



Empires of the Mind The Continuing Battle between Faith and Atheism

In the introduction to his book *The Twilight of Atheism*, Aleister McGrath referenced Winston Churchill's 1943 speech at Harvard University where he predicted that the *empires of the future will be empires of the mind*. Ideologies would rule the future not individual nations. While Churchill was thinking of Nazism and Communism, his prediction appears in the headlines every day.

FRENCH ROOTS

The most dangerous of all *empires of the mind* is atheism. Its many varieties range from a mild absence of belief in God or any supernatural beings to a decidedly more strident and rigorous rejection of any religious belief as being manipulative and enslaving. The word *atheist* first appeared in ancient Greece and identified, not someone who disbelieved in God, but one who denied the state religion. Christians who refused to worship Caesar were called *atheists*, as well as traitors, and were usually martyred for their unpatriotic unbelief.

The French Revolution gave new meaning to the word. While many of its leaders hated the Catholic Church, they did so without any explicit denial of God. While Voltaire sought to eliminate the Church and the trappings of religious worship, it was the *Philosophes*, the revolution's fiery intellectuals who added the denial of God to the equation. They believed a rigorous application of the scientific method that could only lead to the denial of God. Baron Paul-Henri-Dietrich d'Holbach, history's first self-declared atheist, who vowed to eliminate the transcendent altogether, personified their thinking. He believed he was liberating mankind from the superstitious chains of an irrational faith in the supernatural. His thinking helped lead to a *cult of reason* that would disconnect science from its religious moorings.

Despite their best efforts, the revolution was not able to install atheism as the state religion during its 10-year reign. It was left to the godless Communism of the 20th century to establish state atheism in Russia, China and Cuba.

GIANTS OF ATHEISM

According to McGrath, three atheistic giants emerged from the aftermath of the French Revolution. Their ideas, temperament,

and thinking provided a beachhead for a modern iconoclasm that would undermine traditional religious belief for more than a century. Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud served as an *atheistic priesthood*, who turned a *daring revolutionary hypothesis into the established certainty of an age*, placing Christianity constantly on the defensive. Their collective thinking, combined with the skepticism of Emmanuel Kant, gave rise to the modernism that would plague organized religion in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Feuerbach was born into a revolutionary cauldron in 1804. He studied at the University of Berlin where he was exposed to the ideas of G. W. F. Hegel. He felt the Church focused too much on an ethereal paradise and did little to better the living conditions on earth. Feuerbach wanted to create an *intellectual earthquake* that would so shake the pillars of faith in the West that the Church's entire edifice would come tumbling down. He believed humanity had invented the idea of God as a consolation and distraction from the sorrows of the world. In his *The Essence of Christianity*, he set out to prove that humanity was oppressed by its own invention.

Karl Marx moved atheism into a new dimension. He believed that religion was the *opiate of the people*. He felt that the power structure used religion to drug the masses, preventing them from seeing the futility of their petty lives and recognizing those who were oppressing them. As a weapon of the power structure, religion kept the poor down on the farm of misery and discontent. Marx reasoned that if society could remove the social conditions that caused a need for religion, it would soon disappear.

According to Freud religion arises through inner psychological pressures which reflected the complex evolutionary history of the human race. Religious ideas were not deliberate deceptions but came from the human unconscious, the so-called *id*. To him the religious periods of history were the *ignorant childhood days of the human race*. Belief in a personal God was little more than an *infantile delusion*, arising from *unconscious desires for protection and security*. With modern atheism, the world is in *its mature state*. The more a society matures and becomes civilized, the less its need for religion.

URBAN WARFARE

Other residual affects of the revolution are still being felt today. Atheism is the fuel cell that has powered the modernism that permeates the culture war, which has lasted longer than all the wars in America history combined. This battle for minds and souls can easily be reduced to a never-ending struggle between the lingering beliefs of the French Revolution and the battle weary religious traditions of Western Civilization.

The warring sides in this ideological conflict can be best illustrated through the cities of Jerusalem and Athens. These historic cities represent the two forces—revelation and reason that gave life to and sustained the West for 500 years. For centuries under the guidance of the Church they worked in a comfortable harmony. With the rise of modernism in the 19th century, things radically changed. From that point Jerusalem and Athens, or faith and reason, would never appear on the same ideological travelogue. Just as Churchill had predicted, these symbolic cities represent an *urban warfare of the mind which* frames the landscape of ideological debate in the 21st century.

In November columnist Maggie Gallagher wrote about the [Salk Institute for Biological Studies](#)' annual meeting in La Jolla, California, which stressed Athens' bellicose posture toward Jerusalem. She pointed out that science had adopted an evangelical posture vying with religion for the title as *teller of the greatest story ever told*. While posing as the *strong men of Athens*, the attending scientists, many of whom were atheists or agnostics, could not prevent *their clay feet* from peeping out from under their deep-seated need to *suppress people and ideas that threaten their founding ideas*.

