

Lutheran Mission Matters



Volume XXV, No. 1 (Issue 50) May 2017

The Spirituality of Atheism

Armand J. Boehme

Abstract: An increasing number of people today are saying they are spiritual but not religious. Many new spiritualities have surfaced including atheistic spirituality. Atheists have developed their own creed, Sunday gatherings, Sunday Schools, chaplains, devotional books, Bibles, ethics, Ten Commandments, summer camps, and weddings and funeral services. This raises the question as to whether atheism has become a non-theistic religion like Buddhism Taoism and the Raelians. The American legal system has recognized atheism as a religion. Parallels to attempts at secular religions are also explored, as are ways in which Christians can respond to the increasing secularism of the age.¹

For some today spirituality and religion are separate, if not distinct, realities. Spirituality exists in many places not traditionally associated with spirituality in past days.

Currently there exist “Eastern and Western spirituality, women’s spirituality, New Age spirituality, secular and esoteric spirituality, interfaith and ecumenical spirituality, children’s spirituality, even spirituality and aging, spirituality and health, spirituality and gender, spirituality and human well-being. There is also talk of spirituality in management, business, sociology, economics, and geography, even of spiritual capital in analogy to social and cultural capital. . . . This [superfluity] . . . points to the undeniable fact that, in its most inclusive sense, spirituality is so all-embracing that it does indeed touch everything.”¹

In addition are yet other spiritualities: “the individual and communal spiritual experiences of Christianity, sex, science, the New Age, science fiction, technology, humanism, transhumanism, drugs, tattoos, and atheism.”²

This article will focus on the spirituality of atheism, that is, a spirituality as opposed to religion. A growing number of atheists see a distinction between being



Rev. Dr. Armand J. Boehme serves as Associate Pastor, Trinity Lutheran, Northfield, MN. He has served as an Intentional Interim, a Theological Educator in Kazakhstan, guest lecturer at Concordia Seminary in Nagercoil, Gurukul Lutheran Theological College, India, the Lutheran Bible School in Slovakia, and the AALC Seminary. He served on the CTCR 14 years, and is an EIIT mentor. armandboehme@yahoo.com

religious and being spiritual. Daniel Dennett writes that he, like William James, cannot deny the existence of “the lone communicants of what we might call private religions.” To distinguish these privately religious people from “the typical religious people who identify themselves with a particular creed or church” of many members, Dennett calls them “*spiritual* people, but not *religious*.”³

SPIRITUALITY OPPOSED TO RELIGION: Sam Harris, a prominent new atheist, extols the virtues of spirituality in opposition to religion. “Once we have examined the problems inherent to faith, and the threat that even ‘moderate’ religious faith, however inadvertently, now poses to our survival, we can begin to situate our ethical intuitions and our capacity for spiritual experience within the context of a rational worldview.”⁴ “There is no doubt that (spiritual) experiences of this sort are worth seeking, just as there is no doubt that the popular religious ideas that have grown up around them, especially in the West, are as dangerous as they are incredible.”⁵

Harris believes that there is a range of human experience that can be identified as “spiritual or mystical.” He identifies these as meaningful experiences of selflessness and elevated emotion that move one beyond self.⁶ He believes that many “results of spiritual practice are genuinely desirable” and that human beings should “seek them out.” These spiritual or mystical experiences employ varied techniques, such as meditative practices and “the use of psychedelic drugs.”⁷

Like some others, Harris describes the difference between religion and spirituality as that which cannot be proven (religion) and that which can be proven (spirituality): “It is nowhere written, however, that human beings must be irrational, or to live in a perpetual state of siege, to enjoy an abiding sense of the sacred. On the contrary, I hope to show that spirituality can be—indeed must be—deeply rational even as it elucidates the limits of reason. . . . Science will not remain mute on spiritual and ethical questions for long.”⁸

Spirituality and ethics “transcend national, religious, and ethnic boundaries,” and thus vastly different human beings “converge on similar spiritual experiences and ethical insights. . . . Such is not the case with the ‘truths’ of religion, however.”⁹ Harris declares all religious ideas to be “intellectually defunct and politically ruinous.” On the other hand “spiritual experience” is a natural work of the rational mind. Clearly “it must be possible to bring reason, spirituality, and ethics together” which would be the beginning of a reasonable approach to “our deepest personal concerns. It would also be the end of (religious) faith.”¹⁰ Harris believes that religious faith “is surely the devil’s masterpiece.”¹¹

In line with his emphasis on atheistic spirituality, Harris believes that what he has written in *The End of Faith* was: “written very much in the spirit of a prayer.”¹²

Harris wrote *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion* to further separate spirituality from religion. “Spirituality must be distinguished from religion—because people of every faith and of none, have had some sorts of spiritual experiences.”¹³ He notes that “Twenty percent of Americans describe themselves as ‘spiritual but not religious.’”¹⁴

Harris writes that many people have a faulty perception of religion as the true repository for the virtues of love, compassion, moral goodness, and self-transcendence. He believes that atheists are able to exhibit these characteristics and urges non-theists and atheists to change this faulty perspective by talking about the full range of human experience in a way that is “free of dogma as the best science already is.”¹⁵ Harris sees an intimate “connection between scientific fact and spiritual wisdom.”¹⁶

“A rational approach to spirituality seems to be what is missing from secularism and from the lives of most of the people I meet. The purpose of this book is to offer readers a clear view of the problem, along with some tools to help them solve it for themselves.”¹⁷

When this author first encountered Harris’s comments about spirituality, it was as though one were experiencing a new phenomenon—atheistic spirituality. However, further research proved this not to be the case. Harris’s writings on spirituality, especially in his latest book, *Waking Up*, are part of a burgeoning spiritualistic trend among atheists.

The atheistic spirituality Harris encourages is being practiced by many atheists, non-theists, humanists, and secular individuals today. As one surfs the net, one will find websites like “Atheist Spirituality: A forum for exploration of the meaning of spirituality for atheists.”

This website, edited by Geoff Crocker, states that it exists to explore “the meaning of human spirituality . . . from an atheist point of view but it does not exclude anyone with religious belief. Indeed the site explores some surprising areas of harmony between atheism and religion.”¹⁸

Though there are variations in beliefs, the atheist spirituality website, “Atheist Revolution,” provides a good summary of atheistic beliefs about spirituality. This site, subtitled “Breaking free from irrational belief and opposing Christian extremism,” is authored by Jack Vance.

The discussion of
atheistic spirituality
begins by asking
“Can an atheist be
a spiritual person,
and if so, in what sense?”

The discussion of atheistic spirituality begins by asking “Can an atheist be a spiritual person, and if so, in what sense?” He notes that he does not like using the term “spirituality” in reference to atheists and

atheism. He emphasizes that he does not believe in “spirits, souls, ghosts, demons, or anything else that is not part of the natural world.” However he also recognizes that there may be some value and benefit to using the term in relationship to atheist beliefs. What follows is quoted from the “Atheist Revolution” website.

“What is spirituality?” “Spirituality is not the same thing as religion, or even religious belief. One can be deeply spiritual while simultaneously rejecting anything recognizable as religious belief or religious practices. Moreover, not all religious believers are necessarily spiritual.” “Many components of spirituality have been posited, and while consensus remains elusive, some of the more popular include vitality, connectedness, transcendence, and meaningfulness. One of the most commonly described experiences of spirituality involves a sense of one’s interconnectedness to others and a dissolving of self-other boundaries.”

“Can an atheist be a spiritual person?” “Absolutely. If we think of something like spirituality as ranging on a continuum from low to high, atheists can score at any point along the continuum just like anyone else. High scores would indicate someone who seeks spiritual experiences or who experiences the various components of spirituality, depending on how the measure functions.” “Practically, we might see a spiritual atheist as highly empathic, aware of his or her connection to others, concerned with equality and social justice, regularly awed by the beauty of nature, etc. Such descriptors apply in varying degrees to all persons, theist and atheist alike. Being spiritual does not require one to believe in spirits, gods, or any other supernatural entities.” [emphasis in the original]

“Do atheists need spirituality?” “I think this question might need to be reframed in order to be both palatable and meaningful. Think of it this way: atheists (like everyone else) vary in terms of the importance of spirituality in their lives. Spirituality is vital to some atheists, and we could appropriately label such persons as needing spirituality. For others, the need for spirituality may be low enough that it would be hard to recognize it as such.” “In all honesty, I am not sure where I would fall along this continuum. I tend not to think of myself as ‘spiritual,’ but I certainly find great meaning and purpose in experiences that others describe as spiritual. I have had many intense spiritual experiences in which I experienced connectedness, transcendence, and the like, and not all of them were drug-induced. I suppose I am a fairly spiritual person in many ways, but one who prefers to think of himself in terms of components such as empathy, meaning, and connection rather than ‘spirituality.’ Does that make any sense? Like I said, I have a bit of trouble with the label.”

“Should the secular community increase our focus on spirituality?”

“Probably. I suspect that very little is known about the importance and role of spirituality among nonbelievers, and the scientist in me thinks that improved understanding might be beneficial. To neglect something we do not understand well simply because we lack understanding makes little sense. We know that spirituality is important to a great many people regardless of their religious belief, and I think there is a large potential benefit from better understanding its role in our community. Discussing and potentially embracing an explicitly secular form of spirituality could make it easier for believers to imagine life without belief and could make our community more attractive for those who have come to doubt their faith.”¹⁹

“Tailored Beliefs”²⁰ is another atheist spirituality site offering the story and blogs of Sigfried Gold, which attempt to reconcile “absolute atheism with a passionate commitment to spiritual engagement in the form of Buddhist meditation and Twelve-Step recovery—including worship of a non-existent God compatible with my atheism—with the hope of providing inspiration for others to find creative, uncompromising spiritual paths that work for them.” In this site Gold refers to himself as a “Born-again atheist.”

To nourish his spirituality, Gold invented his own God, “Ms. X”—a powerful, rotund, fifteen-foot-tall, black, lesbian goddess with a large afro. Ms. X rides a flying ewe named Butch and is manifested as a small stuffed animal that Gold holds during his prayers. Gold likens this stuffed animal to the icons of saints in Roman and Greek Orthodox churches. He describes his godhead in trinitarian form—“the Mother, the Sheep, and the Infinite Void.” If one finds this alternative atheistic Trinity strange, one should remember that *The Shack* envisioned a Trinity of a black housekeeper, a Hebrew handyman, and a mystical Asian gardener.²¹ Gold offers a long and extended exposition of his spirituality and his journey to atheism. His understanding of a good life would parallel that of the Golden Rule Christians.²² He talks about his atheistic conversion experience in much the same way that evangelicals speak about their conversion experiences. He encourages everyone—the religious and non-religious alike—to explore the meaning of spirituality in order to discover that which is “universal to all religions” and non-theists and to see those spiritual beliefs and practices which transcend dogma, in order to find a “spiritual commonality.”²³

Yet another website entitled “The Center for Spiritual Atheism” purports to unify spiritual atheists regardless of their differing spiritual views. This site stresses that each person is responsible for his or her own “spiritual philosophy.”²⁴

Richard Packham’s website includes an exposition of his conversion to atheism: “How I Became an Atheist,”²⁵ and his article on “Atheist Spirituality.”²⁶

Another site, “The Spiritual life of An Atheist,” authored by S. Anne Johnson states, “My spiritual practice centers around a love of nature and knowledge and a commitment to a pragmatic compassion. . . . Spirituality, for me, is about cultivating my better impulses, nourishing my better nature. My atheist spirituality is founded in a deep appreciation for the privileged stance I have been granted for the briefest moment in our little corner of the Universe by the mechanical forces that be.”²⁷ More sites like this could be found.

In addition to Harris’s *Waking Up* are many other books on the subject of atheistic spirituality.²⁸

ATHEISTIC MONISM: Ninian Smart writes that one of the alternatives to theism is monism.²⁹ The monistic view—that all is one—entered Western theology from Eastern religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, and was manifested in New Age spirituality. Christianity on the other hand is dualistic, emphasizing a distinction and separation between God and the creation and creatures He has created.³⁰

The concept of monism or nonduality is part of an atheistic view of the world.³¹ Sam Harris has great praise for the Eastern religious emphasis on non-duality and faults Christianity, Islam, and the Jewish faith, which are dualistic (God is other than human beings), for the vast spiritual difference he sees between Eastern and Western spirituality. This non-duality is “a fundamental insight of most Eastern schools of spirituality” and the removal of the lines between self and other breaks the “duality of subject and object.” Harris holds that duality leads to “feelings of separateness” that need to be corrected.³² In his book on spirituality, Harris makes extensive use of monistic Eastern thought.³³ Richard Dawkins believes that “children have a natural tendency towards a dualistic theory of mind,” and from his perspective he emphasizes the fact that religious belief is a “by-product of such instinctive dualism.”³⁴ In the atheistic view, dualism is tied to religiosity, Christianity, feelings of separation, and many of the world’s problems. Thus a number of atheists believe that Christianity and other religions need to be eliminated.

