

BEYOND GOD'S OBITUARY:
The Emergence of Christian Atheism

Donald H. J. Hermann

THE CHICAGO LITERARY CLUB

At the Cliff Dweller's Club

Chicago, Illinois

November 15, 2021

**BEYOND GOD’S OBITUARY:
THE EMERGENCE OF CHRISTIAN ATHEISM
DONALD H.J. HERMANN**

I. INTRODUCTION

Many Modernists predicted both religion and atheism would disappear as significant belief practices with the triumph of secularism. Science and secularism would be adequate to explain the material world. Moreover, materialism would satisfy all that was needed to produce human flourishing. Christian Atheism first embraced secularism; more recently, religious Christians and atheists have championed features of Christian belief and practice as consistent with their atheistic beliefs.

The first phase of modern Christian atheism was the “God is Dead Movement.” A number of theologians contributed to this movement with a range of views arguing for the abandonment of concern with a transcendent God. One of the most significant developments in this new Christian Atheism was the development of an understanding of Scripture which adapted as a tenet of faith and belief in an imminent God who was assimilated to a secular understanding of a Christian ethos of human flourishing.

This “God is Dead” movement can be understood in part as a reaction to the perseverance of religion, with the emergence of a new religious formulations of god as imminent and not transcendent. The persistence of religious belief generated the counter movement of contemporary scientific atheism which came to be known as the “New Atheism” movement. Characteristic of those associated with this new religious movement was both its argument against any relevance of God to an understanding of the world, and its denial of any

need for God as a basis for human ethics. Moreover, this “New Atheism” expressed a direct hostility to all religious practice and belief.

One reaction to the New Atheists was the rise of so-called religious atheists who argued for a combining of religious and secular beliefs and practices in what might be labeled a secular religiosity. These secular and humanist religious atheists argued that adoption of aspects of religious belief and practice could provide an enrichment of human social life. There was also an argument that atheism should incorporate specific aspects of religious practice into communal life in order to give greater meaning and purpose to life beyond mere human flourishing provided by the simple materialism characteristic of secular humanism.

A post-secular age also gave rise to a distinctly Christian atheism in which individuals sometimes associate themselves to some extent with the Christian church without endorsing a belief in a transcendent God. Other atheists sought to incorporate Christian ethical beliefs and Christian spirituality into their lives as atheists again without any direct association with any particular Christian church or commitment to deistic belief. Other Christian Atheists did seek participation in churches, sometimes becoming members of specific churches. Forms of this later phase of Christian atheism will be discussed later in this paper. These forms of religious atheism include (i) ethical Christian atheism (ii) cultural or aesthetic Christian atheism; (iii) ritual and communitarian Christian atheism; and (iv) spiritual Christian atheism.

II. END OF RELIGION AND ATHEISM IN CLASSICAL SECULARISM

Charles Taylor in his seminal monograph A Secular Age identifies one of the major aspects of a theory of secularism as "the falling off of religious belief, and practice, in

people turning away from God, and no longer going to church."¹ Hans Joas in an essay "Does Modernization Lead to Secularization" endorsed a similar definition for "the concept of secularization as deployed in the social sciences: the decreasing significance of religion or a retreat of religion from the public sphere or the release of parts of society (such as the economy, science, the arts or political) from direct religious control."

Joas provides an account of the development of this theory of secularization which assumed the demise of religion: "Since the 19th century this assumption has been shared by an astonishingly broad range of opponents [of religion] in the social sciences and nearly all the famous names in philosophy. Whilst this might not be surprising for Marxist philosophers and sociologists, the assumption is also shared by such thinkers as Max Weber and Emil Durkheim, Sigmund Freud, and George Hebert Mead, not to mention Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the most vehement critics of Christianity."² More remarkably, Joas reports that "[e]ven the Protestant sociologist of religion Peter Berger predicted in 1968 that by the year 2000 there would be practically no more religious institutions, just believers huddled together in an ocean of secularity."³

This prediction of the disappearance of religion was based on a theory of history that anticipated the triumph of scientific materialism rather than the result of the efforts of atheists who argued against the existence of God. As Joas reports: "what is meant here is not a

¹ Charles Taylor, A Secular Age (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007) 3.

² Hans Joas, "Does modernization lead to secularization" in Wilhelm Grab and Lars Charbonnier (eds.), Secularization Theories, Religious Identity and Practical Theology (London: Transaction Publishers 2009) 28.

³ Ibid. 28-29.

history of [the advocates of] atheism but rather the prediction that the workings of history itself, without the need for any interference on the part of militant atheists, would lead to the disappearance of religion."⁴ It was also anticipated that with the death of religion, the significance of atheism itself would decline.

III. SECULAR CHRISTIANITY AND THE "GOD IS DEAD" MOVEMENT: THE FIRST PHASE CHRISTIAN ATHEISM

The first phase of Christian Atheism developed in the 1960's; it involved a number of theologians who addressed the place of religion in a secular society. These included Gabriel Vahanian who published The Death of God at the beginning of the decade; this work gave the movement its name.⁵ The place of the movement in relation to secularism is reflected in the title that the Harvard theologian Harvey Cox gave to his book, The Secular City.⁶ The link to Christianity is reflected in Thomas Altizer's The Gospel of Christian Atheism and William Hamilton's book The New Essence of Christianity.⁷ The relation of Christianity to secularism is reflected specifically in the title of Paul Van Buren's book, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel.⁸ The God is Dead Movement most generally asserted that a transcendent God is no longer present in the world. While these authors do not assert the non-existence of God in a cosmic

⁴ Ibid. 29.

⁵ Gabriel Vahanian, The Death of God (New York: Braziller 1961).

⁶ Harvey Cox, The Secular City (New York: Macmillan 1965).

⁷ Thomas Altizer, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press 1966) and William Hamilton, The New Essence of Christianity (New York: Association Press 1963).

⁸ Paul van Buren, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel (London: The Macmillan Company 1968).

sense, they maintain that the transcendent God is not present as a living force in the world of human existence.

This first phase of Christian Atheism is distinguishable from classic atheism which asserts that "God is dead" because there never was a God. The classic atheist including Nietzsche asserted that "God is dead" does not mean that God once existed and now no longer exists, but instead maintains that there never truly was a God. According to classic atheism, what humankind believed in was religious myth. The Christian Atheist, on the other hand, argued that a transcendent God that was once worshiped, but no longer exists in terms of human experience. Instead God has been reduced to an imminent state and incorporated into the secular world of humankind in its ethics and social practices.

