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**New Atheism and ‘Evil’ of Religions: The Call of Pastoral Theology for Building
New Apologetics**

Summary: In this paper, the author explores the New Atheism movement in the West and contemporary Western apologetics. The goal of such research is to present the apologetics as a valid answer of the Church to modern science and atheistic conclusions based on it. Apologetics should be reestablished as a separate theological discipline that would help young theologians understand the issues in dialogue between New Atheism and Christianity, which are currently studied briefly in pastoral theology.

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New Atheism and 'Evil' of Religions: The Call of Pastoral Theology for Building New Apologetics

Summary. In this paper, the author explores the New Atheism movement in the West and contemporary Western apologetics. The goal of such research is to present the apologetics as a valid answer of the Church to modern science and atheistic conclusions based on it. Apologetics should be reestablished as a separate theological discipline that would help young theologians understand the issues in dialogue between New Atheism and Christianity, which are currently studied briefly in pastoral theology.

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On 7 January 2015, two brothers Kouachi broke into the headquarters of *Charlie Hebdo* weekly satirical magazine and killed twelve people, including several members of the editorial board. The reason for this terrorist attack by Islamists was magazine's depiction of Muslim prophet Muhammad, as well as other "racist" insults against Muslims in France and all over the world. Eyes of the nations were focused on Paris; many politicians, religious leaders, and common people expressed their deep grief, calling for tolerance and higher level of mutual understanding between different cultures and civilizations. Moderate (or, simply, true) Muslim theologians, especially those residing in European countries, condemned the attack, declaring once again that Islam is "religion of peace" and that all who kill in the name of Allah and Muhammad are not doing God's work. In other words, religious violence should not be tolerated in any religion, including Islam that faces many problems with proving its peaceful and good intentions to the West recently.

Several years ago, there were many reported cases of children who committed suicide in Australia because of sexual abuse by the members of Roman Catholic monastic orders and priesthood. Such cases produced a worldwide conviction that Roman Catholic Church is a sanctuary for pedophiles and other sexually deviant individuals, which is sometimes backed up by Church's failure to respond adequately to these problems. The irony, as many critics of Church noticed, is in a fact that official Vatican rigorously condemns sexual misconduct of every kind, including homosexual behavior, while showing completely different approach to same problems when they occur among clergymen. Of course, this does not imply that Roman Catholic Church is really

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a sanctuary for pedophiles, but it does shed light on an issue that requires more serious approach and treatment by Church itself.

In 2006, a leader of fundamentalist branch of Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints named Warren Jeffs, was arrested, and accused of several cases of child abuse. It should be noted that Jeffs had about 70 wives (some of whom were minors). Although several members of his closest family testified against him, or admitted that they themselves were his victims, Jeffs was convicted of only two cases of child sexual abuse. The court sentenced him to life in prison. This did not stop Jeffs to consider himself a martyr, so he wrote a book *Jesus Christ Message to All Nations* in prison, claiming that Jesus himself spoke to him and gave instructions for his liberation.

These are only three cases of crimes committed in the name of religion, or under the “protection” of its sanctity. It seems that sane men and women can only commit such atrocities if irresponsible individuals implant certain religious teachings in their brains. That is, of course, a notion that we mostly hear from militant and aggressive atheists, whose main goal is to prove that religion is evil. Their view does not include the fact that deviant or mentally ill individuals might as well use religion as a cover for their own evil deeds. It is almost impossible, in their view, that a man living in 21st century Great Britain might adopt radical Islamist ideology and travel to Syria or Iraq to fight for the so-called “Islamic State”. Even though many ISIL cutthroats received secular education, their brains were poisoned elsewhere, probably in Muslim schools or in organizations for spreading Sharia Law in the West, such as *Islam for United Kingdom (Islam4UK)* led by Anjem Choudary. Apparently, Choudary encouraged many young Muslims in the West to fight for ISIL, but this radical imam himself never fired a bullet at anyone, nor he planned to commit suicide bombing. In other words, not all Muslims are suitable for Choudary’s propaganda. The necessity of examining individual people who are doing evil “in the name of” religion, and not just ideologies or religions that encourage them to do so cannot be stressed enough.

The ongoing war between East and West, mainly fought in the Middle East, turns out not to be a mere political problem of the White House and Dar al-Islam (the House of Islam), nor just a religious problem affecting Islam exclusively, but also a problem of many other profiles of people all around the world. Long has religion been a speck (or maybe a plank) in the eyes of those who claim that world would be much better place if there were no religious beliefs that turn people against each other. The entire movement of so-called “New Atheism” strives to turn as much individuals as possible to a non-religion, to liberate minds corrupted and enslaved by religions, and to fight religious ideas on intellectual basis. Their agenda proves to be quite interesting, but not quite new. Atheism existed hundreds of years before the advent of its “new” descendant in teachings of certain ancient philosophers, and even before them in India and East Asia. Even some religions started their historical progress as essentially atheist ideas. Buddhism, for example, has negation of God, soul, and every other kind of permanent existence in its very core. Taoism speaks of the Way (Tao) and its yin and yang forces as the “rulers” of the Universe, but not of Creator; gods, if they exist, should follow the Way just as mortal humans do. Confucianism,

although not explicitly atheist philosophy or religion, does not consider the existence of (personal) God as the focus of its philosophical inquiry. In other words, atheism in all its forms is actually an ancient religious problem. What is “new” in New Atheism is its use of contemporary political and religious turmoil in the world in order to prove that religion should be ignored or even massively abandoned, not simply because it is “wrong”, but primarily because it is “evil”.

Due to a large corpus of (sometimes truly remarkable) literature produced by contemporary atheists, it is quite hard and almost impossible to discuss all topics mentioned in their works. Several volumes might have adequate number of necessary pages for such discussion, but an article offers just enough space simply to introduce reader to this subject. Therefore, I do not intend to approach the problem of “New Atheism” as an apologist, i.e. as a theologian whose main goal is to refute modern atheist arguments against Christianity or religion in general. My goal is to point at several problems raised by modern atheist authors and mainly to point at necessity of development of new Orthodox Christian apologetics as an answer to those problems. Currently, there is no apologetics as a separate subject of study in our theological faculties and seminaries. That is why the study of atheism by theologians is mostly limited to pastoral theology, i.e. theological discipline that prepares future priests for pastoral work in parishes. However, contemporary atheism presents much bigger problem than those that can be studied in one or two lectures. Thus, one of modern pastoral theology’s goals is the renewal of apologetics as a separate discipline of theology, the one that might study atheism as a global religious problem that did not cease to exist following the fall of communist regime in former Yugoslav republics.

The best way to start the discussion about mentioned issues is to review the works of contemporary atheists. There is hope that the approach of this kind will shed light on the necessity of new apologetics, but not only as another temporary discipline, or as an ecclesial version of Marxism that lost its purpose as soon as that subject disappeared from our secular schools, but also as an opportunity for young theologians to meet exciting new horizons of science. If this understanding of apologetics among other theologians remains firm, than there is a good chance that theology as a scientific discipline itself can become more sensitive to the world we live in today. Apologetics must transcend its former use as Church’s weapon, defensive or offensive, and assume the role of dialogical channel between Church and atheism, between natural and Supernatural, and among people of different educational backgrounds. That kind of apologetics may enrich theology.

New Atheists’ Arguments against Religion

New Atheism is a social movement that propagates “liberation” of humankind from religious evil. The goal of this “new” ideology can be expressed in more complex manner, but the simplification is neither wrong nor impolite. It is true. Why else would such distinguished scientists, authors, and philosophers abandon their primary field of study and put all their efforts in battle against something so “ridiculous” and “unscientific”

as religion? One might say that people like Richard Dawkins did not abandon their profession, but it is simply not true. What has an evolutionary biologist to do with theological themes, such as redemption, original sin, etc? Maybe the core question of theology, which is the existence of God, somehow affects Darwinian worldview, but the interaction of two fields of study should not imply that one of them is wrong. Different approaches to human brain in neurobiology and psychology do not exclude each other. Both disciplines contribute to general understanding of the most complex organ in human body. Why biology and theology cannot cooperate in such manner? For new atheists, the answer is quite simple: if God exists, than all scientific theories like evolutionary biology are wrong, because God somehow negates the empirical Universe and its laws. Many theologians do not think that way, but they are not interesting to new atheists. It is more fun and “appropriate” to debate with fundamentalists, because their religious beliefs are easily ridiculed and refuted. It is not important what sophisticated theologians think; their own belief is irrelevant to what majority of theologically uneducated believers think, as Dawkins said in one of his many debates with Christian representatives. Therefore, there is no need to consult the vast literature of the Church’s Fathers or distinguished theologians. One can only wish that Christian theology were as simple as a personal belief of some barely educated Joe from some village in Texas. That is far from true. If one serious scientist wants to dedicate his life and career to ridiculing such faith, than how is it not abandoning his primary field of study? Evolutionary biology does not deal with folk belief; it is only partially an interest of theology, and primarily an interest of anthropology and religiology. To be an atheist does not require an academic title. It requires, at least according to my personal opinion, excellent knowledge of religion in general. A theologian can claim that God exists because he (or she) studied the theology; an evolutionary biologist who knows theology as much as a first grader in seminary cannot. Nevertheless, new atheists are quite sure that there is no God, that religion as a phenomenon is false scientific hypothesis, and that almost all evil in modern world is caused by these dangerous “medieval” ideas. It is only fair to overview their arguments against religion as an evil ideology.

