

Notes on
god is not great
Book Author: Christopher Hitchens
Notes Author: William Gasarch

I read this book right after reading *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World* by Tom Hollad. That book has a more positive view and I will sometimes allude to it.

Here is the point of the Dominion book:

Dominion Book argument FOR Christianity

Christianity preached that we should help the poor, treat slaves nicely, treat women with dignity (for example no rape, no infidelity), and treat foreigners with dignity. *We forget how radical these ideas were at the time.* The Christian Church has been absolutely awful in following its own dictates (Trump was sent by God as a test- and the American evangelical community failed.) However, when one judges the Church one is USING the very morals Christianity set up in the first place. This is the very-long-term-argument for Christianity having a benefit for society. (MY COMMENT: The book was only about Christianity; however, I wonder if there is also a benefit, very long term, for Islam. For Jews there is some mild benefit in that the Old Testament does talk about being nice to strangers, though even in the Old Testament they often violate that.)

1 Putting in Mildly

Hitchens has a childhood memory of a teacher saying that God exists since he created nature to have the kind of colors that are the most restful for humans to see. Hitchens disagreed (at a young age) as he thought that humans evolved to have colors that are needed for nature. This is typical of arguments in this book: Hitchens has a definite and intelligent point, but how nature and humans co-evolved is a complicated issue. Having said that, I suspect he is right.

Hitchens tells of a school master who essentially said that Religion is good for you even if its false. The school master didn't say it that boldly and probably didn't realize that he was saying that. Hitchens also points out that the school master was a bit of a sadist and a closeted homosexual. Why is that in there? It has nothing to do with the argument. This is also typical- while making an intelligent argument Hitchens will gratuitously

say something unkind about an opponent that is irrelevant to the point. If a critic of the book started out by saying *The overweight bisexual divorced Hitchens claims...* then we would be equally unfair.

The teacher and the schoolmaster gave bad arguments for God. I agree. But Hitchens is giving a straw-man arguments. To be fair, (a) I think these stories are here to tell us Hitchens influences that lead him to his point of view, and (b) he later gives much better arguments.

The school-master story he expands on with other people. Hitchens says that people who say, implicitly or explicitly, that Religion gives comfort even if its false are bad friends giving false comfort. This is a complicated question to which he gives a simplistic opinion. If I lie to a friend but that lie makes them feel better, is that bad of me? Am I being a false friend? There are times I should and times I shouldn't.

Hitchens claims that Religion is man-made and people who think its the word of God and that they understand it are arrogant. While TRUE that people have done STUPID and HARMFUL things because they believe, this does not prove that Religion is man-made. Sloppy arguments.

2 Religion Kills

2.1 Wars and Such

This chapter has many many true examples of people killing because of their belief in a particular religion. But people also kill for other reasons and he does not do a fair comparison. Even so, I will NOW say what he COULD have said to bolster his argument, and also what I read in the Dominion book.

The Counter Argument is that many Countries had wars that also killed a lot of people, so why blame Religion in particular. I will come back to this in the chapter *An Objection Anticipated*

2.2 Salmon Rushdie

When a Fatwa (death sentence) was declared on Salmon Rushdie, Hitchens claims:

In considered statements, the Vatican, the archbishop of Canterbury, and the chief Sephardi Rabbi of Israel all took a stand of sympathy—to the Ay-

atollah.

I looked this up and I could not find anything like this on the web. Some thoughts on this

1. Unlike the Pope, the web is not infallible :-)
2. Who really said this, and what kind of sympathy did they give? This matters to see how serious and bad this is.
3. I DID find that many non-religious people also had sympathy for the Ayatollah. This is part of a problem of modern society: Liberals want to be TOLERANT of other lifestyles, but what do you do if the other lifestyle is abhorrent?
4. Also some people had sympathy for the Ayatollah as a way of saying they object to how America and Europe meddled with Mid East Countries (e.g., overthrowing the first president of democratic Iran in the 1950s).
5. A subtle point: England and other countries in Europe have anti-blasphemy laws that are now mostly NOT enforced, but when they were it was ONLY against people who criticize Christianity.

