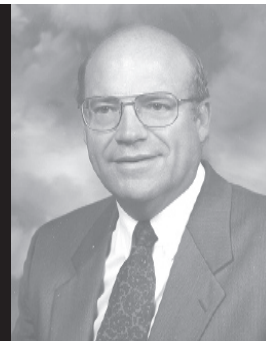




Dr. Fred Schwarz

# The Schwarz Report



Dr. David Noebel

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## Inside



Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed  
Reviewed by James Perloff, Page 5  
Ben Stein makes an intelligent case for scientific evidence.



The Next Fidel, Part I  
by Peter Hitchens, Page 7  
Even in defeat, Chavez bids to revive revolutionary Marxism.



The Schwarz Report Bookshelf  
To see a complete list of books recommended by the Christian Anti-Communism Crusade please check out our website at [www.schwarzreport.org](http://www.schwarzreport.org). This site also has back issues of *The Schwarz Report* as well as other great resources.

And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead expose them. Ephesians 5:11

## Aikman, Berlinski, Day, and Lennox Versus

### Dawkins, Hitchens, Dennett, and Harris

By David A. Noebel

**The Delusion of Disbelief (David Aikman)**

**The Devil's Delusion (David Berlinski)**

**The Irrational Atheist (Vox Day)**

**God's Undertaker (John C. Lennox)**

Our 2008 Australian Summit was conducted in Melbourne at the Deakin University campus. The college bookstore was drenched in Richard Dawkins. His picture was everywhere, promoting his book *The God Delusion*. But nowhere to be found were any works challenging Dawkins's atheism, Darwinism, or humanism (but I repeat myself).

Dawkins teaches at Oxford University, but so does John C. Lennox. Alas, the bookstore had no interest in Lennox, only Dawkins! It wanted nothing to do with Lennox's scientific observation that "the fossil record gives no good examples of macroevolution." (Lennox, p. 110) Also not to be found was Berlinski's *The Devil's Delusion*, "the definitive book of the new millennium," according to George Gilder. And although there wasn't time to check over every book in that bookstore, I seriously doubt one would find Stephen Hawking's scientific deduction that "it would be very difficult to explain why the universe should have begun in just this way, except as the act of a God who intended to create beings like us."

The evidence clearly shows that many of our institutions of higher learning are cesspools of atheism and hotbeds of radicalism, including sexual radicalism. It's as though we're reliving the pre-French and pre-Bolshevik revolutionary eras.

Prior to the French Revolution, atheism was rampant throughout the nation, along with the sexual radicalism of the Marquis de Sade, Mirabeau, Jean-Paul Marat, the Jacobins, and Robespierre, etc.

The same was true during the years preceding the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. Communism was founded on the atheism and socialism of Marx and Lenin with Darwin's evolutionary theory thrown in for spice. Remember that it was Marx who wrote Engels saying, "During . . . the past four weeks I have read . . . Darwin's work on Natural Selection . . . this is the book which contains the basis in natural science for our view."

Now we are being assaulted with what is sometimes labeled "New Atheism."

*"Dwell on the past and you'll lose an eye; forget the past and you'll lose both eyes."* Old Russian Proverb

Paul Kurtz's Center for Inquiry, for example, is conducting a summer institute for young atheists entitled "The Journey From Religion to Science." One of their course descriptions reads, "Contemporary issues in secular studies; multisectionalism, desecularization and the 'new atheism.'"

In reality, however, there are no new arguments for atheism. Unless "new atheism" means "new atheists," it's a misnomer. The arguments that the French and Communist atheists had in their quiver generations ago are the very same arguments Dawkins, Hitchens, Dennett, and Harris (DHDH) have in their quiver. It seems each generation is called upon to face the same issues, and the question of God's existence is a perennial. It wasn't too long ago that Richard Bentley (1662-1742) was invited to give the first Boyle Lectures on Natural Theology. His lectures were entitled, "Confutation of Atheism from the Origin and Frame of the World."