The concept of monism or nonduality is part of an atheistic view of the world.

“Almost every problem we have can be ascribed to the fact that human beings are utterly beguiled by their feelings of separateness. It would seem that a spirituality that undermined such dualism, through the mere contemplation of consciousness, could not help but improve our situation. . . . There is clearly no greater obstacle to a truly empirical approach to spiritual experience than our current beliefs about God” [that He is totally other—a dualistic view].³⁵

This monistic view is widespread. “Evolutionary biologists such as Ernst Haeckel and Julian Huxley attempted to make evolutionary biology a religion by advocating a monistic, naturalist world-view without supernatural revelation. The participants of this study affirm many of the tenets of Haeckel and Huxley, particularly the monistic, naturalistic aspects.”³⁶ For a refutation of Haeckel’s monism and an exposition of the incompatibility of monism with Christianity, see Frank Ballard, *Haeckel’s Monism False*.³⁷ Further evidence that monism is incompatible with religion, especially Christianity, is seen in an article stating that atheistic “Marxism has been one of the most influential monistic systems in the Modern Times.”³⁸

ATHEISTIC DEVOTIONAL SPIRITUALITY: Atheistic spirituality is given public expression in a number of ways. An example of a secular, atheistic devotional spirituality would be A. C. Grayling’s *Meditations for the Humanist: Ethics for a Secular Age*. These brief devotional articles were written to encourage the non-religious to a “life enriched by thinking about things that matter.”³⁹ They are designed to extol virtues to which the non-religious but spiritual person should aspire. The author writes that he believes “passionately in the value of all things spiritual” by which he means the “things of the human spirit, with its capacity for love and enjoyment, creativity and kindness, hope and courage.”⁴⁰

These meditations place religion in the category of “some of the things that are enemies to human flourishing.” Thus religion is put in the same category with evils like poverty, racism, revenge, depression, and capitalism. The meditations state that religion is “an affliction in human affairs” and is “an irrational hangover from mankind’s ignorant and fearful infancy.” These meditations state the desire that humanity be liberated from “tyrannies of belief” and be educated in better ways of human affections, in tolerance, and in the wisdom that comes from “individual experience.”⁴¹

Religious morality is not only stated to be “irrelevant” but that it is also declared to be “anti-moral” and “immoral.”⁴² The same sentiments about religion are also found in the articles titled sin, repentance, faith, miracles, prophecy, virginity, paganism, blasphemy, obscenity, and reason. These meditations ask: “Does religious superstition any longer deserve a place in the intellectual economy of the world? The history of human knowledge shows that it does not.”⁴³ The God of traditional religion (specifically Christianity) is described this way: “God, accordingly is the name of our ignorance.”⁴⁴

ATHEISTIC PATTERNS OF SPIRITUALITY: In spite of the above sentiments, atheistic spirituality has borrowed many things from religion, especially Christianity. Atheists have their own creed.⁴⁵ They have gatherings entitled the

“Sunday Assembly,” which serve as a “full-fledged spiritual community” patterned after typical religious services. There are songs, talks, and the readings of poems or books. Births are recognized. These songs, talks, readings, and birth recognitions are patterned after hymns, sermons, Scripture readings, and baptisms/child dedications in Christian worship services. Atheistic Sunday assemblies even have chaplains like Greg Epstein, who is the Humanist Chaplain at Harvard. Epstein is also one of the organizers of the Sunday Assembly movement in the U.S.⁴⁶ Atheists have borrowed other aspects of religion, such as prayers,⁴⁷ devotional books,⁴⁸ Bibles—*The Good Book: A Humanist Bible*,⁴⁹ *The Atheist’s Bible*⁵⁰—and atheistic Bible commentaries on the Scriptures of major religions.⁵¹ They also have written their own Ten Commandments.⁵²

Like neo-Pentecostals, spiritual atheists often speak at length about their conversion experiences from religion to atheism and are often militantly evangelistic.⁵³ Atheists also have their “sacred” texts, such as the writings of Harris, Dawkins, Hitchens, Dennet, Onfray, Dewey, James, Darwin, Freud, Jung, Fox, and Flew. However, Anthony Flew renounced atheism and became a theist before his death.⁵⁴ Some atheists profess their own version of the Trinity.⁵⁵ Many are now running atheistic Sunday Schools.⁵⁶ They have written books to help in the moral training of children and adults.⁵⁷ Atheistic humanists run their own system of summer camps for freethinking, non-believing children.⁵⁸ Some atheists and humanists have devised orders of service for non-religious weddings and funerals.⁵⁹ They also have begun writing their own hymns.⁶⁰

Atheistic gatherings, actions, and rituals have been directly patterned after their counterparts in organized religion.

These atheistic gatherings, actions, and rituals have been directly patterned after their counterparts in organized religion. This copying of the forms of religion has come about because of the need to replace religious forms with similar spiritual forms that have a humanistic, atheistic, secular bent.

Andre Comte-Sponville writes about the need atheists have to gather in worship settings:

But we need ritual. When we are confronted by the death of someone close, you have to say that purely civil funerals have almost something poor and flat about them, like a copy which wouldn’t be able to make one forget the original. Perhaps it’s a question of time; you don’t replace 2000 years of the imaginary in a flash..[stet] religious ceremony allows horror to be tamed: you don’t bury a man like a beast: you don’t burn him like a log. Atheists are looking for equivalents, with varying degrees of success. Civil marriage, when it’s not botched up, seems today to offer an acceptable substitute. It

allows us to officialise what is intimate, the most secret, the most savage, to include family, friends, and society . . . it's another way of being united.⁶¹

MORE THAN JUST SPIRITUAL? This atheistic copying of the outward forms of religion raises a question: Is atheism a religion?

Stephen Prothero lists four functional characteristics of all religions. They “have statements of beliefs and values (creeds); ritual activities (cultus); standards for ethical conduct (codes); and institutions (communities).”⁶² Ninian Smart provides a longer list, which includes these characteristics or dimensions of religion: the “ritual or practical,” the “doctrinal or philosophical,” the “myth or narrative,” the “experiential or emotional,” the “ethical or legal,” the “organizational or social,” and the “material or artistic.”⁶³

This atheistic copying of the outward forms of religion raises a question: Is atheism a religion?

As noted above, atheists have created their own creed, have their own ritual activities in Sunday assemblies and other gatherings, have compiled their own Ten Commandments, and have formed communities and institutions, such as Camp Quest, and numerous other organizations like the Atheist Alliance International, American Atheists, and the National Council of Ex-Muslims.⁶⁴ In addition, atheists have their own narrative stories, basic teachings and beliefs, texts regarded as scripture, and an ethical worldview that is often claimed to be superior to that of religion. They speak openly about their spiritual experiences and have their own chaplains or clergy, all earmarks of religion.

Some may claim that atheism cannot be classified as a religion because it is not theistic and rejects the existence of any god. It is important to note that there are non-theistic religions: Confucianism,⁶⁵ Taoism,⁶⁶ and Buddhism.⁶⁷ As the Dalai Lama said, “We Buddhists are atheists.”⁶⁸ Other movements have been defined as religions: humanism,⁶⁹ the Unitarian Universalists,⁷⁰ and the Raelians.⁷¹ American Civil Religion is built on four core ideas: “personal freedom (often called liberty), political democracy, world peace, and cultural (including religious, racial, ethnic, and gender) tolerance.”⁷² American Civil Religion is a non-theistic “real religion” that exists alongside and outside of more readily recognized theistic religions like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.⁷³

Don Cupitt was an advocate for religion without God and saw religion as “an experiment in selfhood.”⁷⁴ Chapter 3 of his book, *After God: The Future of Religion*, is entitled “Religion After God.”⁷⁵ Ronald Dworkin stated that the phrase “‘religious atheism’ . . . is not an oxymoron; religion is not restricted to theism.”⁷⁶ Further he wrote that the word religion “does not necessarily mean a belief in God.”⁷⁷ Billington

wrote a book with the desire “to rid religion of theology, to rescue it from God, to declare God redundant.” He also stated that “religious experience is . . . potentially available to everyone” whether they believe in God or not.⁷⁸

Alain de Botton advocates a “‘religion for atheists’ that incorporates religious forms and traditions to satisfy our human need for connection, ritual and transcendence.”⁷⁹ Einstein, though an atheist, considered himself a religious person. Dworkin also stated that religion “does not necessarily mean a belief in God.”⁸⁰ Richard Dawkins has described himself as “a secular Christian.”⁸¹ Dawkins’ self-designation as “a secular Christian” and Dworkin’s statement about “religious atheism” remind one of the Christian Atheism/Death of God movement of the 1960s.⁸²

Other atheists also state that atheism is a religion or can be part of a religion.

Austin Cline has written that people need

to keep in mind that atheism is nothing more than absence [of] belief in the existence of gods. Atheism is not the absence of religion. . . . Because of this, there is no inherent barrier preventing atheism from being part of a religious belief system. . . . So, yes, atheists can be religious. There are not only very old and traditional religions like Buddhism which are accessible to atheists, but there are modern organizations as well. Some humanists call themselves religious, and many members of Unitarian-Universalism, and Ethical Culture societies are also nonbelievers. Raelians are a relatively recent group which is recognized as a religion legally and socially, yet they deny the existence of gods. . . . There is some question as to whether such forms of humanism do qualify as religions, but what is important for the moment is that atheist members themselves believe that they are part of a religion. Thus they do not see any conflict between disbelieving in the existence of gods and adopting a belief system which they consider a religion—and these are atheists in the Western sense of scientific, philosophical atheism. The answer to the question is thus an unequivocal yes: atheists can be religious and atheism can occur in conjunction with, or even in the context of, religion.⁸³

Don Cupitt’s book, *The Sea of Faith*, and his TV series of the same name supplied the title for the Sea of Faith (SoF) Network, an association of individuals who believe that religion is “a human creation.”⁸⁴ While having no formal creed or doctrinal statement, the Sea of Faith Network associates itself with “the non-realist approach to religion. This refers to the belief that God has no ‘real,’ objective or empirical existence independent of human language and culture; God is ‘real’ in the sense that he is a potent symbol, metaphor, or projection, but He has no objective existence outside and beyond the practice of religion. Non-realism therefore entails a rejection of supernaturalism—miracles, afterlife and the agency of spirits.”

This is “a voluntarist interpretation of faith,” which is also “a fully demythologized version of Christianity.” Though its adherents have “given up the idea that religious beliefs can be grounded in anything beyond the human realm, religion can still be believed and practiced in new ways.” Sea of Faith members are free to dissent from the above positions, but almost all adhere to them while remaining members of their respective religious traditions.⁸⁵

The Sea of Faith Network publishes a journal titled *Sofia*. The June 2016 issue contains articles on Jesus as the Son of God. The editorial for this issue states that “God and the Christ Epic” are “creations of the human poetic genius,” which means that they are “myths” that demonstrate the fact that “Jesus can’t really be God because God is not real.” But with a “poetic faith” people “can celebrate the dramas of Christmas, Easter and Pentecost—indeed the Eucharist itself—with all their wealth of liturgy, music and treasures of wisdom” so that religion rises above simple ethics to embrace “a fuller humanity.” People (whether believers or not) are thereby able to “keep the feasts in good faith.”⁸⁶ An article by Edward Walker in the same issue states that Jesus’ divine sonship is a “myth expressing the disciples’ experience.” He further states that because Jesus is not really divine, “Jesus does not have a superior, ‘divine’ status above that of Muhammad or the Buddha.”⁸⁷

The above examples illustrate that the meaning of the word “religion” in current use does not necessarily include belief in a god or higher power. Thus it cannot be argued that atheism is not a religion because atheism believes that there is no God.

Understanding the word “religion” as inclusive of both theistic and non-theistic beliefs is in accord with common definitions of the word.

Dictionary.com defines religion in its second definition this way: “2. a specific fundamental set of beliefs and practices generally agreed upon by a number of persons or sects.”⁸⁸

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* gives as one of the definitions of religion “an interest, a belief, or any activity that is very important to a person or group.”⁸⁹

Steve Donaldson has written that the supposed gap between faith and reason is a false dichotomy, for faith is operative in both the secular and religious parts of life whether it is the scientist who believes that her experiment will be successful because she believes in the laws of science, or the quarterback who believes that his receiver will catch the pass in the end zone, or the student who believes that his diligent studies will be worth the effort, or the person who believes that God exists or the one who doesn’t.⁹⁰

The court system in the United States has begun to recognize atheism as a religion.

