The End of Reason
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FOREWORD

Shortly after Sam Harris published his first poison pen letter against religion, *The End of Faith*, I invited him to debate a Christian on my television show. He came into the studio with a swagger, full of the same supreme confidence with which he ridiculed Christianity and other faiths in his book. But during the taping, Christian attorney Hugh Hewitt, piped in via satellite, skewered Harris’s inflammatory rhetoric, exposing the book’s inconsistencies, recycled arguments, and lapses in logic.

When Harris departed the studio, he looked ashen. His overheated attacks against Christianity might have brought applause in his inbred world of atheism, but I don’t think he had ever tried to test them against a well-informed and articulate defender of the Christian faith.

Nevertheless, that didn’t stop Harris. He went on to publish a second diatribe against religion,
Letter to a Christian Nation, which again found a ready audience among those who lacked the training to see through its flimsy facade. Together with a wave of other books promoting militant atheism, authored by Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens and others, these books by Harris have confused spiritual seekers and even rocked the faith of some Christians.

The time has come for someone to slay this dragon of disbelief—and I can think of no better person to wield the sword than my friend Ravi Zacharias.

Ravi comes to the task with unique credentials. Himself a former atheist, Ravi personally knows the bankruptcy of living as if there is no God, and thus he is impervious to the false allure of atheism being promoted by this new breed of spiritual iconoclasts.

As an insightful and accomplished philosopher, Ravi is able to systematically dismantle the feeble case for skepticism built by Harris. And as an astute theologian, he is equipped to dispel the falsehoods and misinterpretations of Scripture that fuel Harris’s disdain for Christianity.

With relentless logic, an impressive grasp of the relevant literature, a deep understanding of world religions, and an unerring sense of grace and conviction, Ravi manages to unveil the embarrassing impotency of Harris’s arguments. As Ravi concludes,
the emperor of atheism has no clothes—and none of Harris’s frantic efforts can succeed in covering him up.

Unlike Harris, Ravi is willing to take the claims of atheism to their logical conclusions. In fact, Ravi’s own despair from atheism once brought him to the brink of personal destruction. Thus he is able to write not merely as a dispassionate observer, but rather as an impassioned champion of the spiritual truth that rescued him from a life of hopelessness and purposelessness.

I also spent much of my early life as a spiritual skeptic. During that time, I tried to be honest about the implications of an atheistic world. I didn’t pretend that my atheism would lead to a new era of enlightenment and altruism. I didn’t claim that a world without faith in God would somehow be a kinder and gentler place.

Instead, I knew that my atheism was drawing me down a path of narcissism, hedonism, and despondency. Yet I would rather have gone down that ultimately self-destructive road than to manufacture a belief in a phony god who doesn’t exist. My attitude was that if atheism represented the best description of reality, then so be it. It didn’t give me much to live for or look forward to, but truth is what it is.

In the end, though, I was prompted by my agnostic wife’s conversion to Christianity to thoroughly
investigate where the evidence of science and history really point. I was utterly stunned by the avalanche of evidence that undergirds Christianity. In my view, the most rational response was to put my trust in Christ. As someone trained in journalism and law, I had no choice but to respond to the facts.

The result has been a series of positive changes in my character, values, morality, priorities, and relationships. Because of my faith in Christ, anyone who knows me would say that I’m a better husband, father, citizen, and person.

Ravi is thoroughly conversant with the evidence for Christianity. In this book, he doesn’t just refute Harris, but he also builds an affirmative case for the existence of God. Despite the protestations of Harris, Dawkins, Hitchens, and their ilk, this is where truth resides. There are no answers in atheism.

If you’ve read any of Harris’s attacks on faith, then I urge you to consider Ravi’s words with an open mind. Says Proverbs 18:17 (NLT): “The first to speak in court sounds right—until the cross-examination begins.” In other words, often when we hear one side of a case presented, the evidence sounds persuasive. But then we hear the other side of the story, and suddenly we see the initial case crumble in the light of new facts and arguments. I suspect that’s what you’ll experience as you read this book.
So read on, and when you’re done, pass along this book to a friend who also has found his or her faith undermined by Harris and his spiritually cynical cronies.

LEE STROBEL, author,
_The Case for Christ_,
_The Case for Faith_,
_The Case for a Creator_, and
_The Case for the Real Jesus_
PROLOGUE

A university student arrives home and informs his parents that, after reading a popular atheist's book, he has renounced his family's faith. His mother, particularly, is shattered by the news. The father struggles to engage his son in dialogue, but to no avail. The deepening grief causes them to distance themselves from their son. When the game of silence does not work, the mother is plunged further into depression and despair. The grandparents become involved, watching in anguish as beliefs that have been held dear in the family for generations crumble. Before long, this family that was once close and peaceable is now broken and hostile. Abusive words between mother and son are exchanged with increasing frequency and intensity, and the siblings blame their brother's new strident atheism for the rift in the family. After one long night of arguing with her son, pleading
unsuccessfully with him to reconsider his position, the mother takes an overdose of prescription medication and ends her life, unable to accept what she interprets to be the destruction of her family.