The significance of this non-literal understanding of God's death by the modern "God is Dead" Movement was described by Colin Lyas in his article "On the Coherence of Christian Atheism" where he observed that: "We can, therefore, give a non-literal reading to the statement 'God is Dead'. It is obvious that such a non-literal reading removes much of the air or paradox that has surrounded the Death of God Theology. These non-literal versions of the Death of God Theology are either new examples of historically common complaints about the increase in unbelief or new ways of putting the atheist position."⁹ In fact, there is an effort to revitalize religion by making it more relevant to the secular world by negating its transcendent character and replacing it with an immanence by stressing ethics and social relation in religion in a way that makes religion secular. It is for this reason that Thomas Altizer captioned his work

⁹ Colin Lyas, "On the Coherence of Christian Atheism," Philosophy 45 (1970) 2.

The Gospel of Christian Atheism. By the term atheism, Altizer is denying the existence of a transcendent god, instead he is equating the religious with the secular as he develops the argument in his book for a new Christian Atheism.

This form of Christian Atheism can be viewed as an embracing of secularism. It is a transformation of Christianity as a religion devoted to a transcendent being into a religion devoted to ethical guidance and meaning in life as it is lived in the secular world. For Thomas Altizer this is not simply a result of the success or domination of the world by secularism or the triumph of modernity, it is a matter that involves a radical re-interpretation of Christian scripture and tradition which gives it a particular resonance with the contemporary world.

According to Altizer, the Death of God does not refer to the emergence of a new awareness of the irrelevance of the transcendent god to modern man. Instead it refers to the Death of God as occurring in the death of Christ who embodied the transcendent god in imminent form. Jesus was the god-man. According to Altizer: "To confess the death of god is to speak of an actual and real event; not perhaps an event occurring in a moment of time or history, but notwithstanding the resurrection, an event that has actually happen both in a cosmic and in an historical sense. There should be no confusion deriving from the mistaken assumption that such a confession refers to an eclipse of god or a withdrawal of god from history or creation. Rather, an authentic language speaking of the death of god must inevitably be speaking of the death of god himself. The radical Christian or Christian atheist proclaims that God has actually died in Christ, that this death is both an historical and cosmic event, and

as such is a fixed and irrevocable event which cannot be reversed by a subsequent religious or cosmic movement."¹⁰

Altizer's theology is in a sense a response to the person in the modern world who does not find his needs satisfied in secularism, but at the same time is unable to embrace the faith demands of a religion which worships the traditional transcendent God. The ultimate objective of Christian Atheism is to make a life lived in modernity satisfied in a way that transcends mere human flourishing which is limited to secular materialism. Thus, Altizer rejects classic atheism, as well as classic Christian theism, instead he argues that Christ is a central figure for his theology of Christian Atheism. Yet it is a Christ who is to be understood as man, and as the god-man. According to Altizer it is necessary to grasp the full meaning of the incarnation redemption as the full embodiment of the transcendent god in Christ. "[This is] the meaning of an apocalyptic and total redemption, a redemption issuing from the total presence of God in Christ, as God himself becomes the Word who is progressively incarnate in the actual processes of history. A theology expressing the incarnate movement of God must negate the image of the primordial God, closing itself to every echo and memory of God's original form so as to open itself to the metamorphosis of god's original sacrality and transcendence to a profane and imminent totality."¹¹ It is God who is subsumed into Jesus; God is made man offering the new possibility for human kind to find meaning in Christ. According to Altizer, "Dialectically, everything depends upon recognizing the meaning of God's total identification

¹⁰ Thomas J.J. Altizer, The Gospel of Christian Atheism (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press 1966) 103.

¹¹ Ibid. 83.

with Jesus and of understanding that it is God who becomes Jesus and not Jesus who becomes God."¹²

But the emptying of God onto Christ is merely the condition for the continuing presence of Christ in the world and his working for the redemption of all man. The world of human flourishing of secularism is not the end of the story, redemption continues as the presence of Christ provides an opportunity for spiritual fulfillment in this world. This process of continuous redemption in this world was described by Altizer in The Altizer – Montgomery Dialogue. Altizer stated: "Therefore, I think that we are called to understand the death of god as having two full sides, two poles. On the one hand, we affirm in faith that God has died in Jesus Christ, that God has emptied Himself of his Divine glory in Christ, therein initiating and effecting in an original and decisive sense the process of redemption. But on the other hand, the process of redemption is an historical process. It's a gradual process. It's a forward-moving process. It's an enlarging process. And it moves in such a way as to carry the life of Christ to all man, to all experience, to all life whatsoever."¹³

The spiritual transcendent power of God is released into the imminent world through Christ. The transformation of the transcendent God to the human figure of Christ eliminates the need for concern with a transcendent god and enables humankind to give full attention and investment to the lived world of human flourishing experienced in the material world of time and space. This is a complete movement of religion into the secular world. Christian Atheism takes the view that man's existence is focused on redemption in the lived

¹² Ibid.

¹³ The Altizer-Montgomery Debate (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press 1967) 14-15.

world of human flourishing, the transcendent world is emptied and "god is dead." Modern man can find full meaning in the life and teaching of Christ moving beyond mere human flourishing offered by the secular material world.

IV. NEW ATHEISM'S ATTACK ON RELIGIOUS BELIEF IN THE POST-SECULAR WORLD

Ian Leigh and Rex Ahdar, in their article published in The Modern Law Review and entitled "Post-Secularism and the European Court of Human Rights: or How God Never Really Went Away," report on the anticipated and subsequent disappointment of theorists of secularism.¹⁴ Leigh and Ahdar correctly observe that "Since Nietzsche announced the death of god, the secularization thesis has held sway in the Western world."¹⁵ Secularization theory predicted there would be a concomitant, inexorable decline in religious belief and practice at a personal individual level."¹⁶

However, this anticipated disappearance of religious institutions and decline in religious practice did not occur. As Leigh and Adhar report: "In the past decade it has become obvious in secular Western Europe, that the obituary notices for religious faith were premature, exaggerated or simply false, 'god is'"¹⁷ One can view the rise of scientific atheism, which has been called the "New Atheism" both as a reaction to and an attack on the survival of religious belief and practice. But Leigh and Ahdar suggest that the harshness and vitriolic tone of the

¹⁴ Ian Leigh and Rex Ahdar, "Post Secularization and the European Court of Human Rights: Or How God Never Really Went Away," The Modern Law Review 75 (2013) 1064-1098.

¹⁵ Ibid. 1064.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., citing J. Micklethwait and A. Wooldridge, God is Back: How the Global Revival of Faith is Changing the World (London: Penguin 2009).

