gaining press in Newsweek, Time and interviews with major news groups. What I appreciate about them in particular is their desire to understand their opponents arguments and respectfully engage in disagreement with them as they present a case for the Christian faith.

Alister McGrath has written two recent books that are of interest. One is *The Twilight of Atheism*, and another is *The Dawkins Delusion*, a response to fellow Oxford scholar Richard Dawkins (a tremendously influential atheist and author of *The God Delusion*).

Tim Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, NY, has written a wonderful apologetic book called *The Reason for God*. The first half of his book addresses questions and doubts that people commonly have about God and the second half addresses reasons for the Christian faith.

Lastly, N. T. Wright has written a book entitled *Simply Christian* (which is in the vein of C. S. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity*). *Simply Christian* is written for those who do not understand what the Christian faith is all about. It is Wright’s attempt to articulate “why Christianity makes sense.”

In response to serious questions about God, and what faith is, know that there are articulate Christians who are responding with integrity and character (as opposed to mindless rants) to those who are asking really great questions but arriving at the wrong conclusions.