



Article

# The New Atheism and Islam

**William W. Emilsen**

Charles Sturt University

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## Abstract

The rise of the new atheism in the first decade of the twenty-first century is mostly associated with four central figures: Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and the late Christopher Hitchens. Other public intellectuals have identified themselves with the new atheism movement, most notably the literary figures Ian McEwen, Martin Amis, Philip Pullman, Salman Rushdie and ex-Muslim atheists, Ibn Warraq and Ayaan Hirsi Ali. This article argues that the ‘new’ in the new atheists’ writings is not their aggressiveness, nor their extraordinary popularity, nor even their scientific approach to religion, rather it is their attack not only on militant Islamism but also on Islam itself under the cloak of its general critique of religion. The new atheist movement has contributed to a hardening of hostility towards Islam and may well have inflamed relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.

## Keywords

Islam, Islamophobia, literary atheists, new atheism, science and religion, 9/11

The first decade of the third millennium witnessed the emergence of an anti-religious, anti-theist movement known as the ‘New Atheism’.<sup>1</sup> It is primarily a British, American and Australasian phenomenon, confined mainly (though not exclusively) to the English-speaking world. It began with the appearance of four best-selling books against religion by the so-called ‘four horsemen of the anti-apocalypse’: Sam Harris’ *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror and the Future of Reason* (2004), Daniel Dennett’s *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural*

*Phenomenon* (2006), Richard Dawkins’ *The God Delusion* (2006) and the late Christopher Hitchens’ *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (2007). Because of the timing and the similarity of perspective of these works, these four writers are often referred to collectively as the ‘New Atheists’.

Others have willingly embraced the movement and been admitted to the New Atheists’ Hall of Fame. They include the American physicist and astronomer, Victor Stenger, author of two books dealing with atheism: *God: The*

<sup>1</sup> Gary Wolf, ‘The Church of the Non-Believers’, *Wired*, November 2006, [http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.11/atheism\\_pr.html](http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.11/atheism_pr.html), accessed 12 November 2011.

## Corresponding author:

William W. Emilsen

Email: [william@nsw.uca.org.au](mailto:william@nsw.uca.org.au)

*Failed Hypothesis—How Science Shows That God Does Not Exist* (2007) and *The New Atheism: Taking a Stand for Science and Reason* (2009), the French philosophers, Michael Onfray, author of *In Defence of Atheism: The Case Against Christianity, Judaism and Islam* (2005) and André Comte-Sponville, author of *The Little Book of Atheist Spirituality* (2007), and the British philosopher, A. C. Grayling, who has written several popular works advocating atheism, in particular his *Life, Sex and Idols: The Good Life without God* (2003), *Against All Gods: Six Polemics on Religion and an Essay on Kindness* (2007) and his alternative non-religious Bible, *The Good Book: A Secular Bible* (2011).<sup>2</sup>

Alongside these luminaries, adding verve, zest and sometimes spite to the movement, are many of the post 9/11 writings of four contemporary novelists—Ian McEwan, Martin Amis, Philip Pullman and Salman Rushdie—who are also considered part of the movement.<sup>3</sup> McEwan and Amis have written and spoken admiringly of Dawkins, Dennett, Hitchens and Harris on many occasions and much of McEwan's recent novels—*Saturday* (2005) and *On Chesil Beach* (2007)—could even be said to be inspired by new atheist thought. Pullman, Dennett and Grayling have published appreciative essays on Dawkins<sup>4</sup> and Rushdie has come out in public support for Hitchens and contributed an essay titled, “Imagine There's No Heaven” to Hitchens' *The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever* (2007).