Although this particular scenario is imaginary, I suspect that in some measure similar scenes have played out more than a few times since the publication of Sam Harris's bestselling *Letter to a Christian Nation*. It is quite possible that many a young man or woman, stirred by the passion and intent of Harris's book, has repudiated the values intrinsically bound up in the belief in God held dear by parents and ancestors long before them.

In 2005, Harris, a doctoral student at Stanford, published the first of two books that are absolutely and unabashedly hostile to all religions—but particularly to the Christian faith. It is time for us as Americans, Harris states in these books, to outgrow our religious beliefs. His unvarnished hatred for things religious is embellished with strong language and illustrations designed to convince the world that Christians in particular really are buffoons or imbeciles for believing in God. I have always found it fascinating how relativists who say they love the idea of tolerance ultimately reveal themselves to be among the most bigoted. So Harris writes to “America” but in fact to the whole world, telling us that science has the answers to our questions about life and that religion is the bane of existence.
But why do I begin to address a work as serious-minded as that of Harris with an imaginary scene like the one above? Because realities that are far from imaginary are enveloped in this story, and I wonder what Harris would say to those possibilities.

He may argue that the grief his book may cause families such as this one is justified and even necessary sometimes if the young student in the story and others like him are going to stop believing and living a lie. Does this sound familiar? He may well justify any amount of grief to any number of people because of an insistence that the value of his “truth” is greater than the destruction of a family. But to do so raises a huge question, doesn’t it? If in the microcosm of this one little episode Harris were to justify the devastation he has caused for the sake of what he sees as the truth, why does he deny God the same justification for allowing suffering in all of the intricacies and possibilities of a lifetime?

Harris’s biggest complaint against God is that so much suffering is experienced by humanity in the name of God’s sovereignty and goodness; yet in his own little world he would, I suspect, turn a blind eye to any incidental pain in order to freely proclaim “liberation” from “falsehood.” In a recent interview Bethany Saltman suggested that Harris may have gone too far in some of the things he has said. But he responded by saying that if he had a magic wand with which to eradicate either religion
or rape, he would choose to eradicate religion. This strains credulity. I simply pray that none of those he loves are ever raped and come to him for solace. Evidently, while belief in his atheism is worth any price, religious belief is too costly.

This duplicity is only the tip of the iceberg in Harris’s belabored tirade against religion. With Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, and a few others, he is calling for the banishment of all religious belief. “Away with this nonsense” is their battle cry! In return, they promise a world of new hope and unlimited horizons—once we have shed this delusion of God. I have news for them—news to the contrary. The reality is that the emptiness that results from the loss of the transcendent is stark and devastating, both philosophically and existentially.

On the first day of a lectureship I gave recently at Oxford University, the Oxford newspaper carried the story of the suicide of the student body president of an area college. After my lecture at the town hall that morning, I cannot begin to tell you the number of students who came to me to say that suicide is something they have toyed with.

In my travels across the globe, I have found this scenario to be conspicuous among our youth in universities everywhere as these institutions deliver meaninglessness in large doses. On campus after campus, in culture after culture, I have lis-
tended for hours to intellectuals, young and old, who testify to a deep-seated emptiness. Young, honest minds seek answers and meaning. No amount of philosophizing about a world without God brings hope. After three decades of covering every continent and delivering scores of university lectures, I have seen that this sense of alienation and meaninglessness is the principal malady of young minds. Academic degree after degree has not removed the haunting specter of the pointlessness of existence in a random universe. This deep malady of the soul will not be cured by writings such as Harris’s. The momentary euphoria that may initially accompany a proclamation of liberation soon fades, and one finds oneself in the vise-like grip of despair in a life without ultimate purpose. A naturalistic framework offers no remedy for the sense of suffocation that ensues.

I am writing *The End of Reason* to tell young men and women—all who ask the hard questions about the meaning of life—that atheism is bankrupt for answers. The emperor has no clothes, and through his verbal magic Harris is trying hard to cover him up.

It may seem odd that I’m writing a letter to you in response to a man whose letter you may or may not have read. You may not wish to waste your time reading his book, but this response is intended to expose the systemic contradictions of his worldview.
and his cursory knowledge of other religions, which he has wielded with dangerous self-confidence. His book, like many books in America, has succeeded more because of its controversial nature than because of any real substance.

I also want to try to bridge the huge chasm that separates hostile atheists from those of us who believe in the Christ of the Scriptures and in the provision made in our Constitution and culture for those who wish to investigate the claims of any major religion and evaluate its truth or falsehood. The truth is, Harris’s view rejects the very worldview that shaped the United States of America. His is a mind-set that, if it had been dominant at the time of America’s emergence, would have never allowed for the formation of this nation. Thankfully, the America that was founded affirmed, implicitly or explicitly, our worldview while also allowing room for his. His America would ban our belief, leaving room only for the sovereignty of his materialistic or matter-driven vision of all human existence. Such is the demagoguery of his strident atheism.

