

APOSTLES OF ATHEISM

How the broadcast and print media helped spread the Gospel of Godlessness in 2007

Executive Summary

Only eight percent of Americans are atheists, according to the National Cultural Values Survey,* yet atheism was the “it” religion in 2007, with just three best-selling books generating much of the media coverage. *Christianity Today* put the topic at No. 2 in its Top 10 list of religion stories for last year. “The Roar of Atheist Books” was the seventh biggest religion story of 2007 according to *Time* magazine.

Media indifference and even hostility toward religion in general and Christianity in particular has been well documented by the Media Research Center for years. With the ascendancy of atheism as a “religion” story, the Media Research Center’s Culture and Media Institute wondered whether the media gave atheism the same degree of scrutiny as Christianity and other religious faiths? To assess the news media’s coverage of atheism in 2007, CMI examined the morning, evening, late night and weekend news programs on all three broadcast networks, all issues of the three leading weekly news magazines (*Newsweek*, *Time* and *U.S. News and World Report*), and four programs aired on taxpayer-funded National Public Radio (*Morning Edition*, *Weekend Edition*, *All Things Considered* and *Talk of the Nation*).

CMI found 105 stories either featuring atheism or introducing the views of atheists while reporting on other issues. Among the key findings:

- 80 percent (17 out of 21) of feature stories about atheism or atheists had a positive tone, exemplified by *Time*’s December 3 story on a Sunday school for atheists. 20 percent were neutral. No feature stories were negative.
- Atheists were used to challenge religious viewpoints more than journalists used religious viewpoints to challenge atheism. Fifty-four percent of atheist-themed stories included a religious counterpoint, but 71 percent of the Christian-themed stories included atheist counterpoints or were written from an atheistic perspective. The most striking example was *Newsweek*’s choice of avowed atheist and Mother Teresa-basher Christopher Hitchens to critique a book detailing Mother Teresa’s spiritual struggles.

- Atheism stories or commentaries by atheists were present in 51 percent (25 of 49) of the issues of *Newsweek* and 35 percent (17 out of 49) of the issues of *Time*. This included features, mentions in stories on other issues and groupings of letters to the editor from atheists. In sharp contrast, only one issue of *U.S. News and World Report* referred to atheism.
- ABC provided the most enthusiastic television network coverage of atheism, exemplified by features on an atheist Web site called Blasphemy Challenge and an atheist convention held in Baltimore. The network addressed the subject 24 times in five of its six news programs. This number is just under the combined total for CBS (16) and NBC (11). ABC also aired more produced packages (5) on the subject than CBS (4) and NBC (2). ABC's *Nightline* devoted an entire program to a live debate between atheists and Christians.
- Six out of seven news organizations considered in this study addressed the concerns and interests of atheists in the upcoming presidential election. Only Republican candidates for President were asked how they would treat atheists.

This report concludes that, whether deliberately or not, the news media did not subject atheism or atheists to the same skepticism to which they subject Christians and Christianity. By airing unchallenged interviews and reporting predominantly positive-toned features, the news organizations in this study effectively promoted atheism and held it in higher regard than other religions. While the media are not obligated to treat all religions and belief systems equally, their failure to subject atheism to the levels of skepticism directed at Christianity and other religions suggests a deplorable double standard.

Using atheism as a foil against Christianity, but not against any other religion, suggests an anti-Christian bias. If journalists call on atheists to comment on one religion, they should use atheists to comment on all. Further, if reporters use prominent atheists to offer opposing views on religion-themed stories, they should – in equal measure – invite leading believers to provide perspective on stories about atheism. Journalists who look at America's majority religion through a skeptical prism should equally apply their critical faculties to atheism.

* The National Cultural Values Survey was conducted for the Culture and Media Institute in December, 2006.

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By Kristen Fyfe
Culture and Media Senior Writer

Introduction

Like clockwork, the holiest Christian holidays bring stories into the news cycle that clearly take aim at the faith of the majority of Americans. In 2007, the Discovery Channel's "The Jesus Tomb" made headlines just before Easter. So it comes as no surprise to learn that a popular comedian announced plans to release a "documentary on atheism" on Easter Sunday, 2008.