Just as the novelists praise the core quartet of the New Atheists, so the New Atheists repay the compliment. For example, in *Darwin's*

*Dangerous Idea* (1995), Dennett spoke out in support of Salman Rushdie when the latter's *Satanic Verses* drew forth a *fatwa* against him by Ayatollah Khomeini. Hitchens, too, at one time sheltered Rushdie when his life was under threat.<sup>5</sup> And more recently, Hitchens' memoir, *Hitch-22* (2011) has a long chapter dealing with his friendship with Salman Rushdie. Hitchens is also close to Martin Amis as evidenced by the dedication to Amis in his collection of essays *Love, Poverty, and War* (2004). What is most striking about the New Atheists and their circle is the way they introduce, review, dedicate, cite, and publicize one another's books with almost incestuous frequency.

Also standing on the edges of the new atheist movement are two ex-Muslim atheists: Ibn Warraq, the *nom de plume* of a scholarly Muslim born in India, whose family moved to Pakistan when he was very young and then migrated to Europe when he was 10. He is the author or editor of several highly critical works on Islam: *The Quest for the Historical Mohammed* (2000), *What the Koran Really Says* (2002), and his wide-ranging collection and provocative essays *Virgins? What Virgins? And Other Essays* (2010).<sup>6</sup> Two of Warraq's books pursue a particular atheist agenda, notably *Why I Am Not A Muslim* (2003), a book once described by Hitchens as his ‘favourite book on Islam’<sup>7</sup> and *Leaving Islam: apostates speak out* (2003) a collection of almost thirty personal testimonies by Muslims who have abandoned their religion. In an essay titled ‘On Becoming English’ Warraq explains that it was the ‘The Rushdie

<sup>2</sup> See also A. C. Grayling, ‘Dawkins and the Virus of Faith’, in *Richard Dawkins: How a Scientist Changed the Way We Think*, ed. Alan Graffen and Mark Ridley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 243–47.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur Bradley and Andrew Tate, *The New Atheist Novel: Fiction, Philosophy and Polemic After 9/11*, (London: Continuum, 2010), 11.

<sup>4</sup> Graffen and Ridley (eds), *Richard Dawkins*, 101–5, 243–47, 270–76.

<sup>5</sup> Hitchens, ‘Blaming Bin Laden First’, in *Love, Poverty, and War: Journeys and Essays* (New York: Nation Books, 2004), 431.

<sup>6</sup> Ibn Warraq (ed.), *Leaving Islam: apostates speak out* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2003); Ibn Warraq (ed. trans.), *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2000); Ibn Warraq, *The Legacy of Jihad: Islamic holy war and the fate of non-believers* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Ibn Warraq, ‘On Becoming English’, in *Virgins? What Virgins?* (Amherst: NY: Prometheus, 2010), 15.

Affair' that finally persuaded him to break with Islam and to write after the manner of Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*.<sup>8</sup>

The other ex-Muslim to proclaim herself an atheist is Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the Somalian author of the two-part memoir *Infidel* (2007) and *Nomad* (2010). The turning point in her journey from Islam to atheism was the assassination of her friend, the Dutch film-maker Theo van Gogh.

While it is clearly a mistake to think of the 'New Atheism' as a single movement and the 'New Atheists' having identical opinions, it is possible to identify two premises running throughout their writings: (i) that belief in God is irrational in an age of science; and (ii) that religion is dangerous, poisonous and evil ('religion poisons everything', says Christopher Hitchens and the world would be better off without it). For Harris, 'Words like "God" and "Allah" must go the way of "Apollo" and "Baal".'<sup>9</sup> And for Richard Dawkins, the most zealous of the New Atheists, God of monotheistic religion is 'a petty, unjust, unforgiving control freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully'.<sup>10</sup>

What then, is 'new' about the New Atheism? Many critics of the movement (some atheists among them<sup>11</sup>) would say, *very little*, that it is

simply a revisiting and popularising of old ideas, that there is nothing remotely original or ground-breaking about 'this vintage brew of eighteenth-century philosophical empiricism, nineteenth-century evolutionary biology and early twentieth-century logical and scientific positivism.'<sup>12</sup> John Gray, Professor of European Thought at the London School of Economics, says bluntly in his powerful and frightening new book, *Black Mass* (2007), that what distinguishes the New Atheism from earlier varieties of non-belief is little more than its 'intellectual crudity'.<sup>13</sup> Alister McGrath, a Christian arch-opponent of the new atheism agrees that this movement has made no new scientific discoveries nor offered any fresh philosophical arguments: old and tired arguments from the past are simply recycled and rehashed. All that is 'new' in McGrath's opinion is 'the aggressiveness of the rhetoric, which often seems to degenerate into bullying and hectoring.'<sup>14</sup>