The supposed gap
between faith and reason
is a false dichotomy.

In ruling on a case, the 7th Court of Appeals in Wisconsin stated that “Atheism is [the inmate’s] religion, and the group that he wanted to start was religious in nature even though it expressly rejects a belief in a supreme being.”⁹¹

“In 2005, the Supreme Court reiterated its view that religion should not be defined narrowly, and the Seventh Circuit likewise observed that ‘the Court has adopted a broad definition of “religion” that includes non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as theistic ones.’”⁹²

The status of atheism in the legal apparatus and court systems of American and Canada seems to be the basis for this post on Richard Dawkins’ website:

Do Atheists deserve religious protection? The Ontario Human Rights Tribunal says yes, declaring Atheism is a creed that deserves the same religious protections as other recognized faiths. Last year a secular church opened in Calgary. There’s a push to have atheist chaplains in the Canadian and American military. Next month is “Super Secular September” in Manitoba. To discuss whether Atheism is becoming an organized religion of its own, Day 6 is joined by René Choinard. He brought the case to the Human Rights Tribunal. Catherine Dunphy is a former Roman Catholic Chaplain and the executive director of The Clergy Project, and Margaret Somerville is the director of the McGill Centre for Medicine, Ethics and Law.⁹³

Another indication that some atheists and humanists consider atheism a religion comes from England, where the High Court ruled that all non-faith schools in England will be required to teach atheistic humanism in their religious education classes required for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) diploma. This ruling was prompted by humanist parents who objected to the absence of atheistic humanism from the course on religion and brought suit to force its inclusion.⁹⁴

HISTORICAL PARALLELS: Atheistic attempts at displacing religion with non-theistic spirituality and religious belief systems have similarities to previous historical patterns which arose during the French Revolution and the Soviet era. The governments of France and Russia copied and secularized the outward forms of religion in an attempt to displace religion.⁹⁵

The following is a summary of what came after the French revolution of 1789:

The French revolutionaries . . . established a form of “secular religion” [and] . . . numerous churches and monasteries were closed and hundreds of clerics were executed. . . . Revolutionary songs were substituted for church hymns, a new civil calendar took the place of the one previously imposed by the Church. . . . All churches in Paris, including Notre Dame, were turned into Temples of Reason. . . . Within these Temples of Reason, representations of saints were replaced by those of revolutionary martyrs as Marat, Lepelletier, and Chalier became the symbolic focus of a new secular

Copyright 2017 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View *Lutheran Mission Matters* 25, no. 1 (2017) at <http://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.htm>.

E-mail lsfmissiology@gmail.com to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

Trinity. The Jacobin clubs placed man at the center of their “secular religion,” but their practices were clearly influenced by Christianity in terms of rites and vocabulary: a day in the new revolutionary calendar, *decadi*, was even reserved for sermons. . . . Catholicism was replaced by a religion worshipping a God of Reason.”

The French revolution produced a secularism which gave rise to “Comte’s new religion which deified man. . . . After his death, a secular church . . . was founded; it included rites for baptism, marriage, and burial. . . . Secularization . . . filled the void left by the Church’s narrowing role by establishing new forms of ritual that constituted ‘secular religion.’”⁹⁶

The French were not alone. The Bolsheviks attempted their own secular spirituality and religion.

The Bolsheviks . . . suppressed the Christian churches and began to establish a secular religion. . . . That same year [1918], the Soviet legislature issued the “Proletarian Ten Commandments”. . . . Secular rites, often mimicking those of Christianity, have been applied to the life cycle from birth to death. “Octobering,” instituted during the Civil War, is a form of baptism, which can take place at communist party offices or at special baby palaces. . . . Godparents play a role in the ceremony. . . . For teenagers, the equivalent of confirmation is the rite for receiving an internal passport at the age of sixteen. “Red weddings” originated during the twenties. . . . They gave way to civil wedding ceremonies. . . . A funeral rite was initiated . . . in which candles are lit at the graveside and dirt is thrown on the coffin. . . . The communists have parodied church rites by conducting “red masses” at which Christian hymns were sung with the words altered. . . . An anti-religious counter-Christmas was staged in Moscow which featured Komsomol carols based on Orthodox hymns, skits ridiculing God and the clergy, and the burning of the effigies of Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, and other religious figures. . . . The New Year’s holiday has been enhanced in importance to compete with Christmas as trees are decorated and Grandfather Frost replaces Santa Claus. . . . Easter, which has particular importance for the Russian Orthodox, is challenged by rites honoring spring. . . . Thus communism has assumed the function of religion as its earthbound and non-theological rites provide both celebration and solace for the masses.⁹⁷

The Soviets even produced their own Bible: Yaroslavsky’s *Bible for Believers and Nonbelievers*. It engaged in “a rational demystification of religion” and attempted “to undermine its legitimacy.”⁹⁸

After Lenin’s death, the Soviets mimicked the Russian Orthodox home icon corners by encouraging godless corners or Lenin corners. Lenin’s body was preserved in his mausoleum, which mimicked the Russian Orthodox thinking that a true saint’s body would not decay after death. Stalin shaped events after Lenin’s

death to portray his death as the departure of the “atheist Messiah, the God Lenin.” Stalin’s wish was realized, as a mausoleum was built for Lenin, a building which was the place for the “immortal” and “imperishable God,” Lenin.⁹⁹ At his mausoleum, Lenin was proclaimed “Savior of the world.” Lenin’s enduring presence with the Soviet people was encouraged by the phrase “Lenin lived! Lenin lives! Lenin will live.” Lenin’s writings became the new scripture of Soviet scientific atheism.¹⁰⁰

There are other similarities between Christianity and Communism even though the perspective of Christianity is that of faith in God and of Marxism is scientific atheism. Both desire the betterment of human beings. Both share “a concern for history,” have a concern for social justice, are messianic, and have “a predestination of historical moment” and “missionary zeal.” Both share a historical focal point and have a sense of communalism. Each has a specific worldview, a concept of salvation, an understanding of evil, and dogmatic beliefs. Both attempt to deal with alienation, have their own social ethics, and look forward to a better world.¹⁰¹ “In general we can say that Marxism follows Christianity step by step in the meta-narrative of creation, fall, redemption and final salvation. Marxism offers Christianity’s history of salvation, yet without God or the Kingdom of God.”¹⁰²

Soviet scientific atheism’s attempt to portray itself as separating religion from spirituality began with Marx. “Unless we see that for Marx, as for Hegel, man’s needs are more than biological, that they are what may, indeed, be called spiritual, we shall not, I think, fully appreciate the depth of his analysis of religion as a fantasy of alienated man.”¹⁰³ Marx attempted to describe human activity, as well as human spiritual and cultural achievements, “in naturalistic terms.”¹⁰⁴ The Soviet journal, *Science and Religion*, emphasized the fact that Soviet scientific atheism was an “ideological and spiritual alternative” to religion. In its later years the journal did not overtly battle against religion, but rather battled “for Soviet spiritual life.”¹⁰⁵ Showing how far the Soviet attempt to separate religion from spirituality went, Soviet ideology stated that “the observance of religious rituals” would leave “people spiritually desolate.”¹⁰⁶

In the late period of Soviet scientific atheism, the “Soviet state and Communist ideology came to be discussed in explicitly spiritual terms.” Because religion had not disappeared as the Soviets expected, they began “to see spiritual fulfillment” as an obligation the state had in relationship “to its citizens.”¹⁰⁷ A number of Soviet leaders saw that the success of their revolution ideologically was dependent on transforming their overtly violent atheistic battle against religion into a spiritual movement because people wondered what the state would provide for them as it took away their religious spirituality. The pseudo-scientific nature of scientific atheism could not provide adequate answers to questions about spirituality and religion. More and more the Soviets saw the need for a secular spirituality to replace religion and the need to address “the moral world of the Soviet person.”¹⁰⁸

This Soviet spirituality closely resembled actual religion, and many have said that the spirituality of Soviet scientific atheism was or became a secular spiritual religion. As one author noted, the Bolsheviks attempted to develop “a new communist secular religion divorced from Christianity, but with rites that echoed Christian themes.”¹⁰⁹ Others have described Soviet scientific atheism as a civil religion similar to American Civil Religion.¹¹⁰ The Soviet experiment to eradicate religion and replace it with a secular form of atheistic spirituality was not totally successful.¹¹¹ The Soviets failed to achieve the “transfer of sacrality” to their alternative rituals which had also “been the goal of the French revolutionaries in their own festivals.”¹¹²

CONCLUSION: The atheistic movement to spirituality with the attendant borrowing of the forms of religion noted above could be described as the spiritual and religious evolution of atheism.

These trends indicate that human beings have an innate need for something spiritual that transcends reason and that can be empirically measured. Human beings possess a natural knowledge of God that has resulted in worldwide manifestation of religion.¹¹³

Currently some atheists are moved by this natural knowledge of a god or higher power to produce their own brand of spirituality and religion. There are Marxists and others like them today who believe that Marxism is “the legitimate secular successor to the Christian religion in Western Europe.”¹¹⁴ They believe that they actually did “create a modern secular faith.”¹¹⁵

The atheistic movement to spirituality with the attendant borrowing of the forms of religion noted above could be described as the spiritual and religious evolution of atheism.

TO RESPOND: Today “sensitive Christians cannot fail to identify themselves with unbelievers, in the awareness that both are sinners in need of God’s forgiving love. All alike are included in ‘the ungodly’ for whom Christ died.” Many outside of faith have serious and thoughtful questions about matters of faith. Thus, Christians need to proclaim the Gospel and lovingly “speak and act out of concern for the atheist” so that the love of Christ is shared.¹¹⁶

Christians have an important task: to proclaim the reality of God and salvation in Christ to the world today (Mt 28:18–20). To do that in an informed and holistic way, Christians must have an understanding of the “questions, doubts, objections, and rejections” that are held by many “thoughtful people” today.¹¹⁷ Thus Christians need to be engaged in diligent sociological study of the world and culture in which they currently live in order to address the spiritual needs of all. There are resources that can be employed by Christians in preparing for fraternal conversations with non-theists, for example, reading their works to understand their thinking.¹¹⁸

Christians actively engaging in friendships with non-theists enables diverse people to build bridges of understanding. The type and quality of friendship and respect that can and should exist between people, including those with very opposite views, such as an atheist and a Christian, is illustrated by the friendship of Christopher Hitchens and Larry Alex Taunton.¹¹⁹ Such positive relationships are part of loving one's neighbor and are an important part of the Christian's response to the grace of the Gospel and witness to the love of Christ for the world.

Unfortunately, due to the labors of those whose faith is law-based and who see anyone without belief negatively, some outside the faith see believers in a less than positive light and see God as a God of vengeance and judgment. Loving, Gospel-motivated friendships with people outside the faith give a very different and positive picture of believers and of the love and concern of God for all (Jn 3:16; Jn 13:34–35; Mt 22:35–40; Gal 6:10).

Because believers have friendships and relationships with non-theists, there will be many opportunities for reasoned evangelical conversations of a spiritual and religious nature; they should be pursued. In order to do so in an informed manner, Christians should have accurate knowledge about their faith, the Scriptures, and the world in which they live, hence the importance of sound catechetical training and continued religious education throughout the Christian's life. These educational endeavors should include training in Christian apologetics.

Sociological surveys and other studies of the beliefs of Christians in America indicate the need for sound religious education, for many have little knowledge of the tenets of their faith. Some of what is believed is inaccurate, even contrary to the orthodox Christian faith, such as believing that Christ is sinful or that sinners are justified by a combination of faith and works or by simply being good.¹²⁰ An inaccurate view of the faith has led some to leave the faith and others outside the faith to reject it or speak ill of it. Christians have diligent work to do in this area.

Apologetic training needs to address the faulty idea of the eternal conflict between science and religion.

Apologetic training needs to address the faulty idea of the eternal conflict between science and religion.¹²¹ Another idea that needs addressing is that belief in God (religious faith) is unreasonable and lacks empirical evidence. Christian education needs to avail itself of the apologetic books and videos that address these and similar issues so that parishioners are equipped to witness to their faith in sound, biblical, and rational ways.¹²² One such resource is THRED.org.¹²³ Apologetic training should lay out reasoned argumentation for the Christian faith.