Atheism has always intrigued the news media. A 2005 study by the Media Research Center on the media's coverage of religion showed that church-state issues and the convergence of religion and politics was the third most heavily reported religion topic of the year, behind the Catholic Church and Islam. In 2007 the coverage of atheism changed and grew beyond the political.

Fully 87 percent of Americans say they believe in God, according to the National Cultural Values Survey. Yet atheism was the "it" belief system in 2007, or so it seemed according to publishers' bestseller lists and the coverage the topic received from the national media last year. According to "State of the News Media," a report by the Project for Excellence in Journalism, 91 percent of journalists working for national news organizations say it is not necessary to believe in God to be moral. This is exactly the point espoused by 2007's best selling books on atheism: *God is Not Great* by Christopher Hitchens, *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins and *Letter to a Christian Nation* by Sam Harris.

The frequent mentions of atheism and large numbers of features on atheists in news magazines and broadcast news programs caught the attention of the Media Research Center's Culture and Media Institute. CMI set out to determine just how atheism was being covered by the media. Was atheism being scrutinized like Christianity, or treated with kid gloves? Were atheists challenged on their beliefs as other religious believers - especially Christians - were?

CMI examined the 2007 coverage of atheism by several national news outlets, including all news programs on the three broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, NBC), every 2007 issue of three leading weekly news magazines (*Newsweek*, *Time* and *U.S. News and World Report*), and four news programs

aired on taxpayer-funded National Public Radio (*All Things Considered*, *Morning Edition*, *Weekend Edition* and *Talk of the Nation*). This report found and examined 105 stories that either featured atheism or mentioned atheism in the context of reporting on culture, religion and politics.

The analysis found that the media did not scrutinize atheism the same way it scrutinizes Christianity, and that journalists frequently introduced atheistic critiques into stories about Christianity but never into stories about other religious faiths. Concern for the feelings of atheists drove many stories, even questions asked of two overtly religious Republican presidential candidates. In other words, deliberately or not, several major news organizations promoted atheism and atheists throughout 2007.

Atheism Ascendant?

Each of the television networks touted the bestselling books on atheism to proclaim that atheists were increasingly vocal and that atheism was on the rise. Only National Public Radio (NPR) provided context to the atheist-books-are-best-sellers storyline. NPR's *Morning Edition*, on January 22, ran a story about big retailers like Wal-Mart seeing an increase in the sale of religious books. The reporter, Martha Woodroof, interviewed an editor from Knopf Publishers who said that one of their representatives had returned from a religious convention where Sam Harris's book *Letter to a Christian Nation* was the most talked-about title. Knopf published Harris's book, but the editor acknowledged that people of faith were buying the book and that it was "the centerpiece of some very interesting debates." In other words, the fact that books on atheism were selling like hotcakes did not necessarily mean there was a significant rise in the number of atheists in the country. CMI's 2006 National Cultural Values Survey showed that only 8 percent of Americans say they don't believe in God.

Book sales, not demographics, drove the television coverage of atheism. While acknowledging that atheism is still a minority belief system, the networks amplified the voices of atheism's trinity — authors Hitchens, Dawkins and Harris — by suggesting that the sales of their books demonstrated that atheism was ascendant in the culture. ABC's Bill Weir and Liz Marlantes exemplified this during the September 30 broadcast of *Good Morning America*. Marlantes was reporting on an atheist convention, and Weir led into the story by saying, "A large convention of atheists is gathering — men, women and children who all proclaim that God does not exist. Still, of course, the minority view in this country, but it is a view that is becoming more and more vocal with more and more members every day." Marlantes chimed in, "Call it 'atheism unleashed.' Books denying the existence of God are topping the best seller lists. Congress now has its first self-proclaimed atheists. There are even atheist summer camps for kids." She went on to speculate that the "stigma" of being an atheist "may be fading."

The story aired on a Sunday morning, and no opposing point of view was offered in the piece. After Marlantes' feature, Weir interviewed Christopher Hitchens in studio.

Such uncritical promotion of atheism was typical in the coverage CMI examined.

