

New Atheism: An Unreasonable Religion?

As a professional “minister of religion” can I say this: I know religion when I see it.



The so-called “new atheism” is religion. Articles of faith, surrounded by dogma, expressed in creedal statements with an embryonic liturgical leadership. And a growing intolerance for those of differing views that borders on the maniacal.

[Update: Before this becomes too much flamebait – please note that I am talking about the “*new atheism*” as a movement, not *atheism* as a concept or philosophy]

At least that’s what seems to be apparent at the recent Global Atheist Convention. One report notes:

It was superfluous for speaker after speaker to point out that believers are deluded fantasists who believe in a magic friend who does magic tricks, because for almost everyone at the conference that was an article of faith already.

Many there would be horrified at how similar it was to evangelical meetings I have covered, down to the bouffant-haired televangelist prototype in Atheist Alliance International president Stuart Bechman, who was master of ceremonies. Every jibe brought a burst of applause – all that was missing was the “hallelujahs”.

Another report from this week’s Global Athiest Convention

includes this:

Melbourne atheist philosopher Tamas Pataki attracted little applause for suggesting the organised atheist movement was taking on the appearance of a religion "with its priests, apostles and disciples, and this is the worst that could happen".

Bp. John Harrower has also commented.

I know it is subjective perception. But I find it very difficult to see Dawkins et al as anything other than sneering academics engaged in oratorical autophilia. Which is fine, and has a place in society... is a voice that needs to be heard. But when intellectual narcissism aspires to a societal dominance it is time to give voice to some level of disagreement.

I agree with the National Times article above:

We are all enriched when people think through serious issues rather than inheriting parental or cultural assumptions, and when atheists advocate a view of a better society they must be taken seriously. By implication, of course, they must extend the same courtesy...

When it comes to secularism, they have more support than perhaps they realise. Many Christians and agnostics support secularism, as long as it is understood as a voice for all in which none is privileged, rather than the removal of any religious voice from the public arena (which would be undemocratic).

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