Although New Atheism is a movement that involves many scientists, philosophers, authors, and even comedians, four men became its poster-faces. They are known as “Four Horsemen of Non-Apocalypse”, or “Four Horsemen of New Atheism”: an evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, philosopher Daniel Dennett, neuroscientist and philosopher Sam Harris, and late Christopher Hitchens, journalist and author. After Hitchens died in 2011, his place was filled by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Somali woman who escaped from arranged marriage to Netherlands. Thus, she became the “Fourth Horsewoman of Non-Apocalypse”. Some honorable mentions are Lawrence Krauss, an astrophysicist, physicist Victor Stenger, comedian and television host Bill Maher, etc.

Richard Dawkins (born 26 March 1941) is professor emeritus in Oxford and former professor of Public understanding of science. He is probably the most famous and most popular among new atheists, due to his several popular science books and engagement in countless public debates with religious figures in the West. In 1976, professor Dawkins published *The Selfish Gene*, a book in which he discusses evolution as primarily gene-

based process of the development of life. Genetic mechanics, as described in Dawkins's first book, affects the reader so strongly that he must definitely change his view of life. In the Introduction to the 30th anniversary edition of *The Selfish Gene*, Dawkins quotes one reader from Australia:

Fascinating, but at times I wish I could unread it. (...) On one level, I can share in the sense of wonder Dawkins so evidently sees in the workings-out of such complex processes. (...) But at the same time, I largely blame *The Selfish Gene* for a series of bouts of depression I suffered from for more than a decade. (...) Never sure of my spiritual outlook on life, but trying to find something deeper / trying to believe, but not quite being able to – I found that this book just about blew away any vague ideas I had along these lines, and prevented them from coalescing any further. This created quite a strong personal crisis for me some years ago (quoted from: Dawkins 2006a, XIII).

More important for our discussion than genetics is Dawkins's theory of "memes" that he proposed in *The Selfish Gene*. "Meme" is a term that Dawkins invented to describe cultural evolution, as opposed to biological evolution that is accomplished by the transmission of genes and by the means of natural selection. Just as the primeval soup of organic molecules was the environment in which genes were born, memes have their own kind of "soup".

The new soup is the soup of human culture. We need a name for the new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of *imitation*. 'Mimeme' comes from a suitable Greek root, but I want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like 'gene'. I hope my classicist friends will forgive me if I abbreviate mimeme to *meme*. If it is any consolation, it could alternatively be thought of as being related to 'memory', or to the French word *même* (Dawkins 2006a, 192).

These memes are, therefore, cultural replicators that act as a driving force for accepting new ideas, languages, melodies, etc. In other words, they act as genes of culture, jumping from brain to brain and thus affecting great numbers of humans. That is why memes are similar to viruses; they affect human's brain, "turning it into a vehicle for the meme's propagation in just the way that a virus may parasitize the genetic mechanism of a host cell" (N. K. Humphrey as quoted in: Dawkins 2006a, 192). If all processes of human mind, such as learning language, accepting certain philosophical ideas, or remembering catchy tunes, can be explained as "parasitizing" brains by memes, then the religion itself must be a meme. Very soon in the 11th chapter of *The Selfish Gene*, entitled "Memes: The New Replicators", Dawkins treats the idea of God as a classical example of self-replicating meme:

Consider the idea of God. We do not know how it arose in the meme pool. Probably it originated many times by independent 'mutation'. In any case, it is very old indeed. How does it replicate itself? By the spoken and written word, aided by great music and great art. Why does it have such high survival value? Remember that 'survival value' here does not mean value for a gene in a gene pool, but value for a meme in a meme pool. The question really means: What is it about the idea of a god that gives it its stability and penetrance in the cultural environment? The survival value of a god meme in the meme pool results from its great psychological appeal. It provides a superficially plausible answer to deep and troubling ques-

tions about existence. It suggests that injustices in this world may be rectified in the next. The ‘everlasting arms’ hold out a cushion against our own inadequacies which, like a doctor’s placebo, is none the less effective for being imaginary. These are some of the reasons why the idea of God is copied so readily by successive generations of individual brains. God exists, if only in the form of a meme with high survival value, or infective power, in the environment provided by human culture (Dawkins 2006a, 192-193).

In other words, God is nothing but a memetic “virus” that exists due to human desire to find justice in this ruthless world. It is only one of many religious memes, others being the meme of blind faith, the meme of celibacy, etc. If some of these memes had corresponding genes, as Dawkins claims, they would almost certainly die out. For example, the gene for celibacy would not be able to replicate itself because its human carriers or “vehicles”, as Dawkins likes to call them, would not have sexual intercourse as the means of human reproduction.¹ Celibacy as a meme is completely different thing. Some religions have monastic tradition that supports the replication of such meme, regardless of its devastating results in the context of genetic transmission of an individual “vehicle”. Such memes are, therefore, harming and unnecessary. It seems that genetic and memetic influence upon their carriers cannot be avoided, but Dawkins thinks otherwise. Although there is a great deal of determination in this theory, Dawkins claims that “we have the power to turn against our creators. We, alone on earth, can rebel against the tyranny of the selfish replicators” (Dawkins 2006a, 201).

Dawkins wrote several more popular books, including *The Extended Phenotype* (1982), *Climbing Mount Improbable* (1996), *A Devil’s Chaplain* (2003), and last but not least – the manifesto of new atheism, unchallenged champion at the top of atheist literature all over the world, *The God Delusion* (2006). This book sums up Dawkins’s atheist ideas scattered across his older books, calling for “crouching unbelievers, hidden atheists” to come out and express their non-belief in public. *The God Delusion* is, according to Dawkins himself, “intended to raise consciousness – raise consciousness to the fact that to be an atheist is a realistic aspiration, and a brave and splendid one” (Dawkins 2006b, 1). The best way to wake up so many sleeping atheists would be refuting the very idea of God, or a God meme mentioned in *The Selfish Gene*. Thus, Dawkins tries to present religion as a scientific hypothesis about the world and its origin, and than analyses it as such. One might think that this approach is quite unfair because religion does not try to explain quantum mechanics or genetic replication, but Dawkins dismisses these views and treats the belief in God and God Himself as objects that are much closer to his comfort zone: as scientific theories about Universe. Chapter 2 of *The God Delusion* opens with Dawkins’s famous “definition” of God of the Old Testament, according to which He is

arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homo-

¹ One cannot but wonder how could then the famous “gay gene” replicate itself for thousands of years?

phobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully (Dawkins 2006b, 31).

The God of the Old Testament is for Dawkins “an easy target”, one that barely deserves to be refuted in a serious scientific book, so he chooses to refute the very idea of God (or gods) regardless of its form or geographical expressions of his God meme. Accepting a tremendous task that any historian of religion would describe as impossible, Dawkins fails in the very definition of “God” that he intends to refute:

There exists a super-human, supernatural intelligence who deliberately designed and created the universe and everything in it, including us. This book will advocate an alternate view: any creative intelligence, of sufficient complexity to design anything, comes into existence only as the end product of an extended process of gradual evolution. Creative intelligences, being evolved, necessarily arrive late in the universe, and therefore cannot be responsible for designing it. God, in the sense defined, is a delusion; and, as later chapters will show, a pernicious delusion (Dawkins 2006b, 31).

First, the claim that God-idea in general is the idea of a creative intelligence is nothing but false. Teachings about God as the Creator do exist in Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Baha’i), but the creation in the Bible cannot be easily compared to creation in various Hindu myths. Indian religions tend to interpret history as a cycle, and not as a linear history with beginning and the end. In other words, the Creator of Hinduism is not creating the world *ex nihilo*, but from the remnants of previous world. Who or what created the very first world (if there ever was a first world) – no one can tell. Many gods, and the world itself, are nothing but parts or manifestations of great Brahman: they all originate from him, and they all return to him. That is a pantheistic worldview, which is quite different from Christian teaching. Godly figures in Mahayana Buddhism are not creators of any kind. Chinese religions never had creation myths, even though they had many gods, until Indian myth was imported via trade routes. Japanese native religion also does not possess Dawkins’s “creative intelligence”. Therefore, the target of *The God Delusion* is primarily Abrahamic God and not God meme in general. Second objection to Dawkins’s definition of God is that he tends to ignore theological teachings about God who is out of universe. Eternity cannot exist as a category, simply because a scientist does not have necessary means to analyze it. It turns out that Dawkins actually fights against God that he himself invented, and not against God of the Bible. Dawkins even seems angry when someone mentions God that is out of the reach of science: “Why are scientists so cravenly respectful towards the ambitions of theologians, over questions that theologians are certainly no more qualified to answer than scientists themselves” (Dawkins 2006b, 56)? This question should be left unanswered.

Analyzing many historical cases of violence backed-up by certain religious beliefs, Dawkins concludes that it is primarily religion that turns decent people into terrorists and fundamentalists who do not want to accept the evidence, but exclusively teachings of their holy books. Religions turn good people into bad people; it is as simple as that. Dawkins often advocates the liberation of children from religious indoctrination, seeing this phenomenon as a cause of many evils in modern world.

