

ANSWERING THE NEW CS LEWIS AND HIS DEFENCE OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

A SURVEY OF ALISTER MCGRATH BOOK, MERE THEOLOGY (SPCK, London, 2010)

Alister Mc Grath is a popular Christian writer in the vein of C S Lewis. He writes in defence of the faith. He is heavily overrated as the following quote shows where he claims that truth does not matter. "Hopelessly overstated arguments that once seemed so persuasive - such as 'science disproves God' - have lost their credibility. Anyway, our culture's criterion of acceptability is not 'Is it right?' but 'Does it work?' And the simple fact is that religious belief works for many, many people, giving direction, purpose and stability to their lives ...". It works for some not many. And are we to invent all the religions we want to as long as they work? People think a lot of things work when they don't. Think of the terrible things they do with their vote! Mc Grath plainly does not care that once truth is demoted justice soon ends up in trouble.

Page 127, we see this man, McGrath, who knows the Bible extremely well telling a shameless lie about Jesus Christ. He claimed that Jesus never carried out any form of violence. His Jesus was at the receiving end of violence and was a man of pure peace. He upholds the example of the Amish who got great healing by forgiving all desire for revenge and violence to give only forgiveness to the gunman who murdered five Amish schoolgirls. How people who have no concern for justice that restraints and controls the criminal, justice that protects the innocent, but who endorse forgiveness so that they will persevere their inner peace could be a good healthy example I do not know!

Page 129 states that if there is no God, then there is no reason why I cannot commit murder as long as I am sure I will not get caught.

Translation: I am a Christian. God forbids me to murder and I won't do it because he forbids it. If I do things to hurt others it doesn't matter that it hurts them. It only matters that God disapproves. To hell with those who do good because they want to see others happy.

And why can't some reason, "If there is no God then there is no reason why I cannot commit murder even if I do get caught"?

Page 130 deals with Dawkins blind spot about atheists who would raze Mecca and nice Churches to the ground. He thinks that a religion tends to destroy shrines of other religions when it comes to power but an atheist regime wouldn't do such a thing. Atheist authorities had the University Church of Leipzig destroyed in 1968. This Church was built in the thirteenth century and has been described as a masterpiece. The authorities didn't want it there because they wanted to name the area it occupied after Karl Marx.

An atheist who is confident that he is right will not feel the need to persecute. Religion however says that God's rights come first and we are biased towards rebelling against him therefore we need to be protected from influences that take us away from him such as paganism or other religions. Which philosophy logically leads to the destruction of much religious heritage?

Atheist regimes can take on religious dogmatic traits - totalitarianism based on atheism did that to the Church in Leipzig not atheism as such.

Dawkins said that an atheist would not destroy the building. If an atheist regime does it, that is different. It does not mean that any individual atheist would do it.

Page 132 complains that Dawkins didn't seem to realise that once people stop believing in God they make gods out of values such as liberty, equality etc. They forbid questioning of these values and become intolerant and sometimes violently opposed to those who dare to question.

Now why is honouring God important? Is it because he deserves it or because honouring somebody so good is inspirational for us and offers us something to aspire to? God religion says its both. If we honour God because he deserves it, then the more evidence or proof we have for his existence the better. If belief in God makes us tend to imitate him in his virtue then the more evidence or proof for his existence the better.

Take liberty as an example.

If the atheist freethinker can tend to be extremist about promoting liberty, this tendency should be stronger in one who thinks that God somehow is virtue and is liberty.

The atheist freethinker can tend to think that liberty deserves to be strongly promoted, but this tendency should be stronger and more extremist in one who teaches that God and this virtue are somehow the same.

If the atheist can be fanatical and go too far in upholding the virtue of liberty the believer will be worse especially if he thinks God represents liberty and to honour it is to give God what he deserves.

The law of the land is necessarily opposed to the questioning of values of liberty and equality and human dignity - eg you cannot defend racism or you will end up in jail.

McGrath should know that most unbelievers in God do not make gods out of things such as freedom and equality to the point that they would do deliberate harm to implement them. Such evil would be counter-productive.

It is interesting that the book never complains about Dawkins' view that science has no way of telling us what actions are ethical and what are not.

A good person is a person who does good.

Morality and ethics are the same thing. A moral person is a person who keeps moral laws. Morality is a form of law. Real law commands that there be a price for breaking it. Morality then is different from goodness though it is based on goodness.

Science cannot tell us what is ethical but it can tell us what is good. If science did not see consistent thinking as good it would not be science.

Page 133 says that Dawkins is right to say that religion which leads to the formation of in-groups and out-groups - hey I'm part of this religion and you are not - can, in theory, contribute to violence along with other factors. McGrath notes that Dawkins himself has made an in-group - his atheists - who are against the believers who are the out-group. McGrath would agree that Jesus made an in-group but he claims that this in-group was expected to love the out-group.

Dawkins could urge love for the out-group too. He says religion is evil so clearly he implies that believers need to be lovingly rescued from it.

If atheism is correct, then it cannot be condemned for being an in-group. If groups can lead to violence merely by the fact that they are groups, only groups based on lies and illusion must be condemned. It is not the right in-groups fault that there are wrong in-groups.

Page 136, he says that some unbelievers regard humanity as its own rational and moral authority and then contradict this by condemning religion as the opponent of true rationality and true concern for our moral development. He says it is inconsistent to argue that religion is evil, to see it also as a mere human invention and to argue that the human beings that created it are rational and moral!

Since when did any atheist think that all human beings are rational? It is a tiny minority that make religion. We are our own rational and moral authority and if we abuse these that does not prove we have no authority but proves that we abuse it.

Page 137, he quotes Michael Shermer who wrote that religion cannot be categorised as unambiguously good or evil. He says he quotes him as evidence of a freethinker who knows that religion is not all bad. McGrath then notes that religion is not the only thing that can lead to violence and cruelty. He lists politics, race, ethnicity and of course aggressive atheism that refuses to learn from religion.

The answer is that organised religion is unnecessary and therefore it is an irresponsible risk to be part of it. Also, Christianity is an example of the many organised religions that urge that the law of the state must be opposed and overthrown if it contravenes the rules of the religion. For example, Christians are to continue baptising babies even if the state declares this illegal. The underlying attitude is that religious rules take precedence.

Page 137 also states that both religion and science can spawn monsters. McGrath correctly says that something should not be condemned because it is being abused. Only what is good can be abused.

We must however note that it is the abuse of science that spawns monsters. We need science so the risk is justified. But do we need religion? Where are the people who died because they couldn't get a religion? Religion as an organised entity is unnecessary and therefore nobody can excuse its cruelties or excesses by saying it is merely being abused.

Page 145, he writes that the New Atheists claim that religion depends on beliefs for which there is no evidence. He finds

this hypocritical for these atheists believe that human beings will become better than they are - an idea for which there is no evidence. We might all be dead next week if there is a nuclear war or a bad enough nuclear accident.

If I am optimistic about the human potential to improve that says something about me. It says I see myself improving and thus I am easily able to believe and hope that others will improve too. McGrath has the audacity to slam that as hypocrisy. Thus he proves that he is not the big supporter of morality and goodness that he pretends to be.

Who says the atheist has to believe we will get better? What is wrong with saying you don't believe we will get better or that we will not get better as long as you hope we will improve? Maybe believer or unbeliever, hoping is all I am doing?

If McGrath believes that we will get better then he better accuse himself of hypocrisy!

If an atheist perceives that people on the whole are better than they used to be he or she is not to be accused of blind faith for believing that this progress will continue.

Every main point made in the book contains lies and distortions. The book helps use see how Christianity is nonsense.