Because we, too, must face the issue of atheism head-on, let me recommend the four books listed at the top of this article by Aikman, Berlinski, Day, and Lennox (ABDL). These authors handle all the major arguments, accusations, and assertions of the new atheist crowd. Indeed, it's as if we have two law firms bidding for the hearts and minds of this generation. And so they are because ideas have consequences. Theism and atheism have consequences.

Let's begin with David Aikman, who summarizes the case against these famous four theologians of atheism. Analyzing their writings, he says their errors fall nicely into three major categories: (1) their assertions are too wild to be taken seriously (e.g., "religion poisons everything," "better many worlds than one god," or "Christianity is child abuse"); (2) they stray into unfamiliar territory (Biblical studies, theology, philosophy) and prove they are wading in way over their heads (e.g., "Jesus was born in 4 A.D."); and (3) their view that somehow science invalidates religious truth is far from historically true and certainly not scientifically true since religion birthed science (see Berlinski, p. 46). Berlinski goes so far as to state that the faith necessary to do coherent scientific work is debauched by a complacent atheism.

So let's be blunt for a moment. For all the hype given over to the atheists' charges, claims, pronouncements, and fairy tales, I can't think of one thing that Dawkins, Hitchens, Dennett, or Harris preaches that isn't answered in a scholarly, even "fair and balanced" manner, by Aikman, Berlinski, Day, and Lennox. No Christian need be embarrassed by the avalanche of atheistic propaganda, believing that their arguments are really too profound

and powerful to challenge. ABDL challenges every one of them with reason, logic, science, common sense, and yes, a sense of humor, too.

Atheists, by the way, seem to lack a sense of humor (although Hitchens has far more than the others combined). Case in point: Harris wants to put to death those he considers truly harmful to society (Aikman, p. 32). I'll let his words speak for him: "The link between belief and behavior raises the stakes considerably. Some propositions are so dangerous that it may be ethical to kill people for believing them. This may seem an extraordinary claim, but it merely enunciates an ordinary fact about the world in which we live" (*The End of Faith*, p. 52).

And these are our modern-day tolerant atheists! Can you imagine if they were the Communist variety that slaughtered millions (see *The Black Book of Communism* by Courtois). Even one of their own, Theodore Dalrymple, remarks that Harris' statement is "quite possibly the most disgraceful that I have read in a book by a man posing as a rationalist" (*City Journal*, Autumn 2007). Surely the "new atheists" have lost touch with reality.

Hitchens was probably not trying to be funny when he remarked, "We do not rely solely upon science and reason because these are necessary rather than sufficient factors." Berlinski's response is facetious, yet utterly reasonable—"If Hitchens is not prepared to 'rely solely upon science and reason,' why, one might ask, should anyone else?" (Berlinski, p. 5). Hitchens also reasons (in all seriousness) that his belief in the nonexistence of God is not a belief, but my belief in the existence of God is a belief. Go figure!

A question worth asking is this: What triggered such a sudden onslaught of hard-core, mean-spirited, atheistic propaganda? Why now?

Some suggest that perhaps it was George Bush and his administration that riled up the godless with his evangelical Christianity clearly on display. I personally think the answer is much closer to the atheist camp itself. One of their very own (and not just one of their lightweights) decided after looking at the scientific evidence that atheism is untenable, indefensible, and yes, false! The gang of four (DHDH) decided that such a gap in their Secular Humanist worldview armor needed to be plugged, and since Antony Flew is a heavyweight, so, too, the humanists had to call their remaining heavyweights to arms. Hence, this massive flood of atheist books and TV appearances, college lectures, and radio call-in programs.

DHDH could not stand back and fail to challenge Dr. Flew's admission that it was his study of science and philosophy, not theology and evangelism, that actually

led him out of atheism. In his book *There Is A God* (also highly recommended), Flew begins with his early life as an atheist, explaining his reasons why God could not exist, and then moves to his later life and why he changed his mind. He now concludes that indeed there has to be a God, or there would be no universe. Sound like Genesis 1?

Since the flurry over Flew's conversion to deism, a bit of calm has descended and a lot of research and writing has commenced. The authors answering the four purveyors of atheism are handing them their heads on a platter! Regretfully, atheist heads on platters is not graphic enough for coverage on the evening news.