Faith is an evil precisely because it requires no justification and brooks no argument. Teaching children that unquestioned faith as a virtue primes them – given certain other ingredients that are not hard to come by – to grow up into potentially lethal weapons for future jihads or crusades. Immunized against fear by the promise of a martyr’s paradise, the authentic faith-head deserves a high place in the history of armaments, alongside the longbow, the warhorse, the tank and the cluster bomb. If children were taught to question and think through their beliefs, instead of being taught the superior virtue of faith without question, it is a good bet that there would be no suicide bombers. (...) Faith can be very very dangerous, and deliberately to implant it into the vulnerable mind of an innocent child is a grievous wrong (Dawkins 2006b, 308).

These are serious accusations. If religion really produces individuals that would cut someone’s throat in the blink of an eye and sleep peacefully few hours later, than Dawkins is completely right: faith is evil. I myself, as a teacher in religious school, should question every word that comes out of my mouth in classes. Do I participate in the production of morally corrupted individuals? Did I dedicate my life to a cause that is wrong and evil, even though I live in a delusion that I am doing something good? Quite contrary, professors in theological faculties teach students about God who is Love, about establishing peace and happiness in the world, about loving all people, etc. It would be good for new atheists and bad for Christianity if there were even a single book produced by serious theologian, in which children would be advised not to accept the evidence of natural sciences and to believe that Earth is flat, or that crusades were good things. There probably are people who write such books, but that kind of literature has no place in official religious education. Old apologetics somehow attracted individuals who hate dinosaurs for some reason and have need to disprove their existence, and that is one of many reasons why apologetics was removed from theological schools. Apologetic literature that some theologians produced over the years was simply bad, and it failed both theology and natural sciences on many levels.

Many arguments offered by Dawkins to his readers serve as proofs that religion is evil and that God should be treated as just another wrong idea. Theologians have no more right to speak about God than evolutionary biologists or astrophysicists. Theology itself is a false discipline, and it should be flattered if any serious “real” scientist calls it a science. It has no potential to answer the real questions, even though she tries; it should be discredited as soon as possible. Dawkins does not accept the notion of religion and science as two separate fields of human thinking, because they are ultimately trying to answer the same questions about life and the universe. Similar to other new atheists, Dawkins shows great aversion towards the theory that science answers “how” questions, while theology answers “why” questions.

The mere fact that it is possible to frame a question does not make it legitimate or sensible to do so. There are many things about which you can ask, ‘What is its temperature?’ or ‘What color is it?’ but you may not ask the temperature question or the color question of, say, jealousy or prayer. Similarly, you are right to ask the ‘Why’ question of a bicycle’s mudguards or the Kariba Dam, but at the very least you have no right to *assume* that the ‘Why’ question deserves an answer when posed about a boulder, a misfortune, Mt. Everest or the universe. Questions can be simply inappropriate, however heartfelt their framing (Dawkins 1995, 97).

As usual, Dawkins constructs a sentence that seems like it is official scientific dogma, or an evidence-based fact: we have no right to *assume* that the “why” question about the Universe deserves an answer. On the other hand, Dawkins seemingly has every right to *assume* that it does not deserve an answer. A theologian may simply say otherwise, and the discussion will continue forever. Dawkins, a scientist who constantly praises natural sciences for asking good questions, somehow convinces his audience that “why” is not good. In reality, he simply does not like questions that take him out of his comfort zone – if there is no apparent answer to certain questions in natural sciences, than that question must be wrong, or even stupid.

Richard Dawkins, being Darwinian scientist, faces many problems in the very world of science for trying to impose the Darwinian worldview in all other fields of study. A meme theory is one such hypothesis, which is rejected by many serious anthropologists. There simply is no evidence to support it, but it somehow does not require the same treatment as the idea of God, at least according to Dawkins. Similar to Dawkins is another Darwin-enthusiast, a philosopher Daniel Dennett (born 28 March 1942) who also wrote several bestselling books that are classics of New Atheism. It should be noted that he tends to avoid the term “atheist” and uses “bright” as an adequate substitute.² In *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, Dennett explains how nature itself created living beings and then perfected them over millions of years through evolution and ‘natural selection’ that is, according to Dennett and Darwin himself, not a very good term. That is why Dennett, while trying to avoid anthropomorphisms in speaking of evolution, uses Dawkins’s term “the blind watchmaker” (which is also a title of one Dawkins’s book). The explanation of nature cannot be reduced to series of intelligent interventions, or the “skyhooks”, as Dennett names them:

The skyhook concept is perhaps a descendant of the *dues ex machina* of ancient Greek dramaturgy, when second-rate playwrights found their plots leading their heroes into inescapable difficulties, they were often tempted to crank down a god onto the scene, like Super-man, to save the situation supernaturally. Or skyhooks may be an entirely independent creation of convergent folkloric evolution. Skyhooks would be wonderful things to have, great for lifting unwieldy objects out of difficult circumstances, and speeding up all sorts of construction projects. Sad to say, they are impossible (Dennett 1995, 74).

What he tries to say is that God as intervening Creator, whom Dennett compares with skyhooks, is not possible. Nature does not work due to series of supernatural interventions; it is not dependent on the process that is oriented “downward”. On the other hand, nature builds itself “upward”:

There are cranes, however. Cranes can do the lifting work our imaginary skyhooks might do, and they do it in an honest, non-question-begging fashion. They are expensive, however. They have to be designed and built, from everyday parts already on hand, and they have to be located on a firm base of existing ground. Skyhooks are miraculous lifters, unsupported

² Probably because the term “atheist” has a reference to God in it, Dennett wants to avoid old arguments that atheism is religion because it takes stance in relation to God. Thus, the term “bright” is much better, because it does not contain the Greek word for God and implies that religious people are un-bright.

and insupportable. Cranes are no less excellent as lifters, and they have the decided advantage of being real. Anyone who is, like me, a lifelong looker at construction sites will have noticed with some satisfaction that it sometimes takes a small crane to set up a big crane. And it must have occurred to many other onlookers that in principle this big crane could be used to enable or speed up the building of a still more spectacular crane. Cascading cranes is a tactic that seldom if ever gets used more than once in real-world construction projects, but in principle there is no limit to the number of cranes that could be organized in series to accomplish some mighty end (Dennett 1995, 75).

It is obvious that the crane refers to the works of nature itself. It is one elegant and fitting metaphor for explaining how basic atoms and molecules can form organisms that are more complex. A “skyhook” is, therefore, unnecessary, and it was useful only before Darwin’s remarkable breakthrough. When humankind finally realized the might of cranes – invisible skyhooks lost their place in science but somehow kept their place in religion.

In his book *Breaking the Spell*, Dennett compares religion to a lifted state of mind, similar to listening favorite music. The spell of beautiful tunes is sometimes broken by someone’s phone ringing, and Dennett declares that he does not want to be a man with the phone. However, spells are not identical.

The problem is that there are good spells and then there are bad spells. If only some timely phone call could have interrupted the proceedings at Jonestown in Guyana in 1978, when the lunatic Jim Jones was ordering his hundreds of spellbound followers to commit suicide! If only we could have broken the spell that enticed the Japanese cult Aum Shinrikyo to release sarin gas in a Tokyo subway, killing a dozen people and injuring thousands more! If only we could figure out some way today to break the spell that lures thousands of poor young Muslim boys into fanatical madrassahs where they are prepared for a life of murderous martyrdom instead of being taught about the modern world, about democracy and history and science! If only we could break the spell that convinces some of our fellow citizens that they are commanded by God to bomb abortion clinics (Dennett 2006, 13)!

In other words, religion is a bad spell, the one that turns good people into killers for the sake of some false promise. Dennett, however, admits that majority of religious people are not killers and shows a certain level of sympathy for those whose lives would be ruined if they were to understand that there is no God. A source of his optimism is a fact that there are many people who do not actually believe in God, but they still act as they were religious, simply to assure their acceptance in society, or in order to avoid the distress in their families. These people are hidden atheists and there are many of them, according to Dennett’s assumption. The question is how they live their lives without anything sacred to look up to. For Dennett, the *sacred* does not necessary imply some kind of God; it is nature itself that is sacred.

Does that make me an atheist? Certainly, in the obvious sense. If what you hold sacred is not any kind of Person you could pray to, or consider to be an appropriate recipient of gratitude (or anger, when a loved one is senselessly killed), you’re an atheist in my book. If, for reasons of loyalty to tradition, diplomacy, or self-protective camouflage (very important today, especially for politicians), you want to deny what you are, that’s your business, but don’t kid

yourself. Maybe in the future, if more of us brights will just come forward and calmly announce that of course we no longer believe in any of those Gods, it will be possible to elect an atheist to some office higher than senator. We now have Jewish and female senators and homosexual members of Congress, so the future looks bright (Dennett 2006, 245).