Newsweek and ABC Lead the Way

Newsweek was the first media outlet out of the gate in covering atheism in 2007. The January 8 issue profiled a Web site called Blasphemy Challenge. The piece ran in the magazine's Belief Watch column, a unique, near-weekly feature that purports to address issues of faith and belief across the spectrum. The Blasphemy Challenge column reported on an atheist group called the Rational Response Squad that set up a Web site daring people to commit what the Bible terms the "unforgivable sin" of blaspheming the Holy Spirit. The story ranked high on *Newsweek's* Popularity Index, a measure of how many times a story gets viewed at Newsweek.com.

ABC picked up the baton and featured the group and Web site during the January 30 broadcast of *Nightline*. On January 31, *Nightline* anchor Terry Moran commented that the story had generated a "passionate debate" among viewers on the show's message board. So intriguing did ABC find the segment that during the May ratings sweeps, it dedicated an entire *Nightline* program to a debate with two members of the Rational Response Squad versus a pastor and Christian actor Kirk Cameron.

Newsweek and ABC both led their competitors in the amount of coverage they gave to atheism and atheists. Stories about atheism, atheist commentaries, or mentions of atheism were present in 51 percent (25) of the 2007 issues of *Newsweek*, compared with 35 percent (17) of the issues of *Time* and just 2 percent (1 issue) of *U.S. News and World Report*. In total the three magazines ran 12 stories on atheism, included 22 mentions in reporting on other topics, and had 10 issues containing letters to the editor from atheists.

Newsweek devoted more space than the other newsweeklies to atheism, due in large part to the Belief Watch column, which featured or mentioned atheism five times. Just in time for Easter, *Newsweek's* April 9 cover headline asked "Is God Real?" That issue contained a three-page essay by editor Jon Meacham detailing the debate about God's existence that led into a six-page debate between evangelical pastor Rick Warren (author of the best selling *The Purpose Driven Life*) and atheist Sam Harris.

Newsweek added to its pro-atheism story count by profiling Christopher Hitchens in the May 14 issue and then giving him two pages in the September 10 issue to critique a book about Mother Teresa's spiritual struggles.

On the television side, ABC addressed atheism 25 times, compared to 16 for CBS and 11 for NBC. ABC devoted the most time to atheism, thanks to ABC's *Nightline* January 30 Blasphemy Challenge segment, which then led to a full program featuring a debate about the existence of God that aired May 9.

Counterpoints to Christianity Only

The news media in this study used atheists to offer counterpoints to Christian-themed stories, but

not to stories dealing with other faiths. In 77 stories that dealt with Christian issues or themes, atheism or atheists were mentioned 71 percent of the time. Also, journalists were far less likely to include religious views in stories on atheism. Out of 21 stories focused on atheism, a religious counterpoint was offered in only 11, or 54 percent of the time.

Newsweek provides several examples of this treatment.

- The May 14 issue contained an excerpt from Pope Benedict XVI's book *Jesus of Nazareth*. In a story about the Pope's efforts to write the book, reporter Lisa Miller included this nod to atheists: "This approach is not surprising, given Benedict's job description, but in a world where Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris and other proponents of secularism credit belief in Jesus as one of the sources of the world's ills...."
- The September 10 issue featured a critique of the book *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*. The reviewer was Christopher Hitchens, termed by *Newsweek* "the nun's leading critic." Hitchens himself had written a book against Mother Teresa entitled *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice*. Hitchens's *Newsweek* piece was less about the book and more a two-page opportunity for Hitchens to blast the nun one more time. He said the subtitle of the book was "slightly sickly," termed the handwritten notes contained in the book "scrawled" and "desperate," called Mother Teresa a "confused old lady" and wrote that her letters and what he presumed to be her loss of faith was "the inevitable result of a dogma that asks people to believe impossible things and then makes them feel abject and guilty when their innate reason rebels." (It should be noted that *Time* also did a feature story on Mother Teresa's spiritual struggles. That story also quoted Hitchens, but limited his comments to three sentences and described his book about her as a "polemic.")
- By contrast, the *Newsweek* review of Hitchens' book, *God is Not Great*, in the May 21 issue contained no Christian counterpoint, other than to admire Hitchens for having the nerve to quote from the Bible. Reporter Jerry Adler wrote as if he was enamored of Hitchens, ending his piece with this: "...he has been known to give the middle finger to audiences who disagree with him. They get off lightly, compared to God."

