



r. albert mohler jr.

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atheism REMIX

a Christian confronts the New Atheists

Atheism Remix: A Christian Confronts the New Atheists

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Published by Crossway Books

a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers

1300 Crescent Street

Wheaton, Illinois 60187

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Cover design: Jon McGrath

First printing 2008

Printed in the United States of America

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PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-0498-3

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-0499-0

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Mohler, R. Albert, 1959–

Atheism remix : a Christian confronts the new atheists /
R. Albert Mohler.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-1-4335-0497-6 (hc)

I. Christianity and atheism. I. Title.

BR128.A8M64 2008

261.2'1—dc22

2008014228

LB 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 09 08
14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Introduction

Atheism is not a new concept. Even the Bible speaks of the one who tells himself in his heart, “There is no God.”¹ Atheism became an organized and publicly recognized worldview in the wake of the Enlightenment and has maintained a foothold in Western culture ever since. Disbelief in God became part of the cultural landscape in the 1960s when *Time* magazine published a cover story—“Is God Dead?”—that seemed to herald the arrival of a new secular age.²

Nevertheless, atheists have represented only a small (if vocal) minority of Americans. Surveys estimate that atheists represent less than 2 percent of the population, even as the larger group of “unaffiliated” includes over 15 percent. Atheists have published books, held seminars, presented their views in the media, and honed their points in public debates. As a worldview, atheism is overrepresented among the intellectual elites, and atheists have largely, though not exclusively, talked to their own.

Until now. Get on an airplane, settle in for a flight,

¹Psalm 14:1.

²*Time*, April 8, 1966.

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and observe what other passengers are reading. You are likely to see books representing a new wave of atheism as you look around the cabin. The so-called New Atheists have written bestsellers that have reached far beyond the traditional audience for such books. Books by Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens have spent weeks and months on the best-seller list published by the *New York Times*. Clearly, something is happening.

* * *

The New Atheism is not just a reassertion of atheism. It is a movement that represents a far greater public challenge to Christianity than that posed by the atheistic movements of previous times. Furthermore, the New Atheism is not just another example of marketing an idea in the postmodern age. The New Atheists are, in their own way, evangelistic in intent and ambitious in hope. They see atheism as the only plausible worldview for our times, and they see belief in God as downright dangerous—an artifact of the past that we can no longer afford to tolerate, much less encourage.

They see science as on their side and argue that scientific knowledge is our only true knowledge. They argue that belief in God is organized ignorance, that theistic beliefs lead to violence, and that atheism is liberation. They are shocked and appalled that Americans

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refuse to follow the predictions of the secularization theorists, who had assured the elites that belief in God would be dissolved by the acids of modernity. They have added new (and very important) arguments to the atheistic arsenal. They write from positions of privilege, and they know how to package their ideas. They know that the most important audience is the young, and they are in a position to reach young people with their arguments.

The New Atheists represent a major challenge to the Christian church and to Christian theology. *Atheism Remix* is based upon the W. H. Griffith Thomas Lectures delivered in 2008 at Dallas Theological Seminary. Dr. Griffith Thomas was one of the key founders of Dallas Theological Seminary and a staunch defender of the Christian faith. If alive today, he would undoubtedly see the New Atheism as a theological challenge that calls for our active engagement and most careful thought. He would be right.

I express appreciation to President Mark Bailey and the faculty of Dallas Theological Seminary for the invitation to deliver the 2008 W. H. Griffith Thomas Lectures and to the students for their respectful and interested listening. They, along with the students I see every day at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, represent the generation that cannot avoid engagement with the New Atheism. It is not going to go away any time soon.

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I also want to express appreciation to Greg Gilbert, director of research in my office, who has been of such great assistance in my lectures and writings, and to the many friends and colleagues who have sharpened my thinking on this new challenge.

As always, I am thankful for my wife, Mary, without whose constant support and care none of these things would ever see the light of day, and to our children, Katie and Christopher, who love me and make me laugh.

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