



THE DAWKINS LETTERS

CHALLENGING ATHEIST MYTHS DAVID ROBERTSON

CHRISTIAN
FOCUS





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INTRODUCTORY LETTER TO THE READER

Dear Reader,

The book you are reading is a collection of open review letters written in response to Professor Richard Dawkins in the winter of 2006/7 concerning his book *The God Delusion*.¹ Richard Dawkins is a brilliant and well-known British scientist. He is the Charles Simonyi Professor of the Public Understanding of Science at the University of Oxford and one of the best popularisers of science. However, in recent years he has become better known as Britain's most famous atheist. His most recent works have taken an increasingly strident and militant anti-religious position, his previous book being *A Devil's Chaplain*, which is a collection of essays many of which attack religious beliefs,² being followed by this, his most important work.

The God Delusion has hit the American and British markets at a time when religion is never far from the front pages. For those who grew up in the 1960s thinking that they were witnessing the death throes of religion it has been something of a revelation and concern that the 'march of progress' seems to have been impeded by

1. Bantam Press (2006)

2. Weidenfeld and Nicholson (2003)





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a resurgence of 'irrational' religion and superstition. There is considerable worry that 9/11 and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism is being matched by a rise in Christian fundamentalism. In Europe this is seen by many as being a significant motivating factor in the 'War on Terror'. In the US there appears to be the beginnings of a backlash against the perceived power of the Christian Right. It is into this climate of hostility, religious confusion and fear that Dawkins' clarion call to atheists to 'come out' and organise is addressed. It is a message that is being welcomed by many and is causing considerable interest. *The God Delusion* has been on the New York Times bestseller list for several months and is well on its way to becoming a million seller in Britain. This despite a significant number of hostile and negative reviews (by no means all of them from religious protagonists). It is a powerful, well-written book which despite its many weaknesses is having a considerable influence.

It is also generating a response. Alister McGrath and his wife, Joanna, have published *The Dawkins Delusion?*³ in response. Many articles, newspaper columns and reviews have already been written. So why add to them with this small book? There have been a number of academic responses to the various accusations made by Dawkins and I am sure that there will be more. However, for many the damage will have been done and those who do not read academic books will still be left with the impressions and the myths. On the other hand there will be those who from a religious perspective, have a kind of knee jerk reaction and respond to Dawkins' vehemence in kind. Whilst this may appeal to those in their own

3. *The Dawkins Delusion?* SPCK (2007)



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constituencies, it is unlikely to do anything other than reinforce the impression that religious people are deluded. And of course there will be many who think this should just be left alone and ignored. After all, is anything ever settled by argument? I suspect that you are not in the latter grouping, otherwise you would not be reading this book.

Given that there have been and will be many responses, why add to them with this collection of letters? I guess the answer is simply that many people will not have the time, inclination or money to read about every single subject that Dawkins addresses. My aim is to present one person's response to Dawkins and to do so from a wide and personal perspective. My aim is not to convert, nor to insult, nor even to defend. Rather it is to challenge some of the basic myths that Dawkins uses and encourages in his book, in order that you may think and consider these things for yourself. If you are interested in reading about or even discussing these immensely important subjects further, then at the end you will find a reading list and some suggestions.

A word about the style of these letters. Some will consider that they are too angry, others that they are not angry enough; some wonder whether humour is appropriate, others will ask, 'what humour?!' It will be helpful to remember that these are personal letters, not an academic discourse, nor an exercise in English grammar.

I am deeply grateful to those who have read and commented on the letters (the wounds of a friend are faithful!). In particular I would like to thank Dr Elias Medeiros, Bill Schweitzer, Dr Grant Macaskill, Dr Iain



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D. Campbell, Gary Aston, Dr Deuan Jones, David Campbell, Dr Sam Logan, Will Traub, Dr Cees Dekker, Nigel Anderson, Dr Phil Ryken, Iver Martin, Alex Macdonald, Alastair Donald and Dr Ligon Duncan. Whether scientists, philosophers or theologians, British, American or European you have all provoked, encouraged and stimulated. I am especially grateful to my editor, Dr Bob Carling, whose patience and suggestions have been invaluable. The final responsibility for what is written, including any errors or misjudgements, is, of course, mine.

I am not a scientist, and I am not a well-known Oxford scholar with an international reputation. There are many people who will be able to go into detail and answer Dawkins' many accusations in greater depth than this book even attempts. Some of my own personal background comes across in the letters but perhaps at this stage it will be helpful for you to know that I am a 44-year-old minister in a Presbyterian Church in Scotland. Having been brought up on a farm in the Highlands of Scotland, I studied history at the University of Edinburgh and then theology at the Free Church College. I have been a minister for 20 years, 14 of them in the city of Dundee. I am a Christian minister with a deep interest in what Dawkins calls the cultural *zeitgeist* – the way our culture is going. I am a frequent visitor to the USA and Europe with a particular interest in bringing the Good News, the Gospel, to our post-Christian society. I believe that the Gospel is something that is relevant and vital for all people in all cultures at all times and it has been my privilege to see people from many different backgrounds come to know, love and have their lives changed by Jesus Christ.





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As a deeply committed Christian I am disturbed by the attacks that Dawkins makes on God and the Bible, and astonished that his attacks are taken so seriously. I believe that he is appealing not to people's intelligence and knowledge but rather to their ignorance. This series of letters is presented to the reader in order to challenge some of the atheist myths that Dawkins taps into and feeds. Each letter deals with a chapter of the book and each highlights at least one atheist myth. I call them atheist myths because they are beliefs that are widely held or assumed without necessarily having been thought through or evidenced.

If you are a Christian then I presume you are reading this because you want to think about some of the issues involved and like me want to reflect on how your faith fits into modern society. If you are not yet a Christian (or you are unsure, or a follower of another faith) I hope that you will benefit from reading these letters. My prayer is that you will be stimulated, challenged, provoked and most of all drawn to consider the claims of Jesus Christ.

Finally, I would like to thank my congregation St Peter's Free Church, for their love, support and understanding over the years. Likewise I thank my wife and best friend, Annabel, and our children, Andrew, Becky and Emma Jane who are constant reminders to me of the grace and goodness of God.

This book is dedicated to the glory of God and in memory of the many millions who lost their lives in the wars and injustices of the Failed Atheist 20th Century.

David A. Robertson
Dundee 2007