Is it possible to report on a religious-themed story and *not* include an atheist viewpoint? The answer is yes, proved by *U.S. News and World Report*. In 2007 the magazine carried two cover stories dealing with religion. The November 26 issue contained a 32-page spread on "Sacred Places," and the December 24 issue featured "A Return to Ritual," which examined the growing trend of embracing tradition in many religions. Neither piece included an atheist viewpoint.

Television reports also frequently favored atheists when reporting on Christian-themed stories. In November, ABC, CBS and NBC all reported on the governor of drought-stricken Georgia's decision to hold a public prayer session asking God for rain. Governor Sonny Perdue held the prayer session

outside the capitol building, drawing protests from those who think praying on government property is inappropriate if not illegal. In covering the story, ABC and CBS both included interviews with an atheist who raised the separation of church and state issue. In his November 13 ABC *Good Morning America* story about Perdue's prayer session, reporter Steve Osunsami gave an atheist six times as much air time as Governor Perdue. The governor got a three-second sound bite while the atheist had two sound bites and b-roll footage of him walking in town, for a total of 20 seconds. CBS's story was more evenly weighted. NBC's reporting of the story occurred on the *Today* show as an anchor-read by Ann Curry followed by a brief conversation between anchors Matt Lauer, Meredith Vieira and weatherman Al Roker. It contained no atheist viewpoint.

ABC was the only network to follow up with a brief anchor mention that it rained a few hours after Gov. Perdue's prayer service concluded.

Atheism: A Question for Republicans Only

Atheism also became part of the political dialogue in the 2007 presidential race. But only Republican candidates who spoke openly about their faith were asked directly how they felt about atheists. Mike Huckabee and Mitt Romney were asked specifically whether they would appoint atheists to government positions if they were elected. No reporters asked Democratic candidates this question, even though Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and John Edwards all described themselves openly as Christians, and the media had reported about the Democrats' plans to engage churchgoers.

NBC's *Meet the Press* bookended the year with questions for Mike Huckabee about atheism. Both times host Tim Russert used a 1998 Huckabee speech to the Southern Baptist Convention to lead into the question. The first interview happened January 28. Russert started with: "I want to ask you a couple of things that you said earlier in your political career. ... [Huckabee] 'I hope we answer the alarm clock and take this nation back for Christ.' Would you as president consider America a Christian nation and try to lead it as - into a situation as being a more Christian nation?"

Huckabee responded that he would "make no apology" for his faith but that it was dangerous to "say that we are a nation that ought to be pushed into a Christian faith by its leaders." Russert would not let up. "But when you say 'take this nation back for Christ,' what does that say to Jews, Muslims, agnostics, atheists?"

Russert came back to the subject 11 months and two days later, interviewing Huckabee on the December 30 broadcast of *Meet the Press*.

Russert: And then, and then this comment. "I hope we answer the alarm clock and take this nation back for Christ." Where does....

Huckabee: Which was, by the way, that phrase was one I think was 1998, is that when it was? The 1998 speech?

Russert: Yeah.

Huckabee: To the Southern Baptist Convention. So it was a speech made to a Christian gathering, and, and, certainly that would be appropriate to be said to

a gathering of Southern Baptists.

Russert: But where does this leave non-Christians?

Huckabee: Oh, it leaves them right in the middle of America. I think the Judeo-Christian background of this country is one that respects people not only of faith, but it respects people who don't have faith....

Russert: So you'd have no problem appointing atheists to your Cabinet?

Huckabee: No, I wouldn't have any problem at all appointing atheists.

Mitt Romney's speech on his Mormon faith, and his statement that "freedom requires religion," provided another opportunity for journalists to raise concerns about atheists. Again, *Meet the Press* took up the cause on December 16, when Russert asked Romney, "So if you determined that the most qualified person for the Supreme Court or for attorney general or secretary of education happened to be an atheist or agnostic, that wouldn't prevent you from appointing them?" Romney replied, "Of course not."