Today, Christians need to be actively engaged in the public square's marketplace of ideas. If they are not, something is missing in culture and society. This need was expressed by Jurgen Habermas of the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School,

who paid “tribute to religious convictions and their profound historical traditions as powerful cognitive and motivational ‘potentials’ which we cannot dispense with.” Concern was also stated to prevent “secular reason” from setting “itself up as the judge concerning truths of faith.” There is a great need for the religious and secular parts of the world to communicate clearly with one another to help address the “urgent challenges confronting humanity.” Habermas stated that “the Judeo-Christian and Arabian traditions” are an integral part of the inheritance of civilization.¹²⁴

Christians are to be actively pursuing works of social ministry (Mt 25:31–40). Active engagement with the world in which they live illustrates the Christian’s love and concern for the well-being of others. Helping at neighborhood food-shelves, serving as an elected government official, volunteering at a teen shelter, and supporting Lutheran World Relief are examples of things that can be done. The love of Christ constrains us to do these things because we are our brothers/sisters keepers (Gn 4:9).

Christians also need to cultivate loving and caring relationships in their congregations and in other forums.¹²⁵ A Christian community into which people outside the faith can be warmly welcomed provides a loving witness to the Christian faith. Thus, Christians are to be actively involved in their congregations and in their communities.¹²⁶

Christians should avoid thinking that all atheists are immoral and incapable of good. Our Confessions praise the civic righteousness of those without faith in God—people who attempt to live moral lives, be good parents to their children, honest citizens, diligent workers, individuals who are concerned about helping others, protecting the environment, and the like (Ap IV, 24, 27; XVIII, 4). Christians should commend such good works whenever they are found.¹²⁷

Not all atheists desire the eradication of religion or religious belief. There are those atheists who believe that religious faith is a positive in society and who also defend religion and its existence.¹²⁸ Furthermore, Christians should understand that atheists are engaged in apologetic discourse to win human hearts and minds for their position. Thus, Christians should be actively engaged in the apologetic enterprise as well.

Christians have stood and continue to stand before an urgent task: to understand the biblical message as a whole, as a work of one God of history—the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer/Sanctifier of all reality. One must gain a complete picture about God’s actions, about His work of redemption and sanctification, about His will for the redeemed people of God and the whole world. One must make sure that he or she comprehends where the essence of the Gospel lies, and who exactly is this glorious and gracious Lord that the Gospel witnesses to. This fulfills the task of systematic theology, Christian apologetics, homiletics, and Christian witness in general.¹²⁹

Copyright 2017 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View Lutheran Mission Matters 25, no. 1 (2017) at <http://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.htm>.

E-mail lsfmissiology@gmail.com to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

Christians should be taught to understand that God's Holy Spirit is their helper in all that they do. They are not living and witnessing using only human power. God's Holy Spirit helps us to live our faith and witness it to the world. Christians should also remember that reasoned discourse will only go so far. The primary message that the Church has for the world is the saving Gospel of God's love for all sinful human beings in Jesus Christ. This blessed Gospel of justification by grace through faith without the deeds of the Law is the only thing that will change hearts from unbelief to faith. Neither human reason nor the Law will change anyone's heart or mind in matters religious.

Christ died for all. Christ loves all. Christ desires the salvation of all. Christ wants His followers to show love and respect to all. God encourages His people to engage in loving reasoned dialogue and discussion: "Come let us reason together" (Is 1:18). Christians are to love their neighbors as much as they love themselves (Mt 22:39). Christians are also encouraged to always be ready to share the reason for the hope in Christ that exists within them: "Always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have. But do so with gentleness and respect" (1 Pt 3:15). Christ's love and salvation are for all people. As Christians live the spirituality of their religious faith in their daily lives, the love of God in Jesus Christ is communicated by their words and their actions, so that living in the light of Christ, people give glory to the Father in heaven (Mt 5:16).

Endnotes

ⁱ This is an exhaustively annotated essay. For that reason, we have posted these valuable resources on the Lutheran Society for Missiology's Web site (<http://lsfm.global>).

The Spirituality of Atheism

Endnotes

Armand J. Boehme

These endnotes accompany the article in *Lutheran Mission Matters* 25, no. 1 (2017), 105–122.

1. Ursula King, *The Search for Spirituality: Our Global Quest for a Spiritual Life* (Katonah, NY: BlueBridge/United Tribes Media Inc., 2008), 2–3; Dave Hunt & T.A. McMahon, *The New Spirituality* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1988); Elizabeth Lesser, *The New American Spirituality: A Seeker's Guide* (New York: Random House, 1999).

2. Armand J. Boehme, “Spirituality and Religion: The Shift from East to West and Beyond,” *Missio Apostolica* Vol. 23, No. 1 (May 2015), 32; Bruce Demarest, ed., *Four Views on Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012).

“Science as a whole is a woefully-neglected subject in public schools, and it is a shame, because of all disciplines, it can be the most spiritual, especially the study of biology.” Ben Atwood, “5 Ways Atheism Can Be Spiritual,” <http://thoughtcatalog.com/ben-atwood/2012/04/5-ways-atheism-can-be-spiritual/>.

3. Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2006), 11. Dennett writes that in addition to examining and discussing religion, he will also examine and discuss “neighboring phenomena that (probably) aren't religious—spirituality, commitment to secular organizations, fanatical devotion to ethnic groups (or sports teams), superstition,” 7.

4. Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), 42–43.

5. Harris, *The End of Faith*, 40.

6. Harris, *The End of Faith*, 39.

7. Harris, *The End of Faith*, 40.

8. Harris, *The End of Faith*, 41.

9. Harris, *The End of Faith*, 45.

10. Harris, *The End of Faith*, 221.

11. Harris, *The End of Faith*, 226. Religion is also seen to be a poisonous belief in Michel Onfray, *Atheist Manifesto: The Case Against Christianity, Judaism, and Islam*, trans. Jeremy Leggett (New York: Arcade Publishing, Inc., 2007).

12. Harris, *The End of Faith*, 48–49.

13. Sam Harris, *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 8. For an review of Harris' book, see Francis Spufford, "Spiritual Literature for Atheists," *First Things* November 2015 (Issue 257), 43–46.

Harris sees an intimate connection between science and atheistic spirituality noting that "there is a connection between scientific fact and spiritual wisdom." Harris, *Waking Up*, 8; also 9, 198–199. See also his comments on neuroscience 58–59, 60–62, 70, 75.

Harris believes that science and reason are able to produce better values and morals than religion. Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* (New York: Free Press, 2010). For a response, see Craig R. Hovey, *What Makes Us Moral? Science, Religion and the Shaping of the Moral Landscape: A Christian Response to Sam Harris* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012).

Deepak Chopra describes Harris' book, *Waking Up*, as his transition from "militant atheism to peaceful Buddhism." Deepak Chopra, "Can Sam Harris Wake Us Up?" http://www.huffingtonpost.com/deepak-chopra/can-sam-harris-wake-us-up_b_5862580.html

See also Stuart A. Kauffmann, *Reinventing the Sacred: A New View of Science, Reason, and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

14. Harris, *Waking Up*, 6.

15. Harris, *Waking Up*, 9–10.

16. Harris, *Waking Up*, 8.

17. Harris, *Waking Up*, 10.

18. <http://atheistspirituality.net/>

19. <http://www.atheistrev.com/2008/01/atheist-spirituality.html>

20. <http://tailoredbeliefs.com/>

21. The depiction of God as a black woman, a Hebrew handyman, and an Asian gardener is seen on pages 82–87 of William P. Young, *The Shack: Where Tragedy Confronts Eternity* (Los Angeles: Windblown Media, 2007).

22. Nancy T. Ammerman, “Golden Rule Christianity: Lived Religion in the American Mainstream,” in David D. Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 196–216; “What people name as definitional to their religious identity is rarely a doctrine or even a spiritual experience. What they name is a way of living. . . . Ethical spirituality is a common cultural discourse in the conversation about what is spirituality.” This emphasis on Golden Rule religion is regularly “cited by those outside religious communities as often as by those who are religiously active.” Studies have indicated that 73% of respondents spoke of spirituality in terms of morality. Nancy T. Ammerman, *Sacred Stories: Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 214 & 25; see also 2–3, 44–46, 207–225, 249, 297.

Prothero notes that the majority of Christians today are either into theological ethics or emotion. Stephen Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know—And Doesn’t* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 132–152. “Personal religious experience will replace religious doctrine as the driving force in tomorrow’s free market of belief.” Richard Cimino & Don Lattin, *Shopping for Faith: American Religion in the New Millennium* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, A Wiley Company, 1998), p. xi.

23. This material was taken from the article “Born-again atheist”—<http://tailoredbeliefs.com/born-again-atheist/>.

24. Available at <http://spiritualatheism.com/>.

25. Richard Packham, “How I Became an Atheist”—<http://packham.n4m.org/atheist.htm>.

26. Richard Packham, “Atheist Spirituality”—<http://packham.n4m.org/atheist2.htm>.

27. <http://sannejohnson.wordpress.com/2010/12/26/spiritual-life-of-an-atheist-how-can-an-atheist-practice-spirituality/>.

28. Geoff Crocker, *An Enlightened Philosophy: Can an Atheist Believe Anything?* (Hants, UK: O-Books, 2010); Richard Carrier, *Sense and Goodness Without God: A Defense of Metaphysical Naturalism* (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2005); Andre Comte-Sponville, *The Little Book of Atheist Spirituality*, trans. Nancy Huston (New York: Penguin Books, 2008); Robert C. Solomon, *Spirituality for the Skeptic: The Thoughtful Love of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Soren Sorensen, *Spiritual Atheism: The Way of Wisdom* (Portland, OR: Spiral Garden, 2012); Soren Sorensen, *A Book that Could Change the World: Confessions of a Spiritual Atheist*

(Portland, OR: Spiral Garden, 2012); Soren Sorensen, *The Spiritual Atheist's Guide to Mystical Experiences and How to Have Them* (Portland OR: Spiral Garden, 2014); Steve Antinoff, *Spiritual Atheism* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 2009); Stephen Batchelor, *Confession of a Buddhist Atheist* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2011); Gopal N. Honnavalli, *Atheistic Spirituality: Some Strange Cosmic Experiences* (Partridge, India: Partridge Publishing, 2013); Patrick J. Mahaffey, ed., *Evolving God Images: Essays on Religion, Individuation, and Postmodern Spirituality* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2014), pages 81–104 contain essays on feminist spirituality, pages 105–125 contain essays on Eastern spirituality, and pages 127–152 contain essays on atheistic and secular spirituality. J. K. Fausnight, *Going Godless: Rediscovering Spirituality in a Material World* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2010); Barbara Ehrenreich, *Living with a Wild God: A NonBeliever's Search for the Truth about Everything* (New York: Twelve/Hachette Book Group, 2014); Peter Watson, *The Age of Atheists: How We Have Sought to Live Since the Death of God* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014); R. Budd, *Spirituality for Atheists* (a Kindle book); I. M. Probulos, *Good News for Atheists, Agnostics and Secular Humanists* (a Kindle book—2014—www.improbulos.com).

Already in 1955 individuals were writing about a “mystical, religious quality in atheism” which included “a theology of divine absence and nonbeing, of divine impotence, divine non-intervention, and divine indifference.” S. Paul Schilling, *God in an Age of Atheism* (Nashville & New York, 1969), 132. For the original, see Susan Anima Taubes, “The Absent God,” *Journal of Religion* Vol. 35, No. 1 (January, 1955), 6–16. “Atheism has come to mean a *religious* experience of the death of God...The godlessness of the world . . . becomes . . . the signature of God and yields a mystical atheism. . . . God can be present to us only in the form of his absence.” Taubes, “The Absent God,” 6.

29. Ninian Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1996), 48–49.

30. A. R. Victor Raj, *The Hindu Connection: Roots of the New Age* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995), 51–61.

31. Harris, *The End of Faith*, 208–221.

32. Harris, *The End of Faith*, 214, 215, & 218.

33. Harris, *Waking Up*, 21–22, 124–148.

34. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006), 179–183.

35. Harris, *The End of Faith*, 214.

36. “Greg Graffin’s dissertation”—a 2003 PHD dissertation abstract located at The Bad Religion Page—<http://www.thebrpage.net/news/?newsID=290>. This dissertation “Monism, Atheism, and the Naturalist Worldview: Perspectives from Evolutionary Biology” was later published as a book Greg Graffin, *Evolution, Monism, Atheism and the Naturalist World-view* (np: Polyterus Press, 2004).

37. Frank Ballard, *Haeckel’s Monism False: An Examination of ‘The Riddle of the Universe’; ‘The Wonders of Life’; ‘The Confession of Faith of a Man of Science’; Together With ‘Haeckel’s Critics Answered,’ by Mr. Joseph McCade* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1905)—especially chapters 8 “Substance,” & 9 “Monism and Christianity,” 451–565.

38. Sam Ghandchi, “Marxist Thought & Monism,” <http://www.ghandchi.com/299-MarxismEng.htm>.

39. A. C. Grayling, *Meditations for the Humanist: Ethics for a Secular Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. viii.

