



Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011

Volume 19 | Number 2

Article 2

2007

Editor's Introduction, God and Mr. Hitchens

Daniel C. Peterson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr>

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Peterson, Daniel C. (2007) "Editor's Introduction, God and Mr. Hitchens," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011*: Vol. 19 : No. 2, Article 2.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol19/iss2/2>

This Front Matter is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011 by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.



NEAL A. MAXWELL INSTITUTE
FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

Title Editor's Introduction: God and Mr. Hitchens

Author(s) Daniel C. Peterson

Reference *FARMS Review* 19/2 (2007): xi-xlvi.

ISSN 1550-3194 (print), 2156-8049 (online)

Abstract Peterson refutes the views of atheist Christopher Hitchens, who takes a stance against religion and various well-known religious icons.

Editor's Introduction

GOD AND MR. HITCHENS

Daniel C. Peterson

Christopher Hitchens is the fourth of what one might call the four horsemen of the New Atheism—the other three being Sam Harris,¹ Richard Dawkins,² and Daniel Dennett.³ Hitchens is the author of a recent best seller called *god is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*.⁴ Notice the lowercase *god* in the title of his book. Subtlety

1. Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: Norton, 2005). For responses to Harris's ideology, see Michael D. Jibson, "Imagine," *FARMS Review* 18/1 (2006): 233–64; and Louis Midgley, "Knowing Brother Joseph Again," *FARMS Review* 18/1 (2006): lxii–lxv, which discusses Harris's curious fondness, apparently because of his atheism, for a vacuous mysticism. Harris has also published *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2006); some attention has been given to portions of this screed in *FARMS Review* 18/2 (2006): 250–51.

2. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006). For a careful examination of this book, see David Grandy, "Ideology in the Guise of Science," in this number of the *Review*.

3. Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a National Phenomenon* (New York: Viking, 2006).

4. Christopher Hitchens, *god is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York and Boston: Twelve, 2007). For convenience, all subsequent references to this book in the present essay, "God and Mr. Hitchens," are cited by page number alone. This essay, based on remarks given at the annual symposium of the Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (FAIR) on 3 August 2007 in Sandy, Utah, derives from a book that William J. Hamblin, of the Department of History at Brigham Young University, and I have been working on, tentatively entitled *God and mr. hitchens: Empty Rhetoric, Skewed History, and "the New Atheism."* I have allowed the present essay to retain something of its original oral character. I am grateful to my wife, Deborah, and to my son Stephen for their help in tracking down sources for my response to Christopher Hitchens.

is seldom his strong suit, and that is emblematic of the very serious and mature approach that he takes to the subject. Christopher Hitchens has been a presence in America for quite some time as a television commentator on politics. He is a British writer who recently took U.S. citizenship and has appeared in recent years as a defender of the war in Iraq and, more generally, of the “war against terror.” His stance on these topics makes me nervous because, having now read his book twice and given some thought to his positions, I wonder about his motivation. Is it really defense of freedom, or is it just disdain for religion, a sentiment that is a very, very powerful force in his life? Notice the subtitle of his book again: *How Religion Poisons Everything*.

In May 2007, when the Reverend Jerry Falwell died, Hitchens became notorious for his comments about Falwell on various television programs and in other venues. What he said in *Slate* magazine will serve well as an example:

The discovery of the carcass of Jerry Falwell on the floor of an obscure office in Virginia has almost zero significance, except perhaps for two categories of the species labeled “credulous idiot.” . . .

Like many fanatical preachers, Falwell was especially disgusting in exuding an almost sexless personality while railing from dawn to dusk about the sex lives of others. His obsession with homosexuality was on a par with his lip-smacking evocations of hellfire. From his wobbly base of opportunist fund raising and degree-mill money-spinning in Lynchburg, Va., he set out to puddle his sausage-sized fingers into the intimate arrangements of people who had done no harm. . . .

. . . It’s a shame that there is no hell for Falwell to go to, and it’s extraordinary that not even such a scandalous career is enough to shake our dumb addiction to the “faith-based.”⁵

That is not the usual kind of obituary.

5. Christopher Hitchens, “Faith-Based Fraud,” *Slate*, 16 May 2007, <http://www.slate.com/id/2166337> (accessed 17 January 2008).

Christopher Hitchens is also famous for despising Billy Graham, Mahatma Gandhi, and (at book length) Mother Teresa of Calcutta.⁶ On the other hand, he is not a total misanthrope. He has described Vladimir Lenin as a great man, and he still reveres Leon Trotsky (pp. 151–53). However, his *god is Not Great* is explicitly contemptuous of religious believers, at excruciating length and in considerable detail. He despises Jerry Falwell for his alleged crimes but, again, admires Trotsky, who is famous for saying, among other things, that we need to get beyond “the Church babble about the sanctity of human life,”⁷ an idea that Trotsky put into force, serving, with Lenin, as the co-architect of the Gulag in the Soviet Union, leading to the deaths of potentially as many as 40 million people.

Hitchens on the Mormons

One of the exhibits in Hitchens’s case against religion is Mormonism. He has a short and poorly informed section about Mormonism in his book in which he describes Mormonism—and this language is fairly typical of the way he approaches religion altogether—as a “ridiculous cult” (p. 161). He further states that “the actual story of the imposture is almost embarrassing to read, and almost embarrassingly easy to uncover” (p. 162). He has personally gone to a great deal of effort to uncover it by studying the work of Fawn Brodie. The story, Hitchens says, “has been best told by Dr. Fawn Brodie, whose 1945 book *No Man Knows My History* was a good-faith attempt by a professional historian to put the kindest possible interpretation on the relevant ‘events’” (p. 162). This is typical of his approach. Fawn Brodie becomes *Dr. Fawn Brodie*, even though, in fact, she never had a doctorate. And he does this sort of thing consistently. The most obscure atheist emerges as “the great so-and-so,” “the illustrious so-and-so,” whereas the greatest theists—Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine—are all depicted, essentially, as completely clueless idiots. I am fond in

6. Christopher Hitchens, *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice* (New York: Verso, 1995).

7. Quoted in Erik Durschmied, *Blood of Revolution: From the Reign of Terror to the Rise of Khomeini* (New York: Arcade, 2002), 170.

particular of his contrasting “Dr. Fawn Brodie,” who did not have a doctorate, with “William Albright of Baltimore” (p. 103), who is considered by many to be the leading archaeologist and the leading Old Testament scholar of the twentieth century. “William Albright of Baltimore” happens to have taught at Johns Hopkins University, where he founded that university’s notable tradition of biblical studies and archaeology. But that does not count, because it appears he was some sort of believer.

Mormonism shows “what happens when a plain racket turns into a serious religion before our eyes” (p. 165). Joseph Smith was a “gifted opportunist” whose “cleverness was to . . . unite cupidity with half-baked anthropology” (pp. 161, 162). Hitchens also claims that Joseph Smith modeled himself on Muhammad (p. 161). (I find that last assertion interesting because I have recently published a biography on Muhammad and had not noticed any such connection.)⁸ Here is another Hitchens comment I liked: “Smith refused to show the golden plates to anybody, claiming that for other eyes to view them would mean death” (p. 163). He makes no mention of the Witnesses, perhaps because he does not know about them. And further: the Book of Mormon is “a piece of vulgar fabrication” (p. 166).

But you learn a lot about the Book of Mormon from his book. You learn, for example, about “Nephi, the son of Lephi [*sic*]” and “the made-up battle of ‘Cumora’ [*sic*].” Such comments represent the meticulous research found all the way through Hitchens’s book, which is why I can safely use his approach to Mormonism as an illustration, in microcosm, of the way he generally approaches the whole issue of religion. Speaking of the policy on priesthood and blacks and the Mormons, Hitchens informs his readers that Mormon leaders “had still another ‘revelation’ and, more or less in time for the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1965 [*sic*], had it divinely disclosed to them that black people were human after all” (p. 167). Apart from the misstated theological content of the revelation (I was around then, and I am sure we knew that blacks were human), I am puzzled by how he arrived at

8. Daniel C. Peterson, *Muhammad: Prophet of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007).

the date of 1965—not only for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (signed into law on 2 July 1964) but also for the revelation on priesthood. He explains, early on in his book, that his research methodology consists chiefly in using Google, but even then he should have discovered the correct date since this is not an obscure historical issue. June of 1978 is not close to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, but it fits Hitchens's thesis to argue that the revelation on priesthood was connected with passage of the Civil Rights Act. His description of baptism for the dead is also carefully researched: "Every week, at special ceremonies in Mormon temples, the congregations meet and are given a certain quota of names of the departed to 'pray in' to their church" (p. 168).

