

= The Rage Against God =

The Rage Against God (subtitle in US editions : How Atheism Led Me to Faith) is the fifth book by Peter Hitchens , first published in 2010 . The book describes Hitchens 's journey from atheism , far left politics , and bohemianism , to Christianity and conservatism , detailing the influences on him that led to his conversion . The book is partly intended as a response to God Is Not Great , a book written by his brother Christopher Hitchens in 2007 .

Peter Hitchens , with particular reference to events which occurred in the Soviet Union , argues that his brother 's verdict on religion is misguided , and that faith in God is both a safeguard against the collapse of civilisation into moral chaos and the best antidote to what he views as the dangerous idea of earthly perfection through utopianism . The Rage Against God received a mostly favourable reception in the media . Hitchens was praised for making a forceful and intelligent case , in particular with respect to questions concerning morality and God . Some critics contended that the author was misguided in claiming that state atheism would lead to totalitarianism .

= = Background = =

In May 2009 The Rage Against God was anticipated by Michael Gove , who wrote in The Times :

I long to see [Peter Hitchens] take the next stage in his writer 's journey and examine , with his unsparing honesty , the rich human reality of the division he believes is now more important than the split between Left and Right ? the deeper gulf between the restless progressive and the Christian pessimist . This division , the difference between Prometheus and St Paul , the chasm that divides Shelley from T. S. Eliot , Lloyd George from Lord Salisbury , is nowhere better encapsulated than in the contrast between Hitchens major and minor .

Hitchens first referred to The Rage Against God in August 2009 , in one of his weekly columns : " Above all , I seek to counter the assertion , central to my brother 's case ... that the Soviet regime was in fact religious in character . This profound misunderstanding of the nature of the USSR is the key to finding another significant flaw in what is in general his circular argument " . Then , a week before the book 's publication , Hitchens wrote : " ... it is obvious much of what I say [in The Rage Against God] arises out of my attempt to debate religion with him [Christopher Hitchens] , it would be absurd to pretend that much of what I say here is not intended to counter or undermine arguments he presented in his book , God Is Not Great ... " .

= = Synopsis = =

= = Part One : A Personal Journey Through Atheism = = =

In Chapter 1 Hitchens describes abandoning religion in his youth , and promoting " cruel revolutionary rubbish " as a Trotskyist activist . He claims his generation had become intellectually aloof from religion , rebellious and disillusioned and in Chapter 2 explores further reasons for this disillusion , including the Suez Crisis and the Profumo Affair . In Chapter 3 , Hitchens recounts how he embraced scientific inquiry and adopted liberal positions on issues such as marriage , abortion , homosexuality , and patriotism . Chapter 4 is a lament for the " noble austerity " of his childhood in Britain . Chapter 5 explores what Hitchens views as the pseudo @-@ religion surrounding Churchill and World War II heroes ? a " great cult of noble , patriotic death " whose only equivalent , he claims , was in the Soviet Union . Hitchens then asserts that , " The Christian Church has been powerfully damaged by letting itself be confused with love of country and the making of great wars " . In Chapter 6 Hitchens recalls being a foreign correspondent in the Soviet Union and a trip to Mogadishu , and how these experiences convinced him that , " his own civilisation was infinitely precious and utterly vulnerable " . In Chapter 7 Hitchens charts his return to Christianity , and makes particular reference to the experience of seeing the Rogier van der Weyden painting The Last Judgement : " I gaped , my mouth actually hanging open . These people did not appear remote or

from the ancient past ; they were my own generation ... I had absolutely no doubt I was among the damned " . In Chapter 8 Hitchens examines the diminishing of Christianity in Britain and its potential causes .

= = = Part Two : Addressing Atheism : Three Failed Arguments = = =

In Chapter 9 , Hitchens contends that the claim that religion is a source of conflict is a " cruel factual misunderstanding " , and that a number of conflicts , including The Troubles and the Arab ? Israeli conflict , were not motivated by religion but tribal in nature and disputes over territory . Chapter 10 discusses whether morality can be determined without the concept of God . Hitchens asserts that atheists " have a fundamental inability to concede that to be effectively absolute , a moral code needs to be beyond human power to alter " . He also describes as flawed his brother 's assertion in *God is Not Great* that " the order to love thy neighbour ' as thyself ' is too extreme and too strenuous to be obeyed " . Hitchens ends the chapter by stating , " in all my experience in life , I have seldom seen a more powerful argument for the fallen nature of man , and his inability to achieve perfection , than those countries in which man sets himself up to replace God with the State " . Hitchens begins Chapter 11 by asserting , " those who reject God 's absolute authority , preferring their own , are far more ready to persecute than Christians have been ... Each revolutionary generation reliably repeats the savagery " . He cites as examples the French revolutionary terror ; the Bolshevik revolution ; the Holodomor and the Soviet famine of 1932 ? 33 ; the barbarity surrounding Joseph Stalin 's five @-@ year plans , repeated in the Great Leap Forward in China ; atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge ; and human rights abuses in Cuba under Fidel Castro . Hitchens then quotes a number of prominent communist thinkers ' pronouncements on morality , including George Lukacs stating , " Communist ethics make it the highest duty to accept the necessity of acting wickedly . This is the greatest sacrifice the revolution asks from us " , and Leon Trotsky 's claiming that " morality , more than any other form of ideology , has a class character " .

