

Religion Poisons Everything?

Truth in Love Apologetics Conference

Oct. 10, 2020

The “Four Horsemen” of New Atheism

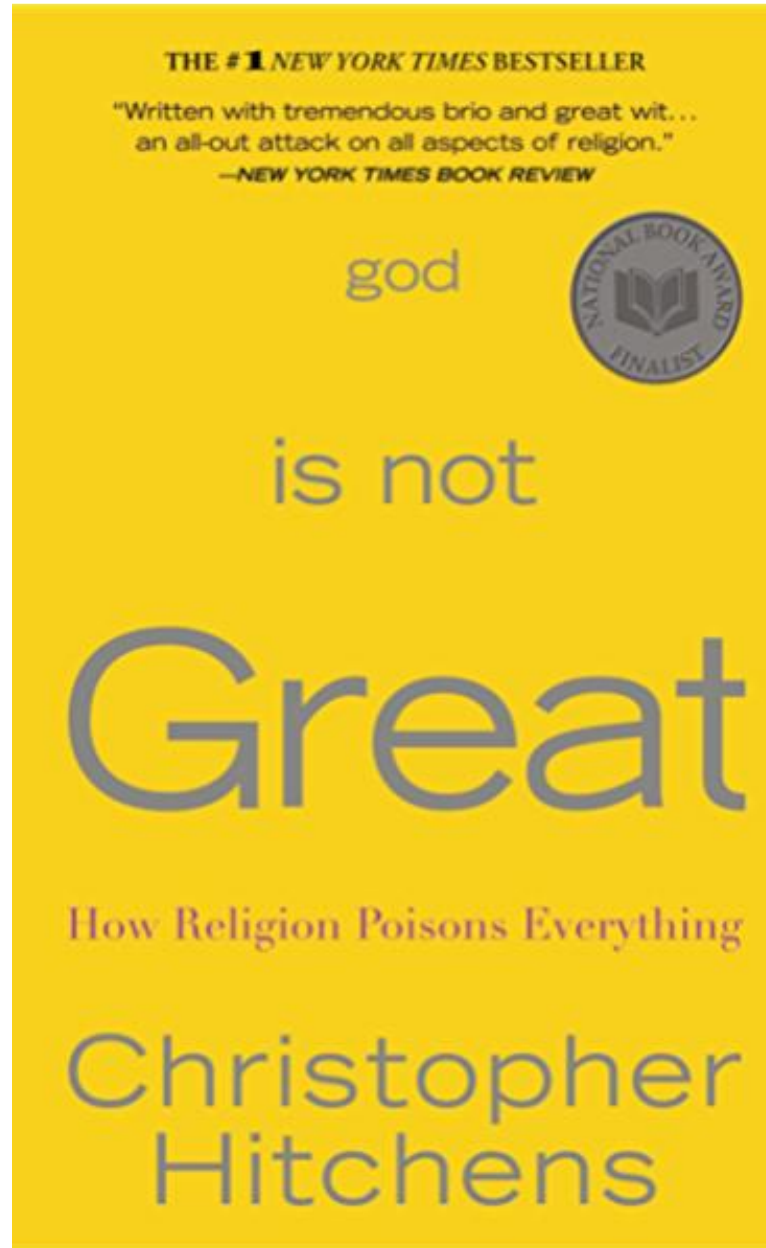
- ▶ Christopher Hitchens: *God is Not Great* (2009)
- ▶ Richard Dawkins: *The God Delusion* (2011)
- ▶ Sam Harris: *The End of Faith* (2004)
- ▶ Daniel Dennett: *Breaking the Spell* (2007)



What is “New” About New Atheism?

- ▶ Conflation of religion into a false universal
- ▶ Religion is not just factually wrong, but it is morally wrong and repugnant
- ▶ Strongly opposed to religious tolerance
- ▶ Atheism becomes evangelical
- ▶ Vitriolic and angry discourse

Christopher Hitchens: A Case Study



The Accusations

1. Religion misrepresents the origins of man
2. Religion has opposed scientific discovery
3. Religion is man-made and all religions borrow from other religions
4. Religion creates sexual repression
5. Religion suppresses women
6. Religion creates bias/hatred
7. Religion causes much of the world's violence

