

Footnotes

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The Francis A. Schaeffer Foundation is a place where the ideas of the late Dr. Schaeffer may be studied and researched.

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Dear friends around us,

Many of you have followed with interest our work in the Francis A. Schaeffer Foundation through the past 18 years. Your comments and conversations, when we met face to face on one of my speaking trips or visiting us in Gryon, were encouraging, helpful and often usefully provocative. Thank you for that. It has enriched our lives, kept our minds open to a wider world and stimulated our own reflection on life, history and our relation as people to God's world around us. **Footnotes** and the occasional longer letter describe our work, life and pursuits with people and places. They reflect what we think, teach and like to pass on to you among about 900 others in many countries.

Today I also write because we need your help urgently. While there have been faithful donors all along who support us with gifts and contributions to the work, their number has declined in recent years to such a level that we could barely continue. This year only half of our expenses were covered. Our budget is approximately \$80,000, of which some is earned through honoraria when I lecture or preach; a bit more results from royalties. But the majority of contribution comes from people who express their appreciation for what we do, think and share with others by sending us gifts or donations.

I ask you to consider becoming part of the group of people who help us continue the work. You may pick up where others have been with us before. The Francis A. Schaeffer Foundation issues receipts for your tax-deductible gifts. You may send it to our address here or to the Francis A. Schaeffer Foundation in the US, c/o McGill, 4320 Omaha, Amarillo, TX 79106.

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Can this perhaps be Missionary Atheism?

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In the previous issue at the end of 2006, I referred to two current proponents of atheism. Their widely advertised and circulated books are reviewed in all kinds of publications. They have been on lively TV and radio shows. The debate about theism and atheism is continuing with renewed energy. Richard Dawkins is the author of *The God Delusion*. Sam Harris mocks Christians with his *Letter to a Christian Nation*.

If their views meet a more receptive audience today, it indicates a public that is perhaps frustrated by the influence of religion on people

1401

FOOTNOTES

VOLUME 10 NUMBER 1

and politics around the world. **For decades the Enlightenment idea of private religion and public rationality has reigned as an antidote to religious wars, superstition and social economic backwardness. This is no longer true.**

I suspect that in addition to an intellectual debate we also have in these books an effort "to come out of the closet" by showing how many atheists there are and who will stand up to the public influence of Christianity in our culture. While homosexuals, drug takers and feminists came out because they wanted tolerance from society, these authors want society to keep religion from people.

In these books, the reaction to religion is sharp and furious. The authors seemingly give many people the ammunition to shoot at the very foundation of religious faith and motivations. They claim to show that reason, facts and social responsibility are not found where religion instructs or even defines people. **To their minds, instead of salvation, religion brings fear, conflict, irrationality and eventually even celebrates death.**

Consequently, the authors attempt to show what miserable conditions result from faith, without ever distinguishing between various faith contents or acknowledging the vast and often opposing differences between various religious attempts to explain the world and the human beings in it.

Not only is this a failing, but it demonstrates that the first interest of the authors is probably not to show the negative influences of many religions. Rather, it is to get rid of the possibility of God himself. **With God gone, the question of truth in religion is rendered void, and no further interest is justified.**

A review of Dawkins' book in the Financial Times in March pointed out not only how easy it is to deny God's existence, but also how un-

scientific and unscholarly that is. **How can anyone be taken seriously who proposes as a finite human being that God does not exist?** The most anyone can say is that there is so far no evidence. But Dawkins prefers to play God himself, to close the debate, and thus to get rid of any potential rival.

The latest author, Christopher Hitchens, adds his proposals by addressing audiences all over the country with his recent book, *God is not Great*. (the cover is laid out in this way!). Together they can now find comfort as a trinity of denial, just as Hegel, Marx and Lenin some time before were a trinity of birthfathers to the cruel and murderous experiment of Bolshevism. Both trinities are unholy copies directly opposed to the original Trinity of the Bible.

Even so, I found some pleasure in the way Hitchens presented his ideas and then fielded questions from a large audience at the Washington, DC, bookstore, "Politics and Prose," on Connecticut Avenue. His presentation was both humorous and serious, and articulate. Where he related it to matters of history and religion he served up vivid illustrations. He responded to Mormons, Marxists and was equally critical of Islam as of Christianity.