So, as is often the case for this book, one needs a more scientific study of what happened.

While I am here I will pick on point (3) and refer to the Dominion book..

When England RULED over India there is a religious practice that they DID NOT ALLOW the people to do. How horrible of them! What was the practice:

When a husband died the tradition from their faith was to BURN the widow alive.

WHY did England decide this was a bad idea? From their Christian faith.

Was England right to interfere with their practice? I think even the most religious-tolerant person would say YES.

2.3 Misc

Other tidbits from this chapter which oddly enough don't really belong in this chapter (bad editing?)

1. Mother Theresa campaigned against Divorce being legal in Ireland, yet later told her friend Prince Diana that she hoped she was happy after her divorce. Hypocrisy.

Side Note: Queen Elizabeth was brought up thinking that divorce is bad and for royalty to divorce is really really bad. She eventually consented to allowing her children to divorce (3 out of the 4 did. The one that didn't is the youngest, Edward, and the one most out of the limelight.) She WAS troubled and UPSET about all of this. I would NOT call her a hypocrite. And indeed- I don't know the timing but I suspect that the divorce of Charles and Diana led to it being easier to divorce in the Church of England.

2. Hitchens claims that there would be peace in Israel if it wasn't for the ultra religious Jews and the Ultra Religious Muslim. That is a simplification beyond belief, and is probably wrong.

3 A Short Digression on the Pig

Not much in this chapter. Speculative and not that interesting.

Hitchens thinks that the Jewish and Islam prohibition on eating pig-meat is NOT a health thing—Trichinosis is NOT common in hot climates. Hitchens speculates that it's because pigs are a very human-like animal. They are intelligent.

Hitchens also says that Muslim Zealots in Europe are demanding that *The Three Little Pigs* and *Miss Piggy* are removed from the gaze of Children. I did not know that!

4 A Note on Health to Which Religion Can be Hazardous

4.1 Medicine

This was written BEFORE COVID and before the current crop of anti-vaxers.

Islam was very anti-vax for the Polio vaccine. Hitchens generalizes this to Religion being anti-medicine since once you have medical explanations of

things, religion and faith-healers and prayer (which, when tested, does not work) lose their allure.

AGREE that religion has had this problem.

But there are other people who decline medicine for other reasons. A more detailed study of this would be more convincing.

In America some of the anti-vaxers were Religious. Orthodox Jews and Radical Catholics had a lawsuit in New York about keeping their houses of worship open. (Jews and Catholics working together. Yeah! :-) Note that Pope Francis DISAPPROVED and has been very PRO-vax.

Hitchens also talks about AIDS misinformation from Religious groups. But same problem— is it worse than from non-religious groups? More work needs to be done here. There are agnostics and atheists who hate Gay people also. Even so, I suspect Hitchens is correct.

Hitchens talks about HPV- there IS a vaccine that would be GREAT to use, but since its a sexually transmitted disease, some religious people in American blocked its use since it would encourage pre-marital sex. There are agnostics and atheists who have the same viewpoint. I suspect Hitchens is correct.

Here and elsewhere this book is best viewed as

Here are some issues that need further study

The INVERSE of what the Dominion book says might be here: Even if non-religious people are anti-vax and anti-gay (AIDS) perhaps they got it FROM Christians.

4.2 Intelligent Design

This chapter wanders into (bad editing) Intelligent Design (ID) and how stupid it is. I agree and actually this I know more about. When I first became a Christian I read some books by the intelligent design movement and they were actually interested in parts but I also MIS-read them. In brief:

1. They pointed out some ways scientists can get stuck in a dogma and let group-think lead them astray. This is TRUE. (Phillip Johnson's Darwin on Trial)
2. They pointed out some issues with Evolution: some gaps in the fossil record and some organisms that seem like there is no way they could have evolved (irreducible complexity). These are valid questions to be asking.