New Atheism reflects its lack of success in its struggle for converts to scientific atheism.

"Although the so-called 'New Atheists' have dominated bookstalls and the media, in many ways their strident re-argued assault simply underscores the sea change" of post-secularism.¹⁸

Similar to classic atheism, the New Atheists of the Twenty-First century draw on science to establish the irrelevance of religion and focus hostility on the concept of god. The New Atheists equate religion with superstition and irrationalism arguing that religion should not simply be ignored but critiqued and countered by rational argument. The movement developed in part as a reaction to the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center by a group of individuals who were identified as religious fundamentalist terrorists. The first major publication of the New Atheists was the 2004 book entitled The End of Faith, Religion, Terror and the Future of Reason by Sam Harris.¹⁹ This was followed in 2006 by Daniel Dennett's Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon.²⁰ Subsequently, in 2006, Richard Dawkins published The God Delusion and in 2007 the journalist Christopher Hitchens published God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything.²¹

The New Atheists argued that belief in god is the equivalent of a scientific hypothesis which can be disapproved. The idea is that the existence and action of a transcendent god is a scientific hypothesis that can be tested by the standard methods of

¹⁸ Ibid. 1064.

¹⁹ Sam Harris, The End of Faith: Religion, Terror and the Future of Religion (New York: W.W. North & Company 2004). Harris specifically address Christianity in Sam Harris, A Letter 2 Christian Nation (New York: Vintage Books 2005).

²⁰ Daniel Dennett, Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon (New York: Penguin Books 2006).

²¹ Richard Dawkins, The God Delusion (Buster: Houghton Mifflin Company 2007) and Christopher Hitchens, God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything (Toronto: Emblem 2007).

scientific proof. The consensus of New Atheist is that the hypothesis which maintains that God created and sustains the world fails such a scientific test. Moreover, scientific materialism is asserted to be sufficient to explain everything that one can observe in the universe. The New Atheists argue that it is not necessary to introduce the existence of a transcendent god or maintain any supernatural theory to explain observable reality.

John Haught in God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris and Hitchens provides a summary of the view of the New Atheists: "For [Dennett], as for Dawkins a naturalistic understanding of religion leaves, no meaningful room at all for plausible theological accounts of why most people are religious. Theology, for Dennett, as for Dawkins, Harris and Hitchens is now completely superfluous. Science also can tell what religion is really all about, and it can provide better answers than theology to every important question people ask. According to Dawkins, science is even qualified to decide whether or not god exists."²²

However, as Charles Taylor explains in A Secular Age, it is not the kind of explanations that science gives that is the real concern of those who look to religion for answers about meaning, purpose and a goal for human existence beyond human flourishing provided by materialistic secular culture. Taylor suggests that the significance religion gives to human beings and the foundation for ethics provided Christianity are aspects of religion which are absent from a purely secular stance. It is these missing aspects of human existence that are sought for by the Christian Atheists described later in this paper. It is important to grasp what Taylor asserts is missing from a secular approach to life being argued for by the New Atheists.

²² John Haught, God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris and Hitchens (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 2008).

Taylor identifies the void in the New Atheist's position: "First in identifying the Christian life with a life lived in conformity with the norms of our [scientific materialist] civilization, we lost sight of the further, greatest transformation which Christian faith holds out, the raising of human life to the level of the divine (theosis). Secondly. . . something is lost when we take the way of living together that the gospel paints for us and make of it a code of rules enforced by organizations created for this purpose."²³ Taylor is saying there is something missing from human aspiration without the transcendence offered by religion, as well as something lacking in a set of ethical rules that lacks the kind of metaphysical foundation provided by Christianity. Christian Atheists seek to preserve these features of meaning and foundationalism from the Christian tradition without retaining a belief in a transcendent God.

V. POST-SECULAR RELIGIOUS ATHEISTS

Alain de Botton in Religion For Atheists begins by rejecting the principal tenets of the New Atheism when he writes "The most boring and unproductive question one can ask of any religion is whether or not is true."²⁴ Instead he maintains: "The premise of the book is that it must be possible to remain a committed atheist and nevertheless find religion sporadically useful, interesting, and consoling and be curious to the possibilities of importing certain of their ideas and practices into the secular realm."²⁵

²³ Charles Taylor, A Secular Age (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2007) 737.

²⁴ Alain de Botton, Religion for Atheists: A Non-Believer's Guide to the Uses of Religion (New York: Random House 2013).

²⁵ Ibid. 11.

De Botton argues that there is a need to pay particular attention to the human needs that have been met through religion. For example, he cites community as an example of an extraordinarily powerful theme in religion. He cites the idea of people connecting with each other in a sacred space. Practice of ritual is connected to establishing a sense of community. Moreover, he is particularly focused on the moral domain and what it means to be good and how we root ethical concerns in practices of mutuality. He is also interested in transcendence in terms of acceding to a more generous, forgiving, timeless zone of our consciousness.

For example, De Botton suggests that the Catholic Mass can provide a source of inspiration and experience for a community in an alienating secular world: "A Catholic Mass is not to be sure, the ideal habitat for an atheist. Much of the dialogue is either offensive to reason, or simply incomprehensible. Nevertheless, the ceremony is replete with elements which subtly strengthen congregant's bonds of affection which atheists do well to study and on occasion learn to appreciate for reuse in the secular realm."²⁶

De Botton identifies among the continuing contribution of religion to human life the significance of purpose, meaning, and the path to goodness. De Botton mentions that religions "have dared directly to address the great questions of individual life. What should I live for? How do I love? How do I be good? in ways that should intrigue atheists even if they find little to agree with in the specific [theistic] answers provided."²⁷

The loss of the transcendent offered by religious creates for de Botton a singular loss with a danger of a shift to human self-importance. De Botton maintains the religious

²⁶ Ibid. 30.