In a December 17 story titled "A New American Holy War," *Newsweek* editor Jon Meacham wrote about Romney's speech, "Romney's failure to make a noble public stand for the rights of atheists and skeptics is tactically understandable if intellectually disappointing." He went on to write, "...religious believers, who far outnumber those who do not believe, have a special obligation to be humble and gracious and respectful."

ABC's George Will, the resident conservative on *This Week*, fretted about the implied message in Romney's comments about religion and freedom on the December 9 broadcast. He said, "Ergo atheists are problematic citizens. Agnostics are problematic citizens. And that's - we're reaching, I swear, a critical mass in this country where you're going to get a rebellion of people against this suffusion of public life with..." Sam Donaldson cut him off at that point.

The July 23 issue of *Time* featured a poll titled "How Voters Mix Religion and Politics." Atheists were featured on two of the questions: 1) whether religious values should "serve as a guide" to what leaders do in office; and 2) their approval of Rudy Giuliani, then the leading Republican candidate for president.

Exquisite Sensitivity Shown to Atheists

Unlike the skeptical treatment usually given to Christians, the media showed an exquisite sensitivity to atheists and their beliefs. Seventeen out of 21 feature stories about atheism or atheists had a positive tone, and the rest were neutral. No feature stories were negative. This was most obvious in reporting on *The Golden Compass*, the movie based on the first book of a bestselling trilogy by atheist author Philip Pullman, which was expected to be a blockbuster when it was released in December.

The agenda of the series, to destroy religious faith, was first brought to light by the Catholic League in the autumn. But most reports on the movie either ignored the concerns of Christians or treated them as a nuisance.

- *Time* (12/10): no mention of any controversy or concern in a feature about Philip Pullman, the book and the movie.
- ABC (11/12): no mention of any controversy or concern in an interview with *Golden Compass* actress Nicole Kidman on *Good Morning America*.
- *Newsweek* (12/3): In a three-page feature on the movie, reporter Devin Gordon wrote, "The film stands accused of being both anti-Catholic and not anti-Catholic enough – though no one making either claim has actually seen it. The loud, bristling organization known as the Catholic League is urging families to boycott a film in which the word "Catholic" is never uttered."
- NBC (11/2): The book *The Golden Compass* was featured on *Today* as a feature for "Al's Book Club." Al Roker asked Pullman about the Catholic League's concerns, saying, "It's a real best seller and it's got a lot going with it when it generates a little controversy. The Catholic League called – released a statement – saying it's atheism for kids. What's your response to 'this book, is, say anti-Christian?'" Pullman responded that he didn't trust people "who tell us how we should understand something" and preferred to "trust the reader" and the "democracy of reading." He maintained the book champions the value of "open-minded intellectual curiosity."

None of the journalists reporting these stories showed professional due diligence. Philip Pullman is on the record saying his books are "about killing God" (*Sydney [Australia] Morning Herald*, 12/13/2003). He has also produced a DVD for children titled "Why Atheism" as part of an attempt to get atheism taught in schools, according to a July 10, 2007 article in *The Independent*.

To their credit, both CBS and NPR's *Morning Edition* reported more extensively on the controversial elements of Pullman's work and the concerns of Christians about *The Golden Compass*. On November 28, CBS's *Early Show* featured a debate between Bill Donohue of the Catholic League and Ellen Johnson of American Atheists.

Atheists received uncritical treatment from the media in myriad stories. On May 11, ABC's *20/20* was devoted to "The Power of Faith." Story topics were varied and included features on exorcism, faith healers, cloistered nuns, and why people need faith. In the middle of the show atheism was portrayed sympathetically in a feature about a student who was suspended from her Oklahoma high school. She said it was because she identified herself as an atheist and refused to pray before a basketball game. The predominantly Christian town she lived in, the local pastor and school officials were portrayed as judgmental.

John Stossel: Students called her names, she says.

Nicole Smalkowski: You know, they would call me devil worshiper. I'd walk down the halls, people would laugh at me. They would look at me really weird

and stare me down.

John Stossel: Then she says teachers joined in. What would they say?

Nicole Smalkowski: This is a Christian country. If you don't like it, get out.