3. I MISREAD the books as saying *Lets investigate these issues scientifically*. In fact there are several think tanks and foundations (the Discovery Institute is one of them) that (I thought) were funding research on this. I THOUGHT that *OH, having someone look at an issue who comes from a different viewpoint could be interesting*. See next point for why I was WRONG WRONG WRONG.
4. They had NO INTEREST in science. The mentions of Gaps in the Fossil Record and Irreducible complexity were just window dressing. The Discovery institute does not fund science—it mostly sues school boards demanding equal time for ID.
Good Science: There are gaps in the fossil record. Lets study that and see if either we can explain it in our current paradigm, have to shift paradigms a little (Steven J Gould did some work on this- Punctuated equilibrium which ponders if there could be big mutations at times, plus environmental factors) OR if you have to THROW THE ENTIRE THEORY OUT.
Bad Science: There are gaps in the fossil record. OKAY, THATS IT, EVOLUTION IS GARBAGE.
5. A magazine in my church had a very nice complete survey of science done by ID people. The article concluded that it was really awful. (My church is NOT an ID church.)

4.3 The Year 2000

Hitchens says *At the turn of the year from 1999 to 2000 many educated people talked nonsense a series of possible calamities and dangers*.

Thats an odd quote in that its not even about religious people. But he is talking about how Christ was prob born in 4 AD, so 2000 has no importance.

However, this is still a very stupid thing to bring up since the only dangers I heard about had nothing to do with religion, but with Y2K. (Side Note- people disagree about Y2K even now- some say that there never was a problem, others say that since we were aware of the issue people fixed it. I tend to think that people fixed it, though the original issue may have been portrayed as more serious than it was.)

5 The Metaphysical Claims of Religion are False

Religion was developed when science was unknown so lots of it is or should be discredited.

Religious people today try to avoid talking about the past and avoid some subjects.

Gee, thats all this chapter really says. And not impressive given its title: Metaphysics is NOT physics so not clear why Science TRIUMPH over religion and making religion look idiotic means that Religion is wrong about metaphysics.

But even on the issue of science its not clear if Religion had a positive or negative effect. We hear the (TRUE) stories of religion BLOCKING science, but we hear less about when religion has ENCOURAGED science.

See these articles:

<https://theconversation.com/religion-isnt-the-enemy-of-science-its-been-inspir>

<https://theconversation.com/why-science-and-religion-arent-as-opposed-as-you-m>

As usual with this entire book, I view him as RAISING a good question but not doing the work to see if he is right.

Having said that, the Religious anti-vaxers and anti-evolutionists are making it harder and harder for me to say *but on the other hand* ...

6 Arguments from Design

Page 77-78 he talks about William Paley's argument for design: If you see a watch you know it could no have been made by accident, it had to be designed. Same with the human body which works so well and has so many complex parts.

Hitchens criticize this argument; however, Paley died the year Darwin was born. I STILL find it to be a good argument, NOT that it refutes evolution, but its a good QUESTION to ask.

Hitchens DOES NOT seem to believe in the notion of

Thats a good question.

or

I respect that argument even if I disagree with it.

Hitchens does a pretty good job of disproving creationism or any kind of argument from design. Not much new here for me, but here are a few new

tidbits:

The story of genesis only mentions animals found in the middle east, NONE that were native to North America. Hence it cannot really be from God.

Counter: Many serious religious people view the first few chapters of Genesis as allegorical.

Counter Counter: As we find out more science and history will more and more of the bible be regarded as allegorical until its reduced to a few nice morality tales?

AND here is something Hitchens writes which I have a comment on

I know that Pythagoras refuted astrology by the simple means of pointing out that identical twins do not have the same future (Page 74).

I REALLY DOUBT THIS IS KNOWN TO BE TRUE! We know VERY LITTLE about Pythagoras. We do not even know he had anything to do with the theorem that bears his name!