It seems that atheists in the West are persecuted by religious people who do not allow nonbelievers to engage in politics. The “bright” people, therefore, are ruled by those who are not bright. Still, USA and Great Britain are among most powerful countries in the world. Nevertheless, Dennett denies that moral values of Christianity are responsible for good standard of life in Western societies because, as all new atheists claim, religion is not what gives us morals. Dawkins himself often expresses his happiness for the fact that people do not get their moral values from the Bible, especially from the Old Testament that is, according to his opinion, no better than the Quran. Dennett claims:

I have uncovered no evidence to support the claim that people, religious or not, who don't believe in reward in heaven and/or punishment in hell are more likely to kill, rape, rob, or break their promises than people who do. The prison population in the United States shows Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, and others – including those with no religious affiliation – represented about as they are in the general population. Brights and others with no religious affiliation exhibit the same range of moral excellence and turpitude as born-again Christians, but, more to the point, so do members of religions that de-emphasize or actively deny any relationship between moral behavior ‘on earth’ and eventual postmortem reward and punishment (Dennett 2006, 279).

Sam Harris (born 9 April 1967) further discusses against the notion that morality is based on religion in his book *The Moral Landscape*. The consequence of such belief is that people are neglecting science and all goods that it had brought to our modern world. Actually, Harris tries to prove that our moral values can be determined by scientific methods, and not exclusively by religious thinking. He claims that

religious conservatives tend to believe that there are right answers to questions of meaning and morality, but only because the God of Abraham deems it so. They concede that ordinary facts can be discovered through rational inquiry, but they believe that values must come from a voice in a whirlwind. Scriptural literalism, intolerance of diversity, mistrust of science, disregard for the real causes of human and animal suffering – too often, this is how the division between facts and values expresses itself on the religious right (Harris 2010, 5).

What made Harris famous, however, is not *The Moral Landscape*, but the book entitled *The End of Faith*, first published in 2004. The agenda of this bestseller is clearly visible in its subtitle: *Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*. Similar to Dawkins's writing in *The God Delusion*, Harris has nothing good to say about the God of the Old Testament. Even more important, if human beings must draw their moral values from some holy book or a deity, it had better be not the God of Abraham.

The deity who stalked the deserts of the Middle East millennia ago – and who seems to have abandoned to bloodshed in his name ever since – is no one to consult on questions of ethics. Indeed, to judge him on the basis of his works is a highly invidious undertaking. (...) In the face of God's obvious inadequacies, the pious have generally held that one cannot apply

earthly norms to the Creator of the universe. This argument loses its force the moment we notice that the creator who purports to be beyond human judgment is consistently ruled by human passions – jealousy, wrath, suspicion, and the lust to dominate. A close study of our holy books reveals that the God of Abraham is a ridiculous fellow – capricious, petulant, and cruel – and one with whom a covenant is little guarantee of health and happiness. If these are the characteristics of God, then the worst among us have been created far more in his image than we ever could have hoped (Harris 2004, 173).

Rejecting God as basis of human morals, Harris also denies theology any right to engage in fair discussion with sciences about ethics and universal values. It is precisely science, as exposed in *The Moral Landscape*, and not religion that should deduce right ethics for the people of the 21st century. Harris notices that contemporary theology fails to explain seemingly evil phenomena in nature in the face of an omnipotent and omniscient God who should be good. It is the problem of theodicy that enables Harris to conclude that “theology is now little more than a branch of human ignorance. Indeed, it is ignorance with wings” (Harris 2004, 173). That is an image that certain branches of theology have in the West, mostly due to creationist circles of apologists. Similar apologetic tendencies can be noticed in orthodox East. Many Orthodox apologists draw “facts” from conspiracy theories in order to “prove” the fallacy of contemporary science, thus making theology itself to look like unsophisticated, backward scientific thinking. Harris could be right if he limits his description of theology only to those apologetic groups, but new atheists in general tend to describe entire theology as ignorance.

Christopher Hitchens (13 April 1949 – 15 December 2011) was British journalist and author. Besides Dawkins, he was probably the most popular among new atheists, and quite militant one at that. Many of his debates with religious leaders and other representatives of religion are uploaded on the internet, and the view count of these videos proves that Hitchens was very intelligent and interesting person indeed. The fans even coined phrases that include *Hitch*, but it would not be appropriate to write them down in this paper. Hitchens’s bibliography is very extensive, so only few books that discuss religious topics will be mentioned by name: *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice* (1995), *The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Non-Believer* (2007), *God is not Great: How Religion Poisons everything* (2007), and *Is Christianity Good for the World?* (2008). Throughout his works, Hitchens addressed political and religious problems in the world, thus making a good case for condemnation of fanatical believers as well as political tyrants who sometimes associate themselves with religion (or religion associates with them). His work could have been excellent, even from a theologian’s point of view, if he had not extended his condemnation of the evils committed by religious fanatics to God himself. Surprisingly, he was even a member of the Orthodox Church:

When I was a member of the Greek Orthodox Church, I could feel, even if I could not believe, the joyous words that are exchanged between believers on Easter morning: ‘Christos anesti’ (Christ is risen!) ‘Alethos anesti’ (He is risen indeed!). I was a member of the Greek Orthodox Church, I might add, for a reason that explains why very many people profess an outward allegiance. I joined it to please my Greek parents-in-law. The archbishop who received me into his communion on the same day that he officiated at my wedding, thereby

trousering two fees instead of the usual one, later became an enthusiastic cheerleader and fund-raiser for his fellow Orthodox Serbian mass murderers Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, who filled countless mass graves all over Bosnia (Hitchens 2007, 16).

It would probably be much better assumption that the archbishop raised money for Serbian people that also suffered during the war in Bosnia, but it is usual in the West to consider Serbs as genocidal maniacs. Hitchens was a Western journalist, after all. Nevertheless, in his book *God is not Great* (which is negation of Muslim Takbir *Allahu Akbar* – God is great), Hitchens expounds many arguments against religion and claims that it does not make people better. The goodness of believers is not a proof for the truth of certain religion; their badness is also not a proof that religion is wrong, which is a great step forward in analyzing the crimes of people who hide their own wickedness behind the veil of religious belief. It is not, however, a basis for the assumption that religion has no real influence on people. Its influence is mostly bad, which is evident in the behavior of certain religious figures in the West. Hitchens notices: “When priests go bad, they go very bad indeed, and commit crimes that would make the average sinner pale” (Hitchens 2007, 186). This is clearly a reference to many cases of the sexual abuse of children by Catholic clergymen in the West. It should be noted that Hitchens criticized Roman Catholicism as one of the worst religions in the world, with Islam at the top of the list. Some of his objections to Catholicism include the condemnation of homosexuals, resistance to abortion, accumulating wealth in the face of poverty throughout the world, etc. However, he admits that he was a “guarded admirer” of the late Pope John Paul II whom Hitchens describes as a “brave and serious person capable of displaying both moral and physical courage” (Hitchens 2007, 193). According to Hitchens, the Pope showed great openness to science and human suffering, and he even made many apologies to those who suffered the terrors of Roman Catholicism.

These did not include, as they should have done, an atonement for the million or so put to the sword in Rwanda. However, they did include an apology to the Jews for the centuries of Christian anti-Semitism, an apology to the Muslim world for the Crusades, an apology to Eastern Orthodox Christians for the many persecutions that Rome had inflicted upon them, too, and some general contrition about the Inquisition as well. This seemed to say that the church had mainly been wrong and often criminal in the past, but was now purged of its sin by confession and quite ready to be infallible all over again (Hitchens 2007, 193).

Even in his praise to the Pope, Hitchens kept a tone of irony. Christianity, and especially its clerical forms like Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox Church, is not a force for good in this world. Rather, it is a force for evil, and Hitchens tries to back up that claim with historical examples of Crusades, forced conversions, etc. In other words, Christianity did not pass its historical test. What humanity needs is, actually, a new wave of “Enlightenment” that would finally free it from the evil religious influence. Hitchens concludes:

This Enlightenment will not need to depend, like its predecessors, on the heroic breakthroughs of a few gifted and exceptionally courageous people. It is within the compass of the average person. The study of literature and poetry, both for its own sake and for the

eternal ethical questions with which it deals, can now easily depose the scrutiny of sacred texts that have been found to be corrupt and confected. The pursuit of unfettered scientific inquiry, and the availability of new findings to masses of people by easy electronic means, will revolutionize our concepts of research and development. Very importantly, the divorce between the sexual life and fear, and the sexual life and disease, and the sexual life and tyranny, can now at last be attempted, on the sole condition that we banish all religions from the discourse. And all this and more is, for the first time in our history, within the reach if not the grasp of everyone (Hitchens 2007, 283).

