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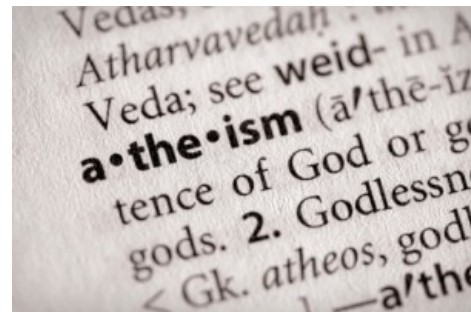
## Thank God for the New Atheists?

*Give Michael Dowd credit for reminding us where the rejection of biblical Christianity inevitably leads.*

**Tuesday, August 10, 2010**

Michael Dowd argues that Christians should thank God for the New Atheists. A self-styled “evangelist” for evolution, Dowd recently preached a sermon in Oklahoma City in which he called for nothing less than a rejection of biblical Christianity and the embrace of a spirituality rooted in an embrace of evolution and a rejection of the supernatural.

A few weeks ago, a reporter called me for comment after Dowd had made a similar argument on his Web site, “ThankGodforEvolution.com.” In more recent days, Dowd has responded directly to my comments. Without doubt, his argument deserves a closer look.



In his 2007 book, *Thank God for Evolution*, Dowd recounts that he, along with his wife, Connie Barlow, decided in 2002 to go on the road as “evolutionary evangelists.” As he explains, “We offer a view of our collective evolutionary journey that frees the imagination, touches the heart, and leaves people wanting more.” An ordained minister of the United Church of Christ and a graduate of Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary (now Palmer Theological Seminary), Dowd now finds his passion in spreading his message of “the epic of evolution” or “the Great Story.”

In his book, Dowd makes clear his rejection of biblical Christianity. He rejects the notion of a personal God. To the contrary, his concept of God is more metaphorical than metaphysical. “When I say ‘God,’ I’m not talking about something or someone that can be believed in or not believed in,” he explains. “I’m talking about the Ultimate Wholeness of Reality, seen and unseen — the whole shebang — which is infinitely more than anything we can know, think, or imagine.”

He rejects the authority of Scripture and embraces scientific knowledge. “New truths no longer spring fully formed from the traditional founts of knowledge,” he asserts. “Rather, they are hatched and challenged in the public arena of science. This is the realm of *public revelation*.”

Dowd rejects the biblical concepts of sin and forgiveness. “Let’s just say our sins and failings can be used as compost for new growth,” he offers.

Those who reject or resist the claims of naturalistic evolution hold to a “flat-earth faith.” The Bible, he insists, must give way to the “public revelation” of science.

In the book, Dowd claimed to bring science and religion together, though in the end the religion seems to be science itself.

Now, in his more recent offerings, Dowd is making waves by celebrating the rise of the “New Atheists” such as Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris. In his Oklahoma City message, he proclaimed his gratitude for the New Atheists, acknowledging “a huge shift” in his understanding of God.

He gushes that the New Atheists “have come to our rescue,” but that “rescue” is an escape from biblical Christianity, and even from any belief in the supernatural. In his view, the God of the Bible is neither believable nor good.

Confidence in the Bible is misplaced and dangerous, he insists: “Ancient, unchanged scriptural stories and doctrinal declarations are inadequate guidance for meeting modern challenges.”

The word “God,” he proposes, must be continually updated in light of scientific knowledge. The God portrayed in the Bible no longer makes sense. “God is not a person,” he avers, “God is a personification of one or more deeply significant dimensions of reality.”

Furthermore, the God of the Bible is immoral, he declares. Dowd describes the God of the Bible as “brutal, cruel, vindictive, and genocidal.” But, he claims, the New Atheists have now come to rescue us from such beliefs. “Few things are more important at this time in history than for religious peoples of all backgrounds and orientations to heed what the New Atheists are saying,” he chided.

The New Atheists, with their assertive and aggressive atheism, are true prophets who are forcing modern people to “get real” as they abandon biblical Christianity. Those enlightened by the New Atheists will “get their guidance from humanity’s common creation story and teach and preach the discoveries of science as God’s word.”

When asked by a reporter if Dowd’s views amount to heresy, I responded by saying that Dowd’s proposals actually give heresy a bad name. Heresies, I explained, are efforts to redefine the Christian faith in ways that are often subtle as well as toxic. There is no subtlety to Dowd’s total rejection of theism, the supernatural, and any belief in a personal God. His embrace of anti-supernaturalism is total and energetic.

In a response, Dowd expressed sympathy for my lamentable ignorance and backwardness. “But time marches on,” he warned. “Like it or not, believe it or not, evolution happens.”

In a telling sentence, Dowd revealed his near total animus to classical Christianity: “In an ever-evolving cosmos, ‘orthodoxy’ is a recipe for either extinction or irrelevance.”

“I certainly don’t expect Dr. Mohler and others like him to let go of mythic beliefs to embrace evidential knowledge,” he explained. “But I’m betting my life that his grandchildren (and theirs) will find Christianity 2.0 more appealing and soul-nourishing than Christianity 1.0.”

“Time, of course, will tell,” he concluded.

In his message, preached to three liberal churches in Oklahoma City, Dowd told of the day in September of 2009 that he learned he had an aggressive form of cancer. “If I have only one message left to communicate to the world, what would it be?” he wondered. His answer: “Preach the New Atheists as God’s prophets.”

I regret to learn of Michael Dowd’s cancer, but my concern for him is far more urgently focused on his malignant beliefs. In his own very effective way, Dowd clarifies the theological and biblical costs of embracing the evolutionary worldview. In describing himself as an evolutionary evangelist, he underlines the fervor of his cause and the inevitable collision between evolutionary theory and biblical Christianity. In sharing his sense that preaching the New Atheists as the prophets of God is his supreme calling, he points us to what is ultimately at stake.

We are engaged in a great battle for ideas that Christians understand to be a battle for hearts, minds, and souls. Dowd and his fellow evangelists for evolution are certain that they own the future, and that biblical Christianity will simply fade and disappear. “Ours is a time of space telescopes, electron microscopes, supercomputers, and the worldwide web,” he asserts. His conclusion: “This is not a time for parsing the lessons given to a few goatherds, tentmakers, and camel drivers.”

Well, give Michael Dowd credit for reminding us where the rejection of biblical Christianity inevitably leads.

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[www.twitter.com/AlbertMohler](http://www.twitter.com/AlbertMohler).

Michael Dowd, "[Thank God for the New Atheists!](#)," A message delivered in Oklahoma City, OK, August 1-7, 2010. Text available [here](#). [Pdf file]

Michael Dowd, "[Giving Heresy a Bad Name!](#)," *The Evolutionary Evangelist*, August 8, 2010.

Michael Dowd, *Thank God for Evolution: How the Marriage of Science and Religion Will Transform Your Life and Our World*, Plume, 2007.

For my book on the New Atheists, see *Atheism Remix: A Christian Confronts the New Atheism*, Crossway, 2008.

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