²⁷ Ibid. 160.

atheist can regain access to the transcendent without re-engaging a dominating theistic figure; according to de Botton: "The single danger of the godless society is that it lacks reminders of the transcendent and therefore leaves us unprepared for disappointment and eventual annihilation. When God is dead, human beings—much to their detriment—are at risk of taking psychological centre stage." They imagine themselves to be commanders of their own destinies."²⁸ What is lacking in secular society and what is needed is the resources of religion without the baggage of God. Secular society seems to say here is man and that is all there is: "Our secular world is lacking in the sorts of rituals that might put us gently in our place. It surreptitiously invites us to think of the present moment as the summit of history, and the achievements of our fellow humans as the measure of all things—a grandiosity that plunges us into continuous swirls of anxiety and envy."²⁹ Religion, on the other hand, according to this view, offers the promise of transcendence which requires that we find something greater than human existence, even in its flourishing. De Botton mentions that: "Religion is above all a symbol of what exceeds us, an education in the advantages of recognizing our paltriness. It has natural sympathies with all those aspects of existence which decentre us: glaciers, oceans, microscopic life forms, newborn babies or the resonant language of Milton's Paradise Lost ('Floods and Whirlwinds of tempestuous fire . . .'). Being put in our place by something larger, older, greater than ourselves is not a humiliation, it should be accepted as a relief from our insanely hopeful ambitions for our lives" lived in a purely secular society.³⁰

²⁸ Ibid. 200.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

According to de Botton there are resources within the traditions of religion which respond to the needs of non-believers; these include: "how to generate feelings of community, how to promote kindness. . . How better to acknowledge our childlike needs, how to surrender some of our counterproductive optimism, how to achieve perspective through the sublime and transcendent . . . and, finally, how to coalesce the scattered efforts of individuals interested in the care of souls and organize them under the aegis of institutions."³¹

Finally, de Botton sets out the basis for his argument for recognition of a religious atheism: "The essence of the argument presented here is that many of the problems of the modern soul can successfully be addressed by solutions put forward by religions, once these solutions have been dislodged from the supernatural structure within which they were first conceived. The wisdom of the faiths belongs to all mankind, even the most rational among us, and deserves to be selectively reabsorbed by the supernatural's greatest enemies. Religions are intermittently too useful, effective and intelligent to be abandoned to the religious alone."³²

Central to de Botton's argument is the necessity for and possibility of an experience of human transcendence without god. Certainly, there is a necessity of an "other" beyond the individual, but the question remains whether other human beings or the natural phenomenon cited by de Botton provides a basis for authentic transcendence. While other religious atheists concede an incapacity for transcendence without the supernatural, all

³¹ Ibid. 311.

³² Ibid. 311-312.

religious atheists confidently identify other basis beyond the divine for religious fulfillment such as the human community itself.

Kennan Pomeroy in his article "Going Beyond God, and Discovering a Religion: An Atheistic Approach to Being Religious" begins by establishing the fundamental basis of atheism: "An atheistic orientation to religion has no need of god concepts or the associated language."³³ The question arises whether one can be atheistic and religious. Pomeroy acknowledges that many deny this possibility by arguing that without the essential object of veneration of a deity of some kind, there can be no religion."³⁴ However, Pomeroy views this necessary linking of God to religion to be a result of traditional Judeo-Christian theological teaching and that there is in fact no necessary relation between belief in god and religion. Moreover, "[b]eing religious is not just a matter of belief" nor principally the adherence to a particular moral code but instead "a qualitative experience of life."³⁵ John Dewey is quoted as authority for this point of view that a religious orientation involves a general approach to life. Dewey wrote in A Common Faith: "The religious attitude signifies something that is bound through imagination in a general attitude. This comprehensive attitude moreover, is much broader than anything indicated by 'moral' in the usual sense. The quality of attitude is displayed in art, science and good citizenship."³⁶

³³ Kenneth Pomeroy, "Going Beyond God and Discovering a Religion: An Atheistic Approach to Being Religious," The Journal of Liberal Religion 8 (2008) 1.

³⁴ Ibid. quoting Judith Hayes, The Happy Heretic (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books 2000) 98.

³⁵ Ibid. 2.

³⁶ Ibid. quoting John Dewey, A Common Faith (New Haven: Yale University Press 1934) 23.

Pomeroy goes on to argue that not only does religiosity not require a belief in God, it does not necessarily entail a concern with transcendence. He writes: "I would note here that [religious] spiritual experience do not require the individual experience of supernatural [transcendent] realms of being, but a deeper and more substantial experience of life."³⁷ Thus, it is the deep and full experience of life, where one can encounter the kind of experience promised by religion.

For Pomeroy religious concerns that take one beyond oneself are other people, it is the human community that becomes the basis of religious practice for the religious atheist. Pomeroy states: "I present here an understanding of community framed around the relational quality of immanence, and without resort to concepts of transcendence, a view that is consistent with an atheistic-religious perspective."³⁸ The atheist and theologian Anthony Pinn is cited as authority for the view that "mine is a firm atheism that avoids talk of transcendence."³⁹ In this view once religion is emptied of both God and transcendence, the "other" beyond the individual person becomes the human community or humankind. Pinn asserts: "There is nothing behind the symbol God. In its place, I affirm the idea of community. It is in community that we are encouraged to develop our full human potential and overcome oppression."⁴⁰

³⁷ Ibid. 5.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid. citing Anthony B. Pinn, "Community" on Paul Rasor (ed.), Unitarian Universalist View of God (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association 2001).

⁴⁰ Ibid. 6.

Pomeroy concludes that the religious atheist finds the object of religious practice in the other of humanity without any need for God or transcendence: "I view community as the center for inspiring individuals toward self-actualization. It is in a community of inspired living that the religious atheist can find a connectedness, and one in which affirms our humanness as a wonderful gift."⁴¹

VI. POST-SECULAR FORMS OF CHRISTIAN ATHEISM: THE SECOND PHASE OF CHRISTIAN ATHEISM

The new Christian Atheists share with religious atheists the rejection of belief in a transcendent God while seeking to preserve certain aspects of practice and values found in religions. However, Christian Atheists go further than other religious atheists in their embrace of religion by specifically adopting particular practices and values of Christianity. Some go so far as to participate in the rituals and community activities of Christian churches. Christian atheists include people "who value the cultural heritage of Christianity—its language, art, music, moral compass, sense of transcendence—without actually believing in God, at least without believing in God in a way that would satisfy Christian orthodoxy."⁴²

In this discussion, Christian Atheists will be considered in four categories of belief or practice, while it should be recognized that any individual could subscribe to one or all of these descriptive areas of connection with Christian belief or practice. These four categories

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Brian Mountford, Christian Atheist: Belonging Without Believing (Winchester, U.K.: Christian Alternative 2011) 1.

are (i) ethical Christian atheists; (ii) cultural and aesthetic Christian atheists; (iii) ritual or community Christian atheists, and (iv) spiritual Christian atheists.