40. Grayling, *Meditations for the Humanist*, ix.

41. Grayling, *Meditations for the Humanist*, ix–x.

42. Grayling, *Meditations for the Humanist*, 102–103.

43. Grayling, *Meditations for the Humanist*, 121.

44. Grayling, *Meditations for the Humanist*, 122.

Some militant atheists declare religiosity bad and, like Grayling’s devotions, advocate the elimination of the evil of religion from society. This is not the first time that what has traditionally been held to be sacred is declared to be its opposite.

“Never before in history had an antireligious philosophy come to so closely resemble a religion. As Ernest Gellner observed, the Communist Party attempted to ‘turn the profane into the sacred,’ with the Marxist-Leninist philosophy of historical materialism serving as its sacred scripture. Accordingly, Soviet elites depicted religious concepts, beliefs, and practices as profane. Through this fascinating reversal of sacred and profane, the Communist Party created an antireligious faith in which the faithful were atheists and the religiously devout, blasphemers. The Secularization Experiment is ultimately a story of how a political movement grew into an antireligious crusade in which a powerful government created and imposed a very different kind of state church.” Paul Froese, *The Plot to Kill God: Findings From the Soviet Experiment in Secularization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 42.

45. Michael Palmer, *The Atheist's Creed* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2010). The creed that Palmer has written is also in the front of his other book—Michael Palmer, *The Atheist's Primer*, (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2012), 5.

46. Cable Neuhaus, “And Now, Let Us Stray,” *Saturday Evening Post* (January/February 2015—<http://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/2014/12/29/in-the-magazine/now-let-us-stray.html>); for sermons see Siegfried Gold's website which lists “Sermons.” [<http://tailoredbeliefs.com/category/writing/sermons/>] Jeremy Beahan, an atheist sermon—http://www.doubtcast.org/podcast/rd_extra_an_atheists_sermon.mp3

Atheistic Sunday Assemblies have appeared in the United States, Canada, England, and elsewhere. “We started the Sunday Assembly—think of it as part foot-stomping show, part atheist church—because the idea of meeting once a month to sing songs, hear great speakers and celebrate the incredible gift of life seems like a fun, and useful, thing to do. What’s more, church has got so many awesome things going for it (which we’ve shamelessly nicked). Singing together in a group? Super. Hearing interesting things. Rad . . . A moment to think quietly about your life? Wizard. Getting to know your neighbors? Ace.”

Calgary Secular Church holds regular Sunday meetings which they describe this way on their website—“The Sunday meeting is the most important feature of the Calgary Secular Church. It allows like-minded people the chance to get together, to fellowship, to share stories, to enjoy beautiful music, to have their children get excellent ethical and rational instruction, to be enlightened, and most importantly, to know they are not alone!” <http://www.calgarysecularchurch.org/2013/07/meetings.html>.

Katie Engelhard, “Atheism starts its megachurch: Is it a religion now?” https://www.salon.com/2013/09/22/atheism_starts_its_megachurch_is_it_a_religion_now/.

Brian Wheeler, “What Happens at an atheist church?” <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-21319945>.

Alain de Botton is an advocate for atheistic temples where atheists can congregate and share wisdom and knowledge, and support one another. Wendy Thomas Russell, “Alain De Botton’s ‘Atheism 2.0’ Cheapened by Temple Talk,” <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/naturalwonderers/alain-de-bottons-atheism-2-0-cheapened-by-temple-talk/>.

The reader is encouraged to access the Sunday Assembly movement at their website—<http://www.sundayassembly.com/>.

47. “In this sense, what follows is written very much in the spirit of a prayer. I pray that we may one day think clearly enough about these matters to render our children

incapable of killing themselves over their books.” Harris, *The End of Faith*, p. 48–49.

The Sunday Assembly’s goal is “to help people . . . to live better, help often and wonder more. . . . Now, please, close your eyes, open your hearts and join me in a prayer to Richard Dawkins.” “An Atheist Church in London, No Faith Required,” <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/01/22/is-atheism-a-religion/at-atheist-church-in-london-no-faith-required>.

Cupitt wrote that he prayed to God “even though I fully acknowledge that no God actually exists.” Don Cupitt, *After God: The Future of Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 85.

“We atheists can experience the divine presence so intensely that it doesn’t matter if God exists or not. And he does not. Atheists can live the religious experience as authentically as anyone before us ever has. Perhaps more authentically, for we know the truth about God: that there is none.”

“Through prayer, the medium of grace, we can experience the God that might as well exist, but doesn’t.”

“If you can develop atheistic prayer and find a completely new idiom, so much the better. If you can’t, use what you’ve got, including godtalk, the traditional language of prayer. Preserve the sacredness, but annihilate the deity. Once God is dead for you, you need not be haunted by Him. Dispose of the corpse and keep on praying.”

D. Midbar, “An Atheist’s Prayer: A Book on the Theory and Practice of Atheist Prayer,” <https://atheistprayer.blogspot.com/2007/06/atheists-prayer.html>.

A sociological study of religion found that the majority of those who say they have no religion pray. Rodney Stark, et al., *What Americans Really Believe: New Findings from the Baylor Surveys of Religion* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2008), 117.

48. Grayling, *Meditations for the Humanist*, for full reference see endnote 29 above. Rick Heller, *Secular Meditation: 32 Practices for Cultivating Inner Peace, Compassion, and Joy—A Guide from the Humanist Community at Harvard* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2015).

49. A. C. Grayling, *The Good Book: A Humanist Bible* (New York: Walker Publishing Company, Inc., 2011). This Bible contains over a thousand texts gathered from individuals like Crowley, Darwin, Hume, Machiavelli, Nietzsche, and Spinoza. Among the titles for the various parts are Genesis, Parables, Lamentations, Proverbs, Acts, and Epistles.

50. Joan Konner, ed., *The Atheist's Bible: An Illustrious Collection of Irreverent Thoughts* (New York: Tonie Doe Media, 2007). Some of its sections are entitled Genesis, Revelations, Proverbs, Exodus, The Word, and The Gospel.

Derek J. Marsdon, *Faith Without Religion: An Atheist Bible from a Socialist Perspective* (Kindle, 2016)—<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01AKXI102?psc=1>. Marsdon writes that atheism is the next evolutionary step in religious belief.

These books and others raise the question as to why atheists use religious terminology in their work? Nietzsche stated that if God does not exist then everything has changed, and the old language of moral discourse is no longer valid. New language must be sought that is not associated with the old. Where is the new terminology? Why re-baptize religious terminology for atheistic purposes? In addition, for Nietzsche life is purposeless so that understanding and rationality are unreliable and become something that may or may not be true or real. Thus reason becomes unreliable. Words like “ought” and “right” are now meaningless for there are no absolute truths. Ian S. Markham, *Against Atheism: Why Dawkins, Hitchens, and Harris Are Fundamentally Wrong* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 28–45; Fredrick Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 12–13; Fredrick Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990).

51. Steve Wells, ed., *The Skeptics Annotated Bible: The King James Version from a skeptics point of view* (np: SAB Books, 2013). Wells has also posted *The Skeptics Annotated Quran*—<http://skepticsannotatedbible.com/quran/index.htm>; Brian Baker, *Nonsense from the Bible* (Campbell, CA: FastPencil, Inc., 2012); Brian Schuty, *An Atheist's Critique of the Old Testament* (Raleigh, NC: Lulu Publishing, 2012); Brian Schuty, *An Atheist's Critique of the New Testament* (Raleigh, NC: Lulu Publishing, 2012); C.J. Werleman, *God Hates You! Hate Him Back: Making Sense of the Bible* (GB: Dangerous Little Books, 2009); Steve Ebling, *Holy Bible—Best God Damned Version—Genesis: For Atheists, Agnostics, and Fans of Religious Stupidity* (Kindle version—Steve Ebling, 2013); Roland Boer, *Marxist Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014).

52. Lex Bayer & John Figdor, *Atheist Mind, Humanist Heart: Rewriting the Ten Commandments for the Twenty-first Century* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).

Others have written their own version of the 10 Commandments. There are the Socialist 10 Commandments, <http://rethinkingchildhood.com/2011/07/26/socialist/>; The Ten Commandments of Karl Marx, <http://www.mannkal.org/downloads/pm/marxstenccommandments.pdf>; Christopher Hitchens, “The New Commandments,” *Vanity Fair*, April 2010—<http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2010/04/hitchens-201004>; Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 406. This website lists a number of alternative 10 Commandments—atheistic, secular, humanist, etc. http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_10cm.htm.

Calgary Secular Church has its own Ten Commandments listed on their website—“The Calgary Secular Church New 10 Commandments,”

<http://www.calgarysecularchurch.org/2013/07/the-calgary-secular-church-new-10.html>.

The commentary page on these New 10 Commandments proclaims them to be “more relevant and useful for the world today” than the original Ten Commandments. “The New Ten Commandments,” <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/daylightatheism/essays/the-new-ten-commandments/>

53. See also the web site <http://www.bornagainpagan.com/> In addition to the websites noted, there are these books—the first book is not associated with above the website—Anthony T. Kronman, *Confessions of a Born-Again Pagan* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2016); Ragnar Galt, *I'm An Atheist, And You Should Be One Too: Why Religion Is Misguiding the World, And How Atheists Have The Power To Stop It* (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014); Greta Christina, *Coming Out Atheist: How to Do It, How to Help Each Other, and Why* (Durham, NC: Pitchstone Publishing, 2014); Peter Boghossian, *A Manual for Creating Atheists* (Durham, NC: Pitchstone Publishing, 2013); David G. McAfee, *Mom, Dad, I'm an Atheist: The Guide to Coming Out as an Non-believer* (GB: Dangerous Little Books, 2012); Hemant Mehta, *The Young Atheist's Survival Guide: Helping Secular Students Thrive* (Denver, CO: Patheos Press, 2012); Joe Wenke, *Papal Bull: An Ex-Catholic Calls Out the Catholic Church* (Stamford, CN: Trans Uber, LLC, 2013); Timothy Michael Short, *Preacher Boy: A Liberty University Graduate Bids Farewell to Falwell and Hello to Atheism* (GB: Dangerous Little Books, 2011); Seth Andrews, *Deconverted: A Journey from Religion to Reason* (Parker, CO: Outskirts Press, Inc., 2013); John W. Loftus, *Why I Became an Atheist: A Former Preacher Rejects Christianity* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2012). Ali A. Rizvi, *The Atheist Muslim: A Journey from Religion to Reason* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2016).

54. Anthony Flew with Roy Abraham Varghese, *There Is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind* (New York: HarperOne, 2007).

Other former atheists who have come to faith in Christ and have written about their journey are Peter Hitchens, *The Rage Against God: How Atheism Led Me to Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010); Holly Ordway, *Not God's Type: A Rational Academic Finds a Radical Faith* (Chicago: Moody, 2010); Jennifer Fulwiler, *Something Other Than God: How I Passionately Sought Happiness and Accidentally Found It* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014); Douglas Ell, *Counting to God: A Personal Journey Through Science to Belief* (Morgantown, WV: Attitude Media, 2014); J. Warner Wallace, *Cold-Case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates the Claims of the Gospel* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2013); Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into Christian Faith* (Pittsburgh, PA: Cross & Crown

Publications, 2012); Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); Jordan Monge, "The Atheists Dilemma," *Christianity Today* Vol. 57, No. 2 (March 2013), 88; Kathryn L. Butler, "A Critical Care Surgeon Meets the Great Physician" *Christianity Today* Vol. 61, No. 2 (March 2017), 79–80.

Other notable individuals who moved from nontheism, atheism or agnosticism to the Christian faith include C. S. Lewis, Joy Davidman, Alister McGrath, Avery Dulles, Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, John Warwick Montgomery, Marvin Olasky, Malcolm Muggeridge, Josh McDowell, Bernard Nathanson, Evelyn Waugh, Bo Giertz, Eugene D. Genovese, Mortimer J. Adler, C. E. M. Joad, Mark Bauerlein, Francis Collins, William J. Murray, Simon Greenleaf, Philip Vander Elst, Czeslaw Milosz, Guillaume Bignon, Nicole Cliffe, Kirsten Powers, Wayne Rossiter, Sarah Slavlander, J.L. Wile, and others. Proslogion at <http://blog.drwile.com/?cat=24> and Eryn Sun, "Former atheist turned Christian through Dawkin's website continues strong faith in God," <http://www.christiantoday.com.au/article/former-atheist-turned.christian.through.dawkins.website.continues.strong.faith.in.god/10601.htm>

See also Hugh T. Kerr Y John M. Mulder, eds., *Conversions: The Christian Experience* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983) which features the conversion experiences of 50 individuals from the Apostle Paul to 1983.