Any fair-minded reader of Aikman, Berlinski, Day, and Lennox will recognize that the atheists' thrusts and daggers have been brilliantly and convincingly defeated.

Berlinski and Lennox, for example, take on the atheistic notion that somehow science proves the nonexistence of God. After examining the scientific method and its various ramifications, Berlinski concludes that he has yet to see how science disproves the existence of God. He notes that physicists seem "remarkably unenthusiastic about welcoming philosophers as fellow scientists" (Berlinski, p. 58). Richard Feynman observes, "The philosophers are always on the outside making stupid remarks." Saying that science somehow proves the nonexistence of God is a stupid remark! Another stupid remark is Dawkins' theological/philosophical claim that "Better many worlds than one god." Equally stupid is his "many worlds" or multiverse theory of not one universe but an infinite number of parallel universes. Such "science so-called" or better, "scientism," is merely Dawkins' atheism and materialism coming to the fore. There is absolutely no scientific evidence for a multiverse, but it seems to be the atheists last stronghold, even though it puts Occam's razor on its head!

Berlinski's comments about "faith" and "science" are also worth examining. He quotes Stephen Hawking to the effect that "so long as the universe had a beginning, we could suppose it had a creator." It takes faith to accept the proposition that science has discovered a beginning to the universe. In fact, it takes faith in reason to even reason logically about it. Vox Day points out that faith is not the opposite of reason; the opposite of reason is irrationalism.

Berlinski contends (p. xii, xiii) that there have been four profound scientific theories since the great scientific revolution in the West—Newtonian mechanics, electromagnetic field theory, special and general relativity, and quantum mechanics—and none disproves the existence of God. Stated another way, none proves the atheist claim

that science has buried God (note the title of Lennox's book). Einstein said it like this, "Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind." Dawkins, who constantly claims Einstein as one of his own atheistic brothers, should listen to his scientific superior. (Incidentally, Einstein repeatedly stated, "I'm not an atheist." See Max Jammer, *Einstein and Religion*, p. 48.)

Berlinski insists that "no scientific theory touches on the mysteries that the religious tradition addresses" (p. xiv). In fact, he says science has "nothing of value to say on the great and aching questions of life, death, love, and meaning." On the other hand, the religious tradition "has formed a coherent body of thought regarding these subjects" (p. xiv). Berlinski further notes, "Science does not harbor the slightest idea of how the ordered physical, moral, mental, aesthetic, social world in which we live could have ever arisen from the seething anarchy of the world of particle physics."

Aikman, Lennox, and Day do not in any way disagree with Berlinski, but rather add to his basic arguments. Day, for example, addresses in some detail the charge that religion is an enemy of science. He proves why the charge is false and quotes from Feynman to the effect that "[s]cientific knowledge is an enabling power to do either good or bad—but does not carry instruction on how to use it" (Day, p. 52).

Both Aikman and Day cover the area of atheism's practical outworkings in society. And their examples do not edify the atheist cause. For example, few atheists wish to discuss the relationship of Darwin to Hitler or atheism's role in the former U.S.S.R. Day quotes Lenin and Trotsky to the effect that "atheism is a material and inseparable part of Marxism" and the "very essence of religion is the mortal enemy of Communism" (Day, p. 243).

Day's chapter entitled "The Robespierre of Atheism" is an insightful look at Michel Onfray, the French atheist and hedonist and far-left Nietzschean. Nietzsche, of course, was not only an atheist and nihilist (life has no meaning), but also a warmonger. His famous statement on war: "War is an admirable remedy for peoples that are growing weak and comfortable and contemptible; it excites instincts that rot away in peace." Not surprising, Onfray, although a historian, has nothing to say of the "fifty-two atheist mass murderers of the twentieth century" (Day, p. 202). But he has plenty of nasty things to say about the American Secular Humanists for accepting way too much of the Judeo-Christian morality (e.g., Paul Kurtz says he can accept the Golden Rule in spite of its religious connotations). Onfray, however, would banish Christian morality on the basis that "it is anti-social."

Translation: It is anti-Darwin's natural selection/survival of the fittest. Christian morality coddles the weak, the sick, and the helpless instead of allowing them to die (or even assisting in their death), thus enhancing the evolutionary process.

