

False and Dangerous?

Mindful of the God-professing but war-making American president, the faith-inspired atrocity of 9/11, the gay-bashing (and sometimes gay) ministers and politicians, the religious opposition to medical stem cell research, and the

science-denigrating creationists,

many of you, my

secular friends,

understandably have had it with religion. In today's world, believing in God strikes you as an irrational delusion and a social toxin.

You may not vilify religion with the ferocity of the new atheists, but you welcome their exposing religion's inanities, superstitions, and hypocrisies. You may wince when religion-despiser Richard Dawkins (in *The God Delusion*) calls Mother Teresa "sanctimoniously hypocritical" and mocks Jews who "nod maniacally towards a wall." You may know better than to join

Truth springs from argument
amongst friends.

—ATTRIBUTED TO DAVID HUME

Dawkins in savaging religion by associating it with its worst extremes, such as homophobic nut case Fred Phelps and self-appointed God-channel Pat Robertson. You may even welcome Martin Luther King Jr.'s faith-based justice, Jimmy Carter's faith-based peacemaking, and Barack Obama's faith-based civility.

But with images of yesteryear's crusades and witch hunts and today's suicide bombers and religious tribalisms, you sympathize with Sam Harris' assertion (in *Letter to a Christian Nation*) that religion is "both false and dangerous." You nod when Christopher Hitchens (in *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*) views religion as "violent, irrational, intolerant, allied to racism and tribalism and bigotry, invested in ignorance and hostile to free inquiry, contemptuous of women and coercive toward children."

Mindful of the example of Jesus, a radical critic of the religion of his day, this letter responds, first, by affirming many of your indictments of religion, which has indeed often been associated with idiocy and evil. Throughout history, people have been eager to domesticate God, to fashion and worship golden calves, to justify their own thoughts and actions by identifying them with a supposed divine will. If skeptics identify irrational images of God and nature, so much the better for their skepticism. This letter responds, second,

by indicating how many of us “dyed-in-the-wool faith-heads” (to accept Professor Dawkins’ aspersion) nevertheless find a progressive, biblically rooted, “ever-reforming” faith to be reasonable, meaningful, hopeful, inspiring, science-affirming, and profoundly humane.