That is a short exposition of the thought of late Christopher Hitchens, the last of the Four Horsemen of Non-Apocalypse. As said before, these four authors are not the only proponents of New Atheism, but detailed discussion about all of them would require much more pages than an article usually has. Some of best resources for studying New Atheism movement include Victor Stenger's *God: The Failed Hypothesis*, Lawrence Krauss's *A Universe from Nothing*, Ayaan Hirsi Ali's *Infidel*, etc. Most of the books written by other new atheists do not offer anything new for the discussion. For example, Stenger claims that "Christendom and Islam have a long history of authoritarianism with little disposition toward individual freedom and justice" (Stenger 2007, 201), following mostly the same arguments one can find in the works of the Four Horsemen. Lawrence Krauss, being the only astrophysicist among "top five" new atheists, had more interesting facts to write down in his book *A Universe from Nothing*, in which he tries to explain how such a complex thing as a Universe can become by itself, i.e. without supernatural intervention. Some more fun works of new atheists are not books, but videos. For example, Richard Dawkins was a host of a television documentary *The Root of All Evil* (2006), while Bill Maher, a comedian with an excellent sense of humor, produced the documentary entitled *Religulous* (an amalgamation of words "religious" and "ridiculous", 2008), in which he travels around the world and exposes what he considers to be ridiculous beliefs of religious people. In addition, his talk show *Real Time with Bill Maher* on HBO is not rarely an opportunity for discussion about religion and its evil influence in the world. Maher is often accused of Islamophobia (as well as other new atheists), and one well-known example from his talk show is a conflict between Maher and Sam Harris on one side and actor Ben Affleck on the other. Affleck claimed that Muslims are mostly peaceful people, while Harris and Maher held that terrorism is almost exclusively connected with Islam and that, therefore, Islam must be solely responsible for the miseries in the Middle East. Other interesting sources for studying New Atheism are many debates between its proponents and religious apologists, found mostly on YouTube and similar websites. Watching these debates further convinces the Orthodox Christian audience that theology had many things to say in the dialogue with New Atheism, but it also has a lot to learn.

Notable Western Apologists

New atheists' books and propaganda drew the attention of many Western theologians. Great number of them wrote books and papers, answering the Four Horsemen and trying to refute their arguments by the means of history, theology, and natural sciences.

William Lane Craig and Alister McGrath are probably two most distinguished apologists who openly stood against the New Atheism movement. There are also some scientists who stood in defense of Christianity or tried to disprove new atheists' hypothesis that science is more qualified than theology to answer the questions of ultimate reality and the meaning of life and the Universe. Stephen Jay Gould, although a Jewish agnostic and evolutionary biologist, often opposed Dawkins and other Darwinians. He was famous for his theory of non-overlapping magisteria (NOMA), according to which theology and science deal with completely different aspects of reality and, therefore, cannot disprove one another. That is why many contemporary atheists, and especially Dawkins, tried to refute the NOMA theory.

William Lane Craig (born 23 August 1949) is Evangelical Christian apologist from USA and author of several apologetic treatises against contemporary atheism. An excellent apologist, Craig engaged in many debates with new atheists, including Hitchens, Krauss, and Harris, and proposed cosmological and historical arguments in favor of religion and Christianity in particular. It might be said that he is also an excellent apologist of apologetics itself, because some of his books propose valid case for the existence of apologetics in contemporary theology. In 1989, Craig published *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus*, which is quite good analysis of the subject mentioned in the title and a useful source for the theist-atheist debates. This book addresses the problem of Biblical criticism and interpretation of Christ's resurrection as a myth rather than historical truth. Craig states that belief based on such assumptions would be false. The book also contains many valid arguments for the existence of apologetics in Christian theology, especially regarding the historicity of Christ and His resurrection.

However fine a theological synthesis an evangelist may present us, I cannot commit myself existentially to it unless I am also convinced that it is true. This is not to take the standpoint of theological rationalism with regard to the resurrection, for certainly God's Spirit may move in the hearts of men to persuade them of the truth apart from consideration of evidence. But it is to deny that a dead man can be of decisive significance for my life today and that this situation is somehow reversed because the proclamation of this dead man's resurrection has theological meaning, though the proclamation is in fact historically false. (...) In this work, therefore, I am primarily interested in the question of the historical credibility of the resurrection accounts, not their theology, except insofar as the latter impinges upon the former. Hence, I am unashamedly pre-occupied with the question of what actually happened (Craig 1989, XIV-XV).

In other words, theological retreat to myth or sole metaphysics, without valid arguments for the historicity of certain events we base our faith on, does no favor to theology itself. Apologetics serves as Christianity's means for establishing such arguments and provides it with firm ground for stressing the credibility of dogma itself. In *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, Craig further explains why apologetics is necessary in modern Christianity. According to his opinion, it has three vital roles in contemporary theology. The first role of apologetics can be seen in wider Christian role in shaping the culture. Craig states that Western culture is post-Christian, influenced by Enlightenment

that preferred knowledge solely based on human reason in contrast to knowledge based on (or shaped by) theology. “Reason and religion are thus at odds with each other”, as Craig notices, concluding that “person who follows the pursuit of reason unflinchingly toward its end will be atheistic or, at best, agnostic” (Craig 2008, 16). This assumption, perhaps, is not completely true, but Craig has good reasons to criticize Western trends that led theology to its “dark ages”. The dominance of naturalistic thinking forces a bad image upon theology, simply because it does not follow the same principles in acquiring knowledge. The truth of the existence of God cannot be proved via scientific experiment in the lab; therefore, it is not true. In other words, cultural domination of naturalism reshaped Western culture into non-Christian or post-Christian at best. Craig states that theology should reaffirm itself in the West if Christians do not want to be treated as ignorant and culturally backward-oriented. He especially criticizes those Christians who do not appreciate the value of apologetics because “no one comes to Christ through arguments”. That is also a favorite argument of our own Orthodox theologians who cannot comprehend the importance of apologetics in contemporary world. As Craig notices, “the value of apologetics extends far beyond one’s immediate evangelistic contact. It is the broader task of Christian apologetics to help create and sustain a cultural milieu in which the gospel can be heard as an intellectually viable option for thinking men and women” (Craig 2008, 17). If observed in cultural context, the apologetics suddenly transcends usual accusations of it being “non-theological”, “too rationalistic”, “unoriginal in the process of the development of theology in general”, etc. Unfortunately, public opinion in the West, as well as in our own cultural environment, is not interested in the depths of theology at all. We theologians might try to convince ourselves that, for example, the teachings of Saint Gregory Palamas somehow have great existential impact on an ordinary believer, but it is simply not true. Most of our believers barely know who this Saint was. Apologetics thus assumes the role of the propagator of Christianity in contemporary culture, reassuring thinking believers, and not just atheists, that the teachings of the Church are perfectly valid in our time as they were 1000 years ago. Craig further explains that

in most cases, it will not be arguments or evidence that bring a seeker to faith in Christ – that is the half-truth seen by detractors of apologetics – but nonetheless it will be apologetics which, by making the gospel a credible option for seeking people, gives them, as it were, the intellectual permission to believe. It is thus vitally important that we preserve a cultural milieu in which the gospel is heard as a living option for thinking people, and apologetics will be front and center in helping to bring about that result (Craig 2008, 19).

The second role of apologetics, as Craig explains, is strengthening the believers. This seems like the same role as the first one, but Craig has in mind Christian family and keeping its unity and traditional values in the face of atheistic naturalism. Apparently, in the West there are many cases of young adults that abandon their parents’ faith, simply because they cannot provide their child with enough arguments for the truth of Christianity. Thus, the naturalistic education breaks Christian family apart. Craig says that he knows many cases of parents who were hurt by their child’s abandonment of Christianity:

It just breaks my heart to meet parents like this. Unfortunately, their experience is not unusual. In high school and college Christian teenagers are intellectually assaulted with every manner of non-Christian worldview coupled with an overwhelming relativism. If parents are not intellectually engaged with their faith and do not have sound arguments for Christian theism and good answers to their children's questions, then we are in real danger of losing our youth. It's no longer enough to teach our children Bible stories; they need doctrine and apologetics. Frankly, I find it hard to understand how people today can risk parenthood without having studied apologetics (Craig 2008, 19).

It is perhaps far-fetched to demand knowledge of apologetics from Christian parents. It is almost impossible to demand such knowledge even from our own theologians, since apologetics does not exist in our schools any more. Craig sees this situation, which is almost identical in West and East, as a big problem. Scientifically uneducated pastors (or priests in our context) cannot engage in dialogue with atheists or scientists in their parishes without embarrassing themselves and the Church. Teaching apologetics in theological schools is one solution to that problem. Sciences such as biology, physics, chemistry, and astronomy are not taught in seminaries; apologetics was the only theological hero who "fought" against those "beasts". Unfortunately, the apparent "defeat" of atheism in our part of the world left that hero lying badly wounded in the battlefield. Other theological disciplines did not help it recover; they abandoned it and left it to die miserably, forgotten and underappreciated. However, one might say that the knowledge of natural sciences is not necessary for priest's work in the parish and that he simply has to know basics of the Biblical theology, some dogmatics, rhetorical skills, liturgics, and singing. Returning to Craig's first explanation of the role of apologetics in modern culture, one might actually not say that without exposing himself as truly ignorant. Just as every other person, a priest should know at least the basics of natural sciences in order to be considered a literate member of the society.

The third role of apologetics is evangelizing unbelievers. Craig claims that the Apostles argued for the truth of Christ's teachings with Jews and Pagans, using various sources (including the natural evidence) to support the truth of the Gospel. In other words, apologetics is useful in mission or evangelism, as Craig calls it. He states:

Frankly, I can't help but suspect that those who regard apologetics as futile in evangelism just don't do enough evangelism. I suspect that they've tried using apologetic arguments on occasion and found that the unbeliever remained unconvinced. They then draw a general conclusion that apologetics is ineffective in evangelism (Craig 2008, 22).