Does this matter? Hitchens is making profound arguments—he needs to be much more careful.

7 Revelation: The Nightmare of the Old Testament

Hitchens points out correctly that many faiths claim that they are true because they are from books they are divinely inspired. These faiths are using circular reasoning which is stupid.

Hitchens claims that the ten commandments are OBVIOUSLY man-made, not God-made, His argument is not at all convincing (Page 99). Hitchens says that the 10 commandments break down as follows

1. The first three claim that God is God of all and must be obeyed.
2. WORK except on the Sabbath. (NOT TRUE- the commandment is to take the Sabbath day for rest, but doesn't say what do do the other days)
3. Some short obvious things: don't murder, steal, adultery, or covet your neighbors wife.

That is all he says-not a proof of anything.

Hitchens then says something that is obviously false:

Page 100

No society every discovered has failed to protect itself from self-evident crimes like the ones supposedly stipulated on Mt Sinai.

There are PLENTY of societies where murder was common, adultery was accepted, stealing-less clear about that. The Dominion book makes the case that before Christianity, in the Roman World, a man would fuck whatever he wanted to and nobody thought this was bad. Christianity led to the Me-To movement.

This is not my usual *The issue is more complicated* complaint. Here he is just plain wrong.

One amusing thing that he is right about: The commandment also wants us to share things and not be envious of our neighbor. Really communism. That part the Christian Right just ignores.

7.1 Pick a Lane!

Hitchens complains (correctly) that the biblical laws of the old testament are really long, really boring, really stupid, and really confining. Hitchens also complains (correctly) of the brutality— after the Golden Calf episode, Moses ordered 1/10 of the people killed. Later in the book he complains (correctly) about the brutality of God telling the Jews to kill every man, women, and child in the territories they were to conquer.

Pretty Gruesome stuff!

Hitchens also complains that the story of Exodus NEVER HAPPENED. (He might be right about this— there are objective scholars on both sides of this one and not to much to go on. His argument that Moses did not write the first five books of Moses is not a big deal- my church thinks that also.)

To summarize he is saying both

1. The book of Exodus shows how a belief in God lead people to do horrible things.
2. The book of Exodus is a work of fiction.

You can't have both of them be your complaint! Its the old joke about someone complaining about a restaurant:

The food is terrible and the portions are so small!

Hitchens COULD have said that its terrible that the Jews WANT to be thought of in this way. But Hitches DOES NOT say that! he wants to use BOTH of the points above.

8 The New Testament Exceeds the Evil of the Old

The chapter does not live up to its title at all.

It does mention the antisemitism that has its base in the NT.

8.1 NT is False

Hitchens gives a brief account of the NT being a random collection of inconsistent writings, and that the Gospels get basic facts wrong. This is an oversimplification. The Gospels tell the same story from different points of view and to different audiences. And again, the story is more complicated than that.

CS Lewis (and probably others) had the Liar-Lunatic-Lord argument: Given what Jesus said about himself he is EITHER a Liar (which they then refute), a Lunatic (which they then refute) or Lord (AH- that must be the one!). Hitchens gives a good argument that the Liar and the Lunatic options should not be so easily dismissed. I found this interesting and had not seen it before. And its NOT a straw man argument, as Lewis is regarded as a great theologian.

The story of the Women accused of adultery is a later addition. I have heard this one back and forth but I suspect Hitchens is right about that one.

8.2 The Beatitudes

Hitchens dismisses the Beatitudes as wishful thinking. But here Jesus is laying out a positive noble goal, so why dismiss it so readily. Indeed- The Dominion Book says that this was the starting point of our current thinking that its GOOD to help others, even if they are not in your clan.

9 The Koran is Borrowed from Jewish and Christian Myths

This chapter mostly says what's wrong with Islam, which is similar to what is wrong with Christianity: myths, both internal and external violence, internal contradictions. Also, they regard their conquests as proof that God is on their side, which leads to the question of what do they think when they lose.