In a vain effort to undermine religious faith they showed pictures of deformed babies and wondered how a *loving creator could be behind our existence*. Others offered the vastness and beauty of the universe as *much more glorious and awesome than anything offered by scripture or God concept* as proof of God's non-existence. Their commitment to reason and logic failed to see the ironic contradictions in their position.

AN ARMY ON THE MARCH

Author Aleister McGrath thinks that atheism is in its twilight because the future looks nothing like the utopia that they had promised. It has littered the highways of history with the death and destruction of millions of people. He believes that political opportunism and cultural sensitivity have led to a state of serious religious revival in the face of Communism's apparent decline.

McGrath has seriously miscalculated atheism's premature demise. Yes, state Communism has lost much of its power in the West but as a cultural force it still promotes its godless philosophy throughout the world. Professor Richard A. Shweder beckoned atheism's revival in an op-ed piece in the [New York Times](#) of 11/26 entitled *Atheists Agonistes*. He announced that the *armies of unbelief* are on the march because the religious right has provoked them. Unbelievers have found new strength in their historic genesis.

Unlike the Bible, theirs only dates back to the French Revolution when the world *woke one morning from the slumber of the dark ages and were enlightened with the real truth*.

Atheists have not forgotten that the Enlightenment provided the blueprint for a *brave new world*, devoid of superstition and ignorance. Despite's McGrath's death knell, they have become more adept in advancing their unbelief by wrapping it in the cloth of secular creeds such as the separation of church and state and radical feminism. While atheists remain the smallest minority of all iconoclastic zealots, their unbelief has attracted a liberal elite that evokes instant name recognition, including such godless luminaries as Kurt Vonnegut, Warren Buffet, Larry Flynt, George Soros, Woody Allen, George Carlin, and the late Katherine Hepburn. No list of influential atheists would be complete without author Christopher Hitchens, whose forth-coming book *The Case Against Religion* will keep the flames of anti-religious discontent constantly lit.

THE NEW ATHEISTS

McGrath has also missed the new militancy among atheists. Though he had his private war with God, Charles Darwin was not an atheist. His theory of evolution was not designed to undo religious belief but many of its proponents used it to provide the *missing link* that had troubled atheists since the 18th century. Atheists could never explain away God's creative sovereignty until Darwin's *Origins of the Species* found its way to the common bookshelves in 1859.

The leading Darwinian atheist is Richard Dawkins, author of the 2006 best seller, *The God Delusion*. Contrary to popular belief, Dawkins believes that *evolution must lead to atheism*. Profiled in an article for the November issue of [Wired Magazine](#) written by Gary Wolf entitled *The Church of Non-Believers*, Dawkins represents the *New Atheists*, a band of *intellectual brothers* mounting a *crusade against belief in God*. It was his seminal book *The Blind Watchmaker*, disputing intelligent design, that first put Dawkins, a 65 year-old Oxford professor, in the popular spotlight. He detests faith in God because churches use fear and judgment to wound people psychologically. He opposes the right of parents to educate their children in their own or any other religious faith. He calls religion an *unmitigated evil* that has to be destroyed.

Another militant atheist profiled in the Wired article was Sam Harris. In his 2004 book *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Religion*, Harris takes more of an apocalyptic approach. He believes that people must renounce religious faith or it will mark the end of civilization, conveniently ignoring the killing of over 175 million people at the bloody hands of atheistic governments during the 20th century.

In his 2006 book *Letter to a Christian Nation*, Harris discussed the hypocrisy of religions. He attacks Christianity, especially the Bible, because it *claims* to contain moral strictures. It is filled with wars, murders, sanction of slavery and in a classic *non sequitur*, he states that the people in the so-called USA's *red states*

have a higher crime and divorce rate. As for *Intelligent Design*, he points to a few flaws in nature, such as flightless birds and sightless eyes, to deny its veracity.

A PRIESTHOOD OF UNBELIEF

Wolf's article especially highlighted the fact that unlike their enlightened forbears atheists are weary of being on the defensive. They have aggressively taken the fight to religion with an angry enthusiasm, unprecedented in modern times. Atheists' new militancy will not even grant the *mirage of religion* a comforting role in assisting some people in dealing with their sorrow in times of affliction and death. Modern atheists argue that even this is delusive and enslaving. They believe Christianity is intellectually vacuous, ridiculous, morally oppressive, and untenable.

Militant atheists decry fence-sitting liberals who do not have the courage of their convictions. This *priesthood of unbelief* is waging an uncompromising, take-no-prisoners war on faith and its believers. Atheists, who have served in the military, have vilified the old Ernie Pyle aphorism that *there are no atheists in a foxhole*, as being untrue, unfair and discriminatory.