(i) ETHICAL CHRISTIAN ATHEISTS

In his book Christian Atheist, Brian Mountford, former Vicar of the University Church at Oxford, observes that: "Near the top of the Christian Atheist wish list comes the so-called Christian 'moral compass'."⁴³ In his book, Mountford interviewed ten English Christian Atheists from a broad spectrum of life including philosophers, business people, scientists and young parents. One of the participants stated: "the moral framework of this brand of Christianity is a good one and one I wish to share."⁴⁴

Mountford challenged this position arguing that Christian ethics are inseparable from Christian dogma and belief in God. ["I object that as an atheist his ethics might be similar to Christian ethics, but without the authority of God and the model of the incarnate love of God, they can scarcely be claimed as truly Christian."]⁴⁵ To which the participant responded: "No, I think that Christian ethics, like every other belief system, are manmade, but I's still content with a notion of Christian ethics . . . without bothering about the need for the authority of God."⁴⁶

Mountford's challenge of the claim to Christian ethics by atheists is similar to that of Alister Mcgrath in his article "Doctrine and Ethics" where he argues that "Christian

⁴³ Ibid. 37.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 15.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

doctrine is what sets Christian ethics apart from the others of the world around us. It defines what is distinctive, what is Christian, about Christian ethics."⁴⁷

Mcgrath challenges the assertion that one can claim to be an adherent to Christian ethics as an authoritative moral code because Jesus was a good man who taught about virtuous conduct without believing that Jesus was God. Mcgrath argues: "It is untenable to suggest that Jesus' authority rests upon the excellence of his moral or religious teaching. To make this suggestion is to imply that Jesus has authority only when he happens to agree with us. We thus would have authority over Jesus. In fact, however, the teaching of Jesus has authority on account of who Jesus is—and the identify and significance of Jesus can only be spelled out in doctrinal terms."⁴⁸

The argument being made is that it is the fact that Jesus is God that gives authority to Christian ethics, not only as an ethical guide but a moral obligation, which goes beyond what most so-called Christian Atheists are willing to subscribe. Mcgrath correctly states: "It is doctrine that explains why and how Jesus' words and deeds have divine rather than purely human authority. It is doctrine that singles out Jesus Christ, and none other, as being God incarnate."⁴⁹

Nevertheless, Nigel, one of the Christian Atheists interviewed by Mountford reiterated an earlier assertion of belief in the moral code of Christian ethics: "I am committed to Christian ethics, love your neighbor, don't always put yourself first, turn the other cheek,

⁴⁷ Alister Mcgrath, "Doctrine and Ethics," Journal of Evangelist Theological Society, 34 (1991) 145.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 147-148.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 148.

that sort of thing—without bothering about the need for the authority of God. Christian ethics just like those of every other belief system are manmade."⁵⁰

(ii) CULTURAL AND AESTHETIC CHRISTIAN ATHEISM

Brian Mountford, it should be noted, is an Anglican and most of the Christian Atheists he is interviewing are involved in the Anglican form of Christianity. Significantly, Mountford reports: "Talking to Christian Atheists about their reasons for hanging on to the coat-tails of religion, nearly all say that art, music and literature provide their closest access to religious experience and the reason many of them are still involved with institutional Christianity is because of the commitment to the search for truth and beauty."⁵¹

Mountford notes that while the Christian Atheist finds significance in the aesthetics of the church, believers find a sense of God in the music, liturgy and art of Christianity. Mountford links this to a traditional religious sense of transcendence: "The traditional definition suggests something beyond human experience and reason, possibly divine, so that in religious writing God (the Divine) is sometimes referred to as 'the transcendent'."⁵² By contrast, the transcendent experience of Christian Atheists involves being emotionally moved by the beauty of Christian music, art, or liturgical writing, which seems to be of this world and clearly distinguishable from religious transcendence experience. Mountford maintains that: "[T]he uplifting experience of [religious] art, as far as I can see [for the

⁵⁰ Brian Mountford, Christian Atheists: Belonging Without Believing (Winchester, U.K.: Christian Alternative 2011) 41.

⁵¹ Ibid. 20.

⁵² Ibid.

Christian Atheist] is of this world and not supernatural and maybe to do with finding new layers of meaning."⁵³ Perhaps, it also relates to special ways of feeling, of special emotional response to experiencing art in a religious context. This leads to the observation that there is a significant difference in fundamental meaning of the experience of the transcendent with the truth lying on one side or the other "between the religious view that transcendent experience can lead to intimations of the divine, and the rational view that it is simply a heightened level of feeling, at neuromechanical matter and no more."⁵⁴

For the Christian Atheists the cultural and aesthetic resources of Christianity lead them to a greater sense of purpose and a sense of transformation of everyday life. The explanation of Christian Atheists for the sense of transcendence from Christian art can be summed up in Mountford's report of their "disclosures of the common experience in which people find some sort of transcendent depth in [religious] art [including music], some sense of being taken beyond themselves, of being the better or the greater for having been there and heard a performance [or a liturgy]."⁵⁵

(iii) RITUAL AND COMMUNITY CHRISTIAN ATHEISM

According to one of the Christian Atheists interviewed by Brian Mountford: "The community aspect is the genius of the Church."⁵⁶ This can involve the inclusion of people in the church community without discrimination, as the one interviewee reported: "I'm there for my

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 22.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 18.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 40.

family and my community. I like the fact that broadly everyone is welcome, including the older, lonely, or difficult people, it provides a brilliant framework for children to grow up in."⁵⁷

In a sense Christian Atheists transform the function of religion into a vehicle for full realization of the imminent world, into a basically secular institution. As the same informant is quoted later by Mountford as asserting: "Religion is about binding people together and the glue in the mix can be a variety of agents: survival, sense of purpose, mutual support, common values, acceptance of a common story or beliefs, safe social environment for the kids, music and so on."⁵⁸

The question arises, why do Christian Atheists seek these goals specifically in a church which claims that its foundation is belief in God. The explanation given in the Christian Atheist is that: "[N]ot all worship [at church] is directed outwards to the divine. Prayers and some hymns are addressed to God, usually expressing praise or some benefit, but worship also functions in a much more inward way as a ritual of community, or of ethics or aesthetics—a beautiful service with music and words which inspire. In much worship these days, attention is directed to each other, the sharing of the peace, a classic example."⁵⁹

There is also the individual who associates with a church as an atheist Christian because of personal relationships and a sense of fellowship with the other members of a congregation. Mountford reports that: "An acquaintance told me that she's not a believer but accompanies her partner to church out of a sense of friendship and commitment, and there she

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 46.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 95-96.

finds both the liturgy and the company congenial."⁶⁰ Mountford concludes that: "It seems to me that 'worship' can have a kind of legitimacy for some people quite apart from a belief in the divine."⁶¹

The question remains whether one can truly and fully participate in a religious ritual without belief in the divine person or liturgy to whom the ritual is directed. Without such belief is one merely an observer or a guest. Is the Christian Atheist simply attending a religious performance similar to the experience of a person attending a concert of sacred music in a concert hall.