In a later chapter he accuses Islam of plagiarism in that it borrows from Christian and Jewish Scriptures. The word *plagiarism* is not quite right here in that they are seeking eternal truths, not authorship.

10 The Tawdriness of the Miraculous and the Decline of Hell

Note much on Hell in this chapter.

The number and quality of miracles has declined. The requirement to be a saint in the Catholic Church used to be FOUR confirmed miracles, now it's TWO, and they have removed the office of Devil's Advocate (that's where the term comes from) to argue AGAINST the case.

Mother Theresa has been credited with a miracle of curing a woman of Uterine cancer. She was actually cured by modern medicine.

John Paul II's first miracle was curing a woman of Parkinsons (I could not find details on that one). The second one is AFTER HIS DEATH- a family prayed to a shrine of JP II and the person they prayed for recovered from a brain aneurysm. I recall that the Vatican was considering using the fall of communism as a miracle for him.

11 The Lowly Stamp of Their Origins: Religion's Corrupt Beginning

This chapter tells of more recent religions (including Mormon) and how we can easily see they are frauds (some of them admitted as much) and the older faiths are all similar. He doesn't quite argue why that it is true.

I thought he would puncture the notion that Christianity started out well but then went bad, and say it didn't even start out well. But he does not do

that.

INTERESTING reading and I assume true stories, but doesn't add to his argument.

12 A Coda: How Religion Ends

He tells the (true) story of how a particular faith, the Millerites, began and ended. Much like the last chapter, and interesting story I did not know, but does not add to his argument.

13 Does Religion Make People Behave Better?

The title makes me think that this will be an intelligent discussion of a fascinating question. He does say some very interesting things but this topic really cannot be given justice in 20 pages.

13.1 Martin Luther King

The Reverend Martin Luther King preached non violence and often quoted scripture. He referred to Moses: the analog of the promised land is a land with no racism.

However, Moses believed in a lot of violence. Both among the Jews (ordering them to kill 1/10 of them after the golden calf) and externally (kill all man, women, and children in the land they were to conquer).

So even an example of religion doing good is not quite right.

13.2 Slavery

Hitchens points out (correctly) that Islam and Christians were involved in the slave trade. And not in a shameful way— they appealed to their religion to justify it.

But many of the abolitionists were also Christian (Hitchens DOES ack this). But here are some interesting thoughts

William Lloyd Garrison was a white christian abolitionist— but he wanted to end slavery by declaring war on the south and making it bloody. John

Brown also used his bible and his abolitionism as a reason to do violence. Do we really want to point to these people as an example fo Christians doing good?

There is A LOT more to this story. Many of the first anti-slavery people arrived their through Christian principles. It is a challenge to find an abolitionist who is NOT so motivated.

Counter: People also defended slavery via scripture.

But once again, a more complicated issue than Hitchens admits. One thing in his favor: The Catholic church has official positions and there were were tepidly anti-slavery.

And also once again, the Dominion book claims that Christianity laid the groundwork for anti-slavery.

13.3 Civil Rights

Frankly I think Christians look far worse here then they did for slavery.

Pat Robertson could not support even the mildest civil rights laws since it would go against his Bible.

There were Christians on both sides of this one. Many white churches gave Civil rights very tepid support or kept saying *people are not ready yet* (NOTE- People were not ready for inter-racial marriage, gay marriage the end of slavery, yet WAITING until they were would have been a long wait, perhaps never.) And there were MANY non-Christians (Socialists and Communists) on the PRO-civil rights side.

Note that the current BLM movement seems to have no particularly religious leaders. The extend to which the Civil Rights movement did may have been exaggerated.

And also once again, the Dominion book claims that Christianity laid the groundwork for civil rights, EVEN BY NON-CHRISTIANS since its in the culture.

13.4 Independence of India

(This was much more new for me to read about.)