In the segment Stossel also interviewed Richard Dawkins, who said, "The time has come for people of reason to say enough is enough. Religious faith discourages independent thought. It's divisive and it's dangerous." Stossel mentioned that Dawkins was touring the country to promote his book and speculated that he might be getting angry reactions because "America is a very religious country." Dawkins replied, "I thought just the same, but people thanked me over and over again for saying what they themselves would like to say, but somehow feel they better not." Stossel did not challenge that assertion.

Other promotional material for atheism came in the July 6 issue of *Newsweek*, which spotlighted a parenting book for atheists. *Time* served up a fluff piece on an atheist Sunday school in San Francisco in the December 3 issue. Neither of these stories included religious counterpoints.

The media used Christmas as another ripe opportunity to showcase the sensitivities of atheists. NBC's *Nightly News* included atheists in a story on the now-standard "Happy Holidays" vs. "Merry Christmas" controversy on December 20. NPR's December 23 *Weekend Edition* ran a story on how hard the holiday season is for atheists. NPR reporter Tovia Smith said, "Every year, as the holidays approach, the issues for atheists begin to bubble up." She continued, "Amanda Shapiro, president of the Harvard Humanist Society, leads about a dozen fellow students into a virtual minefield where even sugar cookies and 'Jingle Bells' ignite controversy."

Conclusion and Recommendation

The news media report on atheism as a "religion," but the news media did not subject atheism or atheists to the same skepticism to which they subject Christians and Christianity. By airing unchallenged interviews and predominantly reporting positive-toned features, the news media effectively promoted atheism. While the media are not obligated to treat all religions and belief systems equally, their failure to subject atheism to the levels of skeptical scrutiny directed at Christianity and other religions suggests a deplorable double standard.

Using atheism as a foil against Christianity, but not against any other religion, suggests an anti-Christian bias. If journalists call on atheists to comment on one religion, they should use atheists to comment on others. Further, if reporters use prominent atheists to offer opposing views on religion-themed stories, they should – in equal measure – invite leading believers to provide perspective on stories about atheism. Journalists who look at America's majority religion through a skeptical prism should also apply their critical faculties to atheism.

About the Culture and Media Institute

The Culture and Media Institute's mission is to advance, preserve, and help restore America's culture, character, traditional values, and morals against the assault of the liberal media elite. Founded in October 2006 with a challenge grant from the Templeton Foundation, CMI has already attracted attention from the Rush Limbaugh Show, Fox News Channel, CNN and many other news outlets.

Using the unique resources at Media Research Center, CMI is exposing media campaigns against the traditional values of faith, self-reliance, patriotism, marriage, decency, civic pride, gratitude, industriousness and good manners. CMI staffers regularly appear on TV, radio and in print, and publish periodic reports as well as articles for outside publications.

The Culture and Media Institute
A Division of the Media Research Center
325 S. Patrick Street 📍 Alexandria, Virginia 22314
(703) 683-9733 📞 www.CultureandMedia.com

L. Brent Bozell III, President
Robert H. Knight, Director
Brian Fitzpatrick, Senior Editor
Kristen Fyfe, Senior Writer
Colleen Raezler, Research Assistant

About the MRC

Founded in 1987, the Media Research Center (MRC) is America's largest and most respected media watchdog group. Its mission is to create a media culture where truth and liberty flourish in America.

The Alexandria, Virginia-based organization brings balance and responsibility to the news media through its News Analysis Division, which documents, exposes and neutralizes liberal media bias; the Business & Media Institute, which audits the media's coverage of economic issues; TimesWatch.org, which monitors the New York Times; and Newsbusters.org, the MRC blog, which exposes liberal media bias 24 hours a day.

The MRC is also home to the Cybercast News Service (CNSNews.com), an Internet news outlet that is dedicated to providing unbiased coverage of the news of the day.

In 2006, the MRC launched the Culture and Media Institute with a mission to advance and help restore America's culture, character, traditional values and morals against the assault of the liberal media elite.

Former CBS reporter and now best-selling author Bernard Goldberg says of the MRC, "The Media Research Center folks don't give the media hell; they just tell the truth and the media thinks it's hell."