A more generous reading of the movement, however, would say that the newness consists of the *passion* that the New Atheists bring to their arguments. Certainly, they do not pretend to be neutral observers. They vigorously try to persuade their readers that not only are the central claims of religion false but that the respect given to religion in Western culture is misguided.<sup>15</sup>

A second reason why the movement has been described as 'new' has been the extraordinary popularity of the movement. Its proponents have attracted media attention and their books are best-sellers. Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* went straight to the top of the

<sup>8</sup> Warraq, 'On Becoming English', 32.

<sup>9</sup> Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror and The Future of Reason* (London: Simon & Schuster), 14.

<sup>10</sup> Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam Press, 2006), 51.

<sup>11</sup> See Tom Flynn, 'Why I Don't Believe in the New Atheism', [http://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php?section=library&page=flynn\\_30\\_3](http://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php?section=library&page=flynn_30_3), accessed 12 November 2011. Flynn is the editor of *Free Inquiry* and *The New Encyclopedia of Unbelief* (Prometheus, 2007). See also, Jocelyne Cesari, 'Islamophobia in the West: A Comparison between Europe and the United States', in *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. John L. Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 35–36.

<sup>12</sup> Bradley and Tate, *The New Atheist Novel*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> John Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 189.

<sup>14</sup> Alister McGrath, *The Passionate Intellect: Christian Faith and the Discipleship of the Mind* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010), 149.

<sup>15</sup> Gregory E. Ganssle, *A Reasonable God: Engaging the New Face of Atheism* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 1–2.

bestseller list in Britain and America when it was published in 2006. It was on the *New York Times* Best Seller List for fifty-one weeks and Daniel Dennett's *God: The Failed Hypothesis* made the *New York Times* Best Seller List in March 2007. Christopher Hitchens' *God Is Not Great* has achieved similar levels of success since its publication in 2007. The new atheists are fêted like rock-stars: over two thousand delegates attended the 2010 Global Atheist Convention in Melbourne, Australia, to hear Dawkins, Grayling, Peter Singer, Tamas Pataki and many other prominent atheists speak. The forward planning of an even bigger atheist convention held in Melbourne in 2012 featured all 'Four Horsemen'—Harris, Dennett, Dawkins, and Hitchens.<sup>16</sup>

Tom Flynn, in a 2010 column entitled 'Why I Don't Believe in the New Atheism', offers a variant on this second explanation. Flynn contends that what has been called 'New Atheism' is neither a movement nor new; all that is 'new' in Flynn's estimation is that major publishers have agreed to publish their radical and blistering attacks on religion:

... for the first time, uncompromising atheist writing was coming from big-name publishers and hitting best-seller lists. You could buy it at the airport. In consequence, people who had never before experienced atheist rhetoric got their first exposure to arguments that had formerly been published only by movement presses. ...But it was nothing new. Readers familiar with nineteenth- and twentieth-century freethought literature—which, of course, most people weren't—knew that everything the Horsemen were being praised and condemned for had been done before. ...The triumph of Harris, Dennett, Dawkins, and Hitchens was to take arguments against religion that were long familiar to insiders, brilliantly repackage them, and expose them

to millions who would never otherwise pick up an atheist book.<sup>17</sup>

Victor Stenger proffers a third reason for the newness of the movement: this is that its central proponents write mainly from a scientific perspective. Dawkins is a biologist and Stenger, himself, a physicist and astronomer. Harris is a neuroscientist and Dennett is a philosopher of science who has written almost exclusively on scientific topics. While Hitchens was not a scientist but a journalist, his approach to religion, according to Stenger, is emphatically empirical.<sup>18</sup>

