

ATHEISTS WRITE. BELIEVERS YAWN.

By Don Feder

O for the days when one could safely stroll into a bookstore without tripping over the latest atheist title. Still, ironically, by writing their tracts, in the long run atheists may boost belief.

My local Barnes & Noble has the following on display: *The Atheist Manifesto: The Case Against Christianity, Judaism and Islam*; *The Quotable Atheist*; *Letter To A Christian Nation*; *God: The Failed Hypothesis: How Science Shows That God Does Not Exist*; and *The God Delusion* -- a New York Times bestseller.

According to Associated Press, Rep. Pete Stark (D, CA.) has become the first Congressman to announce he doesn't believe in God. He's probably just looking for a book deal.

Why the sudden outpouring of atheist advocacy? Perhaps it's a way for the cultural left to assert itself in the face of the religious right. Or maybe it's meant to show that the anti-God argument can be framed more intelligently than in a Bill Maher monologue.

Whatever the impetus, as a believer, I welcome the phenomenon. The great enemy of belief isn't disbelief but indifference.

Let the Godless write their tracts and the faithful answer them. The disillusionment with religion that dominated British intellectual circles after the First World War helped to shape the great Christian apologist C.S. Lewis. The surviving son of atheist icon Madalyn Murray O'Hair is an evangelical.

The books referenced above assert the debate is over and atheism has won. But atheists have been saying that for over 200

years. Since the French Enlightenment, the death of God has been confidently proclaimed. Religion has been made obsolete by egalitarian revolution, industrialism, or science, they insisted. Yet, early in the 21st. century, faith endures.

For 70-plus years, the Soviets tried everything imaginable to kill religion – including show trials, mass murder of clerics, confiscations, indoctrination and even attempts to co-opt religious symbols and ceremonies. But belief survived, while scientific socialism is now defunct.

In China – where communism’s war on God continues – the home-church movement thrives. Half a world away, America has the highest weekly church attendance in the industrialized world – notwithstanding attacks on faith from Hollywood, academia and a judiciary seemingly intent on purging religious symbols from public spaces.

In the U.S. -- the most science-oriented society in history -- Christian bookstores, radio stations and television programming proliferate. It seems as though a hunger for the Creator is imprinted on the human heart.

Without God, morality is – if not impossible – exceedingly difficult. “Thou shalt not kill” loses much of its force, when reduced from commandment to suggested course of action.

How inspiring can it be to wake in the morning, look in the mirror, and see an accident of evolutionary history – the end product of the random collision of molecules?

A universe that isn’t God-centered becomes ego-centered. People come to see choices through the prism of self – what promotes the individual’s well-being and happiness. Such a worldview does not naturally lead to benevolence or self-sacrifice.

An affirmation of God can lead to The Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount and The Declaration of Independence. In terms of morality, a denial of God leads nowhere.

There are no secularist counterparts to John Paul II, Mother Teresa, William Wilberforce (the evangelical responsible for abolition of the British slave trade), Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., or the Christians – from France to Poland – who rescued Jews during the Holocaust.

True, terrible things have been done in the name of religion. Terrible things have been done in the name of every noble concept – including love, charity, loyalty and kinship.

Yet, the worst horrors of the modern era were perpetrated by godless political creeds. The death toll from sectarian conflict over the ages is dwarfed by ideological violence, from the Jacobinism of Revolutionary France to the charnel houses of communism and fascism.

This is not to say that atheism leads naturally to guillotines and gulags -- but, just as love-your-fellow-man-as-yourself can be corrupted, so too can liberty, equality and fraternity.

There is no irrefutable evidence for God's existence or non-existence. But, if you look closely, His footprints can be discerned in the sands of time.

Jews introduced the world to monotheism. They also were the first people to perceive history as linear -- an unfolding story moving toward a conclusion.

Is it a coincidence that this tiny, originally nomadic, people generated the ideas that shaped the Western world – including equality, human rights and a responsibility to our fellow man?

Jews are the only people to maintain their identity during two millennia of exile, and then return to their homeland and reestablish their nation.

Mark Twain wrote: “The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away... the Greek and the Roman followed, and made a vast noise and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up, held their torch high for a time, but it burned out and they sit in twilight now or have vanished All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?”

Had Twain been a believer, he might have answered his own question.

America’s survival and rise to global preeminence are equally improbable. Challenging the greatest empire of the 18th century, America should never have won its independence or should have self-destructed during the Civil War.

Alexis de Tocqueville observed that the genius of our infant republic lay not in its farms and workshops but in its churches whose “pulpits flame with righteousness.”

Atheists are free to disbelieve and to try to propagate their disbelief in books and other intellectual forums. But saying the debate is over doesn’t make it so.

A bit of humility might make their case more persuasive.
Then again, humility is itself a religious concept.