Their battle has been taken to the public relations front as well. Aware that the word *atheist* is a major turn-off for the vast majority of Americans, in 2003 atheists adopted a neologism at their annual conference in Florida. They call themselves *Brights*, which has an obvious connection with enlightened thinking. Minted by Sacramento educators Paul Geisert and Mynga Futrell to designate a person with a naturalistic worldview, *bright* was designed to be broader than the atheistic movement. It is not merely God that is untenable but superstition and magical thinking in general. Despite their denials, it is difficult to separate the idea that they think themselves as superior intellects, free from the inhibiting bonds of religious belief.

PAPAL RESPONSE

According to the official *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Atheism is a sin against the virtue of religion because it depersonalizes human beings, relegating them like Darwinian animals incapable of free will. Other than an occasion blip on the radar screen of philosophical thought in the 16th and 17th centuries, the Catholic Church had little experience in dealing with overt or positive atheism. It was the French Revolution that opened the collective eyes of the Church to the abject physical and spiritual

dangers of the non-believers of the world.

With the dual appearance of modernism and Communism, the papacy took immediate heed of the imminent dangers of such ungodly thinking. As early as 1846 Pius IX explicitly drew attention to the secularization of the world with the rise of modernism and materialistic Communism. In his encyclical, *Qui pluribus*, the Pope offered his solemn condemnation of *that infamous doctrine of so-called Communism, which is absolutely contrary to the natural law*. In 1878 Pope Leo XIII's encyclical, *Quod Apostolici Muneris*, defined Communism as *the fatal plague which insinuates itself into the very marrow of human society only to bring about its ruin*. In his encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1910) Pius X called modernism the *synthesis of all the heresies*. In 1937 Pius XI wrote his encyclical *Divini Redemptoris*, which is the definitive response to atheistic Communism. It is a moving reminder of the dignity of all of God's creation, stressing how Communism destroys not just the body but also the soul.

While Pope John XXIII pragmatically relaxed some of the Church's defenses against Soviet Communism, it fell to Pope John Paul II to remind the world of the abject evils that Communism had inflicted on his native Poland after the war. According to Michael Novak, Pope Benedict recognizes that the move toward atheism today is not as it was in the 19th century, *when it was a move toward the objective world of the 'scientific rationalist.'* Its new paradigm is more sinister because it is pure subjectivism, which lies at the heart of modernity and of the culture war today. The Pope's worst fears that this *dictatorship of relativism* will move the world back to a justification of murder in the name of tolerance and of subjective choice have already rung true.

Like Churchill, Pope Benedict clearly recognizes that the Church is engaged in an imperial struggle against the forces of atheism's *culture of death*, with its insidious attacks on life at both ends of the spectrum. Just as there are *New Atheists*, the Church desperately needs a *New Church Militant* to stop atheism's sinister advance.



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1 JOHN 4:12

*“...If we love one another, God abides in us,
and His love is perfected in us.”*

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Pinochet's Legacy: A Free, Non-Communist Chile

(Excerpts from Paul M. Weyrich's report, 12/21/06.)

Gen. Augusto Pinochet was laid to rest in December 2006. I well recall the dark days of the early 1970s. We had cut and run from Vietnam. The Communists were on the march in Angola and Mozambique. Salvadore Allende had been elected by a minority of the electorate and was busy moving Chile to a Communist state.

The Soviet Union, which seemed invincible, announced the Brezhnev Doctrine. Simply stated it was this: Once a Communist country, always a Communist country.

Under control of the military, Pinochet staged a coup in September 1973 that toppled Allende's Marxist government and led the country into years of economic growth. When the moment of truth came, Allende killed himself with a gun give to him by his pal Fidel Castro.

Pinochet did run Chile with an iron fist. In due course, he promulgated a Constitution and he got voters to ratify it.

Yet what he is known for are the deaths of some 3,000 people and the torture of others. As William F. Buckley reminded us, Pinochet “spoke with passion to say he had not himself known about, let alone authorized any of the random killings and torture laid at his door.”

Pinochet should go down in history as a liberator. He, alone, reversed the Brezhnev Doctrine. Today Chile is a prosperous left-of-center nation. People there have health-savings accounts and have better health care than in any other Latin American country. Pinochet made that happen. His free market reforms made Chile into a prosperous nation. He even looked after the poor with medical care.

The people of Chile should thank Pinochet. He saved their nation from a brutal Communist “experiment.”

Mr. Weyrich is Chairman and CEO of the Free Congress Foundation.

N.B. CMF Council Member, Reverend Gerald J. Brown, C. M. had important missionary work in Chile. He did God's work there from 1964 to 1998. His firsthand knowledge of the harsh conditions under Marxist regime in Chile, followed by a change in government, made him an on-the-spot advisor for CMF in our educational work, combating atheistic Communism with knowledge and facts.

Happy New Year

PRAYERFUL THANKS to each CMFer who offered prayers, greetings and gave donations to the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation during the recent Christmas season,

We are very grateful! We ask God to send you and yours many graces, good health and happiness in the New Year. CMF will confidently persevere in its apostolate of defending our faith, family life and freedom, following the example of our saintly patron Cardinal Mindszenty.