READER COMMENT:


He accuses you of “deception” and dishonesty. He says it is not credible that you spent much time writing books and going to debates, if it weren’t for the motive of convincing and persuading people that the Christian God doesn’t exist. He names you as someone who “has done as much or more than any single individual in modern times to destroy the Christian faith of literally thousands of people, young and old alike, across the globe.”

RESPONSE:

Wow. I didn’t know about Mr. Butt’s post. It is virtually beyond belief. If it weren’t so outrageously funny, I would find it completely outrageous.

But look – maybe he doesn’t mean it seriously? I mean, his rhetoric certainly seems serious. But to say that I have “done as much or more than any single individual in modern times to destroy the Christian faith of literally thousands of people, young and old alike, across the globe” – really?? You gotta be kidding me!

On what basis does Mr. Butt make this claim? I don’t know. He doesn’t say. But it ascribes to me way, way more power and influence than I have, I assure you. The person who posted this comment asked me, in a subsequent email, if people ever write or talk to me to tell me they are either upset or happy that I caused them to lose their faith. And frankly, I can’t think of anyone. Maybe some have? I really don’t know. How does Mr. Butt know? And how can *I* make someone “lost their faith.” It’s not mine to give or take away. People have their own views, based on everything they know and think. If someone leaves the faith it’s not because someone else “made” them do it.

Very ocassionally (i.e., like once a month or so) I’ll get an email from someone who says that they appreciate my books because I articulate what they themselves have long been thinking but haven’t been able, until now, to put into words. Sometimes people tell me that they were having serious problems with their faith and they are grateful for my honest dealings with the problems of the Bible or with the problem of suffering.

But to make me out as the Devil incarnate is really too much. I’d like to know what grounds Mr. Butt has for asserting that I have ruined people’s lives – many thousands of people! of all ages! across the globe! Not just their lives, but their *eternal* lives!! I myself, Bart Ehrman, am the reason so many thousands of people now are going to roast in hell forever! Wow. And there I thought I was just writing a book.

The entire post of Mr. Butt is very difficult for me to read. Read it for yourself. You (unlike I) might find it entertaining at least. Two things struck me about it. The first was Mr. Butt’s arrogant self-importance. He really, really wants his readers to know that he was in a debate that was listened to by 100,000 people. And he really, really, really wants everyone to know that even if he didn’t do as well as he would have liked in the debate (OK, he doesn’t concede this part J ), he certainly won and was right all along. And not only was I, his devilish opponent, wrong, but I won’t admit I was wrong, because – this is a killer, and is the second thing that struck me – I refused to admit that I wanted to “win” the debate.
OK, so let me be as brutally honest as I can. Mr. Butt didn’t believe me in the debate (why not just call me a liar to my face?!?) (wait a second... I think he did!), and he won’t believe me now. But let me say it again as forcefully as I can. I don’t CARE if people agree with me and join with me in becoming agnostic. REALLY!!! I ABSOLUTELY don’t care!! Mr. Butt does not, will not, or cannot believe me. But it’s true. I don’t care if you who are reading this, or anyone I know, or anyone I don’t know, becomes an agnostic.

The reason Mr. Butt can’t believe me is because as a good fundamentalist, he thinks that ALL that matters is that people agree with HIM. If people don’t agree with him, they are going to roast in hell forever. For him, these are not merely issues of life and death, they are matters of eternal life and non-ending torture. He can’t imagine talking about them without having as the one ultimate goal to save people’s souls and give them eternal life.

And if so if someone wants to talk about the problem of suffering in order to explain why it led to their agnosticism, Mr. Butt cannot believe – CANNOT believe – that the objective would be something other than to convert them to an agnostic point of view.

But that’s not my objective – OK, Mr. Butt, call me a liar once more! And it never has been my objective.

Why then do I talk about the matter, and have debates about the matter, and bare my soul publicly about the matter.? It is for a reason that Mr. Butt cannot understand or conceive, even when explained to him. It is to get people to think.

Mr. Butt cannot understand this because he does not want people to think. He wants to convince people that he’s right. He wants to make people agree with him. He wants to convert people. He does not want them to reason through a problem, see its ins and outs, consider the pluses and minuses of the various positions, and come to a reasoned conclusion. He is not interested in thinking and the possibility of various perspectives and views. He is interested in everybody admitting that he was right all along and then joyfully joining his side.

The idea that someone doesn’t much care which side you take so long as you are more thoughtful about it is completely beyond Mr. Butt’s imagination (such imagination as he has). That’s the difference between a university professor and a fundamentalist Christian apologist.

I will say this – to one *extremely* limited sense there is a single aspect of Mr Butt’s view that I would agree with. There is ONE form of “thought” that I wish we could get rid of. It is the arrogant, rigid, and dogmatic kind of fundamentalism that Mr. Butt represents. When I say that I don’t want to convert anybody to agnosticism, I really do mean it. But I do indeed want people not to be fundamentalists.

Otherwise, I don’t care if people are Christian (even evangelical Christian), Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, agnostic, atheist, pagan, or anything else. As long as they are thinking and thoughtful (which is another way of saying non-fundamentalist) - that is all fine by me! For Mr. Butt, that is inconceivable. Literally.

For my part, I would like to dispel ignorance. Mr. Butt doesn’t care about ignorance. He would be perfectly happy for a person to be as ignorant and dumb as dirt, so long as they agree with his doctrines of God, and Christ, and salvation. I am just the opposite. If someone is a Christian, I want them to be a knowledgeable and thinking Christian. Or Jew.
Or Muslim. Or pagan. Or agnostic. Or atheist. The world would be a happier and better place if we got rid of fundamentalist stupidity and ignorance, and became a more thoughtful and thinking place. Beyond that, I really don’t care.

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