The MRC is organized under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, and contributions to the MRC are tax-deductible for income tax purposes. The MRC does not accept government grants or contracts. We raise our funds each year solely from private sources including individuals, foundations, and corporations.

Sundays with Christopher Hitchens



After airing a feature about an atheist convention on September 30, *Good Morning America* Sunday's Bill Weir interviewed Christopher Hitchens and asked him what he'd tell the millions of Americans attending church services that day. Hitchens replied: "It would be better for them if they didn't give themselves forced consolation and if they didn't believe in myth and legend, not all of it harmless."

Christopher Hitchens on the August 19 broadcast of CBS's *Sunday Morning*:
"...those who are religious claim not only that there is a God, which they cannot know, but they claim to know his mind and his instructions, which is much more than any human being can claim to know."

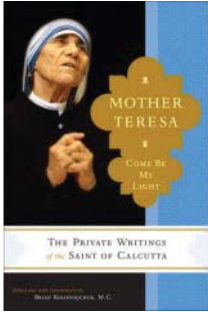


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Newsweek's January 8, 2007 edition featured a profile on a Web site called Blasphemy Challenge. The Rational Response Squad, a group composed of atheists, was behind the site and said their purpose was to get people to "commit the unforgiveable sin" of denying God. Twenty-two days later, ABC's *Nightline* featured the Web site and the group behind it. ABC gave the group more air time when they featured a debate about the existence of God on the May 9th broadcast of *Nightline*.

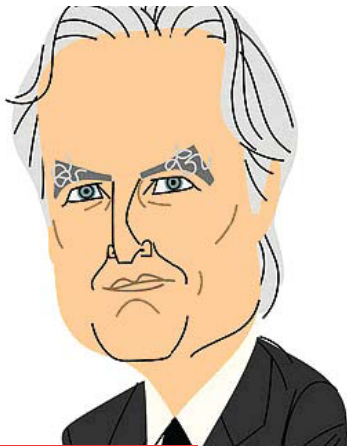
"There's no evidence for such a God, and it's instructive to notice that we're all atheists with respect to Zeus and the thousands of other dead gods who now nobody worships." ~ Sam Harris's response to the question "Is there a God in the sense that most Americans think of him?" [*Newsweek*, April 9, 2007]



A book about Mother Teresa's spiritual struggles was fodder for atheist Christopher Hitchens to launch another broadside against faith. *Newsweek* gave Hitchens two pages for his "critique" of the book in which he wrote the nun was a confused old lady."

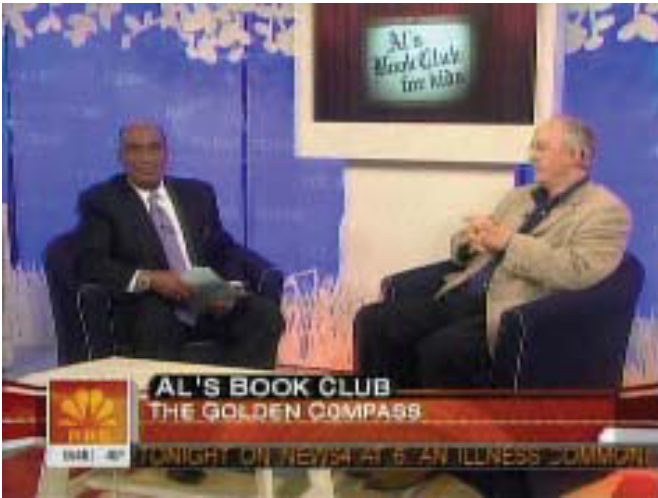


Mike Huckabee appeared on NBC's *Meet the Press* in January and December of 2007. Both times he was asked his opinion about atheists, including whether or not he'd appoint an atheist to his Cabinet if elected President. Mitt Romney was asked a similar question. Democrats were not confronted on their views of atheism.



Time chose atheist Richard Dawkins as one of its

100 Most Influential People in the World for 2007.



On the November 2 broadcast of *Today*, "Al's Book Club" featured "The Golden Compass", a book written by atheist Philip Pullman, which was due to be released as a movie in December. Pullman is on record saying his books are about "killing God." Al Roker didn't address that in the interview but did promote the book to young readers.