55. Geoff Crocker, "From Religion: A Secular Trinity of Grace, Love, and Friendship"—<http://atheistspirituality.net/from-religion-a-secular-trinity-of-grace-love-and-fellowship/>; "The Secular Trinity" of "cosmic creativity, humanity, and global consciousness" was the subject of a Once and Future Faith conference held at the Westar Institute in the spring of 2001. Westar is the home of the Jesus Seminar. [<http://www.westarinstitute.org/store/the-secular-trinity/>].

See also the Taylor Gold trinity of Ms. X, the flying ewe, and the Infinite Void (the Mother, the Sheep, and the Infinite Void)—from the material in paragraph of endnote 21.

56. Jonathan Tweet, "Atheist Sunday School"—<http://jonathan-tweet.blogspot.com/>; Nathan Black, "Atheists Flock to Secular Sunday School" <http://www.christianpost.com/news/atheists-flock-to-secular-sunday-school-30231/>; Jack, "Atheist Sunday School"—<http://www.atheistrev.com/2007/11/atheist-sunday-school.html>.

57. Dan Arel, *Parenting Without God: How to Raise Moral, Ethical and Intelligent Children Free from Religious Dogma* (Durham, NC: Pitchstone Publishing, 2015); Dan Barker, *The Good Atheist: Living a Purpose-Filled Life Without God* (Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press, 2011); Deborah Mitchell, *Growing Up Godless: A Parent's Guide to Raising Kids Without Religion* (Sterling, NY: Ethos, 2014); Dale McGowan, *Parenting Beyond Belief: On Raising Ethical, Caring Kids Without Religion* (New York: AMACOM Books, 2017). See also McGowan's website which notes that his book was written to help those without faith in God to have the "undeniable

benefits” of religion (rites of passage, a defined set of values, etc.) ”without the harmful effects of religion.” <http://parentingbeyondbelief.com/>.

58. Stephen Prothero, *God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions that Run the World—and Why Their Differences Matter* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 325.

59. Corliss Lamont, *A Humanist Funeral Service* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Press, 2011—reprint); Corliss Lamont, *A Humanist Wedding Service* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Press, 1972); Jayne Wynne Willson, *Funerals Without God: A Practical Guide to Non-Religious Funerals* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Press, 1990); Jennifer Hancock, *The Humanist Approach to Grief and Grieving: How to Grieve and Maintain Your Sanity* (Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013). The material on grieving is an excerpt from her book Jennifer Hancock, *The Humanist Approach to Happiness* (Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2010).

60. <http://www.hymnary.org/node/7624>.

See also “Humanist Hymnal” and the songs compiled there including “Freethinker and Atheist”—<http://humanisthymnal.com/2013/05/02/freethinker-and-atheist/>

61. “Andre Comte-Sponville Interview”—<http://atheistspirituality.net/from-andre-comte-sponville/>.

Suzanne Boore, “Why non-believers need ritual too,” <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/27/why-non-believers-need-rituals-atheists>.

One chapter in Katherine Ozment’s book, *Grace Without God*, is entitled “Ritual Without Religion” (166–186). Her book is an attempt to give people without faith in God a community in which there are rituals and stories which were usually given by religion. Katherine Ozment, *Grace Without God: The Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Belonging in a Secular Age* (New York: Harper Wave, 2016).

This felt need expressed by Comte-Sponville was evident in Soviet society. There were atheistic “Soviet alternatives to baptisms, confirmations, religious marriages, funerals, and many other religious life-cycle rituals and celebrations.” Such rituals give a sense of community and belonging and appear built in to the human psyche. Froese, *The Plot to Kill God*, 20–21, 27–28, 42, 107–120, 185–186, 198–199.

Dean H. Hamer posits a God Gene which is hard-wired into human beings, and is instinctive, hence human beings have a built in need for spiritual or religious ritual. Dean H. Hamer, *The God Gene: How Faith is Hardwired into Our Genes* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004). Hamer is not the only one with this explanation of almost universal human religiosity and spirituality. Matthew Alper finds that humans are genetically wired to believe in god, a soul, and the afterlife. Matthew Alper, *The God Part of the Brain: A Scientific Interpretation of Human Spirituality and God*

(Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, Inc., 2008); also Andrew Newberg, Eugene D'Aquili, and Vince Rause, *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief* (New York: A Ballantine Book, 2002); Andrew Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman, *Born to Believe: God, Science, and the Origin of Ordinary and Extraordinary Beliefs* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

62. Prothero, *God Is Not One*, 324.

63. Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, 10–11.

64. Prothero, *God Is Not One*, 325.

Atheistic organizations are not a new phenomenon. The American Association for the Advancement of Atheism was founded in 1925 by Charles Lee Smith. This group also launched the Junior Atheist League with established chapters in schools and attracted students from ages 7 to 17. The American Association for the Advancement of Atheism existed until its demise after its leader James Hervey Johnson, died in 1988. It maintained an internet presence into the twenty-first century. Theodore Graebner, *God of the Cosmos: A Critical Analysis of Atheism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1932), 2; Tom Flynn, "American Association for the Advancement of Atheism," in Tom Flynn, ed., *The New Encyclopedia of Unbelief* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007), 43–44. This encyclopedia also lists the many other atheistic and freethinker organizations that exist including the one organized by Madelyn Murry O'Hare, American Atheists.

65. John B. Noss, *Man's Religions* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1963—Third Edition), 369–427.

66. Noss, *Man's Religions*, 327–368.

67. Noss, *Man's Religions*, 167–252; William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Collier Books, 1961), 43–44.

68. Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, 27. Dalai Lama, *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011)—the first section of the book is entitled "A New Vision of Secular Ethics."

69. Charles Francis Potter, *Humanism: A New Religion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1930). He founded the First Humanist Society of New York. Together with John Dewey, Potter was one of the original signers of the first *Humanist Manifesto*. He believed that supernatural religion should be replaced by humanism—a religion of common sense which would be used by human beings to improve themselves and the whole human race. He also wrote *Humanizing Religion* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1933) and *The Lost Years of Jesus Revealed* (Greenwich CN: Fawcett, 1985—revised edition). See also David Noebel, *Clergy in the*

Classroom: The Religion of Secular Humanism (Manitou Springs, CO: Summit Press, 2007).

“Atheist Group Educates Congress About Humanist Chaplains in the Military,” <http://americanhumanist.org/news/details/2014-07-atheist-group-educates-congress-about-humanist-chapl>.

John W. Whitehead and John Conlan, “The Establishment of the Religion of Secular Humanism and Its First Amendment Implications,” *Texas Tech Law Review* 10 (Winter 1978): 19.

“Humanism . . . shows promise of becoming a great world faith. Humanists are content with fixing their attention on this life and on this earth. Theirs is a faith without a god, divine revelation, or sacred scriptures. Yet theirs is a faith rich in feeling and understanding.” Lloyd Morain and Mary Morain, *Humanism as the Next Step* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1954), 4.

70. Frank S. Mead, Samuel S. Hill, Craig D. Atwood, eds., *Handbook of Denominations in the United States* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005—12th Edition), 371–372. Wendy Russell noted that atheistic temples were not needed because there are Unitarian Universalist congregations already in existence. Wendy Thomas Russell, “Alain De Botton’s ‘Atheism 2.0’ Cheapened by Temple Talk,” <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/naturalwonderers/alain-de-bottons-atheism-2-0-cheapened-by-temple-talk/>.

71. James A. Herrick, *Scientific Mythologies: How Science and Science Fiction Forge New Religious Beliefs* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 24, 115, 194, 208–211.

72. Peter Gardella, *American Civil Religion: What Americans Hold Sacred* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). For more on American Civil Religion, see the essays in Russell E. Richey & Donald G. Jones, eds., *American Civil Religion* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1974)—this book contains two essays by Robert N. Bellah who surfaced the idea of civil religion in America. See also Froese, *The Plot to Kill God*, 16, 170–172, 192–194, 205–206 footnote 21. “Rousseau said a civil religion is necessary to society. . . . The very idea of a culture was a way of preserving something like religion without talking about it. Culture is a synthesis of reason and religion, attempting to hide the sharp distinction between the two poles.” Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today’s Students* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 196.

73. Gardella, *American Civil Religion*, 2; Civil religion in the United States could be “concisely described as the secular part” of a belief system which contains non-religious and theistic parts each being clearly distinct from one another. Froese, *The Plot to Kill God*, 205–206, fn. 21.

American Civil Religion as originally understood included a concept of a deity. “‘God’ has clearly been a central symbol in the civil religion from the beginning and remains so today. (1967) This symbol is just as central to the civil religion as it is to the Judaism or Christianity. . . . From left to right and regardless of church or sect, all could accept the idea of God.” Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” in Russell E. Richey & Donald G. Jones, eds., *American Civil Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers—A Harper Forum Book, 1974), 37

“Behind the civil religion at every point lie Biblical archtypes: Exodus, Chosen People, Promised Land, New Jerusalem, Sacrificial Death and Rebirth.” Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” in Richey & Jones, *American Civil Religion*, 40.

“America’s civil religion has its spiritual side, of course. I should include under this head, first, belief in a Supreme Being, in which Americans are virtually unanimous, proportionately far ahead of any other nation in the Western world.” Will Herberg, “America’s Civil Religion: What It Is and Whence It Comes,” in Richey & Jones, *American Civil Religion*, 78.

In the 60’s and later, the culture was permeated with religiosity. In 2017 the culture has become increasingly secular. Bellah wrote of the changing tides of religious thought occurring even in the late 60’s. “But today, as even *Time* has recognized, the meaning of the word *God* is by no means so clear or so obvious. . . . If the whole God symbolism requires reformulation, there will be obvious consequences for civil religion. . . . It is not too soon to consider how the deepening theological crisis may affect the future of this articulation.” Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” in Richey & Jones, *American Civil Religion*, 37

As Bellah noted above, it would appear from the current secularizing trends away from belief in God, and the concept of God becoming even more nebulous than in the 1960’s, that American Civil Religion, in the eyes of some is still seen to be theistic, but in the perspective of scholars like Gardella and Froese, it is seen in a much more secular and non-theistic sense than originally thought.

74. Cupitt, *After God*, 82.

75. Cupitt, *After God*, 79–128.

76. Ronald Dworkin, *Religion Without God* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 5.

77. Dworkin, *Religion Without God*, 6.

78. Ray Billington, *Religion Without God* (London: Routledge, 2002), 6.

79. http://www.ted.com/talks/alain_de_botton_atheism_2_0.

80. Dworkin, *Religion Without God*, 5–6. Erich Fromm, *You Shall Be Like Gods* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1966), 57; Arthur Jay Klinghoffer, *Red Apocalypse: The Religious Evolution of Soviet Communism* (Lanham/London/New York: University Press of America, Inc., 1996), 80, also 81–88.

Frank Zappa founded the Church of American Secular Humanism (CASH). Kennedy, “Atheism Is a Religion,” <https://reason.com/archives/2012/03/10/atheism-is-a-religion/2>.

Some atheists act in ways that give rise to seeing their belief system as a religion. Support for this position comes from Richard Dawkins himself. After the 9/11 attacks, Tony Blair invited religious leaders in England to 10 Downing Street. In conversation with John Gray, Dawkins was bothered by the fact that Blair had failed to invite “a leader of atheism” to the meeting. Gray recounts that from his comments there “seemed no question in Dawkins’ mind that atheism as he understood it fell into the same category as the world’s faiths.” John Gray, “The Closed Mind of Richard Dawkins,” <https://newrepublic.com/article/119596/appetite-wonder-review-closed-mind-richard-dawkins>.

81. Dawkins described himself as “a secular Christian” at the Hay Festival where he was giving presentations about his book, *An Appetite for Wonder*. <http://www.charismanews.com/world/43997-atheist-richard-dawkins-i-am-a-secular-christian> and <http://hotair.com/archives/2008/06/23/new-pew-survey-21-of-atheists-believe-in-god/>.

Surprisingly Richard Dawkins is reported to have said, “There are no Christians, as far as I know, blowing up buildings. I am not aware of any Christian suicide bombers. I am not aware of any major Christian denomination that believes the penalty for apostasy is death. I have mixed feelings about the decline of Christianity, in so far as Christianity might be a bulwark against something worse.” Ruth Gledhill, “Scandal and schism leave Christians praying for a ‘new Reformation,’” *The Times (UK)* April 2, 2010; Anugrah Kumar, “Atheist Richard Dawkins Says Christianity a ‘Bulwark Against Something Worse,’” <http://www.christianpost.com/news/atheist-richard-dawkins-christianity-god-islamic-terrorism-155068/>.

