

# Book Reviews

in America—including the recent QAnon panic—to the industrial revolution of the 19th- and 20th-century globalization of markets, both of which, they argue, caused dislocation of communities, “ubiquitous isolation and alienation,” and an enduring crisis of meaninglessness (pp. 44–45).

In the grand context of an industrialized and predatory neoliberal society where communities are fractured and kinship ties are nearly non-existent ... where people feel invisible and unmoored, grand conspiracies can function as the gateway to satisfying the drive to find meaning. (p. 45)

Such conclusions smack of circular reasoning, in that any objective historian of conspiracism could easily summon many examples of conspiracy claims, witch hunts, and moral panics that long preceded industrialization and “predatory neoliberalism.” The essay then roams off into a discussion on meaningful existence using Klansmen and Nazis as counterexamples, leaving the reader to wonder what any of this has to do with biblical doctrine or the political fears of American evangelicals.

Peppers-Bates’s essay is the nadir of this collection. In her words,

the seemingly peculiar phenomenon of U.S. evangelical Christians accepting baseless conspiracy theories is grounded in a prior, deeper tendency of Judeo-Christianity in general to reduce God to a white male idol, and in particular to silence or ignore the voices of women, people of color, LGBTQI, and other marginalized groups. [...] Once a group is demeaned, it becomes much easier to believe that they engage in paedophilia, drink blood, cause COVID, or any number of wild claims. (p. 145)

The logical and factual problems with this essay are legion. Not only is its accusatory tone and excessive use of Foucauldian jargon likely to make the book’s target audience stop reading it altogether, it is filled with many misunderstandings of evangelical teachings and culture, often confusing them with those of mainstream Protestants, Catholics, and even white nationalists. It suffocates its reader in a word salad of cryptic terms like “othering,” “patriarchization,” “white-washing,” “white supremacy,” and “religious meaning-making.” It ends with a misreading of the Parable of the Good Samaritan—the only scriptural reference offered in this essay and one she surprisingly argues is rarely taught in evangelical churches.<sup>7</sup> Poorly researched and argued, it comes across as more paranoid than the conspiracy theories Peppers-Bates set out to debunk, undermining many of the thoughtful reflections offered elsewhere in this book.

While *QAnon, Chaos, and the Cross* contains some excellent and thought-provoking contributions, it falls short of serving a general church-going audience due to its lack of organization, insufficient reliance on the leading

academic research, and the incongruity in quality and usefulness of its component parts.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*, 2nd ed. (University of California Press, 2013).

<sup>2</sup>Joseph E. Uscinski, ed., *Conspiracy Theories and the People Who Believe Them* (Oxford University Press, 2019); and Joseph E. Uscinski and Joseph Parent, *American Conspiracy Theories* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>3</sup>Asbjørn Dyrendal, David G. Robertson, and Egil Asprem, eds., *Handbook of Conspiracy Theory and Contemporary Religion* (Brill, 2018).

<sup>4</sup>Karen M. Douglas et al., “Understanding Conspiracy Theories,” *Advances in Political Psychology* 40, Sup. 1 (2019): 3–35; <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12568>.

<sup>5</sup>Peter Knight and Michael Butter, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories* (Routledge, 2020).

<sup>6</sup>See Peter Knight and Michael Butter, “The History of Conspiracy Theory Research,” in *Conspiracy Theories & the People Who Believe Them*, ed. Joseph E. Uscinski, 33–46, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190844073.003.0002>.

<sup>7</sup>For example, the wounded Jew in the parable—a victim of a violent robbery—is falsely described as a “leprous Samaritan” to turn the parable into a lesson about racist hatred instead of religious legalism.

*Reviewed by Michel Jacques Gagné, historian and the author of Thinking Critically About the Kennedy Assassination: Debunking the Myths and Conspiracy Theories (Routledge, 2022). He teaches courses in critical thinking, political philosophy, and ethics at Champlain College, St. Lambert, QC.*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56315/PSCF3-25Alexander>

**COMING TO FAITH THROUGH DAWKINS: 12 Essays on the Pathway from New Atheism to Christianity** by Denis Alexander and Alister McGrath, eds. Kregel Publications, 2023. 294 pages. Paperback; \$21.99. ISBN: 9780825448225.

The Four Horsemen of the New Atheists—Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett—have faded from the cultural spotlight they once attracted. Their books were not only best sellers but their take-no-prisoner approach toward religion in general, and Christianity in particular, dominated conversations and apologetic efforts in the West for the last two decades. However, times have changed.