(iv) SPIRITUAL CHRISTIAN ATHEIST

So far the discussion of Christian Atheism has been discussed with reference to the interviews done by Brian Mountford and reported in his book Christian Atheist. This discussion of Spiritual Christian Atheism will focus on an account of a particular atheist who has adopted the Christian symbol of the crucifix and committed himself to the Christian spirituality associated with suffering. This is the story of the cyclist Lance Armstrong reported in an article in the Journal of Contemporary Religion (JCR).⁶²

Lance Armstrong is a sports celebrity who established himself as cycling champion but was subsequently disgraced as a "drug cheat" because of using drugs to enhance his physical performance. He is also a cancer survivor who has become an advocate for persons

⁶⁰ Ibid. 96.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² William Kennan, "Recycling Religion: Lance Armstrong's Postmodern Spirituality of Suffering and Survivorship" Journal of Contemporary Religion 30 (2015) 107-123.

affected by cancer. Lance Armstrong is a professed atheist who "has continued to wear the Christian crucifix throughout the major part of his public life."⁶³ The concern of the JCR article was stated this way: "In the present study, it is Armstrong's congeries of 'survivorship' beliefs, commitments and ritual practices, particularly the use of a cross 'juju' [a magic charm or fetish], that is the main preoccupation" of the article.⁶⁴

Armstrong is an atheist wholly committed to a materialist position with total denial of the supernatural. In his book Second Crisis, Armstrong writes: "I flinched every time I heard someone say 'It's in God's hands,' or 'God will provide' [Armstrong maintains his survival was not] 'in the name of the Lord' but he asserts "my doctors were my gods."⁶⁵

However, Armstrong's concern was not limited to his medical treatment. He had a felt a need for a spirituality, which for him was symbolized in the Christian cross. The JCR articles correctly observes that in contemporary culture the cross can become a fashion accessory or a dress element, it can be viewed as a jewelry heirloom, and enters into the totally profane realm as a tattoo or t-shirt design. However, for Armstrong the cross is linked to his own spirituality as an expression of suffering which is the core element of his spirituality which is linked to his experience of survivorship.

The JCR article identifies Armstrong as a "spiritual atheist" who can be understood in the following terms: "Maybe surprisingly, spiritual atheists, though by self-definition as atheist, adverse to the idea of supernatural deities, tend to believe in

⁶³ Ibid. 108.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

reincarnation and life after death, and even in the protective power of lucky charms . . . Belief in the protective power of lucky charms seems to indicate a hope of outwitting contingency."⁶⁶

Armstrong's spirituality of survivorship draws on the overtly traditional symbol of the cross. The cross as a symbol of Christ's suffering and resurrection provides a basis for Armstrong's spirituality without the foundational relation to the Divine mystery of redemption. The separation of the human element from the divine foundation is problematical even for Armstrong who has written: "I had no idea where to draw the line between spiritual belief and science. But I knew this much: I believed in belief, for its own shining sake."⁶⁷ The JCR article restates the paradoxical claim to belief related to the symbol of the cross. "Yet Armstrong has a behavioral attachment to conventional Christian religious iconography in the shape of the cross emblem, a symbol stepped in soteriological other-worldly, vertically transcendent religious mystery while at the same moment, proclaiming: "I view my cancer from a scientific standpoint."⁶⁸ The JCR article characterizes Armstrong's belief as a manifestation of the postmodern, post-Christian condition of contemporary religion and non-religion.⁶⁹

Armstrong's spirituality of suffering has echoes of the self-denial and flagellation practices of penitential Christian religious orders as well as the secular physical development through strenuous gym exercise. Armstrong explained his spirituality of suffering in the following terms: "Suffering, I was beginning to think was essential to a good life, and as

⁶⁶ Ibid. 109.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 111.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 112.

inextricable from such a life as bliss. It's a great enhancer. Each time I encountered suffering, I believe that I grew, and further defined my capacities—not just my physical ones, but my interior ones as well, for commitment, friendship, or any other experience. The real reward for pain is this: self-knowledge."⁷⁰ One can see in these remarks a draining of the spiritual of any aspect of supernatural transcendence and an equating of the spiritual with the secular. This is similar to the Christian Atheist who finds in the church a feeling of community and commitment, a moral sense and an aesthetic experience without any relation to God. Armstrong confirms this understanding of his spirituality when he writes: "If I were religious [believed in God] I'd say cancer advocacy is what God wanted me to do, but I'm not. So I'll simply say that's what I have the opportunity to do, and what I'm designed to do."⁷¹

In the end it is clear that Armstrong "explicitly distances himself from Christian institutional religion and refers to himself as an 'atheist'" but he, nevertheless, "does not eschew attachment to the Christian religious symbolic, vie the cross."⁷² The ambiguity apparent in Armstrong's rejection of Christianity while committing himself to a spirituality of suffering derived from the Christian narrative as symbolized in the cross is seemingly acknowledged by Armstrong himself. He admits as much in the following statement: "Any account of my life begs for larger explanation, why did I live? I refuse the pat answer. God didn't do it. I don't mean to offend anyone, and I realize it upends the traditional expectation for me to say this, but I don't believe in a neat religious reckoning. I'm not much for prayer,

⁷⁰ Ibid. 114.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid. 117.

don't belong to any religion that involves buildings, and I'm leery of proselytizing. Yet I wear a crucifix. How do I explain that to a stranger in an airport between flights?"⁷³ It is no way a simple matter.

VII. A NOTE ON CATHOLIC AGNOSTISM

Relevant to the discussion of Christian Atheism is the report of a growing number of Roman Catholic theologians, philosophers and intellectuals who associate themselves with a view of Catholic faith that relegates the question of God's existence to one of irrelevance while attending to other matters of Catholic faith which those individuals regard as significant and intrinsic to their faith concerns.

This view is espoused by Daniel Maguire in his book Christianity Without God: Moving Beyond the Dogmas and Retrieving the Epic Moral Narrative.⁷⁴ Maguire is an ordained Roman Catholic priest. He has taught theology primarily at Catholic universities including Villanova University, Notre Dame University, and Marquette University. Maguire argues for a religion without supernatural deistic belief. He sets his position out succinctly: "In this book, I argue that the moral contribution of Christianity does not depend on the personal God and afterlife hypothesis, nor on doing to Jesus of Nazareth what Jesus did not do to himself—that is turn him into a god."⁷⁵

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Daniel Maguire, Christianity Without God: Moving Beyond the Dogmas and Retrieving the Epic Moral Narrative (Albany: State University of New York Press (2014).

