



BROWSE



Waiting for Spiritual Atheists

David Belden

Tikkun

Duke University Press

Volume 23, Number 2, March/April 2008

pp. 70-72

REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

with life's challenges, celebrate the most meaningful moments, struggle with egotism (or the unhealthy lack of it) and aspire to powerful virtues of discipline, generosity, humility, joy, compassion, mindfulness and more." Bush investigates three movements in particular that have held attractions for him and many other spiritual seekers: Mordecai Kaplan's Reconstructionist Judaism, Matthew Fox's Creation Spirituality, and Wiccan or Goddess religion, as typified for him by the writings and leadership of Starhawk. But he can't join any of them because each requires belief in the unbelievable. And he objects that the anti-science, anti-capitalist ethos that suffuses these movements fails to appreciate how the prosperity, education, freedom, and longevity of life that nurtured them came to be. An agnostic myself, I agree with most of Bush's reasons for not believing. But the book was a deep disappointment. For a start, I would give a lot more credit to spiritual life movements for making capitalism livable than he does. But that's not my main beef. It's that in the aftermath of his demolition job Bush is left with a purely individualistic, lonely pride at not succumbing to others' delusions. I want to know how spiritual atheists can create nourishing communities. What is stopping us from reviving ritual, dance, song, service, teaching

and many other functions of a good congregation, not splitting each of those off into separate disciplines as at present, but combining them in a holistic quest to honor and serve each other and the biosphere? And while creating such communities, I want to know how we nonbelievers can join with other spiritual progressives, including believers in all kinds of things we don't believe in, to make humane, ecological values rule in this world. If you are a spiritual atheist trying to create that values-centric coalition, you don't start with a belief-centric take on what is intellectually wrong with those who should be your natural allies. I expected a man of Bush's sensitivities would be trying to create that coalition but clearly he isn't. America is a society with a religious majority. If you are a person who believes in democratic transformation you cannot build an adequate progressive movement unless its peaks to this majority and makes it feel welcome and comfortable, and that can't happen with Bush's religio-phobia, no matter how smartly articulated. Anyone who is content to be a lone secular critic—like so many in the literary and academic world—gives up on the coalition building with religious believers that is essential to challenge the contemporary elites of wealth and power and their destructive values. Too often it seems the Left would rather be right than effective. Bush's book sent me to one I had not heard of and, more amusingly (and tellingly for the publisher's publicity department if they have one), one that Tikkun editor Michael Lerner had not heard of. Mitchell Silver's *A Plausible God* is a secular philosopher's study of three contemporary Jewish thinkers: Mordecai Kaplan, Arthur Green, and... Michael Lerner. Silver says he wrote the book because so many of his secular friends and family started finding a place for God in their lives. But theirs was the kind of God even an atheist could believe in. It was a plausible God, one who does not stand outside the world but suffuses the cosmos with her (his? its?) presence, a God who has no quarrel with science. This God had no power to avert the Holocaust. She cannot make your prayer-wishes come true, other than by inspiring you and your

70 TIKKUN WWW.TIKKUN.ORG MARCH/APRIL 2008 [BOOKS] WAITING FOR SPIRITUAL ATHEISTS WAITING FOR GOD; THE SPIRITUAL EXPLORATIONS OF A RELUCTANT ATHEIST by Lawrence Bush, Ben Yehuda Press, 2007 A PLAUSIBLE GOD; SECULAR REFLECTIONS ON LIBERAL JEWISH THEOLOGY by Mitchell Silver, Fordham University Press, 2006 THE SPIRITUALITY REVOLUTION; THE EMERGENCE OF CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUALITY by David Tacey, Brunner-Routledge, 2004 Review by David Belden

An atheist to days till focuses on what's wrong with religion and religious belief. Where are the atheist books that go the next step and tell us how the secular faith and values that humans need are built up in a post-religious age? Come on people. We have to end poverty, racism, and religious divisiveness, and tackle global warming and species loss on a worldwide basis together, as one people. The human species needs a massive infusion of energy for noncommercial, heart-to-heart values. Is there any point in looking to atheists for leadership in that shift, or can we only look to "spirituality" and the more spiritual (i.e. less divisive, more universal) religions? And if spirituality is critical, where do "spiritual atheists" fit in? Larry Bush calls himself a "spiritual atheist." He would quite like to join in with the liberal/Left spiritual movements of his boomer peers, but he can't, because they insist on believing in supernatural entities and assistance. "Is it so hard to keep hope alive," he asks, "without believing that the entire universe is on your side?" Bush's *Waiting for God* is a great improvement on the anti...

[BOOKS]

WAITING FOR SPIRITUAL ATHEISTS

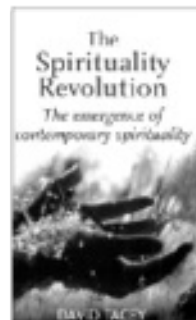
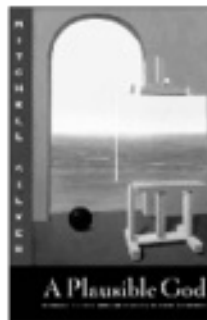
WAITING FOR GOD: THE SPIRITUAL EXPLORATIONS OF A RELUCTANT ATHEIST by Lawrence Bush, Ben Yehuda Press, 2007
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ATHEISM TODAY STILL FOCUSES on what's wrong with religion and religious belief. Where are the atheist books that go the next step and tell us how the secular faith and values that humans need are built up in a post-religious age? Come on people. We have to end poverty, racism, and religious divisiveness, and tackle global warming and species loss on a worldwide basis together, as one people. The human species needs a massive infusion of energy for non-commercial, heart-to-heart values. Is there any point in looking to atheists for leadership in that shift, or can we only look to "spirituality" and the more spiritual (i.e. less divisive, more universal) religions? And if spirituality is critical, where do "spiritual atheists" fit in?

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Bush's *Waiting for God* is a great improvement on the anti-religion tirades of Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, and Richard Dawkins. For an atheist Bush has had an unlikely life, earning his living as a writer within Jewish religious institutions. He has grown to admire liberal faith communities. He finds that many of them "offer their members tools with which to cope



with life's challenges, celebrate the most meaningful moments, struggle with egotism (or the unhealthy lack of it) and aspire to powerful virtues of discipline, generosity, humility, joy, compassion, mindfulness and more."

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