Hitchens on the Bible

Hitchens devotes only a few pages to the Mormons, but he devotes many pages to the Bible—and, on this subject as on others, his book is a treasure trove. I am reminded of the old Far Side cartoon in which a deer is looking at another deer. The second deer has a target on its back, and the first looks at him and exclaims, "Gee, bummer of a birthmark!" Or, alternatively, one thinks of someone walking around with a "Kick me!" sign hanging on his rear end. I am one who is, congenitally, not disposed to not kick. I mention just a few items, though I am choosing from an embarrassment of riches here.

"All religions," Hitchens says, "have staunchly resisted any attempt to translate their sacred texts into languages 'under[stood] of the people'" (p. 125). Now, what are the facts? According to the United Bible Societies, parts of the Bible have been translated into 2,426 languages, with hundreds more in process.⁹ And this is by no means merely a modern phenomenon: the Bible was the most widely translated book in the ancient world. It was translated into Greek (the Septuagint) in the second century BC; Aramaic by the first century BC; Old Latin by the second century AD; Syriac (the *Peshitta*) in the third century AD; Coptic (Egyptian), fourth century AD; Old German (Gothic) in the

9. United Bible Societies, "Scripture Language Report 2006," <http://www.biblesociety.org/index2.htm> (accessed 21 January 2008).

fourth century AD; Latin (Jerome's Latin Vulgate), late fourth century; Armenian, early fifth century; Ethiopic, fifth century; Georgian, fifth century; Old Nubian by the eighth century; Old Slavonic by the ninth; and Christian Arabic and Jewish Arabic (Saadia Gaon's Jewish Arabic version) by the tenth century. Obviously, a lot of effort went into these translations. And the history of the translation of the Buddhist scriptures also reflects a considerable degree of effort through the centuries. So Hitchens is not well-informed on the history of scripture translations. Instead, he is trying to universalize a very isolated phenomenon connected with a specific religious controversy. But even in this limited context, his argument is based on unsubstantiated assertion. "There would have been no Protestant Reformation," he assures us, "if it were not for the long struggle to have the Bible rendered into 'the Vulgate'" (p. 125). Aside from the obvious fact that the term *Vulgate* refers not to translations of the Bible into the vernacular but to a particular late-fourth-century Latin translation by Jerome already referred to, translating the Bible into German does not appear among Luther's original Ninety-Five Theses. It wasn't a major issue of the Reformation. In fact, the Bible had been translated into German in the fourteenth century, and a German Bible had been printed by Gutenberg in 1466, thirteen years after his publication of the Latin Bible. By the time Luther had nailed his theses to the door of Wittenberg's Castle Church on 31 October 1517—the act that is generally regarded as the opening salvo of the Protestant Reformation—Gutenberg's German Bible was nearly sixty-five years old. How serious an issue could this have been for Luther? Of course, he made his own translation, and his own Bible is tremendously important for German culture, but it was not a major issue in Reformation polemics.

Various parts of the English Bible had been translated into Anglo-Saxon from the seventh century on, with interlinear Latin/Anglo-Saxon versions by the tenth century. The Venerable Bede (AD 672?-735), one of the greatest figures in ecclesiastical history in Britain, is said to have translated the Gospel of John into Anglo-Saxon. This may come as a shock to some Latter-day Saints, but the problem during most of the medieval period was not that the church was attempting to suppress

the translation of the Bible, but rather that all literate persons in the early Middle Ages knew Latin. There was no particular point in having another translation. People who couldn't read Latin couldn't read *at all*.

Hitchens laments that “devout men like John Wycliffe [ca. 1330–1384], Miles Coverdale [1488?–1569], and William Tyndale [ca. 1494–1536] were burned alive for even attempting early translations” of the Bible into vernacular languages (p. 125). However, this is another example of the care with which he approaches his research. Far from being burned at the stake, Wycliffe died while hearing Catholic mass in his parish church. Coverdale died, unburned, in 1569 at the age of eighty-one. Of the three translators mentioned by Hitchens, only Tyndale (ironically, he was also known by the adopted family name of Hitchens) was burned at the stake.

Here is an example of biblical interpretation, as he does it: Hitchens's polemics fail completely to put the *akedah*, the near sacrifice of Abraham's son, into context. In his discussion of the *akedah*, Hitchens describes it as “mad and gloomy” (p. 53) and remarks, “There is no softening the plain meaning of this frightful story” (p. 206)—that God would require humans to sacrifice their children. But this is not the message the ancient audience would have gotten from that story. The message they would have gotten is that God does *not* require the sacrifice of their children. He allows a substitutionary sacrifice instead of human sacrifice.

There are other alleged biblical problems to which he points. According to Hitchens, “the Old Testament is riddled with dreams and with astrology, the sun standing still so that Joshua can complete his massacre at a site that has never been located” (p. 117). But the sun's standing still has nothing to do with astrology, which developed centuries later. And Gibeon, the site where the battle occurred, can be located in any biblical atlas; it is an easily found site.¹⁰

But what about the New Testament? For Hitchens, the New Testament “exceeds the evil of the old” (p. 109). That is astonishing to

10. Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1993), 17–18, 56, 94, 99, 100, 103, 111, 120, 140.

me, really. It shows how extreme his case is. Most people will point to the evils of the Old Testament God, but they typically feel more comfortable, even if they are agnostics, with the God depicted in the New Testament. But, for Hitchens, Christianity is even worse than the ancient Hebrew religion. Because he has boundless scorn for the Old Testament, it is very difficult to imagine the New Testament being worse. Hitchens's basic argument is that "the case for biblical consistency or authenticity or 'inspiration' has been in tatters for some time, . . . and thus no 'revelation' can be derived from that quarter" (p. 122). Like the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament is for Hitchens merely a "crude" forgery (p. 110). So any evangelical anti-Mormons who take pleasure in his description of the Book of Mormon as a crude forgery should have the smiles erased from their faces as they discover Hitchens's view of the Bible, which was "hammered together long after its purported events" (p. 110). For Hitchens, the claim that the Gospels could be based on eyewitness accounts is patently fraudulent. It is an "error" to assume that "the four Gospels were in any sense a historical record" (p. 111). There happens to be a fascinating new book on the question of eyewitness testimony in the New Testament. Richard Bauckham's *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*¹¹ meticulously argues the case that the New Testament Gospels are in fact based on eyewitness accounts—that they have access to eyewitness testimony. Whether they were written by the eyewitnesses or simply on the basis of eyewitness testimony is a matter of irrelevance to Bauckham. The fact is that they apparently go back to very specific eyewitness testimony, and he is very careful in laying this out. Of course, Hitchens pays no attention to these sorts of things. His research is limited largely to what he turns up on Google and to what little is represented in his handful of endnotes. He makes the most outrageous assertions, and if you look for any justification for them, you find nothing. One can read twenty or thirty pages without finding any kind of documentation whatsoever.

11. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

This is one that I like. It is probably not coincidental that Hitchens provides no scholarly sources for this claim that the Gospels, as we have them, were based on oral accounts. Why does he not offer any documentation for that? Because the consensus of even secular biblical scholars is precisely the opposite of his claim. Matthew and Luke use at least two written sources, Mark and Q, according to the consensus. (Q is an abbreviation for the German *Quelle*, which simply means “source.” It is essentially defined as passages found in both Matthew and Luke but not in Mark.) Hitchens is aware of this hypothetical source, Q. Remember that he is talking about consensus accounts, but he understands Q in a hopelessly garbled fashion. He regards it as the book on which all four Gospels may possibly have been based (p. 112). Note first that Hitchens is aware that Q is a written source, a book, which is a direct contradiction of his claim that the Gospels are based on oral sources. He simply cannot have it both ways. But he is further mistaken: he says that all four Gospels are based on Q. All *four* of them. In reality only *two* are thought, even by the consensus he refers to, to have used Q: Matthew and Luke. John has nothing to do with Q. John is not one of the synoptic Gospels. And Q is defined precisely as the material common to Matthew and Luke but not found in Mark. So where does he get off saying that Q is the source for all four Gospels? There is no one knowledgeable who holds that view, let alone a consensus.