In another surprising statement, the atheist, Theodore Dalrymple wrote these words which note that if one regrets religion, one regrets Western civilization itself. “The thinness of the new atheism is evident in its approach to our civilization, which until recently was religious to its core. To regret religion is, in fact, to regret our civilization and its monuments, and its legacy. And in my own view, the absence of religious faith...can have a deleterious effect upon human character and personality. If you empty the world of purpose, make it one of brute fact alone, you empty it . . . of reasons for gratitude, and a sense of gratitude is necessary for both happiness and decency. For what can soon, and all too easily, replace gratitude is a sense of entitlement. Without gratitude, it is hard to appreciate, or be satisfied with, what you

have: and life will soon become an existential shopping spree that no product satisfies.” Theodore Dalrymple, “What the New Atheists Don’t See” *City Journal* (Autumn 2007)—[www.cityjournal.org/html/what-new-atheists-don't-see-13058.html](http://www.cityjournal.org/html/what-new-atheists-don-t-see-13058.html)

82. Thomas J. J. Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966); Thomas J. J. Altizer, *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (Indianapolis/New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1966); Paul Van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel Based on an Analysis of Its Language* (New York: Macmillan, 1966); Thomas W. Ogletree, *The Death of God Controversy* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1966); Gabriel Vahanian, *The Death of God: The Culture of Our Post-Christian Era* (New York: George Brazier, 1961). Vincent P. Miceli, *The Gods of Atheism* (Harrison, NY: Roman Catholic Books, 1971), 383–445; John J. Vincent, *Secular Christ: A Contemporary Interpretation of Jesus* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968); Schilling, *God in an Age of Atheism*, 100–114. Frederick Nietzsche, who proclaimed God had died, exerted a significant influence on Altizer. Palmer, *The Atheist's Primer*, 99.

This Christian Atheism/Death of God movement is attempting a resurrection in the current millennium. Thomas J.J. Altizer, *The New Gospel of Christian Atheism* (Aurora, CO: The Davies Group, 2002); Thomas J.J. Altizer, *The Apocalyptic Trinity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Daniel J. Peterson, ed., *Resurrecting the Death of God: The Origins, Influence, and Return of Radical Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014); Lissa McCullough, “Death of God Reprise: Altizer, Taylor, Vattimo, Caputo, Vahanian,” *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* Vol. 9, No. 3 (Fall 2008), 97–109.

There were a variety of reactions to the latest Pew religious study which indicated that 20% of those professing to be atheists said that they believed in a god or a higher power. Some indicated a belief in heaven and hell, and some indicated that they prayed. <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/geneveith/2015/11/atheists-who-believe-in-god-believers-who-dont/>.

As was seen in one of the atheistic spirituality websites above, an atheist can also believe in or relate to a god or higher power. See endnote 20.

A re-reading of the reactions and critiques of the original death of God and religionless Christianity movements, will be helpful in our current climate where atheism, godless religions, and secular spiritualities abound.

“But existential thinking is at the real root of Christianity without Religion.” C.B. Armstrong, “Christianity Without Religion” in Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman, eds., *New Theology no. 2* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965).

Armstrong, “Christianity Without Religion,” in Marty & Peerman, *New Theology* 2, 17–27; William O. Fennell, “The Theology of True Secularity,” in Marty &

Peerman, *New Theology* 2, 28–38; Langdon B. Gilkey, “A New Linguistic Madness,” in Marty & Peerman, *New Theology* 2, 39–49; James W. Woelfel, “‘Non-Metaphysical’ Christian Philosophy and Linguistic Philosophy,” in Marty & Peerman, *New Theology* 2, 50–61; David Jenkins, “Whither the Doctrine of God Now?” in Marty & Peerman, *New Theology* 2, 62–74; Ninian Smart, “The Intellectual Crisis of British Christianity,” in Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman, eds., *New Theology no. 3* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), 20–29; Daniel Callahan, “The Secular City: Toward a Theology of Secularity,” in Marty & Peerman, *New Theology* 3, 30–39; John Macquarrie, “How Can We Think of God?” in Marty & Peerman, *New Theology* 3, 40–52; Kenneth Hamilton, “*Homo Religiosus* and Historical Faith,” in Marty & Peerman, *New Theology* 3, 53–68; Paul Peachey, “New Ethical Possibility: The Task of ‘Post-Christian’ Ethics,” in Marty & Peerman, *New Theology* 3, 103–117; John Killinger, “The Uses of Agnosticism: Secularism in Modern Literature,” in Marty & Peerman, *New Theology* 3, 133–148; Steve Weissman, “New Left Man Meets the Dead God,” in Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman, eds., *New Theology no. 5* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), 21–46; R. F. Aldwinckle, “Did Jesus Believe in God? Some Reflections on Christian Atheism,” in Marty & Peerman, *New Theology* 5, 62–78; Daniel F. Martensen, ed., *Christian Hope and the Secular* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1969); William Hordern, *New Directions in Theology Today, Volume I: Introduction* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), 114–135; John MacQuarrie, *New Directions in Theology Today, Volume III: God and Secularity* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966); Lonnie D. Kliever and John H. Hayes, *Radical Christianity: The New Theologies in Perspective—With Readings from the Radicals* (Anderson, SC: Droke House, Publishers, 1968)—featuring the works of Altizer, van Buren, Cox, Hamilton, Robinson, and Vahanian. See also John Warwick Montgomery, *The ‘Is God Dead?’ Controversy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966).

The above works are often responding to the ideas found in Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965); John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), and the death of God theologians like Altizer and Van Buren. See also Ernst Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and of the Kingdom* (London: Verso/New Left Books, 2009). Lloyd Geering, *Christianity Without God* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2002). Geering believes that Christianity must become non-theist, 131–146.

Necessary reading is an article marking the 50th Anniversary of the Death of God/Christian atheism movement. Matthew Rose, “Death of God Fifty Years On,” *First Things*, Number 265 (August/September 2016), 43–48.

83. Austin Cline, “Can Atheists Be Religious? Are there Religious Atheists?” <http://atheism.about.com/od/atheismquestions/a/AtheismReligion.htm>.

Austin Cline has served as the Regional Director for the Council for Secular Humanism and was Publicity Coordinator for the Campus Forethought Alliance.

As the author was finishing this paper he ran across a reference to Mike Dobbins, *Atheism As A Religion: An Introduction to the World's Least Understood Faith* (Chicago: CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2014).

There is a North Texas Church of Freethought (NTCOF) founded in 1994. There is also The First Atheist Church of True Science (FACTS).

The NTCOF webpage states emphatically that Freethought fits all the criterion of being “a religion” even though the website states that it is “exceedingly doubtful” that any adherent of the Freethought church could believe in the existence of any god. www.churchoffreethought.org/faq.php.

There is also the First Atheist Church of True Science (FACTS) which features sermons and statements about the church’s rituals, and a hymn or song. One “sermon” features a defense of atheism being a religion in a 5/29 2009 www.factschurch.com/facts_sermons.html.

The Atheist Frontier website lists 10 atheist churches or church groups; www.atheistfrontier.com/resources/atheism/church.pl.

84. <http://www.sofn.org.uk/index.html>.

See also David Boulton, “A Reasonable Faith: Introducing the Sea of Faith Network” http://www.sofn.org.uk/sof/reasonable_faith.html

85. <http://www.markfoster.net/rn/texts/seaoffaith.pdf>

For Cupitt’s beliefs, see Nigel Leaves, *Odyssey on the Sea of Faith: The Life and Writings of Don Cupitt* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2004).

86. “Editorial: Jesus Christ: What to Make of Him Today?” *Sofia* #120 (June 2016), 3.

87. Edward Walker, “Jesus, Son of God” *Sofia* #120 (June 2016), 5 & 6.

88. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/religion>.

89. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/religion>.

90. Steve Donaldson, *Dimensions of Faith: Understanding Faith through the Lens of Science and Religion* (London: The Lutterworth Press, 2015), pp. 33–39, passim. Donaldson writes of science as a religion 194–200.

91. “Court Rules Atheism a Religion” <http://www.wnd.com/2005/08/31895/> and Matt Dillahunty, “Atheism and the Law,” <http://www.atheist-community.org/library/articles/read.php?id=742>. Prothero, *God Is Not One*, 325.

92. Casey Luskin, “For First Amendment Purposes, Is Atheism a Religion?” http://www.evolutionnews.org/2014/07/for_first_amend1087481.html.

93. Brent Bambury, “Is Atheism a Religion?” <https://richarddawkins.net/2013/09/is-atheism-a-religion/>

94. Javier Espinoza, “All pupils at non-faith schools must study atheism, judge says,” <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/12015859/Non-religious-views-should-not-have-been-left-out-of-new-GCSE-High-Court-rules.html>.

95. For a perspective on how politics and the legal system in the United States deal with religion and spirituality, see Stephen L. Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

96. Arthur Jay Klinghoffer, *Red Apocalypse: The Religious Evolution of Soviet Communism* (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 1996), 87–88.

“And the history of atheism has featured some undeniably religious moments. During the Furies of the French Revolution, the *ancien regime* that married Catholicism to the French state got the guillotine. What followed, however, was not irreligion but the Cult of Reason. This religion—and it was a religion—was as ritualized as French Catholicism. It worshipped Voltaire as a secular saint, and revered martyrs of the revolutionary cause. It renamed Notre Dame the Temple of Reason, lauded the Goddess of Reason, and celebrated a Festival of Liberty. Soon the French were baptizing their children in the name of the holy trinity of *liberte, egalite, fraternite*, confessing their faith in the French republic, and marking the year with holy days commemorating reason, virtue, and the French Revolution itself.” Prothero, *God Is Not One*, 323.

97] Klinghoffer, *Red Apocalypse*, 112-113; also 114-115, 119-126; Jerry Pankhurst, “Religious Culture: Faith in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia”—http://cdclv.unlv.edu/archives/nc1/pankhurst_religious.html

“Despite avowed atheism, Soviet communism evolved as a secular religion bearing many institutional and doctrinal similarities to Christianity. ‘Red’ baptisms and weddings were incorporated into the system, along with pseudo-Christian rites mimicking the holidays of Christmas and Easter.” Klinghoffer, *Red Apocalypse*, 1. Soviet scientific atheism invented its own moral code, and had its own myths, heroes, sacred spaces, rites, and language which attempted to place Soviet daily life “in a secular context.” Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1998), 96.

“It is useful in this to remind ourselves of a theoretical point about certain secular worldviews such as Marxism and fascism, which acted as religions in terms of the demands made upon citizens in relation to belief and practice. Marxism might represent itself as not a religion...but its role was very similar to that of the older established religious Orthodoxy and Lutheranism. . . . A still more rigorous form of establishmentarianism is the Marxist mode (more rigorous because imposed by totalitarian methods), in which Marxist ideology is in effect the imposed state religion and behavior is, or was classically, strictly prescribed.” Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, 254 & 256.

Kurt Hutten, *Iron Curtain Christians: The Church in Communist Countries Today*, trans. Walter G. Tillmanns (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1967), 235–236, 278–284, 337–342; J. N. Westwood, *Russia 1917–1964* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), 81–82; Froese, *The Plot to Kill God*, 5–8, 16, 19–21, 27–28, 42, 107–120, 166–178; Lukas Bomba, Adrian Kacian, “The Relevance of Christian Faith for Everyday Life in Post-Communist Slovakia,” in Michal Valco & Daniel Slivka, eds., *Christian Churches in Post-Communist Slovakia: Current Challenges and Opportunities* (Salem, VA: Center for Religion and Society, 2012), 75.

See also Nicholas Berdyaev, *The Origin of Russian Communism* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1960); Laurent Murawiec, *The Mind of Jihad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); “Marxism's claim to be scientific is nothing other than a pseudoscientific new religion, which merely borrowed science's verbal attributes.” Aleksandr Yakovlev, *The Fate of Marxism in Russia* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993), 102. Yakovlev also wrote that communist atheism had its own “church followers, its prophets, its icons, its tombs, its relics, its holy writings, its heresies and dogmas, its orthodoxy, its catechism, its system of persecuting heretics, its repentance and renunciation. And of course its Inquisition.” Yakovlev, *The Fate of Marxism in Russia*, 43. For a list of those theologians, historians, and social scientists who have classified Soviet Communism as a secular religion or as an atheist theocracy see Klinghoffer pages 2, 9, fn. 3, 34–35, 39, fn. 9, 80–88 & passim. Jennifer McDowell, “Soviet Civil Ceremonies,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* Vol. 13, No. 3 (September, 1974), 265–278; James Thrower, *Marxist-Leninist ‘Scientific Atheism’ and the Study of Religion and Atheism in the USSR* (Berlin: Mouton Publisher, 1983), 31; Anatoly M. Khazanov, “Marxism-Leninism as a Secular Religion,” in Roger Griffin, Robert Mallett and John Tortorice, eds., *The Sacred in Twentieth-Century Politics: Essays in Honour of Professor Stanley G. Payne* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 119–142.