Day's chapter entitled "The End of Sam Harris" is worth the price of the book. He especially takes Harris to the woodshed for his statement that "some propositions are so dangerous that it may be ethical to kill people for believing them" (Day, p. 129).

John C. Lennox's powerful defense of the Christian perspective will be hard to dismiss by any atheist. His overall thrust is to prove that theism as a worldview "sits most comfortably with science." His argument is that the scientific evidence moves toward theism, exactly opposite the argument of Dawkins, Hitchens, Dennett, and Harris.

In fact, Lennox points to immunologist George Klein, who "states categorically that his atheism is not based on science, but is an a priori faith commitment" (Lennox, p. 34). Statements like this are bad news for the fearsome foursome of DHDH! Lennox also points to former atheist Antony Flew, who admits that his "whole life has been guided by the principle of Plato's Socrates [to] follow the evidence wherever it leads." Following the evidence led him to remove himself from the atheist camp (Lennox, p. 38).

Much of Lennox's book covers the issue that "the genetic material DNA carries information" (Lennox, p. 54). Read it to be fully informed on why the existence of "information" spells death to the forces of DHDH. (Hint: Information is a form of language, and language implies a speaker or an author.)

I now return to David Aikman, whose chapter entitled "The Christian Worldview Is the Foundation of Liberty" is priceless. Aikman begins by quoting Michael Novak: "Can an atheist be a good citizen? That has been done, many times. Can American liberties survive if most of our nation is atheist? The most common, almost universal judgment of the founders was that it could not" (Aikman, p. 135).

Aikman moves to answer more fully the question of the survivability of freedom under the atheistic worldview. He comes to the founding fathers' conclusion, but offers his analysis in a most interesting way. In fact, Aikman quotes Hitchens, one of the fearsome foursome, to the effect that "secular totalitarianism has actually provided us with the summa of human evil" (p. 98). However, this same Hitchens concludes the founding fathers were not "men of faith" because "almost to a man, none had a priest

at his deathbed" (Aikman, p. 137). Aikman replies tongue-in-cheek, "Dying Protestants don't make a habit of calling on priests to attend their departure from this life."

Aikman's comments on Thomas Paine are also worth noting. Though Paine was one of the very few true Deists (most of the founding fathers were either Christian or Unitarian), when he returned to Paris following the American Revolution he went there to "fight against atheism." Paine fought against atheism because he held the atheists of the French Revolution era "responsible for the massacres" (Aikman, p. 141).

Aikman also quotes John Adams' (a Unitarian) answer to the French atheist Condorcet, who was arguing for morality without religion: "There is no such thing [as morality] without the supposition of God. There is no right and wrong in the universe without the supposition of a moral government and an intellectual and moral governor" (Aikman, p. 152).

Not one of the fearsome foursome comes close to challenging Aikman's argument that the founding fathers were in no way establishing an atheistic commonwealth. All of America's founding documents were theistic in one way or another. Thomas Jefferson said, "God who gave us life gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God?" Our founding fathers knew that atheism could not be the foundation of a free, democratic republic. Dozens of their statements prove this point.

Aikman finds it significant that after atheistic Communist regimes have historically "wrecked suffering and chaos" on a national basis, "it is the secular rationalism of the atheist worldview that is being challenged." In China, most Chinese have lost faith in Marxism-Leninism, sensing that Marxist philosophy is chained to "the iron ball of state atheism, [which] has left it in a moral wasteland" (Aikman, p. 167).

Let me conclude by examining the observations of a former atheist—Sir Fred Hoyle (who, incidentally, was skeptical about Darwin's theory of evolution). Hoyle understood that for life to exist on earth, lots of carbon (C and atomic number 6) is needed. He understood how carbon was formed (combining three helium nuclei or combining helium and beryllium). He also understood that for any of this to happen "the nuclear ground state energy levels have to be fine-tuned with respect to each other" (Lennox, p. 69). If the variation were more than 1 percent either way, the universe could not sustain life. Hoyle says nothing challenged his atheism more than "this scientific discovery." This scientific discovery could well be the Achilles heel ("a small but mortal weakness") of

the atheists, and it appears to have all of them reeling in their more quiet moments.