Actually, Craig does not fall in the same trap as our old apologetics did when it tried to enforce Christian truth upon nonbelievers by the means of refuting their own beliefs. For example, one does not perform missionary work in India by attacking Hinduism. Craig thinks that apologetics might affect a small group of people, but that group is big in the context of its influence in the process of shaping modern culture. He proposes two reasons for the validity of this view of apologetics.

First, because every person is precious to God, a person for whom Christ died. Like a missionary called to reach some obscure people group, the Christian apologist is burdened to

reach that minority of persons who will respond to rational argument and evidence. But, second – and here the case differs significantly from the case of the obscure people group – this people group, though relatively small in numbers, is huge in influence. One of these persons, for example, was C. S. Lewis. Think of the impact that one man's conversion continues to have! I find that the people who resonate most with my apologetic work tend to be engineers, people in medicine, and lawyers. Such persons are among the most influential in shaping our culture today. So reaching this minority of persons will yield a great harvest for the kingdom of God (Craig 2008, 22).

Using the example of great C. S. Lewis, Craig makes quite good case for the existence of one “rationalistic” and “naturalistic” theological discipline such as apologetics. Originally being an atheist, Lewis converted to Christianity due to positive influence of Roman Catholic J. R. R. Tolkien and became one of the best Christian apologists of the 20th century. His tremendous literary and theological accomplishment, the seven books of *Chronicles of Narnia*, is still unsurpassed in explaining Christianity to all kinds of audience, from children to academics. It is quite unfortunate that works of both Lewis and Tolkien are not studied in our theological schools.

This brief discussion about C. S. Lewis brings us to another distinguished Christian apologist in the West, and his name is Alister McGrath (born 23 January 1953). He is Northern Irish theologian ordained in Anglican Church and a professor in the Faculty of Theology and Religion at Oxford, which makes him successor to C. S. Lewis who held the same position. Also similar to Lewis, McGrath was an atheist who converted to Christianity and became an apologist. Beside the doctorate in theology, McGrath holds doctorates in molecular biophysics and intellectual history. That makes him more than qualified to engage contemporary atheism and its scientific naturalism on equal grounds. McGrath is the author of many books, and here are only few of his more notable works: *Science and Religion: An Introduction* (1998), *A Scientific Theology* in three volumes, *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World* (2004), *A Fine-Tuned Universe: The Quest for God in Science and Theology* (2009), *Why God Won't Go Away: Engaging with the New Atheism* (2011), *The Intellectual World of C. S. Lewis* (2013), etc. Although many of McGrath's books engage in dialogue with New Atheism, two are direct answers to Dawkins's attempts to refute the “God meme”: *Dawkins' God: Genes, Memes, and the Meaning of Life* (2004) and *The Dawkins Delusion?* (2007), as a response to *The God Delusion*.

McGrath states that contemporary atheism had its rising and falling marked by two important historical events: the first is fall of the Bastille in 1789, and the second is fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Apologist notices that “the fall of the Bastille became a symbol of the viability and creativity of a godless world, just as the fall of the Berlin Wall later symbolized a growing recognition of the uninhabitability of such a place” (McGrath 2004a, 1). One sign of atheism's fall is the increase in the percentage of religious people in modern world, as opposed to almost half of the world's population being atheistic during sixties. McGrath, however, shows great appreciation for atheism as “increasingly sophisticated, powerful, and influential ‘empire of the mind’” and “unquestionably one of the greatest achievements of the human intellect” (McGrath 2004a, 4). Needless to

say, McGrath is expressing this appreciation with a dose of irony that is clearly visible in naming atheism “empire of the mind” and the “achievement of human intellect”. Just like William Lane Craig, he points that atheism is a product of science without God, or a product of human thinking “librated” from the burden of theology. According to McGrath, contemporary atheism, “like all such movements, has its saints and charlatans, its visionaries and nutcases” (McGrath 2004a, 4), and it is on the reader to decide whether new atheists, especially Richard Dawkins, belong to saints or charlatans.

The atheistic arguments of Dawkins are subject of two aforementioned McGrath's books. In *Dawkins' God*, he admits that he was personally a great admirer of *The Selfish Gene*, a book that offered perfectly good explanations of evolution to an ordinary reader and popularized both the theory and natural science in general. However, Dawkins's next few books strained from scientist's original way, according to McGrath, because he transformed into a militant atheist and open enemy of religion. This was quite disappointing development in Dawkins's work:

I find fundamentalism of all kinds equally repugnant, religious or anti-religious, and was deeply distressed at this development in someone I had admired. Dawkins' account of religion tends to amount to little more than freak-pointing, with the extreme portrayed as the typical. Religious people were dismissed as anti-scientific, intellectually irresponsible, or existentially immature – on a good day (McGrath 2004b, 8-9).

Therefore, in Dawkins's bestsellers, there is nothing new regarding atheism, no new development of this way of thinking, and no new arguments that Christian apologists did not meet before. As McGrath says, Dawkins's arguments are “the same plodding rhetoric and tired old clichés” (McGrath 2004b, 10), sometimes backed up by new streams of evolutionary biology, but essentially nothing new in the dialogue of Christianity and atheism. Why was, then, McGrath criticizing Dawkins in the first place? Introducing readers to *Dawkins' God*, the author states:

Some might expect this book to be a religious rebuttal of Dawkins. They must look elsewhere, for it is nothing of the sort. The real issue for me is how Dawkins proceeds from a Darwinian theory of evolution to a confident atheistic worldview, which he preaches with messianic zeal and unassailable certainty. As the title of this book indicates, there are some important questions to be asked about what sort of god Dawkins declares to be redundant or discredited. What god is being rejected? Does this god bear any relation to rival concepts of divinity, such as the God of Christianity? And is this rejection actually warranted on the basis of the arguments Dawkins offers? It is therefore important to appreciate from the outset that this book is not a critique of Dawkins' evolutionary biology. (...) His opinion on evolution must be judged by the scientific community as a whole; my concern – and the field in which I am competent to pronounce – is supremely the critically important and immensely problematic transition from *biology* to *theology* (McGrath 2004b, 10-11).

McGrath's primary concerns are Dawkins's conclusions about religion, based on the attempt to explain the God idea via typical scientific inquiry. These conclusions are as follows: Darwinism makes belief in God impossible, religion is against reason, religion offers impoverished vision of the world, and religion leads to evil. Dawkins thus enforces his interpretation of Darwinism upon all aspects of human life, including religion.

McGrath is concerned that this enterprise might convince many that what Dawkins says is actually the official dogma of science. Another reason for answering Dawkins is the fact that public debates, such as one that Dawkins started, are quite interesting and attractive to all who long for the knowledge. McGrath's third reason is especially important for the subject of this paper, and that is the ability of theology itself to adapt to new environments and to answer new challenges.

I write as a Christian theologian who believes it is essential to listen seriously and carefully to criticism of my discipline, and respond appropriately to it. One of my reasons for taking Dawkins so seriously is that I want to ask what may be learned from him. As any serious historian of Christian thought knows, Christianity is committed to a constant review of its ideas in the light of their moorings in scripture and tradition, always asking whether any contemporary interpretation of a doctrine is adequate or acceptable. As we shall see, Dawkins offers a powerful, and in my view credible, challenge to one way of thinking about the doctrine of creation, which gained influence in England during the eighteenth century, and lingers on in some quarters today. He is a critic who needs to be heard, and taken seriously (McGrath 2004b, 13-14).

In *Dawkins' God*, McGrath discusses Darwinian arguments against religion, proposed by Dawkins in his popular books, further developing the thought of ideal relationship between science and theology, as opposed by Dawkins's inability to accept the possibility of such relationship. McGrath is especially interested in Dawkins's meme theory on which the idea of God as a memetic virus was based in *The Selfish Gene*. It is an interesting fact that Dawkins himself abandoned the theory, as it was proven unnecessary by the historians of culture. Presumably, he did not want to be seen as a sociobiologist. McGrath, however, thinks otherwise: "The meme concept was either redundant or wrong – and quite possibly both" (McGrath 2004b, 134). In conclusion, the author states:

This book has barely scratched the surface of a series of fascinating questions raised by the writings of Richard Dawkins. Some of these are directly, others indirectly, religious in nature. I am conscious that I have failed to deal with any of them in the detail that they rightly demand. I have opened up some questions for further discussion, and have not settled anything – except that the issues raised in this book are important and interesting, and that further discussion is needed. Dawkins raises all the right questions, and gives some interesting answers. They're not particularly reliable answers, admittedly, unless you happen to believe that religious people are science-hating fools who are into 'blind faith' and other unmentionable things in a big way (McGrath 2004b, 158).

Another McGrath's response to Dawkins, entitled *The Dawkins Delusion*, was written as a critique of *The God Delusion*. It is probably the most famous among McGrath's books, though it is not much different from *Dawkins' God* regarding the approach to subject and arguments offered against atheism. However, it is one perfectly good apologetic response to Dawkins's attacks on Christianity in *The God Delusion*, and a critique of Dawkins's somewhat weird adoption (or forceful occupation) of scientific thinking as exclusively atheistic and irreconcilable with religion. As McGrath rightly notices,

when some leading scientists write in support of religion, Dawkins retorts that they simply cannot mean what they say. Dawkins clearly feels deeply threatened by the possibility of his

readers encountering religious ideas or people that they might actually like – or even worse, respect and regard as worthy of serious attention (McGrath 2007, 14).