= = = Part Three : The League of the Militant Godless = = =

Hitchens writes " the biggest fake miracle staged in human history was the claim that the Soviet Union was a new civilisation of equality , peace , love , truth , science and progress . Everyone knows that it was a prison , a slum , a return to primitive barbarism , a kingdom of lies where scientists and doctors feared offending the secret police , and that its elite were corrupt and lived in secret luxury " . He then cites Walter Duranty 's denying the existence of the great Ukrainian famine , and Sidney and Beatrice Webb 's acceptance that the 1937 Moscow show trials were " genuine criminal prosecutions " . Hitchens then examines Lenin 's suppression of religion in the Soviet Union , which included making the teaching of religion to children punishable by the death penalty and the creation of an antireligious organisation of Soviet workers . Hitchens begins Chapter 13 by quoting William Henry Chamberlin : " In Russia , the world is witnessing the first effort to destroy completely any belief in supernatural interpretation of life " , and then examines some consequences of this , including intolerance of religion , terror , and the persecution of priests and bishops at the Solovetsky concentration camp . Hitchens asserts that in the Soviet Union " the regime 's institutional loathing for the teaching of religion , and its desire to eradicate it , survived every doctrinal detour and swerve " . In the final chapter , Hitchens analyses a number of his brother 's arguments , and contends that " the coincidence in instinct , taste , and thought between my brother and the Bolsheviks and their sympathisers is striking and undeniable " . He then records how his brother nominated the " apostle of revolutionary terror " Leon Trotsky for an edition of the BBC radio series *Great Lives* ; praised Trotsky for his " moral courage " ; and declared that one of Lenin 's great achievements was " to create a secular Russia " . Hitchens speculates that his brother remained sympathetic towards Bolshevism and is still hostile towards the things it extirpated , including monarchy , tradition , and faith . He ends the chapter by claiming a form of militant secularism is becoming established in Britain , and that " The Rage Against God is loose " .

= = = Epilogue = = =

In the epilogue , Hitchens describes how after a 2008 debate with Christopher Hitchens " the longest quarrel of my life seemed to be unexpectedly over " and that he held no hope of converting his brother , who had " bricked himself up high in his atheist tower , with slits instead of windows from which to shoot arrows at the faithful " .

= = Critical reception = =

After its UK publication in March 2010 the book received a number of mostly favourable reviews in British newspapers .

In The Daily Telegraph Christopher Howse concentrated on the moral arguments in the book , and agreed with Hitchens that " to determine what is right and what is wrong without God , is difficult " . Also in The Daily Telegraph , Charles Moore wrote that the book " tries to do two things at once . One is to bash up modern militant atheism with all the author 's polemical skill . The other is to give an autobiographical account of how , in our time , an intelligent man 's faith may recover " . In a positive review in Standpoint magazine , Michael Nazir Ali wrote , " One of the abiding canards nailed by Peter Hitchens is that religion causes conflict . He does this by showing that so @-@ called " religious " wars had many other elements to them , such as greed for territory , political ambition and nationalism . His repeated references to Soviet brutality reveal that secular ideologies have caused more suffering in recent times than any conflict associated with religion . " In a more critical review in the New Statesman Sholto Byrnes wrote , " Hitchens makes his case forcefully , passionately and intelligently " , but " makes too much connection between the ill deeds of atheists and their atheism " . Byrnes also reviewed the book in The Independent , where he questioned the validity of a number of Hitchens 's conclusions , including that " atheists ' actively wish for disorder and meaninglessness " . In a sympathetic review in The Guardian , Rupert Shortt wrote , " Hitchens does not seek to mount a comprehensive defence of Christianity . He is wise to avoid deeper philosophical and theological waters , because his strengths lie elsewhere . His more manageable aim is to expose what he holds to be three major fallacies underlying God Is Not Great : that conflict fought in the name of religion is really always about faith ; that " it is ultimately possible to know with confidence what is right and what is wrong without acknowledging the existence of God " ; and that " atheist states are not actually atheist " . In The Spectator , Quentin Letts reviewed the book very positively , describing it as " a magnificent , sustained cry against the aggressive secularism taking control of our weakened culture " .

Reviews of the book in North American publications subsequent to its stateside release were more mixed .

In The New York Times , Mark Oppenheimer commented , " American readers will notice a lack of enthusiasm in Peter 's Christian apologetics . He proceeds largely from historical , rather than personal , evidence : here are the fruits of Christianity , and here is what one finds in its absence " . In a negative review in the Winnipeg Free Press , Ted St. Godard wrote , " What Hitchens can 't seem to appreciate is that , even if ' Soviet Communism is organically linked to atheism , something his brother and others argue against (if somewhat feebly) , and even if one accepts that Soviet tyranny was horrible , this says little about the existence of God " . In a The Washington Times review entitled " Cain and Abel : The sequel ? " , Jeremy Lott wrote , " Hitchens refuses to make a full @-@ throated case for faith . He explains that ' those who choose to argue in prose ... are unlikely to be receptive to a case that is most effectively couched in poetry ' ... Peter does hope that Christopher might one day arrive at some sort of acceptance that belief in God is not necessarily a character fault ? and that religion does not poison everything " .

One mix of the two audiences is the British writer , Theodore Dalrymple , reviewing The Rage Against God and Christopher Hitchens ' Hitch @-@ 22 for the American journal , First Things . Dalrymple writes , Peter Hitchens " has discovered that it is he , and not just the world , that was and is imperfect and that therefore humility is a virtue , even if one does not always live up to it . The first sentence of his first chapter reads , ? I set fire to my Bible on the playing fields of my Cambridge

boarding school one bright , windy spring afternoon in 1967 . ? One senses the deep ? and , in my view , healthy ? feeling of self @-@ disgust with which he wrote this , for indeed it describes an act of wickedness . Peter ? s memoir ... is more personally searching . "

= = Release details = =

The book was first published in the UK on 15 March 2010 by Continuum Publishing Corporation , and was released in the US in June 2010 by Zondervan , with the additional subtitle How Atheism Led Me to Faith .