In my view the 'newness' of the New Atheism has very little to do with its in-your-face, aggressive nature, or its popularity, or even its scientific approach to religion; what seems to distinguish it from earlier forms of atheism is the subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) ways it critiques and attacks Islam through its 'scattergun' critique of religion in general. For the new atheists, their general condemnation of religion targets not only Islamic extremism but also Islam because, in the main, they admit to no meaningful distinction between moderate and extremist Islam. More than anything else, in my view, their attack on Islam is what puts the 'new' into the New Atheism. Islam in the new atheist writings is consistently depicted as irrational, immoral and, in its purest form, violent.

The most savage on Islam is Sam Harris. According to Harris, he began writing *The End of Faith* on 12 September 2001 and the book actually begins with a depiction of a young Islamic suicide bomber who destroys himself and twenty other people on a bus.<sup>19</sup> Chapter 4, the central and longest chapter in *The End of Faith*, is titled 'The Problem with Islam'. There Harris selectively chooses verses (*surah*) from

<sup>17</sup> Flynn, 'Why I Don't Believe in the New Atheism'.

<sup>18</sup> Victor J. Stenger, *The New Atheism: Taking a Stand for Science and Reason* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2009), 13.

<sup>19</sup> Harris, *The End of Faith*, 11–12.

<sup>16</sup> A celebration of reason, 13–15 April 2012, 2012 Global Atheist Convention, Melbourne, Australia, <http://www.atheistconvention.org.au>, accessed 12 November 2011.

the Qur'an in an attempt to show that Islam is a religion of the sword, dedicated to permanent *jihad* against the infidels and determined to convert the enemy or kill him.<sup>20</sup>

In conveying the attitude of the Qur'an to unbelievers, Harris makes no attempt at all to mask his contempt not only for radical Islamism but for Muslims in general, and he seems willing to justify any violence, however extreme, to restrict the threat which he thinks Muslims represent. Harris takes no prisoners. On Islam, he says, 'the rise of Islamic fundamentalism' is only a problem because the fundamentals of Islam are a problem'.<sup>21</sup> He sees the figure of the suicide bomber—not as a modern aberration or distortion of Islam—but as the logical conclusion of the Muslim creed: 'Islam, more than any other religion human beings have devised, has all the makings of a thoroughgoing cult of death'.<sup>22</sup> For Harris, Islam is a monstrous anachronism in the modern world. All religions may be equal in the eyes of the new atheists, but *one* it appears is more equal than all the others. Indeed, Harris is quite explicit on this differentiation: the differences between faiths, he maintains, are as relevant as they are unmistakable. It is for this reason, he says, that we 'must now confront Muslim, rather than Jain terrorists, in every corner of the world. Jains do not believe anything that is remotely likely to inspire them to commit acts of suicidal violence against unbelievers. By any measure of normativity we might wish to adopt (ethical, practical, epistemological, economic, etc), there are good beliefs and there are bad ones—and it should be obvious to everyone that Muslims have more than their fair share of the latter'.<sup>23</sup>

Some of Harris' invective may be understandable writing so close to 9/11 but even six years after that dreadful day, Harris, in a second

book called *Letter To A Christian Nation* (2007) continues his bitter assessment of Islam. He explains to readers in his note at the beginning of *Letter To A Christian Nation*, that Christians 'do not fly planes into buildings',<sup>24</sup> and then adds:

The idea that Islam is a "peaceful religion hijacked by extremists" is a fantasy, and is now a particularly dangerous fantasy for Muslims to indulge. It is not at all clear how we should proceed in our dialogue with the Muslim world, but deluding ourselves with euphemisms is not the answer. It is now a truism in foreign policy circles that real reform in the Muslim world cannot be imposed from the outside. But it is important to recognize why this is so—it is so because many Muslims are *utterly deranged by their religious faith*.<sup>25</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Harris argues that it is extremely problematic to distinguish between Muslim 'fundamentalists' and the more moderate mainstream. Both, he says, consider the Qur'an to be the literal and inerrant word of the one true God, and therefore, the only real difference between fundamentalist and moderates or between 'Islamists'<sup>26</sup> and moderates—is the degree to which they see political and military action to be intrinsic to the practice of their faith. 'Moderate Islam—*really* moderate, *really* critical of Muslim irrationality'—says Harris, 'scarcely seems to exist'.<sup>27</sup>