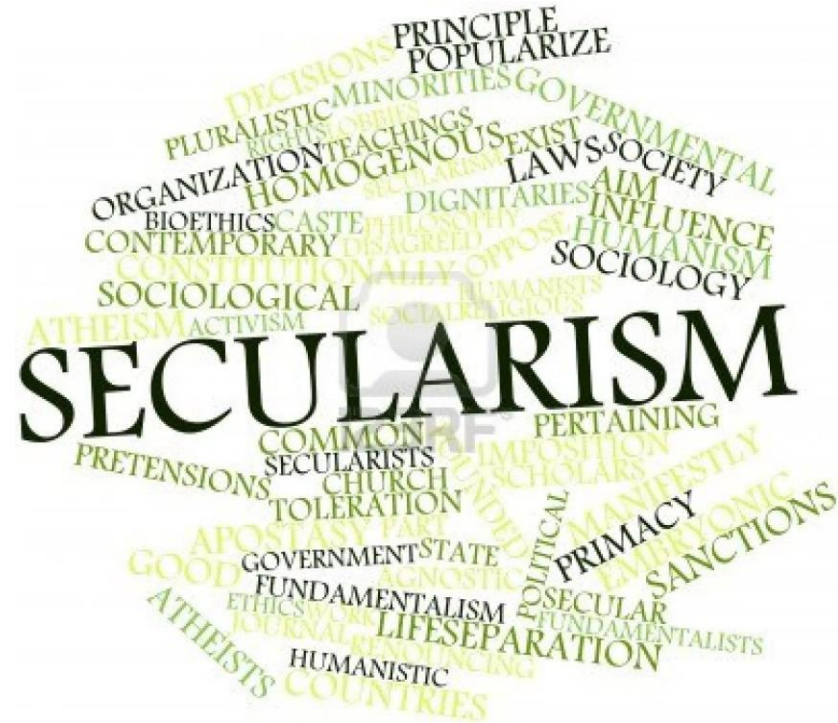
The Accusations (Cont'd)

8. Religion supports slavery, racism, and colonialism
9. Religion allows ignorance to go unchallenged
10. Religion survives by increasing guilt and fear
11. Religious people hypocritically accept their own bad behavior



The New Atheist Solution

- ▶ Set aside religion
- ▶ Embrace secular ethics and ideals
- ▶ Fully embrace the power of science to solve problems and explain the universe



Five Responses to (Mostly) Avoid

Avoiding the Four Dog Defense

The Four Dog Defense

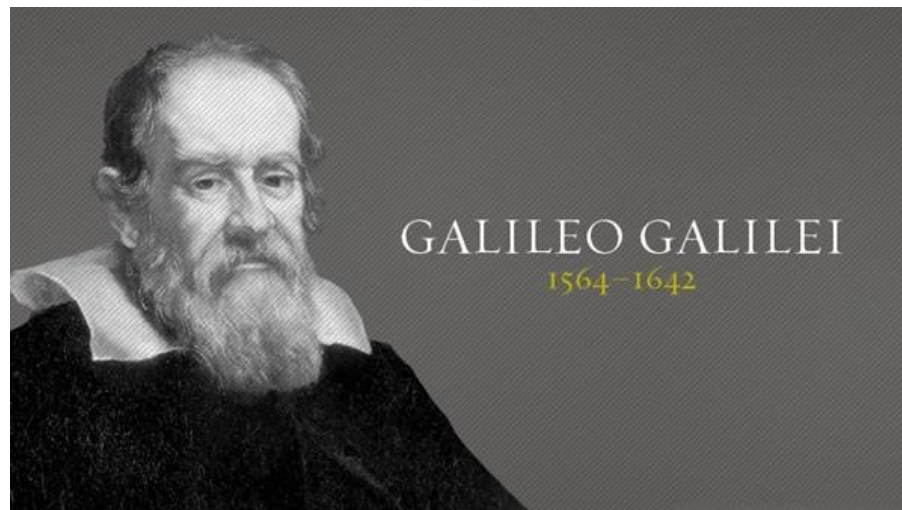
- ▶ “Well, first of all, I don’t even have a dog.”
- ▶ “If I did have a dog, it doesn’t bite.”
- ▶ “If I did have a dog and it does bite, it didn’t bite you.”
- ▶ “If I did have a dog that bit you, you provoked it.”



Response to Avoid Number 1:

“Modern people are misreading history”

- ▶ Example: “That whole thing with Galileo and the Roman Inquisition has been overblown by modern people.”
- ▶ The problem: It is often true, but it denies the fact that the church has, at times, done these things.