Another form of harmful religious influence in modern world is its violence, i.e. religious evil. For Dawkins, faith itself is evil because it is not based on scientific evidence but rather on millennia old scriptures. In other words, religion may approve any kind of violence simply because there are examples of it in Bible or in the Quran. Once again, Dawkins presents extreme forms of religion as its mainstream. As McGrath notices, Dawkins primarily thinks about Islamist ideology and violation of many human rights in the Islamic world, which is partially true, but it is not right to apply same criticism on all religions simply because one of them appears to be violent. Harris often mentions peaceful Jainism and its concept of nonviolence toward all living creatures as an example of completely harmless religion. Some also mention Buddhism as another nonviolent religion, but it is historically false assumption. McGrath has in mind the diversity of religious teachings throughout the world when he agrees with Dawkins that religious violence is something that should be criticized and stopped:

Yet is this a *necessary* feature of religion? Here, I must insist that we abandon the outmoded idea that all religions say more or less the same things. They clearly do not. I write as a Christian who holds that the face, will and character of God are fully disclosed in Jesus of Nazareth. And as Dawkins knows, Jesus of Nazareth did no violence to anyone. He was the object, not the agent, of violence. Instead of meeting violence with violence, rage with rage, Christians are asked to 'turn the other cheek', and not to let the sun go down on their anger. This is about the elimination of the roots of violence – no, more than that: it is about its transfiguration (McGrath 2007, 76).

Both Harris and Dawkins often describe Jesus as an ancient "hippie", a peace-loving individual who ironically was crucified, and so the religion of Christianity was born. The historical development of Church often includes violence, which means that Christians strained from their original "hippie" way and became no better than radical Islamists. Since Christianity claims that it is a religion of peace, its hypocrisy is even bigger, at least according to new atheists. On the other hand, as McGrath suggests, if people were more like that "hippie" from Judea, a world would be considerably much better and less violent place. Dawkins, however, thinks that world of that kind is attainable solely through the abandonment of all religions, and especially Christianity. Atheism is the best answer: it is nonviolent, peaceful, and truth-loving ideology that would make everybody happy.

Since religion is the problem, its disappearance will be to the general benefit of civilization. Dawkins, however, seems more than a little coy about just how religion might vanish. There is a serious risk that criticism of a people's religion might be misconstrued to represent (or encourage) hostility toward them as a social group. Legitimate criticism of religious ideas can all too easily give way to the rather more disturbing and dangerous vilification of a people (McGrath 2007, 80-81).

McGrath offers several historical examples of "atheism gone wild" in many parts of the world, especially in Eastern European countries such as Soviet Union and Romania.

Open persecution of religion in order to enforce atheism was more than evident there. However, new atheists tend to interpret communist violence as a completely different phenomenon, one that has nothing to do with atheism in the first place. For them, Stalinist regime was violent not because it was atheistic, but because it inherited the long tradition of Russian imperial dictatorship that was not better than communism by any means. They would readily express their solidarity with the victims of Islamist violence in the Middle East, but not with the victims of Stalinist regime in Soviet Russia; somehow, atheism was not responsible for their suffering. It is also not a reason for Dawkins to be worried about possible bad consequences of his “new” version of atheism: his ideal atheists are as much “hippies” as Jesus of Nazareth was. One can easily put to test this Dawkins’s belief, simply by typing “Dawkins” in the web search. There are thousands of videos uploaded on internet by his admirers, and the titles of these videos show not only the support for Dawkins’s goal, but great hatred toward religious people as well. It is not just religion that is insulted and ridiculed in these titles; religious people are often described as stupid, ignorant, evil, miserable, violent, etc. According to the results of this easy experiment that can be done by anyone who has internet access, Dawkins’s followers are not peaceful “hippies” who would like to make the world a better place, even for their “less intelligent” or even “stupid” religious brethren. One can hardly find any new atheist propaganda entitled “Dawkins proposes peace in the world”, or “Dawkins helps religious people understand how atheism will make them better people”. Therefore, McGrath seems to be right when he expresses his uneasiness with Dawkins’s “blind faith” in “good atheism meme”. It is truly a blind faith in atheism as a peaceful way toward human unity because, as McGrath proves in *The Dawkins Delusion*, it is not simply religion, but vast variety of different social and political factors that cause violence throughout civilized world.

The simplistic belief that the elimination of religion would lead to the ending of violence, social tension or discrimination is thus sociologically naïve. It fails to take account of the way in which human beings create values and norms, and make sense of their identity and their surroundings. If religion were to cease to exist, other social demarcators would emerge as decisive, some of which would become transcendentized in due course. Dawkins has no interest in sociology, as might be expected. Yet the study of how individuals and societies function casts serious doubt on one of the most fundamental assertions of his analysis (McGrath 2007, 83).

Dawkins barely tried to respond to McGrath’s works. Besides accusing McGrath that he tries to build career on criticizing his books, Dawkins interviewed him for his TV show *The Root of All Evil*, but this interview was not shown in the series. An unedited version of the interview, however, is posted on the internet. Since *The Dawkins Delusion*, McGrath wrote several books about C. S. Lewis and the relationship of science and religion. Dawkins himself still engages in debates, but he is currently preoccupied with criticizing an American Muslim child Ahmed Mohamed, popularly known as “the clock boy”. This boy became famous when he brought a homemade clock to his school in Texas as his own scientific project, but he was suspected to be a terrorist and was arrested. The popularity of this innocent child somehow disturbs Dawkins who often

ridicules him on his official Twitter account, and even compares him to an ISIL child who was forced to behead people. Dawkins's behavior in this case really shook his image in the world of science.

McGrath and Craig are only two of Christian apologists whom I mention in this paper, with full recognition that there are more of them in USA and Europe. These two were chosen as, in my personal opinion, best representatives of Christian apologetics in America and Great Britain. Some scientists defend Christianity from new atheists as well, such as mathematician John Lennox and the director of Human Genome Project Francis Collins. Collins's book *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (2006) is especially interesting work, since Collins is truly a great name in modern science and he follows the path described by William Lane Craig as offering thinking people an intellectual basis for their belief. The work of these scientists and apologists, therefore, should be considered and carefully studied in Orthodox theology as one of primary sources for building new apologetics.

Pastoral Theology and Necessity of New Apologetics

Two previous parts of this article have dealt with the problem of New Atheism and the response of Western Christian apologists to it. This part should be a conclusion of a sort, or an appeal to contemporary theological thought in our Church to reconsider its abandonment of apologetics and, hopefully, to create a positive atmosphere for its renewal in a better form. What, one might ask, has pastoral theology to do with apologetics? How are these two theological disciplines interconnected? The answer is simple. Since apologetics was left to die in the battlefield of Marxism and Christianity, some of its interests remained important. One of these interests is certainly the problem of atheism, and it is mostly studied in contemporary pastoral theology. This particular discipline has its central questions, and atheism seems to be only marginal, regardless of its great influence in the modern world. A future priest should be ready to face different problems in a parish. All theologians who study pastoral theology know how many different aspects of human life require ecclesial guidance or assistance, at least for dedicated believers. Not all of their questions, however, are related to atheism. In fact, most of them are not. An ordinary adult person is preoccupied with social issues, primarily with the lack of adequate employment, miserable salaries, shaky political structure of our communities, etc. Theology, of course, has potential to make life better for these people, and it should strive to accomplish that goal. It is also one of the questions in the context of pastoral theology. The everyday issues faced by all members of the community cannot be properly met without live engagement in the world we live in, and that is what pastoral theology teaches future priests – to be ready to help their Christian brethren in solving all their problems.

The apologetics is thus one more anvil added to a burden carried by pastoral theology, especially the dialogue with atheism. The questions that this “empire of the mind”, as McGrath calls it, raises in our societies are too diverse and too complex, so they cannot be properly discussed or answered in one or two lectures. They require an entire

theological discipline, and pastoral theology already has too much on its plate to be simply transformed into a form of Church's dialogue with atheism. It should be noted that pastoral theology faces similar problems as apologetics, when it was still an official subject in theological schools. Many students, and even professional theologians, think of it as an easy-to-pass subject that deals with problems such as "what color should be a fence around priest's house". Some older textbooks did no favor to pastoral theology in this regard.³ Current pastoral theology, in contrast to the old one, engages in dialogue with psychology, sociology, and various other scientific disciplines in order to prepare future priests for good and adequate work with people. Some people in parishes are not friendly toward Church though. Many of them are atheists. Should future priest simply ignore these people, or should he be prepared to communicate with them properly? Should he study the atheism while in parish, or while in theological schools that should prepare him for such challenges? Pastoral theology is trying to introduce the students to the problems raised by atheism, but it cannot dedicate itself completely to it, unless it becomes a regular and obligatory subject throughout all four years of faculties of theology (it is currently limited to only two semesters). That is not quite possible, since there are many other theological disciplines students should study. However, some recent developments in the field of missiology, or missionary theology, provide necessary optimism that the study of atheism (and natural sciences) might be possible in a separate subject. Missionary theology was separated from pastoral theology and it became a discipline in its own regard; same thing might be accomplished with apologetics, if there were only enough voices to support that quest.