For a non-European example of atheistic communism using secularized religious beliefs, especially those that are Christian, see Les Sillars, “Cambodia’s Anti-Exodus: Remembering Angka & the Idolatry of the Khmer Rouge 40 Years Later,” *Touchstone* Vol. 28 No. 5 (September/October 2015), 32–35.

On the incompatibility of Christianity and Marxism see Louis Dupre, “Marx and Religion: An Impossible Marriage,” in Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman, eds., *New Theology No. 6: On Revolution and Non-Revolution, Violence and Non-Violence, Peace and Power* (New York: The Macmillian Company, 1969), 151–164.

98. Peris, *Storming the Heavens*, 93–94.

99. Edvard Radzinsky, *Stalin* (New York: An Anchor Book, 1996), 212 & 215.

100. Peris, *Storming the Heavens*, 86; James Thrower, *Marxism-Leninism as the Civil Religion of Soviet Society* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 34.

101. Robert Scharlemann, *Communism and the Christian Faith* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 7–13. Also Jon Diefenthaler, *The Paradox of Church and World: Selected Writings of H. Richard Niebuhr* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 158–160, 180–181, 258–259; Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1960), 154–156, 161–168; Reinhold Niebuhr, *Reflections on the End of an Era* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1934); Thrower, *Marxism-Leninism as Civil Religion*, 34; Armand J. Boehme, “World-Changing October Anniversaries—500 & 100 Years—A Study in Similarities and Contrasts,” in Michal Valco & P. Konya, eds., *Ethical Aspects of Contemporary Scientific Research* (Ljubljana: KUD Apokalipsa & CERI SK, 2017—in print).

In *Reflections on the End of an Era*, “Niebuhr sees a kinship between Marxism and Christian eschatology, for both are dissatisfied with merely rescuing individuals from the injustices of history, [both] demand the correction of the whole historical process, and acknowledge that this is accomplished not by peaceful educational methods but dialectally, through conflict and destruction.” T.A. Kantonen, *Christian Faith Today: Studies in Contemporary Theology* (Lima, Ohio: C. S. S. Publishing Company, Inc., 1974), 49.

“In the years immediately following his European sabbatical, Niebuhr tended to stress points of convergence between Marxism and Christianity. Both, in his estimation, recognized that there were forces at work in history beyond human control, and both inspired a trust that something better would eventually emerge from the ashes of misery and discontent the present order had created.” Diefenthaler, *The Paradox of Church and World*, 181.

102. Paul Hinlicky, “The Destruction of Civic Virtue” quoted from Michal Valco, “Communism as a Christian Heresy: A False (and Failed) Prophecy of an Ideology,” in David Zdenek, Suraiya Banu, az-Zubair Esarey & Katia Esarey, eds., *Proceedings of the 26th SVU World Congress of the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences* (Highland Park, NJ: Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences, 2013—English only edition), 299.

103. Thrower, *Marxist-Leninist 'Scientific Atheism'*, 28.

104. Thrower, *Marxist-Leninist 'Scientific Atheism'*, 54.

105. Victoria Smolkin-Rothrock, "The Ticket to the Soviet Soul: Science, Religion, and the Spiritual Crisis of Late Soviet Atheism" *The Russian Review* Vol. 73, No. 2 (April 2014), 173 & 175.

106. Smolkin-Rothrock, "The Ticket," 181.

107. Smolkin-Rothrock, "The Ticket," 176.

108. Smolkin-Rothrock, "The Ticket," 196.

109. Klinghoffer, *Red Apocalypse*, 114.

110. Thrower, *Marxism-Leninism as Civil Religion*, ix–x, 143–168.

111. "But Communists were guided by their belief in scientific atheism, which precluded the acceptance of religious ideas and practice. In many ways, Soviet elites already had their own religion—scientific atheism—and they were unwilling to compromise it. A firm and unrelenting faith in the evil of religion led Soviet leaders to commit vast resources and exert violent efforts to destroy religion, even as these efforts proved counterproductive." Froese, *The Plot to Kill God*, 164; Bomba and Kacian, "The Relevance of Christian Faith for Everyday Life in Post-Communist Slovakia," in Valco & Slivka, *Christian Churches in Post-Communist Slovakia*, 74. "Marxism is secularized Christianity." Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 211; Reinhold Niebuhr described Marxism as a religion without God or grace. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Reflections on the End of an Era*, 284–285. Niebuhr stated that Marxism has a creed, and described Marxism as a religion, and having spiritual promise. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 146–147, 154–156, 162–163, 167, 222.

112. Peris, *Storming the Heavens*, 89.

113. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. I, Committee trans., (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 371–381. "The idea of God in all its multiple forms, is one of the most shared beliefs in the entire world." Froese, *The Plot to Kill God*, 199; also 185–186. The Gallup World Poll of religion taken in 163 nations worldwide included responses from over one million people. The latest Gallup World Poll indicated that 81% of those interviewed claimed to belong to a religious faith organization, 74% said religion was important in their lives, and 50% reported having attended a place of worship or a church service in the last seven days. In a majority of nations the percentage of people claiming to be atheists was around 5%. Only three of the 163 countries had a higher percentage. Rodney Stark, *The Triumph*

of Faith: Why the World is More Religious than Ever (Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2015Z), 11.

114. Thrower, *Marxist-Leninist*, 112, 370ff.

115. Peris, *Storming the Heavens*, 70.

116. Schilling, *God in an Age of Atheism*, 16. Schilling encourages two responses. The first is for Christians to “attempt to discover and clarify our differences, to expose the misunderstandings of the atheist, to refute the arguments, and to convince him of the superiority of the theistic position.” The second response is to use the atheist’s criticism to rethink and clarify “our own understanding of God. . . . The serious atheist who wrestles with ultimate questions . . . may call attention to weaknesses and incongruities in” the Christian understanding of God. The serious wrestling with questions about the existence of evil, the horrors of war and suffering, poverty, the seeming meaninglessness of life, and the thought that only human beings can change what is bad in the world also occurs among believers. What is needed is clarity based on God’s Word. Schilling, *God in an Age of Atheism*, 17.

117. Schilling, *God in an Age of Atheism*, 18.

118. Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Christian Smith & Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Christian Smith, ed., *The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests, and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); John L. Esposito & Dalia Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007); Greg Epstein, *Good Without God: What a Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe* (New York: William Morrow, 2009).

An excellent essay setting forth ways Christians can respond to the more secular and post-modern world is Michal Valco, “Setting the Stage for a Meaningful Engagement: The Need for a Competent Public Theology in the Post-Communist Context of Slovakia,” in Valco & Slivka, *Christian Churches in Post-Communist Slovakia*, 185–256. See also Boehme, “Spirituality and Religion,” 34–36.

The works of many of the atheists mentioned and listed in the footnotes of this essay should also be read.

119. Larry Alex Taunton, *The Faith of Christopher Hitchens; The Restless Soul of the World’s Most Notorious Atheist* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2016). Larry Alex Taunton and Christopher Hitchens shared a close friendship. This is a book that should be read by every atheist and theist throughout the world.

Another book helpful for engaging that respectful dialogue is Larry Taunton, *Listening to Young Atheists: Lessons for a Stronger Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2016).

120. Steven Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know—And Doesn't* (New York: HarperOne, 2007); Ross Douthat, *Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics* (New York: Free Press, 2012); E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987). This book lists 300+ religious words and phrases which every person who wishes to be culturally literate in Western society needs to know whether one is religious or not. Hirsch also produced two dictionaries to help adults and children understand what should be known. E. D. Hirsch, Jr., ed., *A First Dictionary of Cultural Literacy: What Our Children Need to Know* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989); E.D. Hirsch, Jr., Joseph F. Kett, James Trefil, eds., *The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988; Smith & Denton, *Soul Searching*, especially 162-171, 258, 262; Ammerman, "Golden Rule Christianity," in Hall, *Lived Religion in America*, 196-216; Michael Horton, ed., *The Agony of Deceit: What Some TV Preachers Are Really Teaching* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990; Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008).

121. *In Christ, All Things Hold Together: The Intersection of Science and Christian Theology* (St. Louis: Commission on Theology and Church Relations, 2016); Ian G. Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers, or Partners?* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2000); Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006). Modern historians of science have discovered "that the relationship of religion and science has been much more positive than is sometimes thought. . . . Studies have shown that Christianity has often nurtured and encouraged scientific endeavor, while at other times the two have co-existed without either tension or attempts at harmonization." Gary B. Ferngren, "Introduction," in Gary B. Ferngren, ed., *Science & Religion: A Historical Introduction* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), ix. John C. Polkinghorne, "Christian Interdisciplinarity," in Douglas V. Henry & Michael D. Beaty, eds., *Christianity and the Soul of the University: Faith as a Foundation for Intellectual Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 49-64; C. John Collins, *Science and Faith: Friends or Foes?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003); Nancy Pearcey and Charles B. Thaxton, *The Soul of Science: Christian Faith and Natural Philosophy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994); Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, & Naturalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Frank Turek, *Stealing From God: Why Atheists Need God to Make Their Case* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 145-176; John F. Ashton, ed., *In Six Days: Why Fifty Scientists Choose to Believe in Creation* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, Inc., 2000).

The evolutionary biologist Richard Lewontin 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 have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism. . . . 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 counterintuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover that materialism is absolute for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.” Richard Lewontin, “Billions and Billions of Demons” *The New York Review of Books* (January 9, 1997), <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1997/01/09/billions-and-billions-of-demons/>.

122. Rice Brooks’ book, *God’s Not Dead: Evidence for God in an Age of Uncertainty* is one example (Nashville: W Publishing/Thomas Nelson, 2013). This book is the basis for the movies *God’s Not Dead* & *God’s Not Dead 2* which also can be used to help with apologetic training in congregations. Peter S. Williams, *A Skeptic’s Guide to Atheism* (Authentic Media/Paternoster, 2009); Donald J. Johnson, *How to Talk to a Skeptic: An Easy-to-Follow-Guide for Natural Conversation and Effective Apologetics* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2013); Louis Markos, *Apologetics for the Twenty-first Century* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

Sean McDowell and Jonathan Morrow, *Is God Just a Human Invention? And Seventeen Other Questions Raised by the New Atheists* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2010); Jonathan Morrow, *Think Christianly: Looking at the Intersection of Faith and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Riverbed Books, 2008); Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical* (New York: Viking, 2016); Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004); Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* Vols. I & II (Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999); Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H Revell Company, 1976); Norman L. Giesler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976); William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008 - Third Edition); John Carroll, *Humanism: The Wreck of Western Culture* (London: Fontana Press, 1993); Colin Chapman, *The Case for Christianity: An Eerdmans’ Handbook* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981).

123. See also the Thinking Christianly website: <http://www.thinkingchristianly.com/>.

124. Michael Reder and Josef Schmidt, S. J., “Habermas and Religion” and Jurgen Habermas, “A Reply” in Jurgen Habermas, et al., *An Awareness of What Is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge & Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010), 10 & 82. See also Jurgen Habermas, “An Awareness of What Is Missing,” 15–23 in the same volume. On the religious

underpinnings of Western civilization, see also Jacob Neusner, ed., *Religious Foundations of Western Civilization* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006).

125. Hubert F. Beck, *The Cults: How to Respond* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010—updated edition), 18–20.

126. Greg Finke, *Joining Jesus on His Mission: How to Be an Everyday Missionary* (Elgin, IL, Tyler TX: Tenth Power Publishing, 2016).

127. Steve Allen, *Vulgarians at the Gate: Trash TV and Raunch Radio: Raising the Standards of Popular Culture* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2001). The Atheist and Agnostic Pro-Life League is run by James Matthew Wallace (also known as The Compleat Heretic) who is a secular humanist atheist and pro-life—
www.godlessprolifers.org/home.html.

See also Bruce Sheiman’s comments on this subject “Can We Be Good Without God? A Challenge to the ‘New Atheists’” at atheistdefendsreligion.blogspot.com. Sheiman shares the thought that much of the “secular” morality that exists has been borrowed from or influenced by religious or Christian morality. Christians believe that the moral law has been written in human hearts and is expressed in some form by both believers and unbelievers.

128. Bruce Sheiman, *An Atheist Defends Religion: Why Humanity Is Better Off with Religion than Without It* (New York: Alpha, 2009); Chris Stedman, *Faithist: How an Atheist Found Common Ground with the Religious* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012); Alain De Botton, *Religion for Atheists: A Non-believer's Guide to the Uses of Religion* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012); Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2010); Terry Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

129. Valco, “Communism as a Christian Heresy,” 299–300 in Zdenek, Banu, Z. Esarey & K. Esarey, eds., *Proceedings of the 26th SVU World Congress of the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences*, 299–300.