In fact, he is opposed to religion as such and wants to free people from its bondage. **To him, religion has served no beneficial purpose, since it enslaves people by employing fear of punishment and by exacting stupid obedience to irrational demands.**

Like many others, he sees himself as having come of age, and perceives reality now in a clearer light. In Hitchens' view, a child depends on the guidance of an older person to protect him in his juvenile ignorance from getting hurt by life. During the night of ignorance about the world in earlier, pre-scientific days, one was glad for the glow which religions, traditions and other authorities gave off. But few tools existed to distinguish between real insights and superstition. The world was full of mysteries waiting for resolution through better answers, more detailed information and logical coherence.

Religion, including Christianity, served people, if at all, by giving them an illusion of purpose, a common language and common values. It put the experiences of the individual into a cultural, though benighted, context. But a new day has dawned, and by its light Hitchens has come to see that religion itself was a superstition, an attempt to control some fears and to instill others. It enclosed people in a system of habits and promised rewards and punishments.

Hitchens now proposes that we are more mature and independent through the power of reasoning and the tools of science. We have left the night of ignorance to awaken to a day of bright insights. He and the other members of that trinity want to get rid of all this so-called superstition without differentiation by showing what harm has been done by religions. What Hitchens knows as the Christian Church he also rejects in its sources and practice.

At the bookstore, he spoke without notes and alternatively sipped spring water from a plastic bottle and the other kind from a barely hidden flask. Like Dawkins, his background is British and he only very recently became a US citizen. He is in exile from the Church of England, but his critique encompasses all of religion. Like many, he rightly observed how often religion has been used to inhibit the human mind and to cause bondage with many of its resulting tragedies.

We agree with that and have stated it repeatedly ourselves. **Religion is a way to tie people into something bigger than themselves.** It relates people backwards to what was there before them, to what is eternal, bigger and encompassing all reality. People seek that kind of attachment for at least two reasons.

First, we did not make ourselves and wonder what happened before. What is our past? We live in a social context of parents and children. Where did we come from, who are we, what produced us as people? Why now, why me, why here?

Second, as people we are unable to not ask those questions. For in our minds, in our souls or by our personhood we transcend the mo-

ment. By that I mean that we see links, causation and dependencies; we have a sense of sequence or history. We want to know, since, unlike animals, we do not function mainly by natural instinct in response to present stimuli. Instinct is a response to the moment. People, however, want to know the history of that moment and what will proceed from it forward.

Religions, then, tie us into a narrative, which may or may not be true to reality. Religions give answers or suppress them. However, some do not even allow questions and instead demand submission, silence and acceptance.

The bigger picture or story that religion provides needs to be examined to see whether it is true or fiction. In the latter case it may be made up, hoped for, agreed upon, but is not subject to, inviting or allowing of critical evaluation. **Here lies a distinguishing mark of Biblical religion. It is unique among religions in its explicit and implicit links to history and geography, to reason and evidence, to logic and coherence.** It contains not just an invitation, but actual instructions **not** to believe it if reality should turn out to be different from the description found in the Bible.

The God of the Bible invites us to observe, compare and reason. His word, like anything in language, addresses our minds and hearts and challenges us to examine whether what is proclaimed is true to history, geography, reasonable reflection and evidences in real life. The world, which the Bible describes, is the common human experience of mankind everywhere. **Furthermore, by proposing that the human being is made in the image of the Creator, God expects us to read the text with a critical mind.**

To distinguish the true from the false, the just from the unjust, and the ugly from the beautiful is a frequent admonition from God, which matches our own observation of life. The Biblical text confirms our observations that there are lousy kings, false prophets and unfaithful priests, dishonest adults and frustrated children all around us at any time.

Compliance with the Bible's procla-

mation is not required as a presupposition. Faith is not the starting point, but rather the conclusion. One should not read the Bible wishing it to be believable or unbelievable. Such wishes make one blind and foolish. Instead, one should read it to find out what it says about the real world and how it understands human existence, its origin and purpose, etc. Nor does the Bible become believable only after a prior work of God in our heart and mind. A flawed view of prior regeneration has its origin in what I consider to be a mistaken view of being "spiritually dead." It does not imply intellectual dishonesty or lacking curiosity.

With too many texts on the market claiming to be "divine," we must never simply believe. There is too much of the wrong kind of faith, willing to believe anything for whatever reasons, including that there is no God. And yet that is what many people do, and how they so often get into terrible situations, develop odd views, and end up ignoring what is true about both God and Creation.