He is also mistaken in his claim that all of Jesus’s disciples were illiterate. Presumably he is making this claim in order to lessen their value as witnesses; the presupposition seems to be that illiterate people are stupid and cannot recognize what they see and cannot record it or remember it or dictate it accurately. In fact, though, there is no evidence for their illiteracy, but rather considerable evidence against it. There are lots of cases of their writing letters and of Jesus reading from texts, for example. That the early Christian movement was dominated by illiterates is simply unsupported in the sources.

Hitchens also describes the Gospels as late. Because they are late, of course, they cannot be trusted as history. But there are several arguments for assigning early dates to the sources of the Gospels. For

example, it is generally agreed by New Testament scholars that the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts were written by the same author. So people routinely talk of *Luke-Acts*. Acts ends with Paul preaching in Rome for two years as a fulfillment of God's plan to bring the gospel to the gentiles, but it does not mention Paul's death, which is thought to have occurred sometime between AD 62 and 65. If Acts was written after the death of Paul, why did the author not mention that rather important event? Although various explanations have been suggested, the most obvious conclusion is that Acts was written before the death of Paul—that is, in the early 60s. Since the Gospel of Luke was clearly written before Acts, this gives a date in the early 60s—at the latest—for the composition of the Gospel of Luke. Further, since it is widely agreed that Luke is dependent upon Mark, this gives a date for Mark in the late 50s at the latest. In fact, the main reason consistently given for dating the Gospels to after AD 70 is that Jesus prophesies the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem. Since Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple, and since atheists assure us that there is no such thing as real prophecy, the Gospels must have been written after that destruction occurred—in other words, after AD 70. But, in fact, that is a very, very weak argument. We may be looking at documents that were written within roughly twenty years of the death of Christ. Now, how does that compare to secular historiography from the ancient world?

Hitchens on Ancient Historiography

Hitchens seems to be under the impression that we are simply awash in ancient documents that were written by eyewitnesses to many of the events that we talk about in ancient history. But this is not so. The earliest surviving biography of Alexander the Great, by Diodorus, dates to nearly three centuries after Alexander's death in 323 BC. Livy's account of the campaigns of Hannibal was written over a century and a half after the death of that general in 182 BC. Tacitus wrote his annals about AD 115, yet they cover imperial Roman history from AD 14 to 68, meaning that he wrote about fifty to one hundred years after the events he describes. Suetonius wrote his history of the Caesars in the early second century. His biography of Julius Caesar

was thus written more than a century and a half after Caesar's death. The point should be clear: by the standards of the ancient world and of the study of ancient history, the Gospels are amazingly close to the events they narrate, even if you give them a fairly late date. Herodotus wrote non-eyewitness accounts of the Persian Wars, and his treatment was written up to half a century after the dates he describes. Our major surviving source for the lives and teachings of most ancient philosophers is Diogenes Laertius, who wrote centuries after many of the men whose lives he records. Plutarch's famous biographies, *Plutarch's Lives*, are likewise often centuries after the fact. Hitchens clearly has no understanding of ancient historiography. If we were to go by his standards, we could know essentially nothing about the ancient world. All secular ancient history would have to be tossed.

Significantly, Hitchens completely ignores Paul, who is our earliest surviving source for the life of Jesus. One can reconstruct a lot of the life of Jesus (including important things like the account of the resurrection) from the letters of Paul, who apparently wrote before the Gospels were written. The New Testament letters that are universally recognized as authentically Pauline were written in the 50s. We are talking about a gap of only about twenty years between the death of Christ and the writing of Paul's letters.

Some Miscellaneous Mistakes

Hitchens makes errors that demonstrate a lack of seriousness and thus show how seriously he should be taken. One of my favorites is an epigraph at the beginning of one of his chapters. He is trying to show that all serious Christian thinkers are idiots, and so he has to take on one of the biggest, Thomas Aquinas, arguably the greatest philosopher of the Middle Ages and certainly the greatest in the Christian West. Aquinas, suggests Hitchens, once remarked that "I am a man of one book" (p. 63). And by the phrase "one book" he presumably meant the Bible. I could not remember ever running across a passage like that from Thomas Aquinas. And, in fact, anybody who has read Thomas Aquinas knows that he is constantly citing Aristotle, early Greek commentators on Aristotle, Avicenna, other Arabic philosophers, and the

like. He is drawing on all sorts of sources. He is a man of scores if not *hundreds* of books. By the standards of the Middle Ages, the man was a walking library. So why would he say, “I am a man of one book”? Well, what a big surprise! He didn’t. Hitchens says he said it, but he didn’t. In fact, if one follows Hitchens’s own research methodology and does a Google search for Aquinas, one discovers a quotation attributed to Aquinas (probably not authentic either) in which he says, “*Beware the man of one book.*”¹² This is precisely the opposite, of course, of what Hitchens seeks to put in Aquinas’s mouth. Curious, I wrote to Professor Ralph McInerny at Notre Dame, who is one of the leading Aquinas scholars in the world. “Good grief, you know, where’d that come from?” he wrote back. “Just tell somebody to look at the notes in [Aquinas’s] texts. He’s quoting all sorts of things. This is outrageous misrepresentation of Aquinas.”

Another outrageous misrepresentation: Hitchens tries to show that religion is evil in all its effects. One prominent example is Pius XII, the pope during World War II, whom he describes as a “pro-Nazi” (p. 240). I know it has been a common charge over the past couple of decades, but it is absurd. The best book on it that I have seen is one written by Rabbi David Dalin, a professor of history at Ave Maria University in Florida, called *The Myth of Hitler’s Pope*.¹³ If anyone takes the charge against Pius XII seriously at all, he or she should have a look at this book. It devastates the claim. In 1945, Isaac Herzog, the chief rabbi of the British Mandate of Palestine (and, subsequently, of Israel), sent a message to Monsignor Angelo Roncalli (who, in 1958, would succeed Pius XII as Pope John XXIII) in which he expressed his gratitude for Pius XII’s actions on behalf of Europe’s beleaguered Jews. “The people of Israel,” he wrote, “will never forget what His Holiness and his illus-

12. http://thinkexist.com/quotation/beware_the_man_of_one_book/12058.html (accessed 21 January 2008).

13. David G. Dalin, *The Myth of Hitler’s Pope: How Pope Pius XII Rescued Jews from the Nazis* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2005). I cannot possibly do justice to the strength of Dalin’s case here, though I note that Sir Martin Gilbert, official biographer of Winston Churchill and author of ten books on the Holocaust, himself a Jew, has endorsed and supported Dalin’s conclusions. See Martin Gilbert, “Hitler’s Pope?” *The American Spectator* 39/6 (July/August 2006): 68–73.

trious delegates, inspired by the eternal principles of religion, which form the very foundation of true civilization, are doing for our unfortunate brothers and sisters in the most tragic hour of our history, which is living proof of Divine Providence in this world.”¹⁴ Moreover, as if to put an exclamation point after Rabbi Herzog’s tribute, Israel Zolli, the chief rabbi of Rome itself, converted to Catholicism right after the war.¹⁵ And, to honor the pope for what he had done for the Jews and for the role he had played in Zolli’s own conversion, he took the name of *Eugenio*—after *Eugenio Pacelli*, Pope Pius XII’s given name—for his baptismal name.¹⁶ At this removed time, Hitchens can perhaps describe the pope as pro-Nazi and get away with it, but contemporary Jews did not feel that way—and neither did the Nazis. There is a new book out called *A Special Mission*,¹⁷ about Hitler’s plot to kidnap Pope Pius XII and execute him. Is that what Hitler generally did to his faithful supporters?

Hitchens on Secular Glories

There is another tendency running throughout Hitchens’s book: anything that is good is secular; anyone who is bad is a believer, a faithful person. For example, Hitchens admires Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian who died in 1945 as a martyr against Hitler, shortly before the end of World War II. Bonhoeffer was a Christian pastor who believed in a radical discipleship of Christ, and that led him to oppose the Nazis. But Hitchens says that Bonhoeffer was really not a believer, that he was motivated by a “nebulous humanism” (p. 7). Karl Barth, another strong opponent of Hitler and probably the most prominent Protestant theologian of the twentieth century, is omitted altogether, even though he was the main author of the Barmen Confession, the principal Protestant statement denouncing Nazism. Why?