Gandhi and his non-violent-Hinduism get way to much credit. And indeed, Gandhi wanted to take India back to Pre-industrial days which would have been a disaster. Plus he wanted it to be Hindu State which lead to partition and even to todays awful Militant-Hinduism in India. (Note: Hitches

does give credit to Gandhi for recognizing the plight of the untouchables and wanting to lift them up.)

For a laugh see the movie trailer for Gandhi II:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ega5Rcct2s>

And the British are sometimes said to have left India rather than fight out of Christian principles. But only a few decades earlier they had a massive massacre of non-violent Indian protesters. Was that also justified by Christian Principles?

The Dominion book brings up another point about India. The Hindu faith had a tradition of Widow-burning. Once a man died, his wife was set on fire alive. Some Christians in England thought this was appalling and petitioned the British Gov to put an end to it, and they did. (Not as simple as that- there was a reluctance to interfere with another cultures religion, etc.)

Hitchens does not mention widow-burning but if he did he would (correctly) note it as another barbaric religious ritual. Would he then admit that another faith saw to its end?

13.5 Misc

Other (true) stories of faiths doing terrible things, in the modern era, are included, but by now we get the point.

Of more interest is that he asks: If someone religious IS a good person that still does not prove anything.

14 There is no Eastern Solution

Buddhism and other Eastern faiths *seem* to be better as, to Western eyes, they are all about peace and do not seem to really have violence or strange rituals.

This is NOT correct. They are as screwed up as other faiths. Note that the Japanese in WW II were motivated by their faith to kill Chinese and other people.

15 Religion as Original Sin

Not sure what the title means, but this is more of the same. Details that Religion does all of the following:

1. Presents a false picture of the world. This has held back science and other human progress.
2. Doctrine of blood sacrifice.
3. Doctrine of eternal reward and punishment. This has lead to great psychological damage.
4. The imposition of impossible tasks and rules.

16 Is Religion Child Abuse?

Parents and ministers teach children religion before they can properly reason since otherwise they might not believe.

Teaching kids about hell puts quite a burden on them, especially if the faith has things like (this is in the book) *your grandfather will go to hell since he was baptized the wrong way.*

Hitchens then talks about the church opposing abortion and contraception. Bad editing.

Circumcision is gruesome. AH- some say there are health benefits. As usual needs more study.

Teaching children rules on sex can really warp them and entire generations to have very unhealthy ideas about sex.

Pedophilia in the Catholic church is mentioned.

Gee, not much here I didn't already know.

17 An Objection Anticipated: The Last Ditch Case Against Secularism

The last ditch argument is *Yes, religion has done some bad things (e.g., the Inquisition* but secular society has done bad things to (e.g., The Holocaust).

Hitchens counters this. I will mostly use the Catholic church as an example but this really applies to many faiths.

1. (This is a similar to an earlier part of this document) The Catholic Church CLAIMS to have timeless values, an absolute morality that does not change over time. Hence they are asking to be held to a higher standard than secular people.
2. It was a different time. Same problem, with timeless values and an absolute morality that does not change over time, the Catholic Church cannot say *well, that was then, and this is now*.
3. SO, you the Catholic church claims its better than the Nazi's. The Vatican was the first country to sign a treaty with the Nazi's. The Catholic church gladly handed over Jews over to the Nazi's. The Pope excommunicated EVERY communist but NO Nazi's. In some countries the Bishops were explicitly Nazi's and carrying out order- and GIVING orders (no *I was just following orders* defense here). The Pope NEVER spoke out against the Holocaust then. Could they have? They DID speak out when the Nazi's were killing people who were handicapped but NOT ONCE about killing Jews. AFTER the war the Catholic Church helped Nazi's escape justice and get new identities. (NOTE- some isolated priests DID help the Jews- by going AGAINST what the Vatican wanted. NOW those few are celebrated by the Vatican as evidence that the Catholic Church did help, but this is pathetic.)
4. Well- that was then and this is now. Not even. In 1992 in the Rwanda war the Catholic Church helped the government KILL innocent children See pages 190–193.
5. The Catholic church has also supported other dictatorships.
6. The Russian Orthodox Church under the Czar's was very powerful and helped the monarchy stay. Communism made them oppressed for about 80 years. Now they are back and are absolutely awful to women, to Gays, and they SUPPORT the Ukraine War.
7. The Dutch Reform Church was overtly racist and was part of why South Africa remained racist for so long. The history of the Religions role in both being FOR and being AGAINST Racism is complicated. The current Religions Right in America makes the *its complicated* argument harder for me to put forward.