With that said, let me get on with my letter to you. I begin my response to Harris with a humorous story, because I am quite sure the intensity of the text will increase as the letter unfolds.
Dear fellow American,

Two Australian sailors staggered out of a London pub into a dense fog and looked around for help. As they steadied themselves, they saw a man coming into the pub but evidently missed the military medals flashing on his dress uniform. One sailor blurted out, “Say, bloke, do you know where we are?” The officer, thoroughly offended, snarled in response, “Do you men know who I am?” The sailors looked at each other, and one said to the other, “We’re really in a mess now. We don’t know where we are, and he don’t know who he is.”

This story is appropriate to the discussion because, by the end of Sam Harris’s *Letter to a Christian Nation*, we don’t know who we are in essence or where we are in the grand scheme of a world without God. Harris’s mass of verbiage has all the hallmarks of outdated, overused arguments (of the “weak point, shout louder” type) that are further
weakened by a tragic misuse of the Bible and misunderstanding of Christianity and of other religions as well. But even as he rails against God, denying us any transcendent point of reference, he fully embraces God’s life-defining prerogatives. His criticisms are caustic, his alternatives bankrupt. One of my professors at graduate school used to say of a critic, “He’s better at smelling rotten eggs than at laying good ones.” The eggs that Harris claims are rotten are, in fact, good eggs, while the eggs he has laid, claiming they are good, are the rotten ones.

As I read Sam Harris’s books, *The End of Faith* and *Letter to a Christian Nation*, I felt as though I was being dragged through a vortex of emotion—from incredulity to outrage to a deep sadness. I wondered if anything was too sacred for him to mock. I bristled against the unvarnished disrespect, distortion, and illogic of his thoughts that combined to reject any belief in God. It created a titanic struggle within me for an obvious reason: he has attacked that which lies at the very heart of my being and, need I say, of millions of others as well. His is a “take no prisoners” style—both fists flailing in an attempt to hit every conceivable expression of religion, Christianity in particular.

There is an English proverb that when you throw mud at others, you not only get your hands dirty but also lose a lot of ground. Harris may well have done that with his book. If he thinks his be-
lief is noble, he has used ignoble and slanderous rhetoric to communicate it. Why his ridicule? Why such unbridled mockery? I fail to understand his extremist thinking, which has even caused other atheists embarrassment.

Atheists Divided on This New Atheism

Commenting on Richard Dawkins’s book *The God Delusion*, which strikes many of the same notes as Harris’s books, fellow atheist Michael Ruse, professor of philosophy at Florida State University, says, “*The God Delusion* makes me embarrassed to be an atheist.” And in response to Sam Harris’s presentation at the Salk Institute, atheist and professor of psychology Scott Atran used almost identical words: “I find it fascinating that among the brilliant scientists and philosophers at the conference, there was no convincing evidence presented that they know how to deal with the basic irrationality of human life other than to insist against all reason and evidence that things ought to be rational and evidence based. It makes me embarrassed to be a scientist and atheist.”

Ruse and Atran restore my confidence in the sciences—unlike Harris and Dawkins, who make me leery of trusting in their findings when their prejudice is so venomous and obvious. Even with
all the restraint I can muster, this is the most strongly worded book I have ever written, because I am alarmed at the cultural devastation wreaked by this kind of thinking.

**Who Am I to Write This Response?**

For those who do not know me, it may be helpful to introduce myself before I go any further. It may seem ironic that I, who hail from the East, now find myself pleading with a Westerner to remember where he has come from.

I was born to Indian parents and raised in India. My ancestors were priests from the highest caste of Hinduism in India’s deep south. Religion is embedded in that culture, and India has probably spawned more religions than any other nation on earth. Hinduism alone boasts 330 million gods in its pantheon. Consequently, a lifetime of watching ceremony, ritual, superstition, and all that goes along with that worldview made me totally reject all belief in the supernatural. Many, many times I wondered how people could actually believe what they said they did, and I marveled at the masses’ apparent commitment to gullibility. On this I agree with Sam Harris.

But never once did I consider the vitriol that Harris, Dawkins, and the new breed of athe-
ists have spouted in their books and arguments. Frankly, rather than being so cavalier about their attitude, they would do better to seriously rethink whether they can accomplish what they are setting out to do by defacing the better part of humanity, among whom are Nobel laureates, brilliant philosophers and scientists, and others—peaceable men and women who have labored hard to make this a better world.

Now I readily admit that the accomplishments of these people did not justify their beliefs for me, but they did merit common courtesy and respect. Is it possible, however, that Harris’s disrespect is justified because in an atheistic world, love for one’s fellow human beings is a foreign concept? I certainly hope not. I know he tries to protect himself by tossing a bone now and then, saying, “I did qualify my position,” but that’s an old philosophical trick that is readily seen through. His impassioned hostility comes through loud and clear. There is nothing fragrant about atheism when its attitude smells like this.

My Exposure to the World’s Religions

People often say that India is the most religious country in the world. It may be true, yet many in India live as practical atheists.