14. Cited in Dalin, *The Myth of Hitler’s Pope*, 100.

15. James Akin, “How Pius XII Protected Jews,” <http://www.catholic.com/thisrock/1997/9702fea1.asp> (accessed 15 February 2008).

16. Akin, “How Pius XII Protected Jews.”

17. Dan Kurzman, *A Special Mission: Hitler’s Secret Plot to Seize the Vatican and Kidnap Pope Pius XII* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2007).

It is difficult to escape the suspicion that Barth is omitted because he doesn't count. And why doesn't he count? Because he doesn't fit the story that Hitchens is trying to tell. Moreover, Martin Luther King, whom Hitchens greatly admires, turns out not to have been a Christian at all. That would have been a shock to King, who earned a doctorate in theology at Boston University and whose speeches are heavily laden with biblical imagery. But no, he wasn't a believer either.

Secularists, it turns out, were the ones who ended slavery. Really? The famous John Brown was a militant Calvinist preacher who opposed slavery. But it seems that, for Hitchens, he was a secularist. And there is no mention of William Wilberforce. Some may have seen the recent film *Amazing Grace*, about Wilberforce and the Christian opposition to the British slave trade. It tells the story of the profoundly evangelical movement led by Wilberforce and his friend John Newton, who wrote the hymn *Amazing Grace*. Nonetheless, in Hitchens's book, John Newton is not mentioned, nor is William Wilberforce. It turns out that in the Hitchens version slavery was done away with in the United Kingdom by secularists. There is also no mention of the underground railroad in his account of the end of slavery. Nor is there any mention of Sojourner Truth or Harriet Tubman or the *Battle Hymn of the Republic* or Harriet Beecher Stowe (a member of that great family of preachers that also included Henry Ward Beecher), who wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, "the little lady who launched the war." There is no mention of them because religious people, according to Hitchens, cannot ever do anything good.

On the other hand, everything that's bad is done by religious people. For example, religious people put an end to science, tried to stomp it out wherever they could. And of course Hitchens gets into the old standard warfare of science versus religion. The latest interpretations of the history of science, however, suggest that science grew up, interestingly enough, not in China, not in the Islamic world, not in India. Technologies arose there, it is true. But science grew up in Christian Europe. Why? Probably specifically because of attributes of Christian

culture in Europe. This idea, developed in the works of Pierre Duhem¹⁸ and Stanley Jaki,¹⁹ for example, is pretty much the consensus view right now. But Hitchens doesn't know about it, or if he knows, he isn't telling. For him, science and belief are enemies, absolutely opposed to each other. Galileo, of course, is invoked, but Galileo is the one who, unbeknownst to Hitchens, said that we read about God in two books, the book of the scriptures and the book of nature.²⁰ He was a religious man. Still, Hitchens's campaign demands that he has to be painted as a secularist, and so he is.

An interesting case is that of Sir Fred Hoyle, probably one of the most brilliant physicists of the twentieth century. He was a British agnostic, but in Hitchens's book he shows up as a creationist (p. 65). Some may remember that, once, there were two viable alternatives for the origin of the universe: the big bang theory and the steady-state theory. Fred Hoyle was the founder of the steady-state theory, and Hitchens portrays him as being opposed to the big bang theory because it threatened his theism. But Hoyle was actually an agnostic or an atheist. He resisted the big bang theory precisely because it seemed, to him, to carry theistic implications. Hitchens has the facts completely turned around. In many cases, Hitchens is 180 degrees wrong. He is so far wrong that, if he moved at all, he would be coming back toward *right*. But he does this constantly, and in the case of Hoyle, it is especially amusing.

18. Pierre Duhem's ten-volume work on the history of science, *Le système du monde: histoire des doctrines cosmologiques de Platon à Copernic* (Paris, 1913–59), credits the Roman Catholic Church for fostering Western science during the Middle Ages.

19. See, for example, Stanley L. Jaki, *Miracles and Physics* (Front Royal, VA: Christendom Press, 1989); and *Scientist and Catholic: An Essay on Pierre Duhem* (Front Royal, VA: Christendom Press, 1991).

20. An example of this idea is Galileo's 1615 letter to Christina Lotharinga, Archduchess of Tuscany: "For the Holy Scripture and nature derive equally from the Godhead, the former as the dictation of the Holy Spirit and the latter as the most obedient executrix of God's orders." *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 6th ed., ed. Elizabeth Knowles (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), s.v. "Galileo Galilei." See "Science, Religion and Galileo" (http://gc.users.nelsonbay.com/observatory_files/Page1559.htm [accessed 28 January 2008]), which, among other things, notes that the Christian churches of Galileo's era promoted science and discusses the intellectual history of the "two books" idea and its relation to Galileo.

Interestingly, Hoyle *was* probably having doubts about his atheism towards the end. He is the one (and Hitchens simply goes ballistic at this) who said that looking at the theory of evolution reminded him of a storm hitting a junkyard, and when it's done, a Boeing 747 has emerged. But he was by no means an ardent Christian. The irony about this is that although Hitchens sees the big bang as the enemy of religion, guess who was one of the earliest people to just love the big bang? He went so far that his advisers criticized him for it and asked him to restrain himself. It was Pope Pius XII. (You remember him—the supposed pro-Nazi.) He thought it was a wonderful thing. It reminded him of Genesis 1, and so he pushed the big bang. Why? Because this great “atheist” theory, the big bang, was originated to an extent by Georges Lemaître, who was a Belgian priest as well as a mathematician and physicist. So Hitchens has the history of science turned on its head. He doesn't know what he's talking about.

“Newer and Finer Wonders”

“The loss of faith,” Hitchens says, “can be compensated by the newer and finer wonders that we have before us, as well as by immersion in the near-miraculous work of Homer and Shakespeare and Milton and Tolstoy and Proust, all of which was also ‘manmade’” (p. 151). But what is Homer without religion? What do you make of his story of the Trojan War, or of the wanderings of Odysseus, without the gods? You lose about half of the narrative right there. And Tolstoy without religion? He would have been shocked by that. But the one that really gets me is *Milton* without religion. Here are the opening lines of *Paradise Lost*:

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater man
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,
Sing Heav'nly Muse. . . .

.....

... what in me is dark
 Illumine, what is low raise and support;
 That to the height of this great argument
 I may assert Eternal Providence,
 And justify the ways of God to men.²¹

That's the purpose statement of *Paradise Lost*. So, Hitchens advises, get rid of religion, but read your Milton.

But imagine Dante without religion! I have tried to imagine Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* without religion. It is a story about pilgrims; but, absent religion, pilgrimage to what? Where are they going? Imagine a world without Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, without Handel's *Messiah*, without Mozart's *Requiem*, without Igor Stravinsky, without John Tavener, without John Coltrane—heck, even without Brian Wilson. Without cathedrals. Without the Blue Mosque in Istanbul. I mean, it's all gone. You cannot imagine that you can just get rid of all the bad parts of religion and you are still going to have all the good things. All of it has to go. What are you left with? Instead of the cathedral of Chartres maybe a Quonset hut, something purely functional.

More Atrocities

Now we come to a really serious point: totalitarian atrocities. The 1997 *Black Book of Communism* estimates the total deaths caused by Communism at between 85 and 100 million,²² but I think even the highest of those figures may be too low. A relatively new biography of Mao Tse-tung credits him with 70 million deaths—on his own, in peacetime.²³ And you've still got to factor in Stalin and Trotsky and Lenin and the rest. And then, of course, there are the Nazis. Hitchens realizes that such facts pose a threat to the atheism he advocates because *religion* is supposed to be guilty of all these crimes and because secularism will create a brave new world of peace and justice

21. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, bk. 1, lines 1–6, 22–26.