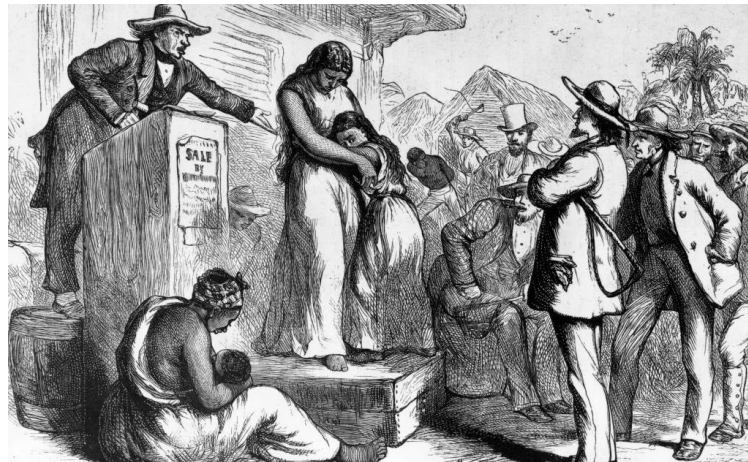
Response to Avoid Number 2: “Atheists do evil things too!”

- ▶ Example: “But look at Hitler. He was an atheist.”
- ▶ The Problem: If we have proven that unbelievers act in ungodly ways, what have we really proven?



Response to Avoid Number 3: “They weren’t really Christians”

- ▶ Example: “People who used the Bible to support slavery in the south weren’t really Christians to begin with.”
- ▶ The Problem: This argument can oversimplify complexity. Believers do sometimes misuse the Bible and do horrible thing.



Response to Avoid Number 4: “It’s not so bad in context”

- ▶ Example: “Yes, the Bible talks about slavery and Paul even returns a slave (Onesimus) to his master (Philemon), but slavery was different back then and not at all like slavery in the U.S.”
- ▶ The Problem: There certainly are nuances to things like slavery and more context can be helpful. But to modern ears, contextualization sounds like justification. It aims at the head, but often misses the heart.

Response to Avoid Number 5: “The good outweighs the bad”

- ▶ Example: “But Christians have built hospitals, defended the poor, championed human rights, etc.”
- ▶ The Problem: Good behavior never really makes up for bad behavior.



Three Suggested Approaches

Breaking Down Barriers

Suggested Approach #1: But What if God Really Exists?

Assume there really is a
self-existent, all powerful,
all knowing God



Suggested Approach #1: But What if God Really Exists?

- ▶ Would it be immediately evident why this God does what he does?
- ▶ Is it possible that his actions could even appear immoral?
- ▶ To judge another person we must understand them, something that is impossible with a being like this.
- ▶ The Alien Abduction Hypothesis

The Bible Presupposes These Truths

⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Is. 55:8-9)

The Bible Presupposes These Truths

³³ O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! ³⁴ For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? ³⁵ Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? ³⁶ For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen. (Rom. 11:33-36)

Suggested Approach #2: The Cello Defense

Is it fair to judge a composer based on the worst performances of his/her composition?



Suggested Approach #2:

The Cello Defense

- ▶ Typically we only judge a composer's work based on the BEST performances of that work.
- ▶ It is a logical fallacy to judge the goodness of God by the worst behavior of his followers.
- ▶ The Bible assumes poor behavior by some believers and Christ gave the church authority to correct them.

The Bible Presupposes These Truths

¹⁵ Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. ¹⁶ But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. ¹⁷ And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. (Matt. 18:15-17)

The Bible Presupposes These Truths

¹⁸ This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; ¹⁹ Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: ²⁰ Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme. (1 Tim. 1:18-20)

Suggested Approach #3: Commit to Challenge “Thin” Religion

Many of the evils done
in the name of religion
are the result of “thin”
religion.



Suggested Approach #3:

Commit to Challenge “Thin” Religion

- ▶ Thin religion is based on factors other than faith (national or economic interest)
- ▶ What is needed is MORE religion, not less!
- ▶ “Stronger, more conscious commitment to faith rooted in a concrete tradition.”
- ▶ This sort of faith is corrective to the violence, greed, envy, bitterness, and wrath in our hearts
- ▶ God’s people commit to challenge thin religion in their own lives and in others

The Bible Presupposes These Truths

²³ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. (Matt. 23:23)

The Bible Presupposes These Truths

29 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, 30 And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. 31 Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. 32 Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. 33 Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? (Matt. 23:29-32).

A Few Words of Warning

- ▶ Crafting well thought out arguments will not suddenly make Christianity palatable.
- ▶ God's word is morally uncompromising because God is morally uncompromising.
- ▶ The goal is not to “win” an argument, but to convert the soul. This is first a work of the Spirit.
- ▶ We need to understand the truths of God's word in our hearts and share our personal experiences.