In the aftermath of 9/11 Dawkins, like Harris, also adopted a more militant form of atheism and committed himself to the defence of Western secular liberal values against what he saw as the rising tides of religious fanaticism. And although Dawkins is much more restrained about Islam than Harris, he endorses

<sup>20</sup> Bradley and Tate, *The New Atheist Novel*, 5.

<sup>21</sup> Harris, *The End of Faith*, 148.

<sup>22</sup> Harris, *The End of Faith*, 123.

<sup>23</sup> Harris, *The End of Faith*, 108.

<sup>24</sup> Harris, 'Note to The Reader', *Letter To A Christian Nation*, xiii.

<sup>25</sup> Harris, *Letter To A Christian Nation*, 85.

<sup>26</sup> Harris, *The End of Faith*, 110.

<sup>27</sup> Harris, *The End of Faith*, 111.

Harris' *The End of Faith* approvingly in the foreword<sup>28</sup> and even supplements it with a discussion of the Islamist motives behind the London suicide bombings of July 2005.<sup>29</sup> As with Harris, it is particularly interesting to observe how Dawkins frames *The God Delusion*. In the introductory chapter Dawkins introduces a case study, which, in his view, tellingly illuminates Western society's exaggerated respect for religion, over and above what he calls 'ordinary human respect'. The incident he refers to is the publication of twelve cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in September 2005. What particularly irritated Dawkins was not the burning down of Christian churches in Pakistan, nor the slaughter of Christians in Nigeria, nor the Muslim demonstrators in Britain bearing offensive banners saying: 'Slay those who insult Islam', 'Butcher those who mock Islam', 'Europe you will pay: Demolition is on the way' and, apparently without irony, 'Behead those who say Islam is a violent religion',<sup>30</sup> it was the disproportionate privileging of Islam by British newspapers (in their failure to print the cartoons) that he found most offensive. Dawkins concludes chapter 1 on this very point:

I am not in favour of offending or hurting anyone just for the sake of it. But I am intrigued and mystified by the disproportionate privileging of religion in our otherwise secular societies ... It is in this light of the unparalleled presumption of respect for religion that I make my own disclaimer for this book. I shall not go out of my way to offend, but nor shall I don kid gloves to handle religion any more gently than I would handle anything else.<sup>31</sup>

The revealing thing about Dawkins' *The God Delusion* is that he then proceeds to list sixteen

separate indictments against religion. Kathleen Jones lists them as follows:

1. No suicide bombers
2. No 9/11
3. No 7/7
4. No Crusades
5. No witch-hunts
6. No Gunpowder Plot
7. No Indian partition
8. No Israeli-Palestinian war
9. No Serb/Croat/Muslim massacres
10. No persecution of Jews as 'Christ-killers'
11. No Northern Ireland 'troubles'
12. No 'honour killings'
13. No shiny-suited bouffant-haired televangelists
14. No Taliban to blow up ancient statues
15. No public beheadings of blasphemers
16. No 'flogging of female skin for the crime of showing an inch of it'.<sup>32</sup>

What is significant about the list is that eleven of the sixteen items relate to aggression by Islamic societies (or individuals) and only five refer to aggression in Western societies.<sup>33</sup>

Dawkins' framing of Islam doesn't end there. Towards the end of *The God Delusion*, Dawkins has a section evidently written with considerable emotional force, entitled 'The Mother of All Burkas'.<sup>34</sup> Dawkins detests the *burka*. He describes it as 'an imprisoning black garment', an instrument of oppression of women and claustal repression of their liberty and their beauty. He writes: 'One of the unhappiest spectacles to be seen on our streets today is the image of a woman swathed in shapeless black from head to toe, peering out at the world through a tiny slit.'<sup>35</sup>

<sup>28</sup> See Dawkins' Foreword to Harris' *Letter To A Christian Nation*, v–ix.