22. Stéphane Courtois et al., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 4.

23. Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005).

and harmony and all that sort of thing. But it doesn't seem to work. So what does Hitchens do? He takes a fairly daring step. He declares that religion created totalitarianism. He points, for example, to the Jesuit "reductions" in Paraguay (pp. 231–32), a theme treated in the Robert De Niro movie *The Mission*, a really fine movie set around Iguazú Falls, a gorgeous area near the intersection of Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina. The reductions, Hitchens says, were an early totalitarian state where the Indians were kept in terror and fear by these Jesuit priests. But let me tell you about these Jesuit priests. There were two of them for every 3,500 Indians, and the Indians were free to come and go anytime they wanted. What kind of terrorist totalitarian state is that? Hitchens has completely misrepresented the reductions. And then he goes on to say that all totalitarianism is religious. And totalitarianism didn't only *originate* in religion; all totalitarianism (and here you thought you knew about Stalin!) is actually theocratic. It's all religious stuff. Believers are guilty for that too. He says of Saddam Hussein, for instance, "I shall simply say that those who regarded his regime as a secular one are deluding themselves" (p. 25). Well, I hereby declare myself deluded. Saddam Hussein was less of a Muslim than I am, and the Iraqi Baathist state was a fascist state. Baathist ideology was founded by a lapsed Christian named Michel Aflaq. Saddam Hussein was merely a nominal Muslim, yes, but his chief deputy, Tariq Aziz, was a Christian—in much the way that Vito Corleone of *The Godfather* was a Christian, but still a Christian of some sort, at least nominally. What kind of a theocracy is this? It is true that after 1979 Saddam Hussein, being a thug but a fairly clever thug and a survivor, knew which way the wind was blowing; so he discovered, for example, that he was a descendent of the Prophet Muhammad. Who would dare to question him on that? And then he also put *Allāhu akbar* ("God is most great!") on the Iraqi flag because he knew which way the ideological winds were blowing. But he never showed any serious signs of religion. He persecuted religious leaders in Iraq. He killed them by the thousands, Shi'a and Sunni both. It wasn't as if he favored only the Sunnis; he disliked them all. Anybody who was a threat to him died. So this is a preposterous claim on Hitchens's part.

Hitchens describes Trofim Lysenko's experiments with Marxist-Leninist genetics. Those who have read some Soviet history may recall Lysenko, who, under the sponsorship of Stalin, undertook an insane project to create a Marxist science of agriculture. The idea was to reject Mendelian genetics and all that sort of scientific nonsense and to go with Marxist-Leninist principles not only in politics and economics (where they failed miserably) but also in genetics (where they failed even more obviously). Many people starved to death as a result of Lysenko's agricultural experiments. So Hitchens, who, remember, is an ex-Trotskyite who really admires Lenin and Trotsky and the entire Soviet experiment, claims that "Stalin . . . pedantically repeated the papal routine [note that word *papal*] of making science conform to dogma, by insisting that the shaman and charlatan [again, note the religious language] Trofim Lysenko had disclosed the key to genetics and promised extra harvests of specially inspired vegetables [note the connotative word *inspired*]. (Millions of innocents died of gnawing internal pain as a consequence of this 'revelation' [again, note his choice of a religious word, *revelation*].)"²⁴ Now that is just rhetorical irresponsibility. Once more, notice the religious language: *inspiration, revelation, dogma, shaman, papal* (bringing up the Catholic papacy), all of which has to do with a completely atheist regime—a *militantly* atheist regime. Consider the demise of the great theocrat and believer Stalin, who died a horrific death in March 1953. He had suffered a severe stroke that had left his right side paralyzed, and his last hours were spent in virtually unbearable pain. Slowly, he was strangled. As his daughter Svetlana later reported, her father choked to death as those around his deathbed looked on. Although at the very last he had seemed at most merely semiconscious, he suddenly opened his eyes and looked about the room, plainly terrified. "Then," according to Svetlana, "something incomprehensible and awesome happened that to this day I can't forget and don't understand." Stalin partially lifted himself in the bed, clenched his fist toward the heavens, and shook it

24. Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 244.

defiantly. Then, with an unintelligible murmur, he dropped motionless back onto his pillow, and died.²⁵ It was a holy death, I suppose.

Hitchens's attempt to blame the atrocities of the Nazis and the Communists on religious believers is nothing short of obscene. Permit me to illustrate:

Lenin wrote to Maxim Gorky in 1913 that "any religious idea . . . is the most dangerous foulness, the most shameful 'infection,'" and that worship is no more than "ideological necrophilia."²⁶ In 1921, by now firmly in control of the country, he called upon the Communist Party to adopt a program of "militant atheism" and "militant materialism."²⁷

Accordingly, the atheist weekly *Bezbozhnik* (The godless) began publication in 1922, and a monthly journal entitled *Bezbozhnik ustanka* (The godless in the workplace) was launched. In 1923 the Communist Party set up the League of the Godless. In 1924 a Society of Militant Materialists was established, and the party launched a national campaign of atheist propaganda and scientific demonstrations. The next year the relatively highbrow magazine *Ateist* appeared. By 1929 the League of the Godless had 465,000 members and 9,000 cells of atheist agitators, and it changed its name to the League of the Militant Godless. In 1932 it could claim 5.6 million members. Museums of scientific atheism were built across the country. During 1940, some 239,000 antireligious lectures were delivered to an estimated audience of 11 million nationwide under the auspices of the League.²⁸

But the Bolsheviks weren't content with propaganda. In 1922 Orthodox churches were ordered to surrender all of their treasures, including chalices and clerical vestments, to the state. When the patriarch tried to retain objects related to church sacraments, they were seized by force. More than 8,000 members of the clergy were killed during the process of expropriation, and over 1,400 violent clashes

25. Svetlana Alliluyeva, *Twenty Letters to a Friend*, trans. Priscilla Johnson McMillan (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 5–11, quotation on p. 10.

26. Quoted in Richard Overy, *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 270.

27. Overy, *The Dictators*, 271.

28. Overy, *The Dictators*, 271–72, 274, 275.

are recorded between agents of the state and angry believers. By 1930, estimates the British historian Richard Overy, a fifth of all of those imprisoned in the far northern Solovki prison camp complex were “clerical victims of religious persecution.” By 1940 the overwhelming majority of churches, chapels, mosques, synagogues, and monasteries had been dynamited, closed down, or seized by the state for some other use. Whereas the Russian Orthodox Church had 46,457 churches and 1,028 monasteries at the time of the revolution in 1917, by 1939 there were fewer than a thousand still in operation—and some estimates put the number as low as a hundred. Six hundred religious communities existed in Moscow in 1917. By 1939 only twenty survived. The famous Strastnoi monastery, for example, located in the heart of the city, was converted into the national antireligious museum.²⁹

Russian novelist and historian Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn puts the proportion of women imprisoned for their religion at Suslovo at about a third.³⁰ When the women of the religious commune near Khosta were arrested and sent to Solovki, their children were left to fend for themselves on their farms. They tended the orchards and vegetable gardens, milked their goats, studied hard at school, and sent their grades to their parents, “together with assurances that they were prepared to suffer for God as their mothers had. (And, of course, the Communist Party soon gave them this opportunity.)”³¹

“At that time,” Solzhenitsyn says of the very beginnings of the Soviet system under Hitchens’s venerated Lenin and Trotsky, “the authorities used to love to set up their concentration camps in former monasteries: they were enclosed by strong walls, had good solid buildings, and they were empty. (After all, monks are not human beings and could be tossed out at will.)”³² In Moscow, for example, there were concentration camps in the Andronnikov, Novospassky, and

29. Overy, *The Dictators*, 273–74.

30. Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918–1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*, trans. Thomas P. Whitney, 3 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1973–76), 3:67.

31. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, 2:464.

32. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, 2:19.

Ivanovsky monasteries. Others were located in empty nunneries in Nizhni Novgorod (already in September 1918) and in Ryazan.

“Men of religion,” says Solzhenitsyn,

were an inevitable part of every annual “catch,” and their silver locks gleamed in every cell and in every prisoner transport en route to the Solovetsky Islands.

From the early twenties on, arrests were also made among groups of theosophists, mystics, spiritualists. . . . Also, religious societies and philosophers of the Berdyayev circle. The so-called “Eastern Catholics”—followers of Vladimir Solovyev—were arrested and destroyed in passing, as was the group of A. I. Abrikosova. And, of course, ordinary Roman Catholics—Polish Catholic priests, etc.—were arrested, too, as part of the normal course of events.

