



Library Update



Welcome to the first issue of the Mathew Hale Public Library newsletter for 2008.

In this issue you will see set out a list of events for the year at the library. Please note the dates in your diary and bring some friends along to the various events. They should all prove very helpful and worthwhile.

You will note in this issue I have provided a review of Dr Alistair McGrath's book "The Dawkins Delusion" which is an interesting read. This is a work in response to Dawkins' book "The God Delusion".

We have taken advantage of the recent visit of Dr Don Carson to purchase a number of his books for the library, including his commentary on the Gospel of John.

We were very pleased to receive a gift from Margaret Thornton of her book "I heard Him Call", a biography of Bishop Neville Langford-Smith who, for many years, was Bishop of the Diocese of Nakuru in Kenya. Also we were most grateful to receive from John and Judy Sexton a copy of

the book "Thomas Moore of Liverpool", a collection of essays in relation to the founder of Moore College in Sydney.

Best Regards,
Dr Keith Weller
Honorary Warden

BOOK REVIEW: *The Dawkins Delusion*, Alister McGrath with Joanna Collicutt McGrath, 78pp, London, SPCK 2007.

The publication of Professor Richard Dawkins' book *The God Delusion* in 2006 has evinced strong public interest as evidenced, for example, by the list of over 200 people who were waiting to borrow the book from the Toowong branch of the Brisbane City Council Library. Dawkins sets out to show, amongst other arguments, how the natural sciences and especially evolutionary biology lead intellectually to atheism. More than that, he is out to convert his readers. "If this book works as I intend", he writes, "religious readers who open it will be atheists when they put it down". Many will be looking for a creditable response to this all-out attack on religious beliefs. The McGraths have provided such a response.

Professor Alister McGrath was a molecular biophysicist before going on to become a leading

Christian theologian. Joanna Collicutt McGrath specialized in clinical neuropsychology and subsequently studied Christian theology. Together they are well qualified to cover the scientific and theological issues raised by Dawkins.

The Dawkins Delusion does not provide a point by point rebuttal of Dawkins' ideas, rather, to quote the authors, "it sets out to do one thing only – assess the reliability of Dawkins' critique of faith in God". It does this by examining the way Dawkins handles four issues in chapters entitled:

- Deluded about God?
- Has science disproved God?
- What are the origins of religion?
- Is religion evil?

In chapter one, the McGraths agree with Dawkins that beliefs are critical. We base our lives on them; therefore it is important that we do not base our lives on delusions. Dawkins asserts that belief in God is entirely analogous to belief in Santa Claus or the tooth fairy and; as a consequence, we should not be teaching our children untruths. The McGraths point out that many people come to faith in God later in life, but this is totally untrue for belief in Santa Claus or the tooth fairy, so there is something intrinsically

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**Note that the library is currently open for advertised events and lectures and every Tuesday from 3.00 to 6.00pm*

different about faith in God. They write, "They (children) need to be taught fairly and accurately what Christianity actually teaches – rather than be subjected to the derisory misrepresentations of Christian theology that litter this piece of propaganda". The chapter also discusses Dawkins' assertion that faith is irrational, examines his treatment of the historical arguments for the existence of God and looks at his assessment of the 'God of the gaps' theory which was promoted in the early 19th century, but is now largely discredited among Christians.

In chapter two, the McGraths provide a masterful demolition of the arguments Dawkins has provided for the assertion that science has disproved the existence of God. They discuss briefly the nature of the scientific endeavour, the limitations of science, and the degree of overlap in the disciplines of science and theology. I am especially impressed that leading scientists who are avowed atheists have panned Dawkins' arguments. Their fear, and indeed the fear of many scientists who are Christian, is that Christians will needlessly come to regard science with great hostility.

In discussing the origins of religion, Dawkins is not concerned with ancient history, but rather he is searching for scientific

explanations for the phenomenon of 'belief in God' or 'religion'. He proposes a naturalistic or "Darwinian" theory along the lines that belief in God is an accidental product of natural tendencies. It provides some sort of natural biological advantage, realised socially or psychologically. The McGraths ask for the scientific evidence. They point out that Dawkins does not supply it and argue that the evidence does not exist.

Dawkins also canvasses two ideas (1) that religion might be a virus of the mind or (2) that the God idea might be carried from one brain to another by 'memes' (a Dawkins invention analogous to genes which carry information between different parts of the body). Again the McGraths call for evidence for the existence of such viruses or memes and conclude that there is none.

Finally Dawkins claims that religion leads to violence and is therefore evil. This is a widespread view and many use this claim to avoid coming to faith in God. The McGraths remind us that atheist regimes such as communism and Nazism have also been responsible for extreme violence and that all ideals, human or divine, are capable of being abused. They point out that Jesus extended the Old Testament injunction to love your neighbour

to love your enemy, and Jesus did not instigate violence but was the victim of violence. The chapter concludes with sections headed:

- Jesus and loving one's neighbour
- Christianity & the critique of religion
- On reading the OT
- Religion and well-being

In reading this book, I had to keep in mind the authors' limited goal of "assessing the reliability" of Dawkins' arguments. As a research scientist/engineer, I would have enjoyed a much expanded discussion, for example, on the limitations of science and related topics, but I have had to be satisfied with and am thankful for the list of books and articles related to the topics of each chapter that the authors have recommended for further reading.

Those interested in the issues Dawkins has raised, should regard this book as compulsory reading; those disturbed by Dawkins' book will find considerable comfort here. I recommend it to all engaged in pastoral ministries.

Reviewer: Dr Keith Weller

Support the Library

The Mathew Hale Public Library relies completely on gifted financial support to continue its ongoing ministry. Please consider making a tax-deductible donation.

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**POST TO: The Secretary, The Mathew Hale Public Library;
PO Box 13675, George Street Post Shop Qld 4003.**



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Upcoming Events In 2008



Adam Lowe, Lecture: "Facilitating Small Groups"
22 April: 7.30pm

Join us at the Mathew Hale Public Library (7.30PM) for a talk by Adam Lowe on "Facilitating Small Groups". Entry by gold coin donation.



Rev'd Richard Trist, Lecture: "A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Bible"
22 May: 7.30pm

Join us at the Mathew Hale Public Library (7.30PM) for a lecture entitled "A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Bible". Entry by gold coin donation.



Canon Dr Peter Adam, Workshop: "Preaching"
25 July: 9.00am—2:00pm

Join us at the Mathew Hale Public Library (9.00AM - 2.00PM) for a practical workshop by Canon Dr Peter Adam on "Preaching". Entry, including lunch, will be \$30.



Rev'd Rhys Bezzant, Lecture: A Reformation Tour
11 November: 7.30pm

Join us at the Mathew Hale Public (7.30PM) Library for a fascinating lecture by Rev'd Rhys Bezzant on "A Reformation Tour". Entry by gold coin donation..

Please visit our website for further information regarding events.

MHPL Online

While the library is currently open each Tuesday from 3.00-6.00pm and for lectures and events and for such other times by appointment (phone 07 3236 4399), the MHPL Website is available 24/7. Online you can view full details of upcoming events, search the catalogue, and listen to previous talks.

You can access the website, using the URL www.mathewhalepubliclibrary.com.