<sup>29</sup> Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 1–2.

<sup>30</sup> Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 25.

<sup>31</sup> Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 27.

<sup>32</sup> Kathleen Jones, *Challenging Richard Dawkins* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2007), 134.

<sup>33</sup> Jones, *Challenging Richard Dawkins*, 134–35.

<sup>34</sup> Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 362–74.

<sup>35</sup> Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 362.

Dawkins uses the narrow slit in the face veil (*niqab*) as a metaphor for limited vision and liberty.<sup>36</sup> It is clear that a double meaning is intended when he refers to tearing off the black *burka*: the action is not only a symbol of opening humanity's understanding to the immense complexity of the universe but is also used as a symbol of bringing Islam into the modern world.<sup>37</sup>

As with Harris and Dawkins, the title of Hitchens' book *God Is Not Great* signals what is to come: an attack on Islam. The title is a less-than-subtle re-writing of the Muslim profession of faith 'Allahu Akbar', ('God Is Great'). In *God Is Not Great*, Hitchens seeks to undermine all that is most sacred to Islam. This is seen in chapter 9 provocatively titled, 'The Koran Is Borrowed from Both Jewish and Christian Myths' where he dismisses the Qur'an as 'humanly derived rhetoric' that cannot possibly claim to be 'inerrant', let alone 'final' because of its innumerable contradictions and incoherencies. Moreover, Hitchens claims, there has been no serious attempt to catalogue the discrepancies between the various editions and manuscripts of the Qur'an, and even the most tentative efforts to do so have been met with almost Inquisitional rage.<sup>38</sup> Hitchens even questions whether Islam is really a separate religion at all. For him, it is little more than an 'ill-ranged set of plagiarisms' from earlier books and traditions.<sup>39</sup> In short, Hitchens refutes Islam's core claim to be unimprovable and final as utterly absurd.<sup>40</sup>

In an essay termed 'The Morning After' (that is, the morning after 11 September 2001), Hitchens wrote: '[T]he bombers of Manhattan represent fascism with an Islamic face, [Islam]

is an enemy for life, as well as an enemy of life and there's no point in any euphemism about it. What they abominate about 'the West', to put it in a phrase, is not what Western liberals *don't* like and can't defend about their own system, but what they *do* like about it and must defend: its emancipated women, its scientific inquiry, its separation of religion from the state.'<sup>41</sup>

Martin Amis' views on Islam are typical of the literary new atheists and undoubtedly the clearest expression of Amis' view is set out in his book *The Second Plane* (2008) consisting of twelve essays and two short stories all published since 9/11.

Where Hitchens treats 9/11 as 'a hinge event of history' for Amis, 'September 11 was a day of de-Enlightenment,<sup>42</sup> an attack on morality, 'a massive geohistorical jolt, which will reverberate for centuries'.<sup>43</sup> 'September 11', writes Amis, 'has given to us a planet we barely recognise.' It has 'revealed the long-established but increasingly dynamic loathing of the West in the Islamic nations, a loathing much exacerbated by America's relationship with their chief source of humiliation, Israel.'<sup>44</sup>

Amis' views on Islam are slightly more nuanced than those of scientific new atheists. He claims not to be an Islamophobe but an Islamismophobe, or better an anti-Islamist, because, he argues, a phobia is an irrational fear, and it *is* rational to fear something that says it wants to kill you. Islamism, or champions of militant Islam, Amis continues, are not only misogynists, woman-haters but also misologists—haters of reason.<sup>45</sup>

Somewhat optimistically, Amis believes that Islamism is the death agony of imperial

<sup>36</sup> Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 362.

<sup>37</sup> Jones, *Challenging Richard Dawkins*, 21.

<sup>38</sup> Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (London: Atlantic Books, 2007), 137.

<sup>39</sup> Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, 129.