Physicist Freeman Dyson sees it nearly the same way: “The more I examine the universes and study the details of its architecture, the more evidence I find that the universe in some sense must have known that we were coming.” Paul Davies likewise concludes, “It seems as though somebody has fine-tuned nature’s numbers to make the Universe.” Or John A. Wheeler, “Imagine a universe in which one or another of the fundamental dimensionless constants of physics is altered by a few percent one way or the other? Man could never come into being in such a universe.” (See also Hugh Ross, *Creation as Science*, p. 96f for additional examples of a finely tuned universe, Martin Rees, *Just Six Numbers*, or even Stephen Hawking, who, in his *A Brief History of Time* insisted that the finely tuned numbers cannot be altered to any degree or the universe collapses.)

Let’s hope and pray that DHDH will reach the same

conclusion. Let’s pray earnestly that they cease and desist their atheistic propaganda machine that weakens Western Civilization’s attempt to survive the current onslaught of Islam in its westward march, convinced that the time is right to demolish the decadent “Christian” West. As George Gilder says, “A culture that does not aspire to the divine becomes obsessed with the fascination of evil, reveling in the frivolous, the depraved, and the bestial.” (See Gilder’s review of *The Devil’s Delusion* in *National Review*, May 5, 2008, p. 58.

Indeed, let’s pray for a revitalized and rededicated evangelical Christianity (for a start read Dinesh D’Souza’s *What’s So Great About Christianity* and Ed Hindson/Ergun Caner’s *The Popular Encyclopedia of Apologetics: Surveying the Evidence for the Truth of Christianity*) that can again be the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world,” reflecting its founder and Master—Jesus Christ. Thus ends the homily!

## Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed

Reviewed by James Perloff

Traditionally minded Americans don’t often cheer Hollywood products. We gladly report an exception: *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* (rated PG).

As many *NEW AMERICAN* readers know, Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution transformed Western culture. The Bible taught that life forms are creations of God, with man the centerpiece, made in God’s image. Darwin introduced a new doctrine: random interactions of chemicals had created life, and man was just an animal, evolved from lower life forms through survival of the fittest. Sold to the public as scientific fact, “Social Darwinism,” with its view of man as beast, helped spawn unprecedented cruelties under communism and Naziism.

Now, however, science has evolution on the retreat. For example:

\* A single cell, which Darwin thought “simple,” is encoded with information that would fill thousands of books, and is far too complex to have formed by chance.

\* In his book *Darwin’s Black Box*, Lehigh University biochemist Michael Behe demonstrates that certain biochemical systems, such as blood clotting and the immune system, are “irreducibly complex” — that is, they consist of interdependent parts that cannot function in lesser stages, and thus cannot have evolved step-by-step.

\* In *Not by Chance*, Dr. Lee Spetner, who taught information theory at Johns Hopkins University, documents that random mutations—evolution’s alleged building blocks—cause losses of genetic information, not gains.

\* In *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, molecular biologist Michael Denton shows that, on a cellular level, there is no evidence for the proclaimed evolutionary sequence “fish to amphibian to reptile to mammal.”

As the new data has emerged, evolutionists have fought to prevent classrooms from openly discussing the weaknesses in Darwin’s theory. Freedom of speech has been suppressed in academia, and educators persecuted for daring to address intelligent design (ID). It was this trend that prompted the documentary *Expelled*.

According to the film’s website, the project “began with an observation made by [co-producer Walt] Ruloff, a successful computer software entrepreneur who comes from a high-tech world in which innovation is constant and eagerly sought. In stark contrast, he noticed, the scientific and academic communities were deeply resistant to innovation, in this case innovation that might revise Darwin’s theory that random mutation and natural selection drive all variation in life forms.”

The film’s host and narrator is Ben Stein, economist, law professor, speech writer for Presidents Nixon and Ford, and author of over 20 books, but probably best known as a comedy actor, with his trademark monotone voice. He is also a pro-life creationist, making him a maverick in Hollywood.

