

Who is in Delusion?

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.

A recent issue of Time Magazine contained an interview with Richard Dawkins, a biologist and popular author well-known for his vehemently atheistic opinions. As part of the interview, a reader asked, "Given how little we know about the universe, how can we possibly be sure there is no God?"

Dawkins' answer: "There are all sorts of things we can't be sure of—we can't be sure there are no leprechauns and fairies. Science in the future is going to be revealing all sorts of things which we have no idea of at present, but it's extremely unlikely that it would happen to home in on an idea from a Bronze Age tribe in the desert." With typical disdain, he breezily equates belief in God's existence with belief in leprechauns and fairies.

Dawkins claims that reliable truth must be based on evidence. He has no use for religious faith, which he calls "blind trust in the absence of evidence." Yet his answer to the Time Magazine reader is not at all based on evidence. He says that it's "highly unlikely" that science will "home in on" the God of the ancient Scriptures. Where's the evidence for such a statement? What facts is it based on? How does he know this?

In giving such an answer, Dawkins unwittingly displays his own faith, his absolute certainty that only science can reveal truth. It's a very dogmatic faith, too. It leads him to claim that anyone who doesn't share it is deluded, holding onto an "infantile" idea, a relic from a superstitious era in human history.

This exclusive faith in science is the basis for the title of one of Dawkins' best-known books, "The God Delusion." He writes that a world without God would be a better one, because religious faith cripples people's minds.

The Orthodox Church knows about delusion. In the baptismal service, God is asked to remove far from the one being baptized his or her "former delusion." In his book "For the Life of the World" Father Alexander Schmemmann describes baptism as God's gift to bring us out of delusion into truth. He writes: "The world from which the human being has received his life, and which will determine this life, is a prison. The Church did not have to wait for Kafka or Sartre to know it. But the Church also knows that the gates of this hell have been broken and that another Power has entered the world and claimed it for its true Owner. "

Father Alexander then discusses the exorcism prayers, in which the baptismal candidate is asked to renounce Satan and confess faith in God. Father writes that the meaning of the exorcisms is "to face evil, to acknowledge its reality, to know its power, and to proclaim the power of God to destroy it. The exorcisms announce the forthcoming baptism as an act of victory."

To deny that we have been given that victory by the only One who can give it, Christians would say, is truly to live in delusion. Why would anyone want to do that?