Even if this optimism develops among many theologians, there would probably still be voices against apologetics. Regardless of New Atheism and its worldwide propaganda, one might *almost* rightly ask why we should be bothered with it, since Dawkins and his accomplices have no influence in our community. Well, as emphasized, it is almost a good question. It is good because it might shed light to the spread of atheism among young people, but it is also bad because it shows complete ignorance of some theologians about popular trends in the community. Due to recent political turmoil in the countries of former Yugoslavia, bad nationalism (as opposed to good patriotism) somehow adopted religion as its own feature. It is not only a case in Serbian countries, but also in Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. To be a Serbian requires the confession of Orthodox faith, Bosniaks should be Muslims, and Croats should be Catholics. Of course, this is not an official dogma of any of these religions, or at least that is my personal opinion. All these religions were born long before Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks, Albanians, and (apparently) Montenegrins emerged as fully formed nations. Contemporary state of

³ I remember some classes of pastoral theology when I was still in seminary. Some questions on the exam were "what objects should be in priest's office" (one student had an amusing, but also somewhat sexist answer – a secretary), "can an actress be a priest's wife", etc. We studied the hygiene, and concluded that priest should dress properly, that his beard should be tidy, that his church should be clean, and that his wife should be pleased "with small" in life. One cannot but ask, how could old pastoral theology not be regarded as a funny subject without real impact on the future priests, as if they did not already know all these things? Fortunately, the times have changed.

high education in former Yugoslav republics, reflected in the fact that almost all young adults attend faculties, proves to be both good and bad. It is good because high percentage of young people is educated, but it is also bad because this situation caused an apparent degradation of high education in general. Some special statistics is not necessary to gain insight into this problem. It is a fact that the young go to faculties for several wrong reasons: because their parents made them do it, because all their friends did it, or because they hope to have higher salaries some day. One can barely find few honest students who went to faculty because they actually love some scientific discipline.

On the other hand, enthusiastic young individuals face the irony of life when they graduate from their respective faculties. To put it simply, it is almost impossible for hundreds of thousands young, educated individuals to find decent jobs. Suddenly, they realize that not all the talk about corruption they have heard on TV is a myth. That TV talk becomes their personal problem. Some more enthusiastic young adults come to think of the masters degree as a fact that cannot be ignored by a potential employer, so they further pressure their families' budgets in order to gain the salvific diploma. The same disappointment, however, awaits them even after they pass this level of high education. As one popular joke states, the one with the masters degree is the biggest hotshot in the bureau of employment. Sadly, this joke is so close to truth that it is not as funny as it should be. Who should be blamed for this situation? Maybe professors are guilty for letting so many students pass through faculties and gain diplomas, but one should not forget that professor is supposed to be adaptable to his audience. After several years of decline of young people's knowledge, as well as decline of their thirst for knowledge, a professor simply adapts the criteria to the audience in the classroom. That adaptation is also gradual and barely noticeable. It says nothing about the knowledge of a professor, or about his ability to transfer knowledge; quite contrary, it says a lot about the bad situation of our society. The goal of high education, at least for the majority of students, is not knowledge per se, but the attainment of a necessary document that provides some hope for getting a job. The adaptation of teachers to this new trend is only natural.

When young people finally hit the last wall of disappointment, they see several possible solutions. One of these solutions is to leave the ruined countries and move to some Western country where they might find a job, financial stability, and a happy life, far away from the misery they face here. Second solution for many young individuals is to rebel against the society, and it leads them in two directions. The first direction, which is clearly visible here in Bosnia, is to religious radicalism. Many young Muslims, for example, join Islamist movements such as Wahhabism, while many Orthodox young adults preoccupy themselves with conspiracy theories about Serbs as the oldest nation in the world, supposed joint efforts of the Western political and religious powers to destroy our identity, etc. These theories do not lead them only to a rebellion against political establishment, which is often described as "sold out" to the West, but also to a rebellion against official Serbian Orthodox Church. Recent establishment of the sect that follows former bishop Artemije is just one example of such animosity toward the Church. Several other nationalist organizations do not publicly affiliate themselves with

this sect, but their members strongly support it, simply because it had put on the image of a defender of traditional Serbian Orthodox values, while official Church, according to their propaganda, is against its own people. There is no need to emphasize specially that this kind of rebellion leads to religious violence, both in Muslim and Orthodox religion. This part of disappointed young adults, however, could not be described as Dennett's "brights" in this context.

The second direction for those who decide to stay in our society and rebel against it leads them to atheism. This is a group of young people who really think with their own heads, but the disappointment they face on everyday basis makes them rebels against traditional values that allegedly direct the society backwards. These values are preached by the Church, so they come to the same conclusion as Dawkins: religion is evil and the world should get rid of it as soon as possible. One such example is a group of atheists who call themselves "The Atheists of Serbia", and their official slogan is "Against the Dogmas and Ignorance". It would be unfair to discard these people as unimportant or ignorant in theology, because they are actually the most thinking ones. Regardless of some shameful criticism of Church and certain religious leaders one can find on their official website, the arguments they propose seem quite strong. They want the freedom of speech, more rights for segregated social groups, abandonment of bad nationalism, etc. In other words, the things they ask for are not bad (excluding their clearly visible wish for bringing Church back to the state it was in during the communist regime). One thing wrong with their effort is the wrong address to which they send their accusations.

Conversing with many educated young people, I concluded that our youth is not as interested in Christianity as it was in the years following the end of civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Something is clearly wrong, and pastoral theology strives to find the cause for such pessimism among the young regarding the Church's ability to help them in solving their problems. Church, on the other side, is able to create a better environment for everybody. Even if a less plausible course of events happen, i.e. if Church manages to convince the state officials to transform their care for young people from verbal pronouncements to actual creation of new jobs, the problem of atheism will remain. Until we make life better for our suffering brethren, one group of theologians might dedicate their work to the problems exposed in this paper. As William Lane Craig wisely notices, the creation of adequate cultural milieu for preaching Christianity as completely valid interpretation of reality is necessary. Only if understood in this way, apologetics can escape the labyrinth of naturalism for which it is often accused, and reaffirm itself as an important and serious theological discipline. We must participate in building our culture. One grows tired of constant criticism of modern "folk" music (sometimes termed turbo-folk) with its immoral messages and intellectually insulting reality TV shows, as if any intelligent individual cannot understand that these things badly influence our young. On the other hand, whether we want to admit it or not, these bad things are actually leading builders of our contemporary culture. What can Church offer instead? Does it degrade itself by proposing actual good values? That is, of course, the problem of pastoral theology.

The problem of atheism, as a growing religious (or anti-religious) conviction of growing number of educated young people, should be treated elsewhere. Apologetics seems as one possible solution. However, it should not be reanimated in its past form. It should be liberated from weird need to attack all who do not think the same way as Christians, and it should engage in living dialogue with contemporary science. It is not necessary to stress how big impact does science has on our lives today. Many things, from simple cellular phones to personal computers and complex medical machines, were created by physicists. One does not ask herbalist for a cure any more, but visits hospitals, thus showing bigger faith in modern medicine than in traditional one. Even the greatest critics of modern science would not dare to attempt to cure serious diseases, such as cancer, by injecting themselves with various grasses found in the mountain fields. They will visit a doctor, and that is a sure fact. Therefore, one must admit that modern science is something that cannot be ignored. An honest theologian will surely express sadness for the fact that vast majority of the students of theology are illiterate in sciences, from such simple ones such as astronomy to more complex ones such as theoretical physics. As everyone else, theologians need this kind of knowledge in the modern world. If we want this knowledge to be applicable in the area of theology, than it must assume the form of apologetics. Constructing some other discipline, for example theology and natural sciences, might also be useful, but it will inevitably turn into apologetics. The reasons for that were already explained by William Lane Craig. Reaffirming Christianity in modern society cannot be accomplished without consulting apologetics: there are many things to be defended, and there are many things we should compromise with science. These are, however, only suggestions, and not an attempt of building such apologetics. That task is hard and can only be accomplished by the most "bright" among theologians, to use Dennett's term, because one who did not seriously think about his own faith after exploring the depths of New Atheism probably does not consider the faith as a serious part of his life. Those who do consider it as such and those who feel pastoral need to care about the people and their salvation will surely rethink the entire apologetics and, hopefully, help in the process of its reestablishment in theological schools.

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Нови атеизам и „зло“ религија:

Позив пастирског богословља на изградњу нове апологетике

Резиме. Аутор у овом раду истражује покрет новог атеизма на Западу и савремену Западну апологетику. Циљ таквог истраживања је представљање апологетике као валидног одговора Цркве модерној науци и атеистичким закључцима који су на њој засновани. Апологетика треба бити поново успостављена као самостална теолошка дисциплина која би помогла младим теолозима у разумевању тема дијалога између новог атеизма и хришћанства, што се тренутно у сажетом облику изучава у пастирском богословљу.

Кључне речи: пастирско богословље, нови атеизам, апологетика, Ричард Докинс, Данијел Денет, Сем Херис, Кристофер Хиченс, Вилијам Лејн Крег, Алистер Мек Грат, религија, морално зло.