“Scientists are supposed to be allowed to follow the

evidence wherever it may lead, no matter what the implications are,” says Stein. “Freedom of inquiry has been greatly compromised, and this is not only anti-science, it’s anti-American.” The film underscores America’s tradition of personal freedom with visits to landmarks such as the Jefferson Memorial and Washington Monument, and contrasts these with images of the Berlin Wall, symbol of tyranny. That wall is gone, but another, we learn, has been erected in American universities.

Stein interviews double Ph.D. biologist Richard Sternberg, a research fellow at the Smithsonian Institution. In 2004, as editor of *Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington*, Sternberg allowed publication of a peer-reviewed article suggesting there is evidence for intelligent design in nature. This resulted in a vicious, smear-tainted campaign of abuse against Dr. Sternberg, driven by certain Smithsonian officials and by the National Center for Science Education (self-described as a “clearinghouse for information and advice to keep evolution in the science classroom and ‘scientific creationism’ out”). The attack on Sternberg was so outrageous that it led to a congressional investigation and an ensuing report, *Intolerance and the Politicization of Science at the Smithsonian*.

Among others, Stein also visits:

- \* astrophysicist Guillermo Gonzalez, who, despite publishing over 60 articles in peer-reviewed science journals and being credited with helping discover new planets, was refused tenure at Iowa State University after he advocated teaching intelligent design;

- \* molecular biologist Caroline Crocker, compelled to leave George Mason University after including several slides about intelligent design in one of her lectures;

- \* NASA-honored engineering professor Robert J. Marks II, forced by Baylor to remove an ID-friendly website from the university’s servers.

But Stein doesn’t just meet intelligent design’s defenders, he also takes on some of its most adamant critics, including Eugenie Scott, executive director of the National Center for Science Education; Michael Shermer, founder of the Skeptics Society; Cornell professor William Provine; and atheist blogger P.Z. Myers. Ultimately he travels to England to confront Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion* and probably the most vocal critic of ID and creation.

Producer Ruloff warns: “People will be stunned to actually find out what elitist scientists proclaim, which is that a large majority of Americans are simpletons who believe in a fairy tale.”

During his interview, Dawkins dismisses religion as “primitive superstition,” and those who reject evolution

for it “ignorant or insane.” Logically questioned by Stein, Dawkins admits that life could have come from “a higher intelligence” that “seeded” it on this planet — i.e., he could accept aliens as our creator, but not God. But this begs for an answer to the question: how did life get started on the aliens’ planet?

Creation-evolution is a vital issue. It is far more than a science discussion. Most Americans believe, as Thomas Jefferson said, that “men are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.” If, as Darwinism says, there was no Creator, then there is no basis for rights, no moral absolutes, nor any God to whom we are accountable for our actions.

Small wonder, then, that Darwinism has always found a comfortable home in totalitarian states. Stein visits the former mental institution at Hadamar, Germany, where over 14,000 mentally ill were once executed by the Nazis. As Stein notes, Charles Darwin advocated eugenics, writing that “the weak members of civilized societies propagate their kind. No one who has attended to the breeding of domestic animals will doubt that this must be highly injurious to the race of man.... Excepting in the case of man himself, hardly anyone is so ignorant as to allow his worst animals to breed.” Stein explores the link between Darwin and Nazi eugenics, interviewing California State University professor Richard Weikart, author of *From Darwin to Hitler*. And he notes that eugenics was espoused in America by Planned Parenthood founder Margaret Sanger.

The film also exposes media bias. Intelligent-design advocates tell Stein how the politically correct press has distorted their positions. Journalist Pamela Winnick recounts the abuse she received after trying to report on the evolution-design controversy in a balanced manner. A discomforting moment for Americans comes in the film when Polish scientist Maciej Giertych tells Stein that there is less censorship on this issue in Poland today than in the United States.

Expelled strikes a blow for free speech, and is drawing much-needed attention to the creation-evolution battle. It has been effectively marketed by Motive Entertainment, which also took on *The Passion of The Christ* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Motive’s appealing website for the film, [www.expelledthemovie.com](http://www.expelledthemovie.com), along with grass-roots promotion from advocates of creation and intelligent design, has spurred a groundswell of demand.

