

An Atheist's (Surprising) Defense of Christians

✖ Christianity has always had its controversies and robust debates. The charismatic movement alone has been riddled with arguments over flamboyant ministers, the so-called prosperity gospel and modern-day apostles and prophets.

The same types of debates also have rattled atheism. The most recent major controversy was the defection of the late Anthony Flew—once called the most famous atheist in the world—who in 2004 said evidence and science led him to conclude there was a God.

But rarely—if ever—has one person managed to shake up both secular and religious folks the way author and conservative commentator S. E. Cupp has.

Cupp has not had Flew's conversion experience; she is still an atheist. But in a surprising turn of events she has become a prominent defender of Christianity against the mainstream media in her recent book, *Losing Our Religion: The Liberal's Media's Attack on Christianity*.

In *Losing Our Religion*, Cupp does not make a theological defense of a faith she doesn't share but critiques the harsh and almost always critical coverage Christianity gets in the mainstream media. There is a revolutionary assault on the faith in America, she claims (and probably most Christians would agree with her), and the mainstream media is a part of it.

"This revolution is in full throttle around the country, and it is being waged against you and me and every other American and its goal is simple: to overthrow God and silence Christian America for good," she writes.

Even if that's the case, the vanguard of that secular revolution likely did not count on a counterattack by an atheist and former ballet dancer turned NASCAR fan. It's almost enough to make you think God has a rather wry sense of humor.

The thesis of her book is that the mainstream media persistently portrays Christianity—or at least serious practitioners of the faith—as violent extremists with exceedingly odd views.

"They are painted as dangerous and fanatical," Cupp said. "The media will make a parallel between Christians and terrorists, between Christians and murderers. Such views are not unique in the media, and there's an example of that almost daily."

Perhaps the most dramatic and repugnant example of what she calls "anti-Christian venom" is found in a review by former *New York Times* religion writer Peter Steinfels. In discussing a book titled *The Democratic Virtues of the Christian Right*, Steinfels wrote, "For many people that's a title akin to *The Winning Ways of Serial Killers*," thus making a blasé parallel between the followers of Jesus and cold-blooded sociopaths.

If Steinfels had been reviewing a book about Islam, he never would have compared the practitioners of that faith to killers, but Christians were fair game.

"They treat Islam with kid gloves and not just because of a possible fatwa," Cupp said. "They don't want to be called a racist or a xenophobe or a Islamphobe. They can't be as cavalier with that topic as they can with Christianity. Christians are the last group of people you can make fun of in this country and call them crazy or evil and have people just laugh."

Cupp is not the only writer or pundit to make that charge. In a recent column, Mona Charen noted that the *New York Times* has always ignored or played down any "honor killings" among

Muslims in the U.S. Christians have never been accused of “honor killings” yet have been compared to serial killers in a book review. There does seem to be a journalistic disparity here.

Although it may be odd for an atheist to be defending Christianity, Cupp said one of her reasons for writing the book is to try to improve the mainstream media she is criticizing. Whether one is atheist or Christian, liberal or conservative, an honest, unbiased media is needed in a democracy, and an honest, unbiased media is not what we’re getting now.

But her book has so unnerved secularists and mainstream media defenders that they are now spreading the Internet with the most vicious of lies—well, at least if you’re an atheist. Her detractors are claiming she isn’t really an unbeliever.

“It’s really like a weird conspiracy theory that I’m only pretending to be an atheist,” she said. “That is not a good business strategy. It is not a put-on. Trust me. But when the media can’t figure someone out, they feel pretty threatened, and they can’t figure me out. They wish they could put me into a box, but I don’t fit into one, and it’s annoying for them.”

Extremely annoying. Even before her book was published, one contributor to the *Huffington Post*, a liberal website, was attacking it.

“It is certainly all right for the liberal media members to have their distorted view of Christianity but, factually and realistically, they have a fringe view, not a mainstream view,” she said.

The media also ignore stories that don’t reflect their knee-jerk, anti-Christian mindset, Cupp claims. While portraying Christians as violent extremists, when there were violent and criminal acts against Mormon churches in the aftermath of the Proposition 8 campaign in California, most of the media

ignored the attacks.

"How many stories on the violence against Mormons and Catholics were featured in the *New York Times* or *Newsweek*? Zero. Not one," she writes.

In a half dozen or so pages, she even meticulously compares the media reception to the Narnia films based on C.S. Lewis' books—mostly negative—and the fawning praise of *The Golden Compass*, the movie based on British atheist Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy.

The New York Times, Cupp notes, wrote no less than five stories on the making of the film, all of them positive. A *Newsweek* critic called Pullman a latter-day . Tolkien. While even Christian critics admit Pullman is a good writer, he's no latter-day Tolkien.

His Dark Materials may have literary quality, but in no way does the trilogy compare with *The Lord of the Rings*. (The Narnia films were box office bonanzas; *The Golden Compass* tanked.) Just as ideology can corrupt reporting, it can also corrupt literary and film criticism.

Cupp documents and analyzes that corruption in the media, but she does it with an irreverence that, when you're not shaking your head in sadness or disgust, will have you laughing at her wit.

Former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee wrote the forward to the book, and he sums it up well: Cupp "uses the sharp blade of careful research, thoughtful reason and brilliant logic to dismember many of the sacred cows of today's liberalism and serve them up 'well done' to the point of being charred."

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