People's blind submission to folly, to inhuman rules for their frequently tragic lives contributes to Hitchens' move from what may have been a quite vague Christian background. He adds his own anger, rage and hype and thereby justifies his ignorant assumptions about the Bible.

I can ignore what came first and how much anything else contributes to his conclusions. But Creation theme parks, like the one recently opened in Kentucky, or the superficial question addressed to national political candidates about whether they believe in creation or evolution, make it easier to turn away from faith and people of faith. Add to this what some religions force people to do towards their neighbor--from mutilation to enslavement, from fatalistic indifference to a life of fear, from superstition to honor killings. The list of human cruelty in the name of religion is endless. So better get rid of it all.

Yet the ease with which Hitchens makes a stew of pieces gleaned from religions to reject them all is more a sign of his anger than a sign of his intellectual discernment. In his recent presentation, he mixed false teachings of the

Roman church, variant readings of the four Gospels, old critiques of miracles and incomplete references to Biblical texts. That is quite a *mélange*, more indicative of his need to justify his conclusion than of prior careful study.

How, he asks, can one belong to a church that for centuries taught about Limbo, where un-baptized babies went, only to now teach that there is no such thing as Limbo? That lines up well with our own astonishment that some former saints are no longer considered saints and thus prayers to and with them are now declared ineffective. And what about the church's cellbacy ethics beyond the teaching of faithful monogamy?

In a more direct reference to the Bible, Hitchens shows that he has not read with any care to context the parts he mentions. Consequently, he ends up with false conclusions. He speaks against a God who forbids murder rather late in human history at Sinai, showing no awareness that Cain already had done wrong in murdering Abel and that God confirmed that view in Genesis 9 at the time of Noah. Hitchens is equally superficial in the discussion of circumcision, which he sees as a mutilation of little boys. He wonders about the resurrection of Jesus, since according to his view, Jesus possibly never really existed.

He makes no difference between the Bible and other religious texts or views. **He fails to recognize how differently various religions, even the great religions of the world, differ in their conceptions of God, Man, faith, morality and what it means to be spiritual.** How can one belong to the Mormons, Hitchens asked in the discussion, when that religion was not revealed until the 19th century and taught, until the recent civil rights acts, that Blacks are not fully human and cannot be redeemed; or that a man has a right to marry under-age girls, and practice polygamy at that?

One would wish that Hitchens had been more discerning and had reached at least for the relationship between belief and culture as contributing and clarifying evidence of the truth or falsehood of a religion. The biggest objections to his view arise in my mind from three factors.

The first is that Hitchens makes no distinction between a God and the people of God. With his assumption that there is no God, he can only see a logical link between a religion and its adherents. They invented it and are now caught up in it. But if there is a God, (his non-existence is not proven) the link is not automatic, for there is a possible break between God and disbelieving people.

The core of the Biblical teaching includes precisely our brokenness, the sin that distorts easily all things and by which we can do great intellectual, cultural and physical harm. At that moment religious and moral foolishness is not God's fault, wish or purpose. Hitchens should lay the folly of human beings at their feet, not at God's!

However, if in fact there is no God nothing can be called folly, wrong or evil. One can then only state what is and reserve one's own reaction to it without any moral import or weight. For without the absolute of a moral God, everything only "is". That things should be otherwise is then only a personal preference. All protest or lament is only a sound, not a complaint.

With this, the second objection arises: The book's title is inappropriate to Hitchens' proposition. The content does not relate to God, great or small, but to the folly of Man. A more fitting title would have been man is not very smart. That would not have been as provocative, but far more accurate. It might even contain a hint why the author himself cannot come up with a more differentiated treatment of religion and the human being. **The subtitle of his book is more to the Hitchens' point: "Religion poisons everything."**

A third flaw lies in Hitchens' ignorance or obvious disregard for the central theme of the Bible about a fallen creation. Only when a moral distance exists between God and man can one trust God's character. **What we experience daily is then not the result of God's Idea of goodness, holiness**

and perfection. Either something tragic, terrible and violent has happened in God's creation or God is himself evil. Man's stupidity and credulity is the problem to be addressed. They result from the bigger problem, common also to the atheist: man's sin. And that again only exists when there is a God against whom Man acts.