Atheists have been bitterly denouncing the film. Atheist P.Z. Myers declared: “It’s going to appeal strongly to the religious, the paranoid, the conspiracy theorists, and the ignorant—which means they’re going to draw in

about 90% of the American market.” Such attacks have unintentionally served as further promotion. On April 18, *Expelled* opened in 1,052 theaters, breaking the record for documentaries (Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11* opened in 868).

*Expelled* is not your grandfather’s documentary. A fast pace, rocking soundtrack, and Stein’s deadpan humor all defy that word’s connotations. The interviews never drag—they are interspersed with clips from old films to underscore points being made. There are two superb animation sequences, one demonstrating the cell’s complexity, the other a satirical “casino of life” in which hundreds of slot machines must simultaneously hit jackpots in order

for life to commence by chance. This movie will leave you entertained and informed (we know plenty these days that do neither).

Near the film’s end, shots of the Berlin Wall coming down remind us that the walls of academic censorship must fall also. Stein’s final words exhort audience members to get involved.

*Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* is a model of communication that all can learn something from.

—*The New American*, May 12, 2008, p. 30-32

## The Next Fidel, Part I

by Peter Hitchens

Viewed from the shanty towns that peer down on it from the surrounding hillsides, Caracas looks like a caricature Latin American capital, with too much North American influence of the wrong kind and too little of the right kind. Here, spoiling a lovely steep valley, is the usual sad, globalized panorama of ugly, uninteresting concrete towers, one of them absurdly crowned with a huge Pepsi can. You might as well decorate the skyline with a gigantic banana.

And here is the usual trite contrast, long common in the Third World and rapidly spreading to the First World—gross wealth on display next to rancid squalor. Yes, there really are hovels a few hundred feet from a freeway crammed with new SUV’s. How obvious. How stupid.

This is, at first sight, a place of clichés. Here they all are—the plethora of uniforms, the propaganda murals, the military despot, the rigged elections, the frequent, sometimes farcical putsches, the blithe, unashamed corruption and the prevalent crime, the Cuban fraternal assistance, the blatant suppression of opponents, the currency restrictions, the annoying, avoidable shortages of milk and toilet paper, the unvarying signs of a socialist hand on the economic tiller.

And like so many authoritarian states, Venezuela has little basic order or justice. There are a thousand murders a month in a country of 28 million people. The police simply pull out of the slums on weekends, unable to face the power of the gangs.

Only when you look a little more closely do you find, hidden in corners or quietly understated, evidence of a serious civil society and a genuine national independence—a glorious equestrian statue of Simon Bolivar, a ravishing

old cathedral, an elegant, airy 19th-century parliament house embodying the heartbreaking over-optimism of the country’s founders, and many honest people, equipped to live in liberty and disturbed by the menace of dictatorship.

They are right to be disturbed. It is astonishing, after more than a century of similar follies all over the world, all ending in weeping or worse, how anyone can still be taken in by the flatulent promises of political messiahs or how anyone cannot be repelled by the blatant unfairness, the transparent purchasing of the votes of the poor, the sheer vanity of Hugo Chavez.

And yet here we go again. No sooner has Fidel Castro finally accepted that his long career in radical chic showbusiness is over and retired to his bed than this new Marxoid messiah, with his own interminable speeches and dubious foreign alliances, has arisen in the Caribbean, loathed to the point of rage by the White House and absurdly idolized by the fashionable Left of the whole world.

I suppose one explanation for this resurrection must be the extraordinarily rapid collapse of the brief, intense Thatcher-Reagan dream. They told us that the world would finally accept that the market was all and that the implosion of the USSR would discredit world-reforming socialism for good. No such luck. The market philosophy, lacking any real interest in the human soul, turned out not to be very persuasive even in its countries of origin and to be a gross, bloated failure when tried in the former Evil Empire itself. If it didn’t kill off idealist yearnings in Washington, London, or Brussels—let alone in Kabul and Mecca—why should it do so here, where some of the Caracas slum quarters have been suppurating on their neglected slopes for seven decades?

Then, of course, there is the Bush-Cheney effect. Nothing could have more effectively revived bad old resentful anti-Americanism—the cartoon kind that relies on images of a heedless, greedy, violent Uncle Sam—than Messrs.