However, the root destruction of religion in the country, which throughout the twenties and thirties was one of the most important goals of the GPU-NKVD, could be realized only by mass arrests of Orthodox believers. Monks and nuns, whose black habits had been a distinctive feature of Old Russian life, were intensively rounded up on every hand, placed under arrest, and sent into exile. They arrested and sentenced active laymen. The circles kept getting bigger, as they raked in ordinary believers as well, old people, and particularly women, who were the most stubborn believers of all. . . .

True, they were supposedly being arrested and tried not for their actual faith but for openly declaring their convictions and for bringing up their children in the same spirit. As Tanya Khodkevich wrote:

You can pray *freely*

But just so God alone can hear.

(She received a ten-year sentence for these verses.) A person convinced that he possessed spiritual truth was required to conceal it from his own children! In the twenties the religious

education of children was classified as a political crime under Article 58-10 of the Code.³³

Such people, Solzhenitsyn observes, typically received ten-year sentences to the labor camps and were prohibited from returning to their children and homes even upon their release. By contrast, prostitutes customarily received three-year sentences, continued to ply their trade among camp administrators and guards, and then returned home bearing suitcases laden with gifts.³⁴

The number of Orthodox parish priests fell from approximately 40,000 in the late 1920s to roughly 4,000 in 1940. And this was by no means merely the result of natural attrition or loss of interest in religion. Many had been executed as counterrevolutionaries or died in prison camps while unknown numbers were in hiding. Jewish and Muslim religious figures suffered similar fates. In 1929 religious study groups and Bible circles were banned, religious youth and women's groups were prohibited, church reading rooms and libraries were closed, and religious instruction was outlawed. Taxes on the incomes of religious workers were raised to 100 percent.³⁵ Civil service workers were fired if their fathers had been Orthodox priests; people who refused to work on Sundays were imprisoned.³⁶ Some religious believers were deliberately starved to death.³⁷

“One stream has never dried up in the U.S.S.R.,” Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn could still write in the 1970s with reference to the river of prisoners going to the labor camps,

33. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, 1:37–38. Even Christians sympathetic to Communism were subject to imprisonment (see 1:51.) For more on the treatment of believers, and especially of believing women, in the camps, see Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, 2:309–10, 419–20.

34. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, 1:38; 2:67.

35. Overy, *The Dictators*, 274–75.

36. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, 1:58, 59.

37. See Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, 2:65–66. For more examples of deliberate Soviet starvation, see Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); and Nicolas Werth, *Cannibal Island: Death in a Siberian Gulag* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

and still flows. A stream of criminals untouched by the “beneficent wave summoned to life . . .” etc. A stream which flowed uninterrupted through all those decades—whether “Leninist norms were infringed” or strictly observed—and flowed in Khrushchev’s day more furiously than ever.

I mean the believers. Those who resisted the new wave of cruel persecution, the wholesale closing of churches. Monks who were slung out of their monasteries. . . .

These are in no sense political, they are “religionists,” but still they have to be *re-educated*. Believers must be dismissed from their jobs merely for their faith; Komsomols must be sent along to break the windows of believers; believers must be officially compelled to attend antireligious lectures, church doors must be cut down with blowtorches, domes pulled down with hawsers attached to tractors, gatherings of old women broken up with fire hoses.³⁸

It is simply obscene for Christopher Hitchens to be suggesting that religious believers were responsible for the Soviet Union.

Another thing that he says they are responsible for is violence. Hitchens objects to the violence that, he says, is caused by religion, and he specifically targets suicide bombings as an example of that evil thing. He apparently doesn’t realize that he makes a crucial admission when he acknowledges that the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka “pioneer[ed], long before Hezbollah and al-Qaeda, the disgusting tactic of suicide murder.” (p. 199). While, true to form, he seeks to paint the violence in Sri Lanka as a religious war between Buddhists and Hindus, the Tamil Tigers are not motivated by religion. Hitchens acknowledges that the conflict is one of ethnic tribalism, but he attempts to obscure its reality by pointing out that the Tamils are “chiefly Hindu” (p. 199). Note that important word *chiefly*. It means that some of them are *not* Hindu and that the strife is at most *reinforced* in some cases by religion. Consider the language of theology in the theological demands made in 1985 by a confederacy of Tamil militant groups:

38. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, 3:514–15.

1. the Tamils to be recognised as a distinct nationality;
2. the recognition and guarantee of the territorial integrity of the traditional homelands of the Ceylon Tamils;
3. the right of self-determination of the Tamil nation; and
4. recognition of citizenship and fundamental rights of all Tamils who regard Ceylon as their home.³⁹

Do you hear a single word about religion in that? There isn't any. But that's deeply significant. Robert Pape, a political scientist at the University of Chicago, compiled a database of every single suicide bombing and suicide attack worldwide from 1980 through 2003 (315 attacks altogether) and carefully analyzed them. In a 2005 book entitled *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, he concludes that

while it might seem obvious that Islamic fundamentalism is the central simple cause, the presumed connection between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism is misleading. In fact, the data show that there is little connection between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism or any one of the world's religions. In fact, the leading instigators of suicide attacks are the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, a Marxist-Leninist group [that's Trotsky territory, Lenin territory, Hitchens territory] whose members are from Hindu families but who are adamantly opposed to religion. This group committed 76 of the 315 incidents, more suicide attacks than Hamas. Rather, what nearly all suicide terrorist attacks have in common is a specific secular and strategic goal: to compel modern democracies to withdraw military forces from territory that the terrorists consider to be their homeland. Religion is rarely the root cause, although it is often used as a tool by terrorist organizations in recruiting and in other efforts in service of the broader strategic objective.⁴⁰

39. As given in A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *The Break-up of Sri Lanka: The Sinhalese-Tamil Conflict* (London: Hurst, 1988), 185–86.

40. Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005), 4.

David Martin, who is an emeritus professor of sociology at the London School of Economics, responded to a book by Richard Dawkins, a friend and ally of Hitchens.⁴¹ Martin says that, from a sociological viewpoint, the role and nature of religion vary according to the kind of society in which it is present, and its relationship to warfare will likewise vary. That is why statements to the effect that religion causes war are not likely to be taken very seriously by sociologists. (Other scholars have written about the causes of violence, and religion is only one factor among many in those cases.) Martin continues:

I know of no evidence to show that the absence of a religious factor in the contention of rival identities and incompatible claims leads to a diminution in the degree of enmity and ferocity. . . . The contribution of religion has instead been of signal importance, and it's always been almost entirely directed to peaceful reconciliation internally and peace in foreign affairs. If Dawkins' arguments were correct, then the separating out of believers and clergy from the general population ought to reveal them as major proponents of violence towards each other and violence in international affairs. This is far from being the case. The evidence does not bear out the contention, the case falls.⁴²

Now, in fact, the cause of violence is what it always is, and it happens with religious people and nonreligious people. It involves lust, greed, irritability, the urge to power—all those sorts of things. Religion is a factor, but not a major factor. As my son recently put it to me: “Hitchens seems to be saying that without religion we could all just hold hands and sing ‘Kumbaya’—except that, of course, we *couldn't* sing *Kumbaya*, because it is a religious song.”

Hitchens also claims that Islam has ruined the culture of Persia. However, the culture of Persia is Islamic. The greatest writers of the Persian tradition are Islamic writers, the Persian miniature paintings are Islamic paintings, the greatest poet of Persia is Jalal ad-Din Rumi,

41. David Martin, *Does Christianity Cause War?* (New York: Oxford, 1997).

42. Martin, *Does Christianity Cause War?* 19–20, 220.

who is an Islamic mystical poet. His book, the *Mathnawi*, is often called “the second Qur’an” or “the Persian Qur’an.” If you get rid of Islam, you get rid of every major poet in the Persian tradition for the past fourteen centuries. You get rid of every major bit of Persian architecture. You are getting rid of every bit of Persian artistry and painting. Statements like this are abysmally ignorant. It’s just astonishing to read them.