<sup>40</sup> Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, 136.

<sup>41</sup> Hitchens, 'The Morning After', in *Love, Poverty, and War*, 413.

<sup>42</sup> Martin Amis, *The Second Plane; September 11: Terror and Boredom* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 13.

<sup>43</sup> Amis, *The Second Plane*, 22.

<sup>44</sup> Amis, *The Second Plane*, 22.

<sup>45</sup> Amis, *The Second Plane*, 19.

Islam: 'Islamism is the last wave—the last convulsion.'<sup>46</sup> But like the rest of the new atheists, there is slippage between Islamism and Islam; 'Millennial Islamism', Amis writes, 'is an ideology superimposed upon a religion—illusion upon illusion. It is not merely violent in tendency. Violence is all that is there.'<sup>47</sup> And again, 'All religions, unsurprisingly, have their terrorists: Christian, Jewish, Hindu, even Buddhist. But we are not hearing from those religions. We are hearing from Islam...'.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Amis, *The Second Plane*, 80.

<sup>47</sup> Amis, *The Second Plane*, 89.

<sup>48</sup> Amis, *The Second Plane*, 49–50.

It is probably unhelpful to accuse the new atheists of Islamophobia because the term itself is disputed and has often been used to suppress discussion. Nevertheless, it is clear that the new atheists' strategy of attacking all religions, or expressions of religion, as a cover for criticising not only militant Islam but Islam itself has contributed to anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim sentiments throughout the Western world. The new atheists' hostility towards Islam verges on cultural and racial supremacy and ignores the fact that millions of Muslims throughout the world (including in the so-called West) live peaceful and compassionate lives. Although the new atheists may not explicitly target Muslim people, their hostility towards Islam has led to a general hardening of non-Muslim/Muslim relations.

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### APAPACY FOR EVERYONE?

James F. Puglisi (ed.), *How Can the Petrine Ministry be a Service to the Unity of the Universal Church?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2010. \$40.00/£26.99. pp. 379. ISBN: 978-0-8028-4862-8).

In this comprehensive collection, twenty-one ecumenical voices offer approaches and directions in aid of reconciling Christians with a renewed office of the papacy. In many ways, this book moves the ecumenical dialogue about the papacy forward. It does so creatively but with deft attention to various and conflicting points of view. Many of the voices will be recognised immediately, such as Geoffrey Wainwright (Methodist), Walter Cardinal Kasper (Roman Catholic), Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon (Eastern Orthodox) and Eero Huovinen (Lutheran). Others are lesser known, but all contributors are serious-minded ecumenists with long experience in both academic theology and the life of the Church. This book grew out of the 'Farfa Project'; a long term study of the role of the Bishop of Rome in relation to Christian unity under the auspices of the International Bridgettine Centre in Farfa Sabina. Dogmatic, theological and historical issues have been studied in some detail as a concrete practice of discernment following John Paul II's call for fraternal reflection on how the role of the Pope might be reformed at the service of all Christians in *Ut unum sint*. Despite John Paul II's magnanimous and surprising gesture, few theologians have attempted to answer his request. If nothing else, this book shows why the most interesting proposals regarding ecclesial unity with the Roman episcopate have grown from the organic conversations and official dialogues between Rome and Lutheran churches.

Individual voices might be creative, faithful and rigorous, but the general trend in Western Christian churches has been to navigate away from ecclesial unity. On the other hand, Eastern Orthodoxy offers a perplexing confluence of possibilities, both positive and negative. As these pages show, there are times when theologians are far more radically disposed to ecclesial creativity than either pastors or the general Christian population. For evidence of why this book is so helpfully engaging, one need look no further than Pope Benedict XVI's journey to Germany in September 2011. It is not only the home of John Paul II's immediate successor and close collaborator, but also that of Luther and the Reformation. Theology and the concrete problems of disunity owe each other close attention and that is provided here. In dialogue it seems, some historical conflicts may find a constructive way forward after all.

NIGEL ZIMMERMANN

School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh

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