Bush and Cheney. They did exactly what people like Hugo Chavez always say they do. They mistook force for power.

It is also hard to dislike Comrade Chavez personally, mainly because he is funny—funny about himself, funny about others, funny at the expense of opponents, who mostly deserve to be laughed at. He calls President Bush “Mr. Danger,” which isn’t a bad name for him.

But he just will not stop talking. All too frequently Chavez commandeers the terrestrial TV channels—the poor can afford no others—and harangues his people, urging them to be ever more grateful for the undoubted benisons he has rained upon them: smart new apartment blocks and shiny new schools can be seen among the slums, and Cuban doctors provide unheard of medical care to the poor. The price is paid in a slow, systematic accretion of absolute power and in obligatory harangues.

When Spain’s King Juan Carlos recently snapped “Why don’t you shut up?” at Chavez at a Spanish-American summit, thousands of Venezuelans downloaded the royal outburst for use as a ring-tone on their cellphones. Chavez is undeterred by such mockery. He says his weekly TV show “Hallo, President!” is a religious program “because only God knows when it will end.” This is disagreeably true for the worthies who have to sit in the invited audience, shifting from buttock to buttock as the hours amble by, sustaining themselves with sandwiches and gulps from water bottles.

It is autocracy conducted as a sort of “Oprah Winfrey Show,” with jokes, reminiscence, and singing thrown in. And despite Chavez’s charm and self-mockery, it is very, very serious. Remember, this is a man who first sought supreme office in a bungled military coup in 1992. We can laugh at it now because it failed, comically, but there is something terrifying about a man who thinks so highly of himself that he tries to take state power with violence. Castro’s first putsch, the Moncada Barracks affair, was likewise a pantomime of bungles. Both failed only because their leaders hadn’t at that stage had enough practice in taking over governments.

It was then, just after his failure had become obvious, that Chavez first used the menacing phrase that is now linked with him forever. The authorities, astonishingly, allowed the unsuccessful putschist to go on national TV, supposedly to tell his troops to surrender. This he duly did, but at the end he carefully added the words “por ahora”—“for now.”

After a little while in prison, Chavez decided to take the democratic route, cleverly exploiting the uselessness

and division of his opponents, and returned as promised. Since then, by what his enemies describe as rigging and corruption, he has remained in office, surviving a coup and slowly strengthening his control of the machinery of patronage and propaganda.

Now those two potent words, “por ahora,” in white letters on a red background, appear again all over Caracas on the most prominent billboards. Their new meaning, known to everyone, is full of menace to those who have dared oppose Chavez. They refer to the referendum last December, which Chavez narrowly lost. Had he won, he would have become far more powerful, far more of a threat to private property, far harder to dislodge. There would have been no limit on his tenure of office, due to end in 2013. Many believe he wanted to ignore the result—he is widely accused of constant, highly scientific ballot-rigging of the kind that is very hard to prove—and was only dissuaded from doing so by a phone call from his friend Fidel Castro.

Whatever the reason, Chavez conceded defeat with a rather touching grace, then told his supporters to go home and let the opposition celebrate. But only for now. He can afford to be restrained. Time and the ever rising price of oil allow him to wait till later to try again. In the meantime, he continues to hustle his country down the familiar Stalinist staircase that leads to one-party rule, censorship, indoctrination, and prison camps, but this time so slowly that it will never again be alarming enough, at any particular moment, to frighten his opponents into effective action.

If there were any justice, Chavez would long ago have been forced from office by bankruptcy. His economic management is wasteful and sloppy and involves a great deal of expensive largesse to the poor in return for their votes, as well as disastrous controls that create shortages. The national oil company—which Chavez treats as his private bank—badly needs costly investment to secure future supplies. But because the Chinese and Indian booms and the Iraq War have taken the demand for oil to unseen heights, he need not worry about this. The money still comes in as fast as he can spend it. Meanwhile, much of the middle classes can be bought off with gasoline so cheap that you can fill a tank for \$1.50.

—*The American Conservative*, May 19, 2008, p. 6-8

This article will continue in the August issue of *The Schwarz Report*.