The book *god is not Great* has been on the best-seller list. But it is crammed to the bursting point with errors, and the striking thing about this is that the errors are always, *always*, in Hitchens’s favor. If you have an accountant or a cashier who makes errors but those errors are random, sometimes one way, sometimes another way, you think, okay, that’s all right; but if the bank teller is always making the error in her favor, you begin to smell a rat. Well, I smell a rat in this case. There is not a disputed fact or a fact that struck me as questionable that I’ve checked in Hitchens’s book where it has not turned out that he’s wrong. Every single time. It reminds me of a very famous review of a book by Lillian Hellman, who wrote a memoir called *Scoundrel Time*. It was reviewed by her longtime archenemy Mary McCarthy, who was on a television show on PBS, the old *Dick Cavett Show*. At one point (this was in 1979) when asked about the book *Scoundrel Time*, she replied, famously (and this led to a lawsuit), “Every word she [Lillian Hellman] writes is a lie, including ‘and’ and ‘the.’”⁴³ Now, I am not saying that Hitchens is lying, but I am saying there is virtually not a sentence in this book that is true. It is absolutely astonishing. He has become wealthy with this book, which gives me hope: by reputation among some ex- and anti-Mormons, I am a constant liar, so perhaps my own future is bright.

I have said before that I think the secular critique of Mormonism and of religious belief is much more serious now than the evangelical critique that Latter-day Saints have been experiencing for so long. When Hitchens’s book first came out, I thought it would represent a formidable challenge. Hitchens is a remarkable fellow. He writes well,

43. Frances Kiernan, *Seeing Mary Plain: A Life of Mary McCarthy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), 15–16.

he has written extensively, he has traveled the world, and he is a formidable presence on television. It is truly disappointing (or in another sense really exhilarating) to realize how poor the case is, at least in his hands, against both Mormonism and religious belief.

Some Final Comments

Christopher Hitchens wasn't done with Mormonism when he published his unfortunate book. In a 26 November 2007 column for *Slate* magazine entitled "Mitt the Mormon: Why Romney Needs to Talk about His Faith," Hitchens railed further against "the bizarre beliefs of [Romney's] church, . . . the Mormon cult." "It ought to be borne in mind," Hitchens wrote,

that Romney is not a mere rank-and-file Mormon. His family is, and has been for generations, part of the dynastic leadership of the mad cult invented by the convicted fraud Joseph Smith. It is not just legitimate that he be asked about the beliefs that he has not just held, but has caused to be spread and caused to be inculcated into children. It is essential. Here is the most salient reason: Until 1978, the so-called Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was an officially racist organization. Mitt Romney was an adult in 1978. We need to know how he justified this to himself, and we need to hear his self-criticism, if he should chance to have one.⁴⁴

"The Book of Mormon," he continued, "is full of vicious ingenuity." Thereupon Hitchens found the roots of the pre-1978 restriction on priesthood ordination in "antebellum Missouri" where "Smith and his cronies" were allegedly "preaching against abolition." And although, this time, Hitchens gets the 1978 date of President Kimball's revelation correct, he still claims, without explaining his quite dubious reasons, that "the timing . . . permits one to be cynical about its

44. Christopher Hitchens, "Mitt the Mormon: Why Romney Needs to Talk about His Faith," *Slate*, 26 November 2007, <http://www.slate.com/id/2178568> (accessed 24 January 2008).

sincerity.”⁴⁵ (As if, when the topic is religion, Christopher Hitchens required anyone’s permission for cynicism.)

Richard Dawkins, another prominent “new atheist,” was so inspired by this “excellent *Slate* article by Christopher Hitchens” that he too felt the imperative need to comment upon “Mitt Romney, . . . a self-confessed Mormon,” in an online article entitled “Banishing the Green-Eyed Monster,” which was otherwise devoted to denouncing sexual jealousy and, in effect, arguing that our desperately repressed and puritanical society needs a more open attitude toward sex. Whatever the subject, Dawkins is rarely in doubt about his opinions, and he has strong views on the Book of Mormon and those who believe in it:

The fact that Joseph Smith wrote it in 16th century pseudo-biblical English although he was a 19th century man marks him out—along with much else—as a charlatan, yet Mitt Romney apparently is gullible enough to be taken in by the scam. After Smith “translated” them, the gold tablets containing God’s words conveniently shot off to Heaven before anybody else could examine them. If a man is gullible enough to believe that, would you trust him to negotiate on your country’s behalf in the tough chancelleries of the world?⁴⁶

Romney’s superb education and his remarkable attainments in the private sector, in the world of nonprofit management, and in government count for nothing when compared with the fact that he’s a Latter-day Saint. “Would you wish,” Dawkins asks, “to be governed by a man who has such a cock-eyed view of reality that he thinks the Garden of Eden was in Missouri, even if he keeps that cock-eyed view private?”⁴⁷

45. Hitchens, “Mitt the Mormon.”

46. Richard Dawkins, “Banishing the Green-eyed Monster,” http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/richard_dawkins/2007/11/banishing_the_greeneyed_monster.html (accessed 24 January 2008). For an examination of Dawkins’s book *The God Delusion*, see David Grandy’s review “Ideology in the Guise of Science,” in this number of the *FARMS Review*.

47. Dawkins, “Banishing the Green-eyed Monster.” In addition to the brief forays into anti-Mormonism by Hitchens and Dawkins, Sam Harris has also recently entered the fray. In a rambling commentary on a host of issues, Harris suddenly mocks the faith

Joining Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins in the claim that Mormons, because of their faith, are unworthy of positions in political leadership is Carole Schutter, co-screenwriter of the abortive propaganda film *September Dawn* (discussed in some detail by Craig Foster in this number of the *Review*). In what the Web site on which it appeared in October 2007 terms “A Heartfelt Letter to America from the Co-Author of September Dawn,” Ms. Schutter laments the failure of her fellow Evangelicals to patronize her film despite its poor quality, and summons them to rally around a true believer in order to thwart the Mormon infidel. She sobs that “Christians . . . backed away from us because they didn’t want to ‘upset’ the LDS church because Mitt was running for office. . . . Money and the unbelievable power and organization of the LDS church (who we discovered are incredibly internet savvy) backs [sic] Romney.”⁴⁸ “I am not anti-Mormon,” Ms. Schutter declares in a counterfactual run-on sentence, “I know some very nice people who are Mormon, but they are not Christians by the biblical and dictionary definitions of the word Christian.”⁴⁹ Anti-Mormon or not, though, she is most definitely courageous: “Now, I fully expect

of the Latter-day Saints. He begins his assault by noting that religions have differences. He then claims that “these differences make all religions look contingent, and therefore silly. Consider the unique features of Mormonism, which may have some relevance in the next Presidential election. Mormonism, it seems to me, is—objectively—just a little more idiotic than Christianity is. It has to be: because it is Christianity plus some very stupid ideas.” Following some additional sneering, Harris insists that the faith of the Saints “is almost guaranteed to be embarrassing even to most people who believe in the biblical God” (Sam Harris, “The Problem with Atheism,” http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/sam_harris/2007/10/the_problem_with_atheism.html [accessed 18 January 2008]). But do those whose religion is some form of atheism not also differ in their views? Harris doesn’t take up this issue. But, if a difference of opinion on issues is grounds for embarrassment, then shouldn’t atheists also experience embarrassment, given the variety of ideologies grounded in militant atheism that have torn up the world in the last two centuries? Shouldn’t Harris have justified his fondness for certain brands of mysticism in the face of typical atheist hostility to that sort of thing?

48. Carole Schutter, “A Heartfelt Letter to America from the Co-Author of September Dawn,” <http://quilterforhuckabee.blogspot.com/2007/10/heartfelt-letter-to-america-from-author.html> (accessed 25 January 2008). Those familiar with the notorious anti-Mormon pseudodocumentary *The God Makers* (produced in 1982 by Ed Decker) will recognize the familiar motif of the virtually omnipotent, truth-squashing Mormon Church.