⁷⁵ Ibid. 4.

Maguire maintains that he is not alone in subscribing to the position that one can participate in religion focused on the sacred and holy without God. He quotes the Catholic theologian Elizabeth Johnson as speaking of "a theological agnosticism more pervasive than has usually been acknowledged."⁷⁶ Similarly, Gary Gutting, a professor of philosophy at Notre Dame, once editor of the Notre Dame Philosophical Review, is quoted as saying: "[A]s to the theistic metaphysics, I'm agnostic about it taken literally."⁷⁷ Instead Gutting emphasizes the ethical tradition of Catholicism as the relevant aspect of religion that he considers the basis of his religious faith; he views Catholicism "as a superb intellectual construction that provides a fruitful context for understanding how our religious and moral experiences are tied to the ethics of love."⁷⁸ Maguire correctly inserts the observation that despite Gutting's linking the ethics of love to his Catholic identity: "The 'ethics of love' can thrive and does so in other moral traditions without reference to Catholic metaphysical arguments for the existence of a personal deity."⁷⁹ Maguire and Gutting agree that for them "Catholicism, too, has reconciled itself to the Enlightenment view of religion."⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Ibid. 25.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 29.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Maguire concludes his discussion of Catholic agnostics by observing: "Not all the agnosticism among Christian scholars admitted by theologian Elizabeth Johnson is staying in the closet, though the closet is by no means empty."⁸¹

VIII. CONCLUSION

It is clear that the anticipated disappearance of religious belief predicted by secular theory did not occur. One religious response to secularism was the transformation of religion into a secular belief and practice. This occurred in some writings of those associated with the "God is Dead" Movement which provided a secular re-interpretation of the New Testament with a view of Jesus as the god-man who transformed the transcendent divine into an imminent moral force.

The "New Atheism" was in part a reaction to the survival of religion and its transformation of religion in some cases into a new fundamentalism. This scientific atheism took a hostile attitude to religion. It received widespread attention but had little effect on belief in the post-secular world. Some atheists were alienated by the militancy of the New Atheism, but more significantly observed positive features of religion that they maintain enrich the everyday life of religious people.

"Religious Atheists" have attempted to appropriate aspects of religion practice and belief while detaching these aspects of religion from a belief in a supernatural deity. "Christian Atheists" have adhered to various Christian practices and principles without maintaining a belief in the divine. Christian atheists can be identified as emphasizing specific

⁸¹ Ibid. 30.

aspects of religious practice as personally significant; these include the Christian ethical or moral system; the cultural and aesthetic elements of Christian religion including music, art and literature; the ritual and community experience afforded by participation in Christian liturgy and worship; and finally the appreciation of Christian spirituality detached from belief in God. The phenomenon of Christian agnosticism can be observed in an increasing number of Anglican and Roman Catholic theologians and philosophers who do not adhere to a traditional belief in God.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

- Altizer, Thomas, The Gospel of Christian Atheism. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, (1967).
- Amarasingam, Amarnath, Religion and the New Atheism. Chicago: Haymarket Books (2010).
- Barker, Dan, Godless: How an Evangelical Preacher Became One of America's Leading Atheists. Berkeley: Ulysses Press (2008).
- Barker, Dan, Losing Faith in Faith: From Preacher to Atheist. Madison: Freedom from Religion Foundation, Inc. (1992).
- Barker, Dan, The Good Atheist: Living a Purpose-Filled Life Without God. Berkeley: Ulysses Press (2011).
- Beaman, Lori and Steven Tomlins (eds.), Atheist Identities – Spaces and Social Contexts. London: Springer (2015).
- Bennett, Bo, The Concept: A Critical and Honest Look at God and Religion. Sudbury, MA ebook.it.com (2011).
- Boston University Law Review, "A Symposium on Richard Dworkin's Religion Without God," Boston University Law Review, Vol. 94 No. 4 (2014).
- Dawkins, Richard, The God Delusion. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company (2008).
- Blake, Robert, The Christian Atheist: Integrating Science, Psychology, Medicine and Spirituality in the 20th Century. Bloomington: 1st Books Library (2002).
- Cox, Harvey, Religion in the Secular City: Toward a Postmodern Theology. New York: Simon and Schuster (1984).
- Cox, Harvey, The Secular City. New York: Macmillan Publishing (1975).
- De Bottom, Alain, Religion for Atheists: A Non-Believer's Guide to the Uses of Religion. New York: Random House (2012).
- Dennett, Daniel, Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon. New York: Penguin Books (2006).
- Dworkin, Ronald, Religion Without God. Cambridge: Harvard University Press (2013).
- Edwards, David (ed.), The Honest to God Debate. Philadelphia: the Westminster Press (1963).
- Egan, Joe, The Godless Delusion: Dawkins and the Limits of Human Sight. Oxford: Peter Lang (2009).

- Epstein, Greg, Good Without god: What a Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe. New York: Harper (2009).
- Garcia, Robert and Nathan King, Is Goodness Without God Good Enough? London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. (2009)
- Groeschel, Craig, The Christian Atheist: Believing in God and Living As If he Doesn't Exist. Grand Rapids: Zondervan (2004).
- Hamilton, William, The New Essence of Christianity: Laying Claim to those Few Things That Are Certain. New York: Association Press (1962).
- Harris, Sam, Letter to a Christian Nation. New York: Random House, Inc. (2008).
- Harris, Sam, The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason. New York: W.W. Norton & Company (2004).
- Haught, John, God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris and Hitchens. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press (2008).
- Heelas, Paul and Linda Woodhead, The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing (2008).
- Henderson, Jim and Matt Casper, Jim & Casper Go To Church: Frank Conversation about Faith, Churches and Well-Meaning Christians. Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers Inc. (2007).
- Hitchens, Christopher, God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything. Toronto: Emblem (2007).
- Hovey, Craig, What Makes Us Moral? Science, Religion and the Shaping of the Moral Landscape: A Christian Response to Sam Harris. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books (2012).
- Inter-Varsity Press, The Altizer-Montgomery Dialogue – Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press (1967).
- Johnson, Eric, Paul Lagerkvist, Religious Atheist. M.A. thesis, University of Montana (1966).
- Johnston, Mark, Saving God: Religion and Idolatry. Princeton: Princeton University Press (2009).
- Keogh, Gary, Reading Richard Dawkins: A Theological Dialogue with New Atheism. Minneapolis: Fortress Press (2014).
- Magno, Joseph and Victor La More, The Christian, The Atheist and Freedom. New York: Precedent Publishing (1973).
- Maguire, Daniel, Christianity Without God: Moving Beyond the Dogmas and Retrieving the Epic Moral Narrative. Albany: State University of New York Press (2014).