Only under these conditions does God not contradict himself when He acts and calls men and women to do good, to bring justice and to seek holiness. Only against that background is there a reason to heal people, unmask false prophets and their religions, and work against evil governments.

Michael Kinsley describes Christopher Hitchens as a "principled dissolute" and an old-fashioned village atheist, who writes with an underlying, genuine anger. Is he only playing the contrarian? Or is he perhaps really fed up with what damage religions have done to so many people, but then unable or unwilling to see more in life than just existence before the end, before death? Until then, to Hitchens, the transcendent can be found only in music and poetry, to which he turns at times.

It is easy to say that Hitchens has not gone far enough. For the terror resulting from religious persuasions is frightening. Religions, including the prophets of atheism, have brought about much grief and suffering. But then he is perhaps only a prophet speaking against rival prophecies, stating an assumption about the assumptions of others, a bit of an extremist against the extremes of irrational religion. For us he is, like all of life, an opportunity to review the basis of our conviction, which can effectively withstand confrontation and survive in the measure in which what we believe is based not on religion, authority and faith, but on a reasoned analysis of an intelligent text about God and Man in history.

Belief in the God of the Bible must distinguish itself from religious belief precisely in the content of the text, the appeal to reason and facts, and a more forceful and effective confrontation of personal and social evil in history.

FOOTNOTES

VOLUME 15 NUMBER 1

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Two helpful pieces in relation to science, reason and religion came to my attention in the past month. It may be well worth your while to look them up.

"Science, Religion and the Human Future," by Leon R. Kass, was published in Commentary Magazine in April 2007. The author was chairman of the President's Council on Bioethics. In this article, Kass suggests that **science, as an enterprise to systematically discover the workings of the universe is unthinkable without the trust in the one God's revelation and the trust in human reason to disclose the workings of nature.** Both hang together in their methodical art of gaining truth. In addition to their discovery of how things work, both Christianity and Science have a "philanthropic aspiration to use that knowledge for the relief of man's estate and the betterment of human life."

Kass rightly suggests that there cannot be two contradictory truths about the same universe. Science itself has the belief in one transnational and transregional truth as its starting point. That is a wonderful limitation, for it excludes prejudice and shoddy work as part of Science.

There are other limitations. One is that Science never claims to give us absolute knowledge about anything, for it also has not yet lived, experienced and included what will be tomorrow or under the next stone. Another limitation is that the rationality of Science is a "partial and highly specialized rationality, concocted for the purpose of gaining only that kind of knowledge for which it was devised, and applied to only those aspects of the world that can be captured by such rationalized notions." It is incapable of dealing with the creative personal; the sub-rational, also found in human thought; or the poetic, for instance.

Science cannot know beings and their nature, their purpose, aspirations, their inner states of being and their hierarchy. It eschews explanations in

terms of reasons or decisions. Neither sight nor seeing are, in their essence, material phenomena, for they are "capacities of soul, hence not an object of knowledge for an objectified and materialist science."

The questions of "what" and "how" are addressed by science, but the questions of "why" and "who" are dealt with rationally in the Bible by language and revelation and by persons seeking, speaking, understanding and believing. More of these questions include what life is rather than how it functions; whether the brain has a mind of its own; whether there is a mind anywhere in the universe; what freedom and purposefulness are -- feelings, passion, awareness, imagination, desire, love, hate and thought, or, speaking scientifically, only brain events?

The question of miracles is often raised as a point at which the irrationality and unscientific attitude of the religious person becomes evident to modern Man. The response lies in the contrast between the view of Man as a neuro-chemical living thing seeking only to reproduce himself and that of the reality of persons doing thinking, believing and being, who are perceived as scientifically "unstable." Science cannot abide such astounding irregularities as once-in-a-lifetime events or miracles.

One reason for this is that science would become impossible if God were capable of intervening and suspending the laws of nature. Former regularities would only be probabilities. **Yet in a real sense regularities are probabilities in a world in which persons are able to create new things, from art to babies, from gardens to ideas.** What keeps the probability from becoming a danger is the fidelity of God to his character -- He is not capricious or random or irrational -- and the lawfulness of his creation.