49. Schutter, “Heartfelt Letter.” On this issue, see Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, *Offenders for a Word: How Anti-Mormons Play Word Games to Attack the Latter-*

to be blasted for this because the media representatives in every ward of the LDS church crawl the net looking for anything they construe as anti-LDS.”⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Carole Schutter will not be intimidated. She is willing to stand up to the looming menace of Mitt Romney and the jackbooted thugs of the approaching Mormon dictatorship:

He is not just LDS, he is a stake president. They hope that at least one of Joseph Smith’s prophecies come true, that “when the Constitution lies in tatters,” a Mormon president will be elected. The history of the LDS church is one supportive of a theocracy. I truly believe, only someone like Huckabee will not tear the Republican party apart. I think Huckabee actually has the best chance of winning. He is a stunningly articulate speaker, but he lacks the backing and financial support of a Republican party seduced by Mitt Romney. And may I say this, by merely saying this and identifying who I am opens me up to vicious attacks. Sandra Tanner, evangelical Christian, great-great-granddaughter of Brigham Young, is not called the “bravest woman in Utah,” for no reason. I challenge you to go to ex-Mormon websites, call a Christian church in Utah or talk to a Christian teenager going to public school in a predominantly LDS area in Utah and ask them how they are treated, and then tell the Christians leaders what you learn. It will open your eyes.⁵¹

Despite our crimes and our nefarious schemes, however, Ms. Schutter refuses to be unkind. Her appeal to religious tribalism is motivated entirely by selfless charity:

But remember, God wants us to love everyone. I do not speak this out of hatred, as the LDS have accused me of, I speak this in bewilderment that Christians would not support a candidate who sincerely espouses their values. . . . Isn’t it enough that we

day Saints (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992), esp. 1–54, where it is demonstrated that no biblical or dictionary definition of the word *Christian* exists to exclude Mormons.

50. Schutter, “Heartfelt Letter.”

51. Schutter, “Heartfelt Letter.”

have shoved God out of our schools? Now, we, the Christian people, through our leadership, have decided that it is okay to turn our backs on someone unashamed to declare that our God is God, in order to endorse someone who believes there are many gods and in fact, that he will be a god of his own planet when he dies. . . . What are the most important Christian values? “Hear O Israel, the Lord is God, the Lord is one,” and Jesus “is the way the truth and the light, no man comes before the Father except through Him.” Everything else, being pro-life, being a strict constructionist, EVERYTHING falls under those two major truths. As a Christian, if you have a choice, how can you not support a candidate who supports these truths?!⁵²

Since Ms. Schutter’s letter appeared, her candidate has in fact become the choice of a burgeoning movement of Evangelicals (which may or may not be ancient history by the time this number of the *Review* sees print). Perhaps this development will assuage the grief she must feel at the monumental failure of her movie. As I write, I have just seen an account from a Latter-day Saint lawyer of something told him by a client:

So, I have a client who was hanging out last week in Aspen with one of the producers of *September Dawn*. My client, who is Jewish, was asked to attend a party at the producer’s Aspen home. My client attended with his two daughters.

The producer was an Evangelical Christian. He was holding anti-Romney meetings for influential people, which were capped off with a screening of *September Dawn*. The producer had quite a screening room in his basement.

My client had never heard of *September Dawn* before. He and his children watched the screening. The producer, who said his son was an actor in the film, explained that the reason *September Dawn* received little play is that Mormons issued

52. Schutter, “Heartfelt Letter.”

death and bomb threats against screening theaters, which came after death and bomb threats against the producers.

My client and his children were deeply offended by the movie in the first place and then by the host's comments thereafter—basically attacking Romney and claiming that Mormons had a death wish against all true Christians. When it became apparent that the meeting was organized just to malign Romney, my client informed all present that his attorney was a Mormon bishop who wasn't like anybody in the movie, and that if his attorney were present he'd set the record straight for what appeared to be gross misrepresentations. My client and his daughters were shown the door.

Being a Dem, I am not a Romney supporter. Nonetheless, the lynch mob mentality Reed Smoot saw is alive and kicking.⁵³

Some Final Comments

I have drawn attention, as readers will have noted, to two essays included in this number of the *Review*: David Grandy's excellent examination of Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion* and Craig Foster's review of *September Dawn*. Both the script for this dreadful anti-Mormon film and the subsequent book were the work of Carole Schutter, who is clearly driven by sectarian animosity towards the Saints and their faith. Recently released on DVD, the film will undoubtedly become—regardless (or because) of its lack of either cinematic excellence or even modest historical accuracy—a weapon in the arsenal of sectarian countercult anti-Mormon propaganda.⁵⁴

53. As posted on the Mormon Apologetics and Discussion Board, 10 January 2008 (<http://www.mormonapologetics.org>). Reprinted with the author's permission.

54. For example, the Christian Research Institute's Web site announces "Mormonism Week" with "Bible Answer Man" Hank Hanegraaff and special guests Bill McKeever, Sandra Tanner, and John Voight discussing "the recently released DVD *September Dawn* and the ideas that lead up to such horrific tragedy" (<http://www.equip.org> [accessed 18 January 2008]). Of course, among other works of anti-Mormon propaganda offered for sale there is the *September Dawn* DVD.

Though it is, of course, not possible to comment on each of the items included in this issue of the *Review*, I must draw special attention to the review essay by Thomas Wayment, who examines a portion of the work of Robert Price. The Reverend Price's rather bizarre career consists of heavy involvement with Paul Kurtz and the primary atheist organization in America, as well as with the notorious Jesus Seminar and related activities. Price has recently begun to insist that there may not have even been a Jesus of Nazareth. These rather odd opinions seem not to have troubled George Smith, the owner of Signature Books, since that press was willing to publish the flawed volume reviewed by Wayment. Those at Signature Books have previously called upon the Reverend Price, who is both a preacher apparently enthralled by religious matters and also a functional atheist, to assist in their effort to convince the Saints that the Book of Mormon is merely fiction fashioned by Joseph Smith out of his immediate environment and, hence, neither an authentic ancient history nor the word of God.⁵⁵

Kevin Barney examines some fine new Latter-day Saint scholarship on the New Testament, indicating, I hope, a new trend that I wish to highlight. A collection of essays on the topic of remembrance is also included in this number of the *Review* and has been given its own introduction, and Larry Morris has demonstrated the troubles flowing from a slanted account of historiography relating to things Mormon. In addition, there are many other essays herein that we trust will interest our readers.

Editor's Picks

Once again, we turn to the matter of making recommendations, something I do after reading the reviews and consulting with my two associate editors and, as a result of staff changes, also with the two new production editors of the *FARMS Review*. Of course, the final responsibility for such endorsements is mine. As usual, the rating system comprises the following elements:

55. See William J. Hamblin, "Priced to Sell," review of "Prophecy and Palimpsest," by Robert M. Price, *FARMS Review* 16/1 (2004): 37–47.

- **** Outstanding, a seminal work of the kind that appears only rarely
- *** Enthusiastically recommended
- ** Warmly recommended
- * Recommended

And now for the recommendations . . .

- *** Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, Eric D. Hunstman, and Thomas A. Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament: An Illustrated Reference for Latter-day Saints*
- *** Kent P. Jackson and Frank F. Judd Jr., *How the New Testament Came to Be: The 35th Annual Brigham Young University Sidney B. Sperry Symposium*
- ** Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*
- * Frank F. Judd Jr. and Gaye Strathearn, eds., *Sperry Symposium Classics: The New Testament*

In addition, I would like to call attention to several items highlighted in the Book Notes section that will be of special interest to Latter-day Saints: W. C. Campbell-Jack and Gavin McGrath, eds., *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*; Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West*; Christopher Partridge, ed., *Dictionary of Contemporary Religion in the Western World: Exploring Living Faiths in Postmodern Contexts*; and Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*.

Acknowledgments

I appreciate the considerable efforts of many people who have assisted in the production of this number of the *FARMS Review*. As always, the insight and counsel of associate editors Louis Midgley and George Mitton proved invaluable, especially while I was away for extended periods on a variety of assignments. I welcome the help of newly assigned production editors Don Brugger and Larry Morris, who juggle other Maxwell Institute projects while performing the duties formerly carried out by longtime *Review* production editor Shirley Ricks. Paula Hicken managed both source-checking and proofreading

tasks with equal aplomb, ably assisted by Brette Jones, Kelley Konzak, Matt Roper, Keegan Taylor, and Sandra Thorne. I also thank Jacob Rawlins and Alison Coutts for the fine typesetting of this number of the *FARMS Review*, and I am indebted to Alison and the other administrative personnel of the Maxwell Institute for their continual support of what we all feel is a worthwhile publication.

Of course, special thanks go to those who have contributed essays, making this enterprise possible. Together their efforts represent hundreds of hours of research and writing given without remuneration except for a copy of the *Review* and perhaps a free book.