The rest of the chapter is saying more bad things religion did, but no real attempt to show that they were worse than secular people. They also say that a Totalitarian gov IS a religion (so communism counts) which I think is a cheat. And also unneeded- I think his point is already made.

I (Bill) found a CS Lewis quote which SUPPORTS Hitchens view.

Of all tyrannies, a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive. It would be better to live under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busybodies. The robber baron's cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity may at some point be satiated; but those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end for they do so with the approval of their own conscience. They may be more likely to go to Heaven yet at the same time likelier to make a Hell of earth. This very kindness stings with intolerable insult. To be "cured" against one's will and cured of states which we may not regard as disease is to be put on a level of those who have not yet reached the age of reason or those who never will; to be classed with infants, imbeciles, and domestic animals.

I think he was thinking of communism as being bad, but it also applies to religious theocracies.

18 A Finer Tradition: The Resistance of the Rational

There have been many different views and thoughts on the question of God from the beginning of time.

1. There are many different religions and even within them, so many different sects, all making actual factual statements (not just *a way of life*). They usually contradict each other. So at most one can be correct. Probably 0.
2. If God exists then why is there so much Evil in the world. One retort: Without God, how do you define evil?
3. Did God just create the universe and then walk away. Deists think this. Some of our founding fathers were deists (Jefferson and Franklin).
4. Without God how to you keep a society from falling apart? (Hitchens would ask the opposite question: With God, how do you keep a society

from falling apart.)

5. As science discovered more and better ways to describe the world than Religions, science was persecuted. (Again- More complicated than that.)

Random other things in this chapter which I find interesting but all need more elaboration and proof.

1. Hitchens talks a lot about Spinoza, a Jew who was really a pantheist and was banned by Jews and Christians. I think Hitchens overrates him to make the point of great minds being suppressed.
2. Hitchens says that Christians often look at older figures and imbue Christianity into them (Lincoln is one of those) and he DOES NOT want to do the same for atheism- though he still does somewhat.
3. In the 1800's the Jews faced TWO threats.
 - (a) Persecution, Pogroms, etc usually from Christians.
 - (b) Secularization: Some countries were becoming more secular.

Hitchens claims they were preferred the first. His quote

Even in a country as broad minded as Holland, the elders had preferred to make common cause with Christian anti-Semites and other obscurantists, rather than permit the finest of their number to use their own free intelligence.

4. Hanukkah has an interesting history. In the 2nd century BC in Seleucid many Jews were fleeing the faith OF THEIR OWN WILL. The Maccabees, like a modern day Taliban, killed some of them and tried to impose a religious theocracy on them. The region was governed by non-Jews who put the revolt down to some extent. But its not clear who the good guys are here (if anyone). NOW, because of its proximity to Christmas, what was a Taliban-like holiday is now a multicultural celebration. Hitchens seems to dislike this. But I think he is wrong- the fact that the Jews don't want to view Hanukkah as a Jewish Taliban is a good thing. MORE GENERALLY- all holidays change their meaning over time.

19 In Conclusion: The Need for a New Enlightenment

Mostly repetitive of prior chapters. Here is one new point:

In the past a society that was religious would fall apart (as the Taliban is today) since they do not allow people to do what they are good at (NOTE-same is true of a corrupt society). BUT now that some of these countries have powerful weapons things could get real bad.