One further interesting point in Kass' essay: "If all truth claims of science -- and the philosophical convictions that some people derive from them -- are merely verbalized expressions

of certain underlying brain states in the scientist who offer these claims, there can be no way to refute the contrary opinions of those whose nervous systems, differently wired, see things the opposite way. And why, indeed, should anyone choose to accept as true the results of someone else's electrochemical brain process over his own? **Truth and error, no less human freedom and dignity, become empty notions when the soul is reduced to chemicals."**

The other piece is an editorial contribution of Sam Brownback, a senator from Kansas, in the International Herald Tribune of June 1, 2007. In his article, "*Creation does not Preclude Evolution*," Brownback laments the superficiality and lack of subtlety in the discussion. During the first Republican presidential debate, the whole matter was reduced to a show of hands if one did not believe in evolution, giving the participants a stark choice between evolution, without getting into the various meanings and extends of it, and creationism, again without any recognition that an insistence on six days of 24 hours is not the necessary conclusion of a belief in God creating the universe.

But with such a reductionist method only a semblance of choice is given. When time is short and only a show of hands is asked for, it is easy to imply that reason and faith are opposites; that reason discovers and works with facts, and faith proposes, well, just itself, faith.

But, Brownback is right to point out, reason and faith are not opposites; they donot work with different data. In fact, all scientific knowledge is only believed as well, after or before testing it in the cauldron of reality. "The scientific method, based on reason, seeks to discover truths about the nature of the created order and how it operates, whereas faith deals with spiritual truths. **The truths of faith and science are complementary... they do not contradict each other, because the spiritual order and the material order were created by the same God."**

That is a fine statement. It could have been

much stronger, however, if reason were also included in the pursuit of spiritual truths. That is first and foremost necessary, because a text always requires reason to understand it. It is the nature of language that one has to recognize not only the meaning of the words from their usage, but also their grammatical relation to each other as they form sentences, dependent clauses, etc. **To understand something involves seeing the specific content and intent of the author's words in relation to reality. That is in no way different merely because something claims to be revelation or proposes to be inspired.** In both cases the author has made an effort to make things known.

Second, the God of the Bible invites us to "reason together." God pleads and argues with us, reminds us of past promises and events. He tells us that he knows where we are intellectually and spiritually and why that is a bad situation. He longs for the Bride, whether Israel in Hosea or the Church in the New Testament, to be true to its vows and faithful to its commitments.

Third, we have many accounts of Jesus and the apostles' teaching, reasoning, setting forth and propounding the truth, both in content to make sure things are understood, and in manner. The argument with the Pharisees in Matthew 11 and the discussions over good things being done on the Sabbath are but two examples of a reasoned discussion.

Fourth, the evident coherence of Scripture within itself (its uniform description of God, Man and the World) and the relationship between Word and Event invite discovery of accuracy and truth or inventions (not to call them lies) and untruth by means of scientific reasoning. The Bible's tie-in with history and geography, with people and places, with practical morals and reasons for behavior is unique at least and at first glance like any interesting book about reality.

Finally, faith is the means by which the human being knows anything. Even reason itself has to be trained,

learned and corrected before it can be trusted to be a faithful tool. It needs to be exercised, explored and distinguished from non-reason. Things, whether they be Biblical accounts and explanations or scientific theories and results, are reasonable only when they fit into a wider net of recognized insights. The same standard needs to be applied to both scientific and Biblical *theories*, for by *theory* we mean a proposed explanation of the area studied.

At this juncture the Biblical theory or explanation touches on a wider field of both material data and personal phenomena that are irreducible to what can be weighed, measured and counted. Choice, creativity, value differentiation are seen by the means of Science in their consequences, but not in their origination.

Francis Schaeffer gave a lecture many years ago in which he suggested that "naturalistic science is poor science." Science should be interested in the whole spectrum of phenomena, including what makes a person more than a biological organism, highly complicated though

it is. **When Science claims to know the limit of the knowable and with that excludes the phenomenon of personal, creative and non-repetitive activity by God or Man, it functions not as Science, but as religion.**

Faced with the reality of persons, both humans and God, the eternal Trinity of persons of the Bible, Science must seek to understand things further, explore new avenues and possibly in the end admit that by its own tools and methods a person is not reducible to scientific knowledge.

Then Science must bow to the wonder of personality, including his or her own as a curious, hard-working, inventive, and artful scientist. Man made in the image of God, a little lower than the angels: there you are as a scientist, in a concert hall, or deciding to love someone, or seeking justice, interested not only in "What can I know", but also in "What ought I to do or what can I hope?"