The New Atheists are now the Old Atheists. The questions once raised still linger faintly, but cultural conversations have shifted dramatically. Instead of asking, “Does God exist?,” there is now an array of books and personalities asking and answering questions of sex, gender, and race, to name but a few. We have new questions and new influencers that now dominate the conversation in academy and household. That being the case, one cannot help but ask: Why write another book about Dawkins? Yet, as it turns out, the Old Atheists are not as irrelevant as one might think. In fact, much of this current cultural moment is a product of their making, one we would be wise to learn from and understand.

*Coming to Faith Through Dawkins* comprises twelve essays, written by men and women with varying backgrounds from accomplished academics to micro-dosing hippies and everything in between. This broad collection indicates that Dawkins and his atheist popularizers might still have a place in the cultural conversation that ironically is bringing people to faith. Although the title is provocative, not every essay is directly a *coming to faith story* because of Dawkins alone. Instead, the book is composed of real people inviting the reader into their journey to faith in God through the Four Horsemen—who, instead of ushering in an apocalypse of unbelief, brought about in these contributors a turning point to find peace and salvation in Jesus Christ. Although the twelve journeys to faith are distinct, there are key themes that emerge and tie the collection together quite powerfully in the current cultural moment.

First, the stories have not been evangelically sanitized. Unlike a cheesy Hallmark movie that ties up all the loose ends with characters that no one except Ned Flanders can relate to, the contributions are refreshingly honest—a feature lacking in the New Atheist literature. These essays are more like reading the Bible—the stories are of real people and, like real life, are messy. What they show is that a journey to faith is not always a straight line, nor altogether complete; there are loose ends, which is, ironically, juxtaposed to the New Atheist plotline that unbelief has it all figured out. These essays are an invitation into the mind and heart of honest people who came to Jesus and are still journeying with God. As expressed in these narratives, faith does *not* mean that you have all your questions answered, nor that you will not have new questions to ask along the way, nor that doubt is not a real part of life.

Second, these stories masterfully show faith as a journey, best traveled in honesty and humility—something the contributors did not find in the works of Dawkins or Hitchens, who are known for their rhetorical wit and provocative prose. Taking aim at the hubris of the religious, the New Atheist's pride and rebukes became their own worst enemies. Although some people were drawn to their strawman attacks and cheered their ad hominem triumphs, this same condescending tone led many of the contributors to this book to reconsider the validity and veracity of the New Atheists' arguments ... or lack thereof. This volume clearly shows that people are looking for honest discussions, presented with the graciousness of mind that comes from those who realize they could be wrong and are willing to face their own doubts.

Lastly, this book is a much-needed encouragement; God is at work in the most stubborn, hostile, and distant of people. From tears to laughter, these essays remind Christians of the importance of sharing our faith and lovingly engaging with people. It must be said that William

Lane Craig is a consistent voice in this collection, who encouraged people not only by his clarity of thought but also by his respectful engagement, something the world needs now, more than ever.

*Reviewed by Andy Steiger (PhD, Aberdeen), founder and executive director of Apologetics Canada.*

## ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56315/PSCF3-25MeyaardSchaap>

**FOLLOWING JESUS IN A WARMING WORLD: A Christian Call to Climate Action** by Kyle Meyaard-Schaap. InterVarsity Press, 2023. 208 pages. Paperback; \$18.99. ISBN: 9781514004456.

If you, or a Christian friend, are unsure of the appropriate faith response to climate change, this just might be the book to read. If you have been involved with Christian creation care for a while and want to see what the next generation of leaders has to offer, read the book.

The Reverend Kyle Meyaard-Schaap has plenty of experience guiding people through the process of integrating their faith with creation care—from his work with Young Evangelicals for Climate Action, to vice president of the Evangelical Environmental Network, to his current position as the executive director of the Association for a More Just Society in the US. He is ordained in the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Meyaard-Schaap loves to tell stories throughout the book and does it well. That gives the book an informal but engaging feel. It is a straightforward read: you will not be reaching for a theological or scientific dictionary; you will not have to interpret any charts or graphs. The book covers a wide swath of material in a few pages so, by its design, it is an introductory book. It would serve that purpose better if it pointed the reader to additional readings at the end of each chapter. The book makes extensive use of the Bible; these references should appeal to an evangelical audience, although a scriptural index would have been helpful.

The introduction covers the consensus around climate change, a history of the recent meetings of the Conference of the Parties, the temperature goals that were set at the twenty-first meeting in Paris, and how our actions are inadequate to meet those goals. The key question this book attempts to answer is: How are we supposed to respond to this reality as followers of Jesus?

In the first chapter, "Coal and the Greatest Commandment," Meyaard-Schaap uses a story of an activist against mountaintop removal coal mining to review the associated environmental issues while introducing us to the coal miners, as well as their families and friends. Their culture gives them meaning and pride in what they