- McFarland, Ken, The Christian Atheist. Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association. (1984).
- McGrath, Alister, The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World. Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press (2004).
- Montgomery, John, The "Is God Dead?" Controversy. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House (1966).
- Moser, Paul, The Severity of God: Religion and Philosophy Reconceived. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2013).
- Mountford, Brian, Christian Atheist: Belonging Without Believing. Winchester, U.K.: Christian Alternative (2015).
- Onfray, Michel, Atheist Manifesto: The Case Against Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. New York: Arcade Publishing (2011).
- Pelly, Raymond and Peter Stuart, A Religious Atheist? Critical Essays on the Work of Lloyd Geering. Dunedin, New Zealand: Otago University Press (2006).
- Robinson, John, Honest to God. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press (1963).
- Rosenberg, Alex, The Atheist's Guide to Reality. New York: W.W. Norton & Company (2011).
- Ruse, Michael, Atheism: What Everyone Needs to Know. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2015).
- Scientific God, Inc., On Atheist Spirituality (featuring Eleanor Rossinger's work), Scientific God Journal, Vol. 3, No. 7 2012.
- Sire, James and Carl Periano, Deepest Differences: A Christian-Atheist Dialogue. Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press Books (2008).
- Steadman, Chris, Faithiest: How an Atheist Found Common Ground with the Religious. Boston: Beacon Press (2013).
- Stewart, Robert (ed.), The Future of Atheism: Alister McGrath and Daniel Dennett in Dialogue. Minneapolis: Fortress Press (2008).
- Thils, Gustave, A "Non-Religious" Christianity. Station Island, New York: Society of St. Paul (1979).
- Todranki, Gustave, The Secular Search for a New Christ. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press (1969).
- Van Buren, Paul, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel, Based on An Analysis of its Language. London: The Macmillan Company (1963).
- Zuckerman, Phil, Living the Secular Life: New Answers to Old Questions. New York: Penguin books (2014).

ARTICLES

- Anderson, Joel and Radka Antalukoya, "Framing (implicitly) matters: The role of religion in attitudes toward immigrants and Muslims in Denmark," Scandinavian Journal of Psychology 12 (2014) 1-8.
- Baker, Paul and James Cruickshank, "I am happy in my faith: the influence of religious affiliation, saliency, and practice on depressive symptoms and treatment preferences," Mental Health, Religion & Culture 12 (2009) 139-157.
- Bakstrup, Sarah, "Doctor Who: Christianity, Atheism, and the source of sacredness in the Davies Years," Journal of Religion and Popular Culture 26 (2014) 145-146.
- Bezrogov, Vitaly, "Between Stalin and Christ: the Religion Socialization of Children in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia," Forum for Anthropology 5 (2009) 301-328.
- Chapman, Bonaventure, "Religious Atheism and the Beautiful," Dominica (winter 2014) 7-23.
- Connors, Gerard, et al., "A Measure of Religious Background and Behavior for Use in Behavior Change Research," Psychology of Addictive Behavior 10 (1996) 90-96.
- De Botton, Alain, "Can we be religious without God? Alain de Botton on 'atheism 2.0'" Vox Explain the News, <http://www.vox.com/conversations/2016/13172608/alain-de-botton>.
- Fogel, Joshua, et al., "Religious Affiliation and Ethics: Patterns Regarding Belief for Workplace Behavior," Journal of Business Systems, Governance and Ethics 5 (2010) 25-41.
- Goplen, Joanna and E. Ashby Plant, "A Religious Worldview: Protecting One's Meaning System Through Religious Prejudice," Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin 41 (2015) 1474-1482.
- Hertzog, Mark, "Life After God: An Atheist's Religion," UUCSS Sermons, January 24, 1999 <http://www.uucss.org/sermons/uu1999-01-24.html>
- Kennan, William, "Recycling Religion: Lance Armstrong's Postmodern Spirituality of Suffering and Survivorship," Journal of Contemporary Religion 30 (2015) 107-123.
- Lyas, Colin, "On the Coherence of Christian Atheism," Philosophy 45 (1970) 1-19.
- Malesevic-Perovic, Lena, "The relative importance of religious denominations for life satisfaction," Journal of Applied Economics and Business Research 1 (2011) 162-176.
- McGrath, Alister, "Doctrine and Ethics," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 34 (1991) 145-156.
- Miller, Ashley, "The Non-religious Patriarchy: Why Losing Religion Not Meant Losing White Male Dominance," Cross Currents (2013) 2011-226.
- Pomeroy, Kennan, "Going Beyond god and Discovering a Religion," The Journal of Liberal Religion 8 (Winter 2008) 1-8.

- Riswold, Caryn, "Teaching the College Christian Privilege and the Religion Professor," Teaching Theology and Religion 18 (2015) 133-148.
- Ritter, Ryan et al., "Happy Tweets: Christians are Happier, More Socially Connected, and Less Analytical Than Atheists on Twitter," Social Psychological and Personality Science (18 June 2013) <http://spp.sagepub.com/content/early/2013/06/18>.
- Roman, Jonathan, "God, Doubt and Dawkins," European Judaism 41 (2008) 71-78.
- Rosinger, Elemer, "On Atheist Spirituality Part V: Extended Harmony, Atheist Spirituality, Mysticism and Mystery," Scientific God Journal 3 (2012) 680-692.
- Ryan, Mark and Carole Ryan, "Killing god: The Propaganda of His Dark Materials," Christian Research Journal 126 (2003).
- Tietz, J., "Deity Belief: Necessity for Draft Status," Southern California Law Review 38 (1965) 529-539.
- Sessanna, Lorelee, et al., "Measure assessing spirituality as more than religiosity: a methodological review of nursing and health-related literature," Journal of Advanced Nursing (2011) 1677-1694.
- Singer, Alan, "Separation of Church and State Protects Both Secular and Religious Worlds," The Phi Delta Kappan 81 (2000) 462-465.
- Vittachi, Nury, "Scientists discover that atheists might not exist, and that's not a joke," Science 2.0: Scientific Blogging (July 6, 2014) <http://www.science20.com>
- Wright, Jennifer and Ryan Nicols, "The Social Cost of Atheism: How Perceived Religiosity Influences Moral Appraisal," Journal of Cognition and Culture 14 (2014) 93-115.
- Yang, Fenggang, "Between Secularist Ideology and Desecularizing Reality: the Birth and Growth of Religious Research in Communist China," Sociology and Religion 65 (2004) 101-119.