



Help From Unexpected Places

by Dewayne Bryant

Christians have been defending their faith in God for nearly 2,000 years. It is no surprise that books in the defense of the faith have been written by scores of Christian apologists. We might even expect believers to defend Christianity. But several books have appeared in the last couple of years that have come from a rather unexpected group: atheists.

Three works stand out on bookstore shelves as unexpected defenders of Christianity: *An Atheist Defends Religion* by Bruce Sheiman, *The Devil's Delusion* by mathematician David Berlinski, and *Losing Our Religion* by political commentator S.E. Cupp. Each one has strengths and weaknesses, and each takes a different approach. All three, however, are valuable reading for the Christian who would like to see the nonbeliever's defense of Christianity in the theism-atheism debate.

An Atheist Defends Religion

In *An Atheist Defends Religion*, Bruce Sheiman admits, "Self-reflection and critical reasoning were the forces that molded me into an obstinate atheist Being an atheist is not something that I rationally or deliberately chose. I did not think through all the competing belief systems and choose unbelief. It's just something that I *am*."

Like many atheists, Sheiman values religion as a cultural institution and argues that it holds a great deal of benefit for humanity. In a particularly powerful section of his book, he notes that polls demonstrate religious belief accompanies a lower risk of depression, drug abuse and attempted suicide as well as a correlation between religious commitment and well-being, life satisfaction, self-esteem, and lower levels of criminality. He also argues that religion is associated with meaning and purpose, altruism and generosity, optimism and hope, relaxation, fulfillment and healthy lifestyle choices.

The only downside of Sheiman's book is a commitment to Darwinian evolution, which has been opposed in various venues by scientists both Christian and non-Christian. Otherwise, his work is a powerful defense of religious faith.

The Devil's Delusion

The Devil's Delusion is authored by mathematician and agnostic philosopher David Berlinski. He writes in the preface of his book, "I am a secular Jew. My religious education did not take. I can barely remember a word of Hebrew. I cannot pray. I have spent more years than I care to remember in studying mathematics and writing about the sciences. Yet the book that follows is in some sense a defense of religious thought and sentiment. Biblical verses are the least of it."

Berlinski is easily the most intellectually capable of the three, although this by no means indicates that Sheiman and Cupp are inferior authors.

Rather, Berlinski is the best equipped to tackle “new atheism” (a sect of atheism that does not tolerate religion) and its rabid proponents from the perspective of a secular scientist.

Richard Dawkins, who is perhaps the face of militant atheism in the 21st century, receives particular attention in *The Devil’s Delusion*. The title is inspired by Dawkins’ *The God Delusion*, a 400+ page literary embarrassment from an otherwise highly acclaimed evolutionary biologist. Dawkins demonstrates his learned ignorance on virtually every page of his book, and Berlinski takes him to task accordingly.

When recounting one of the speakers at a 2007 conference titled “Beyond Belief: Science, Religion, Reason, and Survival,” Berlinski records that physicist Steven Weinberg stated, “Religion is an insult to human dignity. With or without it you would have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, that takes religion.”

Berlinski, responding with his usual rapier wit, says: “Just *who* has imposed on the suffering human race poison gas, barbed wire, high explosives, experiments in eugenics, the formula for Zyklon B, heavy artillery, pseudo-scientific justifications for mass murder, cluster bombs, attack submarines, napalm, intercontinental ballistic missiles, military space platforms, and nuclear weapons? If memory serves, it was not the Vatican.”

Berlinski exposes new atheism’s insatiable lust for the limelight while deriding their deplorable use of science to support failing arguments. Dawkins and other new atheists such as Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris look down their noses at the religious folk they so despise. It must be quite a shock for them to be treated with disdain not by a religious leader but by a secular thinker who possesses as much scientific credibility as they do.

Losing Our Religion

The final work of the three is S.E. Cupp’s *Losing Our Religion*. Like

Sheiman, Cupp also professes her atheism: “I am an atheist. I have been an atheist for fifteen years. And so my approach to this book insofar as it is a defense of Christianity is not one from within the structure but from outside of it.”

Cupp takes a different angle than the other two authors. She approaches

failed with catastrophic disappointment. Their books are breaths of fresh air in a culture where any expression of biblical faith is scorned, mocked and ridiculed.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus warns His disciples, “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world,

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the issue from a media standpoint. She highlights the media’s particular brand of assault on the Christian faith and the values upon which our country was founded.

One of Cupp’s particular talents is deftly slicing through the hypocrisy of the media. She points out how NBC executives agreed to air *VeggieTales* as long as the signature line, “Remember kids, God made you special and He loves you very much,” was removed, citing the need to keep religion out of their programming. Yet the same network aired a Madonna concert in which she sang while mounted on a cross, wearing a crown of thorns in imitation of the crucifixion.

An unsuspecting reader would think that Cupp was a culturally savvy Christian apologist. Despite her unbelief, Cupp sincerely believes in Christians’ constitutional right to express themselves as they see fit. That in itself is refreshing.

A Faith Worth Defending

In a society that is becoming increasingly intolerant of the Christian faith, we must remember that truth is not determined by an opinion poll or popular appeal. Truth is determined by whether an argument accurately interprets the evidence or correctly represents reality. In the views of Sheiman, Berlinski and Cupp, Christianity’s detractors have not only failed to do so but also have

the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:18-20 ESV).

Despite the criticism, it is clear that Christianity is a worldview worth having. Atheists have come to the defense of the faith, arguing that it is reasonable despite its critics’ claims to the contrary. They have argued that Christianity is beneficial, despite the critics who claim it is destructive. They laud the benefits of religious expression as new atheists make millions of dollars cashing in on their repulsive screeds that grossly misrepresent biblical teaching.

Christians may take heart that even agnostics and atheists have recognized the benefits of faith. At the same time, there is much more to belief than the benefits it provides. It holds the key to eternal life, and it is up to us to make sure that everyone we encounter has the opportunity to hear the name of Jesus. □

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